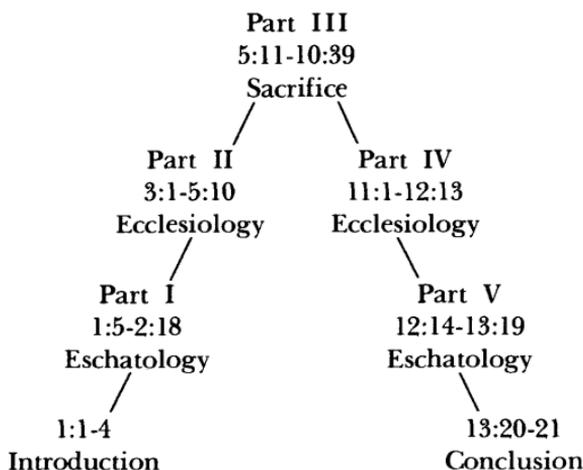


BRIEF NOTE

THE CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF THE CENTRAL SECTION OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

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In his literary analysis of the book of Hebrews, Albert Vanhoye¹ has divided the text into five parts, not including the introduction and conclusion, with Part III being of primary importance. The text and topical divisions of the book of Hebrews would appear as follows:



¹Albert Vanhoye, S.J., *La Structure littéraire de l'épître aux Hébreux* (Paris, 1963).

Part III, the central section of the epistle, begins with what Vanhoye calls a preamble (5:11-6:20). This preamble itself is divided into two paragraphs (5:11-6:12, the *parénèse*, and 6:13-20, the *exposé*) with the first paragraph divided into two subdivisions (5:11-6:3 and 6:4-12).²

Concerning the second paragraph (6:13-20), Vanhoye says that one can very plainly see a relationship with the following chapter, and in particular, the last verse (vs. 20) clearly announces the subject that the author is about to treat, i.e., Jesus having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.³

In his final chapter, Vanhoye gives the entire Greek text of Hebrews, dividing it into its various sections and subsections. The subsections in turn are presented according to the literary structures that Vanhoye sees as being present.

Upon writing a review of Vanhoye's book, John Bligh was not altogether satisfied with Vanhoye's analysis of Hebrews. He, therefore, undertook his own literary analysis, dividing the entire Greek text of Hebrews into a series of 33 chiasmic structures.⁴

Vanhoye and Bligh have adequately shown that chiasmic structures exist in Hebrews, though taking differing approaches to the text. Seemingly, however, a chiasm exists that neither author has identified. It includes the last two verses of Vanhoye's preamble (6:19-20) to his all-important Part III (5:11-10:39). Vanhoye has observed that vs. 20 announces the subject that is to be treated in the next chapter, i.e., Jesus being a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. But there appears to be more present in 6:19-20 than the announcement of Jesus' priesthood. The passage reads as follows: "We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

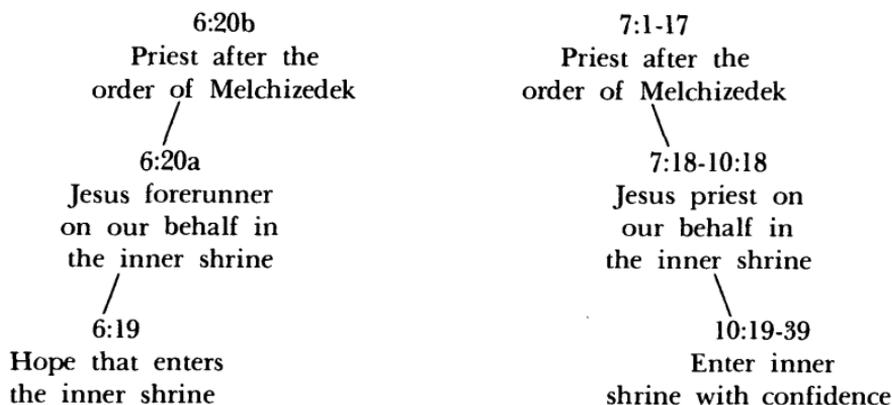
It would appear that the statement about the hope that enters into the inner shrine and about Jesus our forerunner having

²Ibid., pp. 114-124.

³Ibid., p. 122.

⁴John Bligh, *Chiasmic Analysis of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Oxon, 1966).

entered the inner shrine (vss. 19-20a) joins the statement about Jesus' high priesthood (vs. 20b) as well as the subsequent chapters, to form the following chiasm:



It becomes clear that each point in 6:19-20 is given a full theological development in the four succeeding chapters, as follows:

The hope that enters into the inner shrine (6:19) is developed in the parallel passage (10:19-39), where the Hebrew Christians are admonished to enter the sanctuary with confidence by the blood of Jesus. Having once entered into the new covenant relationship with God, they are also exhorted not to break this relationship and turn their backs upon God.

Jesus' entrance into the inner shrine behind the curtain (6:20a) is expounded in 7:18-10:18. Here the details of Jesus' ministry as high priest are developed and the reasons for the confidence spoken of in 10:19-39 set forth. That which could not be accomplished with the blood of goats and calves within the inner shrine of the earthly sanctuary by an earthly high priest, Jesus has accomplished in the inner shrine of the heavenly sanctuary by the application of his own blood.

Becoming a high priest after the order of Melchizedek (6:20b) is discussed in 7:1-17, and the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood over the Aaronic one is detailed.

It may be concluded, then, that each point in the chiasm contained in 6:19-20 cannot be properly understood unless it is viewed in the light of its theological development, found in its parallel passage in 7:1-10:39.