

## **Part 8: CLOSING COMMENTS**

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#### **Closing Comments to the Africa Nazarene Theology Conference**

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Africa's Church of the Nazarene is a dynamic integral part of the Body of Christ. For 100 years, Africa Nazarenes have helped to nurture, grow, and develop the church in 33 countries on the continent and helped them connect with the Global Body of the Church of the Nazarene in over 150 nations of the world.

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century finds the church reflecting, rediscovering, and recovering Wesleyan Arminian holiness theology and core values of the Church of the Nazarene. Beginning with the Global Theology Conference in Guatemala in 2001, an outstanding delegation from Africa helped to 'set the tone' and shape the spirit. Holiness, Memory, Hope and the Great Commission – the four part theme of the gathering – caught fire in the hearts of the nearly 300 pastors, professors, and church leaders from all the regions of our Nazarene world.

The "global concept" began in a planning meeting of professors for a US/Canada conference, who in an epiphanal moment concluded that the days are over for "trickle down" theology. They believed it was time to gather the church from the world for theological reflection and affirmation of the beliefs of the church. God blessed this global dream by providing a foundation to fund the travel and conference costs of the event for the church. No one dreamed the outcome – the spirited dynamic of the gathering, or the fruit of the conference that followed – not even the planning committee. Without being programmed, the regions of the church called for and planned regional events to take place before the next global event in 2006.

The Asia- Pacific Regional Theology Conference was held in October in Seoul, Korea at the Korea Nazarene University campus. The Africa

Theology Conference this week is the second. The Caribbean, Mexico and Central America, and South America Regions just met last week to plan a three regional all Spanish Theology Conference, October 2004, in San Jose, Costa Rico. The US/Canada Theology Conference, centred on the 16 Articles of Faith, is planned for December 2004 at Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City.

The Africa Nazarene Theology Conference begins a new epic in your 100-year history. It is a truly watershed moment, an opportunity for doctrinal and practical coherency. In reflection on the activities of this week, it has truly been significant in that its participation has been by pastors, district leaders, missionaries, and professor scholars. You have interacted with the young and old, male and female, the experienced theologians and novices just beginning. You have read quality papers engaging tough issues, beginning a conversation that the Holy Spirit will guide in the future!

You have heard affirmations that build unity in diversity, which bridge the generations of the future enabling the church to pass on the love for Christ, His message and truth, and passion for the lost people of Africa and around the world.

In Guatemala, Korea, and now Africa, I have heard people talking! What has been accomplished by these conferences? What is the outcome of this Theology Conference?

1. A new freedom – permission – opportunity for “doing” theology at every level of the church.
2. A newly developed partnership for Biblical, Theological understanding and coherency.

Partnerships between colleges, seminaries, extension centres for conducting field and district courses and classes, and local churches.

- The goal – every pastor a student (life-long learning), every pastor a teacher
- The goal – development of a strong Biblical base
  - The local church teaching – for theologically sound doctrine. There is a crisis of doctrine and practice – media infiltration into homes by TV, books, events which change and dilute the holiness message of Wesleyan/Arminian believer.
  - District classes – at district conferences and assemblies. This is an opportunity, especially for lay pastor training in doctrine.

- Field conferences – bi-yearly – using professors, scholars and teachers.
- Regional conference – every four years.
- Global conference – every four years.

Will you permit me to share some of my thoughts, personal observations, perceptions, and reflections? After 10 years of visiting Africa as the Commissioner of Education, I have concluded:

- The only thing bigger than the Continent of Africa is the Heart of Her People.
- The people I know have hearts of love:
  - Love for God and His people,
  - For the Church and her leaders,
  - For Christian Traditions and the aging Saintly Leaders,
  - For Holy Scripture, Theology and the Truth,
  - For Right practices and living out the Christian Faith.
- People who Love and hunger for Righteousness:
  - Have courage to face great difficulties,
  - Are vulnerable and sensitive with the ability to be deeply hurt by injustices and unkindness, are compassionate towards the lost and needy.
- People who are justly proud to be Africans, Proud of your Land and the Beauty of its people.

I have also observed a people with the ability to:

- Think critically,
- Struggle for truth,
- Articulate and express abstract ideas as well as paint pictures with words and eloquently preach the Gospel.

As I reflect on experiences in Africa, I am convinced you have a great God-given capacity to worship and experience God.

- No one sings like an African,
- Prays with such fervency and power,
- Has the child-like faith to take God at His Word and Obey Him.

Thank you for being a part of the new generation of significance for the quantitative and qualitative development of the Church.

Thank you, Planning Committee, and presenters. You have challenged our hearts and minds for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And now, as we come to the close of this great conference, let us come to the Table of the Lord together.