

THE SANCTIFICATION EXPERIENCE AND CHRISTIAN AUTHENTICITY

(Reaction to the paper by Gabriel López)

By J. Victor Riofrío

Country of Origin: Ecuador

Serving in: Argentina

The experience of sanctification is just not a mere ideology that we repeat in our regions, as has been well demonstrated by Rev. Gabriel López. He has correctly affirmed that the experience of entire sanctification is authentically Christian **because:**

1. It is firmly rooted in the Scriptures.
2. It has been taught as a Biblical doctrine by the Church throughout time.
3. It has been and is being a reality in the life of Christians in all contexts and times.
4. The Christian character of those who have experienced sanctification shows in fruits of humility, simplicity, purity, patience, total love for God and neighbor, power to testify and to resist evil, and in a practical ethic that governs all social relations.
5. The testimony of a community is convincing and backs up the life of those who are entirely sanctified.

Also, Rev. López has set forth three proposals for resolving the tensions if the doctrine of sanctification has been well understood in Ibero-America and where we have failed in correctly spreading this doctrine in our context. He proposes:

1. To do a re-reading of the doctrine and life of holiness from the Wesleyan tradition, with charismatic and antinomianist influences.
2. Emphasize the preaching and teaching of the need to demonstrate with life the doctrine of entire sanctification.
3. Promote discipleship projects for those who have been entirely sanctified.

To everything already presented, I would like to add some commentaries and observations. The theme of the paper itself is very suggestive and has a logical sequence (*The sanctification experience and Christian authenticity*). If one speaks from experience, one refers to what has been lived. This someone has made entire sanctification real in his life. This entire sanctification that this someone has experienced is authentic in the way that it is evidenced by the style of Christ. The Apostle John has said: “But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him **must walk as Jesus did.**” (1 John 2:5-6, emphasis added). The declaration of the General Board of Superintendents of the Church of the Nazarene states:

God, who is holy, calls us to a life of holiness. We believe that the Holy Spirit seeks to do in us a second work of grace, called by various terms including “entire sanctification” and “baptism with the Holy Spirit”—cleansing us from all

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sin; renewing us in the image of God; empowering us to live God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves; and producing in us the **character of Christ**. Holiness in the life of believers is most clearly understood as **Christlikeness**¹ (emphasis added).

It is also good to take into account the definition that John Wesley makes about sanctification to recognize once again, that **to be like Christ is the most authentic evidence of having been sanctified:**

... Gospel holiness is no less than the image of God stamped on the heart; it is no other than the whole mind which was in Christ Jesus: it consists of all heavenly affections and tempers mingled together in one. It implies such a continual, thankful love to Him who hath not withheld from us his Son, his only Son, as makes it natural, and in a manner necessary to us, to love every child of man; and fills us “with bowels of mercies, kindness, gentleness, long-suffering:” It is such a love of God as teaches us to be blameless in all manner of conversation; as enables us to present our souls and bodies, all we are and all we have, all our thoughts, words, and actions, a continual sacrifice to God, acceptable through Christ Jesus.²

So that holiness is a gift of the grace of God under the power of the Holy Spirit and not a result of human effort.

Once we understand that the experience of sanctification is authentic when one lives “the style of Jesus”, then it is up to us to respond to some questions that we must ask in the context where we minister: How do I love God in the style of Jesus? How do I live the life of Christ? What personal and community implications are there of being baptized with the Holy Spirit?

In an attempt to do “theology on the way”, and not just “theology in the balcony”, permit me to suggest certain counsels—adding to the guidelines that Rev. López offers—that can help us “land” on Ibero-American soil with an authentically Biblical and Christian message of sanctification, as a real experience for “the here and now”, but also for “tomorrow” and for “the not yet”:

1. *Learn from Christ’s spirituality.* What we have neglected, as Ibero-American Nazarenes, are the basic spiritual disciplines, including: prayer, Biblical exegesis, fasting, preaching the daily ethical life, practical teaching, dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit and participation in public worship. It is urgent that we return to the essential.
2. *Preach all the time, as Jesus, about the ethical life and about sanctification.* Wesley said: “Where Christian perfection is not strongly and explicitly preached, there is seldom any remarkable blessing from God; and, consequently, little addition to the society.”³

¹ International Church of the Nazarene, *Christian, Holiness, Missional: A Living Faith: What Nazarenes Believe* (n.d.).

² John Wesley, *Works* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1986), VI:71-72.

³ Wesley, *Works*, XII:270-271.

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3. *Testify with your life of being sanctified.* Jesus said, “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:16, 20); and Paul specified which should be the fruits of a life that is entirely sanctified: “...fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...” (Galatians 5:22-23). But this experience should not be limited to the personal area, subjective and internal; but that has its external expression in the life of the person that results in the transformation of the society. But for this experience to be real it must be founded on Scripture and must follow the example of Jesus.
4. *Be compassionate as Christ was.* The context of our ministries demands that we show exteriorly the concrete acts of the sanctification experience. Wesley explained this very well: “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. ‘This commandment have we from Christ, that he who loves God, love his brother also.’”⁴
5. *Be holy in daily life, as Christ was.* Jesus was honest, integral, servant, always told the truth, humble, on the side of the poor, coherent between what he said and what he did, sincere, did not make exception of individuals, committed to social transformation.

One of the concerns that have remained in the minds of ministers here in Ibero-America has been, how to formulate our own holiness theology, without distancing ourselves from our Biblical and historical roots? To make a simple proposal, only as a start to think about this issue, we suggest:

1. *Do not distance ourselves from Biblical and historical roots.* Being that what we are interested in is explaining is the authenticity of sanctification in the life of a believer, it is important to be completely sure that the doctrine that is formulated is also authentic. Wesley was very clear in affirming that a doctrine is authentic if it has been founded on at least four sources (Wesleyan quadrilateral): (1) The **Holy Scriptures**, which are the source of Christian doctrines⁵, (2) the same that are confirmed in **personal experience**⁶, (3) are corroborated and ordered by **human reason**⁷, and (4) it is corrected or complemented by **ecclesiastical tradition**.
2. *Through the programs of theological education, teach to do Biblical theology of holiness, from the own context, to clergy and lay persons.* Of course in this will help the application of the Wesleyan quadrilateral. This implies revising and rejecting imprecise or unauthentic doctrinal declarations regarding entire sanctification that causes confusion, frustration or dual behaviors.⁸

⁴ Wesley, *Works*, XIV:321.

⁵ Wesley, *Works* XII:136.

⁶ Wesley, *Works* XII:133. “Personal experience” is understood not only as what the believer experiences internally, but also his or her social experience, that includes behavior and experience that is perceived by others.

⁷ Wesley, *Works* XIII:9-12.

⁸ For example, the term “eradication of original sin” has been badly used, creating intellectual confusion over what change actually occurs in the heart of the believer, and has also resulted in frustration on the real experience level. The definitions of Christ and Wesley previously cited, simply show us that the sanctified believer is “cleansed”—better than saying “eradicated”—from original sin (“the desire to be like God”) and filled with the love of God to be

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3. *Educate the children, from the home and in Sunday school, about the doctrine of holiness.* For this is will be necessary, the same that when we teach about salvation from an early age, to teach the doctrine of sanctification using sure and intelligible terms for our context.⁹
4. *Establish a program of intentional discipleship, about how the entirely sanctified life should be.* We must help, in all levels of the Christian life, to correct those hypocrisies in those that have declared they are “sanctified” but live in sin. We must help preachers to be the first to live in holiness, so that they can insist that their congregations also live it.¹⁰
5. *Promote the writing of article, books and other material from our contexts about the doctrine of Biblical, historical and practical holiness.* It would be interesting to assign well-known professors, pastors and preachers in Ibero-America to write periodically about holiness from their place of ministry.

Dying to selfishness and living for the kingdom of love, of justice and peace, we will find our true identity and authenticity of being sanctified.

To protect Christian authenticity of entire sanctification, it is urgent to form a upright character in the style of Jesus, and guard, day by day, to live our life in accordance to this character, that demands from us maturity and coherence between what we think, what we are and how we act, even in the smallest details because he who builds his house on the sand can only wait for its destruction. Great failures always infallibly begin with the loosening of the little things: with insincerity, duplicity in life, with separating oneself from the will of God, as the only infallible and secure compass to arrive at the right port, until the end of our life.

like Christ. Sin is always besieges the believer while this world exists, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, the entirely sanctified Christian can defeat it.

⁹ For example, the terms “instantaneity” or “secondness” cause confusion. Because of this, at time Christians believe, mistakenly, that sanctification is outside of the doctrine of salvation; far from being the culmination, it is only the beginning of a life of constant Christian growth towards Christian maturity.

¹⁰ To avoid hypocritical behavior implies avoiding speaking falsehoods regarding erroneous formulations about the experience of holiness that leads to the person’s own frustration and that of others. It is better to demonstrate more and more fully the holy character that is based on the truth and intellectual authenticity and of life (expressed in humility, recognition and continual rejection of sin in the person’s own life, and the constant desire of be more like Christ).