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John J. Wainwright

Eusebeia: Syncretism or Conservative Contextualization?

Mr Wainwright, who has been recently studying in Dallas, offers here the fruits of his research into one of the key terms that characterise the Christian life in the Pastoral Epistles and gives fresh substance to the case against seeing a weakened form of Christianity in them.

Eusebeia, commonly translated godliness, along with *eusebein*, *eusebēs*, and *eusebōs*, appears only 23 times in the New Testament. While none of these appearances are in the undisputed Pauline corpus, thirteen are in the Pastoral Epistles (PE). This, along with the word's extensive use in secular Greek literature and inscriptions, has caused scholars to wonder why it appears in the later writings of the NT. Taking into account the diverse historical/critical problems in the PE, Biblical interpreters have sought to determine to what extent *eusebeia* follows secular Greek usage, and to what extent it has a distinctly Christian connotation. In particular, both W. Foerster and Dibelius/Conzelmann (Dib/Con) understand *eusebeia* as part of an ethical shift that takes place in the Church during the time of the PE because Christ does not return.¹ Though these scholars have turned to these and other introductory issues to determine the meaning of *eusebeia* in the Pastorals, a thorough study of the use of *eusebeia* in the Pastorals is not entirely compatible with their conclusions.

Generally speaking, scholars have sought to interpret the occurrence of *eusebeia* in the PE either by ignoring its primarily Hellenistic origin, or by asserting its equivalence with this Hellenistic origin. The most notable influence in the direction of a purely Hellenistic usage of *eusebeia* comes from the work of Dibelius/Conzelmann, and

¹ This hypothesis is intimately related to the question of authorship and date. Though pseudonymity is rarely questioned outside very conservative circles, recent scholarship is beginning to move away from Bultmann's placement of the PE in the second century toward an earlier date (late first century). E. Earle Ellis, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids, 1961), 52-53.

the later expansion of their conclusions by Foerster. For example, Hanson accepts Foerster's conclusion that *eusebeia* is primarily a Greek virtue, and sees its appearance in the PE as due to its occurrence in 4 Maccabees.² Schenk builds on this central tenet of Foerster, and feels that *eusebeia* is a means of transforming the Gospel into a movement that supports the established orders of Roman culture and society.³ Without denying Foerster, Hermann von Lips adds that *eusebeia* also has special reference to the knowledge of the ways of God, this being the means of financial gain for the false teachers in the PE.⁴

In contrast to this line of interpretation, scholars such as Schlatter and Spicq, and more recently Towner, feel that the occurrence of *eusebeia* in the PE is by and large determined by the vocabulary of the heretics. The Pastor simply takes *eusebeia*, denigrates its traditional, non-Christian Greek meaning, and interjects a new meaning into it. For both Schlatter and Spicq this new meaning consists primarily of a deep respect and reverence for God.⁵ Towner builds on the conclusion of von Lips, and asserts that for the Pastor, *eusebeia* becomes 'the constant interrelationship of correct knowledge of Christ and [Christian] behavior'.⁶ Such arguments lack complete cogency because they do not explain the occurrence of *eusebeia* in Acts or especially in 1 Peter (Was the author of 1 Peter attacking the same heresy?), and, as modern scholarship would suggest, do not take seriously enough the Hellenistic connotations of *eusebeia*.

Though his conclusions resemble those of Schlatter and Spicq, George Knight lays special emphasis on Hellenistic Judaism's use of *eusebeia*. Both the usage of *eusebeia* in the LXX for 'fear of the Lord' (Ps. 103:17; Pr. 1:7; and Is. 11:2), and the concept of 'God-fearers' in Acts (13:43; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7) may have influenced Paul's addition of this word to his vocabulary. Unfortunately, though Knight recognizes that the Greek culture of the Pastor's audience also

² Anthony Hanson, *Studies in the Pastoral Epistles* (London, 1968), 23.

³ W. Schenk, 'Die Briefe an Timotheus I u. II, und an Titus in der neueren Forschung (1945-1985)', *ANRW II* 25, 1987, 3414.

⁴ Hermann von Lips, *Glaube-Gemeinde-Amt: Zum Verständnis der Ordination in den Pastoralbriefen* (Göttingen, 1975), 51, 82-84.

⁵ Adolf Schlatter, *Die Kirche der Griechen im Urteil des Paulus: Eine Auslegung seiner Briefe an Timotheus und Titus* (Stuttgart, 1958), 131, 176. Also C. Spicq, *Les Épîtres Pastorales* (Paris, 1947), 482-92.

⁶ P. H. Towner, *The Goal of our Instruction* (Sheffield, 1989), 167.

influenced his choice of *eusebeia*, he does not interact with the Hellenistic background of *eusebeia*.⁷

In an attempt to offer some kind of synthesis between these poles, Brox suggests that *eusebeia* has various connotations in various contexts, sometimes designating strictly a Greek virtue (e.g., 1 Tim 2:2), and at other times Christian doctrines or behavior (e.g., 1 Tim 3:16).⁸ However, with a term so central to the PE as *eusebeia*, one which seems to approach the designation of a technical term, is it reasonable to associate two almost irreconcilable meanings? Though certainly a word will have various nuances of meaning within different contexts, to propose that *eusebeia* means 'honor of established orders', with the intention of establishing a new Christian ethic, and an affirmation of apostolic doctrine and behavior is unwarranted. It may be that for Brox these two meanings are not incompatible, because he sees the latter as simply an extension of the former. Yet, if this is the case, his differentiation of these two nuances is not essentially different from the earlier interpretations of Dib/Con and Foerster.

W. Foerster suggests that *eusebeia* draws its meaning primarily from its use in Greek society. Because *eusebeia* has no lexical equivalent in Hebrew, and only scant use in the LXX, he concludes that its use in the PE has no Semitic background. Instead, Greek literature and inscriptions speak of *eusebeia* as behavior that demonstrates a proper 'respect and honor for the established orders,' i.e., secular piety. Though this piety was often directed toward the Pantheon, and *eusebeia* was even used to describe one who practiced cultic rites, it was also used to express proper respect for parents, ancestors, and masters, as well as faithfulness to an agreement. Throughout this plethora of usage, it never signified exclusive allegiance to a personal deity. Foerster explains, 'Thus the true content of *eusebeia* for the educated Greek is reverent and wondering awe at the lofty and pure world of the divine, its worship in the cultus, and respect for the orders sustained by it.'⁹

In strict accordance with secular Greek usage, Foerster concludes that the Pastor uses this Greek virtue extensively because it expresses well the deficiency of the false teachers, whom he combats through the PE. Foerster chooses 1 Tim. 2:1-4 as his starting point, in which the author exhorts his audience to 'pray for those in authority, so we

⁷ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, 1992), 117-118. See also George W. Knight III, *The Faithful Sayings in the Pastoral Letters* (Grand Rapids, 1979), 70-72.

⁸ Norbert Brox, *Die Pastoralbriefe* (Regensburg, 1969), 174-177.

⁹ W. Foerster, "sebomai", in *TDNT*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 178.

may live a life of piety and dignity (*semnotēs*).⁹ He maintains that these verses counteract a 'fanatical, gnosticizing movement'¹⁰ that has no respect for God-ordained authorities. Because *eusebeia* and *semnotēs*, 'serious and worthy conduct,'¹¹ are used side by side, *eusebeia* has no reference here to God, per se, but, in the Greek manner, refers to a lifestyle that 'honors the established orders.'¹² Foerster further maintains that this passage establishes the normal usage of *eusebeia* since the phrase '*prōton pantōn*' signifies the prominence of this passage in the PE.¹³ With this precedent, Foerster continues throughout the PE to view *eusebeia* as secular piety, which the false teachers have abandoned.

Foerster interprets 1 Tim. 4:7–10 as a direct refutation of the false teachers' contempt of the natural order. Since these teachers repudiate state authorities, their rejection of certain foods, and marriage (v 3) is not surprising. Continuing in this manner, 1 Tim. 5:4, which speaks of proper behavior in the family, and 1 Tim. 6:3 and Tit. 1:1, which express the proper relationship between *eusebeia* and correct teaching, again counteract the profanity of the false teachers. He explains that 1 Tim. 3:16, which initially fits awkwardly in this schema, provides the antithesis to the false teaching by indicating Christ's obedience to the will of God (and his established order?). Finally, in 1 Tim. 6:11 the Pastor exhorts his disciple to 'flee from these things,' i.e., the practices of those who promote Gnostic tendencies, and to pursue 'piety,' among other things.

Foerster concedes that 1 Tim. 6:4–6, Tit. 2:12, and 2 Tim. 3:5 do not support 'piety' in the general sense of 'respect for the established orders,' and sees in these passages a slightly narrower usage. Following the Greek distinction between one's relationship to self (*sophronōs*), neighbor (*dikaiōs*), and God (*eusebeia*), he determines that in these passages *eusebeia* does have reference to God. Nonetheless, *eusebeia* does not have the sense of Pauline 'faith', or of general 'piety', but instead, expresses the type of respectful behavior which the false teachers have despised. Therefore, the opposite of

¹⁰ 'schwärmerisch-gnosticisierenden Bewegung', W. Foerster, 'eusebeia in den Pastoralbriefen', *NTS* 5, 1943, 216.

¹¹ W. Foerster, *TDNT*, 195.

¹² In his article in *NTS*, Foerster states, 'Dann wird sich *eusebeia* schwerlich auf ein Verhalten zu Gott beziehen, sondern, wie *semnotēs*, . . . die Lebensführung, die die "Ordnungen" ehrt.' While he considers this interpretation standard throughout this study (with a few exceptions), in *TDNT* he states bluntly, '*eusebeia* means "piety", i.e., conduct in relation to God.' Evidently, in his understanding, even when 'God' is the object of piety, piety does not imply a deep spiritual or mystical experience, but rather a kind of societal duty.

¹³ For Foerster's discussion of 1 Tim. 2:1ff see W. Foerster, 'eusebeia in den Pastoralbriefen', 215–16.

eusebeia is not 'pagan wickedness, but instead, the fanatical-Gnosticising contempt for the natural orders.'¹⁴

Finally, approximating the cultural accommodation of M. Dibelius' *bürgerlich* ethic, Foerster draws a connection between *eusebeia* and the Christian responsibility to influence non-Christians with an admirable lifestyle. In the sense that *eusebeia* encourages pagan acceptance of Christianity, *eusebeia* is 'profitable for all things' (1 Tim. 4:7).¹⁵

Though Foerster's interpretation of *eusebeia* conforms nicely with secular Greek usage and adds cohesion between *eusebeia* and the esthetic Gnostic-ethic he sees in the PE, it has little basis in careful exegesis. First of all, though it is convenient to establish 1 Tim. 2:2 as the verse that provides the paradigm for understanding *eusebeia*, especially since it is related here to 'authorities', not even the use of '*prōton pantōn*' supports this grammatically – *prōton pantōn* here points to sequential priority, rather than thematic prominence. Furthermore, neither false doctrine nor false teachers is even mentioned in this paragraph. Though some might argue from 1 Tim. 1:3,¹⁶ that at every point the PE combat heresy, 1 Tim. 3:14–15 certainly suggests that not every passage in the PE refers to the heresy: 'I write these things to you although I hope to come to you soon. But if I am delayed, I write them to you so that you may know how one should conduct himself in the household of God.' Therefore, since 1 Tim. 2:1–4 makes no explicit reference to a Gnosticism that despises authority, nor even appears to be polemic or corrective, it does not confirm the relationship between *eusebeia* and the false teachers.

Not only does 1 Tim. 2:1–4 fail to establish a relationship between *eusebeia* and a Gnostic anarchic ethic, the PE nowhere relate *eusebeia* with a teaching that has contempt for the established order. In fact, contrary to Foerster's conclusion that wickedness is not the opposite of *eusebeia*, the only passage that does contrastingly juxtapose *eusebeia* and the false teachers is 1 Tim. 6:3–6, which contrasts *eusebeia* with a vice list describing the false teachers.¹⁷ Furthermore, as Jürgen Roloff points out, 2 Tim. 3:5, one of Foerster's exceptions, actually states that the false teachers exhibit an

¹⁴ 'Der Gegensatz zu *eusebeia* ist also nicht das heidnische Lasterleben, sondern die schwärmerisch-agnostisierende Verachtung der natürlichen Ordnungen ...' Foerster, '*eusebeia* in den Pastoralbriefen', 217.

¹⁵ Foerster, '*eusebeia* in den Pastoralbriefen', 218.

¹⁶ '... remain in Ephesus so that you may command certain ones to stop teaching false doctrine ...'

¹⁷ Disrespect is not part of the list.

outward appearance of 'piety'.¹⁸ Though his argument that 1 Tim. 6:4–6, Tit. 2:12, and 2 Tim. 3:5 employ *eusebeia* in a more restricted manner could express a legitimate nuance, this conclusion certainly does not support his thesis. Furthermore, despite his appeal to the NT persecution motif, it is as equally difficult to imagine that a respect and honor for existing orders results *ex opere operato* in persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Finally, the Pastor's correlation of *eusebeia* and the incarnation of Christ in 1 Tim. 3:16 prohibits an interpretation of *eusebeia* void of a distinctly Christian connotation.

While inadequate exegesis supports Foerster's conclusions about *eusebeia* in the PE, it is his uncritical acceptance of historical/critical conclusions that most influences his thinking. In particular, his conclusions about *eusebeia* are harmonious with Dib/Con's interpretation of the PE: *eusebeia* is one facet of the author's response to the belated parousia of Christ with a social ethic less radical than that of Jesus or Paul (assuming inauthenticity). Dibelius explains that the Christian community dealt with the failure of Christ to return in two different ways: some (the false teachers in the PE) reinterpreted the Christian message into a Judaizing-Gnostic system of thought, while others (the author of the PE) retained their apostolic faith, but developed a new model for ethics. In this ethic, called by Dib/Con *christliche Bürgerlichkeit*,¹⁹ *eusebeia* illustrates the 'ideal of good, honorable citizenship – by referring to that behavior which is well-pleasing to God and men'.²⁰ An exposition of Dib/Con's concept of *christliche Bürgerlichkeit* is congruent with Foerster's interpretation of *eusebeia* in the PE as a secular Greek ideal.

According to Reggie Kidd, who has done extensive research on the social background of the PE, there are three tenets in the *christliche Bürgerlichkeit* of Dib/Con. First all, Dibelius sees in the PE a group of people who are socially ascendant, i.e., an increasing majority of the congregation belongs to the middle class. While the early church gloried in its poverty (Jas 5:1–6), the PE make provision for the wealthy, and in no way despise riches (1 Tim. 6:17–19). The

¹⁸ Jürgen Roloff, *Der Erste Brief an Timotheus*, (Zürich, 1988), 117. See also Towner, *The Goal of our Instruction: The Structure of Theology and Ethics in the Pastoral Epistles*, (Sheffield, 1989), 148f. He maintains that the outward appearance of *eusebeia* is not behavior but doctrine.

¹⁹ *Christliche Bürgerlichkeit* seems to be best translated with "Christian Citizenship". Unfortunately, one does not sense through this translation the importance of this concept to Dibelius.

²⁰ Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, trans. Philip Buttolph and Adela Yarbro, (Philadelphia, 1972), 41.

presence of middle class Christians (bourgeoisie) in the church is no longer compatible with a faith that rejects the riches of this world.²¹

Secondly, the Pastor's exhortations to pursue common Greek virtues, such as *sōphrōn*, depict a church that is accommodating itself to Greek society. Because the apostolic enthusiasm and passion is wearing thin, the Christian community is now struggling to establish Christianity in Greek society and culture.²² 'The ethics of good citizenship [*christliche Bürgerlichkeit*] serve to regulate the time until the parousia, which is no longer felt to be imminent. The components of the regulation are: a good conscience, the idea that the Christian life aims at good works, faith and love, piety [*eusebeia*] and dignity.'²³ Though the PE certainly repudiate wicked deeds that are socially unacceptable, they suggest that the church should accept the ideals of Greek society as Christian good works (e.g., *eusebeia*).

Finally, Kidd suggests that Dibelius' *christliche Bürgerlichkeit* incorporates an 'unheroically conservative social ethic.' Whereas Paul teaches that faith has a revolutionary impact on relationships with others and the world (1 Cor. 7:29–31), the PE seek a 'tranquil and quiet life',²⁴ in which Christians should settle down, learning to respect government and familial relationships.²⁵ The Christian community can no longer depend on Spirit-inspired, irrational decisions for ethics, but instead, must develop a model for behavior that will become a lasting part of the community.²⁶ The PE do not promote radical, social change, but instead, a gradual 'Christianization of the world.'²⁷

From these three observations it is obvious that Dib/Con see in the PE a resignation that Christ might not return. Furthermore, this 'prolonged stay' supports the 'evolution of both orthodoxy and heresy within the Christian communities.'²⁸ Since the direct intervention of God in the parousia of Christ is no longer imminent, and salvation is restricted to what happened in the past generation(s), Christian morality no longer reflects a strict dichotomy between God's will and worldly behavior. Closely related to this, Christianity in the PE is content to maintain a silent witness of good works, rather than actively pursuing the salvation of the world. Even in this silent

²¹ Reggie Kidd, *Wealth and Beneficence in the Pastoral Epistles: A "Bourgeois" Form of Early Christianity*, (Atlanta, 1990), 28–29.

²² Kidd, 19.

²³ Kidd, 19.

²⁴ 1 Tim. 2:2.

²⁵ 1 Tim. 2:9ff; 3:4, 12; 5:4, 8, 16; Tit. 2:4ff.

²⁶ Foerster, "eusebeia in den Pastoralbriefen", 214.

²⁷ Dib/Con, 40.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

witness, the church seems to be more concerned with reputation than spiritual obedience. As the spiritual dynamics from the Apostolic period grew cold, the PE exhort the Christian community to follow a reasonable and God-honoring *christliche Bürgerlichkeit*, which maintains continuity with the Apostolic traditions, rather than the fashionable Christian syncretism of Gnosticism, whose ethic is irrational and *asebeia* (God-dishonoring).

Despite the momentum of past critical/historical studies, recent scholars are beginning to discover evidence that does not support the *christliche Bürgerlichkeit* interpretation of PE. Reggie Kidd, for example, suggests that the term 'bürgerlich' itself has very little potential for describing any first century Mediterranean social phenomenon accurately – can twentieth century scholars employ their own criteria for judging the social class and status of early Christians?²⁹ In addition to the methodological problem, there is no evidence that Christianity began as a lower class religious movement and expanded gradually to the upper classes (i.e., by the 2nd century). Rather, Acts suggests that from its inception Christianity was embraced at every level of society by at least some. While Kidd agrees with Dib/Con that the PE do address the wealthy, he rejects the notion that this describes a socially ascendant group in the church, whose ethics reflect the complete acceptance of traditional Greco-Roman values. Rather, the PE address the deficiencies of the beneficence philosophers and provide a distinctly Christian philosophy for wealth.³⁰

In addition to Kidd's sociological critique of *christliche Bürgerlichkeit*, P. H. Towner questions the validity of the *christliche Bürgerlichkeit* on the basis of the Pastor's theology. He asserts that the eschatological teaching in the PE does not support the tenets of Dib/Con. The author's understanding of the present age, his hope in the parousia, and his soteriology all suggest that his preoccupation with ethics in the present age is not the by-product of a disappointment brought about by the delay of Christ's return. Rather, the heretics' assertions that the resurrection had already occurred resulted in their perversion of Christian doctrine. In response to the false teaching, the PE address issues about conduct in this 'now-not yet' age. Furthermore, the literary form of these ethical mandates, the *Haustafel*, is appropriate only in the light of the mission of the Church to the world. Without compromising essential ethical standards, the Christian community must maintain respectability in the world if it is to persuade Gentiles to salvation. This

²⁹ Kidd, 30–32.

³⁰ Kidd, 124–140.

salvation is the source of the Pastor's ethic, and not a desire to live comfortably in Greco-Roman society. The conclusion that the belated parousia caused the Pastor to promote a socially accommodating ethic is not supported by the theology of the PE.

Though Dib/Con use exegesis to substantiate their claims about *christliche Bürgerlichkeit*, their results depend heavily upon the historical/critical decision that the PE belong to the post-Apostolic period, a time when the Christian community was experiencing a change in its self-concept.³¹ Furthermore, because they believe that the PE are a consortium of Pauline and non-Pauline tradition, often pieced together with very few connecting particles, they place more weight on historical/critical observations than on a strict exegesis of actual passages. Nonetheless, if their critical/historical observations are correct, an exegesis of the *eusebeia* passages in the PE should support their conclusion that the Pastorals teach a *christliche Bürgerlichkeit*.

Though Dib/Con use 1 Tim. 2:2 as one of the main textual supports for understanding *eusebeia* as a part of *christliche Bürgerlichkeit*, this verse makes no actual reference to this ethic. In 1 Tim. 2:1 the author exhorts the congregation to pray for men in authority. The purpose of this prayer, expressed in v.2 by a *hina* clause, is to enable the Christian community to lead a quiet life. In other words, the Christians are to ask God to work in the hearts of their rulers so that their lives might be tranquil and calm. Why? The prepositional phrase, 'in all piety and gravity' reveals that the Christians' desire a more tranquil life so that they can practice *eusebeia* and dignity. This passage does not explain any descriptive characteristics of *eusebeia*. Nevertheless, Dib/Con see *Bürgerlichkeit* in *eusebeia* here primarily because it occurs together with *semnotes* (dignity). However, since the text provides no predication or description of *eusebeia*, and the two terms are not synonymous (*semnotes* and *eusebeia*), 1 Tim. 2:1–2 cannot determine whether or not it is a *bürgerlich* term.

1 Tim. 3:16, on the other hand, is one of the most important verses for understanding *eusebeia* in the PE because, contrary to Foerster's interpretation, it shows that *eusebeia* had a distinct Christian connotation when the PE were written. An orthodox doctrine of the incarnation of Christ, the embodiment and revelation of God himself, cannot possibly support a strictly secular usage of *eusebeia*. Furthermore, from this context, as well as 1 Tim. 6:3, it is clear that *eusebeia* is intimately related to correct doctrine and the teaching of

³¹ Ibid. See also Roloff, p. 382.

Christ.³² Dib/Con would counter that this is the author's way of giving legitimacy to his *bürgerlich* ethic. Yet, is it really possible that the author could promote an ethic that is culturally accommodating and unheroically conservative as apostolic tradition? Certainly Christ did not teach this kind of an ethic, and, by the time of the PE, the Gospels and their portrayal of Christ were written and well established.

1 Tim. 6:3 teaches that *eusebeia* demands 'sound teaching,' and that it also conforms to a standard of behavior. In light of 1 Tim. 5:5 and 2 Tim. 3:5, this standard consists of much more than outward acts. In fact, it is possible to have an outward appearance of *eusebeia*, yet have no inward experience of its power (2 Tim. 3:5). This presents grave difficulties for relating *eusebeia* to *christliche Bürgerlichkeit*. If *eusebeia* were a typical Greek virtue, which any man could practice, why does the Pastor add a spiritual dimension to its practice? In other words, the Pastor does not promote *eusebeia* as a desirable social practice, and even warns that *eusebeia* results in persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). This objection is particularly true since *eusebeia* demands distinctively Christian doctrine (1 Tim. 3:16, 6:3). 2 Pet. 1:3 also supports this spiritual aspect of *eusebeia*, 'His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness [*eusebeia*].'³³

Finally, 1 Tim. 4:6–10, the PE's most extensive passage on *eusebeia*, gives additional insight into the meaning of *eusebeia*. Through the exhortation of v.7 the author shows that *eusebeia* is a character trait that requires practice and perseverance (*gumnazō*). If the Pastor promotes *eusebeia* with a *bürgerlich* ethic that is merely an accretion of certain Greek virtues, which are more reasonable than the radical ethic of Paul and Jesus, why does the author use such strong language in his exhortation? He uses a traditional saying as a ground for this exhortation (v.8), and further emphasizes its importance by employing, 'This saying is faithful and worthy of all acceptance (v.9)³⁴ As if this were not enough, the author testifies that he has labored and striven for *eusebeia* personally (v.10). The author presents *eusebeia* as more than Christian citizenship or an antithesis to false teaching; it is a spiritual discipline that requires single-minded devotion to God himself.

The use of *eusebeia* in this faithful saying also indicates that the Christian community was at least familiar with the term before the

³² Tit. 1:1 also speaks of this correlation.

³³ (NIV).

³⁴ See George W. Knight III, *The Faithful Sayings in the Pastoral Epistles*, (Grand Rapids, 1979), 62–79.

PE, i.e., it was a part of Christian tradition.³⁵ If the PE were written in the first century, even the late first century, it is difficult to see how the experience of the apostles could have been diluted to the point that *eusebeia* was established as a typically Greek virtue within the Christian Church. Furthermore, the faithful saying promises that those who pursue *eusebeia* will find life now and in the future. As a part of early Christian tradition, this promise of future life demonstrates that *eusebeia* was not simply a loan word from Greek virtue lists, but that it actually had a distinct Christian connotation before the PE were written (i.e., a specific eschatology).³⁶ *eusebeia* in the PE does not promote an innovative acceptance of a more socially harmonious Greek ethic, but instead is used as an exhortation to maintain the practice and tradition of orthodox, apostolic Christianity.³⁷

Despite these observations, the thought of Dib/Con continues to find expression today, as seen in Jürgen Roloff's commentary on 1 Timothy. Though Roloff rightly rejects Foerster's conclusions that *eusebeia* is strictly a Greek virtue, he still clings to the idea that the author of the PE suggests *eusebeia* (and other moral injunctions) as a means of ensuring the permanence of the Christian Church in Greco-Roman society. He understands *eusebeia* as a lifestyle that conforms to the obligations of God in every sphere of life through God's grace. He even suggests that 'spirituality' might properly define *eusebeia*.³⁸ Nonetheless, it becomes apparent, especially in his concluding section, that this 'spirituality' does not consist of a personal devotion to the indwelling Holy Spirit, but allegiance to the contemporary Greco-Roman morality, like Dib/Con. Because the author desires to preserve Christianity by cooperating with Greco-Roman society, he syncretizes societal, moral ideals with traditional Christianity. A strict observance of apostolic teaching about society and its morals resulted only in persecution and isolation; therefore, the Pastor desired to extend the Church into Greco-Roman society through a more conciliatory ethical system.³⁹

Rather than rely on a partial analysis of *eusebeia* in the PE for understanding its meaning, conscientious scholarship should take

³⁵ 1 Tim. 3:16 also suggests this.

³⁶ See Kidd, 123.

³⁷ Though Dib/Con would argue that the author uses such traditions to validate a new ethic (in addition to pseudepigraphy), it seems unlikely that this kind of departure from and eisegesis of Apostolic teaching would be so easily accepted by Christians during the first century.

³⁸ Roloff, 117–119.

³⁹ Ibid., 382–385.

each occurrence of the word in the PE, and make any statements or information about it explicit.⁴⁰ This renders the following results:

- 1 Tim. 2:2 . . . when we lead a quiet and still life, we practice *eusebeia* and dignity
- 1 Tim. 3:16 the incarnation is the confessedly great mystery of *eusebeia*
- 1 Tim. 4:7 *eusebeia* demands training
- 1 Tim. 4:0 *eusebeia* is profitable for all things
- 1 Tim. 4:0 *eusebeia* has promise of life now
- 1 Tim. 4:8 *eusebeia* has promise of life in the future
- 1 Tim. 4:9 Timothy⁴¹ should accept the promise of *eusebeia* as true
- 1 Tim. 4:10 Paul labored and strove for *eusebeia*
- 1 Tim. 5:4 let their own house first learn to *eusebein*
- 1 Tim. 6:3 those who do not agree with doctrine that promotes *eusebeia* are false teachers
- 1 Tim. 6:3–5 those who reject the doctrine of *eusebeia* are wicked men
- 1 Tim. 6:5 These wicked men think that *eusebeia* is a means of (worldly) gain
- 1 Tim. 6:6 *eusebeia* is a means of great (spiritual) gain when one has contentment
- 1 Tim. 6:11 Timothy, pursue . . . *eusebeia*, . . .
- 2 Tim. 3:5 Men of the last days will have a form of *eusebeia*, but deny its power
- 2 Tim. 3:12 Everyone who desires to live a godly (*eusebōs*) life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted
- Tit. 1:1 I am an apostle . . . according to the knowledge of the truth that is according to *eusebeia*
- Tit. 2:12 the grace of God teaches you to live godly (*eusebōs*) lives forever

Using this methodology one sees that neither ‘respect for the established orders,’ nor ‘bourgeois piety’ fits consistently into these sentences. *Eusebeia* involves persecution (2 Tim. 3:12); *eusebeia* has great reward (1 Tim. 4:7–10); *eusebeia* demands proper doctrine (1 Tim. 6:3–5); Jesus Christ is crucial to *eusebeia* (1 Tim. 3:16); true doctrine practices *eusebeia* (1 Tim. 6:3; Tit. 1:1); *eusebeia* is more than outward conformity (2 Tim. 3:5); *eusebeia* has an inner spiritual reality (2 Tim. 3:5; 1 Tim. 6:6); *eusebeia* demands hard work and commitment (1 Tim. 4:7; 9); God’s grace directs men in *eusebeia* (Tit. 2:12). In light of its use in the PE, and its meaning in Greek literature and inscriptions (see above, 1), *eusebeia* in the PE

⁴⁰ In other words, the clauses in which *eusebeia* appears are transformed into propositions.

⁴¹ This approach must employ the words, thought, and ideas in the text. Afterwards theological, critical, and historical corrections can be made.

expresses a spiritual devotion to God whose practice effects family and societal relationships (godly devotion). Though its practice includes a proper relationship between 'genuine knowledge of God and the corresponding lifestyle,'⁴² it goes beyond this to suggest that one's true desires, values and passions, as indicated in every relationship and activity, are fixed on the person of God, who is experienced through a spiritual relationship in the heart (1 Tim. 4:10). It does not primarily reflect the secular connotation of Greek literature, nor is it the chief virtue of a new, socially accommodating ethic. Instead, the Christian community adapted the word *eusebeia*, and changed certain aspects of its meaning to reflect Christian experience, behavior, and doctrine.

Neither Dib/Con nor Foerster allow a simple exegesis of the PE to define their understanding of *eusebeia*. While it is true that the PE are shaped by the heresy they address,⁴³ it does not follow that the use of *eusebeia*, or any other word for that matter, must relate to that heresy in every passage. Similarly, though numerous Greek virtues appear in PE, one must first determine what these virtues mean from sound exegesis (i.e., usage) before one determines what they must mean from a historical/critical analysis. Regardless of the authenticity of the PE, the occurrence of *eusebeia* in the PE does not support a *christliche, bürgerliche* ethic in the PE, nor is it merely reverence for the established orders; but instead, *eusebeia* exhorts the Christian community to devote itself to God in every sphere of life, so that both beliefs and behavior are centered in Him.

Abstract

In the contemporary debate concerning the character of the Pastoral Epistles, *eusebeia*, commonly translated godliness, has typically supported the opinion that the PE present a new Christian ethic, *christliche Bürgerlichkeit* (Christian Citizenship), quite distinct from the earlier apostolic ethic. Because the second coming of Christ did not appear quite so imminent as was earlier projected, the author of the PE suggests an ethic that is more in keeping with Greco-Roman society, using such virtues as *eusebeia*, *sōphrōn*, and

⁴² Towner, 151. Towner does an excellent job of relating *eusebeia* to the presence of heresy in the church; however, he does not fully express the spiritual dynamics of *eusebeia* in the PE.

⁴³ Concerning the heresy, see P. H. Towner, 'Gnosis and realized Eschatology in Ephesus (of the Pastoral Epistles) and the "Corinthian Enthusiasm"', *JSNT* 31, 1987, 95-124. The heresy in the PE is at best a form of incipient Gnosticism, and appears to have a Jewish element. It is certainly not the 2nd century Gnosticism that Bultmann and Bauer conceived.

semnotēs. Regardless of the other arguments for a *christliche Bürgerlichkeit* in the PE, a careful examination of the occurrences of *eusebeia* in the PE, along with their literary context, demonstrates that *eusebeia* is not an example of *christliche Bürgerlichkeit* in the PE.