

2014 General Conference

General Bishop Opening Address

Theme: Presenting a Changeless God to a Changing World

Introduction: Mr Chairman, Government officials, specially invited guest speaker, Members of the General Executive, credential workers, delegates, friends, members of the body of Christ. The Pentecostal Assemblies of the West Indies is alive and well! I humbly declare this because just as the Spirit of God moved in creation, to bring order to the formless and void, and light to the darkened realm, so He continues to move in and through us today, to bring peace to battle weary souls, hope to the wavering, and salvation to the dying. The Giver of Life abides with us, His word is in us, and His Spirit still chooses to use us. I dare say again, PAWI is alive and well!

First, I give thanks to God for preserving my life from prostate cancer, and I thank Him for you- His saints and my brethren, who rallied with me and my family in prayer. To God be the Glory! Like Hezekiah I am grateful for the years that are added to my life.

The theme for this year's conference is "Presenting a Changeless God to a Changing World" It is a very relevant issue for us to engage in over the next few days because as we individually and collectively examine our context we cannot help but echo "Our culture is changing rapidly". This theme is inferring a few things namely; the God we serve is changeless, the world is changing, there are many challenges that present themselves, and the church must respond Christian-ly and positively to the changing world with the truth about God.

I propose to address three factors related to this theme, firstly, the nature of change and its effects on us, secondly, the nature of our changeless God and thirdly our response to the changing

world. Let me first attempt to define the word change. According to the Webster dictionary, the word change means: “To make the form, nature, content, future course etc. of something different from what it is or from what it would be, if left alone. It also means to transform or convert into something else.” By implication the world has changed and continues to change. As I prepared this address I could not help but reflect on the noted comparisons between the television shows the ‘the little house on the prairies’ with ‘modern Family’, ‘the big bang theory’ or worse yet ‘two and a half men’ Their worldviews and moral perspectives are as different as east is from the west. We admit that our societies are no longer what they used to be. Things are changing rapidly. Let us examine the nature of change.

A. The Nature of Change

- 1. Change is inevitable and impacting.** We cannot stop change. It is said that more changes have taken place in the last 100 years than in the last 1000 years. The world has changed culturally, politically, economically, socially, and religiously. When we hear of change, there is a tendency to panic because change can bring discomfort, but change can have positive or negative effects. I propose that if we do not change to respond to change we will be changed and possibly not be aware of it.
- 2. Change does not take place in a vacuum.** Change is always as a result of something else, whether time, elements, or philosophies of men and women. I wish to advance that most times when we change it is because our worldview changes. A worldview is defined as:

The underlying belief system held by an individual which determines his or her attitudes and actions in life.

It is this underlying belief that poses the major challenge today. It may be the greatest battle that the church will ever have to face. Satan's diabolic task is to distort the worldview of each Christian and if he succeeds, our actions would automatically be changed. For example, Satan attacked the worldview of Adam and Eve and he succeeded and as a result were deceived.

Let's look at how he did it...

Gen 3:1-5 He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" 4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." NIV

The serpent's simple strategy was to challenge the godly perspective or worldview of our federal head and once that was successfully changed, the attitude to what God had said changed and resulted in their actions.

In the book of Judges chapter 2:10-14, there was the effect of a society that was bankrupt of the Word of God or said differently, they had a worldview that did not value God or His Holy Scriptures. It reads...

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. 11 Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. 12 They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various

gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the Lord to anger 13 because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. NIV

The absence of a biblical worldview leaves men vulnerable to the dictates of the unregenerated heart. The scripture notes the condition of a runaway heart:

Prov 12:20 Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy. KJV

Matt 15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: KJV

Jer 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? KJV

The apostle Paul was correct as he sought to encourage the church at Rome, not to allow itself to be choked by the worldviews that surrounded the Christians of the day. He encouraged them to seek daily transformation that came from the renewing of the minds through the word of God.

Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. KJV

So I reiterate again, when our worldview changes our attitudes change. When our attitudes change our actions change.

3. The 21st century has been characterised by change.

Edwin Lutzer referred to the changes in the twentieth century, as an **Ideological Mega shift**.

In his book *Christ Among Other Gods*, he outlined the 'ideological mega shift' that took place in modern thinking:- He noted that WE HAVE MOVED....

1. From a God-centred to a man-centred worldview. The end has been a disowning of God, and a claiming of freedom that lead in the end to dreadful slavery because the tyranny of atheism is pure evil.

2. From objective reality to relativism. A religion can be accepted or rejected depending whether it is 'right for you'.

3. From objectivity to pragmatism. If there is no fixed point of reference, we must accept along with relativism its close relative, pragmatism. This states that whatever works is right.

4. From reason to feeling. Feeling has replaced thinking as the arbiter of what is good and right.

5. From convictions to opinions. Which says, religion does not deal with truth but with personal taste.

Allen and company in their book *Leadership in the 21st century*, sought to awaken our consciousness about the world in which we must do ministry and noted that:

21st century organizations must contend with increasing diversity in our daily lives, increasing change, complexity, interdependence, increasing tensions around value differences, the increasing gap between the rich and poor and the increasing requirement for continuous learning.

So worldview has become the undergirding of values, values affect attitudes and attitudes affect actions. Therefore, the changing world in which we minister is not merely or

simply a world of liars, drunkards, homosexuals, murderers, adulterers, high classed bandits and the list goes on, but a world that is driven by a mind-set, a worldview that is antichristian, anti-bible and anti-God. Paul notes in Romans 1: 21-32

*21 For although they knew God (**They had a biblical Worldview**), they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking (**Worldview**) became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

*25 They exchanged the truth of God (**Biblical worldview**) for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen.*

*28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God (**Biblical Worldview**), he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. NIV*

4. **CHANGE is the only constant and we must adjust to its effects.** Spencer Johnson in His book “who moved my cheese” noted “What you are afraid of is never as bad as what you imagine. The fear you let build up in your mind is worse than the situation that actually exists.” the cheese is always moving. Do not stay in an empty cheese station or (church traditions and expectation) looking and griping over the cheese or ideas and methods that has moved or changed. Muster the courage and start looking for new cheese.
5. **Change has some positive elements to it.** It is not all doom and gloom? And we are not losing the battle and the war. The prudent business man does not cower under the pressure of change in the environment but rather navigates himself to take advantage of that change. He uses change so that it brings him more money. I am not in any way inciting us to become mercenaries with the gospel, but challenging us to see the

opportunities within our changing environment to fulfil our mission. Like the men of Issachar in 1 Chron 12:32-33 who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.

Allow me to highlight some of these:

Mark Hendrickson in his article *Anatomy of a reformation* noted some positive challenges of change in the culture for the church or those who desire to do ministry. He noted that... “***There is Holy dissatisfaction, this begins with a hunger for more reality in God. What used to work for us, doesn't work anymore. Traditional church is not filling a deep heart need. Then there is spiritual Transition People are becoming pioneers of a new trail. These pioneers are the radicals of the dissatisfied ones. Some are leaving church, but not because of cool hearts or apathy.***

George Barna and James Rutz present empirical statistics in [*MegaShift*](#) which indicate that people are leaving church in order to find God. This is a Megashift away from spectator religion. 8% Growth Per Year There is a hidden world that already has 707 million evangelical/charismatic Christians who are growing by an incredible 8% a year. In the center of this shockwave are roughly 100 million informal networks of committed circles who run their own show without buildings, paid pastors, or sermons. FINALLY he noted that ***there is a desire to Walk in the new thing. This phase impacts everything! Radical new ideologies have sustained sufficient battles along the way so as to prove their enduring qualities. Abraham, Jesus, Martin Luther... all were radicals who defied the status quo and were resolute enough in lifestyle, word and actions to establish a permanent beach-head of new belief.***”

These new realities can be seen as opportunities for us to wake up and address the challenges and opportunities. Certainly I am aware that in the early eighties in the Caribbean many

mainline full gospel churches saw many of its members leaving to more ‘relevant and exciting’ ministries. (if we are honest enough we would agree that we suffered a similar fate.) We must respond christianly, wisely and biblically to these challenges. We must not be afraid to examine our message and methods to ensure that it is truly a biblical worldview and one that has the Holy Spirit’s influence and impetus to make radical changes in the hearts of men and women.

B. The Nature of our Changeless God

Responding to the realities that faced the Hebrew people who were in exile of many years, Isaiah in chapter 40 encouraged a people who were devastated by the assumed perception that:

- God has forsaken them and was no longer close to them
- That the Nations and land mass they found themselves in overpowered their knowledge and their realities of the God they served
- That the nations that held them in captivity appeared to be wiser and they were almost at a dead end.

It is said that the greatest challenge of the twenty-first century leaders is their perception of God. Christian leaders MUST of themselves be assured of the following truths. Isaiah challenged them to change their perspective of their God. He trumpeted these words in their ears and spirits...
BEHOLD YOUR GOD! In other words, Isaiah is saying to them and to us that in order to respond to the changes around us, like the changes of men’s perspective or worldview, we must enhance, establish or even remodel our understanding about the changeless God we are serving.

BEHOLD YOUR GOD! The unchanging God is

1. **PERSONAL**...Responding to the realities of this impersonal changing world. It is bad enough when the workplace and the society have become impersonal. It is tragic when the church becomes impersonal and hopeless if we present a God who is distant and uncaring to the world. The scripture declares, “His name shall be called Emmanuel” which means God with us. That is the purpose of the Incarnate Christ who came, lived and died for man to have a personal relationship with God. Isaiah noted to the distraught in exile...

Isa 40:11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. NIV

What better comforting words could those in exile hear from the God who wanted to be their shepherd? People in this changing world want the reality of a real, relevant personal God.

2. **POWERFUL**...Responding to the perception that power has shifted to man. The changing world has introduced imaginary superheroes to comfort or possibly distort the mind of our children as to where real power exists. So we had batman, wonder woman, spider man, superman, Dr Brown Bear (My 18 month old grand Daughter). Surrounded by the might of Assyria. The exiled could not envisage a God bigger than the might of Assyria. Isaiah with a combination of rhetorical question and absolute statement encouraged them by saying:

Isa 40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? NIV

Isa 40:15-17 Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. 16 Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. 17 Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. NIV

Isa 40:21-24 21 Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? 22 He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. 23 He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. 24 No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. NIV

Our greatest problem is our understanding of who God is. Knowledge of God gives us inner strength to present our message and lifestyle to this changing world.

*Dan 11:32 And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.
KJV*

Let us review our worldview of God's greatness. Let us change our view of God from being the manageable God to understand Him to be the supreme, sovereign, unchanging God that he is and that the world needs to know.

3. **PRUDENT**... Responding to the perception that increased knowledge and technology has become a god in itself, a view of the latest technology and a scan of the knowledge base of humanity would indeed baffle great minds. Knowledge has increased and we are attempting to make absolutely true the statement that knowledge is power. So that the one who has knowledge or proposes to have knowledge is the greatest. This preponderance of knowledge can make the church feel inadequate and like the exiled, impotent. Isaiah again through rhetorical questions challenged the daunted minds to see that their God is All Knowing. He echoed...

Isa 40:13-14 Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counselor? 14 Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? NIV

The scripture is replete with evidence of the vastness of the knowledge of God.

Jude 25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. KJV

1 Tim 1:17 Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. KJV

Job 12:12-13 Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding? 13 "To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and Understanding are his. NIV

Christian leaders MUST speak of a God who is wise, live like people who serve a God who is wise and encourage people to trust in the ONLY wise God's words, and His Ways.

4. **INCOMPARABLE**... We live in a self-projecting culture. There is a craze to project ourselves in such a way that people will be impressed with us. So we dress to impress, we speak to impress, we live to impress. We actually believe that the first impression is lasting. We even try to make our church consciously better than the guy down the road totally ignoring that he is part of the real church. It is cautionary to note that as we project our messages and ministries that we do not set up idols instead of the true and living God. Isaiah knew that one of the challenges of the exiled was the temptation to compare the gods of the Assyrians with that of the eternal God. So again he echoed...

Isa 40:18-20 To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? 19 As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. 20 A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple. NIV

Isa 40:25-26 "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. 26 Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. NIV

Christian leaders in presenting this unchanging God to the changing world MUST remove false images and concepts of God that can distort the minds of men. We must be

careful not to allow our ministries, methods and our pet message, take the place of the unchanging God. He does not need anyone to defend Him.

5. **REVITALIZING**...Responding to the challenges of the changing world. The pace of change, the demands of change in ministry, and the demand of the changing world can make us tired and weary. The expectations of people in our churches, the needs that they confront us with are sometimes overwhelming. The many conflicting issues can literally drain the marrow from our emotional bones and we can find our self shattered, daunted, or distorted. Isaiah saw a people who were tired. They complained about the perceived absence of their God. So again he echoed...

Isa 40:27-31 Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God"? 28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. 29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. 30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31 but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. NIV

The changeless God never grows tired and fully understands all that is happening. In fact He informed us about a number of the realities of our time moons ago. But what is noteworthy is that he can:

- Give supernatural strength and power to the weak

- As we wait (exchange our strength for His strength) He can renew our strength to the extent that:
 - We will soar on wings like eagles
 - Run and not grow weary
 - Walk and not faint

We must believe this God, if we are to present this God to a changing world. It is a necessary precaution of which we must be aware.

C. Our Response to the Changing World

Firstly, RECOGNISE and remember that the builder of the church is Christ and He said:

Matt 16:18 And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.KJV

NEVER forget that Christ is building His church. Never forget the powerful, self-existent one, the king of kings is the designer and builder of His church. We the people of God must never be perturbed when we see changes taking place around us. Christ is omnipotent and omniscient and NOTHING takes him by surprise. He is prepared for any and every eventuality that can occur in human history. Praise God! He is building a triumphant church without spot or wrinkle and no change can withstand His plan and His purpose.

Secondly, it is DANGEROUS to avoid change! Let me emphasize that as a church organization and more so ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ when we are afraid of change or fail to respond to change the following things happen:

1. We can panic and do erroneous things that have no connection with the will and ways of God
2. We can become extinct. Alive but dead. Occupying space but not relevant.
3. We can absorb ourselves into false reality believing that we are alive and relevant but totally missing the mark.

Let us remember change must be managed! Let us boldly face the challenges of the changing world and with the help of the Holy Spirit make a difference.

Thirdly, POSITIVELY AND PRACTICALLY respond to the changes. Someone asked the question “Are we doing ministry for the church that used to be or the church that is?” Let me suggest a few positive and practical approaches to the changing world.

1. Prepare our children and young people so they can cope with change and be a positive influence of change.
2. We as ministers of the Gospel **MUST** continue to Retool and be empowered for the 21st century ministry to effectively and efficiently minister to the changing world.
3. We must Biblically and relevantly prepare the people of God. We have to go past empty traditions and seek God for a timely strategy for reaching the world.
4. We have to re-examine our position on controversial issues and christianly and biblically follow his leading. Oh that God will give us the courage, sensitivity, and mind of Christ.
5. Finally let us draw nearer to the unchanging God. He admonished “Draw nigh to me and I will draw nigh to you”. He wants us to get into His presence where He can talk to us intimately, friend to friend. Let us hear from Him, the heartbeat of men as He alone knows the real need. When we come out of his presence charged with the power and

presence of the Holy Spirit, we can minister real solutions to men and women, boys and girls with real needs.

So Mr Chairman, I close with a plea to us as ministers of the Gospel, servants of the most High God, delegates, friends and well-wishers. The world is certainly changing but we have a God who is immutable in His person, attributes and character. Let us embrace a Biblical worldview. Let us enhance it by the study of His word with an open-ness to the Holy Spirit, the one who teaches truth to us. Let us do like Ezra of old who prepared himself to know the Law, to do the law and to teach the law, so that the Spirit of God will move in and through us, to bring peace to battle weary souls, hope to the wavering, and salvation to the dying.

I make a call for us to embrace the truth of the unchanging God

I thank you!