

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

By Hugo R. Alvarado Muñoz

Country of Origin: Guatemala

Serving in: Guatemala

MAKING MEMORIES: A RETELLING OF SIGNIFICANT ACTS

For Guatemala, 1904 was very significant in its religious history. The Church of the Nazarene declared in 1904 the official year to begin work in Guatemala, and became the fourth evangelical mission to set foot on Guatemalan land. On November 10, 1904, Rev. Richard S. Anderson and his wife Ana Maude arrived at Puerto Barrios, now the Atlantic District. They lived in the department of Zacapa for a short time and moved from there to Livingston, the place where they started an English-speaking church. Later, in 1933, Robert Ingram organized it into a Church of the Nazarene, with Mardoqueo Paz as the pastor. In 1905, they went to Alta Verapaz, the area known as the “Imperial City” by Carlos V of Spain. Accompanied by missionary Thomas Butler, Anderson visited the areas around the department head of Alta Verapaz, Cobán. They sold Bibles, New Testaments and gave away evangelical literature. They celebrated services wherever they were permitted to do so. In this way, the Church of the Nazarene had its beginning in the northeastern part of Guatemala; a place that until now has been the point of historical reference for the work of the church.

As icons of this history are the names of Manfredo De León, Jarier De León, José Catalán, Ventura Nuila and María Teresa de Nuila as the first converts in that place. In 1910, Thomas Butler bought some land in Cobán and in 1916 constructed a church building. On August 10, 1919, missionary John D. Franklin organized the first Church of the Nazarene in Guatemalan territory. You can say with certainty that Cobán (that today, as I am editing this paper, the Church of the Nazarene celebrated 100 years in that beautiful place), was the epicenter of the missionary earthquake that was able to move the foundations of Guatemalan ground with the message of holiness as a synonym of the Good News of the Kingdom.

The point of departure for the Church of the Nazarene to expand throughout Guatemalan territory was the hard work of those missionaries who faced the crisis of yellow fever that affected Zacapa, the inclemency of the climate in the northwest of the country, and the problems that arose in the encounter of different cultures. Names such as Javier de la Cruz, Simón Lázaro, José Figueroa, Matías Véliz and Bernardino Hércules, are tied to the work that was done in the department of Petén, where Luciano Castellanos was the first pastor and Leona Gardner was the first missionary. But, it was not just the dynamic that pushed this expansion that today has 65,000 Guatemalan Nazarenes; it also allowed for the opening of the work in different indigenous communities where the church did personal evangelism.

1912 marked the beginning of the church’s work in the area of secular education when Miss Fay Watson founded the “The Evangelical School”, which soon afterwards changed its name to “Nazarene College for Young Ladies”. The first director was Eugenia Phillips. On January 15, 1921, the “Nazarene College for Men” was inaugurated, under the direction of Sara

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M. Cox. Christina V. Najarro taught at both schools. Theological education emerged in an informal manner. In 1923, Miss Cox opened the Nazarene Bible Institute and Alfredo Chacón and Manuel Buenafé were the first graduates. In 1953, William Dannemann founded the K'ekchí Education Center in San Juan Chamelco, and later organized the Education Center Rabinal Achí in San Miguel Chicaj, Baja Verapaz. In 1976, the educational aspect reached its highest expression when the Nazarene Theological Institute was founded in Guatemala City; today it is the Nazarene Theological Seminary and serves the MAC Central Field.

Among other projections of that work it is worth mentioning that there was emphasis on medical work among the indigenous communities, an effort that until today the church continues to promote, not only with the intent of giving service to physical needs, but to help by means of evangelistic promotion the spiritual well-being parallel with the physical. The production of literature was possible thanks to the efforts of the missionaries that brought a printing press from the United States. A key person is missionary William Sedat, of German origin. The first Women's Society was founded in Cobán in 1928 and the creation of Young People's Societies was encouraged on the districts.

In one hundred years, Guatemala's evangelistic *kerygma* has been wrapped in God's prevenient grace. And in the years to come, it will continue because of wholly sanctified lives and willing to offer their best of themselves in honor of those who died in answering their God and for the glory of this God who called them and loved them until the last moment of their lives. The Guatemalan historical indigenous process, besides paying tribute with generous lives as in the past one this month of July, with a maker of this history Rev. Alfonso Barrientos; this history has as witnesses faithful survivors of the struggles brothers Joel Buenafé, Mateo Mendoza, Arnoldo Izaguirre, Guillermo Dannemann, and others such as Gustavo Crocker, current Regional Director of the Eurasia Region.

THE PRESENT AND SOME PERSPECTIVES TO EVALUATE THE FACE OF THE FUTURE

The past was fruitful, it was fertile. An inheritance arrived that was conformed of different circumstances that formed a strong doctrinal network. A doctrine came that challenged the frivolous life with another of commitment and unconditional surrender. A Wesleyan inheritance came that affirmed the principles of holiness and entire consecration as the ruling paradigms of life. There came an inheritance of service, love and negation before the supreme call of God. Its strength is also its organizational diversity, with NYI, NMI, SSM and Compassionate Ministries. It is its educational institutions, both secular and theological. It is its different ethnicities that make up the rich cultural and linguistic plurality of Guatemala. We can say that the present is only a macro expression of those micro occurrences that formed its glorious past. However, even now, it is very important to revise our church and its assumptions for the future of its missional life. It needs to elaborate a pastoral with a consciousness to expand and not just local function. In reality, much of Guatemalan territory has not even been touched by the mission of the church. This leads us to ask ourselves: in reality does the church have a mission and a vision for the 21st century?

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One wishes that the church would be one with dialogic liturgy between the past and present and with proactive expectation of the future so that our praise and worship does not lose the real sense of having God as the center, where our brothers find the occasion and space to experience a concrete joy that produces a genuine encounter with the God of the Bible. The liberty in the worship services that we enjoy in Guatemala is a reflection of the emanating grace of God towards his people. This is the space that permits public testimony of the powerful acts of God in the life of the church. The divine gift typified by this liberty is what we intercede for, so that it may be a motive for constant expectation and not a tranquilizer that puts people to sleep and makes them lose the sense of responsibility for their mission.

The Guatemalan Nazarene church continues to keep alive the confessional sacrament: in baptism, we emphasize to our members is what is in accordance with Pauline Biblical thinking is that from this moment one dies to the world and is resurrected in Christ for God. The celebration of the Lord's Supper is done with true repentance and with an eschatological projection for the consolation and joy in our lives. At the same time, the Guatemalan Nazarene church continues to encourage the responsibility of stewardship in the Christian life. But, not just through offerings and tithes. Stewardship as Christian theology is understood not as bartering with God but as a liturgical action of thanksgiving because he has already blessed us. We understand this better as an integral stewardship for life. Evangelism today has taken a special interest in the church; proof of this in the expansion into the northwest of the country. In addition to the impetuous spirit of its promoters, the church makes available the different mediums to realize this aspect of her mission thanks to the immersion of the country in the globalization of mass social communication.

However, one needs to be more conscious that there are many things still to do and for which the church up to now has not taken direct action but it should begin. Guatemala is a developing country with great implications and challenges for the church. There is extreme poverty, illiteracy and violence, but due to a spiritual principle badly based that divides the secular from the spiritual, the church has not been able to get involved in these problems. For the church, they are matters of governmental policy and not part of its social holiness. Guatemala is living one of its worst political crises within its leadership and its educational systems to which the church is unable to respond to because it has lost this former vision to be the means that prepares spiritually and ethically capable men and women to be part of the political, economic and social structures of the country. These problems challenge the programs that the church develops and which have the intention of responding to the philosophy of the Kingdom and that of the church. Today, as in the beginning, attention must be given to each one of her theological and non-theological educational programs for the formation of leaders with values and to respond to the crises that the country is experiencing. Developing the objective of cultivating a generation of notable competent leaders full of the Holy Spirit, in the ecclesiastical as well as the non ecclesiastical environment, is a desire that has also started to develop in the hearts and minds of their pastors.

It is gratifying to see the number of pastors and leaders that are enrolled in studying in the diverse programs that the Guatemalan Nazarene Theological Seminary offers. Currently there are 586 students, 67 studying on the main campus and 519 in the different programs of decentralized education (data provided by the Rector of the Guatemalan Nazarene Theological

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Seminary). The legacy of the missionary spirit given to the church is currently latent, but is being with a fusion of young Latin American, North American and Guatemalan missionaries. But one can not deny that our mission in some moments has not had the needed orientation and has been lost, as in the recent case of the pastors of eight churches that recently separated from the denomination and started Manna Ministries. This occurred as a result of a theological problem the confronted the orthodox doctrine of the church with new currents of religious expression manifested by speaking in tongues, being slain in the Spirit and other expressions of the popular religiosity that are the language of the moment in the religious philosophy in Guatemala. It is because of this that it is being given special attention by a committed leadership.

Right now it is urgent to reformulate the theology of the Guatemalan Nazarene mission. Missional theology that predominated at the beginning was elaborated around the church building and an evangelism bordering on proselytism, with a structure based on the North American mindset. Today it is urgent to elaborate one in light of the needs of the community and Guatemalan leadership, which asks the church to no longer have an exclusive pastoral, where the pastor orchestrates that eliminates others expressions of leadership, but one that is inclusive, that gives space to everyone. The initial theology of mission focused on filling the church building. Now it is a theology of mission that sanctifies the sanctuary that is in reality is represented by the men and women who are immersed in a hedonist society. We must return to the initial emphasis that we have lost. National production of formative literature. The lack of literary production has meant the delay in the development in the theological and ecclesiastical world in Latin America today.

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