


The concept of an integral mission as the Evangelical proposal of a systematic social teaching



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The global expansion of Evangelicalism raises essential questions about inculturation, social involvement and contextualising the Evangelical mission. The concept of an integral mission is an answer to these issues. However, when viewed from a non-Evangelical perspective, it is also an illustration of the dynamic changes that occurred in the Evangelical communities and of convergences with other Christian traditions or denominations. The article aims to present the concept's significance and consider its contextualisation. Finally, it asks whether it could be explained in terms of an Evangelical answer for the growing need for theology in concert with the local and cultural contexts.

Contribution: The concept of an integral mission contributes to the theological debate on mission and the meaning of Christian social involvement. The research addresses the focus and scope of the journal of the promotion of multidisciplinary aspects of studies in theology.

Keywords: integral mission; transcultural mission; Lausanne movement; Evangelicalism; ecumenism; social involvement.

The concept of an integral mission seems quite obvious at first glance. Actually, it is not unique in the conviction that the Christian mission should embrace both proclaiming God's words and meeting diaconal deeds. However, it is not so when considering its context. The concept was born among the Evangelical theologians from Latin America who addressed the conviction that today's Christian mission needs a more solid biblical foundation than the traditional missionary movement. Nevertheless, this conviction must be regarded from the perspective of Evangelical distinctiveness, here touching upon two important motives: firstly, biblicism as one of the basic features of Evangelical theology and secondly, a widespread opinion that the Evangelical Churches are reluctant to develop a systematic social teaching or a social constructionism. The concept of an integral mission regards these two and offers an opportunity to work out a modern Evangelical social theology.

The article addresses several research questions: What is characteristic of the concept of an integral mission? How does it reflect changes (Lorans 2011:251) in global Evangelicalism? What is its specificity when reading from a different perspective (here – Catholic perspective)? Might the concept be regarded as an attempt of developing a systematic Evangelical social teaching?

So, the article is about contextualisation of the concept and asking if the integral mission could be explained in terms of an Evangelical answer for the growing need for theology in concert with the local social and cultural contexts. With this having said, the paper focuses mainly on the theological approach developed within the Lausanne movement. Literary analysis is the main research method employed to address the purpose of the article.

Between the transcultural and an integral mission

Rene Padilla explains the integral mission when juxtaposing traditional and new paradigms of mission (Padilla 2021:5). The former refers to a mission that was carried out predominantly from the Western metropolis to the countries and regions where Christianity was recently planted. This missionary model was about crossing geographical and cultural boundaries; it required exceptional spiritual aptitudes and the personal traits of missionaries; and it was often connected with the civilisation mission, therefore, a rationale for spreading the idea of progress. This is a model that brings to mind the images of fearless men and women who went to the most distant corners of the world and taught the gospel and, concomitantly, basic skills for applying the

Note: Historical Thought and Source Interpretation.

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achievements of modern technology. It is, therefore, the model of missionaries who were the first anthropologists living the daily life of the communities they were sent to and were the first bridge of mutual acquaintance between the two worlds, illustrated by famous poem 'The White Man's Burden' by Kipling.

However, this was also the model that brought about ambiguous consequences. Padilla, when describing the unwelcomed results of this traditional understanding of mission, distinguishes the four dichotomies, or, one can say, differences (Padilla 2021:6). He states that mission considerations firstly embraced the difference among churches that sent out missionaries and the ones that received them; secondly, there were differences between the location that was a missionary's home and the location of his or her workplace; thirdly, differences existed among missionaries and ordinary 'Sunday attendants' and fourthly, there was a difference between the mission and the daily life of the church. Every difference brings about tensions and discontinuity in the Christian missionary task that partly resulted from the objective historical process of transmission of cultural and religious elements from one system to another, but there were also some consequences of incorrect or failed discernment of the nature and significance of a mission itself.

Padilla denotes this old paradigm as a 'transcultural mission': 'transcultural' because missionaries must have operated between cultures, taking the Christian message from one cultural field and setting it in a completely different one. Nevertheless, Padilla is far from condemning or rejecting this old, transcultural paradigm. On the contrary, he emphasises that this understanding of mission has inspired thousands of the 'heroes of the faith' and contributed to the church having a worldwide scope (Padilla 2021:6). Yet, even so, this transcultural model does not correspond with the global political and cultural changes and does not address the negative consequences of the above dichotomies.

Instead of such an old paradigm, nowadays, Christianity needs a new one that will be integral. It is so because, as Padilla (2011) argues:

[f]rom the perspective of an integral mission, transcultural mission is far from exhausting the significance of the mission of the church. Mission may or may not include a crossing of geographical frontiers, but in every case, it means primarily a crossing of the frontier between faith and no faith, whether in one's own country ('at home') or in a foreign country (on 'the mission field'). (p. 283)

Universalism is the keyword for describing the integral mission. The mission of the church is universal by its nature and in every aspect of its meaning. There is no sphere of human life, nor is there any field of human cognition, that is excluded from the missionary task. Also, there are no longer churches that 'send' missions and churches that 'receive'; in fact, every church is called to be missionary. Missionary universalism does not limit itself to the churches as institutions or communities; rather, every single Christian is

a missionary in his or her daily life as the Christian life is life in God. The famous words by Paul Tillich can well illustrate this: '[T]he Universe is God's sanctuary. Every workday is a day of the Lord, every supper is a Lord's supper, every work a fulfilment of the divine task, every joy a joy in God' (Tillich 1956:41). Thus, universalism addresses every aspect of human existence: there must not be compartments that would be freed from the mission, whether it concerns morality, science, politics or economics and so on. This is a mission that embraces all 'geographical' levels, whether it is local, regional, national or worldwide. Actually, the concept of an integral mission reflects the most inherent attribute of being a Christian and reaches the most profound dimensions of Christian theology.

Only one border challenges this universalism: the one between faith and no faith. There cannot be a more decisive separation, and, thereby, there cannot be a more important task for churches and individual Christians than participating in the Christian mission. The theology of the universal priesthood of all the baptised reverberates in the background of this vision.

After presenting this theological background, Padilla addresses the dichotomies of the traditional, transcultural mission. The concept of an integral mission removes them when stressing that all churches send and receive missions; that Christian mission reflects the Kingdom of God in words and deeds that meet human needs; that the mission is a matter of every single Christian, whether it a priest or a 'Sunday attendant' and that Christian mission is first of all about the personal witness of a Christian life.

Certainly, this concept also reflects the Latin American context and personal experiences of Evangelical theologians, such as Padilla, who lived not only in a Catholic environment but also in the reality of political oppression, economic exploitation and social exclusion (Kirkpatrick 2016:354). Padilla later admitted that this life full of persecution and suffering determined his quest for a theological continuity of experience; that one's existence cannot be chopped into separate pieces (Kirkpatrick 2016:358).

Padilla's model can well reflect an Evangelical earnestness, dynamism and readiness for literary acceptance of God's vocation. To highlight the significance of the integral mission, one should consider two issues: firstly, the ambiguities of Evangelicalism in terms of approaching social involvement; secondly, the theological trends within the Lausanne movement reflecting the thinking about the integrity of Evangelicalisation and social commitment.

The ambiguities of Evangelicalism

There is a problem with defining what Evangelicalism is. Certainly, it cannot be regarded in terms of such categories as a denomination or confession; instead, it is a theological and spiritual trend that permeates confessional boundaries. When examining Evangelicalism's nature, George Marsden

denotes it as both movement and community. Hence, it is a movement with a shared historical tradition, tendencies and developed identity and character. Although institutionally dispersed, it has points of convergence, such as a common style of worship, the technique of evangelism and behavioural mores (Marsden 1984:x). Simultaneously, it is a consciously Evangelical trans-denominational community. This sense of community is based on Christians' conscious perception of themselves as 'evangelical' and therefore, in upholding a common mission.

Of course, Marsden's observation refers to the structure of Evangelicalism. Nevertheless, many authors define it by distinguishing its essential theological mark or essentials. Six convictions of Evangelicalism by Alister McGrath (1994) or four special marks (biblicism, conversionism, activism, crucicentrism) by David Bebbington (1989:12f) are among the most frequently referenced. However, in light of the article's topic, the famous 'six strands of evangelicalism' by David Bosch seem to showcase the Evangelical family best, also because they somewhat combine the 'structural' and 'essential' definitions. Thus, Bosch (1988) distinguished:

[F]irstly, 'confessional evangelicals', who emphasize their position in the Reformation tradition with its doctrines of *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *sola scriptura*. Secondly, 'pietist evangelicals' who have inherited the eighteenth and nineteenth-century revivals and protests against Protestant scholasticism's 'dead orthodoxy'. The Holiness movement is a more recent manifestation of this. Thirdly, 'fundamentalists', who develop their identity out of the fundamentalist/modernist controversy in North America in the first decades of this century. Fourthly, the Pentecostals, who are the fastest-growing Christian group in the world. Fifthly 'conservative Evangelicals' or 'neo-Evangelicals', a loose grouping which has developed, particularly in the USA, since World War II. It has subsequently grown through large-scale missionary efforts in many other countries, particularly in the Two-Thirds World. Neo-Evangelicals comprise groups as wide-ranging as Fuller Theological Seminary, the Billy Graham Organisation, the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF), the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation (LCWE), and the American Southern Baptist Convention. Sixthly, 'ecumenical evangelicals' who either have evangelical principles and remain within churches affiliated to the conciliar movement or, if they are not in those churches, are open to work with the World Council of Churches. An extension of this would be 'radical evangelicals', who are particularly concerned with issues of social justice. (p. 458)

The list of strands of Evangelicalism by David Bosch can be read in reference to his groundbreaking work 'Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology'. When defining six symptoms of the present crisis of Christianity, the elements of mission, six aspects of Christ's ministry, four historical missionary paradigms and elements of a postmodern ecumenical missionary paradigm, Bosch constructed a comprehensive theory of the contemporary theology of mission. One of its famous motives is a concept of the two mandates: spiritual, referring to 'the commission to announce the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ' and social, assuming working for 'human well-being and justice'

(Bosch 2011:344). The two mandates concept can be regarded as a specific theological paradigm for the social involvement in Evangelicalism.

One can easily discern the Evangelical heterogeneity when reading between the lines of the above quote. One of its symptoms is a different stance towards socioeconomic order and social commitment. In short, some Evangelical circles (like conservative Evangelicals from the USA) affirm neoliberal political agenda and laissez-faire capitalism, whereas others, like neo-Evangelical groups emphasise the necessity of determining a theoretical framework for a more just economic system. William Connolly's (2008:13) claim of the 'evangelical-capitalist machine', demonstrating the ideological alliance of right-wing Evangelical in the USA and capitalism or John Millbank's (2009:267) contention about the interdependence of 'unleashed free-market capitalism' and the 'revival of evangelical religion' can unmask this heterogeneity. The Lausanne movement may be regarded as a counter-example of the trends mentioned above.

The Lausanne movement – Evangelical theology of social involvement

The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation (the Lausanne movement's full name) emerged in 1974, in Lausanne, Switzerland, as an answer to the challenges of the modern world, 'when evangelicalism realised its own cultural, spiritual, and political diversity in the midst of vast changes in world social and political structures' (Hunt 2011:81).

Billy Graham and his son-in-law, Leighton Ford, played the leading roles in establishing the Committee; nevertheless, theologians such as Rene Padilla, Orlando Costas and John Stott vastly determined the future course of the Lausanne theology, even though their influence has continued to develop throughout the years of the movement's existence. When outlining the Committee's history, Robert Hunt (2011) noted that:

John Stott and British evangelicals put forward the importance of Christians addressing social problems as integral to evangelism. More controversial voices from Latin America, notably René Padilla and Orlando Costas, challenged naive concepts of either evangelism or social action divorced from the realities of cultural imperialism and the demand for social justice. (p. 83)

The most crucial events in the movement's history were the global gatherings held in Lausanne in 1974 (convocation meeting), Manila, Philippines in 1989, and Cape Town, South Africa in 2010. Every conference produced a final report that later became the source of Evangelical theology. Thus, there are three documents: the Lausanne Covenant, the Manila Manifesto and the Cape Town Commitment (CPC) (Stott 2009). Their survey proves an essential development of the movement's theological doctrine, not only in size but also in teaching. When referring to this growth, Robert Schreiter (2011) made a significant caveat on Evangelicalism:

The fact that Evangelical Christianity is a very diverse phenomenon – even as it holds firmly to a certain biblical and theological tenet – makes any generalisation at once hazardous and intriguing. Generalisations are hazardous because one could view evangelical Christianity as monolith because of its shared convictions, overlooking its considerable diversity. But evangelical Christianity is also intriguing because of how it manages this very pluralism in light of its biblical faith. (p. 88)

Schreiter's opinion is really valuable. It is indeed striking how much the authors of these standpoints were seeking theological balance between the biblical-theological foundation and sustainable and relevant employment of social science knowledge and social experience. One can risk the opinion that the Lausanne theology reaches far beyond the Evangelical family and could inspire Christians from different traditions and confessions.

The concept of an integral mission is expressly contained in the last document. Yet, besides explicit references, one can discern that Lausanne's entire essential vision is in concert with the integral mission. This concordance is already conspicuous in the first document. The Lausanne Covenant laid a solid foundation for the theology that is Christocentric and Pneumocentric and, concomitantly, is also aware of the universalism of the Christian vocation and the Christian mission.

For instance, the fifth chapter entitled 'Christian social responsibility' emphatically states that social involvement is an integral part of the Christian mission, and this contention relies on such fundamental truths as God, who created all and who is interested in all, not merely the church but in the whole world; it is about the message of salvation that must not be reduced to mere political or cultural liberation, yet that ought to inspire efforts denying oppression, alienation or discrimination (Stott 2009:23).

Also, the seventh chapter – 'Co-operation and Evangelism' – refers implicitly to the concept of an integral mission when solving rudimentary questions about the balance and clarity of theological doctrine and social involvement. Thus, whereas Evangelisation and social involvement are complementary, the former is primary. However, this explanation is completed by the next section, which considers the integrity of the church and its credibility. Hence, Evangelisation is indeed primary only when the church practises what it teaches. Here appear the fundamental aspects of the essence of the church: she is outside this world, but she must be in this world (Stott 2009:54).

Hence, the church's integrity is about her teaching and conduct coming together; however, it is also about her unity. The Covenant distinguished between theological and pragmatic unity. The former stems from the essence of the church just because God intended it to be so. The latter is a calling to a joint mission of spreading Christ's love and peace; however, it respects the diversity and flexibility of local churches (Stott 2009:55). One can risk the opinion that the

pragmatic unity of the church corresponds with her functionalist definition.

Certainly, even though the concept of an integral mission is not explicitly mentioned in the Covenant, the document 'announces' it when outlining the theological foundations of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization's (1992) understanding of mission. The report from the next global gathering, the Manila Manifesto, does so as well. Basically, the Manifesto confirms and extends the theological message from the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (1992). It also reflects changes occurring in the movement.

This confirmation and extension of the fundamental Evangelical tenets are reflected in the 21 affirmations acclaimed by the Manila gathering that introduce more extensive lectures on the Evangelical theology of mission. One of them, entitled 'the Gospel and social responsibility', forcefully defines the signs of evil in prevalent social, economic and political systems (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization 1992):

The proclamation of God's Kingdom necessarily demands the prophetic denunciation of all that is incompatible with it. Among the evils we deplore are destructive violence, including institutionalised violence, political corruption, all forms of exploitation of people and of the earth, the undermining of the family, abortion on demand, drug traffic, and the abuse of human rights. In our concern for the poor, we are distressed by the burden of debt in the two-thirds world. (p. 302)

It is only a sample of the decisive tone in which the document conveys the theological message. The Manifesto is the conceptual place where encounter clearly expounded teaching on Christianity's fundamental truths of the faith and the universal mandate given to all Christians to a Christian *vita active* – spreading the gospel, doing right and opposing evil, all these on every dimension of the social realm, whether global, regional or local.

The Cape Town Commitment as the commentary for the integral mission

Unlike the former two documents, the CPC directly refers to the concept of an integral mission. Yet, before referring to the 'world's affairs', the document outlines basic Evangelical catechesis and emphasises that every point of the Christian teaching must be led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Actually, almost all considered themes reflect a feeling of Christian distinctiveness in referring to the world's rationales or beliefs. In other words, the document sets clear boundaries between 'Christian' and 'secular' worldviews. It is, so to say, 'total' in the sense that clearly indicates what the Christian approach is. A somewhat exclusive stance on issues such as intercultural and interreligious relationships can well show such an avoiding relativism or ambiguity.

Thus, the CPC preserves Christian zeal and intransigence in referring to various world cultures and concepts that are known from the previous documents. The following words well demonstrate this stance (Cameron 2011):

It should be our greatest grief that in our world the living God is not glorified. The living God is denied in aggressive atheism. The one true God is replaced or distorted in the practice of world religions. Our Lord Jesus Christ is abused and misrepresented in some popular cultures. And the face of the God of biblical revelation is obscured by Christian nominalism, syncretism and hypocrisy. (p. 11)

In later pages, when indicating factors distorting the truth, the document also mentions relativism, pantheism, consumerism, racism and ethnocentrism, sinful desire, greed and human pride.

Actually, the entire document demonstrates the stance of being from outside this world but living for this world. Such a conviction reverberates in every page of the commitment, whether it is a lesson on the theological truth or an interpretation of the world's moral and social condition. Being from outside this world but living for this world can well explain the very meaning of the concept of an integral mission.

Thus, according to Cameron (2011) it is:

[T]he proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission, our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. (p. 29)

The commitment has quoted the above definition, but it was originally formulated by the Micah Network, the Christian coalition of various associations, organisations and churches that promotes Christian social involvement in favour of combating poverty and fighting for political justice (Freeman 2020:58). All in all, it is in accord with the conviction from the Manila Manifesto (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization 1992) that the integral mission is simply a necessary consequence of the Christian mandate to spread the gospel.

Such a necessity is manifested perhaps the most blatantly in Cape Town's call to action. The document's authors formulated an impressive programme that encompasses many fields of involvement and provides a Christian roadmap in the more and more intricate world. Six points (keywords) set this roadmap: the truth of Christ, the peace of Christ, the love of Christ, the will of Christ, the church of Christ, and the Body of Christ. Each point contains some references to the concrete challenges Christians face when answering Christ's missionary call.

The truth of Christ is somewhat prior to the following keywords. It provides cognitive and moral grounds for the mission, just because it preserves Christians from the world's

relativism on the one hand and affirms Christianity's universalism on the other (Stott 2009:194). The missionary call entails bringing this truth to the areas of cultural and religious plurality, to the daily workplaces, to the global mass media, to the space of art, science and new technologies and finally to the public space.

Christ's peace is the gift given to the church and the task for Christians to pass it on to the world. This peace is universal in the sense that it embraces all dimensions of human existence. It also entails a call to the churches to advocate justice, forgiveness, reconciliation and reparation, addressing different conflicts and persecutions.

The love of Christ among people of other faiths is the next point on the Christian roadmap. It strikes us with its emphatic tone: the commitment seeks a balance between allegiance to the Christian doctrine and Christian witness that avoids proselytising, coercion or doctrinal distortion and, instead, looks for friendship and hospitality with people of other faiths.

The next point refers to Christ's will, and this theme is also viewed from the missionary perspective: Christians must remember that there are still billions of people who have never heard about Jesus. It imposes the primary task of spreading the gospel. However, this task raises essential questions about the Bible, cultural differences and contextualisation. It is worth stating that this point demonstrates the influences of the integral mission concept.

Next, Lausanne's theologians consider the Church. They start by reminding her of an essential attribute: the Church must be distinct from the world in order to be the sign for the world. If not, Christians do not fulfil their missionary mandate. With this being said, the document's authors distinguish the four idolatries that determine the contemporary world: the idolatries of disordered sexuality, power, success and greed. Each of them insightfully describes the conditions of today's reality and marks the list of crucial actions Christians should undertake. Such an idolatry list brings to mind the prophetic voices of Leslie Newbeking and David Bosch, who joined a vast range of theologians unveiling the dechristianisation of Western culture. Both Newbeking and Bosch were concerned about the condition of the Church in secularised Western societies and sceptical about the consequences of the Enlightenment idea of autonomous human reason (Keller 2014:233), which became a cornerstone for Western dominant ideology [*and myth*] of human rational emancipation from Divine authority.

Finally, the last point is about unity. Yet, maybe not surprisingly, it is not about ecumenism – this word does not even appear in the text – instead, it is about the unity of Christ's disciples in their mission to the world. Thus, it is spiritual unity reaching the most profound dimension of the human being and a unity that overcomes divisions brought about by various human particularisms, such as

different denominations, theological traditions, confessions and, more broadly, the divisions between gender, cultures and ethnicities. The document's authors write about the counter-cultural power of the cross – and this single contention is a very good summary of the document: Christ's cross, Christianity and the church are counter-world; this means they are distinct from this world, but they are for this world.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that CPC, as well as the Lausanne Movement in general, fully adopted the theological significance of the concept. Jambulosi (2020:295f), in his comprehensive study on mission theology and social responsibility, describes Padilla's three concerns, referring to some of Commitment's omissions. It is mainly about an imbalance between evangelism and social commitment, according to which the former is regarded as a primary mission of the Church and the latter as a secondary duty. As Jambulosi (2020:299) stated, in Padilla's view, 'Lausanne seemed to have maintained the long age dualism that characterised its missiology'. In addition, Padilla indicated Lausanne's failures in developing social theology. Finally, the Ecuadorian theologian expressed his disappointment about the lack of an official reference to the historical context of the country where the conference was held.

Overall the CPC may be regarded as a commentary on the concept of an integral mission. It is an insightful document that comprehensively and integrally determines the fundamental points of the Christian life, namely cognition, values, and duties. The Commitment is, in a sense, an Evangelical 'pastoral constitution' (when compared to the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World by the Second Vatican Council) that can also be a point of reference for Christians from outside the Evangelical family.

Conclusion

As stated in the first sentence of this paper, the concept of an integral mission seems obvious at first glance, at least from the confessional Catholic point of view. Nevertheless, its careful reading and contextualisation help discern the trends within global Evangelicalism that are of crucial importance for global Christianity. Some trends make Christianity truly universal in geographical, cultural and social terms. When viewing from the Catholic perspective, one might say that the concept of an integral mission has much in common with the intuition of the Second Vatican Council expressed in the constitution 'Gaudium et Spes'. One may also risk the opinion that an integral mission inspires systematic Evangelical social teaching, which can contribute to a global communion of shared thinking about society beyond confessional or denominational boundaries. It can be seen when reading CPC alongside the Catholic pastoral documents of the Second Vatican Council.

In addition, the concept of an integral mission has ecumenical significance, not only in an inclusive meaning of this term, as a stance of openness towards the different perspectives of

the Christian faith, but also as a tool of the ecumenical theology that helps to discern points of divergence between Evangelical theology and the theologies of other Christian traditions.

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