

# THE EPISTLE'S PHILOSOPHY OF REVELATION AND REDEMPTION

## 1. The Distinction between the Old *Diatheke* and the New

The Epistle distinguishes two *Diathekai*, the first being the Sinaitic and the second that instituted by Christ. The first is referred to as the *Diatheke* made with the fathers, 8:9; note also 9:1–22. The second is called a *new Diatheke*, 8:8; a *better Diatheke*, 8:6; an *eternal Diatheke*, 13:20. The term *old covenant* is not found in Hebrews. As to the new covenant, it should be noted that the English adjective *new* is the rendering of two different Greek words, namely *kaine* and *nea*. The difference between these two terms is that *kaine* is retrospective, looking back upon the old; we in our day can still call the new covenant *kaine*. But *nea* means *recent*, or *still new*; and we of the present day can no longer regard the new covenant as *nea*. An instance of *nea* in connection with *Diatheke* occurs in 12:24.

We shall now consider the relation of the Abrahamic promises to both the old and the new *Diatheke*. With regard to the chronological delimitation of these two covenants, the old begins with Moses, not before, and ends with Christ. The author of Hebrews does not apply the term *Diatheke* to that which was transacted between God and Abraham. This distinction was not accidental, but was due to the fact that the author wished to establish the new *Diatheke* upon a double basis, namely upon the promise to Moses and the promise to Abraham; note 6:13, 14, 18.

The dividing point between the old *Diatheke* and the new is the death of Christ. The end of the old covenant and the beginning of the new *covenant* lies in the death, or perhaps it would be more correct to say in the ascension, of Christ (7:11). The priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity also a change of *law*. The change of priesthood took place at the ascension, therefore it was then, also, that the change of the law took place, marking the initiation of the new covenant. According to 9:17 the new covenant has arrived when there is forgiveness of sins, and this is at the death of Christ.

In 9:10 we see that the time of setting things straight is when *the reality* comes, and the old is changed for the new. 9:15 is still more definite; the first covenant must be completely absolved, and redemption must take place through a death, before the new covenant can come. We may compare with this our Lord's words, "This cup is the new *Diatheke* in my blood," etc., showing that the new *Diatheke* comes at the point of His death. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews simply stresses the priesthood somewhat more than the conception of sacrifice.

We shall now consider the identification of the two *Diathekai* with the two worlds eschatologically distinguished. The Epistle distinguishes not only two covenants, but also two worlds or ages, namely *this age*, and *the age to come*. The peculiarity of the old *Diatheke* is that it pertains to this present world, whereas the new *Diatheke* is that of the future eschatological world. The two terms, *Diatheke* and *world* are not exactly co-extensive, inasmuch as the world existed before the time of Moses. But the new *Diatheke* and the new world are co-extensive.

The writer in several instances affirms that believers are in actual contact with the world to come and its blessings. They are eschatological creatures. In 6:5 he states that

they have tasted the powers *of the age to come*. In 9:11 and 10:1 he speaks of good things *to come*; and these good things to come are regarded as realized by the death of Christ. The writer affirms this not only in terms of time, but also in terms of place. The believers are situated where the eschatological world has its center. In 2:5 he speaks of *an inhabited world to come*, using a geographical term, *oikoumene mellouse*. The context shows what this *oikoumene* consists of: it is identical with the Christian's salvation. In 2:1–5 he exhorts them lest they neglect so great salvation; for “not unto angels did he subject the world to come.” The salvation is so great, because everything is to be put under their feet. The world subjected to angels is the *old* world; the new is under the man Christ, and with Him is under all mankind.

This same idea is expressed in still another way in 12:22, where the author states that Christians have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. We miss the writer's meaning of this if we, regard this as a mere metaphor. Christians are really in vital connection with the heavenly world. It projects into their lives as a headland projects out into the ocean. This is a somewhat peculiar representation, but it is not confined to the Epistle to the Hebrews, for it is also found in Paul's writings. For example, in Phil. 3:20 Paul states “We have our commonwealth in heaven.” Christians therefore are colonists, living in the dispersion in this present world. The same idea is set forth still more strongly in Eph. 2:6, “made us sit with him in the heavenly places,” and also in Gal. 1:4, “that he might deliver us out of this present evil world.” The Christian therefore is a peculiar chronological phenomenon. In Rom. 12:2 the apostle Paul draws the practical inference from this fact: Christians should be fashioned according to the world to come.

To Paul, the death and resurrection of Christ are the beginning of the world to come, and of the eschatological process. This conclusion followed necessarily from his teaching on the resurrection and the judgment, both of which began with Christ's death and resurrection.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has a special motive in his representation, however, being less doctrinal than Paul, and more practical. He sought to cure the readers of their religious externalism, and this externalism was attached to their distorted eschatology. They were dissatisfied because they did not as yet possess the external things, and therefore they were intensely interested in eschatology. The writer shows them that the eschatology is *present* for the most part, only certain features of it being reserved for the future. The internal, spiritual part is the important part, and this we have *now*.

There is a difference between Hebrews and Paul's Epistles not only in the motivation but also in the entire distinction. The representation of the present age is not the same in both. For Paul the present age is the *evil* age and the new age is the *perfect* age. Paul thus presents a bisection of universal history, with the resurrection of Christ as the dividing point. In Hebrews, however, the old age is the Old Testament. Thus Hebrews presents not a bisection of universal history, but a bisection of the history of redemption, which results, therefore, in a philosophy of redemption and revelation. The writer of Hebrews does not regard the old *Diatheke* as something evil, but rather as *the world of shadows* (the Levitical world).

Let us now glance at the Pauline passages, in order to note the ethical contrast presented in Paul's writings: Rom. 12:2; Gal. 1:4; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2:6; 2 Cor. 4:4 (the

strongest statement of all, for it calls Satan *the god of this world*'); Eph. 2:2, "the age (course) of this world"; Col. 1:13; 2 Tim. 4:10, "loved the present world."

In Hebrews there is reflection not on the ethical contrast between this world and the world to come, but on the inadequate, preparatory character of the one as over against the perfect, final character of the other. Another side of this matter is the fact that Hebrews does not drop the old usage altogether. The new remains in part still future: 13:14, "we seek after the city which is to come." The author speaks constantly of hope, as of something still in the future. Paul presents salvation in all three stages, past, present and future.

With respect to the ideas of *patience* and *faith*, we must now consider how these are to be reconciled. This is quite clearly presented in the Epistle. In principle, but in principle only, the coming age has already arrived. This conception is similar to that presented by Christ in His statements that the kingdom has come, and still must come. This may be called a semi-eschatological state of mind. The chronological aspect of the new age is only expressive of intense conviction of its reality on the part of the early Christians. We of the present day, having lost the realism, have also lost the sense of the soonness of its culmination. To be indifferent in regard to the time of this culmination is to commit a chronological sin. The normal Christian state of mind is to pray: "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

Another solution offered for this problem of the twofold age is that the statements are to be regarded as Christological. Still others assert that the eschatological age has already come for believers, but not for unbelievers. The answer to this point of view, however, is that the whole is for believers only.

There are two passages in the Epistle in which it is not clear to which representation they belong. These are 1:2 and 9:26. The question is whether the new or future age, in these two passages, is regarded as beginning with Christ's ascension or with His return. In 1:2 we read that God hath spoken "in the latter part of these days" (*ep' eschaton toon hemeroon toutoon*)—not "in these last days" as in the Authorized Version. The expression *these days* extends back to the Old Testament and is distinguished from those days, which lie in the future. The concluding section of *these days* is now marked by the speech of Christ. The question is, how far do *these days* extend?

One interpretation is that they extend to the ascension of Christ. This is held to be the dividing point, so that everything after Christ's ascension, including the present life of believers, belongs to *those days*, that is, to the eschatological period. Another interpretation is that the speaking of the Son is not limited to the earthly ministry of Christ, but includes the whole Gospel preaching of apostles and ministers, so that it does not reach a conclusion until the end of time. Of these two interpretations the first seems rather preferable to the second, for the latter seems to make the "end of these days" too extended a period.

In 9:26 we read that Christ has been manifested *at the end of the ages*. This end was not just a moment, but a period of at least some duration. Again we face the question, how far does this end extend? The first interpretation is, again, that it extends through the ascension of Christ. In that case the writer and the readers of the Epistle were already *beyond the end of the ages*. But it is also possible to say that the manifestation of Christ is still going on. In that case we must regard the end of the ages as very protracted, extending even to Christ's second advent.

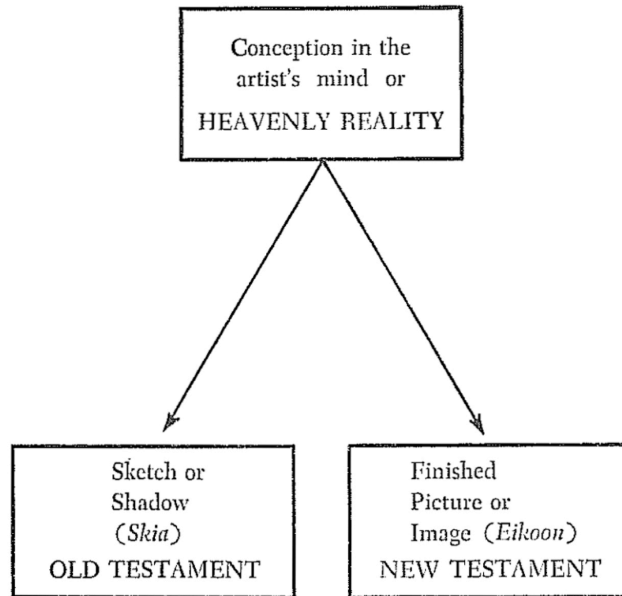
The distinction made between the present and the future age is of great importance in the teaching of the Epistle. The terms employed in this epistle are derived from the Mosaic institutions. Christianity has thus become a historic epoch in time. It is thus a thing in time, and not of the future world. But at times the author goes back to the very beginning, before Moses, and represents Christianity as being what Adam failed to secure. So regarded, Christianity is not a second half of the same period of time, but a new beginning. It thus marks the beginning of the future world. The author speaks of the great salvation of Christianity, which is so great because God has subjected the inhabited world to the rule of His people. This was the original goal of creation, but it was effected only in Christ. With Christ, therefore, we have a new creation.

Again, in 2:10 we read, "For it became him (God), for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings." To subject the inhabited world to the rule of God's people was not too great a thing, if we remember that God created all these things, and that He Himself is the end of all. 2:14 again shows this. The atonement is usually represented in the terminology of cleansing. But here redemption is represented as the destruction of the devil and deliverance from death. Thus the idea is again carried back to Paradise, where man became subject to the devil and to death. In a similar way in chapter 4 Christianity is represented as a rest and a sabbath-keeping. This might have been used as a term referring to time, as expressing an *anapausis*, such as was the rest attained in Canaan. But Christianity is more than that. It is a *sabbath-keeping*, an actual realization of that which the sabbath signified at the creation. We are now living in the age of consummation and attainment.

## 2. The Typology of the Epistle

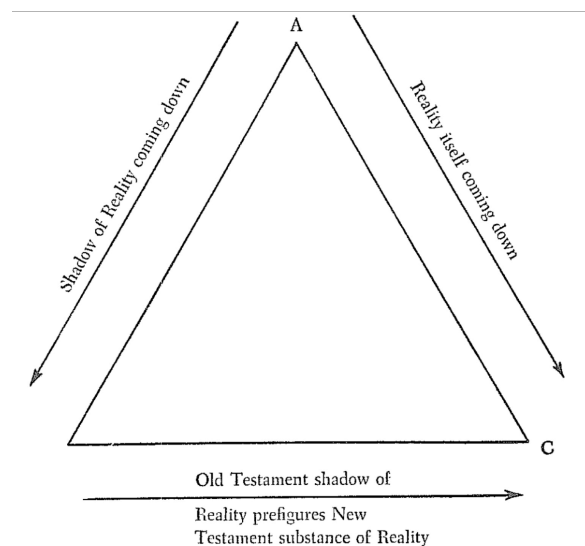
We shall now consider the relation between the content of the first *Diatheke* and that of the second. The relation is that the old prefigures the new. As to how the author conceives of this prefiguring, this is a rather difficult question. In 10:1 we read: "the law having a shadow (*skia*) of the good things to come, not the very image (*ante eikoon*) of the things..." Thus we see that the law lacked something that we of the new covenant possess, namely *the very image*. But what does this expression mean? We might be inclined to say that the law had the shadow whereas we of today have the body. But the author does not say *body*; he says *image*. What kind of conception can it be that regards *image* and *shadow* as correlative terms?

There are two spheres in which such a conception is possible, namely the sphere of art and the sphere of philosophy. In art, the artist first makes a sketch, the *skia* (shadow), then he makes the picture, the *eikoon* (image). Similarly, the Old Testament might be said to possess only the preliminary outline or sketch, while the New Testament possesses the real picture. Considered in this way, both the sketch and the real picture are only *representations* of some real thing which lies beyond both of them. This real thing then would be *the heavenly reality*. This scheme may be represented by the following diagram:



On the basis of the foregoing representation, both the Old Testament and the New Testament may be said to be derived from the Heavenly Reality, while in relation to each other, it may be said that the Old Testament prefigures the New.

The other, and more probable, although also more complicated and difficult, interpretation of the words is the philosophical one, which may be represented by the following diagram:<sup>1</sup>



In the above diagram:

A represents the Heavenly Reality

<sup>1</sup> Vos, G. (1956). [The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews](#). (J. G. Vos, Ed.) (p. 56).

- B represents the Old Testament which is a “shadow” of the Heavenly Reality
- C represents the New Testament which is the *substance* of the Heavenly Reality
- B prefigures C because B is the “shadow” of A and C equals A

When the Epistle speaks of shadowing this means shadowing *down* (from heaven to earth), not shadowing *forward* (from Old Testament to New Testament). According to this philosophical interpretation, the New Testament is not merely a reproduction of the Heavenly Reality, but its actual *substance*, the Reality itself come down from heaven, the *aute eikoon* or very image. The word *eikoon*, besides meaning image, also had the meaning of *archetype*, and this is the meaning which precisely suits our purpose here. Let us test certain passages with this idea in mind.

In 9:24 the author speaks of the earthly tabernacle as the *antitype* of the true tabernacle (*antitupa toon alethinoon*). This manner of speaking differs from our own, and also from that of Paul and Peter. The latter uniformly regard the Old Testament as the type of which the New Testament is the antitype; this is the common New Testament usage. But the author of Hebrews, on the contrary, speaks of the Old Testament as the *antitype*. An antitype, of course, always has a type lying back of it as its model. To find the original *type*, of which the Old Testament is the antitype, then, we must go back of the Old Testament to heaven. This heavenly type was shown to Moses on Mount Sinai.

In 8:5 we are told that the Jewish priests serve that which is a copy and a shadow (*hupodeigma* and *skia*). The author adds that it is a copy and shadow *of the heavenly things*. Thus it is not a shadow projected or thrown forward (into the future), but a shadow cast down from heaven to earth. Moreover, the particular use made by the author of the adjective *true* (*alethinos*) ought to be noted. *Alethinos* is a much stronger word than *alethes* which is the more common word for *true*. *Alethinos* means not simply *the true*, but *the real, the genuine, the veritable*. It occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in the Fourth Gospel. The *true* therefore is the real archetypal representation. *So in the Fourth Gospel we read of the true bread coming down from heaven, and again of Christ as the Truth coming down from heaven.*

This, then, is the one scheme of typology that is peculiar to this Epistle. The Epistle, however, also uses the ordinary conceptions of type and antitype as they are used by Peter and Paul. Thus in 9:8, with reference to the Holy of Holies, the author says that the fact that this was shut off to the people *pointed forward* to the fact that at a future time it would be opened to them. The Holy Spirit was signifying this, he says; therefore a *forecasting* was involved in this fact concerning the tabernacle. In 9:9 the author speaks of “a parable for the time then present.” The Old Testament things, therefore, were a *parable*; that is, they were things called a parable in relation to the reality of the things of the New Testament. In 7:18 the author speaks of *a provisional commandment* contained in the Levitical priesthood. In Christ’s own priesthood we have the subsequent and permanent commandment.

In the three cases cited above the author, while he does not actually use the terms *type* and *antitype*, nevertheless clearly shows a consciousness of the idea involved in those terms. There occur also a few instances in which the two representations are combined. The most striking of these is the reference to Melchizedek. The author states that Christ is a priest after the order (*kata ten taxin*) of Melchizedek. Thus he thinks of Melchizedek as the *model* and of Christ as the *copy*. The idea of temporal succession is also involved in this. Melchizedek is the type and Christ is the antitype. But then we read further of

Melchizedek that he was *made like unto the Son of God (aphoomoioomenos)*, a statement which introduces the other scheme, in which Melchizedek is regarded as the *antitype* back of whom lay the Son of God as the *type* or Heavenly Reality. Of that Heavenly Reality, Melchizedek is the *shadow (skia)*. But now in the New Testament, when the Son of God as the Heavenly Reality has come down to this earth, Melchizedek comes to be regarded as the *foreshadowing* type of which Christ is the antitype.

The other instance in which these two modes of representation are brought together is found in the idea of *rest (anapausis)* in chapters 3 and 4. The New Testament rest had already been foreshadowed by the rest of Canaan in the Old Testament. But then the author goes on to speak of the higher, *heavenly* rest which through Christ has now come down to the readers—a rest of which the Old Testament rest in Canaan was in turn a *skia*, a shadow.

The figures most commonly used to represent the foreshadowing of the New Testament in the Old are drawn from the tabernacle ordinances, such as those of priesthood and sacrifice, in chapters 9 and 13. Christ is foreshadowed in the Old Testament, however, not only as priest, but also as king. This figure is brought out in Psalm 2:7, which is quoted in Heb. 1:5 and 5:5. The same idea is brought out in 2 Sam. 7:14 which is quoted in Heb. 1:5; and Psalm 40:7–9 which is quoted in Heb. 10:5. This is taken as spoken typically of Christ. We have here a confession of sin. It is David as king-priest who is here confessing sin, professing his readiness to do by obedience what the animal sacrifices could not accomplish. There is a peculiar application of this Psalm, however. In the Psalm the true sacrifice lies in the internal sphere of obedience, not in the outward ceremony. The writer of Hebrews affirms that the vicarious sacrifice of Christ is a sacrifice of this type, being not external but internal.

Other instances of prefiguration, in which there is no specific office underlying the figure, are found in Psalm 22, which represents a righteous suffering saint. The author of Hebrews finds this Psalm fulfilled in Christ, and finds that through His salvation He becomes a source of salvation to others (2:12).

Another instance occurs in 2:13, where the writer quotes from Isaiah 8. Two statements from that chapter are quoted: (1) “I will put my trust in him”; (2) “Behold, I and the children whom God has given me.” The author of Hebrews puts these words on the lips of Christ. This can only be explained on the principle that Isaiah, in his trust in God and in his identification with his children, *is a type of Christ*. Some interpreters, indeed, explain this merely as proof that any desirable quality or relationship found in the Old Testament characters may be applied to Christ. This is not the reason for the reference in Heb. 2:13, however. Isaiah in the chapter quoted from occupies a very critical position, and as such typifies the Messiah. The national hardening of the people had already begun in Isaiah’s time, which was to have its culmination in the time of Christ. Thus we have before us one continuous process of hardening. And Isaiah, who lived at the time of the beginning of it, stands as the type of Christ who would live at the end of it. Now, it was due to this crisis that there was a separation effected. The prophet, in a sense, stood alone. Here, then, is the birth of the idea of a church within a church, the idea of *the invisible church*. This idea gave a new identification between the prophet and his most immediate circle, including his disciples, of whom we read. This identification extended not only to his disciples, of whom we read, but also to his children. These children were given him precisely for the express purpose of being identified with him in

his trust in God. They were children of prophetic significance. Centuries later this was repeated, on a higher plane, in Christ. Again there was an unparalleled necessity for Christ to put his trust in God, and also there arose a close identification between Christ and the believers. This passage in Hebrews is unique in the Bible in speaking of believers as *children of Christ*. This expresses the closest identification possible.

There are also certain Old Testament statements of *Jehovah* which are in Hebrews referred to Christ, so that Jehovah becomes a type of Christ. These passages are Deut. 32:43, quoted in Heb. 1:6; Psalm 102:26–28, quoted in Heb. 1:12; Hab. 2:3, quoted in Heb. 10:37. From these references some again derive the interpretation that *everything* that is said of Jehovah in the Old Testament can properly be ascribed to Christ. The correct view, however, is that only the *eschatological* manifestations of Jehovah in the Old Testament may be referred to Christ. This is held also by Delitzsch. Only in these cases is Jehovah the type of Christ.

All the above are instances of prefiguration. In addition to these, however, there are also explicit predictions to be found. There are especially three prophetic passages of the Old Testament that are favorites with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, namely Jer. 31:31, quoted in Heb. 8 and 10; Hag. 2:6, quoted in Heb. 12:26; and Psalm 45:7, 8, quoted in Heb. 1:8, 9.

The first passage is so plainly set forth as to require no special comment. The prophecy in Haggai speaks of a twofold shaking, one shaking lying in the past, referring to the giving of the law at Mount Sinai and the upheaval of the earth which accompanied it, and the other shaking still to take place in the future, a shaking far more comprehensive, including not only the earth but also the heaven. Now the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews finds in this a prediction of the introduction of the new covenant. (Whether he regarded the introduction of the covenant as lying in the past *for him* or as still in the future is not indicated; the full realization of it, at least, he thought of as still lying in the future.)

As to the third reference (Psalm 45:7, 8), there is a difference of opinion as to whether we have here a prediction or a prefiguration. The author quotes it in a way which allows two renderings. The one takes the term *God* as in the vocative case; then Christ is addressed as God. The other rendering takes *God* as in the nominative case, in which case we must translate “Thy throne *is* God” (verse 6). The same uncertainty occurs in the 7th verse: “Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee ...” In the English versions the former of these, at least, is rendered as a vocative, making the divine name apply to Christ. And this is probably the correct rendering.

Now what is the author’s view concerning the inferiority of the Old Testament as compared with the New Testament? Three elements may be gathered from the Epistle. These are expressed, first, in terms of place or sphere; second, in terms of substance or content; third, in terms of efficacy.

First, as to the inferiority due to place, the old covenant is terrestrial, earthly. It finds expression in terms of earth. The new covenant has its center in heaven and finds expression in heavenly forms. The priests in the former covenant were priests on the earth. Christ is a priest in heaven, indicating a difference not merely of location but also of importance. The Old Testament tabernacle was a sanctuary of this earth (9:1), a tabernacle of this creation. Therefore, according to 8:2 and 11:24, it was pitched by man and made with hands. This latter expression is also used by Paul to distinguish the earthly



from the heavenly. This contrast is even applied to *revelation*: the one revelation is on the earth, the other is from heaven. The author represents God as giving oracles in two stages, the one on earth, and the other from heaven.

Second, as to the substance or content of the two dispensations, the author makes use of the contrast between flesh (*sarx*) and spirit (*pneuma*). The old covenant is spoken of as *sarkikos* and *sarkinos*. The second of these two terms is the strongest. *Sarkikos* means having the quality of *sarx*, or being *fleshly*; *sarkinos* means being composed of *sarx*, or being *fleshy*. The author speaks of *conscience* as the opposite of *sarkinos* or fleshy. Sometimes he also includes the idea of *spirit* as accompanying that of conscience.

The use of the term *sarx* here is quite distinct from that found in Paul's writings. The author of Hebrews says that the entire Old Testament is *sarx*. Paul, on the other hand, protests that the law is spiritual (*pneumatikos*, Rom. 7:14) and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Paul used *sarx* with an ethical connotation of evil. But in Hebrews the term means simply *material* or *external*. Paul was also familiar with this same contrast, to be sure, but he expresses the contrast in other terms. He speaks of the Old Testament, for example, as "weak and beggarly elements," in contrast to the New Testament. He also speaks of the Old Testament law written on tables of stone, in contrast to the New Testament which has God's law written on tables of hearts of flesh. He speaks of circumcision of the *sarx*, that is, bodily circumcision, in contrast to the true circumcision which is that of the heart (Rom. 2:28, 29).

Another figure is found in Hebrews, namely that of the mountain (12:18). The Old Testament mountain is that which could be touched, that which was tangible and material. Over against this stands Mount Zion, the heavenly *mountain*. Also in 13:9 we read of *meats* in contrast with grace, and in 13:15 *animals* are contrasted with *the fruit of lips*.

Third, there is the contrast in point of efficacy. The same terminology is used here as in the case of flesh and spirit: the flesh is inert, but the spirit is dynamic. The clearest passage for this is 7:16. Here the author compares the two priesthoods, the Levitical priesthood and that of Christ. The Levites were made priests according to the law of a carnal commandment (*kata nomon untoles sarkines*), but Christ was made priest according to the power of an endless life (*kata dunamin zooes akatalutou*). The former was *legal* and therefore connected with the idea of inertia, as opposed to *kata dunamin* (according to power). It follows from this that the Levitical priesthood was a priesthood according to the law, which sprang from a commandment as its origin, which was a dead thing. Christ's priesthood, on the contrary, derived its dynamic character from a life-birth. Moreover, the two things are characterized as opposites in that the first was made by flesh, and was therefore transitory—something that must eventually decompose—whereas the life of Christ is indissoluble (*akatalutos*). Christ's priesthood is therefore eternal, having been tested by death and having passed through it unscathed.

This is taught in still another form, namely in that of the divine intention. The Old Testament law is dispensed with because of its weakness and unprofitableness. Its weakness is not merely a matter of degree, for in reality it accomplished nothing, since it made nothing perfect and did not lead to the goal. This is further implied in the quotation from Jer. 31:31, quoted in Heb. 8:8–12. The fathers did not continue in the covenant made with them. But in the new *Berith* the law would be put in their minds and written on their *hearts*. And the further promise is added: "Their sins will I remember no more."

In both these respects, therefore, the Old Testament law is inefficacious. In verse 7 the author goes on to say that God found fault with the first covenant, for otherwise there would have been no place found for a second.

### 3. The Problem of the Inferiority of the Old Testament from the Religious Point of View

The matters which we have been considering confront us with a serious problem: What value is still to be placed in such a weak system as the Old Testament is represented to be? Has the Old Testament not been proved to be altogether worthless? How could that which is called *flesh* make atonement at all and be the way to redemption?

The Pauline epistles also raise this problem. They speak of the inefficacy of the legal system. This is so emphasized as even to give the impression that the Old Testament was altogether devoid of grace. In this respect Paul's epistles go further than does the Epistle to the Hebrews. The reason for this is that Paul treats the law from the forensic point of view, and brings out that instead of leading to salvation the law brings a person under a curse. The Epistle to the Hebrews, on the other hand, regards the law as a system of atonement. The author's conclusion is purely a negative one, namely, that the law could not bring forgiveness. But in Paul's writings the law is represented as positively working *a curse*.

But how could a true religion exist under such a system at all? Several observations are in order. First, we may turn to the *types* of the Old Testament as something which should have led the people to something better. The author does not make much of this, however. The types were primarily for the people, but objectively they were for the mind of God. Nowhere in the Epistle has the author set himself really to solve the problem as stated above. Nor is it really solved in Paul's epistles.

Still there was a possibility of the significance of the sacrificial system entering into the subjective mind of the Old Testament believers, by the latter raising themselves to a higher state through the types. We see an indication of this possibility first at 10:3. In the Old Testament sacrifices there was a remembrance made of sin year by year. This was necessary, since it was impossible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. This yearly practice was not intended merely for an objective purpose; it was a remembrance *in the minds of the people*. Because of this remembrance the Psalmist, in Psalm 40, was led to speak concerning sacrifices which *would* satisfy the will of God. It should be noted that it was *the Psalmist* who rose to this consciousness—an inspired writer, not an ordinary individual believer under the Old Testament. Still, he did write it, with the result that higher consciousness later became the common property of Old Testament believers. It was with the aid of *revelation*, therefore, that this higher consciousness was brought about.

Likewise Psalm 110 is quoted. Here we have the prophecy of a future Priest, after the order of Melchizedek. Thus there was the consciousness of a higher order of priesthood than the Levitical being possible, and there was the prophecy that at a future time such a higher priesthood would become actual.

Psalm 95 is also quoted, which speaks of the rest of Canaan. This idea of rest is eschatological, looking forward to the true rest which is to come in the future. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews here again recognized, in one of the Old Testament Psalms, a certain higher consciousness on the part of the people of the Old Testament.

But the Old Testament consciousness, even without this spiritual understanding, could yet function with an absolute effect. The unbelievers of the Old Testament are referred to as being excluded not merely from the rest of Canaan, but also from the *absolute* rest, that is, from the *eternal* rest. This does not imply, of course, that the Old Testament unbelievers themselves realized or understood this. For them the proximate object was Canaan. Yet objectively they not only lost the inheritance of the earthly Canaan, but also were *eternally lost*, for God took their faith or unbelief in this proximate sense as having an eternal and final effect. For the *subjective* consciousness of believers there still *remained* an eternal rest—the heavenly rest which is the true rest of believers.

The Old Testament, however, had more than these mere symbols and ceremonies. It also contained direct *promises*, many of which were spiritual in content. And these promises were given repeatedly, from age to age. Therefore it was not necessary for the Old Testament believers to live exclusively on the basis of insight into the meaning of the types. Of these promises the author of Hebrews speaks much. Especially he speaks with reference to the divine promises made to the Patriarchs. He tells how they made the leap from the external to the internal and the spiritual. The Patriarchs even in their day saw the unnecessary character of the earthly Canaan, for they looked for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Therefore they considered themselves strangers and pilgrims on this earth, even when they were living in the land of Canaan, the promised land. The author of the Epistle so interprets Gen. 23:4 and 47:9.

Finally, we must note the continuity of the Old Testament with the New. In 3:1–6 Moses is compared with Christ. There we read that Moses was *in* the house, whereas Christ is *over* the house. The implication is that the same house is meant in both cases, namely, God's house. (Compare Num. 12:7). In this house Moses is a servant, while Christ is a Son. The superiority of Christ to Moses is further brought out by the consideration that the builder of the house (Christ) is greater than the house and its contents (including Moses). Again the implication plainly is that the same house is meant, namely the house of which Moses was an inmate and in which he was a servant.

Christ is the *core* of the heavenly, spiritual world. Therefore *a real contact* existed between that world and the Old Testament house. The Old Testament house was therefore also in vital contact with the heavenly, spiritual reality.

In 11:26 we read that Moses preferred *the reproach of Christ* to the treasures of Egypt. This phrase, *the reproach of Christ*, is explained by its usage in 13:13, "Let us therefore go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." This reproach is thus seen to be a reproach which Christ Himself first bore and which we now bear together with Him. So we must similarly interpret the reproach of Christ borne by Moses. This does not imply that Moses had a prophetic knowledge of the sufferings of the future Messiah, but rather that the reproach which Moses bore was objectively identical with the reproach suffered by Christ and His people throughout the ages. This implies, therefore, that back of all the reproaches and sufferings which God's people have endured, stood Christ. How this appeared to Moses' own subjective consciousness is told us in 11:25, "choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God ..."

#### 4. The Epistle's Doctrine of Revelation: the Superiority of the New Revelation to the Old

The Epistle views religion as a product of revelation. Thus it gives a warrant to speak of *revealed religion*. Revelation is a part of the supernaturalism of the Epistle. But there

is a special reason for the introduction of this idea here. The author wanted to mark and compare progress in the matter of revelation. This enables us to understand why he begins abruptly with the discussion of his subject, omitting the formality of an introduction. This interest is to be explained by the intense concern of the writer with the subject of *the progressive character of revelation*.

A further reason for the author's stress on revelation as its Diatheke-aspect, the concept of intercourse between God and man. Revelation, therefore, is a conscious thing through and through. Revelation is the speech of God to man. It forms one side of the covenant intercourse, therefore. Note the words used to express this intercourse of God with man. We read that God *lalei* (talks), not that He *legei* (speaks). The word used is suggestive of the kind of talk used in addressing children, who cannot as yet understand ordinary adult speech. The word brings out the practical intent of the speech.

The author speaks of *the word of God* in the singular, 4:12; 13:7. He also uses the expression *the word of hearing*, 4:2. He also speaks of *the oracles of God* (*logia tou Theou*), 5:12. The original meaning of *logia* is *little words*. How did this term get the meaning of *oracle*? When ancient people consulted an oracle they got in reply only mysterious or ambiguous phrases; hence *logia* came to have the meaning of *oracle*, and a divine origin was ascribed to them. Thus in Scripture the real word of God is called *the oracles of God*.

The author wanted the readers to be freed from their religious externalism. The word *speech* is more spiritual than anything else. It comes nearest to the spiritual and brings things in the inner spirit. In 6:1 the author speaks of *the doctrine of Christ* (*tou Christou logos*), meaning the word preached by Christ or the word bringing knowledge of Christ. Because it stresses the idea of revelation, the Epistle treats especially of the theological aspect of Christianity. It expresses a firm belief in the efficacy of *doctrine* as a means of grace. Paul as a rule first presents his argument as a whole, then proceeds to exhortation on the basis of the completed argument. But the author of Hebrews does not wait to finish his doctrinal argument, but immediately inserts hortatory material in the body of his doctrinal discussion. The writer was obviously a theologian before he wrote the Epistle; he had in mind a well defined doctrinal system. The author of Hebrews is not in this Epistle working out his doctrinal system for the first time, as Bruce wrongly supposes. Paul develops theology in his epistles, but only through woes and struggles. The author of Hebrews, on the contrary, writes very smoothly and evenly. He is obviously familiar with the ground he is traversing. In Hebrews doctrine is never introduced for its own sake; the theology of the Epistle is never of a merely speculative or scholastic type, although it does contain a pronounced intellectual vein, calling conversion, for example, *becoming enlightened*.

In agreement with this conception of revelation as a process of fellowship between God and man, the writer conceives of God as speaking through the Scripture: 4:12–14. He conceives of this as a continuous or permanent speech; God is *in His Word*, and this consideration leads the writer of the Epistle to personify the Word of God. He speaks of the Word judging, penetrating, etc. Such things could not be said of a word that stood by itself. After carrying out this personification, the author naturally returns to the idea of the speaking of God. Hence follows the identification of the Word with God.

Some have thought that the author's meaning is personal, that is, that Logos here means Christ. Although it is possible that the author was acquainted with Philo's idea of

the term *Logos*, and that he conceived of it as John did, still this is not probable, because in that case the author would almost certainly have used the term *Logos* in the opening verses of the Epistle, where he speaks of the Son as being the effulgence of the Father's glory. The term *Logos* in the sense which it has in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel would almost certainly have been used in this connection by the author of Hebrews had he been familiar with that meaning of *Logos*. But as a matter of fact he does not use it in the opening verses of the Epistle where it would seem to fit so well.

Besides, it would hardly be necessary to affirm of Christ *that He is living*, which is what the author affirms of the Word of God in 4:12–14. The main point is that in this passage *the word* and *God* are identified. The word is like a two-edged sword. This is a figure of searching, which also contains the idea of judging. The revelation of God in Christ is both a searching and a judgment. It brings to light what is in a man. If unbelief is found in a man, he is searched and judged.

The first sentence of the Epistle (1:1–3) is carefully constructed. The unity and continuity of the old and the new revelation are strictly maintained. In both *God spoke*. The participle *having spoken* is a preparation for the finite verb *hath spoken*. The whole organism of revelation lies in these words. Whatever diversity may exist, still it is all a divine word. The responsibility of people under the New Testament may be greater, but this is not because the New Testament has more authority or more of God in it than the Old Testament has.

Over against the expression *of old time* stands the expression *the latter part of these days*. We have already explained this phrase. The Old Testament having been given *of old time*, it is related to the past; it came to a close with Malachi. This idea of finishing something also belongs to the other side of the comparison, for it inheres in the aorist *hath spoken* (*elalesen*). The writer lays stress upon the fact that God *has spoken in Christ*; both the old revelation and the new are accomplished facts.

The old revelation was made *to the fathers*; the new, *to us*. If the Epistle was originally intended for the use of Gentile Christians, the use of this expression *to the fathers* is interesting; it stresses the continuity of the new with the old.

The old revelation was *in the prophets*; the new *is in a Son*. This is the main difference between the two. Note that there is no possessive pronoun with *Son* in the original, nor any definite article. These were omitted with a purpose, so that the contrast to *in the prophets* is not *in His Son* nor *in the Son*, but rather *in a Son*.

In 7:28 we read that the law appoints men high priests, but the word of the oath, which was after the law, appoints a Son. It is a qualitative contrast; *a Son* is contrasted with *men*.

The old revelation was *in many portions*, for the prophets were many in number, but the new revelation possesses a unitary character. *In diverse manners* is an expression referring to the diverse mentality of the various prophets, and the various modes in which the revelation came to them; but in the case of the new revelation—the revelation made in Christ—the many modes are regarded as united or equalized in one.

Thus the author wishes to point out the inferiority of the old revelation in comparison with the new. In the new revelation all is simplified, and therefore superior. For in the case of that which comes in portions, each portion is necessarily incomplete. The synthesis of the New Testament is therefore superior to the revelation of the Old Testament. As a matter of fact, we find the synthesis of the Old Testament in the New

Testament.

The question may be raised how far we can carry these modes in the Old Testament revelation. Precisely what is referred to by the words *in diverse manners*? Is the reference to various *modes of communication*, or is it perhaps to individual *collections* of the Old Testament revelations? As to the content or subject matter, we think of law, prophecy, wisdom and other kinds of Old Testament revelation. The expression *in the prophets* includes the definite article, therefore prophecy is here used in the widest sense, and covers all the prophets of the Old Testament. Is anything to be inferred from the word *in*? The Hebrew *Be* is rendered only inaccurately by the Greek *en*, since the Hebrew prefix does not have any local meaning, but simply means *through*. It is doubtful, however, whether such Hebraism can be discerned here, since elsewhere the author is careful with the Greek, as for example in 9:25, where the high priest is said to enter *in blood*, which in this case might mean *clothed in blood*, and need not mean *by means of blood*. Compare 1 John 5:6, “in the water and in the blood.” There is some local significance here. In Heb. 11:2 the Greek *en* is used with a precise purpose. In 1:1 the word *dia* could not have been used because it would signify too little; it would mean that the prophets were mere mechanical instruments of revelation, an idea which the author clearly wished to avoid.

The opposite error is also guarded against, namely that of ascribing too much to the prophets, as if in the giving of the revelation only the first stage was directly under the control of God, but the delivering of the revelation to the people by the prophets was not under His control. By using the preposition *en* the author represents God as controlling both elements.

The explanation just presented may be correct, but it seems to overlook the meaning of the little word *en*. There is another possible explanation, which takes *en* in its full local sense, as in Matt. 10:20, “For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.” Here the preposition *en* has its local meaning: the Holy Spirit is actually *in* the speakers. Note also 2 Cor. 13:3, “a proof that Christ speaketh *in* me.” To say that God was speaking in the prophets need not detract at all from their intelligence, but it does serve to emphasize the absolute character of the resultant prophecies. We need not be concerned so much about the *processes* of revelation, provided we maintain a firm conviction that the *product* of revelation is truly the infallible Word of God. This we find in Hebrews, which lays strong stress on the fact that the revelation was *in* the prophets.

Paul personifies the Scripture by using the expression *God says*. He does this only when quoting from statements of the Old Testament in which God is the speaker. Otherwise he says *Scripture said* or *as it is written*. But in the Epistle to the Hebrews God is everywhere represented as the speaker in the Old Testament. Only one passage, Heb. 4:7, names the human instrument, and even that one says *God saying in David*. The author goes so far as to say that it matters little who the human author may have been; the main thing is that God said it. Elsewhere he says, *Somewhere someone has testified*. Of course the author of Hebrews, thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament as he was, knew who that someone was, but still he does not name him.

We must now face the question, what idea does the author associate with the words *a Son*. It is a title given to Christ, to designate His superiority. The passages in which the term occurs are: 1:2, 5, 8; 3:6; 4:14; 5:5, 8; 6:6; 7:3, 28; 10:29. *Son of God* may be a Messianic title. The Son represents the Father, or the Son is the heir of the Father, or the Son is a recipient of the Father's love. Thus understood, the title *Son of God* ascribes to

the Son a certain *function*.

But the term may also designate a *nature or origin*. In that case it is ontological rather than functional. If it is a Messianic title, then it has reference to the Messianic acts in history, referring to the presence of Christ on earth in the incarnate sphere. In this Messianic sense Christ could also be prophetically called the Son of God even before His incarnation. There is of course a certain sense in which the functional Messianic element existed before the incarnation; but broadly speaking, if we give it the functional sense, the meaning must be restricted to Christ's historical appearance in the world. If taken in the ontological sense, on the other hand, the title *Son of God* includes also Christ's pre-existence, without chronological limitations. Of course it must be borne in mind that the Messianic Sonship does not exclude the high ontological or eternal Sonship, nor did the latter render the former superfluous.

Turning now to the various passages, we shall begin with 1:3, 4. Here it is affirmed that Christ became "by so much better than the angels, as he hath inherited a more excellent name than they." Thus the measure of Christ's superiority to the angels is in the name which He inherited. The word *better*, of course, does not mean morally better; it is to be taken in the sense of superiority of nature. The name which made Christ superior to the angels was *Son of God*. The author illustrates this from the Old Testament: "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? and again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?" This name of *Son* is said to have been *inherited* by Christ. This conception of inheriting places the matter within the sphere of time or history. There was a point of time at which He received the inheritance; therefore it appears that a functional or Messianic Sonship is referred to here. That is, Christ is said to be superior to the angels in so far as the Messiah is superior to the angels.

Now if we look at the second verse, we should have the presumption of a similar sense occurring there. Yet such would be a mistaken conclusion. For in the second of the two verses the Sonship is ontological. This is clear from the fact that the more excellent name is contrasted with the name of the angels. This comparison of Christ with the angels is one that is drawn out to some length through the chapter. The angels are contrasted with Christ in respect to their *nature*. Hence also Christ is referred to in respect to *His* nature. *God having spoken through a Son* omits the definite article. Therefore the term is generic, and does not refer to an office, but to His nature. If the reference were to His Messiahship, the definite article could not have been omitted. For *a* Messiah cannot be spoken of, since there can be *but one* Messiah; the form would have to be *the Messiah*, with the definite article. This indicates that the expression *in a Son* in verse 2 is generic. What follows in verse 3 reads like the unfolding of the conception of Sonship. Now the phrases *the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance* are not functional phrases; rather, they describe what Christ is ontologically; they relate to His nature. But if these phrases relate to His nature, then the Sonship which is connected with them must also relate to His nature. So we conclude that the Sonship in verse 4 is functional, while that in verse 2 is ontological. But how can we reconcile these two in one and the same context?

The solution lies in verse 4, as to the manner in which the Messiah obtains the title. We read that He *inherited* the title. But such inheritance can only take place in the case of one who is already a Son by nature. Therefore the two senses are connected; because

Christ is a Son ontologically, He is qualified to inherit the functional title of *Son* in the Messianic sense.

An objection may be raised that we are interpreting the word *inherited* in too literal a sense. In Greek to inherit sometimes has merely the meaning of *to obtain*. Thus the argument presented above would fall down. But in the passage under consideration the context seems to indicate the more specific meaning of inheriting, for in verse 2 it was stated that God had made His Son *heir* to all things; therefore the author had the literal meaning of *inherit* in mind. We conclude, then, that in this verse the word means not simply *obtaining*, but actually *inheriting*.

The next question we must consider is, how far does this ontological Sonship go? It dates back at least to the beginning of time. God has spoken in His Son, through whom also He made the worlds. But further it reached back of the creation into the sphere of absolute eternity, as is shown by the added phrases *the effulgence of his glory* and *the very image of his substance*. Therefore the term *Son* in the ontological sense describes not merely something that He *was*, but something that He *is*, throughout and beyond all time. Compare John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I am."

In 1:8, "thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever," something may be said in favor of the ontological interpretation of *Son* in the first phrase of the verse. The Son is here addressed *as God*, although Westcott and Hort suggest the rendering *thy throne is God*, taking *ho Theos* not as a vocative but as a predicate nominative. According to this interpretation the Son is affirmed to sit as it were on the shoulders of God. But in the margin Westcott and Hort remind us of the other rendering. If we follow their preferred rendering, the conception of sonship involved is a high one, but does not necessarily pass beyond the functional conception. In that case the scepter spoken of would be a scepter of kingship, but not of Deity. And the kingship is traced to the Anointed One as on the seat. The other rendering (*thy throne, O God...*) however can only be ontological. Therefore the question depends on the original author's meaning.

In 3:6 we have the contrast between Christ and Moses. The contrast is in the sphere of office and function. The superiority of Christ is again connected with His being *Son*. Moses was faithful as a servant, but Christ was faithful as a Son. Further, Moses was faithful *in* the house, because he was a servant; but Christ was faithful *over* the house, because He was a Son.

This is explained from the Messianic conception of Sonship. Christ had perfect supervision over the house. The thought, it should be carefully noted, is not that Moses was over the Old Testament house and Christ is over the New Testament house, but rather that Christ is a Son over *the same* house in which Moses was a servant. Christ was also the Messianic Son, and therefore, in the time of Moses, it was Christ that built the house. Hence His Messianic Sonship goes back of His incarnation and reaches back into the historical pre-existence.

In verse 4 we read, "he that built all things is God." Does this mean that Christ is a builder, but that there exists also a greater builder, namely God? If that is the meaning, then the text contains a mark of difference between God and the Son, thus representing God as being more than the Messiah. But another exegesis refers the words *he that built all things is God* also to Christ, so that the statement amounts to a climax in the magnifying of Christ. He that builds is God, but it is Christ, the Son, who builds; therefore in this text Christ is called God Himself. If this exegesis is correct, then the title



*Son* cannot here be restricted to the functional level; the two senses would coalesce. But which is really the correct interpretation is not certain.

In 4:14 the author's conception of Sonship is a very high one. He gives exceptionally high value to the high priesthood of Christ, and derives its eminence from the Sonship. The Messianic Sonship in itself may be sufficient for that.

In 5:5 the author again speaks of the priesthood of Christ, stating that He did not usurp it, but was called to it by God. So Christ also glorified not Himself to be a high priest, but He that spake unto Him, *Thou art my Son*. The God who said to Him *Thou art my Son* is the one who made Him priest. According to some interpreters this means: "But God, *when* he spake to him," instead of *that* He spoke to Him. This interpretation would make the Sonship functional. The speaking amounted to making Him priest. This is hardly plausible, though, because nowhere does the author identify the Messiahship and the priesthood.

In 7:28 we read that the law appoints men high priests, but the word of the oath appoints a Son, who is a Son before He is made high priest. Hence Christ did not glorify Himself to be made high priest, but God gave this office to Him because He had the Sonship forever, that is, He was Son forever before becoming high priest as Messiah. Thus there exists not an identity but a *congruity* between the two offices of high priest and Messiah. The office of priesthood thus comes to Him from the same source as being called *Son*. This would seem to indicate a Messianic Sonship; but in 7:28 the ontological Sonship seems clearly implied, since the appointment to the priesthood comes as an acknowledgment of the Sonship.

In 7:28 *a Son* is contrasted with *men*, which confirms the idea that the eternal or ontological Sonship must be meant here. The Sonship of Christ, therefore, in the *deepest* sense is the ontological divine Sonship, which lies back of the Messianic Sonship.

6:6 and 10:29 yield us nothing new. These passages imply the terrible character of the sin of those who have crucified and trodden underfoot the Son of God. Thus they imply a very high standing of the Son. Still, the Messianic Sonship would be quite sufficient for this. In 7:3 we read that Melchizedek was made like unto the Son of God, which is a reversal of the usual statement, that Christ was made a priest after the order of Melchizedek. The statement that Melchizedek was made like unto the Son of God has been understood as an *anticipation* of the Son of God afterwards to come, the Messiah. While this interpretation would be possible in itself, the context forbids it in this case. Note the point of the comparison: Melchizedek and Christ are compared with respect to their *eternity*. What kind of an eternity is this? Does it extend only forward, or also backward? If the former, then the Messianic sense is sufficient, and the interpretation of anticipation can be accepted as the correct one. But Melchizedek is called eternal in both directions, since it is affirmed of him that he is without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, and that therefore he is like unto the Son of God. So we must conclude that in this verse the Son is ontologically spoken of.

A point of interest here is the question of how the idea of Sonship in both senses contributes to the superiority of the new revelation over the old. As Messianic Son, Christ is *the ideal Revealer*. The Messiahship is the ideal position, high above all the prophets of the Old Testament. In harmony with this, the revelation referred to in connection with the Son is a revelation of *speech*. He who holds the highest office brings also the highest

message. But apart from this, it is also true that the ontological Sonship has a bearing on the superiority of the new revelation, as seen in the comparison made between Christ and the angels. This is an ontological comparison, not merely a comparison of height of position. Note the traits brought out with respect to the angels: they are made winds, and flames of fire; still they are under time, and are subject to change; the Son is not so, however: for His nature is superior to theirs. This superiority of nature makes Christ's revelation also superior in nature, character and person. The new revelation is thus marked by what Christ *is*, as well as by what He says. This idea is also worked out in the Fourth Gospel. Here in Hebrews it is further confirmed that we are to think of the superiority of the new revelation because of what Christ *is*, in that His likeness to God and His close connection with God are brought out.

Further there are two terms which require discussion, found in 1:3, *the effulgence of his glory (apaugasma)* and *the very image of his substance (charakter)*. Two questions should be asked regarding these terms: (1) What figure of speech is involved in each? (2) For what purpose are these figures employed? In answer to the second question we might say that these figures are employed for a Trinitarian theological construction, representing the second Person as the effulgence of the glory, etc., of the first Person of the Trinity. Or we might say that these figures are employed for a cosmical representation, to show how the glory of God is carried into the world of creation. In the latter case the figures would be *economic* phrases, expressing the relation between God and the world.

First, then, we inquire what are the figures of speech in 1:3. The first word concerned, *apaugasma*, is from the verb *apaugazein*, meaning *to shine before*. Note that the noun ends in *-ma*, to distinguish it from the noun ending in *-mos*. Nouns ending in *-ma* denote the *product*, whereas those ending in *-mos* denote the *process* itself. Here we have the concrete product of the act, not the abstract act itself. The Son, therefore, is the product of an act of shining forth in God. He is the product of the radiation of God. The word, however, can mean *refulgence* as well as *effulgence*; that is, it can mean a shining back, an effulgence that has become separated from its source, like a moon that is a replica of another moon, instead of an effulgence such as the mere tail of a comet, for instance. The difference between the two is that *refulgence* would place the emphasis on the distinct personal existence of the Son. The choice between *effulgence* and *refulgence* as a translation of *apaugasma* is indifferent so far as the question of whether the term in 1:3 is theological or cosmical in meaning is concerned. If it is used in a theological sense, then the *effulgence* would refer to the eternal generation of the Son from the Father; or if we prefer to translate *apaugasma* by *refulgence*, then the theological usage of the term would serve to mark the Son as a separate person in the divine Trinity. But if the usage is cosmical, then Christ's *effulgence* would mean that Christ is carrying the glory of God into the world, yet never being detached from God. And if we render *apaugasma* by *refulgence*, the cosmical usage would mean that Christ is immanent in the world, duplicating the glory of God in the world.

With respect to the term *charakter*, again two interpretations are possible, each of them going, however, with one of the two possible interpretations of *apaugasma*, namely trinitarian or cosmical. *Charakter* comes from the verb *charassein*, meaning *to scratch*. The noun can be either active or passive in meaning. Used actively, it means *a designer* or *an engraver*, and with respect to Christ, *he who engraves*. This would be equivalent to

the active participle *ho charassoon*. But passively the word means *he who is engraved upon*, equivalent to the perfect passive participle *ho kecharagmenos*. Now, the passive rendering involves the trinitarian interpretation, whereas the active sense involves the cosmical interpretation. In Greek the word was used with reference to *a seal*. In the active sense it meant the lines on the bottom of the seal which made the impression. But in the passive sense it meant the character or impression that was made. *So* Christ either represents the character *on* the seal of God, or else His is the image *made with the seal*, that is, God's stamp is placed upon the Son so that He as second Person of the Trinity becomes the impression of the first Person, being the character *from* the seal.

With regard to the question of deciding between the renderings *effulgence* and *refulgence*, the church fathers uniformly rendered it by *effulgence*. But over against them stand Philo and the earlier Wisdom literature. In Philo the word meant sometimes the one and sometimes the other. In one passage also his meaning is uncertain, presenting the same difficulty as we face in Heb. 1:3. In the *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:26 the same uncertainty occurs. We may observe, however, that of the four passages involved in Philo only one requires the rendering *refulgence*, while the other three require *effulgence*. The rendering *effulgence* thus has the stronger support.

With regard to the meaning of *charakter* the same uncertainty exists. If we could have certainty concerning the meaning of this word, it would be possible to decide at once whether the former term (*apaugasma*) is to be interpreted theologically or cosmically. Now Philo says: "the Logos is the character of the seal of God." Thus in this instance he takes it actively. The context shows that he has in mind the Logos as an instrument with which God makes an impression on the world. The soul is stamped with this seal. But he also uses it passively, when he says: "The spirit of man is a character of the divine power." Thus we are again left in uncertainty.

How shall we decide whether to adopt the trinitarian or the cosmical interpretation? The probability is in favor of the former. This is also the traditional interpretation. Only in some modern theological writers is the cosmical interpretation favored. Bruce seems to prefer the latter, though he does not expressly say so. In favor of the cosmical interpretation it might be argued that in verse 2b the greatness of the Son is described from the point of view of His relation to the world. We should also note that in verse 3b we again have a cosmological statement (*upholding all things by the word of his power*). Therefore we might expect that the cosmical interpretation is to be preferred in the intervening clause also. But the arguments for the theological or trinitarian interpretation outweigh this consideration: (1) The author speaks in terms of *being*, not in terms of the Son's *doing*; (2) the words are more naturally construed in the theological sense, since the world is not mentioned here; (3) the Son is called *the character of the divine substance*; to take this cosmically would imply a communicating of the divine substance to the world, which is too pantheistic a conception to be consistent with the rest of the Epistle. The theological or trinitarian interpretation, on the other hand, results in no such difficulty.

One more observation may be made: if we accept the cosmical interpretation, we still cannot get rid of the theological background. We must still ask, why is the Son a fitting image to act as seal for the world? The theological idea is a necessary implication in the background, even if we accept the cosmical interpretation.

With regard to the relation of the two phrases to each other, if we take them in the

trinitarian theological sense, then the first phrase expresses the essential unity of the Godhead by reason of the identity of the Father and the Son; we cannot think of the Son without the Father; and the second phrase emphasizes the result, namely, the *likeness* of the Son to the Father. In theological language, then, the expression *the effulgence of his glory* assures us of the Son's being homoousios with the Father, and the expression *the very image of his substance* assures us of the Son's being the monogenes of the Father.

The third verse contains one more statement which adds to the foregoing the idea of the superiority of Christ: *upholding all things by the word of his power*. Here the word is represented as being Christ's *possession*. Therefore in this text Christ is not represented as Himself being the word. Note the connection with the preceding clause by means of the particle *te*: "*and so upholding all things by the word of his power.*" What he upholds is *ta panta*, which is not the same as simply *panta*. The latter means simply numerically *all things*, whereas the former means *the universe*. In John 1:2 we read simply *panta*, meaning *all things*. But not so here in Heb. 1:3, where we have *ta panta*. Therefore we must understand the verb *pheroo* as indicating something more than mere sustentation. It also includes a leading and guiding of the world *to its* appointed goal. Christ is therefore represented as the *Author of providence* in the broadest sense. To say that He does this *by the word of His power* amounts to an attestation of His *divine* power. This expression *by the word of his power* is not a Hebraism, as if meaning simply *by his powerful word*, which in the context would have the effect of an anticlimax. Moreover it is not the habit of the author of the Epistle to use Hebraisms.

Note, in conclusion, the whole general comparison in chapter 1 between Christ and the angels. The angels are not compared with Christ merely as exalted creatures, but also as revealers and administrators, in which respects also Christ is superior to them. Therefore the author's conclusion at the end of the passage (2:2) is to the effect that if the word spoken by angels is great, how much greater must be the word spoken by Christ. The word spoken through the angels is the word of *the law*. There are two other passages referring to this in the New Testament. One of these is Acts 7:35, spoken by Stephen: "Ye who received the law as it was ordained by angels ..."; the other is Gal. 3:19, "it was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator."

The Old Testament basis for this conception is found in two passages, Deut. 33:2 and Psalm 68:17. The former of these is highly poetical language: "Jehovah came from Sinai.... And he came from the ten thousands of holy ones: At his right hand was a fiery law for them." The second passage is also highly poetical: "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands upon thousands: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the sanctuary." Compare the LXX renderings of these two passages.

The New Testament passages cited above are not of an argumentative character at all; the doctrine involved in them is rather represented as a generally accepted one. Therefore we must regard it as current doctrine at the time of writing. But it could hardly have been developed merely out of the Old Testament passages just cited. And yet it appears that the doctrine of the connection of the angels with the giving of the law was well known. This is also corroborated by Josephus, who represents Herod as saying that the Jews had learned the holiest of laws from God through angels, Ant. XV, chap. 5, par. 3.

As to the motive of this doctrine, we may say that the proximate motive was to keep God from too close and direct contact with the world, that is, to preserve the majesty of God. With Paul in Galatians the motive is quite a different one, however; he makes a

distinction between the angels and God in the importance of the dispensation of revelation: God gave *the promise*, not through angels, but *directly*; the law, however, was *indirectly* given through Moses and the angels. What is given most directly stands as the highest revelation. Therefore the promises stand higher than the law. In the case of Stephen's words we have again a different motive for attributing to the angels a connection with the giving of the law. Stephen *exalts* the law by referring to it as an ordinance given through angels.

The passage in Hebrews is parallel to the Pauline representation. The law, as given through angels, imposes a lesser responsibility than does the revealing word of the Son. Of course this does not mean that the word given through angels is less true or less reliable, for in the ultimate analysis it is just as much the Word of God as the word given through the Son. The word given through angels also *proved steadfast* (2:2). Then why is the responsibility greater in the case of the word given by the Son? Because of the *more direct* revelation; the greater the impression of the majesty of God, the greater is the transgression involved in disobedience. It is interesting to observe that the author does not answer the possible objection of an indirectness remaining still because the revelation is through the Son. This shows that the author did not look upon Christ as an intermediate being, but as Himself truly divine.

This whole idea of the angels being involved in the giving of the law has been brought into connection with Paul's statement that the entire Old Testament stood under *the rudiments of the world (stoicheia tou kosmou)*, Gal. 4:3, 9. These rudiments are characterized as weak and poor. Paul uses the word again in Col. 2:20, "If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances....?" Some modern expositors have taken *stoicheia* as referring to angels. It must be admitted that the word does sometimes have this meaning in the Greek. It is derived from the verb *stoichein*, meaning *to step*. The primary meaning of the noun, therefore, is *steps*. Further it means *fence pickets* (as parts making a fence), *component elements, the letters of the alphabet* (as component parts of words), *elements of things* (hence physical elements), *elements in heaven* (the stars), and finally *the angels* (an extreme form of the belief being that angels dwelt in stars as their physical bodies).

The last mentioned idea gained some prevalence even among the Jews. Therefore there is a possibility that Paul made use of this word in referring to angels at times, to bring out the idea of the intimate connection of the angels with the physical world. And it is just this that Paul sought to bring out in the passage referred to (Col. 2:20), namely the physical constitution of the ancient stage of the religion of the people of Israel. He even goes so far as to identify this feature of their religion with a similar feature in pagan religion. The Jewish religion, as a religion of ceremonies, shared some features of pagan religion. Of course in the matter of origin the two are essentially different, but from a formal point of view there are resemblances. Can we, then, with this consideration in mind, admit that the idea of angels is implied in Col. 2:20, as suggested above? We have seen the reasons given by the author of Hebrews for the inferiority of the Old Testament. The chief reason was the external and material (*sarkikos*) element involved in it. Possibly, therefore, the author also introduces the idea of angels as associated with the external physical administration. Compare Robertson Smith in *The Expositor*, 1881, pp. 38 ff.

The other passage in which this superiority of the revelation through Christ is brought

out is Heb. 12:25: “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not when they refused him that warned them on earth, much more shall not we escape who turn away from him that warneth from heaven (that gave oracles from heaven).” Here again the emphasis is on the greater responsibility under the New Testament. Again the difference is that the one revelation is given on earth, and the other revelation is from heaven. Note also the context which follows: “whose voice then shook *the earth...*”

Why should the giving of the law at Sinai be referred to as an oracle *on earth*? Because it came from the mountain, which is in keeping with the entire representation of a terrestrial dispensation. But then how can the revelation through Christ be regarded as exclusively a heavenly revelation? Because the author represents Christ as a portion of heaven come down to earth. In His voice we hear a heavenly voice, not a voice of earth.

This is further worked out in tracing the difference in the *effect* of the two revelations. The first had an *earthly* effect, whereas the second has a more *universal* and *permanent* effect. In the former only the earth was shaken; but as to the latter, the author quotes a promise given in Haggai that yet a little while and there will be a shaking that will include the heaven as well as the earth. This promise in Haggai speaks of the revelation through Christ. Note that the author lays great stress on the words *yet once more*; the shaking is one that cannot be repeated; it is the final shaking, and therefore it represents the final transformation of the whole world or universe. The author further says that this final shaking signifies the passing away of all things *that were made* and therefore can be shaken, in order that the things which *cannot be shaken* may remain.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Vos, G. (1956). *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews*. (J. G. Vos, Ed.) (pp. 49–87). Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.