

Receiving a Legacy

By
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To remember the presence of the Church of the Nazarene in Latin America, confronts to us with two very important challenges: First, despite the profusion of testimonial stories that there are on the work of the Church in most of the Latin American countries,¹ we lack an ample and integral historical perspective. This has not allowed us to relate and to evaluate all the factors that have marked the being and task of our Church on the continent. The absence of integral historical perspective (retrospective vision), conspires against the **forjación** of a church project that, **having itself seated in a certain context**, needs to take root and to be pertinent to the same perspective (prospective vision). The importance of this historical glance, that is task of the historian, is emphasized by Rubem Alves, when it indicates:

The historian is someone who recovers lost memories and distributes them as if they were a sacrament lost to the memory. Indeed, what better communitarian sacrament exists than the memories of a common past, marked by the existence of the pain, sacrifice, and hope? To gather and to distribute. He is not only an archaeologist of memories. *He is a sowing machine of visions and hopes.*²

Second, those of us that comprised the new generations of Nazarenes on this continent are in the urgent necessity to respond to a crucial question: *What does it mean to be a Nazarene in Latin American today?* **For anybody it is a secret that**, in the middle of the "religious Renaissance"³ global society is experiencing, we confronted the challenge of a great number of new religious movements whose beliefs and practices have spread cross-culturally, affecting to Christian churches in many ways, creating subtle **sincretismos** and relativizing the presence of so-called institutionalized religion

(lease "denominational," in its evangelical scope). John Mackay said, "There are moments in the history of the people and the towns, particularly in days of crisis, when the memory of yesterday lays way towards the morning, *when waking up of an inheritance sense it becomes a powerful determinant of a destiny.*"⁴

In light of these challenges it agrees to ask us: What legacy have we received from the pioneering, national and foreign Nazarenes, that with their tesonero effort took ahead a work that has hit to several generations of Latin American? Without a doubt, as we affirmed some time ago: "This is an inheritance that we urgently need to preserve. Surely ... with the passage of time, there are aspects of our ministry as a Church that have to be reviewed and adapted to new challenges and circumstances. But, in the middle of it all, there is a nucleus of elements that constitute our inheritance as a Church that we are responsible to preserve."⁵ We set out to review some key elements of the legacy that we have received. *We Latin American Nazarene are conscious that we are part of a Church:*

1. As a defined Evangelical legacy. The important declaration registered in our Manual,⁶ describes a church that is rooted in a rich Christian history. Therefore, we considered ourselves heirs of an evangelical legacy that is connected with the preaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is good news to share, good news of Jesus Christ. The Articles of Faith of our Constitution⁷ give the best testimony of what is our "deposit of the faith," according to the Pauline expression. These, do not constitute simple doctrinal declarations without their corresponding existential roots. Rather, they are the constant reminder of the frame of life within, as we move toward the fulfillment of our mission. The evangelical identity that characterizes our church appears as a serious commitment to the Scriptures, as our Maxima norm of faith and conduct.

Within this evangelical legacy, we assume with integrity the Biblical message of a holy life, as the norm for Christian faith that honors God and looks to be useful in its intentions. In this line, it corresponds us to the Latin American Nazarenes to continue in exegetical and cultural exploration so that this Biblical truth can be caught, lived, and transmitted with integrity in our cultural contexts. We need to relate this education to the problematic one within which the Church ministers. There must not be any area of the human task that is excluded from the proclamation and influences of the message of full salvation from God in Christ Jesus.

2. *It jeopardizes world-wide evangelization.* What is more, we ourselves are the fruit of the pioneering efforts of our church in that persistence to reach the world with the message of the gospel. Our commitment to world-wide evangelization, which has always characterized our church, is not something added with passing of time, but rather, it constitutes a noteworthy characteristic of its identity at the time of its constitution as a church.⁸ Bound to this, we Latin American Nazarenes perceive our participation in the Church must occur in terms of greater co-responsibility to the commitment to evangelize the world. Also, when we speak of world-wide evangelization, we are alluding to a task that is for all the church and estimates a problematic integral approach to the human one looking for its total transformation. For that reason, our church has developed, in addition to basic the evangelistic ministries, ministries on watch (compassion), programs of education in several levels, and an intense use of resources like literature, radio, etc., even though our financial resources have always been limited. In this connection, one is gratified in our earth, which Frank Sergio remembers about the first Nazarenes in the

U.S.A.: "As soon as the Church was organized it sent a missionary, founded a school, and began a newspaper, although it did not have the money for any of the three."⁹

The ministry of our church has occurred in a Latin American context that is not homogenous. This, **has outlined a rich** diversity in the expression of our church, within its particular contexts. There is a wealth to share, between the Latin American Nazarenes, with respect to the expressions of worship and to the joy of praise. There are differences also, as far as its sensitivity and solidarity as to the experience of pain and hopelessness, as well as in its efforts, **like part of the ampler evangelical village, to indicate new map courses for our beloved nations.** We have the challenge to transform, in the name of Jesus Christ, all of the human reality in which we are found.

3. **Comprometida with integral discipulado.** Personnel and congregational. We arose as a simple church, without abundant nor **falsified** resources. We arrived in Latin America in almost imperceptible ways. Our pioneers, missionaries and nationals, had to face many vicissitudes to sow the message in the soil, without few resource beyond their faith in Jesus Christ, **without another conviction that not outside the one to be making the will of God,** without another goal that the **forjaci3n** of disciples jeopardizes with a life that honors the name of the Lord. In this effort, culture and development of the spiritual disciplines (study and meditation on the Word, sermons, worship, service, the **uninformed one**, etc.), constituted the normal experience and proclamation of the faith of our pioneers.

We Latin American Nazarenes we must rescue this part of the inheritance of our predecessors because the present context demands that we fulfill the mission — the development and exercise of a faith that can **straighten up in the middle of** the limitations

and deficiencies. We need to persevere as a church of deep oration and reverente, of gasping study of the Word, on watch it jeopardize with the Lord, etc. This will give a clear sense to our ministerial action and it will not allow our energies to be spent in secondary or the accessory things that have no connection with the kingdom of God.

We assume the challenge to preserve the legacy and to make our church the appropriate space where the glory of God can be.

¹Especially through what we call "missionary books." For example: see Spangenberg. South America –Territories of the Eucalyptus: An analysis of a Nazarene Mission in South America (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1967). J. Fred Parker. Continental Mission: The Church of the Nazarene from Mexico to Argentina (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1984).

² "the theological ideas and their ways by the institutional furrows of the Brazilian Protestantism", Pablo Richard, ed . ., *Materials for a history of the theology in Latin America* (San Jose ': DEI, 1981), p.363-364. Cursivas ours.

³Cf. John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene. *Megatrends 2000: Ten New Directions for the '90s* (Bogota: Publishing Norm, 1990).

⁴ Mentioned by Wilfredo Canales . "Wesleyan Thought in Latin America: Currents and Challenges for the Holiness Movements. " Unpublished communication for the Seminary in Latin American Theology 1994, School of Theology. Nazarene University, Costa Rica. Emphasis added.

⁵Wilfredo Canales. "Trasmitting the Inheritance." Ministry Magazine (Kansas City) 1, 1 (SAW, 1992): 20. This work has served as a basis for the preparation of the present article.

⁶"*Historical Christianity and the Wesleyan Heritage of Holiness: A Holy Faith.* " Manual 1997-2001 – Church of the Nazarene: History, Constitution, Government, Ritual. (Kansas City: NP, 1997), p. 14.

⁷Ibid., pp. 26-33.

⁸Idem., p. 22.

⁹ Appendix "Nazarenes in Latin American". In M.E. Redford and Gene Van Note. *The Rise of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: NP, 1988), p. 133.