

MISSION IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER

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IN HIS article *Some Missiological Perspectives from I Peter*, Robinson laments the misappreciation and the underrating of the epistle for eccleciological thinking generally and missiology in particular.¹ The valid question therefore is, can one speak of mission in the epistle? It is insightful that Blauw summarizes his survey on the biblical data regarding the foundation and motivation of mission by using a passage from I Peter.² This points to the value of I Peter in mission studies, which needs to be pursued.

In the view of the apostle Peter's authorship of the epistle,³ it is expected that the influence of the colorful disciple and apostle of the Gospels and Acts, who received the Great Commission and personally participated in its fulfill-

¹P. J. Robinson, "Some Missiological Perspectives from I Peter," *Missionalia* 17:3 (1989), 178. Observes that a quick glance of some important publications confirm the missappreciation and the underrating of I Peter as a text for mission.

²Johaness Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (London: Lutterworth, 1964), 126, uses 2:9-10 to illustrate the thought that the theology of the Mission is the theology of the Church.

³The debate on the authorship has not been settled however, Apostle Peter's authorship is accepted in this study.

ment should be evident. Clearly reflected in the epistle, is his perception of the church and its role. He views his recipients as 'the elect' (1:1), and 'holy nation' sent to declare the praises of God (2:9-10). Aptly described by Blauw as "a people called out of the world placed in the world and sent to the world."¹

The epistle describes the role of the community of believers in the world.² The introductory section deals with their identity and the body their winsome behavior in a hostile world. For the purpose of this paper, I Peter 2:12 will be considered because it serves as the transition between the foundational themes and the body of the epistle.³ The unit within which the text is found (2:11-12) has words and phrases that occur in the sections preceding and following it, it is therefore pivotal in the flow of thought in the epistle. The movement in a missiological sense is a development from the spiritual formation for mission in the introductory section where several references are made about conversion.⁴ This is followed by a description of the people of God, the

¹Blauw, 126.

²Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter* trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 21, he views the theme of I Peter as Christians in the world.

³ See John H. Elliot, *I Peter*, The Anchor Bible (AB) vol.37b (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 456; J. Ramsay Michaels *I Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) vol. 49 (Waco: Word Books, 1988), xxxv; P. H. Davids, *The Epistle of First Peter*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (NICNT) (Grand Rapids: 1991), 94; Goppelt, 20.

⁴Several passages in the introductory section refer to regeneration, "He has begotten us" 1:3, "you were redeemed" 1:18, "having been born again" 2:2, and "coming to him" 2:4.

community believers.¹ The transition in 2:12 shifts the focus on the Christian mission in the world.² The diagram below illustrates this development.

Good Conduct in Various Situations **Commission** 2:13-4:10
Having Good Conduct Amongst Unbelievers **Mission**
Transition Text 2:12
The “Holy Nation, Chosen People” **Community** 2:4-10
Spiritual Formation For Mission **Conversion** 1:3-2:4

The mission text calls the Christians to have good conduct among the unbelievers. This theme is developed and applied to various circumstances such as the society 2:17, the workplace 2:18-23 and the family 3:1-7. Bosch considers the text (2:12) as forming the basis of mission in I Peter.⁴ In the first section of the paper attempt will be made to analyze the text under discussion to ascertain what it meant. The second section will deal with the missiological considerations arising from the text to find out a possible Petrine model for mission.

The Study of the Text

τὴν ἀναστροφὴν ὑμῶν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἔχοντες καλήν,
ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαλοῦσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν ἐκ τῶν
καλῶν ἔργων ἐποπτεύοντες δοξάσωσιν τὸν θεὸν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ
ἐπισκοπῆς.

“Maintaining your good conduct among the unbelievers

¹See 2:4-10.

²Michaels, xxxv, designate 2:13-3:12 as the Christian mission in the world, which is summarized generally in 2:11-12 and specifically in 2:13-3:12.

so that when they speak against you as wrong doers, they may by observing your good deeds glorify God on the day of visitation”

The text marks the beginning of the body of the epistle. The direct address ‘Dear friends’ in 2:11 like that of 4:12 indicates a new beginning. In 1 Peter 2:11-12 forms a transitional passage in the epistle. It is a vantage point from which one can look back and forth in the epistle. Like a thread it connects the identity of the community of believers and their responsibility in the world. Numerous terms and concepts that occur in both preceding and following sections are found in this passage.¹¹ There is a chiasmic representation of thought in 2:12

A When they (Gentiles) slander you
 B. As those (Christians) who do wrong
 B' By observing your (Christians) good deeds
 A' They (Gentiles) glorify God on the day of visitation.¹

The chiasm in Greek reveals the two negatives concepts balanced by two positive ones.

A ὧ καταλαλοῦσιν (They Slander)
 B ὡς κακοποιῶν
 B' ἐκ τῶν καλῶν ἔργων ἐποπτεύοντες (Observing)
 A' δοξάσωσιν τὸν θεὸν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπισκοπῆς (They Glorify)²

The text alludes to the hostile context of the recipients. The nature of the hostility has been an issue of debate in Petrine studies. It appears to be to a general hostility towards

¹See Elliott, 72, italics are mine.

²The negative talk about the Christians is reversed by what they observe in the Christians, their good deeds, making the role of observing crucial in the structure.

Christians and not a state programmed persecution.¹ This therefore would locate the epistle around the middle of the first century. The recipients are both of Jewish and Gentile background.² An attempt will be made in the following to study the key elements of the passage.

Interpretation of the Text

Maintaining Good Conduct

The phrase good conduct is a translation of the Greek τὴν ἀναστροφὴν modified by καλὴν.³ The adjective καλὴν frequently serve as synonyms for ἀγαθός. The adjectives καλός and ἀγαθός were used by the Greeks to distinguish the most leading and honored citizens in contrast with the δῆμος the general population, they also denote that which is desirable or honorable.⁴ As used in I Peter τὴν ἀναστροφὴν modified with καλὴν would mean conduct worthy of honor. The believers in the epistle have been reminded of their

¹Davids, 37, suggests that suffering in the epistle is not imperial persecution but hostilities towards the Christians by their unbelieving neighbors.

²There are references in the epistle that denote a Jewish audience in 2:9-10 while others specifically refer to the Gentiles (2:10; 4:3).

³William D. Mounce, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (1993) s.v. “ἀναστροφὴν.” The word could also mean, conversation, mode of life, conduct, or deportment. In this essay conduct is preferred.

⁴Bertram Grudman, “καλός,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT), ed. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 3:536.

“ransom from the futile conduct which they inherited from their fathers”(1:18) and have been advised to “live holy lives with reverent conduct” (1:15,17). This thought is reiterated in 2:12 and repeated throughout the epistle. The intensity of the usage of ἀναστροφὴν six times in I Peter as compared to thirteen times in the whole of the New Testament shows the importance the author attached to it.¹ Good conduct of the Christians results in the unbelievers glorifying God (2:12c). It is instructive that the unbelievers do not praise the Christians but God, showing that the source of their conduct is God. This conduct is envisioned as a result of their regeneration. They have been ransomed from the futile conduct they inherited from their fathers 1: 18. Their present conduct is a negation of their past lives because they have been redeemed. Good conduct, therefore, is a fruition of regeneration functioning as “Christ fragrance.”² Kelly observes that the Christian manner of conducting themselves was an effective form of witnessing to their pagan neighbors.³

Among the Unbelievers

The Greek word ἔθνος from which the locative form ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν is derived is usually translated as nations or

¹W. F. Moulton, *Concordance to the New Testament Greek*, 5d ed., s.v “Ἀναστροφῆ.”

²Bosch, 45 refers to I Corinthians 2:14 to underscore the mission element in 2:12. There must have been something unique in the conduct of the Christians that would drive the unbelievers to glorify God.

³N. D Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1976), 68.

peoples when it has no special sense or characteristics. It is at times used to distinguish other people from the Jews thus gentiles or heathen.¹ In the epistle, Peter addresses his recipients with some distinctive Jewish terms such as the holy nation and chosen people, showing that the term is not used to distinguish the literal Jews from the gentiles.² The usage of the word in this passage is better understood as a collective term for all the unbelievers as differentiated from the believers.³ Michaels suggests that this designation marks those who are outside faith and their mission parallels that of the Jews as described the apocalyptic literature.⁴ Christians are called but not to isolation. The epistle presents the contradiction and tensions the Christians experience, 'out of the world but in the world'. They are exclusive as implied in such terms as the elect, holy, but are to exist amongst the unbelievers. Their election is for service.⁵

The frontiers of the Church as set out here is crossing over to the unbeliever, the Christians are scattered among the unbelievers. Therefore the frontiers could be found in the neighbor next door, the vegetable vendor in the market,

¹K. L. Schmidt, "ἔθνος," *TDNT* 2:370.

²Amongst the recipients were people who were gentiles as the reference to their past show: They are redeemed from a futile past 1:18 and they were once not a people 2:10

³Elliot, *I Peter*, AB, 466, says that the term is used in 2:12 and 4:3 to designate unbelievers.

⁴Michaels, xlv, quotes the Apocalypse of Baruch which states: "And I will scatter this people among the gentiles that they may do good to the gentiles" 2 Apocalypse Baruch 1:4.

⁵H. H. Rowley, *Bible Doctrine of Election* (London: Lutterworth, 1953), 52, quoted by Blauw, 22: "the purpose of election is service when service is withheld the election loses its meaning and therefore fails."

a tribal man in the remotest part of the world or a post modern man in a city office. Christians among the unbelievers is mission in I Peter. Some observe that the language about the gentiles is so harsh that the author does not envision their conversion.¹ However the emphasis on honorable and attractive conduct as a missionizing means of recruitment is made to all believers and the Christian wife in particular. And one important goal of the Christian community in I Peter was attraction and conversion of the unbelievers.²

Speaking Against the Christians

The statement “though they speak against you” is translated from the Greek ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαλοῦσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν. It underscores the slander and the accusation of the unbelievers against the Christians. καταλαλοῦσιν is one of the verbs employed in the epistle to depict the hostile verbal abuse directed towards Christians. It was a malicious gossip that the Christian could be charged with bad reputation.³ This alienation towards Christians is not because they are bad but because they do not conform to the former ways of lust.⁴ The Christians are accused and suffer in the epistle because of their good conduct.

There are different opinions on why Peter admonishes

¹The unbelievers in the epistle are addressed in terms that show their lost condition and are portrayed as awaiting the wrath of God.

²Elliott, I Peter, AB, 456.

³Selwyn E. G, *The First Epistle of Peter* (London: Macmillan and Company 1955), 171.

⁴Goppelt, 158.

his recipients to do good, some like Davids sees a call to minimize suffering in the first section of the book and a call to come to grips with suffering when it becomes inevitable in the second section.¹ However in this passage the Christians are not just invited to observe good conduct so that their accusers may tone down but that they may have a change of attitude and glorify God. Robinson correctly points out that the witnessing of the church in the epistle is described in terms of endurance of faith in trying situations of suffering.² Probably their stance in suffering though falsely accused not retaliating, results in the change of the lives of the unbelievers. Doing good in suffering is mission.

Observing the Good Conduct and Glorifying God

The Greek term ἐποπτεύοντες³ a present participle form denotes continuous observation for a period of time. Consistency is envisioned in the conduct of the Christian who is called upon to maintain good conduct. There are divergent views on the status of the unbelievers when they glorifying God.⁴ Michaels points out that elsewhere in the epistle in 4;14,16 the term glorification is used for worship by the

¹Davids, 28.

²Robinson, 187.

³Mounce, s.v. "ἐποπτεύω," literally means observing look up, or watch.

⁴Some observe the conversion of the unbeliever while others do not.

Christians.¹ In this passage it is Peter's hope that they change. Otherwise it would be awkward glorifying God in their state of unbelief. Davids does not see the conversion of the unbelievers at this point but in 3:2 when the unbelieving husband turn to faith because of his wife's conduct.² But a comparison of the two sections show similarities. Elliot observes a parallel between 2:12 and 3:2,³ which indicates that good conduct is intended for witnessing. Glorifying God denotes a change of attitude towards God as a result of the good conduct of the Christians in 2:12 and the winsome conduct of the wives 3:2. The similarities between 2:12 and 3:2 show that probably the author had the same intention in mind.

2:12b 'So that when they accuse you'	3:1 So if they disobey
2:12c by observing you good conduct	3:2 By observing your conduct
2:12d they may Glorify God	3:2 They are won ⁴

The Day of Visitation

There are various opinions on the meaning of the day of visitation. The word visitation is a translation of ἐπισκοπή

¹Michaels, 118, says that the term as used specifically in I Peter signifies repentance or religious conversion at or before the last day. However it is questionable how this could happen on the last day.

²Davids, 97.

³Elliott, I Peter, AB, 560.

⁴Ibid, there are similarities in the structure, terminology, and the expressed goal.

ς¹ Some observe that it is a day of God's mercy as implied message of Jesus about Jerusalem.² Others see it as a day when God visits an individual testing him when confronted with some winsome behavior³ or when the conscience is searched.⁴ I concur with Michaels who sees the day of visitation as a day of divine intervention into the affairs of man for blessing or judgment and that it is unsatisfactory to see it as an indefinite day.⁵ The motivation of good conduct in the epistle is therefore distinctly eschatological, salvation of the unbelievers and the glory of God in the last day.⁶ The text therefore highlights the eschatological dimension of mission.

Mission in 1 Peter

Some Missiological Considerations from I Peter

A study of I Peter 2:12 brings to light the missiological emphasis of the epistle. In I Peter the status of the Christians in the society is viewed from a missiological perspective. There is a general consensus amongst Petrine scholars

¹Mounce, s.v. "ἐπισκοπῆς," means "inspect," "observe," "look at," "observantly select," "to go to see or visitation."

²D. Edmund Heibert, *I Peter* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 160.

³Elliot, *I Peter*, 471.

⁴Selwyn, 170.

⁵Michaels, 119-120, he further says that it is a day of equivalent to the last day (1:5) when salvation is revealed and the end of all things when the living and the dead.

⁶*Ibid.*

that the Christian in the society is the major focus of the epistle.¹ The development of thought in the epistle moves from identity of God's people (1:3-2:10) to their consequent responsibility in the world (2:13-3:12), a passage described by Michaels as Christian mission to the world.² The shift in 2:11-12 is a summary statement of what this mission entails. Mission concept in I Peter can be viewed from this text.

Mission as Being

Mission in I Peter is conduct. The missionary character of the letter of Peter points to conduct of the Christians as the basis of all mission. That this alone will convince the pagans, that Christians do not publicize their faith. The pagans ask the Christians for an explanation. Blauw further states that evangelization of the world is not a matter of words and activity but presence, the presence of the God's people midst humanity the presence of God amongst his people.³ However I Peter is not averse to public proclamation of the gospel, the Christians had come to the knowledge of the gospel through proclamation.⁴ What is key in the epistle is the consistency between proclamation and practice. The witness of the early church was so effective because it was demonstrated in the

¹Gospels, 64, Davids, 94, Michaels xxxv.

²Michaels, xxxv, designates the 2:13-3:12 as the Christian mission in the world.

³See Bosch, 45. Blauw, 43. While I concur with him on the emphasis on conduct in I Peter I do not observe passivity on the part of the Christians.

⁴See 1:12, 1:18, 3:2-4:6.

lives of its exponents.¹ The comment by Ellen G. White is insightful on the role of conduct in mission she says, “It is not only the preaching of the truth, not only the distribution of literature that we are to witness to God. Let us remember that a Christ like life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in the favor of Christianity”.² The epistle lays emphasis on conduct because it is more effective than words in turning the hearts of unbelievers to God.³ Bosch therefore rightly comments that one of the elements of the New Testament view of mission is that it is a matter of being rather than doing.⁴ The missiological principles laid down in I Peter are intertwined with the church. The congregation itself, its being is part of the message it proclaims.⁵

Suffering and Mission

The false accusations brought against the Christians portray the missionary context of I Peter as that of suffering. Suffering is a central concern for Peter in the epistle.⁶ There is hostility towards the Christians due to their new way

¹Heibert, 159.

²Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain view: Pacific Press, 1948), 9:21.

³Elliott, I Peter, AB, 566.

⁴Bosch, 45.

⁵Robinson, 18. emphasis supplied.

⁶David, 23, observes that the author’s strategy in the epistle is to help the Christians minimize suffering but in its eventuality comes to grips with it.

of life(4:3). The epistle therefore provides a model on how mission can be carried out in a hostile environment. The Christian response to hostility is to be patterned after that of Jesus, who is the perfect example to those who suffer innocently. The suffering motif revolve around the cross and the suffering of Jesus¹ whose suffering, death and resurrection is of significance to the suffering Christians. The suffering of Christ is intended to show the transitory nature of suffering and the glories to follow (1:12). The afflictions of Jesus are described in the epistle as resulting into His victory and exaltation.² The Christian stance in suffering is perceived in the backdrop of the Easter events, which played a key role in the origin of Christian mission in the early church there could be no Pentecost without Easter.³ In suffering Christ accomplished His mission, the Christians are called but to share in his suffering (4:13).

The general admonition laid down in 2:12 of maintaining good conduct among the unbelievers is specifically explained in 2:13-3:22. Endurance in suffering should therefore be seen in the context of this admonition. Maintaining good conduct in suffering is to have a Christ like spirit, being non retaliatory. This eventually makes the unbelievers glorify God. Therefore doing good should be the Christian response in suffering. This is the mission of the church in a hostile environment.

¹Every time the innocent suffering of the Christians is mentioned in the epistle the author supports his admonition on endurance with the suffering of Jesus.

²Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books,1992), 41.

³See 4:13 “ But rejoice that you participate in sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when His glory will be revealed”

Mission as Eschatological

The goal of good conduct in 2:12 is the change and the possible conversion of the unbeliever so that they may glorify God in the day of visitation. This depicts a clear connection between mission and eschatology. The epistle is considered as one of the most eschatological in the New Testament and even apocalyptic.¹ The regeneration, election and the role of the church in the world are all perceived within an eschatological context.² The eschatological motif is stated early in the epistle in connection with the regeneration of the Christians “they are born into a new hope that does not fade” 1:3-4, they are chosen but live as strangers 1:1, they are in this world but temporarily. Their role in the world is also seen as community anticipating the day of visitation, this make those around them ask for the reason for their hope 3:15. The missiological perspective of I Peter is therefore thoroughly eschatological.

Eschatological impetus is a key element in missiology, it provides a constant stimuli for the Church reminding her of her temporality in the world.³ In I Peter the Christians are aliens and strangers they are citizens of two worlds the heavenly and the earthly this fruitful tension call for their faithfulness in both worlds. Eschatological hope dispels despondency and hope is kept alive in the church and becomes

¹See Davids, 115-16, on the discussion of the eschatological nature of the letter.

²The eschatological motif permeates the whole epistle there is a sense of urgency.

³David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 236, observes an eschatological element in all the books he surveys.

the point of attraction for unbelievers they call upon the Christians inquiring about the hope in them.

It is evident from the epistle that there can never be a mission without an eschatological dimension. This understanding provides a broader scope of viewing mission as a movement towards God's intended climax, the day of God's visitation. The missionary therefore becomes a channel to invite others to glorify God together on the day of visitation.

Conclusion

There is a close connection between church and mission in I Peter, they are perceived as the same thing. The church exists but to declare the praises of God. The flow of thought in the epistle demonstrates a movement from conversion to community and then commission. Christians are commissioned to maintain good conduct however this does not downplay proclamation rather it emphasizes a consistency between proclamation and practice. Mission is not what the church does but what it is. The church in the epistle is viewed from an eschatological perspective consequently its mission. Hope in Christians is so evident that it invites inquiry (3:15). The hostility that the church in I Peter experiences is also viewed from a mission point of view, the accusers are to observe her conduct and change their attitudes towards God (2:12).

Petrine model for mission should be a pattern for Adventists. There are so many parallels between Adventists and the recipients of I Peter; both are eschatological communities anticipating an imminent second advent of Jesus. There are a few questions that the study of this book raises to Adventists and their mission; what is the perception of mission, is it just a department of the church? Is our conduct winsome

or even better do we practice what we proclaim? Is the eschatological hope a transforming truth? I Peter provide the Adventists with a good model for mission.¹

The mission emphasis of I Peter can be helpful to the Adventist church. Their environment may not be exactly the same but there are Christians today who find themselves hostile situations. As prescribed by Peter only a truly regenerate person can withstand hostility and even turn it into a witnessing opportunity. The adoption of Petrine model can be helpful in the mission activities of the church. Adventists may find in the epistle admonitions on how to relate with the society at large and with their unbelieving neighbors. They can also apply the missiological considerations found in I Peter in proclamation of the gospel.

¹In a missiological sense the development of thought in I Peter is founded on conversion experience (1:3-2:4). The imagery of the newborns coming to Jesus and becoming living stones (2:4) and then witnessing to the pagans or sharing their hope (2:12;3:15) illustrates an experience that would definitely translate into a healthy mission activity for the church if applied.