

# **OUR PRESENCE AS THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE IN IBERO-AMERICA: AN ANALYSIS WITH INTEGRITY**

*(Closing Conference)*

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*“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from our presence?...  
Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”  
(Psalm 139:7, 24-25)*

## **INTRODUCTION: AN ANALYSIS WITH INTEGRITY. PRESUPPOSITIONS**

To realize a diagnostic of some aspects of our journey, the indication or qualification of “an analysis with integrity” seeks, considering an event like this one that calls us (a theological conference, an encounter to reflect over faith and praxis and that in our case, centers on the life and mission of our church), this without forgetting that this is a celebration of the goals we have attained, that can at the same time allow us to see with clarity the aspects that are misguided in our thinking or to work in such a manner that we can affirm the mission. This makes it more imperative in a church such as ours—whose tradition is placed in the holiness movement—that is to say, of the affirmation of Christian integrity. To practice diagnostics with integrity should lead us normally to ways and expressions of repentance, without which there is no holy or Christian future possible. There is no room for triumphalistic and arrogant attitudes in our midst. The very human demonstrative impulse of success *per se* cannot overpower the value of faithfulness to God and the values of his kingdom. And these same values are those that we affirm as essential or core for our church, the appropriate criteria that we use to evaluate our walk.

To be like Him, the task of following Him, implies taking his yoke as disciples, accepting his continual correction for our affirmation. Part of this walk is joy and gratefulness for what he has done in our life and ministry and in the life of the church. Let us celebrate with Him! But it is also the timely acknowledgement of our sins and errors. The church always needs to be discovering its way to be that *ecclesia reformata et semper reformanda* that measures up to its nature and its historical responsibility. The Scriptures and history itself of the Church teaches us this wise attitude, guided by the Spirit of God himself within his people. The “doctrine of infallibility”, human or institutional, is not precisely a Biblical doctrine; and it is precisely our tradition “Protestant” (from ‘to protest’) that was firmly erected in a critical period of Christianity, to go against this attitude that once and again resurfaces in history and in our institutions.

Because of this, it is necessary to recognize the voices that God himself has established with the special design and charismatic structure of his Church. Many times the people of God in their institutionalization have been deaf or have not wanted to recognize those voices, and, although the immediatist perception of life makes it appear that the established order was owner

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of the truth and in control of the situations; as always, history takes it upon itself to confirm the error and show the mistake. Continually, these renovating voices come from the life itself of the church; they are the prophetic voices of all time that from within the church call us to attention (although at times they are not valued, and are even shushed or excluded); therefore, those of us who are in situations of institutional responsibility, while recognizing the importance of our responsibility, we must be sensitive and humble to hear the voice of God, of his people and of the people, thinking wisely the openness to changes that this could require. Renovation happens when his people humble themselves, pray, seek God, convert and repent of their evil ways (cf. 2 Chronicles 7:14).

It is probably a formative issue, to not be accustomed to doing diagnostic as part of planning itself. And if we do it in any way, it is not done in a coherent or systematic manner. An adequate diagnostic has to take into account the weaknesses and strengths, the successes and the mistakes, the limitations and the potentials. Although we should say that in the science of planning there is a tendency to give prevalence to the recognition of the difficulties and the need to take them seriously to overcome them. In a document where we have very limited space, we need to concentrate more on the problems, which when taken into account could merit steps toward changes in the focus, attitudes and therefore our ecclesiastical projects for the good of the mission.

For us, planning and acting consistently must imply an intelligence and comprehension of the context where we exercise our ministry, as well as an appropriate diagnostic and in the historical perspective of the life and mission of the church. This must be done with the strictest precision and truthfulness. Not doing this implies the tendency to err in the action, to deceive oneself. Thinking of our encounter, to make the most complete diagnostic of the life and mission of our church as in the reality or context in Ibero-America and of the period, goes beyond what we can do in a conference such as this. Even so, we are aware of the importance of these matters. And the method of selecting the themes is well-directed, with which one can evaluate some critical aspects. Behind this, there is an uneasiness to understand the great challenge that is represented by the reality of our continent and if we are responding to the situation in the appropriate manner, with what we are as an institution, individuals, organizational structures, programs and projects.

### **THE CONTEXT**

It is our responsibility as Latin American leaders to have a clear profile of the age, to discern the “signs of the times”, that is to say, to understand the fundamental problems of our generation and of the junctures, to perceive currents of thinking, philosophies or ideologies that are influencing the world and also the Church itself. To discover something in the immediate or remote past of our experiences, since the present is the result of the development of our beliefs and practices that we have whether in the church or in society. Otherwise, I do not know what type of mission we can be referring to. The disincarnated docetism reoccurs throughout history, and a self-imposed blindness is something common in a society characterized by alienation, indifference or fanaticisms, that in the last instance is “lack of lucidity”, as expressed by Nobel Prize winner in Literature, José Saramago, in his analysis of the current deception that represents

for everyone what is called “democratic system” in which most of us live here in the West, and to which we are not reacting with the necessary firmness.<sup>1</sup>

### **Demographic and cultural aspects**

One of the most significant facts to be aware of is about the youth of our regions. Some Christian authors, wanting to show the great lack of strategy to further “the Great Commission” are calling it “the Great Omission” for the lack of attention or priority to the large sector of children that make up almost a third of population.<sup>2</sup> Also, the youth sector, due to the socio-economic characteristics of our continents, is on the edge of social exclusion and abandonment, that in great manner explains the degrading situations in which we are submerged; unemployment, delinquency, alcoholism and prostitution. Therefore, both sectors, youth and children, should be a first level strategic priority for our work.

The urban challenge is also one of the most significant and to which is necessary to respond is largely linked to the internal migratory processes that are present with very particular characteristics in regions like Latin America. We could say that the church has not thought coherently of a strategic and broad response to the phenomena of the social crisis that they represent. But on the other hand, we should not fail to recognize the prevalence and significance of the rural sectors of some of our countries, and also develop coherent and ample strategies for those realities. In general, and from an integral perspective of the mission, we need interdisciplinary actions that allow us to confront the complex urban-rural panorama of our modern times, not just from an evangelistic perspective of reaching the human masses, but of an integral development that takes seriously the systemic aspects behind the disordered and non-organic processes of development.

The use of expressions such as “Latinness” show us a common trait of the manner of being, however, Latin America possesses great ethnic plurality. This cultural diversity of our nations also represents a challenge for evangelization, whether because there are groups hardly reached, or because they merit a specialized work, or because it is necessary that evangelical values be promoted in terms of accomplishment in a more egalitarian society and of real force of the value and rights of every human group. On the other hand, the traits of contemporary *ethos* linked principally to its Westernness—postmodernity, globalization, pluralism, materialism, informational and communications technology—require an effort to rethink the communication of the Gospel in such a context which affirms and strengthens the mission and the evangelical identity as well as the value of the cultures of our Latin peoples, as a gift of God.

Lastly, in the information provided about demographics and culture, comparing the data of the total population to the evangelical population that represents only 10.6%<sup>3</sup> (although this percentage varies from country to country), should lead us to think of the need to grow to be able to influence more significantly the life of our nations, from evangelical values. But this growth has to be at the same time of a qualitative character to be able to transcend by the strength of its

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<sup>1</sup> J. Saramago, *Ensayo sobre la lucidez* (Mexico, D.F.: Alfaguara, 2004), see also his *Ensayo sobre la ceguera* (Mexico, D.F.: Alfaguara, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Dan Brewster and Patrick McDonald. *Children: The Great Omission* (Oxford: Viva Network).

<sup>3</sup> Data provided by P. Johnstone and J. Mandryk in *Operation World*, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition (Carlisle, UK: WEC/Paternoster), 34.

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nature, that is to say, that of being an authentic Christianity. This brings us to the understanding that the task of evangelization as consistent discipleship, more so when we see some Latin American nations already with significant proportions of evangelicals, but where the transformational transcendence of the gospel in the life of the nation seems notably absent.

#### **Economic, social and political reality**

Latin America presents us with great diversity of situations and contrasts related to its development, due to different concurring factors: ecology, people groups (indigenous and migrant) and particular historical and cultural processes, local as well as those in conjunction with the global systemic relations. Its own being, its own identity, seems to be in a permanent colloidal state in search of a definition of a more permanent identity. In spite of this, when we focus on the current situation, as has been aptly described by Wilfredo Canales and Marco Velasco, we seem to perceive the common trait of a deep societal crisis: generalized poverty, economic inequality polarized to the extreme as an epitome of the asymmetrical diversity and as an obvious base of the great instability and social insecurity that is experienced. It seems that the multiple models and recipes for development do not represent anything more than mirages of betterment for the great majority, and do represent rampant accumulation for a few. The statistical indicators do not lie and show us the plain reality. A complete incongruence between macro and microeconomy, in which the essence of the economic objective, the familiar “*oikos-nomos*” is adrift and abandoned. And the indices of social decomposition are revealed in the levels that corruption has reached, when government officials that are placed to guide and guarantee social well-being, are those that exhaust and drain the system.

Clearly, the Church is not absent from these realities; in one way or another it is immersed in them, actively or passively. But being faithful to its prophetic and pastoral role cannot and should not be absorbed by hopelessness. On the contrary, it should be an instrument of the recuperation of hope and confidence. Therefore, this definitely implies a serious and radical revision of a series of suppositions, postures and forms in which we are currently operating and of the object-image that we have of what the church should be. Canales and Velasco have already given some indications: “revise values, priorities, ministry philosophies, leadership styles, define well the direction of the organization, the structure of the church... in function of a pastoral... a reflection of a missiology rooted in the Word.” “...A prophetic function... a community of alternative life reflected in its relations and interdependencies, intradenominational and transdenominationally, promoting the transformations of the Gospel... on a personal, community and social level”. I would only like to add a commentary, so that the effort brings fruit: The mystique and sacrificial commitment is not enough when facing the problematic realities of our society—certainly, very vast—and that come from a clear comprehension of the scope of integral Christian mission. An informed and intelligent action is also needed, one that comprehends the scientific-technical nature of social, economic and cultural transformation. This technical expertise in the diverse spheres of social task is also an ethical challenge for Nazarenes and Latin American evangelicals, if we really want to transcend in a consistent manner in the integral transformation of our communities in the name of the Gospel.

### **Religious and spiritual reality**

Some of the data from the works on demography have already informed us of the religious diversity on the region, primarily with a nominal Roman Catholic background. Concentrating specifically on the Protestant sector, it is to be an issue of concern because of the excessive branching out of the “genealogical tree” of the traditions, families and sub-families of churches that almost reach the categorization of ‘genotype’, ‘species’, and ‘subspecies’. This fact reflects the excessive atomization with traits of sectarianism and self-absorption that in no way contribute to the testimony, and moreover, an impediment to the unified action that permits us as evangelical people to have cohesive impact on the transformations that our societies require.

On the other hand the religious *boom* is everywhere, in the postmodern climate in which we live. One of the reasons for this, as is well pointed out by René Acosta, is the search for spiritual significance that individuals have, the official religion and in the Protestant sector the so-called historical churches, both founded on dogma and excessive institutionalism, have stopped being a relevant response. In one line, it has determined what the historians call the “Pentecostalization” of the Latin American church. In another line, the consequent surge of offers in a new type of religious supermarket with the diffusion of all types of orientalism, resurgence of indigenous religions, and the appearance of cults with every type of human extravagance.

But beyond the appropriate response or not of the most traditional sector of Catholicism or Protestantism, the “postmodern face” of Latin America Protestantism is evident, in a series of particular traits such as post-denominationalism, televangelism, megalomania, relation between gospel-money (prosperity gospel), entertainment and a lucid sense of church service, hedonism and competition. This analysis extends to the “crisis of theology”, due to unreflective and sacramentalist environment that this age generates. All of these characteristics demand from the church a critical and patient attitude and presents a great challenge to its creativity and to its capacity to cultivate an prophetic-apologetic attitude that combines with wisdom and love both the “pull out and destroy” and the “plant and rebuild” for the purpose of renovation.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps, the most important trait that we want to comment on here as part of the description of the Latin American spiritual reality, is that of a deformed and escapist spirituality very well pointed out by Segura and supported by Acosta to show it is part of the Nazarene world: “...the divorce between piety for the church and life for the world; between individual religiosity and social behavior; between puritan morality and Christian life.” Something is definitely wrong in a holiness or spirituality that is plainly just pure religious ritualism. Paradoxically, they mention that the critical social situation has seemed to revive religiosity, but a type of religiosity that shows up in mystical anguish or the typical “refuge of the masses” in temples full of hope in magical solutions,<sup>5</sup> and that are rarely expressed in rational and fully

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<sup>4</sup> See Arturo Piedra, “El rostro posmoderno del protestantismo latinoamericano”, in A. Piedra, S. Rooy, and H.F. Bullón, *¿Hacia donde va el protestantismo? Herencia y prospectiva en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Kairós, 2003), 35-65.

<sup>5</sup> This problem was analyzed earlier by Christian Lalive, when he studied the case of Pentecostal evangelical churches in Chile during the decades of the 1960’s and 1970’s, that while manifesting very creative and participatory forms of the church services, were totally separated from the commitment to social transformation in their country, even though their members experienced the results of the social crisis.

aware attitudes of the social causes that have to be objectively confronted, those that are the most closely linked to systemic and structural reasons of the political, economic and social reality. Therefore, I agree totally with Canales in that "...the serious challenge for the clarity that the church must have in its mission, as well in the way to accomplish it, avoiding falling into the easy, the immediate and the superficial that will affect its integrity in function of the demands of the Kingdom of God that is called to incarnate and proclaim."

## **OUR ECCLESIAL REALITY AND RESPONSES TO IT**

What do we represent in demographic weight within the evangelical people, in view of a more significant influence in our countries? What type of organizational and programmatic structures do we have to channel our mission? How functional are the principal programs of our church to make it an alternative and an instrument of transformation in our societies? This set of questions is enough to focus our remaining commentary, leaving until the end what is related to the organizational and programmatic structures to consider them determinant in terms of the possibilities of a greater transformative insertion in our societies.

### **Statistical-demographical significance in the context of the evangelical people**

As Mario Zani and Accel Ruiz reminded us, statistics are important to make a better informed diagnostic of the reality of the church itself and of the context where it ministers. This is for the labor at whatever level: local, district, national, regional or worldwide. In light of the appropriate criteria, values and objectives—that are not limited to the quantitative—a comparison shines light on what is adequate or not for a determined course of development, of good health or not that an organism such as the church is experiencing.<sup>6</sup> We can make comparisons towards the interior of the church. But the intention of discovering our statistical reality in the context of the evangelical people in Ibero-America, at least in overall facts, should bring us to a healthy measure of appreciation of a variety of aspects of our projection (philosophy, politics, strategies, methodologies) in relation to its evangelistic and transformative effectiveness. To become aware that with all the successes that we have reached in the interior of our own process, we do not reach even a half percentage point in the group of Protestant and Evangelical churches in Latin America and in the Caribbean, and this should bring us to a point of humility, and of the recognition that to reach the masses of our continent from the Gospel and from the evangelical, implies the need of a coordinated and unified work with the rest of the evangelical people to be able to transcend in a more effective manner. It is not worth making our demographic comparisons with the rest of the population of our countries as an exclusive challenge: it is ridiculous.

In first place, this coordination and cooperative work needs to take place with the rest of those in the holiness movement, and later, extend to the rest of evangelical churches. The unified action of the people of God is presented as an ethical imperative that comes from the Scriptures. Sectarian self-centeredness, full of pride and self-sufficiency, thinking that by ourselves alone we can transform the problems that face us in our continent is a sinful trait for which we have to repent. Possibly some would say that cooperation is a given in our denomination on a certain level, or in certain places, or in some personal relationships with

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<sup>6</sup> See Mario Zani's and Accel Ruiz's papers on "Realidad estadística de la Iglesia del Nazareno ubicada en el conjunto del pueblo evangélico de Iberoamérica."

isolated leaders. What needs to be sought is a unifying and joining together vision on the part of the denomination with all of Ibero-America, on all levels: regions, fields, districts and local churches; avoiding the double standard of perspectives, practices and relations, for example, between the United States and Latin America, or between levels of world operation and levels of local and district operation. This for example, making plans together, sharing use of materials and methods and many other resources and actions. The goal: mission and transformative transcendence of the gospel in our communities.

### **Relevant programs in our missional process: evangelism, theological education and social service**

The papers presented by Eduardo Duque, Rubén Fernández and Luis Meza, as well as those of the reactors Tim Brunk and David Wesley, give testimony to the values and constant efforts made by the denomination in the areas of evangelization, theological education and diaconal ministry; of the achievements reached in the growth of membership, in the diversification of alternatives for theological education for greater access in the formation of our leadership, in the advances in raising awareness, organization and efforts related to social service. According to these authors, they also comment on the limitations, or the historical processes of the own denomination that could have affected a better development of the programs, especially in relation to ministries of compassion. At the same time, all offered valid proposals or reflected about the emphasis to maintain firm facing the challenges or tasks still waiting to be done. It is worthwhile to take into account the observations of Salgado and Meador<sup>7</sup>, if our programs are usually linked to the focus of the mission, whether in their origin or in their later developments, have all been as indigenous and contextualized to the reality of Latin America as they should have been, and that new proposals should not be in any way put to the side.

I would like to direct attention to what might have represented our accomplishments in relation to the problematic realities described in our analysis of the context in Latin America. To ponder the historical-transformative effectiveness of the two key elements would define our integral perspective: evangelization and social responsibility, measured by our educative proposal which has a decisive influence on the formation of our human resources, on the configuration of their perceptions and on the development of their abilities for action. My perception that up to now our development has had more of a parameter of internal evaluation, that is to say, measuring and achievements in function of ourselves, more than its historical effectiveness in the environment and society in which we are as a historical agent of the Kingdom of God. Even when wanting to evaluate things within ourselves, it is worth the effort to ask in objective terms the level of investment in its normal programs—in human resources, time, equipment and financial—how balanced has this “holistic mission” been that we say we provide. Could it be that in real terms compassionate ministries are a simple appendix, first theological and then missional? Underneath, education remains instrumentalized with a model of internal consumption and not open in its design to conceive a church “for” the world, which has been reflected in the low profile of interdisciplinary higher education in our Latin American environment. But even supposing a new alternative, of an organic ecclesial model for the integrated relation of its programs and open to the society and history of our people, it will be limited, as has been mentioned earlier, if it does not take into account a coordinated will with the

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<sup>7</sup> Scott Meador, “We are a missional people”, reaction to the paper of C. Sarmiento with the same title.

rest of the people of God to effectively transcend transformingly in the vastness and complexity that the contemporary problems represent, more so considering the systemic and structural dimensions. Here there could be also another limitation of our action: our isolation.

But this circumstance is not limited to our church, but to the evangelical sphere in general. In an analysis of the social contribution of the evangelical people in Latin America, Samuel Escobar<sup>8</sup> synthesizes the projection with two words: promise and precariousness. Promise, for the innumerable cases of social commitment manifested by the protestant presence in the midst of marginalization, the interventions in the secular environment, including the political, and the creation of alternative communities. Precariousness, for the many limitations, failures and the miniscule character of this work compared to the great needs, explicable in part since the protestant movement is relatively new in Latin America (compared to five centuries of Catholic presence). But also, due to reductionism in the theology of mission sustained with little importance on social transformation, and the characteristic of atomized behavior of the evangelical people.

In a broad investigation carried out worldwide, based on listening and seeing what the evangelical churches say and now are trying to do in different continents, it shows the emergence of a unified and convincing paradigm of mission for the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: ***mission as transformation***. This paradigm is constructed on four pillars of truth and missional impulse: (1) we are living in a broken world in crisis; (2) individuals are called to be conformed to the image of Christ; (3) the churches are called to be renewed and conformed to the great purposes of God for His creation; (4) cities, communities, peoples and nations must be transformed. A paradigm that calls for a transformational church that goes out in transformational mission to the world.<sup>9</sup> The whole gospel, for the whole people of God, for the whole world. This will not be possible without rethinking and redirecting the organizational structures as a new framework for the dynamic and efficacy of the principal programs of the evangelical churches.

### **The issue of organizational and programmatic structures**

Jonathan Salgado is on target when he makes us think about the problematic of the structures and the need for revitalization of these by an influx of the Spirit, and on the basis of serious Biblical and theological information and even the social sciences. In itself, the theme has been worked by many ecclesiologists and historians as it has been a reoccurring problem in the history of the church.<sup>10</sup> Even in the gospels themselves Jesus makes reference to the necessity of “new wineskins for new wine” (Mark 2:22; Luke 5:38) to give way to a live and eternal gospel in contrast to the structures and systems that become ancient and an impediment for its advancement. Howard Snyder, in a trilogy of works, is dedicated to the study of the permanent tension between the church’s essence and form, but where this has the exigency to be effectively

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel Escobar, *Tiempo de mision: America Latina y la mision cristiana hoy* (Guatemala: Clara-Semilla, 1999), 112-144, “El impacto social de la mision”.

<sup>9</sup> See Luis K. Bush, ed., “A Unifying Vision of the Church’s Mission”, Forum for World Evangelization (Thailand, September 2004).

<sup>10</sup> See for example the substantial study by Hans Kung, *The Church* (Barcelona: Herder, 1970), that gives an ample historical panorama of the issue. Within this current of analysis of institutional structures, a current theme has been the imbalance in the ordained clerical function in respect to the laity: the problem of clericalization, and with it the organizational and functional hierarchization.



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“a new wineskin for new wine”, a true “kingdom community” and a “liberating church”.<sup>11</sup> It is without discussion that structures are necessary because without them one can not operate, and these vary according to the eras and contexts; but at the same time, they need constant revision due to their easy disfunctionality and decontextualization, is something that is not easily accepted.

Concerned about renovation, it is good to take into account as a constant in the history of the church, that God himself has allowed new revitalizing winds to come from the periphery more than from the centers of the most powerful institutions. As says the renowned missionologist Paul E. Pierson in his work entitled *Emerging Streams of Church and Mission: Transformation from the Periphery*<sup>12</sup>:

...movements of renewal and mission have normally risen on the periphery of the broader Church and usually existed in some tension with it even as they have resulted in new streams of life and outreach. Eventually, but not always, their values have been recognized and embraced by the broader church. However, as this has happened, such movements have often fallen into the dangers of institutionalization and lost their original zeal. That is a major dilemma for all of us... as churchly institutions grow older they soon come to see themselves both as the preservers of orthodoxy and the centers of power through which the Spirit must work. In this process they develop elitist, often rigid models of leadership selection and training... [because of this] ...The rise of peripheral movements is a clear indication of the sovereignty of God and the fact that the gifts of the Spirit that are given to all believers.<sup>13</sup>

Pierson notes that today and throughout the world, churches that are experiencing the most accelerated decline tend to be those that are rigid in their focuses and methodologies; those churches are closed to innovation in relation to its ministries and structures, worship practices and other aspects. And this *ethos* is principally identified with the culture of some established churches that tend to suffocate the spirit of creative innovation and recontextualization of the Gospel. Pierson continues by giving a list of some nineteen common factors that are discovered in movements that in the past have resulted in renovation and mission. Of these I will mention some of the ones relevant to our topic or those linked to themes we have treated in our conference.

1. They arise on the periphery of the institutionalized church.
2. They are motivated by a transforming experience with God, renewal at a personal or group level, and that results is a desire for a more authentic Christian life that frequently leads to a genuine concern for the Church and the world.

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<sup>11</sup> See H. Synder, *The Problem of Wineskins: Church Structure in a Technological Age* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1975); *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1977); *Liberating the Church: The Ecology of Church and Kingdom* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> 2004 Forum for World Evangelism (Thailand, September 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

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3. There are “theological breakthroughs”, that is, rediscoveries of aspects of the Christian message that have been forgotten or ignored. These “ruptures” usually include a rediscovery of the gifts of every believer.
4. The movement will be led into significant recontextualization of the Christian message, and this produces a series of innovations, including the liturgical aspect. The message is frequently communicated by lay persons to those who are marginalized, outside of the traditional structures of the church.
5. In the measure that the movement grows, new models of leadership selection and training become essential. These are more oriented to the laity and are less institutionalized.
6. More flexible structures of church and mission will be needed, different from the traditional ones.
7. There will be growing interest for the marginalized that are expressed in compassionate ministries. In a later stage, it is directed to a concern for a wider social transformation.<sup>14</sup>

How typical these results appear to us when we review the historical moments that mark our own identity as evangelicals and Nazarenes: the birth of the Protestant Reformation, Wesleyanism, and of our own denomination. I believe that we should not be closed to an ample revision of the structures of our organization, on all levels, in the light of serious theological, ecclesiastical and historical considerations. For example, the “corporation” model of modernity and of the contribution of administrative science should be carefully evaluated in its anti-ethical traits to the ideal of body, people, family, etc., representative images of the nature itself of the Church that rise out of the Scripture. The data provided by solid documented investigation of ecclesiastic history and that of the most renovating experiences within the contemporary church come from groups outside of the standardized church structures, for the handling of new forms and flexible structures as more dynamic responses in the context,<sup>15</sup> should make us seriously think in our current organizational and programmatic channels as the only way to respond to “the whisper of the Spirit and the will of the Lord”.

That this forum of the First Ibero-American Nazarene Theological Conference that in great measure arises from the academic leadership through the product of their reflection, can humbly contribute to inform, inspire and challenge us in the paths of better service to the Lord, to his Church and to the world, from this great homeland of Ibero-America. We trust that the Lord himself, by his Spirit, sovereign in his Church and in history, will be in charge of renewing what needs to be renewed in us, in the short, medium and long term, for the glory of his Kingdom and the well-being of our peoples.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 120-122.

<sup>15</sup> See also George Hunter III, *Church for the Unchurched* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).