

CHRIST'S PRIESTLY SOLIDARITY WITH THE BELIEVERS —
AN EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF HEBREWS 4:14-16

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Abstract

The priesthood of Christ in the epistle to the Hebrews is unique in the New Testament. The title, 'the great priest,' is used only once in Hebrews. The priesthood of Christ is generally associated with the fulfilment of Old Testament cultic rituals and Levitical obligations. However, Hebrews touches on the efficacy of the priesthood of Christ in solidarity with human frailties and the assurance to help those who come to him. This portrait of Christ is fully developed only in Hebrews, explicitly in the entire New Testament. This dissertation focuses on examining this portrayal of Christ and his priestly solidarity. This will be done by analysing the authorship, the intended audience and the probable date of composition. Furthermore, the identification of the genre of the epistle and its structural organisation will be examined. The text will be analysed exegetically and theologically based on establishing the overall context. Finally, the understanding of Christ's priestly solidarity will be drawn based on this analysis.

CHRIST'S PRIESTLY SOLIDARITY WITH THE BELIEVERS – AN EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF HEBREWS 4:14-16

Hebrews 4:14-16

14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.

15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us, therefore, approach the throne of grace with boldness so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (NRSV)

Chapter 1

The Epistle to the Hebrews and its distinctive Priestly Christology

The Epistle to the Hebrews stands out among the New Testament writings in the Christological portrait of the priesthood of Christ. It remains distinctive in the NT in its direct designation of the following titles: Priest (ἱερεὺς 5:6; 7:17, 21), Great Priest (ἱερέα μέγαν in Heb.10:21), High Priest (ἀρχιερεὺς 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5,10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11) and Great High Priest (ἀρχιερέα μέγαν in 4:14) to Christ.¹ The Great High Priest, used only once in Hebrews, serves as a comprehensive expression to indicate its superiority to the Aaronic high priesthood; it is also used for Simon Maccabaeus (1

¹ Brian C. Small, *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews* (Leiden: Boston: Brill 2014), p. 183. Ebook; James Strong, *The Strongest Strong's: Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan 2001), pp. 478, 548, 923; William Edwy Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London, Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers 1996), p.3470.

Macc.13:42) and of the Logos in Philo (On Dreams 1.214;2.183).² These titles are used extensively in developing the dominant theme of the priesthood of Christ (other titles or offices of Christ seen in the Hebrews include Lord, Son, Firstborn, Heir, King, Author, Perfector, Apostle, Forerunner, Guarantee, Mediator, Minister, Shepherd). This dissertation primarily looks into Christ's priesthood and focuses on his priestly solidarity with those who believe in Him. Scholars also argue that the idea of the priesthood of Christ can still be found in implicit forms throughout the NT. In Hebrews, the theme is more explicit and systematically developed.³ Apart from seeing Christ the Revealer in the epistle, Geerhardus Vos sees the dominating idea in the epistle as being of Christ's priesthood.

While the epistle has in common with the other New Testament writings the representation of Christ as Revealer, it stands practically alone in explicitly naming Him a priest. It were rash to infer from this that the concept was first created by the author.⁴

While the epistle's distinctive portrayal of the high priestly Christology is evident in the text, the natural and more pertinent question emerges on the author's identity behind such a theological framework. Understanding the author helps us gain insight into his theological influences and hermeneutical approach, which could offer critical perspec-

² F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, U.K: Wm.B.Eerdmans Publishing Company 1990), p. 115.

³ A short and detailed analysis of implicit titles like the Holy One of God, the Son of God, the Son of Man, themes like the Sacrificial Death of Christ, Christ's gestures like the lifting up of his hands for benediction, his seamless tunic as a priestly robe, the intercession of Christ in Pauline Epistles and many such hints and traces are argued as imported reading from Hebrews which are read back into these titles and passages by John W. Baigent, "Jesus as Priest: An Examination of the Claim that the Concept of Jesus as Priest may be Found in The New Testament Outside the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Vox Evangelica* 12 (1981): pp. 34-44.

⁴ Geerhardus Johannes Vos, The Priesthood of Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews, *The Princeton Theological Review*, Vol. V (1907), pp.423-447 and 579-604

tives into the purpose, need and context for developing this unique priestly portrait of Christ.

The Authorship of Hebrews

Identifying the author of this epistle who elaborates on this unique priestly portrayal of Christ, and also of locating his readers remains a matter of historical speculation.

Among proposals regarding the epistle's authorship are those that can generally be classed as Pauline (direct Pauline authorship and indirect Pauline authorship), authorship by companions of Paul (chiefly, Barnabas, Apollos, Luke, Silas, Priscilla and Aquila), and the 'anonymous authorship' hypothesis.⁵ Other proposals 'with virtually no acceptance'⁶ include Peter, the deacon Philip, the elder Aristion, Jude, and Mary. The range of possible authors and the views developed for and against these proposals lead to an endless range of scholarly opinions and interpretations.

This dissertation briefly traces the epistle's proposed authorship, with more interest in Paul, as it is the most primitive debate from the early church. The proposal of Pauline authorship of Hebrews is due to two major reasons: firstly, theological similarities between Hebrews and his letters, such as his Christocentric focus in his engagement with the Law, the believer's faith and relationship with Christ, and his treatment of the old and new covenants as their ultimate fulfilment in Christ.

Secondly, early Church fathers, like Clement of Alexandria and Origen, speculated about Paul's influence for canonical purposes, which helped integrate Hebrews into the New Testament canon. The letter's anonymity, combined with Paul's prominence, led to

⁵ Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), pp. 78-81; James W. Thompson, *Hebrews: Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic 2008), pp. 4-6;

⁶ Koester, *Hebrews*, p. 78

his association with it, despite stylistic differences.⁷ More concisely, Apollos has been proposed as a potential author due to his Alexandrian background, rhetorical skill, knowledge of scriptures, and his ability in persuasive speech (Acts 18: 24-28), particularly as the epistle displays many Hellenistic elements.

Pauline Authorship

The Alexandrian tradition favoured Pauline authorship with Clement of Alexandria, and later, Origen associated its conceptual origins with Paul and the view that Paul influenced the epistle's amanuensis. Clement believed in Luke's role in authoring a Greek translation from Paul's original Hebrew writing for the Greeks. At the same time, Origen is well-known for his comment, 'But who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows'.⁸ Origen's (3rd century) view of indirect Pauline authorship did influence the Western Church's initial rejection of direct Pauline authorship of Hebrews; '(Origen) his influence undoubtedly had powerful weight in overcoming the Western hesitation.'⁹ Augustine and Jerome's (5th century) authority again influenced the Western tradition of Pauline's indirect authorship.¹⁰ Attributing Hebrews to Paul gave it apostolic authority, particularly in the Eastern Church, while the West later accepted this tradition under theologians like Augustine and Jerome.

⁷ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, pp. 287-293.

⁸ Eusebius, 'Ecclesiastical History' 6.25.14, <https://topostext.org/work/732>

⁹ James Hastings, *Dictionary of The Bible* (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1968), p. 370.

¹⁰ Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), p. 31.

‘Hebrews was secure in both halves of the Christian world as a canonical work of Paul. The assumption of Pauline authorship remained intact until the period of the Renaissance and Reformation when it became widely questioned.’¹¹

Post-reformation views relating to ‘non-Pauline’ authorship argue more towards the companions of Paul and anonymous authorship.¹² The major reasons that weaken the Pauline tradition are the lack of stylistic sophistication and elegance, which is more refined than Romans. In Heb. 2:3, the author identifies himself as a secondary recipient of the Christian tradition. This directly contrasts Paul’s consistent claim to apostleship and first-hand revelatory knowledge of Christ in his epistles. Perhaps the main reason that directly impacts this dissertation is the absence of the theological focus on the theme of Jesus, the High Priest. Pauline writings do not use the title ‘priest,’ and the theme of Christ’s priesthood is never developed as in Hebrews¹³. “The treatment of Jesus as high priest is unique in the New Testament, and the elaborate use of cultic categories to interpret the Savior’s work is not characteristic of Paul....”¹⁴ Despite many similarities between Pauline writings and Hebrews, in his argument for Pauline authorship, David Alan Black identifies ‘the treatment of Jesus the High Priest and the sacerdotal imagery of Hebrews’¹⁵ as one of the key conceptual dissimilarities between Pauline writings and Hebrews.

¹¹ Attridge, *Hebrews*, p. 31.

¹² For a more detailed survey and analysis, see Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993) pp. 153-170.

¹³ Attridge, *Hebrews*, p.31.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁵ David Alan Black, *The Authorship of Hebrews: The Case for Paul* (Gonzalez, Florida: Energion Publications, 2013), p. 4. For Black’s argument on similarities in usages of words concerning the character, dignity, and efficacy of the High priesthood of Christ in Pauline writings and Hebrews (see p. 10).

Regarding the text chosen for this dissertation, Black lists some parallels beginning with identifying two words in the text for this dissertation (Heb. 4:14-16): ‘*homologia*’ thrice in Pauline writings (1 Tim. 6:12; 13, 2 Cor 9:13) and thrice in Hebrews (Heb. 3:1; 4:14; 10:23). The other word, ‘*astheneiais*,’ which brings in the idea of Christ’s sympathising with human ‘weakness’ (*astheneiais* in Rom. 6:19; 1 Cor. 15:43; Gal. 4:13) is argued to be a Pauline concept. Christ passing through the heavens in Heb. 4:14 is compared with Eph. 4:10, Christ being ‘without sin,’ used by Paul in 2 Cor. 5:21, and the usage of mercy and grace in Heb. 4:16 is found in 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2 and Tit. 1:4. The most definitive incompatibility of Pauline’s authorship of Hebrews can be seen in the explicit absence of the priesthood of Christ, although the Pauline idea of Christ’s solidarity (Rom. 6:19; 1 Cor. 15:43; Gal. 4:13) is observed. The concept is more skilfully developed in Hebrews in the entire New Testament. Gordon Fee, in a detailed discussion of Pauline Christology, cites Oscar Cullmann’s *The Christology of the New Testament Understanding*, where he analyses the diverse titles and roles attributed to Jesus Christ in the NT in what is called ‘Christology by way of titles’ (titular Christology) and notes the titles of the “prophet, suffering servant, High Priest — none of which is Pauline.”¹⁶

Apollos as the Author

The comparative analysis of Paul’s writings, specifically regarding the concept of the priestly solidarity of Christ, cannot be done for Apollos due to the absence of any recognised writings attributed to him, “the old conjecture that he wrote the Wisdom of Solomon before, and the letter to the Hebrews after his conversion has now been abandoned”¹⁷. Luther’s¹⁸ proposal of Apollos, termed a ‘brilliant guess’ by F.F. Bruce in his

¹⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological study* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), p. 12

¹⁷ Hastings, *Dictionary of The Bible*, p. 45.

¹⁸ On Luther’s view see F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 17-18

commentary on Hebrews, cites several scholars¹⁹ who commend it. However, ‘the Alexandrian²⁰ characteristics of the thought, style, and vocabulary of the epistle have been thought to speak in favour of Apollos’s authorship’²¹ based on NT references (Acts 18:24-28; 1Cor. 1:10-17; 3:1-9, 21-23; 4:1-7; 16:12; Titus 3:13) which record his role and interactions in the early Christian community. Alexandrian rhetorical sophistication and Christocentric apologia with the Corinthian Jews make him a more competent candidate “as he argued cogently (refuting all counter-arguments) that the Messiah of whom the scriptures spoke must be identified with Jesus of Nazareth”.²² A similar ‘turn of phrase’²³ is observed by Bruce for Paul: ‘Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus’ (Acts 18: 5). However, the author of Hebrews does not show any keen interest in introducing or affirming the fulfil-

¹⁹ For the list of authors refer F.F.Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 18.

²⁰ James H. Burtress, ‘Plato, Philo, and the Author of Hebrews’, *Lutheran Quarterly*, 10 no 1 Feb 1958, pp. 54-64 in his article cites Otto Pfleiderer, *Primitive Christianity*, trans, by W. Montgomery (New York: G. P. Putnams Sons, 1910), p. 282. on the Hellenistic influence in the Epistle to the Hebrews: “The Hellenistic basis of the Epistle to the Hebrews, its dependence in thought and word upon the Book of Wisdom, and especially upon Philo, is so obvious that there is not the smallest room for doubt upon the matter.” Also, James cites Hermann von Soden, *The History of Early Christian Literature*, trans, by J. R. Wilkinson, ed. by W. D. Morrison (New York: P. G. Putnams Sons, 1906), p. 249. a concise view of Alexandrianism into Christianity as “It marks the definite entrance of Alexandrianism into the sphere of Christianity. By Alexandrianism, we mean that strange amalgamation of Jewish religion and Greek philosophy which was gradually brought forth chiefly in Alexandria during the last century before Christ, and at the time of St. Paul was consummated in the teaching of the famous philosopher Philo of Alexandria”.

²¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 18.

²² F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, U.K: Wm.B.Eerdmans Publishing Company 1988), pp. 360-361.

²³ F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 361

ment of the Messianic idea associated with Jesus in the NT. Some scholars²⁴ like Friedrich Bleek, Thomas W. Manson, Francesco LoBue, Ceslas Spicq, Hugh W. Montefiore and others positively see the possibilities of Apollo's authorship based on the factors mentioned in the NT, as cited above. Key factors presumed are his exposure to the philosophical traditions of Alexandria, his proficiency in Greek rhetoric and Jewish scripture, his close acquaintance with Pauline ministry and influence, and his connections with Timothy, which positions him favourably within the setting from which Hebrews was written. As the author of Hebrews, Apollos starts and ends as a 'brilliant guess' because of the lack of such views in the early Church. The absence of preserved writings of Apollos makes it nearly impossible to analyse the priestly solidarity of Christ.

The Anonymous Authorship Hypothesis

Although the precise recognition of the author's identity remains complex and debatable, the epistle provides some ideas about who the author might be, which are also widely debated in NT scholarship. The author is identified as male by using the masculine personal pronoun (Heb. 11:32); he is seen as being familiar and authoritative, possibly due to some personal acquaintance with his readers (Heb.13:19; 13:23). The author uses OT scriptures as his primary authority and does not claim any apostolic authority in the epistle, placing him as belonging to the second-generation Christian com-

²⁴ Herbert W. Bateman, *Charts on the Book of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications 2012), pp. 17-25; Attridge, *Hebrews*, p. 2.; F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 18. A detailed argument based on reconstructions from direct evidence from the NT text and hypothetical reconstruction on Apollos's authorship see Hugh W. Montefiore, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: A & C Black Publishers Ltd 1975), pp. 9-29

munity. Most NT scholars agree that the author displays sophisticated knowledge and the use of Greek²⁵, due in all likelihood, to his Alexandrian background²⁶.

The Addressees, Destination and Date of Hebrews

Scholars also vary in their hypotheses about the audience, destination, and date, as the epistle does not provide any direct information about the identity of its envisaged readers. The addressees are widely linked to the following possibilities: exclusively Jewish Christians, a mix of Jewish and Gentile Christians and exclusively Gentile Christians.²⁷ The extensive use of OT quotations and allusions, the epistle's emphasis on Old Testament typology, sacrificial imagery, parallelisms and familiarity with Jewish religious practices²⁸ indicate that the audience might be deeply rooted or have a strong Jewish traditional background. The author's use of allusions or indirect references to Maccabean themes or events in the epistle, particularly in the context of persecution, martyrdom, and fidelity to the Jewish faith (e.g., Heb. 11:36-38; 2 Macc. 5:27; 6:1-7:42; 10:6), angelic mediation and the Mosaic Law (Heb. 2:2-3), food regulations (9:10; 13:9-10), and the use of Jewish exegetical techniques²⁹ to strengthen his Christological arguments and exhortation are seen to favour this view. However, F.F. Bruce argues that this presupposed familiarity with temple-based levitical rituals does not require the audience to be Jewish Christians. He states that Gentile Christians considered the Old Tes-

²⁵ Ceslas Spicq's list of 152 words unique to Hebrews in the entire NT is cited by most commentaries as one of the key evidence for his linguistic refinement.

²⁶ Attridge remarks that the study and practice of rhetoric, philosophy, and Greek scriptures were not limited to Alexandria. Attridge, *Hebrews*, p. 5.

²⁷ Koester, *Hebrews*, pp. 46-47

²⁸ The use of very Jewish expressions like "the descendants of Abraham" (2:16), "sons of God" (2:10), comparisons between the wilderness generation and the readers of the epistle (3:7-4:11), the Levitical and the Melchizedekan priesthood, the old and the new covenant (9:1-20) and

²⁹ Koester, *Hebrews*, pp. 46-47

tament authoritative and sacred, showing enthusiastic interest in the Tabernacle's intricacies and the offerings that made finding “full adumbration of the gospel” in them.³⁰ Koester argues that Paul comprehensively uses the OT in his letters to the Romans, Corinthians and the Galatians, that is, primarily Gentile majority assemblies.³¹ Gentile themes like repentance from dead works (6:1), the idea of enlightenment (6:4;10:32), and the warning to avoid strange teachings (13:9) are seen as concerns addressed to Gentile audiences who might have converted from Paganism. Exhortations not to fall away and to avoid strange teachings are seen as the possible influence of Hellenistic syncretism, which might be one of the author’s concerns towards his readers. Despite these and new speculations, most commentators ³² believe that the first recipients might primarily be Jewish Christians; this does not exclude the presence of Gentile converts. They also postulate five possible destinations: Italy (Rome), Judea (Jerusalem), Antioch of Syria, Colossae, and Cyrene. However, most commentators ³³ agree on Rome. Besides the Hebrews author mentioning Italy (Heb.13:24), commentators also point to other evidence supporting Rome as the destination. This includes the earliest use of the epistle by Clement of Rome in his letter to the Corinthians, in the context of first-century Roman persecution and the suffering of the recipients (Heb.10:32-34; 12:4). The overall pastoral tone and the rich theological exhortations in the face of these circum-

³⁰ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 5.

³¹ Koester, *Hebrews*, p. 23.

³² F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 3-9.; Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 159-166.; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), pp.83-90.; George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), pp. 29-33.; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), pp. 144-149

³³ Ibid.

stances add more evidence for Rome as the destination³⁴. Some of the key considerations for dating the epistle are the mention of second-generation Christians (Heb.2:3) AD 30 - 90s, the reference to Timothy (Heb.13:23), presumed dates from his conversion till death AD 50-90s, and the reference to persecution³⁵ AD 49-96. Lastly, the dating is based on the destruction of the temple, as no mention of such an event is discussed. Scholars see it as a strong argument to posit a heavenly temple and a permanent and superior Levitical priesthood. Moreover, the author uses the Tabernacle (Heb. 8:5; 9:1-9) rather than the Temple in his allusions, which puts the epistle between 70-96 CE. Therefore, the commentators mentioned above support the traditional dating before AD 70.

Having examined the historical context of the epistle to the Hebrews, specifically its debated authorship, intended audience, and the dating of Hebrews, this work is based on the anonymous authorship of the epistle, addressed primarily to the Jewish Christians in Rome pre-AD-70.

To fully engage with the idea of Christ's priesthood and its implications, Chapter 2 of this dissertation examines the genre of the epistle. Chapter 3 explores scholarly approaches to the structure of Hebrews and its implications. Chapter 4 examines the text through exegetical and theological analysis. The final chapter explores Christ's priestly solidarity in Hebrews and its implications in the broader context of Christian Theology.

³⁴ Koester, *Hebrews*, pp. 49-52. Guthrie, Cockerill, Lane, Ellingworth, and Attridge all share a common interpretation, further supporting the argument. For a more integrated view of Rome and Early Christianity linking Mark, 1 Peter, Hebrews, Revelation, and the use of the Epistle by the Apostolic Fathers, see Arthur G. Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church: Context, Growth, Leadership, and Worship* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), pp. 133-138.

³⁵ Claudius' persecution of the Jews 49, Nero's persecution of Christians 64-68, Jewish wars 66-70, and Domitian's persecution of Christians 81-96.

Chapter 2

The Genre of Hebrews

Hebrews 13 and the Genre of the Composition

The Epistle stands distinct again among the NT books in terms of its literary genre; it “begins like a treatise, proceeds like a sermon, and closes like an epistle.”³⁶ Compared to other epistles in the NT, Hebrews does not follow the traditional epistolary structure, which includes the sender's name, recipients, the body, paraenesis (exhortation), a conclusion with a benediction and a farewell. Scholars note that Hebrews begins with a rich theological statement similar to 1 John³⁷ among the NT epistles. Attridge states this is not uncommon in the epistolography of the Hellenistic and Roman periods.³⁸ Despite the absence of the regular NT epistolary features in the beginning and the body of Hebrews, the final chapter bears the characteristics of an NT letter. It begins with ethical and practical instructions (Heb.13:1-17), personal appeals and requests (Heb.13:18-19), and the mention of people (Timothy) and events (his release) in Heb.13:23. It ends with a final farewell and a benediction (Heb.13: 22, 24, 25. Although a few scholarly concerns have been raised about the final chapter as a later addition by a second author, the

³⁶ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews, Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 59, quoting Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), p.690 who cites H.E. Dana on Hebrews

³⁷ In their introduction to the New Testament Letters against their Greco-Roman background, the authors see 1 John and Hebrews with its atypical opening but for different in the Epistles author's intent. D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), p. 132.

³⁸ Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 13.

majority consensus considers it part of the entire document.³⁹ Floyd V. Filson is among the contributors who argue for the integrity of chapter thirteen, with the rest of the epistle highlighting the continuity of theological coherence and epistolary elements. He particularly sees the aspect of recurrent exhortations in the first twelve chapters and the author of the epistle calling his work a word of exhortation (Heb.13:22), which also plays a vital role in understanding the epistle's genre: "this vibrant hortatory note occurs not only in 2.1- 4; 3.7- 4.13; 4.14 -16; 5.11- 6.12; 10.19-39; and 12.1-29 but also in the greater part of chapter 13, which thus has the same dominant note as do the earlier chapters."⁴⁰

This term 'exhortation' (Heb.13:22) is also attested in Acts 13:15 and regarded by most scholars as a significant key for understanding the genre of Hebrews. Paul in Pisidian Antioch delivered a sermon in the synagogue when he and Barnabas were asked if they had a word of exhortation (Acts 13:14-15). The genre of Paul's sermon (Acts 13:16-41) and Hebrews are seen as a synagogue homily. F.F. Bruce accepts Zuntz's view that the only difference between Hebrews and Paul's speech is that one is written and the latter is oral: "It is a midrash in rhetorical Greek prose— it is a homily."⁴¹ Bruce recognises the recurrent use of synkrisis (a rhetorical device used for comparative evaluation, often to highlight contrasts between two individuals, ideas, or events, commonly employed in ancient texts to underscore superiority or inferiority) as 'an outstanding reason' in understanding the genre of the epistle. Zuntz states that the epistle's literary device is argued more towards the magnification of Christ among the authoritative and appealing

³⁹ Patrick Gray (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 133; Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp.13-14.

⁴⁰ Floyd V. Filson, *"Yesterday": A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1967), p. 28.

⁴¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 25., Quotes and cites G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles*, p.286

Old Testament Jewish characters, beliefs, religious institutions and themes in its superiority, wholeness and completion.

‘I ought perhaps to have said that one of the reasons, with me, for regarding Hebrews as, originally, a homily is an excessive use which it makes of the rhetorical method of synkrisis. This is a traditional device of encomiastic Greek and Latin rhetoric: the person, or object, to be praised is placed beside out-standing specimens of a comparable kind and his, or its superiority..... And so does Hebrews, in contrasting Jesus, and his Church, with angels, Moses, Melchizedek, high-priests, the synagogue, the ‘heroes of faith’, etc.⁴²

The final chapter of Hebrews reinforces the key intent of the epistle, which is to exhort the audience after presenting theological arguments. Synkrisis plays a major role in clarifying theological ideas and compelling the audience to remain faithful to Christ.

Hebrews as homily

William L. Lane views ‘a word of exhortation’ as an idiomatic expression for a homily or a discourse containing strong encouragement and a stern warning that would be read aloud in Hellenistic synagogues preceded by a reading from the OT scriptures similar to the one in Acts 13. He highlights the use of such language (a word of exhortation) in other texts (cf. 1 Macc. 10:24, 2 Macc. 7:24; 15:8-11) and finds resemblances in the early Christian adoption of this liturgical pattern in Paul’s writing, advising Timothy to focus on the public reading of Scripture, followed by exhortation and teaching (1 Tim. 4:13).⁴³ Lane also brings to the forefront the importance and the reasons for classifying

⁴² G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles: A Disquisition upon the Corpus Paulinum*, The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1946 (London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1953), p. 286.

⁴³ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 47B, ed. by David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, John D. W. Watts, and Ralph P. Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), p. 637.

Hebrews as a ‘parenthetic homily in the Jewish-Hellenistic synagogue tradition.’ Parenthetic literature encourages certain moral and religious principles among the addressees for a desired behaviour or attitude.

The article "Paraenesis or Paraclesis—Hebrews as a Test Case" by Walter Übelacker, which appears in the book *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context* Übelacker explores the rhetorical and theological character of the epistle to the Hebrews to a more specific and distinct classification by examining whether it is best understood as **paraenesis** (moral exhortation) or **paraclesis** (comfort or consolation). Übelacker emphasises that while paraenesis and paraclesis are distinct, they often overlap in practice, particularly in a text like Hebrews. The epistle blends these approaches to address its audience's ethical conduct and emotional resilience. The dual emphasis on moral exhortation (paraenesis) and encouragement (paraclesis) also gives an understanding of the complex pastoral needs of the early Christian community to which Hebrews was addressed.

Übelacker Paraenesis involves moral exhortation, which is prescriptive and does not allow for disagreement. Paraclesis used in Hebrews includes deeper theological instruction, intellectual engagement, and emotional appeal through examples, blending encouragement and comfort. It encourages dialogue, mutuality, and shared responsibility. It appeals to free will, allowing for choice in Hebrews. It addresses mature believers and not beginners; it creates a sense of moral urgency by encouraging individuals to choose the right path, affirming their ability to make such choices.⁴⁴

From this nuanced perspective, applying it to Heb. 4:14-16 can be seen as the author mastering both paraenesis and paraclesis. The call to hold fast to faith (paraenesis) is balanced by the comfort and reassurance that Jesus (the empathetic high priest) understands and supports believers in their struggles (paraclesis).

⁴⁴ Walter Übelacker, ‘Paraenesis or Paraclesis – Hebrews as a Test Case’, in *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context*, ed. by James Starr and Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 319–352.

Lane, who views Hebrews as a synagogue homily, gives considerable attention to the analysis of Hartwig Thyen in *Der Stil des jüdisch-hellenistischen Homilie* (The style of the Jewish-Hellenistic homily, 1995), in which he interprets Hebrews as a 'parenetic homily in the Jewish-Hellenistic synagogue tradition'. Thyen's work remains a foundational and meticulous analysis pivotal in studying Jewish-Hellenistic and early Christian homiletic forms, especially those that emerged around the first century.⁴⁵ Some of Thyen's key arguments, as cited by Lane, are as follows: 1) The use of the communal "we" in addressing the congregation and the calling of the audience "brothers" to create a sense of solidarity and communal identity. Inferential or transitional phrases like "therefore" and "for this reason" are used to move the argument from exposition to exhortation. 2) The extensive use of the LXX with heavy dependence on the Pentateuch and the Psalms. 3) The use of the Cynic-Stoic diatribe style (a philosophical discourse in the Hellenistic period associated with the Cynic and Stoic schools of thought), which involves the use of rhetorical questions, direct address, vivid examples, moral exhortation, and critique of the audience's behaviour.

Thyen also discovers significant connections between Hebrews and other Jewish-Hellenistic writings, especially those by Philo and the author of *Wisdom of Solomon*. He argues that these are evident in the text's use of scripture, exegetical approaches, and the underlying theological concepts. Thyen also suggests that the author of Hebrews was likely a Hellenistic Jewish-Christian, deeply familiar with both Jewish traditions and Hellenistic philosophy. He firmly argues in favour of the genre of Hebrews as homily:

⁴⁵ Based on Lane, Thyen's study included an examination of Philo's allegorical commentary on Genesis, 1 Clement, 4 Maccabees, the Epistle of James, the Epistle to the Hebrews, parts of 1 Maccabees and 3 Maccabees, Stephen's speech in Acts 7, the Didache (chapters 1-6 and 16), the Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, portions of Tobit, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Wisdom of Solomon. In each of these sources, Thyen traced the influence of the Cynic-Stoic diatribe—a prevalent style of popular preaching in Hellenistic culture—the use of Old Testament scriptures and the varied treatments of parenetic (exhortative) tradition.

Thyen concluded that with the exception of the postscript (13:22–25), which was added when the homily was sent as a written communication, Hebrews is a well-crafted homily of the kind typically delivered in a Diaspora synagogue (Thyen, Stil, 17). He further asserts that Hebrews is ‘the only example of a completely preserved homily’ from this period (Thyen, Stil, 106).⁴⁶

Lane also highlights Spicq’s and O. Michel’s scholarly views on Hebrews as a homiletic work. Spicq views it as “an apologetic treatise” with “the eloquence of a discourse and the form of a homily.” O. Michel states in his commentary on the Hebrews that “Hebrews is the first complete primitive Christian sermon, perhaps built up from several independent parts, which has come down to us.”⁴⁷ This blending of cultures is evident in the sophisticated handling of scripture and the merging of Jewish and Hellenistic interpretative techniques throughout the text.⁴⁸

Gabriella Gelardini offers a fresh and interesting perspective, situating this homily hypothesis not only in terms of a parenetic synagogue homily but rather to the *Sitz im Leben* in which it must have been delivered. Gelardini proposes that Hebrews as a parenetic homily was intended for Tish B’Av, the Jewish day of mourning commemorating the destruction of the first and second Temples, a day of fasting and mourning over the rejection of Israel because of the sinful events in Israel’s history which brought about the covenant breaking and thus covenant curse. She places the homily in the Palestinian Triennial Cycle (the other cycle used is the Babylonian Annual Cycle in a year), a lec-

⁴⁶ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, p.170. Lane quotes and cites from Hans Thyen, *Der Stil der Jüdisch-Hellenistischen Homilie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1955), pp. 17, 106.

⁴⁷ Lane cites Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, 6th edn, Meyers Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966)

⁴⁸ William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 47A: Hebrews 1–8*, ed. by David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, John D. W. Watts, and Ralph P. Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), pp.169-171.

tionary cycle used in synagogues with the first reading from the Torah and the second from the prophets, which would be over three or three and a half period.

Table 1⁴⁹

Theme	Sidrah and Haphtarah references	Complimenting sections in Hebrews
Receiving the Law (First ascent of Moses)	Sidrah (Readings from the Torah) Exod. 24:18; 31:18	Heb. 8:6-13 Jesus as the mediator of a new and a better covenant
The Breaking of the Covenant (The Golden calf incident)	Exod. 31:18-32:35	Heb.3:7-19; 4:1-11 Warnings against hardening of hearts and disobedience based on the example of Israel's failure
Moses' intercession (Second Ascent)	Exod. 32:11-14; 32:30-32 Moses intercedes for the people after the sin of the Golden calf incident	Heb. 7:25 Jesus's intercession as the eternal high priest for those who draw near to God through his priesthood
Punishment and Judgement (Death of about 3000 men)	Exod. 32:27-28	Heb. 10:26-31 warning of a more fearful judgement on rejecting the new covenant in Christ
Covenant Renewal (After the second Ascent new tablets given)	Exod. 34:1-10	Heb. 8:8-12
Promise of a New Covenant	Haphtarah (Readings from the prophets) Jer. 31:31-34 forgiveness of sins and grace for internalisation of the law	Heb. 8:8-12; 10:16-17 the fulfilment of the new covenant and permanent, complete forgiveness and permanent relationship through Christ's empathetic priesthood.

⁴⁹ The Table is only representational and is used for relevance to this dissertation. It does not capture everything discussed in Gabriella Gelardini's article and is not a part of the original.

Gelardini also proposes eighty days from Tisha B'Av, the lowest point in the liturgical year, to the uplifting end of the homily towards Yom Kippur, probably addressing Jewish slaves in Rome and promising a heavenly Jerusalem and temple rather than an earthly one.⁵⁰

Gelardini's article provides a liturgical view of Hebrews as a Synagogue homily for Tisha Be-Av. This impacts the understanding of the genre by proposing that it should be read primarily as a liturgical homily with a focus on Jewish sabbath worship. The themes of the priesthood, access to God, and priestly solidarity bring more depth, meaning, and relevance when seen from the setting she proposes.

Integrating the views discussed above, Hebrews emerges as a liturgical homily as part of synagogue worship. It is an exhortation based on Übelacker, which transitions from a more Tisha B'Av-based **paraenesis** (moral exhortation) towards the Yom Kippur-based **paraclesis** (comfort or consolation). Gelardini's article locates the setting and the liturgical season, which brings fresh relevance to understanding the depth of divine solidarity available through the priesthood of Christ.

The influence of classical rhetoric on the genre of the Hebrews

The homily view sets Hebrews within a context of oral delivery. This brings Hebrews into the framework of classical rhetoric as some scholars see Hebrews blending Greco-Roman rhetorical strategies to persuade its audience. This section examines Hebrews from this perspective. Hebrews employs various strategies to persuade and encourage its audience based on the general classical Hellenistic rhetorical gene or 'species' of rhetoric.

⁵⁰Gabriella Gelardini, "Hebrews, an Ancient Synagogue Homily for Tisha be Av: Its Function, Its Basis, Its Theological Interpretation", in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights*, ed. Gabriella Gelardini (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 107-124.

Forensic or Judicial rhetoric - Used in law courts to elicit a judgement by appealing to the concepts of truth and justice based on past actions or events used to determine the guilt or innocence based on past behaviour (e.g. Heb. 2:1- 4, where the author appeals to the dangers of neglecting salvation by citing the consequences experienced by those who ignored divine warnings in the past). Deliberative rhetoric - Used in legislative assemblies or council chambers where citizens debated on future courses of action for their city by persuading the hearers by amplifying their views to be superior (just, expedient, feasible, and honourable alternatives) to others. Epideictic or ceremonial rhetoric - Used in public forums, solemn occasions and mourning (funerals) wherein the virtues and the achievements of the deceased would be praised and the vicious censured, thus stirring the desire for such virtues and reinforcing the societal values which sustain the culture and the society.⁵¹

⁵¹ David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "To the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp.59-61, Koester, *Hebrews*, pp.81-82, Leo G. Perdue and John G. Gammie (eds), *Semeia 50: Paraenesis: Act and Form* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1990), p. 217, Burton L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), p.28.

Table 2⁵²

TYPE OF RHETORIC	REFERENCE	EXPLANATION
DELIBERATIVE	4:11	Urged to strive to enter God's rest by avoiding the fall through disobedience
DELIBERATIVE	6:18	Encouraged to hold fast to the hope resting on the immutability of God being the basis
DELIBERATIVE	10:36	Emphasises the need for endurance to receive the promised reward
DELIBERATIVE	12:1-2	Motivates to run the race with endurance looking to Jesus as the ultimate example
EPIDEICTIC	3:6	A) Praises the faithfulness of Christ B) Encouraged to holdfast to have confidence and hope in him
EPIDEICTIC	4:14	A) Praises the confession of their faith B) Urges to continue to hold fast to it
EPIDEICTIC	10:23	A) Reinforces the value of the unwavering hope in God's promises B) Encouraged to hold fast to this hope.

Most scholars agree that Hebrews cannot be seen as using Judicial rhetoric: "Hebrews is clearly not forensic, since it is neither prosecuting nor defending a case"⁵³ Koester argues that scholars do not see Hebrews in this category as the primary objective is not to praise or blame the audience based on past actions. The works of Hermann von Soden and Hans Windisch identify judicial rhetorical elements in Hebrews but only to subordinate and support the epideictic and deliberative aims in the broader rhetorical strategy employed by the author.⁵⁴ The above three classifications of rhetoric, as outlined above, emerged from daily social settings and functioned in institutional settings but were not

⁵² This table explains how the sections of Hebrews, particularly Heb.4:14 are categorised based on the rhetorical strategies discussed.

⁵³ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), p.13.

⁵⁴ Koester, *Hebrews*, p. 82., cites Hermann Von Soden, *Hebräerbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), pp. 8-11; Hans Windisch, *Der Hebräerbrief*. Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, 14. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1931, p. 8.

restricted to these settings. Some scholars see Hebrews as epideictic,⁵⁵ the celebration of the superiority and uniqueness of a person (Christ) and the events related to his life and the achievements by his death and his ascension.⁵⁶ This resembles an epideictic eulogy (although Hebrews cannot be limited to a eulogy) reinforcing the virtues and achievements of Christ, especially through his priestly solidarity “for those who obey him, giving the gift of open access to God and the resources God can provide (Heb. 4:14-16).”⁵⁷ This style of epideictic exhortation demands loyalty and faithfulness to such a sacrifice and admonishes to avoid dishonour to Christ, which might come through disregard and disobedience. Johnson sees Hebrews as deliberative rhetoric as he states, “Hebrews is a form of deliberative rhetoric that seeks to persuade the hearers to avoid certain actions and perform others.”⁵⁸ Koester states that both forms of rhetoric could occur in the same speech and might incorporate both epideictic and forensic elements⁵⁹. An example follows of a balanced structure by Lauri Thurén:

Epideictic 1:1-2:18, with a deliberative insert 2:1-4]

Deliberative 3:1-4:16

Epideictic 5:1-10:18, with a deliberative insert 5:11-6:20

Deliberative 10:19-12:29⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p.14, William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8, Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 47A (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), citing C. C. Black II, ‘HTR 81’ (1988), 5; and D. E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), p. 212.

⁵⁶ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, p.181, cites and quotes *Semeia* 50, p.214.

⁵⁷ DeSilva, *To the Hebrews*, p. 46.

⁵⁸ Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, p.33

⁵⁹ Koester, *Hebrews*, p. 82.

⁶⁰ Lauri Thurén, ‘The General New Testament Writings’, in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period: 330 B.C.–A.D. 400*, ed. by Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p.590.

De Silva states, “The aim of employing our firsthand knowledge of classical rhetoric is always to lay bare the persuasive techniques and strategies of the author, never to force his text to wear false or misleading labels for the sake of preserving some "textbook" scheme.⁶¹ Moreover, “rhetors were expected to hide the standard outline when crafting a speech and to produce a composition that would appear to unfold naturally on a given occasion.”⁶²

While the elements of three strategies are observed, Hebrews does not neatly fit into one of these species. Hebrews incorporates the aspects of these techniques and blends them appropriately for its own needs to persuade the audience. The author of Hebrews can be seen as not limited to these principles when employing these techniques. The sophisticated use of these techniques alone does not help the author of Hebrews in persuading his audience. It needs to be enhanced for a more effective presentation.

The influence of Aural-oral stylistic features

The rhetorical strength of Hebrews is interwoven with aural-oral features to capture the listeners' attention, enhance their understanding and help retain the message. Oral strategies in a written document were created with oral delivery in mind, with texts serving as surrogates for oral communication. Aural strategies involve the listener's auditory experience in engaging with the text and ideas read out. Witherington proposes the importance of such strategies in understanding the genre of NT writings as most writings were oral texts and not written for silent reading except for a few addressed for individuals to read. They were meant to be read out loud to a group of people. They were composed with the aural and oral potential in mind.⁶³ Throughout the epistle, the

⁶¹ DeSilva, *To the Hebrews*, P. 70.

⁶² Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, p.32

⁶³ Ben Witherington III, *What's in the Word: Rethinking the Socio-Rhetorical Character of the New Testament* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), pp.1-3

author appeals to the ears and hearing of the audience: Therefore, we must pay greater attention to what we have heard... (Heb.2:1), now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking... (Heb.2:5), therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice...(Heb. 3:7 and 4:7)..since you have become sluggish in hearing...(Heb. 5:11), even though we speak in this way, beloved, we are confident...(Heb. 6:9), now, the main point in what we are saying is this...(Heb.8:1), ..of these things, we cannot speak now in detail... (Heb.9:5), and what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon... (Heb.11:32),...and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them...(Heb. 12:19). The author appeals to even implying the sense of smell (Heb.13:6), the sense of touch (Heb.12:18,20), metaphorical use of taste (Heb.6:5), the sense of sight is evoked (Heb. 2:9; 3:1; 7:4; 12:3; 12:21). The author creates visual scenes through word pictures (*ekphrasis* a rhetorical technique) in 9:1–5 (earthly and heavenly sanctuaries) and 12:18–24 (the scene at Mt.Sinai) and much more could be observed throughout the epistle.⁶⁴ The features mentioned ensure that the theological arguments and exhortations connect with the audience intellectually and appeal to their ability to envision these themes with an engaging auditory experience. The oral delivery of Hebrews would have relied on sound and cadence to reinforce key themes like the priesthood of Christ by the author, much like in classical rhetorical speeches, making the message more memorable and persuasive.

⁶⁴ Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, p.33., Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, p.175., Witherington III, *What's in the Word: Rethinking the Socio-Rhetorical Character of the New Testament*, pp.1-3.

Classical speech techniques

The author of Hebrews is seen by all as persuasive throughout the epistle, using various rhetorical strategies. There is no clear consensus on whether the author was formally⁶⁵ or informally⁶⁶ trained. Still, all scholars agree on the author's ease and familiarity with rhetorical techniques unique to the NT. The key aspects that were generally followed according to the classical handbooks were 1) Invention (*heuresis, inventio*): The process of discovering and selecting appropriate material for the argument; 2) Arrangement (*taxis, dispositio*): The organisation and structuring of material in a logical and persuasive sequence; 3) Style (*lexis, elocutio*): The choice of language, tone and the figures of speech to enhance clarity and persuasion; 4) Memory (*mnémé, memoria*): The technique of memorising the speech for a natural and confident delivery; 5) Delivery (*hypocrisis, pronunciatio*): The use of voice, gestures, and timing for effective presentation.⁶⁷ Memory and delivery are seen to be more relevant for live speeches than NT interpretation.⁶⁸

Ancient rhetoricians, in their strategies of rhetoric persuasion in the first stage of invention, tried to employ three types of rhetoric appeals: Logos (Reason): Logical argumentation is central to Hebrews, especially in their theological exposition.

Ethos (Character): The author establishes credibility by associating with known figures, such as Timothy, and emphasising God and Jesus' reliability. Pathos (Emotion): He-

⁶⁵ Lane assumes a reasonable educational background (private rhetorical school) similar to Philo's (see Lane, Hebrews 1–8, p.142), and Thompson assumes that the author's training would be both on synagogue homiletics and Greek rhetoric see Thompson, *Hebrews*, p.10-19

⁶⁶ Desilva proposes that even if he had been informally trained by exposure to speeches in marketplaces, theatres and synagogues, he has picked up the art of persuasion in these by employing stylistics ornamentation and persuasive argumentation—DeSilva, *To the Hebrews*, P. 53.

⁶⁷ Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, pp.31-34

⁶⁸ DeSilva, *To the Hebrews*, p. 59.

brews appeal to the recipient's emotions, invoking fear and hope to motivate adherence to the faith.⁶⁹ In the text of this dissertation, the author of Hebrews uses one of the key logical arguments to show that the path to glory follows suffering, modelled by Jesus (Suffering to Glory theme in Heb. 2:10–5:10). Emotion (pathos) is a crucial element in persuasion is used in Hebrews, emotions like confidence (assuring God's help as in Heb.4:14-16) and sympathy (Aristotle describes, arises when witnessing undeserved suffering) Christ's suffering evokes sympathy and gratitude from the listeners, reminding them of his shared humanity and reinforcing their faith. This inspires faithfulness, while fear and shame create an aversion to unfaithfulness. Character (ethos) is another key element in persuasion, establishing trust in the entire discourse. In Hebrews, the author makes God the primary speaker, ensuring that listeners focus on God's authoritative voice (Heb. 1:5–13, 3:7–11, 8:8–12). He builds God's credibility by portraying him as faithful and true (Heb.6:18, 10:23, 11:11). The unjust suffering of Christ is used to persuade the audience to understand and experience Christ's solidarity. Throughout the speech, the author identifies with the audience by using the first-person plural, showing that he shares their experiences of hearing God's word (Heb. 1:2, 2:3), confessing faith (Hebrews 3:1, **4:14**, 10:23), and reckoning with divine judgment (Hebrews 2:3, 4:13). The authors own boldness is expressed in confessing Christ and direct exhortations to the listeners (Hebrews 1:1–4, 3:6, **4:16**, 10:19) align his actions with his teachings, giving him integrity as he calls listeners to follow his example.⁷⁰

Christ's credibility (ethos) is affirmed by his divine authority as a high priest who has passed through the heavens (Heb.4:14). Christ's empathy is seen in his ability to sympathise with human weakness, which provides comfort and reassurance (Heb. 4:15).

Christ's sinlessness yet fully tempted human experience logically holds and supports his

⁶⁹ Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, pp.14-15

⁷⁰ Koester, *Hebrews*, pp. 139-145.

role as the effective high priest, providing full solidarity to those who come to him. The author carefully uses logical and emotional appeal based on the character-based credibility of God, Christ and himself (the use of 'our weaknesses') to make the speech compelling to the audience's heart and mind. This helps to view Hebrews as a homiletic or sermonistic discourse, as the text is structured to persuade its audience through well-crafted arguments and appeals in exploiting the decision-making process, which usually involves intellectual, moral and emotional aspects of the hearers as used in ancient rhetoric.

The analysis of the influence of classical rhetoric in Hebrews in understanding how the theological argument of the priesthood of Christ, who understands human weakness and offers grace, is presented in a way that is a logically persuasive and emotionally powerful appeal to exhort his audience. The author also displays careful arrangement and style in his presentation and persuasion of the audience.

Having explored the broader approach and patterns in organising and structuring of the epistle for persuading the audience, it is vital to understand the use of rhetorical devices which implement these strategies, especially devices which help in understanding in Heb. 4:14-16. The author uses *Synkrisis* as a major rhetorical device that is dominant in "excessive use"⁷¹ throughout the epistle. The author tries to prove the superiority of Christ using *synkrisis* in Hebrews with Angels- Christ is superior by emphasising his divinity and sonship (Heb.1-2). Moses- Christ more faithful as a son (Heb.3:1-6). Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood- Christ is projected as the superior high priest (Heb.4:14-10:18). The old covenant- The New covenant is superior through the mediation by Christ. (Heb.8:1-13). Sacrifices- The sacrifice of Christ is compared to the sacri-

⁷¹ Allen states that this caused him to regard 'Hebrews as originally a homily', citing Allen, *Hebrews*, p.92., G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles: A Disquisition upon the Corpus Paulinum* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), (Theology, 5).

fices of the Levitical system, with Christ's being once-for-all and superior (Heb.9:11-28).

The author employs a variety of expressions to highlight the contrasts in his comparisons. Peter O'Brien notes that out of nineteen instances of 'better, superior' in the NT, thirteen are used in Hebrews to 'contrast Christ and his new order with what went before him'. In Heb.1:4; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6 (twice); 9:23; 10:3;11:16, 35, 40; 12:24. see 6:9. A rare comparative διαφορώτερος ('more excellent'), is used here at 1:4 and 8:6 to describe Christ's ministry in comparison with the old covenant system.⁷² The author develops this comparison gradually through the epistle "Christ's superior priestly work (better priest than Aaron, 5:1-7:25; under a better covenant, 8:1-13; in a better sanctuary, 9:1-12; offering a better sacrifice, 9:13-10:18; based on better promises, 10:19-12:3"⁷³ When read and understood collectively and progressively, the motif 'Christ is superior' reveals internal coherence. The progressive nature of these sections, which emphasises Christ's superiority over other figures and systems, aims to strengthen the faith and perseverance of the believers and discourage apostasy.⁷⁴

The author uses the Levitical priesthood in *synkrisis*, foundational in understanding Heb.4:14-16. It provides a credible "type" for comparing Christ's superior priestly role. The surpassing honour of Christ's mediation is emphasised by highlighting the limitations of the Levitical priests. This comparison underscores the believers' privileged access to God in the present era through Christ, as opposed to the limited access of the

⁷² O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 99.

⁷³ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), p.1742.

⁷⁴ David G. Peterson, *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 15 (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020), p.34., citing David M. Moffitt and Jason A. Whitlark, *Inventing Hebrews* (p. 24, 51, 60–76), and George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews* (pp. 1–20)

past. In Hebrews 7:1–8:13, the author contrasts the Levitical priesthood with Melchizedek's, showing that Jesus' priesthood, based on an indestructible life, is superior in character, ministry, covenant, and promises.⁷⁵

The impact of *synkrisis* in Heb. 4:14-16 is that it starts a major theological theme in Hebrews: the comparison between Aaronic and Christ's priesthood (Table 3). It also sets the stage for the broader and deeper exploration that follows in the subsequent chapters. Heb. 4:14 underscores Christ's access and exalted status compared to the earthly Aaronic priests. Heb. 4:15 highlights Christ's unique ability to be both impeccable and empathetic, compared to human priests who are both subject to weakness and sin and those in an inferior service (Heb. 5:2). Heb. 4:16 contrasts the unlimited access and fearless approach is encouraged compared to the restricted and fearful access under the old covenant.

⁷⁵ DeSilva, *To the Hebrews*, pp. 287-289.

Table 3⁷⁶

Theme	Aaronic Priesthood	Christ's Priesthood in the order of Melchizedek	Reference
Introduction to the New Priesthood	Limited, earthly access to God through Levitical priests.	Christ as the great high priest, offering confident access to God.	4:14-16
Basis of the Priesthood	Appointed by genealogy (Torah).	Appointed by God's oath, based on an indestructible life.	5:1-4; 7:11-14; 7:18-22
Mortality and Sin	Mortal and subject to sin, requiring repeated sacrifices.	Immortal, sinless, offering a once-for-all sacrifice.	7:23-28; 7:25-28
Melchizedek	No direct comparison with Melchizedek.	Jesus' priesthood is in the order of Melchizedek, superior to Abraham and Levites.	7:1-10; 7:15-17
Place of Mediation	Serves in an earthly sanctuary, a shadow of heavenly things.	Ministers in the true heavenly sanctuary.	8:1-6
Covenant	Linked to the old covenant, now obsolete.	Establishes a new and better covenant with superior promises.	8:7-13
Sacrifice	Repeated, imperfect sacrifices that cannot remove sin.	Christ offers a perfect, once-for-all sacrifice that brings eternal redemption.	9:6-10; 9:11-14; 9:23-28; 10:1-4; 10:11-14
Exhortation to Believers	Limited access under the old covenant, mediated by earthly priests.	Encourages believers to confidently draw near to God through Christ's sacrifice.	10:19-22; 12:22-24

The other rhetorical device commonly used, which helps in understanding Heb. 4:14-16 is *auxēsis* (Amplification). The theme 'Christ is superior' developed by *synkrisis* is recycled by the rhetorical device of amplification. Aristotle suggested comparing a subject with renowned individuals to amplify their qualities, as proving superiority over virtuous figures enhances nobility. Amplification, a form of praise, emphasises superiority,

⁷⁶ The table tries to cover the scope of this rhetorical device, comparing Christ's priesthood with that of the Aaronic priesthood; it follows the thematic flow and is not meant to be exhaustive.

which is noble. Additionally, amplification helps reinforce previously made points through repetition, enhancing the subject's significance: “orators reiterate what has already been demonstrated.”⁷⁷ Thus, it creates a way of establishing and presenting the excellence of the subject.⁷⁸

In Heb. 4:14-16, the subject that is amplified is ‘the value of Jesus’ mediation’, a ministry, and the benefits of that ministry, which surpasses all other previous methods of access to God. The high priest has opened the way to benefit from his solidarity with their weaknesses. The author tries not so much to correct their idea of Christ’s priesthood but, in a way, calls to avoid failing to appreciate fully his benefactions.⁷⁹

To create an aesthetic and functional flow, the author uses *parēchēsis (Alliteration)* in successive words or phrases with the same consonant sound. In Hebrews, it is used as part of the overall rhetorical and stylistic features to emphasise key ideas, enhance the rhythm, and create a more memorable expression. Koester states that “repetition of initial sounds can help foster attentiveness. The author introduces his speech with words that begin with p, which calls for attention by its explosive sound: *polymerōs kai polytropōs palai ho theos lalēsas tois patrasin en tois prophētais* (“God, having spoken on many occasions and in many forms to the forebears of old by the prophets”, 1:1).”⁸⁰ The author uses π in Heb. 1:1; 2:1-4; **4:16**; 10:11.34; 11:17; 12:21⁸¹. Alliteration involving

⁷⁷Thompson, *Hebrews*, p.79.

⁷⁸ Thompson, *Hebrews*, p.17., citing Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.9.38-39, trans. J. H. Freese (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), pp. 103–5, and *Rhetoric* 3.19.1-2.

⁷⁹ DeSilva, *To the Hebrews*, p. 128 & 204.

⁸⁰ Koester, *Hebrews*, p. 149.

⁸¹ Attridge, *Hebrews*, p.20.

the Greek letter π ("p" sound) was indeed popular in classical literature⁸². The use of this device is seen as that Hebrews is not purely a written text but is crafted to enhance oral-aural rhetorical effectiveness⁸³, "Such elevated prose can help to gain the favor of the listeners and to inspire their imaginations."⁸⁴

In Heb. 4:16, the π sound in "προσερχώμεθα" (*proserchōmetha* - "let us approach") and "παρρησίας" (*parrēσίας* - "confidence") is an example of alliteration. This repetition emphasises the act of approaching the throne of grace with boldness. Alliteration emphasises the core exhortation of this verse; it enhances the flow of thought and retains the idea of encouraging people to draw near to God.

The rhetorical elements in Hebrews are visible but elusive in clarity. The understanding of rhetorical devices in the NT era still remains incomplete. The present state of NT research on Hebrews has not produced a structural analysis that aligns with the classical rhetorical forms outlined in the handbooks. If any such analysis were presented, it would have to be cautiously treated as "neither Philo nor Paul confirmed to strictly identifiable forms."⁸⁵ The author of Hebrews consistently employs these oral-aural strategies throughout the epistle for captivated listening.

⁸² Porter remarks that J.D. Denniston, in his work on Greek prose style, states that both Pindar and Plato frequently employed alliteration with the π sound in their writings (Denniston, 1952: 126, 129). Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), p.778., citing J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), pp. 126, 129.

⁸³ Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, p.165, 175, 346.

⁸⁴ Koester, *Hebrews*, p. 147.

⁸⁵ Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, p. 182.

Conclusion

It is complex to label Hebrews under a particular genre. Hebrews has a complex structure, theological depth and unique literary style. The analysis in this chapter suggests that Hebrews could be a homily written in rhetoric artistry, carefully articulating deep theological themes for a convincing delivery. In Heb. 4:14-16, rhetorical strategies are used to emphasise Christ's authority as the supremely exalted high priest who is well qualified to understand human weakness and the appeal to partake in the comfort that he can provide to those who come to him. Rhetorical devices such as synkrisis (comparing Christ to other priests), amplification (highlighting His empathy), and alliteration (enhancing rhythm and memorability) aid in theological emphasis, elevation and reinforcement. Viewed as a synagogue homily, the passage integrates the concepts and themes discussed for theological exposition with moral exhortation, urging perseverance. Overall, the passage is a powerful exhortation to remain steadfast in the faith, especially in times when perseverance is difficult.

Chapter 3

The Structure of Hebrews

The complexity of the epistle to the Hebrews continues in its structural understanding. Multiple perspectives and proposals have emerged, from the patristic period to modern scholastic attempts to understand its structure. Past and present research in understanding the structure of the epistle has helped in understanding the thematic development, the discovery of literary and rhetorical techniques, transition and flow. These have helped enhance the exegetical precision and theological understanding of Hebrews. However, there is a lack of consensus, to mention a few, regarding sectional boundaries, alternating and intermingling of exposition and exhortation, themes and motifs woven in and out of the discourse and identifying formal divisions remains challenging due to the artistic complexity of the epistle.⁸⁶

George H. Guthrie's *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* discusses the emergence of various approaches in the structural analysis of the epistle. This chapter uses Guthrie's work as the key resource. The first part⁸⁷ begins by briefly tracking the theme of the priesthood of Christ, particularly the sections that cover the text (Heb.4:14-16), by highlighting how it is structurally located. (the sections related to the theme of the priesthood of Christ, which covers the text for this dissertation, are bolded as the structures are tracked). The second part⁸⁸ of this chapter analyses Guthrie's text-linguistic approach to the structural analysis of Hebrews.

⁸⁶ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, p. 176.

⁸⁷ George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp.3-19.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 45–147.

Structural History of Hebrews

Earliest attempts- The *kephalaia* system often functioned as organisational markers, helping navigate longer discourses or arguments. “Hebrews was divided into twenty-two sections (corresponding to modern chapter and verse divisions)

Medieval and Reformation Periods- This period, specifically the thirteenth century, saw the introduction of chapter and verse divisions, which influenced the beginning of the structural proposals for Hebrews.⁸⁹ Thomas Aquinas utilised these divisions and divided Hebrews into two primary sections: Christ’s superiority (1-10) and how believers should follow Christ (11-13). Further, he subdivided the first section into three movements: Christ’s superiority over the angels (chaps. 1–2), **over Moses (chaps. 3–4)**, and over the Levitical priesthood (chaps. 5–10). The second division emphasised faith and works of faith, with chapter 11 focusing on faith and chapters 12–13 on ethical exhortations. Aquinas’s thematic focus influenced later medieval exegesis, emphasising the book’s **Christocentric theology** (*excellentiā Christi* theme). Heinrich Bullinger, a reformation theologian, proposed a tripartite structure for Hebrews based on the rhetorical genre by making 1–4 and 10:19–13 as deliberative exhortations, **with 5:1–10:18 as a didactic exposition on Christ’s priesthood**, noting a break in the middle of chapter 10. A diversion from the more traditional/ thematic or chapter-based structures. Similarly, Niels Hemmingsen approached Hebrews through ancient rhetorical categories, identifying a *narratio* (the section of a rhetorical speech that presents the facts or background of the case) on the person and office of the Son of God in the first part, followed by a *disputatio* (the portion which argues, debate and defends their position) concerning the priesthood of Christ. Hemmingsen’s and Bullingers’s rhetorical approach and application of the thematic method (κρείττων- **"better" or "superior" motif**) central to

⁸⁹ Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, p.4., citing F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments: How We Got Our English Bible*, rev. and updated ed (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1984), p. 112.

Hebrews' theological argument, underscoring the theme of **Christ's superiority** over angels, Moses the old covenant and **the Levitical priesthood**. are seen as the trendsetters for more refined rhetorical studies in the modern era.

Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century contributions- In the eighteenth century, scholars like John Albert Bengel proposed a bipartite division, the first part focusing on Christ's superiority (1:1–2:4) and Christ becoming lower than the angels, his suffering for our sake made him a merciful, faithful and a high-priest (2:5-18), the rest of the second part develops in detail the theme of Christ's priesthood. **Heb.4:14-16 falls into the category of: He has the virtues of priesthood: 1. He is Faithful: Therefore, do not be unfaithful (3:1,2,7-4:13). 2. He is Merciful: Therefore, let us draw near with confidence (4:14-5:3).** The three key terms ("faithful," "merciful," and "high priest"). These are not Bengel's findings, but he highlighted them, which later became the central "foundation stone" in the structural approaches of the twentieth century. After Bengel's work in the greater part of the nineteenth century, the focus was on detailed exegetical commentaries (by scholars like Gottlieb Lünemann and Franz Delitzsch) with thorough expositions which followed relatively traditional structures. At the end of the nineteenth century, Hermann von Soden applied classical Greek rhetoric and proposed a four-part structure. *prooimion* (introduction) Heb. 1–4, *narratio* (presentation of facts), 5–6, *probatio* (proofs) 7:1–10:18, and *peroratio* (conclusion) 10:19–13. The opening chapters emphasise the **traditional superiority of the Christ motif**.

The twentieth century- This period saw a phenomenal increase in structural proposals, driven by new methodologies for understanding the "organizational principle behind the book," which generated "a plethora of outlines." Some scholars use past methods, others create newer ones, and some comment on the proposals of others.

The approaches are broadly classified into three: 1) Genre Differentiation by F. Büchsel and Rafael Gyllenberg, 2) Literary Analysis by Leon Vaganay and Albert Vanhoye, and 3) Tripartite scheme by Wolfgang Nauck.

1. Genre Differentiation by F. Büchsel's Proposal

Büchsel's Outline	Exposition	Exhortation
Movement I	1:1-14	2:1-4
Movement II	2:5-18	None
Movement III	3:1-6	3:7-4:13
Movement IV	4:14-10:18	10:19-39
Movement V	11:1-40	12:1-29

Genre differentiation refers to the division of text based on shifts between two primary genres: 1) Exposition- Theological or doctrinal instruction, and 2) Exhortation- Practical or moral encouragement.

In 1928, F. Büchsel proposed that Hebrews is structured through alternating genres, specifically between exposition (theological teaching) and exhortation (practical encouragement). The epistle is divided into five major movements containing expositional or hortatory material. The alternating structural style marks transitions in the discourse and is seen as the central feature in Hebrews.

Heb. 4:14-16 **falls under the expositional part of Movement IV in Büchsel's outline** (Heb. 4:14-10:18). This movement deals with the theological teaching about Christ as a high priest. In Büchsel's structure, Heb. 4:14-16 introduces a longer section of exposition focusing on Christ's priesthood followed by the exhortation beginning at Heb. 10:19. Exposition is the presentation of theological truths or teachings, as seen in Heb. 4:14-16, which discusses Christ's role as the great high priest. Exhortation is the practical application or encouragement for the audience to respond to the exposition presented.

Rafael Gyllenberg's Modified structure of Büchsel'

Gyllenberg's Outline	Exhortation/Exposition
Movement I (1:1-2:18)	Exhortation
Movement II (3:1-4:16)	Exhortation (continues)
Movement III (5:1-10:18)	Exposition
Movement IV (10:19-12:29)	Exhortation
Movement V (13:1-25)	Exhortation

Rafael Gyllenberg modified Büchsel's structure by combining some sections and extending the exhortation in chapter 4. He stretches the exhortation from Hebrews 3:1-4:16; thus, Heb. 4:14-16 is **still linked to the previous exhortatory section, not as a separate expositional section in Gyllenberg's outline**. It is viewed as the culmination of the exhortation to hold fast to the confession.

2. Literary Analysis (Leon Vaganay and Albert Vanhoye)

Leon Vaganay's Proposal

Vaganay's Outline	Theme
Introduction	1:1-4
Movement I	Jesus Superior to Angels (1:5-2:18)
Movement II	Jesus as High Priest (3:1-5:10)
Movement III	Jesus, Author of Salvation (5:11-10:39)

Leon Vaganay introduced mot-crochets (hook words—a word or phrase used at the end of one section that is repeated at the beginning of the next, creating continuity between the two sections). He emphasised the literary unity of Hebrews, using these hook words to connect passages and show how a thought flows from one unit into another.

Hebrews 4:14-16 **is part of the second movement (3:1-5:10)**, which discusses Jesus as the High Priest. Vaganay identifies this section as dealing with Christ's faithfulness and mercy as a high priest. The **mot-crochet** that ties Hebrews 3:1-5:10 together **is the reference to Jesus as a high priest**, which Vaganay sees as a **key unifying term for this section**.

Albert Vanhoye's Literary Analysis

Albert Vanhoye, a prominent scholar on the Epistle to the Hebrews, proposed a highly influential structural analysis based on the literary and rhetorical features of the text. His approach is distinctive in emphasising stylistic markers rather than thematic divisions. His literary analysis identifies several key literary devices that mark transitions and boundaries in Hebrews. These include hook words, inclusio, genre shifts, and characteristic terms.

General Outline of the Epistle to the Hebrews in table⁹⁰ format:

Section		Passage	Description
I			
		1:1-4	Exordium
		1:5 – 2:18	A name different from the name of the angels
II			
	A	3:1– 4:14	Jesus, high-priest worthy of faith
	B	4:15 – 5:10	Jesus, compassionate high-priest
III			
		5:11– 6:20	Preliminary exhortation
	A	7:1–28	Jesus, is the high-priest in the order of Melchizedek
	B	8:1–9:28	Jesus, comes to fulfilment
	C	10:1–18	Jesus, the cause of an eternal salvation
		10:19 –39	Final exhortation
IV			
	A	11:1– 40	The faith of the men of old
	B	12:1–13	The endurance required
V			
		12:14 – 13:18	The peaceable fruit of justice
		13:20-21	Peroration

Vanhoye's Outline	Structural Markers
Introduction	1:1- 4
Section I	1:5-2:18
Section II A	3:1- 4:14 (Jesus as Faithful High Priest)
II B	4:15-5:10 (Jesus as Compassionate High Priest)

⁹⁰ Albert Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989), p.55; Bateman, *Charts on the Book of Hebrews*, p.56

Part A 3:1 — 4:14 Jesus, high-priest worthy of faith

B 4:15 — 5:10 Jesus, compassionate high-priest

Hebrews 4:14-16 is **placed at the transition point between two sections**:

Section II A Heb.3:1- 4:14: Jesus, the faithful **high priest**.

Section B Heb. 4:15-5:10: Jesus, the compassionate, **high priest**.

Vanhoye identifies **inclusio** as a structuring device here, with the phrase “**high priest**” bracketing the passage and marking the transition from faithfulness to compassion.

Inclusio: inclusio occurs, which frames the concept of Christ as the “great high priest” (Heb 4:14) and ends with his priestly character, which sympathises with human weaknesses (Heb 4:15-16). The repetition of "high priest" also signals the transitional boundary for the inclusion from exhortation to doctrinal exposition.

Hook Word: “High priest” (ἀρχιερεύς) acts as a hook word. It links the doctrinal exposition in Hebrews 3:1–4:14 with the new section on Christ’s priesthood, which begins in 4:14 and continues through 5:10. This repetition creates continuity between these two sections, connecting the section faith-exhortation to the theological exploration of Christ's priesthood.

Symmetric Arrangement: This occurs in Hebrews 4:14, which presents Christ’s humanity (to sympathise with human weakness), juxtaposing it with his divinity (his exalted role “passed through the heavens” as the high priest). It creates a symmetric balance between Christ's transcendence and his accessibility.

Genre Variation: Heb.4:14-16 combines the doctrinal exposition with paraenesis (exhortation) affirming his priestly role and then shifts to the encouragement to confidently approach the throne of grace (exhortative)

Key Vocabulary: The words “confidence” (παρρησία) and “mercy” (ἐλεος) characterise this passage from a focus on faith (3:1-4:14) to a focus on Christ’s solidarity through the grace and mercy available through his priesthood (4:14-5:10).

3. Tripartite Scheme - Wolfgang Nauck’s Proposal

Nauck’s Outline	Parallels
Section I (1:1-4:13)	Introduction and Logos-hymn
Section II (4:14-10:31)	Christ’s Priesthood (marked by parallels)
Section III (10:32-13:17)	Exhortation to Faithfulness

Nauck’s proposal divides Hebrews based on thematic parallels (mark transitions and organise the structure of Hebrews) between key passages. He identifies Hebrews 4:14-16 and 10:19-23 as parallel exhortations that end a central and major theological exposition on Christ’s priesthood.

Heb. 4:14-16 **begins the book's central section (4:14-10:31)**, which focuses on Christ’s priesthood. Parallels with Hebrews 10:19-23 mark this section. Heb. 4:14-16 **introduces the key theological theme of the high priesthood of Christ**, which is elaborated in the subsequent chapters.

Table of Comparison: Twentieth-Century Approaches to the Structural Location of Heb. 4:14-16

Scholar	Method	Location of Hebrews 4:14-16	Key Structural Feature
F. Büchsel	Genre Differentiation	Expositional unit (Introduction Christ's priesthood)	Shift from exposition to exhortation
Rafael Gyllenberg	Genre Differentiation	End of exhortatory section	Extended exhortation
Leon Vaganay	Literary Analysis	Beginning of "Jesus as High Priest" section	Mot-crochet (hook words)
Albert Vanhoye	Literary Analysis	Transition between Jesus' faithfulness and compassion	Inclusio, genre shift
Wolfgang Nauck	Tripartite Scheme	Beginning of central section on Christ's priesthood	Parallels with Heb.10:19-23

Text-Linguistic Analysis

Guthrie states that text-linguistic analysis is also called discourse analysis. This methodology includes the concerns found in Rhetorical criticism, which analyses patterns of argumentation concerned with how the text persuades the audience; conceptual analysis, which focuses on the thematic development within the text; and Literary Analysis, which explores literary style and structure.

Guthrie also emphasises the importance of including the cultural and literary environment in which Hebrews was written. This includes considering the methods involved in writing, speaking and interpreting texts used in the first century, particularly

by Jewish and Greco-Roman scholars. Secondly, he points out the general neglect of the author's use of the Old Testament citations in framing the structures of Hebrews.

Some of the key principles Guthrie uses are applied to understand Heb.4:14-16

1. **Cohesion shift**- indicates a change in grammatical structure and thematic focus in the text. This helps in marking transitions between sections.

High-Level Cohesion shift⁹¹: Heb.4:14-16 introduces a major thematic transition, moving from a previous section of exhortation (Heb.3:7- 4:13) focused on the warning from those who failed to enter God's rest and the promise of entering God's rest 'today'. This then moves to the beginning of the theological exposition on Christ's priesthood (Heb. 5-10).

This creates a natural transition from exhortation (urging action through faith and obedience) to exposition (the foundational theological teaching of Christ's priesthood). The shift marks the change in discourse from how believers must act (exhortation) to who Christ is and what he has accomplished (exposition).

⁹¹ Guthrie also uses Median-Level Cohesion Shifts, referring to subtle shifts within a section, indicating a change in focus or sub-topic, for Heb.4:14-16 lacks such application.

1. Identifying Cohesion Shifts

Section	Textual Unit (Verses)	Type of Shift	Description of Cohesion Shift
Previous Section	3:7-4:13	Exposition to Exhortation	The preceding unit exhorts to enter God's rest, marked by warnings and encouragement. The tone shifts in 4:14-16 toward a theological focus on Christ's high priesthood.
Current Section	4:14-16	Exhortation to Exposition	4:14-16 begins with an exhortation ("let us hold fast our confession") but transitions quickly to exposition, discussing Christ's role as high priest.
Next Section	5:1-10	Full Exposition	Hebrews 5:1-10 continues with an exposition of Christ's priesthood in detail, without any hortatory component.

2. Inclusio- This is a literary device where similar words or phrases appear at the beginning and end of a section, framing or bracketing it to create thematic unity and structural clarity.

Heb.4:14-16 serves in this major inclusio as the inaugural statement of a thematic and structural unit. The key themes are: 1. Introduction of Christ's High Priesthood, 2. Exhortation to Hold Fast, 3. Invitation to Approach God with confidence.

The table below summarises the key points of the inclusio between Heb. 4:14-16 and 10:19-23. This helps in

Aspect	4:14-16	10:19-23	Explanation/Function
Inclusio Start/End	The theme of Christ's high priesthood is introduced	Concluding theme of holding fast and drawing near.	The inclusio frames the major section on Christ's high priesthood and concludes with the believer's response.
High-Level Cohesion Shifts	Major transition from exhortation to exposition	Major shift back to exhortation, emphasising confidence in faith.	The two Cohesion shifts at 4:14 and 10:19 marks the start and end of the major section on Christ's priesthood
Dynamic Parallels	"Let us hold fast our confession" and focus on Christ as high priest.	"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope" and focus on Christ as high priest.	Both passages emphasise the same theological idea and exhortation. (holding fast to faith & draw near to God as Christ is the priest.
Turbulence in Discourse	Significant thematic shift after 4:16.	Another thematic shift after 10:23.	Turbulence refers to important transitions around these passages signalling that the author is introducing new themes or reinforcing key ideas, often to create emphasis or draw attention to a crucial point in the overall structure of the text.
Thematic Unity	Christ as the sympathetic high priest in dealing with human weakness and believers are called to approach God with confidence.	Since Christ is the high priest believers are called to approach God with confidence	Both the passages share the same thematic unity
Possible Section Overlap	Forms part of a section from 3:1-4:16.	Part of a larger section from 4:14-10:23.	When one part of a text seems to function as the conclusion of one section while also serving as the introduction to the next. A passage may have a dual role linking two major sections and creating cohesion and flow of the argument
Function of the inclusion	Begins the discussion of Christ's priesthood	Ends the discussion of Christ's priesthood	The inclusio which occurs provides a clear structure for the theological exposition of Christ's priesthood.

3. Lexical Cohesion- The repetition of key terms, phrases, and concepts linking various parts of the discourse.

Lexical Item	Repetition (verses)	Explanation
High priest	4:14, 4:15	The repeated use of “high priest” ties the central theme of the passage and anticipates the exposition on Christ’s priesthood.
Confession	4:14	The call to hold fast to the "confession" was echoed in the previous exhortations (3:6) and reinforced again for more perseverance
Sympathize	4:15	The term "sympathize" highlights Christ’s solidarity with believers, a key theme in Hebrews. Heb.2: 17-18 echo theme.

4. Genre Shift- A change in the type of discourse, such as a shift from exposition (theological instruction) to exhortation (practical application or encouragement).

Genre	Verses	Content Focus
Exhortation	4:14	Call to perseverance ("hold fast our confession").
Exposition	4:15-16	Christ’s ability to sympathize and the believer’s access to grace.

The shift from exhortation(4:14: let us hold fast our confession) to exposition (4:15-1: focusing on Christ’s ability to sympathize with humanity due to his experience of temptation). Genre shift reflects a key structural dynamic in Hebrews, where the author alternates between calling the audience to faithfulness and explaining the theological basis for that call. This helps maintain the epistle's theological and pastoral coherence.

5. Hook-words- Words or phrases that serve as transitions between sections by linking the end of one unit to the beginning of the next.

Hook Word/Phrase	From	To	Function
High Priest	4:14	5:1	Links the end of the exhortation (4:14-16) with the exposition on Christ's priesthood that follows in Hebrews 5:1-10.

The term "high priest" functions as a hook word, linking 4:14-16 with the subsequent discussion of priesthood in Hebrews 5. This smooth transition between sections maintains the flow of the argument and allows the reader to follow the progression of the theological discourse.

In his commentary, Lane integrates Guthrie's text-linguistic analysis as an additional section within his structural analysis (pp. 196-212), providing further insight into the text's structure. From Lane's view of Guthrie's structure, Heb.4:14-16 plays a crucial role as one of the "overlap transitions" within the structure of the epistle. These transitions serve a dual purpose: they conclude the previous section while introducing the next major thematic block. Lane also sees the expositional unit as both logical and spatial

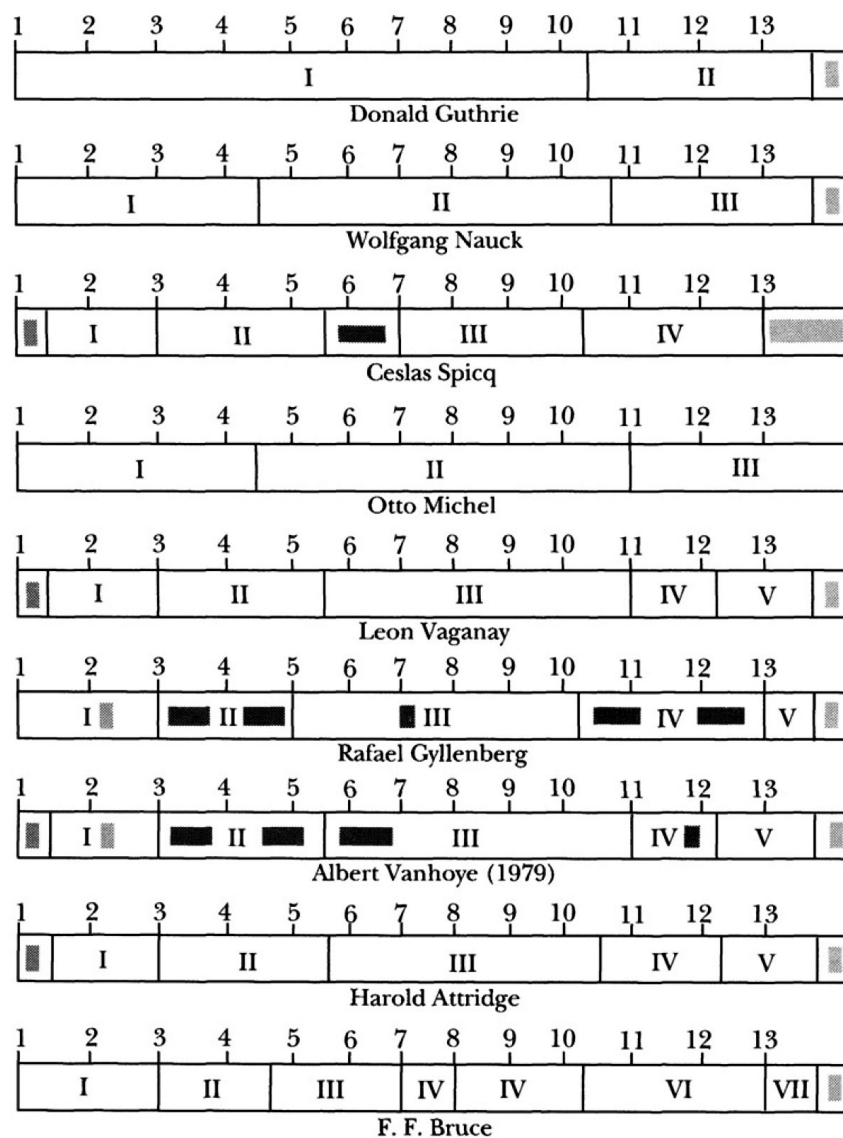
I.A. The Son higher (i.e., the Son has passed through the heavens) - Heb.4:14

I.Ab. Intermediary transition: The superior Son becomes lower (the Son has passed through human weakness in every way) v15

I. B. The Son lower (i.e., in solidarity with the human family who is able to empathise with our weaknesses)

The author blends the main theme of Christ's priesthood with an exhortation to the audience, urging them to hold fast to their confession and draw near to God. This is both the pivotal point in the argument and a transition from the Christological focus on the Son's exaltation and suffering to His heavenly priestly role. The author thus forms the basis to encourage the community to find strength in Christ's priesthood as they persevere in their faith.⁹²

Guthrie's chart on Approaches to the structural divisions of Hebrews. ⁹³



⁹² Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, P.211-212.,

⁹³ Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, p.22.

The relevance of Vanhoye's structural analysis and Hebrews 4:14-16

Vanhoye's structure is considered one of the clearest and most careful analyses of NT scholarship and with a critical reception. His use of literary techniques brings out coherence and sophistication in the epistle. It reveals aspects the author would have employed in maintaining a “profoundly homiletic tone that is generated by Hebrews’ sustained and artful manner of weaving passages of exhortation within the larger expository sections of the epistle.”⁹⁴ Vanhoye’s structural analysis is significant to this dissertation as it creates a concentric symmetry, making the priesthood of Christ the centre and theological heart of the epistle (Heb 4:14–10:18). The text for this dissertation, which initiates the theme, theology and rhetorical force for establishing the theological heart, highlighting its core message: the superiority of Christ’s high priesthood and sacrifice “presentation of Jesus as priestly ministrant and mediator of a “better covenant.”⁹⁵ The alternating pattern of exposition and exhortation occurs throughout the book. Themes are introduced and then developed, followed by many admonitions around the priesthood of Christ. Vanhoye’s structural analysis delves into the intricate layers, as Vanhoye terms it, ‘structuralizing techniques of composition,’⁹⁶ of the author of Hebrews’ attempt to present, prove and sermonise various themes and subjects. The most pivotal technique Vanhoye uses is ‘the announcement of the subject’, in which Stanley summarises Vanhoye’s method by stating that the author of Hebrews employed this technique, along with others, to signal the structure of his homily in a refined manner. Rather than explicitly outlining his points, the author relied on the readers’ discernment to identify more

⁹⁴ Kevin B. McCrudden, *Solidarity Perfected: Beneficent Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), p.135, citing Albert Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de l’épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963).

⁹⁵ Lane discusses Vanhoye's projection of Christ, analysing Vanhoye's structural analysis of Hebrews. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, p.582

⁹⁶ Steven K. Stanley, ‘The Structure of Hebrews from Three Perspectives’, *Tyndale Bulletin*, 45.2 (1994), 245–271 <https://www.tyndalebulletin.org/article/30435-the-structure-of-hebrews-from-three-perspectives.pdf> [accessed 17 January 2023].

nuanced and artistic literary clues within the text's structure.”⁹⁷ The author can be seen endeavouring to prove the fulfilment, validity, and sufficiency of Christ's priesthood while exhorting the audience to embrace it through faith. Vanhoye's analysis explores the nuanced strategies employed by the author to convey these important theological themes and, through them, stimulate the perseverance of the audience in their faith.

Vanhoye's analysis is also critiqued for overemphasising the use of rhetorical devices and stylistic markers to create overly or forced intricate complexity. This approach could obscure the natural thematic flow and the importance and integration of other themes and motifs in Hebrews.

In his article, Stanley critically analyses the approaches for structural analysis; he states that many approaches are attempted to understand the book of Hebrews' literary structure. Some approaches stand out, especially the traditional linear approach, which sees the book in two parts, the “doctrinal/kerygmatic section and the practical/parenetic section”; the other is the chiasmic approach, a more carefully structured model like that by Albert Vanhoye, which gives much deeper insight. The last approach is critically called the “patchwork” approach employed by scholars like Leon Morris and F.F. Bruce, who see multiple units without outlining major divisions and are criticised for sacrificing procedures of scientific criticism in their interpretation. The structural agnostic approach also has to be mentioned. This is presumed based on ignorance and unwillingness towards an extremely structural assessment of Hebrews. This approach expresses the scepticism and criticality of Vanhoye's style of structural construction.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 255.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 245-271

Stanley provides his structural outline, which is recreated in the table below. In his outline, Heb.4:14-16 is positioned as the point of transition from discussing Jesus' superiority over Moses and the leaders of the Exodus (Heb. 3:1-4:13). It moves towards the section "The Superior Mediator", specifically as part of the theme "A Mediator Superior to Aaron in Mercy – The Readers' Need for Confidence" (Hebrews 4:14–5:10). He sees it as a major point of structural shift for introduction and emphasis on the thematic and theological motif of Christ's priesthood and the exhortation to approach Christ.

Section	Verses
Prologue	1:1-4
I. The Sovereign Son as Superior Mediator	1:5-7:28
A. A Mediator Superior to the Angels	1:5-2:18
1. Superior because of His Divinity	1:5-14
2. The Superior Demand of His Message	2:1-4
3. Superior because of His Humanity	2:5-18
B. A Mediator Superior to the Exodus Leaders	3:1-5:10
1. Superior to Moses and Joshua in Faithfulness	3:1-4:13
2. Superior to Aaron in Mercy	4:14-5:10
3. Immaturity of the Readers	5:11-6:20
C. A Mediator Superior to the Levitical Priests	7:1-28
1. The Superiority of Melchizedek to the Levites	7:1-10
2. The Appointment of Jesus in the Order of Melchizedek	7:11-17
3. The Superiority of Jesus to the Levites	7:18-28
II. The Superior Ministry of the New Covenant Mediator	8:1-10:39
A. Introduction to Christ's New Covenant Priestly Ministry	8:1-13
B. Explanation of Christ's New Covenant Priestly Ministry	9:1-10:18
1. The Old and New Sanctuaries Compared	9:1-14
2. The Old and New Covenants Compared	9:15-22
3. The Old and New Sacrifices Compared	9:23-10:18
C. Paraenesis Based on Christ's New Covenant Ministry	10:19-39

1. Confidence to Enter the Sanctuary	10:19-25
2. Judgment for Rejecting God's Covenant	10:26-31
3. Reward for Enduring Sacrifice	10:32-39
III. New Covenant Requirements for the People of God	11:1-13:19
A. Faith in Spite of Delayed Promises	11:1-12:3
B. Endurance for the Sake of God's Discipline	12:4-29
C. Obedience in a Context of Sacrifice	13:1-19
Benediction	13:20-21
Epistolary Closing	13:22-25

This table provides a brief summarised view of Guthrie's evaluation of the different approaches to the structure of Hebrews:

Approach	Positives	Negatives
Structural Agnosticism	Recognises the complexity of Hebrews.	A Passive approach, with no clear methodology. Assumes lack of structure based on complexity, not evidence.
Conceptual (Thematic) Analysis	Links structure with key themes like "Christ is Superior". Highlights unifying theological themes.	Highly subjective, leads to divergent outlines. Overlooks genre shifts (exposition & exhortation).
Rhetorical Criticism	Emphasis on text's persuasive elements. Focus on style and argumentation.	Hebrews does not fit into any one rhetorical category. Overlooks Hellenistic homiletic structure.

Literary (Rhetorical) Analysis	Uses objective tools (inclusio, chiasmus) for identifying structure. Recognises important genre shifts.	Danger of overemphasising form at the expense of content. Underplays key parallels (e.g., Heb. 4:14-16 and 10:19-23).
Linguistic (Discourse) Analysis	Comprehensive approach, combines literary and rhetorical strengths. Clarifies relationships between discourse units.	Neglects the historical context of the text. Focuses much on surface structure, missing deeper rhetorical elements.

Summary and Conclusion

Based on a brief historical tracking of the structure of Hebrews, it can be seen that the early and medieval interpreter's structural focus fell mainly on the theological aspect, especially Christocentric theology (*excellētiām Christi* theme), and Christ is superior (angels, Moses, Aaronic priesthood and Levitical cult and institutions). The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the rise of structuring the priesthood of Christ (three key terms: "faithful," "merciful," and "high priest"). The nineteenth and twentieth used historical-critical methods where the sections of the priesthood of Christ in Hebrews were not seen only from a theological perspective, but the texts were analysed more for their structural role.⁹⁹

Applying Guthrie's text-linguistic analysis, Heb 4:14-16 serves as one of the pivotal transitional units in the epistle. Using cohesion shifts, inclusio, lexical cohesion, genre shifts, and hook words reveals how the author skilfully uses the text as a thematic bridge to combine theological exposition and practical encouragement. The alternation

between exposition and exhortation was likely a deliberate rhetorical strategy employed by the author to keep the audience engaged in presenting a key theological theme (the priesthood of Christ) and practical points (not to hesitate to draw near with boldness and confidence). Thus, Heb.4:14-16 challenges the hearers to endure and persevere in their faith, grounded in Christ's superior and sympathetic high priesthood that always offers help to those who seek it.

Chapter 4

Exegetical and theological analysis of Hebrews 4:14-16.

In the first three chapters of this work, the foundation has been laid for a detailed exegetical and theological analysis of Heb.4:14-16. Chapter One introduced the unique presentation of the priesthood of Christ in the epistle, emphasising its central role in the epistle and how it differs from other NT writings. This was followed by an analysis of the disputed authorship of Hebrews, highlighting various views with a special focus on the possibilities of Pauline's authorship, but ultimately acknowledging the uncertainty surrounding his identity and taking the hypothesis of the anonymous authorship view. The analysis then turned to the intended audience, most likely Jewish Christians, and argued for a pre-AD 70 composition.

The second chapter focused on the genre of the epistle, examining various scholarly views. The analysis considered Hebrews as an exhortation and the possibility of a synagogue homily. A distinction was observed between paraenesis and paraclesis. The perspective of Hebrews as a liturgical homily was also explored, alongside a detailed look at forensic, deliberative, and epideictic rhetoric, identifying Heb. 4:14 as epideictic. The chapter further analysed the influence of aural-oral traditions and classical speech techniques, such as *inventio*, *dispositio*, and rhetorical strategies like *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*, and the use of rhetorical devices like *synkrisis*, alliteration, and amplification in Heb.4:14-16.

The third chapter of this dissertation explored the structural complexity of Hebrews. It traced historical and modern approaches to understanding the epistle's structural arrangement. Early structural divisions emphasised the theme of Christ's superiority, while later analyses applied classical rhetoric and literary techniques. The text-linguistic

analysis examined transitions, cohesion shifts, and other markers in the epistle, particularly around the theme of Christ's priesthood. This revealed Hebrews 4:14-16 as a pivotal passage, marking the transition from exhortation to exposition on Christ's priesthood. The structural analysis of Hebrews helped bring out the concentric centre around the priesthood of Christ. These three chapters provide the necessary context and methodological tools to move forward with a detailed exegetical analysis of Heb. 4:14-16, which will be the focus of this chapter.

Hebrews 4:14-16

14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.

15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us, therefore, approach the throne of grace with boldness so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (NRSV)

The textual context of Hebrews 4:14-16

The preceding context (3:7-4:13): In this section, the author employs a synkrisis between Christ and Moses, developing the superiority motif of Christ's priestly and sonship roles over Moses' servant leadership. The metaphorical imagery of God's house is used to identify the covenant community and how the exodus generation failed to enter God's rest (the promised land) because of their covenantal disobedience rooted in unbelief. Even though the generation of Joshua entered Canaan, they still did not have the eternal rest that only Christ provided. This history of failure of the covenantal community to enter the rest because of unbelief is a lesson of warning for the audience of He-

brews who might miss the superior rest¹⁰⁰ provided by Christ by displaying the same response. The section ends with a stark warning about the sword-like fierceness¹⁰¹ of God's word, which makes the covenant member/community helpless in its judicial work in verse 13. Vanhoye's structure, as discussed in chapter three, projects Jesus as faithful to those of God's house (3:6) in the preceding section (3:1- 4:14) "on the condition that we remain faithful to our vocation."¹⁰²

The immediate context of (4:14-16): As discussed in Chapter Three on the structure of Hebrews, verse 14 is identified as the point which begins a high-level cohesion shift (4:14-16) and starts with an exhortation to hold fast to the confession after a figurative graphic warning (v13). A quick genre shift (from verses 14 to 15) from an exhortation to a short but profound exposition of Christ's priesthood and back to an exhortation in verse 16. Guthrie calls it two conjoined exhortations: "Let us hold fast to our confession" (κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας) at the end of v14 and "Let us, therefore, approach the throne of grace" (προσερχώμεθα ... τῷ θρόνῳ) at the beginning of v 16.

The broader context (Hebrews 5:1–10:18): From here, the much broader exposition of the priesthood of Christ dominates chapters 5 to 10 to prove his superiority over the OT priesthood, sacrifices, and the old covenant. Key themes include Christ's qualifica-

¹⁰⁰ The theological motif of rest 'κατάπαυσις' a macro-typology resonates throughout the epistle with eschatological, Christological and soteriological implications; the primary exposition starts in the preceding section (Heb 3:7–4:11) . See Jared C. Calaway, *The Sabbath and the Sanctuary: Access to God in the Letter to the Hebrews*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2nd series, vol. 349 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 2013); Peterson, *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, p.120.

¹⁰¹ γυμνός (*gymnos*) Peter O'Brien remarks, "The uniform sense in classical Greek is to grab hold of someone by the neck in a wrestling match, to twist the neck and to weaken one's opponent by cutting off his windpipe" See, Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p.149; F.F.Bruce notes "the person is left completely 'helpless'. This characteristic figure then may be held to represent either the denuded or helpless plight of all created persons or forces when brought face to face with their Creator and Lord" see F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p.123.

¹⁰² Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p.51

tions as high priest (5:1-10), marks of spiritual immaturity (5:11-14), the peril of not progressing (6:1-8), the basis for spiritual security (6:9-20), the greatness of Melchizedek (7:1-10), the significance of Christ's priesthood (7:11-19), the superiority of Christ's priesthood (7:20-28), our glorious high priest (8:1-6), the promises of God's new covenant (8:7-13), the earthly sanctuary (9:1-10), the superior sanctuary (9:11-28), and the superior sacrifice (10:1-18).

Exegetical and theological analysis of verse 14

ἔχοντες οὖν ἀρχιερέα μέγαν διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανούς, Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας·

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.

"Since, then, we have a great high priest" (ἔχοντες οὖν ἀρχιερέα μέγαν).

The author begins with the positive present reality (**ἔχοντες**) after ending the previous section with an “image of standing completely vulnerable”¹⁰³ with a dreadful judicial warning; the use of “Οὖν draws an inference from 4:12–13”¹⁰⁴. While οὖν can sometimes indicate contrast, verse 14 is a smooth continuation from God’s judgment to His mercy. This is another instance where the author exhibits a consistent balance of warnings, threats and exhortations, interplaying it carefully and consistently with encouragement to persevere by providing assurance and hope (eg.6:9). The words ‘since then’ functions as a way of calling the audience’s attention back after a paraenetic interruption in the expository flow of the priesthood of Christ as a merciful and faithful high priest (2:17-3:6). “It is precisely the high priest mentioned in 2.17-18 who leads the people of God in a typological comparison to the leadership of Moses. Heb. 3.1- 4.13 does not

¹⁰³ DeSilva, *To the Hebrews*, p. 203.

¹⁰⁴ Dana M. Harris, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Hebrews* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), p.182.

therefore interrupt the train of thought of the author, but it succeeds in emphasizing the point of the Epistle”¹⁰⁵. In this lengthy exhortation (3:7- 4:13), in an exposition drawn from Psalm 95:7-11, the author highlights the ‘rest’ motif as a theological reality for faith and pastoral concern for exhortation. The resumptive participle ἔχοντες should be seen in the “causal sense”¹⁰⁶ as the reason implied is that since we have Jesus, the high priest, we have to respond to this reality by ‘holding on to the confession.’ ἔχω (to have, possess) is a common indicative used in Hebrews expressing we have Jesus (we have a high priest v15) and his soteriological benefits (we have this hope 6:19) and also mentions the Christian behaviour we must possess (5:14). In this verse, the indicative functions as the foundation for subsequent exhortations (v14 & 16).¹⁰⁷ It is the most important announcement of what the believer has - a great high priest. Another instance of ἔχοντες is when the author uses it to impress (the believer having..boldness). Still, ἔχοντες in verse 14, the believer having/possessing the benefits of the office and the ministry of Christ’s priesthood, is the pivot for everything that is built on this motif up to chapter 10. The emphasis on the ἔχοντες ("having") introduces a participial clause, modifying the main verb κρατῶμεν ("let us hold fast"). This present participle suggests that believers are to continuously hold onto their faith because they already possess a great high priest, Jesus.¹⁰⁸ The author moves on to employ *auxēsis* by presenting that what we have is μέγας (“great”), denoting excellent religious powers and political or royal powers and influence used for Simon Maccabaeus, as mentioned in the introduction. The author also uses (ἀρχηγὸν 2:10) terming Jesus a file or rank leader, “a chief, prince, a prime author”, who has opened the believer’s access to God “holding a singu-

¹⁰⁵ John Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, *The Library of New Testament Studies*, 49 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), p. 103.

¹⁰⁶ Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p.266.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.266

¹⁰⁸ Harris, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Hebrews*, p.182

lar office” with ultimate authority as the heavenly and eternal high priest whom even death cannot remove from his office (Heb.5:7). Jewish traditions anticipated a messianic priest-king¹⁰⁹ and angelic beings involved in priestly duties in heaven offering bloodless sacrifices and intercession for sinners.¹¹⁰ Attridge’s analysis, from the perspective of the Jewish Second temple context, views Philo’s priestly allegories, the suffering servant motif of Isaiah, and Johannine Christological ideas inferred into the priestly Christ of Hebrews. This does not provide any convincing parallels on specifically the intercessory and self-sacrificial functions of Christ portrayed in Hebrews. The great high priest motif in Hebrews stands uniquely distinct from early NT writings or any other source from any perspective from the categories named above. Attridge in his ‘Excursus: The Antecedents and Development of the High-Priestly Christology’ concludes that “Hebrews exploits this tradition and develops it in a new way by focusing on the other “priestly” motif of early tradition, Christ’s self-sacrifice, interpreting that act with the imagery of the Yom Kippur ritual.”¹¹¹

The uniqueness of Christ’s priesthood stands above these traditions, as they do not mention once and for all self-sacrifice (Heb 9:12, 14), timeless intercession (Heb 7:25), and the heavenly and hypostatic nature of his priesthood (4:14; 6:19-20; 7:26; 8:1-2; 9:11-12; 9:24).

The question of why or how this high priest (the hook word) excels in greatness seems

¹⁰⁹ Bateman, *Charts on the Book of Hebrews*, pp. 92-106, provides a helpful chart listing the second-temple literature from a priestly perspective and a reference comparison of the messianic priestly idea in Genesis 14, Psalm 110, 11Q13 with Hebrews 1-7.

¹¹⁰ Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p.354,355., citing 1QS IX, 11; CD XII, 23; XIV, 19; XIX, 10; XX, 1; *Testament of Levi* 18:1–14; Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. edn, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), pp. 550–54; John J. Collins, *The Sceptre and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), pp. 74–101.

¹¹¹ Attridge, *Hebrews*, pp. 97-103

logically helpful and relevant to understanding this phrase ‘*..who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God..*’

‘*..διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανούς, Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ..*’ Considering the ‘excessive use’ of synkrisis still at play, it can be assumed that in this text, greatness¹¹² comes because of his ascent into the heavens, which earthly priests could not do. The word διέρχομαι carries these different meanings: “to pass through, to pass over, cross, to travel through or over a country, wander about, to transfix, pierce.”¹¹³ The priesthood of Christ is not earthly but transcendent. The phrase ‘passed through the heavens’ is interpreted in several ways. The gnostic view of journeying through hostile, intermediate realms and spheres cannot be applied to this text but one that is typical of journeys mentioned in Second Temple literature cosmic perspective and NT ideas of the exaltation of Christ (Eph 4:10; 1 Pet 3:22). The significance of Christ passing through the heavens is not explained by the author in the text, but the idea is implicit in the heavenly temple imagery. The entry of Christ through the veil (6:19-20), entering with his blood (9:11-12), fulfilling the atonement by providing access to God’s presence through his blood and his flesh as the curtain (10:19-20). The notion of the Son passing through the heavens is a triumphant journey of exaltation. The first two chapters describe the Son’s preexistent glory, his earthly humiliation and suffering and now finally, in verse 14, his exaltation.¹¹⁴

Attridge’s view focuses on the son passing through the heavens as a festal exaltation and status for the redemptive work being effective and opening the way for the believers to enter the presence of God. The movement of Christ is rhetorical and not literal, where

¹¹² Guthrie reasons to the author of Hebrews why Christ is a great high priest in chapters 5-10; as the exposition gets into greater detail, see Guthrie, *Hebrews*, p. 244-482

¹¹³ GreekBible.com, ‘Hebrews 4:14’, Greek Bible, <https://www.greekbible.com/hebrews/4/14> [accessed 19 July 2024].

¹¹⁴ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 139.

ideas for speculation on the number of heavens are neither mentioned nor seem to be the concern of the author as the journey¹¹⁵ (such ascents¹¹⁶ in 2 Enoch, Ascension of Isaiah, and 3 Baruch) seems to be beyond or above the heavens (7:26). It is a rhetorical presentation of the Christ exalted or the exalted status in the heavenly realm.¹¹⁷ A more ‘novel reading’ of διέρχουμαι in Heb 4:14 is identified as an ‘intertextual echo’ between 4:14 and 1 Samuel 2:30-35. God promises to raise a faithful priest who will walk before him in perpetual service, replacing the service of the household of Eli. The intertextual echo is seen between the Greek verb διέρχουμαι ("passed through") and its Hebrew equivalent הלך ("to walk"). This usage is a metaphor for Jesus’s active priestly ministry, beyond the appointment of the Zadokite priesthood, ultimately fulfilled in Christ and not the son’s journey through the layers of the heavens.¹¹⁸ The name Jesus is used in warnings in oth-

¹¹⁵ The ascent of Jesus is seen from the perspective of Jewish apocalyptic mysticism, where heavenly ascents and divine mediators play central roles. Key figures like Enoch and Moses perform their priestly service and experience divine transformation. These motifs could have shaped Hebrews. The audience of Hebrews may be familiar with the Jewish apocalyptic and mystical traditions, as the author does not explain this journey and other major parallel elements like the heavenly realms, enthronement themes in Hebrews but presents the entire priestly, temple, and ritual details affirming the unique role of Christ. Jody A. Barnard analyses this view of Hebrews, particularly Hekhalot and Merkavah mystical traditions, from evolving perspectives from the 1970s to contemporary scholarship on this ongoing research, suggesting excellent resources for further study. For the ascension theme in his work, see Jody A. Barnard, *The Mysticism of Hebrews: Exploring the Role of Jewish Apocalyptic Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), p. 164-187.

¹¹⁶ “The “ascent” to God’s throne through the heavens is attested in other Jewish writings, especially those associated with Merkabah mysticism (see 1 En. 14–19; 70–71; 2 En. 67; 3 En. 6–7), as well as in the New Testament (2 Cor 12:1–5; Rev 4:1–11)” Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary, New Testament Library* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), p. 139, quoting E. Timo, *Messiah and the Throne: Jewish Merkabah Mysticism and Early Christian Exaltation Discourse*, WUNT 2/142 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), p. 45.

¹¹⁷ Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p.267.

¹¹⁸ For a more vigorous analysis of this proposition, see Philip Church, *Hebrews and the Temple: Attitudes to the Temple in Second Temple Judaism and in Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 2017)., p.370-378.

er parts of Hebrews (6:6; 10:29), but in this context, it highlights Jesus' exalted role as both Son and high priest. The connection between these two titles is explored more fully in Hebrews in 5:5–6 and 7:3, 28. It is the author's theological development of Christ's unique identity and work.¹¹⁹

The author does not provide any details of the confession as in this exhortation ... *let's hold tightly to our confession.. ...κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας...* The origin and the content¹²⁰ of such a confession is also not clear; the author mentions it as a condition (Heb.3.6) and explicitly in (3:14) and reiterated more forcefully in (4:14).¹²¹ Baptismal¹²² allusions are linked to Hebrews 10:19-25,¹²³ or it could be some early Christian liturgy in practice. Koester, Attridge, Guthrie, Lane and Ellingworth agree that the confession is clearly Christological. It probably served as a point of communal unity, distinguishing them from others and navigating the community's challenges. Koester presumes that the crisis could be theological about Jesus' sonship. In the context of the passage, after building up the theme of the transcendent Son, the author exhorts the audience to keep holding ('Let us hold fast our confession (κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας) uses the present active volitive subjunctive of κρατέω, emphasising continuous action. It implies, 'Let us keep on holding fast' or persistently clinging to the confession of faith.¹²⁴) onto the Son and priest. He began verse 14 by stating that's the great thing that they

¹¹⁹ Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p.267.

¹²⁰ Guthrie provides other New Testament confessions (e.g., Romans 10:9–10, 1 Timothy 6:12, 1 John 2:23, 4:2, 2 John 7)

¹²¹ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, P.440.

¹²² "eperōtēma in the legal sense of commitment, stipulation, corresponding to the agreement formula in contracts, eperōtheis hōmologēsa; this would be the equivalent of the homologia of baptism." Césilas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. by James D. Ernest, 3 vols (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p. 229.

¹²³ Attridge, Hebrews, pp.139-140.

¹²⁴ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, p.1743.

have or possess since he has passed through the heavens. The theme runs throughout the epistle. The exhortation is to persevere in faith in light of the community's belief in Jesus' sonship in verse 14 and his high priestly role, a confession of Christ (Heb 3:1), which they had already made.

Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Hebrews 4:15

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.

Heb. 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses... ..μὴ δυνάμενον συμπαθεῖν ταῖς ἀσθενείαις ἡμῶν... The conjunction γάρ prevents the idea that the exalted Jesus cannot empathise with the struggles and vulnerabilities of the believers. The dative ταῖς ἀσθενείαις (with our weaknesses) conveys an associative meaning, referring to human frailties that make a person vulnerable to temptation and sin.¹²⁵ The verb ἔχομεν (we have) is a progressive, ongoing reality.¹²⁶

Litotes /double negative formed by οὐ (not) and μὴ δυνάμενον (unable) “we do not have a high priest who cannot ...”. It is seen as the author trying to negate the idea that Jesus, as the high priest, is incapable of sympathy towards weakness and temptation.¹²⁷ It reinforces the affirmation that we are certain that Christ, through his compassion, will make up for our lack of strength.¹²⁸ The author employs two words unique¹²⁹ to Hebrews in verse 15. The first one is συμπαθεῖν ‘sympathise’, which is used again in 10:34. The second word unique to Hebrews is ὁμοιότης ‘like as we are, as we are, just as we are,

¹²⁵ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, P.446.

¹²⁶ Harris, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Hebrews*, p.183

¹²⁷ Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 225

¹²⁸ Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, p.619.

¹²⁹ Bateman, *Charts on the Book of Hebrews*, p.223.

same...we do.¹³⁰ Both are, in a way, interconnected as his priestly sympathy proceeds from the experience in which he was tested as we are. Christ's priestly sympathy is "not simply the compassion of one who regards suffering from without, but the feeling of one who enters into the suffering and makes it his own.¹³¹" The infinitive συμπαθεῖν (to sympathise) in 4:15 complements the participle δυνάμενον (able), forming part of the description of Jesus' ability to sympathise with human weaknesses. The word Ἀσθενείας (plural dative of ἀσθένεια, meaning "weaknesses") is in the associative dative, meaning it indicates something shared or experienced with others. In this case, emphasising Christ genuinely shares in human frailty and limitations.¹³² The usage of ἀσθένεια here goes beyond physical weakness; it refers to existential weaknesses, highlighting Jesus' participation in the full scope of human struggles (as noted by Lane in his commentary, Hebrews 1–8). Christ's sympathy could be understood from Acts 9:4, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" the combination of σύν (syn) meaning "with" and πάσχω (paschō) meaning "to suffer." This combination of "suffering with" or sharing in someone's feelings, particularly in their suffering or struggles¹³³ brings out the idea that Christ not only understands human struggles but indeed shares in them a profound sense of sympathy and solidarity with those who suffer. In its fullest sense, sympathy reflects a deep bond, an emotional connection between a mother and her children or brothers. A heartfelt connection leads to acts of mercy for those suffering. In Hebrews, the listeners' community showed sympathy by caring for prisoners (Heb 10:34).

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.223.

¹³¹ D. G. Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 77, citing Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1892).p.108.

¹³² Harris, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Hebrews*, p.183.,

¹³³ Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Tyndale Press, 1960), p. 93.

Jesus demonstrated it by sharing in human flesh and suffering (Heb 2:10-18), ultimately offering help to those in need (Heb 4:16).¹³⁴ The author does not provide what the weakness that he is alluding to it could be all common human frailties, such as physical illness, social pressures (like abuse or imprisonment), or the inherent weaknesses of human nature that often lead to sin. The context of the propensity to sin (cf. 5:2-3) is suggested. Ellingworth discusses the use of the Greek term ἀσθένεια (weakness) in Hebrews 5:2 and 7:28 to describe the ineffectiveness of Old Testament priests. In 5:2, the weakness in view is not physical but intellectual and moral, leading to failure to fulfil God's will. The plural form may specifically refer to unintentional transgressions of the Mosaic Law.¹³⁵ The context of Heb. 3:7-4:11 shows that the weaknesses in view might specifically relate to temptations to faith experienced by God's people during their wanderings in the wilderness.¹³⁶

The author moves on to explain why and how Christ embodies such sympathy *...but one who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin.*

πειρασμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας... Δὲ: After a negative clause δέ is often translated as "but" or "rather," highlighting a contrast here between the previous statement 'Jesus is unable to sympathise' or, to put it straight, the fact that he indeed can sympathise because he was tested in every way yet remained without sin πειράζω (to tempt or test). Ellingworth reads πειράζω likely means "tempted" rather

¹³⁴ Koester cites (4 Macc 14:13-14; 15:4, 7, 11) for mother and children, between brothers (4 Macc 13:23), for acts of mercy (Philo, Special Laws 2.115; 4.202; cf. 4 Macc 6:13). Koester, *Hebrews*, p. 424

¹³⁵ Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* p. 295, where he suggests that the plural may refer more specifically to unintentional transgressions of the Mosaic Law, citing Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), p. 105, n. 5; and G. Staehlin, 'ἀσθενής, ἀσθένεια', in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), pp. 491-93.

¹³⁶ Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 199.

than the more general “tested” based on 2:18, the only other place in Hebrews where the word is linked to Christ’s suffering and his death. The prepositions κατά are used to express likeness and manner. The first κατά πάντα means “in all things” (or “in every respect”), while the second καθ’ ὁμοιότητα means “in a similar manner” or “likewise” used in 2:17. χωρίς (without) is used with the genitive case, indicating separation from sin highlights Christ’s sinlessness, differentiating him from human weaknesses.¹³⁷ Lane summarises B. F. C. Atkinson's view that χωρίς in Hebrews 4:15 follows the distributive adj πᾶς means "with the exception of," leading to the translation: “tempted in all points like as we are, with the exception of sin.” Drew the theological conclusion that Christ was tested by every agency of sin like others. His sinless nature was incapable of yielding to these tests. Lane contrasts this with Vos, who interprets χωρίς ἁμαρτίας as “without the result of sin,” emphasising that while Jesus was tempted, he did not sin as a result.¹³⁸ The phrase χωρίς ἁμαρτίας ("without sin") can be read as emphasising the fact that Jesus remained completely sinless despite being tempted or the fact that, although Jesus faced real temptation, it never led to sin or sinful actions. Both readings agree that Jesus did not sin, but one stresses His overall sinlessness, while the other highlights that temptation did not produce sin. The author carefully presents Christ’s full identification with human struggles of all kinds while maintaining Christ's impeccability. Complete identification makes the sympathy authentic, and his sinlessness makes him a superior high priest in atoning sin through his effective sacrifice. Superior to the levitical order, which inherently yields or is vulnerable to sin and needs sacrifice for their sins (7:27). The author continues the superiority theme, focusing on the quality of Christ’s media-

¹³⁷ Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* p.268-269., Harris, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Hebrews*, p.183.,

¹³⁸ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, p.447.,citing B. F. C. Atkinson, *Theology of Prepositions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 5., and Geerhardus Vos, *Princeton Theological Review*, Vol. 5 (1907), p. 583.

tion. Aaronic mediation suffers from continuous liability to sin, a continuous obstacle to seamless, effective mediation. The phrase ‘one who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin’ is the idea of the similarity in participation of human frailties and superior and effective distinction because of his sinlessness.

Exegetical and theological analysis of *Hebrews 4:16*

Let's therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace...

προσερχώμεθα οὖν μετὰ παρρησίας τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος.. The verse starts with the phrase *προσερχώμεθα* (let us approach), a hortatory subjunctive, urging the readers to approach the “throne of grace confidently”. The author anchors οὖν (therefore) and draws an inference from the preceding argument, linking Jesus’ ability to sympathise with human weakness to the bold invitation to approach God’s throne, which deals with the access to his mediation. The verb *προσερχώμεθα* (let us approach) from *προσέρχομαι* is in the present middle subjunctive, a continual approach to God opportunity remains open for believers, implying continuous access to God's grace. It is used in a cultic sense in the Septuagint (LXX) commonly refers to the approach to God in priestly service. It is used throughout Hebrews (e.g., 7:25; 10:1, 22; 12:18, 22), signifying the worshippers' approach to God. The exhortation is to approach μετὰ παρρησίας (with boldness) modifies *προσερχώμεθα*, emphasising the manner of approach with confidence, contrasting the fear (4:12-13). The dative (τῷ θρόνῳ) indicates the location believers are invited to approach. At the same time, the genitive (χάριτος, grace) describes the throne's nature as one characterised by mercy and grace rather than fear, condemnation and judgment. The preceding context 4:12-13 ends with a graphic warning as described in the introduction to this chapter. The author employs his hortatory

subjunctive (let us) to encourage believers to approach confidently, not fearfully. The throne of grace (θρόνον τῆς χάριτος) is a “genitive metaphor” for God's presence.¹³⁹ The alliteration Heb. 4:16 προσερχώμεθα (let us approach) and παρρησίας (boldness) enhances the rhetorical force of the exhortation, drawing attention to the key idea of approaching God with confidence. Attridge sees the call as for entering into a covenantal relationship with God and emphasises that this approach mirrors the path Jesus took by passing through the heavens, providing believers access to God.¹⁴⁰ The “boldness” (par-rēsia) refers to the freedom of speech in frankness, openly and truthfully in the political discourse “, the candour to speak the truth to power” The LXX and Jewish literature is seen as a gift of God. The right to stand before God.¹⁴¹ The term is not confined to speech but conduct; “it is reasoned confidence and a free and easy attitude”, the “right that eliminates hesitation and doubt and justifies boldness.”¹⁴² The second part of the verse begins to focus on what can be expected when the believer approaches the throne of grace with boldness ... *that we may receive mercy and may find grace for help in time of need. ... ἵνα λάβωμεν ἔλεος καὶ χάριν εὕρωμεν εἰς εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν.* The verbs λάβωμεν (receive) and εὕρωμεν (find) are closely related in meaning, as are ἔλεος (mercy) and χάριν (grace). The conjunction ἵνα brings the purpose clause, with λάβωμεν (subjunctive) meaning “we may receive” and ἔλεος (“mercy”) as its object. It occurs

¹³⁹ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, p.447., Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p.268-269., Harris, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Hebrews*, p.183., Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, p.1743.

¹⁴⁰ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 144.

¹⁴¹ Thompson, *Hebrews: Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament*, p.105

¹⁴² Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, p.506-508.

earlier in the use of ἐλεήμων ("merciful") in Hebrews 2:17. The second verb, εὑρώμεν ("find"), is also in the subjunctive, with χάριν ("grace") as its object. The preposition εἰς often indicates purpose or result, leading to the noun βοήθειαν ("help"), which is modified by εὐκαιρον ("timely" or "well-timed"). This means the help is appropriate or comes at the right moment. It is likely a temporal sense, though the focus is more on receiving God's support during times of trial, not just at a specific moment. Βοήθεια (help) frequently refers to God's intervention and response to distress (e.g., Psalms 60:11, 108:12). God's help surpasses the help of family and friends (Sirach 40:24). The use of the word already employed by the author to describe Christ's ability to help those who are tempted (Heb. 2:18). The author echoes this idea in (Heb. 13:16) that God's help brings confidence, not fear. God's help is also perfectly timed to meet the needs of those who seek it.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p.270-271., Harris, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Hebrews*, p.184-185., Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, p.1756.

Chapter 5

Focusing on Hebrews 4:14-16, this work highlights the importance of understanding Christ's priestly solidarity for believers. The introduction presented the uniqueness of the priesthood of Christ, which is exclusive to Hebrews. The great high priest stands out from the text, which posits that the perfection of Christ's priesthood can provide perfect solidarity 'with' those who come to him. The epistle is unique in its exhaustive presentation of the priesthood of Christ, which covers a major portion of the epistle through comparison to the Aaronic priesthood. This unique presentation of the priesthood of Christ in the NT also makes it difficult to identify the author of this epistle among the NT authors. The intricacies and exclusive ideas of the priesthood of Christ make it difficult to associate him with Paul, the major contributor to the NT corpus. The genre of the epistle has a strong exhortation-based homily to emphasise the theological idea of the solidarity of the priesthood of Christ. The author uses the best rhetorical strategies and literary devices, not fully following the rhetorical handbook method of his times but custom-made to his audience in a Greco-Roman world to effectively communicate the new and unique idea of the priesthood of Christ. The author also structures the epistle to project the priesthood of Christ as remaining at the centre of his exposition. The first few chapters prepare and lead to this theme, and the last two chapters exhort the audience towards faith in his new and unique presentation of Christ. Despite the occasional calculated digressions that complement the main focus of Christ's priesthood, the author carefully transitions smoothly into the priestly Christological exposition with his rhetorical expertise. The author masterfully introduces the solidarity of the priesthood of Christ succinctly in Heb.4:14-16 after which he begins to prove it in detail in the following chapters.

Three main aspects of Christ's priestly solidarity emerge from the text. In verse 14, he assures the audience by presenting the greatness of the high priest by pointing to his transcendental exalted status. In this, he affirms and secures the idea of the superior son who has assumed his priestly office, eternally secured by the 'once and for all sacrifice' and fully participating in human frailties without succumbing to them. This assurance is used to induce faith and lays the foundational idea of Christ's priestly solidarity for them. In verse 15, the author most precisely and pithily presents the superior quality of Christ's solidarity, which cannot be paralleled in dealing with human weakness. In verse 16, the author presents the idea that Christ has permanently opened the way to God to bring us near God. The believer who once had to stand outside the holy place and the most holy place has now been given access to God without fear and with confidence. The author concludes in verse 16 the ultimate aim of the entire process by stating that enabling help is available to them whenever they need it.

Thus, in Hebrews 4:14-16 Christ's priestly solidarity is assured, explained, and presented as permanently available to those who come to him. The epistle cannot be seen as a theological treatise, even though it is theologically rich, unique and profound. Throughout the epistle, the author aims at exposition and ends in exhortation, calling the audience with a hortatory pastoral call to benefit from his beneficent priestly solidarity.

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