

INTRODUCTION

This book will chart the gradual change in the understanding of the doctrine of entire sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene in the 20th century. The Church of the Nazarene understood its reason for being as the proclamation of the possibility of life without sin as a consequence of a second work of grace. As the century began, the explication of the doctrine reflected the optimistic hopes of society at large and, therefore, described the change effected by entire sanctification in extravagantly promising terms. The early explication reflected 19th-century holiness orthodoxy and emphasized entire sanctification as an instantaneous second work of grace that eradicated the sinful nature, conditioned only by faith and consecration which resulted in almost glorified human persons.

As the century wore on, the very optimistic expectations of entire sanctification became less and less credible in light of the apparently intractable nature of sin. By midcentury, the extravagant promises of the grace of entire sanctification began to be tempered. Theologians in the denomination began to define the sin that could be eradicated more narrowly and the infirmities that were an inescapable consequence of fallen humanity more expansively. This led to an increasing dissatisfaction with traditional formulations of the doctrine.

As a result, the doctrine as formulated by John Wesley in the 18th century was reexamined. A study of his writings, which were divergent from the 19th-century formulations at important points, resulted in a radical reformulation of the doctrine. This reformulation has resulted in two contemporaneous and competing definitions of entire sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene. Needless to say, this poses a problem for a denomination that understands its primary reason for being as the preservation and proclamation of a doctrine of entire sanctification.