

Talk on Tearfund's understanding of integral mission

The meaning of integral mission

According to the Oxford English Dictionary:

Integrated means "made up of parts", whilst

Integral means "of, or necessary to the completeness of, a whole"

1. ...In an Image

- Integral mission comes from the Spanish "mission integral".
- The Spanish also use the term "pan integral" – whole meal bread.
- Whole meal bread in the language of the old Hovis advert is bread "with nowt taken out".
- Integral mission is whole meal mission - mission with nowt taken out

Its not that separate ingredients have been brought together (integrated), but rather that nothing has been taken out. Proclamation and social involvement are necessary components of the mission or task of the church – take either out, and the activity ceases to be truly "mission".

This is not some new form of mission, but the original, un-adulterated, non-reduced mission of the early church. The word "integral" is only put in front of the word "mission" to clarify that what is not meant is some of the other reduced forms of activity (just evangelism; just social action) that also use the term.

2. ...In one sentence

A one sentence definition of integral mission is "the church speaking of and living out (proclaiming and demonstrating, if you prefer) its faith in Jesus Christ in an undivided way in every aspect of life." (from Tearfund's Working Definition of Integral Mission)

3. ...In one paragraph

Or a slightly longer definition from the Micah Declaration on Integral Mission:

"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. If we ignore the world we betray the word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task."

Key things

The key things to note in both definitions:

- Mission is about every aspect of life: broader than relief and development (E.g. it is part of proclaiming and demonstrating the lordship of Jesus Christ in every aspect of life to work for transparency, honesty and integrity in business, and to campaign for positive values and moral behaviour within public life, and yet such things would fall beyond the remit of an organisation such as Tearfund).
- Mission involves both proclamation and social involvement;
- These two things are indivisible.

The biblical case for social involvement as central to mission

Christians should be involved in social action because to do so is:

- To follow the example and reflect the character of God
- To submit to the lordship of Christ
- To appropriately respond to the grace of God

The character of God

The psalmist describes God in the following way:

He upholds the cause of the oppressed
And gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets prisoners free,
The Lord gives sight to the blind,
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down,
The Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the alien
And sustains the fatherless and the widow,
But he frustrates the ways of the wicked
(Psalm 146:7-9) [1]

Social involvement is rooted in the character of God. This is reflected in both the law and the prophets:

God's concern for the poor was embodied in the Mosaic law: Deuteronomy 15:11 (There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be open-handed toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land).

Numerous laws safeguarded both the needs and the dignity of the poor:

- The law of gleaning: landowners were to leave produce missed by the initial harvest so it could be gathered by the poor
- Interest was not to be charged on loans to the poor so that people did not profit from their misfortune
- When a coat or millstone was taken as a guarantee for a loan it was to be returned when it was needed

God's concern for the poor was articulated time and again by the Old Testament prophets:

Again and again the indictment of the Old Testament prophets against God's people was both that they had turned from God to idols and that they had not upheld social justice (Amos 5:11-12).

In Isaiah, the people complain that God is indifferent to their prayers and fasting, but the real problem, the prophet says, is the indifference of the people to the cries of the poor: Isaiah 58:3-7. God will not hear his people when they ignore the claims of the poor (Isaiah 1:10-17).

The character of God is ultimately revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. In his life:

- He showed concern for the poor (Matthew 4:23; 9:35-38)
- He responded to the needy with compassionate action (Matthew 14:14; Luke 7:13)
- He told a rich man that he had to give everything to the poor if he wanted to follow him (Luke 12:33)
- The poor were drawn to him just as religious leaders were repelled by him (Luke 15:1-2)
- And in his death he gave us a model of love that we should extend to those in need: 1 John 3:16-17.

The reign of God

The second reason for Christian involvement in social action is God's reign, his lordship over life.

In the beginning, in the Garden of Eden God reigned over the first man and woman. This was a reign of life, freedom, peace and joy, and humanity enjoyed prosperity and security.

God made humanity in his image to share his reign, and he gave us the task of stewarding his creation. Creation was made perfect but not finished. God gave us creation to explore, to enrich and be creative - like a gardener, working with nature rather than against it, to create from nature something even more beautiful by tending and caring for it.

But, as we know, humanity rejected God's reign. We chose to live under our own authority. And the result has been conflict, suffering and injustice. Things that were good before the Fall - art, science, business and government - are now too easily distorted. Art celebrates the wrong things, science creates pollution and advanced weaponry; business and government take tyrannical forms of exploitation and oppression.

The story of Genesis 3 is the Fall, when humanity rejected God's reign. The result was that all areas of life - art, science, business, government, family life, relationships - became distorted and corrupted. The rest of the Bible is the story of God re-establishing his liberating reign over the world. It is the story of God restoring us in his image. It is the story of Christ rescuing us from the punishment of sin and liberating us from the power of sin. It is the story of God re-establishing his reign in all aspects of life.

- As Colossians 1 makes clear Jesus is Lord as Creator, for through him all things were created - including thrones, powers, rulers and authorities; and Jesus is Lord as Redeemer, for it is God's purpose through Christ to reconcile all things to himself.
- As Abraham Kuyper said: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not say "Mine"".

Just one example of this is in how the theme of repentance is treated in the New Testament.

Jesus proclaims: "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Just as God's reign extends over every area of life, so our repentance is to affect every aspect of our lives. Repentance is not just moral or spiritual change, but a total change of life. Repentance in the New Testament has social implications:

- John the Baptist preaches a repentance that involves sharing clothing with those who have none, and telling tax collectors and soldiers to stop their extortion (Luke 3:10-14).
- Jesus says that salvation has come to Zacchaeus as Zacchaeus demonstrates that the gospel has transformed his economic relationships (Luke 19:8-10).
- Saving faith proves itself through a commitment to the needs of others (James 2:14-26)

The grace of God

The third reason for our involvement in social action is that as Christians we are called to reflect the experience of grace that we have received. We are to be gracious because God has been gracious to us.

The Israelites were to act towards the immigrant, the vulnerable and the poor in the light of their own experience of deliverance from slavery. Thus:

- the laws of gleaning – Deuteronomy 24:21-22
- the jubilee laws that legislated for the release of slaves every 7 years – Deuteronomy 15:12-15: "If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today"

The God who upheld their cause expected them to uphold the cause of the oppressed.

Grace humbles us before God. We cannot act with any sense of moral superiority. We too were in desperate need, and God rescued us. The more we understand the wonderful grace of God to us in our need, the more our hearts will be open to the poor and marginalised. God's grace causes us to respond to need with compassion.

C. The case for evangelising the poor

We should be proclaiming the good news to the poor.

By proclamation I mean sharing the message of the gospel with people (not just preaching, but conversations, etc).

Why?

1. Because blessing in God's future is ultimately more important than blessing in this life (Matthew 6:19-20 - do not store up for yourselves treasures in this world...)
 - Our eternal fate is more important than what happens to us in this life.
2. Because our most important task in this life is the worship of God. It is for this that supremely we have been created. Every aspect of our lives should be a song of worship to God. And worship of God is impossible unless we acknowledge him and bow the knee to him. The poor's true purpose, as with all human-kind, is the worship of God. We cannot be truly human, and we cannot be truly fulfilled, until we discover God.
3. Because the gospel is good news to the poor. It is:
 - A message of liberation – the gospel is the promise of liberation from all those things, personal and social, that enslave us. For the poor, the promise of liberation is particularly important, for their life experience is that of slavery to poverty, slavery to the powerful, etc. The poor, in believing in the gospel, may get some glimpse of this now, but they will experience liberation fully in the life to come.
 - A message of grace – God's promise of forgiveness and liberation does not depend on status, education or wealth. It is for all. In many parts of the world, the poor don't need to be convinced of their need of God (unlike the rich, they are less likely to trust in their own resources), but they need more convincing of God's "need" of them – his love for them and desire for them to be in relationship with him. The gospel of grace – of acceptance, love, dignity, worth – is an amazing message of good news to the poor.
 - A message of community – the coming liberation of God is anticipated in the liberating relationships of the Christian community. Through the gospel, the poor become part of a community of love and care. The Christian community is both a sign and a promise of God's coming liberation. We are the presence of God's liberating kingdom in a broken world. We are the place where liberation can be found. We are the community among whom liberation is a present reality – the jubilee people who live with new economic and social relationships.

The inseparability of social action and evangelism

You cannot separate proclamation from demonstration, evangelism from social action. Even when you think you are, you're not. The two are indivisible.

Tim Chester, in his book "God of the Poor", explains it in terms of text and context.

The statement "I am mad about my car" can be either understood as being a very positive or frustrated statement. On its own the statement is unclear. It's the context that makes sense of it – "this is the third time it has broken down since its service!" Texts only truly make sense in a context.

1. The text of the gospel message (our proclamation, evangelism, etc) is always heard in a context. We have no choice – it always is!
 - Whenever we share the gospel message with someone they will interpret it by the context of our lives and our life together as Christian communities.
 - The question is whether the context matches the message of the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.

For example:

- If I talk about God's grace and yet am constantly legalistic about other people's lifestyles, the listener will understand the gospel as being about adherence to rules and norms.
- If I proclaim a gospel of love, and yet fail to do anything about the deep poverty of the people I am witnessing to, the gospel will be experienced as one that has no relevance to everyday life.

In other words, I cannot do evangelism without some form of social action. If I tell someone about the need for individual salvation but fail to do anything about their poverty I make a very strong political statement: the earthly status quo is not important.

The two contexts that best enable people to understand the message of the gospel are loving actions and loving community.

2. People will always read values and beliefs into our actions. People will always apply a text to our context.
 - I cannot do social action without some form of evangelism or witness. We are always witnessing to something in our actions. Even secular development agencies witness unconsciously to something (to Western values; to the need for technological change; to the unimportance of a spiritual worldview).

For example, do communities interpret our actions as proclaiming:

- A belief in the pre-eminence of Western or "development" values
- A belief in the saving power of technology
- A belief that the spiritual is irrelevant (because it is not mentioned)
- A belief that our God is a God of love who calls us to love others.

So one of the key issues of integral mission is both:

To what extent can we ensure our actions are consistent with and help to explain our message of the love of God

And

To what extent can we provide a message that helps people to understand the true motivation of our actions

Integral mission is about recognising and ensuring that there is consistency between our actions and what our actions witness to, between our words and the context within which our words are understood.

What does integral mission look like?

If I was to visit a community in India etc what would I see that would tell me that integral mission is happening? The following eight points are taken from Tearfund's Working Definition of Integral Mission:

1. Basic needs being met - the meeting of people's absolute basic needs for food, water, sanitation, health, shelter, education and information
2. Participation and empowerment – the enabling of poor people to make choices, take part in actions and decisions that affect their lives, and become agents for change
3. Good stewardship of resources – the sustainable and compassionate use and distribution of resources, ensuring that the material needs of all are met now and in the future
4. Advocacy – the engagement of people in advocacy to address structural injustice and to protect the vulnerable
5. Values change – the recognition by people of their true worth as made in the image of God, and the challenge and transformation of their values and worldview
6. Local church engagement - the encouragement of sustainable Christian communities in their commitment to Jesus Christ through worship, prayer and their service of the poor
7. Opportunities for exploration of the Christian faith – the provision of opportunities for people to encounter, acknowledge and follow the lordship of Jesus Christ
8. Christians in leadership - Christians serving their communities and taking positions of leadership and responsibility outside the church.

Talk given by Tulo Raistrick, Tearfund's Church and Development Advisor, to Tearfund's Indian Partners in New Delhi, India; January, 2007.

Tearfund is a Christian relief and development agency
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