

Integral Mission

Is Social Action Part of the Gospel?



Agreed:

Compassion

Social Engagement

Justice

New Methods

Presentation/ Q & A





God's Passion Your Call

Declaring God's glory among the nations

www.fim.org

Integral Mission is producing missionaries and mission movements that incorporate socio-economic engagement as an essential component of the gospel. This paper will evaluate the origin of Integral Mission and argue that the gospel is being re-defined to require socio-economic engagement, something beyond its biblical definition. A review of Acts and the Epistles of the New Testament demonstrates that although socio-economic injustices were widespread in first-century Rome, the early church did not establish programs to address social needs as a method for evangelism.

Although societal changes may have been brought about by people whose lives were transformed by the gospel, societal change was not the reason that Christians shared the gospel. This paper seeks to elevate the biblical gospel because of its inherent power to change lives, while keeping it separate from human programs and social action, which, although important, are different endeavors.

Denny Spitters and Matthew Ellison expressed this concern in “When Everything is Missions:”

Yet we are concerned that an uncritical use of words, and in particular a lack of shared definition for the words mission, missions, missionary, and missional, has led to a distortion of Jesus’ biblical mandate, ushered in an everything-is-missions paradigm, and moved missions from the initiation and oversight of local churches to make it the domain of individual believers responding to individualized callings

History is filled with excellent examples of Christians feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, building hospitals, and demonstrating the compassion of Jesus to a needy world. These practices are not in question, but rather, the question at hand is if there is support from the Bible or early church practice to consider the gospel a blend of the spoken message about Christ and the acts of compassion demonstrated by ministers of the gospel.

The Lausanne conferences and the covenants that they produced were highly influential and advanced the concept of Integral Mission.



The Lausanne Movement posts the following definition of Integral Mission on their website:

*“Integral Mission can be defined as the task of bringing the whole of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ, and includes the affirmation that there is **no biblical dichotomy** between evangelistic and social responsibility.”*



The Oxford dictionary defines dichotomy as ‘a division or contrast between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or entirely different.’ The Lausanne definition of Integral Mission therefore considers evangelism and social action to be synonymous. If evangelistic responsibility means ‘sharing the gospel message’ then equating it to social responsibility gives it a new meaning.

Lausanne Movement

The Manila Manifesto, 1989

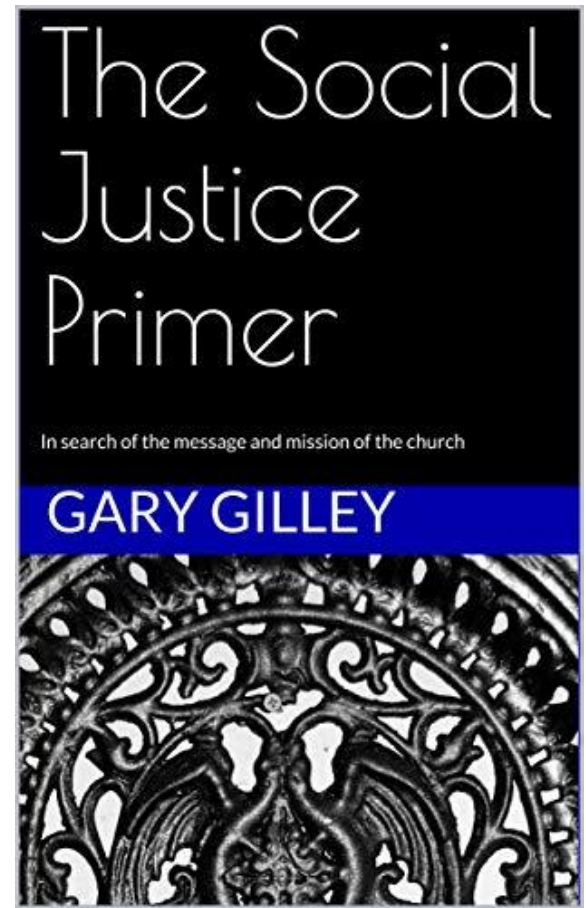
The second Lausanne conference held in Manila in 1989 produced the Manila Manifesto. Under the heading, “The Whole Gospel” is found the sub-point “The Gospel and Social Responsibility.” Part of that statement reads:

Yet Jesus not only proclaimed the kingdom of God, he also demonstrated its arrival by works of mercy and power. We are called today to a similar integration of words and deeds. In a spirit of humility, we are to preach and teach, minister to the sick, feed the hungry, care for prisoners, help the disadvantaged and handicapped, and deliver the oppressed

The statement on “The Gospel and Social Responsibility” in the Manila Manifesto reflects a shift within the global community of evangelical leaders. Since the Manila Manifesto was published, Christian witness has been expanding from the proclamation of the gospel message to include socio-economic action in combination with that message. To be a part of the “Whole Gospel,” one is called to “minister to the sick, feed the hungry and care for prisoners, help the disadvantaged and handicapped and deliver the oppressed.”

Gary Gilley describes this as the “two pronged” gospel. “...A two-prong gospel has arisen composed of both the Great Commission and the so-called Cultural Mandate.” Historically, evangelism has been understood to be the proclamation of the gospel message itself. As Gilley writes,

“Everywhere true Christianity has gone it has benefited the society which it has touched. But historically, conservative Christianity has always seen social improvement as taking a backseat to the church’s true calling of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples. It has never seen the social agenda as an end in itself—until now.”



*The Micah Network, the Micah
Declaration, 2001*



623 members
currently registered
in 89 countries.

Lausanne Movement

The Cape Town Commitment, 2010

A central phrase from the Micah Declaration (2001) was incorporated into the most recent Lausanne covenant produced in Cape Town in 2010. Article 10, “We Love the Mission of God” states the following: Evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God....The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world.

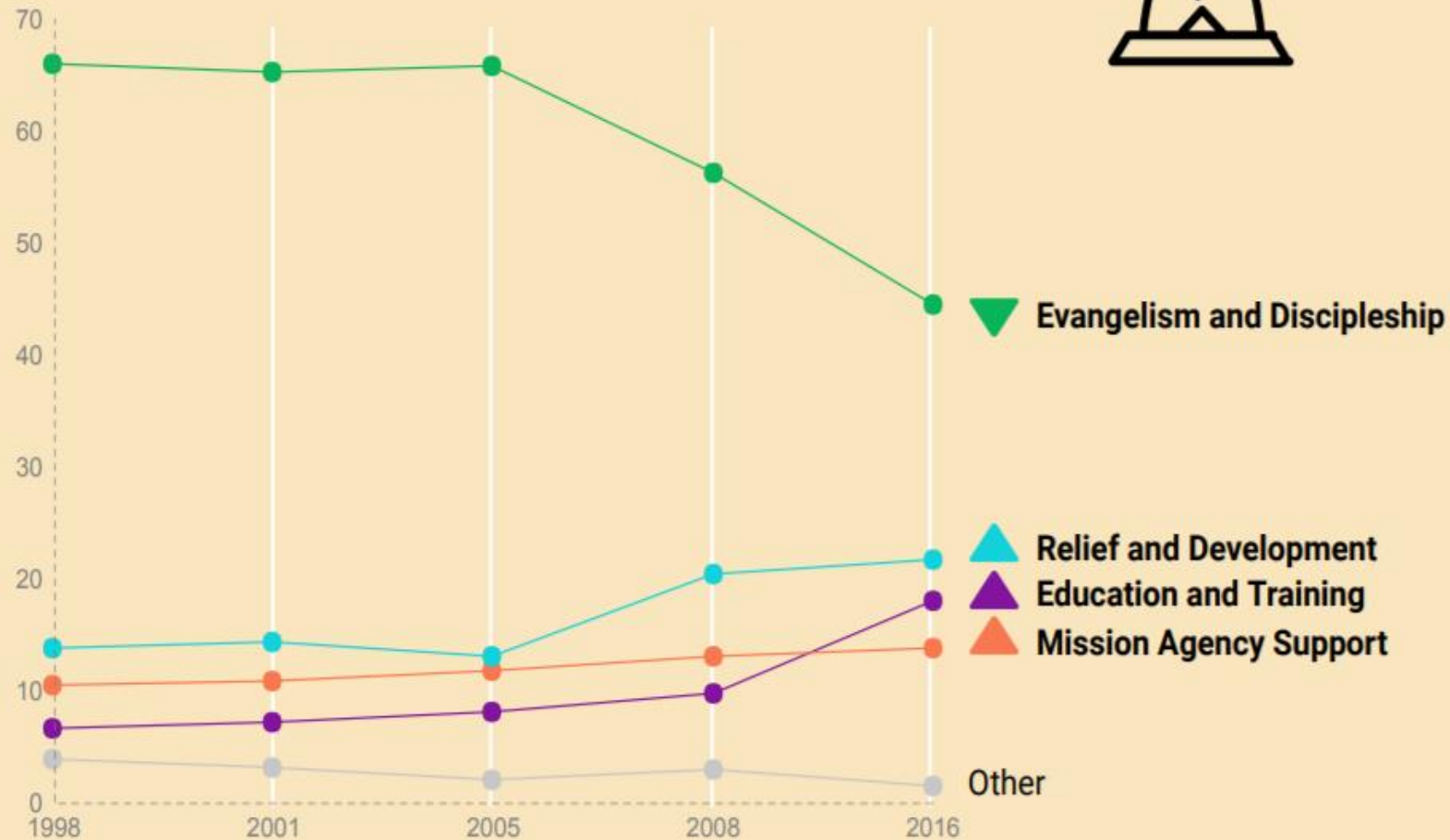
We affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and humankind, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ....The salvation we proclaim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.'[54] *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.

One source indicates a shift in missionary emphasis away from evangelism and discipleship and toward relief/development, and education/training covering a span from 1998 to 2016. This shift corresponds to the time during which Christian leaders have promoted the Integral Mission concept. Using data from the North American Mission Handbook, Missio Nexus compiled the following charts:

Changes in Primary Activity Over Time

This chart shows the changing trends in the primary activity of mission agencies and organizations from 1998–2016.



2005–2016

Evangelism and Discipleship
has Decreased

22%

10%

Increase in both:
Relief and Development
Education and Training

Was Social Action Integrated into the Gospel by Jesus?



The Commissioning of the Twelve, Matthew 10:5-42



The Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37



The fact that he was a Samaritan only reinforced that we are all called to compassion without prejudice. As powerful and familiar as this parable is to us, it should not be interpreted as a call to churches to establish programs to address community needs. There is nothing wrong with such programs, as they may be a part of a church or an individual Christian or even a Christian organization responding to real community needs locally or internationally. But they should not be construed as something commanded in this text.

Was Social Action Integrated into the Gospel by the Apostolic Church?



There is much attention today to the “mission of the church.” De Young and Gilbert address this in their book, What is the Mission of the Church. “It used to be that mission (emphasis in original) referred pretty narrowly to Christians sent out cross-culturally to convert non-Christians and plant churches. But now mission is understood much more broadly. Environmental stewardship is mission. Community renewal is mission. Blessing our neighbors is mission. Mission is here. Mission is there. Mission is everywhere. We are all missionaries.”

Whatever difficulty there may be in defining “mission,” there should be little debate concerning the definition and usage of “gospel,” as the Greek εὐαγγέλιον is used 76 times in the New Testament. None of those references include a description of social action or suggest that compassion should be shown to non-believers as a component of the gospel.

Rather than a broad definition of the gospel encompassing social action, community projects, health care, and other noble causes, the New Testament usage of εὐαγγέλιον is narrow. The definition of the gospel is not elastic but specific and contained.

1 Corinthians 15:1-3

This passage provides a minimalist picture of the content of the gospel message. If social action is a part of the gospel, Paul withholds that information from the most straight-forward explanation of the gospel in the New Testament.

Acts 15:7 Jerusalem council restricted the gospel to a message to proclaim and believe.

Galatians 1:11-3:1 Paul speaks much about the gospel in Galatians, but he does not include anything about social action. One statement about the poor is found in Galatians 2:10, “only they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.” This does not refer to the Council requiring Paul to minister to the poor in places like Lystra, or Derbe, but rather that he remember the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. (Timothy George, NAC)

Summary

While numerous injustices existed in the first century, Paul did not address them or begin efforts to eradicate them. As Gary Gilley writes, “there are no examples of early Christians attempting to transform or create culture or influence the political system in a direct way. Nor do we find them organizing programs to feed the hungry of the world or to right social injustices. Almost all of their attention was on evangelizing the lost as well as the spiritual life and physical needs of the believing community.” The idea that speaking about and participating in social causes was used to woo sinners to the gospel is not found in Scripture.

Practical Considerations

Non-Christians also practice social action.

If “our proclamation has social consequences... and our social involvement has evangelistic consequences,” it has these consequences for Muslims, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jews and atheists. The argument cuts both ways, making a case that in general, kindness and generosity reflect positively on all who practice these actions. Christians can and should respond to human needs both on a personal and corporate level, but compassion is not restricted to Christians, nor would anyone expect that it should be. The idea that people will be compelled to respond to the gospel because Christians have been kind ties the effectiveness of evangelism to the good works of a believer rather than to the power of the gospel itself.

Practical Considerations

A Christian's civic responsibility

It is right that all people should care about poverty, homelessness, disease and injustice, both Christians and non-Christians. Many of the appeals put forth by Christian social action proponents should be embraced by all. As fellow human beings, Christians and non-Christians have a common interest in helping those who are disadvantaged. Who would not be moved with compassion for an ill child, a starving nation, or women captured as sex-slaves? There is no objection to showing compassion in any of these circumstances. Christians should stand up with all others to speak out and act with meaningful intervention because it is a part of our Christian duty as good citizens.

Practical Considerations

Theology or political ideology?

Environmentalism, immigration policy, racial reconciliation, racial imbalance in the prison population, worker's rights, and other themes that have been prevalent in the American Left are now becoming mainstream in the evangelical social justice movement, as well.

Practical Considerations

Revealing Omissions

Injustices not in line with left-leaning politics are seldom mentioned by evangelical social justice advocates. Injustices such as abortion and the persecution of Christians take a back seat to the environment, sex-trafficking, water and food scarcity, AIDS, and other medical needs. As mentioned above, Who is not moved with compassion by these things?

Certainly, Christian should engage in helping in these situations, as should all people. However, such engagement is not the same as proclaiming the gospel. Ministries of compassion might possibly become a platform for presenting the gospel, but they do not themselves communicate the gospel. While compassion work could potentially open doors for evangelistic communication of the gospel message, the gospel itself must be preached. It is the gospel that liberates, not human endeavors.

Practical Considerations

It is easier to dig wells than it is to share the gospel.

The lost will not be saved because Christians do good deeds. Christians must not allow the truth of the gospel to be minimized or even lost simply because our post-modern generation is more moved by image and intention than by precise words explaining the vital historical facts of Jesus, and the necessity of faith in him alone.

Practical Considerations

The Gospel is powerful even when the messengers are weak

This paradox is demonstrated by African slaves who in large numbers became devoted Christians during the American nineteenth century. Enslaving another human is one of the most violent examples of injustice. Professing Christians not only engaged in this wicked atrocity, they attempted to justify it with the Bible. Yet despite the appalling injustices committed against slaves, many of them saw the true Christ and turned to him for spiritual deliverance.

Practical Considerations

Only Jesus can establish his kingdom

Social gospel advocates often use the vague and biblically imprecise statement that by practicing justice, we are “building the kingdom.”

Though there are many things that Christians and churches should do to please and honor our Savior, they cannot build his kingdom.

Ruth Padilla Deborst writes, “The good news of God’s reconciling purposes will reach into our world, mired as it is in corruption, injustice, violence, poverty, and the plunder of creation, if and when the followers of the wounded King allow the Spirit to weave them into a community of such radical discipleship that in all they are, all they do, and all they say they witness to God’s integral transformation until the kingdom comes in full.”

Dispensationalists understand that the church will not bring about the kingdom. As good citizens, Christians participate in society because God has ordained human government and because until our redemption is complete, we are both citizens of heaven and citizens of earth (Philippians 3:20; 2 Corinthians 5:1; Ephesians 2:19).



**Church will not
bring about the
Kingdom**

God's plan does not culminate with the glorious triumph of the church over injustice. It culminates with Jesus executing justice upon a world in rebellion, as he invites his redeemed ones to share authority with him in his righteous kingdom.

An Appeal for Compassion without Re-defining the Gospel

Galatians 6:10

“So then, as we have opportunity...”

“Let us do good to everyone...”

“And especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

While it has been shown that Integral Mission proponents equate social action with the proclamation of the gospel, Piper is more precise when he says, “If you don’t care about all injustice, you’re striving in your heart against God.” This is true and provides all the motivation that Christians need to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8, ESV) Christians do not need to re-define the gospel in order to practice justice, kindness and humility in our world. They simply need to obey God.



God's Passion Your Call

Declaring God's glory among the nations

www.fim.org

DISTINCTIVES



GOSPEL-DRIVEN

It all comes back to the Gospel. This focus is what resonates with missionaries and leads to lives being changed worldwide.



APPROACHABLE

You have access to our experienced team as we walk together on your ministry journey.



FLEXIBLE

Your ministry is ultimately determined by God's call in your life. FIM provides you with the freedom to fulfill your call.



LOCAL CHURCH-CENTERED

FIM seeks to partner with your local church in the process of sending and caring for missionaries.



**Declaring God's glory among
the nations.**

