

대학원생 논문 발표 _ 2분과 교육2-2

Luke's theology of mission : Witnesses to the ends of the earth

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Introduction

In today's post-modern world -- where people are talking about accepting one another and that all religions need to live in harmony, because there is no absolute truth -- it is not easy to talk of mission, that there is one God and that there is only one way to reach him. To make such a claim, one needs credible proof and one needs to be prepared to be a fool in the eyes of the world. Furthermore, the moral standards and the care and concern that people need to have for one another seems to be moving away from what Christians would approve. The importance of Christian missions is therefore being pushed to the sidelines and Christians today seem to be lacking the zeal that was prevalent in the early Church.

Michael Ramsden in his challenge to the participants of Lausanne 2010, said,

The Gospel is not about me. We are not asking people to accept us. With humility, with dependence on God, with dependence on the Spirit, with a clarity from his Word and a conviction in our hearts, we preach Christ crucified, we ask people to accept him. The crisis we have is that people are beginning to doubt whether it is possible to do this anymore. We must recover our confidence in the truth of the Gospel otherwise we will never proclaim it. (Michael Ramsden, 2010)

It is therefore necessary to once again remind every Christian of the need for missions and the things on which missions need to focus on. The best place to begin this search for awakening the Christians is the Bible. However, it is impossible to search the whole Bible in the present work, therefore, looking at the world today and the amount of scholarship that we have on the scriptures; the researcher would focus on Luke-Acts. Jacob Jervell rightly notes that Luke was able to keep the Jews and the Gentiles together without removing "..... their distinctive stamp,

e.g. cultural, national,……” (Jervell 1996, 131). Although the difference today, may not be between Jews and Gentiles, there are a lot of social and cultural differences that needs to be addressed. A study of Luke’s theology of missions will go a long way in enabling Christians to be witnesses in our diverse world today.

I. The author and audience of Luke-Acts

A brief look into the identity of the author and the audience for which Luke-Acts was written for will give us a better understanding of Luke’s theology of missions.

A. The author of Luke-Acts

Luke “was primarily an Evangelist or preacher, concerned to lead men to Christian belief on the basis of a reliable record of the historical facts” (Marshall 1992, 9). Most scholars agree that Luke was the writer of the third gospel and also the book of Acts. As to the identity of Luke, most scholars conclude that he was “a companion of Paul…… based on the travel diaries……(Acts16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16)” (Ringe 1995, 19). Although Sharon H. Ringe does not agree to this proposition, the “we sections”¹⁸⁴⁾ are seen by most scholars as support to the view that Luke was indeed the companion of Paul. As to his profession, there seems to be more consensus that he was, “the beloved physician” as mentioned in Colossians 4:14.

As we study Luke we need to keep in mind that Luke was a medical doctor¹⁸⁵⁾, an evangelist – as seen in the “we sections” and his focus on salvation – Luke was also an historian and a theologian.

B. The audience of Luke-Acts

Tannehill, in regard to the recipients of Luke-Acts prefers the word “audience” since he assumes that “most first-century people would encounter Luke through a public reading in a Christian community” (Tannehill 1996, 24). Although addressed to Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1), Esler convincingly argues that it was addressed to a community which was most probably Christian (Esler 1996, 24-26). The background of these Christians may have however differed and probably it consisted of a mixed community of the Jews and Gentiles.

184) 1 The passages where the word “we” can be found which point out that the author was with Paul in his missions. These can be found in Acts 16, 20, 21 and 23-26.

185) W.K. Hobart, in his book, *The Medical Language of St. Luke*, puts forward many strong arguments regarding Luke’s profession as a physician basing on his language and his description of events, especially those related to healing.

There are varied views on what the composition of this Christian community was. Mary A. Moscato in an article “Current theories regarding the audience of Luke-Acts” concludes that, there are a number of options available regarding the audience of Luke-Acts. She prefers to see it as “a mixed community” of both the Jews and Gentiles in which the Jewish Christians were most probably “Nazoreans”.¹⁸⁶⁾

II. Luke’s theology of missions

Luke’s theology of missions places much emphasis on the word witness. A. A. Trites notes three important features of witness. Firstly, the “witnesses are passionately involved in the case they seek to present”, secondly, “witnesses are held accountable for the truthfulness of their testimony” and thirdly, “witnesses must be faithful not only to the bare facts of the Christ-event, but also to their meaning” (*The New International Dictionary* 1986, 1049-50).

The truth that is witnessed is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. This is the good news of the kingdom of God. For Luke it is important that this witnessing begins from Jerusalem and then moves to the ends of the world.

A. The Great Commission

In order to further understand Luke’s theology of missions we will briefly look at the Great Commission as found in the gospel according to Luke and the book of Acts.

i. The Great Commission in the gospel according to Luke: a comparison with the Great Commission in Matthew In Matthew, the Great Commission is to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18 -- 20). In Luke, the Great Commission is to be witnesses and it also tells us what has to be preached (Luke 24: 44 -- 47) which is also an echo of the Nazareth manifesto in Luke 4: 16-21. Luke 24: 47 says, “repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” The Commission is to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins which has been made available by Christ’s death and resurrection. Both Matthew and Luke are concerned about evangelizing all the nations. Luke notes that this has to begin from Jerusalem, while Matthew does not mention a starting point. Luke mentions the suffering and resurrection which is the source of what Matthew records as all power in heaven and on earth that has been bestowed on Jesus.

Both of them imply that the commission is to be for all. No one is to be left out, the Jew,

186) Mary A. Moscato tells us that Nazorenes were Jewish Christians who lived according to the Law and practiced circumcision. They believed in Jesus, the virgin birth, resurrection of the dead and also believed that Paul was the missionary to the Gentiles.

the Gentile, the rich, the poor, men and women, old or young, slave or free, the able and those differently able, whoever or wherever one may be, God is able to reach into their situation and bless them. All are to be witnessed to and disciplined so that they in turn become witnesses and disciplers.¹⁸⁷⁾

Matthew also records the commission to baptize the disciples and to teach them, while Luke stops at witnessing and leaves the baptism and affirmation to the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself has the authority and promises his presence with his disciples in Matthew. This also affirms that God is one as Jesus continues to be with the disciples through the ever present guide, the Holy Spirit. Matthew shows us that the disciples have been authorized to carry out the mission, while for Luke the Holy Spirit leads and guides the mission. It is the Baptism in the Spirit that confirms God's leading as we see in Acts where

Peter is convinced of the Gentile mission when he sees the Spirit being poured upon them too (Acts 10 -- 11). Matthew's great Commission thus gives the disciples courage through his promise of his presence while Luke's commission gives the witnesses courage by being empowered by the Holy Spirit.

a. Witnessing disciples

The disciples are called to be witnessing disciples. As they win more souls to the kingdom, they continue to increase the number of disciples and the number of witnesses to the kingdom of God. The fulfilling of the Matthews version of the commission is through obedience to the call to be witnesses. As the disciples are entrusted to make disciples of all nations, they have to faithfully witness the gospel through the power and authority given to them by the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised. What both of these commissions imply is that the presence and the confirmation of God's calling and leading is a must for witnessing disciples. Missions is only valid therefore when it is a continuation of the mission that has dawned in and through Christ Jesus. Missions has to be an obedient response to the commission to go and make disciples and be witnesses having been called by Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit according to the will of God. On the one hand, we need to understand the importance of the urgency and direct commission of Jesus to go and make disciples, having faith in the promise that Jesus is with us "to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b), and on the other hand we need to learn to

187) Prof. Doo Young Chung in his class lectures suggests that the commission is not just about *discipleship*, but rather *disciplership*. This implies that a Disciple should be able to disciple people who in turn continue this process of *disciplership*.

wait upon the Lord and “stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49b).

b. Witness and suffering

David Humpal, in his study on the Great Commission notes that many people do not like to talk about Christ’s suffering too often. People would rather talk and listen about the victorious events like Easter and also celebrate Christmas. However, Humpal reminds us that the last words of Jesus as recorded by Luke include the suffering of Jesus. Jesus mentions suffering because it makes the victory meaningful. Without grasping the importance of the suffering,¹⁸⁸⁾ the magnitude of the victory achieved, or the reason of his birth would not be fully understood.

The resurrection becomes most meaningful as it follows the suffering which Luke connects to the suffering servant of Isaiah. Luke notes Jesus saying “Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” (Luke 24:26) and “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day” (Luke 24:46). The suffering servant therefore opens the way for the proclamation of the gospel. The positive result of this proclamation is repentance. When there is repentance, God is there to forgive and cleanse us from all sins (I John 1:9).

The Great Commission is therefore to preach the good news of suffering, resurrection, repentance and remission to all who repent. This mission is bound to face opposition from the world and hence suffering. Both Matthew and Luke note the anticipation of this opposition and hence there is the assurance of Christ’s authority, power and presence in Matthew and being clothed with power from on high in Luke. Suffering therefore opened the way for witnessing and discipleship. At the same time witnessing and discipleship entails suffering as Jesus calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him, reminding them of the cost of following him (Luke 9:23; Matthew 8:20–22).

ii. Great Commission in the book of Acts: The Holy Spirit empowers and guides witness

In the book of Acts the Great Commission is to be “.....witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8) after they have received power from the Holy Spirit.

188) Joshua W. Jipp (2010) in an article “Luke’s Scriptural Suffering Messiah: A search for precedent, a search for Identity” gives us more insight into the suffering messiah.

“In the fourth Gospel and Acts when the apostles are witnessing for Christ in the face of antagonism and hostility, they do not witness in their own strength but rather in the convincing power of the Spirit” (*The New International Dictionary* 1986, 1049). This faith and trust in the Spirit and the experiences of the power of the Spirit keeps them going in their bold witness to the world. We find that at every stage of growth of the church beginning from Jerusalem, the affirmation of the Holy Spirit was always seen (Gallagher 2007, 8–10).

The Holy Spirit empowers people to witness and at the same time; the Holy Spirit is the witness to the truth of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Timothy C. Tennet (2010) categorizes “the purpose and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the early church” (412) under three main themes. Firstly, he points out that “*the Holy Spirit empowers the church for a global mission.*” Secondly, “*the Holy Spirit endues the church with God’s authority*” and thirdly, “*the Holy Spirit extends the inbreaking of the New Creation through the powerful manifestation of signs and wonders and holiness of life*” (Tennet 2010, 412 – 13)

Even today we find that the Spirit continues to move and perform signs and wonders as the kingdom of God is preached and witnessed to the ends of the earth. This can be seen in the various healing crusades that are being organized as well as in the lives and experiences of missionaries in the field. However, “the Spirit’s role in extending the in-breaking of the New Creation is not limited to an evangelistic or missional context” (Tennet 2010, 414). The presence of the Holy Spirit is a guarantee and a proof of the bestowing of the gift of salvation upon the believer. Tennet (2010) rightly notes that “the same Spirit who empowers us for witness is the one who empowers us for holy living. The same Spirit who transforms the unbelieving nations of the world is the one who transforms our hearts, teaching us to say “no” to sin and to embrace the righteousness of Jesus Christ” (414).

Therefore, we can agree with Tennet when he says that we need a dynamic union of “continuity in truth by the word” and “continuity in life by the Spirit” in order to be faithful witnesses.

B. Salvation

Witnessing to Salvation is so vital because as Luke records Peter saying that “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Missions is aimed at making salvation known and experienced by the people. It is a continuation of what Christ's ministry had dawned. Luke's views on salvation was popularized by Conzelmann who used the key word "*Heilsgeschichte*, variously rendered in English as "the history of Salvation," "redemptive history" or "salvation-history" (Marshall 1992, 77).

A study of the use of the word for salvation in Luke-Acts shows that salvation has a "wide range of meaning, and it is not surprising that it came to denote the sum of the blessings which God bestows upon men in rescuing them from every human distress and from divine judgment itself" (Marshall 1992, 95). Luke's use of salvation tends to denote both the physical and spiritual dimension. This can be seen in the stories of healing where Jesus proclaims that the sick have been healed by their faith. This shows that the "power to heal and the authority to save both reside in God" (Marshall 1992, 95).

The concept of salvation for Luke comes from the Old Testament as Luke quotes from it now and again, for instance in Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55), in the Nazareth Manifesto (Luke 4:16-30). The savior and salvation mentioned in these passages become a reality in and through Jesus Christ. Howard says that salvation becomes a reality in Acts as seen through the lives of the disciples and the early Church. Jesus began this work and the Church is to continue this work of salvation. Missions is therefore witnessing to this salvation which has begun through Christ.

i. To the Jews first and then the Gentiles

For Luke, Salvation has come through the Jews but it is also meant for the Gentiles. This is a historical fact that he records as Jesus came to the Jews to fulfill what was said that he would bring about salvation, be a light to the Gentiles and bring glory to the people of Israel (Luke 2:30-31). Jesus grew up in the Jewish settings, being circumcised on the eight day and his ancestry is traced back to Adam "the son of God" (Luke 3: 37). This shows the importance of the Jewish lineage as well as the universal salvation that he is going to bring about as the second Adam.

Even as Jesus' birth into the Jewish setting and the royal line of David affirms the importance of the Jews, in Luke 8:21, Jesus seems to have broken the blood line relationship, when he said that "those who hear God's word and put it into practice" are his mothers and brothers. This opens up a whole dimension for relationship with Jesus. Being related by blood is no longer the

criteria; rather obedience to God's word is the means of being a part of Christ's family. This means that the Jews no longer hold the sole claim to salvation but that all who would believe would also enter into the Kingdom.

In the sending of the seventy-two, particularly in Luke 10:7-8, Sathianathan Clarke notes that this may also be seen as an acceptance of another culture, since the sharing and acceptance of meals is a "symbolic act of accepting them as equals" (171). Luke's record of Jesus' ministry gives us some clues that Jesus was preparing the way for the Gentile missions to begin. Although the setting was still the Jewish setting, certain changes were coming into the exclusive view of salvation for the Jews alone.

In the Great Commission in Acts, the witnessing begins from Jerusalem then moves on to all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. This also shows that salvation begins in the Jewish setting in Jerusalem and then it moves on to the Gentiles. There is continuity from Jews to the Gentiles rather than a breaking away and forming a new mission. It is a continuation of the mission of God that permeates the whole Bible and to which the church today is called to participate in as faithful witnesses. Christopher J.H. Wright (2006) notes that Paul was "consistent with his policy of "to the Jews first" (519) and it was in keeping with this that he moves on to the Gentiles. In Acts 13:46-47, Paul is actually quoting Isaiah 49:6 where he says, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." Wright (2006) points out that Paul uses "these words as a personal mandate for himself in his missionary task. It is a bold hermeneutical step" (519).

ii. The rich, the poor and women

Luke's writing has a lot of references to the rich and the poor and women; this is particularly found in the gospel of Luke. Unlike Matthew, Luke does not necessarily spiritualize the poor when he mentions the first beatitude (Ringe 1995, 9). The poor represent those who are "outside the mainstream of society's benefits -- those who are maimed, lame, blind, or ill...." (Ringe 1995, 9). Scholars have also observed that the theme of the poor seems to have vanished in the book of Acts and hence one may question why the emphasis on the poor that we find in the Gospel does not appear in Acts.¹⁸⁹⁾ One of the suggestions given is that in Acts the focus shifts to the Gentiles who may be equated with the poor, as both the poor and the

189) Although a clear answer is not given, S. John Roth (1997) explores the various answers to this question under the heading; "The Poor as the Objects of Mission" in *Journal for the study of the New Testament supplement series 144* (pp. 34 -- 55).

Gentiles can be considered as “outsiders”. However, Roth (1997) argues that “the equation “poor equals outsider” does not accurately describe the function of the poor in the Gospel” (40).

Yet one thing all the scholars agree upon is that Luke does show us that the poor are also called and chosen to experience salvation. They will be lifted up and liberated. The poor need to be liberated through the redistribution of the wealth that has been amassed by the rich. Although Luke does not condemn wealth, the amassing of wealth as “a source of security is condemned ([Luke]6:24 -- 26; 12:13 -- 21; 16:1 -- 13, 19 -- 31)” (Ringe 1995, 9). Just as the mission of God creates an all-inclusive community irrespective of being Jews or Gentiles, the barrier caused by worldly riches is also broken down in the ministry of Jesus.

Similarly, Luke also highlights the plight of women and seem to be giving them a new focus, rather than being homemakers their primary task is to sit and listen at Jesus’ feet as seen in the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10: 38-42). Ringe notes that Luke may not necessarily be seen as a feminist writer, but he does show us that as the Gospel emerges gradually, “it is the women who model the key to the Gospel’s power. At the empty tomb the women “remembered” Jesus’ words (24:8), and that memory is the key that turns mourning into Easter joy……they have been active witnesses who in the moment of crisis are prepared to testify on behalf of the crucified and now risen Jesus” (Ringe 1995, 12).

Taking note that “Luke’s narrative contains a minimum of sixty-seven women,” (Arlandson 1997, 126), Arlandson reminds us that not all women can be seen in the materially “poor” category. Therefore, the notion that all women needed to be raised from their current economic position in society need not necessarily be true but there is the need to realize how women from different levels in society can be reached and transformed into witnesses to the ends of the earth. Luke’s witness with regard to women is therefore one of equality -- not as inferior to men -- as he faithfully portrays women as not only oppressed and downtrodden but also as successful people who contribute towards building up of the Kingdom. Luke, therefore, conveys the idea that “in the Kingdom of God women can be made equal to men or even rise above them” (Arlandson 1997, 191).

From this picture of the poor and women as portrayed in Luke-Acts we may say that Luke’s interest is in showing that the mission of God concerns the weak and the downtrodden in the

society. This section of the people which may also include the sick and the suffering need to be called into the kingdom of God. Witnessing to them the gospel brings about change not just in their spiritual life but also a holistic change for the better. Witnesses in this sense do not just evangelize with words but also helps in improving the social conditions so that everyone is able to play a role in providing for their daily necessities. Luke also notes that “for two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him” (Acts 28:3). This verse can be seen as God’s ability to provide for his people. As we also see in the feeding of the five thousand in Luke 9:10–17, which follows the sending out of the twelve, Luke seems to be pointing out that not just “preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere” (Luke 9:6), but also feeding the people to whom they witness to is possible and equally important.

iii. The fulfillment of the Jubilee

Salvation in its holistic aspect is a fulfillment of the Jubilee. In this respect, Christopher J.H. Wright points out three angles from which one may understand Jubilee. These three angles are, *the economic angle: Access to resources; the social angle: family viability; and the theological angle: A theology for evangelism*. From these angles, salvation is economically, “restoring to people the capacity to participate in the economic life of the community for their own viability and society’s benefit” (Wright 2006, 297). Socially, it restores the family and morality and theologically, it is a picture of the kingdom of God and God’s mission for the restoration of humanity and creation (Wright 2006, 297 -- 300). Thus Wright concludes that “When appropriately set in the light of the rest of the biblical witness, *the wholeness of the jubilee model embraces the wholeness of the church’s evangelistic mission, its personal and social ethics and its future hope*” (Wright 2006, 300). Wright (2006) also endorses the words of Jean Paul Heldt who says,

There is no longer a need to qualify mission as “holistic,” nor to distinguish between “mission” and “holistic mission.” Mission is, by definition, “holistic,” and therefore “holistic mission is de facto, mission … since we are created “whole,” and since the Fall affects our total humanity in all its dimensions, then redemption, restoration, and mission can, by definition, only be “holistic.” (323)

C. Jesus and Paul in missions

We may further look into Luke's theology of missions by referring to two of the main characters in Luke's writings, Jesus in the Gospel and Paul in Acts.

i. Jesus and his missions

Luke presents Jesus Christ as the son of God, that he has come to this world to liberate all human beings from suffering and oppression. Jesus is presented as the expected Messiah and also the inquiry of John the Baptist also proves Jesus' divine mission.

Jesus had a specific mission to carry out on the earth. This mission as put forward by Luke is popularly known as the Nazareth Manifesto (Luke 4:18-19):

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Jesus came to this world to liberate the captives and heal the sick. This was demonstrated all throughout his ministry. He healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, and set people free from the captivity of demons. Thus from a liberation view Jesus was the liberator. He liberated people from all kinds of bondages be it physical bondage or mental bondage or diseases and even from the bondage of tradition and human laws, such as the Sabbath laws.

a. To save even the worst sinner

Jesus went to places and reached out to people who were considered to be the worst of sinners. At a certain place, in a Pharisees house, a sinful woman came and anointed him. The Pharisees were not happy, but Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:36-50). Jesus also brought salvation to the house of Zacchaeus, the tax collector whom the Pharisees considered as a sinner and publican (Luke 19: 1-10).

b. To save the Gentiles

Jesus Christ sent his twelve disciples to preach good news to all people. (Luke 9:1-6). He also sent out 72 disciples. This number is significant because during those days it was believed that there were 72 nations in the world (Genesis 10).¹⁹⁰⁾ Further, to demonstrate his concern for the salvation for all he narrated the parable of the great dinner. When those invited failed to

190) 7 There is inconclusive evidence as to whether it was 70 or 72 disciples. However, it is clear that this number represented the number of nations in the world as recorded in Genesis 10.

turn up, he sent his servants to go and call anybody from road and lanes and compel them to come in. (Luke 14: 15–24). Luke thus portrays Jesus Christ as one who offered salvation for all.

c. To save the poor

The Mission of Jesus on earth was to bring good news to the poor. David Bosch also sees the poor as the most important among the “categories of people who are prominent in his [Luke’s] writings” (Bosch 2010, 86). When Jesus called his disciples, at least four of them -- Peter, Andrew, James and John -- were called from among the fishermen. The parable of the great dinner talks about bringing people from highways and byways. These are places where people belonging to the poorer section of the society would have been found and gathered (Luke 14:15–24). When Jesus and his disciples were watching how people offer gifts in the temple, Jesus took note of a poor widow who could offer only two copper coins and appreciated her (Luke 21:2).

ii. Paul and his missions

Marshall quotes Robert Maddox, regarding the identity of Paul as saying that “Luke says little about Paul’s theology but depicts him as the greatest Christian missionary and leader” (Marshall 1992, 227). Luke uses his artistic and theological ability to integrate Paul’s witnessing to the Gentiles as a fact that was according to the scriptures and validated by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

a. Paul’s base for missions

The Missions of Paul began with his conversion experience on the way to Damascus. This was an experience where he heard the voice of Jesus. He then went on to preach about Jesus and witness to the salvation that Jesus has to offer. Paul always preached in the synagogues first and then went on to those who were responsive to the Gospel. Luke also portrays Paul as seeking the approval and blessings of the Church in his Missionary Journeys, since it was through his ministry in the church that his task was revealed to him and it was the church that commissioned him (Acts 11:25). His mission centre was the church at Antioch from where he began his missionary Journeys.

b. Gentile missions

Paul is rightly known as the missionary to the Gentiles. In Acts 13: 39 he declares that

through Jesus Christ “..... everyone who believes is justified” and in Acts 13: 46, he says “..... we now turn to the Gentiles” since the Jews rejected the message. Paul thus takes the command to witness beyond Jerusalem, to the ends of the earth. Paul’s witness was centered on the cities and hence he reached out to many Gentile nations. He was able to set up many churches as seen in his successful journeys and his epistles to the churches that he ministered to. Through his awareness of the scriptures and the philosophies of his times he witnessed effectively as the Spirit led him from city to city.

D. Urban missions

Harvey M. Conn in his book, *A clarified Vision for Urban Mission*, begins by showing us the importance of Urban Mission. One of the first things that he brings to our attention is that a large percentage of the world’s population is living in the cities. This figure is ever rising rapidly. He rightly observes that, “Sadly, however, city evangelism and church planting have not been on the agenda of the church.” He quotes McGavran who wrote, “After a hundred and fifty years of modern missions, the plain fact is that churches have not done well in most cities of Africasia.” (Conn 1987, 15–17)

Luke’s writings address the issue of the rich and the poor in the city. In the gospel of Luke, the people that Luke mentions such as Jesus’ disciple Levi, a tax collector, (Luke 5:27–31), the centurion at Capernaum, (Luke 7:1–10), the sinful woman (Luke 7:36–50), the rich young man (Luke 10:25–37; 18: 18–29), the blind beggar (Luke 18: 35–42), Zacchaeus the tax collector (Luke 19:1–9), etc are people who reflect the cross section of people that we would expect to find in the cities.

In Acts also we find similar characters of the rich and the poor such as the crippled beggar (Acts 3:1–10), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40), Cornelius (Acts 10), Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth (Acts 16:11–15) and Paul’s trials before high ranking officials like Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, which reflect the urban setting of Acts. Paul’s claim to being a Roman citizen (Acts 22:22–23), the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), are also indications of the urban context of Luke’s writings. There is also the use of the word *polis* which directly refers to the urban concern of Luke–Acts.

i. Urban mission models

In order to identify strategies for urban mission in Luke–Acts, the ministry of Jesus and Paul

can be seen as effective models. Much has been written and studied about Paul and his ministry with regard to urban ministry. However, it is not in Acts alone that we find Luke referring to urban ministry, but the Gospel also has a lot to teach us about urban ministry.

a. Urban missions in the gospel of Luke

When Jesus returned from the Jordan after his baptism, he was led into the desert for forty days where he was tempted by the devil. The temptations that he had to face were related to food, power and authority and the question about his identity (Luke 4:1-13). These are the temptations that the people continue to face, particularly in the urban setting.

To each of the temptations faced, Jesus refuted by using the Torah, which also shows that Jesus' mission was a continuity of what was already there in the Old Testament. Jesus' mission did not reject the Old Testament but affirmed it and renewed the mission of God, bringing hope to all humankind.

Jesus ministry was holistic as he not only healed the sick and fed the people but also pronounced forgiveness of sins and gave them spiritual food. In the urban setting such gatherings where the kingdom of God is proclaimed and where miracles and healings take place many people come to experience the love of Christ. The sending out of the twelve (Luke 9:1-9), and later on the sending out of the seventy-two (Luke 10:1-24) are also important pointers towards the potential for holistic urban missions with the city serving as mission bases.

Urban missions should also follow Christ's model as a servant (Luke 22:7-38). As opposed to the desire for power and authority, the gospel needs to be presented through an attitude of service. Just as Jesus explained everything to the two disciples as they travelled, on the road to Emmaus, opening up the scriptures concerning himself (Luke 24:13-35), the urban missionary must be ready to make use of these encounters to minister to the people in the cities.

b. Urban missions in Acts

An interesting point to begin with as we study Acts is that Luke uses the word *Polis* the most in Acts compared to the other books. Even Paul in his letters uses this word less than Luke does (Conn & Ortiz 2001, 124). We find that "Luke is not content simply to speak of Joppa, Lystra or Derbe, Thyatira or Lasea. It is "the city of Joppa" (Acts 11:5), "the cities of Lystra and Derbe" (Acts 14:6), "the city of Thyatira" (Acts 16:14) and "the city of Lasea" (Acts

27:8……)” (Conn & Ortiz 2001, 128).

Acts begins where the Gospel of Luke left off – the ascension of Jesus. Just as the focus moved from Jerusalem to Rome we also find the movement from the temple to houses. In line with this movement in Acts, we can see the successful growth of house churches today especially in countries where there is restricted freedom to practice Christianity.

The rapid growth of the Christian population can also be attributed to the urban setting, through which not just people but entire cities were drawn towards the Gospel. This huge numerical growth further not just affected the cities but in turn affected whole regions. In this regard Conn and Ortiz notes that, “In the cities of Samaria “the crowds …… paid close attention” to Philip’s preaching (Acts 8:6). In fact, the response was so great that Luke comments, “Samaria had accepted the word of God” (Acts 8:14)” (Conn & Ortiz 2001, 135).

Of these urban churches, the church in the city of Antioch marks a new beginning in urban ministry as the believers began to reach out to the entire community irrespective of their background -- rich, poor, Jew, Gentile, men, women, etc. The mission needs to reach to all the people in the city that covers a wide range of people groups, religions and classes. These differences that may exist in the urban setting needs to be overcome and the testimony of the early Church about the Gentiles that, “They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have” (Acts 10:47; 11:12 -- 18), should be heard and testified in the cities today.

ii. Building witnesses in the City: The clergy and the laity

Although Conn suggests that we cannot consider the city as evil when compared to the village, there are evils that need to be addressed be it in the village or in the urban setting. The Christians are therefore called to be a prophetic voice that brings to light the dangers of sin and warns the people of its consequences while pointing towards the way out of it. This we can see in,

John the Baptizer’s powerful prophetic speech (Luke 3:11ff). His preaching against sin is even cited as the cause of his death (see Mark 6:18). Prophets, then, called sinners to repentance; they came to turn the hearts of children to their parents (Luke 1:17), and to make straight the way of the Lord (Luke 3:4). Prophets also spoke of revelations from God, new word of grace or judgment, or both (McVann 1991, 343).

This prophetic voice has to begin from the clergy, and also be boldly proclaimed by all who have come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The clergy¹⁹¹⁾ is that group of people who are part of the “full time” workers in the church. They are those who have received special calling to dedicate their life to the ministry of the church. It is their “profession” in the world. The clergy are called to follow the model of Jesus’ incarnation and carry forth the ministry of healing and setting the people free. They need to take care of the flock under their care and equip them to be sent out as sheep among the wolves. Through the strengthening of their sheep, the church can grow and bring about transformation in the society that they live in.

“Involving laypeople in community outreach has proven a powerful influence on cities ever since the church of Jesus Christ began” (Conn & Ortiz 2001, 253). The laity therefore needs to be empowered just as the early church was empowered so that everyone can effectively witness to the cities that they live in. There is ample support for the laity to be involved in spreading the Gospel. This is particularly found in the growth of the Church in Acts as we see the Holy Spirit moving people and congregations to establish congregations of believers. Conn and Ortiz (2001) quotes Braun who notes that,

“It was the scattered Christians of Cyprus and Cyrene…… who founded the church destined to spearhead missionary work to the Gentiles (Acts 11:20). Such churches as those in Laodacea, Colossae, and Hierpolis were the result of the efforts of laymen, not of apostles” ……One such congregation was the one in Jerusalem that witnessed the severe persecution of Stephen (Acts 8:1). This led to a displacement of God’s people into other regions (Acts 11:19). Some landed in Antioch (256).

It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians. The growth of the church through the efforts of the lay people as they were led by the Holy Spirit was one of the major reasons for the growth of the New Testament church.

We may note that witnessing is not with words alone but with one’s whole life. As Bonhoeffer has said, one must preach the Gospel at all times and speak only when necessary. The Christian lifestyle is one of the most powerful witnesses that one can put forward. The

191) 8 The term clergy refers to a group of people who have committed to serve God through the church. “In Christianity there is a wide range of formal and informal clergy positions, including deacons, priests, bishops, preachers, pastors, and ministers. The specific names and roles of clergy vary by denomination” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clergy>. Accessed on 5/31/2012).

early Church as found in Acts was able to present this living testimony of a community that was different. They presented a kingdom community in which “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had……. There were no needy persons among them…….” (Acts 4:32 -- 37).

III. Evaluation of Luke’s Theology of Missions

In order to evaluate Luke’s Theology of Missions we will first take a look at David J. Bosch’s view on the Lukan missionary paradigm, as expressed in *Transforming Missions*

A. David J. Bosch’s Interpretation on Lukan Missionary Paradigm

David J. Bosch, in the third Chapter of *Transforming Mission*, deals with the implications on mission that can be drawn out from Luke-Acts. He begins by pointing out that the Nazareth Manifesto found in Luke 4:16-21 has “replaced Matthew’s “Great Commission” as the key text not only for understanding Christ’s own mission but also that of the church” (Bosch 2010, 84). Another significant note that Bosch makes is that out of the many writers of the New Testament, Luke was perhaps the only Gentile author, and hence he brought in the view of the gospel from a different angle as he had the advantage of being a part of a different community and being accepted into the Christian community. He therefore wrote from the perspective of many communities (Bosch 2010, 85).

Bosch notes that in the Lukan view of missions, there seems to be a lot of emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Bosch also notes that there is also a “stunning crossing of social and religious barrier” which can be seen in Jesus’ association with women, the tax-collectors and Samaritans. These are clear pointers to Jesus’ concern for the weak, downtrodden in society as well as the gentiles. In the gospel of Luke, Bosch notes that there is however just one direct mention of the mission to the gentiles (Luke 24:27) compared to Acts, where the emphasis is on the gentile mission. Combining these two works of Luke, the main thrust can be seen as the poor, setting aside of vengeance and the Gentile mission (Luke 4:16-30).

While stressing on the Gentile mission Bosch also notes that Luke’s account does begin from the Jews and then to the gentiles. The Gospel shows Luke’s particular interest in the poor versus the rich. The emphasis on the Gentiles and the poor thus actually show God’s concern for the Jews and the rich.

Repentance and salvation is another important theme in Luke’s writings. The other theme is

that of “vengeance superseded”, there is forgiveness and peace rather than vengeance. For Luke “there is no room for vengefulness and wrath in the community of Jesus” (Bosch 2010, 113). Bosch also notes the important role of the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit not only *initiates* mission, he also *guides* the missionaries” (Bosch 2010, 114).

Another difference besides the Gentile missions, which can be noted in the two books of Luke is the Church. However the church is not something entirely new in the book of Acts but it is a continuation of Jesus’ ministry as we find that all the works are validated by the apostles, “Even Paul’s mission to Gentiles…… cannot get underway until the apostles have implicitly ratified such mission” (Bosch 2010, 120).

The Last paradigm about Luke–Acts that Bosch notes is that of *adversity and suffering*. Jesus had to “suffer these things” and even the disciples are called to follow the steps of the master by carrying their cross “daily” (Bosch 2010, 121). Bosch concludes by mentioning Frazier who says that “the way faithful Christians die is the most contagious aspect of what being a Christian means” (Bosch 2010, 122).

We can agree with Bosch that Luke’s mission theology has been summarized in Luke 24: 46–49 through the words of Jesus which reflect,

…… Luke’s entire understanding of Christian mission: it is the fulfillment of scriptural promises; it only becomes possible after the death and resurrection of the Messiah of Israel; its central thrust is the message of repentance and forgiveness; it is intended for “all nations”; it is to begin “from Jerusalem”; it is to be executed by “witnesses”; and it will be accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit. (Bosch 2010, 91).

B. Jews and Gentiles; the Rich and the Poor

As a Gentile, Luke wrote much about the Gentile missions especially through the life of Paul as a supreme example and pioneer of the Gentile missions. While doing this he never failed to mention the importance of Israel in the salvation story. The Gentiles are called not to form a new community but to become a part of the chosen community through their acceptance of the redeeming work of Christ.

Luke also had much concern for the poor, and it seems that the poor were more responsive to the gospel -- which is true even today -- yet at the same time the rich are not left out.

They can also play their part in the furthering of the Gospel if they realize that they are poor spiritually like Zacchaeus. It is an encounter with Jesus that matters most and not whether one is poor or rich. Yet, we do find an emphasis on the poor and the oppressed which is especially laid out in the Nazareth manifesto where the good news is proclaimed to the poor, liberation is proclaimed for the captives, and there is healing as the blind will be given sight. It is the proclamation of Jubilee, a time when there is rejoicing especially for those who have been bound up into slavery and poverty. This siding with the poor is not to oppose the rich but to bring about equality.

C. The focus on Urban Missions

The focus on Urban Mission in Luke-Acts is specially seen in the growth of the church and the frequent use of the word *polis* as compared to other writers of the Bible. The setting that Luke gives us in the Gospel, be it the people or the parables that Jesus uses point towards Luke's concern for the urban setting. There is also the Nazareth manifesto which points towards liberation of the poor and the oppressed which can be related to the cities today.

In the book of Acts we find this continued focus on reaching the cities, which many scholars would agree was one of the strategies that Paul used in order to be an effective witness. The book of Acts is especially helpful in encouraging the house church movement and cell churches that are growing rapidly today especially in the cities. This early growth of the church was because each member was led by the Holy Spirit to witness to those around them. The spread of the kingdom did not depend on the few leaders but all the Christians were powerful witnesses of Christ Jesus. Today Christians are called to witness especially in the cities as it is an important place where the rich, the poor, the educated, the uneducated, and people from different people groups gather together. Luke in writing to Theophilus, also appeals to all the Christians that they are to be witnesses for Christ wherever they are, be it in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria or the ends of the earth. Like Paul who "boldly and without hindrance [he] preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:31), the missions have to move towards the cities towards the culmination of the Kingdom of God in the New Jerusalem.

D. Commissioned to witness

The key word that we find in Luke's theology of missions is "witnesses". Luke himself is a witness. Luke is a witness because he has seen, experienced and searched for the truth about the

things that he has described (Luke 1:3). Jesus commissions his disciples because they have also been with him and have seen and experienced the truth in their lives. Without having witnessed what Christ has done, the disciples would not have been able to witness to Christ. Furthermore, it is the empowering of the Holy Spirit that emboldens them to witness to other people.

The commission to be witnesses therefore requires one's own experience of salvation by grace offered through faith in Jesus Christ, as well as the empowering of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles were witnesses to the life and works of Jesus. They had seen and heard all that Jesus did, yet they were not yet enabled to spread the Gospel until Pentecost. While Jesus was still with them, they did go out on a missions trip (Luke 9, 10) as they were sent out by Jesus. But once Jesus had been taken away from them they went into hiding and had to wait for the promised Holy Spirit to once again begin their missions. The Apostles experience with Jesus thus gave them the content of witness while the Holy Spirit gave them the power to witness.

The church today has to carry forward this commission. The church must experience the gift of salvation and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to share this gift to the ends of the earth. As members of the body of Christ and the church today, each individual who has witnessed the saving grace of God must look forward to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Like the church in Antioch, collectively as well as individually the Christians are commissioned to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. The Church needs to set the example of a Kingdom community and also look to extend this Kingdom community in obedience to the commission of Christ to be witnesses.

Conclusion

“Recent studies are right to emphasize that Luke is a historian *and* a theologian” (Wright 1992, 383–84); with this in mind, this thesis dwelt on the aspects in Luke–Acts that relate to missions as Luke faithfully recorded and presented the life and works of Jesus and the early church. Luke began his witness to history by assuring the audience that he has “carefully investigated” what he has written and he closed his story in Rome, signifying the “ends of the earth”, where the kingdom of God and Jesus is being preached without any hindrance. From the above study we can draw the following points regarding Luke’s theology of missions.

Firstly, being “faithful witnesses” wherever one has been placed as we participate in

witnessing “to the ends of the earth”. Witnessing can be as simple as living according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. All Christians are called to witness and hence play an important part as a member of the Kingdom of God, celebrating the year of the Lord in every aspect of one’s life. The church is called to witness to the salvation that has been made available through Jesus Christ.

Secondly, Luke’s theology is inclusive. It includes the Jews and the Gentiles, the rich and the poor, male and female and in fact the whole of creation. This shows that the most important thing in missions is the message of the gospel of the Kingdom that has to be presented to all people beginning from Jerusalem and then to the ends of the earth. This message is the message of salvation to all who would believe in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, missions in Luke–Acts, is not human initiative but rather the initiative of God. God has begun missions and continues to lead and inspire the people for missions through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit prepares and empowers the witness as well as moves the heart of the receiver of the gospel.

Fourthly, urban missions is very important today. It is a strategic place from which the ends of the earth can be reached. There is ample support in Luke’s writings that can be further studied to enhance witnessing to the cities and the urban setting today.

Thus, we may sum up that Luke’s Theology of Missions begins from God and has been passed to man through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. This mission aims at salvation for all who would believe: the Jews, the Gentiles, the rich and the poor and the varied urban population. This mission calls Christians to be witnesses wherever they are and to reach out to the ends of the earth. We are now in the generation that has to reach out to the ends of the earth. We have to witness and affirm the love of God in whichever place on earth God leads us to, be it among the Jews or the Gentiles, the rich or the poor or in the melting pot of cultures in the cities. We need to “.....recognize that wherever it exists, the Church of Jesus Christ always lives in a missionary situation” (Pierson 2009, 59). The mission is therefore to always be witnesses empowered by the Holy Spirit, as this is what the world needs and more so as it is what Jesus commands.

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