



ἀπονέμοντες τιμὴν: 1 Peter as subversive text, challenging predominant gender roles in the 1st-century Mediterranean world

**Author:**Elritia Le Roux¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

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Dr Le Roux is participating in the research project 'Hermeneutics and Exegesis' directed by Prof. Dr Ernest van Eck, Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria.

Corresponding author:

Elritia Le Roux,
elritialeroux82@gmail.com

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Although the tension which Christianity, in continuance with the *Sache Jesu*, first displayed with its surrounding culture, gradually conformed to the predominate culture of the ancient Mediterranean world, probably to avoid further conflict, it seems that the author of 1 Peter, despite my preference for a later dating (*circa* the turn of the 1st century AD), was set on maintaining this tension. 1 Peter employs a 'revolutionary subordination'. When the author of 1 Peter urges wives to be submissive or slaves to obey their masters, he is not perpetuating normative conservatism. Rather, wives and slaves as followers of Christ were to subvert injustice the same way Jesus did. Wives therefore do not submit to their non-believing husbands because they buy in to society's evaluation of them as inferior to their male counterparts. Rather, wives can submit to their non-believing husbands because they are triumphant in Christ and therefore emancipated moral agents, who may win over their non-believing husbands by their moral and godly conduct.

Keywords: 1 Peter; social scientific approach; gender roles; subversive text; *Haustafeln*; early Christianity; honour shame; ethics.

Introduction

It has been argued by many gender scholars (e.g. Schüssler Fiorenza 2015) that 1 Peter is just another product of the patriarchal, male-dominated society of the ancient Mediterranean world and that the letter says minimal if anything for gender equality or the liberation of women from the oppression of male dominance.

A few scholars therefore reject 1 Peter in total, whereas others redeem the author by arguing that the gospel message is concealed within the patriarchal culture within which the letter originated and that the exegete merely needs to discover it. This article aims to suggest a different approach: reading the *Haustafeln* within the context of the entire epistle will bring the letter's inherent subversive nature to the front and then one might conclude that the author is not perpetuating the oppression of patriarchy but challenging and confuting it, especially because the letter advocates a 'soft resistance' within a hostile environment.

Nugent (2018:8; cf. Volf 1994:15–30) argues that in a sophisticated, subtle manner, the letter of 1 Peter is a text with a subversive nature. Crossan (2007:145–146) indicated that the works attributed to Paul in the New Testament shows a decline from being boldly radical and challenging to the values and norms of the 1st-century Mediterranean world to conforming and eventually becoming even 'conservative' by the time of the composition of the Pastoral Epistles. It is as if the tension which Christianity, in continuance with the *Sache Jesu*, first displayed, gradually conformed to the predominate culture of the ancient Mediterranean world, probably to avoid further conflict. However, it seems that the author of 1 Peter, despite my preference for a later dating (*circa* the turn of the 1st century AD), was set on maintaining this tension. 1 Peter employs what Yoder (1994) would call 'revolutionary subordination':

[*Jesus*'] motto of revolutionary subordination, of willing servanthood in the place of domination, enables the person in a subordinate position in society to accept and live within that status without resentment ... The subordinate person becomes a free ethical agent when he voluntarily accedes to his subordination in the power of Christ instead of bowing to it either fatalistically or resentfully. (p. 186)

The omnipotence of God is revealed from a position of apparent weakness. The crucifixion *per se* is the best example of this theological notion and still is Christianity's greatest challenge: how did it

come to pass that the cross, a symbol of contempt and shame, was adopted in Christianity as a symbol of triumph, victory and the ultimate revelation of God's solidarity with humanity. Whatever explanation one would offer to this question, the authors of the New Testament responded to the challenge with a sophisticatedly developed and creatively shaped theology, which embraced exactly this uncomfortable ambiguity.

Research methodology

This study opts for a combination of traditional, historical, critical concerns and a specific emphasis on the social scientific approach to New Testament texts to grasp the author's rhetorical strategy and the impact it would have had on his first audience. Van Eck (1995:82; cf. Elliott 1990:3) indicated that a literary investigation of the text and the descriptive exegesis of the social contexts in which texts originated were not sufficient to shed light on the rhetorical strategy¹ of the New Testament authors and on the objective(s) that the author wanted to accomplish. Therefore, a social-scientific reading becomes necessary.

A text was designed to function within a particular historical context. It was intended to have an effect on the lives and behaviour of its recipients. What needs to be explained is the relation between the biblical text and the social condition it addressed. No text originates in a vacuum. All ideas, and therefore also theological ideas, are socially formed and need to be explored within the social and historical contexts that shaped them. Elliott (1990:1) states that a social-scientific reading of the text 'compliments and improves' historical criticism, for it also pays attention to the social and the sociological dimensions of a text. This study will therefore move beyond historical criticism to social scientific criticism to determine the rhetorical function of a text as well as to attempt to discover the author's theology, which shapes his paraenetic appeals (cf. Le Roux 2018:73–74).

Horrell (1998:22–24) stressed the aspect of ideology criticism, an idea that will be developed further in this study. Horrell adds that feminist and liberation theology employed a hermeneutic of suspicion (cf. Van Aarde 2007:1125). This hermeneutic refers to a critical approach to the social conditions of the people whom the text refers to, as well as the audience of the text and those who are exposed to it. 'Social conditions' imply those factors that influence a group and include gender, age, ethnicity, social class, status, nationality, language political, social and religious affiliations (Van Aarde 2007:1126; cf. Le Roux 2018:76). Elliott (1990:11) argues, and this study agrees, that social-scientific exegesis is critical to expose the ideologies reflected in Biblical texts.

Hypothesis

Honour and *shame* were the paramount values of the 1st-century Mediterranean world (Malina 1981:25).

¹Elliott (1990:10) prefers the term 'strategy' over 'purpose' or 'intention' because a strategy would imply the conscious and calculated choice for the employment of word, phrases, quotations, a certain genre and so on, to accomplish the intended effect on the recipients. The way in which a biblical text has been designed thus becomes important.

Honour, as everything else in the 1st-century Mediterranean world, was considered to be a limited commodity. To gain honour, another male individual necessarily had to lose honour. Therefore, *challenge* and *response* existed as a form of social contest in which persons challenge each other to gain honour at the expense of the other. Although exceptions did occur, these contests normally took place between two equals. According to Van Eck (1995:167), honour was viewed as the exclusive prerogative of men. 'Honour is always male and shame is always female'. Bechtel (1991:47–76) considered shame to be the primary value in the 1st-century Mediterranean world that sanctioned social behaviour.

In 1 Peter 3:7, the only *Haustafel* commandment to men is given with *ἀπονέμοντες* functioning as a participle with imperative force, which is typical of the linguistics of the author of 1 Peter as *ἀπονέμοντες* τιμὴν, ὡς καὶ συγκληρονόμοις χάριτος ζωῆς. 'Show honour to them as co-heirs of the grace of life'. It seems that *honour* becomes something that ought to be shown to women, which is quite revolutionary when the prevailing social practice is taken seriously.

When the author of 1 Peter urges wives to be submissive or slaves to obey their masters, he is not perpetuating normative conservatism. Rather, wives and slaves as followers of Christ were to subvert injustice the same way Jesus did. Wives therefore do not submit to their non-believing husbands because they buy in to society's evaluation of them as inferior to their male counterparts. Rather, wives can submit to their non-believing husbands because they are triumphant in Christ and therefore emancipated moral agents, who may win over their non-believing husbands by their moral and godly conduct.

Nugent (2018:8) indicates that the superficial exegete might think that the author of 1 Peter departs from his subversive venture when reading 1 Peter 3:7. It seems as if the author is here merely confirming socially accepted perceptions about women – referring to them as *ἀσθενεστέρῳ* σκεύει 'weaker vessels'. When one links verse 7 with verses 8 and 9, it becomes clear that the author admonishes the entire Christian community not to get sucked into pagan notions of power play and retaliation, but to answer to evil with blessing: *Τὸ δὲ τέλος πάντες ὁμόφρονες, συμπαθεῖς, φιλάδελφοι, εὐσπλαγχοι, ταπεινόφρονες, μὴ ἀποδιδόντες κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ ἢ λοιδορίαν ἀντὶ λοιδορίας τοῦναντίον δὲ εὐλογοῦντες, ὅτι εἰς τοῦτο ἐκλήθητε ἵνα εὐλογίαν κληρονομήσητε.* [Finally, be all of one mind, having compassion for one-another, loving one another as brothers, kind-hearted, humble, not rendering evil with evil, or slandering with slander, rather bestow blessing for thereto you were called, so that you may be blessed].

This article attempts to indicate that early Christianity and specifically here the author of 1 Peter was challenging the customary gender roles of the ancient Mediterranean society. This article wishes to show that the author of 1 Peter is doing exactly that and that one could categorise the text as subversive in continuance with the *Sache Jesu* proclaiming 'soft resistance'.

Philological and linguistic background

According to Schneider (1972:169), *τιμή* means 'worth that is ascribed to a person', 'satisfaction', 'compensation', 'evaluation', 'honour', 'value', 'price' or 'purchase price'.

Τιμή also has a very significant religious use: 'the worship of God' (cf. Plat.Leg. IV 723e). On the other hand, a person is also honoured when the gods take a particular interest in him (Hom. II 15, 612, 17, 99, 23, 788). An ancient belief existed in Greece that certain men were especially honoured and blessed by the gods. This belief spread to Asia Minor as well especially in association with Hecate and other deities (cf. Nock 1925:100).

The gods grant happiness, wealth and power to men in virtue of their own *τιμή* and *δυναμῖς*. It is therefore a mark of esteem, which characterises divine worship.

Τιμή in the first instance has a strong material orientation. Odysseus' honour is especially bound to the restoration of the control of his possessions (Hom. Od. 1.117) (cf. Nilsson [1923]/24:365). Achilles' honour depends on the number of gifts brought to him to persuade him to participate in the battle (II 9.605). Bodily soundness, the undisputed exercise of social influence and uninfringed enjoyment of one's property are the basis for honour or esteem.

Later, *τιμή* is used in a more ethical context. A certain type of moral conduct becomes a prerequisite for the esteem a human enjoys. Gradually, *τιμή* becomes detached from real possessions and becomes a more abstract concept of honour. During the early Greek period in the 8th century BC, honour as esteem by society on account of circumstances was the highest value among nobility. Later, in the city states, especially in Sparta and Athens, the honour of the individual was also that of the *polis*. Plato was the first to establish the personal, ethical element of honour or inward honour (cf. Venske 1937:30–34). It was Aristotle, however, who made the most significant contribution to ground honour within the science of ethics (cf. Eth. Nic. IV 7 p. 1123b). According to Aristotle, 'The high minded man must be virtuous, for there is no honour without virtue'. A human therefore possesses honour on the basis of inner worth. This honour is bestowed upon him or her from without by his or her fellow citizens. Therefore, although Aristotle individualised the concept of honour, it was never without the solidarity of the *polis*, for honour is ascribed and acknowledged by fellow citizens. It was only within stoicism that honour became completely individualistic. Although stoic philosophy was not opposed to outward honour, the wise human was relaxed about it and does not actively pursue it.

Τιμή within the Septuagint

The Old Testament requirement to honour one's parents (Ex 2:20) and more universally to act morally in accordance with YHWH's commandments (Gn 38:23; 1 Sm 15:30; 2 Sm 6:20) is similar to the Greek concept of *τιμή*. Because of the

Alexandrian influence, the Greek terms increasingly penetrated into the idea world of Judaism. *Τιμή* is used in the LXX to translate 12 Hebrew words of which the foremost denotes 'honour' especially 'honour', which is because of God and should be shown to him. Humans are commanded to give *τιμή* and *δοξα* to God (cf. Job 34:19). But God also bestows honour upon the human whom he created in his image (cf. Ps 8:6). These concepts are made concrete within the cultic sphere: sacred garments emphasise the honour and adoration owed to the high priest (Ex 28:2).

In the wisdom literature, the ethical meaning of 'honour' is emphasised. To do good is to gain esteem from others. Association with wisdom confers praise among men and regard among the elders (Wis 8:10; Sir. 3:11). Within ancient Israel, a human also depended on the honour his father possessed. *Τιμή* is also used imperatively to command honour to be shown others, as wives are supposed to honour their husbands (cf. Est 1:20).

Τιμή also has the meaning of payment in the LXX especially in the sense of an honorarium owed for services rendered (Sir 38:1) or compensation for damages (Gn 20:16) or ransom for redemption (Ex 34:20; Ps 48:9). It could also refer to 'valuables' or 'treasure' (cf. Ezk 22:25; Sir 45:12). It is used once to refer to taxes in 1 Maccabees 10:29. And finally, the idea of 'honourable conduct' occurs in 4 Maccabees 1:10 and 2 Maccabees 4:15, especially in association with martyrdom.

Τιμή within the New Testament

Τιμή holds the following meanings in the writings of the New Testament:

1. 'Honour' – In Romans 12:10, Paul commands the Christians to give honour to one another in a context of equality among members of the faith community which was held in such high regard by the early Christian church. Paul is addressing the charismatics' false claim to spiritual superiority. The charismatic should rather aspire to hold the honour of the other in a higher regard than his own. In 1 Peter 3:7, men are summoned to give honour to their wives. The meaning of *τιμή* in this verse is of particular interest to this study and will be developed further in what follows.
2. 'Esteem', 'dignity', 'recognition': In John 4:44, the Evangelist reports a saying of Jesus that a prophet finds no 'recognition' in his own land. The combination of *τιμή* and *δοξα* which was familiar to Hellenistic thought often occurs in Christological statements (cf. 2 Pt 1:17; Mk 9:2–8; Mt 17:1–8). In 1 Peter 2:7, Christians are said to possess *τιμή* because they will share in the 'honour' of Christ for as living stones they build up the holy house of which Christ is the foundation. The believers are the elect whom God holds in high regard. If they are able to persevere and hold steadfast in their suffering for the sake of Christ, they will also share in his 'praise, glory and honour'.
3. The cultic and liturgical use of the word: In doxological formulae, *τιμή* is often combined with related terms, for

example, δόξα (1 Tm 1:17). This liturgical prayer formula derives from a pre-Christian Hellenistic synagogue. The most highly developed doxologies are found in Revelation *inter alia* 4:9,11; 5:12, 7:12.

4. 'Value' or 'price' – Τιμή can also be used with reference to earthly goods. The members of the original community in Jerusalem delivered the 'money received' through the sale of property to the control of the apostles (Ac 4:34). Annanias and Sapphira were accused of withholding 'proceeds' from the field they sold (Ac 5:2, 3). According to Acts 19:19, the 'value' of the magical books burnt at Ephesus was 50 000 silver drachmas. In Acts 7:16, the grave Abraham purchased was for a 'sum' of silver. So, 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23 is of important theological significance in this regard. A 'price' or 'ransom' was paid for the freedom of the believers and Jesus Christ acquired the believers as a possession, because he paid the 'price with his blood for their liberation from the dominion and power of sin' (cf. Wendland 1964:7).

Τιμή: A social-scientific perspective

Malina (1981:27–28; cf. Malina & Neyrey 1991:25–26) defines honour as:

Honour might be described as socially proper attitudes and behaviour in the area where the three lines of power, sexual status and religion intersect ... Honour is the value of a person in his or her own eyes (that is, one's claim to worth) *plus* that person's value in the eyes of his or her own social group. Honour, then, is a claim to worth *and* the social acknowledgement of that worth ... When a person perceives that his or her actions do in fact reproduce the ideals of society, he or she expects others in the group to acknowledge that fact and what results is a grant of honour, a grant of reputation. (Malina 1981:27–28, [*italics original*])

Honour can either be *ascribed* or *acquired*. Honour is ascribed by being born into a wealthy and respectable family. Ascribed honour therefore is the socially recognised claim to worth which befalls a person. Ascribed honour is attained passively and is not related to any effort or achievement on behalf of the person (Malina & Neyrey 1991:28).

Acquired honour, on the other hand, is a claim to worth, which is recognised by society when a person excels over others within the social interaction which is called *challenge* and *response* (Malina 1981:29).

Challenge and *response* is a form of social contest where men challenged each other to gain honour at the expense of the other. Honour, as everything else in the ancient Mediterranean world, was considered to be a limited commodity. To gain honour another human necessarily had to lose honour. These challenges were a public affair and consisted of the following process:

- The challenge is presented in terms of an action or a verbal provocation or both.
- The challenge is acknowledged by the receiving party as well as by the public.
- The receiving party reacts to the challenge.
- The contest is evaluated by the public.

Although exceptions did occur, these contests normally took place between men of equal social status (Van Eck 1995:166).

Shame was also a positive value, although predominantly a female value. Malina (1981) defines shame as:

... [A] sensitivity for one's own reputation, sensitivity to the opinion of others ... to be sensitive to one's honour rating, to be perceptive to the opinion of others. On the other hand, a shameless person is one who does not recognise the rules of social interaction and who does not recognise social boundaries. (p. 44)

According to Van Eck (1995:116), the shameless person (male or female) is therefore one with a dishonourable reputation beyond any social doubt, one outside the boundaries of acceptable moral life, hence a person who should be denied social courtesies, for to show courtesy to a shameless person, is foolish. Bechtel (1991:47–76) distinguishes between the emotional feeling of shame and the social sanctioning of putting someone to shame. The prior refers to the anxiety caused by 'inadequacy or failure to live up to the *internalised societal and parental goals and ideals*' (Bechtel 1991:49; her italics).

Furthermore, people's primary source of identity was derived from the group which they belonged to.

The ancient Mediterranean personality was dyadic or group-orientated. The group exerted great pressure on people to control social behaviour. Therefore, according to Bechtel (1991:53), shame functioned to exercise social control, to repress undesired behaviour, to preserve social cohesion and to exert domination.

In ancient agrarian societies, women played the positive shame role. This means that women were expected to have this sensitivity towards the human into whose honour they were embedded – whether her father or her husband. Women were also expected to teach this sensitivity to their children (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:371).

An extreme sensitivity existed as far as the sexual shame of a woman was concerned. Male honour, when lost, could be regained, whereas once virginity was lost, a woman's shame, her sensitivity towards honour, was forever lost. Therefore, any sexual offence on a woman's part, however, slightly destroyed her shame as well as the honour of all the men in her paternal group. Therefore, the shame of a younger woman was expected to be defended until death by her brothers, her father and later her husband. As far as mothers were concerned, this was the responsibility of the oldest son.

1 Peter 3:7 in the macro-context of the letter of 1 Peter

The subversive thrust of the author of 1 Peter's rhetoric now deserves attention. The author's strategy is especially concerned with establishing a distinctive Christian identity and then advocates the outward conduct that gives expression to that identity. Horrell (2008:102) moves beyond the Elliott–Balch debate, where Elliott represents the notion that the

author urged his audience to maintain a very distinctive identity and not to assimilate with the surrounding culture, and Balch represents the argument that the author suggested that believers should conform to the practices of the surrounding culture not to provoke further hostility especially from the Roman authorities. Horrell argues that the audience should strive to promote a balance between quiet conformity and simultaneously establishing a distinctive Christian identity (cf. Le Roux 2018:3). Horrell (2008:109; cf. Le Roux 2018:3) convincingly argues that although the author's concern is to comfort his audience, he also wants to motivate them by describing their new identity which became a possibility through the salvation and desire they have in Christ. Therefore, the audience was encouraged to endure suffering in the same way Christ did. 1 Peter thus becomes an important letter in confronting the situation of suffering in the early Christian movement. It gives an example of how the early church applied the acts of Jesus and the writings of the Old Testament to address their contemporary situation of suffering (cf. Davids 1990:3).

The author wants his audience to live blameless and righteous lives to avoid further hostility from the outside world. In the words of Horrell (2008):

[T]he strategy of quiet conformity, within limits, makes sense as a survival strategy in the situation where a powerless minority is oppressed due to both public and imperial hostility. (p. 109, [author's own italics])

Proper moral instruction is therefore key to the author's general message and purpose of his letter.

Dryden (2006:6) advances this idea by arguing that 1 Peter is an example of a paraenetic epistle.

Dibelius (1935:232) argued on the basis of the elaborate *Haustafel* in 1 Peter 2:18–3:7 that 1 Peter was indeed an example of paraenesis.² According to Wilson (1997), this type of epistle aims at exhorting its recipients, who are primarily newly converts to a particular philosophical school, to persevere on their chosen journey and to continuously shape their lives in such a way that it would reflect the teachings they now embrace. The desire of the sender of a paraenetic letter is that the recipients will grow and mature morally. Dryden (2006:7) therefore argues that the author of 1 Peter seeks to encourage new converts to Christianity to exceedingly conform to the ideal Christian character by displaying moral integrity situated in dependence on God. Dryden (2006:8) further argues that the author wants to encourage character growth amidst suffering and social ostracism. Viewed in this way, the entire letter is composed in such a way that it motivates moral growth (cf. Le Roux 2018:64).

The specific concern of paraenesis was moral development or character growth. Virtues have to be enforced whereas prior vices have to be abandoned. Dryden (2006:24) mentions that

'in the ancient world conversion entailed a radical reorientation, involving a degree of estrangement, not only from one's old beliefs, but also from a society which endorsed them'. Therefore, one had to be 're-socialised' into a new philosophy. This was a troublesome period for the newly converted because old ties, habits, rituals, practices and relationships had to be abandoned, and new ones had to be established. It was extremely difficult, given the ancient Mediterranean's group-orientated personality, the fact that the place to which one belonged defined one as a human being. It was during this period that the need for paraenetic letter writing became evident because the new social commitments had to be encouraged and the old ones had to be viewed with continuous contempt.

Therefore, Dryden (2006:24; cf. Le Roux 2018:64) argues that paraenesis is not simply a form of moral instruction; it is concerned with the transformation of an entire life in all its complexity.

Boring (2007:8) emphasises that it is characteristic of paraenetic literature to create a new understanding of reality and that the literature invites the audience to live their lives in the world as proposed by the paraenesis. The addressees are confronted not only with indicative theological statements, promises and moral imperatives, but also with a new understanding of reality. This new understanding of reality is not explicitly communicated through the letter genre; however, it is presupposed and shaped around the Christ-event, which forms the theological basis of the composed letter (Le Roux 2018:64–65). In an epistle, events are not chronologically narrated. Events are presupposed by the author to construct a narrative world. Toolan (2001:7) defines an event as a 'change of state'. In other words, an event describes something that took place: it happened. When something happens, it causes change. An event is contextual, limited to time and space (Boring 2007:10). When an event took place, it is valued by a certain group of people as significant to their creation of meaning. A sequence of events constructed chronologically becomes eventually a story, and stories are a crucial part of what it means to be human.

The significance of the Christ-event, *id est*

Christ who was crucified and resurrected at a specific time and place within history is of such a nature that it cannot be presented chronologically, for it influences the past, the present and the future (cf. Boring 2007:24–26). The author looks back to Christ manifesting in the historical Jesus, the Christ who became flesh and lived among humans, and looks forward to the glorified Christ, which will be completely revealed in the future. The Christ-event is again embedded within the greater narrative of God's involvement with creation and that Christ was predestined before the foundation of the world (cf. 1 Pt 1:20). So also the recipients of the letter were pre-elected as God's people (cf. 1 Pt 1:2).

In this respect, the author's quotation of Old Testament Scripture becomes important. The audience of 1 Peter is the

²On the origins of Christian paraenesis, see Thurén 1995.

people to whom the Scripture speaks (cf. 1 Pt 1:10–12). In the case of 1 Peter, a narrative is not constructed, but the author projects a symbolic universe, which contains certain events. The shared history is reflected in the letter because the author supposes that his audience is familiar with these events. The letter does not only project a symbolic universe based on past events, but also on future eschatological events.

Finally, paraenetic literature seeks to foster an emotional desire for virtue. In developing these emotions, the use of the moral exemplar is very effective because the convert develops an admiration for the virtuous person.

In early Christian literature, that virtuous person is Jesus Christ.

In examining 1 Peter, it becomes clear that the letter does indeed display paraenetic characteristics. The letter contains many moral instructions in the form of exhortations and admonitions, of which the *Haustafel* forms a special kind of moral instruction concerned with domestic affairs. Virtue and vice lists occur in 1 Peter 3:8; 2:1 and 4:3. Jesus *par excellence* serves as a moral exemplar (cf. Schnelle 1998:404). Bechtler (1998) states:

Christ is invoked both as prototype or template for Christian life and as example for his followers. His suffering was uniquely redemptive, to be sure, but it also set the pattern that Christian life must follow, and Christ's disposition during suffering sets the example for the faithful, who are to follow in his steps. Christ is the means by which God has saved the addressees, and Christ continues to function as their example and as the touchstone for how they should conduct themselves in society. (p. 184)

On the basis of the following statement by Dryden (2006), this study agrees with the hypothesis of defining 1 Peter as an epistle with a strong paraenetic character:

[T]he author reminds them of their conversion and draws out moral implications, calling for a break with their past way of life, and a renewed dedication to pursuing of their new life in Christ. (p. 39)

Additionally, the author also aims at constructing a world view displaying God's action in the world and therefore integrates the moral instruction with a concrete situation (cf. Martin 2007:48). Paraenesis becomes an effective literary genre to encourage the audience to continue on the path they have chosen, especially because their decision led them to become strangers and foreigners living in Diaspora (Martin 2007:61).

This study agrees with this approach. Lohse (1986:43) notes that the unit in 1 Peter 2:11–3:12, in which the *Haustafel* occurs, forms the centre of the epistle encouraging the addressees to endure and maintain a life of good conduct, in spite of the slandering that they have to endure, so that their non-believing neighbours will see their good works and praise God. The Christian communities are also urged to obey the authorities.

According to Lohse, the *Haustafel* traditions, which also occur in other New Testament writings, are employed here to serve the main purpose of the epistle, namely that the suffering Christians should through their good deeds 'silence the ignorance of foolish men' (cf. 1 Pt 2:15) (Le Roux 2018:64). Balch (1981:81) with his emphasis on the *Haustafel* argues that the author rather wished his audience to reduce social tension with their non-believing neighbours by proper social conforming conduct in the household.

This study appreciates this view; however, Balch's view that the author wanted to encourage assimilation and conformation cannot be accepted. The author places too much stress on the distinctiveness of the Christian community (Le Roux 2018:65). This study rather agrees with Achtemeier's (1988:219) insistence that assimilation into Hellenistic culture was what the author wanted to discourage the most (cf. Elliott 1986b:72–73). For Elliott, as mentioned above, the author was adamant that the Christian community should maintain their distinctive Christian character and identity and that to re-assimilate would be a form of regression with the ultimate outcome that the Christian communities would cease to exist (cf. Le Roux 2018:64).

The epistle's emphasis on conversion, especially in 1 Peter 1:13–2:3, fits with the paraenetic agenda, describing life before and after conversion to promote the virtues of the new and eradicate the vices of the former.

The question arises, however, why the author opted for the genre of a paraenetic letter to address the suffering that his audience was experiencing. Why does he encourage them to strive for excellence in moral conduct when they are suffering? The answer that Dryden (2006:44) provides is that the author responded to the 'moral challenge' of suffering. The human reaction towards suffering would be revolution, retribution, violence and vengeance, but the author of 1 Peter preferred his addressees to maintain the moral higher ground. Dryden (2006:44; cf. Le Roux 2018:65) identifies that the audience was confronted with two serious temptations. The first is to retaliate and to re-assimilate to their previous pagan ways and the second is to respond with revolutionary activity, rebellion and violence.

Therefore, the author does not simply write to them to comfort them and the aid them in surviving these troubling times, but he motivates them towards character development amidst these challenging circumstances. In the words of Dryden (2006:45): 'In fact, the author interprets their situation of suffering as a means of bringing about growth. Persecution is not something to be endured but an *opportunity for growth*' (cf. Le Roux 2018:66). This character growth is not only manifested in virtuous and exemplary conduct, but also in growing faith. This is an important aspect of the author's purpose for composing this letter because of the universal human response to suffering and how it should be reflected upon within the theological framework of the Christian tradition (Le Roux 2018:66, [*author's own italics*]).

The suffering of Christ provides the theological framework within which the addressees should discover their new identity as well as the moral conduct which results from this identity. Christ ought to be imitated, especially in his suffering and in the way that he practised 'soft resistance'.

For the historical critical exegete, it is crucial to take cognisance of the fact that the Greek word *πάσχω* 'to suffer' and derivatives thereof occur more in the letter of 1 Peter than in any other New Testament writing (12x) (1 Pt 2:19, 20, 21, 23; 3:14, 17, 18; 4:1 [2x], 15, 19; 5:10) and the related noun *παθήματος* 'suffering' in 1:11; 4:13, 5:1, 9. Frequently, reference is made to the suffering of Christ in 1:2, 19; 2:4, 23–24.

The innocent suffering of Christ is compared to the undeserved suffering of the addressees, for similar to Christ they did no wrong (2:19, 21–25; 3:28; 4:1). From the contents of the letter, this study concludes that the suffering that the addressees experienced was that of continuous slander and abuse by non-believers who shamed the Christians and brought them into discredit with the local Roman authorities (Le Roux 2018:56).

Neugebauer (1980:62) also views the nature of the suffering as verbal rather than physical (cf. *καταλαλέω* 'speak evil of' 2:12, 3:16; *ἐπιπράζω* 'mistreat, insult' 3:16; *βλασφημέω* 'speak against slander, insult' 4:4; *ὀνειδίζω* 'reproach' 4:14; *λοιδορέω* 'curse, speak evil of, insult' and *ἀντιλοιδορέω* 'reply with a curse' 2:23; *κακός*, ἡ, ὄν 'evil, bad, wrong; injury, harm (as a noun)' 3:9 and *κακώω* 'treat badly, harm; be cruel and force' 3:13). The non-believing outsiders, because of their ignorance towards the Christian movement, accused the Christians of evil conduct (1 Pt 2:12, 15, 19–20; 3:15). This heightens the continuous estrangement of the believers from the non-believers. Christians were regarded with suspicion because they withdrew from previous associations (4:4) and they were slandered as *Χριστιανός* (4:16), an abusive name meaning 'Christ lackeys' (Elliott 2000:101; cf. Boring 1999:44; cf. Le Roux 2018:57), because of their confessing of Jesus as the Christ. This form of address had a dangerous connotation within a Roman context because it provoked the imagery of the rebellion Jesus, who called himself the Christ, who was crucified in Jerusalem. Those who became his followers might also have revolutionist ideals and therefore posed a threat to the stability of the society. Christians all over the world experienced the same suffering (1 Pt 5:9).

Therefore, this study agrees with Elliott (1990:62) that the causes for the suffering experienced by the Christians should be sought rather in the general interaction, and conflict that arose from this interaction, within the larger society of Asia Minor (cf. Le Roux 2018:57). This study therefore suggests that the author's use of *παροίκους* 'resident aliens' (1 Pt 2:11) to address his audience is rather a reference to their alienation from the society in which they were quite at home prior to their conversion (Le Roux 2018:57).

The situation described above could easily lead to the newly converted becoming disillusioned and experiencing despair.

If the situation persisted or was simply ignored, the believers would become discouraged. Many of them would consider deserting the Christian movement to avoid this suffering. As the believers became estranged as a result of their conversion to Christianity, a simple return to the former ways and a re-assimilation into the society which they belonged to would put an immediate end to this experience. This would ultimately lead to the disappearance of the Christian movement in Asia Minor.

Therefore, the audience required a persuasive word of consolation to remain steadfast in their new faith and commitment to God, Christ and one another and to resist the temptation of returning to previous pagan practices (Elliott 2000:103). The letter confronts the issue of the addressees' innocent suffering, which is the consequence of them being ostracised by the societies they belonged to by emphasising their moral distinctiveness and solidarity with fellow Christians, even elsewhere in the world.

In the words of Green (2007:3), '1 Peter offers not so much an invitation as an exercise in formation in the character and ways of God'. Their conduct should be modelled on that of Christ, who rejected the idea of becoming a political reformer and eventually suffered on a *Roman* cross. The Christian communities were struggling with finding and maintaining their identity as God's holy people in a hostile world. It is the purpose of the author of 1 Peter to alleviate this struggle by identifying with the suffering Christ in the hope that they will also share in his glorification certified by the resurrection of Christ (Le Roux 2018:67).

The letter also has a missionary agenda furthered by the ethic that it proposes. Elliott (2000:104) emphasises the missionary concerns of early Christianity. The Christian movement was attractive to outsiders; precisely because of their distinctiveness, they formed an alternative community. Within this community, they had moral obligations not only towards one another but also as far as relations to the outside world were concerned (1 Pt 4:7–11) (Michaels 1988:xxxv; cf. Le Roux 2018:67).

McDonald (1998:10) employs the term 'crucible' to describe the context in which the ethics of the first Christian communities took shape. The Christians should respect everyone, especially those in authoritative positions (1 Pt 2:13–17). The general emphasis of the letter is on how Christians should respond to their hostile neighbours – they have a missionary obligation towards them (1 Pt 2:11–12) and should pursue to live in peace with their unbelieving neighbours (1 Pt 3:11) (Michaels 1988:xxxv; Le Roux 2018:67). A new *modus vivendi* and a distinctive Christian ethos, which resulted from ethical reflection on Christian theology, had to be created. MacIntyre (1995) summarises it as follows:

What they set themselves out to achieve instead – often not recognising fully what they were doing – was the construction of new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness. (p. 263)

Christian communities parted ways with the social world within which they existed, yet they did not practise ascetism. They were still living *in* this society, although with a radically different world view and accompanying ethos. Their social and public lives were now to be determined by their status as Christians or followers of Christ (Le Roux 2018:67–68).

The first Christian congregations formed an alternative community based on their new identity in Christ (Roloff 1993:38; cf. Le Roux 2018:70). Barton (2001:35) states that to take part in the new fictional family in Christ implied the vocation to manifest the values as embodied by the life and works of Christ in their everyday situations. These values include love, sacrifice, respect, forgiveness, obedience, faithfulness, friendship and hospitality. Barton (2001:112) also argues that these new relations had the potential to achieve true social reform. According to Barton (1994:107; cf. Le Roux 2018:70), the early Christians were not without hope. Although the followers of Christ experienced social marginalisation, they also lived in the promise of a new eschatological community founded on the authority of Christ (Le Roux 2018:70).

Le Roux (2018:70) states that if these Christian communities were to succumb to the temptation of returning to the former existence and to conform once again to the society from which they separated because of their conversion to Christianity, this distinctiveness would be completely lost (cf. Elliott 2000:104 contra Balch 1981).

Strategy plays an important role in the author's success to persuade the audience on a cognitive and emotional level to motivate them towards certain behaviour and commitment to their Christian faith.

The author wrote in response to their situation of suffering and the strategy employed had to effectively address this particular circumstance. The letter was designed to address the Christian community's suffering caused by their continuous social alienation. The author had to respond to their suffering in such a way that the control the suffering has over them is lessened. This situation could lead to the Christian communities completely disappearing because they abandoned all hope and trust. Britzer (1968:6–7) calls thus the 'constraint' that they found themselves in. The author had to respond to their constraint. Therefore, the author stressed their collective new identity and their glorified status as elected by God. The believers had to realise their inherent worth as belonging to and sanctified by God, exactly because they were shamed and humiliated by unbelievers. Their new collective identity also had to manifest within the community in relation and solidarity with their fellow Christians. This feeling of belonging to a new family created a mutual support system against the hostility experienced from non-believers (Le Roux 2018:66).

1 Peter offers, as Feldmeier (2005:29) describes, a theology as a reflective account of faith. Feldmeier (2005:30) finds it

refreshing that a letter written primarily to console and to encourage is so rich in doctrine, and argues that the content of the Apostolic Creed could all be found in 1 Peter.

The command to husbands in 1 Peter 3:7 forms part of the author's paraenetic strategy and in this command, the author is not merely advocating a break with a previously accepted moral code, but he is establishing a new evaluation of reality within a certain theological framework. Therefore, the command to husbands to show honour to their wives should be interpreted in correlation with the wives' inherent value as fellow heirs, *συγκληρονόμοις*, of the grace received in Christ. It becomes quite clear that it is the faithful husbands who are being addressed because the motivation behind the commandment is the fulfilment of prayers (Gielen 1990:363).

The author's entire paraenesis addressed to husbands consists of only one verse. It is, however, a theologically and ethically loaded verse.

Firstly, the co-existence of the husbands with the wives is in focus and not their general co-existence with all the women of their household but with the wives to whom they are legally married (Reicke 1954:302). This co-existence should now be defined as *κατὰ γυνῶσιν*. *γυνῶσις*, εως *ς*, according to Bultmann (1957:690), at least as far as the profane linguistic use of the word is concerned, denotes a theoretical acknowledgement or insight, which is the consequence of reflection. But the Christian employment of the concept orientates itself towards the religious use thereof which means that within the Old Testament or Jewish context, *γυνῶσις* or theoretical knowledge of God always included the practical consequence of the fulfilment of God's will (Bultmann 1957:704–709). The fulfilment of the divine will take place within actual relations. It is therefore not farfetched to argue that knowledge in this sense is very closely intertwined with love – in the sense of 1 Corinthians 13:2. If one were to be in the possession of all the world's knowledge, but one does not have love, then one is indeed nothing. Therefore, divine acknowledgement is always bound to love in as far as the right insight into the divine will leads to the right actions (cf. Phlp 1:9; Col 3:19; Eph 5:25) (Gielen 1990:529).

In a similar way, the husbands are ordered to treat their wives with love and consideration and their behaviour should result from their relationship through faith in Jesus Christ. The motivation for this command is that their wives are the 'weaker vessel' *ὡς ἄσθενεστέρῳ σκεύει*. Gielen (1990:530) is convinced that this use of the word *σκεῦος* holds no negative meaning (see Beare 1974; Kelly 1969; Schelkle 1968; Selwyn 1947), but that it merely refers to women being physically weaker than men. The physical weakness of the women provides further motivation as for why husbands should treat their wives with love and consideration.

Σκεῦος, ους *ν* 'object, thing (pl. often goods, property); vessel, container, dish; instrument' refers to a jar or container of some sort. Luke 8:16 employs the term to refer to the lamp that should not be covered by a jar or a vessel. The New

Testament does, however, discern between two types of vessels: the ordinary ἀτιμίαν and the special τιμὴν. In Romans 9:21, Paul writes: ἢ οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν ὁ κεραμεὺς τοῦ πηλοῦ ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ φυράματος ποιῆσαι ὃ μὲν εἰς τιμὴν σκεῦος ὃ δὲ εἰς ἀτιμίαν [Does the Potter not have power over the clay, to make out of the same lump of clay one vessel unto honour and another onto dishonour].

According to 2 Timothy 2:20, honour can be ascribed to vessels: Ἐν μεγάλῃ δὲ οἰκίᾳ οὐκ ἔστιν μόνον σκεῦη χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργυροῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ ξύλινα καὶ ὄστράκινα, καὶ ἃ μὲν εἰς τιμὴν ἃ δὲ εἰς ἀτιμίαν [But in a big house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, and some to honour and some to dishonour].

Within this context, 1 Peter's employment of σκεῦος in 3:7, he is probably referring to a fragile piece of pottery, which demands special care and therefore the instruction to the husbands would be that as believers they should treat their non-believing wives with care. Rather than exercising power over them and forcing them into the same religion, unbelieving wives could be converted to the Christian faith if their husbands treat them with dignity. This is analogous with how Christian wives were to influence their non-believing husbands and slaves their non-believing masters.

ἀσθενεστέρῳ σκεύει is therefore no theological or sociological evaluation, but rather a naturally given reality. It is on the grounds of a woman's physical weakness and because of her vulnerability within the patriarchal context, that she is entrusted to her husband's special consideration and loving care. Rather, the theological and sociological evaluation of the wives should be found in the command to the husbands to honour their wives as fellow heirs of the grace of eternal life given by Christ. The husbands should not use their dominance as women, but should renounce their position of dominance like Christ did.

The paraenesis addressed to the husbands reaches its climax in both these phrases: συνοικοῦντες κατὰ γνώσιν and ἀπονέμοντες τιμὴν. Similarly, as in the *Haustafeln* in Colossians and Ephesians, the command in 1 Peter 3:7 urges husbands to love their wives and thereby any attachment to their positions of power within their patriarchal society is abolished. The argumentation is that the right relationship with God through faith brings about revelation or knowledge of the divine will, which necessitates certain conduct, and in this particular case the husband's relationship with God leads to a radically different treatment of his wife as that which was commonly understood (see also Popp 2010).

It would have been contradictory if the author was to raise women to the status of moral agents before their unbelieving husbands, only for them to be trampled upon by their believing husbands, especially if the only *caveat* for the husbands is the threat that their prayers will not be answered. This interpretation would not resonate with the immediately following instruction that the whole Christian community should embrace Jesus' 'revolutionary subordination'.

In my opinion, there are two extreme interpretations of the text and neither do the intention of the author of 1 Peter justice, if one does the proper exegesis within the subversive nature that the text displays. The conservative argument would be that the author perpetuates the natural order of things and insists on women being the weaker and subordinate sex; however, they do share in the salvation promised by Christ. To these exegetes, women's inferiority is a self-evident truth (Nugent 2018:8), although such an opinion is not politically correct, it is maintained as a so-called 'Biblical truth'.

Other more liberal exegetes would also argue that the text confirms and perpetuates patriarchy, only with the difference that they criticise the author for doing so, but excuses it as part of the author's cultural heritage of which he is not able to detach himself. These exegetes would then argue that we must leave the cultural baggage of the text behind. Nugent (2018:8) affirmed my original notion that neither does the intention of the author justice. Nugent (2018) argues that:

[C]onsistent with the subversive nature of the wider pericope in which the verse is situated, he was asking men to lay aside their cultural advantage and win over their unbelieving wives in the same Christlike manner that slaves, women and the wider community were called to non-coercively welcome Gentiles into the chorus of believers. (p. 8)

This makes sense when one looks at the author's employment of ὁμοίως 'likewise': the same logic, the same argument that was used to instruct slaves and women, is now used to instruct husbands.

Concluding remarks

The macro-context of the letter of 1 Peter is the consolation of the tiny and fragile Christian congregations in Asia Minor at the end of the 1st century CE. These communities fall victim to serious social ostracising, marginalisation and slandering because of their separation from former pagan ways. It is therefore a situation of a few scattered faithful communities against an antagonistic, mighty Roman Empire and state cult. The main objective of the author in writing the epistle is therefore to encourage and console these suffering and struggling communities. The strategy the author employs, especially in his paraenetic arguments, is one of revolutionary subordination in continuum with the example of Christ, which is advocated as the ultimate ethical guideline in 1 Peter 2:21.

The *Haustafeln* becomes the micro-cosmos within which this struggle is fought. In a similar way, as the entire Christian community should remain steadfast in the faith and in solidarity with Christ and through their good and moral conduct engage missionary with their hostile neighbours, wives married to unbelieving husbands should become moral agents. In 1 Peter 3:1, the universal tense relationship of the Christian communities with their hostile neighbours is played out within the realm of marriage within which, given the patriarchal society of the 1st-century Mediterranean world, women were not in an influential position at all.

However, the author's statement in 1 Peter 3:1 empowers women to become active moral agents – something remarkable and extraordinary.

Balch in *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (1981) offers valuable perspectives, which aid us in understanding the role of women within the 1st-century Mediterranean context:

1. It was generally accepted that the wife will adopt the religious custom of her husband.
2. However, this social order was increasingly threatened by the emergence of mystery cults from the East, which were particularly attractive to women. These cults were therefore regarded by most men as useless superstitions.
3. Although women enjoyed equal rights and certain privileged within these mystery cults, their practices were often extremely immoral by even pagan standards and often involved sexual transgressions. In such a way, for instance, the Dionysos cult was criticised as not only sexually immoral but politically subversive (cf. Lv39:13, 10). Women were considered to be the primary sources of evil behind these cults.

Against this background, 1 Peter 3:1 should be read. 1 Peter 3:1 is not only indicative of the equality women enjoyed within the early Christian movement (see Goppelt 1993), but it also serves as a realistic, sober and pragmatic orientation. Were women to behave in a too radical manner, they simply would have endangered themselves more. Rather wives should remain submissive and become missionaries within their marriages, simply by the way they conduct themselves within their marriages women could be influential.

An example of 'revolutionary subordination'

As members of a religious community which their husbands regarded with contempt, women draw suspicion and judgement upon themselves. Therefore, the ἀναστροφή ἧς of the wives should counter these accusations in that their exemplary conduct is not despite of their commitment to Jesus Christ but a consequence thereof. This means that Christian wives were to accept the leading roles of their husbands within their households. However, it is their fear of God and not their fear of their husbands who should motivate their good conduct, and this becomes the way in which they will influence their husbands to become followers of Christ.

On the basis of 1 Peter 3:1 with the command to wives and 1 Peter 3:7 with the only command to husbands, it is the hypothesis of this study that the author of 1 Peter viewed women to be active moral agents and objects of τιμή, which up until now was an almost exclusive masculine value.

This leads me to the conclusion that the author of 1 Peter is not perpetuating the socially accepted view that women are inherently weaker and should be treated as such. Rather, he employs the metaphor of how households treated precious and delicate vessels as a model for the behaviour of the husbands

towards their wives. The motivation for their behaviour is faith and knowledge and definitely not social confirmation. If the author wanted to maintain the culturally and socially prescribed differences based upon gender, then he would not have said 'likewise' but 'husbands, on the other hand', meaning that as they are men, different rules should apply.

I expect to have shattered the idea that 1 Peter 3:1–7 could be used to argue that the inferiority of women is a biblically sanctioned truth. On the contrary, the author of 1 Peter is rather employing a polemic against this notion because of the subversive nature of the text. Furthermore, one should be cautious to assume that the instruction to slaves, wives and husbands refers to relationships between believers. If one looks at the instruction to slaves and wives, it becomes abundantly clear that their behaviour towards non-believers is in focus. There is no reason why the instruction to husbands should be interpreted differently. The author's concern throughout the letter is about the mission that Christians have within and towards a hostile world. The author of 1 Peter is not arguing for an ascetic lifestyle, but for engagement with the pagan world to win non-believers over to the faith.

The fact that the author urges husbands to honour their wives fits within the greater scope of the letter that honour should be bestowed upon *all* people because if they are not part of the community of believers yet, they might become that because of the exemplary conduct of the addressees. Therefore, those who are opposing them now might and probably will become believers themselves and as such are co-heirs of the grace of Jesus Christ.

To conclude, 1 Peter 3:7 makes the point that social privilege, whether it is on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, seniority or status, should not be abused by believers to force non-believers into the Christian faith. Instead, following in the footsteps of Christ involves laying down the interests of the self and taking up one's cross. This means par excellence to resort from any form of power play for Jesus Christ laid down his Godly status and submitted himself without hesitation to the will of God the father.

Therefore, especially people within the Christian community who enjoy a form of social privilege should keep in mind that those in the social strata beneath them are also co-heirs of the grace bestowed upon them in Jesus Christ. The letter therefore takes an unparalleled stand for equality among all believers who include equality among the genders, which is within the patriarchal Mediterranean subversive context indeed.

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I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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