

ISSUES IN THE INTERPRETATION OF HEBREWS

WILLIAM G. JOHNSON

Andrews University

That the book of Hebrews continues to remain an enigma to interpreters is highlighted by the recent appearance of two significant works—George Wesley Buchanan's commentary in the Anchor Bible¹ and Lala Kalyan Kumar Dey's *The Intermediary World and Patterns of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews*.² Whereas Buchanan finds the document to be centered in a group of migrant Jewish Christians who await in Jerusalem the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, Dey sees it as a polemic grounded in a Philonic-type milieu! Obviously, the *religionsgeschichtliche* background to Hebrews continues to remain elusive. Our primary concern in this essay is not with *Religionsgeschichte*, however, nor with the other issues suggested by Erich Grässer³ in his long review of the literature of Hebrews a decade ago.⁴ Rather, we shall approach the continuing problem of interpreting Hebrews from the perspective of the "internal" issues of the document. That is, we are concerned with the questions of the center of the argument, of the significance of one part over against another and of the intent of the writing. In this endeavor the efforts by Buchanan and Dey provide a convenient backdrop; the respective interpretations are helpful to focus these questions, either in terms of a response to them or a lack of awareness of them.

¹ *To the Hebrews: Translation, Comment and Conclusions* (New York, 1972).

² SBL Dissertation Series, 25; Missoula, Montana, 1975.

³ Erich Grässer, "Der Hebräerbrief 1938-1963," *TRu* 30 (1964): 138-236. A supplement to this excellent article is provided by F. F. Bruce, "Recent Contributions to the Understanding of Hebrews," *ET* 80 (1969): 260-264.

⁴ Grässer discussed questions of NT introduction (author, address, time and place of composition, sources and traditions, integrity), general introduction (the text, genre, structure), *Religionsgeschichte* (Judaism, Qumran, Philo, Gnosticism), connections with Christianity (Paul, synoptics, the Fourth Gospel), and theology (ground-thought, usage of Scripture, Christology, eschatology, the Christian life).

Accordingly, we shall first briefly review these two works; then we shall give attention to the issues suggested by each; and finally we shall relate these issues to the history of research in Hebrews in the modern period as we draw conclusions from the study.

1. *Review of Buchanan and Dey*

Buchanan informs us in his preface that "the first draft of this commentary was written without consulting the available secondary sources in an effort to avoid the conscious or unconscious imitation of earlier commentators."⁵ Although the work was subsequently modified to some extent after reading other interpreters, the stamp of originality strongly remains. His is an interpretation which stands apart; it is clearly outside that stream in which Franz Delitzsch,⁶ B. F. Westcott,⁷ James Moffatt,⁸ C. Spicq,⁹ and O. Michel¹⁰ are the beacon lights.

What distinguishes Buchanan's presentation is the *utter Jewishness* of the understanding. That Hebrews was written to meet the needs of Jewish Christians has been a view of long standing, particularly in British scholarship.¹¹ But in Buchanan's commentary the people addressed seem more "Jewish" than "Christian"! They are a group of migrants who have gathered at Jerusalem to await the promise to Abraham; the land of

⁵ *To the Hebrews*, p. IX.

⁶ Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. Thomas L. Kingsbury, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1862-72).

⁷ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1950). Originally published 1889.

⁸ James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ICC (New York, 1924).

⁹ C. Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1952).

¹⁰ Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, Meyer Kommentar, 12 Aufl. (Göttingen, 1966).

¹¹ Study of Hebrews in Germany has for long inclined towards a view of the "Hebrews" as Gentile Christians. Eugene Ménégoz, *La théologie de l'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris, 1894) traces this view as early as M. Koehler (1834). Despite its espousal by Moffatt and by F. F. Scott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Doctrine and Significance* (Edinburgh, 1922), British scholarship has generally regarded the original readers as Jewish Christians.

Israel is at last to be theirs.¹² Hebrews is a midrash on Psalm 110 designed to encourage these waiting souls, whose ardor is growing cold with the passing of the years.¹³

What of Jesus according to Buchanan? He is an exemplary figure (but not God)¹⁴ whose sacrificial death has so built up the treasury of merits of the Jewish nation that the ancient promise may now be realized.¹⁵ Christ's death has made purification not only for his own sins (1:3 signifies "when he had made a purification for his sins") but for the sins of Israel as well.¹⁶

Indeed, the "Hebrews" are even more remote from our understanding. They are a monastic group, who practice celibacy¹⁷ (chapter 13, with its endorsement of marriage, is not considered part of the original homily¹⁸). Moreover, the Hebrews are altogether sectarian in outlook. They maintain the regulations of Judaism and insist upon strict community rules.¹⁹ No sin is allowed after baptism.²⁰ What we seem to see is a Qumran-type community which "believes" in Jesus transported to Jerusalem.

According to Buchanan's interpretation, the Psalms, which come later than the "law" (that is, the Pentateuch), are thought to override it.²¹ For each era there are corresponding temples, sacrifices, covenant, and leaders, but those of the later era supersede the earlier ones. This explains the basis of the contrasts of Hebrews: Christ and Moses, Christ and Aaron, the two covenants, the two sanctuaries, the two types of sacrifice.

Linking both eras, however, is the promise of "rest." This was the original promise of the land, given to Abraham.²² In the view of Hebrews, this was not fulfilled by either Joshua or the Davidic

¹² *To the Hebrews*, pp. 8-9, 64-65, 169-170, 194, 246.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 56, 58.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. XXV, 83, 108.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38, 82, 129, 130-131, 155, 254.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 217-219, 221, 231, 236.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 227, 231, 235, 267-268.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 214.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 65, 107-110, 171.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. XXIX-XXX, 164, 166.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 64-65, 169-170, 194, 246.

monarchy. Now, however, the sacrifice of Jesus has opened the way for its realization—for those who are “perfect.”²³ This is why no sin may be permitted of a member of the brotherhood. The Messiah, who is a priest-king (*not* a Davidite)²⁴ is about to bring deliverance from Roman rule.²⁵

Buchanan’s approach to Hebrews brings several advantages. These lie principally in the interpretation of the traditional “hard nuts” such as the problematic “no repentance” passages of 6:4-6 and 10:26-31 and the difficult passage at 12:22-24—“You have come to Mount Zion . . . and to the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem. . . .” Buchanan argues strongly that here, as elsewhere in Hebrews we take the language at face value: the writer allows for no repentance from sin after baptism, while *actual* Jerusalem is intended at 12:22.

Obviously, there is a great deal here upon which comment might be made. We shall confine our remarks to but one matter, however: To what extent has Buchanan proved his case? While he claims at the outset to let the conclusions emerge from the discussion of the text²⁶ and although he does, in fact, delay matters of “introduction” till the close of his book,²⁷ he has shaped the entire presentation to accord with his opening statement, “The document entitled ‘To the Hebrews’ is a homiletical midrash based on Ps 110.”²⁸ Before the commentary begins, the reader is given a 12-page description of the nature of midrashim, florilegia, parables, *a fortiori* argument, typology, inclusion, chiasm, the author’s use of the OT, and so on²⁹—key elements in Buchanan’s

²³ Buchanan sees the author’s vocabulary of “perfection” in terms of the cultus. Perfection “describes a person who was fully cleansed from sin, qualified for full membership in a religious order, or one who observed rigorously all the rules required by the group.” *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁴ Buchanan holds that Hebrews portrays a messiah resembling the Hasmonean priest-kings rather than one belonging to the family of David. *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 38-51.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 169-170, 194.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. X.

²⁷ Under the rubric of “Conclusions.” *Ibid.*, pp. 246-268.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. XIX.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. XIX-XXX.

presentation. Throughout the text allusions are constantly made to the OT, rabbinical, and apocalyptic literature.

But how much is actually *established* by such an endeavor? That similarities in expression may be adduced by no means guarantees *necessary* historical links. The purported links, in fact, appear at best tenuous (how valid is the argument from the treasury of merits, for instance?). Such a radical departure in interpretation calls for a more convincing demonstration.

Dey's dissertation, on the other hand, has many scholarly antecedents. Moffatt, Spicq, and others were convinced that, in some degree at least, the book of Hebrews had links with the thought world of Philo.³⁰ That view was examined in great detail and rejected by R. Williamson in his recent *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*.³¹ We would expect Dey to engage this work in an *Auseinandersetzung*, but inexplicably we find no reference to it.

Although Dey seeks to illumine the character of the entire document, his emphasis falls on the first seven chapters.³² His primary concern is with the series of comparisons of Jesus as Son with the angels, the heavenly man, Moses, Aaron, Levi, and Melchizedek.³³ Dey sets out to prove that this entire argument is understandable on the basis of a single religious thought-world—that to be found in Hellenistic Judaism, and especially in the writings of Philo Judaeus. Here angels, logos, heavenly man, and wisdom constitute the intermediary world between God and man. The revelation and religious status of this intermediary world, however, are inferior to that of "perfection," which is character-

³⁰ See Grässer, "Der Hebräerbrief," pp. 177-179.

³¹ Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, *Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums* (Leiden, 1970).

³² The last five chapters of Dey's dissertation are directly concerned with Hebrews. They take up in turn Jesus and the angels (chap. 4, dealing with Heb 1:1-2:4); Jesus and Moses (chap. 5, dealing with Heb 3:1-6); Jesus, Melchizedek, Levi, and Aaron (chap. 6, taking up 7:1-28); and the perfection of Jesus (chap. 7, based on Heb 2:5-18, 4:14-5:10). The final chapter, entitled "The Perfection of the Believer: Faith, Hope and Paraenesis in Hebrews" is very sketchy, with only seven pages in all.

³³ *The Intermediary World*, pp. 4, 7, 121-126.

ized by unmediated and direct access to God. Among those who had attained to "perfection" were Moses (he communicated with God face to face), Aaron as he entered the Holy of Holies (divesting himself of the robe of the universe), Isaac (whose wisdom was self-taught), and Melchizedek. Allegorically the upper limits of heaven (where God dwells) characterize this realm.³⁴

The letter to the Hebrews endeavors to establish the superiority of Jesus to readers steeped in such ideas.³⁵ This explains in particular the concern to prove the superiority of Jesus over the angels and Moses — two comparisons that long have puzzled interpreters of the document. Likewise, the stress on "perfection"³⁶ and the references to Jesus "passing through" or ascending "higher than" the heavens become understandable.³⁷

According to Dey, the book of Hebrews, while assuming this Philonic-type world of thought, makes several unique contributions to it. It selects those already "perfect" (Moses and Aaron) and puts Christ *above* them.³⁸ In an even more radical move, it argues that perfection is to be realized *in this world* of sensory existence, according to the model of Jesus himself.³⁹ Finally, the

³⁴ The first two chapters of the dissertation attempt to establish the Philonic basis of intermediary world and patterns of perfection: chap. 1 deals with "Synonymity of Titles and Interchangeability of Functions in the Intermediary World," and chap. 2 with "Patterns of Perfection."

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 93-96, 110. Note esp. p. 126: "The people addressed in Hebrews, accordingly, were not in the danger of relaxing into a less taxing Judaism which promised inferior salvific benefits than Christianity, nor were they in a state of post-apostolic fatigue, as some have characterized it, but on the contrary their 'neglect' (2, 3) of Christianity was occasioned by a particular tradition of Judaism which promised much more—perfection and immediacy to God without intervening-mediators and the highest of religious status, like that of Aaron and Moses."

³⁶ The contrast between Buchanan and Dey at this point is striking. Whereas, as we noticed above, "perfection" for the former is bound up with the cult, for the latter it is part of a thought-world characterized by levels of religious existence.

³⁷ Heb 4:14, "passed through the heavens"; 7:26, "separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens"; cf. 9:29, "into heaven itself."

³⁸ *The Intermediary World*, pp. 179-180, 217.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 219: "The bold and revolutionary thesis of the author of Hebrews . . . is that Jesus has entered and participated in the realm of imperfection (flesh, blood and temptation) and has accomplished perfection

perfection of the "Hebrews" is to be a *present* reality attained through faith and hope.⁴⁰

That Dey's thesis is poles apart from Buchanan's will be manifest from these few considerations. In fact, Dey has a chapter⁴¹ in which he examines the thought-world of apocalyptic Judaism and concludes that the views of angels and perfection there do not accord with Philo and Hebrews (the presence of angels does not raise the problem of access or immediacy to God, while perfection involves cultic purity). Interestingly, Buchanan argues his position largely by reference to the cultic concerns of Hebrews! Unfortunately, we find not a single reference to Buchanan's book anywhere in Dey.

While both Buchanan and Dey have sought to explicate the basis for the comparisons of Hebrews, Dey's case seems to be the stronger. If occasionally the parallels drawn from Philo appear to be strained, in general he has succeeded in presenting a religious thought-world in which much of the argument of Hebrews makes good sense. But we repeat: *much* of the argument! Dey's thesis is selective in its presentation: There is a great deal of Hebrews left untouched. For instance, he has not been able to extend the series of comparisons beyond the seventh chapter of Hebrews; the "better covenant" and "better sacrifices" of 8:1-10:18 do not seem to fit into his schema.⁴²

With these remarks we are ready to look more closely at the internal issues of interpreting Hebrews raised by these two works.

2. Four Issues Suggested by Buchanan and Dey

Attention in this section will be directed to the following four issues suggested by Buchanan and Dey: the question of *within this realm and thereby has opened the way for others to participate in perfection within this realm of creation and not outside of it.*"

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 227-233.

⁴¹ This is his 3d chapter: "The Angelic World and the Concept of Perfection in Other Traditions of Judaism—a Comparative Perspective."

⁴² Dey gives a passing reference to the covenant motif on pp. 211-212—the "better covenant" is faith and hope. He makes no attempt to weave in the long argument based on sacrifice (9:1-10:18).

emphasis in the book of Hebrews, the matter of cult, the valence of the author's language, and the pilgrimage motif.

1. *The Question of Emphasis*

Whereas Buchanan has been chiefly influenced by the language of "brothers," "priests," "sacrifices," "purification," and "unpardonable" sin, Dey has been guided by the concern with angels, Moses, Levi, Aaron, Melchizedek, and perfection. Dey's construction rests upon the first seven chapters (particularly 1:1-3:6 and chap. 7); Buchanan's is particularly guided by the last seven (chaps. 6-12, chap. 13 not being considered part of the original).

The question of emphasis, which is the question of the "center" for interpreting Hebrews, is a vital one. It has often been expressed in terms of a theology-parenesis division of the material of the document.⁴³ Since the appearance of E. Käsemann's *Das wandernde Gottesvolk*,⁴⁴ the emphasis in Protestant studies of Hebrews has been on the parenesis: It has been argued that here the primary purpose of the writing is to be located.⁴⁵

While Dey's work does not embrace the entire document, he has sought to make the whole intelligible by locating the primary concerns of the writer. His findings are just the reverse of Käsemann: Instead of theology serving the parenesis, parenesis is directed toward the theology:

In other words, paraenesis in Hebrews is a mode of Christian paideia whose aim is to lead the Christians to the knowledge of God and the Christian 'virtues' of faith and hope. This is the precise opposite of the view advanced that theology in Hebrews is at the service of the paraenesis (Käsemann, Michel, and others). Put more simply, paraenesis in Hebrews has as its purpose to lead the learner to the knowledge of God and this knowledge informs and

⁴³ See Grässer, "Der Hebräerbrief," pp. 197-204.

⁴⁴ Ernst Käsemann, *Das wandernde Gottesvolk* (Göttingen, 1939).

⁴⁵ This position is advocated by M. Dibelius, "Der himmlische Kultus nach dem Hebräerbrief," *Theologische Blätter* 21 (1942): 1-11; Berthold Klappert, *Die Eschatologie des Hebräerbriefs* (Munich, 1969); D. Kuss, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Regensburg, 1953); and Albrecht Oepke, *Das neue Gottesvolk in Schriftum, Schauspiel, bildender Kunst und Weltgestaltung* (Gütersloh, 1950).

grounds their religious existence as faith and hope—and not the other way around.⁴⁶

Does Buchanan's emphasis then fall on theology or parenthesis? The answer must be, neither. His work is guided by a factor which cuts across *both* theology and parenthesis—the cult. Here we see raised a second—and related—issue in the interpretation of Hebrews.

2. *The Issue of the Cult*

The language of the cult impregnates the entire book of Hebrews. It is far more than the extended theological discussion of 7:1-10:18; rather it is found as early as the proem⁴⁷ and in the final chapters.⁴⁸ Even in the so-called parenthetic sections, exhortations are couched in cultic terminology⁴⁹—a fact which casts to the winds the whole endeavor to dichotomize the material of Hebrews.

Buchanan has felt the impact of this language. If the end result of his reflections on it leaves much to be desired, his commentary at least enshrines this important insight—one that sets it apart from others.

Dey, on the other hand, has either not felt the force of the cult in Hebrews or has chosen to ignore it.⁵⁰ So, while the presentation of the comparisons between Jesus and the angels, Moses, Levi, and Aaron is laudable, it leaves too much unsaid. How does the "heavenly sanctuary" motif tie in here? What function can Christ have as minister of such a temple if perfection is already a

⁴⁶ *The Intermediary World*, p. 229.

⁴⁷ Heb 1:3—The Son "made *purification* for sins."

⁴⁸ E.g., Heb 12:15, "by it the many become *defiled*"; 13:4, "let the marriage bed be *undefiled*."

⁴⁹ E.g., after the long cultic argument of 7:1-10:18, the exhortation is to "draw near" (*proserchomai*, 10:22)—a term used for the approach of the priest to God. Cf. 4:16.

⁵⁰ Dey, of course, does not set out to interpret the whole document in detail (see *The Intermediary World*, p. 4); he has, however, claimed to have illumined the entire thought-world of Hebrews. The motif of sacrifice, however, does not seem to accord with Dey's explanation of "perfection" as realized now through faith and hope. This appears to us to be a major flaw in Dey's thesis for it is unable to gather up a significant part of the data.

reality for the readers by way of faith and hope? And especially, How does the argument of 9:1-10:18 concerning the *sacrifice* of Christ, a passage that appears to mark the climax of a long development, accord with Dey's construction?

Buchanan's concern with the cult, however, itself leads to a third issue: How *seriously* is this language to be taken? What intent of the letter does it serve? This is the issue of the valence (value) of the terminology adopted in Hebrews, and clearly it embraces the total argument. It pertains to specifically cultic language as well as to apparently non-cultic terminology. Confronting us as we try to understand his discussion is the question, What are we to take literally, and what is to be "spiritualized"?

3. *The Valence of the Language*

Once again Buchanan is sensitive to the issue. Continually he chides previous exegetes for their failure to confront the literal force of the argument, Protestant writers for "spiritualizing" it,⁵¹ and Catholic commentators for reading in ideas of the Mass.⁵² So he contends that the "rest" which is now available to the "Hebrews" was the actual land of Canaan;⁵³ the "sacrifice" of Jesus was a real one;⁵⁴ the heavenly temple stood immediately above the earthly, linked by the smoke of the sacrifice;⁵⁵ thus, Jesus' ascension was in the smoke of the sacrifice;⁵⁶ his sacrifice provided a cleansing of the heavenly temple, which had been defiled by sins on earth;⁵⁷ the Zion to which the believers had come was literal Jerusalem;⁵⁸ and the severe warnings of Hebrews permit of no sin after baptism.⁵⁹

⁵¹ *To the Hebrews*, pp. 136, 160-162, 189, 191-193, 222.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 64-65, 154, 169-170, 194, 246.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 162.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 157-162.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 162.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 162.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189, 222-226, 235, 256, 263.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66, 197-110, 171.

Dey, on the other hand, does not engage in a discussion of this issue. He assumes throughout that the book of Hebrews is operating in Philonic-type categories of thought which allow for a fluidity of meaning. For example, in dealing with the *crux interpretum* of 10:20—*tout' estin tēs sarkos autou*, (“that is, his flesh”)—he sees a distinction being made between the realm of God and the world of flesh:

The inner veil of the temple (*katapetasma*) which is a symbol of the separation of the Holy of Holies (God) from the outside world of body and flesh explains the enigmatic statement in Hb 10, 20, namely, that Jesus has passed out (or through, in terms of the special metaphor) of the realm of flesh when he entered into the Holy of Holies at his death (cf. 9, 11-12).⁶⁰

Both Buchanan and Dey, each in his own way, attempt to face the force of the “realized” element in Hebrews—the way into the Holy of Holies is now open; Christians may now find “perfection” or “rest”; they even now have come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem.⁶¹ But whereas for Buchanan this element is to be understood in terms of literal Jerusalem and literal Canaan, for Dey it belongs to the realm of thought.

Obviously, the issue raised here is crucial to the interpretation of Hebrews. The decision made concerning the valence of the language shapes the understanding of the entire document, and is particularly acute in the areas of cosmology and eschatology.

We pass to a final issue which is suggested by the two works under consideration.

⁶⁰ *The Intermediary World*, p. 180. Not surprisingly, Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, p. 168, finds 10:20 a difficult verse to fit into his literalistic interpretation and resorts to the possibility of a later gloss: “The allegorical interpretation, ‘that is, his flesh,’ seems like a later gloss, similar to the gloss ‘that is, not of this creation’ in 9:11.”

⁶¹ The rest *remains* (4:9); it may now be entered (4:10); Jesus has gone beyond the veil (4:14-16; 6:19, 20); the way through the veil has been opened (10:20); the “Hebrews” *have* come to Mount Zion (12:18-24). Hence the strong note of boldness (*parrēsia*) in the document.

4. *The Pilgrimage Motif*

While the idea that Hebrews sets out the Christian religion as a pilgrimage is of long standing, it was Käsemann⁶² who first focused the significance of this motif for interpreters of Hebrews. Despite the modifications which need to be made in his work (his argument that the gnostic redeemer-myth of the *Urmensch* supplies the format for Hebrews, for instance, may be seriously questioned), he has succeeded in isolating the *poignant* note of Hebrews.⁶³ As pilgrims, God's people are on the move; they have not yet arrived, although great privileges are theirs; the possibility of failure to attain the goal is ever-present; the great need is for faithfulness. Käsemann's book had the misfortune to be released just before the outbreak of hostilities in World War II and has never been revised; consequently, its impact has not been felt in the English-speaking world to the extent it deserves.

A major flaw in Dey's thesis is that it does not—and apparently cannot—accommodate this “pilgrim” motif of Hebrews. The argument that through faith and hope the “Hebrews” even now attain perfection seems directly opposed to the note of *waiting*, of *expectation*, that Käsemann defined so well. Passages that speak of the Return, of course, run directly counter to Dey's position—he must dismiss these as vestigial remains of apocalyptic.⁶⁴ Likewise do the appeals to faithful advance lose their force. Indeed, “faith” and “hope” seem to have been transmogrified on the basis of his argument.⁶⁵

⁶² In *Das wandernde Gottesvolk*.

⁶³ Käsemann was not the first to point out the pilgrim motif of Hebrews. Earlier works on Hebrews such as Philip Mauro's *God's Pilgrims: their Dangers, their Resources, their Rewards* (London, n.d.), however, were *homiletical* in thrust. It was Käsemann who in a convincing, scholarly manner first demonstrated the significance of the motif.

⁶⁴ *The Intermediary World*, pp. 95-96, 175.

⁶⁵ For Dey, “faith” and “hope” function in terms of cosmology; for Käsemann—and, in our judgment, for the book of Hebrews—they are tied to eschatology. It seems strange that Dey should pass by Erich Grässer's important study of Hebrews 11, *Der Glaube im Hebräerbrief* (Marburg, 1965). He has, however, included this work in his bibliography.

Nor is Buchanan's effort satisfactory in this regard. He has succeeded in maintaining the "not yet" aspect of Hebrews (the monastic community awaits the realization of the promise of the land), but the *wandering* motif has been lost. A group of migrants to Jerusalem simply will not fit the specifications.

These, then, are four internal issues of interpretation of Hebrews that arise directly out of our consideration of the comments of Buchanan and Dey: the question of emphasis of the parts, the place of the cult, the valence of the language, and the pilgrimage motif. We may now seek to place these issues against the general backdrop of research in Hebrews in the modern period as we draw conclusions from the study.

3. *Conclusions to be Drawn in Relating the Four Issues to Recent Research in Hebrews*

Of the four issues isolated above, the first and final ones clearly hang together. Käsemann's work threw the emphasis and intent of Hebrews on the parenthesis; and much interpretation of the document, especially from Germany, has followed his lead. That is, interpreters have increasingly looked to 3:7-4:13, 5:11-6:20, and 10:19-12:29 as the most significant parts of the document. Correspondingly, the clearly cultic sections dealing with priesthood, temple, and sacrifice 2:7-18, 4:14-16, 5:1-10, and 7:1-10:18 have been de-emphasized.

The roots of this trend, however, are much earlier than the release of *Das wandernde Gottesvolk* and reach back to the last part of the nineteenth century, as I have shown elsewhere.⁶⁶ During the twentieth century there has not been a single Protestant work devoted to the sustained argument of 7:1-10:18. Roman Catholic scholars, on the other hand, have manifested a continuing interest in this passage, particularly with regard to finding ideas of priesthood and the Mass. In addition to the major works, such as A. Cody's *Heavenly Sanctuary and Liturgy in the Epistle to the*

⁶⁶ William George Johnsson, *Defilement and Purgation in the Book of*

Hebrews,⁶⁷ J. Smith's *A Priest for Ever*,⁶⁸ and F. J. Schierse's *Verheissung und Heilsvollendung*,⁶⁹ a steady stream of scholarly articles continues to appear;⁷⁰ likewise have Roman Catholic commentaries shown keen concern with the cultic argumentation.⁷¹

Protestant reaction to the cultus of Hebrews has been varied over the past 120 years. Delitzsch,⁷² Westcott,⁷³ and Davidson⁷⁴ interpreted the argument of Hebrews in terms of *continuity*: Christ's death was viewed as sacrifice, *surpassing* the OT sacrifices. Ménégos spoke for this view as he wrote:

Hebrews (Ph.D. dissertation; Vanderbilt University, 1973), pp. 27-96.

⁶⁷ Aelred Cody, *Heavenly Sanctuary and Liturgy in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Achievement of Salvation in the Epistle's Perspectives* (St. Meinrad, Ind., 1960).

⁶⁸ Jerome Smith, *A Priest for Ever: A Study of Typology and Eschatology in Hebrews* (London, 1969).

⁶⁹ F. J. Schierse, *Verheissung und Heilsvollendung: Zur Theologischen Grundfrage des Hebräerbriefes* (Munich, 1955).

⁷⁰ As indicative of the continuing interest of Roman Catholic writers in the cultus of Hebrews we note the following articles published since 1963: A. Vanhoye, "De instauratione novae Dispositionis (Heb. 9, 15-23)," *Verbum Domini* 44 (1966): 113-130; "Mundatio per sanguinem (Heb. 9, 22, 23)," *Verbum Domini* 44 (1966): 177-191; "Par la tente plus grande et plus parfaite . . . (Heb. 9, 11)," *Bib* 46 (1965): 1-28; "Thema sacerdotii praeparatur in Heb. 1, 1-2, 18," *Verbum Domini* 47 (1969): 284-297; James B. Swetnam, "The Greater and More Perfect Tent: A Contribution to the Discussion of Hebrews 9, 11," *Bib* 47 (1966): 91-106; "Hebrews 9, 2, and the Use of Consistency," *CBQ* 32 (1970): 205-221; "On the Imagery and Significance of Hebrews 9, 9-10," *CBQ* 28 (1966): 155-173; "Sacrifice and Revelation in the Epistle to the Hebrews: Observations and Surmises on Hebrews 9, 26," *CBQ* 30 (1968): 227-234; "A Suggested Interpretation of Hebrews 9:15-18," *CBQ* 27 (1965): 373-390; P. Andriessen, "L'Eucharistie dans l'Épître aux Hébreux," *NRT* 94 (1972): 269-277; "Das Grössere und vollkommener Zelt (Heb. 9, 11)," *BZ* 15 (1971): 76-92; and L. Sabourin, "Liturgie du sanctuaire et de la tente véritable" (Heb. viii. 2)," *NTS* 18 (1971): 87-90; "Sacrificium ut liturgia in Epistula ad Hebracos," *Verbum Domini* 46 (1968): 235-258.

⁷¹ Apart from those of Spicq and Kuss, we note P. Joseph Bonsirven, *Saint Paul: Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris, 1953); Peter Ketter, *Hebräerbrief* (Freiburg, 1950); and F. J. Schierse, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. Benen Fahy (London, 1969).

⁷² Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*.

⁷³ Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*.

⁷⁴ A. B. Davidson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh, n.d.).

C'est ici qu'il faut nous garder d'une méprise dans laquelle sont tombés de nombreux théologiens. Ils ont confondu le sens propre et le sens figuré du mot *sacrifice*. L'auteur de l'Épître aux Hébreux voit dans la mort du Christ un vrai sacrifice, un sacrifice rituel, assimilé aux sacrifices lévitiques, un holocauste offert à Dieu sous une forme spéciale, exceptionnelle, mais réalisant d'une manière parfaite le type prophétique de ceux de l'ancienne Alliance, et procurant la rémission des péchés aux fidèles qui l'offrent, par l'intermédiaire du Christ, devant le trône de Dieu. C'est le sacrifice au sens propre de ce mot.⁷⁵

But the later current of scholarly opinion began to run counter to the cult. Already G. Lünemann had denigrated sacrifice as "a rudely sensuous means,"⁷⁶ and as the century came to a close A. B. Bruce⁷⁷ argued that the entire cultic framework of Hebrews in fact was directed toward an anti-cultic purpose. Thus, in the twentieth century we find D. B. Weiss dismissing the complete section 8:6-10:18 in only twelve pages under the heading, "Der Abschaffung des Opferkultus!,"⁷⁸ M. Dibelius holding that Hebrews is opposed to all earthly cults,⁷⁹ J. Héring associating the cultus with a "magical conception of religion,"⁸⁰ and H. Strathmann⁸¹ arguing that the OT cultus itself rested on a delusion.⁸²

We should notice, however, that this issue of the place of the cultus in the overall purpose of Hebrews has not been clearly sighted. It has remained a hidden issue, as interpreters of the document have commented on the specifically cultic portions without sensing the need to justify the treatment they have adopted.

⁷⁵ Ménégoz, *La théologie de l'Épître aux Hébreux*, p. 229.

⁷⁶ Göttlieb Lünemann, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. Maurice J. Evans (New York, 1885), p. 641.

⁷⁷ Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The First Apology for Christianity* (New York, 1899).

⁷⁸ D. Bernard Weiss, *Der Hebräerbrief in zeitgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung* (Leipzig, 1910), pp. 47-58. He devotes 32 pages to 12:12-13:25!

⁷⁹ Dibelius, "Der himmlische Kultus . . ."

⁸⁰ Jean Héring, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock (London, 1970), p. 78.

⁸¹ Hermann Strathmann, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Göttingen, 1963), pp. 123, 128.

⁸² He holds that the OT cultus merely furnishes ideas to make the death of Jesus meaningful; the cultus itself rested on a delusion. *Ibid.*, pp. 123, 128.

The related problem of the valence of the language of Hebrews has been discerned even less. We may detect three general responses with regard to it: a literalizing view, a "spiritualizing" stance, and an intermediate position.

During the course of studies in the present century, very few exegetes have favored according a literal significance to the cultic language of Hebrews. The literal view seems to present serious difficulties—the present approach to the Most Holy and to the heavenly Jerusalem, the offering of Christ as a real sacrifice, the need to purify things in heaven, and dire warnings against apostasy. Buchanan emerges as the chief proponent; apart from him, only Windisch⁸³ has been a prominent advocate of this view. Windisch saw Hebrews as setting forth a literal presentation of the blood of Jesus in a heavenly sanctuary, for instance.⁸⁴ The "spiritualizing"⁸⁵ view runs directly counter to this. Its advocates have been legion. Heavenly sanctuary, sacrifice, priest—all are said to indicate the *subjective* benefits of the work of Christ to the believer. W. P. Du Bose, for instance, in his *High Priest and Sacrifice*⁸⁶ equated the heavenly sanctuary with the Church, the Holy Place with flesh and the Most Holy with spirit, blood with human destiny through death, and Christ's act with ours. A. Nairne⁸⁷ asserted that the cult merely provides *auctor ad Hebraeos* with an analogy, while Smith⁸⁸ sees the entire cult of

⁸³ Windisch, *Der Hebräerbrief*.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47. He argues (p. 85) that "blood" in Hebrews is not to be considered as merely a "'plastisches Wortsymbol' für die Erlösung durch Christus, wird doch gerade die überragende kultische Wirkung des Christusblutes der rituellen Wirkung des tierblutes entgegengesetzt."

⁸⁵ The term "spiritualize" is itself a slippery one. E.g., in Webster's *Third New International Dictionary*, there is an oscillation between a *moral*, non-literalizing sense and a "spirit-ish" idea. When the cult of Hebrews is "spiritualized," the reference may be to an actual heavenly (=spiritual) cult or to a complete collapsing of the cultic language so that only "salvation" is indicated.

⁸⁶ William Porcher Du Bose, *High Priesthood and Sacrifice: An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York, 1908).

⁸⁷ Alexander Nairne, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London, 1955).

⁸⁸ Smith, *A Priest for Ever*.

Hebrews as "extended metaphor."⁸⁹ Scholars such as Cody⁹⁰ and F. F. Bruce,⁹¹ however, have attempted to avoid both extreme literalism and the collapsing of the cultic language by taking an intermediate position. They understand an actual heavenly cultus to be pointed to in Hebrews but they seek by various means to avoid crass materiality; e.g., Cody argues that "heaven" is viewed under three different perspectives, while the sanctuary typology is organized in terms of two distinct "sets."⁹²

It is to be stressed, however, that this classification by no means suggests that the issue has been grasped. In general, interpreters of Hebrews have merely launched into their exegesis, presupposing the valence of the cultic language. There has been no clearcut awareness of alternate interpretations and of the need to justify the stance adopted.

We are now in a better position to place the presentations of Buchanan and Dey in terms of the scholarly treatment of Hebrews in the modern period. It has become clear that the issues of interpretation which lie behind these two very differing understandings of the pamphlet have, in fact, a long history. Unfortunately, however, they have remained for the most part hidden issues, and so the interpretation of Hebrews has been clouded accordingly.

What conclusions, then, seem warranted from our considerations in this essay?

First of all, the attempt to lay stress on one part of the document to the exclusion of the other(s) is not helpful. Theology and parenesis are so intertwined that the neglect of any part of the document can only result in distortion. It is largely because each

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 136. This, in fact, is in line with Smith's thesis that the entire argument of Hebrews is extended metaphor.

⁹⁰ Cody, *Heavenly Sanctuary and Liturgy*.

⁹¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1964).

⁹² The three perspectives are cosmological, "axiological," and eschatological; the two "sets" are: (1) that in which the outer and inner apartments represent the earthly and heavenly orders of salvation respectively, and (2) that in which they represent the body of Christ and God's dwelling in glory respectively. *Heavenly Sanctuary and Liturgy*, pp. 46, 77-86.

interpreter chooses to argue out of certain areas of the work that such contradictory "explanations" have resulted.

Second, effort to see the work holistically must take into account the cultic language. Here is a factor that unites both theology and parenesis, but one which has been much neglected in modern studies of Hebrews. Buchanan's commentary has sought to acknowledge the place of this language, but has produced an extreme interpretation. A heightened awareness of the place of cultus in other writings of the NT with studies of the phenomena associated with defilement, blood, and purgation as universal religious manifestations⁹³ may serve as a corrective to his work.

Third, if the cultus is to be studied carefully, then the particular section 7:1-10:18 calls for thorough investigation. It seems undeniable that this passage forms the climax of an argument that has been anticipated from the first verses of the document and which has been built up step by step. Yet, apart from *religions-geschichtliche* interest in the curious figure Melchizedek, this part of Hebrews has been passed over by modern Protestant scholars. Hebrews is likely to remain an enigma until this section is fitted into its rightful place in the total plan of the work.

Fourth, the most urgent need is to tackle the problem of the *language* of Hebrews. This has been the hidden key issue behind investigation of this writing for more than a century. Is all the talk about priests, blood, and temples to be taken seriously? What weight shall we assign it? Is it no more than a *theologoumenon*? The longstanding *cruces interpretum* all spring from this issue; indeed, the entire view of Hebrews rests upon it. But how is the issue of the language of Hebrews to be resolved? Will it be by reference to works outside the document, that is, by a search for parallels? The history of research in Hebrews, illustrated once more by the efforts of Buchanan and Dey, suggests that this

⁹³ My dissertation, *Defilement and Purgation in Hebrews*, has set forth the evidence for this (chap. 3). Buchanan's perspective is too narrow; thus, he has concluded (wrongly, in my judgment) that the cultic language of Hebrews points to a monastic, celibate community.

approach may not be fruitful. Over and over, interpreters have endeavored to identify the *religionsgeschichtliche* contours of Hebrews by pointing to first one apparent similarity, then another—drawn from a different part of the data! Rather, should not *auctor ad Hebraeos* himself be allowed to indicate the answer? If he intends Hebrews to be a sustained metaphor, if all the cultic talk is a *theologoumenon*, somewhere in the writing he must reveal his hand. Unless, of course, he intended that the homily(!) forever remain a conundrum to his readers! Surely the alternatives before us are these: Either we must establish conclusively from the document itself that the language of the cult is to be “spiritualized,” or else we must grant that no such transposition of meaning is intended, with all the implications this entails for the problematic passages of the work.

Finally, a holistic interpretation of Hebrews must seek to resolve the apparent internal tension of the document. Both Käsemann and Buchanan have caught melodies of Hebrews: the former, the song of the wandering people of God; the latter, the chant of the cultus. One has seen the overriding danger to be confronted as that of unfaithfulness; the other, defilement and excommunication from the brotherhood. Is there an inherent theological dichotomy here? Or can, in fact, a dialectical or synthetical harmony be found? This problem, not even sighted by interpreters of Hebrews, calls for serious reflection.

It is evident that debate concerning the interpretation of Hebrews will continue. Such dialog will be significant, however, only as it is intelligent. It must take account of the long-acknowledged questions of dispute, as well as the more subtle ones—the “internal” issues of interpretation—which have not usually been noticed. Perhaps the major part of finding the right answers is in framing the right questions.