

PAST: HERITAGE AND INDIGENOUS PROCESS OF THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE IN PERU

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Country of Origin: Peru

Serving in: Peru

INTRODUCTION

Next November 1st, we will celebrate 90 years since the arrival of the first missionary to Peru, pastor Roger Winans. This hero of the faith, in obedience to a vision he had during one of his glorious encounters with the Lord, similar to that of Paul in Troas when he received the call of the Macedonian, “saw a tribe of Indians in the Upper Amazon and a hand appeared to point to them”. Having such conviction that this was his mission field, Roger Winans and his wife Mary, paying their own passage and other travel related expenses, left California in route to Peru in 1914. They arrived in Pacasmayo, a port in the north of the country.

Roger Winans did the work on his own for the first three years. Officially the headquarters of the Church of the Nazarene authorized the opening of the work in Peru in 1917. From Pacasmayo they went into the Andes and later, to the Amazon jungle, although continuing to preach in the towns and cities along the coast. However, for Winans his biggest accomplishment was arriving to the indigenous tribe that he had seen in his vision back in Kansas.

SOME REFERENCES TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE WORK

During the first decade of the ministry of the Church of the Nazarene, 8 churches and 6 missions were established. When the churches Golden Anniversary was celebrated in 1967, there were 61 organized churches with a membership of 2919, with the majority of the congregations located in the Sierra and in the jungle of northern Peru. Upon celebrating the Diamond Anniversary in 1992, due to the love and passion of the pastors and churches to continue growing, especially during the 1980s, there was a lot of motivation towards growth. In the country we had 500 churches with a membership of 30,000. This year, 2004, the statistical reports state we have 46,730 members distributed among 763 active churches in 16 districts.

The area most heavily evangelized and where the largest concentration of Nazarenes is located (93%) continues to be in the north of Peru, including the three natural regions of the country. From these regions hundreds of pastors have come that have spent their energy and efforts establishing hundreds of churches. The current pastors have taken upon their shoulders the mission of the church, continuing the vision of Roger Winans.

These nine decades of the ministry of the Church of the Nazarene in Peru have left their mark, and have elaborated some paradigms and supports that have permitted the fulfillment of the task to a great extent, gaining also the space and respect in the society and in the fraternity of evangelicals in the country. Included in this mark of reference, we also recognize, as does the church, that the focus of the mission was in rural areas, especially in the Andes and the Amazon,

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where small churches were established whose tendency in recent years has been to decrease or disappear due to the migration phenomena rural area-city. Currently there are some efforts to conquer the cities, but they are very scarce.

INHERITANCE AND INDIGENOUS PROCESS

Inheritance is defined as “the right to inherit” or “what one inherits”, whether it be material goods, properties, inclinations, customs, illnesses, etc.” (*Encyclopedia Sopena Concisa*, 1978). We asked one of our leaders that belonged to the first generation of Nazarene elders, which, or what is the best inheritance of the Church of the Nazarene for the current generation? Dr. Esperideón Julca pointed out two aspects: the doctrine and a committed leadership, which have left indelible prints.

The doctrine is not always easy to articulate from one generation to another. In our case we can see and read, not only in the “gallery” of those Nazarenes that are on the other side of the river, their life of holiness and their commitment to God and to the Church of the Nazarene; there are still some on this side, although very few, teachers of the doctrine and of the life of holiness that our church propagates.

We are going to point out some factors from the historical perspective, using a national approach to this long trajectory of our church in Peru:

Committed leadership with passion for the lost. From the beginning, Roger Winans, the missionaries that followed him, pastors and national workers, were nourished by self-denial, great passion and commitment, to bring the Gospel to towns and remote places, leaving indelible prints for future generations.

This legacy still moves and touches current generations so that they will become involved the ministry due to God’s call. In this mosaic of the Church of the Nazarene in Peru, it is easy to find hundreds of young pastors, preaching and teaching the Word with great love and passion, many of them deprived of a dignified salary or a comfortable house to live in. Their commitment to God and to the church had priority over other needs. The majority of our churches are located in the most depressed areas, where the pastors have had to adopt to do the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The print of holistic ministry The first missionaries and Peruvian pastors probably did not use the language of “holistic mission” that we use in the church now, but from the dawn of the Church of the Nazarene in Peru, a holistic gospel was preached. Along with the proclamation of the Gospel, schools were established to teach children and young people about agriculture, livestock; they taught English, sharing their food on the trip. All of this so that the message of the Gospel would impact in the communities and towns where it went.

“SUPPORTS” OF THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE IN PERU

The Bible Institute. In 1920, along with the school of basic education, the Bible School was created to prepare national workers for Christian ministry. It appears this school never closed, as today it is the Nazarene Theological Seminary that offers a *bachillerato* and a

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licentiatura in Theology, and serves also as an extension of the Nazarene Seminary of the Americas of Costa Rica, for the Master's of Science degree in Religion.

This institution has been and will be the seed plot for the Lord's servants which the Peruvian and Latin American church needs today. From its beginnings, the Seminary has been a "support", not only in training in Bible and Theology, but also in the vision and mission of the Church of the Nazarene in Peru. Currently there are almost a hundred residential students and approximately 500 in the ETED extensions.

The Church has understood that Proclamation and Teaching are the two tracks on which the church runs. Although we are not 100% self supporting in the financial aspect of the Seminary, it gives a strong emphasis on theological education of pastors and also lay people that are serving in the local churches. Because of this, the Seminary plays an important role in the development of the Church of the Nazarene.

Church planting strategy. Another "support" that the Church of the Nazarene has in Peru is the strategy to plant churches. Every local church should become a "mother Church" and does become that when it has planted a daughter church. As an example, the First Church in Chiclayo has planted around 20 churches in marginal urban zones and in small towns. Understanding this manner of church growth has led us to organize 16 districts in the last 20 years; twelve in the north are the largest ones, three in the center and one in the south. The southern part of the country is an open field for the Church of the Nazarene.

Sunday School. This church strategy, received very early, has permitted us to develop discipleship and maturity of church, in the doctrine and identity as the Church of the Nazarene. But it has also been a method to achieve quantitative growth as the multiplication of Sunday School classes has been the start of many new churches. Because of this, Sunday school is greatly loved and through it the church's progress is measured in numerical growth or decrease. It is possible that it needs changes and more dynamism as it relates to Christian education in the church, however, Sunday school still has significant value for the Church of the Nazarene in Peru.

Other factors in the formation of the Church of the Nazarene in Peru. The District Assemblies generally have been times of celebration, revival and training for the church and to advance the work. Until now there has been a sense of expectation, not only to hear the reports and to approve resolutions, but to also experience a special visit and renewing touch from the Holy Spirit.

The three departments of the church have from the beginning assumed with great responsibility their ministries on the district and local levels. They have involved the church, with challenges and training, giving a lot of enthusiasm to extend the kingdom of Christ. I will mention just one, NYI, that has always been concerned with giving a special place to the youth by means of unforgettable camps, retreats, congresses and diverse encounters, where the Lord has called many of them into pastoral ministry.

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The celebration of the Diamond Anniversary (1992) and Iberoamérica 2002 were unique experiences for the church, a space that allowed us to analyze how we were doing in a global context, and what implied new challenges. It was very special to see hundreds of young people touched and called to the mission field by the Lord, many of them are now pastors and others are waiting for the opportunity to prepare themselves to go and open new churches or missions places ripe for the harvest.

CONCLUSIONS AND CHALLENGES

When looking at the dawn of the Church of the Nazarene in Peru, it is relevant to remember the footprints and paradigms of how to do church: self-sacrificing love, deprivations and sacrifices as they were the sustenance of the Lord's servants. They left us a clear and profound doctrine by means of the testimony of a life of holiness. We need to reread this with determination to capture the spirit and not just be left with the letters as "...for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6b).

Over the years we have developed national leadership. The Church of the Nazarene is in the hands of Peruvian leaders: district superintendents, seminary presidents, presidents of national boards and pastors in the majority dedicated full-time to the ministry. Also some international leaders have come developed in the bosom of the Church of the Nazarene in Peru.

Although the church has been sensitive to and open to changes, we should also point out that we have not "developed" large and urban churches as we should have. This is one of the challenges and concerns of the national leadership now. We also have not been able to establish centers for higher education by the Church of the Nazarene although there have been initiatives through the years to realize this dream.

A task that we must work on is unity among the national church. Our social, political and economic reality leads us closer and closer to polarization as a nation; this mark of reference weakens the nerves of unity among the evangelicals and particularly our Church of the Nazarene. We must also recognize that in the way the church has grown it has not established bonds of unity so that it can impact our nation. The districts still choose their own path to success, failure or making efforts to maintain the church.

The greatest challenge that we have is that the leaders, in all levels of the church, must remain integral and with the possibility of strengthening their ministries and giving them greater value, for God's glory. We are aware that in the past two or three decades the advance of the church has been harmed by the bad testimony of some of its leaders.

We give thanks to God for the way he has guided the Church of the Nazarene in Peru, and we trust that he will continue doing so with the challenges that are before us.

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