

A Welcome and Introduction to the US/Canada Theology Conference  
NTS – Kansas City, MO  
December 3-5, 2004

On behalf of the Planning and Program Committees I welcome you to the 2004 US/Canada Theology Conference. This conference is intentionally designed to continue a conversation begun in the 2002 Global Theology Conference that was held in Guatemala City, Guatemala. The key themes of the 2002 Global Theology Conference were Memory, Mission, Holiness, and Hope. This 2004 US/Canada Theology Conference intends to specifically develop the conversation regarding Holiness with Memory, Mission, and Hope providing context and resources. To that end the Planning Committee has selected the theme of this conference to be “Holy God, Holy People.”

Several considerations contributed to the selection of this theme. Certainly holiness was a primary interest and concern at the Guatemala conference. However, in the discussions at Guatemala and in theological literature from various camps it is clear that the significance of church (ecclesiology) for our understanding of holiness is one of the central issues of our post-modern context. The words, “Holy People,” seek to express this confluence of ecclesiology and holiness that is of such interest in our times. But no understanding of Holy People that has any basis in the biblical texts or the great theologians of the church suggests that the church’s holiness is her own or is derived from something we do. Rather the holiness of God’s people is derivative from God’s own holiness. Thus, not only does this conference focus on a Holy God, it does so before thinking about what it means to be a Holy People. For this reason worship “frames” the conference by being the first and final corporate activities in which we participate.

The Planning Committee wanted to continue several characteristics of the Global Theology Conference. First of these was the wider degree of participation across ministry assignments than had been the case in earlier theology conferences in the Church of the Nazarene. Thus invitations have been extended not only to the theological faculties and Presidents of the Nazarene Colleges, Universities, and Seminary of the United States and Canada and to the Board of General Superintendents, but also to all the District Superintendents, and a number of pastors, lay persons, and graduate theology students nominated by their Regional College/University President. The choice to invite representation from all sectors and ministry assignments in the church is an intentional statement about the role of theology and the church. It is the purpose of this conference to do theology with the church and for the church.

This intends to reflect the truth that theology is not simply the work of academic theologians but is the work of all the church. All who participate in the life of the church and think and speak about God and his gracious work among us are theologians. All are invited and all are expected to participate in this corporate theological work of the church. However, we do not suppose such corporate and cooperative work is easy. Each of us comes to the conference with our own “jargon,” the normal, short hand ways we talk about the work of the church in our area of ministry. Such jargon is not always shared nor easily understood by all. The presenters of major papers and their respondents have been asked to keep the breadth of our audience in mind as they wrote. Some have been more successful at this than others. But all of us will be responsible, especially in the small groups, to help each other understand both the words and the perspectives about the church that each of us brings to the conference.

A second characteristic of the Global Theology Conference that the Planning Committee wanted to continue was the important role of small group discussion in which every participant has opportunity to participate in the discussion. A brief glance at the program schedule will show the prominent place for discussion in small groups. However, the Planning Committee also desired fewer but more in depth papers to which to respond than was the case in Guatemala. As in the case of the Global Conference these major papers are available electronically and should be read in advance. You should download and print your own copies of these papers as they will not be distributed in paper form at the conference in December. Each presenter will have about 15 minutes to summarize and highlight her or his contribution to the discussion in the paper. Then two respondents, one from academia and one from a local church or administrative assignment, will respond to the paper in its written form. It has not been determined at this time whether those responses will be posted on the NTS website for downloading or not.

Also like the Guatemala Conference there will be final statements, the End Notes. There will be two of these, one responding to the Holy God section of the program, and one responding to the Holy People section. These papers will not be available on the website until after the conference. To assist the authors of the End Notes each discussion group will be asked to provide a brief record of the primary points of its discussion in each discussion session.

Because this conference seeks to do theology with the church and for the church the Planning Committee decided to make our 16 Articles of Faith the primary point of departure for these discussions. The primary purpose is not to critique the articles nor to propose amendments to them, though there may be instances where that might be a future result of our discussions. Rather, the primary purpose is to explore the theological resources that are

available to us as the Church of the Nazarene through our denomination's Articles of Faith. The presenters of the major papers have been asked to affirm and build on selected Articles of Faith as they wrote their papers. As you read and digest their papers you will discover that a rich treasure of theological resources are available to us as our Church finds its way into the future by affirming its heritage and faith.

Clearly these are important days in the life of our denomination. Part of our heritage is to resist the bifurcation of theology and practice of ministry. For us theology informs, shapes, motivates, and corrects patterns of ministry. Ministry embodies, reveals, validates, and informs our theology. We invite your participation in this theology conference because the church needs to hear your voice as we seek to understand and to live out of the faith that provides our identity and mission. We believe you will be enriched by hearing the voices of the others who will attend. So, download, read, reflect, pray, and come to the conference full of love for our Holy God and his Holy People. We are looking forward to seeing you soon.

- Roger L. Hahn

On behalf of the Planning and Program Committees