The Language and Logic of Virtue in 2 Peter 1:5-7

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Although the polemical development of 2 Peter mirrors interaction between Stoic and Christian moral thought-worlds, the moral grammar of the Stoa employed by the writer in 2 Peter 1 expresses a distinctly Christian quali-fication. The readers are reminded that a profession of faith without ethical fiber is wholly incommensurate with their gracious calling. The rhetorical effect created by the progression and climax of the catalog of virtues in 2 Pet 1:5-7 can be understood to reflect a concrete situation in which there has been a fundamental ethical breakdown. In addressing this crisis the writer appropriates paraenesis and a standard hortatory device to under-score the necessity of the moral life.

Key Words: virtue and vice, ethical catalog, Christian paraenetic tradition, Stoic ethics, 2 Peter

2 Peter stands alongside Jude as one of "the most neglected" among the writings of the NT.[1] This relative lack of attention can be at-tributed to a complex of factors, not least of which are fundamen-tal assumptions about the historical situation behind the epistle. In accordance with the governing "early Catholic" schema, described by Richard Bauckham as "ripe for radical reexamination,"[2] biblical scholarship has broadly assumed that given the purported intrusion of second-century gnosticism, the burden of 2 Peter is doctrine—and specifically, false doctrine.

While more recent reconstructions of the epistle suggest the in-adequacy of the "early Catholic" rubric and move the discussion in a

1. A version of this paper was presented at the 1996 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Philadelphia, Penn.
2. R. J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (WBC 50; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983) 8.

welcome direction,[3] further exploration into the paraenetic character of 2 Peter is needed. To probe literary strategy in 2 Peter is to sharpen our focus and raise questions concerning authorial intent. What purpose lies behind the language of paraenesis and conspicuously pagan metaphysical terminology being utilized in the epistle? Why is the epistle's vocabulary as a whole distinct from the writings of the NT? What do the catalog of virtues and reminder terminology in chap. 1—coupled with the moral paradigms and caricature of the moral sceptic in chaps. 2 and 3—suggest concerning the recipients' social location, and thus, the author's purpose in writing?

As a component of the Christian paraenetic tradition, 2 Pet 1:5-7 presents us with a window into the moral thought-world of Hellenistic culture. Although the grouping of ethical values into lists surfaces in diverse cultures of antiquity, the rhetorical use of ethical lists comes into full bloom in the moral doctrine of the Socratic philosophers, and particularly, in the teaching of the Stoa, the chief ethical propagandists of the Greco-Roman period.[4] Interaction of Stoic and Christian world views reveals a shared moral grammar, even when divergent understandings of the means to the moral life are to be detected. The use of the ethical catalog by NT writers[5] derives from its function in Hellenistic and Jewish literature.[6] In the NT, both

3. Notably, T. Fornberg, *An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society: A Study of 2 Peter* (ConBNT 9; Lund: Gleerup, 1977); J. H. Neyrey, "The Form and Background of the Polemic in 2 Polemic," *JBL* 99 (1980) 407-31; idem, *2 Peter, Jude: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37c; New York: Doubleday, 1993); R. Riesner, "Der zweite Petrus-Brief und die Eschatologie," *Zukünftserwartung in biblischer Sicht: Beiträge zur Eschatologie* (ed. G. Maier; Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1984) 124-43; and C. P. Thiede, "A Pagan Reader of 2 Peter: Cosmic Conflagration in 2 Peter 3 and the OCTAVIUS of Minucius Felix," *JSNT* 26 (1986) 79-96.

4. On the ethical system of the early Stoa, see A. Dyroff, *Ethik der alten Stoa* (Berlin: Calvary, 1897). For an adequate survey of Stoic thought roughly contemporary with the early church, see M. Pohlenz, *Die Stoa* (2 vols.; 4th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972) 1.277-99; and R. B. Todd, "Stoics and Their Cosmology in the First and Second Centuries A.D.," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römishen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung* (ed. W. Haase; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989) 11:36.3.1365-78.

5. See B. S. Easton, "New Testament Ethical Lists," *JBL* 51 (1932) 1-12; and N. J. McEleney, "The Vice Lists of the Pastoral Epistles," *CBQ* 36 (1974) 203-19.

6. Primary texts devoted to exploring the background of the ethical catalog are O. Zöckler, *Die Tugendlehre des Christentums* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1904); A. Vögtle, *Die Tugend- und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament* (NTAbh 16.4/5; Münster: Aschendorff, 1936); S. Wibbing, *Die Tugend- und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament: Ihre Traditionsgeschichte unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Qumran-Texte* (BZNW 25; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1959); and E. Kamlah, *Die Form der katalogischen Paränese im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1964).

strands—Hellenistic form and Jewish theological assumptions—merge in the Christian paraenetic tradition.[7]

I. THE ETHICAL CATALOG AND PETRINE PEDAGOGY

The recording of ethical lists in the Hellenistic world extends formally from the Homeric era. Their usage is by no means restricted to the domain of philosophy, even when moral-philosophical discourse appears to be the *Sitz im Leben* of the ethical catalog. Ethical lists appear in a wide range of literary and nonliterary contexts. In Hesiod, for example, name registers and ethical lists contain both transgressions against the gods and transgressions of the children against the parents.[8] In the intellectual satire of the poet/playwright Aristophanes, the ethical catalog serves to stereotype various behaviors in a parody of the Eleusinian mysteries.[9] In Seneca vice lists depict fellow Romans who can only "indulge in the discovery of new vices."[10]

The emergence of ethical catalogs in the Hellenistic period can be seen as the result of philosophical reflection, initially within an "academic" but later a more popular context. In time, however, the focus of philosophical ethics moves from the theoretical basis for *aretē*, "virtue" or "moral excellence,"[11] in the direction of its concrete and practical expression. Rhetorically speaking, the ethical list has an epideictic function; that is, as a form of speech it is intended to instill praise or shame in the hearer or listener[12]—a rhetorical function occurring in both Stoic and Christian usage. Because the ethical contours of both take their shape against the backdrop of Greco-Roman moral-social conditions, touch-points between Stoic discourse and the NT are numerous,[13] a prime example being 2 Pet 1:5-7.

7. The Christian paraenetic tradition is perhaps most richly on display in the general epistles—notably, in James, 1 and 2 Peter, and Jude. This particular contribution of the general epistles to the NT canon is examined in J. D. Charles, "The Old Testament in the General Epistles," *Dictionary of the Later New Testament* (ed. R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997).

8. Hesiod, *Theog.* 77-79, 240-64. Name-catalogs served for Hesiod the purpose of succinctly summarizing genealogies of the gods. Examples are reproduced in H. Trüb, *Kataloge in der griechischen Dichtung* (Zurich: Winterthur, 1952) 7-43.

9. Aristophanes *Frogs* 5.145.

10. Seneca *Brev. vit.* 10.4.

11. *Aretē* also can denote the manifestation of divine power, the sense of which is conveyed in 2 Pet 1:3.

12. Honor and shame form the rubric under which J. Neyrey's recent commentary is subsumed (*2 Peter, Jude*).

13. One more notable occasion of intercourse between Christian and Stoic ideas is recorded in Acts 17, where Paul's work in Athens is showcased. For discussion of the

As a pedagogical device, the ethical catalog derives its force from a standardization of human or behavioral types. Preaching moral up-lift in the marketplace, peripatetics found ethical lists to be a practi-cal and effective rhetorical tool. In popular usage the lists were far from the convoluted philosophical constructs that had been employed by "scholastic" moral philosophers. People saw themselves in these lists—whether by vice or virtue. In their form, Stoic ethical catalogs do not possess a rigid hierarchy of virtues so as to suggest a moral progression leading to an ethical climax, even when all the virtues stand in close connection with each other and constitute a natural unity. No particular order or arrangement of virtues characterizes popular usage of such lists, although paronomasia and alliteration are frequently achieved through the word order. On the whole, Stoic vice and virtue lists were not intended to be all-inclusive, and the pres-ence or absence of particular virtues in the list simply reflects the val-ues or particular emphasis of the author.[14]

Ethical lists in the NT function paraenetically in different con-texts. They may be used for the purpose of antithesis,[15] contrast,[16] polemics[17] or instruction.[18] Like their pagan counterparts, these lists resist any attempts at being reduced to a single *Urkatalog* or set pat-tern. Occasionally, though not necessarily, alliteration or assonance, cadence and inclusio enhance their descriptions. The catalog of vir-tues in 2 Pet 1:5-7, unlike ethical lists elsewhere in the NT, exhibits a logical progression: each successive virtue is rooted in and issues from the one that precedes.[19] Thus, in the Petrine catalog faith can be

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apostle's presentation at the Areopagus of Christian revelation in culturally relevant categories, see M. Pohlenz, "Paulus und die Stoa," *ZNW* 42 (1949) 69-104; B. Gaertner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (ASNU 21; Uppsala: Almquist, 1955) 73-241; L. Legrand, "The Areopagus Speech: Its Theological Kerygma and Its Mission-ary Significance," *La Notion de Dieu* (ed. J. Coppens; Louvain: Gembloux, 1974) 338-41; F. Mussner, "Anknüpfung, Kontinuität und Widerspruch in der Areopagrede. Apg 17, 22-31," *Kontinuität und Einheit* (ed. P. G. Müller and W. Stenger; Freiburg: Herder, 1981); and J. D. Charles, "Engaging the (Neo)Pagan Mind: Paul's Encounter with Athenian Culture as a Model for Cultural Apologetics (Acts 17:16-34)," *Trinity Journal* 16 N.S. (1995) 47--62.

14. A. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* (Philadelphia: West-minster, 1986) 138.

15. E.g., Gal 5:19-23 and Jas 3:13-18.

16. E.g., Titus 3:1-7.

17. E.g., 1 Tim 1:9-10, 6:3-5; 2 Tim 3:2-5.

18. E.g., 2 Pet 1:5-7.

19. A. Vögtle (*Tugend- und Lasterkataloge,* 47) links together 2 Cor 6:6, Gal 5:22, Eph 4:2-5, and Col 3:12-14 as having a "logical-psychological" function but fails to note the inherent progression of 2 Pet 1:5-7.

seen as the foundation of the Christian ethic and love as the climax. At the very least, one may assume that the rhetorical effect created by the progression and climax of the virtues in 2 Peter 1 is mirroring a concrete situation in which there has been fundamental ethical breakdown. This impression is strengthened by the recurrence of key words throughout the epistle—for example, "knowledge," "righteousness," "piety," "depravity," "destruction," "judgment"—in addition to the use of moral paradigms as prototypes of catastrophic judgment (chap. 2). In order to address this crisis, the writer appropriates a standard hortatory device to underscore the necessity of the moral life as proof of one's profession both to the community and to the world (1:10-11).

While the form and function of the ethical list is borrowed by NT writers, it should be emphasized that Hellenistic philosophical assumptions about moral progress are not carried over into the NT by its writers. To the Hellenistic mind, ethical requirements do not issue from a source of transcendent moral authority; rather, they are the fruit of reason (*logos*) and knowledge (*gnōsis*), by which one comes to realize the fullness of human nature.[20] Acquiring virtue for the Stoic is an absolute good, a goal in and of itself. By contrast, while the Stoic is called to rationality, the Christian is called to be transformed through a full knowledge (*epignōsis*) of divine grace (1:1-2, 3:18).

The polemical development of 2 Peter is significant insofar as it mirrors the interaction of Stoic and Christian moral thought-worlds. The moral grammar of the Stoa in 2 Peter 1 is employed by the writer with a distinctly Christian qualification.[21] While the letter climaxes with the announcement of the inevitability of eschatological judgment and moral accountability, it commences with exhortations to moral uplift that simultaneously point to a Hellenistic social setting and reflect the Christian paraenetic tradition.

II. THE VIRTUOUS LIFE: INTRODUCING A PETRINE THEME

The epistolary opening, despite its seeming lack of data, hints at the historical situation behind 2 Peter, while foreshadowing important themes in the letter—righteousness and knowledge in particular. The recipients of the letter are identified as "those who have received a

20. On this fundamental distinction, see J. N. Sevenster, "Education or Conversion: Epictetus and the Gospels," *NovT* 8 (1966) 247-62.

21. Wibbing's contention that 2 Pet 1:5-7 constitutes the only echo of the Stoic catalog form in the NT (*Tugend- and Lasterkataloge*, 86) can be moderated. It is certainly one of the clearest structural echoes in the NT, when not the sole one.

faith of equal standing as ours through the righteousness of our God
and Savior Jesus Christ." This "faith" which has been imparted to the
readers is described in two ways. First, it has been freely offered by
God through Christ's righteousness, *lachousin pistin en dikaiosynē*[22] *tou
theou hēmōn kai sōtēros*[23] *'Iēsou Christou*. This statement serves as a
necessary counter-weight to the accent on moral progress and cul-
tivating virtue which follows. The frequent occurrence of *dikaios* /
dikaiosynē in 2 Peter (eight times: 1:1, 13; 2:5, 7, 8[2x], 21; 3:13) has a
distinctly ethical quality and is all the more significant because of its
frequency in Hellenistic ethical lists, though with an entirely differ-
ent inflection. Nevertheless, from the outset this is observed to be a
righteousness imparted by God, not manufactured by human effort.
Not what is achieved but what is received is understood by the
author to be the foundation of Christian experience.

Moreover, the recipients possess a "faith of equal standing with
ours," *tois isotimon hēmin lachousin pistin.* The sense of equality ex-
pressed by *isotimos* resonates with the Hellenistic mind, given its
importance in law and politics.[24] From a political standpoint, all cit-
izens have the same position and rights; they are thus *isoi kai homoioi*
(Xenophon *Hist. Graec.* 7.1.1). Political connotations carry over into
the legal domain, infusing law with a principle of judicial right; the
law is no respecter of persons.[25] It is only natural that these legal con-
notations are translated into the covenantal language of the NT, il-
lustrated by 2 Pet 1:1. Inasmuch as a reference to *isotēs* in Hellenistic
culture reassures the citizen of his or her rights and privileges, its
application to equality of spiritual allotment in the Christian life is
particularly meaningful.

But the expression "faith of equal standing" also can be seen as
a veiled warning. Significantly, Jude observes that Israel was deliv-
ered once for all (*hapax*) from the land of Egypt but afterward (*deu-
teron*) was destroyed because of unbelief (Jude 5). Although Israel
was chosen to be a blessing to the nations, her history is littered with
faithlessness and apostasy. A similar warning, couched in the meta-
phor of the marketplace and proverbial wisdom, confronts the recip-
ients of 2 Peter. Spiritual knowledge, such as has been entrusted to the
reader, means proportionate responsibility and accountability (2 Pet
2:19-22).

22. The *dikai-* word group in 2 Peter: 1:1, 13; 2:5, 7, 8[2x], 21; 3:13.
23. "Savior" occurs five time in the epistle (1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18) and is ethical
rather than christological in its inflection. As a corollary, "escape" (*apopheugein*) appears
three times in 2 Peter (1:4; 2:18, 20) but nowhere else in the NT.
24. See G. Stählin, "*isos,*" *TDNT* 3.345-55.
25. Thus Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 1129a.

"Knowledge," a Petrine catchword, appears in the letter's opening (*epignōsis*, 1:2, 3) as well as in the ethical catalog (*gnōsis*, 1:5-7).[26] As it turns out, "knowledge" plays a central role in the writer's literary arsenal throughout the epistle. Whether pertaining to its central place in Stoic moral doctrine (cf. 1:5) or its value to the one being initiated into the higher mysteries of cultic life (compare the use of *gnōrizō*, "to disclose," in 1:16), "knowledge" is important to any pagan worth his salt. The writer's understanding of "knowledge," however, is not the equivalent of its pagan counterpart. Divine grace has come to believers (*lachousin pistin*), and the knowledge—that is, the practical awareness—of this grace is liberating, indeed salvific, in nature. Thus, "knowledge" in 2 Peter is stripped of any misconception whereby the distinction between Christian revelation and pagan rationalism might be obscured. Presupposed is a "knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" as the requisite means by which "grace and peace might be multiplied" (1:2).

The implications should not be lost on the readers and are two-fold. First, the knowledge of God, as already observed, makes possible their growth in grace and peace. This axiom both opens and closes the letter: *charis kai eirēnē plēthyntheiē en epignōsei tou theou kai 'Iēsou tou kyriou hēmōn* (1:2); *auxanete de en chariti kai gnōsei tou kyriou hēmōn kai sōtēros 'Iēsou Christou* (3:18a). Second, grace operating through the knowledge of God has the consequence of providing everything in the way of divine resources necessary for life and godliness (1:3-4). The message of grace in the pagan world is a radical reconstruction of human nature. No philosophical abstraction, *charis en epignōsei tou theou* cuts against materialistic rationalism on the one hand and philosophical mysticism on the other.[27] And lest the readers misinterpret the ethical admonitions to follow as a form of "works-righteousness" or striving that is rooted solely in the power of the human will, the writer emphasizes that the power to lead an ethical life resides not in

26. Conflicting views on the etymology of *epiginōskō* notwithstanding, a writer's own use of the term would appear to determine its inflection. Sometimes, a distinction regarding the use of *epiginōskō* is found in the NT—for example, in Johannine literature, where certain linguistic-theological developments are probably being mirrored. Other times *epiginōskō* and *ginōskō* are used indifferently. R. E. Picirelli ("The Meaning of 'Epignosis," *EvQ* 47/2 [1975] 85-93) examines both sides of the argument. He concludes: there is sufficient grounds for giving *epiginōskō* an intensive force in *some* of its NT occurrences (p. 90). Mere *gnōsis* represents a knowledge already existing, whereas *epignōsis* represents a point at which one experiences it (91). In 2 Peter this "knowledge" is decisive, given the issues at stake.

27. Contra B. Reicke (*The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude* [AB 37; New York: Doubleday, 1964] 112) and others, the literary strategy in 2 Peter calls not for a polemic against gnosticism but a reminder of the foundations of moral reasoning, consistent with the Hellenistic moral and Christian paraenetic tradition.

human strength but in divine provision. "Knowledge," thus, is integral to literary strategy in 2 Peter.[28]

A second key term, *eusebeia*,[29] "godliness" or "piety," also appears in the opening context. Following the greeting, "knowledge" and "godliness" are united in 1:3-4 in a way that serves two strategic hortatory functions. (1) Together they preview the foremost ethical burden of the writer ("You know these things" [1:12]; "What sort of persons should you be in leading lives of holiness and godliness?" [3:11]). (2) They are, moreover, couched together in language reminiscent of pagan metaphysics: "According to the divine power everything necessary for life and godliness has been given to us through the knowledge of him who has called us by his own glory and goodness" (1:3). The effect of this full repository—*ta timia kai megista epaggelmata*[30]—is that, stated positively, the readers "might become partakers of the divine nature" (1:4) and, stated negatively, they might thereby escape "the corruption that is in the world because of lust."

In speaking of suppressing fleshly lusts, the writer is borrowing heavily from Stoic ethical categories. According to Stoic doctrine, one suppresses the passions of the flesh by a rigorous cultivation of the virtues. Being virtuous, however, is an entirely rational rather than "spiritual" exercise. Petrine ethics, by contrast, conceives of itself as both spiritual and rational. While 2 Peter presupposes the Christian distinctive of grace (*pistis en dikaiosyē tou theou*, 1:1; *charis kai eirēnē plēthyntheiē,* 1:2), the will to deal with the flesh must be evidenced. As the remainder of the epistle suggests, not only is this "will" to curb the passions in question, there are those in the community who are reveling in moral depravity.

The author's use of pagan metaphysical language in 1:4 invites further consideration. Rather striking are (a) the Platonic linkage of *doxa* and *aretē*[31] in the author's depiction of Christ's "moral excellence,"[32]

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28. Other key words in the epistle include *eusebeia* (4x), *krisis* (4x), *kosmos* (4x), *sōtēr* (4x) *hodos* (4x), *apōleia/ apollymi* (5x), *prosdokaō* (3x), and the rare *exakoloutheō* (3x).

29. *Eusebeia* occurs in 2 Peter 4 times—in 1:3, 1:6, 1:7, and 3:11.

30. In Classical Greek, *epaggelmata* denotes voluntary or spontaneous promises, in contrast to *hyposcheseis*, which are promises made in response to a petition.

31. The linkage of *doxa* and *aretē* surfaces in two works of Plato, *Meno* and *Republic*. For discussion of some philosophical background, see Y. Lefrance, *La théorie platonicienne de la Doxa* (Montréal: Bellarmin / Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1981).

32. Rarely occurring in the NT (in 2 Peter 3x [1:3, 5], Phil 4:8, and 1 Pet 2:9), *aretē* is all the more striking due to its customary association in philosophical discourse with a pleasant temporal existence, not afterlife (thus, A. Hermann, *Untersuchungen zu Platons Auffassung von der Hēdonē: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des platonischen Tugendbegriffes* [Hypomnemata 35; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972] 59-73).

(b) two uses of the adjectival substantive *theios*,[33] "the divine," and
(c) the phrase "partaking in the divine nature," *genēsthe theias koi-nōnoi physeōs*.[34] The linkage of divine *doxa* and *aretē* is to be found
in a variety of literary sources roughly contemporary with the NT.
Plutarch uses *doxa* and *aretē* together in a context similar to 2 Peter 1.[35]
Philo speaks of the excellence (*aretē*) and wisdom (*sophia*) of God.[36]
Josephus alludes to individuals who "abuse the goodness of the di-vine," *eneparoinei tē aretē tou theiou*.[37] Plutarch elsewhere remarks on
the qualities of the divine in a way that is relevant to the immediate
context: "Divinity, to which men are eager to adapt and conform
themselves, seems to have three elements of superiority—incorrup-tion, power, and virtue [*aretē*]; and the most impressive, the divinest
of these is virtue."[38] That the writer is making use in 2 Peter 1 of

33. It is noteworthy that the use of *theios* in the NT is limited to two instances--
1:3-4 and Acts 17:29, the context of the latter being Paul's discourse before the Council
of the Areopagus in Athens. Both social locations, cosmopolitan Athens and perhaps a
similar setting in 2 Peter such as Asia Minor, betray no evidence of Jewish Torah or
world-view thinking such as one finds in the epistle of James. The terminology em-ployed in 2 Peter 1, reminiscent of philosophical mysticism and the mystery cults, is
especially relevant if the epistle is addressed to a community in Asia Minor. Not sur-prisingly, the adjectival *theios* occurs with relatively frequency in Hellenistic Jewish
Literature. Philo, who also speaks of oneness with the divine, distinguishes this union
as being initiated by God, not caused by humans. Christian evangelists and writers, by
contrast, would have been particularly sensitive about using language to denote be-coming like God or mystical union with the divine, given contemporary connotations
stemming from ever-present mysticism. Perhaps Paul and Barnabas have something
similar in mind following their ministry in Lystra (Acts 14:8-18). Reacting to the heal-ing of an invalid, the crowd exclaims, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness
of men!" Paul and Barnabas instinctively rend their garments and rush out among the
people crying, "Men, why are you doing this? We are also mere humans like you. . ."
The rather unique problem confronting the apostles in Lystra, at least from Luke's
point of view, is that a pagan understanding of *homoiōpathēs*—a sharing in the same (in
this case, divine) nature—was hindering the crowd's grasp of the good news. Theirs
is the challenge of dispelling any notion that might mistake a man for a god, especially
where supernatural powers are on display ("Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they
called Hermes," Acts 14:12). The narrative ends with this note from Luke: "With these
words [of disclamation] they scarcely restrained the people from sacrificing to them"
(14:18).

34. The Platonic phrase *theia physis* (*Rep.* 366c; *Phaed.* 230a; *Theaet.* 176ab) occurs
also in Aristotle (*Part. Anim.* 4.10; *Apol.* 7.1.2), Seneca (*Ep. Mor.* 92.30), Josephus (*Ap.* 26),
Philo (*De dec.* 104; *De conf. ling.* 154), and Diogenes Laertius (10.97.103). Philo distin-guishes union with God as being initiated by God, not caused by humans (*Leg. alleg.*
1.38).

35. Plutarch *De vit. Pud.* 535.

36. Philo *Leg. alleg.* 2.14.

37. Josephus *Ant.* 17.5.6.

38. Plutarch *Arist.* 6.3 (cited in Kelly, *Commentary*, 301).

pagan metaphysical language[39] reveals an underlying motivation: to demonstrate an awareness of and relevance to the social location of his audience.[40] Surely there is a resonation in the mind of the readers between the way in which *aretē* is used here and its application to ethics immediately following (1:5). To wit: there exists a relationship between God's moral character and ours.

III. THE CATALOG OF VIRTUES (1:5-7)

Among Hellenistic philosophers, none could consider himself rational without a pledge to be moral.[41] Such is implicit in Cicero's rhetorical question, "Is not philosophy the law of life?"[42] Indeed, the real business of all philosophy, understood to perform a therapeutic function,[43] was viewed as moral conduct. The power to reflect and act on this reflection—that is, that which distinguishes humans from irrational beasts (see in this regard 2 Pet 2:12)—is a recurring theme in Stoic moral philosophy, particularly in the writings of Seneca and Epictetus. Foundationally, virtue for the Stoic is a corollary of knowledge (*gnōsis*).[44] By this moral calculus, vice is a consequence of (when not to be equated with) ignorance. It may well be that in 2 Peter the writer is exploiting this common epistemological assumption in his moral exhortation; hence, his strategic use of the key words "knowledge" and "knowing" throughout the epistle.[45]

If 2 Peter is addressed to the Christian community in a Gentile social setting, as T. Fornberg[46] has persuasively argued, the con-

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39. Significantly, the language of the mysteries surfaces again in 1:16, where the writer speaks of himself as *epoptēs*, "an eye-witness," of the Transfiguration "while we were on the holy mountain." It is noteworthy that in spite of three synoptic narratives recording the Transfiguration, 2 Pet. 1:16 is the only NT appearance of *epoptēs*. The reason may well lie in the fact that the term used in a technical sense signified the highest degree of enlightenment in the Eleusinian mysteries. Thus J. Klinger, "The Second Epistle of Peter: An Essay in Understanding," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 17 (1973) 161-62.

40. The epistle suggests a social location not unlike the Corinth which Paul encountered.

41. Thus Cicero *Leg*. 1.12.33.

42. Cicero *Ep*. 39. To the extent that religion consists in wisdom and virtue, it does not differ with Hellenistic philosophy (thus, e.g., Seneca *Ep. Mor*. 95.47; idem *Fr*. 123; Epictetus *Ench*. 31.1; and Cicero *De nat. deo* 2.71). It was of the more popular, "irrational" forms of religion that Stoic philosophers were critical.

43. Seneca writes that philosophy "tones the soul" (*Ep. Mor*. 15).

44. Because the Stoic virtues are all forms of knowledge, philosophy can be viewed as both a means and an end.

45. Consider the vocabulary: *ginōskō* (1:20; 3:3); *epiginōskō* (2:21 twice); *proginōskō* (3:17); *gnōrizō* (1:16); *oida* (1:12,14); *gnōsis* (1:5, 6; 3:18); and *epignōsis* (1:2, 3, 8; 2:20). To Clement of Alexandria, who is accustomed to bridging culture and faith, *gnōsis* is the intermediary between faith and love (*Strom*. 7.46, 55).

46. Fornberg, *An Early Church*.

cepts of virtue, faith, and knowledge would constitute an appropriate method of countering immorality or amorality in a sceptical environment. In the hands of the writer, the foundations of pagan ethical life can be symbolically sanctified and incorporated into the Christian paraenetic tradition. No dichotomy exists between the temporal and the eternal, between human cooperation and divine initiation. Christian truth in the mind of the writer manifests itself in the Hellenistic ethical ideal.[47]

Not only would a catalog of virtues be an appropriate way of countering a deterioration of the moral life in the community, it would be all the more relevant based on the catalog's popular usage. One unusually striking parallel to 2 Pet 1:5-7 comes from a first-century Asia Minor inscription said to be in honor of one Herostratus, son of Dorcalion.[48] Listed in this catalog are *pistis* (faith), *aretē* (virtue), *dikaiosynē* (righteousness), *eusebeia* (piety) and *spoudē* (diligence), respectively.[49] A comparison of the two texts, which show verbatim similarities, is worth noting.

> *andra agathon genomenon kai dienenkanta pistei kai aretę̄ kai dikaiosynę̄ kai eusebeiai . . . tēn pleistēn eisēnenegmenon spoudēn.*

> *spoudēn pasan pareisenegkantes epichorēgesate en tę̄ pistei hymōn tēn aretēn, en de tę̄ aretę̄ tēn gnōsin, en de tę̄ gnōsei tēn egkrateian, en de tę̄ egkrateią tēn hypomonēn, en de tę̄ hypomonę̄ tēn eusebeian. . . .*

The Petrine catalog begins: "For this very reason make every effort to add to your faith. . ." The Hellenistic thought-world, on display in 1:3-4, comes to expression concretely in vv. 5-7. Of the eight virtues listed in vv. 5-7, *aretē* (moral excellence), *gnōsis*[50] (knowledge), *egkrateia* (self-control), *hypomonē* (perseverance), *eusebeia*[51] (godliness),

47. Thus J. Klinger, "The Second Epistle of Peter: An Essay in Understanding," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 17 (1973) 163-68.

48. The text is reproduced in F. Dittenberger (ed.), *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae: Supplementum Sylloges inscriptionum Graecarum* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1970) 12-13 (no. 438).

49. Cf. 2 Pet 1:5, 10, 15; 3:14.

50. K.-W. Tröger ("Zum gegenwartigen Stand der Gnōsis- und Nag-Hammadi-Forschung," *Altes Testament—Frühjudentum—Gnōsis: Neue Studien zu "Gnōsis und Bibel"* [ed. K.-W. Tröger; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1980] 11-33) points to the considerable diversity and confusion surrounding use of the term *gnōsis*—usage that ranges from nontechnical to religious. While *gnōsis* in 2 Peter 1 was part of a rhetorical strategy that reflects broader Hellenistic usage, popular understanding related foremost to knowing oneself (*gnōthi sauton*) and others (J. Dupont, *Gnosis: La Connaissance religieuse dans les épîtres de Saint Paul* [Louvain: Nauwelaerts / Paris: Gabalda, 1949] 383-84). Note also Paul's wordplay with "knowledge" in Acts 17:23 before the Areopagus Council concerning the *agnōstō theę̄ ho oun agnoountes eusebeite touto egō kataggellō hymin.*

51. Note the verb form *eusebeite* in Paul's Areopagus speech (Acts 17:23), where common philosophical ground is being exploited.

and *philadelphia* (brotherly affection) all appear in one form or another in comparable pagan ethical lists, of which *aretē, gnōsis, egkrateia,* and *eusebeia* are most common.[52] The clear overlap between the 2 Peter catena and pagan lists gives evidence that the origins of the letter can be traced to a Gentile setting,[53] with a concrete local situation being insinuated by the exhortation to virtue in 1:5ff.

   Pistis, normally conveying the sense of loyalty or trust in common parlance, is to be understood as distinctly Christian in its Petrine conception. In comparable subapostolic lists, faith is also foundational. Hermas's list[54] begins with *pistis* and ends with *agapē*, between which are found *egkrateia, aplotēs, akakia, semnotēs, and epistēmēs*. Barnabas[55] begins with *pistis*, upon which *phobos, hypomonē, makrothymia*, and *egkrateia* follow. Clement has two short lists of three and four virtues respectively,[56] with *pistis* beginning both and *agapē* included in the second. *Pistis* in 2 Pet 1:5 is not the *fides quae creditur* of "early Catholic" understanding—that is, the objective creedal dogma formulated in response to second-century heresy.[57] It is rather the subjective trust placed in the Gospel—a faith procured *en dikaiosynē tou theou hēmōn kai sōtēros 'Iēsou Christou*. It is, moreover, a faith "received" (*lagchanō*) and not "handed down" (*paradidōmi*) by way of tradition, which is to say, it is a free gift bestowed upon all.

   In its earlier classical usage, *aretē* denotes excellence or renown. In time, the term came to be applied to the sphere of ethics, to which it was henceforth more or less restricted. As one might expect, given the underlying Stoic belief that moral excellence was the result of human achievement (as compared, for example, with the notion of righteousness and obedience to the Torah) without any consequence of afterlife, its occurrence in the LXX is rare. The term does appear with some frequency in Philo, Wisdom of Solomon and 4 Maccabees—that is, the literature of Hellenistic Judaism. Although *aretē* appears three times in 2 Peter 1,[58] its usage in 1:3, applied to divine manifestation, is similar to that found in 1 Pet 2:9 ("that you might proclaim his mighty *aretē*").[59]

   52. Even *pistis*, understood as loyalty, occasionally surfaces in popular philosophical catalogs.

   53. So Fornberg, *An Early Church,* 98.

   54. Hermes *Vis*. 3.8.1.

   55. Barnabas 2.2.3.

   56. Clement *1 Clem*. 62.2.43.

   57. Contra Käsemann ("Apologia," 190-95; "Paul and Early Catholicism," 236-51), Schelkle ("Spätapostolische Briefer," 225-32; idem, *Die Petrusbriefe—Der Judasbrief* [HTKNT 13/2; Freiburg: Herder, 1970] 145-68) and others. Jude 3, by contrast, suggests itself as *fides quae creditur*.

   58. *Aretē* in the NT: Phil 4:8; 1 Pet 2:9; 2 Pet 1:3, 5.

   59. Cf. LXX Isa 43:21.

Knowledge (*gnōsis*) frequently begins or ends pagan ethical lists.[60] One is thus justified in concluding that its placement in the catalog immediately following *aretē* reflects the Stoic belief that there is an organic and indivisible link between the two *aretai*. Moreover, from a Petrine standpoint the correlation between virtue and knowledge is not insignificant. Their affiliation points to a practical understanding of what *dikaiosynē* should resemble.[61] Where Christian and Stoic conceptions of knowledge differ is that the Christian view strips knowledge of its technical nuance; *gnōsis* is not a goal in and of itself. In contrast to speculative philosophy,[62] by which *gnōsis* underpins the acquisition of all the virtues, in the Petrine progression it is an extension and not the sole *basis* of one's faith and virtue. It is rather rooted in revelatory grace (1:2). The implication might possibly be drawn that divorced from faith and virtue, knowledge might be "detrimental," a reality to which the community at Corinth bears striking testimony.[63] Hence, what the readers do with the knowledge imparted to them is decisive. In the present context *gnōsis* signifies a practical manifestation or application of what is known to be true. In the moral progression of 2 Peter 1:5-7, knowledge should progress toward greater self-control in the lives of the readers. Growth in knowledge, simply stated, will lead to an exemplary lifestyle—one that is virtuous and, to the Hellenistic mindset, necessarily restrained.

The organic connection between *gnōsis* and *egkrateia*, self-control, is not incidental.[64] Both go together naturally, just as their opposites, ignorance (*agnoia*) and lust (*epithymia*), find an irrepressible linkage: "Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance (1 Pet 1:14). *Egkrateia* is a cardinal virtue for Socrates,[65] and in his contrast of moral strength and weakness, Aristotle devotes a whole section to its importance in *Nicomachean Ethics*.[66] Stoics adopted a similarly exalted view of *egkrateia*,[67] although in the hierarchy of virtues it was subordinated to *sōphrosynē*.[68] In Philo,

60. Vögtle, *Tugend- and Lasterkataloge*, 187-91; and Dupont, *Gnosis*, 388-93.
61. O. Zöckler captures this nuance in his comments on the ethical catalog in 2 Peter 1 (*Tugendlehre*, 3-4).
62. Kelly believes the reference to *gnōsis* in 1:5 to be "a critical side-glance at the speculative gnosis of the errorists" (*Commentary*, 306). More plausibly, the writer's vocabulary is simply a reflection of a *broader* Hellenistic and philosophical usage.
63. 1 Cor 8:1-3, 7-13; 13:2. *Gnōsis* in succeeding generations would be possessed by the few "who are capable of grasping it" (Clement *Strom*. 1.13.1).
64. Clement notes this relationship as well in *Strom*. 7.46. See W. Grundmann, "*egkrateia*," *TDNT* 2.339-42.
65. Xenophon *Mem*. 1.5.4.
66. Aristotle Book 7 (1145b-1154b).
67. Stobaeus *Ecl*. 2.61.11; Diogenes Laertius 7.92.
68. Stobaeus *Ecl*. 2.60.20.

where it is a superior virtue,[69] it is linked with asceticism,[70] which marks something of a shift from the classical view.

Defined in more Stoic terms as "self-discipline in all matters affecting the senses,"[71] *egkrateia*[72] is perhaps best understood when set in juxtaposition to its antithetical twins—*akrasia* (incontinence) and *akolasia* (licentiousness). *Egkrateia*, moreover, is a necessary component in the ethical life to counter any potential misunderstanding of Christian "freedom"—a misunderstanding, for example, that might view the struggle against *pathos* or *epithymia* as unnecessary. It is not incidental that *egkrateia* is frequently associated with sexual restraint, even within the Christian community (e.g., Gal 5:23).[73] A synonym of *akolasia, aselgeia* occurs twice in 2 Peter (2:7, 18), alongside other linguistic indications of moral decay that threaten to debase the community—*phthora* (1:4; 2:12[2x], 19), *epithymia* (1:4; 2:10, 18; 3:3), *anomos* (2:8) and *athesmos* (2:7; 3:17). 2 Peter gives evidence not only that humans are capable of unbridled passion but also that such indulgence has a seductive effect on others (2:10-12, 15-16; 3:3). Thus it is that Stoic philosophy carved out its niche by a rigorous ethical program aimed at curbing the passions. While the power and motivation of the Christian ethic are distinct from a Stoic counterpart, they nevertheless share common ethical ground.[74] Given the fact that the trajectory of much of the material in 2 Peter is aimed at the lawless and morally depraved, that is, those who revel in their "freedom" (2:13), *egkrateia* is the essential and very practical expression of the ethical life.

A fruit of the self-controlled life is *hypomonē*, endurance or perseverance. In its classical usage, *hypomonē* connotes "courageous endurance that fully defies evil"[75] and thus is active rather than passive. In Plato,[76] it is brave resistance that is honorable to a man. Aristotle subordinates *hypomonē* to *andreia*, "heroism" or "courage,"[77] a categorization that is carried over into Stoic ethics. In a Christian context, endurance has two sides: it expresses itself toward the world and to-

69. Philo *Spec. leg.* 2.195.

70. Philo *Leg alleg.* 3.18.

71. Thus Kelly, *Commentary*, 306.

72. From the *krat-* stem, designating power or lordship, and thus dominion over oneself.

73. In his defense before Felix, Paul's discussion of *egkrateia, dikaiosynē*, and *krima* (Acts 24:25) proves somewhat discomfiting to the governor.

74. Self-restraint is not only a mark of and prerequisite for a spiritual leader (Titus 1:8), it is a fruit of the Spirit and a necessary part of any Christian's ethical arsenal (Gal 5:23). With this in full view, Tertullian (*Ad mart.* 3) seeks to encourage Christians under persecution by citing the example of the athletes: *Coguntur, cruciantur, fatigantur*, "They are constrained, harassed, wearied."

75. F. Hauck, "*hypomonē*," *TDNT* 4.581-82.

76. Plato *Theaet.* 117b.

77. Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 1115a-1117b.

ward God. Far from mere will power,[78] by which the Stoic deadens his sensibilities, endurance in the Christian scheme of things issues out of a deep confidence in the divine will and submission to the hand of God. This quality allows the believer to bear up (or more precisely, "remain under") difficulty and trial without being moved. To endure temptation, suffering, and hardship requires patience. It is, moreover, hope, Christian hope, that allows one to "endure all things" (1 Cor 13:7), a hope anchored in a deep confidence that the Christian will not be tested beyond the capacity to stand firm. To endure is to demonstrate mature faith.[79] In 2 Peter, significantly, *hypomonē* appears alongside the *makrothymia* of God (3:15). We endure because of God's longsuffering toward humans.

The connection between self-control, endurance, and godliness, the next link in the Petrine catena, is transparent and logical in the Christian ethical progression. *Eusebeia* is to be interpreted in a broad sense. In late Hellenism it expresses general "piety" or reverence and occurs in both religious and nonreligious contexts. It may be used in the sense of reverence toward the gods, or it may denote respect for family, tradition, or the social order.[80] Thus, it is not an expression of Greek religiosity in the narrow sense of the term.[81] In the NT it carries both Christian and wider Hellenistic connotations. Significantly, all the occurrences of *eusebeia* are confined to the Pastorals[82] and 2 Peter,[83] where it serves to underscore a particular way of life, that is, behavior that is worthy of praise. In a Hellenistic context, it connotes laudable behavior toward the gods and cultic duties and thus is a pagan ideal. The soul of religion, after all, is its practice.

The virtue of piety expresses itself in one's relationships to others—to the world and to the household of faith. Out of one's reverence toward God one learns to honor others. Indeed, the Christian Gospel is nothing if it does not affect one's relationships. *Philadelphia*, often appearing as *philanthrōpia*[84] in pagan texts,[85] describes a kindness

78. E.g., H. von Arnim (ed.), *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (3 vols.; Leipzig: Pustet, 1903-05) 3.65; Seneca *Ep. Mor.* 67.10.

79. This emphasis of enduring presses to the fore in much of the NT, particularly in Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, and Revelation. Within the context of faith, the person who endures temptation is blessed (Jas 1:12). If we endure when we do right, we have God's approval (1 Pet 2:20). In persevering, it is important to remember that we have a model (Heb 12:2).

80. W. Foerster, "*eusebeia*," *TDNT* 7.175-85.

81. This point receives its due in Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 100.

82. *Eusebeia* occurs ten times in the Pastorals.

83. The *euseb-* word group occurs four times in 2 Peter: 1:3, 6, 7; 3:11.

84. Philo links *philanthrōpia* with *eusebeia* in *De virt.* 51 and 95, while linking together *egkrateia, eusebeia,* and *philanthrōpia* in *Spec. leg.* 4.97.

85. Vögtle notes the rather scant use of the term *philadelphia* outside of Christian literature (*Tugend- und Lasterkataloge*, 188).

or affection toward family members and toward others in general. Behind the term stands the Greek ideal of friendship, suggesting duties that attend our relationships.[86] For the household of faith, it acquires a special meaning, though it can easily be taken for granted.[87]

The catalog achieves its climax in *agapē*, which distinguishes the Christian ethos and without which it would be incomplete. Christian morality is distinctly the morality of charity. It is the morality of fruit-bearing, which is to say that it gives evidence of an internal work of grace, demonstrating gratitude through one's actions.[88] Thus seen, Christian morality issues from a wholly unique motivation.[89] This is, then, no rigorist asceticism; rather, it is an ethos that is rooted in and flows from a divine source. *Agapē* is the fount and the goal of Christian virtuous action;[90] therein lies the difference between the Christian and pagan ethos.

While vice and virtue lists in the NT are not all of the same compositional variety, one peculiar feature absent from pagan catalogs is the occasional movement in a list toward crescendo or decrescendo. 2 Pet 1:5-7 is a prime example of this, with its ethical progression that builds toward a climax in *agapē*.[91] Each virtue, a fruit of the life

86. See U. Luck, "*Philanthrōpia*," *TDNT* 9.107-12.

87. It constantly needs to be refined by the work of the Spirit (e.g., Eph 4:1-3; Col 3:12-15; 1 Pet 1:22; 1 John 3:18-22, 4:7-21).

88. Thus C. Spicq, *Théologie Morale du Nouveau Testament* (2 vols.; Paris: Gabalda, 1970) 1.50, 141.

89. Frequently, the NT depicts this work of grace by exploiting the imagery of the farmer, the gardener, and the vinedresser. God is the cultivator; we are the field (1 Cor 3:5-9). The Christian disciple exists to bear fruit, lasting fruit (John 15; Rom 7:4). The Christian's life, if it is judged to be qualitatively different, must bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5). It is in this fruit-bearing that we please God (Col 1:10) and influence men (Matt 5:16). In this regard see J. Bommer, *Die Idee der Fruchtbarkeit in den Evangelien* (Pfullingen: Mohn, 1950); and F. Böckle, *Die Idee der Fruchtbarkeit in den Paulusbriefen* (Fribourg: Fribourg Universität, 1953).

90. Parallel to the over-arching mandate of love is doing the will of God. On this dual emphasis in the NT, see J. Stelzenberger, *Lehrbuch der Moraltheologie* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1965) 69-73.

91. Contra H. Windisch (*Die Katholischen Briefe* [HNT 4/2; 2d ed.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1930], 84) and Bauckham (*Jude, 2 Peter*, 184-85), who see no logical progression in the virtue catalog, there is indeed, from a uniquely Christian perspective, a logic, cadence, starting point, and climax to the virtues listed. Bauckham is correct to observe that apart from *pistis* and *agapē* the writer has chosen virtues from the Stoic and popular philosophical milieu that demonstrate ethical relevance in a Hellenistic cultural environment. His claim, however, that "[o]nly two virtues have a clearly intelligible place in the list" would indicate an absence of discerning their theological and organic union, which at the very least is suggested by the syntax of 1:5-7. Escalation can also be detected in Rom 5:1-5, where the trajectory of grace moves from suffering to hope. Similarly, the list of hardships encountered by Paul recorded in 2 Cor 6:6 moves from the general (afflictions and hardships) to the specific (sleepless nights and hunger). This rhetorical movement is analyzed in H. A. Fischel, "The Uses of Sorites (Climax, Gradatio) in the Tannaitic Period," *HUCA* 44 (1973) 119-51.

of faith, facilitates the next, as is suggested by the *en de tē̦* . . . syntactical arrangement of 1:5-7. The virtues cannot stand in unrelated or unconnected juxtaposition; none is independent of the others. The relational aspect of the individual virtues in 2 Pet 1:5-7 has been aptly summarized by Mayor:

> Faith is the gift of God already received; to this must be added (1) moral strength which enables a man to do what he knows to be right; (2) spiritual discernment; (3) self-control by which a man resists temptation; (4) endurance by which he bears up under persecution or adversity; (5) right . . . behavior toward God [piety]; (6) toward the brethren [brotherly love]; (7)[and] toward all [love].[92]

Rather remarkable verbal and conceptual parallels to 2 Pet 1:3-7 show up in an early first-century Asia Minor inscription. A decree issued by the inhabitants of Stratonicea in the Asian province of Caria mirrors what is apparently commonplace liturgical language for that region. The affinities between the inscription and 2 Peter 1 are strong enough to suggest the possibility of literary dependence. Both the text of the decree and that of 2 Peter follow:

> . . . *tēn polin anōthen tē̦ tōn proestōtōn autēs megistōn theon [pronoią̦ Dios P]anēmeriou kai He]katēs ek pollōn kai megalōn kai synechōn kindynōn sesōsthai, hōn kai ta hiera asyla kai hiketai kai hē hiera synklētos dogmati Se[bastou Kaisaros epi] tēs tōn kyriōn Rōmaiōn aiōniou archēs epoiēsanto prophaneis enargeias. kalōs de echi pasan spoudēn ispheresthai is tēn pros [autous euseb]eian kai mēdena kairon paralipin tou eusebein kai litaneuin autous. kathidrytai de agalmata en tō̦ sebastō̦ bouleutēriō̦ tōn proeirēmenō]n theōn epiphan]estatas parechonta tēs theias dynameōs aretas, di' has kai to synpan plēthos thyei to kai epithymią̦ kai euchetai kai eucharistei. a[ei tois]de tois houtōs epiphanestatois theois kak tēs di' hymnō̦dias prosodou kai thrēskeias eusebein autous [eithistai].[93]*

> *hōs ta panta hymin tēs theias dynameōs autou ta pros zōēn kai eusebeian dedōrēmenēs dia tēs epignōseōs tou kalesantos hēmas idią̦ doxē̦ kai aretē̦, di' hōn ta timia hēmin kai megista epaggelmata dedōrētai, hina dia toutōn genēsthe theias koinōnoi physeōs apophygontes tēs en tō̦ kosmō̦ en epithymią̦ phthoras, kai auto touto de spoudēn pasan pareisenegkantes epichorēgēsate en tē̦ pistei hymōn tēn aretēn en de tē̦ aretē̦ tēn gnōsin en de tē̦ gnōsei tēn egkrateian en de tē̦ egkrateią̦ tēn hypomonēn en de tē̦ hypomonē̦ tēn eusebeian en de tē̦ eusebeią̦ tēn philadelphian en de tē̦ philadelphią̦ tēn agapēn.[94]*

92. Mayor, *The Epistle,* 93.

93. *CIG* 3.2715a-b. A. Deissmann (*Bible Studies: Contributions Chiefly from Papyri and Inscriptions to the History of the Language, the Literature and the Religion of Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity* [trans. A. Grieve; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901] 361-62) dates this inscription possibly prior to AD 22. Should it in fact reflect the local color of the readers' situation, interesting light is thereby shed on the destination of 2 Peter.

94. 2 Pet 1:3-7.

The verbal affinities in the two texts are striking. Among those worth noting are: (1) the likeness of the common Greek idiom *pasan spoudēn eispheresthai*[95] in the inscription to *spoudēn pasan pareiseneg-kantes* in 2 Pet 1:5; (2) the periphrastic reference to God, *hē theia dynamis,* in connection with *aretē—tēs theias dynameōs aretas* versus *tēs theias dynameōs kai aretē* (1:3); (3) the language of eternal lord-ship—*tōn kyriōn aiōniou archēs* versus *tēn aiōnion basileian tou kyriou 'Iēsou Christou* (1:11); (4) the introduction of a relative clause follow-ing the word *aretē—tēs theias dynameōs aretas, di'* . . . versus *idią doxę kai aretę, di'* . . . (1:3-4); (5) repetition of the term *eusebeia--tēn pros autous eusebeia kai mēdena kairon paralipin tou eusebein* versus *tēn euse-beian en de tę eusebeią tēn philadelphian* (1:7); and (6) use of the super-lative *megistos* in both texts (cf. 1:4). Not merely the isolated verbal correspondences, not only the listing of virtues, but also the like syn-tax in which these parallels are found is quite significant. Strongly suggested by a comparison of the two texts is that we have here to do with stereotypical religious language of the Imperial period.

In addition to the idiomatic *spoudēn pareispherō* in 2 Pet 1:5, a sec-ond verb of note in this sequence, *epichorēgeō* (also v. 5), provides much color to the text due to its rich history and the cultural milieu from which it derives, as evidenced by classical and later Hellenistic writers.[96] In Greek theater, large and costly choruses were often em-ployed that normally required the assistance of a wealthy local bene-factor in helping to defray the costs. This individual became known as the *chorēgos.* The relative extravagance attached to such produc-tions is connoted by the verb-form, *chorēgeō,* a strengthened form of which is used in 2 Pet 1:5 (*epichorēgeō*). Unfortunately, the richness of this picture is lost in its translation. The readers are not merely to "add" or "supply," they are to *contribute extravagantly* to their own moral development.[97] Lest there be any misunderstanding, however, this is no mere "works-righteousness" for two important reasons enunciated with considerable rhetorical flourish in the text: (1) a sur-plus of grace and divine resources has already been lavished upon believers for the ethical life (1:1-4), and (2) entrance into the divine kingdom will be "richly supplied" (*plousiōs epichorēgeō*) by Jesus Christ himself (1:11).[98]

95. E.g., Polybius Hist. 21.29.12, and Josephus *Ant.* 20.204.
96. It occurs in Xenophon (*Mem.* 3.4.3), Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 1100a-b), Plutarch (*Mor.* 13e), Polybius (3.78.8), and Strabo (11.14.16).
97. Cf. Pauline usage in 2 Cor 9:10, where *epichorēgeō* and *chorēgeō* alternate.
98. This imagery lends plausibility to F. W. Danker's thesis that 2 Pet 1:1-11 bears some resemblance to later Hellenistic civic decrees, by which the generosity of local benefactors to a particular community was noted ("2 Peter 1: A Solemn Decree," *CBQ* 40 [19781 64-82).

IV. CONCLUSION

2 Peter 1 ushers the reader into the moral world of Hellenistic society. The catalog of virtues in 1:5-7 serves as a linchpin in the writer's strategy to relate the morality of Christian truth-claims in a relevant fashion to the community which finds itself in a morally sceptical cultural environment. Without advancing a Stoic view of "ultimate things," the writer employs rhetorical and lexical tools from the Stoic moral grammar that enable him to address ethical lapse within the community—lapse that may be judged to be potentially catastrophic (2:4-22) if unchecked. Not the false doctrine presupposed by the "early Catholic" hypothesis but moral decay stemming from a disavowal of Christian truth-claims is the burden of 2 Peter. With the possible and scandalous implication that pagans are more virtuous than some in the community, the readers are exhorted toward a virtuous lifestyle—one that is consonant with their profession of faith (1:10). The contours of this lifestyle point to a moral progression for which the believer, based on prior knowledge, is ultimately held accountable.