

TIMELESS MISSION:

SOURCE, PURPOSE, BELIEF, PRACTICE

Where does mission come from? Can Mission be timeless? If it can, in which way and how to understand it?

To begin with, before going any further, what is the mission today?

Very briefly: Rooted in Christ's Great Commission, the Church exists to proclaim the Gospel, serve the poor, and accompany humanity toward salvation.

Thus, Mission is a God's Com-Mission to human beings. If so, then an answer to the question where does mission come from defines and specifies its importance.

- 1) Present paper turns first to Scripture in order to find from our Christian basic document answers to the essence of mission. Where does mission come from, what is mission, and which tools Scripture provides for us?**
- 2) Second, it is necessary to reflect on our faith. How can we get better aware of our own belief and how to be steady in mission?**
- 3) Third, can we share some practical ideas that can help us?**

TIMELESS MISSION

1) WHERE FROM, AND WHAT?

2) BELIEF / FAITH

3) PRACTICE

1) WHERE FROM, AND WHAT?

Though there was no mission in the Garden of Eden, mission is an important motif pervading virtually the entire course of biblical revelation. This revelation starts with God's Story revealed to humans in Hebrew Scripture.

1.1. Israel in God's Story, revealed in the Old Testament

Relationship of humans with God has been and is severely affected that affects our lives and is painfully visible today. God remains faithful to his creation and reveals himself as the one who is in search of his creation. **The Lord God called to the man saying, 'Where are you?'** (Gen 3:9).

Adam represents the whole MANKIND as a symbolic model for all human beings.

The story goes on with a call from the depth of history and the far - off - land: **God first called one person, Abraham.** Abraham a human, like one of us as himself part of the problem, but also a bearer of the solution: a blessed one through whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Here the role of individuals is raised up and disposed in front of our eyes – then, now, and in future! (Gen 12:1-3). No single person should be underestimated, but nobody is the spring of mission.

God makes sovereign choices and chooses individuals and groups for his activity in the way they may first not understand. However, chosen ones should meet God's conditions without which human efforts to carry out divine plans do not work out: **God said to Israel, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples: God next called one nation, Israel** (Exodus 19:5-6).

How could any God's earthly possession, whether Israel, individual human being, or any human collective body, be able to bear given responsibility?

Only by obeying to God's rules that makes humans **God's Instruments** capable to bear witness to loving God and let **all the peoples of the earth know that the Lord is God** (1 Kings 8:41-43, 59-60).

This divine assignment is often corroborated by biblical promises that all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and **all the families of the nations shall worship before him** (Psalm 22:26-28).

God works through individuals and through collective bodies

GOD'S UNIVERSAL CALL TO THE WHOLE MANKIND IS REPEATEDLY REPEATED

(see also Psalm 24; 50:2; 57:10-12; 65:2; 67; 86:9; 96:1-3)

Israel was and Christians are meant to be priestly kingdom and a holy nation to mediate God's presence and blessings to the nations. Even more, to the whole creation.

Isaiah calls all who can hear to hear and to listen to God's word:

Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth; for the Lord has spoken! (Isaiah 1:2)

The key word is LISTEN!

God calls through Word, and humans need to listen and obey to the creative Word of God that embraces and comprises **individuals, total mankind, and created universe.**

What about human capability to do the job? How to become a man for the job?

According to the prophetic word of Isaiah 6:6-10: Human mouth of the prophet is touched by God and made capable to say:

Here am I, SEND ME!

These words apply in the same way to the prophetic calling of modern Christian communities:

Here am I, SEND ME! (see also Isaiah 40:3-5; 42:4; 45:22 etc)

The prophet received from God a fresh sight to the future: It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel;

I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isaiah 49:1-6)

What a marvellous vision of the day when Israel shall be the Light to the Nations!

And all nations shall go up to the mountain of the Lord, that God may teach them his ways, and that they may walk in his path. (Micha 4:1-4; Jes 2:1-4)

Prophecy looks for the day when JHWH, the king of Israel, will be the ruler and instructor of the world. This prophecy to be fulfilled needs people who give themselves to the service of God. And there has been and always are people who are ready for that.

Isaiah added still something quite astonishing to his vision. He points to the Temple as a means and medium to accomplish this goal saying –

God's house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. (Is 56:6-7)

This vision serves as a paradigm for the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations to Zion which is the centre of the revelation of the word of God and of the new creation. (Is 65:17-18)

One aspect of the Old Testament mission paradigm has permanent bearing to all times. What is the reason that nations would seek the God of Israel and turn their eyes to Jerusalem?

The motive power of the ingathering of nations to Zion is attraction to God and God's word. Not human efforts, plans, projects, policies. Here is a place to make a halt and to think about our own human motifs and missionary behaviour. **Israel was called to be holy and behave properly as an example that excites interest of nations to ask, what is the reason of all of this?**

How does it apply to us?

1.2. When the fullness of time had come, the Story continued ...

It was in Galilee where Jesus first said that the time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near! God called his new followers.

What next? How to react to this proclamation? How should humans prepare themselves? Repent, and believe in the good news! (Mark 1:14-15)

The message grew and spread from galilee to Zion, where Jesus referred to the word of God:

My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations (Isaiah 56:6-7 → Mark 11:17)

Eventually God calls all the nations

It is what the good news means – THE WORD OF GOD - must eventually be proclaimed **to all nations.** (Mark 13:10)

The gospel charges all believers to go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation and encourages us to pray: **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.** (Mark 16:15; Matthew 6:9-10)

The Kingdom of God has come near in Jesus and Jesus made it clearer in different ways:

* **He was the healer.** To a centurion in Capernaum Jesus said, **Go**, let it be done for you according to your faith.' And the servant was healed in that hour.

* **He was the teacher.** Jesus proclaimed the gospel to privately like to Nicodemus and to the Samaritans (Jn 3 and Jn 4)

* **He was the organizer.** To the seventy Jesus said to cure the sick and proclaim the nearness of the Kingdom of God. However, Jesus reduced disciple's emotional enthusiasm and gave pastoral

advice: Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven (Luke 10:1-27).

The words that Jesus once said during his ministry, he says to us today:

Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

In sum: Jesus proclaimed the whole Gospel - preaching, teaching, and healing

Hence the commission for Christians to

- **Serve the poor and marginalized**
- **Build communities rooted in love, hope, and faith**
- **Accompany humanity towards salvation**

Jesus did not leave the disciples with empty hands but entrusted them a clear mandate and furnished with proper capabilities. In addition to a well-known command in Matthew 28:19-20 Luke closes his gospel with a promise by Jesus:

Stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49).

A few lines later Acts 1:7-8 tells how Jesus opens the new era: It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.** A little later Acts 2:5-12 gives a list of all languages that were used as the vehicles of good news. Languages are means of communication and bearers of information.

Mission tactics of the apostles was based on what was already known and accepted.

Paul and Barnabas applied Hebrew Scripture to Christian congregation. They picked up God's word to Israel and addressed it to early Christians and thus one finds passages from Isaiah again: For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' (Acts 13:46-47)

Luke's description of Paul's mission moved from Jerusalem to Rome. Paul did not lay foundation to the congregation in Rome. Anonymous missionaries, new-born Christians had done it. We do not know their names and it is just what encourages us very much.

Mission is expected to be done both by outstanding personalities and by all Christians.

When Paul arrived Rome, the congregation was already there and then Paul lived in Rome

proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance (Acts 28:30-31).

- Several Pauline practical recommendations are written down in pastoral letters. One didactic advice is very helpful for us:
You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well (2 Tim 2:1-2).

This instruction is not for clergy alone, but for the members of general priesthood of believers. We are encouraged to entrust our knowledge and skills to others who are able to reach and teach more people than we can. Our fellow Christians reach people whom we do not know in the places we are not aware of. And where the gospel is needed.

In Revelation the great Biblical narrative of the New Testament story stretches towards future consummation:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands (Revelation 7:9).

We are encouraged with these words and visions to reflect on our own vision and to do our duty. The Church exists not for itself, but for humankind, for the whole world.

However, as it was with Ancient Israel, Early Christianity and is with the Church today and tomorrow – there is the so-called *one generation rule* that says:

The extinction of any religion has been and is at a distance of one generation only.

We believe that we are not the last generation of Christians, but “in the middle” of timeless MISSIO DEI. This conviction determines our duty.

Based on Biblical examples and experience, we have to do our own homework and find out, how can Christian belief in our own contexts function spiritually, psychologically, socially, and emotionally.

2) BELIEF / FAITH

The Gospel is an ideological phenomenon too. Call to believe brings belief socially and doctrinally close to ideology that influences and changes individuals, groups, and communities.

- People ask first, what faith in Christ gives to me? Maybe in a short perspective and in a visible form. However, deep down in one's mind and in our subconscious sphere, in today's world marked by change, instability and conflict, many people ask for meaning of life and for security.
- Sometimes also another question arises: does my faith have any meaning also for others? It is a good question, since nobody gets along alone.

**In fact, Christian faith and mission comprises
individuality, communality, and solidarity**

Mission, in the first place, effects in the lives of individuals, families and local communities. Based on that, nation-wide and global changes may take place. Mission makes Christ's love present in a world marked by conflict, poverty, division and loneliness.

Today there is a growing number of lonely people around us. However, even individualistically minded and self-centred people are in fact **longing for belonging. Maybe unconsciously, but still longing for belonging somewhere and sharing with each other what is important.**

Sharing by receiving and giving something important enriches our lives and makes them more meaningful. I would call it a hidden longing for supportive co-existence, or conviviality.

First. If one has sensitive eyes to see it, even positive everyday interaction with fellow people already touches them in a positive way. Maybe by healing with good words some wounds they have suffered in their lives. Next step may bring them to our first, faintly arising feeling of mental, emotional well-being. Sometimes without our own missionary thinking or any sense of being a missionary. There are cases where direct mission is not important. People in a need are around us, often not feeling what is missing. It is good if mutual understanding and emotional preparedness to do something takes place that makes living together better. Christian aspect to this improved conviviality may be added later in a quite natural way.

Second, there are also Christians who think about their role in the congregation and are ready for more systematic activity. With them let us take a step forward towards a bit clearer awareness of God's call. God's call turns into *vocatio interna*. Let us call people who feel that way embryonic missionaries. They may have some instructional basis and preparedness for conscious activity in the community. These people may discover and feel on personal level that for them, mission is a strong, important **task** or **core purpose** that **guides** one's actions and gives clear direction. Sometimes these people may say like Isaiah – Here am I, Send me!

God often brings along internal spiritual illumination and clarity and some preparedness to proclaim the gospel. Modesty and unpretentiousness may prevent these people from being actively involved in mission. However, these people need gentle encouragement and direction to be convinced that when God calls, then God is faithful.

Belief in the faithfulness of God gives strength to overcome our own hesitations like was the case with Jeremiah. It is worth to remind the words of God to Jeremiah that consoled the prophet and would encourage us too. Verses in Jeremiah 15 consists of three elements, three encouraging steps. These steps call to start, to reflect and to see that our commitment can bear fruit. Mission, we believe, is not our effort, but God's work. God effects that people begin to believe:

- 1) First step, it is what **we** need to do: **God says, if you turn back, I will take you back, and you shall stand before me.**
- 2) Second step, it is also what **we** need to do: **If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth.**
- 3) Third step! It is what we see **God** will do: **It is they who will turn to you, not you who will turn to them. (Jer 15:19)**

If to try to follow the ideas of these verses, we as ordinary Christians receive clearer identity and stronger moral backbone to better be involved in **MISSIO DEI**, since

- 1) The first and only real agent of the mission is God;
- 2) Humans are called to participate in **MISSIO DEI**;
- 3) Thus, all of us as baptised Christians, are the so-called “secondary agents” of mission.

In our congregations in particular and communities in general, we may see how faith in God shapes the lives of individuals, whole families, and communities. The areas where Christian faith finds its essence and core values, and where compassionate missionary activity functions, are:

- **Evangelization and catechesis**
- **Education and healthcare**
- **Humanitarian aid and development projects**
- **Pastoral accompaniment in underserved communities**

These areas are also those where mission is needed and possible. Christians are called to be involved in these activities using these talents they have received from God.

By supporting and encouraging each other, Christians together participate in mission that is the purposeful task of being sent by God: to bring God's love, message, and salvation to the world. (Isaiah 6:8)

Some observations for common reflection:

- BY BEING FAITHFUL, ONE BECOMES PART OF A GLOBAL MOVEMENT OF HOPE AND TRANSFORMATION.
- MISSIONAL ACTIVITY DOES NOT MEAN THAT IT IS ONLY GIVING, BUT IT IS ALSO RECEIVING AND REWARDING TO THOSE INVOLVED IN MISSIO DEI.
- MISSIONAL ACTIVITY CHANGES HUMAN PERSPECTIVE. ONE MAY EXPERIENCE THAT CARE FOR PEOPLE MAKES EVERYDAY LIFE MORE PLEASANT AND EASIER.
- SOMETIMES EVERYDAY LIFE SITUATIONS MAY UNEXPECTEDLY TURN INTO "NATURAL COMMONPLACE MISSIONFIELDS". IF IT HAPPENS, GOD BE PRAISED!

HOWEVER, THERE IS NO NEED TO FOCUS ALWAYS ON PROCLAMATION, BUT TO CONTINUE WITH THESE PRACTICAL ACTIONS THAT THIS PARTICULAR SITUATION PRESUPPOSES.

3) PRACTICE

Practice is the criterion of the quality of mission.

Based on Biblical examples and previous discussions, it is evident that on general level, mission contains individual and communal aspects that work together. Mission takes place at homes, schools, churches, and other places, and these environments presuppose specific focusing.

There are factors and resources common to all areas of missional activities that support us and give strength to do all these necessary things:

- Reading and learning the Bible. Why? The Bible provides us with a solid basis and methodical tools that we can use for other theological disciplines and for spiritual growth.
- Prayer. Individually and also in a fellowship of believers. Paul yearned to visit congregation in Rome *so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine* (Rom 1:12). It is a *communio sanctorum* that comforts all of us.
- Personal calling and community acceptance are needed – that is *vocatio interna* and *vocatio externa*.
- Family. A sound Christian home provides a stable background that helps to do our duty. But never, ever, neglect your family saying that my job is so important.

Institutionally, mission is a living reality and an ongoing story. From local parishes to remote communities, the Church exists to bring hope and serve those in need. Understanding this helps us to better understand who we are and what is the purpose of mission in today's world.

Every nation is as strong or weak how strong or weak is its culture, morality, education, and raising of the new Christian generation. It is not superfluous to repeat again the words of God that once raised up the mind of Jeremiah:

- If you turn back, I will take you back, and you shall stand before me.
- If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth.
- It is they who will turn to you, not you who will turn to them. (Jer 15:19)

The motive power of the ingathering of nations to Zion was, according to the OT, attraction to God and God's word. Not human efforts. Israel was called to be holy and behave properly that excites interest of other nations to ask, what is the reason of all of this?

A quite practical factor, indeed.

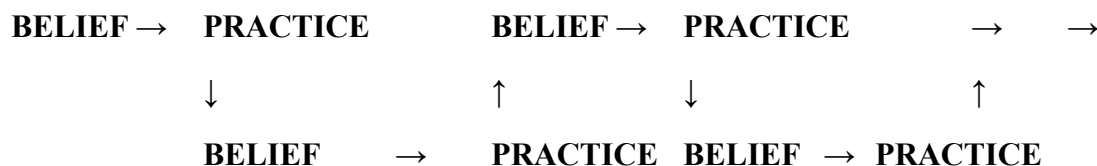
Nothing has changed. The motive power of mission is the same today. People see and hear normal compassionate Christians as representatives of Christianity and its missionary activities. If there is something sincere and good that people see in the lives of Christians, that attracts people to desire something like that in their own lives, too. Is it longing for belonging? Mission is also a living faith that is active in every-day life.

Mission command as a military term has clear meaning in army. In civil and ecclesial life not so much. But the idea may be transferable and helpful. There are three levels of command and it is possible to adapt them to mission tactics:

- 1) The task on the first and highest level is to clarify the aim of mission and what the result would be;
- 2) The task on the next level is to understand and accept the aim and to choose tactics how to carry it into practice,
- 3) The task on the third level is to build a support network within a larger support system – congregations in cooperation with schools, NGO-s *etc* – and to put it into practice.

Be encouraged! When God gives you a mission, you will understand the purpose. God also provides you with readiness to start and preparation to fulfil the mission. So, on personal level, be prepared to notice the call that gives your life a clear direction beyond everyday routines.

Belief and practice are in mutual relationship. Belief gives input to practice and practice gives feedback to faith and for ongoing reflection process. Faith / belief again gives a renewed input to practice and the process is going on as it is illustrated here:



All Christians are called to live a faithful life, love others, and witness to their faith in daily life.

**FULFILLING THE COM-MISSION OF GOD IS A TRANSFORMATIVE PROCESS
THAT CHANGES THE LIVES OF CHRISTIANS, INSTITUTIONS, AND NATIONS**

Christ will have the final Word, and we can lean on him singing, saying and praying

I am strong when I am on Your shoulder

You raise me up to more than I can be

Thank you for your attention. God bless you!