

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

Luis Flores, Mesoamerica Region, North Central Area, El Salvador

Introduction

The concept of *missio Dei*, meaning the “mission of God” or “sending of God,” has been transforming the way in which the church understands its identity, purpose and action in the world, rather than conceiving mission as one extra task among others. *Missio Dei* redefines mission as an essential attribute of the triune God, so that the church participates in a mission that originally exists in the bosom of God: the Father sends the Son, the Father and the Son send the Spirit, and God, in his love, sends the church into the world. The *missio Dei* is the redemptive, reconciling, and restorative work that God has undertaken in the world, from creation to consummation, to bring all things under the lordship of Christ. This concept underscores that God is a God on mission. Mission arises from its character, not from an institutional necessity, and the church is an instrument, not the source of mission.

The central question that is timely on this occasion is: *How can the Church of the Nazarene carry out that divine mission faithfully, effectively, and in a biblically coherent manner?*

In what follows, we will first set forth the doctrinal foundations of the *missio Dei*, then ecclesiological considerations (the nature, identity, and structure of the church) that allow us to participate in that mission, and finally the practical missiological principles that guide the church's practice in the world.

1. Doctrinal Foundations of the Missio Dei

1.1. Trinitarian Origin of the Mission

The *missio Dei* is rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity. It is not an added strategy or a function of the church, but an intrinsic action of the triune God. David Bosch is one of the first modern theologians to insist that *mission is not primarily of the church, but of God himself* (Bosch 1991, 389). When at the Brandenburg conference of 1932, Bosch spoke of “Mission as the Activity of God Himself.” Karl Hartenstein was the one who formally coined the term *missio Dei* in 1934, based on Barth's Baptist theology. Hartenstein distinguished between *missio Dei* (God's mission) and *missio ecclesiae* (the mission of the church), emphasizing that the church participates in something that is already underway in God.

Bosch sums up this foundation by saying that “mission has its origin in the heart of God. God is the source of sending love” and that mission should be understood “in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology” (Bosch 1991, 392). The *missio Dei* runs through the entire Bible and is Trinitarian: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit participate in it. God the Father sends Abraham (Gen 12:1–3) to bless all nations. He sends Israel to be “a light to the nations” (Isa 49:6). God the Son is sent (Jesus says, “As you sent me into the world” (John 17:18). God the Holy Spirit sends. The Spirit drives the mission of the church (Acts 1:8).

The *missio Dei* is fully understood when it is contemplated in the light of the Trinity. This view holds that mission is an eternal movement of love that flows between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and that it reaches out into the world to redeem, reconcile, and restore it. In no way can the church be seen as initiating the mission, since the mission has its origin and part in God himself; the Father is the missionary together with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. God is mission before the church exists.

Mission does not arise from a strategy, a program, or a human need; it arises from the Father's eternal plan. The Son is the center and content of the mission taking concrete form in Christ; he is the "Sent" (*apostles*) of the Father (Heb 3:1). Every Christian mission is participation in the mission of Christ. That is why Jesus says, "As you have sent me into the world, so I send them into them" (John 17:18). The Spirit is the agent of mission, and mission is not possible without the Spirit. It is not a human project, but a cooperation with the giver of life. Here is the Trinitarian foundation of the church's mission. The *missio Dei* asserts that the historical mission reveals the eternal character of the triune God; what God does in the mission reveals who God eternally is.

1.2 Biblical Legacy: Mission in Scripture

The whole of Scripture reveals that God works to redeem, reconcile, and restore his creation. From the Old Testament, there are clear indications of mission: Abraham's call in Genesis 12 to be a blessing to all nations; the exodus as a liberation that points beyond the national; the prophets who call for repentance, justice, care for the poor, judgment and mercy; the Psalms, etc. The New Testament reveals the consummation of this mission in Jesus, his cross, resurrection, and in the sending of the Spirit; in addition to the commission of the disciples (Matt 28:18-20; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). Authors, such as C. J. Wright, elaborate on this extensively, showing how the entire Old Testament is "a mission to the world," and how the church is called to be an agent of that mission (Wright 2010, 148).

1.3. Soteriological and Eschatological Implications

God's mission is not only to restore in the present, but it points to an eschatological end: the total renewal of creation, the establishment of the Kingdom of God, universal reconciliation in Christ, and definitive justice. Moreover, soteriologically, mission cannot be reduced only to the individual aspect of salvation. There is a community, structural, political, and social dimension. God is concerned with sin, but also with oppression, physical suffering, and the well-being of others. As Bosch affirms: God's mission includes justice, liberation, and reconciliation in all areas of life (Bosch 1991, 124).

2. Missionary Identity from Wesleyan Theology

The Church of the Nazarene, in the Wesleyan tradition, understands that mission includes both evangelization and sanctification. Its call is to proclaim the grace that transforms human beings and society. "Holiness is not a private end, but a public vocation; a holy life transforms whole communities" (Wesley, quoted in Outler, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 1984). For Wesleyanism, mission is not limited to evangelizing souls or only to social actions; it is the inseparable union between evangelization, discipleship, and social transformation, the fruit of the holy character and the love of God at work in the human being. In other words, the integral Wesleyan mission is to participate in God's work that fully restores individuals and communities through grace, sanctification, and active love.

For Wesley, the Christian life is born of recognizing that "the essence of God is love" (1 John 4:8). That love is active, redemptive, and restorative, implying that God's mission cannot be fragmented. God saves completely, sanctifies completely, and transforms completely. Therefore, the Wesleyan mission is total, integral, and holistic. Wesley never separated conversion from the ongoing process of sanctification. The integral mission is not to evangelize, on the one hand, and to do social works, on the other, but to preach the gospel so that people may be regenerated and then accompany them so that they may grow in holiness and express that holiness in works of love and mercy.

For Wesley, faith and works are not opposed; true faith always produces practical love. And he divided both into two "wings" of the Wesleyan mission: 1) works of piety (oration,

Bible study, the Lord's Supper, and gathering), and 2) works of mercy (feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and prisoners, striving for justice, and accompanying the poor and marginalized). These two dimensions are the Wesleyan basis of integral mission that equates to personal holiness and social holiness.

The Church of the Nazarene emulates that integral mission and expresses it in the Church of the Nazarene *Manual* (2021–2025, 5) as follows: “Our mission is to make Christlike disciples in the nations.” Therefore, each local church is a missionary center, where believers are formed to reflect the character of Christ and extend his Kingdom. This means that our identity is not limited to evangelizing, but encompasses:

- Evangelism (announcing salvation).
- Discipleship (forming the character of Christ).
- Compassion (responding to human needs).
- Justice and social transformation (manifesting the Kingdom of God in society).

Thus, the Church of the Nazarene understands mission as integral, not fragmented. “We are a people of global mission, committed to the proclamation of the Gospel, the formation of disciples, compassion for those in need, and the promotion of holiness in all dimensions of life.” The Church draws her mission from her own identity: she does not have a mission in herself; The Church is mission. To be Church means to be on mission, because its existence is a function of God's mission. Fellowship, witness, and holiness: The church should reflect Kingdom values: justice, holiness, peace, and love. It cannot be a mere transmitter of the gospel with a double life, or committed to corrupt structures. The witness of the church is credible by the coherence between doctrine and practice.

3. *Ecclesiology: What should the Church of the Nazarene be like to carry out the missio Dei?*

Correct doctrine, by itself, does not produce mission. The Church of the Nazarene is required to have a form, identity, structures, and spirituality consistent with the divine mission. Here are several key aspects.

3.1. *Local Structures and Universality*

Integral mission starts with local congregations as primary agents, so much so that it is insisted that the local church is the basis and primary agent of the outing. It is not enough to rely on outside denominational or missionary structures; Local churches must take responsibility, adapting to the local context, culture, needs.

As God's mission overcomes denominational, cultural, and national barriers, the church must work in cooperation and partnership between majority and youth churches, planting and history churches, to share resources, learning, and mutual accountability.

3.2. *Theological, Spiritual and Ethical Formation*

a. Mission requires sound theological formation, but also spiritual formation (prayer, dependence on the Spirit), and ethics (justice, integrity, service). It is not only doctrine but transformed life. Bosch points out that missiology should have a central place in seminaries, not only as another course, but as a discipline that integrates other areas of theology (Bosch 1982, 27).

b. The church must understand its context: culture, social structures, human needs, and injustices. It must interpret how God is already working in that context, to align with what the Spirit is already moving. This implies cultural sensitivity, humility, dialogue, recognition of

social sin, poverty, marginalization. The integral mission not only proclaims but incarnation, social justice, healing.

4. *Practical Missiological Principles*

The following principles are considered to expand the *missio Dei* in the Church of the Nazarene, so that they serve as a platform in the fulfillment of its mission. What is presented here consists of questions and their respective answers—elements that will describe, expand upon, and enable the telling of the story. It is a mission of comprehensive scope: biblical, social, spiritual, and global in reach.

4.1. *How can the Church of the Nazarene carry forward the mission today?*

The basis of the mission of the Church of the Nazarene arises from the very heart of God: the *missio Dei* (the mission of God). God is the primary missionary agent, and the church participates in his redemptive work. “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (John 20:21). This statement shows that the Church does not have a mission of her own, but participates in Christ’s mission to reconcile the world to God. According to Bosch, “Mission is more than an ecclesial task; it is God’s movement towards the world, and the Church is an instrument of that mission” (1991, 390). The *missio Dei* is achieved through the following aspects:

- **Embodiment and cultural relevance.** Following Christ’s model, the church must be incarnated in today’s social realities, responding to spiritual and material needs.
- **Integral discipleship.** It is not enough to win converts; disciples transformed by grace must be formed.
- **Global mission and cooperation.** The Church of the Nazarene has a worldwide network in more than 170 countries. Global cooperation makes it possible to send missionaries, train local leaders, and share resources.
- **The power of the Holy Spirit in mission.** The book of Acts shows that mission is only possible by the power of the Spirit: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be witnesses to me” (Acts 1:8)

The Church of the Nazarene, led by the Spirit, must be a community of hope, holiness, and service, committed to the Kingdom of God. Karl Barth recalled: “Mission is the movement of God from himself to man; the Church exists only insofar as it participates in that movement” (1956, 869).

4.2. *What is the mission of the Church of the Nazarene?*

Jesus’ command was to make disciples (Matthew 28:19–20). The main task is to make Christlike disciples, people transformed by the gospel who transform their environment. As Wright states, “The mission of the church is commitment to God’s mission: to bring the Gospel to the nations and to form communities that reflect the Kingdom of God” (2010, 24). The church also has the task of proclaiming and incarnating the gospel. Being a missionary church is not just preaching, but living the gospel with power and compassion. Therefore, as a missionary church, it does not close in on itself, but it goes out to its community, showing God’s love in concrete actions. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16).

The Nazarene missionary approach must be an integral mission: spirit, soul, and body, paying attention to all dimensions of the human being: spiritual, social, emotional, and physical. This means that mission is not limited to preaching, but also to serving, restoring, and

healing. Escobar points out: “Christian mission is integral because the gospel affects the totality of human life: the person, the community, and creation” (2003, 44).

4.3. *What resource will be used to carry out this mission? and What is the strategy?*

The primary source and resource is the power of the Holy Spirit, who is the first indispensable resource, because the Spirit enables the church to witness with power, convert hearts, and unite and guide the community of faith. Barth said, “The church cannot send itself; only the Holy Spirit sends it in the power of the risen Christ” (1956, 869). Strategy depends entirely on the Spirit in prayer, worship, and obedience, rather than on structures or programs. By putting into practice the following:

- **A systematic plan of discipleship:** The human resource. The Church of the Nazarene’s most valuable resource is the believers themselves. Every redeemed person is called to be a missionary in his or her environment. As Wright (2010) says, the strategy is to equip and mobilize each believer to serve according to their spiritual gifts (training, mentoring, and missionary sending).
- **The community of faith:** The church as the missionary body. The local Church is the center of mission. The *Manual* states, “Each local congregation is a center of evangelism, discipleship, compassion, and world mission” (100.1). The Nazarene community acts in global networks, sharing resources, volunteers, and ministries. The strategy to be followed is to strengthen the local church as a missionary community that evangelizes, disciples, serves, and multiplies new congregations.
- **Compassion Ministries:** the practical expression of love. The Church of the Nazarene also carries out mission through Nazarene Compassionate Ministries (NCM), reflecting Christ’s love for those in need. “For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in” (Matt 25:35). To this end, the strategy consists of responding to the real needs of food, education, health, justice, and restoration by uniting evangelization and service.
- **Christian education and leadership training.** The Church of the Nazarene has seminaries, universities, and ministry training programs around the world. And today, it offers education for the formation of pastors, leaders, and missionaries, from the platform of the home, local church, in a hybrid way (face-to-face and virtual). As a strategy, it is to continue to develop holy, humble, and biblically trained leaders to guide the mission in its cultural context.
- **Global cooperation and denominational connection.** The Church of the Nazarene is a worldwide family in more than 170 countries, united by a common mission. What it enables: sending missionaries and volunteers, financial support (World Evangelism Fund), and shared educational, social, and spiritual resources. “The Kingdom of God has no borders; the mission of the church is global in its nature and local in its expression” (Escobar 2003, 61). Its strategy is: to work in international missionary collaboration, promoting indigenous and sustainable churches

5. *How do we carry out the mission today?*

Having clear what is doctrinal and what the Church of the Nazarene is like, it is now necessary to have very clear resources or operational principles that allow the church to carry out the *missio Dei* with purpose.

Integrity in the mission. The mission must be complete: word, deed, rice [food], evangelism, justice, proclamation, and service. Do not divide the spiritual from the material, or the individual from the structural. This includes pastoral and spiritual care: discipleship,

doctrinal transmission, preaching; and social actions: health, poverty, human rights, reconciliation, and care for creation.

Inculturation and contextualization. The church cannot impose foreign cultural models but translate the gospel to particular contexts. This requires linguistic, cultural, and social sensitivity: the symbols of faith, of adoration, of service must speak to the local heart.

5.1. Submission, Participation, and Local Testimony

- Every believer, not just ministers, is called. The sent church involves many envoys: lay people, workers, professionals, and entire communities who live as a witness.
- Credible witness: integrity, transparency, solidarity with the poor, reconciliation, and forgiveness.
- Presence in the face of suffering and oppression: the church must be on the margins, with those who suffer, as Jesus was, solidarity with the marginalized, the sick, the oppressed, and refugees. Bosch points out that the mission includes “an active struggle against the powers of evil” in society, not just proclamation (1991, 322).

5.2. Institutional strategies, community mobilization and alliances.

- Decentralization of leadership: empowering local churches, local leaders, and small communities.
- Inter-institutional cooperation: Christian NGOs, churches, academic institutions, y ecumenical organizations.
- Missionary mobility: not only sending missionaries from abroad but moving local members to the interior of their country, to marginal areas.
- Leverage contemporary resources: digital media, technology, social media, online training, and global networks.

5.3. Theological Evaluation and Critical Mission

The church must evaluate its missional practices in the light of Scripture, not simply numerical success, institutional growth, or social recognition. It must recognize the tensions between the global and the local, between the spiritual and the material, between biblical faithfulness and cultural adaptation. Finally, maintaining an attitude of repentance and reform continues: the church must allow God to change its way of doing mission, to reform itself if necessary.

6. Challenges and Tensions

For the Church of the Nazarene to carry out the *missio Dei*, it must face several challenges such as the following:

- **Colonialism and paternalism:** the history of missions has often been linked to cultural imperialisms, the imposition of Western culture, and the destruction of native cultures. The church today must recognize that sin, ask for forgiveness, and work from humility.
- **Secularism and religious pluralism:** we live in contexts where the church is no longer the hegemonic voice; there is religious, philosophical, cultural diversity. The mission must dialogue, respect religious freedom, know how to witness without imposition.
- **With consumerism, pragmatism and superficiality:** risk of reducing mission to marketing, appearance, quantitative metrics, visible success, institutional growth, leaving aside internal transformation, discipleship, character.

- **Resources and dependency:** Many churches have few resources; dependence on external donations can generate alien agendas; need for local sustainability.
- **Policing and ethical dissonances:** certain alliances with corrupt powers, complicity with injustices, can make testimony look corrupt.

Conclusions

The *missio Dei* radically redefines the mission of the Church of the Nazarene: it is no longer something that the church “does” among other functions, but something that the church “is” by participating in God’s movement of love and sending. To carry it out effectively, the church needs to be clear about its doctrine: the Triune God as the source of mission, Scripture as the foundation, salvation as an integral and eschatological restoration. To act in its identity, the church as a missionary people, committed to holiness, communion, witness, create structures, formation, spirituality that enable broad participation (leadership, laity), contextualization and cooperation and act with practical principles such as integrality, inculturation, credible witness, and strategic alliances.

The integral mission of the Church of the Nazarene recognizes that God is present and active in history before the action of the church, through the prevenient work of the Holy Spirit. This redefines missionary practice as an effort of discernment and cooperation with the work that God is already doing in cultures, communities, and people (Escobar 2003). The integral *missio Dei* is based on the holistic character of the saving work of God, who acts to restore humanity and creation in all its dimensions. Integral mission reflects the unity between evangelism, discipleship, justice, compassion, and social transformation, since God himself acts in a total way to reconcile all things in Christ. The mission must spring from communion with God (works of piety) and be expressed in love for one’s neighbor (works of mercy). Biblical spirituality is not limited to the interior sphere; it translates into concrete service, reconciliation, justice, and compassion. This creative tension is essential in the Wesleyan perspective.

The ultimate goal of mission is universal reconciliation under the lordship of Christ. Integral mission points toward God’s shalom: restored communities, healed relationships, renewed people, and reconciled creation. The teleological purpose of the integral *missio Dei*, which is supported by the Church of the Nazarene, is universal reconciliation under the lordship of Christ, in anticipation of the new creation. The ultimate goal of mission is not limited to institutional growth, but to the restoration of humanity and the cosmos according to God’s eternal plan. This eschatological horizon gives coherence to evangelization, justice, compassion and discipleship, integrating them into the vision of the Kingdom of God inaugurated in Christ

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