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A table of contents for *Irish Biblical Studies* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ibs-01.php

HEBREWS IN RECENT SCHOLARSHIP.

J. C. McCullough

In 1980 I published in *Irish Biblical Studies*, an article entitled 'Some Recent Developments in research on the Epistle to the Hebrews'. At that time Hebrews was considered to be the Cinderella of New Testament scholarship. In the nineteen year period from 1960 to 1979, less than 20 commentaries and less than 10 monographs had been written on Hebrews. Since that time, however, there has been a mini revival in interest in Hebrews. In the thirteen year period from 1980 to 1993 some 40 commentaries and almost 40 monographs (not counting dissertations, introductions and books on themes related to Hebrews but not directly on Hebrews) have been produced. Moreover, several of the commentaries run to over 500 pages. The purpose of this article is to review the commentaries, monographs and articles which have appeared since 1980 and to assess what progress has been made, if any, in solving a few of the major problems in Hebrews scholarship.

Author

Discussion about the authorship of Hebrews has in very general terms, gone through three distinct phases. The first phase was concerned with discussion of the question of Pauline authorship; the second with the search for an alternative author; and the third with the creating of a profile of the author, gleaned from the pages of Hebrews itself.

The discussion about whether Paul wrote the Epistle or not seems by and large to have come to a halt, with the conclusion that Paul did not write the Epistle¹, though in 1983 Hagedé² argued that

¹ Probably the last major work arguing for the Pauline authorship was that of William Leonard, *The Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1939) which, in spite of very careful scholarship, still failed to win the day. Cf. for example, in our period the title in Collins, R.F., 1988. Even an article by Robert B. Shaw with the title 'The

the author may be 'un paulien, ou Paul lui-même, selon une solide tradition' (Italics mine). The more fruitful discussion, however, as to whether the author belonged to a Pauline school has continued through our period. In 1981, for example, F. Schröger argued that the book could not in any way be described as Pauline.³ The author was an independent interpreter of primitive Christian tradition and any similarity with the thought of Paul ... e.g. his teaching on the pre-existence, humiliation and suffering and death of Christ, or the establishment of a new covenant through his blood could be explained by reference to that primitive tradition, not any direct influence of Paul on the author of Hebrews. He listed nine points of dissimilarity between Paul and the author of Hebrews to drive home his point. On the other hand, while Strobel also argued that the Epistle was not 'ein Zeugnis des Ringens um die "Entwicklung des paulinischen Erbes"', he nevertheless considered that the author might belong to the wider environment of the later Pauline missionary work, though he was clearly distinguished from Paul as an independent theological personality.⁴ Sören Ruager in his commentary⁵ went much further and argued that the author worked with Timothy and was a member of the Pauline circle; and right at the end of our period, in 1993, Knut Backhaus⁶ has argued persuasively that the author of Hebrews may indeed be said to belong to a Pauline school.

The second phase started when scholars searched the pages of the New Testament and other early Christian literature to discover an alternative author to Paul and many different names were put

Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews', in *Incarnation: Contemporary Writers on the New Testament* ed. Alfred Corn the author states that Paul did not write the Epistle (p. 266).

² Hugedé, 1983 p. 216

³ Schröger, F, 'Der Hebräerbrief -- paulinisch?' in *Kontinuität und Einheit* FS F. Mussner, ed. P. -Galatians. Müller and Werner Strenger (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1981) p. 211-222.

⁴ Strobel, 1981 p. 13f.

⁵ Ruager, 1987

⁶ Backhaus, Knut, 'Der Hebräerbrief und die Paulus-Schule' *BZ* 37 (1993) 183-208 (and literature cited there).

forward⁷. In the 1970's at least one name was added to this long list, that of the mother of Jesus in 1975,⁸ and several old favourites were proposed again. In 1981 R. Jewett⁹ argued that the author was Epaphras and that he had written the Epistle, which is the 'Letter to the Laodiceans' mentioned in Col 4:16, to heretics in the Lycus valley who were angel-worshippers and David Lewis Alan in an unpublished dissertation proposed Luke¹⁰. Such efforts to pinpoint names may be judged largely to have been a failure. If one, however, were absolutely compelled to pick names out of the long list available, the two names of Barnabas and Apollos would be considered to be the most suitable. For example, Strobel argued that the name Apollos is the only one worth considering, but because of lack of documentation he did not go so far as to postulate that name¹¹ and Weiss said the same for Barnabas and Apollos.¹²

The third phase, and we are firmly in that phase now, was to accept the anonymity of the book and most commentators find themselves holding that position. Some scholars accept the anonymity with a certain amount of regret, something they are forced to do because of the paucity of the evidence. For example, Attridge said: 'The beginning of sober exegesis is a recognition of the limits of historical knowledge and those limits preclude positive identification of the author.'¹³ Others, in my view correctly, celebrate that

⁷ cf. Weiss, 1991, p. 61f for a detailed list of suggested authors.

⁸ cf. Ford, Josephine M., 'The Mother of Jesus and the Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews', *The Univ. of Dayton Review*. 11 (1975) 49-56.

⁹ R. Jewett, 1981. He builds on an article by Charles Anderson, 'Who wrote 'the Epistle from Laodicea'?' *JBL* 85 (1966), 436-440

¹⁰ David Lewis Alan, *An Argument for the Lukan Authorship of Hebrews*, Unpublished Dissertation, the University of Texas at Arlington, 1987.

¹¹ Strobel, 1991 p. 12

¹² cf. Weiss, 1991 p. 62 and Robinson, *Redating*; cf. Ellingworth, 1993 p. 21 'His name is perhaps the least unlikely of the conjectures which have been put forward.'

¹³ Attridge, 1989) p 5

anonymity. Grässer¹⁴, for example, argued that the author is anonymous because he *wants* to be anonymous for good theological reasons, reasons which are given in Hebrews 2:3: 'Hebr. ging aus theologischen Gründen von vornherein in anonymer Gestalt aus'.¹⁵ Following M. Wolter¹⁶ he argued that 'Allein Jesus Christus wird als exklusive personale Autorität und Ursprungsnorm der Tradition reklamiert (2:3)¹⁷ -- hence the personal authority of the author is not emphasised.

Failure to find a name to put to the author of the Epistle has, however, lead scholars in the eighties to enter the third phase of the discussion and to concentrate on the much more productive and interesting task of going back to the book itself to find out what kind of person the author was. In this area there have been several points of agreement and several lines of discussion have been drawn.

The reference to eyewitnesses in 2:3 would certainly suggest that the author was not an eye-witness and that we are dealing with second or third generation Christians. Moreover the use of the male present participle in 11:32 would suggest that, in spite of suggestions to the contrary, the author probably was a male.¹⁸

It is in the area of his educational and philosophical background that most discussion has been generated. Many scholars have pointed to his excellent Greek and his general familiarity with the world of letters of his time. This insight, of course, is not one that was discovered only in the eighties. Already in 1909, Deissmann¹⁹ quoted Origen who had pointed out that the 'linguistic character of the epistle has none of that rudeness of speech which

¹⁴ Grässer, 1990.

¹⁵ Grässer, 1990 p. 22.

¹⁶ cf. Wolter, M., 'Die anonymen Schriften des Neuen Testaments. Annäherungsversuch an ein literarisches Phänomen', *ZNW* 79 (1988), p. 10

¹⁷ Grässer, 1990 p. 17.

¹⁸ cf. Ellingworth 1991, p. vii and Attridge 1989 p. 5.

¹⁹ A. Deissman, *Light from the Ancient East* tr. L. R. M. Strachan (New York: George H. Doran, 1909) p. 70 n 3. The quotation comes from Origen, 'Homil. in Hebr' in Eusebius, *Hist Eccl* vi 25.11

the apostle himself confessed ... that on the contrary the epistle is more Greek in its stylistic structure' and then added himself:

'It [the contrast between Hebrews and the other primitive Christian documents] points to the fact that the Epistle to the Hebrews, with its more definitely artistic language... constituted an epoch in the history of the new religion. Christianity is beginning to lay hands on the instruments of culture; the literary and theological period has begun.'²⁰

Then in 1917 Nairne²¹ suggested that the author belonged to a circle of men who have had a Hellenistic education, a view echoed by Käsemann in 1936.²²

Most commentators and writers on Hebrews in the eighties have echoed this theme, both as regards language and culture. As regards language the author was steeped in the Greek of the Septuagint and in his quotations from the Old Testament there is no evidence that he knew any Hebrew.²³ Moreover, scholars stress the skill with which the author commands his Greek. Übelacker quoted Haering who said that it is the 'stilisch bewussteste Schrift im Neuen

²⁰ Deissmann, 1909, *ibid.* p. 70-71.

²¹ A. Nairne, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1917) p. 31.

²² Käsemann, E. *Das wandernde Gottesvolk*. Göttingen 1938.(1961).

²³ McCullough, J. C. 'The Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews.' *NTStud* 26 (1980) 363-379 and 'Some Recent Developments in research on the Epistle to the Hebrews', Part 1 *IBS* 2 (1980), 141-165; part ii *IBS* 3 (1981), 28-45; Ellingworth 1991 p.x; A. H. Cadwallader. 'The Correction of the Text of Hebrews towards the LXX'. *NovTest* 34 (1992) 257-292 who has categorized the changes in favour of the LXX under the headings of expansions, conflation, corrections and common expressions; A. Hanson 1983 *The Living Utterances of God: the New Testament Exegesis of the Old Testament*. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983) p. 105 points out that of the 38 Old Testament quotations, only 6 do not agree with LXX A or B and 14 agree with the LXX against the Masoretic Text.

Testament²⁴ and this view is repeated by almost all the commentators.

This command of Greek, however, is only a pointer to the overall educational level of the author. Attridge²⁵ spoke of the author as being well educated, and very much at home in the general cultural milieu of the Graeco-Roman world while Williamson²⁶ agreed that 'the writer of Hebrews drew upon the same wealth of literary vocabulary and moved in the same circles of educated thought as a man like Philo.' Thompson argued

'While the author is not a philosopher, it is undeniable that the book is the work of a skilled rhetorician. The extraordinary vocabulary (140 *hapax legomena*), with a large number of words attested nowhere else in biblical literature but common in secular literature, point out the educational level and rhetorical ability of the author. The word plays, careful syntactical constructions, and well-constructed parallelisms all point to a level of training that was recognised in the ancient church as exceptional.'²⁷

This view is repeated by Erich Grässer in his commentary where he says that the author is an *ανηρ λογιος* (cp. Acts 18:24).. 'der die Regeln der Rhetorik beherrscht und dies mit gewählter Ausdrucksweise vielfach unter Beweis stellt. Der *auctor ad Hebraeos* ist der beste Stilist unter den Schriftstellern des Neuen Testaments.'²⁸

Moreover, J. W. Thompson and D. E. Aune have pointed out that his use of terminology such as *παιδεια*, an important term in the

²⁴ Übelacker, 1989 p. 12.

²⁵ Attridge, 1989 p 5. Similarly Laub 1988 speaks of 'philosophisch gebildet und überaus schriftkundig ... überdies schreibt er von allen neutestamentlichen Autoren das beste Griechisch' p.18.

²⁶ Williamson, R. *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*. (Leiden: Brill) 1970 p. 296.

²⁷ Thompson 1982 p. 158

²⁸ Grässer, 1990 p. 16

Greek educational system linking education and suffering²⁹ suggests he is at home in that environment.³⁰

While there is general agreement, however, on the fact that the author was an educated man of his time³¹, that he was, as it were, the Philo of the early Christian Church, there is no agreement as to precisely what movement of Greek intellectual thought he belonged to. The discussion as to whether the author was a follower of or was influenced by Philo, Gnosticism or Middle Platonism has continued in the eighties³². First of all we consider Philo.

²⁹ Thompson 1982, p. 17ff and D. E. Aune in 'Heracles and Christ: Heracles imagery in the christology of early Christianity' *Greeks, Romans and Christians: Essays in Honour of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. D. Balch et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) p. 15. He went further, however, and suggested that the myths about Heracles may have played a larger part in the author's thinking than suggested previously: 'the similarities between Heracles imagery and the Christology of Hebrews that have been explored above suggest that many of the important and vital functions attributed to Heracles as a Hellenistic saviour figure were understood by some early Christians as applicable to Jesus to an even greater extent than they were to Heracles' p. 19; cf. too H. W. Attridge, 'Liberating Death's Captives. Reconsideration of an Early Christian Myth.' <*Gnosticism and the early christian world* ed. J. Goehring et al. (Sonoma, Calif: Polebridge Press, 1990) pp. 103-115

³⁰ cf. Section on the genre of the Epistle for a further discussion.

³¹ The author's knowledge of Greek and Hellenistic culture has lead some to argue that he could not have come from Palestine. cf. Isaacs 1992, p. 48 quoting Josephus who in *Ant* 20.264 says that the Jewish masses were less inclined to learn foreign languages than any other nation, (possible this statement was a justification for his own limited knowledge of Greek), she argued that while people from Judaea could get by in Greek, it was not their mother tongue and they did not have the fluency and rhetorical skills in Greek shown by the author of Hebrews.

³² For a very clear and full discussion of the various possible background influences on the author of the Epistle see L. D. Hurst, 1990

Spicq in his great commentary³³ and in later articles³⁴ had argued strongly for a Philonic influence on Hebrews and to prove this, he brought together fifty pages of parallels between the two authors in his commentary. On the basis of these parallels he even went so far as to imagine the author of Hebrews knowing Philo personally and perhaps listening to him in the synagogues of Alexandria.. In a monograph published in 1970 Professor Williamson argued that Spicq was going beyond the evidence. He maintained that while there may be lists of parallel words and expression, these words and expressions are used in completely differently ways in Philo and Hebrews. This view has been echoed by many scholars since then.³⁵ He concluded that while it is *possible* that the author was 'un Philonien converti au christianisme' as Spicq suggested, '...it is hard for me to believe that the conversion of a Philonist could have resulted in so thorough-going a rejection of Philo's attitudes, outlook, methods of Scriptural interpretation, and so on.'³⁶

While Williamson had succeeded in refuting some of the claims made by Spicq, he had not, however, settled the issue of the relationship between the author of Hebrews and the kind of thought represented by Philo, because after a decade of debate Spicq's work has shown that the author at least 'used the vocabulary of educated Hellenistic Jews'³⁷ (of whom Philo was a very important representative, in fact, due to the scarcity of the material which has survived, almost the only representative) though the verbal parallels do not necessarily show that he used them in the same way as Philo. As Thompson has said:

³³ Spicq, C. *L'Épître aux Hébreux*. 2 volumes (Paris: Garibalda, 1952-53)

³⁴ 'Le philonisme de l'Épître aux Hébreux.' *RB* 56 (1949) 542-572; 57 (1950) 212-242

³⁵ cf. Isaacs. 1992 p. 55. 'Only someone who has not read Philo at first hand would miss the difference in 'feel' between him and the author of Hebrews'.

³⁶ Williamson, R, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*. (Leiden: Brill) 1970 p. 579.

³⁷ Thompson 1982 p. 8.

Even if Spicq has claimed too much, the extensive parallels which he has demonstrated for Philo and Hebrews suggest the importance of Philo for understanding the presuppositions of Hebrews³⁸.

This view had been found already in Dey in 1975 when he had argued that Philo was the principal point of comparison with the author of the Epistle³⁹ and has been echoed by many scholars during the eighties. Sören Ruager, for example, in his commentary pointed out that the author was not a pupil of Philo but was at home in the Hellenistic culture of which Philo is an important representative.⁴⁰ This being the case, the important question is how the author uses the traditions which he has in common with Philo, as Thompson correctly pointed out when he argued that

An analysis of the intellectual presuppositions of the author necessitates that one distinguish between tradition and redaction more carefully than has been done in previous scholarship. It is likely that the author of Hebrews employed various traditions which he reshaped for the needs of his audience. Thus a particular parallel may only show the tradition which the author was using.⁴¹

There is, therefore, a growing consensus that the author was acquainted with the 'intellectual presuppositions' which were part and parcel of the educated Hellenistic world, and as such shared by Philo, and which can be roughly categorised as Middle Platonic.

³⁸ Thompson 1982, p. 8

³⁹ Dey, Lala K.K., *The Intermediary World and Patterns of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews*. (Missoula, MT; Scholars Press, 1975)

⁴⁰ Ruager 1987; cf. too Strobel 1991 p. 9 who says he is 'close to Philo'; and A. N. Chester, 'Hebrews: the final sacrifice' *Sacrifice and Redemption Durham Essays in theology*, ed. S. Sykes (Cambridge: CUP, 1990) pp. 57-72. who finds that the links with Philo (and Qumran) are explained by the common first century milieu.

⁴¹ Thompson, 1982 p. 12

Some scholars, however, want to be more specific and see in the author signs of what later developed into full blown gnosticism. This possibility was mentioned by Windisch in his commentary in 1931⁴² but, of course, it was Käsemann who did so much to champion that cause,⁴³ arguing that the gnostic myth of the redeemed redeemer united the themes of pilgrimage, cult and priesthood so prominent in Hebrews. For all the skill with which the case was presented, it has not continued to enjoy a very large following. The main advocate of this view at the present day is Professor Eric Grässer⁴⁴ who has argued that the Nag Hammadi discoveries strengthened Käsemann's argument. rather than weakened it⁴⁵ and in his recent commentary has continued to argue for a gnostic background.⁴⁶ He cited Albert Schweitzer with approval when he said that the purpose of the book is to counter Gnosticism with Christian gnosticism. Where other New Testament writers 'nur durch das Beharrungsvermögen wirkten' the author of Hebrews *attacked*

⁴² Windisch, H. *Der Hebräerbrief* 2nd ed. HNT 14 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1931).

⁴³ Käsemann, E., *Das wandernde Gottesvolk*. Göttingen 1938. (reprinted 1961); tr. as *The wandering people of God. An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews*. tr. R. A. Harrisville and I. L. Sandberg. (Minneapolis: Augsburg), 1984).

⁴⁴ Gert Theissen, *Untersuchungen zum Hebräerbrief*. Studien zum N.T. Band 2. Gütersloh: Mohn, 1969) has also argued that the author's view of creation was closer to gnosticism than to apocalyptic (121), but he also felt that many other themes could have come from other sources.

⁴⁵ Grässer, E., 'Der Hebräerbrief 1938-1963'. *Theol. Rundschau*. N.F. 30. 1964. p. 185; published again in *Aufbruch und Verheissung* pp.48. 'der Wert der Nag Hammadi-Schriften liegt in der Bestätigung dessen, was wir aus den Paulinen, den Past., Joh und Hb schon wissen: nämlich die Indienstnahme eines allen schon vorgegebenen gnostischen Mythos as Interpretament für das Heilsereignis in Christus'. He then went on to list of themes such as the way, pilgrimage, heavenly journey, rest, perfection etc.

⁴⁶ Grässer 1990 p. 27.

false gnosticism which included false teaching about angels and a false attitude to the Old Testament.

However, though writing at the beginning of the decade Thompson in a sense summed up the conclusions at the end of it: 'The attempt to account for the categories and themes of Hebrews against the background of Gnostic presuppositions has not succeeded, despite the valuable contributions of Käsemann, Grässer and Theissen.'⁴⁷ He argued, as well, though that... 'the positive contributions of these interpreters has been in recognising a pattern of argumentation which distinguishes Hebrews from other NT writers.' The problem for scholars, however, is that, given the paucity of our knowledge of Hellenistic thought in the first century, and our lack of knowledge of where the Epistle was written, it is very difficult to be specific about what strands of thought were influenced by what movement.

In the eighties, however, scholars as well as arguing for the Hellenistic background of the author, have also defended his Jewishness.

Earlier scholars such as Michel⁴⁸, Barrett⁴⁹, Michel⁵⁰, Klappert⁵¹ and Hofius⁵² and, though in a difference context,

⁴⁷ Thompson 1982 p. 5.

⁴⁸ O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*. 13th. Ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975) who spoke of the 'intellectual sphere of the hellenistic synagogue.'

⁴⁹ Barrett, C.K., 'The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews' in *Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology* ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: CUP, 1956) pp. 363-393.

⁵⁰ Michel, *O. Der Brief an die Hebräer*. 13th. Ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975)

⁵¹ Klappert, B. *Die Eschatologie des Hebräerbriefes*. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1969).

⁵² Hofius, O., *Der Vorhang vor dem Throne Gottes. Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Hebräerbrief* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1972) and *Katapausis Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1970).

Williamson⁵³ had insisted on a strong Jewish, eschatological, element in the epistle. This insistence on the Jewish character of the book has been echoed in writings in the eighties. Thus Thompson, who argued very strongly for the Greek philosophical flavour of the book nevertheless agreed that the author inherited Jewish eschatological tradition, though he would want to argue that the way he handled those traditions is different from the way other New Testament writers handled them. A very similar viewpoint is found in Strobel's commentary.⁵⁴ Horbury⁵⁵ followed by A. N. Chester⁵⁶, has developed a very interesting theory that the author was not only a Jew but was in touch with living issues of Judaism particularly in relation to the priesthood in first century Judaism. Horbury suggested that 'the antecedents of the priestly thought characteristic of Hebrews should be sought neither in Christianity, nor in sectarian or visionary Judaism, but in the pervasive influence upon Jewry of the Pentateuchal theocracy.'⁵⁷ Clearly the question of Jewish influence on the author is bound up with the question of the Jewishness or otherwise of the recipients and it is to this question we now turn.⁵⁸

⁵³ Williamson 1970 p. 579-580)

⁵⁴ Strobel 1991 p. 15. 'Sie setzt die universale Hoffnung des rabbinischen und apokalyptischen Judentums fort, nun aber in der Neugestalt der gesamtchristlichen Eschatologie.' cf. too Rowland, C. *The Open Heaven* (SPCK, London, 1982) for the view that Jewish apocalyptic tradition lies behind the Epistle.

⁵⁵ Horbury, W. 'The Aaronic Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews', *Journ StudNewTest*. 19 (1983), 43-71.

⁵⁶ Chester, A N, 'Hebrews: the final sacrifice' *Sacrifice and Redemption Durham Essays in theology* ed. S. Sykes (Cambridge: CUP, 1990) pp. 57-72.

⁵⁷ Horbury, 1983 p. 68.

⁵⁸ The question of the author's links with Qumran or Merkhabah mysticism has not arisen in the eighties (though cf Rissi in note 63 p. 78) and so will be omitted from this short survey.

Recipients

Braun, Grässer, Laub, März⁵⁹ and Hegermann⁶⁰ have argued strongly against the view that the recipients were Jewish Christians. Grässer and Weiss believed that the letter was written, not to a particular community but to the church as a whole. He argued that the recipients are 'Christen, ohne Rücksicht auf ihre Herkunft'⁶¹ and Laub and Braun based their argument partly at least on the evidence of the list of Hebrews 6:2.⁶² Most scholars in the eighties, however, have argued or assumed that the recipients were Jewish Christians⁶³ or have been undecided on the issue⁶⁴.

It is when we come to the question as to why the author was writing to his audience and where they were living, in other words what was the *Sitz im Leben* that gave rise to the Epistle that we find the greatest differences of opinions.

As regards where the epistle was written to many scholars writing in the eighties found themselves unable to come to a decision e.g. Bénétreau⁶⁵, Erich Grässer⁶⁶, Weiss⁶⁷ etc., and those who did

⁵⁹ März 1989 p. 19 'Man wird von daher die Adr nicht als speziell judenchristlich geprägte Gruppierung werten dürfen, sonder als eine Gemeinschaft, in der die Ermüdungserscheinungen der nachapostolischen Zeit mit besonderer Schärfe zutage treten.'

⁶⁰ Hegermann, 1988 p. 10 'Aber der Hebr ist weder an Juden noch an Judenchristen geschrieben, sondern an Heidenchristen'.

⁶¹ E. Grässer (1990) p. 24; cf. Weiss 1991 p.71 for a similar quotation.

⁶² Laub 1988 p. 18 and Braun 1984 p.2.

⁶³ Hagner 1990, Kistemaker 1984 p. 17, Casey 1980, p. xii, Morris, 1983 p. 12, Rissi 1987 (on p. 11 he suggested they may previously have been priests or Essenes), Bénétreau 1989 p. 19, Toussaint, S. D. 'The Eschatology of the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews.' *Grace TheolJourn.* 3 (1982), 67-80, Bruce 1990, Ellingworth 1993 p. 27 'a predominantly but not exclusively Jewish-Christian group.'

⁶⁴ Attridge 1989 p.12f, Strobel 1991 p. 10f but on p. 16 he suggested that the work itself is Hellenistic Jewish Christian, Vanhoye 1989 p.2,

⁶⁵ Bénétreau 1989, vol. I. p. 23.

make a decision, acknowledged the tentative nature of that decision. It is fairly clear from Hebrews 13:24, however, that the epistle is involved in some way or other with Italy⁶⁸. However, scholars are divided as to whether they think the Epistle was written from Italy or to Italy. A few scholars thought that the Epistle was written in Rome, and so tells us nothing about the destination of the Epistle⁶⁹. Rome, however, is very unlikely as Raymond Brown has pointed out⁷⁰ for two reasons: firstly, if the author was greeting a community outside Rome and was being joined in this greetings by members of his own community (13:22) then we would expect him to say ‘Those from *Rome* greet you’, not those from Italy. Secondly, and more importantly, if Hebrews came from Rome, then we would expect it to reflect Roman views, whereas, as Brown shows, just the opposite is true. Many more scholars, therefore, think, on the balance of probability, that the letter was written to Rome e.g. Hagner⁷¹, Attridge⁷², Bruce⁷³, Wilson⁷⁴, Rissi⁷⁵, Weiss⁷⁶. This argument has

⁶⁶ Erich Grässer 1990. p.22; he allowed for the possibility that it could have been written in Rome.

⁶⁷ Weiss, 1991 p. 76.

⁶⁸ Übelacker 1989 p. 12

⁶⁹ cf. For example, in an earlier period W. F. Howard, ‘The Epistle to the Hebrews’. *Interpretation*, 5 (1951) 84-86. (He thought it was written from Rome to Ephesus.) and A. Ehrhardt, *The Framework of the New Testament Stories*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 1964. (He thought it was sent from Rome to Jerusalem to comfort Christians there on the Fall of Jerusalem)

⁷⁰ Brown, 1983 p. 147

⁷¹ Hagner 1990. Hagner stressed the tentative nature of any estimate concerning date, provenance and destination of the Epistle.

⁷² Attridge 1989 p. 9-10.

⁷³ Bruce 1990 p.

⁷⁴ Wilson 1987 p. 14

⁷⁵ Rissi 1987 p. 11. He thought the recipients were Jewish Christians located in Rome but separated from the main church there.

⁷⁶ Weiss 1991 p. 76

been developed by Raymond Brown⁷⁷. He has proposed two main reasons for accepting a Roman destination for the Epistle: firstly the fact that Hebrews was known at a very early date by Roman authorities such as Clement of Rome, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Commentaries of Hippolytus and the presbyter Gaius; secondly, the fact of Rome's reluctance to include the Epistle in the Canon. This was because they knew it was not written by the Apostle Paul and so did not meet the criterion for acceptance. On the evidence that is available at the moment, if one had to choose, Rome would probably be the best choice.

The question as to why the author wrote the Epistle has been answered in many different ways in our period. Some scholars see the problem which arose in the Christian community as a general one, a 'faith crisis', as Laub puts it⁷⁸ usually associated with a delay in the Parousia and the general lassitude which is characteristic of second and third generation Christians who face a tension between eschatological hope and the actual course of history with its pressures for the faithful.⁷⁹ William Lane argued that the recipients had already suffered under Claudius in Rome and were now facing danger again, with the result that they were tempted to grow lax in their commitment to the Christian message.⁸⁰

Many scholars, however, would be more specific in the identification of the crisis in the Epistle, linking it more directly with the relationship between the Christian community and Judaism.

⁷⁷ Brown, *Antioch and Rome*, 1983 p. 142-151.

⁷⁸ Laub 1988 p. 3f.

⁷⁹ Weiss 1991 p 73. 'In diesem Sinne ist auch der Hebr Dokument für das Problem der "Parusieverzögerung" im Sinne des Problems der "sich dehnenden Zeit"'; cf. too Strobel 1991 who thought that the crisis lay in the delay of the Parousia. The author does not give a new meaning to it (like Paul and the Synoptics), but 'mit lebhafter Naherwartung reagiert und der angeschriebenen Gemeinde die Notwendigkeit der Ausdauer einschärft'. p. 15.

⁸⁰ Lane 1991 vol. 1. P.lvi. Cp Kistemaker p. 16 who thought that they were in a time of sustained peace and had relaxed spiritually.

Some see the trigger for the problem to be the general suffering and persecution which Christians had endured and their natural desire to avoid this suffering by reverting to Judaism. In 1972, for example, Buchanan had argued that they were Jewish Christians who had lived in the diaspora but who had returned to Jerusalem to await the establishment of the reign of God. They were a very strict communal monastic sect, very similar to the Qumran community and had given up their goods — hence the author says in Heb. 10:34: ‘For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the loss⁸¹ of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one..’ Now, however, they were losing hope and perhaps considering taking part in the Day of Atonement ceremonies as a means thereby of effecting the coming of the Kingdom. In the meantime they were beginning to resent the relinquishing of their private property when they joined the community. Robinson gave a new twist to the theory of Christians reluctant to face persecution, when he postulated that they were rich Jewish Christian businessmen who had their lives so changed by the Neronian persecution that they were tempted to revert to a *religio licita* (10: 32-34; 12:4; 13:3, 12-14). Guthrie⁸² also thought that they were Jewish Christians in Rome, who were in danger of falling into some kind of apostasy to Judaism.⁸³ and Schmithals⁸⁴ argued that they were living in the period after the Fall of Jerusalem when they were deprived of the official protection given to Jews by the Romans. They had to be encouraged in their vulnerability.

⁸¹ ἀρπαγήν is a stronger word than ‘loss’, and denotes ‘unlawful robbery’. Hence Buchanan’s theory is weakened at this point.

⁸² Guthrie 1990 p. 38

⁸³ cf. R. E. Glaze, ‘Introduction to Hebrews.’ *Theological Educator* 32 (1985) 20-37 who argued that it was written to a congregation of Jewish Christians at Rome in the late 60’s, who were tempted to seek security from imperial persecution by reverting to Judaism which had the status of a legal religion. The purpose of the Epistle was to get the recipients to leave the synagogue and make a complete break with Judaism.

⁸⁴ W. Schmithals, *Neues Testament und Gnosis* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft, 1984) p. 138-144

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