

The Christian Life

By Santiago Lange

Some time ago a reporter was interviewing an old man, a grandfather, who was obviously still in intense grief over the shooting death of his teenaged grandson. The grandson had been shot by in a robbery of the family's little neighborhood grocery store.



"Do you want revenge on those who did this?" asked the reporter. "Would you like to shoot the person who shot your grandson?"

The old man looked astonished at the question. "No, that's not possible," said the grandfather.

"I guess you don't even know for sure who did this," said the reporter.

"No," said the grandfather. "It's not that. It's that we are Christians. We are not permitted revenge."

Sometimes knowing the Christian thing to do in a given situation is tough. Life can be complicated; Christian ethics may suggest a number of possible responses. And to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus, means that there are some things for us which are not optional. A disciple of Jesus is someone who, in every situation, tries to respond to other people as Jesus responded. There may be certain responses to the world which, in the world's eyes, "make sense," or which can simply be justified by reference to, "everyone else is doing it." But Christians are those who have publically committed themselves to obey Jesus. And Jesus has commanded us to love.

Whether our obedience to this command will make the world a better place, or lead to deeper human understanding, or help to win friends and influence people, we know not. We only know that this is clearly what Jesus commands us to do. Not that it is always easy to know exactly what loving one another means. Sometimes our love needs to be that sort of "tough love," of which we sometimes speak. Yet hate, violence, revenge and the other means through which the world gets what it wants, are not options for Jesus' people, people who are commanded to love.

Erich Honecker was deposed as East Germany's chief of state while the country was undergoing tremendous change. The turmoil in East Germany received a great deal of attention, but an unpopular act of Christian reconciliation went mostly ignored. Honecker was widely hated by others. After being ousted from his position, he was not allowed to live in his luxury villa. A Lutheran pastor offered to let the homeless Honecker live in the pastor's guest room. The pastor even paid Honecker's expenses. This was especially surprising since Honecker had once persecuted the church.

This move was widely resented. Many people threatened to quit the church (and some did). The pastor received vile phone calls. When asked why he did it, the pastor cited a passage of Scripture. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has give us the ministry of reconciliation...So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18,20).

Every Christian is faced with some frustration. He is supposed to live, love, walk and talk like Christ. The Bible commands him to love his enemies, abstain from all appearances of evil, grow in grace, worry about nothing, be thankful for everything, rejoice in all things, deny himself, accept the fact of his death and follow Christ every day of his life, be of good comfort, cheerful and kind even in the middle of an unkind world. And that's the command made upon ALL Christians. So the great question is "How do we live the kind of life God expects of a Christian?"

Colossians 1:27 is the answer: "Christ in you - that is the only hope of glory". My hope of ever being what I was made to become is Christ living in me. Christ "FOR" us gladdens our hearts. Christ "WITH" us is even more thrilling. But Christ "IN" us is glory unspeakable. Christ in us is the Christ who is creator, sustainer, the one in whom all fullness dwells.

If Christianity is nothing more than a person deciding to worship Jesus and doing his best to imitate Him, then there is not much hope. But if Christianity is Jesus coming into an available human body and acting like himself, then there's great hope. The first is based on human strength, but the other is based on the dynamic power of the indwelling Christ.

People "working for God" is one thing. God working IN people is another. Working FOR God can be bothersome, fruitless and frustrating. But when it finally hits us that "it is God who works in us" then it's like a new day dawning. The Christian life is not the doing of things to please God. The Christian life is the yielding of our bodies to God so that He can, through the indwelling Christ, DO things for Himself.

His will be done! ☐