

BETWEEN CONFORMITY AND RESISTANCE:

BEYOND THE BALCH-ELLIOTT DEBATE TOWARDS A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF 1 PETER\*

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*The Balch-Elliott debate and the reasons for a new methodology*

First Peter remains, and is likely always to remain – for all sorts of theological and historical reasons – a relatively neglected corner of the New Testament canon, despite the best efforts of primopetrophiles to rehabilitate it.<sup>1</sup> It would hardly leap to mind as an

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I would like to thank the participants in the SBL 1 Peter Consultation, and especially John Elliott, who chaired our session, for generous and thoughtful comments on my earlier draft.

It was an honour to present this essay in Elliott's company, twenty-five years after the publication of the two monographs (his and David Balch's) that sparked the debate from which my paper (and others too) takes its initial orientation. The research and writing for this essay were supported by a Small Research Grant from the British Academy for which I here express my sincere thanks. I would also like to thank Jonathan Morgan for assistance with creating a bibliographical database, John White for giving me an initial orientation to the literature on postcolonialism, and Stephen Moore for valuable comments on a draft.

<sup>1</sup> Here, of course, I allude to the work of John Elliott, a prominent primopetrophile (Elliott's term), who has done most to rehabilitate this 'exegetical step-child' (cf. John H. Elliott, 'The Rehabilitation of an Exegetical Step-Child: 1 Peter in Recent Research', *JBL*, 95 (1976), 243-54. Elliott's most influential and substantial contributions to research on 1 Peter are: *The Elect and the Holy: An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4-10 and the Phrase Basileion Hierateuma* (NovTSup, 12; Leiden: Brill, 1966); *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia:

obvious storm centre of debate and discussion in modern scholarship. Stephen Neill, with perhaps a touch of hyperbole, did in fact describe this short letter as precisely that in his 1964 survey of the history of NT interpretation, referring specifically to the starkly contrasting views of 1 Peter in two (then) recently published commentaries, those of Edward Gordon Selwyn and Francis Wright Beare.<sup>2</sup> But a more obvious and prominent ‘storm centre’ in the interpretation of 1 Peter came a few decades later, in the early 1980s, when the letter was the focus of an important debate between David Balch and John Elliott, a debate generated by the contrasting conclusions of their two contemporaneously published monographs.<sup>3</sup> The Balch-Elliott debate was and remains significant not only for the interpretation of 1 Peter but also for the use of social-scientific resources in NT studies, Fortress; London: SCM, 1981); *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (Oxford: OUP, 1964) 343: ‘In a very real sense, the little Epistle called 1 Peter is the storm-centre of New Testament studies.’ For Neill, it might be noted, the divergent results in these two commentaries raises serious questions: ‘Now if two scholars can arrive at such widely divergent results, both on the basis of theoretically scientific methods of study, something must have gone seriously wrong somewhere’ (p. 344). The two commentaries are: Francis W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter* (3rd edn.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1970 [1947]) Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (2nd edn.; London: Macmillan, 1952 [1946])

<sup>3</sup> David L Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (SBLMS 26; Atlanta, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), Elliott, *Home*. In a recent review of research on 1 Peter, Mark Dubis comments that ‘[o]ne of the principal debates related to the study of 1 Peter has been that between Elliott and Balch’; Mark Dubis, ‘Research on 1 Peter: A Survey of Scholarly Literature Since 1985’, *CBR*, 4 (2006), 199-239, at p. 212.

an approach that was then still relatively new but developing rapidly.

The focus for Balch's work, a published version of his doctoral thesis originally presented in 1974, was the domestic code in 1 Peter (1 Pet 2.11–3.12). In tracing the origins of this code to the Greek 'household management' (oikonomi/a) tradition stemming especially from Plato and Aristotle,<sup>4</sup> Balch made an important and lasting contribution to the understanding of the NT *Haustafeln* generally. In terms of the function of the code in 1 Peter, Balch saw this as connected with the tensions evident between Christians and their wider society. Such tensions would have been especially prominent in households where some individual members, slaves or wives for example (cf. 1 Pet 2.18-20; 3.1-6), had converted to Christianity without the head of the household, or the household as a whole, having done so. In such instances, Christians came in for criticism not only for following a strange and novel eastern cult but also for 'corrupting and reversing Roman social and household customs',<sup>5</sup> and failing to conform to the social expectation that household members would follow the patterns of religious observance of the head of the household.<sup>6</sup> In the domestic code instruction, then, the author of 1 Peter is seen by Balch as urging such Christians to lessen criticism of their social deviance by conforming as closely as possible to accepted hellenistic social norms, without compromising their commitment to Christ. The code thus has an apologetic purpose, to demonstrate that Christians follow a respectable form of 'constitution'.<sup>7</sup> In his later paper

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<sup>4</sup> Balch, *Wives*, 23-62.

<sup>5</sup> Balch, *Wives*, 119.

<sup>6</sup> Plutarch, for example, emphatically makes the point that the wife should know and worship only the gods that her husband recognises, and should avoid all strange religions and alien superstitions (*Mor.* 140D). See further Balch, *Wives*, 65-80.

<sup>7</sup> Balch, *Wives*, 81-121.

responding to Elliott's work, Balch draws on social-scientific studies of how minority groups variously adapt to a wider society and culture to illuminate the strategy of assimilation or acculturation he sees in 1 Peter.<sup>8</sup> In short, the purpose of 1 Peter, and specifically its domestic code, was to lessen the hostility and antagonism suffered by Christians by urging them to demonstrate their conformity to conventional social expectations. The Church, in other words, was to accommodate to the world, in order to reduce the tension between them.

Elliott's ground-breaking work of what he then called 'sociological exegesis' (since relabelled 'social-scientific criticism') took a different approach to 1 Peter. In seeking to understand the situation of the addressees, Elliott focused on the terms *paroikoi* and *parepidemotai* (cf. 1 Pet 1.1; 1.17; 2.11), arguing – against an established tendency to read these terms as metaphors indicating that the Christians' true home was in heaven – that these labels described their socio-political status. The first readers of 1 Peter are depicted in the letter, Elliott concludes, as 'strangers and aliens, some of whom are residing permanently and others of whom are living temporarily in the five regions or four provinces of Asia Minor'.<sup>9</sup> For these estranged and dislocated people, the Church offered a 'home', a place of belonging in which these 'strangers' found a positive and valued identity as God's own people. The strategy of 1 Peter, then, was to foster internal cohesion among the community of believers, the 'brotherhood' (*adelphoi*, 2.17; 5.9), to build a distinctive communal identity and resist external pressures to conform

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<sup>8</sup> David L. Balch, 'Hellenization/Acculturation in 1 Peter', in Charles H. Talbert (ed.), *Perspectives on First Peter* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 79-101, at pp. 86-96.

<sup>9</sup> Elliott, *Home*, 47.

In order to grasp and illuminate the character of the ecclesial community and the strategy of the author, Elliott draws on social-scientific studies of religious sects, particularly the typology developed by Bryan Wilson, and categorises the church depicted in 1 Peter as a 'conversionist sect'.<sup>10</sup> This is a sect which regards the world as an evil and hostile place, but which at the same time considers itself to have a missionary task, to save individuals from this wicked world through conversion into the sect. Elliott's stress, therefore, is on the distinction between the Church and the world. In direct opposition to Balch, he argues that:

nothing in 1 Peter, including its discussion of household duties, indicates an interest in promoting social assimilation. It was precisely a temptation to assimilate so as to avoid further suffering that the letter intended to counteract... [T]he letter affirms the distinctive communal identity and seeks to strengthen the solidarity of the Christian brotherhood so that it might resist external pressure urging cultural conformity and thereby make effective witness to the distinctive features of its communal life, its allegiance and its hope of salvation.<sup>11</sup>

The contrast with Balch's conclusions is clear, and leads to an almost diametrically opposing assessment of the Church's relationship with the world. Where Balch sees assimilation and conformity, Elliott sees distinctiveness and resistance.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Elliott, *Home*, 73-84, 101-50.

<sup>11</sup> John H. Elliott, '1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy: A Discussion with David Balch', in Charles H. Talbert (ed.), *Perspectives on First Peter* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 61-78 72-73, 78.

<sup>12</sup> These contrasting assessments find resonance in many other – albeit very different – readings of 1 Peter, some of which expose what they see as the letter's dangerously conformist and unliberating ethic, which keeps slaves and wives in their place, even in

Time and space do not allow an assessment of the specific points of disagreement, nor, indeed, of the agreements and overlaps.<sup>13</sup> Neither can I review the various attempts to progress beyond the contrasting alternatives of Balch and Elliott.<sup>14</sup> What is important here is to draw attention to those points which indicate the potential and the need for a methodology that can take us beyond the Balch-Elliott debate and their opposing conclusions about 1 Peter.

First, while disagreements do not necessarily indicate that a new and different methodology is required – they may simply indicate that one protagonist is correct, the suffering - e.g., Kathleen Corley, '1 Peter', in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures, Vol.2: A Feminist Commentary* (London: SCM, 1995), 349-60 - others of which see in the letter a more positive model for the church's distinctive existence in society - e.g., Miroslav Volf, 'Soft Difference: Reflections on the Relation Between Church and Culture in 1 Peter', *Ex Auditu*, 10 (1994); Larry Miller, 'La Protestation Sociale dans la Première Lettre de Pierre', *Social Compass*, 46 (1999), 521-43.

<sup>13</sup> An excellent early review essay on Balch and Elliott's work is Antoinette C. Wire, 'Review Essay on Elliott, *Home for the Homeless*, and Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*', *RSR*, 10 (1984), 209-16.

<sup>14</sup> For a valuable overview of relevant scholarship, see Stephen R. Bechtler, *Following in His Steps: Suffering, Community, and Christology in 1 Peter* (SBLDS 162; Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1998), 10-18, 112-18. See also Dubis, 'Research on 1 Peter', 212-14. Bechtler's own proposal is to use Victor Turner's theory of liminality to show how 'Christian life for 1 Peter is a liminal existence' (p. 118). This is a suggestive approach in various respects, but it fails to connect the liminality sufficiently with the imperial context which fundamentally (so the present argument) shapes the conditions in which the Church's existence is played out.

other mistaken! – the contrasting assessments of the letter that emerge from the use of different social-scientific perspectives may lead us to question whether an alternative approach might not be better able to account for the character and nuance of the letter’s content. Elliott, for example, acknowledges that ‘[a]t some points [in 1 Peter] Christian and secular valuations of behavior converge’, while ‘[a]t other key points... a distinctive Christian perspective and rationale is evident and a clear distinction of allegiance and ethos is stressed’.<sup>15</sup> He sees both these aspects of relationship to the world – ‘boundary maintenance’ and ‘system linkage (contacts and interdependency...)’ – as part of the difficult balance that any minority group, not least a conversionist sect, must negotiate, and suggests that Balch has paid attention to ‘only one of the two horns of this dilemma’.<sup>16</sup> But just as Balch may be criticised for attending only, or primarily, to the tendency towards conformity, or assimilation, in 1 Peter, so Elliott may be thought to have overemphasised the other tendency, namely the attempt ‘to reinforce a sense of distinctive Christian identity and solidarity’.<sup>17</sup> The issue – one which, as Elliott notes, has dogged scholarship on 1 Peter for some time<sup>18</sup> – is what kind of interpretative perspective will best enable us to do justice to these apparently diverse facets of the letter.

Second, while the huge range of potentially applicable social-scientific resources means that a wide variety of potentially incompatible readings is always possible,<sup>19</sup> we may

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<sup>15</sup> Elliott, '1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy', 66.

<sup>16</sup> Elliott, '1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy', 69.

<sup>17</sup> Elliott, *Home*, 106.

<sup>18</sup> Elliott, *Home*, 107-108.

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, due to the extent to which the reader is always intimately implicated in the construction of meaning, there will always be a diversity of readings of any text, often reflecting the personal, theological or political interests of the reader, as the history of

ask whether the resources chosen by Balch and Elliott are the *most* appropriate for the task, given the particular context of 1 Peter's production. While Balch valuably highlights the extent to which 1 Peter seeks to enable the Church's peaceful existence in society, we may question, as Torrey Seland has recently done, whether the model of assimilation/acclturation is appropriate to describe the Christians' negotiation of their place in society. These converts – mostly Gentiles, it seems, from the internal evidence of the letter (1.14, 18; 2.10; 4.2-4)<sup>20</sup> – have previously been well accustomed to the way of life of their wider society, a way of life from which they *now* are urged to distance themselves (1.14; 4.2-4). These are not, then, people for whom the wider culture is alien and strange, but people whose conversion to Christianity has *created* an alienation, the consequences of which need to be worked out. As Seland suggests, it might therefore be more appropriate to

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interpretation and of contemporary scholarship often shows.

<sup>20</sup> Cf., e.g., Reinhard Feldmeier, *Der erste Brief des Petrus* (THNT 15/1; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005) 29: 'dass die Gemeindevorwiegend – nicht notwendig ausschließlich – aus Heidenchristen besteht'. Elliott, *Home*, 45-46, 55-56 nn. 76-77, also states that Gentiles were likely in the majority, but suggests that the letter also indicates some Jews among its readership. It must be noted, though, that the evidence for this is less direct, hinging mainly upon the use of the Jewish scriptures in the letter, which, Elliott argues, suggests, 'readers of Jewish origin or with previous Jewish background, for whom such tradition would have the most meaning and weight' (p. 56 n. 77). But the question of how well an audience understood the scriptural quotations and allusions in an early Christian letter is a rather open one, as Christopher Stanley has recently suggested: Christopher Stanley, *Arguing With Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

consider the process of acculturation into the Christian way of life, since this is the *novum* to which the readers of 1 Peter are adapting.<sup>21</sup>

The typology of sectarian groups, to which Elliott appeals, on the other hand, may certainly offer a valuable perspective with which to grasp something of the sense of tension and separation which new religious movements perceive in relation to their ‘parent’ religious tradition and/or their wider society – the ‘world’. The examples from which the sect-typology is constructed, however, are drawn from a wide range of historical and geographical contexts – Bryan Wilson’s initial study was of three sects in modern Britain<sup>22</sup> – and while this gives a broad base for a generic model, we may question whether it adequately includes the most significant factors shaping the church-world relationship in 1 Peter. When Elliott suggests that ‘it is necessary to look no further than the sectarian composition of the communities addressed [in 1 Peter] to account for the conflict that characterizes their situation’, or that ‘1 Peter... represents a response to those problems with which conversionist sects *in general* must struggle’,<sup>23</sup> we may wonder whether this does not overlook, or at least underemphasize, the central fact about the particular world in which the addressees lived and which most fundamentally determines their difficult relationship with it: the fact of empire.

Indeed, what is most obviously missing from both these social-scientific approaches – and from most other attempts to move beyond the Balch-Elliott debate – is explicit attention to the structures of (imperial) domination within which the addressees of

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<sup>21</sup> Torrey Seland, *Strangers in the Night: Philonic Perspectives on Christian Identity in 1 Peter* (Biblical Interpretation Series 76; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 147-89, esp. 168-87.

<sup>22</sup> Bryan R. Wilson, *Sects and Society: A Sociological Study of Three Religious Groups in Britain* (London: Heinemann, 1961)

<sup>23</sup> Elliott, *Home*, 74, 102, my emphasis. Cf. also pp. 78, 80.

1 Peter must negotiate their conformity and/or their resistance to the world. Put positively, we might suggest that the most relevant social-scientific resources for appreciating the community-world relationship in 1 Peter are likely to be those which concern themselves specifically with contexts of imperial/colonial domination and with the ways in which subaltern groups produce and sustain their identity in such contexts. In the following section, I shall attempt to show how the work of writers in postcolonial studies offers some valuable resources with which to appreciate this crucial dynamic in the making of 1 Peter.

*Resources from postcolonial studies*

I begin not with a specifically postcolonial approach but with a broader study of the ways in which the dominated practise various forms of resistance, in the work of the political scientist James Scott. Building primarily upon his studies of peasant societies in Malaysia, but ranging much more widely too, Scott has presented a rich and compelling analysis of the various forms of ‘everyday’ resistance practised by subordinate groups and classes.<sup>24</sup> Scott’s work, especially in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, is – like some of the comparative work we have just mentioned on religious sects – wide-ranging and cross-cultural, taking examples from diverse historical and geographical contexts. Where it begins to help to inform our methodology, however, is in its particular focus on relations of domination, and the varied forms of resistance practised by those who are relatively weak

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<sup>24</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985); *idem*, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990) For recent applications of Scott’s work to New Testament studies, see Richard A. Horsley (ed.), *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (Semeia Studies 48, Atlanta: SBL, 2004).

in such patterns of relationship. It provides a valuable perspective to shape our conceptualisation of the crucial issues of resistance and power.

Scott insists that we must not restrict our definition of resistance to the open and physical forms of rebellion that are comparatively rare, of generally short duration, and usually quashed by superior force. Scott's interest is in the many and diverse ways in which subordinates express and practise their resistance to oppression, in what he calls 'the immense political terrain that lies between quiescence and revolt'.<sup>25</sup> One such mode of resistance is through what Scott calls hidden transcripts: modes of discourse generally kept hidden from the public stage, where the official, sanctioned transcript dominates. Such a 'hidden' transcript may be expressed when the oppressed meet away from the gaze of their oppressors, as in the visions of reversal and judgment, the 'symbolic inversions',<sup>26</sup> expressed in African-American slave religion, visions, of course, often directly indebted to biblical language and imagery. Other modes of resistance may appear on the public stage, but in ways which (generally) avoid direct and personal confrontation: anonymous rumours and gossip, euphemisms, ambiguous gestures, 'accidental' acts of insubordination, and so on. Importantly, Scott's work should warn us against seeing rebellion and resistance only in texts and communities that are blatantly and overtly opposed to the established powers in the world. More usual, but no less forms of resistance, are modes of communication and action that subtly and changeably weave resistance into what is in various other respects a discourse of conformity and obedience. Indeed, an appreciation of the variable, complex, ambiguous, even compromised, relations between resistance and complicity is a crucial methodological key, which will be further developed in our engagement with postcolonial writers below. Scott's work also serves as a warning to avoid characterising the 'weak' as

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<sup>25</sup> Scott, *Domination*, 199.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Scott, *Domination*, 166-72.

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.).<sup>27</sup>

While Scott's work incorporates a wide range of examples and socio-historical contexts, their uniting feature being some form of resistance enacted or expressed by subordinates, postcolonialism deals with a yet more specific context crucial for the understanding of 1 Peter: colonialism and imperialism.<sup>28</sup> Postcolonialism 'deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies',<sup>29</sup> with its specific disciplinary focus on the impact of, and reactions to, European colonialism from the sixteenth century to the present day.<sup>30</sup> The prefix 'post', it is important to note – without or without a hyphen, a matter of some debate in the field – does not indicate an interest only in the period after the

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. the summary table in Scott, *Domination*, 198; more generally on the manifold strategies by which the dominated insinuate and practice resistance, see pp. 136-201.

<sup>28</sup> These two terms, as R.S. Sugirtharajah notes, are '[i]n postcolonial writing... often lumped together, and tend to be used interchangeably', though colonialism, in Edward Said's words (quoted by Sugirtharajah), 'almost always a consequence of imperialism', has a more specific meaning as 'the implanting of settlements on distant territory'; R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: OUP, 2002) 24.

<sup>29</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 186.

<sup>30</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, 188.

‘departure’ of the colonial power, although the ramifications of decolonization and the realities of neo-colonialism are of obvious interest to those working in this area.<sup>31</sup> The concerns of postcolonial studies may rather be defined as ‘engaging with the textual, historical, and cultural articulations of societies disturbed by the historical reality of colonial presence’<sup>32</sup> – a definition which rightly, if only just, leaves both colonising and colonised societies as proper foci of postcolonial study.

Although the focus of postcolonial studies is the impact of modern European colonialism, the ideas and concepts are pertinent – as long as one is equally aware of the differences<sup>33</sup> – to the study of the Roman empire too, not least since this empire served in

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<sup>31</sup> For a sense of the issues at stake, the following quotation is indicative: ‘Whereas some critics invoke the hyphenated form “post-colonialism” as a decisive temporal marker of the decolonising process, others fiercely query the implied chronological separation between colonialism and its aftermath — on the grounds that the postcolonial condition is inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation’ (Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998] 3). Cf. also Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (Second edn., New Accents; London and New York: Routledge, 2002 [1989]), 1-2. One might perhaps say that the ‘post’ best refers to what comes after the moment of colonisation, not to what comes after the (putative) end of colonisation.

<sup>32</sup> Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> For example, the essentialist definitions of race that were so prominent in European colonialism are not encountered in anything like the same form in the Roman Empire. I am grateful to John White for this point.

some respects as a model for the European vision.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, interest in the relevance of postcolonial perspectives to biblical studies has been growing considerably in recent years.<sup>35</sup>

Postcolonialism does not constitute, or present, a specific or unified theoretical package that could be 'applied' to a biblical text. The field is much too diffuse and varied, and essentially concerns attempts to read literature produced in colonial contexts with an eye to the impact of colonisation/imperialism and the ways in which colonised subjects resist such incursions and sustain or create cultural and social identity. A focus on resistance, and the forms it may take, is thus prominent in postcolonial studies, and, as with Scott, so too many postcolonial studies emphasise the diverse and nuanced forms that resistance and opposition may take. Anuradha Needham, for example, notes the claim of

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism*, 24. For application of post-colonial perspectives to the study of Roman imperialism see Jane Webster and Nicholas J. Cooper (eds.), *Roman Imperialism: Post-Colonial Perspectives* (Leicester Archaeology Monographs, 3; Leicester: School of Archaeological Studies, University of Leicester, 1996).

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia (eds.), *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005). For application of the perspective to Josephus, see John M. G. Barclay, 'The Empire Writes Back: Josephan Rhetoric in Flavian Rome', in Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives (eds.), *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 315-32; John M. G. Barclay, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, Volume 10, Against Apion* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

many critics ‘that no modes of resistance, whether they acknowledge it or not, are completely free of their implication in the domination they resist’.<sup>36</sup> Inversion, for example, a prominent strategy in literatures of resistance, ‘would not be possible without the terms and evaluations embodied in and by the dominant, which the inversion then attempts to devalue (and revalue) through a process of transvaluation’.<sup>37</sup> Concerning another form of resistance, and quoting Simon Gikandi and Stuart Hall, Needham writes of “the mutual imbrication and contamination” of dominant and subordinate, colonizer and colonized, which in turn renders each... “inextricably mixed and hybrid”.<sup>38</sup> Needham’s study is especially pertinent to a consideration of 1 Peter, since her concern is with the forms of resistance expressed by writers located in the metropole who are thus living in ‘diaspora’, away from their homelands in Africa or South Asia.<sup>39</sup>

This emphasis on the ambivalence and complexity of resistance and conformity is especially prominent in the work of Homi Bhabha, one of the most influential, if difficult, postcolonial writers. Bhabha’s key ‘enabling assumption’, Stephen Moore notes, ‘is that the relationship between colonizer and colonized is characterized by ambivalence... attraction and repulsion at the same time’.<sup>40</sup> To quote Bhabha:

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<sup>36</sup> Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, *Using the Master's Tools: Resistance and the Literature of the African and South-Asian Diasporas* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 2000) 10.

<sup>37</sup> Needham, *Master's Tools*, 11; on the use of inversion, see also Scott, *Domination*, 166-72.

<sup>38</sup> Needham, *Master's Tools*, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Needham, *Master's Tools*, 1, *et passim*.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006) 109.

Resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the “content” of another culture, as a difference once perceived. It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial power.<sup>41</sup> Moore puts the essential point concisely: ‘For Bhabha, resistance and complicity coexist in different measures in each and every colonial subject’.<sup>42</sup>

Also important in this regard is another concept which is prominent in Bhabha’s work: the concept of ‘hybridity’, an attempt to express the idea that the encounter of coloniser and colonised creates forms of interaction and interdependence that affect the construction of their subjectivities such that these are formed and articulated in what Bhabha calls a ‘Third Space’, an ‘in-between’. Bhabha insists that any idea of cultural ‘originality’ or ‘purity’ is untenable, because cultural identity and cultural difference are articulated precisely in ‘that Third Space of enunciation’ which is a space of ‘hybridity’: ‘we should remember that it is the “inter” – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between*... that carries the burden of the meaning of culture’.<sup>43</sup> Language, as Bhabha’s comment already implies, is necessarily implicated in this interaction, and as

<sup>41</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 110.

<sup>42</sup> Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 110.

<sup>43</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, 'Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences [1988]', in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (2nd edn.; London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 155-57, at pp. 156-57. See further Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 111-15; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, 118-19; Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 129-31.

such – and also as a medium of power – is a site of contest and negotiation in colonial engagements. Indigenous languages may, for example, be used and preserved as a deliberate means to sustain distance and distinctiveness, often in the face of overt efforts to insist on use of (only) the imperial language. Alternatively, the coloniser’s language may be used, but changed and subverted as the colonised express both difference and resistance.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, some theorists have adopted the notion of ‘creolisation’ – of language and of identity – another facet of this negotiation of hybrid cultural identity in the in-between space.<sup>45</sup>

Postcolonial writers, drawing, of course, on biblical images and terms, also frequently invoke the notions of diaspora and exile to denote the experience of those displaced from their homeland due to the effects of colonisation and imperialism.<sup>46</sup> Significantly, though, given the use of such terms in 1 Peter, postcolonialism is not only concerned with these terms as a literal description of those physically displaced by empire

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<sup>44</sup> See Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Empire*, 37-50; Amitava Kumar, 'Passport Photos', in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (2nd edn.; London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 455-59, who quotes Salman Rushdie (on p. 455): ‘Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free.’

<sup>45</sup> See the brief summary in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, 58-59.

<sup>46</sup> Indicative of this interest is the section of readings under the heading ‘Diaspora’ in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006 [1995]), 425-59.

but also with what Leela Gandhi refers to as ‘the *idea* of cultural dislocation contained within this term [diaspora]’.<sup>47</sup> Gandhi continues, drawing on the work of Bhabha and Frantz Fanon:

In Bhabha’s characteristic interjections, colonialism is read as the perverse instigator of a new politics of ‘un-homeliness’. If colonialism violently interpellates the sanctuary and solace of ‘homely’ spaces, it also calls forth forms of resistance which can, as Fanon observes, no longer be accommodated within the familiar crevices and corners of former abodes. . . . Not surprisingly, diasporic thought finds its apotheosis in the ambivalent, transitory, culturally contaminated and borderline *figure* of the exile, caught in a historical limbo between home and the world.<sup>48</sup>

These comments will already be forging connections in the minds of those familiar with 1 Peter, and particularly with Elliott’s view of 1 Peter as offering ‘a home for the homeless’. So, as we turn to the letter, it is important to emphasise that what postcolonialism offers us is not a model or a theory to be applied to the text, but rather a language, an orientation, a series of concepts attuned to the themes of life under empire. If there is a claim that unites and underpins postcolonial studies it is that imperial domination, the act of colonisation, inevitably affects, ‘disturbs’, the societies into which its control reaches, such that studies of culture, literature, identity, and so on, cannot ignore – and must take as of primary importance – the impact of the colonial/imperial relationship and the power relationships entwined in it. Postcolonialism thus invites us to read 1 Peter as a literary product of a colonial/imperial situation, with our ears especially attuned to the ways in which this letter constructs the identity of the people to whom it is addressed and offers one particular way of negotiating existence in the empire, between conformity and resistance. Scott and

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<sup>47</sup> Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 131.

<sup>48</sup> Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 132.

Bhabha in particular invite us to consider how expressions of resistance may be subtle and ambivalent, woven in complex ways into a discourse which may also be complicit and conformist, constructed in the encounter between coloniser and colonised.

*Towards a postcolonial reading of 1 Peter*

In the space available, what follows can only be an initial sketch of what a postcolonial reading of 1 Peter might look like, and a particular kind of postcolonial reading at that. Fernando Segovia helpfully identifies three dimensions of a 'postcolonial optic' for biblical studies: the first is the historical setting of the texts of early Judaism and Christianity in imperial/colonial contexts; the second is the history of biblical interpretation, and the emergence of modern biblical scholarship with its connections with the realities and ideologies of European colonial expansion; the third is the context of today's readers in the global sphere and their relation to the centre(s) of power.<sup>49</sup> It will be clear that my preoccupation in this essay is with the first category, namely the setting of 1 Peter in its historical imperial context (though this should not be taken to imply that I consider other facets of postcolonial biblical study to have any less value or interest).<sup>50</sup> Betsy Bauman-Martin's essay in this volume, though in some respects a very different kind of postcolonial

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<sup>49</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, 'Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Toward a Postcolonial Optic', in R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 49-65, at pp. 56-63.

<sup>50</sup> For example, studies of the ways in which colonial expansion and domination, Christian mission and Bible translation were often enmeshed in an unholy alliance. See for example, Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 102-22; Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism*, 127-78; and the essays by Dora Mbuwayesango and Hephzibah Israelin Sugirtharajah (ed), *Postcolonial Reader*, 259-283.

reading of 1 Peter, also focuses on the context of 1 Peter's production, though Martin's particular interest is in the 'ideological imperialism' with which the author of 1 Peter takes over the cultural heritage and identity-markers of Judaism.<sup>51</sup>

*'To the elect refugees of the diaspora... from Babylon': the letter frame (1.1-2; 5.12-14).*

We begin our reading with the letter frame, which sets a context for the remainder of the text. The opening of the letter, immediately after naming its author as the apostle Peter, describes those to whom it is addressed as *e0klektoi\ parepi/dhmoi diaspora~j*, then specifies their location in this 'diaspora' as the Roman provinces in northern Asia Minor. These terms, as is widely recognised, reflect the influence on the letter of Jewish terms and traditions. The positive description of the readers as (God's) elect adopts an OT designation widely used in early Christian literature.<sup>52</sup> The noun *parepi/dhmoj*, rare outside biblical

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<sup>51</sup> It seems to me that our essays are broadly complementary rather than contradictory.

Bauman-Martin writes that '[i]t seems undeniable that the author of 1 Peter did engage in one form of critique of empire and its relationships. But that resistance was based largely on the appropriation of Judaism, and appropriation that constituted an imperialist move' (p. 00). My paper focuses on the subject of the first sentence – 1 Peter's stance towards the Roman empire – while Bauman-Martin's focuses on the second – the extent to which the author draws his materials from Judaism and the implications of this. Cf. further below, with nn. 76-78. My question, though, would be whether Bauman-Martin's notion of ideological imperialism broadens the category of colonial contexts too much: Does any sect that claims to embody the true interpretation of the parent religion necessarily engage in such a move?

<sup>52</sup> Cf. e.g., Deut 4.37; 7.6-8; Psa 78.68; 135.4; Isa 41.8-9; 44.1. For specific uses of *e0klektoi*/, see e.g.: Psa 88.4 [LXX] (note the LXX plural for MT singular: 'my chosen

literature,<sup>53</sup> denoting ‘one who is (temporarily) resident in a place as an alien’,<sup>54</sup> or even a refugee, appropriates the language with which Abraham voices the nature of his residence among the Hittites (Gen 23.4). There Abraham describes himself as a ‘a stranger and an alien’ (בִּשְׂוֵתֵי רֵעִים, παροικοι και παρεπιδημοι), thus linking together both of the terms used in 1 Peter to describe the alien or estranged existence of the addresses (2.11, cf. 1.17). The παροικοι, a rather more common term in Greek to denote a noncitizen, whether native or foreign,<sup>55</sup> is used in the LXX to denote a ‘resident alien’ – a foreigner who dwells somewhere without full national or civic rights, whether a resident alien living among the people of Israel, or an Israelite living in a foreign land.<sup>56</sup> Diaspora, of course, is the technical biblical/Jewish term for the dispersion of the Jews among the Gentiles,<sup>57</sup> a term used to express the experience of being scattered, exiled, ‘led away’, or deported, variously denoted in the Hebrew texts. These diverse expressions, for which the LXX also

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one’); 104.6 [LXX]; 104.43 [LXX]; 105.5 [LXX]; Wis 3.9; 4.15; Sir 46.1. In the NT: Mark 13.20, 22, 27 (and par.); Rom 8.33; Col 3.12; 2 Tim 2.10; Tit 1.1; Rev 17.14.

<sup>53</sup> Bechtler, *Following*, 80.

<sup>54</sup> Walter Grundmann, ‘δημοι, κτλ.’, *TDNT* 2.64. Cf. Polybius 32.6.4, who refers to the Greek παρεπιδημοι in Rome.

<sup>55</sup> Bechtler, *Following*, 71-73.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Karl Ludwig Schmidt and Martin Anton Schmidt, ‘παροικοι, κτλ.’, *TDNT* 5.842-48. See Exod 2.22; 12.45; Lev 22.10; 25.47; Deut 23.7 [LXX 23.8]; 1 Chr 5.10, etc. Indeed, it is the LXX use that is decisive for the meaning of these terms in 1 Peter; see Bechtler, *Following*, 64-83; Reinhard Feldmeier, *Die Christen als Fremde* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992) 207-208.

<sup>57</sup> Karl Ludwig Schmidt, ‘diaspora’, *TDNT* 2.99.

uses terms (significantly for us) such as *paroiki/a*,<sup>58</sup> were ‘appropriate’, Karl Ludwig Schmidt notes, ‘in relation to the deportations by Assyrian, Babylonian and to a lesser extent later conquerors, e.g. Pompey’.<sup>59</sup> The scattering of Israel among the nations came to be seen, by some writers at least, as having a positive dimension: Israel’s strength and importance is demonstrated by her having people in every nation.<sup>60</sup> But with the fall of Jerusalem in 70CE (and further defeat in 132-35CE), and the associated killing, enslavement, and deportations,<sup>61</sup> the negative aspects of Israel’s experience came once again to the fore.

These opening depictions of the letter’s addressees must be linked with the other part of the letter frame, the closing verses, and specifically the single but significant reference to ‘Babylon’, from where the writer sends greetings (5.13). As most commentators agree, this is almost certainly a reference to Rome, even if it also serves as a symbolic reference to the diasporic situation of the readers. With this brief characterisation, Rome is thus identified with the imperial power whose actions were so prominent and paradigmatic in Israel’s history.

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Ezra 8.35: *hlwg%h-yhb* (‘sons of [the] exile’) = *ui9oi\ th=j paroiki/aj*; Psa 120.5 (LXX 119.5) *yt@rg* (‘I live as a stranger’) = *h( paroiki/a mou*; Hab 3.16; Lam 2.22.

<sup>59</sup> Schmidt, *TDNT* 2.100.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Pss Sol.* 9.2; *I Macc* 15.16-24; *Sib. Or.* 3.271; Josephus *Ant.* 14.115; *War* 2.398; 7.43; Philo *Leg. Gai.* 36 (281-284).

<sup>61</sup> One example: Josephus (*War* 3.539-40) refers to the rounding up of Jewish prisoners by Vespasian, the dispatching of 6,000 to work on Nero’s project to dig a canal through the Isthmus near Corinth, and the sale of 30,400 as slaves. Even if the numbers are exaggerated, the treatment of the captives is indicative.

Thus far, our observations on the language of the letter frame are largely standard and well established. What is important, though, is to notice how, with just these few words, the writer of 1 Peter evokes a whole narrative, a kind of hidden transcript, one forged in the fire of Jewish experience, and one that reflects the experience of the underside of empire: being deported and exiled, dislocated from one's home.<sup>62</sup> And by identifying Rome as Babylon, the author not only alludes to the story of Israel's occupation and exile by that ancient empire, but also casts Rome into precisely that role, 'the very epitome and type of an ungodly and domineering city'.<sup>63</sup> In this way, albeit briefly and allusively, the author aligns himself and his readers with a particular narrative about the Roman empire, a particular perspective on its actions. He does not depict – nor perhaps even long for – the downfall of 'Babylon' in the vivid and detailed manner of the writer of Revelation, but he says enough to show that he and John share a common story about the character and achievements of this empire, a story which reflects the experience of the colonised and enslaved, not the powerful and dominant.<sup>64</sup> And, of course, the view of the empire as

<sup>62</sup> References here to the narrative evoked by the author of 1 Peter indicate that my reading is compatible with, and could be further expanded using, the narrative analysis of the letter offered by Eugene Boring elsewhere in this volume. What a postcolonial reading is especially concerned to consider is how the narrative implied by the letter positions the Church vis-à-vis the Empire, how it expresses forms and strategies of resistance, and how it constructs the social and cultural identity of its members, who live under Rome's domination, etc.

<sup>63</sup> Karl Georg Kuhn, 'Babylon', *TDNT* 1.515.

<sup>64</sup> Indeed it is interesting and not irrelevant to note that, in his depictions of the final and decisive revelation which is near, the author of 1 Peter uses apokalup- words more frequently than does the author of Revelation (1 Pet 1.5, 7, 13; 4.13; 5.1; Rev 1.1). This

godless power, scattering and displacing the people of God, stands in stark contrast to the narrative promoted by the architects of empire, for whom their divinely-appointed vocation is to bring peace to warring tribes and civilisation to uncultured barbarians, even if this naturally requires the exercise of terrorising force upon those arrogant enough to resist — *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*, as Virgil memorably expresses the Romans' vocation ('to pardon those who submit and to subdue the proud'; or, as Philip Esler paraphrases the idea: 'Grovel and live; resist and die').<sup>65</sup>

The recipients of 1 Peter were probably not literally geographically displaced aliens, even if a certain number among them might have been. Most scholars have been unpersuaded by Elliott's arguments for a literal reading of this description of their status prior to conversion, and remain more inclined to see the alienation from at-homeness in the aspect of 1 Peter's rhetoric is explored by Robert Webb elsewhere in this volume.

<sup>65</sup> Virgil, *Aen.* 6.853; Philip F. Esler, 'God's Honour and Rome's Triumph: Responses to the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE in Three Jewish Apocalypses', in Philip F. Esler (ed.), *Modelling Early Christianity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 239-58, at p. 240. The *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* serve as a prominent and very public declaration of this imperial perspective, commemorating Augustus's military triumphs and establishment of 'peace' by bringing further peoples into subjection to the Roman people (*Res Gestae* 26). They also culminate in the recording of Augustus's acclamation as *pater patriae*. The *Res Gestae*, primarily intended to be engraved outside Augustus's mausoleum in Rome, were apparently inscribed in both Latin and Greek on the walls of temples of Augustus elsewhere in the empire, though it is significant that our only known examples come from Asia Minor, including the most complete and famous example from the Temple of Rome and Augustus in Ancyra – so this Roman propaganda was certainly known in the areas to which 1 Peter was addressed.

world as something *created* by conversion, and thus in some sense metaphorical rather than strictly politico-geographical.<sup>66</sup> However, this does not mean that the language loses its political edge, nor its connection with the real social experience of the readers; it is not merely an indication that their home is in heaven. Indeed, this seems to me a crucial point in Elliott's argument, and both convincing and important. As we have seen, postcolonial

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<sup>66</sup> See, e.g. Feldmeier, *Die Christen als Fremde*; Bechtler, *Following*, 70-82; Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1996) 174-75; Seland, *Strangers*, 39-78. Indeed, some of the OT texts, noted above (n. 56) as the decisive context for the meaning of the terms in 1 Peter, already indicate a kind of broadening or spiritualising of the term: Abraham describes himself as *pa&roikoj kai\ parepi/dhmoj*... *meq 0 u(mw~n*, referring to the Hitites (Gen 23.4), a phrase echoed in other texts where, however, the description of the people as aliens and strangers pertains to their relationship to Y<sub>HWH</sub>: Lev 25.23 (*pa&roikoi*... *e0nanti/on mou*); 1 Chr 29.15 (*pa&roikoi/ e0smen e0nanti/on sou*); Psa 39.12 [38.13 LXX] (*pa&roikoj e0gw& e0imi para\_ soi\ kai\ parepi/dhmoj*). Here, it seems to me, the terms have already broadened beyond a statement of strictly literal, socio-political identity (1 Chr 29.15 clearly spiritualising, to some extent, since the verse ends: *w(j skia\_ ai9 h(me/rai h(mw~n e0pi\ gh~j kai\ ou0k e1stin u9pomenh&* ('our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding [ESV]'). But this does not deny that the terms continue to convey something of the formative social experience of the people of Israel, which seems to me a key point in Elliott's argument. The fact that the readers of 1 Peter can be addressed as *pa&roikoi kai\ parepi/dhmoi* – in a phrase which suggests a *hendiadys* – indicates the crucial influence of the LXX phrasing and also implies that the author is conveying the character of their experience rather than their socio-political status (in which case someone would be *either* a

writers are interested in diaspora and exile not only as the literal, geographical experience of many of the colonised, but also as a depiction of the cultural, social, and psychological dislocation caused by the intrusion of colonial power. Yet there is one more twist to the use of this language in 1 Peter. The author is not writing to an ethnic group or people – to all the inhabitants of Pontus, say – giving voice to their collective experience of empire.<sup>67</sup> Rather, he is writing to those who, by virtue of their conversion to Christianity, have now become dislocated, no longer at-home in the *oikoumene* which is the empire. Prior to conversion these people may have been quietly, even contentedly, accommodated to the realities of empire and its local manifestations, keeping the peace and their heads down, paying their dues, financially and religiously.<sup>68</sup> Not all the colonised, whatever those with a revolutionary consciousness might like, share or express a negative or resentful view of the empire. But the call to conversion, a call the author reiterates and amplifies in his letter, is a call to inhabit a narrative, one drawn from the experience of the people of Israel, that puts a different spin on the establishment of empire. Now Rome is Babylon, the oppressor of God's people, who are displaced and homeless in its realm. One might therefore say that *παροικοι* or *παρεπιδημοι*).

<sup>67</sup> This does not make a postcolonial analysis inappropriate, any more than it would in the case of, say, Rastafarianism – since not all Jamaicans are Rastafarians. The point is that these religious movements are in some ways responses to, or at the very least shaped by, the experience of empire.

<sup>68</sup> The primary responsibility of any governor was to ensure that his province remained peaceful (*pacata atque quieta*; see G.E.M. De Ste Croix, 'Why Were The Early Christians Persecuted?' *Past and Present*, 26 (1963), 6-38, at 16. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that Asia Minor, at least at the administrative level, was enthusiastic in its responses to Roman rule; see nn. 65 and 82.

the narrative of identity into which 1 Peter invites its readers is one which constructs a form of postcolonial awareness, which challenges positive acceptance or acquiescence and replaces it with a sense of dislocation and distance.

The positive counterpart to the depiction of the addressees as strangers and aliens under Babylon's rule, is, of course, their designation as God's elect, a positive identity spelt out in the remainder of the letter-opening with reference to the saving activity of God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ (1.2). And it is the articulation of this positive new identity that dominates the opening sections of the epistle.

*A glorious salvation and a positive identity as God's people (1.3–2.10)*

The opening thanksgiving of 1 Peter focuses on the great and glorious salvation, the inheritance, that awaits the elect people of God. This is an inheritance more enduring, more certain, and more glorious than any earthly treasure, and a cause of rejoicing despite the hardships of the present (1.6 – the first indication of the reality of suffering which will form a *Leitmotif* of the letter). This salvation stands ready at the door; it is prepared to be revealed (ἀποκαλυφθήσεται) at the end-time (ἐν καιρῷ ἡμετέρῳ) which will be soon (1.5; cf. 1.7; 4.17-19).<sup>69</sup>

The first imperative in the letter is therefore the exhortation to hope (ἐπιπέτετε, 1.13); that is, to hold resolutely and joyfully to this narrative of promised salvation, a narrative which, given the readers' present experience, is certainly counter-intuitive and counter-factual, contrary to the apparent circumstances of their lives. The writer also draws ethical consequences from this basis (1.13–2.3), urging his readers to holy living (1.15-16,

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<sup>69</sup> It seems to me that 1 Peter does convey a sense of imminent eschatological expectation, *pace* David C. Parker, 'The Eschatology of 1 Peter', *BTB*, 24 (1994), 27-32.

quoting Lev 19.2), which means distancing themselves from the patterns of conduct that characterised their ‘former ignorance’ (1.14, cf. v. 19).

The central text in which the new status of the believers as the elect and holy people of God is made clear is 2.4-10, which forms the climax of the affirmations and the exhortations found in 1.3–2.10 and the foundation for the instruction which is to follow in the second major section of the letter (2.11–4.11). ‘Here’ in 2.4-10, Elliott writes, ‘the fundamental indicative for the entire epistle has been spoken’.<sup>70</sup> As Elliott and Richard Bauckham<sup>71</sup> have made clear, this passage constitutes a rich example of a kind of midrashic exegesis, with a number of biblical texts woven into the fabric of a carefully structured text. Verses 4-5 introduce vv. 6-10, briefly stating the themes which are drawn out in the texts and comments which follow: Jesus the elect stone and the Church the elect people of God. The scriptural quotations that follow in vv. 6-10 pick up one or other of two key words, stone (λίθος), or people (λαός). More specifically, v. 4 introduces the texts and comments about Christ the stone in vv. 6-8, and v. 5 introduces and summarises vv. 9-10. Verses 6-10 thus contain the primary sources, the scriptural texts, for the ideas which are summarised in vv. 4-5.<sup>72</sup>

In vv. 6-8 three texts (Isa 28.16, Psa 118.22, Isa 8.14) are quoted and interpreted to describe Christ as the stone rejected by people but chosen and vindicated by God – a fate which is, of course, in certain respects paradigmatic for the experience of the readers. In vv. 9-10 three texts (Isa 43.20-21; Exod 19.6; Hosea 2.23, plus phrases drawn from Hosea 1.6,  
<sup>70</sup> Elliott, *Elect*, 217.

<sup>71</sup> Richard J. Bauckham, 'James, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude', in Don A. Carson and Hugh G.M. Williamson (eds.), *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), 303-17

<sup>72</sup> See Elliott, *Elect*, 48; Bauckham, 'James, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude', 310-11.

9, 10) are woven into a declaration about the identity of the readers, ‘once no people but now God’s people’.

One of the striking things about this latter declaration is the way in which it draws on the Jewish scriptures, indeed on some of the central identity designations of Israel (γε/νοj ε0κλεκτο&n, ε1qnoj α#gion, λα0j qeou~), to describe the identity of the predominantly gentile recipients of the letter.<sup>73</sup> As Peter Richardson notes, the ‘transpositions’ of Jewish attributes and titles to the Church ‘reach a climax within the New Testament in [1 Peter] 2:1-10’, a text which represents ‘a conscious attempt ... to appropriate the *Ehrentitel Israels* for the new people of God’.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, for Paul Achtemeier ‘Israel as a totality has become for this letter the controlling metaphor in terms of which its theology is expressed’. Achtemeier continues: ‘In 1 Peter the language and hence the

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<sup>73</sup> Peter Richardson notes that v. 9 is the only application to Christians of γε/νοj in the NT (Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* [SNTSMS 10; Cambridge: CUP, 1969] 172 n. 8), though it is common as a term to describe the people of Israel in the Jewish scriptures (e.g., LXX Exod 1.9; Josh 4.14; Dan 1.6, etc.) and becomes common later, notably in the description of Christians as a ‘third race’, alongside Jews and Gentiles. The phrase ε1qnoj α#gion is not often found as such in the LXX (but see Exod 19.6; 23.22 [LXX]; Wisd 17.2), but the theme of Israel’s call to be holy is common, especially in the book of Leviticus (Lev 11.44-45; 19.2; 20.7,26, etc.; cf. 1 Pet 1.16). Similarly, the phrase λα0j qeou= is not itself a precisely established label, but the description of the people as the λα0&j is very common, and they are often specifically denoted as ‘your people’, or ‘my people’, where God is the one to whom they belong (e.g. Exod 33.16; 2 Sam 7.23; 1 Kings 8.43; Isa 64.8, etc.)

<sup>74</sup> Richardson, *Israel*, 172-73.

reality of Israel pass without remainder into the language and hence the reality of the new people of God. The constitutive nature of this language is most evident in 1 Pet 2:9-10'.<sup>75</sup>

This appropriation – one might say, expropriation<sup>76</sup> – of the scriptures and identity of Israel raises its own challenging historical, theological, and ethical questions.<sup>77</sup> Notably, the author of 1 Peter gives no explicit indication that these texts and titles also belong to the *ethnos* Israel; 'there is no hint of interest in Israel in 1 Peter'.<sup>78</sup> But its significance in this

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<sup>75</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 69. Similar points are made in Paul J. Achtemeier, 'The Christology of 1 Peter: Some Reflections', in Mark A. Powell and David R. Bauer (eds.), *Who Do You Say That I Am? Essays on Christology in Honor of Jack Dean Kingsbury* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 140-54.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Elliott, *Home*, 38, 149, 153 n. 55 ('through the expropriation of Judaism's distinctive honors, the Christian community saw itself as Judaism's superior replacement').

<sup>77</sup> These are the focus of Betsy Bauman-Martin's paper in this volume.

<sup>78</sup> Richardson, *Israel*, 173. He continues: 'the new people of God is mainly Gentile in origin, with no observable awareness of a present link with God's other people... The Church has taken over the inheritance... of Israel.' But 'no consideration is given to the position of a Judaism without its *Ehrentitel*. The question is left hanging' (pp. 173-75).

Regarding 'the absence of any mention of historical Israel within the letter', Achtemeier similarly notes: 'Nowhere is there any hint of the source from which the language of the controlling metaphor has been drawn.' However, he then goes on to assert that '[t]his is evidently not an instance of anti-Semitism... The reason is simply that for the author of 1 Peter, Israel has become the controlling metaphor for the new people of God, and as such its rhetoric has passed without remainder into that of the Christian community'

(Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 72). But this skates too quickly over the issues: what does this 'without remainder' mean, and what are the implications for the continuing status of Israel

context is that it makes this particular conglomeration of titles and descriptors, this particular narrative, constitutive for the identity of the addressees of the letter. This, one might say, is the positive counterpart of their earlier designation as aliens and strangers in diaspora; *as such*, they are God's *ge/noj e0klekto&n*, God's special people, destined to receive their glorious and imperishable inheritance. Just as the readers are not 'literally' resident aliens, temporary or permanent, so too they are not (at least in the majority of cases)<sup>79</sup> 'literally' or ethnically Jews. But they are now, because of their conversion, to understand themselves precisely as such dislocated people, whose positive identity is given in the stories of the Hebrew scriptures – and in the experience of a people often under the dominion of one empire or another. In this regard, Elliott is right to see the letter as

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as God's people? One might read the silence of 1 Peter critically here, as Bauman-Martin does. Without wanting to be uncritical of the implications of 1 Peter's strategy here, I would also want to note that the silence of the letter about the status of Israel does at least leave some (contemporary theological) room for the view that Israel's existence must be affirmed alongside the Church's. This is, at least, better than explicit declarations that Israel has been replaced by the Church, or that her covenant is now obsolete (cf. Heb 7.18-19; 8.6-13; 9.11-15; *Barn.* 16.5-8; Melito, *Peri Pascha*, 43).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. n. 20 above, on the question of the Gentile or Jewish identity of the addressees. Just as with the designation *pa&roikoi/parepi/dhmoi*, so here too it is possible that some of the addressees were literally Jews. But the letter addresses its whole readership as *parepi/demoi* and as God's *ge/noj e0klekto&n*, so for most of them at least, this is an identity-designation that does not match their 'literal' or ethnic status in the world.

undergirding and reinforcing the positive and distinctive identity of the Christian addressees.<sup>80</sup>

To what facets of this identity-defining narrative might a postcolonial reading particularly draw attention? It is not as if either the negative (dispersed aliens) or the positive (God's chosen race) dimensions of existence as God's people as described here straightforwardly imply a directly 'anti-imperial' stance. Indeed, as we shall see throughout this essay, a postcolonial reading challenges any easy designation of the text as anti- or pro-imperial and calls for a more nuanced and subtle approach to discerning forms and expressions of resistance. What the text does, I suggest, is to insert the readers into a particular narrative of identity which 'places' – or rather, displaces – them in a specific position vis-à-vis the empire. As we have seen, the letter-frame already positions the readers with regard to the empire in an essentially negative way: the 'achievements' of empire are experienced, or at least interpreted, as dislocation and dispersion. The first major section of the letter body then insists that the believers have a positive and far superior basis for hope: their election by God and the inheritance that God has promised to them. Without there being much sign of any explicit polemic against, even 'polemical parallelism'<sup>81</sup> with, the claims and presentations of the Roman empire, nonetheless, the

<sup>80</sup> Elliott, *Home*, 106-107, 148, 198, 225-26, 270, *et passim*.

<sup>81</sup> The phrase derives from Adolf Deissmann, who suggested that Christian claims about Christ were expressed using terms also familiar from their application to the deified emperors or from the context of emperor worship, such that 'there arises a polemical parallelism between the cult of the emperor and the cult of Christ' (G. Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910) 346). Cf. also Paul Barnett, 'Polemical Parallelism: Some Further Reflections on the Apocalypse', *JSNT*, 35 (1989), 111-20; Justin J. Meggitt, 'Taking the Emperor's Clothes Seriously: The New

letter's depiction of Christian identity is such as to depict the impact of empire in essentially negative terms, and to insist that the basis for positive hope lies elsewhere. Insofar as Augustus was heralded – in Asia, among other places – as a saviour who brought good news, put an end to war, and whose birthday marked 'the beginning of all things', the letter does indeed present a counter-narrative, and one with certain elements of polemical parallelism in it.<sup>82</sup> Yet it does this not by any direct or explicit confrontation, but rather by locating the readers within an identity-defining narrative which offers a fundamentally different perspective on their existence, one which first dislocates them from the empire and then locates their positive hopes elsewhere.

But what difference does this make in practice? How are 'God's chosen people' to live in the world and relate to their neighbours, and specifically to the imperial authorities? These are issues taken up in the second major part of the letter, to which we now turn.

*Conforming and resisting (2.11–5.11)*

Having described in the first major section of his letter the glorious salvation to which God has called his elect and holy people the author now deals with 'the consequences for the behavior of Christians in the structures of society'.<sup>83</sup> It is notable that the opening two verses, 2.11-12, marked with the introductory *agaphtoi* (cf. 4.12) and serving as a kind

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Testament and the Roman Emperor', in Christine Joynes (ed.), *The Quest for Wisdom: Essays in Honour of Philip Budd* (Cambridge: Orchard Academic, 2002), 143-69 (here 157).

<sup>82</sup> See, e.g., the announcements made by the assembly and the governor of Asia c. 9BCE in Simon R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984) 54-55.

<sup>83</sup> Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993) 151.

of headline to what follows, express both dimensions of the Christians' ambivalent relationship to the world. Their distinction and distance is first expressed in an emphatic repetition of their estranged identity (w(j paroi/kouj kai\ parepidh&mouj) which requires separation from 'fleshly desires' (sarkikw~n e0piqumiw~n) – evidently the kinds of desires that shaped their former existence and continue to characterise the lives of those among whom they live (4.2-4). But another *Leitmotif* of the letter is also stressed here: the need to 'do good', that is, to live in such a way that those who currently criticise and condemn the Christians may be 'won over' (2.12-15; 2.20; 3.6; 3.11-17; 4.19). Although the recognition of the Christians' goodness may not come about till the eschaton (cf 2.12) the author's notion of what is 'good' is evidently (taken to be) shared in common with those outside, since the hope is that good conduct will be seen as such here and now (cf. 2.15; Rom 12.17).<sup>84</sup> The author is clearly –if, in the end, unrealistically – optimistic about the possibility that Christians might, after all, gain the favour of hostile outsiders through their good conduct (cf. 2.14-15; 3.1-2; 3.13-17). Yet it is a kind of optimism that we continue to encounter in the writings of apologists like Tertullian, who echoes 1 Peter in his arguments against those who condemn the Christians purely on account of their name (*Apol.* 2-3).

What this 'doing good' means is specified in the various sections of the domestic code material. Slaves are to submit to their masters, even those who are wicked, and even

<sup>84</sup> For further and comparable reflections on the 'common good' as presumed by Paul, see David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005) 261-67; Victor P. Furnish, 'Uncommon Love and the Common Good: Christians as Citizens in the Letters of Paul', in Dennis P. McCann and Patrick D. Miller (eds.), *In Search of the Common Good* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 58-87.

when they are unfairly beaten (2.18-20). Wives are likewise to submit to their husbands, whether or not those husbands are believers (3.1-6). Indeed, their decently submissive conduct – a particular example of doing good – is intended to function as a form of missionary appeal, with the aim of gaining their husbands for the faith.<sup>85</sup> Just as Elliott is right to stress the ways in which the letter as a whole aims to strengthen the distinctive identity and group-cohesion of the Christians in Asia Minor, so I think Balch is right to stress that the domestic code instruction, and more generally the practical instruction of the letter, represents a conformity to broader social expectations as part of the attempt to lessen hostility from outside.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> It should not be assumed that all, or even most, of the wives in the Christian community were in this situation. *Kai\ ei1 tinej* certainly implies that *some* wives were in this situation (cf. 1 Cor 7.12-16). But the instruction given to husbands in 3.7, along with the choice of Sarah as example (Abraham hardly being a model of an unbelieving husband), shows that the admonition to wives is addressed to all Christian wives, whether their husbands are Christian or not. However, the situation of a ‘mixed marriage’ would be one of particular difficulty.

<sup>86</sup> Balch sees the code as used by ‘the author of 1 Peter to stress the importance of Christians seeking peace and harmony in their household relationships and with society’ (Balch, *Wives*, 105). By contrast, Elliott argues that ‘the household code... was used to promote both the *internal solidarity* of the sectarian movement and its *external distinction* from Gentile motives and manners’ (Elliott, *Home*, 231, my emphasis; cf. pp. 115, 140, 229). On the latter view it is difficult to see why the code of conduct presented in the letter should bear such striking similarity to that which was widely promoted as socially respectable.

Indeed, the author's desire that the readers conform quietly and decently to the standards of the world is also apparent in the instructions in 2.13-17, which are a particularly crucial focus for our investigation. Echoing Rom 13.1-7, the author instructs that the addressees be subject to the emperor and his governors, whose task is to punish evil behaviour and reward that which is good (2.13-14). Moreover, they are specifically to honour the emperor (2.17).

As Warren Carter has recently shown, in an interesting essay drawing on Scott's work to interpret 1 Peter, this appeal for quiet conformity represents a kind of survival strategy in a particular context of hostility and persecution.<sup>87</sup> One common and understandable response to the pressures and threats of imperial domination is simply to keep a low profile, to be quietly obedient as far as possible (cf. 1 Thess 4.11-12). But is Carter also right to suggest that the author expects his readers to 'go all the way' in conforming to the demands of the empire, including participation in worship of the emperor? Their form of resistance, Carter suggests, is only an internal one: outwardly they conform in all respects to the requirements of the imperium, but inwardly, 'in their hearts', they revere Christ (3.15).

However, there are a number of facets of 2.13-17 that suggest that the author's strategy is more nuanced, and the negotiation between conformity and resistance different from that which Carter suggests. First, it is relevant to note that the appeal for submission to the emperor is framed as part of an appeal to submit to every human *kti/sei*,<sup>88</sup> such that

<sup>87</sup> Warren Carter, 'Going All the Way? Honoring the Emperor and Sacrificing Wives and Slaves in 1 Peter 2.13-3.6', in Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles* (London & New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 14-33.

<sup>88</sup> Meaning here that which has been created, which may refer to human 'institutions' (so NRSV, ESV, etc.) or to human 'creatures' (so Elliott, *1 Peter*, 489).

the emperor is one instance – but by no means a unique one – where this pattern of conduct is appropriate. Second, whatever the author exactly means by  $\alpha\eta\eta\alpha\omega\pi\iota/\eta\eta\kappa\tau\iota/\sigma\iota\eta$  here, it would seem that he implicitly denies any claim that the emperor is  $\theta\epsilon\iota\omega\varsigma$ , ‘divine’.<sup>89</sup> Third, he indicates that Christians are ‘free people’ ( $\epsilon\theta\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\tau\epsilon\sigma\iota$ ), or rather, are slaves (only) to God, even though he insists that this freedom does not provide a justification for acting in ways that are wicked (2.16). Fourth, and most crucially, he allows only that the emperor be honoured, not worshipped, and again only as an instance of the honouring that is due to all people:  $\pi\alpha\sigma\iota\sigma\iota\tau\iota\mu\eta\sigma\alpha\tau\epsilon, \theta\eta\sigma\alpha\delta\epsilon\lambda\phi\theta\eta\tau\alpha\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\alpha\tau\epsilon, \tau\circ\theta\epsilon\omega\theta\epsilon\omega\beta\epsilon\iota\sigma\kappa\epsilon, \tau\circ\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\alpha\tau\iota\mu\alpha\tau\epsilon$  (‘Honour everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honour the emperor.’ 2.17, NRSV).<sup>90</sup>

How crucial this distinction is may be illustrated from the later *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* (180CE), in which exactly the same distinction appears: *Nos non habemus alium*

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<sup>89</sup> ‘With this expression, imperial power is subtly but decisively demystified, desacralized, and relativized... In contrast to devotees of the imperial cult... Christians respect the emperor and his representatives only as human creatures, due only the deference owed to all human beings’ (Elliott, *1 Peter*, 489).

<sup>90</sup> The meaning of  $\theta\beta\epsilon\iota\omega\mu\alpha\iota$  in this context, as with the Latin *timeo*, is well captured by Louw-Nida: ‘to have profound reverence and respect for deity, with the implication of awe bordering on fear – “to reverence, to worship”.’ The first imperative in 2.17,  $\pi\alpha\sigma\iota\sigma\iota\tau\iota\mu\eta\sigma\alpha\tau\epsilon$ , is the only one of the four in the aorist tense, suggesting perhaps that it forms the headline statement to which the following three present imperatives relate, though this interpretation is not without difficulties. Alternatively, one might see the verse as having a chiasmic construction. See the brief discussion of the various possibilities in Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005) 177.

*quem timeamus nisi dominum Deum nostrum qui est in caelis... Honorem Caesari quasi Caesari; timorem autem Deo* ('We have none other whom we worship<sup>91</sup> but our Lord God who is in heaven... Honour to Caesar as Caesar, but worship only to God'; *Act. Scil.* 8-9).<sup>92</sup> The point, of course, is that precisely this level of polite (non)conformity is sufficient to be regarded as an obstinate refusal to conform to the demands of the empire, and as such a form of resistance that carries the death penalty (cf. also *Mart. Pol* 10-11). The occasion for its utterance is essentially the same as that with which Pliny also (much earlier in the second century) confronted those accused as Christians: the requirement to worship the emperor and/or the Roman gods (Pliny *Ep.* 96).<sup>93</sup> Carter uses Pliny's test (and the

<sup>91</sup> On the meaning of *timeo* here, see the previous note.

<sup>92</sup> Latin text from Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs: Introductions, Texts and Translations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 88. Also cited in Feldmeier, *Brief des Petrus*, 110 n. 364, and also earlier, as part of the *testimonia veterum* for 1 Peter, by Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1910) 11. The appearance of the same motif in both texts raises questions about Marta Sordi's claim that it was these late second century martyrs who 'were the first to formulate reasons why their refusal had to be made' (Marta Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire* [London: Routledge, 1994] 177). 1 Peter already sets out the distinction precisely.

<sup>93</sup> The specific demand in *Act. Scil.* is to swear by the genius of the emperor (see *Act. Scil.* 3, 5). Cf. also Tertullian *Apol.* 32; 35; Origen, *C. Cels* 8.65. A number of ancient historians stress that the most prominent requirement demanded of Christians facing trial is not that they worship the emperor but rather the Roman gods. See Ste Croix, 'The Early Christians', 10; Fergus Millar, 'The Imperial Cult and the Persecutions', in W. Den Boer (ed.), *Le culte des souverains dans l'empire romain* (Entretiens Hardt XIX; Geneva, 1973), 145-65;

indication that some of those who had formerly been Christians did what was required) as evidence that (some) Christians did indeed ‘go all the way’ in honouring, even worshipping, the emperor.<sup>94</sup> While there may of course have been some who yielded to the pressure to do this, and perhaps even thereby raised for the church the question about what to do with apostates who later wanted to return (cf. Heb 6.4-12; 10.24-39), the point of Pliny’s test, which Pliny knows all too well, is that it serves well to identify true Christians, since they will never curse Christ or sacrifice to the emperor and the Roman gods.<sup>95</sup> And, Anthony R. Birley, 'Die "freiwilligen" Märtyrer. Zum Problem der Selbst-Auslieferer', in R. Von Haeling (ed.), *Rom und das himmlische Jerusalem. Die frühen Christen zwischen Anpassung und Ablehnung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000), 97-123 (at pp. 103, 121-23, where he sets out the evidence in brief). It should not be ignored, nonetheless, that some of the records cited by Birley *do* mention a requirement to worship the emperor along with the gods (as in Pliny *Ep.* 96). Moreover, the stress on worshipping the gods does not mean that the point was entirely religious and not political, as is sometimes suggested: the two are inextricably bound up, since the preservation of the *pax romana* depended on maintaining the *pax deorum*. The Christians’ refusal to honour the gods meant that they could well be blamed for calamities such as the fire of Rome or any other disasters that overtook their cities.

<sup>94</sup> Carter, 'Going All the Way?', 25.

<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, Carter is right to raise the important question of what, practically, honouring the emperor might mean, if it does not mean participation in the imperial cult. One obvious possibility is that of praying for the emperor, an established practice whereby Jews sustained a fragile *modus vivendi* in the empire, and one for which Christian epistles from roughly the time of 1 Peter explicitly call (1 Tim 2.1-3; *1 Clem* 60.4–61.2). Later, Tertullian stresses the need for Christians to pray for the emperor and for the stability of the empire,

from the Christian side, 1 Peter draws this line of resistance quite clearly. Given the rather precise parallels in the later Martyr-Acts, etc., it is remarkable that scholars see this verse as evidence *against* imperial persecution. Stephen Bechtler, for example, puts it clearly:

the one passage in the letter in which the emperor is explicitly mentioned – 2.13-17 – tells against imperial persecution. Here the letter enjoins fear of God and honor of the emperor in a single breath and commands subjection to the emperor as *υ9pere/xwn*. Nor does 1 Peter elsewhere exhibit the kind of hostility to, or at least wariness of, Rome to be expected in a document dealing with imperial persecution.<sup>96</sup>

while at the same time they refuse to swear by the emperor's *genius* (*Apol.* 31-32).

Similarly, Origen emphatically stresses that Christians (and Jews) are commanded to avoid temples, altars and images, and refuse to pray to images, even on pain of death, citing Deut 6.13 and Exod 20.3-5 (*C. Cels* 7.64-66). Furthermore, in response to Celsus's argument that the Christians should perform acts of propitiation to demons, and to rulers and emperors (8.61-63), Origen is insistent that only the one supreme God should be worshipped and prayed to (8.64). But he also sees this prayer *to* the one God as a way of praying *for* the welfare of others, well aware of the duty to be subject to the governing authorities (citing Rom 13.1-2). Origen nonetheless makes clear that Christians do not swear by the genius of the emperor, just as they do not swear by any other supposed god, even to the point of death (8.64-65).

<sup>96</sup> Bechtler, *Following*, 50; cf. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 502 ('this passage [2.13-17] offers strong incidental support for the conclusion that Rome played no discernible role in the hostility and sufferings encountered by the addressees', also 793 (see n. 100), though note his comments on 2.13 (above n. 89); J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC 49; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988) lxiii.

Despite the tendency of most recent scholarship on 1 Peter to regard the suffering which the letter addresses as a consequence of informal public hostility rather than imperial persecution – a tendency I shall comment on below – 2.13-17 actually fits rather well into a setting where a measured but conscious resistance to imperial demands is required. Indeed, without confrontation with the *imperium* as part of its context, the precise wording of 1 Peter 2.17 lacks a *Sitz im Leben*.

The particular path the author treads between conformity and resistance may also be illustrated from 4.12-19, the text where the fiery ordeals suffered by the readers are most vividly and explicitly discussed. The suffering is depicted as a sharing in the sufferings of Christ, suffering in his name, and thus a cause for rejoicing and blessing (vv. 13-14). The contrast is then drawn between suffering as a murderer, thief, evildoer, or ‘meddler’ and suffering with Christ (vv. 15-16). In keeping with his appeal to the readers to ‘do good’ the author insists that they should be sure never to be guilty of such crimes and misdemeanours as are listed first;<sup>97</sup> this would indeed be a cause for shame. But the

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<sup>97</sup> The label *kakopoiois* can refer to illegal activity (cf. esp. 2.14), but may be taken here in a general, inclusive sense, including both illegal and non-illegal forms of wrongdoing (cf. 2.12; 3.17). Cf. Jeannine K. Brown, 'Just a Busybody? A Look at the Greco-Roman Topos of Meddling for Defining *allogotriepiskopos* in 1 Peter 4:15', *JBL*, 125 (2006), 549-68, at pp. 560-61. For indications as to how and why *kakopoiois* could connote criminality here (cf. esp. 2.14), see Paul A. Holloway, 'Coping with Prejudice: Thoughts on 1 Peter in Social Psychological Perspective', paper given at SBL Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, 18-21 November 2006. I am very grateful to Dr Holloway for sending me a copy of his paper. As is often noted, the *hapax allogotriepi/skopos* is the most difficult term to interpret here. In her very recent treatment, Brown supports the understanding of the term as a reference to

accusation of being *Xristiano* is another matter. This label should be borne with pride, not shame, and regarded as a means to glorify God (4.16).

As mentioned above, the tendency in most recent English-language studies of 1 Peter has been to regard the suffering experienced by the letter's addressees as a matter of informal, local hostility and slander rather than official Roman persecution and possible execution.<sup>98</sup> Again, Elliott's work has been influential. He argues that what we are dealing with is 'verbal rather than physical abuse' which took the form of 'harassment of Christians 'meddling' in others' affairs, but shows that such activity was by no means regarded as a merely trivial matter. Rather, as a form of behaviour which was seen to involve moving outside one's assigned and proper sphere of activity, it was seen as something with potentially serious and politically subversive implications. She links the instruction of 4.15 with the positive instruction to slaves and wives to fulfil their allotted roles in the household: 'The prohibition of movement outside one's assigned sphere of activity in 4:15 (αλλοτριεπι/σκοποι) finds its antidote in the commended submission within the household in 2:11-3:12'; (Brown, 'Just a Busybody?' 565).

<sup>98</sup> For an overview of scholarship and comments to this effect, see Bechtler, *Following*, 19, 49-52, 93-94, though Bechtler notes the possibility of this hostility including 'physical persecution' and uncertainty among scholars as to the extent to which it was 'formally initiated or sanctioned by local officials' (p. 19). Bechtler does not see a direct correlation with the situation described by Pliny, 'in which being a Christian was itself a crime' (p. 93). Cf. also Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 314. More recently, Dubis sums up 'the current consensus that the persecution in 1 Peter is local, sporadic and unofficial, stemming from the antagonism and discrimination of the general populace' (Dubis, 'Research on 1 Peter', 203). Feldmeier, by contrast, is more inclined to see the hostility as including the kind of judicial Roman procedures described by Pliny (Feldmeier, *Brief des Petrus*, 2-9).

by local opponents'.<sup>99</sup> There is thus no sign in 1 Peter of any confrontation with Rome;<sup>100</sup> instead the letter reflects 'a time of toleration and peaceful coexistence'.<sup>101</sup> For these reasons, Elliott sees 'no substantive resemblance' between the situation depicted in Pliny's letters and that portrayed in 1 Peter'.<sup>102</sup> I have argued elsewhere that the similarities between the two depicted situations are much closer than Elliott suggests, and that the context Pliny depicts – where Christians are coming to trial, and are executed on the basis solely of acknowledging the name Christian, that is, for the *nomen ipsum* – is indeed relevant to our understanding of the specific label *Christianos* in 1 Peter.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, posing as alternative scenarios for 1 Peter either 'local public hostility' or 'official Roman persecution' is to bifurcate the analysis with a false either-or. For the procedure Pliny attests, and is instructed by Trajan to continue (Pliny *Ep.* 97), is one in which accusations against Christians arise from the local populace and thus indicate precisely the kind of public hostility that Elliott is right to detect as a background to 1 Peter.<sup>104</sup> However, as Acts

<sup>99</sup> Elliott, *Home*, 80-81; cf. *idem*, *1 Peter*, 791-94.

<sup>100</sup> Elliott, *Home*, 86; cf. pp. 143-45; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 793: 'Nor does he present any critique of Rome anywhere in the letter, an omission difficult to imagine if Roman officials were indeed executing innocent Christians as criminals'.

<sup>101</sup> Elliott, *Home*, 101.

<sup>102</sup> Elliott, *1 Peter*, 792.

<sup>103</sup> David G. Horrell, 'The Label *Christianos*: 1 Pet 4.16 and the Formation of Christian Identity', *JBL*, (forthcoming).

<sup>104</sup> Indeed, a later rescript of Hadrian to the *koinon* of Asia reaffirms the policy that Christians must be tried only through the accusatorial procedure (*cognitio*). The importance of this policy for the Christians – it is, at least, better than an inquisitorial approach or wholesale persecution – may well be the reason why they preserved this rescript of

indicates too (16.19-24; 18.12-17), this public hostility could lead to Christians being brought before the magistrates. Moreover, at least after Nero's persecution of the *Christiani* in Rome, the very name 'Christian' was sufficient in such contexts to indict a person of a form of criminality worthy of death, dependent, of course, on the disposition of particular governors and the perceived threat to the peace of their province.<sup>105</sup> Public and imperial hostility combined in the accusatorial process, which remained the Romans' preferred mode for the judicial treatment of Christians until the Decian persecution of the third century.

1 Peter not only offers an insider's window onto such contexts, where the specific label *Christianus* was the crux around which everything turned, but also, and significantly, marks the earliest attempt to turn his stigmatising label into one which, for insiders at least, is a badge of honour.<sup>106</sup> Both the context and the strategy are, needless to say, highly relevant to a postcolonial reading of the letter. In its depiction of the setting in which this Hadrian, so argues Elias J. Bickerman, 'Trajan, Hadrian and the Christians', *Rivista di Filologia e di Istruzione Classica*, 96 (1968), 290-315

<sup>105</sup> This is the conclusion of a good number of ancient historians: see e.g., Ste Croix, 'The Early Christians', 8; A. Giovannini, 'L'interdit contre les chrétiens: raison d'état ou mesure de police?' *Cahiers du Centre Glotz (Paris)* 7(1996), 103-34; William H.C. Frend, 'Martyrdom and Political Oppression', in Philip F. Esler (ed.), *The Early Christian World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 815-39, at 821, 835 ('a religion deemed since the Neroian persecution to be illegal'); Sordi, *Christians and the Roman Empire* 63; Helga Botermann, *Das Judenedikt des Kaisers Claudius: Römischer Staat und Christiani im I Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1996) 156-57, 187; Joachim Molthagen, 'Die Lage der Christen im Römischen Reich nach dem 1. Petrusbrief: Zum Problem Einer Domitianischen Verfolgung', *Historia* 44 (1995), 422-58.

label might be applied – one of suffering, and one where other labels, such as murderer and thief, might also be suggested – the letter gives us an insider’s glimpse, or an underside glimpse, of the processes by which imperial power operated to censure the new movement. The hostility from the local populace, which certainly underlay the suffering, is also significant. The Christians’ self-disassociation from established patterns of politico-religious practice – their refusal to play their part in sustaining the *pax deorum* on which the *pax romana* depended – could well have made them unpopular, and led to their being viewed as antisocial criminals who hated the rest of the human race (Tacitus *Ann.* 15.44; cf. Suetonius *Nero* 16.2; Pliny *Ep.* 96.8).<sup>107</sup> In other words, just as their (new) identity as dispersed aliens dislocates them from the empire, and inculcates a kind of postcolonial identity, so the hostility they now encounter as *Xristianoí*/ represents the reaction, both public and official, to their self-dislocation. And in this particular instance, when it comes to this stigmatising and criminalised label, the author of 1 Peter insists that the name be boldly accepted, a strategy which at this point draws a clear line of resistance to imperial pressure.

The name *Xristianoí* also rather nicely illustrates one way in which the identity of the addresses of 1 Peter is a ‘hybrid’ one, a form of identity constructed, in Bhabha’s terms, in the encounter of coloniser and colonised, in a kind of ‘in-between’ space. The name

<sup>106</sup> See Horrell, 'Christianos'; *idem*, 'Leiden als Diskriminierung und Martyrium: (Selbst-) Stigmatisierung und Soziale Identität am Beispiel des ersten Petrusbriefes', in Gerd Theissen and Petra von Gemünden (eds.), *Erkennen und Erleben: Beiträge zur psychologischen Erforschung der urchristlichen Religion* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, forthcoming).

<sup>107</sup> For this depiction of the reasons why the early Christians were persecuted, see Ste Croix, 'The Early Christians', 24-31.

itself is clearly a latinism, a label created by hostile outsiders, probably Romans, which – not in its etymology *per se*, but in the contexts in which it is used – represents a negative judgment of this group. 1 Peter represents the earliest attempt on the part of those so labelled to claim the label instead as a badge of identity which can be proudly worn, indeed, worn with what we might call polemical pride. Eventually, of course, this comes to be *the* identifier with which Christians name themselves, a product, ironically, precisely of their bruising encounters in the public realm and with the imperial power.<sup>108</sup>

*Conclusion: polite resistance*

Reading the first letter of Peter with our ears attuned to the themes to which postcolonial studies draws our attention – the impact of imperialism/colonisation, the ways in which subject peoples negotiate their existence and identity under empire, the pressures to conform and the possible modes of resistance – thus presents us with a new way to assess the strategy of the letter, and the particular path it steers between conformity and resistance. More generally, postcolonial studies, and their nuanced approach to the patterns of relationship between imperial centre and dominated colony, offer a way beyond what has too often been a rather crude assessment of the anti-imperial radicalism of some NT texts, and the regrettable accommodation to empire of others.

It is clear that the author of 1 Peter is no John of Patmos. The letter does not present the kind of ‘hidden transcript’ – a symbolic inversion of current realities, a vision of the empire’s imminent and violent destruction – such as we find in the book of Revelation. On the contrary, the author of 1 Peter calls his readers to conform as far as possible to the standards of goodness expected by the powerful: honouring the emperor, submitting to

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<sup>108</sup> For further development of these ideas from a social-psychological perspective, see Horrell, 'Christianos'.

masters and husbands, living such innocent lives as to negate all criticism. One can see why some scholars have contrasted the vengeful anger of John with the ‘sweet reasonableness’ of the author of 1 Peter, even if one does not share the value-judgments which underlie the labels.<sup>109</sup> One can also imagine – a purely imaginary scenario, let it be stressed – John’s angry reaction to the letter of Peter, which he might well have seen as going much too far in accommodating to the demands of the Beast. Disagreement and argument about when and how to resist, and how far, if at all, to conform, are almost inevitably part of the discourse of popular movements which experience the censure and ire of the ruling powers.

Yet at the same time, we have seen that it would be wrong to characterise the author of 1 Peter as someone who promotes a life of conformity and acquiescence to Rome among the converts in Asia Minor. There are a number of respects in which he encourages a stance of what we might call distance and resistance. Firstly, there is the narrative of identity, a kind of hidden and alternative transcript, into which he inserts his readers, addressing them as refugees and aliens scattered by the power of Babylon – thus echoing the narrative

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<sup>109</sup> The phrase is from Leslie W. Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and their Background* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966) 18, who is actually contrasting John’s ‘hatred of the Roman Power and... sub-Christian ideas of vengeance’ with the ‘sense of order, sobriety of temper, sweet reasonableness and forgiving spirit’ of the author of 1 Clement; but the perspective on rulers expressed in 1 Clement is seen by Barnard as an early Christian teaching found in 1 Pet 2.13-17, Rom 13.1-7, 1 Tim 2.1-3, and Titus 3.1-3, 8. Barnard follows Selwyn’s suggestion that 1 Pet 2.13-17 is nearest to the original form of this catechetical instruction (pp. 15-16). Moreover, Barnard is explicit in judging between the two perspectives on Roman rule: ‘We cannot doubt who is nearer to the mind of Christ’ (p. 18) – and it is evidently not John of Patmos!

which underpins John's visions too – and founding their positive identity and hope on the scriptures and the God of Israel. With this move, not explicitly anti-imperial to be sure, the author presses his readers towards a particular form of postcolonial awareness, a perspective on empire, which they are now to see not as the manifestation of good news, the embodiment of peace on earth, but as the evil power which scatters God's people. Moreover, their own hope for a positive inheritance lies elsewhere, but will arrive soon, at the apocalyptic arrival of God's day.

Even where the author is explicitly calling his readers to patterns of conduct that represent a degree of conformity to the empire's dominion and to established social (household) structures, here too a line at which conformity stops is clearly drawn: Caesar will be honoured, but not worshipped. And in the label *Xristianos*, a label which itself emerges from the encounter between Christians and Roman outsiders, the clash of commitments comes to a head. From a Roman perspective the label is an indication of criminality: one may disown the label, or die. From 1 Peter's perspective, the label is one to be borne with pride, a way to honour God, even as one shares in the sufferings of Christ. In the bearing of the name, resistance finds concrete and specific expression. And 'Christian' identity is forged in the space and language of this encounter.

The author's stance towards the empire, then, and the one he commends to his readers, is one in which, we might say, he 'snarls sweetly',<sup>110</sup> or practices a 'sly civility',<sup>111</sup> or, to echo the marvellous proverb cited by Scott, bows obsequiously, at the same time

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<sup>110</sup> John M. G. Barclay, 'Snarling Sweetly: Josephus on Idolatry', in Stephen C. Barton (ed.), *Idolatry in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity* (London and New York: T&T Clark, forthcoming)

<sup>111</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 93-101.

farting silently.<sup>112</sup> Yet the author's resistance is not merely hidden or 'silent', but in certain contexts and on certain points comes clearly and publicly into view. Perhaps an alternative phrase better captures the particular strategy this author represents: he exemplifies *polite resistance*.

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<sup>112</sup> The reference is to an Ethiopian proverb quoted by Scott, *Domination*, v: 'When the great lord passes the wise servant bows deeply and silently farts.'