

DISCIPLESHIP ON THE ROAD TO THE CROSS  
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In this paper, we are going to reflect on what it means to take up the cross and follow Jesus for the practice of making disciples in Mesoamerica.

*The cross in the conquest of Mesoamerica*

"They came. They had the Bible and we had the land. And they told us: 'Close your eyes and pray.' And when we opened our eyes, they had the land and we had the Bible."<sup>1</sup> These words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu refer to the way Africa was conquered, but they are also valid for Mesoamerica.

The arrival of Columbus to America was one of the most important events in world history. The canvas titled *First landing of Christopher Columbus in America* (1862), by the painter Dióscoro Teófilo Puebla Tolín, shows the arrival of the caravels to the islands of the Caribbean Sea and next to the conqueror stands a priest, who with the cross seems to be blessing the Indians hidden among the bushes. This historical portrait has been described as a 'pious lie' of the official church, by suggesting that the arrival in America was motivated by the evangelization of the indigenous people.<sup>2</sup> Nothing is further from reality. At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the crown of Spain wanted to open a new trade route to the East to expand its international market. The truth is that when the original peoples of Mesoamerica saw the symbol of the cross for the first time, it was accompanied by a sword, a symbol of conquest.

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<sup>1</sup> Galeano, Eduardo. *Ser como ellos y otros artículos*, p. 27. accessed 21 September, 2017 de: <https://lahistoriadeldiablo.wordpress.com/2016/02/03/eduardo-galeano-ser-como-ellos-descargar-texto>

<sup>2</sup> Sierra Norte Digital. *Redacción*. Boletín del 23 agosto de 2016 (Madrid). Consultado 21 de septiembre de 2017 de: <http://www.sierranortedigital.com/554362775/En-el-primer-viaje-de-Colon-a-America-viajo-un-sacerdote.html>

A massive invasion of 17 ships was deployed, after Christopher Columbus' second journey, with more than 1200 men, most of whom were soldiers. Along with this contingent, the royal court had insisted on sending priests of different orders. In Mesoamerica, the great civilizations of the Aztecs and Maya were subdued by the sword and by the trickery and deceptions of the conquerors, such as Hernán Cortéz and Pedro de Alvarado. With the permission of the Spanish crown through the 'reducciones' and the 'encomiendas' the Indians were subjugated and forced to work to enrich the conquistadores. These in turn were committed to treat them well and indoctrinate them in the Catholic religion.<sup>3</sup>

Fray Bartolomé de las Casas<sup>4</sup>, in his work *Brevisima relación de la Destruction de las Indias*, recounts the horrors experienced by indigenous peoples (such as the Tainos and the Caribs in the case of the Antilles) who literally 'disappeared' in the war of the conquest. In a few years, America went from being a continent where a variety of cultures of great splendor and beauty had developed, with models of social organization and equitable distribution of goods that amazed the European world;<sup>5</sup> to become a territory exploited for its natural riches<sup>6</sup> and where its original inhabitants were systematically annihilated.<sup>7</sup> "In America, there were about 80 million inhabitants around 1492. Of this amount, three-quarters (about 65 million), belonged to the territory that later became known as Latin America. Its large population centers were the Inca

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<sup>3</sup> Waldemar Espinoza. *La sociedad Andina Colonial, Historia del Perú*, Tomo VI, Mejía Baca, 4ta. Edición, Lima, p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> Bartolomé de las Casas: Dominican friar, chronicler and bishop of Chiapas, was the main protector of the original peoples in the Spanish colonies of America until his death in 1566.

<sup>5</sup> María Rostworowski. *Historia del Tahuantinsuyo*, I.E.P., Lima 3ra edición, 1988, p. 284.

<sup>6</sup> The economy of the colonies was based on mining in the sixteenth century, and then on cattle and agriculture in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>7</sup> This due to diseases brought from Europe, the fall in the birth rate, and the exploitation of forced labor in the mines which provoked a genocide and ethnocide of many towns.

empire, with about 30 million, and Mexican one with about 20 million. By 1700, a century and a half later, this total number had been reduced dramatically to five million, resulting in the disappearance of 60 million indigenous people, about 400 thousand each year. These figures can be compared to the death toll from the Second World War. There are no exact figures regarding the deaths of this conflagration either. However, the UN takes stock in this way: 50 million dead in total."<sup>8</sup>

In several territories of Mesoamerica, it became necessary to replace the labor provided by the indigenous population.<sup>9</sup> Cuba was one of the first colonies to incorporate African slaves for the production of sugar and work in the coffee plantations.<sup>10</sup> Work done by African slaves lasted for 400 years of contemporary history, including in the Caribbean islands of the Western Hemisphere, which today make up most of the countries and territories of Mesoamerica, which the Church of the Nazarene currently serves.

As we have noted, with the arrival of Christianity to the Americas, conversion to the Christ of the cross, was forced. The original temples, idols and literature were destroyed and replaced by temples and images of the Virgin and other Catholic saints.<sup>11</sup> With a few exceptions, a process of discipleship and gradual assimilation of the new faith was not carried out. The Christian ‘religion’ prevailed in the new lands, mimicking the indigenous religious practices and

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<sup>8</sup> Ricardo Pacheco Colín. *60 millones, los indígenas muertos tras la conquista*. Monday 11 of April, 2016 in *Cronica.com.mx*. Consulted on 20th of October, 2017 in <http://www.cronica.com.mx/notas/2002/24297.html>

<sup>9</sup> From the end of the 16th century to the beginning of the 17th century is considered to be the period of the introduction of African slavery in Cuba.

<sup>10</sup> Nilsa Báez, Aura Matos y Katherine Vázquez. *La esclavitud africana en el Caribe*. Published 12th of October, 2008 in *Blog Historia, civilización y cultura*. Accessed October 20th, 2017 in <http://historiacivilizacionycultura.blogspot.com.ar/2008/10/esclavitud-africana-en-el-caribe.html>

<sup>11</sup> Due to the destruction of Mayan literature by Friar Diego de Landa, around the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the last people capable of understanding the complex Mayan glyphs disappeared.

the beliefs of the slaves plucked from Africa, many of which continue to this day. Rome accepted this syncretism and this made possible - along with its proximity to the authorities and its economic power - the strengthening of Catholicism in the new colonies.

*The advance of Protestantism in Latin America*

Previous to the establishment of the first denominational churches in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European immigrants had already been present bringing with them their faith and their ideas. As early as 1526, only 15 years after Hernán Cortéz conquered the Aztec empire, the courts of the Spanish Inquisition in America were established to persecute the Lutheran heresy present among merchants, travelers and corsairs.<sup>12</sup> Many nominal Christians from Protestant nations came, including pirates, filibusters, slave traders, liquor manufacturers, smugglers, landowners and also exploited the inhabitants without mercy.<sup>13</sup>

The presence and expansion of the gospel in these lands began with the independence movements and the establishment of the new republics (1812-1848). Noteworthy in this period is the work of Diego Thompson, a Scottish Baptist pastor, who established Mixed Schools of Popular Education in Argentina, Peru, Chile, Gran Colombia and Mexico, with the Bible as the basic text.<sup>14</sup> Between 1850 and 1930, thanks to civil movements who managed to distance themselves from the official Catholic religion and gain the right to freedom of worship, the missionary movement and Protestantism were gaining strength, especially the more ‘Pentecostal’ indigenous movements which spread rapidly throughout the Continent. Protestants at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were more aligned to a ‘social gospel’ movement in defense of the

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<sup>12</sup> Julio Jiménez Rueda, *Herejías y supersticiones en la Nueva España*, Imprenta Universitaria, México, 1946, p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> Giulio Girardi, *La conquista de América, ¿con qué derecho?*, DEI, San José de Costa Rica, 1989, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> Arnoldo Canclini, *Diego Thompson*, Sociedad Bíblica Argentina, Buenos Aires, 1987, pp. 27-215.

exploited peoples reaching its expression in congresses such as those of Panama (1916) and Havana (1929).

During the 1930s and 1960s the Protestant church moved away from the ‘social gospel’ movement and became marked by fundamentalism, conservatism and proselytism. Unity among Protestant groups was broken, denominational seminaries were created, materials for evangelism and Christian education were also produced. As Tomás Gutiérrez affirms: "... foreign missionary offices took effect over national associations or conferences; in towns and counties ... three or four evangelical churches were founded, each of which believed to have the truth over the others, in populations of fifty or sixty families." <sup>15</sup>

Beyond 1960, social projects were resumed but the church was in danger of losing its way, swinging between the ideologies of the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary movements that were part of the continental political scene. This caused an even deeper division among evangelical people. It is in this context that the efforts to recover the mission of the church and its unity through Latin American councils and fraternities began.

From the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Protestants stopped being seen as ‘enemies’ by Roman Catholics and were accepted as ‘separated brothers’. Unfortunately, there are still people who continue to emphasize the things that separate us and not those that unite us, which are the majority. Thank God that we begin to see, in the new generations, an approach to other Christian communities in projects that promote peace, justice, equity, solidarity and the common good.

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<sup>15</sup> Tomás Gutiérrez S. *América Latina en perspectiva histórica*. Ponencia. CLADE III. Tercer Congreso Latinoamericano de Evangelización. Quito 24/8/1992. Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana.

According to figures from the 2015 Pontifical Yearbook, there are 1.254 million Catholics around the world (17.7% of the world population). 49% of Catholics live in the Americas, being the continent with the largest number of faithful followers of the Church of Rome.<sup>16</sup>

In 2010, around the world, evangelical Christians represented 11.6% of the population, with more than 801 million and 36.7% of the global Christian population.<sup>17</sup> In Latin America, there were 120 million Protestants in 2010.<sup>18</sup> For Latin America, a study conducted by the Pew Research Center between October 2013 and February 2014 that includes all of Latin America except Cuba shows the following results: Until 1950, 94% of Latin Americans were Catholics and only 3% Protestants. Protestants grew from 4% in 1970 to 19% in 2014, while Catholics decreased from 92% in 1970 to 69% in 2014. (For example, 74% of Colombians passed from Catholicism to Protestantism). Atheists or without religious affiliation grew from 4 to 8%<sup>19</sup>

In Mesoamerica, the growth of the Protestant church has been greater than in South America, where in most countries it does not exceed 20%, with the exception of Brazil with 26% growth. In four countries of Central America, Guatemala (41%), Honduras (41%), Nicaragua (40%), El Salvador (36%), evangelicals amount to almost half of the population. In these four countries, the Catholic population does not exceed 50%. Other countries in the region such as Costa Rica (25%), the Dominican Republic (23%) and Puerto Rico (33%) have a good representation of the evangelical population. But we also have one of the countries with the

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<sup>16</sup> Álvaro de Juana. These are the official figures of Catholics in the world. Aciprensa. Noticias Vaticano. Consulted 31 of October, 2017 in: <https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/estos-son-los-numeros-de-los-catolicos-en-el-mundo-segun-anuario-pontificio-2015-40519>

<sup>17</sup> Consulted 31st of October, 2017 in: <http://www.reingex.com/Cristianismo-Denominaciones.shtml>

<sup>18</sup> William Sánchez y Víctor Hugo Murillo. “El panorama de la fe”. *La Nación*, 31 de octubre de 2013. Consulted 30th of October, 2017 in: [http://www.nacion.com/mundo/latinoamerica/Iglesia-catolica-encara-desafio-patio\\_0\\_1355064525.html](http://www.nacion.com/mundo/latinoamerica/Iglesia-catolica-encara-desafio-patio_0_1355064525.html)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/13/7-key-takeaways-about-religion-in-latin-america/>

lowest evangelical population in the region, Mexico with 9%.<sup>20</sup> The same Pew Research study estimates that by 2025 there will be more than 202 million evangelicals in Latin America, (op. cit).

In the last decades, we have also seen in our continent the emergence of many of the so-called mega-churches. Samuel Rodríguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference affirms that Latin America is living a time of revival and estimates that even in the United States by 2030, most evangelicals will be of Latin descent.<sup>21</sup> Peter Wagner refers to the growth of Pentecostal churches, a branch to which many of the new urban mega-churches belong, and points out that few are led by pastors with a biblical theological formation, since they are people who come from the field of business.<sup>22</sup>

But when it comes to seeing how ‘Christian’ are the thousands of people who join the evangelical church, we need to observe what sort of the influence these disciples of Jesus have in transforming their environment. Latin America and the Caribbean are among the regions with the greatest corruption on the planet.<sup>23</sup> 30% of women are or will be victims of gender-based

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<sup>20</sup> Joan Faus, 13 de noviembre de 2014. Consulted 30th of October de 2017 in: [http://elpais.com/autor/joan\\_faus\\_catasus/a/Washington](http://elpais.com/autor/joan_faus_catasus/a/Washington)

<sup>21</sup> *Noticia cristiana.com*. “América Latina tendrá más de 202 millones de evangélicos en 2015”. Portada/Crecimiento. 16 de agosto de 2016. Consulted 31st of October, 2017 in: <http://www.noticiacristiana.com/iglesia/crecimiento/2016/08/americalatina-2025-millones-evangelicos.html>

<sup>22</sup> *Op. Cit.*

<sup>23</sup> *Capital.com*. “¿Cuáles son los países más corruptos del mundo? Un ranking sorpresivo”. Lima, 27 de enero 2016. Sección Mundo. Consulted 30th of October, 2017 in: <http://www.capital.com.pe/mundo/cuales-son-los-paises-mas-y-menos-corruptos-del-mundo-un-ranking-sorpresivo-noticia-845794>

violence in the Americas.<sup>24</sup> Sexual violence against children has been growing in several countries of the Continent, and it is highest in Mesoamerica: in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Belize, and in South America in Chile, Colombia, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay and Peru.<sup>25</sup>

José de Segovia Barrón describes this scene of ‘mere religiosity’ presented by this growth of the evangelical church in the Continent, and refers to the case of Guatemala in a blog published on September 9, 2013: "Guatemala has the highest percentage of evangelicals in all Latin America. However, it has the highest rates of poverty, inequality, violence and corruption ... Some pastors boast of evangelical growth as a sign of God's power (...) however, reality shows that this presence has not impacted the social, economic, cultural and political structures in society."<sup>26</sup> This Guatemalan theologian notes that the numerical growth of the church in his country does not go hand in hand with the growth in the quality of Christian life, "...The numerical factor, far from being a key to change can become a refuge for religiosity without commitment and the absence of responsible action in the world." He also points out in his blog the dangerous obsession with numbers associated with a ‘gospel of prosperity’ present in much of the evangelical leadership of the Continent, but at the same time the little concern to make

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<sup>24</sup> Rosmerys Bernal Piña. “Y...¿Es fácil ser mujer?” *Radio Rebelde*. Portada 29/2/2016. Consulted 30th of October, 2017 in: <http://www.radiorebelde.cu/de-cuba-y-de-los-cubanos/y-es-facil-ser-mujer-audio-20160229/>

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<sup>25</sup> Actualitix. World Atlas – Statistics by country. *Número de casos de violencia sexual en niños por 100000 personas*. Mapa. Fuente UNODC-2013 Consultado 15 de octubre de 2017 de: <https://es.actualitix.com/pais/wld/numero-de-casos-de-violencia-sexual-en-ninos.php>

<sup>26</sup> José de Segovia Barrón. *Protestante Digital. com. Blogs*. “Fe en Guatemala y mera religiosidad”. 9 de setiembre de 2013. Consulted 3rd of October, 2017 in: [http://protestantedigital.com/blogs/420/Fersquo\\_en\\_Guatemala\\_y\\_mera\\_religiosidad](http://protestantedigital.com/blogs/420/Fersquo_en_Guatemala_y_mera_religiosidad)



disciples as followers of Jesus Christ, which is evidenced in the absence of substantial changes in the personal and community life of many evangelicals.

*The call to the discipleship of Jesus*

So much has been said and written in recent years about discipleship that anything we add in this humble paper will surely be a repetition of what has already been expressed in a forum. But we need to reaffirm that discipleship means following Jesus on the road to the cross. Even today, despite efforts to correct them, misconceptions circulate about discipleship in our midst, such as: discipleship represents doctrinal lessons for new converts, or that discipleship is about transmitting to another our ministerial skills. Today we find a church that needs to be re-educated in its central mission: " To make Christ-like disciples."

Juan Carlos Ortiz defines a disciple as, "... one who learns to live the life that his teacher lives and little by little, teaches others to live the life he lives." Therefore, discipleship is not just communication of knowledge or information. It is a communication of *life*. That is why Jesus said: " The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life (John 6:63)."<sup>27</sup>

For Stuart Briscoe, "Christ's call to his disciples always includes two ingredients: the invitation and the challenge" (Mt 11:28, John 7:37). This invitation was accompanied by the promise that his followers would have a different lifestyle. Each invitation 'come to me', implies a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. 'Follow me' means more than going after him, in the sense of moving physically, walking a step or two behind him, and Briscoe explains: "Go on ... has always meant the willingness to accept his leadership and obey his instructions. (...) It is by recognizing the need and desire for change that true discipleship is launched. However, even when there is an acknowledgment of the need and an admission of the desire for change, there may still be a lack of willingness to be changed."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Juan Carlos Ortiz (1978) *Discípulo*. Caparra, Puerto Rico: Betania, p. 121.

<sup>28</sup> Stuart Briscoe (1990) *Discipulado para todos*. Florida: Vida, pp. 40-41, 48-49.

Jesus' call is a call to enter his kingdom. For this a firm decision is required on the part of the person receiving the call, as well as a deep desire to transform their whole life. This change is what is called conversion, in Greek *metanoia* or repentance. This involves:

- 1) A radical change in the way of thinking and acting.
- 2) A decision to leave the kingdom of darkness and enter the community of the King.
- 3) A desire to assimilate Jesus' new perspective on life.
- 4) A sincere commitment to live in this new life.

Lozada and Angulo, explain that the repentance that Jesus asks of those who wanted to be his disciples was clear and firm. It was a call to belong and to commit to his new kingdom: "The answer to the call to the Kingdom cannot be an undecided, conditioned or mediocre response. The appropriate response implies a radical reorientation of our values in accordance with those of the Kingdom presenting to the world an alternative, the alternative of God for the restoration of all things. It is to present to the world people who have opted for a personal and community lifestyle that reflects the character and holiness of God described in the sermon on the Mount (Mt.5-7)." <sup>29</sup>

Authentic Christian discipleship begins with a decision to change, in true repentance, in a radical conversion and in a decision to stay following Christ at all costs. It is through the process of discipleship that the believers understand and learn to surrender their lives, so that they are restored and transformed into the image of Christ, so that in turn, these transformed lives become restorative instruments in each context.

The call of Jesus is a call to a commitment with him for life and that includes all aspects of the individual's life. This call, as we have seen, is a call to conversion, that is, to a radical change. Following him, involves learning from him and walking in his footsteps (doing what he did) every day until the end of life. It is good to rescue the seriousness of Jesus' call in these times when some preachers offer salvation with little or no requirements.

*The call to discipleship involves taking up the cross*

True discipleship involves carrying our personal cross, which is not related to carrying the

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<sup>29</sup> L. Lozada y J. De Angulo (1995) *La Restauración de todas las cosas*. Guatemala: Semilla, p. 205.

burdens that life presents us such as the illness or disability of a family member, or having to deal with people of bad character, or face losses, or pass natural disasters, among others. It is something much deeper and involves commitment.

Jesus stated it clearly in Luke 14: 25-27: "Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.'"

The cross has been the worst instrument of torment and martyrdom invented by humanity. The cross was reserved only for the worst offenders. The cross was an exhibition of dishonor and degradation. Nothing compared to the shame and humiliation of going to the cross. In fact, it was considered that, the cross was too cruel for free men, regardless of the seriousness of their crime. The cross was a sign of guilt. The idea of an innocent person being nailed to a cross was unconceivable. The cross was also a place of punishment and execution. The cross was a place of irremediable death.

However, carrying the cross was part of the conditions that Jesus put to those whom he called as disciples: Vargas Cruzado summarizes these four requirements:

- 1) To die to oneself, which implies a total and complete surrender to the will of God.
- 2) Total renunciation of everything that may interfere with full obedience to the will of Christ. Jesus claims to be the absolute priority in the life of those he chooses. This renunciation includes giving up all our belongings so that the Lord can make use of them and entrust them to us again, but this time as administrators of these resources (Luke 5:11; 14:26, 33; Mr. 10: 7).
- 3) Whoever belongs to Christ must be constant in faithful obedience to his Word. The teachings of the Master had to be printed in the life of the disciples and transmitted to other individuals (disciples).

- 4) To produce fruit, or provide something that is useful. The person Jesus calls must be willing to give the best of himself to develop into a mature disciple and be a reproducer of mature disciples.<sup>30</sup>

The call of Jesus is extremely serious, because it supposes a total roundabout turn in the life of a person. Following Jesus implies identifying ourselves with his mission, implies extending his reign of peace, love, holiness and justice for all. It involves learning to think like him and to feel like him.

Jesus did not avoid telling the truth, he confronted evil, deceit and injustice. Just to mention an example, when Jesus told the paralytic man "your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2: 5) before the leaders of organized religion, he was not only giving witness to his divinity, but he was paving his way to Golgotha, carrying his own cross. As Castillo states: "... the leaders and authorities of the Jewish people, when they saw the things he said and above all how he acted, formally decided to put an end to Jesus (Mark 3: 6, Luke 11: 53-54, 13:31; John 7: 19.26; 8:59), which he knew perfectly and so he announced to his own disciples (Mt. 16:21ff; 20: 18-19ff; Mc.10: 32-34ff).<sup>31</sup>

### 5. *Final reflections*

#### *Gospel of the cross or the gospel of success*

We live in Mesoamerica in the time of the success and prosperity gospel, of the ‘anointing’, of ‘power’, of the importance of ‘image’, of being ‘winners’, ‘champions’, ‘prosperous’, ‘head and no tail’, among others. We are in a historical moment in which we all want to resemble the Jesus of the triumphal entrance to Jerusalem (Matthew 21: 1-11) or the one of the mountain of the transfiguration (Matthew 17: 1-13). However, Paul reminds us that we

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<sup>30</sup> Agueda Vargas Cruzado (1990) *El discipulado: método bíblico para el crecimiento integral de la iglesia.* (Material inédito). Tesis de grado para optar el título de máster en Ciencias de la Religión. San José, Costa Rica: Seminario Nazareno de las Américas, p. 29-39.

<sup>31</sup> José M. Castillo. “Seguir a Jesús: por un cristianismo radical”. *Mercaba.org*. Sacramentos y seguimiento de Jesús. Consulted 29th of September, 2017 in: [http://www.mercaba.org/FICHAS/SACRAMENTOS/sa\\_castillo\\_05.htm](http://www.mercaba.org/FICHAS/SACRAMENTOS/sa_castillo_05.htm)

must be similar to Him (Jesus) in His death (Philippians 2: 4-8). Few however, are interested in resembling that Jesus.

What changes should we make in the way of thinking, of living as disciples to become faithful representatives of the gospel of the cross?

How do we correct these false teachings of the theology of prosperity that have permeated our congregations?

*Christians of the flesh or Christians of the Spirit*

We need a greater commitment to the life of holiness. As disciples of Christ we need to fight against the desires of the flesh that want to impose themselves on those of the Spirit. Desires that lead us to accommodate ourselves, to avoid situations or confrontations that may cause us harm, to believe that we have the right to ‘enjoy life’ by turning a blind eye to sin and the suffering that surrounds us.

How can we theologians help the church get back on track? How can we help each of the disciples of the new generations to live a holiness that is healing and transforming for themselves and their context?

What is the relationship between the sins of the flesh and corruption in the church (Galatians 5: 19-21, 1 John 2:16, Ephesians 2: 3)? What kind of corruption can church leaders fall into? How to we protect our leaders from the temptations of power related to the function of Christian leadership?

*To practice a biblical and Christ centered discipleship that mobilizes the church to serve the world.*

Many things have happened, generations have come and gone and paradigms changed in Mesoamerica since those first sightings of the cross. Today, for many Christians (both Roman Catholic and Evangelical), the cross is simply an element that is part of their dress code or a sort of protective amulet for their house or vehicle. Jesus died for our sins. That's true. But it is also equally true that Jesus died because he confronted the corruption of power. The ministry of Jesus, was really transformative, countercultural and revolutionary and therefore, highly dangerous.

Biblical and Christ centered discipleship should shake the church out of its comfort zone and out of its 'heavenly spirituality' and lead the church to serve people by transforming their communities.

How can we move from practicing a rationalistic discipleship to an existential, transformative and mobilizing one? How can we exchange the spiritualist paradigm for the paradigm of commitment to service to the world?

*A Church that fulfills the expectations of the new generations.*

Young people are waiting for a militant, dissenting, reactive church. We are losing the new generations that reject a church interested in keeping things as they are. There are still places in Mesoamerica where we insist on offering a single ministerial service opportunity (such as a pastoral ministry) and many young people become frustrated because they feel they are missing out if they do not have that call. Rather, we should ask ourselves, how can we help young people to see their careers as means to transform society?

*Taking up the cross is a personal decision.*

How much do we teach people what it would be like to take up the cross today? To be radical will involve denouncing violence, defending those who are attacked unjustly, taking the

side of the weakest, children, the elderly, the unprotected, etc. Ruth Padilla DeBorst describes the most vulnerable part of that society, as follows:

"The darkest feature of our beautiful continent is inequality. In no other region is the gap between rich and poor, so open as it is in Latin America. We claim the richest man on the face of the earth, the Mexican magnate Carlos Slim. And meanwhile, almost six out of ten children live and die in poverty. Two out of every five people living in extreme poverty are under twelve years of age. Four out of ten children are chronically malnourished. Girls have much less access to school than boys, so four out of ten cannot read. Half of the people who suffer from HIV AIDS are under fifteen years of age. And the probability that a young Latin American will be a victim of homicide is 70 times higher than for young people in countries like Greece, Hungary, England, Austria or Ireland. These are more than alarming statistics. Sex trafficking has reached unimaginable proportions: in the last fifty years, more girls have been killed than men who died in all the battles of the 20th century, just because they are girls. "<sup>32</sup>

What is the price that a person pays for condemning these things? They will not have more money or win friends. More likely, they will probably be 'in the sight' of the Central American gangs, drug cartels or human trafficking in Mexico, corrupt police, purchased judges or unscrupulous politicians almost everywhere. If we put ourselves in the place of those brothers and sisters who have been victimized and others who live under threat to their families, it seems difficult to believe that our 'prophetic voice' could deal with those issues.

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<sup>32</sup> Ruth Padilla DeBorst. "Dejen que los niños vengan a mi". Paper presented in "Now and Next" Theological Conference on Children. Johannesburgo, 2010. Consulted in: <https://es.scribd.com/document/144741736/Now-and-Next-Compendium-final-Aug-2011-pdf>

John Wesley said “the world is my parish.” ... How can we mobilize each Nazarene to carry their cross with dignity, so that they may respond to their personal call and become actively involved in the transformation of that place in the world where God send them to serve?

*Transformative leadership or conformist leadership.*

My observation in Mesoamerica is that the leadership of the evangelical church in general terms is of conformist type. What we do well is to preserve the status quo. We do not develop true discipleship on the road to the cross. We do not carry out real transformational leadership, like that of Jesus; we only put bandages on the wounds (and not that that's wrong, but is it enough?). There are some of the countries in our region, such as in Central America, where the percentage of evangelicals is high and growing, but with a tiny impact on the change of society.

Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, who was murdered in cold blood at mass in 1980, said in a homily a year before his death: "A sermon that does not point to sin is not a gospel sermon...When the Church hears the weeping of the oppressed it cannot but denounce the social structures that nourish and perpetuate the misery from which the cry comes." <sup>33</sup>

How do we Nazarenes see the involvement of our church members in political careers? What message are we communicating to our members about the value of investing life in professions related to service and public administration?

How can we change the paradigm that still exists in many churches that the only way to serve God is through the pastoral profession or intra-ecclesial leadership?

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<sup>33</sup> Valecillos, Ismael Noé. San Romero de América. Revista en línea Voz Insurgente. Fundación editorial Voz Insurgente, Marzo 2012. Consulted 2 October 2017 de: [https://issuu.com/vozinsurgente/docs/definitivo\\_voz\\_para\\_minci](https://issuu.com/vozinsurgente/docs/definitivo_voz_para_minci)



How can we help heal institutions damaged by corruption with a participatory presence from within and without? How can we change from being trainers of church leaders to being trainers of leaders for the context?