

## INTEGRAL MISSION: COMPASSION—EVANGELISM

*By Helmer Juárez*

*Country of Origin: Guatemala*

*Serving in: Guatemala*

For many years there has been discussion among church leaders about the mission of the church. Why does the Church exist? For many, the Church was created to be concerned only about “winning people for Christ”, winning the greatest number of souls for the Kingdom. Their foundation is in Matthew 28:18-20, what we know as the Great Commission. But others say that those are wrong, they say that Christians must be concerned about helping our neighbor in his or her physical needs. They lean on Matthew 25:35-40 that mentions when we help our neighbor we are ministering to Jesus. The first ones respond, “What good is it to save the physical life of a man if he will spend all of eternity in hell?” But for this there is another response: “How can a man hear the Gospel when he is dying of hunger?” This is an interminable discussion.

There are some quotes related to compassion that have been given throughout history and that are interesting to remember:

*“For generous souls, every task is noble.”*

Euripides (480-406 B.C.), dramatist and Greek philosopher

*“When there is love and wisdom, there is no fear or ignorance; Where there is patience and humility there is no rage or irritation; Where there is poverty and happiness, there is no envy or greed; Where there is peace and meditation, there is no anxiety or doubt.”*

Saint Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), founder of the Franciscan Order

*“Nothing is so difficult for those who abound in riches as to conceive that others could be in need.”*

Jonathan Swift (1703-1791), cleric and Irish writer

*“Compassion is the antidote of the soul, where there is compassion; even the most venomous impulses remain relatively harmless.”*

Eric Hoffer (1902-1983), social philosopher

In the history of our church, there are also some celebrated quotes:

*“The first miracle after the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the Early Church happened to a beggar. This means that the first service of a church baptized by the Holy Spirit is to the poor. Her ministry is directed to those who are the lowest. The Holy Spirit in Jesus enables the church to preach the Gospel to the poor. His Spirit in his servants will work for the same purpose.”*

Phineas Bresee (1838-1915), co-founder of the Nazarene denomination

*“Pure religion has always had and will have two faces, purity and service. To neglect service in the welfare of others is to demonstrate lack of purity. Holy people should serve principally the*

*Holistic Mission: Compassion—Evangelism (Helmer Juárez)*

*society. This is what principally characterized the Early Church, untiring service to bless the members, to love the widows and children without parents.”*

John Goodwin, General Superintendent, Church of the Nazarene (1920)

Social groups and also Christians respond to human needs in different ways. We will try to review some of these:

1. *The non-Christian response:* Communities and social groups respond to human needs in different ways and such responses depend on many factors such as doctrinal, ideological, individual, etc. They also depend on the level of sensitivity. In the majority of cases the human need is ignored.
2. *Philanthropy:* This is the most common of human responses when confronted with the needs of others. People normally give out of the extra they have, out of their abundance. It is an instinctive reaction, they give as a result of touches their senses, when they hear, see, touch, smell, then they react.
3. *Social action:* Is the response that has gained ground among Christian groups. This practice requires close contact with communities. The reaction of the people is intellectual; leaders make plans, some of which are very creative, and studies to help the marginalized.
4. *Compassion:* This is probably the most profound and difficult to reach response. Compassion goes beyond a simple reaction to a perceived difficulty; it goes beyond a clear perception and criticism of the situations that affect our fellow man. Compassion is feeling and living what others feel and live. The principle motive of compassion is love. It is impossible to exercise a lifestyle of compassion if there is no love among us.

I believe we need to clarify at this point the key concepts of “evangelism” and “compassion” in relation to this paper. I want to do it in a simple way with two fundamental connotations of these terms, and the relationship between them. *Evangelism:* Trying to reach non-Christians. *Compassion:* Reflection of a Christian life. From this perspective, evangelism is in reality a compassionate concept. James 2:14 tells us, “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deed? Can such faith save him?”

The relationship between compassion and evangelism in the Church of the Nazarene has varied in the various historical moments. Even though compassion has been a common and constant practice in the Church of the Nazarene throughout the years, on occasions it has occupied second place with relation to the different areas in the life of the church, whether they be administration, theological educational, discipleship, and day-to-day practice. In some ways, we have given in to the pressure of statistics. Apparently, evangelism in its classic concept, gives better results for “growth”, to the point that we are less committed, including aspects such as the totality of people's lives and long-term investments, while compassion apparently needs a large amount of economic and personal investment.

At the moment, we firmly accept the commitment to be compassionate and the church has taken three ways to relate compassion with evangelism.

## *Holistic Mission: Compassion—Evangelism (Helmer Juárez)*

1. *Compassion as a tool for evangelism:* Frequently we use compassion as bait. We carry out activity that we call “compassion” in order to attract people who will be able to hear the message of full salvation. Medical teams in which we can share with the patients and local helpers, we give out clothes to poor and then preach to them, we prepare food, take it to the needy in the street and evangelize them. Compassion is an excellent tool to open the door to evangelism. John 4:46-54 gives us an example of how we can do this. Because Jesus healed their son, the centurion and all his family believed in him.

2. *Compassion as a result of evangelism:* This, perhaps, is the greatest responsibility for the church to show compassion. New converts come to the church with all their problems, with a fundamental difference, now they are our brothers and sisters. The problems of our new brothers and sisters need to be taken care of adequately. Jesus said to the paralytic, “Your sins have been forgiven. Get up and walk” and Jesus fed the 5,000 that followed him.

3. *Compassion as a partner in evangelism:* In this situation, neither one or the other is more important.

Compassion – Evangelism	} Go together
Evangelism - Compassion	

Acts 6:1-7 shows us that compassionate deeds and growth of the church were responsible for the creation of an administrative way of doing compassion. They did not create “the Compassion Committee” to only do compassion, but to lead all the church’s action in those circumstances.

## **FINAL REFLECTIONS**

We need to seriously consider the “missional” character of the church. We need to consider compassion as a very important part of the Christian life and because of that, in theological reflection. We do not think that compassion is merely a social political action, it is the Christian lifestyle. Allowing us to be carried away by the statistics of growth produced in evangelism could distance us from the discipleship of new Christians, and encouraging the church to have a practical Christian where serving our neighbor is vital.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is transformational. People’s lives are transformed through their contact with Jesus. We could ask ourselves today, in what ways has the Church of the Nazarene contributed intentionally to the communities where she ministers? I say “intentionally” on purpose, because only occasionally do we see activities which positively affect the community. In what ways are we planning compassionate activities that transform our communities in order to go with the church’s evangelistic thrust?

On the other hand, biblical theological reflection is of major importance. I believe that Nazarene Hispanics are far behind in this reflection in spite of having a few positive examples. The profound studies of social conditions in Latin American countries accompanying by serious Biblical reflection will give us the guidelines to establish integral mission in our missionary task.

There are at least two points I would like to include here:

*Holistic Mission: Compassion—Evangelism (Helmer Juárez)*

1. United Nations reports about Latin American Development (especially in Central America) reveal some special situations. Human living conditions are worse than 20 years ago. The indicators for human development for 2002 are at the same level as 1970. In spite of technical advances, industrial development and education, the general population has not advanced. This is the panorama in which the Church of the Nazarene is working in Latin America.

2. For a more permanent and overall effect, compassionate ministries as a lifestyle of the church and of every individual Christian should be taught in all the educational levels of the church: in Sunday school, in Sunday sermons and in the different levels of formal theological education. This education, which is based on the Bible, is rich in examples and commitment to the poor and will give us the correct vision of the missionary life of the Church. We remember the apostle Paul, missionary prototype for all times, in his words to the Galatians, “All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do” (Galatians 2:10).