

Holistic Mission

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There is general consensus among evangelical Christians all over the world that the church is by nature missionary. But what does that mean? How is the mission of the church defined? What is included in mission? Can mission be circumscribed to transcultural missionary efforts for the sake of the planting of churches in “the regions beyond?” Should mission be identified with evangelism being understood as “the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God?”¹ Or should mission be equated with social transformation resulting from God’s action in history through human agency, which may or may not include the church, as has often been advocated in ecumenical circles?

No attempt can be made to answer these questions adequately within the confines of this paper. Enough can be said, however, to account for the description of mission as *holistic* and to illustrate in practical ways this important concept: a concept that has become increasingly accepted among evangelicals, especially in the Two-thirds World, since the International Congress on World Evangelization, held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974.

What Is Holistic Mission?

In a way, the adjective *holistic* only intends to correct a one-sided understanding of mission that majors on either the vertical or the horizontal dimension of mission. The desire to bring both dimensions together in a biblical synthesis was expressed by the late W. A. Visser t’Hooft in an opening speech at the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1968) in the following words:

I believe that, with regard to the great tensions between the vertical interpretation of the gospel as essentially concerned with God’s saving action in the life of individuals, and the horizontal interpretation of it as mainly concerned with human relationships in the world, we must get out of that rather primitive oscillating movement of going from one extreme to the other, which is not worthy of a movement which by its nature seeks to embrace the truth of the gospel in its fullness. A Christianity which has lost its vertical dimension has lost its salt and is not only insipid in itself, but useless for the world. But a Christianity which would use the vertical preoccupation as a means to escape from its responsibility for and in the common life of man is a denial of the incarnation, of God’s love for the world manifested in Christ.²

The same aspiration for a more comprehensive view of mission became evident in evangelical circles as early as 1966, at the Wheaton Congress on the Church’s Worldwide Mission co-sponsored by the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (EFMA) and the Interdenominational Foreign Missions Association (IFMA). Since then it grew consistently throughout the years to such an extent that by the time of the Lausanne Congress, the statement could be made in paragraph 5 of the *Lausanne Covenant* that

Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of

¹ John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 20.

² Norman Goodall, ed., *The Uppsala 68 Report* (Geneva: WCC, 1968), 317-318.

our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread his righteousness in the midst of the unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.³

Such a statement makes clear that, as Rodger C. Bassham has pointed out, the Lausanne Congress “produced some marked changes in evangelical mission theology....through broadening the focus of the Congress from evangelism to mission.”⁴ These “marked changes in evangelical mission theology” are well illustrated by the “change of mind” that the well-known British writer and speaker John Stott experienced between the Berlin Congress (1966) and the Lausanne Congress. In his opening address on “The Biblical Basis of Evangelism”⁵ at the memorable 1974 Congress, the well-known British author claimed that “the mission of the church arises from the mission of God” and should, therefore, follow the incarnational model of Jesus Christ.⁶ On that basis he argued that “mission...describes everything the church is sent into the world to do,” as those who are sent by Jesus Christ even as the Son was sent by the Father, that is, “to identify with others as he identified with us” and to serve as “He gave himself in selfless service for others.”⁷ In his expanded version of the Lausanne address published in 1975 under the title *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, Stott candidly confessed that at the 1966 Congress he had sided with the many who, from the emphasis that most versions of the Great Commission give to evangelism, deduce that “the mission of the church...is exclusively a preaching, converting and teaching mission.” Then he added:

Today, however, I would express myself differently. It is not just that the commission includes the duty to teach converts everything Jesus had previously commanded (Matthew 28.20), and that social responsibility is among the things which Jesus commanded. I now see more clearly that not only the consequences of the commission but the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus.⁸

³ John Stott, Christian Mission in the Modern World (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 24.

⁴ Roger C. Bassham, Mission Theology: 1948-1975 Years of Worldwide Creative Tension: Ecumenical, Evangelical, and Roman Catholic (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library), 231.

⁵ J. D. Douglas, ed., Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications), 65-78.

⁶ J. D. Douglas, ed., Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications), 66-67.

⁷ J. D. Douglas, ed., Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications).

⁸ John Stott, Christian Mission in the Modern World (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 23.

The affirmation that “the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility” seems to suggest a real integration of the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of mission, which is at the very heart of *holistic* mission. This approach, however, did not become part and parcel of the *Lausanne Covenant*, which in paragraph 6 qualified paragraph 5 by stating that “In the church’s mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary,”⁹ thus supporting the two-mandate approach to mission-evangelism *and* social action. In contrast, the holistic approach was forcefully expressed by the so-called Radical Discipleship group, an *ad hoc* group of about four hundred participants who met spontaneously during the Congress. Their document on “Theological Implications of Radical Discipleship,”¹⁰ which may be regarded as the first world-wide evangelical statement on holistic mission, affirms, among other things, that

There is no biblical dichotomy between the Word spoken and the Word made flesh in the lives of God’s people. Men will look as they listen and what they see must be at one with what they hear. The Christian community must chatter, discuss and proclaim the gospel; it must express the gospel in its life as the new society, in its sacrificial service of others as a genuine expression of God’s love, in its prophetic exposing and opposing of all demonic forces that deny the Lordship of Christ and keep men less than human; in its pursuit of real justice for all men; in its responsible and caring trusteeship of God’s creation and its resources.¹¹

This definition of holistic mission as including what the church is, what the church does, and what the church says can hardly be improved. The atmosphere generated by the Lausanne Congress has been described as “euphoric,” particularly for relief and development workers who “could now appeal to the evangelical constituency as family, without the fear of either being rebuked for preaching the ‘social gospel’ or being charged of compromising on evangelism.”¹² It must be said, however, that after the Lausanne Congress the holistic approach to mission was very much under pressure in conservative evangelical circles. Thus, for instance, the Consultation on World Evangelization (COWE), held in Pattaya, Thailand, in 1980, under the sponsorship of the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization (LCWE), led many observers to ask how seriously the organizers had taken the statement made in the *Lausanne Covenant* on the importance of both evangelism and social responsibility. Their concern was voiced by Waldron Scott in the following terms:

It seems unlikely... that the Lausanne Committee will be a major force in the 1980s for promoting a style of evangelism based on a holistic theology and a clear-sighted vision of the definitive contextual realities of

⁹ John Stott, ed., Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement 1974-1989 (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1996), 28.

¹⁰ J. D. Douglas, ed., Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications), 1294-1296.

¹¹ J. D. Douglas, ed., Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications), 1294.

¹² Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, eds., The Church in Response to Human Need (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans), ix.

the decade. Within evangelical circles we will have to look to groups other than LCWE for leadership along these lines.¹³

In spite of all the resistance to a holistic approach to mission, the position expressed by the Radical Discipleship group in 1974 was echoed in various important documents drafted in the eighties, including the following three:

1. The “Statement on Simple Lifestyle,” which came out of the Consultation on this topic, held in Hoddesdon, England, in March 1980, convened by the LCWE Theology and Education Group and the Ethics and Society Unit of the World Evangelical Fellowship.
2. The “Statement of Concern for the Future of the LCWE,” signed by approximately two hundred participants at the Pattaya Consultation of LCWE, in June 1980.
3. The Statement on “Transformation: The Church in Response to Human Need,” which summarized the conclusions of the Consultation on this topic, held in Wheaton, Illinois, in June 1983, under the sponsorship of the World Evangelical Fellowship. One may disagree with David Bosch’s view regarding this document, that “for the first time in an official statement emanating from an international evangelical conference the perennial dichotomy (between evangelism and social responsibility) was overcome,”¹⁴ but there is no exaggeration in saying that this Statement is a historical milestone in the understanding of holistic mission from an evangelical perspective.

After the Wheaton ‘83 Statement, no significant advance was made in evangelical circles with regard to the definition of holistic mission. This must not be interpreted, however, as a lack of interest in the subject. Rather, as a result of the amazing paradigmatic shift in the concept of mission which had taken place during the previous decade, the moment for the *practice* of holistic mission had arrived. Observers of this phenomenon could speak of a “rise in Christian conscience” leading to “the emergence of a dramatic renewal movement in today’s church” (Jim Wallis). Hundreds of Christian faith-based organizations were now engaged in God’s work everywhere, to such an extent that in 1983 it could be stated that “The proliferation of para-local church movements and organizations will be one of the distinguishing hallmarks of the last half of the twentieth century.”¹⁵

An outstanding illustration of the process of change in perspective which took place especially after the Lausanne Congress is the formation of the Micah Network, whose First International Conference was held in Oxford, England, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The Micah Network has grown into a world-wide group of more than 250 evangelical Christian relief, development, and justice agencies. At the Oxford meeting Micah adopted, as a matter of practicality in network communication, a distinctive term to refer to the Biblical model of mission that it advocates, namely, “integral mission,” which was understood as pointing to “the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.” It went on to explain that it

is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has

¹³ Quoted by Orlando E. Costas, Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 154.

¹⁴ John Stott, ed., Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement 1974-1989 (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1996), 407.

¹⁵ Jerry White quoted in Wesley K. Willmer, J. David Schmidt and Martyn Smith, The Prospering Parachurch: Enlarging the Boundaries of God’s Kingdom (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), xii.

social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world we betray the word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task.¹⁶

The Biblical Basis for Holistic Mission

For a proper integration of the various constituent elements of the mission of the church at least three approaches are possible. These three approaches differ only in their focus and are really different parts of one picture.

The first approach takes as its starting point the purpose of God, which embraces the whole of creation. The biblical message of salvation points towards “new heavens and a new earth” and that means that we cannot view salvation as separated from creation. The purpose of salvation is not merely endless life of individual souls in heaven but the transformation of the totality of creation, including humankind, to the glory of God. A person’s conversion to Christ is the eruption of the new creation into this world: it transforms the person, in anticipation of the end time, in a wonderful display of God’s eschatological purpose to make all things new.

This way of looking at conversion has important consequences for evangelism. The purpose of the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ is not to change people into religious individuals who cut themselves off from the world in order to enjoy the benefits of their salvation. Rather, the purpose of evangelism is to constitute communities that confess Jesus Christ as the Lord of the totality of life and live in the light of that confession; communities that do not only talk about God’s love but also demonstrate it in concrete terms, through good works which God prepared in advance for them to do (Ephesians 2:10).

The reduction of the Christian mission to the oral communication of a message of otherworldly salvation grows out of a misunderstanding of God’s purpose and of the nature of human beings. It is assumed that God wants to “save souls” rather than “to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven” (Colossians 1:20) and that the human being only needs to be reconciled to God rather than to experience fullness of life. In the final analysis, this is a reduction related to ideas taken from Greek philosophy, not from scripture.

Mission is faithful to scripture only to the extent to which it is holistic. In other words, it is faithful when it crosses frontiers (not just geographic but also cultural, racial, economic, social, political, etc.) with the intention of transforming human life in all its dimensions, according to God’s purpose and of enabling human beings to enjoy the abundant life that God wants to give to them and that Jesus Christ came to share with them. The mission of the church is multifaceted because it depends on the mission of God, which includes the whole of creation and the totality of human life.

The second approach takes into account that the human being is a unity of body, soul and spirit, which are inseparable. This view, which is taken for granted in both the Old and the New Testament, has been confirmed by modern science. Because the human being is a unity, one cannot properly help a person by taking care of his or her needs of one type (for instance, the need of God’s forgiveness, a spiritual need) while disregarding his or her needs of another type (for instance, the material or bodily needs). James acknowledges this when he writes: “Suppose your brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, Go, I

¹⁶ Quoted from the Micah Declaration on Integral Mission, www.micahnetwork.org

wish you well; keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:15-17).

From this perspective, holistic mission is mission oriented towards the satisfaction of basic human needs, including the need of God, but also the need of food, love, housing, clothes, physical and mental health and a sense of human dignity. Furthermore, this approach takes into account that people are spiritual, social and bodily beings, made to live in relationship with God, with their neighbours and with God’s creation. Consequently, it presupposes that it is not enough to take care of the spiritual wellbeing of an individual without any regard for his or her personal relationships and position in society and in the world. As Jesus saw it, love for God is inseparable from love for neighbour (Matthew 22:40). To talk about “holistic mission,” therefore, is to talk about mission oriented towards the formation of God-fearing persons who see themselves as stewards of creation and do not live for themselves but for others; persons who are willing to fulfil their God-given vocation in the world and to receive and to give love; persons who “hunger and thirst for justice” and who are “peacemakers” (Matthew 5:6, 9).

The third approach to show the integration of the various elements involved in the mission of the church is the one that takes as its starting point the “Christ-Event,” including Christ’s life and ministry, his death on the cross, his resurrection and his exaltation. Each of these events points towards integral mission as the means whereby the church continues Jesus’ mission throughout history and whereby the redemptive work of Jesus takes effect under present circumstances. Since the Lord Jesus Christ is at the heart of God’s ultimate purpose for all creation including human beings, focusing on his significance in its fullness will inevitably include the first two approaches, and any other approach, to holistic mission.

1. The Life and Ministry of Jesus and Holistic Mission. The traditional tendency to separate the death of Jesus from his earthly life in order to give prominence to the cross has resulted in a sad lack of attention to the significance of his life and ministry for the mission of the church. Although it is true that the four Gospels emphasize the passion and death of Jesus, it is also true that what gives validity to the death of Jesus Christ as “the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10) is that it was the sacrifice of the perfect man, whose way of life established the foundations for the definition of what it means to love God above all things and to love one’s neighbour as oneself. His earthly life and ministry in this way came to be the model for the life and mission of the church. If that is the case, the proclamation of good news to the poor, the preaching of freedom for captives, of the recovery of sight for the blind and the liberation of the oppressed is a basic criterion by which to assess how far the mission of today’s church was really the continuation of the mission of Jesus of Nazareth. As John Perkins says, the church is called to be “the replacement of Jesus in a given community, doing what he would do, going where he would go and teaching what he would teach.”

2. Jesus’ Cross and Holistic Mission. The cross represents the culmination of Jesus’ surrender in submission to the will of God for the redemption of humankind. “He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). This is at the very heart of the gospel. However, the cross also represents the cost of discipleship and of faithfulness to God’s call to take part in bringing to fruition his redemptive purpose. The mission of the church provides the link between the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, on one hand, and the appropriation of the justice of God by faith — justification — on the other. As Paul states, the work of reconciliation contains two closely related aspects: God “*reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation: that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us*” (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). The practice of the “ministry of reconciliation” has its cost, however, both in terms of sacrificial surrender for the

sake of others — a self-giving which reproduces that of Jesus Christ — and also in terms of suffering for the sake of the gospel. The church is not truly the church unless it is, according to Bonhoeffer's description, "the church for others," in which the image of "the man for others"— the man who "came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45) — is reproduced. Then too, when Jesus sent his disciples out on their mission during his earthly ministry, he warned them that suffering would be a constituent part of their mission even as it was for his (see Matthew 10:22, 24-25). It would not be fortuitous or accidental, but the logical consequence of membership in the community of followers of the way of the Suffering Servant.

The cross was also the means whereby, according to Paul, Christ broke down the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile, thus producing a new humanity, one body (Ephesians 2:14-16). The church therefore is called to demonstrate, both in its life and in its message, this reconciliation with God and between individuals and groups. Among those who gather beneath the shadow of the cross of Christ, oppression that has come to be associated with ethnic, social and gender divisions disappear so that "there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female," but "all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28) The church provides a glimpse of a new humanity that in anticipation incarnates God's plan, that plan which will be brought to fruition in "the fullness of time," "to gather up all things, things in heaven and things on earth" in Christ (Ephesians 1:10).

3. The Resurrection of Jesus and Holistic Mission. The fulfilment of God's plan for the life and mission of the church relies on one incomparable resource, the power with which God raised Jesus from the dead, the power of the resurrection. No wonder, then, that Paul in his prayer for the faithful asks God that they might experience the "immeasurable greatness" of that power (Ephesians 1:19-20). The resurrection of Christ is the dawn of a new day in the history of salvation. It was the confirmation that his sacrifice had succeeded in overcoming the fatal consequence of sin, which is death. For those who put their trust in him, therefore, death does not have the last word. Because death has been vanquished, Christian hope in the final victory of God's plan is based on a solid foundation. The risen Christ is the first fruits of the great harvest, a new humanity. By His resurrection he has introduced into history a principle of life which guarantees not only the survival of the soul for all eternity, but also the permanent validation of all that the church does through the power of the Spirit for the cause of Jesus Christ, that is, the cause of love and justice. The cause of Jesus Christ is the only cause that has a future. So it makes sense to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" and to strive that the power of the resurrection may become manifest in the here and now and in every sphere of human life, and in the whole of creation.

4. The Exaltation of Jesus and Holistic Mission. The close relationship that exists between the present dimension of the Kingdom of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit who works in history to make the mission of the church possible is clearly seen in Jesus' reply to a question posed by his close followers just before his ascension: "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Even after the crucifixion and the resurrection, two events which should have completely transformed the apostles' idea about the real nature of Jesus' mission, they are still clinging to those Jewish nationalist aspirations which had prompted them to follow Jesus from their first encounter and right up to the crucifixion of their Master. Jesus' reply does not seem to have much to do with the question. Rather, it sets in relief the combination of factors which are going to come into play in salvation history after the ascension of Jesus Christ. *"It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"* (vv. 7-8). The following comments are relevant.

First, according to Luke these are Jesus' final words before his ascension. They include the fifth account of the "Great Commission," in which the missiology of the whole book of Acts is summarized in narrative form. Beginning in Jerusalem, the gospel spreads first to the adjacent areas, Judea and Samaria and then progresses until it arrives in Rome. In the whole process, the church occupies a vital place, but not the church alone: it is the church in the power of the Spirit. The mission is no mere human project. It is the result of Jesus' mission being extended in history, an extension made possible by the action of the Holy Spirit. As such it is brought to fruition, not only by what the witnesses to Jesus *say*, but also by what they *are* and *do*.

Second, Pentecost follows immediately upon the ascension and is inseparable from it. Jesus Christ is enthroned as "Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36), King of the universe and from this position sends his Holy Spirit to equip the church for the purpose of making disciples of all nations. The universal horizons of the mission are foreshadowed by the presence in Jerusalem of "devout Jews from every nation under heaven" (v. 5) on the day of Pentecost. The risen Christ, to whom the Spirit bears witness, has been anointed to reign and put his enemies under his feet. Peter explained it to the believers in his Pentecost sermon: "*Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool'*" (vv. 33-35). Years later, in agreement with Peter, the apostle Paul will affirm that "*he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet*" (1 Corinthians 15:25). With the exaltation of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, a new era has been inaugurated in salvation history: the era of the Spirit, which is at the same time the era of Jesus Christ exalted as Lord and Messiah, and the era of the church and her mission to make disciples in the power of the Spirit.

Third, Jesus' promise to his apostles that he would be with them always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20), a promise which accompanied his commission to make disciples of all nations, is fulfilled through the presence of the Spirit and the Word, the combination that made possible the existence of the church and the success of her mission.

Finally, Acts 2:41-47 clearly shows that the result of the Pentecost experience is no ghetto-church, devoted to cultivating individualistic religion and an exclusive, separatist church. On the contrary, it is a community of the Spirit, a community that becomes a centre of attraction, "*having the good will of all the people*" (v. 47), because it incarnates the values of the Kingdom of God and affirms, by what it is, by what it does and by what it says, that Jesus Christ has been exalted as Lord over every aspect of life. It is a missionary community that preaches reconciliation with God and the restoration of all creation by the power of the Spirit. It is a community which provides a glimpse of the birth of a new humanity, and in which can be seen, albeit "in a mirror, dimly" (1 Corinthians 13:12), the fulfilment of God's plan for all humankind.

Historical Perspective on Holistic Mission

Holistic mission does not lack historical antecedents. Some of the terms that are used today to describe it may be new, but throughout the history of the church there have always been groups of Christians who, by the way they have participated in the extension of the gospel, have demonstrated a deep solidarity with human suffering and needs.

An outstanding historical example of what we now call holistic mission is the missionary work that the Moravians carried out in the eighteenth century. For Nicolaus Zinzendorf (1700-1760), the founder of this movement that gave new life to Pietism, the agent of mission was not the institutional church, which was marked by dead orthodoxy, but small communities of committed believers, the *ecclesiola in ecclesiae*. In line with this line of thinking, small teams of Moravian missionaries were sent with the aim of forming "pilgrim houses" or "emergency residences" instead of churches like the ones in Europe. This holistic approach to mission was articulated by B.

Ziegenbalg, one of the very first missionaries sent from Halle, according to whom the *Dienst der Seele* ("service of the soul") was inseparable from the *Dienst des Leibes* ("service of the body"). This was no mere theory. Rather, it led Francke and other pietists to become involved in "home missions" in Halle and the surrounding area, serving the destitute and founding a school for poor children, a home for widows, an orphanage, a hospital and other institutions. Under this kind of influence, Germany became a leading missionary country sending ordinary men and women to go to the ends of the earth to share the gospel with the poor by living among them, oftentimes in degrading circumstances.

The social commitment of the pietists to serve the deprived sectors of society was admirable but not unique. Space here does not allow a full survey of the valuable contribution that other evangelical Christians made to the social, cultural, and political life of their nations. That was the case, for instance, in England. Several historians claim that the great revivals under Wesley and Whitefield in the eighteenth century were the main transforming factor that made it unnecessary for that country to go through a bloody revolution like the one that took place in France.

The socioeconomic and political impact of these spiritual revivals crossed the borders of Britain. As a result, many of those who were touched by them were moved to compassion toward the disenfranchised living in slums, in prisons, in mining districts, in the "American frontier," in plantations of the British colonies, in the Caribbean (in the British Indies) and in other places. The great influence that evangelical Christianity exercised on the social life in the United States during the eighteenth and the nineteenth century has been carefully studied. Many of the social benefits that people enjoy in many countries today, oftentimes without even knowing about their origin, such as the abolition of slavery, labour reforms and all kinds of philanthropic work are part of the legacy of these revivals.

The Role of the Local Church

An important deficiency in evangelical theology has been in the area of ecclesiology. For Roman Catholics the church constitutes one of the fundamental theological issues, whereas for evangelicals it tends to be a secondary question. It is hard to calculate the consequences of this lamentable deficiency. The least one can say is that, when the church lacks an ecclesiology rooted in biblical revelation, what takes priority is the institutional church, regulated by human traditions and preoccupied with the achievement of secondary objectives such as its *quantitative* growth, to the detriment of its *qualitative* growth.

Quite definitely, the lack of an adequate ecclesiology has practical consequences related to the way the local church perceives its mission. If mission is not holistic or if mission is seen as a peripheral matter, the minimal condition for the church to fulfil its purpose is missing and the church becomes a religious club with no positive impact on its neighbourhood. As the *Micah Declaration on Integral Mission* puts it,

God by his grace has given local churches the task of integral mission [proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel]. The future of integral mission is in planting and enabling local churches to transform the communities of which they are part. Churches as caring and inclusive communities are at the heart of what it means to do integral mission.

The meaning of "caring and inclusive communities" needs to be spelled out in practical terms if the church is going to be recognized in its own neighbourhood as more than a religious institution concerned above all for its own self-preservation. All too often, the stumbling block and the foolishness that prevent non-Christians from turning to Christ is not really the stumbling block and the foolishness of the gospel centred in "Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23), but the self-righteous attitude and the indifference to basic human needs on the part of Christians. The

first condition for the church to break down the barriers with its neighbourhood is to engage with it, without ulterior motives, in the search for solutions to felt needs. Such an engagement requires a humble recognition that the reality that counts for the large majority of people is not the reality of the Kingdom of God but the reality of daily-life problems that make them feel powerless, helpless, and terribly vulnerable.

If that is the case, a top priority for the church that cares is to enable people to articulate their needs, to analyze them, and to reflect on them. Inquiring about what people would like to see changed, what major needs they see in their area, what services they use and what services they lack, and so on, can prevent the church from jumping in with its own agenda. It can also help the church to begin developing meaningful links with the community.

The knowledge of the community based on serious conversation with the people who participate in it is the starting point for the kind of action that is needed — the action that goes beyond paternalistic poverty-relief and helps people to help themselves. Without this kind of empowerment, there is no solution to the problem that underlies many of the problems that affect people, especially the poor, namely, the lack of sense of human dignity oftentimes expressed in terms of marred identities and distorted vocations. Each church is called to be a transformation centre that enables people to change their self-perception by seeing themselves as human beings created in the image of God and called to participate in the accomplishment of God's purpose.

Not every church, however, is fit to become involved in holistic mission. According to the Apostles' Creed, the church is "one, holy and catholic." Traditionally, these are the essential marks, *signa* (signs) or *notae* (characteristics) of the church. Experience makes evident that these characteristics have to be supplemented by others if the church is to be a true agent of transformation in its own context. We suggest the following:

1. Commitment to Jesus Christ as the Lord of all humankind and the whole creation. There are many secular service agencies that do very good work among the poor. As a matter of fact, sometimes we Christians are challenged and even put to shame by people who do not know God but whose dedication to the cause of justice and peace, whatever their motivation may be, is far greater than ours. There is, however, one thing that we as followers of Jesus Christ can give the poor that no one else can give them and that is the witness to Jesus Christ as the Lord of all humankind and the whole creation — the witness that gives meaning to our own struggle for justice and peace.

The mission of the church is Kingdom mission and as such it points, beyond the community of faith, to the crucified King who has been exalted and reigns "until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25). The Kingdom of God that has come in Jesus Christ and is yet to come in its fullness provides the framework within which faith acts in love — a love that is translated into action on behalf of the needy. Holistic mission is the means through which the glory of the Kingdom of God is announced and concretely manifested in history in anticipation of the end by the power of the Spirit. Consequently, the first condition for the church to become an agent of transformation in its own community is to see herself as nothing more (and nothing less!) than a witness to the Kingdom that has come and is yet to come. Faithfulness to the King of kings and Lord of lords is not to be measured in terms of big church buildings full of people, but in terms of faith communities that are making disciples who are learning to obey all that Jesus Christ taught.

2. Commitment to one another. Individualism is inimical to holistic mission because holistic mission requires that the members of the church experience integral growth in Christ, from whom "the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:16). The witness to the Gospel is witness to God who in his love gave his Son to enable humankind, by the power of the Spirit, to

live according to the law of life: to love God above all things and to love one's neighbour as oneself. The church is a faithful witness to the extent to which she becomes a community of love in which people accept one another just as Christ accepted them. When love becomes visible in the church community, outsiders are given ears to hear about the love of God and eyes to see its reality. The likely result may well be the same as the one that occurred in the aftermath of Pentecost: "the favour of all the people" combined with the Lord's action in adding to the church those that are being saved (Acts 2:47).

3. Commitment to the world as the object of God's love. Already in the first century, the apostle Paul regarded it as necessary to exhort Christians not to even imagine that he could suggest that they do not associate with "the people of this world who are immoral." "In this case," he told them, "you would have to leave this world" (1 Corinthians 5:10). In full agreement with Jesus, he took it for granted that Christians are "not of this world," but are sent "into the world" (John 17:14-18) to witness to God's transforming truth and love. Such an attitude of openness to "people of this world" prevents the church from becoming a religious sect or club. It impels the church to look for ways to work in partnership with her neighbourhood in improving the quality of life on both a personal and a community level. The church fulfils her vocation as "light of the world" not merely by preaching the gospel, but by letting her light shine through "good deeds"—works that point towards *shalom* (the well-being for all and by all) and at the same time show the reality of God's love for his world and move people to praise the Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

4. Commitment to the priesthood of all believers. The priesthood of all believers has been recognized as one of the main pillars of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. One can hardly exaggerate the sense of freedom before God that this New Testament doctrine brought to people who before its rediscovery had felt unable to "approach the throne of grace with confidence" (Hebrews 4:16). It was now clear that, by virtue of his once-for-all sacrifice on the cross, Jesus Christ had become the mediator of a new covenant and ordinary men and women could "draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith" (Hebrews 10:22).

The classical Reformation, however, failed to live out the implications that the priesthood of all believers has for the understanding of the church as "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9) — a community of priests called to exercise their priesthood in the following terms:

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased (Hebrews 13:15-16).

The church is faithful to its priestly call to the extent to which she combines the sacrifice of praise with the sacrifice of good deeds that alleviate human suffering. Holistic mission thus becomes a priestly service in which the whole church, not just a sector of it, is involved. Hence the exhortation: "*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds*" (Hebrews 10:24).

5. Commitment to leadership defined in terms of service. From the perspective of a hierarchical concept of leadership, to speak of servant-leaders is to speak of living contradictions. Not so from the New Testament perspective, for which at the centre of Christian discipleship is the Son of Man who "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Holistic mission cannot become a reality unless the church leaders heed Peter's exhortation to his fellow elders:

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not

greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock (1Peter 5:2-3).

Holistic mission is not possible whenever the church is dominated by single-handed leaders who fail to see the importance of decentralizing power for the sake of the participation of the largest possible number of members. It is only possible whenever it is fully recognized that the church as a whole is called to witness to the crucified Messiah through humble service that seeks no other reward than that of pleasing the Giver of every good gift. The role of the leaders in this context is to serve by enabling others to develop and to use their own gifts — “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:12). They are faithful to their vocation to the extent to which they are able to release others for service.

6. Commitment to flexible church structures. Effective holistic mission is not dependent on good structures and organization, but on the Spirit of God. That is true, but if it is true that good structures and organization do not guarantee success in mission, it is also true that bad structures and organization lead to failure. Holistic mission, therefore, requires a careful assessment of the ways in which such matters as the planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating of the service projects, whether in word or in deed, are functioning in reality.

The Role of Christian NGOs and Service Agencies

The outburst of the so-called parachurch organizations, special-purpose groups or voluntary societies especially after World War II, has been such that the claim has been made that they grew more than a hundredfold in the twentieth century. It has been estimated that today there are approximately 100,000 of these organizations. Heavily dependent on volunteer help, they have become a very important faith-based means through which the people of God, regardless of race, social class, or gender, participate in Kingdom work all over the world. That being the case, the question of the role of Christian NGOs and service agencies is quite relevant to the subject of this paper.

A whole paragraph of the 1983 Statement on “Transformation: The Church in Response to Human Need,” mentioned above, was dedicated to “Christian Aid Agencies and Transformation.” Several warnings that are raised there are worth recalling, such as the following:

1. The need for integrity in the efforts to raise funds, lest the plight of the poor is exploited “in order to meet donor needs and expectations.” “Fund-raising activities,” it is said, “must be in accordance with the gospel. A stewardship responsibility of agencies is to reduce significantly their overhead in order to maximize the resources for the ministry.”

2. The need to demonstrate the values of Christ and His Kingdom and to “avoid competition with others involved in the same ministry and a success mentality that forgets God’s special concern for the weak.

3. The need to ensure that promotional efforts reflect what is in fact being done and that the responsibility to educate the donors in the way Christian transformation is experienced in the field is fully accepted.

4. The need to give adequate attention to listening sensitively to the communities that are being served, “facilitating a two-way process in communication and local ownership of the programs,” thus developing a true partnership between the service agency and the local people.

5. The need to ensure that the agency’s legitimate accountability to donors does not result in the “imposition of Western management systems on local communities,” based on the assumption that “Western planning and control systems are the only ones which ensure accountability.” Accordingly, the document calls on development agencies “to establish a

dialogue with those they serve in order to permit the creation of systems of accountability with respect to both cultures.”

The paragraph concludes with a call to repentance which includes “a renunciation of inconsistency and extravagance in our personal and institutional lifestyle.” Such a call is quite consistent with the fact that integral mission is not carried out only by what we say or what we do, but also by what we are. The conflicts that oftentimes affect the relationship between local churches and service agencies should be honestly faced and resolved. To this end Dr. Tetsunao Yamamori, former President of Food for the Hungry, has suggested the following principles:

1. The role of the service agency is that of an *apprentice*. As a part of the body of Christ the members of the service agency must work from within the church so as to learn and to face the local issues of holistic mission.

2. The role of the service agency is that of a *facilitator*. The service agency should place itself beside the church in order to enable the church to carry on its holistic mission.

3. The role of the service agencies is that of a *catalyst*. Despite the increasing number of churches with a vision for holistic mission, there are still many in need of help to get a wider vision of their task. The service agency exists to encourage these churches to become involved with their respective communities.

4. The role of the church is that of a *pioneer*. The role of the service agency as an apprentice, a facilitator, and a catalyst can only be fulfilled when there is a local church in the community. If no church exists, the service agency will have to choose between not working in that community and making strategic plans to plant a church either alone or in cooperation with a church from another community.