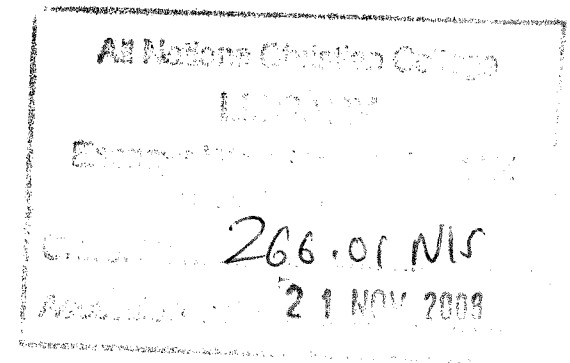


Johannes Nissen

New Testament and Mission

Historical
and Hermeneutical
Perspectives

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(sound like a strong wind), vision (tongues like fire) and automatic speech (glossolalia). However, interpreters differ as where to put the emphasis. It is debatable whether we have here a miracle of speech or a miracle of hearing.⁵³

It is not clear if Luke refers to the same phenomenon as Paul describes in 1 Cor 14. Nor can we say whether Luke considered his description of the ecstasy of the first Christians to be normative for the life in the communities of his own time. As noted above there are historical as well as ideal elements in his picture of the first community. But there is no indication that ecstasy should be constitutive for the ideal Christian community.

c. "*Wonders and signs*". Luke's treatment of miracle is another point of dispute. The Book of Acts has no less than 25 stories of miracles. In nine cases they are labelled "wonders and signs". This phrase has a positive value. Elsewhere in the New Testament the phrase is often used in a negative sense (e.g. John 4:48; Mark 13:22). And yet Luke boasts of the "wonders and signs" as acts which demonstrated God's hand in the mission of the church.

Luke seems to consider the miracles of the early Christian mission as more spectacular than those of any rivals – "*great signs and wonders*", "*extraordinary miracles*" (8:13; 19:11). To be sure, Luke has a tendency to a "theology of glory" or triumphalism which stands in contrast to other parts of the New Testament.⁵⁴ In the Gospel of Mark the publicity and the propagandist value of miracles is disparaged and a faith based on miracle is usually treated with reservation and disapproval (e.g. Mark 8:11ff.; cf. John 4:48). Paul in a similar way insists on the cross as a correction to a "theology of glory" (1 Cor 1:18-25).

On the other hand the contrast between Luke and Paul should not be over-emphasized. Even if "wonders and signs" are characteristics of the church's mission according to Acts, the first Christians are not spared suffering and persecution (Acts 8:1ff.; 12:1ff.). There is also a certain restraint in the miracles he records, and he sharply contrasts the miraculous progress of the gospel with magic (8:18-24; 13:6-12; 19:13-20).

The miracles are significant in that they point to the Pentecost as the arrival of a new age.⁵⁵ This new age manifests itself in powerful acts. It is an indication that salvation is not just for the soul but also for the body. Salvation means a restoration of life – a redemption of our bodies (cf. Rom 8:23).

III. Mission and dialogue in Acts

1. The missionary speeches

The Book of Acts has a number of speeches among which the so-called "missionary speeches" are of special interest.⁵⁶ The most important discourses are Peter's sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2:14-36 and three sermons by Paul. In what follows I shall draw attention particularly to Paul's discourses because of their different content and approaches.

In *Antioch of Pisidia* Paul speaks to a *Jewish* audience (13:13-43), in *Lystra* his

audience is *Pagans* (14:5-20), and in *Athens* he addresses *Greek philosophers* (17:22-31). Each of these speeches has the form of a monologue; nevertheless the content is dialogical. They can be characterized as "including dialogues", that is, Paul pays regard to the questions, viewpoints and experiences of his listeners.⁵⁷

At Antioch Paul enters the synagogue and proclaims the gospel for the Jews. The approach is one of scriptural exposition. Paul points to the *history of Israel*, and his basic argument is that Jesus is Messiah. In Lystra he addresses the Pagans. First he comments on the confusion which has arisen because they want to identify himself and Barnabas as Hermes and Zeus. Then he points to *God's creation*: God sends rain from heaven and crops in their seasons. At the Areopagus Paul's proclamation is marked by the fact that those who listened belonged to the elite in *Greek culture*.

If Paul had spoken about the history of Israel in Lystra, it would have been meaningless to the audience. It would also have been a mistake to speak of fertility and the growth of the earth in Athens, or about the unknown God in Antioch. There is no agreement among scholars on the extent to which these missionary speeches reflect the actual proclamation of the first Christians. Some would argue that they in fact say something about the concrete proclamation. Others maintain that the speeches reflect Luke's concept of Paul. Yet, even in this case there is a remarkable similarity between the approach of the speeches and his reflections in 1 Cor 9:19-23.

More important than this disagreement is the theological and hermeneutical aspect of these speeches. Paul is portrayed as engaging in three different tactics in order to get his message about Jesus through persuasively and appropriately to three different audiences. The proclamation of the gospel has to be formed according to the context in which the hearers are living.⁵⁸ In this sense one should not speak of an "objective" (or neutral) gospel which has the same form irrespective of time and place. If the message altogether is to reach the audience at all, it must be communicated in a dialogical form.

An additional note on the relation between Jews and Gentiles is in order. To be sure, the turn to the Gentiles follows upon the rejection by Israel but it is not wholly explained by this. The "salvation of all flesh" is intended by God from the beginning.⁵⁹ The baptism of the Ethiopian, the conversion of Cornelius, and the mandate of Paul to go to the Gentiles are clearly the result of an explicit divine initiative, regardless of the response of the Jews. The speeches in Acts 14:15-17 and 17:23-31 affirm that the offer of salvation to the Gentiles is not a mere crust from the table of Israel but is part of God's saving care for all peoples already expressed in creation.

2. Paul's speech at the Areopagus – failure or success?

The speech at Areopagus is one of the most famous missionary texts in the New Testament. It is therefore natural to go more in detail with this text.

The speech is sometimes characterized as a failure. It is argued that Paul arrived in Athens from Beroea, almost unintentionally, and while he was waiting for his co-workers he spent his time walking around in the city. He then became provoked

by seeing the city full of idols (17:16). Therefore he "argued" in the synagogue and the market place. By doing so he caught the attention of the Greek philosophers, who brought him to the Areopagus. Paul held a speech in which he attacked their superstition and he attempted by means of intellectual arguments to persuade them of the truth but without success.

This is the reason why he used a different approach when he came to Corinth: "I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:1-2). According to this interpretation Paul has replaced the rational argumentative proclamation (the dialogue) by a different form which is based on the irrational and illogical, i.e. the cross of Jesus Christ. This reconstruction of the events is actually a very dubious one for the following reasons.

In the first place, it is a very disputable methodology to resort indifferently to Acts and to the letters for the purpose of reconstructing Paul's state of soul.⁶⁰ There is no doubt that the cross is central to Paul's proclamation of the gospel. But it is by no way clear that Acts 17 should be interpreted in the light of 1 Corinthians. It is much more obvious to argue that the words of 1 Cor 2:1-2 have nothing to do with Paul's experience in Athens. It is more likely that Paul was dealing specifically with the gnosticizing tendencies of the Corinthians.

Secondly, it is not evident that Luke in Acts 17 is describing a failure in mission. If so, why should he use his space to do this? On the contrary, at the end of the chapter it is said that "some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (17:34). What missionary in these circumstances would have regarded it a defeat to have achieved so much in a single sermon?

Thirdly, rather than being a failure this speech in Luke's view has to be seen as a model for the Christian approach to intellectual representatives of the pagan religiosity. The speech gives an example of dialogue in the primitive church, cf. the use of *dialegomai* in v. 17. Here the Lucan Paul is setting a pattern. As E. Haenchen says, "Luke would not have described this particular event if he had not seen in it an altogether special meaning: actually, a sort of program for mission."⁶¹

3. The context of the Areopagus speech

Acts 17:16-21 sets the stage for the speech at the Areopagus. Luke's way of narrating indicates that we now are in the heart of Greek culture.⁶² He borrows the style of a travel guide and describes the cultural landscape composed of various Greek philosophical schools, the intellectual climate of affected dilettantism and curiosity (17:18.21). He leads us on a tour of the religious landmarks of the city (17:16). This lengthy prologue helps us to see the significance of the speech at Athens: the encounter of the gospel with the Greek culture.

It is said that Paul's spirit "was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols" (17:16) so that he argued in the synagogue and in the marketplace with those he encountered (17:17). The verb "argue" is the English translation of the Greek

dialegomai which is also used in some other passages in Acts (e.g. 17:2; 18:4.19; 19:9-10). This word has the force of "to argue", "to reason", "to contend", that is, the missionary activity of Paul is described as one of dialogue.

A controversy arose when some Epicureans and Stoics heard Paul preaching "Jesus and the resurrection". The conclusion of some listeners was that Paul "seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities" (v. 18).⁶³ Therefore, the philosophers brought Paul to the Areopagus and demanded that he explain his new teaching.

There is a puzzling contrast in attitude between Paul's strong reaction in v. 16 and the much more conciliatory one in v. 22: "I see how extremely religious you are in every way". This comparison reveals the ambiguous character of religion. The reactions attributed to Paul show a variety of possibilities.⁶⁴ One is the emotional disgust typical of a minority as a "sect" – the characterization of the images as "idols" (17:16) implies a negative judgment. It reflects a Jewish judgment on Greek piety that is a minority viewpoint vis-à-vis the dominant culture of Athens. Another is the attempt to find some positive elements in discussion with members of the majority.

4. The content of the speech: points of contact, continuity, critique and contradiction

It is this second possibility which is adopted by Paul in his speech, which has three parts:⁶⁵ (1) points of contact (vv. 22-23), (2) continuity and criticism (vv. 24-29); (3) contradiction (vv. 30-31). The first two parts have many similarities to the approach of Hellenistic Judaism to the Greek culture and philosophy.⁶⁶

a. Points of contact

Paul's address begins with highest praise for the Athenians: by every criterion they are very religious people (17:22). Of course, this is the *captatio benevolentiae* of the rhetorical address, but it is more than this. As Paul was passing through the city, observing their sacred places and objects, he saw an altar with the inscription "To an unknown god". Such an altar was built in honour of unknown gods in order to prevent the gods from being angry if they did not receive any adoration. This is an expression of a radical polytheism.

It is, however, interesting that Paul interprets the inscription in a different way: behind this polytheism is a hidden longing for the one, true God. Thus, he makes the decision to begin where the listeners are in their own religious quest.

Paul finds a point of contact in the concept of God, but for him there is a great distance between this "neutral" God (v. 23) and the Christian proclamation of a *personal* God (vv. 24-31). Therefore, in the end of v. 23 he can declare his intention: "What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (cf. John 4:22).

b. Continuity and critique

Paul's declaration of his intentions leads to a series of statements about God, about God's character (vv. 24-25) and God's dealings with humanity (vv. 26-28).

The unknown God acknowledged by the Athenians was in fact "the God who made the world and everything in it" (v. 24). The following statements (vv. 24b-25a) inform the audience that God is the Lord of the created order and is not capable of being domesticated by humans. He "does not live in shrines made by human hands" resounds the declaration in 7:48. Moreover, the proclamation that God is Lord echoes the statement of Peter in 10:36. In turn, v. 25b speaks of how God gives life, breath, and all things, so that one hears echoes of Paul's declaration at Lystra concerning God's generosity (14:17).

Several of these statements may reflect Isaiah, e.g. the critique of locating God in shrines made by man. The same applies to the attempt of depicting him in sculptures made from gold, silver or stone (v. 29). However, it should be added that these ideas about God correspond to a large degree with philosophical ideas in Stoicism.⁶⁷

In vv. 26-28 the focus shifts slightly from God's character to the way in which he interacts with human beings. Many of the ideas expressed in these verses resemble what has been said in other speeches in Acts, e.g. the idea that God is near to every man echoes Peter's statement in 10:35.

The appropriate human response to God's ordering of the world is to seek to know him, while recognizing that God is the one in whom all human beings exist. This insight is confirmed by quotations, not from the Jewish scriptures but from pagan poets who affirm that God is the locus and origin of all human life (v. 28). Quoting from the verse, "We too are his offspring" from one of the Greek poets, Paul speaks of himself and his audience as children of the one God: "in him we live and move and have our being".

In this part of his speech Paul is pictured as establishing as broad a common ground as possible with his listeners, regardless of their religious background.⁶⁸ Faced with a non-Jewish audience Paul was obliged to adopt a new method. He became theocentric in his approach.⁶⁹ But he does not stop at that. There is also something specific Christian in his message, which is evident from the last part of his speech.

c. Contradiction

The crucial shift in Paul's argument comes in the last two verses. A contrast is made between two times (v. 30): the times of ignorance and the time to repent.⁷⁰ And there is a reference to the eschatological judgment and the resurrection of Jesus (v. 31; cf. v. 18). In these verses the author insists on three points:

1. All people are in need of repentance.
2. The world will be judged in righteousness by Jesus.
3. The credibility of this claim is underlined in the fact that God has raised him from the dead.

By these elements the speech is given a specifically *Christian* content. The audience reacted differently. When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, others were polite, but declined. But some listeners joined the new faith. As noted previously this does not mean that the author is negative to the method used in this speech. Rather he gives expression to the fact that the proclamation of Christ's bodily resurrection was the great stumbling block for the Greeks.

5. Dialogue in Ephesus

We have seen that the Greek word *dialegomai* is used in several passages. One of these is Acts 19:8-10 which is of particular interest. Luke records that Paul

"... entered the synagogue, and for three months spoke out boldly and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God. When some stubbornly refused to believe and spoke evil of the Way before the congregation, he left them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord."

According to this passage Paul is spending two years and three months in the activity described as being in dialogue ("arguing"). The location of Paul's dialogue is noteworthy.⁷¹ First it takes place in the synagogue. He is there until he is forced by other people to leave. The second location is called "the lecture hall of Tyrannus" – the word translated as "lecture hall" in the NRSV is the Greek word *scholē*; cf. our word "school". Paul has moved into the physical environment of the Greek philosophers!

The text also reveals something of the subject matter of the dialogue. In the synagogue it turns apparently on the meaning of the Kingdom of God, which is the key issue in Jesus' proclamation. It must have been about the shape of God's kingly rule on earth. How are the human facts of suffering and impotence to be related to the rule of God in the light of the death on the cross of the Righteous Servant? These are questions which are still of great relevance in the dialogue with Jews and even Muslims.

The text does not inform us about the content of the dialogue in the hall of Tyrannus. But it is recorded that the talks continued for two years "so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord." Taken literally Luke is exaggerating. But perhaps he just wanted to underline that Ephesus was the "city of dialogue", that is, the place for the encounter between the gospel and Greek philosophy and various religious movements.⁷² The role of Ephesus as a place of dialogue is supported by the fact that other New Testament writings which focus on the encounter between Christianity and Greek thinking seem to be related to this city. 1 Corinthians is written from this place. Its cultural milieu is reflected in the letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians. And the Johannine tradition is often associated with Ephesus.

It would be misleading to suggest that "dialogue" was the only form of mission in which Paul was engaged.⁷³ Actually there were at least three other forms.⁷⁴

Firstly, there was a kind of intra-faith dialogue with some disciples of Jesus who knew only the baptism of John (Acts 19:1-7).

Secondly we have the story of an unsuccessful attempt by some Jewish exorcists in Ephesus to cast out a demon through invoking of Jesus' name (19:11-20). When they themselves fall prey to the demon's power, many new believers, who are still practising magic arts burn their books, said to be valued at fifty thousand pieces of silver. Luke concludes this story by noting, "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (v. 20). This story shows that religion is always ambiguous. When it is invaded by demonic forces, dialogue is not the appropriate stance. Then it is replaced by confrontation.

Thirdly, mission can also have the form of unmasking an ideology. Acts 19:21-41 is a story about a conflict between Paul and the cult of the goddess Artemis. The guild of silversmiths whose prosperity depended upon the production and sale of little shrines devoted to this goddess felt threatened by Paul's preaching. Thus, the worship of Artemis both supported and was supported by the economics of big business. Luke's readers on the other hand need to know that their common life may well challenge the economic status quos of their pagan neighbours. Some will experience this challenge as a welcome and be led toward faith, but others will try to persecute the church.⁷⁵

IV. Hermeneutical perspectives

In this concluding section it is impossible to discuss the hermeneutical implications of all the issues which have been touched upon in the preceding pages. I have selected a few topics which I consider to be of special interest in today's mission, e.g. the relation between the poor and the sinners, the problem of selective Bible reading, the theme of the Jubilee, the Holy Spirit in mission and the content and method of dialogue.⁷⁶

1. Good news to the poor – and to sinners

It has often been discussed whether the central message of Luke is the forgiveness of sins or social justice. This is a discussion not only among biblical scholars but also among missiologists. Thus the "evangelicals" have asked the "ecumenicals" the question, "Do you weep for the *lost*?" However, the counter-question from the "ecumenicals" is, "Do you weep for the *poor*?"⁷⁷

In Luke's Gospel this is not an either-or. Jesus is presented both as "the friend of sinners" and as the spokesman for the poor. D. Bosch is therefore right in describing Luke's mission as "practising forgiveness and solidarity with the poor."⁷⁸ The great majority of those who are considered "lost" are also those who are poor in the material sense of the word.

T. D. Hanks, a Latin American liberation theologian, has commented on the discussion as follows: "Some Christians wish to preach a gospel of socio-political liberation to the poor, whereas others want to offer forgiveness of sins to the rich.

But Jesus does not offer us the luxury of two gospels, one for the rich and one for the poor... Luke 4:18-19 forbids us to remove the socio-political dimension from the gospel, and Luke 24:46-47 forbids us to limit the gospel to a purely horizontal level by ignoring forgiveness of sins."⁷⁹

The Jubilee addresses the whole human situation in terms of oppression and liberation. It is a paradigm both of human need and of God's good news in Jesus Christ. To proclaim repentance and forgiveness is not merely the ministry of absolution, but the announcement of total liberation of any form of oppression, in the power of the Spirit. Luke, then, sees salvation as a liberation *from* all kinds of bondage and as a liberation *to* a new life in Christ.

In recent years the "evangelicals" and the "ecumenicals" have come closer to each other. Nevertheless it is still so that evangelicals frequently accuse the ecumenical movement of a selective use of Scripture. The high profile of some biblical portions in ecumenical theology, e.g. Luke 4:16-30 in liberation theology, lends credence to this allegation. On the other hand, many say that evangelicals are equally selective. This may be seen in the prominence of the Matthean "Great Commission", Matt 28:19-20, in evangelical missionary circles.

Both "evangelicals" and "ecumenicals" have to ask the question: how do we read, quote and use the Bible? Both movements are in constant danger of using the Bible simply to confirm what they have been saying all the time, and hence the richness and depth of the whole Bible does not come to life. In many ways Christians in the South read the Bible in a less biased way because as poor, suffering and oppressed (or at least very close to them) they are in a better position than Christians of the North (and West) to hear and understand all implications of the good news. "The Bible which we Westerners had read so comfortably all these years, spiritualising away the many passages about the poor, had been freshly expounded to us in a fierce judgement upon us".⁸⁰

2. Towards a prophetic-critique hermeneutics

At this point it might be helpful to see how Luke challenges our inherent tendency to read the biblical texts selectively.

Luke presents Jesus as reading the Scripture in a way which is quite different from that of his contemporaries, e.g. the Dead Sea community. This is clear from an analysis of Luke 4:16-30. Among Jesus' contemporaries there was a tendency to interpret the Old Testament in a manner which was favourable to themselves. In the terminology coined by J. A. Sanders, this would be a "*constitutive*" reading of the text. In a constitutive reading the blessings and promises of Scripture are seen as flowing towards the group itself whereas every possible curse applies to the out-group or enemy. An *in-group exegesis* means that a community fails to contemporize Old Testament traditions as challenges to the in-group. Instead the traditions are understood as confirming the belief of the group itself.⁸¹

An alternative way of reading the Old Testament can be described as *prophetic-critique hermeneutics*. This approach, which challenges the in-group is employed by Jesus himself. In a prophetic reading the emphasis is on God's freedom to bless whom God wills in the way that God wills. Thus, the townspeople of Nazareth are

described as being provoked to rage at hearing the prophetic message which lets them know that they do not hold a place of privilege in the fulfilment of the promises of God depicted by the prophet Isaiah.⁸²

If Sanders is correct, the concept of Jubilee in Isa 61 was understood by Jesus' audience as referring to blessings promised particularly to Israel at the time of God's eschatological reign. The prophetic reading challenged that assumption of privilege, but left the socially revolutionary implications of the Jubilee imagery intact. In that way, the text of promise was turned into a threat: the poor to whom the good news would come and the captives who would be set free might be any of God's children.⁸³

Probably there were two motives for Luke in recording the sermon of Jesus in ch. 4 – as well as the parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14:16-24.⁸⁴ Firstly, he wished to stress the proclamation of the good news for all the dispossessed. Secondly, he wanted to say that these stories contained a *call* to the Christian congregations to be open ones. Christians of the second and third generation could easily become closed groups practising "in-group exegesis".⁸⁵ In other words, Luke wanted to prevent Christians from subverting Jesus' prophetic critique of the in-group into a constitutive axiom.

Today, we are challenged in the same way not to adopt a constitutive reading of the biblical texts. Instead we must consider what the prophetic criticism means in a situation which is quite different from that of biblical text(s).

3. The Year of the Jubilee and the debt crisis

The Lucan paradigm for mission is proclaiming the Jubilee. What is the implication of the Jubilee for today's mission? We must re-read the biblical texts (Isa 61 and Luke 4) and interpret them in a global context.⁸⁶ The biblical Jubilee calls for international justice.⁸⁷

Though, in its original context, it was concerned with a particular people – the people of Israel – in its eschatological perspective it is concerned with humanity as a whole (cf. Isa 61:1ff; Luke 4:18-19; 7:22). Out of a theo-centric faith emerges a view of man which places all human beings on an equal basis. The land and all its resources belong to God (Lev 25:23; Ps 24:1). Every man in this world has a fundamental right to enjoy the resources of this earth; to deprive him of this god-given privilege is a serious sin.⁸⁸

In this connection I want to draw attention to two points mentioned in the document "Rika och fattiga" ("The Rich and the Poor") published by the Swedish Lutheran bishops.⁸⁹ The first point is that the relation between poor and rich should be seen *from the perspective of the poor*. The poor have a privilege of interpretation.⁹⁰

The second point is the close link between *the economic debt of the poor and the moral debt of the rich*. If the basic rights of the poor (to a decent life) are neglected, a moral guilt on the part of the rich will arise. In other words, the relationship between the rich and the poor is not just an economic problem. It has to be seen within the context of guilt and blame.⁹¹

The one who meets us as herald of the Jubilee of God's reign does so in the particular historical, social, and economic circumstances of his time, just as we are responsible and responding to the same message in the midst of our own historical situation. Each generation must take responsibility for responding to God's decree of liberty, and for doing justice, in its own circumstances and for its children.⁹²

4. The Holy Spirit in mission

It is not an overstatement to say: "The intimate linking of pneumatology and mission is Luke's distinctive contribution to the early Church's missionary paradigm".⁹³ The story of Peter's encounter with Cornelius is especially significant in the light which it throws on the sovereign work of the Spirit in mission. W. Hollenweger has pointed out that this is the story not only of the conversion of Cornelius but also of the conversion of Peter and the church.⁹⁴

Peter realizes that a power greater than his own has broken down the fence which protected devout Jews from the uncleanness of the heathen world. He can do nothing but humbly accept the fact and receive these uncircumcised pagans by baptism into the fellowship of the church (10:47-48).

Mission changes not only the world but also the church. L. Newbigin notes that it is not as though the church opened its gates to admit a new person into its company, and then closed them again, remaining unchanged except for the addition of a new member. Mission is not just church extension. It is something more costly and more revolutionary. It is the action of the Holy Spirit who in sovereign freedom both convicts the world and leads the church toward the fullness of the truth which it has not yet grasped (cf. John 16:8-15). "Mission is not essentially an action by which the church puts forth its own power and wisdom to conquer the world around it; it is rather, an action of God, putting forth the power of his Spirit to bring the universal work of Christ for the salvation of the world nearer to its completion."⁹⁵

Mission is a risky endeavour. Its outcome is unpredictable. "The Cornelius story shows that it is not easy for God to teach the Church that He does not practice partiality. To many of us the signs are strong that He has many ways of working in his world."⁹⁶

5. The message and method in dialogue

In recent years the question has been raised: Can the Acts of the Apostles serve as a model for our relationship with people of other faiths? To answer that question we must look at the context in which the mission took place.

Many passages in Acts are centred on the internal debate between Jews and (Jewish) Christians. Most of those who listened to the witness of the apostles were familiar with the expectations about the Messiah and what it meant to speak of Jesus as Christ. This material would be relevant also in a modern dialogue between Christians and Jews.

It will be wrong to assume that all this can be translated across other cultures and ages and the same methodology used when we relate to Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims etc. However, Acts 17:17-34 and Acts 19:8-10 describe dialogues with

persons who belong to a non-Jewish faith. Paul was aware that neither the message nor the method he used in relating to those with a Jewish background was adequate with this situation.⁹⁷

Two aspects of the dialogues in the Acts call for our attention. The *first* aspect relates to the *location* of the dialogue. According to Acts 19:8-10 Paul was arguing and pleading with the Jews in the synagogue for the first three months. Then he moved into the "lecture hall of Tyrannus", which is the physical environment of the Greek philosophers. In Acts 17 he was in dialogue in a similar way with people on the market place of Athens.

These examples indicate that the dialogue does not take place on Paul's own terms and in a neutral environment. The agenda and terms of reference of the conversations are set by the other parties to the dialogue.⁹⁸ This is different from our own usual forms of activity. We tend to invite people to come into our structures where they will be able to listen to monologues of proclamation in an environment where we are totally at home. In Paul's approach depicted in Acts dialogue becomes a venture – almost in the same way as the meeting of Peter and Cornelius.

It seems probable that Paul used more than one mission strategy. "Paul could switch from Jewish to Greek methods of reasoning, and from the synagogue to a lecture hall".⁹⁹ He spent three months in the synagogue engaging the Jews in rabbinic dialogue. And when he spent two years in the lecture hall of Tyrannus he might have used what the Greek called the "Socratic" method.

The *second* note relates to the specific *approach* and *content* of the Areopagus speech. The strategy of this address is remarkable.¹⁰⁰ The choice of Stoic principles as a point of entry and the quotation of familiar Greek writers virtually guarantees attention and a sympathetic hearing – at least initially. The degree of overlap between the concepts of this popular philosophy and what the author regards as the basic Christian worldview is striking, and serves the reader as a demonstration of what can be done in approaching with the gospel those who have no familiarity with the teachings of the Jewish scriptures.

This deals with some issues which have great importance in Greek philosophy, including in particular the quest for the ultimate reality: How should we as human beings relate to the world, to the *logos* and to the divine essence?

It has been noted that in the encounter between the gospel and Greece, Greek thought grows in breadth and depth, but Christian thought takes on new dimensions as well. The gospel no longer responds only to the expectations of Israel's prophets. Now it is thrust into the heart of a cosmological and metaphysical search. Continuity with Israel is now fitted into the larger continuity of the history of the nations. The gospel finds new echos in this larger context: it encounters the fundamental question of Being and the One, and takes on a universal value, for the West immediately, and for other metaphysical civilizations, such as India, indirectly.¹⁰¹

This raises the question if the Greek religious and philosophical traditions can be seen as a preparation to the gospel almost in the same way as the Old Testament. This would correspond to the view which sees the world religions as

preparations for Christ. If this approach is adopted, one must ask in which manner Christ can be seen as the fulfilment of the longings and aspirations of mankind (especially adherents of non-Christian religions), and in which way he is a correction to that aspiration.

There is one essential element in the Areopagus speech which is incompatible with Stoic expectations – the resurrection of Jesus as a historical event. What is the implication of this for the dialogue with people of other faiths?

Notes

- 1 Conzelmann 1964, 95. The German original "Die Mitte der Zeit" was first published in 1953.
- 2 Cf. Dunn 1977, 348-349; Marshall 1970, 121, 129; Nissen 1984, 92, note 12; Soards 1994, 189.
- 3 Cf. Bosch 1991, 87.
- 4 Senior & Stuhlmüller 1983, 259.
- 5 McAfee Brown 1984, 21-32, has shown that Luke 24:13-35 reflects a new form of knowledge. Cf. Nissen 1989, 274-275.
- 6 Arias & Johnson 1992, 58-59.
- 7 Cf. Ringe 1985, 42.
- 8 For a more detailed analysis see Nissen 1984, 74-78.
- 9 See, for instance, Soares-Prabhu 1978, 204-205.
- 10 Cf. Albertz 1983, 199; Pobe 1987, 20; Bosch 1991, 99.
- 11 Nissen 1984, 75.
- 12 Bosch 1980a, 56; cf. Jeremias 1971, 200; Ford 1983, 81-83.
- 13 Kee 1995, 187-207, rightly underlines the inclusive strategy of Luke-Acts.
- 14 Cf. Sloan 1977.
- 15 For a more detailed analysis see Ringe 1985, 16-32.
- 16 Cf. Arias & Johnson 1992, 62.
- 17 Cf. Liebschner 1979; Nissen 1984, 12-13.
- 18 Cf. Moxnes 1988, 168.
- 19 Nissen 1984, 171-173.
- 20 Cf. Arias & Johnson 1992, 69.
- 21 Ringe 1985, 66-71.
- 22 Nissen 1984, 82.
- 23 So, for instance, Degenhardt 1965.
- 24 E.g. Schottroff & Stegemann 1986.
- 25 Cf. Nissen 1984, 90-91.
- 26 Schottroff & Stegemann 1986, 91.
- 27 Yoder 1972, 73.
- 28 Paoli 1973, 147.
- 29 Cf. Moxnes 1988, 142-143.
- 30 Cf. Senior & Stuhlmüller 1983, 264-265.
- 31 Cf. Sandnes 1981, 123-134.
- 32 Cf. Senior & Stuhlmüller 1983, 269.
- 33 Covenant renewal is thus depicted as worldwide in scope and as potentially universal in its inclusiveness; cf. Kee 1990, 31.
- 34 Cf. Seim 1995, 52.

- 35 Cf. Moxnes 1986-1987, 161-162.
- 36 Cf. Matson 1996, 187.
- 37 Cf. Kee 1990, 63.
- 38 Cf. Koenig 1985, 107.
- 39 Notice that many of the Lucan meal scenes combine repentance and hospitality, cf. Sandnes 1994.
- 40 Koenig 1985, 106.
- 41 Cf. Flender 1967, 166: "The Church is the place where the exalted one manifests his presence and where the Holy Spirit creates anew."
- 42 The term "all things in common" (2:44 and 4:32) is inspired by the Old Testament idea of the sabbatical release, cf. the allusion to Deut. 15:4. It also has parallels to the Greek idea of friendship.
- 43 Santa Ana 1977, 40.
- 44 Sider 1977, 99.
- 45 Arias 1982.
- 46 For a more detailed discussion see among others Nissen 1984, 85-90.
- 47 Notice also the addition made to the Lucan version of the institution of the Lord's Supper: "take this and *divide it among yourselves*" (Luke 22:17).
- 48 Cf. Barrett 1979, 291-292.
- 49 Dunn 1970, 90: "There are few problems so puzzling in NT theology as that posed by Acts in its treatment of conversion-initiation. The relation between the gift of the Spirit and water-baptism is particularly confusing."
- 50 See Hartman 1994, 89.
- 51 Cf. Kjær-Hansen 1995, 71.
- 52 Cf. Dunn 1970, 93.
- 53 For a discussion of this problem see Dunn 1975, 148-152.
- 54 For a comparison between Luke and other New Testament authors see Dunn 1977, 174-202.
- 55 Cf. Synnes 1994.
- 56 For the identification of the missionary discourses see among others Wilckens 1974.
- 57 Cf. Hammar 1975, 57-59.
- 58 Dunn 1977, 12, notes that "*kerygma in the NT probably includes the idea of proclamation at a particular time and place*. That is to say, kerygma is always situational to some degree - to some degree conditioned by the circumstances which the proclamation called forth" (author's italics).
- 59 Cf. Senior & Stuhlmüller 1983, 271.
- 60 Cf. Legrand 1990, 109.
- 61 Haenchen 1971, 530.
- 62 Cf. Legrand 1990, 109.
- 63 It should be noted that Socrates was tried and sentenced to death for similar charges; cf. Haenchen 1971, 527.
- 64 Cf. Moxnes 1995, 123.
- 65 Cf. Schneider 1981, 173-178. Dupont 1979 in a similar way divides the speech into three parts: vv. 22b-23, vv. 24-29, vv. 30-31. He contends that the structure serves the argument of the speech against idolatry. By contrast Soards 1994, 96, divides into two parts: vv. 22b-28 and vv. 29-31.
- 66 Wilckens 1974, 100, is probably right in arguing that the speech in its present form reflects Luke's theology, but it follows a traditional pattern for mission within primitive Hellenistic Christianity which again is influenced by Hellenistic Judaism.
- 67 Cf. Moxnes 1995, 123.

- 68 Cf. Kee 1990, 64.
- 69 Cf. Ariarajah 1985, 45.
- 70 The necessity of repentance is an important theme in many speeches, e.g. Acts 2:38.
- 71 Cf. Cracknell 1986, 27.
- 72 Cf. Cracknell 1986, 28.
- 73 According to Larkin 1998, 183, Luke's assessment of non-Christian religions is negative. Although God has left a witness to people in every culture that a beneficent creator God exists (14:15-17; 17:24-28), the beliefs and practices of non-Christian religions reveal that they are the product of blind ignorance (17:23) and foolish rebellion (14:14-15; 17:25-29). Luke also links, though tangentially, the demonic and non-Christian religions (e.g. 26:18; 16:16-18; 19:13-16).
- 74 Cf. Cracknell 1986, 28-29.
- 75 Cf. Koenig 1985, 113.
- 76 Other issues which are not discussed in this section include the importance of household mission and the relation between proclamation and healing.
- 77 Cf. Bosch 1980b, 33.
- 78 Bosch 1991, 84-122. Bosch considers Luke's understanding of salvation as encompassing the total person (*aphesis* as both forgiveness and release/liberation); see p. 107. By contrast, according to Larkin 1998, 179, it is spiritual salvation that is Luke's focus throughout Acts.
- 79 Hanks 1983, 112.
- 80 Cf. Verstraelen 1980, 46. The quotation is from S. Barrington-Ward, "In Search of a Whole Gospel", in *CMS News-letter*, no. 436, October 1980.
- 81 Sanders 1975.
- 82 Cf. my analysis of Luke 4:16-30 in I.2.
- 83 Cf. Ringe 1985, 44.
- 84 Cf. Nissen 1984, 77.
- 85 According to Ringe 1985, 45, Luke appears to have interpreted the account with a "constitutive" hermeneutic concerning the privileged position of the church in receiving the promised blessings. Nevertheless he has sustained and developed the ethical implications of the Jubilee images themselves.
- 86 This applies not only to Luke 4, but to other texts as well, e.g. Luke 16:1-8. On the hermeneutical consequences of this text see Ukpong 1996, 208: "This parable challenges Christians to be committed to work towards the *reversal* of oppressive structures of contemporary economic systems, and to take life crises as challenges to rise to new heights in response to the demands of the kingdom".
- 87 See also Ucko 1997.
- 88 Robinson 1978, 363-379.
- 89 "Rika och fattiga" 1993, 33-34.
- 90 Rika och fattiga, 34. Liberation theologians speak of "the epistemological privilege of the poor". This expression is used to underline the fact that the way the poor view the world is closer to the reality of the world than the way the rich view it. Cf. Stam 1979, 122-141.
- 91 For further reflections on this relationship see Nissen 1984, 161.
- 92 Cf. Ringe 1985, 93-98.
- 93 Bosch 1991, 114; cf. Larkin 1998, 181.
- 94 W. Hollenweger 1979. For a critique of Hollenweger's view see Klaiber 1997, 82-83. The author argues that Peter learns something in this story, namely the impartiality of God (10:34-35) but this he does not learn "in dialogue with persons of another faith" (Hollenweger 1973, 10), rather through a series of visions which God granted him and Cornelius.

- 95 Newbiggin 1978, 66.
- 96 Stendahl 1977a, 124-125.
- 97 Cf. Ariarajah 1985, 46.
- 98 Cf. Cracknell 1986, 27.
- 99 Bakke 1987, 82.
- 100 Cf. Kee 1990, 65.
- 101 Cf. Legrand 1990, 110.