

THEOLOSIS IN INTEGRALITY AND CONTEXTUALITY  
OF THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH:  
CONVERGENCE BETWEEN THE DIVERSITY OF THEIR PARTICULAR CONTEXTS  
AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF ITS FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE

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*Introduction*

The mission of the church is understood as its diligent participation in the *missio Dei*, or God's mission to the world. This is conceived as an integral task that encompasses the human being in all its dimensions, while attending to every culture in its particular context. From this perspective, the mission of the church cannot be properly understood without recognizing its dual nature. It is universal and integral in its purpose, but also contextual and dynamic in its application. The mission of the church seems to be defined by a dichotomy between the uniformity of its integral structure and the particularity of each context it impacts. The church, being one in essence, mission, and purpose, lives that mission in a diversity of realities, cultures, needs, and languages.

It is necessary, then, to provide an initial framework that guides the debate and future reflection, highlighting the main foundations of the church's mission. To this end, it will be necessary to review the biblical, theological, historical, and pastoral elements that make up a solid and relevant mission. In this search, questions will arise that, in turn, will guide the development of this initial framework. We will categorize them into conceptual blocks for better identification and attention:

1. Church Identity and Purpose—Who are we as a church, and what are we called to be, know, and do? What is our essential mission in a changing world, and why do we do what we do? What biblical, theological, historical, and pastoral foundations define this mission and give it meaning?
2. Motivation, strategy, and resources—What is the motivation that drives our missionary work, and with what resources, methods, or strategies do we carry it out? How do worship, discipleship, evangelism, and compassion relate within an integral mission of the church?
3. Biblical frameworks for mission—How is a biblical theology of mission articulated from the Old Testament, particularly in the mission of Israel, and how does it complete or illuminate the mission of the church today? How does the New Testament present the mission of God's Kingdom, and how do we participate in that Kingdom today?
4. Local Church, Ecclesiology, and Participation—What is the theological and practical role of the local church and its leaders in the overall mission of the church? How are the *missio Dei* (God's mission) and the *missio ecclesiae* (mission of the church) related, and what impact does our ecclesiology have on missionary practice?
5. Contemporary challenges and global context – What recent trends or emerging strategies in global missions are influencing current practice, including reflection in spaces such as the Lausanne Conference? What cultural dynamics—postmodernism, pluralism, moral

relativism, globalization, new media, and technologies such as artificial intelligence—are affecting the mission of the church today?

Let's give background and context to these questions, and the answers will emerge from this exercise.

### *Background and Context*

#### *Mission as an Extension of God's Character*

Every authentic Christian mission is rooted in the very nature of God. The Bible does not present mission as a human activity to “bring God” to the nations, but as the initiative of a God who is already at work in the world, and who calls his people to participate in his redemptive work. From the Old Testament, it is evident that God's purpose has always been universal: to bless all the families of the earth through a chosen people. Genesis 12:3 defines it as follows: “I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Israel was not chosen by privilege, but by purpose. Their identity was to reflect the character of God, manifested in justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Such is the statement of the prophet Micah: “O man, he hath declared unto thee what is good, and what the Lord requires of thee, only to do justice, and to love mercy, and to humble thyself before thy God” (Micah 6:8).

However, Israel repeatedly failed to understand that its calling was missionary. Election was interpreted as exclusion, and holiness as hostile separation. The prophets, especially Isaiah, remembered that Israel's mission was, as Isaiah 49:6 says, “a light to the nations.” That light was not a nationalistic ideology, but the manifestation of a holy God who desires to restore communion with all creation. In this vein, the mission of the church (as the new Israel) does not begin in Matthew 28 but in the very heart of God from Genesis.

Already in the New Testament, this vision is expanded in Christ. Jesus is the incarnation of the *missio Dei*: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). Here the church inherits not only a mandate but a nature. The community of disciples exists only to the extent that it participates in the sending of the Son and the Spirit. The Kingdom of God, as the central theme of Jesus' preaching, is not a territory, but the restoration of human and divine relationships under the lordship of Christ. Thus, the mission of the church is to manifest that Kingdom in every dimension of life.

#### *The Missio Dei as a Trinitarian Framework*

The *missio Dei* is not an ecclesial strategy, but an expression of the Trinity in action. God the Father sends the Son, the Son sends the Spirit, and the Spirit sends the church. In that sense, a mission is not something one “has”; it is a mission. Karl Barth stated that “the church does not have a mission, but the mission has a church.”<sup>1</sup> This reversal of perspective underlines that all authentic missionary action is participation in the divine life. The purpose is not institutional growth, but Trinitarian communion made visible in the world.

In Wesleyan theology, this Trinitarian dynamism is expressed in holiness of heart and life, where prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace cooperate to transform the whole person and,

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<sup>1</sup> Paraphrase of an idea by Karl Barth: see Karl Barth, “*Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart*” (Brandenburg Missionary Conference, April 11, 1932).

through that person, society. The mission is not only to evangelize, but to heal, educate, liberate, reconcile, and transform, because in the economy of grace the whole human being, in all its integral expressions, is called to reflect the image of Christ.

The Church of the Nazarene, born of the holiness movement, has historically understood that holiness cannot be divorced from service to one's neighbor. Personal sanctification necessarily leads to social and evangelizing action. The *missio Dei* is therefore concretized in the *missio ecclesiae* when the Church embodies Trinitarian love in specific contexts, articulating a spirituality committed to justice, compassion, and witness.

### *Mission as a Response to the Times*

Historically, the church has reinterpreted its mission in light of cultural challenges. In the first centuries, Christians understood their sending as martyrdom, a faithful witness before the Empire. In the Reformation, the mission was seen as the proclamation of grace in the face of religious legalism. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was a global missionary expansion. Today, in the twenty-first century, the church faces a new scenario framed by digital globalization, religious pluralism, moral relativism, and growing spiritual disenchantment.

The Lausanne Conference of 1974 and its 2024 meeting in South Korea reaffirmed that the mission must be comprehensive. This establishes that evangelization and social action are not polar opposites, but two inseparable dimensions of the same gospel. John Stott expressed, "Our neighbor is not an incorporeal soul... nor is he a body without a soul... he is a body with a soul, integrated into a community.... We must attend to his total well-being—the good of his soul, of his body, and of his communal life."<sup>2</sup>

In the Church of the Nazarene, this approach has been reflected in its educational, medical, and community ministries. From hospitals in Africa to universities in Latin America, the church has sought to bear witness to the fact that holiness has a human face. But each context requires a different application. What holiness means in a rural African community is not the same as what it means in a Latin American metropolis. Here, contextuality is not relativism, but embodiment. It is the universality of the gospel expressed in the diversity of cultures.

### *The Mission as Integral Accompaniment*

In pastoral practice, the mission becomes concrete in accompaniment. It is not enough to preach; one must walk with people through their processes. For example, a ministry that evangelizes without educating leaves minds empty; one that teaches without caring for the body ignores the Incarnation; one that addresses social needs without promoting spiritual reconciliation remains mere philanthropy. But a theologically integral mission based on the model of Christ forms disciples who think, feel, believe, and act from the gospel.

In developmental psychology, authors such as Erikson and Maslow have shown that people seek meaning, belonging, and purpose. Christian mission responds to these deep needs but redirects them to their divine source. Where psychology describes the process, theology reveals its destiny: to be conformed to the image of the Son. For this reason, the pastoral task is also therapeutic, educational, and spiritual. It involves discerning the wounds of the soul and

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<sup>2</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (InterVarsity Press, 1975).

accompanying its healing. It involves teaching the Word in ways that are understandable to the cultural context. It implies, in short, making the Kingdom visible in the totality of human life.

For all that has been expressed, the challenge of the Church of the Nazarene is not only to “do” mission, but to be a transformed community that expresses, in each context, the integrity of the Gospel in action. The *missio Dei* is incarnated where faith is contextualized. But what does that mission consist of, and what do we need to do to accomplish it? Many strategies and concepts have been developed to identify, define, and explain the work required to meet this objective.

Much is said about church growth and ecclesiology as instruments of study and development for understanding the role of the church in its theological and dogmatic practice within a specific sociocultural context. Precisely—and given that we are discussing the definition, study, and development of structures as working tools for the fulfillment of the *missio Dei*—I would like to propose a functional model for the realization of the mission, within which each of its characteristic elements is defined, so that, armed with this structural definition, we may subsequently address the particular needs of the context. We will define the parts of an operational mold or plan and intentionally handle the immediate or evident particularities of the mission’s “field of operations.”

I would like, then, to present for the reader’s consideration a model of integral structure that considers the fundamental aspects of life through which the needs of individuals in a particular environment are identified, strategic priorities are established in the management and attention of these, and at the same time, the evangelistic mission of the Great Commission is fulfilled.

Fortunately, a theory of human development already exists that encompasses all these integral aspects of life and facilitates the comprehensiveness of our mission, as well as the diversity of the environments in which we carry it out.

I take the liberty of integrating Theolosis as that theological, psychological, and scientific structure that defines the elements of integrality within the mission of the Church. Theolosis is a theory of human development based on Luke 2:52, “And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and man.” Theolosis offers us a holistic structure that considers four fundamental aspects of human life. The relationship of the biblical text to these aspects of Theolosis is defined as follows:

- Wisdom—Intellectual or knowledge aspect
- Height—Physical, physiological, or health appearance
- Grace to God—Spiritual Aspect
- Grace toward people—Social or relational aspect.<sup>3</sup>

With this structure as a general framework for the definition and development of the mission, let us answer the following critical and fundamental questions:

*What is our mission? What do we need to do?*

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<sup>3</sup> Elvin Heredia, *Theolosis as a Theory of Human Development (2nd. Edition)* (Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing, Columbia, SC, USA, 2024), 22.

The mission of the Church of the Nazarene is framed in the mandate of Christ. Matthew 28:19-20 tells us, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.” Now, with the perspective of Theolosis we can identify in the passage of Matthew those four integral aspects of life:

- Social or relational aspect—*“Go and make disciples of all nations.”*
- Physical aspect—*“Baptizing them”*—The public exercise of the sacrament of the church.
- Intellectual or knowledge aspect—*“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”*
- Spiritual aspect—*“Behold, I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

Interestingly, these integral aspects were the same ones in which the early church grew. From the book *Theolosis as a Theory of Human Development*, we quote the following:

Acts 2:42: “And they continued in the apostles’ doctrine, in fellowship with one another, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” This passage is perhaps the most expository systemic passage of the concept, after Luke 2:52. Of course, if Jesus defined the four systemic aspects of life, his church would equally exhibit these aspects in its formation:

- Intellectual aspect—*The doctrine of the Apostles*. Knowledge of the faith and teachings of Jesus.
- Social aspect—*Communion with one another*. Consequently, Acts 2:43-47 testifies that many signs were performed among the people, that there was unity among the believers, that they had all things in common, and that they had the favor of all the people.
- Physical appearance—*The breaking of bread*—They shared all things and ate together. They catered to their common needs.
- Spiritual Aspect—*Prayers*—They persevered with one accord each day in the temple. The Apostles performed wonders and miracles. A spiritual revival with an impact on society.<sup>4</sup>

Mission is integral and holistic when it teaches the truth of the Gospel in an understandable and applicable way, encouraging critical thinking and moral discernment; when it promotes a healthy, balanced life, where corporeality is understood as an instrument of service and not as an end in itself; when it cultivates communion with God through prayer, worship and obedience; and when it practices justice, mercy, and reconciliation in community life. In that sense, making disciples involves much more than communicating religious information. It requires forming people who develop integrally in all dimensions of Theolosis. Therefore, the mission of the church is to form disciples who are theologically aware, emotionally mature,

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<sup>4</sup> Heredia, *Theolosis as a Theory of Human Development*, 22.

physically responsible, and socially supportive. Evangelization and sanctification, Wesleyan pillars, are here in the same process of integral transformation.

*Why do we do what we do? What is our motivation?*

The motivation of the church does not arise from institutional duty, but from the love of God that compels us. The Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:14, “For the love of Christ constrains us.” Theolosis teaches that integral human development has its origin in divine grace, which moves human beings towards their fullness. From behavioral psychology, genuine motivation comes from a sense of purpose. In the church, this purpose is defined theologically: to participate in the redemption of the world.

The mission is not carried out to preserve an institution, but to manifest the life of the Kingdom. The Church of the Nazarene, as a body of sanctified believers, responds to God’s love by reflecting it in concrete works of compassion, teaching, and restoration. This identification with the Father’s mission is the inner engine of the church. Love becomes the principle of action, holiness its expression, and Theolosis its structure of growth.

*What are we called to be, to know, and to do? What is our identity?*

The missionary identity of the Church of the Nazarene is determined by its call to be holy, to teach wisely, and to serve with compassion. It is that willing, being, knowing, and doing that Philippians 2:13 speaks of. What God produces within us indicates that holiness is not merely a spiritual state, but an integral way of existing—one in which the character of Christ is formed within us; in which theological and educational formation is indispensable for correctly interpreting contexts and responding to their needs from a place of informed faith; and in which pastoral, evangelistic, and social action is the natural consequence of a transformed heart. In Theolosis terms, this identity is reflected in the maturity of the four human dimensions, which together is what Paul suggests in Ephesians 4:13 as “the fullness of Christ,” that is, the unity of faith (social aspect), the knowledge of the Son of God (intellectual aspect), and the measure of his full spiritual stature in the context of his body as “a perfect man.” The church not only teaches the Word but embodies it in community. Not only does it proclaim the Kingdom, but it visibly represents it in every context.

*What resources do we use to carry out this mission? What is our strategy?*

Any missionary strategy must integrate spiritual, intellectual, human, and contextual resources. It has prayer, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, sacramental communion, and the Word of God as a source of wisdom. It also embraces collaborative leadership, ministerial formation, and the participation of the laity as active agents of transformation; and it engages body and soul with culture, social needs, and contemporary media—technology, education, and art—that serve as vehicles for the gospel.

From Theolosis, these resources must interact in a balanced way: the intellect organizes the action, spirituality guides the purpose, the body executes the service, and relationships multiply the impact. Thus, the strategy of the Church of the Nazarene must be a contextualized praxis, capable of maintaining the universality of the gospel without losing its sensitivity to the environment.

### *Application of Theolosis*

The *missio Dei* is manifested in the convergence between the universal and the particular. The Church of the Nazarene, called to live out and proclaim the Gospel of holiness, must do so from a comprehensive theological understanding that recognizes human beings in their totality and their context in its specificity. Theolosis, then, offers a solid framework for this balance, recalling that God works in human beings integrally and contextually. Theolosis offers a bridge between Trinitarian theology and human praxis. The integral development of Christ, as described in Luke 2:52, becomes the paradigm for the integral mission of the church.

From the cognitive point of view, Theolosis teaches the church to form renewed minds, as the Apostle Paul exhorts in Romans 12:2: “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Evangelization cannot be limited to emotional conversion. It must include transformative education that teaches people to think theologically, to discern culturally, and to decide ethically. A church that evangelizes but does not educate produces followers without critical judgment. On the other hand, a church that teaches without mission produces theologians without compassion.

This area relates to the cognitive, moral, and psychological development described by Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, who argue that human beings reach maturity when they can reason ethically from universal principles.<sup>5</sup>

In Theolosis, Christian wisdom is more than morality. It is spiritual discernment incarnate. The mission of the Church of the Nazarene, then, must integrate theological education, ethical reflection, and spiritual literacy in every context where it serves.

From the physical aspect of the integral plan of Theolosis, a frequently forgotten theological truth is revealed: The Incarnation dignifies the body. In Christ, God not only redeems the soul but assumes the human condition in all its materiality. Therefore, the mission of the church also encompasses the holistic healing of the human being. Jesus did not preach without healing, nor did he heal without preaching. His gospel was word and touch, message and miracle, soul and body. In Theolosis, stature symbolizes the harmony between physical health and emotional stability that accompanies spiritual maturity.

From pastoral psychology, authors such as Howard Clinebell emphasize that pastoral mission includes caring for oneself and others, because a healthy body and mind are effective instruments of the Spirit. Clinebell discusses integrating “body therapies,” including deep relaxation, body alignment, dance, exercise, and movement, as physical practices and growth approaches that emphasize working directly with the body to increase its vitality and liveliness.<sup>6</sup> In a world marked by stress, anxiety, and psychosomatic illnesses, the church must rediscover the therapeutic dimension of the gospel. The *missio Dei* is not fulfilled in physically exhausted or emotionally fragmented communities, but in those where the “stature” reflects the fullness of the risen Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (New York: Free Press, 1965), Ch.2, 4, 5; Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development. Volume I: The Philosophy of Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), Ch.2, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Howard, Clinebell, *Counseling and Pastoral Care: A Model Centered on Whole Health and Growth* (Challenge Books/Eerdmans, 1996), 377.

The third axis of Christ's development, "grace toward God," leads us to the core of the spiritual life. Jesus, though the Son, cultivated a constant relationship with the Father. Their mission sprang from communion, not activism. This principle is crucial to the church's mission. It is not possible to participate in the work of God without abiding in the presence of God.

In Theolosis, this dimension corresponds to the development of the believer's spiritual and theological life. It is the maturity that integrates faith, prayer, discernment, and obedience. Without this vital connection, the mission becomes a human project. In fact, many missionary failures in history are due to attempts to "do God's work without the God of the work."

The apostle John expresses this relationship clearly: "He that abides in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit" (John 15:5). The *missio Dei* is not sustained by planning, but by permanence. The Church of the Nazarene, heir to the Wesleyan emphasis on holiness, understands grace as a process: preventing, justifying, and sanctifying. Each of these stages is also missionary, because every grace that transforms the individual seeks to extend itself to others. In pastoral terms, this implies that the church's mission must be continually nourished by worship and spirituality. There is no discipleship without contemplation, no service without prayer. For this reason, the integral mission is also contemplative: action flows from being. Holiness is not only ethical, but a living relationship with God that is translated into holy action.

Finally, Jesus' growth includes "grace toward people." This area encompasses the relational and social dimension of the Gospel. The grace that restores communion with God is necessarily expressed in reconciliation with one's neighbor. The mission of the church is, then, a mission of bridges, contacts, relationships, and closeness. The apostle Paul describes this aspect in the words, "He gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). The gospel not only reconciles people to God, but people to one another. Here, Theolosis becomes community praxis when it develops healthy, empathetic, and just relationships. From social psychology, we know that human beings flourish in community. From theology, we understand that love is the language of that redeemed community.

The Church of the Nazarene has shown this dimension through compassion ministries, social justice programs, humanitarian aid, and family restoration projects. But beyond philanthropy, the mission seeks to ensure that every human relationship reflects Kingdom reconciliation in marriage, at work, in society, and across cultures.

In the current global context, fragmented by ideologies, polarization, and inequality, the church is called to be a space of alternative communion. Its testimony lies not only in its doctrine, but in its capacity to love. For this reason, the integral mission is always relational and made measurable and tangible not by the temples built, but by the lives reconciled.

### *Conclusion*

The Church of the Nazarene, in her participation in the *missio Dei*, is called to reproduce in its community life the same formative pattern of Christ. Every congregation, every ministry, and every missionary expression becomes an extension of what we will call "The Theology Process": the church growing in wisdom, stature, and grace in the contexts where God sends it.

The mission of the church is not only to preach, but also to accompany the development of men and women towards their fullness in Christ, in every culture and in every generation. Theolosis reminds us that spiritual growth does not occur in isolation, but in relationship. Development in wisdom (cognitive dimension), stature (physical and emotional dimension), grace

with God (spiritual dimension), and grace with people (relational dimension) are intertwined in the pastoral task. Only in this way will the church be able to faithfully fulfill the *missio Dei*, being a visible witness that the Kingdom of God is already among us and continues to expand through lives transformed integrally.

The four axes of Jesus' development converge in a single word: *fullness*. The mission of the church is not partial or sectoral, but total. To evangelize without educating, to serve without healing, to preach without reconciling, or to disciple without caring is to fragment the gospel. Theolosis invites us to understand that authentic mission reproduces the growth of Christ in Christian communities.

Just as Jesus grew in a balanced way, the Church of the Nazarene must grow integrally:

- In wisdom, forming minds that think like Christ.
- In stature, taking care of bodies and emotions that serve with strength.
- In grace with God, cultivating a deep spirituality.
- In grace with people, building redemptive relationships.

Such a church can faithfully reflect the *missio Dei* in a world that yearns for meaning, health, faith, and community. In Paul's words, "Until we all come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). So help us!