

# The core of Missio Dei is evangelism

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## Miss•io Da•ee

(noun)

A Latin Christian theological term that can be translated as the 'mission of God,' or the 'sending of God.'

The belief that mission is at the heart of God's very self, and that mission is his task not ours. The church exists because God has a mission, not the other way around.

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**Seidel Abel Boanerges of Spurgeon's College responds to the most upvoted question on Slido at this year's Baptist Assembly:**

*'It is becoming sad that our union does not value evangelism as an equal priority. Can my voice be heard please?'*

I'm sure most of our Baptist churches wouldn't skip a beat in responding to this question by saying they do see evangelism as an equal priority. Nevertheless, are we humble enough to listen carefully and willing to be challenged about this concern? I was reflecting on what sparked this question? Was it the single 9-minute presentation on making disciples

during the whole assembly? Lack of scheduled evangelism training or events? Or is it because the word 'evangelism' is confused with 'mission'? This short article is aimed at exploring the relationship between mission and evangelism and why we need to prioritise evangelism ministry in our churches today.

I begin my evangelism lectures at Spurgeon's College by asking students to briefly discuss the definitions of mission, evangelism, gospel and outreach. In our discussions, it is very clear that there are diverse views of evangelism today, sometimes even contradicting ones. Evangelism is often confused with 'mission'. Evangelism is mission, but mission is wider than evangelism. The Greek word for evangelism simply

means 'good news'. Evangelism is sharing the good news about Jesus Christ. The words 'evangelism' or 'to evangelise' have been around much longer than the word 'mission'.

David Bosch defines evangelism succinctly in these words,

Evangelism is the core, heart, or center of mission; it consists in the proclamation of salvation in Christ to nonbelievers, in announcing forgiveness of sins, in calling people to repentance and faith in Christ, in inviting them to become living members of Christ's earthly community and to begin a life in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

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Definition of Missio Dei by Helen Paynter an Old Testament tutor at Bristol Baptist College

<sup>1</sup> David J Bosch, 'Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-Currents Today', in *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church*, ed by Lacey C Warner, Paul W Chilcote (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 4-17, (p9).

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The Acts of the Apostles and Pauline epistles testify to the fact that the gospel is primarily about what Jesus has done through his death and resurrection. This is the gospel Paul preached and defended throughout his ministry, and that is the gospel by which we are saved (1 Cor 15:1-11). Salvation does not just mean we are saved from hell; it means we are given a new life in Christ (born again), a new nature (2 Cor 5:17) with a transformed heart that desires the kingdom of God. Luke uses the word 'good news' in Luke 4:43, showing the action of the verb, with the object being the kingdom of God. Evangelism involves an invitation and aims for a response. False evangelism ignores a call to repentance and faith in Christ. Sometimes evangelism happens as a result of an event (Damascus Road), and other times, it is a process (Emmaus Road). We should never restrict it just to process evangelism and underestimate God. Evangelism is always contextual. The language of the gospel can change, but the content or its essence shouldn't.

Some people prefer the term mission to evangelism as the latter brings up some painful oppressive connotations of Christendom or Colonialism. Unfortunately, some Christendom and colonial practices of mission and evangelism did bring disrepute to Christ. However, this is not a reason to stop using the word 'evangelism' but to point to the true gospel of Jesus Christ, which brings redemption and deliverance.

The concept of mission of God (missio Dei, if you prefer a theological term) was developed in the 20th century. The mission of God is God's overall redemptive work in reconciling the whole creation back to himself through Christ (Eph 1:9-10; Col 1:20). Evangelism is a part of this wider mission of God. Mission is not dependent on humanity, but the church joins the Triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in his mission to redeem his creation. I subscribe to and endorse holistic/integral mission. Practising an integral mission protects the church from the false dichotomy between social action and evangelism.

Integral mission is the 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.<sup>2</sup>

'The core of missio Dei is evangelism, the communication of the Gospel.'<sup>3</sup> The Anglicans gave us the Five Marks of Mission 1) evangelism, 2) discipleship, 3) social action, 4) justice, and 5) environment.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, they put a footnote under evangelism which states,

The first Mark of Mission, identified with personal evangelism at the Anglican Consultative Council in 1984 (ACC-6) is a summary of what all mission is about, because it is based on Jesus' own summary of his mission. This should be the key statement about everything we do in mission.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, in everything we do, nurturing new believers, helping the poor, the sick and the needy, challenging violence of every kind, solidarity with the suffering and the poor, fighting for justice and faithful stewardship of God's creation, we should never lose our focus from evangelism. It is important to uphold the distinctiveness of evangelism in the wider mission of God and make it a priority in every missional activity.

As Baptists, we have come together, agreeing that it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world. I came across people who are genuinely afraid of talking to people about Jesus, but that is fine, and it shouldn't be a barrier to evangelise. Evangelism can be done in many imaginative and creative ways. The gospel message can be shared in both verbal and non-verbal ways. I believe that every believer can share the gospel in their own unique way if proper training, support and encouragement are given. Proper training in various evangelism styles and methods should be a part of every church's discipleship strategy.

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<sup>2</sup> Micah Global, *Definition of Integral Mission*,

[www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn\\_integral\\_mission\\_declaration\\_en.pdf](http://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn_integral_mission_declaration_en.pdf) [accessed on 15 Jul 2022].

<sup>3</sup> D L Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), p49.

<sup>4</sup> Marks of Mission, *Anglican Communion* [www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx) [accessed on 15 July 2022].

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

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We need to prioritise evangelism because if there is no evangelism, then there will be no church left in your community to do any ministry. Transfer growth is not evangelism. Some churches prioritise discipleship, but again if there is no evangelism, there will be no one left to disciple.

We need to make sure that evangelism is prioritised in our vision, strategies and publications. Does evangelism feature in our leadership plan? Does it feature in your church's vision for this year? Are you discussing it in your church meetings?

Can you ask your regional association to host some evangelism training or invite our Baptist evangelists such as Yinka Oyekan, Chris Duffett or others to do some evangelism training? Do you need help from one of our colleges to come and speak to your church or do a training seminar? Jesus called us to be fishers of men and women, not to take care of an aquarium. I constantly pray and believe that God will bring a revival in the United Kingdom, but it might not be how we expect it. Let us commit ourselves to prioritising evangelism alongside our other aspects of Christian mission.



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