



Biblical foundations for mission

Fundamentos bíblicos da missão

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Abstract

The Church has been a missionary from its very inception. From the Apostolic to our contemporary times this comprehension has been preserved by the Church. This shift from its parental religion Judaism is well noticed and becomes prominent in all the activities of evangelization. Undoubtedly, there is some solid biblical basis for the missionary task undertaken from the apostolic times. But why did the Church do so and how do the Church maintain this mandate? An honest exploration of the biblical basis and the role of the Holy Spirit is being investigated in this article. The prominent role of the Holy Spirit seen as an instrument for this understanding and the role of the Holy Spirit has been seen as the foundation for the mission.

Keywords: Apostolic. Foundations. Inception. Missionary mandate.

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Resumo

A Igreja tem sido missionária desde seus primórdios. Desde os tempos apostólicos até a nossa contemporaneidade esta compreensão foi preservada pela igreja. Esta mudança de sua religião parental, o judaísmo, é bem notada e torna-se proeminente em todas as atividades de evangelização. Sem dúvida, há uma sólida base bíblica para a tarefa missionária empreendida desde os tempos apostólicos. Mas por que a igreja o fez e como a Igreja mantém este mandato? Uma exploração honesta sobre a base bíblica e o papel do Espírito Santo está sendo investigados neste artigo. O papel do Espírito Santo, visto como instrumento para este entendimento e ao mesmo tempo o Espírito Santo visto como Fundamento para a missão.

Palavras-chave: *Apostólico. Fundamentos. Primórdios. Mandato missionário.*

Introduction

That the Church, be it Catholic or any other denomination, has been missionary from its very inception, from the Apostolic times, is a given; no one needs to contend it. However, why did the Church¹, unlike its “parent religion” Judaism, become so prominently a missionary Church? Undoubtedly, there is some solid biblical basis for the missionary task undertaken from the Apostolic times. But why did the Church do so and how do the Church maintain this mandate? An honest exploration of the biblical basis and the role of the Holy Spirit is being investigated in this article. Was it the work of the Apostles or was it the Holy Spirit who was doing all the work?

Evangelical Foundations for Mission

Jesus was an itinerant “missionary” is evidently in the Gospels. The evangelists inform the readers that Jesus went from place to place. There

¹ Here and elsewhere, the term Church, in a more general way, will refer to any mainline Church or denomination.

is a remarkable statement in the Gospel of Mark which indicates the intention of Jesus. On the morrow, after a busy Sabbath day activity, Jesus rises early — before dawn — and goes to a “deserted place” (ερημον τοπον) to pray. His first disciples, viz., Simon Peter and companions (cf. Mk 1:16-20), look for him and report saying, “Everyone is searching for you” (Mk 1:37). Obviously, the people who looked for Jesus must have been those who were sick and those who must have heard about the many healings he had performed the previous evening. Such popularity might have got the better of Jesus. However, Jesus does not yield to such a “temptation” of returning to the place of popular acceptance. What is interesting in the context is Jesus’ response to the suggestion of Peter and company. He tells them, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do” (Mk 1:38)². This statement of Jesus, right at the beginning of his public ministry, underlines his “missionary intent”. Jesus was not to be a static, institutionalized, teacher; he intended to be on the move. He was not going to wait for people to come to him in one place or entertain those who merely seek miracles, but he was going to go from place to place, proclaiming the kingdom of God. In addition, Jesus emphasizes the divine injunction to his course of action: “that is what I came to do”. God, the Father, had sent him to be a missionary, to “proclaim the message”. Jesus intended to do precisely that. Jesus does not sit in any one place; he does not get attached to a place of acceptance or popularity; rather he goes in search of the people who are “like sheep without a shepherd” (Mk 6:34; cf. also Mk 6:6b; Mt 9:35). Hence, Jesus clearly manifests, in and through his own ministry, that he has come to do the mission for which His Father had sent him to. Nothing else would matter to him and no one can deter him from this mission.

² Unless otherwise stated, the Text of Holy Scripture, NRSV, is from Bible Works™ Version 7.0.012g, Copyright © 2006 Bible Works, LLC. Similarly, Greek or other versions, the directly quoted verses are from this same source.

Mission “Practice” for the Twelve

Jesus not only engaged himself in the mission of the Father, but also invited his disciples to continue this mission. For this very purpose, he personally “delegated” them with his own authority and sent them out “in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go” (Lk 10:1; Mk 6:7). The mission command at the end of the Gospel of Matthew seems to be only an addendum to this “missionary journey” of the disciples during the earthly ministry of Jesus himself. It does seem to stem from this intention of Jesus to have his disciples go everywhere in order to continue to proclaim the message. In comparison to other religious leaders or “founders of religions” Jesus seems to have set a different life-style for his disciples. We hardly find other religious leaders of various other religions following this practice. Even from a socio-religious point of view, the Missiology of Jesus is strikingly different. Jesus did not wait for a time when He would entrust the mission fully in the hands of his disciples; he did so while he was still with them. Was it to test their capacity? Was it to ascertain whether he could entrust the mission to them? The intention of Jesus did not seem to be such. His intention was to proclaim the message. In this respect, the third evangelist had more “missionary” interest than the other two. Luke sends out not only the twelve (Lk 9:1-6; cf. Mk 6:7-12) but also the seventy others (Lk 10:1-20). The longer instruction and the subsequent reaction of Jesus when they return and report their “heroics” (cf. Lk 10:17), indicates the foundation of the future mission that Luke narrates in the entire book of Acts. Lukan favorite aspiration seems to be mission. Hence, unlike both Mark and Matthew (the Lukan evangelical “predecessors”) Luke, the third evangelist, writes the sequence to the Gospel. Luke makes it explicitly clear that the mission was the same for Jesus and his followers. This mission was to be continued, spread to all the world and for this purpose, he was going to empower them with the power of the Holy Spirit. So, Luke writes: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit’s role is now brought out. But the Holy Spirit will

accompany the followers of Jesus, only after Jesus returns to the Father (Acts 1:8; Lk 24:47-49; Jn 14:16, 12; 16:7-8).

Cast Fire upon the Earth: Urgency and Scope of Mission

“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!” (Lk 12:49-50). In the Lukan context, this sudden change of topic and tone of Jesus’ teaching seems to be “out of place”. Jesus is engaged in teaching different things prior to this statement in Chapter 12 of the Gospel of Luke. This sudden change calls our immediate attention and opens itself for a deeper reflection and pause! The thought must have been uppermost in the mind of Jesus. Why does Jesus “jump” to this “fire upon the earth”, and, “a baptism with which to be baptized”? The urgency of this “mission” cannot be ignored even by a casual reader of the text. Jesus’ intention to inaugurate the Kingdom and its spreading all over the world is evident here. Jesus wants that the mission begin immediately: “how I wish it were already kindled”. He also wants it to spread all over: “I came to bring fire to the *earth*, . . .” In other words, one can also hypothetically propose that Jesus’ mission is not merely a matter of the distant future; it is erupting now! The “fire” has been kindled. It needs to burn bright and strong. Secondly, this burning fire is not limited to one nation, one particular people, viz., the people of Israel/Judah. It has to spread and reach all the people. Most likely, therefore, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus sends not only the twelve on a practice mission but also the seventy for a wider reach out!

Another aspect that must be emphasized here is that Luke seems to be more intent on spreading the good news than his two other Synoptic friends. The “opening scene” of Jesus and his mission (after the Baptism and Temptation) is in the Synagogue, on a Sabbath, in *Nazara* (Nazareth). In this curtain raiser, Luke once again underscores the mission of Jesus by selecting the pertinent passage from the book of Isaiah. To quote:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Lk 4:18-19; cf. Isa 61:1; 58:6b; 61:2a).

While Mark is busy casting out the unclean spirit (Mk 1:21-28), and Matthew engages Jesus in "Mosaic form of teaching on the Mount" (Mt 5:1-7:28), Luke brings Jesus to his own native village to proclaim the message of liberation and God's favor. In other words, Luke seems to be more concerned about the spreading and the extension of the mission than the other two evangelists. In addition, for Luke, this mission is all about total liberation of the people who are oppressed, depressed, suppressed and are without any hope of recovery. To such people, Jesus comes to proclaim the year of the favor of the Lord. This also indicates not only the scope of the mission, but also the nature of the mission. Again, in his response to the question of John the Baptist, who was in prison, Jesus gives a similar reply: "And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them" (Lk 7:22). The good news being brought to the people is emphasized once again. Hence, one can clearly notice the urgency and importance of the spreading of the good news during the earthly ministry of Jesus. The same urgency is then emphasized later in the Acts of the Apostles as well as in the mission of St. Paul.

The scope of the intended mission is all the more emphasized in another important passage. Many of the biblical scholars now agree that Acts 1:8 is a *programmatically verse*. Here, the Risen Jesus, just before His ascension, tells the disciples: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in *Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:8; emphasis added). As in the case of the mission command in Mt 28:16-20, here too, Jesus emphasizes the scope of the mission. The proclamation of the good news is no more limited only to the Jews; only to Jerusalem and Judea, but indeed to the "ends of the earth". That the good news has been — and continues to be — proclaimed all over the world is merely an actualization of the Lord's intention. In reality, therefore, the good news is indeed proclaimed, and

received by the millions even today, even in the remotest parts of the world. I myself have worked as a missionary in Papua New Guinea³. It is an island country in the southern hemisphere, just north of Australia, in the Pacific. Given the population of the country (about five million) the number of Christian missionaries belonging to all denominations working in Papua New Guinea is amazing. What is more encouraging, and equally challenging, is that many missionaries have sacrificed their lives in this country not due to persecution but due to widespread malaria that has taken the lives of so many missionaries. In spite of all the possible difficulties and hurdles, the missionary activity in Papua New Guinea is in full swing. The good news continues to be proclaimed because the Holy Spirit has empowered these missionaries just as the Holy Spirit had empowered the disciples according to the promise of the Lord.

Role and Function of the Holy Spirit

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, *the Holy Spirit said*, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them”. Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out *by the Holy Spirit*, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus” (Acts 13:2-4, emphasis added). A categorical statement like this leaves little room for any imagination or speculation. The author of the book of the Acts

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could not say it louder or with more clarity⁴! In yet another place, the Holy Spirit prohibits the intended missionary undertaking: “They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been *forbidden by the Holy Spirit* to speak the word in Asia” (Acts 16:6, emphasis added). One gets the impression that behind every move or missionary journey, the Holy Spirit either impels or prohibits the undertaking. Such examples, especially in the Acts of the Apostles abound. In fact, the entire process begins only after the Holy Spirit had descended on the Apostles on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1-12). Peter, the leader of the Apostles, had begun to proclaim about the death and resurrection of Jesus only after receiving the Holy Spirit. But the immediate question that arises is: Why does the author attribute the missionary action to the Holy Spirit?

The role of the Holy Spirit in the work of spreading the good news about Jesus is not only limited to the book of Acts. It is more clearly pronounced even by the fourth evangelist. In the Gospel of John, we find Jesus teaching his Apostles, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (Jn 14:26). Was it not enough for the disciples/Apostles to know what Jesus had taught them? Could they not understand and remember what he taught? Why did they have to be taught by the Holy Spirit and be reminded of all that Jesus had already taught? Was the teaching of Jesus in any way inadequate or insufficient? Or, was it the lack of understanding from the part of the Apostles that the Holy Spirit had to come upon them to enlighten their minds? To any one of us, these questions should bother a lot. But the biblical authors write in such a way that this is quite simple and normal. The Holy Spirit had to come and set all things straight. By themselves, the disciples/Apostles could not do much!

⁴ The author, as is generally known, is assumed to be Luke, the evangelist. But he will be simply referred to as “author” in order to avoid any debate on the authenticity of the authorship of the book of Acts of the Apostles.

The “Road-Map” of the Holy Spirit

“So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to *Seleucia*; and from there they sailed to *Cyprus*”. This above quoted statement from Acts 13:4, gives a “road-map” for missionary journey to be undertaken by the Apostles Paul and Barnabas. In other words, all the planning, the strategy, the time of execution, the places to be visited and evangelized, are all prompted by the Holy Spirit. From a divine point of view, this makes perfect sense: How could the mortal human beings know where to go and what to expect when we do go there? Only the Divine wisdom can suggest ways and means. Therefore, as we noted above, Jesus instructs, and informs, his Apostles that the Holy Spirit will teach them and remind them all that was taught by him. But there seems to be more to this: even the missionary dimension is also part of the Holy Spirit’s portfolio. Of course, Jesus did give the mission command saying: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations*, [...]” (Mt 28:18-19). However, it looks like it is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit to direct the Apostles to go, or not to go, and “make disciples of all nations”.

An apparent ‘contradiction’ of a sort can be noted in the above-mentioned verses. In Acts 13:4 the Holy Spirit makes the two chosen Apostles go to Seleucia, en route to Cyprus, a small island. We also noted that the Holy Spirit forbade them to go to “Asia” (that is most likely the present day south-eastern part of Turkey), whereas, Jesus commanded the twelve to make disciples of “all nations”. Why this difference? Here we need to take into consideration also the geographical (or better, geo-political) aspects. Going to Galatia, Phrygia, and other areas through the Taurus Mountains in Cilicia (along Tarsus, the birthplace of Saul/Paul) would have been a difficult travel in comparison to the sea voyage through Cyprus. So, if the Holy Spirit forbade the Apostles from going into Asia, it may not have been due to any other “religious” reason; it could simply have been more convenient the other way. Secondly, this “prohibition” while writing the book of Acts, could have been prompted very much by the reality of the mission work of Paul and Barnabas. The mission work of Paul was easily undertaken along and towards Europe

and not to Asia! Again, this could have been due to the fact that Paul knew Greek, and possibly Latin, the two major languages of the “Roman world”. Going into Asia would have required of them the fluency of other Middle Eastern languages! In other words, going to Seleucia, Cyprus and then on to Pamphylia, Phrygia, etc. had practical advantages. So, this “prohibition” by the Holy Spirit not to go to Asia, but to take the road to Cyprus, does not contradict the mission command of Jesus to make disciples of “all nations”. It simply must have been a matter of geographical, political, and religious advantages.

Woe to Me if I do not Proclaim the Gospel

If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and *woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!* For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel (1Cor 9:16-18).

St. Paul must be considered as one of the most prominent, indomitable, stalwarts of missionary activity of all times. Never did the Church have such a zealous, self-sacrificing, committed, missionary like Paul and never it may have one again. This quote from his first letter to the Corinthians is a standing testimony of the “obligation” Paul felt in preaching the good news. But why did Paul feel this way? Why is it that any other missionary did not feel the same pressure or urgency?

Necessity of Missionary Proclaimers

As much as Paul thought of his ministry of proclaiming the good news as an “obligation” placed on him, he also understands that there cannot be any proclamation without any proclaimers! This may sound odd; for common sense tells us that to do a plumber’s job, we need a plumber! To have a hospital running, we need doctors, nurses, and most

of all patients too. But emphasizing the need of the proclaimers of the Word, Paul asks some rhetorical questions as follows:

For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And *how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?* As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Rom 10:13-15).

In Pauline understanding, the necessity of choice and sending of the missionaries is of paramount importance. This activity, of course, is a divine prerogative. The Lord calls the ones He wants. He sends them out to proclaim the good news; for the *good news* that the missionaries should proclaim is about the Lord Himself. There is a sequence in this missionary activity in the reverse order. The series of rhetorical questions raised by Paul help us to see that the missionaries (1) *are sent to proclaim the good news*, (2) they proclaim the good news, (3) the people hear the good news that is proclaimed by the missionaries, (4) then, the people believe — in God — whom the missionaries proclaim when they hear this good news, (5) and then, the people call on God about whom they have heard. This is now in the reverse order. Basically, this is a sequential activity, one leading to the other. And, finally at the end of the rhetorical questions, Paul quotes the prophetic word to show the importance of the missionaries and the joy this proclamation brings. Paul quotes, most likely, from Isaiah: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’ (Isa 52:7). There is also another similar passage in Prophet Nahum: “Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace!” (Nah 1:15). Hence, sending of the missionaries, proclamation of the good news by those who are sent, are “essential” parts of the missionary activity. We get to read an explicit example in Acts 8:26-40, where the deacon Philip was taken by the angel of the Lord to teach, explain and baptize the Ethiopian Eunuch. The Ethiopian was reading the book of Isaiah without having any clue about whom the prophet was talking about. Philip explains to him

the text and proclaims that Jesus is the “lamb led to the slaughter” for our salvation. Needless to say, therefore, that the missionaries are required. People have to be chosen and sent but the choosing and sending is the prerogative of the Lord.

“I have Chosen you . . . Sent to Bear Fruit . . .”

“You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name” (Jn 15:16). This is an interesting statement of Jesus in the gospel of John, placed at such a literary context that it is hard to miss its importance. Speaking about “being united” as branches with the vine and having to lay down one’s life to manifest the greatest act of love, Jesus then goes on to say this. In other words, in the point of view of Johannine Jesus, a true missionary is one who is first of all, united with the Lord, one who has been loved by the Lord, one who has experienced His love, one who has been chosen and finally sent to “bear fruit, fruit that will last”.

What kind of fruit can a missionary bear? In the former times, at least before the great Second Vatican Council, the “fruit” borne by the missionaries was measured against the number of converts, number of baptisms. A missionary was often asked: “How many people did you baptize?” But at the present time, such a question does not seem to be quite appropriate! Because, conversions of people to Christianity are rare. Adult baptisms are also not too frequent or common. In many of the places, direct conversions are not even allowed; there is so much political and/or religious opposition. In some other places, there is an unhealthy competition between different denominations within the Church⁵. This is a force against the mandate of Jesus. Due to the internal fights and squabbles, many non-Christians find it difficult to accept the message and embrace the faith. In such adverse conditions, bearing fruit is not easy. However, one cannot just give up, sit back and feel helpless. As Paul tells us, we must continue to proclaim the good news, *in season, out of season* [...].

⁵ The present writer knows well the difficulties and opposition faced in a country like Papua New Guinea.

In Season, Out of Season . . . No Season

Paul brings out yet another important aspect of spreading the good news and missionary work. Is there any particular, *auspicious*, or good time to proclaim the good news? When should one proclaim the good news? Should we proclaim only when the atmosphere/climate is suitable or only when it is personally convenient for people? Paul's injunction to Timothy stresses the aspect that there is no such thing as an auspicious or convenient circumstance for preaching. He tells him clearly:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: *proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable*; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching (2Tim 4:1-2, emphasis added)⁶.

The emphasis of Paul cannot be missed by even a casual reader of this passage. "Proclaim the message, [...] whether the time is favorable or unfavorable" says Paul. In other words, proclaiming the good news is a must at any cost. No matter how the reception is, whether people accept the message or not, the good news has to be proclaimed. This is in line with Jesus' own injunction to his disciples when he sent them out with his instructions: "But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near" (Lk 10:10-11). In these instructions of Jesus, the aspect of proclaiming the good news is clearly emphasized. If, perchance, in a village people refuse to listen to the proclamation, the proclamation itself should not be stopped. This implication of the instruction of Jesus cannot be missed. Leave that village, for good, go to other places — but proclaim the message nevertheless. Paul too, in the letter to Timothy, seems to underline the same, for he continues saying:

⁶ The authenticity of the authorship of the letters to Timothy by Paul is widely contested. Most likely, Paul is not the author of these "Pastoral Letters". Having said that, we merely accept the more conventional or traditional view here without going into its debate on the issue.

For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully (2Tim 4:3-5).

Another aspect needs to be reflected upon. It is not necessary that the proclamation of the good news should be accepted by everybody. In fact, it is not, and it may not always be. This is a realistic approach both by Jesus and later by Paul. Most likely, this realistic understanding is the by-product of the experience of the missionaries. They might have been eager to proclaim the message, going from place to place, expecting people to embrace the “New” message eagerly. But it was not so! Many had clearly refused to accept the good news and embrace the new faith — faith in Jesus. And, according to the narrative in the book of Acts, this was precisely what had happened to Paul and others. The Jews themselves had rejected the missionaries, refusing to accept their message of salvation. So, Paul, literally had to shake off the dust of his feet and turn to the Gentiles as Luke reports:

But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul. Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. *Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles* (Acts 13:45-46, emphasis added).

And, Luke is quick to add: “When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers. Thus the word of the Lord spread throughout the region”. (Acts 13:48-49). Indeed, the rejection by the privileged people — and persecution of the missionaries — opens the proclamation to many more. In any case, the proclamation of the good news cannot — and will not — stop. In fact, the persecution turns out to be a catalyst for the proclamation as we will see below.

Proclamation and Persecution

One of the final points to be noted carefully is that the proclamation of the word, the good news, necessarily “carries” with it the reality of persecution. It is almost as if proclamation without immediate and subsequent persecution is impossible. In other words, proclamation of the good news goes hand in hand with persecution. Jesus could not have made it clearer than this while saying:

See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Mt 10:16-20).

[. . .] you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. (Mt 10:22-23).

Now, the historical question about whether Jesus himself actually gave this warning or not cannot be ascertained. But his own experience, and his terrible passion and death could have prompted him to tell his disciples that if he was persecuted, his disciples will also be persecuted: “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. [...] Remember the word that I said to you, ‘Servants are not greater than their master.’ If *they persecuted me, they will persecute you*; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. (cf. Jn 15:18, 20, emphasis added). From a historical point of view, this must have happened to the disciples so that the ‘instructions and warnings’ given by Jesus have found a place in his teachings. The confirmation of persecution is clearly visible in abundance in both the Book of the Acts of the Apostles as well as the Letter of Paul to the Corinthians; so much so, Paul “boasts” of his sufferings and persecutions (read 2 Cor 11-12). This must help us to be

sober in the face of various kinds of persecutions in the world today. When we are persecuted, however, it only catalyzes our proclamation. It brings more motivation, determination, and consequently a better result. Proclamation in the face of persecution and rejection also confirms its authenticity. Only a person who knows that his preaching is genuine, and he is doing what is demanded of him, will be willing to face any trial and endure the tribulations. Because, when the people — our audience of the proclamation — see how we endure our suffering for the sake of the Gospel, they will be more convinced of the message of the Gospel that we proclaim. Besides, the persecution becomes a means to go to other places than the ones where we feel comfortable. In Acts 8, it is due to the persecution that the disciples of the Lord went away from Jerusalem and proclaimed the good news in surrounding regions. Hence, persecution can only be a catalyst, a ‘necessary evil’ for proclamation.

Conclusion

Missionary activity and proclamation of the good news is clearly mandated by Jesus and it has sufficient biblical foundation. The proclamation is entrusted to the followers, the disciples of the Lord, who are his witnesses (Lk 24: 47-49; Acts 1:8; 2:32). The disciples boldly, untiringly proclaimed the good news to all the nations. They went from place to place with only one determined aim: at all costs, proclaim that Jesus is alive, that He is the Lord and Messiah. In so doing, not only did the disciples proclaim who Jesus is but also brought the people to believe in Him. One who believes in the name of the Lord will surely be saved. Thus, the proclamation of the word of God continues to find adherents even to this day; because, *they* [the disciples] *went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it* (Mk 16:20).

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