

“WE ARE A CHRISTIAN AND HOLINESS PEOPLE” (I)

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INTRODUCTION

We are a Christian, holiness and missional people because we belong to Christ! The Church of the Nazarene belongs to Him, obeys Him, adores Him in spirit and in truth, serves Him, and loves Him with all of its being. He is our Savior, our Sanctifier, our Lord, our Teacher, our Pastor, Our King, our Friend and our Companion. The Church of the Nazarene testifies of His perfect deity, His perfect humanity, His preexistence, His incarnation, His life and earthly ministry, His atonement, His resurrection, His ascension, His glorification and His coming return. The Church of the Nazarene incarnates the life of the Nazarene. Such is our conviction about being a member of a Christian, holiness and missional people.

To articulate our core values as God’s people implies reaching a balance in its highest level between being Christians, being holy and being missional. We cannot be Christians and not be holy; we would be contradicting the basis of “...the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). We cannot be holy without being Christians; we would fall into a horrendous presumption worthy of judgment and eternal punishment. Neither can we be missional without being holy Christians; we would fall into the category of philanthropists or social activists, lacking the love for our neighbor demanded in every one of our actions. To be Christian, holy and missional are values that must be an intimate part and indissolubly amalgamated in the life of everyone who professes Jesus Christ.

The Church of the Nazarene ministers in a world “...so that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9), with the profound conviction of faith that Jesus Christ is our “capstone” (Acts 4:11), that holiness is the life style that God has designed for his children, and that mission is the *praxis* of this life style.

There are some important considerations for the amplification and understanding of this theme:

1. As Christian people, persevering in our “most holy faith” (Jude 20), we have the obligation to know, love and serve better the Triune God.¹

This is how the testimony of the apostles is revealed, the first fathers of the church, the precursors and actors of the Reformation, the servants of God during the past centuries, the leaders of our church who have maintained faithful in front of heresies, and the countless believers who offered their lives for the cause of the Gospel. All of these incarnated the Great Commandment “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind... Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-40;

¹ Adapted from William Barclay’s interpretation of the prayer of Richard of Chichester (Englishman of the 13th century), and with it expresses his general purpose of drafting his New Testament Commentaries.

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Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27; Deut. 6:5). As contemporary Christians we must emulate these paradigms if we are to fulfill the *mission Dei*.

2. As Christian people we have the obligation to reinterpret and live out the revealed Word.

In Ibero-America, as in the rest of the world, there is a crisis of Christian identity, and a theological and denominational crisis. The result is an accentuated inconsistency between faith and life that affects the holiness and the mission of the church. Our contact with the people of God in its diversity and expression of life brings us to the conclusion: There is a lack among the members of the knowledge, interpretation and consistent application of the Sacred Scriptures. Therefore, as the Church of the Nazarene we need to reinterpret them, internalize them, live and teach them with pertinence. Jesus Christ prayed for holiness for the church through the Word (John 17:17). We must educate church members by a systematic study of the Bible, and the Holy Spirit will guide us in all truth (John 16:13); and then we will be true disciples of the Lord of the church (John 8:31).

3. As Christian people, we have the obligation to know our Christian and denominational roots; that is, our history.

Our present is articulated in our historical past. The “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9) cannot fail to recognize a twenty century long process during which a vast number of believers lived in the beauty of holiness and did the mission that God had commended to them. In the dawning of the 21st century and facing new demands that our society imposes, we need to give answers regarding our origins (past), our reality (present) and our hope (future), regarding our identity, so that we can “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have...” (1 Peter 3:15).

4. As Christian people, we have the obligation to know our theology and our doctrine.

The Triune God is Holy, the written revelation is holy, the church is called to be holy, the mission needs to saturate with holiness. Blessed holiness! To live it implies understanding, experiencing and testifying to it. The divine promises about this, point in this direction. Questions that allow us to analyze ourselves can help us to reorient us in the will of the Lord. Are we living in the beauty of holiness? Are we ministers of holiness? Are our pulpits saturated with holiness? We need to be careful with “defense mechanisms” that argue in favor of the debilities and weaknesses of those ethical expressions which are not. The Church of the Nazarene in Ibero-America and in the world must be a “...a holy nation...that you may declare the praises of him” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

5. As Christian people, we have the obligation to know and make feasible the *missio Dei*.

On this point, I will say only, the Church of the Lord, as “a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9) incarnates the *missio Dei* for the expansion of the Kingdom on this planet, that during this century bleeds suffering, pain, inequality, injustice, unbelief, confusion and violence. Does not our world need the action of a renewed mission? Renewed in love, in the knowledge and teaching of the Holy Scriptures, in the witness of holiness, in theological argument, renewed in its missional praxis, renewed in its strategies of better application in the different cultural contexts in Ibero-America.

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6. As a Christian, holiness and missional people, we are obligated to preserve and transmit our inheritance.

It is true that we live in the sociological phenomena of postmodernism², a historical moment of aggressive changes that in many ways affect the life of the church. Change is a component of history. During two thousand years the church has experienced changes; however, it has maintained and strengthened itself, has grown, is and will be the alternative for moral and spiritual change for everyone who believes. The projection of social well-being in the future is uncertain; the Scripture warns of a greater test before the Parousia (Matthew 24; 2 Timothy 3). However, the mission can not be interrupted. Persevering in the “sound doctrine” will liberate us from the coming trial. Future generations need to receive the Nazarene legacy, in doctrine and testimony. The Christian life of holiness prepares us the way to enjoy the eternal blessing of the presence of the Triune God.

CONCLUSION

To finalize our reflection and analysis, we suggest a critical analysis of the growth of the Church of the Nazarene in Ibero-America in light of our values that are fundamental for such growth. We have the impression that there is divorce between qualitative and quantitative aspects. In comparison to other sister denominations, especially in the Hispanic Caribbean, we are falling behind. The call to holiness that comes from our God is a call to proclaim it, as an expression of an internal experience and of a commitment to the mission to save mankind that is thirsting for faith and to give a new lifestyle and to increase His Kingdom. Let us keep our core values flaming. We are a Christian, holiness and missional people!

² For further information regarding the issue, we recommend Antonio Cruz, *Postmodernidad* (Siglo XXI, 1996) and José Mardones, *Postmodernidad y cristianismo: El desafío del fragmento* (Sal Terrae, 1988).