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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Although written for four different courses and to address particular issues, the following four essays revolve around the theme of discipleship. The general question which the essays tackle is “What does it mean to be a disciple?” This, of course, is not a new question. We can quote many lines from Scripture to answer this question. What this paper seeks to do, besides deepening what we already know about discipleship both from formal studies and from daily living, is to ask the question in the context of our contemporary understanding and experience of ourselves as human persons, our community as Church and our world as ever changing. Hence, the general question becomes “How do I become a disciple today?”

To be a disciple is to follow Jesus on the way of the cross. Usually, the would-be disciple begins with a good deal of enthusiasm and idealism like Peter, the leader of the Twelve. However, when one starts to experience the pains and sufferings of the cross, one is tempted to give up altogether or to make compromises along the way. How does one become a faithful disciple, aware of one’s human weaknesses and limitations that can discourage the disciple from carrying through to the end? What models of discipleship are available for the follower of Jesus? Hence, the first essay explores the problem of crisis in discipleship and the models offered by Jesus in the Gospel of Mark.
The journey of the disciple begins with Jesus calling people he knows to be capable of failure and frustration. But as He calls, He also empowers the disciple to face the tasks and challenges of a disciple's life. This power is experienced even in the midst of one's weaknesses and limitations. The disciple realizes that Jesus has made good His promise that His presence will unfailingly remain with His followers even as they are sent to the most difficult missions in the most adverse circumstances. The second essay looks at how this power is experienced precisely in one's powerlessness.

An important aspect of discipleship is its communal dimension. Christ did not call only one or two people to be His followers. He called several people and He formed them into a group which He sought to be characterized by loving and humble service to each other. As Catholic Christians, we hold that this small group of people gathered by Christ eventually became the Church. Hence, the Church is a community of disciples among whom service to one another is the primary mode of relationship. The third essay examines the meaning and implications of being known as a Servant Church.

The challenge of discipleship confronts a follower of Christ in a specific situation the circumstances of which are peculiar to that time and place. One is therefore expected to respond to that challenge in accordance with one's self-understanding of discipleship and with one's best evaluation of the situation. The fourth essay studies how one group of people handled the situation which called for a response according to the demands of discipleship. The essay tackles the problem of discipleship in a changing world.
Scope and Limitations

The scope of the first essay is the area of the problem of discipleship in the Gospel of Mark. The paper limits itself to the discussion of the crisis in discipleship and the models of discipleship in the Gospel of Mark. The essay begins by giving some background information about the Gospel of Mark. It then presents how Jesus teaches the disciples about the nature and meaning of discipleship through the use of models. It examines the process of the disciples' failure to grasp the teaching of Jesus, how they actually failed to follow Jesus, but were eventually restored as disciples.

The scope of the second essay is the area of exegetical analysis of 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. The essay limits itself to explaining how the grace which God grants to St. Paul in answer to his prayer is experienced as power made perfect in weakness. It looks at the context of Paul's experience of God's power in his weakness and the value which Paul accords to the weakness and suffering he encountered in his ministry. The essay underlines faith in the Crucified and Risen Lord as the basis for Paul's boasting in his weaknesses and sufferings.

The scope of the third essay is the area of theological discussion on the meaning and significance of the Servant Model of the Church. The essay limits itself to the exploration of the basis of this model and the possibility of reconceptualizing it in the light of Vatican II's understanding of the mystery of the Church. The essay then presents how a dialogue between the Servant Model and the other models of the Church can aid towards a more adequate grasp of the identity and mission of the Church. By way of conclusion, the essay proposes some points for reflection and action.
The scope of the fourth essay is the area of the question of how the Church’s self-understanding affects the way it deals with crisis situations and how it reacts to changes in the world in which it finds itself. The essay limits itself to the analysis of the Friar Memorial of 1898, an important document issued towards the end of Spanish sovereignty in the Philippines. The essay introduces the document by presenting its authors, addressee and contents. It then gives a brief summary of the document and analyzes it according to the paradigm of its authors. The essay concludes by raising some questions that invite the reader to reflect on the Church more than a century from the publication of the Memorial.

Significance of the Study

Each of the four essays examines an aspect related to the theme of discipleship, the following of Jesus, especially in the context of contemporary Church and society.

The first essay deals with the models of discipleship as used by Jesus in teaching his disciples. It also tackles the problem of failure and restoration in discipleship. The essay shows that while the disciples did not grasp the meaning of discipleship and failed to follow Jesus to the end, they were restored to discipleship after the Resurrection. By taking note of the open-ending of Mark’s Gospel, the essay invites the reader to check whether he identifies with the values of the disciples or of Jesus.

The second essay presents an exegesis of 2 Cor. 12:9-10 which speaks of Paul’s claim that he experiences God’s grace as power made perfect in weakness. It discusses how Paul arrives at the conclusion that such is his experience of God’s grace. The essay then demonstrates how Paul, as a result, rejoices and boasts in his weaknesses and
sufferings as vehicles of God’s grace working in him. It points to the Crucified Lord as Paul’s inspiration in proclaiming that in his weakness is his strength. Hence, the essay tackles the problem of weakness and suffering which is very much part of the experience of following Jesus.

The third essay deals with the understanding of the Servant Model of the Church in the light of Vatican II. The essay shows how the example of Jesus the Servant of Yahweh, whose life and ministry were fully consumed by the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God, is the pattern of the servanthood of the Church. It then demonstrates how the interface of the Servant model of the Church with the other models urges the Church to reexamine its life in the areas of inculturation and work for the poor, training and life of its ministers, ecumenism, and interreligious dialogue.

The fourth essay, through an analysis of an important document at the turn of the century, reflects on how the Church handles the problem of power and change, particularly the loss of power in a period of change. It examines how the institutional Church suffers from the tendency to hold on to power when threatened by the possibility of losing it. The essay studies the document not simply from the point of view of history, but also from that of ecclesiology. Hence, it tackles the questions of the Church’s identity and mission, its relationship with the State, and its response to societal changes. The essay ends by reflecting on whether the Church, especially in the Philippines, has learned a new way of handling the abovementioned issue a hundred years after the Memorial.
Methodology

Each of the four essays begins with an introduction which presents the problem or issue to be addressed, as well as the significance of that particular study. Various sources used as references, like Sacred Scriptures, Church documents and theologians’ writings are cited accordingly. Each essay presents the context of the issue in its specific field of study. Then it develops the thesis presented at the beginning of the essay. In the concluding part of each essay, an attempt is made to draw out the implications and applications of the findings and conclusions made in the study to the contemporary situation of the Church and its members.

In the general conclusion, the main points of each essay are summarized. Recommendations are made as regards concrete ways in which the Church can be a community of disciples faithful to the example of Jesus the Servant and effective in responding to the challenges of the contemporary world in which it finds itself. These recommendations are based on the implications drawn from the theme of discipleship as discussed in each paper.

Definition of Terms

The terms to be used will be defined within each of the essays.

Related Literature

Related literature can be found in the individual bibliographies of each of the essays.