

Christian Identity in the First Letter of Peter: An Exegesis of 1 Peter 2:11

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Abstract

The author of First Peter addresses his audience as ‘Resident aliens’ and ‘Sojourners’ and reminds them of their responsibility as a Christian minority in a hostile non-Christian society. The sense depicted by the author’s use of the two Greek adjectives *paroikos* and *parepidēmos* (2:11) is to be determined especially in the context of the adjective *eklektos* in 2:9. This work uses a historical critical method of exegesis to reveal that for the author of the First Letter of Peter, Christians have become ‘aliens’ and ‘strangers’ in the world they live because of their election by God. Election exposes Christians to a new way of life; this way of life sets them apart from others and makes them citizens of heaven rather than of the world in which they live. This eschatological reality of Christian existence therefore makes them unacceptable to the world and exposes them to rejections and alienation.

Keywords: Christianity, Election, Exegesis, Immigration, 1 Peter, Strangers.

1. Introduction

One unique feature of the First Letter of Peter is the author’s depiction of the Petrine Christians in 1 Peter 2:11 as *paroikoi* and *parepidēmoi*. This pair of Greek terms is traced to the LXX (Gen 23:4) where it is used to describe the stranger and transient status of Abraham among the Hittites. Together the terms reflect the precarious social situation of Abraham due especially to the invitation to leave his homeland in search of a new home. They are best rendered in English as ‘resident aliens’ and ‘passing strangers.’ There are various scholarly interpretations of the terms. Some authors underscore primarily the social situation of the addressees as foreigners in the various districts of Asia Minor and consequently reject any figurative or religious connotation. Other scholars on the other hand see primarily a figurative and therefore religious sense in the author’s use of the term. There are some authors too who, from the point of view of the Gentile and Jewish Christian composition of the addressees, identify the need for a socio-religious interpretation of the terms. This work leans towards the third option and suggests that acknowledging the social status of a group of the addressees as strangers; the author considers the Christian status of the entire receiving community as an added/principal motive for their estrangement.

By virtue of their baptismal consecration/election Christians have become strangers and sojourners among their people; their otherness in behaviour sets them apart from their contemporaries. Election in this context implies consecration, separation, and being set apart by and for the Sacred. This exclusivity proper to both the Christians has resulted in an increase in social friction, alienation and rejection just as biblical Israel’s history as God’s chosen and separated people has been dominated by the experience of social alienation and oppression. These conditions are not situations that call for withdrawal; rather they call for witnessing and open up the Christian towards comprehending the pains and needs of those who live away from home.

2. Scholarship on 1 Peter, Addressees and Purpose of the Letter

Prior to 1976, the First Letter of Peter suffered neglect among New Testament scholars and was viewed as an ‘exegetical stepchild.’ Previous scholarship saw the letter widely as a pseudonymous production of the Pauline school. Between 1947 and 1970 Francis Bearer and his supporters considered it theologically inferior to the Pauline letters (Bearer, 1970). Subsequent scholarship underscored the social dimension of its content and context; hence Goppelt, L. (1978), Brox, N. (1979) and Elliot, J.H. (1979) identify in the letter the social responsibility of the Christian minority group in a hostile non-Christian environment. The text, anchored on the terms *paroikos* its paronym *oikos*, and *parepidēmos* is a reflection of the social conditions of its addressees and the suggested socio-religious responses to the challenges in which their strangeness has exposed them. These terms, as used by the author of 1 Peter harbour in themselves not only the theological but also the sociological dimension of the letter. Mazzeo, M. (2002) on the other hand identifies these social considerations of 1 Peter as one of the themes that underscore the relationship between the letter and the Old Testament. These recent studies have revealed clearly that within the New Testament, 1 Peter, influenced by the Old Testament depicts Christians as resident aliens and comprehensively addresses their status and responsibility in the context of non-Christian institutions and structures. The Old Testament depiction of Israel is that of a people whose election by Yahweh has placed them on earth as resident aliens; ‘strangers in a foreign land but members of the household of God.’

The First Letter of Peter is suspected to have been written in Rome (5:13) and addressed to the Christians ‘of the dispersion’ in the Roman provinces which represent practically all of Asia Minor. Majority of

these Christians are converted pagans (see 1:14,18; 2:9-10; 4:3) along with some Judaeo-Christians. The letter is meant to strengthen the faith of the Christians in the face of the challenges associated with the choices they have made against the *status quo* (4:3-4). They are not to allow their trials to force them to return to their former ways (1:14), instead they are to follow in the step of Christ who has called them (2:18-25; 3:18; 4:12-17) and be submissive to the civil authority (2:13-14; 16-17). The author is not however precise on the exact persecution facing the Christians; because of this apparent ambiguity some critics attempt to link the persecution to that of Domitian or Trajan (Brown, 1997). Some scholars who question Peter's authorship of the letter seem to prefer this position. There are however no strong indications within the letter to permit this conclusion.

3. Composition of the Letter and the Role of 1 Peter 2:11

A review of the available literary breaks, indices and progressive themes in 1 Peter provides ready possibilities for determining the composition or structure of the text. As an epistle it has an address/salutation which serves an introduction (1:1-2), and final greetings or words which serve as the conclusion (5:12-14). Common to these two aspects of the letter are the themes of 'election,' 'grace,' and 'peace.' Together they form an 'inclusion' (1:1-2 & 5:12-14) within which the entire body of the letter is sandwiched. The body of the letter itself (1:3-5:11) contains two specific references to the term *agapētoi* 'beloved' which constitute two literary breaks to the flow of the letter (2:11; 4:12). These literary breaks make it possible therefore to divide the body of the letter into three sections. The first section: 1:3-2:10 articulates the identity of the believers as God's people. The second: 2:11-4:11 discusses the commitments consequent on the vocation to be God's people. The third unit: 4:12-5:11 underscores Christian hope for the *parousia* especially in the relationship between Christian sufferings and Christ's suffering. Worthy of note is the identification of believers as 'beloved' in 2:11 which comes only after the author has established their status as the elect of God. The adjective is not used in the first unit; the subsequent usage in 4:12 depicts 'the election by God' as the basis for a strong bond between the author and the addressees. It is this bond that permits the author to address them as 'beloved.'

1 Peter 2:11 which is of interest to this work forms part of the second section 2:11-4:11. It is in the subunit of 2:11-12 which speaks of Christians in their relationship to the world. While 2:9 specifies election as the basis for which Christians are God's people, 2:11 marks the consequences of the vocation of Christians as 'God's people.' It emphasizes their distinctiveness in their relationship to the world. This uniqueness is both an asset and a liability and in both cases Christians are expected to be proactive. The distinctiveness which qualifies them as strangers and transients determines their relationship to the world and to Christ whom they have chosen to follow and at the end determines their destiny. It imposes on them the need to prove to the world the correctness of their choice by the life they live as they look forward to the *parousia*. Though treated as strangers on account of their new way of life (4:3-4), Christians are to be lovers of strangers and as good stewards they must readily make available to others the varied graces they have received from God (4:9-10). The structure of 1 Peter expresses this stranger status of Christians and its consequences as flowing from their election. The letter does this especially through a play on words which constitute the themes of 'election,' 'foreignness,' and citizenship of 'God's household.' The theme of 'foreignness' is captured in the final greeting 5:12-14; this salutation speaks of greetings from the letter's Christian community of provenance designated as 'co-elect' in Babylon (Rome). The term 'co-elect' expresses the perfect correspondence between the situation of the receiving 'elect pilgrims' of the dispersion in 1:1 and the sending 'co-elect' in Babylon (Bosetti, 1996). This therefore, underscores the theme of 'elect-strangers' as the interpretative framework of 1 Peter; the theme begins, constitutes and ends the Letter.

4. 1 Peter 2:11 and Gen 23:4

In Gen 23:4 Abraham requests to purchase a property for the burial of his wife Sarah among the Hittites in the land of Canaan. He describes himself in that request as *ghēr*; stranger with the right of stay and *tōshāv*; a sojourner among the Hittites. These Hebrew words are translated in the LXX as *paroikoi* and *parepidēmoi* (Gen 23:4). The two terms are for the first time in the Scripture used together in this passage. They describe the social status and precarious situation of Abraham as a man with no right of and access to property and particularly to a land. He is depicted as relying on the good will of the citizens with whom he sojourns as a foreigner; it is the social reality he faces as a result of his stay in a land that is not his own. This status and social situation of Abraham as a stranger is consequent on his 'call' by Yahweh and the invitation to live a life of a migrant in Gen 12:1-3. Abraham is invited to walk away from or abandon his land, kindred and father's house for another land unknown to him. He is invited to undertake a journey of hope in search of a new home. In relation to the expected new home this 'call' by Yahweh constitutes his vocation as a migrant and makes him a stranger and a transient. It is this journey that brings him among the Hittites as a stranger and a man on the move; without a land to bury Sarah in Gen 23. Socially and theologically Abraham becomes a stranger and transient; socially in relation to the Hittites and theologically in relation to the Promised Land and his 'call' by Yahweh.

The verb that depicts the 'call' of Abraham by Yahweh is the *qal^omar* which means 'say' or 'speak.'

The Greek verb 'legein' is used to translate *o'mar* in the LXX and forms the root for the family words like *logos*, *alogos*, *logikos*, *logomachia* and *eklektos*. Its basic sense which cuts across most of its derivatives is 'to gather' or 'to pick out' things that are from certain perspectives alike. The picking out implies the twofold nuance of 'succession/repetition' and 'logical separation' (Debrunner, 1967). It is used therefore in Gen 12:1 to introduce the story of Abraham as God's 'call' of Abraham; it helps depict God's speech to Abraham as a choice and a call to undertake a migrant life style. The 'call' equally informs Abraham's sojourning activities and experiences depicted by the verb *paroikeō* and its derivatives in Gen 12:10 and 17:8 (LXX). The same status, represented by Abraham, constitutes the model for subsequent Patriarchs who with the verb *paroikeō* and its derivatives are depicted as continuing the 'sojourning' in the land of Canaan (Gen 26:2-3; 32:5). The continuity of the 'sojourning' from Abraham to Isaac, Jacob and beyond underscores the coherence of life proper to the descendants of Abraham as a people called by Yahweh. Thus being strangers and sojourners becomes an identity that flows from Abraham's 'call' to his descendants as Yahweh's people (Bosetti, 1993). The consciousness of this nomadic style of life and of existence as strangers contingent on the election of Abraham and his progeny informs the exclamation of David in 1Chr 29:15: "for we are strangers *ghērīm* before you and sojourners (*pilgrims*) *tōshāvīm* as all our fathers were..."

The author of the First Letter of Peter employs the exact terms used in the LXX of Gen 23:4 to describe his addressees in 2:11. He is not oblivious of the social and theological connotations of these terms in the passage in question. He is equally aware of the use made of the words independently in the LXX to represent the sojourning activities and experiences of Israel's forebears in their relationship with their host nations and with God. An evaluation of the use of these terms in 1 Peter must necessarily take into consideration the usage and meaning accentuated by the LXX.

5. The Elect in 1 Peter

The verbal adjective *eklektos* is derived from a combination of the preposition *ek* and the verb *legō*. Based on the basic sense of separation and repetition of *legō*, *eklektos* denotes being 'selected,' or 'chosen' from, and especially 'distinguished;' an 'elect.' In the religious sense proper to the Old and New Testaments, it denotes those whom God has chosen from the generality of the humankind and drawn to himself (Matt. 22:14), 'the called' and 'the chosen' or 'the elect' (Bauer, 2000). In the OT, Israel through the call of Abraham, is represented as particularly chosen by Yahweh (1 Ch 16:13; Ps 88(89): 4; 104(105): 6,43; Is 65:9,16,23). The New Testament refers to Christ as the Chosen of God in Israel and Christians as 'the chosen' of God through Christ (Mtt. 24:22,24,31; Mk 13:20,22,27; Luke 18:7; 2 Tim 2:10; Rom 8:33; Col 3:12; Tit 1:1).

The term *eklektos* appears four times in the letter; it is used twice to refer to Christ (2:4,6) and twice to refer to the believers to whom the letter is addressed (1:1; 2:9). The fifth appearance is in the compound form *suneklektē* in 5:13. It is used in the first instance in a Christological sense (1 Peter 2:6); Christ is depicted as the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophesy (Isa 28:16) of the chosen and precious cornerstone that was to be laid in Zion. The author thus represents Christ as that living and precious stone chosen by God but rejected by men (1 Peter 2:4). The term 'chosen' or 'elect' is used here in the context of rejection; in other words he is rejected because he is chosen by God; rejection is consequent on the divine choice. It manifests itself in the sufferings that were imposed on Jesus in his passion and death (2:23). 'Election' on the other hand manifests itself in the resurrection and glorification that followed as justification for the election (3:22). As the living stone chosen by God and rejected by men, Christ serves as foundation and model for the configuration and edification of the Christian community (1 Peter 2:5). The ecclesiological implication of the imagery consists in the fact that the 'chosen' and 'rejected' 'precious' 'living stone' used earlier to describe the condition of Christ serves in 2:5 to depict the situation of Christians. By aligning themselves with Christ in the world Christians by their baptismal consecration have become the 'chosen' or 'elect,' but 'suffering' and rejected like Christ himself. The verb of building *oikodomeisthe* which may be present indicative passive or imperative passive is used in an ecclesiological sense to describe the edification of believers. When taken as an imperative it is an insistence on the commitments of believers towards building up their lives in the manner of Christ. Only in communion with Christ can believers build their brotherhood into living stones that make up the 'spiritual house for a holy priesthood' (Mazzeo, 2002). It is in the context of this Christ-Christian dynamics that Christians are requested to come to Christ *proserchomai* 'not literally in a spatial sense' but in a figuratively cultic sense of devoting themselves to and uniting themselves with him in worship (2:4).

The term is used of believers in the prologue (1:1) to describe the basis for which the letter is addressed to them. The basis consists especially in that which the recipients share with the sending community described as co-elect in 5:13. The expression 'elect or chosen pilgrims of the dispersion *eklektois*, *parepidēmois diasporas* describes the identity and condition of believers in relation to God and to the world in which believers live. In relation to God they are the 'elect' or the 'chosen' or separated from among others, while in relation to the world they are pilgrims or sojourners of the dispersion. In this era their position is that of foreigners, but they belong to the nation of the elect (Schrenk, 1967). The adjective 'elect' or 'chosen' expresses the choice made by

God himself through which the ones chosen are specifically reserved by an act of consecration for God alone as his own possession. This election or choice accomplished in consecration is a vocation which determines the lives of Christians in the less friendly society in which they form a part. It is this sense of being possessed by God that is shared between the recipients of the letter in 1:1 and the sending Christian community in 5:13.

The concept of exclusivity proper to the separation, reservation and preservation of the 'elect' for God is underscored in the pairing of *eklektos* with the noun *genos* in 2:9. *Genos* means 'ancestral stock,' 'race' or 'descendant;' it refers to a relatively small (family/relatives) or large group (nation/people) with common ancestry and therefore united by common traits. The 'election' builds the Petrine Christians into a separate race with distinguishing peculiarities. It makes of them the 'people of God' *laos theou* (2:10), a 'people preserved' (for God) *laos eis peripoiēsin* (2:9), a 'holy nation' and a 'royal priesthood.' These peculiarities set them apart as different and therefore foreign to the society in which they live; and in this eccentricity they are unwelcome and rejected. The expressions 'people of God,' 'holy nation' and 'royal priesthood' are technical terms used in the OT to describe Israel as the 'chosen people' (see Isa 43:20-21; Ex 19:6; Malachi 3:17). In Exodus the possibility for Israel acquiring or claiming their status as 'God's chosen people' consists in the obedience of listening to the word of Yahweh and keeping his covenant (Ex 19:5). The 'election' in Isaiah is mission oriented; as the exclusive preserve of God they are chosen to declare unconditionally the praise of Yahweh (Isa 43:21).

The election as indicated in 2:9 is a call by God of a people from darkness into his marvellous light to declare as his own exclusive possession his wonderful deeds/virtue or moral excellence. The call is from an old and familiar pattern of life into a new and foreign life style in view of the mission to bring others into the chosen race. In being chosen the vocation and mission of Christians are underscored; while the call underscores God as the initiator of the mission, the mission emphasizes the role of the chosen. But each cannot function without the other; life as the 'elect' therefore implies vocation and mission (Mazzeo, 2002). The goal of election therefore is ministry; in election the preordained are commissioned to declare the graciousness of God.

While the election of Israel is tied to the call of Abraham in Gen 12 the election of Christians is tied to the election of Christ as the foundation of the Church (1 Peter 1:20; 2:4). Thus in 1 Pet 2:9-10 the basic OT promises and terminologies which originally pertained to Israel are now transferred to the Christian community in its universality. The transfer is founded on and effected by Christ especially in the link between Christ as the cornerstone and Christians as the 'elect nation' (2:4-6). As the *lithos eklektos* Christ creates and sustains the *genos eklekton* (Schrenk, 1967). Christians in Christ now become the new 'people of God,' the 'elect' Israel, a people of possession whose realized status on the day of visitation (2:12) is to depend on their mission to declare the deeds of God during the time of their pilgrimage or sojourning *paroikias* (1:17; see also Eph 1:4-6). In living their election in exile the elect together form a brotherhood across the world (5:9) and distinguish themselves by the obedience of faith in contrast to unbelief and disobedience.

The doctrine of this election is specified in 1:2; here the basis, means and goal of election are rooted in the Trinitarian order of the eternal plan and foreknowledge of the Father *prognōsin theou patros*. The *en* specifies the means whereby the election is accomplished *hagiasmō pneumatos*; sanctification by the Spirit which implies consecration and dedication to God. In the *eis* the goal of election is identified as obedience for the realization of the salvation enhanced by the sacrificial act of Christ (Schrenk, 1967). This Trinitarian root of election therefore implies Christian baptism administered in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit. In baptism Christians are consecrated and elected God's people and thus made part of God's universal plan of salvation for humanity. 'Election' is therefore a theme which permits the author of First Peter to establish the link between believers and Christ, between believers and baptismal consecration, between believers and the trinity, and between believers and God's plan of salvation. It permits the author consequently to exhort Christians to live their vocation in mission towards enhancing the divine plan of salvation [2:11-12 (Eckert, 1990)].

6. Resident Aliens and Sojourners of 1 Peter 2:11

The term *paroikos* depicts especially strangers with resident status who are permanently residing in a place, but are not citizens; they are resident aliens who live 'alongside' or 'beside' *para* the 'home' *oikos*. It was a technical term used, in Ancient Greco-Roman world, of strangers *xenoi* who resided legally in foreign territories. It therefore expresses the social distinction and position of such persons in relation to *xenoi* (non-resident strangers) and citizens. In contrast to *xenos*, *paoikos* is used of strangers who enjoy certain legal rights and privileges arising from their legally recognized presence in foreign lands as resident aliens. In relation to the citizens of the land *paoikoi* do not have full rights; they have limited rights. This understanding of *paroikos* is reflected in the LXX and in secular writings of the time. It is a mid-way between full citizenship status of the citizens *politai* and strangers *xenoi* (Schaefer, 1949). *Parapidēmos* on the other hand depicts strangers who are temporarily residing in, visiting or passing through foreign territories. It means pilgrim or sojourner.

The two terms used already in 1 Peter 1:1 and 1:17 express the socio-religious situations of the Christian addressees in the world in which they live. They are used here to describe the addressees as 'strangers,' 'exiles,' 'resident aliens,' 'sojourners' and 'pilgrims.' In the wider sense they imply 'emigrants' and 'refugees.'

The Petrine addressees are seen as strangers in the environment in which they find themselves; like Abraham in Gen 23:4 they have only temporary residence among a different people without necessarily enjoying the benefits of citizenship. They are pilgrims whose condition can best be described as a ‘people on the move’ capable of rearranging its luggage and departing.

The choice of the adjectives therefore helps the author highlight the difficult conditions of the addressees whose social situation offers them little or no legal privileges or protection. They reflect the geographical, religious and social displacement of the addressees based on their ethnic composition and religious allegiance. This choice is to be viewed therefore from two perspectives; ‘socio-juridical and ‘religio-ethical’ (Mazzeo, 2002). The Gentile-Christian/Judeo-Christian composition of the addressees is of importance here. Especially for the pagans or Gentiles who become Christians, their new ways make them strange before their fellow citizens (4:3-4). In their strangeness they see themselves and are looked at by others as foreigners who merely sojourn among their own people. The Judeo-Christians, on the other hand, whose presence in foreign territories of the great Roman provinces (as Jews of the dispersion) makes them socially resident aliens, are exposed to further alienation because of their newly acquired Christian status (Elliott, 1990). In Acts 2:9-10 such Jews of the dispersion from Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia are said to have been visiting Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. Their first contact with Christianity started with the Pentecost experience of the Twelve and the speech of Peter. From here they may have had their conversion and acquired their new status as Christians; in their foreign territories of residence therefore they acquire a second eccentric status. Both the Gentile-Christians and the Judeo-Christians therefore find themselves in the category of minorities who are in most cases misunderstood on account of their different life style.

The religious/ethical connotation derives especially from the use made of the terms in 1:1 and 1:17. The Petrine Christians are identified in 1:1 as *eklektōis, parepidēmois diasporas* ‘elected pilgrims of the Diaspora.’ Christians are elected by God and separated from the present world. Consequent on this election is their constitution as *parepidēmois*; people who reside temporarily in the world. Diaspora implies the dispersion of these Christians in different parts of the Roman Provinces mentioned, it reflects especially the reality of the Diaspora Jews in those provinces who have become Christians. It is figuratively used to depict the addressees as Christians living in dispersion in the world far from their home [see also James 1:1 (Bauer, 2000)]. They have become strangers because they are elected and consecrated by God to be his people and property 2:9-10. By virtue of the election by God, Christians are in an eschatological manner not of this world but strangers on a pilgrimage in the world towards their heavenly fatherland. In this context the *paroikos* and *parepidēmos* define the identity of Christians, their existence and essence in the world beyond geographical, historical and social confines. They are used figuratively by the author of 1 Peter to represent Christians as foreigners in this age because they belong to the community of the ‘elect’ whose homeland is heaven.

This understanding of Christians as not possessing earthly but heavenly citizenship was equally central to the ecclesiology of the primitive Church (Heb 11:9,13,14; Phil 3:20; Eph 2:19) and the Fathers of the Church. The letter of Polycarp of Smyrna in Asia Minor to the Philippians states: “Polycarp and the presbyters with him, to the Church of God sojourning at Philippi.” His other letter equally notes: “The Church of God sojourning at Smyrna to the Church of God sojourning in Philomelium and to all the brotherhoods of the Holy and Universal Church sojourning in every place....” (The Letter of Smyrnaeans). The earliest and most winsome description of the situation of Christians in ‘the Epistle to Diognetus’ states:

For Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs..., at the same time they give proof of the remarkable and admittedly extraordinary constitution of their own commonwealth. They live in their own countries, but only as aliens. They have a share in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land.... They live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven (The Epistle to Diognetus).

The socio-religious dimension of the alien status of Christians emphasized by the author of 1 Peter places the life of Christians in a dual hermeneutical scheme; spatial and temporal. From this is derived in an effective sense an imagery that appears similar to the Johannine dualism; earth-heaven and present-future. This allows the author to attach meaning beyond the present to the life of a Christian; the meaning allows the Christian especially to overcome the challenges of sufferings associated with his or her new status.

7. Conclusion

Through the act of baptismal consecration a stable and permanent condition of belongingness to God is created for the Christian; this belongingness to God constitutes Christian election. Election sets Christians apart, makes them strangers and challenges them to use their strangeness as an opportunity to evangelize (2:12). The Diaspora Jews in the Roman territories who became Christians are socially resident aliens and sojourners or transients. The citizens themselves who became Christians and whose situation is captured in 1 Peter 4:3-4 are not socially strangers in the sense the Christian Jews are. They are strangers by virtue of their new Christian ways which are

notably contrary to their former Gentile ways. This implies that the designations *paroikoi* and *parepidēmoi* go beyond the sociological situation of the addressees and anchor figuratively on the spiritual status which their vocation as Christians has afforded them. The spiritual status is their ‘citizenship in heaven’ (1 Pet 1:4-50), the different life style which as a result they now lead sets them apart and makes them appear different and therefore strangers among their contemporaries. It makes them citizens not of their present world, but of heaven with the obligation to live out the principles characteristic of such citizenship for the conversion of others.

The principles of this Christian citizenship according to 1 Peter consist in holiness of life, sobriety in hope and non-conformity to the passions characteristic of the former non-Christian lives of ignorance (1:13-17; 2:1-3; 4:3). Members of the Christian commonwealth are expected to love one another (1:22; 4:8) and to love especially strangers; *philoxenoi* (4:9). Their good conduct must serve as testimony for the glorification of God among non-believers (2:12) and as argument against the ignorance of the foolish (2:15). They are expected to have a socio-familial code of conduct *Haustafeln* (2:13-3:7) which must include respect for constituted authority, respect for the rule of law/the human person (2:13-14, 17) and the fear of God (2:17). It should promote respect for the family (3:1-7), and acceptance of suffering on account of the Christian faith as participation in the passion of Christ (2:18-2:25). It must enhance the pastoral care for souls within the Christian community (5:1-4).

These missionary activities constitute the contact between the vertical dimension of the vocation of Christians as ‘elect’ of God and its horizontal historical aspect as ‘sojourners or pilgrims in the world. It explains why the author addresses the audience in the prologue to the letter as ‘elect pilgrims or sojourners of the dispersion’ (1 Peter 1:1). Election places believers within the tension of the two worlds; the former life of unbelief characteristic of the past, and the new and foreign lifestyle as God’s people. The phrases ‘chosen sojourners of the dispersion’ in 1:1 and ‘resident aliens and sojourners’ in 2:11 depict this Christian existence as foreigners and its consequent hostilities as the resulting reversed-side of election. The First Letter of Peter is therefore written to strengthen Christians in this situation of hostility urging them to do battle against all human tendencies that go against the good (2:11b) and to use their Christian way of living as an opportunity to bear witness (2:12). The peculiarity of 1 Peter in relation to the theme of election is its consequent attraction of misunderstanding, suffering and rejection. By their lifestyle Christians become different and unwelcome, looked at as strangers and excluded, and exposed to the pains of rejection and sufferings.

The social and spiritual situation of Christians as resident aliens and pilgrims and the deprivations and hostilities that go with these conditions place Christians in a position to comprehend the plights of people who live as refugees/immigrants in territories that are not their own. It equally predisposes them consequently to be readily available to help others; because whoever is distanced from his wealth is placed in the condition of using it for the service of others. This Christian sensitivity and hospitality toward strangers and especially recognition of the challenges of living as foreigners that can help commit stakeholders to finding a lasting solution to the humanitarian crises of immigration that face the International Community. Christians must make their impact felt on the willingness to resolve the crises of migrants across the world by being actively involved in the discussions, and providing for both the economic and spiritual needs of migrants.

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