

Some recent developments in Research on the Epistle to the Hebrews

J.C. McCullough

The purpose of this article is to describe and assess some of the trends which have appeared in recent scholarship in connection with a few of the main problems associated with the Epistle. No effort has been made at completeness, since it would be impossible in an article of this size to comment on every work that has appeared in the last twenty years, especially where that work is concerned with only a single verse of the Epistle. Rather the purpose is to concentrate on some main areas of discussion, to summarize earlier contributions and to assess more recent ones, especially those made in the last twenty years. The areas to be considered are: authorship, religious background, date, area to which the epistle was sent, literary genre, literary structure, use of the OT, individual themes and passages.

Authorship

"Without father, without mother, without genealogy" (Heb.7.3). In these words Overbeck summed up the state of knowledge about the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews in his day. Scholars since then have not been able to add much to that knowledge. Certainly by the early sixties many names had been suggested as possible authors: these included Paul /1/, Barnabas, Apollos, Judas, Silas, Luke, Clement of Rome, Peter, Philip, Timothy, Aristion, Mark and Priscilla but no agreement had emerged and most scholars had given up trying to find some new name or discover new support for a name already suggested. In recent years, however, one or two scholars have again tried to champion one or other of the names suggested earlier.

Martigno Rancaglia, for example, in his important book, Histoire de l'Eglise copte /2/ tried to revive the thesis which had been championed by Luther, and which more recently has been argued by Montefiore /3/

Spicq /4/ , T.W. Manson /5/ , and several others /6/, that Apollos was the author. He listed many reasons for accepting Apollos /7/, but seemed to be offering no decisive new argument which would compel scholars to reconsider their position. /8/ In 1969, R. Hoppin /9/ revived Harnack's old theory that the authors were Aquila and Priscilla, but that prejudice against women teachers in the church led to the suppression of the names. /10/. It is doubtful, however, if she produced enough evidence to win scholarly acceptance. J.M. Robinson /11/ has revived the claims of Barnabas as the author, but again without enough decisive new evidence to gain universal support.

While, however, little progress has been made since Overbeck's day as regards positive identification of the author, one question concerning the authorship at least has been settled, namely that concerning Pauline authorship. There seems to be general agreement that no matter who did write the epistle, Paul did not. This has been the opinion of Protestant scholars for some time, but since the Decree of the Papal Biblical Commission (Divino Afflante Spiritu) in 1943 and a subsequent letter of P. Vosté to Cardinal Suhard, /12/ more and more Catholic scholars have considered that the epistle was written by a Pauline pupil rather than Paul himself. /13/ As Coppens /14/ says: "L'Épître aux Hébreux n'est plus guère retenue dans le dossier paulinien."

While, therefore, modern scholars perhaps would not go as far as Dibelius in 1926 /15/ when he described the question of authorship as "uninteresting", nevertheless they would agree with Moffatt when he says "the identity of the author and of his readers must be left in the mist where they already lay at the beginning of the second century". /16/.....an obvious reference to Origen's oft quoted remark that God only knows who wrote Hebrews. /17/ There the matter must rest.

Religious Background

The question of the religious background of the epistle has been an important one in the past decade of

NT scholarship because it has raised several issues which are pertinent to the much wider debate concerning the religious thought world of the first and second centuries AD, in particular the relationship between the literature found at Qumran, the Coptic gnostic library found near Nag Hammadi, Jewish writings from Alexandria and early Jewish mystical writings and the NT. We will consider the present state of research on the religious background of Hebrews under four sections: Hebrews and Philo, Hebrews and Qumran; Hebrews and Gnosticism; Hebrews and Merkaba mysticism.

Hebrews and Philo

According to C. Spicq it was Grotius who first drew attention in 1644 to the influence of Philo upon Hebrews.

/18/ This view received some support in the 18th century /19/ , was accepted almost without question at the end of the 19th century, but became less and less popular during the 20th century. It was, however, in the 20th century that this theory of Philonic influence upon the epistle to the Hebrews received its most vehement and well documented support, through the work of Spicq. In chapter iii of the first volume of his commentary he offered a massive amount of evidence for the dependence of the author of the epistle upon Philo. This evidence was based on a thorough examination of the author's vocabulary, literary style, theological arguments, exegetical methods, schemes of thought, psychology and on a discussion of Hebrews 11. His conclusion was that while the author of Hebrews is no plagiarist, nevertheless

His affinities with the philosopher of Alexandria which have their origin neither in an identity of readers nor in a similarity of the subjects which are discussed, compels one to conclude that at a minimum he studied Philo's work and probably even that he knew him personally and was taught by him. /20/

In spite of the massive erudition with which Spicq supported his claim that the author of Hebrews was "un philonien converti au christianisme" /21/ , most scholars have been reluctant to accept that conclusion,

but rather have tended to ascribe the affinities perceived between the works of Philo and the epistle to the Hebrews to a common Alexandrian background. F. Schröger, for example, in a relatively recent book on the epistle gives as his judgment that

It is only with the greatest reserve that one can draw conclusions about a direct use of Philo by the redactor of the epistle to the Hebrews, because in the vast majority of cases, the "influence" is to be explained better through the same spiritual background and general Alexandrian culture rather than direct literary dependence. /22/

In a slightly earlier book S.G. Sowers had argued on the basis of the affinities between the works of Philo and Hebrews, that the author of Hebrews came "from the same school of Alexandrian Judaism as Philo, and that Philo's writings still offer us the best single body of religionsgeschichtlich material we have for the NT document". /23/ But he did not postulate a direct relationship, rather a geographical proximity.

In 1970, however, Spicq's views were directly challenged by Professor Williamson, in a book entitled Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews. /24/ He examined the affinities between the epistle and the works of Philo under three heads: Linguistic evidence, themes and ideas, use of Scripture. /25/ His conclusion after almost 600 pages of well documented argument is:

We can only insist that in the realm of vocabulary there is no proof that the choice of words displayed in the Epistle to the Hebrews has been influenced by Philo's lexicographical thesaurus. In the use of the OT made by the two writers, striking and fundamental differences of outlook and exegetical method appear... But it is in the realm of ideas, of the thought which words and OT texts were used to express and support that the most significant differences between Philo and the writer of Hebrews emerge. /26/

Williamson's book succeeded, in my view, in its narrow objective of proving that the author of the Hebrews was not a converted follower of Philo and has been a salutary warning against trying to define the religious background of the epistle within too narrow limits. It did not, however, attempt to solve the wider problem of determining the milieu against which the epistle was written and left open the possibility that in trying to gain an accurate picture of this milieu, scholars might find the writings of Philo to be very fruitful in indicating the type of thought world in which the epistle arose.

Hebrews and Qumran

The discovery and gradual publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls beginning in 1949 gave a new impetus to studies seeking to find the religious background against which Hebrews was written. The first commentary to mention the Dead Sea Scrolls in connection with Hebrews was that of Michel in the tenth edition of the Kritisch Exegetischer Kommentar in 1957, /27/ where he added an appendix underlining the important parallels between Hebrews and Qumran. It was Yadin, however, in a lecture given in 1957 /28/ but published in 1958 /29/ who was the first to draw far reaching conclusions about the relationship between Hebrews and Qumran. He argued that

" At the outset it should be emphasized that the main part of Hebrews is concerned with proving the superiority of Jesus over several persons and heavenly creatures of Messianic or eschatological character who, according to the beliefs of the readers, are either superior to Jesus as a lay Messiah, or were appointed to perform some function at the End of Days which, according to the writer, are reserved for Jesus the Messiah." /30/

According to Yadin, the people who held such beliefs were sectaries of Qumran and hence he assumed that the epistle was written to a group who held many of the Qumran sect's beliefs. /31/ Kosmala took this

view one step further by arguing that the addressees of the epistle were in fact an Essene congregation and that the purpose of the epistle was to urge them to become Christians. /32/ By the early sixties, however, scholars were becoming more cautious about claiming too much concerning the relationships between Hebrews and Qumran, and two important articles helped to point scholarship in a more fruitful direction. /33/ Both articles argued that the differences between the ideas found in the Scrolls and those found in Hebrews were more significant than the similarities and that the similarities could be explained easily by reference to the sharing of a common cultural milieu. On the one hand, therefore, they came to the negative conclusion that to call the recipients of Hebrews "Essenes" or "converted Essenes" or "spiritual brethren of the men of Qumran" would be "outstripping the evidence". /34/ On the other hand they took up the argument already proposed by Michel /35/ and Flusser /36/ that the recipients of Hebrews and the sectaries shared a common cultural milieu, without postulating direct historical connections. In the early sixties, therefore, work on the relationship between Hebrews and Qumran became a matter of painstaking comparisons and studies of the affinities between the two groups within the context of their religio-cultural background. /37/

However, in 1965 the publication /38/ of a group of 13 small fragments discovered in Cave II at Qumran brought a new dimension to the discussion. In these fragments Melchisedek is a kind of celestial figure, a 'god' (Fitzmyer's translation) or 'celestial being', (Van der Woude's translation) perhaps even the leading celestial being who is associated with divine judgment against Belial and his host at the end time. In connection with that judgment is mentioned an act of atonement in the Year of Jubilee and also the redemption promised in several OT passages /39/ which involves the liberation of God's people. The Sons of Light, as the inheritance of Melchisedek, are his companions in this judgment.

Yadin immediately suggested a direct connection between the Melchisedek mentioned in II Q Melch. and the epistle to the Hebrews, postulating that the author of Hebrews who was addressing converted Essenes, deliberately chose the figure of Melchisedek because he was already known in the Qumran sect "in order to convey more intimately and decisively his perception of Jesus' unique position." /40/ Other scholars were more cautious, however, Van der Woude, for example, in his article in which he introduced the fragments to the public suggested that the reference to Melchisedek in II Q Melch. helps us to understand the tradition which the author of Hebrews was using in Heb. 7.2-3, but he did not postulate any direct connection between Hebrews and II Q Melch. This is made even more explicit in his later article written in co-operation with De Jonge where they state: "Neither the points of connexion between Hebrews and the Qumran literature already noticed nor the new material in II Q Melch. enable us, however, to state with certainty that Hebrews is directed against adherents of the Qumran sect; we should say with more caution that II Q Melch. helps us to understand certain ways of thinking in the Judaism of the first century AD which form the background against which the argumentation in Heb. 1-2 can be understood." /42/ This view is also shared by Fitzmyer who believes that the presentation of Melchisedek in Qumran with its exaltation of him as a heavenly redemptive figure "makes it understandable how the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews could argue for the superiority of Christ the high priest over the Levitical priesthood by appeal to such a figure". /43/

Even this view, however, has been challenged in recent years as some scholars have suggested that the occurrence of Melchisedek in the Epistle to the Hebrews can be understood without reference to Qumran. Horton, for example, suggested that the author chose Melchisedek because as the first priest to be mentioned in the OT, he has a role similar to that of Jesus who is the first priest of the New Covenant. /44/ I have argued that the author chose Melchisedek because he figured in Ps. 110, one of the basic OT passages of the Epistle and the NT. /45/ Buchanan saw parallels between the

Hasmonaeans' use of the Melchisedek figure and that found in Hebrews and argued that "the author of Hebrews, like the supporters of the Hasmonaeans, justified on the basis of Scripture, a position for Jesus that he could not have merited on the basis of family lineage. Both used Ps. 110 to support their view". /46/ In any case, in my view, it is not absolutely necessary to postulate any influence from Qumran to explain why the author of Hebrews appealed to the figure of Melchisedek. He may, of course, have known many traditions about Melchisedek /47/, but his arguments do not demand knowledge of any traditions apart from those found in the OT.

The enthusiasm and "parallelomania" /48/ which greeted the initial discovery and publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the subsequent publication of II Q Melch. has now given way to a much more sober assessment of the affinities between Hebrews and Qumran. The general consensus of opinion seems to be that it is impossible to prove direct historical connection between the recipients of Hebrews and Qumran. Nevertheless it is also agreed that the writings of Qumran, along with other contemporary literature, throw valuable light on the general religious and cultural climate in which Hebrews was written.

Gnosticism

Several scholars have argued that the epistle to the Hebrews is written to combat some kind of gnostic heresy. R. Perdelwitz /49/, for example, suggested that Jewish Christian gnosticism was the key to understanding the tendency which the author of the epistle was attacking. Later in 1942 G. Bornkamm /50/ argued that the danger which the author of Hebrews was combatting was that of lapsing into the kind of syncretistic gnostic Judaism which is also opposed in the Pastorals and Colossians. In 1949 T.W. Manson /51/ took up the same theme arguing that the epistle was written by Apollos to the churches of the Lycus valley to correct a tendency which some years later developed into the "Colossian heresy". He thought that Chs 1-10 present "a complete refutation of the Colossian heresy as that heresy is described by Lightfoot." /52/

While these views, that the epistle is directed against Gnosticism, have not gained much support, another view has been widely discussed. It is that Gnosticism has supplied some of the thought patterns of the epistle. This view was argued forcefully by Käsemann in 1938 in his monograph entitled "Das wandernde Gottesvolk". /53/ He said that the main theme of the epistle was that of the "Wandering people of God" and that this theme and the christology of the epistle could not have been developed except in soil already prepared by Gnosticism. He believed that the christology of Hebrews was based upon a gnostic anthropos myth which had independent existence in late Judaism. One of the obvious weaknesses of Käsemann's argument when it was presented was that there was no evidence at that time for gnostic speculation which could be shown to be pre-Christian or independent of early Christianity. Since the writing of the book, however, a great deal of research has been undertaken, partly due to the important Nag Hammadi finds and, as a result, more and more scholars have been prepared to postulate an early form of Gnosticism which was independent of Christianity. /54/

The Nag Hammadi finds, however, have had other effects on scholarly inquiry. They have led scholars to try to trace the influence of gnostic ideas, or ideas taken up later in gnostic systems of thought, in a much wider range of literature than had previously been done. Some scholars, for example, have postulated that the Qumran sect belonged to the general milieu from which Gnosticism arose. /55/ Cullmann argued that there existed on the periphery of official Judaism a form of Jewish Gnosticism and that Qumran has furnished us with evidence about that form of Judaism. /56/ Other scholars have tried to trace gnostic influences on Philo. /57/ Obviously, therefore, there is a tendency to define Gnosticism in terms much wider than had been done previously, when Gnosticism was used to describe second century Christian heresies against which the early church fathers had done battle. /58/ Rather it is seen as a general movement of thought, as Robinson and Koester describe it, "a continuous probing of alternatives within heterodox Judaism on the basis of the OT all the way from Qumran to Nag Hammadi". /59/

The question, therefore, which is being asked now concerning the relationship of the epistle of the Hebrews to Gnosticism is: what particular place does the epistle occupy in this complicated and still very obscure world of "heterodox Judaism", which existed alongside "orthodox Judaism". Obviously a definitive answer to this question can only be given when much more is known about Gnosticism and the religious world in which the author lived. /60/

Merkabah Mysticism

One of the most interesting recent attacks on Käsemann's position was that made by O. Hofius in his Habilitationsschrift published in 1972. /61/ While his thesis was limited to a discussion of the concept of the "Curtain before God's throne", his insights have relevance for an understanding of all of the epistle. He suggested four possible religious backgrounds for the concept of the "Curtain" in Hebrews: Merkabah mysticism of Jewish Apocalyptic; Rabbinic thought; Jewish-Hellenistic thought as found in Philo and Josephus; Gnosticism. After a discussion of all four possibilities he argued that the first is the most likely and that the Pargot speculation of the Merkabah mysticism of Jewish Apocalyptic is the background against which the author of the epistle formed his concept of the "Curtain". This suggestion of a Merkabah mysticism background for some ideas in the epistle is not limited to Hofius, however. H.M. Schenke, writing in the Festschrift for Herbert Braun published in 1973 /62/ after considering in some detail the teaching about angels and about Melchisedek in Hebrews came to the conclusion that "the essential background of Hebrews.....is a quite specific early form of Jewish Merkabah-mysticism out of which the author comes and which still determines his thought forms as a Christian". /63/

R. Williamson /64/ has given Schenke's views a positive but cautious reception:

On the whole, then, while the evidence is not strong enough to prove beyond all shadow of reasonable doubt that a form of first century Merkabah mysticism is the personal background against which the thought and language of

Hebrews can best be interpreted, it does seem that enough exists to make such a hypothesis probable". /65/

Clearly then much work has still to be done, both in learning more of this aspect of early Judaism /66/ and then in a sober assessment of the relationship of the epistle to it. This assessment must be made with the realisation that Merkabah mysticism is only one element in the "Kaleidoscopic Judaism of the first century Hellenistic world" /67/ , and that while "an early form of Merkabah mysticism explains some of the peculiar features of the thought and language of Hebrews; the search must still go on for the explanation of others". /68/

Conclusion

The tendency in recent studies on the religious background of the epistle to the Hebrews, has been, therefore, to abandon the attempt to see the epistle's background in terms of only one scheme of thought, be it that found at Qumran, or in Philo and other forms of Judaism, or in Gnosticism. Rather scholars have concentrated on trying to gain clearer knowledge of the religious pluralism and diversity within heterodox Judaism and then to place the epistle to the Hebrews in that context. Obviously this is a much greater task than merely drawing parallels (in terms of vocabulary, theology etc.) between the epistle and other contemporary writings and then concluding that the epistle either does or does not show affinity with those writingsbut it is a task which is infinitely more worthwhile and promises to yield more lasting results.

Date and Area to which Hebrews was sent

Clearly with no general consensus of opinion as to the authorship or the religious background of the epistle, there can be no agreement on either the date of composition or the area to which the epistle was sent. Most main towns between Rome and Jerusalem have been mentioned as possible places where the recipients could have lived, but as yet no consensus of opinion has emerged among

scholars. As regards date, the terminus ad quem is fairly clearly fixed at AD 96, since the epistle is quoted in 1 Clement 36.2-5, but scholars are divided as to whether AD 70, the year of the Fall of Jerusalem, is relevant for dating the epistle or not. /69/ Two of the most recent writers on the epistle have argued that it must have been written before AD 70 since otherwise the fall of the Jerusalem cult would certainly have been mentioned. /70/ It remains to be seen whether this very early dating for the epistle will gain support in scholarship on Hebrews.

Literary Genre

The epistle to the Hebrews ends like an epistle. Its Benediction, personal words of exhortation and mention of Timothy all suggest that a letter is being completed. The long balanced period however which begins the epistle does not fit in any way into this picture of a letter. It suggests rather an essay or a formal sermon. Hence the question, is the epistle a letter, a writing or a sermon? Some scholars have tried to answer the question by postulating that either the beginning or the end of the epistle is not original /71/; or that the omission of greetings at the beginning was typical of the Near-Eastern letter form. /72/ A more recent suggestion has been that Hebrews is a pseudepigraphical letter whose beginning can be found in fragmentary fashion in Romans 16.25ff. /73/ The most generally held opinion, however, has been that the epistle is a sermon which the author sent to a community. One of the most cogent defences of this position was given by H. Thyen, /74/ who argued that Hebrews was written in the style of the Jewish Hellenistic homily, a style also found in Philo's allegorical commentary on Genesis, 1 Clement, 4 Maccabees, James, parts of 1 and 3 Maccabees, Stephen's speech in Acts 7, Didache 1-6 and 16, Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas, parts of Tobit, Testaments of the 12 Patriarchs and the Wisdom of Solomon. While doubts have been expressed about whether Thyen has proved his assertion that the style of the epistle is that of the Jewish-Hellenistic homily as opposed to that of the Jewish-Palestinian

one /75/ there seems to be general agreement with his basic assumption that except for the few verses which come at the end of the epistle, Hebrews is a carefully constructed homily of the type preached in synagogues of the first century. /76/

Literary Structure

In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest among NT scholars in what has been termed "rhetorical criticism" /77/ or "structural analysis" and application of this method to certain aspects of NT criticism has proved extremely fruitful. /78/ It is, therefore, not surprising, in view of the obvious care with which the author of the epistle has presented his themes, that close attention has been paid to the problem of discerning the literary structure of Hebrews.

In 1940 L. Vaganay published an important article entitled "Le Plan de l'Épître aux Hébreux", /79/ in which he suggested that the epistle should be divided into five sections:

- A. Jesus superior to the angels (1.5-2.18)
- B. Jesus faithful high priest
compassionate high priest (3.1-5.10)
- C. Jesus, priest according to the order of
Melchisedek
made perfect
author of eternal salvation
(5.11-10.39)
- D. Faith
and perseverance (11.1-12.13)
- E. The Duty of Holiness (12.14-13.21)

As the outline shows, by the year 1940 Vaganay was already drawing attention to a definite symmetrical structure in the epistle with sections A and E each having one line, sections B and D two lines each and section C, the middle section, three lines with the middle line summarizing the central theme of the epistle. Thus he pointed out that the epistle was constructed symmetrically, following the principle of inversion, a principle which has been found to determine the structure of other NT and OT passages. /80/

It was A. Vanhoye; however, who systematically examined the epistle from the point of view of its structure. /81/ He suggested not only that the Epistle had a symmetrical structure but that the author had used literary devices to make known his structure. He listed six such devices:

1. Announcement of the subject. This is a brief sentence or phrase before each major part which presents the theme to be discussed and its principal divisions.

2. Inclusion. This involves the use of the same word at the beginning and the end of a part or section.

3. Hook words. These are words at the beginning of a paragraph repeated from the end of the preceding paragraph and designed to "hook" the two paragraphs together.

4. Characteristic terms. These are terms which are repeated within a section to give it a distinct physiognomy.

5. Alternation of the use of literary structure. This involves the change from one type of discourse to another, especially the change from doctrinal exposition to paraenesis.

6. Symmetrical arrangement. This phrase is used to describe the many patterns formed from correspondences in many details within sections.

Following these principles he elaborated on the outline already suggested by Vaganay and suggested the following outline on his own:

1.1-4 Exordium

1.5-2.18 A name so different from the name of the angels

3.1-4.14 Jesus faithful

4.15-5.10 Jesus compassionate high priest

5.11-6.20 Preliminary exhortation

7.1-28 Jesus high priest according to Melchisedek

8.1-9.28 Come to fulfilment

10.1-18 Cause of eternal salvation

10. 19-39 Final exhortation

11.1,40 The faith of the men of old

12.1-13 The endurance required

12.14-13.19 The peaceful fruit of justice

13.20-21 Peroration

He also analysed very thoroughly the literary structure of individual sections of the epistle.

Most scholars welcomed the book enthusiastically, but many, while agreeing with the main principles behind the work, expressed caution about accepting the findings in toto /82/ and offered alternative outlines of their own. /83/ J. Swetnam, for example, in two important articles in Biblica /84/ suggested an outline which took into greater account the role of content than in Vanhoye's scheme. His primary, literary criteria for indicating structure were "announcements", genres of exposition and paraenesis and length of sections, as well as content, but he assigned a subsidiary role to "hook words", "characteristic words" and "inclusions". His outline is as follows:

- a. 1.1-4 Exordium
- A. 1.5-2.18 Exposition: Christ as divine and human
 - 1.5-2.4 Christ as superior to angels (i.e. divine)
 - 2.5-18 Christ as brother to men (i.e. human)
- B. 3.1-6.20 Exhortation: to faith and hope
 - 3.1-4.13 To faith (based on divinity of Christ)
 - 4.14-6.20 To hope (based on humanity of Christ)
- C. 7.1-10.18 Exposition: Who Jesus was and what he did
 - 7.1-28 Who Jesus was (high priest according to the order of Melchisedek, human and divine)
 - 8.1-10.18 What Jesus did (enter the Holy of Holies and sit at right hand of God)
- D. 10.19-39 Exhortation: response to what Christ did: Love and good works.
- E. 11.1-13.21 Exposition-Exhortation: faith, hope and charity in salvation history

- 11.1-12.2 Faith as an objective reality pointing to the unseen
 12.3-39 Endurance(hope) based on example of Jesus for obtaining an unshakeable kingdom
 13.1-21 Response to God's act in Christ: Christian life as an act of thanksgiving.

Clearly the discussions about the correct outline and literary structure for the epistle will continue for some time to come. As a result of discussions already held, however, some things have become clear.

Firstly, attention must be paid to literary techniques, such as those listed by Vanhoye /85/ and Swetnam /86/ used by the author to indicate structural divisions; hence all insights gained from "rhetorical criticism", must be applied. But secondly, in my view, it is above all the content of the epistle which must be the final decisive factor in determining what outline the author followed. J. Swetnam's words must be heeded by every scholar who would undertake rhetorical criticism of the epistle:

The successes or failure of the attempt (to outline the structure of the epistle) is to be judged by the convergence of formal literary principles, content, and structure into a plausible literary whole which is consonant with Christian tradition: for the suppositions on which the present article is based are 1) that Hebrews is a finely worked piece of literary art and 2) that Hebrews was written and transmitted in the milieu of the primitive and early Christian church. The "proof" - - - or non-proof - - - in other words, is the illumination - - or lack thereof - which the present paper gives the reader. Does the present article aid the reader to make more sense out of the first six chapters of Hebrews than previous attempts at structuring? That is the question.

/87/

When this caveat is heeded, then hopefully one day we will have a structured outline for the epistle on which most scholars can agree and which will throw light on our understanding of the content of the epistle.

Notes

1. Defenders of Pauline authorship were plentiful among the Church Fathers as well as more recently, and need not be listed. One Father who is not so well known, however, was "Basrin the Syrian", who transcribed the Mt Sinai Arabic ms 151 in AD 867, and who gave four pages of argument in favour of the Pauline authorship of the epistle. Cf. H. Staal, "Pauline authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews according to Mt Sinai Arabic ms 151", Reformed Review 21, 1967, pp 14ff.
2. M. Roncaglia, Histoire de l'Église Copte, Lebanon, 1966, T.1.
3. H. Montefiore, The Epistle to the Hebrews, London 1964, 9ff.
4. C. Spicq, L'Épître aux Hébreux, Paris 1952/3³, T.1, 210ff.
5. T.W. Manson, "The Problem of the Epistle to the Hebrews", Studies in the Gospels and Epistles, Philadelphia 1962, 242ff. (originally printed in BJRL 43, 1949/50, 1ff.) He suggested that the epistle was written by Apollos to the churches in the Lycus valley to correct a tendency which later developed into the Colossian heresy.
6. e.g. J. Héring, L'Épître aux Hébreux, Paris 1955, 12 and F. Lo Bue, "The historical background of the Epistle to the Hebrews," JBL 75, 1956, 52-57. He gives a list of authors who support this hypothesis, and suggests that Apollos wrote the epistle from Ephesus to Jewish Christians in Corinth.
7. *op.cit.* 21ff
8. *Ibid.* The arguments he offers are a repetition of those offered by C. Spicq, *op.cit.*, T1, 211ff
9. R. Hoppin, Priscilla, Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews and other essays, New York 1969.
10. A. Harnack, "Probabilia über die Adresse und der Verfasser des Hebräerbriefes", ZNW 1, 1900, 16-41
11. J.A.T. Robinson, Redating the NT, London 1976, 215ff.

12. Cf. J. Frankowski, "Problemy autorstwa do Hebrajczyków i etapy egzegezy katolickiej w dobie współczesnej", Studia Theologica Varsoviensia 6, 1968, 201-33. Article only available in NTA in summary; also 7, 3-33.
13. Cf. the pre-1943 book by W. Leonard, The Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews, London 1939, which gives a traditional Roman Catholic defence of the Pauline authorship.
14. J. Coppens, "L'État présent des études pauliniennes", ETL 1956, 366. E. Grässer, "Der Hebräerbrief 1938-63", ThR(NF)30, 1964, 145 gives a list of the Catholic exegetes who postulate an independent Pauline writer.
15. M. Dibelius, Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur, vol.ii, 1926
16. Cf. p.lx of his commentary.
17. Quoted in Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 6.26.14.
18. op.cit, T1, 39
19. J.J. Wettstein, Novum Testamentum Graecum, Amsterdam 1752.
20. op.cit.88f. In his updated and shortened commentary, L'Épître aux Hébreux, Paris 1977, 15, he comes to similar conclusions.
21. First made by Menegos, La Théologie de l'Épître aux Hébreux, Paris, 1894, 198, quoted from Spicq, op.cit T1, 91 .
22. Der Verfasser des Hebräerbriefes als Schriftausleger, Regensburg 1968, 306
23. S.G. Sowers, The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews, Zurich 1965, 66.
24. R. Williamson, Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews, Leiden 1970.
25. ibid. 10
26. ibid. 576

27. O. Michel, Der Brief an die Hebräer,¹⁰ Göttingen, 1957.
28. Given to the Israel Society for Bible Research at Jerusalem on March 19, 1957.
29. Published as "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Epistle to the Hebrews", Scripta Hierosolymitana, ed. Chaim Rabin and Yigael Yadin, Jerusalem 1958, 36-55.
30. *ibid.* 38.
31. This view had already been given in earlier articles; cf. O. Cullmann, "The significance of the Qumran texts for research into the beginnings of Christianity", JBL 74, 1955, 213ff; F.M. Braun, "L'Arrière-fond judaïque du quatrième et de la Communauté de l'Alliance", RB 62, 5ff. It has been followed and developed by many scholars: C. Spicq, "L'Épître aux Hébreux, Apollos, Jean Baptiste, les Hellénistes et Qumran", RQ 1, 1959, 365-390; J. Betz, Die Eucharistie in der Zeit der griechischen Väter, Fribourg-en-Br., 1961, Vol.ii, 145; R. Schnackenburg, Die Kirche im Neuen Testament, Fribourg-en-Br., 1961, 85; J.W. Bowman, Hebrews, London 1962, 13-16; M. Delcor, "Melchisedek from Genesis to the Qumran texts and the Epistle to the Hebrews", JSJ 2, 1971, 126.
32. H. Kosmala, Hebräer-Essener-Christen, Leiden 1959; cf. also J. Daniélou, The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity, Paris 1957, 112.
33. F.F. Bruce, "'To the Hebrews' or 'To the Essenes'", NTS 9, 1963, 217-252 and J. Coppens, "Les analogies qumraniennes de l'Épître aux Hébreux", NouvRTh 84, 1961, 128-141 and 257-282; cf. also H. Braun, "Qumran und das Neue Testament. Ein Bericht über zehn Jahre Forschung", ThRund., 30, 1964, 274, who also rejects Spicq's position.
34. Bruce, *art.op.cit.*, 232
35. *Comm.* 10th Ed., 111
36. David Flusser, "The Dead Sea Sect and pre-pauline Christianity", Scripta Hierosolymitana, Jerusalem 1958, Vol. iv, 215. He considered that Hebrews' affinities with Qumran go back to pre-pauline Christianity; cf. also H. Braun, *art.op.cit.* 1-38; H.W. Montefiore,

op.cit.16ff; E. Grösser, op.cit. 171-177; A.J.B. Higgins, "The Priestly Messiah", NTS 13, 1967, 232ff.

37. Cf B. Gärtner, The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the NT, Cambridge 1965, esp. 88-99.

38. A.S. Van der Woude, "Melchisedek als himmlische Erlöser-gestalt in den neuerfundnen eschatologischen Midrashim aus Qumran Höhle xi", Qudtestamentliche Studien 14, 1965, 354-373. He gives a Hebrew transcription and an English translation. For other Hebrew transcriptions with English translation cf. M. de Jonge and A.S. Van der Woude, "II Q Melchisedek and the NT, NTS 12, 1966, 301-326 and J.A. Fitzmyer, "Further light on Melchisedek from Qumran Cave 11", JBL, 86, 1967, 25-41; Y. Yadin, "A note on Melchisedek and Qumran", Israel Exploration Journal 15, 1965, 152-154 offers some improvements on Van der Woude's original transcription. For a Hebrew transcription and a French translation cf. J. Carmignac, "Le document de Qumran sur Melchisédeq", RQ vii, 1970, 343-78 and J.T. Milik, "Milki-Sedeq et Milki-Resa dans les anciens écrits juifs et chrétiens", JJS xxii, 1972, 95ff. Carmignac has also drawn attention to a Russian translation by J.D. Amoussine in Vestnik Drevnej Istorii, Moscow 1967, 45-62.

39. Deuteronomy 15.2; Isaiah 61.1; Leviticus 25.10; Isa.52.7.

40. op.cit.152-54

41. op.cit.372ff

42. op.cit.318; cf also 322 where they state that the Melchisedek conception of Hebrews was influenced by notions which are also found at Qumran but do not assume that Hebrews was influenced directly by Qumran.

43. op.cit.267

44. F.L. Horton, The Melchisedek Tradition, a critical examination of the sources to the fifth century AD and in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Cambridge 1976, 161.

45. J.C. McCullough, "Melchisedek's varied role in early exegetical tradition", ThReview 1, 1978, 57f and also 63,N.2 for a list of the more recent

literature on the subject.

46. G.W. Buchanan, "The present state of scholarship on Hebrews", Christianity, Judaism and other Graeco-Roman Cults, ed. J. Neuner, Leiden 1975, 299-330.
47. Shinya Nomoto, "Herkunft und Struktur der Höhenpriestervorstellung im Hebräerbrief", NT 10, 1968, 14 postulates that the author is using an apocalyptic-Hellenistic Jewish tradition of Melchisedek interpretation; cf. G. Theissen, Untersuchungen zum Hebräerbrief, Göttersloh 1969 for a similar view.
48. An expression used by S. Sandmel, "Parallelomania", JBL 81, 1962, 1ff.
49. R. Pardelwitz, "Das literarische Problem des Hebräerbriefes", ZNW 11, 1910, 59ff, 105ff.
50. G. Bornkamm, "Das Bekenntnis im Hebräerbrief", ThL, 1942, 56ff reprinted in Studien zu Antike und Urchristentum, 1959, 188ff.
51. T.W. Manson, op.cit. 242ff.
52. Ibid, 254.
53. E. Käsemann, Das Wandernde Gottesvolk, Göttingen 1938, (present ed. 1961).
54. Cf. J.M. Robinson, "The Coptic Gnostic Library today", NTS 14, 1967/68, 372ff for a discussion of the evidence for non-Christian Gnosticism provided by the finds of Nag-Hammadi. For an up-to-date discussion cf. E. Yamauchi, "Pre-Christian Gnosticism in the Nag-Hammadi texts", Church History 48, 1979, 129ff.
55. Cf. J.M. Robinson, op.cit. 380 who thinks that while Qumran has produced no evidence of a gnostic redeemer, "it has indicated steps towards Gnosticism"; cf. also H. Ringren, "Qumran and Gnosticism" in Le origini dello gnosticismo, Colloquio di Messina 13-18 Aprile 1966, ed. Ugo Bianchi, Leiden 1970, 379ff and in the same volume, M. Mansoor, "The Nature of Gnosticism in Qumran", 399.
56. "The significance of the Qumran text for research into the beginnings of Christianity," JBL 74, 1955,

p213f., reprinted in The Scrolls and the NT, ed. K. Stendahl, New York 1957, 18-32; cf. also his "L'Opposition contre le temple de Jerusalem", NTS 5, 1959, 157ff.

57. M. Simon, "Éléments gnostiques chez Philon", Le origini dello gnosticismo, 359-374

58. In Le Origini dello gnosticismo, xxviff., the following definitions of Gnosticism are offered: Gnosticism is the term used to describe the fully developed myths of the second century; proto-gnosticism is the term used to describe earlier primitive forms; pregnosticism describes ideas not yet lodged in a gnostic framework but usable therein once the occasion arises.

59. J.M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, Trajectories through early Christianity, Philadelphia 1971.

60. I. Batdorf, "Hebrews and Qumran, old methods and new directions", Festschrift to honor F. Wilbur Gingrich, ed. E.H. Barth and R.E. Cockroft, Leiden 1972, 26ff. attempts to do this on a small scale. He tries "to fix the cultural milieu underlying Hebrews and Qumran on its trajectory and to discuss both literatures in that light". His conclusions were that "both Hebrews and Qumran (in the limited ways we have suggested) would surely play some part in a gnostic trajectory...". A Ph.D student of Koester has also attempted to find a place for Hebrews "within a diverse and pluralistic situation"; cf. Lala Kalyan Kumar Dey, The Intermediary world and patterns of perfection in Philo and Hebrews, SBL Dissertation Series, Missoula, 1975.

61. O. Hofius, Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes. Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Heb. 6.19f und 10.19f, Tübingen 1972.

62. H.-M. Schenke, "Erwägungen zum Rätsel des Hebräerbriefes", NT und christliche Existenz, Festschrift für H. Braun zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. H.D. Betz und L. Schottroff, 421-437.

63. ibid. 433f; this view is also supported by K.M. Fischer, ThL 99, 1974, 598f.

64. R. Williamson, "The background of the Epistle to the Hebrews", ET 87, 1975/76, 232-237.
65. ibid. 236
66. Cf. G. Scholem, Die jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen, Zurich, 1957 and Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition, 2nd ed. New York 1965 and Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala, StJud. 3, Berlin 1962, 15-29; J. Maier, "Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelsreise in der jüdischen Apokalyptik und Gnosis", Kairoa 5, 1963, 18-40 and Vom Kultus zur Gnosis. Studien zur Vor und Frühgeschichte der "jüdischen Gnosis", Bundeslade, Gottes-
thron und Merkabah, Salzburg 1964
67. R. Williamson, op.cit.236
68. ibid.236
69. For a list of those who date the epistle before AD 70 and those who date it after, cf. J.A.T. Robinson, op.cit.200.
70. Cf. J.A.T. Robinson, op.cit.; G.W. Buchanan, To the Hebrews, New York 1972, 257; cf. also A. Strobel, Der Hebräerbrief, Göttingen, 1975, quoted in Robinson, op.cit.201, N.11. Two major commentaries written in 1964 have also dated the epistle pre-AD 70; cf. Bruce and Montefiore.
71. Cf. H. Thyen, Der Stil der jüdisch-hellenistischen Homilie, Göttingen 1955, 17 who postulates that the ending is not original as does Buchanan, op.cit., 267 who assumes that all of chapter 13 is an addition.
72. Cf. Spicq, op.cit., 24 and W. Marxsen, Introduction to the NT(ET), Philadelphia 1970, 217.
73. F. Renner, An die Hebräer - ein pseudepigraphischer Brief, Münsterschwarzbach, 1970
74. Cf. note 71.
75. Cf. J. Swetnam, "On the literary genre of the 'Epistle' to the Hebrews", NT 11, 1969, 261-269 esp. 266ff.

76. H. Thyen, op.cit., 17; cf Swetnam, op.cit., 261: "The 'Epistle' to the Hebrews is basically a homily, with a few words attached at the end after the manner of a letter"; cf. Buchanan, op.cit., 246 who thinks that it is a homiletic midrash on Psalm 110.

77. This phrase was used by J. Nuilenberg in a lecture printed in JBL 88, 1969, called "Form criticism and beyond", where he talked about examining the "structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit".

78. Cf., for example, K.E. Bailey, Poet and Peasant, Michigan 1976 and Through Peasant Eyes, Michigan 1980, who applied this methodology to the parables; J. Bligh, Galatians in Greek. A Structural Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, Detroit 1966; J. Dewey, "The literary structure of the controversy stories in Mark 2.1-3.6", JBL 92, 1973, 396-401; A.J. Ehlen, The Poetic Structure of a Hodayat from Qumran, unpub. Diss., Harvard Divinity School, 1970; J. Jeremias, "Chiasmus in den Paulusbriefen", Abba, Göttingen 1966, 276-289.

79. In Memorial Lagrange, ed. L.-H. Vincent, Paris 1940, 269-277.

80. Cf. K.E. Bailey, Poet and Peasant, 49ff. for many examples; cf. also R. Gyllenberg, "Die Komposition des Hebräerbriefes", Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok, 22/23, 1957/58, 137-147 for further discussion of a symmetrically constructed outline to the epistle.

81. La Structure littéraire de l'Épître aux Hébreux, Paris 1963; cf. also his A Structured Translation of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Rome 1964 and Situation du Christ, Épître aux Hébreux 1 et 2, Paris 1969 which is a commentary on Heb. 1-2 based on the structure he had already proposed. His article "Discussions sur la structure de l'Épître aux Hébreux", Biblica 55, 1974, 349-380 is a detailed defence and modification of his thesis in the light of the discussions of the previous ten years.

82. For a summary of scholarly reactions cf. Vanhoye,

"Discussions...", op.cit., 349-361.

83. G.W. Buchanan, "The present state of scholarship on Hebrews", op.cit., 316 omits chapter 13 from his scheme; J.Bligh, Chiastic Analysis of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Heythrop 1966, divides the epistle into 25 sections, but his work was not available for this article.

84. "Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6", Biblica 53, 1972, 368-385 and "Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13", Biblica 55, 1974, 333-348.

85. Cf. his Structured Translation, 3f.

86. "Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13", 333f.

87. "Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6", 385.

(To be continued)

Near East School of Theology,
Beirut,
Lebanon

J.C. McCullough

Dr McCullough in an Honours Graduate in Arts (German and French) and a Graduate in Divinity of Queen's University, where he completed his theological studies in Union Theological College; his doctoral thesis was on "The OT Quotations in Hebrews"; sometime Lecturer in the University for the Certificate of Biblical Studies; he pursued post-graduate studies in the University of Heidelberg and is presently Professor of NT in the Near East School of Theology at Beirut. He is an ordained Minister of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.