

The Sacramentality of Christian Mission and the New Evangelization: A Study of Luke 10:1

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Introduction

As the year of faith gradually roles by, one cannot but wonder about the outcomes of a full year's celebration and prospects going forward.¹ Was it worth the while? Has our faith really gotten deeper and more profound? How much has it affected the missionary import of church life? Do we have everything covered? If so, how do we sustain the momentum? And if not, what do we do to ensure that the mandate to bring the good news to all is carried out effectively? The Year of Faith invites us to be open to a fuller presence of Christ in our lives and bring Jesus to others.² Were we successful in both endeavours? If no, why and how so? If yes, how do we sustain what we have accomplished?

It is with these questions in mind that this study examines the statement of the evangelist Luke, when he mentioned that Jesus missioned the seventy (seventy-two) to all the cities and places he was about (intended) to visit (Luke 10:1). What is the *intent* in that statement and how actualized is that *intent*? Was that one mission enough for the accomplishment of that *intent* or were future missions and our own time included? At what point would we be able to say that proper coverage has been achieved as far as the injunction is concerned?

The study would like to suggest right from the outset that Jesus' injunction was an invitation to actualize universal redemption and reconciliation through the sacramentality of mission, and therefore, the text under examination is much more concerned with the transposition that takes place in missionary efforts rather than with how much ground is covered through missionary endeavours. Sometimes, so much emphasis is placed on the expansion agenda and little is done with regards to what I tag a sacramental transposition of the person of Jesus into the person of the missionary. Both must go hand in hand and this paper aims to highlight this other aspect of mission in order to complement existing efforts.

A good starting point would be an examination of the literary context of Luke 10:1. That will be followed by the analysis and interpretation of the verse and then a brief look at the outcomes of that interpretation. Finally, the study will take on the theme of the sacramentality of Christian mission with a view to highlighting the importance of presence and adequate representation in missionary endeavour.

The Literary Context of Luke 10:1

Luke 10:1 is located near the beginning of the Lukan journey narrative section of the gospel (9:51-19:27), following the brief presentation of the mission of the "twelve" in Luke 9:1-6. Such a strategic location is not without its implications, since, within the context of the journey narrative section, these newly recruited disciples become part of the journey with and for Jesus. They become a people of the "way," who not only accept the teaching of Jesus, but also identify fully "with the master's very way of life and destiny, a following that involves intimacy and

¹ Cf. *Porta Fidei*, 7, 9.

² See Pope Benedict XVI's Apostolic Letter "Motu Proprio data" *Porta Fidei* for the Indiction of the Year of Faith (11 October 2011), no. 1.

imitation.”³ Subsequently, as Joel Green correctly mentions, “the missionary instructions that the seventy-two receive are determined by the exigencies of the journey.”⁴

The verse is without any synoptic parallel and, therefore specially Lukan in origin, whether redactional or from an existing tradition, with only one exception, namely, the mention of the sending out in pairs, which is also found in Mark 6:7. Although, the surrounding material has parallels in Mark and Matthew, 10:1 is creatively used by the evangelist as transition from the previous pericopés to what follows even as it forms a foundation for the presentation of subsequently shared material. It provides a setting for the mission charge and summarizes its content and implications.

One needs to also be mindful of the fact that the consideration of literary-contextual matters regarding Luke 10:1 must be inclusive of the entire Lukan corpus, since this introductory statement to the narrative of the expanded mission in the Lukan tradition supplies the rationale for the more universal mission of the disciples of Jesus in Luke’s second volume, the Acts of the Apostles.

Text and Interpretation

Following this brief discussion on the literary context of the Luke 10:1, the study can now direct its attention to the interpretation of the verse, beginning with a brief focus on some of the key terms or concepts in the verse. Some of these have also been subjects of various contentious and teething discussions Lukan scholarship.

Kyrios: Lord, is frequently used by Luke to refer to Jesus. It is a distinctive feature of his gospel and he uses the title so extensively in the narrative itself (see 7:13, 19; 10:1, 39, 41; 11:39; 12:42; 13:15; 17:5-6; 18:16).⁵ The Lord is mentioned as the subject of two very important verbs: first is the reference to a special act of choosing or election (*avadeixen*, translated by the *NJB* as “appointed”) and the second is the act of sending. These two define the relationship between Jesus and the seventy(two): he was the origin and source of the mission for which he gives the terms of reference (10:2-16); those sent were disciples, who now take on a apostolic character (not in the sense of the apostolic juridical personality of the twelve, but by the very nature, content and meaning of the verb for missioning, *apesteilen*). Both verbs and actions define both the nature of the message and the messengers. In carrying out the mandate as given, the messengers take on the identity of the sender even as they bear the same word and carry out the same actions carried out by the sender (sense of Jesus’ statement in 10:16).

Seventy or Seventy-two: Although the discussion regarding the disparity in manuscript traditions on whether those on this second mission were seventy or seventy-two has been heated in certain circles, it is important to note that they are both well attested in the different manuscript traditions. With regard to which of the two numbers is correct, John Nolland notes that the “loss of two is easier to explain than its addition.”⁶

³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989) 123, 134.

⁴ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; ed. Gordon D. Fee; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997) 396-97.

⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke (Sacra Pagina, 3)*; ed. Daniel J. Harrington, SJ; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991) 188.

⁶ John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34* (Ed. Bruce M. Metzger; Word Biblical Commentary, 35b; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1993) 546. The other textual variations in 10:1 are negligible because of the focus of this paper. The

Noteworthy also is the fact that the numbers “seventy and seventy-two are often interchangeably used in Jewish traditions, symbolizing wholeness and completeness, like the traditional number for the number of nations of the world, found in the list in Genesis 10:2-31 (MS [70], LXX [72]). Thus Jesus’ mission to all the nations is in view and it is not derailed or displaced by the focus of his movement to Jerusalem.⁷ Craig Evans notes that the number seventy(two) may represent the “seventy nations Gentile nations of the world, founded by the sons of Noah after the flood (Genesis 10). Thus...the Seventy would represent the Jewish Gentile foundation for the church.”⁸

Noteworthy and obviously so is the fact that no geographical setting is provided for the sending of the seventy(two). Yet in the context of larger Luke-Acts narrative, its geographical delineation is unveiled. It is found in the number sent (seventy (two) and in the anticipated mission to the “ends of the earth” as portrayed in Acts 1:8.⁹ “This third block of material focuses on the continuation of Jesus’ ministry of proclaiming the kingdom of God, which is extended ahead of him, as he journeys, by the disciples who go before at his direction.”¹⁰

Heterous: Others in this verse also raises some questions. In connection with whom are these others mentioned? Is this a clear parallel to the first sending, that of the twelve in Luke 9:1-6, or is it a reference to the volunteer disciples presented in Luke 9:57-62, which immediately precedes the sending of the seventy(two)? In relation to the later, one could argue that the sending of the seventy(two) in 10:1 was a response to the reluctance and rebuff noted in 9:57-62, such that despite the difficulties noted in that pericopé, there is another group of generous and more eager responders to the invitation of Jesus. These he sends out two by two. Nolland notes that both pericopés may be in view in 10:1, in which case, the “twelve may actually be understood to be involved alongside the seventy(two) as a continuation of the role they already have, and by extension, the same may be said of the anonymous messenger of 9:52.”¹¹ Also the narrative of the seventy(two) must be read in the light of the first sending in Luke 9. In clear terms, the instructions given to them combine the instruction given to the twelve to preach and heal (9:1-2) and that given to the anonymous messenger of (9:51) to prepare the way as Jesus began his journey to Jerusalem. These seventy (two) were to go and prepare the way but also work as labourers in the vineyard on the same terms that were given to the twelve.¹² This is the point of the first verb of 10:1 (*anedeixen*), which when translated as “publicly commissioned,” highlights the special and distinctive nuance of the intent of Jesus as he sent (*apesteilen*) out these seventy(two). Commissioned and sent gives a special sense of an apostolic ministry that bears with it all the authority and representation of the first sending.¹³

number seventy-two is found in N A C L W Θ Ξ Ψ, while the number seventy is found in P⁷⁵ B D 0181. Nolland also spells them out in great detail.

⁷ See Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 549. Behind the number may also be the frequent use in scripture. For example, Moses chose 70 elders in Num 11:24-25, plus the later two elders, Eldad and Medad, in 11:26-30. Seventy was also the count of Jacob’s offspring (Exod 1:5; Deut 10:22).

⁸ Craig A. Evans, *Luke* (New International Biblical Commentary, 3; ed. W. Ward Gasque; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990) 169.

⁹ Green, *Luke*, 410.

¹⁰ Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 547.

¹¹ See Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 549.

¹² Green, *Luke*, 410, 412-13.

¹³ See M. Culy *et al*, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament; ed. Martin M. Culy; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010) 341-42.

Two by two:¹⁴ The reference to the sending, two by two, is the only component in this verse that has parallel in Mark's account of the mission of the twelve, whom Jesus sends out two by two (Mark 6:7). Luke's use of the tradition of being sent out in pairs looks back to the ancient practice of the validity of the "testimony of two witnesses" (cf. Num 35:30; Deut 19:15). The pair may also have been for the purpose of companionship and mutual support in the midst of the challenges accompanying their mission.¹⁵ Robert Karris further adds that such mutual coexistence and support embody "the gospel of peace" signalled in 10:5-6.¹⁶

Interpretation

The hermeneutical key to Luke 10:1 may be found in Luke 10:16, with which it forms a thematic inclusio around the details of the mission, as well as in some of the other missionary texts in Luke-Acts, esp. Acts 1:8. In Luke 10:16, the sent one of the father, who fully represents the father through his life and works, describes how such a representation is extended to the ones he has sent out in 10:1. The oneness between the God and Jesus is manifested in the message and works of Jesus, the missioned and sent one of God; that same oneness is translated by the obedience of the disciples as they are missioned and sent by Jesus. They make Jesus present by their very presence. Theirs is not just a mission of proclamation and healing. It was also a mission of presence; a presence that means peace and wholeness.

Many scholars in the past interpreted the text to mean that Jesus was merely sending these disciples ahead of him like the anonymous messenger in 9:52 to prepare the way; therefore, merely going ahead. He comes behind. Their mission was therefore limited in scope and time. Some of those who held this view were simply eager to make a distinction between the twelve and this expanded mission because of the characteristically hasty nature of the instruction in 10:2-15.¹⁷ Yet as Fitzmyer points out, "they have not only been given a share in Jesus' 'power and authority' (9:1) and been sent on ahead of him (10:1), but they have been commissioned to speak in his name and in the name of the one who sent Jesus himself" (cf. 4:43).¹⁸ The added emphasis here is on their status as "disciple-representatives," who in the standard practice of the time, are recognized not just as messengers who speak and act in the name of the one who sent them, but also as messengers in whom the sender is truly present. To have seen or encountered them is to have seen and encountered the sender. According to that practice, "The one who is

¹⁴ For details on the textual variation regarding *ana duo* or *ana duo duo*, see Martin M. Culy *et al*, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament; ed. Martin M. Culy; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010) 342.

¹⁵ Note that this is not the only sent of pairing found in Luke-Acts. The evangelist makes a more extensive use of pairing of this sort. Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:1, Paul and Silas in Acts 15:40, Peter and John in Acts 8:14, Barnabas and mark in Acts 15:40 and Judas and Silas in Acts 15:32. (cf. Joseph Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV* [The Anchor Bible, 28A; eds. William F. Albright and David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1964] 846).

¹⁶ Robert J. Karris, O.F.M., "The Gospel According to Luke," in *NJBC* (eds. Raymond E. Brown, et al; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990) 43:122.

¹⁷ See, for example, the later 19th Century commentary of Jamieson, Fausset and Brown (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1871), which notes that: "The mission, unlike that of the Twelve, was evidently quite temporary. All the instructions are in keeping with a brief and hasty pioneering mission, intended to supply what of general preparation for coming events the Lord's own visit afterwards to the same "cities and places" (Lu 10:1) would not, from want of time, now suffice to accomplish; whereas the instructions to the Twelve, besides embracing all those to the Seventy, contemplate world-wide and permanent effects." (<http://www.textweek.com/mlk/lk10a.htm>, accessed on October 23, 2013)

¹⁸ Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 856.

sent is to be regarded as the sender himself.”¹⁹ So the evangelist made special efforts to put this in as plainly a way as he could, using the “Q” material he shares with Matthew (10:40) to indicate that even the teaching of the church of his day and time “is rooted in the teaching of Jesus himself” and in a certain sense, that church was the very person of Jesus (cf. Acts 9:4-5).²⁰

Eugene LaVerdiere hit the nail on the head when he notes that: “living in Jesus’ absence, the seventy actualize the presence of the Lord (see 10:1) in the historical years between his ascension and the definitive consummation of history (10:16). Jesus’ journey thus provides the community with a pattern for its eschatological mission as well as for its journey to God.”²¹ The sacramentality of discipleship is an indispensable part of that journey. In the mission of the disciples of Jesus, even in the present age, Jesus becomes present to the world and to today’s man and woman.

The Sacramentality of Christian Mission and the New Evangelization

The main argument of this paper thus far is that in addition to the geographical and chronological implications of the missioning of the seventy (two), there is also a sacramental character, that is, a sign character. The presence of a missionary is the presence of Jesus, at least in a certain sense. Those who are beneficiaries of the work of a missionary should see and feel Jesus in those who bring them the message of faith. Until the union of the spoken word and the “Word,” that is, Jesus himself, manifest themselves vividly in the very life, message, work and presence of the missionary, the full implications of the sending have not been realized. Consequently, the absence of such a sacramental character may be responsible, in part, for the failures that have led to the need for a new evangelization.

To bring it home. One may dare to ask: how much of Christ do people experience in our ecclesial and evangelical structures, personnel, functionaries and agents? The extent to which Jesus is present and transparent in their mission defines the successes that we can record. So as we discuss issues regarding lapsed Christians, shallow churchgoers, drifting Roman Catholics, and empty pews (in Europe and America) during this year of faith, a little bit of introspection is necessary. Many no longer encounter Christ himself in the structures we have put up and it is sometimes worse when they come in contact with the “so called” agents of evangelization.

When Jesus sent the disciples to the places he intended to visit (Luke 10:1), he simply meant that these disciples become his word and work, his hands and feet. Where they go and visit, Jesus visits. Whom they touch, Jesus touches. When they speak, Jesus speaks. When they are present, Jesus is present. This sacramental representation places a huge responsibility on the disciple and

¹⁹ Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 856-57. Cf. Ulrich Luz’s commentary on the “Q” parallel, Matt 10:40 (*Matthew 8-20* [Hermeneia-A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; ed. Helmut Koester; Trans. James E. Crouch; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001] 120).

²⁰ Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 857. The principle implied here is that of “representation, akin to the *šālīh* of the contemporary Judaism: the one sent is to be regarded as the sender himself.” Despite the warning by Fitzmyer that one should not read into Luke that Pauline designation of the church as the body of Christ, one can certainly not miss the sign character of mission as it is given to these disciples (See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* [The Anchor Bible, 31; eds. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1998] 425). He, however, notes that at the time of the writing of the Lukan corpus, the evangelist could perceive Jesus “identifying himself with his disciples, in effect with his church.”

²¹ Eugene LaVerdiere, S.S.S., *Luke* (New Testament Message, 5; eds. Wilfrid Harrington, O. P. and Donald Senior, C. P.; Dublin: Veritas Publication, 1980) 146.

history has shown that those who truly dispose themselves to being vessels and sacraments of Jesus have very fruitful missionary endeavours.

So if our year of faith must yield the desired fruits and the new evangelization generate the expected outcomes, Jesus must become more present in our structures and in the agents of evangelization. If the structures we now have hinder Jesus' presence, then change must take place and Pope Francis has already lead the way in that regard and thank God the world is already responding to the signals he has shown. Many already say that they can connect with him because they feel the presence of Jesus in and through him.

The structures we have are too comfortable, too sedentary, too official, too immune to the signs of the time and too corporate. That, I am afraid to say, is also the case with many of those who are supposed to be agents of evangelization. The presence of Christ is hindered by such unwelcoming structures and agents, despite all the work that we think we are doing. There is too much emphasis on number. We need to start simplifying things by breaking the numbers down to individual persons and individual needs. We need to come down from our corporate ladder and ivory towers to be with the people as living persons, and not just numbers, once more. It is true that we have to take care of sheep that is already in the fold, but Jesus is also challenging us to venture into new mission fields and uncharted waters. Those too, he intends to visit and the only way he can do that is through us; through the agents of evangelization; through a renew and a re-energized church; through a living church that manifests the living presence of Jesus Christ.²² Beyond just showing up at the ends of the earth, Jesus intends to, through us, be a living presence at the ends of the earth.

The concept of the ends of the earth, in missionary terms, is much more than a geographical mandate. That mandate extends to the ends of the earth, to the corners, the fringes, and the margins of human existence, in all its evangelical and social justice ramifications. The new mission fields of Jesus exist in these corners and margins. That is where we find the jails, the hospitals, the slums, the addicts, the forgotten poor, those stereotyped by society for different reasons, rural and underserved communities and populations, those separated from life and civilization by water, mountains, forests and deserts, those condemned to a life of sin (prostitution, drug and alcohol addiction, etc.) as a result of systemic decays that enshrine oppressive socio-political and economic structures, those condemned to human degradation by psychiatric and mental conditions, those oppressed and kept down by unjust cultural and traditional structures, the many homeless and hungry, those who suffer from all forms of violence (religious, cultural, social, family, educational, cultic etc.), our teeming population of young people, etc.²³

We must not leave out those who have been enslaved by the allures of wealth, power, and immorality. These and many more are places that Jesus intends to visit and the only way to actualize that intention is by a faithful and dedicated renewal of the commitment of both structures and agents in the work and mission of evangelization.²⁴ Just getting there is not enough. Jesus wants to be there also. Bringing him there is the ultimate desire of the Lord, who calls and sends.

²² Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, 29 June 2013, no. 4.

²³ Cf. *Porta Fidei*, 14.

²⁴ *Porta Fidei*, 6.

Pope Francis in his Encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, suggests that the mission field is so universal, so all-inclusive, so all embracing, that no one and nothing is left out or behind. He notes: “Faith teaches us to see that every man and woman represents a blessing for me, that the light of God’s face shines on me through the faces of my brothers and sisters...at the heart of biblical faith is God’s love, his concrete concern for every person, and his plan of salvation embraces all humanity and all creation, culminating in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”²⁵

Conclusion

The Latin adage, *nemo dat quod non habet*, is applicable here as we conclude this discourse. The truth is that the extent to which Jesus becomes present to those to whom we are sent depends to a great extent on the measure of our own openness to the grace and the spirit of Jesus in our life. Unless our faith is deepened through this process of revitalization that we call the year of faith, we would be unable to help others deepen theirs or even kindle faith where there is none.²⁶ The little we do under such conditions would be like the seed that falls on shallow ground during the sowing (Matt 13:5) with very short-lived impact. Jesus intends to visit with us, in us, through us and by us. He also needs us to be courageous enough to visit all the places he intends to visit. Let us bring Christ with us as we do the work we are called to do. Let us be Christ to the world of our daily encounters and endeavours. Our consciousness of what Jesus wants to do in us and through us goes a long way in faith formation. Our willingness to cooperate with his intention goes a long way to making our mission fruitful. Hopefully, when our life on earth is over and we give a report of our mission, we would be able to say: “even the devils submit to us when we use your name;” even the worst situations we resolved by your presence in our mission; even the greatest resistance was subdued. And I pray that we hear Jesus, the sender and master, say to us: “Rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:17-20)

²⁵ Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 54.

²⁶ cf. *Porta Fidei*, 7.