from middling groups. This is consistent with the picture of early Christian communities that emerges from other sources. Early Christian epitaphs reveal the same diversity. From a slightly later time in Asia Minor, we find examples of Christians participating in a number of different occupations: shoemaker (Johnson, *Epitaphs*, no. 2.19), merchant (no. 3.13), wood carver (no. 3.14), baker (no. 3.15), goldsmith (no. 3.16), orchard keeper (no. 3.17), butcher (no. 3.18), and lawyer (no. 4.12). This picture is also consistent with the way that outsiders portrayed the Christian community. When Pliny writes about the Christian movement in this area a few decades after 1 Peter was composed, he notes that 'a great many individuals of every age and class (*ordinis*), both men and women, are being brought to trial…' (*Ep*. 10.96.9 [LCL]; cf. Tertullian, *Apol*. 1.7). Included among the group of Christians that Pliny questions are those of slave status, as well as some members who possessed the privilege of Roman citizenship.

Socio-Historical Context

Initial Bibliography

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Modern Perceptions of Suffering in 1 Peter

The specific socio-historical situation that 1 Peter was written to address has been a matter of considerable debate. Most understand the letter as a response to circumstances in which the recipients are experiencing, or are liable to experience, various kinds of hostility, opposition, or persecution. In this way, there is assumed to be congruence between the conditions of the implied readers and the actual readers.[830] The questions under dispute have concerned the type of suffering experienced by the readers, the agents who contributed toward the suffering, and the time period in which the suffering occurred.[831]

As we consider these issues, we will begin by tracing the contours of the debate.[832] In doing so, we will uncover some important misconceptions about persecution that have significantly shaped the interpretive landscape. The first problem is the three-emperor persecution scheme that was adopted by most interpreters up until the early 1900s. This view held that early Christian history could be divided into three distinct periods of Christian persecution. While Christians had faced opposition from the beginning of the faith,

[830] One of the few interpreters to question the reality of suffering in 1 Peter is Rousseau ('Multidimensional Approach', 257–59), who suggests that the addressees were actually lukewarm Christians whose lives were closely aligned with this present world. In response, the author wants to lead them to identify with the Christian life as one of suffering and persecution 'in order to persuade them ultimately to accept their strangeness and uniqueness in the world' (258).

[831] The definition of 'persecution' from which we are working is as follows: any type of hostility or ill-treatment experienced by an individual or group (particularly minorities with little to no recourse for reciprocation) due to their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or beliefs. Decock claims that 'suffering' in 1 Peter includes not only antagonism from those outside the community but also 'all the suffering and difficulties, which are part of life in the flesh' ('Towards Maturity', 2). Among these troubles, he would include problems such as the mortality experienced by humans and the internal struggles that individuals experience as a result of personal desire (2 n. 12). However, this definition of suffering stands outside the purview of the Petrine author.

[832] For a more detailed treatment of this debate, see Williams, 'Suffering from a Critical Oversight', 271–88.

what distinguished these persecutions from the conflict experienced in the intervening periods was the initiative and involvement of the Roman government. It was only during the respective reigns of the well-known 'persecutors of the Church' (Nero, Domitian, and Trajan) that the State exerted a concentrated effort to seek out and punish believers. With the history of Christian persecution so clearly demarcated, Petrine interpreters assumed that the conflict described in the epistle must be situated either within one of these three periods, or sometime shortly prior to the outbreak of state-sponsored opposition.

Scholars who took the latter approach often did so out of a conviction that 1 Peter was a genuine epistle of the apostle Peter. When they looked to the text to substantiate this view, they found the letter's description of suffering to be relatively informal, with a tone that was thought to indicate a time when conflict between Christians and outsiders was only just beginning.[833] The escalation into trials, torture, and even death were thought to be on the horizon. The author, it was argued, still held out hope that opponents might be won over by an upright and circumspect Christian lifestyle. For this reason, proponents often stressed the localised, inter-personal nature of suffering, which primarily included discrimination and verbal abuse. The readers' suffering, as Huther noted, 'consisted more in contumelies (*Schmähungen*) and revilings (*Lästerungen*) than in actual ill-treatment'.[834] Or, as Keil described it, 'Peter does not mention actual persecutions but only abuse and blasphemies of the Christians from the side of the gentiles, as has always come, and still continues to come from the unbelievers'.[835]

Others during this early period took a different route when assessing the same evidence. Still working from the assumption that the circumstances had to be connected to known periods of Christian persecution, some understood the letter as describing a

[833] Some of its early proponents include: Augusti 184; Hensler 15–16; Steiger 1:33–36; Bloomfield 700; Wordsworth 41 n. 7, 65; Fronmüller 9; Barnes cviii, 117; Fausset 497; Alford, 126–28; Keil 33; Huther 30; Weidner 99, 162; Hort 1–5; Monnier 1, 112, 214, 220; Bigg 24–33, 80–88; Erdman 52.

[834] Huther 30.

[835] Keil 33: 'Nicht eigentliche Verfolgungen erwähnt Petrus, sondern nur Schmähungen und Lästerungen der Christen vonseiten der Heiden, wie solche jederzeit vorgekommen sind und noch gegenwärtig vonseiten der Ungläubigen vorkommen'.

somewhat more escalated situation. They envisioned a more formal mode of persecution (often referred to as 'systematic persecution') originating not simply from the local populace, but from an organised initiative on the part of the Roman State.[836] Due to the official proscription of the Christian faith, the Roman government was said to have actively pursued its members. As described by Ramsay, '[t]he Christians are not merely tried when a private accuser comes forward against them, but are *sought out* for trial by the Roman officials'.[837] In most cases, these trials were thought to result in capital punishment, whether in the form of crucifixion, burning, or *ad bestias* execution.

Over time, these two positions came to be labeled the 'unofficial' persecution theory and the 'official' persecution theory, respectively. An important development in their history occurred during the mid- to late twentieth century. It was during this time that the three-emperor view of persecution fell into disrepute. Early church historians and NT scholars began to recognise that the persecution of Christians in the first few centuries was much more complicated than this clearly demarcated scheme allows, and that many of the historical assumptions upon which it was based are unfounded. At this period in history, no legislation was set down that outlawed Christianity, nor was there any indication that Christians were actively sought out by Roman authorities in a systematic way. Further, questions were raised about the involvement of Domitian and Trajan in the persecution of Christians.

Because the 'official' persecution theory was closely associated with the three-emperor approach, its validity too was called into question. When this happened, there was a clear movement toward the 'unofficial' position,[838] and by the latter half of the twentieth

[836] Some of the early proponents include: Jülicher, *Introduction*, 211–13; Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, 279–95; Gunkel 251–52. For more proponents of this view, see below.

[837] Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, 280–81 (emphasis added). Cf. Fuller, *Critical Introduction*, 157: 'It is a deliberate policy of the state directed against "Christians" as such'.

[838] This was the conclusion reached by various commentaries produced at this time (e.g., Selwyn, Schelkle, Spicq, Kelly). Factoring into this equation were a number of important articles as well (e.g., Selwyn, 'Persecutions in I Peter', 39–50; Moule, 'Nature and Purpose', 1–11). Not everyone moved in this direction, however. There were still some during this period who wanted to connect the

century a consensus had taken shape.[839] The majority of scholars had reached an agreement that the suffering described in 1 Peter should be attributed to the animosity of the general populace rather than to any 'official' actions by Roman authorities, a view that remains the majority view today.[840]

It was within the process of this consensus formation that the second important misconception developed. As with any debate, an important way of clarifying one's own position is by distinguishing it from alternatives. However, when scholars began to rehearse the different views on persecution, a false dichotomy arose. Interpreters set up 'official' and 'unofficial' theories of persecution as diametrically opposed and exclusive interpretative options. In doing so, they effectively masked other more nuanced approaches that had been (and would be) discussed, including considerations about the subsidiary cause of the persecutions and the role of Roman authorities. Yet, it is these points—which have played almost no role in the discussion until recently—that hold the key to understanding the socio-historical situation in 1 Peter.

The first consideration that has often been overlooked is the subsidiary cause of the persecutions. Rather than viewing the conflict as the result of laws passed by the Roman government that proscribed the Christian faith, it may be more appropriate to stress the influence of the Neronian pogroms, both on the local populace and on governing officials.[841] These set a *precedent* for the future treatment of Christians, which spilled over into the provinces. This

persecutions of 1 Peter with either Domitian and Trajan (e.g., Knox, 'Pliny and I Peter', 187–89; McCaughey, 'Three "Persecution Documents"', 27–40; Bauer, 'Verfolgung unter Domitian', 513–27).

[839] It is interesting to note that Elliott's survey of the field in 1975 (later printed in 1976) involved a criticism of the 'official' persecution theory, which included not simply Beare (who was Elliott's main target) but also 'many scholars' who relate the conflict 'to an imperial persecution against Christians undertaken in the reign of Trajan' (Elliott, 'Rehabilitation', 251). This can be contrasted with the assertion of Cothenet a little over a decade later regarding the fact that 'the majority of commentators' (*La majorité des commentateurs*) at that time subscribed to the 'unofficial' persecution view ('La Premiére de Pierre', 3703).

[840] See Dubis, 'Research on 1 Peter', 203. Cf. also Webb, 'Petrine Epistles', 382–83.

[841] Cf. Masterman 22: 'Now though the Neronian persecution was confined to Rome, a step of this kind, taken by Imperial authority, would be certain to form a precedent for Provincial Governors, and there was therefore good reason to fear

idea was clearly stressed by Moffatt many years ago: 'After the Neronic wave had passed over the capital, the wash of it was felt on the far shores of the provinces'. That is, 'the provincials would soon hear of it, and, when they desired a similar outburst at the expense of local Christians, all that was needed was a proconsul to gratify their wishes, and some outstanding disciple like Antipas or Polykarp to serve as a victim'.[842] Nevertheless, many scholars have overlooked the implications of this informal precedent because they have assumed that persecution would have naturally been grounded in formal legal regulations.

A second, and perhaps more important, point of emphasis is the need for a more nuanced perspective on the role of Roman authorities in the persecution of Christians. In most discussions on the subject, the only role assigned to Roman authorities is the organised and active pursuit of Christians around the empire in an effort to eliminate the faith. Clearly, this was not the case in 1 Peter. But it does not, therefore, rule out any participation by governmental officials, as many have wrongly assumed.[843] The reason is because it is impossible to separate popular hostility from legal accusations within first-century Asia Minor. As noted by Moffatt, 'the action of governors was usually stimulated by private information laid

that the persecution would extend to other parts of the Empire'. See also Plumptre 62; Bennett 45; Wand 17.

[842] Moffatt, *Introduction*, 326–27. It is noteworthy how much the traditional dichotomy shapes interpreters' conclusions. Drawing attention to the reference to suffering ὡς Χριστιανός in 1 Pet 4.16, Hiebert notes how some scholars have used this verse to situate the persecutions shortly after the Neronian pogroms (ca. 65–67 CE). Then, although he correctly acknowledges that the view 'assumes that Roman officials in the Asian provinces would readily have followed the action of the emperor in the capital', for some reason, Hiebert attempts to summarily rule out this proposal because, according to him, 'there is no firm evidence that the Neronian edict [*sic*] resulted in *systematic* persecution of Christians outside of Rome' (27; emphasis added). Such a conclusion reveals the failure to consider that there may be a median position which allows for the persecution of Christians as Christians following the Neronian pogroms, but which would not be equated with 'official', systematic persecution resulting from an imperial edict.

[843] The importance of focusing on provincial and local officials as well as the Roman legal system, rather than simply limiting the discussion to imperially sponsored initiatives, was emphasised in past years by various interpreters (see, e.g., Warden, 'Alienation and Community'; idem, 'Imperial Persecution', 203–12; Schutter, *Hermeneutic*, 14–17; cf. Molthagen, 'Die Lage der Christen', 422–58); nevertheless, this suggestion has not factored into the modern consensus.

by angry citizens'.[844] Therefore, we must be open to the potential involvement of Roman authorities, even when they are not actively seeking out Christians for punishment.[845]

Causes of Suffering in 1 Peter

As we look to move past the simple dichotomy of 'official' versus 'unofficial' persecution,[846] we will begin by considering the cause(s) behind the readers' troubles. Why had the Petrine audience begun to experience conflict? There were two key contributing factors. Part of the problem stemmed from the social reorientation

[844] Moffatt, *Introduction*, 326; cf. also Knopf 23. Even those who acknowledge this fact are still sometimes cautious about postulating the role of local and provincial officials in the conflict because the text never explicitly states their involvement (see Vahrenhorst, 'Leiden als Gnade', 65).

[845] Even when the 'official'–'unofficial' distinction is not properly made, this connection between formal and informal measure is beginning to be granted in scholarship (see, e.g., Sun, *True Grace*, 181). It is probably going too far, however, to claim that 'to negate persecution and the role and influence of [the] Roman Empire in the plight of [the] Christian community is sheer colonial interpretation' (Cherian, 'Suffering in 1 Peter', 39).

[846] In our previous efforts to challenge the modern consensus, we have perhaps not been sufficiently clear in explaining how scholarship should move past the 'official' vs. 'unofficial' dichotomy. We are not exactly 'argu[ing] that what we have in 1 Peter is both official and unofficial persecution' (Schreiner 260). Rather, we seek to problematize the dichotomous distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' and to redescribe the likely experiences and processes. These two designations are inadequate to fully capture the complexity of the conflict experienced by Christians during the first few centuries. As such, we suggest that interpreters move away from using these labels to describe two alternative forms of persecution/suffering. Another option might be to focus on the ways in which conflict could escalate through various levels, distinguishing between non-escalated forms of conflict that often found their resolution through informal means (e.g., verbal abuse, discrimination) and escalated forms of conflict that were generally—though not always (e.g., mob stoning)—resolved through formal channels, given the accusatorial process by which members of the public brought charges (e.g., legal trials, *ad bestias* execution). Yet during the first three centuries even these types of distinctions have their limitations. In Roman Asia Minor, informal conflict could quickly and easily transform into something more formal and escalated. The evidence from the first three centuries suggests that all Christians shared the same perilous legal status following the Neronian persecution: Christianity was 'effectively illegal' in that the mere profession of one's faith *could* (but did not have to) be treated as a punishable offence at the governor's tribunal if one was so charged by another private citizen, or at the whim of a governor (see further below).

that took place upon the readers' conversion. This involved not only a withdrawal from activities that were normative in Greco-Roman culture, it also included a lifestyle marked by 'good works', which many outsiders looked upon with disapproval. The other factor that led to conflict was the legal status of Christians. By the latter half of the first century CE, the Christian faith had become effectively illegal (though what we mean by this needs careful definition). Although no formal legislation had been passed against the religion, the simple adherence to Christianity—and that alone—could nonetheless be treated as a punishable offence in a Roman court of law, if one was taken to court by a private accuser. We will consider each of these causes in turn.

According to 1 Pet 4.3–4, the Christian communities were experiencing conflict with those outside the church because of social withdrawal. Prior to their conversion, some (or all?) members of the audience had been involved in certain social activities, and upon joining the Christian faith they were no longer able to continue in these practices. In response, some of their former associates—perhaps friends, family, and neighbours—had begun to vilify them.

The verse (4.3) is a stock denunciation of 'pagan' behaviour, and so it may not provide direct insight into the types of activities that defined the readers' former lifestyle. The encyclical nature of the epistle would suggest that each situation and each congregation would be somewhat different.[847] Nonetheless, there are two conclusions that can be drawn. First, the agitators from whom hostility is experienced are most likely fellow Gentiles rather than Jews.[848]

[847] Some question whether the historical situation can actually be diagnosed. See Sigismund, 'Identität durch Leiden', 205: 'letztendlich weder aus dem Ersten Petrusbrief noch aus der Rezeption der Leidenssituation historisch valide Rückschlüsse aus Art und Umfang der Verfolgung zur Zeit der Abfassung dieses Briefes möglich sind'.

[848] This conclusion runs contrary to the suggestion of van Unnik ('Redemption in 1 Peter I 18–19', 79), who contends that the agitators were Jewish. He notes, 'nowhere do we read that they suffered from the pagan authorities', and thus he rules out this possibility. Likewise, he discounts any persecution from the general populace of pagan society on the basis that 'we read nothing about that either'. His conclusion, then, is that the slander and ridicule experienced by the readers derived from the synagogue. Interestingly enough, he does not apply the same criterion to his suggestion. If he had, it too would have been ruled out, because the epistle fails to mention Jewish hostility arising out of the synagogue.

Second, the problem involved withdrawal from activities that were common (and expected?) in Anatolian society. The author focuses a considerable amount of attention on his readers' former way of life (1 Pet 1.14, 18; 2.9, 25; 4.3–4) in comparison with the type of conduct that is required 'in Christ' (3.16). In seeking to confirm the latter while denigrating the former, it seems that part of his paraenetic strategy is to encourage them to maintain a level of social separation—a separation that was begun at conversion.

This leaves us to ask about the types of activities from which the audience may have withdrawn. One such activity, which may have led to criticism, is the worship of the traditional gods. The refusal of Christians to acknowledge other deities in sacrifice or in worship was an affront to ancient sentiments and was, according to some sources, the reason why Christians were hated (cf. Diogn. 2.6).[849] Their abandonment of the traditional gods posed a serious threat to the wider community. Not only could it create significant economic loss for local businesses whose financial stability was tied up in the worship of Greek and Roman deities (Acts 19.23–27; cf. Pliny, *Ep*. 10.96.10), the 'atheism' of Christians was believed to disturb and displease the gods (Athenagoras, *Leg*. 4; Justin Martyr, *1 Apol*. 6). As a result, the actions of a few Christians, it was believed, might put an entire community at risk.[850] As Tertullian explains, when disaster struck, the blame was often placed on the Christians who refused to participate in the traditional cults which maintained the *pax deorum*: 'If the Tiber reaches the walls, if the Nile does not rise to the fields, if the sky doesn't move or the earth does, if there is

[849] In some cases, pagans broke into Christian meetings and attempted to pressure them to recant and to sacrifice to the gods, even threatening to accuse them (as Christians) before the authorities if they refused (Hippolytus, *Comm. Dan*. 1.20). According to Justin Martyr, in some instances the denial of the gods could lead to threats of death (*1 Apol*. 25.1; cf. Tertullian, *Apol*. 10.1). At times, these threats materialised, as in the case of the bishop Polycarp, who was condemned to death as 'the destroyer of our gods (ὁ τῶν ἡμετέρων θεῶν καθαιρέτης), who teaches many not to sacrifice or worship' (Mart. Pol. 12.2; trans. Holmes).

[850] Levieils, *Contra Christianos*, 368–91. It is possible that the later 'confession inscriptions' (*Beichtinschriften*) from southwest Asia Minor (see Petzl, ed., *Die Beichtinschriften Westkleinasiens*) reveal how this problem was viewed within pagan society. According to Schnabel ('Divine Tyranny', 160–88), the multiplication of these stelae—which were set up to appease the gods as a result of the sins of the people—may have been due to the spread of Christianity in these areas.

famine, if there is plague, the cry is at once: "The Christians to the lion!"' (*Apol*. 40.2; trans. Glover [LCL]).

Among Petrine commentators, it is usually acknowledged that the lack of participation in traditional cultic activities would have spurred conflict within local communities. In 1 Peter, we are supplied with ample evidence to suggest that the Anatolian readers had previously participated in the worship of Greek and Roman gods and that upon conversion they withdrew from these former practices. As we demonstrated above,[851] the letter appears to have been written to a group of churches composed predominantly of Gentile Christians. Therefore, it is natural to assume a prior association with the traditional cults.

Their withdrawal from these activities is presumed in 1 Pet 1.18, where the author describes their conversion to Christianity as being 'ransomed from the futile (ματαίας) ways inherited from your ancestors (πατροπαραδότου)'.[852] This thesis receives further support in 1 Pet 4.3, which reveals that one of the reasons why the audience was being attacked by former alliances was because of their refusal to partake in ἀθεμίτοις εἰδωλολατρίαις ('lawless idolatries'). Even though this description is found in a formulaic Christian critique of Greco-Roman lifestyle (Gal 5.20; Did. 5.1; Barn. 20.1 cf. Col 3.5), it nonetheless presupposes that a withdrawal from pagan worship would result in public backlash. As such, we might assume that this type of conflict was typical among those who converted to Christianity and is indicated as such in 1 Peter.[853]

[851] See *Introduction: Ethno-Religious Identity*.

[852] The terms that are chosen to depict the readers' former way of life (ἀναστροφή) would appear to confirm their prior participation in pagan worship. As noted by Elliott, 'The adjective *mataios* ("futile") and its paronyms are regularly used by Israelites and Christians to condemn the idolatrous ways of the pagans as "empty," "useless," "worthless," "lacking in honor" (Jer 2:5; 8:19; Esth 4:17; 3 Macc 6:11; Acts 14:15; Rom 1:21; Eph 4:17)' (370; see further *TDNT* 4:519–24). Likewise, the word πατροπαράδοτος is often employed by Christian authors to condemn the former influences of paganism and idolatry in the lives of Gentiles (see van Unnik, 'Critique of Paganism', 129–42).

[853] Cf. Herm. Sim. 9.21.3, which refers to the 'double-minded' who 'worship idols because of their cowardice and are ashamed of the name of their Lord whenever they hear about a persecution' (trans. Holmes). Note also the degree to which sacrifice to the gods was a point of contention between Jews living in urban communities across the Greco-Roman world (Josephus, *Ant*. 4.137–138; 12.125–126; *Ag*. *Ap*. 2.66).

Scholars are often much more sceptical, however, about whether the imperial cults[854] created the same difficulty for the Anatolian congregations. Within Petrine studies, there has been considerable hesitancy to view emperor worship as an underlying cause of the readers' troubles. For some, these reservations stem from the fact that the epistle apparently never addresses the issue directly.[855] Others have argued that since the central and eastern portions of Asia Minor were untouched by the affects of Romanization, the imperial cults would have played little to no part in the conflict situation.[856] Nevertheless, the ancient evidence reveals the pervasiveness of the imperial cults across Asia Minor and the impactful role they played in the lives of provincial inhabitants.

Roman imperial cults pervaded the urban (and rural) landscape of Asia Minor. All the extant examples of the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* come from Asia Minor, specifically from Galatia, including the most complete example from the temple of Rome and Augustus in Ancyra.[857] These cults also included not simply the provincial cults, which were scattered across the region, but also the various municipal cults and even household shrines. As Friesen has noted, 'We should expect that most—if not all—small cities and towns had imperial temples, some more modest than others, that

[854] The designation 'the imperial cult' is avoided here due to the fact that it suggests more uniformity than the phenomenon exhibited within the various local manifestations, and because it could be taken to imply a distinction between the cult of the emperor and other traditional cults (see Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 318; cf. also Friesen, 'Normal Religion', 24, who suggests adopting the plural, 'imperial cults').

[855] So, e.g., Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*, 86, 138; Lampe and Luz, 'Nachpaulinisches Christentum', 198–99; Michaels lxvi; Elliott 501. Many ancient historians, likewise, believe that emperor worship played a very small role in the early persecution of Christians. It is often pointed out that the failure to sacrifice to the emperor is rarely mentioned as a source of conflict in the early Christian martyrdom accounts. Rather, it is the lack of reverence shown to the gods that caused the greatest problems (so, e.g., de Ste Croix, 'Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?', 10; Millar, 'Imperial Cult', 151). Other interpreters, however, are more open to the problems caused by imperial cults (e.g., Zinsmeister, 'Kirche in der Fremde?', 206–207; Nef Ulloa and Lopes, 'Identidade', 747–48).

[856] Elliott, *Home for the Homeless*, 62: 'The direct confrontation with the imperial cult in the cities of Asia…can by no means be assumed as the situation underlying the social problems of the Christians in the hinterlands of Bithynia, Pontus, Galatia and Cappadocia'.

[857] See Brunt and Moore, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 1–2.

complemented the array of religious institutions of each community'.[858] Despite the dearth of architectural evidence from these sites, what little material evidence we possess depicts widespread participation in the cult across the provinces of Asia, Pontus-Bithynia, and Galatia-Cappadocia.[859]

The pervasiveness of this system within civic communities is significant as well. Rather than simply being a religio-political litmus test for Christians who were on trial before the governor, the imperial cults were an inescapable part of everyday life in Roman Asia Minor, with imperial ideology being perpetuated through the alteration of civic space (e.g., temples, statues, inscriptions) and social entertainment/leisure (e.g., festivals, games).

While the threat posed by lack of participation in the imperial cults may not have been as great as the abstention from that of the traditional gods, this institution did cause problems for early Christians. Tertullian later describes the lack of participation in emperor worship as a primary reason for public hatred: 'this is why Christians are public enemies,—because they will not give the Emperors vain, false and rash honours; because, being men of a true religion, they celebrate the Emperors' festivals more in heart than in frolic' (*Apol*. 35.1; trans. Glover [LCL]; cf. *Idol*. 15). This, of course, may not have been the experience of every Christian. The Anatolian congregations would have included believers who participated to varying degrees in the social, political, and religious life of their communities, and their exposure to censure would have depended largely on the limits of their conformity and resistance.[860] Thus, it would not have been a case where Christians were being forced (at any level) to worship the emperor, but their lack of participation meant abstention from a variety of social and political structures, which further fueled the negative sentiments.

Regardless of the fact that 1 Peter does not specifically attribute the persecution to the imperial cults, it is possible therefore that some of the negative reaction described in the letter stems from the

[858] Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 61.

[859] See Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter*, 245–54. For further documentation, see Price, *Rituals and Power*; cf. also Sventitskaya, 'Polis and Empire', 33–51 (Russian); Süss, 'Kaiserkult und Urbanistik', 249–81.

[860] For a description of the potential levels of conformity and resistance that could have been practised by the readers, see Williams, *Good Works in 1 Peter*, 186–201.

audience's failure to participate in the emperor cult and its related activities. The lack of involvement in this institution certainly held out the potential for conflict. At the very least, we might say that emperor worship was at least one issue in the author's mind when he composed the letter.

There are indeed various points in the letter where the Petrine author engages in a subtle critique of Rome and its imperial ideology.[861] One point of criticism seems to be aimed directly at the emperor himself: in 1 Pet 2.13–14, the readers are told to 'submit to every human creature because of the Lord, whether the emperor as supreme or the governor as sent by him'. As Achtemeier notes, '[t]he specific qualification of the emperor as a human being almost surely points to an increasing tendency, particularly evident in Asia Minor, to regard the emperor as divine, and thus gives a polemic edge to this verse'.[862] Through his unusual word choice (ἀνθρωπίνη κτίσις), the Petrine author makes an ontological distinction between the emperor, who is merely a created being, and God who is the ultimate creator (cf. 1 Pet 4.19). In doing so, he subtlely undercuts the exalted claims about the divinity of the emperor perpetuated by the imperial cults.[863] The carefully crafted exhortations of 2.17 (τὸν θεὸν φοβεῖσθε, τὸν βασιλέα τιμᾶτε) also reveal a deliberate and influential distinction between what is properly owed to God (*viz*. fear) and to the emperor (*viz*. honour).[864]

Beyond their withdrawal from traditional forms of religious devotion, the readers' abandonment of their former 'pagan' lifestyles might have included abstention from numerous social activities.

[861] See *Introduction: Theology, Message, and Strategy of 1 Peter*.

[862] Achtemeier 182–83. In the material and documentary evidence from Asia Minor, the title θεός is often attributed to a deceased emperor. This tendency is prominently displayed in the 'son of god' (θεοῦ υἱός) designation that is so frequently employed on coins and in inscriptions. Even living emperors, on occasion, were referred to in this way. An inscription from Priene refers to Domitian as, 'Emperor Domitian Caesar Augustus Germanicus, the unconquered god (θεὸν ἀνίκητον)' (I.Priene 229), and in Laodicea, one Neronian coin reads, 'the divine (θεός) Nero Augustus' (RPC I 2923). The designation θεός was often avoided in provincial cult contexts, especially during the early Empire. Nevertheless, it did appear with somewhat more frequency in municipal cults (see Habicht, 'Die Augusteische Zeit', 83–84; cf. also Fujii, 'Imperial Cult', 159–66).

[863] On this critique of the emperor and popular claims about him, see Williams, 'Divinity and Humanity of Caesar', 131–47.

[864] See further Horrell, 'Honour Everyone', 192–210.

Rather than identifying a specific form of social withdrawal, it might be better to imagine the possibilities by considering the various ways that early Christians failed to conform to cultural expectations. Some early believers found their Christian faith difficult to reconcile with Roman spectacles, and so they refused to attend (cf. Tertullian, *Spect.* 1–30; *Apol*. 15.5; Tatian, *Or*. 22–24). Others, likewise, disparaged all attempts by Christians to hold municipal office (Origen, *Cels*. 8.75). Attendance at the Roman baths was another common social custom that Christians may not have been able to reconcile with their new faith. While most believers seem ambivalent toward the baths, some would no doubt have spurned them due to the 'idols' with which they were decorated and their association with sexual immorality.[865] Meals and group associations, which often included some element of sacrifice or consumption of sacrificial meat,[866] would have also presented problems for some Christians, as is documented in other early sources (cf. 1 Cor 8.1–13; 10.27–30; Did. 6.3).

It is at this point that many treatments end their discussions on the cause(s) of conflict in 1 Peter. But there is more to the problem than just social withdrawal. It appears that certain behaviours

[865] In one story, the apostle John is described as entering the baths, only to be repelled by the presence of the heretic Cerinthus (Eusebius, *Hist*. *eccl*. 3.28); thus, it seems that some Christians did participate (cf. Tertullian, *Apol*. 42.2). On the other hand, Clement of Alexandria—while approving of bathing for health purposes—does mention that bathing is only proper if lustful thoughts are not present (*Paed*. 3.5, 9). The issue of lust created by mixed bathing (and also because of the prostitutes that frequented the baths) remained a problem that later church writers were forced to address (see Dvorjetski, *Leisure, Pleasure and Healing*, 404–17). On the idols that decorated the baths, see Tertullian, *Spec*. 8; *Idol*. 15.6. Possibly in connection with these idols, some Christian texts portray the baths as haunted by demons (see Bonner, 'Demons of the Bath', 203–208; cf. Dunbabin, 'Dangers of the Baths', 33–46).

[866] The cultic dimension of group membership in the ancient world can be seen in a monument from Panormos (in the province of Asia), which contains a relief of an actual meeting of a local voluntary association (GIBM IV.2 1007; cf. I.Apameia 35). The relief presents a three-part design: the gods honoured by the club (Zeus, Artemis, and Apollo) stand above the members holding libation bowls for sacrifice; reclining below are the members of the association; and beneath the members is the group's entertainment (flute player, woman dancing, percussionist, wine mixing). Such a depiction reveals that the club understood its activities as integrally connected to the realm of the gods (cf. I.Eph. 719: 'the physicians who sacrifice to ancestor Asclepius and to the *Sebastoi*').

and/or activities of the Christian community were also contributing to the problem. In particular, the letter indicates on a number of occasions that the 'good works' of the readers were (and would continue to be) a cause of hostility and suffering.[867]

In 1 Pet 2.20, the author draws a causal link between suffering and doing good: 'If you endure when suffering for doing good (εἰ ἀγαθοποιοῦντες καὶ πάσχοντες ὑπομενεῖτε), this finds favour with God'. Likewise, in 3.16 the audience's 'good conduct' (τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἀναστροφήν) is expected to be maligned (lit. 'those who disparage your good conduct'). This causal connection between good works and social conflict is then made even more explicit in the following verse: 'for it is better to suffer for doing good (ἀγαθοποιοῦντας…πάσχειν), if it be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil' (3.17). An explicit claim that good works may produce hostility is found in 3.14a. After posing the rhetorical question, 'who will harm you if you are zealous for the good' (v. 13), the author immediately qualifies his claim, noting, 'but even if you should have to suffer for righteousness sake (πάσχοιτε διὰ δικαιοσύνην), you would be blessed' (v. 14a). In each of these instances, good deeds are not merely 1 Peter's prescribed *response* toward their present conflict, they are part of the antecedent *cause*. In other words, the Petrine author is asking his readers to continue the very behaviour(s) that originally caused the hostility.[868]

[867] Some have attempted—in our opinion, unsuccessfully—to explain this evidence differently. This is the case in the recent treatment of Carter, who draws unnecessary distinctions to avoid the implication of attributing suffering to good deeds. He argues, 'It is true that the author acknowledges that suffering for doing good is *possible* (2:20; 3:14, 17; perhaps 3:6), and in referring to it three or four times he implies that it does sometimes happen. But it is never presented as *probable* (that is, likely to be experienced by most Christians), let alone *normal*' (*Restored Order*, 145 [original emphasis]; cf. also Schreiner 136 n. 45, who notes that 'even though the [un]believers may have criticized the believers for their good works', this happened 'probably as a secondary rationalization'). Nevertheless, in both 2.20 and 3.16, the Petrine author presents suffering for doing good not as a possibility but as an expectation. Further, the fact that the author, on multiple occasions, draws a causal link between good deeds and persecution (2.20; 3.14, 16, 17; cf. also 3.6; 4.19)—particularly within such a brief correspondence—implies an expectation that the good deeds of Christians, their 'lifestyle' in Christ, would likely (and perhaps, regularly?) generate conflict.

[868] For a full defence of this position, see Williams, *Good Works in 1 Peter*.

What type of conduct would generate such animosity from non-Christians? The Petrine author, while not setting out a comprehensive set of ethical guidelines, does describe the type of behaviour that is appropriate for Jesus followers. Some of the good deeds are actions that Greco-Roman society normally acknowledged with approval. The letter's encouragement to be subordinate to existing authorities is a case in point. On a political level, believers were expected to submit to both the emperor and the governor (1 Pet 2.13–14, 17). Insofar as these instructions aligned with socially approved conduct, they were not the kind that normally led to censure.[869] Thus, Christians were not always and invariably performing deeds that were contrary to Greek and Roman standards.

In other cases, however, these good deeds extend to behaviours that God alone approved. This would have been the case with the exclusive devotion that the readers were expected to show toward their God (1 Pet 2.17; cf. 4.3: ἀθέμιτος εἰδωλολατρία). The freedom (cf. 2.16) given to women and slaves to devote themselves exclusively to Christ (cf. 3.15), separate from the oversight of their husbands and masters, respectively, represents conduct that ran counter to the traditional expectations of Greco-Roman society.[870] It is not difficult to imagine the friction that such independent religious orientation would have caused.[871]

What is more, deviance theory suggests that even acts that might not have otherwise been offensive to 'pagan' sensitivities

[869] The problem came in defining how the emperor was to be honoured. Whereas most 'pagans' would have understood this to mean active participation in imperial cults, many Christians would have sought alternative means of fulfilling this duty. There were various ways that Christians might demonstrate their loyalty toward the emperor while still showing ultimate deference to God. Following the example of the Jews (cf. Ezra 6.10; 1 Macc 7.33; m. 'Abot 3.2), some Christians were willing to offer prayers for the emperor (1 Tim 2.2; 1 Clem. 60.4–61.2; Tertullian, *Apol*. 30–32). Others might erect an inscription to the emperor or even dedicate a public structure on his behalf (see Harland, 'Honouring the Emperor', 115).

[870] On the expectation that a slave would adopt his or her master's religion, see Bömer, *Epilegomena*, 247. On the expectation that a wife would follow her husband's religion, see Plutarch, *Conj. praec*. 19 (*Mor*. 140D).

[871] The numerous examples of marital strife caused by a wife's conversion to Christianity suggest that independent religious initiative was viewed as an act of rebellion (cf. Justin, *2 Apol*. 2; Tertullian, *Scap*. 3.4; *Apol*. 3.4; *Ux* 2.5.4; Augustine, *Conf*. 9.9.19; *Passion of Anastasia*; *To Gregoria*).

would have been magnified and repudiated as aberrant. This may have been the case, for instance, when Christians displayed loyal love toward one another (1 Pet 1.22; 4.8) or when they exercised their spiritual gifts within the Christian community (4.10–11). This negative labelling is confirmed by early polemic against the Christians for their incest, cannibalism, and other deeply offensive practices.[872] Given such general suspicion, the Petrine author probably does not have any specific conduct in mind when he describes the negative response toward the good works of Christians. This is a general comment about hostility shown toward Jesus followers based on their newly adopted lifestyle.

Aside from the behavioural cause of suffering, there was also the legal situation that further exacerbated the threats described in 1 Peter.[873] It is widely accepted that during the second and third centuries, the legal status of Christians might best be described as 'effectively illegal'; that is, adherence to the Christian religion could be treated as a punishable offence in a Roman courtroom if one was so charged by a private accuser, despite the fact that there were no laws or edicts proscribing it. In this situation, one's simple adherence to the Christian faith could be treated as a capital crime. The crucial question is whether this situation pertains in the time of 1 Peter.

The purported dialogue between Lucius (a Christian) and Q. Lollius Urbicus (consul and prefect of Rome), recorded by Justin Martyr (*2 Apol*. 2), is particularly enlightening with regard to the legal status of Christians during this period. After Urbicus sentences Ptolemaeus to execution for confessing Christianity, an innocent bystander named Lucius asks, 'What is the reason for this sentence? Why have you brought a conviction against this man who is not an adulterer or a fornicator or a murderer or a thief or a robber, nor has performed any misdeed at all, but only confesses to bear the name Christian?' (Justin, *2 Apol*. 2.16). In response, Urbicus inquires as to whether Lucius might be a Christian as well. When Lucius responds positively, he too is led away for execution.

[872] For records of such polemic, see, e.g., Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.7.11; 5.1.14, 26; 9.5.2; Justin, *1 Apol.* 26; *2 Apol.* 12; Tertullian, *Apol.* 2.5; 6.11–7.5.

[873] A helpful discussion of one who recognises the social and governmental aspects of persecution in 1 Peter is provided by Steenberg, 'Reversal of Roles', 74–102.

The important point to notice is that there was no crime for which either man was being charged other than adherence to the Christian faith.[874]

It has been the assumption of many Petrine commentators—whether implicit or explicit—that there was a categorical distinction between the persecutions described in 1 Peter and those that took place during the second and third centuries CE. The latter, it is assumed, mark a period of further escalated tension between the church and the Roman state wherein the mere confession of one's faith was sufficient to secure the punishment of Roman authorities. The former, by contrast, are thought to depict a somewhat less contentious relationship prior to the time at which Christianity was branded as a punishable offence (cf. Acts 18.12–16; 23.25–30; 24–26).

Different historical events are used as lines of demarcation. The persecution of Decius (249–251 CE) is commonly regarded as the first empire-wide persecution of Christians that was sanctioned by the Roman state. In this way, it is thought to mark the beginning of 'official' persecution. Due to the fact that 1 Peter is far removed from this later proscription of Christianity, commentators are thus able to label the conflict recorded in the epistle as 'unofficial' persecution.[875]

Yet, there are two problems with using the Decius' conflict to inform our understanding of 1 Peter. The first is that it is grounded in a dichotomy that falsely separates governmental involvement in Christian suffering from the informal conflict which Christians experienced with the general populace (see above). The second problem is that the edict of Decius was not a direct attack on Christianity.[876] All inhabitants—both Christians and non-Christians alike—were required to demonstrate their allegiance to the gods

[874] Other examples that illustrate the effective illegality of Christianity during this period include: *Scill. Mart*. 14; *Acts of Justin and his Companions*; *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*; *Martyrdom of Polycarp*; *Acts of the Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne*.

[875] See, e.g., Achtemeier 33 n. 333; Elliott 98; Senior 7–8; Prigent 132; Witherington 215.

[876] For more on the Decian persecution, see Clarke, 'Persecution of Decius', 63–77; Molthagen, *Der römische Staat*, 61–84; Pohlsander, 'Religious Policy', 1826–42; Rives, 'Decree of Decius', 135–54; Selinger, *Persecutions of Decius*, 27–82.

through traditional sacrifice.[877] The monitoring and enforcement of individual compliance to standard religious acts was an innovation, but these actions were nonetheless categorically distinct from the searching out of Christians simply on the basis of their outlawed status.

Another way that commentators attempt to distance the situation from governmental involvement is by differentiating the suffering in 1 Peter from the difficulties that Christians experienced under the governorship of Pliny during the early second century. At this time, Christians were brought to trial by private accusers, and those who refused to recant their confession of Christ were put to death (Pliny, *Ep*. 10.96). According to Jobes, 'the situation in 1 Peter appears to reflect a time when the threat had not yet escalated to that point, which indicates an earlier time in Asia Minor than that indicated in Pliny's letters'.[878]

However, there are clear similarities between the circumstances described by Pliny and the situation of the Petrine readers some years earlier.[879] The reason why a comparison is informative is because the same legal procedures on display in the Pliny correspondence would have also been used by late first-century governors in Asia Minor: throughout the Principate, cases that reached the provincial tribunal were normally tried through the process of *cognitio*, wherein the formal procedure of the trial, the rendering of a verdict, and the dispensing of appropriate punishments were all dependent upon the personal discretion of the governor.[880]

[877] The commissions did not discriminate between age, sex, or socio-economic status. Both the elderly (P.Wilckens 124) as well as young children (Meyer, *Griechische texte*, 77, no. 15, ll. 10–11 [σὺν τοῖς ἀφήλιξί μου τέκνοις, 'with my children who are minors']) were required to participate, even if only through their parents (cf. P.Oxy. XII 1464, Aurelius Gaion claims that his wife and children act 'through me' [δι᾽ ἐμοῦ]). Furthermore, neither eminent members of the community nor public office holders were exempt from this process (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 6.41.11; Meyer, *Die Libelli*, 14–15, no. 16). Even Aurelia Ammonus, a priestess of the crocodile-god Petesouchos, was compelled to prove her devotion (P.Wilcken 125).

[878] Jobes 9; cf. Michaels lxiii–lxvi; Bechtler, *Following in His Steps*, 50–52; Elliott 792; Donelson 12.

[879] See Horrell, 'The Label Χριστιανός', 370–76, expanded in *Becoming Christian,* 183–97. Cf. also Holloway, *Coping with Prejudice*, 18.

[880] On the role of the governor in judicial proceedings during the Roman Principate, see Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter*, 156–76.

The more important question is what the correspondence of Pliny reveals about the legal status of Christians. Most who draw distinctions between the persecutions of 1 Peter and the second-century trials held by Pliny claim that the latter represent an escalated form of conflict in which Christianity was treated as a punishable offence. Not only was the governor willing to hear the case of a group whose sole charge was their confession of Christianity (Pliny, *Ep*. 10.95.2–3: [*in*] *iis qui ad me tamquam Christiani deferebantur, hunc sum secutus modum*), he sentenced many to death on this basis and it alone. The punishment of these Christians was not the result of their prior proscription according to Roman law; neither Pliny nor Trajan references any specific legal policies that were informing their actions. On the other hand, the actions of Pliny were not altogether without precedent.[881] Other trials against Christians are mentioned, although Pliny had not previously been part of those proceedings.[882] Furthermore, the actions of the governor, who otherwise displays extreme caution in his administrative duties,[883] indicates that the confession of Christianity was a sufficient basis

[881] Cf. Reichert, 'Durchdachte Konfusion', 227–50, who argues that during the early second century there was neither an official Roman law nor a common precedent by which Christians were dealt with in the provinces of Rome (cf. Downing, 'Pliny's Prosecution', 110–13). She therefore views Pliny as an innovator who convinces the emperor of the proper procedure for handling Christians (pardon/punishment), which then serves as the model for subsequent Roman authorities. For a refutation of Reichert's proposal, see Molthagen, 'Das Nichtwissen des Plinius', 112–40.

[882] Recently, Thraede ('Noch einmal', 113–14) has expressed scepticism about the use of the statement '*cognitionibus de Christianis interfui numquam*' as evidence for the existence of prior Christian trials. Nevertheless, this conclusion seems to be demanded by the fact that Pliny's dilemma was not caused by the *novelty* of the relationship between the Church and the Roman State—as if Christian trials were altogether unusual or non-existent—but by his own *inexperience* in provincial administration (cf. Sordi, *Christians and the Roman Empire*, 60). Had he wished to express the non-existence of Christian trials, the blame would have been laid not upon his own shoulders but upon the nature of the circumstances (e.g., 'Because there is no precedent for this type of case, I am consequently ignorant of…').

[883] Cf. Hardy, *Studies in Roman History*, 83: 'To suppose that Pliny took this perfectly definite and decided course [*viz*. sentencing confessing Christians to death] without precedent is quite impossible'.

for a capital sentence.[884] Pliny's main uncertainty—and the rhetorical climax of his letter—is whether he is correct to release those who deny or 'repent' of their Christian allegiance.[885]

If the change in legal status cannot be connected with the trials of Pliny, when did Christianity become 'effectively illegal', and what contributed to this status change? It is difficult to attribute the situation to one single factor; instead, the effective illegality of the Christian faith arose through a combination of historical factors during the mid- to late first century CE and were later perpetuated throughout the empire due to the nature of the Roman legal system. Fueling the situation from the start was the fact that Christians were often subject to suspicion and hostility, with negative public (and official) reaction recorded consistently across our earliest sources.[886]

A significant development in the legal status of Christians came with the persecutions of Nero in 64 CE. Regardless of what actually occasioned this event,[887] it is clear (at least from our only extant

[884] Keresztes, 'Imperial Roman Government', 277. There are some who insist on an alternative basis for the capital sentence. Many believe that the Christians were put to death because of their obstinacy before the governor, as if this, rather than confessing to be 'Christian', were their crime (so, e.g., Sherwin-White, 'Early Persecutions', 210–11; Moreau, *La persécution du christianisme*, 43). But this suggestion overlooks key factors in the trial: the charge of obstinancy only arose *after* they had been accused and put on trial for being Christians. Furthermore, the third group of defendants (former Christians) were not obstinate, yet they were detained on the possibility that even apostate Christians might be punished, though Pliny ends up releasing any who deny or abandon their Christian commitment (a practice he is anxious to check with the emperor). Obstinacy is only a problem here insofar as it equates to a refusal to curse Christ and to sacrifice to the emperor's image.

[885] See Horrell, *Becoming Christian,* 195.

[886] See Engberg, *Impulsore Chresto*.

[887] Beginning in one of the shops around the Circus Maximus, a fire broke out in Rome on 19 July 64 CE, sweeping across the city and leaving only four of the fourteen districts intact (Tacitus, *Ann*. 15.38–40; cf. Cassius Dio 62.18.2). Within the earliest surviving source records, blame for the fire is almost unanimously placed on the shoulders of the emperor Nero (see Pliny, *Nat*. 17.1.5; Suetonius, *Nero* 38; Cassius Dio 62.16–18). However, Tacitus (and Sulpicius Severus, *Chron*. 2.29, who follows him) is the only one who connects Nero's persecution of Christians with his attempt to pass-off the blame for the fire. Some are, therefore, sceptical about the connection of the two events (e.g., Koestermann, 'Ein folgenschwerer Irrtum', 456–69; Rougé, 'L'incendie de Rome', 433–41; Keresztes, 'Nero, the Christians and the Jews', 404–13).

records) that Christians were specifically targeted. What is not as clear is whether this conflict was further supported by official legislation against Christianity. This is the impression given by some Christian sources. According to Sulpicius Severus, the Neronian incident was the beginning of troubles for Christians. It was at this time, he notes, that the 'religion was prohibited by laws (*legibus*) which were enacted; and by edicts (*edictis*) openly set forth it was proclaimed unlawful to be a Christian (*Christianum esse non licebat*)' (*Chron*. 2.29; trans. Schaff).[888] Given the difficult experiences of Christians following this event, many church historians, in fact, have been led to posit the existence of an imperial edict or *senatusconsultum*, which outlawed the Christian faith.[889]

While evidence for the establishment of an official decree is lacking, we should not go to the other extreme by thinking that the Neronian persecution 'set no official precedent for any policy of Rome toward the Christian movement in general'.[890] Insofar as precedents can be 'official', Nero's actions seem to serve as an important foundation for the popular resentment of Christians as well as their legal treatment by Roman governors.

There are certain considerations that indicate this pogrom was the turning point in the legal treatment of Christians. One is the fact that, prior to Nero, there are no recorded instances of Christians being tried and condemned in a Roman court of law simply on the basis of the name alone;[891] whereas during the second and third

[888] A Neronian law or decree against the Christian faith is also posited by Tertullian, *Nat*. 1.7.9: 'Now, although every other institution which existed under Nero (*institutum Neronianum*) has been destroyed, yet this of ours has firmly remained' (trans. Holmes). Similarly, the *Acts of Paul* indicates that Nero passed laws against Christians. After being miraculously revived to life by the apostle Paul, Patroclus (the emperor's cupbearer) confessed his Christian faith to Nero and revealed that he was now fighting for a new king. Upon hearing of Patroclus' conversion, as well as that of other chief men, Nero is said to have issued an edict (διάταγμα/*edictum*) to the effect that all Christians were to be put to death (11.2).

[889] E.g., Callewaert, 'Les Premiers chrétiens' (1901) 771–97; (1902) 5–15, 324–48, 601–14; Zeiller, 'Legalité et arbitraire', 49–54; idem, 'Institutum Neronianum', 393–99; Keresztes, 'Law and Arbitrariness', 204–14; Sordi, *Christians and the Roman Empire*, 17–20, 31–32, 63; Giovannini, 'L'interdit contre les chrétiens', esp. 122–24.

[890] Elliott 98.

[891] On more than one occasion, the apostle Paul and his missionary associates were dragged before the local civic magistrates and accused of advocating customs that were unlawful according to Roman standards (cf. Acts 16.16–40; 17.1–9).

centuries CE, adherence to the Christian faith was considered to be a punishable offence (see above). Sometime between the lifetime of Paul and the time of Pliny's trials (early second century CE), the legal treatment of Christians underwent an important transformation. The actions of Nero seem to be the only event that could have established such a precedent.

Another consideration is how the early Christians understood their legal situation. As we have already pointed out, some Christian authors claimed that the persecutions were fueled by official legislation that outlawed Christianity (Sulpicius Severus, *Chron*. 2.29; cf. also Acts Paul 11.2; Tertullian, *Nat*. 1.7.9). While such claims are technically inaccurate in that there is no evidence to prove that the religion was officially proscribed, they are nonetheless an important representation of how Christians were actually treated. What is even more significant, however, is the fact that Christians trace the beginning of their struggles back to the time of Nero. By doing so, they are looking back to a time when their legal status changed, leaving them prone to accusations (and subsequent condemnation) before Roman authorities simply on the basis of their Christian confession.

It would be inaccurate to claim that, in his efforts to seek out Christians following the events of the fire, Nero moved his search outside of the city limits of Rome and into other parts of the Empire. Yet there was a natural avenue through which the impact of the emperor's actions would spread beyond Rome itself.[892] As provincial governors were sent out from Rome, their exposure to Christians would have likely been somewhat limited (cf. Pliny,

There were also a number of instances where the apostle was forced to stand trial before the tribunal of the provincial governor (Acts 18.12–16; 23.25–30; 24–26; cf. 13.6–12). Without exception, however, all of these proceedings served to exonerate the defendants and their religion. Even when Luke's apologetic is taken into account, there is no evidence that Paul's confession of Christianity was judged to be potentially criminal in itself—except when he is finally sent to Rome for trial (exactly the same procedure Pliny records for those who are Roman citizens; Acts 26.30–32; Pliny *Ep.* 10.96.4)

[892] Even though it is not one of the earliest sources on the situation, the fifth-century Christian historian Paulus Orosius (*Hist*. 7.7.10) does in fact claim that the Neronian persecution extended into the provinces. While the historicity of this claim may be incorrect, it could be explained as another attempt to depict how Christians perceived the situation. Following the pogroms of Nero, Christians living in the provinces felt the negative repercussions—whether in the form of harassment from neighbours or in the way of legal accusations from private accusers.

Ep. 10.96.1). While they wielded judicial freedom to try and condemn Christians who were brought to trial before them, their assessments would have been informed by the negative perceptions and violent treatment of Christians known from Rome.[893] Thus, when underlying hostility or popular opposition was exacerbated to the point of accusations being made, or Christians otherwise coming to the governor's attention, Christians could be tried and punished accordingly. This was not a result of any Roman edict outlawing Christianity; instead, it was the result of a situation in which informal hostility combined with imperial precedent and the freedom of the governor to define and punish criminal offences according to his own discretion—and his duty to keep the 'peace' of the province. This was no systematic, 'official' or (still less) inquisitorial persecution; rather, it represents the potential escalation of popular hostility via the accusatorial process, supported by legal precedent and the disposition of certain governors. It was this complicated legal situation in which the readers of 1 Peter found themselves.[894]

Forms of Suffering in 1 Peter

Modern commentators maintain that the primary forms of hostility faced by the Anatolian congregations were discrimination,

[893] Hiebert acknowledges this possibility and correctly recognises that such a view 'assumes that Roman officials in the Asian provinces would readily have followed the action of the emperor in the capital' (27). However, he seems to misunderstand both the nature of the Neronian persecution and the means by which the precedent would have been perpetuated in the provinces, for he goes on to state, 'However, there is no firm evidence that the Neronian edict resulted in systematic persecution of Christians outside of Rome'. If we recognise that (1) Nero's actions were perpetuated not through official laws or edicts but through mere influence and as precedent, and that (2) Christian persecution in the provinces generally originated from the private accusations of a hostile populace rather than any imperial initiative, then the objection no longer stands.

[894] The idea that persecution in 1 Peter reflects the background of the effective illegality of Christianity has been increasingly accepted within Petrine scholarship (see, e.g., Byrley, 'Persecution and the "Adversary"', 87–88; idem, 'Suffering in 1 Peter', 139–46; George, 'Petrine Missional Ethics', 57–58; Kock-Malan, 'Suffering, Submission, Silence', 88–91; Danielson, 'Gospel to the Martyrs', 172–76). Among the recent dissenters is Carter (*Restored Order*, 270–72), although he concedes some points to this position, but argues that the possibility of legal trials is remote.

'persistent slander and verbal abuse from non-believing outsiders aimed at demeaning, shaming, and discrediting the Christians in the court of public opinion'.[895] The prevalence of verbal abuse can be seen in a number of passages in 1 Peter. The addressees are said to be 'maligned (καταλαλέω) as evildoers' (2.12) and 'reviled (ὀνειδίζω) for the name of Christ' (4.14). Moreover, they are encouraged to 'silence (φιμόω) the ignorance of foolish people' by doing good (2.15) and to repay 'insults' (λοιδορία) with blessing rather than cursing (3.9). All members of the Christian community would have been prone to this type of hostility—both individually and collectively.

By limiting the nature of suffering to discrimination and verbal abuse interpreters have been able to distinguish the situation of 1 Peter from that of Christians in later centuries who faced more extreme hardships.[896] Yet the question is whether these experiences were the only forms of persecution threatening the Anatolian readers.[897] Properly reconstructing the forms of suffering in 1 Peter—which the author describes as 'varied' (ποικίλοι, 1.6)—requires moving beyond a generalised perspective to attempt to distinguish the diverse experience of different groups within the Christian community.

[895] Elliott 100.

[896] Some even compare the situation to the experience of Christians in the modern Western world: 'There is no evidence that Peter wrote his first letter during a time of empire-wide persecution, but it is clear that these Christian brothers and sisters were suffering for what they believed. In this sense, we can say that the experience of the Christians in 1 Peter is much like that of Christians in the West today. Unlike some of our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world who face persecution in the form of war, violence, displacement, torture, and even death, we face cultural discrimination, social pressures, and the potential loss of rights and privileges simply for identifying with Christ' (Sanchez, 'Peter the Expositor', 18). Cf. Williamson, 'Surprising Commands', 111, who claims that the letter was written to a 'mildly persecuted group of Christians'.

[897] Elliott 100: 'The nature of this abuse and insult is primarily verbal, not physical'. Others likewise stress the verbal nature of the hostility over against physical forms (e.g., Osborne, 'Christian Suffering', 265–67; Bechtler, *Following in His Steps*, 87). Aside from the Petrine author's frequent mention of verbal forms of conflict, another consideration that is sometimes raised in this context is the fact that 1 Peter lacks any of the technical terms (e.g., διώκω, διωγμός) used to denote more violent oppression (see Spicq 18; Kelly 10; Schelkle 8; cf. Sigismund, 'Identität durch Leiden', 180–81).

The letter itself specifically addresses physical forms of hostility, at least those directed towards one group within the Christian congregations. In 1 Pet 2.19, the question is posed to slaves, 'What credit is it if you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong?' From this, it is clear that the author assumed that slaves could, and probably did, experience violent mistreatment—sometimes because of their commitment to Christianity (cf. 2.20b). This is a natural assumption given that 'any Roman slave, as a matter of course, could become the object of physical abuse or injury at any time'.[898] It is notable that in his examination of Christians, Pliny 'extracts the truth by torture' specifically from two slave women, who were also *ministrae* among the Christians (*Ep.* 10.96.8).

But it was not only slaves that lived under the threat of physical violence. The letter also hints at the possibility that wives too might experience something similar. When the women of the Anatolian congregations are instructed, 'You have become children of Sarah, if you do good and do not fear any terror' (1 Pet 3.6), it is likely that the 'terror' (πτόησις) the author seeks to guard against is related to the dangers for women inherent within domestic relationships: physical or sexual violence, forced conformity to the husband's wishes or to his customs of religious devotion, divorce, and abandonment.[899]

Even when the threat of physical violence is acknowledged, this type of suffering is usually seen as confined to conflicts within the household, particularly among the more vulnerable members of the community (slaves, wives).[900] Rarely do interpreters consider the potential of physical danger facing Christians outside of this context. However, three important considerations demand that the legal trials of Christians (and the dangers that would ensue from them) be considered as a potential threat facing some members of the Petrine congregations. First, as we have shown, following the

[898] Bradley, *Slavery and Society*, 4. The abuse and mistreatment of slaves in Greco-Roman society is well-documented both in primary and secondary sources (e.g., Suetonius, *Aug*. 67.2; *Cal*. 32.1-7; Tacitus, *Ann*. 4.54; 16.19; Cassius Dio 54.23.1–2; Petronius, *Satyr*. 45, 53; Achilles Tatius, *Leuc. Clit.* 4.15.6).

[899] Those who have recognised that the letter acknowledges the threat of physical violence include: Moffatt 33; Spicq 123; Kelly 132; Powers 55; Skaggs 63; Schreiner 178; cf. also Johnson, 'Fire in God's House', 286. Some have been more hesitant to allow for this form of conflict (e.g., Wand 91; Jobes 206).

[900] See, e.g., Webb, 'Petrine Epistles', 383; Watson, 'Body and Abuse', 265–82.

punishment of Christians by Nero in the aftermath of the fire of Rome, the legal status of Christians became precarious, making membership in the group effectively illegal (see above). This situation provided the *opportunity* for anyone to bring charges against Christians in a Roman court of law, however infrequently this took place.

Second, there was also a *motive* for this type of prosecution: the Christian lifestyle was commonly met with a negative response from outsiders (see above). While such hostilities were often expressed through informal means (e.g., verbal abuse, discrimination), this form of conflict cannot easily be separated from more formal measures (e.g., legal actions). In the Roman world, as tensions escalated, participants often turned to the courts to resolve their issues.

Finally, *examples* of this type of persecution are represented in later Christian sources. Some Jesus followers were beaten and imprisoned (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 5.1.7; Mart. Pol. 2.2; Tertullian, *Apol*. 39.7); others were exposed to wild beasts or set on fire (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 5.1.37, 47, 50; Mart. Pol. 2.4; 3.1; 5.2; 13–16; Tertullian, *Apol*. 12.4). The key is that these and other forms of persecution[901] were carried out under the same legal conditions as those under which the Petrine readers were living, and as such, they were prone to the same experiences. Indeed, certain texts in the letter allude to a judicial context (3.15–17; 4.15–16; see discussion ad loc.) suggesting that such a setting was at least within the range of possible threats.

We should not, however, conclude that these possible forms of judicial conflict were the regular or frequent experiences of the Petrine audience: early Christian communities experienced escalated forms of conflict (e.g., burning, *ad bestias* execution, etc.) on

[901] E.g., red-hot brazen plates fastened on tender parts of one's body (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 5.1.21); beheading (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 5.1.47; Tertullian, *Apol*. 30.7); crucifixion (Tertullian, *Apol*. 12.3); exile/banishment (Tertullian, *Apol*. 12.5). These types of punishments were not unique to Christians. Roman governors punished other criminals in much the same way. Examples of gubernatorial punishment include: flogging (Dig. 47.21.2); hard labour (Dig. 48.13.8.1; 48.19.9.11; 49.18.3; Pliny, *Ep*. 10.58); imprisonment (Dig. 48.3.1, 3); execution (Dig. 48.19.15; 48.22.6.2; Pliny, *Ep*. 2.11.2–9); exposure to wild beasts (Dig. 28.3.6.10; 47.9.12.1; 49.16.3.10; 49.18.1.3); crucifixion (Dig. 48.19.9.11; 49.16.3.10; Suetonius, *Galb*. 9.1); burning alive (Dig. 48.19.28.11).

a sporadic and occasional basis.[902] Extreme forms of persecution in which Christians lost their lives seem to have been a rare occurrence in the first few centuries. For many, this fact is difficult to reconcile with the contention that the confession of Christianity was a punishable offence at the time when 1 Peter was written. The assumption of many scholars is that if Christianity were effectively illegal, and if its punishment simply required a local inhabitant to bring formal charges before the governor, then adherents to the Christian faith would have been largely exterminated by prosecution.[903] Yet this overlooks the various factors that often prevented escalated forms of conflict.[904]

On a social level, family ties—even those with unbelieving relatives—would have offered some level of protection for early Christians. In the case of Perpetua, an early Christian martyr, it was her father who went to great lengths to preserve her life, despite the fact that he was not a Christian and that he disapproved of her faith (*Pass. Perp*. 3, 5). Furthermore, we cannot assume that every Jesus follower lived a separatist lifestyle that avoided social integration and thus stirred up animosity. Early Christians exhibited various degrees of accommodation, with some remaining highly integrated into wider Greco-Roman society.[905] Given the link between cultural

[902] Based on this fact, some scholars have attempted to downplay Christian suffering during the first few centuries (e.g., Moss, *Myth of Persecution*). Yet this overlooks the evidence suggesting that prejudice was a consistent experience of Jesus followers (see Holloway, *Coping with Prejudice*), and minimises the threat of escalated conflict that was always a possibility. For a more balanced view, see Merkt, 'Verfolgung und Martyrium', 233–43; Kinzig, *Christian Persecution*.

[903] The inability to reconcile these two considerations is most clearly seen in a statement by Michaels. He notes, 'Even if 1 Peter were dated (with Beare, 28–34) in the time of Pliny, it would be difficult to argue that being a "Christian" was in itself a crime, for Pliny's description of the great success of the Christian movement in Bithynia tells against any notion that Christianity had been outlawed there' (268–69). Such an argument seems to reflect an assumption that the (effective) illegality of Christianity would have prevented its successful spread.

[904] See Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter*, 226–34.

[905] See Williams, *Good Works in 1 Peter*, 186–201. For a study that illustrates this ongoing integration (but arguably underestimates the degree of social conflict, including in 1 Peter), see Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, and his later work, *Dynamics of Identity.*

conformity and social animosity,[906] much of the conflict may have been avoided by those who most accommodated to societal expectations. What is more, since one of the prominent accusations directed against the Christians concerned their failure to worship or show respect to the traditional gods, it is to be expected that escalated hostility might only occur intermittently, when calamity struck and, in seeking explanation, the populace was reminded of the Christians' 'atheism' (cf. Tertullian, *Apol*. 40.2; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 4.13; Origen, *Comm. Matt*. 24.9).

Aside from these social factors, there were also obstacles inherent within the Roman legal system that would have provided some protection for Christians. First, the prosecution of Christians required an official accuser (*delator*) willing to submit formal allegations against them. Trajan's affirmation of this principle in his mild rebuke of Pliny (Pliny, *Ep.* 10.97)[907] explains why Christians were concerned to preserve official support of this stance: it offered them some legal protection.[908] Although one might expect local citizens to take such an opportunity eagerly, accusers were not always forthcoming. Many were deterred from entering into this form of personal litigation because of the risks it posed.[909] Roman law set out stiff penalties for anyone who made false accusations in court (*calumnia*).[910] This threat was compounded by the fact that

[906] This link has been observed within the Pauline congregations by de Vos, *Church and Community Conflicts*. He notes that 'where there is a pattern of ethnic integration or assimilation there will be a lower incidence of conflict' (297; emphasis removed).

[907] See further Sherwin-White, 'Early Persecutions', 204–205.

[908] A later rescript of Hadrian reiterating this policy is recorded by Justin Martyr (*1 Apol*. 68.5–10) and then by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.9; on this, see Engberg, *Impulsore Chresto*, 206–14; Minns, 'Rescript of Hadrian', 38–49). Bickerman argues that Christians preserved Hadrian's rescript precisely because it 'upheld the principle of *cognitio* even with reference to the Christians' ('Trajan, Hadrian and the Christians', 311) and thus 'made it easier for the "good governors" to resist the demands of the Provincials for a wholesale persecution of Christians' (315).

[909] In Ulpian's *Duties of Proconsul*, he notes, 'If a charge is to be brought against anyone, the charge must first be signed. This [procedure] was devised so that no one should readily leap to an accusation since he knows that his accusation will not be brought without risk to himself' (Dig. 48.2.7; trans. Watson; cf. Cod. theod. 9.1.9, 11, 14).

[910] See further Camiñas, 'Le "crimen calumniae"', 117–34; Centola, *Il* crimen calumniae, esp. 61–106.

the mere recantation of one's Christian faith was normally sufficient for acquittal (cf. Justin, *1 Apol*. 4.6; 8.1). Since many Christians who were faced with possible execution chose denial rather than perseverance (see *Acta Pionii* 15.2; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 6.41.12; Cyprian, *Laps*. 7–8), an accuser could easily (and quickly) be placed in the role of a defendant.[911]

For opponents of Christianity who were willing to take the risk involved in formal accusations, there was also the matter of gaining a hearing before the governor and convincing him to convict Christians of their 'crime'. Because one's access to the governor was dependent upon the various stops in his assize tour, sometimes there could be considerable delay in prosecution.[912] If the trial did eventually occur, there was no guarantee of a conviction. In a Roman province, the governor exercised significant judicial freedom. Not only did he possess the right and responsibility to define and punish criminality that was not legislated against under formal law,[913] the punishment for such offences was bound up in his own personal discretion. Thus, he was able not only to execute Christians as Christians (Pliny, *Ep*. 10.96; Mart. Pol. 10.1; 12.1; *Pass. Pert*. 6), but also to dismiss the case against them (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 6.41.19–20; Tertullian, *Scap*. 4.3; 5.1; Lucian, *Peregr*. 14). The problem for would-be accusers was that they could not be entirely sure of whether a particular magistrate would be willing to exercise his authority to punish Christians,[914] and with proconsular

[911] This was the reason why the right to a proper trial was sought after so diligently by Christian apologists (cf. Justin, *1 Apol*. 68 = Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 4.8–9). Given the deterrents of legal accusation, a proper trial afforded the Christians at least some level of protection from capital punishment (cf. Bickerman, 'Trajan, Hadrian and the Christians', 312–13).

[912] Each city on the *conventus* was normally visited annually (Dig. 1.16.7), assuming that the governor was not slow in arriving at the province (see Pliny, *Ep*. 10.17A–B), or that certain stops were not delegated to a legate. It seems as though most followed a particular timetable for assize visits (cf. Plutarch, *An. Corp*. 4; SEG 28:1566; I.Eph. 24).

[913] See Mommsen, *Römisches Strafrecht*, 193–96.

[914] de Ste. Croix, 'Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?', 13. Cf. Rives, 'Piety of a Persecutor', 25: 'The men who conducted the trials of Christians and who determined their outcomes were individuals with varied and sometimes idiosyncratic points of view… Those with a strong interest in religious questions will have had very different opinions on the matter, while others were no doubt largely unconcerned. And these personal differences would have affected the way

governors only remaining in office for one year, this uncertainty would have remained an ever-present cause of legal trepidation. It is notable, for example, how the accusations in Pontus-Bithynia multiplied exponentially once the people realised that Pliny would actually prosecute Christians who were charged before his tribunal, even if some of these accusations were submitted anonymously (Pliny, *Ep*. 10.96.4).

Just as the causes of suffering were complex and interconnected, and could at times escalate from informal verbal (or physical) hostility to formal accusation and judicial trial, so too the potential forms of suffering cover a wide range, depending both on circumstance and on the particular socio-economic location of each person: verbal accusation from outsiders; physical punishment and abuse, especially from slave-owners and husbands; judicial punishments, including torture and potentially execution. Against a general background of suspicion and prejudice shown toward the Christ-cult, actual suffering might be sporadic and infrequent, and directed only at some members of the Christian assemblies, but the letter (and the wider evidence) indicates that the threats were real and concrete.

Theology, Message, and Strategy of 1 Peter

Initial Bibliography

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they handled accusations of Christianity. As a result, the situation of Christians was above all one of great uncertainty. Their safety depended not only on the restraint of popular hostility, but also on the interests and attitudes of the current governor. An indifferent or tolerant governor could assure a period of peace and security, whereas a governor…with strong religious interests and a conservative bent, could spell trouble' (25).