

A Biblical and Theological Basis for Mission

1. Mission Belongs to God — and takes place within the real world

Mission begins with God. The Council for World Mission (CWM) expresses this clearly: "Mission begins in the heart of the Triune God and the love which binds together the Holy Trinity overflows to all humanity and creation" (CWM Preface, 2025). This is the doctrine known as *Missio Dei* — God's own mission, in which the church is invited to participate.

The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu names this same starting point for mission in its own way: the Church is called to worship the Triune God and to serve God's purposes in the world. As the Statement of Faith puts it, the Church is holy because the Lord has set her apart "so that the Church might worship him and carry out His Mission and Ministry in the world."

The Church is Holy because her Lord has set her apart in the world, so that the Church might worship him and carry out His Mission and Ministry in the world.

(Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, Statement of Faith)

In other words, mission is not an optional activity added onto church life; it belongs to what the Church is, because it belongs first to who God is.

But God's mission has never taken place in comfortable surroundings. From the very beginning, the biblical story unfolds in the shadow of empires. Egypt enslaved Israel. Assyria scattered the northern kingdom. Babylon took Jerusalem into captivity. Persia, Greece, and Rome each dominated God's people in turn. Jesus was born under Roman occupation. He was threatened by Herod's violence as an infant (Matthew 2:13-16). He was killed by the collaboration of Roman power and religious authority. To understand mission biblically is to understand it as always taking place within structures of domination — and as always resisting them.

2. The Incarnate Christ: God's Mission enters and confronts the places of power

God's most decisive act in mission is the Incarnation. The Word became flesh — not in a palace, but in an occupied territory, among an oppressed people.

In Jesus, we see True God and full Human — present in the real, political, suffering world. The PCV Statement of Faith speaks of Christ's saving presence in the world:

In Jesus, everyone who has gone astray has been reconciled again to God... everyone who is divided and enemies with each other has been united by God and lives in His Peace.

(Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, Statement of Faith)

Mission that follows Jesus therefore includes reconciliation where relationships have been broken, peace where violence has taken root, and unity where enmity has become normal.

Jesus announced his own mission in the synagogue at Nazareth. He read from the scroll of Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18-19, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2)

He then rolled up the scroll and said: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). This was not only a spiritual announcement. It was a social and economic one. Jesus aligned himself with the poor, the prisoner, and the oppressed. His message was good news — but it was dangerous to those who held power.

CWM makes this point directly. The church is "commissioned to flourish life, and to resist and transform all life-destroying forces, in the power of the Holy Spirit" (CWM Preface, 2025). Jesus himself said: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Empire, by contrast, is the thief who comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. Mission names this contrast clearly.

3. The Prophetic Tradition: Mission as Transformation

The prophets of Israel spoke of a God who takes sides. Isaiah envisions a day when swords become ploughshares (Micah 4:3). He imagines people sitting under their own vines and fig trees without fear (Micah 4:4). Mary's song — the Magnificat — declares that God brings down the powerful from their thrones and lifts up the humble, that he fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty (Luke 1:52-53).

The book of Job shows what happens when the poor are exploited. Job describes fatherless children seized for debt, labourers who go hungry (Job 24:9-12). He does not accept this as normal. He names it as wrong. Biblical mission carries this same prophetic courage. It names injustice. It does not baptise suffering as natural or inevitable.

CWM's 2020-2029 strategy framework reflects this prophetic vision. It identifies the urgent missional challenges of our time: patriarchy, racism, nationalism, economic injustice, climate catastrophe, neo-colonialism, forced migration, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (CWM Introduction, 2025). These are not merely social problems. They are, in biblical terms, signs of empire's ongoing power over human life. Mission must speak to them.

4. The Kingdom of God: Empire's Counter-Reality

Jesus did not only critique empire. He inaugurated an alternative. He called it the Kingdom — or, using the language of some theologians, the "kin-dom" of God: a community shaped by relationship and equality rather than by hierarchy and power.

In this Kingdom, the last shall be first (Mark 10:31). A child placed in the centre becomes the measure of greatness (Matthew 18:1-4). Those whom society excludes — the Syro-Phoenician woman, the Samaritan at the well, the person with disabilities — are welcomed into full community (Mark 7:24-30; John 4).

To be born again is to be made new — to belong to a new community with new values.

Paul describes this community in striking terms. In Philippians 2:1-11, Christ empties himself of divine privilege and takes the form of a servant. This kenotic self-emptying is the definitive rejection of imperial logic. Power in the Kingdom is not accumulated. It is given away. It is shared. It serves the flourishing of all.

5. Community as Missional Counter-Sign

Mission is not something individuals do alone. It is something communities live out together. Paul's vision of the church as the body of Christ is powerful here. He writes:

"The body is not made up of one part but of many... If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it." (1 Corinthians 12:14, 26)

This directly challenges empire's logic of competition and individualism. No member can say to another: "I have no need of you." Paul's declaration that in Christ there is "neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female" (Galatians 3:28) was radically counter-cultural in the ancient world. It remains counter-cultural today. The Statement of Faith also describes the Church's continuing task in missional terms:

The work of the Church is always to proclaim in every place, that Jesus Christ alone is the Lord of all, and everyone must obey him... Whenever the Church proclaims this message, Jesus Christ sends the Holy Spirit to renew the Church and to give the Church everything she needs to do His work in the world.

(Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, Statement of Faith)

This PCV emphasis holds proclamation and Spirit-empowerment together: we speak, we teach, we live as a community—and God supplies what is needed for faithful witness.

The early church practised a form of solidarity economics. They held goods in common and distributed to each as anyone had need (Acts 2:44-45). CWM models this same spirit in its own identity. It is not a donor agency. It describes itself as "an equal partnership of churches working together to participate in God's transforming mission" (CWM Preface, 2025). Each member church both contributes to and receives from common resources. This is mission as shared life, not charity from the powerful to the weak.

Mission will look different in these places, shaped by the presenting needs. It is One Lord Jesus Christ who calls us, and the One Spirit that empowers us, but the God of all creation sends us to love a world that is bigger than any of us. Our very existence, oriented to God, and God alone, is counter-cultural in the places where God sends us.

6. Hospitality: Resisting Exclusion

The biblical mandate to welcome the stranger is rooted in Israel's own story. The Torah commands: "The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt" (Leviticus 19:34). The story of Ruth and Naomi embodies this welcome across cultural and national boundaries.

CWM notes that our world now contains vast numbers of displaced people. Up to 68.5 million people are migrants and refugees today, fleeing conflict, poverty, and climate disaster (CWM Introduction, 2025). Empire creates the conditions that produce refugees. Mission responds by humanising those whom empire has made into statistics. Hospitality is not a minor practice. It is an act of resistance and witness.

Perhaps we experience Divine Hospitality as people who know what it means to be foreigners. Perhaps we experience it as people who offer welcome. In a world with many violent conflicts, we hear about refugees who have fled persecution, but in our own region, we see people seeking refuge from the rising waters, the loss of arable land and the depletion of the fishing grounds. We hear the groaning of creation. Creation is Mission Field.

7. Creation Care: Partners with the Whole of Creation

Biblical mission does not stop at humanity. It extends to the whole of creation. God's covenant with Noah includes all living creatures (Genesis 9:9-10). The mandate of Genesis 1:26 and 2:15 calls human beings to stewardship, not exploitation. The Psalmist declares: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1). The earth belongs to God. We are caretakers, not owners. The PCV Statement of Faith begins creation care with confession of God the Father as Creator:

We believe that God the Father made all things, and all things find their true purpose when they serve him.

(Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, Statement of Faith)

If creation's purpose is to serve God, then our purpose cannot be to consume creation for profit; it is to tend it so that life can flourish as God intends.

The eschatological vision of Isaiah 11:6 and Revelation 21:3-4 points to a renewed creation where suffering, death, and destruction are overcome. This hope grounds mission in a cosmic scope. CWM affirms that care for creation is not merely environmental advocacy. It is "a matter of faith in God, the Creator, and of stewardship and witness in faithfulness to the God of life" (CWM Strategic Priorities, 2025). When empire treats the earth as a resource to be consumed for profit, creation care becomes an act of resistance.

8. The Spirit at the Margins: Pentecost as Counter-Imperial Event

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on people from every nation. They heard God's mighty works spoken in their own languages (Acts 2:1-11). This was a subversion of empire. Imperial power works by imposing one language, one culture, one centre. The Spirit works in reverse — from the margins outward, in the native tongues of the displaced and the diverse. The Statement of Faith describes the Spirit's mission like this:

The work of the Holy Spirit is to change all people, to make them disciples of Christ, to lead all people into obedience of God.

(Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, Statement of Faith)

The same Spirit who fell at Pentecost continues to move — especially at the margins, among those whom empire has deemed dispensable. Mission discerns and joins this movement.

9. Reparation and Confession: Mission Addresses Historical Sin

CWM's history contains a painful reality. It grew out of the London Missionary Society, founded in 1795, which was deeply complicit in colonial structures and, at times, in the enslavement of African people. CWM states plainly: "CWM has come to see that these injustices are deeply rooted not just in the colonial era but in the missionary endeavour itself" (CWM Onesimus Project, 2025).

The story of Onesimus — an enslaved person in Philemon's household, whose situation Paul addressed in his letter — provides a biblical entry point. CWM uses this story not as a neat resolution, but as an invitation to go further than Paul and Philemon reached: "to a deeper and more transformative praxis resulting in systemic and institutional changes" (CWM Onesimus Project, 2025).

Sin is not only personal. It is also structural and institutional. Mission that is honest about sin — including the sins of missionary institutions — is mission that can speak truthfully about forgiveness and restoration.

In Summary

A biblically grounded mission cannot be politically neutral. The scriptures bear witness — from Exodus to the Prophets, from the Gospels to Revelation — to a God who takes sides with those whom empire crushes.

CWM embodies this mission: as an equal partnership of churches, committed to "dismantling systems of exploitation and embodying just alternatives that promote dignity, peace, and the flourishing of all creation" (CWM Preface, 2025).

Mission includes proclamation and discipleship. It includes compassion and justice. It includes creation care and community. All of these are practised as signs of God's Kingdom breaking into the world — and as resistance to every power that diminishes the fullness of life that Christ came to give.

Sources: The Holy Bible - Biblical citations from NIV unless otherwise noted. | Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, Statement of Faith | CWM Common Resources Handbook 2025 (cwmission.org) |

JESUS' Mission Manifesto

Luke 4:14-21 (Bislama NT):

Yesu i statem wok blong hem long Galili

14. Mo Yesu i gobak long Galili, hem i fulap wetem paoa blong Tabu Spirit, mo nius blong hem i goraon long olgeta ples.

15. Hem i stap tij long ol sinagog, mo evri man i stap presem hem. [1]

Yesu i stap long Nasaret

16. Yesu i go long Nasaret, ples we hem i gruap long hem. Long dei blong Sabat, hem i go insaed long sinagog, olsem hem i stap mekem evri taem. Hem i stanap blong ridim tok blong God.

17. Ol man i givim buk blong profet Aesea long hem. Hem i openem buk, mo hem i faenem ples we oli raetem se:

18. "Spirit blong Masta i stap long mi, from we hem i makemaot mi blong talemaot gud nius long ol puaman. Hem i sanem mi blong talemaot se ol prisina oli fri, mo ol blaenman oli save lukluk bakegen. Hem i sanem mi blong mekem ol man we oli stap kasem trabol oli fri,

19. mo blong talemaot taem blong Masta i kam blong sevem ol man."

20. Yesu i rolem buk, hem i givimbak long man blong givhan, mo hem i sidaon. Ol man long sinagog oli stap lukluk hem gud.

21. Hem i stat blong talem long olgeta se, "Tedei, tok ia we yufala i harem i kamtru."

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

Then Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding region. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Discussion: What does 'good news to the poor' look like in your community?
Identify one biblical idea of mission that resonates with your context
Share with the full group — one idea per group, briefly explained

What biblical image most captures God's call to PCV today?

How Mission thinking has changed over the past 50 years.

1. THE LAUSANNE MOVEMENT (1974)

The first Lausanne Congress (1974) was a landmark moment. Billy Graham provided the platform and John Stott provided the theological depth. John Stott argued that the Great Commission (Matthew 28) and the Great Commandment (love your neighbour) cannot be separated. Mission must include both telling people about Jesus AND working for justice and human dignity.

The Lausanne Covenant became one of the most influential documents in modern mission. It said evangelism has a certain priority, but social action is also a true part of mission. This ended a long debate in evangelical churches between 'preach the gospel' and 'serve the poor'. The answer was: both.

KEY TERM: Holistic Mission - mission that addresses the whole person and the whole of society.

2. VOICES FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH (1970s-80s)

As Christianity grew rapidly outside Europe and North America, new voices entered the mission conversation. Gustavo Gutierrez (Peru) was the most important voice from Latin America. He argued that God has a 'preferential option for the poor' - not that God loves the poor more, but that God's mission always starts with the most vulnerable. Liberation theology said that mission must challenge unjust social and political structures, not only call individuals to personal faith.

African and Asian theologians raised different questions: How can the gospel be truly at home in our cultures? How does it relate to our traditional religious practices? This gave rise to the study of CONTEXTUALISATION.

KEY SHIFT: Mission thinking was no longer just a Western conversation and it needed to move beyond colonization.

3. DAVID BOSCH - TRANSFORMING MISSION (1991)

David Jacobus Bosch (1929-1992) was a South African missiologist. He lived through apartheid, which gave him deep personal experience of how mission could be misused to oppress people, but also how it could bring justice and healing.

His book *Transforming Mission* (1991) is widely considered the most important missiology book of the 20th century. It is still essential reading today.

KEY IDEAS:

1. **Paradigm Shifts:** Mission has changed dramatically across history. Each age has its own understanding of mission. We are now entering a new 'emerging ecumenical paradigm' - a new era.
2. **Holistic mission:** Bosch refused to separate evangelism from social concern, or word from deed. He held them together in one vision.
3. **Bold yet humble:** The church must be confident about Christ, but not arrogant. We witness with deep respect for others.
4. **Creation care:** Bosch explicitly included environmental responsibility in his vision of holistic mission.

Bosch died in a car accident in 1992, just one year after the book was published. His influence has only grown since then.

4. LESSLIE NEWBIGIN - MISSION TO THE WEST (1980s-90s)

Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998) spent many years as a missionary in India. When he returned to England in the 1970s, he was shocked. He expected to come home to a Christian country. Instead he found a society that had forgotten God and had no interest in the gospel.

He asked a powerful question: 'Can the West be converted?'

His key insight was that modern Western culture - with its belief in science as the only truth and its rejection of absolute moral values - is itself a kind of religion. It is a worldview that must be engaged, not simply accepted.

He developed what he called 'missionary encounter with Western culture' - the idea that Western countries now need to be evangelised just like any other culture.

This gave rise to the ***Gospel and Our Culture*** network, which influenced many church leaders in the UK and North America.

His books: *The Other Side* of 1984, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*.

5. THE MISSIONAL CHURCH MOVEMENT (1990s-2000s)

The 'Missional Church' idea built on three foundations: *Missio Dei* (God's own mission), Bosch's holistic vision, and Newbigin's challenge to Western Christianity.

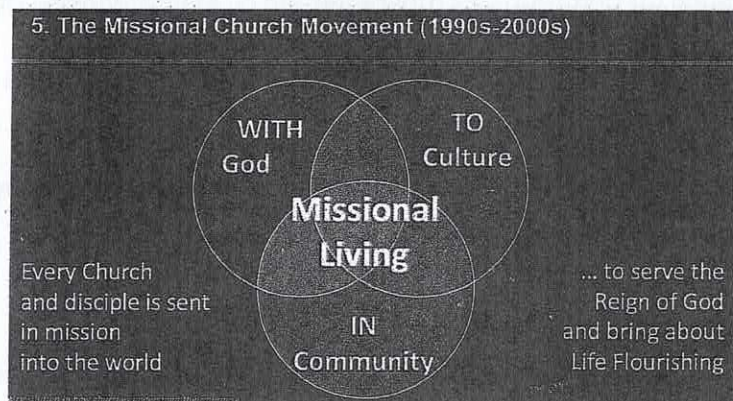
The key book was *Missional Church* (1998), edited by Darrell Guder, from the *Gospel and Our Culture* Network.

THE CORE ARGUMENT: For too long, churches have thought about mission as one of many programmes - something the church does in addition to its normal life. The missional church movement said this is wrong.

The church does not have a mission department. The whole church IS mission. It exists for others, not for itself. Every local congregation, in every neighbourhood, in every city or village, is a community of people SENT by God to that place. The Church of God does not have a mission, the God of Mission has a Church.

This changed how many churches thought about their structure, worship, evangelism, and relationship to their community.

KEY QUESTION for your group: In what ways does your church think of itself as 'sent' to its community?



6. CREATION CARE ENTERS MISSION

For most of mission history, 'salvation' was understood in terms of individual human souls. Creation care was seen as a political or environmental issue, separate from the gospel.

From the 1990s onwards, this began to change, for several reasons:

1. **MISSIO DEI framework:** If God is the creator of all things, and if God's mission is to reconcile all things (Colossians 1:20), then God's mission must include the renewal of creation, not only human salvation.
2. **Global South voices:** Communities in the Pacific Islands, coastal Africa, and South Asia were already experiencing the devastating effects of climate change and environmental destruction. For them, this was not a political issue - it was a survival and justice issue directly connected to mission.
3. Christopher Wright (Langham Partnership) developed a **comprehensive biblical framework:** God's purposes span from creation in Genesis to the New Creation in Revelation. Mission must reflect this full scope.

The Cape Town Commitment (Lausanne 2010) made a landmark declaration: 'We care for the earth and responsibly use its resources... The earth is the Lord's and caring for it is part of our mission.'

7. KEY VOICES IN CREATION CARE AND MISSION

Pope Francis issued *Laudato Si'* (2015), a major teaching document on the environment. It spoke of 'integral ecology' - the connection between care for the earth and care for the poor.

Though Catholic in origin, its influence spread widely across Protestant and evangelical churches, and into the missiology conversation.

The term **ECO-MISSIOLOGY** is now used by some scholars to describe a way of thinking about mission that holds together:

- The salvation of human beings
- The renewal of the whole created order
- The pursuit of justice for communities most affected by environmental damage

This is not an addition to mission - it flows from the biblical vision of God's kingdom coming 'on earth as in heaven'.

KEY VERSE: Romans 8:19-22 - 'The whole creation is waiting for the children of God to be revealed.'

8. GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY - THE SOUTH SENDS

The historian Andrew Walls and the scholar Lamin Sanneh helped the church understand a remarkable historical shift. In 1900, about 80% of Christians lived in Europe and North America. By 2000, the majority of Christians lived in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. By 2050, projections suggest that only about 20% of Christians will live in the West.

Christianity is now primarily a religion of the Global South.

REVERSE MISSION: Churches in Nigeria, Ghana, South Korea, Brazil, the Philippines, and elsewhere are now sending missionaries to Europe and North America. They are bringing the gospel back to places where Christianity is in decline.

LAMIN SANNEH's key insight: Every time the gospel is translated into a new language and culture, it comes alive in fresh ways. **Translation** is not a loss of the original - it is a gift. New cultures discover things in the gospel that older cultures may have missed.

CURRENT QUESTIONS in missiology:

- Interfaith: How does the church witness among Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists with both conviction and respect?
- Digital: What does mission look like in digital and online spaces?
- Creation: How is creation care part of God's mission?
- Global Context: How does the church speak truth in a deeply pluralist world?

DISCUSSION

Which of these developments most challenges or excites your own understanding of mission?

5 MARKS OF MISSION



TELL

PROCLAIM THE
KINGDOM OF GOD



TEACH

TEACH, BAPTISE &
NURTURE OF NEW
BELIEVERS



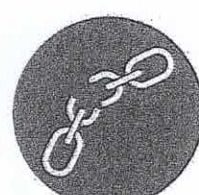
TEND

RESPOND TO HUMAN
NEED BY
LOVING SERVICE



TREASURE

STRIVE TO SAFEGUARD
THE INTEGRITY OF
CREATION & SUSTAIN &
RENEW THE LIFE OF THE
EARTH.



TRANSFORM

SEEK TO TRANSFORM UNJUST
STRUCTURES OF SOCIETY, TO
CHALLENGE VIOLENCE OF
EVERY KIND, & TO PURSUE
PEACE & RECONCILIATION

1. **TELL** Share the good news of Jesus Christ
2. **TEACH** Help people grow in the way of Jesus Christ
3. **TEND** Care for people with the love of Jesus Christ
4. **TRANSFORM** Be like Jesus Christ in challenging unjust systems and structures and offering alternatives
5. **TREASURE** Be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ today, in caring for God's creation and the resources of the Land and Sea

Group Activity

1. Each person writes: 'Mission is...' - one sentence from their context
2. Share in pairs — note agreements and differences
3. Groups of 6: synthesise into a shared statement
4. Gallery walk: post statements, read and respond to others
5. Plenary: What is distinctive about our theology of mission?