

HOW CAN THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE CARRY OUT GOD'S MISSION (*MISSIO DEI*)?

Hugo R. Alvarado

Pastor, Central District, Guatemala; Professor, Mariano Gálvez University

God's mission, known as the *missio Dei*, constitutes the ontological and teleological foundation of the Church of the Nazarene in the world, since it reveals that every Christian community is called to participate actively in God's redemptive work, from creation to its consummation. Legitimately and historically, the Church of the Nazarene was born at the beginning of the twentieth century as a holiness movement inspired by the Wesleyan tradition, which not only emphasizes the experience of personal holiness but also its involvement in the social, cultural, and educational transformation of the communities in which it is embedded. Theologically, authors such as David Bosch (1991), Orlando Costas (1982), and José Míguez Bonino (1975) agree that mission is inseparable from the identity of the church, since being a Christian implies being "sent" to reconcile, serve, and proclaim the Kingdom of God. Ecclesiologically, the Church of the Nazarene combines organizational structures with local autonomy, allowing congregations to adapt the mission to their context without losing doctrinal or spiritual coherence.

Ecclesiology and mission are two inseparable dimensions in contemporary theological reflection. According to David Bosch (Op. cit.), the church does not exist for herself, but her identity is constituted in God's mission, being "a symbol and tool of the Kingdom." This means that any ecclesial model that is not mission-oriented loses its *raison d'être*. In the case of the Church of the Nazarene, its history confirms this truth, since it was born as a holiness movement that sought to incarnate the gospel in concrete contexts of social and spiritual need. Orlando Costas (1982) points out that the church must be understood as a "community of witness" rather than as an institution of power, because only from there can it proclaim the Kingdom with credibility. Ecclesiologically, then, mission involves revising structures, leadership models, and pastoral practices that strengthen, rather than hinder, proclamation and missionary action. From the point of view of holiness, living missionary ecclesiology means that the church does not close in on itself, but opens up and overflows in love for its neighbor, manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in works.

In terms of the economy of holiness, the *missio Dei* induces the Church of the Nazarene to be a living witness to the Kingdom of God. Where personal and community holiness becomes the engine of mission, only a community transformed by grace can offer an innovative, recontextualized, and credible message of reconciliation and hope. According to Wright (2006), the mission that flows from holiness seeks the transformation of all dimensions of human life—spiritual, social, and ethical—and is reflected in acts of compassion, justice, and care for creation. For the Church of the Nazarene, this approach translates into ministries that do not separate evangelization and social action, but rather integrate them as expressions of fidelity to God and his call to transform the world—specifically, through justice, compassion, and reconciliation.

For the Church of the Nazarene, therefore, being a missional church implies living in constant obedience to God's sending, acting as a leaven of the Kingdom in all contexts. Holiness trains its members for this task, but contextualization ensures that its message is pertinent,

understandable, and relevant to every culture, language, and environment. The Church of the Nazarene, in rethinking its mission in the twenty-first century, recognizes the need to inculcate the faith within the framework of technological, scientific, and multicultural societies, while maintaining its identity and commitment to the *missio Dei*. As Costas (1982) points out, mission is not a temporary project, but an ontological and teleological mandate: the church is to expand the Kingdom of God, being salt of the earth and light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16).

From the point of view of ecclesiology, mission, and expansion, the ecclesiology of the Church of the Nazarene cannot be understood outside of mission. John Stott (2008) stresses that an authentic Christian church exists to fulfill God's mission, and its structure, discipline, and programs should be tools for this, not ends in themselves. In practice, the Church of the Nazarene has developed an ecclesiological model that combines centralized leadership with regional autonomy, allowing it to adapt to diverse cultural contexts. Historically, this flexibility was evidenced in its expansion into Latin America, Africa, and Asia, where local churches assumed pastoral and ministerial leadership without losing connection to the foundational values of holiness and evangelization. Theologically, this reflects Bosch's notion (Op. cit.) of the church as a "community sent," whose identity is defined in obedience to Christ's missionary mandate. From the perspective of holiness, missionary ecclesiology demands that leaders and members live transformed lives, reflecting coherence among faith, conduct, and social service, thereby strengthening the credibility of Christian witness in the contemporary world.

A central aspect of the *missio Dei* in the twenty-first century is the inclusion of voices that have historically been muffled or marginalized in ecclesial life: children, youth, women, and communities in vulnerable conditions. José Míguez Bonino (1975) stresses that Christian mission is authentic only when it integrates the oppressed as subjects, not as objects of evangelization, because in them, too, God's grace is manifested. Orlando Costas (Op. cit.) complements this idea by arguing that the mission must be liberating, by considering the experiences and testimonies of those who suffer exclusion.

For the Church of the Nazarene, listening to these voices is fundamental, since the doctrinal *Manual* itself affirms that "social holiness" is expressed in the defense of the dignity of all people. Ecclesiologically, this means opening spaces for participation in ministries and decision-making processes, so that the community reflects God's manifold wisdom (Eph. 3:10). In terms of holiness, giving voice to the marginalized is living the perfect love that seeks justice and reconciliation. Thus, a truly missional church allows itself to be challenged by these voices, recognizing that they magnify its witness and extend its reason for the Kingdom.

The core values of the Church of the Nazarene, which are holiness, evangelism, compassion, and discipleship, form the foundation of its mission. In this sense, David Bosch (Op. cit.) emphasizes that mission is not a borderline activity, but the core of Christian identity. Orlando Costas (1982) complements this view by emphasizing that faithfulness to Christ demands a "sent" church that responds courageously to the shortcomings of this world. Ecclesiologically, Nazarene values outline a path of coherence: to live in holiness, to proclaim the good news, and to accompany the vulnerable. These principles are not metaphysical, but are embodied in community practice, where every believer is called to reflect the character of Christ. Holiness, understood as authentic love, cements a way of life that divorces itself from apathy and indolence and is committed to justice and compassion.

The Nazarene mission at the global level has consistently shown, throughout its history, the need to contextualize the gospel in time and space. According to Samuel Escobar (2003), the challenge of the missionary church is to “embody the gospel” in each culture without losing the essence of the message. In this sense, the Church of the Nazarene has sought to be sensitive to local contexts, bringing the message of holiness to diverse social contexts. Míguez Bonino (1975) warns that contextualization does not mean uncritical adaptation, but rather discerning what in each culture must be transformed by the gospel. Ecclesiologically, this principle calls for Nazarene communities open to cultural dialogue and capable of giving concrete responses to the difficulties of their time. From holiness, contextualizing means translating faith into daily practices of service, hospitality, and reconciliation, avoiding the imposition of a uniform model and recognizing the heterogeneity of peoples.

Fortunately, the Church of the Nazarene’s historical memory is a spiritual and theological resource that enables it to preserve its identity. Bosch (1991) recalls that every church needs to reread its history to discern the rights and wrongs that illuminate its present mission. It can be seen throughout history that the Nazarene tradition, since its origins in the holiness movements of the nineteenth century, has maintained a strong commitment to the marginalized, something Orlando Costas, already cited, calls “the mission from the periphery.” Remembering this trajectory is not a nostalgic exercise, but an ecclesiological act that vitalizes the mission and renews the call to social holiness. This remembering is also pedagogical, since it constantly reminds the new generations that the church is heir to a living witness that must be incarnated today in commitment to the poor and in the search for justice.

Globalization poses unprecedented challenges for the mission of the contemporary church. Samuel Escobar (2003) affirms that the gospel must be proclaimed in an interconnected, but profoundly unequal world. For the Church of the Nazarene, globalization demands a witness that combines the local and the global: an identity unified in holiness, but expressed contextually in each region. Míguez Bonino (1993) recalls that the mission must confront the globalized structures of injustice and proposes alternatives for community life and solidarity. Ecclesiologically, this implies that the church does not limit itself to reproducing Western models but listens to the voices of the global South, where the gospel takes on new expressions. From the perspective of holiness, globalization must be an opportunity to strengthen Christian fraternity and to manifest Christ’s compassion on a global scale, without losing closeness to one’s immediate neighbour.

It is assessed that education has been a pillar of the Church of the Nazarene’s mission. Since the creation of schools, universities, and ministerial formation programs, education has been understood as part of practical holiness. Bosch (1991) states that teaching is an essential expression of mission because it transmits values and shapes discipleship. Orlando Costas (Op. cit.) maintains that a truly missionary church forms critical subjects, capable of reading reality from the point of view of faith. Ecclesiologically, education is a stage from which community is built, traditions are transmitted, and the active participation of all believers is encouraged. From the perspective of holiness, Nazarene education seeks the holistic transformation of the person, encompassing not only the spiritual but also the moral and social aspects, to enable each believer to live in connection with the gospel of the Kingdom.

An important value to highlight is that education in the Church of the Nazarene is a mission tool. Education in the Church of the Nazarene is not only academic instruction but also integral formation for the Christian life and mission. Bosch (1991) argues that education is an

essential means of prolonging God's work in history, as it prepares disciples to discern and act in complex contexts.

The church has founded universities and schools that combine academic excellence with spiritual formation, which allows it to prepare pastors and lay leaders with a global missionary vision. Escobar (2002) highlights that this contextualized education allows leaders to interpret cultural reality from the perspective of the gospel. Ecclesiologically, these institutions are extensions of the church's mission and reinforce its missional identity. From holiness, education entails ethical and spiritual principles that transform the individual and his environment, ensuring that the church's witness is relevant and selective in today's societies.

But it should also be noted that, even in spaces such as Latin America and Africa, there are voices underrepresented in this mission, and they are children, young people, women, and the excluded. It should not be forgotten that incorporating those historically rejected voices is an important step for a comprehensive mission. Samuel Escobar (Op. cit.) points out that authentic mission includes the active participation of the poor and excluded, recognizing them as subjects and not as objects of evangelization. For the Church of the Nazarene, this means training women in pastoral leadership, listening carefully to young people in valuable dispositions, and accompanying children and adolescents in their spiritual formation.

In addition, in contexts with racial minorities or marginalized groups, it is vital to take into account their worldview and way of life in evangelization and education programs. Orlando Costas, already mentioned, emphasizes that the liberating mission transforms both the community that receives the message and those who proclaim it. Ecclesiologically, opening inclusive spaces strengthens the church's cohesion and legitimacy; from a holiness perspective, it reflects the action of God, who seeks justice, equality, and reconciliation. The active participation of these groups allows the Church of the Nazarene to embody the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10), showing a more faithful witness to the *missio Dei*.

The Church of the Nazarene's track record shows a consistent commitment to global and local mission. From its inception in 1908, the denomination developed ministries of education, hospitals, and works of compassion in the United States and later in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. According to Escobar (1999), these projects represent the concretization of the theology of holiness in social life.

In Latin America, pastoral formation initiatives are highlighted, where the church established regional seminaries that today produce leaders trained for multicultural contexts. In Africa, health and literacy programs show how the mission goes beyond verbal proclamation of the gospel, integrating total progress. Theologically, these examples reflect Bonino's view (Op. cit.), who argues that mission cannot be reduced to evangelization but must encompass social transformation and justice. Ecclesiologically, these projects consolidate the local presence and reinforce the church's identity as a community sent, where holiness is actively lived in service of others.

Thus, holiness, hermeneutically understood and exegetically explained as practical love and obedience to God, motivates church members to be living evidence of the gospel, integrating evangelization, social justice, education, and compassion into their practice as a holistic approach to mission. This model of missional church also requires contextualization: inculturating the faith in each society requires respecting contemporary languages, values, and challenges, including technology, science, and cultural diversity.

The history of the Nazarene Church shows a constant commitment to the formation of leaders, the inclusion of children, youth, women, and marginalized groups, and transformative social action, confirming that the mission is both global and local. The *missio Dei* is not a human project, but participation in the work of God who sends the church to be salt and light, fostering reconciliation, hope, and justice. Thus, this reflection sought to answer the central question: how can the Church of the Nazarene carry out God's mission, integrating holiness, evangelization, and contextualized action in the twenty-first century, maintaining fidelity to its history and relevance in a diverse and globalized world?

As a conclusive synthesis, it can be reliably said that the Church of the Nazarene can carry out God's mission by equitably integrating the historical, theological, ecclesiological, and holiness foundations in all its practices. Understanding the *missio Dei* as a divine mandate encompassing evangelization, justice, education, and social transformation enables the church to act with coherence and global relevance.

The contextualization of mission, the inclusion of marginalized voices, integral education, and the strengthening of flexible ecclesiological structures are essential elements to fulfill this call. Theologians such as Bosch, Costas, Míguez Bonino, and Escobar provide conceptual tools that illuminate the relationship between holiness and mission, showing that a life transformed by God's grace translates into concrete action in the world.

The Church of the Nazarene, in assuming this responsibility, not only preserves its historical and doctrinal identity but also embodies the Kingdom of God in different contexts, faithfully fulfilling the mission entrusted to it from its origin.

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