

PARTICIPATE IN THE TRIUNE GOD'S MISSION:
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE *MISSIO DEI* AND THE *MISSIO ECCLESIAE* IN THE
MISSIONARY IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

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Abstract

This article explores the theological relationship between the *missio Dei* (God's mission) and the *missio ecclesiae* (the mission of the church), in light of Trinitarian theology and the Wesleyan perspective on holiness. It argues that the mission of the church is not a human initiative, but a participation in God's redemptive movement in the world. From its identity as a holy people, the Church of the Nazarene is called to embody the divine mission through the proclamation of the gospel, the practice of compassionate outreach, and the formation of disciples in the image of Christ. Finally, theological and pastoral guidelines are offered to renew the church's missionary vision in the contemporary context, reaffirming that holiness is essentially missional and that authentic mission flows from Trinitarian love.

Keywords: *missio Dei*, *missio ecclesiae*, missionary holiness, Church of the Nazarene, Trinitarian theology, discipleship, grace and mission, Wesleyanism

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Introduction

To speak of the church's mission in the twenty-first century requires starting from an essential conviction: mission does not belong to the church but to God himself. Before the church existed, God was already on mission. From creation, the triune God has revealed himself as a God who sends, who seeks, who reconciles, and who restores. This principle, known theologically as the *missio Dei*, constitutes the foundation of all missionary action.

The Church of the Nazarene, grounded in the Wesleyan tradition of holiness, understands its participation in the *missio Dei* as a vocation to missionary holiness oriented toward mission and evangelization. Missionary holiness is understood as the commitment that the experience of God's sanctifying grace is not an end in itself but an indispensable qualification for participating actively in God's redemptive mission in the world. It is the conviction that holiness is inherently missional. Thus, holiness is relational and is expressed in mission, in active love for God, and in practical love for others. John Wesley declared, "There is no holiness that is not social."

From its origins, the Church of the Nazarene has been a sending and multiplying community. Its purpose—"to spread biblical holiness throughout the world"—synthesizes the inseparable union between sanctification and mission. The experience of grace that transforms one's personal life impels the believer to participate in God's redemptive work. Thus, the *missio*

ecclesiae (the mission of the church) is the visible continuation of the *missio Dei*, incarnated in holy communities that live as signs of the Kingdom of God.

However, contemporary mission takes place in a changing and very complex world. The church faces new theological and cultural challenges: postmodernism that relativizes truth; religious pluralism that blurs doctrinal boundaries; moral relativism that questions Christian ethics; and digital globalization, which transforms the forms of communication, belonging, and discipleship. Added to this are the emerging challenges of artificial intelligence and new technologies, which demand a missionary theology capable of discerning how to proclaim and live the gospel in an increasingly virtual and decentralized environment.

In this context, it is urgent to review the biblical, theological, historical, and pastoral foundations of the Christian mission, and to renew the understanding of how the Church of the Nazarene can effectively participate in the *missio Dei*. This article proposes a comprehensive reflection on this question, guided by the central question: How can the Church of the Nazarene carry out the *missio Dei*? From this, four interrelated conceptual dimensions will be addressed:

- (1) Our mission: what we are called to do;
- (2) Our motivation: why we do what we do;
- (3) Our identity: what we are called to be, know, and do; and
- (4) Our strategy: what resources and means we use to fulfill the mission.

Each section will examine biblical principles, theological underpinnings from a Trinitarian and Wesleyan perspective, historical precedents of the Nazarene tradition of holiness, and pastoral implications for contextual mission in a pluralistic and technologically advanced world. Likewise, contributions from recent trends in global missions will be integrated, including reflections from the Fourth Lausanne Conference, which reaffirms the call for an integral, collaborative, and relational mission. The purpose is to contribute to the discernment of the church in its time: how to be a holy people participating in the *missio Dei*, incarnating the holiness of Christ in the nations.

I. What do we need to do? What is our Mission?

1. Biblical Foundation: Mission is Born from the Heart of God

The mission of the church begins with the eternal movement of God's love toward creation. From Genesis to Revelation, God seeks, calls, sends, and restores. In Genesis 12:1–3, God's call to Abram sets the missionary pattern: "And in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed." God chooses a people to be an instrument of universal blessing. This promise finds its fulfillment in Christ, the Son sent by the Father (John 3:16–17), and continues in the church, sent by the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit (John 20:21; Acts 1:8). The Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20) is the revelation of the nature of the church—to be a missionary, disciple-making, and formative community of holy peoples. The church exists insofar as it is sent; its *raison d'être* is to participate in God's redemptive movement towards the world. Paul puts it this way: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18). Thus, mission is not an optional activity, but an extension of the very being of God, who reconciles the world to himself. The church, then, participates in that work as an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor 5:20).

2. Theological Foundation: Participation in the Missio Dei

The theological foundation of mission lies in the trinitarian nature of God. The Father sends the Son, the Father and the Son send the Spirit, and the Spirit sends the church. This sending sequence expresses that the mission belongs to God himself (*missio Dei*), and that the church participates in it as an instrument and witness. Bosch (2008) states that mission should not be seen as a secondary activity of the church, but as an attribute of God, since God is a missionary God. The Church of the Nazarene understands mission within the framework of divine grace in action.

- God's *prevenient grace* reaches people before they are aware of their need.
- *Justifying grace* reconciles them to Christ
- *Sanctifying grace* transforms them into his likeness.

The mission, then, is to accompany individuals and communities on the path of grace, collaborating with the Holy Spirit in forming holy disciples who reflect the character of Christ. John Wesley, in affirming that "the world is my parish," understood that God's mission transcends institutional borders. His vision was transformative: a holy people who, by being filled with the Spirit, participate in the renewal of creation. Therefore, the mission of the Church of the Nazarene is to embody the Kingdom of God in holiness and compassion. We exist to propagate biblical holiness through evangelism, discipleship, and compassionate service (Church of the Nazarene 2015, 62023).

3. Historical Foundation: Holiness in Action

The first Nazarenes understood holiness as a missionary force that was to transform both personal life and society. In the words of Phineas F. Bresee, "Our mission is not to build great temples, but to take the gospel to the poor and needy" (Cunningham 1976, 112). The Nazarene movement grew with a vision of Christ's love multiplying and incarnating, establishing holy communities. This missionary impulse, sustained by faith in God's transforming grace, allowed the spread of the gospel in more than 160 countries, under the conviction that personal holiness leads to global mission. Today, this historical heritage calls the church to renew its missionary DNA by mobilizing disciples and communities that reflect the holiness of Christ in their environment.

4. Pastoral Foundation: Contextual Mission in a Changing World

An effective mission requires pastoral discernment of the contemporary context. We live in an era marked by profound transformations:

- Postmodernism has replaced certainty with doubt, promoting subjectivity and distrust of absolute truth (Morales 2005).
- Religious and cultural pluralism challenges the exclusivity of the Christian message.
- Moral relativism dissolves ethical boundaries, generating confusion about justice and truth (Morales 2005).
- Globalization and the digital revolution have altered the forms of communication, community, and identity.

- The advancement of artificial intelligence requires both creative evangelization and deep ethical discernment about what AI is changing in human nature (Lausanne Movement 2024).

Thus, pastoral mission must be incarnational and contextual, discerning where and how God is already at work, and how the church can join his work. This implies a spirituality of presence, a theology of accompaniment, and a pastoral care that is even digital and capable of incarnating the gospel in this context.

5. Recent Trends in Global Mission: Lausanne 2024 and Beyond

The fourth Lausanne conference on World Evangelism (Lausanne Movement 2024) reaffirmed the need for integral mission, which unites evangelism, justice, and discipleship in the power of the Holy Spirit. Among its emphases are:

- The need for an embodied spirituality, where personal holiness drives commitment to justice, reconciliation, and care for creation.
- The call to a digital mission, using technological means for witness and discipleship that addresses the challenges of misinformation and secularism.
- The importance of contextual theological training, which enables local leaders to interpret and apply the gospel in their realities.
- Work in global partnerships by mobilizing resources, knowledge, and leadership.

These emphases coincide with the Wesleyan identity of the Church of the Nazarene (2015), whose mission integrates grace and truth, holiness and service, and evangelism and compassion. The pastoral challenge today is to translate these principles into local strategies, where each church lives as a missional community that reflects Christ in its context.

6. Conclusion of the section

So, what do we need to do? We need to participate faithfully in the mission of the triune God, proclaiming and embodying his Kingdom in the power of the Spirit. Mission is the very essence of the church's life. We are called to be instruments of prevenient grace, witnesses of saving grace, and promoters of sanctifying grace. In a changing world, our mission is: To be a holy people who make God's redemptive love visible, forming Christlike disciples in all nations.

II. Why do we do what we do?

The Motivation of the Mission: God's Redeeming Love

The motivation of every authentically Christian mission is theological. The church participates in mission because God is love (1 John 4:8) and because its relational nature compels us to share life with his creation. The *missio Dei* is, in essence, the dynamic expression of trinitarian love that seeks to redeem, reconcile, and restore humanity.

1. Trinitarian Love as a Source of Mission

The mission has its origin in the Trinity. The Father sends the Son (John 3:16-17); the Son, in obedience, becomes incarnate to reveal the glory of the Father (John 1:14); and the Holy Spirit continues the work of the Son, enabling the church to be a faithful witness (Acts 1:8). Bosch (2008) establishes that mission has its ultimate source in God's trinitarian being. This thesis is developed from the work of Karl Barth, for whom "God is missionary in his own

being.” Mission is therefore not reduced to an ecclesiastical activity but reflects the eternal movement of love within the trinitarian communion. From this understanding, the Church of the Nazarene participates in the mission to unite with the very life of God. This motivation transcends obedience to command and becomes a response of grateful love to his grace.

2. The Wesleyan Motivation: Perfect Love and Practical Holiness

John Wesley understood Christian perfection as the perfect love that compels service and mission. To be filled with the Holy Spirit implies being moved by love for God and neighbor. In this sense, mission is the natural expression of the sanctified heart. By assuming this legacy, holiness without mission is incomplete, and mission without holiness loses its transforming power. As John Wesley wrote (Maddox 1994): “There is no holiness that is not social.” Therefore, our motivation is not only to win souls but to manifest God’s holy love in redeemed relationships, in justice, compassion, and mercy.

3. Pastoral and Compassionate Motivation in a Wounded World

In a context marked by inequality, violence, migration, ecological crisis, and digital loneliness, missional motivation translates into deep pastoral compassion. We are called to reflect the heart of Christ, who “saw the multitudes and had compassion on them” (Matt 9:36). Mission is an empathetic response that embodies the love of Christ. Thus, mission becomes an extension of the incarnation: just as Christ became incarnate, now the church, filled with the Spirit, is present in the lost world. This pastoral impulse is born of the redemptive compassion that moves God himself.

4. Contemporary Challenges to Missional Motivation

In a world dominated by postmodern individualism, global consumerism, and moral fragmentation, the Church of the Nazarene must reaffirm that its missionary motivation is fidelity to God’s character. Evangelizing, discipling, and serving are expressions of holy love, not mechanisms of institutional expansion. In short, we do mission because God loved us first. Our motivation arises from the heart of God who sends and gives himself. Thus, every local church and every disciple participate in the *missio Dei* by living in the flow of trinitarian love that seeks to restore all creation.

III. To what are we called to be, to know, and to do?

The Missionary Identity of the Church

The mission of the church cannot be understood apart from its identity. The church’s mission is a natural consequence of its being in Christ. In other words, the mission was not made for the church, but the church was created for God’s mission (Bosch, 2008). God, in his redeeming love, has created a holy people to participate in his ongoing mission of reconciliation and restoration of the world.

1. Identity: Being the People of God on Mission

From biblical foundations, the identity of God’s people is intrinsically linked to mission. In the Old Testament, Israel was called to be a blessing to all nations (Gen 12:1-3), showing God’s holy and righteous character in the midst of the world. In the New Testament, Jesus established the church to continue that task, sending it “as the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (John 20:21). Therefore, the identity of the Church of the Nazarene is to be a community of missional holiness. As the body of Christ, the church is called to embody the Kingdom of God in

every cultural context, manifesting the love and justice of the gospel in word and deed. This identity is summarized as follows: “Called to be saints who transform the world” (Church of the Nazarene, 2023). Holiness is the way in which we reflect the image of Christ in our character, relationships, and mission.

2. *Being: Trinitarian communion that sends*

To be a missionary church means to live from the trinitarian communion. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit live in a perfect love relationship, and the church, as an extension of that communion, is called to be a living reflection of that unity. The church expresses this relational identity through its model of global connection, where each local church participates in the same universal call to holiness and mission. The *trinitarian koinonia* becomes the model for how we live, serve, and disciple in interdependence: “We are one body in Christ, and all members of one another” (Rom 12:5).

3. *Knowing: Discerning the Truth in a Changing World*

In this context of pluralism, secularism, and moral relativism, the Church of the Nazarene needs to form disciples who think theologically and live with firm convictions. This requires cultivating a spirituality informed by Scripture (integral biblical learning), the Wesleyan tradition, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Theological thought is an indispensable pastoral tool for responding wisely to the contemporary challenges already mentioned.

Theological knowledge is practical. It involves understanding how prevenient grace is manifested in culture, how salvation is proclaimed in post-Christian contexts, and how Christ’s character is formed in fragmented communities. Therefore, discipleship must include critical thinking to understand the world, cultural sensitivity to relate to that world, and spiritual obedience to transform it.

4. *The Doing: Discipling, Serving, and Multiplying*

Missional identity is embodied in concrete actions. The Church of the Nazarene is called to make Christlike disciples in the nations (Matt 28:19–20). This action involves personal accompaniment, community life, and compassionate service. In the Wesleyan model, discipleship occurs in community: classes, bands, and small groups where believers exhort each other to grow in grace. In the 21st century, this can translate into hybrid communities (in-person and digital) that integrate discipleship, mentorship, and contextual mission. It is noteworthy that small groups remain effective for spiritual growth, but unfortunately, this practice is not widespread (Barber 2023, 129).

In addition, missionary action includes a commitment to justice and compassion: “to do justice, to love mercy, and to humble yourself before your God” (Mic 6:8). We are called to embody the good news in ministries of social restoration, education, health, disaster response, and pastoral accompaniment.

Finally, doing mission implies multiplication. We participate in the Kingdom vision by planting new churches, raising up new workers, and developing local leaders who reproduce the DNA of missional holiness. Multiplication is a spiritual fruit of mature discipleship.

In short, the identity of the Church of the Nazarene is defined by its participation in the mission of the triune God. We are called to be a holy people, to know how to discern God’s

action in a changing world, and to make disciples who live and proclaim the fullness of the gospel.

IV. What resources do we use to carry out this mission?

Missional Strategy in a Changing World

Carrying out God's mission depends primarily on the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. However, mission also requires wisdom, planning, and contextualization, for the same God who sends the Spirit also calls us to use the means available to us to fulfill his purpose. In this sense, in participating in the *missio Dei*, one must discern what spiritual, human, and structural resources the Lord has entrusted to us in order to serve faithfully and effectively in our context.

1. The Essential Resource: The Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit

At the heart of every Christian mission is the Holy Spirit, who empowers, guides, and renews the church. The mission began at Pentecost, not with a strategic plan, but with spiritual filling: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be witnesses to me..." (Acts 1:8). For the Wesleyan tradition, holiness of heart translates into missionary dynamism. The Spirit not only purifies but sends. Perfect love poured out in the heart (Rom 5:5) impels the believer to share the gospel and serve his neighbor. Thus, the mission's first resource is spiritual: constant dependence on the divine presence. Therefore, we must cultivate a missionary spirituality: fervent prayer, Christ-centered worship, intercession for those reached, and sensitivity to the Spirit to discern new paths of ministry. There is no mission without Pentecost.

2. Theological and Historical Resources: Wesleyan Heritage of Missional Holiness

The Church of the Nazarene has a Wesleyan heritage. John Wesley understood mission as the extension of holiness to the world. His methodology—classes, societies, outdoor preaching, education, and social service—was deeply *contextual, relational, and transformative* (compassionate outreach). In the same vein, the Nazarene mission is based on the following theological axes:

1. *The prevenient grace*, which impels us to reach out to every person, trusting that God is already at work before our arrival.
2. *Saving grace*, which proclaims the gospel as God's power for transformation and forgiveness.
3. *Sanctifying grace*, which transforms disciples who reflect Christ's character into love and obedience (Busic 2021).

Thus, this framework has produced a global church committed to education, justice, compassion, and sending missionaries. God has always led his people in times of change, renewing their mission with creativity and faithfulness.

3. Human and Community Resources: God's Priestly People

Another indispensable resource is the community itself. The *missio Dei* is realized through the *people of God*, not only their leaders. In Wesleyan ecclesiology, every believer is a minister of grace (1 Pet 2:5, 9). The mission belongs to each disciple. This implies a vision of multiplying discipleship, where each believer assumes his or her missionary role in his or her context: home, work, school, or society. We must continue to train members to serve as Kingdom

agents in every sphere of life. Small groups, spiritual mentoring, and accountability communities remain practical and theological resources for keeping mission alive in everyday life. In a digital and dispersed world, the spiritual community remains the most powerful instrument of witness (Barber 2023).

4. Contextual Resources: Missional Strategies in the Twenty-First Century

The mission of the twenty-first century requires discerning the signs of the times and responding with contextualized and ethically responsible strategies. These include:

- *Globalization and human mobility*: migration turns cities into new mission fields. We are called to serve the migrant, the refugee, and the stranger as an expression of Christ's love.
- *Postmodernism and pluralism*: the mission must rediscover the apologetics of witness, giving irrefutable evidence of the transformation that the gospel produces in the life of the believer, with humility and compassion. As Jaime Morales (2005) points out, we must know the barriers and build bridges with postmodern society.
- *Technology and digital communication*: Artificial intelligence, social media, and virtual environments offer new platforms for discipleship, pastoral formation, and creative evangelization. These must be used with ethical discernment.
- *Ecology and social justice*: mission today includes the care of creation and the defense of human dignity. The Church of the Nazarene, in proclaiming integral holiness, must commit herself to an ecological spirituality that reflects the Lordship of Christ over all creation (Julca 2007, 2).

These trends are not threats, but opportunities for a more integral, embodied, and hopeful mission (Bullón 2013, 106).

5. Learnings from the Lausanne Conference (South Korea, 2024)

The recent Lausanne Conference (Lausanne Movement 2024) reaffirmed principles essential to contemporary global mission that are deeply compatible with Wesleyan theology. Among them:

1. *The centrality of Christ* as the foundation and message of every mission.
2. *The integrality of the gospel*, which unites evangelization and social transformation.
3. *The global cooperation* of the body of Christ. The future of missions depends on deep partnerships between cultures, denominations, and organizations that share God's longing for the nations (TMS Global 2015).
4. *Mission in the digital age* calls the church to be an incarnational presence in virtual spaces.
5. *The formation of missional leaders* who unite character, competence, and compassion.

These emphases coincide with the Nazarene call to be a global church on mission, where practical holiness translates into justice, mercy, and multiplication of disciples.

6. Pastoral Resources: Leadership, Accompaniment and Formation

Effective mission requires missional pastoral leadership. The pastor is a disciple formator and a multiplier of workers. Missionary ministry integrates three dimensions:

1. *Deep spirituality*: a life of prayer, discernment, and continual dependence on the Spirit.
2. *Strategic vision*: the ability to understand the context and orient the church towards its mission.
3. *Pastoral care*: accompaniment of people in their processes of growth and restoration. Here, lay leaders have a significant opportunity to use their gifts.

Nazarene missionary leadership **serves and trains intentionally**, reflecting the model of Christ, the Good Shepherd.

7. Synthesis: Strategy from Holiness

In conclusion, the resources and strategies of the Nazarene mission are articulated around a central principle: practical holiness is the missionary strategy. Everything we do—evangelize, disciple, serve, plant churches, form leaders, innovate digitally—must flow from a life sanctified by the Spirit and centered in love. Mission depends on people transformed by grace. Moreover, when a community lives in holiness and love, it naturally becomes a missionary community, where the *missio Dei* becomes visible in concrete actions of redemption, justice, and hope.

General Conclusion:

Participating in the Mission of the Triune God

The *missio Dei* reminds us that mission is the very work of the triune God who acts in love for the reconciliation and restoration of all creation. The Church of the Nazarene participates in this mission. The mission of the church is born of the character of God: the Father who sends, the Son who becomes incarnate, and the Spirit who empowers. This trinitarian fellowship is both the model and the source of all missionary action. Therefore, the church cannot separate itself from its missionary nature without denying itself. To be the church is to be sent.

From the Wesleyan perspective, participation in the *missio Dei* is understood as the expression of perfect love that transforms personal and social life. Relational holiness is a redemptive immersion in the world to reflect the character of Christ. In this vision, mission, and holiness are inseparable: holiness is the source of mission, and mission is the public manifestation of holiness.

In a time marked by cultural pluralism, moral relativism, ecological crisis, digital globalization, and rapid technological advances, the Church of the Nazarene is called to discern the move of the Holy Spirit amid complexity. The mission today demands more than methods; it requires theological discernment, pastoral sensitivity, contextual creativity, and deep spirituality.

Contemporary theological reflection, confirmed at the 2024 Lausanne Conference, highlights that mission must be Christocentric, integral, collaborative, and contextual. In the same vein, the Church of the Nazarene has the opportunity to renew its global vision, uniting the preaching of the gospel with compassion for the needy (compassionate outreach), relational discipleship with technological innovation, and the formation of holy leaders with a commitment

to justice and peace. It should be noted that this aligns with the core values of *discipleship as a path of grace* (Hicks 2023).

The challenge, therefore, is to rediscover God's mission. It is not a matter of adding programs, but of cultivating a discipleship identity that permeates the whole life of the church. Every congregation, every ministry, every Nazarene home must become a center of mission, where God's grace is lived, shared, and multiplied.

The future of the Nazarene mission will depend on three fundamental convictions:

1. *Dependence on the Holy Spirit*: without his presence, mission is empty activism.
2. *Christ's centrality*: without his cross and resurrection, mission loses its message.
3. *Commitment to practical holiness*: without transformed lives, mission lacks witness.

When these three dimensions are integrated, the church embodies the gospel in its fullness: it evangelizes with love, serves with humility, and disciples with hope.

Finally, the *missio Dei* invites us to look to the future with confidence. The Holy Spirit continues to work beyond our structures, and the Kingdom of God continues to advance silently in hearts, communities, and cultures. The Church of the Nazarene is called to be a community of missional holiness, present where pain cries out, where truth is confused, and where hope seems far away, proclaiming with his life and word, "The God who calls us is faithful, and he will also do it" (1 Thess 5:24).

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