

Tearfund's theology of mission

2016

Tearfund's understanding of mission

Jesus called and commissioned the church to participate in God's mission to redeem and restore all of creation, seeking his kingdom in all spheres of life through words, deeds and character. Having been unified with Christ we are transformed to be more like him and to do the things he did, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Summary overview

This paper lays out Tearfund's theology of mission, to provide a common understanding of our approach to our work, and so that we can grow as people and an organisation who are seeking the kingdom of God. Internally, it sits alongside Tearfund's Theory of Poverty, which explores in more detail how Tearfund pursues its calling to see people lifted out of poverty and oppression by seeking to help restore relationships between people, creation and God. Tearfund's theology of mission is the basis of all our work: it guides the way we develop our corporate character, values and activities, and the impact and transformation for which we aim.

In this paper we also examine Tearfund's particular calling within the wider mission of the church, which is born out of our identity and our calling to tackle poverty and injustice. Our own discipleship is vitally important to us as we discern the best ways to seek and share the kingdom as we pursue our calling within the mission God has given the church.

The first section of this paper looks at what the story of the Bible tells us about the nature and ends of the mission of God. It describes the way that God breaks into our lives, through Jesus, inviting us into a relationship with him and to be part of his mission to restore and redeem all creation. It focuses particularly on the way that Jesus reveals the nature and ends of God's mission, fulfilling it through his death and resurrection on the cross, and on the way that his ministry shows us what it looks like to participate in it, sharing the good news and opening the way for restored relationships with God, humanity, and creation. Finally, it discusses the way that our acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice for us brings us into the Body of Christ, within which we are shaped as we mature as Christians, and as a part of which we participate in mission.

The second section describes the commissioning of the church for mission and the diversity of the body of Christ that is the church. It discusses the way that different individuals and organisations are called to play different roles in the mission of God, while remaining united in Christ and in our desire to bear witness and invite people into the kingdom. It presents the work of Tearfund as a part of this mission, as an organisation established and called to help the church bring an end to poverty and injustice. It describes the way that this work is the context in which the organisation participates in mission, helping us to determine the way in which we can best share the love of God and reveal the coming kingdom.

Finally, in section three we outline the whole life transformation that we believe God's mission brings – for which we work and hope. It asks what it would look like to have 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10). Here we explain the long-term consequences of the restored relationships with creation, other people, and God that are made possible through Jesus, as they change our lives, our community, and our world, which we hope to see develop now and be fulfilled in the new creation.

We have also included two appendices to this paper. The first notes that Tearfund's understanding of mission is sometimes described as integral or holistic mission, explaining these terms and how they describe Tearfund's theology of mission. The second appendix looks briefly at two terms often associated with mission and missionary activity, evangelism and proselytism, to explain Tearfund's understanding of these terms and activities in relation to our work and participation in mission.

1. The theology of mission

The Bible tells us a story that helps us to understand God, the world, and God's relationship with the world. It is a story of a God who created the world in love, of a world which was broken when people turned away from God, and of a God who is seeking to redeem and restore the world – who will ultimately bring a new creation into being. This section will explain our theology of mission in the following stages:

- We believe that God enters into the world and into our lives in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, reaching out to us to bring us back into a relationship with God.
- Jesus invites us to follow him, offering us salvation and a new relationship with God and making us a part of God's mission to reach out to others.
- Jesus' life and ministry show us the nature of God's mission and are our example for participation in this mission.
- Jesus taught and commissioned his disciples to follow in his footsteps. He promised and sent the gift of the Holy Spirit to be with them. Similarly, we learn how to participate in the mission of God through our own discipleship.

From this point, we will be able to move on to think further about what this theology means for Tearfund and for our work.

1.1: God enters our lives

'One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.' (Luke 5:1-11)

In this passage in Luke's gospel we read the story of the meeting between Jesus and the men who would become his first disciples. Here we see Jesus deliberately entering the everyday lives of ordinary people, fishermen from a rural backwater. He reveals himself to them as the Lord by showing them how he could transform the most ordinary, everyday things of their lives – in this case their job – and how he could make

the impossible (catching fish in the middle of the day) possible. He also let them know that he could work with and transform things they already had – their boats and their skills as fishermen – if they were willing to follow his guidance and let his power work through them. He became an active, transforming part of their lives, and called them to be active participants in his life and mission, using the language and concepts of fishing that they understood in order to invite them to do so.

It is in the entry of God the Son into our world through the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus that God shows us his love and reveals the good news to the world, as we will discuss in more detail later. It is also the way that he creates a new relationship with humanity and seeks to draw us into the much bigger story of God: the story that is told in the Bible.

1.2: We enter God's life

A number of theologians have used the idea of drama to help us understand the key points in the narrative of the Bible, describing it as a story that has six acts.¹ These acts are:

1. God's creation of the world.
2. The fall, in which relationships between God, humans, and creation are broken.
3. The story of Israel, including God's covenant promise to Abraham and the establishment of Israel as the people of God, and the promise of the Messiah and the salvation that would be offered by Jesus after the failures of the nation of Israel.
4. The story of the gospels: the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that makes salvation possible.
5. The story of the church and its mission to share the good news.
6. The new creation: for which we wait in hope and expectation, when we will see the full redemption and restoration of God's creation and the revelation of his glory.

We live within 'Act Five', in the story of the church.

Within this story, we see the fall as the moment at which poverty and injustice become a feature of the world, its roots lying in this fundamental break between humanity, creation, and God. Poverty is holistic: it is not just economic or physical but is also social, environmental and spiritual. It is complex and multi-faceted. The root cause of poverty is broken relationships which entered the world as a result of humanity's rebellion against God. At this time, we moved from a life of wholeness, living in perfect relationship with God, creation, ourselves and each other, into a life of broken relationships, broken off from God, family and community, broken off from others further removed from us (different communities, cultures or countries) – and even from ourselves, as a result of false images of identity and self-worth.²

¹ Wright (2006) 53-55, 62-66; Wright (2013) 139-43; Wright (1991). See Bartholomew, Goheen (2014); Vanhoozer (2004).

² Tearfund (2012); Sobrino (2015). 24. 'Poverty' is a complex concept. Sobrino argues that the word *poverty* itself is irreplaceable as it covers, 'The expression of the denial and oppression of humanness, an expression of the need, the contempt, the voicelessness, and anonymity that millions of human beings have suffered.' This covers all the categories of poverty.

When God made creation, it was good: humans were intended to live in harmony with each other, with non-human creation, with God, and to be fulfilled in this life. This is what the concept of shalom truly means. It incorporates ideas of wholeness, completeness, balance, healing, well-being, tranquillity, prosperity, security and justice.³ When the good relationships instituted in creation are broken, so is shalom, and in our struggle to find a fulfilment that can never match what we were created to experience, we end up damaging ourselves, each other, creation, and our relationship with God.

From the fall onwards the Bible tells us the story of God seeking to restore the creation he had made beginning with Abraham and Israel⁴ and culminating with Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. It is important to understand that the whole Bible shows us the character and mission of God: the God of the New Testament, incarnated in Christ, is also the God of the Old Testament who cares passionately about social issues: political arrogance and abuse, economic exploitation, judicial corruption, the suffering of the poor and oppressed, the evils of brutality and bloodshed.⁵ Understanding that this is the story of the Bible is essential to understanding what the Bible says about the nature of mission, because the good news that we see in the gospel narratives is that Christ has come in order that God's whole mission can be completed. As Colossians 1:20 says, the mission of God is, 'To reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven.' The cross is the centre-point of this dramatic story, liberating humanity from its sins and opening the way for people to be restored to God, if they will take it.

1.3: Jesus as the example for mission

The character and mission of God are revealed to us most clearly in Jesus, God the Son, told to us in the stories of the gospels. At the very start of his ministry – before he even called his first disciples – Jesus identified himself as the promised Messiah and described his mission:

'He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

³ Spencer, White, Vroblecky (2009) 15-16.

⁴ See for example Genesis 12, 17, and 32:9; Exodus 3 and 34 about God's covenant with Israel. Isaiah 9, and 52-53 pointing towards the Messiah.

⁵ Wright (2005); Wright (2006). Catholic Social Teaching of the twentieth century describes God's concern with injustice as 'the option for the poor' or the 'preferential option for the poor'. Sobrino (2015) 21-24, argues that, biblically, this should fundamentally shape the mission and the identity of the church.

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:16-21)

By identifying himself as the Messiah promised by Isaiah who would make possible the jubilee for which the laws of Israel hoped, Jesus makes it clear that he has come to make possible the redemption and restoration that God seeks with his creation. The jubilee land laws set down in Leviticus 25 were designed to ensure that while the Israelites had the freedom to live and work, succeed and fail, take responsibility for themselves and their families, they also had to take responsibility for each other as a community and for God’s creation. They reminded Israel that a flourishing community makes time for worship, rest and celebration; looks after its weakest and most impoverished members; does not allow inequality and injustice to spiral uncontrollably across the generations; and cares for the creation it lives in and on.

Jesus’ own ministry shows what the good news he brings looks like - what bringing the jubilee into being looks like - engaging with every aspect of the lives of the people that he met, as he responded to the needs that they brought to him. Jesus responded to all kinds of needs: social,⁶ physical,⁷ and spiritual (casting out of demons).⁸ It is important, though, that we do more than categorise the things that Jesus did: that we understand the subsequent consequences of these miracles, all of which enabled relationships to be restored and to flourish. People who were healed of demons and of illnesses, from leprosy to bleeding to paralysis, were free to leave their isolation and enabled to return to lives with their families and communities, while in the case of the wedding at Cana an existing community was able to continue to celebrate one of its most important rituals without social embarrassment creating divisions.

It is important to recognise that Jesus’ good news was not just offered to the upstanding members of his own community. He was born in one of the most out-of-the-way, disregarded communities, to an unmarried young woman and a carpenter. He spent his ministry among the people, and he identifies himself with them:

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me... Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:35-40)

He responded to those who came to seek and receive the restoration he offered, most frequently those whose need for restoration was greatest: the marginalised, excluded, and oppressed. This is clear in the relationships he built as well as in the miracles he did. His own disciples included fishermen (uneducated), a zealot (political rebel), a tax collector (collaborator), and someone who thought that nothing good could come out of a backwater like Nazareth.⁹ He connected with those that the contemporary Jewish

⁶ See, for example, Luke 19:1-10; John 2:1-11; 4:7-26.

⁷ See, for example, Matthew 9:1-3; Mark 2:1-12; 5:25-42; Luke 5:11-13, 8:40-53; John 6:1-13.

⁸ See, for example, Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 1:33-35; Luke 8:26-39.

⁹ Simon, Andrew, James and John (Luke 5:1-11; Simon the Zealot (Matthew 10:4); Levi (Mark 2:14), Nathanael (John 1:46).

establishment disdained: manual labourers, single women, women excluded for sexual immorality, the sick who were considered unclean under temple law, Romans and those who worked with the Romans.¹⁰

Through the course of his ministry – his life, death, and resurrection – Jesus did more than preach repentance, forgiveness, and the coming of the kingdom. Jesus dealt with problems that needed dealing with, the things that separated people physically, emotionally and spiritually from God and from their communities, and that prevented them from participating in the life of the world. He offered God's love, mercy, and justice, and through this gift makes it clear that the ultimate mission of God is to restore humanity and creation to a right relationship with God. While Jesus is the example who shows us what the mission of God looks like, he is not just our example and motivation for doing justice: he is also the way in which God fulfils this mission. Daniel Bell describes Jesus as, 'The very embodiment of God's justice through his faithfulness and obedience in manifesting God's unrelenting desire for reconciliation.'¹¹ This is fully revealed at the cross.

Jesus' death and resurrection made this justice and reconciliation – our salvation – possible, and inaugurated the kingdom of God. His ministry shows us what God's kingdom will look like as it breaks into the contemporary world: as people were restored to wholeness in many different aspects of their lives, reintegrated into their communities, and able to develop a relationship with Jesus. He also showed us that the people of God, those who were restored to relationship with him and have entered the kingdom, should be a community that challenges the world around it and invites people into 'its values and ideals, its moral standards and relationships, its sacrificial lifestyle, its love, joy and peace – these are the signs of the kingdom, as we have seen, and present the world with a radically alternative society.'¹²

It is our relationship with Christ that makes it possible for us to live as members of the kingdom here and now. The love and salvation we receive are expressed by us to others, driving our participation in mission and inviting others to join us in Christ.

1.4: Discipleship for mission

'Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" (Matthew 28: 18-20)

Jesus showed his disciples how to fulfil this commission through his own example, and through the direction he gave them. He made it possible for them to fulfil it by bringing them into a salvation relationship with him and through the gift of the Holy Spirit, which would accompany and shape them and their mission after he left them.

¹⁰ Matthew 8:5-13, 9:10, 11:19, 26:5-7; Luke 3:12, 8:1-3, 19:1-10; Mark 2:14; John 4:7-26, 8:1-11.

¹¹ D Bell (2006) 97; Bell (2011) 197–210; Hauerwas (2011) 100-105.

¹² Stott et al (1982). See also Wright (2012), where he argues that the life and ministry of Jesus are as important to understanding the kingdom of God as the cross.

Firstly, the gospels show us that the disciples chose to respond to Jesus and follow him,¹³ giving him the opportunity to show them what the mission of God was about. Then, for the three years of Jesus' ministry we see the disciples learning from him, watching and questioning him, and building a relationship with him. They were with him throughout his miracles, they met and spent time with the people he did, and they saw him when he sought the time and space to reconnect with God his father. Sometimes, they were surprised by his actions and sometimes they questioned them, but ultimately, they learned who Jesus was and what he had been born for.¹⁴ As Jesus explained to Philip, knowing Jesus means knowing God, and the better we know God, the more we will instinctively participate in his mission:

'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son..."' (John 14:9-12)

After the cross we see the disciples understanding Christ's resurrection and acknowledging him as Lord,¹⁵ and then in Acts, we see them receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. This transforms them, filling them with power, connecting them with God, and giving them the ability to reveal God to those around them as, 'witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1.8). What we see from the first disciples is that they are sent out with the knowledge of God, revealed in Christ, and with the power of the Holy Spirit. This enables them to participate in the mission of God to restore his relationship with all creation and reveal his kingdom. They have agency and responsibility, as Jesus' disciples, to play their part.

We are also Christ's disciples and we can learn how to participate in his mission from this example. We begin by responding to the cross. The crucifixion is the moment when God humbles himself, paying the price for humanity's sins, and the resurrection is the moment when God raises Christ back up to be reunited with God.¹⁶ When we respond to the offer of this reunion, and are baptised, we are also reunited with God. When we take communion we are brought into the Body of Christ:¹⁷

'Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.' (John 6:56-57)

Our identity as Christians is rooted in Christ and our life in Christ is full life in relationship with the Triune God. We experience God and the world, are shaped and grow as disciples in this relationship: 'We live in God and from God.'¹⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' (Acts 17:28)¹⁹

¹³ Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:11; John 1:35-50.

¹⁴ Cf. Matthew 14:32-33; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-20, 28-36.

¹⁵ Matthew 28:17; Luke 24:30-35; John 20:16-29, 21:7-19.

¹⁶ Moltmann (2015) 13-16, 284.

¹⁷ Smith (2009); Bell (2011); Hauerwas (2011); Cavanaugh (2008).

¹⁸ Moltmann (2015) 286.

¹⁹ See also Philippians 2:1-2.

In worship, liturgy, prayer and reflection, by loving God, by living in and following Christ, through the power and with the guidance of the Spirit, we grow more like Jesus and are better able to discern how we can best live in ways that are consistent with the story that we find in the Bible, in the places in which we find ourselves.²⁰ This is where we learn to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.²¹

We are rooted in the vine and so are able to bear fruit.²² The Lausanne paper on evangelism and social responsibility describes this process:

‘From this adoring and loving encounter with God, there immediately flows a desire to share his love with our fellow human beings... When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us... Jesus intends his followers neither to withdraw from the world in order to preserve their holiness, nor to lose their holiness by conforming to the world, but simultaneously to permeate the world and to retain their kingdom distinctives...’²³

This transformation spreads through us into the world, as we are salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). It remains distinctively ‘kingdom’ focused and able to offer life in all its fullness (rather than ritualistic religion or generically ‘good works’) insofar as we remain rooted in God, following Jesus, and in the power of the Spirit.²⁴

It is both a natural part of our being reconciled to Christ and a demanding task, for it requires that we devote ourselves to knowing God and also to knowing the times and places we live in, so that we can build rich relationships with the people around us and share the kingdom with them. It requires us to take responsibility for our discipleship and for making the time to deepen our relationship with God, and to make this the foundation of our lives in the world. It also requires us not to cut ourselves off from the world, but to remain aware of and engaged with its pleasures and its pains. When we live in this way, we will be better able to discern how to express the love of God in ways that best meet the needs of those around us and reveal the nature of the good news to them, and also to discern where we should be living and working. That is not to say that our participation in mission must wait until we are fully shaped as disciples – there is no qualifying exam we need to take to prove we are mature enough to join in with the mission of God. Our participation in mission as part of the body of Christ is one of the places in which we deepen our relationship with God, grow as disciples, and are transformed by the Spirit to become more like Christ.

²⁰ Wright (2013) 93. John 17:13-25 shows Jesus praying this *for us*: ‘*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.*’

²¹ Micah 6:8. Hauerwas (2011) describes the work of justice as originating in our participation in the body of Christ.

²² John 15:1-8. *cf.* Luke 10:25; 1 John 4:19.

²³ Stott et al (1982)

²⁴ Stott (1978) 172; Stott et al (1982); Hughes (2007).

2. Discerning our part of God's mission

In Section One we looked at the way that the Bible tells us the story of a missional God and examined what that mission looks like in our world as seen in the ministry of Jesus. We have also talked about the importance, for us as disciples, of being rooted in God through our relationship with him in order to participate in this mission.

However, participating in mission with Christ as our saviour and our guide does not mean that all disciples of Jesus Christ have to be doing all the things that Jesus did all of the time. The callings and ministries of the apostles and the early years of the church are a guide in showing us how different people are called to be in different places and to take different roles as the church obeys Jesus' great commission. It is important to understand that we are called to participate in the mission of God in different places and different ways, and to learn to discern what these are for us. We will look first at the place of the church in the world, the importance of the diversity of the body of Christ that is the church, and then at the place and role of Tearfund in mission.

2.1 The commissioning of the church

'The place where something of the glory of the coming kingdom is seen now at its brightest is in the renewed community of disciples of Jesus – the church... Just as Israel was meant to model to the world what human society should be under God, so the church is now called to do the same...'²⁵

Luke tells the story of the disciples after they receive the great commission in the opening chapters of Acts. At this time the group of disciples takes on a new corporate identity: what Acts 2 calls 'the fellowship of believers' becomes the church, the body of Christ on earth, continuing his mission until he comes again. 'It is not the Church that 'has' a mission, but the reverse; Christ's mission creates itself a church.'²⁶

Throughout the New Testament we see the church presented as and encouraged to be a caring, inclusive and distinctive community who are reconciled to each other and to God, and who reach out into the world.²⁷ As the Lausanne document on Evangelism and Social Responsibility has pointed out the metaphors of salt, light and yeast that Jesus used to tell his disciples how they should seek to be in the world are 'active', for salt flavours, light casts a beam, and yeast grows. They describe the way that the church, the new community of God, reaches into the old community and begins to transform it.

Being made just and doing justice is about being immersed in the life of the church community, whose life is centred in and ordered by Jesus, who is God's justice.²⁸ We are invited into union with Christ, and it transforms us. As the reconciled body of Christ, the global church and local churches become communities in which the fruit of the Spirit is manifested: 'Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (Gal. 5:22-23). They are a witness to the nature of the kingdom in their very

²⁵ Tearfund (2012) 1.2.

²⁶ Moltmann (1977) 26.

²⁷ For example, Acts 2:42-47.

²⁸ Hauerwas (2011) 104.

being, called to show onlookers what the kingdom will be like, reaching out to those onlookers to invite them in.²⁹ And, as Sobrino points out, as the Body of Christ the church represents God's presence or absence in the world, so how we respond to poverty and injustice is critical in the world seeing the kingdom.³⁰

'Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.' (Matthew 5:16)³¹

The commission that Jesus gave his disciples is the commission of the whole church and all its members. René Padilla has described it in the following way:

'When the church is committed to integral mission and to communicating the gospel through everything it is, does, and says, it understands that its goal is not to become large numerically, nor to be rich materially, nor powerful politically. Its purpose is to incarnate the values of the kingdom of God and to witness to the love and the justice revealed in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit, for the transformation of human life in all its dimensions, both on the individual level and on the community level. The accomplishment of this purpose presupposes that all the members of the church, without exception, by the very fact of having become a part of the body of Christ, receive gifts and ministries for the exercise of their priesthood, to which they have been ordained in their baptism. Mission is not the responsibility and privilege of a small group of the faithful who feel called to the mission field (usually in a foreign country), but of all members, since all are members of the royal priesthood and as such have been called by God 'that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light' (1 Peter 2:9) wherever they may be.'³²

2.2: The diversity of the body

As Padilla points out, all members of the church receive gifts and ministries in which they use in participating in the mission of God, and it is important to remember this as we think about the particular kinds of activities and work that we undertake in our lives as disciples. Jesus never intended that his disciples be identical or do identical things, but he did intend them all to participate in the mission of God.

In Mark 3:13-14 we see Jesus calling together the twelve 'he wanted', creating a group of diverse individuals who had different skills and passions (fishing, finance, and political engagement among them) and who would be good at connecting with different people when they were sent out into the world without him. Later, in Galatians 2:6-10 we see Peter and Paul commissioned into different, specific roles in the church's mission to share the gospel. Peter, a fisherman from Galilee who had personally known Jesus, was appointed to share the gospel with the Jewish people. Paul, a well-educated Greek-speaking Roman Jew from a cosmopolitan town in Asia Minor, with a trade (tent-making) that could sustain him in almost any

²⁹ James 1:17-18; Eph. 3:10-11. Samuel, Sugden (1981), 45–68. Sobrino (2015) 50, points out that as the body of Christ the church represents God's presence or absence in the world.

³⁰ Sobrino (2015) 50.

³¹ *ibid.* cites Ezekiel 36:20-22, Romans 2:24 and James 2:7 as examples of the opposite behaviour.

³² Padilla (2021)

location, was sent to Gentiles. Each was called to the arena he was best suited for by nature and upbringing, gifts and skills – and each was commanded to remember the poor.

In the New Testament, we also see that the Holy Spirit gives different gifts (charismata) to members of the body of Christ so that they can fulfil their whole mission:

‘So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.’ (Ephesians 6:11-13)³³

As Peter also explains, we are then called to use these gifts to serve others, ‘As faithful stewards of God’s grace...’ (1 Peter 4:10) The importance of the diverse gifts and callings of the members of the church is most clearly explained in 1 Corinthians 12, in the famous metaphor of the body:

‘Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.’ (1 Corinthians 12: 12-27)

What is of critical importance to the flourishing of the body, according to this passage, is not that each part does the same thing or does everything, but that each part honours and respects the other, living together, moving in the same direction. That is, the church is following Jesus in the mission of God through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, rooted and held together in our love and worship, in our desire to know and serve him better, and to reveal the kingdom. This mission is our common ground and Christ unites us, and our callings, and transforms us as we participate in it.

³³ cf. Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-30

When it comes to the question of how we do this, as a global church, as local churches, and as members of the church we need to listen to Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, who say, 'Any discussion of priority in the focus of the church's mission will depend not on the concept of mission but on the context.'³⁴ This context includes the times and places in which we find ourselves and the needs that are present to which the church is called to respond with the love of God. These will guide the ministries of the church and the expression of the various gifts we have been given.

2.3: The mission of Tearfund

This diversity of gifting and callings within the church applies to corporate entities within the body of Christ – such as Tearfund – as well as to individual disciples, and so it is important that we consider Tearfund's calling and gifts, the context in which we exist, and our 'part' of the mission of God.

Tearfund was established in 1968 as a direct consequence of the UK Evangelical Churches' recognition that global poverty and the humanitarian crises to which it contributes call for a response from the body of Christ. Tearfund was intended to help the church serve those in need in the present and tackle the causes of poverty and injustice to prevent suffering in future, understanding poverty in a way that is holistic, and encompasses:

'A social and structural legacy of broken relationships with God, a damaged understanding of self, unjust relationships between people, and exploitative relationships with the environment. [This] manifests as a lack of empowerment, opportunity and security, the poor being denied power, opportunity and security by the rich and powerful. Our calling is to serve people who are economically poor, with a holistic transformation of all aspects of poverty in their lives, working towards seeing their relationships with God, others, themselves and the environment restored.'³⁵

As we have explained above, the mission of God is to redeem and restore all of his creation, ending all forms of poverty and suffering, and reuniting creation with him in his kingdom, and as his redeemed people we are called to participate in this mission wherever we are. However, while we believe that biblical mission is integral in its aim and approach, this does not mean that we are all responsible for the whole of the mission all of the time. As Tearfund (and as individual disciples) we are one part of the larger body, and as such, we play a particular part. As the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation has pointed out:

'Para-church organisations... have an indispensable part to play in Christian outreach, especially if they specialise in kinds of ministry which no church can manage on its own, and provided that they accept a measure of responsibility to the churches.'³⁶

This is a role that Tearfund fills. Tearfund's calling is to follow Jesus where the need is greatest and to work with the church to see people lifted out of poverty. Our expertise as an organisation is in international development and humanitarian aid, and so the context for us as we share the good news is the places and

³⁴ Samuel, Sugden (1985) 211.

³⁵ Tearfund (2012)

³⁶ Scott et al (1982)

people who are the most vulnerable and marginalised in our world. We use our professional expertise to serve the church as it seeks to serve the poor, and discern ways in which the church can share the good news of the gospel and reveal the kingdom in the world today. This is where we, as Tearfund, participate and share in the mission of God and seek his justice and transformation, working as part of the global church and alongside local churches in this aspect of mission wherever possible.

As an organisation, we seek to do this to the highest standards with regard to best practice in all areas of our work: in long-term development, humanitarian support, organisational development, fundraising, in theological reflection on what our faith and mission have to say to our work, and in our own spiritual growth and discipleship. As we pursue our particular calling we share in the commission to share the good news of God's love and the coming kingdom. We do this in our words, deeds and character within the various situations in which we find ourselves, but we do not bear the whole responsibility for the whole mission.

Our faith shapes us, making us who we are, guiding how we behave, what we do, what we say, how we interact with people, and how we envision the kind of transformation and flourishing that we want to see taking place as we go about our work. This is summed up in our values: Christ-centeredness, compassion, courage, truthfulness, and servant-heartedness, and in our commitment to maintaining Tearfund's spiritual vitality and Christian distinctiveness. We grow in these qualities as we remain rooted in God as an organisation and as individual disciples, bearing witness to the coming kingdom in who we are, what we do and the way that we do it.

Jesus came to offer us life, but it is an offer that all are free to accept or reject. We want our work to bear witness to the love of God and the kingdom of heaven and we believe faith thrives within sustainable communities and local churches who can nurture and disciple people. Our calling as Christians to share the gospel, reveal the kingdom and make disciples is not a permit to proselytise³⁷ or coerce people into a confession of faith, nor is it licence to be naive about power imbalances in the world in which we find ourselves and the lengths to which people will go to secure the wellbeing of themselves and their families. In our communication of our faith we seek to be holistic, sustainable, culturally sensitive, impartial and non-coercive, and aware of any risks to our partners and local Christians. At the same time, we seek to live out a distinctively Christian witness whilst present and, where the church is present, to enable a strengthened Christian witness to continue once Tearfund withdraws from the community: we do not wish to shy away from giving an account of the hope which we have (1 Peter 3:15) when we have the opportunity to do so.

³⁷ See appendices on Evangelism and Proselytism

3. What is the transformation we are seeking?

‘As integral mission is outworked, we see relationships restored. We call these results transformation, recognising that this process will not reach its final end result until Jesus Christ returns and ushers in the life of wholeness once more. A restoration of these relationships leads us to a position of human flourishing.’ (Tearfund (2012) Overcoming Poverty Together, 3.1)

As we participate in the mission of God, it is important to think about our final destination, to ask the question, ‘what is the transformation we are seeking?’ and think about how we will know if our work, as Tearfund, is contributing to the revelation of the kingdom.

‘Transformation is a part of God’s continuing action in history to restore all creation to himself and to its rightful purpose and relationships. Transformation is a joint enterprise between God and humanity in history, not just a mechanistic or natural process. It involves a transformation of the human condition, human relationships, and whole societies. As social, economic and psychological relationships are redeemed, structures and institutions are transformed. Redeemed structures, in turn, allow people to become more fully human. Ultimately, transformation is hope.’³⁸

In this paper we have talked about God’s mission to redeem and restore creation, about the revelation and incarnation of this mission in Jesus Christ and its fulfilment in the salvation he makes possible on the cross. At its heart this mission brings a message of freedom from the structures and powers (temporal and eternal) that enslave and limit people’s potential to bring justice, and a message of grace and love that brings forgiveness, reconciliation and new hope.³⁹ It has begun, with Christ, and will be fulfilled in the new creation. It promises the possibility that individuals and communities can be released from poverty and injustice, enter into a restored relationship with God and thrive in all spheres of life. We call this whole-life transformation.

‘Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.’ (Romans 12:2)

One of the remarkable features of the early church was the way that it stood out from the dominant Greco-Roman cultures of the Roman Empire in its willingness to support widows and take in orphans, to see men and women, slave and free, as equal members of the body of Christ. Paul’s call to the church in Rome, as embodied in the verse above, challenges readers today to have values different to those generally shown by the world around us: values that emphasise service, love, support of and community with the vulnerable and marginalised.⁴⁰ We have talked about the way that being in Christ forms his disciples so that we are able to be this kind of people, who can challenge, inspire, and transform our environments. It is the mission of the church to live as a community of the redeemed and restored and to share Christ’s invitation and offer of salvation with the world around it. In this way the church embodies whole life transformation within the world, bearing witness to the kingdom.

³⁸ Samuel, Sugden (2003) 1.3.

³⁹ Tearfund (2012) 3.1

⁴⁰ Beck (2016)

As Christians we believe expect that 'life in all its fullness' will ultimately be seen in individuals and communities in the following ways:⁴¹

- The developing strength and diversity of personal relationships and social connections, and people being treated with greater respect and dignity.
- The availability and use of material resources, including the stewardship of the environment, and responsible and accountable management of resources.
- The developing strength of emotional, mental, spiritual and physical health.
- The development of skills, knowledge and expertise.
- The meeting of physical, material, emotional and spiritual needs.
- The willingness to advocate on behalf of others.
- A growing ability to participate and have influence within communities.
- People being empowered to think and act for themselves and to become agents for change.
- A growing and maturing faith, with Christians balancing their inward spiritual development with an external expression of their faith, connecting with the community in which they live.
- The development of a positive attitude towards Christians in the wider and non-Christian community, which we hope will ultimately lead to the restoration of non-Christians to Christ.

We believe that taking a holistic approach in responding to poverty and disaster contributes to this kind of whole-life transformation of our beneficiaries.

As Christians, we believe that 'life in all its fullness' cannot be truly experienced without the restoration of a person's relationship with God that is made possible through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. At the same time, we recognise that in different contexts and situations our work will have different points of focus leading to more noticeable transformation in some areas than in others, and we do not permit manipulative or coercive proselytism in any area of our work. When thinking particularly about our desire to see the growth of a living, maturing faith, we acknowledge that all growth and transformation happens over time. While we believe our work contributes to this process, we are also part of a bigger picture. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: 'I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.' (1 Cor. 3:6) It is our desire that our work should bear witness to God's goodness and love, and by doing this encourage openness to and the growth of relationships with God, and we trust in the Spirit to act in this process.

The church, through its life and mission, gives hope for the present and hope for the future. It shows the world what the kingdom will be like. This hope is important, for we know that we cannot overcome poverty and injustice completely until Christ returns and the kingdom is fully revealed in the new creation foretold in the New Testament (Rom. 8:19; Rev. 21:1-5). We do not know when that day will come or what the path there will look like, and we do not fully know our own role in it. In the meantime we seek to allow ourselves to be shaped in Christ to be more like Christ, and to follow Jesus, bearing witness to our redemption and restoration in all our relationships, and to live lives belonging to the kingdom we believe has already won the victory. This reality shapes all of our work, as Tearfund, and guides our participation in the mission of God.

⁴¹ Tearfund's LIGHT wheel and ALTOGETHER material.

Appendix I: Understanding mission as integral and holistic

Tearfund's understanding of mission is often defined, in technical and theological terms, as integral mission or holistic mission. It is important to explain why these definitions emerged and can be helpful to us.

The concepts of integral and holistic mission emerged because of historical debates within the Church about the nature of mission. Within the Evangelical movement, an understanding of the importance of social action as an expression of faith increased throughout the nineteenth century, but as it did, it became divisive. While some Christians became absorbed in social action and the pursuit of justice, prioritising it over preaching and teaching and over their worship and relationship with God, others argued that a concentration on it was a distraction from preaching the gospel. At the same time, the 'missionary' movement of Evangelicalism from the UK and USA to the rest of the world presented mission as primarily the verbal proclamation of God's salvation from sin for individual souls.⁴² In much of the Evangelical Church social action became seen as 'nice', but not an existentially essential part of our mission to share the good news of the gospel. As Dewi Hughes noted in Tearfund's earlier *Theology of Integral Mission*, 'The polarisation was hardly ever complete but enough heat and suspicion was generated for social action to be damned by many evangelicals for its association with liberalism and for proselytising evangelism to be damned by liberals for its association with obscurantist fundamentalism.'⁴³

Both Holistic and Integral Mission emerged as named concepts describing an understanding of mission in the 1970s.⁴⁴ The term and the concept 'integral mission' emerged in the 1970s among the Latin American Theological Fraternity (Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana) as *misión integral*: 'whole' mission.⁴⁵ Both holistic and integral mission emphasise that the biblical framework for mission and the good news encompassed the whole life of a person, and involved more than just evangelism (understood as the verbal proclamation of the gospel).⁴⁶ It is an understanding of mission that was endorsed by the Lausanne Covenant of 1974 and again by the Micah Declaration on Integral Mission in 2001 and the Lausanne Movement's Cape Town Commitment in 2010. Tearfund subscribes to this understanding of mission and has made it fundamental to our approach to our work.

However, it is important to note that something is lost in translation between *misión integral* and integral mission. 'Integral' in the Spanish is also the word used for 'whole wheat' or 'wholemeal' bread: if something is not integral, therefore, it has lost something of its essential self. If something is not integral, it is because something has been removed as the husk is removed from the wheat when whole wheat is milled to make non-whole wheat flour. In English, by comparison we understand integral and integrated as meaning essentially a whole but we bring to this the understanding that something that is integrated has component parts that are brought or held together.

⁴² Padilla, *What Is Integral Mission?* (2021).; Yung (2008) 250–70, notes that this debate was exacerbated by a prevailing philosophical understanding of humans as essentially 'dualistic' in nature in Western Thought: body and soul being distinct entities, one temporal and one eternal. This understanding of humanity has begun to lose ground in philosophy as well as in theology.

⁴³ Hughes (2007).

⁴⁴ Padilla (2004).

⁴⁵ The key early voices in this are René Padilla and Samuel Escobar.

⁴⁶ Wright (2005). See Appendix I for a definition of Evangelism.

This means that in the English understanding of integral mission, integral is effectively understood as the sum of a number of parts, while in the Spanish understanding it is effectively understood as something that has never been separated. This is why English explanations and definitions of integral mission have often employed the language of verbal evangelism and social action – but this means that we have never fully escaped the dualism that comes from talking about different types of mission being brought together and that we have never escaped the question of which is more important. It is also a reason why holistic mission may be a more helpful term in Anglophone contexts.

Tearfund's theology of mission understands that mission is more than just verbal evangelism plus social action. It does not just bring two types of missional activity together. Rather, mission is our participation in God's mission to redeem and restore the world, seeking the kingdom and its justice in all spheres of life. In our mission we take Jesus Christ as our example, understanding that his incarnation reveals the Father's love, justice and kingdom to us in every aspect of his life and ministry – in his words, his deeds and his character. We also believe that by becoming a part of the body of Christ and being shaped by this relationship we learn how to follow in his footsteps and participate in the mission of God.

Appendix II: Terminology

We understand mission through Christ, who reveals it to us, shapes us for it, and guides us in it. In many ways, seeking to define some of the terms the church has historically used to talk about doing mission and fulfilling the Great Commission (proclamation, demonstration, social action, evangelism) is unhelpful, because it encourages people to ask what we should do first. As we have mentioned above, ‘Any discussion of priority in the focus of the church’s mission will depend not on the concept of mission but on the context,’⁴⁷ just as Jesus’ mission was shaped by his context and the needs that confronted him in his own environment.

At the same time, we need to acknowledge that certain terms are strongly connected with mission in Christian thought and theology, and it is worth explaining our understanding and use of them.

(1) Evangelism

The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘evangelism’ as: ‘The preaching or promulgation of the gospel... Zealous advocacy of a cause or doctrine.’ The Lausanne Covenant further defines it as, ‘The proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God.’⁴⁸ Essentially, evangelism describes the Christian practice of sharing the belief that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour in the hope that other people will come to recognise him as such.

Evangelism is a form of Christian witness and an essential part of mission, and is primarily understood as a verbal activity.⁴⁹ The Lausanne Statement on Evangelism and Social Responsibility describes the two as distinct activities, but also emphasises their interdependence, each the inspiration and consequence of the other, and their essential importance in the mission of God.⁵⁰ As the Lausanne Covenant explains, ‘The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his church and responsible service in the world.’⁵¹ As our definition of mission notes, we share the good news (evangel) in all spheres of life through words, deeds and character: evangelism is one way of sharing the good news of the love of God. We know that these elements are not interchangeable: none of these aspects can bear full evangelistic witness on their own and they need to be integrated in the church’s mission. We discern how best to bear witness to Christ in the contexts in which we find ourselves, guided by our identity as Christ’s disciples.

(2) Proselytism

Proselytism is the attempt to convert a person or people to one’s own group – which may be a political party or a religious faith. It is a form of evangelism which emphasises verbal persuasion, reason and

⁴⁷ Samuel, Sugden (1985) 211.

⁴⁸ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation (n.d.) Section 4.

⁴⁹ Stott (2016) 80.

⁵⁰ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation (n.d.)

⁵¹ 1 Cor. 15:3,4; Acts 2: 32-39; John 20:21; 1 Cor. 1:23; 2 Cor. 4:5; 5:11,20; Luke 14:25-33; Mark 8:34; Acts 2:40,47; Mark 10:43-45; Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation (n.d) Section 4

apologetics, with the intent to encourage conversion. It does not emphasise the importance of relationships in revealing what God has done in our lives, or rely on our lives to bear witness to our faith, and it is generally understood as coercive.

Tearfund participates in the mission of God seeking his kingdom in all spheres of life through our words, deeds and character in response to the situations and contexts in which we are working. We do not encourage proselytism in our work. We believe that the message conveyed by evangelism – of God's redemption and restoration of all creation – should not be forced upon anyone who is not interested or willing to listen, nor should acts of service be seen as earning us a hearing for the message.

We also prefer not to use the term as proselytism is commonly understood to involve elements of coercion, conditionality and manipulation in pursuit of the ultimate goal of conversion. Tearfund clearly rejects the use of coercion, conditionality and manipulation in any activity, and acknowledges the need to pay particular attention to the instrumentalist use of emergency relief for evangelical purposes.

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