Logical Terminology in the Epistles to the Hebrews

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It is usually recognized that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is presenting an argument for the superiority of Christianity to the religion of the Old Covenant and that he bases this argument on the comparison of the Son of God with the angels and with Moses, on the comparison of the new high priest with the priests of old, and on the comparison of the sanctuary and the sacrifice of the New Covenant with those of the Old. It is furthermore agreed that he uses means of rhetoric to get his point across. Thus Michel says: "In the letter to the Hebrews we have before us the first sermon whose author knew and imported into Christianity all the techniques of ancient rhetoric and all its speech forms."[1] However, I have not been able to find a detailed analysis of these rhetorical means and style forms or an investigation of the author's reasoning in detail.[2] This article is intended to show several style forms used by the author and to describe their purpose in the context of the epistle.

I

TERMS OF NECESSITY AND LOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

The fact that the particle γάρ occurs 91 times in the epistle would tend to make clear that not only the general argument is intended to be logical or provable but that the individual steps in the argument also are based on reasoning. While this does not yet approach the number of occurrences in Romans (146) it is still a considerable number. It is of further interest that other conjunctions and particles and prepositional phrases that express some form of logical connection are used in great number: οὖν, 12 occurrences; διό and ἐπεί, 9 each; ὅθεν, 6; καίπερ, 3; διὰ τοῦτο, ἐάνπερ, διότι, and ἄρα, 2 each; διὰ ἣν αἰτίαν, τοιγαροῦν, and δήπου (*hapax legomenon*), 1 each.

But of more interest are cases where a necessity is declared. These are worthy of a more detailed discussion. 2:1: "Therefore we must (δεῖ) pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." The "must" is not due to some outward authority that has decreed

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[1] Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), p. 4. See also the arrangement according to the fourfold division of a discourse which was conventional among ancient rhetoricians, as given in A. H. McNeile, *An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp. 225—229: *prooimion, diegesis, apodeixis, epilogos.*

[2] I am grateful to Professor Paul M. Bretscher, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., for calling my attention to a typewritten Ph. D. dissertation at Washington University, St. Louis,

Mo., by W. A. Jennrich, "Rhetorical Style in the New Testament: Romans and Hebrews," 1947. It is a full discussion of rhetorical forms but has only little relation to the matters discussed in this paper.

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365

this but is an "inner necessity resulting of itself from the described conditions." [3] 2:10: "For it was fitting (ἔπρεπεν) that He, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering." Here also it is not an external ordinance but what Michel calls "the expression of theological reflection and experience." [4] The same inner necessity is found in 2:17: "Therefore He had to be made (ὤφειλεν) like his brethren in every respect." Man cannot be redeemed in any other way. And again 5:3: "Because of this he is bound (ὀφείλει) to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people." Lünemann is correct in saying that reference is not "to the precept in the law of Moses, but to the inner necessity arising from the nature of the case." [5]

In 7:26 also no underlying external cause can be determined: "It was fitting (ἔπρεπεν) that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, ..." 9:26 presents an imaginary case where ἔδει again would point to a necessity inherent in the nature of the case: "he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world." There are also three occurrences of ἀναγκαῖον or ἀνάγκη. In 8:3 a syllogism can be detected: Major premise: "Every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices." Minor premise (not expressed but proven in ch. 7): "Christ is a high priest." Conclusion: "Hence it is necessary (ἀναγκαῖον) for this priest also

to have something to offer." 9:16 and 9:23 use ἀνάγκη also for such cases of inner necessity.

5:12 uses three terms of necessity which, however, are based on an external reason and thus do not exhibit this inner necessity: "For though by this time you ought (ὀφείλοντες) to be teachers, you need (χρείαν ἔχετε) some one to teach you. ... You need (χρείαν ἔχοντες) milk, not solid food." That they should be teachers is expected because of their long period as Christians, but their need for being taught and for milk is due to their lack of development and progress in the Christian faith.

Into this group also belong a number of passages where an impossibility is declared which is only the negative side of a necessity. Usually this impossibility is stated without giving a reason for it, it is an axiomatic impossibility. 6:4: "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened." [6] 6:18: "... it is impossible that God should prove false." 10:4: "For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." 10:11: ". . . the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins." 11:6: "And without faith it is impossible to please Him." Although the writer continues, "For whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him," this does not constitute a true reason for the impos-

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[3] G. Lünemann, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1885), p. 422.

[4] Michel, p. 77.

[5] Lünemann, pp. 504 f.

[6] That ἀδύνατον is stronger in force than οὐ πρέπει is brought out in Chrysostom's statement, quoted by B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1920), p. 150, and referred to by Michel, p. 147: οὐκ εἶπεν οὐ πρέπει οὐδὲ συμφέρει οὐδὲ ἔξεστιν ἀλλ' ἀδύνατον, ὥστε εἰς ἀπόγνωσιν ἐμβάλλειν.

sibility, it only describes the situation once more. But a reason for an impossibility is stated in 10:1: "For since the Law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near." But again it is the nature of the case itself, not some outward ordinance, that accounts for the stated impossibility. The only case in which an impossibility is not based on such inner reasoning is perhaps 3:19: "So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief." 7:7 contains a very strong simple axiomatic statement: "It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior." This presupposes, however, a certain meaning of εὐλογεῖν. Once this meaning is granted, the axiom is clear. This statement could also be seen as the major premise of a syllogism whose minor premise is found in 6b and whose conclusion is to be supplied by the readers. In 7:14 the word πρόδηλον is used to express a historical fact: "It is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah." In 7:15 κατάδηλον is based on a historical fact: "This [that is, the failure of the old and the superiority of the new priesthood] becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek."

Thus in the majority of the cases discussed, 16 out of 22, the author uses terms of necessity to express an inner necessity, that is, a necessity of no outward ordinance but based only on the nature and the condition of the matter under discussion. The author would most likely not deny that in the final analysis God's will stands behind this necessity, but he feels that the statements in themselves are convincing to every reader.

II
RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

A rhetorical question is by definition a question put only for oratorical or literary effect, the answer being implied in the question. If the epistle uses all means of ancient rhetoric, then we certainly would expect a number of rhetorical questions also. And we are not disappointed. A closer analysis proves rewarding again, even if it may not lead to revolutionary results.[7]

Like regular questions, rhetorical questions also either contain an interrogative pronoun or else the whole sentence is a question requiring Yes or No for an answer. It is interesting to notice that in Hebrews all rhetorical questions of the latter type contain the negative and thus require a positive answer. No further discussion of these is necessary; they simply need to be listed.

1:14: "Are they not all ministering spirits?"

3:16: "Was it not all those who left Egypt?"

3:17: "Was it not with those who sinned?"

10:2: "Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered?"

12:9: "Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?"

Of course, rhetorical questions requiring a negative answer are conceivable, thus it really is noteworthy that here only such questions are found that expect a positive answer.

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7 Jennrich, p. 113, mentions 15 rhetorical questions and discusses some of them briefly, e. g., an appeal to the obvious, 1:5; or obvious conclusions if the first clause is admitted: 10:2; 1:13; 1:14, etc. He does not draw the distinction which is set forth in this paper.

On the other hand, rhetorical questions containing an interrogative pronoun also could easily expect almost any answer, for instance: "Who is it that saved us?" but in this epistle they all just require the answer "No one," or "Nothing," etc. All these questions could have been asked without the pronoun, expecting a negative answer, but the author here uses the pronoun. Most of these questions are formed with a form of τίς.

1:5: "For to what angel did God ever say . . . ?" Answer: "To none."

1:13: "But to what angel has He ever said . . . ?" Answer again: "To none."

3:18 is interesting: "And to whom did He swear that they should never enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?" The real answer to the rhetorical question is supplied in this εἰ μή clause, and as it is now, we could only give the answer: "To no one else."

7:11: "What further need would there have been . . . ?" Answer: "None."

11:32: "And what more shall I say?" Answer expected: "Nothing more is necessary."

12:7: "For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" Answer: "There is none."

13:6: "What can man do to me?" (an O. T. quotation). Answer: "Nothing."

The only question containing a different interrogative is found in 2:3: "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" But the answer here also is just a negative statement: "We shall not escape."

In conclusion of this section on questions we may therefore say that the author uses rhetorical questions rather frequently, but that when he expects the answer Yes, he uses a sentence question; when he expects a No, he uses a question containing an interrogative pronoun or adverb.[8]

III
COMPARISONS

Terms of comparison also are quite frequent in Hebrews.[9] A few numbers may be given here: ὡς has 22 occurrences, οὕτως 9, καθώς 8, τοιοῦτος and τοσοῦτος 5 each, ὥσπερ and composites of ὁμοιόω 3 each, ὡσεί, καθάπερ, καθώσπερ, and ὥστε 1 each. This does not prove much since the occurrences in the Pauline epistles also are quite high. But a concordance will further disclose that κρείσσων occurs 13 times in Hebrews and only 6 times in the rest of the New Testament. Occurrences of περισσότερον and περισσοτέρως, although only 4, are exceeded only in 2 Corinthians.

There are 20 simple comparisons, using the comparative degree of adjectives or adverbs, sometimes two together.[10] There are four other occurrences of comparative degrees but not comparative force.[11] There is no need to discuss these further. But it would seem that this is quite a high number even if no figures for comparison with other epistles are available.

The following cases are a little more complex because they involve the comparison not of simple things or persons but of conditions or realities: 9:13-14 contains

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[8] 3:16a and 3:17a are not truly rhetorical questions. But the answer is supplied in new rhetorical questions, discussed above.

[9] Jennrich, p. 130, mentions 38 comparisons, calls this figure exceedingly high, but does not give a further analysis of them.

[10] 2:1; 4:12; 6:9; 6:17; 7:7; 7:15; 7:19; 7:26; 9:11; 9:23; 10:34; 11:4; 11:16; 11:25; 11:26; 11:35; 11:40; 12:13; 12:24; 13:19.

[11] 6:19; 10:8; 10:32; 13:23.

the following reasoning: the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sanctify (to a limited extent); the blood of Christ is greater; therefore: "How much more shall the blood of Christ . . . purify your conscience." In 10:25 the following reasoning is involved: Fellowship meetings are necessary anyway; but the end is near; therefore it is the more necessary that we do not neglect to meet together, etc. A similar analysis could be made for 10:28-29: "A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?" 12:9 reads: "We have had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?" 12:25: "For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape if we reject Him who warns from heaven."

But the situation is really complex where two comparative statements are connected by a comparing adverb, according to this scheme: as A is greater than B, so A1 is greater than B1. In these cases — there are three of them — the author truly betrays his logical mind and his superior ability to reason, besides his power of expression. The following are of such a nature: 1:4:

"having become as much superior to angels as the name He has obtained is more excellent than theirs." 3:3: "Yet Jesus has been counted worthy of as much more glory than Moses as the builder of a house has more honor than the house." This may be considered an enthymeme. 7:20-22 is dissolved in the RSV and NEB into smaller sentences, but the KJV shows again the proportional thinking as it is in the Greek: "And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (. . .) By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament."

The ultimate in complexity is found in 8:6, where three such comparatives are combined in an extremely artistic manner: "But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant He mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises."

To my knowledge, such double or triple comparisons are absent from the rest of the New Testament and show very convincingly the unique reasoning power of this author.

In all three areas discussed — terms of necessity and logical conclusions, rhetorical questions, comparisons — we have thus seen the rhetorical ability and the conclusive thinking of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, apparently not equalled anywhere else in the New Testament.[12]

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[12] Jennrich, p. 182: "The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews shows a quality of studied literary art above all the other New Testament writers."