'Resist him' (1 Pet 5:9): Holiness and Non-Retaliatory Responses to Unjust Suffering as 'Holy War' in 1 Peter

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Abstract

1 Peter exhorts readers to respond to unjust suffering with non-retaliatory righteous behaviour, while looking forward to vindication at the Lord's return. Although several literary-theological and sociological approaches to the epistle have shed considerable light on this exhortation, a number of interpreters maintain that ultimately, the epistle engenders a paralyzing sense of passive victimhood in believers. This article examines the theological significance of several military metaphors throughout the epistle, to show that the exhortation to resist the devil in the final chapter is a climax to a consistent theme in the epistle, aimed at galvanizing spiritual warriors whose weapons are peaceful non-retaliation, hope, and holiness through Christ's redemptive work. It also argues that Peter's approach is in line with the New Testament's transformation of the holy war motif of the Old Testament. Rather than being paralyzed into helplessness, the first readers of the epistle would have been emboldened by the call to holy resistance.

[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

1.1. The problem

The recent 'rehabilitation' of 1 Peter, the epistle once described as 'second-class status … exegetical step-child' (Elliot 1976:243), has shed considerable light on its socio-historical and situational context, as well as Peter's[2] overall pastoral response to the issues that confronted his readers. That the over-riding focus of the epistle was to encourage an appropriate Christian response to persecution is evidenced by the fact that the issue is addressed in each chapter.[3] As the epistle describes it, the believers were facing moderate forms of persecution characterized by 'various trials' (1:6), being 'maligned as evildoers' (2:12), having to 'suffer for doing what is right', and being threatened along with it (3:14), again being 'maligned' and 'abused' (3:16), having to 'suffer in the flesh', i.e. faced corporal punishment of some kind (4:1), verbal abuses (4:4), 'fiery ordeal' (4:12), 'reviled' and 'disgraced' (4:14-16), and miscellaneous unjust sufferings (5:8-9). With this much, interpreters are in agreement.

Interpreters are also broadly in agreement that in a summary, Peter adopts a three prong strategy in this epistle, namely, (a) reshaping the believers' understanding of their Christian identity as the immediate

[2] Theories of pseudonymity or of a 'Petrine school' as author of the epistle fail to convince, and certainly create more difficulties than solve the questions they purport to answer. This article therefore accepts that 1 Peter was written by the apostle Peter, 'through Silvanus' (5:12; NRSV). For a recent review of the arguments against the pseudonymity and Petrine school hypotheses, see Jobes (2005:5-19).

[3] Earlier theories that the epistle was a baptismal liturgical homily or a patchwork of several different exhortations have now been largely abandoned by interpreters in favour of a consistent paranaesis. For a recent examination of the genre of 1 Peter, see Prasad (2000:47-52).

reason for their persecution, (b) urging them to persist in a life of holiness and peaceful non-retaliation in response to the unjust suffering, and (c) instilling a sense of hope in the midst of this suffering by stressing their forthcoming vindication at the day of the Lord. This strategy is exemplified by the instructions he gives to subjects of the government, slaves, wives, and husbands in the Petrine *haustafel* (2:11-3:7). As demonstrated in the summary to follow, the application of literary-theological and sociological methodologies to the epistle (over the last three decades) has tremendously enhanced our understanding of the details of this strategy, even if disagreement still exists as to some of its twists and turns.

Several interpreters, however, have criticized this strategy for fostering a sense of passivity that paralyzes believers into seeing themselves as helpless victims. Edward Schweizer, for example, describes the strategy as 'pagan Christianity' (1977:410). David Balch thinks it is 'repressive' (1986:97). And David Horrell warns of the 'dangers' inherent in the epistle's theology: 'The issue is not only whether the hope which the author encouraged is merely "pie-in-the-sky" but also whether using such a hope as a motivation for quiet submission amid the injustices and sufferings of the world does not place 1 Peter rather firmly into the role of "opiate of the masses"' (1998:17-18). In calling upon persecuted Christians to 'bear such suffering quietly and without complaint', Peter, Horrell continues, 'extinguishes any pressure for change with the promise of reward in heaven' (1998:55).

Writing from a feminist perspective, Kathleen Corley also criticizes Peter's use of Jesus' suffering as example of his exhorted strategy. She concludes, 'The basic message of 1 Peter does not reflect God's liberating Word' (1995:357). Similarly, Warren Carter believes that Peter's strategy, more or less, offers the obedient submission of Christian wives and slaves as 'sacrifice' to the Empire, in exchange for

the peace and tranquillity of the Christian religion (2004:14-33; cf. Dowd 1998:370-372; Fiorenza 1989:260-266). In a nutshell then, Peter's exhortation is judged by these interpreters to be weak capitulation to oppressors.

Such trenchant objections may be justifiably dismissed as worse than unfair characterizations of the epistle motivated by anachronistic modernist concerns.[4] Even so, they cannot be justly branded as empty incendiary rhetoric. For it is an undeniable fact, that some Christians today, wrongly apply Peter's teaching. For example, in her examination of the phenomenon of domestic violence in a number of U.S. churches (published in the *Los Angeles Times*), Teresa Watanabe narrates a story in which a woman, who was being subjected to physical abuse by her husband, pleaded for help from her church. Without exploring what other avenues for addressing the desperate situation were available, her pastor, evidently believing that he was correctly applying 1 Peter, asked her to go back, 'be a kinder wife; then you will win him to Christ because that is what the Bible says' (1998:9). Similarly, in their masterful evaluation of resources for counteracting domestic violence, Kroeger and Nason-Clark identify misunderstandings of 1 Peter's message as one of the fundamental problems in evangelical approaches

[4] Predictably, these objectors have not offered any reasonable ancient alternative to Peter's approach. One issue, for example, is whether it is being suggested that Peter should have encouraged the Christians to resort to violent resistance to the authorities, a reaction which was indeed adopted by some disenfranchised peoples to Roman Colonial rule. Indeed, Moffatt thinks that Peter's conciliatory attitude was exactly aimed at discouraging Christians from adopting such revolutionary responses—'a Christian, especially under the influence of apocalyptic hopes, might incur the suspicion of treason by encouraging disobedience among slaves, for example, or by sympathizing with revolutionary movements, in exasperation against the persecuting authorities. The risk of an extreme left wing among Christians was not unfounded at this period' (1928:158).

to violence in Christian homes: 'First Peter 3:1-6 is often used to argue that women should endure domestic abuse heroically in order to convert their husbands' (2010:125). Steven Tracey also points out, that such examples of misinterpretations of 1 Peter's teaching give 'credence to the feminist assertion that evangelical theology contributes to the abuse of women' (2006:279).

Accordingly, the question cannot be left unanswered. If Sarah Tanzer's conclusion, that 1 Peter's approach is 'a lofty justification for victimization, violence and abuse' (2000:498; cf. Clark 1984) is to be shown to be incorrect, an examination of whether Peter's strategy can be labelled as encouraging a sense of helpless victimhood is warranted. In other words, would the first readers of Peter's letter have understood his exhortations as encouraging a passive paralyzing acceptance of their statuses as victims, or, would they have been emboldened by it?

1.2. Recent insights into the problem

The revival in Petrine studies has followed several trajectories,[5] two of which have shed considerable light on the problem at hand—literary-theological and sociological approaches to the epistle. The literary-theological approaches to 1 Peter have improved our understanding of the text by revealing the immense influence of Old Testament theological thought on Peter's strategy. This has been in two main forms, namely, (a) regarding the influence of the traditions of the persecution and eventual vindication of the righteous sufferer of Psalm 34 and of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, and (b) in the application of the Old Testament's exodus theology to the situation of the believers in Asia Minor.

[5] For summaries of the recent developments, see Boring (2004:358-367) and Dubis (2006:199-239).

The influence of Psalm 34 on the theology of 1 Peter is widely recognized, and it's teaching regarding how the righteous are to respond to persecution in positive anticipation of their vindication clearly governs several aspects of Peter's exhortation. As Gilmour puts it, 'Psalm 34 proposes that hope and peace may be found in the midst of affliction, a theme that appears to have shaped Peter's first letter' (2004:405). This theology, according to 1 Peter, is exemplified in Jesus, whose righteous response to his sufferings was followed by his vindication at the resurrection (cf. 2:3; 3:10-12; cf. Gilmour 2004:404-411; Gréaux 2009:603-613; Kelly 1969:87; Senior and Harrington 2003:49). Similarly, the influence of Isaiah on 1 Peter has also been acknowledged (Dryden 2004:317-320; Moyise 2005:175-188; Osborne 1983:381-408; van Rensburg and Moyise 2002:275-286; Williams 2007:37-55). And in the particular case of persecution, Peter found the Suffering Servant Songs as one of the keys for shaping the self-understanding of the believing community, as well as their responses to unjust suffering (Achtemeier 1993:176-188; Borchert 1982:451-462).

This understanding of unjust suffering is coupled with Peter's transformation of the New Israel exodus imagery, to apply to the identity of the believers (Deterding 1981:58-65; Feldmeier 2008:21-27; Gupta 2009:61-76; Horrell 2007:361-381; Scharlemann 1976:165-170). In so doing, the recipients of 1 Peter are shown to share in the identity and experiences of the biblical people of God as bearers of his mission, a mission which involved experiences of servitude and exiles, interspersed with periods of deliverance and vindication.

Put together, the literary-theological examination of 1 Peter firmly places the apostle's strategy in line with scriptural traditions. Believers are persecuted because of their uniqueness and their mission as God's people. As God's exiles, they are to counter their suffering by persisting in their life of holiness and the proclamation of God's mighty acts,

while expectantly awaiting their vindication. The first readers, who would have been keenly attuned to these traditions, would have found such a message reassuring and reinvigorating, rather than paralyzing.

It is an oversimplification, but nevertheless helpful, to summarize that the sociological approach to 1 Peter categorizes its strategy with three different models, namely, inversion, acculturation / assimilation or resistance. In a pioneering contribution, John Elliot (1981) argued that the statements that the recipients of the letter were παρεπιδήμοις (exiles of the diaspora, 1:1), παροίκους (aliens, 2:11) and παρεπιδήμους (exiles, 2:11) technically identified them as displaced resident aliens in Asia Minor. According to Elliott, this social identity means that we should understand Peter's exhortations as directed largely to Christian immigrants, and marginalized people in Asia Minor with limited rights and very few options for redressing their grievances, apart from, of course, compromising their faith. Even so, Elliott argues, Peter's exhortations were aimed at constructing a Christian community identity that acted as a safe haven for the persecuted minority. The Petrine strategy was, he writes, 'to avert ... forces of social disintegration through a reinforcement of the distinctive identity of the Christian community' (Elliott 1981:217; Elliott 2000; Elliott 2007; cf. Jobes 2005:33).

The exhortations to submission, when seen in this light, were more or less equivalent to Jeremiah's letter to Jewish exiles, exhorting them as immigrants to seek the peace and tranquillity of the host nations (e.g. Jer 29). Other interpreters have pointed out that Jewish groups, such as the Qumran community, adopted similar inversion approaches to their social situation of marginalization. While not all interpreters have

agreed with Elliott's interpretation,[6] almost all agree that the extent of the social and political rights of the Christians should be considered as a major factor when evaluating Peter's strategy. In other words, Peter's exhortations must be re-contextualized in contemporary non-colonial situations, where social and political rights of Christians are less constricting (cf. Chin 1991:96-112; Green 2007:316).

One critic of Elliott, David Balch, put forward an alternative model for evaluating the Petrine exhortations. In contrast to Elliott, Balch proposed that Peter's strategy was aimed at acculturation or assimilation of Christians into the predominantly Greco-Roman culture. Drawing his insights from Hellenistic philosophy, he argued that the ultimate goal of the strategy was apologetic, namely, to reduce the criticisms by the larger society that the behaviour of the Christians was socially destabilizing. Subordination to authority, honouring the emperor, and non-retaliation would show that Christians were willing to assimilate. And this, the writer of 1 Peter reckoned, would result in a dividend of peace for the religion (Balch 1981; Balch1986:92-94). Balch himself thought that this strategy was ultimately counterproductive to the Christian faith. Even if in the short term, it ensured that the Christians were less molested by society: 'The Jewish Christian author of 1 Peter is exhorting these sectarians to accept and maintain a norm of behaviour that differs radically from the way of life legislated and encouraged in Scripture … This tendency reinforced Roman hierarchical society' (1986:96-97). Thus contrary to the

[6] Some have argued, correctly in my view, that we need not take the identification of the recipients as 'resident aliens' literally. Even so, it is admitted by most interpreters that the fundamental problem was that these Christians, be they Jewish, gentiles or more likely of mixed ethnicities, had limited social and political rights by virtue of being Christians. This is quite an important contribution by Elliott.

conclusions of the literary-theological approach, Balch thinks that Peter's approach contradicted scriptural traditions.

Balch's thesis served as linchpin for many critics of the epistle's strategy, especially feminist theologians (cf. Fiorenza 1989). Nevertheless, one benefit of his proposal was that it correctly underlined the fact that Peter's strategy encouraged Christian engagement with society that was albeit rejecting its ethics, and not the tendency toward isolationism that Elliott's approach may lead one to believe. However, Balch's thesis was rightly criticized for its anachronism, and failure to take account of the theological basis of Peter's strategy (cf. Bauman-Martin 2004:259; Martin 1983:103-105). Moreover, Balch's privileging of Hellenistic philosophy over the predominantly Jewish hermeneutics of the writer of the epistle is a major methodological flaw (Bauman-Martin 2004:263; Seland 2005:147-89; Volf 1994:15-30). As shortly demonstrated, Peter's exhortation, in the light of his Jewish hermeneutics, his call for engagement with society was in line with the holy war tradition of the Old Testament.

Paradoxically,[7] it has taken the introduction of postcolonial sociological approaches to the epistle to establish the exact nature of this engagement. Peter's strategy, in this view, was not inversion or assimilation, but a call on the believers to employ their non-retaliatory submission and holy character to resist the powers that be. Drawing from studies by sociologists and political scientists on forms of subversive resistive behaviours of colonized, oppressed, enslaved, and

[7] Paradoxically, because postcolonial approaches to 1 Peter, as exemplified by several feminist approaches, have tended to criticize the strategy of the epistle, rather than attempt to read it from the most likely effect of Peter's teaching on the ancient readers. For an overview of the various different camps in postcolonial biblical interpretation, see Segovia (1998:49-65).

marginalized peoples, aimed at resisting unjust authority,[8] a number of interpreters have found that in many ways Peter's strategy fits this pattern of resistance very well (Horrell 2007:111-143; Horsley 2004).

Bauman-Martin, for example, criticizes the failure of feminist interpreters 'to distinguish between the patriarchal misinterpretation of the letter over the years and the possibilities of interpretation it may have offered for the original readers' (2004:258). She draws on several examples of second and later century women's interpretation of the epistle to conclude that 'the actions of the Petrine women have more to do with marginal resistance than with suffering for its own sake' (2004:247; cf. Horrell 2007:111-143). This subversive and resistive stance of 1 Peter is epitomized by the hierarchy of honour, which Peter creates in 2:17: 'Honour everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honour the emperor'. In other words, God is to be feared, and the brothers and sisters loved; but, the emperor, just as everyone else, is to be merely honoured (cf. Grudem 1988:131). The first readers would have taken the hint of subversion in this placement of limitations on the degree of allegiance to the emperor.

The resistance approach to understanding the apostle's strategy has a lot in its favour. It interprets pragmatically the epistle from the stance of its recipients, and seeks to explore how they would have understood Peter's exhortation, under their ancient colonized and oppressed situation. The fact is, all 'oppressed peoples everywhere [wear] masks in their relations with those who parasitized them' (Petterson 1982:338; cf. Callahan and Horsley 1998:133-152). A simplistic evaluation of

[8] See for example Scott (1985); Scott (1990); Webster and Cooper (1996); Barclay (2005). These are wide ranging cross cultural studies examining records of Jewish behaviour under roman colonial rule, the behaviours of the African American slaves, contemporary illegal immigrants and other minorities.

Peter's strategy, without taking the nuanced nature of responses of the marginalized to their situation, was therefore bound to be inadequate.

Moreover, the resistance approach highlights that Peter's exhortations were not a call to accommodation and compromise, but a call to believers to persist in their Christian faith and praxis, and yet also to be prepared to bear the inevitably painful consequences of their holy and peaceful behaviour. Ironically, the documented popularity of 1 Peter and other New Testament slavery texts among African American slaves of the 17th to 19th century supports the view, that like their counterparts in 1st century Asia Minor, they detected the resistive language in the epistle (Martin 1998:203-233; Patterson 1982:175).

What remains is to demonstrate how this resistance fits into Peter's thoroughly theological strategy. Put another way, how does Peter's overall theological language relate to his strategy of encouraging resistance to the bullying culture?

1.3. The present proposal

In what follows, the aim is to confirm this resistive nature of Peter's theological strategy, by examining several military and quasi-military metaphors that are employed throughout the epistle, and which climax with the exhortation to resist the devil in the final chapter. By also investigating how the holy war motif in the Old Testament was reinterpreted by subsequent prophetic and New Testament writers, I will contend that Peter's strategy amounted to encouraging the use of peaceful non-retaliation, and the hope and holiness inaugurated by the redemptive work of Christ, as resistive weapons in a spiritualized holy war. The first readers of 1 Peter were seemingly empowered to see themselves as spiritual warriors, rather than being paralyzed to see themselves as helpless victims.

The basic tenet of the present proposal is that biblical metaphors are not just literary devices, but often serve as the most effective tools for shaping how the first readers responded to scripture (cf. Adams 2008:291-305; Howe 2006; Jindo 2009:222-243). Military metaphors in particular, are employed in the New Testament in several different settings and to various effects for this purpose (cf. Brink 2005:191-201; Krentz 1993:105-127). The significance of Peter's use of military metaphors should therefore be sought by investigating their theological background, especially from the Old Testament.

The article will proceed in the following three-step fashion. I will firstly summarize the features of the holy war motif in the Old Testament, and its subsequent reinterpretation as spiritualized warfare, characterized by peace and righteousness. This will be followed by exegesis of several military metaphors in 1 Peter's exhortations, which have similar connotations of holy war. The article will conclude with a brief discussion on the relevance of Peter's strategy to contemporary reflections on Christian engagement with a postmodern culture that is increasingly rejecting and marginalizing its stance.

2. Holy War and its Reinterpretation in the Bible

Also called 'divine warfare', 'Yahweh's war', 'wars of Yahweh', or '*herem'*, holy war may be simply defined as physical and/or purely metaphorical military combat that is mandated by God, and fought either by him alone, or with or wholly through the agency of his people.[9] As the definition suggests, such a war has a number of

[9] The commonest terminology in the old testament is 'wars of Yahweh' (Num 21:14; 1 Sam 18:17, 25:28), but the other features make 'divine warfare' or 'holy war' more preferred by interpreters (cf. Jones 1975:642-658; Walzer 1992:215-228). For a recent

distinctive characteristics, namely, (a) God is the initiator of the war, (b) the war involves superhuman miraculous elements, (c) the victory is assured and attributed to God, (d) the war is regarded as part of the mission of God and so of His people, and (e) because of its relationship to God's mission, the concept pervaded several aspects of the life of God's people, including the cultic, worship, and ethical dimensions.

In this respect, many interpreters of the Old Testament have argued that the biblical concept has some continuity with the conception of holy wars among the Ancient Near Eastern people, and reflects the geo-political tensions of the tribes jostling for existence in the Mediterranean region (Cross 1966; Kang 1989; Miller 1973). So, among the non-Israelite, ancient near eastern tribes, for example, the creation of the world was conceptualized as resulting from a holy war that was fought among the gods. Accordingly, holy war was regarded as part of the cosmic conflict between the gods of the nations. The physical battles fought between the tribes were therefore considered as extensions of this cosmology.

Be that as it may, the holy war concept had five different, but overlapping, types throughout Old Testament history. In the first type, the war was a purely cosmological spiritual combat between God and other gods, without human involvement. This type is more often expressed in the hymns of the Old Testament (e.g. Exod 15; Ps 18, 24; 74, 77, 89; Job 26). The depiction of God as surrounded by armed angels, as 'the Lord of hosts', is a reflection of this concept (e.g. Exod 12:41; 14:24; Deut 4:19; Josh 5:14; 2 Kgs 6:17).

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examination of the evangelistic significance of the contemporary misuse of the 'holy war' terminology in Islamic circles, see Love (2001:65-68).

The second type of holy war involved limited human combat that was an extension of the spiritual combat waged by God, in the sense that the miraculous elements of the military combat are elaborated in the biblical account. God is, in this case, depicted as fighting human enemies on behalf of his people, whose role involved largely the ransacking of the defeated army and the collection of the spoils after the holy war. Examples of this type of holy war include the war against Amalek (Exod 17), the fall of Jericho (Josh 5:13-7:26), and the retreat of the Syrian army after hearing sounds of approaching horses and chariots (2 Kgs 6-7).

The third type, which was mostly fought during the period of the judges and kings of Israel, involved much more elaborate physical military combats against geo-political and religious enemies, but with features clearly defined as holy war (e.g. Deut 32; Judg 5; 2 Sam 22; cf. Lind 1980:32).[10] Often, these wars were accompanied by attempts to either seek God's mandate before the war (e.g. 1 Sam 23:1-6), or some indication of divine permission and justification, accompanied by divine encouragement not to fear the enemy (e.g. 2 Chr 20:15-17; Deut 1:21, 3:21, 31:8; Josh 8:1, 10:8; Isa 8:12-15; 41:10). Other features include acts of ritual sanctification of the army before the war (e.g. Deut 23:13-15; Josh 3:5, 7:13), and victory celebrations with offerings of praises, liturgical rituals, sacrifices and/or temple building after the war (e.g. 1 Sam 17:54; 2 Sam 8:11-12; Ps 24:7-10; cf. Kang 1989).

The fourth and fifth types of the holy war involve various degrees of mixtures of apocalyptic, eschatological, and ethical reinterpretations of the previous three types, and began with the ministry of the prophets.

[10] It is sometimes possible to think of all the wars of Old Testament Israel as 'holy' (Firestone 1996:99-123). However, the holy war motif is restricted to subsets of wars with explicit characteristics.

The fourth type, which is mostly apocalyptic and eschatological, depicts God as divine warrior, who wages war against his enemies. And these enemies are by that virtue underlined as ethically opposed to him (Christensen 1975; Collins 1975:596-612; Hanson 1975; Millar 1976). The apocalyptic element of such a war is characterized by metaphorical and/or visionary depictions of God in warrior armour and accessories, accompanied by hosts of angels on military transport systems, such as horses and chariots, to wage war against his enemies (e.g. Dan 7, 10-12; Isa 11, 51, 59; Ps 2; Zech 9-14 cf. Collins 1975:596-612; Lynch 2008:244-263; Neufeld 1997).

The eschatological element tended to stress the futuristic aspect, and depicted the battle as occurring on 'the day of the Lord' (e.g. Isa 13: 6,9; 22:5; Joel 1:15; 2:1,11; Amos 5:8-20; Zeph 1:7-8; Zech 14:1; cf. Miller Jr. 1968:100-107; Stuart 1976:159-164; von Rad 1959, 97-108). The ethical element is often assumed, rather than elaborated, in the fourth type of prophetic holy war. But, the enemies of God are identified, not by virtue of their wrong doing, but principally, by their lack of allegiance to him. Israel is never God's enemy in this category of spiritual warfare, and indeed, the promise of eschatological holy war serves the function of assuring God's people of their impending deliverance and vindication.

The fifth type of holy war depiction, like the fourth, also contains apocalyptic, eschatological, and ethical components. But the ethical dimension is considerably more emphasized than in the previous one. God's enemies are identified, not only by their lack of allegiance to him, but also, because of their lack of moral qualities such as justice, peace and righteousness. In this regard, also, sinful Israel, and specifically those in its midst who have broken the covenant, are equally God's enemies against whom he conducts this spiritual warfare

(e.g. Isa 59; Dan 11:32-33; cf. Banwell 1977:55-60; Janzen 2003:21-31).

For example, in Isaiah 59, God is depicted as a warrior threatening to turn against his people because of their 'transgressions', 'iniquities', and lack of 'justice' (Isa 59:9-11). As part of this spiritualized holy war against sin, God would put on 'righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle' (Isa 59:17) to march against his people, who behaved like drunkards that 'stumble at noon as in the twilight' (Isa 59:11). Similarly, in Isaiah 11, the Messiah is depicted as a divine warrior dressed in his armour, 'righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins' (11:5). And the result of his holy war is eschatological peace and knowledge of God—'the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea' (11:9).

This Isaianic reinterpretation of the holy war motif, as a divine warfare to establish peace and holiness, is made even more striking for our purposes in the Servant Songs, where it intermingles with the idea of the persecuted fate of the faithful servant (cf. Blenkinsopp 1983:242-251; Hanson 1975:209-228). Neufeld has indeed argued that the depiction of God as a divine warrior in Isaiah 59 was a response to the earlier complaint in Isaiah 50 by the persecuted faithful that God had been slow to intervene in their suffering (1997:17). God's response to this complaint by the persecuted faithful, in Isaiah 59, was to promise an eschatological holy war, characterized by righteousness and peace. As Neufeld puts it, 'the author of Isaiah 59 has adapted the scenario of the faithful servant who is abused by faithless people to the fate of Yahweh's virtues at the hands of those who have turned against their God' (1997:35). In other words, the promised holy war to establish

righteousness and peace was God's way of dealing with the persecuted situation of the righteous.

This reinterpretation of the holy war motif in apocalyptic, eschatological, and ethical directions continues in the New Testament.[11] Most interpreters believe, for example, that Jesus' exorcisms were part of a wider holy war theme of his ministry, which climaxed with his victorious resurrection (Duff 1992:55-71; Gombis 2010; Huie-Jolly 1997:191-217; Kovac 1995:236-247; McCurley 1983; Riccoeur 1967). That he achieved this victory through his redemptive suffering not only underlines his fulfilment of Isaiah's Suffering Servant prophecies, but also, indicates the tremendous transformation of the holy war motif itself. In Jesus, and subsequently through him and his people, enduring righteous suffering becomes a weapon through which God wages war against his enemies.

The theme is also present in other parts of the New Testament. The apocalyptic aspect of holy war receives its most extensive treatment in Revelation (cf. Collins 1976; Day 1985). Three Pauline epistles also apply the motif, in which God's redeemed people partake of the spiritualized holy war in apocalyptic, eschatological, and ethical dimensions. In Ephesians 6, for example, believers are exhorted to put on the divine armour, which was previously described by Isaiah, in order to wage war against evil spiritual powers (cf. Asumang 2008:1-19; Janzen 2003:21-31; Neufeld 1997). It must be noted that the list of weapons in Ephesians 6 includes Christian virtues that are inaugurated by Christ's redemptive work. As Timothy Gombis has shown, the

[11] Within the inter-testamental literature the motif is continued in several different directions. The Qumran War Scroll, for example, demonstrates a tendency to mix the apocalyptic and ethical element with a literal interpretation of the holy war motif. The Maccabean literature, on the other hand, moved in the direction of regarding martyrdoms as extension of this motif (cf. Brownlee 1983:281-292).

Ephesian account of spiritual warfare in the final chapter is actually preceded by the divine warrior interpretation of Jesus' death and resurrection in Ephesians 2, through which believers are redeemed and the church established (2004:403-418). The army of God is thus created by Christ's resurrection.

Asumang has also shown that Paul's ethical exhortations in Romans 13:11-14 are derived from this reinterpretation of the holy war motif (2007:1-22). A similar phenomenon occurs in 1 Thessalonians 5, where the apocalyptic and eschatological dimensions of the holy war motif are combined with ethical instructions as part of preparations for the second coming of Christ (cf. Longman III 1982:290-307; Neufeld 1997:73-91).

It must therefore be concluded that the three dimensional interpretation of the holy war motif in Isaiah continues in the New Testament, where believers share in God's mission by employing weapons of righteousness and peace to wage spiritual war. As demonstrated in the following section, Peter's specific contribution to this trend is to underline the manner in which this war may be waged by the persecuted righteous, as it was the case with Isaiah's Suffering Servant.

3. Holy Resistance as Holy War in 1 Peter

Most interpreters now accept that 1 Peter has an organic unity. And as a diasporic paranaetic letter-homily, it is designed to climax in the final chapter (e.g. Feldmeier 2008:18; Horrell 1998:12; Jobes 2005:53-54; Thomas and Thomas 2006). This indeed is demonstrated by the increasing intensity of its three major themes as the letter proceeds:

1. The scattered christological passages of 1:18-21, 2:21-25, 3:18-22 are in fact chronologically arranged to follow 'the story of Christ' that climaxes in the final instalment in his triumphal post

resurrection proclamation of victory to the imprisoned spirits (cf. Dalton 1989; Horrell 1998:69-72), a christology which itself, is patterned after the holy war motif.

2. The accounts of the sufferings of the believers are gradually unveiled in degrees of intensity, peaking in the final exhortation, with the reference to being 'devoured' by the devil, the roaring lion.
3. This gradual unveiling of the sufferings is matched in a parallel fashion by a similarly progressive intensity of the responses that believers are to make to the sufferings, culminating in the final exhortation to 'resist' the devil in 5:8-11.

First Peter 5:8-11, therefore, acts as the *peroratio* of the letter-homily (cf. Feldmeier 2008:245; Thurén 1995:181-184). And accordingly, it is prudent to begin the examination of Peter's strategy from this final exhortation.

3.1. Resisting the devil, the roaring lion (1 Pet 5:8-9)

In his final exhortation, Peter challenges the believers to be sober and watchful while resisting the devil, the roaring lion. Several features of that exhortation echo the holy war motif. Firstly, the identification of the devil, as the enemy to be firmly resisted, places that exhortation in the holy war context. As astutely put by Horrell, 'The terse imperatives here sound like the instructions given to those who must face a battle, indeed the author doubtless believed that the end-time, the last days in which he and his readers were living, would be a time of evil and suffering, and time of climactic conflict between good and evil' (1998:96; cf. Grudem 1988:203). As shown below, 'resist [the devil]' in 5:9 only makes explicit the implicit call to spiritual war throughout the epistle.

Secondly, the depiction of the devil as a 'roaring lion', who devours unwatchful Christians, links the persecution of the believers with the devil's influence, and so, underlines their persecution as part of spiritual warfare. The exact source of this roaring lion imagery for the devil is debated by interpreters. Paschke (2006:489-500), however, has cogently argued that contrary to the popular view that it was derived from Psalm 21:14 (LXX) or the book of Daniel, the imagery was more likely based on the Roman *ad bestias* executions in the circuses of the empire at the time. Whichever is the most likely source, most interpreters agree that the metaphor represents 'human agents under the devil's power' (Elliott 2000:857; cf. Bigg 1978; Michaels 1988), or the ungodly 'world systems deformed by the powers of darkness and sin' (Jobes 2005:314). In either case, the imagery places the devil at the centre of the persecution of the believers in Asia Minor, and hence, underlines Peter's strategy of response as an exhortation to spiritual warfare.

Thirdly, in describing the believer's enemy as ἀντίδικος ὑμῶν διάβολος (adversary the devil), Peter closely associates the devil with the unjust suffering that the believers were facing. The word ἀντίδικος is a *hapax legomenon*, usually reserved as a technical term for official court prosecutors or accusers (e.g. Prov 18:17 LXX; cf. Job 1:6). And διάβολος is used in the LXX to identify the devil as the slanderer (cf. 1 Chr 21:1; Zech 3:1-2). What is striking in 1 Peter's use, is that these two functions of the devil—accusations and slander—are previously used throughout the epistle to describe some of the unjust sufferings that the believers were facing (e.g. 2:12, 15; 3:16; 4:14-16). In other words, in strategically identifying the enemy as ἀντίδικος ὑμῶν διάβολος, Peter unveils the devil as the slanderer and accuser-in-chief spearheading the persecution of the believers.

It is true that Peter does not put all the blame of the persecution on the devil. But, any notion that this final identification of the believers'

opponent as the devil is unrelated to the previous description of their difficulties in 1 Peter, as if 5:8-11 was an after-thought, is mistaken. Horrell, (1998:97) for example, argues that while Peter elsewhere exhorts subordination to authority, honour for the emperor, and respect for human persecutors, he calls for resistance of the devil, thus making a distinction between the devil and the human persecutors. What Horrell, however, fails to acknowledge, is that in Peter's strategy, subordination and non-retaliation are weapons of resistance.

If it is true, as most interpreters believe, that 1 Peter 5:8-11 is the *peroratio* of the letter (cf. Feldmeier 2008:245; Thurén 1995:181-184), then that final exhortation must be read as recapitulating points that have already been made, rather than introducing new ideas *per se*. As summarized by Aristotle, *peroratios* had four functions, namely, (a) securing the favour of the audience and making them reject the opposing view, (b) accentuating the main facts, (c) exciting the emotions to impress the main points on your hearers, and (d) refreshing the memory about the points by recapitulation (*Rhetoric* 3:19). Similarly, Quintilian distilled these functions of the *peroratio* into two: (a) recapitulation of the main points, and (b) arousal of the audience's emotions *(Institutio Oretaria* 6:1.1-55). Certainly, introducing new unrelated concepts was contrary to the nature and purpose of the *peroratio*.

First Peter 5:8-11 excites the emotions with the intensely fierce metaphors of a pacing lion seeking to devour Christians. And its exhortations recapitulate the already stated strategy of the letter in an abridged fashion. It must therefore be concluded that the holy war motif is not restricted to 5:8-11, but also occurs in the rest of the letter (cf. Leigh 2004:122-140).

Fourthly, outside of 1 Peter's triple use (1:13; 4:7; 5:8), the call to sobriety is rare in the New Testament. It is however employed as part of ethical exhortations in a spiritualized holy war context in 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 and Romans 13:11-14, where as in 1 Peter 5:8, they are also linked with spiritual conflict and a call to wakefulness.[12] As stated earlier, the Old Testament background of this phenomenon, namely, associating sobriety with the holy war motif, is in Isaiah 59, where the opponents who are at the receiving end of God's fury, are metaphorically depicted as disoriented drunkards (59:10). As it will be shown, a similar linkage (call to sobriety with holy war) occurs in 1 Peter 1:13. The spiritual battle requires a focused resolution of the mind against the enemy, in whatever guises he appears.

Fifthly, the New Testament often uses the specific word ἀντίστητε (resist, 5:9a) in the context of spiritual warfare associated with persecution and/or temptations. It is certainly used by James (4:7) against the devil, by Jesus against evil in general (Matt 5:39) and persecuting adversaries in particular (Luke 21:15; cf. Acts 6:10), and by Paul in describing the spiritual opposition of Moses by Pharaoh's magicians (2 Tim 3:8).[13] So, the call to resistance in 1 Peter 5:9 specifically summarizes the epistle's exhortations as a call to spiritual warfare.

Sixth, while the exhortation in 5:9b to be 'steadfast' does not, on its own, demand a holy war interpretation, given the present context, it may well be related to it. As a military metaphor, στερεοὶ (literally, 'solidly stand against') is used to describe the solid front with which the

[12] The only other place where it is employed, outside a holy war context, is in the pastorals as part of qualifications for church leadership (1 Tim 3:2, 11; Tit 1:8; 2:2, 4, 6; cf. Feldmeier 2008:244).

[13] The only place in the New Testament that ἀντίστητε is used outside this context is in Romans 13:2, where it involved resisting human authority.

army is to stand its ground against the enemy on the battle field. And it is in this sense that its cognates are used in Ephesians 6:11-13. Given the other evocations of the holy war motif in 1 Peter 5:8-11; the call to steadfastness should also be regarded as complementing the holy war imagery.

Finally, the qualifying statement providing the context and motivation for resisting the devil in 5:9c, εἰδότες τὰ αὐτὰ τῶν παθημάτων τῇ ἐν [τῷ] κόσμῳ ὑμῶν ἀδελφότητι (literally, 'knowing that the same sufferings are occurring in the world of your brothers and sisters') stresses that the call to holy resistance is directly related to the persecution of the believers. Grudem (1988:204) and Horrell (1998:97) have pointed out that Peter's aim here is to remind the believers that they were not alone in their sufferings. This is correct. However, the main point of this qualification, as the construction εἰδότες (having known, i.e. on the basis of the information just stated) indicates, is to stress that resisting the devil was directly related to their persecution. The qualification of 5:9c, therefore, establishes that the exhorted strategy of the epistle (responding to persecution with hope and holiness) was part of resisting the devil, the arch slanderer.

Put together, the call to vigilance, sobriety, steadfastness, and resistance in Peter's final exhortation (5:8-9) was the recapitulation of several battle cries throughout the epistle to the persecuted believers. They cannot approach their Christian engagement with the persecuting society as helpless victims, but as emboldened spiritual warriors resisting the devil in the midst of their experience of unjust suffering. And this climactic development of the holy war motif is the high point of several of its other themes in the rest of the epistle, to which attention now turns.

3.2. Continually guarded by God's power (1 Pet 1:5)

Within the context of the *berakah* of 1 Peter 1:3-12, in which the apostle praises God for his work of salvation, the word φρουρουμένους (guarded) is used to describe one of the benefits of our salvation. This word is a technical military term for describing a military guard, who protects the city against invasion, while at the same time, keeping the beleaguered inhabitants from escaping (Louw and Nida 1988).[14] As several interpreters have underlined, the background of this use of the word in 1:5 is the exodus theology of the epistle, in which salvation is depicted as entering the Promised Land to take possession of the believer's inheritance (e.g. Grudem 1988:63; Fieldmeier 2008:71). In that case, the use of φρουρουμένους evokes the imagery of the military fortifications of the cities of the Promised Land, an interpretation that was quite common with inter-testamental Jews (e.g. Philo's *Moses* 1.235; *Wisdom* 17:16; *Judith* 3:6). This then begins the military connotations of the exodus theology as of 1 Peter.

As stated earlier, holy war in the Old Testament usually began with rituals aimed at fortifying the army in preparation for the war. Here, in 1 Peter, it is stated in the *berakah* that the resurrection of Jesus has resulted in the new birth of these believers. And their resultant life involved a holy war, in which they are guarded from the effects of the external attacks, as well as from escaping from God's powerful fortification. It is from that vantage point of a secure salvation that they engage the persecuting enemy. The reference to the instrumentality of faith in 1:5b also buttresses this point. As in Ephesians 6:16, faith in God's guarding power is a key part of the believer's spiritual armour.

[14] The NIV's 'shielded' is thus a weak translation, dealing only with protection against invasion.

3.3. Girding up the loins of your minds (1 Pet 1:13)

The anatomically contorted, 'almost unintelligible phrase' (Grudem 1998:80) in 1:13, urging the believers to gird up the loins of their minds, does not, on its own, immediately evoke military ideas. In the ancient Semitic and Mediterranean context, it simply refers to gathering and putting the fringes of one's clothing in shape and around the hips as part of preparation for a swift action of some sort. 'Roll up your sleeves" is its modern equivalent (Jobes 2005:111). It is certainly used in this general sense in the Old Testament, among others, in relation to Elijah (1 Kgs 18:46), Elisha's instructions to his servants (2 Kgs 4:29, 9:1) and God's challenge to the self-absorbed Job (Job 38:3; cf. Jer 1:17).[15] In that case, 1 Peter 1:13 calls upon the believers to abandon mental sloppiness and fogginess of thought, and get themselves in shape for the dual responses of hoping in 'the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you', and being holy (1:13-16). This underlines that the believers were to regard hope and holiness as positive responses, rather than part of passive resignation to their situation.

However, there are several indications that Peter may have had the specific scenario of girding up of military clothing for military action in mind. Firstly, given the preponderance of the new exodus imagery of the passage (Deterding 1981:58-65; Gupta 2009:61-76; Jobes 2005:111; Scharlemann 1976:165-170), the call to gird up the loins of the mind, is directly meant to allude to Israel's preparations for exodus as instructed in Exodus 12:11: 'This is how you shall eat it: *your loins girded*, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the Passover of the Lord'. In that case, it is reasonable to

[15] Indeed it could be legitimately taken that the job reference echoes here in 1 Peter 1:13. Peter exhorts the believers to desist from a muddled self-absorption in their suffering and respond to it with a clear-minded active alertness.

conclude that the military imagery, which started in 1:5, continues here in 1:13. For as Lind (1980:46-47) has shown, the depiction of the preparations for the exodus in the Pentateuch, underlines it, and the crossing of the Red Sea, as a holy war, and the Israelites represented as spiritual warriors (cf. Kang 1989:114-121).

Secondly, the call to 'gird up the loins of the mind' is linked to the call to sobriety in 1:13. The call to sobriety (5:8) enhances the holy war imagery there. Its presence in 1:13, alongside other features, also seem to support the view that the holy war motif is present.

And thirdly, in Ephesians 6:14, Paul describes the girdle as a key component of the spiritual armour of the believer. The military interpretation of 1:13 is therefore not an isolated description in the New Testament. In Paul's writings,[16] the metaphorical girdle is described as truth; and, in Isaiah 11:5, the divine warrior's girdle around his waist is described as righteousness and faithfulness. The exact referent of the girdle in 1 Peter 1:13 is not stated, even though it is related to mental alertness. Given that the recipients of the epistle are urged to action with sobriety, discipline, hope, and holiness, the impression is that the idea in 1:13 correlates with the girdle imagery of the armour in both Isaiah and Ephesians. The mental alertness holds their resistive actions together.

3.4. Fleshy desires which war against the soul (1 Pet 2:11)

It is unanimously held by interpreters that the Petrine *haustafel* begins in 2:11, with 2:11-12 serving as the summary introducing the *haustafel's* basic principles, and that the subsequent verses explicate the

[16] For a recent review of the implications of the similarities between the Pauline and Petrine letters, see Jobes (2005:11-13).

details of this summary (cf. Bauman-Martin 2004:253-279; Feldmeier 2008:144-150; Grudem 1988:121; Horrell 1998:45; Jobes 2005:166). Hence, these two verses lay out the key features of Peter's practical exhortations on Christian engagement with society. The features may be categorized as follows: (a) Christians should accept their identity as foreign bodies in society, (b) they should abstain from desires which war against the soul, (c) they must positively employ honourable conduct and good works towards non-Christians, (d) they must desist from retaliation when maligned, but instead look forward to 'the day of visitation'. Even when these features are not stated in each of the four scenarios of the *haustafel*, they should be taken as assumed in the background of 2:11-3:7 (cf. Jobes 2005:172).

In this regard, the military metaphor στρατεύονται (wage war) in 2:11 clearly situates Christian existence in the world as in itself an internal spiritual conflict between the old and new natures, a conflict which requires the believer's constant assertion of victory and self-control. Στρατεύονται was part of a common vocabulary of exhortations to moral development in Hellenistic circles (cf. Fieldmeier 2008:148; Volf 1994:25). It will however be a mistake to miss the thoroughly Jewish nature of the concept in 2:11. In its Diasporic Jewish sense, στρατεύονται was essentially used to refer to the fight for inner spiritual integrity as part of maintaining one's relationship with God (e.g. Philo [*Ebr* 111; QG 4.74; *Leg* 2.106; *Opif* 79-81]; 4 Macc 3:5; *Apocalypse of Moses* 19:3; 25:4; 28:4).

Peter places this call for subjugating 'the enemy within' first as the prelude for strong engagement of society, and for good reasons. In the context of the holy war idea, this relates to the requirement for the sanctification of soldiers, self-control, and abstention from sexual relations as part of the preparations for, and conduct of, battle (cf. 2 Sam 11:11; Deut 23:10). Peter has evidently reinterpreted and

transformed this to become a general exhortation to ensure internal spiritual integrity, as precursor to a confident Christian's engagement with society. The choice of military metaphor in 2:11 was therefore deliberate.

A point in support of the holy war idea in this passage is Peter's reference to 'the day of visitation' in 2:12. This 'day' clearly refers to the eschatological time of the Lord's second coming (Michaels 1988:118; Jobes 2005:172; contra Elliott 2000:47). But, its linkage with the exhortations in 2:11-12, no doubt, evokes the holy war connotations of 'the day of the Lord' imagery of the Old Testament. As observed earlier, holy war was apocalyptically conceptualized as occurring on 'the day of the Lord' (cf. Miller Jr. 1968:100-107; Stuart 1976:159-164; von Rad 1959:97-108). In the Old Testament, the specific designation of 'the day of visitation' is more explicitly stated in Isaiah 10:3 to refer to the time of God's judgement. Hence, it is the same as 'the day of the Lord', which, as has been observed, is linked to the eschatological aspects of the holy war motif (cf. Fieldmeier 2008:150; Horrell 1998:48; contra Grudem 1988:124). Peter does not repeat the holy war language within the rest of the *haustafel*. However, the holy war language in the introductory summary in 2:11-12 firmly places the specific exhorted actions of the *haustafel* under the holy war rubric.

3.5. Do not fear what they fear … but … sanctify Christ as Lord (1 Pet 3:14-15)

It is universally agreed among interpreters that the encouragement not to be afraid, but 'in your heart sanctify Christ as Lord', is a modification of Isaiah 8:12-13: 'Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears, or be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your

fear, and let him be your dread'. As this statement stands in Isaiah, the holy war concept is clearly present. Firstly, the statement is made to Isaiah and Judah, because the Southern Kingdom was militarily threatened by an alliance of the Northern Kingdom and Syria. Secondly, and as was earlier observed, the encouragement by God not to fear, and in the context of a threat of war, was a feature of the holy war motif (e.g. Exod 12:41; Deut 1:21, 3:21, 4:19, 14:24, 31:8; Josh 8:1, 10:8; Isa 8:12-15, 41:10; 2 Chr 20:15-17; Josh 5:14; 2 Kgs 6:17). Thirdly, the description of God as 'the LORD of hosts' also features in a holy war context. Therefore, Isaiah 8:12-13 certainly evokes a holy war setting.

Whether in his modification of the words of Isaiah Peter also intended to transfer the holy war idea, may, on the other hand, be argued. In the case of 1 Peter, the threats the first readers faced to their faith and allegiance to Christ were severe enough, and Peter may well have found *only* the words of encouragement to Isaiah and Judah in Isaiah 8 fitting for the believers, without wanting to transfer the whole holy war setting with his citation. As Jobes understands it, 'First Peter takes the quote up in an entirely different historical context, but with the same purpose of encouraging his readers in the face of threat, applying it to Christians who are not facing hostile powers beyond their borders but adversaries from within their own society' (Jobes 2005:229).

However, since throughout the epistle Peter depicts the believers as inheriting the identity and promises of Israel, it is not unlikely that he aims to depict the engagement with the hostile society as a reinterpretation of the holy war motif of Isaiah 8. The encouragement not to fear adversaries, taken together with the quotation of Isaiah 8:12-13, implies that Peter also intended to adopt the holy war setting.

It may also be countered that the phrase 'the LORD of hosts' in Isaiah 8:13 is christologically modified by Peter, and hence, reduces the holy

war imagery in 3:14-15. But, the evocations of the holy war motif in 1 Peter 3:14-15 are not completely muted. As already noted, in Peter's conceptualization, the 'story of Christ', especially his resurrection which immediately follows this quotation (3:16-22), is depicted as a holy war. The christological modification of 'the LORD of hosts' in Isa 8:13 into 'Christ as Lord' in 1 Peter 3:15 does not, therefore, remove the holy war context of the citation, but rather, reinforces it. For, it is the victorious Christ who is to be revered as Lord by his followers facing persecution. Peter has accordingly adapted the motif to address the believers as spiritual warriors, whose apologetic mission is to be regarded as holy war (cf. Poe 1991:189-193; Wagner 2008:76-106). This passage indicates that the first readers would not have seen themselves as passive victims.

3.6. Arm yourselves with the same intention as Christ's (1 Pet 4:1)

First Peter 4:1 is one of several verses in the epistle, in which Jesus is presented as model for the believers to emulate. Here, Peter refers to Jesus' suffering, and urges the believers to ὁπλίσασθε (literally, 'arm yourselves') as part of the mind-set and disposition to face the unjust suffering of the world. Apart from the explicit use of the military metaphor, the direct relation to Jesus' suffering underlines this passage as a call to holy war. As stated earlier, like the rest of the New Testament, Peter's christology depicts the suffering and death of Christ as holy war, followed of course by his resurrection and proclamation of victory to the imprisoned spirits (3:17-22). Peter thus naturally compares the military connotations in Jesus' sufferings and resurrection to the mission of the believers. They must face up the persecuting world as soldiers of Christ, on whom they model their response. Peaceful non-retaliatory response to unjust suffering, by which Jesus wrought his victory, was equally their spiritual weapon.

In a summary, the explicit call to resist the devil in the final exhortation of 1 Peter is the peak of several descriptions in the letter, that the believers were involved in a spiritualized holy war. Peter's exhortations to holiness and non-retaliation were weapons of spiritual battle, designed and employed by their Lord, for defeating the enemy. The first recipients of 1 Peter would have read his epistle as a call to resistance, and not to passive resignation.

4. The Relevance of Peter's Strategy for Today

Peter's strategy has important significance to Christian engagement with contemporary culture. In many parts of the world, conservative evangelical Christians are increasingly faced with intimidation and antagonism to their faith and practices. While the degree of persecution in the West may not be to the extent that the first recipients in Asia Minor experienced, the temptation they faced, as to whether to withdraw into themselves, or to accommodate, compromise and assimilate to the demands of popular culture is the same for us as it was for them. In Africa, Asia, Central and South America, and the Middle East, the persecution may even be at a higher level of severity. The temptation to believers, however, is the same today as it was for the brothers and sisters of the 1st century. The message of 1 Peter is therefore as immensely relevant to Christian praxis today, as it was to the first readers.

In that case, the present study makes two basic contributions to the current discussion on how best to respond to the antagonistic environment Christians are increasing finding themselves in—one negative and the other positive. On the negative side, this article confirms that resistance is the correct response to a culture that seeks to bully Christians into 'toeing the line". The way of the Lord, and as

reiterated by the apostle, is one in which his mission must be served not through compromise, and retreat, but through an emboldened resistance that is prepared to suffer for the consequences of that stance.

Positively, the present study underlines that the weapons of resistance are very different from what the world would imagine. They are weapons of holy character, peaceful non-retaliation, and Spirit-empowered witness. Far from being weak, these and other Spirit-filled qualities are spiritual weapons of the holy war that Christ has fought and won. As his following soldiers, we can engage the bullying world with emboldened resistance, just as 1 Peter aimed to achieve in its first readers.

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