

Let the Spirit Lead: Missionary Lessons from the *Acts of the Apostles*

❖ KIERAN J. O'MAHONY

Since the Second Vatican Council, it has been clear that the *missio ad gentes*¹ lies at the heart of being the people of God.² The choice is stark: the Church grows or the Church dies. It does not matter whether home missions or foreign missions are intended. In reality, traditional Christian countries in Europe are now mission territories all over again.

For a variety of causes, the Catholic Church is not in an ideal place for mission: the new “evangelical” atheism, the general failure in handing on the faith (already for up to three generations), cultural resistance to absolute claims and life-long commitment, the decline of the ministerial priesthood and, not least, the damage done by the tsunami of child sexual abuse.

There is another issue that many shy away from naming: the breath-taking implausibility of the Christian proclamation. For believers – usually cradle Catholics at home in the faith – it can be hard to appreciate what a leap of faith and courage it is to believe in Jesus Christ and his teaching, in his death and resurrection. Why should God disclose himself in a backwater of the Roman Empire, 2000 years ago, in a single human life? Furthermore, it has become increas-

¹ Decree *Ad Gentes on the Mission Activity of the Church* (1965), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), *Christifideles Laici* (1988), *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), *Porta Fidei* (2011), *Evangelii Gaudium* (2012).

² See P. HEGY, *Wake Up, Lazarus!*, iUniverse, Bloomington, IN 2011; M. WHITE – T. CORCORAN, *Rebuilt. The Story of a Catholic Parish*, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN 2013; I. LINDEN, *Global Catholicism. Diversity and Change since Vatican II*, Hurst & Company, London 2009. More recently: J. HARTL – K. WALLNER – B. MEUSER (Hrsgs.), *Mission Manifest. Die Thesen für das Comeback der Kirche*, Herder, Freiburg 2018.

ingly difficult today for Christians to proclaim “what happened for us” in “the great events of salvation”, given the intellectual collapse of the Anselmian model of redemption.³ If we cannot speak in a culturally resonant way of what lies at the heart of the matter, then evangelisation and *missio ad gentes* are correspondingly compromised and undermined.

In brief, mission has become more urgent, more complex. One part of the task must be to open our foundational texts, the Scriptures again. Here, we turn to the *Acts of the Apostles*, seeking inspiration and insight for today. We will take the following steps: the genre of Acts, mapping Acts, the speeches as the “interpretative constant” across the tumultuous tale, the crucial role given to the Holy Spirit, and the dialogue with culture.

1. The Genre of Acts

The Acts is a thrilling read, full of events, people, unexpected twists, and showing a tremendous energy. It encompasses the break with Judaism and the inclusion of the Gentiles, while offering on the way a large biblical theology of history, traced chiefly in the many speeches. In theory and principle, the Acts recounts a history taking us from the ascension of Jesus to the house-arrest of Paul in Rome, roughly from AD 30 to some time around AD 64. The book makes no effort to tell the whole story comprehensively; instead it offers a highly selective reading of those thirty-five years, combining a racy chronicle with narrative repetition and repetitive thematic insistence. Its story really gets underway with the Pentecost *tableau* and ends somewhat suddenly and intriguingly: “Paul lived there two whole years in his own rented quarters and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with complete boldness and without restriction” (Acts 28:30-31).

The last word in Greek is “without restriction”, that is, *unhindered*, surely one of the great open-ended (non-)endings.

³ The traditional Western model of redemption stems chiefly from Anselm of Canterbury (1033/34-1109). The limits of the model have been apparent for a while on biblical, theological, and scientific grounds.

The Acts cannot be history as it has been practiced in the West since the Enlightenment.⁴ According to Paul Ricoeur, there are three kinds of history: documentary, explanatory, and poetic.⁵ These serve different functions and all three are to be found in the Acts. Documentary history is present in the main characters, as well as in the geography, politics, Roman institutions, place names, and so forth. Explanatory history tries to understand the sequence, both over time and in terms of cause and effect. Poetic history is at a different level. It includes regular divine interventions, as well as other “trans-natural” phenomena. There are sudden transportations and disappearances, releases and rescues. Nevertheless, the Acts is not a novel, nor biography, nor history, nor apologetics in the strict sense, although it shows characteristics of all four. It is, rather, a narrative of origins (“histoire de commencement”), broadly historical and strongly apologetic, aimed at instructing the hearers / readers at the time of writing, and shaping the choices of later generations. Perhaps all history is like that to some degree – not simply a recovery of the past but a shaping of perspectives in the present, so as to mould the future.

Many scholars think the Acts is a later New Testament document, from around AD 110-115.⁶ The implied context shares concerns found also in the Pastoral Letters (the presence of “wolves”, the risk of heresy, the tendency towards rejection of the Old Testament, unease with the empire, yet no direct persecution and so forth). In particular, it may reflect a reaction against *incipient* Marcionism, which flourished in the mid-second century AD. It is likely that the first appearance in print of such a blatant rejection of the Jewish roots of Christianity reflects an earlier development. Such a context would account for Luke’s insistence from start to finish on precisely the Jewish matrix of the Christian movement.⁷

⁴ “Wie es eigentlich gewesen” in the phrase of the German historian Leopold von Ranke.

⁵ Cf. D. MARGUERAT, *La Première Histoire du Christianisme. Les Actes des Apôtres*, Cerf/Labor et Fides, Paris-Genève 2007, 20-21.

⁶ Cf. R.I. PERVO, *Dating Acts*, Polebridge Press, Santa Rosa, CA 2006.

⁷ Apart from the works cited in this essay, these were also helpful in gaining an understanding of mission in the *Acts of the Apostles*: A. BOTTINO, “La missione ‘fino all’estremità della terra’”, in G. LEONARDI – F. TROLESE (eds.), *San Luca Evangelista. Testimone della fede che unisce*, Istituto per la Storia Ecclesiastica Padovana, Padova 2002, 335-350; H.J. CADBURY, “The Speeches in Acts”, in F.J.

2. Mapping the Missio ad Gentes in Acts

The Acts is the only history book in the New Testament. Printed Bibles very often guide the reader with maps and in particular maps of the missionary journeys of St. Paul. A *literary* map such as this may help, bearing in mind that the Acts is part of a double volume.

Luke-Acts: A Simple Outline

Preface	Luke 1:1-4
Part I • The Time of Israel Reaches its Climax	Luke 1:5-2:52
Part II • The Time of Jesus	Luke 3:1-Acts 1:26
Part III • The Time of the Church	Acts 2:1-28:31

An expanded “map” can be produced for the Acts alone:

Transition to Part III	Acts 1:1-26
Petrine Christianity: Jewish Mission from Jerusalem to Antioch	Acts 2-12
Pauline Christianity: Gentile Mission from Antioch to Rome	Acts 13-28

Such a neat outline does not quite follow the text. Stories do overlap in such simplistic divisions. For example, “Petrine” Christianity shows the following sequence:

Christian beginnings in Jerusalem	Acts 2:1-8:1
The Church expands to Samaria and beyond	Acts 8:2-40
Conversion of St. Paul	Acts 9:1-31
<i>Key scenes</i> • Peter, the conversion of Cornelius, and the formation of the Antioch Church	Acts 9:32-12:25

FOAKES JACKSON – K. LAKE, *The Beginnings of Christianity: Part I, the Acts of the Apostles*, Macmillan, London 1920-33; G. LEONARDI – F. TROLESE, *San Luca Evangelista. Testimone della fede che unisce*, Istituto per la Storia Ecclesiastica Padovana, Padova 2002; V.T. NGUYEN, “Mission in Acts: An Inspiration for the Pilgrim Church”, *The Bible Today*, vol. 52, n. 3, 2014, 133-139; M. SCHÖNI, “Un modèle centrifuge et un modèle centripète? Jésus et la mission de l’Église selon Luc-Actes et selon Jean”, in M.H. ROBERT – J. MATTHEY – C. VIALLE (eds.), *Figures bibliques de la mission*, Cerf, Paris 2010; D.P. SENIOR – C. STUHLMEUILLER, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, Orbis Books, New York 1983; M. WHITE – T. CORCORAN, *Rebuilt. The Story of a Catholic Parish*.

Notice that the Paul story is already anticipated within the account of the “Petrine” mission. Finally, “Pauline” Christianity shows these steps:

Gentile mission, promoted from Antioch	Acts 13-14
Gentile mission, confirmed in Jerusalem	Acts 15:1-35
Gentile mission, culminating in Rome and incorporating Paul’s “passion narrative”	Acts 15:36-28:31
Paul’s “passion narrative”	Acts 21:17-28:31

2.1 “Petrine” Christianity: *Acts* 1-12

The *Acts* is never boring because of the layers of stories, long and short, and the intercalation of speeches. This can be disconcerting. For instance, in the section devoted to the “Petrine” Church, we find long narratives, very short self-contained stories, sustained narratives of persecution, and repeated “vignettes” of community life.

Examples of the substantial narratives in *Acts* 2-12 are Pentecost itself (2:1-42), the martyrdom of Stephen (6:8-8:1), the “conversion” of Saul (9:1-29), the conversion of Cornelius and his household (10:1-11:18). Around these large stories, we find shorter scenes, which move the story on: the healing at the Beautiful Gate (3:1-10), the complaint of the Hellenists against the Hebrews (6:1-6) leading to the appointment of the seven to serve at table, while preparing us for the martyrdom of Stephen; Simon Magus (8:9-24); the account of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (8:26-40); the delightful story of Tabitha (9:36-42). Within that, there are sustained narratives of persecution, echoing in some sense the passion narrative of Jesus himself (3:5-22; 5:17-42; 8:2-3; 12:1-23). Along with that story of persecution is affirmation of the continued well-being of the community and the spreading of the Word (2:43-47; 4:32-37; 5:1-11 [a contrasting tale]; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24-25).

2.2 “Pauline” Christianity: *Acts* 13-28

The second half of *Acts* starts with a new, secondary Pentecost. Again, we find substantial narratives, short stories or anecdotes, sustained narratives of persecution (this time from “the Jews”), repeated vignettes of community life and conversions. Again, these are intriguingly intercalated.

Then we have the first of the missionary journeys (Acts 13-14; Antioch in Syria, Seleucia, Cyprus, Paphos, Perga, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Pisidia, Pamphylia, Attalia, Antioch in Syria). Within that grand story, there are minor tales such as the highly ironic blinding of Elymas, and the healing of the man crippled from birth with the attempt to worship the disciples.

2.3 Grand Narratives

For instance, the first missionary journey (Acts 13-14; Antioch in Syria, Seleucia, Cyprus, Paphos, Perga, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Pisidia, Pamphylia, Attalia, Antioch in Syria). The “Council” of Jerusalem is a major turning point in the narrative because it lays down the minimal conditions for communion between Christ-believing Jews and Gentiles (15:1-35). The second missionary journey shapes the next great arc of story-telling (Acts 15:36-18:22), mainly Syria and Cilicia, taking in Derbe, Lystra, Phrygia, Galatia, Troas, Samothrace, Neapolis, Philippi, Thessalonica, Amphipolis, Appolonia, Thessalonica, Beroea, Athens, Corinth, Chenchrae, Ephesus, Caesarea, Jerusalem, Antioch in Syria). The third missionary journey also forms a large arc (Acts 18:23-21:22): Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Assos, Chios, Mitylene, Miletus, Cos, Palatra, Tyre, Jerusalem.

2.4 Short Stories

A good example is that of Bar-Jesus / Elymas (13:4-12) – a highly ironic tale, of course. Other vignettes include Lydia (16:14-15); the slave girl (16:15-18). The story of Paul on the Areopagus is one of the great set-scenes of the Acts, where the Gospel preaching takes on the philosophers of Athens on their home territory (17:16-33).

2.5 Opposition / Turning Away from the Synagogue (Pisidian Antioch, 13:44, 48-50; Iconium, 14:2-7)

Opposition is registered among those insisting upon the full observance of the Law (15:1-5). Considerable opposition is experienced at the hand of slave owners and, for the first time, the disciples are put in prison, leading to a miraculous escape (Acts 16:19-40). In Thessalonica, the Jews are not happy with Paul's preaching (17:1-13), and Paul is removed a few times for safety, ending up in Athens. In Corinth, there is further opposition (18:12-17) but no jailing.

We cannot omit the “passion narrative of Paul” (Acts 21:17-28:31) which brings the Acts to such a dramatic, open-ended conclusion.

With all these themes working in counterpoint, does the symphony hold together, is it a coherent composition? A number of “elements” favour synthesis: the agency of the Holy Spirit, the consistency of the proclamation, the proposed vision of salvation history, and the open engagement with new contexts and cultures.

2.6 Pentecost Experienced Again and Again

Pentecost is first of all a Jewish feast, celebrating the wheat harvest. By the first century, this regular agricultural celebration had come to mark the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. In the world of Luke-Acts, it is the beginning of the gathering in – harvest – under the new Law of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the miracle of the languages is a reversal of the tower of Babel story in Genesis. The linguistic miracle is more than the mere overcoming of foreign languages: instead, a message is offered which speaks to every human heart, across all cultural boundaries and divisions. The adjusted citation from Joel tells the reader that something to do with the end of time has taken place, that is, something to do with God’s ultimate plan of salvation for all humanity: “And then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21). The implied inclusion of all this is important because, at least initially, the proclamation is to Jews and proselytes only, and the mission to the Gentiles is not yet in view. This limited audience is clear from the list in Acts 2:5-11, and from the address in 5:14. Throughout, the writer respects the Pauline order, to the Jew first and then to the Greek.

The Pentecost *tableau* is a symbolic synthesis of the many experiences of the Spirit, scattered throughout the Acts. Early in Acts itself, we have a “second” Pentecost, in response to persecution: “When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the Word of God courageously” (Acts 4:31).

The Spirit descends again in Acts 8, but this time by means of the laying on of hands (Acts 8:14-17).

Before the second part of Acts starts, there is a new Pentecost, on Cornelius and his household (Acts 11:15). Further on, there is another descent of the Holy Spirit, on followers of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7). Pentecost is foundational but not at all “once and for all”.

2.7 Consistency of the Proclamation

In his Pentecost sermon, Peter proclaims Jesus, Baptism, and the Holy Spirit, and at the very end Paul is preaching the same Good News: “Therefore, let all the house of Israel know beyond a doubt that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36); “Repent, and each one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself” (Acts 2:38-39); “From morning until evening he (ed. Paul) explained things to them, testifying about the Kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus from both the law of Moses and the prophets (Acts 28:23)”; “Therefore be advised that this salvation from God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen!” (Acts 28:28).

This echoes the Emmaus story, offering a concentrated summary statement, each element of which merits reflection: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled’. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it stands written that the Christ would suffer and would rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high’ (Lk 24:44-49).

Johannes Nissen provides a useful summary of the points made:⁸

1. The basis of mission: the death and resurrection of Jesus.
2. The *fulfilment of the Scriptures*: the disciples are reminded that the life and death of Jesus must be seen in the light of the Scriptures.
3. The *content* of the mission: this is summarised as *repentance and forgiveness*.

⁸ J. NISSEN, *New Testament and Mission. Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt-am-Main 2006, 50.

4. The *purpose* of the mission: it is to be “from Jerusalem” but is intended for “*all nations*”.
5. The disciples are called to be witnesses.
6. Mission will be accomplished in the power of the *Holy Spirit*.

These combined threads are woven together throughout Luke-Acts and consistently appear throughout the fabric.

2.8 History of Salvation

Even the casual reader of the Acts must be struck by the sheer quantity of talk throughout the text. The initial impression is backed up by statistics. A full half of the Acts is made up of sermons, discourses, and letters and within that, one third of the text consists of Christian sermons. These speeches “map” the grand narrative of salvation history. The very grandest of these must surely be the speech of Stephen before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:2-52, offering a vast panorama from Abraham to the crucifixion of Jesus. This great plan of God is noted a few times in the Acts (emphasis added): “This man, who was handed over by the predetermined *plan and foreknowledge of God*, you executed by nailing him to a cross at the hands of Gentiles” (Acts 2:23); “For David, after he had served *God’s purpose* in his own generation, died, was buried with his ancestors, and experienced decay” (Acts 13:36). “For I did not hold back from announcing to you the *whole purpose of God*” (Acts 20:27).

This purpose (*boulē*) of God did not take place simply in Jesus. It existed before the time of Jesus and continues in the time of the Church.⁹ But already in Peter’s Pentecost speech, the grand vision is unfolded, in the light of prophecy and the psalms. The grand vision accounts are: 2:14-26 (Pentecost), 3:12-26 (Solomon’s Portico), 4:8b-12, 19b-20 (before the Council), 7:2-52 (Stephen again), 13:16b-41, 46-47 (Antioch in Pisidia), 17:22-31 (Areopagus), 28:17c-20, 25b-28 (Rome to the Jewish leaders). Even though brief, the final dialogue between Paul and the Jewish leaders takes up, in somewhat compressed fashion, the very same themes of divine plan, fulfilment in Jesus, and the mission of the community of faith.

⁹ M.L. SOARDS, *The Speeches in Acts. Their Context, Context, and Concerns*, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 1994, 187-189.

2.9 Engagement with Cultures

The language of the Acts traces in a subtle way the cultural outreach. At the start, the Greek echoes that of the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint). By the end, Luke writes in an Attic dialect, more suited to the cosmopolitan outreach portrayed.¹⁰ This cultural outreach can be further illustrated by contrasting three speeches of Paul in Antioch, Pisidia, Lystra, and Athens.

1. Antioch in Pisidia (13:13-43)

The speech in Antioch offers another grand vision of salvation history, working this time with the figure of David and the Psalms. The preaching is successful on the first Sabbath but the presence of Gentiles caused upset on the second Sabbath. Nevertheless, Paul speaks appropriately to a mainly Jewish audience, using arguments and tropes that appeal to them.

2. Lystra (14:8-20)

This time, the audience is made up of pagans. Paul must first correct a serious misinterpretation: the Lystrans take Paul and Barnabas to be Hermes and Zeus. For this pagan audience, Paul argues from nature and creation, using examples from farming and the weather. Naturally, it would not have made sense to have argued with them from Scripture, at least to begin with.

3. Athens (17:22-31)

The audience has changed to sophisticated *urban* pagans. Luke sets up a grand “debate”, a gladiatorial contest between philosophy and the Good News. Epicureans and Stoics are named, as is the Areopagus, the place of their disquisitions. The argument cannot be from

¹⁰ “As Acts moves into the Greek world, in its second half, the quality of its Greek improves. When Paul faces a learned or elite audience, as in chapters 17 and 26, his Greek reaches its highest point. These examples also show that, although he can deploy a few optative and Attic idioms, Luke had difficulty when attempting to write good Greek periods. His literary ambition exceeded his ability.” R.I. PERVO, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN 2009, 8.

Scripture or from agriculture. Paul makes us of his inspection of the city and his discovery of an altar to an unknown god. Thus, using philosophy and poetry, he adapts himself to those before him. Paul provides a kind of “secular” salvation history, as follows: “From one man he made every nation of the human race to inhabit the entire earth, determining their set times and the fixed limits of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope around for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move about and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring’” (Acts 17:26-28).

This constitutes a remarkable adjustment to his audience, their experience and their way of looking at the world. There is still a divine plan, but expressed in a way that non-believers may be encouraged to glimpse it. Antioch, Lystra, and Athens illustrate Luke’s desire to engage respectfully and deeply with his surrounding worlds. Neither Luke (nor Paul, his *porte-parole*) asks his hearers to come into his world: rather he goes out to theirs.

3. Towards Some Conclusions

The *Acts of the Apostles* is a truly unruly account of origins, exhibiting a huge cast of characters, peppered with a vast number of summaries, anecdotes, dramas, conversions, and longer narratives. It *might* be better termed the *Acts of Peter and Paul*. But even they are not the true chief protagonists of the *missio ad gentes*. An even better title would be the *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, given the presence, power and unpredictability of the Spirit throughout.

Luke is calling his generation to trust the Holy Spirit. The protagonists in his story have all to adjust to the agenda of the Spirit. The plan is not *theirs*. On the contrary, the role of the missionary disciple is to listen, in each generation, to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches (Rev 2:7). This hearing and obeying is the highest, perhaps costliest, form of conversion of heart. In the conversion of Cornelius, it is really *Peter* who undergoes the significant change of heart. Both Peter and Paul are effective agents of proclamation because they themselves experience the conversions required.

In the Acts, conversion takes the *form* of attending to and being led by the Spirit. The *content* of that conversion is Jesus, his mes-

sage, cross, and resurrection. The proclamation, taking in an astonishing variety of contexts and cultures, remains the same: God has raised this Jesus from the dead, triggering the final, Jubilee era of God's forgiveness and grace offered to everyone. Authentic proclamation means that the proclaimer has "heard" this for him- or herself. Anything less than that will be second-hand, third person, hearsay (Job 42:5).

In the Acts, there are no "programmes" which will "do the trick". Instead, we have deeply engaged believers doing the hard slog of persuading others of the Good News by means of robust dialogue, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. While the grand narrative does not really change across the Acts, a faithful *relecture* of Acts requires us not simply to repeat but to have the courage to create our own meta-narrative, taking full account of how we view the world today, evolution, human rights, inter-religious dialogue, and care for the earth.

The Acts affirms the rootedness of the Christian project in God's disclosure to the people of Israel. There is continuity and connectedness, even bearing in mind the novelty of the Christian proclamation. The stability of God's continued disclosure is at stake here. The one God – creator, saviour, lover – shows himself in creation, in human experience, in the variety of cultures and cultures, to the first "chosen" people and now to all nations through Jesus' death and resurrection. Our challenge is the same as that faced by Luke: to speak of the continuity and the innovation, the one God speaking to all and yet something new and wonderful took place in Jesus.

The dialogue that Luke illustrates across his text invites us today in the *missio ad gentes* to a dialogue with our surrounding societies, cultures, and religions. As in the Acts, this will mean *robust* dialogue, real conversation, which sometimes will work and other times not. While we know what we hold and proclaim, dialogue means not coming with a package, the deposit in the old language, but with an offer of relationship, which must consider the contexts and contentions of the other earnestly. Paul's experience in Ephesus is instructive: Paul argued in the synagogue *for three months* and then went to the *skolē* of Tyrannus, meaning a lecture hall for public instruction and debate, *for two years!* Clearly, Luke wants his readers and hearers to abandon their comfortable house churches for a real encounter with outsiders.

Luke is convinced that the house church is the basic model, providing that belonging and intimacy which alone can sustain both the individual believers, and the believing community. He is so convinced of it that he chose to place his last dramatic scene in the setting of a house church and chose, presumably with great care, his final words to his readers and hearers. The house arrest of Paul becomes both a house church and a *locus* of final dialogue with the Jews. The author closes his ambitious two-volume project as follows: “Paul lived there two whole years in his own rented quarters and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with complete boldness and without restriction” (Acts 28:30–31).

It is often noted that the very last word in Greek is *akōlutōs*, without hindrance or restriction or unhindered. Paul is *unhindered in himself*. Although under house arrest, he is a truly free man, set free by Christ and free from all self-interest. He welcomes all and proclaims “with boldness”. Paul is *unhindered by the weight of institution* – easier, of course, in his day! But still, what matters to him is not “the Church” but the Gospel. To be of service requires some level of “infrastructure”, as Paul himself knew so well, and yet all these things are only means to an end, that the Gospel may be preached, heard, and lived. Finally, *the Gospel itself is unhindered*. It is clear throughout the Acts that the unruly Holy Spirit inspires faith in unexpected places. There is no way of knowing what the Spirit will do next.

The faith today will be lived and proclaimed by smaller, intentional missionary communities, within which the believers encounter the Risen Lord and know conversion of heart and life. Thus, grounded in their own Pentecost, they will be able to go out as prophets to the world confidently and respectfully proclaiming the Gospel: “For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself” (Acts 2:39).