The Literary Structure
of the Book of Hebrews

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The past 30 years have witnessed considerable discussion over various aspects of the Epistle to the Hebrews.[1] This article and one to be published in the following issue focus on two areas of the discussion, namely, the literary structure of the epistle and the doctrinal center of the epistle. The first of these topics, the epistle's literary structure, is of importance in that it affects one's understanding of how the book is to be dlivided and of the author's development of his argument.[2] This article summarizes the traditional approach to the epistle's structure and then examines contemporary contributions to the discussion.

[1] A number of important bibliographical resources are available. Cf. Erich Grasser, "Der Hebraerbrief 1938–1963," *Theologische Rundschau* 30 (1964): 138-236; M. R. Hillmer, "Priesthood and Pilgrimage: Hebrews in Recent Research," *Theological Bulletin: MacMaster Divinity College* 5 (May 1969): 66-89; F. F. Bruce, "Recent Contributions to the Understanding of Hebrews," *Expository Times* 80 (1968–69): 260-64; George W. Buchanan, "The Present State of Scholarship on Hebrews," in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 12:1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), pp. 299-330; William G. Johnsson, "Issues in the Interpretation of Hebrews," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 15 (1977): 169-87; idem, "The Cultus of Hebrews in Twentieth-Century Scholarship," Expository Times 89 (1978): 104-8; John C. McCullough, "Some Recent Developments in Research on the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Irish Biblical Studies* 2 (1980): 28-45.

[2] For an exposition of the argument of Hebrews, see this writer's "The Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews: Introduction, Prolegomena, and Doctrinal Center" (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1987), pp. 222-48.

Conceptual Analysis

Traditionally most presentations[3] of the argument of Hebrews have divided the epistle in Pauline fashion into a section that is mainly doctrinal (1:1-10:18) and one that is mainly paraenetic (10:19-13:25).[4]   In some of the traditional presentations the doctrinal section is subdivided into two or more parts. Also the proponents of this traditional structure hold that there are paraenetic passages within the doctrinal section[5] and doctrinal contributions within the paraenetic section.

The traditional presentations of the argument divide the epistle "into sections and subsections so as to reveal the development of the argument."[6] They attempt to map out the conceptual structure of the epistle, highlighting the author's themes such as the sonship of Christ, the deity and humanity of Christ, the "rest" of God, the high priesthood of Christ, the New Covenant, the sacrifice of Christ, and the need for faithfulness and perseverance in the Christian life. While most commentators have noted these basic themes, they have failed to agree on all the details "for the simple reason that the author [of Hebrews] composes like a musician intertwining one theme with another."[7]

Literary Patterns in the Book

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF SUBJECT

Dissatisfied with the ways most previous scholars have analyzed the epistle, Albert Vanhoye, a French Jesuit, has argued that

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[3] E.g., Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 4 vols. (reprint, Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), 4:76; Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1892; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), pp. xlviii-l; *Dictionary of the Bible* (Hastings), s.v. "Hebrews, Epistle to," by Alexander Balmain Bruce, 2:327; A. Nairne, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: University Press, 1917), pp. xi-xii; Theodore H. Robinson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Moffatt New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper, 1933), p. xi; Antony Snell, *New and Living Way* (London: Faith Press, 1959), pp. 52-54; Jean Hering, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allsock (London: Epworth Press, 1970), p. xvi; Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 58-59. Also see A. Robert and Andre Feuillet, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. P. W. Skehan et al. (New York: Desclee, 1965), p. 537.

[4] A paraenesis is an exhortation, a call for action.

[5] "The writer is unwilling, even in the development of Truth, to allow the loftiest conception of the Gospel to appear to be a theory only" (Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. li).

[6] John Bligh, "The Structure of Hebrews," *Heythrop Journal* 5 (April 1964): 171.

[7] Ibid.

the key to the structure is to be found in six literary devices used by the author.[9] Vanhoye's thesis has been widely discussed[10] and has influenced a number of modern commentators.[11]

The first of these devices he called *annonces du sujet* (announcements of the subject) or "signpost passages."[12] These are brief statements before a section that indicate the main subject to be treated. For example 1:4, "much better than the angels"; 2:17, "that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest"; 5:9-10, "having been made perfect . . . designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek"; 10:36-39, "you have need of endurance . . . we are . . . those who have faith"; and 12:11, "discipline . . . yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

INCLUSIOS

An inclusio marks off a literary unit by using the same word or phrase at the end of a discussion that was used at the beginning. The passage 1:5-13, for example, begins and ends with the phrase "to which of the angels?" Other examples[13] are 2:5-16 ("for . . . not .. . angels"); 3:1–4:14 (which begins and ends with "heaven[ly]," "Jesus," "high priest," and "confession"); 5:1-10 ("high priest"); 5:11–6:12 ("dull" or "sluggish," **nwqroi**); 7:1-10 ("Melchizedek" and "met"); 12:14–13:20 ("peace"). Shorter examples are "look" (**blepw**) and "unbelief" (3:12, 19); "enter" and "rest" (4:1, 5); "word" (**o[logoj**) (4:12-13); "priest" (7:1, 3); "Abraham" (7:4, 9); "perfection" and "law" (7:11, 19); "oath" (7:20, 28); "first" (8:7, 13); "regulations" (9:1, 10); "Christ" (9:11, 14); "covenant" (9:15, 17); "without blood" (9:18,

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[8] Structure may be defined as the arrangement of the several parts of a written text according to criteria discernible on literary grounds" (James Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6," *Biblica* 53 [1972]: 368, n. 1).

[9] Albert Vanhoye, *La Structure Litteraire de l'Epitre aux Hebreux* (Paris: Desclee De Brouwer, 1963). The main conclusions are presented in English in Albert Vanhoye, *A Structured Translation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. James Swetnam (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964), pp. 3-7.

[10] Cf., e.g., Bligh, "The Structure of Hebrews," pp. 170-77; T. C. G. Thornton, "Reviews," *Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series 15 (1964): 137-41.

[11] Hugh W. Montefiore, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1964), p. 31; George W. Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1972), p. ix; Neil R. Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 46-50; Paul Ellingworth and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook of the Letter to the Hebrews* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1983), pp. 341-42; David A. Black, "The Problem of the Literary Structure of Hebrews: An Evaluation and a Proposal," *Grace Theological Journal* 7 (Fall 1986): 163-77.

[12] Cf. Bligh, "The Structure of Hebrews," p. 171.

[13] Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today*, p. 48.

22); "Christ" (9:24, 28); "year by year" (10:1, 3); "offering" (10:11, 18); "terrifying" (10:27, 31); "not seen" (11:1, 7); "not . . . afraid" and "king" (11:23, 27); "through faith" (11:33, 39); "sons" (12:5, 8); and "leaders" (13:7, 17).

HOOK WORDS[14]

A hook word is a word at the beginning of a paragraph repeated from the end of the preceding paragraph which links or hooks the two units together in a smooth transition. The main hook words in Hebrews are as follows:[15]

1:4, **ἄγγελοι** ("angels")	8:13, **ἡ πρώτη** ("the first")
1:5, **ἄγγελοι**	9:1, **ἡ πρώτη**
2:13, **παιδία** ("children")	9:23, **τὰ ἐπουράνια**
2:14, **παιδία**	("the heavenly things")
2:17, **πιστός** ("faithful")	9:24, **οὐρανός**
3:2, **πιστός**	10:39, **πιστός** ("faith")
2:17, **ἀρχιερεύς**	11:1, **πιστός**
("high priest")	11:7, **κληρονόμος** ("heir")
3:1, **ἀρχιερεύς**	11:8, **κληρονόμος**
3:19, **εἰσέρχομαι** ("enter")	11:39, **μαρτυρέω**
4:1, **εἰσέρχομαι**	("gain approval," i.e., having
4:5, **εἰσέρχομαι** ("enter")	been witnessed to)
4:6, **εἰσέρχομαι**	12:1, **μάρτυροι** ("witnesses")
4:14, **ἔχω** ("have")	11:40, **ἡμᾶς** ("us")
4:15, **ἔχω**	12:1, **ἡμεῖς** ("we")
6:12, **ἐπαγγελίαι** ("promises")	12:24, **λαλέω** ("speaking")
6:13, **ἐπαγγελίαι**	12:25, **λαλέω**

CHARACTERISTIC TERMS

These are terms that are repeated for emphasis within a particular section. Vanhoye[16] cited as examples the word **ἄγγελος** in 1:5-2:18 and the word **πίστις** in 11:1-40.

ALTERNATION OF LITERARY GENRES

The text of the epistle, Vanhoye noted, alternates between doctrinal exposition and exhortation. For example the two paragraphs of exposition in the first part of Vanhoye's outline (1:5-14; 2:5-18)

[14] Vanhoye's concept of *mots-crochets* or "hook words" was first suggested by L. Vaganay ("Le Plan de 1'Epitre aux Hebreux," in *Memorial Lagrange* [Paris, 1940], pp. 269-77). Cf. Thornton, "Reviews," p. 138, n. 1.
[15] Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today*, p. 49.
[16] Vanhoye, *A Structured Translation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 4.

are separated by a paragraph of exhortation (2:1-4). In his overall
analysis of the epistle he saw the following pattern:

1:1-4	Introduction
1:5-14	Exposition
2:1-4	Paraenesis
2:5-5:10	Exposition
5:11-6:20	Paraenesis[17]
7:1-10:18	Exposition
10:19-39	Paraenesis
11:1-40	Exposition
12:1-13	Paraenesis
12:14-13:19	Paraenesis
13:20-25	Conclusion

In a more recent study Fenton has made the same observation and
has divided the epistle as follows:[18]

1:1-4	Introduction
1:5-14	Exposition
2:1-4	Exhortation
2:5-18	Exposition
3:1-4:16	Exhortation
5:1-10	Exposition
5:11-6:20	Exhortation
7:1-10:18	Exposition
10:19-39	Exhortation
11:1-40	Exposition
12:1-29	Exhortation
13:1-25	Conclusion

Fenton made three significant observations about this pattern of
alternation: (1) Verbs in the imperative are more common in the ex-
hortations than in the expositions. (2) The author used third person

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[17] According to Vanhoye's scheme Hebrews 5:11-6:20 introduces a new section. This
suggests, however, that paraenesis is presented *before* exposition, "surely a reversal of
the normal procedure" (Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6," p. 385).

[18] J. C. Fenton, "The Argument in Hebrews," *Studio Evangelica* 7 (1982): 175-76. For an
outline similar to Fenton's see William G. Johnsson, *Hebrews*, Knox Preaching Guides
(Atlanta: John Knox, 1980), p. 2. Also see George E. Rice, "Apostasy as a Motif and Its
Effect on the Structure of Hebrews," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23 (Spring
1985): 29-35.

expressions in the expositions (e.g., 1:14; 2:11; 5:9; 9:15, 28; 10:1, 14), but he used the first and second persons in verbs in the hortatory passages. (3) Four of the five exhortations are introduced by "therefore" (**dia›touîto,** 2:1; ** oæen**, 3:1; **ouîn**, 10:19; **toigarouîn**, 12:1).[19]
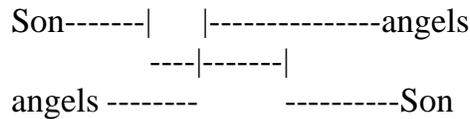
SYMMETRICAL ARRANGEMENTS (I.E., CHIASMUS)

Vanhoye argued that the structure of the epistle, both as a whole and in its parts, shows numerous chiastic patterns (*symetries concentriques*).[20] By way of example he pointed to the central section of his outline (8:1-9:28) where, he argued, the six subdivisions "mutually correspond, two by two, according to a concentric order (the first with the sixth, the second with the fifth, the third with the fourth)."
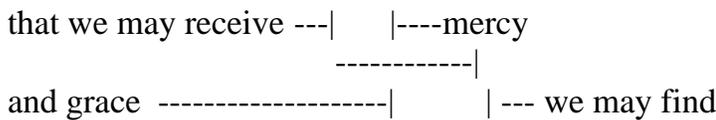
c. The old worship, earthly and figurative (8:1-6)

    b. The first covenant, imperfect and provisional: (8:7-13)

        a . The old and powerless institutions of worship (9:1-10)

        A. The new, efficacious institutions (9:11-14)

    B . The new covenant (9:15-23)

C. The entrance to heaven (9:24-28).21

Other examples of chiastic structure are given by Lightfoot.22 First he cites 1:5-8:

    Son-------| |---------------angels

          ----|-------|

    angels --------   ----------Son

He also mentions 4:16:

that we may receive ---| |----mercy

                 ------------|

and grace -------------------| | --- we may find

[19] In 5:11-14 the author shifted from the third person (5:9) to the first and second, so Fenton included this paragraph in the third hortatory section (i.e., 5:11-6:20). He noted that 6:1 begins with "therefore" (**dioî**, but conceded that this probably refers back to 5:11-14 and not 5:1-10 (Fenton, "The Argument in Hebrews," p. 176). It might be added here that the author used a number of additional "therefores,' "wherefores" or "thens" to introduce shorter exhortations (**dioî** 3:7; **ouîn**, 4:1; **ouîn**, 4:11; **ouîn**, 4:14; **ouîn**, 4:16; **dioî** 12:12; **dioî** 12:28; **toinun**, 13:13; **ouîn**, 13:15). Cf. C. J. Sanford, "The Addressees of Hebrews" (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1962), pp. 68-69. Cf. also 'W. C. Linss, "Logical Terminology in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 37 (June 1966): 365.

20 Vanhoye, *A Structured Translation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 4; cf. Thornton, "Reviews," p. 138.

21 Ibid., pp. 4, 20-23.

22 Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today*, p. 47. For other examples see Philip E.. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdinans Publishing Co., 1977), pp. 49, 90.

Vanhoye's chiastic analysis of the entire epistle is as follows:[23]

a Introduction (1:1-4)

      1 The name above that of angels (1:5-2:18)

          2 a   Jesus, the faithful one (3:1-4:14)

               2b Jesus, the compassionate high priest (4:15-5:10)

               —Preliminary exhortation (5:11-6:20)

                    3a Jesus and Melchizedek (7:1-28)

                        3b Jesus attained fulfillment (8:19:28)

                    3c Jesus, cause of salvation (10:1-18)

               —Final exhortation (10:19-39)

               4a The faith of men of old (11:1-40)

          4b Endurance is necessary (12:1-13)

      5 The fruit of righteousness (12:14-13:19)

z Conclusion (13:20-25).

      Unquestionably Vanhoye rendered a valuable service to students of the Epistle to the Hebrews. His emphasis on the alternation between exposition and paraenesis is a significant one, and his observations concerning announcements and hook words demonstrate the careful structure of the epistle. Much of his outline is correct. For example, 1:1-2:14 and 7:1-28 are distinct units; 8:1 begins a new division; 10:19 introduces an exhortation; and 11:1-40 is a distinct unit.[24]

      Nevertheless particular aspects of his study have been criticized.[25] The following observations may be made. (1) "Literary principles alone are not a sufficient basis for analyzing structure."[26] Such principles cannot be considered in isolation from content.[27] To cite just one example, it is unlikely that the phrase "peaceful fruit of righteousness" (12:11) announces a major division in the argument.[28] (2) The titles assigned to the sections do not reflect the development

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[23] Vanhoye, *A Structured Translation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 7. The typographical arrangement given here is adapted from Ellingworth and Nida (*A Translator's Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 342). It is designed to show Vanhoye's concentric or chiastic view of the epistle.

[24] James Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13," *Biblica* 55 (1974): 346.

[25] Bligh, "The Structure of Hebrews," pp. 173-77; Thornton, "Reviews," pp. 138-41; Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6," pp. 368-85; idem, "Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13," pp. 333-48.

[26] Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6," p. 385; cf. p. 369.

[27] Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13," p. 347.

[28] Bligh, "The Structure of Hebrews," p. 174.

of the author's thought, that is, they do not indicate the direction the argument is taking.[29]

(3) While a number of small chiastic patterns are to be found, the existence of a large-scale pattern embracing all sections of the epistle is to be questioned for several reasons. First, Vanhoye concluded that 13:19 and 13:22-25 were not originally a part of Hebrews in that they do not fit his chiastic structure.[30] Any proposal, however, that eliminates part of the original document must be considered a failure.[31] Second, Vanhoye's concentric structure led him to see correspondences between sections I and V and between II and IV according to the scheme Eschatology-Eschatology and Ecclesiology-Ecclesiology with the central section (III) being devoted to sacrifice.[32]

I.	1:5-2:18	Eschatology
II.	3:1-5:10	Ecclesiology
III.	5:11-10:39	Sacrifice
IV.	11:1-12:13	Ecclesiology
V .	12:14-13:18	Eschatology

These categories are somewhat forced, however. One might ask for example, how 13:1-6 can be included under eschatology when 11:1-40 is omitted (cf. especially vv. 1, 9-10, 16, 40). Further there is no clear parallel between section 1 (entitled "A name so different from the name of the angels") and section 5 (entitled "The peaceful fruit of righteousness").[33] Third, Vanhoye's work seemed to assume that the epistle was composed by using modern literary conventions (chapter headings, clearly marked paragraphs, punctuation, and modern typographical layout). The epistle, however, was written without any breaks, subdivisions, punctuation, or other modern writing aids. It was written to be read aloud, not silently. None of the first listeners would be able to appreciate the elaborate symmetrical patterns Vanhoye envisioned.[34]

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[29] Ibid., p. 175.

[30] Vanhoye, *La Structure Litteraire*, pp. 219-21, cited by Floyd V. Filson, *Yesterday: A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13* (Naperville, IL: Alex. R. Allenson, 1966), pp. 15-16, n. 8.

[31] Buchanan felt that Vanhoye's outline would be improved if Hebrews 13 were eliminated. Buchanan believed that Hebrews originally had only 12 chapters ("The Present State of Scholarship on Hebrews," p. 316).

[32] Vanhoye, *La Structure Litteraire*, pp. 238-47, cited by Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13," p. 345.

[33] Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13," p. 345.

[34] Thornton, "Reviews," pp. 139-40.

(4) Not all of Vanhoye's literary devices, therefore, are of equal value. Swetnam, for example, singled out announcements, genres of exposition and exhortation, and length as primary criteria and cited inclusios, hook words, and characteristic terms as subsidiary.[35] (5) The complexity posed by the convergence of all the criteria (inclusios, hook words, announcements, characteristic words, and chiastic patterns) is a problem to even the most alert minds.[36]

COMPARATIVES

In addition to the six literary devices noted by Vanhoye, six others have a bearing on the author's argument. It has been observed, for example, that the author used a large number of comparatives to support his argument (which runs through the entire epistle) that the new revelation in Christ is superior to the old. The following comparatives are used:[37] **diaforwterwj** ("more excellent," 1:4; 8:6); **elatwn** ("lesser," 7:7; cf. **elattow**, 2:7, 9); **kreittwn**/ **kreisswn** ("better," 1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6 [twice]; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24); **mallon** ("more," 9:14; 10:25; 12:9, 13, 25); **meizwn** ("greater," 6:13, 16; 9:11; 11:26); **perissoteron**) ("even more," 6:17; 7:15); **perissoterwj** ("all the more," 2:1; 13:19); **pleiwn** ("more," 3:3 [twice]; 7:23; 11:4); **teleioteroj** ("more perfect," 9:11); **tomwteroj** ("sharper," 4:12); **uyhloteroj** ("exalted, above," 7:26); and **xeirwn** ("severer," 10:29).[38]

TERMS DENOTING FINALITY

It has also been observed[39] that a number of terms (viz., "new," "once," "eternal/forever," "perfect") in Hebrews suggest that the author is arguing the superiority or finality of the new revelation as compared with the old. Christ has established a New (**kainh**) Covenant which has made the first obsolete (**pepalaiwken**, 8:13; cf. 9:15). He has inaugurated (**egkainizw**) a new (**prosfatoj**) way into God's presence (10:20).

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[35] Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 7–13," p. 333. Swetnam's "announcements" are 1:4; 2:3-4; 2:17-18; 4:13; 6:20; 7:29; 10:18, 39; 12:1-2; 12:28-29 (p. 347) .

[36] Ibid., p. 346.

[37] Fenton, "The Argument in Hebrews," pp. 176-77.

[38] Other comparative terms occur: **wj** (22 times), **ouswj** (9 times), **kaqwj** (8 times), **tosoutoj** (5 times), **wsper** (3 times), **omoiow** (3 times), **wsei, kaqaper, kaqwsper, wste** (once each). Cf. Linss, "Logical Terminology in the Epistle to the Hebrews," p. 368.

[39] Donald Medford Stine, "The Finality of the Christian Faith: A Study of the Unfolding Argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Chapters 1-7" (ThD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1964), pp. 29-44.

Besides this revelation through Christ being "new" it is also unique, as the author illustrates by his use of **ef apac** and **apac**. Christ has been once (**apac**) manifested to put away sin (9:26). In sharp contrast to the daily sacrifices and unending service of the Old Testament priests (9:6; 10:11), Jesus has offered Himself once for all (**ef apac**, 7:27) and has once for all (**ef apac**, 9:12) entered the heavenly sanctuary.[40]

The new order is also eternal. Under the Old Covenant the priests died, but under the new there is a Priest who abides forever (**eij ton aiwna**, 7:23-24). The new order, in contrast with the old (cf. 7:19; 10:1), "perfects" (**teleiow**) the worshipers of God (10:12-.14; cf. 7:11).

A FORTIORI ARGUMENTS

Building on the accepted assumptions of his readers (i.e., on the authority of the Law, the efficacy of the Old Testament sacrifices, and reverence for one's father) the author used a series of a fortiori arguments to demonstrate the supremacy of the new revelation in Christ:[41] 2:1-3; 9:13-14; 10:28-29; 12:9, 25. The more serious perils and more effective promises of the new revelation were presented a fortiori with the clear implication that the new revelation is better.

FORMAL CONTRAST

The author also used adversative particles to delineate the contrast between the old and new revelations.[42] He contrasted the angels and the Son of God in 1:7-8 (**men . . . de**), angels and man in 2:5-6 (**ou gar . . . de**), fallen man and messianic man in 2:8-9 (**oupw . . . de**), the Son and Moses in 3:5-6 (**men . . . de**), Jesus and the Levitical high priest in 4:15 (**ou . . . de**), the sons of Levi and Melchizedek in 7:5-6 (**men . . . de**) and 7:8 (**wde men . . . ekei de**), the physical requirement of the Law and Christ's indestructible life in 7:16 (**ou . . . alla**), the weak commandment and the better hope in 7:18-19 (**men . . . de**), the authority in back of the Levitical priests and the Son in 7:20-21 (**men . . . de**), the transitoriness of the Old Testament priesthood and the permanence of that of Christ in 7:23-24 (**men . . . de**), the earthly ministry of the Levitical priesthood and the heavenly one of Christ in 8:4-6 (**men . . . nuni de**), the earthly tabernacle of the Old Testament and the perfect tabernacle of Christ in 9:1-5, 11 (**men . . . Xristoj de**), and the Old Testament sacrifices and the sacrifice of Christ in 9:23-24 (**de . . . all**), 9:25-26 (**nuni de apac**) and 10:11-13 (**oudepote . . . de**).

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[40] Cf. Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, trans. F. V. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), p. 121.

[41] Stine, "The Finality of the Christian Faith," pp. 44-47.

[42] Ibid., pp. 61-82.

REPEATED THEMES

In discussing Vanhoye's work, Buchanan noted that certain themes echo throughout the epistle: (1) the origin of the ages (1:2; 11:3), (2) exaltation (1:3; 4:14; 7:26; 8:1), (3) high priest (2:17; 3:1-2; 4:14-15; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11), (4) holding fast (3:6; 3:14; 10:23), and (5) the promises (4:1; 6:11-12, 15, 17; 8:6; 9:15; 10:36; 11:9, 13, 17, 39). The author of Hebrews, Buchanan said, was a literary artist who did not say all that he had to say on a subject in one place, even though his units were well structured. Instead he "composed his document as intricately and as carefully as a musical composer might, with many themes woven throughout."[43]

TOPIC SENTENCES

Stine has argued that the epistle falls into three sections: 1:1-7:28; 8:1-10:18; and 10:19-13:25. He noted that each is introduced by a topic sentence: 1:1-4; 8:1-2; and 10:19-25.[44]

Scripture Citations in the Book

A number of North American scholars, approaching the Epistle to the Hebrews from another angle, have contended that the author's argument is structured around several Old Testament citations. These interpreters disagree, however, on which Old Testament passages are key: Caird suggested Psalms 8, 95, 110, and Jeremiah 31; Kistemaker had Psalms 8, 95, 110, 40; Longenecker mentioned the catena of citations in Hebrews 1, Psalms 8, 95, 110, and Jeremiah 31; and Johnson offered Psalms 2 and 110, Jeremiah 31, and Psalm 40.[45] In

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[43] Buchanan, "The Present State of Scholarship on Hebrews" p. 316.

[44] Stine, "The Finality of the Christian Faith," p. 106, nn. 2 and 3. Other scholars have divided the epistle in the same way as Stine (e.g., Gleason L. Archer, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Shield Bible Study Series [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957], pp. 9-14; Carter, "Hebrews," in The Wesleyan Bible Commentary, 6 vol., ed. Charles W. Carter [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964769], 6:5-7). Otto O. Michel also divided the epistle into three sections: 1:1-4:13; 4:14-10:39; and 11:1-13:25 (*Der Brief an die Hebraer*, 12th ed. [Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1966], pp. 92, 204, 368). Others have followed a similar threefold division, including Paul Feine and Johannes Behm, *Introduction to the New Testament*, ed. W. G. Kummel, trans. A. J. Mattill (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 274-75; Snell, *New and Living Way*, pp. 52-54. Swetnam based his threefold division on the occurrence of **omologia** ("confession") in 3:1; 4:14; and 10:23 ("Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13," p. 347). Franz Delitzsch in an earlier time had also divided the epistle into three sections: 1:1–6:20; 7:1–10:18; and 10:19–13:25 (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2 vols., trans. T. L. Kingbury [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978], 1:v-vii; 2:v-vii).

[45] George B. Caird, "The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 5 (1959): 44-51; Simon Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations*

spite of this minor disagreement, however, these writers agree that the major sections of the epistle all have at their core an Old Testament passage that controls the drift of the argument.[46] Adopting a composite list, including the suggestions of all four scholars, one might outline the epistle as follows:

Section in Hebrews	Old Testament Passage
1:1-2:4	Psalms 2 and 110 (cf. 2 Sam. 7)
2:5-18	Psalm 8:4-6
3:1-4:13	Psalm 95:7-11
4:14-7:28	Psalm 110:4
8:1-9:28	Jeremiah 31:31-34
10:1-18	Psalm 40:6-8
10:19-13:25	Psalm 95:7-11
	(Habakkuk 2:3-4?).[47]

Conclusions

Interpreters of Hebrews have differed widely in their analyses of the overall structure of the epistle. Mackay's observation that exegetes of Hebrews have "always been happier with the trees than the wood"[48] is well taken.[49] Nevertheless each interpreter must

in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Amsterdam: Wed. G. Van Soest N. V., 1961), pp. 95-131; Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 174-85; S. Lewis Johnson, *The Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), pp. 53-54. Cf. also H. J. B. Combrink, "Some Thoughts on the Old Testament Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Neotestamentica* 5 (1971): 31. Combrink said the Old Testament quotations "constitute the framework of this letter." Buchanan asserted that Psalm 110 "is the main text of the entire book" (Hebrews, pp. 8, 132).

[46] Caird, "The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews," p. 47. Caird said of other Old Testament passages in Hebrews: "All other scriptural references [in Hebrews] are ancillary to these" Old Testament passages.

[47] Kistemaker classified 10:19-13:25 under faithfulness (*The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 131, n. 1). The present writer suggests Habakkuk 2:3-4 (cf. Heb. 10:37-38) in that it strikes both an eschatological note (cf. Heb. 11:9, 10, 16, 40; 12:22-28; 13:14) and a note of exhortation to faithfulness and perseverance (cf. Heb. 11; 12:1-13; 13:7-17), themes that dominate the final section of the epistle.

[48] Cameron Mackay, "The Argument of Hebrews," *Church Quarterly Review* 168 (1967): 325-38.

[49] James Moffatt (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924], pp. xxiii-xxiv) implied that it was artificial to divide the epistle into formal divisions and subdivisions, yet he went ahead and gave a general plan:
A. The personality of the Son (1:1-4:13)
B. The Son as high priest (4:14-7:28)
C. The sacrifice of this high priest (8:1-10:18)
D. Appeals for constancy (10:1.9-13:25).

study the epistle for himself, carefully evaluate the observations of others, and then set forth a structure that helps the reader make the most sense out of Hebrews.[50]

The present writer suggests the following conclusions: (1) The literary devices suggested by Vanhoye provide the interpreter with a measure of certainty in determining the "joints" of the epistle's structure. (2) Of the literary devices Vanhoye suggested, announcements, hook words, and the alternation of literary genres are primary, yet the others, though subsidiary, help the interpreter see how the author constructed his units of thought. (3) Any presentation of the author's argument must make clear that his expositions lead to exhortations in five major sections (2:1-4; 3:1–4:16; 5:11–6:20; 10:19-39; 12:1-29).[51] (4) Content—that is, the basic themes or concepts of the author as recognized in the history of the exegesis of the epistle—as well as literary devices must be taken into account when presenting the argument. If literary principles and content are divorced, then the content will be distorted.[52] (5) The author's use of comparatives, terms denoting finality, a fortiori arguments, and adversative particles make clear the overall thrust of his argument, namely, that the priesthood, covenant, and sacrifice of Christ are superior to the priesthood, covenant, and sacrifices of the Old Testament. (6) It is evident that the entire argument is built around several key Old Testament passages (viz., Pss. 2; 8; 95; 110; Jer. 31; Ps. 40; Hab. 2).

[50] Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13," p. 348.

[51] On the basis of the threefold occurrence of **oJmologiVa** ("confession," 3:1; 4:14; 10:23) Swetnam argued for three paraenetic sections (3:1-4:13; 4:14-6:20; and 10:19-39) ("Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13," p. 347).

[52] Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6," p. 369. The two articles by Swetnam are helpful in achieving a balance between form and content. He warned, however, that though a measure of certainty is possible in structuring and tracing the argument, absolute certainty is not. He wrote, "Scientific 'certitude' as this term is applied to literary interpretation ... can be positively misleading; any attempt to achieve a quasi-mathematical certitude by isolating 'objective' factors which can then be presumed reliable for determining meaning is to try to impose on words an alien methodology" ("Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13," p. 348).

From the Depths of Despair to the Promise of Presence: A Rhetorical Reading of the Book of Joel. Joel Arthur Barker. History. The Literary Structure of the Book of Hebrews 193 (4) Not all of Vanhoye's literary devices, therefore, are of equal value. Swetnam, for example, singled out announcements, genres of exposition and exhortation, and length as primary criteria and cited inclusios, hook words, and characteristic terms as subsidiary. 35 (5) The complexity posed by the convergence of all the criteria (inclusios, hook words, announcements, characteristic words, and chiastic patterns) is a problem to even the most alert minds. 36 COMPARATIVES In addition to the six literary devices noted by Vanhoye, six others h