

REFLECTION¹

The letter of 1 Peter, the language and the content, was written to a congregation of Gentiles, Christians in Asia Minor who had come to believe that Jesus Christ, the God of Israel, would end the present evil age in an apocalypse. These followers of Jesus perceived themselves to be suffering due to their conversion to following Jesus and even their participation in the church. At that time, most of these people were slaves and, as a result of their conversion, suffered at the hands of their masters, and even many scholars think that the members of the unconverted Gentile community were harassing these people.

(1Pet 3:16 But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then, if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.)

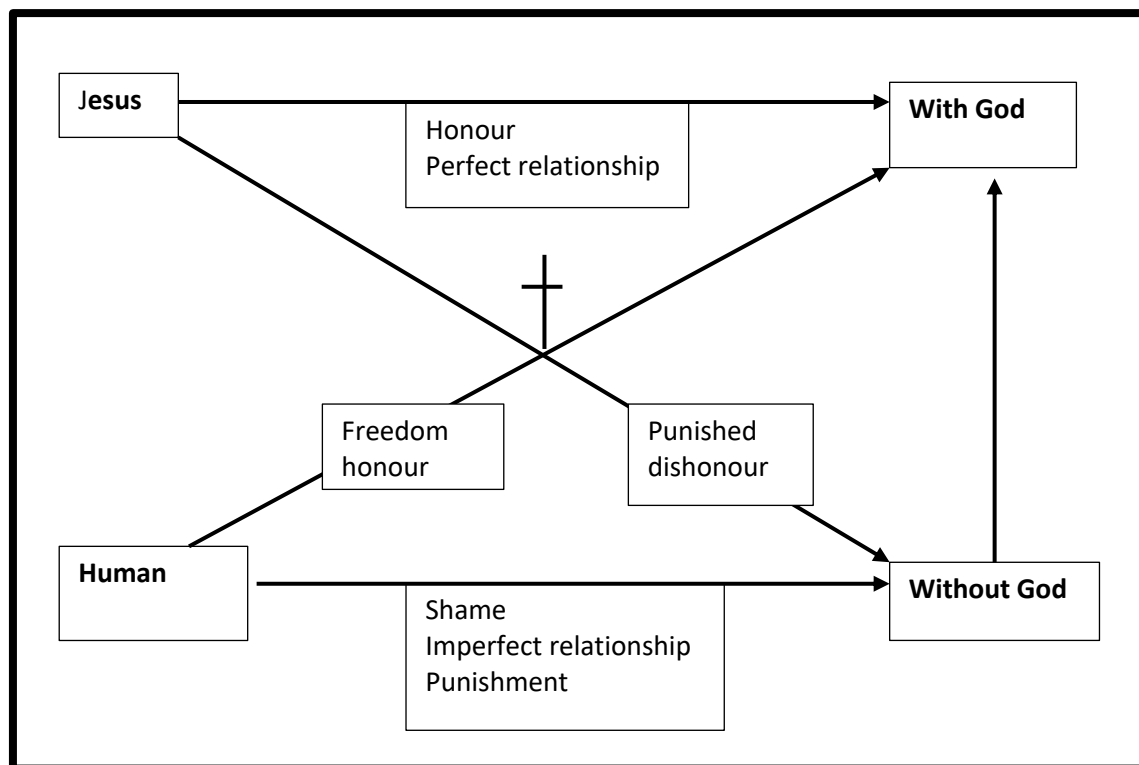
The suffering in this context refers specifically to the suffering that results from living according to Christian values in the midst of a culture that looks down on those values. In our context, we live in an era where sometimes, as a youth, we are afraid to tell our friends that we belong to a church. Where science, which in my view reveals God's creation and presence with us, instead seems to fight against the existence of God and the salvation message.

Peter drew the people's attention to the suffering of Jesus on the cross and encouraged them that Christ gave the community the definitive example of how they should suffer in trying to live out their faith. Peter offered words of encouragement and hope to people who were being persecuted, entreating them to remain strong in the faith, unified in love and humble in spirit. Again, this reminds us that our Lord suffered before he died on the cross. Yet his suffering was not caused by God; rather, it was the result of Christ's faithfulness to his mission of reconciling us to God. This mystery of our faith is what some find hard to believe. Christ embarked on this mission to come and reconcile us to God. It was not a mission that was easy, but because of you and I, Jesus chose to take it upon himself to go through even death for my sake, for your sake; it reminds me of "the movie Lord of the Ring." The Ring needed to be taken back for all to have their peace and feel safe. Like the mission Frodo accepted, when all failed, God's son Jesus accepted to take up this mission to bring us back to restore the broken relationship between humanity and God.²

¹ Based on 1 Peter 3:18-22 and Mark 1:9-15.

² Archibald M Hunter and Elmer G. Homrighausen, *The Interpreter's Bible, A Commentary in Twelve Volume*, Abingdon Press.

So diagrammatically,



By suffering and dying, Jesus not only defeated death but defeated suffering as well. Hispanic theologians like Roberto Goizueta describe the work of Jesus as “accompaniment.” Through his life, suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus has become the one who walks with us. There is no experience- tragedy or triumph, joy or sorrow- that is unknown to Christ (in Paul's words (nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:39b)

Jurgen Moltmann has said, “The death of Jesus on the cross is the centre of all Christian theology.”³ In 1 Peter, it is as if these verses answer the seeker's question, "Who was Jesus, and what does he mean to me?

There is cause and effect at work here:

Jesus suffered /we are made righteous before God.

Jesus was put to death/ we are saved from our sins.

God saves/ we are baptized in water.

³ The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1973),204.

Jesus was resurrected/ we must do good

Jesus ascended into heaven/, and all things are subject to him.

Jesus is God's son, and I have experienced his love and his grace. I am not speaking to you from just books I have read, but as someone who is passionate about youth. Christianity, life in Christ is hopeful and peaceful. Like Frodo in the "Lords of the Ring" movie, life comes with its "ring", but whichever ring it is, like Roberto Goizueta's "accompaniment", Jesus has become the one who walks with us and leads us.

By Rev Samuel Annan