A POSSIBLE STRUCTURE OF HEBREWS 3,7 – 10,39

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A previous article on the structure of the Epistle to the Hebrews concluded that the section 1,1–3,6 is best divided according to a symmetrical pattern: after the exordium (1,1-4) comes a passage of exposition about the risen-exalted Christ as Son of God (1,5-14) followed by a brief paraenesis based on this exposition (2,1-4); then comes a passage of exposition on Jesus as son of Abraham, possibly under the title "Son of Man" (2,5-18), followed by a brief paraenesis based on this exposition (3,1-6).[1]

This review of the first article in the series on the structure of Hebrews has set the stage for the second, which will now analyze: Heb 3,7–10,39.

Heb 3,7 begins with a citation attributed to "the Holy Spirit" involving the citation of Ps 95,7-11. Comments on this citation involving its "spiritualization" through use of *gezerah shawah* and God's "rest" after creation show that the author is thinking of the promise of the land given to Abraham.[2] The previous remarks in 3,1-6 with regard to Moses, based as they seem to be on 2,10-12 and the imagery of leading sons to glory, suggest that Christ who is foreshadowed by Moses is somehow involved in this journey to the spiritualized promised land. He is explicitly invoked at 3,14 under the name of Christ. He is not mentioned as "Jesus", but another foreshadowing of his leadership is — Joshua is presented under the name of "Jesus" (4,8). Joshua did not give the people definitive entrance into the land; if he had, there would not be talk of another "day" in which entrance is still possible.[3]

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1. James Swetnam, "The Structure of Hebrews 1,1 – 3,6", *Melita Theologica* 43(1992)58-66.

2. See H. W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia 1989) 113-132, especially 129-132.

3. See Ibid., 130, under Heb 4,8. Attridge notes: "The reference to Joshua, whose name in Greek *(Iēsous)* is the same as that of Jesus, suggests a typological comparison between one *archēgos* of the old covenant and that of the new. Such a typology was explicitly developed

This presentation of the journey of the people of God to enter into his Rest — with the apparently gratuitous[4] introduction of Joshua under the name of "Jesus" — serves as the preparation for the famous passage at Heb 4,12-13 which speaks of God's "word" as "alive and active and sharper than any two-edged sword":

4,12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from Spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. /
4,13 And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.[5]

The almost universal contemporary interpretation of the "word" (*logos*) of v.12 is that it refers to Scripture.[6] This interpretation gives a superficially plausible exegesis to the passage. But there are also problems connected with this contemporary interpretation of *logos* in the sense of God's word as Scripture, problems which are not sufficiently noticed, much less resolved:[7] 1) It is not clear why the efficacy of Scripture is portrayed in such detail: in the context the elaborate description of a sword penetrating the interior of man seems ill-focused and arbitrary. What is the point of the comparison?[8] What is behind the vigorous imagery?[9] 2) It is not clear that Scripture is viewed in

in later Christian literature, but it is not exploited here." The present article will dispute this last observation.

4. "Apparently gratuitous" — on the supposition that the passage is a preparation for the passage in which the word of Scripture is said to be more powerful than a two-edged sword. If it is the word of Scripture which is providing the theme for the passage (cf. 4,2), why is Joshua introduced?

5. Text after NSRV (*The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments. New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition* [Nashville 1993] 219 [New Testament section]).

6. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 134, notes that "The identification of the Logos here as Christ is common in patristic sources", some of which he identifies. He notes several modern commentators who follow this interpretation, but does not give his approval. See also W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Dallas 1991) 103, who strongly defends the contemporary consensus that *logos* means Scripture and not Christ.

7. See J. Swetnam, "Jesus as *Logos* in Hebrews 4,12-13", *Biblica* 62(1981) 214-224.

8. At Heb 4,2 both the desert generation and the addressees of Hebrews are said to have "received the good news" (*euēggelismenoi*), i.e., received the "promise" (cf. 4,1 — *epaggelias* [cf. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 124-125]). The word of Scripture is not what is decisive about entering into the "rest" of God of which Ps 95 speaks (cf. 4,3), but the failure to hear the word of God with faith (cf. 4,2).

9. The difficulty with trying to understand Heb 4,12-13 comes in no small part from the fact

the context as being only threatening, and accordingly the use of *logos* in a threatening sense in 4,12 — a sword penetrating into the interior of man — seems odd. It seems equally odd to assume that the penetrating power of the sword is designed to enable God to understand man through the power of the word of Scripture (cf. v.13).[10] 3) The use of two unrelated meanings of *logos* — "word" and "account" — within the brief compass of 4,12-13 seems bizarre.[11] 4) Elsewhere in the epistle the word for "living" — *zōn* — is used of God himself (3,12; 9,14; 10,31; 12,22) or of Christ (7,25; 10,20) or of human life (2,15; 7,8; 9,17; 10,38; 12,9), but never of non-personal life. Thus the exception in 4,12 seems odd. 5) Finally, there is the following verse, 4,14, with its illative particle, *oun*: "Having therefore a great high priest...". It is not clear to what the illative particle refers.[12] 4,15 and 4,16 are each linked with what precedes by illative particles, and the impression given is that the three verses form a tightly reasoned unity. This unity seems to be ill matched with 4,12-13 interpreted accordingly to the view of *logos* as the word of Scripture.

The starting point for a coherent resolution to the above problems may be found in still another problem inherent in the contemporary interpretation of Heb 4,12-13: the puzzling conflict in imagery. V. 12 speaks of the "sword" (*machaira*) in an imagery of penetration; but v. 13 speaks of everything as being "naked and laid bare".[13] Thus the juxtaposed images involved in vv. 12-13 clash

that the passage has become an accepted *topos* for the efficacy of the word of Scripture: Heb 4,12-13 is about the efficacy of the word of Scripture because, as everyone knows, the word of Scripture is sharper than a two-edged sword. Thus A. Vanhoye can indicate that Heb 4,12-13 corresponds to Heb 3,7-11 in the structure of the epistle because both concern the word of God, without explaining just *why* Heb 4,12-13 concerns the word of God, even when there are problems with this interpretation (A. Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de l'Epître aux Hébreux* [Paris ^{2}1976]102-103).

10. See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 134.

11. This point needs stressing. A. Vanhoye sums up the problem nicely: "Une inclusion ouvre et ferme la longue phrase: les premiers mots présentent *ho logos tou Theou* et les derniers disent *hēmin ho logos. Logos,* il est vrai, n'est pas pris les deux fois dans la même acception: au début, il s'agit de la parole de Dieu; à la fin, il s'agit, soit de l'exposé en cours, soit — plus probablement — du compte que nous aurons à rendre. Il en résulte pour le text une certaine bizarrerie, qui s'accentue encore, lorsqu'on remarqe que le *pros hon* (traduit: «et c'est à lui») désigne le *logos* du début: c'est à la parole qu'il faut adresser la parole!" (Vanhoye, *Structure littéraire,* 102).

12. Vanhoye, *Structure littéraire,* 104, construes v. 14 as the final point — "une conclusion parfaite" — of the long exhortation 3,7 – 4,11. It would thus seem that he regards the illative particle as referring by way of summation to all that has preceded since 3,7.

13. See Vanhoye, *Structure littéraire,* 102 (bottom of page), where he further remarks on the relation of 4,13 to 4,12: "La retombée de la phrase [sc., v. 12] est . . . amorcé, mais au lieu de continuer de façon symétrique à la montée, elle se met à suivre un autre schème: *logos* n'est

when the supposition is that the word *logos* first means "word" [of Scripture] and then "account".

The present paper basically argues that it is not sound exegesis to interpret two verses obviously related to each other by the presence of the same word in such a way that a number of problems remain, problems which do not go away just because the interpretation is upheld by a majority opinion. A solution which resolves these problems would seem to be preferable, even if it is currently a minority view. The first step toward such a solution will be to assume that the word *logos* means what a common opinion in patristic sources says it means, Christ in the sense of "Word". Given the common interpretation of the exordium and the particular interpretation of the expository section 1,5-14 argued in the previous article,[14] this view cannot be said to clash with the Christology of the epistle, which is decidely high in places. The translation of the two verses would then run as follows:

4,12 Indeed, the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. /

4,13 And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one with whom for us is the Word.

The inconcinnity involving the two meanings of the word *logos* is, of course, removed in this interpretation. But there remains the challenge of seeing how the imagery of the two verses is to be understood. The key insight would seem to be that the two verses, while joined by the same meaning of *logos* as "Word", are nevertheless seen to be pointing in opposite directions. V. 12 points to what precedes, and v. 13 points to what follows. If this view is adopted the possibility of a resolution of the apparently conflicting images is made available through a modification of the unity which is based on the occurrence of *logos* in each verse. It has been argued in the first article of this series that this structure of two adjoining verses pointing in opposite directions has been adopted by the author of Hebrews at 2,12 with regard to 2,10-11, and

plus sujet; on ne lui donne plus d'épithète; mais deux propositions parallèles expriment encoure une de ses propriétés. . .". At this point there is no more mention of the "bizarrerie" which Vanhoye himself had pointed out at the top of the same page. The presumption is that the interpretation of the two occurrences of *logos* is correct and the "bizarrerie" is not only forgotten but transformed into a virtue: "Cet éloge de la Parole de Dieu constitue donc un morceau particulièrement soigné" (Ibid., 102).

14. Swetnam, "Hebrews 1 , 1 – 3,6" , 59-60.

at 2,13b with regard to 2,14-18.[15] This also seems to be the structure which he has adopted at 10,30a with regard to 10,19-29, and at 10,30b with regard to 10,31-39.[16]

Once the basic structural orientation has been posited (it remains to be supported), it follows that the relevance for the imagery of 4,12 is to be found previously, in 3,7 – 4,11, and the relevance for the imagery of 4,13 is to be found in what follows, 4,14-16 The interpretation given above about the section 3,7 – 4,11 was that it referred to the spiritualization of the promise of God to Abraham involving the land: in some way Christ is involved in leading the people into God's Rest. Against this background, the key to the imagery of 4,12 seems to be found at 4,8, where Joshua is presented under the name of "Jesus". For the implication is that whereas the first Jesus (Joshua) did not give the people definitive rest, the second Jesus (Christ) will, provided the addressees remain united with him (cf. 3,14). If this implication is linked to 4,12, an interpretation based on two words in that verse — *machaira* and *kardia* — suggests itself: that the imagery of 4,12 involves a spiritualized circumcision corresponding to the spiritualized goal of the people. For Joshua administered a physical circumcision involving a *machaira* (to be taken in the sense of "knife" — cf. the Septuagint of Jos 5,2-3), but Christ as the Word administers a spiritual circumcision to those who believe, a spiritual circumcision which is more powerful than the knife. This spiritual circumcision is nothing else than the "circumcision of the heart" which Israelite tradition for centuries stated was the necessary accompaniment of any physical circumcision (cf. Deut 10,16 and Jer 4,4; taken up by Christian tradition as expressed in Rom 2,29 and Col 2,11).[17] This interpretation would seem to be supported by the importance of the word "heart" (*kardia*) in 3,7 – 4,11: it is found at 3,8.10.12.15; 4,7 as well as in 4,12 itself. The warning against "hardening the heart" is a solemn refrain in the passage, at 3,8.15; 4,7. There is also a charge that the desert generation "went astray" in their heart (3,10), and the addressees of the epistle are directly urged to avoid a heart of "evil and unbelief" (3,12). But, so goes the interpretation of 4,12 being advanced here, Christ as the Word will supply a circumcision adapted to the need of all who believe in him as the heir to the promises made to Abraham.[18] This spiritual circumcision, a circumcision of

15. Ibid., 61.

16. J. Swetnam, "Hebrews 10,30-31: A Suggestion", *Biblica* 75(1994) 00-00.

17. See Swetnam, "Jesus as *Logos*", 220.

18. Swetnam, "Hebrews 1,1 – 3,6", 60-62.

the heart urged by centuries of Israel's tradition, is effected by the Logos and makes certain the entry of the people.[19] The themes of certainty of entrance for the people as such but uncertainty of entrance for the individual as such is reflected in 4,11, which can be taken as a summary paraenesis of 3,7 – 4,10: "Let us hasten then to enter into that Rest, lest anyone fall into the same kind of disobedience".

4,13 is united to 4,12 by the occurrence of the same word, *logos*. But the imagery functions in view of what follows, not what precedes. The immediately following verse 4,14, on the analogy of 4,11, presumably serves as a summary paraenesis of what is to come: "Since, therefore, we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, Son of God, let us hold fast to the confession".[20] The supposition is that the illative particle *oun* relates to what immediately precedes unless that is seen to be impossible. On several grounds the particle seems appropriate as a sign of the close linkage between vv. 13 and 14 according to the interpretation of the former verse being advanced here. For one thing, there is the resulting relationship which is thereby affirmed between Jesus as Logos and his role as High Priest, a relationship found in Philo. The concepts behind the terminology in Hebrews and in Philo are certainly different, but it would be odd if such specialized terminology itself were not related in some way.[21] Then there is the congruence of the phrase "with whom for us is the Word" (*pros hon hēmin ho logos*)[22] with the idea that Jesus, the Son of God, has passed through the heavens: his passage through heavens has terminated in his place as Logos with the Father.[23] Finally, there is the underlying image of 4,13 and its relation to the term "high priest": the word *tetrachēlismena* ("laid bare" or, perhaps better, "laid back") is parallel to *gymna* ("naked") and the two refer to the

19. This certitude is expressed in 4,9, the verse immediately after the comment about Joshua's failure to give rest: "Hence, for the people of God, a Sabbath rest remains." This means that the people of God, as such, is guaranteed an entrance into God's Rest. This guarantee does not extend to any given member who separates himself from the group. Cf. J. Swetnam, "A Suggested Interpretation of Hebrews 9,15-18", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27(1965) 383.

20. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 137, omits the phrase "Jesus, the Son of God" from his translation, even though he comments on it as part of the text on p. 139.

21. See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 140, and 140 n. 44.

22. Cf. the phrasing of the Johannine prologue at Jn 1 , 1: *kai ho logos ēn pros ton theon.*

23. On the "confession" (*homologia)* referred to in Heb 4,14 cf. Acts 9,20 and 1 Jn 4,15; 5,5, where Jesus is confessed as "Son of God". In view of the interpretation given Heb 1,5-14 this title of Jesus is appropriate.

bending back of a victim's neck prior to a sacrificial killing.[24] Hebrews has already linked the idea of Jesus' death and his role as High Priest, at 2,14–18, and at 3,1 has explicitly attributed the title "High Priest" to him.[25] 2,14-18 has as its theme Jesus as "Son of Abraham", i.e., Jesus as characterized as one who had faith in God's power to fulfill the promises just as Abraham had.[26] The culminating moment of Jesus' faith-trust in this power was at the moment of his death (cf. Heb 2,13).[27] In Hebrews this moment is foreshadowed by the attempted sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham in Genesis 22.[28] All of this is helpful to try to understand the thought behind 4,13: Jesus as Word is more powerful than the *machaira* wielded by Abraham at his attempted sacrifice of Isaac (cf. the Septuagint at Gen 22,10).[29] Nothing escapes the all-knowing glance of God, every sacrifice is visible to him (4,13). The implication within the restricted context of Hebrews, which centres on only two individualized sacrifices, the sacrifices of Isaac and of Jesus,[30] is that both the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham and the sacrifice of Jesus are visible to God, and that they are thus interrelated by God's knowledge as foreshadowing and foreshadowed (cf. the use of *parabolē* in Heb 11,19).[31] Thus the following translation of Heb 4,12-13 seems justified:

4,12 For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged knife, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

24. See Attridge, *Hebrews,* 136: "The best explanation is that the term derives from the sacrificial sphere where it refers to the bending back of the victim's neck prior to slaughter."

25. Cf. Heb 3,3 and Swetnam, "Hebrews 1,1- 3,6", 62.

26. Ibid., 61-65.

27. Ibid., 61.

28. See J. Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac: A Study of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Light of the Aqedah* (Rome 1981)119-123.

29. A marginal gloss of the Targum Neofiti at Lev 22,27 has Isaac stretching forth his neck at the moment of sacrifice. Cf. Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac,* 64, n. 335.

30. Other, "anonymous", sacrifices mentioned in Hebrews seem intended to be subsumed in these two in one way or another (cf. Heb 5,1; 7,27; 8,3; 9,9; 10,1; 10,11). The one exception to this generalization is the sacrifice of Abel mentioned in 11,4, an individualized sacrifice which seems intended to be foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ (cf. 12,24). Thus, though individualized, it is not at the centre of the author's attention the way the other two individualized sacrifices are. See J. Swetnam, "Hebrews 11 — An Interpretation", *Melita Theologica* 41(1990) 98-99.

31. Ibid., 122-123.

4,13 And before him no creature is hidden, but all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one with whom is the Word.

The "two-edged knife" refers to the knives used by Joshua and Abraham considered as one knife with two functions, definitive circumcision and definitive oblation. The first function assures the fulfillment of the promise of land; the second assures the fulfillment of the promise of progeny.

This suggested interpretation of Heb 4,12-13 in which *logos* means "Word" gives a coherent solution to the problems connected with the interpretation in which *logos* means "word": 1) the description of the efficacy of the knife is not ill-focused or arbitrary, for in each of its functions it achieves a definitive fulfillment in line with biblical imagery elsewhere; 2) the use of *logos* is not threatening: it is the basis for the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham; 3) the word *logos* is not used in two unrelated senses in close compass; 3) the word "living" is not applied to a non-personal reality; 5) the illative particle *oun* at the beginning of the following verse, 4,14, makes good sense: it does not refer to some vague previous reality in the epistle, but to what immediately precedes. Thus the positing of the patristic meaning for *logos* seems supported by the context.

The objection can be made that a reference to Jesus as Logos seems out of place in the epistle in general and at 4,12-13 in particular. But this is to ignore the meaning of *logos* in Heb 2,2. There *logos* means the Mosaic Law, and it is used in function of the theme of "speaking" *(lalēo)* which begins in the first verse of the epistle and runs throughout.[32] In Hebrews Jesus as *Logos* replaces the Mosaic *logos*. Jesus and the "salvation" which he began to "speak" *(laleo)* and which was handed on to those who had heard him are presented in Hebrews as taking the place of the Mosaic Law.[33] At Heb 4,12-13 the introduction of Jesus as *Logos* is a veiled but emphatic statement that Jesus replaces the Mosaic Law with his living and active presence as the new centre of the relations between God and his people. It is appropriate that this statement stand at the end of an exhortation to enter the Rest of God, but it is especially appropriate that this statement stand at the beginning of the section 4,14 – 10,39, which has as its heart the relation between Jesus as High Priest and the New Covenant: Jesus *is* the New Covenant just as he *is* the *Logos*. It is through this New Covenant, i.e., the Eucharist, that the promise of progeny

32. See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 64, n. 26.

33. See J. Swetnam, "Christology and the Eucharist in the Epistle to the Hebrews", *Biblica* 70(1989) 85-87.

made to Abraham is definitively fulfilled.[34]

In the verses which follow 4,14 the author alludes to what can best be described as the two stages of Jesus' sonship, which in turn imply two stages in his priesthood.[35] These two stages can be designated "before" and "after" his being "perfected" at the resurrection-exaltation, i.e., before and after his receiving a body commensurate with his divinity.[36] In the section 4,14 – 6,20 the author of Hebrews comments on these two stages. Jesus is now in the second stage, having passed through the heavens, and intercedes for men with God (4,14-16). The two Old Testament citations at 5,5-6 reflect this stage. But there is also an extended allusion to the first stage of Jesus' priesthood, in 5,7-8 — "in the days of his flesh", i.e., in the days when he was possessed of a body subject to death (cf. Heb 2,14).[37] It was only when he was "perfected" subsequent to this death that he entered into the second and definitive stage of his priesthood which is "according to the order of Melchizedek" (cf. 5,9-10).

Apparently the addressees had expressed their belief in the first stage of Jesus' priesthood but had grown "sluggish" (*nōthroi*) in their ability to listen (5,11). They needed to be taught "again" (*palin*) (5,12), but the author wishes, nonetheless, to press on, for the addressees must not remain "children" (5,13) but must become mature in their ability to judge regarding their faith (5,14). These verses are basically negative paraenesis, containing as they do a veiled

34. See Ibid.. 93-94. The activity of Jesus as Word in Heb 4,12-13 can probably be best summed up by resorting to the Christian terminology of "baptism" and "Eucharist". Pressed to their full contemporary meaning these technical, sacramental terms would, of course, be an anachronism in Hebrews. But not if they are used with due adjustment to the nature of first-century Christian theology.
The above argumentation that "logos" in Heb 4,12-13 means Jesus as "Word" is not intended to be definitively probative — no exegesis of a text dating from 1,900 years ago can be definitively probative. It simply states that the meaning of "Word" for "*logos*" makes more sense in the context than the meaning "word" (of Scripture) and hence should be used as a basis for subsequent discussion of the epistle until a more convincing interpretation is adduced.

35. See Swetnam, "Christology and the Eucharist in the Epistle to the Hebrews", 78-79.

36. Ibid., 75-78.

37. On the words "having offered petitions and supplications" as a technical expression of sacrifice cf. Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac*, 183 and 183, n. 36. The words show that the author of Hebrews was concerned to present the earthly Jesus as a priest. On Heb 5,7-10 as based on the Aqedah — the sacrifice of Isaac in Israelite and Jewish tradition — cf. Ibid., 178-184. Several non-biblical texts concerning the Aqedah, from a period roughly contemporaneous with the New Testament, indicate that Isaac approached his sacrificial death not only knowingly but willing (cf. Ibid.. 60). If the author of Hebews was aware of this aspect of the Aqedah tradition, the interpretation of Heb 5,7-10 would become less problematic.

warning based on the deficiencies of the addressees. The negative paraenesis continues until 6,8, and includes an explicit warning about the impossibility of repentance, one of the classic cruces in the epistle.

The failing which leads to the impossibility of repentance would seem to involve the words "crucifying for themselves the Son of God and putting him on display" (6,6).[38] The phrase "Son of God" evokes the same phrase at 4,14, by supposition a programmatic verse for the section. This phrase occurs in an exhortation to "hold fast to the confession". The inference which suggests itself is that the sin warned against consists of not holding fast to the confession, which involves viewing the Son of God as being crucified for the Christians: the Son of God has already been crucified for them; they cannot crucify him again, making fun of him in the process as was done the first time by those who did not believe. This interpretation squares well with 3,1, which views Jesus as "the apostle and high priest of our confession", i.e., the basic confession of faith which the addressees are called on to hold consists in the belief not only that Jesus is Son of God but also, in part, that he is a high priest. The phrase "crucified for us" implies the sacrificial nature of the crucifixion. This sacrificial death corresponds to the first stage of Jesus' priesthood, the priesthood he had "in the days of his flesh". The fact that it appears embedded in the negative paraenesis of 5,1 1–6,8 at a culminating point — the impossibility of repentance — is an indication that the paraenesis at 4,14 – 6,20 centres on this stage.

The section 6,9-20 constitutes a positive paraenesis. At 6,14 the author cites Gen 22,17, God's solemn oath renewing his promise of progeny to Abraham. This suggests that the sacrifice of Isaac has not been far from the mind of the author during his discussion of Jesus' earthly priesthood. It also shows that the author has been concerned with the promise of progeny during the entire discussion. The passage ends with the author's reiteration of God's solemn oath and promise following the sacrifice of Isaac which guarantees the addressees' hope of participation in Abraham's progeny (6,17-18).

Thus the entire section 3,7 – 6,20 can be best viewed as follows:

3,6 – 4,11:	exposition-paraenesis on the promise of land;
4,12:	Jesus as Word is the guarantor of entrance into the spiritualized Land of God's Rest;
4,13:	Jesus as Word is the guarantor of a spiritualized progeny which results from his sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection-exaltation;

38. On Heb 6,4-6 cf. the discussion in Attridge, *Hebrews*, 166-172.

4,14 – 6,20: exposition-paraenesis on the first stage of Jesus' priesthood as the means to achieve the spiritualized progeny promised to Abraham;
5,11–6,8: negative paraenesis;
6,9–20: positive paraenesis.

It is against the background of 4,13 – 6,20 that the Heb 7,1–28 should be viewed. The author has discussed the earthly priesthood of Jesus, i.e., the period of his life on earth before his being "perfected" at the resurrection-exaltation. He does so in an atmosphere of paraenesis, alternatingly threatening (5,11– 6,8) and encouraging (6,9-20), moved by an obvious concern of apostasy on the part of his audience. But he wishes to progress to an aspect of Jesus' priesthood which his audience has not been fully instructed about and which is part of the knowledge which they should have as mature Christians (cf. 5,14).

The author's discussion of the second stage of Jesus' priesthood begins with a linking between Ps 110 and Gen 14, the only two passages in the Old Testament in which the name "Melchizedek" occurs. It is tempting to think that the author resorts to this Old Testament figure because of the reason why he seems to have been used originally by the author of Genesis: legitimation,[39] but legitimation of a special sort. The figure of Melchizedek, appearing as he does with no antecedents and no descendants, i.e., no time-frame to situate him in, suggests the timeless existence of the exalted Jesus (7,3),[40] and thus legitimates the reality of the risen Jesus from God's previous speaking to the fathers. The subsequent treatment enables the author to view Jesus as re-ensconced in his eternity, so to speak, but now with the "benefit" of his unique sacrifice made eternally and irrevocably effective through his being "perfected" (cf. 7,11.19.28): the Word of God has taken on a new dimension (7,27-28). But this exposition is not made without reference to the underlying supposition of the relevance of Jesus' exalted priesthood for the promises made to Abraham, in particular of progeny (cf. 7,6 and the reference to the "people" in 7,11). The whole question of the "law" (*nomos* — cf. 7,5.12.16.19.28) and the "covenant" (*diathēke* — cf. 7,22) is introduced as an obvious way of preparing for the central concern of the epistle — the new covenant.

39. Cf. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 188 and 188, n. 18.

40. See Ibid., 190-191.

The beginning of the section of Hebrews embodying the author's central concern is indicated by his remark at the beginning of Chapter 8 that he has arrived at his "main point" (*kephalion*): "we have such a high priest, who took his seat at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, the cult minister of the holy things / holy of holies[41] and of the true tent, which the Lord pitched and not man". The first half of this main point reiterates what has been stated previously, interpreted in this article as a high priesthood involving two stages, before and after the perfection bestowed by the resurrection-exaltation, with the definitive terminus being the presence of Jesus as Word with God. The second half of the main point indicates what is to come: Jesus, from his place at God's right hand, acts as a liturgical minister involving the holy things / the holy of holies and the true tent set up by God. The sacrificial basis for this new liturgist is recalled (8,3), and his heavenly status, which sets him in opposition to those priestly ministers who make offerings according to the Law (8,4). But these priestly ministers act out a shadowy replica of the heavenly liturgy as the Law itself indicates (8,5). 8,6 sums up this carefully worded preface to the central section: "As things stand now he has obtained a liturgy which is as superior as the better covenant of which he is mediator and which itself has been enacted on the basis of better promises".[42] One of the "better promises" is alluded to at 9,15, which links Christ's covenant through his expiatory death with the inheritance of the promise of "the eternal inheritance", i.e., the Rest of God, which is the spiritualized version of the promise of the land made to Abraham. The new covenant, with its forgiveness of sins, is here shown to be enacted on the basis of a "better" promise — "better" (sc., than Abraham's) because it is spiritualized, involving not an earthly land but heaven. Although 9,15 speaks about the spiritualized promise of the land, the emphasis in the central section is on the promise of spiritualized progeny, as can be seen from the paraenesis in 10,19-39,[43] which stresses the "house" over which the high priest is placed (10,21), God's vindication his people (10,30b), and the positive destiny awaiting those who live by faith (10,39).[44]

41. The Greek word translated "holy things / holy of holies" is ambiguous and is patent of both interpretations. See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 217-218, and Swetnam, "Christology and the Eucharist in the Epistle to the Hebrews", 82-84.

42. On "better" as a technical term implying not only relative but absolute superiority cf. Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac*, 150.

43. For an explanation of the relation of 10,19-39 to 8,1-6 see the following paragraph.

44. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 221, construes the reference to "promises" as involving mainly the inheritance of the land: but for the reason mentioned above — the relation between

The extent of the section of central concern in Hebrews is set off by two citations from Jeremiah which serve as an inclusion. At Heb 8,8-12 Jer 31,31-34 is cited from the Septuagint (LXX 38,31-34), and at Heb 10,16-17 Jer 31,33 and part of Jer 31,34 are repeated. This repeated citation is followed by a long passage of paraenesis, first negative (Heb 10,19-30a) and then positive (Heb 10,30b-39).[45] Thus the section of the author's central concern extends in its entirety from 8,1 to 10,39.

A detailed analysis of Heb 8,1 – 10,39 is, of course, well beyond the scope of this paper. The present writer wishes simply to repeat views which he has expressed elsewhere,[46] that the key element involved in this section is the Christian eucharist viewed as the "holy things" into which Christ "enters" through "the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands" (i.e., his glorified body — cf. 9,11) so that this new "holy of holies" (the same Greek word, *hagiōn)* is now where God's presence is available liturgically to those who have faith. The "new covenant", so central to Hebrews 8,1 – 10,39, is connected with the eucharist elsewhere in the New Testament, and at Heb 9,20 there is an allusion to the institution of the eucharist, an allusion prepared for in Heb 3,5.[47] Just as Jesus is the *Logos* which takes the place of the Mosaic *logos,* so he is the new covenant, which supplants the old covenant.

The "liturgy" which the heavenly Christ presides over is carried out on earth, for it is available to the addressees (Heb 10,19-22).[48] But it is truly a "heavenly" liturgy (cf. Heb 3,1; 6,4; 8,5) because it is presided over by the heavenly Christ who, because he now transcends time and space through his being "brought to perfection", can provide God's effective presence — he is the Word who is "with God" — in the "holy things" / "holy of holies" throughout the Christian world. His presence is a sacrificial presence because he entered into the "holy of holies" / "holy things" through his (sacrificial) blood (9,12). This was and remains a unique sacrifice in terms of the first stage of Jesus' priesthood (9,12 — *ephafax)*, but can be viewed as multiple in the

priesthood and people (cf. 2,14-18; 7,11-12) — the reference should be seen as involving mainly the progeny.

45. For the justification of this division see Swetnam, "Hebrews 10,30-31".

46. For references see Swetnam, "Christology and the Eucharist in the Epistle to the Hebrews", 74.

47. See Ibid., 85-86.

48. The elusiveness of the treatment of the eucharist can probably best be accounted for by presuming the need to follow the usages of the "discipline of the secret". See Swetnam, "Christology and the Eucharist in the Epistle to the Hebrews", 94, and 94 n. 63.

second stage which makes this unique sacrifice available to those who take part in the heavenly liturgy (10,19): the allusion to the "purification" obtained by "better sacrifices" at 9,23 is best taken as referring to the second stage and indicating real plurality.[49]

This view of Jesus' unique earthly sacrifice as being present in multiple fashion in the second and definitive stage of his priesthood explains why the author of Hebrews can state at 2,9: ". . . we see Jesus on account of suffering death crowned with glory and honour so that by the grace of God he may taste death for everyone". The "tasting death" *follows* upon Jesus' resurrection-exaltation and has been a classic crux from earliest times until the present.[50] Jesus "suffered death" in his earthly life and as a result can "taste death" in an infinite multiplicity of times and places because of his glorification-exaltation: "tasting death" refers to the presence of the death suffered by the earthly Jesus in his glorified existence. Jesus died only once and sacrificed himself only once; once glorified, he can die no more. But his unique death and unique sacrifice abide in multiple fashion thanks to his glorified body. The phrase "for everyone" refers to those who everywhere and throughout subsequent time can partake of the liturgy conducted by the heavenly liturgist.

The negative paraenesis at 10,19-30a deserves particular comment. In this section is found the second passage in Hebrews which speaks of the punishment for willful rejection of the foundations of covenental faith — 10,26-29. Thus it matches the placement of the first passage — 6,4-6 — which also occurs in a section of negative paraenesis. 6,4-6 concerns warning against apostasy from belief in the confession involving the earthly priesthood of Christ. 10,26-29 also mentions the "Son of God" (v. 29) and the "blood of the covenant" (ibid.).[51] The phrase "blood of the covenant", in the context of Hebrews, suggests the eucharist blood: one need only think of 3,5 in relation to 9,20.[52] There is question in 10,26-29, then, of apostasy from belief in the

49. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 261, maintains that the plural, "sacrifices" (*thusiai*) is used at 9,23 because the author is stating a general principle: "It is therefore necessary that the copies of what is in the heavens be purified by these things, but that the heavenly things be purified by better sacrifices than these". But how can a general principle be used when what is at stake is something *sui generis:* purification of heavenly things? Further, why would the author of Hebrews choose a way of indicating a general principle which is so confusing in the context of a verse which emphasizes the unique sacrifice of Christ (9,26)?

50. See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 76-77.

51. Mention of "the spirit of grace" deserves special treatment, which is reserved for the third and final installment on the structure of Hebrews.

52. See Swetnam, "Christology and the Eucharist in the Epistle to the Hebrews", 84-85.

confession as it touches the second stage in the priesthood of Christ, the stage in which his unique sacrifice is made available through the new covenant to all who believe.

This, then, is the suggested structure of Heb 3,7 – 10,39:

3,6 – 4,11:	exposition-paraenesis on the promise of land;
4,12:	Jesus as Word is the guarantor of entrance into the spiritualized Land of God's Rest;
4,13:	Jesus as Word is the guarantor of a spiritualized progeny which results from his sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection-exaltation;
4,14 – 6,20:	exposition-paraenesis on the first stage of Jesus' priesthood as the means to achieve the spiritualized progeny promised to Abraham;
5,11– 6,8:	negative paraenesis [with reference to impossibility of repentance];
6,9–20:	positive paraenesis.
7,1-28:	Jesus as foreshadowed by Melchizedek — the second and definitive stage of Jesus' priesthood;
8,1 – 10,39.	the second stage of Jesus' priesthood and the liturgy over which he presides;
10,19-30a:	negative paraenesis [with reference to punishment for the willful rejection of the foundations of covenental faith.];
10,30b-39:	positive paraenesis.

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Attridge's comments on the phrase "blood of the covenant" deserve citation (Hebrews, 294): "The phrase 'blood of the covenant' (*to haima tēs diathēkēs), although similar to the eucharistic blessing of the cup [cf. Matt 26,28; Mark 14,24; Luke 22,20; 1 Cor 11,25], is in this context not sacramentally focused. It rather designates the equivalent in the new order of the blood with which the old covenant was inaugurated (9,20), namely, the blood shed on the cross, which provides access to God and to God's forgiveness." Attridge here does not recognize the allusion to the eucharist in 9,20, although he notes the influence of "liturgical language" on the verse (ibid., 258). But his fundamental error lies in not recognizing two levels to Christ's priesthood.*