

THE COMPOSITIONAL FUNCTION OF THE PETRINE PRESCRIPT: A LOOK AT 1 PET 1:1–3

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First Peter has been referred to as the “exegetical step-child” of NT studies.¹ Given the extensive attention devoted to the gospels and the Pauline letters in contrast to the material produced on 1 Peter, John H. Elliott’s observation is unfortunately a fairly accurate one. Even within Petrine studies there have been several nagging issues that have never been adequately addressed or have never emerged into a general consensus. The compositional makeup of 1 Peter is just such an issue. Scholars have debated over various theories ranging from a baptismal homily to a threefold analytical structure to no discernible structure at all. Liturgical and partition theories have had a strong influence in Petrine compositional discussion, though with less than satisfactory results.² Recently Troy Martin offered a thorough study of 1 Peter’s compositional structure.³ Martin perceives the letter as an early Christian epistle that is parenetic in essence. This parenetic letter is structured both by the basic conventions of letter writing in the ancient world and by metaphorical “clusters.” An overarching diaspora metaphor functions throughout the letter as the controlling device for generating and structuring the three basic metaphor-clusters (1:14–2:10, “elect household of God”; 2:11–3:12, “aliens in this world”; 3:13–5:11, “sufferers of the dispersion”).⁴ Although Martin’s study is the most comprehensive to date, it is questionable as to whether it will gain a substantial following. But it has definitely helped move the discussion forward.

In this brief paper, the prescript of the letter will be studied. It will attempt to ascertain the compositional function of 1:1–2. It will also include an analysis of the transitional relationship between the end of the

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¹ The term “exegetical step-child” within Petrine studies was coined by J. H. Elliott (“The Rehabilitation of an Exegetical Step-Child: 1 Peter in Recent Research,” *JBL* 95 [1976] 243–254). Also see *The Elect and the Holy* (NovTSup 12; Leiden: Brill, 1966); *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

² See R. P. Martin, “The Composition of 1 Peter in Recent Study,” *Vox Evangelica: Biblical and Historical Essays* (ed. R. P. Martin; London: Epworth, 1962) 29–42. Cf. also E. Cothenet, “Les orientations actuelles de l’exégèse de la Première Lettre de Pierre,” *Étude sur la Première Lettre de Pierre* (LD 102; ed. C. Perrot; Paris: Cerf, 1980) 13–42.

³ T. W. Martin, *Metaphor and Composition in 1 Peter* (SBLDS 131; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992).

⁴ *Ibid.*

prescript (1:2b) and the blessing section (1:3–12). I hope this study will add to the ongoing discussion of the compositional units within 1 Peter.⁵

The first unit is the prescript, or the letter opening, which functions to establish the relationship of the sender and the addressee.⁶ Ancient letter prescripts followed a specific stylized form. Francis Xavier J. Exler has described the basic opening formula as “From A to B, Greeting (*chairein*).”⁷ The formula has been identified in ancient letters running throughout the entire time period covered in Exler’s study (i.e. third century BC to third century AD). The prescripts in the Aramaic letters studied by J. A. Fitzmyer exhibit the same formulaic style.⁸ Exler also noted the variations that developed from this standard formula. The addition of qualifying phrases, such as *polla*, *tō patri*, *adelphō*, *pleista*, *tōi philtatō* and others, extended the opening formula so as to add clarity and to enhance the relational connection between sender and addressee. Changes in the formula’s structure also have been observed. For example, the A to B greeting has been changed to “To B from A, Greeting,” “To B from A,” “To B, Greeting, A,” “From A,” “A to B,” “To B.”⁹ Another interesting change in the opening formula was the addition of a “health wish” (*errōsthai* or *hygiainein*). Among Aramaic ostraca, the brevity of a letter resulted in the mixing of the greeting and the prescript.¹⁰ Also found is the more rare opening of the optative or imperative *chairōis/chaire*. Although it has been postulated that this form was the one that slaves primarily would use, Exler has correctly refuted such a claim.¹¹ The letters grew in complexity in order to establish relational feelings between

⁵ This present paper emerges out of my monograph, *Compositional Transitions in 1 Peter: An Analysis of the Letter-Opening* (Bethesda: International Scholars Publications, forthcoming).

⁶ J. White, *Light from Ancient Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 198.

⁷ F. X. J. Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter: A Study of Greek Epistolography* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1923) 23.

⁸ J. A. Fitzmyer, “Some Notes on Aramaic Epistolography,” *JBL* 93 (1974) 211–213.

⁹ Fitzmyer has recognized similar variations within Aramaic letters. He identifies five basic formulaic variances (“Notes” 211): “The *praescriptio*, when it is not simply implied, is usually expressed in one of five ways: (i) ‘To X, your servant/brother/son, (greeting)’; (ii) ‘To X, from Y, (greeting)’; (iii) ‘From X, to Y, (greeting)’; (iv) ‘X to Y, (greeting)’; (v) ‘To X, (greeting)’.” The significance of a study of Aramaic letters for understanding early Christian letters is briefly suggested by Fitzmyer (p. 202): “In a sense this inquiry forms but another aspect of the generic problems of the Aramaic background of NT writings, or more properly of Aramaic interference in NT Greek. . . . Furthermore, N. J. Sevenster has raised a question about the Palestinian origin of James and 1 Peter in a new way, and in the light of it one could ask about the influence of Aramaic epistolography on such letters.” Also see C.-H. Kim, *Form and Structure of the Familiar Greek Letter of Recommendation* (SBLDS 4; Missoula: University of Montana, 1972), who also notes the same literary tendency. Kim utilizes more recent source material and therefore is a significant work to be studied alongside of Exler’s older study, which served as a basis for Kim’s work. Since Kim is interested in the Greek “letter of recommendation” (a genre to which 1 Peter does not belong, unlike Philemon), this present study will not use Kim extensively.

¹⁰ Fitzmyer (“Notes” 213) states: “On the ostraca one finds, undoubtedly because of the brevity of the message, an opening that mixes greeting and *praescriptio*.”

¹¹ This position was argued by F. Ziemann, *De Epistularum Graecarum Formulis Solemnibus Quaestiones Selectae* (Berlin, 1912). Exler’s refutation can be found in *Form* 68.

the sending and receiving parties. Furthermore the extensions played a key role, in many cases, in establishing the letter's specific agenda. Within early Christian letters such as 1 Peter, the prescript establishes both the relational connection between the reader and the author¹² and the letter's conceptual thrust. According to J. Ramsay Michaels, the prescript served a theological-functional purpose so as to set the stage for the rest of the letter.¹³

In establishing the conceptual thrust of the letter, 1 Peter's prescript sets forth the diaspora theme for the entire letter at the very outset. As Norman Hillyer observes, the author "describes the readers in three ways: as 'God's elect,' 'strangers in the world,' and 'scattered throughout.'"¹⁴ Each of these designations identifies the recipients of the letter within the thematic framework of the text—that is, the author uses the epistolary formula of the prescript to present the self-identification of the Petrine community.

Compositionally the prescript has been identified as a summation of the major sections of the letter. Heinrich Rendtorff has stated that 1:1–2 encapsulates the letter's entire thematic thrust (i.e. the elect strangers, whose homelessness is due to their destiny with God).¹⁵ Troy Martin, following Rendtorff's lead, has also identified the prescript as outlining the metaphorical thrust of the letter, though in regard to the diaspora as the controlling metaphor.¹⁶ Martin further notes that *eklektois*, *parepidēmois* and *diasporas* indicate the three metaphor clusters that structure the body of the letter.¹⁷ The diaspora metaphor of 1 Peter is clearly stated at the very outset of the epistle. It serves as the thrust of the

¹² Martin (*Metaphor* 43) clearly states the functional aspect of the Petrine prescript along these lines: "The identification of the writer as an apostle definitely establishes a particular relationship between him and the reader of the letter. Whether or not the writer is indeed an apostle or even truly Peter, the letter makes this claim and establishes this relationship."

¹³ J. R. Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC 49; Waco: Word, 1988) 4, identifies 1 Peter as an encyclical "diaspora letter" in comparison to Jas 1:1; Rev 1:11; Jer 29:4–23; 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 78–87; 2 Macc 1:1–10a, 10b–2:18; Acts 15:23–29. Michaels perceives 1 Peter as such a letter addressed to Gentile Christians within the five Roman provinces listed in the prescript. He declares the function of the prescript in 1 Peter to be as follows (pp. 13–14): "The function of the epistolary introduction is to identify the recipients of the letter as God's chosen people living as strangers in the diaspora and to lay a theological basis for their identity. This theological basis extends only as far as their baptism. All that Peter knows of them is that they are communities of baptized Christians and consequently, like the Jews, 'strangers' to the cities and provinces where they live. Not a clue has yet been dropped that their estrangement means suffering for them or that their baptism has given them hope of vindication. As Peter holds out to them grace and peace, the issues to be addressed in his epistle have not even been raised, yet the resources for addressing those issues—the redemptive work of God through Christ, and the resultant character of the community thus redeemed—are already in place." Also of interest in regard to thematic analysis of the prescript is F. H. Agnew's treatment of the theme of obedience in 1 Pet 1:2b ("1 Peter 1:2—An Alternative Translation," *CBQ* 45 [1983] 68–73).

¹⁴ N. Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992) 25–26.

¹⁵ H. Rendtorff, *Getrostes Wandern: Eine Einführung in den ersten Brief des Petrus* (Hamburg: Furche, 1951) 18.

¹⁶ Martin, *Metaphor* 147.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 160–161.

consolatory purpose of the letter.¹⁸ Martin's thesis can be traced back to Leonhard Goppelt's initial work on the prescript. Goppelt not only understands *diasporas* as a Petrine distinction from the Pauline corpus but also the diaspora as central to understanding the Petrine recipients' self-understanding as "a people living in small communal organizations scattered among the peoples and waiting expectantly for its ingathering in the eschaton." Indeed, this is a people whose diaspora condition is composed of "ideas about estrangement resulting from election."¹⁹ From this self-perception the diaspora is explored in the letter programmatically with the above designations. Thus Martin's work is a progressive development from Goppelt's groundwork.

In reference to the designations *eklektōis*, *parepidēmois* and *diasporas*, Michaels identifies their significance: "The identity of the recipients is a more central concern to the author than his own identity." The terms *eklektōi* and *parepidēmoi*

together sum up the recipients' identity. These terms, nowhere else found in combination in biblical literature, appear on first impression to point in quite different directions. One expresses a relationship to God, the other a relationship to human society. One denotes a privileged group (before God), the other a disadvantaged group (in society). Yet the two expressions do not limit or qualify each other. The addressees are "strangers" because of (not despite) being chosen. Their divine election is a sociological as well as theological fact, for it has sundered them from their social world and made them like strangers or temporary residents in their respective cities and provinces. This is Peter's assumption and the basis on which he writes to them.²⁰

The genitive *diasporas*, according to Michaels, "further characterizes this community's experience as parallel to that of Israel."²¹ According to Michaels, the "diaspora" referred to is not the Jewish diaspora. Rather, the author of 1 Peter "envisioned a parallel situation among Christians. . . . His readers [did not] belong to the Jewish diaspora [and were not] living as strangers among the dispersed Jews, but . . . they themselves constituted a diaspora, the only diaspora, in fact, that Peter gives evidence of knowing. He sees them not in relation to the Jews (not even as displacing the Jews in the plan of God) but (like the Jewish diaspora itself) always in relation to 'the Gentiles' (cf. 2:12; 4:3)."²²

Given the importance of the diaspora theme in the prescript, it is surprising that Michaels' primary criticism of Troy Martin is in direct reference to the diaspora metaphor: "As for the metaphor of the Jewish

¹⁸ First Peter is not only a parenetic letter but also functions as a consolatory address. The consolatory nature of 1 Peter has been observed and studied by F. W. Danker, "1 Peter 1.24–2.17—A Consolatory Pericope," *ZNW* 58 (1967) 93–103.

¹⁹ L. Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 66.

²⁰ Michaels, *1 Peter* 6.

²¹ *Ibid.* 10. The socioreligious dynamics of the Jewish diaspora, however, are significant for understanding the Petrine community's self-designation as "diaspora." For a solid overview of the diaspora concept (historical, sociological and religious aspects within the development of Judaism) see T. Reinarch, "Diaspora," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: KTAV, 1906) 4.559–573.

²² Michaels, *1 Peter* 8.

diaspora, it is indeed significant in 1 Peter, but Martin burdens it with more weight than it can carry. . . . Martin labors to bring all these [metaphor clusters] under the grand umbrella of the diaspora metaphor, but with mixed success. What he demonstrates instead is that no one metaphor so dominates the others that it can explain the structure and the varied rhetorical strategies of this unique letter."²³ Given Michaels' contention that 1:1–2 functions "to identify the recipients of the letter as God's chosen people living as strangers in the diaspora and to lay a theological basis for their identity,"²⁴ one would expect his support of the diaspora metaphor in 1 Peter, with the prescript bringing this out as part of the "identity of the recipients" and the "theological basis" for the letter. As William G. Doty has observed, "description of the addressees extends to mention of their special status as recipients of the gospel, as holy ones/saints, or as church groups in a particular region."²⁵ In 1 Peter the addressees are referred to as constituting a "diaspora." This explains the ontological status of the Petrine community.

The prescript rises to a concluding climax in v. 2 with the dual presentation of grace and peace. Hillyer recognizes the Jewish connotations with this dual greeting in early Christian letters:

The form of greeting, *grace and peace* (*charis kai eirēnē*), is frequent in NT letters. It is often said that it brings together for the first time the usual Greek greeting *grace* (*charis*) and the Hebrew greeting *peace* (*šālôm*)—even if the two terms are not mentioned in what we might regard as "chronological" order. But the likelihood is that the phrase *grace and peace* echoes early Christian worship and derives from the daily Jewish liturgy in the temple, with its priestly blessing of Numbers 6:25–26, "The Lord . . . be *gracious* to you; . . . and give you *peace*."²⁶

Although Hillyer's reiteration of the liturgical compositional theory is highly questionable, he is correct in recognizing the Jewish element in this passage.²⁷ The fact that the section concludes with a possible allusion to the Hebrew Bible (Num 6:25–26)²⁸ is significant but should not be overemphasized.²⁹ According to Fitzmyer, Aramaic letters followed either a "peace" greeting formula or the more personal "well wish" greeting formula.³⁰ The "grace and peace" formula can be found throughout early Christian letters, most notably the Pauline collection. As L. G. Champion articulated, the "grace and peace" formula found in the Pauline letters

²³ J. R. Michaels, review of T. W. Martin, *Metaphor and Composition in 1 Peter*, *JBL* 112 (1993) 359.

²⁴ Michaels, *1 Peter* 13.

²⁵ W. G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973) 29.

²⁶ Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter* 27.

²⁷ Doty (*Letters* 29) also recognizes that in the Pauline letters there is a mixture of Greek and Jewish influence, such as in this "grace and peace" formulaic expression.

²⁸ Due to the reference to "peace . . . in abundance," the allusion to peace may also be derived from Dan 4:1; 6:25 LXX. Hillyer notes that the ordering of "grace and peace" can also be found in 2 Macc 1:1–2 (*1 and 2 Peter* 30).

²⁹ P. H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 50, correctly cautions definitively correlating the Jewish/Greek source for this formulaic expression.

³⁰ Fitzmyer, "Notes" 214–215.

more likely relates to early Christian worship language.³¹ The worship context, which is adapted for the epistolary medium of communication, is broader than the Pauline mission and therefore reflects early Christian circles in a very broad and general sense.³² Consequently a direct or conscious reliance on the Hebrew Bible in v. 2 may not be the case.

It is significant, however, that this formula is used at all. According to Hillyer, it defines “in a nutshell the extent of the mighty benefits of Christ’s saving acts.”³³ These benefits are relational in essence, grace being the basis for the believer’s relationship with God and peace being “the soul’s inward rich enjoyment of that divine bounty.”³⁴ Thus the prescript ends with a Jewish/Christian formula that typified the positive aspect of their diaspora condition—that is, their allegiance to God.

The conclusion of the prescript of 1 Peter and the beginning of the blessing section are nicely balanced. By concluding with a high note of the positive reception of God’s grace and peace, the author shifts to a section of praise. This transition from the focus on the community to the focus on God is accomplished with the opening “Blessed be” in v. 3. The correlation between the community’s reception of grace and peace and the praise to God is clearly established with the reference to “new birth” and “a living hope,” both of which relate back to the grace and peace of v. 2. As Hillyer observes, “the experiences of *new birth* and of a *living hope* are beyond human procurement. They are God’s gracious gift and are bestowed solely on account of *his great mercy*.”³⁵ It is because this new birth/living hope condition is only derived from God’s grace that God is worthy of the praise given in the blessing section. From the consolatory concern of the author for the community, the transition into the blessing section from the prescript section continues and heightens the positive aspects of the community situation. The author correlates the community’s well-being with their relational standing with God.³⁶

³¹ L. G. Champion, *Benedictions and Doxologies in the Epistles of Paul* (Oxford: Kemp Hall, 1934) 29: “It is often held that this sentence arose through a combination of the Jewish greeting εἰρήνη ὑμῖν, with the greeting χαίρειν customary in Greek letters, which by the Christians was changed to χάρις. But the facts given above lend weight to the suggestion of E. Lohmeyer that the whole phrase was first formulated in the Christian worship and then taken over by Paul into his letters.”

³² Ibid. 31–32.

³³ Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter* 27.

³⁴ Ibid. J. N. D. Kelly, *Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (HNTC; New York: Harper, 1969) 45, understands “peace” in v. 2 as Jewish in connotation. Kelly argues that “the OT ‘peace’ (Heb. *shālôm*) was much richer in content than its Greek (*eirēnē*) or Latin (*pax*) equivalents, including all blessings, material and spiritual, bestowed on many by God, more particularly in the eschatology of the prophets. . . . The salvation which He will bring about in the Messianic age . . . is the objective condition of being right with God, with all the blessedness which flows from that.”

³⁵ Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter* 31.

³⁶ J. H. L. Dijkman, *The Socio-Religious Condition of the Recipients of 1 Peter: An Attempt to Solve the Problems of Date, Authorship and Addressees of the Letter* (dissertation; Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand, 1984) 39, indicates that the hope of the blessing is not only interested in the present dilemma faced by the Petrine community but is also eschatological in orientation. This Dijkman understands as the Petrine presentation of the *parousia* “as the fulfilment of the Old Testament hope.”

Contrary to Hillyer's position, Michaels contends that the terms *charis* and *eirēnē* do not designate any significance in anticipating any themes within 1 Peter, due to merely being part of a normal early Christian letter (e.g. Pauline epistles; Revelation; 2 Peter; 2 John; 1 Clement; and with "mercy" replacing "grace" in Jude; Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians*; and *Martrydom of Polycarp*.)³⁷ Michaels' contention, although valid, must be scrutinized according to the literary context within which the formula is utilized. Did the author of 1 Peter merely follow early Christian convention, or did he use a typical formula for a specific rhetorical reason? Only the contextual usage of the formula can determine the correct answer to this question.

The end of the prescript does indeed indicate a significant break in the text. The usage of the early Christian formula *charis hymin kai eirēnē* (v. 2b) typically functioned to conclude the prescript section of an early Christian letter. In 1 Peter, as William L. Schutter has correctly observed,³⁸ this formula in 1:2b is paralleled in 5:14 where a "peace" wish is passed along to the recipients to conclude the letter. Schutter's recognition of an inclusion here in 1 Peter, however, does not rely so much on the closing "grace and peace" formula in 1:2 but, rather, is designated in 1:1/5:13 with *eklektōis/syneklektē*. There are also four compositional devices that establish this inclusion: (1) "It is subtly reinforced by the designation of the recipients in the opening as *parepidēmois diasporas* and of the sending community in the closing as resident *en Babylōni*"; (2) the foreshadowing of "ideas predominant within the letter," such as "alien status (1.17, 2.11), election (2.4ff.), foreknowledge (1.4f., 12, 20), God as Father (1.3, 17), holiness (1.15f., 2.5ff., 3.5), obedience (1.14, 22), and the blood of Jesus (1.19)"; (3) in the closing, "the retrospective motivation-for-writing formula itself that summarizes the letter's contents"; and (4) also in the closing, "the benediction that echoes the key-word, 'peace,' which is first sounded in the opening salutation."³⁹

Thus the peace formula is only one contributing factor for the compositional inclusion of the whole letter, which is primarily structured according to the diaspora concept. Significant, though, is the fact that the fourth compositional device is at the transition point from the prescript to the blessing section.

What is significant in regard to the transitional motion from v. 2 to v. 3 is the fact that there is a definite break in the text. *Eulogētos ho Theos kai Patēr tou Kyriou hēmōn Iēsou Christou* (v. 3a) is followed by a series of relative clauses running to the end of v. 5. Consequently v. 3a sets the stage for the blessing section. This is a typical technique used in 1 Peter—that is, the author states at the outset of a section or subsection the primary theme or thrust of the section and then develops an exposition on his opening statement.

³⁷ See Michaels, *1 Peter* 13.

³⁸ W. L. Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition in 1 Peter* (WUNT; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989) 28.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 28 n. 41.

An interesting shift occurs from a focus on the recipients (prescript) to a focus on the divine realm (blessing). The opening of the blessing section is typical of the opening of early Christian prayers.⁴⁰ One such example is from the fifth or sixth century:

O God almighty, holy, true, benevolent, Creator, Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, reveal to me thy truth, whether it is thy will that I go to Chiot. Shall I find thee aiding me and gracious? So be it. Amen.⁴¹

The word order of both 1 Peter and Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 925 places the subject (*ho Theos*) near the opening of the section. In P. Oxy. 925 the subject takes the vocative case in function, while the nominative is found in 1 Peter. This difference can be discerned as a difference in genre, P. Oxy. 925 being a prayer rather than a parenetic letter (in this particular passage, 1 Pet 1:3–5 is best seen as a “call to worship”).⁴² The subject in both cases is God. There is a sense of exclamation and praise in the opening clause of both texts. Doty indicates that “Hellenistic letters often have thanksgiving sections which state that the writer ‘gives thanks to the gods’ or that the writer ‘makes continual mention of you before the gods,’ followed by the reasons that the gods are being thanked—usually because the gods have saved the writer or the addressee from some calamity.”⁴³ The functional purpose of the blessing section in 1 Peter can be understood along the lines of this thanksgiving motif, though packaged as blessing rather than thanksgiving in form. The purpose of 1 Pet 1:3 is to shift the focus from the grace given, the soteriological act, to the source of that grace: God as the rescuer of the Petrine community.⁴⁴ In P. Oxy. 925

⁴⁰ E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 121–122, notes that “the blessing of God was a characteristic feature of Jewish prayer, and became focused in the *Shemoneh ‘Esreh* or Eighteen Benedictions, which were recited thrice daily in the Synagogue.” Kelly (*Commentary* 47) also understands “Blessed be” in reference to Jewish prayers but adapted by early Christians Christologically (thus the “of our Lord Jesus Christ” addition).

⁴¹ P. Oxy. 925, *Select Papyri* (LCL 1.440–441).

⁴² The Petrine blessing section is an important expansion on the typical prayer formula in ancient letters that followed the health wish. Normally, as in the papyri letters studied by J. White, *The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter: A Study in the Letter-Body in the Non-Literary Papyri and in Paul the Apostle* (SBLDS 2; Missoula: University of Montana, 1972), the prayer formula constituted the closing element in the salutation. In 1 Peter (as in many early Christian letters) the prayer formula has been expanded into its own independent section. W. H. Bennett, *The General Epistles: James, Peter, John, and Jude* (Edinburgh: T. C. and E. C. Jack, 1901) 188, believes that this opening formula emerged from early Christian worship.

⁴³ Doty, *Letters* 31.

⁴⁴ Despite White’s observations on the Pauline adaptations to the thanksgiving section of ancient letters, 1 Peter does indeed follow the basic concepts of the Hellenistic thanksgiving statement. White states that the Pauline occasion for the thanksgiving is no longer the salvation from the gods from a calamity but rather the congregation’s faithfulness to God. In 1 Peter, however, the blessing functions to draw the readers’ attention to the soteriological and eschatological act of grace that God has supplied. Cf. J. White, “The Structural Analysis of Philemon: A Point of Departure in the Formal Analysis of the Pauline Letter” (paper for the SBL Seminar on the Form and Function of the Pauline Letters, 1971), cited in Doty, *Letters* 23.

this emphatic praise is accomplished by the string of titles following the subject proper. These titles stand in apposition to the vocative, thereby modifying *Theos* with titles of glory.⁴⁵

The presence of *eulogētos* in 1 Pet 1:3 adds an equivalent praiseful emphasis for the Petrine blessing section. The further qualification in v. 3, *Patēr tou Kyriou hēmōn Iēsou Christou*, is a titular formula that is not uncommon in early Christian literature.⁴⁶ Here this genitive qualification adds further emphasis of greatness to God. Similarly P. Oxy. 925 also contains a variant of this titular formula (adding *sōtēros hēmōn*, “our savior,” to the formula). Consequently the opening of the blessing section is similar to the opening of this early Christian prayer.⁴⁷ Both emphatically emphasize the significance of God, and each subsequently draws the recipients’ attention to God.⁴⁸ Bo Reicke has correctly indicated the rhetorical function of this opening at v. 3, stating that the author’s “objective is to help the hearers to recognize the infinite value of the gift they have received: the gospel and their faith.”⁴⁹ Thus a clear shift can be discerned in 1 Peter, from a focus on the grace bestowed on the community to a focus on the source of that grace. Goppelt has similarly observed this same function of the blessing’s opening:

The expressions of thankfulness and entreaty that normally follow the address and greeting in ancient letters are formulated here as praise to God, as *eulogia*. The eulogy is an OT and Jewish form of prayer. 1 Peter appropriates this precedent by way of Christian tradition.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ See H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1956) §1287.

⁴⁶ See Champion, *Benedictions* 30.

⁴⁷ To postulate that the Petrine blessing section is liturgical in form would be an incorrect correlation between 1 Peter and P. Oxy. 925. First Peter may indeed utilize hymnic and liturgical material to formulate the blessing, but this cannot be established beyond mere conjecture and speculative historical reconstructions of early Christian worship (contra M.-E. Boismard, *Quatre hymnes baptismale dans la première Epître de Pierre* [LD 30; Paris: Cerf, 1961] 15–56, who attempts to reconstruct an early Christian hymn behind 1 Pet 1:3–5, primarily through a comparative analysis between the Petrine passage and Titus 3, Rom 8:14–25 and Gal 3:23; he gives a reconstruction of the Petrine “hymne baptismale” on p. 26). Furthermore there needs to be a clear sensitivity to the epistolary nature and function of the components in 1 Peter, such as the blessing section. This present comparison between 1 Peter and P. Oxy. 925 is not meant to propose either a liturgical *Sitz* for 1 Peter or to suggest any literary connection between the two texts. Rather, P. Oxy. 925 does highlight the “prayerful” nature of the Petrine blessing. I. H. Marshall, *1 Peter* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991) 35, recognizes that “Peter starts with an expression of praise that is exactly the same as the wording used in 2 Corinthians 1:3 and Ephesians 1:3. This shows that this form of words had become traditional in the church, probably widely used in prayer and praise in the church meetings.” For the Petrine author, such traditions seem to be drawn upon in formulating the call to worship used to open the blessing section. Selwyn (*First Epistle* 122) recognizes the Jewish influence on 1 Peter when he states that “the blessing in 1 Pet. i. 3ff. is not a hymn but a Christian *Shema*.”

⁴⁸ Despite his conjectural attempt to reconstruct a baptismal hymn behind this passage, Boismard (*Quatre 26–27*) is correct in stating: “Dès les premiers mots, cette hymne baptismale plonge le chrétien dans le grand courant d’action de grâces que le peuple d’Israël ne cessait de faire monter vers Dieu pour le remercier des bienfaits reçus de lui” (italics mine).

⁴⁹ B. Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude* (AB 37; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964) 79.

⁵⁰ Goppelt, *1 Peter* 78.

The use of *eulogētos* in this emphatic sense further signifies the sharp compositional break between the prescript and the blessing section.

This paper was prepared in order to ascertain the compositional function of the prescript of 1 Peter. Beginning with the basic elements of an ancient letter, it was observed that the letter starts with the conventional opening of early Christian letters. The expansions in the prescript's salutation indicate the ontological self-perception of the recipients. They are understood as the (Christian) diaspora awaiting the gathering of the saints at the *eschaton*. This diaspora understanding set the stage for the compositional structure and agenda of the entire letter. I then analyzed the transitional movement from the prescript's formulaic conclusion (1:2b) into the opening of the blessing section (1:3a). A sharp and clear shift occurs in this transition. The formula serves as more than a conventional compositional marker, for it sets the stage for the call to worship that opens (and dominates) the blessing. By studying the Petrine prescript, this paper has been able to ascertain the compositional function of the letter's opening section. In effect, the prescript functions as a rhetorical device to set forth the basis for the rest of the letter.⁵¹ Indeed, this section is hardly a static part of 1 Peter. The Petrine prescript is an integral part of the letter as a whole, for it is the programmatic introduction⁵² to the entirety of 1 Peter.⁵³

⁵¹ For a discussion of rhetorical criticism and 1 Peter see my *Compositional Transitions* (forthcoming). The most recent attempt at a rhetorical reading of this letter is L. Thurén, *Argument and Theology in 1 Peter: The Origins of Christian Paraenesis* (JSNTSup 114; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995); see also *The Rhetorical Strategy of 1 Peter: With Special Regard to Ambiguous Expressions* (Åbo: Akademis, 1990); cf. J. W. Thompson, "The Rhetoric of 1 Peter," *ResQ* 36 (1994) 237–250.

⁵² Contra F. W. Beare, "The Teaching of First Peter," *ATR* 27 (1945) 284–296; *The First Epistle of Peter* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), who understood 1 Peter as a baptismal discourse with the opening and closing sections of the text being additions to the discourse to offer it an epistolary appearance. Beare identified the opening and closing of 1 Peter thematically emphasizing a "raging" and "acute" persecution, whereas the discourse proper does not have an acute persecution theme. Therefore he did not see the prescript as an integral part of the document. The present study, however, has shown that this position is inaccurate and that the prescript does indeed play a significant role in understanding 1 Peter and the Petrine author's rhetorical strategy.

⁵³ I wish to express my appreciation for the helpful comments made by Larry Murphy and Troy Martin during the preparation of this paper.