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Holiness as Transformation for Action!

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I am an Afrikaans-speaking pastor in the Gauteng District, South Field. I was introduced to Christ during an *Easter Camp* when I was 12 years old. From age 12 until now, I have been part of the Church of the Nazarene, which I love dearly. I was brought up in an environment where holiness and sanctification was preached (although not always clearly understood by me). My years as a student at the Theological College clarified the holiness concepts to me and I “*fell in love*” with our doctrine of entire sanctification as a life filled with the love of Christ.

The teachings of entire sanctification, and my embracing of the truths, created certain expectations in me. I expected and looked for specific fruit in the lives of people individually and the church collectively, as a result of such a wonderful doctrine. As a teenager in the church I had some “role models”, people I respected and looked up to from a distance.

Everything was wonderful, until I became involved as a student and later as a pastor in the life of a local church. To my deep disappointment (and shock sometimes), I observed some fruit that were not part of my “holiness” frame of reference. I observed people who were “saved and sanctified” for more than forty years, serving on church boards and other ministries, whose lives did not reflect the kind of fruit expected from the doctrine of entire sanctification. However, there are individuals (in the minority unfortunately), whose lives do reflect holiness. I thank God for them.

There is one word, according to my perception, which describes John Wesley, the father of the holiness movement, the best: **CHANGE!** Change was caused by **ACTION** on his side and later by the denomination he founded. Action caused **TRANSFORMATION** in the lives of individuals, families, communities, cities, and nations! Wherever he moved, **LIFE CHANGE** occurred by the mighty working of the Holy Spirit! John Wesley, in the true spirit of his Master, Jesus Christ, can

rightly be called one of the greatest *life change agents* in the history of the Christian Church.

I am writing from a certain context in our denomination. The white Afrikaans-speaking segment of our church in South Africa. We can best be described by one word: **PASSIVE**. It has been said that the Church of the Nazarene is the “*best kept secret of South Africa!*”

What are the reasons for a church that originally had so much zeal for God and people, to become so destructively passive? I will use and describe two words briefly as derived from Dr H Ray Dunning’s book *Reflecting the Divine Image*.

The first word is *monasticism* – it happens when Christians have a pre-occupation with *personal holiness* to a degree that it results in withdrawing from a *redemptive involvement* in the world. It happened in the medieval Church and also now in the 21st century church. Today, many Protestant groups refuse to be involved in the affairs of the world mainly out of fear of defilement (Dunning 1998:15).

Legalism is a by-product of *monasticism*. It shows its ugly appearance when we become so exclusive in our conditions for being part of our fellowship, that we often drive people away from the Church and Christ. I do not advocate the lowering of the standards of holiness. What I do advocate is to let God be God in people’s lives and let Him do the conviction and cleansing according to His plan and timetable. Let us do our part – disciple-making of the nations in love, with sensitivity for people and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Another reason for the passivity of my people can be found in the word *apocalypticism*. It reflects a particular attitude of pious people toward the world. According to Dr H Ray Dunning:

“Apocalypticism is pessimistic about society in general. It assumes that the present age is so corrupt that it is beyond redemption and must soon be brought to an end through divine judgment. Those who believe this way often withdraw into a kind of isolationism and make no effort to exert any influence on the world’s institutions. Apocalypticism involves what can be called a lifeboat mentality. The ship is sinking and only the few who flee the doomed vessel and seek safety in the lifeboat can be rescued. Nothing can be done to save the

ship” (Dunning 1998:123-124).

We know *apocalypticism* in our context as preachers who have only preached about the last days. Jesus is coming soon. He is going to rapture us out of this evil and corrupt world. Our only responsibility is to keep ourselves pure and holy. Forget about the multitudes on their way to a certain death and the eternal hell awaiting them. They are corrupted beyond repair. Save only yourselves, your friends, and family. Be pre-occupied with the end times. Use all your energy to study the trends in the world pointing to the rapture. Programme your church life only around the last days. Make it your business to warn the *Christians!* Forget about the world!

The result is that our focus became centred on ourselves and our purity and holiness. We became so self-absorbed in our own life and church, that we completely missed out on what Jesus said we are to *be* and *do* through the *Great Commandment* and *Great Commission*.

What is holiness other than an active, dynamic living out of Jesus’ words in Mark 12:30, 31 (Great Commandment):

“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment. And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (*KJV*).

Is it possible for a self-absorbed Christian to really love this way? Can a church with a “*monasticism-apocalypticism-syndrome*” love the way Christ as the Head of the Church commanded? Is there any action, transformation, or life change present in and through a self-absorbed Christian and church?

Christ said something equally profound in Matthew 28:19-20 (Great Commission):

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (*KJV*).

Christ is *actively present* in a church where his commandments are *obeyed!* God’s miracles take place where his people take action in faith! His vision

is for the nations, the multitudes of people on earth who need His salvation and life transformation! And we as the Church are supposed to do this! Our calling is not to be an exclusive, self-centred people, but an *other-centred* people with a vision for the nations.

The harvest is white. People are “*ripe*” to be saved. They are waiting ... Waiting for a Christian, waiting for a local church... waiting for a denomination... driven by holy love, to take action and reach out to them by presenting the almighty, omnipotent, loving Christ in creative ways to them.

Passivity equals lovelessness. Passivity is nothing other than *non-holiness*! Passivity is a cruel sin! Christ called it lukewarmness! It is impossible to have Christ’s love in our hearts and keep it for ourselves by being passive and self-centred!

The nations of Africa need us! We are God’s people for this hour! We need to repent; we need to rediscover true holiness! Holiness is always a *transformation for action*. We cannot come into contact with true holiness and not be transformed in the essence of our being! It is impossible for us to be truly transformed and changed, without being a witness of that to other people and affect their lives for the better.

We, as the Church, have unique challenges today. God wants to use us in a dynamic way to address the multiple needs of the terrible AIDS crises we are facing today. Millions of orphans need care and a godly upbringing in the context of a loving family. Orphanages are not really the answer, for children need to experience love in a safe and secure surrounding. We need to think and act more creatively in order to address this huge problem.

We need to plant thousands of holiness churches and disciple the new converts. People need to see and experience the holiness message practically. God wants to make an impact on the continent of Africa and He wants to do it through His Church, networking with each other. Our influence in Africa can become so much greater when we take hands with the greater Body of Christ. We as a denomination have so much to offer. God has blessed us with extraordinary resources. We have to utilize it to His glory!

Our church is a sleeping giant! We desperately need to awake! God wants to use us to create dramatic transformations on our continent! Let’s take

ACTION today! Let's humble ourselves before almighty God, ask His forgiveness and start doing what we know we should – living the *Great Commandment* and *Great Commission* and transform Africa! We already know the **WHAT**. Our challenge however as a church, is to collectively seek God's face concerning the **HOW**. We need to become a Holy Spirit-driven *change agent* as the Church in Africa, as it was in the days of John Wesley.