

CRITICAL ISSUES IN ECCLESIOLOGY
INFLUENCES IN THE NAZARENE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES
WHERE ARE WE?

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Purpose

To understand, analyze and interpret the influences in the present organizational structures of the Church of the Nazarene and propose alternative organizational structures for the Latin American context that respond to the current needs of the church, reflecting an ethic of Wesleyan holiness in order to be true to our nature and to mission in the world.

Critical approach

How has the Church of the Nazarene reacted and assimilated different ideological, historical influences and fashion trends into their organizational structures? We could say that the influences have been of such a magnitude that the onslaught of secularization in the organizational and institutional realm has not always been successfully resisted. If we accept the above, we must ask how such a process of secularization has compromised the *character and mission* of the church today.

Another question that we need to answer could be, is there a correlation between the organizational and institutional structure of the denomination and our denominational theological and ethical standards with our core values, as well as the fulfilling of our mission? Institutional structures are not neutral or a-theological. We should accept this, if we want to have a structure worthy of the authentic nature of the church and its mission.

The approach

- To achieve a better understanding of the institutionalization of the early Christian community in Pauline literature as an example of the influence that culture had in its organizational structure and the process of institutionalization in which it was involved.
- It will be important to analyze the "marks" of institutionalization (the bureaucratic phenomenon) in the organizational structure at the Church of Nazarene at the present time.
- To provide the organizational elements (organizational structure) of the Wesleyan movement as a significant historical reference which points to viable ethical organizational alternatives for the church in the 21st century.
- I will consider the need for the "thinning" of the organizational structure to help us to fulfill better our mission in the world.

- Regarding the use of the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene, we must ask ourselves: Does it facilitate the planning and organization of the local church in order to make it more functional to achieve its mission as the body of Christ?
- We must become aware of how the centralization of power in the organizational structures translates into symbolic violence, which goes against our high ideals and the ethical standards of Christian love within our Wesleyan tradition.
- We must address the issue of how to avoid this symbolic violence? Finally, we need to look at the ethical-theological viability of putting our Nazarene organizational structures at the service of our Wesleyan-Arminian theology of love for God and neighbor to fulfill our mission to extend the kingdom of God in the world.

Introduction

This subject which I have called "Influences in the Nazarene organizational structures" is not a secondary issue in ecclesiology but a matter of primary interest, both biblically and theologically in the Wesleyan contemporary context. We have to build a bridge between ecclesiology and organizational structures. The question is which comes first? It is important to point out the correct order. Our ecclesiology must nourish and condition the forms or ways in which the structure or institutional building must be built up. It is the church as an organism, a community and the body of Christ which defines the structures of the church and not the reverse.

Our denomination, as an institution and organizational structure, has been built up socially in the last hundred years of its history with a high level of organization, but it is also heir of the last five centuries of history since the Protestant Reformation. In light of these developments, as we analyze them, we can obtain a better understanding our current situation and transform it, so as to express more adequately the character of the church in ways which although culturally adapted, are worthy of our Wesleyan heritage in the 21st century.

The following are the different issues to be addressed:

- Processes of institutionalization in the early Christian church
- The Reformation
- The Modernist project.
- Organizational elements of the Wesleyan movement of the 18th century
- Postmodernism and Pluralism.
- Proposals for the present.

I. Processes of institutionalization in the early Christian church

Institutionalization processes were demonstrated very early. As in all human and organizational processes the church also was moving more and more towards the

"routinization of charisma"¹. By the second century a process was begun which was increasingly more organized and structured, overshadowing little by little the "charismatic" aspect of the church.

When I refer to the concept of "charismatic" in the early church I would like to underline that it was a church with a minimum structure and a large dose of spontaneity which favored the impulse of the Holy Spirit. According to the work of Margaret Y. MacDonald² the Pauline letters such as the first and second letter to the Corinthians are typical of the kind of "charismatic" community formed in the first years or first two decades of the early Christian church. The letters that appeared to indicate a second stage in the institutionalization and routinization of charisma are, for example, the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians; and in a third stage the Pastoral Letters (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) considered deuteropauline appeared. Possibly this analysis cannot be accepted and sustained in all its implications, but it illustrates an important fact, that very early the church began to perceive changes in the organizational structures, an incipient change sufficient to reveal the presence of a process of institutionalization within the life of the church.

The process of institutionalization was necessary to maintain the ideals of the early Christian community. In other words social reality also affected the construction of the ancient Christian communities.

1. *The Reformation*

From the second to the fourth century, the church experienced a growing process of institutionalization and hierarchization. The arrival of Constantine to the church scene deeply affected the organizational structures of the church throughout the middle Ages. The arrival of the Protestant Reformation, contrary to what we could imagine, did not make fundamental changes to the institutionalization of the church, but rather these remained almost intact and the medieval model of the church as a hierarchical institution prevailed. William R. Estep stated that: "the Reformation was a rebellion against papal authority, but not against the Roman concept of the church as an institution" (quoted in Snyder (2005, p. 53). The church

¹ "Routinization of charisma" refers to the greater development and greater structuring of the institution, overshadowing the spontaneity and novelty feature of its inception.

² Margaret, Y. & MacDonald (1994). *Las Comunidades Paulinas. Estudio socio-histórico de la institucionalización en los escritos paulinos y deuteropaulinos*. Salamanca: SÍGUEME, p. 17-38.

made no substantive change in terms of its structure, and the institutionalization of the church remained untouched.

2. *The Modernist Project*

This modernist project is closely related to the Protestant church and with the historic churches such as those that had developed in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which spread throughout Latin America (Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and the Church of the Nazarene). The Protestant Church joined itself, consciously or unconsciously, to the philosophical, ideological and cultural of Modernity.

One aspect of modernity can be related to organizational processes. Max Weber points out something important. From the organizational point of view, he observed and revealed the bureaucratization of organizations and defined the nature and character of the bureaucratic phenomenon. When we compare his analysis of bureaucracy with the religious phenomenon of the organization of churches, we find some very interesting aspects. According to Weber the model of bureaucracy should be structured on the basis of certain characteristics, some of which are: the legal nature of the rules, the character of formal communications, rationalization of the division of labor, depersonalization of labor relations, hierarchy with well-established authority, meritocracy, management expertise, professionalism and performance predictability.³

The highly sophisticated modern societies have adopted the Weberian model of democracy with notable features of depersonalization, a strong hierarchy, professionalization and specialization. We just need to take one look at our forms of church organization to realize that we are not far from the Weberian bureaucratic model. Criteria for the evaluation of the model are effectiveness and productivity. Significant sectors of the evangelical churches have succumbed to this model and its evaluation criteria, leaving as a result a profound secularization of the church and a marked institutionalism. We must not forget that the creation of bureaucracy is a beautiful dazzling golden cage, but it is a cage in which we will remain imprisoned.

The sociological insight Weber gives us should be seriously considered to seek a better assessment of our organizational structures.

³ Taken from: [<http://www.monografias.com/trabajos12/burocra/burocra.shtml#MAX>] "charismatic" 29 of October de 2012.

However, the Weberian analysis considers the existence of a force that is able to change the more rigid and powerful structures. According to Weber, charisma is the most effective power for change in the institutional sphere. Weber took this notion of "charisma" from the early Christian vocabulary which he considers to be the quality characteristic of a particular person in virtue of their gifts, skills and abilities for which they are treated as a leader. "The charismatic community is an organized group subject to charismatic authority".⁴ Through Weber's analysis we have a sociological clue that helps us put the emphasis on charisma rather than on the institution.

According to Weber for survival of innovation brought about by the "charisma" it is necessary to have a "routinization of charisma". The main motivations for this are two: a) the interests and ideals in which the movement persists, and b) the even stronger interests and ideals, of the group leader in this trend.

The interest for discussing the idea of *the influences in the organizational structure of the church* is that we should see that the church as an organization is not exempt from these social processes inherent in any human organization. On the other hand it will help us to understand why we got to where we are, in many cases as a depersonalized structure, rigid, inflexible and lacking in charisma.

The Weberian analysis of organizational structures helps us to understand that sociologically the "message of the charismatic leader is vital for the birth and existence of the movement; the leader demonstrates extraordinary qualities to lead a movement for change; leadership is inextricably tied to the needs and desires of the followers; charisma is not a victim of the routinization but actively seeks institutional manifestation."⁵ According to Weber charisma is the greatest revolutionary force.

The institutional structure, because of its cumulative force, tends to stifle the "charisma" of any institution, whether secular or ecclesiastic. Like any human organization the church will follow a process of institutionalization that if you do not renew it in time, will eventually become obsolete and ineffective. The image that paints a picture of an institutional structure like an overgrown arthritic elephant almost unable to move is not an exaggeration.

Although the church should not be reduced to what Max Weber expressed sociologically, it is important to keep his concept in mind because the church is situated socio-historically.

⁴ Óp., cit., Margaret, p. 31.

⁵ *Ibíd.*, p. 31

There is also a difference between what Weber meant as "charisma" and what the Scriptures denote as charisma. The first is a sociological concept that attempts to define the dynamics within organizational relationships between order and spontaneity. The second, the biblical concept is not a human quality but the dynamic divine presence within the Christian community that creates and drives it.

The biblical concept of charisma (gr. Charisma). The Greek word "charisma" points in two directions, first to the grace of God in terms of our salvation by grace; on the other hand it reminds us of the gifts or charismas that God through the Holy Spirit has given to the church, particularly to each member. I think Snyder is correct in saying that, "Charismatic is a good biblically based term, and it needs to be restored to the church in its full scriptural wealth."⁶

Today, we should consciously try to see that the "charismatic" model in the life and ministry of the church take a place of primacy over both the dominant bureaucratic institutional model inherited from the Constantinian project of the church (fourth century. a.D.), and modernity that has so much secularized the church in the last quarter of the twentieth century. According to Snyder (2005) "The charismatic and organic model is distinguished by its emphasis on community relationships, mutuality and interdependence. It is flexible and leaves room for a high degree of spontaneity. The Bible gives us such a model for the church: the human body. "(p. 119)⁷. The charisma understood sociologically and theologically is a suitable corrective for the high structuring and institutionalization of the church. We should not see a contradiction between both concepts; they are complementary. It is a privileged theological concept, but this does not work or operates apart from the sociological reality of so-called charismatic leadership.

The modernity or the modern project in its extreme form brought instruments for organizational efficiency but human relationships were depersonalized, instrumented, diminishing human values, and it is a *commoditization* simply reducing the church to criteria of efficiency and productivity, thereby secularizing the nature and purpose of the church. As Snyder puts it, "The church can never be essentially an organization."⁸

Over-institutionalization. This occurs when the organizational structures are presented as "someone" who has life and speaks for itself. Here, also sociology provides us with much

⁶ Snyder (2005). *La Comunidad del Rey*. Buenos Aires: Kairós. p. 118.

⁷ Ibid., 119

⁸ Ibid., p.119

help identifying this phenomenon as "reification". Reification means, treating things -in this case the organizational and institutional structure- like a human being, possessing their own life and human skills.

3. *Organizational elements of the eighteenth-century Wesleyan movement*

The Wesleyan movement brought fresh winds for a better understanding of the nature and life of the church. The official church in England, the Anglican Church in the eighteenth century, was strictly vertical in its government with hierarchical relationships. Neither women nor laity had any meaningful involvement in the life of the church.

The *Wesleyan revival* manifested a "de-hierarchization" in response to the stagnation of the official Church of England (Anglican). Secondly, the Wesleyan movement brought a significant "democratization" of the church structure. A consequence of this was the inclusion of women in the active life of the church, getting involved in preaching or leading groups (bands and classes). Lay people, gradual but clearly assumed a key role in the revival. Some became preachers and others were ordained.

Sociologically, Wesley can be seen clearly as the charismatic element that set in motion a revival of global dimensions within a highly hierarchical church structure. Wesley was a man of charisma.

The Wesleyan movement was dynamic. Wesley did not hesitate to change what needed to improve or optimize the movement. In "*A clear report on the Methodist people*", someone questioned Wesley about the change in the movement's activities: "I do not understand this constant change of things," they said⁹. But what Wesley was intuitively discovering was that some functional adjustments are beneficial for people's spiritual maturity, and he described it in the following way: "Many now enjoy Christian fellowship as a happy experience for which they had no idea."¹⁰ Wesley considered that the changes are not a weakness but a "bonus!" Truly, Wesley considered changes an advantage rather than a problem. One reason is that Wesley believed that any adjustments were merely "prudent means, non-essential not of divine institution. Within our means we ensure that they do not become a formal and lifeless thing. We are always open to learn, eager to know more than the

⁹ Gonzáles, J. (1996) *Obras de Wesley*. Tomo V. *Las Primeras Sociedades Metodistas*. USA: Providence House Publisher. p.227

¹⁰ Ibid. p.226

day before and to change whatever is necessary to improve".¹¹ When did we forget this in our churches? That any structure even as good it seems, is not essential or of a divine institution.

I think what made Wesley willing to make changes, was his desire to make improvements for the benefit of the spiritual growth and maturity of the people. "People first" is the motto of Wesley, enabling organizational structure not to devour people or charisma. Organizationally, the Wesleyan criterion is functionality. So, it is important that organizational structures be constantly reviewed and contextualized.

It is interesting how Wesley saw the Scriptures and how creatively he used them. For example, answering another objection, that the Bible says nothing about "classes", he explained why he had made adjustments and changes within the classes: "It appears that you have not observed that in most aspects, the Scripture give only general rules, and leave the particular circumstances to be governed by human common sense."¹²

Wesley, in his "*Thoughts on Methodism*" (1786), wrote: "I have no fear that the people called Methodists ever cease to exist in Europe or North America. My fear is that they may remain as a dead sect, as a form of religion without power".¹³

Wesley does not seem interested at first in the institution itself but in its spirit (charisma) and its dynamics. Let's see some reasons why meeting times were at a certain time and not another: "In November, he was offered a building known by the name of the Foundry, and there he started giving two daily sermons: one at five o'clock in the morning and another at seven in the evening, so that their work did not impede the attendance of the people."¹⁴

As you can see, the schedule of services was based in taking advantage of offering to the people the best possible option. This is functionality at its best for the benefit of development and spiritual maturity of believers.

So, in what areas was Wesley interested about the organization of the movement? He himself said: "The essence is holiness of heart and life. What does not contribute to it, should be removed for the good and transformation of the lives of people. And if what is essential ever evaporates, what remains will be slag and waste."¹⁵ Although in a different context - the consecration of land- he said without any hesitation, "... it's time for us to be guided not by

¹¹ Ibid. P.227

¹² Ibid. p.227

¹³ Ibid. p.379

¹⁴ Ibid. p.380

¹⁵ Ibid. p.382

custom, but through the Scriptures and reason". Here we must understand reason to be common sense, perhaps, the least common of the senses in these times.

4. Proposals for our time

- *The nature of the church*

The need for "thinning" of the organizational structure. In this new emerging context a 'thinning' of the organizational structure of the church is needed. The very nature of the church as Christ's body requires this. Our structures are exhausted, not the "charisma". Renewal is required, having functionality as one of its elements of greater purpose. The structure or institutionalism must be in the service of something greater than the institution itself; it should be at the service of the church, the body of Christ, the Lord of the Church and the mission of the church.

Snyder states: "The question we need to ask is what kind of structure can serve the church for its life and testimony best?"¹⁶ Was not this what Wesley applied many times throughout the process of the Methodist revival in England? Yes, it was. Wesley was not willing to hinder the gospel only because of certain forms or general rules that the Bible does not condemn, or even are not imperative.

- *Hallmarks of institutionalization in the Church of the Nazarene*

The centralism, hierarchization of functions, functional paralysis are some of the problems facing the denomination in the 21st century. There are voices that call us out of that stagnant institutional straitjacket. But it is necessary to do more than just wanting a change. We need to carry out a theological, biblical and historical task. We have not thought enough about our ecclesiology and what it means for the practical life of the church. The structures are simply a reflection of our beliefs. So, any organization or structure should be consistent with a type of theology and ecclesiology that reflects our Wesleyan roots, within a solid biblical framework.

- *The operability of the structure*

Our structures must be eminently functional. That is to say, they should be used for what they were designed for in a determined time and place. The functional approach is not just simple pragmatism.

Snyder offers some significant criteria:

¹⁶ Op.cit., Snyder, p. 229

a) The structure of the church should be biblically valid. Compatible with the nature and form of the gospel and the church as presented in the Bible. With our programs (sometimes seen as sacred treasures) we show how much zeal we put in our relationships and Christian fellowship. The critical question is: are our structures facilitating koinonia and mission?

b) The structure of the church should be culturally viable. Our structures must be compatible and sensitive to the cultural forms of society where the churches are so that they can allow for Christian maturity and holiness.

One of our denominational errors was -and still exists locally in many parts- transplanting church structures of a place and culture to another culture. Is this not a factor that should be given priority in any place where a congregation of the Church of the Nazarene exists?

c) The structure of the church must be temporarily flexible. It must be open to change as required by the changing circumstances in favor of the health of the church and Christian maturity.

Cultural studies have shown that in a decade there are two to three cultural variations. At least one of them can be critical to the life of the church. The sociologist Nancy Ammerman designed a study which found that congregations that adapt to changes of the surrounding community are more likely to survive and be more effective in their task and mission. So in the same way as there are cultural changes, either globally or locally, there need to be changes in the way the church functions, both in their structures and processes. Such changes must be consistent with our theology and message of holiness.

- *The Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*

Is the Manual a planning and organizational facilitator for the local church? It is true that the growth of the church has led to the need for refining the structure, but this does not necessarily produce more functionality. We are a colossal global structure, which gives more evidence of rigidity than mobility. We need to recover the "spirit of the Manual", to recover the spirit that gave rise to the formation of a Manual. The spirit to which I refer is not anything else other than our Arminian-Wesleyan essence. I wish to propose two essential aspects that should be the spirit of our Manual. First, related to our Wesleyan roots, love to God and neighbor. The application of the Manual should always seek how to express our love to God and neighbor. The manual by itself cannot precede brotherly relations in the church, or in the District or at any level of the organization where there are people, but rather it must

be used as a medium or channel of expression to facilitate our tasks without violating Christian relations in the context of Christian love and love to the world.

Secondly, we must uphold the Arminian principle, that "God does not coerce the human will, rather He persuades". Our Manual should be a facilitator, able of being contextualized according to the needs of the task and mission of the church, and maintaining its faithfulness to the biblical concept of the church. If I fail to do something through persuasion, no matter how biblical or spiritual it seems, I should not proceed. Trying to convince others by means of coercion implies acts of violence in the life and spirit of the church.

- *Organizational violence within the church*

Organizational violence far more often manifests itself as "symbolic violence". A form of symbolic violence is institutional centralism. As a denomination, we have a strong tendency to centralization

The Violence of Centralism

Centralism often becomes manifest as a refined form of violence. "It concentrates the power of decision in an ecclesiastical bureaucracy, far from the reality of life, ignorant of the challenges facing believers ... unable to admit pluriformity. It does violence to believers, [the churches, districts or regions] treating them as children, in need of overprotection, and imposed discipline with myopic criteria "¹⁷. And to top it off, from centralism (as the power center) those who dare to utter a word against this are punished.

Violence of Authoritarianism

One form of violence present in varying degrees in the structures of the church is patriarchal authoritarianism¹⁸. This can be seen in the exclusion of women from the "core areas of participation." While it is true that most congregants in our churches are composed of women, the same level of involvement in making important decisions is not given to them. These continue to fall mostly on the males. Statistics aren't needed to see this reality.

The violence of dogmatism

¹⁷ Macisse. *La violencia en la iglesia*. Tomado de:
http://opuslibros.org/prensa/violencia_iglesia.htm.2005

¹⁸ Ibid, Macisse

"It is a dogmatism that doesn't admit that we live in a pluralistic world in which it isn't possible to be dominated by a religious, cultural and theological monocentrism. Dogmatism leads to impose a single theological perspective"¹⁹ without any kind of dialogue with an interlocutor. In his classic sermon "*The Spirit of Catholicism*", John Wesley breaks with ideological and theological barriers showing a frank heart in the search for unity in diversity. Wesley was particularly sensitive in this case. He showed respect for the opinions of others expressed in statements such as "A Methodist thinks and allows others to think." His sermon "*The Spirit of Catholicism*" is a statement about tolerance for those who think differently. It is my hope that the theological conference could be free of a spirit of dogmatism and violence and we can dialogue on the foundation of love, trust, humility, hope and criticism²⁰, without inquisitorial attitudes anywhere.

- *The ethical-theological viability of our Wesleyan-Arminian theology within the organizational structures of the Church of the Nazarene*

The ethic of Wesley was an ethic of love made perfect in the heart of man and his practical life. It is love for God and neighbor that shape our Nazarene organizational structures to fulfill our mission in the world. We must see the ethical-theological viability of our organizational structures to be true to our Wesleyan heritage of love made perfect. If our structures do not reflect this or are not an extension of love to our neighbor, something is wrong with them. It calls for a renewal of these structures in order for them to be an extension of God's kingdom.

We know from the social sciences and experience itself that institutionalization is cumulative. For various factors, cultural, social and idiosyncratic, the institutionalization process can become really harmful. It is important that this process of gigantification and stagnation be reversed renewing the structures; otherwise the institutionalization will lead to decay and spiritual death of the church.

Wesley never separated his theology from ecclesiastical and pastoral practice. Justo González, expressed on early Methodist societies: "Wesley conceived the organization in terms of the mission and not vice versa. Repeatedly, we discover him adjusting the organization to respond to a new need or situation".²¹ An interesting example of this was

¹⁹ *Ibíd.*, Macisse.

²⁰ Paulo Freire considered these elements as crucial for there to be dialogue in education

²¹ *Op.cit.* González, Tomo V, p.5

what gave rise to the revolutionary dynamic of "classes" that were formed in the Methodist revival.

Conclusion

Organizational structures do not cause the church to be church. Organizational structures are only a means that when renovated and functional can be an extraordinary aid to fulfill the mission of the church. But we must not forget that the most important resource in the church is not its material resources, but its human resources. The church is people, it is composed of persons. Christ did not die for an organization but for people.

Part of the crisis we are experiencing as a denomination falls within the scope of the organizational structure. The structure has never been nor will ever be the essence of the church as the body of Christ.

The structures are not a-theological or neutral. Organizational structures communicate what we believe about the church and our mission. When institutionalization has grown enough it often becomes increasingly rigid and dysfunctional. The interests shift from people to things and programs.

To renew our structures we need to return to a biblical notion of charisma that is beyond what is popularly defined as certain static manifestations. We should establish that the church, the body of Christ is a charismatic community, "The charismatic and organic model is distinguished by its emphasis on community, relationships, mutuality and interdependence".²²

I hope that changes at the personal and institutional level do not take too long to carry out the renewal that our organizational structures need to fulfill faithfully the mission of the church so that we can stay true to our Wesleyan tradition of innovation and functionality of our structures.

"I have no fear that the people called Methodists ever cease to exist ...

My fear is that they may remain as a dead sect,

As a form of religion without power"

John Wesley (1786)

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²² Op.ct. Snyder (2005), p. 119

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