

THE PILLAR NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

*General Editor*

D. A. Carson



*The Letter*  
*to the*  
HEBREWS

PETER T. O'BRIEN

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*For Peter and Christine*



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## *Editor's Preface*

Commentaries have specific aims, and this series is no exception. Designed for serious pastors and teachers of the Bible, the Pillar commentaries seek above all to make clear the text of Scripture as we have it. The scholars writing these volumes interact with the most important informed contemporary debate, but avoid getting mired in undue technical detail. Their ideal is a blend of rigorous exegesis and exposition, with an eye alert both to biblical theology and the contemporary relevance of the Bible, without confusing the commentary and the sermon.

The rationale for this approach is that the vision of “objective scholarship” (a vain chimera) may actually be profane. God stands over against us; we do not stand in judgment of him. When God speaks to us through his Word, those who profess to know him must respond in an appropriate way, and that is certainly different from a stance in which the scholar projects an image of autonomous distance. Yet this is no surreptitious appeal for uncontrolled subjectivity. The writers of this series aim for an even-handed openness to the text that is the best kind of “objectivity” of all.

If the text is God’s Word, it is appropriate that we respond with reverence, a certain fear, a holy joy, a questing obedience. These values should be reflected in the way Christians write. With these values in place, the Pillar commentaries will be warmly welcomed not only by pastors, teachers, and students, but by general readers as well.

\* \* \*

With his many years of service as scholar, missionary, and long-time lecturer at Moore Theological College, Peter O’Brien has earned a reputation that is well-nigh unique. It is the combination of virtues that is compelling: great care in handling the Scriptures, fairness in dealing with the views of others, a characteristic understatement combined with a passion for the centrality of the gospel, and, uniting all the rest, a gentleness of spirit that

has captured the minds and hearts of colleagues, friends, and several decades of students. In the cutthroat world of scholarship it is difficult to find someone who will say a bad word about Peter O'Brien.

Among commentary readers Dr. O'Brien is doubtless best known for his commentaries on Paul's prison epistles, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. The volume on Ephesians, of course, is published in the Pillar series, and it has become one of the "standard" works on that letter, not least for those preparing to teach and preach the text. Here Dr. O'Brien branches outside the Pauline corpus. The most recent six years of his life have been devoted to Hebrews, a book not always easy to understand but demonstrably important for Christians who want to know how first-century believers read the old covenant Scriptures. Such inquiry is the first step in building up a profoundly biblical theology, a profoundly canonical theology. It would be difficult to find a more helpful guide than Dr. O'Brien, or a guide better endowed with his combination of competence and genial wisdom. It is a pleasure to commend this work by a dear friend.

D. A. CARSON

## *Author's Preface*

My first serious encounter with the Letter to the Hebrews occurred in a missionary context some years ago when I was invited to teach this 'word of exhortation' to a senior class of theological students. It proved to be a rewarding experience — even a spiritual milestone — though I suspect that my teaching in that cross-cultural context left much to be desired. Not long afterwards, I found myself in the classroom of Professor F. F. Bruce at the University of Manchester, where he lectured on Hebrews, having written his New International Commentary on the letter some years earlier.

This amazing 'word of exhortation' in the New Testament, which has come down to us as a letter from the beginning, has fascinated, challenged, probed, and encouraged me since those early classes. It was a delight, therefore, to be asked to prepare the Pillar New Testament Commentary on it, and thus to study this portion of God's word in a fresh way. I am grateful to Don Carson for his invitation, his continued friendship and encouragement, as well as his perceptive suggestions as the editor of this series.

I am aware of my great debt to those who have gone before me in the task of seeking to expound this magnificent New Testament document. As I wrestled with it I felt like a small child standing on the shoulders of giants. The commentaries of John Calvin, F. F. Bruce, H. W. Attridge, W. L. Lane, P. Ellingworth, C. R. Koester, and L. T. Johnson, to name just a few, have been my constant companions, while many others have been within easy reach on the shelves of my study. Special mention should be made of George H. Guthrie, whose range of insightful writings on Hebrews has been of considerable influence on my thinking. If it is true to say that, throughout periods of Christian history, the Letter to the Hebrews has been neglected, then in the last few years there has been an amazing output of literature on this important New Testament document. One might almost say that 'a cottage industry' has sprung up, in which monographs, articles, and commentaries at different levels have been produced. I have learned much from them, and while my primary task has been to explain, as best I

can, the meaning of God's word, the creative and insightful results that have been harvested from this recent research have profoundly assisted me in this joyful endeavour.

It has not been possible to take into account significant material on Hebrews that has appeared after the submission of this work for publication. Also, for reasons of space I have not included in the Introduction any treatment of the letter's major theological themes. I hope to address these issues in a forthcoming volume on the theology of Hebrews.

My thanks are due also to successive classes of Moore College students who have interacted, questioned, and challenged me in the classroom as we have studied the Greek text of Hebrews together. The commentary is better as a result of this bracing fellowship, though the blemishes that remain are entirely my responsibility.

Without the generous provisions of study leave that Moore College arranges for its faculty members, it would not have been possible to complete this commentary. The Principal, John Woodhouse, and the College Board have been a constant support during the past six years, while my faculty colleagues have often taken on responsibilities in order to lighten my tasks.

Mary, my wife of forty-six years, has continued to be a wonderful encouragement. Her confident intercessions before the throne of grace have indeed led to divine mercy and grace helping us in our times of need.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*

PETER T. O'BRIEN

## Abbreviations

ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
ASV	American Standard Version
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
AV	Authorized Version (= KJV)
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i> (2nd ed.)
BDF	F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
DLNTD	R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids (eds.), <i>Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments</i>
EDNT	H. Balz and G. Schneider (eds.), <i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
EVV	English versions
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
GNB	Good News Bible (= Today's English Version)
GTJ	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>

JB	Jerusalem Bible
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
KJV	King James Version (= AV)
Louw and Nida	J. P. Louw and E. Nida, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains</i>
LSJ	Liddell-Scott-Jones, <i>Greek English Lexicon</i>
<i>LuthW</i>	J. Pelikan and H. Lehman (eds.), <i>Luther's Works</i> , 55 vols.
LXX	Septuagint
MHT	J. H. Moulton, W. F. Howard, and N. Turner, <i>Grammar of New Testament Greek</i> , vols. 1-4
MM	J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, <i>The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament</i>
MT	Masoretic Text
NA	E. Nestle and K. Aland (eds.), <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> (27th ed.)
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible (rev. ed.)
NDBT	T. D. Alexander, B. S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and G. Goldsworthy (eds.), <i>New Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i>
NEB	New English Bible
<i>NewDocs</i>	<i>New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity</i>
<i>NIDNTT</i>	C. Brown (ed.), <i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NPNF</i>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>PTR</i>	<i>Princeton Theological Review</i>
<i>RBL</i>	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
REB	Revised English Bible
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
RV	Revised Version
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia theologica</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TEV	Today's English Version

*Abbreviations*

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<i>TLNT</i>	<i>C. Spicq, Theological Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
<i>TNIV</i>	<i>Today's New International Version</i>
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

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## *Introduction*

Hebrews is a magnificent New Testament document. It is carefully constructed and beautifully written, theologically profound and powerfully argued. It challenges our understanding of reality and makes us ‘ponder a world in which the unseen is more real, more powerful, and more attractive than that which can be seen and touched and counted’.<sup>1</sup> The letter that wonderfully portrays Jesus as Son of God and great high priest, who is both human and divine, the crucified and exalted one, also makes stringent demands on its readers in relation to Christian discipleship. It summons believers, just as it did the first listeners, to ‘unqualified commitment, unflagging perseverance and a willingness to suffer’ for one’s faith.<sup>2</sup>

For contemporary readers, however, Hebrews is one of the most difficult New Testament books to understand,<sup>3</sup> and as a result it has often been neglected. Old Testament quotations and allusions abound while details about Israel’s priesthood and sacrificial system dominate much of the book. Many of the author’s arguments employ typological similarities that are difficult to grasp — for example, between old and new, temporal and eternal, or earthly and heavenly (note the comparison between Christ and Melchizedek in Heb. 7). Further, although the arguments seem to be based on careful reasoning, they are often detailed and extensive, so that it is difficult to see how the author moves from one argument or stage to the next. The insertion of repeated exhortations seems, initially at least, to interrupt

1. So Johnson, 1. According to Raymond Brown, Hebrews is one of ‘the most impressive works’ in the New Testament. ‘Consciously rhetorical, carefully constructed, ably written in quality Greek, and passionately appreciative of Christ, Heb[rews] offers an exceptional number of unforgettable insights that have shaped subsequent Christianity’ (*An Introduction to the New Testament* [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 683).

2. Johnson, 2.

3. Attridge, 1, thinks that although Hebrews is ‘the most elegant and sophisticated’, it is ‘perhaps the most enigmatic, text of first-century Christianity’.

the overall flow of the discourse.<sup>4</sup> At a personal level, Christians throughout history have been unsettled by the warning passages of the book (2:1-4; 3:7-4:11; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:25-29) since they seem to contradict assurances and promises elsewhere, and suggest that believers can 'fall away' from Christ.

Other features make Hebrews a difficult and challenging document. It is grouped among the letters of the New Testament, but its form initially suggests that it is not a letter. It begins without an opening prayer for grace or peace, and there is no introductory thanksgiving or blessing. Unlike other letters in the New Testament (except 1 John) and many epistles of the Graeco-Roman period, its author does not identify himself or the people addressed. Instead, Hebrews opens with a majestic sentence celebrating the dignity of the Son of God, through whom God has spoken his final word in these last days (1:1-2). On the other hand, the document ends like a letter, with its benediction, personal remarks, and final farewell (Heb. 13:20-25). The author speaks of his discourse as 'a word of exhortation' (13:22). But what is meant by this? Is it a homily or a series of homilies that has been written as a rather anomalous letter?

Further, Hebrews remains elusive because its setting in life is uncertain. We do not know who wrote the book, the location and date of its composition, or the situation of those addressed. Although there has been an amazing increase in knowledge about the Graeco-Roman and Jewish cultures in recent decades, so that we are better placed than previous generations, many of these questions cannot be answered with certainty.

## I. AUTHORSHIP AND CANONICITY<sup>5</sup>

Hebrews is an anonymous document although it was first received and read as a letter of the apostle Paul. It has come down to us under the title 'To [the] Hebrews' (*pros Hebraious*), and was included among Paul's letters, appearing after Romans in the earliest extant text of Paul (P<sup>46</sup>), about A.D. 200. This clearly reflects the conviction of the Eastern church, especially because of the assessment of several notable Alexandrian scholars, Clement (c. A.D. 150-215) and Origen (185-253), who nevertheless recognized the difficulties associated with this view. Origen found the ideas but not the language Pauline; after acknowledging either Clement or Luke as possible authors, he confessed: 'But who wrote the epistle, in truth God knows'.<sup>6</sup>

4. See D. A. Hagner, *Encountering the Book of Hebrews: An Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 20.

5. On the history of interpretation and influence of Hebrews, see Koester, 19-63. Note also F. F. Bruce, "'To the Hebrews': A Document of Roman Christianity?" in *ANRW*, ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase, Vol. II.25.4 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), 3496-3521, esp. 3496-3499.

6. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.14.

In the Western church, Pauline authorship was resisted until the latter half of the fourth century, even though the earliest attested use of Hebrews suggests a Pauline connection. *1 Clement*, which was sent from Rome to Corinth in the late first or early second century, makes use of the ideas and distinctive language of Hebrews; it weaves material from Hebrews into a plea for discipline within the Corinthian church.<sup>7</sup> But the Muratorian Canon, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus of Rome all agree that Paul was not the author. Tertullian insisted that Hebrews had more authority than the *Shepherd of Hermas* because of the eminence of its author, whom he identifies as Barnabas. When Eusebius wrote (c. 325), many in Rome still did not consider Hebrews to be Pauline.

The Trinitarian controversies in the fourth and fifth centuries led to positions that shaped the reading of Hebrews for later interpretation. In the West, writers who used Hebrews to combat Arianism helped popularise the notion that it was a letter of Paul. But Jerome and Augustine shifted opinion somewhat in the West. The former recognized the important view of the Eastern churches but acknowledged that many in the West still had doubts about the Pauline authorship of Hebrews. He concluded, however, that it does not matter who the author really was, since the work is 'honored daily by being read in the churches'.<sup>8</sup> In his early writings Augustine identified Paul as the author, and used Hebrews to demonstrate his understanding of human sin in disputes with the Pelagians.<sup>9</sup> Later, perhaps due to the influence of Jerome, Augustine refrained from identifying Paul as the author, but he included Hebrews among the church's authoritative Scriptures, and this view was followed by others. Western synods preserved some distinction between Hebrews and the generally recognized Pauline letters. The Synod of Hippo (A.D. 393) and the Third Synod of Carthage (397) wrote, 'Of Paul the apostle, thirteen epistles; of the same to the Hebrews, one'. The Sixth Synod of Carthage (419) ascribed fourteen letters to Paul. On the whole, the Pauline authorship of Hebrews was affirmed in the West, although many learned commentators raised doubts about this.<sup>10</sup>

Hebrews' canonical status was not challenged during the Middle Ages, despite continuing doubt regarding its authorship.<sup>11</sup> At the Reformation questions concerning the authorship and authority of Hebrews were

7. Note the striking similarities between Heb. 1:1-14; 2:17-18; 4:14-16 and *1 Clement* 36:1-5.

8. Jerome, *Epistle* 129.3; note D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 601.

9. Augustine, *NPNF*<sup>1</sup>, 5.34; cited by Koester, 27 n. 29 (note his discussion and further references).

10. D. A. Hagner, *Encountering the Book of Hebrews*, 191-195, esp. 195, suggests that 'the direct apostolic authorship, in this case by Paul, was not an absolute requirement for the acceptance of Hebrews as authoritative and canonical. What seems to have been required as a minimum was apostolic association — that is, that the author had been a member of the larger apostolic circle'.

11. See Hugo of St. Victor, *Didascalicon* 4.2-6.

reopened, particularly by humanist scholars.<sup>12</sup> The textual basis for the many debates shifted from the Latin Vulgate to the Greek text, and as scholars explored the meaning of Greek terms they began to ask questions about the relationship of Hebrews to the wider cultural and religious environment of the ancient world, questions that would be important for historical-critical study of Hebrews in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. On the authorship question, Luther said in his preface that Hebrews was 'the work of an able and learned man, a disciple of the apostles'. Later he suggested Apollos. Although he called Hebrews 'a marvellously fine epistle', he insisted that 'we cannot put it on the same level with the apostolic epistles'.<sup>13</sup> Reformed scholars accepted the canonical status of Hebrews, but their views on authorship varied. Calvin recognized the common objections to Pauline authorship and (on Heb. 13:23) argued for Clement of Rome or Luke. However, he said, 'I class it without hesitation among the apostolical writings'.<sup>14</sup> Zwingli simply affirmed the traditional view of Pauline authorship, while Bullinger repeated traditional arguments for this position. The Council of Trent insisted that there were fourteen Pauline letters, including Hebrews, but few Catholic scholars would advocate this today. So, although the issue of the Pauline authorship of Hebrews was reopened in the sixteenth century, the traditional view remained common until intensive historical investigation overturned it in the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

The number of suggestions as to who was the author of Hebrews is considerable, but we limit our discussion to the following:

## A. Paul

In support of the view that Paul is the author of Hebrews, it is claimed that the personal greetings and exhortations in Hebrews 13:16-25 are similar to those found at the end of his letters. There are some similarities in vocabulary, style, and imagery,<sup>16</sup> while theologically Paul and Hebrews speak of Christ as the one through whom all things were made (Heb. 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 8:6; 2 Cor. 4:4), who suffered an ignominious death but was exalted to God's right hand (Heb. 2:9; Rom. 8:3, 34; Phil. 2:5-11), and who now inter-

12. See Koester, 33-40.

13. *LuthW* 35:395; cited by Koester, 35.

14. Calvin, 1.

15. Note the discussion of Koester, 41-46.

16. Spicq, 1:155-160, esp. 159, listed sixty-five words that are found only in Hebrews and the Pauline corpus, while he noted a number of expressions common to both: e.g., 'the God of peace' (Heb. 13:20; Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23), Christians are made a spectacle (Heb. 10:33; 1 Cor. 4:9), and they compete in a spiritual contest (Heb. 12:1; Phil. 1:20; 1 Thess. 2:2; note also Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:1; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). See also Koester, 42 n. 83.

cedes for his people (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34). Through his death and exaltation he has abolished the old Mosaic order and inaugurated a new covenant (Heb. 7:19; 8:6-13; 2 Cor. 3:18). Historically, Paul was a close associate of Timothy (Heb. 13:23), and the suggestion that he wrote Hebrews while in prison in Rome might account for his request for prayer and the claim of a clear conscience (13:18-19), as well as the mention of Timothy's release, the comment that the author was not free to visit his friends, and the greetings from Italy (13:23-24).

But these arguments are insufficient to establish the case for Paul's direct authorship of Hebrews. By contrast, the distinctive features show clearly that the apostle to the Gentiles was not the author.

(1) Unlike all the undisputed Pauline letters, Hebrews is anonymous. It is hard to believe that Paul wrote Hebrews given the absence of his normal self-identifying salutation. Further, there are no personal allusions in Hebrews that would enable us to identify him. Nowhere does the personal experience of the author intrude into Hebrews, but this was often Paul's practice.

(2) It is difficult to believe that Paul would identify himself as one of those who heard the gospel, not from the Lord but from 'those who heard him' (Heb. 2:3; see Gal. 1:11-12). This is precisely the charge that was levelled against him and which he rejected.

(3) The vocabulary that Hebrews shares with Paul it shares also within a broader Christian tradition. Further, extensive studies of style and vocabulary demonstrate significant differences between the Greek used in Hebrews and that by Paul.<sup>17</sup> Hebrews weaves exposition and exhortation together throughout the discourse instead of placing the hortatory material at the end, as is usual in Paul's letters (e.g., Romans and Ephesians). Scripture citations in Hebrews are not introduced in the Pauline manner of 'it is written'<sup>18</sup> or 'the Scripture says'. Instead, they are usually prefaced with the comment that God, his Son, or the Spirit 'says' (see below).

(4) More importantly, there are different theological emphases between Hebrews and the Pauline letters. What Paul and Hebrews have in common are elements that are basic apostolic teaching. On the other hand, the high priesthood of Christ which is of major significance for Hebrews, is absent from Paul's writings.<sup>19</sup> Several emphases common in Paul's letters are absent from Hebrews, for example, union with Christ ('in Christ'), justifi-

17. Hebrews has 154 *hapax legomena* (see Ellingworth, 12-13), and this is higher than for the Pauline epistles. Words in Hebrews that are missing in Paul include 'sanctuary', 'priest', and 'high priest', while Hebrews lacks a number of key Pauline terms, e.g., 'reveal', 'revelation', 'justify', 'gospel', 'reconcile', 'reconciliation', 'kerygma', 'mystery', 'parousia', etc. So Spicq, 1:154-160, who lists several Pauline expressions and rhetorical formulas not found in Hebrews.

18. The expression 'it is written' occurs only *within* the citation from Ps. 40:8 (Heb. 10:7).

19. Although Christ's intercessory activity appears in Rom. 8:34; note Heb. 7:25.

fication by faith, the contrast between grace and works, and the Pauline tension between flesh and spirit. The resurrection of Christ, which is so prominent in Paul, is mentioned only in Hebrews 13:20, perhaps because it has given way to the repeated emphasis on Christ's exaltation to God's right hand. Moreover, in Hebrews the stress on Christ's work is cast in terms of his cleansing, sanctifying, and perfecting his people, which is different, at least terminologically, from Paul. These differences do not suggest that Hebrews contradicts Paul. Rather, they are complementary and point to non-Pauline authorship.<sup>20</sup>

## B. An Associate of Paul

Most of the other names that have been proposed as the author of Hebrews are Paul's companions. This is due in part to a recognition of theological affinities between Hebrews and Paul's letters, and to the mention of Timothy in Hebrews 13:23. If this 'Timothy' was Paul's associate, which is likely (see on 13:23), then the author must have been connected with the Pauline circle. Early Christian missionaries such as Silas (Acts 15:40–18:5; 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:12) and Epaphras (Phlm. 23; Col. 1:7; 4:12) were prominent and close enough to Paul, but the evidence is purely circumstantial and we have nothing written by them with which to compare Hebrews. Luke has been proposed as a candidate, but the points of connection between him and Hebrews are too slight to support a theory that he wrote the latter.<sup>21</sup>

### 1. Barnabas

From early times Barnabas was suggested as the author of Hebrews. Tertullian ascribed the composition to him although he gives no reason for doing so (*On Modesty* 20). Some aspects of Barnabas that are described in the New Testament could support this suggestion. He was a Levite from Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and thus a member of the Hellenist party in the Jerusalem church. He may have shared the antitemple perspectives of Stephen (Acts

20. Calvin's comments are worth citing: 'As to its author, we need not be greatly worried'. Then in relation to Pauline authorship, he states: 'The manner of teaching and style sufficiently show that Paul was not the author, and the writer himself confesses in the second chapter that he was one of the disciples of the apostles, which is totally different from the way in which Paul spoke of himself'. His conclusion is: 'I can adduce no reason to show that Paul was its author' (1).

21. Koester, 43, observes that while Luke's Gospel and Hebrews begin with intricate sentences that refer to the 'many' who had spoken previously (Luke 1:1-4; Heb. 1:1-4), and that Luke was not an eyewitness but received his information from others, as did the author of Hebrews (Luke 1:1-4; Heb. 2:3), there is 'nothing in Hebrews [that] points particularly to Luke', while the similarities in style simply indicate a common Hellenistic environment.

7:48-50). For a time he was a close associate of Paul (Acts 9:27; 11:19-30; 13:1-15:35; see also 1 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 2:13). Because he was called a 'son of encouragement' (*paraklēseōs*, Acts 4:36), he could have written a 'word of encouragement/exhortation' (*paraklēseōs*, Heb. 13:22). But the term 'encouragement' or 'exhortation' is common in the New Testament and cannot be associated simply with one person. Further, the letter to the Hebrews is not so much antitemple as showing the obsolescence of the biblical cultus (which is connected with the tabernacle rather than the temple). Barnabas was a Hellenistic Jew, and this 'makes him at least potentially qualified to write a Christian book so deeply interacting with the LXX but hardly identifies him as the author'.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. *Apollos*

The proposal that Apollos was the author of Hebrews was first made by Martin Luther and had considerable support in the twentieth century. Although we do not have extensive information about him, what we have is suggestive. He was a co-worker of Paul who, according to Acts 18:24-28, was Jewish, Alexandrian, educated, and knowledgeable in the Scriptures. These are all elements which fit the picture of the author of Hebrews that emerges from the text itself. Hebrews shows extensive knowledge of Judaism. Apollos was from Alexandria, also the home of Philo and a centre for Platonic thought with which Hebrews has been frequently compared. There are numerous connections between the letter to the Hebrews and the writings of Philo of Alexandria.<sup>23</sup> Apollos learned the Christian message from others (v. 25), and Hebrews speaks of the message having been received from others (Heb. 2:2-3). Apollos was learned in the Scriptures (Acts 18:24) and proved from them that Jesus is the Messiah (v. 28); Hebrews is filled with many scriptural citations and allusions, and establishes clearly that Jesus, the Son of God and high priest, is the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises. The reference to 'those from Italy' (Heb. 13:24) would fit with the names of Priscilla and Aquila with whom Apollos was closely associated (Acts 18:26). A significant drawback to this suggestion of Apollos as the author is the lack of any ancient testimony supporting it.<sup>24</sup>

22. D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 603; note the details in Spicq, 1:199-200; Westcott, lxx-lxxiv.

23. Hebrews shares some important vocabulary with Philo (e.g., the idea that earthly things are shadows for eternal heavenly realities), although its thought is different from the Neoplatonism and Stoicism that undergirds much of Philo. The author is acquainted with interpretive methods used on the LXX of the Old Testament in educated circles of the ancient world, especially those of Philo. See D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 603, and note the discussions below.

24. Apollos seems to have been a well-known figure, and if he had been the author of Hebrews, it is surprising that it would not have been mentioned elsewhere. So A. H. Trotter, *Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 49. However, given the

### 3. An Unknown Author

Ultimately our inability to resolve the authorship question does not substantially affect our reading of the discourse. As Andrew Trotter has pointed out: 'the church has benefited for almost two thousand years from this magisterial work without knowing with any more certainty than we do today who authored it'.<sup>25</sup>

Although we are not able to identify the author, there are details we can learn about him from the text of Hebrews itself. He was not an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus. Instead, the gospel of salvation was confirmed to him and his listeners by those who had heard the Lord Jesus (Heb. 2:3). In this sense, he was a second-generation Christian (not chronologically but genealogically) who knew his congregation intimately. From the composition of Hebrews it is likely that the author was of Jewish ancestry and well educated. His writing has been regarded by many as the finest in the New Testament, both in its use of grammar and vocabulary and in its style and knowledge of Greek rhetorical conventions.<sup>26</sup> He was probably trained in rhetoric, as his use of alliteration, antithesis, chiasm, and many other stylistic elements attests, and he is familiar with philosophy, both Jewish and Greek. His reasoning powers were exceptional, as illustrated by the majestic opening sentence (Heb. 1:1-4) that sets the program for the entire discourse.

Our author was saturated in the Old Testament Scriptures, as shown by his extensive use throughout the epistle of the Greek Bible (LXX). He knows the content of the Scriptures intimately, and refers to those in the earliest chapters of Genesis through to the later prophetic and poetic writings (e.g., the heroes of faith in Heb. 11). He interprets the Scriptures in a variety of ways, from a typological and salvation-historical perspective to a straight literal application, as he explains the word of God and brings it to bear on the lives of his listeners (see below).<sup>27</sup>

Hebrews was written by a creative theologian who adapted traditional Christian teaching to the urgent issues facing his community.<sup>28</sup> He was an accomplished preacher of the gospel who sent his sermon ('word of exhortation', 13:22) in written form to a congregation whose members he regarded as Christian 'brothers and sisters' (3:1, 12; 10:19; 13:22) and 'dear

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fragmentary nature of our knowledge of the first century, such an omission may not be decisive. Note the careful assessment by Johnson, 42-44, in favour of Apollos as the author of Hebrews, along with the recognition that this hypothesis is speculative, 'with just enough support to make it plausible' (44).

25. A. H. Trotter, *Interpreting*, 41.

26. Lane, 1:xlix; MHT 4:106-113; A. H. Trotter, *Interpreting*, 44.

27. Note esp. G. H. Guthrie, 'Hebrews' Use of the Old Testament: Recent Trends in Research', *CBR* 1 (2003), 271-294; and his recent work, 'Hebrews', in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids/Nottingham: Baker/Apollos, 2007), 919-995.

28. What Lane calls 'a community in crisis' (1:li).

friends' (6:9). His letter shows an intimate knowledge of their needs:<sup>29</sup> it is addressed to the congregation as a whole, but also to 'each one' individually (6:11). As a true pastor, who understands their peril and their fears,<sup>30</sup> he displays a combination of firmness and tenderness. His powerful warnings (some of the strongest in the New Testament) are immediately followed by words of encouragement and promise. Both warnings and promises are the word of God (based particularly on the Old Testament), and the author identifies with his listeners by recognizing that he too needs to be subject to this divine word and to persevere with them in faith to the very end.

Johnson's concluding quotation is appropriate:

The most important thing Hebrews tells us about the author, whoever he was, is that in the first decades of the Christian movement, another remarkable mind and heart besides Paul's was at work in interpreting the significance of the crucified and raised Messiah Jesus for the understanding of Scripture, of the world, and of human existence.<sup>31</sup>

## II. THE SITUATION OF THE RECIPIENTS

Hebrews was written to be read aloud to a specific local congregation. The title 'To the Hebrews' is attached to the document in our earliest manuscripts and was probably an early effort to identify an anonymous text from its themes as one written to Jewish Christians. This traditional view was held until the nineteenth century, when some claimed that the recipients were Gentile Christians, or perhaps a mixed group. All agree that the book was written for Christians, who are urged to maintain their confession (Heb. 3:6, 14; 4:14; 10:23). Their ethnic background, however, is more disputed.<sup>32</sup>

Attempts at reconstructing the situation of the recipients have been made difficult because their identity and that of the author are not presented in Hebrews, and clear indications of their geographical setting and historical circumstances are lacking. As a result, responsible reconstructions of the hearers' situation will in some measure be tentative. But this

29. See the following section, 'The Situation of the Recipients'.

30. He is 'a friend with a pastor's heart. He understands their peril and their fears — and he cares'; W. L. Lane, *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1985), 25.

31. Johnson, 44.

32. D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 609. Those who believe that Hebrews does not give us enough information to determine whether the recipients were of Jewish or Gentile background, or the group was mixed, include P. Ellingworth, P. Eisenbaum, and L. T. Johnson. Johnson, however, recognizes that there is more internal evidence to support the position that they were Jewish rather than Gentile (citing the arguments of B. Lindars and J. Dunnill).

does not mean that we should adopt a stance of total indecision.<sup>33</sup> Care needs to be exercised in mirror readings so that the situation inferred from specific passages does not become a fixed model, and prevent legitimate inferences from being drawn from other material in the document.<sup>34</sup>

Hebrews is steeped in Old Testament quotations and allusions. The whole argument presupposes considerable familiarity with the Levitical ritual and interest in it. But this in itself does not require that either the author or the recipients were Jewish. Many Gentile believers were thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament, and accepted its arguments as sacred and authoritative. Paul makes extensive use of the Old Testament in his letters to Rome, Corinth and Galatia, and this shows that an author could use such arguments when writing to predominantly Gentile congregations.

Accordingly, some interpreters have maintained that Hebrews was addressed to Gentile Christians. Repentance from dead works (6:1) and enlightenment (6:4; 10:32) are thought to refer to conversion from paganism, while warnings about falling away from the living God (3:12) and avoiding strange teachings (13:9) suggest that the listeners were attracted to teachings of Hellenistic syncretism. The exhortation to honour marriage (13:4) might counter the ascetic tendencies of some Hellenistic groups. Those who favour a (predominantly) Gentile audience<sup>35</sup> think that Hebrews was written in the final decades of the first century, at a time when tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians had become a thing of the past. The listeners were not in danger of reverting to Judaism, but of giving way to the fatigue and discouragement that were typical of second-generation Christians.<sup>36</sup> It is also claimed that if Jewish Christians relapsed into Judaism, this would not involve a renunciation of 'the living God'; they would continue to worship the God of Israel. Further, is not a pagan past indicated by the repeated phrase 'dead works', when the listeners are reminded that 'the foundation of dead works', once laid, cannot be laid again, since the death of Christ cleansed our consciences from these works 'to serve the living God' (9:14)?

There are, however, difficulties with these lines of reasoning. The author views deliberate disobedience to the living God as apostasy against him, whether those guilty of it were from a Jewish or a Gentile background. When he warns his listeners against 'turning away from the living God'

33. As S. D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 9, rightly points out against the stances of P. M. Eisenbaum and L. D. Hurst.

34. See S. D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation*, 11.

35. So with variations J. Moffatt, E. Käsemann, G. Vos, and H.-F. Weiss.

36. So Koester, 47, in his survey of scholarly views as to who the addressees were. He concludes that a 'simple distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christians does not help the interpretation of Hebrews'. Instead of seeking to identify their ethnic background, 'we do well to consider the complex way in which they would have related to the dominant Greco-Roman culture, Jewish subculture, and Christian community' (48).

(3:12), he provides as evidence the Israelites in the wilderness under Moses who disobeyed God and failed to enter the promised land (Heb. 3–4). If such language applied to ancient Israelites, could it not also apply to first-century Jews? The call for repentance and cleansing from ‘dead works’ is relevant to Jews and Gentiles alike — not simply the latter, while the ‘elementary teachings’ of Hebrews 6:1 presuppose a background in Judaism. The author’s ongoing insistence that the old covenant has given way to the new makes sense if the readers were trying to live under the old, or if they imagine that, having passed beyond it, they could legitimately go back to it.<sup>37</sup> The epistle does not suggest that the author is confronting a Jewish propaganda, while the failure to mention circumcision makes sense if Hebrews was sent to a Jewish Christian community but would be surprising if the listeners are Gentile believers who were in danger of being seduced by so-called Judaizers.

Hebrews cites the Greek Old Testament, and the author assumes that his readers will recognize its authority. This would be true of Hellenistic Jews who had become Christians. If they rejected or modified elements of their Christian belief and returned to some form of Judaism, their confidence in the Old Testament would not change. On the other hand, pagans who were tempted to return to their paganism would presumably cease to submit to the Scriptures that had led to their becoming Christians. Several of the author’s arguments relating to the superiority of Jesus challenge the assumption that the cultic regulations of Sinai were final (e.g., 7:11). Christians who had been converted from paganism and were in danger of reverting to it would hardly need these kinds of arguments. But those in danger of reverting to Judaism would.<sup>38</sup>

The author has specific knowledge of the congregation’s conversion (2:3-4; 6:4-5; 10:32-34) and similar accurate information about their present circumstances.<sup>39</sup> If his recital of their previous and current experiences was fictitious or simply generic, it is unlikely that the listeners would have received and passed on his ‘word of exhortation’ (13:22). A personal relationship clearly exists between author and recipients: he asks them to pray for him, so that he ‘may be restored’ to them very soon (13:18-19, 22-24). His pastoral care for his listeners is evident throughout the letter, as the close interrelationship between exposition and hortatory material shows (see below). At various points his theology and particularly his Christology are tailored to the listeners’ situation.<sup>40</sup> But sometimes, as any pastor-teacher

37. Bruce, 6; D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 610.

38. Bruce, 6-7; D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 610-611. Those who favour a Jewish Christian audience include F. V. Filson, F. F. Bruce, D. A. Hagner, W. L. Lane, C. P. Anderson, B. Lindars, J. Dunnill, M. E. Isaacs, P. W. L. Walker, N. H. Young, D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, and S. D. Mackie.

39. Heb. 2:14-15; 3:12-13; 6:10-12; 10:25, 29, 35-39; 12:3-4, 7, 14-16; 13:2-19.

40. M. E. Isaacs, *Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 22-23, even suggests that ‘the situation of those addressed and the

knows, themes may be driven as much by an author's vision as by the concerns and preoccupations of the listeners.<sup>41</sup>

According to Paul Ellingworth, the dangers threatening the community are expressed in three ways:<sup>42</sup> (1) *Passive dangers* which denote 'a certain weariness in pursuing the Christian goal, or making progress along the road of Christian discipleship'.<sup>43</sup> The listeners with whom the author often associates himself are urged not to 'drift away' from what they have heard (2:1); not to 'neglect' the message of salvation (2:3); not to 'fall short' of the Christian goal of rest (4:1); not to lose hold of their confession (4:14); not to lose their confidence and boldness (10:19, 23); not to become 'dull of understanding' (5:11) or 'sluggish' (6:12); to develop from spiritual childhood to maturity (5:12-14); not to prove unproductive (6:7-8) but to continue in 'faith and patience' (6:9-12); to 'cast off the weight of sin' (12:1); not to 'grow weary' or 'lose heart' (12:3); to 'strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees, so that what is lame is not dislocated, but rather be healed' (12:12-13); and not 'to be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings' (13:9).

(2) In contrast to these expressions, there are passages that refer to the possibility of *active dangers* that could issue in rebellion against God and his Son. These include the dangers of 'hav[ing] a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God' (3:12); disobedience that follows the example of the wilderness generation (3:7-4:11) which cannot be hidden from God's sight (4:12-13); 'falling away', 'crucifying the Son of God all over again and holding him up to contempt' (6:6); 'neglecting to meet together' (10:25); 'wilfully persisting in sin' (10:26), which amounts to 'trampling the Son of God underfoot' and 'profaning the blood of the covenant' (10:29); and rejecting God who speaks from heaven (12:25). These strong expressions indicate the real possibility of apostasy in the author's mind, even if he does not actually say that they have committed it.<sup>44</sup>

(3) Finally, there are expressions that point to *external and outward pressures* that assault and test them (2:18; 4:16), bringing suffering through persecution (10:32-34; 12:4), torture, and imprisonment (10:33-34; 13:3), along with abuse (13:13).

Much of the exposition of the author of Hebrews is 'characterized by a dialectic of superiority-inferiority with the most esteemed symbols, sys-

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theological exposition of the author' are 'so interrelated, our view of its audience will largely condition our understanding of Hebrews' message' (cited by S. D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation*, 10).

41. Johnson, 34.

42. Ellingworth, 78-79; and S. D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation*, 10-17. B. Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 2, contends that the congregation and its situation are unlike anything else found in the New Testament (note his discussion, 4-15).

43. Ellingworth, 78, 79.

44. Ellingworth, 79; see also S. D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation*, 12.

tems and personages of Judaism'.<sup>45</sup> This suggests that he is addressing a congregation comprising mostly Jewish Christians. They are apparently in danger of returning to a 'reliance on the cultic structures of the old covenant'. This would involve a return to Judaism and an abandoning of the Christian community. To proceed along this path is to fail to understand how these structures pointed to Christ across the years of salvation history. Worse, it is to assign to them 'a redemptive effectiveness that they never possessed and simultaneously to depreciate the exclusive significance of Christ's sacrifice'.<sup>46</sup>

While the dangers threatening the community are expressed along the above-mentioned lines, the reasons for their returning to some form of Judaism<sup>47</sup> are not spelled out by the author. Instead, they are only hinted at. The listeners were tired of bearing the shame of living outside their cultural heritage (13:13). Novel teachings (13:9) that stood over against the gospel (13:7-8) were becoming the focus of their attention, and some members began to withdraw from their meetings for Christian fellowship (10:25).<sup>48</sup> The possible threat of persecution by state authorities might be avoided under the umbrella of Judaism's protected status as a *religio licita* in the Roman Empire. But whatever the precise reasons, it is the outcome of such a turning away that is of great concern to the author. 'Christ, his sacrifice, and his priestly work are so relativised that they are effectively denied, and apostasy is only a whisker away. It is to prevent just such a calamity that the author writes this epistle'.<sup>49</sup>

45. S. D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation*, 13.

46. D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 612.

47. Attempts to be more specific and identify the particular group or subset of Jews have not been successful because of insufficient evidence. For example, it has been inferred from Heb. 5:12 ('though by this time you ought to be teachers') that the listeners were not ordinary Jewish Christians but some of the 'large number of priests [who] became obedient to the faith' (Acts 6:7). So K. B. Bornhäuser, *Empfänger und Verfasser des Briefes und die Hebräer* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1932), and Spicq, 1:226-231; noted by Bruce, 7; D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 611. This view was modified by C. Spicq, 'L'Épître aux Hébreux: Apollon, Jean-Baptiste, les hellénistes, et Qumrân', *Revue de Qumran* 1 (1958-1959), 365-390, esp. 390. He argued that these converted priests were Essene Christians who were former members of the Qumran sect. Variations on this theme have been urged. But, if anything, the Jewish background of the recipients was 'probably not so much in the conservative rabbinic traditions of Palestine as in Hellenistic Judaism', which was influenced by various Jewish sects of which the Essenes were one example (D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 611; following Bruce, 7-8).

48. N. H. Young, "'Bearing His Reproach" (Heb 13:9-14)', *NTS* 48 (2002), 243-261, thinks that Heb. 13:9-14 envisages a situation where Christians of a Jewish background are still defining themselves too much by their Levitical heritage. They are still interacting with the synagogue, including participation in religious meals. The author of Hebrews urges his readers to go outside the camp/gate, to sever their ties with Jerusalem, that is, to make a clean break from Judaism both in understanding and in practice. Such a parting may bring abuse, but this is only to follow the way of Jesus. The problem, then, is not so much an attraction back into Judaism, but a failure to leave it sufficiently in the first place (see further on Heb. 13:9-14).

49. D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 612.

### III. DESTINATION

The location<sup>50</sup> of the recipients of Hebrews is uncertain, with opinions ranging from Spain in the west to Judea in the east. Jerusalem and Rome are the most common proposals, with Rome considered as the most plausible.

Many ancient interpreters as well as some moderns think that the recipients lived in Palestine, perhaps even in Jerusalem. It was thought that Hebrews was sent to Christians in Jerusalem because the tabernacle and Levitical priesthood would have been particularly significant for those living near the temple. Since the author extends the greetings of 'those from Italy' (13:24), it was assumed that Hebrews was sent from Italy to Jerusalem.<sup>51</sup> The repeated references to the cultus are a strength for this view. But the whole discussion of the Levitical institutions is with reference to the Old Testament tabernacle, and no mention is made of the Jerusalem temple. Of course, priesthood and ritual associated with the tabernacle were in principle connected with the temple as well. But the complete silence on the temple weakens this theory of the recipients living in or around Jerusalem. Further, it is somewhat surprising that our author, who writes in a polished Greek style, bases his arguments on the Septuagint (LXX) even when it differs from the Hebrew or Aramaic (MT). Does this mean that the author knew no Semitic tongue or that his readers were all expatriates living in Jerusalem? If so, then it is hard to see how the evidence supports Jerusalem or Palestine as the destination above many other places in the empire.<sup>52</sup>

Other candidates for the destination have been suggested, including Alexandria,<sup>53</sup> Antioch, Samaria, Colossae, Ephesus, and Cyprus, among others. But it is Rome that has the most going for it, even though it remains only a hypothesis. Rome is the first place where the letter appears to have been known: *1 Clement*, which was written there probably near the end of the first century (c. A.D. 96), quotes from Hebrews extensively (note 17:1; 36:1-5). Clement gives us no hint as to who the author of Hebrews was, although he probably knew if his letter was addressed to Jewish Christians in Rome. The remark in Hebrews, 'those from Italy send you greetings' (13:24), may mean that some Italians who were living outside of Italy were sending greetings back (see on 13:24).

50. See esp. F. F. Bruce, "To the Hebrews", 3513-3519; Koester, 48-50.

51. So Chrysostom and most medieval interpreters. Among recent scholars are C. Spicq, G. W. Buchanan, P. E. Hughes, and M. E. Isaacs.

52. See F. F. Bruce, "To the Hebrews", 3514; also his commentary, 10-11; Koester, 48-49; D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 608.

53. While there is much that could be urged in favour of Alexandria, it is difficult to suppose 'that its origin could have been forgotten so soon in the city to which it was sent'. It is in Alexandria that the ascription to Paul is first attested. So F. F. Bruce, "To the Hebrews", 3516.

What little is known about early Roman Christianity is consistent with the character of the audience that received the Letter to the Hebrews. The earliest Christians were probably affiliated with the Jewish communities in Puteoli and Rome (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.104). In A.D. 49 the emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome because of a certain 'Chrestus', which probably refers to a dispute over Christ.<sup>54</sup> Hebrews may well have been written to a house church within a larger Christian community, and by A.D. 60 there were a number of house churches in Rome (Rom. 16:3-5, 14, 15) and some Christians in Puteoli (Acts 28:13-15). Timothy, who is mentioned in Hebrews 13:23, was known to the Roman Christians (Rom. 16:21), while Jewish Christians such as Prisca and Aquila were significant figures (Rom. 16:3). It is also suggested that many Roman Christians, like much of the city's population, were *peregrini* ('foreigners') from the provinces, who would know what it meant to be resident aliens in their earthly city (note Heb. 11:8, 13-16; 13:14).<sup>55</sup>

Fortunately, few exegetical issues depend on determining the geographic location of the addressees. The circumstances that called forth this letter are more significant.

#### IV. DATE

It is difficult to be certain about the date of Hebrews. If we set a broad time frame within which it was written, then the earliest date would be the death of Jesus (c. A.D. 30). The internal evidence of the document suggests the elapse of some time between his death and the writing of the epistle. The recipients and author belonged to the 'second generation' of Christians,<sup>56</sup> but this is to be understood genealogically, not chronologically. When he writes his letter, the author complains that they should have made further progress 'by this time' (5:12). Moreover, they are called to remember 'those earlier days' when the light of the gospel had shone into their lives (10:32). They are urged to recall their leaders who first spoke the word of God to them, and to 'consider the outcome of their manner of life' (13:7). Our author apparently has in mind those who led the congregation in earlier days but died before Hebrews was written. It is not possible to determine how much time is involved in these temporal notes, but clearly some years had passed between the addressees' conversion and their becoming 'reluctant listeners',<sup>57</sup> when they lacked the joy and enthusiasm

54. Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4.

55. Note the discussion in Koester, 49-51. Recent proponents of a Roman destination include F. F. Bruce, S. Kistemaker, D. A. Hagner, P. Ellingworth, W. L. Lane, and H.-F. Weiss.

56. According to Heb. 2:3, the message was confirmed to them by those who heard the Lord.

57. Johnson, 39.

they had shown at the beginning. One should probably infer that the epistle was not written before A.D. 50; most would insist not before 60.<sup>58</sup>

The latest date for Hebrews is set by the use of repeated references to the letter in *1 Clement* (esp. 36:1-6).<sup>59</sup> This has been traditionally dated c. A.D. 96. Although some have thought that *1 Clement* was written well into the second century (as late as 140) this is unlikely. Even if its date was in the first decade of the second century, Hebrews would have a terminus of A.D. 90. The 'Timothy' mentioned in Hebrews 13:23 is probably the younger companion of Paul (see on 13:23), so Hebrews must have been written in his lifetime. Paul co-opted him into missionary service c. A.D. 49 (Acts 16:1-3), but we do not know how old he was then. It is possible that he was still able to travel toward the end of the first century, although a date beyond A.D. 90 seems unlikely. This is close to the upper limit imposed by the traditional dating of *1 Clement*. We are therefore looking at a band between A.D. 50 (or 60) and 90.

But can we narrow this time frame further? Several references in Hebrews suggest that this is possible.

## A. Hostile Actions against the Community

We turn first to the suffering and persecution mentioned in 10:32-34. The author asks his listeners to 'remember' this experience, which suggests that a number of years have elapsed since it occurred. They had been publicly exposed to insult and persecution, while some were imprisoned in what was 'a great conflict full of suffering' (10:32). The language of our author has been compared with Tacitus's and Clement's descriptions of the persecutions the Christians in Rome suffered under Nero in A.D. 64.<sup>60</sup> But in spite of the similar terminology (they were 'abused and tormented to make a public show',<sup>61</sup> v. 33; NEB), it could not have been said of the Roman Christians after A.D. 65 that 'in their struggle against sin, they had not yet resisted to the point of shedding their blood' (12:4).<sup>62</sup> Many had died for their faith in Nero's pogrom.

58. So D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 605. Note Koester, 54, and his recent discussion of the relevant issues, 50-54.

59. D. A. Hagner, *The Use of the Old and New Testaments in Clement of Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); P. Ellingworth, 'Hebrews and *1 Clement*: Literary Dependence or Common Tradition', *BZ* 23 (1979), 437-440.

60. Tacitus says, 'Their death was made a matter of sport: they were covered in wild beasts' skins and torn to pieces by dogs; or they were fastened to crosses and set on fire in order to serve as torches by night as daylight failed' (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.6; note *1 Clement* 6:2).

61. Gk. θεατριζόμενοι.

62. The exhortation to the hearers to remember their past leaders and to 'consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith' (13:7) refers to the deaths of these leaders, not necessarily their martyrdom (see on 13:7).

However, Claudius's expulsion of Jews or Jewish Christians from Rome in A.D. 49 may be a point of contact with Hebrews 10:32-34.<sup>63</sup> Acts 18:2 states that in Corinth Paul 'met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome'. Aquila and Priscilla left Rome, probably as Jewish Christians. There is no suggestion that Paul converted or baptized them, as he did others in Corinth (Acts 18:8), while they housed him and worked with him as a Christian missionary. Although Aquila and Priscilla were called 'Jews', this term can refer to Jewish Christians (Acts 16:1, 20; 21:39; 22:3).<sup>64</sup>

According to the well-known account of Suetonius, Claudius expelled the Jews because 'they were constantly indulging in riots at the instigation of Chrestus'.<sup>65</sup> The name 'Chrestus', which was common among Romans, is not attested as a Jewish name, and is probably a variant form of Christos.<sup>66</sup> It is likely that disorder broke out in one or more synagogues where some Jews claimed that Jesus was the Messiah (see Acts 6:9-15; 13:45, 50; 14:2, 5, 19; 18:12-17). Although details of the events that occurred under Claudius are lacking, the disturbance may have involved the verbal abuse for the sake of Christ that the recipients of Hebrews experienced (10:32; 11:25-26; 13:13). The epistle does not mention expulsion from the city, but the description of the people of God as 'foreigners and strangers on earth' who have no enduring city (11:13-16; 13:4) may suggest that some had experienced the temporary loss of homes.<sup>67</sup> The events of A.D. 49 could be referred to here. If, however, they point to incidents at some other time or place, then we are even less informed about them than we are about the events in Rome.<sup>68</sup>

But if Hebrews was written to Rome, about A.D. 60-65, it could have been to a community that remembered the events of A.D. 49. The opposition they had experienced from the wider society (11:26; 13:13) is consistent with Tacitus's comment that before Nero's persecution began Christians were 'hated' by the populace (*Annals* 15.44). But if the letter was sent to Christians living elsewhere in the Graeco-Roman world, it is difficult to be precise as to its date.

63. On Claudius's edict in A.D. 49 and its possible connections with Hebrews, see Lane 1:lxiii-lxvi; Bruce, 269-270; and "To the Hebrews", 3519; Koester, 51-52.

64. E. J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, Vol. 1: *Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove/Leicester: InterVarsity/Apollos, 2004), 811, comments: 'When Aquila is described as a "Jew" (Acts 18:2), Luke comments not on his religious convictions but on his ethnic affiliation (cf. Acts 16:1, 20; 21:39; 22:3, 12)'.

65. Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4.

66. For details see Lane, 1:lxv; Koester, 51 n. 108.

67. Koester, 52.

68. Bruce, 270.

## B. The Destruction of the Temple

A critical issue in this attempt to narrow the time frame for the dating of Hebrews is the fall of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70. Once again the internal evidence does not provide certainty, but it may lead us toward some degree of probability.

We have already observed that the epistle makes no direct reference to the temple or its worship as such. Israel's sanctuary and Levitical priesthood are discussed in relation to the tabernacle and priestly practices outlined in the Pentateuch. Koester points out that the author's arguments which centered on the tabernacle would have been suitable either before or after the temple's destruction. Prior to A.D. 70 the focus on the tabernacle and its Mosaic statutes was significant since they revealed the 'basis for the priestly practices of subsequent generations'. These descriptions were available through the law for all Jews, not least for those who lived outside of Palestine and had never seen the temple. The same factors were applicable after the temple was destroyed, for it was not immediately clear that it would not be rebuilt, and later rabbinic sources provide rulings about sacrifices. Accordingly, Hebrews' interest in 'the Law's enduring provisions for a sanctuary could have been designed to move Christians away from hope for a restoration of the old order and toward the new life in Christ'.<sup>69</sup> This would be so whether Hebrews was written before or after A.D. 70.

An argument frequently used in favour of a date prior to A.D. 70 is that Hebrews often refers to the activity of the Levitical priesthood in the present tense. In English translation, the recurring present tense reads as if sacrifices are still being offered in the sanctuary at the time the author is writing (7:27-28; 8:3-5; 9:6-7, 25; 10:1-3, 8; 13:10-11). But there are several flaws in this argument. First, the present tense in Greek, even in the indicative, does not necessarily refer to present time. Traditional approaches to Greek grammar observe the frequency of the so-called historic present in Greek.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, 'a more linguistically informed approach, appealing to verbal aspect theory, doubts that the (morphological) "present tense" has any immediate bearing on time'.<sup>71</sup> Second, Josephus writes about the Jerusalem temple and the sacrificial cult in the present tense even though the temple had been destroyed and the sacrificial system had ceased.<sup>72</sup> Simi-

69. So Koester, 53.

70. So in relation to Heb. 9:6-9, Bruce, 22, holds that the recurring present tense would be pointed if the Levitical priests were continuing to offer sacrifices in the temple. But he concedes that it 'could be explained as a literary present, setting forth rather vividly the state of affairs portrayed in the Old Testament record'.

71. D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 606; see S. E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (New York: Lang, 1989); and, more recently, C. R. Campbell, *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative: Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament* (New York: Lang, 2007).

72. Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.102-150, 224-257.

larly, Clement of Rome uses the present tense to describe the ritual of the temple well after its destruction.<sup>73</sup>

But if the linguistic argument is not decisive, another form of this argument is stronger. When Josephus describes the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the priestly vestments, he is not arguing theologically about their obsolescence or replacement by the realities of the new covenant. These, however, lie at the heart of Hebrews' argument. The thrust of the author's rhetoric is to establish the exclusive finality of Christ's sacrifice, and to stop his listeners from returning to the sacrificial system from which they were drawn off when they became Christians.

After insisting that the continual offering of Levitical sacrifices shows them to be ineffective, the author asks, 'Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered?' (10:2). The question expects an affirmative response. But if the temple had been destroyed, why does the author not point out that the sacrifices have in fact ceased being offered? Admittedly, this is an argument from silence, but on the point of the actual historical fate of the Jewish cult this silence is deafening! If the sacrifices had already ceased, his argument would have been cast in a different form.<sup>74</sup> Although not decisive, this argument provides strong support for a pre-70 date for Hebrews.

### C. The Development of Early Christianity

An argument in favour of a late date for Hebrews turns on where the epistle lies in the development of early Christianity. It is often claimed that the 'high' Christology of Hebrews (note 1:1-3) reflects a similar high Christology found in Luke-Acts, 1 Peter, and the Pastoral Epistles, each of which is frequently dated between A.D. 75 and 90. But the dating of these documents is also disputed, with some scholars insisting that each is a pre-70 composition. Moreover, it is clear that the high Christology of Hebrews 1:1-3 proves nothing in relation to dating. Our earliest Christian writer, Paul, has a similar high Christology. In fact, 1 Corinthians 8:6; Philippians 2:6-11; and Colossians 1:15-20 are recognized by most scholars to be pre-70, and many think that they represent *pre*-Pauline thought.<sup>75</sup>

Hebrews lacks any evidence of an elaborate ecclesiastical structure which is supposed to point to a late dating, and apart from the simple references to 'the leaders' (13:7, 17, 24) there is no suggestion of a hierarchy. The epistle evidences no sign of a diminished eschatology, or of the so-called

73. 1 Clement 41.

74. B. Lindars, 'The Rhetorical Structure of Hebrews', *NTS* 35 (1989), 382-406; Johnson, 39; D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 607. Note also the arguments of P. W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 207-210; and S. D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation*, 84-85.

75. D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 608.

delay of the parousia. In fact, the reverse is true: Hebrews expresses 'a vivid and urgent sense of expectation'.<sup>76</sup> The listeners are urged to exhort one another, 'and all the more as you see the Day approaching' (10:25).

To conclude. It is difficult to be certain about when Hebrews was written. We cannot rule out any date between about A.D. 60 and 90, but much of the evidence supports a time before 70.

## V. GENRE

Hebrews 'begins like a treatise, proceeds like a sermon, and closes like an epistle'.<sup>77</sup> Yet there are difficulties with the application of each of these genres to the discourse. Its form initially suggests that it is not a letter because it commences without an opening prayer for grace or peace, and there is no introductory thanksgiving or blessing. Unlike other letters in the New Testament (except 1 John) and many epistles of the Graeco-Roman period, its author does not identify himself or the people addressed. Instead, the discourse begins with a magnificent portrayal of Jesus as the divine Son through whom God has spoken his final word (1:1-4). These opening lines command attention and engage a listener or reader immediately.<sup>78</sup> Despite its polished literary character and its careful exposition of the superiority of Christ, the Son of God and great high priest, Hebrews is not simply a theological treatise. Its purpose is hortatory, and this is repeatedly made clear by the paraenetic or exhortatory passages<sup>79</sup> which are intended to warn the listeners 'not to turn back from the Christian faith to the forms of piety they once knew'.<sup>80</sup>

This hortatory purpose is consistent with the author's description of his work as a brief 'word of exhortation' (*logos paraklēseōs*, 13:22), which is best understood as a form of oral discourse or speech. It is a way of describing a synagogue homily. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch invite Paul and Barnabas to speak if they have 'any word of exhortation (*logos paraklēseōs*) for the people' (Acts 13:15). In his sermon that follows Paul explains the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection in the light of the Old Testament Scriptures. The pattern of reading from Scripture and giving an exhortation continued in early Christian gatherings.<sup>81</sup>

It is sometimes claimed that Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch was

76. Johnson, 39.

77. R. E. Brown, *Introduction*, 690, citing H. E. Dana.

78. Lane, 1:1xx.

79. Heb. 2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 4:14-16; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 11:1-40; 12:1-13:17.

80. D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 597.

81. So Timothy was directed: 'Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and teaching' (1 Tim. 4:13; also Rom. 12:6-8). See Koester, 81.

different from the Letter to the Hebrews: the former was spoken, the latter written. However, a number of stylistic features point clearly to Hebrews' oral character, even if it was intended to be written down from the beginning. First, the distinctive use of the first person ('we', 'us', and 'our') throughout the discourse enables the speaker to identify with his listeners while addressing them with authority. Second, the language of speaking and hearing, instead of writing and reading, is a significant feature that characterizes the author's message: '[the world to come] about which we are *speaking*' (2:5); 'we have much to *say* about this [i.e., Melchizedek], but it is hard to make it clear to you because you have become reluctant *listeners*' (5:11); 'even though we *speak* like this' (6:9); 'Now the main point of what we are *saying* . . .' (8:1); 'And what more shall I *say*?' (11:32).<sup>82</sup> Third, the skilful oscillation between exposition and exhortation throughout Hebrews is a pattern that allows the speaker to drive home his points immediately without losing the hearers' attention (see below). Such a hortatory emphasis portrays Hebrews more narrowly as a homily or sermon. Fourth, the manner in which the author presents themes that are later developed more fully, 'thus creating a wavelike, cumulative effect', suggests a 'fundamentally oral form of discourse'.<sup>83</sup> So Jesus' sharing fully in the humanity of those he represents (2:14-18) is picked up and developed in relation to his sharing our weakness and learning obedience through what he suffered (5:1-10); his faith (3:1-6) is made explicit in 12:1-3; his role as priest (4:14; 5:1-10) is developed more fully in 7:1-9:28; and the pilgrimage of God's people to his rest is spelled out in 3:7-4:11 and brought to a wonderful climax in 11:1-12:29.<sup>84</sup>

The oral character of Hebrews as a homily, which recent scholarship has rightly stressed, suggests that the author is skilfully conveying the impression that he is present with the assembly and actually delivering his sermon to them. He carefully avoids any reference to writing or reading — at least until the postscript (13:22-25) — which might emphasize the distance that separates him from the congregation. By stressing the actions of speaking and listening which are appropriate to persons in conversation, our author is able to establish a sense of presence with his audience.<sup>85</sup>

At the same time, the document ends like a letter. Its reference to the author's hope of being restored to the readers (13:19), news of Timothy whom the author hopes to join in a visit to the congregation (v. 23), an exchange of greetings (v. 24), and its final prayer (v. 25) are all epistolary features. It seems appropriate, then, to speak of Hebrews as an 'epistle' or 'letter', given that this was a very broad category in the New Testament period, and that it has been classified as an epistle for most of its history.

82. Johnson, 10; see the discussion of W. L. Lane, *A Call to Commitment*, 15-21.

83. Johnson, 10.

84. Johnson, 10.

85. See Lane, 1:lxv-lxxv; and his *A Call to Commitment*, 17-20.

Ancient theorists assumed that letter writing and speech making were two different types of activities, and the handbooks analysed them using different sets of categories.<sup>86</sup> Letters were sent to those who were absent, while speeches were given in assemblies and other contexts where people were present. But letters could be read aloud in an assembly, and speeches were sent in written form. We know that other orators carefully prepared their oral discourses in writing, as Dio Chrysostom did with his *Orations*. Paul dictated some of his letters to an amanuensis (see Rom. 16:22), and it is likely that they were read aloud in the assembly by the delegate who had delivered them to a specific community (see 1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16).

There is no reason why this 'sermon'<sup>87</sup> could not have been delivered and read aloud as a 'letter'.<sup>88</sup> In fact, from Hebrews 13:22 ('bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly', NRSV) we should conclude that Hebrews is 'a document to be understood from both an oral and a written perspective'.<sup>89</sup> When it was first read to the congregation, Hebrews was 'meant to be heard as a discourse rather than seen as a text, experienced as a whole in its unfolding'.<sup>90</sup> But the author has written it down so that it is a text. Presumably Hebrews was read aloud again and again, and studied as a text in the community to which it was addressed.

## VI. STRUCTURE

The letter to the Hebrews is widely recognized as a literary masterpiece that has been carefully constructed. Yet there is little agreement about the shape of that structure.<sup>91</sup> Exegetes differ as to the major and minor divisions of the

86. Note, e.g., S. E. Porter, ed., *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 B.C.-A.D. 400* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

87. It is difficult to determine whether Hebrews was one sermon or a *set* of short sermons or homilies. 'The connecting devices that unify the book's argument and make it seem like one continuous sermon could well have been added after the original sermons were given' (A. H. Trotter, *Interpreting*, 64 n. 5).

88. Johnson, 11.

89. A. H. Trotter, *Interpreting*, 62. He adds: 'The *Epistle* to the Hebrews . . . was obviously not simply a sermon, given once or twice and then lost forever. . . . It is not even the transcription of a sermon, notes taken by a devoted disciple and put into rough written form, . . . but a consciously written document. . . . We have known of the book since very early in the church's history, and always as an epistle' (63-64). Note R. T. France, 'The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor', *TynBul* 47 (1996), 245-276.

90. Johnson, 11. His concern that the discourse should not be studied 'in separate segments' is appropriate, if by this he means each segment in isolation from other parts or separate from the whole. But segments make up the whole and are themselves understood in the light of the whole, as discourse analysts have been at pains to point out.

91. Writing in 1987, D. E. Aune asserted: 'The structure of Hebrews remains an unsolved problem', in *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 213. Although there have been significant scholarly advances since then, notably

discourse as well as the development of its argument. For a literary masterpiece this is rather surprising, as one would expect it to be coherent with a clear train of thought. At a popular level the epistle has often been read as a series of proof texts, while 'the NT specialist has not fared any better' in following the author's movement of thought.<sup>92</sup> Not only differences in culture and background between us as contemporary readers/listeners and the original author/speaker and his intended recipients, but also current presuppositions about composition and structure may cause us 'to lose access to the impact that the discourse had upon its original recipients'.<sup>93</sup>

Numerous suggestions have been made concerning the structure of the epistle.<sup>94</sup> Most recent discussion, however, has revolved around four types of proposals. Although there is some measure of overlap in the following categories, we shall briefly survey representatives of them, and then indicate the analysis followed in this commentary:

### A. Conceptual (or Thematic) Analysis

This approach assesses the structure of Hebrews on the basis of one or more prominent themes around which the epistle is organized. The interpreter makes decisions regarding conceptual turning points in the book and how the various subsections work together towards the author's objective. So a common theme around which the outline of the book has been built is 'Christ Is Greater Than . . .' (P. E. Hughes) or the motif of 'promise' (F. J. Schierse) by which the book is divided into three sections (1:1-4:13; 4:14-10:31; 10:32-13:25).<sup>95</sup>

Rather than building an outline around any single concept, F. F. Bruce divides the book into eight major sections and provides each with a title appropriate to it.<sup>96</sup> These are 'The Finality of Christianity' (1:1-2:18); 'The True

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in relation to discourse analysis, major differences relating to Hebrews' structure remain. Note the approach of S. Stanley, 'The Structure of Hebrews from Three Perspectives', *TynBul* 45 (1994), 245-271. See also R. T. France, 'The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor', *TynBul* 47 (1996), 245-276.

92. D. A. Black, 'The Problem of the Literary Structure of Hebrews', *GTJ* 7 (1986), 163-177, esp. 175; cited by C. L. Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship between Form and Meaning* (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2005), xi.

93. C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, xi.

94. For surveys of research, see Lane, 1:lxix-lxxxix; G. H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 3-41; also his 'Hebrews in Its First-Century Contexts: Recent Research', in *The Face of New Testament Studies*, ed. S. McKnight and G. R. Osborne (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 414-443, esp. 422-425; and C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 1-21.

95. See P. E. Hughes. F. J. Schierse, *Verheissung und Heilsvollendung: Zur Theologischen Grundfrage des Hebräerbriefes* (München: Zink, 1955), 207-209; and for a brief critique, note G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 26-27.

96. Bruce, vii-x. Within the eight major divisions, Bruce provides fifty subdivisions which are basically descriptive.

Home of the People of God' (3:1-4:13); 'The High Priesthood of Christ' (4:14-6:20); 'The Order of Melchizedek' (7:1-28); 'Covenant, Sanctuary, and Sacrifice' (8:1-10:18); 'Call to Worship, Faith, and Perseverance' (10:19-12:29); 'Concluding Exhortation and Prayer' (13:1-21); and 'Postscript' (13:22-25).

The advantage of this content-centred analysis is its descriptive character. Blocks of the author's material do focus on important themes. However, the listing of topics does not in itself indicate the flow of the author's argument.<sup>97</sup> Another difficulty with the topical approach is highlighted by Hebrews' use of repetition. The author mentions a subject, leaves it for the moment, and picks it up at a later point, rather like a musical fugue. So Jesus is called 'high priest' at 2:17 and 3:1. The theme is momentarily dropped from the discourse but re-enters at 4:14-5:10; it appears again at 6:20, after which a full exposition follows in 7:1-28. An adequate approach to the structure of Hebrews needs to show how such repetition should be assessed; the author's argument appears to be 'more a tapestry than a step-by-step progression of ideas'.<sup>98</sup> A general weakness of the content-oriented approach is the tendency to organize topics or headings around the expository sections of the discourse. The resulting danger is to 'skew the text as primarily a dogmatic work'.<sup>99</sup> Also, thematic outlines usually do not reflect the change in genre from exposition to hortatory discourse. A content-centred approach should take into account issues of form since both are present in this literary masterpiece.

## B. Rhetorical Analysis

The second major approach to the structure of Hebrews results from the re-discovery of ancient rhetoric and its applicability to the New Testament writings.<sup>100</sup> Hebrews abounds in rhetorical features in relation to its style, language, and argumentation. Hellenistic literary devices, such as repetition, anaphora, *inclusio*, parallelism, rhetorical questions, direct address to the listeners, oratorical imperative, 'hook words', and the like<sup>101</sup> were employed by the author as he composed his 'word of exhortation' to be read aloud in the congregation to which it was addressed. Rhetorical *devices* are

97. However, Bruce's carefully worded 'Argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews' (xix-xxii) and his exposition draw attention to the flow of the discourse.

98. G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 28. For an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of a conceptual (thematic) analysis of Hebrews, see Guthrie, 26-29; C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 1-3; Johnson, 11.

99. Attridge, 14; see G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 28.

100. Johnson, 12, has particularly in mind theoreticians like Aristotle and Quintilian and orators such as Dio Chrysostom and Cicero. See C. C. Black, 'Rhetorical Criticism', in J. B. Green, ed., *Hearing the New Testament Strategies for Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 256-277.

101. For details, see Spicq, 2:351-378.

thus clearly discernible in Hebrews. But a rhetorical *analysis* of Hebrews goes a step further and uses classical rhetorical patterns to identify the general structure of the discourse.<sup>102</sup>

The rhetorical handbooks divide speeches into three basic forms of rhetoric: *judicial*, *deliberative*, and *epideictic*. *Judicial* calls for a decision for or against an action that occurred in the past through appeals to what is true and just. Most interpreters recognize that Hebrews does not fit this category. *Deliberative* rhetoric urges people to follow a course of action in the future, pursuing what is beneficial and avoiding what is harmful. A number of scholars argue that this fits with the clear hortatory purpose of Hebrews as a whole. The listeners are to set a course that will lead to future rewards (see 4:11; 6:18; 10:36; 12:1-2). Each exposition turns to exhortation, and 'the entire last section of the discourse calls for a commitment from the hearers to act in certain ways rather than others'.<sup>103</sup> The third form of rhetoric is *epideictic*, which is concerned to reinforce the present values of the listeners by commending what is praiseworthy and condemning what is shameful. Hebrews urges the listeners to 'hold fast' to the faith they already profess (3:6; 4:14; 10:23, 35-39; 11:11). It employs honour and shame language, and uses the device of comparison, which is a frequent feature of epideictic oratory, to show Christ's superiority to persons and institutions from the Old Testament.<sup>104</sup>

Rhetorical criticism has brought some important gains to the study of Hebrews.<sup>105</sup> The oral nature of the discourse has been more clearly recognized so that many recent studies have rightly presupposed Hebrews to be a sermon (or series of sermons). With this has come a greater awareness of the goal or intention of the discourse and a recognition of oral features, such as the repetition of sounds (see below) as well as words. Some insights gleaned from rhetorical criticism are consistent with the strongly pastoral character of the discourse, especially in its exhortatory material, while several commentaries have highlighted contemporary social patterns along with formal and rhetorical aspects of the document.<sup>106</sup>

But Hebrews is not easily categorized according to any one speech form of Greek rhetoric. Even those who are sympathetic to such an approach acknowledge the difficulty of making a decision between the dis-

102. C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 4.

103. Johnson, 13. B. Lindars, 'The Rhetorical Structure of Hebrews', 382-406, concludes that once Hebrews is seen from this angle [of deliberative rhetoric], 'every detail of the letter will be found to fall into place' (383). The climax of the argument is not to be found in the central section (7:1-10:18) but in the exhortatory 10:19-12:29. Others who claim that Hebrews ought to be classified as deliberative rhetoric include K. Nissilä and W. G. Überlacker.

104. Those who think that Hebrews is epideictic rhetoric include H. W. Attridge, D. E. Aune, C. C. Black, and T. Olbricht.

105. Note the observations of G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 30-32; and C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 6-7.

106. Especially those of D. A. deSilva and C. R. Koester as C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 6, observes.

course as deliberative or epideictic rhetoric since Hebrews appears to include elements of both. Koester agrees that categorizing the book as either deliberative or epideictic is not helpful. His solution is to suggest that 'assessment of the genre depends in part upon the individual hearer'. For those who remain committed to God and Christ, Hebrews is epideictic. But for those tending to drift away from the faith, it is deliberative.<sup>107</sup>

Scholars who analyze the New Testament compositions rhetorically tend to focus on the *arrangement* of Hebrews, that is, the structure of the argument, how the points are presented. A recent example of a rhetorical analysis of Hebrews is that of Koester,<sup>108</sup> who suggests five sections: (1) an exordium (1:1-2:4) that prepares the listeners to give attention to the speaker; (2) a proposition (2:5-9) that defines the issue to be addressed;<sup>109</sup> (3) arguments (2:10-12:27) that support the speakers' position;<sup>110</sup> (4) a peroration (12:28-13:21) that brings the speech to a close; and (5) an epistolary postscript (13:22-25).

Although this analysis has recently been commended,<sup>111</sup> there are several difficulties with it. Is Hebrews 2:5-9 really a proposition that sets the theme for the whole discourse? Does this analysis of the arguments in 2:10-12:27 accurately reflect the content and indicate the movement of this long, important section of Hebrews? In our judgment a discourse analysis approach seems more compelling (see below). We agree with deSilva that Hebrews belongs to a group of New Testament texts that are 'resistant to being divided neatly into the four or five parts of the Greco-Roman speech'.<sup>112</sup> The discourse is full of rhetorical devices, but the arrangement of it does not fit the template of the classical Hellenistic structure. Guthrie points out that the classical handbooks were crafted in the judicial and political spheres; however, the author of Hebrews' way of arguing follows the rhetorical and exegetical skills of the rabbis. Further, the assigning of general designations, like exordium, narration, and arguments, to large sec-

107. Koester, 82. Similarly, Lane, 1:lxix; deSilva, 46; Johnson, 13. See the discussion of G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 32-33.

108. Koester, 84-86.

109. A narration of the facts relating to the topic often follows the exordium, but, according to Koester, it is not essential and Hebrews omits it (84 and n. 187 for further references).

110. The arguments support the speaker's position. Koester sees three series of arguments: (a) the first (2:10-6:20) is framed by statements that Christ was made complete through suffering, a way that others are called to follow (2:10-5:10); then follow a warning and an encouragement (5:11-6:20). (b) The second series (7:1-10:39) shows that by Jesus' sacrificial death others are enabled to approach God (7:1-10:25). A further warning and encouragement follow (10:26-39). (c) The third series (11:1-12:27) begins and ends with statements about the blood of Abel (11:4; 12:24). God's people persevere by faith through suffering to glory. This series ends with an additional warning and encouragement (12:25-27).

111. By Johnson, 13-14, who describes it as a 'good example of rhetorical analysis' (13), which he basically follows since he views it as 'a reasonable account of the arrangement of Hebrews' (14).

112. deSilva, 46; note Lane, 1:lxix-lxxx; C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 6-7.

tions of the book is 'not particularly illuminative of the literary dynamics of the text'.<sup>113</sup>

### C. Literary Analysis

The description 'literary analysis' refers to an examination of the text that focuses on the literary characteristics by which the author crafted his work. These include features that mark the structure (e.g., inclusion, chiasmus, etc.), aspects of style, genre, repetition, and vocabulary. Literary analysis is concerned with the final form of the text, and, in contrast to rhetorical criticism, is more ahistorical, with the interpretation of the text as the main goal.<sup>114</sup>

The most influential literary analysis of Hebrews' structure in contemporary scholarship has been that of Albert Vanhoye. Building on the work of his predecessors, he produced a structure that was unique and detailed.<sup>115</sup> So influential<sup>116</sup> has his work been that it has become the point of departure for subsequent research. In his landmark monograph of 1963,<sup>117</sup> Vanhoye synthesized the insights of A. Descamps, R. Gyllenberg, F. Thien, and L. Vaganay,<sup>118</sup> and identified six literary devices or techniques used by the author of Hebrews to structure his sermon: (1) the announcement of the subjects to be discussed; (2) inclusions, that is, bookends that bracket a unit of discourse by the repetition of a key word or striking expression at the beginning and close of a section; (3) variation of literary genre, exposition, or exhortation; (4) characteristic terms that are repeated within a given section of material, so making that section distinct; (5) transitional hook words; and (6) symmetrical arrangements.

Vanhoye presented a chiasmic structure of five concentric parts that are framed by an introduction and conclusion (1:1-4; 13:20-21).<sup>119</sup> The five parts are: (1) the name superior to angels (1:5-2:18); (2) Christ's faithfulness

113. G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 32-33. In fairness to Koester, however, his subtitles to each section seek to catch and describe the flow of the author's argument. See the recent discussion of deSilva, 39-58.

114. C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 7.

115. Albert Vanhoye's output in books and articles on Hebrews over the years has been amazing.

116. The works of H. W. Attridge, D. A. Black, P. Ellingworth, G. H. Guthrie, and W. L. Lane, among others, show the significant influence of Vanhoye.

117. A. Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de l' "Épître aux Hébreux"* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963; rev. ed. 1976). This pivotal contribution has been called 'the most influential and debated work ever written on the structure of Hebrews' (G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 14).

118. On the substantial contribution of L. Vaganay to the modern literary discussions on the structure of Hebrews, see G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 11-12, and B. C. Joslin, 'Can Hebrews Be Structured? An Assessment of Eight Approaches', *CBR* 6 (2007), 99-129, esp. 103-105, who describes his observations as 'monumental' (105).

119. A. Vanhoye, *La structure*; also his *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989).

and compassion (3:1–5:10); (3) the central exposition on sacrifice (5:11–10:39); (4) faith and endurance (11:1–12:13); and (5) the peaceful fruit of justice (12:14–13:19). These five parts are arranged concentrically around the theme of Christ's priesthood. Parts (1) and (5) have to do with eschatology, (2) and (4) deal with ecclesiology, while the central section (3) discusses sacrifice. Vanhoye claimed that the literary devices he detected support this symmetrical arrangement of Hebrews. At the very heart of the discourse is Hebrews 9:11, 'But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation'.

Vanhoye's synthesis of several strands of thought into one sustained discussion and thesis concerning the structure of Hebrews has a number of important strengths. It highlights the author's frequent changes in genre between exposition and exhortation. This device is significant for determining the purpose of the discourse and its development throughout. The 'announcement of the subject' that will be developed in what follows assists in recognizing large blocks of material and ultimately for understanding the structure of the discourse.<sup>120</sup> Highlighting literary devices such as 'hook words' or repetitions of words, phrases, or paraphrases provides objective means for determining the beginnings and endings in sections of the discourse. Vanhoye's observations on repetition in Hebrews convinced many of the unity of the discourse. His work of analysing the formal features of Hebrews set the standard for subsequent study of the structure.

Many interpreters have adopted this carefully argued proposal, sometimes with modifications. But it has a number of weaknesses. The symmetrical arrangement of the discourse with its concentric circles supporting the centre has significant problems. Lindars argued that a formal analysis of the grammatical patterns of Hebrews supports an asymmetrical structure that leads to a climax at the end of the discourse.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, 'much of the imagery in Hebrews moves in a more linear fashion'. Its listeners are directed towards 'the goal of entering God's rest, drawing near to the inner sanctuary, and approaching God's heavenly city'.<sup>122</sup> Given this linear movement and the exhortations that flow from it, a concentric structure for Hebrews as a whole is unlikely. Vanhoye's approach has been criticised as overly complex and disregarding content instead of opting for a combination of formal factors and content.<sup>123</sup> Hebrews 9:11 is not the most prominent verse in its immediate context, let alone in the discourse as a

120. See A. Vanhoye, *Structure and Message*, 23–32, where the headings are the discourse announcements that state the subject to be developed.

121. B. Lindars, 'Rhetorical Structure', 382–406; see also C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 10.

122. Koester, 83; note C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 10–11.

123. J. Swetnam, 'Form and Content in Hebrews 7–13', *Bib* 55 (1974), 333–348, esp. 348.

whole. Also, Vanhoye has failed to highlight the parallels found at 4:14-16 and 10:19-23, dismissing them as insignificant. Yet these two passages contain the most prominent use of parallelism in the whole book.<sup>124</sup> Further, it is not obvious that parts (1) and (5) focus on eschatology while parts (2) and (4) deal with ecclesiology. Both motifs are more intertwined than Vanhoye's structure suggests. Christ's priesthood is a major theme of the discourse and is clearly prominent in Hebrews 5 and 7-10. But this is not so in other parts of the speech. It is clearly very important theologically in the Letter to the Hebrews. But is it central structurally, as Vanhoye's arrangement indicates? Further, given that the author calls his discourse a 'word of exhortation' (13:22), should we not expect to learn something of the speech's structure from its exhortatory sections?<sup>125</sup>

#### D. Discourse Analysis

The fourth approach to the structure of Hebrews that we shall consider is discourse analysis. This discipline, also known as 'text linguistics', emerged within the general field of linguistics in the latter part of the twentieth century. Linguistics is the study of human language, and is especially concerned with its inner workings, 'the various aspects of a language which must work together to accomplish an act of communication'.<sup>126</sup> Discourse analysis is an approach in which the critic seeks to understand the relationships between the various sections of the discourse. Perhaps its most distinguishing feature is the attention given to units larger than the sentence, although not at the expense of investigating smaller units such as morphemes, words, and clauses within their sentences.<sup>127</sup> As an interdisciplinary approach discourse analysis is still in its early stages of development. There are important differences in the analysts' approaches because their work is based on several major schools of thought.<sup>128</sup>

124. G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 79, adds that the failure to deal with this obvious parallel, as well as several others, 'remains a glaring weakness in his approach to the structure of the book'.

125. For an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Vanhoye's structure, see D. A. Black, 'Literary Structure', 163-177; J. Swetnam, 'Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6', 368-385; his 'Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13', 333-348; G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 34-35, 76-77; C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 7-11; and B. C. Joslin, 'Can Hebrews Be Structured?' 109-112.

126. G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 35. For a full bibliography on discourse analysis, see C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 22 n. 1.

127. Note the discussion of J. T. Reed, 'Discourse Analysis', in *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament*, ed. S. E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 189-217, esp. 190-192, regarding discourse analysis examining language at 'a level beyond the sentence' (original emphasis); at the same time it investigates smaller units. Reed adds: 'Discourse analysts advocate a bottom-up and top-down interpretation of discourse' (191).

128. For a recent introduction to discourse analysis theory (with a detailed bibliogra-

### 1. George H. Guthrie

Bearing this in mind, we turn first to George Guthrie's discourse analytical approach to the structure of Hebrews.<sup>129</sup> Guthrie sets out to provide objective criteria for discerning units within the whole discourse. He uses the tools of literary and discourse analysis while being 'sensitive to literary and oratorical conventions of the first century'.<sup>130</sup> This somewhat eclectic approach seeks to avoid both the subjectivity demonstrated in thematic assessments of Hebrews' structure and the difficulties which arise in purely formal analyses that do not take content into account.

The author of Hebrews' method of executing smooth transitions from one segment to another tended to be neglected in previous discussions, and, as a result, there is considerable diversity in contemporary outlines of Hebrews. Guthrie set out to discern those elements in the discourse that are transitional in character. He isolated individual units in Hebrews by locating 'cohesion shifts' and inclusions. Major and minor shifts are detected on the basis of twelve cohesion fields: genre, topic, temporal indicators, spatial indicators, actor, subject, verb tense, mood, person, and number, reference, and lexical items. When a number of these occur in a brief space, a 'shift' takes place showing that the author has moved from one unit of discourse to another. The ancient literary device of *inclusio* is used to check Guthrie's findings. He observed that inclusions mark out smaller units of discourse as well as larger sections and subsections.

Guthrie categorized the text according to genre as either exposition or exhortation, and then examined each group of sections independently. There were two 'movements' (each with several subsections) within the *exposition*, one dealing with Jesus as 'Son' (1:5–2:18), the other with his superior work as 'high priest' (4:14–10:25). Rather than present a loose association of topics the exposition developed spatially and logically from one unit to the next.<sup>131</sup> The *hortatory* sections function differently: they return again and again to similar key motifs, for example, falling away, sin, punishment, promise, the need to receive the message of God, Jesus the Son, faith, obedience, endurance, entering in, and the use of examples (see chap. 11). These are woven together in a complex of warnings, encouragements, and the portrayal of positive and negative examples. Through parallelism and repetition listeners are moved to respond to the word of God in faith and perseverance so as to receive the reward, rather than in unbelief and apostasy that leads to destruction.<sup>132</sup>

Sections from the two genres of exposition and exhortation are connected by hook words, overlapping constituents in 4:14–16 and 10:19–25 (see

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phy), see C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 22–87, and in relation to New Testament studies note 23–27.

129. G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*.

130. G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, xviii.

131. G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 121–127; and his commentary, 28–29.

132. G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 12–139; and his commentary, 29–30.

the exegesis below), and semantic connections. In his outline Guthrie placed the expository and exhortatory sections in two columns indicating their independent development and logic.<sup>133</sup> Arrows show the movement of the two sections of exposition and exhortation, as well as the connections between them. Guthrie states that the discourse is woven together as a unity with the two threads of exhortation and exposition forming one coherent work.

This detailed and consistent outline has been regarded as a significant advance, and has been followed by several recent writers.<sup>134</sup> It overcomes the difficulties of earlier, thematic structures, and draws attention to the complex interplay of exposition and exhortation that runs through Hebrews. Guthrie's recognition of identifiable devices for effecting transitions in the discourse assists us in our quest of determining the structure of Hebrews. His presentation is nuanced and allows for overlaps (see 4:14-16; 10:19-25), while providing many exegetical insights into the discourse. Some have raised difficulties with Guthrie's two-column outline. It has been claimed that the independent but interrelated columns of exposition and exhortation running side by side are 'not a coherent mental representation of the discourse'.<sup>135</sup> In our judgment, however, Guthrie's structure 'actually yields a *helpful* visualization'. By placing a 'distinct and *visible* emphasis' on the exposition and exhortation, he enables us to see 'the two lines moving in concert with one another as the epistle progresses'.<sup>136</sup> His later commentary works out his proposal in concrete terms.<sup>137</sup>

### George H. Guthrie's Outline of Hebrews<sup>138</sup>

#### Introduction: God Has Spoken to Us in a Son (1:1-4)

##### I. The Position of the Son in Relation to the Angels (1:5-2:18)

##### A. The Son Superior to the Angels (1:5-14)

*WARNING: Do Not Reject the Word Spoken through God's Son  
(2:1-4)*

133. G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 144.

134. Note the comments of Lane, 1:xc-xcviii; D. A. deSilva, review of *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*, by George H. Guthrie, *CBQ* 57 (1995), 395-397; A. H. Trotter, *Interpreting*, 92-94; D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 598; and B. C. Joslin, 'Can Hebrews Be Structured?' 115-122.

135. C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 20.

136. So rightly B. C. Joslin, 'Can Hebrews Be Structured?' 116. Note the further interaction of Joslin (119-122) with Westfall's critique of Guthrie's structure. See our comments in the relevant sections of the exegesis.

137. G. H. Guthrie, *Hebrews: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); note D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *Introduction*, 598.

138. Guthrie, 39-40. Instead of placing the exposition and exhortation in two parallel columns, as in his *Structure*, 144, Guthrie has put the exposition in plain text, the exhortation is italicized and indented, while the bold material constitutes an overlap between exposition and exhortation.

- ab. The Son, Superior for a Time, Became Positionally Lower than the Angels (2:5-9)
- B. The Son Lower than the Angels (i.e., among Humans) to Suffer for the 'Sons' (i.e., Heirs) (2:10-18)
  - Jesus, the Supreme Example of a Faithful Son (3:1-6)*
  - The Negative Example of Those Who Fell through Faithlessness (3:7-19)*
  - Transition (4:1-2)*
  - The Promise of Rest for Those Who Are Faithful (4:3-11)*
  - WARNING: Consider the Power of God's Word (4:12-13)*
- II. The Position of the Son, Our High Priest, in Relation to the Earthly Sacrificial System (4:14-10:25)

**Overlap: We Have a Sinless High Priest Who Has Gone into Heaven (4:14-16)**

- A. The Appointment of the Son as a Superior High Priest (5:1-10; 7:1-28)
  - 1. Introduction: The Son Taken from among Humans and Appointed according to the Order of Melchizedek (5:1-10)
    - The Present Problem with the Hearers (5:11-6:3)*
    - WARNING: The Danger of Falling Away from the Christian Faith (6:4-8)*
    - Mitigation: The Author's Confidence in and Desire for the Hearers (6:9-12)*
    - God's Promise Our Basis of Hope (6:13-20)*
  - 2. The Superiority of Melchizedek (7:1-10)
  - 3. The Superiority of Our Eternal, Melchizedekan High Priest (7:11-28)
- ab. We Have Such a High Priest Who Is a Minister in Heaven (8:1-2)
- B. The Superior Offering of the Appointed High Priest (8:3-10:18)
  - 1. Introduction: The More Excellent Ministry of the Heavenly High Priest (8:3-6)
  - 2. The Superiority of the New Covenant (8:7-13)
  - 3. The Superior New Covenant Offering (9:1-10:18)
    - Introduction: The Pattern of Old Covenant Worship: Place, With Blood, Effect (9:1-10)
    - a. Christ's Superior Blood (9:13-22)
    - b. A Sacrifice in Heaven (9:23-28)
    - c. An Eternal Sacrifice (10:1-18)

**Overlap: We Have a Great Priest Who Takes Us into Heaven (10:19-25)**

*WARNING: The Danger of Rejecting God's Truth and God's Son (10:26-31)*

*The Positive Example of the Hearers' Past and an Admonition to Endure to Receive the Promise (10:32-39)*

*The Positive Example of the Old Testament Faithful (11:1-40)*

*Reject Sin and Fix Your Eyes on Jesus, Supreme Example of Endurance (12:1-2)*

*Endure Discipline as Sons (12:3-17)*

*The Blessings of the New Covenant (12:18-24)*

*WARNING: Do Not Reject God's Word (12:25-29)*

*Practical Exhortations (13:1-19)*

*Benediction (13:20-21)*

**Conclusion (13:22-25)**

**2. Cynthia Long Westfall**

A more recent and full discourse analysis of Hebrews' structure is that of Cynthia Long Westfall.<sup>139</sup> Recognizing the lack of scholarly agreement on the major and minor divisions of the epistle as well as the development of its argument, Westfall also draws on the insights of linguistic studies. However, unlike Guthrie's approach, hers is based on a strand of discourse analysis that is 'a form of systemic-functional linguistics developed for Hellenistic Greek'<sup>140</sup> that examines the *function* and *use* of language (pragmatics) above the level of the sentence.

Westfall's formally based arrangement of Hebrews is organized around the structures of mood and voice, as expressed by performatives, that is, hortatory subjunctives. The two parallel units of three hortatory subjunctives in Hebrews 4:11-16 and 10:19-25 segment her discourse at the macro level. Her structure 'reflects the importance of hortatory subjunctives and carries the themes that are relevant to the listeners under pressure or facing a crisis':<sup>141</sup>

- I. 1:1-4:16 Consider Jesus as the apostle of our confession
  - 1:1-3:1 Let's hold on to the message that our apostle gave us
  - 3:1-4:13 Let's respond to Jesus' voice today and enter the rest

139. C. L. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*.

140. This is introduced into the field by S. E. Porter and J. T. Reed.

141. See the review of G. Gelardini, *RBL* 11 (2007), <http://www.bookreviews.org/bookdetail.asp?TitleId=5841>.

- 4:11-16 Thematic peak
- II. 4:11-10:25 Consider Jesus as the high priest of our confession
  - 4:11-6:3 Let's press on to maturity with new teaching about Jesus' priesthood
  - 6:1-7:3 The new teaching results in access to God
  - 7:4-10:25 Let's draw near to God
  - 10:19-25 Thematic peak
- III. 10:19-13:16 We are partners in Jesus' heavenly calling
  - 10:19-12:2 Let's run the race
  - 12:1-29 Let's serve God as priests in the heavenly Jerusalem
  - 12:28-13:16 Let's go to Jesus and offer sacrifices of love, good works, and sharing
  - 13:17-25 Draw strength from your relationships with your leaders and community

Although Westfall's discourse analysis focuses on the pragmatics of language, that is, its function and use, rather than on its structure, her threefold model (which is usually divided at 4:13) is consistent with what has frequently been proposed in Hebrews scholarship. Because her pragmatic approach has a different focus of interest, she is critical of symmetric proposals (especially that of Vanhoye). But symmetries have been recognized in Hebrews, at both a macro and a micro level, so to reject them as incorrect or ahistorical is inappropriate. Her discourse analysis is comprehensive, but 'her narrowly focused linguistic study is not entirely convincing'.<sup>142</sup>

### 3. *Our Structure*

The outline I have adopted in this commentary follows that of Guthrie, with minor variations in the divisions and some different headings. He has made a substantial contribution to our understanding of Hebrews' structure, and to date his treatment is the most satisfying approach. Guthrie's analysis ties issues of form and content closely together, and reflects the author's movement between exposition and exhortation. The major turning points at 4:14-16 and 10:19-25 are recognized, along with the main theological exposition found in chapters 5:1 to 10:18.<sup>143</sup>

142. Gelardini, *RBL* 11 (2007).

143. Note my discussions at the beginning of the exegetical sections.

## VII. EXPOSITION, EXHORTATION, AND PURPOSE

We have seen a close but complex interplay between exposition and exhortation running through Hebrews. Attridge, Guthrie, and others recognize that both genres, with their distinctive functions, together served the author's essential purpose as he prepared his homily/letter for his Christian friends. The exhortatory material is 'not a perfunctory afterthought to a dogmatic treatise', nor is it an intrusive digression, disrupting the flow of the exposition of Christ's high priesthood and unique sacrifice. On the other hand, neither is 'the doctrinal exposition an unimaginative repetition of well-worn truths to support an exhortation'.<sup>144</sup> The two genres serve the same ultimate goal.

The units of exposition develop step by step so that the listeners' knowledge of the Son of God and his place within God's saving plan is increased and enriched. The Son comes into sharp focus as our author explains Old Testament passages that show convincingly the Son's superiority to angels (1:5-14), the purpose of the incarnation (2:10-18), the superiority of his priesthood (5:1-7:28), and the superiority of his offering as high priest by which he inaugurated the new covenant (8:1-10:18).

Within the exhortatory units the aim of the discourse is effected by the repetition of key topics, not as in the unfolding argument of the exposition. The function of the hortatory material is to challenge the listeners to right action. By encouraging words, stern warnings, as well as positive and negative examples, the author hammers home repeatedly the importance of faithful endurance in order to reach the eternal rest in the heavenly city. In stark contrast, those who refuse to listen to the one who warns from heaven will face a fearful expectation of judgment.

In every instance where exhortation follows exposition, the hortatory utilizes material from the expository discussion (e.g., 1:5-14 and 2:1-4) in order to accomplish the purpose of Hebrews.<sup>145</sup> Two highly significant instances of this inseparable connection of exposition and exhortation are the author's high priest and Son of God Christologies. The high priest Christology 'issues seamlessly into the benefits his self-offering provides'.<sup>146</sup> These include purification (Heb. 1:3) and atonement for sins (2:17; 7:27; 8:12; 9:26, 28; 10:12, 17-18), sanctification (2:11; 10:10, 14, 22, 29; 13:12), the definitive cleansing of an unclean conscience (9:14; 10:22), merciful representation (2:16-18; 4:15-16; 9:24; 10:21) and intercession (7:25), freedom from the fear of death (2:14-15), a 'promised eternal inheritance' (6:17; 9:15), a new covenant (7:22; 8:6, 10-12; 10:9, 16-17; 13:20), perfection (10:14; 12:23), 'eternal redemption' (9:12, 15), and salvation (2:10; 5:9; 6:9; 7:25; 9:28). In relation to

144. Attridge, 21.

145. G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 126, 127, 140. In relation to 1:5-14 and 2:1-4, note also G. R. Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics: The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Example of Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 7-9.

146. S. D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation*, 20.

Son of God Christology the presentation of the Son's exaltation in 1:5 and 2:12-13 has the purpose of shaping the community's identity as the siblings of the Son. They are urged to respond to his bestowal of family membership (2:12-13) with confessions of his Sonship (4:14-16; 10:19-23; 13:15).<sup>147</sup>

Lexical elements, such as 'God', items used as designations for God's Son, terms (both verbs and nouns) related to 'the word of God' by which the hearers are continually confronted with God's spoken word, and pronominal references to the speaker, the listeners, or the community as a whole, indicate a semantic overlap between the expository and exhortatory elements. The purpose of the author's discourse is 'to exhort the hearers to endure in their pursuit of the promised reward, in obedience to the word of God, and especially on the basis of their new covenant relationship with the Son'.<sup>148</sup>

## VIII. HEBREWS IN ITS FIRST-CENTURY WORLD

The Letter to the Hebrews, like other New Testament documents, was written to the complex, pluralistic society of the first-century Mediterranean world. Students of the epistle have long sought to identify the cultural and intellectual milieu from which the ideas and themes within the discourse derive.

In general terms, the influence of Graeco-Roman culture on Hebrews is evident in its elegant language and elevated rhetoric (see above). Hebrews employs a range of metaphors that were drawn from Hellenistic culture. These include references to athletic contests, which were used as metaphors for the moral life (see Heb. 5:14; 12:1-3, 12). Athletic imagery was linked with that of learning (*paideia*), a natural connection since the term had to do with discipline in a physical sense and education in a cultural sense. The axiom *mathein/pathein* ('to learn is to suffer') is picked up with reference to Jesus at 5:8, while the imagery of learning and training are carefully interwoven in 5:11-14. Following the depiction of faith as running in a race after Jesus (12:1-2), the notion of a father's discipline (*paideia*) connects the elements of training and learning (12:7-12).

Honour and shame language, which served as a powerful motivator for action in Graeco-Roman culture, appears in Hebrews in relation to Jesus and the listeners. Jesus' death was shameful (12:2), although he despised the shame (12:2; 13:13; see 11:26). The hearers have also experienced shame and abuse from others (10:33), but they are urged to despise it as Jesus did

147. S. D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation*, 20.

148. G. H. Guthrie, *Structure*, 143; see 90-94. Note the instances of the οὖν ('therefore') *paraneticum*, a telltale device in which the exhortations are 'genetically linked to the "doctrine" on which they are based' (4:1, 11, 14, 16; 10:19, 35; 13:15); so S. D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation*, 19 and n. 3.

for the sake of a share in the 'glory and honour' to be given to them by God.<sup>149</sup> In addition, the wide-ranging use of 'perfection' language in Hebrews may also point to Hellenistic culture.<sup>150</sup>

However, many scholars over the past century have contended that the non-Christian influences on the author of Hebrews were not simply linguistic or terminological. They also extended to specific cultural values and helped to shape our author's understanding of the world. We shall survey three of these possible influences:

### **A. Philo, Alexandria, and Platonism**

Since Hebrews was written in an elegant Greek style, it was appropriate for a Greek-speaking audience. The author used the Greek version of the Old Testament (LXX) rather than the Hebrew Bible. Early studies showed that many of the Greek words and expressions in Hebrews appeared in Philo of Alexandria, and a comparison helped to clarify the New Testament usage. In the first half of the twentieth century the dominant proposal was that the meaning of Hebrews is elucidated when read against the background of Philo, Alexandria, and Platonism.<sup>151</sup> Comparisons between Hebrews and Philo showed many similarities in language and thought forms, not least the distinction between the temporal and eternal worlds.

But there is considerable doubt as to whether the author of Hebrews knew the writings of Philo. Further, after due allowance is made for the above-mentioned similarities, the differences between the two authors are quite marked. For some interpreters, they were 'so striking and fundamental, both in outlook and exegetical method, as to demonstrate that the two writers "belonged . . . to two entirely different schools of O.T. exegesis"'.<sup>152</sup> Philo and the author of Hebrews were both familiar with a Hellenistic Jewish milieu; their similarities can better be attributed to each author's use of the LXX and common Jewish traditions. Philo chose to develop certain themes Platonically, while the author of Hebrews, influenced by Jewish apocalyptic (deriving from the Old Testament) and primitive Christian tradition, chose to develop them eschatologically.<sup>153</sup>

149. Heb. 2:7, 9, 10; 3:3; 5:5; 9:5; 13:21. So Johnson, 16-17; note esp. D. A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995).

150. Heb. 2:10; 5:9, 14; 6:1; 7:19, 28; 8:5; 9:6, 9, 11; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:2, 23. See D. G. Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the 'Epistle to the Hebrews'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

151. C. Spicq set forth this position cogently in his two-volume commentary.

152. Lane, 1:cvii-cviii, citing R. Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 576-579. Note the further critique by L. D. Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 7-42.

153. Platonic philosophical terminology appears in three (or four) locations: 8:5; 9:23-24; 10:1; also 12:27-28. A number of scholars argue that the author's primary frame of refer-

## B. Gnosticism

Possible links between Hebrews and Gnosticism were suggested in the late nineteenth century and taken up positively with the publication of the Mandaean and Nag Hammadi writings in the twentieth century. Particularly influential was Ernst Käsemann's proposal that the conceptual background of Hebrews was pre-Christian Gnosticism.<sup>154</sup> The sharp metaphorical dualism between earth and heaven was the presupposition for the redeemer who was sent to save the souls of those with whom he had a common kinship. They too were of heavenly origin but had become enmeshed in the material world. Their souls needed to be delivered from hostile powers and taken back to their heavenly abode. According to Käsemann, behind Hebrews lay the Gnostic motif of a heavenly pilgrimage. Jesus and those he came to save were 'all of one' (Heb. 2:11-16). He identified with them by taking on flesh and blood. He overcame the power of the devil in order to deliver them and take them to their heavenly rest (4:1-10).

However, the Gnostic sources to which appeal was made postdate Hebrews, while there is virtually no first-century evidence for a Gnostic redeemer myth. Moreover, Hebrews does not envisage human souls returning to the heavenly world from which they had fallen. Rather, believers journey toward a destination to which they have never been, the heavenly Jerusalem (11:13-16). The similarities between Hebrews and Gnostic texts are better explained as deriving from a common Hellenistic Jewish heritage than Hebrews' dependence on Gnostic mythology.<sup>155</sup>

## C. Palestinian Jewish Writings

Another strand of scholarly research has traced aspects of Hebrews to traditions attested in Palestinian Jewish writings, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, targums, and rabbinic writings. Several factors have enhanced this appeal to Palestinian Jewish texts. First, connecting Hebrews with these Jewish writings would 'seem to help keep it in the mainstream'.<sup>156</sup> If Philo's philosophical cat-

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ence is metaphysical Platonism, e.g., J. W. Thompson, G. W. MacRae, E. Grässer, and W. Eisele. The majority, however, have claimed that in spite of this Platonic terminology 'a traditional Jewish linear/temporal eschatological viewpoint more decisively characterizes the author's thought world' (so S. D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation*, 5). These include F. F. Bruce, W. L. Lane, P. Ellingworth, and particularly C. K. Barrett and L. D. Hurst. Note our exegetical comments on 8:5; 10:1; 11:1, 10; 12:22; 13:13.

154. E. Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984). The original German edition was published in 1939.

155. Note the evaluation of the pre-Christian Gnostic view by L. D. Hurst, *Epistle*, 67-75. Käsemann's renewed emphasis on the notion that the people of God are a pilgrim people who are called to faithfulness as they journey to the heavenly city is a significant contribution to our understanding of Hebrews. See his *Jesus Means Freedom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970).

156. Koester, 61 (note his treatment on 61-63).

egories set him on a trajectory leading to Gnosticism, then the same could be true for Hebrews when interpreted in the light of these categories. Second, if Jesus' message was primarily eschatological then highlighting the eschatological elements in Hebrews and comparing it with the two-age eschatology of these Palestinian Jewish texts would anchor it in the mainstream of Christian tradition. Third, the interest in the Qumran community (as one group of Essenes), generated through the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, enabled scholars to compare Hebrews with the writings of this community.

Hebrews clearly includes apocalyptic elements. Our author believes that he and his community are living 'in these last days' (1:2), when God sent his Son to make atonement for sin by the sacrifice of himself 'at the culmination of the ages' (9:26). Hebrews anticipates the appearance of Christ 'a second time' (9:28) and the coming 'day' of judgment (10:25-31). Members of the community are to look for their inheritance in 'the world to come' (2:5; 6:5), after God shakes heaven and earth (12:26-27). The distinction between the present age and the age to come is found in various Second Temple Jewish writings (with adumbrations in the Old Testament), including rabbinic sources and the targums. It is claimed that a comparison of Hebrews with these Jewish texts allows the eschatological dimension of Hebrews to stand out more clearly.

The current scholarly debate is not about the presence but the function of apocalyptic elements in Hebrews. Some claim that the eschatological or horizontal axis of the book is dominant, with the Platonic or vertical axis playing a supporting role in the discourse. Others argue that the vertical, Platonic axis is dominant, with the eschatological elements serving in a minor role, especially in the exhortations (see above).

Turning to a comparison of Hebrews and the writings of the Qumran community,<sup>157</sup> earlier studies noted that the latter engaged in speculation about angels (Heb. 1-2), and looked for an Aaronic messiah (Heb. 5:1-10) and a prophet like Moses (see Heb. 1:1-2; 3:1-6), as well as a Davidic messiah. The Qumran community understood themselves to be like the people of God dwelling in the wilderness (see Heb. 3:7-4:10). Some scholars therefore proposed that Hebrews was written to former members of the Dead Sea community who had become Christians but who continued to hold on to their former teachings. There is little evidence, however, that Hebrews was seeking to counter these sectarian views of angels or an Aaronic messiah. The Qumran community understood itself as living in the last days of Old Testament expectation and interpreted Old Testament texts in line with this. They believed that they were a 'new covenant' community, but their interpretation of this motif was different from that of Hebrews. The discovery of the text, 11QMelchizedek, which mentions Melchizedek as a heav-

157. Note the history of the discussion and analysis in L. D. Hurst, *Epistle*, 43-66. Advocates who affirm that Qumran provides the conceptual background for Hebrews include Y. Yadin, G. W. Buchanan, and P. E. Hughes.

enly being, has not led scholars to think that Hebrews had any knowledge of these views evident in the Scrolls.<sup>158</sup>

So while there is a significant number of points of contact between the Scrolls and Hebrews, there are striking linguistic and conceptual differences between them. The former were written in Hebrew and Aramaic, and are Semitic in conception. Hebrews is written in elegant Greek and is Hellenistic Jewish in its conception. Hurst concluded: 'That many of the points adduced as parallel to Qumran are also parallel to Philo and other backgrounds makes it more likely that all the similarities are due to a common background — traditional exegesis of the OT'.<sup>159</sup>

To this Lane adds: 'Similarities because of traditional exegesis of the OT are insufficient to offset the striking differences between Qumran and Hebrews'.<sup>160</sup>

To conclude. From this brief survey we suggest that the elements from a non-Christian background that contribute to our understanding of Hebrews consist of elevated language and rhetoric from a Graeco-Roman culture, including athletic and educational imagery, as well as honour and shame language. Hebrews' wide-ranging use of 'perfection' language may also point to Hellenistic culture. Other influences that contribute to our grasp of Hebrews arise from the interpretation of the Old Testament in Greek, the traditions of Hellenistic Judaism (though not Philonic or Platonic), and apocalyptic Judaism. '[A]ll of these components could have been filtered through the mainstream of early Christianity to which the writer of Hebrews was exposed at the formative period in his experience as a Christian'.<sup>161</sup>

## IX. CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

Attempts to determine the influences on the Letter to the Hebrews have been associated with efforts to locate the discourse within the stream of early Christianity. Two main influences have been suggested: (a) the author of Hebrews drew his ideas from Paul's letters or his discourse is a development of Pauline theology; or (b) Hebrews is an outgrowth of Jewish Christianity as represented by the apostles.

### A. Pauline Christianity

As we have seen, the majority view is that Paul did not write Hebrews. But there are affinities with his letters, and the discourse should not be totally separated from the circle of Christians associated with Paul.

158. Lane, 1:cviii; note the summary of Koester, 62-63.

159. L. D. Hurst, *Epistle*, 66.

160. Lane, 1:cviii.

161. Lane, 1:cix-cx.

When we turn to the Christology of Hebrews we observe that it has many points in common with the teaching of the apostle to the Gentiles.<sup>162</sup> Jesus is proclaimed as the preexistent Son of God (Heb. 1:2, 3, 6; 1 Cor. 8:6; Phil. 2:5-6; Col. 1:15-17) who humbled himself to become man (Heb. 2:14-17; Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4-5; Phil. 2:7). He offered himself in obedience to God (Heb. 5:8; Rom. 5:19; Phil. 2:8) as a sacrifice (Heb. 9:28; 1 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2) by shedding his blood (Heb. 9:11-14; 10:19, 29; 12:24; 13:12, 20; Rom. 3:25; 5:9; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:27; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:20) in order to provide redemption (Heb. 9:12, 15; Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col. 1:14) and atonement for sin (Heb. 2:17; Rom. 3:25) once for all (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 26; 10:10; Rom. 6:9-10). By his death Christ overcame the devil and the powers (Heb. 2:14; Col. 2:15). He has been exalted on high (Heb. 1:1-14; Eph. 1:20-21; Phil. 2:9; Col. 2:10), has received a name above all others (Heb. 1:4; Phil. 2:9), and all will be made subject to him (Heb. 2:8; 1 Cor. 15:25-28; Phil. 2:10; 3:21). At present Jesus intercedes with God for his people (Heb. 7:25; 9:24; Rom. 8:34). Christ's work has abrogated or rendered ineffective the statutes of the law (Heb. 7:11-19; Gal. 3:23-29), and instituted the new covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6-13; 9:15; 2 Cor. 3:6). In both authors the Christian life is characterized by faith and obedience (Heb. 11; Rom. 4; Gal. 2:16-21).

Hebrews and Paul's letters alike use Habakkuk 2:4 when dealing with the issue of faith (Heb. 10:38; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11), both link Psalm 110:1 with Psalm 8 (Heb. 1:3, 13; 2:6-8; 1 Cor. 15:24-28) and quote Deuteronomy 32:35 when speaking of divine vengeance (Heb. 10:30; Rom. 12:19). Abraham is an exemplar who by faith inherits the eschatological promises (Heb. 6:13-20; 11:17-19; Rom. 4; Gal. 3:6-9), while the wilderness generation exemplifies unbelief and disobedience (Heb. 3:7-4:11; 1 Cor. 10:1-13). Faithful endurance in both Hebrews and Paul is likened to running a race (Heb. 12:1; 1 Cor. 9:24-27), levels of Christian instruction are compared to milk and solid food (Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 3:2), and the Graeco-Roman 'testament' (*diathēkē*) is used to interpret the biblical covenant.<sup>163</sup>

The epistolary ending of Hebrews has similarities to the letters of Paul, both formally and in relation their content. The epistle concludes with requests for prayer (Heb. 13:18-19; Rom. 15:30-32; Eph. 6:19; 1 Thess. 5:25; Philm. 22), a benediction and doxology (Heb. 13:20-21; Rom. 15:13; Phil. 4:19-20; 1 Thess. 5:23), personal notes, greetings, and a final benediction (Heb. 13:22-25; 1 Cor. 16:19-24; 2 Cor. 13:11-13; Eph. 6:21-24; Phil. 4:21-23) similar to those in the Pauline letters. Of particular importance is the mention of 'our brother Timothy', who is probably to be understood as Paul's co-worker (see on 13:23).

Although it has been argued that these similarities are to be explained on the grounds that the author of Hebrews drew his ideas from Paul, this is

162. See L. D. Hurst, *Epistle*, 107-124; and Koester, 54-55.

163. Heb. 9:15-17 (note the exegetical discussion); Gal. 3:15-17.

unlikely. There are no clear echoes of distinctly Pauline expressions in Hebrews, and there are differences in writing style and content that make this dependence difficult to prove. Apart from these differences with Paul, the affinities between Hebrews and other writings (e.g., 1 Peter) are not adequately explained on Hebrews' supposed dependence on Paul.

## B. Jewish Christianity

Over against Hebrews' supposed dependence on Paul, some scholars have identified it as an outgrowth of Jewish Christianity as represented by the apostles. So the priestly and sacrificial aspects of the law which are the focus of Hebrews would have been important for Jews centred in Jerusalem. According to Hebrews, Christ's death changed the law (7:11-19), but the author sounds a strong note of continuity in his epistle between the history of Israel and the early church (Heb. 11).<sup>164</sup>

More particularly, Hebrews has been associated with Stephen and the Hellenists. Hellenist Christians were associated with the Greek-speaking world that is reflected in Hebrews, while Stephen's speech in Acts 7 recounts the history of Israel in terms of obedience and disobedience, as does Hebrews. Other points of contact between Stephen's speech and Hebrews have been noted: Stephen focuses not on Moses' role as a lawgiver but as an example of faith in contrast to the unfaithfulness of the wilderness generation and Aaron (Acts 7:17-43; Heb. 3:1-19). Stephen's finding fault with the temple that Solomon built has been understood to mean that God cannot be confined to any earthly sanctuary (Acts 7:47-50; Heb. 9:25). God's promise is given central place in Stephen's speech and in Hebrews (Acts 7:6-7; Heb. 6:13-20; 9:15; 10:23; 11:9), as is the life of faith as a pilgrimage.<sup>165</sup> Both refer to the angelic mediation of the law (Acts 7:53; Heb. 2:2), the 'living' word of God (Acts 7:38; Heb. 4:12-13), 'rest' in the promised land (Acts 7:45, 49; Heb. 4:3), and the command in Exodus 25:40 about making everything according to the pattern shown to Moses (Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5). These similarities, along with some differences, do not suggest that 'Hebrews [is] an outgrowth of Hellenistic theology'; rather, it presupposes 'familiarity with common Christian teachings'.<sup>166</sup>

Hebrews has also been linked with 1 Peter, and the similarities between the two have been highlighted: both letters are exhortations that speak of God's 'living word' and focus on Christ's once-for-all death as a

<sup>164</sup> Koester, 57; note his discussion on 56-58.

<sup>165</sup> Abraham (Acts 7:2-5; Heb. 11:8-19), Joseph (Acts 7:9-10; Heb. 11:22), and Moses' generation moved about on earth (Acts 7:36-39; Heb. 3:7-4:13).

<sup>166</sup> Koester, 57, 58. Note the extended interaction by L. D. Hurst, *Epistle*, 89-106, with W. Manson's proposal regarding the relation of Stephen and the Hellenists to Hebrews (*The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Historical and Theological Reconsideration* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951], 25-46). See the recent development of this proposal by Lane, 1:cxliv-cl.

sinless victim at the 'end of the ages'. His sprinkled blood removes sin and sanctifies people, providing access to God. Similar terminology is used of Jesus' followers who have been called and enlightened. They belong to the household of God, yet live as aliens and sojourners on earth. Christians imitate Christ by faithful obedience and offer spiritual sacrifices. They look forward to an eternal inheritance and wait for the revealing of Christ, the shepherd of Christians, who is seated at God's right hand, above the angels. Further, there are formal similarities between the epistolary conclusions of Hebrews and 1 Peter. But once again there are differences.<sup>167</sup> Their similarities may stem from a common reliance on Christian tradition, the Old Testament, and Greek idioms.<sup>168</sup> Direct dependence of one letter on the other is unlikely.

To conclude. Hebrews is not isolated from the rest of the New Testament. It has affinities with a number of Christian writings, including Paul's letters, Stephen's speech in Acts, and 1 Peter. The 'word of exhortation' presupposes common Christian teachings, such as the identification of Jesus as Lord (2:3; 7:14), Christ (3:6, 14), and Son of God (1:2, etc.), and his obedience to God as a sacrifice (9:28) to provide redemption (9:12, 15) and atonement for sin (2:17). Features that are significant elsewhere in the New Testament include Christ's death, which overcame the devil (2:14) and abrogated the statutes of the law (7:11-19), his institution of the new covenant (7:22; 8:6-13; 9:15), his exaltation on high (1:1-14) and present intercession for his people (7:25), his future appearing to bring salvation for those who eagerly await him (9:28), and God's final subjection of all things to him (2:8). Hebrews speaks of repentance and faith, baptism and the laying on of hands, resurrection and judgment (6:1-2). The Christian life is characterized by obedience and faithful endurance to the end of the race, focussing one's attention on Christ (12:1-2). These affinities show that Hebrews is located within the mainstream of early Christian tradition. At the same time, the different emphases and distinctives do not allow us to think that Hebrews is directly dependent on Paul's letters or on 1 Peter.

167. Koester, 58, points out that Hebrews does not use Peter's new birth language or employ a household code, while 1 Peter employs priestly imagery for believers, not for Jesus as Hebrews does. Similar ideas are scattered throughout both texts but linked together in different ways.

168. So L. D. Hurst, *Epistle*, 125-130; Weiss, 88-89.