

The Acts of the Apostles as the Mission of God

A brief account of *missio Dei*

- *Two factors*
 - suspicion of Christian mission because of the intertwining of colonialism and mission
 - Karl Barth's theocentric theology
- *Developments*
 - 1938 International Missionary Council (IMC): Karl Hartenstein
 - 1952 IMC: God's nature as Trinity entails mission
 - '...mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God...Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission...There is church because there is mission, not vice versa.' David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390
 - Late 1905s/early 1960s: God's mission claimed to be located in the world *not the church*
 - Restructure the church to seek and participate in God's work *in the world*
 - The Lausanne movement
 - Chris Wright: social transformation belongs alongside personal and spiritual conversion and transformation

Three key elements of *missio Dei* (John Flett)

- *Sending*; cf. 2 Cor 5:20 'ambassadors for Christ'
- *Orientation to the kingdom of God*
- *The church in its very nature is missionary*
 - 'The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit.' (Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*)

Reading Acts on mission

- *Framing the narrative Acts 1, 28*
 - Acts 1
 - v 1 continuation of Luke's Gospel
 - v 3 'concerning the kingdom of God'
 - vv 5, 8 the Spirit's power for witness, echoing Isa 43:10-12; 49:6
 - vv 14, 15-26 prayer

- Acts 28
 - v 31 Paul teaching about Jesus and the kingdom of God
 - vv 25-27 quoting Isaiah 6:9
 - 'the end of the earth' = everywhere Isa 49:6; Luke 24:47
 - v 28 'the salvation of God' for the gentiles
 - vv 30, 31 durative (ongoing action) verbs; ἀκωλύτως 'without hindrance'
- *The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost Acts 2*
 - The Spirit is missional: speech in other languages vv 4-11
 - Jesus is the key vv 22, 24, 32-33, 36
 - God's purpose v 23
 - The Spirit now available to all v 38; cf. vv 17-18
- *The plot of the incorporation of gentiles*
 - The man at the Beautiful Gate 3:1-10
 - Peter and John before the Sanhedrin 4:5-22
 - Again before the Sanhedrin 5
 - Stephen among the hellenists 6-7
 - Persecution leads to expansion 8:1b, 4
 - Philip in Samaria 8:4-24
 - Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch 8:25-40
 - The church in Syrian Antioch 11:29-36
 - Saul's Damascus road experience 9:1-20; 22:1-21; 26:2-23
 - Cornelius 10:1-11:18
 - Barnabas and Saul sent by the Spirit 13:1-4
 - Cyprus: Sergius Paulus and Bar-Jesus 13:5-15
 - Iconium: signs and wonders 14:3
 - Lystra: Paul is stoned 14:9
 - The Jerusalem meeting 15:6-29
- *Other evidence*
 - Paul's journey to Rome
 - The speeches of Acts
- *Are believers just 'twitching puppets' (Ernst Haenchen)?*
 - The church slow to recognise God's work 11:2; 15:2-3, 5
 - John Miller on 16:6-10

Acts and *missio Dei*

- *Is mission 'sending'?*
 - Yes: 3:26; 2:1-4; 9:17; 13:1-4
 - No: no 'call' to mission; no 'sending' scene Luke 24:46-47; Acts 1:8
- *Kingdom orientation*
- *The church as missionary*
- *Eschatology* 3:21

Three illustrative implications

- *Recognise the breadth of what God does*
- *Focus on seeking God and his ways*
- *Be open to the surprises of God*

Some key sources

- Blauw, Johannes, *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, London: Lutterworth, 1962—classic study of *missio Dei*.
- Bosch, David J., *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology 16, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991—key work on mission.
- Churchill, Timothy W. R., *Divine Initiative and the Christology of the Damascus Road Encounter*, Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010—valuable study of the portrait of Jesus in the Damascus Road experience.
- Flett, John G., *The Witness of God: The Trinity, missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010—important study of *missio Dei*.
- Miller, John B. F., *Convinced That God Had Called Us: Dreams, Visions, and the Perception of God's Will in Luke-Acts*, *Biblical Interpretation* 85, Leiden: Brill, 2007—fine study of decision-making when dreams and visions occur.
- Walton, Steve, 'The Acts—of God? What is the 'Acts of the Apostles' All About?', *EvQ* 80 (2008) 291-306—argues for the centrality of God to Acts.
- Wright, Christopher J. H., *The God I Don't Understand*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009—very helpful shorter book on God's approach to mission.
- , *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, Nottingham: IVP, 2006—key larger study on *missio Dei* from a biblical perspective.