

## 6

**Conflicts Between Holiness and Culture**

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The Church of the Nazarene is a denomination that has as its central message “Holiness unto the Lord”. This message is not only denominational but also a biblical message. In many passages of the Bible such as Leviticus 11:44 and I Peter 1:6, God requires His people to be holy. The Church of the Nazarene teaches sanctification as an experience and as a life-style of every Nazarene.

However, many Nazarene Christians preach about holiness and teach the holy life-style but they find it difficult to make it the standard of their life because the holy life clashes with their traditions, customs, habits, and ethnological concepts. They are not able to reconcile holy living and culture. They want to be completely consecrated to God and wholly dedicated to Him but their culture seems to push them into consecrating only their hearts, pressuring them to preserve the practices of the traditions, heritage and history of their people. For example, the African traditional culture teaches that people should communicate with their ancestors because they are connected by blood, by customs, and by spirits. For this traditional culture the deceased are closer to their gods and to the Almighty God so the ancestors can be used as their advocates in our worship.

*How can Nazarenes be dedicated to God without getting into conflict with their culture? How can they express holiness in their culture?*

God wants Christians to share His nature and character. In the past God commanded Abraham to come out from his nation, from the customs and traditions of his ancestors and their pagan worship. The purpose of Abraham’s call was for service and worship of the only Almighty God. Even today God still wants the people that are called by His name to come out from their traditional customs, habits, and pagan worship to serve Him only.

When people are possessed by demons or malignant spirits, these spirits consider the person as their temple, their wife and their possession. When

they are expelled from the person, they refuse to come out until they are overcome by God's power. God wants to possess us in the same way that demons will possess a person, but He does not want to do this by force. He wants us to willingly consecrate ourselves to Him and become His temple and instruments for His ministry. In the same way that demons refuse to share their possessions with other masters, God also refuses to share His children with other gods or masters in pagan customs and traditions.

In Luke 16:13 Jesus said, "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Mammon." Whenever a Christian serves God and serves also pagan traditions, customs, and ancestors, he or she disturbs God's plans for the character and nature of His people because He wants them to completely forsake all that is pagan. Is it possible for the Nazarene to come out from these pagan customs, habits and traditions? Yes! When a Christian dedicates himself to God, God does the work of transformation. The Christian does not battle alone against these pagan traditions but God fights, too.

**How can Nazarenes make holiness a life-style even in customs like those relating to death?**

Every Nazarene should present himself or herself as holy even in the sadness and pain of the death of a loved one. Many Nazarenes have made the holiness message irrelevant to themselves and to others who do not know Jesus. When death comes to families, many Christians get involved in pagan rites and ceremonies of the purification of the house which include cutting their beards, shaving the hair from the whole body of each family member, climbing to the roof of the house if someone has lost a husband or wife or mother, or the practice of sexual relations between a couple from one family or a member of the family with another person. This practice may lead the person into immorality and adultery. Moreover, the ceremony includes the participation of each member of the family in a special meal which is prepared with impure ingredients.

Other rites which conflict with the holy life-style are the practice of masses that are held in memory of the dead, the transference of the shadow of the deceased from the tomb back to his or her house, the burying of drugs, herbs and charms; self-mutilation for protection and success in life and work. Usually these practices are conducted by witchdoctors and

magicians.

What can the church do when death comes? Does the church have some practices and Christian habits or customs that may be done to replace these pagan practices and ceremonies? What can be found in the Bible which may be applied when death comes? Does culture not contain good practices and habits that can be adapted by Christians to fit to the holy life-style?

In some cultures when a family loses a member, friends and fellow Christians as well as relatives come to the grieving family and bring with them prepared and unprepared food to share together with the family. The visit lasts for days, a week, or even a month. Some visitors go back to their house to rest and come the next day. Some sleep with the family. The purpose of this visit is to comfort and entertain those grieving with conversation, words, songs, prayers, and stories. This fellowship helps the family in grief to not fear death and to give a mental break from thinking about the deceased. It also prevents those grieving from seeking help from witchdoctors and magicians and from practicing pagan ceremonies because they have people around them.

Another positive aspect present in some cultures is providing company for those grieving when they have to leave their house. During the first days right after the death, the bereaved family is not allowed to be alone. They are accompanied by others to the fields, to church or to the market, etc. They are also not allowed to be without counsellors who take care of them and give them support and advice in making decisions. Nazarenes can use these positive aspects of the traditional culture encouraging Christians to be with the grieving ones, teaching them the good models of holy living. Nazarenes can pray, tell stories of others in grief who were able to keep the faith. Nazarenes can show holiness by loving, caring and testifying to grieving people. By doing these acts and keeping internal and external life holy even on the occasion of death, they can make holiness relevant and practical. Nazarenes must follow the words of Paul in Ephesians 5:10-11: "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them for it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret."

**Is it possible for a Nazarene Christian to be available for God's use and not be in conflict with his or her culture?**

In some religions such as Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, a person can be

an instrument of the god of his religion but this should not create conflict with culture.

How can a person be used by God and Satan at the same time? How can a person practice magic, sorcery, self-mutilation or use herbs, talismans or charms in order to get protection and success, or even to get position or employment? Is it possible for the Nazarene to put God at the centre of heart, family, and life? What protection does God offer to His children in the time of suffering? The Bible says that God promised to Abraham and the people of Israel that if they would be His holy people, that He would protect them, that their enemies would be His and that He would curse who they cursed. God surrounds the Saints with His fire and He seals them with His presence so that they will not be attacked by the enemy. The Nazarene can relax and be sure that there is someone on his or her side in the midst of anguish who will fight for him or her and bring the victory. Those who have the presence of the Holy Spirit, also have a great Protector who is greater than any magician or witchdoctor.

Usually the history, tradition, and customs of a people are passed from one generation to another. The people who have this responsibility of teaching and passing on are the elders and the leaders of communities and families. The church can use these elders of the families and the communities to teach the members of the culture the good ideals of life that are used in holy living. It is a duty of the church to organize discussions and debates concerning habits, customs, and traditions that are not Christian and are not according to the will of God. It is the duty of the church to persuade the heads of families to not practice them.

In I Thessalonians 4:7, Paul says, "For God did not call us to be impure but to live a holy life." Nazarenes, God is calling us to holiness, to share with Him His celestial heritage, to be a part of His character and make holy living a reality and a life-style. There is a conflict between holiness and culture if the person is not totally dedicated to God, but for the saint, God is above every culture.