

# *Missão Integral* [holistic mission or the ‘whole Gospel’] applied: Brazilian evangelical models of holistic mission in the Arab-Muslim world

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In this article, I will first show the historical development of this theological approach within the Brazilian and Latin American evangelical spheres through the work of the Latin American Theological Fraternity – a movement founded in 1970 that maintained historic evangelical values (i.e. a high view of Scripture, the necessity of conversion) whilst also taking Latin America’s great social needs into account. Nurtured by thinkers such as René Padilla (Ecuador), Orlando Costas (Puerto Rico), Samuel Escobar (Peru), and later Valdir Steuernagel (Brazil), the movement has not only responded to the concerns raised by Liberation theologians, but it has also influenced the direction of the Lausanne Movement – an expression of global evangelicalism. Secondly, I will discuss how *missão integral* has found its way into the missional ‘bloodstream’ and become a central value for some Brazilian and Latin American missions organisations, including *Missão Antioquia* (1975) and *PM International* (1984). Finally, based on 55 interviews conducted in 2009–2010 with Brazilian workers and mission leaders focusing on the Arab world, I will show how Brazilian workers are demonstrating *missão integral* through their ministries and also why this approach is relevant in the Arab-Muslim world.

## Introduction

In a village inhabited by refugees and displaced peoples, a soccer school is established for the community’s children. In a hospital, a nurse makes her rounds, dispensing medicine and praying for patients. During classes at a business-training centre, a teacher lectures on how to start a small business whilst growing in one’s Christian character. Each scenario is an example of Christian work presently being performed by Brazilian evangelical workers serving in the Arab-Muslim world. By proclaiming the traditional Gospel message of salvation and compassionately caring for the physical needs in their context, these Brazilian transcultural workers are applying a vital aspect of Brazilian and Latin American missiology known as *missão integral* [holistic mission or the ‘whole Gospel’].

In this article, I will first show the historical development of this theological approach within the Brazilian and Latin American evangelical spheres through the work of the Latin American Theological Fraternity – a movement founded in 1970 that maintained historic evangelical values (i.e. a high view of Scripture, the necessity of conversion) whilst also taking Latin America’s great social needs into account. Nurtured by thinkers such as René Padilla (Ecuador), Orlando Costas (Puerto Rico), Samuel Escobar (Peru), and later Valdir Steuernagel (Brazil), the movement has not only responded to the concerns raised by Liberation theologians, but it has also influenced the direction of the Lausanne Movement – an expression of global evangelicalism. Secondly, I will discuss how *missão integral* has found its way into the missional ‘bloodstream’ and become a central value for some Brazilian and Latin American missions organisations, including *Missão Antioquia* (1975) and *PM International* (1984). Finally, based on 55 interviews conducted in 2009–2010 with Brazilian workers and mission leaders focusing on the Arab world, I will show how Brazilian workers are demonstrating *missão integral* through their ministries and also why this approach is relevant in the Arab-Muslim world.

Before proceeding, some qualifications ought to be made. Firstly, holistic mission theology and practice can certainly be observed within many Christian traditions within the history of global Christianity as Bosch (1991), Bevans and Schroeder (2004) and Buys (1983) have shown. Therefore, I am not claiming that holistic missiology originates from Brazil or Latin America. Rather, the significance of this study is to show how *missão integral* emerged as an important aspect of Brazilian and Latin American evangelical theology, especially as these congregations read Scripture in their own context and, as a result, forged their own path away from the inherited North American evangelical missionary theology and liberation theology.<sup>1</sup>

1. See my article (Smither 2010) for a description of Brazilian evangelical history and identity.

Secondly, let us comment briefly on the present state of Brazilian missiology. João Mordomo argues that 'there is no comprehensive Brazilian theology of mission to be found' (Mordomo 2006:224). Whilst acknowledging the strides made by Latin American theologians and missiologists in the last 40 years, Mordomo maintains that a distinctive Brazilian theology of mission has yet to be articulated. On the other hand, Valdir Steuernagel, a Lutheran missiologist who presently serves as minister at large with World Vision and has played an influential role in the Lausanne Movement, related in conversation (22 July 2009) that Brazilian missiologists continue to 'drink from the streams of Padilla and Escobar'.<sup>2</sup> That is, they remain indebted to these innovative thinkers within the Latin American Theological Fraternity (FTL). Hence, Steuernagel, a leading Brazilian missiologist who has been an active member of the FTL and regards himself as a disciple of Escobar, sees more continuity between Brazilian and Latin American missiology than Mordomo does (Steuernagel 2000:123–25). Indeed, it is difficult to read an article by a Brazilian missiologist in which Padilla, Escobar, or Orlando Costas are not cited.

To be sure, Brazilian missiology, not unlike Latin American missiology in general, is continually emerging and is supported by the more well known works of Steuernagel and Ronaldo Lidório, as well as through the reflections of missiologists who contribute to journals such as *Capacitando*. Whilst a Brazilian theology of mission can certainly be appreciated through articulated thought in published articles and books, it can be understood more strategically through the observed practice of Brazilian transcultural workers, which, in the present study, focuses on those serving in the Arab-Muslim world. Indeed, as Timothy Tennent has recently asserted, 'missions and missiology each stimulate, support, and lead to the other' (Tennent 2010:496). Similarly, Costas reflected, '[missiology] is a critical reflection that takes place in the praxis of mission' and that 'it emerges out of mission and leads to mission' (cited in Smith 1983:236). Perhaps Steuernagel best summarises this approach by asserting that theology of mission develops 'at the kitchen table' and in the context of relationships – rather than in libraries (Steuernagel 2000:124–25). In short, our understanding of Brazilian missiology, especially in the Arab-Muslim world context, will be informed by articulated thought of theologians as well as observed practice of missionaries.

## Historical development of *Missão Integral* [holistic mission or the 'whole Gospel']

For much of the 20th century, Western evangelicals struggled to reconcile the relationship between kerygmatic proclamation and social action. Historically, evangelicals – including those

who went to Latin America in the 19th century – were quite concerned with ministering to human needs (Steuernagel 1988:51). However, beginning in the late 19th century, North American evangelicals in particular became preoccupied with the challenges of liberal theology, science and modernity (Steuernagel 1988:46). In addition, as North American evangelicals were becoming increasingly individualistic culturally and more premillennial theologically, this led to the so-called 'great reversal' in which a dichotomy between proclamation and social action emerged, especially after World War I (Campos 2009:150; Padilla 1985:88; Steuernagel 1988:51–52, 60–65; Tizon 2008:23–36). Hence, for many evangelicals, caring for social needs meant compromising the Gospel and giving in to the aims of liberal theology. As a result, this North American contextual theology, which emphasised evangelism as mission, prevailed at global evangelisation congresses in Berlin in 1966 and in Bogota (CLADE I) in 1969 (cf. Bosch 1991:409–420; Steuernagel 1988:100–101, 104, 110, 126–27, 157, 160).

Following the Bogota congress, the Latin American Theological Fraternity (FTL) was founded in 1970 and was nurtured by a diverse group of evangelical theologians, including Escobar, Costas, Padilla, Emilio Núñez, Pedro Arana, Peter Savage, Andrew Kirk, and later Steuernagel (Bonino 1995:48; Escobar 2002:119–20; Smith 1983). In reality, the FTL was initiated as a response to what was regarded as two unsatisfactory streams of thought – liberation theology, which developed in the Roman Catholic Latin American context, and evangelical fundamentalism, which originated in North America. In rejecting the hermeneutics and presuppositions of liberation theology, including an ecumenical theology that regarded Latin America as thoroughly Christian, the FTL thinkers maintained the noted evangelical values of the need for genuine conversion, visible faith and a high view of Scripture (Bonino 1995:49; Escobar 2007:204; Smith 2010; Tizon 2008:53–55). Observing the authoritative place of Scripture in the theological method of the FTL leaders, Bonino correctly notes, 'Assent to the authority of the Bible could be considered as one of the most general features of the evangelical movement in Latin America' (Bonino 1995:49; cf. Costas 1982:33). Steuernagel maintained this value and, in a recent article, admonishes evangelical missiologists to recapture the primacy of Scripture in their missiological reflection (cf. Heaney 2008:94–125; Padilla 1985:106–107; Smith 1983:95–104; Steuernagel 2000:130).

Whilst the FTL rejected liberation theology for promoting ideology over authentic Christian faith, they also faulted North American evangelicals serving in Latin America for failing to develop a missiology that took the Latin American context seriously. Padilla argued that the:

[the] aim [of the FTL] was to offer a new open-ended reading of Scripture with a hermeneutic in which the biblical text and the historical situation become mutually engaged in a dialogue whose purpose is to place the church under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in its particular context.

(cited in Escobar 2007:204–205; Heaney 2008:84; cf. Smith 1983:14–15)

2. World Vision (<http://www.worldvision.org/>) is an evangelical humanitarian organisation founded in 1950 in the United States and presently has projects in more than 100 countries. The Lausanne Movement (<http://www.lausanne.org/>) began in 1974 when a global consultation on world evangelization met in Lausanne, Switzerland at the initiative of American evangelist Billy Graham. Whilst similar global gatherings have been held in Manila (1989), Pattaya, Thailand (2004), and Cape Town (2010), the Lausanne Movement has developed into a network of evangelical mission leaders, practitioners, as well as scholars.

Escobar added that what was needed was 'a fresh exploration ... into the depths of the biblical text, with the questions raised by the Latin American context' (Escobar 2002:114); that is, Scripture should be read in light of Latin America's very real social problems, including poverty, injustice and oppression – issues that have been addressed in Scripture and in the earthly ministry of Jesus (Escobar 2007:205; Steuernagel 1988:7). Acknowledging the contextual concerns of liberation theologians – concerns largely ignored by North American evangelicals in the 20th century – Padilla asserts:

The question for me is not how do I respond to liberation theology ... but rather, how do I articulate my faith in the same context of poverty, regression, and hopelessness out of which liberation theology has emerged?

(cf. Heaney 2008:46–47; cited in Smith 1983:117)

The FTL's commitment to proclaiming the kerygmatic Gospel and applying the authoritative Scriptures within the concrete Latin American context led to an organic integration of proclamation and social action – a *missão integral* [holistic mission or the 'Whole Gospel'] (Bonino 1995:50; Smith 1983:194–202; Steuernagel 1988:129).

As the FTL thinkers forged a holistic theology of mission for Latin America, they also began to influence some global conversations amongst evangelicals on evangelisation – most notably the 1974 Lausanne Congress. As theology of mission – including the relationship between social action and proclamation – was amongst the planned topics at the meeting, Padilla and Escobar gave papers, which raised difficult questions and challenged the delegates' missiological paradigms (Steuernagel 1988:136, 141). In his paper, Padilla argued:

Concern for man's reconciliation with God cannot be separated from concern for social justice ... I refuse, therefore, to drive a wedge between a primary task, namely the proclamation of the Gospel, and a secondary (at best) or even optional (at worst) task of the church.

(Steuernagel 1988:144)

Warning against creating a false dichotomy between evangelism and social action, Escobar added, 'To give only ... spiritual content to God's action in man or to give only a social and physical dimension to God's salvation are both unbiblical heresies' (cf. Padilla 2007:157; cited in Smith 1983:212). Years after the 1974 Lausanne gathering, Steuernagel helpfully summarised the Latin American position by asserting, 'Word and deed cannot be separated from each other at the cost of sacrificing the rich wholeness of the Gospel' (cf. Escobar 2003:149–54; Steuernagel 1988:257). Although the missiology presented by Padilla and Escobar encountered strong opposition from other Western evangelicals at Lausanne who championed the priority of proclamation, it seems that without the FTL influence at Lausanne, article five of the Lausanne Covenant on 'Christian Social Responsibility' would not have been drafted (Escobar 2002:113; Heaney 2008:212–14; Steuernagel 1988:143–44, 151, 169–70). The article reads:

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all people. We therefore should share his concern for justice and

reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression. Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, color, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless 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 man, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.

(‘Lausanne Covenant’ 1974)

In the aftermath of the 1974 conference, the Lausanne Movement continued to struggle to strike a balance between proclamation and social action. In some cases, such as at the 1989 Lausanne Congress in Manila, social action was virtually ignored (Steuernagel 1988:170–236). On the other hand, at the 1982 Grand Rapids gathering – a meeting chaired by John Stott, who had come to appreciate the FTL missiology – the delegates had a healthy discussion regarding the integral relationship between word and deed. At the conference, three possibilities were affirmed: firstly, social action could be regarded as a consequence of evangelism; secondly, that it could serve as a bridge to evangelism; thirdly, that social action was an equal partner with evangelism (Bosch 1991:403–408; Stott 1982; Tizon 2008:43–49).

Whilst holistic mission has been debated amongst evangelicals worldwide, it seems to have been embraced more readily by the Latin American and Brazil evangelical church. Steuernagel notes that following Lausanne 1974, Latin Americans delegates who gathered at Curitiba (Brazil) in 1976 engaged in rigorous and stimulating missiological reflection in light of their context (Steuernagel 1988:227). Referring to the declaration adopted at Curitiba, Brazilian missiologist Antônia Van der Meer (2000) stated that in mission:

We are called to take the presence of Jesus Christ, proclaiming his redeeming Gospel, serving the world and changing it by his love, patient in the hope of a new creation that he will bring.

(Van der Meer 2000:154)

Commenting on the work of the Brazilian Congress on Evangelization that met in Belo Horizonte (Brazil) in 1983, Steuernagel observed that 'the commitment of the congress was to identify the needs of the Brazilians and present to them a word of faith and hope through the redemptive cross of Christ' (Steuernagel 1988:227). Finally, following the 1992

CLADE (*Congreso Latinoamericano de Evangelizacion* [Latin American Congress on Evangelization]) III gathering in Quito, Ecuador, a definitive statement of Latin American theology of mission was drafted and given the descriptive title, 'The whole gospel from Latin America for all peoples' (Scherer & Bevans 1994:191–98).

## ***Missão Integral* [holistic mission or the 'whole Gospel'] defined**

Given this historical development in which Brazilian and Latin American evangelicals have laboured to forge their own theology of mission, let us now move toward a definition of *missão integral* [holistic mission of the 'whole Gospel'], which will be presented as a tapestry of thought from Brazilian and Latin American thinkers. Padilla defines the whole Gospel as 'a real integration of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of mission' (Padilla 2007:157). He adds:

The salvation that the Gospel proclaims is not limited to man's reconciliation to God. It involves the remaking of man in all the dimensions of his existence. It has to do with the recovery of the whole man according to God's original purpose for His creation.

(Costas 1982:37–38; cf. Heaney 2008:225–26; Padilla 1985:179)

Commenting with more colour on these aspects of the Gospel, Van der Meer (2000) adds:

Mission is the fruit of the love of God, who so loved the world that he gave his only Son in order to redeem human beings from their blindness, oppression, captivity, and poverty, so that they can experience a new life of fullness given by his grace.

(Van der Meer 2000:153)

Discussing *missão integral* [holistic mission or the 'whole Gospel'] on a more practical level, Steuernagel writes, 'what is the whole Gospel? It's putting ourselves aside and listening to the needs of the people who are crying for help. It's following Jesus' example' (Steuernagel 2009:184). He adds that 'mission and *diakonia* [service or ministry] are inseparable on both theological and practical levels' and that 'the mission of the church is expressed in *diakonia*' (cf. Bevans & Schroeder 2004:394; Steuernagel 1988:35). Illustrating the integral nature of the Gospel, Padilla concludes rather bluntly that:

There is no place for statistics on 'how many souls die without Christ every minute' if they do not take into account how many of those who die are dying of hunger.

(Padilla 1985:25; cf. Heaney 2008:225)

Finally, asserting that the whole Gospel leads to the spiritual and physical transformation of communities, Steuernagel states:

[I] want to understand the mission of the church as intentional as possible and as broad as possible in order that Christ is recognized and affirmed, for life to be promoted, for community to be developed, and for justice to flow in God's river as a sign of God's eternal obsession with *shalom*.

(Steuernagel 2008:64; cf. Kirk 2000:63)

## **Theological foundations of *Missão Integral* [holistic mission or the 'whole Gospel']**

In light of this working definition, what are the theological underpinnings given by Brazilian and Latin American theologians for *missão integral* [holistic mission of the 'whole Gospel']? Firstly, the whole Gospel is founded on the integrated nature of the Triune God. Steuernagel writes, 'The Gospel is complete in itself just as God is. God has not finished His work in us and the Gospel continues to call us to being complete' (Steuernagel 2009:184). Secondly, Padilla asserts that the Holy Spirit, having brought diverse people together in a caring community at Pentecost, continues to work powerfully and in a holistic manner (Padilla 2007:160).

Thirdly, arguably the most foundational aspect of *missão integral* [holistic mission or the 'whole Gospel'] is its Christology; that is, the whole Gospel stems from the life, person, and work of the God-Man Jesus Christ (Heaney 2008:170–82). Escobar and other Latin American thinkers have expressed concern that, in failing to reflect on Christ's concrete acts in history and focusing more on the eternal benefits of Christ's work, North American evangelical theologians have actually presented a docetic Christ. Docetism, of course, refers to the ancient heresy that Jesus did not have a human body but only appeared [*dokeō*] to have one. Emilio Núñez writes: 'We were presented with a divine-human Christ in the theological formula; but in practice, He was far removed from the stage of the world, aloof to our social problems' (cf. Escobar 2007:206; Escobar 2002:118–20; cited in Heaney 2008:172; Boff 1991:16; Costas 1982:5–16; Steuernagel 1988:257).

Yet, as Jesus' life included feeding, showing compassion, confronting, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, and suffering amongst other acts, his divinity and humanity come to bear in his mission (Boff 1991:75; Escobar 2003:106–111, 143–45; Escobar 2002:124; Steuernagel 2008:67–68). Ultimately, the whole Gospel acknowledges that Jesus is the Saviour and Lord of the universe (Padilla 1985:9–11).

As Christ established the 'definition of what it means to love God above all things and to love one's neighbour as oneself', his approach to mission serves as a model for all Christians and for the church (Padilla 2007:159). Because of Christ, the church is to proclaim salvation, identify with the poor, confront social injustices, as well as suffer (Heaney 2008:223; Padilla 2007:159; 1985:177–78; Steuernagel 1988:130, 161). Steuernagel (2009) summarises:

The whole gospel is to re-encounter Jesus. The mission of today's churches lies in the authority and inspiration of the life of Jesus. Jesus sent out the disciples as God sent Him. Jesus went with them and taught them what to do. It is necessary to align our lives and our concept of missions to the strategies within the Gospels. It's necessary to bring it all to Jesus and ask if our strategies, concepts and practices correspond to God's methodology; if they correspond to God's heart and His way of communicating

with us and establishing His churches; if they correspond to the incarnational model of Jesus. If not, we are getting away from discipleship.

(Steuernagel 2009:184; cf. Bosch 1991:399)

A fourth theological foundation for *missão integral* [holistic mission or the 'whole Gospel'] is anthropology; that is, the whole Gospel is necessary because human beings have spiritual and physical needs. Padilla writes that holistic mission:

takes into account that people are spiritual, social and bodily beings, made to live in relationship with God, with their neighbors, and with God's creation' and it is concerned with 'meeting ... basic human needs, including the need of God, but also the need of food, love, housing, clothes, physical and mental health, and a sense of human dignity.

(Padilla 2007:158; cf. Heaney 2008:129–30, 239)

Steuernagel and other FTL theologians have particularly reflected on how the Gospel should confront human poverty and social injustice. After describing conditions in Northeast Brazil where World Vision has begun some humanitarian work, Steuernagel wrote:

The challenge of the church, and even of an organization such as World Vision, is that it cannot rob itself of contributing with her drop of hope in the ocean of poverty and human suffering. Moreover, this drop has to have the face of Jesus and a call to meet this same Jesus who calls the poor and sinners to be part of His family.

(Steuernagel 2009b:612)

Others have affirmed this and argued that the global church must actively confront corrupt economic structures, which oppress the poor. At the same time, the church should come alongside the poor to aid them in realising economic transformation and to find solutions for problems such as clean water, hunger, community health, and sustainable agriculture (ed. Campbell 2005:24–39; Heaney 2008:234–35).

Regarding the human need for justice, Steuernagel argues that although evangelicals have historically focused their energies on ministries of compassion, the significant biblical motif of justice requires that the church become more engaged in confronting institutional and social sins (Costas 1982:21–26; Heaney 2008:133–35; Steuernagel 2008:62–76; Steuernagel 2000:131; Steuernagel 1988:242–44). Defining justice as 'liberating the oppressed from the yoke of the oppressors and giving them the promise and the vision of a new land and a new life', Steuernagel asserts that justice is 'a fundamental expression of God's search for transformation' (Steuernagel 2008:64; Steuernagel 1988:243–44). Arguing that confronting injustice should receive more emphasis in a holistic evangelical missiology, he concludes:

In our missionary journey, we need to listen, especially to those who are crying, who are suffering, and who are lonely. We must respond to their cry and go to those places where God is already present – places of the orphan, the widow, and the stranger ... the abused children, the single mothers, and the refugees.

(Steuernagel 2008:71)

A fifth theological foundation for the whole Gospel is the Kingdom of God. This theological motif, which has figured prominently in the work of many theologians, has been especially meaningful to the FTL thinkers and has provided a hermeneutical framework for reading Scripture that has resulted in *missão integral* (Campos 2009:159–69; Kirk 2000:64–64; Smith 1983:31–32, 104–108; Steuernagel 1988:260). For Padilla, the New Testament emphasis on the Kingdom of God and the mission of Jesus is much more present than it is future, thus the Gospel is:

God's good news in Jesus Christ; it is good news of the reign he proclaimed and embodies; of God's mission of love to restore the world to wholeness through the cross of Christ and him alone; of his victory over the demonic powers of destruction and death; of his Lordship over the entire universe; it is good news of a new creation, a new humanity, a new birth through his by his life-giving Spirit.

(Padilla 1976:93; cf. Heaney 2008:174)

He adds that, by implication, the Gospel is the 'good news of liberation, of restoration, of wholeness, and of salvation that is personal, social, global, and cosmic' (Padilla 1976:93). In light of this view of the Kingdom, Padilla makes social action an equal partner with proclamation. He writes:

Good works are not, therefore, a mere addendum to mission, rather they are an integral part of the present manifestation of the Kingdom: they point back to the Kingdom that has already come and forward to the Kingdom that is yet to come.

(Padilla 1985:192–93; also Heaney 2008:179)

Reflecting practically, Padilla (1985) concludes:

In actual practice, the question of whether evangelism or social action should come first is irrelevant. In every concrete situation, the needs themselves provide the guidelines for the definition of priorities.

(Padilla 1985:198)

Finally, for the FTL, the whole Gospel is supported by and proclaimed by a missional church. Whilst Padilla asserts that 'the mission of the church ... can be understood only in light of the Kingdom of God' (Padilla 1985:186), Steuernagel goes farther and describes the church as the 'display window' of the Kingdom (Steuernagel 1988:263–64). Both Padilla and Steuernagel assert that a missional ecclesiology, in contrast to Western individualism that pervades the church, must be characterised by an authentic and transformational community. Steuernagel (2009) writes:

To speak of the whole Gospel is to speak of the need we have to be corrected by the Gospel and by our interdependence. We need one another as we need to take in the Gospel in totality and integrality.

(Steuernagel 2009:184; also Padilla 2007:161)

Whilst the local church experiences transformation from within as a true community, it is also an agent of holistic mission in which every member plays a role (Heaney 2008:205–207; Steuernagel 1988:130–31). This vision of a missional church at work in Kingdom mission is helpfully summarised by the 'Micah Declaration on Integral Mission' that states:

God by his grace has given local churches the task of integral mission [proclaiming and demonstrating the Gospel]. The future of integral mission is in planting and enabling local churches to transform the communities of which they are part. Churches as caring and inclusive communities are at the heart of what it means to be integral mission.

(Cited in Padilla 2007:160)

## ***Missão Integral* [holistic mission or the ‘whole Gospel’] applied**

In light of the historical development and theological foundations of *missão integral* [holistic mission or the ‘whole Gospel’] in the Brazilian and Latin American contexts, how has this theology affected the work of Brazilian missions in the Arab-Muslim world?<sup>3</sup> Let us first examine how some Brazilian missions organisations regard holistic ministry and then, secondly, consider how Brazilian missionaries are applying this missiology in their contexts.

### **Brazilian missions organisations**

It seems that *missão integral* [holistic mission or the ‘whole Gospel’] is becoming increasingly central to the vision of Missão Antioquia, Brazil’s first indigenous mission, which has a growing presence in the Arab-Muslim world. In 2006, after doing some strategic planning and reflecting on its vision and mission, the organisation articulated the following:

Our vision then would be to bring about transformation through the Gospel [in unreached areas] with the Word and good deeds. That certainly results in glory to God here and now. In practice, we didn’t even consider the possibility of doing only good deeds. For us it is essential that the proclamation of the Gospel and good deeds go together. First and foremost, we believe that Jesus is the only one who can bring about transformation in this world.

(*Missã Antioquia* 2010, trans. C. Boersma)

Following this statement in the same document, the Antioquia leadership expressed encouragement that more doors were being opened for sports ministry and community development – ministries that would be a partner and support to church planting. Hence, with a great sense of humility and dependency on the Lord, the organisation has communicated a clear strategy of holistic mission.

This strategy also seems evident in how Antioquia is training its new mission candidates. Whilst visiting the Antioquia’s headquarters and training centre (‘the valley of blessing’) in July 2009, I observed that in addition to classrooms, dormitories and a dining hall, the campus also includes a local church, an intercessory prayer chapel, a school, a foster care facility and a day care centre. Thus, during their five months on site at the valley, mission candidates have opportunities to serve within these various ministries.

As Missão Antioquia personnel are increasingly entering fields in the Muslim world that are closed to conventional

missions, Antioquia director Silas Tostes related that each missionary should have a professional skill in order to gain employment and residency (interview 23 July 2009). On the one hand, this approach gives the worker credibility in the eyes of those in the host culture – including neighbours and government officials – and it alleviates the worker’s frustration and discouragement when their identity is questioned. On the other hand, such work is also an opportunity to testify to the Gospel through tangible deeds. For this reason, Tostes encourages Antioquia personnel to develop skills and find work that corresponds with their gifts, abilities, and passions so that they can perform their job with joy. Indeed, Totes’ thoughts reveal a theology of work that regards labour as a viable act of worship – a winsome partner and support to kerygmatic proclamation. However, Tostes warns that social ministry alone is inadequate and that it must be deliberately integrated with a verbal witness and a plan for church planting.

*Missão integral* [holistic mission or the ‘whole Gospel’] is also evident in the work of PMI, the first Latin mission to focus on the Muslim world. During my interview with Daniel Calze (21 July, 2009), the present director of PMI Brazil, he asserted that one’s platform or tent making job is not merely a ‘cover’ that allows a PMI worker an excuse to preach the Gospel. Rather, he argues that a nurse, for instance, must truly be a nurse and that he or she glorifies God and testifies to the Gospel in part through a job well done. When asked if the whole Gospel was especially strategic in the Arab-Muslim context where resistance to the Gospel is common, Calze admitted that whilst this approach did promote trust and helped relationships with Muslims, he asserted that they would pursue *missão integral* in any context because this was simply the ministry model of Jesus. Steven Downey captured similar perspectives in his interview with Marcos Amado, a Brazilian who formerly served as the executive director of PMI:

*A good example is a PMI worker, an engineer by trade, who designs water purification systems for needy communities,’ Amado says. ‘This puts him in contact with people of various social levels, principally the needy, and gives him a chance to share his faith’. PMI recognizes that to do ministry in poorer countries, one must engage in holistic witness. But Amado says, ‘we are not involved in community development projects only because they give us the opportunity to go into Muslim countries. We are involved in them because we believe that it is part of our mission as Christians. At the same time, we speak about Christ’.*

(Downey 2003)

Calze added that whilst PMI workers certainly needed to be discerning about communicating their faith during the course of a workday, it was not unusual for Muslims to expect to discuss faith issues at work. Hence, a holistic approach in the Arab-Muslim world is important because Muslims tend not to compartmentalise faith from other parts of their lives.

Finally, like Tostes, Calze affirmed that humanitarian work was not the end of holistic mission. The goal of their mission was not to train good soccer players or small business owners who would then die without knowing Christ in a saving

<sup>3</sup>Whilst a comprehensive discussion of contexts of the Arab world (including culture, belief, worldview) is limited in this article, I have discussed this further elsewhere (Smither 2011:90–246).

way. He added that pursuing *missão integral* [holistic mission or the 'whole Gospel'] meant that they were deliberate about every aspect of ministry – ministering to human needs, evangelism, and church planting.

In addition to Missão Antioquia and PMI, other Brazilian missions organisations have also demonstrated a conviction for holistic mission. The Junta de Missões Mundiais (global missions board) of the Brazilian Baptist Convention has developed ministries around the skills of educational specialists, health professionals (doctors, dentists and nurses), and humanitarian aid workers – especially those trained to work with women and children. It has also developed a soccer school strategy that integrates teaching soccer skills whilst communicating the Gospel message (*JMM: Missões Mundiais* 2010). In addition, Interserve, with its stated vision 'to proclaim by word and action, that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of all humanity', has *missão integral* as a central focus. Whilst offering formal training in holistic ministry through its partner mission school, the Centro Evangélico de Missões, Interserve Brasil has built its mission around Christians with medical, technical, and community development training who are able to care for real human needs and verbally proclaim the Gospel (*Centro Evangélico de Missões* 2010).

### Humanitarian work

Let us now consider some examples of holistic mission from Brazilian missionaries. Nearly half of the 45 Brazilian workers surveyed indicated that they were involved in some form of humanitarian work through existing NGOs or through ones that they have established. In one context, which I visited on 12 October 2009, a Brazilian worker directs a team of Brazilian, international, and local volunteers at a cultural centre for the handicapped that offers classes in language, arts, and crafts whilst also offering short excursions. The centre, which has a great reputation with the government and community, cares for around 50 regular members who would otherwise be marginalised in a society that does very little for the handicapped. One Brazilian volunteer related that working amongst the handicapped was a great way to show God's presence, to build genuine friendships, and to respond to the commonly posed question – why are you so different? That is, through tangibly serving and caring for human needs, this volunteer has also been able to communicate her faith in Christ verbally.

The director also added that Brazilian volunteers – especially those who were handicapped themselves – seemed naturally able to relate to Arab members of the centre. One reason is that in both Brazil and this particular Arab context, the handicapped are on the fringes of society and receive little help from the government in the way of programmes and assistance. Hence, handicapped Brazilian workers can identify with those to whom they are ministering. Secondly, many Brazilian volunteers – handicapped or not – can relate to the centre's poor members who struggle to scrape together enough money to take public transportation to the centre for activities. As many Brazilian workers are struggling

with financial challenges, they can certainly identify and empathise with the poor, who frequent the centre (interview and observation conducted on 12 October 2009).

In another context, a group of Brazilian women, in partnership with other international workers, have started a centre for women. After paying a modest annual fee to the centre, participants are offered training in languages, computer skills, and arts and crafts. Whilst some develop skills that will help them to find a job or start a small business, others frequent the centre to make friends and have their relational needs met. In an otherwise class-based society, it is an interesting phenomenon to see poor and uneducated women attending the same workshops and activities with university-educated professionals. Whilst addressing the social and economic needs of women in their context, the Brazilian workers are also building long-term friendships in which they naturally share the Gospel verbally. When interviewed on 24 July 2009, the women shared that some of these friends have indeed embraced the Christian faith.

Finally, Brazilian missionaries have engaged in humanitarian work by ministering to refugees. One worker, commenting on the general lack of care afforded to displaced peoples in his Arab context, shared in an interview conducted on 07 January 2010, 'We are seeing God work more among the minority peoples despite the fact that Arabs can be so racist against them'. Another Brazilian (in an interview conducted on the same day) described his service in an existing centre for refugees:

*'We have worked in a humanitarian centre for refugees in our country that includes a feeding ministry, teaching crafts, [and] home visits.' He adds that caring for these real needs has led to opportunities for 'evangelism and teaching, and training Christian leaders to run the centre.'*

(Brazilian interviewee)

Finally, another Brazilian serving amongst refugees described the holistic nature of his work in an interview which was also conducted on 07 January 2010: 'God has opened doors to work with refugees and we have seen people healed and desiring to follow God'.

### Medical work

Brazilians are also proclaiming the whole Gospel through medical work. In one context, two Brazilian women are working as nurses in a historically Protestant hospital in the Middle East. Despite serving in a country that is 94% Muslim, in the hospital they have a great deal of freedom to communicate the Gospel verbally and to pray for patients as they dispense medicine and care for them. One of the women asserted in an interview on 09 October 2009 that serving as a nurse allows her the opportunity to show the Gospel in a tangible way – 'to be more than to do'. She added that it would be difficult to be expelled from a country for showing God's love to people. That said, this worker related that although she is able to communicate her faith quite often, particularly to female patients, she is unsure of the outcomes. The cultural constraints on women make follow-up and on going discipleship difficult within her context.

Another medical strategy that some Brazilian workers are beginning to pursue is known as Community Health Evangelism (CHE). Defined as 'a true best practices model for integrating evangelism and discipleship with community based development', CHE volunteers seek to 'raise awareness of need and opportunity, and facilitate a process by which the community itself identifies solutions and begins to work together in an organized way' (Global CHE Network 2010). Although this is a new and developing strategy amongst Brazilians, one worker shared in an interview 07 January 2010 that her priority in ministry was 'community health evangelism and thus getting involved more with the humanitarian needs of the community'.

### Business as Mission, business development

Brazilian missionaries who have accessed the Arab world through business platforms have also shown a commitment to holistic ministry. More recently, some Brazilian workers have adopted a Business as Mission (BAM) approach or Kingdom Business approach. According to Rundle and Johnson, BAM is 'the utilization of for-profit businesses as instruments for global mission' (eds. Johnson & Rundle 2006:25; Johnson 2010; Rundle & Steffen 2003; cf. eds. Tunehag, McGee & Plummer 2005). Holistic in nature, BAM practitioners endeavour to offer a vibrant Gospel witness by running their business according to biblical principles, to create jobs and wealth, and to see communities transformed. One Brazilian worker has successfully started a consulting business in one Arab country and has managed to land some significant clients. He related, 'I have had a successful business here. It is a kingdom business'. That said, in his reflections on BAM and Kingdom Business – mission models that are certainly continuing to develop – he places more value on proclamation in mission. He asserts:

*'I am challenged to pursue mission through business rather than Business as Mission. I want to do more direct evangelism. What's wrong with a hybrid business that includes good godly business and sharing the Gospel?'*

(Interview with Brazilian worker,  
07 January 2010)

Another Brazilian worker has integrated business with mission by opening a small business development school in one Arab country. As the school operates under the auspices of a registered Christian entity, the worker describes the project in an interview 08 May, 2009 as 'a Bible school and at the same time, a professional training centre'. Working from the assumption that evangelism and church planting happen through relationships, and that small business owners are strategically placed people in a community, the worker's goal is to train and set apart business people who will also be able to serve as evangelists and church planters (those tasked with beginning new church fellowships). This worker and his team are especially burdened by the physical and spiritual needs of those living in the country's rural areas. Trainees come to the school for three months where they take classes in business and the Bible, and also serve in various capacities within the church. After this period of training,

students spend another three months traveling to different parts of the country where they study the possibilities for opening a business. After working on this project for four years, the worker reported in an interview on 08 May 2009, 'We have already trained fifty people and seven small companies have already been established around [the country]'. In terms of the leadership of the school itself, he added, 'At the beginning of this year I was able to pass on the leadership to the locals, and today they lead and I help them'.

### Sports ministry

*Missão integral* [holistic mission or the 'whole Gospel'] has also been evident in the work of Brazilians who are ministering through sports. Whilst sport has often been regarded as an international language that breaks down cultural barriers and promotes friendship, Brazilians, with their excellence in basketball, volleyball, the martial arts, and, of course, *futebol* [soccer], speak this language quite well. Arabs also seem to welcome Brazilian transcultural workers –athletic or not – because Ronaldo, Ronaldino, and Roberto Carlos (Brazilian soccer stars) are household names in the Arab world. Brazilian workers serving amongst Arabs are making the most of this strategic connection and have proven to be innovative in using sports in ministry.

At least a couple of Brazilians are employed as physical trainers and also use that as a platform for ministry. One church planter in Southern Brazil recognised this as a viable strategy, and so he returned to the university and earned a degree in Physical Education. At present, he meets clients daily – many of whom are Arab businessmen. In an interview which was conducted on 19 July 2009, he indicated that the nature of his work provides an interactive context in which to build relationships and communicate the Gospel. Similarly, a female Brazilian worker with significant training and experience is beginning to work in one Arab country as a physical trainer. As physical fitness is becoming more important to many Arab women, she related in an interview on 09 October 2009 that this strategy also facilitates personal relationships and opportunities to communicate the Gospel.

At least one Brazilian worker, a former professional soccer player and coach in Brazil, has been hired by a school in the Middle East to teach Physical Education and to coach the school's soccer teams. Although he teaches classes with a national teacher whilst his language abilities develop, this worker still endeavours to communicate in Arabic with students as much as possible. As I visited with him at his school and interviewed him on 10 October 2009, I was impressed with a number of elements of his work. Firstly, he seemed quite at home and comfortable in the rather chaotic atmosphere of the school. Secondly, there was an evident mutual affection between him and his students. As a steady stream of children made the effort to greet their teacher (they addressed him in Arabic as *ustadh* [teacher]) throughout the day, he greeted them with warmth and affection. Thirdly, he was able to connect quickly with a new afternoon soccer team as the group quickly responded to his instructions

on the field. Fourthly, he coaches with excellence and has developed a coaching plan laid out for the entire year. Finally, he concluded each class and practice with a moral lesson that emerged from the practice itself. Whilst each lesson is rooted in a biblical teaching or principle, his presentation is less explicit because of the local constraints against open evangelism. Perhaps the greatest affirmation of this Brazilian worker's ministry comes from a local Arab-Christian who remarked: *'He coaches with passion. Although he has the challenge of learning the language, he is so good with our people'*.

A number of other Brazilian workers have also used soccer as a basis for ministry. One worker reported in an interview on 29 July, 2009 that he used soccer as a means of building relationships with Arab university students studying in the United States. At least a couple of missionaries in Southern Brazil reported in interviews on 19 and 21 July 2009 that they have organised soccer camps as a way of reaching out to Arab children. In an interview on 09 October 2009, another Brazilian serving in the in the Middle East shared that he has begun a soccer outreach that integrates teaching on purity. One worker serving in North Africa shared in an interview conducted on 20 July 2009, *'I ... started a soccer ministry that one mission organisation in the Muslim world has adopted and is using as a strategy'*. Thus, it is apparent that soccer outreach is an important strategy that organisations are working to develop reproducible models.

Finally, in one Arab country, a team of Brazilian workers has put on a series of soccer camps in some very conservative and restricted villages, including those inhabited by refugees. One worker reported in an interview on 09 October 2009 that with a soccer ball and a jersey, they have accessed places where doctors and teachers have never been allowed to enter. After receiving permission to work with the children from tribal leaders, the men have worked with the boys, and their wives have coached the girls. As this group also integrates moral teaching from a biblical foundation in their coaching, each practice ends with some group reflection on what was learned during the experience. Apparently, the soccer camps have provided a welcome diversion from the difficulties of daily living for these children and their parents also seem to appreciate the constructive physical activity that their children are receiving. The fact that Arabs like Brazilians and know their soccer players has probably allowed this team of workers access into an otherwise restricted area where Westerners are not welcomed. In short, Brazilian missionaries are effectively using sports as a means to overcome barriers of mistrust, to build relationships, and to communicate Christian teaching. One worker concluded in an interview on 20 July 2009, *'I think that sports ministry in the Arab world is very important and should continue to be used'*, whilst another added in an interview 15 October 2009, *'I love using sports – something I really enjoy – for ministry'*.

## Teaching

Some Brazilian missionaries are also getting jobs in Arab contexts as English and Portuguese teachers. Whilst this often provides a platform to access a country not open to

Christian missions, teaching also offers an environment in which relationships can be built. One woman teaches both English and Portuguese to Arab children in Southern Brazil. Regarding her teaching as a tangible way to serve children, she also prays for opportunities to proclaim the Gospel. Hence, she asserted in an interview on 19 July 2009, *'I love to minister through my work as a teacher'*. In another Arabic country, one Brazilian worker added in an interview on 09 May, 2009, *'In my English teaching for teens, I have shared the good news'*. Finally, another Brazilian missionary employed as a teacher shared in an interview on 07 January 2010, *'I have been used to touch the lives of my students through words of encouragement'*.

## Hospitality

Many Brazilians have ministered the whole Gospel through offering hospitality. Hospitality is certainly an important shared cultural value for Brazilians and Arabs, which affords Brazilian missionaries a natural opportunity to connect with their host culture. More than that, it is a biblical value in which Christians invite, serve, listen and ultimately care for their guests. The kerygmatic Gospel is certainly not intrusive in this environment.<sup>4</sup> In an interview on 15 October 2009, one Brazilian couple offered this winsome description of the holistic ministry of hospitality: *'Opening the doors of our home ... seeking to always be available to our friends, spending time with them and helping them in what is needed'*.

## The missiological significance of *Missão Integral* [holistic mission or the 'whole Gospel'] in the Arab world

Given the theological foundations for the whole Gospel and considering how it is being applied currently, what is the missiological significance of a Brazilian *missão integral* [holistic mission or the 'whole Gospel'] for the Arab-Muslim world? Firstly, it is relevant because the Arab world has many social problems and physical needs. Not unlike Latin America, where *missão integral* [holistic mission or the 'whole Gospel'] was nurtured, the Arab nations face poverty, unemployment, political corruption, abandoned children, violations against women, and educational deficiencies amongst others. Although Brazilian workers must, of course, maintain a posture of respect toward Arab governments and their infrastructures – including departments established to meet social needs that may not be functioning effectively – there remain many open doors for Brazilians to relieve suffering, show compassion, and facilitate development and transformation. In short, teachers, business people, medical professionals, soccer coaches and humanitarian specialists are still welcomed in the Arab world to carry on this aspect of the earthly ministry of Jesus.

<sup>4</sup>Please see a more extended discussion on how Brazilians use hospitality in mission in Smither 2011:184–94.

Secondly, Brazilian *missão integral* [holistic mission or the 'whole Gospel'] is peaceful and disarming in a region that has been resistant to Christian missions. Much of this resistance has come in response to an overly polemical style of proclamation through the history of Christian work amongst Muslims (Makdisi 2008:58–59, 88–90, 143–44; Ryad 2006:285–88; Sharkey 2009:109; Smither 2011:145–47). As a result, the Gospel has come to be regarded by many Arab-Muslims as simply another form of Western propaganda. Whilst Brazilian evangelicals serving in the Arab world are clearly committed to proclaiming the kerygmatic Gospel – a message that will often be met with resistance and even violence – their verbal message receives credibility because of their tangible and useful service. Many Brazilian workers involved in humanitarian work reported that they were often invited by Arab friends to share their motivation for serving, which led to opportunities to communicate their faith.

Thirdly, a Brazilian holistic approach is meaningful in the Arab-Muslim world because it is Brazilian and not North American or European. The humanitarian efforts of Brazilian workers are received with far less suspicion than that of their Western colleagues, who bring significant historical, political, and cultural 'baggage' with them to the field simply because of their nationality. Reflecting on his experience in North Africa, in an interview on 04 August 2009, Marcos Amado recalled sadly that 'everything that the Americans attempted (in terms of humanitarian projects) was met with suspicion'.

Fourthly, *missão integral* is important because Arab-Muslims are integrated peoples; that is, Arabs tend to think and talk about subjects like religion and politics even on the job. Therefore, it is not unusual for Brazilians working in the Arab marketplace to communicate spiritual matters during the course of their day. Within this integrated framework of work and faith, it is acceptable that a Brazilian nurse, whilst caring for sick patients, would pray for and even offer a spiritual word of encouragement to them. Although Arab-Muslims have resisted the Gospel historically, they would still expect Brazilians to be Christians (of some sort) who talk about their faith.

In summary, Brazilian *missão integral* [holistic mission or the 'whole gospel'] is relevant in the Arab-Muslim context because it is an authentic expression of incarnational ministry. In following the model of Jesus' ministry, Brazilian holistic mission involves identifying with Arabs, living amongst them, loving and serving them, and proclaiming the Gospel message. Such incarnational ministry is perhaps best summarised by a Brazilian worker who shared in an interview 27 March 2009:

*'During the past years, I've come to learn to look at my friends here as people created according to the image of God, people with human value and dignity, and not as 'contacts' or people to whom I'm trying to win for a specific faith. To love my friends who are part of the majority [Muslim] religion is the basis for sharing the Gospel'.*

(Brazilian interviewee)

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