

CHAPTER II

READING THE RHETORIC

“For understanding, function is more significant than the origin.”¹

Introduction

This chapter is intended to look at the narratological and rhetorical effect of the content of the letter that precedes the *Haustafel* in 1 Peter. A full or thorough assessment along these lines would indeed require its own monograph. For our purposes, however, it is enough to highlight the overall importance of this particular content. The three main areas of focus are the labels “aliens and refugees” and “royal priesthood and holy nation” and the command to “honor the Emperor.”

As Alasdair MacIntyre has noted, “There is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things.”² Looking back from the vantage point of two thousand years of Christian traditions, it is easy to overlook the social and even psychological impact that the new testament texts might have had the first few times they were heard or read. Thus it is essential that we take the time to (re)consider what these texts, not as “given truths” but as performative

¹ Lauri Thurén, *The Rhetorical Strategy of 1 Peter with Special Regard to Ambiguous Expressions* (Åbo: Åbo Academy Press, 1990), 186.

² Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University, 1981), 201.

and affective writings, tell us about the “heart of things” for early Christian communities: their identities, roles, and socio-political alignments.

If we think of the labels “aliens and strangers” and “royal priesthood and holy nation” as part of a new symbolic universe for the self-identity of the communities in Asia Minor,³ then the letter of 1 Peter gives new life to old narratives and sacred stories. As Philip Wheelwright has noted, “What really matters in a metaphor is the psychic depth at which the things of the world, whether actual or fancied, are transmuted” for the benefit of those who engage the metaphor.⁴ Additionally, as Lakoff and Johnson note, the impact of metaphors can be seen in our daily lives, since the concepts that govern our thought also structure and govern how we understand what we perceive, how we function in the world, and how we relate with one another.⁵

Various groups of Christians throughout the history of the church have taken up images or labels such as “royal priesthood” or “aliens and strangers” in order to understand their own identity as a part of G*d’s people.⁶ There must be something in a narrative or a metaphor that rings true for the audience in order for it to have staying power. Since “it is the primary function of tradition to explain the new in terms of the old and in that way to authorize the new,”⁷ we can safely assume that the author of 1 Peter

³ Steven Richard Bechtler, *Following in His Steps: Suffering, Community and Christology in 1 Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 40.

⁴ Philip Wheelwright, *Metaphor & Reality* (Bloomington, Ill.: Indiana University, 1962; repr. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 71.

⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *The Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), 3.

⁶ A divinity school student recently informed me that her Easter sermon would contrast Jesus’ testing in Gethsemane—the emphasis being on the testing, with which the members of her African-American church identify—with the church’s identity as the “royal priesthood.” Far from being a problematic theological justification for hierarchical relations, for this student and those who receive or claim this label it is an affirmation of G*d’s love for them.

⁷ Ferdinand Dienst, “Idealistic *Theologiegeschichte*: Ideology Critique and the Dating of Oracles of Salvation. Posing a Questions Concerning the Monopoly of an Accepted Method,” *Studies in Isaiah* (Wouter C. van Wyk, ed.; Hercules, South Africa: NHW, 1981), 65.

drew upon familiar myths that would continue to touch “psychic depths.” Consciously or not, he joined thought, feeling, imagination and language in the development of a new authoritative myth or symbolic universe.

The first part of the letter (1:1-2:12) is devoted to recalling several parts of an ancient myth/story, which is (re)adapted by these communities. The part immediately following this beautiful midrashic composition is an incorporation of a socio-political expectation, what we refer to as a “household code.”⁸ Its inclusion is often read today not as a symptomatic irruption but as a perfectly reasonable section of the letter. I suggest that its reasonableness is due to the blending of religious and socio-political language that occurs leading up to it. It remains an irruption in the text, however, because it departs from the traditional household code form and it prescribes an over-determined circumscription of women—issues that I will address in the next chapter. For now, the first label or metaphor I will analyze comes from both 1:1 and 2:11.

Immigrants and Refugees

The initial address of the letter contains one part of this label: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus, to the chosen *parepidēmois* of the diaspora in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1P 1:1). Most English translations highlight the foreignness, transient, or alien sense of the term *parepidēmois*: “elect who are sojourners,” “chosen exiles,” “pilgrims,” or “elect strangers in the world,” for instance. For reasons that I will explain below, I prefer “refugees.”

⁸ As noted in chapter 1, the household code was never labeled as such in the ancient world. To refer to it as such is truly the reflection of a modern construct, though I will continue to do so because of its familiarity and convenience.

The familiar phrase “aliens and strangers” comes from the most common translation of 2:11,⁹ “Beloved, I urge you as *paroikous kai parepidēmous* to abstain from worldly desires that wage war against the soul.” Here we find the much more common term *paroikous* paired with *parepidēmous*; the typical rendering of this phrase indicates that translators see these terms as synonymous.¹⁰

Whatever is intended by these labels, however, there can be no doubt that some aspect of them is forefront on the author’s mind in relation to these communities and the situation that he is addressing for them. It is understandable that subsequent interpreters of this letter have assumed that this terminology is intended to overshadow the content of the letter. The ongoing debate is, “in what way?”

What the term “stranger,” a common rendering of either Greek word, might bring to mind today is not necessarily parallel to all that is implied by this term in its first century context (or 6th century BCE, for that matter). The same is true of “alien,” which perhaps invokes for westerners thoughts of spaceships and multiple-headed beings or a person caught within the borders of a country that is not her homeland—though even with the latter connotation, the focus tends to be on whether she is “legal” or “illegal” as such, which completely avoids dealing with the underlying issues that force a person to relocate at all. It seems appropriate at this point to take a brief look at some Hebrew Bible

⁹ Though it resonates with Ephesians 2:19: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household,” a passage that picks up on the “stranger” (*xenoi*), “exile/refugee” (*paroikoi*), “citizen” (*sumpolitai*), and “house of G*d” imagery as well.

¹⁰ This suggestion is confirmed by two observations. The first is that there is a lack of consistency in a term-for-term rendering in English translations. For example, while in 1:1 (*parepidēmois*) the translation might be “elect who are sojourners,” in 2:11 (*paroikous kai parepidēmous*) it is, “sojourners and pilgrims,” flipping the order in relation to what is in the Greek text. The New Living Translation does something similar: “chosen people living as foreigners,” and “foreigners and aliens.” This is a minor detail, I realize, but it does indicate a certain amount of interchangeability between these two terms. The second observation is that any form of *parepidēmos* is exceedingly rare in both the new testament and the LXX, and when the LXX uses it, it is paired with *paroikos*.

parallels of these terms in order to demonstrate my rationale for a somewhat distinct rendering of these labels, “immigrants and refugees.”¹¹

The Hebrew word *gēr* is translated with both *paroikos* and *parepidēmos*. A common word in labeling those in the Hebrew Bible who were not a part of the twelve tribes, *gēr* is often used to refer to a hired employee of a household. It implies someone clearly not a member of the family and yet distinct from the slaves of the house. It appears that the term is also used within the Hebrew Bible to refer to a non-native resident who does not have full citizenship.¹² Many of the common modern translations have more of a transient sense than what I see in the various Bible dictionaries and encyclopedia¹³: in particular, the Levites are told to be *gērim* among the rest of the Israelites and *gēr* is used to refer to G*d’s presence at times. I do not see why either of these contexts implies transience, and prefer to interpret the connotation of the term in more socio-political ways.

Additionally, since the Israelites were *gērim* in their time in Egypt, it seems that the economic and political factors that precipitated the move to Egypt or later into the “promised land” should be considered in the assessment of these terms in context. I am taking up this word study at some length because, for instance, Elliott has based his theology of the whole letter, and by extension the purpose of the church, on his understanding of this one phrase in 2:11, which he translates as “resident aliens and visiting strangers.” While I find his interpretation to be on the whole a helpful and

¹¹ See also R.S. Sugirtharajah, “Postcolonial and Biblical Interpretation: The Next Phase,” in *A Postcolonial Biblical Commentary on the New Testament Writings* (Fernando F. Segovia and R.S. Sugirtharajah, eds.; Sheffield: Sheffield Press, forthcoming), 463-5.

¹² Within the Roman Republic and Empire, however, the term is taken up to refer to native residents who do not have full citizenship. Especially given the importance of land and belonging to a particular geographical location as a part of one’s identity, this subtle shift is somewhat noteworthy.

¹³ Daniel I. Brock, “Sojourner; Alien; Stranger,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* 561-64; T. M. Mauch, “Sojourner,” *IDB* 4:337-9; John R. Spencer, “Sojourner,” *ABD* 6:103-4.

productive one, I also think that it is lacking in political implications in the way he applies it, which is actually somewhat contradictory to his overall project.¹⁴

In fact, the more I look at the Hebrew Bible references to *gēr* the more convinced I am that a helpful modern parallel to these *paroikoi* and *parepidēmoi* would be immigrants from Central and South America¹⁵; or in the case of the Israelites who had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, I see today's prisoners of war of various forms, even sex slaves such as the "comfort women" in Japan, as appropriate parallels. We do the text and the early Christian communities a disservice if we de-politicize these labels and downplay the desperation that accompanied being in such a position.¹⁶ Thus, I have chosen "immigrants and refugees" in order to highlight the three concerns of: the lack of citizenship and "belonging", bearing the brunt of the labor that sustains the region or simply fulfilling work that no one else would choose, and the continual state of being at the mercy of others.

Contrary to what Elliott has said about *paroikoi*, which is that this term focuses upon their social estrangement,¹⁷ Michael Ivanovitch Rostovtzeff suggests that this term was applied to *native* people who "cultivated and inhabited" extensive tracts outside the major cities. "From the Roman point of view these villages were 'attached' or 'attributed'

¹⁴ Elliott touches upon the literal, instead of merely metaphorical or spiritual, homeless in the United States in his work, *A Home for the Homeless*, leading me to believe that economic and political factors of our society are important to him.

¹⁵ The story of Jacob taking his entire clan to Egypt is usually told from an entitled position – they were entitled to seek a place where they would survive, and this is an understandable move. We might benefit from seeing the same right or entitlement to seek ways to survive motivating those "illegally" crossing the border between Mexico and Texas, for instance.

¹⁶ In spite of many white Western males' assertions to the contrary, the typically white-Western privileged church in the United States today hardly reflects the socio-political realities that I imagine are going on for the communities in Asia Minor. Thus wealthy members of mega-churches, for instance, would do well to reconsider to whom and how easily they assign this label.

¹⁷ John H. Elliott, *I Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* AB 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 458-9, 476-83. While Elliott notes the political implications for the native tenant farmers (478), he then returns to using "social" terms, as if the vast array of political dynamics is sufficiently represented by the "social realm."

to the city; from the Greek point of view the villages were inhabited by ‘by-dwellers’ (*paroikoi* or *katoikoi*) who never had had and were never destined to have the full rights of municipal citizenship.”¹⁸ In other words, according to Rostovtzeff this was a label used by the elite within the cities to refer to the peasants in the outer-lying areas, those who worked the land and were ultimately the foundation of the economic system.¹⁹

Some regions of Asia Minor had a predominance of cities, but much of the inner part of Asia Minor did not.²⁰ Perhaps we must assume that the letter was addressed to and read in communities in both urban and rural areas, with the potential to have constituents of varying political and economic standings. Whatever the case, we cannot lose sight of the opening line that describes all the recipients as “chosen refugees,” a label I maintain is best understood in politico-economic terms.²¹ J. W. Pryor adds that “it is just not imaginable that a group of churches in Asia Minor at this time would be made up of one social class, that of ‘resident aliens’,”²² which I take as a helpful warning against taking any of these terms too literally.

The method proposed in chapter 1 raises two important points about this label, “immigrants and refugees.” The first is that it draws upon the reality lived by those most exploited by the kyriarchal socio-economic structure. The label only makes sense as long as the exploitative system remains in place. Second, the socio-political relations that the

¹⁸ Michael Ivanovitch Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford, 1926), 236-7. One might also ponder the racial/ethnic undercurrents that may have been at work here, though they would not have been labeled as such at the time. If someone who was native to a particular area was still seen as a “by-dweller,” it raises the question as to what part of him or her evoked such othering language.

¹⁹ Dio of Prusa spoke to the tension created by this political issue, suggesting that a *sunoiikismos* be created, a social and economic unity between the city and country-side villages.

²⁰ Rostovtzeff, *Roman Empire*, 239.

²¹ See also Edgar Krentz, “Order in the ‘House’ of God: The *Haustafel* in 1 Peter 2:11-3:12,” in *Common Life in the Early Church: Essays Honoring Graydon Snyder* (Julian Victor Hills and Richard B. Gardner, eds.; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 1998), 279.

²² John W. Pryor, “First Peter and the New Covenant (II),” *Reformed Theological Review* 45/2 (1986):45.

kyriarchal system requires are not necessarily scrutinized or critiqued.²³ In identifying with these members of society the author acknowledges their relative powerlessness and voicelessness that is created by the system. When taken in conjunction with the other labels of the letter, however, we will see that their real social location is to be traded in for a metaphorical identity that resonates with the very institutions that exploit them. Additionally, what this label cannot do is acknowledge the additional layer of oppression or powerlessness that wo/men have in this situation.

Royal Priesthood and Holy Nation

The realms of priesthods and leaders of nations are typically inhabited by men, often chosen by God (or the gods) for such prestigious roles. Because of the theocratic nature of Israel there was for them no boundary preventing one institution from influencing the other, the way we might think of them as separate entities today. The author of 1 Peter crafted an authoritative identity for these faith communities in borrowing or claiming the traditions, stories, promises and covenant established for Israel. Because the language used here in 1 Peter bears the imprint of religious and political terminology, the new identity becomes a fascinating example of mimicry of both realms, and ultimately resonates with imperialist ideology.

Of priesthods and nations

The text that most closely reflects the labels of “royal priesthood and holy nation,” is that of Exodus 19:6, which begins, “And you shall be to me a kingdom of

²³ It can be posited that in the author’s calling attention to their plight there is an underlying critique of the system that holds them in it. For me, however, that critique does not go far enough.

priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”²⁴

The issue of what these phrases meant in the Hebrew Bible’s initial context is certainly one of debate, as one might expect. It is beyond the scope of this project to do a full analysis of any kind on the Exodus passage in question, though I direct the reader to John H. Davies’s recent work as a starting point for such a focus.²⁵

The label “royal priesthood” draws upon the communal aspect of their calling and indicates an access to the divine presence reserved for the priesthood;²⁶ it also resonates and identifies with kingdoms and their ruling powers. Similar to Davies’s understanding of the Exodus passage, I see these descriptors primarily marking the relationship between the chosen people and their God;²⁷ any residual effect on the faith communities’ relationship with outsiders is secondary, though certainly significant. For our purposes, it is important to note that the members of priesthoods and the rulers of nations are men, and both realms are kyriarchically structured.

Davies reminds us that “any depiction of relationship between deity and humanity must necessarily strain the limits of language, and any neat packaging of that relationship into formulas may do as much or more to obscure than to enlighten.”²⁸ At the same time,

²⁴ Various translations use the wording, “royal priesthood,” or “priestly kingdom” instead of “kingdom of priests.” A minor detail, but it is worth noting that in the LXX it is *basileion hierateuma kai ethnos hagion*, the same short phrase we have here in 1 Peter 2:9 which is consistently translated as “royal priesthood and holy nation.” There is one exception, of course, which is John H. Elliott’s translation in his Anchor Bible commentary of 1 Peter. His choice is to translate *basileion hierateuma kai ethnos hagion* as: “a ‘royal residence,’ a ‘priestly community,’ a ‘holy people,’” treating the first two words as two substantives, but the last two as one concept. My point here is that scholars are making distinctions between a Hebrew Bible and a “New Testament” usage of the same phrase, presumably to fit their own theological presuppositions, as if the “intention” for such a transformation was already there in the document.

²⁵ John H. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6* (JSOTSS 395; London: Continuum, 2004).

²⁶ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 98.

²⁷ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 102.

²⁸ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 137.

however, I am reminded that these texts are the words of humans.²⁹ They reflect the needs, visions and desires of those with influence in these communities. The language used reflects an androcentric bias, represents male experiences, and in this situation defines the communities with institutions reserved for men³⁰—institutions associated with great power and leadership, and thus structured according to the roles and realms of royalty and priesthoods.³¹

Ambivalent mimicry

As Homi Bhabha has explained, the dynamic of mimicry is a multi-layered phenomenon.³² The ambivalence of this socio-political development is noted by the colonized people wanting to both reflect the ways of the colonizer for the sake of survival or acceptance and subversively redefine the ways and structures of the colonizer for the sake of resistance. In terms of the letter of 1 Peter, its author and its recipients, then, we might expect to see this mimicry in the structuring of the community, based upon a kyriarchal system, which includes the identity of these people and the ways in which they relate with one another. It may also be present in the roles and expectations placed upon members of the communities, or in the values that direct what is esteemed and encouraged.

²⁹ Surely women were active in passing along some of the stories, either as story-tellers specifically or as the primary parent involved in rearing the children. Thus, my use of “humans” instead of the strictly male, “men.”

³⁰ An objection may be raised that women were judges over Israel, for instance. Not only was judge not the same role as a king/emperor but Deborah stands out as an exception to the “norm.” Though there were some priesthoods that included or were exclusively women, the fact that they are either not spoken of in Christian literature or are denigrated when they are brought up indicates the gendered role expectations that “won.”

³¹ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 5.

³² Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, in particular chapter four, “Of Mimicry and Man.”

When we read the text of 1 Peter today, we must consider the fact that the communities in 1st century Asia Minor would have received such a correspondence from the center of the Roman Empire fully aware of the religio-political implications of these metaphors. These faith communities were given appellations that resonate with and counter two different dominating influences in their lives. Even though the effort to counter an oppressive regime is intended to be liberatory for its constituents, when it draws upon the basic structure of the oppressor it ensures that the new community will also be structured upon kyriarchal power relations.

Israel's Tradition Superseded

The use of the term or image of “priesthood” in this particular letter may not strike modern readers as out of the ordinary. After all, Christianity is based upon the traditions and texts of the Hebrew Bible and the religious communities that identified with them. The role of the priest within these texts is central to the worship context, and it is by worshipping their particular god that the people are set apart and given their identity.

Drawing upon this priestly tradition, the new testament book of Hebrews is concerned about Jesus' relation to the order of Melchizedek and various other priestly issues. Hebrews is also the only place in the new testament where we have a theologian working out the sticky issue of Jesus being both the sacrifice and the priest who offered it—clearly an indication that priestly matters and the sacrificial system in general were important to the communities for whom that particular writing was intended. The

continuation today of the use of priest and related concepts in various branches of the Christian church indicates that the terminology is still affective.

Aside from 1 Peter, however, the label of priesthood itself is not taken up in the new testament as a way to describe the developing Christian communities.³³ Yet, oddly enough, the term or label has taken on something of an endearing quality for theologians throughout the centuries. For instance, referring to a theologian of the twentieth century, Michael G. Cartwright explains John H. Yoder's vision of the church as "Royal Priesthood":

The apocalyptic writings of the apostolic communities of faith...exhibit the awareness that there is "no crown without a cross" and, thereby, no sharing in the kingly reign of God without sharing in Christ's sacrificial servanthood. In *these* practices of discipleship the "royal priesthood" of the church is made visible in the world wherever Christians may gather.³⁴

Royal priesthood language applied to the church is quite appropriate, it seems, since its constituents will be sharing in the "kingly reign of God." I find it to be a doubly tragic metaphor since in this case it is affirmed by a passionate pacifist.

Yoder simply takes for granted that the church's identity is that of a priesthood. "The church's royal priesthood is ultimately validated not by economic standards or efficacy but by its capacity to manifest the continuing relevance of the servant-like work

³³ I would note that Rev 1:6, 5:10, and 20:6 all make reference to the followers of the Lamb as having been made into priests for their God, perhaps more out of countering the priests of the Emperor worship than out of an adaptation of this Exodus passage. There is obviously a connection to "priesthood," but the specific label "royal priesthood" has direct supercessionist implications that "priest" alone does not.

³⁴ Michael G. Cartwright, "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder's Vision of the Faithful Church," in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*. John Howard Yoder (Michael G. Cartwright, ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 2. I would also refer the reader to other works, such as *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically: A Dialogue with Oliver O'Donovan* (Craig Bartholomew, et al, eds.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), and Thomas Forsyth Torrance, *Royal Priesthood* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1955). The label "royal priesthood" is assumed to be appropriately ascribed to the Christian church in both of these works and is the foundational image of the political assessments, so claimed, within each, though 1 Peter is not referred to in the discussion of the theological-political ethics discussed.

of Christ as *the sign* of the lordship of Christ.”³⁵ I could go on about the royal priesthood’s role to “serve God and rule the world,” according to Yoder, whose perspective is shared by many, but I believe my basic point is made.

In his book, *The Elect and the Holy*, Elliott notes the premise of the supersession claim. His extensive chapter on the history of the transmission and interpretation of Exodus 19:6 includes the following succinct comment: “It is the continuation of Israel as the elect and holy people of God, her abiding relationship with God, and her continued preservation through Him which are important here.”³⁶ This understanding of what was at stake makes perfect sense, given that those themes play out in the biblical traditions and history of the people of Israel, yet it does not explain away or justify the supersessionist move.

What I see happening in the choice by the Christian community and the author of 1 Peter to adopt these promises is a colonization of the texts and traditions of another people.³⁷ Several scholars have noted that Peter does not refer to these communities as the “new” Israel³⁸—a label that is the product of New Testament scholarship not the content therein—perhaps as a means to soften the impact of 1 Peter’s effect.

There is no getting around the fact that 1 Peter makes a move to take over what belonged to another group of people, justified by the claim that those traditions were

³⁵ Cartwright, “Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity,” 2.

³⁶ John H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy: An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4-10 and the Phrase basileion hierateuma* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 126. There are several non-canonical texts that are also important for this thesis, in particular, Jubilees 16:18, 33:20; Philo’s *De Sobrietate* 66; and 2 Maccabees 2:17.

³⁷ While the initial disciples were Jews and many of the members of the faith communities being addressed in this letter may have been as well, there is no question that the Jesus followers represent at best a new sect of Judaism, and Christianity as a movement would quickly become antithetical to its mother religion.

³⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, “1 Peter,” 387; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 472; and W. Edward Glenny, “The Israelite imagery of 1 Peter 2,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the church* (Draig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, eds.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 156-87.

intended for the new group all along.³⁹ The author suggests that the ancestors in this faith tradition were not entirely on the right track, but were merely pawns for the sake of preparing the way for Jesus' followers. We could look at this assertion through the lens of colonization that justifies claiming someone else's land or that explains the desire to "civilize" another people is a part of God's will for all involved. In both cases—the efforts to colonize or to supersede another—something that the original people have is desired by a group that comes after them, and the original people group is spoken of in demeaning terms in order to create the illusion that the new people are justifiably in charge. Most notably, both efforts are supported and driven by claims to theological certainty and divine right. Thus we see Israel's traditions and covenant snatched away from them with the same certainty they had when originally claiming the promises for themselves.

"Holy Nation" in relation to Empire

For reasons that I imagine have to do with a linguistic connection, "royal priesthood" receives much more attention in biblical scholarship than does "holy nation." Yet with postcolonial lenses on, it seems that the claim to be a (separate) holy nation would be more disturbing for imperial rulers than the claim to be a priesthood of some sort. Just as Israel, the original holy nation in this tradition, is represented as an

³⁹ 1 Peter 1:10-12: "Concerning this salvation, prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and investigated it, investigating the time and circumstances that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the glories to follow them. It was revealed to them that *they were serving not themselves but you* with regard to the things that have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels longed to look." 1:17b-20: "Conduct yourselves with fear during your time as refugees, realizing that you were *ransomed from your futile conduct, handed on by your ancestors*, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a spotless unblemished lamb. He was known before the foundation of the world but revealed in the final time for you." (italics added)

independent nation at times, the application of this covenantal promise also holds resonances of autonomy for these communities.

W. Edward Glenny applies a “typological-prophetic hermeneutical” approach to the metaphors in 1 Peter. While his interpretation is but one of many, and is different from my own, I refer here to his work as representative of an apolitical understanding of the new testament. “Israel is a nation, and the national, political, and geographic applications to Israel in the Old Testament contexts are not applied to the church, the spiritual house, of 1 Peter.”⁴⁰ His explanation offers a nice way to avoid supercessionism. The Church does not fulfill the national, political and geographical prophecies of Israel—since it is not the *new* Israel—but is built upon the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible and in this way is the fulfillment of these texts, simply within the spiritual realm.⁴¹ Even if the author had a “spiritual nation” in mind, he was still using nation language which carries with it socio-political implications. More importantly, the fact that Glenny must do such acrobatics to deny the religio-political connection that this text makes indicates how strong that connection actually is.

Yahweh as God and King of Israel ensured that they were a theocratic people. Within the covenant established at Sinai, Yahweh claimed them as His own people and the people in return pledged to be obedient to Yahweh. This covenant reflects the needs of the people to feel secure and taken care of, an understandable motivation on their part. Their utter devotion assured their survival. They fought and conquered other peoples in the name of their god and with the command from their god to do so. Their communal identity was wrapped up in their relation to their god, thus legal and ritual, social and

⁴⁰ Glenny, “The Israelite imagery of 1 Peter 2,” 186-7.

⁴¹ Glenny, “The Israelite Imagery of 1 Peter 2,” 187.

familial relations were all crafted in the light of their covenant with their god. In some sense, the divinity—in this case Yahweh—was never separated from the realm of political warfare and “national” well-being.

For the neophyte “Christian” movement then, claiming to be a holy nation is not necessarily mimicry of the Imperial Reign any more than it is an appropriation of a theological worldview. This world-view was not unique to the Israelites and their lineage. From coins to statues, temples to domestic altars, we have artifacts indicating the ways the gods were called upon or given credit for victory and peace.⁴² The role of Emperor veneration/worship in supporting the Roman Empire⁴³ was in keeping with a general practice that was endemic to cultures in the Ancient Near East.⁴⁴ Emperors represented themselves as presciently chosen and approved of by the gods. Any citizen who was not forthrightly participating in the various rituals of Emperor veneration, as Klaus Wengst suggests, would have “inevitably aroused the suspicion of fundamental political disloyalty.”⁴⁵

While the language “royal priesthood and holy nation” may have been borrowed from sacred texts of a specific people, the general idea of ascribing royalty / kingly-ness to a priesthood and holiness to a nation were in concert with the way many people understood that the world naturally functioned. In fact, Fergus Millar suggests that the priesthoods within the Roman Empire were always a “significant medium of imperial

⁴² J. Rufus Fears, *Principes a Diis Electus: The Divine Election of the Emperor as a Political Concept at Rome* (Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1977).

⁴³ See the “Honor the Emperor” section below.

⁴⁴ It is also one that is alive and well today. For example, “Long live the King!” is an expression of self-preservation as much as respect for the King, given that peace and prosperity were considered to be in the hands of the King. There are plenty of church traditions today that regularly pray for government officials and many of the members of such traditions hold the president of the United States to be most important in this matter, even though “in Christ” all people are equal.

⁴⁵ Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Christ* (John Bowden, trans; London: SCM Press, 1987), 50.

patronage,”⁴⁶ which blurs the line between sacred and royal realms of interest, ultimately attributing all power therein to the Emperor. The realm of the Emperor cult certainly is a part of this dynamic as well. Thus, when a holy nation arises within the people under Imperial rule, the challenge to Imperial sovereignty cannot be missed. In adapting a familiar or traditional myth, the author is also making a statement against or in reaction to the *other* royal priesthood present in Asia Minor at that time.

Musa Dube’s method of postcolonial feminist interpretation to the bible,⁴⁷ applied to this passage, produces the following questions: What does the inclusion / reinterpretation of the promises to Israel do within the letter of 1 Peter? What kind of a stance does this reclaimed covenantal promise establish for the Christian communities in relation to the Empire? And finally, do these texts encourage one to collaborate with the contemporary powers of domination?

I hope at some level I have addressed the first two questions. In claiming these central covenantal promises these new faith communities supersede that of Israel and its people. Given the theocratic nature of the people of Israel, the ideology imbued in their texts sets up these new communities to collaborate with Imperial ideals, if not simply a mindset of political autonomy over and against that of the Roman Empire. The next section is intended to address the final question, which is related to the materialistic implications as I have defined it for this project.

Materiality of Metaphors

⁴⁶ Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 BC – AD 337)* (London: Duckworth, 1992), 355.

⁴⁷ Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), 135-41.

The author of 1 Peter employs several metaphors straight from the traditions of the Jews in the description of the communities in Asia Minor: immigrants and refugees, royal priesthood, and holy nation. The exclusion that we see in the Hebrew Bible of this one people being chosen by God becomes a part of the Christian communities, since they now claim to be God's chosen people. Several aspects of what defined Israel as God's people—covenant, being chosen, being an example for the nations—are easily discussed as taking on new meaning in and through Christ. What is often overlooked is what lies beneath the promises and metaphors. It is the things that go unspoken because they are assumed to be objective realities that are most influential in the foundational structure and power relations within these communities.

“He doth protesteth too much”

One of the ways these unspoken yet fundamental pieces make their way to the surface is when tradition and/or doctrine, and thus theologians and biblical scholars, go out of their way to smooth over a seeming contradiction. Within the scholarship on our text, we see this taking place most significantly when scholars try to separate the leadership roles implied with the “priesthood” identity,⁴⁸ the section addressing young men and elders (*presbuteroi*) near the end of this epistle, and the general household order.

It is almost humorous the way so many scholars attempt to separate the “official leadership” from the role of the laity in ministry. Typically they treat the “royal priesthood” designation with great importance for defining the church but claim it has no

⁴⁸ There are other textual resonances with priestly issues that could be mentioned here. In the salutation the author refers to these non-citizens as having been chosen in G*d's foreknowledge for obedience and the sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:1-2), imagery that resonates with the sprinkling of the altar in their own tradition and of initiation rites for priests in other contemporaneous religious ceremonies; and the “ransom” language and Christ as the lamb imagery in 1:18-19.

direct correlation to actual ministerial roles.⁴⁹ From this perspective, 1 Peter 5:1-5 (which encourages young men to be respectful of and submissive to male elders,) is assumed to be foreshadowing the *episkopos* and *diakonos* roles delineated in Titus and 1 & 2 Timothy,⁵⁰ and 1 Peter 2:4-10 is granted importance for its connection to Hebrew bible references (in particular for its cornerstone, “royal priesthood and holy nation,” and “once you were no people but now you are the people of God” language). According to these same scholars, however, the meanings of the first two and the last chapters do not meet.⁵¹ There is no acknowledgement that the brain makes connections in themes, even when those connections are not explicitly delineated in the text.

A question such as, “How accurately and faithfully do even the Early Church Fathers represent the position of the New Testament [on leadership/ministerial roles], specifically 1 Peter?”⁵² seems to me to miss the point. Aside from the fact that the early Church Fathers represented various trajectories of the Christian faith and its expressions, their interpretations *were* deemed to be faithful and accurate and were given authoritative weight. The question of “right” or “wrong” is not only impossible to resolve, it veils the

⁴⁹ For instance, Elliott makes the following claim: “The inner-directed ministry is comprehended under the aspect of brotherly love and humility; *hierateuma*, under that of election and holiness. The former is a consequence of the latter and not identifiable with it” (*The Elect and the Holy*, 195). Yet, several pages later he notes, “Here in 2:4-10 the injunction to a holy life, brotherly love, growth in the word, and witness to the world receives its most detailed support. Here the fundamental indicative for the entire epistle has been spoken” (217). I agree with this statement, and do not find that a reader/hearer must separate these various fields of responsibility the way he seems to think that the church has and ought to continue.

⁵⁰ Again, in playing the “word study” game, even this claim is a bit shaky. The leadership roles discussed in Titus and 1 and 2 Timothy are those of *episkopos* and *diakonos*. *Episkopos* is a name for Christ used in the midst of the household code, “the shepherd and guardian of your souls” (2:25), and only shows up in Acts once. *Diakonos* is not used in Acts at all, but does show up in various places throughout Paul’s letters. But 2 Timothy, on a quick reading, it seems to me has more household-type language (fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, slaves and masters, women encouraged to be “self-controlled, chaste, good homemakers, under the control of their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited,” all such commands are directly in line with household code instructions) than strictly deacon and leader language.

⁵¹ See, for example, John H. Elliott, “Ministry and Church Order in the New Testament: A Tradio-Historical Analysis (1 Pt 5, 1-5 & plls.),” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 32: 367-91.

⁵² Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy*, 14.

deeper issue of the effect that their voices and texts did have and continue to have because of their role in shaping the early church, its traditions, and texts.

One of the main purposes of Elliott's book *The Elect and The Holy* is to address this very issue of leadership and ministerial roles. In his chapter, "Verses 4-5 and the Election and Holiness of the Body of the Faithful," he makes what he claims is a specific distinction between "ministry" and the role of the *hierateuma*.⁵³ He asserts that since 1 Peter makes no clear connection between these two realms, we should not make that connection, either. Again I say in response to this textual or vocabulary based assessment that the connection does not need to be named in order for it to be in effect. The use of the priesthood and other familiar imagery in the first two chapters sets the stage, and thus has some staying power throughout the letter.⁵⁴ I do not wish to argue over details, but to point to the power of words to evoke various semantic and image producing domains.

Regarding the tension between the priesthood and the household code, some scholars, pastors and general readers of the bible may rationalize the male-centered language of the first section of 1 Peter by noting that it was typical to address a mixed group with male plural terms. This logic begins to break down, however, when we see the

⁵³ Elliott, *Elect and the Holy*, 192. On this note, for instance, he claims that the term "ministry" implies only "'inner-directed' ministry within the body of the faithful" and is not to be used for the "'outer-directed' witness toward the world" (192). Aside from this being an arbitrary definition of 'ministry', these two particular roles within the Church (inward nurturing and outward witnessing) are by nature related to one another, and the need to define them separately is driven by a need to control and compartmentalize, rather than by a free-flowing empowerment by the Spirit. I can anticipate an objection to this point, given the dating of the book. But if one consults Elliott's 2000 Anchor Bible commentary, one would see his dependence upon his early thought. Even his foray into social-scientific theory did not alter his interpretation of this letter but only solidified it.

⁵⁴ Many scholars make such assumptions in their dissections of epistles and the underlying implications of some theme or concept mentioned within the greeting and/or introductory section. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor suggests the nature of the description of the sender and the recipients tells us a great deal about the context in which and to which it was written and the nature of the relationship between the parties. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer: His World, His Options, His Skills* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1995), 45-53. See also, for instance, Peter T. O'Brien, "Letters, Letter Forms" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds.; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993), 551.

commands directed specifically to the wives and house slaves 2:18-3:7. Not only does the specific mentioning of them become a symptom or an irruption in the text, the roles and behavior encouraged for them utterly clash with the imagery used for the (male) priesthood. This dissonance belies the fact that the wo/men were not, after all, some of whom the author had in mind would embody the identities ascribed to the communities.

Populating a Priesthood

The constituents of a priesthood and their role as mediator between the divine and human realms is one of privilege and thus one of great power. As Davies has noted, priests are chosen and appointed by God. Their attire, a point of interest for parallels with the wives in the following chapters, is elaborate and regal, serving as a visual reminder of their status and role as mediator and their association with life and wellbeing.⁵⁵ Since only male leadership was acceptable or deemed natural, this socio-cultural norm is part and parcel of the ideology of the texts and thus is perpetuated by the use of this kyriarchal image or metaphor, “priesthood.”⁵⁶ The implications of these expectations, in particular as they have been adopted by the church, is that the ethos and structuring of the faith communities is exclusionary, kyriarchal, and imperialistic.

Sacredness, being set apart, was an integral aspect of any priesthood. The sacred aspect of a priest or priestess’s role was marked by some form of ceremony, rite or ritual. Bourdieu speaks of the rite of circumcision, but his point can be extrapolated for the purpose of this discussion, which is that “the most important effect of the rite is the one which attracts the least attention: by treating men and women differently, the rite

⁵⁵ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 240. This point also has significant implications for the discussion on women’s attire in chapter 3.

⁵⁶ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 102.

consecrates the difference, institutes it.”⁵⁷ The language of priesthood invokes a consecrated role, which was reserved, at least within the Jewish communities at that time, for men. The “psychic depth” to which such defining characteristics of an institution inform what its members know and can do should not be underestimated.

Rites actually serve to separate those who have undergone or will undergo the ritual from those who *will never do* such a thing, creating an inside and outside, which implies a superior and inferior, a primary and secondary participant. With this overarching theme of priesthood the community perpetuates a patriarchal structure: men as leaders, wo/men as laity. The connection to royalty or kingly-ness reinscribes a theocratic and kyriarchal worldview. Thus the language and worldview of the Hebrew bible lends itself quite nicely not simply to the communal identity formation of the early Christian communities, but to an imperialist agenda as well.⁵⁸

Living into the labels

The social effect of a designation, then, is that a person is compelled to behave accordingly – to live into the name, to live within the boundaries of appropriateness for the role. It serves as much to keep the person in line (accountability) as it does to let others know where they cannot go.⁵⁹ The identities of the communities and of the members within them function as social control mechanisms, “channeling and constraining individual as well as collective sentiments, emotions, and action.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 188.

⁵⁸ Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 135-41.

⁵⁹ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 121.

⁶⁰ Robert D. Benford, “Controlling Narratives and Narratives as Control within Social Movements,” 53-75 in *Stories of Change: Narrative and Social Movements* (Joseph E. Davis, ed.; Albany: State University of New York, 2002), 53.

From the perspective of “what a person does controls what s/he can know; what a person knows controls what s/he can do,” both labels “royal priesthood” and “holy nation” declare that wo/men do not have access to power and leadership roles in these communities. They are then socialized to think that they can not have such power. It is in this way that these two metaphors do have legitimate “symbolic efficacy in the construction of reality” for the early Christian communities.⁶¹ Much like legal discourse, which “brings into existence that which it utters,”⁶² the language of this epistle is creative speech that has brought into being the very imagery and power relations that it has “uttered.”

“Honor the Emperor”

The final command in 1 Peter 2:17, “honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear G*d, honor the emperor,” inevitably evokes discussion about the Imperial cult and the Christians’ involvement in it. Just what does it mean, in that context, to honor the Emperor? There is plenty that can be said, and indeed the region of Asia Minor seems to have a unique story to tell on this matter.⁶³ Nonetheless, I will keep the discussion of the role of the Imperial cult in this region to a minimum, while touching upon the aspects of “honoring the Emperor” that I deem to be the most relevant here: its kyriarchal

⁶¹ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 105.

⁶² Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 42.

⁶³ See, Samuel Dickey, “Some Economic and Social Conditions of Asia Minor Affecting the Expansion of Christianity,” in *Studies in Early Christianity* (Shirley Jackson Case, ed.; New York: Century Co., 1928), 406; Tenney Frank, *An Economic History of Rome* (Baltimore: John’s Hopkins, 1927), 337-8; and Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (New York: Brill, 1993).

presuppositions, the way it encourages collusion with Empire and the effects of this string of commands functioning as the preface to the household code.⁶⁴

Kyriarchal presuppositions

The command to honor the emperor as the ultimate element in the set of commands implies, among other things, that the Emperor and the system he represents are necessary for peaceful existence. He is named last in a short list of relations central to daily life. This may seem like an obvious point to make, but consider how the verse would change without “honor the emperor” at the end. Its inclusion creates a subtle but powerful presence that connects these faith communities and the socio-political realm.

Emperor and Empire are essential

There is no question that Emperor worship/veneration was prevalent in the region of Asia Minor during the time that the letter of 1 Peter was written.⁶⁵ The pressing question seems to be, “to what extent did this dynamic affect the members of Christian communities, and in what form?” The persecution that the letter refers to has been assumed to be founded upon religious tensions, which are heightened when the followers of Jesus are perceived to be choosing to worship a heavenly Emperor instead of the one in Rome and in so doing are not behaving in a manner supportive of Rome’s empire.

⁶⁴ I would also refer the reader to both S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998) and to Friesen’s short dialogue with Price’s interpretation of the data, *Twice Neokoros*, 142-68. Additionally, it is worth noting that Allen Brent in his monograph, *Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order* (Boston: Brill, 1999), only refers to 1 Peter twice, in reference to 5:1-5, and ever so briefly. Clearly the interpretation of the matter of how the developing Christian communities were to relate to the political powers is no less ideologically driven than any other realm of scholarship related (or not) to 1 Peter.

⁶⁵ This claim remains true no matter when a person chooses to date the letter.

Based upon this assumption, this letter is an attempt to help the members of these communities be faithful to both the Roman Empire and the “heavenly” kingdom.

We cannot determine with certainty who or what power initiated this persecution, nor what form it took. Duane Warden suggests that what Domitian did or required of Roman residents had little, if anything, to do with the persecution of Christians in Asia, but it was the actions of Roman governors in Asia that mattered in this instance, an insight I find particularly persuasive.⁶⁶ Some scholars, such as F. Gerald Downing, suggest that the lack of textual evidence implies that the suffering, whatever it was, was not intense.⁶⁷ Considering the fact that persecution will affect all aspects of one’s life, and how difficult it is to communicate such effects in writing, it seems to me that a strict dependence upon textual evidence will not allow us to see the whole picture in any historical situation, in particular at this point in time.

On the flip side of Downing’s assessment is John Knox’s brief critical note,⁶⁸ which highlights the similarity between what Christians were being accused of in court, in particular as murderers and evil-doers, and the language used in several places of 1 Peter. For instance, Pliny notes in one of his letters that he had some Christians put to

⁶⁶ Duane Warden, “Imperial Persecution and the Dating of 1 Peter and Revelation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34(1991): 203-12.

⁶⁷ F. Gerald Downing, “Pliny’s Prosecutions of Christians: Revelation and 1 Peter,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34 (1988): 105-123.

⁶⁸ John Knox, “Pliny and 1 Peter: A Note on 1 Pet 4:14-16 and 3:15,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72/3 (1953): 187-189; and I would add 2:12-15 to this list. Comparing the correspondence of Pliny to Trajan with these verses of 1 Peter, Knox raises the question as to whether Pliny’s letter informs more than the issue of ‘the name’ for which Christians were persecuted, as historians have typically seen. He notes that in the section where Peter speaks of suffering as murderers etc. that perhaps he is saying that they should not allow themselves to be persecuted as such, in the ways that Pliny indicates some of being falsely accused. It is a delightful take on these pieces of the letter. 4:14-16: “If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.” Along a similar line of thinking, W. M. Ramsay, “The Church and the Empire in the First Century, III: The First Epistle Attributed to St. Peter,” *Expositor* 4/8 (1893): 282-96, suggests the same thing is at work behind the use in 4:15 of the term, *allogriepiskopos*, most often translated as “trouble maker” or “meddler.”

death due to their “obstinacy and unbending behavior.” Pliny continues, “For I held no question that whatever it was that they admitted, in any case obstinacy and unbending perversity deserve to be punished.”⁶⁹ This confession on Pliny’s part could explain why the recipients were encouraged to be prepared to give a reason for their hope, and to do it politely. W. M. Ramsay suggests we should also read the use in 4:15 of the term *allotriepiskopos*, typically translated as “trouble maker” or “meddler,” within a similar semantic domain or socio-political context that Knox suggests. This term was one applied to Christians during Nero’s reign for crimes they had committed.⁷⁰

While there was most likely no official persecution going on at the time that 1 Peter was written, this does not preclude unofficial persecution from taking place that would have had significant social and religio-political effects. A comparison with an event in our own day may help in understanding just how intense unofficial persecution can be.

After the events of 9/11 in the United States, there was no official persecution of adherents of Islam. To this day, however, people who even *appear* to be of Middle Eastern descent⁷¹ are constantly ostracized—dare I say persecuted—in various forms, the most obvious taking place in airports, but certainly not restricted to such locations.⁷² Unofficial persecution, which can be just as devastating as official, tends to happen “under the radar,” and will be undocumented precisely because it is unofficial. It is in this

⁶⁹ John Wayland Coakley and Andrea Sterk, eds., *Readings in World Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 23.

⁷⁰ Ramsay, “The Church and the Empire,” 282-96.

⁷¹ I am having difficulty knowing how to refer to the phenotypical attributes that many people associate with a person from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. I am aware of the dangers of making collective generalizations based upon resemblances, language, and culture; yet it is based upon such misguided generalizations that so many people in the United States have behaved in the past five years.

⁷² Wiretapping and surveillance of email and postal correspondence, which is sanctioned and monitored by the federal government, can be considered official persecution.

way that I imagine the members of the Christian communities might have been persecuted in Asia Minor near the end of the first century C.E.—unofficially, with governors and other leaders at least turning a blind eye, if not being complicit with it. Additionally, just as airports today are spaces where suspicions run highest in terms of potential threats to public safety, we might think in similar terms regarding the “threat” Christians posed, specifically in their worship practices.

Whether or not the author of 1 Peter saw the Emperor as other than or distinct from god/the gods is another important issue in scholarship on this passage, and has an impact on what is meant by “honoring” the emperor. The distinction that modern minds tend to draw between humanity and deity was not as clearly present, if at all, in the first century C. E.⁷³ It is clear that the Christian movement adopted terminology that was used in various religious traditions, but also of the Emperors as they saved (*sotēr*) their people from famine and foreign armies, and were referred to with *theos* terminology for the way they provided for the people and created peace over the land. The more governance was placed in the hands of one man and the people could turn to their emperor in addition to their gods for their well-being, the more god-like this man became, both in perception and in relation to his power and control over resources.⁷⁴

So on a fairly basic level, the command to honor the emperor is a concession to the preeminence of the Emperor in Rome and a charge to behave in such a way that reflects obedience to him.

⁷³ Lauri Thurén, “Jeremiah 27 and Civil Obedience in 1 Peter,” pp. 215-28 in *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und Römische Herrschaft* (Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 2002), 219. I will never forget the day I realized, while reading the *Iliad*, that if a man did something heroic or savior-esque and no one knew who his father was then he was spoken of as a son of a god.

⁷⁴ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “Patronage in Roman Society: From Republic to Empire,” in *Patronage in Ancient Society* (Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, ed.; New York: Routledge, 1989), 63-85.

“Honoring” is a public endeavor

What exactly did it mean to “honor the Emperor” then? We may never be able to say with confidence what the author intended by this short exhortation, but many scholars have posed possibilities. Some suggest that it means to participate politically within society, whether critically, “unconditionally submissive,”⁷⁵ or simply as actively engaged citizens is another matter.⁷⁶ Miroslav Volf has suggested that it was a “soft difference” that the author had in mind: “the open life-stance of the strong, who feel no need to support their own uncertainty by aggression toward others.”⁷⁷ From the perspective of these scholars it is the involvement itself that is honoring to the Emperor.

C. Freedman Sleeper suggests that what the author meant by “honor the Emperor” was to do good things, since 1 Peter makes use of terms employing the *agath-* and *kala-* prefixes several times throughout the letter, primarily within the household code.⁷⁸ Bruce Winter’s work pushes this suggestion to the point of it being about the benefaction system.⁷⁹ Just as the Emperors were praised and glorified for all the good deeds they did

⁷⁵ Lauri Thurén, “Jeremiah 27 and Civil Obedience in 1 Peter,” 226; cf. Jan Botha, “Christians and Society in 1 Peter: Critical Solidarity,” *Scriptura* 24 (1988): 27-37, who claims that Christians, as strangers to the world, were to live in critical solidarity with the world, seeking to do good and to be a positive example for those around them.

⁷⁶ See, for instance, Goppelt’s understanding of the use of *hypotagete*: “order yourselves,” in 2:13. He read this command as a counter not to rebellion but to “the flight of emigration.” Goppelt, *A Commentary of I Peter*, 168. They were to enlist themselves in the organizations of their society, as Epictetus notes in his *Dissertationes* that the “role of a Man” was to be a citizen of the world which meant that one should bear in mind the proper character of a citizen (2.10.1) (171).

⁷⁷ Miroslav Volf, “Soft Difference: Theological Reflections on the Relation Between Church and Culture in 1 Peter.” *Ex auditu* 10 (1994): 24. Unfortunately, Volf also claims that ‘soft difference’ is the “missionary side of following in the footsteps of the crucified Messiah” (25). I do not see the turbulence that the Messiah represents being embodied simultaneously with this kind of meekness or gentleness. But it does, also, seem to me to be the kind of interpretation that a privileged white western male might come up with in peering into this letter.

⁷⁸ C. Freedman Sleeper, “Political Responsibility According to I Peter,” *Novum Testamentum* 10 (1968): 270-89.

⁷⁹ Bruce Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

for various regions and specific cities, the author is, according to Winter, encouraging similar benevolent acts on the part of these communities.⁸⁰

Winter's conclusion deserves some consideration, for what kinds of "good deeds" would a governor know of unless it was somewhat publicly demonstrated? If a Christian were honored for civic benefaction, then s/he would be publicly honored and/or crowned. Certainly any actions that were acknowledged by governors would silence any talk about Christians being ill-willed or haters of humanity and especially that of being a threat to the stability of the society.⁸¹

Whatever form of "honoring of the emperor" the author had in mind—that of veneration, political involvement, or public "good deeds"—there is clearly an element of public engagement involved. Choosing to honor the emperor by means of religious rituals and social benefaction is a choice to participate in and maintain the kyriarchal structuring of society.

Encouraging Collusion

The grouping of commands, "honor all, love the brotherhood, fear G*d, honor the Emperor," is laden with political and social concerns more than those that define individual piety. It is directed toward collective behaviors and ways of relating both within the faith community and in the socio-political realm. This list of commands closes

⁸⁰ If we take Winter seriously the author was, at least in part, encouraging them to support other clubs and associations, perhaps as a way of starting new communities or simply to be seen being supportive of other associations in general. As William Countryman notes, clubs were usually dependent upon a patron for funds. The club gave the patron "honorary titles, decrees, crowns, inscriptions and even statues." The patron was typically not a member of the club, or even an officer, but was influential: "in fact, the club functioned almost as a client—particularly if it was a club composed of poor people." L. William Countryman, "Patrons and Officers in Club and Church," in 1977 SBL Seminar Papers (Paul Achtemeier, ed.; Missoula: Scholars, 1977), 136.

⁸¹ Bruce Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City*, 39.

a short section (2:13-17) that encourages being subject to all authorities, in particular the emperor or his governors (*hegemusin*) sent to approve those who do what is good or right and reprove those who do what is evil or wrong. One can see how the domestic code is smoothly incorporated into this letter, coming after this exhortation on civic behavior.

In addition to encouraging “good deeds,” the charge to honor the Emperor engenders an attitude of submission and compliance toward the Emperor and his representatives. A comparison between 1 Peter and the Apocalypse of John on this matter makes the issue a bit clearer. The latter condemns the Emperor and his exploitative administration and any members of the local communities who were complicit with, and thus benefited from, this oppressive regime. The Apocalypse is written from the perspective of “the people” and with their best interests in mind.

The author of 1 Peter is also, seemingly, sending exhortations with the best interest of the people in mind, since he is clearly trying to help them avoid unnecessary persecution. Yet the structures and systems that his advice draws upon and perpetuates are those that benefit the elite.⁸²

He does not criticize or condemn the Emperor or his exploitative tactics; he does encourage participation within the kyriarchal social structure *as it was*. There is no indication within this letter that he wanted them to actively challenge or reform social structures and relations of power. In anticipating an objection to this comment, I fully understand that the author may have been specifically *not* taking this route for the sake of keeping the movement alive, which is my point entirely. He was helping them find a way to survive within the system as it was, which meant capitulating to all the exploitative or

⁸² It is akin to what often happens in Christian churches today, where language that is patriarchal and kyriarchal by nature is employed, thus reinscribing and perpetuating the structures and systems that cause the sufferings that the people in those congregations often attend church to escape.

oppressive aspects of it. Countering unjust systems may not have been the author's intent, but when this kind of rhetoric and ideology becomes canonized, collusion with unjust systems is endemic to the movement.

2:13-17 as a preface to the *Haustafel*

Whether the author of 1 Peter made the connection consciously or not, the placement of his adaptation of the household codes immediately following 2:13-17 strengthens their socio-political implications. The content of this section is the focus of the next chapter, but for now I will note that whatever "Christianizing" of the socio-political construct is reflected in 2:18-3:7, it is not enough to neutralize the political aspects of it. Additionally, it creates a requirement of anyone who wishes to be obedient to Christ to be submissive to Empire as well.

As Musa Dube has claimed in response to the gospel of Matthew, so it can be said of 1 Peter, that "paralleling faithfulness to an imperial institution, one that is fundamentally oppressive and exploitative, with faithfulness to God not only disguises its evil character but also sanctifies it."⁸³ The author of 1 Peter is encouraging faithfulness to the emperor and the imperial system, and such behavior is given the weightiness of being equivalent to fearing their G*d.

Conclusion: The Religio-Political Preface to the Household Code

In the same way that the symbol of G*d functions,⁸⁴ symbolic metaphors used to define the people of G*d function. If we heed the warning to examine the role "played by words

⁸³ Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 133.

⁸⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 5.

in the construction of social reality” and the struggle that occurs in trying to define certain groups “in terms of age, sex or social position, [and] also clans, tribes, ethnic groups or nation,”⁸⁵ then we will take seriously metaphors that are at work in 1 Peter. The entities drawn upon were familiar, thus their re-presentation struck deep psychic chords for the recipients of this letter. The metaphors employed in the defining of the Christian communities in Asia Minor effectively influence the structure of the movement as well as the nature of the ways people can participate within it.

The appellation “immigrants and refugees” highlights the socio-economic and political reality of being displaced and exploited. It has a strong connection with the plight of the people of Israel, or various specific individuals within it, linking the members of the Asia Minor communities with the sufferings of Israel as well as to the chosen-ness Israel claimed. Whether a person interprets these words, “refugees and immigrants,” literally or metaphorically, we must contend with the implications of these social realities being juxtaposed with terminology of royalty, priests and emperors. The system that establishes both the Emperor and the “by-dweller”/refugee/immigrant as recognizable social locations significantly depends upon the socio-economic contributions of the latter category.

In a fanciful transformation from refugee to royal priest, the members of these communities are simultaneously liberated or empowered and made into a pawn of Empire. The true paupers now have no grounds by which they can challenge the injustices of their daily lives, because the theological ideology of these communities is now in line with and supports imperial ideology. One can also appreciate that women were, as always, subsumed under the general categories of roles allotted to men.

⁸⁵ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 105.

“Immigrants and refugees” certainly included wives or wo/men, but the new religious identity of priesthood and nation includes them only as “supporting actors.”

The metaphors “royal priesthood” and “holy nation” not only stand in stark contrast with the socio-political nature of “immigrants and refugees,” but also, due to their connection with leadership, become a part of the nature and determine the structure of the communities that adapt them. Because the language employed in 1 Peter is embraced by the followers of Christ, the systems and structures that are associated with priesthoods and nations are intertwined with the identity and behaviors of the movement. These metaphors are simultaneously religious and political, thus they play upon roles and terminology used in both realms with wildly successful results, for as Bourdieu suggests, “Religion and politics achieve their most successful ideological effects by exploiting the possibilities contained in the polysemy inherent in the social ubiquity of the language” of the culture.⁸⁶ The use of such polysemic metaphors ensures the perpetual mimicry of empire and its power relations within these faith communities.

When a command such as “honor the emperor” is appropriately included in a letter to faith communities, we can conclude that what those communities stand for and how they interact with society must be conducive with honoring the Emperor. Taken together with the various labels ascribed to these communities, this command becomes the unifying element and effectively locates the faith communities in a subservient position regarding Empire. Since we cannot serve two masters at once and please them both, submission to Empire and its rulers must be an aspect of submission to Christ.

⁸⁶ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 39.