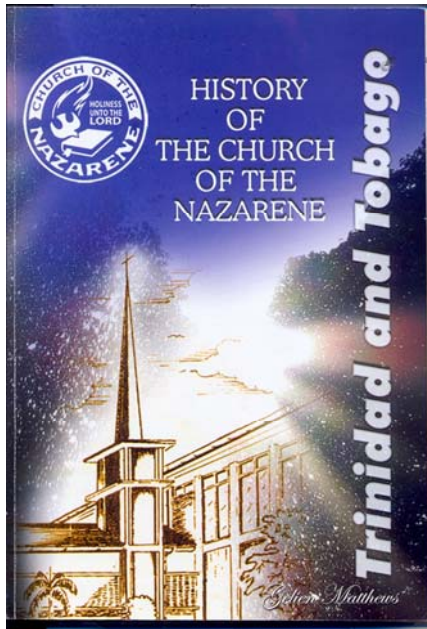


Gelien Matthews, *History of the Church of the Nazarene in Trinidad and Tobago*, Barataria, Christian Printers, 2008, 348 pp.



Dr. Gelien Matthews would have been inspired in preparing this comprehensive and scholarly researched work which tells the compelling story of the Church of the Nazarene in Trinidad and Tobago. The book certainly fills a void in the religious literature of Trinidad and Tobago. In this period of ecumenism and global interfaith dialogue, such a publication definitely helps us to understand each other's religion. It should certainly help us to respect differences and appreciate our diversity in Trinidad and Tobago with its tremendous religious plurality. History records that, through the ages, many wars were fought simply because one community did not understand or appreciate the religion of another. Today, this publication contributes to a more progressive approach to such challenges, one rooted in the search for clarification and understanding.

The historical snapshots in this publication provide the reader with an insightful look into the history of the Church, starting with the pioneering work of James Ivy Hill, the first American Nazarene Missionary in Trinidad and Tobago in 1926. But while the book faithfully records the early challenges faced; against the background of the global aims of the organization, it focuses primarily and specifically on the Trinidad mission with its ensuing growth and witness.

What is more, the story unfolds around personalities, pastors, and lay-people who made a difference in the lives of converts to Christ, and impacted greatly and positively on their communities. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 record the crucial and passionate role of the early pioneer fathers and mothers of the Church and specifically, the influence of the Nazarene Church's founders. But as the text continues, the tremendous effort of an evolving and enduring local mission comes alive. The Church of the Nazarene Trinidad and Tobago is presented as bridging the rural-urban divide so that today there are branches of the churches throughout the country. Similarly, the church is posited as being able to transcend racial barriers. Remarkably, too, there seems to have been no gender bias in the clergy.

The book is informative on many fronts. Short of a reading of this text, many people would hardly be aware of the role of this Church in the development of education in Trinidad and Tobago. Knowledge and education empowers people in many different ways, and it is clear from Dr. Matthews's work that, among other things, the Church has used education to promote Caribbean integration. Chapter 3 records the work of the Caribbean Nazarene College in Santa Cruz, Trinidad, an institution which has attracted students from Grenada, Guyana, Barbados, Martinique and Suriname. The College's

online curriculum continues to promote the integration process across the English-speaking and wider Caribbean.

One of the pillars of the Church of the Nazarene is the District Advisory Board which began operations in 1962. The internal operations of this Board are discussed in Chapter 5. We are given insights into its outreach programs as the mission developed. Prime example of this outreach are the purchasing and maintenance of properties, the development of Christian responses to social concerns, and the formulation of medical and pension plans for pastors.

Dr. Matthews also highlights the importance of the Church in treating with current social problems. She analyses the crucial work of the Church among our nation's youth from the late 1950s to the present. It is clear from the text that the mission remains most relevant today, given the rampant crime and violence among our youth. The book also pays tribute to the women of the church. A number of its humble and dedicated women were able to become pastors and contribute to forging the Church's direction, including the expansion of its membership and the development of its policies.

The longest and final chapter of the book, Chapter 7, which is entitled "Local Churches of the Nazarene of the Trinidad and Tobago District," offers a rich compilation of biographies of spiritual leaders and historical sketches of churches in the twin island republic. Overall, the book makes both interesting and enjoyable reading. In fact, one of the strengths of this publication is its lucid writing, which enables anyone to read and enjoy the material presented. The footnotes and bibliography reveal diverse historical and other sources, such as, journals, websites, interviews, and the Church's manual and monographs.

As the book is being read, one becomes increasingly aware that as a member of the Church, Dr. Matthews is telling the history of the institution as an insider. The book is a poignant reminder that the history of Trinidad and Tobago is incomplete without a major publication on the Nazarene Church such as this one.

Jerome Teelucksingh