

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE IN THE MAC REGION: **PAST: HERITAGE AND INDIGENOUS PROCESS**

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The Bible is the paradigm of our historic memory; it is a chronicle that remembers all of the events of God in history and human culture and man's response to this divine dynamic. To be able to remember the past is vital for a people with a history such as the Church of the Nazarene in the MAC Region. The collective memory is a pre-requisite for the existence of a collective identity.

This work tries to analyze the MAC Region, past, present and future. A region conformed of different districts with distinct generations and varied cultures. The intention of this paper is to explore, among other things, the way in which the papers from Mexico and Central America reflect and refract ecclesiastical phenomena to which have been, are being and will be exposed and how they should orient their stories towards the moral tension of the future. It is because of this that we can strongly affirm that to remember the past offers us a way to evaluate the past as well as hope for the future.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PAST IN THE MAC REGION

In the first place, the papers teach us that our church needs to constantly rewrite and reread our history. If we take into consideration that history is primarily our memory of the past which enables to understand our transformations and our theological and educational processes. History makes us perceive our present, allows us to understand ourselves and make projections for the future, and facilitates the building up and the security of our Nazarene identity. It inspires us to see that there is still room for the history of missions. History should be global. A lot of the production from our historians has been used to promote missions.

The information in these papers describes the role that foreign and national leaders have played in the past. It shows the importance of the need to promote local leaders. Because of this, it is urgent to write and rewrite the history of Nazarene missions, not only from the perspective of the missiology specialist but also from those stories of local leaders who are, basically in the end, the great links that conform the global chain.

The diverse papers of the MAC Region show that we are the people of God and therefore, a people in exodus. We are "foreigners" and "strangers" in the world. This demands that we have an inclusive history not just relative to one geographic entity but one that represents all of our diversities. These papers show that there is not just one history of the Church of the Nazarene in Latin America or in the world. There are many that flow towards the main river. This past opens up the perspective that the history of the Church of the Nazarene in the MAC Region can be revised and rewritten. Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama are churches who need to urgently and constantly rewrite their history because every day they are asking questions about diverse phenomena. On the other hand,

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according to the data in these papers, in spite of their ups and downs, we see profound and positive signs in the history of our countries. But as we have mentioned, it needs to be written again. New paradigms have arisen as keys to interpret history, emphasis such as urban-rural, early-present, church-sect, mission-church, Christ-culture, religion-popular religiosity, society-church, and Christian and post Christian.

We infer from the sociological and religious data from the papers that man, because he is intrinsically social, can not live without a social culture, and because he is intrinsically spiritual, he can not live without a religious culture. Both should be expressed in a system of values and attitudes, visions, symbols and interpretations of reality, of both the social and religious communities to which they belong. When our countries see their borders disappear because of Internet traffic and satellite television, it teaches us that what will give cohesion to our churches is identity. Only if our churches have a powerful cultural and religious vitality, will they be able to creatively enter into a saving dialogue between peoples now that the Kingdom of God is global in nature.

The crises lived in the past in our countries as revealed in the papers direct or call our attention to the only way that the opposing arguments will balance each other out to obtain peace as they counter-balance with God, the only absolute value. The social relevance of God changes the dimension of authentic human behavior. On the contrary, legitimate denominational options can be transformed into exclusive religious fanaticism which ends up usurping the place of true religion. This is very serious and socially dangerous. Only in a society that takes God into account is it possible to receive divine forgiveness. In light of this, we are able to understand the formidable social and political energy contained in the Lord's Prayer, when it is authentic and clear cut. "Forgive our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRESENT IN THE MAC REGION

According to Dr. Floyd Cunningham, our church's present obliges us to consider that our history should not just be the histories narrated in the personal journals of missionaries, which might not be true. It seems that it is not easy for us as holiness people to truthfully reveal our mistakes and because of this we talk about our founders more in terms of their holiness than humanity. The present, as a result of our maturity, teaches us that we can and we ought to manage truth, and the differences between our countries in a fraternal spirit as a holy community. A complete and truthful history of the Church of the Nazarene in the MAC Region will correct some of the poor interpretations of holiness itself.

The present teaches that the memory of the church is in the mystery of the cross: the church looks to the cross when she wants to understand more deeply the mystery of herself. The origin of the church comes about as a result of a completely free initiative from God who calls us so that we might have "fellowship in his divine life". In the past, as in the present, missional theology has taught that in the Gospel of the Cross the church learns to know and taste the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ; in Christ, the church understands her own ministry and presents this to men so that they can be saved. The Church of the Nazarene, as part of the Church of Christ, understanding the source of her holiness, is invited now to purify her memory, to ask forgiveness for everything which through the sins of her sons and daughters has been an obstacle impeding the love of God from being fully experienced by all men.

May this new millennium prepare the church more intensely for a new missionary impulse and the building of a “civilization of love”: our today is a time when we can talk in love, as a result of the profound and passionate love that Jesus has for the church. Evangelization of the MAC Region demands a new contemporary missionary dynamic essential for the life of the church: the authentic preaching of the Gospel is salvation to Latin American men and women who being ennobled and elevated by the grace of God, voluntarily accepts the truth that is preached and is believed. Today in the towns and cities in the MAC Region God has chosen a new people. The work of evangelism will be done as long as the faithful, motivated by grace, take part in the holiness of the church in those “new paths in the world that God opens”. The present invites us to ask for forgiveness and as we ask for forgiveness, we recognize before the Lord our urgency, so that he can more deeply purify our memory as his body who wants to serve in holiness.

The historic plurality of the MAC Region is our history. It is not the history of others; it is our history and can neither escape nor be ashamed of it. There are differences in history has worked out in each of our countries but this does not dishonor us. For it is part of our collective historical identity. In all the papers it is possible to discover the riches of the Church of the Nazarene in the countries of the MAC Region which permits us to perceive the existential reality in each place. We can infer from these papers that among the missionaries who brought the message of the second blessing of holiness there were many conflicts. The question that arises is: what concept of holiness did they transmit to the people if those missionaries lived in the same city and only saw each other during formal services. It is because of this that Dr. Cunningham says, “We need to repent of the persistent desire to control others instead of freeing them and empowering them, perhaps not just in the context of missions but throughout all the denomination.” As in the past, today we confess that the Church of the Nazarene in the MAC Region can not stop being holy. Effectively Jesus gave himself to sanctify her, joined himself to her, and filled her with the Holy Spirit. But we are reminded that the church, enfolding sinners to her breast, is holy but is always needing purification and urgent renovation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FUTURE

One of the virtues of the papers from the MAC Region papers is to understand history for the future. It impels us to repent but to also teach that we should not be prisoners or slaves of the past. History offers us options, alternatives and hope. I would like to affirm that Jesus, as Lord of history, is Lord of the past, present and the future.

From the institutional perspective, according to the papers, the Church of the Nazarene in the MAC Region has been preceded by the commitment of men and with God which has allowed us to create human and saving links where others only saw only commercial and business relations. The church has always looked for innovation as the only way to be successful in the Christian life, and as a result, the church has been recognized as a standard for evangelism amongst the people of God. According to these papers, we are both national and transnational church with strong projections to the future. And we visualize that through arduous work, careful dedication and profound effort we can keep growing. Our future mission is to generate added and sustained value for the plan of salvation of man to each act that we start, from the beginning of a relationship with him until we reach Christian perfection.

However, our new history will try to read and reinterpret, not only the presence and importance of Nazarene missionaries in our countries, but also as Dr. Cunningham says, “recover the women’s voices, those of the young people and ordinary lay people.” We should no longer focus on institutional history but on those protagonist acts which emerge from the weekly and day to day business of local congregations. The micro-stories represented in the papers, reflect how a people forge history. We see in them the church as a dynamic and organized society; but subject to the judgment of history. Nothing occurs in history that excludes as essential protagonists man and God. This understanding of history goes with that which Wesleyans understand about God working dynamically, for the gentle stimulus of grace, and for the human response. The voluntary cooperation of humans with God’s intentions in the way in which God interacts with his creation. We get from the Wesleyans a philosophy of history that perceives God as the Great Convincer.

The future demands a new church. According to the papers, one hopes that the hierarchy would become smaller, serving, servant, humble to brotherly service, and that on the horizon all the titles and worldly honors that surround us today would disappear. The future already present, demands a poor Church but rich in the Lord, simple, compassionate, but much more vigorous than it is in this moment, that can maintain herself strong about the perspective of economic power. The power of the Church is the cross, and authenticity of the power of Christ revives in his life.

In a world such as ours, in which every day is more and more interdependent, the church on the MAC Region has to learn that no one has a future unless we are educated to work together. In a moment in which values such as cooperation and community seem more threatened than ever, a positive future offered by the church to man in the third millennium consists in an optimistic offer from the perspectives of a new moral and spiritual order. For those who hope for a more humane politic and economy and less destructive, this offer will be such a source of inspiration, like a practical resource that cannot be substituted. The parishes will be smaller, more humane, where Christian *koinonia* shines, since today, sadly, there is very little, as a negation of the philosophy found in Psalm 133. Likewise, one hopes that in the actual practice of routine rituals and sacraments in the church, changes would occur to make them celebrations of faith and of a participative life, in which the Kingdom of God is expressed; those that typify true celebrations of faith and the spirit as serious proclamations of salvation to the world.

Currently Christianity is losing little by little her strength in front of a secularized world, the kind of world we talk about in a post Christian time. It is because of this that it is hoped there will be a spirit of genuine Christianity that is light to the world and salt to the earth. As we are now, the Church is not centered in Christ and it is not community, and so she cannot illuminate the world or season the earth. Wesley understood this for his time and place, as did the Holiness Movements during the 19th century in North America, but what does this mean for us to be a holiness church in the 21st century? Or to be made in the image of Christ, as individuals and as a group in the MAC Region and during this moment in history?