

“THE CHURCH AFTER THE LIKENESS TO THE TRINITY...” A RESPONSE
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I would like to thank Dr. McCormick for this paper in which he reminds us again of the reality of the *Missio Dei*. I agree with most of the content of the paper. I should point out that my comments are made from the position of someone who is the fruit of the faithfulness to the mission of generations of Nazarenes who preceded us.

I will begin this reflection reaffirming that the mission reveals the holy character of God, who does not abandon his creatures that suffer the consequences of sin. God is a missionary God, his mission of redeeming love acting in human history, flows from his holiness.

The love of God and his holiness are the fundamental essence of his character, and from these arise his purposes for the created universe. The mission is his, before it is of the church, and his purpose is to restore all things, through this active love, according to his holiness.

God sent his Son Jesus Christ who came to do the will of the Father. Jesus came with a mission, the mission of the Father (Luke 22:42; John 6:38).

- a. To seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).
- b. To teach them to live in the will of God, so that none would be lost (John 6:39).
- c. To delegate his intercessory mission to the church, his kingdom of priests (Matthew 28:16-20; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6).
- d. To send the Holy Spirit to empower them in holiness and love for the fulfillment of this task (John 14:16-17; 16:13).

We as a church continue the ministry of Jesus. On one hand we are “participants of the divine holy nature” (1 Peter 1:3-15), and on the other we are also agents of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11-21). It is the same mission of God made effective in different channels: the men and women that form the redeemed people. Although it is his mission and God continues to be involved in it as the great Designer of the redemptive work, the church as servant has a very important role to fulfill.

Dr. McCormick affirms that it is presumptuous to think that the church can “fulfill” the Great Commission. All depends on what we understand by “fulfill”. There are various meanings of “fulfill”; one is “to consummate” (complete, finish). This will not be achieved until the end times. Biblical eschatology is full of hope of a future in which the salvific plans

of God are finalized and the church is part of the great celebration of victory over sin and death.

The other meaning is to practice (effect, do, carry out). In this sense it is possible to “fulfill” the Great Commission. Until this future fullness of the kingdom of God is established, we his people cannot rest. In our hands we have the responsibility and the privilege to serve God as vehicles for the redemption of the world. On occasion as theologians we assume the role of critical observers of the mission of the church, but we should remember that we are part of a generation of Christians that has a redemptive role to fulfill for God. As part of this church “servant of the mission”, we have the privilege to make a constructive and proactive contribution to the great contemporary missional task, illuminating and guiding the church in the understanding of its role as servant and in creative forms for an increasingly better missional practice.

I would like to introduce at this point the element of faithfulness to the mission, using a story to illustrate it.

On December 16, 1909, after several months of ocean travel, a North American couple, Frank and Lula Ferguson, arrived at the port of Buenos Aires, Argentina. They had sold their house in Bowling Green, Kentucky, and took part of the money from the sale to pay for their tickets. The Fergusons traveled without the support of any missionary organization, without salary or benefits of any kind. For four years they shared Christ through the distribution of Bibles. Their house was a small room with only a few pieces of furniture. In 1914 the Fergusons began services in a neighborhood of the city of Buenos Aires. There, the married couple, John and Emilia Comandu, was converted, who lived in another part of the city, and they offered their house for evangelistic meetings.

Among the neighbors who came to the open air service there, was Josefa, a young mother who was a Spanish immigrant. She was saved and baptized in 1924. Her 8-year-old son, Felipe, came to Sunday school and his teacher led him to accept Christ as his Saviour. In a few months they brought both his sisters and his father. Felipe grew up and married a Nazarene named Ines. They had six children and fourteen grandchildren; all of these are currently serving the Lord in different ministries of the Church of the Nazarene. Two of their children are global missionaries. I am one of them. Felipe was my father. He died in January 2005 in Buenos Aires, leaving me the best inheritance: 80 years of faithfulness to the mission of God.

Frank Ferguson is also linked to the life of my wife’s grandmother, who was named Pilar, another Spanish immigrant whom he found in a desperate condition on the train tracks,

with the intention of taking her own life, after her stepfather had tried to abuse her. Ferguson and his wife took her into their home as a daughter, and she and the family that she formed later with an Italian named Armando, were faithful all of their lives, bringing many people to the Lord.

The Fergusons were sensitive to the need of people beyond their own borders. They obeyed the call of God, preferring sacrifice and discomfort because of love for the families of my country. God rewarded their faithfulness to the mission by multiplying the fruit of the seed they planted. Faithful families committed to the church were raised up everywhere, remaining faithful to the mission for four generations, serving in multiple ministries and even sending their children to foreign missions.

Did the Fergusons and that Sunday school teacher imagine that all this would happen 80 years later? I don't think so. But with eyes of hope they saw these young women, and with eyes of transforming faith in Jesus Christ, who is able to make everything new.

Did the Fergusons fulfill the mission successfully? If we judge by the fruit of transformed lives we have to respond, "Yes, very much so". The fulfillment of their mission depended on their obedience and faithfulness, and God did the rest. God always does the rest if we are faithful.

I wonder if the Fergusons ever asked themselves if the mission that led them to Argentina was of God or of the church. We don't know if they did. But we can affirm that they were moved by an inner fire, a passion that is called holy love. When we are totally filled with the Holy Spirit, our desires and the goals of our lives are fused with the will of God and his mission of redeeming love becomes our purpose in life. The mission of God possesses us and directs us as the hand directs the glove. It penetrates us, colors us as ink that is absorbed by a cloth. We cannot do anything but missions, because we are filled with the Spirit of the missionary God. The Fergusons had this fire, this passion until the end of their lives. They were faithful to the mission of God.

Of course, if my grandmother were still alive and the theologians tried to explain to her that the Fergusons had come to Argentina to fulfill the Mission of God and not that of the church, she would have given them a response like that of the man to the Pharisees in John 9:25, "*...I don't know; the only thing I know is that I was blind, but now I can see.*" Availability and faithfulness translate into transformed lives.

It is necessary to point out that in 1925, due to the great economic crisis; the Fergusons (who were by then affiliated with the Church of the Nazarene) received the suggestion of the general church to close the work in Argentina, because they could no longer

send economic support. They decided to stay and face the situation as they could. In 1926—according to the history of the Church of the Nazarene in my country—God spoke to Mrs. Susan N. Fitkin who mobilized 10,000 women to pray, fast and give the price of a meal to the missionary work. So, in my country the work continued; my grandparents and parents could be disciplined, and as a consequence of that, I am here before you today. Last Sunday a local church in Oklahoma raised more than \$ 86,000 in faith promises. Praise the Lord, we still believe in faith promises!

Maybe my perception is different because I was not born in a naturally sending country like the USA or U.K.; on the contrary, I am the result of the missions that wonderful people from both countries came to carry on in the Republic of Argentina. I am the result of the mission of God, the grace of Jesus Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, but also the result of the sacrifice made by many lives full of holiness and love, of the faithful task of men and women, missionaries of the Church of the Nazarene.

On another note, I have a little difficulty to believe with Dr. McCormik that being holy is a synonym of being happy. Maybe the problem is only with the concept we have of happiness. I prefer the use of the term “joyful” rather than “happy” that the author uses. Happy means (in English and Spanish) glad, lucky. I know a good Christian lady, very committed to the work of the Lord, who within a few months was abandoned by her husband, her mother suffered a stroke, and her father was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She has not lost the joy of salvation, but I cannot say that she feels happy. She goes through frequent periods of depression and crying. Is being holy a synonym of being happy? I am not sure. I think we should reflect on this more.

On the other hand, it is hard for me to believe as the author affirms, in a God that is immutably happy. I do not believe that the Bible shows us a God like that. I believe that God is saddened by the suffering of his creation because of sin. Jesus Christ wept seeing the multitudes scattered and disoriented like sheep without a shepherd.

How can God be happy, seeing the suffering of thousands of families every day who face hunger, the lack of potable water, war, sickness, domestic violence, among other things? How can our compassionate God be happy, while many of his children around the world suffer persecution and death? How can God be happy, seeing the human beings that instead of being good administrators of creation are contaminating and destroying it more and more? How can God be happy, when 18% of the population of Latin America lives with less than a dollar a day, and 39% with less than two? How can God be happy when violence, teenage pregnancy, abortions, homosexuality, among others, prevail in countries with a large

percentage of Evangelical Christians that have not fulfilled their mission to be salt and light? How can God be happy, when many of his children live every day of the week for the accumulation of goods and capital, ignoring the voice of the Lord that tells them to give their lives as living offerings for the salvation of the world?

Some of us maybe are more fortunate (happy?) because we get up in the morning and can see the mountains covered in a green canopy (as we do at the Nazarene Seminary in Costa Rica), but many are less fortunate, as the inhabitants of the garbage dump in Panama that can only see the mountains of trash covered in vermin in front of their houses, since they cannot escape from the waste that they live in. I do not conceive of a God that can remain ecstatically happy before such a situation, and neither have our fellow Nazarenes in Panama, who seeing the suffering of these persons have mobilized to bring them the gospel that transforms their lives and are working to improve their living conditions.

Concluding, I believe that we should emphasize two fundamental elements of the mission of God that the church serves:

The contemporary church has much still to do as a servant of the mission of God. The church has the privilege and the responsibility to serve the ends of the redemptive mission, at the local level, transforming their communities being salt and light, as well as at the global level, planting groups of believers in all of the peoples of the earth. The final fulfillment of this task is in the future when the Lord establishes his kingdom forever.

The contemporary church should develop an increasing missional intelligence to learn from the good examples and also from the errors of the past, and to look to the future of the church with hope. Today the Church of the Nazarene has more and better prepared human resources than ever before in its history. We live in a world that provides us with new means every day to communicate the gospel. Maybe our greatest challenge is to make holy disciples in other cultures that will be able to understand and serve God in the fulfillment of the mission.