

GOD'S MISSION AND THE MISSIONAL VOCATION OF THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE: BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND PASTORAL FOUNDATIONS FOR A CHANGING WORLD

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Preface

Mission is not a human invention; it is the reflection of God's very heart. In a rapidly changing world, the Church of the Nazarene is called to rediscover the *missio Dei* as the foundation of her identity and vocation.

This article is part of the dynamics of the 2028 Global Theology Conference, which invites us to rethink our missional commitment in the light of the Trinity, holiness, and compassion. The following reflection proposes a biblical, theological, and pastoral reading of God's mission, in dialogue with contemporary challenges and the reality lived in the Caribbean region, especially in Haiti.

It is intended to be both an academic contribution and a spiritual call: that the church, sanctified by the Spirit, may remain faithful to her sending into the world for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity.

The article responds to all the dimensions raised in the GTC 2028 document: what we need to do, why we do it, what our identity is, what resources we mobilize, and how contextualization and holiness unite in mission. Finally, it shows that lived holiness, compassion incarnate, and discipleship remain the essential ways to fulfill God's mission in a pluralistic and globalized world.

Introduction

The history of Christian mission is inseparable from the history of God himself. From creation, God reveals himself as a God who sends, speaks, and acts in human history. The Church of the Nazarene, heir to the Wesleyan holiness movement, is part of this missionary history by seeking to unite the transformation of the heart and the transformation of the world. The Global Theology Conference 2028 (GTC 2028) calls for renewed reflection on *missio Dei*. This reflection is part of a time of upheaval: social crises, migration, secularization, inequality, but also new opportunities for evangelization and compassion. This work aims to answer the central question: *How can the Church of the Nazarene fulfill God's mission (missio Dei) in a changing world?*

To answer this question, we will successively analyze the biblical, theological, historical, and pastoral foundations of mission, while addressing the issues specific to the Church of the Nazarene: its missional vocation, its relationship between holiness and action, and the contemporary challenges of contextualization. The approach is intended to be theological (based on Scripture), ecclesiological (rooted in the life of the church), and pastoral (practice-oriented).

1. Biblical and Theological Foundation of God's Mission

1.1. The Missio Dei: God as Source and Actor of the Mission.

The *missio Dei* affirms that the mission belongs to God before it belongs to the church. The Father sends the Son (John 3:16), the Son sends the Holy Spirit (John 14:26), and the Holy Spirit sends the church (Acts 1:8). Mission is therefore not a human program, but the continuation of God's redemptive work in history.

Christopher Wright points out that “The entire Bible tells the story of a missionary God.”¹ In this vision, God’s plan embraces all of creation: to restore, reconcile, and renew. Thus, the mission is not limited to evangelization but includes justice, compassion, formation, reconciliation, and social transformation.

1.2. The Old and New Testaments: Missionary Continuity

In the Old Testament, God calls Abraham to become a blessing to all nations (Gen 12:3). Israel was to be a missionary people, bearers of light (Isa 49:6). In the New Testament, this vocation is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, sent by the Father to reconcile the world (2 Cor 5:19). After his resurrection, Jesus entrusts this mission to his disciples: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21).

2. What should we do? What is our mission?

2.1. The Essence of the Mission

According to Matthew 28:19-20, the Christian mission is to make disciples of all nations by teaching and baptizing. But the mission goes beyond individual conversion. It aims at the formation of holy and committed communities in the world. For the Church of the Nazarene, this mission can be summed up in three verbs: **evangelize**, **sanctify**, and **serve**. To evangelize is to proclaim the Good News of Salvation; to sanctify is to invite believers to the fullness of grace; to serve is to manifest the love of Christ through works of justice and compassion.

2.2. Balance between being and doing.

The mission is not reduced to action. It is born of being: to be a people sanctified before being a people sent. The danger of religious activism is real when the mission is not rooted in spirituality. This is why Jesus first calls His disciples to be “the salt of the earth” (Matt 5:13) before sending them out on mission.

3. Why do we do what we do? What is our motivation?

The missionary motivation stems from God’s love for the world. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). This love precedes all human initiative. The church does not make the mission to justify herself, but to manifest the grace received. Paul expresses this inner dynamic: “*The love of Christ compels us*” (2 Cor 5:14). Thus, sanctified love becomes mission. The theology of holiness, at the heart of the Nazarene, teaches us that Christian perfection is not measured by moral conformity, but by active love.

4. What is our identity?

The Church of the Nazarene is defined by three inseparable characteristics: Christian, holy, and missional. This identity is profoundly Trinitarian, reflecting the God who sends, the Christ who saves, and the Spirit who inflames. A church that loses its missional vocation ceases to be truly Christian.

5. What resources do we mobilize? What is our strategy?

The Church of the Nazarene mobilizes spiritual, human, and institutional resources:

- **Spiritual:** prayer, the Word, communion, the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- **Human:** Pastors, lay people, educators, young leaders.
- **Institutional:** Seminaries, universities, compassion centers.

¹ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (InterVarsity Press, 2006), 17.

Its strategy is based on contextualization, discipleship, and regional collaboration. Each local church becomes a missionary center, a community of faith in action.

6. The Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Foundations of an Effective Mission

6.1. Biblical Basis

Mission flows from the very heart of God. From Genesis to Revelation, God seeks to bless, save, and restore.

6.2. Theological Basis

The mission is Trinitarian: the Father sends, the Son obeys, the Holy Spirit makes effective. A church that participates in the *missio Dei* becomes a living sign of the Kingdom.

6.3. Historical Basis

From the early apostles to John Wesley, mission has evolved from imperial expansion to holistic mission. The Church of the Nazarene was formed to preach sanctification and compassion.

6.4. Pastoral Foundation

The pastoral mission aims at formation, care, and transformation. The pastor is a local missionary, a spiritual guide, and a model of service.

7. The Central Mission of the Church: Worship, Discipleship, Evangelism, and Compassion

An effective mission is an integral mission. These four dimensions are interdependent:

- Adoration: The mission begins in praise (John 4:24).
- Discipleship: Mission forms transformed believers.
- Evangelization: It proclaims the Good News.
- Compassion: It embodies God's mercy.

8. The Theological and Practical Role of the Local Church

The local church is the place where the mission becomes visible. It is there that faith is lived and shared. Each believer is a missionary in his or her environment. Missional ecclesiology considers the church as a living and sent organism, not as a closed institution.

9. Cultural Trends and Contemporary Challenges

Pluralism, moral relativism, globalization, and technology are transforming the mission. Artificial intelligence, social media, and digital culture are creating new fields of evangelization. Mission must adapt without being diluted, being in the world without being of the world (John 17:15).

10. Issues Specific to the Church of the Nazarene

10.1. The Three Fundamental Values: Holiness, Faith, and Mission

Holiness gives meaning to the mission. A sanctified church becomes a church sent. Lived holiness engenders compassion and justice.

10.2. Contextualization and Mission

Contextualization makes the gospel understandable to every culture, but it must always remain faithful to the message of Christ.

10.3. Historical Legacy

Since 1908, the Church of the Nazarene has proclaimed sanctification and formed educational institutions. It must now recognize its historical limitations and affirm its global commitment.

10.4. Globalization and Mission

The mission is no longer from “North to South,” but “from everywhere to everywhere.” The global church is called to collaboration and reciprocity.

10.5. Role of Education

Nazarene seminaries train the next missionary leaders. Education remains one of the most powerful instruments for transforming nations.

10.6. Ecclesiology and Mission

The structure of the church must always serve the mission and not the other way around. A rigid church becomes sterile; a missional church remains alive.

10.7. Emerging Inclusion and Theology

Children, youth, women, and the marginalized participate in the *missio Dei*. The Church of the Nazarene must value these voices because they embody the diversity of the Kingdom.

Conclusion

God’s mission precedes, embraces, and surpasses that of the church. The Church of the Nazarene, as a church of holiness and compassion, is called to be the visible face of this divine mission.

To carry out the *missio Dei* is to unite holiness and service, adoration and compassion, faith and commitment. In an unstable world, the church is called to be light, salt, and hope. As Jesus says, “*As the Father has sent me, so I send you*” (John 20:21). God’s mission thus becomes the mission of every believer, of every local church, of every Nazarene community in the world.