

Son and High Priest: A Study in the Christology of Hebrews

Mikeal C. Parsons

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Dr. Parsons is a Lecturer in the Department of Religion at Baylor University, Waco, Texas, with a special interest in textual criticism and in the writings of Luke; he is the author of The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts (JSOT Press, Sheffield). In the present essay he attempts to establish some of the main lines of the Christology of Hebrews against their background in Judaism, particularly in the Qumran writings.

Introduction

Since Boussett's monumental work, *Kyrios Christos*, critical scholarship has grappled with the same question that prodded, challenged, excited, and grieved the early church: Who was Jesus? The number of books, monographs, and articles on christology has been steadily growing over the past thirty years¹ and Hebrews has played a role of varying significance in these contemporary studies in christology. Yet such a document, so rich in material on the subject, demands not to be neglected. This study undertakes the task to present the major christological arguments of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Hebrews

The Epistle to the Hebrews has been the centre of much scholarly discussion. Especially has there been a keen interest in the ' See, for example, Testament

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christology of the epistle.² One of the most important factors which contributes to an understanding of Hebrews and its christology is the religious background against which the epistle is written. Unfortunately, this background has remained as elusive as it is important. No less than four different types of literature/systems of thought have been suggested as providing the milieu in which the homily is grounded: (i). Philo, (ii). Qumran, (iii). Gnosticism, and (iv). Apocalyptic and Rabbinical Judaism. What follows is a brief examination of the present state of research under these four areas.

Hebrews and Philo. The most forceful and detailed argument regarding the influence of Philo on Hebrews was provided by C. Spicq.³ Spicq based his conclusion on a close examination of the author's vocabulary, literary style, theological presuppositions, and exegetical methods.

¹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1977); J.D.G Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980); F. Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969); Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus, An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979); *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

² Cf. F.F. Bruce, 'Recent Contributions to the Understanding of Hebrews', *Expository Times* 80, 1969, 260-264; especially Erich Grasser, 'Der Hebraerbrief 1938-1963', *Theologische Rundschau* 30, 1964, 138-236.

³ C. Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 2 Vols. (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1952). For an assessment of Spicq's work, see J.C. McCullough, 'Some Recent Developments in Research on the Epistle to the Hebrews', *Irish Biblical Studies* 2, 1980, 143.

The results of his work 'compel one to conclude that at a minimum he (the author) studied Philo's work and probably even that he knew him personally and was taught by him'.⁴ Despite the massive amount of evidence employed by Spicq in his argument, few scholars have accepted his conclusion and have attributed the affinities between Philo and Hebrews to a common Alexandrian background. In 1970, Ronald Williamson poured cold water on Spicq's theory of direct use of Philo by the author of Hebrews. After 600 pages of detailed argument, Williamson concluded 'that the writer of Hebrews had never been a Philonist, had never read Philo's works, had never come under the influence of Philo directly or indirectly'.⁵ While Williamson appears to have argued his case persuasively, scholarly consensus has not been won. Recently, L.K.K. Dey has revived the argument that Hebrews is understandable from the viewpoint of a single religious thought world—Hellenistic Judaism and more particularly, the writings of Philo.⁶

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Hebrews and Qumran. Yigael Yadin was the first scholar to draw far-reaching conclusions about the relationship between Hebrews and Qumran.⁷ After comparing Hebrews' treatment of Jesus and the prophets, angels, Moses, and Aaron, with that of Qumran, Yadin argued that the epistle was written to a group who held or had held many of the Qumran sects' beliefs.⁸ Kosmala developed this conclusion and went so far as to claim that the author had written to an Essene community/congregation urging them to become Christians.⁹ Two scholars, F.F. Bruce¹⁰ and Joseph Coppens,¹¹ working independently, brought the conclusions of Yadin and others under close scrutiny and restored 'the sober common sense of the scholarly community'.¹² Both writers argued that the differences between the ideas found in the scrolls and those found in Hebrews were more significant than the similarities. Their plea was to put to rest the flurries of what Samuel Sandmel once called 'parallelomania'¹³ and to return to a more cautious and judicious attitude concerning the relationship between Qumran and the New Testament.

A new dimension was added to the discussion, however, with the publication of 13 small fragments found in Cave 11 at Qumran. 11QMelch focused on the figure of Melchizedek as a

⁴ Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 88.

⁵ Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: EJ. Brill, 1970), 579.

⁶ L.K.K. Dey, *The Intermediary World and Patterns of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews*. SBLDS, 25 (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975). Inexplicably, Dey has failed to make any reference to Williamson's work. See also the recent attempt by Robert Thurston to connect Philo with Hebrews in 'Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews', *The Evangelical Quarterly* 58, 1986, 133-43.

⁷ Yigael Yadin, 'The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Epistle to the Hebrews', *Scripta Hierosolymitana* IV, ed., C. Rabin and Y. Yadin (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1958), 36-55.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 38-45.

⁹ H. Kosmala, *Hebräer-Essener-Christen* (Leiden: EJ. Brill, 1959).

¹⁰ F.F. Bruce, "'To the Hebrews' or 'To the Essenes'?" *New Testament Studies* 9, 1963, 217-232.

¹¹ J. Coppens, *Les affinités qumrâniennes de l'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Louvain Universitaires Publications, 1962). For an assessment of these arguments, see Irvin W. Batdorf, 'Hebrews and Qumran: Old Methods and New Directions', *Festschrift to Honor F. Wilbur Gingrich* (Leiden: EJ. Brill, 1972), 20-25.

¹² Irvin W. Batdorf, 'Hebrews and Qumran: Old Methods and New Directions', *Festschrift to Honor F. Wilbur Gingrich* (Leiden: EJ. Brill, 1972), 21.

¹³ S. Sandmel, 'Parallelomania', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81, 1962, 1-13.

kind of 'celestial being'.¹⁴ Yadin again saw a direct link between the Melchizedek of 11QMelch and the Melchizedek figure in Hebrews and suggested that the author of Hebrews had selected the figure of Melchizedek because he was already known to the converted Essene congregation.¹⁵ Others have been more cautious

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in their judgment, claiming that while 11QMelch may have no direct link with Hebrews, it does shed light on the thought patterns of first-century Judaism.¹⁶ Still others have recently claimed that the figure of Melchizedek may be understood without reference to Qumran.¹⁷ These arguments will be taken up in more detail later.

Hebrews and Gnosticism. Several scholars have argued that Hebrews was written to refute a form of gnostic heresy.¹⁸ While the view that the letter is directed against gnosticism has received little support, that gnosticism supplies much of the thought patterns for the epistle has been a widely discussed issue. Ernst Käsemann first purported this view.¹⁹ Käsemann argued that the christology of Hebrews grew out of a gnostic anthropos myth which had independent existence in late Judaism. At the time, Käsemann's argument was considerably weakened by a lack of evidence showing gnosticism to be pre-Christian or independent of early Christianity. With the discovery of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts, a new flurry of interest in gnosticism arose, and Käsemann's thesis, in a modified version, was revived. The Nag Hammadi finds have led scholars to define gnosticism in much wider terms than those used to define the second-century controversy in which the early church fathers were embroiled. Some have even suggested that there existed a Jewish Gnosticism, reflected in the Qumran scrolls.²⁰ The relationship between Hebrews and gnosticism is now revolving around the task of locating the epistle within the complex and obscure realm of 'heterodox Judaism', which co-existed with 'orthodox Judaism'.²¹

Hebrews and Judaism. Still other scholars have attempted to is

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¹⁴ Cf. M. de Jonge and A.S. Van de Woude, '11 Q Melchizedek and the NT', *New Testament Studies* 12, 1966, 301-26; J.A. Fitzmyer, 'Further light on Melchizedek from Qumran Cave 11', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86, 1967, 25-41; and Y. Yadin, 'A Note on Melchizedek and Qumran', *Israel Exploration Journal* 15, 1965, 152-54.

¹⁵ Y. Yadin, 'A Note on Melchizedek and Qumran', 152-54.

¹⁶ Cf. Fitzmyer, 'Further Light on Melchizedek', 41.

¹⁷ F.L. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition: A Critical Examination of the Sources to the Fifth Century AD and in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: University Press, 1976), 161; J.C. McCullough, 'Melchizedek's varied role in early exegetical tradition', *Theological Review* 1, 1978, 57.

¹⁸ Cf. R. Perdelwitz, 'Das literarische Problem des Hebräerbriefes', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 11, 1910, 59 ff., 105 ff.; T.W. Manson, 'The Problem of the Epistle to the Hebrews', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 32, 1949-50, 1-17.

¹⁹ E. Käsemann, *Das Wandernde Gottesvolk* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1938).

²⁰ Oscar Cullmann, 'The Significance of the Qumran texts for Research into the Beginnings of Christianity', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 74, 1955, 213f.; J.M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

²¹ Batdorf, 'Hebrews and Qumran', 35, following the lead of Robinson and Koester, suggested, 'both Hebrews and Qumran (in the limited ways we have suggested) would surely play some part in a Gnostic trajectory, by way of helping us uncover pre-Gnostic motifs'.

establish a relationship between Hebrews and Jewish Apocalyptic, particularly the Merkabah-Mysticism.²² H.M. Schenke concluded 'dass der wesentliche Hintergrund des Hebr... eine ganz bestimmte frühe Form der Jüdischen Merkaba-Mystik, aus der der Verfasser kommt und die noch als Christ seine Denkformen bestimmt, ist'.²³ Ronald Williamson has given his thoughtful and cautious endorsement of Schenke's views.²⁴

G.W. Buchanan, on the other hand, has understood the epistle almost exclusively as 'a homiletical midrash based on Ps. 110'.²⁵ To facilitate the reader's grasp of the Jewish midrash, Buchanan has provided a 12-page introduction which defines such concepts and literary forms as: midrashim, florilegia, parables, *a fortiori* arguments, typology, chiasm, the author's use of OT, etc.²⁶ References to the Old Testament, rabbinical, and apocalyptic literature are constantly made throughout the entire commentary.

Conclusion. This brief sketch of major options in understanding Hebrews uncovers two developments in the present state of scholarship. First, the attempt of Religionsgeschichte to provide historical links between Hebrews and Qumran, Philo, Gnosticism and Judaism has been inadequate. It may be, as William Johnsson has suggested, that *Religionswissenschaft* (phenomenology of religion) which seeks to glean insight 'not in terms of establishing historical links but from generalized religious phenomena', will prove to be more fruitful.²⁷ Second, most

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scholars have realized it is impossible to think 'that any one element in the kaleidoscopic Judaism of the first-century Hellenistic world provides the answer to all the questions that need to be asked about its background'.²⁸ In light of these two observations, this study in the christology of Hebrews, will draw upon the insights provided by the background studies of the epistle, while (i). seeking to establish a religious milieu for Hebrews and not historical links and (ii). recognizing that no one element of Judaism can adequately serve as background to the epistle.

Methodology

Due to the limitations of this study and in light of what I consider to be the major christological arguments of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the methodology employed is a study

²² For a full discussion of the definition of Merkabah-Mysticism, cf. G.G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem, 1941), 43 ff. Merkabah means 'chariot' and is the place of God's throne. According to Scholem, *ibid.*, for the Merkabah mystic, 'God's pre-existing throne is at once the goal and theme of his mystical vision'. Other characteristics of Merkabah Mysticism include: (i). an interest in angels, (ii). the use of fire imagery, stressing the holiness and transcendence of God, (iii). the element of the numinous, (iv). the journey of the mystic through the heavens to reach the heavenly sanctuary and God's throne. See also Ronald Williamson, 'The Background of the Epistle to the Hebrews', *Expository Times* 87, 1975/6, 232-37.

²³ H.M. Schenke, 'Erwägungen zum Rätsel des Hebräer-briefes', *NT und Christliche Existenz*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz and Luise Schottroff (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1973), 433-34.

²⁴ Williamson, 'Background', 236, claimed, 'An early form of Merkabah mysticism perhaps explains some of the peculiar features of the thought and language of Hebrews; the search must still go on for the explanation of others'.

²⁵ G.W. Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 36 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972), xix.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ William G. Johnsson, 'The Cultus of Hebrews in Twentieth Century Scholarship', *Expository Times* 89, 1978, 108.

²⁸ R. Williamson, 'The Background of the Epistle to the Hebrews', *Expository Times* 87, 1975-76, 236.

of two predominant titles found in Hebrews, 'Son' and 'High Priest'.²⁹ Two weaknesses of such an approach must be noted. First is the inadequacy of any study which seeks to establish christology on the basis of examining titles only.³⁰ To that end, this study is employing the titles 'Son' and 'High Priest' not merely as titular christological categories, but as stockpoles around which the christology of Hebrews is built. Under the rubric 'Son' will be discussed the author's arguments concerning the pre-existence, humanity/humiliation, and exaltation of Christ. Much of the argument is based, then, on passages not necessarily containing the title 'Son'. Under 'High Priest' will be discussed the author's view of Jesus as fulfilling qualifications for the high priestly office and the relationship between Jesus and Melchizedek.

A second weakness in this methodology is that all the christological arguments found in Hebrews will not snugly fit under the rubrics of Son and High Priest, nor shall any attempt be made to force them to fit. However, if these two concepts are as important for the argument of the letter as suspected, then they will serve to surface the major thrust of the christological arguments found in Hebrews, which in itself is no small

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accomplishment. The study of these two titles represents an attempt to rectify existing methodological shortcomings.

Jesus as son

The term 'son' is applied to Christ thirteen times in Hebrews.³¹ Jesus as High Priest in Hebrews has received much of the scholarly attention; on the other hand, some have gone so far as to suggest that the idea of the Sonship of Jesus Christ is 'the fundamental idea of the whole Epistle'.³² Certainly the concept of Jesus as Son is an important one for Hebrews. Following a brief consideration of the background materials which are helpful in placing the Sonship christology of Hebrews in its appropriate context, the three-stage christology of Hebrews will be discussed.

The evidence and conclusions which have been recently presented concerning the background of the Sonship christology of early Christianity are no less confusing than the conclusions reached regarding the background to the whole epistle. The old *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* view that a gnostic redeemer myth underlies the entire christology of Hebrews has largely fallen into disfavour among scholars, though pre-gnostic tendencies have not been totally discounted.³³ More fruitful, perhaps, have been the studies focusing on the background

²⁹ See W.R.G. Loader, *Sohn and Hoherpriester: eine traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung zur Christologie des Hebräerbriefes*, (Neukirchen, 1981).

³⁰ R.S. Barbour in a review of R.H. Fuller's *Foundations for NT Christology*, in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 20, 1967, 243, claimed, 'while an investigation of these titles must form a part of any study of this subject, it is at least open to question whether this is enough by itself.

³¹ See Hebrews 1:2; 5:2; 8; 2:6; 3:6; 4:14; 5:5,8; 6:6; 7:3,28; 10:29. Four of these places are OT texts quoted by the writer.

³² Henry E. Walden, Jr. 'The Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews', (Th.D. Dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1944), 23. See also A.B. Davidson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T.T. Clark, 1882), 79.

³³ Batdorf, 'Hebrews and Qumran', 21.

materials found in ancient Judaism.³⁴ Both OT passages frequently referred to as providing background to the Sonship idea in the NT are quoted in Hebrews (2 Sa. 7:14; Ps. 2:7). In addition, the literature of Jewish Mysticism, the Talmud, Wisdom of Solomon, The Prayers of Joseph, and Philo may be helpful in establishing the religious framework within which the Sonship Christology of Hebrews was understood.³⁵

Pre-Existence

Fred Craddock, among others, has noted that the concept of pre-

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existence is to be found in much of the New Testament background materials.³⁶ Craddock insisted 'that an understanding of pre-existence will come through an investigation of the *functions* of this category for various writers rather than through the effort to locate sources of the category'.³⁷ This concept of pre-existence may be found in the *Sophia* or Wisdom Literature, the *Logos* in Philo, the Son of Man in I Enoch, the Torah of the Rabbis, the *Logos* of the Stoics, and the myths of the gnostics.³⁸ Certainly, references to the Son's pre-existence would be an understandable term to the author's readers.

The first reference to Christ's pre-existence in Hebrews is in the prologue of the epistle, (1:1-4). In these opening lines, the Son pre-existed with the Father. This pre-existence is conveyed in terms of the Wisdom myth (Wisd. 7:26).³⁹ Christ, then, is pre-existent Wisdom, creator and sustainer of the universe (1:3).⁴⁰ This opening statement is followed by a catena of OT quotations whose primary purpose is to demonstrate the superiority of the pre-existent Jesus over the angels (see below). In fact, several scholars have suggested 'in Hebrews, what was originally a scriptural proof for the exaltation or resurrection of Jesus becomes an argument for his pre-existence'.⁴¹ While one may not wish to venture this far, at least it may be admitted that the catena does reflect an assumption of Jesus' pre-existence.

The argument of pre-existence is extended elsewhere at 2:7, 9: 'Thou didst make him *for a little while* lower than the angels'.⁴² Here is an exegesis based on Ps. 110:1 in which Christ,

³⁴ The works by Hahn and Fuller suffer somewhat by employing categories within Judaism (Hellenistic and Palestinian) which may not be quite so easy to distinguish as once thought.

³⁵ Cf. Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 41-56.

³⁶ Fred Craddock, *The Pre-Existence of Christ in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968); see also O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1959). Cullmann discussed the titles 'Word' and 'Son of God' under the heading, 'The Christological Titles Which Refer to the Pre-Existence of Jesus'.

³⁷ Craddock, *Pre-Existence*, 29.

³⁸ For a fuller discussion of how pre-existence functions in these various writings, cf. Craddock, *Pre-Existence*, 31-76.

³⁹ Fuller, *Foundations*, 220; Buchanan, *Hebrews* 10; but cf. Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *Pre-Existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man* (London: Cambridge University, 1973), 243.

⁴⁰ Hamerton-Kelly, *Pre-Existence*, 241. Wisdom of Solomon has both "χαρακτήρ" and "ἀπαύγασμα" cf. also Philo.

⁴¹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 253; cf. also Hamerton-Kelly, *Pre-Existence*, 241, who claimed Hebrews 'transforms what were initially testimonies to his resurrection and exaltation into testimonies to his protological pre-existence'.

⁴² This translation interprets βραχυ τι having a temporal force; cf. Bruce, *Hebrews*, 34.

moves from a pre-existent state of glory to assume his role of suffering death only to be 'crowned with glory and honor'. The argument

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to this point, according to Hammerton-Kelly makes most explicit statements about Christ's protological pre-existence.⁴³

Eschatological pre-existence is also stressed in Hebrews. Here an understanding of hope as the presence of the future is important for the idea of pre-existence (cf. 3:6, 3:14, 6:11, 11:1). At 6:4 salvation is seen as 'tasting the heavenly gift' and is paralleled with 'the powers of the ages to come'. Herein is the hope of eschatological pre-existence: the age to come is present already in Heaven and may be described as a heavenly gift. This concept is true of Christ as well. The expectation of the parousia in Hebrews (9:28) is sustained by the belief that in the interim, Christ is performing his high-priestly work for us. Here the emphasis is on Christ's heavenly presence pre-existing, not creation, but his own manifestation. Because of Christ's heavenly pre-existence, 'things promised for the future are already present in heaven'.⁴⁴ Therefore, Hebrews, with its teaching of the 'already present' future, the eternal priest, and heavenly cultus, emphasizes not only the protological pre-existence of Christ (i.e. before creation), but also his eschatological pre-existence (before parousia).⁴⁵

The argument of the Son's pre-existence is inextricably linked to the emphasis on his humanity and exaltation. In fact, 'pre-existence for this writer, therefore, serves as the larger context that frees him to explain and to present fully the fact of Jesus' humanity and humility'.⁴⁶ This is seen no more clearly than in 6:6, 'since they *crucify the Son of God* on their account', and 10:29, 'how much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has *spurned the Son of God*'. Here the highest title of pre-existence and pre-eminence ascribed to Jesus stands in sharp contrast with the suffering and rejection endured at the hands of humanity (cf. 5:8). Attention now turns to a consideration of the humanity/humiliation of the Son motif found in Hebrews.

Humanity/Humiliation

A distinct interest in the earthly Jesus has been noted in the letter.

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David Mealand claimed, 'Hebrews is the one theological treatise in the NT which comes closest to the earliest stratum of the Synoptic tradition in its positive emphasis on the humanity of Jesus'.⁴⁷ This emphasis on Jesus' humanity runs like a scarlet thread throughout

⁴³ Protological pre-existence is where the entity (in this case, Jesus) pre-exists creation. In contrast eschatological pre-existence is where an entity pre-exists its own manifestation.

⁴⁴ Hamerton-Kelly, *Pre-Existence*, 250.

⁴⁵ If this be true, then much has also been asserted about the idea of a pre-existent church, the forerunner of whom is Christ. See Hamerton-Kelly, *Pre-Existence*, 268-69.

⁴⁶ Craddock, *Pre-Existence*, 136. Martin Hengel, *Son of God*, 88, has noticed this relationship between pre-existence and humanity as well: 'it is remarkable that at the very point where the divine sonship and pre-existence of the exalted Christ is stressed, the shame of his passion also stands in the centre'.

⁴⁷ David Mealand, 'The Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews', *The Modern Churchman* 22, 1979, 184.

the epistle. The first extensive treatment of Jesus' humanity is at 2:9-17. Jesus is 'for a little while lower than the angels' in order that 'by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone'. There is an interesting textual variant here: in some mss. $\chi\acute{o}\rho\iota\tau\iota$ is replaced by $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ (0121b.1739.vg^{ms}, Or^{ms}. Ambr. Hier^{ms}. Fulg.) The resulting translation is that Jesus tasted death 'apart from God'. Several scholars have favoured this reading, despite weak external support, claiming that the reading is in accord with both the synoptic picture of Jesus' death,⁴⁸ as well as the theological stance of the epistle.⁴⁹ At any rate, either reading stresses the humanity of the Jesus who drained the cup of death to its bitter dregs.

Hebrews 2:10-13 stresses the reality of Jesus' humanity.⁵⁰ Because of his humanity, Jesus is not ashamed to call fellow humanity 'brethren'. Words from Ps. 21:23 (LXX) and Isaiah express both Christ's 'dependence on God and his identification with humanity'.⁵¹ Leading a life of 'flesh and blood' (2:13) is a humiliating experience for the Son. This humiliation, also stressed in the synoptics, must have hung like fishhooks in the throats of the Christian readers of Hebrews. Yet, it was precisely because Christ 'himself partook of the same nature' and suffered death that he was able to conquer death and 'deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage' (2:14-15). The reality of Jesus' humanity expressed here in terms of suffering recurs later, emphasizing that, in solidarity with humanity, Jesus can also be tempted (2:18, 4:15).

This note is sounded again in 5:7-9 where the writer speaks of 'the days of his flesh' and of Jesus offering up 'prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears'.⁵² While this passage recalls the struggle of Gethsemane,⁵³ the difficulty arises when one seeks to find detailed

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parallels between this passage and the Gethsemane agony. There is no reason to limit the reference to the Gethsemane scenario; these verses may best be understood as a general reference to the whole course of Jesus' passion and humiliation.

The thrust of this section has been to show the 'predominating overtone of emphasis upon the humanly non-impressive and non-exalted, upon the Christ of humble estate, of trial, of suffering, of sacrifice, of death'.⁵⁴ Evidently, this understanding of Jesus' humanity and humiliation touched a deep need of the readers (cf. ch. 11:1-40; 13:7). They are encouraged to

⁴⁸ Cf. Mark's cry of desolation from the cross (15:34).

⁴⁹ Cf. J.K. Elliott, 'When Jesus was apart from God: an Examination of Hebrews 2:9', *Expository Times* 83, 1972, 339-341. W. G. Johnsson seems to favour this reading as well, *Hebrews* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 18.

⁵⁰ Johnsson, *Hebrews*, 19.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² For a survey of the positions taken on these verses, cf. O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1966), 222-23.

⁵³ (Mk. 14:33, 34) pace J. Jeremias, 'Hbr. 4:7-10', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 44, 1952-53, 107-11. However note the objections raised by Harold W. Attridge, 'Heard because of His Reverence', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98, 1973, 90-93. Attridge, p. 91, suggested, 'a better framework than the Gethsemane story' for understanding Heb. 5:7 is provided by Philo's discussion of the prayers of Abraham and Moses in *Quis Heres* 1-29; see also A.E. Garvie, 'The Pioneer of Faith and of Salvation', *Expository Times* 26, 1914-15, 549.

⁵⁴ Reuben E. Omark, 'The Saving of the Savior: Exegesis and Christology in Hebrews 5:7-10', *Interpretation* 12, 1958, 50.

look to Jesus, 'pioneer and perfecter' of faith, who endured the cross.⁵⁵ They are exhorted to go 'outside the camp' to bear the abuse of Jesus who suffered 'outside the gate' (13:12-13).⁵⁶ The writer can be so encouraging because not only is the humanity of Christ stressed, but at least equal emphasis is given to the exalted one who has conquered death. To this understanding of the Son, we now turn our attention.

Exaltation

If the humanity of Jesus is an important theme for Hebrews, how much more is Jesus' deity.⁵⁷ While this theme of exaltation is asserted 'in many and various ways' we shall content ourselves by considering how the writer addresses this theme by asserting Jesus' superiority to a) angels, and b) Moses.

Superiority to Angels. The first chapter of Hebrews stresses the superiority of the Son to the angels. The very name 'Son' indicates superiority. This exaltation theme, in which the Son is contrasted with the angels (1:4), is expanded in the following string of OT

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quotations (1:5-13).⁵⁸ While some have understood the catena as referring primarily to Christ's pre-existence,⁵⁹ it is more likely that the verses should be understood, 'as a Christological hymn which traces the entire Christ event, including the pre-existence, earthly life, and exaltation of Christ'.⁶⁰ The overall structure of the catena seems to point to exaltation as the underlying motif.⁶¹ The first three citations (of which the first two refer to the Son and the third to the angels) are used as *scriptural validation* of the claim in 1:4 that Christ is better. The next section (1:7-12) (of which the first quotation refers to angels and the next two to the Son) provides the grounds on which the author argues that Christ is 'better'. The argument climaxes with the citation of Ps. 110:1, the *locus classicus* to which the early church turned again and again to shape its christology,⁶² and the author's exegetical remarks

⁵⁵ Though the theme of Jesus' death is predominant, this is the only occurrence of the word 'cross' in Hebrews. The term 'crucify' is also employed only once (6:6).

⁵⁶ For a discussion of 13:9-14, cf. Helmut Koester, 'Outside the Camp', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 55, 1962, 299-315; James W. Thompson, 'Outside the Camp: A Study of Heb. 13:9-14', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40, 1978, 53-63.

⁵⁷ Cullmann, *Christology*, 305, claimed the divinity of Jesus is 'more powerfully asserted in Hebrews than in any other New Testament writing with the exception of the Gospel of John'.

⁵⁸ Scholarship is divided as to whether or not these verses represent a 'catena' proper. For the sake of this paper, the term 'catena' will be used not in any technical way, but merely to refer to the passage Heb. 1:5-13 *in toto*. The passage quotes from v. 5) Ps. 2:7; 2 Sam. 7:14; v. 6) Dt. 32:43; v. 7) Ps. 101:4; vs. 8-9) Ps. 45:6-7; vs. 10-12) Ps. 102:25-27; v. 13) Ps. 110:1.

⁵⁹ cf. Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 253.

⁶⁰ James W. Thompson, 'The Structure and Purpose of the Catena in Heb. 1:5-13', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38, 1976, 353. Thompson (*ibid.*) also claimed: 'The author's interest in this hymn may derive from the presence of the exaltation motif in it, as the exaltation is of enormous importance to him'.

⁶¹ For a detailed consideration of this passage, see Thompson, 'The Structure and Purpose', 355-63. cf. also Simon Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Amsterdam: VanSoest, 1961), 134-146.

⁶² On the importance of Ps. 110:1 for the christology of the NT, see David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973); W.R.G. Loader, 'Christ at the Right Hand—Ps. CX.1 in the New Testament', *New Testament Studies* 24, 1978, 199-217. Besides 1:3, 13; Ps. 110:1 also occurs at 2:8; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2 and plays not only an important part in the exaltation motif in Hebrews, but serves to develop the high-priestly/intercession motif.

concerning the inferiority of angels. Again, this section functions to give Christ a superior status to the angels.⁶³

The superiority of the Son to angels is taken up again in chapter two. Here, though, it is Jesus' humanity which elevates him to an exalted position in the heavenly hierarchy. Jesus, not the angels, will rule the world to come (2:5), and through him humanity will be crowned with glory and honour. By virtue of having been made for a little while lower than the angels, Christ will have everything put into subjection to him.⁶⁴ The last comparison of Jesus (and humanity)

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with angels comes at 2:16. The angels have no part in humanity and therefore do not benefit from Christ's aid.

The commentary on the catena (1:5-13) and later on Ps. 8:4-6 (2:6,7) indicates that Christ is exalted because he is both divine ('the Son') and human (lower than the angels in rank, not ability). Whether or not these two chapters represent a polemic against angelology is beyond our parameters.⁶⁵ At least it may be concluded that the superiority of the Son is demonstrated by this comparison/contrast with angels.

Superiority to Moses. Peter Rhea Jones has reminded us that 'Moses is not merely one of the figures compared unfavourably to Jesus'; but rather, 'Moses and Jesus are yoked throughout the entirety of the epistle'.⁶⁶ Allowing that Moses is much more than a 'whipping boy' for the author, the fact remains that the figure Moses is utilized as a basis for christology.⁶⁷ While there are several references to Moses, only two will be needed to demonstrate Jesus' superiority.

The first passage to be considered is Hebrews 3:1-6. D'Angelo and others regard the larger context of this passage (3:1-4:16) to be the superiority of Christ's message to the Law.⁶⁸ While the comparison between Jesus and the angels is based on a number of OT citations, the comparison of Jesus and Moses turns on a single verse, Nu. 12:7. Like the angels (1:14), Moses was a servant who witnessed, as it were, to the Son. In other words, 'faithful Sonship is superior to faithful servanthship'.⁶⁹ The Son is once again exalted.

⁶³ Heb. 1:8 has long puzzled scholars. Does the writer call Jesus 'God'? If so, then Cullmann, *Christology*, 310. has correctly observed, 'outside the Johannine corpus only Hebrews unequivocally applies the title "God" to Jesus'.

⁶⁴ The question has been raised whether 'son of man' in 2:6 is a reference to Jesus or humanity in general. See Buchanan, 'Present State of Scholarship', 319-21.

⁶⁵ Cf. Adolphine Bakker, 'Christ an Angel? A Study of Early Christian Docefism', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 32, 1933, 255-65.

⁶⁶ Peter Rhea Jones, 'The Figure of Moses as a Heuristic Device for Understanding the Pastoral Intent of Hebrews', *Review and Expositor* 76, 1979, 95. The author's 'Moses Christology' also leads him to share his understanding of Christ in light of Mosaic categories. Ergo, in the closing benediction, Jesus is referred to as the great Shepherd, echoing the portrayal of Moses as shepherd (Is. 63:11). But even here Christ is the 'great Shepherd' surpassing all examples, including Moses. Note also the Leader Christology (2:10, 12:2) and Apostle Christology (3:1) which may also derive from the Mosaic model.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of the place of Moses in the christological argument cf. Mary Rose D'Angelo, *Moses in the Letter to the Hebrews*, (Missoula Scholars Press, 1979).

⁶⁸ D'Angelo, *Moses*, 66; Buchanan, *Hebrews*, 57.

⁶⁹ Jones, 'Figure of Moses', 98. In 3:1 Jesus is called 'apostle', a *hapax* for the NT.

The exaltation theme finds expression in a more opaque way at 11:26. Here in the famous chapter on faith Moses is said to count 'abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt'. The portrait of Moses drawn here is that of a martyr, and a Christian martyr at that.⁷⁰ In effect, Moses joins that great cloud of

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witnesses who looked to Jesus as pioneer and perfecter of faith.⁷¹ Once again, Christ's superiority is asserted, this time over Moses and the entire Mosaic epoch.

In summary, the writer stressed the Sonship of Jesus and expressed it in a three-stage christology of pre-existence, humanity, and exaltation. This interfacing of humanity with deity allowed for further expression in sacerdotal terminology. Edward Schillebeeckx claimed:

These two characteristics—that Jesus takes up God's cause and at the same time shows solidarity with mankind and defends their cause—makes the author of Hebrews realize that what the apostolic Christian experience calls salvation from God in Jesus can equally well be expressed in priestly terms.⁷²

While it would be fruitless to try and claim that this emphasis on both the humanity and deity of Jesus necessarily resulted in use of priestly imagery,⁷³ it is helpful to notice that the Son and High Priest are complementary terms which produce a full-orbed christology.

Jesus as High Priest

The concept of Sonship was ready to hand as a tool for the early Christians to use in understanding who Jesus was; in fact, Jesus as 'Son' became a basic assumption for the NT writers interpreting Jesus of Nazareth. While the essence of the claim that Jesus is a priest may be found throughout the New Testament,⁷⁴ the explicit application of the term to Jesus with subsequent exposition is found only in Hebrews. Fuller notes, 'In any case, the term high priest was not applied to Jesus until Hebrews, while Son of God was applied... at a much earlier stage of Christological reflection'.⁷⁵

Several scholars have suggested that the background to the high priesthood of Jesus is to be found in the Qumran scrolls. One passage in particular, 1QS 9:10-11, refers to 'the coming of a Prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel'.⁷⁶ This passage,

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⁷⁰ D'Angelo, *Moses*, 18.

⁷¹ This raises the difficult question: How did Moses become a Christian? See D'Angelo, *Moses*, 64.

⁷² Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 252.

⁷³ For example, the Gospel of John has a highly developed Christology which stresses both humanity and deity and yet does not express its argument in priestly terms.

⁷⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 259.

⁷⁵ Fuller, *Hebrews*, 83.

⁷⁶ Quoted by Kuhn, 'The Messiahs of Aaron and Israel', *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. K. Stendahl (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 54.

along with several others (1QSa 2:12-17, CD 12:23ff), is cited as evidence that the Qumran community expected two Messiahs, one priestly (Aaron) and one kingly (Israel). Furthermore, in the Qumran community, pre-eminence was given to the priestly messiah over the kingly messiah.⁷⁷ The next step is to claim that Hebrews has joined these two Messiahs, priestly and kingly, into one person, Jesus Christ.⁷⁸ The priestly attributes in Hebrews are then explained as a polemic used to affirm Christ's superiority even to the priestly messiah. This view has come under sharp criticism by Fuller and Buchanan among others. Fuller claimed the high priest christology... is not derived from the Messiah high priest of Qumran, who invariably appears in conjunction with the Davidic Messiah'.⁷⁹

Perhaps more appealing is the view of Buchanan, that the writer is following the lead of the Hasmoneans who sought to fuse the roles of high priest and royal leader. Jesus, then, as Son is the ideal king, and as High Priest, fulfils the cultic needs of his people.⁸⁰ Again, this might be arriving at conclusions the weight of which the evidence will not bear. At the least, it may be claimed that a germinal or basic knowledge needed to understand the sacerdotal language of Hebrews existed in the milieu of the first century, in general, and in the early Christian community, in particular.

Qualifications for High Priestly Office

To understand the high priesthood of Christ, it is first necessary to grasp the presuppositions that the author had concerning the qualifications for priesthood in general. While there are several passages which might suggest such qualifications, this study will be limited to 5:1-10. F.F. Bruce has noticed a chiasmic structure in this passage in which the general qualifications of priesthood are followed by Jesus' fulfilment of those requirements.⁸¹ The chiasm may be set out as follows:

- A) High Priest must be able to sympathize with the ones whose cause he represents, (vs. 1-3).
- B) High Priest must receive divine appointment to priestly office, (v. 4).

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B1) Jesus is divinely appointed and fulfils requirement B (vs. 5-6, 10).

A1) Jesus sympathizes with the ones whom he represents and fulfils requirement A, (vs. 7-10).

The writer has attempted to establish validation for Jesus' status as High Priest.⁸² Repeated reference to Ps. 110:4 in this passage (cf. 5:7, 10) suggests the importance of that Psalm for the writer's argument. In fact, the pericope climaxes with the affirmation that Jesus is 'named by God a high priest after the order to Melchizedek' (5:10). Following a lengthy admonition

⁷⁷ See 1QSa 12:14-15.

⁷⁸ See R.E. Brown, 'The Messianism of Qumran', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 19, 1957, 65f.

⁷⁹ Fuller, *Foundations*, 259. A.J.B. Higgins, 'The Priestly Messiah', *New Testament Studies* 13, 1966-67, 211-39, also refuted this view.

⁸⁰ Buchanan, 'Present State', 324.

⁸¹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 88ff.

⁸² Cullmann, *Christology*, 89, claimed, 'Whereas other Christians at this time sought to prove by means of the OT that Jesus is the Messiah expected by the Jews, the writer of Hebrews seeks to show that Jesus fulfills absolutely the high priestly function of the Jews'.

addressed to the readers' spiritual condition (5:11-6:20), the argument concerning the relationship of Jesus and Melchizedek is resumed.

Jesus and Melchizedek

Richard Longenecker once claimed: 'The focal point of and the watershed for the exposition of chapters 1-10, in fact, is the Melchizedekian argument of chapter 7...'.⁸³ Considering the amount of ink spilled in the form of monographs and dissertations on Melchizedek, few would be inclined to disagree. Following a brief consideration of possible background materials, the importance of Melchizedek for the christological arguments of Hebrews will be considered.

Background Sources. The cruciality of background sources for an understanding of the major issues of Hebrews chapter 7 is matched only by the complexity of these sources. As was noted earlier concerning the entire epistle, more than one source has been suggested as providing adequate conceptual background for understanding the intention of chapter seven.⁸⁴

De Jonge and Van de Woude have sought to explain Melchizedek in Hebrews by focusing on the importance of 11QMelch.⁸⁵ Hebrews 7:3 refers to an angelic figure, Melchi-

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zedek, which is similar to the pattern found in 11QMelch.⁸⁶ Joseph Fitzmyer gave cautious support to De Jonge and Van de Woude's argument. He concluded:

Even though it is not possible to say that the presentation of Melchizedek which is found in it (i.e. 11 Q Melch) directly influenced the midrash on him in Heb. 7... nevertheless its exaltation of him... makes it understandable how the author of the epistle to the Hebrews could argue for the superiority of Christ ... by appeal to such a figure.⁸⁷

One of the most telling arguments against seeing a direct interdependence between Qumran and Hebrews is the use of the OT by these two documents. While the argument in Hebrews turned on the use of Gen. 14 and Ps. 110, the Qumran scroll inexplicably avoided these texts, and based its case on Is. 52:7, 61:2, Ps. 82:1 and Ps. 7-9, among others.

Fred Horton has pointed out five parallels between Melchizedek in 11QMelch and Christ in Hebrews:

1. Both Christ and Melchizedek are eschatological, redemptive figures.
2. Both are exalted in the heavens.

⁸³ Richard Longenecker, 'The Melchizedek Argument of Hebrews', *Unity and Diversity in NT Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 172.

⁸⁴ For an excellent discussion of the possible sources which inform both writer and reader, see Horton, *Melchizedek*, 12-151. See also M. Delcor, 'Melchizedek from Genesis to the Qumran Texts and the Epistle to the Hebrews', *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 11, 1971, 115-135.

⁸⁵ De Jonge and Van de Woude, '11 Q Melchizedek', 301-26. Their thesis that Melchizedek is the celestial being found in the scrolls has been brought under serious criticism by Jean Carmignac, 'Le Document de Qumran sur Melkisedeq', *Revue de Qumran* 7, 1970, 343-78.

⁸⁶ See Horton's critique of their argument, *Melchizedek*, 155f.

⁸⁷ J.A. Fitzmyer, 'Further Light', 41.

3. Both make atonement for sin.
4. Both overcome the forces opposed to God.
5. Both bring the promise of a new age.⁸⁸

Despite these similarities, Horton still maintained, '...if the author of Hebrews had known of the speculation about Melchizedek contained in the 11QMelch, he might well have rejected Melchizedek as a type of the Christ'.⁸⁹

Horton examined the references to Melchizedek in other first-century Jewish writings, especially Philo and Josephus. Philo mentions Melchizedek on different occasions: *Legum Allegoriae* III, 79-82; *De Congressu*, 99; *De Abrahamo*, 235.⁹⁰ In the first two passages, Philo refers to Melchizedek as an historical figure; the third identifies Melchizedek with the Logos. Josephus also makes reference to Melchizedek (*Jewish Wars* 6.438). For

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Josephus, Melchizedek was a Canaanite chieftain who, because of his outstanding moral character, became the priest of Israel's God. Horton suggests that two separate streams of tradition were present in first-century Judaism, 'the one represented by Philo, Josephus, and the Genesis Apocryphon, and the other represented in the fragments of the 11 Q Melchizedek'.⁹¹ (See Appendix I). Again, the background sources, while lacking any claim to direct historical links with Hebrews, do provide much needed direction in establishing a context for the epistle.

Melchizedek in Hebrews. While scholarly consensus regarding the background of the Melchizedek figure in Hebrews is certainly missing, there has been a general agreement that Hebrews 7 is in the form of a midrash homily based on Gen. 14:18-20 and Ps. 110:4.⁹² Following an examination of Hebrews' use of the OT in chapter 7 and an inquiry into the identity of this enigmatic Melchizedek, a few conclusions will be drawn concerning the significance of Melchizedek for the christology of Hebrews.

(1). Use of the OT. While the use of Ps. 110:1 to affirm the exalted state of the Son was a common device employed by the early church, the author takes up Ps. 110:4 and applies it to Jesus in such a way as seems 'unprecedented in the early church'.⁹³ As already noted, the Hasmoneans had made some use of Ps. 110 to validate their claim to both the high priesthood and civil leadership. They even called themselves 'high priests forever' (cf. Ps. 110:4). Hebrews, so far as we know, was the first in the early Christian community to expand the atomistic use of Ps. 110:1 to include the entire Psalm. The result is an emphasis on Jesus' kingship and priesthood.

⁸⁸ Horton, *Melchizedek*, 167.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁹⁰ Cited in Horton, *Melchizedek*, 54. James W. Thompson, 'The Conceptual Background and Purpose of the Midrash in Hebrews VII', *Novum Testamentum* 19, 1970, 223, argued, 'The dualistic reading of the OT, the use of Hellenistic terminology in VII. 3, and the focus in the abiding of the exalted one have their closest analogies in the work of Philo'.

⁹¹ Horton, *Melchizedek*, 85.

⁹² Thompson, 'The Conceptual Background', 209.

⁹³ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 94.

Having repeatedly asserted that Jesus is a 'High Priest after the order of Melchizedek', the author then turns to the only other OT passage containing a reference to Melchizedek, Gen. 14:18-20. Although both OT references to Melchizedek are brief, this does not deter the author. 'He finds as much significance in what is not said about Melchizedek as he does in what is said about him'.⁹⁴ Using these texts as a springboard, the author leaps through typological exegesis to affirm once again that Jesus is High Priest.

(2). The Identity of Melchizedek. The identity of Melchizedek hinges upon one's interpretation of 7:3.⁹⁵ While some have

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understood Melchizedek to be an archangel (Michael?)⁹⁶ or Elohim,⁹⁷ I concur with Horton, that for the author of Hebrews, 'Melchizedek is the first priest mentioned in the Torah'.⁹⁸ Both Philo and Josephus seem to make the same assumptions.⁹⁹ If this is the writer's understanding, then 7:3 comes into focus. Applying the rabbinical principle of exegesis, *quod non in thora non in mundo*,¹⁰⁰ the reader may logically deduce from the silence of the scripture that this first priest has neither father, nor mother, nor genealogy, but 'continues as a priest forever'. Because of his status as the first 'High Priest', Melchizedek received the title from Abraham and established the superiority of his priesthood of which he was the progenitor (Gen. 14:18-20). The author of Hebrews has not chosen an esoteric, celestial figure, but the first priest on earth. The absence of genealogy and the omission of any reference to birth or death, play an important part in underscoring the originality of Melchizedek.¹⁰¹ How then does Jesus relate to this first priest?

(3). Internal Argument of Hebrews. Both F.F. Bruce and F.L. Horton have recognized that Melchizedek is not the type after which Christ is patterned, but Melchizedek is the antitype 'made like unto the Son of God'.¹⁰² A similar 'antitypology' is found in Heb. 9 where the earthly sanctuary is only an antitype of the true heavenly sanctuary (9:24). The same method of exegesis has been applied in ch. 7 where the author attempts to understand Christ's heavenly priesthood by grasping the features of the earthly, perpetual priesthood of Melchizedek. Melchizedek's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood, because through Abraham, Levi himself paid tithes to Melchizedek. Melchizedek became a priest without benefit of genealogy, and remains a priest perpetually. This corresponds, as antitype to type, to Christ's priesthood. F.L. Horton's conclusion is worth quoting here in full:

This priesthood of Melchizedek, however, is but the antitype of the higher priesthood of Christ, and every significant feature of Melchizedek's priesthood is recapitulated in

⁹⁴ Ibid., 134.

⁹⁵ For a brief discussion on the history of the interpretation of 7:3, cf. Bruce Demarest, 'Hebrews 7:3: A Crux Interpretum Historically Considered', *The Evangelical Quarterly* 49, 1978, 141-42.

⁹⁶ De Jonge and Van der Woude, '11 Q Melchizedek', 306.

⁹⁷ Fitzmyer, 'Further Light', 32.

⁹⁸ Horton, *Melchizedek*, 157.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 156-57.

¹⁰⁰ Literally, 'that which is not in the Torah, is not in the world'.

¹⁰¹ Horton, *Melchizedek*, 159-60.

¹⁰² Bruce, *Hebrews*, 138; Horton, *Melchizedek*, 161.

Christ's priesthood. Christ is not Melchizedek's successor, for Melchizedek... has no successor. Rather, Christ's priesthood is of another order, a heavenly order.¹⁰³

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Thus, the author uses the figure of Melchizedek to build the argument for the perpetual priesthood of Christ. It is very likely that the figure of Melchizedek was suggested to the writer as a result of the rigorous application of Ps. 110:1, 4.¹⁰⁴ The characteristics of the earthly priesthood of this first priest serve to illuminate the nature of the heavenly high priesthood of Christ,¹⁰⁵ and to prepare the way for a discussion of the high priestly work of the Son in 8:1-10:18.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to avoid several of the methodological shortcomings which have generally plagued studies of the christology of Hebrews. First, though the titles of 'Son' and 'High Priest' have been employed as organizing principles, I have focused on the overall presentation of Christ in Hebrews, rather than limiting discussion to those texts where christological titles occur. Second, I have attempted to use the parallels to other literature to establish the conceptual framework for the christological arguments of Hebrews rather than arguing for any historical connection between the author of Hebrews and any other writer or document. Here my interest has been more in underscoring the ways the intended audience of Hebrews most probably resounded to the message about Jesus.¹⁰⁷ To this end, the Jewish literature (particularly from Qumran) has been far more helpful in providing the conceptual framework for Hebrews than the Hellenistic writings.¹⁰⁸ By setting the arguments of

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Hebrews against the backdrop of the larger religious milieu of the first century, both internal and external evidence are employed in elucidating the christology of Hebrews.

The christology of Hebrews contributes significantly to the kaleidoscope of NT christology. The development and application of Ps. 110 with its resulting emphasis on Jesus as exalted High Priest after the order to Melchizedek, allow the writer to stress both the humanity and deity of Christ. Jesus, who serves as God's representative to humanity and humanity's

¹⁰³ Horton, *Melchizedek*, 163-64.

¹⁰⁴ Horton seemingly failed to notice this point.

¹⁰⁵ Horton noted that any thought of Melchizedek as a divine or angelic figure would destroy the author's antitypology.

¹⁰⁶ No attempt will be made to examine the argument of these chapters in detail. Cf. J. Swetnam, 'Form and Content in Heb. 7-13', *Biblica* 55, 1974, 333-348; A.C. Cody, *Heavenly Sanctuary and Liturgy in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (St. Meinrad, Indiana: Grail Publications, 1960); William G. Johnsson, 'Cultus', 106, and *Hebrews*, 64.

¹⁰⁷ This focus on the reader rather than the writer is justified by recent studies in communication theory which suggest that a writer chooses rhetoric which will communicate to the intended audience. Hence, language, style, and literary strategies often tell us more about the readers than the author of a particular document. On information theory see Colin Cherry, *On Human Communication* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1957); J.P. Pierce, *Symbols, Signals and Noise: The Nature and Process of Communication* (New York: Harper & Row), 1961; C.L. Book, T.L. Albrecht, et al., *Human Communication: Principles, Contexts and Skills* (New York St. Martin's, 1980).

¹⁰⁸ Still, there is no need to argue, as some have done, that the intended readers were Essenes.

advocate before God, bridges the gulf and so cleanses humankind from defilement. The christology of the NT would certainly be impoverished should it have been deprived of Hebrews' deep and rich understanding of who Jesus was. The christology of Hebrews is deserving of more attention and reflection.

APPENDIX I

		Gen.				Gen.	11Q
		xiv	Ps. cx	Philo	Josephus	Ap.	Melch.
1.	King of Salem	X	.	X	X	X	.
2.	Priest	X	X	X	X	X	X?
3.	Salem = Jerusalem	.	.	.	X	X	.
4.	Priest of El Elyon	X	.	X	.	X	.
5.	Founder of Temple	.	.	.	XX	.	.
6.	Founder of Jerusalem	.	.	.	XX	.	.
7.	Heavenly figure	.	.	.	.	.	XX
8.	First priest to God	.	.	.	XX	.	.
9.	Unlearned priesthood	.	.	XX	.	.	.
10.	βασιλεὺς δίκαιος	.	.	X	X	.	.
11.	King of peace	.	.	XX	.	.	.
12.	Logos	.	.	XX	.	.	.
13.	Eschatological figure	.	.	.	.	.	XX
14.	Friend of Abraham	.	.	XX	.	.	.
15.	Receives tithe	X?	.	X	X	X	.
16.	Entertains army	.	.	X	X	X	.
17.	Elohim	.	.	.	.	.	XX

NOTES X—information given by source. XX—unique information given by source. X?—information perhaps given by source.

From F.L. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 86.

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- Begins with Christology (Hebrews 1:1-4) - David's son, greater than angels, fulfillment of covenant. Greater than Adam. - Rules as the priest-king who gives full salvation to his people, he was appointed - Mel superior to Levitical priesthood, one who blesses is greater, everlasting, sacrifices are better, secured ultimate forgiveness - Jesus is the fulfillment of Psalm 110 - Tabernacle points forward - Old covenant imperfect, Jesus is the "once for all" - Establishes rule over creation - Perfection, attained through life of sacrifice, had to learn obedience. Jesus as Divine Son and Priest-King. - Specific situation, so not much JC - "Slave of JC" (1:1) - high Christology, JC identified as the Christ, he is the promised Davidic King - "Lord," exalted one, judge, sick anointed in his name. 1 Peter. This is the eleventh part of a sermon series titled Near to the Heart of God: A Study of the Book of Hebrews. A manuscript will be posted when it is available. From the series: Near to the Heart of God: A Study of the Book of Hebrews [PREVIOUS PAGE](#) | [NEXT PAGE](#). Related Topics: Christology, Ecclesiology (The Church).