

THE STRUCTURE OF HEBREWS

A Fresh Look

On the Occasion of a Recent Commentary

James Swetnam

The publication of Harold W. Attridge's commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Hermeneia series is a major event in New Testament scholarship and in the study of the epistle. The meticulous attention given to textual matters, the impressive control of the secondary literature, the expertise in the relevant non-biblical material, the crisp clear style - all of these qualities and more indicate that a classic commentary on Hebrews has arrived, fully on a par with Spicq and Michel and Moffatt. In the future, anyone writing on any aspect of Hebrews will have to consult Attridge. It is as simple and impressive as that.¹

This praise is not meant to indicate complete agreement with all the opinions which Attridge ventures, of course. No one who has worked extensively on the epistle could be expected to concur with all the positions which he takes. The epistle itself is simply too complex, study of it is simply not far enough along, and Attridge is simply too honest in facing problems. (He is not chary about opinions, nor is he ambiguous in giving them, and this is one of the strengths of the work.) But the reviewer must confess to a major disappointment after working through the commentary, a disappointment which Attridge's own remarks helped create: disappointment in the structure which he has adopted.²

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- 1 Harold W. ATTRIDGE, *The Epistle to the Hebrews. A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Edited by Helmut Koester (Hermeneia, Fortress Press; Philadelphia 1989). Not to be overlooked is the physical presentation. The work is a typographical tour de force.
 - 2 *Ibid.*, 19. A key difficulty is that the epistle seems fragmented into so many parts that one has to have recourse to an outline to know just where one is. Form is obscuring content, not enhancing it.

In this structure the epistle comes through as being ill-focused and its author not clear about what he was driving at. There is no a priori reason why fuzziness in exposition and lack of clarity in paraenesis should not mark the epistle. But the evident vigor of expression and skill in using Greek shown by the author of Hebrews makes fuzziness unlikely. What then is the author of Hebrews really up to? What is he saying? What does he expect his audience to do? Attridge's outline leaves these questions hanging in the air, as have earlier attempts to outline the epistle.³ In venturing this opinion the reviewer is giving a vote of no-confidence in himself as much as in Attridge, of course. It is simply that the excellence of Attridge's commentary in the areas noted above and others as well underlines how much needs to be done still in getting the epistle's thought into focus.

Such is the background for the present attempt to look again at the outline of Hebrews. What will be offered here in the context of Attridge's commentary (pro and con) will be a radically new look at what the epistle has to say, but a new look which incorporates features of past attempts. More attention will be paid to content and less to form so that the suppositions underlying the various parts of the outline can be allowed to generate perspectives from which to view the epistle as a whole. Along the way new looks will be directed to old cruces.

All of this, of course, will be presented as an hypothesis.

Hebrews 3,1-6: A Key Passage for Understanding Hebrews 1,1 - 3,6

Attridge's outline of the epistle has 3,1-6 facing forward: it serves as an introduction to the section 3,1 - 4,13, which he labels "A homily on faith".⁴ But once this interpretation is reversed and 3,1-6 is made to look backward to what precedes, a whole series of perspectives opens up which enables the epistle as a whole to be focussed more clearly.

It would seem more appropriate to view 3,1-6 as a paraenesis based on what precedes: 2,5-18. The vocabulary offers no difficulty in this regard: the linking word *hoten*, the phrase *adelphoi hagioi* (the first time the author speaks directly to the addressees through use of the vocative), and the use of the imperative *katanoēsate*, all combine to indicate a change in genre from the exposition which

3 This includes the attempts of the reviewer to come to grips with these questions: James SWETNAM, "Form and Content in Hebrews 1 - 6", *Bib* 53 (1972) 368-385; idem, "Form and Content in Hebrews 7 - 13", *Bib* 55 (1974) 333-348. The present review article will not attempt to keep track of the reviewer's past views which he hereby renounces, or his past views which he hereby reaffirms.

4 ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 19. He takes the section 3,1 - 5,10 as forming the second part of the epistle dedicated to "Christ faithful and merciful".

has preceded in 2,5-18. More important still, taking 3,1-6 as a piece of paraenesis based on what precedes shows how much importance the author attaches to the theme of faith which he began to develop in the previous section⁵: it is Jesus faithful whom the "holy brothers" are being urged to consider.

Once 3,1-6 is viewed as paraenesis following on 2,5-18, the first two chapters of the epistle come into focus: 1,1-4: exordium; 1,5-14: exposition; 2,1-4: paraenesis based on the preceding exposition; 2,5-18: exposition; 3,1-6: paraenesis based on the preceding exposition.

The exordium indicates the pre-existence and earthly existence of the Son. In this juxtaposition the author readies the road in which the glorified Christ and the earthly Christ will be placed in creative counterpoint to convey the epistle's central message.⁶

After the exordium comes a miniature treatise in Christology (1,5 - 3,6, divided as indicated above) based on Ps 110,1 and Ps 8,5-7 united and interpreted according to the exegetical principles of *gezera shawa*. That is to say, the text of Ps 110 and the text of Ps 8 are used for mutual illumination because of the fact that the same phrase is found in each: *hypopodion tōn podōn* from Ps 110 at Heb 1,13 and *hypokatō tōn podōn autou* from Ps 8 at Heb 2,8.⁷ This common phrase is the key structural element in 1,5 - 3,6, but there are other elements as well (symmetry, repetition of thematic words, announcements).

The explicit invocation of a "name" by the author at 1,4 is another important structural indication, and one involving content. The name is "son",⁸ and it

5 A point forcibly, but incompletely, made by ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 91.

6 Cf. ATTRIDGE's perceptive comments at the end of his discussion of 1,2: "In the juxtaposition of the protological and eschatological perspectives a tension begins to emerge that will continue through the exordium and the following scriptural catena. Christ was made heir of that which he, as God's agent, created".

7 ATTRIDGE (p. 50, n. 17 - read "Heb 1:13" for "Heb 1:3") inexplicably refuses to recognize the use of *gezera shawa* here in Heb 1 - 2 even though he uses it, as he should, in Heb 4 and Heb 7 (cf. pp. 128-130 and 187). As used in Heb 1 - 2 *gezera shawa* is one of the most important indications of structure in the entire epistle because it introduces the key concepts of the heavenly and earthly Christ in terms of Scripture texts which are mutually illuminatory.

8 ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 47.

constitutes the underlying basis for unity in the exposition at 1,5-14. Crucial is the need to note how the word "son" is being used: in the semitic sense of an indication of similitude of some kind.⁹ In 1,5-14 the son is granted at his resurrection¹⁰ a similitude in glory with God. The language of "clothing" so marked in the section,¹¹ together with the underlying supposition involving "name" in the context of the resurrection, indicate that the author is saying that the risen body of Jesus has been brought to a state of perfection corresponding to his divine status.¹² The use of angels as a point of reference to indicate the son's superiority would seem to be a way of conveying the absolute nature of this status.¹³

Interpretation of 3,1-6 as paraenesis depending upon 2,5-18 opens the way to a more penetrating exegesis of the latter passage provided the nature of *gezera shawa* is kept in mind. For given the *gezera shawa*, the exposition at 2,5-18 should somehow balance the exposition at 1,4-14 while being distinct from it. Once the mention of Moses, of Christ, and of the participation of the Christians in the son's "house" is added to the data of 2,5-18, the Christological pattern of 2,10-18 becomes reasonably clear: it is the "seed of Abraham" as illustrated in Gal 3,15-29.¹⁴

On the assumption (supported independently from other indications in the text) that 3,1-6 is meant to refer back as paraenesis to 2,5-18 as exposition, Gal 3,15-29 offers several clues helpful for interpretation:

- 1) use of the unqualified numeral *heis* at 3,16 to refer to Abraham's seed;
- 2) oblique reference to the deficiency of the Mosaic Law in relation to the "oneness" of the Christian disposition at 3,19-20;
- 3) stress on the unity of all Christians in Christ at 3,27-28;
- 4) use of the name "Christ" to refer to Abraham's seed at 3,16;

9 For examples in the New Testament cf. Luke 20,34.36 (the latter with regard to resurrection) and John 8,39 (with regard to Abraham, a meaning important for Heb 2,5-18).

10 On the relevance of the resurrection cf. J. SWETNAM, *Jesus and Isaac: A Study of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Light of the Aqedah* (AnBib 94; Rome 1981) 142-145 and idem, "Christology and the Eucharist in the Epistle to the Hebrews", *Bib* 70 (1989) 78.

11 Cf. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 61.

12 Cf. SWETNAM, "Eucharist", 78.

13 Cf. SWETNAM, *Jesus and Isaac*, 149-150.

14 For a discussion of the possible Christological pattern underlying Heb 2,10-18 cf. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 79-82. Gal 3,15-29 is not among the possibilities listed.

- 5) explicit mention of the seed of Abraham at 3,16.29 (with allusion at 3,19);
- 6) overriding importance of the context of faith at 3,22-25.

Supposing that Heb 2,10 - 3,6 is related to Gal 3,15-29 either by way of cause or effect or parallel dependence on a common source helps show that the Hebrews passage is centred on what it explicitly mentions at 2,16 - the seed of Abraham. That the author of Hebrews dedicates half of his Christological treatise to Christ as seed of Abraham should not be viewed a priori as being implausible, for even a surface reading shows that Abraham and the promises made to Abraham figure elsewhere in the epistle (cf. 6,13-15; 11,8-10.17-19).

The points clarified by supposing a relation between Heb 2,10-18 and Gal 3,15-29 are as follows:

- 1) Galatians helps explain not only why the phrase *eks henos* of Heb 2,11 can refer to Christ as seed of Abraham but why the author of Hebrews felt no need to explain what to modern interpreters is a conundrum: it was probably already familiar language for the addressees.¹⁵

- 2) Whatever the precise exegesis of the problem passage at Gal 3,19-20, it alludes to the inferiority of the Mosaic Law with regard to the Christian dispensation, and this is the same message conveyed at Heb 3,1-6.

- 3) The unity of Jesus the Christ with all Christians is a theme of the entire passage of Heb 2,5 - 3,6, but it comes to a climax at 3,6 with the statement that Christians constitute Christ's "house", i.e., dynasty.

- 4) The name "Christ" is used for the first time in Hebrews at 3,6. Just why it should appear here is explained by the occurrence of "Christ" at Gal 3,16 as the identification of Abraham's seed.

- 5) The mention of "Abraham's seed" at Heb 2,16 becomes more plausible as a reason for the author's way of speaking of humans in contrast to angels if it is presumed that he is speaking throughout the passage of the seed.

- 6) Faith is a key motif in Heb 2,5 - 3,6.¹⁶

The importance of faith-trust in 2,5 - 3,6 is the explanation of why the entire

15 Cf. ATTRIDGE's remark: "...the ambiguity [sc., of the phrase *eks henos*] that has occasioned so much controversy needs to be recognized" (p.89). If the ambiguity needs to be recognized it needs also to be explained.

16 Cf. Heb 2,13.17 and 3,2.5-6. On the importance of faith in the epistle, beginning with the text at 2,11, cf. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 91.

The importance of faith-trust in 2,5 - 3,6 is the explanation of why the entire section is to be taken as the second half of the *gezera shawa* construction beginning at 1,5: just as the risen Jesus is "son" because he has become like God in the glory of his exaltation, so the earthly Jesus is "son" because he was like Abraham in his faith-trust in God. The laws of interpretation of *gezera shawa* suggest this exegesis and the stress on Abraham's faith (Heb 11,8-10.17.19) and Jesus' faith (2,13.17; 3,2.5-6) in the context of a passage discussing Abraham's seed is consistent with such a view. What makes it so tentative in Hebrews is the ambiguity attendant on Heb 2,5-9 and the exegesis which is given there of Ps 8,5-7. A Jewish midrash on the Psalms has the "man" *anthrōpos* of 8,5 referring to Abraham, and the "son of man" *huios anthrōpou* referring to Isaac.¹⁷ Such an exegesis would be appropriate for Hebrews, but it is not at all certain that the Jewish midrash of Ps 8 was current when Hebrews was written, or if it was, that the author of Hebrews was aware of it. Uncertainties surrounding research on the "son of man" in the New Testament preclude help from that quarter for illumining Hebrews, at least at the present time.¹⁸ But from the evidence in Hebrews itself (context of the *gezera shawa*, discussion of the faith of Jesus in the light of Abraham's seed) there are grounds for constructing a working hypothesis that in Heb 2,5 - 3,6 the discussion is about Jesus as "son" of Abraham.¹⁹

The implications of the above interpretation for Hebrews are considerable. In his discussion of Christology, at the very beginning of his presentation of who Christ is, the author of Hebrews opts for two meanings of the word "son":

- 1) the risen Jesus, who has been transformed by an exaltation which makes him superior to the angels and which is a participation in the glory of God;
- 2) the earthly Jesus, subject to suffering and death, who is like Abraham in faith and trust.²⁰

17 Cf. SWETNAM, *Jesus and Isaac*, 160-161.

18 Attridge (*Hebrews*, 73-75) valiantly attempts a synthesis of a recent research on the phrase "son of man". If New Testament research on the phrase cannot illumine Heb 2,5-10, at least at the present time, perhaps research on Hebrews can illumine discussion on the phrase in the New Testament, at least by way of hypothesis. It seems worth investigating if when the gospels speak of "son of man" they speak of Jesus as Abraham's seed, with all that that implies as regards faith, inheritance, sacrifice, resurrection, etc.,

19 Thus there would seem to be reason for distinguishing "man" and "son of man" in the exegesis of the author of Hebrews, i.e., there is a type of midrashic exegesis at work which does not rely on classic Hebrew parallelism indicating synonymity. Contra: ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 75, n. 62.

20 Cf. SWETNAM, "Eucharist", 78-88, for a discussion of multiple meanings of words in Hebrews.

Faith-trust is a key theme of Heb 2,5-3,6, but more than faith-trust is being discussed in this section. Apart from the problematic exegesis of Ps 8 at 2,5-9²¹ the section would seem to be divided into three parts: 10-12; 13a; 13b-18. The structure is dictated by the three citations at 2,12-13 which from their length and placement are meant as being parallel in some way. The citations can be seen to have distinctive functions in the context of Jesus as seed of Abraham. Vv. 10-12 are summed up by the citation "I shall announce your name to my brothers, in the midst of the assembly I shall sing your praise". V. 13a is a citation which is considered by the author as being so clear from the context that it needs no explanation. Vv. 13b-18 are summed up by the citation "Behold, I and the children whom God has given me".

The central citation indicates the central concern of the author. Jesus as "son" of Abraham has placed his trust in God. The preceding citation is prepared for by vv. 10-11. Jesus is leading Christians to glory and is the agent of their sanctification while remaining their brother in faith-trust towards Abraham their father. The citation makes community the point of the passage: *God's promise to Abraham (cf. Heb 11,8-10) of a place of inheritance is being fulfilled in Jesus and the community which he has established under God.* The Christians are not yet definitively in the land of rest which is their ultimate goal, but the Christian community is the earthly equivalent of this definitive rest. Hence the crucial importance of not deserting it.²² The citation at v. 13b is explained by the death Jesus underwent which was made possible by the blood and flesh he assumed in common with the seed of Abraham. The death resulted in his becoming a merciful and faithful high priest able to help those who are being tried just as he was tried. *God's promise to Abraham (cf. Heb 11,17-19) of descendants is being fulfilled in Jesus by means of the "children" which God has given him through his death.* Just as the trial connected with the "death" of Isaac resulted in the reality of spiritual (and physical) descendants for Abraham, so the sacrificial death of Jesus has resulted in the reality of spiritual descendants of Jesus.²³

21 Heb 2,9 gives a hint about a double level in Christ's priesthood, but Attridge, unfortunately, fails to rise to the challenge (cf. his lame resort to the gloss to explain away the difficulty in the clause *Hopōs geusetai thanatou, Hebrews, 76-77.*

22 Cf. Heb 10,25 and ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 290-291. Cf. also Heb 3,14 and 3,3. In the latter text Attridge fails to see the allusion to the "house" constructed by Jesus (p.110, especially n. 69) and thus misses an important reference to the effects of Jesus' covenant. Not surprisingly, he correspondingly fails to note the relevance of Heb 3,5 for Heb 9,19-20 and the covenant theme. Cf. SWETNAM, "Eucharist", 85, and ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 111.

23 The author of Hebrews is primarily interested in the "spiritual" descendants of Abraham, i.e., those who in imitation of Abraham believe in the promises of land and of descendants which were made by God to him.

The author of Hebrews uses the same technique at 10,26-39 for dividing paraenesis as he does at 2,10-18 for dividing exposition. The first part of 10,30 (*emoi ekdikēsis egō antapodōsō*) refers to the negative section which precedes (10,26-29), and the second part of 10,30 (*krinai kyrios ton laon autou*) refers to the positive section which follows (10,31-39). Divided this way the citation *krinei kyrios ton laon autou* retains its positive meaning which it has in its original context in Deuteronomy (32,26) and in the Psalms (135[134],14), and the phrase "to fall into the hands of the living God" at 10,31 can have the positive meaning it usually has elsewhere. The only apparent problem is connected with the word *phoberos* in 10,31: it seems to be negative (cf. 10,27). But Attridge supplies the solution by translating the word neutrally as "awesome". This still does not prevent him from interpreting *krinei kyrios ton laon autou* negatively, despite his obvious misgivings (cf. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 295-296).

In Heb 2,10-18 the promises made to Abraham are reworked in the context of the earthly life of Jesus. It is through the Christian community that the promise of land is destined to be fulfilled; it is through the death of Jesus that the promise of descendants is destined to be fulfilled. This treatment in vv. 10-18 suggests that for the author of Hebrews the concept of Jesus' relation to Abraham has developed beyond the faith-trust which is the basis for the predication of "sonship". Jesus is taking charge of the two promises made to Abraham, land and seed, and is bringing them to fulfillment not only in the context of the faith-trust which characterized the life of Abraham, but also in the context of the trials which characterized the life of Abraham. Jesus is "son" of Abraham not just because he believed and trusted as Abraham believed and trusted; he is "son" of Abraham because he brings many sons of Abraham to glory through "sufferings" (2,10) and because in these sufferings he was "tried" (2,18).²⁴ Jesus moves subtly but unmistakably from "brother" of Abraham's spiritual children in 2,10-12 to one for whom these brothers are "children" (*paidia*) in 2,13b-18. He thus takes over the function of Abraham as a source of faith and inspiration. In a word: he is the "leader" (*archēgos*) of salvation (2,10).

The three key functions of Jesus with regard to Abraham are brought out in the reflective paraenesis at 3,1-6. Besides the stress on Jesus' faith at 3,2 (*pistos*), he is called *apostolos* and *archiereus* (3,1). The word *apostolos* refers to Jesus' comportment in 2,10-12, where he announces God's name to his brothers.²⁵ This name of God would seem to be "father", corresponding to the

24 The author of Hebrews seems to be trying to justify this broadening of the relevance of Abraham for Jesus when he uses the word *prepō* in 2,10, linking it to the spiritual seed of Abraham in 2,11 by *gar*.

25 Noted by ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 107.

name "son" assigned to Christ in the previous exposition.²⁶ (According to the rules of *gezera shawa* such reliance on the other half of the scriptural unit in the pair - here, 1,5 - 2,4 - is perfectly in order.) The word *archiereus* refers to Jesus' comportment implied in 2,13b-18, where his death in the context of a test serves to liberate his children from the fear of death. The context suggests the Aqedah, where Abraham offers Isaac in the test which God has called him to.²⁷ In these verses the author is indicating that Jesus is assuming Abraham's role as a source of faith and trust for those destined to be liberated from the fear of death.²⁸

Heb 2,5-18 is not the only text illumined by looking on 3,1-6 as paraenesis following what precedes.²⁹ The parallel paraenesis at 2,1-4 also becomes clearer. For 3,1-6 alludes to the contrasting roles of Christ (i.e., Messiah) and Moses as regards God's "house", i.e., Israel. Christ is superior to Moses in glory because he founded a house and as son is "over" it³⁰, whereas Moses remains a servant "within" the house and although faithful, functions as a subordinate, mainly as a witness to "those things which were to be spoken" (*ta lalethēsomena*). The allusion is to Heb 9,19-20 where Moses inaugurates the Mosaic covenant in language which alludes to the Christian eucharist.³¹ The perspectives generated by the parallelism between 2,1-4 and 3,1-6 now clarify the "salvation" (*sdōtēria*) which began to be spoken by "the Lord" in the former text: the allusion there is also to the eucharist. And the central role which the eucharist thus has in the first paraenesis of the epistle, balanced as it is by renewed exhortation at 3,1-6, indicates that is a matter of central concern for the author with regard to what he wants the addressees to do. Hence it is of central concern for his purpose in writing his epistle.

26 The use of *apostolos* in Heb 3,1 as explained in the text above should be compared with the language of Jesus in John 8,42 in the context of Jesus' dispute with the Jews about the meaning of "sonship" with regard to Abraham. Cf. also John 17,1-8, where the themes of "Father", "son", "glory", "eternal life", "name", "believe", and "sent" cluster together. Cf. also Rom 8,15-16, and Gal 4,6.

27 The reviewer suggested as much in his book *Jesus and Isaac*, 176-177. The outline of the epistle presented in this review considerably strengthens the suggestion. The Aqedah, with its accompanying promise of seed, is at the heart of Hebrews. Contra: ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, pp. 94-95, n. 179.

28 To the point ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 95, nn. 189 and 190.

29 The use of the word *klēsis* in 3,1 should be noted with relevance to what has precedes. The use of words based on this root seem to be associated with Abraham and his seed. Cf. Heb 11,18 and the citation from Genesis which seems to be the origin and the use in Hebrews, and 11,8. Cf. also 9,15, and the sacerdotal dimension added by the use of *kaleō* at 5,4. The use of such terminology in Hebrews with regard to Jesus, Abraham and the addressees illustrates the importance of the idea of "sharing", *metochos*, at 3,1 (cf. 3,14).

30 The mention of "son" in the context of "house" and the contrast with Moses as "servant" would seem to constitute an allusion to Christ as "heir". In the ancient Near East "son" implied legitimacy and hence the right to inherit.

31 Cf. SWEINAM, "Eucharist", 86.

As the author of Hebrews arrives at 3,7 he has already managed to convey a considerable amount of information to the addressees. In the present article Heb 3,1-6 has played a key role in enabling the reviewer to get the entire first part of the epistle into clearer focus. But of course the author of the epistle was relying on other factors to enable the addressees to focus clearly on what he wanted to say: the familiarity they had with the scriptures and the knowledge they had of some basic elements of the Christian faith (cf. Heb 6,1). What he presupposes with regard to what he writes and what he thinks he can achieve by writing are important for an understanding of who that audience is.³²

Hebrews 4,12-13: Jesus as Logos and Hebrews 3,7 - 4,16

With 3,7 a new section of the epistle begins. In 1,1 - 3,6 the author of the epistle has relied heavily on citations from the scriptures to convey his exposition. His paraenetical sections have not cited the scriptures, but have relied on their content. With the citation of Ps 95,7-11 at 3,7b-11 a more nuanced use of the scriptures is evident: not only are they used as an essential element in the exposition, they are regarded reflexively as somehow needing fulfillment. The Israelites who wandered in the desert were not allowed to enter into the land promised them. But the promise of the land remains (4,1) and the psalm's warning not to fail of entrance through unbelief still has relevance (3,12-13). The "rest" promised the Israelites becomes transformed with the aid of a *gezera shawa* into eternal life (4,3-4).³³ The need for fulfillment is made clear at 4,8-11: if Joshua had really given Israel rest, the psalm could not be considered as speaking of another "day" (i.e., for entering).³⁴ The text of scriptures, in other words, is looking for fulfillment.

This is the context which prepares the way for the much-discussed text at 4,12-13 which speaks of the *logos tou theou* as "living" and "sharper" than a two-edged *machaira*. Here is one of the classic cruces of the epistle, not just as regards the meaning of *logos*, but also as regards the imagery. The author's technique used in dividing 2,10-18 gives a hint for the solution to the problem of imagery: v. 12 speaks of a *machaira* which is a knife of circumcision and sums

32 On the suggestive concept of the audience for a text as the creation of the text cf. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 9, n. 66.

33 Well handled by ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 128-130.

34 *Ibid.*, 130.

up what went before; v. 13 speaks (implicitly) of a *machaira* which is a knife of sacrifice and introduces what is to come.

Heb 4,12 carries on from what precedes. The context is of entrance into the promised land. Joshua and his rite of circumcision was inadequate to usher Israel into the land. What is needed is an effective circumcision, a circumcision of the heart, and this is described in v. 12, with the word *machaira* being taken from the account of Joshua's circumcizing the Israelites on their entrance into the promised land (Josh 5,3). The emphasis is on the interior efficacy of the action which culminates with the word "heart" (*kardia*) and which thus picks up the key word of the previous context which attributes the failure of the desert generation of Israelites to hardness of heart (Heb 3,8.10.12; 4,7).³⁵ The circumcision of the heart effected by the *logos* touches the interior and is thus efficacious as regards entrance, provided it is received with obedience/faith.³⁶

Heb 4,13 introduces what is to come and concerns the other promise made to Abraham, which in 2,13b-18 was connected with sacrifice. Heb 4,13 speaks (implicitly) of *machaira* in the sense of knife of sacrifice, taking up the use of the word in this sense at Gen 22,6.10. The word *trachēlizomai* seems to have been used for two reasons: 1) it indicates the physical exposure of the neck of a sacrificial victim and 2) it implies the turmoil of soul of such a victim in the face of imminent death.³⁷ Thus it links up with Heb 2,13b-18, where Jesus' death is portrayed as freeing his children from the fear of death in the context of his priestly, i.e., sacrificial, role. Thus Heb 4,14 can begin. "Having, therefore (*oun*), a great high priest..."³⁸

In the light of the analysis of the imagery of Heb 4,12-13 the role of the *logos* - and hence, its identity - becomes reasonably clear. The *logos* fulfills the scriptures but itself stands outside the scriptures.

As the agent of the circumcision the *logos* achieves what Joshua did not; bring to fulfillment the promise of the land made to Abraham. It is Christ who makes entrance possible. Only by remaining united to him by faith/obedience can the Christians remain in community and thus enter definitively into their

35 *Ibid.*, p. 136 and n. 45.

36 *Ibid.*, p.132 and n. 120

37 *Ibid.*, p. 136, n. 55. This is an example of the advantages deriving from Attridge's command of the contemporary non-biblical sources.

38 The use of two tightly related clauses to refer first to what precedes (4,12) and then to what follows (4,13) has been pointed out to exist at 2,12-13 and 10,30. At 4,12-13 images are juxtaposed and not texts.

heavenly rest. Union with Christ through faith/ obedience, not some kind of union with the scriptures, is the key to this entrance (cf. Heb 3,6.12.14; 4,6.11; 5,9; 11,31).³⁹ This means union with the living God as well (Heb 3,12), but God is speaking and acting through his son (Heb 1,2; 2,10; 3,4). The failure of the desert generation to enter the land was caused by their failure to be united to the Christians, i.e., to Christ (4,2). The fulfillment of the heroes of old was effected not without the Christians, i.e. Christ (11,40). Christ is the living *logos* of Heb 4,12, not the scriptures, for he is the cause of entry, not the scriptures.

The scriptures are needed to understand the role of Christ as *logos*, however. At 2,2 the Law is termed a *logos* because it is viewed as part of God's acts of speaking mentioned in 1,1-2.⁴⁰ Christ as *logos* stands in the same line of God's acts of speaking as the Law (i.e. the scriptures - cf. the use of *logos* at 4,2), except that he brings the Law, i.e., the scriptures, to definitive fulfillment and thus replaces them. With Christ, God's speaking finally attains its goal, as eventually it had to.

What Christ does with regard to Joshua and the scriptures he also does with regard to Isaac and the scriptures. The definitive entrance into the land and hence the definitive fulfillment of the first promise made to Abraham is achieved only by Christ as *logos* and the definitive circumcision which he brings. The definitive fulfillment of the second promise made to Abraham - of progeny - is achieved only by Christ as *logos* and the definitive sacrifice which he brings. With 4,14 the author of Hebrews begins the discussion of that sacrifice which is to occupy him for the rest of the epistle. The promise of the land is important, but its fulfillment depends on the fulfillment of the promise of progeny, and this involves sacrifice which in turn involves covenant. For the discussion of all this the scriptures are essential, but the *logos* which fulfills them stands outside them: it is Christ who is the definitive revelation of God.⁴¹

A standard objection against taking the two instances of *autos* at Heb 4,13 as referring to the *logos* and not to God is that there is no indication in the epistle of the judgemental role of the son.⁴² But this is to take too lightly the reference to Christ as "heir of all things" in 2,2. As heir the son is responsible to God, just as he is responsible as agent of creation. This allusion to the son's authority is repeated at 3,1-6, where he is portrayed as being "over" the house which he

39 Also relevant is Heb 4,2. ATTRIDGE (*Hebrews*, 125-126) is at his best in discussing this text.

40 ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews* 64, n. 26.

41 This use of the term *logos* to refer to the son as the one who replaces the Law as the centre of God's communication with humans seems to parallel the Johannine use of *logos* in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel.

42 Attridge makes this standard objection his own at p. 136. But God acts through the Son in judging enemies just as he acts through the Son in rewarding friends.

fashioned. And this leads back to the parallel paraenesis at 2,1-4, where the addressees are warned not to neglect a salvation which was begun by the Lord himself. A day of reckoning is still to come (cf. Heb 10,25; 9,28).

Following on the exposition of 3,7 - 4,13 the author of Hebrews has a brief paraenesis which sums up his advice to the addressees at this point: hold on to belief in Jesus as son of God (i.e., Heb 1,5 - 2,4) and high priest (i.e., Heb 2,5 - 3,6) who has been tried in all things except sin; he is with God in a position of authority ("the throne of grace", 4,15). With this juxtaposition of the glorified and the earthly Christ placed in the framework of the *logos* who is the definitive fulfillment of God's speaking, the author of Hebrews is ready to prepare for his central exposition and its paraenesis.⁴³

Hebrews 5,1 - 6,20: The Earthly Priesthood of Christ

With 5,1 the author of Hebrews takes up his principal task: explanation of how the second promise made to Abraham, of progeny, is fulfilled in Christ. This entails discussion of Christ's priesthood, his sacrifice, and his descendants.

In 5,1-10 the high priesthood of Christ is obviously being presented in the context of the high priesthood of Aaron. But the passage will not be fully understood unless it is placed in the context of the high priesthood of Christ with regard to the Akedah, a perspective generated by Heb 2,13b-18 and 4,13.⁴⁴ This earthly priesthood of Christ in contrast with the heavenly priesthood of Christ (i.e., after he is brought to fulfillment and is high priest "according to the order of Melchizedek" - 5,5-6.9-10) and with reference to those who are saved eternally through obedience to him, i.e., his "children" (2,13b) or "house" (3,6). Christ is said to "learn" obedience (5,8). This learning takes place "in the days of his flesh", before his "fulfillment" (5,9), as "son" of Abraham, i.e., filled with faith/trust (cf. the word *eulabeia* in 5,7). Inasmuch as Christ is presented in the epistle as coming into the world determined to do God's will (10,7), this

43 It would seem particularly appropriate for the style of Hebrews that the author should explicitly identify Jesus and the *logos* only once, even though the reality of Jesus as *logos* is central to his final chapters. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 118-119) notes that the author of Hebrews "delights in the polyvalence of language". On the "subtle manipulation of language" with regard to the word *logos* cf. *ibid.*, 136. Sensitivity to nuances in the use of words is definitely one of the strengths of Attridge's commentary.

44 The possible relevance of Heb 11,17-22 for the priesthood of Christ needs to be explored.

“learning” of obedience must refer not to the act by which Christ offered himself (cf. 5,1.3.7),⁴⁵ but to the result of that act, i.e., fulfillment and fecundity.⁴⁶ The word “learns” of fulfillment the only way he can, through experience.⁴⁷

With this brief but powerful evocation of Christ’s two-stage priesthood, earthly and glorified, the author sets the scene for his discussion of the priesthood according to Melchizedek which follows at 7,1-28. But before he addresses himself to this discussion he inserts a long paraenesis at 5,11 - 6,20 which both threatens and consoles. The threat comes from the impossibility of forgiveness for apostasy⁴⁸; the consolation comes from the promises to Abraham of descendants. By implication, the addressees will be among the descendants provided they do not apostatize.

The promises of descendants to Abraham present the author with a problem. The promises came to a climax with the oath at the time of Akedah (Gen 22,16-17), in connection with Abraham’s offering of Isaac which, in the perspective of Hebrews, means Christ’s offering of himself and thus his earthly priesthood (2,13b-18; 4,13; 5,1.3.7-8). But Christ’s definitive priesthood is not merely earthly; it is also heavenly, i.e., of the glorified Christ, the earthly Christ brought to fulfillment (5,9-10). Does God have anything to say about descendants in the context of the definitive priesthood of Christ? The author of Hebrews solves the problem by observing that there are “two immutable things” which ground the heirs’ hope in God’s promise, and they are linked with an oath (6,17-18). Now there are two things which God swears to with an oath mentioned by the author in connection with the relevant context: 1) God’s oath to Abraham of descendants (6,13-14) and 2) God’s oath to Christ witnessing to his heavenly priesthood (7,21; cf. 5,6). Thus, by an implied *gezera shawa* the promise of descendants is valid not just for Christ’s earthly priesthood but for Christ’s heavenly priesthood as well. Such is the basis for the hope of those descendants (6,19-20).⁴⁹ Without the perspective generated by the linking of priesthood and descendants made at 2,13b-18 the argumentation at 6,13-20 remains enigmatic.

45 The tendency of Christ in Hebrews to take on the role of Abraham is relevant here.

46 If Christ is being “tested” at 5,7-8 (cf. Heb 2,18) and this test is to be useful by way of example to those whom he is to free from the fear of death. (cf. Heb 2,15 and 4,13), then it would seem that he is asking earnestly to die at 5,7-8, and is heard even though the son at the Akedah was spared death (cf. SWETNAM, *Jesus and Isaac*, 178-184). But Jesus’ adherence to what he perceived as the divine will (cf. Heb 10,7) resulted in his learning experientially (cf. 5,8) what that obedience entailed: eternal life and numerous progeny - the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham.

47 This “learning”, of course, involves suffering. Cf. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 153 and n. 196.

48 The crux at Heb 6,4-6 will be discussed below together with the crux at Heb 10,28-29.

49 In his discussion of Christ and hope in Heb 6,18 Attridge mentions Col 1,5 twice (*Hebrews*, 183, nn. 64 and 66), but fails to note Col 1,27 which seems to identify Christ and hope. This identification is not without importance in Heb 11,1.

Hebrews 7,1-28: The Second Stage of Christ's Priesthood

Exposition of Christ's high priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek is found at 7,1-28. In 5,1-10 the author shows that there are similarities between the priests of the Law and Christ's priesthood, both early and even heavenly. In 7,1-28 he labours to show that the Law's witness to Melchizedek as a priest existing outside time corresponds to what can be said of the Son of God (7,3; cf. 1,5-14). Thus the glorified Christ (note the imagery of entrance at 6,19-20 which has introduced the exposition in 7,1-28) constitutes a type of priest radically different from the priests instituted by the Law. The chapter is taken up with discussing the implications of this radically different type of priest, but the most important of the implications is discussed in what follows: change of priesthood calls for change of law (7,12). Thus 7,1-28 prepares the way for 8,1-2 in which the author sums up the content of his exposition in the whole letter: the new priesthood of the glorified Christ sees him as the cult minister of a new liturgy (the new law considered from the standpoint of worship).⁵⁰

Hebrews 8,1 - 10,39: The Centrality of Covenant

The heart of Hebrews (8,1 - 10,39) is dedicated to an exposition of the high priesthood of Christ in the context of a definitively new covenant called for by a definitively new priesthood. 8,1 - 10,18 constitutes the exposition; 10,19-39, the paraenesis.⁵¹ The challenge facing the author is briefly put: in terms of the scriptures, how does Christ's heavenly priesthood "fulfill" (i.e., bring to definitive perfection) his earthly priesthood?

The expository section is outlined by a massive inclusion involving the citation from Jeremiah about the new covenant (8,8-12, echoed at 10,16-17).⁵² The argumentation is intricate and it is well beyond the scope of this paper to trace it in detail. Perspectives generated by Christ's two stages of priesthood and by the old and new covenants are invoked by the author to introduce the addressees into a deeper understanding of their faith involving "solid food" (5, 14).

50 That the author of Hebrews is interested in the Law primarily from a cultic point of view becomes evident at 7,11 although this interest was hinted at as early as the paraenesis at 2,1-4. Cf. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 200.

51 ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 216, is good about recognizing the unity of Hebrews' central part, but does not recognize the paraenetic role of 10,19-39 with regard to what precedes.

52 On the more universal scope of the new covenant as suggested by the wording of Heb 10,16 cf. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 281. This is important for Chapter 11.

The motif for the priesthood of the earthly Christ is "offering" (imagery of the Aqedah), just as the motif for the priesthood of the risen Christ is "entrance" (with "presence" implied as the term). The two images are complementary, based on the common element of forgiveness of sin (cf. 9,11-14,28; 10,19). Thus the "eternal spirit" at 9,14, occurring as it does in the context of Christ's "offering himself", refers to the earthly sacrifice. The transforming action of the Spirit replaces the fire of the holocaust of the Aqedah (cf. Gen 22,3,13).⁵³

The key to understanding the imagery of "entrance" would seem to be the "greater and more perfect tent" through which Christ enters into the Holy of Holies in definitive fulfillment of the liturgy of the Day of Atonement. That "tent" is the glorified body of the risen Christ, i.e., the risen Christ as portrayed in 1,4-14, in whom the earthly body which made possible his sacrificial death is no longer subject to the limitations of earthly existence but is transformed into a body commensurate with his divine status as "Son" (of God).⁵⁴

Christ "enters" in order to be present (10,12; cf. 1,3). He is permanently present in *ta hagia tōn hagiōn*, which refers to the Christian mysteries in the imagery of the Holy of Holies.⁵⁵

The "new covenant" is considered in Hebrews as a successor to the Mosaic Law (cf. 8,6-7). If the new law (i.e., the definitive fulfillment of the Mosaic Law as an initial stage in God's speaking) is Christ himself as *logos*, it is appropriate that the new covenant is in some way Christ himself. And this is realized in the eucharist. Christ is the mediator of this new covenant, but his mediation is paradoxical in that it does away with intermediaries between the people and God: Christ himself is God (*logos*) and comes into contact with the heart of each believer through the testament which is based on his death (9,15-17). Thus the propriety of the allusion to the words of the institution of the eucharist at 9,20 in the mouth of Moses: the Law was a foreshadowing of the covenant-testament which fulfilled it.⁵⁶

The paraenesis at 10,19-39 is both encouraging and threatening. The encouragement comes from the access which the Christians now have to *ta hagia* (10,19). The threat comes from the second passage about the impossibility of

53 Thus the objection of ATTRIDGE (*Hebrews*, 250) that a parallelism between fire and spirit is not operative because fire does not play a major part in the Day of Atonement ritual is beside the point. This is yet another example where Attridge's refusal to recognize the influence of the Aqedah in Hebrews leads him astray.

54 Cf. SWETNAM, "Eucharist", 79-82.

55 *Ibid.*, 82-84.

56 *Ibid.*, 84-88.

forgiveness (10, 26-30a). It is now time to address both threat-passages in the context of the perspectives generated by the outline of the epistle being suggested here. The first threat-passage (6,4-6) comes in the paraenesis following the exposition on the sacrifice of Christ "in the days of his flesh", i.e., in his capacity as earthly priest. The threat alludes to this ("crucifying for their benefit the son of God"). Here the author is speaking to those addressees who might be scandalized by the fact that one claiming sonship of God is permitted to be executed as a common criminal (cf. Heb 12,1-3 and 1 Cor 1,23). And here an unspoken supposition comes into play: the addressees are presumed to be persons who formerly gave allegiance to the Mosaic Law ("... to the Hebrews").⁵⁷ If they apostatized from their new allegiance to Christ there was nowhere in God's providential designs for them to go, for the Law was still in effect when the epistle was written (8,13), and the Law makes no provision for the forgiveness of apostates, even should they want to return to it. At 10,26-30a the threat of unforgiveness occurs in the paraenesis following the exposition of the heavenly priesthood of Christ. The phrase "blood of the covenant-testament" show that the second stage of Christ's priesthood is under consideration.⁵⁸ Here the author is speaking to those addressees who might be scandalized by the general implausibility of Christian teaching about the eucharist (cf. 5,11) or by the Mosaic strictures against drinking blood (cf. John 6,52-66). If they fall away from Christ as apostate Jews there is nowhere to go to obtain God's forgiveness (cf. 10,28 where this fate is made explicit).

Thus the epistle would seem to have a clear focus: the author is concerned that the addressees might be scandalized by teaching involving Jesus Christ as high priest, both in his earthly death on the cross and his glorified activity as minister of the new covenant. He seeks to counter these dangers with explanation and paraenesis based on the explanation suited to the addressees, who are converts from Judaism.⁵⁹

57 This is an eminently plausible supposition, given the familiarity with the Scriptures and Jewish exegetical techniques which the author of Hebrews supposes. Contra: ATTRIDGE, Hebrews, 12.

58 The "spirit of grace" mentioned at 10,29 evokes the enigmatic text at 2,9, where Jesus is "crowned through suffering and death with glory and honour so that by the grace of God he may taste the death of all". The transforming action of the Spirit (cf. 9,14) assures the continuance of the sacrificial value with regard to forgiveness of sin of Jesus' earthly offering on the level of his heavenly priesthood. The Aqedah is thus brought to fulfillment and the effects it has obtained through the shedding of blood subsumed into the entrance into the Holy of Holies. Christ's earthly priesthood is an essential preliminary stage for his heavenly priesthood.

59 The Epistle to the Hebrews would probably yield up more of its riches if some of the suppositions usually governing current research were to be reversed. That is to say, it is better to take it as written by Paul the apostle, written to people who were formerly under the Mosaic Law (i.e., "Hebrews"), and when taken in its entirety, a letter supported by the authority of its author who is not one to take authority lightly (13,17-19). This is not to say, of course, that other elements have not guided the structure.

Hebrews 11,1 - 13,25: The Descendants

These remain the final three chapters of the epistle. In the light of the perspectives presented in this article it is clear how they should be considered: they present the descendants of Abraham, the heirs of the promise made to him by God. The link between sacrificial faith and posterity established at the Aqedah and transformed at Heb 2,13b-18 into a link between priesthood and posterity has to be maintained: having talked about priesthood in 5,1 - 10,39, (and the covenant based on it), the author must now talk about the posterity connected with that priesthood. But of course the posterity are not simply the descendants of Abraham. They have become preeminently the descendants of Christ (cf. 2,13b). And since Christ is the Word who transcends time, his "children" can exist before he lived on earth. Heb 11,1-40 discuss these "children" of Christ who existed before his life on earth, and Heb 12,1 - 13,25 discuss the "children" who existed after his arrival on earth.

The entire section 11,1 - 13,25 is introduced by three particularly challenging statements at 11,1-3. Only by placing these statements in the perspective of the two types of Christ's children and in the perspective of the two types of relationship of Christ to faith - initiator and perfecter - can they be understood. For the discussion of faith in 11,1-3 takes all these factors into account.

The basic problem for the author lay in the obvious fact that the heroes of old had no knowledge of Christ. How then they could they have faith in him? For only in faith can one be justified.⁶⁰

The basic solution which the author adopts is based on Christ as initiator and perfecter of faith.⁶¹ By collaborating with Christ who is initiator and perfecter of faith, even as the Word, the heroes of old pleased God and hence were justified, at least ultimately, by their faith. Knowledge of the earthly Jesus is accordingly not necessary for salvation.⁶²

To take into account the situation of the heroes of old who lived before the coming of Christ, the author of Hebrews devises a special definition for faith,

60 Aside from the general attribution of "justice" at 11,33, Abel (11,4) and Noah (11,7) are the only persons to whom "justice" is attributed, a fact probably not without importance for the identification of these persons in terms of New Testament reality (cf. text below). The fact that all the persons mentioned and alluded to in Chapter 11 were "witnessed to" through faith indicates that the author regarded them as being on good terms with God.

61 Cf. Heb 12, 2.

62 Cf. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 314: "Despite the absence of a christological referent, Hebrews' understanding of faith is clearly developed within a christological framework". A shrewd observation, but one which needs further insight. There is a christological referent in Heb 11,1, but it is not explicit.

part of which is valid for all of Christ's "children", part of which is not.

The first part of the definition of faith at 11,1 is valid for all of Christ's children: "Faith is the *hypostasis* of things hoped for ...". The key to understanding this *ad hoc* definition is the word *hypostasis*. Here it is used in an objective sense to indicate that Christ is the underlying reality of that which is hoped for. Two lines of development in the epistle, one concerning hope and the other involving *hypostasis*, suggest this interpretation. Hope plays an important part in the epistle and is always associated with Christ (cf. 3,6; 6,11; 7,19; 10,23). This association becomes especially close at 6, 18, where hope is virtually identified with Jesus.⁶³ The reality underlying all that is hoped for in Hebrews is Christ. The second line of development in the epistle which converges on 11,1 involves the use of *hypostasis*. The word is found only three times in Hebrews. At 1,3 the Son is viewed as the "imprint" of God's "fundamental reality" (*hypostasis*). Here the underlying reality is that of the Father (inferred from the reference to the Son in 1,2 from whom "God" is being distinguished). At 3,14 *hypostasis* appears with seeming gratuity in a context of participation in Christ. There seems to be an allusion to the underlying reality of the Spirit in baptism (cf. Heb 6,4).⁶⁴ At 11,1, then, the use of *hypostasis* with reference to Christ makes good sense when viewed in the context of the other uses of *hypostasis* in the epistle: it complements references to the Father and to the Spirit found previously. Christ as Son (Word) underlies what the heroes of old were hoping for "in faith". Christ is here the perfecter of faith, and that faith is viewed from the stand-point of hope, i.e., it is trust.

The second part of the definition of faith at 11,1 looks upon it from the standpoint of "proof" (*elenchos*) and "vision" (*blepō*), i.e., it is a type of knowledge: "... the proof of things not gazed on".⁶⁵ This part is framed with special reference to the heroes of old whose comportment with relation to the things "not gazed on" constitutes the proof (cf. 11,7). But of course the author of Hebrews is thinking above all of the addressees, who are able to "gaze on" Christ and the things which pertain to Christ as regards salvation (cf. 2,9; 3,19; cf. the imperative at 3,12 and 12,25). The "faith" of the heroes of old was an objective attestation of the Christian realities which would be revealed in Christ; the heroes themselves could not appreciate this, for only in the light of "things gazed on" was the objective quality evident. The addressees have gazed on these

63 Cf. above, n. 49.

64 Cf. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 119, n. 84, and especially the final observation: "Our difficulty with the term *hypostasis* may be due to some technical use..."

65 Cf. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 310: "The basic and common meaning of the term [sc., *elenchos*] outside the New Testament is 'proof' or 'test' whereby something is established and verified".

things and hence can appreciate the objective proof involved. Here Christ is the initiator of faith, acting in his capacity as creator who “completes the aeons” (11,3; cf. 1,2).⁶⁶

After this carefully worded introduction the author can now proceed to his task. Chapter 11 is about those who could not gaze on Christ for the benefit of those who could; chapters 12-13 are both about and for those who can “look upon” *Jesus* (cf. 12,2) with the awareness that he is both initiator and perfecter of faith. Chapter 11 is subdivided according to the promises made to Abraham: 11,4-16 are about both promises (cf. the plural, “promises”, at 11,16), but are especially about the land; 11,17-40 are about prosperity (cf. the singular, “promise”, at 11,39).

All through Chapter 11 the author of Hebrews uses Old Testament realities as an “objective proof” (*elenchos*) to illustrate Christian realities which the addressees are presumably aware of (“things gazed on” - *blepomena*). Thus, in effect, Chapter 11 serves as precious window into the early Christian world. The author is content with presenting snapshots through this window; only once, in the case of the sacrifice of Isaac at vv. 17-22, does he give a “parable”, i.e., an extended comparison which could be compared to a movie.⁶⁷ Vv. 4-7 may be adduced as an example.

At 11,4 there is a statement about Abel and Cain in which Abel, “although dead, still speaks”. Witness to Abel’s righteousness and to the validity of his sacrificial gifts is emphasized.⁶⁸ This theme of witness and righteousness is picked up in the following two examples concerning Enoch and Noah. Enoch and Noah are witnesses to Abel not in the Old Testament, of course, but as part of Christian reality. Abel, Enoch and Noah are three snapshots of Christian reality couched in Old Testament terms, and it is this juxtaposition which is the key to their interpretation, given their Old Testament meaning.

Abel stands for Christ. It is Christ’s sacrifice (cf. Heb 5,1) that the author is interested in showing to be validated by God’s witness. Abel, though dead, still speaks (11,4). It is Christ’s blood of a new covenant which speaks “better” than Abel’s (12,24). The author of Hebrews has already mentioned that this covenant has been witnessed to by God in extraordinary ways (2,4). At 11,5-7 he gives two examples of such witness.

66 ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 305 translates *katartizō* in 11,3 as “to fashion”, which seems to miss the nuance of fulfillment which the verb can have and which seems appropriate here.

67 Hebrews seems to use two “parables” (cf. 9,9 and 11,19) but many prefigurations. Cf. the use of *parabole* in the gospels.

68 If there is an implied contrast here between Abel’s sacrifice and some other sacrifices contemporary with the writing of Hebrews, perhaps 11,4 is another indication that the temple at Jerusalem was still standing when Hebrews was written.

The first example concerns Enoch (vv. 5-6). He was "translated" and thus did not see death, disappearing in the process. Before this translation his being pleasing to God had already been attested (v. 5). The reason for this pleasing to God was his faith: the one who approaches God must believe that God is and that he rewards (v. 6). It would seem that the author intends the latter verse to be seen in the general context of the epistle and hence as an exception to that exaltation which is part of the process of the aftermath of death (cf. 11,19; 1,5 - 2,5; 13,20). Normally, one who approaches God must believe that God is and that he can raise from the dead (cf. 11,19 and Rom 4,17). But, strictly speaking, the belief in God's power to raise from the dead is not necessary: for God can reward with a translation which dispenses from death. The Christian counterpart of Enoch was spared death. This Christian reality is a sign of God's power (2,4), witnessing to the validity of Christ's sacrificial death (11,4) which, in part at least, has as its purpose to free humans from the fear of death (2,15). Putting all these factors, implied and explicit, together, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the author is speaking about the assumption of Jesus' mother, implausible as this may seem. If Abel is the prefiguring counterpart of Jesus at 11,4, then Enoch is the prefiguring counterpart of Mary at 11,5.⁶⁹

In the next verse, 11,7, Noah "fashions an ark for the salvation of his house" and thus through his faith becomes an "heir of righteousness". The cluster of words found here and used elsewhere in the epistle in various contexts of Christ - "reverence" (*eulabeomai* - cf. 5,7), "salvation" (*sōtēria* - cf. 2,3.10), "heir" (*kleronomos* - cf. 1,2), "house" (*oikos* - cf. 3,3.6), and "fashion" (*kataskeuazō* - cf. 3,3) - indicates that Christ is being represented by Noah, and that the author is giving a glimpse of one way in which the early Christians viewed the founding of the Church.⁷⁰

Thus the assumption of Mary and the founding of the Church are two examples of God's witnessing to the validity of Christ's sacrificial gifts. Thus "things gazed upon" have resulted from "things not seen" under the guidance of God's Word, i.e., God's word in the Scriptures, viewed from the standpoint of Christian realities, becomes an *elenchos* of those realities because this is the way the Word has "completed" (*katartizō* - 11,3) the ages. The other examples

69 A basic problem with presenting this suggestion, of course, is that there is no New Testament text in which the assumption of Mary is obviously mentioned.

70 On the typology of the ark as church cf. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 319.

in the chapter are other windows into the life of the early Christians couched in Old Testament terms.⁷¹

In Chapters 12 and 13 the author speaks to the addressees as ones who can "look on" (*aphoraō*) Christ.⁷² The author does not emphasize faith because in the key aspect in which the heroes of old needed faith the addressees do not: they can "gaze on" Jesus (cf. 2,9) and even "look to" him, i.e., study him for indications as to how to live. But endurance is as important for them as it was for the heroes of old.

The Generation of Perspectives

The present review article has made a number of suggestions about classic cruces in Hebrews in the process of taking a fresh look at the outline of the epistle. The reviewer had no intention to take on so many problems when he began the article; the solutions suggested themselves as the outline grew organically.⁷³ There seems to be a lesson here - that outlines are valid only insofar as they generate perspectives in which solutions to problems of content suggest themselves. The same can be said, *mutatis mutandis*, about commentaries - commentaries are valuable because they generate perspectives in which solutions to problems suggest themselves. By this criterion, as well as by many others, Attridge's new work on Hebrews succeeds handsomely, even though it has not reached perfection.

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- 71 The interpretation given to Abel, Enoch and Noah would obviously gain in credibility if all the figures mentioned in Chapter 11 could be given plausible interpretations in the light of New Testament realities. The reviewer hopes to present such interpretations.
- 72 Excellent discussion of Heb 12,2 (where the verb *aphoraō* occurs) in ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews*, 356. Attridge rightly sets much store by Heb 12,1-3 in his commentary.
- 73 Perhaps this point could be considered a subsidiary thesis of the article: that cruces in a work as tightly written as Hebrews are best approached in clusters rather than individual entities. In clusters cruces are more susceptible to treatment in such a work because they are mutually illumined by the perspectives generated by an outline based heavily on content - if the outline is valid or insofar as it is valid. The validity of an outline would accordingly be judged by the plausibility of the interpretations which it suggests for cruces.