DISCIPLESHIP AND SUFFERING

Posted on September 30, 2020 by Eddie

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Category: Observations

I love this paper that my friend Israel Olofinjana has recently published on the Lausanne Movement website.

> *The crucial question I have been wrestling with is, if Jesusâ€™ way of life includes suffering and sacrifice, how can our whole-life discipleship revolve around these concepts? We want to be followers of Jesus but only when it is convenient or when we are benefitting from the relationship. However, Jesusâ€™ imperative calling to his disciples was: if anyone wants to follow him, they must deny themselves and carry their cross (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). Denying ourselves in a consumeristic, materialistic, and individualistic society would involve suffering and carrying the cross and would mean we are ready to sacrifice to the point of death for the sake of Godâ€™s kingdom.*
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> *The implication of this is that if our discipleship programmes and events do not prepare Christians to understand and live with suffering and sacrifice, they will only follow Jesus when all is going well. The result is that when things get really tough, they will walk out on God. On the other hand, if we follow Jesus as the only lifestyle and not as an optional lifestyle when it is convenient and comfortable, we put every part of our mind, will, and emotions and all aspects of our livesâ€"job, family, education, hobbies, financesâ€"before God to use as he pleases and whenever he calls us.*

Israel makes the point that believers from the majority world have lived experiences which can be very helpful in this situation.

> *The ideas of suffering and sacrifice are relative. The suffering of Majority World Christians who are refugees, asylum seekers, and economic migrants will be very different from that of white middle-class European Christians. I am not advocating that Africans, Asians, or Latin Americans have a monopoly on pain and trauma. What I am highlighting is the fact that the histories of some Majority World (Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean) countries demonstrate that certain regions of the world have suffered from systemic and institutional injustices like the slave-trade, indentured servitude, imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Therefore, this makes Majority World Christians accustomed to suffering and pain. In addition, the legacies of these institutional injustices continue in the lives of so many people from the Majority World.*

> *Majority World Christians who have relocated to Europe or North America through various migratory factors come with this notion and experience of discipleship. Diaspora Christians therefore understand from first-hand experience that whole-life discipleship entails different kinds of suffering and demands sacrifice. If the church is going to do discipleship and mission well in this coronavirus climate, we need to grasp Jesusâ€™ understanding of suffering and sacrifice. Part of that mission will mean using the notion in Liberation Theology of intentionally responding in solidarity with the poor who are more affected during this crisis.*

I am aware that some people will react negatively at the mere mention of liberation theology. However, I would argue that much of the response to the coronavirus pandemic in the west has demonstrated that our theology is inadequate to deal with suffering and hardship. The current situation has shown that we need to learn from others, even if we do not adopt the totality of their views.