

## Conference Theme

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A group of over 35 theological educators and church leaders gathered at Korea Nazarene University on October 7-9, 2003, to explore together a most critical topic. The international makeup of this group, representing over ten countries of the Asia-Pacific Region as well as the U.S.A. and United Kingdom, brought a richness to the discussion of how to make Scripture relevant to the peoples of these lands.

The conscious, driving force of our conference was to progress towards our goal as disciples of Jesus Christ of guiding people into transforming relationship with God. Theological dialogue provides a solid foundation for the evangelistic mission of the church. One of the significant challenges we face today is taking the message of this relationship as described in the Bible and making it relevant and understandable to cultures and contexts far removed from the cultures of the Bible. Our task as theologians is to find the inner reality and transformative message of Scripture and articulate it to our own contexts without altering that message. We must be faithful to both text and context while preserving the message of Scripture as interpreted by our Wesleyan tradition.

Hermeneutics is one essential if not primary step in the process of doing theology. Our theology (and thus preaching and teaching) is determined to some degree by our hermeneutic, and our hermeneutic is guided by theological presuppositions. With the new challenges and opportunities facing the church, a careful look at how we formulate and apply our doctrines is much needed. In an area as diverse as the Asia-Pacific Region, contextualized theology is mandatory, but in this contextualization lies the threat of factionalism or regional theologies that become separated from the larger, global church. The call for world evangelization urges fresh and relevant approaches, but the unity and theological integrity of the church calls for mindful interpretation.

This book contains the papers and sermons presented at the conference. The planning committee structured the presentations to come to the topic from a number of disciplines, thus the divisions of this book: historical theology, society and culture, ethics and theology, Bible, missiology, and evangelism and church growth. In this regards, we were attempting to be “Wesleyan” in our method, realizing that the various disciplines will help us see the bigger picture of the application of scriptural truths.

The title of the conference carries significance. The distinct (as in clear and obvious) message of the Bible, we believe, is the desire of the holy God to be in a love relationship with His creatures whom He makes holy through Jesus Christ in response to their faith and obedience. As a denomination, we believe we have been “called unto holiness,” that is, called to remind the global Church about and invite the world to this deeper relationship with God in Christ. If we are to be truly a people of holiness, we must be people of the Word. Even though this is such an important thought, it contains a bit of ambiguity because of the dynamic of interpreting the Bible. The words of Scripture do not change, but their understanding, translation, and application change from one person, language, time, and location to another. The Holy Spirit inspired the original authors but also inspires those who read the sacred Scriptures today. The critical question is this: in the range of interpretations and applications within our Nazarene movement, is there a danger of losing Scripture’s dynamic of holiness? In our efforts to be relevant and contextual, could we also be diminishing our message? All Nazarene ministers, scholars, professors, and missionaries should be concerned about this danger.

A number of questions were posed to the presenters at the conference which the reader of this book might also consider.

1. What does an Asian or a Pacific hermeneutic look like if it also comes from the Wesleyan tradition? Is there such a thing as a Wesleyan Asian hermeneutic or a Wesleyan Pacific hermeneutic? Should there be one?
2. Is there one agreed approach to interpreting the Bible? How diverse can theologians in the Church of the Nazarene be in their approach to the Bible? Is it possible to be a global denomination unified by one message? How will both the internationalization and maturation of the global church challenge our core doctrines?
3. What are the cultural, historical, or biblical models for doing hermeneutics that are relevant and useful for pastors and teachers on our region? Does John Wesley or any other figure in church history (perhaps an Asian or Pacific person) provide a model for us?
4. How can we base our doctrine of holiness on Scripture without sacrificing the need for cultural relevancy? How much should culture influence our hermeneutics?
5. What can Asian and Pacific preachers do to make their preaching not only intelligible, meaningful, applicable, and “relevant,” but also dynamic, powerful, and life-transforming?
6. How much does culture influence our use and interpretation of Scripture?

All who participated in the making of this book hope that our dialogue with each other will contribute to the global work of the Church of the Nazarene and other similar groups. We invite those from other parts of the world to join with us in seeking answers to our questions. We also hope that a bit of our passion for God and the spreading of His Gospel will rub off on those who read our papers.