

“RESPONSE TO DEIRDRE BROWER LATZ AND RUBÉN FERNÁNDEZ”

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Introduction

It is my great pleasure to be invited to respond to these two significant papers, which deal with one of the most essential Christian themes: “What does it mean to be Christ-followers?” Even though Latz and Fernández address the issue in their own contexts, they offer valuable insights and inputs relevant to the other parts of the Global Church of the Nazarene. Here I will interact with the authors with reference to the core concept of our denomination, namely holiness.

The Prevalence of Inadequate Discipleship

We Christ-followers are called to grow into maturity, into the measure of the full stature of Jesus (Ephesians 4:13). In this life-long process of discipleship we are to truly make a difference in our community and beyond as God’s salt and light (Matthew 5:13-14). According to both Latz and Fernández, these sorts of faithful disciples of Christ are seldom found in their respective areas, which I think is the widespread phenomenon in the Christian world inclusive of Asia-Pacific Region. For instance, the Korean Church is also struggling with the continual increase of nominal and secular Christians.¹

Then, what has brought about the world-wide prevalence of unfaithful Christ-followers and inadequate discipleship? Latz and Fernández alike state that it basically stems from the failure to grasp the genuine meaning of the cross. Jesus invites his disciples to “take up their cross, and follow him” (Matthew 16:24). In Christian history, though, the spirit of the cross was twisted and tarnished in the middle of colonial and imperial missions. As Fernández rightly puts it, “through the ‘reducciones’ and the ‘encomiendas’ the Indians were subjugated and forced to work to enrich the conquistadores” (2). Latz also points out that “the cross has been, or is, appropriated for the enterprise of war, political rhetoric or violence perpetrated against others” (2). Furthermore, they indicate the contemporary attachment of the cross to “the gospel of success” (Fernández, 12) or “the domestication of faith and Christ’s claims” (Latz, 2).

¹Yoon-Shik Choi, *2020-2040 The Future Map of the Korean Church* (Seoul: Word of Life, 2013). Part I.

In this situation we are to recover the truest meaning of the cross indivisibly linked with discipleship. My belief is that holiness lies at the core spirit of the cross, which naturally calls for the understanding of discipleship in the light of personal and social holiness.

Genuine Discipleship as Personal Holiness

The first and foremost aspect of the cross is the invitation to personal piety toward the likeness of the Triune God who is holy (Leviticus 20:26). In this regard Heather Randell expresses: “We acknowledge that the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ provides for the remission of our sins, which creates awareness that a deep understanding of holiness is needed.”² According to Latz, the cross-shaped discipleship is “the call to a life-style of holiness...in constant growth in maturity” (5). She adds that “this discipleship is marked by self-denial...may challenge us to go against one’s own instincts, interests, ideas, whether of religion, security, well-being, comfort, peace, wealth, family or whatever other idols our particular societies construct”(6-7). Fernández also emphasizes “a different lifestyle” involving “a radical change in the way of thinking and acting...a desire to assimilate Jesus’ new perspective on life...a sincere commitment to live in this new life” (9-10).

It is true that genuine discipleship needs the total orientation of one’s life to Jesus. Just forming a personal relationship with Christ is not enough. Such a relationship needs to be continually deepened and strengthened, as the Apostle Paul confesses that “inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). To be Christ-followers means to die unto sin and live into holiness every day. The lack of this perspective results in the mass-producing of habitual Sunday Christians “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5). There is an urgent need for the change of our perception on discipleship from static to dynamic. It is the “present continuous following without an end point” (Latz, 5), which demands that we should encourage fellow believers to have a daily Quiet Time while developing and distributing Quiet Time resources reflecting our Nazarene beliefs in contemporary modes.

Genuine Discipleship as Social Holiness

Next, the cross-oriented discipleship takes on the social and corporate aspect beyond the personal and individual one. It was John Wesley who discovered this biblical concept of holiness. Notably, he claimed: “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social, no holiness but social

² Heather Randell, *A Quest for Holiness* ([Philadelphia, PA: Xlibris, 2013), 11.

holiness. ‘Faith working by love’ is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.”³ In this vein Latz aligns “cross-shaped following” with “radical, subversive action for the sake of others...familiar with suffering and solidarity, against injustice in whatever forms it is found” (7-8). Fernández also maintains that “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” (14).

Indeed, the ultimate litmus test of genuine discipleship is social holiness. We are called to be salt and light in the world, advancing God’s Kingdom of peace and justice. During his ministry Jesus showed great concern for marginalized, disadvantaged, impoverished, discriminated, and oppressed people. He even identified himself with “one of the least” in the society and urged his disciples to care for the poorest and weakest (Matthew 25:40). Since its inception, the Church of the Nazarene has engaged in compassionate ministries meeting human practical needs. As Latz mentions, “engaging creatively with the world, its needs, realities, and the dynamics of oppression is in keeping with our shared ancestry in faith” (9). Nowadays poverty and injustice are still widely prevalent on the face of the earth. In the case of Asia-Pacific Region many parts are suffering from economic inequality and political instability. Therefore, we need to reinforce our precious heritage, compassionate ministries. In doing so, we should not only reach out to help the poor and needy but also confront the social and structural forces of evil. As a prophetic voice, we can fulfill Lord’s prayer: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

Conclusion

As stated above, genuine discipleship is characterized by personal and social holiness. In person we are to pursue holiness day after day with a view to Christ-like maturity. We are in a life-long process of spiritual growth, which requires our daily walk with God’s Word and humble dependence on God’s Spirit. In addition, we are to practice social holiness in this sinful world of poverty and injustice. Our unity with Christ unquestionably invites our solidarity with the poor and oppressed, which leads us to live as change agents to transform society.

³ John Wesley, *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M.* (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2011), 593.

Once again, I wish to express my sincere gratitude for the significant contribution made by Latz and Fernández. They remind us that in genuine discipleship personal and social holiness ought to go hand in hand. Let us work together for this God-given task!