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Faith that Leads to Action: Perspectives from the Acts of the Apostles

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Abstract

The book of Acts of the Apostles narrates the early history of the Christian Church and the spread of the gospel message throughout the Roman Empire. This paper explores the theme of faith that leads to action in the book of Acts. It will argue that the apostles and early Christians were not merely passive recipients of God's grace, but were also active participants in God's mission to the world. Their faith was not simply a matter of belief, but also a matter of action. They demonstrated their faith by sharing the gospel message, serving others, and suffering for their beliefs. This paper will also examine some of the challenges and obstacles that the apostles faced in their pursuit of faithful living.

Keywords

Acts of The Apostles, Faith, Action, Discipleship, Mission, Evangelism, Persecution, Holy Spirit

INTRODUCTION

I have been asked to speak on the theme of the conference, *Faith in Action: Theology for the Changing World*, from a biblical perspective, in particular from the perspective of the Acts of the Apostles.[1] While it is true that the book of Acts does offer a cogent theological framework for a dynamic Church and world, its preceding volume, the Gospel of Luke, cannot be ignored altogether, since both Luke and Acts form a unified whole. Therefore, for this presentation it is opportune to start with the Acts of the Apostles and then go back to the Gospel of Luke.

[1] Already in the New Testament there are apparently two trends of thought when it comes to faith and action. One, represented by the Paul, insists on justification by faith alone (see Rom 3,28; 4,1-8; Gal 3,6-9) or salvation by grace (see Eph 2,8-9); the other, represented by James, emphasizes the necessity also of action (Jas 2,14-26). While we do not enter into the validity of the one or other, we want to focus how a narrative text such as the Acts of the Apostles, contributes to this broader theme.

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Faith/Believe in Luke-Acts

It is not an exaggeration to say that Luke uses two terms, "faith" (πίστις, *pistis*) and "to believe" (πιστεύω, *pisteuō*), more frequently in his two-volume work than the other synoptic evangelists. Luke's usage of these words varies between the action of trusting and the attitude of trust that saves. All these occurrences suggest a person's reliance on another to provide something one cannot provide for oneself. For instance, the friends of the paralytic demonstrate faith in the healing power of Jesus (Luke 5,20). The "great faith" of the centurion enables him except Jesus' healing authority (Luke 7,7-9). Jesus commends the faith of the sinful woman who washed his feet (Luke 7,50). The woman with the continual flow of blood believes that only Jesus can heal her, and in faith she touches his garment (Luke 8,48). Jesus challenges Jairus to believe (Luke 8,50). Thus, each act of faith expresses itself in concrete action. By contrast, the disciples' lack of faith makes them question God's ability to watch over them. As a result, they are nervous and panicky (Luke 8,25).

The apostles' appeal, "increase our faith!" (Luke 17,5-6) indicates that faith can be increased. This request implies faith can always have more depth, though Jesus' reply emphasized the importance of faith's presence, no matter how small. The Samaritan leper (Luke 17,19) and the blind beggar (Luke 18,42) also acted out of faith in approaching Jesus.

There are instances of the failure of faith. Peter's faith failed, as Jesus had predicted (Luke 22,32). The possibility of failed faith in the face of persecution was so real that Jesus asked if faith would be found on earth when he returns (Luke 18,8). The faith described in these last two examples refers not to initial faith but to the continuation of faith. Lapses of faith can and do occur, but ideally faith should be constant. Such faith involves a fundamental orientation and trust that a person possesses, a basic recognition that if provision for deliverance in any situation is to come, Jesus provides it. So faith is to continue; if it does not, spiritual catastrophe is the result.

The use of the noun "faith" in Acts is similar. Faith comes through Jesus and is the basis of the lame beggar's healing by Peter (Acts 3,16) and of Paul's healing of the man in Lystra with crippled feet (Acts 14,9). Stephen was "full of faith," a spiritually mature man, whose faith was exemplary and constant (Acts 6,5). At times, the Christian movement was actually called "the faith" (Acts 6,7; 13,8; 14,22; 16,5). Gentiles

had faith (Acts 14,27) and were cleansed by faith (Acts 15,9). Faith's object is Christ (Acts 20,21; 24,24), and faith is the subjective means that sanctifies (26,18).

In Luke's Gospel, the verb "to believe" is similar in force. Positive and negative examples abound. Zechariah did not believe the angel Gabriel about what God could do (Luke 1,20), but Mary did believe (Luke 1,45); as a result, she became a vessel for God's use. In the Parable of the Sower, the devil is said to prevent belief (Luke 8,12), while faith on the part of others is portrayed tragically as short-lived (v.13). Luke notes that many people believed John's message (Luke 20,5). Jesus declared that whatever he might say in his defense, the Jewish leaders would not believe (Luke 22,67). Jesus asked the Emmaus travelers if they believed all that the prophets spoke (Luke 24,25). Faith responds to content and results in concrete reaction. It includes perception, but this perception produces a product, a reliance on God and what he promises.

Most uses of the verb πιστεύω in Acts are summaries of people's responses of belief. In a few passages the Church is described as a community that believed (Acts 2,44; 4,32). The participle describes the respondents as "believers" (Acts 5,14; 15,5). Usually, the word refers to someone or something who is trusted: belief was in the message (Acts 4,4); in the good news (Acts 8,12-13); in the Lord, with faith in him produced by a miracle (Acts 9,42); in the Lord, with forgiveness as a result (Acts 10,43); in Christ (Acts 11,17); in the Lord (Acts 11,21; 14,23; 16,31); in God (Acts 16,34; 27,25); in Jesus (Acts 19,4); in the OT promise (Acts 24,14); and in the prophets (Acts 24,14). Those who believed included the Bereans (Acts 17,12), Athenians (Acts 17,34), Corinthians (Acts 18,8), Ephesians (Acts 19,18), Jews (Acts 21,20), and Gentiles (Acts 21,25). In Acts 13,12, no object of faith is mentioned, but the proconsul of Cyprus believed as a result of the sorcerer Bar-Jesus being blinded. Belief justifies (Acts 13,39), but those who do not believe will perish (v. 41). All those whom God has ordained to eternal life believe (v. 48). And believing comes by God's grace (Acts 15,11; 18,27).

Faith, that is, simple belief, expresses itself concretely. Numerous pictures provided in Jesus' ministry are illustrative. They show that faith acts. Faith is the recognition and persuasion that God has something to offer that one must receive and embrace. So in Jesus' miracles, individuals receive what he offers. Faith is not passive. It understands, receives, and embraces. The one who welcomes God's message receives what God offers and responds to the Gospel. He or she acknowledges that God through Jesus has dealt with the effects of sin and that only God can provide what is needed to reverse sin's presence and eradicate its penalty.

Faith Leading to Action in the Acts of the Apostles

Let me present two prominent texts from Acts which have become the basis for the life of many religious communities: Acts 2,42-47 and Acts 4,32-35.

Life of communion in Acts 2,42-47

Acts 2,42-47:[42] And they (those who were baptised, see v.41) devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.[44] Now all the believers (πάντες δὲ οἱ πιστεύοντες) were together and had all things in common; [45] they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need.[46] Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart,[47] praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

This is the first summary statement in the Acts of the Apostles, which summarizes the community life of the early Christians.[2] It highlights four key aspects of the life of early Christians: apostolic teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread together, and prayer. The newly formed community functions by the believers' devoting themselves to these activities. The expression "devoting themselves" ((ἦσαν δὲ προσκαρτεροῦντες, *ēsan de proskarterountes,* v.42) has the idea of persistence or persevering in something. The imperfect periphrastic construction speaks of the ongoing devotion that they the early Christians demonstrated. Of its ten NT occurrences the verb appears six times in Acts (1,14; 2,42; 2,46; 6,4; 8,13; 10,7). It echoes the unity of mind Luke describes in Acts 1,14. In these four ongoing activities, much of the basic work of community appears.

The first activity is the adherence to apostolic teaching (διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων, *didachē tōn apostolōn*).[3] Instruction is an important part of the new community, and the task is with the Apostles. The centrality of Jesus and the preparation of members to share in the new life and witness are key community concerns. Later the apostolic

[2] A summary statement in the narrative writings is that which summarizes the main issues so far in the narrative and also offers a proleptic summary of what is presented next in the narrative.

[3] Reference to teaching using the term διδαχή appears thirty times in the NT, five of which are in Luke-Acts (Luke 4,32; Acts 2,42; 5,28; 13,12 [of Paul and Barnabas's teaching]; 17,19 [of Paul's teaching at Athens]).

teaching, called "your" teaching by opponents, will fill Jerusalem, the only other reference to the apostolic teaching (Acts 5,28). Matt 28,19–20 expresses the task as "teaching them to observe all I commanded you." It likely would have included all kinds of instruction like what we see in the Gospels and Epistles: ethical and practical teaching and a grounding in the central promise God had given in Jesus.

Next comes the mention of fellowship, or, more precisely, sharing in common (κοινωνία, *koinonia*). This is the only use of this term in Acts.[4] The term speaks of communion or fellowship. Keener opines that κοινωνία is "the sort of harmony created by shared purpose and working together."[5] This partnership included sharing of profit, and early Christians sometimes used the term κοινωνία to refer to sharing with others (Rom 15,:26; 2 Cor 8,4; 9,13; Heb 13,16), as also the cognate verb (κοινωνέω, Rom 12,13; 15,27; Gal 6,6; Phil 4,15). Thus, the sharing described in this passage (Acts 2,44–45, note κοινά, 2,44) implies that the community's "fellowship" was accomplished by sharing their possessions. With the adjective κοινά (*koina*, in common, v.44), Luke points to fellowship to underscore the personal interactive character of relationships in the early Church at all levels. There is a real sense of relationship between one another and for one another. This 'communion' is further strengthened by the use of the adverb ὁμοθυμαδόν (with one mind).[6]

Third is 'the breaking of bread' (τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου, *klasei tou artou*). This expression (the breaking of the bread) appears only twice in the Luke-Acts in the entire New Testament (here and in Luke 24,35).[7] Here "the breaking of the bread" is so closely connected grammatically with "fellowship" implies that part of the disciples' sharing of possessions included "breaking of the bread". This was not a simple meal but a commemorative of the Lord's supper. Therefore, for Luke, the Lord's Supper represented a meal believers shared together in memory of what Jesus had done for them (see 22,19).

Finally, there is reference to prayers (προσευχαῖς, *proseuchais*).[8] A community at prayer is something Luke emphasizes about community life. It seeks God's

[4] The term κοινωνία occurs 19 times in the New Testament, 14 of which are in Paul.

[5] C. S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 1002.

[6] Of the eleven occurrences of this adverb, ten are found in Acts.

[7] In all other Eucharistic instances, the verb κλάω is used. Here the noun κλάσις is used.

[8] This noun appears 36 times in the New Testament, twelve of which are in Luke-Acts and nine of which are in Acts (1,4; 2,42; 3,1; 6,4; 10,4.31; 12,5; 16,13.16). Of 85 NT occurrences, the verb "pray" (προσεύχομαι, *proseuchomai*) appears 34 times in Luke-Acts, sixteen of which are in Acts (Luke 1,10; 3,21; 5,16; 6,12.28;

direction and is dependent upon God because God's family of people do not work by feelings or intuition but by actively submitting themselves to the Lord's direction.

Common life in Acts 4,32-35:

Acts 4,32-35: [32] Now the heart and the soul of the multitude of those who believed (τοῦ δὲ πλήθους τῶν πιστευσάντων) was one, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. [33] With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. [34] There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, [35] and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need.

This summary looks almost verbatim to the previous one. However, the noted difference here is that the greater emphasis on common life: "the heart and the soul of the multitude of those who believed (τοῦ δὲ πλήθους τῶν πιστευσάντων) was one" (Acts 4,32). This expression enforces the adverb ὁμοθυμαδόν, mentioned in the previous pericope. The unity among the believers is described here by the sharing of possessions (v.32): "no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common". The expression "no needy people" (οὐδὲ … ἐνδεής, *oude … endeēs*) meets the standard God called for in Deut 15,4: "there shall be no poor among you." Once again, the verbal forms are in the imperfect, implying that this life was the very characteristic of the early Christian community.

There is one more aspect that is common between the two summary statements – the apostolic authority. If the first summary describes the community as adhering the apostolic preaching, in the second summary, it is the reference to Apostles' witness-bearing activity with the accompanying "great favor". This 'witness-bearing' includes what takes place in chapters 3 and 4: healing of the lame man, Peter's preaching at Solomon's portico, the arrest, questioning and subsequent release from prison of Peter and John. In all these, the power of the Lord is visible.

The apostolic authority is further described in the members of the community place the proceeds from their selling at the "feet of the Apostles" (Acts 5,35). It was the responsibility of the apostles to distribute the goods. Barnabas also sells the field and keeps the money at "the feet of the apostles" (Acts 5,37). Luke thus shows the Twelve

9,18.28–29 [2x]; 11,1–2 [3x]; 18,1.10–11; 20,47; 22,40–41[2x].44.46; Acts 1,24; 6,6; 8,15; 9,11.40; 10,9.30; 11,5; 12,12; 13,3; 14,23; 16,25; 20,36; 21,5; 22,17; 28,8).

to "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22,30). They are the true authorities within the restored prophetic people. At the same time, having the apostles not only receive the goods placed at their feet but also distributing to each one according to need, Luke continues to develop the theme of servant leadership. In imitation of the Jesus who declared, "I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22,27), they serve at the table by distributing goods to others.

Is this all that the Acts narrative has to say to us? There is more. Luke also provides another glimpse of the Jerusalem community's practice of sharing possessions in the account of the dispute that arose over the feeding of the Hebrew and Hellenist widows (6,1-6), a conflict that necessitated a decision to expand ministry within the community. The feeding of orphans, widows, and sojourners was a common obligation practiced in the Jewish synagogues. This practice is attested also among the early Christians (see 1 Tim 5,3-16). With this account, Luke further presents the Church as the restored Israel that observes all the commandments of Torah ensuring there be "no needy person among them" (see Deut 15,4). By showing the community devoting its resources to those totally unable to reciprocate, furthermore, Luke indicates that it embodies the prophetic mandate of giving to others without expecting a return (cf. Luke 6,30-35).

Furthermore, Luke presents several other personalities in the narrative who live their faith by sharing their possessions. In Joppa lived a disciple named Tabitha who was "completely occupied with good deeds and almsgiving" (Acts 9,36) and who appears to live at the center of a community of poor widows (Acts 9,39). Like the Gentile centurion in Luke's Gospel, of whom Jesus is told, "he loves our nation and he built the synagogue for us" (Luke 7,5), the Gentile centurion Cornelius in Caesarea is identified as one who was "devout and God-fearing along with his whole household, who used to give alms generously to the Jewish people and pray to God constantly" (Acts 10,2). Cornelius is told by the angel that "your prayers and almsgiving have ascended as a memorial offering before God" (Acts 10,4). By focusing on his prayer and sharing of possessions, Luke identifies Cornelius as one who lives by the prophetic program even before hearing the good news. He is, as Peter subsequently states, among the righteous: "In every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him" (Acts 10,35). In the case of both Tabitha and Cornelius, furthermore, the household hospitality shown to Peter further demonstrates openness to the prophetic visitation (9,38-41; 10,24-33).

Luke presents Paul's use of possession in two ways:

- When Paul addresses the elders of the Church of Ephesus he describes his personal practice as based in the words of Jesus: "I have never wanted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You know very well that these very hands have served my needs and my companions. In every way I have shown you that by hard work of that sort we must help the weak, and keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus who himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20,33-35).
- Luke shows Paul as fully involved in the collection for the Jerusalem Church taken up by the Church in Antioch. Because the great famine threatened the Church in Jerusalem, "the disciples determined that, according to ability, each should send relief to the brothers who lived in Judea. This they did, sending it to the presbyters in care of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11,29-30). Paul and Barnabas complete this relief service (*diakonia*; Acts 12,25) before they are commissioned for their itinerant mission in Acts 13,1-4. We can also note that Luke has Paul state in his defense before the prefect Felix, "After many years I came to bring alms for my nation and offerings" (Acts 24,17), an aspect Paul also shares in his letters (Gal 2,10; 1 Cor 16,1-4; 2 Cor 8-9; Rom 15,25-29)

With respect to the use of possessions, then, Luke shows the Church to be thoroughly in line with the prophetic word announced by Jesus in the Gospel. There should be no desire for wealth. The example of Ananiah and Sapphira (Acts 5,1-11) illustrates this point. Ananias, after conspiring with his wife, "kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 5,2). Instead of trusting in God's providence, this couple keeps some money for themselves as security. While offering even part of one's possessions is surely a generous act, the problem is with the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira. As Gillman says, "the conniving couple make themselves appear as if they are embodying the ideals of the fellowship of 'one heart and one soul', but instead their pretense violates trust and disrupts the Spirit-centered unity of the fellowship."[9] As a result of their hypocrisy, the harmony

[9] J. Gillmann, *Possessions and the Life of Faith: A Reading of Luke-Acts* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 98.

in the community is upset,[10] and they are punished with death. The problem with Ananias and Sapphira is deceit. It was voluntary to sell their property. But their hypocrisy leads them to lie "not to people but to God" (Acts 5,4) and "to tempt the Spirit of the Lord" (Acts 5,9).

Also, when Simon Magus offers money to acquire the power to bestow the spirit (Acts 8,8-19), he is told by Peter, "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money. You have no share in this matter, for your heart is not upright before God. Repent of this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord, that, if possible, your intention may be forgiven" (Acts 8,20-22). Simon's self-aggrandizement excludes him from the common life of the Church.

With greater emphasis on the common life of believers, the life in the early Church highlights ethical dimensions of faith. Merley an interior attitude of faith is not sufficient; one requires to demonstrate it in one's concrete actions too. The concrete action, the texts from the Acts say, that a life of sharing. The mark of true discipleship, as a faith response, in Acts is the sharing of possessions, especially with those most needy. Anyone going against this practice, upsets the unity of the Church and is punished immediately.

Communion as the Gift of the Spirit

This brings to the fore the motivation for this type of life of believers. What is the theological impetus for the common life among the believers? It is interesting to note that both summary statements are preceded by the pouring down of the holy spirit (Acts 2,1-13; 4,31). Therefore, it's the outpouring of the Spirit that gives the apostles authority to guide the Church. It is the outpouring of the Spirit that leads the community to a life of common sharing. As R. Longenecker puts it, "for Luke as well as the early Christians, being filled with the Holy Spirit not only concerned proclaiming the Word of God but also sharing possessions with the needy because of believers' oneness in Christ."[11]

Even before the outpouring of the Spirit, during the earthly ministry of Jesus in the Gospel, Luke emphasizes sharing of possessions. We shall note a couple of examples. To the question of the crowds, "what shall we do?", John the Baptist insists

[10] Fitzmyer calls it "a lie to *koinōnia*". See J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 323.

[11] R. N. Longenecker, "Acts," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 309.

to " bear the fruits of repentance" that requires that those who have clothing or food share such possessions with those who do not have them (Luke 3,11).

In the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6,20-49), Jesus challenges the traditional practice of love and sharing (6,32-34). If the disciples love, do good, and lend only to those who love them, do good to them, and can repay them, Jesus points out, they are living by a measure that is employed even by sinners. What credit is it to them to act by such a measure? The measure that Luke then has Jesus propose is the measure of how God acts (is acting) among humans. To love their enemies, to do good to others without expecting a return, is possible because the "credit" or "reward" comes to them from God (Luke 6,35). They should acts in this way because they are children of the Most High who can act toward others the way God acts toward them. God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Their moral measure, therefore, is not social convention but the good news itself: "be merciful just as also your Father is merciful." (Luke 6,36).

Luke also presents two important aspects of the faith response of disciples: almsgiving (Luke 12) and a total renunciation of possessions (Luke 14). In Luke 12, Jesus emphasizes trust in God in relationship with the right use of possessions. Jesus warns against the misguided pursuit of security in life. He further exhorts his disciples not to be anxious about the basic necessities of life: food, clothing and shelter (Luke 12,22-31). Thus, one who has possessions is asked to sell them and give alms. One's security is found not in material possessions but by turning one's heart to God (Luke 12,33-34). In Luke 14, Luke has Jesus articulate the demands of discipleship. There are three conditions to which the key phrase 'cannot be my disciple' is attached: first, the one who does not hate one's family (v. 26); second, the one who is not willing to take up one's cross (v. 27); third, the one who does not renounce all one possesses (v. 33). While a hyperbolic element in these three conditions is not excluded, it is interesting to note that the supreme example of the cost of discipleship is not martyrdom but renunciation of possessions.

While Luke offers several examples of sharing possessions such as the Parable of good Samaritan (Luke 10,25-37), the Zacchaeus episode (Luke 19,1-10), he also presents some negative examples to highlight the consequences of avarice and lack of concern for the people in need. In the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12,16-21), the rich man should have shared his abundant crops with others instead of building large barns. He is a 'fool' not because he has possessions, but because he is so immersed in his possessions that he is 'not rich towards God' and is not considerate towards his

neighbor. In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16,19-31), Jesus says that rich man should indeed have "listened to Moses and the prophets" and shared his possessions with Lazarus (16,29-31). Failure to do this implies a moral judgment on the rich man who had systematically ignored the poor man who lay every day at his door.

Thus, the impetus for the life faith is already found in the Gospel of Luke. It is reinforced in the Acts of the Apostles with the outpouring of the Spirit. Luke thus highlights that an ideal community is that community whose common life is based on sharing of possessions.

Theology for the changing world?

By placing these two descriptions of community life immediately after bestowals of the Holy spirit, and putting them at the very beginning of Acts, Luke indicates to his readers his understanding of the Church as the embodiment of the prophetic word announced by Jesus in the Gospel. If we turn the pages of Christian history, we note that the ideal of sharing possessions has inspired radical forms of communal discipleship. In the early Church, the hermits literally gave up all their possessions and lived a life of total poverty. Cenobite religious orders draw inspiration from these passages of Acts. The community life of several religious orders and congregations is modelled by these summaries. Luke Timothy Johnson points out that the various dimensions of the early Church, i.e., being led by the spirit, sharing possessions, engaging in an itinerant mission, exercising servant leadership, bearing powerful witness before religious and state authorities are prophetic in character, inspired by the prophetic word of Jesus in the Gospels.[12]

Luke's two-volume work certainly had a prophetic character for its earliest readers, who could see his depiction of Jesus' ministry and the work of Jesus' prophetic successors as a challenge to the circumstances of the Church in the late first century. In the same vein, the prophetic character of the work should challenge the present-day readers. Reading this work didactically and prophetically will surely help us to address the issues that concern the rapidly changing world.

The following implications of a prophetic reading of Acts (and Luke) can be enumerated:

[12] L. T. Johnson, *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church: The Challenge of Luke-Acts to Contemporary Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 4..

1. The early Church activities were prompted by the Spirit. In the Acts of the Apostles there are ten references to people or individuals being 'full of the Holy Spirit', who act under the influence of the Holy Spirit.[13] The biggest challenge today is to have the courage to act according to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.
2. The people filled with the spirit led a continuous life of prayer. In fact, prayer is the dominant theme in the first half of the Acts.[14] It was their regular habit; they prayed in the Temple; they prayed before making important decisions; prayer was also an essential part of commissioning; prayer sustained the early Christians in the face of persecution. A Church constructed on the foundation of prayer will never fail.
3. Spirit inspired prayer guided the early Christians to live a life of communion. The elaboration above has noted this point in detail. This aspect is crucial for the world in general and the Church in particular. Pope Francis' vision of the synodal Church based on participation, communion and mission can surely have these passages from Acts as guiding principles.
4. The Apostles are presented as the mainstay life of communion of the early Christians. They not only continue their witness-bearing mission entrusted to them by the Lord (see Luke 24,48; Acts 1,8; 2,32; 3,15; 5,32; 10,39; 13,31), but, at the same time, keep the community united with their servant leadership. As the witnesses of the Risen Lord, it is the task of every Christian (clergy, religious or others) to carry forward this mission of unity and reconciliation.
5. One of the basic hindrances that the modern Church or the world is facing today is the rise of individual freedom. While a certain individual autonomy can never be negotiated, its extreme forms can lead to ruin the social fabric of the Church and the World. The negative examples of Ananiah and Sapphira, and Simon the Magus (and several other parables in the Gospel) are reminders of the deteriorated social balance that needs an immediate restoration.

[13] See Acts 2,4; 4,8.31; 6,3.5; 7,55; 9,17; 11,24; 13,9.52.

[14] There are 33 references to prayer in Acts; 23 of these occurrences are in the first half and only ten feature in the second half. This indicates the role prayer played in the life of early Christians. See Acts 1,14.24; 2,42; 3,1; 4,24; 6,4.6; 9,40; 10,2; 12,5; 13,3; 14,23; 16,25; 20,36; 21,5; 28,8.

Thus, Acts of the Apostles (along with the Gospel of Luke) is a concrete example of faith translated into action; the book, with its emphasis on the life of communion and generous giving, does provide a theological framework for the ethical dimension of faith.

CONCLUSION

The book of Acts of the Apostles provides a compelling model of faith that leads to action. The apostles and early Christians were not merely passive recipients of God's grace, but were also active participants in God's mission to the world. Their faith was not simply a matter of belief, but also a matter of action. They demonstrated their faith by sharing the gospel message, serving others, and suffering for their beliefs.

The apostles' example challenges us to live out our faith in a similar way. We are called to share our faith with others, to serve those in need, and to stand up for what is right, even when it is difficult. Our faith should not be something that we keep to ourselves, but something that we share with the world.

The book of Acts also reminds us that the Christian life is not always easy. The apostles and early Christians faced many challenges and obstacles, including persecution, imprisonment, and even death. However, they never gave up on their faith. They were sustained by their belief in God and their hope for the future.

We can learn a great deal from the example of the apostles and early Christians. Their faith that leads to action is an inspiration to us all. Let us strive to live out our faith in a way that makes a difference in the world.

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