

CHRISTLIKENESS: BELIEFS AND HISTORICAL EFFECTIVENESS

(Reaction to the paper by Ely Camas)

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“Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness...’ (John 8:12), says the Lord. These are words of Christ, and with them He exhorts us to imitate His life and virtues...The one who wants, then, to understand well the words of Christ and to taste them needs to persist in adjusting all of his way of life to His.”¹ I wanted to begin with this quote from á Kempis because it summarizes the ideas of Rev. Ely Camas, whose paper reminds us that more than with words, “Christlikeness” is expressed in living, a life according to the character of Christ.

The paper shows us the concept of “Christlikeness”, through the character of Christ and what it signified for the Early Church and what it signified for Christians in the 18th century. In this respect, I would only like to highlight a few points:

- **Christ and his love.** An inclusive and unconditional love.
- **Christ and his compassion.** That was his lifestyle.
- **Christ and his message of salvation.** A message whose purpose of redemption never wavered.
- **Christ and his model of discipleship.** A discipleship developed along the way, in the activities of every day life, a discipleship in which rested the future of ministry.
- **Christ and his message of holiness.** A message, although high and supreme, referred to the life of the people in their historical moment.

This is the Christ who the early church and Paul sought to imitate in a practical way, and was such that it influenced the Greco-Roman world of its time. In the XVIII century, John Wesley and the group of Christians that accompanied him, lived in an integral manner preaching a practical holiness that insisted on ministering to the poor, on evangelism and discipleship and changed England in that century. The writer of the paper asks us two questions. If the life of holiness should lead us to appear like Christ, Why does a church with a holiness doctrine not have explosive growth? Is there possibly a divorce between the theory and practice? The challenge is that being part of a church that preaches the message of holiness, we have to live in “the likeness of Christ” and impact the society.

I agree with the practical aspect, lived out, that has to have the concept of “Christlikeness” within the Christian community. I just want to reflect on one element of this likeness, which is necessary in the majority of our countries.

“The community of Jesus Christ is the place in which one believes in Christ as the salvation of the entire world and where obedience to Christ is found. With this, the community already from the beginning with its nature has responsibility to the world that God has loved

¹ Thomas de Kempis, *La imitación de Cristo* (Barcelona: Herder, 1984), Libro 1, capítulo 1.

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through Christ. When the community does not perceive this responsibility, it stops being the community of Christ.”² The Church today has to reflect Christ; it is the community that has responsibility over society. The Church today can not isolate itself from the realities of our communities. It is there where we find our reason for being; it is the definition of our action.

Christ has called us to continue his mission. Luke presents us Jesus in the temple reading Isaiah, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). The Jubilee is the reference that signified justice and equality. Jesus said the this Scripture had been fulfilled, and today as the people of Christ, in a continent where inequalities can not be hidden, it will be necessary that as the His body, who was sent to restore all things, that we be those who raise our voices when justice and equality are required and needed to be obtained. We must dress ourselves as the new man that was “...created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24b). This is part of our call. C.S. Lewis says “When we speak of being ‘in Christ’ or Christ being ‘in them’ it is not referring to those who are thinking of Him or imitating His example. It refers to Christ, in all of the purity of the truth, is working through them; that is the Christian community in the body that He uses to work.”³ This is to say “the likeness of Christ” happens when we are willing to be the hands and feet of Him who is the head, actors of change in our communities.

Jesus, always aligned himself with the oppressed and not the oppressors, he wants to restore to him all things and has marked the way for us to follow the footsteps of Christ is to offer ourselves. “...with the oppressed and for the benefit of all, as a sign of the new era of justice and of the liberation of God, that has interrupted in history.”⁴ Our *Manual* says, “The Church of the Nazarene believes that Jesus commanded His disciples to have a special relationship to the poor of this world... we understand Christian holiness to be inseparable from ministry to the poor in that it drives the Christian beyond his or her own individual perfection and toward the creation of a more just and equitable society and world.”⁵ The option for the oppressed and for the search for justice are part of our beliefs, and should bring us to living them in our message of holiness. I believe the efficiency of “Christlikeness” is backed up by more than a testimony in every historical moment. The element that predominates on every occasion is the search for justice and equality, and this is how we impact the society in which we live. Matthew 28:20-21 says, “and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Amen! This includes the search for justice and equality; to be the image of the Kingdom of God, the image of Christ, in our time.

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ética* (Barcelona: Estela, 1968), 228.

³ C.S. Lewis, *Cristianismo esencial* (1966), 70.

⁴ José Míguez Bonino, *La fe en busca de eficacia* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1977), 151.

⁵ *Manual, Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: NPH, 1993), ¶904.5, 323-324.