

# The Acts of the Apostles and the Mission

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This work examines the beginning of the *missio ad gentes* to spread the divine Good News in the *Acts of the Apostles*, and the basics of this beginning. The book of *Acts of the Apostles* is well known for its account of the activities of the early Church. One such activity focuses on the efforts that were made in preaching the Gospel, the mission to save. Since the mission to nations and the subsequent document *Ad Gentes*<sup>1</sup> can easily be traced from *Acts of the Apostles*, it is appropriate then to reread their roots from this very book. Below is a rereading of some of the roots in *Acts of the Apostles*, starting with the mission as the divine plan and the promise of God. This is followed by the Holy Spirit event on Jewish Pentecost, which opened the door to the evangelization of *all*, Jews and non-Jews. This was realized through preaching and a call to repentance that established the new Christian Community of prayer and service.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. The Mission

In a religious context, ‘mission’ can simply be said to be an activity of a movement that attempts to win others to a new understanding of a transcendent reality through either active means, that is, preaching

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<sup>1</sup> *Ad Gentes* is the abbreviation of *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, which is the Second Vatican Council Decree (7 December 1965) on the Missionary Activity of the Church.

<sup>2</sup> Besides the works cited in the footnotes throughout this chapter, the following books are also useful to the understanding of the theme in the *Acts of the Apostles*: M. DUMAIS, *Le Lange de l'évangélisation (Actes 13:16-41)*, Bellarmin, Montreal 1976; A. FLANNERY (ed.), *Vatican Council II, Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, St. Paul Publications, Badra 1975; J. JERVELL, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts*, Augsburg, Minneapolis, MN 1972.

and healing, or passive life witness. It is implied in Acts (1:6-8) that the essence of the Church is its mission. The Church and mission are inseparably interrelated. A Church without missionary activity is not a true Church.

### 1.1 The Mission According to God's Plan

The mission in *Acts of the Apostles* is primarily to be considered within the whole framework of God's plan.<sup>3</sup> The Acts' mission to nations is rooted in the overall plan of God. The intent of the divine plan is revealed to the reader in the birth narrative of Jesus: it is to bring light to the Gentiles and glory to Israel (Lk 2:32). And this plan is to be examined in the light of the person of Jesus, the definitive revelation of God, and His ministry. Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God, His offer of new life to the outcasts of society, and His announcement of the Kingdom of God, all possess a 'missionary character'.

The missionaries were aware too that their mission was to bring light to Gentiles and preach them salvation (Acts 13:47), that is, to restore all things to their proper place under the exalted Jesus (cf. Eph 1:22). It is a process that began with the Christ-event and finds its realization in the preaching of the disciples (Lk 24:46-49).

The preaching in Acts is, therefore, part of the overall plan of God. In fact, the activity of the members of the early Church apparently was to bear testimony to God's plan, which was advanced in the name of Jesus Christ; the testimony is part of the ongoing operation of God's plan. The preaching, thus, does not merely serve to report the Christ-event, it plays an integral part in the outreach of the divine plan, and the mission of the Church today should be viewed as an endeavor to enhance this plan.

### 1.2 The Mission as the Fulfilment of the Promise

The descent of the Spirit on the Jewish Pentecost is interpreted in the book as a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy and promise. The message of this prophecy is found among many others in prophet Joel. The prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 about the gift of the Spirit and prophesy has been wonderfully fulfilled on the occasion

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<sup>3</sup> See *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 2.

of Pentecost. The fulfilment of the promise is most clearly shown in Acts 2:17-21 where the author alludes directly to Joel 2:28. The Holy Spirit descends upon the whole group of Apostles (Acts 2:4), and prophecy is taken as the gift of the Spirit to the Apostles for bearing witnesses (Acts 2:32). This coming of the Spirit can be interpreted as a prophetic empowering of mission or witness.

Peter interprets the Pentecost event in terms of Joel's message where God promises to pour out His Spirit on all flesh, that is, on whole Israel. The Apostle moves from Joel's passage, with its mention of people calling upon the name of the Lord for salvation (Acts 2:21), to focusing on Jesus' crucifixion (Acts 2:22-23), and then God's raising Him from the dead and exalting Him to be Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:33-36). After His exaltation, Jesus poured out the promised Holy Spirit. The Apostle also picks up the prophetic promise of salvation to all who call upon the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21; Joel 2:32), and urges his hearers to call upon the Lord Jesus by repenting and being baptized for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Lk 24:47). They will receive the gift of the Spirit, since the promise is for them and their children (Acts 2:39). Peter's witness to Israel is that they should hear and embrace this message of renewal and eschatological blessing.

But the coming of the Spirit is not only for Israel. Pentecost also foreshadows the universality of the Church's mission. The Jerusalem residents who appear on the scene turn out to be representatives from every nation under heaven (Acts 2:5). Indeed, the geographical listing that follows in Acts 2:9f is a case in point. Of course, the languages of every nation are uttered at Pentecost (2:5-8) and the anticipated universality can be interpreted as a 'reversal of Babel', pointing to harmony rather than to the confusion of Babel. The text does not mention one new language spoken by the Spirit, but of different foreign languages from different nations being spoken,<sup>4</sup> thereby symbolizing the unifying force of the Church.

### 1.3 The Holy Spirit and the Beginning of the Church

The Spirit has a multi-dimensional role in the establishment of the Church and the mission. It is true that the founder of the Church is

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<sup>4</sup> A.T. LINCOLN, "Theology and History in the Interpretation of Luke's Pentecost", *The Expository Times*, vol. 96, n. 7, 1985, 205.

Jesus, but it is also true that the Spirit has a crucial part in the origins of the Church. Just as the Spirit is vital for Jesus' birth and ministry (Lk 1:35; 3:22), so the Spirit is vital for the Church's birth and ministry. For the Church, this is parallel to the virginal conception of Jesus under the power of the Spirit and to the descent of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism. Just as the latter took place in the context of prayer, so does Pentecost (Acts 1:14). The fullness of Spirit that is expressed here is used for the initial and permanent endowment of a person who is to serve God, such as Paul (Acts 9:17). It is especially used where a person is inspired by the Spirit before making some statement under prophetic inspiration or preaching a sermon (Acts 4:8f). Applied to the Church, it means that the Spirit-filled Church is ready for the service of God.

## 2. Mission to All

### 2.1 To Jews

The mission in Acts is the new mission with a different criterion from the old covenant.<sup>5</sup> The Old Testament election was now replaced by election in the Christ-event. Thus, in Acts, the mission to the Jews calls for the mission to non-Jews. It is a single mission in its perpetuation and realization. In addition, it is to be perpetuated and realized among the Jews as well as among non-Jews.

Considering it was a Jewish Pentecost, the Jews could not be absent from the feast. But the Spirit that descended on the Jewish Pentecost brought eschatological renewal to Israel (Acts 3:19-21), along with a call to repentance. In fact, Pentecost focuses on Israel and the miracle it brings leads to the establishment of a repentant and believing Israel. The audience is Jewish (Acts 2:5). The message is to "all the house of Israel" (Acts 2:36) and to "all that are far off", that is, to the Jews in diaspora or to the other nations (Acts 2:39). The "Twelve" are to be taken as the foundation of a renewed Israel (Acts 2:14). It is to be noted here that for many Jews the Feast of Pentecost was important not simply because it celebrated the offering of the first fruits of the wheat harvest but also because of its association

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<sup>5</sup> See *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 1965, 14.

with the renewal of the covenant made by God with Israel.<sup>6</sup> It is on this occasion that pneumaphany<sup>7</sup> takes place. The pneumaphany appears to be undergirding an eschatological covenant renewal at Pentecost. The Spirit is therefore the fulfilment of the covenant promise (Acts 2:39; 3:25).

## 2.2 To Non-Jews

Although the mission to non-Jews is taking place according to God's plan, it was strongly challenged from many quarters. According to the Jews, the mission of salvation is reserved exclusively to Israel, the people of the law of God, God's elected people. With such limited revelation it was difficult to see how non-Jews could be included in the array of God's elected people. Thus, the legitimacy of the mission among the Gentiles is to be drawn from the very fact that Gentiles are part of those promised to Israel. It is the God of Israel himself who forced the Church to accept Gentiles as its members. This irresistible force of God in accepting Gentiles is exemplified in the story of Cornelius in chapter 10 of the Acts and in other incidents (15:7-10,14): God ordains Peter to proclaim the Gospel to Cornelius and then to baptize him. The whole Gentile mission is for the sake of the name of God (Acts 15:14).<sup>8</sup> This is what can be read in Acts 10:34-43, which is a speech addressed to the God-fearing among the Gentiles where Peter affirms that God shows no favoritism.

The mission to the non-Jews is a further step in the fulfilment of God's plan. In addressing the Jews, the Apostles point out that the Gentiles are part of the salvation plan. The introductory statement of Peter's speech at the house of the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:34-43) shows a significant moment in the history of the mission. The message to Israel also includes Gentiles and those who can be reached through Israel, and that the Gospel is for all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. In his speech to Jews at Jerusalem, in Acts 2:39, Peter says "the promise is to you and your children and to all that are

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<sup>6</sup> A.T. LINCOLN, "Theology and History in the interpretation of Luke's Pentecost", 205.

<sup>7</sup> Pneumaphany here means the appearance and the descending of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>8</sup> J. JERVELL, *Theology of the Acts of Apostles*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, 22-23.

far off”: though “far off” can be interpreted as relating to the diaspora Jews, it can also be read in the light of Luke 24:47 and Acts 1:8, where the passage can be understood as indicating the inclusion of Gentiles in the promises to Israel.

The conversion of Gentiles is the fulfilment of the promises to Israel. It does not mean, however, that the promises made to Israel have been extended to the Gentiles, while excluding Israel, but that Gentiles have gained a share in what has been given to Israel. This fits with Jewish expectation that at the end of time Gentiles will be included in the restored Israel. The conversion and restoration of Israel is the basis for the Gentiles’ seeking the Lord, so that missionaries operate in synagogues with their mixed audiences. Conversion occurs via the synagogue, because here the scattered of the Dispersion are gathered, because the inclusion of the unrepentant must take place here, and because here the Gentiles can be found. God’s chosen people in Acts of Apostles are therefore defined by a response to a call to conversion which does not exclude anyone.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.3 New Election: Repentance and Faith in Christ

A shift from the old covenant and election demands new terms, i.e. repentance and faith in Christ. This is what is presented in the climax of Peter’s speech in Acts 10:37-40, which is none other than an invitation to repentance, baptism, and reception of the Spirit. Jews are invited to repent as their sin could easily be considered as idolatry, a denial of the law and its first commandment (Acts 7:40-43). Idolatry is ignorance and occurs when God as creator is not acknowledged. All idols are made by “human design and skill” (Acts 7:38; 17:29; 19:26) and are therefore nothing but worthless follies (Acts 14:14-18).

But since many Jews rejected Jesus and the message, Peter called them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus. In his speech (3:11-26), while aware of God’s promise to them as chosen people, Peter does not hesitate to call the Jews for repentance. Thus, the Christ-event is described as taking place within a Jewish framework: the people to whom the witnesses shall preach (10:42) is Israel and election now occurs by repentance and faith in Christ.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 20-21.

Acts of the Apostles also provide an account of the Gentiles' history of idolatry and worship of worthless things (14:14-18). But Peter was brave enough to stand up against the heathens' idolatry in 17:22 ff. and to call them for repentance.

Through repentance and faith in Christ, a new generation seeking the creator came into being not out of circumcision, but out of repentance and baptism. The position upheld by the Jerusalem Church that Gentiles were to be circumcised before admission<sup>10</sup> was no longer tenable.

However, it was not so straightforward since circumcision was not the only issue at stake. The missionaries encountered other cultural problems while dealing with Christian converts, obliging the disciples to come up with a new morality to tackle the problems. While the non-Jewish Christians were free from observance of circumcision, they were obliged to observe the primary and necessary articles of ethics and faith: the first prescription in the Apostolic Decree required them to abstain from pollution of idols, to abstain from meat offered to idols, from blood and things strangled and from fornication (Acts 15:20f).<sup>11</sup> To show the gravity of the sin of idolatry, it is believed that when King Herod obliged people to hail him as a divinity was only to be immediately smitten down (Acts 12:22-23).

### 3. Preaching

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, which of course occurred during Jesus' mission, the preaching of Good News was resumed with Pentecost. The Pentecost event brought about new impetus to the preaching of the Apostles, who had been commanded to do so by Jesus himself<sup>12</sup>. Their mission of proclaiming the Gospel started in Jerusalem. Chapters 2-4 of Acts clearly show just how many people Peter and the other Apostles came to faith in Jesus through their preaching. There are plentiful examples in which the disciples are shown preaching the Good News: "after spending some time there, Paul departed and went from one place to the next through the re-

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<sup>10</sup> M. GOODMAN, *Mission and Conversion, Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1994, 170.

<sup>11</sup> J. JERVELL, *Theology of the Acts of Apostles*, 20-21.

<sup>12</sup> *Dei Verbum*, 7.

gion of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23). At the end of this journey, Paul did not return to Antioch because he seemed to have been pressed for time (Acts 21:4) and planned to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 20:16). Paul’s arrest made further visits to Antioch impossible. Yet Paul possibly had planned a further visit there on his way to Rome (Acts 18:22; Rom 15:22-24).<sup>13</sup> With these good examples one can easily see that the Apostles invested a lot in the mission charged with them by Jesus.

The Apostles’ zeal in spreading the Good News, through their missions and speeches is reported in Acts: “And every day, in the temple and from house to house they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42). They were charged by their opponents with “filling Jerusalem with their teaching” (5:17-28). The resistance of the Jerusalem religious leaders was focused on the Apostles; as the other Christians were not yet targeted.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.1 Preaching, Divine Initiative

The spread of the Gospel is an important theme in Acts and it is signaled by a number of key verses: Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31. A close examination of these verses and others, of course, shows how dependent the preaching is upon divine initiative. At key moments in the story, it is God who steps in and moves events on, not least in the events of Pentecost. The Pentecost launched the mission, for there God poured out the Spirit (Acts 2:4, 16-17, citing Joel 2:28) and thus enabled the believers to proclaim God’s praise in many languages (Acts 2:4-11). Peter’s speech, which explains how God is acting in the event, led to three-thousand people being added to the community of believers (Acts 2:41).

The sending and the mandate that was given to the missionaries remained as a basic resource in their functionality. In this manner, the Apostle who replaces Judas is chosen by God (Acts 1:24); what happened on the day of Pentecost occurred because of God’s initiative (Acts 2:17-21); and the healing of the lame man (Acts 3:1-10)

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<sup>13</sup> C. STENSCHKE, “Mission in the Book of Acts: Mission of the Church”, *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa*, vol. 103, 2010, 76.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.



is an act of God. When charged to cease speaking in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:17), Peter insisted on the divine necessity of the Apostles' actions (Acts 4:19; 5:29). In declaring that what the Apostles were doing was not a human undertaking (Acts 5:38) but God's (Acts 5:39), Gamaliel advised the Council not to oppose the Apostles, for "you might even be found opposing God" (Acts 5:39). Thus, the divine impetus for the activity of the Apostles is clearly underlined.<sup>15</sup>

In most cases, as it is today, speeches were a response to a given situation or need. Acts of the Apostles contains sixteen major speeches;<sup>16</sup> and a striking feature these speeches share is what one may call the 'necessity' of the preaching. The preacher is commanded to preach, as it were, by the activity of God. The preachers do not deliberate whether or not to preach; the situation demands the preaching, for example Peter was compelled to preach at Pentecost (Acts 2), after the healing of the lame man (Acts 3:11), and in response to the accusation of the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8-11; 5:29-32). The same necessity is found in the preaching of Stephen and Paul. Stephen was forced to give an apology in response to the accusation of the Jerusalem synagogue that he spoke against the temple (Acts 6:8 ff.). Paul was miraculously called and chosen for the specific task of preaching (Acts 9).

In other words, preaching in Acts is initiated by circumstances outside the control of the disciples. Preaching, one may say, is the outcome of God's activities. The Acts, therefore, emphasizes the necessity of the preaching of the Gospel; God's activity in human experience demands the preaching. As the mission in Acts is governed by God, so too is the preaching. Since God's sovereign will and plan determine the mission, it is by no means the initiative and work of the human agents, such as Peter or Paul.

### 3.2 Preached Message: About God

Preaching in Acts is focused on specific themes. The Apostles and missionaries in general were focused on their preaching. Up to that

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<sup>15</sup> J.T. SQUIRES, *Plan of God in Luke-Acts*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1993, 58.

<sup>16</sup> Most frequent are the speeches of Peter (six speeches), Paul (eight speeches), Stephen, and James.

moment, the community was heterogeneous and the missionaries had to take into account what was common to all. Thus, the teaching about God is abundant. God is designated as the creator, “maker of heaven and earth and sea and of everything in them” (Acts 4:24; 14:15; 17:24); the designation serves to demonstrate God’s power over creation (Acts 4:24); further, the book condemns each and everything that does not conform with His nature, thus, the book writes off idolatry and “temples made by men” (Acts 7:48; 17:24) and shows God’s power over history.<sup>17</sup>

There is yet an invitation in Acts to realize that God is constantly at work in history. History, thus, gives us a comprehensive mode of the action of God, extending throughout the whole span of human history according to the divine and intention.

Yet, the best thing we gather from the book is that God is associated with salvation history (Acts 13:47; 16:17, and 28:28). The mission to save the created, therefore, cannot be excluded from God’s saving power and His initiative to save the created. In the New Testament, it is God who reconciles the world to Himself and it is God who takes the initiative and who directs the accomplishment of this reconciliation.<sup>18</sup> It begins with God Himself sending His only Son (cf. Jn 3:17; Gal 4:4). So, the mission to save avails us an occasion to think about the immense love of God revealed in His only Son.

### 3.3 About Jesus

Most prominent in the kerygma of apologetic preaching is the resurrection account: that God raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection is not simply an historical event, it is an event with cosmic dimensions, it ushers in a new age (Acts 2:17-23, 32-36). Indeed, the suffering and resurrection of Jesus are central in the divine plan for the salvation of the world (Acts 2:32). The basic content of the speeches in Acts, therefore, describes how God acted for the salvation of the world. Suffice it to say that in the preaching the conviction that God acted is inseparably linked with how he acted, viz.

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<sup>17</sup> J. JERVELL, *Theology of the Acts of Apostles*, 19.

<sup>18</sup> G.W. HULITT, “Ambassadors of Reconciliation: Paul’s Genius in Applying the Gospel in a Multi-Cultural World: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21”, *Review and Expositor*, vol. 104, n. 3, 2007, 594.

through the suffering and resurrection of Jesus, and, one may add, through the preaching of the Gospel. Therefore, the subject of the preaching in the Acts is the divine plan. God acted to restore all things to their proper place; and God acted through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and is now acting through the preaching of the disciples. Therefore, Paul's words in Acts 20:27, that he proclaimed the whole plan of God, should be understood in terms of God's action in salvation-history, and not only in terms of a body of doctrine.

In Jesus Christ, therefore, God's activity in the history of Israel is manifested. The key figure in this history, and so also in Christology, is God himself. God is the saviour, even when salvation is tied to the Christ-event (Acts 4:12). God himself is the very centre of Christology, something demonstrated by the strong reliance on the Scriptures in the Acts of Apostles, which is the revelation of God's will, works and words throughout history, finding meaning in the Christ-event.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.4 Healing and Miracles as a Form of Teaching

The Acts presents us with various events of healing performed by the Apostles. Healing and other miracles can be interpreted as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy (Isa 35; Jer 31). It is an eschatological prophecy in which the restoration of the original order of things and people bring joy. The healing in Acts not only restores health to the afflicted but also encourages the simple recognition of Christ as a powerful deity, that is, intent on apologetic mission. This, after all, was the most likely effect of the witnessing of miracles and healing, for which there is much evidence.<sup>20</sup>

It can be said, therefore, that healing and miracles were another form of preaching the Good News. It is important to note here that the God of the people is responsible for the Christian miracles, performing miracles as He once did through Moses (Acts 7:36). The Apostles witnessed the resurrection of Jesus with "great power". And their preaching was sometimes confirmed by miracles and

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<sup>19</sup> J. JERVELL, *Theology of the Acts of Apostles*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> M. GOODMAN, *Mission and Conversion, Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire*, 75.

signs (Acts 15:12).<sup>21</sup> This is what we read in Acts 8:6f that Philip's preaching effectiveness hinged on deliverance ministry and healing (Acts 8:7).

That it is God who performed miracles remained as the primitive understanding of the people. Even when it is said that the risen Jesus performs miracles, it is God who did them through the name of Jesus (Acts 3:6,16; 4:30). What is decisive is not that miracles happened, but that they were miracles of God. The wonders were always connected to the preaching and served to show the irresistible nature of the Word of God. Miracles performed by others were mentioned in some summaries with a stereotypical and characteristic form: God performed signs and wonders through Apostles etc. (Acts 2:19; 4:30; 14:3,27; 15:4,12; 19:11), or signs and wonders occurred through them (Acts 2:43; 5:12; 8:13; 19:11-12).

The healing of the man at the Beautiful Gate of the Jerusalem temple (Acts 3:1-10) is one of so many cases that can be used to prove the matter. The narrated event calls for the action of God in healing this man. Peter's speech happens "while he clung onto Peter and John" (Acts 3:11), and the healing provides the starting point for his words (Acts 3:12). Indeed, Acts 3:12 suggests that Peter's speech arises from the implicit questions raised by the healing.

### 3.5 Persecution

It is unfair to reflect about the mission and leave out persecutions which were a blessing in disguise. The success of their mission could not leave the missionaries safe; persecutions came as an answer to the missionary success of the Church.<sup>22</sup> It is an undeniable fact that persecutions were meant to hamper further evangelization. Christians had to put up with false accusations and persecutions (Acts 14:22) for the sake of the Gospel. This is testified in Acts 8:1-4 and 11:19f., texts which show clearly the situation of the Church by that time: "And there arose on that day a great persecution against the Church in Jerusalem, and they all were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles" (Acts 8:1).

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<sup>21</sup> J. JERVELL, *Theology of the Acts of Apostles*, 50.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

Though the Apostles, apparently, were made to stay behind their city<sup>23</sup>, they continued with the mission of preaching the Good News. The result of the persecution in Jerusalem, thus, is that the scattered Hellenists and others went about preaching the Word (Acts 8:4). Through their ministry many churches came into being (Acts 9:31, 36-41). According to Acts, these churches did not come into being only through the ministry of the Apostles, but also through other devout converts to Christianity.

It can also be read in Acts 11:19-20, which states specifically that after persecution arose in Jerusalem, some of the scattered brethren in Phoenicia and elsewhere preached only to the Jews, but men of Cyprus and Cyrene' on coming to Antioch spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus'.

### 3.6 The New Christian Community is Born

The efforts of these missionaries and their preaching of the Gospel resulted in the founding of new churches and communities. In short, from these simple divine beginnings, that is, of sending and praying for the sent (Acts 13:3), the Church began to spread throughout regions and nations.

Just as it is prophesied in Isa 55:10-12, the Word of God bears fruits. Peter's preaching led many to believing, and the number of believers rose to five-thousand (Acts 4:4); only the Sanhedrin demanded believers to stop speaking in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18). As the story moves on, the believers' prayer led to renewed power from God (Acts 4:29-31). The development of Gospel ministry in Samaria is also greatly dependent on the power of God.

Being aware that the mission was of divine origin, they sought recourse for His power through prayers. There are different incidents of a praying community. In Acts 2:42, the prayers are introduced as the fourth chief article of the summary there given; also in the Pauline epistles, the basis and the sphere of the Christian life are summed up in these four articles (together with Baptism). Again, prompted by the Holy Spirit, Barnabas and Saul were commissioned with fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands by the Church in Antioch, which itself had been founded and nurtured by

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<sup>23</sup> C. STENSCHKE, *Mission in the Book of Acts: Mission of the Church*, 70-71.

Christians from Jerusalem. As missionaries of the Antiochene Church, Barnabas and Saul started what became known as the first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3), preaching the Good News.

With time, the apostolic era began fading away and new ministers started to emerge. Acts 14:26 recalls that they had been commended in Antioch to the grace of God for the work which they had to fulfil. These statements bracket the account of the journey. The activities that take place in these brackets are activities of the Church of Antioch through its various missionaries, and Acts 11:19-26 testifies this as it says much less about the presence of the Apostles.<sup>24</sup> This means that the Church was taking root among persons with courage to embark on the mission; courageous people who could stand on their own and defend God. This is attested in the prayer of Acts 4:24-30, the members of the congregation request God to enable them to speak with boldness, while God causes healings and signs and miracles to happen through the name of Jesus. Thus, the mission in Acts of Apostles was carried out by simple but courageous, determined and devout persons able to venture and break in to different cultures and beliefs.

#### 4. *Missio ad Gentes* in Acts: Conclusive Observations

The *missio ad gentes* which can be deduced from the Acts of Apostles admits the differences of backgrounds, cultures, and races. Despite these differences, there are yet common things people share: creation, the power that realizes and moves this creation, and finally our destiny. Whatever the belief or understanding, creation is an *undeniable reality* that demands us to find the creator; it is now revealed that the creator is God or whatever the name. Again, there is a need to understand how the created is sustained and what is its destiny. Hence, the need for revelation that was given through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the mover. So, speaking of the mission to all, to Jews as well as non-Jews, one should think of God as the One who took the initiative not only to create, but also to sustain and save mankind and all creation. This is what is known as God's plan. Herein lies the relevance of the mission: that people should know all this.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 74-75.

While it is true that the mission in the Acts of Apostles is none other than the continuation of God's mission to save the universe in the person of Jesus, it is also true that a lot had to be overcome, including widespread persecutions. Through these unwanted and unexpected persecutions the phenomenon of *imitatio Christi* was glowing; and through this imitation the Apostles and other missionaries carried out God's mission to save wherever they were and acted according to different circumstances. The persecutions did not bar altogether Apostles' efforts to carry out God's mission to save mankind.

However, the recognition of their status as disciples of the Risen Jesus was not enough, this recognition was manifested in their mission and message. Though the mission remained the same the message had to take another orientation. The determining factor was now the Christ-event. The Christ-event, particularly the resurrection, was at the centre of their preaching. Not only did the resurrection of Christ give them new potency offsetting the negative effects of the crucifixion, it became also the subject matter of their preaching. To the resurrection was attached the original message of Jesus: the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God and its demands, that is, a call to repentance and faith in the One sent. Just as it was in the case of Jesus' preaching of the Good News, their preaching was upheld by signs and miracles, which, of course, should not be ignored when preaching the Good News in terms of building hospitals, schools, helping the poor and spiritually stricken persons and through so many other charitable works.