

addresses a circle of "teachers" who are falling down on the job, except as this applies to the failure of the community as a whole to act as "teachers" for one another, especially those who are losing sight of the group's vision.<sup>68</sup>

## The Author

### *Identity*

The author left his work completely anonymous, with only a passing reference to Timothy in the closing greetings (13:23). Scholars from the first centuries on, however, have not been reticent in proposing his identity. Alexandrian Christianity attributed the work to Paul quite early (the 2nd-century manuscript P46 includes it after Romans among the Pauline epistles). The style of Hebrews stands so far apart from the Pauline letters, however, that the Alexandrian fathers Origen and Clement attributed the actual writing to an associate of Paul, whether as an original composition that includes the thoughts of the apostle or as a translation of a Hebrew letter of Paul into Greek.<sup>69</sup>

Pauline authorship was not the view of the Western churches. Tertullian named Barnabas as the author, and Irenaeus and Hippolytus regarded it as non-Pauline. Only after Jerome and Augustine championed the cause of Pauline authorship did that view take hold in the West. Even these scholars, however, voiced their reservations about authorship. Jerome on one occasion calls it irrelevant, given the prestige the text enjoyed in many churches, and Augustine likewise is more sure of Hebrews' acceptance as a core text of Christianity than of the identity of the author.<sup>70</sup> Advocacy of the book's connection with Paul was subservient to their "feeling" that Hebrews deserved to be recognized as canonical.

Pauline authorship is probably the least likely solution to the question. External evidence actually favors non-Pauline authorship, and internal evidence

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68. Other views, such as the notion that Hebrews addresses a Jewish-Christian house church in Rome, or a house church of "Hebrew Christians" in Palestine (P. Hughes, *Hebrews*, 18-19), are inextricably bound up with the assumption that this letter is more meaningful to Jewish than Gentile Christians (see discussion above).

69. The hypothesis that this letter was originally written in Hebrew fails to take into account the author's use of the LXX (Greek) version of the OT, specifically grounding essential points of his argument on precisely those words or phrases where the LXX departs from the Hebrew text. As John Calvin rightly pointed out, moreover, the wordplay on "testament/covenant" would not have been possible in the Hebrew language (*Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948], xxvii).

70. See Bruce, *Hebrews*, 17.

does nothing to overturn that view. Most noticeably, the style and syntax of the Greek is far and away superior to anything found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus (both letters of undisputed and disputed Pauline authorship). To suggest that Paul was simply writing in a different style, as if preaching in a synagogue, is a desperate attempt to hold onto Pauline authorship.<sup>71</sup> Why would he reserve his best for this one document and not give a hint anywhere else that he was such an artist with syntax and vocabulary, such a master of ornament? Considerations of content also point away from Paul. While the author of Hebrews argues that Torah is an obsolete predecessor to the new covenant, holds up faith as a central value, and sees Abraham and Jesus as examples for the Christian to follow, he treats all of these topics differently from Paul in his known letters. The thickness of Platonic concepts, interest in cult, and exposition of Jesus' work in terms of priesthood — all make this letter stand out from the Pauline corpus.

Many suggestions for authorship have arisen. The earliest candidate was Barnabas, suggested by Tertullian (*De pudic.* 20). Barnabas was a member of the tribe of Levi (Acts 4:36) and a co-worker of Paul for some time, but we know nothing else about Barnabas that would establish him as the author. Apollos is a popular choice. He enjoyed a reputation for eloquence, even rhetorical training (he was "an eloquent man," ἀνὴρ λόγιος, Acts 18:24); he was well schooled in the OT and able to dispute with non-Christian Jews based on the texts (Acts 18:24, 28). His connection with Alexandria made him an especially popular candidate during the time when the connections between Hebrews and Philo were thought to be foundational.<sup>72</sup> He also was a part of the Pauline mission (at least, he had connections with Prisca and Aquila, and Paul was kept informed of his whereabouts), although clearly a person with a mind of his own, which would explain the points of contact with Paul as well as his independent development of shared motifs. While the profile fits in general, the case remains undemonstrable. Other candidates from the Pauline circle have also been proposed, including Prisca, Luke, Silas, Epaphras, and Aristion. No convincing case

71. Such an attempt is usually tied to the presupposition that apostolic authorship is a viable prerequisite for keeping a book in the NT canon (as if anyone would stop publishing Bibles with 2 Peter if its pseudonymity could be conclusively demonstrated!). The criterion of apostolicity, however, called for connection with an apostolic witness, not actual authorship by an apostle, and Hebrews certainly meets that criterion (whether the author should prove to be, in the last analysis, Apollos or Silas or Prisca or any of Paul's associates).

72. The Philonism of the author of Hebrews was championed by Spicq (*L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 39-91) but has been overturned by the work of G. A. Williamson (*Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* [ALGH] 4; Leiden: Brill, 1970), who demonstrated that the differences in the way the two authors interpret the OT are far greater than any similarities, and L. D. Hurst (*The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought* [SNTSMS 65; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990]), who rightly emphasizes the eschatological and apocalyptic elements of Hebrews as primary.

can be made for any candidate, however,<sup>73</sup> and Origen's final statement on the question of authorship remains the wisest of all — "But who wrote the epistle? God knows the truth" (preserved in Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.14).<sup>74</sup>

While we lack a name for our author, we do not lack a personality. We may also inquire into the nature of his relationship with the community he addressees and the authority in which he grounds his "word of exhortation" (13:22). The author does not count himself as a witness to the Lord Jesus, but rather as one who has himself been evangelized by the apostolic founders (2:3). Neither does he appear to be a leader from within the community to which he writes (13:7, 17, 24). He has, however, been in contact with the community before, as he hopes to be "restored" to them (13:19). On the one hand, he makes extensive use of associative language, referring to their common experience of Christ's activity in the believers' lives, and calling the addressees "partners in Christ" (3:14) or "partners in a heavenly calling" (3:1), as well as "brothers and sisters" (3:1, 12; 10:19; 13:22). He also includes himself through his use of hortatory subjunctives (2:1, 3; 4:11, 16; 6:1; 7:19; 10:19-24; 12:1; 13:13). On the other hand, the author considers himself to have sufficient authority to point out what is amiss in the community, even to berate them for not doing better, and to expect that his imperatives will be followed.

He does not exercise charismatic authority, as John the Seer did in the churches of Asia Minor. That is to say, he does not give his message legitimacy through appeals to visions or revelations or special proximity to divine power (although he does remind the hearers of their original reception of the gospel amid such charismatic phenomena, 2:3-4; 6:4-5). He does not claim authority on the basis of being a community founder, as does Paul, who can call himself the "father" of those he addresses. Charisma, or extraordinary access to the sacred, is now located in the community. For the author, the exhortation "Let us approach the throne of grace with boldness" (4:16; cf. 10:22) corresponds to the exhortation not to neglect to meet together (10:25), for the gathered congregation is the place of access to God.<sup>75</sup> The process of "primary institutional-

73. The author's use of a masculine ending for the self-referential participle διηγοούμενον (11:32) would rule out Prisca or another female author. First, it could hardly be a "mistake," given the author's command of the Greek language; second, there would be no reason for a female teacher to hide her gender behind the guise of masculinity, given the openness to female leadership in the early Church; third, the author appears to expect that the audience would have personal knowledge of his identity (see, e.g., 13:18-24), and thus a disguise would not have worked anyway.

74. For readers interested in reviewing the detective work that has produced a horde of suspects but no conviction, see Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 1:197-219; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 14-20; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 1-5.

75. David R. Worley, Jr., "God's Faithfulness to Promise: The Hortatory Use of Commissive Language in Hebrews" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1981), 55.

ization," in which the charisma of the founding leader "is . . . diffused into the group, its customs, rituals, doctrine, verbal tradition, ethos," and in which the community begins to regard itself as an anticipation or prototype of the new society or kingdom to come,<sup>76</sup> has taken place by the time the author writes. It appears that the author works in the time of "secondary institutionalization," in which the founder's staff works "at preserving the original group and fulfilling its mission, and consequently their authority is of necessity traditional and rational and can by no means be purely charismatic, resting in themselves only."<sup>77</sup>

The authority of the author of Hebrews is not charismatic, but rather is based on the "prior tradition or *ratio*" of the converts, namely, the word "declared at first by the Lord and attested to us by those who heard him" (2:3) together with the tradition passed on through the socialization process and contained in the Jewish Scriptures. The author seeks to maintain the community's place within the tradition. The nature of the argumentation from the Hebrew Scriptures and the prior tradition of their Christocentric interpretation (e.g., the application of Psalms 2 and 110 to the person and significance of Jesus) point also to the traditional-rational nature of the author's legitimation.

As a final piece in this puzzle, one may look to the indications in 6:11 and 13:18 that the author is part of a larger circle. In these verses a "we" element appears to be distinguished from the "you" element, indicating a group around the author as well as a community of recipients. The reference to Timothy in 13:23, far from being a later addition in an attempt to bring this letter into the Pauline canon, may show that the author, like Timothy or Titus, was part of the staff of an apostolic founder (in this case, Paul), evangelized by the apostle and now carrying on the mission of the departed apostle (whether he moved on to new mission grounds or died). The connection with Timothy, as well as the clear points of contact with known Pauline letters,<sup>78</sup> confirms that the author comes from that circle within early Christianity. The author belongs already to a later stage of institutionalization — primary institutionalization has been achieved, and now the members of the staff exercise a ministry of teaching and exhorting in an effort to maintain the communities founded by the apostolic leader (who, in the case of early Christianity, was also bound to the tradition). While not part of the local leadership of the congregations, they nevertheless exercise traditional-rational authority over the apostle's former mission field

76. Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 145, 148.

77. *Ibid.*, 178.

78. Witherington has conducted a close examination of the points of contact between Galatians and Hebrews ("Influence," 146-52), demonstrating how Pauline thought provides a primary formative matrix for the theology, OT interpretation, and even choice of diction of the author of Hebrews.

and seek to preserve the work accomplished by the member of the senior staff (the apostle) who took them into his service. The author desires to return to the community to visit them and asks them to pray that he may be able to do so more quickly (13:19, 23) and in the company of Timothy (13:23). What delays the author or necessitates the prayers of his audience is unknown — he might be imprisoned, but might equally well be caught up in the affairs of another congregation in need of guidance or encouragement.

### Worldview

The author's presentation of the reality in which he and his audience live is very much the cosmos of apocalypticism.<sup>79</sup> Reality is divided into two distinct realms. First, the author speaks of the hearers' (and his own) actions in this world, the visible, material realm of everyday experience (e.g., 2:3-4; 10:32-34; 13:18-19, 23). The Son entered this realm at a precise time, and acted within it "for a little while" (2:9). The visible realm consists of the earth and the "heavens." We must distinguish carefully here between the two uses to which the author puts the term "heaven." There are, on the one hand, the "heavens" (always plural) that are part of the changing, temporary creation:

Lord, you founded the earth from the beginning, and the heavens are the works of your hands. These will be destroyed, but you will abide, and all will grow old like a garment, and you will roll them up like a scroll and like a garment they will be changed. But You are the same and your years never run out. (1:10-12)<sup>80</sup>

Such an assessment of the durability of the visible world anticipates the author's eschatological expectations set forth in 12:26-28, the "rolling up" and

79. These apocalyptic dimensions are so deeply woven into the fabric of the argument that it seems impossible to regard them merely as an accommodation to the views of the audience that the author shored up with occasional images drawn from his alleged "Alexandrian" cosmology (a position advanced by George W. MacRae, "Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews," *Semeia* 12 [1978]: 179-99, especially 190-191).

80. The fact that this psalm text is quoted in the context of developing a Christology in chapter 1 rather than a cosmology or an eschatology does not render it irrelevant for these closely connected topics (pace L. D. Hurst, "Eschatology and 'Platonism' in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *SBLSP* 23 [1984]: 41-74, 73). The author desires that the addressees regard both Jesus and the invisible realm as the places or sources of stability, and the visible realm as the place of limited, temporary, inferior, shakable things. Christology, eschatology, and cosmology all together call the hearers away from setting their hearts on the things of this world and toward fixing their desires wholly on the things of the "coming world" (2:5) that is also the divine realm.

throwing away of the visible, temporal cosmos at some point in the (near) future, after which the invisible and unshakable kingdom that the believers are inheriting will remain.

Beyond the visible "earth" and "heavens" stands another realm that is superior, even if now it is unseen. This is the realm where God dwells, where God's full and unmediated presence is enjoyed by the angelic hosts and the glorified Christ. The author has this realm in mind when he speaks of "heaven itself" (Heb. 9:24), the place Jesus entered after he "passed through the heavens" (Heb. 4:14) and from which vantage point he stands "exalted above the heavens" (Heb. 7:26). The author is not considering the visible sky (the "heavens") as part of this superior realm. Rather, "heaven itself" is somewhere beyond what can be seen: the "vertical" dimension is, moreover, an expression of the worth of that realm "beyond" (in which "higher" becomes synonymous with "better," just as we speak of moving "up" in the world). This better realm is not "in the sky" but beyond "this creation," namely the "heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1) that are temporary and slated for an end.

In keeping with several distinct strains of Jewish thought, the author of Hebrews conceives of this realm of God in terms of the architecture of the tabernacle.<sup>81</sup> The author differs from Philo and Josephus on this point, however, for the "real" temple of God is not the universe of this creation, with earth and sea as the outer courts and the sky as the inner court.<sup>82</sup> The "true tent" is "not of this creation" (Heb. 9:11), and none of the chambers of the "greater and more perfect tent" (Heb. 9:11) are to be identified with any part of "this creation."<sup>83</sup>

"Heaven itself" is the eternal and abiding realm, "God's country," the place where God has always been and where God's presence is known in its fullness and not in any dim reflection. It is not a realm that will come into being only at the end, but it is the only realm that remains past "the end" as apocalyptists describe it. It is the realm of God's abode from before the creation of the visible, material cosmos. It is the realm where the Son was adored by angels before and after his incarnation. It is the οἰκουμένη of 1:6, which is not the sphere of visible, temporal activity but the realm where the Son is worshiped by angelic hosts (see commen-

81. See *1 Enoch* 90:28-29; *Testament of Levi* 5.

82. Thus Josephus *Ant.* 3.123, 180-81; Philo *Vit. Mos.* 2.88; *Spec. Leg.* 1.66; these and other texts are discussed at length in Jean Daniélou, "La symbolisme du temple de Jérusalem chez Philon et Josèphe," in *Le symbolisme cosmique des monuments religieux* (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1957), 83-90.

83. On this point I thus differ with MacRae ("Heavenly Temple," 187), who understands the author "unequivocally to make use of the Hellenistic concept of the temple-structured universe." The passage of Jesus "from earth to heaven" is only parallel with his "entrance through the veil into the Holy of Holies" if we understand "heaven" here quite differently from the "heavens," or "skies."

tary on 1:6). This divine realm is also, as the author himself clarifies, the “coming realm” (οἰκουμένη μέλλουσα, 2:5). This is another important clue to the author’s eschatology: the realm to which the Son returns to the adulation of the angelic hosts is also the realm that is, from our vantage point, “coming.”

The realm beyond “this creation” is, finally, the destiny of the “many sons and daughters” who follow Jesus, their pioneer on their eschatological pilgrimage. It is there, in God’s realm, that the believers will find their “better and lasting possessions” (Heb. 10:34), their “better” because “heavenly” homeland (Heb. 11:16), and the “unshakable kingdom” (Heb. 12:28) in which is their “abiding” city (Heb. 13:13-14). That God could be said to have “prepared” a city for the faithful in this realm suggests that there are still “created things” in this realm (like the beings who, apart from the Son, populate that realm), but the crucial point is that none of these promised benefits is “of this creation,” of a temporary and therefore inferior kind.<sup>84</sup> It is the author’s elevation of “abiding” and “lasting” as terms of value in contrast to “something that ends” that most suggests the impropriety of speaking of any “interim” kingdom (something transient by definition) in connection with the eschatology of this letter.

The author’s eschatological expectations (namely, the removal of the visible creation and the persistence of the divine realm) introduce assessments of value into his cosmology that will be crucial to the success of the author’s strategy. That which belongs to the other realm, the realm of the Son’s preincarnate and post-ascension existence, is “better,” and everything that belongs to that realm is valued as “better” than its counterpart in this realm of everyday experience. Thus the author contrasts the possessions lost by the converts as a result of their association with Jesus with the “better and lasting” possessions they have in the realm beyond (10:34); Abraham and the patriarchs were looking not for a temporal homeland but for a “better homeland, that is, a heavenly one” (11:16).<sup>85</sup> All material creation is of limited value since it is of limited duration. The appurtenances of the realm beyond are “better” precisely because they are “lasting” or “abiding,” as opposed to temporary and, indeed, subject to removal.

The penultimate character of the earth and the heavens — and all that pertain to them — becomes a recurring theme throughout Hebrews, bolstering the author’s deliberative cause at every point (primarily in terms of how it defines the topics of “advantage” and “relative expediency”). The honor, wealth, and sense of having a home in this world, all of which was lost by the addressees

84. Hurst (“Eschatology and ‘Platonism,’” 72) is right to stress that the author does not oppose created to uncreated things, as would Plato, but rather two orders of created things — that which belongs to “this creation” and that which is “not of this creation” (Heb. 9:11) but rather of that better creation which is God’s realm, “heaven itself.”

85. Access to these “better” goods is, of course, inseparable from the “better” covenant, mediator, sacrifice, and hope that have come in Jesus.

as the price of their continued adherence to Jesus and Jesus' household, pale in comparison with the honor, possessions, and enfranchisement that the believers who persevere will receive in the realm beyond (2:10; 10:34; 13:14). The addressees will therefore be urged to invest only in the eternal possessions (10:34; 11:13-16; 12:26-28; 13:13-14) and to consider worldly goods and security ultimately to be a bad and foolish investment (11:24-26; 12:16-17). Viewed another way, continued commitment to the group (even at the cost of ongoing deprivation of this world's goods, security, and honor) will be urged on the basis of the belief that the visible world is of secondary value to the presently invisible world, in which the believers are to set their hopes and ambitions.

It has been impossible to speak of the spatial elements of the author's cosmology in isolation from certain temporal elements, since the latter do to a great degree define the former. These realms are not static but rather are involved in a dynamic process through time — a feature that sharply distinguishes the author's thought from Platonic thought. The coming, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus are in Hebrews, as elsewhere in the New Testament, an event in time that has signaled the beginning of the "end" of this realm and all its evil. The message of Jesus and about Jesus is an eschatological one, coming "in these last days" (1:2). One can recognize its eschatological character in one sense from its relationship to the whole of sacred history and ritual practice. The death of Jesus on the cross and his subsequent entrance into the divine realm "to appear before God on our behalf" (9:24) accomplished a task that centuries of animal sacrifices prescribed by Torah could only prefigure. His death for others made possible the consummation of the journey that the people of God had been on throughout the epic of biblical (and intertestamental) history.

From the perspective of the author of Hebrews, then, the last days have come and the end time has been initiated. With the session of Jesus at the right hand of God, the preparatory work for the end has been accomplished. "Yet a little while," and Jesus will come a second time for the deliverance (the "salvation") of those who eagerly wait for him (9:28; see 10:37-38). The eschatological dimension of salvation is consistently underscored in Hebrews.<sup>86</sup> The "Day,"

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86. The use of the term "salvation" in 1:14, 2:3, and 9:28 clearly has a future, eschatological orientation. 6:9 posits that the believers will have "better things, things pertaining to salvation, in store for them" (in contrast to "burning" in 6:8), and so falls easily into this same forward-looking vision. The uses of the term in 2:10 and 5:9 are ambiguous when taken in and by themselves, but readily lend themselves to the same eschatological orientation when read in the context of the other passages. Even the appearance of the term in 11:7, where Noah's trust in "things yet unseen" results in obedient action "unto the salvation of his household," highlights this future aspect of deliverance, for "salvation" came not to Noah when he believed God's warning, nor when he began to build the ark, but after he persisted, completed the task, and boarded it with his family.

which can be no other than the "Day of the Lord," is drawing nearer (10:25). It will be a day of judgment and destruction for God's enemies (10:26-31), who are also the Son's enemies (1:13; 10:13), but of deliverance for those who have kept faith with Jesus in the midst of the pressures of this realm (9:28). It is the theme of "receiving the reward" that also links this Day with the anticipated dissolution of the material, visible cosmos and the revelation of the divine realm, the locale of the believers' "unshakable kingdom" (12:26-28).

For the author of Hebrews, the kingdom of God already exists beyond the material and visible creation, and will simply "remain" after the removal of the temporary, secondary created order. Being part of the Christian community (and remaining a part) is vitally important for survival itself, which is perhaps one reason the author conceives of "salvation" as that which the believer is "about to inherit" (1:14), as the gift that comes with Christ's second "appearing" (9:28): deliverance from the material world that is slated for dissolution and entrance into the abiding realm that alone survives the "shaking"<sup>87</sup>. At this eschatological shaking, the visible creation that stands as a barrier between the believers and their better, abiding, heavenly homeland — the presence of God in the unshakable heaven — will be removed. They will then enter into their promised, eternal inheritance, the "unshakable kingdom" that they are receiving.

The author will remind the addressees at length of these elements of the Christian worldview, which together provide the ideology necessary to sustain

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87. Stedman's presentation of the eschatology of Hebrews is fundamentally flawed in this regard. He speaks repeatedly about the believers awaiting the appearance of the city of God on earth, and is very specific about the location of this city coming *on earth* (*Hebrews*, 14, 37, 123, 133, 144). He is committed to reading "the coming world" (2:5) and "the unshakable kingdom" as a terrestrial millennial kingdom. Aside from the fact that Rev. 20:4-6 gives no sure indication that this reign of the martyrs would take place "on earth" as opposed to the heavenly realm, we have already seen how the author of Hebrews finds the "material and earthly" to be less reliable, since temporary, than otherworldly realities (i.e., the city God has prepared in the abiding realm).

Another argument advanced by Stedman in favor of reading the millennium into Hebrews is worth discussing as an example of fallacious exegesis. He adduces Eph. 2:7 (*Hebrews*, 37), which speaks of "coming ages," as proof that "at least two more ages lie ahead." Following a popular eschatological scheme, he proceeds to enumerate these as the restored Davidic monarchy on earth (thus making room for the "millennial kingdom") and then the new earth and heavens. The problem, of course, is that the plural of "ages" is frequently interchangeable with the singular. If we were to turn to Luke 18:10 or Mark 10:30, we could match proof text with proof text and say, "But Jesus speaks of only one coming age — 'in the age to come [my followers will receive] eternal life.'" Even Eph. 1:21 contrasts "this age" with "the one that is coming," so that it cannot be said on the basis of Eph. 2:7 that two ages are yet to come. That is turning a blind eye to the complexities of the texts themselves for the sake of rigid schematization.

commitment to the group and its confession. The amount of exposition in Hebrews should not lead us to think of the text as an abstract theological tract. The author reinforces beliefs and "ideas" in order to reposition how the addressees think about what would be truly advantageous for them. Commitment to the group wanes as the believer thinks more about temporal losses and temporal expedience. The author therefore spends much time bringing the addressees back to considering their plight in light of eternity as well as in light of the history of God's interaction with humanity.

### *Use of the Old Testament*

The author of Hebrews was clearly a master of OT content and interpretation. The depth and extent of oral-scribal intertexture between this text and the Jewish Scriptures is impressive indeed. For the author, these Scriptures provided the body of authoritative texts in which the worldview and ethos of the community must be grounded. They were not the relics of a Semitic people's tribal and national history, but rather "the oracles of God" (5:12), the God who "spoke to the fathers in the prophets" (1:1). While the revelation of God was "piecemeal and diverse" in those Scriptures, all the pieces came together when viewed in light of the "Son." The meaning of the OT for the author was its testimony to the achievement and significance of Jesus, as well as its guidance for the community, which was responding to God's promises in the Son. Thus the author can freely place verses from the Psalms or Isaiah on the lips of Jesus to find their meaning, or refer them to Jesus, or address them to Jesus (all these techniques are displayed in 1:5-2:13). The author can reconstruct the unseen work of Jesus now in the divine realm based on his conviction that the OT description of the levitical cult provides the shadow of Jesus' more effective priestly service. The Scriptures are read thus in a thoroughly Christocentric manner. They are also read in an ethical manner, providing examples of honorable and faithful response to God for the Christians to imitate (11:1-40) as well as admonitory paradigms of dishonorable, disobedient, or foolish responses to God's promises, which the Christians must not replicate (3:7-4:11; 12:16-17).

The author's OT, however, is not the same text that stands behind the Jewish Scriptures read in synagogues today or printed as the OT in Catholic or Protestant Bibles. These are translations of the MT, an edition of the Scriptures in Hebrew. The author of Hebrews uses a Greek translation of those Scriptures, which closely resembles what has come to be called the Septuagint.<sup>88</sup> Jews living

88. There were, of course, a variety of Greek translations available in the centuries before and after the turn of the era, so that speaking of the LXX *tout court* is something of a simplification.

outside of Palestine became, over the generations, alienated from their ancestral language, Hebrew. They required their sacred texts to be translated into the language that they had come to accept as their own, namely, Greek. The process of translation appears to have begun around 250 B.C. — first the Torah, then the prophets and other writings.

Recognizing that the author of Hebrews used an LXX version is significant, since the LXX frequently differs from the MT.<sup>89</sup> Thus if one were to compare the citation of Psalm 40 in Hebrews 10:5-7 with Psalm 40:6-8 in the OT of most printed Bibles, one would be immediately struck by the differences. The MT reads “sacrifice and offering you have not desired, but ears you have dug for me” (Ps 40:6), whereas Hebrews (following the LXX) reads “sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but you prepared a body for me” (Heb. 10:5; LXX Ps. 39:7).<sup>90</sup> The MT clearly speaks of “ears” to emphasize “hearing” the Torah and doing it as the work that pleases God (rather than ritual acts for sins against Torah and the like). The LXX translator probably understood the psalm in the same way, but found the expression about “digging ears” to be distasteful, and so substituted “a body,” still to live out the requirements of Torah. The LXX version, however, opens up the psalm to a Christological interpretation, which would be impossible from the MT. Now Christ becomes the speaker of the psalm and receives a body from God with which to effect the perfect sacrifice, which replaces all the ineffective rituals of the levitical cult. Throughout the commentary we will note these differences and how the author’s reading of Christ in the OT is affected.

Available codices of the LXX contain numerous books not included in the Jewish canon of the OT, nor, as a consequence, in Protestant Bibles. While it is unlikely that the author of Hebrews enjoyed the benefit of an LXX codex (it is virtually certain that the Scriptures were written on scrolls as separate books), it is likely that the inclusion of the Apocrypha in later LXX codices reflects the importance of these books for Diaspora Jews and, by extension, the Christian churches that inherited not the Hebrew but the Greek Scriptures as their OT. The author of Hebrews certainly read books like the Wisdom of Solomon and either 2 Maccabees or 4 Maccabees, applying the same Christocentric and ethical principles in interpreting their significance as he applied to the books that became the official Jewish canon. For example, Wisdom of Solomon has left its mark on the author’s understanding of Jesus’ preincarnate life (see commentary on 1:2-3), and the martyrs celebrated in 2 and 4 Maccabees shape his ethi-

89. Frequently the differences reflect the ideology or interpretative voice of the translator, but on occasion the LXX is held by OT textual critics to contain the more original reading than the MT.

90. Because the LXX joins Psalms 9 and 10 into a single hymn, the numbering of the rest of the book is off until Psalm 148 (Psalm 147 being split into two hymns in the LXX).

cal instruction (these are the faithful who "were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection," 11:35).

Finally, the author incorporates a wide variety of exegetical techniques into his interpretation of OT texts.<sup>91</sup> In addition to typology (seen largely in the exposition of facets of the levitical cult to construct a picture of the heavenly cult) and homiletical midrash (seen, e.g., in the admonitory handling of the story of Num. 14 in Heb. 3:7-4:11), the author uses the Scriptures to reinforce his argument, exhortations, and sometimes even emotional effect (thus 10:30, 37-39). He draws out the implications of OT texts (frequently focusing on the literal meaning of a key word like "new" in Heb. 8:8-13 or "yet once more" in Heb. 12:26-27) to advance his argument and employs several exegetical "rules" found in the legal interpretations of the rabbis. Hillel is credited with developing seven principles for applying the legal material of the Torah to situations not covered in the Torah. Of these seven, two are very important for Hebrews.

The first is called, in Hebrew, *qal wahomer*, meaning "light and heavy." This principle states that if something applies in a lesser case, it will apply in a greater case as well. The Torah prescribes that, if one sees one's neighbor's donkey or ox straying, one should return it to the neighbor or keep it safe until the neighbor comes looking for it, or, if one sees it injured in the road, one should help it get back up on its feet (Deut. 22:1-4). The Torah says nothing at this point, however, about what to do if one sees a neighbor's child straying lost or injured on the roadside. By the principle of *qal wahomer*, it would readily be inferred that the same responsibilities were due to the child as to the animals, since a child was of much more value than an animal. This is not, of course, a strictly Jewish principle of interpretation. The argument "from the lesser to the greater" was a mainstay of Greco-Roman argumentation as well (*a minore ad maius*). The author of Hebrews makes frequent use of this principle in his exhortation (see 2:2-4; 9:13-14; 10:28-29; 12:25). In each case, the OT provides the basis for the "lesser" premise, and the message or work of the Son provides the "greater" case.

The second rule is *gezera shawa*, or "verbal analogy," which seeks to clarify the meaning or applicability of one text through a reference to a second text that shares a common, relevant word with the first text. Hebrews employs this technique at 4:1-11, as the author attempts to define what "God's rest" actually signifies in Psalm 95:11. In that passage, both "rest" and "works" remind him of the Creation account, and so he goes to Genesis 2:2 as a means of proving that

91. For a more complete treatment of the author's use of Jewish interpretative techniques, see Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, cxix-cxxiv; Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 1:330-50; Herbert W. Bateman IV, *Early Jewish Hermeneutics and Hebrews 1:5-13* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), esp. 9-120.

God's rest was not merely the land of Canaan but some primeval creation of God. *Gezera shawa* is also applied in Hebrews 5:5-6, where two citations from the Psalms are linked by the word "you": the first text has already been shown to apply to Jesus ("you are my Son," Ps. 2:7), and so clarifies the referent of the pronoun in Psalm 110:4, "you are a priest forever," to be Jesus as well.

### *Expertise in Rhetoric*

Not only was the author a gifted interpreter of the Scriptures, but he was also a gifted orator, an expert in rhetoric and style. Harold Attridge writes that "the body of [Hebrews], which the epistolary postscript styles a 'word of exhortation' (λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως), is generally recognized to be a product of rhetorical art."<sup>92</sup> Indeed, Hebrews has been singled out among the NT documents as "the earliest example of Christian artistic literature."<sup>93</sup> The question is not whether the author received formal training in rhetoric, although he would have the best claim to such education among NT authors.<sup>94</sup> Even if he had only the informal training available to all who heard speeches in the marketplaces, synagogues, and theaters, it is clear that he paid sharp attention to the art of persuasion behind such performances. Both at the level of stylistic ornament and persuasive argument, this author shows himself fully equipped in the art of persuasion.<sup>95</sup>

Like many ancient texts, Hebrews appears to have been written with a

92. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 14.

93. A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, trans. L. R. M. Strachan (New York: Doran, 1927), 244.

94. Lane (*Hebrews 1-8*, 1-li) finds the rhetorical ornamentation and careful, studied appeals to logic and emotion in the sermon to be positive proof of the author's formal training in rhetoric. He posits that the author enjoyed a primary and secondary education comparable to Philo's own.

95. Rhetorical critics rarely desire to prove or need to claim "training in and conscious use of the ancient rhetorical rules" on the part of the NT author, as a recent critic of rhetorical analysis seems to suggest (Jeffrey A. D. Weima, "What Has Aristotle to Do with Paul?" *CTJ* 32 [1997]: 458-68, 463). Such matters are, essentially, irrelevant. The question is not whether a NT author received a degree in rhetoric but whether he uses rhetoric and whether or not the persuasive strategies of his text can be illumined (and the impact on the hearers assessed) through further study of those strategies in the ancient textbooks. When we find Paul, or the author of Hebrews, or Peter employing inductive and deductive forms of argument, seeks to arouse certain strategic emotions on the part of the hearers, or defends his own credibility (or attacks the credibility of rival teachers), then we are looking at strategies of argumentation that are the subjects of the rhetorical handbooks. The explicit and systematic discussion of these strategies in the latter illumine when and how they appear in the NT documents.

view to oral delivery.<sup>96</sup> Given that spiritual leaders of the early Church read letters in a liturgical setting, this makes perfect sense.<sup>97</sup> William Lane has brought together a number of indications from within the text that Hebrews is self-consciously an oration, that is, a text for oral rather than visual communication.<sup>98</sup> The author uses verbs of speaking when referring to his communication (2:5; 6:9; 8:1; 9:5; 11:32); he also voices his concern for the addressees' attentive hearing (not reading) of the message (5:11). Awareness of the orality of Hebrews has opened the door for scholars to examine its use of many of the devices employed by orators, whose goal was not only to create an argument but to deliver it "in such a way as to *sound* persuasive to [their] audience."<sup>99</sup>

96. In the epilogue of 2 Maccabees, for example, the epitomator reveals the assumption that his work would be read aloud: "For just as . . . wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one's enjoyment, so also the style of the story delights the ears of those who read the work" (15:39, NRSV).

97. Compare Rev. 1:3, NRSV: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear."

98. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, lxxiv-lxxv.

99. Michael R. Cosby, *The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 4. Both Cosby and G. H. Guthrie (*The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Approach* [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 146) affirm the oral character of Hebrews and take this into careful account in their respective analyses. In light of these observations, it is surprising to read criticisms of rhetorical analysis such as one finds in Weima ("What Has Aristotle to Do with Paul?" 463): "There is a fundamental problem in mixing the genre of a speech (oral discourse) with that of a letter (written discourse). If one takes seriously the fact that Paul wrote letters, then the most important source for understanding Paul's letters must naturally be the letter-writing practices of his day, not the rules for oral discourse." The distinction between oral and written discourse, letters and speeches, is by no means as clear-cut as Weima pretends. Many specimens of "written discourse" exist that are merely literary speeches (e.g., 4 Maccabees, many of the "orations" of Lucian, Demosthenes, or Dio), and 2 Maccabees, Hebrews, and Revelation presume that the audience will "hear" rather than "see" the words of the text. If, therefore, Weima had taken seriously the orality of ancient texts like Paul's letters or Hebrews or Revelation, then he would not conceptualize writing and rhetoric as so thoroughly incompatible. Ancient handbooks on letter writing are useful in terms of asking whether or not, say, 2 Corinthians will be heard as a "letter of consolation," but 2 Corinthians does far more than any letter of consolation. It also seeks to persuade, and insofar as it seeks to elicit some kind of response from the audience it belongs to the art of rhetoric to assist the modern interpreter in sorting out what Paul's goals are and what strategies he employs to achieve them. One of the benefits of a socio-rhetorical approach, it might be said, would be to view epistolography and rhetoric as complementary rather than competing backgrounds (Weima's term, "source," is inappropriate) against which different aspects of the text are illuminated or highlighted. With regard to the Epistle to the Hebrews, however, the rhetorical quality of the text is especially pronounced given the sonorous and oratorical exordium without any of the preliminaries of an epistolary prescript such as one finds in other NT texts from the second half of the canon. It is only the addition of an epistolary postscript that makes the title "Epistle" at all appropriate to Hebrews, rather

The author uses a wide variety of the embellishments, ornaments, and forms of argument recommended or listed by the ancient rhetorical theorists, pointing to his rhetorical artistry and acuity. Taking merely the opening verses, one sees at once numerous skillfully employed rhetorical techniques already at work:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. (Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων, δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας. ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτῆρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ.)

The Greek reveals the author's use of extended alliteration in the repeated sounding of the phoneme /p/ (five times in one clause).<sup>100</sup> Similarly, one finds a repeated cadence between the two parallel clauses of 1:3a: -στάσεως αὐτοῦ and -νάμεως αὐτοῦ.<sup>101</sup> The two phrases ὃς ὢν . . . τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ and φέρων . . . τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ exhibit homoeoptaton (similar sounds at the endings of words or phrases) with words at the beginning and ending of each phrase. Hebrews 1:1-2a shows perfect parallelism of the constituent clauses, developed by means of a complex antithesis (contrasts): "of old" stands in contrast with "in these last days"; "to the ancestors" stands in contrast with "to us"; "through the prophets" stands in contrast with "through a son."<sup>102</sup> Verse 4 contains an example of hyperbaton (ὄνομα is in a syntactically unexpected position) and brachylogy, or elliptical expression (παρ' αὐτοῦς stands for παρ' ὀνομάτων αὐτῶν). Hebrews begins in what might be termed the "grand style" but frequently moves back and forth from grand to middle to plain styles, sometimes forming sonorous and embellished sentences and sometimes speaking in terse, concise maxims.<sup>103</sup> Thus the author varies the style and sentence length in ways

than simply "Sermon to the Hebrews" or "Oration to the Hebrews" (see above for discussions of the appropriateness of the designation of the audience as "Hebrews").

100. Attridge cites 2:1-4; 4:16; 10:11, 34; 11:17; and 12:21 as other prominent examples of alliteration (*Hebrews*, 20 n. 157).

101. See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 20 nn. 145-47 for this and other indices of attention to rhythm in the author's prose composition. Aristotle advises (*Rh.* 3.8.1, 3): "The form of diction should be neither metrical nor without rhythm. . . . Wherefore prose must be rhythmical, but not metrical."

102. Calvin (*Hebrews*, 1) opens his commentary with a discussion of the careful rhetorical construction of this central proposition.

103. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 20.

that classical rhetorical theorists deemed necessary for effective composition and impact.

In addition to judicious use of alliteration, Hebrews provides the most extended example of anaphora in the NT. Both Michael Cosby and George A. Kennedy note the prominence of this rhetorical feature in chapter 11 with its repetition of *πίστει*.<sup>104</sup> Harold Attridge has further identified several occurrences of assonance, asyndeton, brachylogy, chiasm, ellipse, hendiadys, hyperbaton, isocolon, litotes, and paronomasia.<sup>105</sup> The author also employs a wide range of metaphors, all from areas of life commonly selected for such illustrative purposes: education, agriculture, seafaring, law, athletics, and the cultus.<sup>106</sup>

The author also employs forms of argumentation that can be analyzed in terms of classical rhetorical theory. The sections of exposition abound in syllogistic and enthymematic arguments (e.g., 7:4-10); arguments "from lesser to greater" are observable throughout the oration (e.g., 2:1-4; 10:26-31); appeals to common rhetorical "topics" such as the just, expedient, honorable, feasible, praiseworthy, and the like abound; examples and analogies are skillfully selected and crafted to furnish inductive proofs in support of the author's exhortations; the author arouses emotions like fear, confidence, shame, and emulation in his audience to lead them to accept his proposals more readily. His use of the LXX as authoritative witness throughout the oration sets him apart from other Greco-Roman orators in terms of his choice of "scriptures," but he is like Greco-Roman orators in the way he employs those scriptures in his proofs.<sup>107</sup> Aristotle saw orators using Homer and Hesiod in much the same way as the author of Hebrews uses the canon of church and synagogue. The rhetorical device of *synkrisis*, or "comparison," figures prominently throughout the argumentation of Hebrews (e.g., the comparison of Jesus with Moses in 3:1-6 or with the levitical priesthood in 7:1-10:18). These kernels of argumentation and discrete rhetorical units are further linked together throughout the oration by means of connecting particles and phrases such as *διό, τοιγαροῦν, διὰ τοῦτο* and *οὖν*, as

104. Cosby, *Rhetorical Composition*, 3; George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 156.

105. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 20-21; cf. also Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 1:331-36. All of these rhetorical figures are discussed in book 4 of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. It will not be the aim of this commentary to point out the verbal ornamentation employed by the author, save on rare occasions. Attridge and Spicq have done an exceptional job searching out these embellishments, and the interested reader can peruse their work. For an excellent introduction to these rhetorical devices and samples of how they are used in Hebrews, see Trotter, *Interpreting Hebrews*, 163-80.

106. Attridge (*Hebrews*, 21) provides several examples in each of these areas.

107. Cf. T. H. Olbricht, "Hebrews as Amplification," in *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht (JSNTSS 90; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 382-83.

well as through frequent use of the device of *inclusio*,<sup>108</sup> foreshadowing of themes (e.g., the introduction of Jesus as high priest in 2:17 and 3:1 before arriving at 4:14-16, which initiates the first actual discussion of Jesus' priesthood), summary statements (once explicitly in 8:1: *Κεφάλαιον δὲ . . .*), and transitional techniques involving linking words and key terms.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, the author of Hebrews forms discrete units that are identifiable as standard rhetorical forms. One finds in chapter 11 a complete encomium on "faith." Burton Mack has argued that 12:5-17 exhibits the characteristic form of elaboration on a theme, found in the *progymnasmata*, the elementary exercises undertaken before advanced schooling in rhetoric.<sup>110</sup> The question of whether or not Hebrews is a carefully crafted piece of rhetoric is answered roundly in the affirmative given this "overabundance" of "structural indices."<sup>111</sup>

The author of Hebrews, in sum, is a member of the Pauline mission whose task it is to nurture and preserve the work started by the apostolic leader. He exercises authority based on his expertise in, and fidelity to, the tradition of the Christian culture, namely, the Jewish Scriptures and the message of Jesus. To encourage the addressees to remain firmly committed to the Christian group and its hope, he brings the resources of the authoritative scriptures of the sect and the full spectrum of rhetorical tactics to bear on the task of reaffirming the worldview of the Christian culture as the context in which to deliberate wisely about what course of action will be advantageous for the hearers and what values will lead to lasting honor.

## The Rhetorical Goal and Socio-Rhetorical Strategy of Hebrews

### *Ancient Rhetoric and New Testament Interpretation*

Rhetorical analysis offers a wealth of insights into the way in which a NT text sought to persuade its hearers to take a particular course of action. Since rhetorical analysis will play a large part in this commentary, a concise introduction to its concepts and terminology is in order here.<sup>112</sup> The principal sourcebooks

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108. Compare Guthrie, *Structure of Hebrews*, 76-89.

109. *Ibid.*, 94-111.

110. B. L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 77-78.

111. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 16.

112. For more detailed introductions to rhetorical analysis of NT texts, see Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*; Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*; Duane F. Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter* (SBLDS 104; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).