Embracing Pauline Mission Strategies for Effective Gospel Proclamation in Urban Contexts

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INTRODUCTION

The command to preach the Gospel involves engaging diverse peoples everywhere (cf. Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). Foremost among the individuals mentioned in the Bible whose impact stood out and serves as an example for many today is Apostle Paul. A careful study of his life and mission shows that he was largely involved in urban missions. This article considers strategies for executing the task of the Great Commission in urban areas with a focus on Paul's missionary efforts. After a brief look at Paul's life and background, it considers the dimensions of his mission endeavor and discusses its feasibility today. It is argued that Pauline methods, largely applied in urban contexts, should still be pursued today despite the increasing resistance to Gospel proclamation in urban centers.

PAUL THE URBAN MISSIONARY

Urban missions is a dimension of mission[1] which involves efforts of the church to proclaim and demonstrate the Gospel, confronting and surmounting challenges posed by urbanization. Urban dwellers are brought into the saving faith of the Gospel through Jesus Christ through proclamation and through demonstration, urban problems such as poverty, sickness, and injustice, are addressed. This means that in implementing the task of the Great Commission through urban mission strategy, the church seeks the restoration of the city.[2] Thus, urban missions encompasses the proclamation and the demonstration of the Kingdom of God.

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1. Peter O. Atoyebi, "From Stagnation to Revitalization: A Study of Select Turnaround Churches in the Urban Context of Nairobi, Kenya" (Doctoral Thesis, North-West University, Kenya, 2010), 38.

2. Ibid, 47-48.

Strategy is the overall plan, principles, or ways by which resources and opportunities are to be utilized in a task.[3] The term "strategy" is sometimes

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3. John M. Terry, Ebbie Smith and Justice Anderson (ed. s) Missiology. An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions (Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998), 434.

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used interchangeably with methods, meaning the comprehensive and flexible body of tactics or actions, the detailed means by which God's people implement God's work. Strategy is the rationale upon which the enterprise rests.[4] Kanagaraj defines strategy in relation to Christian mission as:

> A well-organized plan of action or policy to be followed in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and consolidating the believers in their faith. It implies an order or discipline with which the missioners are to be led in order to accomplish their mission… the practical working out of the will of God within a cultural context because…all missiological decisions must somehow be rooted in theology and take into consideration the cultural context in which the mission is carried out.[5]

To him, the word "strategy" carries with it ideas of design and goals. Also, "strategy" is practical as well as situated, given that it is to be exercised within a given context. Also, strategy in Christian mission has to be in line with the Word of God. Any strategy that goes contrary should not be employed in carrying out Christian mission.

An effective missionary enterprise may likely require more than one strategy, for one or more strategies can be employed to accomplish a certain task. Also, it is not guaranteed that the same strategy or strategies may work in every missionary endeavour. Strategy varies from place to place and from one missionary to another. It is the responsibility of missionaries or mission workers to determine the strategy or strategies which best suit the missions initiative. Mission Strategy therefore is the operation of one or more tactics or actions in the practice of missions.

There is not much information about the family of Paul except that he was born to Jewish parents from the tribe of Benjamin. This information is borne out of his own testimonies during his ministerial confrontations with fellow Jews. His Hebrew name was Saul. He was named after the most celebrated Benjamite of his time – Saul of Kish, the first king of Israel. Also, as a Roman citizen, he was required to have three other names, but only the last of his three Latin names (Paullus) was common, and which would later rhyme with the Greek name Paulos.[6]

Paul was born in Tarsus of Cilicia – a Roman province (cf. Acts 22:3); a city of great historical influence (cf. Acts 21:39). The exact time as at when his family settled in tarsus is not known, but apparently, his family would have been one of the Jewish families that found solace in Cilician towns, notably Tarsus during the Seleucid ruthless rule in Palestine.[7] Thus,

he was born and brought up in an ancient and significant city with multiple cultures.[8] This earned him his place among the elites of his day and he fully maximized the benefits thereof towards achieving his evangelistic goals.

Furthermore, his claim as a born Roman citizen implies that the rights of Roman citizenship would have been conferred on his parents for having done something very significant to the Roman government.[9] Roman citizens, irrespective of race, enjoyed great measures of freedom and respect including that of fair hearings before trial and the possibility to appeal to Caesar. Paul maximized all these benefits during his gospel ministerial engagements as recorded in the book of Acts.

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Paul encountered Christ and got converted on one of his journeys to Damascus to persecute the church there. He transferred his extreme passion for Judaism to Christianity. This is evident in his ministerial exploits and writings, confirming his place among significant figures in the New Testament. Herbert Kane claims that Paul did for Christianity what Moses did for Judaism.[10]

Paul did many good things in the course of his ministry but his apostolic mission was to win the lost, teach the saved, and plant churches.[11] He is seen in the New Testament as a church planter. A church planter is one who starts a new church as an individual

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4. Ibid.

5. Jey J. Kanagaraj, "The Strategies of Paul the Missionary" retrieved from http://www.mhs.no/uploads/SNTS_2008_Kanagaraj. pdf. Accessed on 03/09/2024.

6. Gerald F. Hawthorne. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 681.

7. Merrill C. Teney & Steven Barabas. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible (Michigan: Zondervan Corporation, 1975),

863.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Herbert J. Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1976), 72.

11. Paul A. Beals. A People for His Name: A Church-Based Missions Strategy (California: William Carey Library, 1995), 23.

or within a group.[12] Paul is the biblical model for missions in this modern age.

PAULINE MISSIONARY STRATEGIES FOR THE CITY

Opinions vary as to whether Paul had a mission strategy or not. But a close examination of the life and ministry of Paul as recorded in the Bible, particularly in the Book of Acts reveals a flexible modus operandi developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and subject to His direction and control.[13] These tactics stand out in the ministry practice of Paul and are worthy of note. The writer will discuss them within the periscope of chapter 13 to chapter 28 of Acts which contains a detailed record of Paul's three missionary journeys.

First, Paul mainly ministered in cities. He intentionally focused on urban missions. His strategy to make disciples began with evangelizing the cities and planting local churches in them.[14] Ikechukwu Ugo recounts that as Paul went about his missionary journeys, he crossed the Mediterranean world, covering the Roman provinces, going from city to city with his message and establishing churches.[15] Similarly, as Gene A. Getz observes, Paul viewed cities such as Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, Thessalonica, Macedonia, etc. as pivots from which the Gospel would spread to surrounding areas. For example, it is probable, as recorded in Acts 19, that those who came to Ephesus to do business and to worship in the temple of Diana were converted to Jesus Christ and returned to their hometowns spreading the Gospel as they went. This explains the founding of the six other churches in Asia mentioned in the Book of Revelation chapter 1 and verse 11.[16]

Second, Paul focused on those who were receptive to the Gospel. In Acts 16:12-13 Paul and his team arrived in Phillipi, a leading city of the district of Macedonia. They went to the riverside and spoke to some women who would listen to them. Lydia happened to respond and show that God was working in her, so they followed up with her and this resulted in the conversion of her whole household (v14, 15). God was already working in Lydia and the conversation drew her out as a "person of peace."[17] By this means, Paul was able to plant house churches. This strategy is also evident in Acts 17:11-14 where it is clearly stated that the Bereans were more receptive than the Thessalonians. In the cities Paul preached to both Jews and Gentiles who were receptive (cf. Acts 17:12), though in some cases the former was not so, therefore, he focused on the latter. Charles Arn views receptive people as "fertile soil" and terms the act of focusing evangelistic efforts on them as "selective evangelism."[18] Urban missions should be selective. There are souls which are ripe for harvest and those who are not. Though one cannot tell beforehand, the only way to know is to engage in evangelism.

Third, Paul engaged in diverse approaches of proclaiming the Gospel. He was not rigid; he engaged in personal or one-on-one evangelism as well as mass evangelism. He preached in the synagogues, in marketplaces, in public squares, as well as in homes. In Thessalonica Paul preached in the synagogue on the Sabbaths and in the square during the week.[19] By so doing he reached out to both Jews and Gentiles. Urban missions must not be stereotypical. The urban context is a multi-cultural context with various subcultures. Hence, a single approach to evangelism may have limited impact.

In addition, despite his approach to evangelism, Paul contextualized his message. When contextualizing, the message of the gospel does not change, but the method of presentation is altered.[20] The gospel is presented to fit the needs and aid the understanding of the audience. For instance, when Paul addressed Jewish monotheists in the synagogues, he began with the Old Testament.[21] To the pagans of Lystra (cf. Acts 14), he presented the gospel differently from his approach to the Jews; making no special appeal to Scripture, but to nature, which reveals a supernatural Creator.[22]

Paul used what was known by his audience to bring them to the unknown. He communicated through local languages such as Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew as the need arose. He understood the need to be flexible with respect to his audience – their culture and worldview as well as their beliefs. Paul's attitude to other religions permitted him to engage them in dialogue in which he eventually won them over. But the underlying factor was his life of integrity and faithfulness to biblical revelation which made his ministry relevant to receiving cultures.[23]

Fourth, Paul planted house churches. He did not hesitate to enter the houses of city dwellers and uses these spaces as places of worship. The conversion of entire members of individuals' households is illustrated during his encounter with the Jailor (cf.

12. Evert Van De Poll & Joanne Appleton. *Church Planting in Europe: Connecting to Society, Learning from Experience* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), n.p.

13. Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 73.

14. Ikechukwu Ugo, "St. Paul's Church Planting Strategies as Revealed in Selected Passages in the Book of Acts" *Global Missiology*, Vol. 3, No. 9 (2012) retrieved from http://ojs. globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/714/1758. Accessed on 10/09/2024.

15. Ibid.

16. Gene A. Getz. *The Walk: Growing into the Fullness of Christ* (Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2000), 7.

17. J. S. Shaw. "5 Ways to Start New Works (From Paul's Church Planting Strategy)" retrieved from www.vergenetwork.org. Accessed on 09/09/2024.

18. Charles Arn. Selective Evangelism retrieved from www. pastors.com/selective -evangelism/ Accessed on 07/09/2024.

19. Ronaldo Lidorio. "The Method of Paul for Church Planting" retrieved from www.churchplanting.com. Accessed on 09/09/2024.

20. Ugo.

21. Ibid.

22. C. Peter Wagner, Win Arn & Elmer Towns, *Church Growth: State of the Art* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers 1986), 143.

23. S. Ademola Ishola. "Embracing and Releasing: Do Christians Ever Need to Abandon Their Cultures?" *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* Vol. XVII, No. 1 (June 2013), 143.

Acts 16:32-34), and the households of Crispus and Stephanas (cf. Acts 18:8).[24] Hence during the early years of Christianity, people met in homes. In urban centers where there is usually limited space, houses of converts are a good place to start a church plant pending availability of affordable public space to set up a church auditorium.

Fifth, while establishing the churches he planted, Paul developed strong Christian leadership via role modelling and equipping through discipleship and mentorship. Getz remarks that Paul assisted the churches to become mature both spiritually and administratively.[25] He spent an entire year in Antioch teaching the disciples; a year and six months in Corinth; and at least six months in Thessalonica; and a total of three years in Ephesus.[26] Effective urban missions that will ensure continuity require the development of leaders who will consolidate the work by nourishing new converts and raising other leaders.

This strategy is seen in Paul's discipleship of Timothy, Titus, and so on. Paul A. Beals reasons that this was surely why these men demonstrated leadership qualifications while the apostles were absent.[27] They had been groomed to have a sense of responsibility. The goal of missionary activity is to build responsible, reproducing believers so as to have responsible, reproducing churches.[28] By so doing continuity in missions is ensured.

It is reported that Paul probably started close to twenty churches himself, with many more born out of those by his apprentice leaders.[29] A clear evidence for the success of Paul's discipleship and mentorship is seen in the fact that the leaders he raised ultimately spread the Gospel and the whole Roman Empire surrendered to Christianity. This is because the churches were raised to spread the gospel rather than contain it.[30]

Sixth, Paul's missionary effort was holistic. He was not only interested in preaching and teaching but also in meeting physical needs. Thus, he promoted a sense of koinonia among the churches that belonged to different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.[31] He encouraged the members of these churches to share their economic resources with other churches that were in need. Divine salvation, which is for all human beings, is concerned with all aspects of human welfare - physical, spiritual, emotional, and psychological.[32] Paul took poverty seriously. He was eager to remember and help the poor long before

the instruction to do so came from the apostles in Jerusalem (cf. Gal. 2:10).[33]

Paul's attempt to help the poor had a long-term goal. That is, the collection was made not merely to meet the physical needs of the receiving churches, but particularly to bring spiritual unity and equality between the churches with Jewish background and those with the Gentile background (cf. Rom. 8:14).[34] On the part of the Jews, accepting gifts from the Gentile churches showed that they accepted them as members of God's family. Issues of social justice and racial inequality which are pronounced in urban areas were therefore addressed.

Seventh, Paul practiced partnership in missions. He was not a lone ranger. Though he was powerfully used by God (cf. Acts 19:11-12), he partnered with others such as Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, John Mark, etc. James L. Garret notes that about twenty fellow workers are mentioned in Acts and the Pauline epistles.[35] This shows that urban missions should be a collective effort; it brings together a variety of gifts and skills which are vital for a successful mission initiative. Co-workers such as Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete were Paul's "apostolic" delegates.[36] Besides, he maintained a good relationship with his home church in Jerusalem; making five visits there from Macedonia and Achaia.[37]

Lastly, Paul engaged in tentmaking. In 1 Corinthians 9:6 Paul asks, "Are Barnabas and I the only ones who cannot refrain from working for a living? This suggests strongly that Paul raised funds for missions via tent making; only refraining from it to focus fully on preaching when he had support from the brethren (cf. Acts 18:5). The Apostle Paul stated three reasons for supplementing his support from churches through tentmaking: (1) To offer the gospel without charge (2 Corinthians 11:7-9); (2) To relieve the burden upon churches (2 Corinthians 12:14-16); (3) To be an example to others (Acts 20:35; 1 Corinthians 9; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9).[38] Pauline missionary strategies have been presented and discussed differently with input from other scholars.

Roland Allen considers the social background of the world in which Paul ministered as he compares Paul's methods with current ones. He considers strategic points such as the position or character of the places in which Paul preached; He questions whether Paul's success was due to the existence of a special class of people to which he made a special appeal; and whether the great nuance between the moral, social, or religious condition of the provinces and these modern

24. Ugo
25. Getz, 3.
26. Ibid, 116.
27. Beals, 22.
28. Ibid.
29. Neil Cole. "How Many Churches did the Apostle Paul Start?" retrieved from http://www.churchplanting.com. Accessed on 04/09/2024.
30. Ed Stetzer. "Monday is for Missiology: Paul's Church Planting Strategy" retrieved from www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/january/. Accessed on 10/09/2024.
31. Kanagaraj, "The Strategies of Paul the Missionary"
32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. James Leo Garret. *Sytematic Theology, Volume 2, Second Edition: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 541.
36. Philip H. Towner. *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 106-108.
37. Garret, 540.
38. "Tentmaking/Business as Mission" retrieved from http://www.biblicalministries.org/files/BMW%20Tentmaking-BAM%20Policy.pdf. Accessed on 10/09/2024.

times render a comparison of Paul's work with the modern approach futile.[39]

Allen's submission is that the nature of the places Paul preached were not different from today's world. The Greco-Roman culture was full of lofty philosophies. Knowledge was celebrated and reason exalted just like today. The classes of those Paul preached to were diverse. There were mixed classes in Paul's day as in the present day. He addressed the poor as well as the rich. He successfully ministered to both. Likewise, there were moral, social and religious issues such as homosexuality, incest, extortion, corruption, false ministers, etc. faced by Paul which confront urban missions today.

Another dimension considered by Allen is the argument that Paul was an exceptional man living in exceptional times, preaching under exceptional circumstances (his education and exposure), unlike any other.[40] To this Allen responds that (1) Paul's missionary method was not peculiar to Paul. Others were establishing churches at that time. (2) The modern day advent and advancement of technology gives Gospel ministers an advantage over Paul who had only the Old Testament in Greek. This advantage is in the form of the Bible (Old and New Testament) in hard and soft copy, the media, internet, diverse means of mobility, and so on. (3) Pauls' example overshadows his advantages – an example the modern church should follow: despite the numerous challenges, he persistently fulfilled his calling.[41]

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39. Roland Allen. *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2012), 1.

40. Ibid, 4.

41. Ibid.

CONCLUSION

This paper has considered Paul, his mission strategies, and their feasibility for urban missions in the twenty-first century. The writer is of the opinion that Pauline mission strategies are still relevant in carrying out the task of the Great Commission today. This is especially true in the African context, much like Paul's. However, one must note that not every strategy can work in every context today and not every strategy can be effectively utilized by every missionary. For example, a gospel minister who does not share a similar background with Paul may have limited options for engaging others and, therefore, a limited audience. The same applies to utilizing contemporary technologies such as the media and internet in implementing some strategies.

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