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Missionary Methods

Research, Reflections, and Realties



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Editors

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Missionary Methods: St. Paul's, St. Roland's, or Ours?

ROBERT L. GALLAGHER

Introduction

This chapter examines various perspectives of Paul's missionary methods as recorded in the book of Acts and his epistles, as well as comparing and contrasting the findings with Roland Allen's claims in his book *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* This assessment clarifies implications for contemporary mission praxis and, conversely, suggests that an awareness of key missiological issues should aid in enhancing biblical studies.

To understand Paul's mission strategy, it is important to first define fundamental terms and establish a methodology of biblical interpretation. With these foundations established, crucial areas of Paul's missionary techniques are demonstrated: Paul was empowered by the Holy Spirit in speech and guidance, functioned in community with associates and other Christian workers, planted and distributed his partners with continued interaction—all to complete the task of the gospel as he preached systematically in prominent centers before moving on. Having described Paul's manner of operation, the final section discusses ways of mission inadequately addressed in Allen's work: the vital function of prayer and spiritual conflict in the expansion of Christ's kingdom.

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Definitions

Mission may be defined as the total undertaking God has assigned the church for the salvation of the world. The end result of mission is God, through the church and beyond, reaching across barriers of culture, language, geography, ideology, and ethnicity to bring people to Christ by announcing the gospel in speech and social action. Evangelism may be defined as the activity of the church's mission, through which people are offered the gospel to accept Christ by faith as Savior and serve him in his kingdom community. Having defined these key terms, let us consider the approach to biblical interpretation.

Allen's Hermeneutical Approach

A critical review of Roland Allen's study, which has won such "wide assent and influenced policy and practice," is necessary.[1] Since this paper includes an appraisal of Allen as a foil for the discussion of Pauline methods, both the strengths and weaknesses of his contribution will be biblically assessed. This evaluation first needs to realize Allen's method of biblical hermeneutics. Analyzing the index of his biblical references in *Missionary Methods* shows that his use of the Scriptures was somewhat imbalanced. Allen referenced the Gospels four times, including only one reference to the Gospel of Luke. He cited Acts fifty-four times, which indicates that he had little concept of evaluating Acts in light of Luke's first volume. Therefore Allen could not recognize repeated mission tapestries throughout Luke-Acts as valuable insights to Luke's idea of Paul's missionary methods. Allen obviously failed to take advantage of the whole of Luke's narrative to help interpret the Pauline journeys.

Furthermore, all of Allen's biblical references from Acts were between chapters 13 to 22. They were distributed as follows: the first trip had twelve references, the second twenty-five, and the third ten. After Allen concludes the third mission in Acts 20, he recorded only two scriptures from chapters 21 and 22. In other words, Allen formed his theory of Paul's missionary tactics based largely on Paul's second journey and without any consideration of any missional value beyond Acts 20. Obviously Allen's definition of Paul's "mission" was restricted to the three traditional journeys. As defined, however, this paper views mission as "reaching across barriers

1 Kenneth G. Grubb, publisher's foreword to *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?,* by Roland Allen, American ed. (1912; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), vi.

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of culture, language, geography, ideology, and ethnicity to bring people to Christ," which would consider the following Pauline experiences as missionally relevant as well: his conversion (Acts 9:1–22; 22:3–16; 26:9–18); his prejourney evangelistic efforts in Damascus (Acts 9:19–22; 26:20), Jerusalem (Acts 9:23–30; 22:17–21; 26:20), and Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:25–30; 12:25); his activities and speeches beyond the third journey in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17–23:30); his witness before Governor Felix (Acts 23:31–24:27) and Governor Porcius Festus, King Agrippa, and Bernice (Acts 25:1–26:32) at Caesarea; and his journey to Rome via Malta and subsequent gospel presentation to the city's Jewish leaders (Acts 27:1–28:31).

Finally, Allen, in observing the letters of Paul to the Gentile churches, focused predominately on the Corinthian correspondence with forty-six biblical references, compared to 1 and 2 Thessalonians (twenty-two), Galatians (seven), 1 and 2 Timothy (six), Romans (five), Titus (three), Philippians (two), and Ephesians and Colossians with one mention each. Philemon was not cited. Allen not only placed considerable interpretative stress on a select number of Paul's letters to draw his conclusions, but also often gave his arguments a concentrated biblical weight in various subjects. For example, Allen's chapter on "Authority and Discipline" (pages 111–25) contains sixteen references to the Corinthian letters within seven pages (111–17), while page 68 holds nine references from 1 Thessalonians ("The Substance of St. Paul's Preaching"). When discussing Paul's first and second mission journeys, Allen similarly displayed a biblical convergence whereby pages 20 to 23 had eight references, six notations for both pages 10 to 12 and page 62, four for pages 66 to 67, and three for page 41. Analyzing the first three journeys showed an even more pronounced biblical concentration: pages 10 to 12 and page 62 (eight scriptures cited), and page 41 and pages 66 to 67 (both five). All this indicates that Allen supported his claims within a narrow range of Scripture. What then were the factors that shaped the British missionary's myopic view of biblical understanding?

Allen does not often mention his tradition—which guided him to order, ministry, and sacrament—yet Newbigin asserted that Allen took his sacramental theology for granted and, by default, used it as an exegetical lens to interpret the Bible. Thus, Allen approached the book of Acts and the Pauline corpus with a biased hermeneutical view that shaped his understanding and conclusions, which Newbigin emphasized in his foreword to *Missionary Methods.* He cautioned, "Allen was a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. He was a priest of

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the Church of England nurtured in the Catholic understanding of churchmanship. He was a High Churchman."[2] The bishop of the Church of South India continued:

> In Allen's thought—so far as I understand it—the central place given to the work of the Spirit in no way implied a lessening of the importance of the ordered life of the church as one divine society bound together in a single visible fellowship with the Lord and His apostles, and visibly united in the sacramental life.[3]

An Alternate Biblical Hermeneutic

Since the book of Acts was Allen's primary measure of Pauline mission methodology, this chapter will now explore an alternate biblical hermeneutic of interpreting Acts to draw missional conclusions and reexamine Allen's work, while serving as a model to elucidate the Lukan mission tapestries of prayer and spiritual conflict. William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. in *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* believe that Luke was not only a trustworthy historian, but also composed theological realities "to teach his readers what he believed God was accomplishing in the world and what God was commanding believers to do in and through the events he narrated."[4] To correctly interpret the teaching of a pericope in Acts, we need to correlate that section with the writer's overall structure of Luke-Acts and the progressive themes throughout. If we splinter the book of Acts into pieces (systematic theological, devotional, narrative, or sermon fragments) and do not view the overarching narrative of the whole of Luke-Acts, we fail to embrace the author's complete theological purpose. Our bits and pieces of Acts are more easily accommodated to our all-persuasive cultural story, dictated by our personal pilgrimage, theological tradition, and mission context. Yet when we shape the Bible rather than letting the Bible shape us, the question becomes what we can learn from the Bible rather than what the Bible is teaching.

I. Howard Marshall reminds us, "Our aim is to discover what the text meant in the mind of its original author for his intended audience."[5] This goal is subverted

2 Lesslie Newbigin, foreword to Allen, *Missionary Methods,* ii.
3 Ibid., iii.
4 William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 345.
5 I. Howard Marshall, introduction to *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 15.

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when we do not interpret the biblical text as originally intended. This is evident in Allen's disregard for the theological motifs in the Gospel of Luke that will inevitably impact Acts. In particular, Luke's interest in the role of the Holy Spirit, the believing community of prayer, spiritual conflict in mission, the contextualized gospel message, and compassion to the outcasts should not be overlooked.

Following this historical-critical approach to interpretation, we seek the first author's theological message and the response that he desired from his original audience. Only then should we ask what this means for our own mission context. In the process of proper interpretation of historical narrative, how does the reader discern what was applicable only to the original culture, and what should be practiced in today's context? In other words, should biblical narratives of the church's actions and decisions in the book of Acts also serve as norms to guide today's church? In part, the interpreter must be observant of the text itself, which may hold clues as to whether or not an example should be implemented.

On the other hand, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart claimed, "Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narrated or described does not function in a normative (i.e. obligatory) way—unless it can be demonstrated on other grounds that the author intended it to function in this way."[6] Concerning the hermeneutics of historical narrative, Fee and Stuart maintained that the word of God in Acts can only be regarded as normative for contemporary believers if it can be shown what the narrative was intended to teach. They stated, "Historic precedent, to have normative value, must be related to intent. That is, if it can be shown that the purpose of a given narrative is to establish precedent, then such precedent should be regarded as normative."[7]

This paper challenges the hermeneutical proverb of Fee and Stuart and offers a less restrictive approach, while still directly involving the vital purposes of the narrative. To interpret Acts, we must study the whole book, which includes Luke's Gospel, as well as the history of the early church in Acts, to understand if specific incidents form recurring themes. If individual events form a consistent pattern, then we can conclude that the biblical writer was emphasizing a normative principle. If the arrangement varies from situation to situation, then the applications may

6 Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth,* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 118–19. Also see Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 91–92.

7 Ibid., 121.

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