

**THE SHAPE AND MOTIVE OF PIETY IN  
CHINESE RELIGIOUS TRADITION AND  
THE BIBLICAL TRADITION**

*Li and Eusebeia*\*

**PHILIP H. TOWNER**

Regent College  
Vancouver, B.C., Canada

*Introduction*

The purpose of this study is to compare in a preliminary way the idea of piety as expressed in Chinese religious thought and in the Biblical tradition. The first task is to set some necessary limits and to isolate and define the comparable terms. "Piety" is obviously a slippery sort of term with all kinds of religious connotations. The use of the term "piety" in this study (e.g. Chinese and Christian piety) relates to the behavioral side of life; that is, our focus will be more on what corresponds to the visible dimension of ethical life, although an invisible element may play a more or less significant role within the concept. Terms denoting concepts which are broad enough and deep enough to stand for the whole of the observable life and yet which find expression in specific modes of behavior are what we seek. In the Chinese term *li* (禮) and the Greek term introduced into the Christian vocabulary rather

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\*This is a revised version of a paper delivered to the Bible in Africa, Asia and Latin America Group at the 1994 SBL Annual Meeting in Chicago, travel to which was kindly funded by a travel grant from the British Academy. My thanks go to the participants of that seminar, and especially to Prof. Antionette Wire for her helpful interaction.

late in the NT, *eusebeia* (εὐσέβεια), we have our comparable terms. It is well to note that Chinese existence is actually held to be the harmonious interrelating of *ren*, *yi* and *li*, with *ren* and *yi* applying more to the inner person and the will, and *li* to the rules and structure that shape outward behavior is (see below). A complete ethical model must see the three in relation to one another. But it is the *li* which forms the underlying principle of hierarchy and structure of Chinese ethical behavior, and it is so dominant in Confucian thought that it almost takes on a life of its own. *Eusebeia* is a broader concept since by itself it can incorporate both the outer and inner dimensions of life into a whole. But the accent falls on the visible side of life which suggests it is the best term to compare with *li*.

However, at the outset it must be said that although the concepts function in similar ways within their respective thought worlds, there are some fundamental differences as well. Rather than understanding these differences as grounds for throwing out the comparison, it is more the case that they reveal fundamental points at which Chinese thought and Christian thought diverge.

Before we turn to a consideration of *li*, some justification is needed for the reliance on Confucian teaching that will mark this study.

### ***Confucianism in the Broadest Sense***

While it is accepted that Confucianism is the most important thought system to influence Chinese culture, the Confucianism that has had this influence was one which underwent much development and syncretism through the centuries. The Confucianism by which *li* today must be understood certainly owes a major debt to the Confucius of the *Analects*. However, after Confucius "generations of Confucian scholars were growing up who, whilst acknowledging their supreme debt to Confucius, were taking over and making their own the ideas of thinkers who had been strong opponents of Confucius." (Smith 1973:112) After a period underground, in the Han dynasty Confucianism gained official recognition, but

the Confucianism that triumphed was no longer [simply] the philosophy of Confucius and Mencius. It had already absorbed many extraneous ideas coming particularly from Legalism and yin-yang cosmology and religious philosophy. It would emphasize--far more than Confucius and Mencius did--the vertical and authoritative dimensions of the five moral relationships. (Ching 1977:40)

Official recognition meant also to some degree official manipulation, and it was inevitable that Han thinkers, in drawing what they wanted from the Confucian heritage and then shaping it to their benefit, would baptize the developed version in the Confucian and pre-Confucian classics. (Creel 1949:218) Thus construed Confucianism could serve to enforce the status-quo, and so assure stability and continuity from one generation to the next. Chiang Kai-Shek had similar designs in calling for a return to Confucian ideals in 1934 and onwards. (de Bary *et al.* 1960:2:138-50)

Through the centuries Confucianism grew in the telling. Filial piety becomes a dominant concept, and incorporation of the *yin-yang* concept and other metaphysical strands from the eleventh century on give it a more dynamic view of the universe.<sup>1</sup> Attention today to such things as *feng-shwei* in situating a desk in an office or in determining whether one location or another is the better one in which to open a shop is a way in which this belief in the universal force which influences human life and the need to live in harmony can be seen. But such mysticism is not to be found in the *Analects*, even if an awareness of the human relation to heaven is (cf. *Analects* 20:3). So, we use terms like "Confucius" and "Confucianism" advisedly. But we must also use the terms "Christian" and "Biblical" with caution, particularly when talking about such a thing as "piety" which has taken so many different forms in the various strands of the church's tradition.

What leads to this study is the question, To what degree are the traditional religions (including Confucianism and Christianity) relevant to the modern Chinese situation? Particularly in Taiwan, where rapid technological growth has transformed the shape of society, this question is relevant and very evident. (C.S. Song 1976:147-60) The hierarchical system of behavior that relates to the five relationships (see below) and the importance of the extended family, which a changing world has disintegrated, may be considered outmoded. Confucianism fell on hard times under the Communist regime in China. It is at best one among

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<sup>1</sup>Ching 1977:7; see the discussion, 7-12. The relationship between the heavens and human affairs (not completely lacking in the early Confucius, e.g. *Analects* 20:3), was developed further, and it was firmly believed that the forces evident in the universe were also operative in human history and in human society. "The arts of divination practiced in antiquity, those of astrology, the almanac, and the Five Elements, all laid emphasis on the relationship believed to exist between 'the Way of Heaven' and human affairs" (Fung 1952-3, 2:8). For discussion of *yin-yang* and Five Elements, see 1:159ff.

other competing ways of understanding and approaching life today, alongside Buddhism, Taoism, the Yi Gwan Dao, and optimistic humanism. But the Chinese attention to relationships and propriety within them, no matter whether the family religion is Buddhism, Christianity or humanism, nevertheless, stems from the pervasive influence of Confucianism on the Chinese mind and society. Therefore, the shape, potential and goals of Chinese piety are still to be sought in the system behind the modern phenomenon, "Confucianism", though we must be aware of the numerous forces at work and of the growth of suspicions among modern Chinese concerning the usefulness of traditional ethical systems in bringing meaning to life. Even so, the importance of *li* in shaping social life today is still evident.

Consequently, in seeking to address the question above, two things emerge. First, the question forces us to consider the kind of life or shape of life that the traditional religions/thought systems might produce and foster. This means the dialogue must include consideration of Chinese and Christian piety. Therefore, secondly, the most strategic contact point to facilitate meaningful dialogue will be where *li* and *eusebeia* meet even if at that meeting point we encounter contrast and tension instead of harmony. A comparison of Chinese *li* and Christian piety (*eusebeia*), a better understanding of the potential of each way of life, i.e. of piety as expressed in Chinese and Christian thought, and of points of contact and agreement, as well as contradiction, can conceivably aid us in taking the dialogue on relevance further.

We turn now to consider the shape of *li*.

### ***I. Piety in Chinese Thought: Confucian Li***

The key ethical concepts within Confucian ethics are *ren* (humanity or love for humanity), *li* (rules of propriety, and the ceremonies by which it is expressed) and *yi* (rightness). The *dao*, or "way of Heaven," is the way of life ordained by Heaven, which by practicing *ren*, *yi*, and *li*, a person may follow (*Analects* 16:2; *Li Chi* 9). (Cf. Smith 1973:65; Cua 1989:211) As important as the latter three concepts are to this system, they are not given precise definition and in fact are allowed to float, sometimes very broad in meaning, sometimes very narrow. They "operate more like satellite notions revolving around the ideal of *dao*, the Confucian vision of human excellence. They all hang together, so to speak, and constitute a family of interdependent notions, adaptable

to employment in varying contexts of human life." (Cua 1989:210) *Dao* might thus be seen as the goal of life, with *ren*, *li*, and *yi* functioning as guides to the realization of that goal. The interdependence of concepts is illustrated in *Analects* 12:1; "*ren* is the denial of self and the response to *li*." As Smith explains further, according to Confucius, "men learn to distinguish between what is righteous [*yi*] or unrighteous in the concrete situations of life, and they find that righteousness is a quality displayed in the character and conduct of the chun-tzu or noble-hearted man, whose inner nature is motivated by jen [*ren*] and whose outward conduct accords with *li*." (Smith 1973:68)

### ***Historical Considerations***

It is generally agreed that Confucius took his bearings mainly from the Chou civilization (cf. *Analects* 7:1). Four aspects probably determined the main contours of his thought. First was the belief in the providence of heaven and the Decree of Heaven (*Analects* 20:3). Heaven was the source of virtue and the justification for living a virtuous and proper life. Second, the family was the basis for social organization; in the early part of the Chou dynasty, a kind of feudalism existed in which these feudal lords were related to the royal house by marriage. They existed as self-sufficient colonies of extended families which could only survive if the entire series of relationships -- parents/children, brothers to brothers, master to servant, etc. -- was carefully maintained. Virtues such as filial piety and brotherly love consequently became essential ingredients to successful, harmonious existence. Thus Confucius emphasized the necessity of *ren* and *yi*. Third, the rivalries and jealousy that went with pressure on territory caused by hostile non-Chinese forces were destroying society in Confucius' day. Community needs had to be put in front of the desires of individuals, and orderly government and respect for rulers were rediscovered through Confucius. Fourth, the aggressiveness natural to the nobility, who were always vying with one another for power and prestige, made the inculcation of a code of conduct mandatory to preserve peace. The needs had led to the development of the *li* concept long before Confucius. It included rules and rituals and patterns of behaving for all occasions. Through the code of *li* the status of each person, in a family and community, could be known and affirmed. To put it another way, "the *li*, by emphasizing political and social inequalities and duties implicit in the relationships of ruler and ruled, father and son, husband and wife, form the basis of government both within the family and within

the State." (Smith 1973:104) Rituals, with their pageantry and music, became a way of transmitting and extending the culture. (See Smith 1973:28ff., 62-64)

Confucius found himself in a time of political and social upheaval in which the ideal peace and harmony and ethical consciousness attributed to the reign of the early Chou kings (cf. the Shi Ching [Book of Poetry]) had long since crumbled. In its place was a period marked by power struggles and social chaos. The answer to the selfishness and injustice of the times was seen to be in a return to the ideals epitomized in the Duke of Chou (filial piety and loyalty). If it is correct to assess the period leading up to Confucius also as a time in which the belief in the complete "otherness" and indifference of heaven was emerging (Tso Chuan; Legge, *Chinese Classics*, 5:607; Smith 1973:45ff), then we see in his insistence on the way of Heaven as providing direction to the way of man something of a reply. On the whole, he sought to respond to the rapid changes and upheaval of his time by reclaiming an ancient ideal ethical pattern which he believed to be in conformity with heaven and which he believed to be "the cement of family and state." (Smith 1973:64) And it is in connection with a desire for conservation and producing harmony that the *li* concept must be seen.

### ***The Directions and Shape of Li***

The *li* developed into a system of rules which pertained to life in general. It is probably true that originally *li* referred to religious rites (and even today it often refers to rites of a religious nature), but it was broadened to include all customary rites, and became in its broadest usage the overarching principle (with its specific expressions in rules) governing manners and social order in Chinese culture. (Fung 1952-3: 68) As can be seen in the pervasive role of *li* in directing filial piety ("While they are alive, serve them according to *li*. When they die, bury them according to *li*, and sacrifice to them according to *li*"; *Analects* 2:5; cf. 2:6-8; 4:18), the *li* (expressed as regulations and rules) governed the whole of inter-relational life. For Confucius the *li* were of fundamental importance for social life: "if you do not study the *li* (the ritual), you will find yourself at a loss how to take your stand" (*Analects* 16:13; cf. 8:2). By living one's life in accordance with the *li*, showing filial piety and honesty, a person actually served (and helped to preserve) the state (*Analects* 2:21). The Book of Rites (*Li Chi*; a product of the later Confucian school), in which the subject matter ranges from *li* in relation

to rituals, sacrifices, mourning, marriage, and various communal events, to the more mundane events of daily life, preserves a fundamental statement on the importance of *li*:

Duke Ai asked Confucius, "What is this great *li*? Why is it that you talk about *li* as though it were such an important thing?"

Confucius replied, "Your humble servant is really not worthy to understand *li*." "But you do constantly speak about it," said Duke Ai.

Confucius: "What I have learned is this, that of all the things that the people live by, *li* is the greatest. Without *li*, we do not know how to conduct a proper worship of the spirits of the universe; or how to establish the proper status of the kings and ministers, the rulers and the ruled, and the elders and the juniors; or how to establish the moral relationship between the sexes, between parents and children and between brothers; or how to distinguish the different degrees of relationships in the family. That is why a gentleman holds *li* in such high regard, and proceeds to teach its principles to the people and regulate the forms of their social life. When these are established, then he institutes different insignia and ceremonial robes as symbols of authority to perpetuate the institutions. When everything is in order, then he proceeds to fix the periods of burial and mourning, provide the sacrificial vessels and the proper offerings, and beautify the ancestral temples. Every year sacrifices are made in their proper seasons, in order to bring about social order in the clans and tribes. Then he retires to his private dwelling where he lives in simple contentment, dressed simply and housed simply, without carved carriages and without carved vessels, sharing the same food and the same joys with the people. That was how the ancient princes lived in accordance with *li*." (*Li Chi* 27)

But the dimensions of "life" were rather narrow in shape. The family or "great family" social identity is the axis on which Confucian ethics turns.<sup>2</sup> Out of this concept Confucian thought could reduce most of life to activity within and among the five basic relationships (cf. *Chung Yung* [*Li Chi*] 20): "between sovereign and minister [or ruler and subject], between father and son, between husband and wife, between elder brother and younger, [between]...friends." Yet as narrow as social life so conceived might seem, it provided at the same time a kind of interconnectedness: obligations to immediate family relatives took on civil implications as through them loyal service to and support of the government were rendered (*Analects* 2:21). Through filial piety expressed in ancestor veneration a religious dimension in Confucianism

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. Smith 1973:20ff.; Ling 1977:96ff. Confucius viewed Chinese society as a large family (*Analects* 12:5).

was woven into the social-ethical family network. Within each relationship "the decreasing measures of love due to relatives, and the steps in honor due to the worthy, are produced by the principle of propriety"(Quoted from Legge 1875:299-300); that is, *li* must be properly observed: (1) The first basic relationship relevant to all Chinese was that of the ruler and the subject; *li* in this case demanded loyalty, consideration, and righteousness (*Analects* 4:15; 15:17). (2) In the case of the father/son relationship, *li* called for love and respect. Filial piety, which later Confucians exalted as the source of all virtues (especially in the Hsiao Ching; see Fung 1952-3, 1:361; Legge 1879, 3:450-51) was not an invention of Confucius. (Smith 1973:70, 105-106; Fung 1952-3, 1:73) He confirmed its fundamental importance (*Analects* 2:21; 4:18), but in his articulation of it, it is to be executed according to *li* ("While they are alive, serve them according to *li*. When they die, bury them according to *li*, and sacrifice to them according to *li*"; *Analects* 2:5). (3) The relationship between the husband and the wife is to be marked by benevolent affection and (on the part of the wife) obedience (*Li Chi* 9:24). (4) The fourth relationship was that of elder brother and younger brother. Inferiors and the young were to relate to superiors and the old with respect and humility (*Analects* 1:6). (5) Among friends *li* was to find expression in honesty (*Analects* 1:4).

The structure contains an inherent hierarchical orientation and inflexibility, which, however much originally intended, has carried down through the centuries. Although this was strengthened through later developments, which grounded the arrangement in the *yin-yang* concept and the doctrine of the authority of the state developed by the Legalists (see Chywun Chyou Fan Lu 53; 43; Quoted in Fung 1948:196; and de Bary, ed. 1960:163. See also discussion in Ching 1977:98-101), the beginnings of ossification may be found already in the "Rectification of Names" (*Analects* 16).

### ***The Limiting Function of Li***

All of behavior could thus be seen to fall under one or more of these categories at any one time. Piety or *li* was successfully practiced when the relationships were consciously in mind and the virtues and characteristics proper to them were actually expressed. Confucius did not offer theories to explain the nature of *li*, he simply transmitted what he had received from the ancients (*Analects* 7:1; 17:5; Fung 1952-3, 1:337). Later Confucians did produce such theories. If one compares the *Li Chi*, Mencius and Hsun Tzu, one will find slightly different



accounts of the role of *li* in life. However, generally it functions to regulate human emotions and their expression in behavior (cf. *Li Chi* 28:284; Mencius 4a:27; see Dubs 1928:243). Moreover, *li* formed a kind of mold for defining and maintaining the various gradations of society, without which (both the gradations themselves and the rules for appropriate behavior between them) Chinese society would cease to be "Chinese":

Of all things by which the people live, the *li* are the greatest. Without them, there would be no means of regulating the services rendered to the spirits of Heaven and Earth; there would be no means of distinguishing the positions of ruler and subject, superior and inferior, old and young; and no means of keeping separate the relations between man and woman, father and son, elder and younger brother, and of conducting the intercourse between contracting families in a marriage, and the frequency (of the reciprocities between friends) or their infrequency (*Li Chi* 28:261).

As Fung Yu-Lan explains, "the *li* thus maintain the social gradations that are necessary if there is to be no conflict between man and man" (Fung 1952-3, 1:339) within the family as well as outside of it.

There is doubtless another, positive ("ennobling") side to *li*, as Cua maintains--viewed from this positive perspective, *li* is to be understood as a standard by which cultural values may be measured and sustained, and thus by which the beautiful things in life may be enjoyed properly. (Cua 1989:218-220) However, this is simply to view the positive consequences to be realized from a life lived according to the *li* which are rules of propriety.

The actual patterns of behavior through which *li* was expressed in any given relationship need not be considered in detail here. The appropriate demeanor would be signaled through speech, physical body positions and gestures, as well as the giving and receiving of gifts, offering of sacrifices, worshipping ancestors, providing protection and displaying loyalty. To observe *li* in this way was to insure a life of harmony at all levels. As already noted above, observance of the *li* in the family amounted to an actual contribution or service to the preservation of the state (*Analects* 2:21). It is little wonder, then, that leaders of the Han dynasty (and later leaders) saw such potential for securing popular support through the ethical teaching of Confucius.

## *The Source of Li*

Thus the *li* provided the fabric out of which social moral behavior was woven into a carefully regulated whole. But the "whole"--which through life lived according to the *li* human activity participated in--was still greater in scope.

*Li* is, according to Confucian thought, a principle which governs the whole universe. (Fung 1952-3, 1:38, 68) In fact prior to Confucius and after him as his thought was developed by those such as Hsun Tzu, and comes to expression most clearly in the *Odes*, *History*, *Ritual*, *Music*, *Book of Changes*, *Spring and Autumn Annals*, this remained true.

*Li* is that whereby heaven and earth unite, whereby the sun and moon are bright, whereby the four seasons are ordered, whereby the stars move in their courses, whereby rivers flow, whereby all things prosper, whereby love and hatred are tempered, whereby joy and anger keep their proper place...the rules of proper conduct [*li*] are the utmost of human morality (Hsun Tze). (Dubs 1928:223-24)

The essential relationship being affirmed in this way is that believed to exist between human beings and the universe, and while implicit and sometimes explicit in the Confucius of the *Analects*, it comes most clearly to expression in the later scholars who developed and enlarged his thought into a more diverse "Confucianism".

The *li* (as rites and ceremonies) were regarded as expressions of the universal patterns which bore on life:

The movements of the *li* accord with the (yin and yang) ethers of heaven and earth. When the four seasons are in mutual accord, when the yin and the yang complement each other, when the sun and the moon give forth their light, and when superiors and inferiors are in intimate harmony with one another, then persons and animals are in accord with their own natures (*Li-Wei* 54:2). (Fung 1952-3, 2:126)

The *li* serve to establish (standards of human) conduct and to illumine the forms of heaven and earth (*Chywun-Chyou-Wei* 56:34). (Fung 1952-3, 2:126)

The *li* constitute an essential substance. Man possesses the feelings of grief and pleasure, just as the five elements have their (periods of) rise and decline. Therefore the *li* have been established for the offering of food and drink to the aged, for marking the beginning and end of grief (in mourning), for following the proprieties in the marriage ceremony, and for making a proper display at the court audiences. Then the eminent and the humble maintain an orderly hierarchy, and superiors

and inferiors have their proper substance. The king, by performing the *li*, gains the central harmony of heaven. When the *li* are maintained, all things under heaven gain their proper place, the yin and yang nourish and fertilize, all things are in accord with one another, and the four seasons operate in proper harmony. Whether active or non-active, one must constantly follow (the *li*); they may not be neglected for even an instant (*Chyun-Chyou-Wei* 56:34).

The movement of the heavenly bodies and pattern of changing seasons observe or run according to *li*. The nature of the existence of the universe is a harmonious inter-relatedness, by which the heavenly bodies are seen not to collide. This cosmological harmony is *li*. *Li* makes the universe operate smoothly, and Confucius (and the later Confucianists through their developments of Confucianism) might be credited with codifying and transmitting an application of the concept of *li* to human relationships (which are merely a part of the whole). For harmony to be maintained between heaven and earth, human behavior must comply with the universal *li*. Confucius taught the specifics of which that compliance consists, even if the need for such compliance to the heavenly model develops later. Consequently, *li*, as respectable behavior, is behavior lived according to the principle/pattern evident in the universe. Season succeeds season according to *li*. Likewise generations of mankind will succeed generations of mankind if behavior conforms to *li*.

The model for (and in a sense source of) *li* is then the universe. If we were to try to find an inner dimension to *li*, we would really find none in principle. It is the cosmos, not the Creator, that gives meaning to *li*. There is much talk of sincerity in the practice of *li* (e.g. *Chung Yung* 20; Legge *LTC*). In the *Chung Yung* it is stated that Confucius' conviction is that the harmony which pervades the universe may be established in the person in the form of sincerity:

Sincerity is that by which self-completion is effected (25:1);

How great is the path proper to the sage! Like overflowing water, it sends forth and nourishes all things, and rises up to the height of heaven. All complete is its greatness! It embraces the three hundred rules of ceremony, and the three thousand rules of demeanor. It waits for the proper man and then it is trodden. Hence it is said, "Only by perfect virtue can the perfect path in all its courses be made a fact" (27:1-5);

It is only the individual possessed of the most entire sincerity that can exist under heaven, who can adjust the great invariable relations of mankind, establish the

great fundamental virtues of humanity, and know the transforming and nurturing operations of heaven and earth (32:1).

It is this inner commitment to truth, sincerity, which is meant to insure that outward form is driven by inward conviction and honesty. But as the *Chung Yung* states, the achievement of this inner-outer harmony was what determined one to be a Sage. If it was not out of the reach of most in principle, it was in practice.

### ***The Motive of Li***

Nevertheless, the *li*, as rites and ethical regulations, were part of the key to human happiness and harmony. For such circumstances to come about and be maintained, social and political living that accorded with the moral (cosmic) order were required; the *li* provided the ceremonies and the rules of propriety for maintaining this status-quo.

The motive of Chinese *li*/outward piety is to achieve harmony with the universe. But it is also to conserve. The *Analects* depict Confucius as consciously and consistently taking his bearings from the past in which he found ideal figures who ruled during the Golden Age. His goal, and the goal of *li* as he conceived it, was to conform to that ideal pattern evoked by the universe and taught and practiced by the ancients. Confucius said, "I do not create; I only tell of the past" (*Analects* 7:1).

As such, Chinese piety, as shaped by *li*, also has the motive of preserving and conserving Chinese culture. By rigid conformity to an ideal model, its goal is to preserve a specific social/cultural order, a specific culture, from one generation to the next.

The Chinese piety determined by *li* is therefore in one sense static and inflexible; but to the Chinese this inflexibility is regarded as a positive thing--it restricts unwanted change and provides a trustworthy continuity from one generation to the next. The model--the universe--while full of movement, nevertheless maintains a regularity which is generally dependable; why should not human society? Of course, whether the status-quo is prized by other than the ruling class becomes a very real question particularly in the 20th century.

The pragmatic solution to a complicated interpersonal relation is perceived through the "general revelation" of an impersonal universe, and not from any personal God or God-Man. Chinese piety is the analogical transference of the action (*li*) of the universe to human life and society. And there is no sense of divine imperative. We might say

*li*/Chinese piety is grounded, then, in physics; it is neither logical nor metaphysical. Knowledge of the universe occupies the place which in some other religions is given to a knowledge of God.

In the end, the importance of *li* is such that a son who does not show filial piety (*li* in the father/son context, i.e. *syau*) is not (or soon ceases to be) a son; and so for those in the rest of the relationships. A Chinese who does not express *li*, live according to *li*, may be suspected of being something less than Chinese. Traditionally, Chinese existence/culture and *li* are inextricably interwoven.

## ***II. Piety in the Biblical Tradition***

When Hellenistic Judaism and then Christianity adopted the term *eusebeia* from the Greek thought world, they borrowed (but then transformed) a term that functioned in Greek ethical thought in ways similar to the Chinese term *li*. The scope of this study does not allow for a thorough discussion of the *eusebeia* concept in the NT. What will have to be done in very introductory fashion with some substantiation provided in the notes and inset discussions is to state that its emergence and usage in the Pastoral Epistles (PE) challenges the widely held view that the author had simply adopted a Greek line of ethics and that Christian ethics in the PE had become secularized. On the contrary, the term had been prepared for use in a thoroughly biblical and theological way by earlier adoption in the writings of Hellenistic Judaism, as we will see. Nevertheless, we begin with *eusebeia* as piety in the Greek setting.

### ***Directions and Shape of Eusebeia***

1. Greco-Roman Usage. In the Greco-Roman world *eusebeia* was an important ethical concept that described the acceptable attitude of respect to persons of various stations and the institutions of society which were believed to be sanctioned and supervised by the gods. It became "reverence" when the objects were the gods, and since the gods oversaw all of life (people and the structures of society), the understanding of piety grew to be more and more an idea which regulated the understanding of the human relationship with the gods. Although an inner dimension is not completely lacking in this concept, the emphasis in piety was on its outward expression in worship. Piety thus conceived figured prominently in both Greek and Roman ethical and religious

thought.<sup>3</sup> As a virtue and a duty, it played a role within an ethical system designed to preserve the city-state that was very similar to the Chinese *li*.

2. Hellenistic Judaism. While most have taken their bearings from the Greco-Roman background when explaining godliness/piety in the NT, Hellenistic Judaism may be far more important. The discussion of developments here must be brief.

In the writings of Hellenistic Judaism, we discover in various degrees efforts to explicate traditional OT concepts in the Greek language for Greek-speakers. It has often been thought that the result of such a program would inevitably be the thorough surrender of what was traditionally "Jewish" to concepts which were Greek. Such judgments have colored the interpretation of *eusebeia* in the LXX. But the conversion of Jewish ideas into Greek language does not necessarily mean the loss or dilution of traditional meaning. In adopting the *eusebeia* word-group to explain aspects of Jewish religion, those aspects retain their traditional sense. We will restrict our consideration in the main text to summaries of the canonical usages and occurrences in Sirach and 4 Maccabees: more detailed discussions are inset below.

In Isaiah 11:2 and 33:6 *eusebeia* encompasses the traditional components within Jewish religion of the "knowledge" of God and "the fear of the Lord" (cf. Prov 1:7). In other occurrences it serves as a comprehensive description of conduct that is acceptable to God (e.g. Prov 13:11; cf. Wis 10:12). Additional occurrences of the concept demonstrate that the realm of ideas which *eusebeia* covers includes fear of the Lord, loyalty to the covenant, the moral response and devotion to the law (see inset discussion below).

The main extra-canonical writings to employ the word-group are Sirach and 4 Maccabees. Sirach provides an interpretation of those exhibiting "piety" which conforms closely to traditional OT categories.

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<sup>3</sup>The Latin equivalent was *pietas*. Its meaning and function are nearly identical to *eusebeia* (cf. Cicero, *Deorum* 1.116; *Rhet.* 2.66). *Pietas* was revered as a goddess in 101 BC in Rome. Developments in Greek thinking are thoroughly discussed with references in Kaufmann-Buhler, *RAC* VI:985-1051; W. Foerster, *TDNT* VII, 168-96; G. Bertram, *TDNT* III, 123-28. Philo was apparently significantly influenced by Greek thought (*Spec. Leg.* 4, 135, 147; *Abr.* 270; *Dec.* 52, 119; cf. Mott 1978:22-48). He does not fail to bring the OT and the law to bear on piety (*Deus.* Imm. 69), and piety is related to the human relationship to God (W. Foerster, *TDNT* VII, 180-81).

In 4 Maccabees *eusebeia* is synonymous for the large concept of "the Jewish faith"; as such *eusebeia* is held to be the criterion of reason--reason is not superior to the faith.

Consequently, in Hellenistic Judaism the word-group did not actually introduce ideas that diluted or distorted traditional Jewish teaching. It is not accurate to conclude that simply because this word-group was prominent in Hellenistic ethical and religious thought, its use by Jews of the Diaspora reflects the thoroughgoing hellenization of traditional OT categories. (Contra e.g. W. Foerster, *TDNT* VII, 182; G. Bertram, *TDNT* III, 123-28) On the contrary, the evidence reflects much more that these translators were involved in a task of contextualization: the *eusebeia* word-group provided a suitable vehicle for Hellenistic Judaism to expound in Greek society certain elements which were central within traditional OT Judaism. (Quinn 1990:288) For this part of the task, *eusebeia* supplied a term that could successfully convey the interrelationship in OT thought of "the fear of the Lord", "the knowledge of God" and appropriate conduct. Whatever limitations *eusebeia* language had due to strong connotations in Greek thought (e.g. it functioned as a virtue and was linked to cultic acts), it remained a broad concept natural for associating ideas such as loyalty to God and outward behavior. Undoubtedly, its currency made its selection for OT/Jewish use natural for interpreting piety or spiritual life.

*Eusebeia* (noun) occurs upwards of fifty times in the LXX (4x in the canonical writings; 5x in extra-canonical; 3x in 3 Macc and 47x in 4 Maccabees). The Hebrew equivalent, where there is one, is "the fear of the Lord": ideas linked to "fear of the Lord" (e.g. loyalty to the covenant, moral conduct, obedience to the law) make it the nearest Hebrew equivalent of "religion", an inclusive term which is otherwise lacking (cf. Prov 1:7; Isa 11:2; 33:6; cf. Fuhs, *TDOT* VI, 297-315). See Jdg 8:31; Job 32:3; Prov 12:12; 13:19; Sir 3:16; Mic 7:2; Isa 24:16; 26:7[2x]; 32:8 for the adjective, *eusebes*. See Sus 64; 4 Macc [5x]; cf. Sib Or 4:187 for the verb, *eusebeo*.

There is no indication of the dilution of traditional Jewish ideas in Sirach's usage of the word-group to develop a theology of piety. The categories used to describe the "pious" are traditional: the antithesis of sinners, 13:17; 33:14; possess a knowledge of God, 43:33; devotion to the law, 37:12; speech characterized by wisdom and holiness, 23:12; 27:11; blessed by God, 11:22). The adjective, *eusebes*, stands frequently for "righteous" (*tsedek*). 49:3 *eusebeia* conveys the thought of Israel's response to God's covenant (cf. the MT which has *hesed*).

4 Maccabees is often thought to be the most thoroughly hellenized. For here the

word-group is prominent in the defense of the priority of "devout reason" (*ho eusebes logismos*) over the emotions. But as the argument develops, *eusebeia*/piety (= Jewish faith) is clearly established as the criterion of reason—it is not something which attends or issues from reason. In turn, reason then shapes appropriate human conduct (including worship; e.g. 5:22-24).

3. *Eusebeia* in the Christian Tradition. Evidence of this dynamic equivalence is equally apparent in the NT, though Christian developments in piety are evident. Use of the word-group outside of the PE is confined to Acts and 2 Peter. We will leave consideration of the latter two writings to the notes in order to allow a fuller discussion of the usage in the PE.<sup>4</sup>

The Pastoral Epistles contain the greatest concentration of the word-group in the NT.<sup>5</sup> It has been quite typical for interpreters to see in this lexical choice evidence that the author of the PE endorsed an understanding of Christian ethics that was becoming secular. (See e.g. M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann 1972; Roloff 1988; Brox 1969; Foerster 1959) A detailed summary of the developments in the interpretation is inset for reference.

(1) A. Schlatter (1962:176) and C. Spicq (1969:482-92) represent a traditional/conservative line of interpretation, which emphasizes OT and Christian backgrounds. The term refers to behavior and attitudes that in the religious realm are pleasing to God.

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<sup>4</sup>Acts: the verb stands for the cultic practices connected with pagan religion in 17:23, where the context is Athens. But this is an exception to the "Christian" usage. Normally it describes traditional aspects of spirituality taken over from the OT into the early church: the adjective describes "God-fearers", whose piety is indicated by alms-giving and prayer (10:2, 7). The apostles, Peter and John, are "pious", although the power to perform miracles is distinguished from this quality. Cf. 10:35 which links "fear of the Lord" and acceptable conduct.

2 Peter: the word-group describes Christian life in its entirety, and more narrowly may refer to aspects of Christian behavior (1:6-7; 3:11). 1:3 indicates that God provides what is necessary for life (i.e. eternal life) and "piety" (the lifestyle, corresponding to salvation, which believers are to pursue). Usage in 2:9 is reminiscent of Sirach (13:7; 33:14), as the pious (whose models are Noah and Lot) are contrasted with the impious (*asebeia*, vv.5-6), whose models include the fallen angels and other sinners). 3:11 refers to pious deeds (aspects of behavior which reflect genuine *eusebeia*), and among the Christian qualities enumerated in 1:7 is piety.

<sup>5</sup>Why did the word-group reach such prominence in the PE? Some have argued from 1 Tim 6:5 and 2 Tim 3:5 that the author lifted a concept which figured prominently in the heretics' vocabulary, in order to redefine it and correct misunderstandings about the Christian life introduced by their teaching (Fee 1988:63; cf. von Lips 1979:82-83). But the usage in Acts and 2 Peter suggests a wider currency, and it seems to be used easily throughout the PE not strictly in polemical passages. Others have seen in the choice of the term the possible influence of Luke on Paul (Moule 1982:113-32; Wilson 1979:31, 50-52). See below n. 35.



(2) Earlier, H. J. Holtzmann (1880:176-79), who reflects the directions taken by critical scholarship in the PE, understood *eusebeia* to represent a development in thinking about Christian ethics related to developments in the Church's self-identity. As the Church came to view itself as a vast institution in the world, "piety" came to have less to do with theology and more to do with morality. Uprightness and visible respectability in the form of good deeds are the vital characteristics.

(3) M. Dibelius (see Dibelius-Conzelmann 1972:39-41) regarded *eusebeia* as behavior that pleased both God and people. He related it to his dominant interpretation of Christian ethics in the PE--"Christian Good-Citizenship" (*christliche Bürgerlichkeit*). This secularized ethic grew out of the delay of the return of Christ which forced the church to find a home in the world. To continue to live in opposition to the world would endanger the church's existence. Thus "piety" describes a life lived harmoniously and respectably in the world--it is peaceful coexistence with the world (1 Tim 2:2).

(4) The next stage in the development of the interpretation of *eusebeia* in the PE is seen in W. Foerster (1959:213-218), P. Trummer (1978:230) and H.-W. Bartsch (1965:40-41). Emphasis is placed on the Greek background of the concept. In this context (see above) the term stands for respect for people, gods, institutions of society. This respect, especially for the gods, was shown through religious acts. Foerster stresses that the outward act corresponded to an inward attitude. But for these scholars in interpreting "piety" in the PE the accent falls on respect for world structures and institutions prized by society (marriage, family, the creation). These things were being threatened by Gnostic false teaching which rejected the traditional earthly categories of life. 1 Tim 2:2 and 5:4 are the central passages from which this view is recovered. In contrast to Dibelius, Foerster attempts to make a place for the role of faith and the Christ-event (1 Tim 3:16) and God's will (4:10) in his interpretation. He argues that these factors suggest that the author of the PE attempted to provide a theological foundation for the *eusebeia* concept, but nevertheless felt that the choice to employ the concept in Christian thought would have harmful consequences for the church: Because the concept lacks the inherent Christological orientation of a term/concept such as faith/*pistis*, and because its stress in the secular context falls on outward forms of morality, its use by the church would lead to confusion and an eventual equation of Christian ethics and secular morality.

(5) To this point, apart from Spicq and Schlatter, the trend in interpretation was to ignore any theological orientation in "piety". Foerster's own attempt to correct this oversight was hindered by an overemphasis on Greco-Roman usage and a very narrow interpretation of the concept in the PE based on mainly two occurrences (1 Tim 2:2; 5:4).

N. Brox (1969:174-77) reacted against Foerster and Dibelius, arguing that though drawn from the secular world, Christian piety nevertheless was something more than secular piety. It is the response of faith; but it is also a notion or expression of Christian lifestyle which the author consciously expressed (through the term

*eusebeia*) in ways more compatible with the later church's post-charismatic self-identity (cf. Bultmann 1952-55, 2:184-86)

H. von Lips (1979:80-87) and J. Roloff (1988:117-118) take the discussion one step further. Von Lips made the helpful observation that *eusebeia* and knowledge are linked both in Hellenistic Jewish and Greek sources. In his treatment of the PE, he sought to incorporate all of the occurrences therein. He argues that *eusebeia* stands for the Christian life as the combination of a knowledge of God and behavior that corresponds to that knowledge.

Roloff did not take up von Lips' suggestion that *eusebeia* combines knowledge and conduct. Instead he understands it to be a life determined by the grace of God in all respects. Moreover, it is the visible dimension of life. It appears to be a Christianized version of the Greco-Roman ethic. The church borrowed the concept in a way that reflects its desire to justify its existence in the world (cf. Schlarb 1990:292-93; Wainwright 1993:221).

However, what has been downplayed throughout the recent discussions of piety in the PE is the possibility that the use of *eusebeia* in the NT and the PE is determined by developments in Hellenistic Judaism. A summary of its use in the PE will place it within the sphere of meaning established in the LXX, where piety (*eusebeia*) as a term for religion was already in use.

(1) Titus 2:12 contrasts the life of piety with impiety (*asebeia*; cf. Sirach), a way of life characterized by worldly lusts. Piety, along with soberness and uprightness, pertains to life in this age, but is also linked to hope in the return of Christ. It is clear that piety or pious living here means a life which is lived as a result of the appearance of God's grace in Christ.

(2) Tit 1:1 (cf. 1 Tim 6:3) describes the mission of the apostle in terms of preaching the gospel which leads to the knowledge of the truth that is "according to godliness/piety." This might mean that visible piety is the proof of the message or that the message (embraced in faith) leads to piety. What is critical is its link to the gospel and faith.

(3) 2 Tim 3:5 describes some whose behavior is characterized by sin and yet who have "the form of godliness". Apparently, the superficial display of religion (asceticism) is contrasted here with genuine faith which, marked by inner power, produces the genuine Christian lifestyle = piety.

(4) 2 Tim 3:12 refers to "piety in Christ Jesus" and links it to suffering. The "in Christ Jesus" qualification shows that *eusebeia* is conceived of as having a specifically Christian character--Titus 2:12 suggested that it had a specific relationship to the Christ-event. If the life so envisaged here were not substantially different from any secular counterpart, it would not elicit persecution.

(5) 1 Tim 2:2 links prayer for rulers to the conditions most conducive to a life characterized by piety. While the conditions of peace and tranquillity might be ideal, the practice of piety is not dependent upon the conditions.

(6) 1 Tim 2:10 refers to Christian women who profess "godliness" (*theosebeia* is a synonym of *eusebeia*). The reference here is comprehensive; it is a claim to be genuine believers, and the lifestyle of genuine believers is to be respectable, and marked by good works.

(7) In 1 Timothy is 3:16 *eusebeia* similarly, in its affirmation of the Christ-event as the great mystery of godliness, encompasses the whole of Christian life; belief, confession and behaviour whose source is the Christ-event.

(8) In 1 Tim 4:7-8 Timothy is urged to make an effort to attain godliness through training. Why? Because piety is something which bears both on life now and in eternity. It is the practical and visible outworking of his faith.

(9) 1 Tim 5:4 reveals the very practical expression of piety. The children of widows are obliged to practice piety in the form of care for those who cannot care for themselves. The allusion is to the fifth commandment.

(10) 1 Tim 6:5 refers to some who understand piety to be a way of making a profit. Here godliness is probably a reference to a form of their teaching or a concept within their doctrine. *Eusebeia* is thus implicitly linked to knowledge (cf. 1 Tim 6:20). In 6:6 the author's understanding emerges: the gain to be had from true piety is spiritual; piety is not to be connected with physical conditions (cf. 2:2)

(11) In 1 Tim 6:11 piety can be regarded as a quality which can be sought along with others. Its comprehensive use elsewhere suggests that the parenetic thrust here is similar to that of Gal 5:22-23, where faith and love, equally comprehensive ideas, can similarly be made part of a list.

To summarize the above observations, first, *eusebeia* is an inclusive reference for the whole of Christian life (Tit 1:1; 2:12; 1 Tim 2:2; 3:16; 4:7-8; 6:3, 5-6; 2 Tim 3:5, 12; cf. *theosebeia* in 1 Tim 2.10 which is synonymous). Second, piety is a theological concept. Its cause or source is the Christ-event (1 Tim 3:16; 2 Tim 3:12; cf. Tit 2:12). It stands inseparably related to a correct knowledge of God (the gospel, the truth, Tit 1:1; 1 Tim 6:3, 5, 6, 11). In contrast to the ethics of the heresy (2 Tim 3:5), true Christian piety is linked to obedience to God and the apostolic faith. Third, piety is expressed in practical and specific behavior (1 Tim 5:4). It is an aim to pursue (1 Tim 6:11; Tit 2:12). Even so, it exceeds the bounds of the secular Greek virtue (but cf. Mott 1978:22-48) in the same way as faith and love do (Gal 5:22-23). Fourth, *eusebeia* operates within the author's polemic against the false teachers. It is similar to the Hellenistic Jewish polemic

directed against the *asebeia* (e.g. Prov 1:7; 3 Macc 2:31-32; see esp. Tit 2:12; 1 Tim 1:9; 2 Tim 2:16; where the impious are heretics; cf. 2 Pet 2:6).

From all indications, *eusebeia* as used in the PE is a comprehensive term for the Christian life, combining inner and outer dimensions, and is no more a virtue than are faith and love which are equally comprehensive terms for the characteristics of Christian living.

Consequently, the most probable background of the usage in the PE (and NT) is Hellenistic Judaism. Just as Hellenistic Judaism employed the term "piety" to translate and combine the Hebrew notions of "the fear of the Lord" and knowledge of God and lost nothing, theologically, in the process, so the PE employ the term without diluting traditional concepts. Since nothing is lost in the process, in each case the motive behind the lexical choice is clearly not secularization. For the author of the PE, the choice of *eusebeia* was determined by the shape given to it in the LXX. But in each historical setting it was a current term in the Greek milieu. Its selection was motivated by a desire to make an element of the traditional faith understandable in the language of the culture. The aim in this could have been evangelistic.<sup>6</sup> But an act of contextualization might also have been called forth by the need to defend the faith in the face of a current misunderstanding, for which use of the current language would be most appropriate.<sup>7</sup> In either case, if *eusebeia* were going to be used to establish the church's "piety" and at the same time to bridge the gap between pagan and Christian understanding, it would have to be carefully anchored in theology.

<sup>6</sup>Quinn (1990:289), assuming a Roman destination of the letters, explains the choice to employ *eusebeia* as intended to help the church to identify with the society in which they lived: "The values grounded on *pietas* in pagan Rome offered a point of departure for showing what Christians meant by *eusebeia*, and they took the language to explore that area" (cf. Brox 1969:174). How much Rome actually comes into the purview of the PE is questionable, but Quinn's suggestion that the choice of the term reflects the church's search for strategic contact points with society (Greek or Roman) is perceptive.

<sup>7</sup>R. A. Bauman (1974) has demonstrated that during the first century C.E. an issue of considerable concern was what constituted *impietas*, the equivalent to the Greek *asebeia* ("impiety", "ungodliness"). Actions falling into this category were regarded as treason against the emperor, and the early church's distinctive resistance to emperor worship and idolatry may well have raised the question whether Christianity would be so judged by the Roman government. It is possible that at the time of the writing of the PE the pressure was felt to be such that a Christian explication of *eusebeia/pietas* was needed. However, the currency of the language in Greco-Roman ethical thought may also have played a part in delaying and limiting its use in the early church's vocabulary. That is, it is reasonable to think that Christian writers concerned to distinguish the Christian faith from the pagan religions would have thought twice before using a term like *eusebeia* precisely because it might lead to confusion.

### *The Source of eusebeia*

In contrast to Greek ethical thought, *eusebeia*, piety, is not a virtue which the good person can practice. It is not simply a life lived according to certain social rules. The biblical tradition, beginning in the LXX and most clearly in the NT, links it inseparably to the revelation of God. *Eusebeia* in Christian parlance describes the life which is a response to the revelation of God.

Thus Christian piety is a *theological concept*. On the one hand, according to Titus 2:12 the appearance of God's grace in Christ "taught" the life characterized by piety. This passage also reveals the need for human decision in taking this life on board. (See Towner 1989:209-91 n. 195) 1 Tim 3:16 similarly anchors the "mystery of godliness" in the Christ-event, and 2 Tim 3:12 defines the pious life of the Christian as being "in Christ". On the other hand, *eusebeia* cannot be separated from a genuine knowledge of God (the gospel, the truth; Tit 1:1; 1 Tim 6:3, 5, 6, 11), and it is in some of these contexts that the role of the word-group in the polemic emerges. The Hellenistic Jewish writings (e.g. Prov 1:7; 3 Macc 2:31-32) directed a similar polemic against the impious (*asebeia*). In the PE the false teachers are categorized similarly (see esp. Tit 2:12; 1 Tim 1:9; 2 Tim 2:16; cf. 2 Pet 2:6). The importance of the polemic is that it reveals that the proper understanding of Christian piety (among other things) was in dispute. The letters also reveal that far more than just outward behavior was at issue; the inner source of outer behavior was in question. The heretics are denounced for misunderstanding the theological substance of the faith, and this is seen to be at the root of aberrant behavior. In the end, *eusebeia* brings together the outer manifestation, i.e. conduct, and the inner source, i.e. faith, belief, knowledge of God.

In contrast to the superficial piety of the false teachers (2 Tim 3.5), genuine piety is a product of obedience to God and the apostolic teaching. The false teachers were not Greek ethicists, but the same theological rationale distinguishes the source or basis of Christian *eusebeia* from the *eusebeia* of Greco-Roman ethics, even if the observable behavior so described might appear to be identical.

### *The Scope of eusebeia*

As we have already seen, *eusebeia* could serve to describe the whole of life *comprehensively*. The word-group describes the Christian

life as a whole, and envisages a specifically Christian manner of life (Tit 1:1; 2:12; 1 Tim 2:2; 3:16; 4:7-8; 6:3, 5-6; 2 Tim 3:5, 12; cf. *theosebeia* in 1 Tim 2:10). The result might be close to our term "spirituality", or genuine Christianity, or Christian existence. It is capable of being defined in these ways because it is the combination of the inner relationship with God (including faith and knowledge of God) and the outer behavioral, response dimension.

But the emphasis in the concept is on the observable lifestyle that the knowledge of God produces. Thus piety can be viewed from the perspective of the kinds of behavior of which it consists. This is especially evident in 1 Tim 5:4, where honoring parents is one specific application of *eusebeia*: "if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to express piety (*eusebein*) to their own family and make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God." (Towner 1989:290-91 n. 195) In 1 Tim 6:11 and Tit 2:12 piety is one among other aims to be pursued. But this is not to say that it is no more than a Greek virtue. (Mott 1978:22-48) The more dominant tendency is for *eusebeia*/piety to represent the life of faith in its entirety. It is worth comparing the way Gal 5:22-23 subordinates faith in its list of characteristics of the Spirit-controlled life. Nevertheless, because the inner dimension of Christian existence produces an outward result, this lifestyle, the visible dimension of Christian piety, is open to evaluation.

Since it is a holistic concept, we rely on other ethical, behavioral terms to specify the content and directions, as well as the motive of piety or godliness. In the PE the kinds of specific elements of behavior which are discernible in one's conduct or speech contained in the broader *eusebeia* concept would include: prudent behavior, self-control, seriousness, dignity, uprightness, gentleness, sexual purity, hospitality, cooperativeness, humility, patience, and so on. Some of these are virtues or qualities and as such remain abstract until they are placed within a concrete context. Thus if one is to begin with the duty code in Titus 1:6-9, given to guide the church leader in the selection of elders and constructed in part at least by lists of these Christian virtues or qualities, it is obvious that they will be evident in the context of relationships. Titus 2:1-10 repeats many of the qualities and places them into the concrete context of relationships in the church and home.

### *The Motive of eusebeia*

All of these things were already part of a biblical paradigm; but since they were also prized by pagan ethicists and formed a part of the accepted model of respectability, what makes *eusebeia* in the biblical tradition different from *eusebeia* in secular thought? The answer lies first in the theological grounding of Christian (and before it Jewish) piety. The life of piety is the life lived in response to the revelation of God; it is a life made possible by that revelation, and a life which depends upon a consciousness of being in relationship with God ("in Christ"; 2 Tim 3:12; etc.). There are implications here (especially in the NT through the concept of the Spirit-filled life) of empowering, which place Christian *eusebeia* on a different plane from secular piety.

But secondly the motive (or at least a part of the motive) of Christian *eusebeia* sets it apart from secular piety. On the level where Christians function as witnesses of the divine revelation (in human society), the motive of much of Christian behavior (particularly according to the PE, but it seems true throughout the NT) is to communicate. This is not to say that the pious life is not also intended to bring joy and peace to the individual believer and to the Christian community; but it is to say that according to the biblical tradition, the divine purposes do not stop here. The motive of Christian piety is also to communicate God's will and expectations to the world.

Piety, therefore, intends to communicate. It must do so in ways that may be subtle and sensitive to the surrounding culture, and sometimes by way of introducing vivid contrasts. Contextualization of the gospel/the Christian faith is the modern missiological term for the process in which *eusebeia* engages the Christian.

The people of God, in the OT, Judaism (via the LXX), and the NT, reflect this missionary interest, this interest in initiating dialogue with surrounding cultures, in their choice of the term *eusebeia* and in their care to preserve its theological content. "Fear of the Lord" combined with a knowledge of God in Hebrew thought becomes *eusebeia* (a concept which was flexible enough to bring both of these dimensions together) in the movement into the Greco-Roman sphere. In this development, the missionary character or motive is certainly more obvious in the NT than in OT/Judaism, which is of course also true in terms of the overall sense of calling and reason for being of God's

people. But there is shared in the OT and NT the belief that God's people are on display and charged to display the truth of God in the world through, among other things, lifestyle.

It is only when the OT community is forced to live in a Diaspora setting that there will be any significant challenge to live in a way that communicates to the Gentile culture. Thus the Diaspora phenomenon forces the dialogue to begin. This was also true of the church. It was challenged to communicate its faith in a new language and new cultures as it moved out of Palestine (in whatever ways that it did--through individuals such as those on hand on the day of Pentecost, missionaries, groups) into Greco-Roman Asia Minor, Europe and Africa. In this movement, Christian existence proves itself to be capable of adaptation to all cultures.

To take a theoretical example, we might consider the interplay of *eusebeia* within relationships in which there are clear cultural rules in effect. For example, the husband/wife relationship. Godly behavior will include observance of directives linked directly to God's will which clearly relate to this relationship--sexual behavior, and mutual respect in the marriage relationship. But *eusebeia*, expressed concretely along the lines of the other qualities already mentioned, will also include behavior that is appropriate to a given culture; perhaps "headship" of the husband and submission of the wife belong to this category. Whatever conclusions are drawn about headship and submissiveness, such things will be expressed differently in different cultures--through dress, gesture, body position, speech, etc. Christian *eusebeia* is flexible enough to incorporate the peculiarities of any culture and because of its theological foundation can remain thoroughly Christian *eusebeia*. In this way, the motive of Christian piety is to articulate through living contextualization the truth of God in any setting without being any less Christian. This intention is already evident in the selection of the term *eusebeia* by the Greek-speaking Jews and by the author of the PE. As long as the theological content of the term is demonstrable, it is contextualization rather than compromise or assimilation to the surrounding culture that is in view.

This is not to say that Christian piety is not aiming also to preserve the good in any society. It can accept social rules as they are and participate in social institutions as they stand. But the goal is not to preserve the status-quo--the city-state which depends upon ordered



relationships. The subtle changes it brings to, for example, slavery in the first century, means that the outward form will crumble as something new takes root within the hearts of those involved. Reformation is the goal, but by starting with things as they exist and bringing them into a critical confrontation with the will of God.

But the main point of my thesis is that the Christian concept of godliness/piety seeks to establish contact with the world. Biblical piety may be called "conservative" in the sense that it always seeks to articulate the will of God; but it is not culture-specific, and it is not tied to any one cultural construct.

### *The Adaptability of eusebeia*

In the concrete outworking of the lifestyle, cultures dictate what constitutes responsible behavior, and a Christian expression of piety/godliness will be shaped (or should be shaped) to some degree by culture: i.e. behavior in various social relationships (man/woman; husband/wife; superior/subordinate; parent/child) and so on. It is my assumption that certain aspects of the behavior enjoined by the biblical writers is shaped by culture (dress codes, rules for displaying respect for elders, parents, the opposite sex, etc.). This is not to say necessarily that everything is relative. Biblical directives do exist to inform us of limits, but there is much room for negotiation here as the church interacts with society. And *eusebeia* is a theological concept which is inherently flexible enough to meet the needs of Christians in different cultures without recourse to compromise and without (necessarily) recourse to legalism (in the sense of concretizing the "biblical" pattern in every detail) which would lead inevitably to the rejection of a culture's mores.

What gives *eusebeia* its flexibility? As we consider this question, we must first keep in mind that Christian existence (i.e. *eusebeia*) consists of inward and outward dimensions. Its core or foundation is the personal relationship with God, faith, and knowledge of God; its visible expression or response is a lifestyle which the relationship with God produces. If these two dimensions are disconnected, there is no Christian piety--only cold, dead legalism, or libertinism. Thus Christian piety, just as the OT "fear of the Lord", is an expression of behavior that is informed and encouraged by a genuine relationship with God. It is the means in human life by which God's will is expressed through people; it is not so much the preaching of the gospel as it is the verification of the truth and effectiveness of the gospel.

### ***III. Concluding Thoughts: Li and eusebeia***

Chinese piety (*li*) and Christian piety (*eusebeia*) share some important points of resemblance and yet differ in certain other fundamental ways. In summary fashion, both corresponding and opposing elements will be laid out, followed by a discussion of some of the main implications and questions.

An important similarity is evident in that in the case of both Chinese (particularly Confucian) thought and Christian thought (at least as depicted in the biblical tradition) human relationships are central to life. It is at this level where observable conduct occurs, which explains the emphasis on *li* and *eusebeia* respectively. It should not be thought that Christianity emphasizes the "inner" and minimizes the "outer"; nor should the opposite be said of Confucianism. But life continues to be viewed from the perspective of the Five Relationships in Chinese culture, and indeed in the NT teaching on relationships a similar sort of pattern can be seen to have existed in Christianity's first-century, Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures.

But the fundamental differences are more numerous. (1) While acknowledging debate about the nature of Confucianism, it can still be said that its basic orientation differs from life according to the biblical tradition. Confucianism teaches a belief in a cosmic "rightness," and is optimistic about human potential to improve with teaching (in principle *ren* and *yi* are within the reach of everyone). The *li* are designed to help humankind get in step or stay in step with the universe. The biblical tradition while affirming the existence of a sovereign Creator God of the universe, nevertheless believes in a cosmic "wrongness": a "world" in opposition to the divine principles; a fallen, sinful nature characteristic of human beings. There is a solution envisaged, but it is available only through a personal encounter with God in Christ.

The *li* is a code of behavior designed to regulate human relationships which is modeled after the universe. As a "code" it is static and "legalistic"; it imposes a hierarchical shape upon the relationships in life and directs behavior within those relationships in a rigid way. Its legalistic potential is perhaps seen best in the way it functions when a relationship suffers strain and forgiveness (and restoration of "face") is needed. Since divine grace is lacking in the ethic, rigidly defined human effort must suffice. When forgiveness is needed, the cultural

rule (*li*) calls for the giving of a gift (*liwu*). This gift may actually take the form of a bribery-gift designed as a favor to save face. The result is that the offended party accepts the gift and the offender has bought back his or her face.

In contrast *eusebeia* is theological in origin; it is a new capacity or potential to live in a way that accords with the will of God, and as such it is a dynamic force. From the divine perspective it originates in the revelation of God--supremely in the Christ-event--the result of which was the introduction of a new possibility for life which is based upon the forgiveness of God. From the human perspective, *eusebeia* becomes a possibility through a faith encounter with God; the knowledge of God in the responsive individual manifests itself in a new way of life. Relationships are equally important to *eusebeia*, but rigid hierarchy is replaced by a new tendency to find points of equality between people even if they are situated in relationships defined rigidly by culture.

The *li* as a code of conduct intends to produce and conserve a harmonious life. *Li* is a "conservative" concept. Although Confucianism took to itself the ingredients (*yin-yang*) that might allow for change, a static system nevertheless resulted with its dependence upon the cosmic model, cyclical notion of time and belief in the accessibility of the Golden Age paradigm. However little Confucius intended it, his aim to restore order in society through "the Rectification of Names" (*Analects* 16) seems to have had the effect of establishing an ideal, static hierarchical structure of the relationships (and their proper roles and conduct) in society. (Ching 1977:97; Mencius 1B:8) This kind of teaching was certainly capitalized on by later Han scholars seeking justification for preserving a rigid authoritarian structure. But whatever the cause of the development, life guided by the *li* became a definitive characteristic of Chinese culture, perpetuated through the generations. Concepts of the Christian life have certainly devolved into legalistic systems of behavior (the "do's and don'ts"). But *eusebeia* in the biblical tradition was never so conceived. It is the life of Christ, or the new life of the Eschaton which can be experienced in this age, according to NT teaching, in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The inherent dialectic of Christian existence (old nature/new nature existing side by side, resulting in a battle; Gal 5:17f.) places certain limitations on the growth possible prior to the Eschaton (none will become sages). But development is possible. This life is revolutionary. It promises to deliver the virtuous life which the Greek ethicists lauded but to which they themselves

could not attain. Like the life guided by the *li*, the life characterized by *eusebeia* is observable and pertains to relationships. But it is not static nor does it aim simply to conserve. It aims to reform relationships governed by cultural rules, but it is accommodative; it can start with social structures as they exist and renovate them from the inside.

The Pastoral Epistles of the NT envisage a *eusebeia*, a visible piety, which is able to express itself through Christians in society who obey rules of etiquette and observe the code of behavior that governs relationships. It is, however, not limited by those rules or by the social structures. It is in principle "supracultural," aiming only at transmitting/expressing the will of God to all human cultures in the context of human relationships, and it will use the social rules/codes as avenues for expressing Christian love. That expression of love will eventually wear down unjust or unbalanced relational structures (e.g., slavery, even where both members are Christians), but the only structures or cultural features it cannot abide are those in which love cannot be expressed. Chinese *li*, however, is bound to a culture, it is the very expression of Chinese culture at the level of human relationships. Its function (as social rules in any culture) is to provide the fabric out of which the social side of culture is formed.

Do *li* and *eusebeia* provide a useful point at which to continue the Chinese-Christian dialogue? I think the answer is yes both because of a common interest and because of an undeniable and fundamental point of contradiction. On the one hand, the biblical tradition's commitment to encouraging a lifestyle which is observably pious and not limited to Western categories suggests a point of resonance with Chinese thought influenced by centuries of Confucianism. On the other hand, in a dialectical way the main point of dissonance or contradiction ought not to be minimized as a point of possible dialogue. *Eusebeia* is dynamic and parallel, *li* is static and hierarchical. Christianity's theoretical ability to work in a culturally sensitive way at the relationship level is something Chinese would benefit from seeing. The transforming and developmental nature of *eusebeia* within relationships and social structures offers a dynamic model that may be instructive as Chinese society faces rapid social change armed mainly with the rather conservative approach to human relationships offered by the *li*.

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## ABSTRACT

Chinese religious thought and the biblical tradition share an emphasis in what may be called piety-*li* in Chinese and *eusebeia* in biblical Greek. In each case, "piety" finds expression above all in the context of relationships, and equally is to be related to other aspects of the moral life. This common interest in piety may be a point which could lead to useful dialogue among the two traditions. However, there are significant differences between piety as conceived in Chinese terms and in Christians terms, as the Confucian development of *li* and biblical development of *eusebeia* reveal. Chinese piety is conservative and hierarchical, patterned after the cosmos and rather rigid in encouraging the perpetuation of rules for interpersonal behavior that will insure stability. It is also optimistic about the goodness of humankind. Christian piety, on the other hand, is a theological rather than a cosmological concept -- the expression of the dialectical new existence in Christ that is an ongoing response to the revelation of God. It is communicative in that it seeks to display the reality of God in the very practical relationships which make up human life, and it is transformative seeking to make relationships vehicles for the expression of love and service. The presence of both similarities and differences must be acknowledged, but "piety" provides a useful point at which to continue the Chinese-Christian dialogue.

## 撮 要

中國的宗教思想和聖經的傳統對敬虔同樣重視，即是中國的禮，和希臘 *eusebeia*。在這兩方面「敬虔」都是人際關係中最重要的一環，而且與道德生活其他層面的關係是對等的。兩者在敬虔的共通之處，使這兩種傳統可以有效地對話。然而從孔夫子的禮和聖經的 *eusebeia* 來看，中國人的敬虔與基督徒的敬虔大有迥異。中國的敬虔既保守又階級化，強調倫常秩序，一成不變地鼓吹可以永遠確保人際關係和諧的規矩。中國的敬虔讚揚人類的美德。反之，基督徒的敬虔是有關神學的概念，並非人常秩序的概念——這個基督裏新的辯證法，就是對神啟示延續不斷的回應。它具有溝通性：嘗試在人類生活的實際關係中展示神的真實；它具有變革性：尋求讓人際關係成為表達仁愛和服事的工具。我們必須認清中國和基督教敬虔的異同，但「敬虔」確實為中國基督教提供了有利的話題。