

the Gentiles. Indeed, it took a good many years of ministry before the apostles finally understood the clear implications of the great commission.

In this respect it is interesting to note that when Peter defends his mission to the Gentiles in Jerusalem he never once refers to the great commission (11:1-18) Why? Simply put, the great commission did not play any explicit role in this mission.¹⁰ We should keep in mind that the passages of the great commission found in the gospels, were written well after the mission to the Gentiles had taken place. In fact, the mission to the Gentiles was the dominant in the apostles remembering what Jesus had said. Standing so close to the resurrection and the crushed hopes of Jews not establishing the kingdom, it is understandable that the apostles could not "hear" Jesus' commission. When this is coupled with the orthodoxy of Jesus' life and ministry, the absence of any abrogation of the importance of circumcision and the keeping of the law, it is very understandable that the great commission was incomprehensible to the disciples when Jesus gave it.

The apostles, then, were slow to become involved in a mission to the Gentiles, not out of disobedience, but out of an emerging new paradigm of universalism. As this new paradigm unfolded they show themselves obedient. The mission to the Gentiles would never have occurred without them. The extended mission began by Jesus. They opened the door to the Gentiles and affirmed the mission to the Gentiles as the will of God. As for whether the apostles ever became missionaries to the Gentiles Luke never comments, but the traditions of the church regarding the ministries of the apostles would seem to confirm that they were obedient to the great commis-

sion.

4. *Positive Models for Frontier Missions*

The twelve apostles provide a positive model for frontier missions today. Most churches today are trapped in a particularism that blinds them to the urgency of reaching those who have never heard the gospel. This mission of turning the church toward the unreached may involve a lengthy process. There are many possible roles for individuals and churches to play in this mission effort.

Peter's "conversion" provides a model for missionaries today who are concerned for those who are unreached. Peter went through a major paradigm shift in his ministry to the Gentiles. This involved a long process but was absolutely essential for Jews to evangelize Gentiles. Equally the church missionaries today may need go through a long developmental process in effectively reaching the hidden peoples of our world.

Notes

¹See Gordon Richardson's article, "The Hidden Message of Acts" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, edited by Ralph D. Winter and Stephen C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, revised edition, 1992), pp. A-110-120. The "hidden message" of Acts is Luke's intention to show that God bypassed the apostles because they would not go to the Gentiles. Richardson's opening sentence in the article says: "Hundreds of millions of Christians think that Luke's Acts of the Apostles records the 12 apostles' obedience to the Great Commission. Actually it records their reluctance to obey it" (p. A-110). Commenting on the apostles' ministry in Jerusalem another writer asks this question: "... if you look at Peter's ministry in Jerusalem (as seen in Acts 1-9), what rating would you give him on a scale

of one to ten? Seven? Ten? God probably gave him a rating of about two." See Bob Sjogren's *Destination 2000: Moving the Church into the 21st Century* (Pasadena: Frontiers, 1990).

²See Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*. (London: SPCK, 1958).

³The word particularism refers to the cultural and religious distinctiveness of Israel. God willed that the Jewish people become particular. The Jews erred (as most people do) in over-emphasizing their particularity, thus building needless barriers between themselves and the Gentiles.

⁴James Mervell's studies of Luke-Acts have been especially forceful on this point. See his study on *The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984).

⁵Harold Dollar, *A Biblical-Missiological Exploration of the Cross-Cultural Dimensions in Luke-Acts*. (San Francisco: Mellen Press, 1993), esp. pp. 25-34.

⁶*Ibid.*, Dollar, pp. 35-61

⁷F.F. Bruce, *A commentary on the Book of Acts in The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 39-48.

⁸*Ibid.*, Dollar, pp. 188-220.

⁹While the story of the martyrdom of James and the escape of Peter recounted in Acts 12 is important for giving a glimpse at the church in Jerusalem it does not seem to advance Luke's major thesis of tracing the mission to the Gentiles.

¹⁰See Henry Boer, *Pentecost and Missions*. (London: Butterworth, 1961).

¹¹For some indication of this process see H. Dollar, "The Conversion of the Messenger" in *Missiology*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, January 1993.

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A Critique by Hans M. Weerstra

The article by Harold Dollar is a welcome contribution as it relates to the biblical undergirding of frontier missions. The frontier mission movement should be totally grounded in the Word of God and be exploring and understanding in an ever growing sense the biblical foundations for frontier missiology. It is critical to establish sound biblical moorings for what we do in frontier missions. Dr. Dollar speaks to this challenge. His article highlights the need for a sound biblical basis and thus provides an invaluable service, taking us back to the sure foundations of God's Word for the frontier mission

task and challenge.

The Crux of the Matter

As a brief and critical response to the article, I would begin at what seems to be the crux of the matter. It is the basic question regarding the paradigm of particularism and universalism as used in Dollar's article. In footnote 3 the author defines particularism as that which "refers to the cultural and religious distinctiveness of Israel. God willed that the Jewish people become particular. The Jews erred (as most people do) in over-emphasizing their particularity, thus building needless barriers between

themselves and the Gentiles." In this light it must be noted that many in the frontier mission movement, including those who contribute articles in the popular *Reader Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* are those who by and large have seen a new light. They no longer see the particularism of the Old Testament with a universalistic unfolding in the New. It is a new hermeneutic of the Bible, what Dr. Hesselgrave calls "a missionary pre-understanding" of the Scriptures, Old Testament and New Testament alike. (See his excellent article in Volume 10, No 1 January 1993 issue of *IJFM*, pp.

17 through 20.) Seen from this light the old paradigm of particularism in the Old Testament, namely that God's concern of redemption focused on Israel largely at the exclusion of the Gentiles, with an unfolding universalism in the New, that is, His redemptive concern for all Gentile peoples, no longer is an accurate "pre-understanding" of Scripture. The same could be said and applied to a related paradigm of "promise" (in the O.T.) and "fulfillment" (for the N. T.).

Yet professor Dollar's article finds its basis in this concept of O.T. particularism. Luke's purpose in Luke-Acts, according to Dollar, was to take the Gospel out of Jewish particularism, and through a long process bring it into a New Testament universalism, i.e., salvation for and the gospel being proclaimed to the Gentiles, to all non-Jewish nations and peoples of the earth. According to Dollar the twelve apostles played a significant role in the transition process of change from one to another concept, and therefore form a significant model of frontier missions focused on the nations of the world.

Jesus and the Nations

This review seriously questions this concept as well as its conclusion. For instance, in light of Genesis 12:1-3, with its focus on the fact that in Abraham and his seed all the "families" (nations, peoples or Gentiles) of the earth will be blessed, with its further expanded definitions and impact on the rest of the Scriptures, it seems we should question the old particular versus universal paradigm. The universal intent and plan of God's redemptive concern revealed in the acts of God centered in the person of Jesus Christ for the salvation of the all the nations and peoples of the world, was and remains the all-encompassing fact both in the O.T., in the Gospels as well as the rest of the New Testament. This being so in spite of Jewish misunderstanding, misinterpretation and largely negative response.

When we see God's redemptive plan for the world in the O.T. history of salvation, and see it as the main feature of God's Word, a great light dawns and most events and truths of the Word truly begin to make sense and most of the O.T. needs to be reinterpreted. The old paradigms no longer work. They need to be seriously evaluated in light of the new mission hermeneutic, e.g., in the light of the mega-context of Scripture, namely "the missionary pre-understanding" of the whole Bible, especially the O.T. portion. As a people and nation, Israel frequently displayed a particularistic mind set and continued to show this throughout most of her O.T.

history. However we should note that God never endorsed this particularism on Israel's part since it was not in accord with His will in light of the fact that she was to be a blessing to all the families and nations of the earth. Furthermore God never approved it since her concept of particularism was essentially rooted in Israel's *ethnocentrism* and in later years in her *legalistic religious* development.

From this vantage point then, looking at Jesus and the twelve, what do we see? Though we see Jesus thoroughly rooted in Jewishness, as Dr. Dollar points out, we would not conclude that because of his Jewish context, Jesus is necessarily operating out of a particularistic concept or paradigm. What do we see instead? We see Jesus operating from a deep universal redemptive intent all along from beginning to end. Though a great deal of Jesus's ministry is focused on the Jews, nevertheless, the bottom line of his life and work was totally universalistic in nature and scope.

Yet Dollar believes that Luke portrays Jesus' life and ministry as strikingly particularistic. This is due to the fact that particularism is part of the story of salvation. "A process has been set in motion," according to professor Dollar and, "This process flows out of the story of salvation history found in the Scriptures moving from particularism to universalism." Seen from this perspective, the life and work of Jesus and the later work of the twelve apostles as well are interpreted as follows: The fact that Jesus stayed in the borders of Palestine is sighted to prove the point of essential particularism. Also Dollar sees Jesus remaining "ritually pure" in this Jewish perspective, and sees that Luke only mentions world missions toward the end of his gospel.

But from this new understanding of Scripture, we see Jesus constantly challenging the narrow-minded misinterpretations of the Jews, including when it appears in the hearts and lives of the twelve, which it often does. Rather than remaining "ritually pure," we rather see Jesus as a spiritual revolutionary operating from a radically different mind set pulling them toward a self-understanding which they never managed to really comprehend throughout their Old Testament journey. H. H. Rowley states clearly that Israel as God's people never could come to terms with the universal implications of her faith. (See his *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*, 1948, Chapter 3 "The Limited and Extension of Israel's Election," pp. 69-94. Also see Jacob Jocz's *A Theology of Election: Israel and the*

Church, 1958, Chapter 5 "The Jewish People and the Christian Church," pp. 95-126.) The apostles also have "bought into" the wrong frame of reference and therefore frequently are guilty of misinterpreting and misunderstanding God's Word and concern for the redemption of the world, namely that His glory of salvation might be declared through His people (O.T. Israel included) to all the nations of the earth.

The Twelve Apostles

It appears that this wrong interpretation persisted to a large extent even after Pentecost. The record shows, and it seems irrefutable, that Peter, and by and large the rest of the apostles, for some ten years primarily evangelized and worked with the Jews. A case could therefore be made that they, like the people of Israel in the O.T. era of salvation history, were reluctant or perhaps even disobedient to God's world-wide mission concern and will.

However rather than see them as disobedient, we could also say with equal validity, and this is essentially my position, that all through the New Testament, especially in Acts, we see them getting trained, reeducated as it were, getting a true understanding regarding "the plan of the ages" of God's world redemptive purposes which radically transformed them. Though they truly seem to be slow learners, like most of us, nevertheless something did happen. A kind of realignment with the central purposes of God's salvation plan for the world occurred in their hearts.

Slow Learners Indeed

We stand with our mouths open as we read Acts 1:6, that even at this late point in time the apostles are asking Jesus in *His risen state*, "Lord, will you at this time give the kingdom back to Israel?" For them the "kingdom" was still some kind of political entity primarily to be handed over to Israel for her behalf.

Dollar reminds us that during this time the apostles question Peter's ministry among the Gentiles, that it violated his commitment to God, and that Peter would have been the first to criticize any of the apostles had the Lord called someone else to visit Cornelius. It appears that after Pentecost and for many years later, Peter and the others simply had not seen the full light nor understood the full impact of the Lord's concern for his people to bless the nations and disciple the Gentile peoples.

Needing Reeducation

Rather than seeing the twelve apostles as disobedient followers of the

Lord, which implies that they knew and understood, we rather need to see them standing in need of reeducation, of being trained and equipped, frequently carried out by the Lord himself, like in the case Peter on the roof top in the house of Simon the tanner or like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. We read that their eyes were opened and their hearts burning within them due to the word of "the stranger" as they discovered the plan of God for world redemption. We must really come to grips with the plain fact that the Lord opened their eyes through the O.T. Scriptures.

The Question of Calling

Another important factor in the discussion is the question of calling that the apostle Paul clearly emphasizes in Galatians. He says: "James, Peter and John, who seemed to be the leaders, recognized that God had given me this special task; so they shook hands with Barnabas and me as a sign that we were all partners." This Galatians passage (Gal 2:7-9) makes it very clear that there was corporate agreement in this matter. Paul had the blessing of the "the pillars" of the Church in Jerusalem to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Greek, *ta ethne*, i.e., the non-Jewish peoples of the world) while Peter was called to the Jews. This passage reveals that not only did everyone recognize this to be the will of God but that they endorsed it. We do not sense the apostles and elders hindering Paul from his Gentile mission, especially as they begin to understand its full import.

As Dollar points out, Acts 11:18, and the related passage in Acts 15:7-11, show that they understood God also had granted salvation to the Gentiles, are indeed decisive passages due to the fact that a paradigmatic shift occurs in their minds and hearts. This is really the first time that the full light dawns. Though Peter had been involved in ministry outside of Jerusalem in Lydda, ministering to Jews of the Diaspora,

and others ministering to Greek speaking Jews, it was not until the vision on the roof top at Simon's house and his subsequent visit to Cornelius that Peter saw the light really for the first time. It is on this basis that they begin to under-

ing task "to suffer in My name" and preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

To this we might add the consideration of need. It may very well be that the Lord called Peter and the others to remain in Jerusalem, on the home front, to be apostles to the Jews, because they were needed there. They were needed to evangelize the Jews, to grow and nurture the home base, especially during those first critical years.

Looking at the unfolding drama of missions in the early church and the apostles' place in it, we see that the Lord of the harvest called Paul and his companions to be apostles to the Gentiles, basically initiating missions to the Gentile nations in the true sense of the word, and this mainly due to their special gifts, training and life experience, while the twelve apostles were called by

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stand God's will and redemptive plan for the Gentiles. Referring to this event, Paul could say in Galatians 2:7-9 "on the contrary" that it was the apostles and "pillars" of the church who commissioned him to go with the task of ministering the gospel to the Gentiles. At this point the leadership may still not know all the ins and outs of a cross-cultural mission to the Gentiles, yet we do sense that they are beginning to get a grasp on it, they are understanding that God's concern was wider than the Jews, that it also included the Gentiles.

Conclusion

We could say in conclusion that if the apostles were reluctant it was basically due to the fact that they needed training, that their eyes needed to be opened wider. Furthermore the question of calling was significant. The fact that the Lord did not call Peter, nor seemingly the rest of the twelve, at least not initially, is very significant. Instead the Lord called Paul, who indeed was gifted, even brought up in a bi-cultural home, and thus uniquely equipped for this special and demand-

ing task "to suffer in My name" and preach the gospel to the Gentiles. All of this was carried out by the Holy Spirit in accord with the Lord's redemptive plan and covenant purpose, made with Abraham and affirmed to Israel, confirmed again and again in the rest of the Scripture, centered and revealed in the person and work of Jesus (not started by Jesus, since its foundations lie in the O.T.), with the strategy to evangelize the Jewish people as well as the Gentile nations of the earth through the Church, through the Redeemed of the Lord who as the Spirit-empowered community of saints are God's witnesses unto the uttermost parts of the earth. That was the story in the early New Testament Church written for our instruction and encouragement, all of it motivating us as the Church of Jesus Christ in our generation to frontier missions for world evangelization by AD 2000. ■

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