Chapter 2. The Problem of Suffering

It seems evident in the book of first Peter that his audience was experiencing suffering. In this chapter it is endeavoured to sketch this problem more clearly so that we know what Peter and his readers were dealing with. To do this the source and form of suffering will be discussed, since the source and form of suffering have a direct bearing on the advice and encouragement that Peter had to offer. The source and form of suffering are important for us to understand since it defines one of the problems we are dealing with in first Peter. It also reveals whom we are dealing with. Are we, for example, only dealing with society, a small group of antagonists, Rome, other religions, or with what? With that in mind, the concept of suffering in first Peter will be explored.

According to certain scholars[222] *"the predominant subject in all of 1 (sic) Peter is suffering". In 1:7 we find the loose association of Christian suffering with the purification of gold by fire.*[223] *Verse seven commences with a purpose clause. Suffering thus serves the purpose of perfecting their faith (faithfulness)(1:5-7) and letting their genuine perfected faith be found honourable. The emphasis of this section is not that suffering serves as the test to prove the genuineness of their faith but rather to accentuate the value of this genuine faith in God's view. This can be seen in the concept that people are saved* διὰ πίστεως εἰς σωτηρίαν *(1:5). The end result of genuine faith is thus salvation (1:9 -* τὸ τέλος τῆς πίστεως *[ὑμῶν]* σωτηρίαν*) and Peter seems to be attributing value to this salvation with the phrase:* εἰς

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[222] *Campbell (1995:46).*

[223] *It is important to note here that 1:7 does not actually say that suffering itself is purifying the person who endures the suffering (Michaels 1988:30). However, the same cannot be denied in a group context where suffering purifies the group (this thought has been discussed in more detail previously).*

κληρονομίαν ἄφθαρτον καὶ ἀμίαντον καὶ ἀμάραντον *(1:4). The second accentuation of the value of genuine faith is illustrated in verse seven which starts with the purpose clause,* ἵνα, *thus providing the purpose of the test or trial viz. the "genuineness of your faith" followed by a value classification -* πολυτιμότερον.

Furthermore, this section serves to affirm the ultimate eschatological significance of genuine faith. Two points emerge regarding the gold that is tested by fire. Firstly, Peter creates a startling contrast between genuine faith which, like the inheritance for which it waits (1:4), is indestructible and eternal on the one hand and the gold which is perishable on the other. The perishable character of gold is further mentioned in 1:18. Secondly, the common ground between faith and gold (which is used metaphorically) is that both are tested by fire. The fact that testing by fire is implicit here should not move the thought to centre stage since it is not that important in the current argument and it is expressed indirectly within a paraenthesis.[224] *The simple thought seems to be that faith experiences trials. Suffering is normal for the faithful. This thought is expressed later in the book with Christ as example. It is for this reason that Christians are reminded in 4:12 not to be surprised when trials come, since that is normal. Peter describes genuine faith as already more precious than gold that is tested by fire.*

Peter equates suffering with a "painful trial" (4:12)(New International Version). The word that is being employed in a metaphorical format in 4:12 is πύρωσις. *Besides this occurrence the word is only found twice more in the New Testament, namely, Rev. 18:9,18. Extra-biblically,*[225] πύρωσις *is qualified as the fiery test or trial by fire. In Justin*[226] *we find the*

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[224] *Michaels (1988:31).*

[225] *Didymos (16:5).*

[226] *Justin (Dial. 116.2).*

devil and his work force trying the believers with affliction and fiery trials. The notion in all of these appearances seems to be clear in referring to refinement[227] *by fire (1:6,7). This is substantiated by Prov. 27:21 where* πύρωσις *appears as an equivalent of the Hebrew words* מְצָרֵף *and* וְכִוּר *describing the process of refinement (LXX). From this we can conclude that their suffering is a test to illustrate their faith.*

2.1 The Source and Form of Suffering

Selwyn reads no intensification of the suffering into the πύρωσις *of 4:12, but rather sees* πύρωσις *in the context of the whole letter which, according to Selwyn,*[228] *consists not of imperial persecution but rather of episodic slander, social ostracism, mob violence and even arrest and prosecution by local authorities.*[229] *Bechtler also agrees that the situation reflected*

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[227] *Sander (1966:43-44; 49,50; 67; 85,86; 90,91; 93,94; 96; 103,104) stands in opposition to the interpretation of* πύρωσις *as refinement in first Peter 4:12. She holds the view that this was the meaning in Prov. 27:21 but that the meaning has shifted from refinement / test to the ordeal of the end-time or the eschatological trial (Sander 1966:43-44; 49,50; 67; 85,86; 90,91; 93,94; 96; 103,104). This, however, would imply that the suffering, and time period in which Peter was written, was in fact the end-time. This hypothesis would be open to certain questions: What are we still doing here if the end-time has passed more than a thousand years ago? Was the end-time not the end, as we now still have time after the end-time? Does the end-time or eschatology not refer to the time right before the parousia? And does the fact that the parousia has not occurred not mean that Peter's time could not have been the end-time? The problem is that* πύρωσις *does not refer to some future event as it is equated with their current suffering.*

[228] *Selwyn (1946:52-56, 91).*

[229] *Although local authorities had the authority to make decisions that affected their*

in first Peter represents one of verbal abuse and slanderous accusations of Christians by their non-believing antagonists.[230] *Helmut Millauer*[231] *published a full-length monograph on suffering in first Peter in which he attempted to uncover the origin and tradition-historical background of the various statements about suffering. Millauer calls Peter's theology on suffering*

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local jurisdiction, they were weary of offending the empire. Pliny's letter (111 AD.) illustrates that they continuously asked the Emperor or higher powers for advice. Thus, although the empire was not necessarily involved in the persecution / suffering of Christians, there is little doubt that they would have known about it, and condoned it. In this sense the empire is at least implicated into this matter. Bechtler (1996:10) agrees when he writes:

> *"it does appear that the local authorities considered Christianity basically criminal, with the result that some had been arrested and even condemned to death for their faith".*

The only way for someone to be "condemned" to death was through the authorities, again implicating government. The suffering therefore could not have come solely from society but they had to have at the very least the co-operation of the authorities. Goppelt (1978:20; 39-40) agrees with this view. Peter also insinuates this in 4:15-16. In 4:17 it is entirely possible for Peter to contrast God's judgement with the presupposed imperial judgement that is being insinuated in 4:15-16.

In spite of the adverse treatment Christians received, they still remained Christians. The question is why? Peter attempted successfully to encourage them, utilizing the reversal of roles as his reasoning.

[230] *Bechtler (1996:119).*

[231] *Millauer (1976).*

"leidenstheologie".[232] *He concluded that two great "vorstellungskomplexe" from the tradition provide the author with most of the materials for the construction of this "leidenstheologie". The first "vorstellungskomplex" is sourced both from the election tradition of the Old Testament and Palestinian Judaism which give an indication of suffering as:*

a. πειρασμός - *A trial or temptation and even an experiment (1:6,7; 4:12).*
b. *The distinction between a present time of suffering and a future time of rejoicing (1:6; 4:13).*
c. *Judgement or purification of the elect (4:17).*

The second "vorstellungskomplex" is from the synoptic discipleship tradition which provides the conceptions of suffering as:

a. *The Christian's calling (2:21).*
b. *Blessings (the blessedness of the sufferer)(3:24; 4:14).*
c. *The joy of suffering (4:13).*[233]

One scholar[234] *could well be speaking on behalf of the majority modern scholars who mostly agree on this topic when he writes that the suffering with which first Peter is concerned is due NOT to imperial persecution but to: "hostility, harassment, and social, unofficial ostracism on the part of the general populace".*[235] *The reason for this conviction on the form of suffering*

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[232] *He calls Peter's theology on suffering "leidenstheologie" in Millauer (1976:11,185).*

[233] *This vorstellungskomplex can be seen in Millhauer (1976).*

[234] *Earl Richard (1986:121-139).*

[235] *It seems evident as mentioned in previous footnotes and the discussion thereof, that not EVERYONE is in agreement on this matter. Look for example at Warden (1986) for a*

is mainly caused by a lack of technical terms for persecution as we have become accustomed to when there is reference to formal, official persecution.[236] *Examples of such technical terms would include:* διωγμός *(Matt. 13:21; Mark 4:17; 30:10; Acts 8:1; 13:50; Rom. 8:35; second Cor. 12:10; second Thess. 1:4; second Tim. 3:11); and* φλῖψις *(There are 43 texts utilizing this word).*

Not even the technical term for formal accusation, κατηγορία, *appears in first Peter (For example, in Matt. 12:10 and in 28 other references). In first Peter we find more general terms*

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lengthy debate on the matter. Everybody does agree that the above mentioned actions did take place, but the question is whether it was limited to such social dynamics, and would such action lead to death (there is proof of deaths of Christians on account of Christianity in contrast to criminal activity)? If we look at the example of Jesus we also find that it was society at large that was the instigators behind His death, yet there had to be governmental approval and thus involvement.

Michaels (1988:225) for example states that "Christ's suffering and death were virtually indistinguishable" in passages like 3:18-22 and 4:1. In verse 4:1 the "verb, 'suffer' embraces both ideas (of suffering and death) without risk of misunderstanding (Michaels 1988:225). The same attitude which Christians are to arm themselves with in 4:1, is that Christ suffered in the flesh. The author deliberately inserts the phrase "in the flesh" to signify physical suffering. In 2:19,20 physical suffering is specified. In 4:12 mention is made of "painful" trials. In 4:15,16 there is a strong possibility that the suffering that Peter had in mind was very similar to the suffering experienced by murderers, thieves, etc.

[236] *For a more complete discussion on technical terms for persecution and the lack thereof in first Peter see Kelly (1969:10); Schelkle (1961:8); and Selwyn (1947:53).*

for suffering like: πάσχω[237] *(2:19,10; 3:14,17; 4:1,15,16,19; 5:10);* παθήματα[238] *(4:13; 5:9);* ὑποφέρειν λύπας *(2:19);* λυπηθῆναι ποικίλοις πειρασμοῖς[239] *(1:6);* ἡ πύρωσις[240] πρὸς πειρασμόν *(4:12). Furthermore, when the letter typifies suffering we find language of slanderous and accusatory speech rather than physical persecution. Examples of such speech are:* ἐπηράζω[241] *(3:16);* καταλαλέω *(2:12; 3:16);* ὀνειδίζω[242] *(4:14);*

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[237] *In all of the occurrences in first Peter* πάσχειν *never takes a direct object. In 2:19 the expression* ὑποφέρει ... λύπας *appears to be a synonym of* πάσχειν *(Michaels 1988:140).* πάσχειν *is the word that Peter employs throughout the book as the standard word for the suffering of Christ (2:21, 23; 3:18; 4:1) and Christians (2:20; 3:14, 17; 4:15,19; 5:10) alike.*

[238] παθήματα *is in a partitive genitive construction in 5:9. In this phrase "the same kind of suffering," allowance has been made for different types of suffering. We are dealing with a wide variety of experiences here. Instead of* τὰ αὐτὰ τῶν παθημάτων *the phrase* τὰ αὐτὰ παθημάτων *could have been used. However, the word* τῶν *does make room for the variety mentioned above.*

[239] *The use of* ἄρτι *implies that* λυπηθέντες *(admittedly aorist) refers to the present (1:6). Some (Beare 1970:26) have thought that suffering intensifies as the book moves along. They (Beare 1970:30) have suggested that suffering is a mere possibility in 1:3-4:11, whilst others (Zerwick 1963:110,111) maintained that suffering becomes a present reality later on in 4:12-5:14. However, suffering as this text suggests is already a present reality from the very first chapter (Michaels 1988:29).*

[240] πύρωσις *which means "fiery ordeal" occurs in Prov. 27:21 (LXX)(Michaels 1988:260). After studying the appearances of* πύρωσις *at Qumran Sander (1966:36-50) reaches a conclusion in defining the word technically as the "trial of the end-time, the eschatological ordeal or test" (Sander 1966:43).*

[241] *Here (3:16) we are dealing with a result clause introduced with* ἵνα ἐν ᾧ. *It*

αἰτεῖν λόγον[243] *(3:15); and* βλασφημέω[244] *(4:4). The latter group of words certainly points to verbal abuse rather than physical abuse of Christians by their antagonists. Because of the presence of general terms for suffering, persecution, etc, rather than that of legal, specific terminology in first Peter, one might conclude that the letter envisions verbal hostility in the form of reproach and false accusations of criminal activity against its intended audience.*

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would be fair to assume that ἐπηρεάζειν *is similar to (or not exceeding)* καταλαλεῖσθε *mention earlier in the text. The object of* ἐπηρεάζειν *in 3:16 is the* ἀναστροφή *of Christians and not Christians themselves. This might suggest that we are dealing with verbal and or societal pressure rather than physical pressure.*

[242] *There are some parallels between Matt. 5:11-12, Luke 6:22 and this text (4:14). In essence this text is a beatitude with the verb* ὀνειδίζειν. *Once again we are dealing with the reality of persecution here and not just some future possibility. This can be seen in the introductory conditional clause (*εἰ *in conjunction with the indicative). The word ridicule is used in the passive here. This might suggest that name calling was involved. As we know from the honour and shame dynamic, name calling is not only limited to causing displeasure but rather used to lower the status of the recipient. There are far more grave consequences than just a slanderous name change.*

[243] *This phrase is appropriate for judicial precedings although it would not qualify as a technical legal term. The meaning refers to a demand, accounting or explanation of something. If* ἀπολογία *and* αἰτεῖν λόγον *appear together it might say, as Michaels (1988:188) suggests, "that Peter sees his readers as being 'on trial' every day ...".*

[244] *Translated as "they blaspheme" (New Revised Standard Version) this present active participle means literally blaspheming. The context persuades us that the word is attributive rather than circumstantial. The verse division suggests that this term is linked to the preceding phrase which insinuates that we can understand* βλασφημεῖν *as a synonym for ridicule and slander.*

On the other hand the reference in 3:15 to ἀπολογία[245] in the sense that the readers should familiarize themselves with an ἀπολογία in order that they can answer anyone demanding an account of their hope, may refer to judicial proceedings.[246] If this is in fact the case, then some if not all instances of such terms may also refer to accusations[247] brought against them in the courts of law.[248] Although it is believed that the source of suffering is socially inspired, it is admitted that there is "the possibility of judicial proceedings".[249]

Witness to the possibility that Peter's readers were in fact being brought to courts of law could possibly be found in three passages indicating that they were being tried by the procedure of cognition extra ordinem[250] which is the same procedure by which Christians were later tried

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[245] *This term is used of a formal defence in a court of law against specific charges (Michaels 1988:188). This is well illustrated in Luke 12:11,12; 21:12,14 where explicit mention is made of "kings and governors" or synagogues, rulers and authorities. The term is also used in a more general and therefore private sense as in first Cor. 9:3 and second Cor. 7:11. Also see Paul's use in Phil. 1:7, 16.*

[246] *Examples of such usages are Acts 22:1; 24:10; 25:8,16; 26:1,2,24 and second Tim. 4:16.*

[247] *Bechtler (1996:111).*

[248] *The most substantiated argument to date in favour of Peter presupposing legal proceedings against its readers is presented by Schutter (1989) in his fine work: Hermeneutic and Composition in I Peter.*

[249] *Bechtler (1996:134).*

[250] *For more information on the legal procedure of cognition extra ordinem in Roman law refer to Berger and Nicholas (1970:588-589); de Ste Croix (1963:11-17); Jones (1972:101-118); Sherwin-White (1992:1-23).*

by Pliny. Firstly, there is reference to the imperium by which provincial governors were empowered to try potentially capital cases (2:14-15). Here we find the word ἐκδίκησιν *which is used to describe one function of the Roman governors - the responsibility and power to prosecute in criminal cases.*[251] *There are various ways in which to read* ἔπαινον, *but regardless of how it is read, the first member of this purpose clause seems to be clearly referring to the magistrates' juridical function of sentencing criminals. As certain scholars*[252] *suggest, it is probable that 2:12-15 refers to slanderous accusations whether that is being done in courts, in society at large or elsewhere. Secondly, there is also witness of cognition extra ordinem procedure in 3:13-17 although it must be said that this section is formulated in a general manner so as to also be applicable to informal settings as well as to forensic contexts. The word* ἀπολογία *used in 3:15 and the profound similarity between the terminology of 3:16b-17a with that of 2:12-15, is striking. The word stems from the juridical sphere and is used as a technical term to denote a legal defence.*[253] *Lastly, 4:15 could well imply that some Christians had already been convicted of the crimes listed, possibly even murder.*[254] *In 4:15 the believers were given an exhortation concerning the types of deeds for which they were not to suffer. This did not necessarily imply that they were involved in such deeds. For Peter was clear that they were suffering because they were Christian (3:14; 4:14). Even heathens knew that the crimes mentioned in the above said passage (4:15) were wrong. One could draw*

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[251] *This word is to be interpreted in the light of juridical proceedings since it bears that interpretation in its extra biblical usage (Bechtler 1996:112). For a more detailed discussion on the usage of* ἐκδίκησιν *see Schrenk (1964:2.446); Best (1971:114); Goppelt, (1978:185) who incidentally translates this word with "to prosecute". To examine the juridical meaning of the* ἐκδίκ- *word-group see Schrenk (1964:2.442-446).*

[252] *Bechtler (1996:114).*

[253] *Kelly (1969:29).*

[254] *Schutter (1989:14-17).*

parallels between the punishment of such crimes and the persecution they were suffering. It would seem as if they were suffering the punishment of such crimes for being Christian. In 2:1 they were to put away guile, insincerity, envy and slander. In 2:11 the admonition is to abstain from "desires of the flesh" (New Revised Standard Version). In 3:9 they are urged not to return evil with evil. Therefore we might assume that Christians were enduring guile, insincerity, envy, slander and evil. It is suggested that the readers of first Peter may have been placed in a position where thievery and murder were assumed to be part of the guilt associated with the practice of Christianity.[255] *It is worthwhile to note that criminal charges could have been brought by any subject of the Empire. In certain cases this subject could even have been summoned to state the accusation in court, but it was the magistrate who conducted the formal trial. As such the accused was interrogated by, and would respond to the magistrate rather than just anyone.*[256] *The reference to "everyone who asks" (New International Version) in 3:15 would still apply to the magistrate who in the case of a trial would be the one who asks. The "everyone" would then refer to all of the magistrates, since they would not know before whom they would be brought. Ordinary citizens did not have the right or power to conduct trials. In the light of the above mentioned scenarios, especially that of 2:12-25, there is a strong possibility that criminal trials may well have been one of Peter's concerns. This concern does prevail,*[257] *especially in 3:15, in terms of future possibilities rather than of "present reality". However, there is a sharp contrast between the offenses listed in 4:15*[258] *and the offenses listed in 4:16. Since 4:16 concerns itself with suffering for being Christian with no mention of wrongdoing, it appears that they suffered for both criminal and Christian activity.*

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[255] *Knox (1953:188).*

[256] *For the order and manner of judicial proceedings see Berger and Nicholas (1970:589); Jones (1972:113,114).*

[257] *Balch (1981:95).*

[258] *Take note of the* εἰ δέ *and the repeated* ὡς *(4:15,16).*

We sincerely hope that the vast majority of them rather suffered for being Christian than for criminal activity.

Contrary to the popular belief regarding the limitation of suffering and persecution to social friction, the following questions and information arise:

a. *It seems doubtful that the general suspicion and prejudice of neighbours regarding a new religion would have resulted in the type of persecution which is addressed by the author.*
b. *New religions were hardly strange to the cities of Western Anatolia.*
c. *Would social hardship be equated with trials by fire called* πύρωσις *in 4:12?*[259]
d. *Their suffering was compared with that of Christ's (4:13). Was Christ's suffering then also limited to social friction?*
e. *Peter's emphasis (2:12,14; 3:16,17; 4:15) that they should suffer for doing good in contrast with doing bad deeds* (κακοποιοῶντας)*(3:17) illustrates that they were suffering the same suffering fit for bad deeds and evil doers* (κακοποιὸς)*. In 4:15 it would seem as though some of them were suffering the type of punishment associated with criminals which was certainly not social friction.*
f. *Would acts of social friction alone be enough to warrant and cause Peter to regard it as evidence that the end (1:5,7,20; 4:17) was near?*
g. *The author yields evidence that its readers not only were suspicious of the prevailing political powers under whose rule they lived, but that there was a tension brought about, at least in part, because of their disdain for the government. Peter also encouraged them to be more conscious of the way they were perceived by the authorities than they had been in the past. An example of such inference is: "Be subject, then, to every human creation, because of the Lord, whether to a king, as the highest, whether*

[259] *Also view 1:6,7.*

to governors, as to those sent through him" (2:13,14). The reason why Peter needed to request his readers to be subject was simply because they were not. They were not subject because the possible source of their hardship was the authorities.

h. *Taking the previous position one step further gives an indication that the author himself lacked the highest regard for the prevailing powers as he would like them to:*

h.1 Be "put to shame" (3:16).

h.2 Give account to "him who is ready to judge the living and the dead" (4:5).

h.3 Experience a worse judgement (4:17).

i. *Social friction alone does not correspond to the rest of the New Testament when it comes to suffering as Peter and Paul, etc., were jailed by the authorities, admittedly on social demand.*

j. *The fact that Peter entitled his readers as "aliens and exiles" (2:11) and the collaborative self identification by the readers as such, indicates that the readers had broken contact with former acquaintances and practices. They had embarked on a new way of life and conduct where they defined themselves as "aliens and exiles". The pressure that the readers were facing stems from old acquaintances to resume their former associations and practices. It was when they did not adhere to this pressure that they were resented. This situation is clearly insinuated to in 4:3,4. Their new lives impacted their social and political[260] existence. The impact on their social existence would lead to social resentment, but the impact on their political existence would certainly lead to political action.*

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[260] *Their new lives prevented them from taking part in certain political activities and religious rites. As political activity was so closely connected with religion they impacted each other directly. Religion and politics were connected in the sense that they worshipped Roman gods and Emperors. Refusal to worship the Emperor would unequivocally be interpreted by the Emperor as political dissent. Political dissent would unlock political action and hence the pressure on Christians included not only social friction but also political action.*

k. *The new group of Christians became a cohesive group.*[261] *Cohesiveness takes an abundance of time and trust to develop. The possible reason for such a quick development of cohesiveness was that they had been driven to a strong, in-group cohesiveness by general societal resistance as well as governmental resistance. It is a known sociological phenomenon that physical disasters bind people together. There are also two further transpirations as a result of suffering. Firstly, suffering purifies (1:7; 4:12). People are not willing to suffer or die for something they do not fully believe in. Thus, when suffering comes they would rather leave the group, hence the group is purified since only the true believers are left in the group. This process has a binding effect to the remnant group. Secondly, suffering unites people (4:8; 5:9). It is debatable whether their cohesiveness would have developed so strongly and quickly due just to societal pressures.*

One thing that seems certain is that general societal pressures could hardly be placed in the same category as suffering and as a murderer or a thief. Furthermore, the word πασχέτω *used in 4:15 is also used in 2:21, 23; 4:1 in reference to Christ's death.*[262]

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[261] *Their cohesiveness can be illustrated by remarks such as: "... you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart" (1:22)(New Revised Standard Version). Also peruse the following: 2:17; 3:8; 4:8 and 5:14.*

[262] *When used of Christ* πασχέ- *communicates connotations of death. The word* πασχέ- *also occurs in 2:19,20; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 15, 19; and 5:10. These times the word is not used in reference to Christ but rather to the suffering of Christians (Blazen 1983:28). While it remains highly unlikely that Peter suggested that the suffering of all Christians would culminate in death, it is a prospect that he was alluding to the real possibility that it sometimes might. See Bauer (1957:639).*

In 4:19 the author writes that those who suffer παρατιθέσθωσαν τὰς ψυχὰς *to a faithful Creator. This might also possibly refer to death.*[263]

The following points in 4:12-19 might lead us to another source and nature of the suffering that Christians were enduring:

a. *The use of* πύρωσις *in the context of 4:12.*
b. *The nature of the crimes mentioned in 4:15.*
c. *The fact that the believers were suffering purely for the name Christian.*
d. *The eschatological orientation which equated contemporary events with the Messianic Woes.*

Points one to four all argue that the source and nature of the persecution referred to in this passage were linked to the Roman proconsul, his representatives and the city government which ruled at Rome's will. The nature of the suffering according to the allusions in this passage then points to official persecution and even death. Thus, Peter suggests that Roman governors (like Tacitus, Pliny, etc) of Asia and Pontus-Bithynia had learned of Christianity, disapproved of it, and marshalled the powers of their office against it. It seems evident that official persecution sourced from Rome[264] *was what Christians endured from an early date.*[265]

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[263] *Warden (1986:230).*

[264] *It is worthy to note that the state did not really stand in opposition to the community. The state and community were viewed as an organic whole. It was the state's perception of the church as a threat to the whole that caused the conflict.*

[265] *Warden (1986:242).*

In conclusion then, the source and form of the suffering with which Peter's readers were faced, consisted of both societal and governmental actions.[266] *It would appear as if their group orientation in the πόλις supported such an opinion. The first and foremost common source of suffering was the society exerting suffering in the form of accusations, slander and shame. This represented the primary source and form of suffering. But, this source and form of suffering spilt over into the secondary source and form, with occasional conflicts of public disturbance that resulted in criminal prosecutions of those who seemed to constitute a threat to the peace.*[267] *The ensuing quotation will serve as summary:*

> *"Yet it is perfectly clear that for three centuries the emperors either persecuted Christians or connived at their maltreatment; and it is clear too that for much of this period Jews felt and were oppressed to such an extent that it is reasonable to speak of persecution".*[268]

The following section seems to support this postulation.

2.2 *Pliny's Letter*[269]

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[266] *Read the chapters entitled "Rome and First-Century Judaism" and "The Primitive Community" in Frend's book (1982:15-34).*

[267] *Goppelt (1978:327,328).*

[268] *Wardman (1982:123).*

[269] *The full transcript can also be found in Benko (1984:5-7) who discusses the matter in some detail. For the reader's edification an extract from one of Pliny's letters and Tacitus' reply is supplied:*

It is my practice, my lord, to refer to you all matters concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better give guidance to my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never participated in trials of Christians. I therefore do not know what offenses it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent. And I have been not a little hesitant as to whether there should be any distinction on account of age or no difference between the very young and the more mature; whether pardon is to be granted for repentance, or, if a man has once been a Christian, it does him no good to have ceased to be one; whether the name itself, even without offenses, or only the offenses associated with the name are to be punished.

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ - none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do - these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been, but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your

image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ.

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food - but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it. It is certainly quite clear that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed, and that from everywhere sacrificial animals are coming, for which until now very few purchasers could be found. Hence it is easy to imagine what a multitude of people can be reformed if an opportunity for repentance is afforded.

Trajan to Pliny

You observed proper procedure, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those who had been

Pliny, the younger, was governor of Pontus / Bithynia from 111-113 AD. He engaged the Emperor, Trajan with correspondence regarding a variety of administrative and political matters, one of which was the issue of Christians being brought to court and the subsequent punishment for those found guilty. Pliny simply asked them if they were Christians or not. If they answered in the affirmative they would be punished. If they answered in the negative they were subjected to a test. The test consisted of:

a. *The invoking of the gods in words dictated by Pliny.*
b. *Offered prayer with incense to the gods.*
c. *Offered wine to the Emperor's image.*
d. *Cursing Christ.*

Pliny seemed to be clearly stating that people were being punished for merely being Christian, "even without offenses". Such punishment consisted of torture and / or execution. It was Pliny's view that Christianity endangered society. In the salutation of the letter Pliny declared that he had "never participated in trials of Christians". It is therefore reasonable to conclude that he must have acted on certain precedents. This would conclusively prove that official governmental persecution dates earlier than 111 AD. In fact, it takes time for such precedents to be set especially when it comes to the execution of people, and according to the letter we are talking about a considerable number of people. Pliny's letter shows that he was ignorant of

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denounced to you as Christians. For it is not possible to lay down any general rule to serve as a kind of fixed standard. They are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished with this reservation, that, whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it - that is, by worshipping our gods - even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance. But anonymously posted accusations ought to have no place in any prosecution. For this is both a dangerous kind of precedent and out of keeping with the spirit of our age.

imperial policy regarding Christians. On the other hand he clearly illustrated that he was in no way ignorant of the local practice. If his actions to summarily execute Christians[270] *were not policy-driven we might ask what made him act in this way. One of the possible answers seem to be that his actions were shaped by precedents.*[271] *Whether or not Pliny's letter was contemporaneous with 4:12 is of no consequence*[272] *for earlier governors, no doubt with more independence than Pliny, had probably acted in ways similar to Trajan's legate.*[273] *It was written of such Christian executions by official powers that:*

> *"The judge did not act capriciously; he based his sentences on judicial precedents and on universal imperial policy. Nor was the case of the three martyrs an*

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[270] *Warden (1986:223).*

[271] *Warden (1986:223). The interesting thing is that Tacitus also clearly had no sympathy for Christians. He also formed his opinions of Christians while he was proconsul of Asia. Now the twist in the plot lies in the fact that Tacitu, Seutonius and Pliny (who were the earliest Romans from secular life who mentioned Christians) were all contemporaries and apparently well acquainted (Benko 1984:14). Benko suggests that Tacitus served as governor during 112-113 which was just after Pliny had written his report in 111. Therefore, they would have shared sentiment, information and precedents. In fact, it was probably they who in conjunction with each other formed such precedents.*

[272] *It is well documented in Benko (1984:14-) that such official treatment of Christians by Rome did take place in first Peter's time.*

[273] *During the reign of Emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161) we find a story of Christian executions purely on the charge of being Christian. On this occasion the judge who ordered such executions was Urbicus. The story can be perused in a letter to the Emperor called "The Second Apology of Justin Martyr".*

isolated one".[274]

However, the fact that Pliny's letter and first Peter are being associated with the same part of the Roman world adds force to the supposition that the church's relationship with the government was an issue in both documents. It is even quite possible that Pliny was the persecutor himself.[275] *Persecution as assumed in first Peter and sustained over a period of time can normally only be undertaken by those who have the powers of the state and thus the police / army at their disposal. It is agreed by certain scholars*[276] *when they observe that Pliny's letter possibly illustrates the fact that the legates' actions against Christians were based on a well established practice.*[277]

It is stated by some[278] *that this group of Christians must have had their origin "some two to three decades at least" before Pliny's correspondence.*[279] *This would place the start of official governmental persecution at "at least" 81 AD to use Bechtler's words.*[280] *If we take into account*

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[274] *Benko (1984:1). In the following pages of Benko's book he sets out to prove what has just been quoted with the use of similar examples.*

[275] *Warden (1986:225).*

[276] *Keresztes (1980:270).*

[277] *It is noted that the region in contention was organized into smaller areas. It is therefore, reasonable to allow room for different rules, practices and precedents from one area to another. Although, one cannot really envisage major differentiation as they had to comply, at least, to the framework set by Rome*

[278] *Bechtler (1996:76).*

[279] *Michaels (1988:66).*

[280] *Bechtler (1996:76).*

that official persecution usually starts after all social methods have failed and the fact that social methods always take longer than official methods and the fact that most modern scholars suggest that the suffering in Peter is social, then it places us at an early date.

Concerning the class of person involved in Christianity, Pliny states that some of them were Roman citizens and others were from every order (ordines). The main three orders were the senatorial, equestrian and decurion orders of Roman citizens. All other citizens belonged to the order of free persons.[281] *The rest of the accused (whom Pliny had already dealt with) consisted of non-Roman citizens called peregrini.*[282] *Furthermore, it is Pliny's testimony that both cities and rural areas were infiltrated by Christianity. The epistle does confirm that Christians were sourced from the Gentiles rather than the Jews, which is confirmed by Peter in 1:14-19 and 4:3-4.*

It is possible that the hardship of Christians was bestowed on them by both societal pressure and governmental actions. Such awesome pressure would have been reason enough for new converts to Christianity to digress from the new found pathway. Peter's reasoning for remaining Christian needed to be, at the very least, equally powerful to persuade the new converts to remain Christian.

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[281] *On the Roman Ordo system, see Garnsey and Saller (1987:112-118); Garnsey (1974:159-165); Hopkins (1974:103-120).*

[282] *The word peregrini does not appear in Pliny's letter, but it is implied in the fact that some of the accused were executed while others were being sent to Rome for trial. See Jones (1972:102); Sherwin-White (1963:13-23); Wilkens (1984:23).*

2.3 Problem One: The Problem of Clashing Symbolic Universes

Sociology of knowledge leads us to believe that we are dealing with a situation of conflict in first Peter between the social world and the symbolic universe. We have two sets of symbolic universes conflicting. Firstly, we have the symbolic universe of the social world and secondly, that of the Christian orientated world. The incongruence between the two symbolic universes causes the conflict. Because one of the causes of the conflict seems to be a clash between the social symbolic universe and the Christian symbolic universe, it does not necessarily imply a social resolve, just as a verbal dispute does not limit the result to verbal action and most often than not leads to a physical conflict. The cause of the conflict in first Peter therefore, could have been social with an official, physical outcome.

Within the symbolic universe of society Christians were viewed as "non-conformists who threatened the religious, and hence the sociopolitical (sic), status quo".[283] *This, however, reveals inconsistency in the argumentation of the "emerging consensus"*[284] *since threats to the religious status quo leads to threats to the socio-political status quo as Achtemeier admits. In other words threats to the religious world lead to:*

a. *Threats to the social order - hence social action.*
b. *Threats to the political order - hence <u>not only</u> social action but also political action.*
c. *Threats to the Emperor worship - hence also imperial action.*

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[283] *Achtemeier (1989:211).*

[284] *This refers to the notion that most scholars see the source and form of suffering as being solely social. See Bechtler (1996:19,20). This dissertation questions such a notion.*

The clashing symbolic universes caused a problem in as much as society viewed things totally differently from how Christians viewed them. Society did not approve of the Christian's view and hence they pressurised the believers.

One of the most important symbolic universalistic views of these cities was social order which would serve as an example of the above. The whole Roman government was constructed around social order. Any attempts to foil the social order were not only seen as anti-social but also as a security threat. Therefore Christians were viewed as shameful and as a threat to the social order by the indigenous ethnic and / or religious majorities.

Reasons for this view are:[285]

a. *The unheard of independence of Christian slaves and wives in choosing their own religion apart from the pater potestas, since this was perceived as a threat to the social order.*

b. *The perception*[286] *that the nature of Christianity is superstition.*[287] *Because of the similarities between Christianity and the mystery religions*[288] *both were thought of in terms of superstition.*

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[285] *Campbell (1995:41).*

[286] *Bechtler (1996:106,107). Also see Benko (1984:21-24).*

[287] *This view can clearly be seen in Suetonius, Nero (The Twelve Caesars) 16.2; Tacitus (The Annals of Imperial Rome) 15.44 and in Pliny's letter.*

[288] *There were many of these mystery religions. Several cults even originated in this area (Bechtler 1996:75). Examples of such cults are: Cybele, Sabazius and Men (Schutter 1989:9). Excavations in the Bithynian city of Nicomedia resulted in a find of coins testifying to the polytheistic worship of more than forty deities (MacMullen 1981:1.34).*

c. *The perception that Christianity (also seen as a sect) promotes sexual immorality*[289] *and libertinisms. This was seen in the fact that the woman's place was no longer limited to domesticity.*

d. *The accusation of cannibalism.*[290] *This accusation is deduced from communion - "eat this bread for it is my body" was interpreted as the eating of human flesh and thus constituted cannibalism.*

e. *The practice of magic.*[291] *As with point number two, there were similarities between travelling magicians and the travelling apostles and therefore Christians were accused of practising magic.*

f. *Sedition.*

g. *Atheism and / or polytheism. Because they believed in Jesus and specifically that He is also God meant to the Gentiles that Christians believed in two gods (Jesus and God), hence Christianity was polytheistic. Atheism also played a role since the other religions did not accept Jesus as divine. The fact that Christians worshipped the unaccepted Jesus constituted atheism for they thought that Christians were not worshipping any god - as Jesus was a man. Furthermore, the rejection of Christians of their gods may*

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[289] *When Peter writes: "Greet one another with the kiss of love" (first Peter 5:14) it could well be interpreted by outsiders as being or at least leading towards sexual immorality. Also see Benko (1984:53-78) on the question of immorality. For further reading on the interpretation by outsiders of the kiss (be it a holy one or not) as was customary (the notion that such a kiss was in fact customary among Christians can be derived from the following texts: first Thess. 5:26; first Cor. 16:20; second Cor. 13:12; Rom. 16:16) for Christians see Benko (1984:79-102) who has written a whole chapter on it.*

[290] *See Benko who once again devotes a whole chapter to "The charges of immorality and cannibalism" (1984:53-78).*

[291] *See Benko's chapter entitled: "Magic and early Christianity" (1984:103-139).*

also seem to leave them godless.

h. *Contempt for death and a show in martyrdom.*[292]

i. *Withdrawal of economic support to pagan interests (Acts 19:18-41). They no longer took part in the worship of the state gods.*

j. *Hatred of the human race. Because they withdrew from state worship this withdrawal was perceived as anti-social.*

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[292] *Although Campbell would not admit it, the fact that he uses Christian martyrdom and death as an example, also proves that the government was involved in the persecution since Roman law states that one cannot be killed unless found guilty of a crime. This could only be done in a court of law. Thus, we do not only have a situation of public discontent towards Christians but at least also affirmation of that discontent from the government. It is further likely that the government was the instrument used to consummate the court judgement in putting to death these Christians. Campbell (1995:41) himself writes that: "the community of believers constituted an invasive foreign body, whose adverse influences required countermeasures". The question remains whether defamation will suffice as a "countermeasure" or whether an official response would be necessitated. As part of the solution Peter submits the consolation that the suffering of Christians is linked to those of Christ. Campbell (1995:47) writes: "He suffered just as they do". Again Campbell proves that the suffering was more than just defamation, unless of course Jesus' suffering was limited to defamation too. When Peter equates Jesus' suffering with that of the current Christians then surely it also needs to include: court appearances, involvement of Roman officials, physical suffering, etc. This objection is also voiced by Feldmeier (1992:174).*

2.4 Problem Two: The Exclusivism of Christians

Furthermore, Christians refused to worship other gods. At the same time they professed to own the truth solely. This profession would also lead to suffering as such professions violated an important aspect of Roman society which is conforming tolerance or reciprocal acceptance.[293] *Thus conversion (abandonment of one religion in favour of exclusive devotion to another) was rare and in response to proselytizing, atypical and unheard of. Others,*[294] *for example, refer to proselytizing as "a shocking novelty in the ancient world".*[295] *Although Judaism was to a certain extent protected by Roman law, vilification was frequent (largely due to exclusivity).*[296] *On the other hand, Judaism did command a certain respect that Christianity could never command which brought about more reason for suffering and persecution.*[297] *An unwillingness from Christianity to acknowledge the legitimacy of other religions generated suspicion. This was further aggravated with the fact that Christianity refused to partake in both religious and civil ceremonies that were part of common life.*[298]

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[293] Goppelt (1978:40).

[294] Goodman (1994;105).

[295] For detailed discussions on the topic of proselytizing see Goodman (1994:20-37); MacMullen (1981:94-112); Wilken (1984:64); Cohen (1989:13-33); Trebilco (1991:145-185).

[296] Cicero, Pro Flacco 28.66,69; Tacitus, Historiae 5.1-13; Juvenal, Satires 14.96-106.

[297] On Judaism and Christianity see Gager (1985:67-88; 59-62); Fredriksen (1991:532-548); Cohen (1992:14-23); Feldman (1992:24-37); Goodman (1994:38-90).

[298] Benko (1984:1-29); de Ste Croix (1963:24-31); Frend (1967:77-93); Garnsey (1974:163-177); MacMullen (1981:1-4); Nock (1933:66-137); Smallwood (1981:124); Wilken (1984:63,64). On Roman criticism of other religions and specifically Christianity see Balch (1981:65-80); Wilken (1984:1-93).

The readers' exclusivity as members of the church could be illustrated by means of a comparative contrast. The readers were typified as they who were sanctified (1:2); the holy (1:16); the redeemed (1:18); the purified (1:22); and an elect race (2:9). Compared to these characterizations the unbelievers were contrasted with terms like the disbelievers (2:7); the disobedient (2:8); those who lived their lives in the flesh to the lusts of men (4:2). Furthermore, their exclusiveness and bond originated from the fact that previously they had been no people, but at that time they were the people of God (2:9). Utilizing the mathematical equation once again Peter stated that God was against the proud and on the side of the humble. He then concluded that Christians were the humble (5:5,6). Therefore God was on their side. By inference God was then against the non-believers.

In their society Christians were dispossessed by the wealthy and influential people. In the church however, they found a sense of superiority which set them above the mighty and proud things of their world.[299] *In a new way they then saw themselves as the elect and as such they were the really significant ones in the ultimate order of things. In separating themselves and refusing to recognize the superiority of those above them Christians conveyed the message and image of superiority and exclusivity. But in so doing angered society as Celsus asserted when he said that the language of a Christian:*

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[299] *This sense of superiority can be seen in the New Testament and continuing into the later centuries (Contreras 1980:974-1022). In reviews of the epistle of Diognetus and others like Justin; Clement of Alexander; Tarian; Tertulian; and Arnobius one can clearly see this sense of superiority as they use irony and sarcasm to attack pagan idolatry. Also see the citations about the suggested superiority that can be found in the work of Colwell (1939:57-59).*

"... is a rebellious utterance of people who wall themselves off and break away from the rest of mankind".[300]

The question of motif for the coercing of suffering on Christians by society has been discussed as the clashing of symbolic universes and the exclusivism of Christians. One could see how these would suffice as reasons for persecution. However, if such reasons were in fact enough to warrant persecution then it must also be agreed that Rome had even more reason to do so, as would be argued in the next chapter. If such motifs are valid, then on the basis of motif it would support the conclusion that the persecution in first Peter was both societal and official.

Now that the suffering of the believers has been examined and it was concluded that suffering was both politically and socially motivated, the political views and the consequences thereof will be explored. Subsequently, the social ramifications will be dealt with.

This is done so that it would be understood how politics and society functioned. Peter uses their very way of functioning to solve their problems or at the least to encourage them.

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[300] *Origen Contra Celsum 8.2.*