

## THE AUTHOR OF HEBREWS AS A LEADER OF THE FAITH COMMUNITY

VICTOR (SUNG-YUL) RHEE\*

### I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years some scholars undertook the study of leadership in the Bible by considering the backgrounds and the authors' intended messages in certain books of the NT. With this approach they attempted to bring out the essential characteristics of the biblical model for leadership.<sup>1</sup> This method is in contrast to many writers who took the approach of employing the passages of Scriptures as prooftexts to support the lessons they learned from their ministry experiences, or the principles they borrowed from the social science in writing about Christian leadership.<sup>2</sup> However, a survey of literature indicates that virtually no article or book is written on the topic of leadership in Hebrews.<sup>3</sup> The author of Hebrews displays many leadership traits as the spiritual leader of the community to which he was writing. This essay will highlight some of the important characteristics of leadership that the author demonstrates from the book of Hebrews. Some implications from these leadership qualities will also be drawn. This arises from the conviction that the principles of the Scriptures derived from sound exegesis must be applied to contemporary issues that we face in our churches today.

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\* Victor Rhee is associate professor of NT language and literature at Biola University, 13800 Biola Ave., La Mirada, CA 90639.

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: a Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1–6* (New York: Brill, 1993); Garrett C. Kenney, *Leadership in John: an Analysis of the Situation and Strategy of the Gospel and the Epistles of John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000); Steve Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle: the Portrait of Paul in the Miletus Speech and 1 Thessalonians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Perry Leon Stepp, *Leadership Succession in the World of the Pauline Circle* (New Testament Monographs 5; Sheffield: Phoenix, 2006); Andrew D. Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership* (LNTS 362; London: T & T Clark, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Bill Perkins, *Awaken the Leader within: How the Wisdom of Jesus Can Unleash Your Potential* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Calvin Miller, *The Empowered Leader: 10 Keys to Servant Leadership* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995); J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988); Tom Marshall, *Understanding Leadership: Fresh Perspectives on the Essentials of New Testament Leadership* (Lynwood, WA: Emerald, 1991). Undoubtedly, the books with these approaches have helped many pastors and other Christian workers to be effective in their ministries. However, the danger of these methods in defining the biblical model of leadership is that it can misrepresent the meaning of the passages intended by the authors of the books of the Bible.

<sup>3</sup> I found only one published article on leadership in Hebrews. See Timothy M. Willis, "Obey Your Leaders": Hebrews 13 and Leadership in the Church," *ResQ* 36 (1994) 316–26.

## II. THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE FACED BY THE AUTHOR OF HEBREWS

Let us imagine for a moment a church in Rome in the first century whose members consisted predominantly of Hellenistic Jewish Christians,<sup>4</sup> who were converted to the Christianity by the effort of those who received the gospel from the apostles and others eyewitnesses of Christ (Heb 2:3–4; 13:24).<sup>5</sup> As the church was growing and expanding, there arose trials and persecution during the period of the reign of Claudius. This persecution was probably due to the edict of the expulsion of Jews by Claudius in AD 49 (cf. Acts 18:1–2). It appears that the persecution mentioned in Heb 10:32–34 was before the persecution of Nero in AD 64 because Heb 12:4 indicates that the persecution has not yet involved bloodshed.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the reference to “you have need of endurance” in 10:35 implies that the author of Hebrews is expecting more severe persecution in the near future, which suggests that the time period of the persecution and trials is probably in between the edict of the expulsion of Jews by Claudius (AD 49) and the great fire of Rome (AD 64).<sup>7</sup> The author reminds the congregation that during the period of Claudius some were made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, some were imprisoned, and others forfeited their property on account of their faith (10:32–34). As a result of the persecution, certain members of the community began to forsake their own assembling together (10:25), others had departed from their faith already (6:4–8), some were drifting away from their Christian faith (2:1), some remained in the condition of spiritual immaturity (5:12), and others were contemplating to leave the faith community (3:12–14; 4:1). Apparently, these Hellenistic Jewish Christians were in danger of reverting to Judaism. They were in peril of falling into apostasy (i.e. falling away from the living God).

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<sup>4</sup> In support of this view see William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1991) liii–liv; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 11. Ellingworth believes the addressees of Hebrews were mixed community of Jewish and Gentile Christians. But he thinks that the evidence leans toward the predominance of the Jewish believers in the church. See Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 21–27. Attridge argues that certain features of Jewish cultic traditions do not necessarily indicate that the addressees are Jewish Christians. He is satisfied with the view that the recipients of the letter were second-generation Christians. See Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989) 12–13.

<sup>5</sup> The expression “those from Italy” (οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας) in Heb 13:24 probably refers to those Christians who were currently away from home, sending back their greetings to those who were in Italy. See Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews* 10. On the other hand, Hughes interprets “those from Italy” as those who are residing in Italy. He argues that the recipients were the Jewish Christians who lived in Palestine at the time of the writing of Hebrews. See Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 16.

<sup>6</sup> Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews* 12.

<sup>7</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* lxvi.

## III. THE AUTHOR'S LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

When the recipients of Hebrews were in crisis because of the threats from within and outside the community, the author of Hebrews responded to this critical situation as a leader of the church. According to 13:17–19, he seemed to have been among the leaders of the faith community. The expressions “pray for us” (v. 18) and “I may be restored to you” (v. 19), along with the exhortation to “obey your leaders and submit to them” (v. 17), support this notion. Moreover, 13:22 indicates that the author was the leader who was writing this word of exhortation, which suggests that he was considered the chief spokesperson among the leaders.<sup>8</sup> Apparently, he was absent from the congregation at that time for some unknown reasons. What aspects of leadership qualities can be observed from the author when he was faced with this dire situation in the church that he was ministering? I will point out four characteristics of his leadership from the contents and the style of the letter.

1. *Courage to confront.* To begin with, the author has an uncompromising attitude in communicating the truth of God's word. He is not afraid of letting the readers know of the severe consequences of falling into apostasy. As a spiritual leader, he has the courage to confront the sins of apostasy and spiritual callousness. This aspect of leadership can be observed in what is commonly known as the “warning passages” in Hebrews.<sup>9</sup> For example, in 2:1–4, the author warns the readers to pay much closer attention to the message that they have heard, in order that they would not drift away from it. The reference to “what we have heard” in 2:1 has to do with the entirety of the Christian message, which has been proclaimed in a Son (1:1–2).<sup>10</sup> The warning against drifting away from faith is expressed by way of an *a fortiori* literary method, which is an argument from the lesser to the greater.<sup>11</sup> The lesser situation refers to God's speaking through angels to the wilderness generation at the time of Moses (2:2). The author points out that this generation could not escape the punishment of God when they rebelled against him. The greater situation has a reference to the great salvation which was first spoken through the Lord, and then confirmed by those who heard him (2:3–4). The question “how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” implies that there will be absolutely no escape of punishment, if we reject God's message spoken through the Son in the greater situation. This is an urgent warning for the readers to stay on the course of faith.

The author's firm attitude in the truth of God's word can also be observed in the warning against those who have fallen into apostasy in 6:4–8. This passage describes the characteristics of the apostates as those who (1) have been enlightened once (v. 4); (2) have tasted the heavenly gift (v. 4); (3) have become

<sup>8</sup> Barnabas Lindars, “The Rhetorical Structure of Hebrews,” *NTS* 35 (1989) 386.

<sup>9</sup> The warning passages are found in 2:1–4; 3:7–4:16; 6:4–8; 10:26–39; 12:25–29. For a comprehensive discussion on the warning passages in Hebrews see Herbert W. Bateman, ed., *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews* 64.

<sup>11</sup> Herbert Braun, *An die Hebräer* (HNT; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1984) 48.

partakers of the Holy Spirit (v. 4); (4) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come (v. 5); and (5) have fallen away, even though they had such great spiritual blessings (v. 5).<sup>12</sup> Most likely, these are the ones who deliberately rebelled against God and chose not to believe after they had been enlightened by the word of God. The context of 6:4–8 implies that these people willfully rejected salvation in spite of the privilege of having tasted the knowledge of it in full. This sin of apostasy is equivalent to falling away from the living God (3:12), the deliberate rejection of Christ after receiving the knowledge of truth (10:26), coming short of the grace of God (12:15), and refusing him who is speaking (12:25).

Then what is the outcome of the apostasy? The author clearly indicates that there is no possibility of being restored to repentance for these apostates (6:6). The reasons for this impossibility are because (1) they crucify again the Son of God to themselves; and (2) they put him to open shame (i.e. they expose the Son of God to public humiliation by rejecting him). These descriptions have a reference to the rejection of Christ himself. In other words, the apostasy is tantamount to shaming Christ, and therefore brings about such serious results.<sup>13</sup>

The consequence of the apostates is further illustrated in 6:7–8 with an agricultural image.<sup>14</sup> In these verses the author employs the contrasting imageries of the land which is fruitful (i.e. blessing), and the land which is unfruitful (i.e. curse) to describe the outcome of the apostates. The depictions of the apostates as having produced “thorns” and “thistles,” and their fate being “worthless” and “cursed” and “burned” are clear indications of the judgment that God will render to the apostates. The expression “the end of which is burning” in 6:8 refers to the final outcome of recrucifying Christ by the apostates. This eschatological judgment is also expressed in terms of “no more sacrifice for sins” (10:26) “a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of fire” (10:27), “not being able to escape” (12:25), “shaking of the earth and the heaven” (10:26), and “a consuming fire” (12:29).

A brief analysis of the warning passages in Hebrews shows that the author, as the spiritual leader of the community, has a firm commitment to God’s word. He expresses with a stern warning to plead with his readers not to abandon Christ.<sup>15</sup> I believe that having the courage to confront the people of God who are going astray is an important aspect of Christian leadership.

2. *Balancing firmness with gentleness.* Next, the author shows gentleness in dealing with the issues that the community is facing. The quality of tenderheartedness is essential for Christian leaders to cultivate in their ministries. As the leaders of the

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed analysis of the characteristics of the apostates see Victor (Sung-Yul) Rhee, *Faith in Hebrews: Analysis within the Context of Christology, Eschatology, and Ethics* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001) 116–20.

<sup>13</sup> A. Mugridge, “Warnings in the Epistle to the Hebrews: An Exegetical and Theological Study,” *RTR* 46 (1987) 77.

<sup>14</sup> O’Brien points out that the agricultural image in Hebrews 6:7–8 has the OT as its background (Gen 3:17–18; Isa 5:5–7, 12). See O’Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 228.

<sup>15</sup> R. Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 1970) 246.

faith-community in which God has placed us, it is necessary for us to speak the truth of God's word, but it needs to be done in love (Eph 4:15).

A careful examination of the warning passages indicates that these negative remarks were balanced with positive exhortations. The author of Hebrews, as a leader of the church, is firm in his commitment to the truth of God's word. He does not hesitate to warn them of the consequences of being disloyal to God and falling into apostasy. But at the same time he is careful not to leave them in total despair. For example, the first warning (2:1–4), expressed with a rhetorical question, implies that we will not escape the judgment of God if we neglect the message of salvation given by the Son. However, this warning is softened by introducing the theme of Jesus as the high priest (2:17); as a merciful and faithful high priest, he is able to help those who are tempted. In 3:7–4:13, the warning is intensified with stronger expressions. The implication is that just as the wilderness generation fell because of disobedience, the readers would be liable to fall by the same sort of unbelief. But, again, this harsh warning is followed by the exhortation to hold fast the confession of Jesus because he is the high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses (4:14–16).<sup>16</sup>

The author also reminds them of their progress of Christian life in the past in the midst of warning them of the severe consequence of forsaking their faith in Christ. For example, in 6:9–12, while describing the terrible consequence of those who have fallen from faith (6:4–8), the author also helps his readers think of their spiritual growth after they have received the message of God's word. He does so by using the triad of love, hope, and faith (i.e. love you have shown toward his name [v. 10], full assurance of hope [v. 11], imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises [v. 12]). Likewise, in 10:22–25, the words "faith" (v. 22), "hope" (v. 23), and "love" (v. 24) are deliberately chosen in exhorting the believers to continue with faith in Christ. The author further develops these ideas in chapters 11–13 (i.e. faith in 11:1–40; hope in 12:1–29; and love 13:1–21).<sup>17</sup>

In 10:26–31, another severe warning is given to those who sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth. In this passage the apostates are described as those who have (1) trampled underfoot the Son of God (v. 29a); (2) regarded unclean the blood of covenant (v. 29b); (3) insulted the Spirit of grace. Then, in 10:32–39 the author again exhorts his readers not to throw away the confidence in Christ by reminding them of how they have endured a great conflict of sufferings for the cause of Christ.

The above examples show that the negative remarks were given in the broader context of the positive exhortations. The combination of both positive and negative admonitions can be illustrated as follows:

*Example #1:*

- 3:1–6: Consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession (positive)  
 3:7–19: The peril of refusing to believe God's word (negative)

<sup>16</sup>Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 42–43.

<sup>17</sup>James Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 7–13," *Bib* 55 (1974) 339.

4:1–16: Strive to enter God’s rest (positive)

*Example #2:*

6:1–3: Let us press on to maturity (positive)

6:4–8: Consequence of falling away from faith (negative)

6:9–20: Be diligent to realize the full assurance of hope (positive)

*Example #3:*

10:19–25: Let us hold fast faith, hope, love in light of the high priesthood of Christ (positive)

10:26–31: The peril of disloyalty to Christ (negative)

10:32–39: Continue to persevere in faith (positive)

*Example #4:*

12:1–3: Let us run the race by fixing our eyes on Jesus (positive)

12:4–11: Do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord (negative)

12:12–13: Strengthen the hands, knees, and feet that are weak (positive)

In these examples one may observe that the sandwich method of alternating admonitions (i.e. positive, negative, and positive exhortations) is employed to encourage the readers not to give up their faith in Christ. The truth of God’s words can be painful on the part of those who hear the message. For this reason the author intentionally combines both harsh and gentle words, so that they may not be in too much sorrow. One can perceive from this literary style the desperate anxiety that the author had felt as the leader of the community.<sup>18</sup>

What is the lesson that we need to learn from the author of Hebrews? Just as the author has a firm commitment to God’s word and yet can sympathize with the feelings of the readers, Christian leaders should also develop the dual aspects of firmness and gentleness in teaching, preaching, counseling, and doing other ministries when it comes to dealing with the people of God. This means that we as Christian leaders should not be afraid of speaking out when someone in the church goes astray and commits sins. We have the responsibility of correcting them. But we must do so in the context of love for the other person. We, Christian leaders, should also be willing to teach and preach negative messages (e.g. repentance, rebuke, warning of God’s judgment, etc.) to awaken the people from their spiritual sleep, but again, this must be done with extreme care and gentleness.

3. *Affirmation of other leaders.* The leadership quality of the author can also be observed from the way he affirms the leadership of his co-leaders in the assembly. The term for “leaders” used in Hebrews is ἡγούμενοι, which is the present participial form of ἡγέομαι. The word is not a technical term for a specific designation of office, but a broad description of the leadership role in the formative stage of the church (e.g. Luke 22:26; Acts 15:22; Heb 13:7, 17, 24).<sup>19</sup> Koester points out that the plural form of the term is an indication that the leadership of the faith-community was composed of plurality of leaders, as opposed to the later practice

<sup>18</sup> Lindars, “Rhetorical Structure of Hebrews” 386.

<sup>19</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1991) 526.

of a single pastor leading a congregation.<sup>20</sup> In 13:7 the author urges his readers to respect other leaders in their faith-community in this delicate situation. As a chief-leader, he intentionally recognizes the authority of the church leaders before the congregation. How does he go about affirming their leadership?

First, he does so by urging them to remember their former leaders who led them and spoke the word of God (13:7). The expressions “who spoke the word of God” and “the outcome of their conduct” suggest that they were the leaders who were deceased at the time of the writing of the letter.<sup>21</sup> It appears that these leaders were the ones who initially brought the gospel to the readers after they had received it from the Lord (2:3), or those who taught the elementary doctrine of Christ in the beginning stage of the faith-community of Hebrews (6:1–2).<sup>22</sup> The author exhorts the readers to imitate their faith by considering the result of their conduct. Apparently, these leaders are placed in the same category as the exemplars of faith in 6:12–15 and 11:1–40.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, it is probable that the call to consider the conduct of these leaders in 13:7 looks back to the exhortation to fix their eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith (12:2).<sup>24</sup> If this observation is correct, then the statement in 13:8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever,” would probably refer to the unfailing faithfulness of Christ (3:1–6).<sup>25</sup> The author implies that these leaders were the ones who had imitated the faithfulness of Jesus in their lives. He exhorts the readers to imitate their leaders’ faith because their faith is based on the ultimate example and life of Jesus. In other words, it is a call to emulate the faithfulness of Jesus by imitating the former leaders’ conduct. Probably, the reason why some of the people in the community were led astray was because they did not have a high regard for their leaders; consequently, they did not pay attention to the word of God that their leaders taught them. This inference is supported by the author’s exhortation not to be carried away by various and strange teachings (13:9). The author reminds the readers that they need to remember the word of God that these leaders taught them, and imitate the outcome of their conduct to keep from being led astray by false doctrines.

Next, the author affirms the authority of the leadership by exhorting the readers to obey and submit to their present leaders (13:17). The switch of expression from “remember your leaders” in 13:7 to “obey your leaders” in 13:17 implies that these leaders were the ones who were alive, and were responsible for the spiritual care of the congregation at the time of writing of the epistle. The reasons for this admonition are threefold: (1) they are the ones who keep watch

<sup>20</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 75.

<sup>21</sup> In 13:7 the aorist tense ἐλάλησαν is used, which indicates that the author has the former leaders in mind. In addition, Attridge points out that the word ἔκβασις (outcome) frequently refers to the end of one’s life (Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews* 392).

<sup>22</sup> Hughes, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* 569.

<sup>23</sup> George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan) 439.

<sup>24</sup> Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews* 392.

<sup>25</sup> For the discussion on the relationship between 13:7 and 13:8 see Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* 528. The statement recalls the eternity of Christ that the author described in 1:8–10. But in the present context the verse seems to be related to Christ’s eternal faithfulness as the Son.

over the souls of the believers in the faith-community; (2) they exercise their leadership in light of the final Day when they will give an account to the Lord for their shepherding; and (3) it will be unprofitable for the readers if these leaders do not do it joyfully. In addition, the author elevates those who are in the leadership position by asking the congregation to greet their leaders (13:24).

What insight can we gain from this aspect of the author's leadership qualities? The lesson is that the leaders of the church must affirm the role and the position of the leadership of other coworkers before the assembly by following the footsteps of the author of Hebrews. We must be careful not to discredit other leaders before the church members. Many problems occur in the church because we neglect to exercise this aspect of leadership. This leadership quality is essential in maintaining the unity of the church.

4. *Christ-centered leadership.* Lastly, the most important characteristic of the author's leadership is that it is Christ-centered. His intention throughout the letter is to guide them to focus their attention on Jesus in their faith journey. One of the ways he accomplishes this purpose is by using the literary device of "alternation of genre." The author uses the alternating sections of doctrine and exhortation five times to encourage the community to remain faithful to Christ by holding fast the confession of faith they have made (i.e. faith in Jesus) when they first believed in him. This can be illustrated as follows:<sup>26</sup>

First alternating section	1:1–14 (doctrine)	2:1–4 (exhortation)
Second alternating section	2:5–18 (doctrine)	3:1–4:16 (exhortation)
Third alternating section	5:1–5:10 (doctrine)	5:11–6:20 (exhortation)
Fourth alternating section	7:1–10:18 (doctrine)	10:19–39 (exhortation)
Fifth alternating section	11:1–40 (doctrine)	12:1–13:25 (exhortation)

In the first alternating structure (1:1–14: doctrine; 2:1–4: exhortation) the author admonishes the readers not to drift away from faith in light of the finality of the revelation given through the Son. The doctrinal section (1:1–14) places an emphasis on Christ's divinity. The author indicates that Jesus is qualified to be the finality of God's revelation because he is the Son in his preexistent, incarnate, and exalted stages.<sup>27</sup> More specifically, the Son is the agent in creation; he is the creator (1:2c, 10) and sustainer of the universe (1:3b). The divinity of Jesus is also evident in his attributes. He is the radiance (ἀπαύγασμα) of God's glory, that is, he is the radiant splendor as sunshine is from the sun.<sup>28</sup> The term "radiance" expresses the

<sup>26</sup> Rhee, *Faith in Hebrews* 28. This is the modification of the alternating sections proposed by Vanhoye. See Albert Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de l'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1976) 59.

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed analysis of the three stages of Christ as the Son see John P. Meier, "Structure and Theology in Hebrews 1:1–14," *Bib* 66 (1985) 168–89; John P. Meier, "Symmetry and Theology in the Old Testament of Heb 1:5–14," *Bib* 66 (1985) 504–33.

<sup>28</sup> Gerhard Kittel, "ἀπαύγασμα," in *TDNT* 1.508. The word ἀπαύγασμα can also have a passive meaning of "reflection" (*BDAG* [3d ed.] 99). With this understanding, the phrase ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης

relationship existed between God and the Son.<sup>29</sup> He is also the exact representation (χαρακτήρ) of God's nature. The term χαρακτήρ has the meaning of "impression placed on an object."<sup>30</sup> That is to say, the Son bears the very mark of his nature, as the image and inscription on a coin exactly matches the device on the die.<sup>31</sup> It describes the essential nature of Christ in his preexistent stage. By setting forth the divine aspect of the Son, the author argues that Jesus is qualified to speak as God's final revelation to humankind. This Christological teaching is the basis for the exhortation in 2:1–4, in which the author urges the readers to remain faithful to the message they had heard when they first believed. The exhortation "we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard" (2:1) looks back to what the author has just explained about Christ. It is his way of reminding the readers to focus on Jesus, who is the final spokesperson in revealing God's revelation in these last days.

In the second alternating structure (2:5–18: doctrine; 3:1–4:16: exhortation) the readers are exhorted to enter God's rest with teaching on the humanity of Jesus. In the doctrinal section (2:5–18) the author indicates that Jesus fulfills the destiny of mankind as the representative (2:5–9) and remains in solidarity with humanity by (1) calling believers "brethren" (2:10–13); (2) identifying himself with humankind in flesh and blood (2:14–15); and (3) offering help when tempted (2:16–18). The emphasis of the doctrinal section of 2:5–18 is that Jesus is qualified to become a merciful and faithful high priest due to his identification with humankind (2:17–18).

On the basis of this teaching, the author urges readers to consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of their confession (3:1). The expression "the apostle and high priest" is most likely the summary statement of the two doctrinal sections (1:1–14; 2:5–18). On the one hand, the term "high priest" (ἀρχιερεύς) refers back to 2:5–18, which describes the humanity of Jesus; namely, Jesus is qualified to become a merciful and faithful high priest (2:17–18). The word "apostle" (ἀπόστολος), on the other hand, goes back to 1:1–14, which speaks of the divinity of Christ.<sup>32</sup> Jesus is an apostle in the sense that he was sent by God the Father to be the final agent of God's revelation.

In the third alternating section (5:1–10: doctrine; 5:11–6:20: exhortation) the author again warns the readers against falling into apostasy by reminding them that believers have a merciful high priest who is appointed by God according to the order of Melchizedek. The dual aspects of Christ's high priesthood (i.e. a merciful and faithful high priest) are mentioned in 2:17 and further elaborated in 3:1–5:10. But this is done in a reverse order. The author first gives an exposition on the faithful aspect of Christ's high priesthood in 3:1–6 and then the merciful aspect in 5:1–10.

would be the glory of God manifested in the incarnation Jesus (see Hughes, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* 42).

<sup>29</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* 13.

<sup>30</sup> Bauer, *BDAG* 1077.

<sup>31</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 48.

<sup>32</sup> Rhee, *Faith in Hebrews* 90.

Based on this Christological teaching, the author exhorts readers to press on to maturity (6:1–3). The descriptions such as “impossible to renew them again to repentance,” “crucify to themselves the Son of God,” and “put him to open shame” in 6:4–6 are emphatic ways of urging them to continue with faith in Christ. The author also mentions that Jesus has entered within the veil as a forerunner for us (6:20). The word “forerunner” (πρόδρομος) has the idea of “running before.”<sup>33</sup> This verse is in the context of imitating those who through faith and patience inherited the promise (6:12). The implication is that the readers must imitate Christ in running the race of faith. It is the author’s manner of encouraging them to press on to maturity in Christ Jesus.

In the fourth alternating structure (7:1–10:18: doctrine; 10:19–39: exhortation) the author urges the readers not to go on living in sin based on the superior high priesthood of Christ. In this doctrinal section (7:1–10:18) the theme of Jesus’ high priesthood is fully developed. The author indicates that Jesus is (1) the high priest after the order of Melchizedek (7:1–28); (2) the high priest of the new covenant (8:1–13); and (3) perfect and ultimate sacrifice for the sins of mankind (9:1–10:18).

Based on this Christological teaching, the author, as the leader of the community, exhorts his congregation to remain faithful to God in their Christian walk (10:19–39). In this passage he begins his positive exhortation by using three verbs, each with subjunctive mood (10:19–22): (1) let us draw near (προσερχώμεθα) with a true heart in full assurance of faith (10:19–22); (2) let us hold fast (κατέχωμεν) the confession of our hope without wavering (10:23); and (3) let us consider (κατανοῶμεν) how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds (10:24–25). Then in 10:26–31 the author uses a negative exhortation to remind them of the consequence of disloyalty to Christ. He indicates that the sin of apostasy (i.e. the deliberate rejection of Christ) will incur a terrible judgment from God. Finally, in 10:32–39, the author again returns to a positive exhortation to admonish them to persevere in faith. The leader’s call not to throw away their confidence (10:35) is basically equivalent to the idea of continuing with faith in Christ. Moreover, the admonition to have endurance (10:36, 39) is based on the Second Coming of Christ (10:37). The author’s intent of using the literary method of positive, negative, and positive exhortation is clear. He encourages them not to fall into sin by considering Jesus who became the high priest of the new covenant through his ultimate death on the cross.

Finally, in the fifth alternating section (11:1–40: doctrine; 12:1–13:25: exhortation), the author reminds his readers to focus on Jesus by urging them to be loyal to God through enduring faith. In 11:1–40 he illustrates his point through a series of the exemplars of faith in the OT. Then in 12:1–3 the author continues this theme of endurance by exhorting them to consider Jesus who endured the cross. More specifically, the readers are exhorted to fix their eyes on Jesus, the author (ἀρχηγός) and perfecter (τελειωτής) of faith (12:2). What is the significance of these titles? These terms denote the dual aspects of the saving work of Jesus Christ. He is

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<sup>33</sup> Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews* 348.

the author (ἀρχηγός) in the sense that he is the founder of faith; he started eternal salvation for his people. He is also the perfecter (τελειωτής) of faith in that he will see them through to finish the course.<sup>34</sup> Hamm points out that the combination of the terms ἀρχηγός and τελειωτής suggests the idea that Jesus is the beginner and the finisher of Christian faith, making him to be the enabler of faith.<sup>35</sup> These expressions are the author's way of indicating that Jesus himself is the very center of Christians' faith.<sup>36</sup> His purpose of bringing Jesus into focus is to encourage readers to imitate Jesus who endured the suffering on the cross.

What is the significance of the discussion of the alternating sections of doctrine and exhortation? The inference that can be drawn from it is that the author is quite intentional about driving home the centrality of Christ in his exhortation to his readers. In essence he is saying to his congregation, "Look, Christ is so much better than the Judaism that you used to adhere to. Now, if you have come to know Christ, and have tasted the excellence of him, why do you want to go back to the old way of life? Be serious about Jesus. Fix your eyes on Jesus and never quit in your Christian walk." Just as the author of Hebrews is very much Christ-centered in his exhortation, those who are leaders in God's work must exercise leadership so as to help others turn their focus on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

What are the leadership qualities that we can learn from the author of Hebrews? First, a Christian leader must be uncompromising in presenting the truth of God's word to one's own people. This means that a leader should have courage to confront others with the word of God. Second, a leader needs to be firm in speaking the truth but must also display the quality of gentleness in exercising the leadership among God's people. We must mix the truth of God's word with gentleness and compassion. Third, a leader must have the quality of affirming the co-leaders before the people of God in ministry. Last, a Christian leader must develop messages and design programs so as to bring people closer to Christ. We must be intentional in making Christ known to others, as we are involved in the ministries that God has given us. Our task is not to build our own kingdom, nor promote our own glory. We as Christian leaders have the responsibility of helping God's people to focus their attention to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. The messages we preach, the counseling we do for people, the programs we develop in our churches and other ministries, and all other activities must be Christ-centered. Our task as Christian leaders is to represent Christ in such a way that people may be able to imitate Christ in their lives.

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<sup>34</sup> William Manson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Historical and Theological Reconsideration* (London: Hodder And Stoughton, 1951) 83.

<sup>35</sup> Dennis Hamm, "Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Jesus Factor," *CBQ* 52 (1992) 287.

<sup>36</sup> For further discussion on Jesus as the "author" and "perfecter" of faith, see Victor (Sung-Yul) Rhee, "Chiasm and the Concept of Faith in Hebrews 12:1–29," *WTJ* 62 (2001) 272–74.