



The missio Dei and the identity of the church in 1 Peter

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

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In 2023 the editors Abeneazer G. Urga, Edward L. Smither, and Linda P. Saunders brought together an accomplished team for the book *Reading Hebrews Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message, and Methods of Hebrews* (Littleton, Colorado: William Carey Publishing, 2023). Because there are not many missiological studies in the General Epistles, this book (as does the first volume) seeks to fill the gap within missiological scholarship by paying more attention to these letters of the NT. Now, the second book in the series has appeared, this time discussing 1 Peter. As with the first volume, reader have a truly global perspective in their hands. The editors and authors of *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically* come from north to south, from east to west: they represent world Christianity at its best. So, we see contributions from authors who have served, studied, or lived in the following countries: Ethiopia, Zambia, China, Netherlands, USA, Ghana, Norway, Germany, Egypt, Canada, Kenya, England, Greece, etc. This is the global church coming together to produce a resource for the church catholic.

The book is divided into three major sections: (1) the “why” (reason/missionary motive), (2) the “what” (content/missionary message), and (3) the “how” (strategy/missionary method). In the following pages, I will summarize each chapter in a brief manner. Chapters which, to my mind, make an outstanding contribution by showing in great depth the missional implications of 1 Peter will be treated in more detail.

The *missio Dei* and the Identity of the Church in 1 Peter

BOOK REVIEW: *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically*, edited by Abeneazer G. Urga, Jessica A. Udall, and Edward L. Smither

Part I: “The Missionary Motive of 1 Peter”

The first part starts with “**Salvation of the Nations: The Vision of God’s Mission in 1 Peter 1:10–12**” by Joshua Bowman (ch. 1). In this essay, Bowman argues that the salvation mentioned in 1 Peter 1:10 “provides a solid biblical and theological basis for engagement in mission” (3) and gives reason to endure suffering. As suffering is an ever-present reality in this world, believers need to know how to respond in a godly manner to such. Instead of fear and reclusion, “confidence, peace, and even joy come from faith in the promised salvation of the Lord” (5). Such hope is based in the story of the Christ — his suffering and glory. Bowman states that “the historic, prophetic testimony of the faith is vital to current confidence and future hope” (10) which ultimately gives boldness to missional engagement in this world.

Bowman’s chapter is followed by Gift Mtukwa’s “**Like Father, Like Son: Holiness and the *Missio Dei* [sic] in 1 Peter**” (ch. 2). Mtukwa contends that Peter’s commands on holy living are integral to the mission of God’s people. In order to enrich our understanding of this topic, the author uses African Biblical Hermeneutics (leaning on Elizabeth Mburu’s *African Hermeneutics* [Carlisle, Cambria, UK: HippoBooks, 2019]) focusing on Shona proverbs. The Shona proverbs selected could be equated to the English “like father, like son” and thus emphasize resemblance and imitation. In this way, Mtukwa argues that holiness is at the heart of God’s mission (see, e.g., 1 Pet 1:15). Being holy and doing good attracts the surrounding society like a magnet (1 Pet 2:12). Further, Mtukwa sees ‘praise’ not solely as a vertical aspect (worshipping God) but also incorporating a horizontal aspect in terms of proclamation (1 Pet 2:9). There is thus an accord of word and deed which is grounded in the identity of God’s people. Though the Shona proverbs do not present the missional aspect, they are useful to appreciate the importance of resemblance and imitation. This resemblance and imitation focuses on holiness in Peter’s writing, which has a missional component in reaching those who are not yet part of God’s people.

In chapter 3, Jacob Chengwei Feng’s “**Mission by God’s Living Stones: Watchman Nee’s Missional Exegesis of 1 Peter 2:5–11**” shows how Watchman Nee’s missional exegesis enriches our missional reading of Scripture, as well as our understanding and practice of mission “as a ‘coordinated spiritual house,’ which is accomplished by all believers as living stones and priests of God and by their migration” (35). The church is missional in nature; thus, mission is not something the church does, rather it is part of her identity. And as the church is a communal body, mission too is to be lived in community and in coordination. For Nee the terms ‘aliens/foreigners’ and a ‘exiles’ do not refer to a static discipleship in one’s own hometown but rather to a dynamic and missional engagement by means of migration.

The *missio Dei* and the Identity of the Church in 1 Peter

BOOK REVIEW: *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically*, edited by Abeneazer G. Urga, Jessica A. Udall, and Edward L. Smither

Feng not only summarizes Nee's missional understanding of 1 Peter, but he also proposes some missional implications. For example, Feng says that if Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS) is the way forward for the community of the church to engage with the Bible, and if the church by its definition is missional, then why "should not the interpretation of Scripture be *missional*?" (45; emphasis original). This would then lead to a reorientation of TIS into a more missional landscape — something the church catholic needs to reflect upon more.

Boubakar Sanou in his "**Embodying God's Mission in an Unfriendly World: The Identity and Missionary Mandate of the Church in 1 Peter**" (ch. 4) puts forward the argument that the believers' identity is "determined by God's verdict rather than by their social location" (52). He then explores mission in 1 Peter looking at two aspects: 1) identity, and 2) the task of being witnesses. Similarly to Mtukwa's argument above, we see a strong connection between identity and lifestyle (holiness and doing good). Again, verbal proclamation and ethical lifestyle are two aspects of the church's participation in the *missio Dei* — word and deed in harmony (see also LeMarquand's argument in ch. 6).

In chapter 5, "**The Role of the Spirit in Mission in 1 Peter**" by **Yimenu Adimass Belay**, emphasis is given to the Spirit in mission. This chapter could be strengthened by a more rigorous exegesis of the corresponding biblical texts as well as a more thorough argumentation of its individual points. At times the reader is at loss for lack of clarity. To give one example, we read that "the work of mission is not separated from the work of the Spirit in the Old and New Testaments" (65). Yet, the author then goes on to state that the Old Testament (OT) "contains no clear depiction of mission and the role of the Spirit" (65–66). No further explanation is then given as to how we should relate the former declaration to the latter concerning the OT.

A splendid essay (ch. 6) is written by **Grant LeMarquand**. With the title "**Eschatology and Mission in 1 Peter**" LeMarquand engages Ferdinand Hahn's *Mission in the New Testament* (Studies in Biblical Theology 47 [London: SCM Press, 1965]). For Hahn, mission is only present in a modified way in 1 Peter, as Christians give testimony while being persecuted. Hahn, so LeMarquand, rightly recognizes the eschatological aspect of Peter's letter, but he might overplay his hand in seeing an organized persecution of Christians. Further, the concept of mission differs between Hahn's and LeMarquand's works. According to LeMarquand, Hahn limits mission in two ways: 1) mission as a function of the church, and 2) mission as being exclusively verbal proclamation. LeMarquand's understanding of mission is that 1) mission is primarily God's in which the church participates, and 2) mission is not limited to verbal proclamation but includes witness to the lordship of Christ in word and deed.

The *missio Dei* and the Identity of the Church in 1 Peter

BOOK REVIEW: *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically*, edited by Abeneazer G. Urga, Jessica A. Udall, and Edward L. Smither

With this, LeMarquand continues his argument by integrating Peter's eschatological outlook with his missionary understanding.

In order to advance this argument, LeMarquand first engages in a careful analysis as to 1) what "eschatology" and then 2) "mission" refer to. Eschatology is the understanding that early Christians "were aware that the Christian life was eschatological, that is, lived in hope, in the reality of the last things inaugurated by the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah" (80). The author then proceeds to show from 1 Peter these features in the letter. The end times are present in (what many have called) an "already-but-not-yet" fashion: "The readers of 1 Peter live in the end but still look forward to the final end" (83). In terms of mission, LeMarquand argues for a broader definition of mission, mentioning the concept of the *missio Dei* and not limiting the church's participation therein to mere verbal proclamation (although he states that this is a crucial aspect of mission), but also to include aspects like honorable deeds. So far in the book, LeMarquand is the only author who from the outset lets the reader know what he means by "mission" in explicit terms. To relate the concepts of eschatology and mission, LeMarquand states that OT and Jewish "eschatology anticipated God's future rescue of Israel and he creation from decay of sin, evil, and death. Eschatology, therefore, is the expectation of God acting to judge and to save, the assurance that the God who has come in the past will once again act decisively. In other words, eschatology is inherently missional" (84). The author proceeds in a two-fold manner: examining passages which portray 1) the mission of God and 2) the mission of the church in 1 Peter. Concerning the former, LeMarquand shows that 1 Peter 1:1–12 portrays the church as the recipient of God's mission, and in 3:18–22 we see Peter's contribution in "thinking eschatologically about the mission of God in Christ" (87). In regard to the church's mission, the author mentions "worship and ethics" in 2:1–12 (89–91) and suffering and submission in 2:13–3:2; 3:13–17; 4:12–19 (91–94). LeMarquand states: "Mission, said Peter, is always one with an eye toward God's future action" pointing to 1 Peter 3:15 — the hope we have (94).

In conclusion regarding part I, it seems that the majority of the authors base the mission of the church in her identity (leaning specifically on 1 Pet 2:9–12) with its two aspects of verbal proclamation and ethics — word and deed.

Part II: "The Missionary Message of 1 Peter"

The second part of the book concerns Peter's missionary message. This part starts with "**Salvation and Judgment as Missionary Message in 1 Peter**" (ch. 7) by Markus T. Klausli. Klausli asserts that there are different levels of Christian persecution, and that Peter adapts his missionary message accordingly. One

The *missio Dei* and the Identity of the Church in 1 Peter

BOOK REVIEW: *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically*, edited by Abeneazer G. Urga, Jessica A. Udall, and Edward L. Smither

aspect of this message is the “rich presentation of God’s salvation in light of the reality of God’s judgment” (99). The author speaks of a ‘subversive’ mission strategy in that Christians live according to God’s will while giving a response to people who ask about their hope (1 Pet 3:15–16). Again, words and actions come to the fore. Klausli then divides his chapter into two parts: 1) God’s salvation from future judgment, and 2) a worthy response to God’s salvation in light of present judgment. Jesus’s death and resurrection are the centerpiece of salvation (101–102), and the heart of Peter’s missionary message is “that a pleasing response to God’s grace has the potential to awaken interest in the gospel and provide believers with the opportunity to explain God’s saving acts” (106). There is thus an attractive lifestyle of believers which potentially gives way to verbal proclamation.

In chapter 8, Sarah Lunsford’s “**The Missiological Message of Hope in 1 Peter**” makes use of Jürgen Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope*. Lunsford starts out by quoting Moltmann that “Christianity is eschatology, is hope” and then explores the missiological dimension of hope. This hope is anchored in the resurrection of Jesus (116), and the object of that hope is the promises of God (123). She argues that “the redemption and consummation of this fallen creation into a glorified family of God ruling over a new heaven and new earth is the *missio Dei*, the grand uniting theme of all Scripture” (121). Our hope is thus theologically grounded, and Christologically secured. Our participation in the *missio Dei* is “revealed in us through our ethical response to suffering and injustice, our sacrifices of praise, and our loving community of faith” (126). One minor issue in this essay is that Lunsford cites two articles from *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* incorrectly by neither mentioning the authors nor the titles of the entries.

The last chapter (ch. 9) of part two is “**Mission to the Dead and the Resurrection of Jesus: 1 Peter 3:18–22 and Ancestor Christology in Africa**” by Rudolf K. Gaisie. This is another essay which merits some more space. In this chapter, Gaisie sets out an Akan contextual reading of 1 Pet 3:18–22 and 4:5–6. Gaisie focuses on one of the Christological passages of 1 Peter — 3:18–22 — because, as he says, in African contexts there is no expressed dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual world (133). He starts by stating that Jesus’s death is not only good news for the living but also “a message for the dead” (129). The purpose of his essay is to highlight “some aspects of a functional Ancestor Christology for the Akan context and beyond” (129). Gaisie highlights the importance of Christ’s resurrection and its missional aspect for Ancestor Christology. He can do this because it is the resurrection which “ratifies the image of ancestor for and the ancestorship of Jesus” (130).

The *missio Dei* and the Identity of the Church in 1 Peter

BOOK REVIEW: *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically*, edited by Abeneazer G. Urga, Jessica A. Udall, and Edward L. Smither

If there is one area in this essay which could be improved, it is the small section on the OT ideas on death and resurrection. Here Gaisie could have spent more space covering the idea of resurrection or life after death in OT writings. [However, word count limits might have not allowed him to dig deeper here.] Nevertheless, in this section he rightly points out that “death as an enemy to life from God will ultimately be defeated by the true source of life himself, God,” pointing to Isa 25:8 (131).

Gaisie argues that the “spirits in prison” (3:19) and the “into heaven” (3:22) refer to two domains of the spirit realm: “With the assumption that heaven, God’s ‘perfect’ domain, is for ‘obedient or obeying spirits,’ the reading of hell (the domain of disobedient spirits) and heaven respectively in verses 19 and 22 seems *natural* in the flow of thought” (135, emphasis original). The missiological implication of Jesus’s resurrection is that he is Lord of both, the living and the dead: “Jesus did not go to the realm of ancestors and deities as one of them but rather as their Lord” (138).

In more general terms, Gaisie points out that Christology — our understanding of Jesus — is shaped by our experience of him in our context and thus “our christological insights find meaning and clearer expression” (139). Further (and with this I will conclude my reflection of this essay): “What we say of Jesus during the process is always germinal, and there is room for clarity or improvement” (139).

Part II of this book seems to be a bit weaker than the essays presented in Part I. At times it is not clear what the difference between ‘motive’ (Part I) and ‘message’ (Part II) is. Is hope, judgment, or salvation a motive or message? To me, the distinction is not obvious. Nevertheless, the essays in Part II contribute to our overall understanding of 1 Peter with its missiological heart. With this we will come to the last section of the book — the missionary methods.

Part III: “The Missionary Methods of 1 Peter”

Part III with the topic of missionary methods begins with “**Missional Hospitality: Responding to Physical and Spiritual Alienation**” (ch. 10) — a tremendously insightful essay written by **Tricia Stephens** who explores the concept of diaspora mission via 1 Peter. This essay is well written, argued, and researched. Stephens starts out by grounding Christian hospitality in God’s own hospitality. Further, from the beginning she points out — leaning on Enoch Wan’s work on diaspora mission¹ — that in Westernized mission

¹ Enoch Wan, “Diaspora Missiology and International Student Ministry (ISM),” chapter 2 in *Diaspora Missions to International Students*, edited by Enoch Wan, 11–42 (Portland, Oregon, USA: Western Seminary Press, 2019).

The *missio Dei* and the Identity of the Church in 1 Peter

BOOK REVIEW: *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically*, edited by Abeneazer G. Urga, Jessica A. Udall, and Edward L. Smither

understanding, mission has been understood more in terms of doing rather than being. The latter sees mission as part of the church's identity and also brings the relational aspect of mission to the forefront.

Stephens acknowledges other people's work and shows that her essay contributes to the "traditional host-guest power dynamics by shaping a powerful Christian identity as alien and strangers" (146). Hospitality and eschatology via a Christocentric view become the motivation of Christian engagement in this world. After an overview of Greco-Roman understanding of hospitality, the author then examines the social conditions of the reader of 1 Peter. Some interpret the language of 'strangers' and 'aliens' as technical terms referring to the political-legal standing of the readership (see, e.g., ch. 3 of this book), whereas others understand the terms in more metaphorical ways. Stephens then argues for a multivalent *topos* of this language and states that "believers experience legal and social alienation, but it is their gentile neighbors who are experiencing spiritual alienation" (151). A minor change I would love to see is in her chart on p. 152, concerning the then-now of the believers' lives. The author has two columns: "Christians' Lives before Christ" and "Christians' Lives after Christ." Knowing that this is standard evangelical terminology, I would still prefer to read "in Christ" rather than "after Christ" (whatever that might mean).

In the next section, Stephens redefines Christians as both hosts and guests — something which every missionary should take to heart. (I have experienced this struggle of being 'solely' a guest in the Quechua communities here in the Andes of Peru, thus receiving hospitality.) Being a host reflects "God's generosity and love" and being a guest "cultivates humility and openness" (153). This understanding of being a Christian then also links hospitality to eschatology, which Stephen does by exploring 1 Peter 4:7–11. She reasons that "an eschatology of hope receives those who are suffering in the interim and reflects a hope of the fulfillment of God's kingdom" (156).

Again, the essay of Stephens is both insightful as well as helpful in challenging the reader into a new understanding of our participation in God's mission. The only issue I have is with the brevity of the chapter. One really would love to listen more to what Stephens has to say, but I suppose her doctoral dissertation on which she is working will satisfy that need.

In chapter 11, "**Suffering in God's Mission: Reflections from 1 Peter**" by **Edward L. Smither**, we read about some reflection on Peter's encouraging the church to participate in God's mission in the midst of suffering. There were different kinds of sufferings and levels of persecution for Peter and his audience alike. Smither, with some others, thinks that the status of 'aliens' and 'strangers' is not to be seen as a purely metaphorical description of the audience. These

The *missio Dei* and the Identity of the Church in 1 Peter

BOOK REVIEW: *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically*, edited by Abeneazer G. Urga, Jessica A. Udall, and Edward L. Smither

Christians were truly living diaspora realities: they were suffering trials, accusations, and various insults from the surrounding society. So Smither sets out four areas in which Peter's audience was to respond and engage in mission in the midst of suffering: 1) imitating Christ in suffering, 2) godly living (holiness lifestyle), 3) communal witness (as the people of God), and 4) verbal witness. Smither states that "gospel speech should align with their godly conduct," thus connecting word and deed once more. In addition, Peter also imparts a theology of suffering combined with an eschatological hope. In the last section Smither concludes with some reflections on the implications for the global church in the twenty-first century.

In her essay "**Ethical Living as Proto-Evangelion: Holiness, Honor, and Hope in 1 Peter**" (ch. 12), **Jessica A. Udall** puts forward the argument that Peter admonished his readers to live a life full of holiness and honor "which God uses to silence critics of the Christian faith and even to inspire questions regarding the great hope that motivates such good lives" (181). This, the ethical life (characterized by holiness and honor) serves as a proto-evangelion. One could even say that attraction leads to proclamation. One minor error on p. 185 is that Udall unfortunately mixes up the two Wrights, and names N. T. Wright as the author instead of Christopher J. H. (rightly cited in the bibliography). Nevertheless, her argument — that our lifestyle matters in terms of missional engagement with the world — rings true. Udall maintains that holiness and honor as a lifestyle is "not simply a missionary method . . . but part and parcel of Christian identity itself" (190; quoting Miroslav Volf, "Soft Difference, Theological Reflections on the Relation between Church and Culture in 1 Peter," *Ex Auditu* 10 [1994], 25).

In chapter 13, "**Evangelism in 1 Peter: The Verbal Proclamation of a People Awaiting the Return of Their King**," **Will Brooks** states that "Peter's missiological and eschatological vision compelled them to engage the world around them" (193). This reminds us of LeMarquand's essay, discussed above. Brooks is one of the few authors in this book who lets the reader know from the start what he means when he talks about 'mission.' His essay then engages two principal passages in 1 Peter: 2:9b and 3:15 in their respective literary contexts. In the concluding section, Brooks puts forth some missiological insights like evangelism as a communal endeavor, the need for theological education to equip "students with the skills to do theology in context" (204), and the importance of understanding our faith (theology) in more general terms.

Another very insightful essay is "**Missional Implications of Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits**" by **Sigurd Grindheim** (ch. 14). He, like Rudolf K. Gaisie in chapter 9, tackles the difficult passage of 1 Peter 3:18–22. Grindheim argues that this passage is crucial in that it undergirds other passages in 1 Peter

The *missio Dei* and the Identity of the Church in 1 Peter

BOOK REVIEW: *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically*, edited by Abeneazer G. Urga, Jessica A. Udall, and Edward L. Smither

and their call to evangelism. The author sees the spirits in 3:19–20 as evil spirits which led the nations astray. This follows Second Temple Judaism's understanding of fallen angels and evil spirits in the period before the flood. Thus, Christ's preaching to them is not evangelistic in spirit (pun intended!) but proclaims his victory over them. "The powers that are deceiving the nations and leading the people astray have been made subject to the supremacy of Christ" (218). This in turn is motivation for Peter's audience to keep proclaiming the gospel as they hope for the conversion of their earthly-human antagonists.

The last essay (ch. 15) is written by **Sofia Papaspyrou** with the title "**The Pilgrimage Motif in 1 Peter and Its Implications for Evangelism.**" Here, the author explores the motif of pilgrimage and what this means in terms of our evangelistic endeavors. She explores 1 Peter 2:11 and the different views as to whether the collocation of "strangers and aliens" is literal or metaphorical language. Papaspyrou concludes this section by stating that it is the "theological significance" which helps us contemplating our place in this life (229). She then explores the different mentalities of tourists and pilgrims and how they relate to mission. Papaspyrou states that in Greece she has encountered missionaries with pilgrim mentalities — meaning, missionaries who immerse themselves in a given culture and context — as well as missionaries with tourist mentalities who have more their own benefit and development in mind than anything else. The final part then gives a case study of slow tourism in which connections to local communities are established. According to Papaspyrou, 1 Peter 2:11 helps us to examine our true identity and how we are shaped by our current culture. Ultimately "this verse serves as a foundational reminder of the Christians' role as ambassadors of Christ" (237). By adopting a pilgrim mindset, we will be engaging in this world in a humble, missional manner.

With this we will now come to some brief final reflections concerning the entire book.

Concluding Thoughts and Reflections

While reading this book many of my senses have been reawakened. Memories of the smell of coffee during the Ethiopian ceremony returned, and I recalled the taste of injera with vegetables, spicy stews, and meat. This book is like a typical Ethiopian meal: rich in taste and best enjoyed in community.

One of its main strengths and contributions to world Christianity is that it is written by global Christians as indicated in the introduction above. Though the quality and depth of the different chapters vary, the overall insightfulness and challenging remarks make this book a must read for students of 1 Peter as well as current and future missionaries. One aspect which might have been of further benefit could have been a concluding chapter by the editors, or a part IV

Benjamin Marx

The *missio Dei* and the Identity of the Church in 1 Peter

BOOK REVIEW: *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically*, edited by Abeneazer G. Urga, Jessica A. Udall, and Edward L. Smither

“Review and Response” as in the earlier book on Hebrews. Additionally, it needs to be stated that it would have been beneficial for the reader if the authors had stated how terms like mission or missional are to be understood. Though it is difficult to define mission satisfactorily for everyone, it would at least be useful to know how each author defines these terms — as, for example, LeMarquand and Grindheim do in their respective chapters.

As often stated in the book, mission should not be seen as a mere task but rather as some kind of identity of the church — participating in God’s mission. This is even strengthened by the close relationship between eschatology and mission, which is pointed out in several essays. A theology of hope (eschatology) motivates and invites us to engage in the *missio Dei*.