

ORGANIZATIONAL AND PROGRAMMATIC STRUCTURES FACING CURRENT CHALLENGES

(Reaction to the paper presented by Jonathan Salgado)

By Libni Otoniel Rivera V.

Country of Origin: Guatemala

Serving in: Guatemala

INTRODUCTION

I celebrate this occasion to meet together, to sit and reflect about the action of the Church of the Nazarene that on the threshold of the Centennial of its organization, it is healthy to reflect on its past, the challenges that confront it and the indicators that can be proposed for a better insertion in its current action and towards the future.

In writing this reaction to the paper of our illustrious servant of God, Dr. Jonathan Salgado, we do it with John the Baptist's attitude (Mark 1:7), in recognition of the fitting assignation toward the "Organizational and Programmatic Structures" of the flock to which the Lord has called us to serve. Thus, as Dr. Salgado asked, How to understand the Church of the Nazarene and its structures in Ibero-America? And how to do this in a critical yet humble way to renew us with the purpose of learning together and being challenged?

At the beginning of his paper, Dr. Salgado shows us that the current challenges of the context obligate us to "think about the necessity and the possibilities to renew or rebuild those structures". Thus when we direct our attention to organizational and programmatic structures we need to be clear that they are not the law of the Medes and Persians, but that they are instruments or means by which we can channel the fulfillment of the delicate mission that has been given to us, on the principles on which the Church has based itself, particularly in the Ibero-American context, in which we develop our ministry. But if it is presented as "**the**" structure or "**the**" programs, we are already have problems.

On the other hand, I consider very apt that Dr. Salgado structures his paper in three levels and how the third is divided into four veins as if they were precious metals, which the figure implies, slightly tenuous at the beginning but if we follow them, they can direct us to deep riches.

I. BIBLICAL CLUES

To begin this section, Dr. Salgado shows that the foundation of the Church is precisely its Christological confession that leads us to two conclusions: On one part, it affirms that "the church assumes, according to its possibilities, the mission of Jesus" reaffirming the integrity of said mission. And the other part, it reaffirms that the Christological confession has as its central beam the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, therefore we are called to take great care in not substituting "the *teología crucis* for a *teología gloriae*".

In this vein of thought I would like to highlight two aspects that are already implied: On one hand, in the text of the Christological confession it indicates clearly the origin and belonging of the *ecclesia*: "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). Therefore, the church is His, and He

Reaction: Organizational and Programmatic Structures (Libni O. Rivera)

is building it and if “the gates of hell will not overcome it” then it is invincible. Therefore, without polarizing between an ecclesiastical triumphalism of the *teología gloriae*, or the reductionism of pessimism or passivity of belonging to the *ecclesia*, it is necessary to reaffirm the stewardship of the *ecclesia* to be active agents in the work of edifying on the Christological confession, with which I do not share that “it must assume the mission of Jesus according to its possibilities”, but that in complete contrast, when we do not assume the mission we are failing in the stewardship that he has delegated to us, and therefore, failing in the faithfulness, of which we will have to give an account (1 Cor. 1:1-2).

On the other hand, as is well pointed out in the paper, in the New Testament we are not going to find a systematized ecclesiology but we will find the birth and establishment of the ecclesial community that vibrates with energy. This vital energy is the presence of the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5) and is manifested on the day of Pentecost when the beginning of the *ecclesia* is witnessed, with its clear manifestations of vital energy (Acts 2:1-42) and of the praxis of an integral mission (Acts 2:43-47). Therefore, it is just not a question of stewardship, but one of belonging and dependence, because for the fulfillment of the mission of the church, which is the mission of Jesus, we are not drifting or without vital connection, but on the contrary, the possibilities are in direct proportion to the vital flow that comes from the presence, power and grace of the Spirit.

Therefore we can conclude that when analyzing the organizational and programmatic structures, from Biblical clues, we have to also reflect about the fact that:

1. Not all the structures show a direct connection with the vital energy of the *ecclesia*.
2. Not all of the programs pass the test of faithfulness which corresponds to the *ecclesia*.

HISTORICAL CLUES

In the historical clues Dr. Salgado approaches his paper affirming that “structure is necessary but brings with it risks”, of which he presents two that historically demonstrable ecclesiastical processes have arrived at: on the other hand, lacking or resisting structurization can lead to being absorbed by other groups or annihilation. On the other hand, structurization can lead to distortion of the faith and loss of identity.

Upon reflecting on this historical contribution to organizational and program structurization, I would like to highlight two aspects of the denominational ecclesial process: First, the heritage of the Wesleyan principle of “center of the road” that it the characteristic of a theology that “modifies extreme positions”, can help us to not polarize between extremes that are “the phenomena of the pendulum that has been present throughout history” (Riggle 1987:25).

On the other hand, at the dawn of the denomination, in uniting different holiness groups a consensus was reached in regard to the organizational and programmatic structures, to avoid the extremes of episcopatism and congregationalism, ending up with a representative government (*Manual* 1987:6; 16-20, 38, 56). In accordance with the principles of healthy church development, the structure is a means and not an end in itself. Galloway affirms that a characteristic of a healthy church is the “flexible and functional structure” and he asks: “Are the structure and organization important? Yes, all of us need a bone structure, but it is not necessary

Reaction: Organizational and Programmatic Structures (Libni O. Rivera)

for us to show our bones wherever! The organization has the purpose of mobilizing us with the end of fulfilling the tasks that have been entrusted to us” (Galloway 2001:35).

Therefore, I observe that we must focus our attention on reflecting on the indications that there is a crisis in the superstructure and our search for a place in it. These indicators are exemplified in the following concrete aspects: First, the district superintendency has become a status to hang on to although the functions are not fulfilled. Second, already at the threshold of the denomination’s centennial, one notices that regional leadership is still in the hands of “foreigners”. And third, missions can become just part of denominational status and not the proclamation of the gospel in remote areas.

Dr. Salgado concludes the historical clues indicating that, “there are elements that not only reflect the need to analyze but also to renovate our programs and structures”, therefore, I second the motion.

III. SOCIOLOGICAL CLUES

In the sociological clues, Dr. Salgado finds four veins, which need to be followed to encounter a mine of “precious” principles for the comprehension of the *ecclesia* and its action at this present juncture in the Ibero-American region.

The veins that are profiled are:

1. *Institutional model*, that every socio-political movement can be seen as a reaction to a previous situation.
2. *Tension between institution and charisma, authority and liberty*, that all church movements that begin as “communities” become present later as reactions to the suffocating structures.
3. The concept of *dynamic equivalency*, that a contextualized church must be perceived as an original production and of its own culture.
4. The phenomena of *entropy (cooling down of natural systems)*, that the movements of the Spirit lose their vitality due to the inertia or that are suffocated by outside forces.
5. We should consider one more vein: the phenomena of the church as an *open system*, showing that there is an “interdependence and interrelation between all of the systems, and that at the same time they form another more complex system, that acts and reacts (or responds) to other systems o its environment. To observe all these systems interacting with their context is what is called “open systems or microsystems”. “Therefore, every congregation, although it does not realize it, has an operative system that is always used in the processes to reach its purposes and goals” (Wagenveld 2000:73, 81).

Dr. Salgado concludes that all of these reveal the need for a new infusion of the Holy Spirit, and of the correct Biblical-theological-sociological information to get moving once again the church as God wants.

CONCLUSION

Reaction: Organizational and Programmatic Structures (Libni O. Rivera)

The organizational and programmatic structures are means and not ends. Therefore, we must be susceptible to constant diagnosis and evaluation. Unfortunately, the pendulum phenomena has always been present throughout history and our church does not escape it. But I consider that the Wesleyan principle of the “center of the road” is a corrective that is crucial to bring it to praxis in the theme of structurization.

Without forgetting the vision and commission that the core values of our church provide us, we must fulfill the mission that has been entrusted to us, innovating and renewing the organizational or programmatic structures.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Galloway, Dale. *The iglesia para nuestro días*. Kansas City: CNP, 2001.

Iglesia del Nazareno. *Manual*. Kansas City: CNP, 2001.

Riggle, MaryLou. *La teología wesleyana en perspectiva histórica*. San José, Costa Rica: SENDAS, 1997.

Wagenveld, Juan. *Iglecrecimiento integral*. Miami: UNILIT, 2000.