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# Hebrews, Rhetoric, and the Future of Humanity

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HEBREWS IS ONE of the earliest extant Christian sermons. Although it has been traditionally called an “epistle,” the idea that Hebrews is a sermon or speech has gained broad support, and many recognize that the work draws on the devices of classical rhetoric.<sup>1</sup> What is disputed is whether the author of Hebrews follows standard rhetorical patterns when developing the argument of the speech. Interest in this question is not limited to specialists, since the way that interpreters perceive the book’s structure reflects the way they understand its message. The traditional chapter divisions give the impression that Hebrews was written to show Christ’s superiority to the institutions of Judaism.<sup>2</sup> Those who divide the book into three parts usually hold that the book is a call to hold fast to the confession, while the division into five concentric parts fixes readers’ attention on the priesthood of

<sup>1</sup> See Craig R. Koester, “The Epistle to the Hebrews in Recent Study,” *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 2 (1994) 123-46, esp. 125-28; Duane F. Watson, “Rhetorical Criticism of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles,” *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 5 (1997) 175-207, esp. 181-87.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Christ’s superiority to angels (Heb 1:1-14), to Moses (3:1-6), to Aaron (5:1-10), to Melchizedek (7:1-10), etc. The theme of the *excellencia Christi* was emphasized by John Chrysostom (PG 63. 13; NPNF 1st series, 14. 366), and the *eminentia Christi* was a standard feature of medieval commentaries on Hebrews. See, e.g., Alcuin, *PL* 100. 132D; *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*: Facsimile reprint of the Editio Princeps of Adolf Rusch of Strassburg, 1480-81 (ed. Karlfried Froehlich and Margaret T. Gibson; 4 vols.; Turnhout: Brepols, 1992) vol. 4, *ad* Heb 1; Thomas Aquinas, “Super Epistolam ad Hebreos” §4, in Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Super epistolas S. Pauli lectura* (ed. R. Cai; 8th ed. rev.; 2 vols.; Turin/Rome: Marietti, 1953) 2. 335.

Christ, which appears at the center of the book.<sup>3</sup> Interpreters generally agree on where the paragraphs within Hebrews begin and end, but are less certain about the way the paragraphs fit together to create a sustained argument. This basic question concerning the shape and message of Hebrews is our focus.

Speeches from the Greco-Roman period are often described as judicial, deliberative, or epideictic types of rhetoric (Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1.3.1-9; *Rhet. ad Her.* 1.2 §2; Quintilian *Inst.* 3.4.1-16). Interpreters have debated whether Hebrews might be a form of deliberative rhetoric, since it tries to persuade listeners to follow the course of faithfulness, or whether it might better be considered epideictic, since its examples praise those who have shown faithfulness and reprove those who are unfaithful.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, neatly categorizing Hebrews is not necessary, since deliberative and epideictic elements were often interwoven in speeches (Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1.9.36; *Rhet. Ad Her.* 3.8 §15; Quintilian *Inst.* 3.7.28).<sup>5</sup> More importantly, various types of speeches included standard elements, such as an introduction, arguments, and conclusion. Although speakers showed considerable freedom in adapting typical patterns to specific situations, the use of familiar components helped listeners follow the speaker's train of thought. Some interpreters have tried to identify sections of Hebrews according to the usual rhetorical patterns, but little consensus has emerged, and other interpreters question whether the classic categories can be applied to the structure.<sup>6</sup> The proposal made here is that the categories provide a sense of clarity about the flow of the argument.

Major sections of the speech can be identified by considering the formal characteristics, the thematic content, and the rhetorical function of the material.

<sup>3</sup> The call to confession, which is central to the three-part division, is found in Heb 4 14-16 and 10 19-25. See, recently, Hans-Friedrich Weiss, *Der Brief an die Hebraer* (KEK 13, Göttingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991) 48-51. The five-part division proposes that Hebrews is framed by an introduction and conclusion (1 1-4, 13 20-21). The main sections are 1 5-2 18, 3 1-5 10, 5 11-10 39, 11 1-12 13, 12 14-13 19. See especially Albert Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de l'épître aux Hébreux* (2d ed., Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1976) 329-31. For a survey and discussion of proposals, see Koester, "Epistle to the Hebrews," 126-27.

<sup>4</sup> On Hebrews as deliberative speech, see Walter G. Ubelacker, *Der Hebraerbrief als Appel* (ConB 21, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1989) 214-29; Knut Backhaus, *Der neue Bund und das Werden der Kirche: Die Diathekedeutung des Hebraerbriefs im Rahmen der frühchristlichen Theologiegeschichte* (NTAbh 29, Münster: Aschendorff, 1996) 64-65; Barnabas Lindars, "The Rhetorical Structure of Hebrews," *NTS* 35 (1989) 382-406, esp. 386. On Hebrews as epideictic speech, see Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989) 14; Thomas H. Olbricht, "Hebrews as Amplification," in *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht, JSNTSup 90, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 375-87, esp. 378.

<sup>5</sup> See David A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (SLBDS 152, Atlanta: Scholars, 1995) 35; Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism," 187.

<sup>6</sup> For a summary of attempts to apply classical rhetorical categories to the structure of Hebrews, see Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism," 182-83. For arguments against the idea that Hebrews follows classical patterns, see Paolo Garuti, *Alle origini dell'omiletica cristiana: La lettera agli ebrei* (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Analecta A 38, Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1995) 185-315.

Perhaps the best known of the formal characteristics of Hebrews is its use of catchwords and *inclusios* to mark the beginning and end of paragraphs. Similar *inclusios* may also mark larger sections of material.<sup>7</sup> Another formal characteristic is the period, which is a complex sentence that integrates a number of thoughts into a unified whole. Periods were often used to introduce and conclude sections of an argument by drawing together the speaker's main points.<sup>8</sup> Since periods could be used for various purposes, we will note ways in which periods seem to conclude a section by summarizing the points that preceded the sentence itself. Thematic coherence is another factor in identifying sections of an argument. A section should develop a given line of thought in a way that can be distinguished from what comes before and after it. Finally, asking about the rhetorical function of a section shows one's awareness that parts of a speech may work in different ways. The arguments appeal primarily to logic, but digressions and perorations often appeal to emotion. The interplay among these elements enables us to discern the flow of the speech.

The salient features of the structure of Hebrews can be summarized as follows: First, the book's introduction, or *exordium*, extends from 1:1 to 2:4, which means that the opening section concerning the exalted Son of God is not part of the main argument, but is preparatory to it. Second, many assume that the *exordium* should be followed by a *narratio*, which is a statement of the facts pertaining to the topic, but speakers in antiquity did not consider a *narratio* to be essential, and Hebrews omits it.<sup>9</sup> Instead, the author moves directly to the thesis, or *propositio*, in 2:5-9, where he affirms that in Jesus' death and exaltation listeners can see how God's designs for human beings are accomplished through the suffering and exaltation of Christ. Third, the body of the speech includes three main series of arguments, each of which draws on a different group of images: the generation of the exodus and the wilderness, priesthood and sacrifice, and the story of God's people that culminates in the heavenly city. Transitions between sections are created by digressions in which the author interrupts the flow of thought in order to appeal for attention and to warn about the dangers of spurning

<sup>7</sup> Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire*, 37-49, George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Textlinguistic Analysis* (NovTSup 73, Leiden: Brill, 1994) 76-111.

<sup>8</sup> On the form and rhetorical function of periods, see BDF §464, *Rhet. ad Her.* 4.19 §27, Quintilian *Inst.* 9.4.128, Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study* (ed. D. E. Orton and R. D. Anderson, Leiden: Brill, 1998) §947.

<sup>9</sup> On omitting the *narratio*, see Quintilian *Inst.* 4.2.4-5, 5. Preface 5. Some propose that Hebrews does contain a *narratio*, but they vary widely in identifying the *narratio* as 4.14-6.20 (Hans von Soden, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* [2d ed., HKNT 3, Freiburg: Mohr, 1899] 11), 1.5-4.13 (Backhaus, *Der neue Bund*, 59), 1.5-6.20 (Ceslas Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* [2 vols., EBib, Paris: Gabalda, 1952-53] 1.38), 1.5-2.18 (Keijo Nissila, *Das Hohepriestermotiv im Hebräerbrief* [Schriften der Finnischen Exegetischen Gesellschaft 33, Helsinki: Oy Litton Kirjapaino, 1979] 24, Ubelacker, *Der Hebräerbrief*, 185-96).

God's word (2:1-4, 5:11-6:20; 10:26-39; 12:25-27).<sup>10</sup> Fourth, the peroration or conclusion begins not at 13:1 but at 12:28, where the author makes an appeal for service that is pleasing to God (12:28-13:21). An epistolary conclusion comes after the peroration. Hebrews can be outlined in this way:

- I EXORDIUM (1:1-2:4)
- II PROPOSITION (2:5-9)
- III ARGUMENTS (2:10-12:27)
  - A First Series (2:10-6:20)
    - 1 Argument Jesus received glory through faithful suffering—a way that others are called to follow (2:10-5:10)
    - 2 Transitional Digression Warning and encouragement (5:11-6:20)
  - B Second Series (7:1-10:39)
    - 1 Argument Jesus' suffering is the sacrifice that enables others to approach God (7:1-10:25)
    - 2 Transitional Digression Warning and encouragement (10:26-39)
  - C Third Series (11:1-12:27)
    - 1 Argument People of God persevere by faith through suffering to glory (11:1-12:24)
    - 2 Transitional Digression Warning and encouragement (12:25-27)
- IV PERORATION (12:28-13:21)
- V EPISTOLARY POSTSCRIPT (13:22-25)

## I. The Exordium (Heb 1:1-2:4)

Hebrews begins with what can be called an *exordium* according to the canons of classical rhetoric.<sup>11</sup> An important question concerns the length of the *exordium*, because knowing where the *exordium* ends helps us identify where the author presents the speech's central thesis. Interpreters often identify the *exordium* as the first sentence (1:1-4) because the style shifts from the elevated poetry of 1:1-4 to a series of biblical quotations in 1:5-13, and the content changes from God's revelation in the Son in 1:1-4 to the Son's superiority to the angels in 1:5-13.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Using digressions of different lengths was common (Lausberg, *Handbook* §§340-42, 345). Heb 3:7-4:11 has the hortatory features of a digression but does not interrupt the argument.

<sup>11</sup> Theodoret called Hebrews 1 the προομιον (PG 82:675A), and Augustine called it the *exordium*, perhaps in a nontechnical sense (PL 44:137, NPNF 1st series, 5:34).

<sup>12</sup> Interpreters have identified the *exordium* as 1:1-3 (Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [2 vols., Edinburgh: Clark, 1870] 1:39) and 1:1-4:13 (von Soden, *Brief an die Hebraer*, 17). Recent commentators commonly use *exordium* for 1:1-4 (Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 35; Samuel Benetreau, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* [2 vols., Vaux-sur-Seine: Edifac, 1989-90] 1:61; Erich Grasser, *An die Hebraer* [3 vols., EKKNT 17, Zurich: Benziger, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990-97] 1:46; William L. Lane, *Hebrews* [WBC, Waco: Word Books, 1991] 1:9; Weiss, *Brief an die Hebraer*, 133; Backhaus, *Der neue Bund*, 58-59; Ubelacker, *Hebraerbrief*, 106).

There are, however, good reasons to think that the *exordium* encompasses all of 1:1–2:4.<sup>13</sup> In style, the introduction is framed by periods that deal with God's mode of "speaking" (λαλέω) in the past through prophets and angels, and in the present through his Son (1:1–4; 2:2–4). In content, the first part of the *exordium* introduces the Son as the heir and creator of all things who is seated at God's right hand (1:1–4); and the second part provides a battery of OT quotations concerning divine sonship, eternity, and exaltation to support these claims (1:5–14).<sup>14</sup> The final part (2:1–4) brings what has been said into an appeal for attention. The author cautions that if neglecting the message that was delivered of old had dire consequences, the result of neglecting the salvation proclaimed through Christ will be even more serious. Significantly, there is no major shift in subject matter after 1:4. Only after 2:4 does the author begin considering Jesus' suffering, the topic that will be developed in the remainder of the speech. Thus, the *exordium* provides an *indirect* introduction to what follows it, as was common in the *exordia* crafted by ancient orators (Quintilian *Inst.* 4.1.30). The depiction of the Son of God enthroned in heaven does not address the principal concern of the speech; instead, it has an important preparatory function. By reminding listeners that exaltation followed Jesus' crucifixion, it provides a perspective from which the meaning of Jesus' death can be comprehended.

Comparison with other speeches suggests that an *exordium* extending from 1:1 to 2:4 would have been appropriate for Hebrews. The length of an *exordium* depended on the issue being addressed; a few sentences might be sufficient for simple matters, while longer introductions were used for more complex issues (Quintilian *Inst.* 9.4.125). An *exordium* might be as brief as Heb 1:1–4 (e.g., Demosthenes *Exordia* 3 and 51), but speakers typically allowed themselves at least two to three hundred words of introduction—several minutes in delivery time—and they frequently went longer. Hebrews is a speech that would have taken about forty-five or fifty minutes to deliver, and an *exordium* lasting for three to four minutes—about three hundred and twenty words (1:1–2:4)—would have been appropriate for a speech of this scope and complexity.<sup>15</sup>

*Exordia* were usually designed to make listeners attentive and ready to receive instruction (*Rhet. ad Her.* 1.4.6; Quintilian *Inst.* 4.1.5). Hebrews achieves this, in

<sup>13</sup> Interpreters who have identified 1:1–2:4 as a unit without calling it an *exordium* include Johannes A Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament* (5 vols., Edinburgh Clark, 1858, Latin original, 1742) 4:335, Eduard Riggenbach, *Der Brief an die Hebraer* (2d–3d ed., Leipzig Deichert, 1922) 1, and Harald Hegermann, *Der Brief an die Hebraer* (THKNT 16, Berlin Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1988) 26. Cf. Lawrence Wills, "The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity," *HTR* 77 (1984) 277–99, esp. 281.

<sup>14</sup> John P. Meier, "Structure and Theology in Heb 1:1–14," *Bib* 66 (1985) 168–89.

<sup>15</sup> See John R. Walters, "The Rhetorical Arrangement of Hebrews," *Asbury Theological Journal* 51 (1996) 59–70, esp. 64, Gareth L. Cockerill, *Hebrews* (Indianapolis Wesleyan, 1999) 31. Compare the opening of Romans (Rom 1:1–15), which begins with a period (1:1–6). The thesis follows the introduction in Rom 1:16–17 as in Heb 2:5–9.

part, through the use of rhetorical conventions. The elevated style of the first sentence is reminiscent of the oratory of Isocrates,<sup>16</sup> and words beginning with the  $\pi$  sound catch the listener's ear: πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις ("God, having spoken on many occasions and in many forms to the forebears of old by the prophets," Heb 1:1). In terms of content, a speaker could gain attention by announcing that he would address matters that were new or unusual, or that pertained to the listeners or to God. This is what the author of Hebrews does in 1:1-2, which focuses on the word of God that came recently "to us." Attention could also be secured through an appeal to listen carefully. This is what the author does at the end of the *exordium* through a direct appeal to "attend all the more to what we have heard" (2:1). By using rhetorical questions at the conclusion of the *exordium*, the author also heightens the level of interaction with the listeners, helping to move them from being passive recipients of information to being more active participants in the thought process.<sup>17</sup>

The author also altered rhetorical conventions to suit the content of his speech. Writers often began by referring to the "many" (πολυ-) things that people had said previously about a subject. For example, Demosthenes began, "Many speeches are delivered, men of Athens, at almost every meeting of the Assembly" (*Philippics* 3.1). Dionysius of Halicarnassus said, "Many strange and paradoxical pronouncements has our age brought forth" and "this statement of yours seems to me to be one of them" (*First Letter to Ammaeus* 1). In the same way, Jewish and Christian writers sometimes referred to what "many" of their predecessors had said on a given topic (Sirach prologue; Luke 1:1). Hebrews, however, shifts the level of discourse from human speech to divine speech by focusing on God, who spoke in times past through the prophets, and who now spoke again through a Son (1:1-2). Presenting God as speaker was unconventional rhetorically and significant theologically. Some speeches opened with an appeal that God or the gods might help the speaker,<sup>18</sup> but Heb 1:1-4 identifies God *as* the speaker. The scriptural quotations in 1:5-13 maintain the focus on God as speaker, since the quotations are not prefaced with a formula such as "it is written," as is common in the NT, but declare what God "said" or "says" (1:5, 6, 7, 13). OT passages are cited rapidly and virtually without comment, so that listeners are confronted not with the author's reflections about God but with God's words from the Scriptures.

<sup>16</sup> *Rhet ad Her* 3 12 §21, James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (ICC, Edinburgh Clark, 1924) lvi-lx, James H Moulton, Wilbert F Howard, and Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (4 vols., Edinburgh Clark, 1906-63) 4 106-13

<sup>17</sup> On gaining attention in the *exordium*, see *Rhet ad Her* 1 4 §7, Lausberg, *Handbook* §270 For rhetorical questions in *exordia*, see Demosthenes *Exordia* 35 4, 51, Dio Chrysostom *Discourses* 1 10

<sup>18</sup> Philo *Aet* 1, cf Plato *Timaeus* 27bc, Demosthenes *On the Crown* 1 1, *Letters* 1 1

Another distinctive element is the positive value given to what God has said in the present when compared to what he has said in the past. Speakers commonly considered their contemporaries to be inferior to previous generations in virtue and in the ability to speak: People “of the present day, apart from a small fraction of them, do not resemble those of former times in their aims and actions,” for language “that was once healthy and robust they have turned into a jargon hopelessly depraved” (Philo *Plant.* 156-57).<sup>19</sup> By emphasizing the superiority of what God said “in these final days” (1:2), the author reverses a widespread perception of decline. Many may have thought that human speech was degenerating, but God was not captive to the trend. Rather than dwelling on how things have declined since a past golden age, the author moves listeners to consider their situation with a view to the salvation that God had newly declared, seeking to draw them forward in the hope of its consummation.

The *exordium* also presented an opportunity to make listeners well disposed toward the speaker. Often this involved establishing the speaker’s integrity, since whatever was said was more persuasive when listeners were confident that the speaker was reliable (Quintilian *Inst.* 4.1.7). The author assumes that listeners will grant that God is a speaker of the highest moral integrity (Heb 6:13). By quoting the Scriptures and by tracing the transmission of the divine message from Christ to the listeners in 1:1–2:4, the author assures the audience that they have been confronted with an authentic word of God. It was fitting to emphasize that God is the primary speaker, because the arguments made in the rest of the speech depend on the conviction that God will be faithful to the promises that he made. The proposition that will be put forward in the next section (2:5-9) is that God wills that people be crowned with glory and honor. Since this hope seems to be contradicted by experiences of conflict and loss (10:32-34; 13:13-14), affirming the integrity of the divine message in the *exordium* places listeners in a position to expect that God’s integrity will be demonstrated through the speech.

The author depicts himself first as a listener rather than a speaker, including himself among those to whom the word of God has come (1:2; 2:3); nevertheless, the *exordium* does help to establish the author’s credibility indirectly. The author’s identity was already known to the intended audience, and it would appear that he already had some rapport with them (13:22-25). The *exordium* helps to confirm the author’s integrity by including what is, in effect, a confession of faith concerning the exalted Christ.<sup>20</sup> The opening lines emphasize aspects of the faith that cannot be seen, including the Son’s exaltation and his activity in creation (1:1-4). Therefore, when the author later asks listeners to hold fast to their confession

<sup>19</sup> See George A. Kennedy, *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) 446-64.

<sup>20</sup> See Franz Laub, *Bekennnis und Auslegung: Die paränetische Funktion der Christologie im Hebräerbrief* (Biblische Untersuchungen 15; Regensburg: Pustet, 1980) 14-27.



(4:14; 10:23) and their boldness (3:6; 4:16; 10:19), his appeal has integrity, for he does not ask them to do anything that he has not done already.

## II. The Proposition (Heb 2:5-9)

The next section is the proposition (*propositio*), which identifies the principal issue to be addressed in the speech (2:5-9).<sup>21</sup> The proposition is a discrete section, consisting of a quotation of Ps 8:4-6 and a brief exposition of the text.<sup>22</sup> The author placed the proposition immediately after the *exordium*, which is framed by periods concerning divine speech (1:1-4; 2:1-4), and just before the first series of arguments, which is framed by statements about the Son of God becoming complete through suffering (2:10; 5:8-10). Situated at the juncture between these two parts of the speech, the proposition marks the point at which attention turns from the glory of the exalted Christ to the significance of Christ's suffering. Therefore, the proposition sets a course for what is to come.<sup>23</sup>

A proposition is effective to the extent that it frames a question in a way that contributes to its solution. The direction of the argument is established through the quotation of Ps 8:4-6, a text that speaks of glory, honor, and dominion. The passage is useful because its references to "man" and "son of man" can be taken broadly as a statement about God's intentions for humankind, and more specifically as a statement about the exalted Christ. On one level, the references in Hebrews to human beings inheriting salvation from God (1:14; 2:3) move listeners to take the psalm as a statement about the glory, honor, and dominion that people will receive in God's kingdom in "the world to come" (2:5). On another level, the psalm can be applied to Christ, who is God's Son and heir of all things. Hebrews has already used language from Ps 110:1 to say that God promised to make the Son's "enemies a footstool" for his feet (Heb 1:13). Since Ps 8:7 uses similar language to declare that God had placed all things "under the feet" of the

<sup>21</sup> On the "proposition" in rhetoric, see *Rhet ad Her* 1 10 §17, Cicero *De inventione* 1 22 §31, Quintilian *Inst* 4 4 1-9

<sup>22</sup> Many include 2 5-9 with 2 10-18 (e.g., Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* [NIGTC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993] 143, Grasser, *An die Hebraer* 1 111, Ubelacker, *Hebraerbrief*, 163-84, Albert Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ Hébreux 1-2* [LD 58, Paris: Cerf, 1969] 255-387, Weiss, *Brief an die Hebraer*, 190). The arguments that begin in 2 10 are closely related to 2 5-9. Nevertheless, identifying 2 5-18 as a unit tends to separate this section too sharply from what follows in 3 1-6. See n. 27 below.

<sup>23</sup> This was suggested in the eighteenth century by Bengel (*Gnomon*, 4:335, 359), who said that Hebrews' "proposition and sum" were first stated through the quotation and interpretation of Psalm 8 in Heb 2 5-9 and developed in 2 10. More recent works that point to the pivotal role of 2 5-9 include Lincoln D. Hurst, "The Christology of Hebrews 1 and 2," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament* (ed. Lincoln D. Hurst and N. T. Wright, Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 151-64, Robert L. Brawley, "Discursive Structure and the Unseen in Hebrews 2 8 and 11 1: A Neglected Aspect of the Context," *CBQ* 55 (1993) 81-93.

son of man, listeners might well apply both passages to Jesus. Hebrews will develop both senses, arguing that in Jesus listeners can see how God has fulfilled his purposes in a manner that anticipates and brings about the salvation of other people.<sup>24</sup> The question of God's purposes for humanity undergirds the speech.

When defining an issue, speakers tried to distinguish the points of agreement from those that were disputed. The formulation of this *crux* or *stasis* was most widely developed in juridical cases, but it was a feature of other kinds of oratory as well.<sup>25</sup> Hebrews formulates the issue in several steps. After quoting the psalm and repeating that God's intention is to bring all things into subjection (2:6-8b), the author raises an objection that, once stated, would be readily apparent to his listeners. Experience does not conform to what is stated in the psalm, since "at present we do not *see* all things" in subjection as God intends (2:8c). Hebrews was written for a community that had been persecuted in the past and continued to experience verbal harassment and internal malaise. Some members of the community remained in prison (10:32-34; 13:3, 13; cf. 5:11; 6:12). These experiences called into question the idea that God has placed all things in subjection to either Christ or his followers.

The author responds to the objection by interpreting the psalm in light of Jesus' death and exaltation. The *exordium* of Hebrews assumes that listeners have already come to believe that Jesus has been exalted to heavenly glory. Instead of using the *exordium* to persuade the listeners that Christ had been exalted, the author presupposes this belief, citing it in the *exordium* in order to establish common ground with the listeners. Given the conviction that Christ has been exalted, the author now points out that suffering and death preceded Christ's exaltation to glory, just as the subject of the psalm-verse was made "lower than the angels" for a time before receiving glory, honor, and dominion (Heb 2:9). In the context of Hebrews, being made "lower than the angels" means humiliation.<sup>26</sup> When applied to the exalted Christ, the psalm describes his present glory; when applied to the beleaguered people of God, the psalm promises future glory (1:14; 2:10). For Jesus and his followers, glory does not come by exemption from suffering, but comes out of suffering.

The concluding lines of the proposition set the direction for the remainder of the speech:

<sup>24</sup> On the idea that the destiny of humanity is realized in Christ, see James Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac: A Study of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Light of the Aqedah* (AnBib 94; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981) 137-41; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 151-52; Lane, *Hebrews*, 1. 48.

<sup>25</sup> On the *stasis* of a speech, see Quintilian *Inst.* 3.6.1-104; Ray Nadeau, "Hermogenes' On Stases: A Translation with an Introduction and Notes," *Speech Monographs* 31 (1964) 361-424; Lausberg, *Handbook*, §§79-254.

<sup>26</sup> In the context of Psalm 8, the statements about being made "lower than the angels" and being "crowned with glory and honor" are parallel and could be understood *synonymously*; but Hebrews takes them to be *opposites*.

(a) One point is that Jesus was “crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death,” opening the way for others to follow (2:9a). This idea is developed in the first series of arguments, which are framed by statements about Christ being made complete through suffering so that he brings salvation for others (2:10; 5:8-10), and which deal with questions of glory and honor (δόξα, τιμή, 2:10; 3:3; 5:4-5).

(b) A second point accents the sacrificial aspect of Jesus’ death, since Jesus suffered so that “by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (2:9c). The sacrificial quality of Jesus’ death “for everyone” is most fully explored in the second series of arguments, which concerns Jesus’ priesthood and self-offering (7:1–10:25).

(c) The third series of arguments returns to the contradiction between the hope of glory in God’s kingdom and the inglorious experience of life in the world. The proposition acknowledges that Jesus’ followers do not yet “see” all things subjected as God intends (2:8c), but the final series of arguments shows that faith is bound to what is unseen (11:1–12:24). Since listeners do “see” that Jesus who suffered and died is now crowned with glory and honor (2:9), they can keep looking to him as they journey toward the heavenly city that is the consummation of their hope (12:1-2, 22-24).

### III. Arguments and Digressions (Heb 2:10–12:27)

The body of the speech begins when the author declares that it was fitting that God, “in bringing many sons and daughters to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation complete through suffering” (2:10). It concludes by showing the culmination of God’s purposes in the heavenly Jerusalem, where, through the work of Jesus the pioneer, the righteous are made complete so that they can celebrate with the angels in glory (12:2, 22-24). Thus the broad movement of the speech shows how God brings people to the glory that he has promised them by means of the suffering and exaltation of Christ, and that life along the way is lived by faith in this promise.

Within this large section are three major series of arguments, each showing listeners how Christ’s suffering and exaltation open the way for them to come into the presence of God. In one sense, the arguments are progressive, so that the first series holds that Jesus received glory through faithful suffering, a way that others are called to follow; the second series argues that Jesus’ suffering is the sacrifice that enables others to approach God; and the third series maintains that God’s people persevere through suffering to glory by faith. In another sense, the internal movements of the three series are repetitive. Although they use different images, they send a constant message that faith is a journey that culminates in the fulfillment of God’s promises. In the first series, listeners are like the generation in the wilderness, for they have experienced God’s act of deliverance, but they still

journey toward God's promised rest. In the second series, they are worshipers in the sanctuary, who stand in the outer court and now have the prospect of entering the inner chamber where God is present. In the third series, they are among the generations of Israel, sojourning on earth in the hope of finding a place in Zion, the city of God. Thus different images—the promised land, the sanctuary, Zion—work together to convey the same hope.<sup>27</sup>

Transitional digressions separate the three series of arguments. These digressions do not move the larger argument forward in a direct way, but allow the author to turn and address the listeners with words of warning and encouragement. The digressions resemble each other in that they admonish the listeners to pay attention, and warn about the dangers of neglect, sluggishness, apostasy, and persistent sin, since divine judgment is inescapable (2:1-4; 5:11-6:20; 10:26-39; 12:25-27). Rather than trying to fit the digressions into the flow of the argument, as is common in outlines of Hebrews, we can better treat them as digressions that seek to retain the audience's attention during the transitions between sections. At the same time, the importance of the digressions in the author's rhetorical strategy should be recognized. The arguments appeal to logic and the digressions speak more to the listeners' will and emotions, so that, together, the two phases of the discourse promote the goal of faithfulness. For convenience, we will consider the arguments and the digressions separately.

### A. The Three Series of Arguments

#### 1. First Series: Jesus received glory through faithful suffering—a way that others are called to follow (2:10-5:10).

The first series of arguments develops the point made in the proposition that Jesus is "crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death" (2:9a). The course of Jesus' life, death, and exaltation shows that suffering need not mean that God's purpose has failed, for in Jesus' case suffering was the way in which God's purpose was carried out. The arguments that develop this idea are framed by parallel statements that connect suffering with being "made complete," an expression that links suffering with entry into glory.<sup>28</sup> The section begins with that statement that Christ was "made complete through suffering" (διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι) so that he has become the pioneer of "salvation" (σωτηρία) for others (2:10). The section concludes with a period that recalls how, in the days of his flesh, Jesus "learned obedience by what he suffered (ἔπαθεν)" and was "made complete" (τελειώθει) so that he might be a "source of eternal salvation (σωτηρία)" for

<sup>27</sup> John Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews* (SNTSMS 75; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 134-38.

<sup>28</sup> David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (SNTSMS 47; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 96-103; Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 87.

others (5:8-10). A complete change in subject matter occurs afterward (5:11–6:20). If the *exordium* prepared for the arguments by focusing on the glory of the ascended Christ, the arguments themselves emphasize that suffering preceded and led to Christ's exaltation.

In content, these arguments emphasize the relationship of Christ's suffering to his glory. Two portrayals of Christ serve as bookends for the section. In the first, the glory of Christ is compared to that of Moses, and Jesus' death and exaltation are recounted in terms taken from the exodus. If Moses left the Egyptian court to identify with and deliver an enslaved people, Christ also identified with people who were enslaved by oppressive powers in order to liberate them. Therefore, if Moses is rightly honored for his faithfulness as God's servant, Jesus is worthy of even greater glory for his faithfulness as God's Son (2:10–3:6).<sup>29</sup> In the second portrayal, the glory of Christ is compared to that of Aaron, Moses' brother, who did not seize the honor of high priesthood for himself, but who was called to that position by God. Like Aaron, Jesus did not glorify himself by seeking the priesthood, for he was exalted to that position by God, in order to raise up a "priest forever after the type of Melchizedek," as God said in Ps 110:4 that he would do (Heb 4:14–5:10).

Between the comparisons of Moses and Aaron to Jesus, who now rests in heavenly majesty, the author likens Jesus' followers to the generation that accompanied Moses and Aaron out of Egypt and into the wilderness in the hope of finding rest in the promised land. Like that generation, which was delivered from slavery in Egypt through the exodus, the followers of Jesus have been delivered from slavery to fear of death through Jesus' exaltation (2:10-18). Like that generation, too, Jesus' followers have received promises from God and live in the hope of entering God's promised rest (4:1-10). The people in the wilderness missed receiving what God had promised, not because God failed but because they refused to trust God (3:7-19). The question is whether the followers of Jesus will also prove unfaithful or whether they will persevere in the hope of entering God's rest (4:11), as Jesus persevered and now sits at God's right hand.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Interpreters sometimes treat 2 10-18 and 3 1-6 as separate sections, but the two passages can best be taken together. The word ὅθεν ("because of this") in 3 1 shows that the author is in the middle of a section (cf. ὅθεν in 2 17, 7 25, 8 3, 9 18, 11 19). Repetition of key words and ideas strengthens connections between 2 10-18 and 3 1-6. God is the Creator of all things (2 10, 3 4), Jesus' followers are the brothers and sisters who belong to God's household (2 11-12, 3 1, 6), and they can be called "holy" because Christ sanctifies them (2 11, 3 1). The portrayal of Christ as the one sent to deliver people (2 14-16) and as the priest who makes atonement (2 17-18) continues in 3 1, where he is called "apostle" (i.e., "sent one") and "high priest." On allusions to the exodus in this passage, see Paul Andriessen, "La teneur judéo-chrétienne de Hébr. I,6 et II,14b-III,2," *NovT* 18 (1976) 293-313, esp. 304-13.

<sup>30</sup> Some outlines of Hebrews include chap. 5 with what follows it because Christ's priesthood is a topic in 4 14-5 10 and again in 7 1-10 25. I link chap. 5 with what precedes it because 4 14-5 10

2. *Second Series: Jesus' suffering is the sacrifice that enables others to approach God (7:1–10:25).*<sup>31</sup>

After a digression in which the author reproves the listeners and exhorts them to perseverance, the second series of arguments takes up a second point that was made in the proposition: By the grace of God, Christ tasted death on behalf of everyone (2:9d). This section, which extends from 7:1 to 10:25, is bracketed by two major digressions (5:11–6:20; 10:26–39) and is unified by its content. The author introduces the section by speaking of Christ's passage through the curtain and into the inner chamber of the sanctuary, where he has gone as a high priest and a forerunner for others to follow (6:19–20). The arguments themselves show that Christ is a priest whose sacrifice enabled him to enter the heavenly sanctuary (7:1–10:18), and the conclusion reiterates that Christ the high priest has opened the way for others through the curtain and into the presence of God (10:19–25). Repeated references to Christ being seated at God's right hand (8:1–2; 10:11–15) and quotations from Jeremiah's oracle announcing the new covenant (8:8–12; 10:16–17) enhance the unity of this section.<sup>32</sup>

If the first series of arguments showed that Christ suffered *like people* before he was exalted to glory, the second series of arguments shows that Christ suffered *for people* in order to bring them to glory. Biblical texts dealing with priesthood and sacrifice provide the author with a way to show how Christ's suffering and exaltation could benefit others. Initially, the author demonstrates that Christ's exaltation to eternal life makes him uniquely qualified to serve as a "priest forever after the type of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:4). Because Christ's priesthood is "forever," the author argues that it is superior to the Levitical priesthood. Next, he speaks of Christ's death and exaltation as a sacrifice that was made on behalf of others. Christ's sacrifice is the definitive source of the atonement that was foreshadowed by the Law's provision for an annual atoning sacrifice. Because Christ's death is a definitive source of atonement, it fulfills God's promise to make a new

emphasizes the theme of glory, which is important in 2:10–5:10, but less so in chaps. 7–10. Moreover, 4:14–5:10 emphasizes the similarities between Christ and Aaron, whereas 7:1–10:25 stresses the differences between Christ's priesthood and the Levitical priesthood.

<sup>31</sup> Many interpreters identify 10:18 as the conclusion of the previous series of arguments and treat 10:19–39 as a block of hortatory material (e.g., Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire*, 173–81, cf. Bénétreau, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 2:107, Nello Casalmi, *Agli Ebrei. Discorso di esortazione* [Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Analecta 34, Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1992], 295, Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 515, Grasser, *Brief an die Hebraer*, 3:11, Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:271, Weiss, *Brief an die Hebraer*, 519). Hegemann makes a major break after 10:31 (*Brief an die Hebraer*, 202). I include the exhortation to enter the sanctuary (10:19–25) with the arguments that precede it and treat 10:26–39 as a transition (cf. Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 283, Guthrie, *Structure of Hebrews*, 144).

<sup>32</sup> Although the topic of priesthood was already discussed in 4:14–5:10, that section belongs in the first series of arguments. In the previous series of arguments, the author showed the *similarities* between the priesthood of Aaron and Jesus, but here he stresses the *differences* between the Levitical priestly service and Christ's priestly service.

covenant under which he would remember sins no more. The arguments move like footsteps along a path, alternating between comparing Jesus' ministry with Levitical ministry, on the one hand (8:1-6; 9:1-14; 10:1-10), and elaborating the meaning of the new covenant, on the other (8:7-13; 9:15-28; 10:11-18).

Formally, the period in 10:19-25 creates a peroration that closes the second cycle of arguments (see Quintilian *Inst.* 6.1.1, 54-55).<sup>33</sup> The period draws together the main themes of the section and urges listeners to draw near to God as the Day of the Lord draws near to them. Perorations could help to refresh listeners' memories by drawing together ideas from previous arguments, so that even "though the facts may have made little impression" in detail, "their cumulative effect is considerable" (Quintilian *Inst.* 6.1.1). This occurs here. The author has said that previously the "way" (9:8) into God's presence was closed and the "conscience" was not cleansed (9:9), even though the first covenant was "dedicated" (9:18) and people "sprinkled" their flesh according to Levitical ordinances (9:13, 19). Now Christ has "dedicated" a new and living "way" (10:19-20), so that Jesus' death provides a "sprinkling" not only for the body but also for the "conscience" (10:22).

### 3. *Third Series: God's people persevere through suffering to glory by faith (11:1-12:24).*

In this final series of arguments, the author returns to the problem raised in the proposition, namely, that the listeners do not yet "see" the realization of God's promises (2:8c). The author sounds the theme in the opening declaration, which stresses that "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proof of things unseen" (11:1). Repeated references to ways in which generations of God's people have acted "by faith" illustrate the claim. The author traces the journeys of the righteous who endured conflict, disappointment, and death on earth: Abraham lived as a foreigner on earth in the hope of life in God's city (11:10, 16); Moses gave up wealth in Egypt for a future reward (11:26-27); and the martyrs accepted death in the hope of resurrection (11:35). These heroes and heroines were not "made complete" during their lifetimes (11:39-40), but the author brings their story to its culmination in chap. 12, where the spirits of the righteous are finally "made complete" in God's heavenly city (12:22-24). Distinctive comments about the blood of Abel frame the section (11:4; 12:24).

The author brings the listeners into this epic story of faith by depicting them as athletes in a race, who are called to persevere in the hope of receiving what God has promised. Faithful figures from the biblical world—Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Rahab and the others in Hebrews 11—join the "great cloud of witnesses" in the stadium where the listeners run the race of faith by looking to Jesus, who completed the contest before them and is now seated at God's right hand (12:1-4). The

<sup>33</sup> Lausberg, *Handbook*, §§431-42; Weiss, *Brief an die Hebräer*, 519.

followers of Jesus are to persevere in faith, despite its difficulties, just as athletes complete a contest and children receive discipline for the sake of a greater good (12:5-17). That greater and final good is life in the heavenly city of God, where the hope of celebrating in the presence of God and God's people will be fully realized (12:22-24). The courage to live faithfully in one's earthly city, despite experiences of conflict and loss, comes from the confidence that God will not abandon his people but will grant them a place in his eternal city, as he has promised.

### B. The Digressions

The three series of arguments that were described above are separated by digressions (Greek *παρέκβασις*, Latin *egressio*).<sup>34</sup> Short digressions, which contrast the way that God spoke in the past at Sinai with the way God now addresses the listeners, make the transition from the *exordium* to the proposition (2:1-4) and from the final series of arguments to the peroration (12:25-27). Longer digressions create transitions between major sections of the argument by warning about apostasy, recalling the listeners' faithfulness, and encouraging perseverance (5:11-6:20; 10:26-39). The digressions form an integral part of the rhetorical strategy of Hebrews. Calling these sections "digressions" simply means that in them the speaker turns aside from a series of arguments; it does not imply that the digressions are unimportant. When digressing, the speaker continues to deal with significant issues, often by addressing the listeners directly in reproof, warning, and encouragement. Working together, the digressions and arguments promote perseverance in faith.

The digressions provide transitions between portions of the speech much as modulations in a musical composition provide transitions between sections that are written in different keys and tempos. This is most evident in the major digressions, which begin by elaborating a point made in the preceding arguments and end by introducing the next series of arguments. The first series of arguments concluded by telling how Jesus reached completeness and "learned obedience" by what he suffered (5:8-9). The digression that follows contrasts Jesus with the listeners, who instead of learning seem unresponsive to learning, and instead of being complete seem immature (5:11-14). Following rhetorical convention (Cicero *De orat.* 2.77 §§311-12; 3.53 §203), the author signals the end of the digression by taking up the reference to Jesus' priesthood "after the manner of Melchizedek" (6:20) that was introduced just prior to the digression (5:10). Jesus' priesthood will be a focus in the next section (cf. 7:1). The reference to Melchizedek paraphrases Ps 110:4, and the idea that Melchizedek represents a priesthood that endures "forever" becomes the lens through which the account of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 is read in Heb 7:1-10.

<sup>34</sup> On digressions, see Quintilian *Inst.* 4.3.1-17; 9.1.28; cf. Cicero *De inventione* 1.51 §97; Lausberg, *Handbook*, §§340-45.



The next two digressions follow a similar pattern. The second series of arguments concludes with a carefully fashioned period that twice refers to faith or faithfulness (10:22, 23). Faith was not mentioned in the second series of arguments, but it becomes the focus of the third series. The period also mentions the “Day” of the Lord (10:25), and before taking up the theme of faith the author embarks on a digression that deals with divine judgment (10:26-39). The author signals the end of the digression by returning to the theme of faith, which was announced earlier, using words from Hab 2:3-4 to declare that the righteous live by faith (Heb 10:37-38). Just as Ps 110:4, which was paraphrased at the end of the earlier digression, provided the hermeneutical key to the next series of arguments, the quotation of Hab 2:3-4 in Heb 10:37-38 provides the lens through which OT narrative is considered in Heb 11:1-40. The third series of arguments concludes with references to the way God and the sprinkled blood of Jesus speak (12:18-24), and the digression that follows urges listeners not to neglect the one who is speaking (12:25). The digression includes a quotation of Hag 2:6 warning that God will “shake” heaven and earth, and it concludes by saying that only what “cannot be shaken” will remain (12:26-27). The peroration that follows the digression calls Christians to the kind of “acceptable worship” or service that is a fitting response to the hope of receiving an “unshakable kingdom” (12:28–13:21).

A rhetorical function of such digressions was to prepare the audience to give their full attention to what would follow. Although modern interpreters who deal with Hebrews in written form might prefer a single sustained argument, speakers in antiquity often digressed to regain the attention of live audiences, who found it difficult to follow a sustained argument without occasional respites (Quintilian *Inst.* 4.3.12-17; Cicero *De orat.* 3.53 §203).<sup>35</sup> Speakers were aware that people typically “dismiss their minds elsewhere” since they are preoccupied with business, politics, and home life. Therefore, when it comes to the subject of the discourse, “they are deaf, and while they are present in the body are absent in mind, and might as well be images or statues” (Philo *Preliminary Studies* 64-65). The digressions, some of which would have taken several minutes to deliver, are designed to secure people’s attention by addressing them with reproof, warning, and encouragement. Intensity was considered appropriate in a digression. Speakers might express indignation or pity, and they might rebuke or excuse someone; both praise and blame were common (Quintilian *Inst.* 4.3.1-17; 9.1.28; cf. Cicero *De inventione* 1.51 §97).<sup>36</sup> The hortatory quality of the digressions means that they play an important role in the persuasive strategy of Hebrews, for they are designed to move listeners from sluggishness to renewed commitment.

<sup>35</sup> Lausberg, *Handbook*, §§340-42.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, §§340-45.

The first digression warns listeners about the dangers of “drifting away” from the message that they received, for “neglecting” the message of salvation would bring inescapable consequences (2:1-4). The second digression occurs about fifteen minutes into the speech, where the author reproves those who are “sluggish,” then warns of the devastating consequences of apostasy, before offering more assuring and encouraging words (5:11-6:20). Coupling reproof with assurance was common rhetorical practice. Speakers understood that cutting remarks were to proceed out of concern for the listeners and to be aimed at the listeners’ improvement, just as a physician sometimes makes a painful incision in order to free a patient of some malady. Sharp remarks were also to be accompanied by more soothing comments, just as a physician uses ointment to soothe an incision that he has made (Plutarch *Moralia* 74DE; cf. Philo *Migr.* 116; Dio Chrysostom *Discourses* 77/78.38). Through both warning and promise the author of Hebrews seeks to create a willingness to listen carefully to what he is about to say concerning the work of Christ.

About thirty or thirty-five minutes into the speech, the author of Hebrews digresses again after completing the second series of arguments (10:26-39). The digression was not designed to convey new information, since it deals with divine judgment and the history of the listeners’ community—topics that were familiar to the audience (6:1-2; 10:26-34). Instead, the digression seeks to awaken uneasiness before a God who deals mercilessly with those who reject his grace. God’s opponents are depicted starkly: they know what is right but willfully sin; they have been sanctified by Christ’s blood but seek to defile it; God’s Spirit is gracious, yet they are insolent. Listeners would presumably grant that such behaviors warrant divine wrath. Rhetorically speaking, this is δεινώς, or language that gives “additional force to things unjust, cruel, or hateful,” so that the speaker not only brings the listener to a negative judgment on the matter but awakens emotions that are stronger than the case might otherwise warrant (Quintilian *Inst.* 6.2.24; 8.3.88).<sup>37</sup> The final digression, which begins about forty-five minutes into the speech, leads into the peroration. It resembles the earlier digressions in its call for attention and its warning about the inescapable consequences of rejecting God’s word, but also in the words that orient listeners toward the hope of receiving something of abiding value (12:25-27). The digressions and the main arguments function differently in Hebrews, yet each plays an important role and together they serve the same end, which is that the listeners persevere in faith.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, *Handbook*, §257 (3c), Nissila, *Hohepriestermotiv*, 254, Weiss, *Brief an die Hebraer*, 536, Grasser, *An die Hebraer*, 3 33

## IV. The Peroration (Heb 12:28–13:21)

“Peroration” is the term for a conclusion, according to the canons of classical rhetoric.<sup>38</sup> Used in various types of speeches, the peroration gave the speaker a final opportunity to influence the listeners by reviewing key arguments and by appealing to the emotions. The strength of this section comes not from new arguments, but from a creative fusion of themes and images from earlier portions of the speech, together with appeals for solidarity in community life. Modern readers might expect the peroration to begin at 13:1, since that is where the chapter division has been placed since the Middle Ages. The traditional division allows chap. 12 to end forcefully, with the contrasts between shakable and unshakable things running throughout 12:25-29; but it creates a thirteenth chapter that is so different from the rest of the speech that some have argued that it was tacked on to a completed composition in order to make Hebrews conform more closely to other early Christian letters.<sup>39</sup> It is better to recognize that the medieval chapter division obscures the natural section break—a phenomenon that occurs elsewhere in Hebrews.<sup>40</sup> Although the “unshakable kingdom” in 12:28 continues the idea of “shaking” from 12:25-27, it works well to place the reference to the unshakable kingdom at the beginning of a new section, since Hebrews regularly begins a new section with an idea cited at the end of the previous section.<sup>41</sup>

Worship or service “pleasing” to God is the theme of the peroration (12:28–13:21). The idea of pleasing service (εὐαρέστως) is introduced in 12:28-29 and is developed in 13:1-19 through exhortations to show brotherly love, hospitality,

<sup>38</sup> The final portion of the speech was called the *peroratio* or *conclusio* in Latin and ἐπιλογος in Greek. On the peroration, see Aristotle *Rhetoric* 3 19 1-6, Cicero *De partitione oratoria* 15 §§52-60, *De inventione* 1 52 §§98-109, *Rhet. ad Her.* 2 30 §47, Quintilian *Inst.* 6 1 1-55, Lausberg, *Handbook*, §§431-42. For Ubelacker (*Hebraerbrief*, 224) the peroration begins in 13 1, and for Backhaus (*Der neue Bund*, 61-63) it extends from 10 19 to 13 21.

<sup>39</sup> Some have argued that Hebrews 13 was added by someone other than the author (George W. Buchanan, *To the Hebrews* [AB 36, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972] 243-45, 267-68), but the more common view is that it was an epistolary appendix added by the author himself. See the listing in Jukka Thurén, *Das Lobopfer der Hebraer. Studien zum Aufbau und Anliegen von Hebraerbrief 13* (Acta Academiae Åboensis, Series A Humaniora 47/1, Åbo: Akademi, 1973) 51-53, Lane, *Hebrews*, 2 495-98.

<sup>40</sup> A section on Jesus' high priesthood begins not at 5 1 but several verses earlier in 4 14, and the next section begins not at 6 1 but several verses earlier in 5 11. Similarly, the peroration begins not in 13 1 but several verses earlier in 12 28.

<sup>41</sup> The first series of arguments ended with what Jesus “learned” by suffering (5 7-10), while the ensuing digression considers the listeners' lack of learning (5 11-14). At the end of the digression there are references to the curtain of the Tabernacle and the priest like Melchizedek (6 19-20), both of which are developed at length in 7 1-10 25. The second series of arguments concludes with a reference to the “Day” of the Lord (10 25), and the digression that follows explores the theme of judgment (10 25-39). That digression concludes by declaring that the righteous live by faith (10 38-39), and the next cycle explores the theme of faith (11 1-12 24).

and compassion, and to remain faithful in marriage and avoid avarice. The author repeats that offerings of praise and sharing one's possessions are sacrifices "pleasing" to God (ευαρεστέται, 13 15-16), and his benediction asks God to equip the listeners to do what is "pleasing" (εὐαρεστον, 13 21). If the central part of Hebrews argued that Christ's death was a sacrifice for others, the peroration urges that those who receive the benefits of Christ's sacrifice offer their own sacrifices of praise and service as a response. These exhortations, when read as an explication of worship or service, form a coherent part of the speech and a compelling conclusion to the treatment of priesthood and sacrifice.<sup>42</sup>

Internally, the peroration contains three movements of thought, of which the first and third are parallel:

- A Service to God (12 28-29)
  - Serving others (13 1-6)
  - Attention to leaders (13 7-9)
- B Priestly Sacrifice (13 10-11)
  - Christ's death for others (13 12)
  - Attention to Christ's lead (13 13-14)
- C Service to God (13 15)
  - Serving others (13 16)
  - Attention to leaders (13 17-19)

Going over the same material at the beginning (12 28-13 9) and the end of the peroration (13 15-19) emphasizes that service to God involves service to others. In order to shape and support this view of Christian discipleship, the middle section (13 10-14) creatively fuses themes of Christ's priestly self-sacrifice and the hope of entering the city of God that were developed earlier in Hebrews. The benediction in 13 20-21 concludes the speech proper.<sup>43</sup> Personal greetings follow in 13 22-25.

One function of a peroration was to affect the listeners' commitments by influencing their emotions. Speakers often appealed to common values, such as love for God, for one's parents, and for one's family, and respect for virtues that promote generosity and human community (Cicero *De partitione oratoria*, 16 §56). By calling for compassion, hospitality, faithfulness, and generosity (13 1-6), the author of Hebrews emphasizes community-building values that listeners would find hard to reject. A peroration also helped evoke sympathy for the speaker's case, and this speaker helps to generate sympathy by remembering afflicted Christians,

<sup>42</sup> On the close connection of 13 1 21 with 12 28 29, see Thuren, *Lobopfer*. Albert Vanhoye, "La question littéraire de Hébreux XIII 1 6," *NTS* 23 (1977) 121 39, esp. 137. Lane, *Hebrews* 2 497 98. Weiss, *Brief an die Hebraer* 697.

<sup>43</sup> Grasser, *An die Hebraer* 3 400, Guthrie, *Structure of Hebrews* 134, Ubelacker *Hebraer brief* 197. Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire* 217 19.

faithful leaders of the past, and Christ's suffering on his people's behalf (13:3, 7, 12). The author also requests prayers for himself, implying that his integrity has been unfairly challenged (13:18-19). Such a request can reinforce bonds with the listeners. Finally, a peroration might seek to evoke indignation at opponents. Hebrews is remarkable for its lack of polemic against those who threaten the community (10:32-34; 13:13); but the author does warn against "those who serve the Tabernacle" (13:10), and this helps to foster opposition to positions that differ from those of the author.

Another function of a peroration was to refresh the listeners' memory. Judicial perorations sometimes summarized the main points of a court case, but other kinds of speeches exhibited more variety (Cicero *De partitione oratoria* 17 §59). The peroration of Hebrews draws on the second series of arguments (7:1-10:39) when recalling how regulations about food and service in the Tabernacle failed to benefit people, whereas Christ's death was an effective sacrifice for sins (10:9-12). The author also weaves in elements from the third series of arguments (11:1-12:27) by calling on listeners to endure reproach for Christ, knowing that they have no abiding city on earth but seek the one that is to come (13:13-14). In so doing, the author provides a "refreshing of the memory of the audience, rather than a repetition of the speech" (Cicero *De inventione* 1.52 §100).

Stylistically, a good peroration was to be brief, and that of Hebrews would have taken perhaps four minutes to deliver. When composing a peroration, speakers were counseled to use a number of short sentences that were not linked by connectives: "I have spoken; you have heard; you know the facts; now give your decision" (Aristotle *Rhetoric* 3.19.6; cf. Cicero *De partitione oratoria* 15 §53). This style, which is evident in Heb 13:1-6 and in the hortatory sections of other NT writings (e.g., 1 Pet 5:6-11; Phil 4:4-7), is useful because the author is not developing new arguments but calling for decision: "Let brotherly love abide . . . Remember those in prison . . . Let marriage be held in honor" (Heb 13:1, 3, 4). Using strong metaphors was encouraged (Cicero *De partitione oratoria* 15 §53), and our author follows this practice by comparing the taking of a sacrificial victim outside the Israelite camp on the Day of Atonement to Christ's death outside the gates of the city. The use of strong metaphors continues in the haunting summons to follow Christ outside the social setting of one's earthly city, enduring the kind of denunciation that Christ endured in the confidence that his followers have a place in God's abiding city (13:10-14).

## V. Conclusions

Hebrews is addressed to a Christian community in decline. During its early period, the group experienced miracles and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit (2:3-4), but soon violence from non-Christians led to incidents where Christians were denounced before the authorities and were physically abused. Some were

imprisoned and lost property. Nevertheless, members of the community remained in solidarity with one another during the crisis (10:32-34). Hebrews was written after some more time had passed, and the group exhibited signs of a malaise that was evident in tendencies to neglect the faith and the community (2:1-2; 5:11; 6:12; 10:25). The causes of decline were probably complex and may not have been fully apparent to the members of the community themselves. Therefore, the author of Hebrews had to define the issue that was plaguing the community in a manner that would enable him to address it.

The author focused his speech on the way that the hope of inheriting glory in God's kingdom seemed to be contradicted by the inglorious experience of Christian life in the world. He affirmed that God's intention is that people should be crowned with glory and honor, and he acknowledged that his listeners could not yet "see" the realization of God's promises in their own experience. Nevertheless, he declared, they could "see" in Jesus' death and exaltation the assurance that God will be faithful and bring his suffering people to the glory that has been promised to them. Jesus suffered with people and for people, so that they might come to the glory for which God created them, to the glorious rest that Christ has already entered. God's faithfulness is the basis for human faithfulness. Since God has raised Christ to serve as "a priest forever" (Ps 110:4; Heb 5:6) and established a new covenant on the basis of Christ's death (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 10:16-17), the faithful can be confident that God will yet bring them to the inheritance that has been promised to them (Hab 2:3-4; Heb 10:37-38). In the meantime, the shape of faithfulness corresponds to the work of Christ, whose self-sacrifice is the basis for Christian sacrifices of praise to God and service to others.