“But if You Suffer as Christians”

A Critical Analysis of 1 Peter’s Theology of Suffering as a Redemptive Political Strategy

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Contents

Abbreviations:

Num - Numbers

Ps - Psalms

Isa – Isaiah

2 Macc – 2 Maccabees

Pss Sol – Psalms of Solomon

SpecLeg – Philo's On Special Laws

Virt – Philo's On Virtues

ST – Galen's Sacred Tales

Disc – Epictetus' Discourses

Matt – Matthew

Lk - Luke

Joh – John

Rom – Romans

Eph – Ephesians

Col – Colossians

Phil – Philippians

1 Thess – 1 Thessalonians

1 Pet – 1 Peter

Rev - Revelation

Introduction

A popular Christian hymn, often sung to me in my childhood church in the rural Netherlands, had the following refrain: "*Stil maar, wacht maar, alles wordt nieuw*" (just be quiet, just wait, everything will be made new). To the ears of some critics, the song lyrics provide the penultimate example of what is often perceived as the Christian response to suffering and injustice: quietly sit it out and wait for God's kingdom to come. Some critics have leveled the claim that Christianity's "turn the other cheek" mentality promoted passivity and docility in the face of injustice. The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche famously accused the *Bürgerliche* Christianity of his day of promoting a "slave mentality."[1] In his view, the focus on undergoing one's suffering meekly and the classic Christian claim that "in my weakness I am strong" promoted a submissiveness that could reach pathological levels. Critiques such as these are at least to some degree justified. Biblical texts have, in fact, on some occasions been used throughout the centuries to perpetuate the oppression of marginal groups, prompting Phyllis Trible to refer to these texts as "texts of terror."[2]

The biblical text central to this thesis, the Epistle of First Peter, has not escaped this critique.[3] The *Haustafel* in particular, with its injunctions for slaves to endure suffering at the hands of

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: The Philosophy Classic* (Newark: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2020), 195-230.
[2] Phyllis Trible, and Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).
[3] The scope of this thesis does not permit an exhaustive discussion of the *Einleitungsfragen* that have stirred up debate amongst many interpreters of First Peter. For the purposes of this essay, I concur with David Horell's argument, contra Elliott, that the predicament of harassment that faces the audience does not precede their becoming Christian but is instead a direct result of their turn to Christ (*Becoming Christian: Essays on 1 Peter and the Making of Christian Identity* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 114-118; 131; cf. Miroslav Volf, "Soft Difference: Theological Reflections on the Relation Between Church and Culture in 1 Peter," *Ex Auditu* 10 (1994) 18). Furthermore, the letter was likely written pseudonymously by an author drawing extensively from the Hebrew Bible (both in its LXX form as well as through Second Temple Jewish traditions that had interpreted [it?] in), from Paul and from other strands of early Christian tradition (Becoming Christian, 37-38). The epistle was most likely written somewhere between 70-112 C.E. (111) to a group of predominantly gentile converts (with possibly also some Jews) (120-122) living mostly in urban centers in Asia Minor and comprised of a mix of socio-economic

their masters (1 Pet 2:18-25) and wives to submit to the authority of their husbands (1 Pet 3:1-7), has a reception history that is marred by its misuse to present slavery as divinely mandated and silencing women as a reflection of God's will.[4] Consequently, the epistle's apparent commands to be docile and submissive in the face of unearned suffering have often left modern readers puzzled or even offended.

Interestingly, in response to this perceived "weak" Christian attitude concerning suffering, recent forms of Christian discourse that underscore strength, masculinity, and a militant-combative approach to dealing with one's opponents have gained surprising popularity in Western societies, particularly amongst young, white males. Influential right-wing populist politicians such as Donald Trump increasingly make use of "Christian language" and refer to the bible to promote a very masculine, aggressive, and militaristic form of Christianity that does not embrace suffering but instead casts it off as infantile and pathetic.[5] Similarly, the powerful big-tech tycoon Elon Musk recently called himself a "cultural Christian" in Jordan B. Peterson's podcast.[6] The specific cultural Christianity to which Musk subscribes is equally characterized by a focus on masculine strength, cultural conservatism, and a militant approach to overcoming resistance. Yet another example of this turn towards masculine Christianity may be found in the writings of the influential Canadian psychiatrist Jordan Peterson. Writing for a predominantly

backgrounds (128-129). In this thesis I will refer to the author if 1 Peter either as "the author of 1 Peter" or as "Peter".

[4] Cf. David G. Horrell, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter in 2 Volumes*, ICC (London: T & T Clark, 2023), 287. Cf. "The same goes for the Petrine *Haustafel*, which, like other NT *Haustafeln*, played its part in sustaining the idea that the owning of slaves and the subordination of wives to husbands aligned with God's will. The instruction in 1 Peter is especially problematic due to its emphasis on enduring even unjust suffering (2:19–20), which, on the part of both slaves and wives, can be taken to imply that choosing to remain in situations of abuse is a Christian duty; even in recent times, there are instances where women are advised by their pastors to remain in violent or abusive relationships." For a particularly critical critique see also Kathleen E. Corley, "1 Peter," Pages 349–60 in *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 2: A Feminist Commentary, ed. by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Ann Brock, and Shelly Matthews (New York: Crossroad, 1994).

[5] Donald Trump's close ties with referencing the bible in his political discourse is even further exemplified by his decision to publish his very own "Trump Bible."

[6] Jordan B. Peterson, Twitter Post on 22 July 2024, https://x.com/jordanbpeterson/status/1815427698703090085 .

white, young, and male audience, Peterson, who is well known for his conservative views on masculine and feminine roles and traditional portrayals of male strength, recently published a book on the Bible that promotes a form of Christianity that stresses masculine strength as well as the far-reaching ability of young men to change their lot in life.[7] This trend of militant and masculine Christianity is not limited to a few isolated figures. The winds of cultural and political conservatism, paired with the tendency to view suffering as weak and feminine, also seem to sweep across European societies. This is exemplified by the rise of radical and populist right-wing parties gaining political influence in Germany, Italy, France, The Netherlands, Hungary, and Austria. Oftentimes, these parties clamor for a return to "Judeo-Christian values."

Writing within a Northern American context, Kristin Kobes Du Mez, in her book *Jesus and John Wayne,* convincingly traces the development of this masculine, aggressive, and militant form of Christianity to white evangelical theology that aimed to establish a close tie between the cultural ideal of the tough, violent and aggressive cowboy-soldier as the paradigmatic American male on the one hand and fundamentalist forms of conservative Christianity on the other.[8] Paradoxically enough, just like Nietzsche, this fundamentalist theology polemicized against what was perceived to be a weak, passive, feminine and submissive strand within Christian discourse around suffering.

What do these observed trends share? Perhaps the underlying commonality between these trends is that they both have a shared perception of suffering as something submissive, agency-depriving, politically quietist, and, consequently, something that should be rejected. To endure one's suffering is to promote weakness over strength; to not strike back in anger at one's opponents is to be guilty of having a "slave mentality," and to turn the other cheek is to

[7] Jordan B. Peterson, *We Who Wrestle with God: Perceptions of the Divine* (New York: Random House Publishing, 2024).
[8] Kristin Kobes Du Mez, J*esus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*, first edition (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020).

surrender one's masculinity and one's societal and political power. If one adheres to this paradigm, the proper response to the impending feeling of cultural irrelevancy that many Christians in the West experience should be to start an aggressive cultural war (often against "woke, leftist elites") rather than to accept the embrace of suffering and hardship that seems to be presented in texts such as 1 Peter.

But what if the idea of suffering as something submissive, agency-depriving, and politically quietist is wrong and not at all the kind of suffering that the biblical authors had in mind? What if, in the eyes of the author of 1 Peter, suffering constitutes a political and missiological strategy that empowers the maligned audience of this epistle to effect change in their dire situation? As the reader may begin to suspect, this thesis will explore if the latter view may be present in 1 Peter. I seek to investigate whether an alternative view on suffering, one that is more attuned to its transformative and political potential, may yield novel insights into the role that suffering plays in 1 Peter. In this endeavor, I aim to answer the following question:

> *To what extent does the author of 1 Peter present suffering as an active, deliberate political strategy - modeled after and participating in the suffering of Christ – to shape the community's socio-political posture towards their Greco-Roman environment?*

The methodological approach of this thesis is to analyze the suffering texts in 1 Peter from a conceptual, historical, and exegetical perspective. Beginning with the conceptual, we will set out by analyzing the phenomenon of suffering itself. It is possible that some views on the nature of suffering may be more helpful for understanding First Peter than others. The first chapter will, therefore, study the works of several prominent Petrine scholars to analyze how their preconceived ideas concerning the nature of suffering influence their reading of 1 Peter. I will attempt to illustrate that these scholars bring to their analysis of the suffering texts in 1 Peter the presupposition that suffering is submissive, agency-depriving, and politically quietist. This may lead to a reading of the text that overestimates the degree to which the author of 1 Peter

requires his audience to conform to broader Greco-Roman society. Hence, the argument of 1 Peter is potentially robbed of its immanent and political relevance and essentially seems to make the same claim that the children's song mentioned above makes: just be quiet, just wait, one day everything will be made new. In contrast, will forward the theology of Martin Luther King and Howard Thurman as valuable sources for constructing a more fruitful conceptualization of suffering in 1 Peter. Their understanding of suffering as active, agency-bestowing, and politically redemptive may serve as a lens that will enable us to better understand the suffering language in 1 Peter. Both of these thinkers agree that how one responds to suffering can be a powerful, redemptive strategy that endows an otherwise powerless audience with the ability to effect social and political change. Moreover, King and Thurman claim that enduring unearned suffering is inherently missiological; it exposes the evil of one's adversaries and has the potential to lead them to repentance.

Moving on to the historical dimension of the methodology of this thesis, the second chapter will attempt to provide an account of how other ancient authors conceptualized suffering. Of course, 1 Peter is not the first ancient text to address the idea of suffering. The second chapter will, therefore, explore the "cultural encyclopedia" that informed the audience's preexistent views on suffering. We will study Greco-Roman and Jewish suffering discourses to describe a trend that gradually centered the subject as a "suffering self" and come to a more positive appraisal of suffering. Similar to 1 Peter, these texts understand suffering for one's convictions in the face of religious repression to be part of the divine purpose and present unearned suffering as a legitimate and effective missiological and political strategy.

These conceptual and historical considerations prepare the way for the third chapter, in which we will analyze the suffering discourse of 1 Peter from a exegetical perspective. After having argued for the concept of "redemptive suffering" as a heuristic device (chapter 1) and having explored the kinds of discourses that formed the cultural soil in which Peter wanted his message

to take root (chapter 2), we are positioned to investigate the role that suffering plays in 1 Peter's broader theological agenda. More specifically, three different suffering pericopes within 1 Peter will be studied. The first pericope presents the community as a group of suffering servants modeled after Christ, who the author perceives as the suffering servant prophesied in Isa. 53. The second pericope will explore how 1 Peter presents suffering as a missiological strategy that could lead to the repentance of the community's oppressors by exposing the evil that they perpetrated. The third section will study how the author believes suffering is prefigurative. That is, through their suffering, the audience is "pre-figuring" an eschatological reality that has not yet been fully realized but is the source of their "hope" that Christ will come to bring justice at his *Parousia.*

The final brief chapter will combine all the previous strands to provide a tentative sketch of 1 Peter's "theology of redemptive suffering." I will conclude that the epistle presents suffering as something that endows the audience with missiological and political strategies to change their social reality. I will conclude that the evidence suggests that the author aims to endow his audience with a source of "hope" that enables them to not only cope with their dire situation but also to labor towards its transformation. Far from silencing the maligned community, exhorting them to submissiveness and docility, and depriving them of agency, the author of 1 Peter develops the notion of suffering so that it becomes agency-bestowing, politically transformative, and missiologically redemptive.

1. The Phenomenon of Suffering: Passive Submission or Redemptive Political Strategy?

Before we embark on our investigation of suffering in Greco-Roman and Jewish sources, as well as First Peter, it may be helpful to more clearly delineate the specific perspective on the nature of suffering that we will bring to our reading of the text. This chapter will argue that some interpreters of 1 Peter arrive at an eschewed understanding of the epistle's discourse on suffering because they fail to properly elucidate the unquestioned presuppositions about the nature of suffering that inform their understanding of this phenomenon within the text.

This chapter's first section will describe three presuppositions: that suffering is inherently submissive, agency-depriving, and politically quietist. In the second section, an alternative perspective on suffering will be presented as a more tenable way of understanding the role of suffering in the theological and rhetorical framework of the author of 1 Peter. The foundation for such an alternative view on suffering may be found by engaging with the thoughts of the civil rights movement thinkers Martin Luther King and Howard Thurman. Thurman and King relied heavily on the Bible and Christian theology for the development of their view on suffering. Using their theology; suffering will be presented as something that has the potential to be redemptive, both in the present reality of the original author and audience, as well as in the eschatological times. Furthermore, these authors understand suffering as something that bestows agency on those who undergo it and that may be used as a political strategy to effect concrete change.

1.1 The Fallacy of Passive Suffering

Some variation of the verb "πάσχω" (suffer) occurs more than 12 times within 1 Peter, more than in any other New Testament writing.[9] This underscores the importance of suffering as one of the key concerns of the entire epistle.[10] How exactly one understands the role of suffering is thus crucial for understanding the epistle as a whole. As mentioned above, there is a tendency amongst certain Petrine scholars to presuppose three characteristics of suffering that may potentially lead to lopsided understandings of the role that suffering plays in the theology and rhetoric in 1 Peter. The first characteristic that these scholars presuppose is that Peter's emphasis on enduring suffering promotes an unhealthy degree of submissiveness to those in positions of authority. The second characteristic is that those who suffer are passive subjects who are, at best, able to act in such a way as to prevent even further harm but are not at all empowered to enact actual change in their current situation. Thus, suffering is perhaps understood by these scholars as something that is agency-depriving. The community has no realistic possibility of changing their reality in life. Instead, they must passively wait and endure until the eschatological return of Christ, when all will be made well. The third and final characteristic is that suffering promotes political quietism in the sense that it does not allow the audience to change their own standing within society and expose or call into question the injustice that they experience. Adherents of this position argue that 1 Peter essentially clips the community's wings in their ability to change their lot in the here and now. Drawing these three characteristics

[9] MartinVahrenhorst, "Leiden als Gnade: Zum realen Hintergrund einer theologischen Deutung," in *Bedrängnis und Idantität: Studien zu Situation, Kommunikation und Theologie des 1. Petrusbriefes,* ed. David du Toit and Tortsen Jantsch (Berlin, De Gruyter, 2013), 64. "Dieses Wort begegnet überproportional häufig im 1 Petr und darf sicherlich als eines der Leitworte des Briefs gelten." Cf. also James A. Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power: Readiness to Withstand Hardship as a Corroboration of Legitimacy in the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010),105. Kelhoffer provides a list of all occurrences in the NT. The other thirty instances of this term are Matthew (4), Mark (3), Luke (6), Acts (5), the undisputed Pauline letters (5), 2 Thess (1), 2 Tim (1), Hebrews (4), and Revelation (1).

[10] At 1 Pet 2:19, 20, 21, 23; 3:14, 17, 18; 4:1, 15, 19; 5:10. Among those who recognize this are Vahrenhorst, "Leiden als Gnade," 63-64; Jan Lodewyk De Villiers, "Joy in Suffering in 1 Peter," *Neotestamentica* 9 (1975): 67.

together usually leads to an understanding of 1 Peter as arguing for something like the following:

> As a community of Christians who diverge in significant ways from your pagan peers, you are being maligned for your faith in the present moment. The way to deal with this suffering is to conform as much as you can to Greco-Roman society while nevertheless maintaining steadfast to the crucial elements of the Gospel message. By conforming to the pagan environment, submitting to those in authority, enduring one's suffering meekly, and trusting in the eventual coming eschatological justice of God, you will be able to reduce the reasons for your peers to malign you and will be able to endure your hardship in the knowledge that one day your adversaries will be subject to God's judgment.

These scholars rightly emphasize these aspects of 1 Peter's suffering discourse. First, Peter does, in fact, call for a certain amount of subordination to authority, as can be seen in 1 Pet. 2:13-18. Moreover, Peter is concerned with balancing conformity with Greco-Roman rules to non-conformity. Furthermore, the author really does present the patient waiting for the *parousia* as a manner of coping with their present hardship.[11]

The problem is not that these interpretations are incorrect *per se*. Instead, the issue is that this view of suffering fails to adequately account for many other aspects of the text that seem to have a more "here-and-now," ethical, missiological, and political concern. Another problematic aspect of this view on suffering is that it universalizes the experience of suffering and fails to account for the historical and cultural differences in interpreting suffering. When 1 Peter discusses suffering, the author may hold vastly different views than our own.[12] Therefore,

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[11] Cf. Mark Dubis, *Messianic Woes in First Peter: Suffering and Eschatology in 1 Peter 4:12-19* (New York: P. Lang, 2002).
[12] Betsy J. Bauman-Martin, "Feminist Theologies of Suffering," in *A Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews,* ed. Amy Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004).

I aim not to discard the perspective mentioned above altogether but rather to show how a different view of suffering may yield refreshing and novel insights that have often remained underappreciated. In what follows, several examples will be provided for each of the presupposed characteristics of suffering that were outlined above. Due to the scope of this thesis, this overview cannot be more than an illustration of a larger trend. I do not claim to be exhaustive here. Moreover, no single author will fit neatly into the three categories outlined below; in reality, they show characteristics of one, two, or all three but also diverge in significant ways. In any case, I am indebted to the work of several scholars who do provide a more politically attuned and active perspective on suffering in early Christian texts.[13]

1.1.1. Presupposition 1: the call to endure suffering promotes submissiveness

To start with the first aspect of suffering as promoting submissiveness, 1 Peter repeatedly commands its hearers to "submit" (Ὑποτάγητε) "to every human authority" (1 Pet 2:13), slaves to slaveholders (1 Pet 2:18-25) and wives to husbands (1 Pet 3:1-6).[14] It must be remarked that scholars such as Horrell and feminist interpreters such as Schüssler Fiorenza, Martin, Dowd, Corley, Tanzer, and Malone fault Peter with perpetuating unjust situations and the suffering of his audience through his continuous emphasis on submission to those in positions of power,

[13] For example, Miroslav Wolf's concept of "soft difference" cf. Miroslav Volf, "Soft Difference," or David Horrell's idea of "polite difference" that stems from his post-colonial reading of the text. Horrell argues for the need for more complex and nuanced interpretative frameworks that overcome an essentialist understanding of 1 Peter as either arguing for conformity or for non-conformity. Cf. Horrell, *Becoming Christian,* 211-238.

[14] It is important to recognize that the household code and the political discourse of the text are intrinsically related. Politics, religion and the domestic domain did not constitute clearly demarcated domains in antiquity, they were contiguous and the boundaries between these dimensions of life were fluid and porous. This is why Peter's discussion of the household code and personal ethics cannot be detached from his more general discussion of the political place of the community within their society. Schüssler Fiorenza states "central to the rhetoric of the letter is the image of the household – *oikos*. Its inscribed argument engages the hegemonic socio-political and cultural discourses about household management (*peri oikonomias*) and about politics (*peri politeias*) which were intertwined in Graeco-Roman political theory." Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The First Epistle of Peter," in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings,* ed. Fernando F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 391.

whether they be emperors, human institutions, slave masters or husbands.[15] These scholars call into question the contemporary relevance of these texts for women, slaves, and other marginalized groups. In the view of these scholars, Peter's hoped-for result in arguing for submission to the authorities is to "take the wind out of the sails" of those who malign the community, depriving them of legitimate grounds for continuing their maligning of the community. Perhaps the most well-known and influential example of this argument in Petrine scholarship may be found in David Balch's seminal work *Let Wives be Submissive.*[16] For Balch, it is vital that the *Haustafel* of 1 Peter is not a Jewish or Christian creation but deeply rooted in Greco-Roman literature.[17] He argues that the *Haustafel* essentially echoes a common Greco-Roman topos that divided society, the *politeia,* in the class of those who rule (men, fathers, husbands, masters) and those who are ruled (women, children, wives, and slaves).[18] According

[15] It is worthwhile quoting Horrell at length here: "It is difficult to deny that the author valorises the patient bearing of unjust suffering. And while this may be a pertinent and encouraging survival strategy in situations where critical challenge to injustice is out of the question, it is important to acknowledge that as part of its afterlife, such a text may be used to legitimate and prolong situations of suffering. Rather than implausibly attempting to depict this as a revolutionary, radical, or "counter-cultural" text that teaches the equality of men and women, it is more convincing—exegetically as well as ethically—to acknowledge its ancient patriarchal character, and the risks inherent in its ongoing treatment as authoritative scripture." Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 76. Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 260-66; C.J. Martin, "The Haustafeln (Household Codes) in African American Biblical Interpretation: "Free Slaves" and "Subordinate Women", in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation,* ed. C.H. Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), pp. 206-31; Corley concludes that 1 Peter "perpetuates a cycle of victimization and violence." Cf. K.E. Corley, "1 Peter," in, *Searching the Scriptures: II. A Feminist Commentary,* ed. E. Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994), pp. 355-57; S. Dowd, "1 Peter," in *Women's Bible Commentary,* ed. C.A. Newsom and S.H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, expanded edn, 1998), pp. 370-72; Tanzer states that 1 Peter provides "a lofty justification for victimization, violence and abuse." Cf. S.J. Tanzer, "1 Pet 3:1-7 Wives (and Husbands) Exhorted," in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, ed. by C. Meyers, R.S. Kraemer and T. Craven (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), p. 498; M.T. Malone, *Women in Christianity. I. The First Thousand Years* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), p. 81.

[16] David L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: the Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1981).

[17] Balch traces the origins of this topoi to the works of Plato and Aristotle. Plato, saw a correspondence between the correct way to live together in the "city" and in the "house." Hence, "household management," in which submission played a key role, was not merely a domestic concern but also bore important political ramifications. He states on this "those household relationships which we normally consider private, individual matters are here part of a social-political, philosophic ethic." Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive,* 41.

[18] Cf. esp. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive,* 35-39. Balch also remarks "it is centrally important for Plato that child, woman and slave, etc., perform his or her assigned function, not trying to perform the function of members of a different group (…) it is the place of "children, women and slaves" to be submissive, to be ruled." Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*, 35. The delineation of society into a class of rulers and a class of the ruled is especially prominent in Aristotle who Balch quotes as stating "authority and subordination are conditions not only inevitable but also expedient; in some cases, things are marked from the moment of birth to rule or to be ruled." Balch, *Let Wives Be*

to Balch, there was a deep-rooted suspicion in this context, especially among magistrates and rulers, of "eastern religions," to which Judaism and Christianity were said to belong, as potentially uprooting this *politeia* by reversing the normal order between the ruling class and the ruled.[19] Balch posits that this is precisely why the Petrine communities in Asia Minor were being maligned; slaves maintaining a different religion than their masters, wives departing from the customs and faith of their husbands, many pagan peers would have considered these things to be detrimental to the good of society as a whole.[20] This resulted in malignment and repression of these groups that were deemed to be morally and politically subversive.[21] It was common for Jewish authors, such as Josephus or Philo, to write apologetic texts in an attempt to rebut the accusation that they were attempting to uproot the normative separation of society in a ruling and a ruled class.[22] According to Balch, Peter showcases a similar apologetic concern in his *Haustafel* and exhorts an attitude of submission on the part of wives and slaves in order to ease

Submissive, 50. It is important to note that there are also points of discontinuity with Greco-Roman literature that Balch underappreciates. While the social order in Plato and Aristotle is something authoritative because it is perceived as "natural", in the NT the household codes speak of "ὑποτάσσω" (subordination) in reference to the divine will. Cf. John Hall Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed. AYB (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 508-509. This has also been pointed out by Schüssler Fiorenza, cf. Schüssler Fiorenza, "The First Epistle of Peter," 393.

[19] Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive,* 115-133. On this concern, Balch says "In other words, in these three cases the kind of ethic found in the *Haustafel* vas important to the Roman aristocracy, that class from which governors for the provinces were drawn. These are the "governors" mentioned in I P 2:14, who would be judging the Christians and many of whom would be antagonistic to new, foreign cults like the Isis cult, which upset the household relationship between man and wife (Dio Cassius 50.28,3; Diodorus Sic. 1.27.1-2), so could be seen as a threat to the Roman politeia." Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive,* 133.

[20] Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive,* 202-214.

[21] Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive,* 139-140.

[22] Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive,* 141-148; 166-175. Balch summarizes their aim as follows "So just as in Josephus, Philo is attempting to demonstrate that Jewish laws meet the demands of the surrounding Graeco-Roman culture, that the laws do not deserve the censure they have received." Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive,* 175.

the suspicion of the community's pagan peers.[23] Even though this submission may result in suffering, it is essential to the community's survival.[24]

Concerning the call for submission in 1 Pet 2:14-15, Horrell argues for a similar point, claiming that the main focus of Peter's Household Code underscores submission to those placed in higher authority as an apologetic means of reducing the maligning that the community faced.[25] While allowing for some forms of resistance, Horrell maintains that the primary goal of the text is to promote "submissive obedience" for wives and "enduring inevitable mistreatment" by the slaves.[26] He concludes, "For the author, then, it would appear that proper subordination to governing authorities was one form of "doing good."[27] Later on, Horrell states, "the author's sense of what God regards as good also includes patterns of behavior—notably the submission of slaves and wives—that conform to the patriarchal expectations of ancient society."[28]

In short, according to both Petrine scholars, (varying degrees of) conformity to Greco-Roman values is a key concern of First Peter.[29] The author goes to great lengths to tell his

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[23] Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive,* 211. "The non-submission of wives to their husbands or the non-honoring of masters by their slaves would be a source of slander or blasphemy against the word or against God. This fact supports the suggestion that the "apology" anticipated in I P 3:15 would include assurances to outsiders that Christians would conform to the kind of behavior in the household demanded by society, demanded by masters and husbands." John Elliott provides a convincing critique of Balch's claim that the *Haustafel* apologetic, stating that Balch mistakenly isolated the household code from the broader strategy of the texts in which they are found. Elliott concludes "However the function of the code material in Josephus, Philo, and some NT writings may be judged, this is clearly not the case in 1 Peter. For here such an "accommodating" and conformity-urging aim of the code material is thoroughly incompatible with the exhortation of 1 Peter as a whole, which urges "holy nonconformity" (1:14–170)." Elliott, *1 Peter,* 509.

[24] Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive,* 230. "The purpose [of the *Haustafel*] is to reduce tension between society and the church, to stop the slander. Christians must conform to the expectations of Hellenistic society, so that that society will cease criticizing the new cult. The author of I Peter writes to advise the Christians who are being persecuted about how they may become socially-politically acceptable to their society."

[25] Horrell remarks "The main thought of 1 Pet 2:13–15 is for the readers to be subordinate to the Roman emperor and the provincial governors, because God wants to silence the foolish speech of detractors through the good deeds of Christians." Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2*, 747.

[26] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 802.

[27] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 747.

[28] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 75.

[29] Some nuance should be applied here. Elsewhere Horrell does in fact seem to perceive the suffering community as having more agency in his chapter that employs a post-colonial reading of the text. Horrell states referring to the work of political theorist James Scott "Scott's work also serves as a warning to avoid characterizing the 'weak'

audience to provide as little ground for repression as possible. The main way in which this aim is to be achieved is by "proper" submission of those in the subjugated (subjects, slaves, and wives) class to those in the ruling class (rulers, masters, and husbands). In some cases, as with slaves who must submit to their cruel masters (1 Pet 2:18), suffering may be a direct result of this submission. According to some of the Petrine scholars mentioned above, the author of 1 Peter takes this suffering for granted in order to achieve the higher goal of removing any obstructions for the Gospel to enter Greco-Roman society, while other scholars hold that Peter genuinely believed submission to these authorities to be divinely mandated.

It becomes clear, then, that for Balch and Horrell, suffering becomes intimately tied to the idea of submission. [30] The author of 1 Peter is not concerned with effecting social change in the present situation of his audience but rather with conforming as much as possible to the Greco-Roman norms and values to secure the future survival of the community. Rather than suffering having the potential to change the hearts and minds of their adversaries, the audience is called to be as submissive as possible and to meet slander with quietness.[31] Indeed, Balch's view of the text as promoting passivity and submission robs the text of any missiological and subversive power it might have.[32] Horrell, too, does not seem to have a high view of the epistle's ability to effect concrete change. He believes that the main thing that Peter says about suffering is that it

as powerless. Certainly there is no attempt to obscure the extent to which the dominant and powerful wield the big sticks, and are able to exercise power through a range of ideological and physical means, not least the brute force to subdue and coerce by terror. But the weak also exercise agency and power through the multifarious means by which they resist their domination, whether in hidden or overt ways, and whether through linguistic means (such as jokes, gossip, parody, etc.) or by physical acts (such as poaching, concealment, evasion, etc." Horrell, *Becoming Christian,* 218. This underscores the fact that no author ever fits entirely into the categories mentioned above. While at some points Horrell seems to perhaps overstate the degree of submissiveness that the author requires, at other points he allows for more agency.

[30] Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive,* 245; 253-260.

[31] Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive,* 253.

[32] Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive,* 223. "The only times (IP 1:12, 25; cp. 4:6) missionary evangelizing is referred to in the letter, the aorist is used and the reference is to those presently Christians having been evangelized, there being no reference in the letter to the present or future "task" of all Christians doing missionary preaching."

is something to be "endured."[33] Furthermore, Horrell claims that Peter does not believe this submissive attitude of the community has the power to effect any change in the concrete real-world experience of the community, as it will not "ultimately alleviate conflict."[34] The dire situation in which the community finds itself will not be resolved at the present time and can "be brought to an end only through God's eschatological intervention."[35] Ernest Best also has trouble imagining how Peter's exhortation to suffer and submit could effect any real, concrete change in the audience's situation. Best remarks: "Perhaps the writer is a little optimistic in believing that the good deeds of Christians will end the calumnies and attacks of those who do not think of them as God's people."[36] For these scholars, then, Peter believes that suffering is something that is, at best, endured and passively accepted.[37] The proper response to suffering is submission to authority, hoping that the reason for attacks will be taken away. Submission and suffering become essentially two sides of the same coin.

1.1.2. Presupposition 2: suffering is agency-depriving

The second presupposition that scholars bring to their understanding of suffering is that suffering is agency-depriving. Some commentators, particularly those employing a post-

[33] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 812. "Along with more conventional means of returning thanks—such as declaring God's excellent virtues (2:9)—the author specifically defines as χάρις the non-retaliatory endurance of unjust suffering. The shame and humiliation that threatened the Christian communities have now been valorised as a reciprocal gift to be returned to God. This marks one more way that the author encourages his audience to find positive value even in their suffering and empowers them to discover agency even in their relative powerlessness—in the act of enduring unjust suffering. Whatever the difficulties with the legacy this leaves, it represents a step towards a prominent motif in Christian identity as that of 'a sufferer'. Acceptance of unjust suffering is given a new significance."
[34] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2*, 750.
[35] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2*, 750.
[36] Ernest Best, *1 Peter*, New Century Bible Commentary (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971), 115.
[37] While Horrell does allow for the possibility that suffering in 1 Peter is redemptive, especially in 1 Pet 2:17-18, this redemptive quality is mostly presented as some eschatological reality that will be realized in the future. When mentioning the redemptive quality of suffering he only discusses this as a quality of the suffering of Christ, and not as a quality that may also be part of the suffering of the community in the present situation. Cf. Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 815-818.

colonial or feminist interpretative framework, seem to understand suffering as something that is inherently passive and hence as agency-depriving. For this reason, it is automatically assumed that suffering is intrinsically problematic and thus should and could never consciously be chosen for.[38] Schüssler Fiorenza asserts that the *Haustafel* and by extension all of 1 Peter, which comprises both socio-political and cultural-religious dimensions, "advocates the submission of the subaltern migrants and non-citizens in Asia Minor and specifies as problem cases the unjust suffering of household slave women and the marriage relationship between Christian women and Gentile men."[39] She maintains that the text makes use of a "colonizing rhetoric" that "naturalizes kyriarchal power structures as God's will."[40] A little later Schüssler Fiorenza continues that what is at stake here is "his [the author of 1 Peter] attempt to transpose the hegemonic cultural ethos of submission into a "theological key" rationalizes it as "God's will" and divine revelation."[41] The author's insistence that the audience should endure their suffering is, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, a clear instance of "kyriarchal rhetoric" that theologizes oppressive Greco-Roman power structures, enforcing them on the community and in doing so victimizing the audience.[42] While allowing the community some ability to resist these power structures on a religious level, the author actively deprives his audience of any political agency and ability to effect change in their hardships. Or, to use Schüssler Fiorenza's words, "The author advises "limited adaptation" in a difficult situation of harassment and suffering, insofar as he counsels opposition only in religious but not in socio-political terms."[43]

[38] Bauman-Martin, "Feminist Theologies of Suffering," 64.
[39] Schüssler Fiorenza, "The First Epistle of Peter," 396.
[40] Schüssler Fiorenza, "The First Epistle of Peter," 392.
[41] Schüssler Fiorenza, "The First Epistle of Peter," 398.
[42] Schüssler Fiorenza, "The First Epistle of Peter," 398.
[43] Schüssler Fiorenza, "The First Epistle of Peter," 401.

Kathleen Corley is also convinced that Peter's view on suffering victimizes and has historically victimized many Christian communities.[44] Corley points towards several feminist scholars who have asserted that this victimization of the community, and in particular its women, has served to reinforce passive attitudes in Christian communities. For example, Rosemary Ruether posits that the epistle admonishes slaves to "passively accept not only the conditions of slavery itself, but also the arbitrary beatings inflicted on them by their masters."[45] In addition, Corley summarizes this passivity as follows:

> The glorification of suffering, like that found in 1 Peter, is seen to glorify all suffering and in fact holds up the *victim* as a model for women. As in reality *victimization* does not lead to vindication, feminists argue that such an image not only trivializes human suffering but encourages *passivity* in Christians, particularly women. This allows women to endure *victimization* in their own lives. Thus, the myth of Jesus as "Suffering Servant" should not be made into a model for Christian life, particularly for Christian women [emphasis added].[46]

Corley explicitly rejects the idea that the Christians possess any means of effecting social change.[47] She perceives the audience as essentially deprived of any agency, stating that "the suffering of Christians generally is rather a fate that may be lessened or avoided (…) their

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[44] Corley, "1 Peter," 349. Corley attests to the troubled reception history of the text "Generally speaking, its [1 Peter's] message of enduring "unjust suffering" at the hands of "every social institution" after the manner of Christ has no doubt encouraged many Christians throughout history to submit quietly to the yoke of various unjust social institutions. Furthermore, passages from 1 Peter have also been used by those in power to support a divine mandate for continuing institutions such as slavery or abusive marriages (…) Moreover, the Petrine admonition that both slaves and women should endure even unjust or terrifying situations still serves as a scriptural justification for violence against women in the present, in the same way that it gave justification to violence against African Americans under slavery in the past. Thus, it is difficult for the Christian feminist searching for a liberating "Word of God" in the Christian scriptures to find that liberating word in 1 Peter."

[45] I found indebted for this quote to Bauman-Martin, "Feminist Theologies of Suffering," 68.

[46] Corley, "1 Peter," 354.

[47] Corley, "1 Peter," 355. For the purposes of this thesis, it is interesting to note that Corley goes on to explicitly denounce the perspective on suffering that will be presented here. She states that scholars have suggested that the suffering of the women could possibly effect social change, and even refers to the theology of Martin Luther King Jr. Unfortunately, Corley goes on to reject this view on suffering. I invite the reader to take note of Corley's critique against my thesis and to form their own judgement at the conclusion.

[slaves' and women's] sacrifice does not result in the disruption of the patriarchal household but rather its reinforcement."[48] Corley sees this perspective on the author's theology of suffering as highly problematic since it is used to silence women and uproot any agency that they might have to escape situations of abuse.[49]

I do not seek to discount the many valid critiques these scholars raise against the problematic aspects of the Petrine household code and the possible malevolent power structures present within the text and its troubled reception history. Without a doubt, this text has been used as a stick with which to beat women and people of color into submission. However, I think that the audience's victimization results in an underappreciation of the agency that the author seeks to bestow upon his audience. Peter does not approach the Christian community first and foremost as victims of their adversaries but rather as a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (2:9) who are charged with the task to "proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2.9). It seems to me that 1 Peter does not think that suffering deprives the audience of their audience but rather forms the backdrop, the "darkness" as it were, that all the more clearly accentuates their agency and unique vocation to proclaim the acts of the one who called them "into his marvelous light" (2:9). In other words, the very dimension of the suffering of the community that tmakes the scholars mentioned above perceive the community as victims deprived of any agency, is precisely the dimension that in my view bestows the audience with agency to employ a strategy that has the potential to effect real socio-political change.

[48] Corley, "1 Peter," 355. She continues "they are to view their suffering as a means to imitate Christ is submission and obedience.

[49] Corley, "1 Peter," 356. Corley summarizes the overall aim of 1 Peter as follows "The image of a suffering Jesus and the prominence of the household codes make the admonitions to women and slaves central to the overall argument of the book. The entire focus of the book is to present a model for Christian behavior based on the model of Jesus as a servant or slave who submits himself to unjust suffering and achieves vindication (…) the basic message of 1 Peter does not reflect God's liberating Word."

1.1.3. Presupposition 3: suffering promotes political quietism

Finally, the tendency of some Petrine Scholars to view suffering as politically quietist can be seen in interpretations that claim that the author of 1 Peter does not provide his audience with strategies for political or social resistance or any other means of changing their standing in society. The author is trying to help his audience be as Christian as possible without alienating them so much from their pagan peers as to give cause to violent repression. Hence, the many injunctions of the epistle to "do good" include, according to Horrell:

> Conforming, as far as possible, to conventional social expectations: honouring the emperor (2:13-17), submitting to masters and husbands (2:18-3:6), and generally avoiding confrontational, disruptive or intrusive behavior. They give an answer when called on to make their defense (3:15), but generally it seems that mission is conceived of not in terms of active evangelism but rather of "*passive* attraction" [emphasis added]. (…) They [the Christians] are urged to lessen social hostility as far as possible without abandoning their faith.[50]

Suffering, for Horrell, is thus something to be avoided by practices of submission, and if the community's suffering has any real effect, it is "passive" at best. Warren Carter too, sees in the epistle the demand that the community conforms as much as possible to their political environment.[51] Carter points out that Peter seems to be explicitly advocating for submissive political practices as the chief means of reducing the malignment of the community.[52] He posits

[50] Horrell, *Becoming Christian,* 205.
[51] Warren Carter, "Going all the way?: Honoring the Emperor and Sacrificing Wives and Slaves in 1 Peter 2:13-3:6," in *A Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews*, ed. by Amy Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 26. "The repetition of the unqualified commands to submit (2.13, 17, 18, 3.1, 5) suggests, then, an emphasis that challenges existing Christian communal practices. The advocacy of behaviors that will patently exhibit submission and conformity in well-understood cultural terms comprises the author's solution to the 'problem' of considerable group-society tension caused not by conversion per se but by post- conversion practices of non-participation."
[52] Carter, "Going all the way," 24. "Several factors suggest, though, that 1 Peter responds to these pressures not by forbidding participation, but in fact by advocating it. For starters, it is worth observing that the commands to honor

that these submissive practices are permissible for the Christian community because they are not done for their own sake but are presented by the author as the will of God.[53] How does Carter make sense of the many injunctions in the letter to break with the foolish ways of their ancestors (e.g., 1:18) and to not participate in the behavior of their pagan peers (e.g., 4:1-6)?

Well, Carter asserts that this may be explained by the attention on the inward disposition of the heart in the epistle (cf. 2:17; 3:8; 4:8; 5:14). The focus of the epistle on inward attitudes is due to the fact that the author wants his audience to outwardly pretend to engage in cultural esteemed practices, such as participating in the emperor cultus, while outwardly completely conforming to submissive political practices, the true resistance lies within.[54] On the outside, the community conforms to pagan norms and values, while inwardly, they profess Christ as Lord. However, Carter risks presenting Peter's argument as hypocritical, outwardly acting in a way that does not correspond to one's inner convictions. What is more, Carter may walk into the very trap that he dismisses three pages earlier when he states in his discussion of the inadequacies of other scholarly discussions of the emperor-cult, "At this distance, we can neither determine motivations, not religious "genuineness," especially by employing anachronistic contemporary emphases on inner emotions that ignore the role of public activity in Greco-Roman religious observance."[55]

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the emperor (2.13-14, 17) and for slaves and wives to submit to masters/husbands (2.18; 3.1) do not include exceptive circum- stances. While interpreters draw lines to establish 'selective (non-)submission' and forbid sacrifices, the texts do not. Similarly in exhorting Christians to do the 'right' or the 'good' (2.12, see below), the text does not offer exceptions when cultural expectations and God's will collide."

[53] Carter, "Going all the way," 27-28.

[54] Carter, "Going all the way," 28. Carter explains this attitude as follows "How does this prioritizing of the heart's acknowledgment of Christ as Lord, the valuing of interior commitment, function in relation to the letter's concern with 'good actions among the Gentiles' (2.12)? These "good actions" are public and visible (2.12) so that 'doing right' silences opponents (2.15). Prioritizing the heart's commitment to 'Christ as Lord' allows the letter's hearers to engage in the publicly conformist and submissive behavior of cultic participation without compromising loyalty to God. They can be seen to be compliantly honorable in culturally determined ways while reverencing and expressing loyalty to Christ as Lord in their hearts."

[55] Carter, "Going all the way," 16.

If this is indeed the attitude that Peter demands of his audience, then the critique that it is politically quietist and an untenable exhortation for contemporary readers is well founded, for the epistle would essentially perpetuate obedience to unjust and oppressive regimes. Carter rebuts that modern readers have options for resistance, such as "shelters and counseling services," and refers to Dowd, who remarks that the audience of 1 Peter "had no options" for resistance in any form.[56] In Carter's reading, this supposed lack of options explains 1 Peter's supposed solution of an "inward rebellion" with no concrete political ramifications. However, scholars such as Carter do not consider the fact that political resistance can also take non-violent and less explicit forms. Could it be that eliminating suffering from the lives of his audience is not one of Peter's main concerns?

Perhaps the author presents his audience with a strategy of redemptive suffering that has profound political ramifications. For the author of 1 Peter, the suffering of the community is explicitly based on and modeled after the suffering of Christ. Just like Christ's suffering challenged the status quo and is the singular most transformative event in all of history, according to Peter, so the Christologically qualified suffering of the community bears tremendous redemptive political potential. Bauman-Martin arrives at the same conclusion when she asserts, "When we look at the Petrine code in its historical context, we can also detect a first-century suffering theology of resistance that is different from our own, but not necessarily wrong (…) they [Christian women, slaves, and the broader Christian community] may have reinterpreted suffering as empowering."[57] The next section will explore if and how it is possible to view suffering as "empowering."

[56] Carter, "Going all the way," 31.
[57] Bauman-Martin, "Feminist Theologies of Suffering," 74.

1.2 Martin Luther King Jr.'s Redemptive Suffering Theodicy

> So don't despair if you are condemned and persecuted for righteousness' sake. Whenever you take a stand for truth and justice, you are liable to scorn. Often you will be called an impractical idealist or a dangerous radical. Sometimes, it might mean going to jail; if such is the case, you must honorably grace the jail with your presence. It might even mean physical death. But if physical death is the price that some must pay to free their children from a permanent life of psychological death, then nothing could be more Christian.[58]

This quote might well have been drawn from 1 Peter. However, these words were spoken by Martin Luther King. The civil rights movement thinkers Martin Luther King Jr. and Howard Thurman encouraged millions by positing that their hardships did not have the final say. Suffering is paradoxical, they claimed. On the one hand, it is a great source of pain and grief, while on the other hand, from it may sprout the very roots of liberation and transformation. Or, to use the metaphor of another famous sufferer, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (Joh 12:26).

In the previous section, we surveyed the faulty presuppositions of suffering that shape the interpretative framework of many Petrine scholars and cloud their understanding of the role that suffering plays in 1 Peter. We ended by noting that the view of the author of 1 Peter may very well have been vastly different from our own. Perhaps he even understood it as something that bore the potential to bring liberation and transformation to the lives of his beleaguered audience. Reading 1 Peter, one would almost begin to suspect that the author had become gripped by the

[58] Martin Luther King, "The Most Durable Power," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essentials Writings of Martin Luther King Jr,* ed. James Melvin Washinton (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 10.

story of someone who has suffered greatly, perhaps even unto death, and yet that somehow this suffering had changed the very nature of life itself.

This section will aim to develop the conceptual framework of suffering that can perhaps better capture the "*intentio operis"* of 1 Peter. Over against the three presuppositions of suffering mentioned above, we will place three alternative views on suffering presented by King and Thurman.

Firstly, in contrast to promoting submissive conformation to Greco-Roman society, King helps us see that "creative engagement" with the state of suffering is not concerned with conformity to society (whether it be to Greco-Roman or white supremacist) but rather with its redemption. Suffering is thus potentially redemptive.

Secondly, King and Thurman correct the idea that suffering is agency-depriving. King's use of the notion of "black messianism" reveals how suffering places the sufferer in a unique position to unveil the evil of their adversaries as a dead end and even to bring about their repentance. Moreover, Thurman casts light on the soteriological and theological dimensions of this unveiling by stating that enacting violence estranges one from one's inner altar, that is, the place where one encounters God. According to Thurman, enduring suffering without retaliation can expose just how estranged from one's altar the violator is and provide a powerful incentive for change. In the deepest sense of the word, King and Thurman thus see suffering as agency-bestowing.

Finally, far from promoting political quietism, King's notion of redemptive suffering as leading to an (eschatological) "beloved community" ruled by *agape* calls our attention to both the communal as well as the prefigurative dimensions of suffering. As in the last chapter, these three concepts of suffering are contiguous and mutually constitutive yet distinct enough to provide three unique insights.

1.2.1 Redemptive Suffering

Suffering does not have the last word.[59] That was the fundamental truth on which Martin Luther King Jr. based his theodicy. Importantly, this truth was intimately linked for King to the stories of the Bible, both those that narrated the liberation of Israel out of Egypt as well as the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These stories instilled in King the firm belief and hope that suffering could potentially be redemptive.[60] Two key factors influenced King's notion of redemptive suffering. Firstly, his upbringing in the Black Church provided him with a rich theological tradition that had ample experience both with suffering as well as with the idea that suffering could somehow be turned into a part of the divine purpose and used for a greater good.[61] A crucial tenet of the theology of the Black churches was the faith in a God who could "make a way out of no way." King's second significant influence was his encounter with liberal theologians such as Keithon, Skinner, and Brightman during his studies at Crozer Theological Seminary and Boston University. It is important to note at the outset that suffering itself did not hold any intrinsic value for King. This would lead to the absurd and masochistic claim that suffering should be perpetuated.[62] Incidentally, this masochistic attitude is precisely the shallow

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[59] Rufus, Jr. Burrow, "The Doctrine of Unearned Suffering," *Encounter* 63, no. 1–2 (2002): 71.

[60] Reflecting on his personal suffering, King states "My personal trials have also taught me the value of unmerited suffering. As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways that I could respond to my situation: either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course. Recognizing the necessity for suffering I have tried to make of it a virtue. If only to save myself from bitterness, I have attempted to see my personal ordeals as an opportunity to transform my- self and heal the people involved in the tragic situation which now obtains. I have lived these last few years with the conviction that unearned suffering is redemptive There are some who still find the cross a stumbling block, and others consider it foolishness, but I am more convinced than ever before that it is the power of God unto social and individual salvation. So like the Apostle Paul I can now humbly yet proudly say, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." The suffering and agonizing moments through which I have passed over the last few years have also drawn me closer to God. More than ever before I am convinced of the reality of a personal God." Martin Luther King, "The Most Durable Power," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essentials Writings of Martin Luther King Jr*, ed. James Melvin Washinton (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 12.

[61] For a more detailed exposition of the various influences that informed King's theodicy cf. Mika Edmonson, "Unearned Suffering is Redemptive: the Roots and Implications of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Redemptive Suffering Theodicy," (PhD diss. Calvin University, 2017).

[62] "King freely admitted that not all suffering is redemptive and that the violent also use suffering as a powerful social force to keep the subjugated oppressed. In fact, if not redemptively engaged, suffering could become a tremendously negative social force to foster even more oppression." Edmonson, "Unearned suffering is redemptive," 188. Cf. also Burrows, "The Doctrine of Unearned Suffering," 68-71.

critique that certain Petrine scholars raise against 1 Peter. King escaped these pitfalls by distinguishing between redemptive and non-redemptive suffering. The distinction between the two lay not so much in the degree or nature of the suffering itself but rather in the "creative engagement" with which the person responded to the suffering.[63] If one endured suffering, refusing to resort to violent retaliation, this bore the potential to transform the suffering into something that could be redemptive. In 1961, King presented the idea of redemptive suffering as the core idea behind his entire agenda of non-violent resistance. He explained this as follows:

> The nonviolent say that suffering becomes a powerful social force when you willingly accept that violence on yourself, so that self-suffering stands at the center of the non-violent movement and the individuals involved are able to suffer in a creative manner, feeling that unearned suffering is redemptive, and that suffering may serve to transform the social situation.[64]

This quote conveys several of the crucial elements of King's theodicy. First of all, suffering can potentially effect real and concrete social change. That is, far from promoting the passive attitude suggested by the children's song quoted in the introduction or the seemingly detached and disassociated eschatological quietism that some see in 1 Peter, King is convinced that suffering has real-world and concrete effects. Mika Edmonson explains:

> King's theodicy not only resists quietism, it provides strong motivation for non-violent social action. (…) King's theodicy resists even the potential of quietism by strongly emphasizing the human responsibility to engage suffering non-violently in order to help

[63] Edmonson, "Unearned suffering is redemptive," 37.
[64] Martin Luther King Jr. "Love, Law and Civil Disobedience," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.,* ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 48.

> transform it into something socially transformative. (…) the oppressed have the responsibility to actively and creatively respond in love rather than bitterness.[65]

This is crucial for my reading of 1 Peter since it may help us recognize that the author may actually be serious when he claims that the gospel message will bring some adversaries to repentance. Rather than "naïve," as Horrell maintains, or "a little too optimistic," as Best argues, suffering has the potential to have profound and concrete political ramifications. Redemptive suffering does not promote submissive conformity to the norms of the cultural milieu. Instead, it is a "powerful social force" that inspires the sufferer to swim against the stream of the cultural river.

A second dimension of King's theodicy is that suffering is not exalted to a virtuous status in and of itself. Instead, it is the "creative manner" in which one responds to this suffering that has the potential to transform suffering into a force of redemption.[66] This raises the obvious question: how exactly does one "creatively engage" with suffering, and what does this entail? It is here that King develops his idea of *agape,* an idea that is explicitly based on the Biblical witness and the Gospel message.[67] Concerning this love, Edmonson states, "By 'creative redeeming love,' King means the power by which God works through suffering, creatively transforming it to fulfill his redemptive purposes. In this context, King meant creatively engaging suffering through non-violent direct-action protests."[68] Edmonson explains that King

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[65] Edmonson, "Unearned suffering is redemptive," 166.
[66] Edmonson, "Unearned suffering is redemptive," 36. Edmonson states that "King Jr. would, also [like his father] make a careful distinction between suffering itself, and the potential redemptive benefits. He denied any redemptive aspect to suffering itself. Instead he maintained that social redemption could be experienced through creative engagement with suffering. Edmonson goes on to explain that the political implications of redemptive suffering were intertwined with the theological dimensions, for King Jr saw "voluntary suffering as a spiritual force."
[67] King describes the agape love like this "Agape means nothing sentimental or basically affectionate; it means understanding, redeeming good will for all men, an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. When we love on the agape level, we love men not because we like them. Martin Luther King Jr., "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr*., ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 8.
[68] Edmonson, "Unearned Suffering is redemptive," 77.

used Anders Nygren's idea of *agape* to show how suffering could be redemptive. For Nygren, Christ's love on the cross is not self-centered *eros* but self-less and other-centered *agape.*[69] Edmonson goes on to say that Christ's suffering is redemptive because it was based on this *agapic* love.[70] What may be learned from this is that King believes that the encounter with the Gospel empowers people to engage with suffering creatively. This creative engagement is not to be equated with submissive conforming to society. It is run by an entirely different logic: the logic of Christologically qualified *agape*. That redemptive suffering is fundamentally "cruciform" is essential for King. Edmonson posits

> "Fundamentally, the sufferings of Christ have a pedagogical purpose, a moral display which compels a moral transformation. The key to the cross of Christ is in being the perfect revelation of divine love and righteousness, a revelation so compelling that enemies are drawn into communion with the divine. (…) Not only is the cross of Christ the model of redemptive suffering, but the power behind it as well.[71]

Finally, King makes the paradoxical claim that creative engagement with suffering has the potential to be redemptive, that it serves not only the good of the community but also the good of those perpetrators of violence who are the very cause of the suffering. How exactly does King envision that the suffering of the community could bring about the conversion of his white supremacist countrymen? It is to this seemingly paradoxical dynamic that we now turn.

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[69] Edmonson, "Unearned Suffering is redemptive," 108. "Agape is a sacrificial, self-giving, theocentric, unconditional and spontaneous form of love. Agape sacrifices for the sake of God and the other rather than for the self. It is important to note that many classicists would not concur with Nygren's characterization of *eros* here. For Plato *eros* was also outwardly oriented.

[70] Edmonson, "Unearned Suffering is redemptive," 108.

[71] Edmonson, "Unearned Suffering is redemptive," 106.

1.2.2. Black Messianism

King's idea that God could work through human suffering by transforming it into a redemptive social and political force did not reduce the human agent to a mere passive conduit for divine action. As a pastor once put it, "God doesn't steer a parked car." Edmonson remarks, "King says that this [redemptive suffering] is a divine gift, and yet, it is a gift that requires human activity for its efficacy."[72] King referred to this activity as the "moral agency" of the sufferer.[73] But how exactly should we understand this moral agency?

It is here that King's concept of "black messianism" comes into play. This notion entails the idea that the suffering of Blacks in 20th-century segregationist America had placed this community in a unique position to bring about social, political, and even "spiritual" change in the entire country.[74] By willingly choosing to embrace and endure suffering, returning evil with love, the black community could confront the white supremacist with the error of their way.

This idea is best explained through King's own words. King spoke these words during the Birmingham campaign in 1963. Black children had walked out of school *en masse*. They gathered in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, resulting in the arrest of over 900 minors by Birmingham's infamous commissioner for public safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor. The next day, over 2,500 young black kids marched out on the streets for a peaceful protest. The nation watched as TV crews captured the ruthless beating and hosing down of the protestors, driving them "crying and bloodied into the park."[75] However, the next day, the children walked out in

[72] Edmonson, "Unearned Suffering is redemptive," 196.
[73] Edmonson, "Unearned Suffering is redemptive," 223.
[74] Baldwin writes a whole very instructive, chapter about Kings development of the notion of "black messianism." Lewis Baldwin, *There Is a Balm in Gilead: the Cultural Roots of Martin Luther King, Jr*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1991), 230-273.
[75] Edmonson, "Unearned Suffering is redemptive," 186.

peaceful protest again, strengthened by the following words of King that were booming over a sound system:

> My friends, we must keep on believing that unearned suffering is redemptive. We must say to our white brothers and sisters who try to keep us down: We will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. We will not hate you. And yet we cannot in all good conscience obey your evil laws. Do to us what you will.... We will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. In winning the victory, we will not only win our freedom. We will so appeal to your heart and your conscience that we will win you in the process. And our victory will be a double victory. We will win our freedom, and we will win the individuals who have been perpetrators of the evil system that has existed so long.[76]

This was the messianic vocation of the black community: to endure their suffering in such a way as to expose the forces of evil at work within their society. Baldwin explains this notion as follows: "The essential point for King was that black America, through its struggle and suffering, was challenging white America with a new and greater sense of what it meant to be human by calling her back to the noble principles. (…) He believed that the special role of his people in shaping, by both critique and reformation, a prophetic vision of liberty was the most distinctive contribution any people could make to the American society and civilization."[77]

According to King, this would work as follows "If you confront a man who has been cruelly misusing you, and say, 'Punish me if you will, I do not deserve it, but I will accept it so that the world will know that I am right and you are wrong,' then you wield a powerful and just weapon.

[76] Martin Luther King, Jr., "5 December 1957: 'Some Things We Must Do, Address Delivered at the Second Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change at Holt Street Baptist Church," in The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., vol. 4, Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958, eds. Susan Clayborne, Adrienne Clay, Virginia Shadron, and Kieran Taylor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 341-342. King adopted this passage from E. Stanley Jones' description of Gandhi's non- violent strategy (cf. Jones, Mahatma Gandhi, 88

[77] Baldwin, *There is a Balm in Gilead,* 234.

This man, your oppressor, is automatically morally defeated, and if he has any conscience, he is ashamed."[78] King believed the Black community to be placed in a unique position to redeem the heart and soul of America. Notably, this was not in spite of but rather because of their suffering. In 1967 King describes the black messianic mission as follows:

> Let us [American Blacks] be those creative dissenters who will call our nation to a higher destiny, to a new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humanness. We are superbly equipped to do this. We have been seared in the flames of suffering. We have known the agony of being the underdog. We have learned from our have-not status that it profits a nation little to gain the whole world of means and lose the end, its own soul. We must have a passion for peace born out of wretchedness and the misery of war (...) So in dealing with our particular dilemma, we will challenge the nation to deal with its dilemma."[79]

It has become clear by now that King perceives of redemptive suffering as a force that is inherently empowering and agency-bestowing to groups of people who normally have very little means of exercising political influence.[80] But there remains a crucial addition to be made to fully demonstrate the relevance of this idea for our reading of 1 Peter. Just like for the author of 1 Peter, the political and the religious intersect and overlap. Hence, the redemption of the adversary through creative engagement with suffering does not only affect the social and the

[78] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Playboy Interview: Martin Luther King, Jr. (1965)," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 348

[79] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community*? (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 133-134.

[80] Burrows explains how in King's view suffering is not to be endured passively but rather leads to the moral obligation to engage creatively with suffering: "Along with his claim that unmerited suffering has redemptive value, there is also his absolute insistence that the oppressed should not passively accept oppressive, unjust treatment. As self-determined autonomous beings, the oppressed are obligated to resist the evil done to them, albeit militant nonviolent resistance. Therefore, it was never for King merely a matter of requiring that the oppressed passively suffer in the hope that by so doing their witness would move oppressors to do the right thing. For King, suffering which also resists "can be a most creative and powerful social force." Passive suffering ensures only more suffering. Burrows, "The Doctrine of Unearned Suffering," 75-76.

political but also the spiritual and even soteriological. Here, it would be helpful to turn toward the mystical thinking of one of King's chief inspirations: Howard Thurman.

According to Thurman, every human, whether they be religious or not, has an "inner altar" that constitutes the place where they come into contact with the creator of everything that is: God.[81] When one commits violence against another human being, this causes a rift in one's inner altar; the connection to the transcendent is disrupted, and the perpetrator becomes estranged from the very ground of his being and fundamentally also from himself.[82] Thurman provides a poetic and rich description of the various ways in which a person's innermost core can be harmed as a result of violence and hatred:

> "To live under siege, with the equilibrium and the tranquility of inner peace; to prevent the springs of my being from being polluted by better waters that flow as drainage from the tablelands of violence and hatred."[83]

For Thurman, one's inner "springs" can become "polluted" by violence and hatred. Thurman states that violence is so damaging because through it, "both the sufferer and the offender are cut off from their own altars."[84] It is the vocation of the sufferer, according to Thurman, "to remove from his fellows whatever there is or may be that prevents them from realizing their own experience of the truth within them."[85] It is clear then that Thurman, as well as King, believed that the only true way to redeem society was to restore the relationship of the oppressor

[81] It is Thurman's contention that mysticism insists that "there is within reach of every man a defense against the grand invasion (...) that a man can seek deliberately to explore the inner regions of his own life and (...) that the individual comes to himself, the wanderer comes home, and the private life is saved for deliberate and self-conscious involvement." Howard Thurman, "Mysticism and Social Change (Lawrence Lecture), 1978 October 13," The Howard Thurman Digital Archive, accessed March 7 2025, https://thurman.pitts.emory.edu/items/show/1131
[82] Thurman, "Mysticism and Social Change," 2-5.
[83] Thurman, "Mysticism and Social Change," 3.
[84] Thurman, "Mysticism and Social Change," 7.
[85] Thurman, "Mysticism and Social Change," 6.

to their creator. Edmonson captures this well when he says, "For King, the atonement is fundamentally about overcoming humanity's enmity against God. Reconciling it to its loving Father."[86]

Suffering is thus an agency-bestowing creative force that enables and empowers the sufferer to contribute to the redemption of their oppressors.[87] This redemption effects real change in the political, social as well as the soteriological domains. This may help us to see how 1 Peter's use of redemptive suffering theology bore the seeds of real political and social change. Furthermore, it may help us to make sense of his seemingly baffling claim that, through their suffering, the Christian community is able to restore their adversaries' relationship with God.

1.2.3. The Beloved Community

Over and against the presupposition that suffering promotes political quietism, King's and Thurman's views on suffering help us to see that suffering has the potential to effect real, concrete societal and political change. One reason for this is that suffering is inherently relational, involving several parties: those inflicting suffering and those undergoing suffering. Thus, it is also profusely political in nature.

Consequently, the redemptive quality of suffering is not a matter for the individual, King asserted. Precisely because of the power behind redemptive suffering, the fuel on which it runs, as it were, is *agape,* and because this love is fundamentally outward-oriented to the wellbeing of the other, redemptive suffering has an intrinsically communal quality. Redemptive suffering

[86] Edmonson, "Unearned Suffering is redemptive," 106.
[87] To use King's own words "We had to make it clear that nonviolent resistance is not a method of cowardice. It does resist. It is not a method of stagnant passivity and deadening complacency. The nonviolent resister is just as opposed to the evil that he is standing against as the violent resister but he resists without violence. This method is nonaggressive physically but strongly aggressive spiritually." King, "The Power of Nonviolence," 12.

does not promote political quietism but rather aims at the transformation of the political systems and reality that facilitate and perpetuate the suffering in the first place. King held fast to the eschatological hope that one day, all of society would be redeemed and run on the transformative power of Christ's *agape.* He called this ideal the *beloved community.*[88]

Edmonson explains this concept of King's thinking as follows:

> Rather than servant of his oppressor's salvation, we might say that King was servant to the redemptive formation of the beloved community. King's concern for the liberation of the oppressor acknowledged that the oppressed could not truly be liberated without regard to the healing of the entire society. Agape, the force at work through redemptive suffering, aims to create and sustain the beloved community, a society modeled after the Kingdom of God in which everyone would live together as sisters and brothers. As the oppressed engage their suffering agapically, they look toward more than their own personal liberation, but toward the creation of the beloved community. King explained, "Agape is love seeking to preserve and created community. It is insistence on community even when one seeks to break it."[89]

It becomes clear, then, that redemptive suffering is politically oriented. For King, this transformation of society also had an eschatological scope. While he genuinely believed in the ability of his movement to effect real political change in the here and now, this change always remained "prefigurative" in the sense that any transformation that may be observed in the present was but a mere reflection of the "beloved community" that would one day be inaugurated by Christ. How the desire for present change, paired with the hope of a full restoration at the *parousia,* overlap for King becomes clear in his most famous speech.

[88] Edmonson, "Unearned suffering is redemptive," 18.
[89] Edmonson, "Unearned suffering is redemptive," 233.

The famous “I Have a Dream” speech, delivered by King at the Lincoln Memorial on 28 August 1963, captures the prefigurative element of King’s redemptive suffering theodicy.

> I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, that one day, right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today! I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places shall be made plain, and the crooked places shall be made straight and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning “my country 'tis of thee; sweet land of liberty; of thee I sing; land where my fathers died land of the pilgrim's pride; from every mountain side, let freedom ring" and if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.”[90]

This speech clearly blends eschatological language with the concrete and present transformation of society.

In conclusion, there are three dimensions of suffering that will be used as a heuristic device to interpret the suffering discourse in 1 Peter. Firstly, creative engagement with unearned suffering has the ability to transform hardship into something that is potentially redemptive.

[90] Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 120.

Secondly, unearned suffering places the suffering community in a unique "messianic" position to bring the perpetrators of violence to repentance. Finally, through their suffering, the community empowered by Christ's *agape* is prefiguring in the here and now what will one day be a reality for all of creation.

Before focusing on 1 Peter, let us first explore the background against which this letter was written. In the next chapter, we will set the stage for ancient suffering discourse by exploring both Hellenistic and Jewish sources. This will ensure that once 1 Peter enters the scene, its unique voice will ring all the more clearly.

2. Greco-Roman and Jewish Contexts of Suffering

Now that we have explored a different way of perceiving suffering conceptually, it is time to ask the historical question of whether it is plausible that early Christian texts such as 1 Peter held a view of suffering that makes use of a mode of reasoning that resembles the redemptive suffering theodicy of King and Thurman.[91] This requires us to embark on a historical exploration of suffering discourses more generally in antiquity, for only by understanding the soil in which 1 Peter seeks to plant his message can we understand how it begins to take root in the minds of his audience.

This chapter aims to sketch what Umberto Eco refers to as the "cultural encyclopedia."[92] With this term, I refer to the ideas concerning suffering that circulated within Greco-Roman and Jewish society. By studying the texts central to this chapter, we may be able to form a clearer picture of this cultural encyclopedia as it pertains to ancient suffering discourses. This notion allows for a more nuanced understanding of the influences of these discourses on 1 Peter. Whereas the texts studied in this chapter may not have directly influenced Peter or his audience, they do demonstrate that these notions of suffering were circulating at the time. Therefore, these or similar notions of suffering help us to form a clearer picture of the possible backdrop against which the author of 1 Peter writes his own text.

[91] To be clear, "resembles" here does not refer to any direct literary borrowing or dependence. King's and Thurman's contexts are vastly different than that of 1 Peter. However, it is possible that these authors, writing for groups of marginalized Christians, come to conclusions on the nature of suffering that bear a family resemblance to another.

[92] I understand this idea similar to how Kavin Rowe uses it in his work. He uses Umberto Eco's notion of "cultural encyclopedia" as a comprehensive term to denote the "the wider cultural knowledge (tacit and explicit) assumed by the author and embedded in a text." Kavin C. Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

I am indebted to several seminal studies into suffering in antiquity and within the context of the New Testament that have significantly influenced my understanding of the field.[93] For our purposes here, Judith Perkins' influential work *The Suffering Self* is especially helpful since it explores how early Christian texts consciously and actively portray the subject as a suffering self. Moreover, Perkins asserts that this centering of the subject as a suffering self was one of the chief ways in which Christianity gained political power and effected social change. Therefore, the first section of this essay will provide an overview of Perkins' exploration of ancient and early Christian suffering discourse.

However, Perkins' argument has a lacuna, which she herself recognizes in her introduction.[94] She states that, as she is not a biblical scholar, she does not include the suffering texts of the Jewish Scriptures and the New Testament in her research, even though these texts were key sources for the early Christian texts she investigates. She invites the readers of her work to apply her insights to the earlier texts of the Jewish Scriptures, Second Temple Judaism, and the New Testament.[95] This will be precisely what the second section will attempt to do. Any reader of the epistle will be quick to recognize the profound influence of the Jewish Scriptures and Second Temple Jewish thought on the 1 Peter.[96] This has even led some scholars, such as Nauck, to posit that there was a "Jewish suffering tradition" that the New Testament authors amended and incorporated into their text.[97] Therefore, in the second section, we will study several Jewish

[93] Kelhoffer provides an insightful overview of recent studies on the topic: Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: West- minster, 1984); Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990) See further Charles H. Talbert, *Learning Through Suffering: The Educational Value of Suffering in the New Testament and in Its Millieu* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991). Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1999.
[94] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 13.
[95] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 13.
[96] In his work *Die Christen als Fremde,* Reinhard Feldmeier convincingly argues that the Hebrew Bible material and the LXX have been mediated to the author of 1 Peter through second temple Judaism, particularly through Philo. Cf. Reinhard Feldmeier, *Die Christen Als Fremde: Die Metapher Der Fremde in Der Antiken Welt, Im Urchristentum Und Im 1. Petrusbrief* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), 96.
[97] Wolfgang Nauck, "Freude Im Leiden: Zum Problem Einer Urchristlichen Verfolgungstradition," *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche* 46, no. 1–2 (1955): 72-74.

texts that demonstrate the ideas concerning suffering that circulated at the time and how they may help us elucidate certain aspects of 1 Peter's formation of a redemptive suffering theology.

Moreover, we will nuance Perkin's treatment of Stoic discourses on suffering. Perhaps she makes too much of the similarities between the Romances and the Stoic texts. Perkins claims that both of these groups of texts ultimately perceived of suffering as something that was transient and left the subject unscathed. However, whereas the romances certainly perceive of suffering as a mere hurdle on the road to a "happily ever after," in the texts of the Stoics we can already discern some emancipatory traces. The Stoics contended that how one dealt with suffering, what King might call "creative engagement", bore the potential to transform one's experience and coping with suffering.

2.1 Greco-Roman perceptions of suffering

Judith Perkins begins her investigation of early Greco-Roman and early Christian suffering discourse by using Michel Foucault's ideas concerning the nature of "power." In Foucault's philosophy, "discourse" plays a central role in understanding how power works.[98] For Foucault, power lies not so much in specific people or institutions but rather in the contents of what we think, believe, and talk about, which he names "discourse." The basic focus of Foucault's ideas around discourse is that how we speak and think about things influences who will receive power and who won't. In other words, what is most dominantly present in a culture's discourse will

[98] Perkins summarizes her aim as follows "In this study I want to identify a particular preoccupation in the discursive climate of the early Roman empire. From a number of different locations, narratives were projecting a particular representation of the human self as a body liable to pain and suffering. This representation challenged another, prevailing, more traditional Greco-Roman image of the self as a soul/mind controlling the body. I intend to try to locate the "triumph" of Christianity within the discursive struggle over these representations. It would be around one of these represented "subjects," the suffering self, that Christianity as a social and political unity would form and ultimately achieve its institutional power." Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 3.

exert more power than that which hardly receives any focus. Essentially, Perkins uses Foucault to argue that whatever view on suffering is most prominently present in the "cultural interest" will receive a central place in the cultural discourse.[99] In turn, whatever is central to the cultural discourse will be the most dominantly present in the minds of the population and, as such, will have the biggest claim to (political) power.[100]

This is relevant for the understanding of suffering in ancient texts, according to Perkins. She asserts that in order to understand how different views on suffering may lead to the empowering of one group of people and the marginalization or even oppression of another, it is essential to understand the specific discourse of a particular culture around suffering. This is because how one conceptualizes suffering will affirm the life experiences of some groups while neglecting that of others. As we will see, Perkins argues that some ancient discourses of suffering, particularly those that view it as something transient that has no lasting impact on the individual, will affirm the perspective of those in power. Conversely, Christian and Jewish discourses of suffering centered the life experience of non-elites. In doing so, these texts demonstrate how their suffering could provide the source material for a counter-discourse that challenged the prevailing power structures.

How people think and talk about suffering will shape whether or not they see suffering as something weak and passive or as something that is potentially subversive. From this follows

[99] "Cultural discourse "produces" humans in the sense that human subjects come to understand themselves through the categories and representations of "being human," operating and present in their particular culture." Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 4. On page 7 Perkins states "In cultural terms, those belonging to the category of sufferers, the sick, the deformed, the poor, had little existence in cultural representation throughout most of Greco-Roman antiquity before the early empire. That is not to say that humans were not in pain or did not suffer before this period, but that their pain and suffering did not have significant cultural visibility and in that sense they did not have substantial existence within cultural consciousness."

[100] Cf. Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 3. "Although discourses do not represent "reality," they do have very real effects. In every society, persons come to understand themselves, their roles and their world through their culture's discursive practices and the "reality" these practices bring into cultural consciousness. It is my contention in this study that the discursive focus in the second century on the suffering body contributed to Christianity's attainment of social power by helping to construct a subject that would be present for its call. It is in this sense that I say that the "triumph" of Christianity was, at least in part, a triumph of representation."

that in order to change a culture's view on suffering in a society, one must develop a new discourse around what suffering is and does. This is precisely what Christian texts did, according to Perkins. Early Christian texts rejected popular notions of suffering forwarded by romantic novels that perceived suffering as something that ultimately left the subject unmarked. Moreover, they further developed the rather individualistic treatment of suffering from the Stoics and provided it with a more communal and political scope. Early Christian texts actively presented an alternative view on the nature of suffering that called into question the existing power dynamics of Greco-Roman society and resulted in a growth of institutional Christian power.

Early Christian texts placed a very different emphasis on the nature of suffering than other literature at the time by centering the subject as a suffering self.[101] So much so that Perkins claims, "It is safe to say that one thing contemporaries knew about Christianity (in fact, for some, the only thing they give any evidence of knowing) is that Christians held death in contempt and were ready to suffer for their beliefs."[102] This stark rise in focus on death and suffering cannot simply be accounted for by an increase in the actual suffering that Christians experienced through state-organized persecution, according to Perkins.[103] Rather, the rise of the importance of suffering in these texts was occasioned by a conscious effort of early Christian authors to present the self as a suffering subject.[104] Significantly for our understanding of

[101] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 9. "Christianity was only able to create itself as an institution because cultural "talking," its own and others, had prepared a subject ready for its call—a subject that apprehended itself as a sufferer."
[102] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 18.
[103] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 9; 21-24. On page 23 Perkins states "Contemporaries knew so well that Christians suffered and died not because they witnessed multitudes swept up and executed, but rather because this was how Christians presented themselves. Christian suffering was the message encoded in nearly all of the Christian representation of the period."
[104] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 16. "As long as it is uncritically accepted that the emphasis of Christian texts on pain and death resulted from widespread and inclusive persecutions, the extraordinary Christian effort to bring into consciousness a world centered on these topics will go unrecognized. It is my contention that Christian representation in the early Roman empire functioned to offer a particular self-representation to Christians—the Christian as sufferer."

suffering in 1 Peter, early Christian apologetic works and stories of martyrs show that the authors of these texts believed that the presentation of the Christian as a sufferer played a key role in the conversion of pagans.[105] In the next chapter, we will see that in 1 Peter, the notion of righteous suffering is also linked to the idea of winning over the pagan environment.

This was not an entirely new phenomenon, for in doing so, these early Christian texts used trends already underway in Greco-Roman Stoic and medical texts that focused on creative engagement with suffering and even placed suffering within the realm of the divine purpose.[106] In what follows, we will study three categories of texts that were popular in Greco-Roman society at the time many early Christian texts were written and, as such, formed a significant part of the "cultural encyclopedia" of suffering: romantic novels, Stoic texts, and medical texts.

2.1.1 Romantic Novels

The first category of texts that forms an interesting backdrop for Greco-Roman understandings of suffering are romantic novels. A key element of these stories is the "happy ending," which is demonstrated by the prominence of the theme of marriage in the romantic novels. Perkins studies three romantic novels: Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, Xenophon's *Ephesian Tale*, and Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon.* Each of these tales "demonstrate how romances embodied an elite idealized dream of society."[107] In Perkin's view, romantic novels in Greco-

[105] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 40. "Tertullian, Justin, and Minucius Felix, as well as other Christian writers, gave Christian suffering a privileged position in explaining the impetus behind conversions. It is the privileging of this notion, rather than its validity as an explanation, that is of interest. For such Christian claims show what those making them granted authority to in their own conceptions of what would attract others to their community, and give access to their assumptions about what they thought was effective within their cultural context. That Christians granted authority to the function of suffering in attracting converts implies that suffering held a constitutive position in their own notions of Christianity."

[106] Perkins remarks "Without the preparation of a subject already underway in the cultural discourse of the early empire, the defining elements of Christianity as we know it may not have emerged. But Christian discourse was able to join other types of discourses to produce the subjectivity it needed to exist as an institution."

[107] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 44.

Roman literature follow a similar plot: the protagonist comes from an elite and prosperous background, some tragedy strikes that temporarily inflicts the protagonist with suffering and calls their privilege into question, but ultimately, the protagonist is restored to their original state of prosperity and happiness unfazed and unmarked by the hardships they had faced.

An interesting dimension of romantic novels is that, time and again, they show how the protagonist is able to regain their status and wealth with baffling ease. Regardless of the adversities that they have faced and how much they have had to suffer, the suffering is always temporary, and the "natural" balance is always restored.[108] Rather than the redemptive suffering theodicy, the romances appear to be run by what Perkins has called the "theodicy of good fortune."[109] She borrows this term from Max Weber, where it entails that the elite deserved where they were in society and that this unequal power dynamic was somehow "natural."[110]

An illustration of this "theodicy of good fortune" that is characteristic of the genre as a whole may be found in Chariton's work *Chaereas and Callirhoe*.[111] The protagonist Chaereas' ship is attacked and destroyed, and they are sold into slavery, suffer deprivation, and even risk crucifixion. However, at precisely the right moment, the powerful satrap Mithridates intervenes and restores Chaereas to his original status (4.3.7).[112] Chariton narrates how Mithridates organizes a lavish feast for the rescued protagonist: "At once he ordered his slaves to take them to the baths and see to their physical well-being, and after the bath to clothe them in expensive Greek mantles." (4.3.7).[113] While Chaereas had endured considerable suffering, in the end this did not change him as a subject. The true climax of the romance is the restoration of the pre-

[108] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 55.
[109] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 55.
[110] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 55.
[111] Cf. Chariton, *Callirhoe,* ed. and translated by G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 481 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). For an excellent introduction to the work see also: B.P. Reardon, "Theme, Structure, and Narrative in Chariton," *Yale Classical Studies 27* (1982): 1–27.
[112] Chariton, *Callirhoe,* 206-207.
[113] Chariton, *Callirhoe,* 206-207. εὐθὺς οὖν προσέταξε τοῖς οἰκέταις ἄγειν ἐπὶ λουτρὰ καὶ τὰ σώματα εραπεῦσαι, λουσαμένοις δὲ περιθεῖναι χλαμύδας Ἑλληνικὰς πολυτελεῖς·

suffering condition rather than a transformation of the subject and his environment through suffering.

The perception of suffering arising from the romances is that it is ultimately transient and leaves the person undergoing it unscathed.[114] It does not constitute a lasting change in their status. Suffering is but a mere cathartic phase that, while unpleasant at the moment, will, without exception, allow the hero to arise gloriously on the other end.

This romantic view of suffering exerted influence on the cultural discourse concerning suffering and thus on the political power dynamics and discourse in Greco-Roman society, according to Perkins. Since suffering is presented as something transient that leaves the subject unscathed, it affirms the life experience of those in power. The romance functions as a "veil of power" that masks the suffering reality of the lower class while idealizing the elite's relatively easy and painless experience.[115] To use Perkins' words, "In romance, we can glimpse one of the means through which the Greek urban elite in the early years of the Roman empire created and maintained their identity."[116]

To conclude, while suffering does play a significant role in romances, it does so in a vastly different manner than 1 Peter. It is aimed at maintaining the political status quo and privileging those in power rather than transforming the political reality in favor of the powerless.

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[114] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 56-59. On page 77 Perkins describes this subject as follows "The central "subject" of romance, the character who passes through suffering but is unmarked by the experience, is not an anomaly in the representation of the early centuries A.D.

[115] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 55. "Rather, in societies, ideology in all its various formations creates an unconscious veil distorting the image of social reality within a class and sublimating its interest basis" even to those benefiting most. The rhetoric of the romance offered the wellborn as just naturally deserving of their place as the focus of the community and deserving of the community's goods. A repeated plot element in the romances served to inculcate this sense of the elite's innate right to prosperity and well-being and to veil the material reality affecting most non-elite inhabitants of the early empire.

[116] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 42.

2.2.1 Stoic Texts

According to Perkins, the centrality of the idea that the subject was unmarked by their suffering in Greco-Roman society is illustrated by another corpus of popular texts in this period: the Stoic philosophical writings.[117] While obviously vastly different from the romances in tone and surface-level content, she asserts that the two genres essentially present the same subject: "a self that is exempt from the experience of pain and suffering."[118]

Perkins' argument needs to be slightly nuanced here. While it is true that both the romances and the Stoics perceive suffering as something transient that does not ultimately affect the subject, there is an emancipatory development in the Stoic suffering discourses. Many Greco-Roman texts saw a deep connection between suffering and one's identity; if one suffered, it was likely because it was a deserved punishment from the gods. In contrast, the Stoics held that suffering could happen to anyone, emperor and slave alike, and that this did not reflect one's identity or social status. What is more, whereas the romances had presented suffering as something to be passively endured, the Stoics argued that one could exert a certain amount of influence over one's experience of suffering.

For the Stoics, suffering is not an objective human experience but is rather determined by the subject's response to those aspects of his life that fell under his control.[119] Central for the

[117] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 77. Perkins refers to Brent Shaw to illustrate the widespread popularity of this philosophy at the time. According to Shaw Stoicism was "*the* idea system associated with most of the high period of the ancient classical world." This makes it plausible that this philosophical framework exerted at least some degrees on the ideas of suffering of the audience of 1 Peter.
[118] Grecthen Reydams-Schils, "The Stoics," in *The Oxford Handbook to the Second Sophistic,* ed. Daniel S. Richter and William A. Johnson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 528-529; Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 77.
[119] Tad Brennan, "Stoic Moral Psychology," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics,* ed. Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 262-264.

Stoics was the idea that it was one's response to the experience of suffering that mattered more than the suffering in and of itself. Therefore, the Stoics assert that it is crucial that one learns how to control one's "passions" (πάθος).[120] The only true good for the Stoic was the pursuit of a virtuous life, whereas the only true evil was vice; all other matters of life were indifferent.[121] For the Stoics, virtue was tied to the idea of self-mastery. Only that which one could control should be responded to; all external things should be met with indifference based on the recognition that things outside one's control cannot be changed and, therefore, do not truly matter.[122] For one prominent Stoic, Epictetus, it was important that his philosophy enabled one to endure suffering. His student Arrianus portrays him as calling for the following:

> Endure revilings [ἀνάσχου λοιδορίας], bear [ἔνεγκε] with an unreasonable brother, father, son, neighbor, fellow-traveler. Show us that you can do these things, for us to see that in all truth you have learned something of the philosophers (*Discourses* 3.21.6*).*[123]

A central part of enduring this suffering was learning how to differentiate between which suffering lay within one's control and which was "external." In the Stoic view, the internal faculty that was able to judge whether something lay within one's control or not was the very core of the self, the "I."[124] This faculty was called the "*prohairesis"* (προαίρεσις).[125] This internal capacity to determine what lay within one's control, the *prohairesis,* was central to the thinking Epictetus.[126] In the *Discourses* his thought is formulated as follows: "You are not flesh,

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[120] Brennan, "Stoic Moral Psychology," 265. Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 79.
[121] Brennan, "Stoic Moral Psychology," 263. Brennan remarks "Only virtue, along with whatever shares in it, is good; only vice and its participants are bad. All else is indifferent, where this means that it is neither beneficial nor harmful, or equivalently that it has no effect on one's happiness or misery."
[122] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 79.
[123] ἀνάσχου λοιδορίας, ἔνεγκε ἀδελφὸν ἀγνώμονα, ἔνεγκε πατέρα, ἔνεγκε υἱόν, γείτονα, σύνοδον. ταῦτα ἡμῖν δεῖξον, ἵν' ἴδωμεν, ὅτι μεμάθηκας ταῖς ἀληθείαις τι τῶν φιλοσόφων. Cf Epictetus, *Discourses*, Books 1-2, translated by W. A. Oldfather. Loeb Classical Library 131 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), 124-125.
[124] A.A. Long, *Epictetus: a Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 207.
[125] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 81.
[126] For a more detailed introduction to the thought of Epictetus Cf A.A. Long, *Epictetus: a Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

nor hair, but *prohairesis*" (3.1.40). For Epictetus, suffering, pain, disease, and violence were all unable to ultimately faze or affect the inner core of man, the *prohairesis*.[127] Elsewhere in the *Discourses* we read:

> Go out of the house at early dawn, and no matter whom you see or whom you hear, examine him and then answer as you would to a question. What did you see? A handsome man or a handsome woman? Apply your rule. Is it outside the province of the moral purpose [ἀπροαίρετον], or inside [προαιρετικόν]? Outside. Away with it. What did you see? A man in grief over the death of his child? Apply your rule. Death lies outside the province of the moral purpose [ἀπροαίρετον]. Out of the way with it. Did a Consul meet you? Apply your rule. What sort of thing is a consulship? Outside the province of the moral purpose, or inside [ἀπροαίρετον ἢ προαιρετικόν]? Outside. Away with it, too, it does not meet the test; throw it away, it does not concern you. If we had kept doing this and had exercised ourselves from dawn till dark with this principle in mind, by the gods, something would have been achieved! (3.3.15).[128]

Epictetus repeatedly asserts that good and evil are not inherent to the external events themselves but rather to one's inner response to these events. This resembles what we saw in Chapter 1's discussion of King's theodicy of redemptive suffering. According to King, suffering itself was neither a vice nor a virtue; rather, it was how one "creatively engaged" with suffering that truly mattered. Similarly, Epictetus places suffering within the realm of the subject's personal control.

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[127] For a fuller exposition on this notion in Epictetus' thinking see especially chapter 8 in Long, *Epictetus: a Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life*; Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 81-81.

[128] εὐθὺς ὄρθρου προελθὼν ὃν ἂν ἴδῃς, ὃν ἂν ἀκούσῃς, ἐξέταζε, ἀποκρίνου ὡς πρὸς ἐρώτημα. τί εἶδες; καλὸν ἢ καλήν; ἔπαγε τὸν κανόνα. ἀπροαίρετον ἢ προαιρετικόν; ἀπροαίρετον· αἶρε ἔξω. τί εἶδες; πενθοῦντ᾽ ἐπὶ τέκνου τελευτῇ; ἔπαγε τὸν κανόνα. ὁ θάνατός ἐστιν ἀπροαίρετον· αἶρε ἐκ τοῦ μέσου. ἀπήντησέ σοι ὕπατος; ἔπαγε τὸν κανόνα. ὑπατεία ποῖόν τί ἐστιν; ἀπροαίρετον ἢ προαιρετικόν; ἀπροαίρετον· αἶρε καὶ τοῦτο, οὐκ ἔστι δόκιμον· ἀπόβαλε, οὐδὲν πρὸς 16σέ. καὶ τοῦτο εἰ ἐποιοῦμεν καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο ἠσκούμεθα καθ᾽ ἡμέραν ἐξ ὄρθρου μέχρι νυκτός, ἐγίνετο ἄν τι, νὴ τοὺς θεούς. Cf. Epictetus. *Discourses*. 3.3.15.

Nevertheless, the Stoic discourse concerning suffering bears some similarities to the one we encountered in the romances. Both genres presented the self as a subject that passes through suffering in life unmarked by the experience. In addition, while the Stoic discourse do allow more room for individual agency, Epictetus claimed that his pupils needed to assume their social roles and responsibilities, both genres reaffirm the political status quo.[129] While the Stoics leave room for individual engagement with suffering, this does not translate to any change on a more structural level. As with the romances, this Stoic attitude towards suffering serves as a "veil of power" to perpetuate the status of the elite, according to Perkins.[130] The big emphasis on accepting and enduring one's fate in life, whether it be miserable and unjust or not, coupled with the basic idea that outside circumstances lay beyond the scope of one's control in practice "confirm prevailing social structures."[131] The Stoic views on suffering, Perkins claims, "reflect an elite perspective making the status quo appear fixed and natural, while at the same time, veiling the realities and concerns of the non-elite."[132]

Thus, the Stoic suffering discourses constitute a first step towards a more active engagement with suffering while nevertheless maintaining the status quo. Perkins' overview of romances and Stoic texts reveal how several influential and popular discourses concerning suffering in Greco-Roman society both argued that suffering did not truly matter in the end and served to maintain the political status quo.[133] This promoted an attitude of political passivity; in the words

[129] Reydams-Schils, "The Stoics," 529.
[130] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 84.
[131] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 84-85. Perkins claims "His teaching supported the status quo, and any affirmation of the status quo acts to affirm an elite's position. Stoic insistence that poverty and social position did not matter fitted into an elite agenda better than into an underprivileged one: as does the corresponding counsel that what did, in fact, matter was how well you did at being poor, imprisoned, or politically unpopular. "Well" was defined as how little you allowed the conditions to upset or disturb you. This teaching, along with emphasis on control directed at the interior self, had significant relevance for the social body; it would work to restrain social as well as personal disturbances
[132] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 86.
[133] Perkins summarizes "The implicit message of romance is clear, and it is the same as that Epictetus offered; pain and hardship did not matter. And Epictetus might add that pity was unnecessary. In the early empire, from a number of discursive points, a particular subjectivity was being offered to inhabitants as a model for self-understanding—a self immune to the effects of pain and suffering. Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 90.

of Perkins, "Both texts reflected an innate conservatism, constructing subjects intent not on changing their world, but on enduring and controlling themselves in whatever world they found themselves."[134] We will see in the next section that the medical discourses provide a further development; suffering is more outwardly oriented and placed within the realm of the divine.

2.1.3 Medical texts

The final body of texts that Perkins examines are the medical texts. It is important to note at the outset that the texts discussed in this section were written in the second century CE and were thus written later than 1 Peter. Nevertheless, Perkins' discussion of the medical texts is relevant to my argument. They show that it is plausible that more appreciative views of suffering that placed suffering within the realm of the divine purpose could arise in a context similar to that of 1 Peter. Furthermore, the shift towards this view of suffering that Perkins describes was part of a long-going, gradual process that may well have been underway at the time that 1 Peter was written but had not yet found its way into the literary sources discussed here.

The medical texts present a radically different view of the subject, the body, and human suffering. Moreover, these medical texts presented a certain kind of subject, a cultural "self" that would prepare the way for later Christian ideas of the self as a suffering subject, Perkins argues.[135]

It would be a mistake to think the medical texts were mere practical analyses of the physiological body. Perkins convincingly shows that the medics perceived their writings on

[134] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 102.
[135] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 144-145. "It was the kind of body, as represented by Galen and other doctors of his persuasion, that helped to constitute a subject for Christianity (…) It was a body that mattered, that signified and was significant, very unlike the body offered in Epictetus' narratives that was to be bracketed off from the "real" self.

medics as pertaining to epistemology and philosophy more broadly.[136] This may be seen in the works of Galen, the prolific second-century author who was both a philosopher and a physician.[137] Galen was convinced that medicine was founded on rational principles and, as such, revealed much of reality as a whole. For Galen, the physician was a true philosopher who mastered all the basic philosophical elements: the logical, the scientific and the ethical.[138] In his classic work, the *Prognosis,* Galen passionately argues that the inner body could be known and understood; the body could be an "object of knowledge."[139] Moreover, Galen saw the physical body as representing the social body.[140] Hence, his texts were not limited to the physical body but also had political, philosophical, epistemological, and cultural ramifications. Galen was engaging the broader cultural discourse, and his view on suffering had political implications, according to Perkins.[141] For Galen, the self was an "inner-directed person" whose internal life could be analyzed, known, and understood but whose body was also continuously at risk of pain, disease, and suffering.[142] Perkins claims that these medical texts reveal just how important the body and its suffering had started to become at the time of the early empire.[143]

This focus on the body resulted in an epistemological shift. Whereas Epictetus and the Stoics had prioritized the soul/mind's mastery over the body and its suffering, the medical

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[136] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 145-146. Perkins distinguishes between three schools of medical writings, the empiricist who focused on the body alone and made no larger epistemological claims, the methodist who did not believe that any broader philosophical knowledge was necessary to come to an accurate diagnosis and finally the rationalist, to which Galen belonged, who saw medicine as a form of philosophy. It is this latter school that prepared the way for a new cultural subject according to Perkins.

[137] For more general literature on Galen Cf: P.N. Singer, and Ralph M. Rose, *The Oxford Handbook of Galen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024); L G. Ballester, "Soul and Body, Disease of the Soul and Disease of the Body in Galen's Medical Thought." *Le Opere Psicologiche di Galeno,* ed. P.Manuli and M.Vegetti (Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1988), 117–151; Vivian Nutton, *Galen: Problems and Prospects* (London: Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1981); O. Temkin, *Galenism: Rise and Fall of a Medical Philosophy* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1973).

[138] Cf. P N. Singer, "Philosophy, Science, and Psychology, Galen's Theory of the "Soul" in Its Intellectual Context," in *The Oxford Handbook of Galen,* eds P.N. Singer, and Ralph M. Rose Perkins, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 43-86; *The Suffering Self,* 154.

[139] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 155.

[140] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 144.

[141] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 144.

[142] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 150.

[143] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 157-160.

writings placed the body at the center. They showed that the self ultimately had no control over the body[144] The calling into question of self-mastery over the body revealed the ubiquitous need for external guides, such as doctors who were able to understand the mysteries of the internal body.[145] Since self-mastery was debunked as myth by the very concrete and real experience of the suffering body; everyone relied on these external guides: emperor and slave, man and woman, father and child.[146] For Perkins, a consequence was that

> "All the usual barriers that separated the social orders fell away, subsumed in the universal category of body. In a hierarchical society such as the Roman state, the ruler's body was the cynosure of all eyes, the special focus of attention. But in this narrative, the emperor's body was represented as no more privileged than any other. All bodies are equal in their dysfunction and their need for the expert's help."[147]

In his work *Quod Animi Mores Corporis Temperamenta Sequuntur,* Galen explained that the body was not detached from the soul but rather influenced the very nature of the soul itself. According to Galen, the mixtures of fluids within the body exerted influence over the moral disposition of the soul.[148] Hence, the body came to receive a certain moral quality for medical writers such as Galen.

For thinkers belonging to the Asclepius cult, the body and its suffering received not only a moral quality but also a theological one. To the orator Aelius Aristides, the suffering body

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[144] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 159
[145] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 160. "The structure of the Prognosis itself showed the necessity for external guidance in the management of the body. Everyone it depicted needed a guide for understanding his or her body, free and slave, men and women, philosophers, even an emperor: all are shown to need such guidance.
[146] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 165. "Galen's work suggested that at the same time as inhabitants of the early Roman empire turned toward their bodies and discovered a complex individual interior that could be read and interpreted, they also became aware of its fragile stability that needed external supervision and control to help set it right. The "turn toward the body" initiated a retreat from the ideal of self-mastery and tokened a change in cultural subject, a redirection from a subject as a controlling rational mind or soul to a subject as body, a dissolving body tending toward disequilibrium, that needed interpretation, attention, and external control."
[147] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 160.
[148] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 161-162.

became the locus for divine action.[149] Sleeping in the temple of Asclepius and receiving visions there, Aristides develops an understanding of divine revelation that is not spiritually based or psychologically mediated but is rather rooted in the body.[150] In the *Sacred Tales,* Aristides conceives of the relationship to the divine as parallel to that of a patient to a doctor.[151] For him, man was a patient needing an external expert, in this case, not a human doctor but a deity. In the *Sacred Tales,* Aristides describes his physical ailments at great length. On one occasion, he recounts Athena appearing to him in a dream with her aegis, and she is presented as a doctor who will treat her patient. Aristides says of the encounter, "And it immediately occurred to me to have an enema of Attic honey, and there was a purge of my bile" (ST 48.43).[152] In other instances, the doctor deity Asclepius "prescribes" the treatment of enduring physical suffering, such as running barefoot or bathing in icy cold water.[153] Enduring this hardship was a way of honoring the deity and magnifying the status of his cult. Suffering could thus become part of enacting the divine will, with the purpose of proclaiming the deity's glory. The ability to endure suffering and even explicitly carry out divine commands for suffering were seen as indicative of that god's presence amongst the devotees.[154] Aristides explains how his sufferings could be worn as a badge of honor that testified to the greater glory of his god:

> If someone should take these things into account and consider with how many and what sort of sufferings and with what necessary result for these he bore me to the sea and rivers and wells, and commanded me to contend with the winter, he will say that all is

[149] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 174.
[150] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 175.
[151] Texts and translations in this section come from C.A. Behr, *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales* (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1968); Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 176.
[152] Behr, *Aelius Aristides,* 232; Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 178.
[153] Behr, *Aelius Aristides*, 227-228; Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 180.
[154] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 181. On page 188 Perkins helpfully explains "If, as Foucault has suggested, the body is the site of all control, The Sacred Tales relocates control, not to the self, or the contemporary society, or the political structures, but to the realm of the transcendent. Part of the discursive project of the Tales is a radical relocation of power from the earthly to the divine."

> truly beyond miracles, and he will see more clearly the power and providence of the god, and will rejoice with me for the honor which I had, and would not be more grieved because of my sickness. (ST. 48.59).[155]

The self-mastery of the romances and the Stoics was yielded to the divine by adherents of the Asclepius cult.[156] According to Perkins, the works of Aristides were vastly influential and "part of a far-reaching cultural discourse that constructed new locations for social control and power."[157] We see that both Galen and Aristides called into question the romantic and Stoic ideals of self-mastery and perceived the suffering body as a location for social and political power. The suffering body became an integral part of the moral agent and a medium through which the divine could work.

2.1.4 Early Christian Suffering Discourses

Perkins sees a clear parallel with these medical texts and early Christian martyr accounts.[158] Both in medical texts and Christian martyr texts, the body and its suffering were presented as a means of winning divine approval. The approval of the deity became more important than any pain or hardship.[159] Interestingly, both for the martyrs as well as for Aristides, the endurance of suffering provided the very grounds for the consequent proclamation of the deity's glory.[160] Perkins points towards Ignatius, who also presents the relationship to the divine as that of a doctor to a patient, sees the suffering body as a meeting place between the human and the divine,

[155] Behr, *Aelius Aristides,* 235.
[156] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 181.
[157] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 174.
[158] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 180; 189.
[159] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 183.
[160] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 185.

and sees how enduring hardships can further the cause of the gospel message.[161] Perhaps the most important aspect of Ignatius' thought on suffering for our purposes is Perkins' claim that, for Ignatius, suffering was a key means of discipleship, of "attaining Christ."[162] He states:

> May I benefit from the wild beasts prepared for me, and I pray that they will be found prompt with me, whom I shall even entice to devour me promptly…Indulge me; I know what is to my advantage; now I begin to be a disciple. (*Ad Romanos* 5.2–3).[163]

Several interesting parallels between Ignatius and 1 Peter may be noted here. In both 1 Peter and Ignatius, the idea of suffering is linked to the missiological vocation of the suffering devotees. In addition, for both Ignatius and 1 Peter, the sufferer is not only an individual but is a member of "a community that was united around their suffering bodies."[164] Finally, for both authors, suffering is a key way of participating in the work of Christ.

Furthermore, this notion of suffering as part of the divine purpose is also explicitly linked to social and political transformation in early Christian discourse. This is illustrated by early Christian martyr Acts, such as the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* and *Acts of Peter.* According to Perkins, these had a "subversive agenda".[165] One finds in these texts characters who transcend and subvert the power structures of their society "buttressed by a growing sense of her [Perpetua's] empowerment through suffering."[166] She asserts that "This Christian discourse, like the *Passion of Perpetua*, projects a subversion of the contemporary hierarchy through the power acquired by suffering."[167] These early Christian texts did not reject the body

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[161] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 189.
[162] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 190.
[163] The Apostolic Fathers, Volume I: *I Clement. II Clement. Ignatius. Polycarp. Didache.* Edited and translated by Bart D. Ehrman. Loeb Classical Library 24. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003; Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 190.
[164] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 191.
[165] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 104.
[166] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 105.
[167] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 114.

and its suffering, as did the Stoics and the romances; rather suffering "provided Christians with their community identity."[168] This had profound missiological consequences since it allowed large swaths of the pagan population, particularly those who were also non-elites, to perceive the Christian message as "for them."[169] Perkins asserts that this early Christian discourse on suffering was part of a larger trend that was already set in motion by medical texts that sought to place suffering in the realm of the divine.

This is of vital importance for our understanding of 1 Peter. As we will see, both the idea that suffering is part of the divine will, as well as the idea that this suffering can enact social change and missiological growth, are salient aspects of 1 Peter's suffering discourse. 1 Peter's suffering discourse may thus reflect one of the earlier stages of this later Christian trend. However, in constructing his discourse, the author draws heavily from Jewish sources in constructing this agenda. It is to this tradition that we now turn.

2.2 Jewish perceptions of suffering

The previous section explored influential Greco-Roman suffering discourses. It revealed that various suffering discourses circulated in the early empire, some of which perceived the subject as unscathed by suffering while others maintained that that the self was a suffering subject and that their suffering could even be part of a larger divine purpose. Moreover, this new view on suffering removed the "veil of power" of earlier suffering discourses that had affirmed the life experience of elites. In contrast, early Christian suffering discourses centered the suffering community as a medium through which God would work toward political and societal change.

[168] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 142.
[169] Perkins, *The Suffering Self,* 142.

1 Peter's suffering discourse may have been part of this larger shift towards the subject as belonging to a community of sufferers. While at the time of 1 Peter, the envisioned political change did not occur at the institutional level it would later, the epistle still argues that the community's suffering can enact real and concrete change in their relationship with their peers and even bring about their redemption. In constructing this redemptive suffering theology, 1 Peter draws heavily from the Jewish Scriptures and other Jewish writings. The Jewish Scriptures will be analyzed in the next chapter as part of the exegetical analysis. In this section, we investigate how several Jewish writings, namely the works of 2 Maccabees and the Psalms of Solomon, may help us understand the suffering cultural encyclopedia better. Since 1 Peter bears a close family resemblance to these Jewish texts, it will be possibly to more explicitly make comparisons between the epistle and these texts in this section.

The Jewish texts studied here have been selected because, like 1 Peter, they respond to a similar situation of suffering that arose as a direct consequence of religious oppression. The Petrine community was not the first to face the difficult challenge of balancing conformity to pagan norms and values and loyalty to one's religiously mandated lifestyle. This is, in fact, the key concern of many second-temple Jewish texts. Many of these texts recognize that distinguishing oneself from the broader cultural domain can lead to suffering. However, similar to 1 Peter, these texts do not necessarily find this suffering inherently bad. In some instances, suffering is presented as a key means of enacting the divine purpose. Moreover, similar to King and Thurman, suffering is conceived of as something that has the power to expose evil and, as such, has an "unveiling" quality to it. Understanding how these Jewish texts conceptualize suffering may reveal the concerns that 1 Peter shares with these Jewish sources but can also help elucidate Peter's unique contribution to ancient suffering discourses.

Martin Vahrenhorst has convincingly argued that one of the key reasons for the suffering of the Petrine community may have been that they "alienated" themselves from their pagan

environment by their refusal to participate in the prevalent pagan customs.[170] In 1 Pet 1:18, the author states, "you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors" (ἐλυτρώθητε ἐκ τῆς ματαίας ὑμῶν ἀναστροφῆς πατροπαραδότου). Again, in 4:4, the author remarks on the sharp break that the community enacted with their environment and that their pagan peers are surprised when the Christians "no longer run with them into the same flood of dissipation, and so they revile you" (μὴ συντρεχόντων ὑμῶν εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν τῆς ἀσωτίας ἀνάχυσιν βλασφημοῦντες).

The idea in 1 Peter that deviating from the broader culture could lead to suffering is also found in many other ancient Jewish texts. Philo of Alexandria believed that proselytes who converted to Judaism broke loose from their former way of life. In his work *The Special Laws,* he states that the proselytes "reject the foolishness of their fathers and forefathers" (κατεγνωκόσι τοῦ πατρῴου καὶ προγονικοῦ τύφου, *SpecLeg* 1.53)."[171] That their conversion had resulted in an entirely new lifestyle is showcased by the fact that they had "abandoned their blood, their fatherland, their customs, their shrines, the statues of their gods and their worship..." (γενεὰν μὲν τὴν ἀφ᾽ αἵματος καὶ πατρίδα καὶ ἔθη καὶ ἱερὰ καὶ ἀφιδρύματα θεῶν γέρα τε καὶ τιμὰς ἀπολελοιπότας, *Virt* 102).[172] This sharp rift that occurs upon conversion is also described in *Joseph and Asenath,* where the state of being a convert is compared to being an orphan. Asenath prays: "I have no other hope but in Thee, Lord, for Thou are the father of orphans, the

[170] Vahrenhorst, *Leiden als Gnade,* 66. Some pages later, Vahrenhorst aptly summarizes this dynamic "Nur soviel ist deutlich: Offenbar haben sich die adressaten, bevor sie Christen wurden, im Blick auf Essen, Trinken, die Gestaltung der Sexualität und des Gottesdienstes nicht andersverhalten, als ihre Zeitgenossen auch. Nun aber haben sie an diesen gesellschaftlichen Vollzügen keinen Anteil mehr und unterziehen sie einer radikalen Umwertung, die sich in der Polemik von 1 Petr 4,3 spiegelt. Dadurch haben sie sich selbst aus der Mitte der Gesellschaft zurückgezogen und an ihren Rand gestellt. Ihr neues Verhalten „befremdet "(ξενίζω) die Mehrheit und macht die Christen zu Fremden in dem Umfeld, zu dem sie einmal gehört haben." Vahrenhorst, *Leiden als Gnade,* 68.

[171] Vahrenhorst, *Leiden als Gnade,* 69. Vahrenhorst's excellent article has first notified me of these interesting parallels with Philo.

[172] Vahrenhorst, *Leiden als Gnade,* 70.

protector of the persecuted, and helper of the distressed … Look upon my orphan state lord, for I have fled to Thee."[173]

This sharp rift with Greco-Roman customs, norms, and values as a result of religious deviation led to the oppression of the Jews and resulted in their suffering. Like 1 Peter, several Jewish texts attempt to make sense of this suffering by casting it in a more positive light as part of the divine purpose and a form of political resistance. Perhaps the most relevant parallel may be found in 2 Maccabees.[174]

2.2.1 The Suffering Discourse of 2 Maccabees.

Resisting this push for assimilation is a central theme of 2 Maccabees. The author narrates in polemical fashion how Jason, the brother of the high priest Onias, had supplanted his brother by petitioning the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanus through bribery (2 Macc 4:7-8). Consequently, Jason proceeded to "Hellenize" Jerusalem into a Greek *polis*, establishing a gymnasium and enforcing Hellenistic wardrobe. In the author's view, this resulted in a rising pressure on the Jewish way of life. The priests "were no longer interested in the services of the altar, but despising the sanctuary, and neglecting the sacrifices, they hurried to take part in the unlawful displays held in the palaestra" (2 Macc 2:14-15).[175] The duress on the Jewish way of life was further exacerbated after Antiochus desecrated the temple in Jerusalem and imposed bans on Jewish customs. In 2 Macc 6:1-2, we read:

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[173] *Joseph and Asenath* 12.11, 13.1

[174] Nauck even goes so far as to suggest that 1 Peter incorporates a "suffering tradition" of which the earliest origin may be found in the Maccabean period. In my view, arguments concerning "traditions" often run the risk of circular reasoning since first such a tradition is developed and subsequently all texts are read in light of this hypothetical tradition. Regardless of the historical veracity of such a tradition, Nauck's comments underscore the relevance of this text for understanding the suffering discourse in 1 Peter. Nauck, "Freude Im Leiden, 72-74. Cf. De Villiers, "Joy and Suffering," 69.

[175] ὥστε μηκέτι περὶ τὰς τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου λειτουργίας προθύμους εἶναι τοὺς ἱερεῖς, ἀλλὰ τοῦ μὲν νεὼ καταφρονοῦντες καὶ τῶν θυσιῶν ἀμελοῦντες ἔσπευδον μετέχειν τῆς ἐν παλαίστρῃ παρανόμου χορηγίας, μετὰ τὴν τοῦ δίσκου πρόσκλησιν· καὶ τὰς μὲν πατρῴας τιμὰς ἐν οὐδενὶ τεθειμένοι.

> Not long after this, the king sent an Athenian senator to compel the Jews to forsake the laws of their ancestors and no longer to live by the laws of God; also to pollute the temple in Jerusalem and to call it the temple of Olympian Zeus, and to call the one in Gerizim the temple of Zeus-the-Friend-of-Strangers, as did the people who lived in that place (2 Macc 6:1-2, NRSV). [176]

The religious repression went so far, according to the author, that "a man could neither keep the sabbath, nor celebrate the feasts of his fathers, nor so much as confess to be a Jew." (ἦν δ' οὔτε σαββατίζειν, οὔτε πατρῴους ἑορτὰς διαφυλάττειν, οὔτε ἁπλῶς Ἰουδαῖον ὁμολογεῖν εἶναι, 2 Macc 6:5). Any attempts to resist this regime were met with severe punishment or even execution (2 Macc 6:9).

Interestingly, after recounting the oppression of the Jews, the author of 2 Maccabees provides an explanation for the suffering of his people. Switching to the first person, he seems to make a similar point as the medical texts, namely that suffering could be a part of the divine purpose. In 2 Macc 6:12-17, the author portrays the hardships that the Jews faced as an act of God's mercy and "great kindness." Whereas with the gentiles, God withholds his punishments "until they have filled up their sins to the full" (μέχρι τοῦ καταντήσαντας αὐτοὺς πρὸς ἐκπλήρωσιν ἁμαρτιῶν κολάσῃ, 6:14), he treats his own people differently. For the Jews, God will not wait to let their "sins reach their height" (ἵνα μὴ πρὸς τέλος ἀφικομένων ἡμῶν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὕστερον ἡμᾶς ἐκδικᾷ, 6:15). Although 1 Peter does not view suffering as a divine punishment, this claim seems strikingly similar to the idea in 1 Peter that the suffering that the community faces is paradoxically an instance of God's mercy (1 Pet 4:12-17).

[176] Μετ' οὐ πολὺν δὲ χρόνον ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ βασιλεὺς γέροντα Ἀθηναῖον, ἀναγκάζειν τοὺς Ἰουδαίους μεταβαίνειν ἀπὸ τῶν πατρίων νόμων, καὶ τοῖς τοῦ θεοῦ νόμοις μὴ πολιτεύεσθαι· μολῦναι δὲ καὶ τὸν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις νεὼ καὶ προσονομάσαι Διὸς Ὀλυμπίου, καὶ τὸν ἐν Γαριζεί[ν], καθὼς ἐτύγχανον οἱ τὸν τόπον οἰκοῦντες, Διὸς ξενίου

Furthermore, in both 1 Peter and 2 Maccabees, the suffering of the people in the face of religious oppression becomes a political strategy. An example of the very public implications of enduring suffering may be found in the story of Eleazer. When compelled to eat pork meat, a Jew named Eleazer chooses to suffer voluntarily rather than conforming to the pagan way of life. He "advanced of his own accord to the instrument of torment" (2 Macc 6:20). Eleazar's voluntary endurance of suffering is presented as a way in which he demonstrates his loyalty to God that could serve as an "inspiring example" (ὑπόδιγμα γενναῖον, 6:28) to the youth. In 1 Pet 2:21, Christ's voluntary submission to torture and death is likewise presented as an "example" (ὑπογραμμόν) that should inspire similar conduct within the community. As Eleazer undergoes his torture, he cries out to God that his suffering is part of a larger divine purpose: "I endure cruel pains in my body from scourging and suffer this gladly in my soul, because I fear Him [God]" (6:30).[177] For Eleazar, his suffering is clearly not something passive or quietist but rather a powerful testimony that witnesses to his commitment to God and that can serve as an inspiring example to his peers.

Another example is recounted by 2 Maccabees immediately after this episode. A mother and her seven sons are arrested and subjected to horrible torture. Once again, this torture aims to compel the sons to conform to Greco-Roman customs: they are required to eat pork meat. Upon their refusal, the brothers are tortured and executed in the most gruesome ways. In each instance, however, just as with Eleazar, the sons use their suffering to proclaim their faith in God. They insist that their suffering is part of God's plan and should even be understood as an instance of his mercy (cf. 2 Macc 7:1-42). Moreover, several brothers name their trust in the resurrection as a key reason for their ability to endure their suffering (2 Macc 7:9,11,14). The

[177] ἀναστενάξας εἶπεν Τῷ κυρίῳ τῷ τὴν ἁγίαν γνῶσιν ἔχοντι φανερόν ἐστιν ὅτι δυνάμενος ἀπολυθῆναι τοῦ θανάτου, σκληρὰς ὑποφέρω κατὰ σῶμα ἀλγηδόνας μαστιγούμενος, κατὰ ψυχὴν δὲ ἡδέως διὰ τὸν αὐτοῦ φόβον ταῦτα πάσχω

idea that suffering is part of God's plan and can be endured by hoping for the resurrection is also prevalent in 1 Peter (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-7).

Finally, another informative similarity between the two texts is found in the "unveiling quality" of both instances of suffering. Some of the brothers remark that their suffering will ultimately lead the king to see the evil of his ways. Notably, the youngest son tells the king that his willful suffering will "make thee acknowledge, in torment and plagues, that he alone is God" (καὶ σὲ μετὰ ἐτασμῶν καὶ μαστίγων ἐξομολογήσασθαι διότι μόνος αὐτὸς θεός ἐστιν, 2 Macc 7:37). In 1 Pet. 4:1-4 we also encounter the idea that adhering to a righteous way of living in accordance with God's will and enduring the consequent suffering will lead the oppressor to recognize the evil of their ways and God's judgment upon them. Significantly, the mother of the twelve sons is apparently able to cope with this suffering due to her "hope" in God. The "hope" in God is also presented as the main way in which the audience of 1 Peter is told to endure their hardships (3:15).

To conclude, we may note four interesting parallels between these suffering episodes in 2 Maccabees and 1 Peter.[178] Firstly, suffering is perceived not as a source of shame to be passively endured but rather as a badge of honor that can testify to one's loyalty and faith in God.

[178] In addition to the structural similarities there are also several interesting similarities in the historical contexts of both works. In 2 Maccabees, one reason for the suffering of the Jews is that they choose to resist the commandments by rulers to forsake their religious way of life, for example, by consuming pork meat. A similar dynamic is present around the time of 1 Peter. This is demonstrated by a letter written by the Roman governor, Pliny the Younger, to the emperor Trajan. This text is usually dated to the early half of the second century and is thus probably later than 1 Peter which is often dated between 60-90 CE. Nevertheless, many Petrine scholars find the letter to be informative for understanding 1 Peter's context. This is due to the fact that the Christian movement had become large enough to be noticed by the authorities, paired with Pliny's remark that some of the Christians he questions claimed to have fallen away from the faith "20 years ago." This suggests that the context of the letter may also be indicative of much earlier persecutions during a period that is closer to 1 Peter. Pliny is unsure how to deal with the many accusations that are leveled against Christians in his province and writes Trajan asking for advice. He currently upholds the practice of pressuring the Christians to abandon their faith by conforming to Greco-Roman customs. Pliny assures Trajan that he has been pardoning anyone who "repeated after me a formula of invocation to the gods and had made offerings of wine and incense to your statue … and furthermore reviled the name of Christ." Both in 2 Maccabees as well as close to the time of 1 Peter, there was thus significant pressure on the religious community to assimilate to their Greco-Roman environment. Cf. Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 10.96-97; Cf. Pliny the Younger. *Letters*, Volume I: Books 1-7. Translated by Betty Radice. Loeb Classical Library 55. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Secondly, in both texts, suffering is a manner in which one can respond to religious oppression, which can affect social and political change. This change can happen in two ways: by serving as a witness and example to one's peers and by "unveiling" the evil ways of the oppressor. Thirdly, the idea that suffering can be "righteous" if it is borne out of loyalty to God is a key element of the suffering theology of both 1 Peter and 2 Maccabees. Finally, faith in God is presented as a source of "hope" that will allow those who suffer to endure their hardship. In 2 Maccabees, suffering seems to resemble the active, agency-bestowing, and politically engaged form of suffering that we encountered in the thinking of King and Thurman. One crucial missing link that 2 Maccabees' theology of suffering does not incorporate, though, is the idea that suffering is redemptive and will somehow cause their oppressors to turn to God. Whereas in 2 Maccabees, those who undergo suffering sometimes claim that their endurance may induce repentance, 1 Peter is more explicitly optimistic in stating that this will have concrete effects in the lives of the perpetrators. As we will see in the next chapter, this is part of 1 Peter's unique contribution to the Jewish suffering discourse.

2.2.2 The Suffering Discourse of Psalms of Solomon

A second text whose suffering discourse displays informative similarities with 1 Peter is found in the *Psalms of Solomon.* The pseudepigraphic work, usually dated to the first or second century B.C.E., consists of a collection of 18 psalms. The Psalms were likely originally written in Hebrew but only Greek and Syriac translations have survived.[179] In the 13th Psalm, we

[179] Cf. Kenneth Atkinson, "Psalms of Solomon," in *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture: Translation*, ed. Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2013), 1903.

encounter both the distinction between earned and unearned suffering and the notion that suffering can be redemptive.[180]

In Psalms Solomon 13:7, we read "For not the same is the discipline of the righteous in ignorance and the destruction of the sinners." (ὅτι οὐχ ὁμοία ἡ παιδεία τῶν δικαίων ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ καὶ ἡ καταστροφὴ τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν). For the authors of the Psalm, there is a clear difference between the affliction of the righteous and that of the sinner. For the former, it is a matter of "discipline" or "learning" (παιδεία), whereas for the latter, it will lead to his "destruction" (καταστροφὴ). The same distinction between the suffering of the righteous versus suffering as a transgressor is mentioned several times in 1 Peter (1 Pet 2:19; 3:13, 17; 4:15-16).

Another way in which 1 Peter's discourse resembles the Psalms of Solomon is through the shared notion that that suffering can be redemptive. As we have seen, suffering is not so much a punishment for the righteous as it is a matter of formation and education. What is more, in v.9, the author asserts that this disciplining is a signal of the sufferer's right standing with God; it is "the discipline as that of a firstborn son" (καὶ ἡ παιδεία αὐτοῦ ὡς πρωτοτόκου). That this suffering is redemptive becomes even more apparent in the next verse. Here, the author states that, through their suffering, the Lord "will wipe away their transgressions with discipline" (καὶ τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν ἐξαλείψει ἐν παιδείᾳ).[181] This is similar to the role that suffering plays in 1 Peter, as we will see in the next chapter. There are also notable differences. In the Psalm of Solomon, the redemptive quality of suffering is focused predominantly on the believers themselves. In contrast, the redemptive quality of suffering in 1 Peter is more missiological and outward-focused in nature.

[180] Cf. Ross J. Wagner, "The Paideia of the Lord: Moral formation in Old Greek Isaiah," in *Scriptural Interpretation at the Interface between Education and Religion,* ed. Florian Wilk (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 48.
[181] Wagner, "The Paideia of the Lord: Moral formation in Old Greek Isaiah," 48.

This exploration of Greco-Roman and Jewish suffering discourses is highly relevant to our investigation into the role of suffering in 1 Peter. The analysis may help us understand how, at the time of the epistle, Christian authors such as the one of 1 Peter were informed by but also rejected certain aspects of suffering discourses. Looking back to the categories of redemptive suffering outlined in Chapter 1, we have seen in this historical exploration that some notions of redemptive suffering were being developed prior to 1 Peter. The Stoics argued that suffering was not inherently tied to identity or to one's standing with the Gods; everyone could suffer, emperor and slave alike. Moreover, the Stoic view on suffering constituted a partial emancipation due to their insistence that every individual had the choice on how to respond to their hardships. The medical texts, as well as the writings of the Asclepios cult, further developed this idea and placed it within the realm of the divine. One needed an external guide to understand the body and its suffering, and this external guide could be a deity. Finally, the Jewish texts that we studied went a step further and asserted that suffering could somehow have a powerful "unveiling" quality that forced the oppressors to recognize the evil of their ways.

While it is not my aim to prove any direct literary or philosophical dependence of 1 Peter on these suffering discourses, this exploration helps to show that Peter's vision of suffering as potentially redemptive and politically subversive was not conjured out of thin air.[182] Moreover, it may help us understand why Peter goes to such great lengths to argue that suffering has some greater meaning in the divine plan. In light of our investigation of the Stoic and Romantic ideas concerning suffering, this was likely not something that could be presupposed for an audience that consisted of a mix of Jewish and pagan groups; it would require some convincing. Peter's suffering discourse may thus be seen as a part of the broader development in antiquity and a continuation of the early Jewish insistence that righteous suffering could be a strategy of

[182] In the next chapter we will study the central role of the Jewish Scriptures in the suffering discourse of 1 Peter. These Scriptures were very important for the emergence of a distinctly Jewish suffering theodicy. Both 1 Peter as well as the texts discussed in this section draw extensively from the Jewish Scriptures for their own argument.

political resistance. This phenomenon serves as an early precursor of the trend that Perkins will recognize in subsequent early Christian suffering discourse.

3. Redemptive Suffering in 1 Peter

The author of 1 Peter names his reason for writing the epistle in the very first verses of the letter: to encourage the community to remain hopeful in the redeeming work of Christ even as they are suffering "for a little while" (1:7). The author insists that this suffering will not have the last word but will ultimately "result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1:7). From the first verses of the epistle the author is attempting to recast the experience of suffering as something that has the potential to be part of the divine purpose for their lives.[183]

Now that we have conceptualized suffering as redemptive in the first chapter and demonstrated that similar views of suffering were prevalent in 1 Peter's Greco-Roman and Jewish *Umwelt,* we are ready to embark on an exegetical exploration of the role that suffering plays in 1 Peter's agenda. The first section will investigate more clearly what the historical background of the suffering in the epistle is. The following sections provide an exegetical analysis of three key suffering texts in 1 Peter. Space does not permit me to discuss every suffering text of the epistle; whole books could be written on any of these passages, let alone the epistle as a whole.

Therefore, I will adopt a more thematic approach. Using the three categories of suffering drawn from King and Thurman as a hermeneutical lens, I will provide a study of three focal texts that most adequately portray how these categories may help us understand suffering in the epistle. This analysis will reveal how these categories of suffering could be used to study other "suffering texts" in 1 Peter and within the New Testament more broadly. The three focal texts under discussion are broadly recognized as key pericopes within the epistle's suffering

[183] Cf. Travis B. Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter: Differentiating and Contextualizing Early Christian Suffering* (Boston: Brill, 2012), 327.

discourse. Schüssler Fiorenza goes so far as to call them "paradigmatic" in their importance and notes how there is an especially strong link between the suffering of the community and that of Christ in each of these three texts.[184]

The notion that suffering is redemptive will be used to analyze 1 Pet 2:19-27, which discusses the redemptive suffering of Christ as a model for the community's suffering. The idea that suffering has an "unveiling" quality that exposes evil will be used to better grasp 1 Pet 3:8-18. Finally, the prefigurative dimension will elucidate the eschatological tension inherent to suffering as well as its politically transformative potential that is found in 1 Pet 4:12-19.

3.1 *The Nature of Suffering in 1 Peter*

It is clear that the people addressed by the epistle are victims of a hostile environment. As we saw in the previous chapter, the community's suffering was likely the result of their radical departure from prevailing Greco-Roman customs, norms, and values. Vahrenhorst has referred to this as a process of gradually increasing "alienation" that eventually resulted in direct conflict with the audience's pagan peers.[185] According to Vahrenhorst, it is crucial to distinguish between the actual historical suffering that may or may not have been experienced by the audience and the theological interpretation of that suffering found in 1 Peter.[186] An appropriate amount of scholarly caution is thus warranted when trying to deduce the actual situation of the audience from the epistle itself.

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[184]Schüssler Fiorenza, "The First Epistle of Peter," 392.

[185] Vahrenhorst, "Leiden als Gnade," 69.

[186] Vahrenhorst, "Leiden als Gnade," 64. Vahrenhorst explains "Allein das häufige Vorkommen des Wortes „Leiden" darf nun nicht als Indiz dafür gewertet werden, dass der Brief in eine Situation hineinspricht, in der sich die „Leidenssituation […] am Ende des 1. Jahrhunderts unter Domitian zugespitzt "habe. Damit wird die Unterscheidung von Situation und Deutung verwischt, genauer gesagt: Die Deutung wird mit der Situation gleichgesetzt. Stattdessen ist zu fragen, welche Erfahrungen, die als Leid gedeutet werden, denn konkret angesprochen werden.

With that caveat in place, we may ask what type of suffering could historically have been at stake for the letter's audience. Like the majority of modern scholars, I am not convinced by John Elliott's (in)famous claim that the suffering of the audience *preceded* their conversion.[187] Rather, the suffering is clearly the result of the Christian's far-reaching break with their former pagan way of life.[188] Concerning the precise form of their suffering, Petrine scholars tend to be divided between two positions that can be understood as different points along the same spectrum. On the one hand, there are those scholars who believe that the suffering of the community was possibly physical and violent in nature. An example of this group is David Horrell, who claims that it is implausible that the suffering of the Christians was limited to verbal slander.[189] The severity of the situation of the community is underscored by the fact that their hardships are portrayed as a "fiery trial" (πυρώσει, 4:12). Furthermore, the same term that is used to describe the suffering of the community is also used to refer to Christ's passion (2:21, 23; 3:18; 4:1). In the case of Christ's suffering, the term πάσχω is used to explicitly denote the physical nature of his suffering and subsequent death. Therefore, it seems likely that if this same term is applied to the suffering of the community, concrete physical violence is at least within the realm of possibility.[190]

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[187] In his seminal work *A Home for the Homeless,* Elliott famously understood the terms παρεπιδήμοις, διασπορᾶς and πάροικος as technical legal terms that reflected the varying groups of people within the community. Rather than their malignment being the result of their conversion, Elliott claimed that the suffering was a direct result of their belonging to these social categories. For a notable critique of this position that understands these terms as metaphors cf. Reinhard Feldmeier, *Die Christen als Fremde,* 203-10. Also Balch, *Let Wives be Submissive,* 132-136. In addition, Frederick W. Danker strongly disagrees with Elliott's claim that the social groups of the epistle were predominantly rural, cf. Frederick Danker, "First Peter in Sociological Perspective," *Int* 37 (1983):84-88.

[188] Cf. Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter,* 240-275.

[189] Horrell, *Becoming Christian,* 188.

[190] Horrell, *Becoming Christian,* 188. Horrell explains "[the references to suffering] may certainly be taken to indicate that the suffering inflicted by outsiders could be anything 'up to and including execution'. The key point about Jesus' suffering, after all, was that he was killed, not that he suffered public ridicule. That the author describes the response to suffering in terms of 'shame' (4:16) does not mean that it cannot refer to something as momentous as potentially suffering to death."

On the other hand, there is a group of scholars who claim that the suffering mentioned in the epistle is predominantly of a verbal nature.[191] The main arguments for this view are the references in the epistle that seem to describe the social nature of the audience's predicament. A representative of this group is Paul Holloway. He uses insights from social psychology to analyze the audience's situation, arguing that the suffering consisted of "social prejudice and negative stereotyping."[192] This anti-Christian prejudice is evident at several points in the epistle: 2:12, 15; 3:9, 16; 4:4, 14-16.[193] In addition, there are some more specific terms such as the use of shame and honor language as well as the mentioning of the Christians being "reviled for the name of Christ" (εἰ ὀνειδίζεσθε ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ, μακάριοι, 4:14) that seem to suggest that the suffering was predominantly verbal in nature.

Both camps of scholars point out relevant aspects of suffering in the epistle. There is no need to prioritize one to the exclusion of the other.[194] In reality, the epistle does not present the suffering in an undifferentiated manner but instead includes references to verbal, physical, and legal mistreatment.[195] I align with Travis B. Williams' more comprehensive understanding outlined in his excellent in-depth study of the topic, *Persecution in 1 Peter.*[196] The view on suffering that emerges from his overview is that Christians find themselves in a hostile environment in which they experience a whole range of hardships that are verbal and social in nature but, in some instances, may have escalated to physical confrontations or at least the threat thereof. Moreover, the conflict may have resulted in legal and criminal accusations and in the

[191] De Villiers, "Joy and Suffering in 1 Peter," 65; Vahrenhorst, "Leiden als Gnade," 69; Paul A. Holloway, "1 Peter and Prejudice: Insights from Modern Social Psychology," *Sewanee Theological Review* 54, no. 3 (2011): 201.
[192] Holloway, "1 Peter and Prejudice," 201.
[193] Paul Holloway, "1 Peter and Prejudice," 201. According to Holloway the main prejudices against Christians were that they were 1) disruptors of the public social order and 2) anti-social behavior or misanthropy. For an excellent discussion of the causes of the suffering in the epistle, cf. also Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter,* 239-295.
[194] Cf. Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power*, 99.
[195] Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter,* 335.
[196] Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter,* 326-337.

marginalization of the Christian faith on an institutional level, rendering it "effectively illegal," although this was not actively enforced.[197]

Furthermore, it is crucial for the author that the specific sort of suffering that is potentially redemptive is not anything that results from bad behavior but rather any suffering incurred "as Christians" (ὡς χριστιανός, 4:16) and stemming from Christian behavior (2:19-20; 3:13-14; 17).

3.2 *Suffering is Redemptive: 1 Pet. 2:18-25*

Now that we have briefly explored the historical background of the suffering discourse in 1 Peter let us investigate the role that suffering plays in the epistle's theological agenda. The first dimension of suffering outlined in Chapter 1 was that suffering is redemptive in nature. This section will reveal how viewing suffering as redemptive will better help us understand the nature of suffering in 1 Peter's slave-paraenesis.

While suffering plays a key part in the entire epistle, it is not until the beginning of the *Haustafel* with its slave paraenesis that the author systematically and theologically develops the theme.[198] Moreover, while already in 1:6-8 Christ and suffering are linked, it is here that

[197] Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter,* 299-326. With this term Williams means that while the religion may not have been officially banned and persecution enforced on a national scale, the legal and governmental repression was so severe that it made it particularly challenging to adhere to Christianity, rendering it "effectively illegal." He maintains on page 333 that "According to 1 Pet 4.16, Christianity was considered to be a punishable offense at the time of the letter's composition. So while believers were not actively sought out by the local or provincial authorities, if official accusations were brought against Christians by members of the local populace, they could be convicted and punished simply for the Name alone (nomen ipsum)."

[198] I am well aware that the terms "slave, master, owner" etc. are historically problematic. They tend to reduce people to their status within an unjust system as if this were the only relevant aspect of their identity. A more appropriate term would perhaps be "enslaved people." Other studies try to use more neutral terms such as "servant". However, in my view this latter option glosses over the fact that slavery was often times a very harsh and crual existence. I have chosen to use the terms "slave" and "master/owner" here, partially because these are the most accurate translations of the Greek terms found in the text and also because these terms are adopted most frequently in the relevant literature within the field.

suffering is first more comprehensively integrated into the Christology of the epistle. Three out of the four times that "suffering" and "Christ" occur in the same passage are all found in this pericope (the final occurrence being in 3:18). This density in the combination of Christological and suffering language suggests that the framework on suffering outlined here will be influential in shaping the audience's understanding of their identity as Christians. Indeed, while it is the slaves specifically who are addressed here, the scope of the passage applies to the Christian community as a whole.[199]

In the preceding verses, the need for submission to "every human institution" (2:13) was put forward alongside the injunction to "honor the emperor" (2:17). In stating that the audience is to honor the emperor only after the injunction to "honor everyone," the author is relativizing the divine status that the imperial cult had attained in the early empire, thus providing a shocking relativizing the importance of the imperial power. The redemptive nature of suffering is also communicated for the first time in these verses when Peter states, "Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge" (2:12).[200]

Our pericope picks up on this idea that the community's suffering is redemptive but provides it with a Christological motivation. The passage explicitly addresses the "slaves" (Οἱ οἰκέται, v.18) in the community.[201] It aims to recast their suffering in a more positive light as a force of

[199] Cf. Chris L. De Wet, "The Discourse of the Suffering Slave in 1 Peter," *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 95 (2013), 16; Achtemeier, *1 Peter,* 192; Green, *1 Peter,* 78. Volker Gäckle, "Jesus, the Slaves, and the Servant(s) in 1 Peter 2:18–25," in *Isaiah's Servants in Early Judaism and Christianity: The Isaian Servant and the Exegetical Formation of Community Identity*, ed. Michael A. Lyons and Jacob Stromberg, WUNT 2/554 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 275. Concerning the broader relevance of the pericope for the epistle he says "The slaves, because of their extreme conditions, have a representative and paradigmatic status for the entire community."

[200] 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.

[201] However, it is important to note that just a few verses earlier in 2:16, the author has referred to the whole community as "θεοῦ δοῦλοι" The change in terminology here may indicate that he is now referencing a specific subset of the audience. Nevertheless, it is significant that the author conceptualizes the entire community as a group of "slaves of God."

redemption of their oppressors and as an integral part of their Christian calling.[202] The slaves are to accept any suffering that may occur at the hands of their masters, regardless of whether these masters are "kind" and "gentle" or "harsh" (σκολιός, v.18). The latter term literally means "crooked" or "bent" and is often used in geographic contexts to refer to rivers or paths. Its metaphorical use is also attested in Greco-Roman literature. In those instances, it describes someone's deplorable moral quality as a person who is "unjust, dishonest or perverse." It is this metaphorical usage that is at play here.[203]

The author then goes on to make a claim that resembles what we also encountered in Jewish and Greco-Roman suffering discourses, namely that the endurance of this suffering is part of the divine purpose for their lives. The author exhorts the enslaved people to bear their suffering with "a consciousness of God" (διὰ συνείδησιν θεοῦ, v.19) and describes this as lying at the heart of their Christian calling (εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ἐκλήθητε, v.21).

The suffering referred to here likely arose due to the slave's refusal to participate in the religious practices of their owners.[204] The very fact that the author of 1 Peter allows for the slaves to diverge from their owner's religion and does not name conformity to the household religious practice as an option underscores that perhaps this pericope is not as submissive as is often supposed by scholars.[205] Moreover, I will suggest in what follows that the insistence to

[202] While the term "οἰκέται" can technically be a generic term, referring to any category of slaves, the context here seems to suggest predominantly those servants working within a domestic context. This may point towards a more urban setting of the epistle, although this is by no means unanimously accepted by scholars. According to Horrell, the "Οἱ οἰκέται" should be understood as a vocative here rather than as a noun, thus indicating that the slaves are directly addressed by the author. Cf. Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 788.
[203] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 789. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon,* 9th ed. with revised supplement, (Oxford: Clarendon,1996), 1313. Horrell points out that in the LXX of Proverbs the term is used to refer describe individuals whose speech is "crooked" (e.g., Prov 2:15; 4:24; 8:8; 21:8; 22:5). Cf. Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 789.
[204] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 791.
[205] By no means do I wish to negate the many problematic aspect of the text's reception history, particularly where it has been used to perpetuate the institution of slavery. However, perhaps it is possible that this these problematic aspects arise more from the misuse of later interpreters than from the text itself. While Peter does not explicitly attack slavery here, the text does offer a veiled critique of slavery as such by pointing out that masters can be unjust and that suffering of slaves is unearned. What is more, by not demanding that slaves conform to their master's religion, something that was very much the norm at the time, Peter builds in the possibility for some form of

remain steadfast to the faith is actually a crucial dimension of the text. It is Peter's implicit contention in this passage that by enduring their suffering, the slaves are following in Christ's footsteps and, in doing so, are working towards the redemption of their oppressors. In other words, part of the slaves' missionary calling is to maintain a steadfast adherence to their faith in the face of oppression so that they may be able to win over their owners for the Gospel.

Peter continues his argument by making the startling claim that the slaves' suffering at the hands of unjust masters can somehow be perceived as "grace" (τοῦτο γὰρ χάρις, v.19). More concretely, it is not just any kind of suffering but specifically the kind of pain that is endured while suffering unjustly (ὑποφέρει τις λύπας πάσχων ἀδίκως, v.19) that is somehow perceived as "grace." The author further underscores that only unearned suffering is to be seen in a more positive light by structuring his discussion of the topic chiastically in an A-B-A' structure.[206] In v.19, he posits that unearned suffering is to be understood positively as "grace." In v.20a, he remarks that it is no "credit" (κλέος) if they suffer because of wrongdoing, and then in v.20b, he again asserts that if they suffer for what is good, this is counted by God as "grace." Schematically, the argument develops as follows:

A - v.19: τοῦτο γὰρ χάρις, εἰ διὰ συνείδησιν θεοῦ ὑποφέρει τις λύπας πάσχων ἀδίκως

B - v.20a: ποῖον γὰρ κλέος, εἰ ἁμαρτάνοντες καὶ κολαφιζόμενοι ὑπομενεῖτε

A' – v.20b: ἀλλ' εἰ ἀγαθοποιοῦντες καὶ πάσχοντες ὑπομενεῖτε, τοῦτο χάρις παρὰ θεῷ.

Scholars have been puzzled by how exactly one must understand the idea that enduring unearned suffering is "grace." Some have posited that it refers to the provision of divine

resistance. Horrell formulates this as follows "given its uncompromising commitment to the religious independence of slaves, these instructions present themselves more as an example of feigned deference, which cautiously undercuts the powerbase of the standard hierarchy of household management. In other words, where there is accommodation in 1 Peter, there is also resistance." Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 789. Cf. Joel B. Green,*1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2007), 79.

[206] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2*, 796. Green, *1 Peter,* 80.

unmerited grace in times of difficulty, whereas others have argued that suffering may be seen as a signal of God's presence in the life of the person undergoing it.[207] However, there is a problem with such understandings of the text; in v.19 χάρις is not used to describe God's action but that of the human community. By stating that "this" (τοῦτο), i.e., the community's endurance of unjust suffering, is "grace," the emphasis is on the human activity rather than on the divine. Another textual clue that points towards the importance of human action may be found in the usage of "ὑπομενεῖτε" to describe their endurance of unearned suffering in v.20. This term denotes an active holding on firm to one's beliefs.[208]

This leads to the question of how we must understand Peter's claim that this active endurance of suffering can somehow be perceived as grace. Travis B. Williams provides an insightful solution to this question by studying patron-client relationships in antiquity.[209] He makes the case that often χάρις was used to describe the grateful response of a client to the beneficent bestowal of gifts and favors by their patron.[210] Hence, for the author of 1 Peter, χάρις refers here to the active endurance of suffering from the side of the audience as an act of reciprocity in response to the benevolence of their patron: God. What is more, their patient endurance of suffering is not only χάρις towards God, but it will also affect their relationship with their owners. By enduring suffering even when it is unearned, they will earn "credit" (κλέος) in the eyes of their masters.[211] According to Williams, this term refers to "the good reputation that one achieves through commendable behavior."[212] He argues that "grace"

[207] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 797.
[208] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 806.
[209] Travis B. Williams, "Reciprocity and Suffering in 1 Peter 2, 19–20: Reading χάρις in Its Ancient Social Context," *Bib* 97 (2016), 421–39.
[210] Williams concludes "Evaluated from the perspective of the ancient system of reciprocity, 1 Peter portrays unjust suffering as a binding responsibility which has been placed on the readers in view of the bountiful munificence which God (their divine benefactor) has lavished upon them." Williams, "Reciprocity and Suffering," 438. For other proponents of this view cf. also Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 800;
[211] Gäckle, "Jesus, the Slaves and the Servant(s)," 277.
[212] Williams, "Reciprocity and Suffering," 425.

describes how God will view their endurance, and "credit" denotes their reputation in the eyes of their human masters.[213] The endurance of unearned suffering is thus not only an act of reciprocity to the divine gifts but also something that will be counted to them as credit by their masters.

The author then goes on to describe what exactly God has done for the slaves that warrants such an act of reciprocity. The ground for their grateful acts of reciprocal grace is provided with a firm Christological foundation. Peter asserts, "To this you have been called, for Christ also suffered for you" (εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ἐκλήθητε, ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἔπαθεν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, v.21). The "because" (ὅτι) for their endurance of suffering is thus rooted in the fact that Christ had also suffered for them. Notably, Christ's work for the community is described not so much in terms of his death but in terms of his suffering.[214] Why this is done will become clear momentarily. For now, we should note that the suffering of Christ becomes intimately tied to the audience's identity as Christians. To be a "χριστιανός" (cf. v.4:16) is to be someone who does not shy away from unearned suffering, for the same kind of suffering lies at the very heart of Christ's redeeming work.[215] Peter then goes on to explain that the suffering of Christ was inherently outward-oriented; it was fundamentally concerned with the "other." Christ did not suffer for God or himself, Peter says, but "for you" (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, v.21). What's more, Christ had done this suffering while they were still walking in the wicked ways of their forefathers (1.18). This same

[213] Williams, "Reciprocity and Suffering," 425.
[214] Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power*, 111. Kelhoffer refers to Steven Bechtler here "No mention is made here of the paradigmatic nature of the second part of Christ's experience, namely, his glorification; rather, all the emphasis in this paragraph falls on the necessity of unjust suffering - both Christ's and that of his followers," including Christians enslaved to harsh masters."
[215] Gäckle formulates apptly just how important Christ's suffering is for the identity of the Christians: "The suffering of Christ in his Passion becomes exemplary suffering for his followers: "[T]he implication is that as Christ did good and suffered, so also slaves do good and suffer."23 The suffering of the Christian slaves, as well as the stigmatization, repression, and defamation which all the addressees of the First Letter of Peter experience, are thus anchored in and accounted for by the Passion of Jesus. Because it is the "calling"24 of Christians to follow Christ, this also applies in suffering. Conversely, suffering in the First Letter of Peter becomes an essential expression of being a Christian (cf. 1:6; 4:12-14; 5:9-10). Thus, the Passion of Jesus takes on a paradigmatic meaning." Gäckle, "Jesus, the Slaves and the Servant(s)," 277.

outwardly oriented suffering aimed at the redemption of those walking in the dark has now become the slaves' own calling; they are to return this favor as an act of service and "grace" to God.

Scholars have debated on how to understand the "for you" in this verse, some arguing that it refers to Christ's vicarious redemptive work and others maintaining that the main focus here is providing an example for *imitatio Christi.*[216] Horrell helpfully points out that the "for them" can, in fact, incorporate both of these aspects as two sides of the same coin. Hence, there is both a "*Vorbildschristologie"* and a soteriological dimension at work here.[217] To say that Christ's suffering is portrayed as redemptive here is thus to view redemption as denoting both a change in the ethical behavior on the side of the sufferer and the soteriological transformation of those "for whom" one suffers. Two metaphors are employed to describe how Christ's suffering is a model after which their own lives should be shaped. Firstly, Christ's suffering is an "example" (ὑπογραμμόν), referring to the letters that children had to trace over when learning how to write.[218] Secondly, his passion is something that they should re-enact by "following in his footsteps" (ἐπακολουθήσητε τοῖς ἴχνεσιν αὐτοῦ).

Let us take stock for a moment to see what we have learned about the nature of suffering from Peter up until this point in his argument. So far, Peter has exhorted the community to actively endure unearned suffering (v.18-19). He argues that this would be an act of gracious reciprocity for the benevolence Christ has shown them through his Passion. Moreover, their endurance would bear the potential to effect change in the minds of their owners, harsh as they may be (v.20a). The reason for their endurance is provided by the acts of Christ himself, who suffered on their behalf when they "were not a people," and had "not received mercy" (2:10).

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[216] For an overview Cf. Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 812-819.
[217] Gäckle, "Jesus, the Slaves and the Servant(s)," 288; Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 816. "As these interpreters have clearly demonstrated, the paradigmatic nature of Christ's suffering is at the forefront of this verse. But ultimately, it is difficult to separate the exemplary character from its redemptive value."
[218] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 819.

Through his suffering Christ had redeemed them so that they can now confidently believe that they are "God's people … who have received mercy" (2:10). Or to look forward to the redemption metaphor used in v.25 "for you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls." Moreover, the slaves are to understand Christ's suffering as constitutive of their own new identity as Christians, instilling them with a sense of vocation. The story of Christ's suffering has become to them a model after which they should shape their own experience with hardship (v.21). Finally, Christ's suffering, and thus that of the community, is outwardly oriented; it is always "for you." Suffering is, therefore, redemptive in the sense that it is both an active act of righteousness on the side of the sufferer as well as soteriologically significant for those for whom one undergoes the suffering. It is this redemptive dimension of suffering as an act of service that the author will now brilliantly develop by adapting Isaiah's fourth servant song found in Isa. 53. Peter will modify this Isaianic language to argue explicate the dynamic of Christ's redemptive suffering and to bolster his claim that the endurance of unearned suffering has the potential to bring about the redemption of one's oppressors with scriptural evidence.

Excursus: The Song of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah.

Before studying how Peter modifies the servant song, interpreting it messianically to establish his own theological agenda, it is prudent to see how the fourth song of the suffering servant functioned in its original context. This will allow us to appreciate why Peter drew specifically from this source to make his point. It also elucidates that the idea of redemptive suffering was already present in the Jewish Scriptures well before 1 Peter makes use of it. Joel Green argues that Israel's view on suffering was unique amongst ancient worldviews. Other worldviews that were prevalent in Israel's environment tended to see suffering as a punishment from God.

Therefore, those who suffer could not be considered righteous.[219] While this idea is also present in the Jewish Scriptures, Green claims that "this view is confronted by Israel's tradition of the suffering righteous, in which the righteous suffer because they are righteous."[220] In Green's view, the Jewish Scriptures held that "God will rescue the righteous *through* suffering, rather than *from* suffering.[221] In referencing the Servant Song, Peter builds on this Jewish tradition. Above, we noted that in the first part of the slave paraenesis, redemption is perceived both as an active mode of righteous behavior on the part of the sufferer as well as the idea that suffering will bring about redemption for others. These ideas may already be found in Isaiah's fourth song of the suffering servant in Isa 53.

According to Paul Hanson, the historical context of the collection of the so-called "Servant Songs" found in Isa 40-55 find their place in the destruction of the "David-Zion theologoumenon" through the Assyrian and subsequent Babylonian invasions of Israel and Judah.[222] With this "theologoumenon," Hanson refers to the ideas that Zion and David were specially elected by God, which were prevalent amongst pre-exilic Judaism and resulted in the formation of a strong nationalistic theology. This theology came under real pressure after the destruction of the temple and the Davidic monarchy.[223] The exile left Jewish communities in Babylon in a theological and political crisis that posed the real threat of a massive falling away from the faith. Handson argues

[219] Green, *1 Peter,* 82.
[220] Green, *1 Peter,* 82.
[221] Green, 1 Peter, 82.
[222] Paul Hanson, "The World of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 40-55," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins,* ed. William H. Bellinger Jr. and William R. Farmer (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1998), 11-13.
[223] Hanson, "The World of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 40-55," 11.

that the Servant Songs were formed in an attempt to make sense of these traumatic events theologically.[224]

The anonymous author of Isaiah 40-55 writes the Servant Songs as a theological and political "counterattack" against those who oppressed the Jews.[225] According to the Songs, YHWH is going to start acting in an entirely new way, "I am about to do a new thing" (עַתָּה תֶּחֱדָשֶׂה עֹשֶׂה הִנְנִי, Isa. 43:19). He will use the hardships of the Jews to achieve what the temple-cult and Davidic monarchy had not been able to: to restore His people to Himself and bring about the redemption of the gentiles.[226] A servant figure will arise as the primary medium through which God will establish this redemption of the Gentiles. This Servant of God will "bring light (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6), righteousness (Isa 43:1, 4), justice (Isa 42:4) and salvation (Isaiah 49:6), and he suffers vicariously giving his life away for "the many" (Isaiah 53:4-12).[227]

However, this servant will not be received with great rejoicing. Rather, outsiders will be startled and shocked by the servant figure: "so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him" (פִּיהֶם מְלָכִים צֻוִּיקְפּוּ עָלָיו רַבִּים גּוֹיִם יַזֶּה כֵּן, Isaiah 52:15). As a result, the Servant will have to suffer greatly. He will "be despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity" (אִישׁ מַכְאֹבוֹת וִידוּעַ חֹלִי וְחַדֵּל נִבְזֶה אִישִׁים, Isaiah. 53:3). In v.7 the author compares the servant to a lamb being led to the slaughter, and in v.8 as someone cut off from the land of the living.

Yet somehow, all of this suffering was part of God's will, the author explains: "yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain" (וַיהוָה חָפֵץ דַּכְּאוֹ הֶחֱלִי, Isaiah 53:10).[228]

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[224] Hanson, "The World of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 40-55," 15. Hansom remarks "The viability of an official national world view had been called into question by calamitous events. A spiritual struggle was underway to reformulate the conceptual underpinnings of the Jewish people.
[225] Hanson, "The World of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 40-55," 14.
[226] Hanson, "The World of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 40-55," 15.
[227] Gäckle, "Jesus, the Slaves and the Servant(s)," 289.
[228] Hanson, "The World of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 40-55," 18.

The underlying reason for this suffering was to redeem others, "upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed" (עָלָיו שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ מוּסַר וּבַחֲבֻרָתוֹ נִרְפָּא־לָנוּ, Isaiah 53:5). These others included not only the people of Israel but also those on the outside who have come to see the truth through the mediation of the Servant. According to Hanson, when those dwelling from God's way see the suffering of the Servant they will be "shocked to their senses, accept the gift of divine healing, and are thus restored to righteousness."[229] The suffering servant in Isaiah is thus not a docile, submissive, and passive victim. Instead, he is an active agent who undergoes suffering to unveil the evil of his oppressors, resulting in their eventual repentance. This is precisely what deutero-Isaiah concludes. The text goes on to provide a glorious description of the establishment of an eternal covenant with not only the people of Israel but all peoples. In Isa. 54-66, the covenant of God is extended to include all peoples, culminating in the universalist statement of Isaiah 66:23 that "all flesh shall come to worship before me."

To conclude, already in the Servant Song in Isaiah 53 do we encounter the idea that unearned suffering can be part of God's purpose and that this purpose is fundamentally outward-oriented: it will bring about the redemption of those who currently oppress God's people, incorporating them into the covenant relationship of YHWH with his people.

It is becoming clear why Peter felt that the fourth Song of the Suffering Servant was especially relevant for his own purposes. First, he perceives of the situation of his audience as similar to that of the Jews in Babylon: they are a minority living in "exile" (1:1), torn away from their homeland and oppressed by a pagan majority. Furthermore, Peter himself is writing from

[229] Hanson, "The World of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 40-55," 18.

"Babylon" (5:12), which is likely a codename for Rome. Peter helpfully explicates his hermeneutic of the Jewish scriptures in 1:10-12. According to him, the prophets had already been "seeking and searching" for the salvation that has now been revealed in Christ (v.10). It was the very Spirit of Christ that had been at work within them when they made their prophecies (v.11). Moreover, these prophecies were not made for the sake of their contemporaries but rather for the addressees of 1 Peter (v.12). Finally, in both texts we encounter a similar dynamic of one figure standing for the whole community.

We can conclude from this that when Peter refers to the Fourth Servant Song, he is very much convinced that this text is concerned with the work of Christ as it relates to the current community. It should, therefore, be no surprise that Peter modifies Isaiah 53 to represent the chronology of Christ's Passion.[230] In vv.21-23, the suffering is described, in v.24a-c, the crucifixion and finally, v4.24c-25 describes the effects of Christ's suffering for the community.[231]

Just as in Isa 53, the Servant (Christ) in 1 Peter 2:18-25 is far from a passive victim in this text. In v.24, the author combines terms from Isaiah 53:4, 11, and 12 to portray Jesus as an active sufferer who undergoes his lot for the express purpose of redeeming the addressees. Horrell explains how the author constructs the passage to underscore "Christ's vicarious suffering."[232] Firstly, the author emphasizes Christ's action by placing αὐτός immediately before the verb. Secondly, the verb ἀναφέρω is used, which is a technical term for a priest offering up sacrifices at the altar. The same term had been used in 2:5 to describe the active role that the community was to take up in offering up spiritual sacrifices to God. Christ the sufferer is thus presented as a priestly, mediating figure, actively laboring for the redemption of the

[230] Gäckle, "Jesus, the Slaves and the Servant(s)," 273; Achtemeier, *1 Peter,* 192.
[231] Gäckle, "Jesus, the Slaves and the Servant(s)," 279. Green, *1 Peter*, 85.
[232] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 832.

addressees.[233] The result of this priestly action will be the repentance "ἐπεστράφητε" of those who were formerly estranged from God.

This repentance has both ethical and soteriological implications. Firstly, the suffering will enable the addressees to "live for righteousness" (τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ ζήσωμεν, v.24). Secondly, they are now once again in right standing with God, having been saved they are now returned to the "guardian of your souls" (ἐπίσκοπον τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν, v.25). In Peter's view, redemption consists of two aspects: it leads to both ethical repentance and soteriological salvation. Having achieved this redemption for the audience, they are now exhorted to re-enact Christ's behavior to their oppressors through their suffering. Green attests that the pericope's Christological argument is very much concerned with how the church is supposed to relate to their environment, here we find " This is Christology in the service of ecclesiology."[234]

A concrete example of how this redemptive suffering would work in concrete relationships to the outside world is provided in the following pericope discussing wives married to unbelieving husbands. Through their submission and acceptance of their suffering, the wives will be able to "win over" (κερδηθήσονται, 3:1) their husbands, thus essentially enacting their redemption. Based on our investigation, we can conclude that Peter does not perceive suffering as something passive but rather as a powerful strategy that instills the sufferer with the ability to work towards the real redemption of their adversaries and transformation of their own hardships in the process.

The view on suffering as redemptive outlined in the first chapter has hopefully helped us better grasp the logic of 1 Pet 2:18-25. Suffering is not something docile, passive, and quietist.

[233] Horrell notes that there is some discussion concerning the interpretation of the verb here. Some scholars remark that ἁμαρτία is never used in conjunction with ἀναφέρω. Furthermore, there is no Christian precedent for intepreting the cross as an altar. Hence, these scholars argue for a more passive understanding of the verb here. However, Horrell concludes that an active rendering is more appropriate in light of the prepositional modifier ἐπὶ here. In this case, the sense would be that Christ actively carried the sins to the cross. Cf. Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 1-2,* 832-835.
[234] Green, *1 Peter,* 83.

Rather, it has the potential to enact real and concrete change in one's situation. In this particular pericope, 1 Peter has demonstrated that through "creative engagement" with suffering, it can become a medium for redemption. This redemption has both ethical and soteriological dimensions. Moreover, just like with King's notion of *agape,* the driving force behind the ability to endure suffering is rooted in the Passion of Christ.

3.3 *The Unveiling Quality of Suffering: 1 Pet. 3:8-18*

The second dimension of suffering in Chapter 1 described how precisely this redemptive nature of suffering worked in practice. We investigated King's notion of "black messianism" and Thurman's understanding that perpetrating violence estranged one from one's "inner altar." According to King and Thurman, enduring unearned suffering could expose and unveil the evil of violence. They argued that endurance of unearned suffering could potentially shock one's oppressor into recognizing the evil of their ways and bring them to repentance. Through this repentance, political justice could be achieved, and the connection with the divine could be restored.

Viewing suffering in this manner will help us elucidate the dynamic of suffering presented in our next paradigmatic pericope: 1 Pet 3:8-18. This passage logically elaborates on the previous pericope.[235] In 2:18-25 the author has posited that suffering could be redemptive and firmly rooted this idea in the Passion of Christ. He had called the audience to take this same task as an integral part of their own mission as Christians. Peter then provides a very concrete example of how such a redemptive task could work in the case of wives married to gentile husbands in 3:1-7. In 3:8-18 the author continues his argument by explaining the types of moral behavior that

[235] Green, *1 Peter,* 110

the community should display in enacting of redemptive suffering and the potential results of this action. Since the redemptive role of the community rather than that of Christ is central here, there is a slight shift in the theological focus and language of the text. Whereas in 2:18-25 the justification for enduring unearned suffering was Christological, here the justification is moral.[236] Nevertheless, the logical connection between both pericopes is demonstrated by the many instances of shared language in both texts.

In the first verse, the author uses a list of relatively rare terms to describe the moral behavior he expects from his community: "unity in spirit, sympathy, mutual love, a tender heart, and a humble mind." Some of the virtues the author prescribes diverge from those typically held in high regard in broader Greco-Roman culture. For example, Horrell points out that having "a humble mind" (ταπεινόφρων) was used negatively in Greek literature to describe someone as base or mean-spirited.[237] In the Pauline tradition, however, the term is often used to describe the humble attitude that mimics that of Christ (cf. Acts 20:19; Eph 4:2; Phil 2:3; Col 3:12). This term also occurs in Ps. 33:19. This Psalm will play a crucial role in this pericope and underscored that this attitude also has a background in Jewish thinking. Another notable term in this list is the prescribed attitude of displaying "sympathy" (συμπαθεῖς), which denotes the ability to respond with compassion and kindness in situations where a harsher response may have been expected.[238] The author is thus exhorting his audience to respond differently than

[236] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 82

[237] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 87. Horrell states "However, in terms of moral values, it seems that social humility—specifically the humility (ταπεινοφροσύνη) of lowering or abasing oneself for the sake of other (lower-status) people—is not presented as a virtue in the traditions of Greek and Roman ethics and may be a distinctive innovation, or at least emphasis, of early Christianity. In light of this contrasting valuation of being ταπεινός, Christians were sometimes ridiculed for practicing this virtue." In the Textus Receptus the term is omitted and instead reads "courteous" (φιλόφρονες). Cf. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament,* 621; Green, *1 Peter,* 103.

[238] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 84.

would have been customary in their cultural environment; rather than retaliation, they are to respond to their hardships with non-violence.[239]

The author argues for the kind of attitude that is also characteristic of the redemptive suffering theology found in King, stating: "do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing" (μὴ ἀποδιδόντες κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ ἢ λοιδορίαν ἀντὶ λοιδορίας, τοὐναντίον δὲ εὐλογοῦντες, 3:9).[240] The term "λοιδορία" also occurred in 2:23, where it specifically denoted the depiction of Christ's acts of non-retaliation.[241] This shared language establishes a strong connection between the behavior of Christ and that which the community is now exhorted to adopt. In contrast to retaliation, they are to actively seek the "blessing" of their adversaries.[242] According to Horrell, this entailed that the community is to petition for God's favor towards those who sought to harm them.[243] In other words, they are to seek their redemption.

Moreover, just as in the 2:21, the author presents this injunction to seek the blessing of their enemies as a fundamental aspect of the community's calling, using the exact language found in 2:21: "To this you have been called" (εἰς τοῦτο ἐκλήθητε, 3:9). However, the author goes a step further than he did in 2:21 when he remarks that following this calling will result in the inheritance of "a blessing." The "τοῦτο" likely refers here not only to the blessing but also to

[239] Achtemeier, *1 Peter,* 223.
[240] This statement reoccurs frequently in other parts of the NT, most prominently in Rom 12:17 which reads "μηδενὶ κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ ἀποδιδόντες." This parallel is so strong that Horrell perceives direct influence of Paul's letters to the romans here, cf. Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 91. Other instances of this theme are 1 Thess. 5:15, and in the Sermon on the Mount found in Matt 5:38-48, and Lk 6:27-38).
[241] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 92. Horrell shows parallel use of the term in Sirach, Philo and Josephus where it is associated with curses, slander and insults and is thus used here in 1 Peter to refer to verbal slander and abuse. However, in his view these verbal encounters could be paired with very real physical violence. Hence, these terms may be more comprehensive and refer to "any form of evil in the form of words and deeds."
[242] Green, *1 Peter*, 106. "In this context, "blessing" follows the significance given it in the LXX rather than secular Greek, "to call upon God to bless" rather than "to speak well of."
[243] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 95.

the non-retaliation.[244] The calling of non-violence that is placed on the community, therefore, has both a passive and an active dimension. Firstly, they are to prevent any retaliatory behavior. Secondly, they are to actively pursue the bestowal of divine favor (i.e., redemption) of their adversaries.

To further explain these passive and active dimensions of their calling to non-violent redemptive suffering, Peter quotes Ps. 33:13-17 LXX. He uses the Psalm to convince his audience that if they "desire to love life" and "to see good days" (3:10), it would be best if they respond to their suffering with non-violence.[245] They can do so by "keeping their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit" (3:10), this is the more passive dimension of non-violence. However, the call on their lives also has an active dimension: their calling is rather to "do good; seek peace and pursue it" (3:11). The final part of the quotation provides the reason for this behavior. The author adds the "ὅτι" not found in the original text of the LXX to introduce the reason for this non-violent response.[246] The result of the ethical behavior will be that the community will be perceived as "righteous" in the eyes of the Lord, and they will maintain a unique relationship to God; his ears will remain open to their prayer (3:12). The term "righteous" echoes the language of 2:24 where Chris's own endurance of unearned suffering was presented as the sources that enabled the community to live in this morally upright manner "τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ ζήσωμεν."

We should note here that in the original context of Psalm 33, the promised blessing that would occur because of choosing the way of non-violence was thought to be achieved in this life.[247]

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[244] Achtemeier provides an overview of the debate amongst scholars of whether the τοῦτο refers to what follows or what precedes. The close parallel with 2:21 paired with the logic of the immediate textual context cause Achtemeier to conclude that it follows to what precedes. Achtemeier, *1 Peter,* 224.
[245] The author has slightly changed the text of the LXX here, changing the participle ἀγαπῶν into the infinitive form ἀγαπᾶν. This alters the meaning of the sentence. In the Psalm the sentence means "the one desiring live" whereas in 1 Peter a better rendering would be "the one who desires to love life."
[246] Achtemeier, *1 Peter,* 225.
[247] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 98.

In the Psalm, this divine blessing entailed the conviction that the suffering would be alleviated in very real and concrete ways. Time and again, the present efficacy of God's action reoccurs as a theme in the Psalm: "he delivered me from all my sojourning" (33:4), the author "was saved from every trouble" (33:6), and "when the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and rescues them from all their troubles" (33:17), "the Lord redeems the life of his servants" (33:22). Some scholars maintain that the author likely departed from this original context and read the Psalm in a strictly eschatological manner.[248] However, I have demonstrated in the previous section that 1 Peter's framework is by no means unequivocally eschatological; the author is very much concerned with the community's suffering in the here and now.[249] In the present age they have already been able to "taste" that the Lord is good (2:3), and it is here and now that they have been given a new identity (2:5; 9).[250] By drawing from a Psalm that shared this concern of immanent deliverance, it is at the very least plausible that Peter imagined that deliverance was a concrete, real, and present possibility for the community. This is further underscored by the Psalms' mention of "life" and "good days" (Ps 33:12 / 1 Pet 3:10), which point towards a concern for alleviation of the suffering in the present situation.[251] This also seems to be Peter's conclusion after he cites the Psalm, for in v.13, he says, "Now who will harm (κακώσων) you if you are eager to do what is good?" Evidently, the author believes change is possible here and now.

[248] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 100. Horrell argues against my view here, stating that the author adopts this the Psalm into his own eschatological framework. He argues that quoting a text does not necessarily mean that one shares the worldview of that text. While this is certainly true, it also does not mean that Peter *did not* share the immanent concerns of Ps. 33. I do not agree with Horrell that the entire framework of the epistle is straightforwardly eschatological in nature. If anything, it is certainly plausible that by alluding to Ps. 33, the author is trying to provide the audience with a cause for hope that would have concrete effects in their present situation.

[249] In the next section we will further characterize this balancing of the contemporary relevance with the eschatological hope of this text as "pre-figurative."

[250] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 108.

[251] Achtemeier, *1 Peter,* 226.

The Psalm not only explicitly describes the deliverance of the righteous but also how God will bring down those who do evil against these righteous people. In 3:21, we read, "Evil brings dead to the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned." Another place where the theme of judgment occurs is seen in v.16: "the face of the Lord is against the wicked" (πρόσωπον δὲ κυρίου ἐπὶ ποιοῦντας κακά). However, it is interesting that Peter only quotes a part of the entire sentence found in the original LXX Ps. 33:16.[252] There, the sentence continues with "to destroy the remembrance of them from earth" (τοῦ ἐξολεθρεῦσαι ἐκ γῆς τὸ μνημόσυνον αὐτῶν). Apparently, the author of 1 Peter is reluctant to provide such a definitive statement of the ultimate fate of the wicked. Perhaps this omission can be explained by the argument of this essay, namely that Peter views suffering as redemptive and, therefore does not support the Psalm's conclusion that the adversaries will be "destroyed." In contrast, while Peter believes that their evil must be exposed, he holds that this will ultimately lead to their repentance and subsequent redemption.

Just as in the slave-paraenesis, suffering "for doing what is right" (εἰ καὶ πάσχοιτε διὰ δικαιοσύνην, 3:14a) is positively qualified by the author. While in the previous pericope, suffering was presented as "grace," here, the author again makes the striking claim that enduring unearned suffering is somehow indicative of something positive. Like the "grace" mentioned in 2:19-20, the term "right" (δικαιοσύνην) is qualified in relationship to God. The common usage of this term in classical Greek denoted the fulfillment of one's duties to a particular set of cultural customs, behaviors, and norms.[253] Later, the term was used to refer to the fulfilling of one's duties more broadly, whether they be religious, social, or political. However, what is different about the use of the term in v.14 is that the behavior results in an outcome that is the

[252] Some of the later manuscripts do in fact include this sentence. For a discussion cf. Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 81. .
[253] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 137.

opposite from what one would have expected: it leads to suffering.[254] For Peter, what is "right" is therefore not ultimately rooted in societal norms and customs but rather in God's will.[255] If they do what is right in the eyes of God and suffer as a consequence, this must, therefore, not be interpreted as something negative. Instead, it is a sign that "you are blessed" (μακάριοι, 3:14a). When the audience encounters suffering because of their living in alignment with God's will this is to be seen paradoxically enough as a blessing. This conviction should bolster their courage: they should not passively and docilely shrink back from their suffering. In contrast, the author quotes Isa 8:12 to say that they must not let themselves fear or be intimidated: "τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε μηδὲ ταραχθῆτε, 3:14b.[256]

At this point in his argument, Peter introduces the "unveiling" dimension of enduring unearned suffering. If indeed, the community does not resort to retaliatory violence but rather responds in patient endurance and non-violence, their malignment will do two things: it will be a public witness to the glory of God, and it will unveil the evil of their perpetrators.

Beginning with the first aspect, in v. 15 the author says, "but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord" (κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἁγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν). The verb ἁγιάζω is used in the LXX of Isa 8:13 to translate the Hebrew hiphil of the Hebrew verb קדש which means "to consecrate." Horrell points out that often humans are the object of this verb, meaning that it is God who will make them holy.[257] However, in this instance, the human community is the subject; they are to make Christ as Lord holy.[258] Horrell explores several instances in the LXX

[254] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 137.
[255] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 137; Achtemeier, *1 Peter,* 225.
[256] Horrell points out that there is some ambiguity as to how interpret the αὐτῶν here. If it is taken as an active subject, it would mean that they audience should not be afraid by the fear that their adversaries sought to intstill in them. If it is taken as a passive subject, it would mean "do not fear what they fear," perhaps referring to the fear of societal marginalization and fear that was prevalent in Greco-Roman society. Finally, if the αὐτῶν is interpreted as an objective genitive, it would mean that they should not be afraid of their persecutors themselves. I concur with Horrell that this is the most likely meaning here. Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 140.
[257] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 149
[258] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 149.

where it is God himself who is the object of ἁγιάζω and humans are the subject. In all these cases, this consecrating is part of a human response to witnessing God's miraculous action. The human party responds to this experience by magnifying and glorifying God. For this reason, ἁγιάζω often occurs with other terms such as δοξάζω, ἐνδοξάζομαι, and μεγαλύνω. Horrell points out that when the people of God perform this action, this is almost always visible to the other nations.[259] The goal of performing ἁγιάζω was, therefore, to provide a public witness to the glory of God that would be visible for those outside of the community of believers. This also seems to be what Peter has in mind, for in v.15 he goes on to say that they should "always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" (ἕτοιμοι ἀεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογίαν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος, 3:15). This "defense" (ἀπολογίαν) should by no means be understood as an endorsement of any form of retaliatory violence. The defense should be cruciform and in alignment with the attitude portrayed in the citation of Psalm 33 LXX and already hinted at in 2:18: "with gentleness and fear" (μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου, 3:16).

Peter then turns to the second aspect, namely that enduring unearned suffering will unveil evil. In verse 16, Peter asserts, "keep your conscience clear, so that when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame" (συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθήν, ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαλεῖσθε καταισχυνθῶσιν οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφήν, 3:16). By their "good conduct," i.e., their response of non-violent endurance of unearned suffering, the audience will be able to "put to shame" (καταισχυνθῶσιν) their adversaries. Verse 3:16 seems to rely strongly on verse 2:12, which uses the same language of good conduct to say that it would result in the adversaries glorifying God on the day of judgment.[260] In light of this, some scholars find it difficult to understand how Peter seems to be

[259] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 150.
[260] Michaels, *1 Peter,* 190.

arguing for an opposite outcome here.[261] However, if we view suffering as redemptive, the two statements actually argue for a similar point. The confrontation with the good conduct of the Christians will unveil the pagan's harsh treatment of them as profusely evil. This will lead to their repentance and, in turn, will have as a consequence that they will glorify God in the present.[262] Kelhoffer also recognizes the missiological aspect of Peter's argument. He claims that Peter actively attempts to "valorize" suffering, i.e., to instill it with inherent value. According to Kelhoffer, "the author suggests that steadfastness amidst persecution will result in the conversion of one's persecutors and thus further the Christian mission prior to the Parousia and final judgment. Herein lies the value to be derived from suffering."[263] In other words, the author insists on the endurance of unearned suffering because he is convinced that it is redemptive. By responding with non-violence, both by passively turning away from evil and by actively pursuing peace and doing good, the perpetrators of violence will be confronted with their own evil. It is the same dynamic we already saw at work in 2 Maccabees in the previous chapter. There too, the patient endurance of suffering was thought to have the capacity to expose evil and injustice. However, Peter is more optimistic about the effects of this suffering: it will not only unveil evil but may also result in the present-day repentance and redemption of their adversaries.

Verse 17 echoes the distinction between suffering for what is wrong and suffering for what is right, which was first developed in 2:20. Again, the author is adamant that only suffering for what is right is part of the positive recasting of hardship in this pericope.[264] Achtemeier summarizes this as follows: "The point is to urge Christians to be sure that the behavior that is

[261] Michaels, *1 Peter,* 190.
[262] Achtemeier, *1 Peter,* 236. Achtemeier points towards Vogels as another strong proponent of this view cf. Heinz-Jürgen Vogels, *Christi Abstieg ins Totenreich und das Läuterungsgericht an den Toten* (Freiburger Theologische Studien 102 [Freiburg: Herder, 1976], e.g., 35–36.
[263] Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power*, 104.
[264] The idea that it was better to suffer evil or injustice rather than to inflict it was broadly accepted in Greco-Roman society. For example it may be found in the works of Plato and Cicero. Cf. Achtemeier, *1 Peter,* 237.

despised by non-Christians is good rather than evil, that is, that the vilification they receive is due to behavior in accord with the Christian faith, not behavior that even by then-current cultural standards would be deemed evil."[265] The lens of redemptive suffering may help to make sense of this recurring insistence of the author that it is only suffering while being innocent that is "better" (κρεῖττον). In light of our interpretation of v.16, it is becoming increasingly apparent why enduring unearned suffering can be something good: it is a strategy that the community is to use to work towards the redemption of their pagan peers. In fact, through this suffering, the community has become a crucial medium in achieving "God's will."[266] In Peter's view, suffering is only "part of God's will" (3:17) and, therefore, redemptive if it is unearned. The reason for this is that the endurance of suffering will only have the desired "shocking effect" if those undergoing it are genuinely innocent. The violators will only come to see the evil of their ways if they have no other possibilities to justify their behavior through cognitive dissonance. If those who malign the Christians can convince themselves that they somehow deserve this treatment since they are murderers, thieves, or wrongdoers of any kind, they won't be forced to see their violent behavior as deplorable. In other words, what King and Thurman hoped for, namely that the endurance of suffering would lead to the repentance of the perpetrator, is only effective in the case of unearned suffering. It is perhaps for this reason that the call to upright behavior plays such a central role in the author's argument. Ethical exhortations permeate the entire argument of the epistle. The community is to be beyond reproach, "sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient" (1:2), "imperishable, undefiled and unfaded" (1:5), "holy as he who called you is holy" (1:16), "purified souls" (1:22), "born of imperishable seed" (1:23) etc.

According to Kelhoffer, Peter's conviction that enduring suffering will bring about this repentance amounts to "audacious, if not naïve, optimism that oppressors will repent."[267]

[265] Achtemeier, *1 Peter,* 237.
[266] This conclusion is supported by Horrell cf. Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 182.
[267] Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power*, 110.

Kelhoffer is not alone in this critique; we saw in Chapter 1 that Horrell and Best share this view. This leads to the question of why it was plausible for Peter that the endurance of suffering would have any concrete effect on the adversaries of the community. The attitude Peter argues for reminds one of the famous picture of the march on the Pentagon in October of 1967, taken by Bernie Boston. The photograph depicts protestor George Harris placing a flower into the barrel of an assault rifle held by a soldier of the Military Police. This picture exemplifies the kind of non-violent attitude for which 1 Peter argues here, and that is disregarded by Kelhoffer as audaciously naïve. Nevertheless, as King and Thurman believed, so did Peter: responding with peace to violence was by no means naïve since it would effect concrete and real change. With Kelhoffer, we must press Peter and ask him: can a flower stop a bullet?

It is Peter's contention in v.18 that, indeed, it can. Just like the author argued in the slave-paraenesis, the fundamental ground for the endurance of unearned suffering may be found in Christ's Passion. "For Christ also suffered for sins once and for all" (ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν, 3:18). When Christ had suffered for the community, he had done so from the same seemingly futile position that is now required of the community: as a "righteous for the unrighteous" (δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, 3:18). Christ evidently did not believe this suffering to be "naïve" or "overly optimistic" for the very existence of the Christian community now demonstrates that this redemptive suffering is effective. The author can boldly proclaim that suffering is redemptive because the addressees themselves have experienced just how transformative it can be. Through the suffering of Christ, they themselves have been redeemed, having been "born again of imperishable seed" (1:23) and being called "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2:9). Once again, when the author is trying to convey Christ's redemptive action, the same priestly language also found in 2:24 is used "ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ." In fact, so effective was Christ's redemptive suffering that he descended into the very pits of hell to proclaim his message to "the spirits in prison" (3:19). The point here is not so much that the

suffering of the community will somehow repeat the redemption that Christ has enacted. Rather, the idea is that Christ's suffering constituted a redemption of the entire cosmos "once and for all" (3:18). By enduring their suffering in a similar manner to Christ's passion, the community is participating in Christ's unique redemptive work and mediating divine redemption to their pagan peers.[268]

We can conclude that suffering in 3:8-18 is understood as both active and redemptive. Far from suffering being something that would promote passivity or quietism, it is here intimately tied to active moral behavior on the side of the community and thus agency-bestowing. Using the lens of redemptive suffering outlined in Chapter 1 has laid bare the inner workings of this redemptive function of suffering. Just as King believed through his idea of "black messianism" that his suffering people were placed in a unique position to redeem the soul of America, so Peter claims that his community is uniquely positioned through their encounter with Christ's suffering to bring their adversaries to repentance. This repentance is by no means a mere utopia in the mind of the author. He has the very real and concrete expectation that the endurance of unearned suffering will restore the maligners to their "inner altar" and thus to their connection with God.

3.4 *Suffering is prefigurative: 1 Pet. 4:12-19*

So far, one may have perhaps gained the impression that my representation of Peter's argument makes too much of the present-day and immanent relevance of his writing. Is Peter not also concerned with eschatology? Indeed, already in the first verses of the epistle, the eschatological hope is clearly communicated: the community will inherit an inheritance "kept in heaven" (1:4),

[268] Achtemeier, *1 Peter,* 249-251.

and through their current tests and tribulations, the authenticity of their faith will become apparent when "Christ is revealed" (1:7). Should the suffering language of the epistle therefore not also be interpreted eschatologically?

To be sure, there is a strong eschatological dimension at work within Peter's argument. So much so that this has led Kelhoffer to remark that perhaps there are two suffering theologies in 1 Peter: one that is concerned with missionary change in the present and one that has an eschatological focus.[269] Contrary to Kelhoffer, I do not think seeing these two aspects as distinguishable and separate theodicies within 1 Peter is necessary. I agree with Horrell that perhaps the present and the contemporary overlap and intermingle in the author's framework.[270] The walls of the Kingdom of Heaven are porous, partially present in the present while still needing to be fully inaugurated. In fact, it is perhaps that inherent tension between the "already" and the "not-yet" that plays a crucial role in 1 Peter's redemptive suffering theology. Furthermore, it is precisely the eschatological hope that provides the Christian community with the grounds for their endurance of their hardship in the present. Their confidence that they will be vindicated through God's judgment incentivizes them to keep on "doing good" (4:19) here and now.

In this section, I will argue that Peter believes the community is present at the very epicenter of the theological tension between the "already" and the "not yet." Through their redemptive suffering, they are already pre-figuring the very reality that will be fully inaugurated "when Christ is revealed." A prefigurative perspective is useful here since it strikes a more nuanced balance between eschatological concerns on the one hand and the immanent ethical and political

[269] Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power*, 101.
[270] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 100-117.

dimensions of the text on the other.[271] New Testament scholar Peter-Ben Smit refers to the work of Leach to describe what is meant by a prefigurative political strategy:

> "Rather than looking to a revolutionary vanguard to seize existing power structures and implement revolutionary change on behalf of the masses or to trade unions or political parties to leverage reforms within the existing system, a prefigurative approach seeks to create the new society 'in the shell of the old" by developing counterhegemonic institutions and modes of interaction that embody the desired transformation."[272]

Essential to the idea of prefigurative politics is the creation of a heterotopy that mirrors a new way of being a community in the here and now and through this mirroring to be an example, a *Vor-bild,* of the desired transformation. This mode of thinking transcends the bifurcations between future and present that are characteristic of much eschatological thinking. Prefigurative politics maintains that the "future is already in the present through its prefigurative performance in communal practices."[273]

We saw the same kind of prefigurative thinking in King's writings. In King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech, the contemporary language of injustice in Alabama, Georgia, and Missouri is mentioned in the same breath as the eschatological language that "every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain be made low." For King, Black Americans as a community are able to bring about the kind of righteous society run by agape in the here and now. King's

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[271] For a basic introduction to the notion of prefiguration Cf. Mathijs van de Sande, *Prefigurative Democracy: Protest, Social Movements and the Political Institution of Society* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023); Raekstad, Paul, en Sofa Saio Gradin. *Prefigurative Politics: Building Tomorrow Today*. Polity Press, 2020; Dan Swain, "Not Not but Not yet: Present and Future in Prefigurative Politics," *Political Studies* 67, nr. 1 (2019): 47-62; Uri Gordon, "Prefigurative Politics between Ethical Practice and Absent Promise." *Political Studies* 66, nr. 2 (2018): 521-37 and within the context of New Testament Studies see: Peter-Ben Smit, "Exploring the Eschaton. The Lord's Supper as a Cultural Technique Enabling Prefigurative Politics." *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies* 38 (2022): 59-72.

[272] Smit, "Exploring the Eschaton," 63-64.

[273] Smit, "Exploring the Eschaton," 64.

theology may help to elucidate how a similar dynamic is at work in our final focal text: 1 Pet 4:12-19.

This pericope forms the second main part of the letter. After the doxology in 4:11 the author starts a new argument which, just like in 2:11, is signaled by the term "beloved" (Ἀγαπητοί).[274] The pericope recounts similar themes that we have already explored in the two previous passages: suffering is something positive, the community shares in the suffering of Christ, suffering is, paradoxically enough, a sign of God's blessing, and suffering should only be experienced as a result of being Christian. To all of this, a new dimension is added; in their suffering, the community is already enacting what will one day be a reality for everyone.

The eschatological dimension of the pericope had already been formulated in the previous verses. In 4:5, the author mentions that everyone must account for their actions when Christ comes to "judge the living and the dead." Therefore, the community should ensure that they remain faithful and pure, even if they are to suffer for it, for "the end of all things is near" (4:7). The time for messing about is over. In preparation for the coming judgment, the community must "be serious and discipline themselves."

Our focal text picks up on the eschatological exhortation to remain pure and explicitly relates it to the community's suffering. Peter will argue that, through their suffering, the believers are already entering into the glory of the final days. In addition, the community is not only looking forward towards this future hope but already enacting the realities of this hope in the here and now through their missionary engagement with their environment.

In the first verse, the author remarks that the suffering of the community should not come as a surprise to them: "Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal." This constitutes a new

[274] Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 312; Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 418.

development of the author's treatment of the theme of suffering in the epistle. Whereas earlier suffering was presented as something that was not to be avoided, here it is clearly something that *cannot* be avoided.[275] Here, suffering is more explicitly linked to the Christian identity than in earlier passages. The term "surprised" (ξενίζεσθε) was also used in 4:4 to describe the response of the pagans to the behavior of the Christians. The fact that this behavior is negated here seems to reinforce the rift that the author seeks to establish between the pagans and the Christian behavior.[276] This information fits within the dichotomy between believers and non-believers that will be the main concern of vv.17-19.

The reason that the suffering in the present day is happening is that God is testing (πειρασμὸν) them through it. Perhaps this needs some explanation. Why is suffering presented as a "fiery test" (πυρώσει)?[277] The term is a relatively rare and is used metaphorically here to describe "an intense degree of some painful occurrence or experience."[278] Already in 1:7, "fire" was mentioned to denote the context of testing.[279] In the opening of the letter, the author stated that the suffering that the community had to endure "for a little while" was, in fact, a test of "the genuineness of your faith" (1:7). This testing of their faith was like a purifying fire used to test the quality of gold and to sift out any impurities. The purpose of this testing in the present was that it may ultimately lead to "praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." The testing is thus ultimately a good thing in the mind of the author for it will reveal the glory of God. The logic of the text is perhaps aptly conveyed by a popular Dutch saying: "*van wrijving*

[275] Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter,* 311.
[276] Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter,* 314.
[277] Some scholars have remarked that this term signals that the author is addressing a new form of suffering, perhaps a more full-blown persecution such as the Neronian persecution. With the majority of commentators I agree that this is unlikely and that there are no literary reasons to think that πυρώσει signals a shift in the kind of suffering that is being addressed. Cf. Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter,* 311; Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 418.
[278] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* ed. Frederick W. Danker. 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
[279] Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2008) 224.

komt glans" (friction can cause something to shine). Through the trials and tribulations, the "gold" that is faith in Jesus Christ will be able to shimmer like gold in the present, thus already pointing towards the full glory of God that will be revealed in the future.

It is this metallurgical sense that is probably also the background of the "fiery trials" in our pericope.[280] In 4:12, the author returns to this idea of testing and the resulting revelation of God's glory in the present day and age. This is precisely why he is able to present it as a cause for "rejoicing" (χαίρετε, 4:13). Through their sharing in the suffering of Christ, the community is already being judged by God to test the genuineness of their faith. Hence, it is precisely *because of their suffering with Christ* that their genuineness is demonstrated, and they will be vindicated. The basis for the joy in the suffering of the community is thus rooted in the eschatological hope of future reward.[281] The author provides a qualification for the joy here "insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings" (καθὸ κοινωνεῖτε τοῖς τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθήμασιν).[282] According to Leonhard Goppelt, the idea of joy found in suffering has deep Jewish roots. Specifically, in the extra-canonical Jewish texts, we encounter several writings that seem to suggest that suffering could be a cause for rejoicing. Goppelt notably refers to both of the texts studied in Chapter 2: the Psalms of Solomon and 2 Maccabees.[283] In Psalms of Sol 13:15-17 Goppelt recognizes that the idea that suffering can somehow be part of a learning experience, of *paideia,* that brings one closer to God.[284] In 2 Maccabees, we encounter several figures who gladly bear their suffering since it is perceived as a test of the genuineness of their

[280] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 423; Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter,* 314.
[281] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 424.
[282] Some scholars have argued that the Χριστοῦ παθήμασιν should be understood as messianic woes here. In this case Χριστοῦ refers not to Jesus but rather to the messianic nature of suffering that would occur before the end times. Cf. Dubis, *Messianic Woes.* This explanation seems unsatisfactory to me. Given the frequent earlier occurrences of references to Christ's suffering and the crucial role that this motif plays in the authors argument is seems more straightforward to read here a reference to the sufferings of Jesus.
[283] Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter,* 319.
[284] Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter,* 319

faith, according to Goppelt.[285] In both of these texts, suffering is similarly perceived as a ground for rejoicing and for the bestowal of divine favor.

This is precisely what verse 14 states: if they are "reviled for the name of Christ" (εἰ ὀνειδίζεσθε ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ), they are actually "blessed" (μακάριοι) for this is a sure sign that "the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you" (ὅτι τὸ τῆς δόξης καὶ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ᾽ πνεῦμα ἐφ᾽ ὑμᾶς ἀναπαύεται). The statement that the Spirit of God will dwell upon the Christians reveals the active dimension of the suffering here; it bestows agency upon the community. Peter makes use of Isa 11:2 LXX here. In the Jewish Scriptures, the dwelling of the Spirit of God upon a person usually entailed the empowering of that person for a specific task (e.g. Num 11:25).[286] The endurance of suffering are thus moments when Christians will receive divine strength and assistance.[287] In 2:5-10 the same language of "spirit/spiritual" was used by the author to describe the transformed identity of the community. They are "built into a spiritual house…where they offer up spiritual sacrifices" (2:5). The result of this pneumatological endowment is that they will "proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2:9). The pneumatological language in 4:14 echoes this earlier missionary language. Evidently, the author is convinced that enduring unearned suffering is a way in which the community will become spiritually endowed to prefigure the coming Kingdom of God in the here and now and has an outwardly oriented missionary scope.

Since suffering is actually indicative of their genuine faith and hence the reason for their redemption, it is crucial for the author to once again stress that only righteous suffering is positive (v.15). Verses 15-16 serve as a *parallelismus membrorum.* Verse 15 provides the negative ground for not suffering for the wrong reasons. In the next verse, the author states:

[285] Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter,* 319.
[286] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 442.
[287] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 442.

"Yet if you suffer as a Christian, do not consider this a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear his name."

It is in this theme of "glorification" (δοξαζέτω) that the prefigurative dimension of suffering becomes most salient. Just as Christ's suffering on the cross was to ultimately point towards a greater glory to be revealed, so here too the suffering of the community is pointing towards a better reality that will be inaugurated in the future. Already in the present age, in their suffering, the community is like ambassadors of Christ who prefigure in their suffering the impending judgment of the cosmos. The point is also cleverly communicated by the author by means of a pun. The term "Christians" (χριστιανός), which may be translated as "Christ-lackey," was likely one of the insults that the pagan slanderers leveled against the believers.[288] Their suffering as a result of being a χριστιανός is not a reason for despair, however, but should be a reason for glorifying God.

The prefigurative nature of suffering also becomes apparent in v.17. The community's suffering in the present should be seen as a form of judgment that they will receive first since they are the "household of God." What will one day be a reality for all peoples, namely their judgment by God, is thus already enacted here and now by the community of believers. Throughout the epistle, the author expresses his confidence that they will come through this judgment unscathed, as gold is through a purging fire. In enduring their unearned suffering, the vindicated community of Christians prefigures God's eschatological kingdom in the present age.

This is the ground for the final injunction to "continue to do good" in v.19. While they are suffering in the present age, the Christians are also living in a different reality. As a community, they live in a reality that has already begun to be transformed by the gospel of Christ; they are

[288] Horrell, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on 1 Peter 3-5,* 451-462.

the “already” in the midst of a world that is “not yet.” In many ways, the Christians are therefore already in the here and now able to act in accordance with the kingdom of God. Despite their suffering, they can “entrust themselves to a faithful creator.

King’s idea of the “beloved community” may help us better understand this dynamic. The Christian community does not function according to the rules dictated by their community; their existence is in the eschatological tension between their current suffering and their coming vindication. The beloved community runs on the logic of Christ’s redeeming love, his *agape.* That is why, amid their suffering, they are able to glorify God and entrust themselves to God despite their hardships. Because the community is a beloved community, they can have faith in their final vindication. This frees them up to continue to “do good” (ἀγαθοποιΐᾳ). As we have seen, this injunction to “do good” is very much outwardly oriented. Far from promoting quietism and political passivity, therefore, the suffering in this pericope is presented as a reason to keep engaging with the surrounding world, to glorify God and to do good.

Conclusion: 1 Peter’s Theology of Suffering

This thesis aimed to provide a fresh perspective on the theology of suffering of 1 Peter. To arrive at this theology, we explored suffering on a conceptual, historical, and exegetical level. The first chapter challenged some of the prevalent presuppositions concerning suffering that many

Petrine scholars bring to their reading of the text. These scholars conceptualize suffering as something submissive, agency-depriving, and politically quietist. Consequently, these scholars see the suffering in the epistle primarily as a problem to be solved. We posited that these presuppositions fail to account for much of the suffering language in the epistle. The author does not want to reduce the community's suffering but instead attempts to recast their predicament in a more positive light. Subsequently, a more fruitful conceptualization of suffering was developed using the redemptive suffering theology of Martin Luther King and Howard Thurman. With them, we concluded that if we perceive suffering as redemptive, agency-bestowing, and politically transformative, we might be able to make better sense of 1 Peter's theology of suffering.

In the second chapter, we embarked on a historical exploration of ancient Greco-Roman and Jewish suffering discourses. This enabled us to gain access to the kind of texts and thinking that helped shape the "cultural encyclopedia" that forms the backdrop against which Peter writes his epistle. Some ancient suffering discourses, such as the romances, presented what we called a "theodicy of good fortune." Within this framework, suffering was seen as something transient that ultimately left the subject unscathed. Conversely, the Stoic texts constituted a first emancipatory move. Like the idea of "creative engagement" we encountered in King, stoic thinkers like Epictetus claimed that suffering was not a reflection of one's identity and a consequence of divine wrath. Instead, the degree to which suffering affected you relied on one's personal response to it. Hence, everyone, slave and emperor alike, had some degree of agency when engaging with their suffering and coping with its consequences. Nevertheless, this emancipation remained a matter of the individual and did not challenge injustice or inequality on a societal level. As a result, the romances and stoic texts served as a "veil of power" that affirmed the life experience of the elites and marginalized that of the non-elites. The medical texts and the writings of the adherents of the Asclepius cult constituted a further development

in ancient thinking on suffering. The medics centered the subject as a suffering self. For thinkers such as Galen, the body and the soul become intimately connected, and as such, the body and its suffering received a more prominent place in his philosophical framework. The writer Aelius Aristides, a follower of the deity Asclepius, placed this suffering body within the realm of the divine. Aristides' god would ask his followers to undergo hardships to enhance his status and glory; suffering thus became a part of the divine purpose. Early Christian authors pick up on this idea of the subject as a suffering self. In various martyr narratives and the writings of Ignatius, Christians do not perceive suffering as something to be dissolved; instead, it forms an integral part of their Christian mission.

The Greco-Roman and early Christian texts mentioned above did not form the only backdrop of 1 Peter's cultural encyclopedia. The epistle is filled to the brim with Jewish thinking and implicit and explicit references to the Jewish scriptures. For this reason, we studied several Jewish suffering discourses that may help to inform our understanding of suffering in 1 Peter. Like 1 Peter, the writing known as 2 Maccabees proved to elucidate various aspects of 1 Peter's suffering language since it also responded to a situation of religious oppression. In 2 Macc suffering as a direct result of religious oppression was presented as a way of demonstrating one's commitment to God. In addition, the endurance of unearned suffering was used as a powerful political tool that had the ability to "unveil" the evil of their hardships. By enduring unearned suffering, those who inflicted the hardships were forced to see the evil of their own ways. Finally, the Psalms of Solomon revealed that suffering was seen as something that could be redemptive; through it, God was actually forming and educating his people, like a purifying fire. This resulted in their inequities and sins being cast away and their relationship with the divine being restored.

In the third and final chapter, we then studied the suffering discourse in 1 Peter from a exegetical perspective. Each of the three dimensions of redemptive suffering outlined in

Chapter 1 were used to elucidate the role that suffering played in a key focal passage in 1 Peter. The first dimension of suffering as redemptive was used to study the slave paraenesis in 2:18-25. Here, the author presents Christ's suffering as inherently redemptive. Through his modifications of the Song of the Suffering Servant to fit his own Christological agenda, Peter seeks to argue that Christ's endurance of unearned suffering is profusely redemptive: "Through his wounds, you are healed." This redemption had both an ethical and a soteriological dimension. Moreover, Christ's redemptive suffering became the very framework for the hardships of the Petrine community. Christ's redemption through his Passion was both an ethical example that they could follow as well as a conduit for soteriological redemption that they could participate in.

The second dimension of redemptive suffering, namely that it is agency-bestowing and has an "unveiling quality" was used to analyze 3:8-18. In this pericope, the author further develops the kind of moral attitude that the redemptive suffering framework requires of his community. In doing so, he uses Psalm 33 LXX to show that redemptive suffering has both a passive element (turning away from evil) and an active, agency-bestowing dimension (seeking peace). In the author's view, this moral behavior would transform the community's situation in the present. One way in which this transformation would occur was that, through their endurance of unearned suffering, the community would force their adversaries to see the evil of their ways; they would be "put to shame" (3:16). The hoped-for result of this repentance is was profoundly missiological, the community was to "provide an account for the hope that was in them" (3:15) with the hope of bringing their pagan peers to salvation.

The final aspect of redemptive suffering, namely that it is prefigurative, was used to study 4:12-19. This pericope contains the most explicitly eschatological suffering language of the epistle. We saw that, just like with King, the endurance of suffering is seen as something that lies at the heart of the eschatological tension between the "already" and the "not yet." In the

author's mind, the community's suffering is a purifying fire that is a precursor of the coming judgment and confirms their right standing with God. Consequently, the community can live in a way that pre-figures the coming Kingdom of God in which all of reality will be transformed.

We can conclude then, that the Epistle of 1 Peter presents a theology of suffering that is inherently redemptive, agency-bestowing and unveiling, as well as prefigurative. This message, the author believes, will be a profound source of hope and encouragement for his audience and will instill them to interpret their situation with a certain sense of vocation. This view on suffering provides the grounds for the author to ultimately proclaim "resist him [the devil], steadfast in your faith, for you know your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen" (5:9-11).

This research has various implications for the field of Petrine studies, the discipline of New Testament Studies more broadly, and contemporary ecclesiology. To begin with the first implication, the first section of Chapter 1 of this thesis provided an overview of the shortcomings of some forms of current Petrine scholarship. In constructing a new conceptualization of suffering, I hope to have forwarded an interpretative framework that helps to better elucidate the suffering dynamic within 1 Peter. My argument could be expanded in several ways. While I carefully selected the texts that seemed most relevant to our discussion for a comparative study in Chapter 2, the scope of this thesis did not permit me to be exhaustive here. More interesting research could be done to further map relevant early Greco-Roman, Jewish and Early Christian suffering discourses. Particularly, rabbinic sources, as well as patristic sources such as the writings of Dio Chrysostom, who also draws extensively from Isaiah, could be relevant here. In addition, 1 Peter contains several suffering pericopes, particularly in the opening and ending of the letter (1:6-9; 5:5-14), that I have not been able to

study in this thesis but may yield interesting results when brought into dialogue with my own investigation.

Secondly, my thesis could prove relevant for investigating the suffering discourse of other New Testament texts. The New Testament provides a rich and varied conceptualization of suffering that is by no means homogeneous. The book of Revelations has often been named as an interesting parallel to 1 Peter that casts the endurance of suffering in more explicitly apocalyptic language. Moreover, within the Pauline epistles, we encounter the endurance of unearned suffering as a legitimization strategy for Paul's authority as a teacher. This thesis is but a modest contribution to this larger mosaic of suffering texts that hopefully invites further research into the topic.

Finally, I am convinced that the Epistle of 1 Peter is highly relevant for contemporary ecclesiological reflection. Within a Dutch context, the missiologist Stefan Paas has conducted an excellent study into the missiological relevance of 1 Peter for churches operating within a secular European setting.[289] However, this work has not yet explored how the suffering discourse of 1 Peter may provide modern churches and Christians with a powerful political strategy for change. The notion of the church as "pre-figuring" the Kingdom of God may prove to be an especially rich ground for future inquiry in which the fields of biblical studies, political sciences, and ecclesiology come to a fruitful symbiosis. Further study into the prefigurative dimension of redemptive suffering may help to enable academic theology to constructively engage with suffering communities in the present day and age.

[289] Stefan Paas, *Pelgrims and Priests* (London: SCM Press, 2019).

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