

# **“WE ARE A MISSIONAL PEOPLE”: MISSION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WESLEYAN TRADITION**

*by Christian D. Sarmiento*

*Country of Origin: Colombia/United States*

*Serving in: Guatemala*

## **I. THE ESSENCE OF GOD AS A BASIS FOR MISSION**

The concept of mission, giving one's life for the salvation of others, is not natural for fallen human nature. The ways of this world are to receive, to hoard things for oneself and to be selfish. We are not naturally motivated to do mission.

The mission initiative comes only from God, from his very essence and nature. The Bible is clear about the essence of God. In Spanish the word which describes essence is “to be”. The only two phrases in the Bible which describe the essence of God are: “*God is love*” (1 John 1:8, 16) and “*God is holy*” (Psalm 99:9). God is missionary by nature. Mission is in the essence of his being.

### **A. The love of God makes it necessary for him to form a people**

The love of God from eternity was the force which made him look for companionship and to create his own people. The Love of God reached its climax in the creation of the individual. There is complete harmony and agreement in the Trinity when they choose to create their own people: *Let us make man in our own image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them* (Genesis 1:26, 27).

Unfortunately, the human race rejected this love. But God chose Abraham to restore his people, “I will make you a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; *and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*” (Genesis 12:2, 3). From the very beginning God wanted to bless “*all peoples of the earth.*” Now from the seed of Abraham he was able to establish a people from whom the “new Adam” would emerge Jesus Christ. Colosians expresses it very clearly: “For by him all things were create, all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (1:16, 17). The purpose of God is “to reconcile to himself all things...making peace through his blood shed on the cross” (1:20). Today he blesses all the families of earth.

### **B. The Holiness of God demands that he should protect his people**

Even as the love of God demands that God form and create again a people for himself (which is what mission is all about), His holiness demands that this people should be holy. God wants his people to be like Him: “*in his image of God he created him*” (Genesis 1:27). A people separated exclusively for Him.

*“We are a Missional People” (Christian D. Sarmiento)*

If a nation, ethnic group, denomination, church or individual self exalts itself, lives for itself, it is in opposition to the love and holiness of God and becomes ethnocentric, which is an aberration to the Mission of God.

It is impossible to be missional without holiness. The love of God and his holiness are the structures of mission: “For you are people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all people *but it was because the Lord loved you*” (Deuteronomy 7:6-8; see also Deuteronomy 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9; Isaiah 62:12).

Mission without a call to holiness is a contradiction (Exodus 28:36; 39:30). The only mission way is holiness (see Juan 14:6) : “And a highway will be there, it will be called the way of holiness” (Isaiah 35:8). Paraphrasing Hebrews we could say: “without holiness there could be no mission.” The presence of a holy and loving people who live out the character of God attracts other people. This is what it means to be missional!

To be missional is to practice the love of God in holiness. As a result, mission requires justice (righteousness), both moral and ethical. It is only possible to have mission if God is present. The presence of God is magnified (see Philippians 1:20) by people who are full of Him and show the image of God in tangible and practical ways to a world that has an internal longing to go back to the original state of Creation: “the image of God”

## **II. GOD CALLS US TO SHARE IN HIS MISSION**

The mission is not an external calling. Mission comes from a heart full of the presence of God. It is an internal call.

### **A. The call of God invites us to participate in his love and his holiness**

God in us, God filling us, his love and his holiness touches every aspect of our being (“Love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37; see Deuteronomy 6:5), demands and compels us to be missional. This is the reason why we are Christians; there is no other option but to be missional. This was the reason behind the Great Commission: “Make disciples.” The internal calling of the presence of God in us (the testimony of the Spirit) *dictates* that the only reason why we exist is to “BE LIKE HIM” and to “BE LIKE HIM” demands that “we love our neighbor as ourselves” (Matthew 22:39). From these two commandments: “love God and love our neighbor,” come all revelation (“from these two commandments depend the Law and the Prophets,” Matthew 22:40).

### **B. The call of God orders us to reflect God at all times**

Peter in his first epistle reminds his readers that they are “strangers in the world scattered...” (1:1). The reason is that they are “aliens and strangers” (2:11). Peter reminds them that the calling is to reflect what God is: “Be holy because I am holy” (1:16). The readers of Peter’s letter, “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, *a holy nation*, a people belonging to God, *that* you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”

*“We are a Missional People” (Christian D. Sarmiento)*

(2:9)...”so that you have sincere love for the brothers, love one another deeply from the heart” (1:22).

The call of God continues to be relevant. A call to be “imperishable seed” (1 Peter 1:23), a call which flows from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22). It is an internal call which needs to be expressed in love and holiness. There is no other option. The result of this calling is to be “A MISSIONAL PEOPLE.”

If the Church of the Nazarene (as the people of God who express love and holiness through their distinctive doctrine of entire sanctification) stopped being missional, it would no longer be the people of God. If the Church of the Nazarene stopped being a holiness church it would not be missional. If we abandon our distinctive doctrine which reflects God’s love, we would abandon mission. The impulse of God in our hearts to be missional would be put out and we would become the same as any other philanthropic organization pleasing ourselves. We would end up like the Pharisees, traveling “over land and sea to win a single convert and when he becomes one, you make him twice a son of hell as you are”. The only way that we can continue to be a holiness and a missional church is to really be one.

### **III. THE PRACTICE OF MISSION FOR A MISSIONAL PEOPLE**

The document in which our General Superintendents express the core values of the church states that we are “a missional people”. According to this document, we are missional in “our worship” (p. 9), “our mission of compassion and evangelism” (p. 10) “our mission of discipleship” (p. 12) and “our mission in higher education” (p. 14).

#### **A. Our worship**

The Bible tells us, demands and reminds us to “worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness” (1 Chronicles 16:29, Psalm 29:2, 96:9, cf. 110:3), and that we celebrate “the remembrance of his holiness” (30:4; 97:12, KJV), that “holiness adorns his house” (93:5), that we “serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days” (Luke 1:74, 75, KJV). Worshiping God is to present ourselves as “a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom 12:1). The missional demand is to establish churches (centers for worship) in all the corners of the world.

#### **B. Our mission of compassion and evangelism**

The way to establish the church in every corner of the world is through evangelism. Evangelism is the demonstration of God through the proclamation of the Good News and the acts of God through his people to a community or individual. The proclamation of Good News with the love of the incarnate God in compassion will attract others to look for this love and accept the Good News. We do not use compassion as a bait to win others; we are compassionate because we want to “BE LIKE HIM”.

#### **C. Our mission in discipleship and higher Christian education**

“To make disciples” is the principal imperative of the Great Commission. In Matthew 13:52, Jesus said, “every teacher of the law that has been *instructed* about the kingdom of heaven.” A scribe was a doctor in the Scriptures. A scribe was an expert interpreter of the

*“We are a Missional People” (Christian D. Sarmiento)*

Scriptures. Someone who knew the principles and was able to contextualize them so that they would be clear for the next generation (see the case of Ezra). The word “instructed” in the original (*didaktos*) has the same root meaning as the word for “disciples” (*didasko*). Every Christian should be disciplined. Each one should become an expert, *instructed* in the things of God. In this sense higher theological education begins with the first lesson on discipleship. The missional task of the church demands commitment from each disciple from the “a,b,c” of the Christian life to higher Christian education which leads the believers to a lifelong practice of discipleship. Our concept and commitment to higher Christian education includes the holistic formation in all the disciplines of human knowledge so as to fulfill the “cultural mandate” given by God at the beginning of creation, which has not been abrogated and is included in Christian mission from the perspective of the world belonging to the Kingdom of God. The aim is to become Christians “instructed in the kingdom of God”.

Our mission is holistic and circular. We are called to open centers of worship where the holiness and the love of God are seen through the practice of evangelism, compassion and lifelong discipleship. This cycle should be repeated with each new Christian until the Lord returns.

To be missional is not optional. It is the heart of the Great Commission and really is the primary focus derived from our true worship of God. This is our task! Let us do everything possible to make the Church of the Nazarene continue being a missional church!