Institute for Christian Studies

FACULTY BULLETIN

Number 3

October, 1982

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FOREWORD

In times of moral confusion, sensitive persons are tempted to denounce the perversity of their fellows. Some are tempted to nostalgia for bygone days; others, in despair, simply yield to hysteria. What the present unsettled age needs, however, is neither moralistic condemnation nor pious exhortation to the good. Rather, in the first instance, what is needed today is a clear vision of the good.

In many ways it was in a similar climate that the early Christian movement experienced rapid growth. Men like Justin, Tatian, and Tertullian indicate that the moral earnestness of Christians first commended Christianity to them. It may well be that in the present age that it will be the moral vision of Christian faith--and the faithful lives of individual Christians--that commend themselves to those whose lives are without meaning and direction. These essays are directed toward clarifying that vision and the situation which it illuminates.

A word of thanks is due to groups in Dallas, Houston and elsewhere who aided in the developing of the ideas here presented. Special thanks is also due to Mrs. Nancy Tindel, Faculty Secretary, for her invaluable aid in preparing these manuscripts.

Michael R. Weed, Editor

SECTARIAN LIFESTYLE: AN ALTERNATIVE MORAL VISION IN THE FIRST AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

by Allan McNicol

By now it is all too evident that something is desperately wrong with Western culture. The moral traditions of this country, heavily indebted to our Protestant heritage, have broken down. The Issue today is not so much what should a person do in a particular situation but how, in our pluralistic society, can we find a common basis to assess what is the difference between a moral and an immoral action?

All one needs to do is to walk around certain neighborhoods of any of our great cities and he will quickly know what I am talking about. The panorama consists inevitably of a strange collection of “gay bars, “ massage parlors, and pornography shops. Drifting around on the streets among the general populace will be a considerable number of unwed teenage mothers, traumatized handicapped and elderly citizens, and addicts of all kinds. Morally sensitive persons cry out for an alternative to this disturbing state of affairs.

It would be comforting to say that in its congregational life the church offers

an alternative to this bleak situation. Honesty, however, compels us to question the level of moral growth and maturity of many Christians. To be sure, Paul reminds us that before the eschaton we do not attain perfection (Phil. 3:12). But all too often factors such as an increasing divorce rate, concentration on the accumulation of wealth, the pursuit of social acceptance rather than transcendental values, and a general disregard for the poor indicate that the maturity of many Christians is suspect. Christian lifestyle too frequently is not discernably different from that of the world.[2] In that more seekers than we suppose occasionally cast their eyes wistfully toward the Christian vision as a possible alternative to the current moral morass, it is doubly tragic that our moral performance does not match our rhetoric.[3]

The current crisis in Christian moral maturity poses a particular problem to the Christian witness. Congregations are filled with people who, sickened with equivocations, became Christians on the grounds that there was at least one community that adopted as normative a simple common sense rendering of the New Testament for all aspects of the Christian life. This was, and still is, a tremendous advantage when non-denominational Christians discuss, for example, matters such as baptism or the Lord's Supper. But, by and large, these issues are only peripheral areas of concern for a decreasing number of even the faithful today. In the church, the real issues are increasingly about the fundamental validity of the whole Christian enterprise. Questions being raised are more nearly, "How can I raise my children so they will choose to be Christians?" or, "Are the benefits that accrue from my belief

in Christ and the Christian vision enough to sustain the effort I have put into this enterprise?" The answers to these questions cannot be found simply by looking up the answer in the New Testament as we would look in the back of an arithmetic book for the answer to a problem. Given the shift of weight to such questions, how is our traditional plea--which tended to focus on the restoration of the Christian doctrines--relevant to the present moral crisis?

In this essay I wish to suggest a way out of the present situation. The thrust of this new focus is to change the metaphor with respect to our view of the New Testament. Given the present cultural situation which demands that Christians reclaim the moral power of Scripture, I propose that we change the metaphor for approaching the Bible from "blueprint" to "key."[4] The study of the New Testament as "key" opens the door to understanding the struggling first-century Christian communities' moral development after they took up the task of faithfully remembering what God had done in the history of Israel and in Christ. Based on the character of God acting in dynamic tension with the reality of their present world, early Christians strove against tremendous odds to live faithful and mature lives.[5] We may learn much from their struggles and achievements. In a formal way, Christians today are in a similar situation to those Christians in the first centuries. We constitute a remembering community which exists to live by and perpetuate what came to light in God's faithful care for his creation in Israel and in Jesus Christ. Materially, of course, our social circumstances are very different from those

of the first century. Nevertheless, to trace the course of how the early Christians left their old world and acknowledged the lordship of Christ can inform us as we struggle in our present situation to develop lives that are congruent with the character and purpose of God.

Early Christians Encounter a Hostile World

Much like ourselves, the earliest Christians existed in a pluralistic world. Churches throughout the Eastern parts of the Mediterranean existed in diverse cultures even though they came under the general umbrella of the Roman Empire. Any analysis of the setting of early Christianity must look at least briefly at the particular history and situation of various Christian groups in the different geographical areas of the Empire.

I intend first to examine the general pagan reaction to the morality of the Christians and the Christian response when it first became an important factor for them in the second century. Then I will more closely examine the moral problems of churches in the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia who received a letter we know as 1 Peter.[6] In closing, I will draw some conclusions relevant to our present situation.

In the first century, Christianity was of minor concern to the writers, historians, and artists of the Roman Empire. In fact, practically no non-Christian materials commenting directly on Christianity can be dated positively from the first

century.[7] In the early second century, however, a spate of writings appears among the Romans on the subject of Christianity. This probably indicates that steady growth in the church during this period increasingly forced Rome to come to grips with Christianity.[8]

The central problem arising between Christians and pagans in this period seems to be in the pagan perception that Christianity was a crude superstition (superstitio) undermining the received moral traditions of the culture.[9] It is important to note that to the Romans superstitio designated practices and customs foreign to Roman piety and good taste (such as Bacchic rites, Druid religion, and certain bizarre activities of the Egyptians).[10] According to Plutarch superstitio led to irrational belief in untrustworthy gods, undermined the trustworthiness of any religion, and ultimately produced atheism.[11] Thus among intelligent citizens of the Empire in the early part of the second century of our era, by labeling Christianity as superstitio, concerned thinkers were saying that the veneration of a crucified Messiah was a threat that would undermine the received religions and patriotism of the citizenry.[12] Inevitably, pagans equating Christianity with such sects as the Druids and the followers of Isis and Osiris led to suspicions about the lack of virtue among Jesus' followers.[13] As one writer has quipped, "The Romans not the Christians were the puritans."[14]

The Apologists for the second century responded to the taunts of adversaries. Clearly, if one placed himself in the sandals of a pagan in the second century as he

surveyed the level of moral virtue of Christians, an interesting picture comes into view. On the one hand, the pagan would see examples of extreme moral virtue among Christians superior even to that among the most ethical pagans.[15] On the other hand, there were those calling themselves Christian who participated in bizarre rites such as eating the Eucharist nude.[16] It is little wonder that the pagan reaction to all of this was some what mixed. To be sure, some were bewildered that such "virtues" as contempt of death, restraint in sexual expression, pursuit of justice, and concern for the outcast came from such a despised underclass as the Nazarenes.[17] Yet others considered Christians to be the scum of the earth and thought that the Empire would be better off without them.[18] Under these circumstances it is understandable that a crucial defense of the faith on the part of the Apologists is the commendation of Christianity as leading to virtue on the part of it adherents.[19] Bizarre moral practices, the Apologists argued, are those taken up and carried out among fringe groups on the edge of the faith. They do not represent genuine Christianity. Therefore it is invalid to draw conclusions about the genuine truth of Christianity through the expressions of behavior of these cults.

In summary, Christians were generally believed to belong to a social class that deserved only contempt on the part of patriotic citizens. In part, some Christians brought on these pagan evaluations by their bizarre manner of behavior. But this is not the whole story. Certain pagans noticed there was widespread concern for justice, the poor, and a humble lifestyle among the despised people called

Christians. Perhaps it was not virtue in the traditional pagan sense, but it had a beauty of its own. The Apologists seized upon this virtue, arguing that it was congruent with a people who followed a crucified Messiah. They charged that the pagans should encourage people with such virtues and not despise them. It was in fact the power of this suffering servant lifestyle that finally caused Christianity to supplant the tired and weary philosophies current throughout the Roman Empire.

Moral Advice in 1 Peter

The churches in Asia Minor that first received 1 Peter neither encountered as much organized opposition as Christians in the second century, nor had the benefit of the responses of the Apologists to defend their cause. However, it is clear that already the later conditions which later produced the hostile pagan attitudes toward Christians were already present in the first century.

In an exhaustive study of the literary form of the moral codes in 1 Peter, David Balch argues that the community which received the letter was facing pagan hostility to their practices and in need of an adequate apology against the charges of the general populace and the authorities.[20] According to Balch, 1 Peter, especially in its moral codes, exhorts Christians in Asia Minor to live such an exemplary moral life that the pagans would cease their slander and allow Christians to live in peace.[21] At the heart of this Balch sees 1 Peter 3:15b, "Always be prepared to give a defense (Greek-apologia) to anyone who asks you a word concerning the hope

which is in you."[22] Just as pagans of various groups and origins could give an account of their politeia (laws and customs), so the Christians must be prepared to give an account of their practices, especially since they were marked as troublemakers because they divided households through conversion.[23] The moral codes in 1 Peter thus not only exhort Christians to be prepared to answer hostile charges against them by a mainly uninformed populace, but they also supply ammunition for the defensive battle.

Recently, J. H. Elliott has refined Balch's conclusions.[24] Elliott correctly notes that the connection Balch makes between 1 Peter and other contemporary literature which contain a politeia as a defense of behavior of the household is strained.[25] Elliott argues that such materials as Against Apion were addressed to "outsiders" whereas 1 Peter is definitely to "insiders" (1 Pet. 1:1; 5:12) and is especially different in form and content to supposed parallels, produced by Balch, such as Against Apion.[26] As a point of refinement to Balch's observations, Elliott agrees that the real need of the community which received 1 Peter was to be able to face pagan ridicule and the attendant sufferings and persecutions which were beginning.[27] But he then observes that the exhortations in 1 Peter go beyond providing the faithful with ammunition for a defense against the pagans. Rather, 1 Peter is characterized by a spiritual appeal to Christians to maintain separation from pagan ways (1:14-16; 2:11; 4:25). The argument is made that believers through completely leaving their old matrix and developing a distinctive social existence as a moral community with

its own unique behavior and identity, check the threat of its disintegration through persecution, and create inner cohesion which is promoted by the power of social contrast with the Gentiles.[28] Thus the real tension in 1 Peter is between a "sectarian particularism and societal pressures for conformity."[29]

Elliott's insight that the central focus of 1 Peter is to stress the peculiar identity and behavior of the Christians in Asia Minor in order to maintain both inner cohesion and prevent social disintegration is very significant.[30] Put simply, Elliott views 1 Peter as saying that the moral life of the community in Asia Minor must comport with its faith. But I believe this analysis can be sharpened even further. Our clue to get to the heart of the matter comes from a point made earlier in this essay about pagan views of the Christian community in the second century. It was noted that in many cases the pagans had good reason to be skeptical about the virtue and moral worth of the Christian enterprise. Many Christians did conduct a lifestyle similar to the bizarre practices of the pagan sects. And, of course, we know that these practices were not entirely unknown in the first century as well. The example of the church at Corinth with which Paul had to deal comes to mind immediately. The New Testament is filled with examples of Christians who lived more in keeping with the licentiousness of the hoi polloi than according to either the ethical standards of a virtuous pagan, or the pious believers upholding the way of Christ (1 Cor. 5-6; l Thess. 4:3-8; 2 Tim. 3:l-5; Matt. 7:21-23). The community that received 1 Peter appears to have had its share of such people. From time

to time these believers suffered and went back to old habits and associations. The point, however, is not that such people suffered necessarily because they were virtuous,[31] rather they suffered both because they came from a persecuted social class and because in becoming part of a new community, they severed their old associations (1 Pet. 4:5). The temptation was for these believers to become discouraged, quit the faith, and go back to old habits and associations. Thus they were Christian in name only. They desperately needed guidance.

In 1 Peter the heart of the guidance may be said to be found in 4:14-19. There the community was told the difference in the ground of their reproach. One may suffer as a murderer, thief, or, for all sorts of other reasons (4:15).[32] Presumably there is little virtue in this area. But to suffer as a Christian is worthwhile as long as one does good (4:19; cf. 3:17). Judgment comes, even to the household of God, certainly, to those who do <u>not</u> do good (4:17, 18). Those who do good place their hope in a faithful Creator who keeps his promises and will give an imperishable reward in the hereafter (1:4, 9; 2:25; 4:19; 5:4, 10). Thus to suffer as a Christian will be productive only if one breaks entirely with the kind of life characteristic of the old pagan households and social groups (1:14, 18; 2:1-3; 4:2-4). Despite the fact that many in the community act in a way that is not visibly different from the pagans, the Christian household of God must have an ethically structured way of

life which comports with its foundational story. The heart of the matter is stated in the address in 1 Peter 2:9--to the community:

> You are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who have become God's possession, in order that you may declare his way by living the virtues of the character of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The ethical purity that was expected of Israel (Lev. 19:2) now must be found in the household of God which has been reconstituted by the cross (1:3, 4, 19-21; 2:21; 3:17, 18). Shaped by this story, this community has the capacity to be virtuous in a way that correlates with the life of Christ. This produces a mode of conduct different from the Gentiles--even the ethical ones. Stated simply, the practices of the principle of subordination in the family, respect for the emperor, love, hospitality, unity of spirit, sympathy, compassion, and humility constitute the Christian vision of life and moral conduct. Such a vision only makes sense when it is carried out by a life informed by the Christian story (2:11-3:6; 3:8; 4:8, 9). It is not a universal ethic. It is not a primer about how to get along or justify one's manner of life in a pagan society. Rather it is a logical product of the lives of those who have left past associations and have heard a word from the eternal.

We conclude that the letter of 1 Peter constituted a demand for a group of Christians to form an alternative moral community which was congruent with the story of God's act in Christ. Certainly there is plenty of evidence that the community was facing harassment from the "outside" and needed appropriate

guidance. But the problem of this community went far deeper. Its lifestyle could not measurably be discerned as being different from the pagans. That being the case, there was little rationale for being a Christian. In the view of 1 Peter, without some purpose for virtue, only masochists would wish to endure constant suspicion from the authorities and the loss of old friends and acquaintances. Only when the community is viewed as a household with its own unique story, and its unique behavior and identity which grow out of that story, could its existence be made intelligible and it would have a hope for future perpetuation in this world and the world to come.

Conclusions and Application

First Peter, a monumental work of early Christian literature, produced some concrete lessons applicable to the current situation. Formally, there is a definite parallel between the "remembering" communities that comprise the churches today and the community that received 1 Peter in the first century. Furthermore, both communities face a hostile outside environment. Also, both communities have difficulty developing moral virtue among their adherents. Christians today exist in a society that cannot find a common basis for distinguishing between what is moral and what immoral. Many allow their lives to degenerate into the disgusting nostrum of emotivism and live by the maxim of "do your own thing." Conversely, there is considerable hostility expressed towards those who believe there are ultimate moral

standards and who attempt to live virtuous lives. We have seen the community that received 1 Peter faced a different situation, viz., suspicion from authorities and the misunderstanding of old acquaintances who did not believe or care whether the Christians could live virtuously. Our conclusion is that this had already led to widespread discouragement among the believers and a tendency to go back into the past habits of licentiousness, drunkenness, etc. Discouragement involving the threat of social disorientation and dislocation in such situations is another formal connection that links these first and twentieth century communities.

Under these circumstances the underlying thrust of the message of 1 Peter, brought to light essentially by Elliott, is as important for us today as it was for the church in the first century. The church today must become an alternative moral community. It is only through the cultivation of a distinctive moral identity, shaped by the cross of Christ, that the community today will find the means of survival. The siren is very attractive that comes from the world; "there are no ultimate objective moral standards, therefore do not waste your time searching for them, do your own thing." How can the resources be found to defeat this temptation? Only in a community such as the church can the ethos be founded and nourished to promote moral growth. The problem of the disintegration of our fellowship in this pluralistic world, both numerically and ethically, is a very real one. But perhaps the need for a common bond to promote inner coherence is even greater. The call in 1 Peter to an ancient community which was also coming apart at its seams was for

common allegiance to a style of moral life and behavior congruent with the Christian story. I suspect that this "key" to unlocking the door to the treasures of 1 Peter could well give us the entry into a vision of existence that will be the solution to many of our current problems.

As mentioned earlier, the challenge we face today is not for us to be sectarian in the traditional sense. We used to say, "Based on the blueprint of Scripture we have the one true view of baptism and it is only prejudice or ignorance that stops you from seeing that." In past generations such an understanding had mixed results. Many were converted and found spiritual security. We had a sectarian identity that did promote a form of social integration and inner coherence also supported by a broader quasi-Christian environment.

The situation now is different. In a post-Constantinian and even anti-Christian environment the issue is not what is the true perception of the doctrinal blueprint of the New Testament, but whether our children in the next generation will have a fellowship known as the church. One thing is sure, the fuel for the perpetuation of the church will come neither through the nostalgic repristination of a bygone era, or the current predilection of many to accommodate Christian faith to the "do your own thing" world through a frantic pursuit of wealth or education, a general acceptance of the lifestyle of the current elite, or just dropping out.

A watchword of our movement has always been "We are Christians only." First Peter defined as Christians those whose religious and moral identity became

congruent with the servant existence of Christ. To take this same message seriously today as a personal and a social ethic will mean that we must be sectarian equivalents of our brethren in the first century--strangers and aliens. This is the needed word for the current crisis.

Notes

[1] For an analysis of how we have arrived at the present moral crisis see Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism (New York: Norton, 1978); note also Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981),

[2] On the general religious scene a recent Gallup poll was able to distinguish selectively few differences in personal values between the churched and unchurched of America. Cf. George Gallup, Jr. and Daniel Poling, The Search for America's Faith (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980) Appendix H.

[3] Note for example the analysis of secularism in Dick Dabney, "God's Own Network," Harper's (August, 1980) 33-37.

[4] Everett Ferguson, "The Validity of the Restoration Principle," Mission (August, 1973), 7-9.

[5] As is the case today this is a Herculean task. Note that all the letters of Paul end in paraenetic advice about the need for growth and development of the moral life (e.g. 1 Thess. 4-5; Rom. 12-13); also Wilken notes that the bishop in early Christian thinking was viewed as much as an example of moral conduct as a teacher of doctrine (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Polycarp, Phil. 6:1). Thus literary evidence of the first two centuries indicates that Christian communities were defined as much by their character and type of behavior as through doctrinal teaching. Cf. Robert T. Wilken, "Diversity and Unity in Early Christianity," The Second Century: A Journal of Early Christian Studies, (1982), 108.

[6] Critical scholarship is divided over whether the letter is directly attributable to the Apostle Peter, or whether it is written by a later disciple (circa A.D. 70-100) who invokes the authority of the apostle. The latter view recently has been defended by Peter Stuhlmacher, "The Gospel of Reconciliation in Christ--Basic

Features and Issues of a Biblical Theology of the New Testament," Horizons in Biblical Theology,

(1979), 172. Also this position is advocated in the very significant recent monograph of John H. Elliott, A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 84-87. In my judgment, what is necessary before the dating of a first century document can be computed is that we have an understanding of the ethos of the particular community addressed. It is to this task that I wish to direct attention in this essay.

[7] For an exhaustive analysis of the available evidence see Stephen Benko, "Pagan Criticism of Christianity During the First Two Centuries A.D." Aufstieg und Niedergang der romischen Welt II, 23:2 , (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1980) 1055-1118.

[8] This analysis runs counter to notions in the church that the first century was a time of unprecedented fervor, spirituality, and growth in the church. Yet the facts do not warrant this conclusion. Much of the New Testament, written from A.D. 50-100, is concerned with the problems of discouraged believers with the attendant problems of apostasy--hardly a situation indicating great growth (e.g. Hebrews, the Pastorals, Mark, etc.) Using the secondary sources, Elliott, A Home for the Homeless, (45, 63) estimates that the Christian population in the provinces that received 1 Peter was about 5,000 at the outbreak of the Jewish revolt in A.D. 70. In the early part of the second century, there was great growth in the church in Asia Minor. The numbers grew in excess of 80,000.

[9] Adolf Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries (New York: Harper Torch Book, edition 1962) 267

[10] Robert L. Wilken, "The Christians as the Romans (and Greeks) Saw Them," Jewish and Christian Self-Definition; Vol. 1: The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries (3 vols.; ed. E. P. Sanders; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 1: 105-116.

[11] Ibid., Wilken notes the evidence from Plutarch's Concerning Superstition, 169-170a; 168-b; 171 b-f.

[12] Of course, the response of Christian leaders was to reject the charge of superstition. Christianity was not another version of Druid religion. It was a new philosophy. We should understand philosophy in this era meant systematic ethical

teaching available for everyday living. This is the context for the production of the Apologies of such figures as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and others in the second and third centuries. These not only attempted to show pagans and Jews that Christianity was intellectually credible but also that a more virtuous person was produced as a result of becoming a Christian. Cf. Epistle to Diognetus 5-6.

[13] Tacitus, Annals: 15:44 relates that Christians were thought to be the type who may set fire to the city of Rome.

[14] Robert L. Wilken, "Collegia, Philosophical Schools, and Theology," The Catacombs and the Colosseum: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity, (eds. Stephen Benko and John J. O'Rourke; Valley Forge: Judson, 1971), 270.

[15] Epistle to Diognetus 4-5; Tertullian, Apology 38-39; 42-: 1-3; Justin Martyr, Apology 1:16-17.

[16] Wilken, "Collegia" 270.

[17] Various references are found in Benko, "Pagan Criticism of Christianity," 1100; see also Lucian, The Passing of Pereginus, 11-13.

[18] Tacitus, Annals: 15:44.

[19] A. Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity (147-198), has an entire chapter of references to the defenses of their virtues on the part of mainly second century Christians.

[20] David Balch, "Let Wives be Submissive..." The Origin, Form and Apologetic Function of the Household Duty Code (Haustafel) in 1 Peter: Yale Dissertation (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1974), 264-265.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 213.

[23] Ibid., 206-214.

[24] Elliott, Home for the Homeless, 213-233.

[25] Ibid., 216, 217.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., 217, 222, 231. On the point with reference to social contrast, the argument seems to be that if a sect reaches a certain point of distinctiveness from prevailing society in its doctrine and life it will be less or no longer susceptible to outside "evil" influences and thus may perpetuate itself through the dynamic resources of its own inner life. Thus, according to Elliott, 1 Peter is quite pleased to characterize his readers as "exiles and strangers" (1:1, 17; 2:11). It is precisely in the integrity of this type Christian existence that the raison d'etre of the community is found. A situation considered as a vice by the Gentiles is now transformed into a "virtue" since it leads to the maintenance and stability of the community.

[29] Ibid., 255.

[30] Ibid., 200-208; 220-233. It should be remembered that the term "household of God" is important in Elliott's view of 1 Peter (2:5; 4:17; cf. 2:5, 17, 18; 3:8; 5:9). For Elliott, the household codes in 1 Peter, unlike the view of Balch, are given for the purpose of strengthening the actual families inside the community, not as ammunition for a discussion with outsiders. By extension, the language of house, and households living with a special identity as family, in keeping with the Christian story creates its own metaphor for the Christian community: the oikos (household) of God. One should note further that the early Christian assemblies in Asia Minor, as else-where, were in houses and so the language of the structure of an ideal household could transfer quite easily to gatherings of people who assembled together in house churches because they shared in a common confession. It is also worthwhile to note that the Greek word ekklesia (assembly) which is used in other parts of the New Testament to describe the Christian community does not appear in 1 Peter.

[31] Elliott, Home for the Homeless, seems to assume this point with reference to the community of 1 Peter throughout his book. On p. 83 he makes an important point when he remarks, "what is proscribed in the letter (i.e., l Peter) was possibly current practice in the audience, and that what is prescribed had not yet been fully realized." But then he goes on to say that the failure of the community to live virtuously, as indicated by the moral exhortations in the letter, was due to conflict over policy to conform or not to conform to the general cultural ethos that needed to be adopted over against the pagans rather than the

individual moral virtue of the believers.

[32] Elliott, Home for the Homeless, 24-48, on the former point, does an excellent job of pointing out that the converts in 1 Peter, in the main, came from a sociological group in Roman Society known as the paroikoi (homeless non-citizens) and that the descriptions of them in 1 Peter 1: 1, 17; and 2:11 was as much about their actual social position as their religious position. In short, because of who they were, regardless of whether they were Christians, these people would be used to being harassed and persecuted.

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