

“WE ARE A CHRISTIAN AND HOLINESS PEOPLE” (II)
Two Essential Traits

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We are part of the Christian people, the People of God, and this is a very great privilege and very special, incomparable. In life, every human being has many opportunities to develop himself and also has distinguished privileges. One for example is to belong to a great family, others become members of an important institution, school, university, international organism; others reach a singular status in the society. However, none of this can equal or compare to the privilege that we have when we come to Christ. We come to belong to the family of God; we are members of the People of God, what a privilege!

We Are a Christian People

As we understand in this conference, this is an essential trait of the Church of the Nazarene. Our denomination sustains that we are part of the Christian Church and every member that enjoys Christ's salvation is a member of the Universal Church. What greater privilege can we attain? To know that we are part of the Christian People is one of the greatest reasons that dignify a human being in the least favorable social stratus or the most remote one in our world.

Of course, in our Latin American context, the word “Christian” does not have the strength, value and power that were implied in the beginning of the New Testament. The term Christian has become very trivial due to the process of bringing a selfish and capricious message to our people when they were “Christianized”. The Dictionary of the Spanish Language says: “Christian is an adjective pertaining to or relative to the religion of Christ. A Christian is one who professed faith in Christ that he received in baptism.” It appears that there is more interest in the Christian religion and not in being identified with Christ by means of a personal experience, an encounter with the Author of our salvation.

The Church of the Nazarene is a Christian church; its members identify themselves with the Apostolic Christian Church of the New Testament and with the Church throughout time. This identification is one of its essential traits or core values; we have our origin in the Primitive Church, founded by our Lord Jesus Christ. We do not have any other base, any other foundation for our church. The day that this would happen we would cease to be a Christian church. The Cornerstone of the Church of the Nazarene continues to be the Lord Jesus Christ.

For what has been shown, and to see the march of our church, we must be in the vanguard of the core value that sustains us and identifies us with Christ. History warns us that it is possible to mutilate this essential trait of the church. It appears that in our time some sectors of the Universal Christian Church have fractured the essence of what it means to be a truly Christian church, establishing another base, another “foundation” that is not the Jesus Christ, the essence.

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As the Church of the Nazarene, we are also part of the Christian people by inheriting the experience and the understanding of a doctrine that conforms to the Holy Scriptures. What we can emphasize in this section are the historical Trinitarian creeds of the Christian faith, spiritual disciplines and the Wesleyan inheritance of holiness. These elements enrich the life of the church and challenge it to maintain and give emphasis to what it means in our time to be Christian and to be a Christian people.

We Are a Holiness People

If our identification as Nazarenes is fully with the Christian people, by the link that we maintain with Christ and the Church that he founded, to say that we are a Holiness People is to refer to the same nature of the Church, to be the Church. To understand what God desires in his heart that we should be is a personal and community task, as the People of God.

Since the fall of man, God has been ready to restore him, redeem him and save him from such a great tragedy. He established covenants with his servants, always making special provisions sufficient with the result that men return and live for God. The supreme demand has always been that his creature would carry the image of his Maker, become a holy and perfect being in all his ways.

In the Old Testament, God established a people that would reflect the character and glory of Jehovah, and not just in their own context, but also before all the peoples and nations of the earth. This is what God wanted to do with the people of Israel, a holy people conformed to the heart of God to be an efficacious instrument in a world dominated by sin: “...then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6).

God’s plan to have a people continues in the New Testament, but it must be a Holy People. Christ establishes his church, this time more than with a message or a voice from the top of a mountain, more that a prophetic message; the Son of God incarnated, he has been identified, or said in another way, he has “tasted” in the condition of man the bitterness that sin causes and from this angle, calls, demands from his church, that has made a “more than sufficient” provision for our sanctification. So, we have a new covenant through his blood to reflect the holy character of God and Christ in a personal way and as the people of God. We are a Holiness People in the midst of a world of darkness and disturbed by sin.

It is important to ask ourselves here, Can we reflect the holy character of God in Latin America? Or, are we reflecting the character and the glory of God as a Nazarene people in Ibero-America? We can assume that we are not the only church that proclaims holiness, as there are other churches that are making the effort to preach and live holiness in a way that is also dynamic and I am sure are reflecting the character and glory of God.

The Christian Church, as the people of God, received the command to be a holy people. The apostle Peter, without breaking the essence of the Old Testament, referring to the church says: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”

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(1 Peter 2:9). This command from God to his people has not changed, **to be a holy nation**, is his will, the desire of his heart is to have a holy people and without stain. When we are not going in this direction that the Lord suffered, He has made all the provisions and gives us other resources to live a pleasing life, a life of holiness for his honor and glory.

God’s goal is that one become a holy being in a personal way, but at the same time it must be demonstrated in community, in his people. Christ has given us the Holy Spirit to save and sanctify us, to be free and to have victory over sin. This is the most wonderful experience that can happen to a human being. But it is also a challenge to keep, making it real every day that passes.

We can run the risk to live statically, to live in past experiences and to not make each day dynamic in our personal experience as in the community of God’s people. We need this so that our Latin nations will be transformed by the message and glory of the Lord that we must radiate every day, as happened with John Wesley and others in the subsequent revivals during the 19th and 20th centuries.

I believe that I have written enough about the reality of our peoples and nations, but let me show that the character of our beloved Latin America “smells” tremendously bad due to the corruption, injustice, violence and so many other nests of sin. It is in this context that the Lord has raised us up, in the terminology of Paul to be “...the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing” (2 Corinthians 2:15). This is what is to be a Holy Nation that “smells like” Christ and transmits the knowledge of Him. Amen!