

REVIEWING OUR MISSIONAL PRACTICE OF INTEGRALITY

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Faced with the invitation to write a document¹ for the first stage of the process leading to the next denominational Theological Conference to be held in 2028 in the Philippines, I will focus on only one topic for reasons of in-depth exploration of its related issues and nuances,² which is connected to an issue that persists as a permanent challenge, given the nature of the gospel itself.

The subject to which we turn concerns an issue that has been at the center of global reflection in recent decades, especially in what is commonly called the “majority world,” or more recently, the “Global South.” I refer here to the theme of integrality of mission, which I will connect to a central axis of the denomination’s identity: **Christian integrity** (to employ a term alternative to “holiness”). Both concepts elevate the ethical dimension to a position of priority within Christian expression and/or engagement in the world—doing so in a context marked by skepticism toward religion and metaphysically grounded discourse, stemming from the lingering aftereffects of postmodernism.

In addressing this topic, certain ecclesiological connotations necessarily come into view that require reconsideration, as well as seminal doctrinal aspects concerning the conception of mission in relation to the doctrine of creation, by taking its implications seriously. Likewise, attention must be given to key expressions within the denomination’s mission statement that appear to have been subject to certain reductionisms, both in understanding and in practice.³ This entire endeavor is undertaken with the overarching aim of achieving greater—or at least improved—missional effectiveness and church development; yet, due to a similar conceptual flaw regarding the balance between the quantitative and the qualitative, it necessitates a greater emphasis on the latter.

1. Recent Background of the Topic and Denominational Practice

Regarding the perspective of *integrality*, the term *Integral Mission* gained relevance; in the English-speaking context, the term *transformation* was also widely used as an alternative. The context in which both terms emerged during the latter half of the twentieth century was largely shaped by an imbalance between evangelization and social responsibility. With priority given predominantly to the former, the conceptualization of these terms substantially emphasized

¹ The communication received states: “The purpose of the first set of documents is to establish the direction for future thought and dialogue by highlighting the significant and essential themes and considerations related to the mission of the Church, and more specifically, of the Church of the Nazarene. The foundational documents should explore the biblical, theological, historical, and pastoral foundations for effective mission.”

² However, further on (Section 3), reference is also made to other important topics that should be addressed in the important conclave.

³ Thus, what is meant by making disciples “like Christ,” or disseminating “scriptural holiness”? Regarding aspects linked to the core of “denominational identity,” are there biases or reductionisms in its understanding, cultural captivities...? In itself, focusing on the statement established in the regulatory *Manual* should not be a limit to more comprehensively reviewing concepts such as, what is the gospel, or the church, or the mission...?

the latter: to speak of “transformation”⁴ or “integral mission” meant taking social responsibility seriously. The denomination was not far from this current of thought when Nazarene Compassion Ministries (NCM) was launched globally in the 1980s.

However, a certain reductionism is perceived in the current conception and practice of what it means to project oneself in “integral mission,” due to the prevalent organizational and action forms. It seems that the issue of Christian social responsibility is reduced to channeling some actions through the “Nazarene Compassion Ministries” (NCM) (that is, where they are organized and functioning, which is not the case in every local church and/or district); a great constraint, even, to only those specifically in charge of such a program. On the other hand, where they are functioning, there is a style of implementation and practice that again reduces the scope of what the social responsibility of the church implies; they usually have a welfare and philanthropic character, and, in the most advanced cases, some community development projects (economic-productive or social); but there are almost no lines of action in the sphere of advocacy, human rights, social justice; nor strategies historically used by Christians to generate larger-scale social changes (social movements, significant public roles). Likewise, if one thinks that the denominational mission statement is what sets or influences the tone of all its programs, possibly that making disciples “like Christ” and/or spreading “scriptural holiness” may also have its connotation and style, which may be reducing its scope: a *compassionate* Christ, but without the strength for the struggles for social justice; or a *scriptural holiness* that disregards the prophets’ perspective, their keen insight and evaluation of the entire system of social practice, and their great concern for shortcomings in social justice and for systemic ethical and social reforms.

2. Revisions to Consider

2.1 Historical Experience of Integrality

When we review the history of the church and focus on those luminous periods in which evangelical faith was accompanied by social transformation, what distinctive features can we identify that might serve as lessons and inspire us to make the necessary adjustments in our approaches?

Thinking about the Protestant Reformation movement and its influence in Northern Europe, there is no doubt that it is considered by believers as a point of reference regarding the sociocultural impact of a biblical faith lived in light of a better understanding of the Scriptures and their consequences. Therefore, the perspective of the so-called historical churches, mainly of European origin and in connection with the Reformation event, does not have dilettante positions regarding whether the mission of the church is integral or not, or whether social responsibility is an inherent part of the gospel, or whether Christian action has to do with all of culture. But in that case, it is necessary to recognize the special situation Northern Europe was experiencing at the time, in which the political sphere, by becoming independent from the dominion, supported the reformed movement, facilitating global changes and the influence of the new interpretation of the Scriptures. This situation was evidently highly conducive to generating significant structural

⁴ This stems from a consultation in Wheaton, Illinois on “The Church in Response to Human Needs” (Wheaton Declaration, 1983). In itself, various dimensions of church development have been addressed regarding the integrality of the mission (e.g., Orlando Costas for Latin America), but here we emphasize the main point, the imbalance described.

changes, even more so in a context of monarchical systems where all powers were concentrated in one person and their associates, thereby enabling a more monolithic, influential action. Thus, there is data on the contributions in the political, economic, and educational spheres, among the most important, and all of this is based on a predominant role of the religious sphere.⁵

In contrast, and particularly relevant to our context, the Wesleyan movement developed as a grassroots movement, since its influence did not depend on political power, as in the Reformation, but rather on widespread evangelization and service across nearly the entire nation. This is not to say that there were no political engagements by significant Wesleyan figures; however, these were the fruit of Wesleyan evangelization and discipleship and, in due time, made notable contributions. Indeed, the qualitative transformation in English life resulted from the intensive and extensive Wesleyan work throughout the land. The impact of this broad labor became evident in English society by the mid-nineteenth century, as several historians have described. The key in this case was that lay believers were involved in diverse social spheres through which social change emerged: public and private sectors, education and health, organizations and social movements, labor unions, and so forth.

From an integrally transformative perspective, it therefore seems necessary to refocus our orientation toward congregations, recognizing that the primary and majority ministry is the everyday service of church members within the social fabric in which they are embedded—a point argued below.⁶

2.2 Doctrinal Considerations and the Integral Missional Approach

[i] The Creation Narrative and the “First Mandate”: the “Cultural Mandate”

Considering the biblical canon, beginning here allows for a more organic understanding and vision of mission, since it explains the nature of the world and human life, their sustainability, and their implications and responsibilities at the physical, biological, and social levels, not only at the spiritual level. It likewise grounds the social, relational, and corporate nature of human existence. If to these intrinsic features of the physical, biological, and social we add the special faculties granted to human beings—reason, free will, spirituality, and moral responsibility—then it is clear that “social responsibility” is a substantive feature of human existence and therefore an unquestionable dimension of Christian ethics. This should suffice to prevent dichotomous arguments between social engagement on the one hand and Christian life, ethics, and mission on the other. There is no arbitrary separation between social ethics and mission, as if ethics were merely a consequence of mission.

In fact, mission cannot be separated from the primordial cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28), which reinforces the substantial nature of social responsibility and human development as integral to a Christian perspective on life and, therefore, to mission in the world. The so-called

⁵ For example, much is known about the main reformers, such as Luther’s social influence on education in Germany, or Calvin’s unique political experience in the city of Geneva. But the relationship is vast. See, for example, *The Changing Continuity of Christian Ethics*. Vol. 2. The Insights of History (Exeter, Paternoster Press, 1981).

⁶ See J. Wesley Bready, *England Before and After Wesley: The Evangelical Revival and Social Reform* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938); M. Edwards, *John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century: A Study of His Social and Political Influence* (London: The Epworth Press, 1955); D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989).

cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28; 2:15–24) entails God’s charge to humanity to steward creation and to develop society and culture. Thus, it implicitly affirms the legitimacy and importance of all vocations and all fields of knowledge—the humanities, natural and social sciences, the arts—and their multiple derivations, developments, and applications, as products of the exercise of the special faculties given to humanity for fulfilling this mandate. This mandate was not annulled by the Fall; rather, from that moment it needed to be assumed within the redemptive perspective of God’s salvific project, within the life-giving message of the gospel, and within the eschatological horizon of the values of the Kingdom of God.⁷

[ii] Holism: Multidisciplinarity and Social Transcendence

Therefore, proclaiming and announcing new life in Christ to all of creation without applying its mandates to society and culture is comparable to possessing a valuable tool that remains unused or kept as a museum piece, fostering a Christianity that is socially and historically irrelevant. Likewise, attempting to apply the principles and values of the Kingdom without relating them to the various disciplines of knowledge results in an overspiritualized view of what Christians can truly contribute to the transformation of the world; a clear link to the disciplines of knowledge is needed. This is even more urgent in today’s context, where society is highly differentiated and where problems and challenges are increasingly complex, rarely monocausal, and therefore requiring interdisciplinary approaches.

To offer a preliminary assessment, the fact that the bulk of the evangelical community in Latin America appears to lack a missional orientation toward social impact is largely due to a failure to grasp the dimensions involved in exercising various vocations—and applying their related disciplines—in alignment with the values of the Kingdom, and for the betterment and transformation of society: charity, justice, integrity, solidarity, and excellence, articulated through daily engagement within the social fabric. Furthermore, the community is ill-equipped to think and reflect on human responsibility in light of the demands of the times, as it lacks the criteria to evaluate attitudes, behaviors, or events in contemporary daily life. This task also requires contributions from various disciplines of knowledge. The available data on the negligible impact of the evangelical community’s contributions toward confronting or resolving a diverse array of social problems, despite its numerical growth, stem largely from a misunderstanding of these very issues.

[iii] Clarifications Regarding Ecclesial Composition and “Ministry”

[a] The Lay Nature of the Church

The church, the people (*laos*) of God, is fundamentally lay. Its membership, being a “royal priesthood,” is predominantly lay in its functional presence within society; that is, its primary location and service are embedded in the secular social fabric. There is no room to obscure, confuse, or negate this truth.

This *laity*, diverse in gifts, training, and life experience, is dispersed and active in the daily affairs of the world. Each member of the church is linked to a vocation and a body of

⁷ In practice, Christian ethical reflection seeks to articulate the values of the kingdom of God in human history, as a contribution to the transformation and common good of society. Soteriology begins with the narrative of Creation, the recovery of what was lost there (through the Fall) pointing towards the New Creation. Therefore, mission, theology, and human development are inseparable from a biblical perspective on life, which should be reflected in all spheres of human activity: in the economy, politics, education and social welfare, art, or religion.

disciplinary knowledge through which they are to exercise their role within the social body, fulfilling the cultural mandate and serving society. Inspired by the vision and values of the Kingdom of God, they should seek to fully manifest the fruits of the transforming impact of the gospel across all dimensions of life, displaying the manifold grace of God through the gifts they have received, and embracing their calling as God's people: *to be a blessing to the world* in the fullest sense.⁸

[b] *“Ministerial Calling” and Vocations*

The “doctrine of vocations” within the Protestant Reformation tradition—particularly expressed by Martin Luther and later reformers such as John Calvin—is a central teaching that profoundly redefined work, daily life, and Christian identity. All within the people of God are called, without exception, to *ministry* and service within the church and in the world from a Kingdom perspective.⁹ Any vocation may be holy if exercised with integrity; one need not withdraw from the world to serve God. One's occupation or profession itself becomes ministry as much as preaching. And this service, most naturally, is carried out through one's particular gifts, talents, disciplines, and knowledge associated with those occupations or professions, in clear connection to the broad cultural mandate and service to society. The crucial matter is understanding the lordship of Christ over all spheres of life and, correspondingly, the nature of Christian witness.¹⁰

[c] *The Issue of “Spiritual Gifts” and “Human Talents”*

The church, as the “body” of Christ, in the words of theologian Hans Küng,¹¹ is a charismatic structure: a community composed of individuals with diverse charisms and gifts. As

⁸ As a spiritual entity but at the same time a historical and social reality, the people of God have a citizenship that they must exercise consistently: as citizens of the Kingdom but in the world. The Church, a transcendent essence that must manifest itself in historical form, as the objective body of Christ in the world, and an incarnational witness of his life.

⁹ This aspect is clearly explained by John Stott, regarding the various calls to ministry; the pastoral call being one of them, but for the vast majority of God's people, secular vocations or professional careers in society. All with a clear Christian sense of calling (“Guía, Vocación y Ministerio,” in *El Cristiano Contemporáneo* [Buenos Aires: Nueva Creación, 1995], pp. 123-139).

¹⁰ For example, for believers who are economists, their good testimony in their workplace is not only linked to being upright (no vices, no theft, not taking one's neighbor's wife, etc.), but if they have opportunities to fight for fairer wages for workers, they should do so; if this does not concern them, then it is due to an inappropriate understanding of the Scriptures; therefore, they will be failing in their witness. The same applies to any other profession in its respective field: in contrast to those economists who swarm around financial markets to get rich, there are those who fight for the poor sectors that need to improve their living conditions; opposite those doctors who seek to climb the ranks in the main clinical centers of the capitals, there are those willing to go to marginalized areas to serve those with the fewest resources; those in environmental sciences committed to the great challenge of climate change; lawyers willing to invest their lives in fighting for the rights of the helpless and abused, as opposed to those who seek prestige and to get rich defending the interests of large transnational corporations, etc.

¹¹ Hans Kung (1970) “El Ministerio Cristiano como Servicio,” in *La Iglesia* (Barcelona: Herder), 461-525. There is a widespread belief in the miraculous act of infusing the convert with extraordinary abilities, a kind of “extraterrestrial gift” that can instantly transform Sancho Panza into Plato. And it is customary to differentiate between “spiritual” gifts and talents, placing the former at a level of acquisition of a quasi-magical character, and talents as totally immanent, “human,” “earthly.” Rather, it should be a sign of behavioral inauthenticity to express that something supraphysical happened to oneself, because of which one possesses such and such a “spiritual” gift; in the experience of dynamic psychology, there is no differentiation in terms of human “abilities” between the two.

such, it also functions as a diaconal community, directed towards service, since charisma finds its justification only in service and responsible engagement. All gifts are placed at the service of the body and are projected outwardly into the world through its missionary activity. Thus, the church can be characterized as both charismatic and diaconal.

However, the challenge lies in the apparent inability of the church to operationalize this “doctrine of gifts and talents,” often dominated by limiting frameworks influenced, on the one hand, by magical-religious attitudes,¹² and on the other, a clerical-administrative intra-church focus.¹³ There is a need for a more integrative approach to this doctrine, one that embraces the entirety of a believer’s life and experiences, recognizing the potential for life that each individual represents both as a citizen of the Kingdom and as a member of their communities and nations. This begins with engaging the doctrine of creation, embracing human life more holistically, and avoiding a dichotomous, reductionist conception of an individual’s faculties and capabilities. A sound ecclesiology and pneumatology should not conflict with the doctrine of creation or with a biblical anthropology that effectively employs knowledge from various disciplines (such as psychology, cultural anthropology, sociology, etc.) to understand the human development process better.

A deeper understanding of the gifts present in the church involves discovering the potential of each member through their total being—recognizing their innate gifts, education, life experiences, character traits, inclinations, and passions for particular endeavors, as well as their availability of time and other resources.¹⁴

Of course, when people convert to the Lord, we believe that something sovereign and transcendent occurs in their lives; we affirm that they are born of the Spirit. However, regarding faculties, rather than an act of thaumaturgic infusion of capacities foreign to the convert, what occurs is a redirection and ignition of their own gifts and abilities—essentially, their entire being—toward service for God’s Kingdom. Where faculties once served the ego, evil, or sin, they now aim to be enhanced “for the building up of the body, toward perfection, and for mission in the world.” It is natural for individuals to begin serving in areas aligned with their acquired faculties. This is the primary phenomenon, encompassing the entire community of God.¹⁵

¹² There is a widespread belief in the miraculous act of infusing the convert with extraordinary abilities, a kind of “extraterrestrial gift” that can instantly transform Sancho Panza into Plato. And it is customary to differentiate “spiritual” gifts from talents, placing the former on a level of acquisition of a quasi-magical nature, and talents as entirely immanent, “human,” “earthly.” Rather, it should be a sign of behavioral inauthenticity to express that something supraphysical happened to oneself, as a result of which one possesses such and such a “spiritual” gift; in the experience of dynamic psychology, there is no differentiation in terms of human “abilities” between the two.

¹³ We refer to the well-known organizational structure of modern boards of directors (president and vice-president, secretary, treasurer, members, etc.). The organization that the church may have should be based on existing charisms and talents, avoiding a predominance of administrative schemes that disregard “the authority” that flows from the gift of service, and that implies mutual service and mutual submission to one another.

¹⁴ There have been partial efforts along these lines, thinking about various “ministries” that can be enabled, apart from the traditional ones, but always primarily focused on intra-church ministries, or with a limited projection to the community. e.g., Rick Warren, *A Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); George Hunter III, *Church for the Unchurched* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Rather, there is some confusion when trying to promote a hierarchical stance, to make certain “exclusive gifts” prevail—usually centered on the “pastoral calling”—and which leaves all others as orphans of the Spirit and its gifts. This—the matter of the so-called pastoral calling—is rather linked to subsequent formative processes that,

Therefore, in light of this shift in focus and reconceptualization, churches should move beyond the disorientation they currently face regarding operationalizing the illuminating “doctrine of gifts” in the real world. This is hampered by a magical-religious attitude and a singular hierarchical-clerical and administrative intra-church option that has done little to aid understanding of the full missionary involvement of the entire community of God, or of the exercise of the vocations and faculties of each member in diverse ways in service both within the church and in the community. It is important to emphasize that most individuals who make up local congregations live dispersed and embedded in society as full witnesses, exercising the cultural mandate.

3. A Necessary Presence and Practice: Public Theology and Public Pastoral Ministry

It is necessary to remember the unwavering responsibility that Christians, especially leaders, have to reflect on and act upon the great challenges of our time, particularly in the face of the major problems that are generally characterized as crises of social and human development. It is urgent to move beyond the internal circle towards an open and permanent dialogue with civil society, the academic community, the political and economic spheres, the media, and other relevant institutional areas. The social process needs constant ethical evaluation for clear guidance on the most appropriate objectives for human development; this is what has come to be called the exercise of a “public theology and pastoral ministry.”

Coming from the academic field and of particular importance due to their diverse impact, are the new paradigms of thought in the Humanities and Social Sciences, as they are also influencing theology and missionary, educational, and pastoral work. In summary, the following need to be addressed in the discussion: [i] globalization and ecumenism; [ii] decoloniality and epistemologies of the South; [iii] interculturality and interreligious dialogue; [iv] culture of human rights and global ethics; [v] complexity, uncertainty and interdisciplinarity; [vi] environmental crisis and sustainability; [vii] social communication and digital mediation.¹⁶ It is crucial to analyze their relevance for the church seriously, and what adjustments would need to be made in the approaches, declarations, and missionary practices; evaluating whether our “traditional theological thinking” appears inoperative in the face of the challenges of the time in which we live, and whether it is necessary to overcome certain institutional vices that occur with the wear and tear of organizations, even having started as dynamic social movements of renewal.¹⁷

It is therefore important that the leaders of the denomination—General Superintendents, Regional and Area Directors, District Superintendents, and pastors in general—take this task

in one way or another, may well maintain continuity with abilities stemming from what is innate, from training, and from life experience, and that all members should have their opportunity, according to their “particular callings.”

¹⁶ Hopefully, there will be those at the conference who can address these issues; each requires particular attention. Starting from the studies in the field of science and socio-economic development by Thomas S. Kuhn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*), its application has transcended various fields, including theology (referred to by Hans Küng and David Bosch, on how they have manifested themselves in the history of the church).

¹⁷ We refer to that combination of dogmatism, formalism, and authoritarianism that prevents necessary changes. Therefore, also as an urgent issue to consider in these theological conferences, is the matter of the “implementation” of the contributions and guiding principles that are generated (in this regard, it would be good to review what has been produced in the various theological conferences so far, first, so as not to be repeating discussions of issues as if starting from scratch; but above all, thinking about how what has been discussed can be truly implemented and thus contribute to improving the mission of the church).

seriously and thus provide updated guidance. Not engaging in this exercise would reveal indifference or alienation from reality and, consequently, a lack of understanding regarding proper missionary leadership. Undoubtedly, the same task falls inescapably to the leaders and faculty of denominational educational institutions; only in this way can those being trained for pastoral leadership, and through them, the congregations, be appropriately guided. And it is extremely important in the Protestant context, where some denominations have their origin and main executive leadership in the North (USA), to have a fluid dialogue with their counterparts in the South, to address issues that are confusing vast sectors of the church, given simultaneous geopolitical processes between the Northern and Southern hemispheres.¹⁸

Conclusion: Pastoral Formation and Integrality

Therefore, regarding the integral nature of the mission—aimed at achieving an impact that is not only spiritual but also of profound social significance—and in light of historical experience, priority must be placed on forming a committed laity capable of connecting the values of the Kingdom, in their full breadth, with their daily endeavors within the spheres of civil and public service. Social programs, such as “compassion ministries,” serve merely as supplements and are limited in their scope. To this end, it is indispensable that ecclesial leadership at various levels acquire, as much as possible, a more interdisciplinary formation,¹⁹ enabling them to foster a more holistic perspective of the mission; this entails learning to harness the multidisciplinary potential already present within congregations—a missional force currently dispersed throughout the broader social fabric. Such leadership must also possess a clear vision of the church's compositional nature: that it is, fundamentally, a body of the laity. Furthermore, to avoid the repetitive cycle—or vicious circle—inherent in clericalization, the concepts discussed previously must be clearly understood: specifically, the substantive nature of the cultural mandate, the integral concept of ministry, the reality that lay vocations constitute the majority, and the recognition of gifts and talents as representing the church's total potential for life.

Thus, preaching, teaching, and motivations for mission will need to undergo the necessary reformatting or adjustments. And when these calls to “ministerial” commitment are made (to young people and others), they will know that, yes, they will continue to make those calls to the pastoral vocation (ultimately, the Lord knows whom he calls and even draws from other professions for this purpose). But they must also make these calls to lifelong commitments to fight against the various social problems affecting our nations, encouraging people to study careers and disciplines related to these issues (Economics, Law, Public Administration, Environmental Sciences, etc.), so that in the name of Christ and his Kingdom, they may dedicate their lives to working to improve living conditions in our countries, with a sacrificial Christian spirit, following the path of the cross.

¹⁸ Issues such as Christian nationalism and Zionism, or US interventionism in other nations, should be clarified with timely pronouncements by the governing bodies (given the also Protestant affiliation of acting politicians, Pew Research studies).

¹⁹ Based on this consideration, it seems unusual that in today's world the model of the “seminary” is maintained as the main institution to form the leadership of the church. Or if this is justified, that it remains isolated from other spaces of multidisciplinary education. In itself, the university environment appears as the best environment for the formation of the leadership of the People of God, declericalizing it and turning it into one of a more integral character, corresponding to the reality of the world and of the social and cultural development that the Creator has imagined from the beginning.