

PARADIGM SHIFTS IN MISSIOLOGY

2. FROM SAVING SOULS TO HOLISTIC MISSION

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1. INTRODUCTION

Last week I suggested that a paradigm is a way of thinking, a framework for our theology. The western church used to think of itself in Christendom ways—church and state bound up together, using power, and assuming all people within Christendom were Christians. But over recent times it has recovered a missional paradigm. We see the church now as joining in God's mission, which is to reconcile the world to Godself. We now see the whole life of the church—whether in worship or community—directed towards mission. This is a big shift in missiological paradigms.

Today we're going to consider another paradigm shift, from 'saving souls' to holistic mission.

2. MISSION REDUCED TO SAVING SOULS

There is a way of thinking—a theological and missiological paradigm—that goes like this.

God made the world so that God could enjoy a relationship with humans. He knew, however, that humans would go wrong. Once the first humans sinned, every human after that was born in sin, guilty from birth, separated from God. God had to set things right.

(Some theologians say he knew from the beginning that Plan B would be needed. Some say that God's holiness was offended and he needed a sacrifice in order for justice to be met.)

So he sent his Son to live a sinless life and then take the blame for humans, in their place. He would suffer death as a substitute for humans paying the death penalty. This paid the price of sin and humans are now able to be restored to relationship with God as a result. Only those who turn to God by believing in Jesus' name will escape eternal punishment. The rest will go to hell. While our bodies are important, it is our souls that are eternal.

So Christian mission consists of evangelism, saving souls. We must invite others to believe what we do so that they go to heaven instead of hell. Of course, we must also love our neighbour, but that is much less important than telling others the Good News.

This is what I call the 'saving souls' paradigm. It is the framework of conservative evangelicalism. Many, but not all, evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal Christians live by this story. Other evangelicals would disagree with one or two parts of it. Ecumenical Christians tend to disagree with several parts of it.

3. HOW THE VISION OF THE KINGDOM WAS NARROWED

How did this story come to be strong in the history of the church? I'm going to suggest six factors. This paradigm is not just recent; it's been there all along in the life of the church. But from the beginning others have been telling a bigger story, and that bigger story is being accepted by more and more Christians today. Why did the story of God's mission become so narrow?

a. Choosing Narrowly from the Bible

One reason is that many people read the Bible narrowly.

When we interpret the Bible, how should we go about it? If it is a matter of choosing just one verse—what we call 'proof texting'—we can prove almost anything. If we study the Bible in depth we discover that it consists of many documents put together over thousands of years and written by many people. Even though it is inspired, it is written by humans. We need to understand which parts are poetry and which are law, which parts are the words of Jesus and which parts are remembered by the church and written down decades later.

One good principle is to interpret things through the eyes of Jesus. Jesus is the hermeneutical key, we say.

Another principle is to stand back and look at the whole story.

To take an example, in parts of the Old Testament God seems to tell Israel to kill other people brutally (e.g., Deut 2:31–34; Deut 7:1–6). And in the Psalms we find vengeful thinking, a desire to pay back those who do evil. How do we interpret this? I suggest we read back through the lens of Jesus' command to love our enemies (Mt 5:44). I suggest we also listen to God telling Israel to seek justice and love mercy (Micah 6:8). Then we can see the brutal and vengeful passages as an expression of Israel's partial understanding of God, rather than take it as 'gospel' and act upon it.

It is similar with the passages on atonement and sacrifice. Animal sacrifice was an important part of Ancient Israel's religious practice, an offering to God to make God happy. The Hebrew word *kaphar*, atonement, occurs seventy-eight times in the Old Testament. So it is not surprising that the death of Jesus should be referred to on four occasions as a sacrifice for human sin (Heb 2:17, 1 Jn 2:2, 1 Jn 4:10 and Rom 3:25).

Before we settle on sacrificial atonement as the only metaphor for Jesus' death, however, we need to remember that other images for Jesus' death are used.

One is Christ as victorious over sin—his death was a cosmic victory.

Another is Jesus as a moral influence, showing God's love to us so strongly that we respond in gratitude and are transformed.

These three metaphors—sacrifice, victory and influence—are each in the Bible and can be seen as trying to describe a mystery that cannot be fully understood. Many theologians argue that we need them all because each has strengths and limitations.¹

b. Narrowing God’s Concern to Humans Alone

Christians have often paid so much attention to God’s love for humans that they have ignored the rest of creation. Genesis 1 can give the impression that everything leads to humans at the top, and we are all that matters to God. The famous philosopher, Ludwig Feuerbach, criticised Christians for this human-centredness (known as anthropocentrism): ‘Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself and the salvation of his soul.’²

c. Narrowing Salvation to the Church

Often in the first thousand years the church claimed that you could not be saved unless you were in the church. In 1302 the pope issued an even stronger statement saying that unless you obeyed the pope you couldn’t receive salvation. If a person held the wrong opinion they could be excommunicated, that is, thrown out of the church. Then, it was believed, they would go to hell.

During the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, the Catholic view changed a bit. It is now accepted that God may be at work outside the church, even in other religions. But the question is not settled clearly in the Catholic church³ and is debated by Christians in other circles.

d. Narrowing Humanity to Our Soul

In the Bible humans are made up of body, mind and spirit but are seen as one being, not separated. This is often called the Hebrew view of the human being.

But some Christians, including some of the Early Fathers, have reduced humans to spiritual beings. They have been influenced by the Greek view of the human being, which separates spirit from matter.

Origen (who lived in the 3rd century) saw humans as souls in exile from heaven, trapped in a material body, which dissolves when we die and go to heaven. For Origen, the body is like a temporary prison. It is not an essential part of us. This reduces humanity to souls trapped in bodies.

¹ Daniel L Migliore, *Faith seeking understanding: An introduction to Christian theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 182–187.

² Ludwig Feuerbach, *The essence of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1989 (1843)), 287; cited in Migliore, *Faith seeking understanding*, 94.

³ See a more conservative view put forward in a recent Vatican declaration: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus: On the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (Rome: The Vatican, 2000), available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

Mission then becomes reduced to saving souls. It only serves the 'spiritual needs' of people.⁴

e. Narrowing Christ's Work to Personal Atonement

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that 'in Christ God was reconciling the world to Godself'. God's plan, we read in Ephesians 1:10, is 'to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth'. God's reconciliation is as big as the universe. It is cosmic as well as personal.

But the church has often focused on the individual being reconciled to God. And not only this, it has focused on the simple fact of conversion, and forgotten to emphasise the changed life. We have often forgotten that we become followers of Jesus so that our lives may be transformed and may transform others and the world.

The English word 'atonement' comes from putting three words together: at-one-ment. In other words, humans and God are at one again (reconciled). This is just part of many dimensions of transformation. It is just the beginning of a life lived in relationship with God.

f. Evangelicals Gradually Narrowing Their Vision

The modern evangelical wing of the church grew from a strong desire to share the Good News of Jesus, which is very good. It is usually agreed that it began in the 18th century, with great preachers such as John Wesley. For the 18th and most of the 19th century evangelicals had a broad vision, including seeking justice and showing compassion on the poor.

But from the second half of the 19th century evangelicals were concerned about liberal Christianity. Liberals seemed to question the Bible. They rejected some Christian beliefs that the evangelicals held to. And they emphasised the social side of the gospel—justice, peace and compassion.

In reacting against liberalism, the evangelicals narrowed their vision of mission.⁵ It now became evangelism only and not seeking justice. Or, evangelism came first and social action a long way behind in second.

As a result of factors like these many Christians have worked under the mission paradigm of 'saving souls', where the main aim of mission is to get people into the church so that their souls will one day be in heaven rather than in hell. It is true that the decision for Christ is important. And the 'spiritual' dimension is important. But many other aspects of Christian mission are forgotten in this paradigm.

⁴ Paul G Hiebert, *Anthropological insights for missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 24.

⁵ Timothy Chester, *Awakening to a world of need: The recovery of evangelical social concern* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1993); David O Moberg, *The great reversal: Evangelism and social concern*, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Holman, 1977).

4. THE PARADIGM SHIFT: A BIGGER VISION OF GOD'S MISSION

All along there have been Christians who have had a different way of thinking, a broader missiological paradigm. I'll mention some recent shifts in paradigm.

Since the *World Council of Churches* was formed in 1948 it has grappled with the nature of mission. It has been sensitive to the condition of the poor and the oppressed. It has affirmed the social dimensions of the gospel. Since the 1970s it has used the phrase 'justice, peace and the integrity of creation' to describe what we long for as Christians.

The *Lausanne Movement* is the biggest group of evangelicals, meeting regularly since its first congress in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974. The Lausanne Covenant broadened the evangelical vision of mission and began a shift in paradigm. It said, 'evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty'.⁶ It saw evangelism and justice-seeking as two separate things, with evangelism 'primary', that is, more important.⁷ This is called the 'two-mandate' view. While it affirms both evangelism and social action, it is not yet holistic.

It was the *Radical Discipleship Group at Lausanne* who expressed the need for a paradigm shift to holistic mission most clearly. They said that the gospel 'is Good News of liberation, of restoration, of wholeness, and of salvation that is personal, social, global and cosmic.'⁸ They said there is no division in the Bible between the Good News spoken and the Good News made visible in the lives of God's people.⁹

In the writings of Samuel Escobar (from Peru),¹⁰ René Padilla (from Argentina),¹¹ Vinay Samuel (India) and Chris Sugden (UK)¹² we find the idea of *holistic mission*—or 'integral mission'—developed. (The two words mean the same thing: the many dimensions of mission seen as one mission, an integrated whole.)

A large group of evangelical aid agencies, more than 500 of them, including TEAR and World Vision, formed a network in 2001 to promote integral mission. It is called the *Micah Network*,¹³ inspired by Micah 6:8:

⁶ 'The Lausanne Covenant', in *Let the earth hear his voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland, Official reference volume*, ed. J D Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide, 1975), available at <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html>, 3–9, see paragraph 5.

⁷ 'The Lausanne Covenant', paragraph 6.

⁸ 'Theology and implications of radical discipleship', in *Let the earth hear his voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland*, ed. J D Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide, 1975), available at <http://www.lausanne.org/docs/lau1docs/1294.pdf>, 1294.

⁹ 'Theology and implications of radical discipleship', 1294.

¹⁰ Samuel Escobar, *A time for mission: The challenge for global Christianity* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003).

¹¹ C René Padilla, 'Holistic mission', in *Holistic mission (Occasional Paper No. 33, 2004 Lausanne Forum on World Evangelization, Pattaya, Thailand)*, ed. Evvy Hay Campbell (Geneva: Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization, 2004), available at http://www.lausanne.org/documents/2004forum/LOP33_IG4.pdf.

¹² Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, eds. *Mission as transformation: A theology of the whole gospel* (Oxford: Regnum, 1999).

¹³ Micah Network, www.micahnetwork.org.

He has told you, men and women, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

The Micah Declaration issued by this network in 2001 defines integral mission very well. It says:

Integral mission or holistic transformation 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.¹⁴

I'm now going to outline my vision for mission in the new paradigm. What does mission look like when we see it as holistic mission?

5. A DEFINITION

I'll try to express my vision for mission. I keep changing this definition and adding to it as I learn more, so it's a work in progress, an unfinished piece of work. It contains some of the recent trends in missiological thinking that have influenced me. You'll see straight away that it is multi-dimensional, that it has many aspects. I'll explain in a minute why it is also a holistic vision.

The church's mission is to	Not just each of us
co-operate in the power of the Spirit	Spirit-empowered
and in the way of Jesus	Discipleship
with God's purposes	The mission of God
to bring the whole world into relationship with God	Kingdom of God
through Jesus Christ,	Jesus' death & resurrection
giving witness in word and deed	Incarnational
in every culture	Contextual
to the good news	Out of joy
of God's transforming power	The gospel as power
to reconcile us	Reconciliation is the heart
to God,	Conversion
to ourselves,	Journey to wholeness
to each other, and	Restored relationships
to the earth,	Caring for creation
to overcome evil and violence,	Non-violent
leading to love, justice and peace.	Love is the centre

¹⁴ Micah Network, 'Micah declaration on integral mission', in *Justice, mercy and humility: Integral mission and the poor*, ed. Tim Chester (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), available at http://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn_integral_mission_declaration_en.pdf.

6. MISSION IS MULTI-DIMENSIONAL

You'll see in my definition that I've chosen **reconciliation** as the heart of God's mission and therefore our mission. Reconciliation means becoming friends again. It means the setting right of relationships. It means overcoming brokenness. 2 Corinthians 5:19-20 says that in Christ God was reconciling the world to Godself, and that we also are given the task of reconciliation, as representatives of Christ in the world.

I'm going to mention, very briefly, some of the many dimensions of mission as reconciliation. Mission is multi-dimensional in scope and in its tasks.

a. In Scope

Mission has a wide scope (or range). Consider some of the dimensions.

i. Reconciling Us to God

The basis of all mission is God's outgoing and forgiving love. Through Jesus Christ God opens the way back to God for us all. In conversion we are reunited with God the source of all life. Our broken relationship with God, due to sin, is overcome and we become like children of God again. The cross and the resurrection are at the centre of Christian mission. There is no easy hope of human reconciliation if we are not also responding to God's transforming power.

ii. Reconciling Us to Ourselves

At a psychological level, we respond to being reconciled with God by growing into wholeness. Humans suffer from 'alienation,' which means 'being split within' or 'not feeling at home in ourselves'. When our relationship with God, the source of wholeness and freedom, is repaired, we begin on the road to becoming fully human, with a hope that we will experience inner healing and taste the fullness of life and love.

iii. Reconciling Us in Interpersonal Relationships

In 1 Corinthians 3:3 Paul says that as long as the church at Corinth is full of jealousy and quarrelling it is living according to the old ways. 'Be reconciled', he says, 'and let there be no divisions amongst you' (1 Cor 1:10). As Christians we will still have conflict, because we are human, but in God's love there are ways forward, ways to work through the conflict and remain in fellowship.

iv. Reconciling Society and Transforming Social Structures

We can't expect wider society today to reflect the kingdom of God. But part of the vision of Christian mission is to co-operate with God's mission for all humanity to turn to God's ways. We dream of a time when love and justice will reign in all structures, in all organisations, in all governments and between all nations. Our call to peacemaking has

this wide scope. We are to work for peace, for justice and for the empowerment of the weak and the voiceless. It is part of our mission

v. Reconciling Us to Creation

Only recently has missiology begun to realise that God's reconciling purposes include all of creation.¹⁵ The setting-right of relationships includes our relationship to the environment. God's mission has cosmic scope. It is not only personal and spiritual, not only social, but also includes the universe. As Paul writes in Romans 8:18, creation waits with eager longing for God's coming in fullness, for humanity to turn to God and for all relationships to be set right. In practical terms this means that caring for creation is part of Christian mission as well, a new thought for many Christians.

vi. But It Is the One Mission: Reconciling the World to God

Even though I've mentioned a few dimensions of mission as reconciliation, it's important to realise that they all flow from the one mission of God to win the universe through love to God's gracious ways. It is one holistic mission.

b. In Task

Mission also has many different tasks which all flow from the one mission. We could ask the question, 'How can we best work with God to welcome and build the kingdom of God?' The answers are many and various.

i. Community and Worship as Signs of the Kingdom

The main reason for worship is to praise and adore God. But true worship has an evangelistic dimension. It will be attractive to those who are not Christians. Praise is a part of mission, because God's name is held up before everyone as worthy. So true worship is a sign of the kingdom.

It is the same with the way Christians live together and support each other. An open and inclusive Christian community where the weak are supported and there is practical care for each other is a strong sign of the kingdom. Like good worship, it has an evangelistic dimension. We practise community because we are called to be the body of Christ, to enjoy the love which is the sign of God's presence amongst us. But in the process we witness in word and deed to the kingdom of God.

So community and worship, aspects of ministry, are also aspects of mission.

¹⁵ Ross Langmead, 'Ecomissiology', *Missiology* 30 (2002), available at http://repository.mcd.edu.au/74/1/2002_JA_Langmead_Ecomissiology.pdf.

ii. Evangelism

Mission includes the telling of the gospel, not just the living of it. Good news isn't good news if people don't hear it ('How are they to hear if there is no-one to proclaim him?', we read in Romans 10:14).

Evangelism, like mission, has a bad reputation in some circles because often evangelists have been too strong, too aggressive. In my culture Australians don't like strangers coming up to them and talking about religion. They don't like people preaching on street corners or knocking on their doors.

But one of the trends in missiology is that evangelism is being seen in a new light. Evangelism can be conversation and dialogue. It can be gentle and sensitive. It can be natural and simple. It is mission in Christ's way.

iii. Dialogue

Across the world missiology is realising what you in Myanmar have probably realised all along, that mission takes place in the context of many religions. There is no room for assuming we are the only ones who seek God and that the rest of the world lives in total darkness. We are surrounded by believers of other faiths. I suggest that the appropriate way for Christians to relate to believers of other faiths is dialogue, that is, respectful and open conversation.

iv. Compassion

Another dimension of mission is care for the poor and the needy. As we read in Matthew 25, when we clothe the naked, feed the hungry and visit those in prison, we are serving Christ himself. Showing love to others in need is actually part of our worship. We follow Jesus, who was so often moved by compassion for the people (Mt 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34, Mk 6:34, 8:2, Lk 7:13). Caring for others is one of the central ways in which we show what God is like.

v. Justice Seeking

Justice is similar to compassion, except that it is love translated into social structures. Justice goes further than love between individuals and seeks fairness in the rules that govern society. Love becomes fairness when people are treated well and equally by organisations and by governments. Justice says that everybody gets to have a say in how things are run. Nobody has their rights trampled. Nobody's voice is silenced. Nobody is stopped from expressing what they see as the truth. The Bible is full of God's calls for justice, particularly in the Prophets and in Jesus' teaching, and seeking justice is another dimension of Christian mission, even though it can be very costly.

vi. Peacemaking

'Blessed are the peacemakers', says Jesus in Matthew 5:9. But the church has not always made the link between the non-violent way of

Jesus and our mission in the world. 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you', Jesus said in Matthew 5:44. Of course we have to insist that there is no peace without justice, but the call to build peace between nations is an urgent part of Christian mission. It is a costly, ongoing, complicated and often discouraging dimension of mission, but in our world it is so important.

vii. Ecological concern

I've already mentioned caring for creation as part of God reconciling the world to Godself, so I won't say more here.

viii. But It Is the One Mission: Witnessing in Word and Deed to God's Kingdom

All of the tasks I've mentioned are a little different, but they overlap and are all expressions of the one mission, making the Good News visible in our words and deeds. We can't separate our speaking from the way we live. We can't separate evangelism from seeking justice.

I know that evangelicals have tended to treat evangelism and justice as two separate aspects of mission.

There was a conference of evangelical theologians in Grand Rapids in the United States in 1982 on the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility. The way they saw it was that evangelism and social responsibility are partners, like the two arms of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird.¹⁶ But I would argue that they are much more intertwined than that. They are not 'one-each-side', separate or quite different. They are expressions of the one mission, facets of the one diamond. This is what I mean by holistic mission.

Evangelicals have recently made a stronger statement on how evangelism and social action are both part of expressing the good news. There was a meeting in August 2007 in Philadelphia organised by the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship, where everyone agreed on a statement, called the Philadelphia Statement. In it we find these words:

We Evangelical Christians must repent of our failure to live as a community of faith that demonstrates the kingdom of God. Then we must commit ourselves to the common life of faith and action

¹⁶ *Evangelism and social responsibility: An evangelical commitment*, Grand Rapids Report No.21, Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (CRESR) (Wheaton, IL: Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Fellowship, 1982), available at <http://www.lausanne.org/all-documents/lop-21.html>; James A Scherer, *Gospel, church and kingdom: Comparative studies in world mission theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 184.

which will lead to a transformation of the world in which we live.¹⁷

7. MISSION IS HOLISTIC

a. Holistic Mission: The Whole Is Greater Than the Parts

Holism is the belief that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.¹⁸ It is the belief that the parts are not as significant in themselves as they are when taken together. It is a way of talking that always returns to the whole in order to understand the parts. It emphasises how interrelated things are.

You can see why the multi-dimensional view of mission I've been presenting is holistic. I'll quote Lesslie Newbigin to sum it up:

We are not talking about one sector of human affairs, one aspect of human life, one strand out of the whole fabric of world history; we are talking about the reign and about the sovereignty of God over all that is, and therefore we are talking about the origin, meaning, and end of the universe and of all [human] history within the history of the universe.¹⁹

b. Mission is Founded on the Unity of the Three-in-one God

The mission of God flows from the very nature of God, which is mutual love. We experience God as three in one: Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, but in total harmony and in perfect relationship. It is from this vision that mission arises. Mission is holistic, that is, many and varied but also one, because God, it seems to us, experiences difference and yet also unity within Godself.

c. An Ecological View of Mission: Relationships Are the Foundation of Reality

In Western culture there is a new ecological sense of reality, which has been present in many other cultures for centuries. Ecology studies the relationships between things. It sees things in systems. It sees everything as interconnected, related. For a while Western culture saw things as separate, material things, like atoms or like little balls bouncing around in the universe. Now there is a growing understanding that at the very heart of reality, at the very foundation of life is relationship. This view meets Christian theology well, because at the heart of God's mission is the restoration of relationship.

¹⁷ World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission, 'A statement on evangelical social engagement: The Philadelphia Statement, August 2007', *World Evangelical Alliance*, <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/tcstatements/>, 2007, Accessed 8-10-12.

¹⁸ John Stott, *The contemporary Christian: An urgent plea for double listening* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 337.

¹⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The open secret: Sketches for a missionary theology* (London: SPCK, 1978), 32; cited in Ken Gnanakan, *Kingdom concerns: A theology of mission today* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 115.

e. No-one Is Fully Saved until All Are Saved.

If we have an ecological view, then if you are deeply unhappy I can't be totally happy because my happiness is bound up in yours. We are in the web together. Buddhists of the Mahayana tradition are clear in this teaching. Bodhisattvas delay their entry into bliss because they want to wait for all to reach bliss. Christian mission can affirm the same truth. I cannot enjoy the full benefits of God's forgiveness and transformation while my brothers and sisters are in poverty or spiritual darkness. We engage in mission in active hope for the fullness of God's coming in Jesus. As long as there is injustice and poverty and pain, we wait for full salvation.

f. No-one Is Fully Saved until We Are Saved in Every Dimension

The ecological and holistic view also means that salvation is multi-dimensional within each person. If a person knows Jesus Christ as Saviour but is dehumanised by poverty, that person is not saved in fullness, because the kingdom of God includes the sharing of all things. It involves joy and shalom (well-being). This is why all the dimensions of mission, from evangelism to social action, are all a part of mission, which is like a cloth without a seam.

8. GOD'S MISSION IS BIGGER THAN WE EVER THOUGHT

To summarise, one of the most important paradigm shifts in recent missiology is to realise that God's mission is bigger than we ever thought. Our God has been too small. Our mission has been too narrow. Our sense of mystery has not been deep enough.

To put the kingdom of God back at the centre of mission means that we are always exploring what that kingdom means. The kingdom of God is the rule of God, or the gracious presence of God. It is a gift that comes to us, and we are invited to respond to it. Where can we see it at work? How can we encourage it or promote it? Christian mission is co-operating with God's holistic mission in its many dimensions.