A Response to "Discipleship as Process: The Manager's Role in Connecting People to Faith"

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ABSTRACT: McMahone renews attention to workplace disciple-making. His broad understanding of discipleship and his historical and contemporary applications serve as kindling for additional inquiries into the nature of discipleship and disciple-making, with multiple avenues appearing for exploring the contours of witness and possibly broadening evangelism to include restoration and transformation.[2]

Scripture teaches that the aroma of Christ is divinely spread from individuals (2 Corinthians 2:14-16), presumably through virtues, actions, and words. Example and mentoring are two ways Christ's aroma diffuses in the workplace and Dr. Marty McMahone explores both in his article "Discipleship as Process." I applaud his broadening the scholarly aperture on workplace disciple-making and offer a few comments and potential follow-up questions for research, sparked by the article.

Workplace disciple-making is not new. It has been advocated by many individuals and in multiple movements. Its contemporary presence was enough to convince Miller (2007) to include an "Evangelism Type" as one of four expressions of workplace faith. Yet faith and work discussions sometimes shy away from disciple-making. Several *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* articles explore how Christian discipleship shapes managerial style and business practice, but McMahone sharpens the focus to disciple-making. So, with history in mind, the topic begs the question:

- How do various faith and work outreach movements (e.g., British industrial mission, workplace chaplaincy, welfare work, business as mission, the worker-priest movement) compare in context, approach, and outcome regarding disciple-making?

McMahone asserts that discipleship includes all influences used by God to call persons to him. This inclusive definition broadens post-conversion discipleship to include pre-belief influences, proclamation, new birth, and *theosis*. McMahone's view is consistent with those of others, such as McGever (2018), who views conversion as "…a vector, having a continued velocity and direction toward Christian holiness and the restora-tion of the image of God in the life of the believer" (p. 41). Redefining the scope of discipleship does more than adjust a definition; it reaffirms that many influences—including a manager's virtues, actions, and words—can be used by God over time to impact the discipleship journey of co-workers and oneself.

Although many managers neglect mentoring (Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002; Wallo, Ellström, & Kock, 2013), a manager's tacit impact on others can be significant—whether it be faithful or hypocritical. McMahone reviews five virtues, principles, and practices which spread the aroma of Christ. In this regard,

- How thoroughly have virtuous and hypocritical behaviors of Christian managers been explored (cf. Alford & Naughton, 2001; Lee, 2018; Moberg, 1987), and what outcomes have been identified?

- How does the extensive research on values and virtues in organizations provide insight for Christian disciple-makers in the workplace (cf. Cameron, 2003)?

McMahone's definition of discipleship underscores the work of God in disciple-making, yet transcendent elements, such as a recognition of God's presence at work or image in others, are often difficult to see by working Christians (Lynn, Naughton & VanderVeen, 2011). Because a predicate to disciple-making in any form requires remaining connected to Christ (John 15:4-6), scholars may ask:

- How do Christian disciple-makers remain aware of and abide in God in the workplace (cf. Lecourt & Pauchant, 2011)?

McMahone recommends that a Christian leader might introduce faith "by praying routinely about small events, sharing God's wisdom on difficult decisions or helping to show the relevance of Christ's teachings to day-to-day problems" (p. 10). Indeed, some corporate executives sponsor Bible studies, including leaders at Walmart who, for a time, presented a lesson or testimony to 200-300 employees gathered for a monthly "Daily Walk" luncheon. Yet *kerygma* may be limited, and deeply spiritual leaders may faithfully and meaningfully communicate without direct reference to religion—former UN Secretary Dag Hammarskjöld is a possible exemplar of the latter (Lipsey, 2011).

It is not illegal to proselytize in the workplace, but multiple potential hazards exist, including impacting social relationships, the work environment, and work performance (Beane, Ponnapalli & Viswesvaran, 2017; Beatty & Kirby, 2006; Rudin & Harshman, 2004), displacing occupational responsibilities with non-work activities and manipulating or instrumentalizing others (Lips-Wiersma, Dean & Fornaciari, 2009). A solid foundation exists, but researchers might further explore:

- What are the contours—the motivations, expressions, hazards, and abuses—of religious proclamation and proselytization in the workplace (cf. Ghumman et al., 2013)?

Some writers go farther than McMahone to include any outward movement of God's mission as evangelism (Alford & Naughton, 2001; Paul VI, 1975; Tizon, 2018). This view widens discipleship to include efforts of human flourishing within the rhythms and structures of work, organization, and commerce. Rather than targeting a utopian human creation or a reconstruction of society, this expansive inclusion envisions a life of discipleship which supports restoration broadly. Such an understanding might employ theological concepts such as the common good; the restoration of all things; and transformational, holistic, or integral mission as a foundation for discipleship, "teaching them to obey everything" (Matthew 28:20 New Revised Standard Version). A potential research question could be:

- Might a workplace model be developed which reflects holistic theologies of reconciliation, restoration, and the common good?

From a pedagogical perspective, McMahone states that disciple-making perspectives should "help business professors think about how they can help future leaders think about the potential of their future role as business mentors to move people along the spectrum of discipleship" (p. 3). He does not develop this notion further, thus, future inquirers might explore:

- How might students be inspired and taught to critically consider disciple-making in the workplace?

Finally, McMahone suggests that Christian disciples are on an ongoing journey of formation themselves. As co-pilgrims, humbly growing and being formed in Christian vocation (Lynn, 2006), we might question:

- How can respectful dialogue be taught and practiced, particularly in pluralistic and secular environments (cf. Phipps & Matkin, 2014)?

- What spiritual disciplines and communal and other supports strengthen disciple-makers?

I am thankful to Dr. McMahone for bringing renewed attention to discipleship and disciple-making and believe that pursuing some of the branches of research I have identified would be valuable for Christian disciples who are learning to work, confessionally.

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FOOTNOTES

[1] Thanks to Tim Johnston and Richard S. Lytle for their dialogue and insights.

[2] I use the term "disciple-making" herein to refer to helping people to trust and follow Jesus and "discipleship" to mean following Jesus.

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