

Does Integral Mission include everything that God requires of us and does God require of us everything included in Integral Mission?

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The Micah Network owes its name to the well-known verse from the Old Testament prophet: ‘What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.’ (Micah 6:8) Its fundamental concept is ‘Integral Mission’ whose definition has been given in the *Micah Declaration on Integral Mission* (2001).

The concept of ‘Integral Mission’ has received widespread acceptance among the Evangelical Christians who are acquainted with it and part of its definition has been included in the *Cape Town Commitment*, giving it still more weight. Yet one wonders if everybody really gives it the same meaning, despite some common general ideas receiving acceptance, like ‘evangelism and social action belong together’.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the *scope* of Integral Mission. It seems to me that the expression ‘Integral Mission’ as used by the Micah Network tends to include everything that God requires of us, whereas the term ‘Mission’ has not always had so broad a meaning among Christians. Instead, mission has been viewed as only one of the things (maybe the most important) that God requires of us.

We should add to this the fact that, on the other hand and in spite of Micah Network’s endeavours to a different understanding, ‘Integral Mission’ may suggest a very specialized form of mission that requires skill and time that most local Churches, let alone individual Christians, do not possess. It could come to design the way Christian development, relief and advocacy professionals do mission. But does God require of us (ordinary Christians) everything included in Integral Mission?

I will try to show in this paper that there are some issues that need to be addressed, whatever vocabulary we choose. Whether we decide to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the questions I ask in the title of this paper is not *that* important. As philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once wrote: ‘Say what you want, as long as it does not stop you from seeing the facts.’ (*Philosophical Investigations*, §79) But he very subtly added: ‘And when you see them, there is much that you will not say.’ What really matters is that we live our whole life to the glory of God, are able to deepen our understanding of what God requires of us, and humble enough to recognize our limits and appreciate the particular vocation of others – that may be different from ours.

1. A life to the glory of God

The *Micah Declaration on Integral Mission* affirms: ‘We call one another back to the centrality of Jesus Christ.’ This centrality of Jesus Christ is expressed in what is possibly the most beautiful and profound statement of the Declaration: ‘As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task.’

Because Jesus is Lord and Saviour, we cannot imitate him in every way¹; but nevertheless, as he left us an example that we should follow in his steps, it is proper that we look to Him if we want to know what God requires of us.

At the beginning of the Westminster Larger Catechism, one finds this well-known statement: 'Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.' The search for the glory of God is an overarching theme in the Bible and Jesus himself summarized his life thus: 'I have brought you glory on earth' and he added – thus linking the glory of God with his *mission*: '... by finishing the work you gave me to do.' (John 17:4)

Jesus brought glory to God. In this, surely, we should try to imitate him. The apostle Paul put it like this: 'So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. [...] Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.' (1 Corinthians 10:31 and 11:1)

How did Jesus glorify God? He did it *fully*, and here we may well use the three verbs of the Micah Declaration: he glorified God by what he was, what he did, and what he said. Being, doing and saying were always harmoniously related in Jesus. They formed a seamless garment.

More precisely, I suggest that we emphasize two aspects in the way Jesus glorified God in his being, doing and saying: first, he was made under the law, and perfectly fulfilled it in the true spirit of it. That is: he perfectly loved God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself. This love characterized who he was, what he did and what he said. One has only to read the Gospels to be convinced of it. Second: he glorified God by accomplishing the specific mission God gave to him. He was to be the Servant King, and all that he was, did or said reflected it. But these two aspects are not to be separated or even added one to the other: *fulfilling his specific mission was, for Jesus, the concrete manner of his obeying God's commandments.*

So, if by carrying out Integral Mission, one thinks of the specific and concrete forms that accomplishing God's commandments must take into our lives, in order to glorify God in all we are, do or say, we must answer the two questions of this paper's title with a loud: 'Yes!' All that God requires of us is that we glorify him in this way and God requires of us that we do all to his glory. 'As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task.'

Insisting on this is all the more important today, in a context where the divide between the religious and the secular is strongly felt. I once heard a very interesting comment from René Padilla saying that human beings tend to separate religion and the rest of their lives. On the contrary, the Bible strongly links the religious and the ethical (the way one 'walks' to use the biblical metaphor for the way one leads his or her life). It is in everyday life that Disciples of Christ, as a community as well as individually, are commissioned to serve as salt and light in the world, that others 'may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven' (Matthew 5:16). The examples that Jesus gives throughout the Sermon on the Mount show how broad his concern was for discipleship in all areas of life.

As far as action towards the poor is concerned, either within the Church or in wider society, this means that it is as much God-related as activities like prayer or worship. We must resist both temptations to confine ourselves in a kind of Evangelical ghetto – to go outside only for the strict

¹ There can be something superficial in always asking: 'What would Jesus do?' Maybe he would do things proper to the Only Begotten Son of God, that I should not dare to do.

necessities of life or for brief evangelism incursions – and the acceptance of the widespread opinion in the West today that religious convictions must be strictly kept to the private sphere. We want to serve the poor for the glory of God and as Disciples of Christ!

This being said, we are left with a lot of questions: recognizing that what we are, do and say must be integrally related, all to the glory of God, says very little about much more specific kinds of ‘doing’ and ‘saying’. Take for example, the relationships between proclamation and demonstration, the precise form that concern for the poor must take, advocacy and justice, environment, simple lifestyle, the role of the local Church, etc. that are supposed to be of great concern to the proponents of Integral Mission. We have said that we must do all things to the glory of God, but do the specific requirements of Micah Declaration or the usual concerns of proponents of Integral Mission cover all that God requires of us for his glory, and does God require of us everything included in Micah Declaration? I think that when we examine more closely the concept of ‘Integral Mission’, we find that it faces some temptations related to holistic concepts². It is important that we look at these *before* we can answer our questions.

2. The temptations related to holistic concepts

Three temptations may be related to holistic concepts such as ‘Integral Mission’ and I suggest we take them seriously.

The temptation to overlook useful distinctions

Having an all-inclusive concept may sometimes (often?) be more confusing than useful. It may lead us to consider a given reality from one point of view only. Even trying to do all things to the glory of God is not the only legitimate end of our life: the Westminster Catechism was wise enough to add to this that we should also ‘fully enjoy him forever’.

It is legitimate to define ‘Integral Mission’ as ‘all that God requires of us’ (‘Say what you want’), but is it useful or misleading (‘as long as it does not stop you from seeing the facts’)? The biblical worldview is structured by the distinction between Creator and creatures, and the biblical narrative is structured by the distinction between creation, fall and redemption. Of course we can choose to use an all-inclusive concept of ‘mission’ including God and man (the mission given to man being a participation in the so-called ‘mission of God’) and all of God’s requirements (as for example, the cultural mandate related primarily to the creation and the Great Commission related primarily to redemption). *But is it useful?* Does it really help us to understand the Scriptures better? The least we can say is that it confronts us with the *temptation* to overlook the useful distinction between creation and redemption.

We can give whatever definition we want to ‘mission’, but we will have problems if we forget the fact that its common use associates it with redemption. Now, social action, involvement for and with the poor, advocacy, and the quest for justice in society is not merely related to our redemption and to our mission as Christians; it is *also* part of our vocation as human beings. As such, it is worthwhile in

² I wish to underline that I used the word *temptations*. I am *not* assuming that one always gives way to temptations. It may be that one holds to a holistic concept *without* yielding to its related temptations. But I think it is better to be *aware* of them.

its own right, even if not directly linked with some kind of ‘proclamation’³. Does an all-inclusive concept of ‘Integral Mission’ help us to see this or rather does it hinder it?

There is an ever-recurring temptation among Evangelical to forget the importance of doctrines like creation, providence, and common grace: it may lead some to focus almost exclusively on the salvation of souls, but it may lead others to overestimate the link between social action and Kingdom of God and to *underestimate* all that we can say about issues like poverty, justice, environment, etc. from a creation/providence/common grace perspective. Is an all-inclusive ‘Integral Mission’ concept a help or a hindrance in this respect?

Another useful distinction that holistic concepts may induce us to overlook is that of ‘already’ and ‘not yet’. Although lip-service is always paid to this terminology, proponents of Integral Mission rarely appear to be willing to explain in detail what exactly must be included in the ‘not yet’. They seem to think that the difference is only one of degree.

As Professor Henri Blocher aptly states⁴:

One characteristic makes the distinction of the ‘times’ of the rule or kingdom precise and clear in the New Testament, but too many writers leave it out of the picture. [...] The Spirit gives life to the ‘inner’ man (*anthrōpos*), while the kingdom is simply future for the external order of the world, of which our body makes us an integral part. Jean Héring had already pointed out, with reference to the kingdom, ‘that it is realized at the present time [for the gospels], in so far as it is spiritual, in the heart of those who accept the Preaching with faith and who repent’, adding that this ‘partial’ realization ‘will remain in the moral sphere’.

Henri Blocher adds that the New Testament does not say that the regeneration of the world or liberation of the body is already achieved, nor that the resurrection of the inner man is still future (I would even add that in the spiritual order there is also much that remains future!). Of course, this does not exclude present *signs* of the future kingdom, but signs should not be mistaken for the reality to which they point. It is my opinion that, in very diverse ways⁵, an over-realized eschatology⁶ would be one of the main weaknesses of most of the Evangelical world today (even if, in some corners, the opposite tendency might also make itself felt).

Does an all-inclusive concept of ‘Integral Mission’ help us to see the distinctions of the times or does it make us fancy that we can have a holistic fullness in the present age? I confess that I am a little disturbed when I see that some Christian NGOs talk about envisioning a world without poverty. The Bible says: ‘Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God.’ (Proverbs 14:31) I wish that Christians could rest satisfied with the thought of

³ Please note that I have *not* written that Christians may divorce social action from a missionary horizon. I have *only* said that it needs not *always* be *directly* linked with some kind of proclamation.

⁴ Henri Blocher, *Evil and the Cross*, Vancouver (British Columbia), Regent College Publishing, 2003, p.120-121.

⁵ One of these ways is the so-called ‘prosperity gospel’ that lets people think that faith can assure them that they will have health and wealth in the present age. Another would be the naïve expectancy that if I am Christian nothing *really* painful can happen to me or that in the Christian community I will always find all the love and harmonious relationships that I expect. There would be other examples. And one of them might be, I suggest, some sort of holistic thinking, more or less expecting the regeneration of the world or the liberation of the body for the present age.

⁶ I borrow the expression ‘over-realized eschatology’ from a friend of mine, Pierre-Sovann Chauny, who uses it in his studies on the relationships between old covenant and new covenant.

glorifying God by helping the poor, avoiding oppression and injustice, and living with integrity in what they are, do and say, without needing the Western conviction that it has to work, and if possible to change the whole world, to be worth doing.

The temptation to overlook priorities

A holistic concept such as 'Integral Mission' insists on the fact that every element of it is integrally related and not only juxtaposed to the others. Thus, the *Micah Declaration* states that 'it is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other'.

So far so good.

But what about talking about priorities? As is well-known, the *Lausanne Covenant* was willing to say that in 'the Church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary' (§6). This notion by no means excludes the idea of evangelism and socio-political involvement as being integrally related and not simply to be done alongside each other. So the *Lausanne Covenant* is perfectly compatible with the concept of Integral Mission, as is expressed in the *Cape Town Commitment* quoting the *Lausanne Covenant* and the *Micah Declaration* next to one-another (I, §10).

But the temptation with which a holistic concept faces us is that it tends to avoid sharp distinctions such as those found in the *Lausanne Covenant*: '... reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation...' (§5) Most of all, it tends to avoid all talk about hierarchy or priority, or simply of order. This is true when one focuses on the relationship between evangelism and socio-political involvement, and all the more true when more and more ideas are included in the 'Integral Mission' concept.

It is not my intention to discuss in full the priority debate here. Suffice to say that I think it is dangerous when the concept we use tends to make it difficult simply to *discuss* an issue such as this. In this respect, I would urge my brothers and sisters involved in this type of debate to be a little more cautious before labelling other brothers and sisters as 'dualists' or as influenced by 'Greek philosophy', maybe simply because they introduce *distinctions* and *priorities* that some do not like.

Dualism is a metaphysical position that opposes two equally ultimate principles of reality. It may be that a sharp distinction and opposition between the religious and the private spheres of life have a tendency towards dualism. This is not simply because it distinguishes between sacred and secular. That would only be introducing a distinction or duality. Rather, it is because one of these spheres of reality would be dependent on God (ultimate reality) and the other would not.

Now, saying that evangelism and social action are distinct and both part of our Christian duty, and that evangelism must have the priority (as the *Lausanne Covenant* states) may be wrong or right, but is certainly no form of dualism at all. According to the *Lausanne Covenant* both are the necessary expression of the very same doctrines and ethical principles. There is not the least hint of an opposition between ultimate principles of reality, but everything is clearly God-related. May I also underline that monism is as much to be feared as dualism (and just as much a characteristic of Greek Philosophy), because it obscures or destroys the distinction between Creator and creature? I would certainly not say that the use of holistic concepts is a sign of monism, but I wonder if it helps us to face its temptation.

The temptation to overlook our humanity

Someone said that if everything is mission, nothing is mission. This may be true or false – I will not discuss this now. But I think it may direct us to meditate on something which I believe is a part of the reality and limits of our humanity.

What I mean is this: if we want to do *all* things to the glory of God, we would do well to do *some* things more especially to his glory. If we claim that *everything* we have is his, we could begin by putting aside *part* of what we have to dedicate it especially to him. If we think that *all* our time belongs to him, we would be wise to keep some *specific* time focusing on him.

This is not to introduce the sacred/secular divide again, but first to recognize that our relationship with God is distinct from our relationship with our neighbour even if they are related and even if our attitude to our neighbour may be God-oriented⁷; and second to recognize our limits: if the relationship with God is not, at times, very explicitly acknowledged and focused upon, it will be forgotten sooner or later.

Our involvement with the poor may be God-oriented even if it is not always directly linked with some kind of proclamation. But we should not deceive ourselves: if our social action is not accompanied by prayer; if we do not seize opportunities to confess the name of Jesus in the midst of our social work or even try to *create* such opportunities, there will come a time when the Christian character of our work will be reduced to none. Does an all-inclusive concept of 'Integral Mission' help us to keep a special focus on the relationship with God and the centrality of his Word? Beware if everything is 'Integral Mission', that instead of having an integrally religious life where everything (being, doing and saying) is to the glory of God, we have an integrally secular life, only wrapped in biblical language.

Add to all this that, paradoxically, if everything that God requires of us is included in Integral Mission, it may be that we will sooner or later discover that neither evangelism nor concern for the poor will retain any significant place in the infinite number of elements that will end up being labelled as part of 'Integral Mission'.

3. Living with integrity

It has often been said that the Protestant Reformers almost completely overlooked the importance of mission. Some have argued that it was because, in trying to reform the Church, they abolished so-called 'sodalities' such as monasteries that were actively involved in mission in the Roman Catholic Church and that nothing took their place.

The French theologian Auguste Lecerf proposes a totally different understanding of Calvin's attitude in this respect⁸. He thinks that Calvin was perfectly aware of the abiding nature of the missionary mandate, but that he thought we should have a close look at the *opportunities that God gives us* in

⁷ By the way, may I call to mind the fact that the Great Commandment is *not* to love one's neighbour as oneself but to love *God* and that loving one's neighbour is 'only' the *second* commandment, *like* the first and not identical to it?

⁸ In a text written in French: Auguste Lecerf, 'Calvin et les missions', in *Les cahiers missionnaires*, n°6, Les précurseurs de l'idée missionnaire en France aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles, Paris, Société des missions évangéliques, 1923, p. v-xv.

deciding what to do. Says Calvin, commenting on the expression of Paul to the Corinthians, “A door having been opened to me”⁹:

Its meaning is, that an opportunity of promoting the gospel had presented itself. For as an opportunity of entering is furnished when the *door is opened*, so the servants of the Lord make advances when an opportunity is presented. The *door is shut*, when no prospect of usefulness is held out. Now as, on the door being shut, it becomes us to enter upon a new course, rather than by farther efforts to weary ourselves to no purpose by useless labour, so where an opportunity presents itself of edifying, let us consider that by the hand of God a door is opened to us for introducing Christ there, and let us not withhold compliance with so kind an indication from God.

Auguste Lecerf argues from the way Calvin comments on the proceedings of the Apostles in the book of Acts, that the French Reformer thought (rightly or wrongly) that in his time, the door was open in Europe and shut in other continents. For this reason, he was not much interested in overseas missions.

If the Reformers did not insist on ‘mission’ in the everyday life of Christians, perhaps for the aforesaid reason, and also because they did not think the Great Commission defined the mission of all Christians but rather that of the Apostles and of the pastors after them, they did have a concept of ‘vocation’ that included the daily work and placed the whole of life in the sight of God.

Says Calvin¹⁰:

... the Lord enjoins every one of us, in all the actions of life, to have respect to our own calling. He knows the boiling restlessness of the human mind, the fickleness with which it is borne hither and thither, its eagerness to hold opposites at one time in its grasp, its ambition. Therefore, lest all things should be thrown into confusion by our folly and rashness, he has assigned distinct duties to each in the different modes of life. And that no one may presume to overstep his proper limits, he has distinguished the different modes of life by the name of callings. Every man’s mode of life, therefore, is a kind of station assigned him by the Lord, that he may not be always driven about at random. So necessary is this distinction, that all our actions are thereby estimated in his sight, and often in a very different way from that in which human reason or philosophy would estimate them.

What is the point of these remarks? I think that we should recover the sense of what the Reformers called ‘vocation’. It is not to be understood as some kind of mystical communication with God telling me what he requires of me. Rather it is the recognition of the fact that everything is controlled by God and included in his plan (some would say his ‘mission’) and that my duty is to do whatever good I have the opportunity to do, according to the ‘station’ God assigned me: by my saying, my doing and the way I am. *This* is living with integrity.

My point is this: there are so many different situations and opportunities to do good, to be good and to tell good news, that it is useless to try to make a list, and that it is *wrong* to insist that every Church, every Christian organization, and every individual Christian should be involved in all. Samuel

⁹ Calvin’s commentaries on 2 Corinthians 2:12. Lecerf alludes to this text. I quote the English translation found on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom40.viii.iv.html> (accessed 08/08/2012).

¹⁰ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, 10, § 4. I am quoting the English translation found on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.v.xi.html> (accessed 08/08/2012).

Escobar, in the paper sent to participants prior to the first Lausanne Congress¹¹, helpfully distinguished different contexts in which Christian social action can take place: context of small minority; context of a long tradition of Christian influence; context of persecution. We could certainly find more such contexts and there is need here for detailed analysis.

Of course, on closer examination of Scriptures, we would find some common features relevant for every individual, every local Church and every Christian organization. I expect them to be relatively few (but I may be wrong). It is not the place here to develop them. Suffice to say that I would indicate Acts 2:42 for the local Church¹² and texts like the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount for the individual Christian. Among the common features of (almost?) every Christian life, one would certainly find confessing the name of Jesus and caring for the poor (I have purposely avoided the terms 'evangelism' and 'social action'), acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with God. This is what God requires of us. But I must confess that I think we have *no* reason to suppose that these common features would include everything that enters into the concept of 'Integral Mission' (for example, while convinced that advocacy has solid biblical foundations, I do not see in the New Testament that it is part of the vocation of every individual Christian or even every local Church). This is true of the specialized forms of social involvement, but equally true of the specialized form of evangelism. Holding, as I do, that evangelism has priority in the mission of the Church by no means entails saying that it must have priority in every individual Christian vocation.

We can have a concept of 'Integral Mission' that includes everything that God requires of us, but only if we remember that Integral Mission will look very different for each of us dependent on the different opportunities to do good that we will face, and also if we remember that the strong temptations that I mentioned earlier would instead encourage us to be cautious in our use of the concept in this sense. So I would rather recommend that we *limit* the scope of 'Integral Mission' and that we use it as a *tool*, helping us to have a more integrated understanding of mission, but not trying to force everything to enter into its realm; and finally that we *complement* the 'Integral Mission' language with others so that we can develop more perspectives and insights on our 'Christian duty' or 'Integral task'. But, as Wittgenstein wrote: 'Say what you want, as long as it does not stop you from seeing the facts.'

As to the other question: does God require of us everything included in Integral Mission, we can answer yes; but only if we remember that God requires all that we include in Integral Mission of us as a whole, not of each of us as individual or of each local Church. My suggestion would be therefore that we recognize more the wide diversity of vocations among Christians, and of opportunities to do good. That would perhaps lead us to recognize 'Integral Mission' at the level of the Universal Church¹³ and to accept that at the individual or local level, the mission may be more 'partial', 'fragmented', or 'incomplete' than 'integral'. And it could also lead us to be more tolerant and open to individual Christians or Christian organizations with a focus different from ours.

¹¹ Samuel Escobar, 'Evangelism and Man's Search for Freedom, Justice and Fulfillment', in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, sous dir. J.D. Douglas, Minneapolis, World Wide Publications, 1975, p.313-314.

¹² I have argued this choice in a paper published in *Théologie Évangélique*, where I linked this verse with evangelism and social action.

¹³ And we would also do well to introduce here a distinction between the Church as gathered and the Church as dispersed in the world.