

What is the relationship between mission, evangelism and apologetics?

Evangelism and apologetics are tasks that the church does in order for it to fulfil its God given mission. This does not come out of a sense of duty, but rather out of a sense of joy and gratitude for what Jesus has done for the church. The church is not an end to itself but its purpose is to tell more people the Gospel, that is the good news about Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection and what that achieved. Two of the ways the church is to tell others about the Gospel is to give a reasoned defence as to why it believes what it does and to give others an opportunity to become a Christian for themselves.

The church is rooted in the concept of the *Missio Dei*. That is, the Church is on one mission and that is God's mission. Both Karl Barth and Jurgen Moltmann argue mission is not something the Church is to do, but it is an attribute of God, for God is a missionary God (Lee, 2008, p. ii).

Mission is not an invention of the Church but of God. He sends His people with a purpose or a task to do. Ultimately the goal of mission is to enable all the nations to give glory to God (Lee, 2008, p. ii). The Bible is "the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation" (Wright, 2003, p. 223). Abraham was called for a specific reason so that in the end "all peoples on earth will be blessed through [Abraham]" (Gen 12:3 NIV)¹. Moses was also called for the specific reason to liberate the nation of Israel, and Israel in turn was called to help all nations to give glory to God (Lee, 2008, p. ii). The greatest example of God being a sending God is that of sending His Son Jesus to the world. Jesus was sent by God to bring in the Kingdom of God where death would be defeated and humanity's standing before God would be restored. After Jesus had overthrown the power of sin

¹ All bible verses come from the NIV unless stated otherwise

and death He then told His disciples, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).

Defining the mission of the Church is difficult. In a general sense it is connected to God’s mission as He is sending people for a specific reason. The mission of the Church needs to be centred on God’s Word as even the context of the New Testament is that it is a missionary book written by missionaries with the primary objective of meeting missionary needs and promoting missionary work (Glover, 1948, p. 22). In 1984 the Anglican Communion defined mission as having five parts: proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom; teaching, baptising and growing believers; acts of service; transforming unjust structures in societies and looking after the creation and renewing life to the earth (Lee, 2008, p. iii). This definition is helpful because it highlights proclaiming the gospel accompanied by action. Ultimately the mission of the church should flow from the mission of God and the fulfilment of His purposes and his Word (Wright, 2003, p. 230). Since Jesus set up His church and sent her, mission should flow from the identity of God and His Christ (Wright, 2003, p. 229). One example of this connection between Jesus’ mission and the church’s mission can be seen in Luke 4:18-19. Jesus declares that the Spirit of the Lord is on Him as He has been anointed to preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom to the prisoners, give sight to the blind, release the oppressed and proclaim the Lord’s favour. Here there is a mixture of preaching or proclaiming the work’s of the Lord and helping and healing those in need by acts of service or by undoing unjust structures in society. God’s mission is that of verbal communication and good works, and two aspects of the verbal communication that Christians are called to do are evangelism and apologetics.

The word evangelism comes from a Greek word that means “good news.” This “good news” is a proclamation or declaration of the saving events of Jesus. There is a debate about whether

evangelism is solely a verbal proclamation about Jesus or if it also includes good deeds. Bosh defines evangelism as “the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in him, calling them to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sin, and inviting them to become living members of Christ’s earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit” (Bosch, 1991, pp. 10-11) and that “Evangelism will of necessity consist of word *and* deed, proclamation *and* presence, explication *and* example” (Bosch quoted in Kandiah, 2007, p. 54). Bosh “seeks to secure an indissoluble link between social involvement and verbal proclamation” (Kandiah, 2007, p. 54). On the other hand Lesslie Newbigin argues that evangelism is only a verbal proclamation of Jesus: “I use ‘evangelism’ in the sense of communicating news, which means that words are involved, and specifically the name of Jesus” (Newbigin, 1998, p. 1). Newbigin argues that words without deeds are dumb and that deeds without words are empty (Newbigin, 1998, p. 2), and that in communicating the Gospel, words and action belong together (Newbigin, 1998, p. 4). Nevertheless he prefers the definition of evangelism to be the verbal communication of the name of Jesus.

The mission of the church is to do God’s will and a significant part of God’s will is to proclaim the good news of His saving work for the world. That is, evangelism is a subset of mission.

“Evangelization is mission, but mission is not merely evangelization” (Moltmann quoted in Bosch, 1991, pp. 411-412). The church cannot be on mission and not proclaim the Gospel. Since evangelism is a response to what God has done for His people, it should only be natural for His people to do His will and tell others about what He has done for them. “Evangelism takes place as the overflow of the gospel among people captivated by the joy of the good news”

(Hunsberger, 2004, p. 137). Evangelism is not so much a command to be done out of duty, but rather a response to what has been done for a person.

Jesus said to His disciples in Luke 24:46-48 that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be preached to all nations and that they were to be His witnesses of these things. At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus sends out His disciples to make disciples of all nations instructing them to teach others to obey Jesus. In both these cases the reason for the disciples to go out and evangelise was not so much that it was a direct commandment by Jesus, but because of the very nature of who they now are, that is witnesses to Jesus. They were not told that they “must” go, but that they “will” go. In the New Testament Paul never commands the churches to evangelise (Hunsberger, 2004, p. 133). That is not to say that evangelism is not important, but evangelism springs from the free grace that has been shown to the believer and not out of forced obedience. Karl Barth indeed stresses the importance of evangelism in the church: “A Church which is not as such an evangelizing church is either not yet or no longer the church, or only a dead church, itself standing in supreme need of renewal by evangelization” (quoted in George, 1989, p. 19). One aspect of the mission of God is for the Church to evangelise, not out of a sense of duty but out of an overflow of grace that has been shown to it. In order for the Church to evangelise effectively it must know its local culture and be equipped to give a reason for the hope that it has.

Apologetics is to give a defence of what someone believes. This can be in the negative by countering objections to the Christian faith or in the positive by showing the attractiveness of the Gospel (McGrath, *Evangelical apologetics*, 1998, p. 3). In order to do this task effectively it is important that the Church knows its culture and the world views of the people in its area. One task of apologetics is to identify gospel points of contacts in other world views and explain how this point is relevant to the Christian faith (McGrath, *Apologetics to the Greeks*, 1998, p. 262). In the book of Acts we see Paul’s missional strategy was to reason with both Jews and Greeks

about the attractiveness of the Gospel. He does this in Corinth (Act 18:4) as well as Athens (Acts 17:4).

Apologetics should be considered a kind of pre-evangelism, something that sets up the groundwork for evangelism (McGrath, *Evangelical apologetics*, 1998, p. 5). Apologetics stresses the reasonableness, truth and attractiveness of the gospel, evangelism makes the personal offer of faith in Jesus (McGrath, *Evangelical apologetics*, 1998, p. 6). In Acts 17:16-34 we get a full account of what Paul said in Athens to the Areopagus and see how he moved from apologetics to evangelism. Paul sees the number of idols in the city and even an idol “to an unknown God” and uses their spirituality and ignorance as a point of contact. He declares there is one God who made everything and in the past overlooked their ignorance but now is calling them to repent because Jesus has risen from the dead. This argument moved from what (little) they knew about God to an invitation for people to repent. In this sense Paul’s apologetics moved to evangelism.

In a general sense 1 Peter 3:15 connects the mission of the church with evangelism and apologetics. Peter encourages all Christians to be ready to give a reason for the hope that they have in response to anyone who asks. Here the Christian is to see their local surroundings of everyday life as a mission field. In this they are to conduct themselves in a way to demonstrate the hope that they have, whether by the occasional comment here or there or by an action. They are then to be ready to respond to anyone who asks about their conduct, whether it is a confrontation or someone seeking to know more about their faith. This response will be done with the goal of introducing the person to Jesus. In this scenario the task of apologetics and evangelism is done under the overall umbrella of the mission of the Church, which is also the mission of God; to make disciples of all nations.

The mission of the church is a wide umbrella involving many aspects of communication and good deeds. Evangelism and apologetics fall under the proclamation side of the mission of the church. The church is not to be silent about what God has done for them, for He has saved them from death and is Lord over all of creation. He is to be worshiped and praised for saving humanity from their sins. Silence from the Church, God's bride, would spell the end of the church, for how will the next generation know about God unless they are told? God's chosen people are to be proclaiming people who are ready to give an answer for the hope that they have in Jesus; this is one of the tasks of the mission of God.

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