

## THINKING SYSTEMATICALLY WITH THE SCRIPTURAL CHRISTOLOGY OF HEBREWS: CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE THEOLOGY OF CHRIST'S THREEFOLD OFFICE

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### *Abstract:*

The epistle to the Hebrews presents a rich Christology articulated in dialogue with the OT. This article assumes that the dogmatic potential of Hebrews should enrich the architecture of systematic theology. Accordingly, the study aims at identifying how the conceptual articulation of the Christology of Hebrews contributes to the theology of Christ's threefold office. To achieve this goal, the article dialogues with categories of the *munus triplex* (Christ's threefold office): prophet, priest, and king. After a short description of these categories in Christian theology, the study undertakes a systematic reading of Hebrews by first outlining its material contribution to Christology. Then, the article seeks to uncover the formal contribution of Hebrews by exploring how it conceptually uses the OT to articulate its Christological content. The thesis of the article is that the material and the formal dimensions of the Christology of Hebrews enrich the theology of Christ's threefold office. The conclusions of the study suggest that Christ's kingship and priesthood are the ontological content of his eschatological revelation, which is broadly conceived as the prophetic aspect of the *munus triplex* and is taken as the epistemological principle that expands the meaning of Christ's life and work.

*Keywords:* Hebrews, Christology, Systematic Theology, Christ's threefold office

### *Introduction*

Considering traditional ways of doing canonical systematic theology, the approach adopted in this article is uncommon. Instead of providing a systematic perspective of different portions of Scripture, I will delimit my study to only one canonical book to learn from it the systematic potential of its Christological thinking. To say that this approach is uncommon does not mean that it is pointless for systematic theology. Rather, this reflection builds on the

significant essay written by Daniel Treier and Christopher Atwood regarding the role of Hebrews in modern systematic theology. Their research reveals that the text of Hebrews is cited frequently enough by systematic theologians “and occasionally passages are treated at length, but no one is particularly renowned for his or her theology being decisively shaped by the book.”<sup>1</sup> Taking this situation into account, the essay suggests that the dogmatic potential of Hebrews should enrich the architecture of our systematic thinking.<sup>2</sup> This suggestion assumes the importance of crafting “theological systems that mirror the internal ordering of the Bible’s own teaching.”<sup>3</sup>

The epistle to the Hebrews presents a rich Christology that is theologically articulated in dialogue with the OT. In fact, systematic theologians can learn from Hebrews, not only about Christology *per se* (from a material standpoint), but also how to construct a systematic understanding of Christ (from a formal standpoint), dealing canonically with Scripture. To be sure, I do not anachronistically assume that Hebrews is a modern work of systematic theology. Rather, I only suggest that theologians can learn more about the inner logic of Scripture when they pay closer attention to the Christology of Hebrews. It goes without saying that this learning experience is crucial for sound systematic theology that is canonically oriented.

The purpose of the present article is to identify how the conceptual articulation of the Christology of Hebrews contributes to the theology of Christ’s threefold office. Taking into account that this study undertakes a systematic reading of Scripture, at the outset I intentionally dialogue with traditional Christological categories in Christian theology, namely, Christ’s threefold office (*munus triplex*): prophet, priest, and king. The description of these categories is followed by a systematic reading of the Christology of Hebrews. The attempt to uncover the inner logic of the Scriptural Christology of Hebrews involves two basic steps. First, the focus will be on the material contribution of Hebrews to Christology, that is, on the Christological concepts presented in the epistle. Then, the second step will explore the formal contribution of Hebrews to Christology,<sup>4</sup> uncovering how it concep-

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel J. Treier and Christopher Atwood, “The Living Word Versus the Proof Text? Hebrews in Modern Systematic Theology,” in *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, ed. Jon Laansma and Daniel J. Treier (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 173.

<sup>2</sup> A significant work on Hebrews that promotes a dialogue between biblical scholars and systematic theologians is Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A. Hart, and Nathan MacDonald, eds., *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). From the perspective of systematic theology, the contributions of this dialogue point to the dogmatic potential of Hebrews.

<sup>3</sup> Treier and Atwood, “The Living Word Versus the Proof Text?,” 174.

<sup>4</sup> This language of material and formal contributions of Hebrews is similar to the

tually uses the OT to articulate its Christology. My thesis explores how both the material and the formal dimensions of the Christology of Hebrews enrich our theological reflection on Christ's threefold office.

Before focusing on the material contribution of Hebrews to Christology, I will clarify the methodological assumptions that underlie this attempt to read Hebrews systematically. These assumptions refer to the type of relationship between systematic and biblical theologies that would elucidate the possibility of a systematic reading of Scripture.

#### *Methodological Remarks*

To suggest an interaction between biblical and systematic theologies is a challenging enterprise. First, there is the distinction of disciplines in modern theology, which are legitimate and necessary given the complexity of issues in theological research.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, one finds diversity not only in the comparison of distinct disciplines but also in the very conception of the specific discipline itself. To put it more clearly, different definitions of biblical theology<sup>6</sup> and of systematic theology<sup>7</sup> exist in the literature.

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sections presented in Treier and Atwood, "The Living Word Versus the Proof Text?," 173–201. However, the focus of the discussion is different.

<sup>5</sup> For a brief overview of the emergence of the fourfold theological disciplines, see David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 166–169.

<sup>6</sup> For a helpful typology of approaches in biblical theology, see Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012). This work presents a heuristic classification of five types that are organized respectively between the poles of history and theology in the spectrum of biblical theology: (1) historical description; (2) history of redemption; (3) worldview-story; (4) canonical approach; and (5) theological construction.

<sup>7</sup> As Colin Gunton points out regarding the complexity of defining systematic theology, "There are a number of different ways in which one might claim to be systematic." Colin Gunton, "Historical and Systematic Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 11. John Webster suggests that different systematic theologies prioritize either an internal or external orientation in the task of systematic construction. "In its internal orientation—what might be called the dogmatic-analytic element of the task—systematic theology concerns itself with ordered exposition of Christian claims about reality. In its external orientation—what might be called the apologetic-hermeneutical element of the task—systematic theology concerns itself with the explication and defence of Christian claims about reality in order to bring to light their justification, relevance, and value." John Webster, "Introduction: Systematic Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.

Despite these difficulties, it is not impossible to envision an integration between the disciplines to avoid the danger of fragmentation in theology.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the work *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*<sup>9</sup> and the subsequent *Two Horizons Commentary* series are significant examples of efforts that seek to combine biblical and systematic theologies. In the specific context of Hebrews scholarship, publications such as *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*<sup>10</sup> and *Christology, Hermeneutics and Hebrews*<sup>11</sup> seem to reveal a growing interest in a dialogue between biblical scholars and systematic theologians about the theology of Hebrews.

As I have indicated in the introduction, the present article follows the overall intention of Treier and Atwood's essay in *Christology, Hermeneutics and Hebrews* that attempts to promote more intentional reflections on Hebrews in systematic theology.<sup>12</sup> From this essay I borrow the categories of material and formal analyses<sup>13</sup> and the notion that the systematization of a specific doctrine should reflect the internal ordering of that teaching in the Bible. What remains to be explained now is how these analytical categories and this notion of systematization are methodologically crafted in the present article, assuming an interaction between biblical and systematic theologies.

At the risk of simplification, it is possible to sketch basic characteristics regarding the nature of biblical theology and of systematic theology, especially when these two disciplines are compared. In comparison with systematic theology, biblical theology is more descriptive, inductive, and diachronic.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For proposals of integration, see Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 178–193; Fernando Canale, “Interdisciplinary Method in Christian Theology? In Search of a Working Proposal,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 43.3 (2001): 366–389.

<sup>9</sup> Joel B. Green and Max Turner, eds., *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Bauckham et al., eds., *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*.

<sup>11</sup> Laansma and Treier, *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews*.

<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere, I explored Hebrews for the purposes of systematic theology, more precisely for the doctrine of Christ's priesthood. See Adriani M. Rodrigues, *Toward a Priestly Christology: A Hermeneutical Study of Christ's Priesthood* (Lanham, MD: Lexington; Fortress Academic, 2018). While the hermeneutical focus of this monograph was on the level of macro-hermeneutics, the task of the present article is more modest and I operate here at the level of meso-hermeneutics. According to this hermeneutical classification, macro-hermeneutics addresses “the role of philosophical presuppositions behind doctrine and exegesis,” whereas meso-hermeneutics deals with “the articulation of doctrinal concepts.” (Ibid., 10.)

<sup>13</sup> See footnote 4 above.

<sup>14</sup> D. A. Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers

Conversely, in comparison with biblical theology, systematic theology is more conceptual, logical, and synchronic.<sup>15</sup> Fernando Canale maintains that “exegetical and biblical methodologies are textually oriented” and concentrate on the analysis of parts, “while systematic methodologies are ideas and issues oriented” and focus on the synthesis of the whole.<sup>16</sup>

This contrastive comparison, however, does not overrule the possibility of overlapping between the two disciplines when we consider these basic characteristics. For instance, in his proposal of a canonical biblical theology, Gerhard Hasel argues that biblical theology “is not a purely historical or descriptive enterprise.”<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, the task of biblical theology includes the conceptual work of “(1) providing summary interpretations of the final form of the individual biblical documents or groups of writings and of (2) presenting longitudinal themes, motifs, and concepts that emerge from the biblical materials.”<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, the overlapping between the disciplines should not imply that they are methodologically equalized in the overlapping areas. Even if some biblical textual analysis is performed in systematic theology, biblical theology is the discipline that offers the analytical tools for the exegetical description of the meaning of canonical texts. Likewise, whereas biblical theology is able to conceptually summarize interpretations of biblical writings and present longitudinal motifs in the canon, systematic theology is the ideal discipline for a conceptual articulation that synthesizes the whole of biblical ideas.

At the same time, what is apparently a weakness of one discipline in comparison with the strength of the other should not be hastily dismissed, but viewed as a potential valuable contribution. The acknowledgment that systematic theology is the privileged realm for conceptual synthesis should not ignore the fact that systematic reflection is potentially enriched by the summaries of interpretations and longitudinal motifs coming from biblical theology, as this discipline is ideally able to provide substantial descriptive analysis to exegetically generate these summaries and identify specific motifs. In the same way, the recognition that biblical theology is the best discipline to exegetically analyze specific passages should not rule out the potential contributions of a systematic reading of Scripture to biblical theology, inasmuch as the strength of systematic theology is precisely the capacity of conceptually articulating biblical ideas.

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Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 102.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>16</sup> Fernando Canale, “Is There Room for Systematics in Adventist Theology?” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 12.2 (2001): 121.

<sup>17</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, “Proposals for a Canonical Biblical Theology,” *AUSS* 34.1 (1996): 24.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

This strength of systematic theology implies that this discipline is not merely reduced to the task of working with summaries or even summarizing the exegetical results provided by biblical theology. Even though these exegetical results are invaluable for systematic reflection, systematics is not primarily defined by a harmonic summary of scriptural teachings, but by a keen perception of “the inner logic of biblical thinking ... from within its inner intellectual operation.”<sup>19</sup> This brings systematics to the task of reading Scripture to grasp its logical articulation. Norman Gulley elaborates on this point by using the language of penetration. In his words, “Systematic theology penetrates the biblical material”<sup>20</sup> and this penetration reaches “the inner-rationality and inner-coherence of Scripture.”<sup>21</sup> As a result, systematic theology essentially thinks “through the inner-coherence and logical consistency found within Scripture.”<sup>22</sup>

In doing this systematic reading, systematic theology operates in an overlapping area with biblical theology. This means, on the one hand, that the former needs to acknowledge the strength of the latter in this overlapping area in at least two ways: (1) by borrowing analytical tools from biblical theology to read the biblical text; (2) by submitting the results of the systematic reading to the exegetical scrutiny of biblical theology. On the other hand, systematic theology is operating in this overlapping area to bring its unique contribution of conceptual articulation that is inherent to the nature of the discipline. In this conceptual contribution, “systematic theology pushes beyond the explicit statements of [biblical] passages to their logical presuppositions, entailments, and implications.”<sup>23</sup>

This contribution of conceptual articulation is aligned with Treier and Atwood’s affirmation, highlighted above, that doctrinal systematization should reflect the internal ordering of that respective teaching in the Bible. If systematic theology is restricted to summaries and motifs processed by biblical theology, without having its own chance to read Scripture, the discipline will have access to the concepts of Scripture but not to the way in which they are logically articulated according to inner-rationality of Scripture. Therefore,

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<sup>19</sup> Canale, “Is There Room for Systematics in Adventist Theology?,” 124.

<sup>20</sup> Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 140.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 195. These implications have the potential to connect with other contexts and texts, since “interpretation is broader than simply redescribing the historical author’s intentions in an original context; we must engage a passage in light of its potential implications and points of interface with other texts and contexts.” (*Ibid.*, 154.)

without underestimating the necessary dialogue with biblical theology, systematic theology needs somehow to have its own taste of Scripture in order to grasp, to some degree, the logical construction and the conceptual connections of the biblical ideas.

The goal of this conceptual contribution is to provide the criterion for systematic theology to select specific tools from biblical theology to read the biblical text. According to Treier, “The process of a biblical theology discipline ... will involve a more *historically and literarily* focused approach, whereas the process of a systematic theology (or interdisciplinary theological interpretation of scripture programme) will involve a more *literarily and philosophically* focused approach.”<sup>24</sup> Because of the purposes of logical articulation and conceptual synthesis in systematics, the overlapping area between systematic theology and biblical theology (in the sense that the former borrows tools from the latter) is the literary approach, since this approach allows the discipline to connect parts of the text within the logic of its whole. Yet, differences between the two disciplines remain. Biblical theology handles the literary approach with a historical flavor, taking into account the historical background where the literature in question was composed. Conversely, systematic theology employs the literary approach with a philosophical taste, focusing on the articulation and the inner-coherence of the ideas. This difference highlights the unique contribution of a systematic reading, but also entails that a dialogue with biblical theology is necessary to enrich, correct, or even challenge the conclusions of the systematic reflection.

In light of these methodological remarks about the possibility and the potential contribution of a systematic reading of Scripture, I will explain the rationale of each step taken in this article. First, to affirm that reading Scripture can be conceived as an overlapping area of systematic and biblical theologies implies that there are other activities that describe the methodological procedures of systematics. A major aspect of these activities is the consideration of the articulation of doctrines in Christian theology. Before turning to Scripture to synthesize its doctrines, it is necessary to pay careful attention to the work of synthesis that influential theologians have provided. This is the reason why I will dialogue in the next section with traditional Christological categories in Christian theology, namely, Christ’s threefold office (*munus triplex*): prophet, priest, and king. This is an influential theological synthesis about the work of Christ and, even though we could focus on only one category, the articulation of three categories seems fruitful for systematic thinking.

Since the thesis of this article is that a systematic reading of the Christology of Hebrews enriches the theological reflection of Christ’s threefold office, in the second part of the elaboration of this study I will engage in a system-

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel J. Treier, “Biblical Theology and/or Theological Interpretation of Scripture? Defining the Relationship,” *SJT* 61.1 (2008): 16–31.



atic reading of Hebrews. According to the methodological intentions of this article, it is not enough to identify the Christological concepts that emerge from Hebrews. Rather, the study intends to observe how these concepts are elaborated and logically articulated in the epistle. The choice of the epistle to the Hebrews is particularly significant in this regard, as the epistle builds its Christological reflection in dialogue with the OT. Indeed, the observation of how the Christology of Hebrews is logically built in relationship with the OT is conveniently instructive for the interests of canonical systematic theology. Overall, the section of the systematic reading of Hebrews will be divided into two main parts. The first part is about the Christological content of Hebrews, that is, the Christological concepts that emerge in the epistle, with particular reference to the ideas of revelation, mediation, and lordship (Christ's threefold office). This part is entitled *The Material Contribution of Hebrews*. Then, the second part explores the way in which Hebrews logically elaborates the content of its Christology, which was expounded previously in the material contribution of Hebrews. This part is entitled *The Formal Contribution of Hebrews* and is focused on the Christological articulation structured by Hebrews in dialogue with the OT.

*Christological Categories: The Theology of Christ's Threefold Office*

One of the principal ways theologians organize Christological reflections based on Scripture is by means of meaningful categories. These categories are supposed to encapsulate key concepts that emerge from the Old<sup>25</sup> and New<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> With regard to the biblical data, the Christological reading of the OT is usually concentrated on passages that present or seem to imply a messianic projection, and also on passages where interpreters find a Christophany (e.g., the angel/messenger of the Lord). For helpful studies on the Christology of the Old Testament, see Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), Olivier-Thomas Venard, "Christology from the Old Testament to the New," in *The Oxford Handbook of Christology*, ed. Francesca Aran Murphy and Troy A. Stefano (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 24–28.

<sup>26</sup> In the field of NT studies, older approaches to Christology focused on passages with Christological titles. See Richard A. Burridge, "From Titles to Stories: A Narrative Approach to the Dynamic Christologies of the New Testament," in *The Person of Christ*, ed. Stephen R. Holmes and Murray Rae (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 37–60; Christopher M. Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament: Jesus and His Earliest Followers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 10–11. A distinguished example of this approach is Cullmann's functional Christology. He organizes the Christological titles in the following way: those that refer to Jesus's *earthly* work (prophet, suffering servant, high priest), to his *future* work (messiah, son of man), to his *present* work (lord, Savior), and finally those that refer to his *pre-existence* (word, son of God). The sequence of the categories (earthly, future, and present work, and then pre-existence) seems to be explained by Cullmann's focus and historical assumptions regarding the development



Testaments. Categories and titles are helpful for systematic Christological thinking, assuming that they are interpreted narratively and canonically.<sup>27</sup>

The Christological categories traditionally known as the *munus triplex* (prophet, priest, and king) seem helpful for thinking systematically about biblical Christology. To be sure, any suggestion of categories will be limited and present, at some point, its own shortcomings. Thus, the *munus triplex* categories are not able to exhaustively cover the Christological richness of Scripture. But one of the systematic advantages of these categories, which are employed by biblical<sup>28</sup> and systematic theologians both in classic<sup>29</sup> and in contemporary<sup>30</sup> theology, is that they are potentially able to organize Christological information efficiently.

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of the theological thinking of early Christianity, as exhibited in the NT in the historical context of Judaism and Hellenism. See Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 7–9. Cullmann does acknowledge that his list of Christological titles is not exhaustive, but he claims that these are the most important ones in the NT. Moreover, he recognizes that the titles cannot be easily squared in the classification suggested, as each title could be related to more than one category of Christ's work. *Ibid.*, 8–9.

<sup>27</sup> In the wake of the recent narrative turn in Christological studies, Leander Keck criticizes “the fascination with the palaeontology of christological titles.” Leander E. Keck, “Toward the Renewal of New Testament Christology,” *NTS* 32.3 (1986): 44. While this approach runs the risk of overemphasizing a presumed reconstruction of early Christian thinking, at the expense of the attentive consideration of the rich content of the biblical materials themselves, Christopher Tuckett correctly warns that “one should not let the pendulum swing too far in the opposite direction,” which means that Christological titles should not be simply overlooked but explored in light of the narrative features of Scripture. Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament*, 11.

<sup>28</sup> See Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 479–80.

<sup>29</sup> Overall, the systematic conception of the *munus triplex* is attributed to Calvin. See *Institutes of the Christian Religion (ICR)* 2.15. For helpful remarks regarding this concept in Calvin, see Stephen Edmondson, *Calvin's Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5, 84, 220; Bruce L. McCormack, *For Us and Our Salvation: Incarnation and Atonement in the Reformed Tradition*, Studies in Reformed Theology and History (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1993), 6; Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins*, vol. 2 (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1986), 28, 33.

<sup>30</sup> See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 1999), §§102–5; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics (CD)*, 14 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), II/2: 431; IV/1:123–124, 137–138, 274, 314; IV/2:155; IV/3.1: 14–18; Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993); Geoffrey Wainwright, *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 99–185; Michael Welker, *God the Revealed: Christology*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 209–216.

Moreover, an important assumption about the *munus triplex* is that the three functions (prophet, priest, and king) largely overlap each other,<sup>31</sup> and they could be related in different ways to the work of Christ in all times (past, present, and future).<sup>32</sup> In short, each of the three aspects of his work refers to specific Christological concepts. The prophetic function focuses on the idea of revelation. The priestly function describes the cultic mediation of salvation, especially in terms of sacrifice and intercession. Finally, the kingly function centers on the notion of lordship. In the history of Christian theology, the prophetic function could be considered an addition to the priestly and kingly offices. According to Karl Barth, “the theology of the early and mediaeval Church spoke fairly commonly of a twofold office, a *munus duplex*, of Christ,”<sup>33</sup> as priest and king. The threefold office, with the addition of the prophetic dimension, was “discovered or rediscovered by Calvin.”<sup>34</sup> Elaborating on the idea that the Greek term Christ renders the Hebrew word Messiah, which basically means anointed, John Calvin argued that the name “*Christ* refers to those three offices: for we know that under the Law, prophets as well as priests and kings were anointed with holy oil.”<sup>35</sup> In Scripture, we find a

<sup>31</sup> Michael Welker argues that, “Because the three offices interpenetrate one another and are thus *perichoretically* connected, it is more appropriate to refer to the ‘threefold office’ than to the ‘three offices.’” Ibid., 215. See also this emphasis on the threefold office instead of three different offices in G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 62; Dietrich Ritschl, “Office of Christ,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 820; R.W.A. Letham, “Offices of Christ,” in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, ed. Martin Davie et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 629.

<sup>32</sup> As Welker points out, the “doctrine of the threefold office (*munus triplex Christi*) ... enables us to grasp the complex wealth of both the public and eschatological ministry of Jesus Christ, disclosing as it does a nexus of relationships with Old Testament traditions, threads of continuity between the pre- and post-Easter ministry of Jesus Christ.” Welker, *God the Revealed*, 212.

<sup>33</sup> Barth, *CD IV/3.1:5*.

<sup>34</sup> Barth, *CD IV/3.1:6*. See Calvin, *ICR 2.15*. As Ritschl emphasizes, “From the days of the early church, with a view to interpreting the title ‘Christ,’ it was the tradition, unformulated doctrinally, to speak of Christ’s priestly office (*munus sacerdotale*) and his kingly office (*munus regium*). The question was left open whether we should speak instead of a *triplex munus* by adding the prophetic office (*munus propheticum*). J. Calvin took this view in *Inst. 2.15*.” Ritschl, “Office of Christ,” 820. For a helpful overview of the threefold office in the history of Christian theology, see Rose M. Beal, “Priest, Prophet and King: Jesus Christ, the Church and the Christian Person,” in *John Calvin’s Ecclesiology: Ecumenical Perspectives*, ed. Gerard Mannion and Eduardus Van der Borgh (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 90–106.

<sup>35</sup> Calvin, *ICR 2.15.2*. Translation taken from Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 2:37.

few references to the anointing of prophets in 1 Kgs 19:16; 1 Chr 16:22; Ps 105:15. References to the anointing of priests appear in Exod 28:41; 29:7; Lev 8:12, 30; 21:10–12; Num 3:3; Ps 133:2. Finally, the anointing of kings are mentioned in 1 Sam 9:16; 10:1; 12:3; 15:1; 16:1, 12–13; 2 Sam 2:4, 7; 1 Kgs 1:34; 19:16; 2 Kgs 9:3.

While Calvin acknowledged that the messianic language was more directly related to “the kingly office,” he argued that “the prophetic and sacerdotal unctions have their proper place, and must not be overlooked.”<sup>36</sup> One of Calvin’s scriptural arguments for the prophetic office of Christ was the messianic emphasis of Isaiah 61:1–2, Christologically interpreted by Jesus himself in Luke 4:17–21. In this passage, the Messiah is anointed to proclaim the good news embodied in his presence and work. In this way, Calvin speaks of the prophetic office especially in terms of Christ’s earthly teaching and preaching. Furthermore, he mentions the synoptic account of the transfiguration, where the heavenly voice said: “This my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him”<sup>37</sup> (Matt 17:5; see also Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). While the divine voice here seems to echo what was stated in Jesus’ baptism (cf. Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22), with reference to Isa 42:1 and right after the Spirit descended to rest on him (cf. Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22), this voice adds a significant request in the context of the transfiguration: “listen to him.” In other words, the Messiah has something to say or to teach. Moreover, Calvin quotes Pauline references to Christ Jesus as divine wisdom (1 Cor 1:30), “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3).<sup>38</sup>

In the OT, the role of the prophet, who was a messenger of the Lord, refers basically to proclaiming the word of the Lord.<sup>39</sup> But in the NT, Christ is much more than God’s messenger, he is actually the divine Word made flesh (John 1:1–3, 14). Therefore, Christ not only teaches or proclaims God’s revelation, as the true prophets do, but he himself and his work are a true revelation of God. In fact, the function of teaching the word of God is not exclusively a prophetic role, but also a priestly one. According to Malachi 2:7, the priest is also God’s messenger: “For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.” The conception that the priest is supposed

<sup>36</sup> Calvin, *ICR* 2.15.2.

<sup>37</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible quotations in this article are to the English Standard Version (ESV), 2016.

<sup>38</sup> See Calvin, *ICR* 2.15.2.

<sup>39</sup> See 1 Sam 3:1, 7; 8:10; 15:1–3, 10; 2 Sam 24:11–13; 1 Kgs 12:22–24; 16:7, 34; 17:24; 18:1. Overall, the latter prophets in the Hebrew Bible begin with the formula “the word of the Lord came to” the prophet. See, e.g., Jer 1:2–4; Ezek 1:3; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Amos 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Mic 1:1; Zeph 1:1; Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1.

to teach God's law appears elsewhere in the OT (Lev 10:11; Deut 31:9–13; see also Jer 18:18). Furthermore, the Urim and the Thummim in the high-priestly vestments (Exod 28:30; Lev 8:8; Deut 33:8; Neh 7:65) functioned as instruments by which high priests received divine revelation (Num 27:21; 1 Sam 14:41; 28:6; Ezra 2:63).

This overlapping of the prophetic with the priestly office, however, should not obliterate the Christological emphasis on the former. The OT does speak of a future prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15) and of an eschatological Elijah (Mal 4:5), while the NT confirms the messianic expectations about the eschatological prophet (John 1:21, 25; 4:19, 25, 29; 6:14; 7:40), sometimes even mentioning the name of Elijah (e.g., John 1:21, 25), and explicitly highlights the fulfillment of the future prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15) in Christ (Acts 3:22; 7:37).<sup>40</sup> Therefore, there are good reasons to affirm the Christological prophetic office. Instead of diminishing the importance of the prophetic office, its overlap with the priestly office on the concept of revelation actually highlights the Christological importance of the notion of divine revelation.

After this brief discussion of the categories of Christ's threefold office in Christian theology, in the next section I will begin a systematic reading of the Christology of Hebrews. As it will become evident below, both in the material and formal study of Hebrews, the categories of prophet (revelation), king (lordship), and priest (mediation) are significantly enriched by the Christological reflection of Hebrews.

#### *The Material Contribution of Hebrews*

This section on the material contribution of Hebrews is intended to expound the Christological concepts that emerge in the epistle, with particular reference to the ideas of the agent of revelation, priestly mediation, and royal lordship (Christ's threefold office). Two of the methodological points elaborated above need to be recalled here. First, this systematic reading of Hebrews will adopt a literary approach with a conceptual flavor. This is why George Guthrie's literary structure will be helpful in this section. Second, because of the conceptual flavor of the approach, this systematic reading is not focused merely on the description of Christological titles, but it may go beyond explicit statements according to the inner logic of the categories conceptually articulated in Hebrews. This point is particularly significant for the consideration of the prophet category (Christ's threefold office) in Hebrews. If this study had its focus on the description of explicit Christological titles, the conclusion would be that the prophet category could not be considered in Hebrews, since the epistle does not call Christ a prophet. However, inasmuch

<sup>40</sup> See Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 15–23; Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 57–60.

as the systematic reading pays attention to the inner logic of the categories, the basic concept indicated in the previous section about the prophet category is revelation. According to this conceptual perspective, the fact that Hebrews elaborates the concept of Christological revelation implies that the prophet category in the theology of Christ's threefold office can be informed by the Christology of Hebrews.

Using George Guthrie's proposal as a frame of reference for the literary structure of Hebrews,<sup>41</sup> in which there is a complex interplay between the genres of exposition and exhortation,<sup>42</sup> the main passages about Christ are found in different sections and genres of the epistle, as it can be observed in the general structure of Hebrews outlined below.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> See George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 39–40; George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 144. In this article, I use Guthrie's more recent unpublished outline of Hebrews, which includes minor adjustments to his two previous publications, found in George H. Guthrie, "The Structure of Hebrews Revisited" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Washington, DC, 2006), <https://hebrews.unibas.ch/documents/2006GuthrieH.pdf> (accessed 10 November 2019), 2 (Figure 2: the Structure of the Book of Hebrews). He adopts the method of text-linguistics analysis or discourse analysis, which attempts to track cohesion shifts in the discourse. See Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 36–37, 45–58. To some extent, his analysis builds on the literary analysis of Albert Vanhoye, *La Structure littéraire de L'épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962). See Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 45; Cynthia Long Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship between Form and Meaning* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 19. Supporters of Guthrie's proposal include Barry C. Joslin, "Can Hebrews Be Structured? An Assessment of Eight Approaches," *Currents in Biblical Research* 6.1 (2007): 115–22; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, WBC 47A (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1991), xc–xcviii; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2010), 31–34. The main critic of Guthrie is probably Westfall, who considers "his proposal of two independent but interrelated backbones [exposition and exhortation] that run side by side but eventually converge" as incoherent and confusing. Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 20. For a defense of Guthrie's proposal in face of Westfall's criticism, see Joslin, "Can Hebrews Be Structured? An Assessment of Eight Approaches," 99–129; O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 33–34.

<sup>42</sup> Guthrie, "The Structure of Hebrews Revisited," 6; Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 50, 115.

<sup>43</sup> Adapted from Guthrie, "The Structure of Hebrews Revisited" (Figure 2).

*Introduction: God has spoken to us in a Son (1:1–4)*

Exposition I: The position of the Son, our Messenger, in relation to the angels (1:5–2:18)

A. The Son Superior to the Angels (1:5–14)

*Exhortation: Pay Attention to What We Have Heard Through God's Superior Son (2:1–4)*

ab. The Superior Son, to Whom all things are Submitted, for a Time Became Lower than the Angels (2:5–9)

B. The Son Lower than the Angels (i.e., among humans) to Suffer for the “sons” (i.e., heirs) (2:10–18)

Transition from exposition to exhortation: Jesus, the Supreme Example of a Faithful Son (3:1–6)

*Exhortation: A Series of Exhortations on the Rest (3:7–4:13)*

Transition from exhortation to exposition: Having a great High Priest – hold fast and draw near (4:14–16)

Exposition II: The Position of the Son, Our High Priest, in Relation to the Earthly Sacrificial System (4:14–10:25)

A. The Appointment of the Son as a Superior High Priest (5:1–10; 7:1–28)

*Exhortation: Immaturity, the Danger of Falling Away, and Confidence (5:11–6:20)*

ab. We Have Such a High Priest Who is a Minister in Heaven (8:1–2)

B. The Superior Offering of the Appointed High Priest (8:3–10:18)

Transition from exposition to exhortation: Having a great High Priest – draw near, hold fast and consider (10:19–25)

*Exhortation (10:26–13:19)*

*The Danger of Rejecting God's Word and God's Son (10:26–31)*

*The Positive Example of the Hearer's Past, Encouragement to Endure to Receive the Promise (10:32–39)*

*The Positive Example of the OT Faithful who Endured (11:1–40)*

*Jesus, the Supreme Example of Endurance (12:1–2)*

*Endure Discipline as Sons (12:3–17)*

*The Blessings of the New Covenant (12:18–24)*

*Do Not Reject God's Word (12:25–27)*

*Practical Exhortations (12:28–13:19)*

*Benediction and Conclusion (13:20–25)*

In this structure Guthrie discerns three general movements of discourse, namely, the two Christological expositions and the final section of exhortations. The first expositional section (1:5–2:18) uses the angelic beings as a point of reference to explore both the Son’s exaltation (1:5–14) and incarnation (2:10–18).<sup>44</sup> The second Christological exposition (4:14–10:25) focuses on the Son as high priest, being elaborated in two parts: his priestly appointment (5:1–10; 7:1–28) and his priestly offering (8:3–10:18). It is noteworthy that Guthrie proposes that these two expositional materials develop their concepts spatially. To be more specific, the first exposition begins with the heavenly/superior status of the Son “as exalted Lord of the universe”<sup>45</sup> (1:5–14) and then moves to the earthly discussion of the incarnation (2:10–18), which was necessary for his sacrificial death (2:9–10, 14–15, 18). The beginning of the second exposition continues on the earthly level to discuss the Son’s priestly appointment (5:1–10; 7:1–28). This presupposes his incarnation, as according to Heb 5:1–2 “high priests are appointed *from among people* and thus can empathize with their weaknesses.”<sup>46</sup> The discussion of the priestly offering (8:3–10:18), however, logically ends on the heavenly level. While the discussion certainly emphasizes Christ’s earthly sacrifice and his blood, it also conceptualizes this priestly offering in terms of his entrance into the heavenly sanctuary (8:1–4; 9:11–12; 9:24–25; 10:19–21). To use Guthrie’s words, “One aspect of the offering’s superiority concerns the place of offering—in heaven—the discourse thus moving back to a focus on the heavenly realm where it began.”<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the first exposition begins with the heavenly realm (the Son’s exaltation) and moves to the earthly realm (the incarnation). The second exposition continues on the earthly level (the incarnation as the presupposition for Christ’s priestly appointment and also for his sacrifice) and moves back to the heavenly realm (the heavenly aspect of Christ’s priestly offering), where the first exposition began. It seems that this emphasis on the heavenly level, which marks the beginning and the end of the two expositions, when they are read together, is significant for the hortatory purposes of the epistle.

In agreement with the idea that Hebrews is a “word of exhortation [*παρακλήσις*]” (Heb 13:22), Guthrie argues that “the purpose of the book of Hebrews is to exhort the hearers to endure in their pursuit of the promised reward.” In this way, the two Christological expositions offer to believers “a powerful motivation for an active obedience and endurance,”<sup>48</sup> particularly

<sup>44</sup> Guthrie, “The Structure of Hebrews Revisited,” 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* Italics mine.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 143, 145.



when we consider the heavenly emphasis of the expositions. According to this perspective, the final section of exhortations (10:26–13:19) emphasizes the importance of obedience and endurance, especially by pointing to the supreme example of Jesus' obedience and endurance in 12:1–2. Besides the emphasis on Jesus' example, this motivation is also articulated by highlighting the salvific benefits of his sacrificial obedience and endurance on behalf of believers. These benefits are alluded to in the language of Jesus' blood (10:29; 12:24), which is more specifically understood in the context of his priestly offering. Indeed, Jesus' example and his salvific benefits are not only mentioned in the final section of exhortations, but they seem to also be presupposed in the ideas elaborated in the previous sections of exposition. According to this general perspective of the Christology of Hebrews, we can briefly outline the Christological emphases of the letter.<sup>49</sup>

#### Introduction and Exposition I

In the introduction (1:1–4), the Son is the eschatological<sup>50</sup> divine messenger who is contrasted with the prophets. Previously, “God spoke to our fathers

<sup>49</sup> In this outline I will benefit from the ideas elaborated on by Brian Small, *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 257–308. For surveys on the history of interpretation of Christology in Hebrews, see Helmut Feld, *Der Hebräerbrief* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), 65–82; Erich Grässer, “Der Hebräerbrief 1938–1963,” *TRu* 30.2–3 (1964): 214–23; Andreas Stadelmann, “Zur Christologie des Hebräerbriefes in der Neueren Diskussion,” in *Theologische Berichte 2: Zur neueren Christologischen Diskussion* (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1973), 135–221. Other studies on the Christology of Hebrews include: Friedrich Büchsel, *Die Christologie des Hebräerbriefes* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1922); Franz Laub, *Bekennnis und Auslegung: Die Parännetische Funktion der Christologie im Hebräerbrief* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1980); William R. G. Loader, *Sohn und Hoherpriester: Eine Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Christologie des Hebräerbriefes* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981); Harris L. MacNeill, *The Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1914); Kevin B. McCrudden, *Solidarity Perfected: Beneficent Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008); Harm H. Meeter, *The Heavenly High Priesthood of Christ: An Exegetico-Dogmatic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma, 1916); Alexander Nairne, *The Epistle of Priesthood: Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1915); Angela Rascher, *Schriftauslegung und Christologie im Hebräerbrief* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 101–202; Mathias Rissi, *Die Theologie des Hebräerbriefes: Ihre Verankerung in der Situation des Verfassers und seiner Leser* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 45–91; von Joseph Ungeheuer, *Der Grosse Priester Über dem Hause Gottes: Die Christologie des Hebräerbriefes* (Würzburg: H. Stürtz, 1939); Heinrich Zimmermann, *Die Hohepriester: Christologie des Hebräerbriefes* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1964).

<sup>50</sup> The eschatological language is found in the expression “in these last days” (ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων) (1:2). According to Graham Hughes, “The Word in the

by the prophets” in multiple ways and times. But in these last days, “he has spoken to us by his Son” (1:2). This eschatological message is quantitatively singular and qualitatively unique. According to the locative rendition of ἐν υἱῷ employed in several Bible translations, God has “spoken to us in His<sup>51</sup> Son” (NASB, REB, YLT; see also NET, NEB). The NJB even adds the idea that “he has spoken to us *in the person of his Son*.”<sup>52</sup> While it could be argued that Jesus is contrasted to rather than described as a prophet, the introduction clearly emphasizes that he is the supreme agent and form of God’s revelation.<sup>53</sup> In fact, for the contrast to work, this emphasis assumes some kind of commonality between the prophets and Jesus. Obviously, the prophets are agents of divine revelation. But the superiority of Jesus as both the agent and the content of God’s revelation is strongly underscored by his description as heir of all things (1:2), the intermediary agent (δι’ οὗ) of the creation of the world (αἰῶνας<sup>54</sup>) (1:2; see also v. 10), the sustainer (verb φέρω<sup>55</sup>) of everything (τὰ πάντα) (1:3).

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Son is the eschatological form of what God has to say.” Graham Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics: The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Example of Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 6.

<sup>51</sup> Daniel Wallace criticizes the inclusion of this pronoun in the translation of this verse, as he argues that the absence of the article in Greek highlights the qualitative difference of this way of divine revelation, and not the idea of possession that is unfortunately introduced by the pronoun “his” in the translation. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 245.

<sup>52</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>53</sup> Small correctly points out that “The author of Hebrews never describes Jesus a prophet” nor seeks “to indicate that Jesus is a better prophet.” Small, *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews*, 260. Furthermore, Ben Witherington III criticizes those who “see here the idea that Christ is presented as prophet, priest and king from the outset. The problematic part of this deduction here is the phrase *spoken in/through his Son*. The idea is probably not focusing on Christ’s own prophetic speech (that would require ‘spoken by his Son’), but on Christ himself being the revelation on earth....Jesus’ priestly and royal aspect is the special focus, coupled with the notion that Jesus is the revelation or word of God come to earth.” Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic; Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2007), 107–108.

<sup>54</sup> According to BDAG, this term has four meanings: (1) “a long period of time, without ref. to beginning or end”; (2) “a segment of time as a particular unit of history, *age*”; (3) “the world as a spatial concept, *the world*”; (4) “the Aeon as a person, *the Aeon*.” The third meaning is assigned to αἰῶνας in Heb 1:2. BDAG 32–33. NJB translates it as *ages* and NIV as *universe*.

<sup>55</sup> This verb appears in the participle form (“sustaining,” NIV, NJB). For further information regarding the meaning of this verb, see BDAG 1052.

Furthermore, He as the Son is God (1:8–9; see also v. 3) and co-regent king (1:3, 8–9, 13; see also v. 5). Besides this active characterization of his lordship, the introduction of Hebrews also alludes to Christ's priesthood, as it briefly refers to the purification of sins performed by the Son (1:3).

Following this introduction, the first exposition begins with an explanation in 1:5–14 of what was mentioned at the end of the introduction in 1:4, namely, the superiority of the Son in comparison with angels. It is noteworthy that the Greek terminology for angel (ἄγγελος) also conveys the meaning of messenger or envoy (just as the terminology of מַלְאָכִים in the Hebrew Bible),<sup>56</sup> which may imply that they are agents of divine revelation as well, as Heb 2:2 speaks of “the message declared [λαληθεῖς] by angels.” Interestingly, in Heb 2:3 great salvation was “declared [λαλείσθαι] by the Lord” Jesus,<sup>57</sup> which suggests that both angels and the Son are agents of divine revelation, assuming that the Son is clearly a superior messenger. But instead of elaborating on this superiority in terms of Christ's way of communication as the agent of revelation, the focus is on his lordship. This focus appears both in the contrast to the prophets in the introduction (1:1–4) and in the contrast with the angels in the first exposition (1:5–2:18).

In the first part (1:5–14) of the first exposition, the superiority of the Son is clear. This superiority is grounded in his exalted status. To mention only one example, the catena of OT quotations organized in 1:5–13 from a Christological standpoint begins and ends with royal psalms (Ps 2:7 in Heb 1:5; Ps 110:1 in Heb 1:13). Overall, the catena<sup>58</sup> implies that Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven (cf. Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).<sup>59</sup> However, the sovereignty of this royal lordship seems to be challenged in the second part of the exposition (2:5–18), inasmuch as the exposition moves to the earthly dimension of the Christological discussion (2:10–18), that is, to the incarnation. Therefore, whereas the task of the author of Hebrews in the first part of the exposition (1:5–14) was to demonstrate the superiority of

<sup>56</sup> See BDAG 9; HALOT 585.

<sup>57</sup> Κύριος clearly refers to Jesus also in Heb 1:10; 7:14; 13:20.

<sup>58</sup> For an interpretation of 1:5–14 as a catena that largely refers to Christ's exaltation or session, see Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 50, 53; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 102; Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1993), 108; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 36 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 197, 199; Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 24; Kenneth L. Schenck, “The Celebration of the Enthroned Son: The Catena of Hebrews 1:5–14,” *JBL* 120 (2006): 469–485.

<sup>59</sup> This is affirmed elsewhere in the NT (cf. Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55–56; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; 1 Pet 3:22).

Jesus in comparison with “the angels by virtue of his divinity,” now his task in the second part of the exposition (2:10–18) is to “show how Jesus is superior to the angels by virtue of his humanity.”<sup>60</sup>

If the arguments of creation (1:2; 1:10) and sustenance (1:3) of the world constituted important reasons for affirming the royal sovereignty of Christ in the first part of the exposition, now the author needs to explain how this affirmation can be sustained in the context of the incarnation, especially considering Christ’s shameful suffering and death. To be sure, in his reflections on Ps 8,<sup>61</sup> the author of Hebrews acknowledges that Jesus was made lower than the angels for a little while (2:9).<sup>62</sup> But, paradoxically, the suffering of death that would explain Christ’s lowering is rather considered the reason for his subsequent glory and honor as king (2:10).<sup>63</sup> Instead of merely a sign of shame (cf. 12:2), Christ’s suffering death is surprisingly described in terms of making him perfect (2:10; cf. 5:8–9; 7:27–28), as the author of Hebrews

<sup>60</sup> Small, *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews*, 270.

<sup>61</sup> There are two major proposals regarding the interpretation of Ps 8 in Hebrews 2, namely, the anthropological and the Christological reading. Overall, there is a growing assumption in Hebrews scholarship that the author is intentionally ambiguous in this reading. For a helpful summary about the anthropological and the Christological interpretation, see Small, *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews*, 270–271.

<sup>62</sup> The temporal and qualitative ambiguity of “being brief in duration” (little while) or “being low in quality” (little) expressed by the adjective βραχύ (see BDAG 183) seems to play a role in the Christological reading of 2:9, which points out that Jesus was made a little lower or for a little while lower than the angels (τὸν δὲ βραχύ τι παρ’ ἀγγέλους ἡλαττωμένον βλέπομεν Ἰησοῦν). While the NIV prefers the rendition “a little lower,” other translations opt for “a little while lower” (NASB, NRSV, NET, ESV). Overall, the language of being lower does not seem to allude to an ontological hierarchy of being, where the human being is in itself ontologically lower than the angelic being. The point of Heb 2:9 is not primarily the incarnation in itself, but an incarnation for mortality, which conveys the idea of lowering in terms of suffering, that is, a lowering described by the lack of honor. See Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 154; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 91.

<sup>63</sup> “But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, *crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death* (διὰ τὸ πάθημα τοῦ θανάτου δόξῃ καὶ τιμῇ ἐστεφανωμένον), *so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone*” (ὅπως χάριτι θεοῦ ὑπὲρ παντός γεύσῃται θανάτου) (2:9, italics mine). The position of the term ὅπως, which, associated with the subjunctive verb γεύσῃται (*to taste* or *come to know*, BDAG 195), indicates purpose (*in order that*, BDAG 718), seems to qualify the immediately previous word ἐστεφανωμένον (*having being crowned*) or complement the previous prepositional phrase διὰ τὸ πάθημα τοῦ θανάτου (*because of the suffering of death*). See Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 76. See also Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 134n46; Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 155.

seems to use the language of Christological perfection in the sense of fitness to the priestly role.<sup>64</sup> This fitness implies a profound identification with mortal human beings (2:14). Indeed, the incarnate Christ is not ashamed to call them “brothers” (2:11–12, 17). The familial language is quite explicit in this section. Because of the salvific work of the Son (2:10, 15), his brothers are also called “sons” (2:10; cf. 12:5–8) and “children” (2:13–14).<sup>65</sup>

Therefore, he was “made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest” (2:17–18). If the second part of the first exposition attempted to show how the lordship of the incarnate Christ could be still maintained, considering his suffering death, the affirmation of his royal crowning “with glory and honor” (2:9) is further elaborated in terms of Christ’s priesthood. In fact, his suffering death is significant for the two crucial features of the priesthood, namely, Christ’s *faithfulness* in the

<sup>64</sup> Small, *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews*, 277. The meaning of Christ being made perfect (expressed by the verb *τελειόω* in 2:10; 5:9; 7:28) in Hebrews has been debated in the literature. Overall, the principal meanings suggested are: (1) moral: “full moral perfection of His humanity” (Westcott) or “going through the various stages of” His “human life” (Cullmann), learned obedience in a fuller degree (McKelvey); (2) vocational: qualification to the priesthood (Peterson, Attridge), particularly expressed in the ability to sympathize (McKelvey); (3) cultic: consecration of a priest, as indicated in the LXX (see, e.g., Exod 29:9, 29, 33, 35; Lev 21:10) by the use of *τελειόω* in the Pentateuch (Vanhoye, Silva), which would be ontologically interpreted as the transformation/glorification of Christ’s humanity (Vanhoye); (4) eschatological: the fulfillment of glorification/exaltation (Silva); and (5) theological: “unimpeded access to God” (Bruce, Sabourin, Scholer). See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 44; R. J. McKelvey, *Pioneer and Priest, Jesus Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 26–33; David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the “Epistle to the Hebrews”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 66–73, 118; Leopold Sabourin, *Priesthood: A Comparative Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 183; John M. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 185–200; Albert Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest: According to the New Testament*, trans. J. Bernard Orchard (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 1986), 83, 157, 165–168; Moisés Silva, “Perfection and Eschatology in Hebrews,” *WTJ* 39.1 (1976): 61, 65, 68; Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 83–87; Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 93; Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1903), 49. This cursory overview of suggestions hardly does justice to the nuanced treatment offered by each author. Furthermore, there may be an overlap among these positions (see McKelvey). As long as 2:17 and 5:9 (read in light of 5:8) indicate that Christ was made perfect through suffering, this earthly experience seems to imply a vocational idea of perfection.

<sup>65</sup> For a helpful study on the conception of God’s family in Hebrews, see Amy L. B. Peeler, *You Are My Son: The Family of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014).

service of God and his *mercy* toward his brothers (2:17–18). His faithfulness is discussed especially in the exhortation (Heb 3:7–4:13) that follows this exposition that ended in 2:18, and later in the large section of exhortations that follow the two pieces of exposition in Hebrews (10:26–13:19). The exhortation of Heb 3:7–4:13 is introduced by a transitional discussion of Christ as the faithful high priest (3:1–2), with glory and honor (cf. 3:3), who is superior to Moses’s faithfulness to God: whereas the faithfulness of Moses describes a servant of God, the faithfulness of Christ refers to the faithfulness of a son (3:5–6). This introduction seeks to stimulate the faithfulness of the brothers (cf. 3:1), who are called to “hold firm the confidence” (3:6 NRSV) and pay attention to the divine voice (3:7).

The second characteristic of Christ’s priesthood is unpacked in the second major exposition of Hebrews, where the idea of mercy is introduced right at the beginning of this exposition.

#### Exposition II

As indicated above, the priesthood of Christ in Hebrews is somehow implied in the “purification of sins” in 1:3 and explicitly mentioned in 2:17–3:1, where he is qualified as “merciful and faithful high priest” (2:17). However, this priesthood is spelled out in the exposition of Heb 4:14–10:25, which particularly elaborates on the merciful nature of the priest. In the transition from the previous exhortation and the new exposition, the author of Hebrews “closely aligns” in 4:14, “for the first time in the discourse,” “Jesus’ two most important titles: Son of God and high priest,”<sup>66</sup> which point to Christ’s kingship and priesthood respectively. In his profound identification with human beings, which was already mentioned in chapter 2, this merciful high priest is able “to sympathize with our weaknesses,” because he “has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (4:15). Following the logic of 4:16, “Jesus’ identification with and sympathy for humanity are the bases for the Christian boldness or confidence ... to approach God”<sup>67</sup> in order to find mercy and grace.

After this transitional introduction, the exposition explores the appointment of the Son as a superior high priest in chapters 5 and 7, and then concentrates on the superior offering of this appointed high priest in chapters 8–10. The discussion of the priestly appointment in chapter 5 starts with a general definition of a high priest: he is “chosen from among men,” being “appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins” (5:1). This definition assumes that a high priest is merciful toward his fellow brothers, as “he can deal gently” with them (5:2). Furthermore, the general definition of a high priest in 5:1 presents three basic points.

<sup>66</sup> Small, *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews*, 283.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

Firstly, it emphasizes the necessity of the incarnation for Christ's priesthood, since a high priest is "chosen from among men." Secondly, the high priest is established in his position by means of a proper appointment. Thirdly, this appointment has in view the offering of sacrifices and gifts on behalf of human beings. While the first point was already formulated in chapter 2 and the third point will be spelled out in chapters 8–10, chapters 5 and 7 deal with the appointment of Christ as high priest.

This appointment is affirmed on the basis of two chapters from Psalms (2 and 110) that were already cited in Hebrews 1. More precisely, these two Psalms open (Ps 2) and close (Ps 110) the catena of quotations in Heb 1:5–13. Ps 2:7 is quoted in 1:5 and then repeated in 5:5. With regard to Psalm 110, Heb 1:13 quoted Ps 110:1 and, then, Heb 5:6 cited Ps 110:4. This movement from Ps 110:1 (a royal passage) to 110:4 (a priestly passage), highlights the combination presented in Heb 5, namely, that Christ is both king and priest. Surprisingly, his priestly appointment in 5:5 is firstly a royal appointment ("You are my Son, today I have begotten you") and, then, the specific priestly appointment in 5:6 ("You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek"). In fact, the focus of Heb 7 is on the elaboration of the endless priesthood of Christ according to the order of Melchizedek, who was also king and priest ("king of Salem, priest of the Most High God," 7:1).

The transition between the first part of the exposition (chapters 5 and 7) and its second part (chapters 8–10) in Heb 8:1–2<sup>68</sup> reinforces the Christological combination of kingship and priesthood, the setting of the heavenly throne and the heavenly sanctuary.<sup>69</sup> Having this combination in mind, the author of Hebrews starts the second part of the exposition by recalling, in 8:3, the general definition of priesthood provided at the beginning of the first part of the exposition in 5:1. If the focus of the first part of the exposition was on the priestly appointment, the second part explores the reason for this appointment: "For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer." (Heb 8:3). According to Heb 8:4, the priestly offering is related to the heavenly sanctuary, the sanctuary of the new covenant, which was the real typological pattern for the earthly sanctuary in the first covenant (8:6). But the following discussion in chapter 9 certainly recognizes the earthly dimension of this offering, as it underscores Christ's sacrifice on the cross by using, especially, the language of blood and death. In chapter 10, we are informed about the Christologi-

<sup>68</sup> See A, ab, and B of Exposition II in the outline of the structure of Hebrews presented above at the beginning of the section *The Material Contribution of Hebrews*.

<sup>69</sup> "Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a *high priest*, one who is *seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven*, a *minister* in the holy places, *in the true tent that the Lord set up*, not man." (Heb 8:1–2, italics mine).



cal intentions of this sacrificial offering. Reciting Ps 40:6–8 in Heb 10:5–7, Christ came to the world (incarnation) in order to do God’s will (cf. also Heb 10:8–9). “And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” (Heb 10:10).

#### Exhortations

After the two main Christological expositions of Hebrews, the final section of exhortations in 10:26–13:19 attempts to use Christology to motivate believers to endure in their faith. To be sure, the sacrifice and priesthood of Christ are actions of mercy, considering that his sacrificial offering provides forgiveness of sins according to the promises of the new covenant (cf. 10:16–18). But his sacrifice and priesthood also reveal Christ’s faithfulness, as he shows his determination to do the will of God, according to which believers are to be saved precisely by this sacrifice and priesthood.

Just as the faithfulness of Christ to the one who appointed him as high priest (cf. 3:1–2) provided the Christological basis for the exhortations in chapters 3–4, his faithfulness in doing the will of the Father regarding the sacrificial offering seems to lay down the Christological foundation for the exhortations in chapters 10 to 13. While the exhortations in chapters 3–4 encouraged believers to consider (verb *κατανοέω*) Jesus, the faithful high priest (3:1), the exhortations in chapters 10–13 motivate them to consider (verb *ἀναλογίζομαι*) the endurance of Jesus in the face of terrible suffering (12:3).<sup>70</sup> In fact, this motivation is preceded by a list of several examples of faith in OT times (chapter 11), which is concluded with an appeal to endurance (12:1–2) and a call to look “to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross...and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2). Therefore, “Jesus is the ultimate exemplar of faith and endurance.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, his faithfulness seems to be described in chapter 13 in terms of reliability and constancy: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (13:8).

Notice that several Greek terms or concepts used to describe the experience of believers in this major section of exhortations parallel the experience

<sup>70</sup> For a helpful study on endurance in Heb 12, see N. Clayton Croy, *Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12:1–13 in its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>71</sup> Small, *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews*, 304. Small identifies virtues in the list of Heb 11 that characterize Jesus. “Abel and Noah demonstrated righteousness by their deeds (11:4, 7), even as Jesus is a righteous king (1:8–9; 7:2). Noah exhibited reverence (*εὐλαβηθεὶς*), even as Jesus did (5:7). Abraham displayed obedience (*ὑπήκουσεν*; 11:8), even as Jesus did (5:8). Moses evinced endurance (11:27), even as Jesus did (12:2–3).” *Ibid.*, 303.

of Jesus himself.<sup>72</sup> For instance, two passages contain several terms that point to this parallel, namely, Heb 10:32–34 and 13:15. With regard to Heb 10:32–34, we are able to identify at least five parallels. First, in Heb 10:32, the endurance (ὕπεμείνατε) of the audience in the face of “struggle with suffering” “anticipates the reference to Jesus’ endurance” (ὕπέμεινεν) “in the face of hostility and crucifixion (12:2–3).”<sup>73</sup> Second, some believers had been “publicly exposed to reproach” (ὄνειδισμοῖς, 10:33), as Jesus had experienced reproach (ὄνειδισμὸν, 11:26; 13:13). Third, they became sharers (κοινωνοὶ, 10:33) with their fellows’ mistreatment, even as Jesus shared (κεκοινώνηκεν; 2:14) in flesh and blood, that is, he shared in the human experience of suffering and death. Fourth, believers expressed sympathy (συνεπαθήσατε, 10:34) to the prisoners, just as Jesus showed sympathy (συμπαθήσαι, 4:15) with our weaknesses. Fifth, the audience accepted the confiscation of their property with joy (μετὰ χαρᾶς, 10:34), since they were expecting a better and abiding possession, which anticipates the reference to Jesus enduring the cross “for the joy (χαρᾶς) that was set before him” (12:2).

In Heb 13:15, we can identify significant conceptual parallels, particularly with Heb 2:12. First, in 2:12, Jesus affirms that he will sing praise (ὕμνήσω) to God in the midst of the congregation, while in 13:15 Jesus is described as enabling (δι’ αὐτοῦ) believers to offer a sacrifice of praise (αἰνέσεως) to God. Second, in 2:12 Jesus declares that he will proclaim (Ἀπαγγελάω) the name of God, whereas in Heb 13:15 the audience is encouraged to confess (ὁμολογούντων) God’s name. Third, the emphasis on believers continually offering these sacrifices (θυσίαν) of praise parallels the references to Jesus’ sacrifice in Hebrews (cf. 9:26; 10:12). It is noteworthy that, according to Heb 13:15, all these actions expected of the believers are not merely an imitation of the actions of Jesus. Rather, they can be done only by means of him.

This principle is compatible with the language employed by Hebrews that implicitly considers believers as priests.<sup>74</sup> Just as the idea of offering sacrifices of praise, the idea of believers entering and drawing near seems to express a priestly conception that also parallels the experience of Christ. Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus entered (verb εἰσέρχομαι) the heavenly sanctuary (6:20; 9:12, 24). But he entered as a forerunner (πρόδρομος), which means that believers are also supposed to enter the sanctuary because he entered first. This implication seems to explain statements of our hope entering (verb εἰσέρχομαι) the sanctuary (6:19), the confidence we have “to enter the sanctu-

<sup>72</sup> I am indebted to Small, *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews*, 301, 307 for identifying these parallels.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>74</sup> For a helpful study on the implicit priesthood of believers in Hebrews, see Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*.

ary by the blood of Jesus” (10:19, NET), and the invitation to draw near (verb *προσέρχομαι*) to God (4:16; 10:22).

In short, this conceptual overview of the Christology of Hebrews, according to its main literary sections, offers significant material contributions to the theology of Christ’s threefold office. Regarding the concept of revelation, which is at the center of the meaning of the prophet category, Christ is the supreme agent of divine revelation. While this concept is mentioned in the introduction of the epistle, it does not receive the level of material elaboration that we find in the king and prophet categories in Hebrews.<sup>75</sup>

The concept of lordship in the king category is particularly emphasized in Exposition I, as this section highlights Christ’s royal status of heavenly exaltation above the angels. Moreover, his royal lordship is affirmed in conjunction with the assertion of his priesthood in Exposition II, both at the beginning of the subsections on his priestly appointment and on his priestly offering. Therefore, the heavenly status of Christ’s priesthood as a whole cannot be thought of without his royal lordship.

Whereas the concept of mediation in the priest category is principally discussed in Exposition II, which explores Christ’s royal priestly appointment and offering, Exposition I already articulates the necessity of the incarnation for his faithful and merciful priesthood. This means that the priest category combines earthly and heavenly aspects. The earthly dimension underscores the need of the incarnation and his suffering death, which establish Christ’s enduring faithfulness to the will of the Father and provide the foundation for his merciful royal priesthood in heaven. Besides, the incarnation is crucial for his royal priestly appointment and his suffering death describes the sacrifice of His priestly offering. With regard to the heavenly dimension of the priestly category, the necessary association with the king category emphasizes the exalted status of Christ’s priestly appointment and the supreme reality of his priestly offering and merciful mediation. A significant implication of the combination of these earthly and heavenly aspects of the priest category is that mediation—in the sense that the ascended Christ is mercifully making the salvific benefits available to human beings, on the basis of his earthly life and sacrifice—is not the only major concept of this category, but it is accompanied by the concept of exemplary enduring faithfulness, displayed on the earthly level and vindicated in the kingly exaltation and priestly appointment of the heavenly dimension.

#### *The Formal Contribution of Hebrews*

Having in mind the material contribution of Hebrews expounded above, we turn now to the task of discerning the ways in which the Christological

<sup>75</sup> The language of revelation/appearance (verb *φανερώω*) is employed in Heb 9:8 and 26.

content of the epistle is conceptually articulated according to the inner logic of Scripture. A distinguishing feature of Hebrews that needs to be taken into consideration in this enterprise is the abundant and extensive use of the OT in the letter.<sup>76</sup> In fact, the OT is the conceptual foundation for the Christology of Hebrews. To be sure, the use of the OT has been a prominent area of research in Hebrews scholarship,<sup>77</sup> especially when exegetical aspects are considered in light of the interpretive practices of Second Temple Judaism.<sup>78</sup> However, given the nature of this article, my focus here will be more theological and conceptual regarding the use of the OT in Hebrews.

Two general features of the use of the OT in Hebrews are particularly significant for this study. First, Hebrews' Christological reflection is heavily based on references to Psalms, especially Ps 2 and, even more, Ps 110 (109 LXX). While Pss 2:7 and 110:1 (109:1 LXX) are used to emphasize royal Christology, Ps 110:4 (109:4 LXX) is the basis for priestly Christology. In fact, these two Christological aspects should not be separated, as the author of Hebrews shows from the same OT chapter (Ps 110:1, 4) that Christ is both king and priest.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> See a "Chart of Old Testament References in Hebrews" in George H. Guthrie, "Old Testament in Hebrews," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, eds. R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 846–849. According to this categorization, "There are roughly 35 quotations, 34 allusions, 19 cases where Old Testament material is summarized, and 13 where an Old Testament name or topic is referred to without reference to a specific context." George H. Guthrie, "Hebrews' use of the Old Testament: Recent Trends in Research," *Currents in Biblical Research* 1.2 (2003): 274.

<sup>77</sup> Studies on the use of the OT in Hebrews include, David R. Anderson, *The King-Priest of Psalm 110 in Hebrews*, Studies in Biblical Literature (New York: Peter Lang, 2001); Susan E. Docherty, *The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews: A Case Study in Early Jewish Bible Interpretation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009); Radu Gheorghita, *The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews: An Investigation of Its Influence with Special Consideration to the Use of Hab 2:3–4 in Heb 10:37–38* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics*; Dirk J. Human and Gert J. Steyn, eds., *Psalms and Hebrews: Studies in Reception* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010); Simon Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Amsterdam: Wed. G. Van Soest, 1961; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010); James Kurianal, *Jesus Our High Priest: Ps 110,4 and the Substructure of Heb 5,1–7,28* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000); Dale F. Leschert, *Hermeneutical Foundations of Hebrews: A Study in the Validity of the Epistle's Interpretation of Some Core Citations from the Psalms* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1994); Peter Katz, "The Quotations from Deuteronomy in Hebrews," *ZNW* 41.1 (1958): 213–223.

<sup>78</sup> For a helpful overview of the trends in research and the comparison between the use of the OT in Hebrews and the exegetical methods in the Judaism of the first century, see Guthrie, "Hebrews' use of the Old Testament," 271–294.

<sup>79</sup> See Heb 1:5 (Ps 2:7), 6 (Ps 97:7 [96:7 LXX]), 8–9 (Ps 45:6–7 [44:6–7 LXX]),

The second feature refers to the epistemological assumption that underlies this Christological interpretation of the OT. In Hebrews, the OT is essentially God's speech. As the author of Hebrews cites the OT, he rarely mentions an OT author<sup>80</sup> and never uses the common NT formula "It is written" (*γέγραπται*) to introduce a quotation.<sup>81</sup> "Rather, the scriptures are introduced as falling from the lips of God."<sup>82</sup> Among other quotations, the use of Pss 2 and 110 in Heb 1:5, 13 and 5:5–6 are declarations of God, not only about Christ, but more precisely *to* Christ. In other words, Christ's royal priestly appointment is enacted by God's speech act, which in Hebrews appears in the form of an OT quotation. Indeed, the emphasis on divine speech appears from the beginning of the epistle, as God spoke many times and in many ways to our fathers by the prophets (Heb 1:1). But when we hear God speaking in the OT quotations found in Hebrews, we realize that God did not merely speak to the fathers in the past, but that he actually spoke these same words more recently to the Son.

Moreover, as we continue reading in the introduction that, in contrast to the multiple times and ways that God spoke to the fathers by the prophets, God has spoken in these last days "in His Son" (1:2, NASB), we could expect that Hebrews would present several teachings of Jesus, by which we could hear God speaking to us. However, we surprisingly find out that "the author of Hebrews does not quote any of the teachings Jesus spoke during his earthly ministry."<sup>83</sup> When Jesus speaks in Hebrews, he speaks back to the Father, and from his lips we hear, again, OT quotations. More precisely, at first we hear Jesus speaking the words of Ps 22:22 (21:23 LXX) and Isa 8:17–18 in Heb 2:12–13. Then, he speaks the words of Ps 40:6–9 (39:7–10 LXX) in Heb 10:5–7. In his first speech in Heb 2, the Son is praising God in the context of a discussion about the necessity of the incarnation. His praise is related

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10–12 (Ps 102:25–27 [101:26–28 LXX]); 13 (Ps 110:1 [109:1 LXX]); 2:6–8 (Ps 8:4–6 [8:5–7 LXX]), 2:12 (Ps 22:22 [21:23 LXX]); 5:5–6 (Ps 110:4 [2:7 and 109:4 LXX]); 7:17, 21 (Ps 110:4 [109:4 LXX]), 10:5–7 (Ps 40:6–8 [39:7–9 LXX]). Regarding Ps 110:1 (109:1 LXX), see also Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2. Regarding Ps 110:4 (109:4 LXX), see also Heb 5:10; 6:20; 7:11, 15.

<sup>80</sup> One exception is the reference to David in the quotation of Ps 95:7–8 (94:7–8 LXX) in Heb 4:7.

<sup>81</sup> The term *γέγραπται* appears in Heb 10:7 but as part of the OT quotation (cf. Ps 40:7 [39:7 LXX]).

<sup>82</sup> Guthrie, "Hebrews' use of the Old Testament:" 274. See also Madison N. Pierce, *Divine Discourse in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Recontextualization of Spoken Quotations of Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Jonathan I. Griffiths, *Hebrews and Divine Speech* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014).

<sup>83</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *Letters to the Church: A Survey of Hebrews and the General Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zonervan, 2011), 69.

to his profound identification, by means of the incarnation, with the many sons (that he calls brothers) that he will bring to glory (cf. Heb 2:9–14). In the second speech in Heb 10, Christ affirms his commitment to the will of the Father as he offers his own incarnate body as a sacrificial offering for the forgiveness of our sins (cf. Heb 10:5–18).

There are at least two implications about these Christological speeches in Hebrews. First, in terms of content, the quotations of Psalms and Isaiah show that what Christ speaks in NT times is not different from what God spoke by the prophets in OT times. Second, what Christ speaks in Hebrews is more related to his life and work, that is, to his incarnation and sacrifice, than to his actual words and teachings. These two implications reveal that there is no distinction between the content of what God spoke by the prophets in the past and what he spoke through the Son. But this same content is fulfilled in an eschatological context, not necessarily involving the revelation of new words, but in the fulfilment that we find in Christ's incarnate life and obedient sacrifice. In the words of Jobes, Hebrews shows an "organic connection between Jesus Christ as the Word of God and the word of God spoken through the prophets: it was the incarnate Jesus Christ who could most aptly voice those prophetic words in their final and fullest sense."<sup>84</sup> This principle is valid not only for the prophetic words voiced by Christ in Heb 2 and 10, but also for the prophetic words voiced by the Father to Christ and even for the prophetic words in Hebrews that are about Christ. In other words, in the life and work of Christ we find God's new and ultimate revelation, in the sense that his previous revelation by the prophets is fulfilled.

According to this epistemological perspective, it could be affirmed that the kingship and priesthood of Christ fulfill the revelation of God declared by the prophets. To put it in another way, Christ as king and priest is God's eschatological revelation; a revelation of Christ's lordship and also a revelation of his faithful and merciful priesthood. If this systematic articulation is correct, all Scripture (the revelation of God by the prophets in the past) points to the fulfillment of Christ's royal priesthood. As a matter of fact, even though Hebrews concentrates on the Psalms to lay the ground for the discussion of Christ's royal priesthood, the epistle also quotes other parts of Scripture to articulate its Christological perspective, such as Isa 8:17–18 in Heb 2:13 and 2 Sam 7:14 in Heb 1:5.

But Hebrews goes beyond quoting passages from the OT. It conceptually elaborates a royal priestly Christology in light of persons, themes, institutions, and events in the OT. To mention a few examples, the royal lordship of Christ depicted in the catena of chapter 1 has an unmistakable Davidic flavor. The faithful aspect of Christ's priesthood is explicitly compared to the faithfulness of Moses (cf. Heb 2:17–3:5), while the general idea of appointment

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<sup>84</sup> Jobes, *Letters to the Church*, 69.

and the merciful aspect of the priesthood is compared with Aaron (cf. Heb 5:1–5). However, according to Ps 110, the specific appointment of Christ needs to be understood in the context of the royal priesthood of Melchizedek, who even preceded the Aaronic priesthood (cf. 5:6–7, 6:20–7:1–20). Besides, Hebrews discerns in the eschatological Melchizedekian priesthood of Ps 110:4 the eternity of Christ's priesthood, in the sense that he is a priest forever. This leads Hebrews to discuss an important OT theme, namely, the covenant. An eternal priest makes him a guarantor and a mediator of a better covenant (Heb 7:22). The discussion of the covenant presupposes a kingship (our royal high priest is seated on the heavenly throne, 8:1) and a sanctuary (where priestly sacrifices are offered, 8:2–3) for his priesthood. Actually, the author of Hebrews compares two covenants, both discussed in the OT. The first covenant presupposes the Mosaic sanctuary and its Aaronic priestly service (Heb 9:1–10), while the new covenant, promised in Jer 31:31–34 (Jer 38:31–34 LXX) and quoted in Heb 8:8–12, has the heavenly and true sanctuary (8:1–2; 9:11) where Christ ministers as high priest (8:2; 9:11–12). The entrance of Christ into this sanctuary is compared with the ritual of inauguration in the first covenant performed by Moses (Heb 9:18–21). The sacrifice of Christ, which was a once-for-all sacrifice (Heb 7:27; 9:12; 10:10), is compared with the plurality of several types of sacrifice in the Levitical priesthood (Heb 9:13–14), including the sacrifices offered in the inauguration of the first covenant (9:18–21) and the sacrifices offered on the Day of Atonement (9:25–26).

These brief examples show that the eschatological fulfillment of Christ's royal priesthood could not be adequately understood without the conceptual tools that we find in passages, persons, events, institutions, themes, and narratives divinely revealed by the prophets in the OT. While previous revelation is not intended to exhaust the meaning of the Christological fulfillment, this revelation provides the necessary foundations for our understanding of Christology. As an example of this principle, the Aaronic priesthood is unable to prefigure all the aspects of Christ's priesthood. Moses prefigures the faithfulness of Christ as high priest, not Aaron. Melchizedek illustrates the specific nature of Christ's priestly appointment, not Aaron. Yet, the figure of Aaron is helpful for underlining the general nature of the priestly appointment in terms of God's calling (Heb 5:4). Also, the discussion of Christ's priestly offering in Hebrews 8 to 10:18 uses the ritual performed by the Aaronic priesthood in the first covenant as a frame of reference. To be sure, this discussion highlights differences between Christ's priestly offering and the offerings and rituals of the Aaronic priesthood, but we can also identify typological similarities and even logical conclusions about Christ's priesthood, derived from ritual practices in the Aaronic priesthood in general.<sup>85</sup> For instance, the

<sup>85</sup> For a helpful study on the typology of Hebrews, see Richard M. Davidson,



language of necessity (*ἀναγκαῖος, ἀνάγκη*) is used in Heb 8:3<sup>86</sup> to indicate that Christ has to offer something as a heavenly priest, and in Heb 9:23<sup>87</sup> this language is employed to stipulate that the heavenly things need purification by means of a superior sacrifice.

As a final note about the epistemological assumption of God speaking Christologically by means of the words and events of the OT, it is important to consider the hortatory intentions of the epistle to the Hebrews. To paraphrase a crucial question in Graham Hughes' investigation on the hermeneutics of Hebrews, if the epistle is a "word of exhortation" (Heb 13:22) addressed to the "concrete situation of urgency" of the audience, why should this exhortation "demand such a massive structuring and working out of the"<sup>88</sup> Christological reading of the OT? According to our discussion above, the answer seems to be that the Son's lordship and priesthood is the climax of God speaking to us since the times of the OT, offering salvation now by means of the life and work of Christ. But because God speaks to us in Christ, we need to give him a proper response, in terms of persevering faith and obedience (even when we face suffering and hardships)<sup>89</sup> by the example and power of Christ's priesthood. In one of the last Christological points of the epistle, we read about Jesus as "the mediator of a new covenant" and his "sprinkled blood that *speaks* a better word than the blood of Abel" (Heb 12:24, italics mine). In this rhetorical statement, the blood of Christ seems to speak about merciful grace, while the blood of Abel probably requires punitive judgment (cf. Gen 4:10). After this image of Christ's priesthood and of his blood speaking, the exhortation of Hebrews is, "See that you do not refuse him who is speaking" (Heb 12:25).

In a nutshell, this discussion of the formal contribution of Hebrews attempted to discern the inner-rationality of biblical thinking that undergirds the material contribution outlined in the previous section. This task was undertaken by a general observation of how the epistle conceptually deals with OT Scripture, considering that Hebrews quotes the OT from the perspective of divine speech and uses persons, themes, institutions, and events in the OT as a conceptual framework to think Christologically.

According to the logic assumed by Hebrews, the life and work of the incarnate Christ is God's eschatological revelation that fulfills the prophetic

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"Typology in the Book of Hebrews," In *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), 121–186.

<sup>86</sup> "For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary [*ἀναγκαῖον*] for this priest also to have something to offer."

<sup>87</sup> "Thus it was necessary [*ἀνάγκη*] for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these."

<sup>88</sup> Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics*, 28.

<sup>89</sup> Jobes, *Letters to the Church*, 61.

revelation given in the OT. To be more specific, the historical reality of Christ as king and priest is the climax of God speaking to his people since the times of the OT.

If the previous section on the material contribution of Hebrews concluded that the concept of Christ as the supreme agent of divine revelation (broadly conceived as the prophet category) does not receive the level of material elaboration that we find in the king and priest categories in Hebrews, it is in the formal contribution of the epistle that the nature and function of this concept is more adequately perceived. In short, this study suggests that the notion of Christ as prophet is not a material concept that is explicitly placed alongside the ontological concepts of Christ's royal lordship and priesthood in Hebrews. Rather, because of its epistemological nature in the epistle, the function of this concept of Christological revelation is to expand the meaning of Christ's kingship and priesthood from the level of status and activities to the level of divine revelation.

#### *Conclusion*

Hebrews articulates a rich Christology that is epistemologically founded on a sophisticated view of divine revelation in Scripture. Theologians can learn to think systematically with the Scriptural Christology of Hebrews. One of the benefits from this learning experience for doing systematic theology is to emphasize more in Christological thinking the concepts of Christ's kingship and priesthood, which presuppose earthly enduring faithfulness, followed by the majesty of his heavenly status. In this emphasis, these concepts are interpreted as the ontological content of his eschatological revelation, which is broadly conceived as the prophetic aspect of the *munus triplex* and is taken as the epistemological principle of Christ's life and work. Accordingly, the systematic elaboration of the royal lordship and priestly mediation of the present Christ highlights these activities as having a major impact on Christian life, including an appeal to Christians to continually respond positively to this revelation.