

Chapter 9. Conclusionary Remarks

The readers of the first epistle of Peter were faced with a peculiar situation. On the one hand they experienced societal pressure and governmental action. On the other hand they encountered a paradigm shift in attitude, values and priorities. These Christians certainly had enough reason to fall into apostatecy. Peter faced a daunting task in his epistle attempting to encourage them to remain in the faith. Peter's reasoning for enduring hardship and method of remaining Christian, was the reversal of roles. His arguments were, amongst others, as follows:

- a. New symbolic universe. He introduced and legitimated a new symbolic universe. There is a new value system apparent in the establishment of this universe. Both these value systems and these universes reversed roles with the old ones since they are opposites.*
- b. New family. He introduced them to a new family. Their Christian community with God as the Patriarch was their new family. Since they experienced loss by becoming Christians their new family represented many gains. This was also a reversal of roles.*
- c. An eschatological perspective - He assisted them to see and understand the situation through the viewpoint of eschatology. This viewpoint reversed their situation with their antagonists' since they were to exchange places. This exchanging of places was due to two events:
 - c.1 The judgement. In this event the antagonists would be declared guilty, and the believers would be vindicated. Previously society declared the believers guilty and exonerated the antagonists. The judges also reversed this process: previously society was the judge while God became the Judge in the end time.*
 - c.2 The glorification. Peter's readers were to be glorified as Christ was. Society at large was to be shamed. Society shamed the believers and glorified themselves. God would reverse this situation.**



- d. *Discipleship. The believers were to become true disciples. This represented a reversal of aspirations as they previously aspired to reach the pinnacle of societal status. Peter persuaded them that they were to be servants rather.*
- e. *Good behaviour. They were to emphasize good behaviour as this would lead to the public shaming of their accusers and the approval of God. The reversal was found in both society's and God's approval which exchanged places.*

The reversal of roles thus takes centre stage in Peter's reasoning for remaining Christian in the face of hardship.

9.1 Conclusion

During this dissertation we asked the questions:

- a. *Why remain Christian in the face of hardship and suffering?*
- b. *How to remain Christian in a Christian-unfriendly world?*

We have seen that Peter used rhetoric to provide his readers with valid reasons to remain Christian, such as, amongst others:

- a. *Current hardship and suffering will end.*
- b. *Christians will be vindicated.*
- c. *The antagonists will be judged.*
- d. *Christians will be glorified.*
- e. *Christians are to gain an eternal inheritance.*
- f. *The above mentioned reasons were based upon the suffering of Christ.*

We have also seen that in each of these reasons presented by Peter there were several reversals of roles. (In fact, these reasons were conveyed to the converts by means of such reversals).

Peter also showed his readers how to remain Christian in their practical experience by:

- a. Changing their way of thinking.*
- b. Providing a new, caring environment via the Christian community. He gave them guidelines as to how such a community should function.*
- c. Showing them how to make current hardship tolerable in view of a glorious eschatological end.*
- d. Giving them the principles of discipleship and beseeching them to run their lives accordingly.*
- e. Displaying good behaviour at all times.*

In each of these practical solutions to the "how" problem (methodology) we find reversals of roles. In this instance he does not use the reversals as arguments or reasons, but the reversal of roles here becomes consequential to the adherence to, inter alia these five principles.

The hypotheses of this dissertation is that Peter rhetorically provides the suffering Christians with:

- a. Reasons to remain Christian through the reversal of certain roles.*
- b. Practical ways to remain Christian which, if accepted and adhered to, would eventuate in further reversal of roles.*

The contribution of this dissertation is that it fills the void of:

- a. *Defining the problems faced by the Christian readers of First Peter.*
- b. *Providing them with both reasons and practical advice on “why” and “how” to remain Christian.*
- c. *Motivating modern Christians to remain Christian in a world where the Christian faith does not seem to attract the secular mind.*
- d. *Showing future Christians how to deal with suffering that might come their way.*
- e. *Providing modern churches with factors they need to focus on if Christianity is to survive.*

The hypothesis of this dissertation was communicated by showing that the readers of first Peter faced enormous problems. Society exerted almost unbearable pressure,⁷³³ such as the use of the honour and shame dynamic, in order to induce the Christians to relinquish their faith. It appeared as if the Christians were mentally on a different planet as to the general society, for their way of thinking was totally different from society's.⁷³⁴ The political landscape did not look much better for the Christians either. As Pliny's letter illustrated, Roman rule had an adverse effect on them, so much so that Rome perceived them as political opponents. This perception was not entirely unwarranted as there were startling similarities between Christianity and other mostly unpopular groups. Furthermore, Christianity seemed to have mostly attracted

⁷³³ *Other examples of pressure was shown to be, inter alia, ostracization, apologetic demand, possible loss of inheritance and even the possible loss of kinship. The Romans also applied such pressure, although not necessarily for religious reasons.*

⁷³⁴ *This seemed to be one of the objectives of the author of first Peter. This objective was achieved by creating and legitimating a new symbolic universe, identity, value system and even included a new community.*

followers from those who were in disfavour with Rome. Lastly, the Christians' views on many topics seemed to have contradicted Roman wishes.⁷³⁵

Christians did not only feel the pressure externally from society and the government but also from within their very households. Husbands probably did not take kindly to the fact that their wives forsook their religion in favour of Christianity. Their reaction was presumably even worse when it came to their slaves doing the same thing as the wives did. It also seemed plausible to conceive that their parental homes would have added to such pressure. From the Christian's perspective, there seemed to be some kind of malicious attack on their faith from everywhere.

Peter did not deny that these pressures existed. Rather, he used the very concepts that were used to work against them, rhetorically to persuade them to remain firm in their faith. Just about every concept that impacted negatively on the Christians was reversed so that then the same concepts worked for them, and against the enemy. Their way of thinking and values were reversed as was their role model.⁷³⁶ Their identity reversed from being rejected by society to being elected by God. Similarly society's identity reversed from being elected by themselves to being rejected by God. Not only do we find single reversals in which case only the Christians make certain reversals but we also find double reversals in the sense that the so called "other group" (non-believers) makes a reversal with Christians, albeit that their reversals

⁷³⁵ *Examples of contradicting thoughts were the belief that all things were coming to an end, and the usage of the designation "lord".*

⁷³⁶ *Society and / or societal values no longer held the position of role model for Christians. Nor did those who were held in high esteem by society retain their positions of moral influence. Jesus now holds that position.*

seem always to be in the opposite direction to the Christians' reversals.⁷³⁷

This can be illustrated as follows:

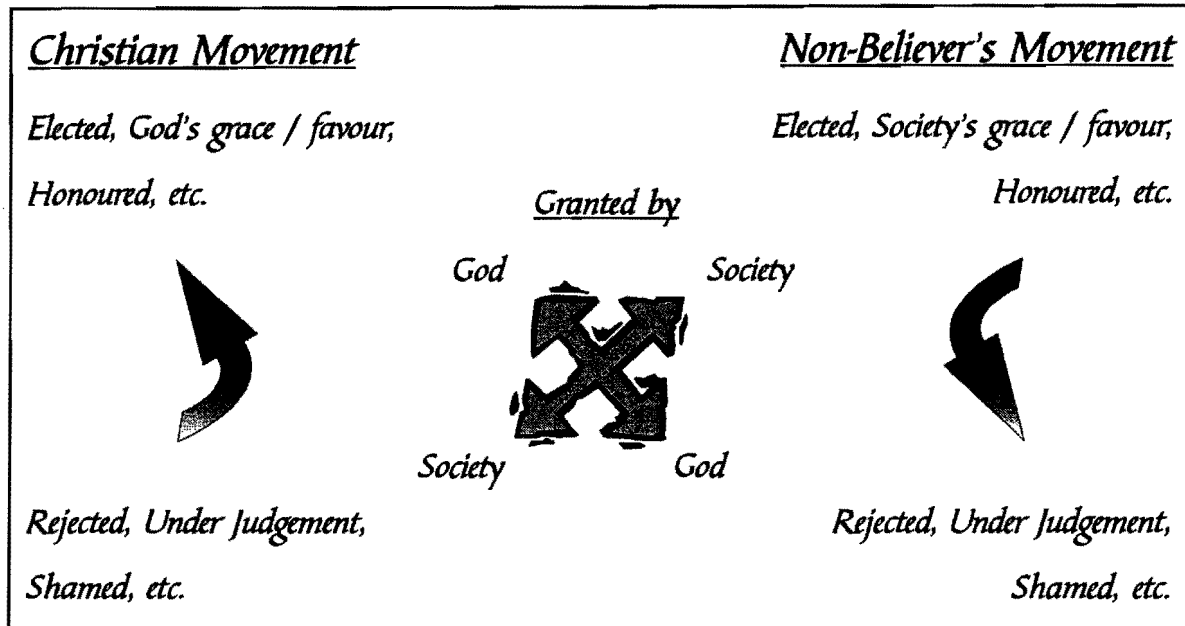


Figure 50

Figure fifty illustrates a double reversal. On the left hand side are the Christians who always seem to be making a movement from bottom to top.⁷³⁸ Thus they move from being rejected, shamed, etc. to being elected, honoured, etc. On the other side are the non-believers who always seem to be making a movement from top to bottom, the reverse of the Christians. Non-believers move from being elected, etc. to being rejected, etc. Therefore we do not only have one group reversing but both. However, they reverse in opposite directions. The interesting part

⁷³⁷ *An example of such a double reversal can be seen in the judgement where it is not only the Christians that reverse their position but also the non-believers that reverse their position. These two groups therefore seem to be exchanging places.*

⁷³⁸ *It would seem as if society keeps on placing the Christians at the bottom whereas Peter comes along and places them on top.*

is that there is also a reversal as far as the identity of who bestows these grading judgements, is concerned. Again there are two identities, God and society that reverse.

Such reversals, amongst others, are used by Peter to help his readers to visualize and create not only a new personal identity, but also to visualize and create a new corporate identity. Their community is thus replaced by a new corporate body, viz. the church. Even here, we find reversals being employed to convey the message. Amongst other things, their structure is reversed, their purpose is reversed and their behaviour is reversed. The end result, according to Peter, is a magnitude of reversals that will finally change everything. This climax is reached in the parousia. Here, God makes known His judgement (according to what Peter anticipates), viz. the Christians are vindicated / honoured whilst the non-believers are condemned / shamed. In this great day, Peter's readers are saved.

Reading through this dissertation one might conclude that there seems to be a great measure of repetition characterised by a noticeable diversity but also a marked sameness. This is inevitable seeing that the concept of reversals permeates the first epistle of Peter like a golden thread of which the glistening appears and reappears repeatedly and in a great variety of aspects relating to the lives and adverse circumstances of Christians in their society, adding different perspectives regarding reversals relevant to their existence as Christians in a present situation and in the future. In various ways the author repeatedly employs the reversal of roles as the reasoning of remaining Christian in the face of hardship.