

As his apprentices, we pass through a course of training, from having faith in Christ to having the faith of Christ (Gal. 2:16-20). As a proclaimer and teacher of the gospel of his kingdom, I do not cease to announce a gospel about Jesus. That remains forever foundational. But I also recognize the need and opportunity to announce the gospel of Jesus (Mark 1:1)—the gospel of the present availability to every human being of a life in The Kingdom Among Us. Without that, the gospel about Jesus remains destructively incomplete.

### Getting Clear on Objectives

#### Four Things We Must Not Take As Primary Objectives

To correctly form a curriculum for Christlikeness, we must have a very clear and simple perception of the primary goals it must achieve, as well as what is to be avoided.

Two objectives in particular that are often taken as primary goals must not be left in that position. They can be reintroduced later in proper subordination to the true ones. These are external conformity to the wording of Jesus' teachings about actions in specific contexts and profession of perfectly correct doctrine. Historically these are the very things that have obsessed the church visible—currently, the latter far more than the former.

We need wait no longer. The results are in. They do not provide a course of personal growth and development that routinely produces people who "hear and do." They either crush the human mind and soul and separate people from Jesus, or they produce hide-bound legalists and theological experts with "lips close to God and hearts far away from him" (Isa. 29:13). The world hardly needs more of these.

Much the same can be said of the strategies—rarely taken as primary objectives, to be sure, but much used—of encouraging faithfulness to the activities of a church or other outwardly religious routines and various "spiritualities," or the seeking out of special states of mind or ecstatic experiences. These are good things. But let it be said once and for all that, like outward conformity and doctrinally perfect profession, they are not to be taken as major objectives in an adequate curriculum for Christlikeness.

Special experiences, faithfulness to the church, correct doctrine, and external conformity to the teachings of Jesus all come along as appropriate, more or less automatically, when the inner self is transformed. But they do not produce such a transformation.

The human heart must be plowed much more deeply. Thus these four emphases are good in their place, and even necessary when rightly understood. But when taken as primary objectives, they only burden souls and make significant Christlikeness extremely difficult, if not impossible. With respect to these four emphases, we need to say loudly and repeatedly, to everyone concerned, "You cannot build your house on the rock in this way."

#### The Two Primary Objectives of the Course of Training

By contrast, the primary objectives of any successful course of training for "life on the rock," the life that hears and does, are twofold.

The first objective is to bring apprentices to the point where they dearly love and constantly delight in that "heavenly Father" made real to earth in Jesus and are quite certain that there is no "catch," no limit, to the goodness of his intentions or to his power to carry them out.

When the elderly apostle John, who had been the "kid" among the apostles, came near to the end of his long life he said, "This is the message we heard from Jesus . . ." (1 John 1:5). It will be very useful in helping us see where we actually stand today if we ask ourselves, before looking at the rest of his statement, how we would automatically finish his sentence for him. What is the message Jesus brought, according to us? And then we might also ask our friends and acquaintances. If you do this, and write down the answers you elicit, I think you will be both astonished and enlightened by what you get.

But the aged apostle, on the basis of a lifetime of firsthand experience of Jesus, said that this was his message: "God is light, and darkness in him there is not, none" (v. 5). That is the message he brought, according to John. It is also, according to him, the message "we proclaim to you" (v. 5). It is the message we today are to proclaim. It is, as we shall further develop later, the message that impels the willing hearer to dearly love and constantly delight in that "heavenly Father" made real to earth in Jesus. And it is the message that, finally, gives us assurance that his universe is "a perfectly safe place for us to be." Love perfected eliminates all fear.

When the mind is filled with this great and beautiful God, the "natural" response, once all "inward" hindrances are removed, will be to do "everything I have told you to do."

The second primary objective of a curriculum for Christlikeness is to remove our automatic responses against the kingdom of God, to free the apprentices of domination, of "enslavement" (John 8:34; Rom. 6:6), to their old habitual patterns of thought, feeling, and action. These are the "automatic" patterns of response that were ground into the embodied social self during its long life outside The Kingdom Among Us. They make up "the sin that is in my members" which, as Paul so brilliantly understood, brings it about that "wishing to do the good is mine, but the doing of it is not" (Rom. 7:18).

It is not enough, if we would enable Jesus' students to do what he said, just to announce and teach the truth about God, about Jesus, and about God's purposes with humankind. To think so is the fallacy underlying most of the training that goes on in our churches and theological schools. Even relentlessly pursued, it is not enough.

Very little of our being lies under the direction of our conscious minds, and very little of our actions runs from our thoughts and consciously chosen intentions. Our mind on its own is an extremely feeble instrument, whose power over life we constantly tend to exaggerate. We are incarnate beings in our very nature, and we live from our bodies. If we are to be transformed, the body must be transformed, and that is not accomplished by talking at it.

The training that leads to doing what we hear from Jesus must therefore involve, first, the purposeful disruption of our "automatic" thoughts, feelings, and actions by doing different things with our body. And then, through various intentional practices, we place the body before God and his instrumentalities in such a way that our whole self is retrained away from the old kingdoms around and within us and into "the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13 NAS).

This part of the curriculum for Christlikeness consists of "disciplines for the spiritual life." We shall discuss them later in this chapter.

But for now let us only add the comment that these two "primary objectives" of the curriculum are not to be pursued separately but interactively. We do not first bring apprentices to love God appropriately and then free them from pattern enslavement. Nor do we do it the other way around.

Pursuit of the two primary objectives goes hand in hand. They are to be simultaneously sought. This would be expected in the case of persons such as we are, who live at the mercy of their thoughts, to

be sure, but also are bodily beings with a social context that all too easily takes over our life.

Now let us consider in some detail what we would have to do in order to achieve the two primary objectives. And here we enter the substance of the curriculum for Christlikeness.

### *O. Axline* Enthralling the Mind with God

#### Turning the Mind Toward God

With regard to our first primary objective, the most important question we face is, How do we help people love what is lovely? Very simply, we cause them, ask them, help them to place their minds on the lovely thing concerned. We assist them to do this in every way possible. Saint Thomas Aquinas remarks that "love is born of an earnest consideration of the object loved." And: "Love follows knowledge."<sup>3</sup> Love is an emotional response aroused in the will by visions of the good. Contrary to what is often said, love is never blind, though it may not see rightly. It cannot exist without some vision of the beloved.

As teachers we therefore bring the lovely thing—in this case, God—before the disciple as fully and as forcibly as possible, putting our best efforts into it. But we never forget that in the last analysis, as we have already learned from Emily Dickinson, "the soul selects her own society, then shuts the door."<sup>4</sup> Though we act, and as intelligently and responsibly as possible, we are always in the position of asking: asking them, asking God, and responding to their responses.

God has placed the only key to the innermost parts of the human soul in its own hands and will never take it back to himself or give it to another. You may even be able to destroy the soul of another, but you will never unlock it against his or her will. The soul, to continue the words of the poet just quoted, can "close the valves of her attention, like stone." She can even lose the key, and have to have help finding it. She can even refuse the help she desperately needs. But she will never cease to need to love, which is deeper than the need to be loved.

A popular saying is "Take time to smell the roses." What does this mean? To enjoy the rose it is necessary to focus on it and bring the rose as fully before our senses and mind as possible. To smell a rose you must get close, and you must linger. When we do so, we delight in it. We love it.