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# Henry Venn (1796-1873) and the Church of the Nazarene: A Study in National Leadership, Political Solidarity and Activism

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Thesis

**HENRY VENN (1796-1873) AND THE CHURCH OF THE  
NAZARENE: A STUDY IN NATIONAL LEADERSHIP,  
POLITICAL SOLIDARITY AND ACTIVISM**

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CHAPTER ONE  
INTRODUCTION

**Nazarene People-hood**

Timothy Smith, the renowned Nazarene Historian, once described the hope of the Church of the Nazarene in a vision that someday every member will sense a level of equal standing as Nazarenes and allow their denominational identity to transcend their national allegiances. In relation to India, Smith wrote that despite the different castes that separate its peoples the Church of the Nazarene has the task of making “the Indian converts one community...we must encourage them gradually to exchange their differing historic ethnicities for what is essentially a new one—that of Nazarene people-hood.”<sup>1</sup> This incredibly optimistic vision is still a part of the hope of the International denomination, but what does this people-hood look like? What does it mean to be one church?

To understand this we will begin by looking at the mission theory of Henry Venn. Henry Venn was a mission theorist who articulated a vision for a way of being the church that combined a sense of mutuality, solidarity and responsibility. These are the ideals that I believe are present in the very best that is hoped for in the Church of the Nazarene. Henry Venn is an appropriate model because, similar to the Church of the Nazarene, he was both evangelical and Episcopal. Venn’s theory and instruction valued a vision of

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Smith, “Internationalization and Ethnicity: Nazarene Accomplishments and Problems”, In *Evangelism and Social Redemption: Addresses from a Conference on Compassionate Ministry November 1985*, ed. Albert L. Truesdale and Steve Weber (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1987), 114.

church expansion that respected and valued the importance of the “native”<sup>2</sup> leadership, valued a vision for holistic development among the indigenous church and valued a vision for political solidarity amongst the missionary and the indigenous people. I believe these are all vitally important practices for the Church of the Nazarene within its global setting as it tries to live out the unity of being one church global fellowship.

### **Henry Venn**

Henry Venn has been called “the most influential mission administrator and strategic thinker of his age.”<sup>3</sup> He applied these gifts to the advancement of the gospel through his 30 plus years of leadership of the Church Missionary Society during the mid-nineteenth century. Henry Venn never served as a missionary in a foreign field, but his correspondence with missionaries around the world helped to shape his significant contributions to mission theory through the theory of self-supporting, self-governing and self-extending indigenous churches. Venn’s contribution included not only a more effective or efficient church planting process, but also a broader view of the equality of the native church with its foreign counter parts. Through his philanthropic endeavors Venn also broadened the concept of evangelical activism through the advancement of both native church development and social transformation.

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<sup>2</sup> Venn used the term “native” to describe people who were local and indigenous. Venn argued that churches be led by local people not foreigners. The term “native” is no longer useful, but instead we will use the terms indigenous and national.

<sup>3</sup> Porter, Andrew, *Religion Versus Empire?: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004),167.

### **The Church of the Nazarene**

The Church of the Nazarene, which organized in Pilot Point, Texas in 1908, began as the combination of a group of holiness movement fellowships from across North America. Many of the churches that joined together as the Church of the Nazarene already had active missionary work around the globe. Since that early time this denomination has grown to over 2 million members worldwide and is larger outside the United States than inside. Despite this global movement, the denomination continues to struggle with what it means to be one church across the great boundaries and borders that separate each of the local congregations. As one Nazarene mission theorist put it our sense of “missiology is an effort to understand what we do so that we can do it better.”<sup>4</sup> There is awareness within the denomination that theirs is a work in progress.

When Nazarene missions began in 1898, even before the denomination was organized, it reflected the era in which it lived. In the late 1800’s colonialism was in full swing, even though in some areas independence had been achieved. Nazarene missions simply reflected the culture and the time that it inhabited. For example the rights for the church to enter into India were attained through connections with Western authorities, and missionaries were housed in large compounds away from the disease, climate and danger of the local culture.<sup>5</sup> In the following decades the Church of the Nazarene adapted to the changes in the rise of sovereign nationhood and the decline of colonialism.

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<sup>4</sup> Louie Bustle, “Changes,” In *Vistas: The Changing Face of Nazarene Missions*, ed. R. Franklin Cook (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2009), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Bustle, “Changes,” 10.

During this time of transition the Church of the Nazarene began to focus on ways to develop indigenous leaders.<sup>6</sup> This development did not always happen as quickly as some might have liked. In some world areas it took decades before any indigenous leaders were ordained. In Peru it took 28 years to ordain its first indigenous minister, in Swaziland it took 38 years, and in some places as many as 57. Louis Bustle, World Mission Director for the Church of the Nazarene, states that “missionaries were victims of the system.”<sup>7</sup> The missionaries often transported small versions of American or British culture to the world areas where they served. Bustle states that often “leaders weren’t sure that they could turn over the work to local leaders very quickly” and even admits that it was possible the denominational leaders at times did not encourage turning over church leadership very fast.<sup>8</sup>

### **Global Body?**

Why would it take so long to allow the local indigenous leadership to begin to shape their own church? And if there was not a sense of mutuality in leading the global body how could there be a sense of unity regarding social, economic and political issues? In the following pages I will endeavor to look into the words and actions of both Venn and the Church of the Nazarene to address some of these issues. I will also engage some contemporary theologians who have experience throughout the global church, namely, Miroslav Volf, Leonardo Boff and William Cavanaugh. Through the language of these

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.,14.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.,14.

theologians I will attempt to articulate what it might mean for a denomination to really be one global fellowship. If the Church of the Nazarene is to be one church we must have a sense of equity, and a sense of shared responsibility in regards to their current and future life together.

## VENN'S MISSION THEORY

### **Venn's Sense of Equality**

One of the first important features that Venn has to offer the Church of the Nazarene is his sense of equality between the various cultures that are a part of the church. Venn was a part of an evangelical tradition that was moving towards a greater understanding of the world's diverse cultures and a greater sense of equality. Underlying such evangelical perspective was the conviction that people were equal in their capacity to hear and respond to the challenge of Christ and equal, too, in their fundamental capacities.<sup>1</sup> When describing the difficulty with converts in Calcutta, India, Venn spoke of the young native men who are willing to convert and express a deep understanding of the Christian faith, but who are afraid because they did not want to disappoint their mothers. He explains that:

nothing but the power of a mother's love withheld them from the profession of Christianity; that their mothers had declared it would make them miserable even to death if the sons avowed themselves Christians. May God look down in mercy upon the mothers of India who refuse to give up their sons to Christ and convert their hearts, and may He look down in mercy also on the mothers of England who do give up their sons to Christ and comfort their heart; and may He Hasten the day when the mothers of India and the mothers of England shall become both one in Christ! Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C. Peter Williams, "Not Transplanting': Henry Venn's Strategic Vision." In *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999*, ed. Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 149.

<sup>2</sup> Venn, Henry. *Memoir of the Rev. H. Venn: The Missionary Secretariat of Henry Venn; Prebendary of St. Paul's, Honorary Secretary of the Church Missionary Society*, ed. William Knight (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1880), 138. Venn's journal entry from 12/9/1856.

For Venn there was a sense of equality, at least in the aspect of potential Christian identity, between these mothers despite their vast cultural differences. Venn expresses his hope that these cultural differences could be bridged in Christ. Even though he would certainly see a difference in the superiority of the English civilization, this was not a lack of potential within the Indian culture, it simply had to do with the effect that Christianity had had on the British culture not inherent to the citizens of the empire itself.

Venn's vision for this equality could be seen in the mission society that was his home for so many years. In describing the founding of the Church Missionary Society he suggests that it was operating in the new political and social realities that were breaking forth in the world. He described how the CMS modeled "the great principle, that we should be all fellow-workers, 'high and low, rich and poor, one with another.'"<sup>3</sup> The Church Missionary Society was a Christian community that was made of both lay and clergy who were joined together in their common mission. So even within the CMS Venn saw an expression of Christian equality, a fellowship of equals. There is a sense that amongst the CMS, Venn saw all its participants, indigenous and missionary, as equal partners in this new community that shared mission, even if that sense of mutuality was not shared by the larger Anglican fellowship.

Throughout Venn's leadership he was always having to safeguard indigenous leadership from the discriminating tendencies of English leadership. One aspect of this was in regards to local church leadership. Venn's idea of having overlapping dioceses

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<sup>3</sup> Venn, *Memoir*, 148.

within the same geographical area seemed made necessary because Europeans were dominating local churches and unwilling to bow to Native Bishops.<sup>4</sup> Venn's vision for equality was certainly ahead of its time amidst the larger colonial forces at work in the world.

Venn believed a "collision of races" was on the immediate horizon for the mid nineteenth century advancement of Christianity across the globe. For Venn it was essential that not one of those encountered were to be viewed as a lesser class of the human race. This was central to his theology as well as his philanthropy. Venn recounts how these views stemmed from his experiences growing up playing with young African children in his youth who were sent to England to be educated. He was always irritated by the tendencies for missionary societies to "underrate the social and intellectual capabilities of the native races."<sup>5</sup> Venn had a high respect for people of other races, who were often deemed to be inferior and treated as such. He cited the story of meeting an African merchant who said to him, "Treat us like men, and we will behave like men...treat us like children and we shall behave like children."<sup>6</sup> This story would be incredibly influential throughout his career in missions.

Henry Venn had a higher view of culture than most missionary theorists.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> C. Peter Williams, "The Necessity of a Native Clergy: The Failure of Victorian Missions to Develop Indigenous Leadership (The Laing Lecture for 1990)," *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 41.

<sup>5</sup> Williams, "Not Transplanting," 149.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>7</sup> Venn certainly had higher view of indigenous people than exists a generation later. Venn once said candidly that he had an "increasing conviction that Missionaries are too backward to trust their Native

Although Venn accepted the prevailing nineteenth century view that cultures were ranged along a continuum from the primitive to the advanced, and that Western culture was assumed to be the most advanced of all, he did not, however, consider the state of a culture as determining of a people's worth.<sup>8</sup> After Venn's career, even among one-time supporters of his principles, there developed a sense of caution and misgivings as to the capacity of indigenous Christians in many places to sustain churches from their own resources. These reservations were only reinforced by the emergence of young, impatient and far more narrowly ethnocentric or racially conscious missionaries in the 1880's and 1890's.<sup>9</sup> But what truly distinguished Henry Venn was his belief in the capabilities of the indigenous church and the potential of its people to move from their current conditions. He came to the conclusion that "it had suddenly appeared that the Native Converts were in many cases ready and willing to do more for them selves than was expected."<sup>10</sup> In a letter Venn described a meeting with a navy surgeon who spent nine years working in West Africa and who had an opportunity to visit the CMS's work amongst the Yoruba tribe. Venn shared that until the doctor had witnessed the advanced state of the Yoruba mission "he had not previously believed that the [native] existed in so amiable and

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Agents of all classes." Quoted in Wilbert R. Shenk, "Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn: A Special Relationship?" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, October (1981):169.

<sup>8</sup> Wilbert R. Shenk, "Venn's Instructions to Missionaries," *Missiology: An International Review* 5:4 (1977): 476.

<sup>9</sup> Porter, *Religion*, 288.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Venn, *To Apply the Gospel*, ed. Max Warren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1971), 64.

civilized a state.”<sup>11</sup> At the core of Venn’s mission theory was a sense that the indigenous peoples were equals, and his mission practices were an attempt to empower local leadership and indigenous development whenever possible. Unfortunately, Venn’s vision for equality was not shared by everyone in the Anglican mission.

### **The Issue of European Influence**

Venn was a proud Englishman who reveled in the established position of the Church of England in relation to its state, especially when he viewed the rest of contemporary Europe.<sup>12</sup> As an Englishman he was proud of the liberty that marked his life as a birthright, and desired for the Crown, that gave him that liberty, to also be the securer of the development of churches throughout the world. Venn believed the church’s place in societies could be secured through the Crown and the courts.<sup>13</sup> He saw the great responsibility of Britain as being the people who could spread the gospel throughout the world. In writing to his friend, Daniel Wilson, Bishop of Calcutta, he wrote “since the last time I wrote I have spent two months in a tour of France and Switzerland and have returned more than ever impressed with the responsibility of England as having immensely larger opportunities and means of evangelizing the world than all the Protestant states of Europe if combined together.”<sup>14</sup>

Venn’s challenge was in finding a way to offer a Christianity that was not so tied

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<sup>11</sup> Venn, *Memoirs*, 127. Journal Entry for 2/8/1852

<sup>12</sup> Timothy E. Yates, *Venn and Victorian Bishops Abroad*. (Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, Uppsala Sweden, 1978) 15.

<sup>13</sup> Yates, *Venn*, 192.

<sup>14</sup> Venn, *To Apply the Gospel*, 23.

to English culture. He desired to offer a Christianity that did not denationalize the indigenous people but that in them became “naturalized,” thereby enabling them to reach their own peoples.<sup>15</sup> The CMS was an arm, albeit a voluntary body, outside of the formal structures of authority of the Church of England. As an evangelical institution, it had its own particular theological and cultural heritage. This heritage inclined to be suspicious of imperialism, whether it was in church or state. Behind Venn’s thinking was a different attitude towards civilization from most missionaries; along with Rufus Anderson he firmly rejected the idea that “civilization” was integral to Christianity. It might follow, but missionaries must avoid the idea that missionaries must settle and civilize in order to convert.<sup>16</sup>

C. Peter Williams suggests that Venn was on guard against any Episcopal extension that was beyond the healthy checks and balances to the power bishops would be granted from England and against an English bishop setting up a church that would be modeled on European ideas rather than indigenous ones. This drove his creative thinking. Venn believed that the presence of “the European element” that was present in native churches hindered the development of the mission of the church.<sup>17</sup> For Venn the ineffectiveness of the church resulted from its inability to lose its British imperial trappings. Venn understood that there was a danger of the spread of a Christianity

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<sup>15</sup> C. Peter Williams, “The Church Missionary Society and the Indigenous Church in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century: The Defense and Destruction of the Venn Ideals.” In *Converting Colonialism: Visions and Realities in Mission History, 1706-1914*, ed. by Dana L. Robert (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 90.

<sup>16</sup> Williams, “The Necessity of a Native Clergy,” 35.

<sup>17</sup> Williams, “The Church Missionary Society,” 86.

clothed with a form so “Anglicanized.” In describing the movement of the mission society in Asia he illustrated this by suggesting that the type of Christianity that they were planting there was too attached to its growth in English soil, and it would not be compatible with the ground in Asia. He warned that “it can never thoroughly adapt itself to the requirements of a new country, and hence, not becoming naturalized, at the best will only be able to maintain a dwarfed and stunted existence.”<sup>18</sup>

Venn realized that it was vital to recognize the racial differences between the English and the natives. If it was ignored then it would likely remain “Anglicanized” and the members of the church would lose any ability to reach their own people. For Venn there was a danger that Christianity could too easily be seen as an attempt towards furthering the interests of the nation of the missionaries’ sending. Here Williams suggests Ireland would be a model where the Church of England sent in bishops that were seen as representatives of a conquering race.<sup>19</sup> Venn’s hope was that everything could be stripped from the evangelizing that might be seen as an attempt to continue the aims of colonization.<sup>20</sup> The danger of the English influence was that this sense of superiority, opposite Venn’s vision of equality, would create an atmosphere of perpetual paternalism among the indigenous church.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, “The Necessity of a Native Clergy,” 36.

<sup>20</sup> Williams, “Not Transplanting,” 166.

### Venn's Concern with Paternalism

The evidence of this paternalism from Venn's perspective was seen in the Europeans who were unwilling to submit to the authority of indigenous pastors and in particular to the office of Bishop Crowther in West Africa. The greatest obstacle for Venn was the tendency of European missionaries to wish to act as pastor to the congregation they had gathered, and to regard the African pastors as their rivals.<sup>21</sup> This was one of Venn's major obstacles as he tried to move the indigenous church towards self-sustenance. He realized that he had to move it to a place of independence. One problem was that none of the Christian missionaries for all their devotion "came near an adequate understanding of the complex religious system they were trying to displace."<sup>22</sup> The essential point about the complex religious system was that it was not so much a matter of personal beliefs but the culture of the whole of the community. Ajayi understands religion as the "good-will and fear that kept the family as a unit and the village as a distinctive community."<sup>23</sup> There were beliefs, already at work before the missionaries' arrival, beliefs about the relationships between themselves and gods and families and the living and the dead. But there was no theology in the sense of dogmatic tenets. The traditional religion was an attitude of mind, a way of explaining the world, a way of life. It was expressed in laws and customs hallowed by time and myth as being

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<sup>21</sup> J. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite* (Harlow: Longmans, 1965), 179.

<sup>22</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 4f.

essential for the well-being not just of the individual, but of the whole community. To the problem of life to which these customs tried to provide an answer, Ajayi admits that “a catechism that was no more than a set of beliefs necessary for personal salvation must have appeared irrelevant.”<sup>24</sup> Too often the European missionary failed to see the host culture in its indigenous understanding as of fundamental importance.

Despite Venn’s optimistic sense of the equality of all those who would call themselves followers of Christ, he was aware that this did not necessitate that everyone would accept such a sense of equity. It also did not naturally follow that everyone would see the importance of a church that was “naturalized” into the “native” culture. Venn always held a fear that British paternalism would dominate the potential development and mission of the indigenous churches.

This atmosphere of paternalism influenced Venn’s ability in the process of moving towards national leaders. His concerns for the survival of indigenous leadership made him very cautious in bringing this to fruition. The crowning achievement of national leadership would eventually be the appointment of a native bishop, but in order to understand Venn it is important to look at what concerned Venn, and why he was hesitant about the Anglican church making this appointment too quickly. According to C. Peter Williams, Venn encouraged Crowther’s appointment as the first native bishop with more trepidation than is normally understood.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>25</sup> C. Peter Williams, *The Ideal of the Self-Governing Church: A Study in Victorian Missionary Strategy* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 2.

In 1841 when Venn became the Secretary of the Church Missionary Society he entered a situation that was under serious financial jeopardy. It was then that the committee decided to withdraw from their work in Jamaica, Trinidad and Malta. This period of uncertainty also stimulated Venn's efforts to push his case for indigenous churches to be self-supporting and under the leadership of indigenous pastors.<sup>26</sup> According to Williams, by 1851 Venn had established many of his ideas about the independence of indigenous churches and the necessity to not remove pastors from their native cultures anymore than necessary in terms of training and experience. By this time Venn was also clearly asserting that indigenous pastors were not assistants to missionaries but ministers of a native church that for a while was under the superintendence of missionaries.<sup>27</sup> He was clear that this superintendence by the missionary was a "transition stage." In time the indigenous pastors would be under the direct supervision of a Bishop. But Venn realized that most missionaries would not be in favor of this movement. According to Williams, "the most constant factor through the entire period is the difficulty missionaries have in handing over authority to those they suspect will work differently and to the detriment of the foundations which they have laid."<sup>28</sup> Williams makes it clear that Venn's hesitant view of native bishops at the time came from a hope for indigenous independence and he felt that this move would create a new sense of dependence. Venn feared that he would be placing a native bishop in a

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<sup>26</sup> Of the Twenty-six missionaries who went out between 1825 and 1834, eighteen had died. Williams, *The Ideal*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, "The Necessity of a Native Clergy," 40.

position in which he could never succeed. In a sense it was like leading a sheep to its slaughter.<sup>29</sup>

### **Venn Encourages Separation**

Venn thought that the solution was to allow Europeans involved in a diocese overseen by a native bishop to keep separate. Venn stated that “the European element in a Native Church is the great snare and hindrance to its growth.”<sup>30</sup> Venn believed that it was imperative to keep the indigenous church separate “with a complete organization of Bishop, priest and Deacon” and it would “exhibit a more firm and rapid development.”<sup>31</sup> In order to encourage this, Venn gave his missionaries “race distinctions” in view of their mission. These instructions explained the importance of respecting all national differences, called for the development of indigenous churches and a national institution that would be free from missionary control and would be able to appropriate the Christian faith to their own people. He illustrated this separation by describing how the CMS and the Church of England are bound by the Church of England rules but their own Prayer-book has laid down the principle “that every national church is at liberty to change its ceremonies, and adapt itself to the national taste.” He looked forward to the day when

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<sup>29</sup> Williams, “Not Transplanting,” 155.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

indigenous churches in India will “modify and perfect themselves according to the standard of God’s holy word.”<sup>32</sup>

During the course of his first decade in leading the CMS, Venn had moved from advocating “superintendence” to “association” to “separation.” He believed only through this separation would the native church truly be an independent church. Venn’s idea of separation by races was motivated to protect and advance the indigenous church.<sup>33</sup> The idea that Venn’s ideas were creating a caste system may be true but his ideas came from his strong sense of cultural difference, and it paralleled his belief that indigenous people had the capacity of Europeans.<sup>34</sup> While Venn preferred the “amalgamation of races” he recognized that it was not probable in the current climate in which he lived. Venn viewed the gospel as a seed that can be sown in different soil and the soil in which it is planted will have an effect on the outcome. Venn believed that this seed would grow in Christian character but also take on the characteristics of the national “soil” as long as it was not interrupted.<sup>35</sup>

### **Venn’s Ideal is Contextualization**

In looking at Venn’s missiology it is evident how much he believed culture mattered. Venn’s hope was that the gospel seed could be planted in the native soil, free

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<sup>32</sup> Venn, *Memoir*, 285.

<sup>33</sup> Williams, “The Necessity of a Native Clergy,” 37.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>35</sup> Williams, “Not Transplanting,” 167.

from its Anglicanism, so that it might become naturalized in the new environment. For Venn this movement towards contextualization involved not a disengagement from the indigenous culture, but a re-engagement. Venn stated that the goal of the mission

was evangelization and not Europeanization. The objective was not to allow Christianity to be part of a process of ‘denationalization’ converts so that they became ‘Anglicanized,’ but rather for it to be ‘nationalized’ and thus to be placed ‘in an advantageous position for permeating the whole race.’ There was a real danger that Christianity would become ‘an alien element,’ productive only of ‘disorder and confusion’ and, rather than bringing new national strengths, would encourage its converts to deny their national heritage.<sup>36</sup>

Venn had an ecclesiology that pushed for the formation of national churches. Venn believed that “local people should be trusted to lead and to discover what forms of worship and church organization were appropriate for them.”<sup>37</sup>

According to Williams, Venn realized that “Christianity was not in essence western and ought not therefore to be transported as if it were.”<sup>38</sup> For Venn it was the aim of missionaries to create independent churches and to this end they were “to take advantage of such national customs, notions, and tendencies” as they could.<sup>39</sup> In his own words Venn suggested that the church must recognize that it has many centers and not just one.

The foreign mission is to be gradually and silently removed as the nascent community advances towards completion. Much care and foresight are needed in order to judge when the time is ripe for each onward step; haste is as evil as delay,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>37</sup> Williams, “The Church Missionary Society,” 94.

<sup>38</sup> Williams, “The Necessity of a Native Clergy,” 39

<sup>39</sup> Williams, “Not Transplanting,” 148.

but the Lord of missions will guide servants aright. The Church of Rome has no such difficulty; her prelates in the East are always foreigners; but when we aim at making Christianity indigenous and not exotic, with many centers instead of one—as at Jerusalem and Antioch in the earliest days—the problem becomes delicate and difficult.<sup>40</sup>

For Venn the issue of contextualization<sup>41</sup> was essential. In describing the failure of the mission in Jamaica compared to the success in Western Africa he characterizes it as the failure of the missionaries in Jamaica to follow the principles of a native church. In another instance he quotes testimony from a Re. J. G. Lincke, who was a missionary in Bengal for thirty years who said,

The longer I live amongst this people the more I see and feel the great importance and necessity of their having native pastors. A European can never be to them what a pastor ought to be...A native may go into their houses at all times, by which would at once engage all their better feelings, and thus obtain a direct access to their hearts; and, by mingling with his people, would be in the best possible position...Our people need the influence of living examples raised up from amongst their own countrymen, and living in daily intercourse with them.<sup>42</sup>

According to Williams there was great awareness of the “cultural distinctiveness” that existed in the world of nineteenth century missionaries and much expectation that they create independent churches in the cultures to which they went, taking advantage of the norms and customs and tendencies that were already present. There was a sense that contextualization would be a natural part of their job description. Williams does not however give an explanation as to why this awareness did not become a reality in the

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<sup>40</sup> Venn, *Memoir*, 210.

<sup>41</sup> While the term contextualization was coined by Shoki Coe and Aharon Sapsezian in 1972, it is appropriate to apply it to Henry Venn’s emphasis on responding to the gospel within the framework of one’s own situation. Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 21.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

missionary endeavor that follows. But the interaction between the life of the church and these new contexts created space for Venn's ideals to be articulated. Venn's ideals are some of the most important principles for the development of strong churches that are appropriately rooted in their cultural context.

Venn was a part of an Evangelical tradition in the Church of England that was focused on a sense of nationality rather than on an understanding of Catholic order as understood by High Anglicans.<sup>43</sup> For them the Reformation principle, *cujus regio eius religio* was an absolute principle in the mission of the church. Venn's ideas about a contextualized national church come from historic statements in the Church of the England that "every particular or national church" has the authority "to ordain, change and abolish ceremonies" and this may be done "according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners."<sup>44</sup> According to Williams, Venn had a vision for the centrality of a national church. The task, said Venn, was not simply to get a few individuals of every nation to profess the Christian faith but that the whole nation would eventually adopt the Christian faith as its national profession of faith, thus filling the universal church with an accession of national churches. Venn's ecclesiastical expectation was influenced by his Anglican modeling, but his passion for national churches was shaped by his hope for indigenous contextualization. As we now turn to the Church of the Nazarene we will see a shared emphasis on indigenous

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<sup>43</sup> Williams, "The Church Missionary Society," 87.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 87.

contextualization, but because of its foundations in American voluntarism, we will see a vision to maintain the whole church as one global family.

## THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE AS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

### **Early Vision for Global Equality**

When the Church of the Nazarene emerged in 1908 the parties that merged already had a number of missionaries around the world. The task now was to bring to them a shared sense of identity in this new church. In December 1913 Hiram F. Reynolds, an early General Superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene, embarked on a world tour with ten missionaries to Japan, China and India. In the following years he would visit Africa, Central America, Europe and the Middle East. As one of the highest office holders in the Church of the Nazarene, Reynolds took it upon himself to enter into the world of the missionary to gain a vision for what the global picture looked like. It was through these trips that he began to appreciate the role of the missionary, as well as the international potential of the denomination, and the international nature of the general superintendency.<sup>1</sup> From early on the denomination tried to live out the ideals of Venn and Anderson. In fact, in the year following Reynolds' first trip the church created a process for establishing self-supporting districts of churches that could do the work of contextualization in their native settings.

When a Mission Church reaches a place where it can become entirely self supporting it shall be organized by the District Missionary Superintendent (SIC) into a self supporting body according to the manual of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene adapted to the needs peculiar to the country, and shall be governed by the same. The church shall be granted a pastor whose duties and privileges

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<sup>1</sup> Floyd T. Cunningham, ed. *Our Watchword and Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2009), 215.

(SIC) shall conform to the manual; and at this time all missionary control shall be relinquished except such superintendency as provided for in the manual.<sup>2</sup>

Under this policy, foreign districts were placed on an equal plane with North American districts with the authority for the district's operation moving from missionaries to local pastors.

One important early move on the part of the Church of the Nazarene was that it did not emphasize national churches but instead tried to exist as a federation of districts. By making "mission" districts that hoped eventually to become "regular" districts they were in fact establishing an international community of Nazarenes: the decision, slowly arrived at but at last firmly made was that they were to become not a worldwide alliance of national churches but an international fellowship of related districts.<sup>3</sup> These districts were often made of people of "more than one nationality" or ethnic group, except in the case of South Africa, which accommodated to the culture of apartheid until 1992. In regards to Latin America, Nazarene historian Timothy Smith stated that "our mission to these countries...have been multiethnic in their outreach. Their real aim, however, has been to create new social communities whose members would be loyal Argentines or Brazilians and at the same time part of a worldwide fellowship called the Church of the Nazarene, in which differences of race, nationality, and skin color did not matter."<sup>4</sup> It is not to say that race and color didn't matter but they shouldn't divide the local indigenous

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<sup>2</sup> Charles R. Gailey, "Internationalization in the Church of the Nazarene" (accessed 5 March 2010); available from <http://www.nazarene.org/files/docs/Internationalization%20in%20the%20Church%20of%20the%20Nazarene.pdf>; Internet.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, "Internationalization," 112.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 115.

churches. Instead their identity within the body of Christ should unite them. The equity of Venn's ideal is certainly a part of the very best of the hopefulness of the Church of the Nazarene. According to Smith the denomination in the 1920's pressed steadily towards a ministry and an ecclesiastical polity that asked people of all backgrounds to consider themselves one in Christ.<sup>5</sup>

During this early period the decision was made that General Superintendents, the overseers of the entire "global" church, would preside at all district assemblies. The purpose of this decision was to elevate each district by giving each district body access to a General Superintendent. The people who made that decision may not have realized what the outcome would eventually look like, but with that decision they put all districts worldwide on the same footing. In a time when colonial powers ruled the world, this decision was one in the opposite direction.

### **The Importance of National Leadership**

As previously mentioned, Hiram Reynolds was heavily influenced by the works of Anderson and Venn and he allowed his ideas to shape the Nazarene tendency towards national leadership. In 1922, Reynolds appointed Nagamatsu, a native Japanese pastor, as the district superintendent. Through this act Reynolds affirmed his commitment to moving towards national leaders as soon as possible. Not long after his appointment Nagamatsu was found guilty of the misuse of church funds. There was a concern that Reynolds would not continue to trust national leadership, but Reynolds immediately

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 120.

appointed Kitagawa, another Japanese pastor, in his stead.<sup>6</sup> In 1928 the Japanese Nazarenes petitioned the General Board of the denomination to officially be recognized as a self-governing district. The Foreign Missions Department agreed and Japan became the equivalent of other fully organized districts in North America and the British Isles.<sup>7</sup>

### **Movement Towards Internationalization**

Over the next three decades the church operated under a system that acknowledged the importance of self-supporting districts, but still was not fully a global church. According to W.T. Purkiser, a Nazarene historian, the process of "internationalizing" the church began at the General Assembly, the quadrennial global denominational gathering, in Portland, Oregon in 1964.<sup>8</sup> Following that assembly a commission was started for developing the denomination's first "National Church Policy." This created the plan by which districts around the world could achieve "regular" district status. While this process can be criticized in its expectations for global districts to achieve a level of financial status that may be more difficult in some world areas, it did shed light on the need to bring more of the members of the Church of the Nazarene into the largely North American dominated denominational picture. By 1972 there was a clear movement to bring in all international voices into denominational conversations and to count all international members more effectively.

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<sup>6</sup> Cunningham, *Our Watchword and Song*, 221.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>8</sup> W.T. Purkiser, *Called Unto Holiness, Volume Two: The Story of the Nazarenes: The Second Twenty-Five Years, 1933-58*. (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962), 234.

### **National Leaders Should Have a Voice**

In a 1972 quadrennial report E.S. Phillips, as the executive secretary for World Missions, stated: “The administrative bodies of the church must be internationalized. That portion of the church which lives overseas, about one out of five, and which is growing at a rate twice that of the church in North America, must be given full voice.”<sup>9</sup> On Sat June 24, 1972, Marco Polo Hotel in Miami, FL following the General Assembly there was the first meeting of international leaders of the Church of the Nazarene without a missionary presence.<sup>10</sup> This was an important sign that the denomination was beginning to see all of its global members with a sense of equality and shared responsibility. One example of this expanding sense of internalization through national leadership was seen in the Caribbean region of the Church of the Nazarene where it was stated that “the immense growth in all of these countries owes much to rapid indigenization. The district superintendents all represent their own peoples, and missionaries have accustomed themselves very well to serving chiefly as advisors, as channels of funds for new buildings, and as educators.”<sup>11</sup> This an example of the recognition that national and indigenous leadership was not only changing the roles of the missionaries, but spurring new growth for the global church.

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Cunningham, *Our Watchword and Song*, 526.

<sup>10</sup> Franklin R. Cook, *The International Dimension: Six Expressions of the Great Commission* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1984), 52.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, “Internationalization,” 117.

### **Internationalization is a “Process”**

In the 1980's the Church of Nazarene began to focus extensive resources on the issues regarding remaining one global fellowship. At the 1985 General Assembly there was the decision to allow cultural adaptations of local, district, and regional church government procedures. This global assembly also approved the creation of regional advisory councils and conferences, and national administrative boards. In 1989, a Commission on Internationalization recommended that the Church of the Nazarene should reaffirm its preference to be a "denomination of districts, not nations." It was also reaffirmed that districts and regions should follow geographical rather than racial or ethnic lines. The 1989 General Assembly stated three principles for internationalization. The first was a sense of shared mission to spread the message of holiness around the world. The second was a focus on national identity. The third and final focus was "indigenization." This commission officially described the denomination as being a "global family."

One of the most amazing aspects of recent global Christianity, that Venn never saw, was the massive movement of persons from a “foreign” nation coming to the “mother” nation. The global family of the Church of the Nazarene has seen a radical transformation in migration of members from different nations moving to the United States, and being a part of the changing face of the church on this continent. The growth of Nazarene congregations in Mexico yielded a growing number of immigrants who had

assumed a Nazarene identity before they moved across the border to the United States.<sup>12</sup> This group now partners with Nazarenes speaking Spanish in the US. What was once considered “foreign” missions is having to be re-evaluated. This emphasis on being one global family has stimulated a movement within the denomination to avoid being simply a white middle class church and return to a focus on the poor and the immigrant in the hopes of staying true to the origins of the Church of the Nazarene, namely John Wesley, the apostles and Phineas Bresee, the founder of the Church of the Nazarene in Los Angeles prior to the merger. The ideal of a world-wide Christian “people-hood” bids every congregation in the region, no matter what its principal ethnic identity has become, to open its doors wide to persons of every race and nationality.<sup>13</sup> This new picture of the international church is beginning to be seen in some local churches, as various cultural groups share fellowship in the same congregation. Many urban centers in New York, Los Angeles and throughout Hawaii have become microcosms of what the whole Nazarene world is becoming.<sup>14</sup>

But with a sense of humility it should be noted that internationalism is a process, not a product. An international church is always in the process of becoming, of finding ways to integrate ideas, to bridge differences, to seek common goals. We are in a torn and divided world living in uneasy wariness and suspicion. The task of an international church is to allow the truth of the Good News, the beauty of holiness, the unity of the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 134.

Spirit, to bind into one unit the peoples of earth, and to model that international spirit of God's love on earth. As one Nazarene mission theorist stated, "internationalism, then, is largely a spirit, an attitude."<sup>15</sup> This is the same spirit that can be seen in Venn's mission theory and it is this same attitude of equality that leads to the mutuality that the Church of the Nazarene must keep before itself in order to remain one global family.

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<sup>15</sup> Cook, *The International Dimension*, 54

## VENN AND NAZARENE SYNTHESIS

### **Mutuality, Solidarity and Responsibility**

In this chapter I will look at Henry Venn's ideals in relation to the Church of the Nazarene's past and present experience as a "global" church family. I will look at the work of Miroslav Volf to articulate a vision for the mutuality that must exist within a global denomination. I will look to William Cavanaugh to understand the ways that solidarity must be present in the life of the "global" church family. And I will offer the work of Leonardo Boff's vision for Base Communities as an expression of the compassion and responsibility that should characterize the care and concern that must be embodied in the fellowship of the congregations that are a part of the international family of the Church of the Nazarene.

### **Venn's Vision of "Not Transplanting" Disappears**

Henry Venn was concerned that the integrity of the indigenous churches needed to be protected from the influence of European Christianity. Venn saw the failure of the missionary efforts of Jamaica in that they ignored the cultural differences of the native converts and assumed that they would fall in line with ecclesiastical organization. Venn realized that only a native church organization would turn back the tide of failure.<sup>1</sup> For Venn the essential goal was evangelization and not Europeanization. The objective was not to allow Christianity to be part of a process of "denationalizing" converts so that they became "anglicized," but rather for it to be "nationalized" and thus to be placed "in an

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, "Not Transplanting," 162.

advantageous position for permeating the whole race.” There was a real danger that Christianity would become “an alien element,” productive only of “disorder and confusion” and, rather than bringing new national strengths, would encourage its converts to deny their national heritage. In particular Christianity could too easily be seen as furthering the interests of the evangelizing nation “at the expense of the interests of the one which is being evangelized.” But it ought not to be so, and great care should be taken “to eliminate from Christianity everything of mere national peculiarity which might excite prejudice and obstruct progress.”<sup>2</sup>

Venn describes how native Christians have been raised up from the seed, the word of God. It must be remembered that Venn understood that indigenous Christians should not be the product of Christianity transplanted from Britain or anywhere else. For Venn indigenous Christianity will be raised up from seed and that seed is the word of God.<sup>3</sup> The indigenous Christianity must then be allowed to grow up in its native soil if it hopes to be generative. This emphasis on the independence of the indigenous growth dominated Venn’s later thinking, and according to Williams it was his hope that these indigenous bodies could create a separate existence.<sup>4</sup> His principles are strong conviction that culture and context matter and that paternalism is the enemy of the effective church.<sup>5</sup>

According to Yates, Venn can be counted among those “far sighted

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

administrators, who refused to listen to the voice of European procrastination.”<sup>6</sup> Venn recognized that the colonial period was a transitional time and he worked persistently to create an indigenous national church that would remain as a unifying institution after the period of colonialism was over. In fact some have even referred to him as a national hero, not in England, but in Nigeria. Venn’s work to bring development to the whole country of Nigeria has led some to describe him as responsible as any man for Nigerian nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

In 1899 amidst a fading of the Venn ideal a committee of the CMS confirmed Venn’s ideas through their report. While they recognized that Venn’s ideals may place the indigenous leaders in a position where “mistakes” might be made, they affirmed that they “must make the same venture” as Venn and entrust the church to national leadership. They admitted that it was “not unlikely that errors, troubles, or even scandals will arise—rather it is certain that they will arise—but experience is the school of God.” This idea that “experience is the school of God” was reminiscent of Venn’s sense of patience and tolerance in regards to the political, cultural and even moral ethical differences that existed between the indigenous cultures and his own.<sup>8</sup> The committee affirmed that it was their business to awaken a sense of indigenous independence. The committee’s report was not accepted but was sent to a special handpicked sub-committee to look into

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<sup>6</sup> Venn, *Memoir*, 202.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Williams, “The Necessity of Native Clergy,” 35.

the Native Church.<sup>9</sup> The ideas of the committee never saw the light of day, and Eugene Stock moved the CMS towards a church that aimed to bring together races in Christ, and not to separate them. In the following decades there would be a much greater role for Europeans, and according to Stock they should be regarded “not as a hindrance but as a help” in the organization of the church.<sup>10</sup> Here Stock was being realistic. There was no way in which the Venn ideal could ever be achieved given the prevailing high theological views of episcopacy and given the increasingly imperialistic views of European supremacy.<sup>11</sup> According to Williams, Stock’s vision for bringing the indigenous and foreign people together was out of touch with cultural and racial differences.<sup>12</sup> This methodology would not create unity, but the continued domination by the European church members.

By 1909 the Venn ideals were all but dead, and there was a general acceptance of imperialistic European superiority.<sup>13</sup> Williams describes how the 1890’s saw a new group of missionaries in the Niger region that desired to purify the lax methods of Crowther. Williams suggests that this “new, intense, unbending theology seemed to walk hand-in-hand with the cultural superiority of the new imperialism.”<sup>14</sup> Williams expressed that there was “a theological climate of certainty and high expectation which entirely

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<sup>9</sup> Williams, “The Church Missionary Society,” 107.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, “The Necessity of the Native Clergy,” 46.

lacked the sort of flexibility that is essential in any operation where the giving of greater responsibility to others is central.”<sup>15</sup> Venn’s vision for equality, independence and separation was lost in a false unity that looked more like a return to paternalism.

### **Miroslav Volf’s View of Church**

Despite the disappearance of Venn’s ideals from the following generation of the CMS, his ideals still offer much to the vision of the Church of the Nazarene to be a global church. In order to understand Venn’s contribution we will now look to the theology of Miroslav Volf, specifically his ideas about what it means to be the “charismatic church.” In *After Our Likeness*, Volf engages the tension between the particular and the universal ideas of the church within various ecclesiologies. Volf suggests that the church must be understood to exist in both particular, or local, and universal or eschatological forms. Volf contends that everywhere the worshipping body confesses and is empowered by the Spirit there is the church, but this is not the church exhaustively, as the church is always anticipating its unification in the universal church of God’s consummation. In order to describe the particularity of the church Volf refers to the term the charismatic church. According to Volf the charismatic church is the church that is empowered by the Spirit. This empowerment causes the church to have an awareness that each member of its fellowship has gifts that have been given to them for the good of the community. Volf contends that because the Spirit is universally distributed each member has common responsibility for the church. This universal distribution places each member of the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 47.

church on equal footing. Volf theorizes that because each member has gifts the church is interdependent and the life of the church must be characterized by mutuality.<sup>16</sup>

### **Volf's View of the Polycentric Church**

For Volf it is important to recognize that the church can be witnessed wherever the Spirit empowered Christ confessing community exists. Therefore the denomination or institutions of the church are not more the church than local expressions. In fact Volf says that the church does not exist “above” the congregation that assembles as a local group, a “congregation is the body of Christ in the particular locale in which it gathers together.”<sup>17</sup> He states that “the local church is not a concrete realization of the existing universal church, but rather the real anticipation or proleptic realization of the eschatological gathering of the entire people of God.”<sup>18</sup> Volf describes the polycentric nature of the church in that it is founded in its interdependence between the particular and the universal forms.

Volf's mutuality is an aid in understanding how Venn's sense of equality can be of service to a Nazarene sense of being one global family. Venn had a very high view of culture. As we have seen Venn attempted to protect the importance of this sense of culture among indigenous churches by creating a sense of separation from the hinderance

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<sup>16</sup> Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 261.

<sup>17</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 138.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

of European influences. Venn's high view of culture was relative to his high view of the indigenous church to carry out its mission free from the control of European control. Venn concluded that in order to achieve this ethnic autonomy that there would need to be a level of ecclesiastical separation between these national churches in order to safeguard against European dominance. In the Church of the Nazarene there has been an attempt to create one global church, but this has been an attempt to be done not through separation but through a committed sense of interdependence.

### **Towards a Nazarene Sense of Mutuality**

The commissions on Internationalization that met between 1985 and 1989 concluded that the local church should remain the emphasis of the denomination. They also suggested that the church should remain a federation of districts and not national churches. They described how regions and districts should be organized geographically and not ethnically.<sup>19</sup> According to Nazarene doctrine the church is defined as “the community that confesses Jesus Christ as Lord, the covenant people of God made new in Christ, the Body of Christ called together by the Holy Spirit through the Word.”<sup>20</sup> This is similar to what Volf understands as the church. As with Venn and Volf the validation of local churches within the Church of the Nazarene was something the Spirit gives and not the denominational hierarchy.

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<sup>19</sup> Cunningham, *Our Watchword and Song*, 529.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

As already stated Venn had a sense that the mission of the CMS was to make Christianity indigenous in every culture, thus recognizing that the church had many centers and not just one. This is similar to Volf's emphasis on the polycentric nature of the church. This aspect of mutuality, that everywhere the Spirit was forming a concrete people who confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, is central to the Church of the Nazarene's recognition that each local and district expression within the denomination is given validation and that each is significant to the life of the global family as a whole. The Church of the Nazarene recognizes the importance of cultural difference and the need for a sense of separation, but Volf's vision for mutuality suggests that this is not accomplished through strict independence but by developing a sense of interdependence. As one leading Nazarene missionary said, "as Christians we need each other, and we need to share with each other. In a collective we're able to hone our personalities, sharpen our vision, and strengthen our faith."<sup>21</sup> In regards to interdependence, the Church of the Nazarene as a denomination has the opportunity in its fellowship to remind the local church that there is something larger and greater than itself that it must be anticipating. The denomination also serves to protect against any sense that the church is an abstraction but that the future universal eschatological hope must be presently anticipated and participated in and through a local setting. As the church moves forward it must continue to be challenged in this area of mutuality, and the value of the equality of all local churches and district churches around the world. It must continue toward

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<sup>21</sup> Richard F. Zanner, "The Expanding Church In A Globalized World," In *Vistas: The Changing Face of Nazarene Missions*, ed. R. Franklin Cook (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2009), 33.

recognizing each as an embodiment of the Spirit at work, and the continued movement towards a global body that awaits the eschatological vision of equality, by creating a body of people where all voices have equal participation in the life of the community.

### **Mutuality in Nazarene History and Present**

In May 1919 Hiram Reynolds convened the first district assembly in Japan. Through this gathering of missionaries and nationals, Reynolds was eager for more national involvement by the indigenous Japanese who had become Nazarenes. One major stumbling block to this vision was that there were missionaries who were not desirous for this to take place. During this assembly Reynolds had the Manual, the Nazarene handbook for doctrine and polity, translated into Japanese. He also took time to listen to the arguments of several missionaries against the participation of the Japanese leaders in the assembly. They told Reynolds plainly that the Japanese leaders must be treated as subordinates, or they themselves would leave. Reynolds acted in the same way as he had with other missionaries in India some years before who had attempted to keep nationals as their subordinates. He accepted their resignations.<sup>22</sup>

This early expression of attempts at equality and mutuality continued in the Nazarene progression over time to see the role of the missionary as changing from “controller” to “adviser and consultant.” Similar to Venn’s concern about the “euthanasia” of the mission, the movement from the necessity and value of the control of the foreign missionary had to give way to the necessity and value of the contextualization

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<sup>22</sup> Cunningham, *Our Watchword and Song*, 220.

of local leadership.<sup>23</sup> The missionary could no longer be given exclusive claim to control of the funds. They no longer could control the selection of national leadership. They no longer could impose their will and ideas, nor the ideas of the denomination, as they perceived them. In the spirit of Venn's "euthanasia of the mission" the missionary in the Church of the Nazarene became only temporarily the leader. The hope is that they would soon become the servant follower.<sup>24</sup> Mutuality in the Church of the Nazarene means that each indigenous local and district church must move to a place where they are responsible for the contextualization of the gospel within their world area as a part of a global interdependent family. This mutuality is still a work in progress.

### **Embracing the Global Voices**

In order to see the progression that is taking place in regards to the involvement of global participation it will help to see the progression of the diverse involvement of members of the denomination in its largest gathered form, the quadrennial General Assembly. By the time of the 2001 General Assembly, held in Indianapolis, IN, 42 percent of the Nazarene delegates present and voting were native of world areas outside of the US. By the time of the last assembly in 2009, 64 percent of the members of Church of the Nazarene were from world areas outside of the US. In that same year some 80 percent of the church's 429 districts were from outside the United States. In regards to participation in the actual General Assembly it was reported that compared to the 562 delegates representing the USA and Canada (55 percent) there were only 461 delegates

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<sup>23</sup> Cook, *The International Dimension*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 17.

were from other world regions (45 percent).<sup>25</sup> As many elected delegates from outside the United States could not attend the General Assembly due to financial, US immigration policies or other reasons, the General Assembly authorized the creation of "a committee to address the concern that a high percentage (as many as 40 percent in some world regions) of non-North American/non-United States delegates are unable to attend a General Assembly".<sup>26</sup> Since the Church of the Nazarene's quadrennial General Assembly is based on representation from districts from 151 world areas, the 2009 General Assembly was probably one of the most racially and linguistically diverse general meetings of any religious body that originated on American soil.<sup>27</sup> Despite the diverse presence in 2009, it is still vitally important that as the denomination moves towards further mutuality that it find creative ways to further involve more of its global representation. This may include using technology to allow those who cannot be present to participate "virtually." This may mean that the General Assembly needs to be held in another world area like South America or Africa where a greater representation from that world area would be able to attend.

In looking at mutuality it is important to look at the other major governing body in the denomination is the General Board. The General Board is elected to serve as the representative governing body for the denomination in between the times of General Assemblies. For the quadrennial that started in July 2009, the General Board currently

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<sup>25</sup> "Legislative Actions and G.S. Ballots", *Nazarene News* (29 June 2009 accessed 2 March 2010); available from <http://www.nph.com/nphweb/html/ncn/article.jsp?id=10007296>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

has 44 members representing the church's 15 regions, and an additional four members were elected to represent the International Board of Education, Nazarene Youth International, and Nazarene Missions International. Of the 48 members elected, 27 (56%) are from outside the US, and 21 are US citizens.<sup>28</sup> From this smaller scale we can see that there is a more equitable system of involvement in the General Board. This microcosm of the denomination does serve as a hopeful image for greater mutuality, but much still has to be done to incorporate a larger percentage of voices from outside the US in the General Assembly if it is to be truly representative of the global church family.

The most significant movement towards a sense of mutuality in the Church of the Nazarene in recent times was the recent election of a new General Superintendent during the events of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Quadrennial General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene in the summer of 2009. During that assembly the denomination elected its first non-US born General Superintendent. The election of this leader was an important move to place a non-US born member of the denomination in the most influential office in the entire global church. It will be interesting to see what effect this leader has on the sense of oneness that exists among the global church family. It can at least be said that this election is a significant move towards a sense of mutuality within the denomination. It communicates a sense that anyone from anywhere can potentially rise to the level of global leadership within the global church family. But what does this mutuality look like in concrete political and economic reality? First we will look at what this one global family can look like in regards to political solidarity.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

### Venn's Political Intervention

Venn was not an imperialist, and his advice regarding political intervention gives a vision of how missionaries could be focused on a transcendent mode of citizenship within indigenous cultures. Venn was also concerned that missionaries could serve as a voice of solidarity with their indigenous converts. In Andrew Porter's article "Commerce and Christianity" he characterizes Venn as standing in line with Buxton and De Las Casas as he views the important role of commerce and Christianity but only views government as a regulating body that can help create sustainable trade for potential church financiers.<sup>29</sup> David Bosch paints a similar portrayal of Venn, as he suggests that Henry Venn urged missionaries to take their stand between the "oppressor of the oppressed, between the tyranny of the system and the morally and physically threatened masses of the people to whom they went."<sup>30</sup> While Venn believed in the morality of the government in England to bring about positive advancement in Africa, he also recognized that sometimes the missionary had to stand against governing bodies in order to stand on the side of those who needed liberation.

While Venn's fame for his prowess for mission theory often overshadows Venn's accomplishments in political and economical intervention, it is important that Venn's role in fighting for justice be recognized. One of Venn's contributions is that he

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<sup>29</sup> Andrew Porter, "Commerce and Christianity: The Rise and Fall of Nineteenth Century Missionary Slogan," *The Historical Journal* 28:3 (1985): 615.

<sup>30</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 288.

acknowledged the role of the missionary as advisor against injustice. He described the political aspect of the missionary as one

going among the people with a message of love upon his lips, and with the spirit of love in his heart, he soon wins their confidence beyond all other persons of his race. He becomes their best friend—their faithful adviser. His message embraces their temporal as well as their spiritual interests, for ‘godliness’ hath the ‘promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.’ They have, therefore, a claim upon him for advice, and assistance against injustice and wrong.<sup>31</sup>

The missionary has, moreover, a message to declare, on proper occasions, to those in authority, on their responsibility to God, by whose ordinance they exercise the right of government.<sup>32</sup> Venn had a clear sense that obedience to the sovereign powers is not an absolute. He suggested that the effect of the good news had a tendency to elevate the social standing of those who become a part of the church. This elevation included a greater awareness of issues related to justice within their society. For Venn the call to Christian duty secured “obedience to the sovereign powers” but this was limited only to those “things lawful in the sight of God as defined in His Word”<sup>33</sup>

During the period of the Indian Mutiny in 1857 Venn was receiving letters from missionaries who were concerned what action they should take. Venn suggested that there may be an outcry from government and political agencies when a minister of religion were “meddling with politics” but he views these issues (the State support of idolatry, the social institution of slavery, the treatment of the aborigines) as not simply

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<sup>31</sup> Venn, *Memoir*, 469.

<sup>32</sup> Venn, *Memoir*, 469.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 468.

political affairs but “mixed character.” Venn expressed his belief that when the issues of justice, humanity and Christian duty are in question it is the duty of the missionary to engage in these “mixed” issues.<sup>34</sup>

In regard to political intervention Venn admired the work of Francis Xavier in his efforts to protect those to whom he was sent as a missionary. Venn describes how Xavier was able to interact respectfully with both high government officials and the poorest of the indigenous peoples. But his esteem for Xavier came especially in his respect of the indigenous people for whom “he acted the part of a true Missionary, maintaining their rights against the oppression and injustice of his own countrymen, and treating them as possessing the same feelings and capacities as their more civilized fellow-men.”<sup>35</sup> Venn had an optimistic sense of the influence of the missionary. He believed that in questions of justice it would be a sign of wisdom for the governing powers to listen to the suggestions of the missionary and seek their partnership. Venn warned that if the government authorities fail to heed the advice of the missionary then the missionary is driven to an appeal to public opinion as a final resort. Venn hoped that the missionary could create enough pressure on the government that it might be “compelled to yield that which Christian principle demands.”<sup>36</sup> In Venn’s *Memoirs* he cited a specific case where there was an appeal to the British Empire to step in when a missionary was imprisoned

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Venn, *Xavier*, 252

<sup>36</sup> Venn, *Memoir*, 471.

for being a “political agitator” and tried as a rebel.<sup>37</sup> He also described a case in Madras where the missionaries had been known to stand up for the civil rights of the converts. The government of Madras censured the missionaries for appearing in courts of justice as the friends of the oppressed Christian, the “Home Government” reversed the censure, and vindicated the conduct of the missionary, as being the natural and proper guardian of the just civil rights of the convert.<sup>38</sup>

In regards to specific political activity Venn and the CMS offered these practical steps. First, each missionary was “not to take up supposed grievances too hastily” but to wait to consult other Christians to see if they ascertained the reality and importance of any alleged social or civil wrong. The church is perfect for this as the community can serve as a conversation party for deciding whether issues should be engaged. These “mixed” questions, questions of justice, not just governance, are the exception to the general rule of strict abstinence to interfering in political affairs.<sup>39</sup> Second, Venn suggested that if you cannot avoid getting involved, guard against a “political spirit,” which he described as a position of hostility to the ruling powers. He suggested that becoming hostile to the ruling government could create public censure, or bad press. He challenged the missionaries to respect the authorities in respectful and confiding terms.<sup>40</sup>

The instructions made it clear that there would be a serious threat of danger if the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 472.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 473.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 474.

missionary was to take the side of the indigenous people, or to stand up as the friend of the aborigines, in opposition to the oppression of unprincipled European settlers. Venn cited the danger that was faced by those who were working towards the end of the slave trade, namely, Wilberforce, Macaulay, Stephen, and all other champions of the “negro” race.<sup>41</sup> Venn suggested that if a missionary cannot maintain a sense of neutrality they should at least consider coming “home,” but he stated that as long as they can maintain their Christian “independence and unity, let them remain as oil upon troubled waters, and may He who stilleth the madness of the people be their shield and refuge—their guide and friend—their all in all.”<sup>42</sup>

### **Cavanaugh’s View of Solidarity**

Venn’s sense of equality led to a sense of political solidarity with the members of the indigenous churches. In order to more fully understand this sense of solidarity, I will turn to the work of William Cavanaugh. In William Cavanaugh’s *Torture and Eucharist* we see a vision for what it might mean to have political solidarity against injustice, especially when one is standing as one global family. In *Torture and Eucharist*, I see a contemporary example of the Catholic Church in Chile. In this work Cavanaugh is attempting to recount the deadly practices of the regime that existed before and during the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, from 1973-1990. Cavanaugh suggests that the coercive powers and tortuous practices of this regime were not merely against individuals, but social groups. He argues that when the church removes itself

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 478.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 480.

from political responsibility and solidarity with those who are being oppressed, it allows these powers to reign free. He describes how even the simply but profound practice of the Eucharist can be a powerful sacred action that allows the church to understand itself as an alternative social group to the coercive state and an alternative body to stand with those who would be oppressed. In his time in Chile Cavanaugh heard the horrific stories of those who were tortured by this corrupt regime. Cavanaugh states that torture is meant “for the colonization of the subjectivities of political opponents of the regime, their neutralization as opponents, and their reconstitution” into a people who can be controlled by the fearful tyranny of political dictators.<sup>43</sup> The practice of torture is not only threatening in its effect against individuals, but it must also be understood as “aspiring to the disappearance of the visibility of the body of Christ.”<sup>44</sup> Cavanaugh describes how in order to take a public stand against the torturing the church began to institute the practice of anonymously excommunicating torturers. The church recognized that it was attempting to thwart the activity of torturers by making the church visible as a countering force to those who were torturing. Its only recourse was through the excluding of torturers in general, and not by name, from their fellowship and from communion and confession. The church discussed actually publically excommunicating General Pinochet himself, but chose not to because they neither wanted to invite more abuse to the poor and the church, and also because they wanted not to be guilty of forming their own inquisition and using the same practices as the torturers. One leader suggested that when

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<sup>43</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist* (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 70.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Jesus met with tax collectors the effort was always on building, not burning bridges between the oppressor and the oppressed.<sup>45</sup>

To get a fuller view of Cavanaugh's vision for political solidarity it is important to view another of his works, namely *Theopolitical Imagination*. In this work Cavanaugh argues that nation states are institutions that rely on imagination. He describes how national borders, national enemies and national identities are all myths that are created by the state. He states that the church as "the body of Christ transgresses both the lines which separate public from private and the borders of nation-states, this creates space for a different kind of political practice, one which is incapable of being pressed into the service of wars or rumors of wars."<sup>46</sup> Cavanaugh describes how the international nature of the church is an affront to the nation-state for whom citizenship stops at the border.<sup>47</sup> From Cavanaugh we can see a vision of how the oneness of the church as a local and global family can offer its members a place of not only identity, but hopefully a place of refuge and political support.

### **Cavanaugh's Faulty Unity**

Cavanaugh describes how there were those within the Catholic Church in Chile who desired to do nothing in regards to actual political activity, but still keep unified as one Catholic Church. He describes how there was a group that believed that regardless of

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<sup>45</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture*, 259.

<sup>46</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 90.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

the torturous practices there must be a sense of unity that remains. Cavanaugh describes how this is a faulty unity based in a faulty ecclesiology which “posits unity only on the level of the ‘spiritual’ and pluralism on the level of the ‘temporal.’”<sup>48</sup> This is an important distinction as we look back at Venn, who saw it as the duty of the missionary to be actively involved in the political defense of the indigenous church. This is also an important distinction as we look at specific examples within the history of the Church of the Nazarene. If a church is to be one people then is this simply limited to “spiritual” issues alone? For Cavanaugh the “temporal” is essential for defining whether there is a true sense of solidarity within a group. The church that claims to be one global family is called to embody a sense of solidarity, and called to enact a different kind of ‘politics.’”<sup>49</sup>

### **Nazarene Political Solidarity**

During World War II the Church of the Nazarene issued a statement granting the freedom of its members to decide as citizens of their own nations how to participate in the war. The only caveat is that they should do this in a way that is compatible with the Christian faith and the Christian way of life.<sup>50</sup> The Church of the Nazarene, to its US membership, declared that it would recognize members of its congregations that desired to be conscientious objectors to war; within a year 700 Nazarene members had registered as such with the general secretary.<sup>51</sup> When war came to the United States over 25,000

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<sup>48</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture*, 261.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>50</sup> Cunningham, *Our Watchword and Song*, 329.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 330.

Nazarenes were active in military service, and 680 of the 700 who registered as conscientious objectors actually went on to enlist in military service.<sup>52</sup> In Japan numerous Nazarene pastors were selected to serve on the front lines of military service; many others were also required to serve in military factories.<sup>53</sup> Overall the Nazarene Church in Japan expressed a sense of national allegiance through its editorials and actions during this time period. Following the war Nazarene chaplains in the US armed services were the first to be able to gain contact with many of the Japanese Nazarenes. Through their positions these chaplains were able to provide food, clothing and even work as translators to their Nazarene brothers and sisters.<sup>54</sup> These events in both the U.S. and Japan are an interesting image of a church struggling towards becoming a global family, as members of the same denominational body were on opposite sides of a war. Interestingly following the conflict, the actions of the US chaplains expressed the reality that despite their allegiances to their national causes there still was an underlying sense of loyalty to those whom they considered to be family.

Nazarenes were also divided in the revolution in Nicaragua in the 1970's and 1980's. While many Protestants, including Nazarenes, fled the cities to avoid the conflict between the regime of Anastasio Somoza and the "Sandinistas", some Nazarenes, viewing the Sandinista rebels as having similarities to Christ's kingdom, actually took up arms.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 333

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 336.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 562.

Throughout the past hundred years Nazarenes have been present in the many conflicts around the globe from Nicaragua to Rwanda. In these conflicts Nazarenes have not displayed any unified response. As already mentioned many Japanese church members supported the nation during World War II. In 1993 the Church of the Nazarene in Japan made a formal confession of regret and repentance for their participation in the military actions by their nation during the second World War. In his statement Higuchi Shigeru, District Superintendent of Japan, stated that the Nazarene churches of Japan “regret and repent” that they did not “resist the aggression, but rather cooperated with it.”<sup>56</sup> He expressed the intent that they would never be a part of such atrocities again. But despite this statement from the members of the denomination in Japan there had never been a similar expression from other members of the global Nazarene family for their roles in the same world war. One question for the denomination as a global family is which is more central to their identity in times of conflict and oppression, their national citizenship or their ecclesiastical fellowship.

Historically the missionaries of the Church of the Nazarene were forbidden to make political speeches or take political positions in the countries where they were serving. But what does political solidarity look like now that the denomination is attempting to be an interdependent global family? This is especially interesting in looking at the case of South Africa. As one Nazarene mission theorist recognized the missionary is no longer a colonizer, but he went on to suggest that instead they must act as if they were a loyal citizen, living among the people and sharing in the life of the

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<sup>56</sup> Cunningham, *Our Watchword and Song*, 565.

nation.<sup>57</sup> But sometimes sharing in that life is a challenge to being a united global family.

In regards to South Africa, Timothy Smith suggested that Nazarene accommodation to the legal segregation of races suppressed the dawning consciousness of Nazarene people-hood. Smith admits that the denomination faces criticism for its compromises with the system of apartheid, but he suggests that the denomination had always thought that this was merely a temporary necessity.<sup>58</sup> Historically there has been a perspective from some traditions that it is the responsibility of Christians to merely accept governmental systems like apartheid as ordained by God. This was true in the case of South Africa under the apartheid regime where even some protestant pastors warned members of the church that they should not be involved in “political matters.”<sup>59</sup>

But a young Baptist theologian named Ellis Andre attempted to challenge his colleagues, by asking them to define legitimate dimensions for the church’s socio-political witness in relation to its proclamation of the Gospel. He challenged his fellow pastors to consider if this time and this stage were not the perfect opportunity for the gospel to speak out against injustice, and call the governing bodies to what is right.<sup>60</sup>

Andre worked described how Romans 13:1-7 was often used to call the church to submit to the governments that they assumed God had put in place. But he suggests that a better translation is to see the call in this text to arrange oneself under the governing

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<sup>57</sup> Cook, *Vistas*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Smith, “Internationalization,” 119.

<sup>59</sup> Frederick Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid” *Journal of Church and State*. 48:4 (2006): 768.

<sup>60</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union” 770.

power, not simply to obey. He suggested that in as much as they might believe that God had ordained the governments that are in place, he had also ordained this Christian presence to be there and take part in God's ordering of Creation.<sup>61</sup> While the transition of post-apartheid South Africa took place in the 1990's, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission called for churches to submit oral and written submission of their roles during the time of apartheid. The Baptist Union admitted that they had taken some steps to condemn the wrongdoings but confessed that they "did not do nearly enough... We did not sufficiently challenge the legitimacy of unjust institutions and sometimes we hid behind our own structures. All too often we did not translate our resolutions into resolute action."<sup>62</sup>

Ted Esselstyn, a retired Nazarene missionary to southern Africa, describes how the Nazarene response to Apartheid was mixed. He suggests that "Government support for church work and opposition to atheistic communism, the American concept separating Church and State, and biblical injunctions to obey the law, led Nazarene missionaries to defer to apartheid laws." Many white Nazarenes, even missionaries who viewed it as a wrong, supported the basic separate-development concept.<sup>63</sup> But Esselstyn suggests that for many Nazarenes apartheid was a government and societal issue beyond the concern of "true" Christianity. From

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 771.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 775.

<sup>63</sup> Ted Esselstyn, "Remembering Issues in Africa" (accessed 6 March 2010); available from <http://www.nazarene.org/ministries/administration/archives/links/display.aspx>

Venn's example we see that there are times when the church must take on oppressive systems and stand as an alternative state. In the case of political action should the Church of the Nazarene not move to a place of globally unified activity in times of oppression and war? The images of US Nazarenes going into battle against Japanese Nazarenes seems to be a far cry from the image of one global family. And with regards to unjust political systems, could Cavanaugh's vision of solidarity be a challenge to the Nazarenes to live out creative ways of protest amidst unjust systems?

### **Venn's Activism**

Venn's contribution to the Church of the Nazarene's understanding of oneness was not only in the areas of mutuality and solidarity, but also in the importance of viewing activism as a new sense of responsibility. His philanthropic activity is a challenge to the Church of the Nazarene of what a global family might look like in an economic sense. The activism of Venn's missionary endeavors is an example of what Nazarene compassionate responsibility can hope to emulate.

One of the ways that Venn and other evangelicals understood the unity of "evangelization" and "humanization", of "service to the soul" and "service to the body" was through proclaiming the gospel and spreading a "beneficent civilization."<sup>64</sup> William Wilberforce and other members of British evangelical society through its involvement in the anti-slavery movement produced a pressure group seeking to exert a corporate

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<sup>64</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 288.

influence on many aspects of public life.<sup>65</sup> This involvement in the anti-slavery movement led the evangelicals down many an unexpected path. The evangelical missionaries in Africa found themselves champions not only of Christianity, but also of European commerce and civilization.<sup>66</sup> Venn believed that the involvement of the Clapham sect in the founding of Sierra Leone, as a place where slaves were brought to be liberated after being released from slave trading ships, was a sign of God's providence.

One of the major influences on Venn's practice of activism in Africa was Thomas Fowell Buxton. In *The African Slave Trade*, Buxton's only major published work, he attempts to present the state of the African slave trade from the perspective of indigenous Africans as having for them both an "infinite cost" and "a miserable return of profit." He argues that the cultivation of Africa's natural resources would provide a harvest to create trade and support Africa. Buxton believed it was possible to convince the African nations of the possibility of them becoming a partner in the global economy and not just its victim. Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786-1844) was a member of the parliament of England from 1818 to 1837. During that time he was asked by William Wilberforce to lead the parliamentary charge against slavery. He saw the passing of legislation in 1833 granting emancipation to slaves within the British Empire, and he spent the remainder of his life searching for a new future for Africa in the global arena.

Buxton served as the president of the Aborigines Protection Society. It was through this position that he heard the testimonies of the atrocities of the African slave

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<sup>65</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, 9f.

<sup>66</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, 10.

trade. Buxton, who had experienced an evangelical conversion at the age of 27, relied heavily on the reports coming from missionaries in regards to the atrocities of the slave trade to the indigenous people. The majority of his work in *The African Slave Trade* recounts the deplorable treatment of the African people by those who benefited from the trade. He suggested that it cost 475 Africans for every 150 slaves that actually made it to market.<sup>67</sup> The problem is that even though Buxton's movement was able to shame<sup>68</sup> England out of the trade, this tactic was not effective against the Portuguese and others who were making 180 percent profit off the situation. He suggests that "if we cannot be persuaded to suppress the Slave Trade for the fear of God, or in pity to man, it ought to be done for the lucre of gain."<sup>69</sup> Buxton argues that if you removed the obstacle of slavery, then Africa's fertile soil, abundant raw materials, and compensated laborers could provide a more rich global market for everyone involved.

Buxton stood with the indigenous oppressed against the settling government authorities. His vision for a biblical understanding of the equality of all humanity inspired him to fight against the view of the slave traders, that Africans were mere raw materials themselves, and fight for the view of the indigenous Africans that they had the

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London: John Murry Albemarle Street, 1840) Buxton argues that during the sequencing process of seizure, march, detention, passage and seasoning the number dead is far more than the number of slaves being sold (168). He also gives testimonies that speak to the tribal wars that exist merely because there is a market for their prisoners. (57) He also states that he feels "confident that the Slave Trade has established feuds among them (the African tribes around the Gambia), by which they will be embroiled in war for generations to come, unless the disposition be destroyed by the Christian religion, or their circumstances be changed by civilization." (65)

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., xiv. Buxton gives background to remind the British that once they were viewed by the Romans as savages, guilty of cannibalism and of little more value than "cattle."

<sup>69</sup> Buxton, *The African Slave Trade*, 194.

capacity to transform their land into a fertile source of benefit for the global market. He concludes by challenging all Christian peers to unite as one confederacy to bring both Christian faith and commerce to the indigenous African nations for their cultivation as a global economic partner.<sup>70</sup> The work of Venn seems to embody the work of Buxton in that if he cannot interest the British government to act on behalf of those being traded on moral grounds, he hopes to at least make the situation important on monetary grounds.

Buxton attempted to live out these ideas in an incredibly costly expedition along the Niger River. His expedition failed for the immediate time frame and Buxton died two years later. But his ideas were carried on in the work of Henry Venn. And it was through Venn that “[Buxton’s] vision and the broad principles of action that he proposed” were seen.<sup>71</sup> The best-known and best-documented results of the Buxton plan were the efforts to promote African cash crops made by Henry Venn. Though he looked at a number of other possible products, he settled on cotton. He first tried to promote its cultivation in Sierra Leone but achieved success at Abbeokuta. This experiment was so successful that by 1859 raw cotton exports had reached some 2500 bales and 200 gins and half a dozen presses were at work there. Abbeokuta’s experience impressed others. In late 1859 a party from an American organization for the promotion of “negro” emigration visited the town and returned convinced of the cotton-exporting potential of West Africa. Their enthusiasm helped prompt the foundation for the African Aid Society, which sought African improvement and an end to the slave trade through cotton cultivation aided by

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>71</sup> Venn, *Memoir*, 183.

the immigration of the negro experts. This Society directed its major efforts to compelling local tribal leadership away from the slave trade by persuading them to grow cotton in its stead. Various other missionary groups in the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and elsewhere established model cotton farms or sought to encourage cotton export through purchases. It was therefore not surprising that in December 1859 the Cotton Supply Reporter saw collaboration with missionaries as the most promising method for achieving its ends in West Africa.<sup>72</sup>

Venn would be the architect of the broadening nature of evangelical activism, that was understood in the importance of social transformation as well as spiritual. On October 25, 1844 he wrote in a letter addressed to missionaries on their way to Abbeokuta that there are “three means of improving the condition of man.”<sup>73</sup> First and most important was the Gospel, “the most potent influence... the grace of God.”<sup>74</sup> But he followed by saying that they should also recognize that in proportion you will be “laying the foundation on solid grounds of the improvement of the Social condition of the Natives, while you are imparting to them spiritual blessings.”<sup>75</sup> Second, Venn encouraged them to see the importance of agriculture. He suggested that “this secures a due supply of the necessaries of life...fosters habits of industry...creates property...and consequently operates as a preventive of wars and rapine.” Finally, he spoke of

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<sup>72</sup> Barrie M. Ratcliffe, “Cotton Imperialism: Manchester Merchants and Cotton Cultivation in West Africa in the Mid-Nineteenth,” *African Economic History*, No. 11 (1982), 95.

<sup>73</sup> Venn, *To Apply the Gospel*, 184.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 184.

commerce, how agriculture should create the stimulus of an active economy there.

Another important contribution by Venn was that he arranged for Africans to spend three months at Kew Gardens, where they learned methods of cultivation. He established cotton gins at Abeokuta, promoted the training of Africans in industrial employment and he helped them to establish themselves. In Sierra Leone he recognized that there was no industry, no profitable employment and so he called for practices that caused the “encouragement of industry” like prizes for agricultural and mechanical enterprise, and of model farms as well as Savings’ Banks.<sup>76</sup> Venn warns his African leadership that they have been placed in charge of many of these projects and that they must be wary about trading with Europeans who try to take advantage and trade to get the lowest possible price. He suggests that they don’t have their best interest in mind, but he states that we “hope that by God’s blessing on our plans a large body of such Native independent growers of Cotton and traders may spring up, who may form an intelligent and influential class of Society and become the founders of a kingdom which shall render incalculable benefits to Africa and hold a position amongst the States of Europe.”<sup>77</sup>

In Venn we see the power of the gospel in history through the valuing of every human being as having potential to wage his/her own future, through partnerships that advance mutuality and through a church that transform society. In a letter to a Mr. Johnson, Venn gives words of encouragement to this student who is returning to Sierra Leone, after spending time in London at the CMS School for training and at the Kew

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 193.

Gardens for agricultural training. In this note Venn is optimistic that on his return he can build a great garden. He writes,

When you first return to Sierra Leone, and look at your own farm, and then recollect Kew Gardens, you may think that your lots are worth little care. But remember, that the ground of Kew Gardens was once of little value as yours – that it only grew grass and trees without fruit, till cultivation made it what it is; so the value of your farm, if the soil be better tilled, and it be stocked with valuable plants, may become double, or five times its present value.<sup>78</sup>

These words are exemplary of the optimistic view that Venn had of both the native church and especially its native people in Africa. Venn's legacy as a church strategist may be what he is most remembered for, but his understanding of the importance of a people in Africa standing on their own two feet is what is so prophetic today. Venn was a prophetic voice that was forgotten during the long years of imperialism, but whose words can still speak today of the possibilities and potential for a continent to develop to a place of economic stability. This could especially be made possible through partnerships within a global family of interdependent churches.

Venn's developmental strategy also included the creation of financial institutions. In another letter Venn suggested that the African Industrial Committee should establish Savings' Banks to provide opportunity for the natives of Sierra Leone to protect their resources.<sup>79</sup> He recognized that when natives get money they hide it in the ground, invested it in furniture or bought goods that were sold at a disadvantage to the European

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid. Venn's letter to Mr. Johnson, a native African who had come to Kew Gardens to study agriculture and returned to Abbeokuta to advance the mission.

<sup>79</sup> It is important to recognize that Venn had a high opinion of capitalism, as was common among the early evangelicals.

traders. Venn suggested that the group should ask the government to store the money in the Colonial chest and give “a per cent interest” so that the native could benefit. Venn also wanted to encourage shared leadership in this enterprise. He suggested that the bank should have both native and English management, and “that the presence of two managers, a European and a Native, should be necessary for any receipt or re-payment of money.” The committee should “allow for the expenses of Management for three years; in which time it may be hoped that the Bank will be able to pay its own expenses, and the Management of it to be sufficiently established.”<sup>80</sup> Here we see ideas similar to Venn’s vision for a native church. While these ideas share the same strategy, they more importantly share the same sense of activism, the sense that the native people were capable of achieving their own future. Venn suggested the creation of a “ Loan Society, for advancing loans either upon Colonial produce or upon personal security” as well as, “Benefit clubs, clothing clubs and a dispensary.” Venn concluded by making them aware that the CMS has already arranged for a medical doctor to come in a few months “for the double purpose of affording medical aid to the Mission, and of training up a few hopeful native youths in medical knowledge and practice.”<sup>81</sup> All of these episodes of activism are Venn’s vision for what the gospel looks like embodied. For Venn the goal was not simply efficient churches but real social transformation. In fact he suggested that if the Institution prospers so far as to afford any surplus profits, such surplus will be available for Missionary purposes. But this was not the object of the Institution. That object was to

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

“train up Natives, especially those educated in their Schools, to industrial employments, and to help the Natives to establish themselves in profitable trade and commerce, to supersede by God’s blessings the abominable traffic in each other.”<sup>82</sup>

Throughout his efforts in activism, Venn was concerned with continuing the work of Buxton in stopping the slave trade. One means of doing this was the British squadrons that were arresting the trade ships along the West African coast. To one missionary activist he wrote:

A great change has taken place since you left England in the price and demand for Cotton. The manufacturers of Manchester have become most eager for the encouragement of African cotton. This has already become a powerful argument in favor of the Squadron.<sup>83</sup>

Venn went on to say that the missionary should send cotton specimens in order to convince more private investors in England. The emphasis in the letter is that all of this development is necessary to ensure that the British squadrons will continue to protect the West African coast against slave traders. The cotton business was successful until 1865, and during that time Venn was able to strengthen the protection of the West Africans against those who saw them as easy targets for capture.

### **Boff’s View of Responsibility**

To understand the vision for how the Church of the Nazarene might benefit as a global body from a understanding of Venn’s vision for activism, we will look at the work of Leonardo Boff in regards to base communities. In *Ecclesiogenesis* Leonardo Boff

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 185.

speaks of the important contribution grass roots Christian base communities are making in regards to new expressions of ecclesiastical life. In particular he speaks about how the absence of priests and the institutional hierarchy of the Catholic in certain rural areas of Latin America had resulted in a church community that was less centered in sacramental liturgy and more centered in catechesis. Through these times of teaching the people began to create a new grounded sense of religious life. One result was that instead of building chapels they built meeting halls. These meeting halls were also able to be used for schools, sewing lessons and community meetings.<sup>84</sup> The lack of institutional oversight in these places created expressions of church life that are concerned with the everyday lives of the people. These communities were characterized by reciprocity, direct relationships and a sense of equality among members. Boff suggested that these particular communities are the church wholly, because in each location expression the whole expression of the mystery of salvation is contained. But Boff also recognized that it is important to realize that none of these particular churches are the whole church because none of them exhausts the whole mystery of salvation in itself.<sup>85</sup> Similar to Volf's vision for both the particular and universal expressions of the church, Boff places great value on the concrete expressions through local congregations but also expresses a vision that these expressions are only an anticipation of what God is bringing through His whole salvation. Boff envisions a church community that views its responsibility to be a

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<sup>84</sup> Leonardo Boff. *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), 3.

<sup>85</sup> Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, 18.

community of compassion, suffering with, as its life of worship.

In an article regarding base community ecclesiology, William T. Cavanaugh critiques Boff in that he assumes that the base communities are utopic autonomous units that view authority as entirely negative and assumes that the base communities are likened to the apostolic communities that he suggests grew up without authority.<sup>86</sup> Boff's view of the negative effects of institutional hierarchy, and positive effects of local autonomy is similar to what some of the early Nazarenes wanted. In the original group that merged to form the global denomination there was a representation from the East coast who were hesitant about giving up their more congregational form of government for a merger that they feared would produce a large institutional government. Many of the Nazarenes desired a polity that had a hierarchy that was as invisible as possible. In regards to institutional life Boff states that the universal church must rely on an organizational entity to maintain its life, but this hierarchical function does not exist for itself.<sup>87</sup> The key for a church to maintain mutuality is to create an organizational structure that values the Spirit's leadership in each local body and views the institutional hierarchy as a means of service to those local communities.

We have already seen in Volf the importance the charism or the Spirit serves within the recognition of each local church being recognized as a part of the global family of churches in an equal sense. For Volf this charism is "not outside the

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<sup>86</sup> Cavanaugh, "Medelin," 76.

<sup>87</sup> Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, 25.

community, but within it; not over the community, but for the good of the community.”<sup>88</sup>

Venn’s model of activism, that was concerned with the economic development of the new indigenous churches, is illustrative of the type of hierarchy that should be a model for the Church of the Nazarene. Venn’s model requires that character of our organizational life must have a sense of compassion, a shared sense of economic responsibility. Like the early church in Acts that shared its possessions in common, compassionate responsibility is a call that the Global Church of the Nazarene express its mutuality and solidarity through concrete acts. Compassion has to be more than charity but must really be an example of *cum patti* or suffering with. As we have seen Venn is concerned with the potential of the people of his churches. This oneness must be embodied in a new social, economic and political reality. Compassionate Ministry is not about enlarging our territory in an abstract way, but creating local communities that embody the new social, economic and political life of the body of Christ. The denomination is a means of serving and stabilizing this reality.

Cavanaugh gives an example of some of the acts of compassionate responsibility by the Catholic Churches during his time in Chile. He describes how an important way that the church served as a parallel state during this time was through the Committee of Cooperation for Peace in Chile (COPACHI). This group created space within churches, for people to receive support, when they were unable to receive it by any other means. Through this group people were offered legal help, health clinics, job training, soup kitchens and buying cooperatives. It was through this group that the church continued to

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 28.

be a source of hope and peace under a torturous regime.<sup>89</sup> This activity is a picture of the responsibility that the Church of the Nazarene must embody as one global family.

### **Nazarene Compassionate Ministry**

The Church of the Nazarene has had a long history of social ministries. One former General Superintendent suggested that in the early beginnings of the denomination there was a sense of “a rebirth of social concern and compassion as an authentic expression of Christian holiness.”<sup>90</sup> In its formative years the denomination was active in ministries to women, orphans and immigrants around the world. But following the difficult years of the Great Depression the general superintendents reaffirmed “saving souls” as the central mission of the Church of the Nazarene. An attempt was made during that time to keep the emphasis away from institutionalism. Throughout the following decades there was a sense that social ministry would take away from the spiritual vitality of the church.

In 1974 a group of Nazarene leaders attended the International Congress at Lausanne, Switzerland. This conference was a major impetus for many Nazarene leaders to overcome any polarity between the good news expressed through the spoken word and the good news expressed through Christ-like action. They began to emphasize the relation between the preaching of the gospel and the transformation of society. This had an immediate impact on places like Haiti, where there were more Nazarenes than in any

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<sup>89</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*. (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 264.

<sup>90</sup> William Greathouse, “Compassionate Ministries in the Church of the Nazarene”, In *Evangelism and Social Redemption: Addresses from a Conference on Compassionate Ministry November 1985*, ed. Albert L. Truesdale and Steve Weber (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1987),103.

other country excluding the United States. In Haiti the Church of the Nazarene began to offer medical care, education and agricultural programs. It would take until 1984 for the denomination to create a special department for the management of resources related to social transformation, Nazarene Compassionate Ministries.

Even since the creation of NCM, an official organization focused on global social response and development, there are still those who view NCM as a means to an end. But it is vital for the Church of the Nazarene to recognize that compassionate ministry, especially amongst its own membership, is never a means to an end. This is an obvious concern for a denomination that is trying to move to a place of mutuality, solidarity and responsibility. If the Church of the Nazarene is to be one global family it must view compassion as a means of responsible social concern for members of its own church. Part of the issue is simply clarifying what is meant by compassion. At a Nazarene Compassionate Ministry conference in 1985, Paul Rees, a member of the Board of Directors for World Vision International challenged the Church of the Nazarene to move beyond a vision of compassion as pity towards a vision of compassion as identification. He stated that “pity has overtones of condescension and remoteness not found in compassion. I can express pity and feel superior while doing so. I can pity at a safe distance. Compassion on the other hand gets me down on my knees.”<sup>91</sup> This is still a challenge to the Church of the Nazarene as it moves from any sense that social ministry is means to an end, towards Venn’s vision of hope and partnership for a better future for

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<sup>91</sup> Paul Rees, “Compassion as Motive and Movement: The Role of the Gospel in Social Ministries”, In *Evangelism and Social Redemption: Addresses from a Conference on Compassionate Ministry November 1985*, ed. Albert L. Truesdale and Steve Weber (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1987), 19.

those in difficult circumstances. Here Boff's vision of responsibility is a vision on a local level of what the denomination can be on the global level as it finds ways to actively invest in the economic and social development in every world area where the church is present.

## CONCLUSION

Henry Venn's mission theory and practice provides a vision for what the Church of the Nazarene can be as a global family. Venn's sense of equality among members of every culture where the CMS was working is a challenge for the Church of the Nazarene to be a people who live a life of mutuality together. In applying the ideas of Miroslav Volf to the Church of the Nazarene, I believe the denomination can be a global embodiment of the new social, economic and political reality that is the present but not complete kingdom that Christ has begun in his death and Resurrection and who we participate in and anticipate with the Spirit. Similarity to Venn's self supporting, self governing and self propagating the church of the Nazarene is desirous to create a global family that has a sense of interdependence in which there is a vision for a shared social, economic and political life characterized by mutuality; a sense that all local and district churches contextualize the message in their settings, solidarity; a sense that all local and district churches share the burden of particular political injustice, and compassionate responsibility; a sense that all local and district churches throughout the denomination have embraced a life of suffering with one another and moving each other to a place of flourishing.

One example of where much of this work is happening in the Church of the Nazarene is through a grass roots movement called Central American Partnerships (CAP). The CAP began as a grassroots movement to create one to one partnerships between congregations in North America and those in Central America. While it is organized by local Nazarene congregations it is not funded by the Church of the

Nazarene, and is not recognized an official ministry of the denomination. This partnership allows a local congregation in Guatemala City, Guatemala, to be able to partner with a congregation in Cambridge, MA, USA. Through this relationship they are able to share resources based on local needs without any added responsibility on the part of the denominational hierarchy. With the decreased cost of international travel and global communication this is one aspect of the Nazarene fellowship that may increase over the coming years as sister churches partner for specific social causes without interference of denominational interests. This may also lead to the sending of missionaries from local church to local church. Imagine a church in Cambridge that is working to develop a ministry within its Spanish speaking population. This partnership may allow them to invite a member of that local church in Guatemala City to serve as a missionary for a period of time for the work of that local church. Imagine a local church in Guatemala City who is looking for finances to create an educational program for its local neighborhood outreach. This partnership may allow them to invite the congregation in Cambridge to partner in sponsoring that ministry. I believe the CAP is a microcosm of the sense of mutuality, solidarity and responsibility that the Church of the Nazarene can embody if it is to be one global family sharing its life together.

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