Integral Mission Today
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The progress of evangelicals towards an integrated approach to mission can be observed in the consultation and conference statements surveyed in the previous paper. Needless to say, it takes far more than good statements to enable Christians to make a meaningful contribution to integral mission. The statements, however, are indicative of a new mentality searching for change. One of the most positive results of this period was the articulation of theological concepts rooted in Scripture that provide a firm basis for integral mission.

A fine example of the theology of integral mission that evangelicalism has produced since the early 1980s are the statements of the Third and Fourth Latin American Congresses on Evangelism (CLADE III, 1992 and CLADE IV, 2000). Both the *Quito Declaration* (1992) and the *Word, Spirit and Mission Statement* (2000) leave no doubt that for a good number of evangelicals in Latin America integral mission is no longer a matter of debate but the way ‘to participate in the mission of God by giving an integral witness to the gospel, by living an inclusive Christian spirituality, by carrying out a stewardship of creation which would put material reality at the service of the spiritual and use power for the well-being of others and for the glory of God, and by promoting reconciliation among races, social classes, sexes, generations, and the environment’ (*Word, Spirit and Mission Statement*).

This advancing theoretical understanding of the Christian mission has resulted in the formation and strengthening of an amazing number of evangelical para-church agencies committed to serving the poor. The Micah Network is a sign that thousands of Christians now recognize that the Great Commission is inseparable from the Great Commandment.

Without minimizing the importance of the large Christian service agencies characteristic of the wealthy world, it should also be recognized that much of the work in the front line is actually done by countless common believers. Among para-church organizations there has been a paradigm shift towards a more kingdom-centred approach. This shift, however, is not restricted to para-church organizations. In the Two-Thirds World it extends to a myriad of local churches that are engaged in integral mission – not only *saying*, but also *being* and *doing* the witness to Jesus Christ.

Another striking development in the last few decades has been the engagement of an increasing number of evangelical Christians in advocacy on behalf of the poor and oppressed. *Paz y Esperanza* (Peace and Hope) in Peru and *International Justice Mission* in the United States are good illustrations of this development. Through them and similar institutions the call...
for involvement in questions of justice, issued in the early eighties – especially at the Consultation on Simple Lifestyle (1980) and the consultation on The Church in Response to Human Need (1983) – is being fulfilled.

At the same time, however, there are still many local churches and missionary societies that continue to reduce the Christian mission to ‘saving souls’. A recent study of churches in Buenos Aires, Argentina, conducted by the Kairos Foundation produced the following conclusions:

1. A predominant number of churches do not see themselves as part of the area in which they are located. They can ignore the city and the needs of people. Their efforts are centred on their self-preservation.

2. Only a few churches are really concerned for their respective neighbourhoods. Most do not listen to outsiders and are not interested in the real needs of people around them are. Yet they regard themselves as saviours of the city because they do some good works for people.

3. It is rare to find churches that see themselves as part of, or partners with, their respective neighbourhoods, working with them in the solution of common problems, as incarnate in their communities.

This indicates that, while the cause of integral mission has made big strides in the last few decades, much more still needs to be done to help local churches see themselves as salt and light in concrete terms. For too long a narrow view of mission has been taken for granted. It is not surprising that the more holistic – and biblical – paradigm of mission should take time to be established.

Alongside this need for grassroots change, much more needs to be done to respond to the growing gap between the rich and the poor around the world, characteristic of today’s ‘international economic order’. The 30 percent of the world’s population who live in Japan, Europe and the United States consume 80 percent of the world's wealth. And in Brazil the top 20 percent earn 32 times the income of the poorest 20 percent.

One need not be an economics expert to realize that the so-called neo-liberal system is causing havoc around the world. Global capitalism is in deep crisis because it has placed money at the centre of life. The main beneficiaries of this system the policies and procedures of the established order are the wealthy nations and the local oligarchic elites, but for the large majority of the world’s population the result is poverty and misery.

Furthermore, the globalization of ‘savage capitalism’ is accompanied by the globalization of North American political and military interventionism for the sake of economic profit. The US Government in their official documents on their strategy for national security have made clear their intention to do all they can to protect ‘the official security of our territory and that of our allies, and the security of our citizens and our economic well-being’. ‘We would even
use,’ they say, ‘our military power in a unilateral and decisive way, if necessary’. More often than not the United States has lived up to this explicit policy of using violence to protect its economic interests. US military interventions – whether directly or through surrogates – in countries like Panama, Guatemala, Cuba, Iran, Grenada, Dominican Republic and Nicaragua provide plenty of evidence to substantiate this claim. In 1989 Senator J. William Fulbright, a former chair of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said: ‘Since World War Two, the United States has become a globalist interventionist power’. Senator Fulbright went on:

It is understandably difficult... to get off to a good start with a new revolutionary regime when you plot to kill its leaders. If we start to plan to assassinate leaders we don’t like, as the CIA is believed to have done with Castro, you are only asking for trouble. It’s self-defeating. It is against our interests. I don’t think it ever succeeds. It gives others an excuse to engage in terrorism, to kill our ambassadors or citizens travelling abroad [or at home]. You start a process of terrorism that has far-reaching and unpredictable consequences. There is a good case to be made that we initiated it. We and some of our friends have initiated some of the worst aspects of modern terrorism.

The recent brutal terrorist acts committed in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 were abominable acts. But there should no surprise if a country that sows violence for the sake of economic profit reaps violence. Unfortunately the recent terrorist blow has prepared the scene for a new military build-up and the resulting expansion of an economy heavily dependent on militarization. After all militarization is a highly profitable business.

Given these circumstances, the plight of the poor will change without a concerted effort on the part of people in wealthy countries. Perhaps the greatest challenge for Christians in the West with regard to world poverty is to rediscover their prophetic role at the centre of political and economic structures. As Lesslie Newbigin has put it:

The ideology of the free market has proved itself more powerful than Marxism. It is, of course, not just a way of arranging economic affairs. It has deep roots in the human soul. It can be met and mastered at the level of religious faith, for it is a form of idolatry. The churches have hardly begun to recognize that this is probably their most urgent task during the coming century.

The idolatrous shape of the contemporary economic system suggests that the time has come for evangelical service agencies to make educating Christians in the West to fulfil their prophetic task a priority. Much of the work of Christian service agencies is still focused on ‘development’. Too often the assumption

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7 J. William Fulbright, The Price of Empire, 172.
is that the rich countries are called to provide social models for the rest of the world; that they represent a higher stage of development towards which every other societies should evolve. In a world where injustice has become institutionalized on a global scale, however, Christians are called to bear witness to the God of love over against the idolatrous materialism of our day as we wait for the fulfilment of God’s promise of a new heaven and a new earth where justice will be at home.