

SERMON

What In Heaven Is Jesus Doing Right Now?

Hebrews 4:14-16

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The first time Americans heard the expression was September 9, 1966. Since that time, it has become a slogan, a proverb, a joke, and a piece of Americana. On the earliest episode of *Star Trek*, Captain Kirk, otherwise known as William Shatner, said, “We’re going to go where no man has gone before.” This statement was so impressive that the producers decided to place it in the introduction of *Star Trek* every week—“to go where no man has gone before.”

Now, balanced people realize that this TV series is about people who never existed, going to a place they never went and encountering things they never really encountered. If you go to a *Star Trek* convention, you’ll find some people who are not quite sure about that, but most people know that *Star Trek* is just science fiction.

But on a higher, heavier, holier level, this passage pulls back the curtain on a distinctive part of our Christian faith—that Jesus Christ, Son of Man and Son of God (as much man as He was God), has gone where no man like Him has ever gone before. Our great High Priest has passed through the heavens and subsequently is in another dimension and another zone.

Remember that the Christian confession is this: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). We believe in a holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All of them are co-existent and co-eternal. As the Nicene Creed asserts, Jesus was begotten, not made. In other words, there never was a time when He did not exist. But there was a time when He was not clothed in human

flesh. From all eternity, before Bethlehem and the Incarnation, before that crèche in Bethlehem, before that manger in a cow stable, He was the eternal Word of God.

Christianity makes one of the most staggering claims any faith has ever made: That eternal Word clothed Himself in human flesh and was born in a barn. He wore that flesh in a sinless life. It was nailed to a bloody cross. That flesh was then placed in a cold borrowed tomb. On Easter it stood up and ascended to the right hand of God the Father. And now, He has gone where no one like Him has ever gone before.

From there the risen and ascended Lord watches us with sympathy in our weakness. On top on a mountain overlooking Paris is the gleaming Cathedral of the Sacred Heart on Montmartre overlooking Paris. Over the altar of the cathedral is the largest mosaic of the face of Jesus in the world. Triumphant, risen, cosmic and engaged, regardless of where you stand in the cathedral He looks at you with compassion and sympathy. You cannot find a place in the church where He is not looking at you. So is the Great High Priest of our salvation ascended to the right hand of the Father.

Jesus, our great High Priest

First Timothy 6:16-17 says, “God . . . alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see.” In other words, He is an invisible, immortal, pure spirit. But out there, in another dimension, is the God-man—Christ Jesus. You may be asking, “What in heaven is Jesus doing right now?” He is there as our great High Priest—a sympathetic High Priest who can be approached with boldness for you to find His pity and grace to help in times of need.

Not only has Jesus gone where no man has gone before, but He has also been given a title that no man ever had before. We're used to reading this phrase in Hebrews 4, "great High Priest," but we can search the Old Testament and all the Hebrew literature that preceded it, and never find that phrase. It talks about a "great priest" and a "high priest," but because Jesus has gone where no man has ever gone before, He alone has been given the name, "great High Priest." Actually, the word in Greek is *mega*; He's the "mega" High Priest. That is, He enjoys the title that no one else ever has been given.

Jesus *is* a priest. In modern terms, He is a double agent who stands before God for you, and He stands before you for God. Now, even though Jesus acts as that great High Priest/Double Agent, He's not in front of God because He's got to change God's mind about loving you. That's a misunderstanding of Jesus' High Priesthood. It's not that God is up there in heaven as angry as He can be. No, Jesus is up there serving as the great High Priest, not to convince God to love you, but to convince you that God *does* love you. He's not there because God wants to bar you from His presence; instead, He's there to let you know that God *doesn't* want to bar you from His presence.

Jesus passed through the heavens

There's another phrase used here that isn't mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament: "He has passed through the heavens." On that day recorded in the first chapter of Acts when the risen Jesus ascended to heaven, back to the right hand of the Father, He looked up at God as He rose through the clouds. That terminology works all right if you live in the Northern Hemisphere. But if you live in the Southern Hemisphere,

that “up” is your “down.” This is simply figurative language describing that He moved into another dimension, or zone.

We may be able to understand this today better than anyone else ever has in history. Modern cosmologists and physicists who study the universe say that there’s every possibility that parallel universes exist. Right next to our universe, around us and among us, could be a whole other sphere of being. I don’t know where Jesus went, but He went where He is, and He’s the great High Priest. Whether it’s up there, down there, in another zone or dimension, He wears that title.

You have to understand that this phrase, “passed through the heavens,” has a historical background. For 1400 years, the Hebrews had a physical temple in a physical city with physical priests who “passed through” that temple. When they came to work, they walked through the Court of the Gentiles, the Court of the Women, the Court of the Men, and the Court of the Priests. According to the Book of Leviticus, once a year the high priest, carrying the blood from bulls and goats, would go behind the curtain that was 60 feet wide, 30 feet tall, and as thick as a man’s hand, into the Holy of Holies. Trembling with awe, he would present the sacrifice to God and hope that he would get out of there alive.

This annual Old Testament event is a scale model, a metaphor, a poem, a picture, a hint, an evocation pointing toward reality—that one day our great High Priest, of which all of that was just a shadow, would pass, not just through a tiny building in a tiny city in the Middle East, but through the heavens into the very presence of God Himself. And there He is, your great High Priest.

All of us want to know what's on the other side. What's on the other side of time? What's on the other side of space? What's on the other side of what we can see? What's on the other side when we draw our last breath? Where have those whom we've loved and lost gone? What this passage tells us is that whatever is on the other side, Jesus is there. That, in and of itself, ought to be enough.

Hold fast your confession

Mountaineers rope themselves together under certain circumstances when they climb alpine peaks and Tibetan mountains. The person above them whom they may not ever see has a rope tied to him or her. All the way down the mountain face they're tied together, unless they decide they're too weak or dehydrated or starved for oxygen to do that. But this system doesn't always work. The theory is that if you're tied to the person above you and you fall off the mountain, those anchored to the mountain can drag you up.

On July 15, 2011, in the Meitin Glacier of the Swiss Alps, three expert climbers roped together all fell to their deaths because those at the bottom thought that the one at the top was able to hold the rope. There was another instance when two men were tied together while mountaineering. One of them fell off the face of the mountain, and the other held on to the rope for as long as he could. But when the spikes he had driven into the mountain loosened and the rope began to cut off the circulation to his hands, he had to cut the rope, or he would die as well.

Our great High Priest has gone up above us. In the storms of life, we often don't see where He is, but He is *never* going to cut the rope. He has gone inside the veil, and

we can pull on that rope. I've spent a lifetime discovering there's Someone on the other end who never lets go, never comes loose, and never loses his footing.

When I say that I have a great High Priest, it means that I am tethered to Somebody who has gone into another dimension on my behalf. If that's true and He's holding His place for me there, the least I can do is hold my confession for Him down here. The end of verse 14 says, "Let us hold fast our confession." Because I have a great High Priest, my mega-priest, who is in another dimension holding on to the rope, I want to spend my lifetime holding fast my confession.

The Book of Hebrews talks a great deal about holding. Verse 6 of chapter 3 says, "If we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end . . ." Hebrews 10:23 says, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, because He who promised is faithful." Hebrews is full of this concept of "holding your confession."

I've made up my mind that if He's going to hold on to the other end of the rope up there for me as the great High Priest, I'm going to hold to my confession today. If you're a child in the sunshine days of life when God is in His heaven and all is right with your world, hold to your confession. If you're a teenager in the midst of insidious peer pressure that mocks your confession, hold to your confession. If you're in the middle of life—in the sandwich generation with people under you who are younger and those above you who are older that are depending on you—and the winds of life are blowing hard, hold to your confession. If you're old and your eyesight is dim and your steps feeble and you don't know if you're going to make it another day, hold your confession.

In good days when life smiles on you, hold your confession. In bad days when life pounds on you, hold to your confession. If people stand with you, hold your confession.

If people abandon you, hold to your confession. It's really not rocket science: He's holding there, so the least I can do is hold my confession here. He said, "Hold (grasp)!" You may say, "Well, I just can't hold out." No, you *can* hold because you're held.

In the lobby of Spurgeon's College in south London, there's a stained glass window that's quite unusual. It features one hand holding another hand and a Latin inscription underneath it that reads, *Teneo et teneor* ("I hold, and I am held.") Some of you may be wondering how you can hold your confession. You may not even know how to face the day. But let me encourage you that you can hold because you are held. Can't you be loyal to Jesus if He's holding the other end of that rope?

Many of us saw that remarkable, striking video that has gone viral about the funeral of a Navy SEAL in Rockford, Illinois. He was involved in that tragic helicopter accident in Afghanistan. Fifteen hundred people came out, but what made the service unusual was the sight of a dog lying directly under the casket. The SEAL had a Labrador Retriever that was as close to him as life itself. The strangest thing was that the dog would not leave the casket, so they let the dog go to the memorial service. They led the dog in, and it just lay down under the casket and whimpered. Many people made a lot out of that incident. People like me were moved by it; we got a lump in our throat, impressed by the dog's loyalty. Others thought that a dog had no place at a funeral service.

That story grabbed my mind. Here's what I took away from this incident: If a dog is willing to stay by the casket of a dead soldier, can't I hold on to a living Christ? I hold the hope because I'm being held.

You can hold on because Jesus is a sympathetic High Priest.

Many of you might say, "You don't know what I'm facing." Nevertheless, verse 15 says, "We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses." There's one thing we can all agree on: we all have real individual weaknesses—not imaginary weaknesses, not science fiction weaknesses, not special angel dust weaknesses.

I have down-to-earth, flesh-and-blood weaknesses. So I've got to decide, *What happens to me? How does the universe respond to that? Is there nobody out there to help me?* And I fight my little battles, shed my little tears and wet my pillow every night and wonder how I'm going to face the next day. I feel nobody is out there. Or, if Somebody is out there, is He just mad about the whole thing and doesn't want anything to do with me? This word says that at the heart of all creation is the ascended God-man, Jesus the Christ, who is sympathetic with you in your real weaknesses. Now, we humans run out of sympathy. We just do. We have a limit of sympathy.

There was a traveling salesman who had an awful day. He hadn't sold anything or closed a sale. He couldn't even get his foot in the door. As a commission-only salesman, he was flat broke. He took the money he had left to a diner, where he ordered eggs and bacon. He looked at the waitress and said, "I'd like some eggs and a little human sympathy." But the wait staff had experienced a worse day than he had. About 10 minutes later, the waitress threw his plate on the table. The salesman asked, "Where's the human sympathy?" The waitress replied, "If I were you, I wouldn't eat those eggs."

We're not always that good at showing sympathy. But take that up to a higher level. The Greek word for "sympathy" only occurs in this verse in the New Testament. There are three terms that only occur here: "Great High Priest," "passed through the

heavens,” and “sympathy.” You can put a bombshell by those three terms. They are so powerful that they’re only mentioned in this verse.

This kind of sympathy does not have an aloof, detached, distant sense of empathy. Instead, *sympatheia* means that at the center of the universe, there’s a great High Priest who *feels* with you in your weaknesses. When you say, “I’m so tired that I can’t put one foot in front of the other” because you’ve had to take on second and third jobs to make ends meet, at the center of the universe is Someone who also wore your humanity. John 4:1 says that Jesus sat down on the curb of a well, weary with the journey.

You go out in the blazing sun to the burnt grass of some Texas cemetery, and somewhere under a live oak is the grave of someone as dear to you as life itself—gone forever. There’s an empty chair in your house because they’re never coming back. Is heaven like brass? No! There, at the center of it, is Someone who stood outside the tomb of his close friend Lazarus and burst into tears. If the Holy Ghost could help us understand the truth of this passage, it would indeed radically revolutionize our lives. We have a great High Priest who is sympathetic. In fact, this verse uses a double negative: “He is not, never . . .”

You say, “How can He do that?” He can do it on high because He’s been low. He can do it when He’s exalted because He knows what it is to be diminished. He can do it when He’s omnipotent because He knows what it is to live in the impotence of weakness. He can do it on a throne because He went to a cross. And He took that humanity with Him, back to the center of the cosmic universe. So, you ought to be able to hold on because at the heart of the universe is our sympathetic High Priest.

But, He did all of this on earth *without sin*. Now, a lot of this is amazing, but that might be the most amazing fact of all. Jesus Christ never went to bed at night regretting a thing He said or a thing He did. He never woke up in the morning haunted by a sin of omission or commission. He never lived with a word, a deed, an act, an attitude, or a relationship that was anything but perfect. In short, He lived without sin.

Did you know that even the Pope has a confessor? He does. Every week he goes to confession—the Pope! The late John Paul II, according to his private secretary, went to confession every week to a Polish monsignor. Like every other person on this planet, he had to confess his sins. Now, if the Pope has to go confess, so should we. Nobody but Jesus ever lived without sin, and that made Him a sympathetic advocate.

You can hold on because of His grace.

Verse 16 gives us the sum of all of it. What are we to do because of what He's doing? "Let us come boldly [candidly, or frankly, like a friend speaking to a friend] to the throne of grace." We can do this because our great High Priest has an undiminished capacity for mercy to cover the past and grace to cover the future. That's the good news!

The word for "come" is a present tense imperative verb that literally means "keep on coming, again and again, over and over." All of us know the stinging feeling of going to somebody and asking for help, and they say, "Well, I'll help you this time, but don't you show your face here again." They're one-shot helpers who let you know when they help you.

One of the sweetest verses in the New Testament is James 1:5 (KJV): "When you come to Him, He upbraideth not." That means He never says, "You were in here

yesterday with the same problem. You're wearing Me out. I've got to run this universe." No! He welcomes us to come again and again. I've got a great High Priest holding on to the end of the rope, and I can pull on that rope every time I need help.

Look at where He's sitting: You can come to the throne of grace. On earth, thrones have had proper names. Ivan the Terrible, the Russian czar, sat on an ivory throne. I don't need to come to an ivory throne because I'd mess it up if I came around it. I need a throne of grace. The queen of Sweden sits on the Silver Throne. I don't need to go to a silver throne; the last thing I need is hard metal. I need grace. The emperor of China used to sit on the Dragon Throne. But the last thing I need to see when I come is a dragon. I need grace. The Dalai Lama sits on the Lion Throne. When I come, I don't need anything to roar at me. I need grace. The Emperor of Japan sits on the Chrysanthemum Throne. The last thing I need is to see somebody sitting around a bunch of chrysanthemums. I need solid grace. The Emperor of Sri Lanka sits on the Stone Throne. When I come before the throne of God, I don't need the hardness of stone. I need grace.

I'm glad that my great High Priest is there, at the center of the universe, because grace is on the front and back of the throne. Grace nailed it together, and grace glued it together. It was delivered by grace and set up by grace. Thank God that when I go there, it's a throne of grace.

And when I get there, He offers mercy. That word means "active pity." From my past, I bring Him the brokenness, the garbage, the literally unforgivable—people hurt, destinies thwarted, things done and undone. And as I lift them up, what I can expect from Him is active pity. That's the good news!

And then I look forward to the future. He tells me that He will give me grace to help in times of need. The thing about grace is that you need it when you need it. I don't need tomorrow's grace today. When you're dead broke and going to lose everything you have unless you come up with a thousand dollars today, and you come to me for help but I say, "Catch you tomorrow," that's not going to help you today. If you're deathly ill and need valuable medicine today, it's not going to help if it's invented next week. Grace is the kind of stuff that you need right now. The sweetest promises are at the end of this verse. There is mercy and grace available when you need it.

Some of you may not know how you're going to face tomorrow. You're such a mystery inside of a puzzle inside of an enigma that you don't know how you're going to even get out of bed tomorrow. I've got good news for you: There's grace to help in your time of need. Some of you are so tired that you don't know how in God's name you're ever going to get in your car and go anywhere. Yet there's grace to help in times of need.

That's not only for now, but ultimately then. All of this looks forward. I don't know what it's going to be like, but I believe with every fiber of my being that I've got an appointment with the great High Priest. No word can tell it, no symbol can describe it, no metaphor can mean it, and no simile can say it. It's beyond us. But we have an appointment with this one. I think about it because I'm closer to that day than not. What will it be like?

When I get to heaven, the angels will get out the books and find "Gregory" under the "Gs." Would they say, "There must be some mistake. I'll have to call the bookkeeper"? No, because I've held to the confession. They may protest, "People like you don't normally get in." But I can tell them that when I was eight years old, I leaned

my life on Jesus because of what He said in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he sent His only Son that if you believe on Him, you will have eternal life." The angels may reply, "But we've got to look at your file." "No," I would reply, "God said, 'By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.' " They may still drag their feet, but I'll say, "No! God said I could come boldly to the throne, and I could find mercy and grace to help in times of need." And even if they can't find my name under the "Gs," I'll demand that they let me in anyway.





A Commentary on
the Epistle to the Hebrews

by Harold W. Attridge

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e "God." It is clear that what the imagery finally is the reality of God's judgmental vision. Yet this has not abandoned the imagery of the sharp word reveals God's vitality. In this verse the metaphor referent are inextricably mixed, as indeed God is ably mixed with God's vital word. metaphor of the sword continues in the other iatic feature of the verse, the participle "laid *εραχλητισμένα*). That the word has this sense is m the parallel with "naked" (*γυμνά*), but why it sense remains obscure.⁵³ The best explanation is term derives from the sacrificial sphere where it the bending back of the victim's neck prior to r.⁵⁴ The verb can also be used of a wrestling but there is not any exposure of the neck to a ged sword" as in the case of a sacrifice. inal phrase, *πρὸς ὑμῖν ὁ λόγος*, which forms a lusion for these two verses, is ambiguous.⁵⁶ It es formulaic conclusions found, for example, in meaning "our account is about him (or it)," but se certainly suggests more than that: God who judges is the one "to⁵⁸ whom our account must e rendered."⁵⁹ Once again our author delights in anipulation of language in the shift of meaning

4

14 Since,¹ therefore, we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, let us hold fast to our confession. 15/ For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been similarly tried in every respect, apart from sin. 16/ Let us, therefore, approach with boldness the throne of grace, so that we might obtain mercy and find² grace for timely help.

5:1 Now every high priest chosen from human beings is ordained for human beings with respect to things pertaining to God, so that he might bring both³ gifts and sacrifices for⁴ sins, 2/ being able to behave with moderation toward those who in ignorance go astray, since he himself is beset with weakness 3/ and ought, because of this weakness,⁵ to bring an offering for⁶ sins for himself,⁷ as for the people. 4/ And no one⁸ takes the honor to himself, but (receives it) when called⁹ by God, just as Aaron was.¹⁰

5 So also Christ did not give himself the glory of becoming high priest, but He did so who said to him, "You are my son, today I have begotten you," 6/ since he says elsewhere, "You are¹¹ a priest¹² forever according to the order of Melchizedek." 7/ (This is the Christ) who, in the days of his flesh, having offered, with a loud cry and with tears, prayers and supplications to the one who was able to save him from death, and having¹³ been heard because of his reverence, 8/ Son though he was, learned obedience through what he suffered, 9/ and, having been perfected, became for all those who obey him the cause of eternal salvation, 10/ having been addressed by God as¹⁴ "high

- 1 Some witnesses (C² H¹) insert at the beginning of the verse a reference to the addressees, *ἀδελφοί*, "brothers (and sisters)." Cf. 3:1; and see Braun, p. 123.
- 2 The omission of the verb *εὑρωμεν*, "we might find," by B destroys the chiasm of the verse.
- 3 The conjunction *τε*, "both," is omitted in B D¹ Ψ *pc*, perhaps to make the connection between *θεοσίας* and *περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν* closer. See Zuntz, *The Text*, 40.
- 4 Some witnesses (B⁴⁶ 1739) read *περὶ* instead of *ὑπέρ*, perhaps on analogy with the expression in 5:3. See Zuntz, *The Text*, 43.
- 5 Literally, "because of it." The personal pronoun in the prepositional phrase *δι' αὐτήν* is well attested (B⁴⁶ & A B C* D* P 33 81 1739 1881 2464 2495 *pc* sy co). Various scribal changes attempt to make the reference clearer: *διὰ ταύτην*, "because of this" (C² D² M sy^{hmg}); *διὰ ταῦτα*, "because of these things" (467 a b vg^{cl}^{ms}).
- 6 On analogy with 5:1 and the text's common usage elsewhere (9:7; 10:12), some witnesses (C² D² M) read *ὑπέρ* instead of *περὶ* (B⁴⁶ & A B C* D* P Ψ 33 81 104 1739 1881^s 2495 *pc*).
- 7 The pronoun *αὐτοῦ*, found in B⁴⁶ B D* 1881^s *pc*, should probably be understood as *αὐτοῦ*, a construal made explicit in the variant *αὐτοῦ* (A C D² Ψ^{vid} M).
- 8 B* omits the indefinite pronoun *τις*, perhaps to make explicit that the high priest is involved here. See Braun, p. 134.
- 9 Some witnesses (C¹ L P *pl*) add an article, *ὁ*, after *ἀλλά* (or *ἀλλ'*). This insertion makes the ellipse of the verb *λαμβάνει* smoother.
- 10 The whole phrase *καθὼς περ καὶ Ἁαρῶν* (B⁴⁶ & A B D* 33 *pc*) is apparently omitted by B¹³. Other witnesses have different forms of the comparative adverb: *καθάπερ* (C² D² Ψ M) or *καθὼς* (C*).
- 11 The copula *εἶ*, "are," omitted in most witnesses, is added in a few (B⁴⁶ P 692 *pc*), possibly to bring the citation into conformity with the LXX.
- 12 A curious error appears in B⁴⁶ which reads *επειξ* for *ἱερεὺς*. H. C. Hoskier (*A Commentary on the Various Readings in the Text of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Chester-Beatty Papyrus B⁴⁶ [circa 200 A.D.]* [London: Quatitch, 1938] 3-6) argues that the unattested *επειξ* is the original reading, meaning "prayer leader." Hebrews, however, regularly cites Ps 110(109):4 correctly and the odd word is no doubt a mechanical scribal error. See Zuntz, *The Text*, 253 n. 7.
- 13 Adolph von Harnack ("Zwei alte dogmatische Korrekturen im Hebräerbrief," SPAW.PH 5 [1929] 62-73) proposed, unnecessarily, to emend with a negation *οὐκ* before the participle *εισακουσθείς*.
- 14 The allusion to Ps 110(109):4 is made explicit in B⁴⁶ which inserts *συ εἶ*, "you are." Similarly, several

ἀκάλυπτα, "For you made all things, having indeed all power, and all things are in your sight manifest and unconcealed." For the text, see Matthew Black, *Apocalypse of Enochi Graece* (PVT 3; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 63. Cf. also Philo *Prov.* 2.35, cited above, n. 21. Note esp. *γυμνά τὰ βουλήματα*.

1 Cf. 1 Cor 4:5; 1 Thess 2:4; Rom 8:27.

2 See n. 24 above.

3 Hesychius glosses with *πεφανερωμένα*.

4 Cf. Theophrastus *Char.* 27.5.

5 Cf. Plato *Amat.* 132C; Plutarch *Anton.* 83; Diogenes Laertius *Vit. Phil.* 6.61. The term is then widely used as a metaphor for being gripped by distressful circumstances. Cf. Philo *Mut. nom.* 81; *Rer. div. her.* 274; *Vit. Mos.* 1.297, 322; *Cher.* 78; *Omn. prob. lib.* 159; *Praem. poen.* 153.

There is, however, no reason to delete the phrase as a gloss, with Syngde (*Hebrews*, 46).

Cf. *Det. pot. ins.* 13.

For this use of *πρὸς*, cf. 1:6-7.

Cf. Luke 16:2; 1 Pet 4:5. For such expressions in commercial contexts, cf. *P. Oxy.* 1188.5 and *P. Hibeh.* 53.4, cited by Moffatt (p. 58).

Analysis

The pericope functions in a complex way to conclude the themes developed in the first two movements of the text and to introduce the topics that will occupy the central expository portion (7:1—10:18).¹⁵ It begins with three verses (4:14—16) dominated by twin paraenetic themes of holding on and moving ahead. The first of these exhortations looks back¹⁶ to the inauguration of the comparison between Moses and Christ, the faithful servant and the Son (3:1—6). The second, while looking backward to 2:17—18, begins the treatment of the other attribute of Christ the High Priest mentioned there, his compassion.

This theme develops through a consideration of the high-priestly office. The treatment deals in turn with the function (5:1), personal quality (5:2—3), and the divine authorization (5:4) that a high priest must have. These reflections are then applied to Christ in inverse order.¹⁷ His divine call to be a priest is recorded in scripture (5:5—6), as was his designation as Son. His sympathetic quality is assured by the suffering through which he learned obedience (5:7—8). Finally, his salvific function is guaranteed by his "perfection" and priestly designation (5:9—10). This exposition sets the stage first for chap. 7, where

the nature of priesthood "after the order of Melchizedek" is explored through exegesis of Genesis, and for chaps. 8—10, where the salvific function of Christ's priestly act is presented through an elaborate treatment of the effects of his sacrificial death.¹⁸

The motif of Christ the High Priest, mentioned at 2:17, is thus more fully developed, although it will undergo further refinement later in the text. As in the preceding chapters, this pericope probably relies on Christian traditions, although attempts to isolate a particular block of tradition, such as a hymn,¹⁹ behind all or part of 5:7—10, have been unsuccessful.

Whatever its sources in Christian tradition, this important hinge pericope is a transition in the christology of Hebrews, a transition intimated previously but now made more clear. Hebrews now begins in earnest the reinterpretation of the confession of Jesus as Son, humiliated and exalted, in terms of his status and function as High Priest.

Comment

■ 14 The block of paraenetic material begins with the common resumptive particle οὖν²⁰ and a reference to

Exhort

15 The position and function of this pericope are variously understood, largely because of its complex thematic texture. Some commentators prefer to separate 4:14—16 from what follows. See Spicq 2.91; and Nissilä, *Hohepriestermotiv*, 55—74, but vs 15 has clear links with the following exposition.

16 Hence, Vanhoye (*Structure*, 39, 54) takes the verse as an inclusion with 3:1, distinct from the two verses that follow. The three verses, however, with the two coordinate exhortations of vs 14 and vs 16, form a unit. See James Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 1—6," *Bib* 53 (1972) 383; and Peterson, *Perfection*, 74.

17 Most critics recognize this chiasmic arrangement. See Westcott, p. 121; Michel, p. 214; and Bruce, p. 94. See also Mathis Rissi, "Die Menschlichkeit Jesu nach Hebr 5,7—8," *ThZ* 11 (1955) 36; Th. Lescow, "Jesus in Gethsemane bei Lukas und im Hebräerbrief," *ZNW* 58 (1967) 224; Brandenburger, "Text und Vorlagen," 221; Peterson, *Perfection*, 81; Loader, *Sohn*, 98. This structure is rejected by Laub (*Bekennnis*, 113—19), who sees a major break at 5:3, con-

struing 5:1—3 as the grounds for the paraenesis of 4:14—16. This position represents an overreaction to the overly precise parallels occasionally drawn between 5:1—4 and 5:5—10. Some commentators ignore the parallels and see 5:7—10 as a simple development of the motif of the "call" in 5:4. See Riggenbach, p. 127; Snell, p. 79; Strathmann, pp. 93—94; Friedrich, "Das Lied," 95, 112; Schille, "Erwägungen," 101.

18 Vanhoye (*Structure*, 42—43; and "Discussions sur la structure de l'Épître aux Hébreux," *Bib* 55 [1974] 358) insists that 5:9—10 introduces three discrete segments of the central expository section: 8:1—9:28 with τελευθεῖς; 10:1—18 with αἴτιος σωτηρίας; and 7:1—26 with Μελχισέδεκ. This analysis artificially divides 8:1—10:18, the whole of which is explicitly announced with the reference to Christ's "once for all sacrifice," at 7:27.

19 See the commentary on 5:7, and nn. 133—35 below.

20 For οὖν with paraenesis, cf. 4:1, 11, 16; 10:19, 35; 13:15. For other uses, cf. 2:14.

what Christians "have" (ἔχουρες). This phrase in other transitions in Hebrews,²¹ particularly functionally similar pericope at 10:19. Similar transitional phrases may have been a common feature in the style.²²

The adjective describing what Christians have "great High Priest" (ἀρχιερέα μέγαν), at first appears redundant.²³ The collocation is attested of the high priest²⁴ and it is possible that the adjective is a part of the traditional language. For Hebrews, Jesus is a "great" High Priest in a special sense, who belongs to an entirely different order of priesthood from that of the descendants of Aaron. As Christians make clear, that difference is intimately bound up with Christ's heavenly status, alluded to in the next

Christ's entry into the presence of God has been described precisely as a "passage through the heavens" (διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς), although the notice is implicit in earlier references to the exaltation.²⁵ The passage will later be described in terms of movement through the temple and Christ will be depicted as going "through the veil" into the true heavenly sanctuary. It is that action which guarantees Christ's effectiveness as redeemer and makes possible the addressees' experience of divine presence.²⁷ Thus, the image deployed here for the first time is an important one for Hebrews: passage through the heavens is not a spe-

21 Cf. 8:1, ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα.

22 Cf. 2 Cor 7:1, ταύτας οὖν ἔχομεν followed by a hortatory subjunctive.

23 The high priest is regularly styled μέγας in Lev 21:10; Num 35:25, 28; 23:5; *Leg. Gaj.* 306; Heb 10:2.

24 Cf. 1 Macc 13:42, of Simon; 2 Macc 1:219; 2:183. On the use of the title, see Wilhelm Grundmann, "μέγας" (1967) 529—44.

25 Cf. 1:3, 13; 2:9—10.

26 Cf. 6:19—20; 8:1—2; 9:11, 24; Galling, "Durch die Himmelskuppel" (Hebr 4:14), *ZNW* 43 (1950—51) 10.

27 Cf. esp. 6:19—20 and 10:19—20, where the "veil" image requires further explanation.

28 See Käsemann, *Wandering People*, 10.

29 Cf. 1 Enoch 14—19, 70—71; 2 Enoch 1:6—7. In general, see Jewish Apocalypses, *Semeia* 1:10.

30 Cf. Eph 4:10; 1 Pet 3:22.

31 For further references to the "passage through the heavens" style, see the commentary on 10:19.

of priesthood "after the order of Melchizedor through exegesis of Genesis, and for 10, where the salvific function of Christ's is presented through an elaborate treatment of his sacrificial death.¹⁸

if of Christ the High Priest, mentioned at s more fully developed, although it will rther refinement later in the text. As in the hapters, this pericope probably relies on additions, although attempts to isolate a park of tradition, such as a hymn,¹⁹ behind all or -10, have been unsuccessful.

r its sources in Christian tradition, this impor- pericope is a transition in the christology of transition intimated previously but now clear. Hebrews now begins in earnest the ation of the confession of Jesus as Son, humili- alted, in terms of his status and function as

lock of paraenetic material begins with the sumptive particle οὖν²⁰ and a reference to

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what Christians "have" (ἔχοντες). This phrase will appear in other transitions in Hebrews,²¹ particularly in the functionally similar pericope at 10:19. Similar transitional phrases may have been a common feature of homiletic style.²²

The adjective describing what Christians have, a "great High Priest" (ἀρχιερέα μέγαν), at first appears redundant.²³ The collocation is attested of the Levitical high priest²⁴ and it is possible that the adjective is simply a part of the traditional language. For Hebrews, however, Jesus is a "great" High Priest in a special sense, one who belongs to an entirely different order of priesthood from that of the descendants of Aaron. As chap. 7 will make clear, that difference is intimately bound up with Christ's heavenly status, alluded to in the next phrases.

Christ's entry into the presence of God has not been described precisely as a "passage through the heavens" (διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς), although the notion is implicit in earlier references to the exaltation.²⁵ This passage will later be described in terms of movement through the temple and Christ will be depicted as entering "through the veil" into the true heavenly sanctuary.²⁶ It is that action which guarantees Christ's effectiveness as redeemer and makes possible the addressees' entry to the divine presence.²⁷ Thus, the image deployed here for the first time is an important one for Hebrews's soteriology. Passage through the heavens is not a specifically

Gnostic motif,²⁸ but reflects the same general cosmological perspective found in many Jewish texts of the Hellenistic and early Roman periods,²⁹ a perspective found in other Christian texts that portray Christ's exaltation.³⁰ The emphasis is not on the process of passage through hostile spheres, as in some Gnostic literature, but on the result—Christ's exalted status.

In the identification of the great High Priest as Jesus, "the Son of God" (τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ),³¹ the title that had played so prominent a role in the first two chapters³² and in the comparison with Moses (3:1-6), is taken up again in a formal, indeed triumphant, way. This festive reference to Christ's exaltation will soon be balanced by mention of his incarnation and humiliation. The christological movement thus replicates that of the first two chapters and sets the stage for the exposition of the decisive moment where humiliation ends and exaltation begins.³³

The title of Son is mentioned in connection with the "confession" (τῆς ὁμολογίας)³⁴ to which the addressees are urged "to hold fast" (κρατῶμεν),³⁵ as they had earlier

21 Cf. 8:1, ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα.

22 Cf. 2 Cor 7:1, ταῦτας οὖν ἔχοντες τὰς ἐπαγγελίας, followed by a hortatory subjunctive.

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24 Cf. 1 Macc 13:42, of Simon; and Philo *Som.* 1.214, 219; 2.183. On the use of the adjective in general, see Wilhelm Grundmann, "μέγας, etc.," *TDNT* 4 (1967) 529-44.

25 Cf. 1:3, 13; 2:9-10.

26 Cf. 6:19-20; 8:1-2; 9:11, 24; 10:20; and see Kurt Galling, "Durch die Himmel hindurchgeschritten (Hebr 4:14)," *ZNW* 43 (1950-51) 263-64.

27 Cf. esp. 6:19-20 and 10:19-21. The precise function of the "veil" image requires further discussion.

28 See Kasemann, *Wandering People*, 133.

29 Cf. 1 Enoch 14-19, 70-71; 2 Enoch 67; 3 Enoch 6-7; *Asc. Isa.* 6-7. In general, see John J. Collins, "The Jewish Apocalypses," *Semeia* 14 (1979) 36-43.

30 Cf. Eph 4:10; 1 Pet 3:22.

31 For further references to the "Son of God," cf. 6:6;

7:3; 10:29.

32 Thus the verse serves not simply as an inclusion with 3:1, but as a resumption of the affirmations of Christ's status as Son made since 1:2.

33 Nissila (*Höhepriestermotif*, 67-68) rightly notes the balance between vs 14 and 15, but his description in terms of Christ's humanity and divinity is inapposite and somewhat anachronistic.

34 Cf. 3:1. The collocation of Jesus and Son of God is found several times in explicitly confessional formulas. Cf. Acts 9:20; 1 John 4:15; 5:5. Cf. also Rom 1:4; 1 Thess 1:10; 1 John 1:7.

35 Kosmala (*Hebräer*, 7, 39 n. 5) argues that κρατέω with the genitive is to be distinguished from κατέχω with the accusative (3:6, 14) and to be interpreted as "grasp." Cf. 6:18. Hebrews then would be exhorting non-Christians (Essenes) to take up the Christian confession. It is clear, however, that κρατέω with the genitive can mean "to be in possession of, hold, or maintain." Cf., e.g., Polybius *Hist.* 18.11.8; Josephus *Bell.* 1.5.3 § 112; 1.9.1 § 183; *Ant.* 6.6.3 § 116.

Kosmala interprets Sir 4:18 and 25:11 as examples of

been urged to hold on to their "boldness," "hopeful boast," and "basic reality." The maintenance of the confession probably involved preservation of a commitment made in a liturgical context³⁶ but cannot be limited to that.

■ 15 The next two verses replicate in an expanded form the structure of the preceding verse and move from an affirmation of what the author and addressees have to an exhortation about what they should do. The descriptive portion of the verse highlights one characteristic of the High Priest, using language from the first reference to the theme in chap. 2. The picture of Christ's fellowship in suffering with his followers will be developed in the rest of the pericope.

The addressees should hold on to their confession of the Son of God because their High Priest is able³⁷ to "sympathize" (*συμπαθεῖν*)³⁸ with general human "weaknesses" (*ἀσθενείας*), especially that weakness which results in sin. The noun can refer to physical weakness or

illness or the general weakness of the flesh. The moral connotations emerge in the references to the weakness of the imperfect priests who must sacrifice for their transgressions.³⁹ This grounding of the paraenesis contrasts with and balances the admonition issued in the preceding passage on God's powerful, judgmental word. Christ's sympathetic character is, in turn, based on the fact that he was "tried" (*πεπειρασμένον*)⁴⁰ in every respect like (*κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα*)⁴¹ other human beings. The qualification that this likeness excluded sin (*χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας*)⁴² involves an affirmation common in early Christian circles.⁴³ Hebrews's grounds for making the exception need not be sought elsewhere in, for instance, Philo's speculations on the sinless Logos whom the biblical high priest symbolizes,⁴⁴ nor in messianic expectation,⁴⁵ nor even in the texts from the Old Testament which may have influenced the Christian affirmation.⁴⁶ Christ's sinlessness is not a quality for which Hebrews needs justification; it is assumed and affirmed as virtually

self-evident. Nor is it suggested that Christ's is a special achievement, as if his "learning obeyed involved overcoming some moral failing.⁴⁷ A pericope (10:5–10) will indicate, Hebrews' conformity to God's will as characteristic of Christ's entry into the world. Although a modern might feel that Christ would more properly fit as a "merciful high priest" if he were likened to human beings even in sin,⁴⁸ this is hardly the of Hebrews or of early Christians generally.⁴⁹

The accent in this verse is finally on the like suffering human Jesus to the addressees, an ir element in Hebrews' paraenetic program.⁵⁰ The tional motif of Christ's sinlessness will be deve the imagery of the High Priest as a characteri distinguishes Christ from the Levitical priests (9:14).

■ 16 The final alliterative⁵¹ exhortation in this paraenetic section urges the addressees to "ap

meaning "to lay hold of," but both refer to "holding on," to wisdom or to the Lord. The expression κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας is thus synonymous with κατέχομεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν (10:23). See also Grässer, *Glaube*, 32 n. 108.

36 See Käsemann, *Wandering People*, 173; Grässer, *Glaube*, 109; Schierse, *Verheissung*, 165; and note the baptismal allusion in the context of the reference to the confession at 10:19–25.

37 For the litotes (literally, "we do not have a high priest unable . . ."), cf. 6:10; 7:20. The negation μή is regularly used with participles in Hebrews. Cf. 4:2; 6:1; 8:3, 6; 9:9; 10:25; 11:8, 13, 27; 12:27; 13:17. At 11:1, however, οὐ is used.

38 Cf. 10:34, the only occurrence of the verb in the NT. Cf. 1 Pet 3:8 for sympathy as a Christian virtue. Cf. also 4 Macc. 5:25; 13:23; Josephus *Ant.* 16.11.8 § 404; Philo *Leg. all.* 1.8; *Spec. leg.* 2.115.

39 For physical weakness or illness, cf. Luke 5:15; 8:2; 13:11–12; John 5:5; 11:4; 2 Cor 11:30; 1 Tim 5:23. For the general weakness of the flesh, cf. Rom 6:19; 1 Cor 15:43; Gal 4:13; Heb 11:34. For the priests' weakness, cf. 5:12; 7:28. Cf. also Rom 5:6. See Gustav Stählin, "ἀσθενής, etc.," *TDNT* 1 (1964) 490–93; Schierse, *Verheissung*, 153; and Braun, p. 125. As Michel (p. 208) suggests, there may here be an allusion to the language of Isa 53:4, cited in Matt 8:17.

40 Cf. 2:18, *πειρασθεῖς*. As in that verse, the remark here is highly alliterative: *πεπειρασμένον κατὰ πάντα*.

41 Cf. 2:17, *κατὰ πάντα . . . ὁμοιωθῆναι*. The prepositional phrase *καθ' ὁμοιότητα* is literally "in accordance with a likeness," certainly the Savior's likeness to his

brothers and sisters, as at 2:14. The noun appears in the NT only in Hebrews, here and at 7:15. In the LXX, cf. Gen. 1:11–12; Wis. 14:19, and 4 Macc. 15:4.

42 The point is not that Christ was not tempted to sin, but that he did not commit sin. Some commentators argue that Christ could not have been subject to temptations arising from his own sin. See Westcott, p. 107, and Moffatt, p. 59. Hebrews is not interested in such subtle psychologizing.

43 Cf. 2 Cor 5:21; John 7:18; 8:46; 14:30; 1 John 3:5, 7; 1 Pet 1:19; 2:22; 3:18. See Roy A. Stewart, "The Sinless High-Priest," *NTS* 14 (1967–68) 126–35; and Loader, *Sohn*, 124.

44 Cf. *Spec. leg.* 1.230; 3.134–35; *Fug.* 106–18; *Som.* 2.185; *Virt.* 176–77. On these Philonic parallels, see Spicq, "Philonisme," 220; Sidney G. Sowers, *The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews* (Richmond: John Knox, 1965) 122; Dey, *Intermediary World*, 192. For critiques of a Philonic derivation, see Loader, *Sohn*, 124, and Peterson, *Perfection*, 230 n. 23.

45 For an example of the expectation of a righteous messiah, cf. *Ps. Sol.* 17.36; and see Michel, pp. 211–12.

46 Cf. Isa 53:8, cited at 1 Pet 2:22.

47 So Buchanan, p. 130; and I "Hebrews 4:15 and the Sinl 86 (1974–75) 4–8.

48 So Williamson ("Sinlessness contradicts [the] emphasis c ineness of the humanity [sci

49 See Peterson, *Perfection*, 18;

50 See Laub, *Bekenntnis*, 109–

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54 Cf. *P. Oxy.* 8.1119.8, noted Montefiore, p. 92.

55 For the verb in this sense, c 29.1; 2 *Clem.* 17.3; and, in a Plutarch *Ei Delph.* 2 (385D)

56 Cf. Exod 16:9; 34:32; Lev 6; participle is used virtually a worshipers at Heb 10:1.

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self-evident. Nor is it suggested that Christ's sinlessness is a special achievement, as if his "learning obedience" (5:8) involved overcoming some moral failing.⁴⁷ As a later pericope (10:5–10) will indicate, Hebrews conceives of conformity to God's will as characteristic of Christ from his entry into the world. Although a modern sensibility might feel that Christ would more properly fulfill his role as a "merciful high priest" if he were likened to other human beings even in sin,⁴⁸ this is hardly the conception of Hebrews or of early Christians generally.⁴⁹

The accent in this verse is finally on the likeness of the suffering human Jesus to the addressees, an important element in Hebrews' paraenetic program.⁵⁰ The traditional motif of Christ's sinlessness will be developed in the imagery of the High Priest as a characteristic that distinguishes Christ from the Levitical priests (7:26; 9:14).

■ 16 The final alliterative⁵¹ exhortation in this transitional paraenetic section urges the addressees to "approach"

(προσερχώμεθα). The call to "move on" or "in" is another recurrent feature of Hebrews' paraenesis⁵² and believers are frequently described as approaching or drawing near to God.⁵³ Through that exhortation the addressees are urged to follow the path "through the heavens" that Christ blazed and take advantage of the access to God that he provides. The verb προσέρχομαι can be used in a forensic context,⁵⁴ although in this passage it more likely carries cultic connotations.⁵⁵ The addressees' approach is thus like that of worshipers in general,⁵⁶ or of the priests of old, to the altar.⁵⁷ The cultic language is probably used in a metaphorical way and to find here a reference to a specific Christian cultic activity is dubious.⁵⁸ Our author is interested that his addressees maintain their participation in their communal assembly,⁵⁹ but a sacramental issue hardly seems to be at the center of his concern.⁶⁰ "Approaching" God is used as a more encompassing image for entering into a covenantal relationship with God.⁶¹

brothers and sisters, as at 2:14. The noun appears in the NT only in Hebrews, here and at 7:15. In the LXX, cf. Gen. 1:11–12; Wis. 14:19, and 4 Macc. 15:4.

The point is not that Christ was not tempted to sin, but that he did not commit sin. Some commentators argue that Christ could not have been subject to temptations arising from his own sin. See Westcott, p. 107, and Moffatt, p. 59. Hebrews is not interested in such subtle psychologizing.

Cf. 2 Cor 5:21; John 7:18; 8:46; 14:30; 1 John 3:5, 7; 1 Pet 1:19; 2:22; 3:18. See Roy A. Stewart, "The Sinless High-Priest," *NTS* 14 (1967–68) 126–35; and Loader, *Sohn*, 124.

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47 So Buchanan, p. 130; and Ronald Williamson, "Hebrews 4:15 and the Sinlessness of Jesus," *ExpTim* 86 (1974–75) 4–8.

48 So Williamson ("Sinlessness," 4), "χωρίς ἁμαρτίας contradicts [the] emphasis on the unimpaired genuineness of the humanity [scil. of Christ]."

49 See Peterson, *Perfection*, 188–90.

50 See Laub, *Bekenntnis*, 109–12.

51 Note προσερχώμεθα . . . παρηρησίας and εὐρωμεν . . . εὐκαιρον.

52 Cf. 6:1 (φερώμεθα); 10:22 (προσερχώμεθα); and the exhortation to "enter the rest" (4:11).

53 Cf. προσέρχομαι at 7:25; 11:6; 12:18, 22; εισέρχομαι at 4:3; and ἐγγίζω at 7:19.

54 Cf. *P. Oxy.* 8.1119.8, noted by Moffatt, p. 60, and Montefiore, p. 92.

55 For the verb in this sense, cf. 1 Pet 2:4; 1 Clem. 23.1; 29.1; 2 Clem. 17.3; and, in a non-Christian context, Plutarch *Ei Delph.* 2 (385D).

56 Cf. Exod 16:9; 34:32; Lev 9:5; Num 10:3–4. The participle is used virtually as a technical term for worshipers at Heb 10:1.

57 Cf. Lev 9:7; 21:17, 21; 22:3; Num 18:3; Philo *Fug.* 41. In 1 Pet 2:5 those who "approach" the living "stone" become a holy priesthood.

58 Contra Wilhelm Thüsing, "Lasst uns hinzutreten (Hebr. 10,22): Zur Frage nach dem Sinn der Kulttheologie im Hebräerbrief," *BZ* 9 (1965) 1–17, although he suggests that the Christian's approach to God involves both life and cult.

59 Cf. 10:25 and the ambiguous allusions at 13:10, 15. Denial of any interest in the Christian cult, as by

Friedrich Schröger ("Der Gottesdienst der Hebräerbriefgemeinde," *MThZ* 19 [1968] 161–81, esp. 180), is certainly unwarranted. The way cult is understood remains to be seen.

60 Neither does our author seem to be polemicizing against an excessive sacramentalism, as suggested by Theissen (*Untersuchungen*, 53–87); nor is he concerned to correct a defective sacramentalism, as suggested by Johannes Betz, *Die Eucharistie in der Zeit der griechischen Väter*, 2.1: *Die Realpräsenz des Leibes und Blutes Jesu im Abendmahl nach dem Neuen Testament* (Freiburg im Br./Basel/Vienna: Herder, 1961) 144–66.

61 For this extended sense of the language of "approaching" God, cf. Sir 1:28, 30; 2:1. Philo frequently discusses the appropriate "approach" to God by the soul on the path of virtue. Cf., e.g., *Op. mund.* 144: πάντα καὶ λέγειν καὶ πράττειν ἐσπούδασεν εἰς ἀρέσκειαν τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ βασιλέως ἐπόμνος κατ' ἔχθος αὐτῶ ταῖς ὁδοῖς, ἅς λεωφόρους ἀνατέμνουσιν ἀρεαί, διότι μόναις ψυχαῖς θεμῖς προσέρχεται τέλος ἡγουμέναις τὴν πρὸς τὸν γεννησαντα θεὸν ἐξομοίωσι, "He (the first man) earnestly endeavored in all his words and actions to please the Father and King, following Him step by step in the highways cut out by the virtues, since only for souls who regard it as their goal to be fully conformed to God who begat them is it lawful to draw nigh to him." Cf. also *Deus imm.* 161; *Plant.* 64; *Conf. ling.* 55; *Mut. nom.* 13. For a similar metaphorical use of the cultic image of approach, cf. Heb 11:6.

The recommendation that the approach be "with boldness" (*μετὰ παρρησίας*) recalls the earlier appeal (3:6) to hold on to the bold proclamation, although what is here in view is clearly not a public "freedom of speech," but a confident self-expression before God, above all in prayer.⁶² That free access to God makes possible the Christian's "maintenance of the confession" and the bold proclamation of the faith.⁶³

The call to the addressees to approach the "throne of grace" (*τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος*) evokes the image, common in the Old Testament, of God enthroned on high.⁶⁴ That throne was the archetype of the ark of the covenant in the inner sanctuary where God was to be found⁶⁵ and where the rites of expiation on the Day of Atonement were conducted.⁶⁶ The earthly counterpart of the heavenly throne was then suitably called a "mercy seat" (*ἰλαστήριον*),⁶⁷ and the heavenly throne where the true High Priest⁶⁸ has ministered is the source of God's gracious assistance.⁶⁹

Christians approach to "receive mercy and find grace" (*λάβωμεν ἔλεος καὶ χάριν εὐρωμεν*).⁷⁰ The objects of this action, "mercy and grace," which are frequently linked in Greco-Jewish and Christian texts,⁷¹ are virtually synon-

ymous, although it might be appropriate to see the first as relating to past transgressions and the second as relevant to contemporary and future needs.⁷² Such support comes for "timely assistance" (*εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν*), another allusion to the formulation at the end of chap. 2.⁷³ As that earlier remark suggested, the aid that Christians receive through the heavenly High Priest is timely⁷⁴ because it is available for those who are being tried as Christ was.⁷⁵ The pastoral concern with the situation of the addressees in evidence here will also be a determining factor in the description of Christ's human experience in 5:7-10.

■ 5:1 Hebrews proceeds to explain⁷⁶ how the High Priest is able to sympathize with the weaknesses of his followers. The pericope begins not with Christ, but with a description of "every human" (*ἐξ ἀνθρώπων λαμβανόμενος*) high priest.⁷⁷ The following verses do not provide an exhaustive list of the characteristics of biblical high priests, but focus on attributes particularly relevant to the theme of Christ as High Priest.⁷⁸ The number of these points of comparison between the biblical high priest and Christ has been variously assessed. Many of these attempts are overly precise and the correspondences inexact.⁷⁹ The

two halves of the whole pericope fall most naturally under three general points of comparison.⁸⁰

The first point, expressed in this verse, deals with the high priest's basic function, to make atonement. This corresponds to the salvific function of the High Priest expressed in vss 9-10. Every high priest established (*καθίσταται*)⁸¹ as an intermediary between God and humankind, chosen from among humans to act on their behalf. The sentence is neatly divided. The first half emphasizes the humanity of the high priest; the second, his functions with respect to God. The author certainly considers Christ's incarnation important (2:14), he does not focus on the human qualities of the high priest as a direct point of comparison with Christ. The emphasis on the humanity of the high priest serves primarily to make clear that the high priest is not an ordinary high priest. It also prepares the way for the next verse that the high priest's weakness. It is that notion which will find an

62 Note the association of *παρρησία* with the approach to God at 10:19-22.

63 Cf. 3:6; 10:23, 35.

64 Cf. 8:1 for the "throne of majesty." For the glorious throne, cf. Jer 14:21; 17:12. The throne, as Michel (p. 208) notes, is a periphrasis for God, but its characterization here is significant.

65 God's dwelling in a temple and being enthroned in heaven are juxtaposed in Ps 10(11):15. Cf. also Exod 25:22 and Isa 6:1.

66 Cf. Lev 16:1-17.

67 For the term in Hebrews, cf. 9:5.

68 Cf. 9:23-24. Although Christ himself is "seated" (1:3, 13; 8:1), it is probably not his throne (1:8) that is involved in the present image, as Chrysostom suggests, but rather God's proper mercy seat.

69 Cf. also 10:29; 12:15; 13:9; for the "grace" that is available in the new covenant.

70 Note the chiasm.

71 Cf. Wis 3:9; 4:15; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; 2 John 3; and see Grasser, *Glaube*, 109.

72 See Westcott, p. 110, and Peterson, *Perfection*, 80.

73 Cf. *βοηθήσαι* at 2:18.

74 The adjective *εὐκαιρος* appears elsewhere in the NT only at Mark 6:21, of an "opportune" day. Cf. Ps 103(104):27; and *Ep. Arist.* 203, 236. The suggestion by Gerhard Delling ("*ἄκαιρος*, etc.," *TDNT* 3 [1965]

462) that the adjective means "divinely appointed time" reads more into the term than is warranted.

75 Philo, too, knows that divine aid (*βοήθεια*) is available for those who "approach" (*ἐγγίζω*) God. Cf. *Migr. Abr.* 57. The basis for the assurance that such aid is available is quite different from Hebrews.

76 The *γάρ*, like that of 4:15, introduces the grounds for the preceding paraenesis, but more specifically introduces the exposition of how Christ was "tried" (*πειρασθέντος*).

77 It is occasionally suggested that Hebrews emphasizes the contrast between "human" high priest and the divine Son. See Friedrich, "Das Lied," 114; and Jukka Thurén, "Gebet und Gehorsam des Erniedrigten (Hebr 5,7-10) noch einmal," *NovT* 13 (1971) 136-46. The corresponding passage (5:7-10), however, also emphasizes Christ's humanity. See Loader, *Sohn*, 96 n. 11.

78 So correctly Albert Vanhoye, "Situation et signification de Hébreux V,1-10," *NTS* 23 (1976-77) 445-56. For OT descriptions of the high priest, cf. Exod 28-29; Lev 8-10; Deut 33:8-11; Sir 45:6-22; 50:1-22. See also Domenico Bertetto, "La natura del sacerdozio secondo Heb v,1-4 e le sue realizzazioni nel Nuovo Testamento," *Salesianum* 26 (1964) 395-440.

79 Dibelius ("*Himmelsche Kultus*," 169-72) finds seven

points of comparison. John leide Hohepriester. Zur tung des irdischen Jesus für Hebräerbriefes," in Georg Christ in *Historie und The Conzelmann* [Tübingen: M 66, esp. 150] finds four (Weiss, p. 25; Moffatt, p. 6 two, the solidarity of priests call to office.

80 See Gottfried Schille, "Er priesterlehre des Hebräer 81-109, esp. 105; Brande Vorlagen," 219; Nissila, *h Peterson, Perfection*, 81, 2' For the verb in the sense (esp. 8:3. Cf. also Luke 12 2:109. The verb is obvious (Calvin), and the phrase r tive of respect.

82 The parallel remark at 8: tion with the same sense. (p. 120) between the two- and immediate end, *eis* wi the more remote result—

83 For the same phrase also Cf. also Plutarch *Cons. ad*

84 The verb *προσφέρω* is cor fices. It appears nineteen infrequently in the rest of 8:4; John 16:3; Acts 7:42

85 Cf. 1 Kgdms 8:64; *Ep. Ar*



THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

THE ENGLISH TEXT
WITH INTRODUCTION, EXPOSITION AND NOTES

by

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III. THE HIGH PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

Chs. 4:14-6:20

1. CHRIST'S HIGH PRIESTHOOD AN ENCOURAGEMENT
TO HIS PEOPLE

Ch. 4:14-16

- 14 Having⁵⁹ then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.
- 15 For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as *we are, yet* without sin.
- 16 Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find⁶⁰ grace to help us in time of need.

14 With admonition is coupled positive encouragement. Jesus has already been presented to the readers as "a merciful and faithful high priest" (Ch. 2:17), and they are now shown how He is the one from whom they can receive all the strength they need to maintain their confession and resist the temptation to let go and fall back. "Jesus the Son of God" is not disqualified by His divine origin from sharing in His people's troubles and sympathizing with their weakness. He Himself endured every trial that they are likely to undergo, but remained steadfast throughout, and has now "passed through the heavens" to the very throne of God. In Him, then, His people have a powerful incentive to perseverance in faith and obedience.

"The heavens" through which Jesus passed are the heavenly regions in general; we need not try to enumerate the successive "heavens" involved and determine whether He is envisaged as

⁵⁹ In the versions of Tyndale and Coverdale (following Luther) Ch. 4:14 appears as Ch. 5:1.

⁶⁰ Gk. εὐρωμεν, omitted from B; according to Zuntz (*op. cit.*, p. 41) its omission means that we have as the object of the remaining verb λάβωμεν the typical LXX expression ελεος και χάρις ("mercy and grace").

passing through three or seven of them.⁶¹ The plural "heavens", as regularly in the New Testament and Septuagint, reflects the Hebrew word used in the Old Testament, which is always plural. What is emphasized here is His transcendence; He is "made higher than the heavens", as we are told later in the epistle (Ch. 7:26), or, as it is put in Eph. 4:10, He "ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things".⁶² It is because He has been so highly exalted that He is such a "great" high priest;⁶³ there is already the implied contrast here (which is brought out in explicit detail later) between Him and the earthly high priests of Aaron's line, whose highest privilege was to pass once a year through the inner veil into the holy of holies in a material and temporary sanctuary, there to appear for a few moments before God on behalf of their people. With Him as their helper, the people of Christ might well hold fast the "confession"⁶⁴ in which He played a central part.

15 His transcendence, however, has made no difference to His humanity. Our author has already stated that, in order to "become a merciful and faithful and high priest", the Son of God had "in all things to be made like unto his brethren"; and that "he is able to succor them that are tempted" because "he himself hath suffered being tempted" (Ch. 2:17f.). So here he repeats that Christians have in heaven a high priest with an unequalled capacity for sympathizing with them in all the dangers and sorrows and trials which come their way in life, because He Himself, by virtue of His likeness to them,⁶⁵ was exposed to all these experiences. Yet He endured triumphantly every form of testing that man could endure,

⁶¹ For the enumeration of heavens (three or seven) cf. II Cor. 12:2; Test. Levi 2:7ff.; Ascension of Isaiah 6:13; 7:13ff.; TB Hagigah 12b (see p. 374, n. 150). For the view that "the heavens" through which Christ has passed are symbolized by the outer compartment of the earthly sanctuary see p. 194, n. 57.

⁶² Cf. Eph. 1:21.

⁶³ In OT "high priest" is literally (for the most part) "great priest" (Heb. kōhēn gādōl); so in Ch. 10:21 (p. 249 with n. 97). The unusually full expression here (Gk. ἀρχιερεὺς μέγας) probably marks Jesus out as greater than the Aaronic high priests; it is used in I Macc. 13:42 (of Simon Maccabaeus) and in Philo, On Dreams i. 214, 219; ii. 183 (of the Logos).

⁶⁴ Gk. ὁμολογία, as in Ch. 3:1.

⁶⁵ Gk. καθ' ὁμοιότητα, lit. "according to likeness" (rendered "like as we are" in ARV, following AV). NEB brings out the meaning well: "one who, because of his likeness to us, has been tested every way, only without sin".

without any weakening of His faith in God or any relaxation of His obedience to Him. Such endurance involves more, not less, than ordinary human suffering: "sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain".⁶⁶ The phrase "apart from sin"⁶⁷ does not mean that our Lord experienced every kind of human temptation except temptation to sin; like the Israelites in Moses' day, He too had His day of trial in the wilderness, and any compromise with the tempter's suggestions, any inclination to put God to the test, would have been as certainly sin as His refusal to countenance these suggestions or abate one iota of His confidence in His Father meant spiritual victory—victory for Himself and also for His people.⁶⁸

16 Therefore, says our author, let us come with full confidence⁶⁹ to the throne of grace. This throne of grace is the throne of God, where Jesus, as His people's high priest, sits exalted at the Father's right hand. It is the antitype, in our author's mind, to the "mercy-seat" in the earthly sanctuary, of which he speaks below in Ch. 9:5; in Tyndale's New Testament and the Great Bible (1539) the same rendering, "the seat of grace", is used both there and here. It was before the earthly mercy-seat that the work of propitiation was completed in token on the day of atonement and the grace of God extended to His people; the presence of the Christians' high priest on the heavenly throne of grace bespeaks a work of propitiation completed not in token but in fact, and the constant availa-

bility of divine aid in all their need. Thanks to Him, the throne of God is a mercy-seat to which they have free access and from which they may receive all the grace and power required "for timely help"⁷⁰ in the hour of trial and crisis.

⁷⁰ Gk. εἰς εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν. TWNT i, p. 629, cites a close parallel from a Greek inscription: βοηθεῖτο κατὰ τὸ εὐκαιρον ("received timely help").

⁶⁶ B. F. Westcott, *ad loc.*

⁶⁷ Gk. χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας. Cf. B. F. C. Atkinson, *The Theology of Prepositions* (London, 1944), p. 5 ("His sinless nature contained nothing that responded to temptation, as does ours"); J. Moffatt, ICG, *ad loc.* ("The special reference is to temptations leading to apostasy or disobedience to the will of God. It is true that χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας does exclude some temptations ... a number of our worst temptations arise out of sin previously committed").

⁶⁸ J. R. Harris (*ExT* xxxiii [1921-22], pp. 217f.) sees an allusion here to the typological parallel between Jesus and Joshua the high priest of Zech 3:1ff. (p. 77, n. 28; p. 249, n. 97); the parallel is incomplete in that Joshua required to be cleansed from his own sins (cf. Ch. 7:27), whereas Jesus was χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας. On the general subject which our author treats here cf. J. K. S. Reid, "Tempted, yet without sin", *EQ* xxi (1949), pp. 161ff.; A. H. Curtis, *The Vision and Mission of Jesus* (Edinburgh, 1954), pp. 131ff.

⁶⁹ Gk. παρρησία (cf. p. 244 with n. 82, on Ch. 10:19).



COMMENTARY

ON THE

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

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Translated from the German

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be, that whatever shamefaced creature bows its head, and would fain withdraw and cloak itself from the eyes of God, has indeed the throat, as it were, bent back before these eyes, and so remains, with no possibility of escape, exposed and naked to their view. (See Oekumen. in Bleek, ii. 589). To the second αὐτοῦ is now subjoined the relative clause, πρὸς ὃν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος. Hofmann (*Schriftb.* i. 97) thinks that the former αὐτοῦ has also a reference to it. This is possible, but the assumption is not needed to prove αὐτοῦ both times to refer to God and not to the λόγος. For if the relative clause meant nothing more than "of whom we speak" (πρὸς ὃν = περὶ οὗ, v. 11), which sense it would undoubtedly bear, we should have, whether referring both αὐτοῦ's to God or to the λόγος, a feeble and unmeaning pleonasm. Πρὸς ὃν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος must therefore signify "to whom we have to give account" (Peshito), *cui reddiduri sumus rationem actuum nostrorum* (Alcuin and others), or rather, since λόγος πρὸς τινα (ἀποδοτεός) is scarcely Greek, "to whom we stand in relation, i.e. in a relation of responsibility" (Calvin, Bengel, Böhme, Bleek, De Wette, Lünemann); as Libanius, for instance, says once, τοῖς ἀδίκως ἀποκτενοῦσι καὶ πρὸς θεοῦς καὶ πρὸς ἀνθρώπους γίνεται ὁ λόγος (that is, they find they have dealings in consequence both with gods and men). If the clause πρὸς ὃν, κ.τ.λ., has (as can scarcely be doubted) this sense, it is self-evident that αὐτοῦ is meant to refer both times to God as being our judge; and this concluding thought reveals the purpose of what might seem the somewhat episodic description of the word of God, which is given here as a reason for the σπουδάσωμεν of ver. 11. With ver. 14 the exhortation is resumed.

CHAP. IV. 14-16. *The parænesis returns to its starting-point: how firm and joyous should our faith be in having a High Priest so gracious and so exalted!*

The author having, at iii. 1, urged the contemplation of Jesus as the Sent of God, and High Priest of our profession, has now shown what we owe to Him, as God's Messenger, raised so high above Moses, and how much depends on our bowed or bent—was more expressive. [Our English "open" suppresses also the image.—Tr.]

faithfulness to Him. This he has shown by the example, so full of warning for Christendom, of the ancient people whom Moses led, and by the present activities of the word of God, searching out and exposing to view the inmost being of His creatures. On all which he proceeds to ground a further exhortation, which on the one hand concludes that commenced at iii. 1, and on the other leads to a fuller account of the office and dignity of our great High Priest.

Ver. 14. *Let us therefore, having a great high priest who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, hold fast by our confession.*

The latest commentators do not seem to have understood the logical connection here. The sacred writer has not been speaking immediately before this of the high-priesthood of Christ, and Bleek therefore pronounces the method of reasoning to be inexact, and somewhat incongruous. De Wette and Tholuck would connect our verse with ii. 17, iii. 1, as if nothing lay between; while Lünemann makes the ὃν refer back to the whole previous discussion (ch. i. 1-iii. 6). All these expositors lie under the illusion that this ὃν in the participial clause must also logically belong to it, whereas logically it belongs to κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας. For what is the conclusion drawn by ὃν from the preceding context? A fresh exhortation, or the motive for one? In the first instance, certainly, a fresh exhortation. With more reason, therefore, Hofmann takes the ὃν as referring to both exhortation and motive taken together (*Schriftb.* ii. 1, 44): "*Both the existence for us of such an High Priest, and the holding fast by our profession—the former as a fact, the latter as a requirement based upon it—are already contained in the section just concluded (iii. 1-iv. 13), the whole contents of which section form the basis of the present exhortation; and hence the ὃν is justifiably employed to lead on from the former parænesis, which was founded on the contemplation of Christ as our great Apostle, the true Moses and the true Joshua, to this following one, which is based upon the fact that He is not only the true High Priest and antitype of Aaron, but also the kingly Priest, exalted now to God's right hand, and antitype of Melchizedek.*" But here likewise I feel that there is not a due recognition of the close relation in which ver. 14 stands in the first instance to vers. 12,

13. The word of God demands obedience and self-appropriation, *i.e.* faith, but faith not merely confined to inward apprehension,—a “Yea and Amen” openly pronounced,—a profession (*ὁμολογία*) without reserve or regard to consequences,—the echo from the mouth of the heart’s belief, and of the living hope¹ which it more especially proclaims. The danger to which the Hebrew Christians were exposed from the synagogue, was that of suffering themselves to be deterred from making this profession, or even brought to abandon it. The author, therefore, sets before them the all-penetrating energy of the divine word, and the omniscience, from which there is no escape, of the Searcher of hearts, whose word it is, and to whom we are responsible. On all this he grounds the admonition, Let us therefore hold fast (*firmiter teneamus*)—properly, grasp firmly so as not to let go (*firmiterprehendamus* with the genitive, as at vi. 18)—our (Christian) profession. The participial clause (*ἔχοντες, κ.τ.λ.*) confirms this exhortation, by stating how glorious, consolatory, and encouraging the substance of our profession is. That substance is Jesus, an High Priest infinitely exalted above the Levitical. As our author is now beginning to treat more particularly of the special subject of the Christian profession, in the aspect indicated by *τὸν ἀρχιερέα τῆς ὁμολογίας ἡμῶν*—and it is, moreover, his general custom in exhortations, not merely to apply doctrines previously enounced, but to make further developments of them—we are not bound to trouble ourselves with endeavouring to show that this participial clause, in all its parts, merely recapitulates what has been said already. This much, however, is certain, that not one of the attributes here assigned to our Lord has been wholly unprepared for.² This is now the third time that He is styled *ἀρχιερεύς* (ii. 17, iii. 1), and not without its having been shown previously in what sense. Such He became through suffering and death, and so continues; for after having purged our sins,

¹ The exegetical addition, *τῆς ἐλπίδος ἡμῶν*, is found in several MSS., and in Primasius, “*spei nostræ*.”

² We must, however, beware of finding allusions here which could hardly have been in the author’s mind: *e.g.* that our Lord is called “Jesus the Son of God,” in contrast with *Josiuca the son of Nun*, who is also called “Jesus” at ver. 8, where, however, *υἱὸς Ναυῆ* is not found; or again, that *διεληλυθὲτα τ. οὐρ.* designated our Lord as having truly entered into God’s rest, whereas again ver. 10 does not directly refer to Him.

He continues to reconcile and sanctify and represent us before God, performing always and continuously for His people, what the high priest of the Old Testament did only once a year. Because of His exaltation above this Levitical high priest the author calls Him *μέγαν*; and from what has preceded, we already know wherein His greatness consists: raised high above the angels, He sits crowned (in consequence of death) with glory and honour, at the right hand of Divine Majesty (*τῆς μεγαλωσύνης*), in highest places. *Ἀρχιερεύς μέγας*, a name given also by Philo to the Logos as mediator of all good in the whole sphere of creation, is used here in a sense as far above Philo’s thoughts as heaven is above earth. And further, the meaning of *διεληλυθὲτα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς* here is substantially the same as that of *ἐκάθισεν, κ.τ.λ.*, at i. 3. The throne of God is the final goal of the Lord’s transit through all the heavens. We must beware of regarding this *διεληλυθὲτα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς* as parallel to the *διὰ τῆς μεζονος καὶ τελειοτέρας σκηνῆς* of ix. 11 (see note there); and indeed we are forbidden to do so by the addition in that passage of the epithet *οὐ χειροποιήτου*. The heavens here are the *created* heavens, which Christ passed through in going to the “Place” of God (Ezek. iii. 12). That “Place” is God’s own eternal *Doxa*, the *uncreated* heaven (*αὐτὸς ὁ οὐρανός*, ix. 24) of His eternal residence and self-manifestation. We must distinguish between that highest heaven and the heaven of glory in which He vouchsafes to manifest Himself to the blessed. This latter is of necessity local, albeit not as a place expressly created for the purpose: it is the *cælum empyreum* which our dogmatic theologians rightly call a *dulce sine somno somnium*, and the collective whole of the “many mansions” into which the blessed are received. But the uncreated heaven of God Himself is His own omnipresent glory,—omnipresent, because absolutely without any local limitations: it may be said to be *above* all the created heavens, inasmuch as it is the super-creaturely background of all creation, and to be everywhere present, yet so as resting uncomprehended by the finite in its own infinitude. And now Jesus the exalted One, being thus above all heavens in this His *Doxa* with God, is thereby omnipresent too. This conclusion, drawn by the dogmatic theology of our church,¹ is incontrovertible. Heb. iv. 14,

¹ [*i.e.* the Lutheran communion, especially those portions of it which

taken in connection with Eph. iv. 10, is rightly adduced as proving the "ubiquity" of Christ. Compare, besides what was said on i. 3, the passage in Philo, quoted by Dorner (*Entw.* i. 29): πάντα γὰρ πεπλήρωκεν ὁ Θεὸς καὶ διὰ πάντων διελύθη καὶ κενὸν οὐδὲν οὐδὲ ἔρημον ἀπολέλοιπεν ἑαυτοῦ.

Finally, the two last appellations here given to our Lord (*Ἰησοῦν, τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ*) have also their root in what has gone before. First, we have the Son of man, who for our good passed through suffering and death to royal and priestly glory, called by His birth-name (*Ἰησοῦν*); and then *τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ*, to remind us of the divine height from which He descended, in order to regain it as the reward of that suffering. And having thus on what we have in Jesus based the exhortation, to "hold fast our profession" in Him, the author proceeds to develop the statements contained in the participial clause, and from them to show how not only are we bound to obey it, but thereby enabled stedfastly and cheerfully to do so.

Ver. 15. *For we have not an high priest unable to sympathize with us in our infirmities, but one who has in all points been tempted in like manner, without sin.*

Συμπαθεῖν is used of that compassion which, by a fellow-feeling, places itself in the position of the sufferer (as x. 34); whereas *συμπάσχειν* is to share in one and the same experience of suffering (Rom. viii. 17; 1 Cor. xii. 26). Under *ἀσθενεῖαι* may be comprehended the various kinds of physical evil to which our frail humanity is subject (Luke v. 15, and often; comp. Matt. viii. 17); but here, in the first instance, the manifold kinds of temptation are meant to which we are exposed in the midst of this sinful world, and in which we have need of higher help, in order to stand firm. The High Priest whom we have is not one who can have no fellow-feeling with those states of suffering from which our weakness cannot defend itself, and in which this weakness often enough becomes mourn-

are committed to the dogmatic definitions of the *Formula Concordiæ*, drawn up in 1575. See § viii. *de Persona Christi*. The extreme Lutheran position might be expressed in the following syllogism: "Christ in His human nature is seated at the right hand of God;" God's right hand is everywhere; therefore Christ, in His human nature, is omnipresent. —Tr.]

fully manifest; "on the contrary, He is one who," etc. *Δέ* is here, as ii. 6 and iv. 13, adversative, while also introducing an additional thought not contained in the direct antithesis. That would simply be *δυνάμενον συμπαθεῖσαι*; but here we have the further proposition, *πεπειρασμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα*, which shows why Jesus cannot but thus *συμπαθεῖν ταῖς ἀσθενεῖαις ἡμῶν* (Hofm. *Weiss.* ii. 25). Instead of the *πεπειρασμένον* of the *text. rec.*,¹ retained by Wetstein, Scholz, and Lachm. (following A.B.D.E., etc.), Mill, Bg., Kn., Tischd., have preferred the reading *πεπειραμένον* (C.I.K. and other authorities), prevalent in the editions before Beza, but rejected by Bleek and Lünemann, as giving, instead of the here requisite designation of our Lord as *tentatus*, the unsuitable one of *expertus*. The context would certainly lead us to expect *tentatus*, i.e. *πεπειρασμένος*, here (comp. ii. 18): *πεπειραμένος* might indeed (comp. *πειρᾶν τινος* or *τινα*) also bear the sense of *tentatus*, did not usage seem to confine it to the other of *expertus*, which again would require *πάντων* or *πᾶσι* instead of *κατὰ πάντα*. Add to which, the specially Attic forms *πειρᾶν, πειρᾶσθαι*, are very rare in Hellenistic Greek;² while *πειράζειν, πειράζεσθαι*, are quite common. The author therefore, in all probability, wrote *πεπειρασμένον*.³ Instead of *ὁμοίως*, in like manner, similarly, he uses the stronger term *καθ' ὁμοιότητα*, after the likeness, suggesting the addition of *ἡμῶν*, of us; and further, the *χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας* serves, by making only one exception, to extend the idea of unqualified similarity to every other particular. This *χωρὶς ἁμ.* is appended, not to *κατὰ πάντα*, but to *καθ' ὁμοιότητα*, to imply not merely that temptation produced no sin in our Lord, but also that it found in Him no sin (Hofm. *Schriftb.* ii. 1, 32). It limits the similarity of His temptation and ours in this sense, in order to bring out more clearly the unlimited similarity in all other respects.⁴ It is a

¹ i.e. the Elzevir edition, for R. Stephens reads *πεπειραμένον*.

² In the Septuagint it is perhaps only found at Prov. xxvi. 18; in the New Testament nowhere beyond suspicion but in Acts xxvi. 21.

³ Or if *πεπειραμένον*, only as a bye-form or variation of *πεπειρασμένον*, in the same sense. See Winer, § 15, Obs. at the end. Cyril of Alexandria read *πεπειραμένον*, and explains it in the sense of *expertum*.

⁴ Zonaras (on the word *καινοτομία*) appeals with effect to this *καθ' ὁμοιότη.* against those who taught that our Lord had a human nature of a peculiar and different kind from ours. V. Gerlach vindicates its true meaning

necessary, though here only a subordinate addition. *Χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας* might indeed be taken as conveying a main idea: Christ has not only experienced, but also overcome temptation. His mere experience of it would profit us nothing, unless He had under every condition and kind of temptation continued the sinless One; but this He has done, and therefore is not only disposed to help us, from having shared our experiences, but also able so to do, from having overcome in like trials to our own. But the context does not favour this more emphatic view of the meaning of *χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας*: it is here only a secondary consideration (Bl.). Christ has passed through a life in which He was in all points equally tempted as we are, provided only we leave out of account the sin through which our temptations find in us an innate proneness to be led astray (*Schriftb.* ii. 1, 45). Nothing is wanting to us, the author means to say, for encouragement to expect victory in the trials of our faith: we have a great, and at the same time a compassionate High Priest, who has without sin endured exactly the same temptations as ourselves,¹ so that we can supplicate divine assistance with the joyful confidence of certainly obtaining it.

Ver. 16. *Let us therefore approach with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace for seasonable assistance.*

The sacred writer must not be supposed, in using the term *θρόνος τῆς χάριτος*, to have had in view [what we after Luther² are wont to call the mercy-seat] the Cappôreth of the ancient tabernacle, which in the Septuagint is always rendered *ἱλαστήριον*.

from the heterodoxy of Irving and Menken: "We are tempted by sin and to sin: Christ is tempted like as we are in both respects, but only externally, and therefore *without sin*, although there lay in the human nature which He assumed the abstract possibility of falling."

¹ The Logos of Philo is also a sinless high priest (i. 562, *de profugis* 20), who makes of the human soul a sanctuary, and preserves it from sin (*ib.* 21); but he knows of no incarnate sufferer descending from heaven and returning thither.

² [*Gnadenstuhl*. Cappôreth properly signifies the "cover," or lid of the ark. The rendering *ἱλαστήριον*, or *propitiatorium*, gives it a metaphorical and spiritualizing sense, which does not belong to the term as originally applied.—Tr.]

ριον, the propitiatory. Compare note on ix. 5. As in Ezekiel's vision the "firmament" over the "chariot" corresponds to the golden Cappôreth of the earthly sanctuary, so here (had this been the writer's thought) the throne of grace would be the seat of Jehovah, as worshipped by the cherubim behind the veil (Isa. vi.; Rev. xi. 19). But this supposed reference, which our translation of Cappôreth so naturally suggests to us, has no basis in the text. *Θρόνος τῆς χάριτος*, which would in Hebrew be *כסא חסד*, might (when compared with *θρόνος τῆς Μεγαλοσύνης* of ch. viii. 1, Hebr. *כסא עזרה*; comp. note on i. 3) be taken to signify the seat on which grace is enthroned, but (comparing Ps. xlvii. 9, Heb.; Prov. xx. 8; Jer. xiv. 21) is better understood of a throne established upon grace (Isa. xvi. 5; Ps. lxxxix. 15, Heb.), or one from which grace proceeds. To this throne, from which descends the grace obtained and conveyed by the high-priestly work and office of Christ (comp. *δι' αὐτοῦ*, vii. 25), we are exhorted to draw near,¹ imploring aid with joyous confidence that we shall obtain it. The following clause, *ἵνα λάβωμεν ἔλεον καὶ χάριν εὐρωμεν*, forms a beautiful and euphonious *chiasmus*.² It can hardly be decided whether the author wrote *ἔλεον* (from the classical *ὁ ἔλεος*, of the occurrence of which in the New Testament we are not quite certain) or *ἔλεος* (the neuter form *τὸ ἔλεος*, used almost exclusively in Hellenistic Greek, and undoubtedly the only form found in St. Luke): the *text. rec.* has *ἔλεον*, but Lchm. and Tischd. prefer *ἔλεος*, which is better supported by MSS. It is indeed possible that the author meant to express the same thing by the classical *λάβωμεν ἔλεον* and the Hebraizing *χάριν εὐρωμεν* (= *לָקַח חַסֵּד*). "Ἐλεος is mercy which lays to heart the unhappy situation of another, and by sympathy makes it her own; *χάρις*, kindly favour, which from a free

¹ *Προσερχεσθαι* is a favourite word with our author: it is derived from the *קָרַב* of the Old Testament, used specially of the approach of the priest to the altar—comp. Lev. xxi. 17, etc.—or of the levitically clean to the holy place—Lev. xxii. 3.

² [*Chiasmus, χιασμός* (the making of a *χ* or cross), is a figure of rhetoric, thus described by H. Stephens (*Thesaur. sub lit. K*, not X, p. 4660 of Valpy's edit.): "*Figura est quando quatuor propositis tertium secundo respondet et convenit quartum primo.*" Here Delitzsch seems to think there is a crosswise (chiastic) reference of the verbs and substantives, *λάβωμεν* more properly belonging to *χάριν*, and *εὐρωμεν* to *ἔλεον*.—Tr.]

internal impulse inclines to one who has no claim on its regard, and devotes itself to befriending him. In τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος both are included under χάρις, as the general designation of God's prevenient condescending love, as sympathizing with and manifesting itself to His creatures, and more especially to sinful men. To this throne we are exhorted to draw near, as to the source of grace, that we may obtain both that mercy which is moved by the contemplation of our wretchedness, and the grace which is ever ready to give εἰς εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν. To take this as a reference to iii. 13, and by it understand a help vouchsafed in the time of grace, and before its expiration (Bleek, De Wette, Lünemann), accords, as seems to me, neither with the expression nor the context. We all are πειραζόμενοι (ii. 18), and they who received this epistle were so, as being in a special manner surrounded by temptations to apostasy. The author directs them to the throne, where the Redeemer, exalted to give help, sits at God's right hand, that (as need requires) they may thence obtain help at the right time, *i.e.* before sinking through their own infirmity. Βοήθειαν reminds us of the βοήθησαι of ii. 18,—the thought on which this exhortation is founded being similar to that, but here expressed with greater fulness.

The sacred writer now proceeds to speak more copiously and argumentatively of the high-priesthood of Christ, and so to provide his readers with the defensive armour of which they stand most in need.

CHAP. V. 1-10. *The high priest of Aaron's race holds, as man, on behalf of other men, his office from God: and so also Christ has been appointed priest by God His Father, after a higher order, that of Melchizedek; and though Son of God, become through suffering and prayers in the days of his flesh, the author of eternal salvation to us.*

The close internal connection of these ten verses is recognised by all modern expositors except Tholuck, who takes vers. 1-3 as explanatory supplement to iv. 15, 16, and begins the new section with ch. v. 4.¹ Older commentators, such as Beza,

¹ Tholuck regards vers. 1-3 as explanatory of iv. 15 above: "For (γράφ) there is this difference between our High Priest and every other human

Schlichting, Hammond, Limborch, Storr, and the Lutherans Balduin and Gerhard, do much better in finding the requisites for a true high priest first laid down at vers. 1-3, and then exhibited as fulfilled in Christ at vers. 7-10. They rightly regard the structure of vers. 1-10 as *chiastic*, vers. 4-6 forming the centre, from which vers. 7, 8 look back, and correspond to vers. 2, 3, and vers. 9, 10 to ver. 1, thus completing the parallelism in all particulars. As the high priest of Aaron's race was taken from among men, and could therefore sympathize with men, so also is it with Christ; and as the Aaronic high priest was made by God the mediator and offerer of sacrifice on man's behalf, so also again was Christ,—both requisites, the true humanity of the priest himself, and the divine origin of his call, being found antitypically in the Lord Jesus; yet so that, in virtue of the essential superiority of antitype to type, He is not only the antitype of Aaron, but also that of Melchizedek.

No modern expositor has evinced such a thorough understanding of this orderly arrangement of thought, the symmetry of which is not merely mechanical, but of organic growth, as Hofmann (*Schriftbeweis*, ii. 1, 280 et seq., comp. 49).¹ The γάρ, v. 1, is not merely explanatory, but demonstrative. "From the nature of the high-priesthood of Jesus, resembling as it does

one, that while the mediatorial functions of the latter are based on fellow-feeling with their brethren, it is a fellow-feeling in the sense of guilt." But as the thought involved in iv. 15 was even there quite subordinate, so here too it stands in the background; and it only needs a glance at vers. 7, 8, to see that it is not points of difference, but points of agreement between Christ and the Aaronical priesthood, which the author has here in view. Bleek, De Wette, Lünemann, and others, are right in regarding vers. 1-10 as an inseparable whole; but they fail in discerning what a perfect whole it is. There is no proper application to Christ in their view of what is said of Aaron's priesthood, vers. 1-3. Bleek supposes the author to have dropped some of the threads of his argument; while De Wette and Lünemann suppose, that either such applications may be inferred from what had gone before in iv. 15, ii. 17, etc., or are supplied in what follows, vii. 27, viii. 3, ix. 11, x. 11, etc.

¹ Ebrard correctly observes, that the author of the division into chapters was guided by a happy instinct in making v. 1 the commencement of a new chapter; but he deranges the order of thought when he makes iv. 16 the *thesis* of which v. 1-9 is the exposition, and finds the enunciation of a fresh thesis at v. 10.



THE EPISTLE TO THE
HEBREWS

*A Commentary on the
Greek Text*

by

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4:14. Let us hold fast to Jesus, our high priest!

Ὅν does not draw an inference from what immediately precedes. Ὅν is sometimes adversative (Bauer *s.v.* 4), but there is no other suggestion in vv. 12-16 of a contrast between God's judgment and his mercy; the thought flows smoothly, as usual in Hebrews, from one to the other. It is therefore best to understand Ὅν as indicating the resumption of a subject after an interruption (Bauer *s.v.* 2a; cf. Lk. 3:7; 1 Cor. 8:4). In this case, the interruption probably extends from 3:7 to 4:13.

The participle ἔχοντες is causal, "since we have . . ." (MHT 3.157); it is present in meaning as well as in form (BD §339). The "we" is inclusive: "we Christians," though Schenk's "only we" is too strong. The use of a subordinate clause to reintroduce the theme of Christ's high priesthood serves a double purpose: in the nearer context, the subordinate clause serves as a stylistic variant for the main clause with ἔχομεν in v. 15, and in the broader context it serves (together with Ὅν) to remind the readers that the subject has been mentioned before. The whole construction, together with the earlier anticipatory references to Christ as high priest, may indicate the author's sensitivity in approaching a theme which, as he says explicitly in → 5:11, he finds difficult to explain (δυσσεμμήνευτος, perhaps a tactful periphrasis for "difficult for you to understand"). Hebrews often uses ἔχω with Jesus (v. 15; 8:1; 10:21) or other aspects of salvation (6:19; 10:19, 34f.; 12:1; 13:10, 14) as objects; also of Christian behaviour (5:14; 6:18; 10:19; 13:18); in the present verse, ἔχομεν is the indicative basis for the exhortations κρατῶμεν (v. 14) and προσερχώμεθα (v. 16).

Ἀρχιερεὺς → 2:17. Ἀρχιερεῖα μέγαν is emphatic and tautologous, but is applied in 1 Macc. 13:42 to Simon Maccabaeus, and by Philo (*Abr.* 30) to Melchizedek and (*Somn.* 1.214, 219; 2.183) to the Logos; cf. ἱερεὺς μέγας, Heb. 10:21; μέγας ἱερεὺς, Justin, *Dial.* 115; τὸν ποιμένα . . . τὸν μέγαν, Heb. 13:20, both referring to Jesus. Μέγας may anticipate the comparison between Jesus and other (high) priests which begins in 5:1; or it may reflect the author's conviction that Jesus is a high priest of an entirely different order (Attridge). See Hillmann 1960; Williamson 1970.130-132.

Διελθῆναι τοὺς οὐρανοὺς: the exaltation of Jesus, like his temptations (πειρασμένον, v. 5), are now viewed as permanent aspects of the Christ-event, seen as a whole; cf. 2:9, ἠλαττωμένον . . . ἐστεφανωμένον; 12:2, κενάθειεν; contrast ἐκάθισεν, 1:3; 8:1; 10:12. There is nothing in Hebrews corresponding to the detailed accounts of passage through the heavens found in 2 *Enoch* 1-20; *Asc. Is.* 7-9; 3 *Baruch* (*passim*); (2nd) *Apoc. Jas.* 46.12f. "he who passed [through] the [worlds . . .]" For the plural οὐρανοί, → 1:10; οἱ αἰῶνες in 1:2; see also McRay. Διέρχομαι + acc. is regularly used with expressions of place, and the present verse is to be understood similarly, though there is no exact parallel (Sir. 35[32]:17, προσερχή ταπεινοῦ νεφέλας

διήλθεν) in the Greek Bible. Διέρχομαι + acc. may, depending on the context, refer to movement within an area (Acts 13:6; 18:23), but more usually it denotes movement through an area and beyond it (Acts 14:24; 15:3, 41; 16:6; 19:1, 21; 20:2; 1 Cor. 16:5). The latter option is confirmed by Heb. 7:26 ("above the heavens"). The thought is generally traditional, but the author shows no interest in speculating on the number of heavens, nor in precise consistency between this expression on the one hand, and such expressions as 9:24 (εἰσῆλθεν . . . Χριστὸς . . . εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν οὐρανόν) and ἐν (τοῖς) οὐρανοῖς (8:1; 9:23; 12:23) on the other. For a different cosmological picture again, cf. 7:26, ὑψηλότερος τῶν οὐρανῶν, which is close to Eph. 4:10, ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν. The language is poetic or rhetorical, even if (as in the case of *κατάπανσις* in 3:7-4:11) the images are to be taken seriously. See Du Bose 72f.; Galling; Dey; Johnsson 1978.173-175; Ellingworth 1986.

Ἰησοῦς is as usual emphatic (→ 2:9) — all the more so since it is the first occurrence of the name since 3:1, and the first explicit reference to Christ since 3:14. The present verse does not relate this name directly to Jesus' human existence, but v. 15 will do so indirectly.

It is most unlikely that τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ is added to distinguish Jesus from Joshua, mentioned in 3:8. As 5:5f. make clear, the author's purpose is rather to relate his distinctive teaching about Christ as high priest to the traditional teaching, developed in chaps. 1-2, about Christ as Son of God. The full expression ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, as distinct from the simple (ὁ) υἱός, more common in Hebrews as in John, is emphatic; elsewhere (6:6; 10:29) it is associated with warnings, here with references to Christ's unique status (7:3). For the relation between the titles of Son and high priest, see the comment on 5:5f.; 7:3, 28; cf. Schröger 126f. For Jesus as Son of God, → 1:2.

Κρατέω (Rev. 3:11) and its synonym κατέχω denote holding on to hope (6:18; 10:23), confidence (3:6, 14; 4:16), and the Christian confession (here and in 10:23). Westcott takes κρατέω to mean taking possession, and κατέχω holding on to what is already possessed, but stylistic variation is probably intended rather than contrast. The objects of these verbs are related to one another (W. Michaelis in *TDNT* 3.910-12; MHT 3.232).

This suggests that ἡ ὁμολογία, though distinctively Christian, and in Hebrews probably "a firmly outlined, liturgically set tradition" (O. Michel in *TDNT* 5.215f.), is not limited to a formula confessing Jesus as Son of God (as in Acts 8:37 *v.l.*; Rom. 1:4; 2 Cor. 1:19; so here according to Käsemann 1939.105-110). In → 3:1, τῆς ὁμολογίας may well be verbal in meaning: ". . . whom we confess as apostle and high priest." Here the absolute ἡ ὁμολογία suggests refusing to abandon a confession which is in the process of becoming fixed. The variation between the two verses may, however, be stylistic, with ἡμῶν omitted because it occurs in v. 15a. See Galling 263f.; G. Bornkamm 1963; K. T. Schäfer 1971; Schenk 1980.

4:15. Christ and temptation

As in v. 13, a double negative in the first part of the verse corresponds to a positive statement in the second; in both verses, *δέ* indicates a contrast of form rather than of meaning. However, unlike v. 13b, v. 15b goes further than the first part of the verse; the underlying meaning is: "Our high priest can feel with us in our weaknesses, because he has been tempted in all respects as we are. . . ." At this stage of the argument, there is probably no implied polemic (as for example at Qumran) against unworthy high priests. It is the author's usual practice to compare antitype and type positively, before contrasting them (→ 3:1-6); Christ is not contrasted with the levitical priests until at least 7:7-10. The present verse is better understood positively in the light of 5:2, with the rhetorically negative *μη δυνάμενον συμπαθήσαι* having a positive meaning. See Laub 1980.109-12.

Δυνάμενον recalls *δύναται* in → 2:18, and anticipates *δυνάμενος* in 5:2. *Δύναται* is later used to denote God's power to save Jesus from death (5:7); and more commonly Jesus' own power to save believers (7:25) and to perfect their consciences (cf. 10:1, 11).

Συμπαθεῖω and cognates in the LXX, especially in 4 Maccabees, are used most often of family affection (e.g., 4 Macc. 14:13-20); hence by extension to the Christian family in Heb. 10:34**, and in the present verse to the relation between Christ, as exalted high priest, and believers. Although the two occurrences in Hebrews refer to the stress of temptation (here) and imprisonment (in 10:34), the strong sense of sharing suffering, expressed by *συμπάσχω* in Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 12:26***, is not required by the context. The meaning here, as in 2:16-18 and 5:2, is more probably that Christ's earthly life gives him inner understanding of human experience, and thus makes him ready and able to give active help. *Μετριοπαθεῖω* is similarly used in 5:2. See W. Michaelis in *TDNT* 5.935f.; Spicq 1978.842f.

Ἀσθενεία is used in 5:2; 7:28 of the ineffectiveness of the OT priests, and in 11:34*, as perhaps by implication here, in contrast with the *δύναμις* which comes from God or Christ. 5:2 suggests that the author is thinking, not of physical weakness, but of the intellectual and moral weakness which leads to failure to do God's will. Here the plural may refer more specifically to unintentional transgressions of the Mosaic Law (Michel 105n.5; cf. ἄγνοια in 5:2). See G. Stählin in *TDNT* 1.491-493.

Πειρασμένον (C K L P minn. *πειραζόμενον* from the Attic *πειράω*, with no difference of meaning; BD §101): *χωρίς ἁμαρτίας* suggests that the meaning here is specifically "tempted," rather than more generally "tested." However, this verse recalls 2:18, the only other place in which Hebrews uses *πειράζω* of Christ, and there *πειρασθεῖς* is related to his suffering (*πέπονθεν*), and by implication to his death. The same connection recurs in 5:7, though without the use of *πειράζω*, so an implicit allusion to the final test of the

cross is possible, as perhaps in 12:4 (cf. 12:2). For the force of the perfect, → v. 14, on *διεληλυθότα*. There is no suggestion that the exalted Jesus is still being tempted; what continue are the effects of what he underwent on earth (cf. BD §342 [2]).

Κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα (cf. 7:15**, of Melchizedek) is equivalent to *κατὰ πάντα τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ὁμοιωθῆναι* in → 2:17. *Ἡμῶν* is understood from the previous clause; *καθ' ὁμοιότητα* is used absolutely in Gn. 1:11f.; cf. Philo, *Fuga* 51; J. Schneider in *TDNT* 5.189f. The phrase itself, here as in 7:15, probably means no more than "like," or more emphatically "just like"; the following words introduce a qualification not inherent in *ὁμοιότης* itself.

Χωρίς is one of the author's favourite words (7:7, 20; 9:7, 18, 22, 28; 10:28; 11:6, 40; 12:8, 14*). It is "the proper Hellenistic word" (Bauer s.v.) for "without," synonymous with *ἄνευ*, *ἐκτός* (all still in modern Greek), and also *ἄπερ*. The originally spatial reference of *χωρίς* is probably a dead metaphor by NT times (cf. the English "apart from"), but *χωρίς*, more strongly than its synonyms, suggests separation; *ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἐποίησεν* in 1 Pet. 2:22 is weaker. *Χωρίς ἁμαρτίας***: Christ's sinlessness is presupposed in the tradition, not emphasized; for the thought, cf. Jn. 8:46; 1 Jn. 3:5; contrast Mt. 19:17 with parallels Mk. 10:18; Lk. 18:19 (Braun). The closest LXX parallel is 4 Macc. 5:9, *τὸ μὴ ἀπολαύειν τῶν χωρὶς ὀνειδῶν ἡδέων*, of which Heb. 11:25 may be a reminiscence. *Χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας* has a different meaning in → 9:28. In the present verse, the meaning "apart from the temptations which arise from sin" seems linguistically forced and foreign to the thought of Hebrews. The plain meaning is that Jesus, though tempted, remained untouched by sin. Sinlessness is attributed to the incorporeal Logos in Philo, *Fuga* 109f.; *Spec. Leg.* 1.293, and to the Messiah in *Ps. Sol.* 17:41; cf. Bergh van Eysinga; Vanhoye 1980.132-136.

4:16. The Christian's approach to a gracious God

This verse forms the climax and conclusion (*ὄν*) of the author's encouragement to approach God through Jesus as his high priest.

Προσερχόμεθα is the first of a rhetorically effective though not obtrusive series of words prefixed by *προσ-* which continues to *προσαγορευθεῖς* in 5:10. *Προσερχομαι* in Hebrews is always used in a cultic sense, of worshippers approaching God, either generally (11:6), in the OT ritual (10:1; 12:18), or through Christ, as here and in 7:25; 10:22 (cf. v. 19); 12:22. These passages overlap in meaning with the present verse, thus illustrating the author's practice of underscoring important themes. This sense of *προσερχομαι* is frequent in the LXX, for example, in Lv. 9:5 of Israel, vv. 7f. of Aaron; Dt. 4:11 (cf. Heb. 12:18) of Israel; without reference to sacrifice in Ps. 34:5 (LXX 33:6); Sir. 1:27; 24:29; but rare elsewhere in the NT (1 Pet. 2:4), and not Pauline (1 Tim. 6:3 in a different sense). The language of

liturgical procession complements that of the journeyings of God's people (2:10; 4:1, 9; 12:2; 13:14), the first being predominantly present and the latter mainly future (Brady). Cultic associations extend to ἐγγίζω in Heb. 7:19 (cf. Jas. 4:8); otherwise in Heb. 10:25, as in Rom. 13:12; Jas. 5:8; 1 Pet. 4:7, ἐγγίζωι denotes the approach of the last days. See also the comment on εἰσέλθομαι in 3:18, and see J. Schneider in *TDNT* 2.683; Laub 1980.265-272.

In other contexts, παρρησία suggests open speaking, sometimes more specifically a confident confession of faith (→ 3:6 with καύχημα; 10:19, cf. v. 23), but the main factor here is that of trusting confidence in God.

Τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος, as 8:1 (cf. 12:2) clearly shows, is God's throne, not Christ's (notwithstanding 1:8* = Ps. 45:7, where the emphasis is on θεός, not θρόνος). The phrase recalls but also contrasts with (ὁ) θρόνος (τῆς) δόξης 1 Sa. (LXX 1 Kgdms.) 2:8; Is. 22:23; Je. 14:21; 17:12; Sir. 47:11; Mt. 19:28; 25:31; cf. also θρόνος μεγαλοσύνης (Heb. 8:1); θρόνος ἀνομίας (Ps. 94[LXX 93]:20); θρόνος αἰσθήσεως (Pr. 12:23); all genitives of quality, here "the throne on which God sits to extend his mercy" (Héring; cf. MHT 4.110). Young 1973.165f., following many older commentators, sees a reference to the ἰλαστήριον or mercy seat (cf. 9:5), but Bleek, Michel, and others disagree; the context allows at most an indirect allusion to a heavenly counterpart of the earthly temple's mercy seat. God's name is respectfully avoided, as for example in 1:3; 8:1, but elsewhere grace is explicitly associated with God (2:9 text; 12:15), and with the Spirit (10:29). For χάρις → 2:9. The mention of a throne recalls the idea of judgment which predominated in vv. 12f.; but here the author's purpose is to encourage rather than warn (O. Schmitz in *TDNT* 3.165).

The chiasmus ἵνα λάβωμεν ἔλεος καὶ χάριν εὐρωμεν (obscured in B, which omits εὐρωμεν) suggests that λάβωμεν is close in meaning to εὐρωμεν, and ἔλεος to χάριν. Montefiore unconvincingly relates ἔλεος to the present, and χάρις to the future. Montefiore also stresses the element of penitence, but this is not emphasized either here or elsewhere in Hebrews (6:1). Both λάμβανω and εὐρίσκω (especially passive) sometimes imply an activity of God, from which human beings benefit: for λάμβανω, → 2:2; for εὐρίσκω, cf. 9:12; 11:5 = Gn. 5:24; 12:17*; εὐρίσκω χάριν, Lk. 1:30; Acts 7:46, both with reference to God. There is an implicit link with ἔχοντες in v. 14: "one 'has' what one has 'received'" (Michel).

"Ἐλεος" (here neuter, not masculine as in Attic, and here in C^c D^c E L Chrysostom etc.; there is similar variation in Is. 63:7; 1 Macc. 3:44) is associated with χάρις in Wis. 3:9; 4:15, and in salutations in 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4 *v.l.*; 2 Jn. 3. Further references in R. Bultmann in *TDNT* 2.482-485; Spicq 1982.250-258; see also ἐλεήμων → 2:17.

Εἰς εὐκαιρον (Mk. 6:21**) βοήθειαν (Acts 27:17**) probably goes with the entire previous chiasmus, not only with χάρις εὐρωμεν. Εὐκαιρος (Spicq 1978.318-320; cf. K. L. Schmidt in *TDNT* 3.462) retains its temporal sense

in Mk. 6:21 as well as in Ps. 104(LXX 103):27; 2 Macc. 14:29; cf. εὐκαιρος Sir. 18:22, though elsewhere (2 Macc. 15:20f.; 3 Macc. 4:11; 5:44) it denotes convenience of place. In the present context, a temporal element is probably present but not emphasized. There is probably no direct reference to the σήμερον theme of 3:7ff., but rather a more general reference to the readers' need for God's support in times of trial. Βοήθεια is spoken of as God's response to his people's troubles in Ps. 60:11 (LXX 59:13); 108:12 (LXX 107:13); Sir. 40:24; → καιρός, 9:9. For βοήθεια, → βοηθέω, 2:18; cf. βοηθός, 13:6 = Ps. 118:7 (LXX 117:6). For the thought, cf. Sir. 8:9. The meaning is "to help when help is needed"; cf. TEV, "to help us just when we need it."

JESUS THE MERCIFUL HIGH PRIEST (5:1-10)

The transition to the theme of Christ's high priesthood, first introduced in 2:17, is now complete, though vv. 5f. will form a pivot joining earlier teaching about his Sonship to later teaching about his high priesthood. As on a smaller scale in 3:1-6, the author mentions first the similarities between Christ and others, then develops the contrasts. 5:1-10 is almost entirely concerned with the points of contact between Jesus and other high priests (so Vanhoye 1977b); the greater value of Christ's high priesthood and sacrifice will be the main theme of the central doctrinal section, 7:1-10:18. The basis of the discussion is twofold: on the one hand the OT, and on the other hand the events of Christ's suffering and death. There is no trace of Qumran's polemic against the contemporary Jerusalem priesthood, or even of interest in it.

The generally chiasmic structure of 5:1-10 is widely recognized, but cannot be pressed in detail (so already Bleek, against Beza and others; cf. Vanhoye 107-113; further references in Braun). V. 1 and especially v. 4 emphasize the levitical high priest's divine call, while vv. 2f. express his sympathy with his fellows. Vv. 5f. and 10 correspondingly emphasize the divine call of Christ, and vv. 7f. the suffering which united him with others. Jesus thus meets the two essential conditions which any high priest must fulfil in order to deal with sin.

Although OT high priests, like Jesus, were of course male and Jewish, neither feature is stressed in this passage: priests are ἐξ ἀνθρώπων, not ἐξ ἀνθρώπων. There is no reference to priesthood outside the biblical tradition.

The distinction between the two subsections vv. 1-4, 5-10 is marked by the use of the present tense in the general description of a high priest's task (vv. 1-4) and the aorist in describing Christ's priesthood, the uniqueness of which, however, is not yet emphasized (vv. 5-10). The two subsections also belong together; the general description of high priesthood is selective and from the beginning has in view the person, and probably the earthly life,

of Jesus. However, the implied reserve in the references to sin in v. 2, and the vivid description of Christ's sufferings in v. 7, already imply the superiority of Christ's priesthood, which will later occupy the centre of attention. The symmetrical references to Aaron and Melchizedek which close vv. 4 and 10 point in the same direction.

The detailed comments below will suggest that the language of this passage combines traditional elements, drawn mainly from the LXX, with distinctive features such as the emphasis on priesthood as a christological category.

See De Keulenaer 1934.417-420 (vv. 1-4), 1935.404-406 (vv. 7-10); Oepke 63 (vv. 1-10); Bourgin 1958.82-87 (vv. 1-4, 10); Cerfaux (vv. 5-10); Rabanos 66-69 (vv. 1-10); Bertetto (vv. 1-4); Javierre (vv. 1-6); Vanhoye 1977c (vv. 1-10); Zimmermann 1977.176-180 (vv. 1-10); Laub 1980.113-143 (vv. 1-10); Vanhoye 1980.136-141 (vv. 1-4); Bachmann (vv. 1-10). Díez Macho 88 appears to exaggerate in describing the whole of Heb. 5-7 as a midrash.

5:1. The qualifications of a high priest

The essential nature of a high priest is that he should be chosen by God to act for his fellows in offering sacrifices related to the removal of sin.

If this verse stood alone, it would be possible to understand the passives λαμβανόμενος and καθίσταται as referring generally to selection and appointment by the community, or as in 7:28 by virtue of the Law. V. 4 however, makes it clear that the action of God is meant, λαμβανόμενος being synonymous with καλούμενος in v. 4. 8:3 recapitulates most of this verse.

Πᾶς . . . ἀρχιερεὺς (→ 2:17) looks back to the reference to unsympathetic high priests in 4:15. Γάρ thus explains (Bauer s.v. 2) and develops the implied description of Jesus as high priest in 4:15; it does not, as P. E. Hughes believes, express a logical connection with what precedes, and it is not directly related to the exhortations κρατῶμεν (4:14) and προσερχόμεθα (4:16). Πᾶς . . . ἀρχιερεὺς, here and in 8:3, but not πᾶς ἱερεὺς in 10:11, should be understood strictly as including Jesus; the context, rather than any contrast between ἱερεὺς and ἀρχιερεὺς, establishes the difference.

Ἐξ ἀνθρώπων λαμβανόμενος is best taken with the following words: not "every high priest who is taken from among men is appointed" (Syriac, Luther), but "every high priest is taken from among men and (then) appointed." Ἐξ ἀνθρώπων λαμβανόμενος is not to be taken as contrasting with Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ in 4:14 (Windisch), since at this stage the author is making general statements which apply to all high priests including Jesus, who is himself a man among men (→ 2:6-8). Λαμβάνω (→ 2:2) is often used with a personal object, not only in the sense of "receive" (11:35), but also with the stronger meaning "take" (cf. Jn. 19:1), here implying "choose" (cf.

v. 4). The closest verbal parallel is Nu. 8:6, where the Lord commands Moses: λαβὲ τοὺς Λευίτας ἐκ μέσου υἱῶν Ἰσραήλ; cf. Ex. 28:1; Nu. 3:12, 41; 8:6; Dt. 18:5; Am. 2:11). Here as elsewhere (→ 1:5) Hebrews tends to eliminate secondary characters, at this point in order to indicate the direct activity of God. → v. 4, λαμβάνει.

Ἐπὲρ ἀνθρώπων καθίσταται balances ἐξ ἀνθρώπων λαμβανόμενος: the high priest is set apart from others in order to act on their behalf in matters related to God. Contrast Ex. 28:1, 3; 29:1, ἱερατεύειν μοι (God). On Hebrews' use of ὑπὲρ and περὶ, → 2:5. The repetition of ὑπὲρ here may be seen as an example of the author's tendency to glide from one meaning of a term to another; cf. the use of διὰ in 2:10; 9:11f. Ἐπὲρ ἀνθρώπων is used only here in the NT referring to Jesus, and only here of a high priest (Braun; compare and contrast Caiaphas's ὑπὲρ τοῦ λαοῦ . . . ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἔθνους, Jn. 11:50f.). For the adverbial phrase τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν, → 2:17. Calvin's construction "ordains those things which pertain to God," taking καθίσταται as middle and transitive, does not suit the context (cf. the passives λαμβανόμενος here and καλούμενος in v. 4); it is impossible in 8:3 where καθίσταται is used absolutely, and in 7:28 where the object ἀρχιερεὺς is expressed. Καθίστημι occurs as a *v.l.* in 2:7 = Ps. 8:7, a text which the author of Hebrews understands in the light of the enthronement of Christ. Although this line of Ps. 8:7 is not quoted in Hebrews, the author may have recollected its use of καθίστημι in writing the present verse. Cf. 1 Ch. 12:18.

Ἴνα προσφέρῃ is synonymous with εἰς τὸ προσφέρειν in 8:3, but makes a closer link with v. 2. It is assumed throughout Hebrews that the high priest's functions are essentially sacrificial, not legal or political, as for example in the period of the Hasmoneans, nor even didactic (W. Manson 107f.). This is in line with the author's exclusive interest in the cultic aspects of Mosaic Law as well as with his interest in the institutions described in the Pentateuch, rather than in those of later times; though in fact the term ἀρχιερεὺς itself almost never occurs in texts relating to pre-exilic times (Lev. 4:7; → 2:17). Προσφέρω occurs 21 times in Hebrews, but nowhere else in the NT outside the Gospels and Acts (of offering gifts or sacrifices, Mt. 2:11; 5:23f.; 8:4; Jn. 16:2; Acts 7:42 = Am. 5:25; 21:26; cf. Mk. 1:44||; προσφορά → 10:5, only in quotation and exposition of Ps. 40:7; πρόσφατος → 10:20). In Hebrews, it is used overwhelmingly (the passive in 12:7 is an exception) in connection with sacrifice, especially but not only with the OT high priests or Jesus as subject. → v. 7; see K. Weiss in *TDNT* 9.65-68.

Δωρά τε καὶ θυσίας: On the author's use of τε καὶ, → 2:4. In 8:3; 9:9, where the same phrase recurs, the text certainly includes τε, but here τε is omitted by μ^{13} ρ^{46} B D Ψ pc. Riggensbach, perhaps rightly, assumed assimilation to 8:3; 9:9, and WH printed the word in square brackets, but Zuntz 62 and UBS retain τε.

If τε is omitted, there is slightly more reason for taking ὑπὲρ ἀμαρτιῶν



New Testament Commentary

*Exposition
of the
Epistle to
the Hebrews*

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Outline

- 4:14-16 A. Encouragement for the Readers
5:1-3 B. Enablement of the High Priest
5:4-10 C. Fulfillment of the High-priestly Office

4

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

A. Encouragement for the Readers 4:14-16

In his series of illustrations establishing the excellence of Jesus, the writer now contrasts Jesus with Aaron, the high priest. In Hebrews 2:17 and 3:1, the author introduced Jesus as high priest. With occasional digressions,¹ the author writes extensively about the office and work of the high priest (see Heb. 5:5, 10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21).

14. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Note the following points:

- a. Because of his sonship, Jesus already is great.
- b. Thus, being high priest does not make Jesus great.
- c. Jesus excels because he is divine.
- d. Only Jesus has gone through the heavens.
- e. The difference, therefore, between Jesus and Aaron is immeasurable.

The adverb *therefore* ought not be understood to refer to the immediately preceding context but to Hebrews 2:17, where the subject of Christ's priesthood is first introduced.² The author, who briefly referred to the "high priest

1. The chapter division is somewhat infelicitous at this juncture. Martin Luther in his Bible translation boldly begins chapter 5 at Heb. 4:14. Most commentators believe that the concluding verses of chapter 4 should be interpreted with the following chapter on the high priesthood of Christ.

2. Franz Delitzsch prefers to connect the word *therefore* with the exhortation: "Let us therefore, having a great high priest who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, hold fast by our confession" (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2 vols. [Edinburgh: Clark, 1877], vol. 1, p. 217). However, the adverb *therefore* in the Greek has a variety of meanings, which should be determined on the basis of context, "and at times it may be left untranslated." (See Bauer, p. 592.) Indeed, a number of translations delete the adverb.

whom we confess" in Hebrews 3:1, now is ready to explain the significance of Jesus' priesthood.

Since we have a great high priest. The emphasis falls on the term *great*, which also occurs in Hebrews 10:21 ("since we have a great priest over the house of God") and Hebrews 13:20 (where Jesus is called "that great Shepherd of the sheep"). The adjective *great* indicates that Jesus is superior to earthly high priests and shepherds.³ He is the *great* high priest, not the one who entered the Most Holy Place once a year and sprinkled blood to atone first for his own sins and then for those of the people. Jesus, as the great high priest, excels earthly high priests.

Who has gone through the heavens. The Jewish high priest entered the inner sanctuary of the temple once a year and stood momentarily in the very presence of God. Jesus, by contrast, has entered the heavens and is always in the presence of God (Heb. 9:24). He has been raised from the dead, has ascended to heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father. He has gone through and is "exalted above the heavens" (Heb. 7:26). He is majestic in power and glory because he is the Son of God, human and divine.

Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. The author of Hebrews uses the earthly name of Jesus to focus attention on his ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus could not be in heaven as the great high priest without having performed his priestly work on earth.

Once more the writer of Hebrews intersperses his teaching with exhortation. This exhortation can be connected logically with the first part of the verse ("since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens"). Characteristically, the author includes himself in the exhortation when he writes, "Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess" (see also Heb. 3:1; 10:23).

What then is this faith we profess? Is it a formulated confession of faith? Perhaps. But as Philip Edgcumbe Hughes writes, faith "is the belief that is both inwardly entertained by the heart and outwardly professed before men."⁴ This is, of course, a paraphrase of Romans 10:10, "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." This faith we must continue to profess with heart and mouth, joyfully, openly, so that our fellow man, too, may hear about Jesus the Son of God.

15. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

The recipients of the epistle might have raised an objection to the author's teaching: Because Jesus is the Son of God and is exalted in heaven, far

3. C. P. Sherman ("A Great High Priest," *ExpT* 34 [1922]: 235) demonstrates from the Hebrew that two terms were used: "the great priest" and "the chief priest." Ceslaus Spicq, in *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 3d ed., 2 vols. (Paris: Gabalda, 1953), vol. 2, p. 92, notes that in the time between the accession of Herod the Great and the destruction of the temple there were no fewer than twenty-six high priests.

4. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 171.

removed from man's daily toils and struggles, his priesthood is of little consequence. The author, however, anticipates objections and in Hebrews 4:15 counters them. Not so, he says, for when I introduced the teaching I stated that we, the brothers of Jesus, have a high priest who is merciful and faithful. And "because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb. 2:18).

The writer makes his point by stating this truth negatively and positively.

a. *Negatively.* The double negative—we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize—expresses a positive idea: yes, we have a highly exalted high priest who can descend to our level.

The original recipients of Hebrews knew that the teaching about Jesus' high priesthood was articulated for the first time in this epistle. Perhaps they had to endure hardship, persecution, and isolation from the Jews if they professed the high priesthood of Jesus. They may have wondered: Would the exalted high priest understand their weaknesses if they failed to profess him publicly? Would he understand their situation? Yes, the author assured them, the heavenly high priest is able to sympathize. If we confess his name publicly, he suffers with us when others reproach, scorn, and insult us.

b. *Positively.* Jesus is not only fully divine; he is also fully human and thus understands our weaknesses and our temptations. Furthermore, Jesus himself experienced weaknesses and temptations. At the onset of his ministry, he was tempted by Satan; he coped with thirst, weariness, desertion, and disappointments throughout his earthly ministry.

Jesus, fully acquainted with human nature, is "touched with the feeling of our weaknesses," as B. F. Westcott puts it.⁵ He has been tempted—in extent and range—in every way. Nothing in human experience is foreign to him, for he himself has endured it. And he has been tempted just as intensely as we are. The author adds the qualifying phrase *yet was without sin*.

When he was in the wilderness, Jesus experienced hunger, and the devil tempted him by asking him to make bread out of stones (Matt. 4:2–3). While hanging on the cross, he was mocked by chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders, who said, "Let him come down now from the cross . . . for he said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matt. 27:42, 43). He endured the full range of temptations, although, as the writer notes, without sinning. Sin is the only human experience in which Christ has no part.

The temptations we endure are given to us in accordance with what we are able to bear. God's watchful eye is always upon us, so that we do not succumb. Says Paul:

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.

5. B. F. Westcott, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), p. 107. And John Calvin classifies as infirmities the physical as well as the spiritual: "fear, sorrow, the dread of death and similar things." See Calvin's *Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 108.

But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. [I Cor. 10:13]

We, however, will never be able to fathom the depth of the temptations Jesus endured. Yet he withstood the depth, as well as the force, of these temptations. He overcame them as the sinless One.

Is Jesus (the sinless One) able to sympathize with us (weakened by sin) in our temptations? Because of his sinless nature, says John Albert Bengel, "the mind of the Savior much more acutely perceived the forms of temptation than we who are weak," not only during his earthly ministry but also during his service as the exalted high priest.⁶ He anticipates temptations we are going to face, sympathizes fully with us, and "is able to help [us] who are being tempted" (Heb. 2:18).

16. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

What encouraging words! The writer throughout his epistle exhorts the readers numerous times, but in this particular verse he has a special word for us. This time he does not exhort believers to rectify their way of life; he commends us for coming in prayer to God and urges us to do so confidently.

a. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence." The invitation to approach the throne of grace implies that the readers are already doing this. The author also uses the same verb in Hebrews 10:22 ("let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith"). He later repeats the same invitation in slightly different wording (see Heb. 7:25; 10:1; 11:6; 12:18, 22).

The verb *approach* may have a religious connotation, because it often referred to the priests who in their cultic service approached God with sacrifices (Lev. 9:7; 21:17, 21; 22:3; Num. 18:3).⁷ In Hebrews 4:16 the writer urges us to come near to the throne of grace in prayer, for the only sacrifice a believer can bring is a broken and a contrite heart (Ps. 51:17). The great high priest has brought the supreme sacrifice in offering himself on the cross on behalf of his people. The merciful and faithful high priest invites the weak and tempted sinner to come to the throne of grace.

What is meant by the phrase *throne of grace*? This is an explicit reference to the kingship of the Son of God (Heb. 1:2-4). Jesus sits at the right hand of God and has been given full authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). But the word *grace* implies that the reference is also to the priesthood of Christ. The sinner who comes to the throne of grace in repentance and faith indeed finds the forgiving grace of Jesus.

6. John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, ed. Andrew R. Fausset, 7th ed., 5 vols. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1877), vol. 4, p. 384.

7. Spicq, *Hébreux*, vol. 2, p. 94. James Moffatt asserts that the verb applies to a court or to authority. See his *Epistle to the Hebrews*, International Critical Commentary series (Edinburgh: Clark, 1963), p. 60.

Moreover, we are exhorted to come to the throne with confidence; that is, we may come boldly (Heb. 3:6; 10:19, 35), not rashly or in fear of judgment, but "in full confidence, openness to God and in the hope of the fullness of the glory of God."⁸ Jesus invites his people to approach freely, without hesitation. He holds out the golden scepter, as it were, and says, "Come!"

b. "So that we may receive mercy and find grace." Although the terms *mercy* and *grace* are often interpreted as being synonyms, their difference ought to be noted. Westcott makes the distinction succinctly:

Man needs mercy for past failure, and grace for present and future work. There is also a difference as to the mode of attainment in each case. Mercy is to be "taken" as it is extended to man in his weakness; grace is to be "sought" by man according to his necessity.⁹

The mercy of God is directed to sinners in misery or distress; they receive God's compassion when they approach him. And whereas God's mercy extends to all his creatures (Ps. 145:9), his grace, as the writer of Hebrews indicates in Hebrews 4:16, extends to all who approach the throne of God. Mercy is characterized as God's tender compassion; grace, as his goodness and love.¹⁰

c. "To help us in our time of need." Help is given at the right moment in the hour of need. The author is not saying that the help is constant, but rather that it alleviates the need of the moment. That need may be material, physical, or spiritual. When we call on the name of the Lord in faith and approach the throne of God, he will hear and answer. He stands ready to help (see Heb. 2:18).

This aid, in the form of grace, comes when temptation seems to sway us. God provides the means to find a way out of our temptations. God is faithful (I Cor. 10:13).

Doctrinal Considerations in 4:14-16

When the writer states that Jesus "has gone through the heavens" (v. 14), he implies that Jesus has entered the presence of God the Father. The Aaronic high priest, by entering the Most Holy Place once a year, stood in the presence of God. Because Jesus appears before God the Father in heaven, he transcends the Aaronic high priest. Therefore, the author of Hebrews calls him the "*great* high priest" (*italics added*).

The use of the plural noun *heavens* in the original Greek is rather common in

8. Hans-Christoph Hahn, *NIDNTT*, vol. 2, p. 736. This sense of assurance, writes Heinrich Schlier, "works itself out in the confidence and openness which [causes one] not [to] be ashamed when [he] stands before the Judge" (*TDNT*, vol. 5, p. 884).

9. Westcott, *Hebrews*, p. 109. Also see Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, 10th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1957), p. 124.

10. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), pp. 71-72.

the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 1:10 [Ps. 102:25]; 4:14; 7:26; 9:23; 12:23, 25). It is possible that the plural, which is also common in the Septuagint and in the New Testament (especially in Matthew's Gospel), conveys in the Epistle to the Hebrews the idea of completeness. However, the author uses the word *heaven* in the singular, too (Heb. 9:24; 11:12; 12:26 [Hag. 2:6]).

In rabbinic writings and in apocryphal literature, the conception of a multilayered heaven is somewhat common. In fact, Paul even speaks of knowing a man "caught up to the third heaven" and "to paradise" (II Cor. 12:2, 4). It seems that Paradise is located in either the third or the seventh heaven. Speculations about the heavenly Jerusalem, the location of God's throne, and the heavenly altar are numerous.

Because of the scarcity of information on this point in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we do well to refrain from speculation. In 4:14, it is implied that God's dwelling place is not in heaven; that is, "not within his creation to which heaven belongs, but above the heavens."¹¹ Jesus has transcended the heavens, has come to the throne of God, and has taken his place at God's right hand as the great high priest.

If Jesus endured temptations during his earthly ministry as the Son of God, how do we understand the author's teaching that he "has been tempted in every way, just as we are" (v. 15; italics added)? Herman N. Ridderbos, commenting on Jesus' temptation in the desert, raises this question in a slightly different form: Could Jesus fall into sin or was the temptation imaginary? Although Jesus as God's Son surpassed Satan and therefore could not fall, Jesus was not necessarily immune to temptation.¹² We admit that for us it is difficult to understand how the Son of God, who could not sin, was tempted just as we are. From our limited perspective, we are unable to explain the difficulty inherent in the biblical teaching about Jesus' sinlessness and temptation.

Greek Words, Phrases, and Constructions in 4:14-16

Verse 14

ἔχοντες—in the context of the verse, the present active participle may express cause.

διεληλυθότα—the perfect active participle, accusative singular masculine, derives from διά (through) and ἔρχομαι (I go). It denotes completed action in the past with lasting results for the present.

κρατῶμεν—a hortatory subjunctive, as a present active from κρατέω (I hold firmly, I keep faithfully; see Rev. 2:25; 3:11).

11. Hans Bietenhard, *NIDNTT*, vol. 2, p. 195.

12. Herman N. Ridderbos, *Mattheüs*, Korte Verklaring, 2 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1952), vol. 1, p. 68. Geerhardus Vos, in *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 103, asserts that for Christ "there was as much real appeal to sin . . . as there is with us, but in His case there was no issue of sin." R. Williams argues that Jesus had to have actual participation in the experience of sinning in order to share fully in the human weaknesses of man. Next, Jesus had to subject himself to the process of learning obedience and thus achieve sinlessness when he offered himself on the cross. See Williams's article in *ExpT* 86 (1974): 4-8. Of course, this reasoning controverts Scripture's unequivocal teaching about Jesus' sinlessness (Isa. 53:9; John 8:46; II Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; I Peter 1:19; 2:22).

Verse 15

συμπαθήσαι—in the New Testament the verb appears only twice: in Hebrews 4:15, referring to Jesus, and in Hebrews 10:34, referring to the recipients of the epistle. In extrabiblical literature it occurs numerous times. The aorist tense is constative; that is, the action of the verb does not refer to duration but rather to entirety.

πεπειρασμένον—the perfect passive participle, instead of the aorist passive περασθεῖς (see Heb. 2:18), indicates continued action in the past until its culmination—Jesus' death.

χωρίς ἁμαρτίας—the last two words in this sentence emphasize the contrast between man, who is tainted by sin, and Jesus, who is sinless. The adverb χωρίς, serving as a preposition, controls the genitive singular ἁμαρτίας.

Verse 16

προσερχώμεθα—we are exhorted, with the hortatory subjunctive, to approach the throne of grace. The present tense suggests that we in fact are doing so.

λάβωμεν . . . εὑρωμεν—the verse shows chiasmus with two verbs and two nouns. The noun *mercy* follows the verb to receive, and the noun *grace* precedes the verb to find. Both verbs are in the aorist tense.

5

1 Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. 3 This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

B. Enablement of the High Priest

5:1-3

After encouraging his readers, the author continues his teaching ministry by defining the qualifications for the one who serves as high priest. The obvious reference is to the institution of the Aaronic priesthood (Heb. 5:4); the high priest's appointment, duties, and obligations were divinely stipulated and were to be meticulously observed.

1. Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

Three points require our attention.

a. A high priest is selected. The writer constructs a beautifully balanced sentence in which he describes the selection, appointment, and duty of a high priest. According to the law of Moses (Exod. 28-29, Lev. 8-10, and Num. 16-18), only Aaron and his sons were permitted to serve at the altar. "The priesthood was therefore a fraternity fenced round with irremovable barriers, for they had been fixed forever by natural descent."¹³ From what

13. Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, 5 vols. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1885), vol. 1, div. 2, p. 209.



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A COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

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14 at the point where it was left in ii. 18. **Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to what we profess.** Jesus has already been described as high priest (ii. 17). The expression **great high priest** is probably little more than pleonastic usage (cf. Philo, *de Somn.* 1. 219), as the Hebrew phrase for high priest means, literally, 'great priest'. The use of the phrase does however suggest that Jesus is greater than the levitical high priests. They have only passed through the veil of the tent; but Jesus has actually passed through the heavens to the throne of God himself (cf. Eph. iv. 10 ff.). It was popularly supposed that there were seven heavens (cf. 2 Enoch iii-xx; Chag. 12) and that God dwelt far above them. The earlier declaration that Jesus has taken his seat on the right hand of God (i. 3, 13) presupposes that he **has passed through the heavens** and the reader is prepared for the coming exposition of the high priestly work of Jesus. The juxtaposition of **Jesus** and **Son of God** stresses both the humanity of Jesus and the divinity of the Son. The hortatory words, **Let us hold fast to what we profess**, briefly summarise the preceding two chapters (cf. especially iii. 1, 6, 14).

11. THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST. iv. 15-16

(15) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted similarly to us, yet without sin. (16) Let us therefore confidently approach the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

In iii. 17 Jesus was described as a merciful and faithful high priest. It has been explained how Jesus' faithfulness was of a higher order than that of Moses. It has not, however, been fully explained in what sense Jesus can be called a compassionate
15 high priest (cf. iii. 17). A return is now made to this point. **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise**

with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted similarly to us, yet without sin. The objection is here anticipated that one so exalted cannot properly sympathise with human frailties. For these weaknesses, inherent in humanity, not only concern the physical side of human life (Gal. iv. 13), but also the intellectual (Ro. vi. 19), religious (Ro. viii. 26) and moral (1 Cor. viii. 9) spheres of human existence. Jesus is not said to **sympathise** with these weaknesses in the sense that contemplation of them arouses in him feelings of pity and compassion. He sympathises because he has, through common experience, a real kinship with those who suffer.

His temptations had not been confined to certain compartments of his life (e.g. to those particular temptations which are specially mentioned in the gospels), but they covered the whole range of human experience. **In every respect he has been tempted similarly to us, yet without sin.** Here there is ambiguity in the Greek, an ambiguity which is for once best left in the English translation. The Greek can have two meanings; either that Jesus' temptations were exactly the same as ours, except that he never succumbed to them and so he never sinned; or that Jesus' temptations were exactly the same as ours, except for those temptations which are the result of previous sins. Probably our author did not clearly distinguish between the two. The conviction of Jesus' sinlessness is deeply embedded in the New Testament (2 Cor. v. 21; 1 Peter ii. 22; 1 John iii. 5; cf. John viii. 46). The gospel records portray one who neither sinned nor had consciousness of guilt. No doubt the account of the Suffering Servant in Is. liii and the analogy of an unspotted and flawless sacrificial offering helped to give expression to the doctrine of Jesus' sinlessness; but the doctrine itself was based on the impression which Jesus made on his disciples and which he has always made on his followers. Some theologians have explained that the absence of original sin rendered Jesus invulnerable to sin. This, however, would seem to suggest that since he lacked common human frailties he was not fully incarnate. These speculations would not have occurred to our author. He is clear that temptation itself is not a sin: on the contrary, temptation consists of the tension between a desire to give deliberate consent to sin and a determination of

steadfast obedience to God. But the question is not raised how a perfect character could develop without human errors and mistakes and without reaction against authority, or how these could be avoided during the complex of attitudes and emotions associated with adolescence. Probably by sin our author means conscious and deliberate disobedience, and in this sense he can truthfully say that Jesus was tempted, **yet without sin**. Philo, too, suggests that the *Logos* as high priest should be sinless (*de Spec. Leg.* 1. 230); but then Philo's *Logos* had no experience of the frailties inherent in adult existence.

Precisely because Christians have a compassionate high priest, they have grounds for confident assurance (cf. iii. 6; x. 19, 35) that the barriers between God and man have been removed. And so the Christian way is much better than the Judaism into which his readers are in danger of lapsing. For in Judaism only the priests could approach God, but our writer encourages **all** his readers: **Let us therefore confidently approach the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.** The meaning here is not primarily cultic. Our author has in mind not so much approach for worship, as approach to the highest authority who has it in his power to favour the requests that are made to him. **The throne of grace** is where God sits (not where Jesus sits); and from his throne God dispenses to the penitent not justice, but free undeserved pardon. The penitent sinner receives not merely mercy and compassion as a present gift, but also the continuance of divine favour to assist him whenever need arises. In his need the sinner can ask for and **receive mercy** now; and in addition to this request he can also **find**, unasked for, **grace to help in time of future need.**

12. APPOINTMENT TO HIGH PRIESTHOOD.

v. 1-4

(1) For every high priest is chosen from among men and is appointed to represent men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. (2) He can deal gently with

the ignorant and erring, since he also is beset with weakness, (3) and on this account he is obliged to make sin-offerings for himself as well as for the people. (4) No one takes the office for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

Our author now turns back to the major doctrinal theme of his Epistle. Starting from the levitical high priesthood, he establishes three necessary qualifications for the office, humanity, compassion and divine appointment; and then he proves that Jesus was high priest by showing that he had these three qualifications. For this proof, no use is made of either rabbinic speculations or rabbinic exegesis of scripture. Here, as elsewhere in the Epistle, the descriptions of Jewish institutions and beliefs are taken straight from the Old Testament. Our author seems uninterested both in the actual holders of the high priestly office and in contemporary Jewish views about the office.

It is biblical teaching that **every high priest is chosen from among men and is appointed to represent men in relation to God.** Because a high priest is himself a man, he can act as representative of men. In fact the Jewish priesthood had a smaller range. Aaron and the levitical priesthood were chosen from among the children of Israel to minister to the Israelites (Ex. xxviii. 1; Nu. xviii. 17). Our author, however, speaks in universal terms, for he includes within his generalisation the universal priesthood of Christ. The high priest is described solely in terms of his biblical functions, to **represent** man to God in worship. The contemporary secular role of the high priest as President of the Sanhedrin or as Primate of the Jewish nation is ignored. The high priest's sole function mentioned here is **to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.** If sacrifice was at the heart of Hebrew religion, oblation was at the heart of sacrifice. No man could stand before God with empty hands. He must offer a gift as an acknowledgement of adoration, gratitude and homage; and, in as much as man is a sinner, sacrifice must also be offered in expiation for sins. The priesthood was instituted so that priests might represent men before God in sacrifice. It is tempting to understand the **gifts** which the high priest offers as signifying meal-offerings, and the sacrifices as

THE
EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

THE GREEK TEXT
WITH NOTES AND ESSAYS

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¹³καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν κτίσις ἀφανῆς ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, πάντα δὲ γυμνά καὶ τετραχλισμένα τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ, πρὸς

¹³ κτίσις: κτίσις D₂.*

that of the universal Providence of God with regard to all created beings. Τί λέγω περὶ ἀνθρώπων, φησὶν, κἀν γὰρ ἀγγέλους κἀν ἀρχαγγέλους κἀν τὰ Χερουβὶμ καὶ τὰ Σεραφὶμ κἀν οὐρανόποτε κτίσις, πάντα ἐκκεκάλυπται τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ ἐκείνῳ; (Chrys.). Comp. Philo *Leg. Alleg.* iii. 60 (l. 121 M.). Timeamus ejus praesentiam cujus scientiam nulloatenus effugere valeamus (Primas. Atto).

There is some difficulty as to the antecedent of the two pronouns (ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ). They must evidently refer to the same subject; and since the subject in the second case is unequivocally personal ('*Him to Whom we must render account*'), there can be little doubt that we must understand 'God' in both places, suggested by the compound subject of the former sentence, 'the Word of God.' Nor is there anything unnatural in the transition from the manifestation of God through His Word to His Person.

For κτίσις (*creature*) see Rom. i. 25; viii. 39; 2 Cor. v. 17. 'Αφανῆς does not occur again in N. T.

The negative statement that nothing is hidden from the sight of God is supplemented by a positive statement that all things are stripped of every disguise which might conceal their true nature (γυμνά) and brought by an overmastering power into full view before His eyes (τετραχλισμένα).

The general sense of τετραχλισμένα (Lat. *aperta*, Syrr. *revealed*, made manifest) is clear, as it is given in the old versions (Hesych. τετραχλισμένα' πεφανερωμένα), but it is by no means certain from what image the meaning is derived. The word τραχλίζειν is not found in the LXX. It is fre-

quently used by Philo in the sense of *prostrating, overthrowing*; e.g. *Quis rer. div. har.* § 55 (l. p. 512 M.) ἀνὴρ ὄντως τραχλίζων ἢ (lege-ῖ) τραχλίζεσθαι δύναται; *de vit. Mos.* § 54 (ii. p. 127 M.) τραχλίζόμενοι ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις πάνθ' ὑπομενοῦσι δρᾶν τε καὶ πάσχειν ('*obtorto collo pertracti*'); and, with a more general application, *de assecr.* § 7 (ii. 433 M.) ἀρεταὶ ποτε διαπνεῖν καὶ ἀνακύπτειν ἢ πολλὰ γυμνασθεῖσα καὶ τραχλίσθεισα γῆ. So Jos. B. *Jud.* iv. 6, 2. Comp. Plut. *de Curio* ii. p. 521 B. ὁρᾶτε τὸν ἀθλητὴν ὑπὸ παιδισκαρίου τραχλίζόμενον (where the idea is of the head turned round to gaze, *περιπιαστροφόμενον*, and so, in the next sentence, *τραχλίζομένους καὶ περιγαγομένους*).

The Greek Fathers were evidently perplexed by the word. Chrysostom appears to understand it of victims hung up (by the neck) and flayed: τὸ τετραχλισμένα εἴρηται ἀπὸ μεταφορᾶς τῶν δερμάτων τῶν ἀπὸ τῶν ἱερῶν ἐξελομένων. ὡσπερ γὰρ ἐκεῖνα, ἐπειδὴν τις σφόδρα ἀπὸ τῆς σαρκὸς παρέλκυση τὸ δέρμα, πάντα τὰ ἐνδον ἀποκαλύπτεται καὶ δῆλα γίνεται τοῖς ἡμετέροις ὀφθαλμοῖς, οὕτω καὶ τῷ θεῷ δῆλα πρόκειται πάντα.

Theodoret interprets the word of victims prostrate and lifeless: τὸ δὲ τετραχλισμένα τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ ἐκ μεταφορᾶς τέθεικε τῶν θνομένων ζώων, ἃ παντελῶς ἄφωνα κείται, τῆς σφαγῆς τὴν φωνὴν ἀφελομένης.

Ecumenius gives Chrysostom's meaning and another without deciding between them: τετραχλισμένα δὲ φησὶ τὰ γυμνά ἀπὸ μεταφορᾶς τῶν προβάτων τῶν ἐκ τραχίλου ἠγομένων καὶ γεγυμνωμένων τῆς δορᾶς. ἢ τὸ τετραχλισμένα ἀντὶ τοῦ κάτω κύντοτα, καὶ τὸν τράχηλον ἐπικλινοντα διὰ τὸ μὴ ἰσχυρῶς ἀντισταῖ τῇ δόξῃ ἐκείνῃ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ

ὄν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος.

¹⁴Ἐχοντες οὖν ἀρχιερεῶ μέγαν διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοῦς, Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ

υἱῶν (leg. ἡμῶν) Ἰησοῦ. Theophylact prefers the interpretation of Chrysostom.

The word has been popularly explained as used of a wrestler who seizes the neck and thrusts back the head of his adversary (*resupinare*) so as to expose it fully to sight; but there is no direct evidence of the use of τραχλίζω in this sense; and the words of Ecumenius point to the sense of pressing down the head, which agrees with the general idea of prostration.

πρὸς ὃν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος] *to whom we have to give account.* (So Syr.) O. L. *ante quem nobis oratio est.* Vulg. *ad quem (Hier. de quo) nobis sermo.* Comp. Ign. *ad Magn.* 3. Compare Chrysostom *Orat. ad illumin.* i (ii. 274 ed. Gaume) οὐ γὰρ πρὸς τοὺς συνδοῦλους ἡμῖν ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸν Δεσπότην ὁ λόγος ἐστὶ, καὶ τοῦτ' ἴσως εὐθὺς ἀπόστομος τῶν βεβαιωμένων ἀπάντων. So he rightly gives the sense here: ὃ μὲν δούλου εὐθὺς τῶν πεπραγμένων. Primasius lays open the ground of the truth in impressive words: nec mirum si totus ubique totam suam agnoscat creaturam.

iii. *Transition to the doctrine of the High-priesthood of Christ, resuming* ii. 17 f. (14-16).

Having dealt with the relation of the Son of Man (iii. 1 *Jesus*) to Moses and Joshua; and with the relation of the promise which declares man's destiny to the people of God under the Old and New Dispensations, the writer now returns to the central thought of the High-priesthood, from which he has turned aside, and prepares for the full discussion of it in the following chapters (v.-x. 18). Briefly, he shews, we have a High-priest who has Himself entered the rest of God (v. 14); who can perfectly sympathise with us (v. 15); so that we

can ourselves draw near to God, with whom He is (v. 16).

¹⁴Having therefore a great High-priest, Who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us cling to our confession; ¹⁵for we have not a High-priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one that hath been tempted in all points like as we are, apart from sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore come with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

14. Ἐχοντες οὖν ἀρχ...] Comp. x. 19; xii. 1. The words point back to ii. 17; iii. 1. The fear of final failure, the consciousness of weakness and partial failure, turn the thoughts again to the Mediator.

Our High-priest, our Apostle, has done more than Aaron or Moses pre-figured. He has entered into the rest which He foreshadowed, so that He can also bring His people into it. He is seated at the right hand of God. But meanwhile man has his part to do; and as we strive to secure the promised rest we must cling firmly to the confession in which lies the assurance of success.

The simple fact that we have a High-priest is stated first (*Having therefore a High-priest*), and then His character and position are described: *Having therefore a High-priest, great* in His essential Nature (i. 1 ff.), and *One Who hath passed through the heavens*, and so come before the very Presence of God. The epithet μέγας does not go to complete the notion of High-priest, but characterises his dignity. Comp. x. 21; (xiii. 20). Philo *de somn.* i § 38 (i. p. 654 M.) ὁ μέγας ἀρχιερεὺς [τῆς ὁμολογίας]; *de Abr.* § 40 (ii. 34 M.) ὁ μέγας ἀρχιερεὺς τοῦ μεγίστου θεοῦ.

διελ. τ. οὐρ.] *who hath passed*

θεοῦ, κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας· ¹⁵οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα

through the heavens. O. L. *egressum caelos*. Vulg. *qui penetravit caelos*. Comp. Eph. iv. 10 (c. vii. 26 note). Christ not merely ascended up to heaven in the language of space, but transcended the limitations of space. Thus we say that He 'entered into heaven' and yet is 'above the heavens.'

The phrase points out the superiority of Christ over the Jewish high-priest and over the Jewish mediator. He has passed not through the veil only but through the heavens up to the very throne of God (comp. ix. 24; i. 3), and entered into the royal rest of God.

Theophylact well compares Christ and Moses: οὐ τοιοῦτος εἶδος Μωϋσῆς, ἐκείνος μὲν γὰρ οὐτε αὐτὸς εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὴν κατὰπανον οὐτε τὸν λαὸν εἰσῆγαγεν· οὗτος δὲ διηληλυθὼς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς συνεδριάζει τῷ Πατρὶ καὶ δύναται ἡμῖν τὴν εἰς οὐρανοὺς εἰσοδὸν δοῦναι καὶ τῆς ἐν ἐπαγγελίας καταπαύσεως κληρονόμος ποιῆσαι. And Primasius brings out aspects of μέγας: *Magnum pontificem eum appellat qui habet æternum sacerdotium, semper vivens, ad interpellandum pro nobis* (c. vii. 25). Sic enim dixit de illo angelus ad Mariam: *Hic erit magnus et Filius altissimi vocabitur* (Lk. i. 32).

[Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ] The two titles are placed side by side in order to suggest the two natures of the Lord which include the assurance of sympathy and power. For the use of *Jesus* see ii. 9 note; and for the *Son of God* see vi. 6; vii. 3; x. 29; and Additional Note on i. 4. And for the combination of the two see Acts ix. 20; i Thess. i. 10; i John i. 7; iv. 15; v. 5. κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολ.] Let us cling to our faith in Him, Whom we openly confess, as truly human, truly divine (Lat. *teneamus confessionem*). Οὐ τὸ πᾶν τῷ ἱερεὶ δίδωσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ παρ' ἡμῶν ζητεῖ, λέγει δὴ τὴν ὁμολογίαν (Theophlet.).

The phrase κρατεῖν τῆς ὁμολογίας, as contrasted with κατέχομεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν (c. x. 23), seems to mark the act of grasping and clinging to that to which we attach ourselves, as distinguished from the act of holding firmly that which is already completely in our possession. Comp. vi. 18. Thus the words imply danger and incite to effort.

For ὁμολογία compare c. iii. 1; x. 23 note; i Tim. vi. 12 f.

The writer everywhere insists on the duty of the public confession of the faith. The crisis claimed not simply private conviction but a clear declaration of belief openly in the face of men. Comp. i John iv. 2 note.

15. οὐ γὰρ] The apostle calls for effort, and he encourages it. By the negative form of the sentence he recognises the presence of an objection which he meets by anticipation. The divine glory of Christ might have seemed to interpose a barrier between Him and His people. But on the contrary, the perfectness of His sympathy is the ground for clinging to the faith which answers to our needs. He is as near to us as the human high-priests (nay, nearer than they) whose humanity inspired the Jewish worshippers with confidence. For we have not a High-priest such as cannot be touched...but one that hath been tempted...

μη δυνάμενον...πεπειρασμένον δέ] The power of Christ's sympathy is expressed negatively and positively. He is not such as to be unable to sympathise: nay rather He has been tried in all respects after our likeness, and therefore He must sympathise from His own experience.

μη δυνάμενον] such that he cannot... For μη with participles in this Epistle see iv. 2; vii. 3, 6; ix. 9; xi. 8, 13, 27; xii. 27; (vi. 1; x. 25; xiii. 17 are

μη δυνάμενον συνπαθῆσαι ταῖς ἀσθενείαις ἡμῶν, πεπει-

different); for οὐ xi. 1 (contrast 2 Cor. iv. 18), 35. For other examples of participles with οὐ see 2 Cor. iv. 8 f.; Gal. iv. 8, 27; Col. ii. 19; i Pet. i. 8; ii. 10 (not Eph. v. 4; Phil. iii. 3); Winer, pp. 606 ff.

συνπαθῆσαι] to be touched with the feeling of. Vulg. *compati*... c. x. 34 (*συνπαθῆς* i Pet. iii. 8. Vulg. *compatiens*). The verb occurs in Symmachus Job ii. 11, and in classical writers from Isocrates downwards. It expresses not simply the compassion of one who regards suffering from without, but the feeling of one who enters into the suffering and makes it his own. So Christ is touched with the feeling of our weaknesses, which are for us the occasions of sins, as knowing them, though not with the feeling of the sins themselves. Such weaknesses can be characterised by the circumstances of the Lord's life, natural weariness, disappointment, the feeling of desertion, shrinking from pain (contrast the sing. ἀσθενεία c. vii. 28 note). [From temptations through such weaknesses the Hebrew Christians were suffering. Comp. v. 2; vii. 28; xi. 34. Clement also combines the thought of Christ's High-priesthood with that of His help to man's weakness: *ad Cor.* i. c. 36 αὐτῆ ἡ ὁδός, ἀγαπητοί, ἐν ἧ εὐρομεν τὸ σωτήριον ἡμῶν, Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν ἀρχιερέα τῶν προσφορῶν ἡμῶν, τὸν προστάτην καὶ βοηθὸν τῆς ἀσθενείας ἡμῶν. Compare Orig. *in Matt.* xiii. 2 Ἰησοῦς γοῖν φησὶν διὰ τοὺς ἀσθενούντας ἡσθέουσι καὶ διὰ τοὺς πεινῶντας ἐπεινοῦσι καὶ διὰ τοὺς δυνάστας ἐδίψων, and Resch *Agrapha* p. 244.

πεπειρασμένον δέ...χ. ἀμαρτίας] O. L. *expertum in omnibus (omnia) secundum similitudinem sine peccato*. Vulg. *tentatum autem per omnia pro similitudine absque peccato*. Syr. Pesh. *tempted in everything as we (are), sin excepted*.

The words are capable of two distinct interpretations. They may (1) simply describe the issue of the Lord's temptation, so far as He endured all without the least stain of sin (c. vii. 26). Or they may (2) describe a limitation of His temptation. Man's temptations come in many cases from previous sin. Such temptations had necessarily no place in Christ. He was tempted as we are, sharing our nature, yet with this exception, that there was no sin in Him to become the spring of trial. The first of these thoughts is not excluded from the expression, which is most comprehensive in form, but the latter appears to be the dominant idea. In this sense there is a reference to the phrase in the Chalcedonic definition: Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν...ἐκδιδάσκον...κατὰ πάντα ὁμοιον ἡμῖν χωρὶς ἀμαρτίας. Comp. c. ix. 28.

We may represent the truth to ourselves best by saying that Christ assumed humanity under the conditions of life belonging to man fallen, though not with sinful promptings from within. Comp. c. ii. 18 note.

Comp. Greg. Nyss. c. *Eunom.* ii. p. 545 Migne: οὐδὲν ἀφῆκε τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν ὃ οὐκ ἀνέλαβεν ὃ κατὰ πάντα πεπειρασμένος καθ' ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἀμαρτίας. ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ ἀμαρτία οὐκ ἐστὶν ἀλλὰ δεκτικὴ ἀμαρτίας ἐξ ἀβουλίας ἐγένετο... c. *Apoll.* xi. *id.* p. 1144 ἄσπερ γὰρ τὰ τοῦ χοικοῦ ἰδιώματα τοῖς ἐξ ἐκείνου ἐνθεωρεῖται, οὕτως ἐπάναγκες, κατὰ τὴν τοῦ ἀποστόλου ἀπόφαση, τὸν κατὰ πάντα πεπειρασμένον τοῦ ἡμετέρου βίου καθ' ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἀμαρτίας. ὃ δὲ τοῖς ἀμαρτία οὐκ ἐστὶ, πρὸς πᾶσαν ἡμῶν οἰκείως ἔχειν τὴν φύσιν. c. *Eunom.* vi. *id.* p. 721.

Atto, pursuing the thought of Primasius, says well: Venit per viam humane conditionis per omnia sine peccato, nihil secum afferens unde mortis debitor esset, sicut ipse in Evangelio testatur (St John xiv. 30).

ρασμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας.
 16 προσερχώμεθα οὖν μετὰ παρρησίας τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάρι-

The Greek Fathers generally interpret the words χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας in relation to the facts of Christ's life: ἐν ταῦθα καὶ ἄλλο τι αἰνίττεται, ὅτι δυνατὸν χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας καὶ ἐν θλίψεσιν ὄντα διενεγκεῖν. ὅστε καὶ ὅταν λέγῃ ἐν ὁμοιωματι σαρκὸς οὐ τοῦτό φησιν ὅτι ὁμοίωμα σαρκὸς ἀλλ' ὅτι σάρκα ἀνέλαβε. διὰ τί οὖν εἶπεν ἐν ὁμοιωματι; περὶ ἁμαρτωλοῦ σαρκὸς ἔλεγεν' ὁμοία γὰρ ἦν τῇ σαρκὶ τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ τῇ μὲν γὰρ φύσει ἡ αὐτὴ ἦν ἡμῶν, τῇ δὲ ἁμαρτία οὐκ ἦν αὐτῇ (Chrys.).

ὡς ἄνθρωπος πείραν τῶν ἡμετέρων ἔλαβε παθημάτων μόνης τῆς ἁμαρτίας διαμείνας ἀμύητος (Theod.).

οὗτε γὰρ ἀπλῶς ἁμαρτίαν εἰργάσατο, οὗτε ὅτε ταῦτα ἐπάσχευεν ἁμαρτητικὸν τι ἢ εἶπεν ἢ ἔδρασεν. ὅστε δινασθε καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας διαγενέσθαι (Theophyl.).

πειρασμένον] For the perfect, see ii. 18; xii. 3 notes.

κατὰ πάντα] in all things, as in nature so in life. Comp. ii. 17.

καθ' ὅμοι.] c. vii. 15. Comp. Gen. i. 11 f. The words may mean 'according to the likeness of our temptations,' i.e. like as we are tempted (*secundum similitudinem* O. L.); or 'in virtue of His likeness to us,' i.e. ὁμοιωθεὶς ἡμῶν (ii. 17; *pro similitudine* Vulg.).

Primasius (compare Chrysostom quoted above) interprets the words as if they were καθ' ὁμοιότητα σαρκὸς [ἁμαρτίας] (Rom. viii. 3): *Pro similitudine carnis peccati absque peccato* ... In hoc enim quia homo factus est, veram carnem habuit: in hoc vero quia carnem peccati non habuit sed absque peccato, similitudinem nostrae carnis habuit, quae est caro peccati, nam peccatum non habuit... Illius caro non fuit peccati sed munditiae et castitatis atque innocentiae; quapropter non est tentatus in carne peccati ut peccatum faceret sed in similitudine carnis peccati ut absque

peccato maneret; and again on c. v. 2; tentari potuit per omnia similitudine carnis peccati absque peccato.

16] προσερχώμεθα οὖν... The vision of the High-priest Who is not Priest only but King, Who is not only Son of God but Son of man, suggests the conclusion that believers, clinging to their confession, can and must use the infinite privileges which their Lord has gained for them. The minds of writer and readers are full of the imagery of the Levitical system, and of the ceremonial of the High-priestly atonement; and the form of the exhortation suggests the grandeur of the position in which the Christian is placed as compared with that of the Jew: Let us therefore, trusting the divine power and the human sympathy of 'Jesus the Son of God,' draw near, as priests ourselves in fellowship with our High-priest,—and not remain standing afar off as the congregation of Israel,—to the throne of grace, no symbolic mercy-seat, but the very centre of divine sovereignty and love...

προσερχώμεθα] The word occurs here for the first time in the Epistle (comp. vii. 25 note; x. 1, 22; xi. 6). It is used in the LXX. for the priestly approach to God in service: e.g. Lev. xxi. 17, 21; xxii. 3, though it has also a wider application. That right of priestly approach is now extended to all Christians. Comp. Apoc. i. 6; v. 10; (xx. 6); 1 Pet. ii. 5, 9. See also ἐγγίζομεν, vii. 19, note.

The power of sympathy in our High Priest is made effective by the power of help per hoc enim quod similia passus est potest compati; et per hoc quod Deus est in utraque substantia potest misereri (Primas. ad c. v.).

μετὰ παρρησίας] Latt. cum fiducia. (The Syr. Pesh. gives, as elsewhere,

τος, ἵνα λάβωμεν ἔλεος καὶ χάριν εὐρωμεν εἰς εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν.

16 εὐρωμεν: om. B.

om. εἰς D*.

'with eye (face) open.' So Acts ii. 29; iv. 29, 31; xxviii. 31. St Paul uses ἐν παρρησίᾳ Eph. vi. 19; Phil. i. 20; Col. ii. 15; St John παρρησίᾳ vii. 13 &c.; ἢ μηδὲν πρὸς τὴν πίστιν διαστάζοντες, ἢ ὅτι νενίκηκε τὸν κόσμον (John xvi. 33), δῆλον οὖν ὅτι νικήσει καὶ τοὺς νῦν ἡμᾶς θλίβοντας (Æcum.). The phrase is perhaps used here in the primary sense, 'giving utterance to every thought and feeling and wish,' though the word παρρησία is used more generally elsewhere in the epistle: iii. 6; x. 19, 35.

τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος] The phrase is to be compared with θρόνος δόξης (Matt. xix. 28; xxv. 31; 1 Sam. ii. 8; Jer. xiv. 21; xvii. 12; Eccles. xvii. 11); ὁ θρόνος τῆς μεγαλωσύνης (c. viii. 1), θρόνος ἀνομιᾶς (Ps. xciii. (xciv.) 20), θρόνος αἰσθήσεως (Prov. xii. 23). The gen. in each case seems to express that which is shewn in a position of sovereign power. Thus the 'throne of grace' is that revelation of God's Presence in which His grace is shewn in royal majesty. Of this revelation the glory over the mercy-seat was a faint symbol.

Philo speaks also of ὁ ἐλεῶν Βωμός *de eassec.* § 7 (ii. 434 M.); and Clement describes Christians as having come ὑπὸ τὸν ζυγὸν τῆς χάριτος [τοῦ κυρίου] (1 Cor. 16).

Θρόνος χάριτος ἐστίν (Ps. cx. 1) οὗ θρόνος κρίσεως νῦν... θρόνος χάριτος ἐστίν ὡς κἀθηται χαριζόμενος ὁ βασιλεὺς, ὅταν δὲ ἡ συντέλεια γένηται, τότε ἐγείρεται εἰς κρίσιν (Chrys.).

On this 'throne of grace' Christ Himself is seated: ἵνα μὴ ἀκούσας αὐτὸν ἀρχιερέα νομίσης ἐστάναι εὐθέως αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον ἄγει, ὁ δὲ λερέως οὐ κἀθηται ἀλλ' ἔστηκεν (Chrys.).

ἵνα λάβωμεν ἔ. καὶ χ. εὐρωμεν] that we may receive mercy and find grace.

The twofold aim corresponds with the twofold necessity of life. Man needs mercy for past failure, and grace for present and future work. There is also a difference as to the mode of attainment in each case. Mercy is to be 'taken' as it is extended to man in his weakness; grace is to be 'sought' by man according to his necessity. Ut misericordiam consequamur, id est, remissionem peccatorum, et gratiam donorum Spiritus Sancti (Primas.).

For χάρις compare ii. 9; x. 29; xii. 15, 28; xiii. 9, 25.

For λαβεῖν compare John i. 16; xx. 22; Rom. viii. 15; 1 Pet. iv. 10; and for εὐρεῖν Luke i. 30; Acts vii. 46; 2 Tim. i. 18.

εἰς εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν] Vulg. gratiam inveniamus in auxilio opportuno. The help comes when it is needed and not till then (ii. 18 τοῖς περασμένοις βοηθήσας). Comp. Philo *de migr. Adv.* § 10 (i. p. 445 M.) οὐκ οὖν ὅτι καὶ πρὸς βοήθειαν δύναμις ἀρωγὸς εὐτρεπὴς ἐφειδρεύει παρὰ θεοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ ἡγεμὼν ἐγγυτέρω πρόσεισιν ἐπ' ὠφελεία τῶν ἀξίων ὠφελείσθαι δεδιλωται. The clause goes with all that precedes: 'mercy' and 'grace' are always ready at the present moment. Ἄν νῦν προσέλθῃς, φησί, λήψῃ καὶ χάριν καὶ ἔλεον· εὐκαιρως γὰρ προσέρχῃ· ἂν δὲ τότε προσέλθῃς, οὐκέτι· ἄκαιρος γὰρ τότε ἡ πρόσδος (Chrys. followed by the later commentators).

Comp. Gen. xxxv. 3. One of the names of Ahura Mazda is 'the One of whom questions are asked' (*Zenda-vesta* S.B.E. ii. p. 24 and note). Philo's description of 'the Divine Word' as High-priest in the soul of man is worthy of study: *de prof.* §§ 20, 21 (i. pp. 562 f. M.).

Additional Note on the reading of iv. 2.

There is evidence of a twofold difference in the earliest authorities as to the reading of this verse. The difference in the forms *συγκεκριρασμε*, *συγκεκριραμ*- may be neglected. The substantial differences which affect the interpretation of the passage lie in (1) *-μένος*, *-μένους*, and (2) *τοῖς ἀκούσασιν*, *τῶν ἀκουσάντων*, (*τοῖς ἀκουσθεῖσι*).

(1) (a) The *nom. sing.* (*συγκεκριρασμένος*) is read by N (vg *non admistus*) d (*non temperatus*) syr vg (*because it was not mixed*) Cyr. Alex., Lcfr. (*non temperatus*), (Primas).

(b) The *accus. plur.* (*συγκεκριρασμένους*) is read by ABCD₂*M₂, the great mass of later MSS., some Lat. MSS. (*am. non admixtis*), syr hl (text *for they were not mixed*), me (*quia non confusi sunt*, Wilkins), Theod. Mops., Aug., Chrys., Theodt., Theophot.

(2) (a) *τοῖς ἀκούσασιν* is the reading of all the Greek MSS. with the exception of D₂* and 71.

(b) *τῶν ἀκουσάντων* is read by D₂* (and this may be the original of *auditorum* in d e Lcfr.), and by syr hl mg.

(c) *τοῖς ἀκουσθεῖσι* which appears to have been a conjecture of Theodore of Mopsuestia is read by 71, but the sense is given by the vg *ex his quas audierunt*.

Thus four combinations which have early authority require to be considered.

(a) *μη συγκεκριρασμένος τῇ πίστει τοῖς ἀκούσασιν.*

(β) *μη συγκεκριρασμένους τῇ πίστει τῶν ἀκουσάντων.*

(γ) *μη συγκεκριρασμένους τῇ πίστει τοῖς ἀκούσασιν.*

(δ) *μη συγκεκριρασμένους τῇ πίστει τοῖς [ἀκουσθεῖσιν v. ἀκούσασιν].*

Of these (β) may be set aside without hesitation. The variant *τῶν ἀκουσάντων* is not unlike one of the mechanical changes of D₂ (see *sv.* 1, 12, 16), and it gives no tolerable sense.

The other readings ((a), (γ), (δ)) give severally a good sense, though there are difficulties in each case (see Notes).

The external authority for (δ) is relatively so slight¹ that this reading can hardly be accepted unless the better attested readings are inadmissible. Moreover it simply gives in another form the thought which is conveyed by *συγκεκριρασμένους τῇ πίστει τοῖς ἀκούσασιν*.

Our choice then lies between (a) and (γ). The authorities for (a) though few in number cover a very wide field, and reach in each case to the earliest accessible date. And further, while the change from *-μένος* to *-μένους* is natural both as a mechanical alteration and as the intentional correction of a scribe, the change from *-μένους* to *-μένους* is more difficult to account for. It would scarcely be made mechanically; and it is not obvious as a correction.

On the whole therefore it seems best to accept the reading *συγκεκριρασμένους τῇ πίστει τοῖς ἀκούσασιν* as attested by varied ancient authority, adequately explaining the other readings, and giving a satisfactory sense.

¹ Comp. Iren. iii. 19, 1 nondum commixti verbo Dei Patris.

Some of the patristic explanations are worth quoting:

THEODORUS MOPS. (Cram. Cat. p. 177): οὐ γὰρ ἦσαν κατὰ τὴν πίστιν τοῖς ἐπαγγελθεῖσι συνημμένοι, ὅθεν οὕτως ἀναγνωστέον, 'μη συγκεκριρασμένους τῇ πίστει τοῖς ἀκουσθεῖσιν,' ἵνα εἴπῃ ταῖς πρὸς αὐτοὺς γεγενημέναις ἐπαγγελίαις τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ Μωυσέως.

THEODORUS: τί γὰρ ἀνησεν ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπαγγελία τοὺς ταύτην δεξαμένους, μη πιστῶς δεξαμένους καὶ τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμει τεβαρηκότας καὶ οἷον τοῖς θεοῦ λόγοις ἀνακραθέντας;

CHRYSOSTOM: εἶτα ἐπάγει 'ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀφέλησεν ὁ λόγος τῆς ἀκοῆς ἐκείνων μη συγκεκριρασμένους (80 MSS.; add. -μένης) τῇ πίστει τοῖς ἀκούσασιν,' δεικνύς πῶς ὁ λόγος οὐκ ἀφέλησεν, ἐκ γὰρ τοῦ μη συγκεκριραθῆναι οὐκ ἀφελήθησαν. Then afterwards he goes on to say, οἱ οὖν περὶ Χάλεβ καὶ Ἰησοῦν, ἐπειδὴ μη συγκεκριραθῆσαν τοῖς ἀπιστήσασιν, τοῦτέστιν οὐ συνέφώθησαν, διέφυγον τὴν κατ' ἐκείνων ἐξενεχθεῖσαν τιμωρίαν. καὶ ὅρα γέ τι θαυμαστόν. οὐκ εἶπεν, οὐ συνέφώθησαν ἀλλ' οὐ συγκεκριραθῆσαν, τοῦτέστιν, ἀστασιάζως δίστησαν, ἐκείνων πάντων μίαν καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν γνώμην ἐσχηκότων.

This latter is the opinion which THEOPHYLACT quotes and criticises as Chrysostom's.

AUGUSTINE, in commenting upon Ps. lxxvii. (lxxviii.) 8 *non est creditus cum Deo spiritus ejus*, writes: ut autem cor cum illo sit et per hoc rectum esse possit, acceditur ad eum non pede sed fide. Ideo dicitur etiam in epistola ad Hebraeos de illa ipsa generatione prava et amaricante, Non profuit sermo auditus illis non temperatis (80 MSS.) fidei eorum qui obaudierunt (*In Ps. lxxvii. § 10*); and again: erant illi etiam electi quorum fidei non contemperabatur generatio prava et amaricans (*id. § 18*)¹.

The note of PRIMASIUS is: non profuit illis, quia non fuit admistus et conjunctus fidei, et contemperatus fidei ex his promissionibus quas audierunt. Tunc enim prodesset iis sermo auditus si credidissent quoniam tunc esset contemperatus fidei (? fidei). Quoniam vero non crediderunt, non fuit conjunctus fidei, ideoque nihil eis profuit quod audierunt...

Additional Note on iv. 8. On some hypothetical sentences.

It is worth while for the sake of some young students to illustrate a little in detail from the writings of the N.T. the various forms of the sentence which expresses the hypothetical consequence of an unfulfilled condition.

Two main cases arise. In one (I) the protasis expressed by *ei* with the indicative is followed by the imperfect indicative with *ἄν*. The thought here is of a present or continuous result which would have been seen now if the unfulfilled supposition had been realised. In the other (II), the protasis expressed by *ei* with the indicative is followed by the aorist indicative with *ἄν*. The thought here is of a past and completed result which would have ensued if the unfulfilled condition had been realised.

¹ This reference I owe to my very sometime Fellow of Trinity College, old friend the late Rev. A. A. Ellis,