The Contribution of Hebrews to New Testament Christology

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Abstract

This essay attempts an exegesis of some of the key Christological texts in the Epistle to the Hebrews in order to sketch the author's Christology. The challenging introductory questions relating to the Epistle's composition are largely avoided; the exegetical method instead focuses on context, grammar and syntax, and intertextuality. Competing scholarly viewpoints are presented and weighed. Particular emphasis is placed on the exordium (Hebrews 1:1-4), the catena of scriptural quotations (Hebrews 1:5-14), the discussion of Christ's humanity (Hebrews 2:6-18), the comparison of Christ with Moses (Hebrews 3:1-6), and the enigmatic comparison of Christ with Melchizedek (Hebrews 7). Other Christologically significant texts discussed more briefly include Hebrews 4:15-16, Hebrews 5:7-9, Hebrews 9:15-16, Hebrews 10:5-10, and Hebrews 13:8. The conclusion drawn from the study is that the author of Hebrews regarded Jesus as the pre-existent, divine Son of God who became incarnate to deal with sin and was exalted by God for his faithfulness unto death. By its dual emphasis on Christ's divinity and humanity, Hebrews provides the raw materials for later Chalcedonian orthodoxy, although it does not develop these concepts or attempt to resolve the tension between them.

1. Introduction

Hebrews is a document probably written to Christians with Hellenistic Jewish associations or practices (Cockerill, 2012). Beyond this, the authorship, provenance, date and even genre are matters of debate (Koester, 2001). However, despite these uncertainties Hebrews is immensely important for reconstructing the early church's Christology.

It has been common to make titles of Jesus the primary focus of studies in New Testament Christology, for instance in the influential monograph of Dunn (1980). This methodology has been criticised by Holladay (1983), who warns that it can entail arbitrary arrangements of the material. Nevertheless, the Christology of Hebrews does revolve around two main titles, "Son of God" and "high priest" (Ellingworth, 1993; Matera, 1999). The writer intertwines these two titles with other associated ideas, and it is disputed which of the two is primary (MacLeod, 1989).

It is true that "there is virtually no basis in Hebrews for the more technical statements of Chalcedon regarding the interrelation of the divine and human natures in Christ" (Ellingworth, 1993, p. 67). Nevertheless, while not attempting to resolve the metaphysical tensions, Hebrews provides the raw materials from which later syntheses were formed. Hebrews teaches Christ's eternal divinity, his incarnation, and emphasises his present exalted state. However, the Christology of Hebrews is not an end in itself, but is used for exhortative ends (Osborne, 2003) and is explicitly tied to soteriology (Jipp, 2010; Matera, 1999). It is possible that the writer intends to discredit an incipient angel Christology (Goulder, 2003; Steyn, 2003), but there are other explanations for the prominence of angels in Hebrews 1-2 (Bauckham, 2009).

The methodology of this essay is to embark on a tour of christologically significant passages in Hebrews. The aim will be to draw out what Matera (1999) calls the "Christ story of Hebrews" (p. 187). This entails demonstrating that the letter portrays Christ as a pre-existent divine person

who assumed real humanity in order to effect atonement, and who was consequently exalted above all things.

2. The Exordium

The epistle opens with an emphatic declaration of God's eschatological revelatory activity "ἐν υἱῷ". The exordium of vv. 2b-4 provides a sketch of the Son's "narrative identity" (Bauckham, 2009, p. 20). It may draw on an early Christian hymn (Witherington, 2007), and it uses what ancient rhetoricians called the grand style, which was reserved for the weightiest issues (Nasselqvist, 2012). The exordium "operates as a sort of program statement for the rest of the epistle, containing *in nuce* the principal themes" (Mackie, 2008, p. 438), including the unique dual (Son/high priest) Christology.

Matera (1999) describes the temporal movement of the exordium as beginning with the Son's exaltation, moving back to his role in creation and essential relationship with God, then moving forward through his sustaining role, earthly redemptive work, and finishing again with his exaltation. The initial backward movement in time may emphasise that "the exaltation of Jesus discloses purposes of God that would otherwise be hidden" (Koester, 2001, p. 187).

Most scholars regard δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποιησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας (Hebrews 1:2c) as an unambiguous expression of Christ's participation in the creation of the world and thus his personal pre-existence (Cockerill, 2012; Ellingworth, 1993; Johnson, 2006; Koester, 2001; Witherington, 2007). Two notable exceptions are Schenck (1997, 2001) and Dunn (1980).

Schenck considers the Son's pre-existence to be figurative: "To speak of Christ as creator is to recognize that he is the wisdom of God par excellence, the final goal and purpose of God for creation" (Schenck, 1997, p. 106). However, for διά to entail indirect causation as of goal or

purpose, the following noun must be an accusative. Instead it is a genitive, which means that διά denotes instrumentality or personal agency (Arndt, Danker, & Bauer, 2000). Sterling (1997) explains that the language here aligns with Middle Platonism's concept of instrumental agency. He notes that Philo distinguished between τὸ δι' οὗ ("the through which") which is the "tool" and τὸ δι' ὅ ("the for which") which is the "purpose". The writer of Hebrews was aware of the distinction since he used such prepositional constructions together to describe God (Hebrews 2:10), in a passage which also shows that for him the 'tool' and 'purpose' could be personal.

Schenck argues against Christ's creatorship by pointing out other passages which declare God's creatorship without reference to Christ (Hebrews 2:10; 3:4; 11:3). However, Peeler (2014) notes that it is unfair to expect the writer to mention Christ every time he mentions creation. Moreover, the does refer to Christ's creative activity in 3:3-4, as also in 1:10-12 (see below).

Dunn (1980) puzzles over Hebrews' understanding of Jesus' sonship status inasmuch as it is in one sense pre-existent, but in another sense a status to which he was appointed. His solution is that what pre-exists is not a divine person but the act and power of God. This is made possible by the fact that Christ embodies God's Wisdom. This exegesis is driven by his perception that the writer has been influenced by Jewish Wisdom speculation.

There is an overwhelming consensus that the language of Hebrews 1:3 is dependent on what is said in Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-26 (Cockerill, 2012; Ellingworth, 1993; Johnson, 2006; Koester, 2001; Witherington, 2007). However, Hebrews 1:3-4 does not merely appropriate Jewish traditions about Wisdom but transforms them (Koester, 2001). It is difficult to construe Wisdom as at the heart of the writer's Christology when the word σοφία does not even occur in the letter! Moreover, the fact that the writer draws on Hellenistic personifications of Wisdom does not imply that the description of the Son is figurative. Such reductionism wrongly assumes

that such language can mean no more in its new context than it did originally (Cockerill, 2012). Instead, the writer adapts Wisdom language "to include the Son within the identity of God by affirming his role as Creator, Sovereign, and agent of redemption" (Cockerill, 2012, pp. 99-100).

Dunn's "ideal pre-existence" view also rests on his characterisation of Hebrews as a "unique synthesis of Platonic and Hebraic world views, or more precisely Platonic cosmology and Judaeo-Christian eschatology" (p. 52). However, Adams (2009) stresses that despite the Platonic language in Hebrews 10:1, the cosmology of Hebrews does not correspond to the Platonic distinction between the physical and the heavenly realm of ideas. Rather, heaven is a great city inhabited by personal beings (Hebrews 12:22-24).

In summary, objections to the scholarly consensus that Hebrews 1:2c affirms the personal pre-existence of the Son cannot be sustained.

In Hebrews 1:3, the word ἀπαύγασμα could have an active sense of radiance like the sun's rays or a passive sense like the moon's reflection of the sun (Witherington, 2007). The majority of modern commentators favour the latter view, due to the parallelism with the passive term χαρακτὴρ (Ellingworth, 1993). However, others argue that the distinction between the active and passive meanings should not be pressed, as both may be present (Johnson, 2006; Mackie, 2008). Mackie points out that the sustaining function (1:3b) is active and counterbalances the passivity of the χαρακτὴρ imagery. He also notes three other cases in the letter in which a function of the Son vacillates between active and passive: the sitting down of the Son on the throne (1:3d cp. 1:13), the active entry (εἰσῆλθεν) and passive appearance (ἐμφανισθῆναι) of the Son in heaven (9:24), and the active and passive aspects of the Son's sacrifice (9:26, 28).

In Hebrews 1:4, most commentators take the "more excellent name" to be "Son" in light of 1:2a (Cockerill, 2012; Ellingworth, 1993; Koester, 2001). Others, however, argue that only the Divine Name can fit such a lofty description (Bauckham, 2009; Gieschen, 2003; Johnson, 2006; Witherington, 2007). Evidence for the latter view includes the use of κύριος from an Old Testament YHWH text for Christ in Hebrews 1:10-12 and the parallel with the "name that is above every name" (surely κύριος) in Philippians 2:9-11. This identification would imply a high Christology inasmuch as divinity is presumably a prerequisite for inheriting the Divine Name.

3. The Catena

The string of scriptural quotations in Hebrews 1:5-14 is "dominated by the relationship between the Father and the Son" (Jipp, 2010, p. 565).

Following the lofty claims of the exordium, the quotation from Psalm 2:7 to the effect that the Son has been begotten "today" is "jarring to the reader" (Talbert, 2011, p. 33). Bauckham (2009) posits that "today" refers to "the eternal today of the divine eternity" (p. 34). However, this solution has found little support. Psalm 2:7 is linked to Jesus' resurrection in Acts 13:33, and so the resurrection or exaltation of Jesus are the most likely occasions for the pronouncement (Cockerill, 2012; Ellingworth, 1993; Guthrie, 2007; Koester, 2001; Matera, 1999; Talbert, 2011; Witherington, 2007). This undermines an adoptionist interpretation of Christ's sonship, since the writer elsewhere affirms that his sonship preceded his exaltation (Hebrews 5:8). Instead, as in Romans 1:4 it was at his resurrection and exaltation that "Jesus was vindicated or demonstrated to be God's true Son" (Witherington, 2007, p. 126).

Most scholars agree that the main source for the quotation in Hebrews 1:6 is Deuteronomy 32:43 (Bateman, 2001; Cockerill, 2012; Guthrie, 2007; Johnson, 2006; Matera, 1999; Witherington, 2007), although the words quoted are not preserved in the MT but only in the

LXX and a Qumran quotation of the passage (Witherington, 2007). This text implies the Son's deity since in the OT context YHWH is the 'him' whom the angels are called to worship. Ellingworth (1993) suggests that the writer understood the Son to be in view in Deuteronomy 32:43 because of the rapid changes in person in the context.

A few scholars regard Hebrews 1:7 as affirming that the Son created the angels (Bateman, 2001; Bauckham, 2009). It is possible that the writer would have linked Psalm 104:4-6 with Psalm 102:25-27 (cited in Hebrews 1:10-12) through verbal analogy since both psalms refer to "foundations" and "garments" in the context of creation. However, the writer does not explicitly identify the ὁ ποιῶν of Psalm 104:4. His main purpose here is to describe the angels and so set up the contrast with the Son in 1:8-12 (Cockerill, 2012; Ellingworth, 1993; Guthrie, 2007).

In Hebrews 1:8, it is widely agreed that ὁ θεὸς is vocative (Hagner, 2005; so also Ellingworth, 1993; Guthrie, 2007). Bateman (2001) notes that the attribution of deity to the king in Psalm 45 is figurative: the statement "merely means that this Davidic monarch receives his authority from God" (p. 10). However, Bateman argues that in its new context, the expression 'O God' "is understood literally of the Davidic Son through the literary connections with Deut 32:43 and Ps 102:25-27" (p. 11).

Such an obvious and deliberate designation of the Son as ὁ θεὸς is distinctive and without parallel outside John's Gospel (Johnson, 2006). It is possible that the Son is so designated again in 1:9, if the first part of the double ὁ θεὸς is understood as vocative in parallel with 1:8a. In this case, 1:9 "continues the 'dialogue of divine persons'" (Ellingworth, 1993, p. 124), implying a "Trinitarian perspective that affirms the Son as God but makes a distinction between him and the Father" (Guthrie, 2007, p. 939).

The quotation of Psalm 102:25-27 in Hebrews 1:10-12 is arguably the most striking in the catena. It applies an OT YHWH text to the Son and credits him with having created the universe and also with full eternity (Bauckham, 2009; Hagner, 2005; Neyrey, 2004). The writer shows that "the Son stands on the side of the creator, rather than the creature" (Witherington, 2007, p. 131).

As in 1:2c, Dunn (1980) and Schenck (2001) challenge this interpretation. Dunn cannot see how the writer of Hebrews came to regard the Son as the referent of Psalm 102:25-27. He concludes that the quotation means only that the exalted Christ embodies "the very power of God that created the world" (p. 289 n. 216). However, this obscure interpretation is unwarranted. Guthrie (2007) observes that in Psalm 102(101):24 LXX the translator rendered ἀπεκρίθη ("he answered him") which suggests a dialogue, so that "in the LXX the words of our quotation can be taken as the words of Yahweh spoken to one addressed as 'Lord'" (p. 940). A Christological interpretation of Psalm 102 is plausible from the vantage point of the writer (Ellingworth, 1993).

Schenck (2001) discounts v. 10 on the grounds that "one cannot assume that all the salient points of a quotation are meant to be extracted from another author's use of it" (p. 476). It is true that Christ's post-existence receives more emphasis than his pre-existence here and elsewhere, being more immediately relevant to the readers. However, Peeler (2014) rightly criticises Schenck for insisting that the quotation emphasise only one point (permanent post-existence) to the exclusion of Christ's role in creation.

In Hebrews 1:13 the writer applies Psalm 110:1 to Christ in a way typical of earliest Christianity. In summary, the catena of scriptural quotations expands on the assertions of the exordium by emphasising the Son's worthiness of worship and the names God and Lord, as well as his eternality and pre-existent role in creation.

4. The Brother of Humanity

Just as Hebrews 1 emphatically declares the divinity of the Son, so Hebrews 2 emphatically declares his humanity. The writer draws attention to Christ's solidarity with humanity by participating in human nature and dying.

Gray (2003) states that the author of Hebrews emphasises "the sibling relationship between Jesus and the readers" (p. 338). This is most explicit in 2:10-18. The declarations between the Father and Son in 1:5-13 and 2:12-13 establish a model of family belonging which is extended to the readers (Mackie, 2007, 2008; Peeler, 2014) (as also in Hebrews 12:2-7). Gray regards "father" as the elliptical word in 2:11a, as does Koester (2001). Other scholars prefer "source", referring to Abraham (Ellingworth, 1993; Johnson, 2006), or "family" (Witherington, 2007), or prefer not to supply any word (Cockerill, 2012). Whatever the case, Christ's fraternal solidarity with believers is proclaimed here.

In its original setting, Psalm 8 referred to humanity in general, or more specifically to the archetypal human, Adam (Ellingworth, 1993). However, the use of this passage in Hebrews 2:6-9 is primarily christological rather than anthropological (Guthrie, 2007). The writer uses Psalm 8 to expresses an Adam christology in which Christ fulfils God's original plan for man (Dunn, 1980). Numerous commentators see in the exegesis of the Psalm in Hebrews 2:9 an outline of the Son's career: incarnation, suffering, and exaltation (Cockerill, 2012; Guthrie, 2007; Witherington, 2007). Most understand βραχύ τι here in a temporal sense ("a little while lower") although in Psalm 8 MT the sense is spatial ("a little lower") (Ellingworth, 1993; Johnson, 2006; Koester, 2001; Parsons, 1988; Witherington, 2007). The Son temporarily assumed a status beneath the angels so that he could suffer death and consequently be crowned with glory and bring others to glory (Hebrews 2:9-10).

A number of scholars regard the reference to partaking of blood and flesh in Hebrews 2:14 as an explicit statement of incarnation which implies pre-existence (Cockerill, 2012; Ellingworth, 1993; Matera, 1999). Schenck (1997) disagrees. He acknowledges that this text depicts Christ as embracing God's purpose, but suggests that there is ambiguity in the timing. Ambiguity notwithstanding, Christ has just been depicted in 2:12-13 as the speaker in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 8. Furthermore, in 2:14 there is a contrast in tense between κεκοινώνηκεν, an intensive perfect verb denoting a state, and μετέσχεν, an aorist verb denoting an occurrence (Wallace, 1996). Hence Ellingworth's (1993) paraphrase: "The 'children' share permanently with one another a common human nature, and at a particular time Jesus himself also shared it with them" (p. 171). In all probability, not only Jesus' suffering but also his very incarnation is understood as an act of obedience (Koester, 2001). It is Christ's willingness to be made in all respects like his brothers and share their experiencing of suffering and death that qualifies him for the high priesthood (Barrett, 1999).

5. Christ compared to Moses

The comparison between Christ and Moses in Hebrews 3:1-6 is neglected in Christological studies. Bauckham (2009), for instance, ignores this passage completely. However, the comparison would have carried great christological significance for Jewish readers. Moses was "the most special and favoured intermediary between God and human beings in the entire Old Testament period" (Witherington, 2007, p. 169).

The pair of designations for Jesus that introduce this section, ἀπόστολος ("apostle") and ἀρχιερεύς ("high priest"), are both without parallel outside Hebrews. The alliterative juxtaposition serves to illustrate the two directions of Jesus' mediatorship (a theme developed in 8:6; 9:15 and 12:24). Just as the ἀπόστολος is sent by God to summon humans into relationship

with him, so the ἀρχιερεύς represents humans in their response to God (Johnson, 2006; Scott, 1998).

Hebrews 3:2 likens Jesus to Moses (cf. Deuteronomy 18:15-18), and may even state that Jesus was "made"; the Arians claimed as much (Koester, 2001). However, what follows in vv. 3-6 is a contrast between Moses and Jesus. In view of this contrast, most rightly understand ὁ κατασκευάσας in 3:3 to refer to Jesus (Ellingworth, 1993). The house metaphor in the context, which may be dependent on 2 Samuel 7:11-13 (Guthrie, 2007) refers primarily to people (the household of God). Thus, in isolation "builder of the house" need mean no more than that Christ is the pioneer of salvation (Hebrews 2:10). However, 3:4 shows that a loftier christological claim is in view (especially when this passage is read in light of Hebrews 1:2 and 1:10-12). While some translations (e.g. ESV) render 3:4 as a parenthetical aside, the conjunction γὰρ ("for") indicates that, to the contrary, this verse is a further argument for Jesus' superiority to Moses (Cockerill, 2012).

Cockerill regards Christ as the referent of θεὸς in 3:4. Koester (2001) points out that 1:8 provides a precedent such usage, but thinks it unlikely. Indeed, θεὸς in v. 4 provides the antecedent for αὐτοῦ ("his") in 3:5-6, which can only refer to God. Thus Hebrews 3:4 does not explicitly call Jesus "God." Rather, it brings out the implications of 3:3. Every house is built by someone, but the house built by Jesus is not just any house. It is a house worthy only of the builder of all things, God. Thus the writer places Jesus with God above the created order, in contrast to Moses who belongs to the created order. This is reinforced in 3:5-6, where Moses is depicted as a servant ἐν ("in") the house and Christ as a Son ἐπὶ ("over") the house. Importantly, Hebrews 3:3-4 subordinates Christ's role in creation to God's (cf. Hebrews 1:2c; 1 Corinthians 8:6).

In summary, Hebrews 3:1-6 depicts Jesus as both "made" and "maker". As he did in chapters 1-2, the writer here "brings together both the 'highest' and the 'lowest' of Christologies, with equal emphasis" (Johnson, 2006, p. 109).

6. The Great High Priest

We have already seen references to the Son's high priesthood in Hebrews 2:17 and 3:1. It is in Hebrews 4:14-5:10 that the writer first joins the traditional teaching about Christ as Son of God with his distinctive teaching about Christ as high priest (Ellingworth, 1993). The high priest motif is the most distinctive and indeed unparalleled aspect of Hebrews' Christology (Baigent, 1981; Hagner, 2005). One should avoid the oversimplification of correlating sonship with divinity and high priesthood with humanity, since both divinity and humanity are crucial to Christ's work as high priest and to his identity and perfection as God's Son (Bauckham, 2009; Hagner, 2005; Matera, 1999).

The reality of the high priest's humanity is reinforced in 4:15 in that Jesus was tested in every respect, without yielding to sin (Koester, 2001). Jesus' ability to function as a sympathetic high priest is once again predicated upon his suffering. The "throne of grace" (4:16) anticipates the integration of royal and priestly imagery that characterises the order of Melchizedek (Koester, 2001; Rooke, 2000). The stress on the humanity of the high priest continues in chapter 5, where Jesus is depicted as "a man of prayer dependent on the Father for help" (Witherington, 2007, p. 201). The adversative καίπερ ὢν υἱός (Hebrews 5:8) shows that the writer regarded it as paradoxical for the Son of God to undergo suffering (Ellingworth, 1993).

For the Son to be perfected (Hebrews 5:9 cf. 2:10; 7:28) refers not to moral conversion, since Jesus was sinless (4:15; 7:26), but to his learning solidarity with his brethren by experiencing

"the suffering that obedience to God entails" (Matera, 1999, p. 199). Ellingworth (1993) also emphasises the cultic aspect of perfection, i.e. qualification for participation in worship.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the writer's high-priestly Christology is his use of Psalm 110:4 to show that Christ's high priesthood is not according to the Aaronic order but is superior, being according to the order of Melchizedek. This point is drawn out in detail in Hebrews 6:20-7:24. In his religions-historical study of the language of Hebrews 7:3 (ἀπάτωρ, ἀμήτωρ, ἀγενεαλόγητος, μήτε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν μήτε ζωῆς τέλος ἔχων), Neyrey (2004) found it to "correspond exactly to the commonplaces in Hellenistic thought that describe a true deity" (p. 228). Hence, although the argument that follows concentrates mainly on Christ's post-existence, readers would have understood the writer to be acclaiming him not as a divinised hero but as a true god.

The comparison with Melchizedek has troubled exegetes, but "whatever the author says of Melchizedek must be understood as stated in the service of Jesus" (Neyrey, 2004, p. 242). Koester (2001) draws our attention to the direction of thought: "the Son of God is not like Melchizedek; rather, Melchizedek is like the Son of God, who is the principal reality" (p. 343). The writer uses the Jewish practice of exegeting the silence of Scripture: if the text did not mention Melchizedek's lineage then he had none (Johnson, 2006; Witherington, 2007). In view of 7:8, the author may have regarded Melchizedek as a heavenly being, as the Qumran sect did (Witherington, 2007). Alternatively, he may have regarded Melchizedek as a mere human but used his "textual" eternity as a hermeneutical ploy to foreshadow the Son's real eternity (Cockerill, 2012). The Christological implications of the comparison are explained in vv. 15-19 and 23-25. There, given the carefully constructed context, δύναμιν ζωῆς ἀκαταλύτου can refer to no less than "the eternal life of God shared by the eternal Son" (Cockerill, 2012, p. 323).

Christ's sinlessness and exaltation are again emphasised in 7:26-27 as the reason why his single atoning sacrifice was sufficient. Cockerill (2012) points out how the Greek word order in 7:27 isolates "for his own sins" from "for the sins of the people", suggesting that τοῦτο γὰρ ἐποίησεν ἐφάπαξ ("for this he did once"), refers only to the latter phrase. The sinless Son himself had no need for a sin offering. However, he did need salvation and redemption from death (Hebrews 5:7; 9:12). In the latter text, the middle voice of εὑράμενος implies that the Son himself benefited from the redemption he secured for others (Ellingworth, 1993).

7. Other Christologically significant texts

Christ's dual role as covenant-victim and covenant-maker (or testator) in appears in Hebrews 9:11-16. Hengel (1995) notes the parallel between the role of the pre-existent Christ as mediator of creation (1:2) and the role of the exalted Christ as mediator of the new covenant (9:15). In 9:26-28, pre-existence is assumed in raising the possibility that Christ might have needed to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world, and stressing instead his two "appearances" (Cockerill, 2012; Ellingworth, 1993).

Hebrews 10:5-10 reinforces the idea, discussed above with respect to Hebrews 2:14, that not only the Son's suffering but his very incarnation represented an act of obedience (Cockerill, 2012; Ellingworth, 1993; Guthrie, 2007; Johnson, 2006; Koester, 2001; Witherington, 2007). "Coming into the world" was a Jewish idiom for birth, but here has incarnational overtones (Cockerill, 2012; Ellingworth, 1993; Koester, 2001). The present participial construction could conceivably portray Christ's declaration of the words of Psalm 40(39) LXX as prior to (Cockerill, 2012; Ellingworth, 1993), contemporaneous with (Johnson, 2006; Witherington, 2007), or subsequent to (Koester, 2001) his incarnation. Whatever the timing, the emphatic "I have come to do your will" (Hebrews 10:9 cf. 10:7) makes Christ's birth something that he himself purposed

(Ellingworth, 1993). In similar fashion, the way Christ's body is prepared as a vehicle for his obedience suggests pre-existence (Cockerill, 2012).

A final emphatic Christological statement is found in Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (ESV). This perpetual "sameness" recalls the words of Hebrews 1:12 (Neyrey, 2004), and evokes threefold formulas for divine eternity found in ancient Hellenistic and Jewish literature (Bauckham, 2009). The statement affirms Christ's permanent sufficiency and faithfulness in brief, memorable form (Koester, 2001).

8. Conclusion

We have seen that Hebrews expresses Christ's exalted status and soteriological sufficiency with a unique richness of style. The writer regarded the Son as a pre-existent divine being who became incarnate to deal with sin and was exalted by God for his faithfulness unto death. He sits enthroned at God's right hand to make intercession for the saints (Hebrews 7:25), from whence he will return to save to those who endure faithfully (Hebrews 9:28; 10:36), like their "pioneer and perfecter" did (Hebrews 12:2 NIV).

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