

AGUIAR, A. T. The mission of Jesus, the work of the Spirit and the role of the church: a reflection from the gospel of John. **Práxis Teológica (Ahead Of Print)**, volume 20, número 1, e-2181, 2024.

## **THE MISSION OF JESUS, THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH: A REFLECTION FROM THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

Adenilton Tavares de Aguiar

Doutor em Novo Testamento pela Universidade Andrews, EUA. Professor de Novo Testamento no Centro Universitário Adventista de São Paulo (UNASP).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7898-0465>

E-mail: [adenilton.tavares@adventista.edu.br](mailto:adenilton.tavares@adventista.edu.br)

### **ABSTRACT**

Mission has a central role in John's theology. As follows, three major aspects of the missionary theology in the Fourth Gospel will be briefly examined, namely, the mission of Jesus, the mission of the Spirit, and the mission of Jesus' followers. The present discussion has shown that the mission of Jesus, the mission of the Holy Spirit, and the mission of the church are inseparable elements. Indeed, they are integral parts of only one mission: the mission of God. The church is summoned to proclaim forgiveness of sins, made available to humankind by means of Jesus' atoning death on the cross, in the power of the Spirit for the glory of God.

**Keywords:** Mission. Theology. Missiology.

### **RESUMO**

A missão tem um papel central na teologia de João. A seguir, três aspectos principais da teologia missionária no Quarto Evangelho serão brevemente examinados, a saber, a missão de Jesus, a missão do Espírito e a missão dos seguidores de Jesus. A presente discussão mostrou que a missão de Jesus, a missão do Espírito Santo e a missão da igreja são elementos inseparáveis. De fato, elas são partes integrais de apenas uma missão: a missão de Deus. A igreja é convocada a proclamar o perdão dos pecados, disponibilizado à humanidade por meio da morte expiatória de Jesus na cruz, no poder do Espírito para a glória de Deus.

**Palavras-chave:** Missão. Teologia. Missiologia.

## INTRODUCTION

Mission has a central role in John's theology<sup>1</sup>. Here, I will deal with the Gospel only. As follows, three major aspects of the missionary theology in the Fourth Gospel will be briefly examined, namely, the mission of Jesus, the mission of the Spirit, and the mission of Jesus' followers.

### 1 THE MISSION OF JESUS

Andreas J. Köstenberger has shown that the mission of Jesus plays a crucial role in John's missionary theology. He argues that what Jesus does cannot be dissociated from who he is. The divinity<sup>2</sup> of Jesus and his humanity<sup>3</sup> are crucial elements of John's teaching, without which a broader comprehension of Jesus' deeds and their relation to his mission is not possible. Thus, Jesus' human and divine attributes qualify him "for a unique mission" (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 46)<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, a better understanding of Jesus' mission sheds light on the way one ought to see the disciples' mission and, consequently, the mission of the church.

Köstenberger observes that Jesus' signs and works depicted in the Fourth Gospel have the goal of revealing what kind of Messiah Jesus is. The signs are never applied to the disciples'

---

<sup>1</sup> See Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, p. 1502–1514; see also 1502n43 and 1512n89–90 for additional bibliography. For a lengthy study on the Gospel of John, see Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus*, p. 45–198. Although some scholars wonder whether the Gospel of John is really concerned about mission, it seems there is an increasing understanding that the answer is yes. For details, see Senior and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 280–296; Martin Erdmann, "Mission in John's Gospel and Letters," in Larkin and Williams, *Mission in the New Testament*, p. 207–226; Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends*, p. 203–226; Nissen, *New Testament and Mission*, p. 75–97; D. A. Carson, "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:31 Reconsidered", *JBL*, v. 104, n. 4, p. 639–651, 1987. For a summary of scholarly opinions see Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus*, p. 5–16.

<sup>2</sup> In that connection, the Fourth Gospel emphasizes (1) Jesus' preexistence (1:1, 14, 18; 15, 30; 3:17; 4:34; 5:23–24, 30, 36–38, 43; 6:14, 46; 7:28–29; 8:58; 9:33, 39; 10:10; 11:27; 12:46; 15:22; 16:27–28; 17:5, 8, 24; 18:37); (2) acknowledgment (6:68; 11:3, 12, 21, 27, 32; 13:6, 9, 25, 36; 45:5, 8, 22; 21:16, 17, 20, 21) and worship (9:38; 20:28) of Jesus as Lord; (3) Jesus' claim of divinity (5:17–18; 10:30; "I Am" sayings); (4) Jesus' uniqueness and unique sonship (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; cf. 1:34, 49; 3:17, 18, 35, 36; 5:19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26; 5:25; 6:40; 8:35, 36; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 14:13; 17:1; 19:7; 20:31); and (5) Jesus' Messiahship (1:41; 4:25, 29; 7:26, 27, 31, 41, 42; 9:22 10:24; 11:27; 12:34). For details, see Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus*, p. 46–50.

<sup>3</sup> Jesus' human attributes are evident in 4:6–7; 11:35; 19:28, 30, 38–42, with human designations such as "teacher" (1:38, 49; 3:2; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8; 13:13–14; 20:16); sir (4:11, 15, 49; 5:7; 11:34, 39); and "man" (4:29; 5:12; 7:46; 8:40; 9:11, 16, 24; 10:33; 11:47, 50; 14:5; 18:14, 17, 29; see also the title "Son of Man" in 1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23, 24; 13:31). For details, see Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus*, p. 50–51.

<sup>4</sup> For a helpful summary on the relationship between Christology and mission in John, see Senior and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 283–286.

AGUIAR, A. T. The mission of Jesus, the work of the Spirit and the role of the church: a reflection from the gospel of John. *Práxis Teológica (Ahead Of Print)*, volume 20, número 1, e-2181, 2024.

mission. The reason for this is that they foreshadow Jesus' death and resurrection (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 54, 72)<sup>5</sup>, and, thus, reveal Jesus' unique identity as the Messiah sent by God (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 62) and His true representative (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 73). While an overlap between signs and works must be admitted (6:30; 9:3–4, 16), an important distinction is that, whereas “signs” are related to Jesus' mission only, John allows a few exceptions in which “works” can also refer to the disciples' mission<sup>6</sup>. If Köstenberger's assessment that the cross itself is not a “sign” but the event the signs point to is correct, paradoxically, the cross becomes the *Grand Momentum* of Jesus' glory – the vehicle *par excellence* through which Jesus' glory is revealed<sup>7</sup>. His “theology of the cross may be particularly designed to make as palatable as possible for his readers the notion of a crucified Messiah” (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 80).

In order to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah (20:30–31)<sup>8</sup>, John presents him as the Sent Son<sup>9</sup>, the Coming and Returning One<sup>10</sup>,

---

<sup>5</sup> Köstenberger rejects the idea that the crucifixion, the resurrection, or the miraculous catch of fish can be considered as an additional sign completing a seven-element list of signs. Rather, he suggests that the cleansing of the temple (2:14–17) must be included in the list. One of his arguments is that the signs are located in the first half (1–12), whereas the second half (13–21) revolves around the counterpart of the signs: that is to say, they focus on Jesus' death and resurrection. For details and other arguments, see pages 54–72. While scholars in general acknowledge six signs (Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus*, p. 56), the idea of a seventh sign is controversial. By and large, those who see a sevenfold list argue for the resurrection of Lazarus as the seventh item (Köstenberger, *John*, p. 321; Morris, *John*, p. 473; Brown, *John*, p. 430).

<sup>6</sup> See 14:12; cf. 3:19–21; 6:27–30; 8:39–41. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus*, p. 72.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, many scholars have interpreted Jesus' request in 17:1, “glorify your Son” (cf. 12:23) in relation to Jesus' death on the cross. However, since Jesus' request also included “glorify me in your own presence with the glory *that I had with you before the world existed*” (17:5, emphasis added), his exaltation is also in view. Jesus' death and exaltation cannot be separated. See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), p. 554.

<sup>8</sup> Köstenberger observes that innumerable passages in John utilize mission terminology in relation to Jesus in order to indicate messianic expectations that are finally fulfilled in him (20:31). See Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus*, p. 94–96. Two puzzling, interconnected questions related to mission arise from the reading of 20:31: (1) Does “you” in “you may believe” refer to believers or non-believers? (2) Should one read πιστεύω/*believe* as a present subjunctive (“you may continue to believe,” i.e., addressing believers) or as an aorist subjunctive (“you may come to believe,” i.e., addressing non-believers)? Advocates of both views present reasonable arguments. Those who tend to see the Fourth Gospel as having an evangelistic intent support the reading of πιστεύω as an aorist subjunctive, “you may come to believe,” e.g., Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 755–756. As important as these issues may be to the study of mission in the Gospel of John, there is no time or space to address them here. Furthermore, even if the “believers” view is correct, this does not mean that the Fourth Gospel does not have a missionary impulse. It only means that this Gospel is not an evangelistic document itself. However, it is missionary in that it shows that Jesus involved his followers into his own mission and envisioned their future engagement to mission after his death and resurrection.

<sup>9</sup> The references are too many. In addition, besides the verbs ἀποστέλλω and πέμπω, other terms relate to sending language in the Fourth Gospel. For details, see Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus*, p. 96–121.

<sup>10</sup> Köstenberger identifies four different kinds of references to coming-and-returning language: (1) “coming into the world” (1:9; 3:19; 9:39; 12:46; 16:28; and 18:37); (2) “come” without the prepositional phrase “into the world” (10:10;

AGUIAR, A. T. The mission of Jesus, the work of the Spirit and the role of the church: a reflection from the gospel of John. *Práxis Teológica (Ahead Of Print)*, volume 20, número 1, e-2181, 2024.

and the eschatological Shepherd-Teacher<sup>11</sup>.

These tasks summarize the mission of Jesus in the Gospel of John (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 138). Some “coming” passages are connected with a purpose statement (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 123). Thus, Jesus came to offer abundant life (10:10)<sup>12</sup>; to be the light of the world (12:46; cf. 1:9; 8:12; 9:5)<sup>13</sup>; “to save the world” (12:47; cf. 3:17; 1 John 4:14); “to bear witness to the truth” (18:37)<sup>14</sup>; and also for judgment (9:39)<sup>15</sup>. The depiction of Jesus as the Shepherd-Teacher becomes clear as one sees that an integral part of his mission was (1) to call others to follow him (1:37; 8:12; 10:4, 5, 27; 12:26; 21:19–23); (2) to gather and bring other sheep to “this fold” (10:16a; cf. 11:52), so that “there will be one flock, one shepherd” (10:16b)<sup>16</sup>; (3) to call followers to gather his eschatological harvest (10:16; cf. 4:34–38; 14:12; 17:20; 20:21–23; 21:15–19) (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 133–138; KÖSTENBERGER; O’BRIEN, 2001, p. 203–204) thereby connecting the disciples’ mission to his own mission. This portrayal of Jesus’ mission intends to lead readers to believe (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 139) and glorify God

---

12:47; 15:22); (3) “come” in parallelism to sending (6:38; 7:28–29); (4) coming and going together or one of them implied (7:35; 8:14, 21–22; 13:1, 3, 33; 14:2, 3, 12, 28; 16:7, 28; 17:11, 13). Also, John develops “coming and going” terminology by using descent-ascent language, which, in turn, is associated with Jesus as the Son of Man (3:13; 6:62) and the Bread of Life (6:33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58). For more, see Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus*, p. 121–130 and Leon Morris, *Jesus Is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 102–104. Morris remarks that no other NT writer is as interested in this concept of mission as John. Likewise, John is the NT writer who most emphasizes God’s love for humankind as his propelling motivation for sending the Son (3:16; 1 John 4:9–11). For details, see Erdmann, “Mission in John’s Gospel,” p. 216–218.

<sup>11</sup> Chap. 10; 11:51–52. Other relevant passages include 1:37–43; chap. 15; 21:15–23. However, this portrayal pervades the book from end to end (Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus*, p. 140). Köstenberger argues that without this dimension, “a discussion and understanding of the Fourth Gospel’s presentation of Jesus’ mission remains incomplete” (134).

<sup>12</sup> Martin Erdmann notices that “John seems to characterize most frequently the saving purpose of Christ’s mission as the giving of life, which appears like a refrain throughout his gospel” (3:16; 5:24–25; 6:57; 10:10; 11:25–26; 17:2; 20:31; also 1 John 2:25; 3:14; 4:9; 5:11–13). See Erdmann, “Mission in John’s Gospel,” p. 213.

<sup>13</sup> This is also an important motif in John. For a brief discussion on the importance of the concept of light to John’s missionary theology, see Morris, *Jesus Is the Christ*, p. 111–113.

<sup>14</sup> Senior and Stuhlmüller remark that “testimony” is a major feature of John’s Christology. See Senior and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 285.

<sup>15</sup> Jesus’ statement in 9:39, “For judgment I came into this world” does not contradict what he says in 3:17 (cf. 12:47; 8:15), “God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world” (NASB). Indeed, Jesus came to save the world (3:17; 12:47). But judgment naturally results from his coming (Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*, UBS Handbook Series [New York: United Bible Societies, 1993], p. 319), since “saving some entails condemning others” (Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, p. 377).

<sup>16</sup> It is Jesus’ death that provides the means through which that would be possible (12:24; cf. 10:11, 15, 17). R. T. France argues that Jesus utilizes the shepherd imagery from the OT in the self-portrayal of his Messianic mission. R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), p. 103–110.

AGUIAR, A. T. The mission of Jesus, the work of the Spirit and the role of the church: a reflection from the gospel of John. *Práxis Teológica (Ahead Of Print)*, volume 20, número 1, e-2181, 2024.

(ERDMANN, 1998, p. 213)<sup>17</sup> by engaging in the mission that has been ascribed to them (ERDMANN, 1998, p. 215). Thus, the earth will be filled with God's glory by means of the universal mission<sup>18</sup> of the church in the power of the Spirit.

## 2 THE MISSION OF THE SPIRIT

As Luke (Luke 24:48–49; Acts 1:8), John also connects the mission of the church with the work of the Spirit (John 16:8–10) (SCHNABEL, 2021, p. 1508). Also, one can find the promise of the Spirit in various passages in John conveying temple theology (7:37–39; chaps. 13–17) (WRIGHT, 2016, p. 186)<sup>19</sup>. John's teaching concerning the Spirit is parallel to that in the Synoptics in various aspects<sup>20</sup>. On the other hand, John's references to the Spirit as Paraclete (παράκλητος, 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) and Spirit of truth (14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6; cf. 1 John 5:6) are unique. This terminology is a particular feature of the farewell discourse (John 14–16), where Jesus focuses on what the Spirit will do in the church after Jesus' resurrection (SENIOR; STUHLMUELLER, 1983, p. 286-287).

There is no consensus in the literature as to the meaning of παράκλητος<sup>21</sup>. It is accepted, however, that it is a verbal adjective from παρακαλέω, with a passive sense<sup>22</sup>. With caution, one should notice the idea of nearness originating from the preposition παρά (SILVA, 2014, p. 627-628). Therefore, to say the least, παράκλητος simply means “called to be near” or “called to stand beside” (SILVA, 2014, p. 628). However, one can be called to be near for a number of purposes,

---

<sup>17</sup> For details, see pages 213–215. See also Thomas R. Schreiner, “A Biblical Theology of the Glory of God,” in Storms and Taylor, *For the Fame of God's Name*, p 229–230.

<sup>18</sup> While the expression πάντα τὰ ἔθνη/*all the nations* does not occur in John as in the Synoptics, this does not mean that John does not allude to the universal scope of mission. Universal language pervades the Gospel as a whole. In 1:9 (NKJV), Jesus is “the true light which gives light to *every man*.” In 6:40, “*everyone* who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life” (cf. 11:26). The idea that “whoever believes” in Jesus has eternal life pervades the entire Gospel (3:15–16; 11:26; 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 6:35; 7:38; 11:25; also 4:14; 6:37, 54, 56, 57, 58; 8:12; and 12:25). Jesus is the Savior of the world (4:42; cf. 3:17; 12:47). Jesus died not only for Israel but also to gather those “who are scattered abroad (11:51–52). He has “other sheep” (10:16). However, in using universal language, John does not mean that every human being will be saved. Salvation is open to all but will be granted only to those who believe in Jesus as the Way, Truth, and Life, the only access to the Father (14:6). For details, see Senior and Stuhlmueller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 283–286.

<sup>19</sup> For details, see pages 185–193.

<sup>20</sup> John indicates that Jesus receives the Spirit in the beginning of his ministry (1:33; cf. Matt 3:11, 13–17; Mark 1:8–11; Luke 3:16, 21–22) and the disciples, after Jesus' resurrection (John 20:22; cf. 7:38–39).

<sup>21</sup> EDNT, 3:29.

<sup>22</sup> BDAG, 766; EDNT, 3:28.

AGUIAR, A. T. The mission of Jesus, the work of the Spirit and the role of the church: a reflection from the gospel of John. *Práxis Teológica (Ahead Of Print)*, volume 20, número 1, e-2181, 2024.

such as helping, teaching, advocating, guiding, and comforting, to list a few<sup>23</sup>. It is possible that John uses the term precisely because of its range of meanings (SENIOR; STUHLMUELLER, 1983, p. 287) for the Spirit does all these things (e.g., 14:26; 16:13). The Spirit continues the work of Jesus in that he does for the church what Jesus did for the disciples (SENIOR; STUHLMUELLER, 1983, p. 287), as below.

**Table 1.** The Spirit and Christ

The Spirit	Christ
“...he [the Father] will give you another <i>Parakletos</i> , to be <b>with you</b> ( <i>meth’hymōn</i> ) forever” (author’s translation) John 14:16; cf. 14:17	“and he remained there <b>with them</b> ( <i>met’autōn</i> )  “yet a little while I am <b>with you</b> ( <i>meth’hymōn</i> )”  John 3:22; 13:33; cf. Matt 28:20
“he will <b>give</b> you another <i>Parakletos</i> .” John 14:16	he <b>gave</b> his only Son” John 3:16
“Whom the Father will <b>send</b> in my name” John 14:26	“Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who <b>sent</b> him.” <sup>24</sup> John 5:23 (and many others)
“he will <b>teach</b> you all things” John 14:26	“Jesus went up into the temple and began <b>teaching</b> ” John 7:14 (cf. 8:2)
“When the <i>Parakletos</i> <b>comes</b> ( <i>erchomai</i> ), ... who <b>comes from</b> ( <i>ekporeuomai</i> ) the Father...” (author’s translation) John 15:26	“I <b>came from</b> ( <i>exerchomai</i> ) the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving ( <i>poreuomai</i> ) the world and going to the Father) John 16:28
“he will <b>bear witness about me</b> ” John 15:26 <sup>25</sup>	“ <b>I</b> am the one <b>who bears witness about myself</b> ” <sup>26</sup> John 8:18a
“he will <b>guide</b> you into all the truth” John 16:13	“for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth” John 18:37

<sup>23</sup> See L&N, p. 141.

<sup>24</sup> The Son is also portrayed as sending the Spirit (16:7; 15:26). This shows the close connection between The Father and the Son in the Fourth Gospel.

<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, the Παράκλητος is further portrayed in this passage as the Spirit of truth. In 18:37, Jesus bears witness to the truth.

<sup>26</sup> In the Fourth Gospel, the Father (5:32; 8:18b) and the Spirit (15:26) bear witness about the Son (15:26), and Jesus bears testimony about himself (5:31; 8:14, 18a).

<p>“when he comes, he will <i>convict</i> (<i>elenchō</i>) the world concerning <u>sin</u> and <u>righteousness</u> and <u>judgment</u>” John 16:8</p>	<p>“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been <u>guilty of sin</u>, but now they have <u>no excuse for their sin</u>” John 15:22<sup>27</sup></p>
--	--

The term “Spirit of truth” enhances the parallels between the work of Jesus and that of the Spirit. First, this term is used twice as an explanation for the term παράκλητος (14:16–17; 15:26). Second, the terminology of 15:26 resembles that of 14:6. As Leon Morris observes, “The verb ‘guide’ (ὁδηγέω, here only in John) is connected with the word for ‘way’ (ὁδός); just as Jesus is the Way, so he is the Truth (14:6) to whom the Spirit of truth leads people” (MORRIS, 1989, p. 157)<sup>28</sup>. Consequently, the Spirit has a revelatory function, which is described in terms of teaching and reminding (14:26). Very likely the two ideas form a unit—teaching by reminding—in that “what is meant is a later recollection of the message of Jesus (cf. 2:22; 12:16; 16:4)” (EDNT, p. 28) likely meaning inspiration of the Scripture. Thus, there is no new teaching, only reminding of Jesus’ teaching.

Finally, Jesus’ statement that his followers would do “greater works than these” (14:12e) is to be interpreted in light of its immediate context, “because I am going to the Father” (14:12f; cf. 16:7) as well as the broader context of chapters 14–16. In other words, “greater works than these” would be possible through the power of the Spirit. Therefore, more than simply replacing the presence of Christ, the Spirit intensifies it (SENIOR; STUHLMUELLER, 1983, p. 287)<sup>29</sup>. As one can infer from 20:21–23, this intensification results in power for the church to fulfill its missionary call<sup>30</sup>. In reading John 14–16 from this perspective, one can agree with N. T. Wright’s

<sup>27</sup> As J. Ramsey Michaels observes, “to convict the world concerning sin” is “what Jesus himself has done” (Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, p. 833). The Fourth Gospel contains various passages dealing with the “conviction of the world concerning sin (3:19–21, 5:28 f., 38–47, 8:21 ff., 34–47, 9:41, 14:27, 15:18–24); righteousness (5:30, 7:18, 7:24, 8:28, 8:46, 8:50, 8:54, 12:32, 14:31, 18:37); and judgment (12:31, 14:30, 17:15)” (Brooke Foss Westcott and Arthur Westcott, eds., *The Gospel according to St. John Introduction and Notes on the Authorized Version*, CCGNT (London: J. Murray, 1908), p. 228). To a lesser or greater extent, all these passages are descriptions of Jesus’ mission. Interestingly, in the Psalms of Solomon, a Davidic figure is portrayed with a phraseology very close to that of John 16:8. The similarities between the two passages are noteworthy: “See, O Lord, and raise up their king for them, a **son of David**... to *reprove* (ἐλέγχω) sinners.... And he will gather a holy people whom he will lead in righteousness, and he will judge tribes of the people sanctified by the Lord its God.” (Ps Sol 17:23, 27–28, LES (cf. v. 41).

<sup>28</sup> The two statements also share the verb “to come” and the noun “Father”.

<sup>29</sup> Senior and Stuhlmueller further state that “there is little doubt that this intensification of the power and presence of the risen Christ in the community through the presence of the Spirit-Paraclete is linked to the church’s missionary experience” (287).

<sup>30</sup> Dunn goes as far as to state, “It is not so much the case of where Jesus is there is the kingdom, as where the Spirit

AGUIAR, A. T. The mission of Jesus, the work of the Spirit and the role of the church: a reflection from the gospel of John. *Práxis Teológica (Ahead Of Print)*, volume 20, número 1, e-2181, 2024.

contention that the farewell discourse is “a preparation for the mission to the world” (WRIGHT, 2016, p. 186).

### 3 THE MISSION OF JESUS’ FOLLOWERS

In John, both the mission of the Spirit and that of Jesus’ followers must be understood in reference to the mission of Jesus itself. The mission of Jesus is continued through the body of believers in the power of the Spirit. The tasks of harvesting, bearing fruit, and witnessing are all seen as an extension of Jesus’ mission. In this manner, the disciples reap that for which they did not labor as the ones sent by Jesus (4:38); they prove to be Jesus’ disciples by bearing much fruit (15:8); they bear witness because they have been with Jesus from the beginning (15:27); and they will do “greater works” because of the abiding presence of Jesus through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (14:12–13) (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 141). The opposite is also true: the more fully the disciples abide in Jesus, the more they understand and fulfill their own role in mission (John 15)<sup>31</sup>.

Two key passages for understanding the church’s mission in the Fourth Gospel are 14:12 and 20:21–23. However, before turning toward these passages, a brief comment on the missionary agents is necessary. Although the term *ἐκκλησία/church* does not occur in the gospel of John, the fourth evangelist applies corporate metaphors such as “flock” (chap. 10) and “vine” to refer to Jesus’ messianic community<sup>32</sup>. In addition, while John does not obliterate the function of Jesus’ first disciples, he widens the concept of *μαθητής/disciple* to include a larger group not limited by time and space (8:31; 13:35; 15:8; 17) (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 149). Therefore, as the reader moves toward the end of the gospel, physical seeing is no longer a *sine qua non* condition for witnessing or believing (20:29) (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 150–152)<sup>33</sup>, in such a manner that

---

is there is the kingdom.” James Dunn, “Spirit and Kingdom,” *Expository Times* 82 (1970–71), p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> For an insightful discussion on that respect, see Michael J. Gordon, *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018). In abiding in Jesus, the “disciples participate in the divine love and life, and therefore in the life-giving mission of God” (Gordon, *Abide and Go*, p. 27).

<sup>32</sup> “These metaphors transfer descriptions of OT Israel to the group of Jesus’ followers, thus marking an important salvation-historical development.” Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus*, p. 143. See also p. 161.

<sup>33</sup> The fact that non-eyewitnesses can share in the same fellowship as those who saw, heard, and touched the earthly Jesus seems to be sharpened in 1 John 1:1–4. Although some scholars deny that by “we” John did not mean eyewitnesses (for arguments, see Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 158–61; also 193–94, 356–58, 498–99, 522–25, 724), there are good reasons to believe that this is the case. See Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leicester: Apollos, 2000), p. 61).



AGUIAR, A. T. The mission of Jesus, the work of the Spirit and the role of the church: a reflection from the gospel of John. *Práxis Teológica (Ahead Of Print)*, volume 20, número 1, e-2181, 2024.

Jesus' missionary assignments to his first disciples (4:38; 17:18; 20:21) are applicable to every believer from that point onwards (cf. 14:12) (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 152).

The first key passage has been an object of much debate for centuries. After all, what did Jesus mean by “greater works than these” (14:12e)? How could one possibly perform mightier works than those performed by Jesus? Indeed, scholars seem to be far from consensus on the matter<sup>34</sup>. An overall explanation regards the success that would mark the disciples' missionary activities. The fact is that Jesus provides the grounds upon which those greater works are made possible in the end of 14:2, “because I am going to the Father,” which is evidence that they take place after Jesus' death and exaltation. Thus, as D. A. Carson puts it, the greater works are connected to “the new eschatological age” and “the power of the eschatological Spirit” (CARSON, 1991, p. 496). In short, the emphasis is not so much “on the marvelous character of the ‘greater works’” but on “their eschatological character” (BROWN, 2008, p. 633). They concern what Jesus' followers would do in the power of the Spirit throughout the Christian era until the return of Christ.

The second key passage (20:21–23) develops 14:12 in that while the latter implies “a distinction between the time before and the time after Jesus' glorification and return to the Father” (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 180), the former presupposes “Jesus' completed work (cf. 17:4), *i.e.*, his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension (cf. 20:17, 19–20) (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 180). John 20:21–23 is one of three instances in which sending terminology is applied to the disciples (cf. 4:38; 17:18). In 4:38 the disciples are sent to harvest<sup>35</sup>, but this is only an anticipation of 20:21, since Jesus' actual sending of the disciples will not take place until his death and resurrection (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 181, 184). Köstenberger argues that the harvest

---

<sup>34</sup> The suggestions include: (1) no geographical or temporal limitations (Newman and Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*, p. 462); (2) emphasis on the mighty works of conversion as those portrayed in the book of Acts (Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 574); (3) that which was done by Peter (at Pentecost) and Paul (through his journeys) after Jesus ascended into heaven once the Spirit was now available (Frédéric Louis Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John: With a Critical Introduction*, trans. S. Taylor [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1900], 3:138–139); (4) more people receiving the benefit of Jesus' death (J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], p. 780); (5) the conversion of the Gentiles (William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953–2001], 2:273); (6) “the conveying to people of the spiritual realities of which the works of Jesus are ‘signs’” (George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC 36 [Dallas: Word, 1999], p. 254); (7) the disciples' works are based on the work Jesus completed on the cross (Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004], p. 433). Not all of these suggestions are mutually exclusive.

<sup>35</sup> For details, see Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus*, p. 180–184.

AGUIAR, A. T. The mission of Jesus, the work of the Spirit and the role of the church: a reflection from the gospel of John. *Práxis Teológica (Ahead Of Print)*, volume 20, número 1, e-2181, 2024.

language in 4:38 is tantamount to bearing fruit in 15:16. Both have evangelistic connotations (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 184-185). However, John 17:18 and 20:21 move the matter a step forward once the usage of the adverb καθώς/*just as* establishes a connection between Jesus' having been sent by the Father and Jesus' sending of the disciples (cf. 6:57; 15:9). Jesus' relationship with the Father becomes a model for Jesus' relationship with the disciples. More than that, Jesus' obedience to the commission he received from the Father becomes a model to be followed by Jesus' disciples. The mission of Jesus is the basis upon which the mission of Jesus' followers is grounded<sup>36</sup>. In a sense, ultimately, the disciples do not have a separate mission, but continue Jesus' mission.

Despite the similarities between 17:18 and 20:21, one can also learn from the differences. While 17:18 focuses more on the process of sending, in 20:21 it is the relationship between the sender and the sent one that is being highlighted (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 187). In 17:18 the prepositional phrase “into the world” has its counterpart in 17:16, “they are not of the world.” This indicates that before being sent into the world, the disciples must be set apart from the world<sup>37</sup>. While building upon 17:18, the message of 20:21 underscores the authority and legitimation with which Jesus invested the disciples (KÖSTENBERGER, 1997, p. 190). This happens by means of the Spirit. As in the farewell discourse, here the Spirit is closely related to the mission of the church (20:22). He is the empowerment that makes the disciples' future mission possible (20:23) (RIDDERBOS, 1991, p. 643; BAUCKHAM; MOSSER, 2008, p. 127)<sup>38</sup>. Thus, the disciples are Jesus' agents (cf. 13:20) as they fulfill their mission through the power of the Holy Spirit (MICHAELS, 2010, p. 1014).

## CONCLUSION

The discussion above has shown that the mission of Jesus, the mission of the Holy Spirit, and the mission of the church are inseparable elements<sup>39</sup>. Indeed, they are integral parts of only

---

<sup>36</sup> See Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1505.

<sup>37</sup> This is confirmed in 17:17, “*Sanctify* them in the truth” (emphasis added). Köstenberger calls attention to the repetition of ἀγιάζω in 17:16–19 and καθαρός in 13:8–14; 15:3 (Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus*, p. 187).

<sup>38</sup> Bauckham states that the catch of fish in the conclusion of John's gospel symbolizes “the coming mission of the church” (128).

<sup>39</sup> Just as Matt 28:16–20 and Luke 24:44–49 are climactic passages bringing their respective gospels to a conclusion

AGUIAR, A. T. The mission of Jesus, the work of the Spirit and the role of the church: a reflection from the gospel of John. **Práxis Teológica (Ahead Of Print)**, volume 20, número 1, e-2181, 2024.

one mission: the mission of God<sup>40</sup>. The church is summoned to proclaim forgiveness of sins, made available to humankind by means of Jesus' atoning death on the cross, in the power of the Spirit for the glory of God.

## REFERENCES

BAUCKHAM, Richard. The Fourth Gospel as the Testimony of the Beloved Disciple. *In*: BAUCKHAM, Richard; MOSSER, Carl (eds.). **The Gospel of John and Christian Theology**. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

BEASLEY-MURRAY, George R. **John**. Word Biblical Commentary, v. 36. Dallas: Word, 1999.

BROWN, Raymond E. **The Epistles of John**: Translated, with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary. The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

CARSON, Donald Arthur. **The Gospel According to John**. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991.

CARSON, Donald Arthur. The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:31 Reconsidered. **Journal of Biblical Literature**, v. 104, n. 4, p. 639-651, 1987.

DUNN, James. Spirit and Kingdom. **Expository Times**, v. 80, n. 2, p. 36-40, 1970.

ERDMANN, Martin. Mission in John's Gospel and Letters. *In*: LARKIN JR., William J.; WILLIAMS, Joel F. (eds.). **Mission in the New Testament**. An Evangelical Approach. New York: Orbis Books, 1998, p. 207-226.

FRANCE, R. T. **Jesus and the Old Testament**: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982.

GODET, Frédéric Louis. **Commentary on the Gospel of John**: With a Critical Introduction. Translator: S. Taylor. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1900.

GORDON, Michael J. **Abide and Go**: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018.

HENDRIKSEN, William; KISTEMAKER, Simon J. **Exposition of the Gospel According to**

---

and, at the same time, providing a sort of summary of the entire previous presentation, it seems that John 20:21–22 plays the same role in the Fourth Gospel; see Craig S. Keener, "Sent Like Jesus: Johannine Missiology," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 12, no. 1 (2009): 21–45. This paper is also now available in Keener, *For All Peoples*, 21–46.

<sup>40</sup> Senior and Stuhlmüller notice that "the Father, alone, is not sent. He is the origin and the goal of all the testimony of the Gospel." Senior and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 292.

AGUIAR, A. T. The mission of Jesus, the work of the Spirit and the role of the church: a reflection from the gospel of John. **Práxis Teológica (Ahead Of Print)**, volume 20, número 1, e-2181, 2024.

**John**. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001 (1953).

KEENER, Craig S. **For All Peoples**. A Biblical Theology of Missions in the Gospels and Acts. Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2020.

KEENER, Craig S. Sent Like Jesus: Johannine Missiology. **Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies**, v. 12, n. 1, p. 21-45, 2009.

KEENER, Craig S. **The Gospel of John: A Commentary**. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.

KÖSTENBERGER, Andreas J. **John**. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

KÖSTENBERGER, Andreas J. **The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel**. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

KÖSTENBERGER, Andreas J.; O'BRIEN, Peter T. **Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: a Biblical Theology of Mission**. Westmont: IVP Academic, 2001.

KRUSE, Colin G. **The Letters of John**. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leicester: Apollos, 2000.

MICHAELS, J. Ramsey. **The Gospel of John**. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

MORRIS, Leon. **Jesus Is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John**. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.

MORRIS, Leon. **The Gospel According to John**. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

NEWMAN, Barclay Moon; NIDA, Eugene Albert. **A Handbook on the Gospel of John**. New York: United Bible Societies, 1993. (UBS Handbook Series).

NISSEN, Johannes. **New Testament and Mission: Historical and Hermeneutics Perspectives**. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2006.

RIDDERBOS, Herman. **The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary**. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

SCHNABEL, Eckhard J. **Early Christian Mission**. Westmont: IVP Academic, 2021.

SCHREINER, Thomas R. A Biblical Theology of the Glory of God. *In*: STORMS, Sam; TAYLOR, Justin (eds.). **For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper**. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010, p. 229-230.

AGUIAR, A. T. The mission of Jesus, the work of the Spirit and the role of the church: a reflection from the gospel of John. **Práxis Teológica (Ahead Of Print)**, volume 20, número 1, e-2181, 2024.

SENIOR, Donald; STUHLMUELLER, Carroll. **The Biblical Foundations for Mission**. New York: Orbis Book, 1983.

SILVA, Moisés (ed.). **New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis**. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

WESTCOTT, Brooke Foss; WESTCOTT, Arthur (eds.). **The Gospel according to St. John**. Introduction and Notes on the Authorized Version, CCGNT. London: J. Murray, 1908.

WRIGHT, N. T. A Missional Reading of the New Testament. *In*: GOHEEN, Michael W. (ed.). **Reading the Bible Missionally**. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.