



*The Reversal of Roles as the Reasoning for Remaining Christian  
in the Face of Hardship in the First Epistle of Peter.*

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*Submitted as Fulfilment of the Requirements  
of the Degree*

*Philosophiae Doctor*

*In the  
Faculty of Theology  
Department New Testament  
of the*

*University of Pretoria*

*Promoter: Prof Dr. J.G. van der Watt*

*Pretoria*

*December 2000*



*To my wife, Karlien and my parents for their*

*unconditional love  
and  
unlimited support.*



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## Summary

*In this dissertation, *The Reversal of Roles as the Reasoning for Remaining Christian in the Face of Hardship in the First Epistle of Peter*, the rhetorical motivation which the author of first Peter uses to persuade the believers to remain Christian in the face of hardship is examined. Introductory discussions set the table for meaningful discourse to follow. It is then shown that the original readers of the first epistle of Peter faced both societal and governmental hardship, merely for being Christian. Values such as honour and shame were used by society as leverage to pressurize believers into apostasy. Such hardships, inter alia provided ample reason to forsake their new found faith. The Roman system of governance further hampered the Christian cause as their paradigms seem to be opposite.*

*The author of the book makes use of, inter alia the reversal of roles as his reasoning and persuasion to remain Christian regardless of the hardships faced. Employing certain reversals the author changes the believer's symbolic universe and role model. Jesus is presented as their new role model. Peter seems to suggest that what happened to Jesus will also happen to believers. Hence, condemnation and shame will reverse with vindication and glorification. Amongst others, these thoughts are used to change the believer's identity and community with different attributes than the old community that they reverse places with, viz. Society. Their perspective on life is modified to become eschatological. Not only are attitudes attempted to be amended by the author but also their behaviour. These changes are brought into effect on both macro and micro levels as Peter endeavours to make his influence penetrate into their very households.*

*The end result is that the whole picture of their situation is changes to such an extent that, in their minds, society has no real authority to grant true honour in the first place. God, on the other hand, has the authority to do so, and uses it to bestow genuine honour on the*





*believers and shame on the non-believers resulting in a reversal. In a similar way society and Christians exchange places on many different planes through reversals engineered by the author of first Peter.*

*The culmination of such reversals transpire at the parousia where society takes the place they created for the Christians, viz. condemnation, whilst the Christians are vindicated and saved. Thus the reversal of roles is primarily the reasoning for remaining Christian in the face of hardship in the first epistle of Peter.*

## *i. Introduction*

*The first epistle of Peter has to a certain extent been relatively academically neglected. This probably motivated Elliott to call this book of Peter' an "exegetical step-child".<sup>2</sup> Yet, the book is rich in theological reasoning<sup>3</sup> and has much to offer the academic world. In order to be placed in the wider academic scope of what has been studied in first Peter the following survey<sup>4</sup> is supplied:*

### *i.i Survey of Academic Work on First Peter*

*As can be expected there have been the usual commentary<sup>5</sup> and introductory studies on first Peter. Furthermore, thematic studies have also been published. Such studies may, inter alia, be categorised as follows:*

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<sup>1</sup> *This does not presuppose in any way that Peter is the author of the book that carries his name. For the purpose of reference this dissertation calls the author "Peter". The subject of authorship will be discussed at a later stage.*

<sup>2</sup> *Elliott (1976).*

<sup>3</sup> *Peter attempts to persuade Christians to remain Christian in the face of hardship by means of, inter alia rhetoric. As such, first Peter argues theologically and presents as his solution to the suffering problem, inter alia, the reversal of certain roles. The notion that first Peter's argument is theological is supported by Perkins (1995:17).*

<sup>4</sup> *This survey is by no means a comprehensive one. It will discuss some of the works on first Peter over the last ten years. The idea is to supply only an overview.*

<sup>5</sup> *Examples of such commentaries are Michaels (1988); Marshall (1997); Achtemeier (1996); Best (1971).*



- a. *Wives and husbands.*<sup>6</sup>
- b. *The use of the Old Testament in Peter.*<sup>7</sup>
- c. *Ethics in Peter.*<sup>8</sup>
- d. *Holiness of life / priesthood.*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Studies on this theme have been published, amongst others, the following: Wives like Sarah, and the husband who honor (sic) them: 1 (sic) Peter 3:1-7 (Grudem 1991); Are the wives of 1 (sic) Peter 3:7 Christian? (Gross 1989); The co-elect woman of 1 (sic) Peter (Applegate 1992); Peter's instructions to husband in 1 (sic) Peter 3:7 (Slaughter 1994); Instructions to Christian wives in 1 (sic) Peter 3:1-6 (Slaughter 1996). As can be seen from these publications these themes seem to be rather limited to either a specific section of the book, for example, first Peter 3:1-7 or a very narrow theme.*

<sup>7</sup> *It seems evident that Peter uses the Old Testament extensively in his book. Publications that discuss this occurrence are, inter alia: The use of the Old Testament for Christian ethics in 1 (sic) Peter (Green 1990); The Israelite imagery of 1 (sic) Peter 2 (Glenny 1992); First century Bible study: Old Testament motifs in 1 (sic) Peter 2:4-10 (France 1998). Another study that might be of interest is Warden (1989).*

<sup>8</sup> *It is acknowledged that not much seems to have been said on ethics in Peter. This is probably due to the fact the studies on holiness and Christian life touch on this subject too. Since these two topics are more visible in Peter they seem to be studied more than the subject of ethics. To consult a publication on ethics in Peter see Green (1990).*

<sup>9</sup> *As mentioned in the previous footnote, this topic is studied more frequently than that of ethics in first Peter. The following will suffice as examples: Holiness of life as a way of Christian witness (O'Connor 1991); The message of 1 (sic) Peter: The way of the Cross (Clowney 1992); The Priesthood of all believers: 1 (sic) Peter 2:1-10 (Schweizer 1992); The common priesthood ... (Seland 1995).*



- e. *Aliens and strangers.*<sup>10</sup>
- f. *Persecution / suffering.*<sup>11</sup>
- g. *Peter in the light of the other writings.*<sup>12</sup>
- h. *Eschatology.*<sup>13</sup>
- i. *The household code.*<sup>14</sup>
- j. *Metaphors / rhetoric.*<sup>15</sup>
- k. *Church and culture.*<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Refer to: *A heavenly home for the homeless: Aliens and strangers in 1 (sic) Peter* (Chin 1991); *To all those scattered throughout ...* (Marill 1998).

<sup>11</sup> This topic has been hotly contested between those who believe that the suffering / persecution was societal and those who believe that it was official. Some publications that deal with this and other aspects of suffering / persecution are, amongst others: *Imperial persecution and the dating of 1 (sic) Peter and Revelation* (Warden 1991); *Suffering servant and suffering Christ in 1 (sic) Peter* (Achtemeier 1993); *Abundant living in a hostile world* (Grenz 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Examples of such studies are: *1 (sic) Peter 3:6b in the light of Philo and Jesus* (Sly 1991); *The common priesthood of Philo and 1 (sic) Peter ...* (Seland 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Martin, Troy (1992); *The eschatology of 1 (sic) Peter* (Parker 1994).

<sup>14</sup> This appears to be one topic that has enjoyed the attention of the academic world. Peruse the following: *Non-retaliation and the haustafeln in 1 (sic) Peter* (Schertz 1992); *Order in the "house" of God : the haustafel in 1 (sic) Peter 2:11-3:12* (Krentz 1998).

<sup>15</sup> One of the books on this topic that made some impact is: *Metaphor and composition in 1 (sic) Peter* (Martin, Troy 1993). Also see *The rhetoric of 1 (sic) Peter* (Thomson 1994); (Snyder 1995); (Slaughter 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Miroslav (1994); Rowan (1996).



1. *The gospel in Peter.*<sup>17</sup>

*Generally speaking it appears as though most of these studies are either limited to a specific section of the book or limited to that topic in the book. It seems as if there are very few publications which study a topic that is applied to all the other topics in the book. Furthermore, these studies seem to deal with literary, theological and topical arguments on all kinds of issues but do not seem to answer the questions why and how to remain Christian. For example, the topic of holiness are discussed but one does not seem to find logic for why Christians have to be holy in the first place. Similarly the how question seems to be untouched. It would appear as if there are certain voids when it comes to the study of first Peter.*

*As shall be discovered in this dissertation the readers of first Peter were facing numerous serious problems.<sup>18</sup> Although scholars have looked at various themes within first Peter there seems to be a void. Firstly, it appears as if there are not many publications dedicated to pin point the exact problems facing Christians. Secondly, and probably because the problems have not been adequately defined, one does not find many scholars presenting a tangible, practical solution to such problems. The interesting part is that this part of history written about and referring to first Peter seems to repeat itself in history.<sup>19</sup> One can also not preclude possible*

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<sup>17</sup> Elliott (1995).

<sup>18</sup> *The whole first part of this dissertation is devoted in outlining and sketching these problems faced by Christians. In short, (since it is dealt with later) they suffered socially, politically and physically. Furthermore, they even had problems within their households due to their new found faith.*

<sup>19</sup> *Examples of such repetitions could possibly include: the persecution of the dark ages and religious persecution in the previous communist block, where Christians were socially,*

*future religious persecutions. This implies that Christians faced similar problems than the readers of first Peter in the past. Furthermore, it is also possible that Christians might once again face similar problems in the future. The question is, how did Christians face and deal with similar suffering since Peter's day? The more important question to ask is how Christians are going to deal with such issues should they arise in future? Many studies on Peter bring with them new revelations and wonderful thoughts, but are they practically helping Christians who face hardship? This dissertation attempts to fill that apparent void. Examine some past studies on first Peter:*

*In the nineteen-sixties certain articles appeared dealing with first Peter as a paschal liturgy, others on baptism and Christian expectation.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, church order and ministry in first*

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*politically and physically persecuted for their faith.*

<sup>20</sup> *Refer to the articles of Thornton (1961); de Ru (1966) and Parnham (1969). Also look at Robinson who attempts to define baptism (1975). Please note, that this dissertation is in no way downgrading such studies. They are all filling certain voids and answering certain unanswered questions. But to a large extent these questions and answers seem to be those of the academic world, for example: Snyder's "Participles and Imperatives in First Peter" (1995); Whitcomb's "Contemporary Apologetics .." (1977); Rodger's "The Longer Reading of 1 (sic) Peter 4:14" (1981); Cahill's "Hermeneutical Implications of Typology" (1982); Hill's article on liturgical formulas and paraenesis in first Peter (1982); Johnson's article on imagery from Malachi three in Peter's theology (1986); Janse van Rensburg's "Use of Intersentence Relational Particles and Asyndeton in First Peter" (1990). The Christian with no academic background in theology or religion is hardly benefitting in a practical way. This dissertation attempts to study the problems in first Peter with a view of defining them (since they are possibly the same problems that modern and future Christians might face) and also to provide answers and to assist in order that they may not only cope with such problems, but that they*

*Peter came up for study in 1970.<sup>21</sup> Polan worked toward practical advice in his article "Marriage in the Lord: A Significant Mode of Christian Presence", but still the address of this dissertation seems to be missing.<sup>22</sup> Also offering advice to Christians is the study of Piper on Christian behaviour in first Peter.<sup>23</sup> Yet, it is felt that the problems facing Peter's readers and the solution to those problems seem to be largely missing in the arsenal of academic battery. This is an attempt to fill that void, to define and deal with such problems, and moreover, to provide Peter's reasoning for remaining Christian in the face of such problems.*

### *i.ii Survey of this Dissertation*

*This is the reason why this dissertation is firstly concerned with a topic that deals with the why and how question. The original readers of first Peter suffered hardship due to their acceptance of the Christian faith (1:6; 2:20; 3:14,17; 4:16,19).<sup>24</sup> They were socially ostracised*

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*may also be encouraged and assisted to remain Christian when such problems do arise. In conclusion then, there seems to be a need that current studies have not met. This dissertation is endeavouring to meet that need which is perceived as a need of the lay-people suffering and asking the question repeatedly, why they should remain Christian. It seems certain that church growth figures across the secular world would suggest that this question is asked. It is granted that this is also an academic study, but it is hoped that it will be an inspiration to future non-academic work with the same purpose.*

<sup>21</sup> Elliott (1970).

<sup>22</sup> Polan (1979).

<sup>23</sup> Piper (1980).

<sup>24</sup> Please take note that references made to Bible verses without the mention of the book, throughout this dissertation, automatically refers to first Peter, for example 1:1

*and were forced to abandon many social privileges. They had many reasons for relinquishing their faith as will be argued later. Peter was faced with the daunting task of persuading the believers to remain firm in their faith, as will be argued. He does this by answering the “why” question - why to remain Christian in the face of hardship. But Peter also deals with the “how” question very practically. Most studies seem to deal with “what” issues. Secondly, this dissertation deals with a topic that is applied to the whole book dealing with most aspects thereof.*

*The quest of this study is then to investigate how Peter went about this task. It is the postulation of this dissertation that he did this by reversing certain roles and presenting that as the reasoning for remaining Christian in the face of hardship - thus answering the “why” question. Firstly, their hardship is defined, amongst others, regarding:*

- a. The type of suffering they were enduring and the source thereof.*
- b. The negative effect of Roman rule on Christianity.*
- c. The negative application of the honour and shame dynamic against Christians.*
- d. The household code.*

*Secondly, since these problems are defined, Peter’s answers to such problems are discussed which is the reversal of roles which , inter alia, is achieved by:*

- a. The placement of a new symbolic universe.*
- b. The placement of a new role model.*
- c. The creation of a new group.*
- d. The creation of a new group identity and value.*
- e. Recommendations to the households.*

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*automatically refers to first Peter 1:1.*



*The way in which Peter reverses these roles also supplies practical solutions to the “how” problem. The author shows them how they should go about remaining Christian, by providing them with structure, cohesion, a calling and purpose. He also does this by changing certain attitudes like eternity versus temporality. This is also done by the reversal of roles. The reversal of roles not only gives hope in a seemingly hopeless situation, nor does it only legitimate their existence as a group, but it also supplies glorious reasons for remaining Christian, and reasons for growing to be even better Christians.*

### *i.iii Problem Statement*

*It seems in order to present theoretical reasons and hypotheses when it comes to the question of why people should remain Christian. Such arguments tend to lose their meaning in the face of practical life issues such as suffering. It is a valid question to ask why people should remain Christian when it does not seem advantageous. Sometimes the more important question, however, is to ask how to remain Christian when most things seem to be an obstacle, and when the Christian life becomes difficult. These are the two basic questions of investigation in this dissertation, viz. why and how to remain Christian in a world that is unfriendly towards Christians.*

*The author of first Peter does not only provide theoretical and hypothetical arguments, but suggests practical solutions of action and encouragement. This will be discovered by looking at the reversal of roles as Peter’s reasoning for remaining Christian.*

*There are two parts in this dissertation. Part one has to do with the problems facing the readers. Part two deals with Peter’s solution to these problems. In Part one the following will be dealt with:*



- a. *Introductory issues in order to place the reader in the correct setting.*
- b. *The problem of suffering.*
- c. *The negative effects of Roman rule on Christianity.*
- d. *The honour and shame dynamic.*
- e. *Problems facing Christians within the household code.*

*In part two the solutions of the above mentioned problems are dealt with as follows:*

- a. *The reversal of roles as the solution to the suffering problem.*
- b. *The reversal of roles as the solution to the believer's alienness.*
- c. *The reversal of roles as the solution to macro and micro cosmic problems.*

*Although possible solutions will already be evident during the preliminary discussions the actual solutions will be developed in chapters six through to the end.*

#### *i.iv Methodology*

*The method followed in researching introductory issues, such as presented in the first chapter of this dissertation, is basically the standard method for dealing with introductory material. Certain criticisms<sup>25</sup>, external factors<sup>26</sup> and internal factors<sup>27</sup> are used in an attempt to answer*

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<sup>25</sup> *Examples of such criticisms are literary and social scientific criticism. For further information as to these and other criticisms study the historical critical methodologies.*

<sup>26</sup> *External factors may include themes that are not specifically mentioned in the first epistle of Peter but which are relevant to the understanding or introduction thereof. An examples could be Peter's linguistic ability.*

<sup>27</sup> *Internal factors are factors occurring within the book itself and could include*

*introductory questions.*

*In ascertaining the problems facing the believers the first epistle of Peter is read through a filter which filters out most information retaining mostly information about these problems. Such problems are then researched both from within the book and externally. From within the book it is attempted to link certain themes, to study certain vocabulary and to examine social data relating to the problem being studied. Externally, other material revealing information about the same topic in a similar setting is researched. It is then endeavoured to syncretize all finding of the given problems. Finally, the conclusion about the problem is tested against the text and situations in the book.*

*Part two of this dissertation follows a similar method as described above. The filter used this time, however, retains information about possible solutions to the problems sketched in part one. This data is then examined to observe whether there are any common threads. It appears as if Peter's answers display remarkable threads throughout the book. Although he provides different solutions there are many reversals in these solutions. A hypothesis is then formulated on the basis of the many appearances of reversals being part of Peter's solutions. The first epistle of Peter is then read through yet another filter, viz. the filter of reversals.*

*These reversals are then examined both externally and, but mostly internally (textually). The examination indicates the hypothesis which is then tested by applying it to the situation mentioned in the book.*

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*theology, the composition of the household code, etc.*

## *i.v Hypothesis*

*It seems apparent that the audience of first Peter faced many problems. It also seems evident that Peter was, inter alia, addressing these problems in his first epistle. Therefore, he makes use of, inter alia rhetoric to provide solutions for them. Rhetorically he seems to be providing basically two categories of advice. Firstly, advice which changes their thinking to help them see things differently. Secondly, behavioural advice that changes both their conduct, and addresses their needs.<sup>28</sup>*

*Both categories seem to be employing reversals as either the motivation for, or the act by which such advice is put in place. These reversals thus serve the role to point out that their affliction will be reversed with fortune. They also serve the purpose to change their behaviour so that reversals could eventuate.*

*It is therefore the hypothesis of this dissertation that the author of first Peter uses the reversal of roles as the reasoning and method for remaining Christian in the face of hardship.*

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<sup>28</sup> *Some of their needs are, for example, met by Peter's advice that the church becomes their new community.*