

THE FUTURE OF OUR CHURCH IN IBERO-AMERICA:
EXERCISING OUR CORE VALUES

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The role that has been assigned to this paper is to make a prophetic statement for the Nazarene church in Latin America. I have heard Dr. Bruno Radi say many times, “I am neither a prophet nor son of a prophet.” In agreement with this statement I have to repeat that I too am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet.

However, The Bible is very clear about the results of the obedience or disobedience of God’s people to His voice. The way that a nation, a family, a group of people or a church replies to God’s options will mark their future destiny. Those who obey the missionary mandates of God are promised blessing. On the other hand, those of our people, our neighbors, our fellow countrymen who do not follow the paths that God has set out, will be punished. (See Deuteronomy 28—29). These blessings or curses are laid out in the context of the Covenant that God made where he promised to train the people to keep the covenant. (In the Old Testament this Covenant was by means of the law and in the Christian Era by grace through the death of Jesus on the cross for us; See Genesis 15:8-21; Deuteronomy 30 among other passages.)

The planners of this theological conference (and I underline theological) have rightly classified the themes in past, present and future. It is in these three dimensions that Theology has been developed. An in-depth study, examining and learning from the ways that God has acted in the past through fragile, fallible and finite human beings like us, can show us lessons for the present and the future. At the same time it is possible to examine errors, disobedience and discover what were the consequences for the church, the individual, and the nation for the present and in the future.

Each country has contributed papers about the history of the Church of the Nazarene under the title of “Our Past: Inheritance and Indigenous Process”. They have made a brief summary of the legacy received from the founders of the church and have expressed their gratitude, listed the struggles and contradictions experienced, and pointed to the hope for the future of our beloved church.

The past represents floodlights for the present. A detailed study of the current situations including, demography, the socio-economic and political situations, the religious and theological dimensions, as well as the structures and systems, form the basis for the incarnation of God’s message in our times. This study not only provides the basis but also warns the church about the needs of their generation. It is only when the church is able to identify with and adapt to their current situation that they will be able to meet the deepest needs of those they serve as well as carry out God’s mission to fallen humanity. Dr. Humberto Bullón in his paper presented clearly the present state of the Church of the Nazarene. Although he failed to mention some of the present glories such as the celebration of 100 years of Nazarene ministry in some countries such

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as Mexico and Guatemala, he demonstrated clearly some of the barriers which could harm the future mission of the church.

The action or inaction of the church now will draw up the blueprint for the future. As the Latin American Nazarene church we need to remove the barriers which we ourselves have raised in our generation if we want to transmit to the next generation the legacy which we have received.

I would like to take the liberty to change the title of the paper to: **THE FUTURE OF OUR CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA: EXERCISING OUR CORE VALUES**. We will start with **EXERCISING OUR CORE VALUES**, and then we will continue with **THE FUTURE OF OUR CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA**.

EXERCISING OUR CORE VALUES

This final summary is based on the document *A Living Faith: What Nazarenes Believe*.¹ It is important at this moment to explain the role that these *core values* play in whatever society whether ecclesiastical or secular.² I suspect that the document about our *core values* which has been amply circulated among our Central American pastors and leaders, and I am sure also among those serving in South America and the Caribbean for two consecutive years has not been studied sufficiently by some. So I will take this opportunity to explain the purpose of this document³ and the important role that it must play in the vision that the Nazarene church must have for the future.⁴

If we try to see the future of the church of the Nazarene projected for 4, 15, 20, and 50 or 100 years into the future, this vision should have two component parts: a core ideology and the vision for the future.

The key to carrying out the vision (which is what I have been asked to produce in this paper) lies essentially in deeply understanding our core ideology. Core ideology for whatever institution is made up of two elements: core values and a core purpose. The core ideology (values and purpose) stimulates how business is done, progress and change of an organization so that they can achieve their goals in the future. These core values and goals do not change. They last as long as the institution lasts; in fact they must not be change. The difference between these core values and goals in the day to day operative practices and strategies needs to be clarified. These strategies and operative plans need to be constantly changing because we are in a world that is changing, as Dr. Bullón has expressed. It is because the core values and goals are

¹ Board of General Superintendentes, *Valores esenciales* (booklet on Core Values published in Spanish by the México, Central America and Panama [MAC] and South America [SAM] Regions of the Church of the Nazarene, n.d.).

² The concepts for the description of the function of values have been taken from chapter 11 of James C. Collins, Jerry I. Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (Philadelphia: HarperCollins Publishers, 2nd ed., 1999). The Spanish edition is titled *Empresas que perduran* but it does not contain chapter 11.

³ We will not explain the significance of what it means to be a Christian, holiness, or missional people; we will focus on the role of values in an entity such as the Church of the Nazarene.

⁴ Dr. Bullón in his paper on education attributes the neglect on the part of local churches and boards of regents to develop university level Christian institutions with secular majors, on their lack of knowledge of the Core Values, and the procedures of our *Manual* to make them a reality.

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permanent that they need to become incarnated and contextualized. We can only do this by means of carrying out a careful study of the present situation in which we are ministering whether it is in a setting which is urban, rural, modern or post modern, poor or affluent, educated or illiterate.

Dr. Bullón pointed out in his analysis “there are 52 cities in Latin America with more than one million inhabitants, of which Mexico City and São Paulo are two of the largest cities in the world.” He adds:

Since almost 80% of the youth in this region reside in urban areas, in first place, the bulk of the poverty is accentuated by that concentration; in second place, while one sector is able to acquire human and social resources necessary to adapting rapidly to the new demands of productivity, other find access to those opportunities impossible; in third place, the youth assume directly the educational deficiencies whether because of lack of family resources or the precarious conditions that the state offers in this area. All of this is reflected in a situation of poverty of the youth in urban populations, and creates isolation in them... In the sector of the population considered Christian (91.65%), the average percentage considered Evangelical [Protestant] in Latin America is 10.6%, varying from country to country.

It is in the midst of this scenario that the church needs to profoundly understand the core ideology (the core values and goals) before creating programs and making plans for the future.

If we believe that we need to work with excellence worthy of our Lord and Savior in our church, we need to be *constantly* changing, but there are things that do not change. We need to know for sure what is sacred, what we cannot and must not change and those things which are subject to change. In other words, we must stimulate processes of adaptation and change to progress in all areas which do not touch our core ideology (values and essential purpose).

The key to the future of the Latin American Nazarene church is to preserve the basic values: What we believe in and what we are prepared to die for, the reason why we exist. The medular ideology (core values and goals) define the permanent character of which we are, the self-identity of the Church of the Nazarene which will remain consistent through time in whatever part of the Globe. Our identity should transcend fashions, advances in technology, current administrative theories, leaders in determined places or time, cultures, sociological moods and the environment in which we move. The core ideology (core values and goals) is the most significant contribution given to us by the founders of the Church of the Nazarene.

The core ideology provides the glue which keeps the church together while she grows, decentralizes, diversifies, and expands globally. One example which we could share is found in Judaism. Their core values and goals kept them united for centuries even though they did not have a land to live in and they were scattered all over the planet. This core ideology is what has kept Christianity vibrant and the church has passed the Good News on from generation to generation. As Jesus Himself gave us the assurance: “The gates of Hell will not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18).

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Moving on to one of the components of the core Ideology, the core values which are essential and unchanging. They consist of a small group of principles which guide; they do not need external justification, and only have intrinsic value for those in our church. They are independent of contemporary situations, competitive needs of society, administration fads, worship and adoration styles, ecclesiastical structures, present leadership, the cultures that we move in and the church's political legislation.

Strategies for "success" change with time, cultural norms are being permanently transformed through globalization and are open to change, but the core values resist the test of time and are Biblical principles which have been revealed for all times.

The key question is: if circumstances change and we should be *punished or penalized* for holding these core values, would we be able to maintain them? If some one cannot maintain them then they are not core values or they is not prepared to be a member of the Church of the Nazarene in any part of the world.

Our core values are clear: We are a Christian, holiness, missional people. Do we know what these really mean? Rev. Canales was right when he concluded his paper saying:

In an atmosphere of missiological fragility (not being aware of our values) described above, we can understand why it is that today we have so many difficulties in trying to preserve our "Nazarene identity" in the face of the influences of a diversity of movements which are present in contemporary religious context and which, in one way or another have even reached our churches... The most elemental observation tells us that, in practice, our indigenous processes assumed and reproduced the *procedures* of an organizational structure, but not the *principles* on which they were based. The *programs* have been taken on board with enthusiasm (schemes have been defended ardently in themselves), but we have not been able to develop the *ministries* for which these programs were designed to serve. Theologically they opted for a repetitive attitude rather than a more reflexive one.⁵

Now let us turn to the second component of the core ideology, the core purpose. The core purpose is the *fundamental reason for the existence of the Church of the Nazarene*. If we had to choose between *core values* and *core purpose* we would have to select the purpose as being the most important because it guides and inspires the Church of the Nazarene. It is harder to identify than the core values. The core purpose is the most profound reason of being of an organization. This core purpose should not be confused with practical aims and goals, the need to elaborate strategies or worship modalities. It is good to make goals which need to be met and strategies to be carried out. The core purpose cannot be completed. It is like a star in the sky which guides us. We are always following this star but we cannot reach it. Though the core purpose does not change it inspires change. Even though it is not possible to achieve the ultimate goal, the Church of the Nazarene cannot stop stimulating change and progress to get nearer to achieving this final goal.

⁵ Wilfredo Canales, Closing paper for this Conference.

The *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene clearly presents our ultimate goal: “The Church of the Nazarene exists as an instrument for advancing the Kingdom of God through the preaching and teaching of the Gospel throughout the world. Our well defined commission is to preserve and propagate Christian holiness as set forth in the Scriptures.”⁶ The preamble to the Constitution of the *Manual* expresses it in the following way: “In order that we may preserve our God-given heritage, the faith once delivered to the saints, especially the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification as a second work of grace.”⁷

This ultimate goal is unique. It is the reason why the Church of the Nazarene exists. Sharing abroad Biblical holiness, “especially the doctrine of the experience of entire sanctification as a second work of grace” is what makes us different from other evangelical groups. We can never fully achieve this as there are hundreds of neighborhoods, communities, villages, cities and countries where the Church of the Nazarene has not been able yet to share the message. The day that our core purpose gets changed or we ignore or “give emphasis to other agendas” we will cease to be what we have been called to be.

Let us remind ourselves: **the core ideology** (values and core purpose) encapsulates what we believe and the reason for our existence. **When we have, understand, affirm and live our core ideology**, then and only then can we proceed to determine what type of progress we need to stimulate so as to state our vision for the future.

THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH OF THE LATIN AMERICAN NAZARENE

Robert K. Greenleaf, who speaks of the concept of the servant-leader, presents three contemporary figures in his paper “*Feeding the Spirit: The Challenges of Religious Leaders*”.⁸ These figures are key for the future of the Church. They are the prophet, the follower and the leader. He defines them in the following ways:

A *Leader* is the person who directly or indirectly makes things happen with his people to heal them, or immunize them from the bad things in their environment... so the leader has to go ahead to show the way... especially in situations where the road is dangerous or uncertain... the leader offers the opportunity to make creative changes. To be a leader means taking risks and having an adventurous spirit.

A *Prophet* is different from the leaders, but is indispensable for them. The prophet is the person who has the ideas which if they were implemented could create the means to heal the society.

The *Followers* are those who make the leader... those who are waiting for the prophetic voice and respond even if the prophet is not very persuasive.⁹

⁶*Manual de la Iglesia del Nazareno* (Kansas City: Casa Nazarena de Publicaciones, 2001), 5, Spanish version.

⁷*Ibid.*, 25.

⁸Greenleaf wrote this document on his position in 1982 for a commission of the leadership of the United Methodist Church. It appears in the book *Religious Leaders as Seekers and Servants*, 6-48.

⁹*Ibid.* These definitions have been taken from the article; they are not literal quotes but inferences from Greenleaf's article.

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Greenleaf continues:

...the prophet, the follower, and the leaders are intricately linked together. The *prophet* brings vision and penetrating intuition. The *seeker* or follower from his context brings openness and a profound sense of aggressive searching and critical thinking. The *leader* adds the art of persistent and determined persuading as well as the value of adventure and risk taking. Occasionally one person could have the three functions.¹⁰

What does this have to do with the vision? The fact is that if we are to think about the future of the Church of the Nazarene in Latin America we need to have all three groups. The vision without one of these groups will be incomplete.

The vision should have to do with the spiritual hunger of *the seekers* (followers). Without them there can be no vision. The vision is born from the bases. The vision should be compacted and expressed by the prophet. He is the one who studies the times, the context and the tendencies to suggest the direction that the church should take. The leader should see the challenge, understand what risks are involved, what precautions he needs to make and decide guided by God's Spirit lead the people to the Promised Land.

The vision should follow the cry of the people in the grass roots. The prophet should take this cry and the leader should work out some plans and methods to help the people to achieve their vision.

Is it that we are not listening to what the people in our churches are saying? How are our levels of communication? Are we trying to have a vision without the vertebral column, the core values and purpose? Are we just bothered about carrying out our agendas? If the people are not listened to they will revolt. The prophet is the one who needs to know the times and the seasons to carry out and prepare the way for the leader. Have we stopped listening to our prophets? ¿Are the prophets so fearful that they can not express the heart cry of the people? The leader needs to take the reins. Could it be that we do not allow them to exercise their leadership role because we do not realize what each others place is in the Body of Christ? One characteristic of post modernity is the lack of respect for authority, lack of submission, and leadership from among the people. ¿What is the future of the Church of the Nazarene in Latin America? Do we have vision, "the vision"?

I cannot speak for all of Latin America, as my field of action is limited to Mexico, Central America and Panama. But I can speak about the vision that they have found. Please forgive me for talking the liberty to use the MAC region as an example, in no way am I trying to promote the MAC region by doing so.

In Guatemala, from August 24-25, just over a month and a half ago, seekers, prophets and leaders joined together to evaluate where we are and where we want to go.

¹⁰Ibid, 14.

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We reaffirmed the core ideology and core values by means of the following statements of our goals and purposes:

Fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, making disciples, multiplying and developing a holiness church according to the doctrines and principles of the Church of the Nazarene.

We wrote the following vision of how we want to see this church in the MAC Region by the year 2008:

By the year 2008 we can see a Church of the Nazarene that is alive, holy, and growing, which affirms its identity, impacts the community through compassion and the love of Christ, and is committed to make disciples and to evangelize the world.

We mark the following imperatives to help us to stay on track and accomplish our vision:

- 1. There should be a strategy for prayer in the local churches coordinated at the district, area and regional levels.*
- 2. To establish effective mechanisms to transmit the vision to the local churches.*
- 3. To establish systems and methods of continual discipleship.*
- 4. To establish intentionally the pathway for evangelism to discipleship.*
- 5. To continue the doctrinal clarity (the orthodox position of the church), which has been the spinal column of the churches.*
- 6. To apply and to understand that in order to grow, pruning and weeding is necessary.*

We also established goals which are not pertinent for this document.

I would like to close by challenging us—I am not sure how, maybe someone has an idea—as educators, theologians administrators, pastors and lay people, not to leave this conference without first receiving anew a complete vision of what God can do through the Church of the Nazarene in Latin America in the future.