

Philosophy of Mission in the Bible

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ABSTRACT

Today one fourth of the inhabitants of the world proclaim Christianity as their religion. This popularity of the faith started after 15th century, when Western Christian powers started colonizing the people of Africa, Asia and South East Asia. Christian Mission took benefit of conducive circumstances to spread its message in the subjugated nations. Missionaries put a lot of efforts to win the hearts of people. Missionaries had to face a lot of difficulties and even some of them had to scarify their lives. Muslim scholars with reference to the Bible opine that the message of Jesus was only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. In spite of the view, is it not logical to enquire the real reason behind the success of mission? Was it only political backing that caused the spread of Christianity or the Bible contains a viable message and methodology of mission? This article is an effort to glean the teachings and philosophy of mission in the Bible.

INTRODUCTION

Muslim scholars have always been proclaiming that religion of Islam is the universal religion and shall last till the last day. Only its teachings are applicable beyond time and space. All other religions and faiths are momentary and time bound. The revealed religions like Judaism and Christianity were the source of guidance for only the people of Moses (A.S) and Jesus (A.S). Particularly Christianity has been thought to be the religion for Bani Israel as Jesus (A.S) himself stated “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel”.¹ Goal and limit of his message were openly been declared in his instructions to his fellows while sending them for mission. Matthew quotes that “these twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”.² In lieu of all such commands in the Bible we find Christianity is the largest religion on the earth today. Almost one fourth of the inhabitants proclaim Jesus as their savior. It means that apart from the refereed above verses, the Bible contains more instructions on mission and has a viable code and philosophy that has been gearing followers of Jesus (A.S) towards mission for centuries. They did not give up calling infidels to the way of salvation even in arduous circumstances. They suffered all types of brutalities on the hands of Romans and other political authorities of their time. History witnesses that early three centuries of Christianity is the tale of sacrifices and sufferings. The first sigh of relief for them became possible after conversion of Emperor Constantine that made them to embark upon mission in comfort of political backing. The following article is an effort to analyze the ethos of the movement and paradigm of mission in the light of the teaching of Bible.

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Christianity is a missionary religion. It claims to have a comprehensive philosophy of Mission. This philosophy has influenced the religion to the extent that it has overshadowed its theological and ethical aspects and it has become mostly recognized with the Mission. Although there are other religions i.e. Buddhism, Islam which are missionary by nature, but Christianity has infused the institution of mission to such an extent in its body that it seems to be synonymous with it. There is hardly a part of the world which is without Christian Mission. People of various races, tribes and origin know about Mission before they are acquainted with Christianity. Why is this phenomenon? To answer this question one will have to look into the theological literature of Mission in Holy Scriptures - the New Testament. Christians believe that God Himself is explaining this way of life and the verses of the Gospel are projecting this theme to such an extent that it depicts a comprehensive picture. It discusses all logical synchronized steps and dimensions of the movement of mission. This multi-dimensional movement consists of a scheme of seven elements in Holy Scriptures i.e., command, message, purpose, destination, method/process, power/ equipment, and reward. This scheme presents the Gospel's rationale and intrinsically meets the need of the Mission. The dimensions of mission are projected on Figure A and the original references given in the New Testament are subsequently explained in the comparative statement on the Figure B included in the annex.

This dimensional understanding of the missionary phenomenon taken by a number of scholars includes Matthew Vallenickal who says that the commissioning words of the four Gospels are complementary and illustrative. After the comparative presentation of the text from the Gospels, he contemplates that, we have four elements of evangelization. The command to “preach the Gospel”, the command “to make disciples”, the command to “preach repentance” and “to be sent as Jesus was sent to take away sin”. The Gospel which Jesus preached and the disciples were sent to preach is the Gospel of the “Kingdom of God” or “Salvation” or “Life”.³ John Power SMA, including 8th verse of Acts 1, with the commissioning words of four Gospels states, “It is easy to see that these texts present three essential elements of the missionary apostolate: a) an active going forth; go; proclaim; preach; witness b) a message, of hope; Good News; forgiveness of sins c) an unlimited horizon: the whole world; all the nations; all creation; the ends of the earth. It is considering these three elements that we must, even today, evaluate any missionary theory or achievement”.⁴ S. Paul Schilling in reviewing the aims of mission, states that “if we re-examine these materials (Commissioning verses of Gospels and Acts) with particular reference to the purpose of Christian missionary endeavor, we find in them the following directives: The followers of Christ are:

- i) Sent to carry forward among men [and woman] the ministry for suffering of love committed to the crucified and risen by the Lord himself.
- ii) Commissioned to bear witness to Jesus Christ in various places near and far, throughout the world;
- iii) Sent forth to win souls in all nations and to baptize them in the name of Triune God;
- iv) Chosen as the new people of God, and in this capacity called to proclaim His redemptive acts and carry on His behalf the ministry or ambassadorship of reconciliation;
- v) Charged with instructing new disciples to observe the teachings of Jesus;
- vi) Counseled to preach the good news of God's Kingdom in the expectation that the end of history will disclose the victory of God in judgment and glory; and
- vii) Assured that in all their efforts, they will be empowered by the Holy Spirit".⁵

In the following pages the comprehensiveness of missiology with the help of Biblical commentaries is illustrated, and all the seven elements will be explained subsequently.

COMMAND

The Bible, explaining the events of the life of Jesus Christ hints God's command about mission. Holy Scripture in its own terminological style dictates the followers to do the sacred job of mission. This directive is explicit in the language of Jesus Christ; sometime directly instructing his followers to embark upon the mission and sometime implied in the phrases of stories. Sometime it is reflected in dialogues and sometimes in situational context. Calling, preaching, follow and discipleship are the phrases that advocate the command and orders of God for mission. For example:

“Go therefore and make disciples”⁶

“Go into the world and preach the Gospel”⁷

“Should be preached”⁸

“As the Father sent me, so I am sending you”⁹

“Be my witness”?¹⁰

“Lead a life worthy of calling of which you have been called.”¹¹

“Go sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me.”¹²

These are some of the instructions to the apostles to invite others to the Kingdom of God. All these commandments induce the believer to come out for the sacred job of calling. They are put into practice of preaching. Jesus Christ himself had been witnessing the authority of God. The citizens of Jerusalem had constantly been hearing the invitation of Jesus Christ to the

way of God. His whole life seems to be the story of calling and proclaiming the discipleship of God. Even the last moment of His, worldly life, after the resurrection, as narrated by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is the experience of calling. His last instruction to the apostles was to go and make disciples, go and baptize and preach. And these last commands are very logical because as now He was no more in this world to do the job, it was the duty of his true followers to continue his Mission and prove their loyalty to the Master. Lawrence E. Porter in his commentary of Luke explained the words of “would be preached”. “At that last moment”, he says, “While they were exchanging these wonderful experiences, He again appears. Despite these wonderful things they are paralyzed with fear for it seems they have been taken off their guard. They were startled and frightened and imagined that they are meeting a spirit. He invites them to touch Him; He eats in their presence of the very food they are eating. He repeats briefly the lesson of Emmaus road, and commissions them to preach in Repentance and Remission of Sins ... In His Name to all Nations”.¹³ The comments of Porter are significantly projecting the command. Jesus Christ is asking His disciples to touch His body; and eating with them reflects the effort of Christ to make them to believe that what they are experiencing in this special company is a reality and not an illusion or hallucination. After awakening His disciples he transfers his most important order the command of preaching. He emphasizes that it “should be preached”. A. E. Harvey names this last moment scene as “then He opened their minds to understand the scriptures”.¹⁴ Carroll Stuhlmann C. P., affirming this point writes that “Luke insists upon the importance of scriptural interpretation either by Jesus or by one of the apostles”.¹⁵

The same significance of message is found with Mec Nicol when he phrases it as the “Farewell Instructions”. The only theme and subject which Mec Nicol could present in that Farewell Instructions was “the Missionary Commission”.¹⁶ A. E. Harvey comments on John “As the Father Sent Me, so I sent you”. He says that “it belongs to a pattern of Jesus teaching as it is prescribed in the Farewell discourses. But the scene as a whole falls into emphasis on the fact that the risen Jesus was not mere ghost, so here the apparition, though he enters through locked doors, shows the disciples His Hands and His side again, the ending of the scene represents a formal commission given by Jesus to his disciples”.¹⁷ Peake's reaffirming Christ's role of making Himself consciously identified to the disciples for significance of the message, narrates, “He shows his wounded members, no doubt, for identification, and to show that his body is “real” and not a phantom. Jesus repeats his greetings and transfers to his disciples - to the Church His mission”. Prof. Earnest W. Burch commenting on the Father's words of “Be my witness” (Acts 1:8) terms it as “a vast responsibility and opportunity”.¹⁸

All the commentators enthusiastically advocate the importance of the message and especially mention the environment created by Jesus Christ Himself. This environment not only signifies the importance of His command but the philosophy of the Christian religion that has overcome all other ethical and theological teachings of Jesus Christ. F.C. Atkinson while emphasizing the need of Mission, points out that “the existence of millions in the world who have never heard the Savior's name is a disgrace to us all”¹⁹ Atkinson's comments are leading towards the dire need of mission for pagans and unbelievers. He wants to invite Christians for the fulfillment of God's command in the world which is still ignorant of the evangelical message of God.

MESSAGE

Matthew's words, “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit contain the sacred message. It was the message which was reinforced in His last meeting with the apostles. It is the program for establishment of the Kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Verkuyl titles the message as “the salvation activities of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”²⁰. Today's Christianity and objectives of mission are projection of these three basic components of the program. This claim of Trinity is not only criticized by non-Christian religionists but also by Christian commentators of the Gospel themselves who are of the view that “most commentators doubt that the Trinitarian formula was original at this point in Matthew's Gospel, since the New Testament elsewhere does not know such a formula and describes baptism is being performed in the name of Lord Jesus”.²¹ John L. McKenzie expresses the same view and says “it seems unlikely that the Trinitarian formula was the earliest baptismal formula employed but the inclusion of all three reflects a more mature practice of Matthew”.²² The same pattern of understanding is found with R. E. Nixon. He says that “initially baptism was administered in the name of Jesus but in due course it came to be administered in the name of Trinity. The reference to the Trinity here may not be intended as a baptismal formula but as a theological description of meaning of the sacrament”²³ Despite all such views of commentators, present day Christianity is very rigid on the point of Trinity and it has become one of the fundamentals of Faith. The entire, mission is geared towards the creation of the kingdom of God in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as provided in Matthew's Gospel.

PURPOSE

Was it a prophetic Mission of Jesus Christ to proclaim and ask his disciples to follow His path or His personal wish to be established in the world? Or was it a Godly purpose to be acknowledged worldwide or a humanistic need to witness Him and His Kingdom? Was it an imposed movement or an awaited blessing? The teachings of the Bible about the purpose of mission proclaim it to be a dire necessity of humanity as claimed by

Christians. Humanity seems to be wayward and aimless creation without the proclamation. Man's condition emerges as the most depressed and pitiable in the absence of apostleship. Christian theology claims that humans are sinner and the burden of sin changes their psychology into the psychology of criminal. It is only the proclamation of the Christian faith which can resolve his sin. It is only the witnessing of the Lord which provides salvation from this eternal peccatism. Ismail Faruqi describing peccatism in Christianity expounds that “without it, the whole edifice of Christian ideas stands on sand”²⁴. The idea of the man as a fallen creature is deeply rooted in Christian philosophy of life and is believed that man is elementarily corrupt because of Adam's sin. Bishop Newbigin categorically says that “sin is something which is seated at the very center of the human personality. The human race as a whole is corporately guilty of sin”.²⁵ There is no part of the human race which is free from sin. There is no part of man's nature which is free from sin. In this bleak, horrible and depressed psychological context, man naturally, will search for expiation. Man will try his utmost to get rid of the situation. The expiation will become the only desire of mankind. Jesus Christ commands his disciples to go, baptize and expiate those who come to his way. It is the way of God which leads to salvation and expiation. There are a number of verses in the Bible which explain this theme i.e. “I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me”²⁶ “And there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by whom we must be saved”²⁷ “For man who believes with the depth of his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved”²⁸ “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners”²⁹ “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. You and your household”³⁰ this “distinctive feature of Christian theology”³¹ as narrated by Abdul Hamid Qadri is greatly explained and highlighted by commentators of the Bible. Repentance or the forgiveness from the sins introduces two factors as commented by I. H. Marshall. “The command to preach repentance and faith to all nations was issued, and for those who had been witnesses of His resurrection, appearances were promised that God's power would enable them to be His witnesses”³² The graciousness of repentance and remission of sins is identified by John Wesley when he comments on the same verse of Luke (24:47-49). “The way that it was so graciously encouraged the greatest sinners to repent, when they say that even murderers of Christ were not exempted from mercy”³³ And all this expiation and salvation is not a simple purpose but in the words of Matthew D, salvation is “an authentic achievement of creation”³⁴ God Himself was pure and clean. He created this world and man in his manner of cleanliness and purity. Both of His creations were pure. But human sin corrupted the whole creation. This world because of his sinful existence endangered the work of God. Now, when, he confesses the faith of God and accepts the kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, He, not only expiates himself but also helps to

purify the creation of God. As much as persons are purified and expiated from sin the world becomes more and more purified.

POWER

The words of Matthew “I am with you always” (28:20) and John's “Receive the Holy Spirit” (20:23) designate the power gifted by Jesus Christ to his apostles. He knew that the command which He was giving to them was not an easy task but it was a challenge. His experience had taught Him that His disciples will face hardships and arduous circumstance, in the way of calling. When He was breathing on them and awarding them the Holy Spirit and assuring them His Company, He was in fact equipping them with the power - the spiritual power necessary for the task. It is very logical that whenever one embarks upon a challenge he needs the capability to face it. If he is not well prepared then he is bound to fail. The equipment and the armament which Jesus Christ had were awarded to His disciples too. The only power that could satisfy them was His own person and the same was declared to be with them. One who went for calling, one goes for mission or one who will gear up for preaching will experience His Spiritual Company. David J. Ellis relates this gift of God with the birth of man. Commenting on John's phrase “Receive the Holy Spirit”, He says “the first effusion of the breath of God made man a living being. Here, the breath of the risen Christ makes the timorous disciples into new men”³⁵ This newmanship was the power that made his disciples to go to antagonistic tribes of Jerusalem for preaching the “Good News”. This newmanship is the armor that is preparing thousands of missionaries every year to travel to the corners of the world for calling. Donald Guthrie takes up the issue in a different way. He advocates the thesis that one that works for God and goes for preaching is definitely awarded the Godly prize. In his words, “since the Greek Pneuma means both breath and spirit, some specific assurance of the conveyance of the gift is clearly given here”.³⁶ Assurance that if a believer goes for God's mission will not be left alone and he will surely be gifted with the Holy Spirit and will experience His presence in his mission. This spiritual reliance provides the energy to face any kind of hard circumstances to the worker.

PROCESS

There are three words that tell the process of preaching and calling. These words reveal the logical method and process of accepting some unbeliever into the camp of followers. These words are: witnessing the repentance, teaching and baptizing. This gradual and progressive process is not necessarily to be adopted and followed. It varies from person to person and situation to situation. The duty and obligation on missionary are to apply this mechanism or adopt any of the options for the completion of his task. Theologians have been of the different view about the methodology. Some think that baptizing is essential at any cost and others opine that if

circumstances are not favoring then only witnessing and preaching are sufficient. John Wesley says that “baptizing and teaching are the two great branches of the general design of Christ's commission and these were to be determined by the circumstances of things; which made it necessary baptizing adult Jews or heathens to teach them before they were taught as Jewish children, in all ages were first circumcised and after taught to do all that God had commanded them”.³⁷ John L. McKenzie explains Matthew's phrase that “their work is to baptize and to teach. Baptism is a rite of initiation; the command to baptize “into the name” is to signify that the person baptized belongs to the Trinity of persons whose names are invoked in baptism”.³⁸

DESTINATION

Jesus has not confined his disciples to a particular nation, tribe or any particular geographical boundary. God is not the God of one part of the world or the creator of anyone nation. He has created all mankind and the entire universe. So His principles are for all the nations and for the entire world. His blessings can never be confined in some specific context. Christian theologians claim that it is not a fact that human beings of one nation or any tribe are the only sinners and that they are corrupting their bounded ecology by their sinful living. All the mankind is sinner, so all the world is polluted with their sins. Salvation is not bound as far as man (sinner) in the world (the corrupted/polluted) is living, it will have to touch the boundaries. That is why Jesus Christ in his last message of Commission commanded his disciples to spread the Good News and go to all directions and all the people of this world “to the whole world” and “to all creation” (16:15) and Matthew's (28:19) and Luke's (24:47) words of “all nations” are determining the bounds of mission. Jesus Christ, knowing the need of salvation for every single soul in each corner of the world, asked His apostles to go everywhere and witness their repentance, preach and baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Newton Davies explaining Matthew's words of “all nations”, writes that “the universality of the Christian Message is inherent in all teachings of Jesus, but it was due largely to the; spiritual experience of Paul that this universality received definite expression”³⁹. It is impossible to maintain that everything which goes to constitute even the essentials of Christianity must necessarily be traceable to explicit words of Jesus. This theme was further advocated in John L. Mckenzie's understanding of Matthew's words that “there is no longer any question of the restriction of mission to Jews”⁴⁰. R. E. Nixon names it “the universal authority of the Lord entrusted to disciples for universal mission”⁴¹. S. Paul Schilling referring to the verses under discussion concludes “in the New Testament passages the followers of Christ are commissioned to bear witness to Jesus Christ in places near and far throughout the world sent forth to win disciples in all nations and to baptize them in the name of the Triune God”⁴² And this unboundedness of

the sphere of mission is also not restricted in any of the time- frame. As the creation and universe are designed for the particular time known to God Himself the message is also for that specified time. The mission was not confined to the times of Jesus Christ or the time of his twelve apostles. The universality of mission is also not time bounded. John Wesley comments, "Our Lord speaks without any limitation or restriction. If, therefore, every creature in every age hath not heard it, either those who should hear it, or both, made void the council of God herein."⁴³ Eternity of God is acknowledged with the eternity and everlasting nature of His mission. As God is for all the creation, the entire world and all the time, so His command carries the characteristics of universality in the context of time, space and souls.

REWARD

Now at the end it is very logical to think that after the long struggle and putting all energies in the way of God, one would expect the reward for the job done. It is human psychology to look forward to the better future and hope some plus points in-his favor. Although it is Godly endeavor and the reward is hidden in the core of the job and spiritually imbued soul is the reward itself, but God has promised the reward in spiritual as well as worldly terms. Success itself is the reward that satisfies someone when he gets it. It has great psychological implications and a step forward to the goal enhances the desire, will and courage to speed up. When a missionary wins a soul to the way of God his zeal and passion automatically increases and he once again embarks upon the Godly journey--the way of calling. Apart from human psychological treatment the experience of the company of Jesus Christ is the reward for a missionary which is tremendously boundless. When a missionary is filled with joy and pleasure of the conscious company of Jesus he is charged with the new fuel and zeal.

Besides this, reward we find a number of sayings of Jesus Christ and commitments on His behalf to the missionaries about heavenly rewards and in this regards following quotes from the New Testament help us to understand it: "Take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded"⁴⁴, "Sow righteousness gets a sure rewarded"⁴⁵, "Go, sell what you have, and give to poor, and you will have treasure in heaven"⁴⁶, "Whatever your task, work heartily as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward".⁴⁷

ANNEX

FIGURE A

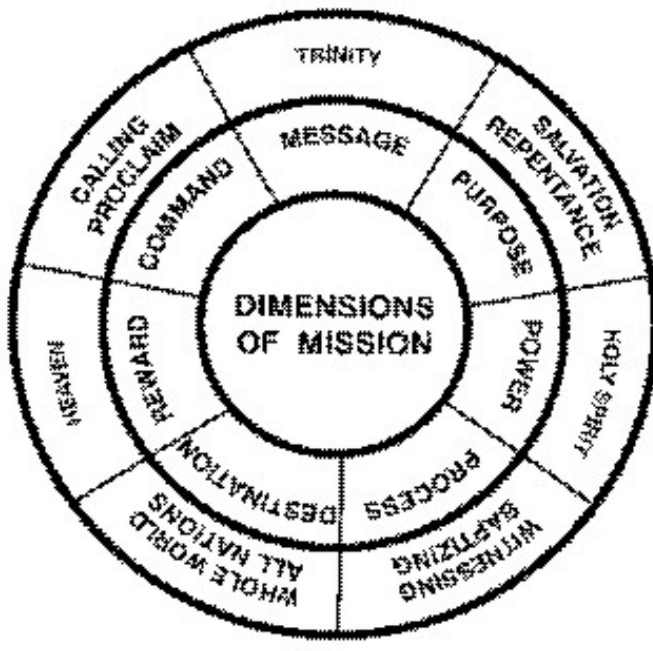


FIGURE B

Comparison of Scriptural Injunctions on Mission

	METHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN	ACTS
Command	Make disciples 28:19	Proclaim 16:15	Preached 24:47	Sending 20:21	-
Message	In the name of Father Son or Holy spirit 28:19	-	-	-	-
Purpose	-	Good News 16:15	Repentance 24:47	Sins are forgiven 24:23	-
Power	-	-	-	Holy Spirit 20:22	Holy Spirit 1:8
Process	-	Baptize 16:16	-	-	Witness 1:8
Destination	All the Nations 28:19	All Creation 16:15	All the Nations 24:47	-	To the ends of the earth 1:8

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