

CHAPTER 4

1 PETER, ITS SITUATION AND STRATEGY: A DISCUSSION WITH DAVID BALCH

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The following represents an expanded version of my contribution to a dialogue with David Balch on 1 Peter held in December 1982. This discussion was part of the program of the joint annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature that took place on 19-22 December 1982 in New York City. Our dialogue and its theme, "1 Peter: Social Separation or Acculturation?" had been prompted by the opposing conclusions that we had reached concerning the situation and strategy of 1 Peter in our recently published works, *A Home for the Homeless*¹ and *Let Wives Be Submissive*.²

¹John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981); see also my *1 Peter: Estrangement and Community* (Herald Biblical Booklets, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1979) and my popular-level commentary that appeared following our discussion, *James* (R. A. Martin), *I-II Peter/Jude* (John H. Elliott) (Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982).

²David L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (Society of

As is the case with many such dialogues, this one too had its history of previous exchanges. In my study, *A Home for the Homeless*, I had referred to Balch's original 1974 Yale dissertation.³ In his dissertation as well as in its published version (1981) he had commented on my earlier treatment of 1 Peter 2:4-10, *The Elect and the Holy* (1966).⁴ This published work, containing both striking agreements and sharp divergences, set the background for our 1982 discussion. By agreeing to summarize our views on 1 Peter and critique each other's conclusions we hoped to shed some light on the complex social dynamics implied by this text and ultimately to advance the understanding of early Christianity's engagement with its environment. The positive response of those attending our friendly debate has encouraged us to make this discussion available to a wider audience.

Unfortunately, no recording was made of the proceedings and much of the exchange was oral. Professor Balch summarized a paper that he had prepared, and my response was based on a summary of its main points, which he had sent me in advance of the meeting. The remainder of the discussion consisted in oral exchange between ourselves and the audience. With Professor Balch's 1982 paper now at my disposal, I can offer in this article a more extensive response to his comments. First I shall summarize major points on which we agree. Next some minor misunderstandings or misreadings will be clarified. Then the remainder of this article will treat areas and issues of major disagreement.

POINTS OF AGREEMENT

1. Regarding the general time frame of 1 Peter and the social situation it presumes, we agree that the letter was written in the last third of the first century (Balch, *Wives*, 138: "65-90 A.D."; Elliott, *Home*, 87: "73-92 C.E."). It was addressed to Christians suffering not as a result of an official persecution of Christianity instigated by Rome but as a consequence of sporadic outbursts of local suspicion, resentment, and hostility.

2. We agree that 1 Peter incorporates and modifies a traditional hellenistic household code though there is disagreement over the purpose of its employment (*Home*, 207-37; *Wives*, 1-20, 81-116; Paper, 1-3 and passim).

Biblical Literature Monograph Series, 26; Chico: Scholars Press, 1981). For a recent assessment of both works see the review essay of Antoinette Wire in *Religious Studies Review* 10:3 (1984): 209-16.

³David L. Balch, "Let Wives Be Submissive . . ." *The Origin, Form and Apologetic Function of the Household Duty Code (Haustafel) in 1 Peter* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1976).

⁴John H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy. An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4-10 and the phrase Basileion Hierateuma* (NovT Supplements 12; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).

3. We agree that the historical origin of this domestic code can be traced back to Aristotle's comments on the household in the first book of his *Politics* (*Home*, 213-20; *Wives*, 33-59.)

4. In our respective studies both of us have also noted the antiquity, continuity, and universality of the association between discussions concerning household management (*oikonomia*) and management of the city or state (*politeia*). The roles and relations of the household provided an apposite model for conceptualizing and legitimating roles and status in the political sphere. The use and elaboration of the "oikonomia tradition" (*Home*, 214) served as a vehicle for promoting order and harmony in both *oikos* and *polis* by embodying a set of shared values concerning the central importance of the *oikos* as the primary instance of human association, its structure and its effective management.

From these common observations, however, the differing focuses of our research in *Wives* and *Home* have taken us on diverging paths and ultimately led us to conflicting conclusions concerning the function of the proximate origin and intended function of the household code in 1 Peter. Balch (*Wives*, paper) restricts his attention exclusively to the material and purpose of the code in 1 Peter and sees the use of the code as evidence that the letter is advocating a program of Christian assimilation to secular society. On the other hand, I am concerned with the totality of 1 Peter and the manner in which the household code serves the letter's overall strategy of encouraging and exhorting its addressees as the brotherhood of faith (2:17, 5:9) and household of God (2:5, 4:17).

CLARIFICATIONS

As my colleague has pointed out (Paper, 4), unclarity concerning the issue under question had led to some misunderstandings and misrepresentations. I welcome and accept his criticism that I have erroneously mistaken his interpretation of the aim of the Petrine household code in *Wives* for an interpretation of the general aim of the letter as a whole. It is a hermeneutical truism, however, that the function of any of the parts of a writing can only be adequately determined by examination of its total literary context and of its role within the total line of argument from commencement to close. One of my major contentions is that in neglecting to analyze and explain in *Wives* how the household code relates to and serves the general strategy of the letter, Balch has forfeited an essential control over his interpretation. He thus has produced an incomplete and unbalanced assessment of the code, its context, and of the social dynamics implied by the letter. The remarks of his present paper, however, involve a "necessarily broader" view of the pertinent issues

for discussion (Paper, 5). This will require a consideration of 1 Peter in its totality.

Before turning to points of major disagreement, I too should like to clarify some minor misreadings or misimpressions. Among the many instances in 1 Peter of social polarity and conflict that I cite, I nowhere claim that the letter sets "the rural house of God over against the evil city" (paper, 5, 9). My point in *Home* (59-65) is that the intended recipients of the letter included inhabitants of the predominantly rural regions of the Anatolian interior and that the letter reflects awareness of their rural location.⁵ The fundamental contrast to which I call attention is that drawn between the Christian community and external non-Christian society, life within the *oikos* of God as contrasted with resident alien status (*paroikia*) within secular society (*Home*, 21-58, 118-32, 200-37).

Balch also wonders how I can "read the domestic code and conclude that the letter encourages the termination of past familial ties" (Paper, 8). Here I suggest, he is confusing his reading of the domestic code with my interpretation of such passages as 1:3-5, 10-12, 13-21; 2:4-10, 11; 4:1-6. Finally, Balch curiously sees me implying that Christian sectarians "swallow[ed] Roman politics whole" (Paper, 22, n. 42) when a major concern of my study is to demonstrate the measures urged in 1 Peter for *resisting* external pressures to conform (*Home*, 101-64 and *passim*).

With this final clarification we are already touching on areas of substantive disagreement.

MAJOR DISAGREEMENTS

Our first methodological disagreement involves more than the differing focal points of our interests, his in the household code and mine in the letter as a whole. It rather concerns the scope of the material to be taken into consideration when attempting to ascertain the strategy⁶ of a biblical writing or

⁵For a more extensive treatment of this issue see Armand Piug Tarrech, "Le Milieu de la première Epître de Pierre," *Revista Catalana de Teologia* 5 (1980): 95-129, 331-402. This study is an expansion of his research paper for a course on 1 Peter that I taught at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome in the Spring semester, 1978. It is in relation to Luke-Acts, not 1 Peter, that attention was called to the contrast between the household and the temple and its urban base (*Home*, 193-94). On the well-known ancient contrast between rurality and *urbanitas* see Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974) esp. pp. 28-56 and G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) esp. pp. 9-19.

⁶On the meaning and use of the term "strategy" see Elliott, *Home*, 10-11, 19 n. 22, 106-107.

the function of any of its component parts. Ignoring all but the code material in 1 Peter, Balch thinks that a social function of this code can be determined solely on the basis of its content and its previous history and use. I, on the other hand, maintain that a determination of the function of this or any other traditional material incorporated in 1 Peter requires analysis not only of its content, shape, history and function *prior* to its incorporation in 1 Peter, but also of the manner in which this tradition has been adapted to fit and serve the general strategy of the letter.

Restriction of attention to the Petrine household code alone, in my opinion, constitutes an unjustifiable isolation of the part from the whole. All subunits of the Petrine letter, except for demonstrable later interpolations (which Balch does not claim the code to be), are controlled in their semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic (functional) aspects by their larger context, the text as a whole. Accordingly, the function of the household code in 1 Peter may be expected to be consonant with the argument and aim of the letter in its totality. Through an investigation of the entire content of 1 Peter, I have attempted in *Home* to elucidate the part played by the domestic code material in the overall strategy of the letter. Balch, on the other hand, in focusing exclusively on the code itself has neglected to examine the relation of this material to its total context. This difference in method and the scope of the material examined has led us to divergent conclusions regarding both the significance of the code in 1 Peter in particular and the strategy of the letter in general. His theory that the code has been employed to indicate and urge Christian assimilation to secular values appears diametrically opposed to my theory that the code provides a schema in 1 Peter for instructing Christians concerning the conduct and commitments typical of the Christian brotherhood, the household of God (*Home*, 200-37). The first view, I would contend, assigns to the household code in 1 Peter an aim incompatible with the letter's general strategy. The second view sees the code as part of a coherent argument developed throughout the letter.

Though *Wives* contains an analysis of the structure of 1 Peter (123-31), it remains unclear to me how Balch understands the letter's overall strategy. Since I have already treated this question at length (*Home*, 101-64), a summary of my view may suffice at this point. In general the letter offers consolation and encouragement to Christian resident aliens and strangers suffering from local hostility, slander, and unjustifiable abuse. The strategy of the letter was to counteract the demoralizing and disintegrating impact that such social tension and suffering had upon the Christian sect by reassuring the intended recipients of the distinctive elect and holy community to which they belonged and the new dignity they shared by virtue of their call by God, their sanctification through baptismal rebirth, and their faith in Jesus Christ, the elect and holy suffering servant of God. As obedient children subject to the

divine Father's will, these holy people are urged to lead a holy way of life that specifically involves not only the avoidance of evil and the doing of good but also nonconformity "to the passions of your former ignorance" (1:14) and "futile ways inherited from your fathers" (1:17), renunciation of Gentile (that is, non-Christian) patterns of behavior (2:11, 4:1-3), severance of debilitating social ties (4:4) and vigilant resistance of the devilish adversary seeking to devour them (5:8-9). In general the injunctions, contrasts, imagery, and traditions in 1 Peter all served the common aim of reinforcing a sense of distinctive communal identity, promoting the internal cohesion of the community, and providing it with a persuasive sustaining rationale for continued faith, commitment, and hope.

Within this conceptual framework and consonant with the letter's general aim, the household code (2:13-3:12; 5:1-5) provides a schema for delineating behavior, norms, and values typical of persons belonging to the household of God. At some points Christian and secular valuations of behavior converge (for example, respect for just civil rulers, 2:13-14; avoiding evil and doing good, 2:12, 14, 15, 20; 3:6, 10-12, 13-17; 4:12-19; subordination of domestic slaves to owners, wives to husbands and younger men to elders, 2:18-20, 3:1-6, 5:5). At other key points, on the other hand, a distinctive Christian perspective and rationale is evident and a clear distinction of allegiance and ethos is stressed. The ultimate reason for Christian subordination, for instance, is obedience to the will of God as his servants (2:15-16, 19-20; cf. 3:17; 4:2, 19) consistent with the obedience of the servant Lord (2:13, 21-25, cf. 1:2). In 2:18-20 the traditional order of domestic roles is reversed so that domestic servants are *first* addressed and thereby made examples of the entire household of God to which then the connected christological material applies (2:21-25). In their subordination to their husbands, wives are Sarah's children and God's subjects in the doing of good (3:6). Conjugal life is motivated by the fact that *both* believing husbands and wives are "co-heirs of the grace of God" (3:7). Mutual humility of *all* members of God's household, superordinates and subordinates alike, is a sign of a common subordination to the will of God (3:8-9, 5:5-7). In 2:17 a clear distinction is drawn between the honor due the emperor as to all men on the one hand, and on the other, the love that binds only the brotherhood (cf. 1:22, 3:8, 4:8, 5:14) and the fear (awe and reverence) that is reserved for God alone (cf. 1:17; 2:17-18; 3:2, 6, 14, 16).

This similarity and yet dissimilarity in Christian and secular values and ethos brings us to the important question raised in Balch's paper concerning "separation, boundaries, and linkages." Before proceeding, however, first a word of summary is in order. Thus far a comparison of our two analyses of 1 Peter presents us with the following alternatives. As a rather unlikely possibility for which I see no textual justification, it might be suggested that there is no coherence between the strategy of the letter in general and the function

of the code in particular. In this case, Balch's hypothesis concerning the function of the code material might be correct, my interpretation of the general strategy of the letter might also be correct, but my proposal regarding the function of the code might be erroneous. If, however, as seems much more likely, there is a coherence between the aim of the letter in general and that of the code in particular, then: (A) either Balch's interpretation of the code's function is correct and my interpretation of the letter's overall strategy is incorrect; or (B) my interpretation is correct on both counts and his conclusions regarding the code's function is incorrect.

Balch's present paper, while still directing attention to the material of the Petrine code, has the merit of broadening the field of discussion. The questions he raises require examination of the entire text of 1 Peter and of the sociological theories most useful for discerning its situation and strategy. Since the theory underlying his string of arguments in pages 5-11 becomes evident in his comments on "Separation, Boundaries, and Linkages" (11-13), I shall begin here and consider his earlier points when they become pertinent.

First Peter bears witness to the difficulties encountered by the early Christian movement in its interaction with non-Christian society. On the one hand, by the time of 1 Peter this messianic movement in Christianity constituted a movement distinguishable from both its parent Judaism and other Mediterranean cults. Its adherents bore the distinctive label of *christianoï* (4:16). Attracting Jews and Gentiles alike to its vision of a universal salvation, it saw itself as the covenant community of the end time, God's special elect and holy people (2:4-10). It was constituted by God's merciful election and call (1:2, 15; 2:4-10; 5:10, 13) and faith in Jesus Christ and his resurrection that conferred new life and hope (1:3, 13, 21; 3:15, 21; 5:10). These distinctive beliefs involved a distinctive set of loyalties to God, Jesus Christ, and the brotherhood and required a distinctive mode of behavior. As the God who calls is holy, so believers are to be holy and "not to conform to the passions of your former ignorance" (1:14-16; 2:11; 4:1-3). As obedient children born anew to a living hope (1:3, 14, 22), believers were subject to God's will. In their hearts they were to reverence Christ as Lord (3:15) and await his coming with hope and confidence (1:5, 7, 13; 4:13; 5:1).

On the other hand, this sectarian community did not and could not live in a social vacuum. In contrast to the Qumran sect, for example, its conception of a universal salvation was embodied in a universal mission. The brotherhood reached throughout the world (5:9). Its goal was to convert nonbelievers to the faith and to the glorification of God (2:12, 3:2). This exotic movement from the East, however, was perceived to be a dangerous cancer within the body politic and was treated accordingly. Within its ranks were many strangers and resident aliens (*parepidemioi*, *paroikoi*, 1:2, 2:11) who had no permanent roots in the local communities and whose strange lan-

guage, habits, and customs already called into question their civic loyalties. In the Christian community these marginalized and displaced strangers in society had sought a place of belonging, and a salvation that involved a new and inclusive form of human brotherhood. But the exclusive allegiance to God and the severance of social ties which conversion to Christianity required (1:14-19, 4:4) only exacerbated the social tensions. Branded with the opprobrious label "Christians" (4:16, literally, "Christ-lackeys"), the followers of Jesus had begun to suffer from discrimination, slander, and reproach of a hostile society comprising Jews and pagans alike (1:6; 2:12, 19-20; 3:9, 13-17; 4:4, 12-15; 5:1, 8-10). Suffering caused by the social tensions with outsiders would eventually undermine confidence, cohesion, and commitment within the community. Discouragement could also lead to defection and the disintegration of the sect. Suffering and the opprobrium of "strangeness" could have been minimized or eliminated through the simple step of social conformity or assimilation. But this would have resulted in the sacrifice of the distinctiveness and exclusiveness to which the sect owed its existence. The crisis that the Christians of Asia Minor faced was not simply coping with suffering in itself but maintaining those elements of their communal life which suffering threatened to undermine: a common sense of identity and mission nurtured by a unifying faith and hope that involved unswerving loyalty to God, Jesus Christ, and the brotherhood.⁷

This foregoing analysis of the situation addressed in 1 Peter is based upon material in the letter. The reconstruction of the social dynamics and the underlying social issues at stake, however, is made with the help of social scientific research on sects. The social conditions, tensions, and strategies evident in 1 Peter are typical of sects or analogous religious movements in formative stages of their development, particularly those groups adopting what has been described as a "conversionist response to the world."⁸

Professor Balch rejects the conversionist sect as an appropriate model for analyzing the character and condition of the Petrine community and instead contends that "the Petrine communities are more acculturated than Professor Elliott suggests" (Paper, 12). He proposes the case of the Mennonites in North American society as a more appropriate social analogue for conceptualizing

⁷For similar assessments of the situation of the Petrine situation see, inter alia, the literature cited in *Home*, 57-58, nn. 87 and 88; Marc E. Kohler, "La communauté des Chrétiens selon la premier Épître de Pierre," *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 114 (1982): 1-21; and especially the commentaries of Leonard Goppelt, *Der erste Petrusbrief* (KEK 12/1, ed. Ferdinand Hahn, 1. ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978) and Norbert Brox, *Der erste Petrusbrief* (Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 21; Zürich: Benzinger, and Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1979).

⁸Elliott, *Home*, 73-84, 107-18.

the situation of the Petrine communities in first century Asia Minor.⁹ Within the limits imposed by any such cross-cultural comparison,¹⁰ the value of Balch's suggestion is to call attention to the related dynamics of group "boundary maintenance" and "linkage" of some group members with elements of the external social system.¹¹

As with any subsociety within the total social system, this tension between boundary maintenance (preservation of distinctive group values, beliefs, norms, identity, and limits set on intergroup contacts) and system linkage (contacts and interdependency among groups) aptly characterizes a dilemma reflected also in 1 Peter and the early Christian movement. J. Howard Kauffman's description of the Mennonite dilemma which Balch quotes (Paper, 13-14), in fact, is strikingly similar to my analysis of the dilemma facing the Petrine community (*Home*, 107-108). I have attempted to show how the strategy of 1 Peter *in its entirety* was designed to deal with *both* horns of this dilemma. While advocating means for preserving the distinctive identity, internal cohesion, and continued commitment of the addressees (that is, effective steps toward boundary maintenance), the letter also encourages behavior, principally the avoidance of evil and the doing of good (2:12, 14, 15; 3:6, 10-12, 13-17; 4:19), or a holy way of life in obedience to God's will (1:14-17, 22; 2:1, 19; 3:1-6, 13-17; 4:1-4, 12-19) which will enlighten and silence Gentile (that is, outsiders') ignorance (2:15, 3:15), put the lie to their slander (2:12, 3:16, 4:14-16) and ultimately be effective in even "winning" such outsiders to the faith (3:1-2) and leading them to glorify God (2:12, cf. *Home*, 118-29).

Balch, unfortunately, examines only one of the two horns of this dilemma. As a consequence he draws unbalanced conclusions concerning the situation addressed in this letter and the letter's overall aim.

⁹Balch makes use of J. Howard Kauffman's study, "Boundary Maintenance and Cultural Assimilation of Contemporary Mennonites," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 51 (1977): 227-40.

¹⁰The comparison of firmly established independent Mennonite groups in the United States and Canada with an emergent Christian sectarian movement in Asia Minor has serious limitations. In any such cross-cultural comparison differing historical, economic, social, political, and cultural conditions must be weighed. Furthermore, the groups Balch compares are in different stages of development and face different modes of response from their "host societies." The problem of "stagnation" facing the Mennonites according to Kauffman varies greatly from the problem of hostile abuse encountered by the Asia Minor Christians. Finally, while both groups seek to maintain identity and cohesion through boundary control, I see no evidence in 1 Peter of the further goal that Kauffman attributes to the Mennonites, namely that of "making socio-political contributions to the larger world and receiving beneficial value inputs from the larger world" (235). The value of Kauffman's study for our purposes lies chiefly in the attention it calls to the concepts of "boundary maintenance" and "linkage."

¹¹On "boundary maintenance" and "systemic linkage" see Charles P. Loomis, *Social Systems: Essays on Their Persistence and Change* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1960) 31-34, and Marvin E. Olsen, *The Process of Social Organization: Power in Social Systems*, 2d ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978) 74-75.

His case for the supposition that "the Jewish author of 1 Peter is assimilating" (Paper, 15), is based on two questionable suppositions: (1) that the household code is employed in 1 Peter to urge "a systemic linkage between Christian sectarians and Roman society" (Paper, 14, 15) and (2) that this shows a preference for Greco-Roman domestic values and structures which were "radically different" from those of Old Testament Israelite society (Paper, 15).

The second supposition is even weaker than the first. Is Balch seriously suggesting that wives and slaves did not occupy subordinate positions in ancient Israelite patriarchal society (Paper, 15)? Furthermore why compare 1 Peter to the domestic structures and values of ancient Israel when the arrangements and culture of hellenistic Judaism are closer to hand? As Balch himself has shown in *Wives*,¹² both Philo and Josephus give eloquent testimony to diaspora Judaism's adoption of the hellenistic structure and rationale of household management. The close affinities between hellenistic-Jewish and hellenistic-Christian reflections on household management point to the former as *the most immediate source* of influence upon the latter. Thus it appears unwarranted to conclude that "the pattern of household submission" in 1 Peter indicates *direct* Christian adoption of Greco-Roman culture and a calculated step toward social assimilation (Balch, Paper, 3, 4-15).¹³ Christianity emerged in a social context where these patriarchal structures were already in place. Its choice was not whether or not to "adopt" domestic patterns in which its members already found themselves, but whether or not to encourage behavior within these structures which would embody a new set of values typical of a new vision of human community.

First Peter advocated the latter course. In religiously divided households slaves and wives were to remain subordinate, but for the same reason that in the communal household of faith subordination was appropriate. Subordination now signified submission to *God's will* and solidarity with the obedient servant Lord (2:18-25). In this brotherhood all members are co-heirs and household stewards of God's grace (3:7, 4:10). While this represents no frontal assault on the institution of the hellenistic household, it also constitutes no case of total capitulation to pagan values.

¹²Balch, *Wives*, 8, 52-56. See also James E. Crouch, *The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafel* (FRLANT 109; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1972) *passim*, and Goppelt, *Der erste Petrusbrief*, 166-68.

¹³Earlier in *Wives* Balch took a more cautious position. Here he considered it "*a priori* probable" that influence came "through Hellenistic Judaism rather than through pagan sources" and states: "the ultimate origin of the ethic is to be found in Greek political thought, but I cannot draw firm conclusions about the immediate source of the code in 1 Peter" (120).

Balch's first supposition relates his theory concerning assimilation to the issue of social linkage. He defines "assimilation" as "the process of replacing traditional . . . norms of belief and behavior with alternative norms borrowed or adopted from the surrounding society and cultures" (Paper, 13, 14). The phenomenon and process of assimilation is actually more complex than this, involving not only the change of cultural patterns to those of [the] host society ("acculturation"), but also "large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of the host society ("identificational assimilation"), absence of prejudice ("attitude receptional assimilation"), absence of discrimination (behavior receptional assimilation), and the absence of value and power conflict ("civic assimilation").¹⁴ A thorough consideration of 1 Peter as reflecting a situation of Christian assimilation to Greco-Roman society would require examination of all these factors in the assimilation process, an enterprise that at this point must be reserved for another time. For the present discussion I will restrict myself to the following observations.

The material in 1 Peter upon which Balch concentrates does indeed illustrate some points of system linkage (contacts between Christian slaves and wives with non-Christian owners and husbands, 2:18-25, 3:1-6). I do not find this cogent evidence, however, for the contention that this material "urges the Christian sectarians in one social system to maintain systemic linkages to pagans in another, Roman, social-political system" (Paper, 14). Slaves and wives were not advised to terminate their relations with unbelieving owners and husbands because slaves had no legal power or right to do so, and because of Christian valuation of the marital bond and the envisioned possibility of spousal conversion (3:1-2 and 1 Cor. 7:10-16).

Moreover, even here in the letter, the valuation of domestic order (and its institutionalization through super- and subordination) shared by Christian and non-Christian alike is conditioned by Christian motives attached to such behavior ("for the Lord's sake, 2:13, and 2:18-20 followed by 2:21-25; as children of Sarah and the holy women who "hoped in God," 3:5-6). In the case of the wives, furthermore, the expectation is that such subordination may gain their husbands for the Christian community (3:1-2). Where Christians' relations with non-Christians cannot or need not be terminated, as in the case of these slaves and wives, the believers should use the situation as an opportunity for demonstrating the distinctive beliefs, values, and commitments of the Christian brotherhood, including steadfastness in faith and unjust suffering in mindfulness of God and in solidarity with the suffering Lord (2:18-25),

¹⁴Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life. The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) esp. 60-83. I am grateful to my colleague Ralph Lane, Jr. for referring me to this study.

and "reverent, chaste and confident conduct" in solidarity with the holy women of old (3:1-6) and in hope of spousal conversion.

Keeping open the channels of communication between believers and nonbelievers ought not to be confused with an advocacy of social assimilation. Nor has it been shown that 1 Peter anywhere urges an *increase* in system linkages which a program of social assimilation would require. The hope of *converting* nonbelievers through exemplary Christian behavior points rather in an opposite direction. Contacts between insiders and outsiders are to be utilized as an opportunity for recruitment to the Christian faith and "proclaiming the mighty saving deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2:9).

Thus, even the material upon which Balch exclusively focuses fails to demonstrate the theory that the maintenance of Christian and non-Christian contacts is evidence of 1 Peter's interest in social assimilation. This theory appears even more implausible when we consider the related factor that Balch mentions but fails to examine.

As has been previously noted by Balch himself following Kauffman, interaction between groups involves the dilemma of *both* system linkages *and* boundary maintenance. What he states about the problem facing the Mennonites applies equally to the Petrine community:

The old dilemma shows itself again. If they were to tighten their boundaries and reduce their linkages with other groups, Mennonites would give less, and receive less from, other groups. On the other hand, if they abandoned their boundaries and greatly increased their linkages, Mennonites would lose their present identity and no longer have any contribution to make to themselves or to other groups. The goal has to be to keep up enough communication linkages to allow the flow of benefits inward and outward, but also to maintain boundaries effective enough to prevent the loss of whatever unique identity Mennonites have, or whatever contribution they can make to the world around them. (Paper, 14)

Balch's analysis of 1 Peter, however, gives no attention to the other horn of this dilemma, namely, its concern for the maintenance of Christian group boundaries. In focusing exclusively on the household code and the issue of social linkage, he fails to examine the evidence of a predominant stress upon the necessity for dissociation and nonconformity, a stress that is bolstered by emphasis upon the believers' distinctive communal identity and divinely conferred status as the elect and holy household of faith. Any adequate explanation of the letter's situation and strategy must take into account all its content. Balch's interpretation does not. In his analysis it remains unclear whether or how both horns of the dilemma were addressed in 1 Peter.

My contention is that nothing in 1 Peter, including its discussion of household duties, indicates an interest in promoting social assimilation. It was

precisely a temptation to assimilate so as to avoid further suffering that the letter intended to counteract. To be sure, there were patterns of behavior that the sectarian minority and the secular society commonly valued. Both Christians and non-Christians placed a premium on *agathopoiia* and avoiding vices, as well as social order, domestic harmony, and the "gentle and quiet spirit" of wives. On the other hand, according to 1 Peter, Christians hold that this same "gentleness" should characterize *all* believers, males and females alike (3:4, 15). Humility, moreover, is not only appropriate for slaves but typifies *all* believers, superordinates and subordinates alike. Therefore servants/slaves and wives provide the model for all Christians to emulate just as Jesus Christ the suffering servant of God has established the ultimate model and rationale for the reversal of values within the Christian brotherhood. First Peter makes reference to both similar and dissimilar sets of values and establishes for all such values a distinctively Christian configuration of motivations and legitimations; namely, obedience to God's will, solidarity with the rejected and yet exalted and vindicated Lord, and membership in a new community created by God's mercy and marked by his holiness.

Where there is no conflict of interest between conformity to God's will and subordination to human authorities established by God (2:13), submission is recommended "on account of the Lord" (2:13, 21:24). The avoidance of evil and the doing of good is behavior consonant with both societal and divine norms (2:1, 12, 14-16; 3:10-12, 13-17; 4:12-19).

But where Christian adherence to pagan values, customs, and moral standards would violate the will of God, and obscure the distinction between the respect due the emperor and the fear reserved for God alone (2:17); where retaliation sanctioned in society would betray the solidarity Christians have with their nonretaliating Lord (2:18-25; 3:9, 15-16); where exploitation of role and rank would deny the humility, love, and mutual service owed by all believers to one another (1:22, 2:17, 4:8-11, 5:2-5) as "good household stewards of god's varied grace" (4:10-11); where continued association with nonbelievers and their sinful desires and futile ways (1:18; 2:11; 4:2-4) would contradict the reality of their conversion, their holy union with God and Jesus Christ and their incorporation into a new family united by a distinctive faith and hope (1:3-2:10); then in such instances when the distinctive identity, cohesion, and commitments of the brotherhood are at stake, the household of God is to manifest its distinctiveness through behavior consonant with the will of God and through social disengagement, nonconformity, and resistance (1:13-21, 2:11, 4:2-4; 5:8-9). Though the price for such nonconformity be societal abuse and Christian suffering, such suffering should be experienced as a divine test of faith, solidarity with the suffering Christ and the suffering brotherhood, and an occasion for glorifying God (1:6; 2:12, 18-25; 3:13-22; 4:12-19; 5:1, 8-9). Ultimate judgment and vindication of the righteous is in

the hands of a faithful creator, the God of grace by whom the believers are called, sustained, and blessed (1:14-17, 2:9-10, 23; 4:5-6, 17-19; 5:5-11).

In comparison with my colleague's analysis, this interpretation has several advantages. First, it takes into account the content of the entire letter. Secondly, it requires no assumption of discrepancy between the aim of the letter and that of the instruction on household duties in particular. Thus a coherent line of argument is brought to light. Third, this analysis reveals how 1 Peter grappled with *both* aspects of the social dilemma described in terms of linkage and boundaries. Fourth, it makes more comprehensible and consistent use of the sociological concepts of linkage and boundary maintenance than does Balch's partial treatment. Although he introduced these concepts as "an alternative to the 'conversionist sect' model" that I used in *Home* (Paper, 12), they have provided him little means for proving his assumption regarding assimilation. In point of fact, these concepts identify issues with which any conversionist sect must be concerned. My analysis has shown how the recommendations in 1 Peter were designed to urge an effective balance between intergroup communication and preserving lines of demarcation. I maintain that, were he to follow through on the implications of these concepts, he would arrive at conclusions closer to those of my own.

This is an appropriate point at which to respond to a question raised earlier in the paper (5-7) concerning sociological theory. The study of early Christianity as a social phenomenon and of its literature as media of social interaction requires the use of the theories, models, and methods of the social science. All reconstructions of the social world of early Christianity or of particular situations such as that implied in 1 Peter are based not only on sets of data but also on conceptions of how the data are related. Some investigators make their conceptual models explicit, most exegetes leave theirs implicit, and thus unavailable for evaluation.¹⁵ In *Home* I have proposed that similarities between the Petrine community and the ideal type of a conversionist sect enable the latter to serve as a useful model for conceptualizing the social conditions and dynamics at work in the former. It is important to recognize, of course, that ideal types in general are heuristic devices and not historiographic descriptions. They are models that help organize data so as to form generalizations at a useful level of abstraction.

First, a model can help us gain insight into the essential nature of a real phenomenon, by emphasizing significant features and ignoring nonessential ones. Second, use of a model facilitates scientific analysis because the ab-

¹⁵On the use and explication of models in historical and exegetical research see the important studies of Thomas F. Carney, *The Shape of the Past: Models and Antiquity* (Lawrence KS: Coronado Press, 1975), and Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World. Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981).

stract concepts and symbols that comprise it are easier to manipulate than is the phenomenon they represent, and also because a model is usually more internally consistent than our observations of reality. Finally, a model can alert us to similarities existing among several seemingly different phenomena.¹⁶

One of the essential tests of a good model is that it fit all the data in the text under examination. "If the data have to be forced or prove insufficient, then the model has to be questioned, adapted, or rejected."¹⁷ In the case of my interpretation of 1 Peter, Balch claims that I have forced the data onto a "Procrustean bed" (Paper, 7). The data, he states, fail to fit the model of a conversionist sect. If this criticism is to carry weight, however, it must be demonstrated by a thorough reexamination of the entire text and the model used for its interpretation. This Balch has not done. Nor has he provided us with a more adequate model to replace it. In fact it is not at all clear that there is any coherent model underlying his interpretation of the Petrine situation since he fails to take into account all the evidence. His concepts of linkage and boundary maintenance are a welcome contribution to the discussion. But at this point in Balch's reflections they remain isolated concepts in search of an integrating model. On the other hand, in this essay I have attempted to show that issues of linkage and boundary maintenance are concerns of a conversionist sect like the Petrine community and that this sectarian model serves as a valuable analytical tool for discerning the letter's overall situation and strategy.

The final section of Balch's paper raises some questions concerning the basis of the ecclesial model of Christian community in 1 Peter and the connection between the ethos advocated through this familial model and the christological kerygma. The Petrine concept of the believing community constituting a household of God is based upon the everyday experience of family, household, and home as a paramount and enduring source of personal, social, and religious identity. It is a symbol of collective identity rooted in, yet transcending the limits of, mundane reality. In questioning the central importance of this symbol in 1 Peter, Balch makes a curious statement (Paper, 16):

The Roman household was merely a political expediency for early Christianity, and a temporary expediency at that. The domestic code is dropped by later authors. Prof. Elliott has mistaken a mere expediency for an identity symbol.

¹⁶Olsen, *The Process of Social Organization*, 21.

¹⁷Bruce J. Malina, "Why Interpret the Bible with the Social Sciences," *American Baptist Quarterly* 2:2 (1983): 119-33, 130.

In my earlier study (*Home*, 165-266) I have shown the importance and enduring significance of the household in the ancient world as a fundamental basis and model of human community. As the Christian literature amply attests, the household constituted the focus of the Christian mission, the locus of its worship, the basis of its material support, a model for its organization, and a potent symbol of its evangelical message. It is incomprehensible to me on what grounds Balch would dismiss the household as a mere "temporary expediency." That "the domestic code is dropped by later Christian authors" is hardly proof that households and house churches themselves evaporated or were replaced by some other form of Christian organization.¹⁸ In 1 Peter we see how a concrete physical and social form of human organization, the household, provided a model for conceptualizing a community embracing God the father and his reborn children. The power of this communal symbol derives from the actual experience of household and home as the most basic and intimate sphere of identity and belonging, personal and collective origin and destiny. Balch perhaps is led to criticize my view as "utopian" (Paper, 11) because he fails to distinguish what I have said about the domestic conditions within the divided households of slaves and wives, on the one hand, from what I said about the ecclesial household of faith, on the other. The latter is indeed a utopian concept in that it embodies a vision of an *ideal* community, a vision designed to inspire filial trust in God, fraternal love within the brotherhood, and familial solidarity in the face of social estrangement.

It is also not clear why and on what grounds Balch would divorce Christian ethos from Christian mythos. I certainly concur that "the Christ story" figures prominently in the message of 1 Peter and have already shown the key role it plays in affirming the distinctive identity of the believers, in providing a christological rationale for their subordination and endurance of suffering, and in establishing a basis for their hope (*Home*, passim). In 1 Peter the keystone of Christ's suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation, his rejection by men and his favor with God, is used to stress the solidarity between suffering believers and their suffering yet vindicated Lord. Through faith in Christ believers are incorporated into the household of God; as he is elect and precious in God's sight, so are they (2:4-10). Through his resurrection and God's mercy they have been born anew to a living hope (1:3). As the blood of the holy one liberated them from the futile ways of the fathers (1:18-19), so believers as God's obedient children are to be holy "and not conformed to the passions of your former ignorance" because they are now subject to the Father's will (1:14-17). Moreover, in more extended passages such as 2:18-25,

¹⁸On the continuing importance of the household communities and house churches in the pre-Constantinian period see Hans-Josef Klauck, *Hausgemeinde und Hauskirche im frühen Christentum* (Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 103; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981).

3:13-4:12-19 we see how a distinctive Christian ethos of patient suffering is founded on the suffering of the crucified and vindicated Christ.¹⁹

Throughout the letter familial terminology and metaphors (*oikos*, *oikodomein*, *oiketēs*, *synoikein*, *oikonomoi*; rebirth, God as Father, believers as children and brothers, brotherhood, brotherly love, household service) are employed to relate this christological kerygma to an encouragement and exhortation of the addressees as the household of God. To state that "the key identity symbol [for Christianity in 1 Peter] is a mythos not an ethos, a story not a political institution (Paper, 16), is to mistake a political institution for a Christian style of life described in familial terms. In 1 Peter this description of Christian life unites ethos with mythos. Here mythos and ethos are woven into a seamless whole. What the letter has joined together Balch would rent asunder.

Moreover he states with reference to Israel's past that its mythos alone "gave Israel identity, life" (Paper, 17). Quite apart from whatever version of that myth Balch has in mind—myths undergo limitless modifications in the hands of their transmitters and receivers!—what does Balch imagine the mere telling of a myth would accomplish? Myths become socially significant and effective only when they become embodied in corporate forms of social life. Judaism in Babylon resisted assimilation not by simply repeating its myth but by developing social institutions, norms of conduct, and patterns of behavior consonant with its Torah and effective for the maintenance of its corporate identity and distinctive style of life. For early Christianity it was no different. Balch's divorcing of mythos and ethos is an unfortunate return to the discredited idealist view of history that ideas alone, disconnected from material and social reality, have the power to transform individuals and society. It is best in this case to let sleeping dogs lie.

CONCLUSIONS

Our discussion has covered a broad range of questions concerning exegetical method, appropriate data bases, and use of sociological theory and models in the analysis of a biblical text in its social context. These issues have ramifications extending beyond an interpretation of 1 Peter, the immediate focus of our attention here. In regard to an examination of the situation and

¹⁹For a more extensive examination of the christological tradition in 1 Peter and of 2:18-25 in particular see John H. Elliott, "Backward and Forward 'In His Steps': Following Jesus from Rome to Raymond and Beyond. The Tradition, Redaction and Reception of 1 Peter 2:18-25," in *Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

strategy of this text, however, I would offer the following summarizing remarks.

1. An analysis of the entirety of 1 Peter is required for a determination of its social situation, its general strategy, and of the meaning and function of any of its component parts.

2. Such an analysis reveals that instruction on domestic duties and relationships formed an essential ingredient in the letter's overall argument. A modified household code provided a logical schema for encouraging behavior appropriate for a Christian community conceived as the family or household of God.

3. Intergroup linkages and boundary maintenance are interrelated concerns of any sectarian movement such as that of early Christianity.

4. These concepts, along with the more comprehensive model of sectarian formation, supply useful tools for the understanding and interpretation of the situation and strategy of 1 Peter. In response to a situation of intergroup conflict and a concern for missionary recruitment, the letter recommends tactics for promoting effective intergroup communication and simultaneously maintaining internal group identity, cohesion, and boundaries.

5. Reconstruction of social situations and conceptualization of social dynamics implied in ancient texts presumes the use of social models. In order to serve as useful heuristic tools, these models should be valid social-scientific models assessed positively by social-scientific research, appropriate to the data under examination, and made explicit so as to allow for evaluation of conclusions reached through their employment.

6. Neither the household code in 1 Peter nor the letter as a whole advocates a program of Christian assimilation. To the contrary, the letter affirms the distinctive communal identity and seeks to strengthen the solidarity of the Christian brotherhood so that it might resist external pressures urging cultural conformity and thereby make effective witness to the distinctive features of its communal life, its allegiance and its hope of salvation.

7. In 1 Peter, as in the literature of early Christianity in general, its mythos and ethos are inseparably related. The christological mythos inspires and shapes the Christian ethos; its ethos embodies its mythos.

8. The social basis of Christian mission, worship, and organization was the household. The symbolization of the people of God constituting a "household or family of God" derives its power from the personal, social, and religious significance attached to family and home as a place of identity, belonging, and unity. In a suspicious and hostile society, states 1 Peter, Christians suffer the consequences of strangeness and alienation. But as believers who have found peace and union in Christ, they can endure such estrangement with fortitude and hope. For in the family of the faithful the homeless of society have a home with God.