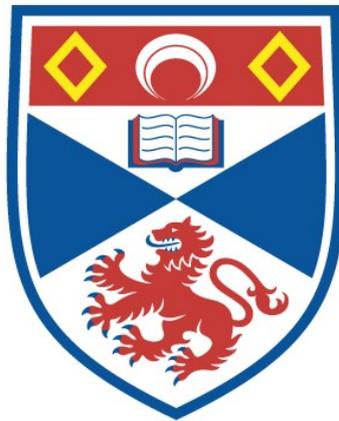


FAITHFULNESS AND THE PURPOSE OF HEBREWS : A
SOCIAL IDENTITY APPROACH

Matthew J. Marohl

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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A Social Identity Approach*

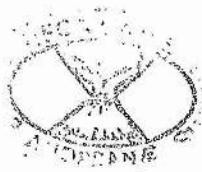
A thesis submitted
in application for the degree

PhD in New Testament

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To
John Arthur and Nola Gustafson
and
to the members of
Grace Lutheran Church, LaGrange, Illinois, USA

Abstract

It has become commonplace for interpreters to refer to Hebrews as a 'mystery,' or an 'enigma.' Indeed, many questions have remained unresolved. The aim of this thesis is to provide fresh answers to several questions by employing that branch of social psychology known as social identity theory.

Who were the addressees? Relating the text to social identity theory, I conclude that the addressees categorised the world into two groups, 'us' and 'them.' They understood their group, 'us,' to be the 'faithful.' Similarly, they understood 'them' (a symbolic outgroup of 'all others'), to be the 'unfaithful.'

How did the addressees understand the faithfulness of Jesus? Why did the author compare Jesus with Moses, Melchizedek, and others? Relating Hebrews to the theories of 'prototypicality' and 'shared life story,' I argue that the author described the faithfulness of Jesus as 'prototypical,' and that he portrayed all others in relation to Jesus. In addition, he integrated both Jesus and the addressees into an ongoing story of faithfulness.

What is the meaning of the promised 'rest?' Utilising a model of 'present temporal orientation,' I conclude that the author described the 'antecedent' faithfulness of many 'witnesses' and the 'forthcoming' promised rest of the addressees. He also encouraged them to use 'foresight,' to 'consider their future, by looking to the past.'

Finally, what was the purpose of the text? Social identity theorists explain that groups with a negative social identity have two broad options: 'social mobility' and 'social change.' I argue that the author provided internal constraints which were meant to prevent 'social mobility,' and utilised 'social creativity' (an aspect of 'social change') to provide a positive social identity for the addressees.

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Introduction

Why was Hebrews written? What was the purpose of the text? The discussion of the purpose of Hebrews is traditionally connected to the discussion of the identity and social context of the addressees. In other words, it is often assumed that to answer the question, 'Why was Hebrews written?', it must first be established, 'To whom was Hebrews written?' Herein lies a problem for modern readers of the text. There is little, if any, consensus regarding the identity of the addressees. In turn, there is little, if any, consensus regarding the purpose of Hebrews. While most still hold to the 'traditional view,' that the addressees were 'Jewish Christians'¹ in danger of falling back into 'Judaism,' a growing number of interpreters have concluded that nothing can be known regarding the identity of the addressees. And so the debate continues. Who were the addressees of Hebrews? And, perhaps more importantly, what was the purpose of the text? The aim of this thesis is to provide fresh answers to these questions by employing that branch of social psychology known as social identity theory.

The founder of social identity theory, Henri Tajfel, describes the process of social categorisation as the simplifying and systematising of one's environment, by placing persons, objects, or events into groups with similar persons, objects, or events.² In other words, when individuals encounter new persons, objects, or events, they evaluate them and place them into a category which makes sense to them. Tajfel further notes that this categorisation process is controlled by the 'accentuation effect,' which is the tendency to accentuate the similarities between persons, objects, or events which have been placed within the

¹ While most biblical interpreters continue to use the terms 'Jew,' 'Gentile,' and 'Christian,' in the discussion of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews, I will argue at the end of Chapter 1 that these terms are problematic. As will be seen below, I will use the terms 'Judean,' 'non-Judean,' and 'Christ-followers' in the discussion of the possible identity of the addressees. I will, then, place the terms 'Jew,' 'Gentile,' and 'Christian' in inverted commas to call attention to both the problematic terms used by other interpreters and my disapproval of their continued use.

² Tajfel 1978b: 61.

same category.³ Therefore, social categorisation helps to structure what would otherwise be a chaotic environment. Individuals are constantly bombarded with new social situations and without a method of simplifying and systematizing these experiences it would be difficult to evaluate and interpret the situation.

Perhaps at this point, a practical example of the social categorisation process would be helpful. Shortly after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Scrolls and the group which they were thought to represent were commonly categorised as 'Essene.' This categorisation simplified and systematised the Scrolls, and helped to make sense of this 'new' information. Further, this categorisation assisted in providing structure to the discovery. While many, perhaps most, interpreters still hold to the 'Essene-hypothesis,' or a variation of the hypothesis, some have questioned the validity of this initial categorisation. Regardless of one's view concerning the Dead Sea Scrolls, there is little debate over the influence that this categorisation has had within the subsequent study of the Scrolls. It is not, however, only in the case of a rare discovery that we engage in the process of social categorisation. This process occurs whenever we encounter new persons, objects, or events. Whether categorising the Dead Sea Scrolls as being 'Essene' or categorising an acquaintance as being a 'bookworm,' we tend to simplify and systematise our environment through the process of social categorisation.

So, why begin a thesis concerned with the identity of the addressees of Hebrews and the purpose of the text with a description of the social categorisation process? In short, while historical critics have not used the language of Henri Tajfel, the historical critical method for examining identity is one of social categorisation. In terms of the social categorisation process, historical critics seek to place the addressees of Hebrews into a category with similar first-century Mediterranean people. In other words, the historical critic seeks to categorise the identity of the addressees of Hebrews. Who were the addressees? Were they 'Jewish' or 'Gentile Christians?' Perhaps they were former Essenes, Samaritans, or Ebionites? Like the straight-forward nature of the question, the historical

³ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 19.

critical method for analysing identity is one of simplicity. What were the various groups of the first-century Mediterranean world? What were the unique characteristics of these groups? Does the text point to any of these unique characteristics? While both the question and the method of inquiry may appear simple, the multiplicity of answers and a commonly voiced frustration point to a deeper, problematic level to this question. Perhaps, then, it is best to begin with a follow-up question. 'Why has it been so difficult to answer the question: Who were the addressees?'

Albert Vanhoye, in his text, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, explains that the author does not offer an exact designation of the addressees.

The Hebrews are never named in the document. Nor is the name 'Jews', so frequently used by Paul, found in it, nor 'Israelites', nor any reference to the 'circumcision'. In fact, the text contains no exact designation of the addressees. It is clearly speaking to Christians (cf. Heb 3,14), and Christians of long standing at that (cf. 5,12). But the author neither indicates the place where they live nor their ethnic background. He does not speak of what they were before their conversion. He does not make use of any distinction between Jew and pagans. The only reality which attracts his attention is their calling to be Christians: with might and main he seeks to foster this call (cf. 2, 3-4; 3,1; 4,14; 10,19-25; 12,22-25; 13,7-8).⁴

In this important observation, Vanhoye points to one of the central problems in the present discussion of the identity of the addressees. Namely, Hebrews does not offer the type of information commonly used by historical critics in the discussion of identity.

Vanhoye's observation is certainly not unique. It has become almost commonplace to refer to the 'mystery' of Hebrews, to speak of Hebrews as an 'enigma.' It is not only the question of the identity of the addressees that has proven problematic for historical critics, the identity of the author, the date of the text, its literary genre, its place of writing, its destination, the social context in which it was written, its structure, and its very purpose have all been widely debated and difficult to discern. For many, these problems may all be traced to

⁴ Vanhoye 1989: 2.

the text's lack of specific historical data. Therefore, while some continue to attempt to answer the question, 'Who were the addressees of Hebrews?', others voice frustration at the perceived impossibility of the task. Perhaps the best example of such frustration is found in the writing of Floyd V. Filson. According to him, the identity of the addressees cannot be known.

It is unfortunate that so much attention has been paid to questions of authorship, destination, place of writing and date. No adequate evidence is available to support a definitive and dependable answer. The frustratingly inconclusive study of Hebrews should make it clear that we cannot find certain answers to the questions: Who? To whom? From where? When?"⁵

Frustration, such as that voiced by Filson, is justified. There is an incompatibility of the historical critical method to the data available in Hebrews. However, this may only be a symptom of a much more significant problem associated with an historical critical investigation. The larger issue concerns the categories commonly used by historical critics. As noted above, social categorisation is a process by which individuals simplify and systematise their environment by placing new persons, objects, or events into categories with similar persons, objects, or events. This means that the individual places the new person, object, or event into a category which the individual deems appropriate, a category that the individual has used before to simplify and systematise the environment. Because the categorisation process of historical criticism relies upon categories selected and defined by modern interpreters, the categories may be inadequate. As we will see, the inadequacies of such modern categories include both the use of problematic terminology and problematic conceptions of the nature of the various first-century groups. For example, a modern reader might envision the first-century addressees as having been 'Jewish.' Further, 'Judaism' might be understood to be a 'religion.' For some, the 'religion' of 'Judaism' is understood to have been in direct conflict or competition with the 'religion' of 'Christianity.' Attempting to place the addressees into one of the categories with which *we* are familiar, is, after all, a natural part of *our* social

⁵ Filson 1978: 12.

categorisation process. However, in order to understand the identity of the addressees, we must attempt to understand *their* process of social categorisation. In other words, *what categories did the addressees use to simplify and systematise their environment?* In short, the information present in Hebrews does not correspond to the categories proposed by historical critics, not because Hebrews does not offer relevant data, but because historical critics have not been employing appropriate categories. This thesis will utilise ‘social identity theory’ to identify and interpret the social categories employed by the author and the addressees of Hebrews and, finally, to identify and interpret the purpose of the text itself.

In Chapter 1, I will outline the historical critical process for examining identity. Next, I will present a description of each of the eight common proposals concerning the identity of the addressees of Hebrews. Finally, I will engage in a critical examination of the categorisation process of historical criticism. At the end of the chapter, I will propose that the problem of understanding the identity of the addressees is not rooted in a lack of information within the text, but with an inadequate conceptual framework for understanding identity. An adequate conceptual framework will seek to answer two essential questions. First, how did first-century Mediterranean groups form and maintain identity? Second, what social categories were employed by the author and the addressees of Hebrews?

In Chapter 2, I will outline the historical critical process for analysing purpose. Next, I will provide a description of each of the four common proposals concerning the purpose of Hebrews. Finally, I will engage in an examination of the historical critical process for analysing the purpose of Hebrews. At the end of this chapter, I will propose that the multiplicity of proposals regarding the purpose of the text reflects the multiplicity of proposals regarding the identity of the addressees. Further, a proposal regarding identity which is based upon an inappropriate conceptual framework will necessarily produce an inadequate proposal regarding the purpose of Hebrews.

In Chapter 3, I will offer a thorough overview of ‘social identity theory,’ the theoretical framework with which I come at the problem in a new way. Social identity theory is a social psychological theory that was first proposed in the

1970s by Henri Tajfel and which has undergone two decades of helpful critique and development by subsequent social psychologists. This theory not only offers insight into the social categorisation process, but more importantly, helps to describe how social groups form and maintain identity. Therefore, this chapter will describe not only the social categorisation process, but will also define social identity, the role of social comparison in identity formation and maintenance, and the function of time within social identity. In addition, and of particular importance to the study of Hebrews, I will discuss the 'nature' of outgroups according to social identity theory. For example, need an outgroup be a 'real' group, or might an ingroup compare itself to a 'symbolic' outgroup?

In Chapter 4, I will consider the cultural context of the first-century Mediterranean world. Specifically, I will address in this chapter a fundamental question, 'Is social identity theory an appropriate conceptual framework within which to examine the identity of the addressees of Hebrews?' While the majority of the chapter will be devoted to this important question, the dynamic of temporal orientation will also be outlined in Chapter 4. Here, it will be argued that unlike the 'future temporal orientation' of most twenty-first century North Atlantic interpreters, the addressees of Hebrews were likely to have had a 'present temporal orientation.' It will be proposed, then, that social identity theory integrated with a working model of present temporal orientation serves as an appropriate conceptual framework within which to examine the identity of the addressees of Hebrews.

In Chapter 5, I will consider whether or not the addressees of Hebrews understood themselves as having been a social group. In other words, did the addressees understand themselves to be a distinct group, an 'us?' I will argue that an affirmative answer to the question arises from data within the text. Next, I will examine the social identities of the addressees of Hebrews in light of the conceptual framework of social identity theory, relating text to theory in a general way. Here, the social categories employed by the author and the addressees of Hebrews will be identified. Further, these social categories will be shown to reveal how the addressees of Hebrews understood themselves. Rather than to rely upon the categories of 'Jewish Christian' or 'Gentile Christian,' this chapter will

reveal how the addressees of Hebrews understood their own identity.

In Chapter 6, I will examine the faithfulness of Jesus in Hebrews. The author of Hebrews places a significant emphasis on comparison, regularly comparing the faithfulness of Jesus with others. The faithfulness of Jesus is compared to that of Moses (Hebrews 3:1-6). Likewise, his faithfulness is compared to that of the 'great cloud of witnesses' (Hebrews 12:1-2). In order to understand the author's use of comparison and his emphasis on the faithfulness of Jesus, I will employ two relevant areas of social identity theory: the theory of 'shared life story' and the theory of 'prototypicality.' Together, these theories will enable me to interpret the role of the faithfulness of Jesus in Hebrews.

In Chapter 7, I will examine the present temporal orientation of the addressees of Hebrews, again relating text to theory. Why is it necessary to consider issues of temporality within the discussion of social identity in Hebrews? In short, the author thoroughly integrated issues of identity and time. Therefore, to more fully understand social identity in Hebrews, it is necessary to consider the role of time within the text. Specifically, this section will address four issues regarding temporality. First, what was the role of the 'antecedent' in Hebrews? Second, what was the role of the 'forthcoming?' Third, what was the role of 'foresight?' Fourth, is there evidence of 'imaginary time' in Hebrews? In addition, this chapter will conclude with a description of the meaning of the promised 'rest.'

In Chapter 8, I will broaden the discussion from the identity of the addressees of Hebrews to the purpose of the text. As noted above, the discussion of the purpose of Hebrews has traditionally been connected to the discussion of the identity and social context of the addressees of Hebrews. As will be seen in Chapter 1, there is both a multiplicity of proposals regarding the identity of the addressees and a growing frustration over the question. As explained in Chapter 2, there is also a multiplicity of proposals regarding the purpose of Hebrews and, again, a growing frustration. However, if we take seriously the conclusions made in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 regarding the identity of the addressees, it is possible to present a new proposal regarding the purpose of the text. This proposal, based upon the culturally appropriate conceptual framework of social identity theory

and present temporal orientation, will in turn serve as a helpful tool for the interpretation of Hebrews.

Finally, I will conclude that by utilising social identity theory and a model of present temporal orientation, it is possible to identify and interpret the social categories employed by the author and the addressees of Hebrews. Rather than using the categories of 'Jewish Christian' and 'Gentile Christian,' the author and the addressees simplified and systematised the world into two groups, 'us' and 'them.' They understood their group, 'us,' to be the 'faithful.' Similarly, they understood 'them' (a symbolic outgroup of 'all others'), to be the 'unfaithful.'

Next, I will conclude that the theories of 'shared life story' and 'prototypicality' serve as appropriate theoretical frameworks for interpreting the faithfulness of Jesus in Hebrews. The author described the faithfulness of Jesus as perfect, or prototypical. All other faith examples, therefore, are described in relation to the prototypical faithfulness of Jesus. In addition, the author integrated both Jesus and the addressees into an ongoing story of faithfulness.

After an analysis of faithfulness and Jesus in Hebrews, I will examine the faithfulness of the addressees in the context of present temporal orientation. I will argue that the author described the 'antecedent' faithfulness of Abraham, Moses, and many others. In addition, he encouraged the addressees to consider their 'forthcoming' promised rest.

Finally, I will argue that the purpose of the text was to establish internal constraints which would limit the possibility of 'social mobility.' In addition, the author used 'social creativity' to redefine the value placed upon the ingroup identity descriptor. In this case, 'faithfulness' was re-defined and the addressees were offered a positive social identity.

Henri Tajfel could have had no concept of the far reaching influence of social identity theory he first developed in the 1970s. Sadly, Tajfel died only a decade after it was first proposed. However, social psychologists around the world have continued to test and develop this important tool. In this thesis, social identity theory and a model of present temporal orientation provide the conceptual framework within which to understand the identity of the addressees of Hebrews and the purpose of the text. While such inter-disciplinary projects are rarely

imagined in the early stages of the development of such theories, subsequent projects such as this thesis can be informative beyond the boundaries and limitations of both New Testament interpretation and social identity theory.

Chapter 1

The Historical Critical Investigation of the Identity of the Addressees of Hebrews: An Overview and Critique

The discussion of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews often includes mixed reactions and emotions. While some readers conclude with great confidence that the identity of the addressees is made clear in the text, others conclude with equal confidence that the text offers little evidence of the addressees' identity. And so, the debate goes on. Who were the addressees of Hebrews? In this chapter, I will outline the historical critical method for examining identity, and specifically, the method that has been used in the discussion of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews. Next, I will outline the eight most common proposals regarding the identity of the addressees. After an outline of the eight proposals, I will critique the categorisation process of historical critics. Here, I will conclude that the 'problem' inherent in the discussion of the identity of the addressees is not a lack of data in Hebrews, but lies in the use of inadequate categories. In other words, the information available in Hebrews may not neatly correspond to the categories commonly employed by historical critics, but this information does point to the social categories used by the author and the addressees.

1.1 The Historical Critical Method⁶ and the Question of Identity

The historical critical method for analysing the probable identity of an individual or group is a three-step process. First, the historical critic must identify the various groups of the first-century Mediterranean world. For example, the interpreter might identify 'Jews' and 'Gentiles.' Second, the known individuals

⁶ While historical criticism has proven to be the primary method with which to approach the question of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews, other methods have been employed. For example, with the canonical approach, Brevard Childs finds the addressees to have been 'Christians' in danger of 'falling away from their confession.' Childs 1984: 408-409.

or groups are defined and differentiated by their unique characteristics. For example, one might understand ‘Jews’ as having been circumcised and ‘Gentiles’ as having been uncircumcised. Third, the historical critic closely examines the text for information which points to the unique characteristics of one of the known individuals or groups. For example, does the text in some way deal with the issue of circumcision? If so, does this information provide any clues to the identity of the individual or group? After this process of comparing the information available concerning a specific individual or group with the perceived characteristics of other individuals or groups, a conclusion is drawn regarding the identity of the individual or group in question.

Within this three-step process for examining the possible identity of an individual or group, the second and third steps tend to be the primary areas open for debate. Worded differently, the historical critical process often encourages debate over: (1) the ‘unique’ characteristics of an individual or group and whether or not these characteristics are appropriate tools for categorisation; and (2) over the presence of data in a text which might conclusively point to a commonly recognized individual or group characteristic. For example, if a ‘unique’ characteristic is proposed, is this characteristic true for all group members? Is this characteristic true of all group members regardless of location or time? Is this characteristic actually unique or do other groups share in this trait? Finally, is there any evidence in the text of this unique characteristic?

In the case of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews, I have examined the methods and results of nearly 200 interpreters from over a 150 year period. The conclusions of the interpreters may be broken into eight categories. The addressees of Hebrews are variously understood to have been: (1) ‘Jewish Christians;’ (2) ‘Gentile Christians;’ (3) both ‘Jewish’ and ‘Gentile Christians;’ (4) a group that had some type of relationship to the Essenes; (5) Samaritan ‘Christians;’ (6) Ebionite ‘Christians;’ (7) ‘non-Christians;’ and (8) ‘Christians.’ I will outline each proposed group identity below, paying attention to both the assumptions concerning the unique characteristics of each group and the information available within Hebrews. While it is impossible to summarise the specific methodology of each work referenced in this chapter, a few

generalizations can be made. First, Hebrews is commonly understood to have both 'exposition'⁷ and 'exhortation.'⁸ Second, the language of the 'exposition' is often thought to reveal the unique characteristics of a specific group, and therefore, the identity of the addressees. For example, for those who understand the addressees to be 'Jewish Christians,' the use of the Old Testament is often thought to be compatible with a unique group characteristic, that of knowledge of the Old Testament. Third, it is understood by many that the 'exhortation' reveals the specific social situation of the addressees. For example, the addressees may be weakening in their commitment to 'Christianity' or in danger of apostasy. Finally, this methodology is one of mixing and matching the above observations. In other words, matching the conclusions made from the 'exposition' regarding identity with the conclusions made from the 'exhortation' regarding social situation.

While understanding the roles of the 'exposition' and the 'exhortation' is important, there is an additional dynamic at work for many interpreters of Hebrews. There has long been a debate whether or not Hebrews presents a 'Jewish-Christian' polemic.⁹ For those who understand there to be such a polemic, the social situation of the addressees is most commonly understood to be a danger of 'falling back' into 'Judaism.'¹⁰ However, others have argued that the 'Jewish-Christian' polemic indicates addressees who have been reluctant to sever their ties with 'Judaism,'¹¹ are in fear of being excluded from temple worship,¹² or addressees who have grown lax or apathetic. For those who argue that a 'Jewish-

⁷ There is a range of terms used to describe the 'exposition' of Hebrews. For example, some refer to the 'doctrine' of Hebrews while others use specific theological terms, such 'Christology' or 'eschatology.'

⁸ A variety of terms are also used to describe the 'exhortation' of Hebrews, for example, 'paraenesis.' For an example of the discussion of 'exposition' and 'exhortation,' see Attridge 1989: 21; Bevard Childs 1984: 416; Matera 1994: 169-82; and the whole of Rhee 2001. For an argument against the use of the term 'paraenesis,' see: Esler 2003a: 51-63.

⁹ It is important to note that the term 'polemic' is rarely defined. However, most interpreters use the term to mean two items (i.e. 'groups,' 'religions,' etc.) held in opposition or tension.

¹⁰ For an early example of this 'traditional view,' see Alford 1864: 4/62. For a recent example, see Hagner 1990: 11.

¹¹ For examples of this position, see F.F. Bruce 1990: 9; and A.E. Harvey 1985: 89.

¹² For an example of this argument, see Ebrard 1853: 381-382.

Christian' polemic does not exist within Hebrews,¹³ the social situation of the addressees is often understood to be a need for encouragement¹⁴ or that of suffering persecution.¹⁵ Further, it is occasionally held that Hebrews reveals a 'Gentile-Christian' polemic and the danger faced by the addressees is that of returning to 'paganism' or 'heathenism.'¹⁶

It may be helpful at this point to briefly examine a test case. George H. Guthrie finds that the "author uses theological concepts that were popular in Greek-speaking synagogues of the first-century."¹⁷ From this, Guthrie notes that the addressees were a mixed group of 'Jews' and 'Gentiles.'

Although some scholars have taken these insights to indicate a thoroughly Jewish audience for Hebrews, one must remember that many Gentiles affiliated themselves with first-century synagogues, either as proselytes or God-fearers. Consequently, some Gentiles came to Christ with a rich background in Jewish worship and extensive knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures. Therefore, the exact mix of Jews and Gentiles in this church group must remain a mystery.¹⁸

Next, Guthrie understands there to be a 'Jewish-Christian' polemic and warns that "a potential danger to this community seems to lie in the temptation to reject Christianity and return to Judaism proper."¹⁹ Guthrie is just one example of how historical critical methodology is employed in the study of the addressees. For Guthrie, the knowledge of 'Jewish' worship and scriptures is not a unique characteristic of 'Jewish Christians,' but was a characteristic that was shared by 'Gentile Christians.' Rather than arguing for a group comprised exclusively of either 'Jewish' or 'Gentile Christians,' Guthrie concludes that the group was mixed. Next, Guthrie believes there to be a 'Jewish-Christian' polemic inherent in Hebrews. Based upon this assumption, he finds that the specific social situation of the group is that of a threat of returning to 'Judaism.'

As we will see below, each of Guthrie's assumptions is widely debated. Is

¹³ Sandmel 1978: 120-122.

¹⁴ For an example of the need for encouragement, see Johnson 1986: 414-415.

¹⁵ For an example of 'Christians' (in Italy) suffering persecution, see Filson 1978: 325.

¹⁶ Vos 1956: 18.

¹⁷ Guthrie 1998: 19.

¹⁸ Guthrie 1998: 20.

¹⁹ Guthrie 1998: 20.

the use of the Old Testament and repeated references to ‘Jewish’ cultic practice a sign of ‘Jewish’ addressees? Or, as Guthrie argues, a sign of a mixed community? Is there a ‘Jewish-Christian’ polemic within the text? If so, does this polemic help to illuminate the social context of the addressees? If not, what was the social context of the addressees? To best understand the complexity of this discussion, it is necessary to examine each of the proposals regarding the identity of the addressees. However, I will first consider the traditional superscription of this work

1.2 ΠΙΡΟΣ²⁰ ΕΒΡΑΙΟΥΣ - Superscription and the Identity of the Addressees

The discussion of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews often begins with a discussion of the superscription, ΠΙΡΟΣ ΕΒΡΑΙΟΥΣ. This title encourages the same set of questions in nearly every interpreter, “What is meant by the designation, ‘Hebrews?’” And, “Can this superscription inform our discussion of the identity of the addressees?”

The earliest known occurrence of ΠΙΡΟΣ ΕΒΡΑΙΟΥΣ is located in the superscription on folio 21r of P46 (ca. 200 CE). From that time on, it was the regular designation for the work in New Testament manuscripts²¹ and in the

²⁰ Nearly every translator understands ΠΙΡΟΣ ‘ΕΒΡΑΙΟΥΣ to mean “To (the) Hebrews.” However, B.P.W. Stather Hunt proposes that ΠΙΡΟΣ ‘ΕΒΡΑΙΟΥΣ is best understood to mean *against* the Hebrews. “Could there be a more appropriate title than ΠΙΡΟΣ ‘ΕΒΡΑΙΟΥΣ for a treatise of which the primary object was to set forth the thesis that the Jewish law has been superseded by the Christian because it was only ‘*a shadow of good things to come*’; that the old covenant had been supplanted by a new one; that the old priesthood was abolished and that the old sacrifices had come to an end for ever? How better could such a treatise be described than as one *against* Judaism, *Adversus Iudaeos*?” Hunt 1951: 292. See also Synge 1959: 44.

²¹ Metzger 1998: 607.

κ C 33	πρὸς Ἑβραίους
A	πρὸς Ἑβραίους ἐγράφη ἀπὸ Ῥώμης
P 1908	πρὸς Ἑβραίους ἐγράφη ἀπὸ Ἰταλίας
K 102 1923	πρὸς Ἑβραίους ἐγράφη ἀπὸ Ἰταλίας διὰ Τιμοθέου
460 Euthalius ms	πρὸς Ἑβραίους ἐγράφη ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας διὰ Τιμοθέου
425 464 al	ἢ πρὸς Ἑβραίους ἐπιστολὴ ἐγράφη ἀπὸ Ἰταλίας διὰ Τιμοθέου
404 al	Παύλου ἀποστόλου ἐπιστολὴ πρὸς Ἑβραίους ἐγράφη ἀπὸ Ἰταλίας διὰ Τιμοθέου
1911	Παύλου ἀποστόλου ἐπιστολὴ πρὸς Ἑβραίους ἐγράφη ἀπὸ Ἀθημῶν ἄλλοι δὲ ἀπ’ Ἰταλίας

writings of Christians.²² That the superscription existed and became the popular ‘title’ for the writing is without question. However, how the superscription originated is not known. Craig Koester explains that, “the title was almost certainly not part of the earliest text of Hebrews, since letter writers often identified their intended audience in salutations²³, whereas superscriptions were added later when a number of writings were put into a single collection.”²⁴ F.F. Bruce adds the popular opinion that, “it very well may be that when, in the course of the second century, the work was included in the Pauline corpus, the editor gave it this title by analogy with ‘To (the) Romans,’ etc.”²⁵

Independent of the question of the origin of the superscription is another important question. What is meant by the term ‘Hebrews?’ While the answer to this question is again unknown, most believe that it reflects the impression that the addressees were ‘Jewish Christians.’ However, even this assumption lends itself to a variety of hypotheses. For example, ‘Hebrews’ may be understood to be synonymous with ‘Jews.’ Holders of this view argue that both the Masoretic Text and Septuagint use ‘Hebrews’ as a designation that is virtually synonymous with ‘Jews’ or ‘Judaism.’ This use of ‘Hebrews’ may also be seen as a contrast to

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- 431 ἡ πρὸς Ἑβραίους αὕτη ἐπιστολὴ ἐγράφη ἀπὸ Ἰταλίας
διὰ Τιμοθέου τοῦ ἀποστόλου τοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτοὺς πεμφθέντος διὰ τοῦ
μακαρίου Παύλου ἵν’ αὐτοὺς διορθώσῃται
- 104 ἡ πρὸς Ἑβραίους αὕτη ἐπιστολὴ ἐγράφη Ἑβραϊστὶ ἀπὸ Ἰταλίας
διὰ Τιμοθέου τοῦ ἀποστόλου τοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτοὺς πεμφθέντος διὰ τοῦ
μακαρίου Παύλου ἵν’ αὐτοὺς διορθώσῃται

Metzger does not include P46 in his analysis of the subscription. However, this is perhaps the earliest known occurrence of the superscription , πρὸς Ἑβραίους. Further, it is important for the discussion of the identity of the addressees to recognize that while the subscriptions in the manuscripts vary (some include designations regarding authorship and location), they each include πρὸς Ἑβραίους.

²² Pantaenus (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 5:26.1); Clement of Alexandria (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 6.14.2-4); Irenaeus (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 5.26); Origin (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 6.25.11-14); Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist.* 2.17.12; 3.3.5; 3.38.1-2; 6.20.3); Tertullian (*On Modesty* 20).

²³ Compare the titles with the addressees identified in the salutations of Romans , 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philemon, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Also note that many significant manuscripts of Ephesians do not identify the intended audience in the salutation of the letter.

²⁴ C. Koester 2001: 171.

²⁵ Compare ΠΡΟΣ ΕΒΡΑΙΟΥΣ with: ΠΡΟΣ ΡΩΜΑΙΟΥΣ, ΠΡΟΣ ΚΟΡΙΝΘΙΟΥΣ, ΠΡΟΣ ΓΑΛΑΤΑΣ, ΠΡΟΣ ΕΦΕΣΙΟΥΣ, ΠΡΟΣ ΦΙΛΙΠΠΗΣΙΟΥΣ, ΠΡΟΣ ΚΟΛΟΣΣΑΕΙΣ, ΠΡΟΣ ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΕΙΣ, ΠΡΟΣ ΤΙΜΟΘΕΟΝ, ΠΡΟΣ ΤΙΤΟΝ, and ΠΡΟΣ ΦΙΛΗΜΟΝΑ. See F.F. Bruce 1990: 3-4.

‘Greeks’ or ‘Gentiles’ (cf. 2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:5). For others, ‘Hebrews’ is understood to be in opposition to ‘Hellenists’ (cf. Acts 6:1). In this case, ‘Hebrews’ indicates Hebrew or Aramaic speaking ‘Jews’ from Palestine, rather than ‘Jews’ of the Diaspora, or the Hellenistic world.²⁶ Still others understand ‘Hebrews’ to indicate loyalty to traditional ‘Jewish’ values. Matthew Black explains that ‘Hebrews,’ “came to be employed increasingly to describe loyal Jews, especially in the Maccabean period, who displayed the traditional virtues of the patriarchal forefathers.”²⁷ Graham Harvey offers a possible example of this use of ‘Hebrews’ in the New Testament. “When Paul writes that he is a ‘Hebrew of the Hebrews’ (Phil 3:5) he is denying that he is innovative or anything but a traditionalist. He is claiming that what he teaches is in continuity with biblical tradition.”²⁸ Finally, some identify a polemic between ‘Hebrews’ and ‘Jews.’ Harvey explains that, “Hebrews are Jews by descent, but when writers express anti-Jewish sentiment they use ‘Jew’ and reserve ‘Hebrews’ as an appellation for ‘good Jews.’”²⁹ Those who understand there to be such a polemic, conclude that “‘Hebrews’ exist not only in the past of the prophets and apostles but are also the community from whom the Christian group arose.”³⁰

Some critics propose that ‘Hebrews’ is to be understood symbolically. Koester summarises this position.

Some suggest that ‘Hebrews’ identifies the audience symbolically as pilgrims passing through this world, like Abraham, who was a transient on earth (Heb 11:13-16). Linguistically, the Hebrew words ‘Hebrew’ (*‘ibri*) and ‘passing through’ (*‘abar*) are based on the root letters *‘br*. Although the LXX translator took ‘Hebrew’ in Gen 14:13 to mean ‘sojourner’ (*perates*; cf. Philo, *Migration* 20; Jerome, *On Jeremiah* 1.14), Hebrews does not include the usual Greek equivalent for ‘Hebrew’ (*perates*) or otherwise allude to the Hebrew *‘br*.³¹

Such a symbolic understanding of the superscription led Ernst Käsemann to

²⁶ For an early example of this argument, see Delitzsch 1868: 20-21. For a more recent example, see Hengel 1983: 1-29.

²⁷ Black 1983: 79.

²⁸ G. Harvey 1996: 110.

²⁹ G. Harvey 1996: 142.

³⁰ G. Harvey 1996: 143.

³¹ C. Koester 2001: 172.

suggest the title, *The Wandering People of God*.³²

While most people believe that the superscription, ΠΡΟΣ ΕΒΡΑΙΟΥΣ, was not a part of the earliest text(s), and that the origin and meaning remain unknown, it is far from unanimous how the superscription ought to be used in determining the identity of the addressees. Or, if the superscription should be used at all in the discussion of identity. Those who understand the addressees to be ‘Jewish Christians’³³ commonly hold that the title reflects a correct assumption on the account of the person or persons who first used the superscription or subscription. On the other hand, those who understand the addressees to be ‘Gentile Christians,’³⁴ see the title as a second-century speculation. Joseph B. Tyson summarises that the title is, “fairly early but not part of the original document. There is no internal evidence that the author was addressing Hebrews or Hebrew Christians. The title must have been the result of speculation by people who were impressed with the weighty OT material contained in the document and by the contrasts between Christianity and Judaism.”³⁵ So, what conclusion may be drawn regarding the superscription and the discussion of identity? In short, the title cannot be used conclusively to identify the addressees of Hebrews.

³² Käsemann 1984.

³³ ‘Jewish-Christianity’ is the traditional view of the identity of the addressees and remains the majority opinion. However, a number of possibilities exist within this ‘Jewish-Christian’ designation. For example, C. Sandegren, argued that the title should read “to the Priests” after concluding that the addressees were converted ‘Jewish’ priests in danger of falling back into ‘Judaism.’ Sandegren reasoned that it was perhaps due to a scribal error that ΠΡΟΣ ΙΕΡΕΙΣ became ΠΡΟΣ ΕΒΡΑΙΟΥΣ. Sandegren 1955: 221-224.

³⁴ Albert Vanhoye argues that the letter does not make a ‘Jewish-Gentile’ distinction, and therefore, the most appropriate title would be “To some Christians.” Vanhoye 1989: 2.

³⁵ Tyson 1973: 243.

1.3 'Jewish Christians'³⁶

In 1882, Gottlieb Lünemann summarised the certainty with which many held to the view that the addressees were 'Jewish Christians.' "That the epistle was designated for a Jewish-Christian circle of readers is not only universally acknowledged, but also becomes so palpably certain from contents and aim, that Röth's supposition of the opposite can only be regarded as a manifest error."³⁷ While the identity of the addressees has been widely debated since Lünemann made this observation, the majority of interpreters still hold to this view. The conclusion that the addressees were 'Jewish Christians,' is often based upon the three-step process of a historical critical analysis of identity. First, interpreters identify 'Jewish Christians' to have been a first-century Mediterranean group. Second, they create a list of characteristics which they believe were unique to 'Jewish Christians.' Third, they believe that there is conclusive evidence in the text that points to this list of characteristics. So, what are those unique characteristics? First, some interpreters understand 'Jewish Christians' to have

³⁶ While it is impossible to provide a complete list of those who have identified the addressees as 'Jewish Christians,' the following is a list of over 100 interpreters who have argued for this view. Alford 1864: 62-73; Anderson 1989: 255-277; Attwater 1949: 225; Barnes 1848: iv-xix; Bengel 1858: 4/333-335; Bourke 1990: 920-941; Bristol 1967: 21-23; J. Brown 1862: 6-7; R. Brown 1982: 13-14; A. Bruce 1899: 1-25; A. Bruce 1900: 337; F.F. Bruce 1962-1963: 231-232; F.F. Bruce 1982: 1008-1019; F.F. Bruce 1990: 3-9; Buchanan 1978: 255-256; Cockerill 1999: 15-18; Craddock 1998: 8-10; Cross and Livingstone 1984: 625-626; Dahms 1977: 365-375; Dale 1882: 5-7; A.B. Davidson 1882: 9-18; S. Davidson 1848-1851: 3/266-276; Delitzsch 1868: 1/3-35; Dey 1975: 126; Dods 1910: 230-233; Downer (undated): 8; Dunnill 1992: 24; Ebrard 1853: 379-383; Edmundson 1913: 154-155; English 1955: 27-30; L. Evans 1985: 25; Fuller 1974: 147-149; Fuller 1995: 4; Gayford 1937: 597; Gench 1996: 3-6; Glaze 1966: 142; Gleason 1998: 66-69; Gleason 2000: 301; Gouge 1866: 6-7; R. Grant 1963: 219; Greene 1965: 8; Gundry 1979: 334; D. Guthrie 1982: 663-670; D. Guthrie 1983: 22-25; Hagner 1990: 1-7; A.E. Harvey 1985: 88-90; Héring 1970: xv; Hewitt 1960: 32; Isaacs 1992: 22-45; Jervell 1980: 13-38; Kent 1972: 22-25; Kistemaker 1984: 17; Klassen 1986: 1-19; Lake and Lake 1938: 159; Lane 1991a: liii-lx; Lane 1997: 444-447; Lane 1998: 221-224; Lauersdorf 1986: 2-3; Lenski 1946: 13; Lightfoot 1976: 30-33; Lincoln 1982: 206; Lindars 1991: 4-21; Livingstone 1997: 742-743; Lünemann 1882: 40; W. MacDonald 1971: 9-13; T.W. Manson 1949: 1-6; W. Manson 1951: 159-162; Marsh 1915: 539; Martin 1978: 350-352; May and Metzger 1977: 1455; McCaul 1871: 1; McLean 1847: xiv; Milligan 1899: 53; Moule 1950: 36-37; Moule 1981: 97-98; Munck 1959-1960: 114; Nairne 1913: 20-21; Narborough 1961: 20-27; Nash 1984: 89-112; Nestle 1898-1899: 422; Peake 1906: 8-16; Peake 1910: 4-5; Peterson 1982: 186; Pfeiffer 1962: 8-9; Pink 1954: 9-11; Quanbeck 1972: 898; Rendall 1883: xvii; J. Robinson 1976: 200-220; Roddy 1962: 9; Salevao 2002: 113; Sandegren 1955: 221-224; Saphir 1902: 2; Schmid 1870: 514; Snell 1959: 27-28; Stibbs 1970: 9-10; Stuart 1864: 265; Thompson 1985: 380-381; Thompson 2000: 568-570; Vine 1965: 7-8; Walker 1996: 201; Wall and Lane 1993: 171-173; Westcott 1892: li; Wickham 1910: xv; Williamson 1964: xii-xiii; and Witherington 2001: 351.

³⁷ Lünemann 1882: 40.

had a unique knowledge of the Old Testament and of 'Jewish' cultic practice. Second, some believe that a comparison between the 'old covenant' and the 'new covenant' would have had unique significance for 'Jewish Christian' addressees. Third, some interpret titles such as 'descendants of Abraham' to refer to 'Christians' who were previously 'Jewish.'

Those who understand the addressees to have been 'Jewish Christians' commonly begin their defence by noting that the writing moves almost entirely within the realm of Old Testament ideas and presupposes precise knowledge of 'Jewish' views and concepts. Such extensive use of the Old Testament led James Charlesworth to conclude that Hebrews was "profoundly Jewish in thought and imagery."³⁸ Such 'profoundly Jewish thought and imagery,' is understood by many to indicate 'Jewish Christian' addressees. Further, it is believed that the very appeal to the Old Testament signals 'Jewish Christianity.' This argument contends that 'Jewish Christians' would understand the Old Testament to be authoritative. However, 'Gentiles' could reject or turn away from 'Christianity' without feeling any obligation toward the Old Testament. Therefore, appealing to the Old Testament would only be persuasive to those who believe it to be authoritative, in other words, 'Jewish Christians.'

Second, advocates of this view argue that the comparison between the new covenant and the old (i.e. Hebrews 7:22; 8:6, 8-10; 9:15; 12:24) indicates 'Jewish Christian' addressees. This comparison is commonly understood to be a comparison between 'Judaism' and 'Christianity,' with an emphasis on the superiority of 'Christianity.' They argue that such a comparison, and emphasis on the superiority of 'Christianity,' was necessary to prevent 'Jewish Christians' from returning to 'Judaism.' They further argue that a 'Gentile' audience would not benefit from the comparison of 'Judaism' to 'Christianity,' for 'Judaism' was not their natural alternative to 'Christianity,' but rather, their previous 'Gentile' state.

Third, it is thought that the designations given to the addressees signal a 'Jewish Christian' audience. Whether referring to the addressees as 'descendants

³⁸ Charlesworth 1985: 87.

of Abraham' (Hebrews 2:16) or as 'the people of God' (Hebrews 4:9), it is believed the author used language to describe the addressees that had commonly been used to refer to the 'Jews.'

While a majority of interpreters still hold to the view of a 'Jewish Christian' audience, there is diversity in their understanding of the social situation of the addressees. The most commonly held view, often called 'the traditional view,' includes the assumption that the addressees were in danger of returning to 'Judaism.'³⁹ However, other proposals have been offered. For example, it has been argued that the addressees had not fully embraced 'Christianity.'⁴⁰ Still others find that the 'exhortation' was written to encourage faithfulness,⁴¹ encourage steadfastness in the face of persecution,⁴² or to help move the addressees from immaturity to maturity.⁴³

A critique of this majority view often comes in the form of an alternate proposal for the identity of the addressees. Those who argue for Essene or Samaritan addressees concede that Hebrews points to a 'Jewish Christian' audience, but further argue that the text also testifies to a particular form or sect of 'Judaism.' On the other hand, those who understand the addressees to be 'Gentile Christians' challenge whether or not the supposed 'unique' characteristics of 'Jewish Christianity' are actually 'unique.' Or, if the 'Jewish' elements of the text are also compatible with 'Gentile Christian' addressees. Therefore, rather than to provide a detailed critique of the assumptions and methodology behind the conclusion that the addressees were 'Jewish Christian,' it will be most helpful to analyse the various other proposals for the identity of the addressees.

³⁹ There are too many adherents to the "traditional view" to list, however, for a recent example, see: Gleason 1998: 66-69; Gleason 2000: 301; or Lindars 1991: 4-15.

⁴⁰ Hewitt 1960: 40.

⁴¹ Thompson 2000: 569.

⁴² Saphir 1902: 3.

⁴³ Thomas 1944: 11.

1.4 'Gentile Christians'⁴⁴

Many interpreters have observed that the identity of the addressees of Hebrews was not questioned until 1836. Before E.M. Röth⁴⁵ proposed the possibility of a 'Gentile' audience, the addressees were universally understood to have been 'Jewish Christians.' The discussion of the identity of the addressees had so diversified in one hundred years, however, that by 1965 John L. McKenzie could boldly write that most doubt that the addressees were Jewish Christians.

Most scholars doubt that Heb was addressed to Jewish Christians; they believe its terms are equally suitable for a Gentile community without any reference to the division between Jews and Gentiles, or to a Gentile community which was strongly influenced by Judaism, such as Colossae.⁴⁶

While McKenzie may have overestimated the number of those who understand the addressees to be 'Gentile Christians,' he correctly summarised the influence of this important minority view. Those who hold that the addressees of Hebrews were 'Gentile Christians' tend to offer a two-step argument. First, they challenge the validity of the list of the 'unique' characteristics of 'Jewish Christians.' In this case, the characteristics which some believe to be unique to 'Jewish Christians' are argued to be characteristics of both 'Jewish Christians' and 'Gentile Christians.' Second, they create a list of the 'unique' characteristics of 'Gentile Christians' and evidence of the characteristics is sought in Hebrews. Therefore, when combined, the arguments are thought to indicate that Hebrews does not refer to the unique characteristics of 'Jewish Christians,' but does reflect the unique characteristics of 'Gentile Christians.'

To begin, those who understand the addressees to be 'Gentile Christians' argue that the language that is thought to be uniquely suitable for a 'Jewish

⁴⁴ For examples of those who have identified the addressees as 'Gentile Christians,' see: Aune 1987: 212; Davies 1967: 6; Dinkler 1962: 572-573; Kee, Young, and Froehlich 1973: 300; Klijn 1967: 142; Kümmel 1975: 398-401; McGiffert 1897: 463-469; McKenzie 1965: 349; Pfeleiderer 1910: 275-279; Robinson 1933: xvi-xvii; Röth 1836; Scott 1923: 14-21; Tyson 1973: 243; von Soden 1907: 269; Vos 1956: 11-23.

⁴⁵ E.M. Röth is often credited with being the first to argue for a 'Gentile Christian' audience. This thesis will continue this tradition and I have included his bibliographic information. However, I have been unable to find and examine his famous 1836 text for myself. Therefore, all information concerning Röth has been gathered from secondary sources. Röth 1836.

⁴⁶ McKenzie 1965: 349.

Christian' audience is equally suitable for 'Gentile Christians.' For example, when Paul wrote to a 'Gentile' audience, he used 'Jewish' language and imagery.⁴⁷ Clement of Rome, the putative author of a letter to the church at Corinth, also made extensive use of the Old Testament.⁴⁸ Such use of the Old Testament, some argue, indicates familiarity with the scriptures rather than a 'Jewish' identity. The related argument that the very use of the Old Testament indicates 'Jewish Christian' addressees, for 'Gentile Christians' would not feel obligated to its message, is also answered by those who argue for a 'Gentile Christian' audience. At the most basic level, the examples above of Paul and Clement's use of the Old Testament imply its presumed effectiveness with 'Gentile Christians.' However, Kümmel also explains that "the missionary activity of early Christianity had made the OT into the Bible of the new community everywhere, and accordingly it had for them unassailable authority and effectiveness as a source of proofs."⁴⁹

Similarly, some claim that the titles used for the addressees, 'descendants of Abraham' (2:16) and 'the people of God' (4:9), are inconclusive. Arthur Cushman McGiffert explains that "Clement of Rome in his letter to the Corinthians, which was addressed to a Gentile church, and was written shortly after the Epistle to the Hebrews, speaks of 'our father Jacob' (Clement: *Ad Cor.*, chap. 4) and 'our father Abraham' (chap. 31), and when referring to the Old Testament worthies in general, he calls them 'our fathers' (chap. 62)."⁵⁰ Likewise, Werner Georg Kümmel summarises, "Very early the Gentile Christians were regarded as heirs of the blessings and the promises of the OT people of God. As Christians they are the true Israel, the chosen people of God (Gal 6:16; 1 Cor 10:1 ["our fathers"]; 1 Pet 2:9) for whom the OT was written (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11; 1 Pet 1:12)."⁵¹ Thomas H. Tobin examined Paul's appeal to Abraham in Romans 4. Tobin, like McGiffert and Kümmel, concludes that Abraham is

⁴⁷ For an example of Paul's use of the OT, see 1 Cor 10:1-5.

⁴⁸ For an example of Clement of Rome's use of the OT, see 1 Clem. 4:1-13.

⁴⁹ Kümmel 1975: 400.

⁵⁰ McGiffert 1897: 465.

⁵¹ Kümmel 1975: 399-400.

referred to as the father of both ‘Jews’ and ‘Gentiles.’ “When set against the backdrop of Paul’s earlier use of Abraham in Galatians, the Abraham who emerges from Romans 4 is a very different figure. The Abraham of Romans 4 is the father of both Jews and Gentile believers. The seed of Abraham is interpreted as a collective noun referring to both Jews and Gentile believers rather than as a singular noun, which by referring to Christ alone, excludes Jews as the ‘seed of Abraham.’”⁵² While it is generally accepted that Paul was not the author of Hebrews, some understand the examples above from Paul, Clement of Rome, and the book of 1 Peter to indicate that the collective designations in Hebrews may not conclusively signal the identity of the addressees.

The first and most common argument for the unique characteristics of ‘Gentile Christian’ addressees is based upon Hebrews 6:1ff. Here, the reference to instruction is believed to indicate the previous ‘Gentile’ state of the addressees. Geerhardus Vos summarises this position.

The writer there speaks of the *first principles* in which the readers had been instructed when they *first became* Christians. These first principles were: repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection and eternal judgment. Now the Jewish did not have to be instructed in these elementary matters, since they knew them from the beginning. A convert from paganism, however, would have to be taught the meaning of repentance, faith, etc.⁵³

A second argument for ‘Gentile Christian’ addressees also focuses upon 6:1 (cf. Hebrews 9:14). Those who understand the addressees to be ‘Jewish Christians’ commonly understand the phrase ‘dead works’ to refer to the law/works of the Old Covenant. However, those who argue for ‘Gentile Christian’ addressees believe that this interpretation involves a serious error, for the opposite of ‘dead works’ is said to be ‘the living God.’ Therefore, the contrast is between the false gods of ‘paganism’ (‘dead works’) and the ‘the living God.’⁵⁴ For some, this indicates a ‘Gentile-Christian’ polemic inherent in the letter, rather than the often presumed ‘Jewish-Christian’ polemic.

⁵² Tobin 1995: 251.

⁵³ Vos 1956: 18.

⁵⁴ Vos 1956: 16.

Thirdly, J.H. Davies explains that, “the warning about holiness of life in 12:14, and about sexual immorality in 13:4, seems unlikely to be directed to Jews, who were conspicuous in the ancient world for their ethical religion and their standards of sexual morality.”⁵⁵

Another argument for ‘Gentile Christians’ is based upon Hebrews 13:9-13. Here, the addressees are warned, “do not be carried away by diverse and strange teachings.” Some find this to be a reference to the teachings of the Old Testament. If this is the case, ‘Jewish Christians’ would not understand them to be ‘diverse and strange teachings.’ The reference, then, must be made to a group which would understand the teachings to be diverse and strange, namely ‘Gentile Christians’ (possibly in danger of apostasy to ‘Judaism’).⁵⁶

What was the social situation of the ‘Gentile Christians?’ Here, as with those who find the addressees to be ‘Jewish Christians,’ there is diversity of opinion. McGiffert⁵⁷ and Scott⁵⁸ argue against the notion of apostasy to ‘Judaism’ and against the understanding of Hebrews as a ‘Jewish-Christian’ polemic. However, Davies⁵⁹ and Kee, Young, and Froehlich⁶⁰ believe the addressees may have been considering turning from ‘Christianity’ to ‘Judaism.’ For those who understand there to be a ‘Gentile-Christian’ polemic, the social situation is one of possible reversion to ‘paganism’ or ‘heathenism.’⁶¹ Still others find the addressees to be endangered by lethargy of faith,⁶² or as not having made the progress which the author expected.⁶³

Many interpreters are sympathetic to the argument that the characteristics which some perceive to be unique to ‘Jewish Christianity’ are, in fact, characteristics of ‘Gentile Christianity’ also. However, there is less sympathy for the arguments made in favour of an exclusively ‘Gentile Christian’ audience. For

⁵⁵ Davies 1967: 6.

⁵⁶ For an example of ‘Gentile Christians’ in danger of apostasy to ‘Judaism,’ see Davies 1967: 4-5; and Willis 1909: 335-340.

⁵⁷ McGiffert 1897: 466.

⁵⁸ Scott 1923: 16.

⁵⁹ Davies 1967: 5.

⁶⁰ Kee, Young and Froehlich 1973: 300.

⁶¹ Vos 1956: 18.

⁶² Klümmel 1975: 400.

⁶³ T. Robinson 1933: xvii.

example, if the addressees were ‘Gentile Christians’ we might expect a clearer indication of this. Whether references to a previous worship of idols (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:9), a former state when the addressees did not know God (cf. Galatians 4:8), or being categorised as the ἔθνη (cf. Romans 1:5-6; 1 Pet 4:3-4), it would seem that if the addressees were in fact ‘Gentile Christians’ the author would have made this more clear. However, the author never uses the designations Ἰουδαῖος or ἔθνη. This lack of conclusive evidence of either ‘Jewish’ or ‘Gentile Christian’ addressees has led some interpreters to take a neutral position regarding the identity of the audience. As early as 1957, Johannes Schneider wrote that, “since we know nothing in detail with regard to the readers, we are limited to guesswork.”⁶⁴ Similarly, A.E. Harvey wrote in 1970 that the identity of the addressees was “by no means certain.”⁶⁵ Therefore, while those who have argued for a ‘Gentile Christian’ audience have had limited success in showing that Hebrews does not necessitate ‘Jewish Christian’ addressees, they have been less successful at arguing for an exclusively ‘Gentile Christian’ group. So, where has this left the interpreters of Hebrews? As we will see below, some interpreters continue to wrestle with the questions of ‘Jewish’ and ‘Gentile Christianity’ while others simply conclude that the addressees were ‘Christian.’

1.5 Both ‘Jewish’ and ‘Gentile Christians’⁶⁶

An alternative to the debate between ‘Jewish’ or ‘Gentile Christian’ addressees is that of a mixed audience comprised of both ‘Jews’ and ‘Gentiles.’ The historical critical method employed here is again a two-step process. First, proponents of this view argue that Hebrews does not reflect the exclusive and unique characteristics of either ‘Jewish’ or ‘Gentile Christianity.’ Second, they

⁶⁴ Schneider 1957: 2-3.

⁶⁵ A.E. Harvey 1970: 686.

⁶⁶ For examples of those who have understood the addressees to be both ‘Jewish’ and ‘Gentile Christians,’ see: Raymond Brown 1983: 74-79; Brown and Meier 1983: 151-158; Duling and Perrin 1994: 283-285; Eisenbaum 1997b: 9; Ellingworth 1993: 21-27; Frost 1987: 168; G. Guthrie 1998: 20; Montefiore 1969: 16; Pfitzner 1997: 28-30; R. Smith 1984: 18; A. Trotter 1997: 28-33; Willis 1909: 337.

often insist that early 'Christian' groups were not exclusively 'Jewish' or 'Gentile,' and therefore, Hebrews was necessarily written to a mixed congregation. While a number of interpreters so argue, there is no consensus concerning the specific nature of this group. For example, some interpreters argue for a predominantly 'Jewish Christian' community with a small 'Gentile component,'⁶⁷ others believe the addressees to be 'Gentile Christians' who came to 'Christianity' through 'Judaism,'⁶⁸ while still others espouse a mixed community without making any predictions to its specific makeup.⁶⁹

Perhaps the most thorough discussion of such mixed communities is presented by Raymond E. Brown.⁷⁰ Brown presents four types of 'Jewish/Gentile Christianity' that he understands to have been present in the New Testament. From this list, he explains that Hebrews represents a group "consisting of Jewish-Christianity and their Gentile converts, who did not insist on circumcision or observance of the Jewish food laws and who saw no abiding significance in Jewish cult and feasts."⁷¹ Brown and Meier conclude that Hebrews represents a group of "Jewish/Gentile Christians that had broken with Judaism in a radical way and so, in a sense, had become a new religion."⁷²

For those who conclude that the addressees of Hebrews are both 'Jewish' and 'Gentile Christians,' the relationship between exposition and identity is often left undetermined. Instead, they state that the language is equally meaningful for both 'Jews' and 'Gentiles.' However, the relationship between 'exhortation' and social setting remains problematic. For example, following the 'traditional view,' Montefiore, concludes that this mixed group was in danger of apostasy.⁷³ Duling and Perin, quite dissimilarly, conclude that the letter was written to correct some view within the group.⁷⁴

The category of a mixed group of both 'Jewish' and 'Gentile Christians'

⁶⁷ Ellingworth, 1993: 21-27; Frost, 1987: 168; Pfitzner 1997: 28-30.

⁶⁸ Guthrie 1998: 19-23.

⁶⁹ Duling and Perin 1994: 283-285; Eisenbaum 1997b: 9; and A. H. Trotter 1997: 28-33.

⁷⁰ R. E. Brown 1983: 74-79. See also Brown and Meier 1983: 1-9.

⁷¹ R. E. Brown 1983: 78.

⁷² Brown and Meier 1983: 8.

⁷³ Montefiore 1969: 20.

⁷⁴ Duling and Perin 1994: 285.

functions in a similar manner as the category of 'Christian' that will be analysed below. Many interpreters who argue that the addressees were 'Christian' have come to this conclusion because they believe that a more specific categorisation is not possible. Therefore, the category of 'Christian' is used in a neutral, even generic, sense to refer to the addressees. However, those who argue for a category of both 'Jewish' and 'Gentile Christians' feel the need to retain these categories, but are (1) not satisfied with the arguments for an exclusively 'Jewish' or exclusively 'Gentile' audience, and (2) understand that exclusively 'Jewish' or 'Gentile' groups either did not exist or were very rare at the time when Hebrews was written. Therefore, the category of a mixed group of both 'Jewish' and 'Gentile Christians' serves best to illuminate both concerns of these interpreters.

1.6 Essenes ⁷⁵

Since the late 1950s there have been a number of interpreters who have understood there to be a relationship between Hebrews and the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁷⁶ The historical critical inquiry behind this investigation is again the three-step process for investigating identity. First, the interpreter recognizes that the Essenes were a first-century Mediterranean group. Second, he or she develops a list of the unique characteristics of the Essenes (often based upon the Dead Sea Scrolls). Third, the interpreter analyses Hebrews for evidence of those characteristics. In this case, some have found there to be 'doctrinal similarities' or 'points of contact between the texts.' Most commonly cited are: the role of angels, the role of the new covenant, similarities in messianic conceptions, the role of prophets (cf. Moses), and the priesthood of Melchizedek.

Further, the hypotheses advanced to describe the nature of the relationship between Hebrews and the Essenes may be characterized by three general

⁷⁵ For a partial list of those who have understood the addressees to be in some way connected with the Essenes, see: Batdorf 1972: 16-35; Bowman 1962: 7-16; W.R.F. Browning 1996: 167; Danielou 1979: 111-114; Flusser 1958: 215-217; Gilkes 1962: 156-158; Hoppin 1969: 81-82; Hughes 1977: 10-15; Kosmala 1959; LaSor 1972: 180-190; O'Neill 1999: 64-82; O'Neill 2000: 286-288; Schubert 1959: 157-159; Spicq 1959: 365-390; Yadin 1958: 36-55.

⁷⁶ For an overview of the Hebrews-Qumran discussion, see Batdorf 1972: 16-35.

proposals.⁷⁷ First, Hebrews was written directly to the Essenes in order to convert them to 'Christianity.'⁷⁸ Second, Hebrews was written to a 'Christian' group some of whose members had either been Essenes or had been deeply influenced by the Essenes.⁷⁹ Third, both Hebrews and the Dead Sea Scrolls find their origin in a common cultural milieu.⁸⁰ While these three proposals summarise the majority of hypotheses concerning the relationship between Hebrews and the Essenes, other arguments have been advanced. W.R.F. Browning proposes that the addressees of the letter were "Jews, perhaps Essenes," who understood Jesus to be more than human but less than divine.⁸¹ P.E. Hughes concludes that the addressees were "Jewish-Christians who were attracted to the teachings of the Essene sect."⁸² And finally, J.C. O'Neill argues that Hebrews was written to Essenes, by Essenes, about the Teacher of Righteousness, and was later adopted by 'Christianity' and adapted for its use.⁸³

Just as there is a great diversity of hypotheses concerning the relationship between the addressees of Hebrews and the Essenes, there are various proposals for the group's social situation. Again, some argue that the group is in danger of apostasy⁸⁴ while others understand Hebrews to be an apologetic for 'Christianity'⁸⁵ or a tool for conversion.⁸⁶

The first thorough critique of the proposed relationship between the Dead Sea Scrolls and Hebrews was presented in 1962 by F.F. Bruce.⁸⁷ Bruce began by noting the proposed similarities between the Dead Sea Scrolls and Hebrews. He focused on the areas of: (1) angels, (2) biblical exegesis, (3) prophet, priest, and king, (4) purification, (5) the house of God, (6) sacrifice, (7) earthly copies of

⁷⁷ Batdorf 1972: 16-19.

⁷⁸ Danielou 1979: 111-114; and Kosmala 1959.

⁷⁹ Bowman 1962: 9-16; Hoppin 1969: 81-9; Schubert 1959: 157-159; Spicq 1959: 365-39; and Yadin 1958: 36-55.

⁸⁰ Flusser 1958: 215-266; and Gilkes 1962: 156-158..

⁸¹ W.R.F. Browning 1996: 167.

⁸² Hughes 1977: 10-15.

⁸³ O'Neill 1999: 64-82.

⁸⁴ Gilkes 1962: 156; and Hoppin 1969: 93.

⁸⁵ Hughes 1977: 10-15.

⁸⁶ Kosmala 1959.

⁸⁷ The paper was read at the Society of New Testament Studies in Münster, August 1962. F.F. Bruce 1962-1963: 217-232.

heavenly realities, and (8) saints and martyrs. While Bruce acknowledged that certain similarities are present, he finally concluded that “we may continue to call the Epistle πρὸς Ἑβραίους, if we give the word a reasonably wide connotation and bear in mind that these ‘Hebrews’ were in culture and language ‘Hellenists’, and in religious background Jewish non-conformists - but it would be outstripping the evidence to call them Essenes or spiritual brethren to the men of Qumran.”⁸⁸ L.D. Hurst has offered a more recent critique of the relationship between the Dead Sea Scrolls and Hebrews.

... the enthusiasm which has been attached to the suggestions of Yadin and others which relate Hebrews directly to a Qumran background is less than well founded. These suggestions involve a certain distortion of the argument of Hebrews, and in some cases the evidence of Qumran appears to have been misinterpreted. That many of the points adduced as parallel to Qumran are also parallel to Philo and other backgrounds make it more likely that all the similarities are due to a common background - traditional exegesis of the O.T.⁸⁹

As seen in the analysis of both Bruce and Hurst, critiques of the possible relationship between Hebrews and the Dead Sea Scrolls often come in two forms. First, while some interpreters will agree that there are similarities between material found in Hebrews and that in the Dead Sea Scrolls, they argue that these similarities do not form a perfect ‘one-to-one’ relationship. For example, there may be topics, words, or themes which appear similar on a macro level, but function quite differently in their respective texts. Second, they contend that these apparent similarities may not be a unique feature of the supposed relationship between the Dead Sea Scrolls and Hebrews. In other words, the similarities do not necessitate a relationship between the texts or groups, but may be due to a much larger common cultural milieu.

⁸⁸ Bruce 1962-1963: 232.

⁸⁹ Hurst 1990: 65-66.

1.7 Samaritans⁹⁰

A very small minority of interpreters argue for a relationship between Hebrews and the Samaritans. Utilising the historical critical method, they establish a list of characteristics which they believe to be unique to the Samaritans and then find what they believe to be examples of these characteristics in Hebrews.

E.A. Knox, in his 1927 article, "The Samaritans and the Epistle to the Hebrews" was the first to suggest "the possibility that the Epistle to the Hebrews might have been written to Samaritan Christians."⁹¹ In that article, Knox provided a survey of the characteristics of Hebrews that he felt would appeal to Samaritans. John MacDonald,⁹² the next to examine the parallels between Samaritan thought and Hebrews, concluded that there is no evidence to suggest literary dependence, but perhaps one could suggest the use of common source material. MacDonald also noted that, "the affinities of the Epistle to the Hebrews with the Samaritan teachings are in some respects so close that it is not an irresponsible act to suggest that the Epistle was written to Samaritan Christians."⁹³

Charles H. Scobie presents the most thorough defence of Samaritan Christians as the addressees of Hebrews. Scobie explains that the writer begins with a discussion of three 'inadequate chronological categories' (Angels, Moses, and Joshua) which the addressees might be tempted to employ. The writer, having rejected these categories, proceeds to expound his own highly original Christology.

Like Stephen and John he rejects a Davidic Christology; though well aware of the tradition of Jesus' descent from Judah (7:14), having mentioned the fact he proceeds to ignore it completely. Once again it could be argued that he presents a Christology which could be accepted by

⁹⁰ For a list of those who have understood the addressees to be Samaritans, see: Knox 1927: 184-193; J. MacDonald 1964: 421; Scobie 1972-1973: 390-414; R.J.F. Trotter 1961. For an overview of the Hebrews-Samaritan discussion, see Hurst 1990: 75-82.

⁹¹ Knox 1927: 184-193.

⁹² In R.J.F. Trotter's 1961, 37 page monograph entitled, "Did the Samaritans of the Fourth Century Know the Epistle to the Hebrews?" Trotter mentions in passing and without discussion, "the question whether the Samaritans were the people whom the writer of the Epistle had in mind." R.J.F. Trotter 1961.

⁹³ J. MacDonald 1964: 421.

Samaritan Christians for whom Davidic messianic conceptions were anathema. The writer's own Christology is centred in the idea of priesthood, a subject of special interest to Samaritans, whose high priest was a more important figure in the total life of the community than was the case in Judaism.⁹⁴

Next, Scobie explains that "the Samaritans had an interest in the figure of Melchizedek in pre-New Testament times, as is shown by the extract from Pseudo-Eupolemos, a Hellenistic Samaritan writer, who links Melchizedek not with Jerusalem but with Mt Gerizim."⁹⁵ Scobie also understands the writer's interest in the tabernacle instead of the temple to reflect a Samaritan concern, since the Samaritans rejected the Jerusalem temple.

Scobie further argues that the 'roll-call of faith' reflects a Samaritan view of history, explaining that "Hebrews, for example, omits Aaron and Phineas, names redolent of controversy between Jew and Samaritan; but included are the Israelite judges Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah. Particularly remarkable is Samson, who does not appear in Jewish sources (outside of the Book of Judges) but who is regarded by the Samaritans as the last of the kings, his reign being a landmark in Samaritan history."⁹⁶

Critiques of the proposed relationship between the Samaritans and Hebrews are as rare as the argument itself. While I have found four interpreters who argue for a relationship between Hebrews and the Samaritans, I have found only one detailed critique of this position. L.D. Hurst, after exploring the possibility of a relationship between Hebrews and the Dead Sea Scrolls, turned his attention to the Samaritan hypothesis. After responding to each of Charles H. Scobie's arguments, Hurst concludes, "... it seems difficult not to conclude that while at first blush a Samaritan background may contain certain perspectives for an understanding of the epistle, in the end it brings one no closer in our search than did Philo, Qumran, or pre-Christian gnosticism, and at at least one point - the angels of Heb. 2:2 - a Samaritan background actually seems to be ruled out."⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Scobie 1972-1973: 411.

⁹⁵ Scobie 1972-1973: 412.

⁹⁶ Scobie 1972-1973: 413.

⁹⁷ Hurst 1990: 82.

1.8 Ebionites⁹⁸

Michael Goulder argues for a unique relationship between Hebrews and the Ebionites. Again, utilising the historical critical method, Goulder establishes a list of characteristics which he believes to be unique to the Ebionites and finds what he believes to be examples of these characteristics in Hebrews. According to Goulder, Christ functioned as an angel, or spiritual being, for the Ebionites.⁹⁹ Goulder further notes that the Ebionite picture of Jesus had something in common with the later orthodox picture, but with two vital differences.

What they had in common was the ministry period, in which, according to our Gospels also, Jesus 'proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles'; though of course the evangelists' 'my Father in heaven' is by no means unknown. The two differences come at the beginning and the end of the story. Paul (and our evangelists) believed that Jesus Christ was a unified, eternal being, the Son of God, who had become incarnate at Jesus' conception/birth (2 Cor 8.9; Phil 2.6-7; Mark 1.1, 11; 2.17; 10.45; etc.). The Ebionites thought that Christ was a heavenly figure of the second order who had taken Jesus over at baptism. Paul and our evangelists believed that, divine though he was in origin, Jesus Christ suffered in the full human way; his passion had begun with the agony in Gethsemane, and had continued through his false trials to his crucifixion and death. The Ebionites thought that spiritual beings could not suffer, so Christ had withdrawn from Jesus before the passion, and the human Jesus alone had suffered.¹⁰⁰

It is this pattern of 'agreement and double difference' that Goulder believes is a dominant feature of Hebrews. For Goulder, the author only mentions the ministry of Jesus once (cf. Hebrews 2:3), because the addressees/Ebionites were here in agreement with orthodoxy. However, Goulder argues that the author places great emphasis on both the birth (cf. Hebrews 1:6; 2:9; 2:10-15; 10:5-6) and death (Hebrews 1:3; 2:9, 10, 18; 4:15; 5:8-9) of Jesus in order to combat the errant views of the Ebionites. Further, Goulder notes the emphasis that the author places on the comparison of Jesus with angels and the author's emphasis on the suffering of Jesus. When viewed together, Goulder believes that this points to

⁹⁸ For an example of this position, see: Goulder 2003: 393-406.

⁹⁹ Goulder 2003: 396-397.

¹⁰⁰ Goulder 2003: 398-399.

Ebionite addressees.

Similar, again, to those who argue for 'Jewish Christian,' 'Gentile Christian,' Essene, or Samaritan addressees, Goulder describes his understanding of the social context of the Ebionite addressees. For Goulder, "The Jewish Christians are just sliding back into an apocalyptic Judaism, with Jesus as no more than an inspired prophet."¹⁰¹ In response to this crisis, "Hebrews was written to dissuade certain Jewish-Christian members of the community from lapsing; it proclaims a Pauline-type faith, in incarnation and the atonement."¹⁰²

1.9 'Non-Christians'¹⁰³

The conclusion that Hebrews was written to 'non-Christians' stands at odds with all of the other proposals concerning the identity of the addressees. The other seven proposed identities find common ground in the assumption that the addressees were 'Christian,' and find dissention when discussing the group's 'past.' Were they 'Jewish?' 'Gentile?' Essene? Samaritan? Ebionite? However, for the very small minority who understand Hebrews to be addressed to 'non-Christians,' there are two levels of dissention. Not only is the present 'Christian' identity of the addressees challenged, but the group's 'past' also remains a significant point of contention. For example, F.C. Syngé¹⁰⁴ argues that the addressees were hesitant 'Jews who had not committed to 'Christianity.' W.E. Vine¹⁰⁵ understands the addressees to be 'Jewish Christians,' however, "there were many who, though attracted to Christianity, had never definitely accepted Christ."¹⁰⁶ And Kenneth S. Wuest¹⁰⁷ concludes that Hebrews was written to show unsaved 'Jews' that Christ is the mediator of a better covenant. While each of these examples assume a 'non-Christian' 'Jewish' audience, I have previously

¹⁰¹ Goulder 2003: 405

¹⁰² Goulder 2003: 393.

¹⁰³ For a partial list of those who have understood the addressees to be 'Non-Christians,' see: O'Neill 1999: 64-82; O'Neill 2000: 286-288; Syngé 1959: 52; Vine 1965: 7-8; Wuest 1948: 13-17.

¹⁰⁴ Syngé 1959: 52.

¹⁰⁵ Vine 1965: 7.

¹⁰⁶ Vine 1965: 7.

¹⁰⁷ Wuest 1948: 13-17.

outlined the 'non-Christian' Essene hypotheses of both Kosmala and O'Neill. Hans Kosmala argues that Hebrews was written to convert the Essenes, while O'Neill argues that Hebrews was an Essene text with Essene addressees which was later adopted and altered for use by 'Christians.'

Those who argue that the addressees were 'non-Christians' use the same historical critical methodology as those who argue for 'Jewish Christian,' 'Gentile Christian,' Essene, Samaritan or Ebionite recipients. In the examples above, each interpreter utilises a list of the supposed unique characteristics of either 'Jews' or Essenes. Next, the interpreters argue that evidence of the unique characteristics can be found in the exposition of Hebrews. For Kosmala and O'Neill the addressees are thought to be Essene, based upon doctrinal similarity. For Synge, Vine and Wuest the addressees are thought to be 'Jews,' based upon the extensive use of the Old Testament. The critical difference for these interpreters comes in their analysis of the social situation of the addressees. Again, using the historical critical method, the interpreters find the 'exhortation' of Hebrews to reveal the social situation of the addressees. Here, there is one general level of agreement, the addressees are not yet 'Christians.' However, similar to the conclusions of those who argue for a 'Jewish,' 'Gentile,' or mixed 'Christian' group, there is significant dissention over the specific social situation of the audience. For example, Synge concludes that, "there is nothing in the epistle about falling into Jewish ways; there is everything about the failure to advance from Jewish ways into the Christian Church."¹⁰⁸ Reaching the opposite conclusion, Vine argues that the addressees were in danger of apostasy.

Critiques of the various 'non-Christian' hypotheses are commonly based upon verses from Hebrews which indicate an existing 'Christian' faith. For example, Hebrews 3:4 indicates that the addressees have an existing hope in Christ. Here, the author urges the addressees to hold fast to this hope, that they might be the house of God. Similarly, in Hebrews 10:23 the author calls for the addressees to hold fast to the confession of their hope. In Hebrews 6:4-6, the author explains that it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have

¹⁰⁸ Synge 1959: 52.

once been enlightened, but have since committed apostasy. This strong warning indicates that the addressees have been enlightened (i.e. are currently 'Christian'), and are being warned not to give up their faithfulness. Similarly, Hebrews 10:26 explains that the addressees have received the knowledge of the truth. Here, like Hebrews 6:4-6, the addressees are commonly understood to be 'Christians' who are receiving a word of 'exhortation.' Finally, in Hebrews 12:22-24, the author explains to the addressees that they have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem ... to Jesus. This section, like the previous examples, is often understood to refer to the current 'Christian' faith of the addressees. While these examples are cited by interpreters to defend the 'Christian' identity of the addressees, it must be recognized that most interpreters enter the discussion of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews with the assumption that the group was 'Christian.' Very little attention is given to the discussion of the existence of the 'Christian' faith of the addressees.

1.10 'Christians'¹⁰⁹

A growing number of interpreters are concluding that Hebrews does not reveal the specific nature of the identity of the addressees. Finding the arguments for Essene or Samaritan 'Christians' unconvincing, and the discussion between 'Jewish' and 'Gentile Christians' inconclusive, they describe the addressees simply as 'Christians.' In 1988, C.F. Evans explained that based upon the rhetoric of Hebrews, one could deduce that the addressees were either 'Jewish' or 'Gentile.'¹¹⁰ James Moffatt¹¹¹ and Alexander C. Purdy¹¹² observe that the author never mentions 'Jews' or 'Gentiles,' and views the addressees without distinctions. In 2001, Craig Koester explained that if the addressees were 'Jewish Christians,' we would expect a discussion of "circumcision, keeping kosher, and

¹⁰⁹ For a partial list of those who have understood the addressees to be 'Christians,' see: Attridge 1992: 97-98; Attridge 1998: 514-515; Barclay 1957: xix-xxi; Clarke 1952: 904; deSilva 2000a: 2-7; Filson 1978: 325; Horrell 2000: 150; Johnson 1986: 414; C. Koester 2001: 46-48; H. Koester 1982: 2/274; Larsson 1995: 98; Marxsen 1968: 222; Moffatt 1975: xvi; Purdy 1955: 591-593; Schneider 1957: 2-3; von Dobschutz, 1904: 196.

¹¹⁰ Evans 1988: 3-19.

¹¹¹ Moffatt 1924: xvi.

¹¹² Purdy 1955: XI/593.

observing the Sabbath, along with confessing Jesus to be Messiah, yet Hebrews makes no mention of circumcision and speaks only of an eschatological sabbath rest, not the weekly sabbath (4:1-10). The author relegates food laws to the realm of the flesh and a time that is past (9:9-10; 13:9).¹¹³ On the other hand, if the addressees were 'Gentiles,' we would expect "a clearer indication of this, as in other NT letters (cf. 1 Thess 1:9; Gal 4:8; Rom 1:5-6; 1 Pet 4:3-4). If listeners were in danger of reverting to Greco-Roman religious beliefs, there would probably have been some clearer mention of threats posed by idolatry (cf. 1 Cor 8:1-13; 10:14-30)."¹¹⁴ Koester then concluded that, "A simple distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christians does not help the interpretation of Hebrews ... Therefore, instead of seeking to identify the listener's ethnic background, we do well to consider the complex way in which they would have related to the dominant Greco-Roman culture, Jewish Subculture, and Christian community."¹¹⁵

For those who conclude that the specific identity of the addressees cannot be determined, the relationship between 'exposition' and identity need not be resolved. For example, some note that while Hebrews makes use of Old Testament language and images, this does not reveal the identity of the addressees. The relationship between 'exhortation' and social setting, however, remains problematic. For example, the debate concerning a 'Jewish-Christian' polemic or 'Gentile-Christian' polemic continues to affect the understanding of social setting. For David Horrell, it is not clear whether the 'Christians' addressed in Hebrews were 'Jewish' or 'Gentile,' but it is clear that they were in danger of leaving 'Christianity' for 'Judaism.'¹¹⁶ Leonhard Goppelt understands there to be a 'Gentile-Christian' polemic and concludes that the addressees were in danger of a relapse into "the secular way of life."¹¹⁷ Others do not understand there to be a polemic and conclude that the social situation of the addressees is

¹¹³ C. Koester 2001: 48.

¹¹⁴ C. Koester 2001: 48.

¹¹⁵ C. Koester 2001: 48.

¹¹⁶ Horrell 2000: 150.

¹¹⁷ Goppelt 1970: 135.

that of abandonment of the 'Christianity's' confession,¹¹⁸ facing persecution¹¹⁹ or of the need for encouragement.¹²⁰

1.11 A Critique of the Categorisation Process of Traditional Historical Criticism

As noted above, the traditional historical critical method for examining the possible identity of an individual or group is a three-step process: (a) the creation of a list of all groups in the first-century Mediterranean world; (b) the identification of the 'unique' characteristics of each group; and (c) the examination of a text for evidence which might point to the unique characteristics of one of the groups. If the text does offer conclusive evidence which points to the unique characteristics of a single group, then the identity of the individual or group is believed to have been identified. Also noted above, it is only the second and third steps which are commonly debated. In other words, while critics will argue over the supposed 'unique' characteristics of each group and over the presence of conclusive evidence within a text, it is most unusual to debate the categories themselves. In fact, the first step in this three-step process seems to be the easiest and 'safest,' for there appears to be ample evidence of the various 'groups' of the first-century Mediterranean world. In other words, these interpreters conclude with confidence that 'Jews,' 'Gentiles,' Essenes, Samaritans, Ebionites, and 'Christians' all existed at the time of the writing of Hebrews. What they find difficult, as we have seen above, is the process of identifying the 'unique' characteristics of the 'Jews,' 'Gentiles,' Essenes, Samaritans, Ebionites, and 'Christians.' Further, the difficulty they have identifying such 'unique' characteristics is matched only by the difficulty in identifying conclusive evidence of these characteristics within Hebrews.

It is essential that the historical critical method for examining identity be fully explained, for this thesis does not continue to challenge the second or third

¹¹⁸ Childs 1984: 409.

¹¹⁹ Filson 1978: 325.

¹²⁰ Johnson 1986: 414-415.

steps of the process, but in a fresh departure challenges the first. That is, and this is important, that I will not challenge the actual existence of a specific group nor propose the existence of an ‘unknown’ group; rather, this thesis will propose two necessary critiques of the *first* step of the historical critical process. First, historical critics employ an inadequate conceptual framework when identifying and describing the groups of the first-century Mediterranean world. This inadequate conceptual framework includes the use of both problematic terminology and problematic conceptions of the nature of the groups. Second, while historical critics have commonly employed putative first-century Mediterranean groups as categories with which to understand the identity of the addressees (i.e. ‘Jewish Christians,’ ‘Gentile Christians,’ etc.), they have not questioned whether or not these same categories were employed by the author and the addressees of Hebrews. In other words, they have not questioned whether or not the author and the addressees categorised the world in the same way that they do as historians.

1.12 The Inadequate Conceptual Framework of Historical Criticism

Much of the discussion concerning the identity of the addressees of Hebrews surrounds the question of whether they were ‘Jewish’ or ‘Gentile Christians.’ As explained above, some variations on this discussion exist. For example, there is consideration of whether or not they were specifically Essenes, Samaritans, or Ebionites. However, one thing that is common throughout the various proposals is the use of the terms: ‘Jews,’ ‘Gentiles,’ and ‘Christians.’ While these terms remain common designations, a growing number of interpreters are challenging the appropriateness of their use.¹²¹ In light of this important discussion, it is necessary to examine each of the three terms.

Why is it problematic to use the term ‘Jew?’ Philip F. Esler provides the most thorough examination to date of the terms ‘Jew’ and ‘Judean.’¹²² Esler

¹²¹ See Hanson and Oakman 1998: *xix* and 176; Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 32; and Pilch 1999: 98-104.

¹²² Esler 2003b: 62-74.

argues persuasively that “among the Greeks it was the practice to name ethnic groups in relation to the territory in which they originated.”¹²³ He explains that this practice “goes back as far as the *Catalogue of Ships* in book 2 of the *Iliad* and is evident in most pages of the *Histories* of Herodotus. Moreover, of the forty or so individual ethnic groups mentioned by Josephus in *Against Apion*, only one of them is non-territorial, the Hycsos, and the origin of this people were shrouded in mystery.”¹²⁴ Esler further notes that the practice of naming ethnic groups according to their territory of origin is related to the assumption that one’s environment affects one’s character. Based upon this evidence, Esler concludes that to translate Ἰουδαῖος as ‘Jew’ is to make an exception to a common cultural practice of the first-century Mediterranean world. He also argues that it is likely that Greeks and Romans would have connected the Ἰουδαῖοι with the territory called Judea whether they lived there or not. Therefore, rather than being ‘Jews’ they would have been understood as being ‘Judeans.’ Esler’s point, then, is that we should treat the Ἰουδαῖοι as members of an ethnic group (admittedly one with a strong ‘religious’ dimension), not as ‘Jews,’ the adherents of a religion.

A second and equally compelling argument against the use of ‘Jew’ is that many people are so familiar with a modern use of the term ‘Jew’ that they risk imposing those modern associations on the ancient groups. Hanson and Oakman note that “with the formation of the Mishnah (c. 200 C.E.) and the Bablylonian Talmud (c. 550 C.E.), ‘rabbinic Judaism’ took shape as a religious phenomenon, no longer connected to the geographical and political region of Judea.” It is the variety of modern expressions of Rabbinic Judaism which are known to modern readers. The use of the term ‘Jew,’ then, risks the modern associations of readers being placed upon an ancient people. While the practice of translating Ἰουδαῖος as ‘Judean’ is becoming increasingly more common, and is the designation which has been adopted by the *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, other positions are also offered. Helmut Koester suggests, “that the term ‘Judaism’ be removed from the entire debate, that we speak instead of ‘Israel,’ and that we define Israel as the

¹²³ Esler 2003b: 63.

¹²⁴ Esler 2003b: 63.

sum total of the highly diversified phenomenon of various groups, who were committed to the interpretation of the religious and cultural heritage of Israel.”¹²⁵

The term ‘Judaism’ also proves problematic, for it is not appropriate to add the suffix ‘-ism’ to an ethnic group when referring to the group’s behaviours, norms, etc. For example, we do not refer to the norms and behaviours of the Greeks by speaking of ‘Greek-ism,’ nor do we add the suffix when speaking of modern ethnic groups (i.e. ‘Irish-ism’). It is also important to note that by using the term ‘Judaism’ we risk employing an additional anachronistic assumption, for the term ‘Judaism’ is commonly used to refer to a modern ‘religion’ rather than the behaviours and norms of an ancient ethnic group, the Judeans.

Why is it problematic to use the term ‘Gentile?’¹²⁶ The discussion of the term ‘Gentile’ is necessarily connected to the discussion of the designation ‘Judean.’ Members of the Judean ingroup on some occasions ignored ethnic distinctions and lumped all outsiders, outgroup members, into one group. In Greek, Judeans referred to these people as the ἔθνη¹²⁷ or ‘the nations.’ This term has traditionally been translated, and therefore this outgroup has traditionally been designated, as ‘Gentiles.’ There was, of course, no such group as the ‘Gentiles,’ such people would have understood themselves to be ‘Greeks,’ ‘Romans,’ or members of another ethnic group. Most importantly, the translation ‘Gentile’ lacks the Judean intent of the term ἔθνη, for the complete ‘other-ness’ of this group is not adequately expressed. How then are we to understand and subsequently translate the term? To answer this important question, it is helpful to distinguish between an ‘emic’ and an ‘etic’ perspective.¹²⁸ In this case, we may conclude that ‘outsider’ or ‘foreigner’ constitute appropriate emic translations (i.e. a translation from the perspective of the indigenous or insider), while from an etic perspective the ἔθνη are ‘non-Judeans’ (i.e. a translation from the perspective of an outsider, or one studying another social group). Therefore, if one wishes to

¹²⁵ H. Koester 1994: 541-542.

¹²⁶ For a discussion of the term ‘Gentile,’ see Stanley 1996: 105-108.

¹²⁷ Compare with ἄλλοφύλοι in Acts 10:28. The New Revised Standard Version translates ἄλλοφύλοι as ‘a Gentile,’ while the Revised Standard Version uses, ‘one of another nation.’

¹²⁸ For an overview of the emic/etic distinction, see: Headland, Pike, and Harris: 1990.

emphasize the complete ‘other-ness’ of the ἔθνη, it is appropriate to refrain from using the designation, ‘Gentile,’ and use instead the etic designation ‘non-Judean.’

Why is it problematic to use the terms ‘Christian’ and ‘Christianity?’ John H. Elliott offers a recent and thorough analysis of the origins and meaning of the term, Χριστιανός.¹²⁹ Elliott explains that the three occurrences of the designation in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16) are the first appearances of the term in all of Greek literature. Further, he notes that Χριστιανός includes a borrowed Latin ending (-ιανός from the Latin -ianus) or an underlying Latin formation in its entirety. Elliott explains that in Latin-speaking circles, “‘Christ’ was regarded as a proper name (not a title ...), and the suffix *-ianus* designates a partisan, adherent, or client of the one named.”¹³⁰ After providing numerous examples from the Latin-speaking world, Elliott concludes that Χριστιανός is best understood as a designation which originated in Latin-speaking circles and was applied to ‘followers, partisans, or clients of Christ.’ Next, Elliott provides a detailed analysis of the three occurrences of the term in the New Testament, concluding that it was a designation used by others, or outsiders, to refer to the members of new movement. Finally, Elliott explains that the label had a derogatory overtone from the beginning. Therefore, translating Χριστιανός as ‘partisans of Christ’ would not reflect its appropriate social context, it would be better translated, ‘Christ-lackeys.’ After all, the group members were the “shameful sycophants of Christ, a criminal put to ignominious death by the Romans years earlier, in 30 CE.”¹³¹ In the second century CE, the movement did adopt the term as a self designation.

Because the term was a derogatory designation used by outsiders to identify the members of the new Christ movement, and was not used nor apparently known by Jesus, Paul or virtually any other New Testament writer (apart from the authors of Acts and 1 Peter), it is becoming increasingly more

¹²⁹ Elliott 2000: 789-797.

¹³⁰ Elliott 2000: 789.

¹³¹ Elliott 2000: 791.

common for biblical interpreters to avoid the problematic term, at least in relation to the first century. Further, many understand it to be anachronistic to use the term when referring to the Christ movement and its followers before 90 CE. In 1986, Dieter Georgi,¹³² and more recently Philip Esler¹³³ and John Pilch,¹³⁴ argued that the designation should not be used to describe the Christ-followers or the Christ movement in its first two generations. While it is notoriously difficult to date Hebrews, the majority of interpreters agree that the date is sometime between 60 and 90 C.E.¹³⁵ Because it is anachronistic to use the designation, 'Christian,' to refer to the movement at the time when Hebrews was likely written, and because the designation reflects an outgroup description rather than ingroup self-definition, it is appropriate to refrain from using the term. Instead, it is appropriate to employ the term, 'Christ-followers,' to refer to the members of the movement, and the term 'Christ movement,' to refer to the movement itself.

Is all this simply replacing one set of anachronistic terms for another? This question identifies the most common and understandable critique of the reassessment of these traditional terms. While it may be understood that 'Jew' is commonly used to refer to Rabbinic Judaism, and 'Christian' was not a designation used by members of the Christ movement until very late in the first century or early in the second, there is no evidence of the terms 'Christ movement,' or 'Christ-followers.' Therefore, isn't it equally inappropriate to introduce another set of 'foreign' terms? There are two responses to this question. First, it is inevitable that readers use language from their own perspectives (i.e. etic language). The awareness of this practice necessitates that the reader be very clear about the meaning of key words that are used. Therefore, by re-evaluating, and in some cases re-labelling, traditional group categories readers are able to distance themselves from the anachronistic assumptions that often come with the use of the terms such as 'Jew' and 'Christian.' Further, since these are terms which are commonly used today, it is all too easy to suppose that the sameness of

¹³² Georgi 1986: 347-348.

¹³³ Esler 1998: 245.

¹³⁴ Pilch 1999: 100.

¹³⁵ Compare Attridge 1989: 9; C. Koester 2001: 50; and Charlesworth 1985: 83-86.

language indicates a sameness of situation. For example, one might quite erroneously conclude that the 'Jews' were 'the same yesterday, today, and will be the same tomorrow.' Therefore, in order to respect the temporal and cultural distance between the first century and this study, I have chosen to employ words which force the reader to be intentional about how categories are defined and understood. Secondly, each of the 'new' category designations attempt to reflect the social context of the first century. As argued above, 'Judean' is the culturally appropriate designation for the descendants of Abraham, those with origins in Judea. Further, the term 'non-Judean' attempts to make clear, from an etic perspective, the extreme other-ness intended in the word ἔθνη. Finally, the designations 'Christ movement' and 'Christ-followers' attempt to reflect to the complexity of the discussion of the first decades of 'Christianity.' Such language is essential to allow a more methodologically sophisticated grasp on the important issues of identity relevant to the discussion.

It is not, however, only the terminology of historical critics that is inadequate. More fundamentally, they have an inadequate conception of the nature of the groups. As noted above, the use of the term 'Jew' does not encapsulate the ethnic nature of the group. Likewise, the term 'Gentile' does not bring out either the ethnic nature of the group or the complete 'other-ness' of the group. In fact, the use of 'Jew' and 'Christian,' implies that the groups were of the same 'type.' In other words, the categories of 'Jewish' and 'Christian' are often understood to be two competing 'religions.' Further, some have assumed that the addressees would have compared these two 'religions' and that it would have been possible to move freely between the two 'religions.'

These challenges made to the traditional terminology of historical critics and to the traditional conceptualisation of group 'types' are important. However, within the discussion of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews, neither a re-evaluation of terminology nor an appropriate conception of group 'types,' will prove to be completely sufficient. For even if a reader approaches the text with an appropriate conception of the Judean ethnic group, of the various non-Judean

ethnic groups, and of the ‘domestic-religiousness’¹³⁶ of the Christ movement, there still is not evidence in Hebrews that conclusively points to one of these ‘appropriate’ categories. For this reason, what is needed is a conceptual framework which addresses the specific situation of Hebrews.

1.13 The Identity of the Addressees of Hebrews: Identifying an Appropriate Conceptual Framework

In attempting to understand the identity of the addressees of Hebrews, it is common to overlook the nature of the question itself and to move directly to its many possible answers. If we step back and explore the question, if we attempt to understand how social groups in the first-century created and maintained identity, we find that the question actually illuminates the most appropriate answer. For example, interpreters from a variety of disciplines have proposed that social groups in the ancient Mediterranean world established and maintained identity with reference to outside groups.¹³⁷ If identity was established and maintained through the process of intergroup comparison, this proves to be the most appropriate avenue to pursue in attempting to understand the identity of the addressees of Hebrews. In other words, does Hebrews provide information concerning intergroup comparison? If so, how might this inform the discussion of the identity of the addressees?

Many classicists and ancient historians have concluded that social groups in the ancient Mediterranean world established and maintained identity through ‘us’ and ‘them’ statements, or the construction of the alien ‘other.’ For example, Robert Browning begins his essay on Greek identity by explaining that, “it is a commonplace both of sociological theory and of everyday experience that a human group often perceives and defines itself partly in terms of that which it is not - the other.”¹³⁸ Edith Hall¹³⁹ examines how Athenians defined themselves by

¹³⁶ For a recent discussion of households, house churches, and of fictive kinship, see: Osiek and Balch 1997.

¹³⁷ See Ardener 1989: 159-185; Dench 1995; J. Hall 2000.

¹³⁸ R. Browning 1989: 1-26.

¹³⁹ Edith Hall 1989.

inventing the barbarian other. Similarly, Paul Cartledge finds that the Greek understanding of self occurred through the invention of the Persians as barbarians. Through this invention, the Greek erected an 'us/them' boundary which separated Greece from all others and marked out Greek-ness.¹⁴⁰ Janet Huskinson notes that the Romans "paradoxically needed an 'uncivilized other' as a foil for the qualities of civilization which Romans wanted to claim for themselves."¹⁴¹ Francois Hartog argues that the barbarian in Herodotus functions like a mirror which reflects the Greek norms of his readers in reverse. Hartog concludes that the 'other' serves to define the group's 'self' and in turn unites the group.¹⁴²

Historians have also examined the 'us/them' distinction of the Mediterranean world as it relates to the study of the New Testament. Adela Yarbro Collins, Sean Freyne and others look at specific questions regarding Christianity and the 'self-other' distinction in the text, *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, 'Others' in Late Antiquity*. Yarbro Collins offers a thorough analysis of the notions of 'insiders and outsiders' in the "cultural diversity of western Anatolia toward the end of the first century of the Common Era."¹⁴³ Within this 'cultural diversity,' she provides insightful examinations of insiders and outsiders from the perspectives of Romans and Greco-Asiatics, 'Jews,' 'Christians,' and insiders and outsiders in the Book of Revelation. She also explains that "the judgment that some are insiders and others outsiders is obviously dependent on a particular perspective. It is relative to the self-definition of a particular group and to the criteria for membership in that group."¹⁴⁴ While Yarbro Collins offers keen insight into differing cultural perspectives of insiders and outsiders, and appreciates that an 'us/them' distinction is important to a group's self-definition, she does not provide any theoretical discussion of how such distinctions inform group identity. In other words, she fails to answer the question, 'how does intergroup distinction and

¹⁴⁰ Cartledge 1993.

¹⁴¹ Huskinson 2000: 14.

¹⁴² Hartog 1988: 5-6.

¹⁴³ Yarbro Collins 1985: 187-218.

¹⁴⁴ Yarbro Collins 1985: 187.

comparison relate to a group's self-definition?'

Similarly, Sean Freyne explores the anti-'Jewish' rhetoric in Matthew and John, arguing that vilifying the 'other' is an important element in defining the 'self.'¹⁴⁵ In his study, Freyne identifies the necessity of the 'us/them' distinction in the creation and maintenance of identity. However, Freyne, like Yarbrow Collins, fails to provide an adequate conceptual framework within which to define and understand identity. In fact, for Freyne the use of such a "heuristic device" is incompatible with an application of the texts to modern 'Jewish-Christian' relations. He notes that "a number of different approaches come to mind as possible heuristic devices for describing the phenomena we have uncovered. Social psychology, for example, might suggest the transference of fears into aggression; sociology could talk of sectarian rhetoric; cultural anthropology might see here a case of aggressive resymbolisation to meet social needs."¹⁴⁶ However, Freyne continues that "illuminating as all these approaches undoubtedly are, it would seem that some hermeneutical reflection concerning the texts' contemporary meaning, is called for ..."¹⁴⁷ Freyne provides no explanation why such "heuristic devices" are incapable of providing insight into a text's "contemporary meaning," he simply rejects their use. As we will see, attempting to understand identity without an appropriate conceptual framework is difficult, if not impossible. Further, we will see that such a framework is both able to provide insight into the social setting of an ancient text, and is also able to inform a modern reading of the text.

Doron Mendels' work, *Identity, Religion and Historiography: Studies in Hellenistic History*,¹⁴⁸ provides another example. Mendels explains, "*Ethne* in the ancient Near East were very aware of the differences between themselves; an *ethnos* builds itself not only by looking into a mirror, namely its own heritage, but also by constantly comparing itself with its various neighbours."¹⁴⁹ Later, under

¹⁴⁵ Freyne 1985: 117-143.

¹⁴⁶ Freyne 1985: 140.

¹⁴⁷ Freyne 1985: 140-141.

¹⁴⁸ Mendels 1998.

¹⁴⁹ Mendels 1998: 19.

the heading, 'Opposition and Identity,' Mendels notes that, "in certain cases identity is formed or strengthened by opposition."¹⁵⁰ However, like Yarbrow Collins and Freyne, Mendels also fails to provide any theory of identity with which to better understand these insightful observations.

While many explore the 'us/them' distinction and its relationship to identity, few move to the next, and necessary, level of interpretation. It is not enough to note that the relationship of one group with another influences group identity, one must also identify and apply an appropriate theory of group identity which is based upon group processes. In other words, concluding that 'us/them' differentiation informs identity is only the first step in creating an appropriate conceptual framework within which to understand identity. There remains many important questions. Why do groups compare themselves with one another? How does such comparison affect identity? Do groups compare themselves with groups of equal status, lower status, or higher status? What is the nature of group boundaries? In order to answer these questions, and to create an appropriate conceptual framework with which to understand identity, I will utilise social identity theory. Social identity theory is a social psychological theory developed in the 1970s by Henri Tajfel at the University of Bristol with important developments subsequently made by a number of social identity theorists. To date, Philip F. Esler is the only interpreter to make a detailed application of social identity theory in the study of the New Testament.¹⁵¹ Building upon, but developing, Esler's example of the appropriate and effective use of social identity theory in biblical interpretations, this thesis is a detailed application of social identity theory to the question of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews and to the possible purpose of the text. The thesis I will pursue, therefore, is a model of 'intergroup comparison' in a specific sense to be explained below.

¹⁵⁰ Mendels 1998: 30.

¹⁵¹ For examples of Philip Esler's application of social identity theory in New Testament interpretation, see Esler 1996: 215-240; Esler 1998; Esler 2003b; and Esler: forthcoming, a.

1.14 Conclusion

Who were the addressees of Hebrews? More importantly, why is this question so difficult to answer? In short, Hebrews does not offer the information traditionally used by historical critics in their investigation of identity. This observation is not unique. In fact, interpreters have long voiced this frustration, leading many to conclude that nothing can be known regarding the identity of the addressees of Hebrews. The question of the identity of the addressees, however, has far-reaching implications for the interpretation of the text. For example, this question has traditionally been connected to the question of the very purpose of the text. For many, to answer, 'Why was Hebrews written?' it is first necessary to answer, 'To whom was Hebrews written?' And so, the debate continues. Who were the addressees?

Perhaps the difficulty inherent in answering this question is not due to a lack of information available in Hebrews, but is due to the inadequate conceptual framework commonly employed by traditional historical critics. Historical critics have commonly employed modern categories when attempting to identify the identity of the addressees. By asking whether the addressees were 'Jewish' or 'Gentile,' modern readers have used categories that are at-odds with the categories employed by the author and the addressees. The author spoke in terms of 'us' and 'them.' The author described the behaviour of both groups and the forthcoming 'future' of each group. In fact, Hebrews is rich with information that might be used to understand the identity of the addressees. However, this information must be viewed through an appropriate conceptual framework, a framework that helps a modern reader understand the process of identity formation and maintenance. In short, an appropriate conceptual framework within which to examine the question of identity must begin with the consideration of two essential questions. First, how did social groups in the first-century Mediterranean world create and maintain identity? Second, what social categories were employed by the author and the addressees of Hebrews?

Chapter 2

The Historical Critical Investigation of the Purpose of Hebrews: An Overview and Critique

Discussion of the interpretation of the purpose of Hebrews is as diverse as that concerning its addressees. While some critics conclude with great certainty that the purpose of the text was to combat a threat of apostasy, others conclude with equal exuberance that the author wrote to strengthen the faith of the 'sluggish' addressees, addressees who were not in danger of such apostasy. Is the text polemical or non-polemical? Does the author assert the superiority of 'Christianity?' And so, the debate goes on. What was the purpose of Hebrews? In this chapter, I will outline the traditional historical critical method for examining purpose, and specifically, the method which has been used in the discussion of the purpose of Hebrews. Next, I will outline the four most common proposals regarding the purpose of the text. After an outline of the four proposals, I will critique the process commonly employed by historical critics. Here, I will conclude that the 'problem' inherent in the discussion of the purpose of Hebrews is necessarily linked to the 'problem' inherent in the discussion of the identity of the addressees. Since the purpose of the text is often based upon an interpreter's understanding of the identity of the addressees and their social context, a problematic conception of identity will produce a problematic conception of the purpose of the text. However, when an appropriate conceptual framework is employed in the discussion of identity, the text proves to yield important information concerning both the identity of the addressees and the purpose of Hebrews.

2.1 The Historical Critical Method and the Question of 'Purpose'

The historical critical method for analysing the probable purpose of a text is a three-step process. First, he or she must determine the identity and the social context of the addressees. For example, the interpreter might identify the

addressees of Hebrews as 'Jewish-Christians' who were at risk of 'apostasy.' Second, the historical critic must identify the main themes present in the text, for example, by concluding that the main theme of Hebrews is a comparison between 'Judaism' and 'Christianity.' Finally, the purpose of a text is thought to be discernable in the interplay between the identity and the social context of the addressees and the main themes present in the text itself. In the case of the example above, the interpreter might conclude that the purpose of Hebrews was to combat the threat of apostasy by emphasising the superiority of 'Christianity' over 'Judaism.'

In the case of Hebrews, I have examined the method and results of nearly 150 interpreters from over a 150 year period. Like the discussion of the identity of the addressees, it would be impossible to summarise the specific methodology of each work referenced in this chapter. However, a few generalizations can be made. First, and as noted above, Hebrews is commonly understood to have both 'exposition' and 'exhortation.' Second, some interpreters conclude that the purpose of the text is found in the sections of 'exposition.' For those readers who emphasise the 'exposition' of the text, the purpose of Hebrews may be summarised as: (a) a comparison of 'Christianity' with 'Judaism,' often with an emphasis upon the superiority of 'Christianity;' or (b) a text to address doctrinal problems. Third, some interpreters conclude that the purpose of the text is found in the sections of 'exhortation.' For those readers who emphasise the 'exhortation' of the text, the purpose of the Hebrews may be summarised as: (a) an 'exhortation' to strengthen the faith of the community; or (b) an 'exhortation' to prevent apostasy. Fourth, some interpreters conclude that the purpose of the text is found in a combination of the sections of 'exposition' and 'exhortation.' For example, many have concluded that the purpose of Hebrews was to strengthen the faith of the addressees (i.e. a conclusion based upon the 'exhortation') by emphasising the superiority of 'Christianity' over 'Judaism' (i.e. a conclusion based upon the 'exposition').

It may be helpful at this point to briefly examine a test case. In his discussion of the purpose of Hebrews, Thomas Hewitt notes that, "the writer's purpose was to a large extent influenced by the circumstances and spiritual

condition to whom the Epistle was addressed.”¹⁵² Because the identity and the social context of the addressees influenced the writer’s purpose, Hewitt offers his conclusions regarding the addressees. He notes that the addressees were ‘Jewish Christians’ who were: (a) “still babes in need of teaching;” (b) had a “low mental and spiritual grasp of the Christian faith” which was “blinding their minds to the true nature of the value of Christianity;” and (c) “they had become grieved at, and absorbed with, their sufferings.”¹⁵³ Further, “the Jewish nation had become hostile to Christians and no longer was it possible for the latter to worship within the temple precincts. This exclusion of the Christians from the law and temple seems to have affected the readers and was partly responsible for their discouragement.”¹⁵⁴ Hewitt also explains that, “it was also possible that the Jewish nation was facing a serious crisis and was making a strong appeal to all Jews for help and loyalty.”¹⁵⁵ Therefore, the addressees had “neither fully broken with Judaism nor fully embraced Christianity.”¹⁵⁶ In order to address this situation, Hewitt concludes that “the evidence strongly supports the view that the author is giving a full and systematic answer to the Judaistic controversy.”¹⁵⁷ Finally, Hewitt explains that, “the author’s main method for dealing with such a situation is to stress the finality of Christianity, and its superiority over all other religions. He seeks to accomplish this by a comparison of those two religions which claimed divine revelation - Judaism and Christianity.”¹⁵⁸ Hewitt is just one example of how the historical critical method is employed in the study of the purpose of Hebrews. First, Hewitt outlines his conclusion regarding the identity and the social context of the addressees. Second, he explores the sections of ‘exposition’ and ‘exhortation’ within the text. Finally, he concludes that the sections of ‘exposition’ are a “systematic answer to the Judaistic controversy,”¹⁵⁹ which was intended to address the specific issues identified in the sections of

¹⁵² Hewitt 1960: 39.

¹⁵³ Hewitt 1960: 39.

¹⁵⁴ Hewitt 1960: 39-40.

¹⁵⁵ Hewitt 1960: 40.

¹⁵⁶ Hewitt 1960: 40.

¹⁵⁷ Hewitt 1960: 40.

¹⁵⁸ Hewitt 1960: 40.

¹⁵⁹ Hewitt 1960: 40.

'exhortation' (i.e. addressees who had 'neither fully broken with Judaism nor fully embraced Christianity').

As we will see below, each of Hewitt's assumptions is widely debated. What was the identity and social context of the addressees? What are the main themes of the text? What might this tell us about the purpose of Hebrews? To best understand the complexity of this discussion, it is necessary to examine each of the possibilities regarding the purpose of the text.

2.2 Comparison and Superiority

In 1988, C.F. Evans offered a helpful description of the author's use of comparison in Hebrews. While many focus upon this feature of the text, Evans has provided a concise description of the variety of forms of comparison present in Hebrews and how both the use and the frequency of such forms of comparison are unique within the New Testament. Because comparison plays such a significant role in Hebrews and in social identity theory, and because I will revisit the role of comparison in Chapter 6, I will include the entirety of Evans' analysis.

In Hebrews there are twenty-seven instances of the comparative, which is a high percentage. The Son has obtained a more excellent name than the angels (1.4) and a ministry much more excellent than that of the old covenant (8.6). Christians must pay closer attention (2.1), to what God desired to show more convincingly (6.17), and what has become even more evident (7.15). Most significantly, the comparative *kreittōn* = 'better than', which was a kind of hallmark of syncretic vocabulary, occurs twelve times in Hebrews, twice as much as in the rest of the New Testament. Along with this go expressions of comparison such as 'so much the more' (12.9,25), 'how much more' (9.14); and the preposition *para* with the accusative case with the sense of 'compared with' is found eight times, and is almost confined to Hebrews in the New Testament. Another stylistic feature is the explication of the thesis of the superiority of one person over another by a series of antithetical statements introduced by the particles *men* and *de* - 'This man on the one hand ... that man on the other hand.' This strict use of the particles is rare in the New Testament, even in Paul, despite his antithetical cast of mind. In Hebrews it is relatively frequent and plays an important part. It serves to introduce some of the introductory string of Old Testament quotations as having been uttered with reference either on the one hand to the angels or on the other hand to the Son (1.5-13). It serves also to compare and contrast the faithfulness of Moses with that of Christ (3.5-6), and it governs the extended comparison and contrast in chs. 7-10 between, on the one hand,

the priesthood of the sons of Levi, which is plural, transient and mortal, is concerned with the copies of heavenly things, and needs to offer repeated sacrifices, and on other hand, the priesthood of Christ, which is without human descent, is single, permanent and immortal, which is concerned with the heavenly things themselves, and needs to offer a single sacrifice once for all. Finally, one may mention the use of the verb *prepein* = 'to be fitting'. One of the criteria in encomiastic Greek was what is befitting, and this may account for the two instances in Hebrews of a word so characteristic such as that in 7.26, 'It was fitting that we should have such a high priest ...', which commentators find surprising.¹⁶⁰

Evans further noted that within the examples of comparison present in Hebrews, there lies an emphasis upon 'superiority.' In fact, so strong is the role of comparison and superiority within the text, that Evans felt able to conclude that, "the theme, then, of superiority by comparison may be said to be stamped on the epistle from the start, and to control its argument."¹⁶¹

It should come as no surprise, then, that many of the interpretations examined for this study conclude that a purpose of Hebrew was that of 'comparison.' While there are great numbers who conclude that comparison is a primary purpose of the text, the nature and meaning of the comparison has been contested. To understand the diversity of opinion concerning the nature of comparison in Hebrews, it is necessary to understand the interrelationship between 'comparison' and the various other proposals regarding the purpose of Hebrews.

To begin, the majority of those who find comparison to be the purpose of Hebrews understand there to be an essential connection between comparison and the threat of apostasy. As outlined in Chapter 1, the 'traditional view' regarding the identity and social context of the addressees is that they were 'Jewish Christians' in danger of 'falling back' into 'Judaism.' For many, it is believed that the author compared 'Christianity' with 'Judaism,' placing an emphasis upon the superiority of 'Christianity,' in order to counter this threat of apostasy.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Evans, C.F. 1988: 7-8.

¹⁶¹ Evans, C.F. 1988: 9.

¹⁶² For examples of this position, see: Bristol 1967: 25; Brown, John 1862: 15-36; Cross and Livingstone 1984: 625; Gayford 1937: 597; Hagner 1990: 11-12; Lightfoot 1976: 35-38; Livingstone 1997: 742; May and Metzger 1977: 1455; McCaul 1871: 2; Montefiore 1969: 20;

Iutisone Salevao offers a recent example of this position. While Salvevao stresses that the purpose of Hebrews was not to engage in a 'blanket confrontation with Judaism,' but was to help the addressees 'cope with the problems besetting their community,' he still forcefully noted that the 'anti-Jewish' polemic in Hebrews cannot be ignored.

... although there is no explicit statement by the author to the effect that the readers were on the verge of relapse to Judaism, the general tenor of the letter and the whole orientation of his argument gives rise to a strong inference that the danger of relapsing was indeed a real threat and was a major regulating refrain in the letter. For instance, the danger of relapse of some members made it imperative for the author to define the relationship between Christianity and Judaism in terms of the superiority-inferiority dialectic. My claim in respect of the anti-Jewish polemic in Hebrews needs to be qualified though. What should be noted is that the letter was sent to a group of Jewish Christians to help them cope with the problems besetting their community. The primary purpose of Hebrews therefore was not to engage in a direct or blanket confrontation with Judaism as such. What the author said about the Jewish cult and institutions was nevertheless polemical. The anti-Jewish polemic in Hebrews is indeed real; it cannot be ignored, it is obvious.¹⁶³

While many understand there to be a relationship between the threat of apostasy and presence of comparison within the text, not all adhere to the 'traditional view.' For example, David Horrell concludes that, "these Christians may perhaps have been Jewish Christians tempted to return to the faith and practice of Judaism, or gentiles tempted to proselytize (there is certainly evidence that such a turning to Judaism was sometimes an attraction to gentile Christian converts: Gal 3:1-3; 5:1-12; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 47; see Wilson 1995: 159-67; Hvalvik 1996)."¹⁶⁴ Horrell further notes that, "what is absolutely clear is that the letter itself is full of quotations and imagery from the Jewish scriptures but that its overriding concern is to show how Christianity is superior to Judaism."¹⁶⁵ Similarly, Joseph B. Tyson argues that the addressees were 'Gentile Christians' in danger of falling away. Tyson then asserts that the author

Pink 1954: 11-13; Salevao 2002: 113; Saphir 1902: 1-19; Stibbs 1970: 10-11; and Vine 1965: 7.

¹⁶³ Salevao 2002: 113.

¹⁶⁴ Horrell 2000: 150.

¹⁶⁵ Horrell 2000: 150.

compared 'Christianity' and 'Judaism' as a means of preventing apostasy.¹⁶⁶

For others, the theme of comparison is linked with 'doctrinal' issues.¹⁶⁷ In other words, the author compares the 'doctrines' of 'Christianity' and 'Judaism.' For example, E. Schuyler English divides Hebrews into two sections, 'doctrinal' (Heb 1:1-10:18) and 'practical' (Heb 10:19-13:25).¹⁶⁸ English further describes the social context of the addressees."

The spiritual condition of those to whom this epistle was addressed was far from satisfactory. They were under the new covenant established through the sacrifice of the Son of God for sin, and yet it was difficult for them to lay aside entirely the provisions of the old. When, however, they turned to the old forms of worship, they were not happy in them. They were not holding fast to their profession, but were discouraged under suspicion, ostracism, and trial, and were becoming slothful.¹⁶⁹

Finally, English concludes that, "by comparing the doctrines and institutions of Christianity with the laws and [sic] customs of Moses, the writer points out that under the new and better covenant there are better promises. It was his purpose to lead these immature Christians in this way from the rudimentary state in which they were now dwelling to maturity and toward a state of perfection."¹⁷⁰

While the author's use of comparison is most commonly linked to apostasy, others conclude that the author used comparison to nurture,¹⁷¹ to strengthen the faithfulness of the addressees in light of persecution,¹⁷² to strengthen the faith of the sluggish addressees,¹⁷³ to move the addressees from immaturity to maturity,¹⁷⁴ to "reconcile his readers to the inevitable change through which they were passing,"¹⁷⁵ or more generally, to emphasise the absoluteness and superiority of 'Christianity.'¹⁷⁶ Finally, some conclude that while the comparison between 'Christianity' and 'Judaism' does emphasise the

¹⁶⁶ Tyson 1973: 245. See also: Davies, J.H. 1967: 5.

¹⁶⁷ For examples of this position, see: English 1955: 33-34; Manson 1949: 6-11.

¹⁶⁸ English 1955: 34.

¹⁶⁹ English 1955: 33.

¹⁷⁰ English 1955: 34.

¹⁷¹ Evans, Louis H. Jr. 1985: 31.

¹⁷² Filson 1978: 325.

¹⁷³ Lake and Lake 1938: 159-160; Héring 1970: xvi.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas 1944: 10-11.

¹⁷⁵ Rendall 1883: xxi.

¹⁷⁶ Pink 1954: 11-13.

superiority of 'Christianity,' the comparison is not presented as a polemic. In 1962, E. Dinkler argued that, "... the author regards Christianity in the historical continuity with Israel and Judaism, despite his constant stress upon its superiority."¹⁷⁷

What then can be concluded regarding the discussion of 'comparison' as the purpose of Hebrews? First, while some argue that the purpose of Hebrews is solely the comparison of 'Christianity' with 'Judaism,' it is most often seen as a means by which the author attempted to achieve another goal (i.e. prevent apostasy, strengthen faith, etc.). Second, it is most commonly assumed that the author compared 'Christianity' with 'Judaism' (or a Gnostic form of Judaism, as will be seen below). Third, the result of this comparison is thought, then, to include an emphasis on the superiority of 'Christianity.' Finally, while we will see that comparison is indeed a central feature of the text, its significance requires an appropriate theoretical framework to be appreciated.

2.3 Doctrinal Problems

As previously explained, many interpreters understand Hebrews to consist of both 'exposition' and 'exhortation.' And while most conclude that the purpose of the text is made apparent in the sections of 'exhortation,' or a combination of the 'exhortation' and 'exposition,' a number have focused primarily on the 'exposition' or 'doctrine' of Hebrews for insight in to the meaning of text. For those who conclude that the 'exposition' of Hebrews provides insight into the aim of the author, there are four primary theories of the purpose of the text. First, Hebrews was written to correct or inform the 'Christology' of the addressees.¹⁷⁸ Second, Hebrews was written to explain the true nature of 'Christianity.'¹⁷⁹ Third, Hebrew was written in response to some type heresy or to correct a view.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Dinkler 1962: 572.

¹⁷⁸ For examples of this position, see: Craddock 1998: 10; Harvey, A.E. 1970: 687; Lindars 1991: 135-142; Marxen 1968: 220; Schneider 1957: 4; and Vos 1956: 7.

¹⁷⁹ For examples of this position, see: Downer (undated): 6; Eisenbaum 1997b: 12; and Schmid 1970: 514.

¹⁸⁰ For examples of this position, see: Browning, W.R.F. 1996: 167; Duling and Perin 1994: 285; Goulder 2003: 393-406; and Grant 1963: 219.

Fourth, Hebrews was written to combat Jewish Gnosticism.¹⁸¹

First, a number of interpreters conclude that the purpose of Hebrews was to correct or inform the 'Christology' of the addressees. This conclusion is typically based on what is perceived to be an emphasis upon the nature of Christ present in Hebrews. While some conclude that the purpose of Hebrews is that of 'Christology,' the nature of the inadequacy of the 'Christology' of the addressees is often unanswered. For example, Fred B. Craddock notes that at the heart of the crisis facing the addressees was an inadequate Christology.

Whatever may have been the external factors contributing to the crisis of the community of readers, the fact that the writer responds to them with a lengthy and carefully argued christological presentation strongly implies that at the heart of the crisis was a christology inadequate for their social context. Perhaps they had a christology that was long on divinity but short on humanity, providing no way to fit the flesh and blood, lower than angels, tempted, crying and praying, suffering and dying Jesus into the larger scheme of God's redemption. Or perhaps their christology ended with the exultation and enthronement of the Son and offered no good news of his continuing ministry of intercession for the saints. At least in the writer's view, the crisis can best be met not with improved structures or social strategies, but with a more complete christology.¹⁸²

Regardless of whether or not the specific 'Christology' of the addressees may be identified, the conclusion that the author was primarily concerned with 'Christology' is believed to be present from the text. Perhaps A.E. Harvey most forcefully asserts this purpose with his conclusion that the author of Hebrews presented the most 'systematic and suggestive' doctrine of 'Christology' in the New Testament. According to Harvey, "the author had an academic mind."¹⁸³ Harvey further explains that, "he drew the entire inspiration for his argument from his study of the Old Testament. From the narrative in the Book of Exodus he gained his overpowering sense of the seriousness and awesomeness of the presence of God; and out of the detailed regulations in the Law of Moses concerning the arrangement of the sanctuary, and the office and function of the high priest, he developed his doctrine - the most systematic and suggestive in the

¹⁸¹ For examples of this position, see: Narborough 1961: 21-24; and Pfleiderer 1910: 278-279.

¹⁸² Craddock 1998: 10.

¹⁸³ Harvey, A.E. 1970: 687.

New Testament - of *Christ divine and human*.¹⁸⁴ Johannes Schneider offers another important example of 'Christology' and the purpose of Hebrews. For Schneider, the purpose of Hebrews is practical and pastoral. However, he argues that this pastoral aim was achieved through an emphasis on the nature of Christ. "The purpose of the Epistle is suggested by the situation of the recipients. The author labels his writing in 13:22 as a word of exhortation and consolation. He pursues primarily a practical, pastoral aim. He would strengthen the assurance of his readers in Christ and protect them by a series of exhortations. The readers must rather recapture a new vision of the whole grandeur and glory of Him who endows all human words with power and authority. For this reason the writer puts the meaning of Christ into proper perspective. If the readers learn once more to look upon Christ, then the danger now threatening will be banished."¹⁸⁵

Second, a number of interpreters conclude that the purpose of Hebrews was to explain the true nature of 'Christianity.' For some, the addressees are believed to have had a defective view of 'Christianity.' The author, then, wrote to correct this inadequate view. Arthur Cleveland Downer concludes that the author's aim was "...to show the excellence of Christianity to a community possessing a very defective insight into its true nature."¹⁸⁶ In 1870, Christian Friedrich Schmid concluded that the purpose of Hebrews was to explain the 'peculiar nature of Christianity.' Of further interest is Schmid's conclusion that this purpose was achieved without the use of a negative comparison or polemic. Schmid explained that, "the Epistle to the Hebrews also turns to the Jewish Christians with a view of bringing home to them the peculiar nature of Christianity; but this is done in a milder and less polemical mode, the fundamental idea of which is the positive connection between the new and higher and the earlier ordinance."¹⁸⁷ Like Schmid, W.K. Lowther Clarke concludes that the author's purpose was to describe Christianity in a non-polemical manner. Clarke explains that, "he gives us a picture of the continuous life of God's people from

¹⁸⁴ Harvey, A.E. 1970: 687.

¹⁸⁵ Schneider 1957: 4.

¹⁸⁶ Downer (undated): 6.

¹⁸⁷ Schmid 1870: 514.

the earliest time to the present, on which lines alone an intellectually satisfying theory of Christianity can be obtained.”¹⁸⁸ While both Downer and Schmid envision the author writing to a specific group which required an explanation of Christianity, Pamela Eisenbaum argues that Hebrews was a ‘generic speech’ written to set forth ideas which the author believed all ‘Christians’ should hold about their faith.¹⁸⁹

Third, some conclude that Hebrews was written in response to some type of heresy or to correct a view. For those who argue for this conclusion, the presence of comparisons is believed to provide evidence that the addressees possessed inappropriate views. For example, W.R.F. Browning concludes that, “... the recipients were surely former Jews, perhaps from the Essene group, who were inclined to honour Jesus as more than human but less than divine. They compromised by regarding him as an angel. (Philo wrote of the *Logos* as an angel). Hence the veneration of angels is particularly denounced in Heb. 1:4-12, 18.”¹⁹⁰ For Browning, the presence of a comparison between Jesus and angels points to a view which needed correction, namely, that the addressees regarded Jesus as an angel. Michael Goulder also emphasises the author’s comparison of Jesus with angels, concluding that the addressees were Ebionites who understood Christ to have been an angel.¹⁹¹ Hebrews, then, was written to combat this Ebionite heresy. Similarly, though with little explanation, Dennis C. Duling and Norman Perrin conclude that the aim of Hebrews was to ‘correct some of the views of that community.’¹⁹² In 1975, Reginald Fuller noted that, “the clue to the purpose of Heb is to be found in the hortatory parts of the letter.”¹⁹³ Based upon the ‘hortatory’ parts of Hebrews, Fuller concluded that, “... these Christians are in danger of forgetting the eschatological salvation in which they proleptically participate through their baptism.”¹⁹⁴ Fuller also explained that, “there is further

¹⁸⁸ Clarke 1952: 905.

¹⁸⁹ Eisenbaum 1997b: 12.

¹⁹⁰ W.R.F. Browning 1996: 167.

¹⁹¹ Goulder 2003: 397.

¹⁹² Duling and Perrin 1994: 285.

¹⁹³ Fuller 1974: 148.

¹⁹⁴ Fuller 1974: 148.

indication that the addressees were not simply lapsing *away* from Christianity but *into* certain questionable practices.”¹⁹⁵ He finally concluded that these questionable practices are ‘some kind of syncretism.’

Perhaps the best example, however, of this position may be found in the work of J.V. Dahms. While Dahms notes that the author was concerned that the addressees avoid persecution, five ‘doctrinal’ issues are also understood to be present in the text. Dahms identifies that the addressees (1) were putting confidence in the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices, (2) had a defective view of Christ, for Christ was understood to be not really superior to angels, (3) were failing to see the significance of the incarnation (in view of 12:2-3, Dahms does not think that it was a tendency toward Docetism), (4) were failing to perceive the significance of the promise to Abraham; and (5) were failing to perceive the importance of grace.¹⁹⁶ The purpose of the author, then, was to correct each of these problematic views.

Fourth, some argue that Hebrews was written to combat Jewish Gnosticism. Here, the reference to ‘diverse and strange teachings’ in Hebrews 13:9 is thought to be that of Jewish Gnosticism. The ‘exhortation’ that the addressees not be ‘carried away’ by such teachings is then seen as a possible purpose for the writing of Hebrews. According to F.D.V. Narborough, “the hypothesis that Hebrews was written in opposition to a Jewish type of Gnosticism, similar to that which was vexing the Colossian Christians, throws a flood of light on the contents of the Epistle.”¹⁹⁷ Similarly, though much earlier, Otto Pfleiderer concluded that Hebrews was written to combat Gnostic syncretism.¹⁹⁸

While the four positions outlined above are the primary theories regarding the ‘exposition’ of Hebrews, other variations are offered. For example, Charles Anderson concludes that, “In Hebrews we encounter a set of arguments designed, among other things, to justify transfer of support and commitment from the

¹⁹⁵ Fuller 1974: 148.

¹⁹⁶ Dahms 1977: 365-375.

¹⁹⁷ Narborough 1961: 23-24.

¹⁹⁸ Pfleiderer 1910: 278-279.

sacrificial system to the new sect.”¹⁹⁹ Helmut Koester offers yet another proposal of the purpose of Hebrews based upon its ‘exposition.’ Koester explains, “*The Epistle to the Hebrews* is a witness for the efforts to develop the Pauline legacy during the last decades of 1 CE.”²⁰⁰ Koester further notes, “But like Ephesians, Hebrews does not speak to the situation of a specific church, nor does the treatise deal with an immediate threat from heretical teachers. Rather, Hebrews presents a theological position within the general situation of the churches after Paul’s time.”²⁰¹ Finally, John L. McKenzie offers another proposal regarding the aim of the author. According to McKenzie, “The writer believed that the primitive gospel needed development and application to their needs.”²⁰²

What then can be concluded regarding the discussion of ‘doctrine’ as the purpose of Hebrews? First, those who emphasise the ‘exposition’ of the text tend to identify a problematic view held by the addressees (i.e. the ‘Christology’ of Jesus has too ‘high’ or too ‘low’). Second, it is often proposed that the aim of the author was to combat such problematic views by offering the preferred view (i.e. a systematic ‘Christology’). Finally, only a small number of those who emphasise the ‘exposition’ of Hebrews also emphasise the ‘exhortation’ of the text. For example, few incorporate ‘the threat of apostasy’ or the need for ‘strengthening the faith of the addressees’ into the discussion of the purpose of the text.

2.4 Strengthen the Faith of the Addressees

For George Wesley Buchanan, and certainly many others, the purpose of Hebrews is clear. Regardless of what an interpreter concludes regarding the date or location of the text, the aim of the author was to motivate the addressees to remain faithful. Buchanan explains, “The author wanted to persuade the original hearers or readers to hold fast to their faith and not give up hope that Jesus’ self-sacrifice was the perfect gift needed to motivate God to fulfill for them the promise he had made to Abraham. To achieve this purpose, he warned,

¹⁹⁹ Anderson 1989: 273.

²⁰⁰ Koester, H. 1982: 272.

²⁰¹ Koester, H. 1982: 273.

²⁰² McKenzie 1965: 349.

threatened, pleaded, encouraged, and interpreted scripture doctrinally to convince them to hold fast.²⁰³

That the author wrote words of 'exhortation' to strengthen the faith of the addressees seems apparent to many interpreters. However, there has been disagreement regarding the specific nature of this 'exhortation.' For some, the author wrote to strengthen the faith of the addressees in the face of opposition. Others argue that the author wrote to strengthen the faith of the addressees who were experiencing sluggishness, weariness, or doubt. Still others argue for a more general position, that the author wrote to strengthen, revitalize, or to confirm the faith of the addressees.

The argument that the purpose of Hebrews was to strengthen the faith of the addressees in the face of opposition generally takes two forms. First, some argue that the addressees were facing persecution and that the author wrote to strengthen their faith in the midst of this crisis.²⁰⁴ Second, others argue that the addressees were suffering dishonour, or reproach from the outside, and that the author wrote to strengthen their faith in the midst of that crisis.²⁰⁵ Floyd V. Filson offers a helpful example of the first line of argumentation. For him, the addressees had been persecuted in the past (Hebrews 10:32-34) and were again facing persecution. Further, he concludes that the author used 'comparison,' with an emphasis on 'superiority,' to urge the addressees to remain faithful.²⁰⁶

George Guthrie concludes that the addressees were facing both persecution and an increasingly 'blurred picture of Jesus.'²⁰⁷ Similarly, A.F.J. Klijn concludes that the addressees were facing multiple opponents. For Klijn, the addressees were suffering from persecution and false teachings.²⁰⁸ Regardless of the variety within this position, many conclude that the purpose of the author was to strengthen the faith of the addressees who were facing persecution.

²⁰³ Buchanan 1978: 266.

²⁰⁴ For examples of this position, see: Bristol 1967: 25; Brown, Raymond 1982: 13; Filson 1978: 325; Guthrie, George 1998: 22; and Klijn 1967: 143.

²⁰⁵ For examples of this position, see: Craddock 1998: 10; deSilva 2000a: 18-19; Koester, C. 2001: 72; and Roddy 1962: 9-10.

²⁰⁶ Filson 1978: 325.

²⁰⁷ Guthrie, George 1998: 22.

²⁰⁸ Klijn 1967: 143.

Clarence S. Roddy offers an alternative perspective on the crisis faced by the addressees. Rather than facing persecution, Roddy argues that the addressees were facing reproach or social ostracism. For Roddy, the addressees “... were outcasts from Judaism and they were suspect by the Empire. Therefore, they were being tested by being ostracized by society in general.”²⁰⁹ Further, Roddy connects this social ostracism with a weakened faith and threat of apostasy.²¹⁰ The author, therefore, wrote to strengthen the faith of the addressees by emphasising the superiority of Christ.

David A. deSilva argues a similar position,²¹¹ basing his analysis on the first-century Mediterranean values of honour and shame. For deSilva, “The situation thus presented appears to be a crisis not of impending persecution, nor of heretical subversion, but rather of commitment occasioned as a result of the difficulties of remaining long without honor in the world. The danger of falling away stems from the lingering effects of the believers’ loss of status and esteem in their neighbors’ eyes, and their inability to regain a place in society, or approval from the outside world, by means that would allow them to remain rigidly faithful to Jesus and the One God.”²¹² DeSilva further explains that, “The author encounters his audience at this point of wavering and challenges them with the claim that the real loss is not the deprivation of their place in society but the forfeiture of their inheritance from God. They risk losing the lasting honor that God grants them if they ‘shrink back’ under pressure from society.”²¹³ Informed by the writing of deSilva, Craig Koester concludes that, “Hebrews addressed a situation in which listeners were experiencing reproach from those outside of the community (13:13) together with some disintegration within the community (5:11; 6:12; 10:25).”²¹⁴ Koester further explains this social situation.

If meeting with Christians meant being treated with contempt, one might

²⁰⁹ Roddy 1962: 9.

²¹⁰ Roddy 1962: 10.

²¹¹ DeSilva’s position may be found in a number of his publications. For a thorough overview, see: deSilva 1995. For a summary, see: deSilva 1999a: 144-177; deSilva 1999b; or deSilva 2000a: 18-19.

²¹² DeSilva 2000a: 18.

²¹³ DeSilva 2000a: 19.

²¹⁴ C. Koester 2001: 87. See also: Craddock 1998: 10.

hope for more honorable treatment by leaving the Christian community (10:25). As a response, the author places listeners before an alternative court of reputation, one in which God's judgements overturn society's judgements. The world pronounced a negative judgement against Jesus, subjecting him to disgrace and death (12:2), but God overturned the verdict of the lower court by raising Jesus from the dead and exalting him to everlasting glory (1:2-4; 2:8-9). God will do the same for his people, so that listeners are to hope for the glory (2:10) and to fear the judgements that come from God (4:12-13), not from unbelieving society.²¹⁵

Rather than understanding the purpose of Hebrews to be that of strengthening the faith of the addressees in light of opposition, some interpreters understand the aim of the text to be that of strengthening the faith of a sluggish group of addressees.²¹⁶ Perhaps it is Marcus Dods who most vividly expresses this position. According to Dods, "... the danger which roused the writer to interpose was ... a gradual, almost unconscious admission of doubt which dulled hope and slackened energy."²¹⁷ Therefore, "To restore in them the freshness of faith the writer at every part of the Epistle exhorts them to steadfastness and perseverance."²¹⁸ Finally, Dods concludes that, "The aim of the writer then was to open up the true significance of Christ and His work, and thus to remove the scruples, hesitations and suspicions which haunted the mind of the Jewish Christian embarrassing his faith, lessening his enjoyment, and lowing his vitality."²¹⁹ Within this position, the argumentation tends to vary as greatly as the terminology. For example, while some describe the addressees as 'sluggish,' others might favour 'weary,' 'sagging,' 'slothful,' or any number of similar terms.

Likewise, while all would understand the addressees to have been complacent and in need of 'exhortation,' the response of the author remains open for debate. For example, while Dods concludes that the author emphasised 'the true significance of Christ and His work,' others find that the author placed an

²¹⁵ Koester, C. 2001: 72.

²¹⁶ For examples of this position, see: Dods 1910: 235-237; Gench 1996: 3-5; Lake and Lake 1938: 159-160; Lane 1991a: xcix-c; Larsson 1995: 102; Milligan 1899: 53-55; Peterson 1982: 186; Purdy 1955: 591; Quanbeck 1972: 898; Smith, R. 1984: 17; Thomas 1944: 10-11; Thompson 2000: 569.

²¹⁷ Dods 1910: 235.

²¹⁸ Dods 1910: 235-236.

²¹⁹ Dods 1910: 237.

emphasis elsewhere. In 1984, Robert H. Smith wrote that, "One of his high hopes is that his readers will prove to be in real continuity and community with the faithful heroes of the past, Hebrews as well as non-Hebrews, like Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Melchizedek."²²⁰ Further, the effect of this complacency is open for debate. For example, while some conclude that the effect of sluggishness is apostasy, others argue against such a view. Ruth Hoppin explains that, "We are sure Hebrews was designed to spur the flagging zeal of the readers. They are warned against apathy (Heb 12:12,13) and faintheartedness (Heb 12:3)."²²¹ Hoppin further notes that, "The threat of reversion to Judaism was of major proportions."²²² Therefore, for Hoppin the 'flagging zeal' of the addressees and the possibility of apostasy are interrelated. In contrast, George Milligan provides a very early example of an alternate understanding of the complacency of the addressees. Milligan notes that the addressees were, "... a small community of Jewish Christians, located probably in Rome ..."²²³ He further draws attention to the sluggishness of the addressees. Milligan explains that, "Their failure in spiritual growth too had been accompanied, as is ever the case, by failure in practical life."²²⁴ Finally, Milligan argues that this 'failure in spiritual growth' was not related to a threat of apostasy. "Nowhere, whether in the elaborate contrasts which he draws between the New Covenant and the Old, or in the practical appeals with which he accomplishes them, does the writer warn his readers against falling back into the religion of Moses."²²⁵ While many, then, argue that the purpose of Hebrews was to strengthen the faith of the complacent addressees, there has been great variety in the way that this situation has been conceptualised.

Finally, a number of interpreters prefer a more general description of the purpose of Hebrews. Here, the aim of the author was to strengthen the faith of the

²²⁰ Smith 1984: 17.

²²¹ Hoppin 1969: 92.

²²² Hoppin 1969: 93.

²²³ Milligan 1899: 53.

²²⁴ Milligan 1899: 54.

²²⁵ Milligan 1899: 55.

addressees.²²⁶ In 1992, Harold Attridge provided an outline of the discussion of the purpose or aim of Hebrews.²²⁷ After examining the various proposals which have been offered by interpreters, Attridge concluded that, "Whatever the precise causes of the problem confronted by the author and whatever his perception of the problem, he is engaging in Hebrews in an attempt to revitalize the faith of his addressees and put their commitment on more solid footing."²²⁸ This example from Attridge is perhaps the best example of this position, for although Attridge does not presume a specific social situation, he does assert the need for the author to strengthen the faith of the addressees. In some ways, this position has much in common with the argument that the identity of the addressees was 'Christian,' for those who hold both positions feel able to make a general description regardless of the many unknown variables.

What then can be concluded regarding the discussion of the purpose of Hebrews as the need to strengthen the faith of the addressees? First, there is great diversity in the way that this situation is understood (i.e. persecution, social ostracism, general sluggishness, etc.). Second, there is great diversity in the interpretation of the response of the author (i.e. use of comparison, emphasising the superiority of 'Christianity,' etc.). Third, there is great diversity in the interpretation of the possible result of the weakened faith of the addressees (i.e. threat of apostasy, no threat of apostasy). Finally, regardless of the specific situation, the author is often thought to view this weakened state of faithfulness as significant.

²²⁶ For examples of this position, see: Attridge 1992: 100; Barclay 1957: xx; Bengel 1858: 335; Buchanan 1978: 266; Héring 1970: xvi; Kee, Young, and Froelich 1973: 300; Robinson 1933: xvii; Schneider 1957: 4.

²²⁷ Attridge 1992: 99-100.

²²⁸ Attridge 1992: 100.

2.5 Apostasy²²⁹

A great number of interpreters conclude that the purpose of Hebrews is to prevent apostasy. While there is, again, diversity in this position, the majority adhere to the traditional view,²³⁰ that the addressees were 'Jewish Christians' in danger of 'falling back' into 'Judaism.' The author, then, wrote to prevent this apostasy. For example, Richard Lauersdorf concludes that the addressees were 'Jewish Christians' facing the temptation of turning away from 'Christianity' and back to their 'Jewish' religion. Lauersdorf notes, "About its purpose there can be no uncertainty. It was written to urge people not to abandon their faith in Christ."²³¹ While many adhere to the traditional view, how this position is argued does vary. As seen above, some understand that the author used 'comparison' as a tool with which to dissuade the addressees from apostasy. Others understand that the author has used 'doctrinal' arguments to show the superiority of 'Christianity.'

The conclusion that the purpose of Hebrews was to prevent apostasy does not, however, require that the interpreters understand the addressees to have been 'Jewish Christians.' For example, J.H. Davies,²³² Arthur Cushman McGiffert,²³³ and J.R. Willis²³⁴ all conclude that the addressees were 'Gentile Christians' in danger of apostasy. Similarly, Victor C. Pfitzner argues that the addressees were a mixed group of 'Jewish' and 'Gentile Christians' in danger of apostasy. For both Ruth Hoppin²³⁵ and Philip Edgcumbe Hughes there is a special relationship

²²⁹ It is important to note that the term 'apostasy' is rarely, if ever, defined by those who use the word. Like the use of the terms 'identity' and 'polemic,' the use of 'apostasy' suggests different things to different interpreters. For a thorough discussion of the meaning of 'apostasy,' see: S. Wilson 2004: 10-22.

²³⁰ For examples of this position, see: Barnes 1848: iv; Bruce, A.B. 1899: 9; Bruce, F.F. 1982: 1008; Bruce, F.F. 1990: 9; Davidson, A.B. 1882: 19; Davidson, S. 1848-1851: 266-276; Gouge 1866: 6; Gundry 1979: 334-335; Hagner 1990: 11-12; Kent 1972: 25; Lauersdorf 1986: 4; Lightfoot 1976: 35-38; Livingstone 1997: 742; Lünemann 1882: 56; W. MacDonald 1971: 9-13; May and Metzger 1977: 1455; McCaul, 1871: 2; Montefiore 1969: 20; Nairne 1913: 20-21; Peake 1906: 8-16; Peake 1910: 1-19; Pfeiffer 1962: 9; Salevao 2002: 113; Saphir 1902: 1-19; Snell 1959: 27-28; Stibbs 1970: 10-11; Stuart 1864: 265-272; Vine 1965: 7; Williamson 1964: xii-xiii.

²³¹ Lauersdorf 1986: 4.

²³² Davies 1967: 5.

²³³ McGiffert 1897: 469.

²³⁴ Willis 1909: 338.

²³⁵ Hoppin 1969: 93.

between the threat of apostasy and the Essenes. In short, regardless of differing views concerning the identity of the addressees and their social context, many view the 'exhortation' of the text to speak clearly to the threat of apostasy.

In 1984, Brevard Childs presented an analysis of Hebrews based upon the canonical approach. Childs, like many before him, concluded that Hebrews offers both 'exposition' and 'exhortation.' Further, Childs observed that, "The canonical significance of the interchange between doctrinal and paraenetic sections is in reminding the reader that the christological discussions of the letter have an immediate effect on the believer. The Christians who are addressed in Hebrews are in danger of falling away from their confession (3.1; 4.14;10.23). The author of Hebrews sets out to remind them of the nature of the salvation which Christ, the subject of the confession, has procured."²³⁶ For Childs, then, the threat was a 'falling away from their confession.' While not specifically a threat of 'apostasy,' this proves to be another example of the uniformity with which many read the 'exhortation' of Hebrews. The addressees were in danger of 'falling away.'

What then can be concluded regarding the purpose of Hebrews and the threat of apostasy? First, interpreters with different perspectives concerning the identity and social context of the addressees argue that the addressees were in danger of apostasy (i.e. 'Jewish Christians,' 'Gentile Christians,' and Essenes). Second, interpreters with different perspectives concerning the nature of the author's argument argue that the addressees were in danger of apostasy (i.e. polemical, non-polemical, an emphasis on comparison, an emphasis on doctrine, etc.). Third, the most common perspective regarding the identity and the social context of the addressees, the 'traditional view,' integrates the threat of apostasy into its position, making this the 'majority' position regarding the purpose of the text.

²³⁶ Childs 1984: 416.

2.6 Mixing and Matching: A Warning Concerning the Nuances of the Discussion of the Purpose of Hebrews

To best summarise the various proposals regarding the purpose of Hebrews, it is necessary to group or categorize the theories. For the purpose of this thesis, it is reasonable to assert that interpreters tend to emphasise either the 'exposition' or the 'exhortation' of the text, and in some cases there is an emphasis upon both. Further, the theories may be roughly grouped into four categories: comparison/superiority, doctrine, the strengthening of faith, and the threat of apostasy. However, as soon as such categories are employed, their limitations become apparent. While some interpretations may fit 'neatly' into a single category, most do not. In fact, most interpretations employ a combination of theories regarding the purpose of the text. As shown above, it is common to argue that the author compared 'Christianity' with 'Judaism,' emphasising the superiority of 'Christianity,' in order to combat a threat of apostasy. Here, both the first and fourth categories are employed. It is quite reasonable to assert that by simplifying the arguments of various interpreters for the purpose of categorisation, much is lost. However, because the categories are not 'fixed' entities, but fluid arrangements of the various proposals, much can be gained by their use. In this chapter, I have shown that there is diversity of opinion regarding the identity and social context of the addressees (i.e. 'Jewish Christians' in danger of apostasy, 'Gentile Christians' that have grown 'sluggish,' etc.) I have also observed that there is diversity of opinion regarding the emphasis of the author (i.e. a polemical argument asserting the superiority of 'Christianity,' a non-polemical argument asserting continuity between the 'old' and the 'new,' etc.). Lastly, I have noted that even within similar proposals, there is often variety (i.e. within the 'traditional view' some interpreters emphasise 'comparison,' while others emphasise 'doctrine'). Therefore, while there are four general positions regarding the purpose of Hebrews, one must acknowledge and appreciate the nuances of each individual proposal.

2.7 A Critique of the Traditional Historical Critical Process of Determining the Purpose of Hebrews

Hebrews presents a dilemma for the historical critic engaged in the discussion of the purpose of the text. As noted above, the historical critical method for analysing the purpose of a text is a three step process. First, the interpreter must determine the identity and social context of the addressees. Second, the interpreter must identify the main themes present in the text. Lastly, the purpose of the text is thought to be discernable in the interplay between the identity and social context of the addressees and the main themes of the text. In the case of Hebrews, however, there is little to no agreement regarding the identity and social context of the addressees. Further, the conclusions made regarding the identity and social context of the addressees have traditionally informed the conclusions made regarding the main theme or themes of the text and the conclusions made regarding the purpose of the text. This means that there has been as much diversity in the discussion of the main themes and purpose of Hebrews as there has been in the discussion of the identity of its addressees.

For example, if it is believed that the text points to 'Jewish Christian' addressees in danger of apostasy, this conclusion informs how the interpreter reads the text. In this case, the comparison of Jesus with Moses in Hebrews 3:1-6 tends to be understood to represent a comparison between 'Christianity' and 'Judaism.' Here, it might be believed that an emphasis on the superiority of Jesus is actually an emphasis on the superiority of 'Christianity.' Further, if an interpreter understands the addressees to have been 'Jewish Christians' in danger of apostasy, the conclusion is commonly made that the author's main theme was that of 'the superiority of Christianity.' While this example might seem quite reasonable, and actually represents the 'traditional view,' an alternative understanding of the identity of the addressees produces an alternative understanding of the text. If the addressees are understood to have been 'Christians' who had a problematic 'Christology,' the comparison of Jesus and Moses might be understood to have been a 'doctrinal' argument asserting the divine nature of Christ. Here, it might be believed that an emphasis on the superiority of Jesus is not a sign of the danger of apostasy, but a signal that the

addressees possessed a dangerously 'low' 'Christology.' For this interpreter, the main theme of Hebrews might be the 'divine nature of Christ.' Perhaps most significantly, the conclusions made regarding the identity of the addressees and those made regarding the main theme or themes of the text inform the conclusions reached as to the purpose of the text. Referring again to the examples above, if an interpreter concludes that the addressees were 'Jewish Christians' in danger of apostasy and that the main theme of the text was 'the superiority of Christianity,' the interpreter likely concludes that the purpose of Hebrews was to show 'the superiority of Christianity in order to combat the threat of apostasy.' On the other hand, if the interpreter concludes that the addressees were 'Christians' with a dangerously 'low' 'Christology,' the interpreter tends to conclude that the purpose of Hebrews was to 'emphasise the divine nature of Christ in an attempt to correct this problematic view.' In short, there are nearly as many proposals regarding the purpose of Hebrews as there are proposals regarding the identity of the addressees and the main themes of the text.

2.8 The Purpose of Hebrews: Identifying an Appropriate Conceptual Framework

An appropriate conceptual framework within which to examine the purpose of text must begin with an appropriate conceptualisation of the identity of the addressees. As explained in Chapter 1, such a conceptualisation must be based upon two important questions. First, how did social groups in the first-century Mediterranean world form and maintain identity? Second, what social categories were employed by the author and the addressees of Hebrews? As suggested in Chapter 1, social identity theory provides an appropriate framework within which to answer both critical questions. Therefore, after a detailed analysis of both social identity theory and the text of Hebrews, I will provide an answer to the question, 'Who were the addressees of Hebrews?' As will be seen in Chapter 7, a culturally sensitive answer to the question of identity will also provide insight into both the main theme of the author and, finally, the purpose of the text. This thesis, therefore, follows closely the historical critical process for analysing the purpose of a text. However, rather than allowing an inappropriate

conceptualisation of identity to inform the discussion of the purpose of the text, this thesis will provide a detailed analysis of identity through a social identity approach. This analysis of identity will, in turn, inform an analysis of the purpose of Hebrews.

2.9 Conclusion

What was the purpose of Hebrews? Was the author concerned to combat apostasy? Was the author writing to strengthen the faith of the addressees? Were the addressees facing opposition? Were the addressees 'sluggish?' More importantly, why is this question so difficult to answer? In short, the discussion of the identity of the addressees informs the discussion of the purpose of Hebrews. It is submitted that the difficulty inherent in answering this question is due to an inappropriate conceptualisation of identity. If an interpreter takes seriously both the manner in which first-century Mediterranean social groups formed and maintained identity and the social categories employed by the author and the addressees of Hebrews, an appropriate conceptualisation of identity is available. Further, this conceptualisation of identity leads to a new understanding of both the main theme and the purpose of the text.

Chapter 3

Social Identity Theory and Hebrews

As introduced in Chapter 1, the historical critical process for examining identity involves the differentiation of groups by their presumed unique characteristics. Because groups are assumed to possess unique characteristics, the interpreter searches a text for evidence of the characteristics of a single social group. If such characteristics are believed to be present, the identity of the group is then thought to have been determined. Unfortunately, this process is inadequate for analysing the identity of the addressees of Hebrews. In short, Hebrews does not offer evidence which conclusively points to the presumed unique characteristics of a single social group. This has led to both a multiplicity of proposals regarding the identity of the addressees and to a commonly voiced frustration over the question of identity.

This is not, however, the end of the discussion of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews. As explained in Chapter 1, interpreters from a variety of disciplines argue that social groups in the first-century Mediterranean world formed and maintained identity through a process of intergroup comparison. But, an adequate conceptual framework for examining the identity of the addressees of Hebrews is based upon a methodologically sophisticated understanding of the relevant groups and on the process of intergroup comparison, rather than upon the presumed unique characteristics of social groups provided without any disciplined consideration of issues of identity. It is within this conceptual framework that this study will analyse the identity of the addressees of Hebrews. However, before we look at intergroup dynamics in the text, we must fully understand the process of identity formation and maintenance through intergroup comparison. Here, social identity theory proves invaluable. This chapter, therefore, provides both a brief history of social identity theory, for it is necessary to understand the context out of which this theory emerged, and a thorough description of the theory. Further, the chapter concludes with current criticism and refinement of social identity

theory. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, social identity theory will not only provide an appropriate conceptual framework within which to analyse the identity of the addressees of Hebrews, but also one within which to understand the very purpose of the text.

3.1 Historical Context: The 'Master Problem' of Social Psychology

The roots of social identity theory are planted deeply in the 'master problem' of social psychology, that of the relationship between the individual and the group. Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams frame this problem within an essential question of social psychology. "Are groups merely aggregates of individuals in which the normal processes of interpersonal behaviour operate in the usual way but among a larger number of people, or do groups represent modes of interaction and thought which are qualitatively distinct from that involved in interpersonal interaction?"²³⁷ The pendulum swung between these opposing theories concerning the relationship between individuals and groups throughout the twentieth century.

The earliest non-experimental social psychological studies of the relationship between the individual and the group were based on the study of large-scale collective events, such as crowds, riots, demonstrations, and mobs. The conclusions of these earliest studies indicated that groups produced what we might call a 'mob' or 'crowd' mentality, a mindset which produces a behaviour in individuals within a group which would normally not be found in single individuals.²³⁸

In 1920, William McDougall argued that the group was something greater than the sum of its individual members. Calling this the 'group mind,' McDougall argued that groups are governed by their own laws and norms which are different than those of the individuals who make up the group.²³⁹ In 1924, F. H. Allport, in sharp contrast to McDougall, argued that since psychology occurs

²³⁷ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 7.

²³⁸ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 11.

²³⁹ McDougall 1920.

in the mind of the individual, there can be “no psychology of groups which is not essentially and entirely a psychology of individuals.”²⁴⁰ While Allport emphasized the individual in the social psychology, others have remained open to the possibilities of group oriented approaches.

Muzafer Sherif’s 1939 analysis of the ‘special properties of crowd situations,’²⁴¹ followed McDougall’s example of a group oriented approach. In his analysis, Sherif offered four observations concerning the special properties of groups. “(a) the *group situation* may bring about modifications in the experience and behaviour of every individual in it. (b) When the performance of a task is in question, the output of the individual members may vary. (c) The individual in the group or crowd situation acts as a member of the group. His experience and behaviour are determined by the nature of his membership in it. (d) The formation of crowds may depend on the relaxation of old norms, and may also result in establishing new norms.”²⁴²

Similar observations were made in 1952 by Solomon Asch. Asch began his analysis of group theory by examining ‘two extreme doctrines:’ the individualistic thesis and the group mind thesis.²⁴³ He noted that while each doctrine is an exaggeration, they are both built upon a valid assumption. Group theory must recognize the fact that psychological processes occur in individuals. But no less important is the fact that individuals function within groups with their own governing norms. Therefore, Asch concluded that “we must see group phenomena as both *the product and condition* of actions of individuals.”²⁴⁴

While Sherif and Asch asked critical questions concerning the relationship between the individual and the group, few social psychologists followed in this area of analysis. In fact, L. Berkowitz’s 1962 analysis of aggression swung the pendulum back into the arena of individualism.²⁴⁵ Worchel, Morales, Paez, and Deschamps summarise that “before Tajfel’s formulation of social identity theory,

²⁴⁰ Allport 1924: 4.

²⁴¹ Sherif 1936: 75-88.

²⁴² Sherif 1936: 78.

²⁴³ Asch 1952: 241-242.

²⁴⁴ Asch 1952: 251.

²⁴⁵ Berkowitz 1962.

there were several psychosocial approaches to the study of identity. However, perhaps due to their low theoretical coherence, they did not succeed in making social identity a crucial concept of the discipline of social psychology."²⁴⁶

Understanding that social identity theory arose out of the tension of the 'master problem' of social psychology is essential. Responding to this tension, social identity theory seeks to resolve the issue of the relationship between the individual and the group by offering a 'non-reductionist' approach. Exemplified by Allport, much social psychological analysis of groups has been reductionist in nature. Such reductionists understand groups to be collectives of individuals, and believe, therefore, that they may understand the group by understanding the individual. It is precisely this individualistic reductionism that is challenged by social identity theory.

3.2 Historical Context: A 'Crisis in Social Psychology'

The reductionist history of social psychology is only a part of the context out of which social identity theory emerged. To complete this contextual picture, it is important to note that the theory also emerged from a 'crisis' in social psychology. During the 1960s, social psychology was criticised for being socially irrelevant, scientifically trivial, and for its epistemological confusion. One of the reasons for the success of social identity theory was its response to these charges.

From the beginning, social identity theory has sought social relevance by seeking to understand ingroup bias and the nature of outgroup stereotyping and discrimination. In so doing, social identity theory has sought to provide possible solutions to intergroup discrimination. In Dora Capozza and Rupert Brown's text, *Social Identity Processes*,²⁴⁷ four chapters are dedicated to "Social Identity Theory and Change in Intergroup Relations." This work is a good example of the practical application of social identity theory to intergroup relations.

The charge of scientific triviality would split social psychology. Social psychology was originally understood to be a scientific study, using scientific

²⁴⁶ Worchel et al. 1998: xvii.

²⁴⁷ Capozza and Brown 2000: 117-183.

methods and laboratory experiments for testing hypotheses. However, the appropriate use of experimentation was questioned in the 1960s and 1970s, leading some social psychologists to abandon the use of experimentation. Rather than using laboratory or field experiments to study targeted areas of social behaviour, emphasis was placed upon the study of the whole individual. This, therefore, proved a double 'crisis' for social psychology, for not only was it critical of experimentation but also proved to be reductionist in nature.

While some social psychologists were rejecting experimentation, Tajfel continued to use and develop appropriate methods of laboratory experimentation. He commonly used 'minimal group experiments,' in the development of social identity theory. Minimal group experiments were inspired by studies conducted by Sherif in boys' summer camps in the USA in the 1950s. His studies showed that when divided into groups, boys would compete with one another. Even close friends, when placed in opposing groups, would exhibit aggressive competitiveness. Minimal group experiments, then, rely upon the creation of intergroup divisions based upon a minimal degree of intergroup difference.²⁴⁸ While social identity theorists have continued to employ various experimental methods over the past three decades, their commitment to the scientific study of groups has remained a constant and important response to the social psychological 'crisis' of the 1960s and 1970s.

A third criticism of social psychology was that of epistemological confusion. This may have been an accurate observation of social psychology. As noted above, social psychology lacked any consensus regarding the nature of the relationship between the individual and the group. Tajfel, with social identity theory, sought to establish a social psychological theory which could better explain the nature of intergroup relationships.

In summary, social identity theory emerged as a response to individualistic reductionism in social psychology. It also emerged as a response to a 'crisis' in social psychology, promising social relevance, championing competent experimentation and sound social psychological epistemology.

²⁴⁸ Tajfel 1978a: 32-38.

3.3 A Study of Social Categorisation and Intergroup Behaviour - 1971

The origins of social identity theory may be traced to a 1971 study by Henri Tajfel et al.²⁴⁹ Tajfel and his associates developed their experiment in response to two earlier studies which hypothesized that ingroups would differentiate themselves from outgroups only when there was anticipation of future interaction between the two groups.²⁵⁰ Tajfel aimed to “assess the effects of social categorization on intergroup behaviour when, in the intergroup situation, neither calculations of individual interest nor previously existing attitudes of hostility could have been said to have determined discriminative behaviour against the outgroup.”²⁵¹ In other words, was the mere process of social categorisation enough to produce ingroup favouritism and outgroup discrimination? In order to test this question, Tajfel et al. conducted two series of ‘minimal group’ experiments.²⁵² In both experiments, the simple act of categorisation did indeed produce ingroup favouritism and outgroup discrimination.²⁵³ These conclusions would serve as the foundation for social identity theory.

With regard to the question of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews, Tajfel’s conclusions prove invaluable. Although much social identity research works with a real ingroups and real outgroups, one infrequently noted aspect of Tajfel’s minimal group experiments is highly significant for my argument. In his minimal group experiments, individuals attempted to discriminate against an outgroup which they had never met. In fact, the individuals attempted to discriminate against an outgroup that did not even exist, although they were led to believe that it did.²⁵⁴ In this case, the individuals tested created an ingroup identity (and showed favouritism toward the ingroup) based upon a ‘symbolic’ outgroup.

²⁴⁹ Tajfel et al. 1971: 149-178.

²⁵⁰ Rabbie and Horwitz 1969: 269-277; Rabbie and Wilkens 1971: 215-234.

²⁵¹ Tajfel et al. 1971: 150.

²⁵² For the criteria of minimal group experiments, see: Tajfel et al. 1971: 153-154.

²⁵³ Tajfel et al. 1971: 150.

²⁵⁴ George Orwell’s classic novel, 1984, is a very helpful example of a ‘symbolic outgroup.’

Similar discrimination has also been observed in identity formation in the ancient Mediterranean world.²⁵⁵ As noted in Chapter 1, both classicists and biblical interpreters have concluded that identity in the first-century Mediterranean culture was created and maintained through a process of intergroup comparison. For example, Romans created and maintained their sense of identity through a process of social comparison with the 'uncivilised other.'²⁵⁶ Likewise, Judeans created and maintained their sense of identity through a process of social comparison with 'non-Judeans.' In the case of both examples, the outgroup (i.e. 'uncivilised other' and 'non-Judeans') were symbolic in nature. In other words, there were not actual groups which understood themselves as having been 'uncivilised others' or 'non-Judeans.' Certainly there were people who were not Roman citizens or who were not Judeans, but they would have understood themselves in terms of their own ethnicity. Therefore, the identities of both the Romans and the Judeans were created and maintained through the social comparison of symbolic groups which they perceived to have been 'outgroups.'

In addition to the possibility that ingroup favouritism and outgroup discrimination may occur between an ingroup and a 'symbolic' outgroup, it is important to note that such a distinction will likely be made on a dimension which is important to the ingroup and which will necessarily encourage a positive social identity. For example, if 'purity' is important to an ingroup, it may choose to compare itself with a symbolic 'impure' outgroup. By categorising the 'symbolic other' as 'impure,' the ingroup insures that a distinction will be made between the two groups on a dimension which will necessarily provide a positive social identity for the members of the ingroup. In short, because the outgroup is 'symbolic' a comparison need not include actual group characteristics or behaviours, but such a comparison may be based upon those characteristics or

²⁵⁵ There is a difference between the 'symbolic' outgroup of Tajfel's minimal group experiments and those observed in empirical research. Namely, the outgroup did not exist in Tajfel's experiments. In the examples of the 'uncivilised others' and the 'non-Judeans,' there were actual people who were 'non-Roman' and 'non-Judean.' This difference is, however, insignificant. In both the minimal group experiments and in the empirical examples, the ingroup formed and maintained their identity based upon a comparison with a symbolic group rather than an existing group with its own set of characteristics, behaviours, values, etc.

²⁵⁶ Huskinson 2000: 14.

behaviours which are important to the ingroup and which will guarantee a positive social identity.

In Chapter 5, I will argue that the addressees of Hebrews categorised their world in terms of 'us' and 'them.' Further, the addressees compared themselves with a 'symbolic' outgroup. Similar to the Roman comparison with the 'uncivilised other,' and the Judean comparison with the 'non-Judean,' the addressees compared themselves with a group which did not understand itself to be a group.²⁵⁷ In addition, because the addressees compared themselves with a 'symbolic' outgroup, they were free to compare themselves on a dimension that necessarily provided a positive social identity. In short, the addressees understood themselves to the 'faithful.' Those who were not ingroup members were understood to be the 'unfaithful.' A positive comparison, therefore, was made on the relative faithfulness of each group and the forthcoming result of faithfulness, or the lack thereof.

3.4 Three Dimensions of Group Identification

Following Tajfel's conclusion that the simple act of categorisation proved to be enough to produce intergroup behaviour, he observed that an individual's sense of belonging to a group actually consists of between one and three components. First, Tajfel identified a 'cognitive component.' This is the knowledge that one belongs to a group. The second, the 'evaluative component,' is the notion of the group and/or of one's membership in the group as having either a positive or a negative value connotation. Finally, he identified an 'emotional component.' Tajfel described this as, "the sense that the cognitive and evaluative aspects of the group and one's membership of it may be accompanied

²⁵⁷ In Chapter 2, I provided many examples of interpreters who understand 'comparison' to be a/the purpose of Hebrews. However, this comparison is always described in terms of a 'real' outgroup. For example, many understand the comparison to be between 'Christianity' and 'Judaism.' See: Bristol 1967: 25; Brown, John 1862: 15-36; Cross and Livingstone 1984: 625; Gayford 1937: 597; Hagner 1990: 11-12; Lightfoot 1976: 35-38; Livingstone 1997: 742; May and Metzger 1977: 1455; McCaul 1871: 2; Montefiore 1969: 20; Pink 1954: 11-13; Salevao 2002: 113; Saphir 1902: 1-19; Stibbs 1970: 10-11; and Vine 1965: 7. This thesis is the first to describe the outgroup as 'symbolic.'

by emotions (such as love or hatred, like or dislike) directed toward one's own group and towards others which stand in certain relation to it."²⁵⁸

Each of the three dimensions of group identification are important to the discussion of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews. To begin, it must be determined that the addressees understood themselves to be a social group. In other words, that they exhibited the 'cognitive component' of group identification. In Chapter 5, I will argue that the addressees did possess the knowledge of group belonging.²⁵⁹ Was this group belonging accompanied by an evaluation? Was there either a positive or negative value connotation to their ingroup membership?²⁶⁰ Further, was this value connotation accompanied by emotions? The addressees may have had a negative social identity (cf. Hebrews 5:11-14; 6:11-12; 10:23-25, 32-36). The author did urge the addressees to maintain their faithfulness (cf. Hebrews 2:1; 3:12-14; 4:1; 6:1-12; 10:35, 39; 13:9), and at least some of the addressees were neglecting to meet together (Hebrews 10:25). This evidence suggests that at least some of the addressees did understand there to be a negative value connotation to their ingroup membership. The author's response to this situation, and a purpose of Hebrews, is outlined in Chapter 8. It will be argued that he²⁶¹ compared the ingroup with a 'symbolic' outgroup on the grounds of faithfulness, a dimension that would encourage a positive social identity.

²⁵⁸ Tajfel 1978a: 28.

²⁵⁹ While the majority of interpreters assume that the addressees of Hebrews were a distinct group, Helmut Koester and Pamela Eisenbaum have argued that the text is 'generic' and was not intended for a specific group. I will deal with this position in greater detail in Chapter 5. Eisenbaum 1997b: 12; and H. Koester 1982: 2/273.

²⁶⁰ A wide range of possibilities have been proposed. For example, David deSilva understands that the addressees had a negative self-understanding due to a lack of honour. DeSilva 1999a: 144-177. For a similar position, see: C. Koester 2001: 72, 87; and Craddock 1998: 10. Others have argued that the negative self-understanding of the addressees is evident in their 'sluggish' behaviour. For examples of this position, see: Dods 1910: 235-237; Gench 1996: 3-5; Lake and Lake 1938: 159-160; Lane 1991a: xcix-c; Larsson 1995: 102; Milligan 1899: 53-55; Peterson 1982: 186; Purdy 1955: 591; Quanbeck 1972: 898; Smith, R. 1984: 17; Thomas 1944: 10-11; Thompson 2000: 569. Importantly, while many interpreters describe the negative self-understanding of the addressees, this is done without an appropriate conceptual framework.

²⁶¹ It has been argued that the author of Hebrews was a Priscilla (see: Hoppin 1969:13-116). I will, however, use the pronoun, 'he,' in reference to the author. This use is not intended to deny the small possibility of female authorship, but is used for convenience given the strong probability that the author was male.

3.5 Self Concept: Social and Personal Identity

Social identity theorists understand one's self-concept to be made of two components: social identity and personal identity. 'Social identity' is the term given to that aspect of the individual's identity that is based upon group memberships.²⁶² 'Personal identity' is the term given to that aspect of the individual's identity that is unique to the individual and may be based upon a relationship with another individual, or object, or upon a unique attribute of the individual. Both components are further divided into multiple identifications. Therefore, an individual's social identity is divided into multiple social identifications (sex, ethnicity, nationality, religion, etc.) and one's personal identity is divided into numerous personal identifications (friend of x, daughter of y, etc.).²⁶³ Finally, each of the social and personal identifications produce identity descriptors. For example, as a citizen of the United States of America I tend to be individualistic, and as the son of Gerald I tend to be influenced by his sense of optimism. Social identity theory, as its name implies, is primarily concerned with that aspect of the individual's identity which is based upon group memberships, one's 'social identity,' without denying that personal identity is often salient.

Figure 3.1 Self-Concept and Social Identity Theory

	Self-concept ²⁶⁴	
Identity:	Social	Personal
Identifications:	Citizen of the USA	Son of Gerald
Identity-descriptors:	Individualistic	Optimistic

In the case of Hebrews, the author does not place any emphasis on the personal identities of the addressees. The author does not mention any member of the ingroup, nor does he mention any interpersonal relationships. The author

²⁶² Tajfel 1978b: 63.

²⁶³ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 24-25.

²⁶⁴ Figure 3.1 adapted from Hogg and Abrams 1988: 24.

does, however, place great emphasis upon the social identity of the addressees. The addressees are to understand themselves to be a group with a positive identity descriptor. They are the 'faithful.'

3.6 The Interpersonal-Intergroup Continuum

Just as Tajfel understands self-concept to have two components, social and personal identity, he insists there is an 'interpersonal-intergroup' behavioural continuum. The continuum seeks to explain the difference between social behaviour which is interpersonal in nature and social behaviour which is intergroup in nature. He argues that these differences can be understood as a continuum with 'purely interpersonal behaviour' as one extreme and 'purely intergroup behaviour' as its opposite extreme.

What is meant by 'purely' interpersonal is any social encounter between two or more people in which all of the interaction that takes place is determined by the personal relationships between the individuals and by their respective individual characteristics. The 'intergroup' extreme is that in which all of the behaviour of two or more individuals toward each other is determined by their membership of different social groups or categories.²⁶⁵

Tajfel is quick to point out while the concept of a 'purely interpersonal behaviour' is necessary to serve as one extreme in the continuum, it cannot actually occur. "It is impossible to imagine a social encounter between two people which will not be affected, at least to some minimal degree, by their mutual assignments of one another to a variety of social categories about which some general expectations concerning their characteristics and behaviour exist in the minds of the interactants."²⁶⁶ This is true for even close friends or family members. Social categories such as sex, age, and profession prevent a 'purely interpersonal behaviour.' On the other hand, one is able to identify 'purely intergroup behaviour.' Tajfel uses the image of air force bombings of enemy populations as an example of behaviour that is based entirely upon one's group membership, having nothing to do with personal relationships.

²⁶⁵ Tajfel 1978a: 41.

²⁶⁶ Tajfel 1978a: 41.

Once it has been established that social behaviour is to be understood within the context of this continuum, all social situations will necessarily fall somewhere between the two extremes. This means that the behaviour of individuals will be informed by their perception of where the interaction falls on the social behaviour continuum. Some social situations will be more interindividual and therefore idiosyncratic in nature, while others will be more intergroup, and therefore more stereotypic in nature. Social identity theory is primarily concerned with social behaviour nearer the intergroup extreme.

When considering the interpersonal-intergroup continuum in relation to Hebrews we arrive at three important conclusions. First, the author of Hebrews did not include any discussion of interpersonal behaviour between the members of the addressee ingroup and the members of the outgroup.²⁶⁷ Second, the author of Hebrews did not include a discussion of interpersonal behaviour between members of the ingroup. While it might be assumed that ingroup members had personal relationships with one another (i.e. kin groups, patron-client relationships), there is no mention of such relationships in Hebrews. Third, the author only refers to behaviour between ingroup members which was determined by their mutual group membership. For example, the addressees are to encourage one another (Hebrews 3:13) and to 'provoke one another to love and good deeds' (Hebrews 10:24). Such behaviour between group members was not based upon personal relationships, but was based upon a shared group membership.

What impact do these conclusions have on the study of the social identity of the addressees of Hebrews? As explained above, social identity theory is primarily concerned with social behaviour nearer the intergroup extreme. Since Hebrews is concerned exclusively with intergroup behaviour, we are made aware of the compatibility of social identity theory with the study of the text. However,

²⁶⁷ Some interpreters do envision interpersonal behaviour between members of the addressee ingroup and an outgroup. For example, some have argued that the 'Jewish-Christian' polemic in Hebrews indicates that the 'Christian' addressees were reluctant to sever their ties with 'Judaism.' Such an understanding of the social context of the addressees implies that there was interpersonal behaviour between members of each 'group.' Further, it was the purpose of Hebrews to prevent such interaction. For examples of this position, see F.F. Bruce 1990: 9; and A.E. Harvey 1985: 89.

there is much more to be gleaned from these three conclusions. When intergroup behaviour is understood to be salient, the ingroup members: (1) are more likely to be aware of their group membership, (2) are more likely to be aware of the positive evaluation of that group membership, and finally, (3) are more likely to exhibit a degree of emotional investment in this group evaluation. Therefore, by focusing exclusively upon intergroup behaviour, the author intended to draw attention to (and possibly to raise) the level of awareness and subsequent positive evaluation of the addressees' group membership. In other words, by stressing the salience of intergroup behaviour over interpersonal behaviour, the defining characteristic of the group would govern behaviour. In this case, ingroup members were to see one another as faithful and treat one another accordingly (i.e. encourage one another to remain faithful). Likewise, ingroup members were also to recognize the unfaithful and treat them accordingly.

3.7 Social Categorisation

The process of social categorisation is the simplifying and systematizing of one's environment, by placing persons, objects, or events into groups with similar persons, objects, or events.²⁶⁸ In other words, when individuals encounter new persons, objects, or events, they evaluate them and place them into a category which makes sense to the individual. Tajfel argues that this categorisation process is controlled by the 'accentuation effect,' which is the tendency to accentuate the similarities between persons, objects, or events which have been placed within the same category.²⁶⁹ Therefore, social categorisation helps to structure what would otherwise be a chaotic environment. Individuals are constantly bombarded with new social situations and without a method of simplifying and systematizing these experiences it would be difficult to evaluate and interpret the situation.

The social categorisation process of placing persons, object, or events into categories which make sense to the individual, also proves to be a guide for

²⁶⁸ Tajfel 1978b: 61.

²⁶⁹ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 19.

action. As noted above, individuals constantly encounter new social situations. If individuals did not participate in social categorisation, each social situation would require the individual to evaluate the appropriate action or response. However, because individuals do participate in social categorisation, social situations are placed into categories with similar social situations, by the accentuation of the situations' similarities. Because the individual has previously encountered similar situations and previously evaluated the appropriate action or response, the individual is able to reproduce the action or response in this 'new' social situation. The social categories, then, serve to simplify and systematise the individual's social world and serve to simplify and systematise the individual's actions within that world.

Social categorisation is dependent upon the act of stereotyping.²⁷⁰ In other words, in order to perform social categorisation, in order to place persons, objects, or events into appropriate categories, one relies upon a series of mental images called 'stereotypes' to help evaluate and classify the 'new' person, object, or event. These mental images, or stereotypes, are generalizations concerning the characteristics of each category.²⁷¹ Because stereotypes are based upon generalizations of the characteristics of category members, there is a tendency to attach positive or negative evaluations to the stereotypes.²⁷² The tendency to attach positive or negative evaluations to stereotypes is important for social identity theory, for ingroups are often given positive stereotypes while outgroups receive negative stereotypes.

Since social identity theory is primarily concerned with intergroup behaviour, Tajfel outlines the process of stereotyping within the context of the group. He explains that individuals tend to share stereotypes with the other members of their ingroup, and therefore the shared stereotypes affect how the ingroup evaluates and categorizes other groups. The shared stereotypes also

²⁷⁰ For a thorough analysis of categorisation, social identity and stereotyping, see: Hogg and Abrams 1988: 68-78.

²⁷¹ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 65.

²⁷² Hogg and Abrams 1988: 75-77.

affect how the ingroup relates to other groups.²⁷³ In other words, the ingroup simplifies and systematises the social world by utilizing a series of shared stereotypes. The stereotypes tend to provide a favourable evaluation of the ingroup and a negative evaluation of outgroups. When an ingroup member is involved in a social situation, he or she relies upon stereotypes utilised by the ingroup to categorize the person, object or event. This social categorisation in turn serves as a guide for action, in this case, action nearer to intergroup behaviour.

Social categorisation lies at the centre of this discussion of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews. In Chapter 5, I will argue that they employed the social categories of 'us' and 'them,' the 'faithful' and the 'unfaithful.' In addition, the only intergroup comparison in Hebrews was between the 'faithful' and the 'unfaithful' (cf. Hebrews 3:7-4:13).

3.8 Social Comparison

The process of social comparison rests upon two important assumptions. First, social comparison provides meaning and significance to social categories.²⁷⁴ The process of social comparison is closely linked with social categorisation. Social categorisation is the simplifying and systematizing of one's environment by placing similar people, objects, or events into groups. It is the comparison of these groups with one another, and the value connotations of their differences, which provides meaning and significance to the characteristics of each group. In addition, the comparison of social categories and the meaning which is derived from the comparison is what gives a society its distinctive social structure.²⁷⁵ In short, there will be high status and low status groups based upon such comparison.

Second, individuals desire a positive social identity.²⁷⁶ In the process of social comparison, some groups receive a positive evaluation, while other groups receive a negative evaluation. Since individuals desire a positive social identity,

²⁷³ Tajfel 1981a: 144-167.

²⁷⁴ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 21-23.

²⁷⁵ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 26-29.

²⁷⁶ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 23.

the results of social comparison affect how each group understands the criteria for social stratification and their responses to the social stratification. High status groups will approve of the current criteria for stratification and seek to further legitimate and stabilize the stratification. Low status groups will disapprove of the current social stratification and will seek a positive social identity. In this case, there are two broad options available to low status groups: 'social mobility' and 'social change.'²⁷⁷ Both 'social mobility' and 'social change' will be outlined in Chapter 8, where I will relate the theory to the text of Hebrews.

Social comparison plays an essential role in a discussion of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews and the purpose of the text from a social identity perspective.²⁷⁸ As noted in Chapter 2, some interpreters identify the author's use of comparison. However, they do not employ an appropriate conceptual framework within which to understand this important dynamic. In Chapter 6, I will analyse several examples of the author's use of comparison in light the theory of 'shared life story' and the theory of 'prototypicality.'

3.9 Social Identity Theory and Time

For over two decades, researchers have identified a tension within the development of social identity theory. While Tajfel suggests that groups must be understood as ongoing processes, the majority of social identity theorists ignore the temporal aspects of identity. In 1982, Rupert Brown and Gordon Ross observed that "very little research has studied the temporal and dynamic aspects of intergroup situations."²⁷⁹ They further noted that "we now know a little about the effects of changing the intergroup goal, status, and power relations, but still almost nothing about the way competitive or cooperative interactions *develop* over time. We have, in other words, focused on structure at the expense of

²⁷⁷ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 27.

²⁷⁸ C.F. Evans provides a very helpful summary of comparison in Hebrews. Evans 1988: 7-9. While this summary highlights Evans correct assumption that comparison plays a critical role in Hebrews, his analysis lacks a theoretical framework within which to properly understand such comparison.

²⁷⁹ R.J. Brown and Ross 1982: 155.

process.”²⁸⁰ While Brown and Ross identified the potential for social identity theory to incorporate the dynamic nature of group, they concluded that there had been a significant lack of empirical research to substantiate the theoretical advances. Sadly, the decade which followed the article by Brown and Ross produced very little theoretical discussion concerning the temporal aspects of identity.

Like Brown and Ross before her, Susan Condor identified the glaring omission of the temporal aspects of identity. In 1996, Condor noted that, “remarkably few²⁸¹ social identity theorists have considered the ways in which intra- or intergroup processes may unfold and transform over time.”²⁸² Condor identified both a theoretical and a methodological reason for the neglect of understanding social groups as an ongoing process. Condor explained that the theoretical reason “derives from Tajfel’s reluctance to adopt reductionist models which analyse ‘large-scale’ intergroup phenomena in terms of the dynamics of ‘small group’ behaviour.”²⁸³ The methodological reason for this neglect may be identified by the manner in which laboratory experiments are conceived of and carried out. Most experiments bracket the ‘movement’ of the phenomena under investigation within the experimental setting and do not consider the precursors to, or consequences of, the activity taking place within the setting.

According to Condor, for those who identify the need to integrate time and social identity theory, a new set of questions arise.

How do people reflexively experience *themselves*? As radically decentred subjects whose being is confined to the transitory, ephemeral moment?; or, as coherent beings-over-time? And how do people conceive of social categories (and, by extension, their own category membership)? As synchronic collections of individuals co-existing and acting in parallel at any moment in time?; or as serial ‘generations’ of social actors? And what can this tell us about the sorts of behaviours that people engage in when they act on the basis of these subjective understandings?²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ R.J. Brown and Ross 1982: 155.

²⁸¹ Condor identified three contributions to the discussion of temporal aspects of identity: R.J. Brown and Ross 1982; Taylor and McKirnan 1984: 291-300; Reicher 1987.

²⁸² Condor 1996: 292.

²⁸³ Condor 1996: 292.

²⁸⁴ Condor 1996: 303.

In 1998, Marco Cinnirella identified the “need for a theory of social identity which adequately encompasses the temporal nature of identity maintenance and the quest for coherence amongst past, present and future identities.”²⁸⁵ Cinnirella responds to this need by proposing that social identity theorists supplement their understanding of group identity with the theory of ‘possible selves.’ During the 1980s, Hazel Markus, Paula Nurius and their colleagues developed a theory of possible selves. Cinnirella summarised that possible selves “represent individuals’ beliefs about what the self was in the past and might become in the future, together with some estimate of the probability that different possible selves will be realized.”²⁸⁶ Further, the link to motivation in the theory is similar to that of social identity theory, for the theory of possible selves contends that “individuals attempt to achieve positively valued (i.e. desired) possible selves, whilst hopefully avoiding other, negatively (i.e. feared) possible selves.”²⁸⁷ Lastly, through the process of creating possible selves, individuals or groups may devise plans to achieve or avoid particular outcomes. For example, if a group understands its own past as undesirable, it may estimate with high probability that its future will also be undesirable. Since social groups will likely attempt to achieve a positively valued possible self, a plan may be devised to achieve that outcome. After supplementing social identity theory with the theory of possible selves, Cinnirella composed seventeen hypotheses concerning the temporal nature of social identity. While each hypothesis is important and may inform the future of social identity research, several of Cinnirella’s hypotheses will prove especially relevant to the study of the addressees of Hebrews.

The first hypothesis relevant to the discussion of the addressees of Hebrews states that “the current salience of (ingroup-)relevant outgroups will be influenced by the temporal orientation adopted toward the ingroup.”²⁸⁸ Here, Cinnirella explained that the temporal orientation of the ingroup plays an

²⁸⁵ Cinnirella 1998: 227-228.

²⁸⁶ Cinnirella 1998: 229.

²⁸⁷ Cinnirella 1998: 229.

²⁸⁸ Cinnirella 1998: 232.

important role in understanding the social identity of the group. In the case of Hebrews, this hypothesis may inform an important discussion. Why does the author depict the symbolic outgroup, that of the 'unfaithful,' only as a 'past' outgroup? When the author discusses the unfaithful, why is it that only the 'past' wilderness generation is mentioned? Again, once we consider the nature of the addressees' present temporal orientation, we may better understand the saliency of this relevant outgroup.

Marco Cinnirella also presented important hypotheses concerning the tendency for social groups to use 'exemplars' and prototypes' and the tendency for social groups to create 'shared life stories' or 'narratives.' Each of these hypotheses also inform a reading of Hebrews and are presented in greater detail in Chapters 6.

3.10 Criticism and Refinement of Social Identity Theory

Rupert Brown explains that "any theory which generates the volume of research that SIT has is likely to encounter the occasional empirical refutation and reveal any conceptual ambiguities it may possess. In my view, such difficulties are a sign of a theory's continuing vitality and should be welcomed as opportunities to refine and modify rather than defensively rejected or simply ignored."²⁸⁹ Brown continues by outlining relevant criticism of social identity theory and the responses made by social identity theorists.²⁹⁰ While the theory has undergone three decades of criticism and refinement, one issue proves to be essential in the discussion of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews and the purpose of the text.

As explained above, central to social identity theory are the assumptions that individuals desire a positive social identity and that groups establish a positive social identity through favourable intergroup comparison. Based upon these assumptions, one might expect that the more groups are able to favourably compare and differentiate themselves from other groups, the greater their sense of

²⁸⁹ R.J. Brown 2000: 753.

²⁹⁰ R.J. Brown 2000: 753-760.

positive social identity.²⁹¹ However, Hinkle and Brown observe that at least three studies conducted in the 1980s²⁹² found that intergroup comparisons did not always occur. In response to these studies, they sought to determine the circumstances in which intergroup comparison did occur.²⁹³ Therefore, they began their analysis by noting that even to the casual observer, groups differ from one another (e.g. size, activities, likely emotional significance, etc.). While this observation may appear quite basic, it has been largely overlooked in theories of group behaviour, including social identity theory. To remedy this oversight, Hinkle and Brown suggest two constructs which differentiate between different types of groups. They believe that by integrating the two constructs, social identity theory will be better able to identify when intergroup comparisons are likely to occur.

The first construct is that of individualism-collectivism.²⁹⁴ "This refers to the extent to which cultures emphasize interpersonal competition, individual achievement and separation from the in-group versus co-operation within the group, collective achievements and close ties with in-group members."²⁹⁵ Hinkle and Brown concluded that groups from a collectivist culture are more likely than groups from an individualistic culture to engage in the process of social comparison. Since social identity theory is primarily concerned with social identities and intergroup behaviour, the theory is, therefore, most applicable to groups which are collectivist in nature. However, this alone does not guarantee that social comparison will occur. They concede that it is possible to find collectivist groups who do not participate in social comparison (e.g. writers' circles, therapy groups, some close knit families, etc.). For this reason, a second construct is needed for social identity theory to adequately assess the likelihood of intergroup comparison.

The second construct is that of comparative and non-comparative group

²⁹¹ For an early test of this hypothesis, See R.J. Brown and Ross 1982; For a more recent test, See: Perreault and Bourhis 1998: 49-66.

²⁹² R.J. Brown and Williams 1984: 547-564; Ross, Eymann and Kishchuk 1986; S. Watts 1989.

²⁹³ Hinkle and Brown 1990: 48-70.

²⁹⁴ Hinkle and Brown 1990: 65-67.

²⁹⁵ Hinkle and Brown 1990: 65-66.

ideologies.²⁹⁶ This construct seeks to illuminate the comparative nature of groups. Here, Hinkle and Brown find that two factors must be considered. First, some groups may be comparative by nature, while other groups may be non-comparative (i.e. a jury). Second, some situations may cause groups to act more comparatively, while other situations will encourage non-comparative behaviour. Therefore, the nature of the group and the specific group context must both be understood in order to estimate probable group comparative behaviour. By looking at both continua together, Hinkle and Brown believe that social identity theory will better be able to assess whether or not groups will engage in intergroup comparisons. If groups are collectivist by nature and possess a comparative ideology, they are likely to engage in intergroup comparison.²⁹⁷ It is in this case that social identity theory is most appropriate in analysing group processes. On the other hand, if a group is individualistic by nature and possesses a non-comparative ideology, it is less likely to engage in intergroup comparison. Here, social identity theory is less appropriate for analysing group processes. While these options represent the extremes of both constructs, other options do exist. Groups may be collectivist, but non-comparative. Groups may also be individualistic, but comparative. Finally, each construct functions as a continuum, therefore, one must assess the group's relative collectivist-individualistic orientation and relative comparative-non-comparative ideology.²⁹⁸

In the case of Hebrews, then, two important questions must be addressed. Did the addressees tend to be more individualistic or collectivist? And, did the addressees tend to be competitive or non-competitive? The answers to both questions will be provided in the next chapter.

²⁹⁶ Hinkle and Brown 1990: 67.

²⁹⁷ Hinkle and Brown 1990: 67-68.

²⁹⁸ For a critique of Hinkle and Brown's hypothesis, See Turner 1999: 6-34.

3.11 Social Identity Theory and Hebrews: Possibilities and Promise

While this thesis employs social identity theory in the discussion of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews, the faithfulness of Jesus, and the purpose of the text, the possibilities of the integration of the theory with the text are not limited to these areas of study. In fact, the theory may be related to the entirety of the text. A brief overview of the structure and message of Hebrews shows the possibilities and promise of a reading which employs the conceptual framework of social identity theory.

In the first chapter of Hebrews, Jesus is compared to angels. As outlined in Chapter 2, some interpreters have understood this chapter to represent a doctrinal problem among the addressees.²⁹⁹ Others have argued that the identity of the addressees may be understood in light of this comparison.³⁰⁰ Still others find this section to be one of many comparisons between 'Christianity' and 'Judaism' (i.e. angels were the mediators of the law of Moses). However, when a reader employs social identity theory as a conceptual framework, both the nature of comparison and the role of prototypes are clearly defined. In this case, a reader might ask several illuminating questions. For example, were the angels meant to represent an opposing 'group?' If not, what does this comparison say about the person of Jesus? Does this chapter, like chapters to follow, present Jesus as the prototype of faithfulness?

The author begins Chapter 2 with a warning that the addressees are not to 'drift away' from what they have heard. Some interpreters have understood such warnings as a threat of 'Christian' addressees 'falling back' into 'Judaism.'³⁰¹ Others imagine a threat of 'Gentile Christian' addressees 'drifting away' back into

²⁹⁹ For an example, see: W.R.F. Browning 1996: 167.

³⁰⁰ For an example of the Ebionite theory, see: Goulder 2003: 393-406.

³⁰¹ For examples of this position, see: Barnes 1848: iv; Bruce, A.B. 1899: 9; Bruce, F.F. 1982: 1008; Bruce, F.F. 1990: 9; Davidson, A.B. 1882: 19; Davidson, S. 1848-1851: 266-276; Gouge 1866: 6; Gundry 1979: 334-335; Hagner 1990: 11-12; Kent 1972: 25; Lauersdorf 1986: 4; Lightfoot 1976: 35-38; Livingstone 1997: 742; L themann 1882: 56; W. MacDonald 1971: 9-13; May and Metzger 1977: 1455; McCaul, 1871: 2; Montefiore 1969: 20; Nairne 1913: 20-21; Peake 1906: 8-16; Peake 1910: 1-19; Pfeiffer 1962: 9; Salevao 2002: 113; Saphir 1902: 1-19; Snell 1959: 27-28; Stibbs 1970: 10-11; Stuart 1864: 265-272; Vine 1965: 7; Williamson 1964: xii-xiii.

'paganism' or 'heathenism.'³⁰² Still others understand the addressees to be at risk of 'drifting away' from their 'confession.' Again, social identity provides a helpful framework for this discussion. Does the phrase, 'drift away,' imply movement from one 'group' to another? If so, does the text here provide any data capable of interpretation in relation to issues of social mobility, change, and creativity?

In Chapters 3, Jesus is compared with Moses (Hebrews 3:1-6) and the faith of the addressees is compared to the unfaithfulness of the 'wilderness generation' (Hebrews 3:7-13). The meaning of both sections has long been debated. For some interpreters, this section is understood to represent the relationship of 'Christianity' to 'Judaism.'³⁰³ For others, this material does not denigrate the faithfulness of Moses.³⁰⁴ When one reads this section with the framework of social identity theory, an entirely different set of questions arise. Is the author comparing two 'groups?' Does the author show the superiority of Jesus over Moses? How should we interpret the comparison between these two faith figures? Again, social identity theory provides a framework to interpret both social comparison and prototypicality. In this case, Jesus is described as the most prototypical of faithfulness (i.e. the son of the house), while Moses is a relatively prototypical example of faithfulness (i.e. the servant of the house).

In Hebrews 5:11-6:8, the author warns the addressees that 'it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have one been enlightened.' These strong words of warning have fuelled an active debate over the nature of Hebrews. Does Hebrews present a 'Jewish-Christian' polemic? Does the author address an audience who is in danger of leaving 'Christianity?' Does this section *really* say that it is *impossible* to restore an individual to repentance? Social identity theory provides a conceptual framework within which a reader is better able to understand the nature of social mobility, change, and creativity.

The structure of Hebrews is notoriously difficult to outline, however, 6:13-

³⁰² Vos 1956: 18.

³⁰³ For an example of this position, see: Fuller 1995: 9.

³⁰⁴ For an example of this position, see: Montefiore 1969: 71.

10:18 may be identified as a large sub-section of the text.³⁰⁵ Here, Jesus is compared with Melchizedek (Hebrews 7), the new covenant is compared with the old covenant (Hebrews 8), the earthly sanctuary is compared with the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 9), and the sacrifice of Jesus is compared with the sacrifice of the priests (Hebrews 9: 23-10:18). While interpreters tend to ask somewhat similar questions, in methodologically non-reflective ways (i.e. Is the author relating two 'groups?' Is the author emphasising the superiority of 'Christianity?'), the framework of social identity theory again encourages a new way of reading. According to social identity theorists, "social groups will create shared 'life stories' or narratives of the group which tie past, present and predicted futures into a coherent representation."³⁰⁶ In this case, is the author of Hebrews integrating Jesus into the shared life story or narrative of the ingroup? Is the author attempting to tie past, present and predicted futures into a coherent representation?

The section which begins at Hebrews 10:19 extends through the end of the Chapter 13. Here the author urges the addressees to 'hold on' and not to 'fall away.' After each word of warning, the author provides examples of faithfulness from the 'past.' He reminds the addressees of their own 'past' faithfulness (Hebrews 10:32-34), he describes the faith of the 'great cloud of witnesses' (Hebrews 11), and finally he describes the faith of Jesus (Hebrews 12:2). Why does the author use examples from the 'past?' Does the comparison of the faith of Jesus with the faith of the 'great cloud' imply that the faith of the witness was insufficient? How do these examples help the addressees 'run their race?' While this section includes the best known verses of Hebrews (cf. Hebrews 11:1), interpreters have not agreed in their answers to these questions. Social identity theory again clarifies some of the important intergroup dynamics of this section. For example, the framework of prototypicality sheds light on the comparison between Jesus and the 'great cloud.' The framework of social identity and time sheds light on the author's use of the 'past.' And finally, social identity theory

³⁰⁵ For a discussion of the structure of Hebrews, see: Guthrie 1994; Vanhoye 1989.

³⁰⁶ Cinnirella 1998: 235.

provides a framework with which to consider the relationship between 'past' and 'present' ingroup members.

In summary, this thesis employs social identity theory as an appropriate framework with which to discuss the identity of the addressees of Hebrews, the faithfulness of Jesus, and the purpose of the text. However, social identity theory might be employed in a variety of additional ways throughout a reading of Hebrews. There is, then, great possibility and promise in its application to this text.

3.12 Conclusion

As previously noted, the use of the historical critical method has led to both a multiplicity of proposals regarding the identity of the addressees and to a commonly voiced frustration concerning the question of identity. For some, this has meant that the discussion of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews is a 'dead end.' However, this is not the end of the discussion of the identity of the addressees of Hebrews. As explained in Chapter 1, many interpreters conclude that social groups in the first-century Mediterranean world formed and maintained identity through a process of intergroup comparison. Therefore, an adequate conceptual framework for examining the identity of the addressees of Hebrews might be based upon the process of intergroup comparison, rather than on a methodologically non-reflective reliance upon the presumed unique characteristics of social groups. It is within this conceptual framework that this study will analyse the identity of the addressees of Hebrews. As argued in this chapter, social identity theory proves invaluable for an understanding of the process of forming and maintaining social identity. Therefore, the social identity of the addressees of Hebrews will be examined below in light of the conceptual framework of social identity theory.

Chapter 4

Social Identity Theory and First-Century Mediterranean Culture

In Chapter 3, I provided a thorough overview of social identity theory. Before setting off to apply the theory to Hebrews, however, we must demonstrate that the two conditions that we have seen which are often necessary for the theory to operate are satisfied. According to Hogg and Abrams, groups are more likely to engage in intergroup comparison if they are collectivist by nature and possess a comparative ideology. It is in this case that social identity theory is most appropriate in analysing group processes.³⁰⁷ This chapter, therefore, will answer the vital questions: Were the addressees collectivist? And, were they comparative? Considering these issues will also allow me to discuss contextual issues helpful for the argument I will present.

In order to answer these questions, it is important to understand the cultural dimension of 'individualism and collectivism.' Therefore, I will begin by defining 'culture.' Next, I will divide the concept of 'culture' into 'subjective' and 'objective' culture. Finally, I will sub-divide 'subjective' culture into cultural 'dimensions' and cultural 'domains.' It is in the area of cultural 'dimensions' that cross-cultural social psychologists compare and contrast cultures. After an introduction to the dimension of 'individualism and collectivism,' I will conclude that the addressees of Hebrews were likely collectivist and comparative.

While the dimension of 'individualism and collectivism' has proven to be the most commonly used tool for the comparison of cultures, other dimensions are also employed. For example, cross-cultural social psychologists might compare cultures on the basis of their understanding of 'time.' In the case of Hebrews, the author places significant emphasis on time. The addressees are repeatedly reminded of 'past' or antecedent examples of faithfulness, they are instructed to 'hold on,' and the author emphasises the 'future' or forthcoming promised 'rest.'

³⁰⁷ Hinkle and Brown 1990: 67-68.

In short, to understand the identity of the addressees and the purpose of the text, an interpreter must take seriously the author's use of time. Since cultures have differing perceptions of time, cross-cultural social psychologists have developed cultural models with which to compare and contrast temporal orientations. I will, therefore, include in this chapter a description of a second cultural dimension, that of 'temporal orientation.' After an introduction to the dimension of 'temporal orientation,' I will conclude that the addressees of Hebrews were likely present temporally oriented.

4.1 Defining 'Culture'

'Culture' has proven to be a notoriously difficult term to define.³⁰⁸ Not only has the concept itself proven difficult to define, but the disciplines of anthropology, sociology and psychology have each contributed unique methodologies, vocabularies, and definitions to the discussion of culture. A distinction also exists between scientific and popular definitions. In fact, so varied is the discussion of the definition of culture, that two studies have been conducted to analyse this phenomenon.

In 1952, anthropologists A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn published their analysis of 164 definitions of 'culture.'³⁰⁹ Based upon this analysis, they presented their own definition which they believed best summarised the essence of most definitions.

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment of artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of actions, on the other hand as conditioning elements of further action.³¹⁰

While Kroeber and Kluckhohn's study has become an important and often-cited contribution to the discussion of the meaning of 'culture,' their

³⁰⁸ For a critique of the use of the term 'culture,' see: Aguilar: forthcoming.

³⁰⁹ Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952.

³¹⁰ Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952: 357.

definition did little to slow the introduction of new and competing definitions. The continued proliferation of definitions was further examined in a 1990 study by cultural psychologists Karel A. Soudijn, Giel J.M. Hutshemeakers, and Fons J.R. van de Vijver, who rated 128 definitions of 'culture.'³¹¹ Their goal was not to determine the 'best' definition, nor was it to add a new definition of culture which was deemed superior to existing definitions. Rather, they identified five factors commonly present in definitions of culture: (1) localisation; (2) function; (3) gestalt; (4) composition; and (5) dynamics.³¹² Based upon these factors, they provided a 'mapping sentence' for those wishing to create a new definition.

Culture is composed of [symbolic / evaluative / descriptive / productive / cognitive / organisational / functional / process / developmental] elements which are located in the [individual / collective]; these constitute a [molar/ molecular] structure with a [low / high] functionality and with a [high / low] degree of dynamics.³¹³

So what definition of 'culture' is most useful in the study of intergroup relations? Cross-cultural psychologists tend to employ the inclusive definition of culture - that culture is the human-made part of the environment - provided by Melville J. Herskovits.³¹⁴ While they are quick to acknowledge that this definition is very broad, they helpfully subdivide this definition of culture into its 'subjective' and 'objective' components.³¹⁵

4.2 Cultural Dimensions and Domains

Cross-cultural psychologists often separate aspects of culture into two components: 'subjective' and 'objective' culture.³¹⁶ Subjective culture is that aspect of culture which cannot be seen, but that we know exists. For example, subjective culture includes social norms, customs, attitudes, and values. Objective culture is the physical manifestation of subjective culture. For example, objective culture includes clothing, utensils, cooked food, and architecture. As

³¹¹ Soudijn, Hutshemaekers, and van de Vijver 1990: 19-39.

³¹² Soudijn, Hutshemaekers, and van de Vijver 1990: 19-39.

³¹³ Soudijn, Hutshemaekers, and van de Vijver 1990: 37.

³¹⁴ Herskovits 1955: 95.

³¹⁵ For an example of this position, see: Triandis 1994b: 1-2.

³¹⁶ See: Harry C. Triandis 1972; and Triandis 1994b: 2.

this brief explanation makes clear, subjective and objective culture are necessarily linked. For example, a culture's social norms or attitudes regarding the body may be reflected in its clothing.

Most cross-cultural psychologists are primarily interested in the subjective components of culture. Here, they often subdivide the subjective elements of culture into two groups: 'dimensions' and 'domains.' David Matsumoto defines 'dimensions' as the "general tendencies that affect behavior and reflect meaningful aspects of cultural variability."³¹⁷ The key element to this definition of 'dimensions' is the use of the word 'general.' In this definition, Matsumoto stresses that dimensions are examples of subjective culture which all cultures exhibit. Therefore dimensions are examples of subjective culture upon which all cultures may be compared or contrasted.³¹⁸ 'Domains,' then, are the "specific sociopsychological characteristics that are considered to be meaningful outcomes, products, or constituents of culture, including attitudes, values, beliefs, opinions, norms, customs, and rituals."³¹⁹ The key element to Matsumoto's definition of 'domains' is the use of the word 'specific.' In this definition, Matsumoto stresses that domains are examples of subjective culture which one or more cultures exhibit, but are not an example of subjective culture upon which all cultures may be compared or contrasted.

Figure 4.1 A Definition of Culture³²⁰

Subjective Elements	Objective Elements
1. Dimensions	1. Examples
A. Individualism/Collectivism	A. Clothing
B. Temporal Orientation	B. Food
C. Others	C. Others
2. Domains	
A. Values	
B. Norms	
C. Others	

³¹⁷ Matsumoto 2000: 40.

³¹⁸ For an additional example of the study of cultural dimensions, see: Hofstede 1984.

³¹⁹ Matsumoto 2000: 40.

³²⁰ Figure adapted from Matsumoto 2000: 40.

In the case of Hebrews, interpreters might use a variety of cultural dimensions and domains in the study of the text. For example, is there evidence of objective culture in the text (i.e. priestly sacrifices, earthly sanctuary, etc.)? In this thesis, I will integrate the cultural dimensions of 'individualism and collectivism' and 'temporal orientation' into the discussion of the identity of the addressees and the purpose of the text.

4.3 Cultural Dimension: Individualism and Collectivism

While a number of cultural dimensions have received interest from cross-cultural psychologists, the 'individualism and collectivism' dimension has been most helpful to researchers. Michael Harris Bond explains that individualism and collectivism has had a "magnetic pull on cross-cultural researchers."³²¹ So great has been the interest in individualism and collectivism among cross-cultural psychologists, that Çigdem Kagitçibasi labels the 1980s, 'the decade of I/C.'³²² Triandis explains that the reason for the overwhelming interest in individualism and collectivism is that seventy percent of the world's population is collectivist. He notes that Central and South America, Asia, Africa, and the Arab-speaking countries tend to be collectivist, while individualism tends to be found in the USA, the nations of northern and western Europe, and Australia and New Zealand.³²³

So, what is individualism? Individualism is characterised as a preference for a loosely knit social framework in which individuals are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families only.³²⁴ People in collectivist cultures, on the other hand, give priority to ingroup goals and define the self in terms of membership in ingroups which influence a wide range of social behaviours. According to Triandis, collectivists are often, but not always, "organized hierarchically, and tend to (1) be concerned about the results of their actions on members of their in-group, (2) share resources with in-group members, (3) feel

³²¹ Bond 1994: 69.

³²² Kagitçibasi 1994: 52.

³²³ Triandis 1990: 48.

³²⁴ Hofstede 1983: 336-337.

interdependent with in-group members, and (4) feel involved in the lives of in-group members. They feel strongly about the integrity of their ingroup."³²⁵ Triandis adds that, "the behavior of collectivists tends to be self-sacrificing toward in-group members and generally exploitative toward out-group members. Even if the in-group is not exploitative, it is formal with outsiders, and when resources are scarce, it can become quite nasty."³²⁶

As explained in Chapter 3, Hinkle and Brown envision individualism and collectivism as a continuum, with cultures falling somewhere between either dimension.³²⁷ Likewise, Geert Hofstede does not consider individualism and collectivism to be a mutually exclusive dichotomy, but speaks of the 'degrees' and 'levels' of individualism and collectivism.³²⁸ Finally, biblical interpreters have also acknowledged this aspect of individualism and collectivism.³²⁹ For example, Philip Esler presents a section titled, 'The individualism/collectivism spectrum' in his reading of Galatians.³³⁰

Finally, Triandis acknowledges that the individual members of a cultural group must be considered. Therefore, he differentiates between 'allocentric' and 'idiocentric' individuals. 'Allocentric' refers the individuals with 'other-directed' personalities, while 'idiocentric' is the designation given to the individuals with 'self-directed' personalities. While allocentric individuals are more commonly found in collectivist cultures and idiocentric individuals are more commonly found in individualistic cultures, this is not always the case. In fact, there are allocentric individuals present in individualistic cultures and idiocentric

³²⁵ Triandis 1994b: 165.

³²⁶ Triandis 1994b: 166.

³²⁷ Hinkle and Brown 1990: 65-67.

³²⁸ Hofstede 1984: 148-175. See also: Triandis 1990: 43.

³²⁹ While the dimensions of individualism and collectivism are commonly described in terms of a continuum, critics still tend to envision 'mutually exclusive monolithic categories.' For example, Louis Lawrence has recently argued that "...cultures do not have to subscribe to strictly individualist or collectivist patterns. It is more helpful to think of cultures being plotted somewhere along a scale of these two orientations." She further asserts that "to imagine that whole cultures or societies may be classified in terms of mutually exclusive monolithic categories as either individualistic or collectivist is simplistic and misreads the ethnographic and anthropological record." While Lawrence accurately identifies that problem of imagining 'mutually exclusive monolithic categories,' her criticism does not fairly represent the study of individualism and collectivism. Lawrence 2003: 250.

³³⁰ Esler 1998: 46-47.

individuals in collectivist cultures. Here again, Triandis speaks of points on a spectrum and not a rigid dichotomy.

4.5 The Addressees of Hebrews: Individualist or Collectivist?

Sociologist Daniel Bell notes that “the fundamental assumption of modernity, the thread that has run through Western civilization since the sixteenth century, is that the social unit of society is not the group, the guild, the tribe, or the city, but the person.”³³¹ Correspondingly, the fundamental assumption before the sixteenth century was that the group was society’s social unit. Philip Cushman likewise observes that “most historians place the emergence of the self in the modern era, beginning in the sixteenth century, although some have seen the beginnings of this form of the self as early as the twelfth century. There have been many configurations of the Western self over the course of the last 2,500 years, and most of them have resembled more the communal self of non-Western cultures than the highly individualist self of our current era.”³³² For both Bell and Cushman, individualism as we know it did not emerge until the sixteenth century.

Both classicists and biblical interpreters³³³ have integrated variations of this critical observation into their understanding of the individuals and groups of the ancient Mediterranean world. In her book, *Roman Honor: A Fire in the Bones*, Carlin A. Barton presents a thorough description of honour and shame and the competitive nature of Roman culture.³³⁴ Riet van Breman begins his analysis of Hellenistic family structures by noting that, “the interest of the family group overruling that of the individual is a historical constant until recent times.”³³⁵ Breman continues by placing an emphasis upon collective mentality and upon ‘family-thinking.’ Likewise, John Pilch describes first-century Mediterranean individuals and social groups in terms of their collectivism. “The vast majority of the people described in the Bible represent collectivist personality types.

³³¹ Bell 1979: 16.

³³² Cushman 1995: 357.

³³³ For examples, See Esler 1994: 29-30; Malina 1996a: 41-61; Malina and Neyrey 1991: 67-96; Neyrey 1998a: 53-56.

³³⁴ Barton 2001.

³³⁵ van Bremen 2003: 313.

Individualist personality types are rather rare in the Bible and the Mediterranean culture in general.”³³⁶

While the examples from Bell and Cushman emphasise that the Western individualist self was not present before the sixteenth century,³³⁷ others have additionally stressed that modern Mediterranean cultures tend to be collectivist. For example, Triandis explains that modern, traditional Greeks tend to be allocentrics.

Traditional Greeks have been found to depend on ingroups (family, friends, and those concerned with my welfare) for protection, social insurance, and security. They readily submit to ingroup authorities and accept their control; they are willing to sacrifice themselves for the ingroup. They relate to ingroup members with great intimacy; they achieve to glorify the ingroup. They perceive the self as weak but the ingroup as strong. They view themselves largely (74% in surveys) as having *philotimo* (as being polite, virtuous, reliable, truthful, self-sacrificing, tactful, and diligent). They believe that social control (e.g., severe punishment) is desirable. They value ingroup success, honor, kindness, and dependability. They define *freedom* and *progress* as societal (e.g., national) constructs rather than as individual constructs. Their supreme values are good social relations and social control within the ingroup. By contrast, Americans value achievement and efficiency. Among Greeks behavior toward the ingroup is consistent with what the ingroup expects; behavior toward everyone else (e.g., strangers) is characterized by defiance of authority, competition, resentment of control, formality, rejection, arrogance, dogmatism, and rejection of influence that have outgroups as a source.³³⁸

In the case of Hebrews, were the addressees collectivists or individualists, allocentrics or idiocentrics? The text offers data which indicates that the addressees were likely allocentric individuals in a collectivist culture. The author never addresses an individual member of the ingroup, not does he refer to any interpersonal behaviour. In fact, the only behaviour mentioned by the author is intergroup rather than interpersonal in nature. In Hebrews 3:13, 10:24, and 12:13

³³⁶ Pilch 2001: 171.

³³⁷ For an example of the debate concerning individualism in the twelfth-century, see: Morris: 1972; Bynum 1980: 1-17; Morris 1980: 195-206; Morris 1982: 82-109.

³³⁸ Triandis 1990: 56.

he urges the addressees to care for one another in a variety of ways. In each example, the text suggests that this behaviour is based upon a mutual ingroup membership, rather than upon interpersonal relationships. In other words, the addressees are instructed to 'encourage one another,' not because of interpersonal relationships, but because there is a commitment and loyalty to the group. According to the definitions provided by Triandis, the addressees likely possessed 'other directed' personalities and therefore were allocentric individuals.

There are, then, three questions which must be considered when attempting to determine whether the addressees of Hebrews were nearer to individualism or nearer to collectivism. First, if the origins of the Western individualistic self can be traced back to the period between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries, is it possible that the first-century addressees of Hebrews were individualist? Second, if modern traditional Greeks still tend to be more collectivist than individualistic, is it likely that ancient Mediterranean individuals were individualistic? Third, if there is no evidence of interpersonal relationships in the text, is it likely that the addressees were idiocentric individuals? Based upon the conclusions that individualism did not exist as we know it in the first-century and that modern Mediterranean cultures continue to be more collectivist with allocentric members, it may be assumed on a *prima facie* basis that the addressees of Hebrews were nearer to collectivism than individualism, though this assumption will be tested against the data.

4.6 The Addressees of Hebrews: Comparative or Non-Comparative?

The discussions of 'individualism and collectivism' and 'comparative and non-comparative' social groups are intimately connected. By definition, collectivist cultures tend to be comparative and competitive. Allocentric members of collectivist cultures tend to place great loyalty and commitment on the ingroup, while treating outgroup members with hostility and contempt.³³⁹ While there is empirical evidence of groups which tend to be both collectivist and non-comparative (i.e. some juries, some book clubs, etc.), examples of this are quite rare. It is not

³³⁹ Triandis 1994b: 166.

surprising, then, that the first-century Mediterranean world is commonly described in terms of its competitiveness.

As noted above, Carlin Barton provides a helpful description of the competitive nature of the ancient Mediterranean world.³⁴⁰ Likewise, in his 2005 article, 'Paul and the Agon: Understanding a Pauline Motif in its Cultural and Visual Context,' Philip Esler provides a thorough explanation of the comparative and competitive nature of first-century Mediterranean culture.³⁴¹ Esler notes that both modern and ancient Mediterranean cultures are characterised by fierce competition between males (unless they are members of the same ingroup) in any social interaction. For this reason, "Anthropologists have taken to referring to the competitive cultures of the Mediterranean of this type as 'agonistic,' a usage obviously dependent on the Greek ἀγών the word of general application for all the sporting events of the stadium."³⁴² After his analysis of the etymology of ἀγών, Esler concludes that the "semantic shift from *agon* meaning 'contest' to *agon* meaning 'assembly' graphically reveals that the Greeks could not even come together in the outside on a patch of grass without wanting to compete with one another!"³⁴³

Confirmation of the competitive nature of Mediterranean culture can be found throughout Greek and Roman literature. In fact, Aristotle provides a theoretical treatment of this subject in *Rhetorica* (1370b-1371a; 1384a; 1387a-b). Here, he explains that 'We compete with our equals' (1384a). He also explains the competition between those 'who are after the same things.'

Envy is pain at the sight of such good fortune as consists of the good things already mentioned; we feel it toward our equals; not with the idea of getting something for ourselves, but because the other people have it. We shall feel it if we have, or think we have, equals; and by 'equals' I mean equals in birth, relationship, age, disposition, or wealth ... So too we compete with those who follow the same ends as ourselves: we compete with our rivals in sport or in love, and generally with those who are after the same things; and it is therefore these whom we are bound to envy

³⁴⁰ Barton 2001.

³⁴¹ Esler forthcoming, b: 363-365. See also: Malina 2001: 36.

³⁴² Esler forthcoming, b: 363.

³⁴³ Esler forthcoming, b: 363.

above all others.³⁴⁴

Esler explains that to understand this competitiveness, one must take into account two aspects of Mediterranean culture: the role of honour and the prevailing understanding of 'limited good.' Both honour as the core cultural value and the understanding of 'limited good,' require individuals and groups to understand themselves to be in direct competition with other individuals (members of other groups) or groups for finite resources. Because honour, the core value of Mediterranean culture,³⁴⁵ in spite of variations in how honour is embodied in different contexts, is something for which individuals and groups compete, and because one's honour, or the honour of the group, may be challenged, there is an underlying competitiveness inherent in first-century Mediterranean culture. Honour, along with all other desirable goods, was considered to exist in finite portions. George Foster explains the concept of 'limited good' as "one in which all of the desired things in life such as land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness and honor, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety, exist in finite quantity and are always in short supply, as far as the peasant is concerned."³⁴⁶ Because every desirable thing was considered finite, competition was required.³⁴⁷

Based upon the discussion of comparative and competitive culture and the type of data referred to by Esler, it may assumed on a prima facie basis that the addressees of Hebrews were likely competitive, though this assumption will be tested against the data. As noted above, groups are more likely to engage in intergroup comparison if they are collectivist by nature and possess a comparative ideology. It is in this case that social identity theory is most appropriate in

³⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1387b-1388a (translated by Roberts 1924).

³⁴⁵ Much has been written concerning the role of honour and shame in the ancient Mediterranean culture. For a recent discussion see: Barton 2001; Horden and Purcell 2000: 485-529.

³⁴⁶ Foster 1965: 296.

³⁴⁷ For a short treatment of the relationship between competitiveness and limited good in ancient Mediterranean culture, see: Esler 1998: 47-48. See also: Foster 1967a: 296-300; Foster 1967b: 300-323. Kennedy 1966:1212-25; Malina 2001: 81-107; Neyrey 1998b: 122-127; Piker 1966: 1202-11.

analysing group processes.³⁴⁸ Because the addressees of Hebrews were likely allocentrics (and members of a collectivist culture) and likely possessed a comparative (even competitive) ideology, social identity theory is an appropriate framework for analysing the group. I will, then, relate the theory to the text throughout the next four chapters.

4.7 Cultural Dimension: Temporal Orientation

As noted above, the author of Hebrews places significant emphasis on time. He begins the text by explaining that 'in many and various ways God spoke to the fathers through prophets' (Hebrews 1:1), but now 'he has spoken to us by a Son' (Hebrews 1:2). He repeatedly refers to 'past' or antecedent expressions of faithfulness (cf. Hebrews 11) and to the 'future' or forthcoming promised 'rest' (cf. Hebrews 3:7-4:13). Because of the interest of the author of Hebrews in time, a thorough reading of the text must include this important dynamic.

As noted above, cross-cultural social psychologists understand 'temporal orientation' to be a dimension of culture. In other words, all cultures have some type of temporal orientation and, therefore, cultures may be compared and contrasted on this important dimension. Because it is likely that the temporal orientation of the author and the addressees of Hebrews differs from that of most modern interpreters, the dimension of 'temporal orientation' (and a model of present temporal orientation) serves as an appropriate conceptual framework within which to consider issues of time.

In 1961, anthropologists Florence Rockwood Kluckhohn and Fred L. Stodtbeck warned that "far too little attention has been given to the full range of major variations in the *time* orientation."³⁴⁹ Kluckhohn and Stodtbeck then quoted an emphatic statement by Oswald Spengler.³⁵⁰ "It is by the meaning that it intuitively attaches to time that one culture is differentiated from another."³⁵¹

Since Kluckhohn and Stodtbeck's warning that 'far too little attention' has

³⁴⁸ Hinkle and Brown 1990: 67-68.

³⁴⁹ Kluckhohn and Stodtbeck 1973: 13.

³⁵⁰ Spengler 1926-28: 1/130.

³⁵¹ Kluckhohn and Stodtbeck 1973: 14.

been given to the consideration of temporal orientation, there have been what anthropologist Nancy D. Munn called, 'endlessly multiplying studies of sociocultural time.' Munn explains that the proliferation of studies concerning time is both a cause and a product of insufficient theoretical attention. Munn further asserts that with the exception of Alfred Gell's 1992 publication, *The Anthropology of Time: Cultural Construction of Temporal Maps and Images*,³⁵² "anthropological reviews or summaries of the field are both sparse and relatively superficial despite the importance of the topic."³⁵³ In an attempt to address her own challenge, Munn provides a thorough overview of the cultural anthropology of time.³⁵⁴ Similarly, Barbara Adam thoroughly surveys perceptions of time from the perspective of sociology.³⁵⁵

Social psychologists and cross-cultural psychologists have also contributed to the discussion of time,³⁵⁶ notably in the area of culture and temporal orientation. James M. Jones finds that there are critical distinctions between future and present temporal orientations and an awareness of the nature of both perspectives is necessary for appropriate cross-cultural understanding. According to Jones, a future time perspective is a function of two things:

- (1) strength of the belief in the conditional probability that if a specific act (say, studying hard) is performed in the present, the probability of some future goal state (say, getting a good job and having a successful career) will be greater, and;
- (2) strength of the tendency to value goals whose attainment can only occur in the future.³⁵⁷

The present time perspective, on the other hand, is based upon two different premises:

- (1) The present time perspective supports the idea that the probability of achieving a distal³⁵⁸ goal is not greater as a result of present behaviors than

³⁵² Gell 1992.

³⁵³ Munn 1992: 83-123.

³⁵⁴ Munn 1992.

³⁵⁵ Adam 1990; Adam 1994: 503-526.

³⁵⁶ For a thorough introduction, see: McGrath and Tschan 2004.

³⁵⁷ Jones 1988: 23.

³⁵⁸ Distal is used here in its traditional sense, as 'situated far away from the centre' or 'the opposite of proximal.' In anatomy, distal means 'situated farthest from the point of attachment.' For example, the distal end of the tibia. In geology, distal represents the outer part of an area

it would be as a result of future behaviors initiated when the goal becomes more proximal. This might be recognized as characteristic of the *mañana* cultures. Never do today what you can put off until tomorrow. If putting off until tomorrow does not materially alter the probability of successful goal attainment, there is little reinforcement for anticipatory goal behavior. (2) In the present time perspective, it is quite clear that proximal goals are more important than distal ones. In some cultures it is a generally held value that enjoying today is more important than worrying about enjoying tomorrow.³⁵⁹

Jones concludes that “what differs between the two perspectives is not the instrumentality of behavior, but the location of the goals in temporal extension.” According to Jones, future oriented cultures locate their goals in the distant future and interpret their present behaviour in light of the distant goals, while present oriented cultures have proximate goals and understand the future as an outcome of the present. Similar to the cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism, temporal orientations are not understood to be binary opposites, but rather, cultures tend to emphasise one temporal orientation over another. For example, members of individualist cultures are commonly understood to have the future as their first temporal preference, the present as the second temporal preference, and the past as the third preference.

4.8 Pierre Bourdieu: An Early Study of Present Temporal Orientation

Pierre Bourdieu provides an example of present temporal orientation in his study of Algerian peasants. While many of Bourdieu’s observations correspond with the conclusions of James M. Jones, he also makes additional observations concerning present temporal orientation.

Bourdieu notes that, “nothing is more foreign to the indigenous civilization of Algeria than the attempt to secure a hold over the future, and nothing more strange to it than the idea of an immense and open future as a broad field of innumerable possibilities which man is able to explore and dominate.”³⁶⁰

affected by geological activity. See Pearsall 1988: 535.

³⁵⁹ Jones 1988: 25.

³⁶⁰ Bourdieu 1963: 55.

If such an understanding of the future is completely foreign, what is their attitude toward time? Bourdieu explains that time is not 'measured time,' but that of intervals of subjective experiences. This manifests itself in two important ways. First, temporal points of reference are expressed by experiences (i.e. 'the year of the great fire'). Second, the 'present' is defined in terms of experience.

The lapse of time which constitutes the present is the whole of an action seen in the unity of a perception including both the retained past and the anticipated future. The 'present' of the action embraces, over and above the perceived present, an horizon of the past and of the future tied to the present because they both belong to the same context of meaning. Consciousness is present in the immediate future integrally linked to the present moment. The same is true of the past. The 'present' of existence is not confined to the mere instantaneous present, because consciousness holds united in a single look aspects of the world already perceived and on the point of being perceived.³⁶¹

It is in the area of 'retained past' and 'anticipated future' that Bourdieu makes his greatest contribution to the understanding of present temporal orientation. He explains that both temporal duration and space are described by reference to the performance of a concrete task (i.e. 'a days walk'). In this case, "time, both past and future, has the same limits as the 'space of life.' The perceived horizon of the world is also the horizon of the present."³⁶² The implications of this are significant. Bourdieu notes that "beyond the horizon of the present begins the imaginary world which cannot be linked with the universe of experience."³⁶³ In this context, the 'forthcoming,' or anticipated future, stands as the horizon for the perceived present. Beyond the 'forthcoming' begins the imaginary world which cannot be linked with the universe of experience.

Bourdieu further describes the nature of the 'forthcoming' in his analysis of foresight. He explains that "to have foresight is to follow a well marked road and not to explore new ways; it is to conform to a model transmitted by the ancestors and approved by the community."³⁶⁴ Bourdieu also notes that "acts of foresight are much more dictated by imitation of the past and by fidelity to the

³⁶¹ Bourdieu 1963: 59-60.

³⁶² Bourdieu 1963: 60.

³⁶³ Bourdieu 1963: 60.

³⁶⁴ Bourdieu 1963: 64

values transmitted by the ancients than by the forecast design of the projected future.”³⁶⁵

As noted above, Bourdieu’s conclusions correspond with the analysis of James Jones and in several places his work expands or supplements the description of present temporal orientation provided by Jones. In Chapter 7, Jones’ description of present temporal orientation and Bourdieu’s description of the ‘present,’ his differentiation between the ‘forthcoming’ and the ‘imaginary,’ and his description of ‘foresight’ will each inform the discussion of social identity in Hebrews.

4.9 The Addressees of Hebrews: Past, Present, or Future Oriented

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck explain that, “Americans, more strongly than most peoples of the world, place an emphasis upon the Future - a Future which is anticipated to be ‘bigger and better.’”³⁶⁶ Likewise, Edward C. Stewart and Milton J. Bennet propose that future temporal orientation is an American cultural pattern.³⁶⁷ The individualism of American culture and its relative economic security in the present are two of the contributing factors to this future temporal orientation. Philip Esler notes, “If it is reasonable to establish a spectrum of concern with the future among various cultures, we may begin with the suggestion that modern northern European and North American cultures are future oriented to an extraordinary degree. We continually reach into the future in order to eliminate or control its uncertainties.”³⁶⁸

In contrast, the tendency toward collectivism and the relative economic insecurity in the present (i.e. peasant society) suggest that first-century Mediterranean culture was one of present temporal orientation. Esler confirms this conclusion with regard to the addressees of Romans.

Cultures at an agrarian stage of evolution, where the peasantry live from one harvest to the next and are largely at the mercy of the natural forces (rain or drought, pests, crop disease, etc.), have a very different attitude to

³⁶⁵ Bourdieu 1963: 65.

³⁶⁶ Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1973:15.

³⁶⁷ Stewart and Bennett 1991: 123-125.

³⁶⁸ Esler 2003b: 257.

the future. While such people do have a sense of future, it is much more attenuated. People must accept what the future, something almost entirely beyond their control and, accordingly, in God's hands, will bring. There is little sense that one can reach into the future to control or eliminate its uncertainty and dangers. To a much greater extent, people live in the present.³⁶⁹

He concludes that, "For the preindustrial, agrarian societies of the ancient Mediterranean, the connection of the future to the present was widely understood as the culmination of presently occurring natural processes."³⁷⁰ Similarly, Bruce Malina explains that a future orientation "is surely not to be found in any peasant society. Peasant societies invariably have the present as first-order temporal preference; secondary preference as past; and the future comes in as third choice. Since Mediterranean societies of the first century were examples of classical peasant societies, by and large, the primary preference in temporal orientation at the period and place was the present, with past second and future third."³⁷¹ Malina concludes, "... all the evidence indicates that New Testament authors were present oriented. They were fundamentally and directly concerned with the present, as were Jesus and the others described by those authors."³⁷²

Based upon the discussion of temporal orientation and the precedents set by Esler and Malina, it may assumed on a *prima facie* basis that a present temporal orientation was more probable for addressees of Hebrews, though this assumption will be tested against the data.

4.10 Conclusion

An appropriate conceptual framework for examining the identity of the addressees of Hebrews must consider the culture of addressees. In this chapter, I introduced a definition of 'culture,' I broke this difficult concept into 'subjective' and 'objective' culture, and I sub-divided 'subjective' culture into cultural 'dimensions' and cultural 'domains.' It is in the area of cultural dimensions that

³⁶⁹ Esler 2003b: 257.

³⁷⁰ Esler 2003b: 257-258.

³⁷¹ Malina 1996b: 182-183.

³⁷² Malina 1996b: 210.

cross-cultural psychologists compare and contrast cultures. The most fruitful dimension for cross-cultural comparison is that of 'individualism and collectivism.' Further, the addressees of Hebrews were likely allocentric members of a collectivist culture, an assumption we will see confirmed by the textual data discussed below. It is with this understanding that we are able to identify an appropriate conceptual framework. Social identity theory is, then, an appropriate model with which to analyse the identity of competitive, collectivist social groups. Temporal orientation is also a fruitful dimension for cross-cultural comparison. As noted above, the addressees of Hebrews were likely allocentrics with a present temporal orientation, again, an assumption we will see confirmed by the textual data discussed below. Like collectivism, this cultural dimension will also play an important role in the discussion of the identity of the addressees.

Chapter 5

'Us' and 'Them,' The 'Faithful' and the 'Unfaithful'

Who were the addressees of Hebrews? Where they 'Jewish' or 'Gentile Christians?' As explained in Chapter 1, a variety of answers have been given to this question, accompanied by an overall frustration regarding the question itself. In short, Hebrews does not include the data traditionally used by historical critics to address the issue of 'identity.' However, this is not the end of the discussion concerning the addressees. As noted in Chapter 4, collectivist, competitive social groups tend to form and maintain identity through a process of intergroup comparison and differentiation. This process, for example, played a primary role in the identity formation and maintenance of the Greeks,³⁷³ the Romans,³⁷⁴ and the Judeans. It is for this reason that intergroup comparison and differentiation, the relationship between 'us' and 'them,' is an appropriate framework within which to examine the social identity of the addressees of Hebrews, a social group which was likely both competitive and collectivist. Did the author engage in a comparison between 'us' and 'them?' If so, how did the author describe each group? Before I am free to examine the intergroup comparison and differentiation present in Hebrews, I must first determine that the addressees did, indeed, perceive of themselves as having belonged to a distinct social group.³⁷⁵

5.1 The Addressees as a Social Group: A History of Investigation

The observation that the addressees were a distinct group is a fundamental assumption for the vast majority of the interpreters of Hebrews. While there are a variety of proposals regarding the identity of the addressees, their location, and

³⁷³ Edith Hall 1989; Cartledge 1993.

³⁷⁴ Huskinson 2000:14.

³⁷⁵ To use the words of social identity theory, did the addressees possess the 'cognitive component' of group identification? For a discussion of the three components of group identification, see section 3.4.

their social context, it is very rarely argued that the addressees were not a distinct group. So prevalent is this assumption, that even those who argue that nothing can be known regarding the identity of the addressees tend to assume that Hebrews was written to a specific audience. As noted above, Floyd V. Filson acknowledges great frustration regarding the question of the identity of the addressees.³⁷⁶ And yet, he has no doubt that Hebrews was written with a specific group in mind. He concludes, "It is not a private personal letter, but is intended to be read to a group of Christians met together for worship and consideration of their critical situation."³⁷⁷ Like most interpreters of Hebrews, Filson assumes that Hebrews was written to a specific social group.

The case is also made, however very rarely, that Hebrews was not written to a distinct group of addressees, but to a general audience. Helmut Koester notes, "But like Ephesians, Hebrews does not speak to the situation of a specific church, nor does the treatise deal with an immediate threat from heretical teachers. Rather, Hebrews presents a theological position within the general situation of the churches after Paul's time."³⁷⁸ Likewise, Pamela Eisenbaum explains, "I further suspect that Hebrews is a generic speech, one in which the author wanted to set forth certain ideas that he believed all Christians should hold about their faith."³⁷⁹ She further asserts, "Even if the author did have one particular community in mind, his elaborate theological and christological reflection indicates that he wanted to make a statement that could transcend any one occasion. More than this we cannot know for certain."³⁸⁰

Ironically, what both sides of this position hold in common is an almost absolute absence of argumentation. While the majority assume with little analysis that the addressees were a distinct group, both Koester and Eisenbaum claim the opposite, again without a detailed argument from the text. Certainly it is not sufficient to observe that Hebrews is 'theological' and therefore must have been

³⁷⁶ Filson 1967: 12.

³⁷⁷ Filson 1967: 19.

³⁷⁸ H. Koester 1982: 2/273.

³⁷⁹ Eisenbaum 1997b: 12.

³⁸⁰ Eisenbaum 1997b: 12.

originally intended for a general audience. Likewise, the claim that Hebrews was written to a specific social group must be based upon evidence from the text.

5.2 The Addressees as a Social Group

One the data is examined, however, it becomes clear that the addressees did indeed understand themselves to be a distinct social group. To use the language of social identity theory, they possessed the 'cognitive component' of group identification, they had knowledge of belonging to a group. Evidence of this 'cognitive component,' to use Tajfel's expression, is located in at least nine areas of the text.

First, the author's use of the first person plural, 'we,' is an indication that the addressees belonged to a distinct social group.³⁸¹ The relationship between the author and the addressees was that of mutual ingroup membership. He opens the text with the observation that 'God has spoken to *us* by a Son' (Hebrews 1:2). Later, he urges '*we* must pay the closer attention to what *we* have heard, lest *we* drift away from it' (Hebrews 2:1). In both examples, the author includes himself in the group. Simon Kistemaker observes that while the author does not address the audience by name or place, he does use intimate forms of the first person pronoun ('we,' 'us,' and 'our') throughout the text.³⁸² Indeed, with over fifty examples of the use of the first person plural, 'we/us,' the author places significant emphasis upon the group and upon his place within the group.

Second, the author's use of the second person plural, 'you,' is an indication that the addressees belonged to a distinct social group. Similar to the author's repeated use of the first person plural, he repeatedly uses the second person plural, 'you.'³⁸³ For example, he warns that '*you* have become 'dull of hearing' (Hebrews 5:11). In the next verse, he warns that '*you* ought to be

³⁸¹ For examples of the author's use of the first person plural, 'we,' see: 1:2; 2:1, 3, 8, 9; 3:1, 6, 14, 19; 4:1, 2, 3, 11, 14, 15, 16; 6:1, 3, 18; 19; 20; 7:14, 26; 8:1; 9:14, 24; 10:10, 14, 15, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 30, 39; 11:3, 40; 12:1, 2, 9, 25, 28, 29; 13:6, 10, 13, 14, 15, 21, and 23.

³⁸² Kistemaker 1984: 25.

³⁸³ For examples of the author's use of the second person plural, 'you,' see: 3:7, 3:8, 12, 13, 15; 4:1, 7; 5:11, 12; 6:9, 11, 12; 10:25, 29, 32, 35, 36; 12:3, 4, 12:5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 22, 25; 13:2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 25.

teachers.’ Instead, ‘you need milk, not solid food’ (Hebrews 5:12). For Harold Attridge, there is no doubt that the author is speaking to a distinct group. In his exegesis of Hebrews 5:11-12, Attridge repeatedly refers to the ‘addressees’ and the ‘community.’³⁸⁴ In each case, a distinct group is imagined. With over fifty examples of the author’s use of the second person plural, ‘you,’ there is substantial evidence that he was addressing a distinct group.

Third, the author’s descriptions of intragroup behaviour are an indication that the addressees belonged to a distinct social group. A striking feature of Hebrews is the author’s lack of emphasis upon individuals or upon interpersonal behaviour.³⁸⁵ In fact, he never mentions a single individual or a single instance of interpersonal behaviour. Instead, the author speaks to members of a group. The individuals were allocentric, ‘other directed,’ and were urged to encourage one another and care for one another in a variety of ways (cf. Hebrews 3:13; 10:24; and 12:13). To use the language of social identity theory, the behaviour of the addressees was to be nearer the intergroup end of the ‘interpersonal-intergroup’ continuum. In other words, they were to encourage one another because they were fellow members of an ingroup, not but because they enjoyed personal relationships.

Fourth, the author’s warning ‘not to neglect to meet together’ (Hebrews 10:25) is an indication that the addressees belonged to a distinct social group. While this clause has been variously interpreted, most interpreters envision individuals neglecting to meet with their group for worship. Kistemaker writes, “Apparently, some members of the Hebrew congregation to whom this epistle originally was addressed showed a disregard for attending the religious services.”³⁸⁶ Likewise, Harold Attridge noted that, “some members (τισίν) of the community are not ‘coming to church’.”³⁸⁷ P.E. Hughes also imagines a ‘local

³⁸⁴ Attridge 1989: 158-159.

³⁸⁵ The author uses the singular in only two situations: in references to scriptural passages (cf. Hebrews 8:11; 12:5; 15; 13:6) and when encouraging the individual members of the group to maintain their confidence (cf. Hebrews 3:12-13; 4:1, 11; 5:13; 6:11; 8:11; 10:28; 12:14; 12:16).

³⁸⁶ Kistemaker 1984: 290.

³⁸⁷ Attridge 1989: 290.

church.’³⁸⁸ While a critique may be offered regarding the potentially anachronistic understandings of ‘church,’ there is a broad consensus that the ‘assembly’ refers to a gathering of a distinct social group. Indeed, the command ‘not to neglect to meet together’ implies that the addressees were aware of and were (previously) committed to meeting with the other members of the group. This particular example counts strongly against Helmut Koester and Pamela Eisenbaum’s postulation of a general ‘Christian’ audience.

Fifth, the author’s mention of the group’s leaders is an indication that the addressees belonged to a distinct social group. He encourages the addressees to ‘imitate the faith’ of their leaders (Hebrews 13:7) and to ‘obey and submit to them’ (Hebrews 13:17). While interpreters often disagree over the identity and social context of the addressees, there is general consensus that the author’s reference to the ‘leaders’ indicates a distinct group. Hugh Montefiore notes, “The language here suggests a primitive form of church order in which the leaders of the community (cf. Acts xv. 25) were those who first told them about the good news of Christ.”³⁸⁹ Donald Guthrie similarly envisions former leaders and founders of the addressees’ ‘church.’³⁹⁰ Likewise, Craig Koester envisions leaders of a specific ‘community.’³⁹¹ In Hebrews 13:7, the author describes the leaders as ‘those who spoke the word of God to you.’ This reference, very importantly, indicates a face-to-face presence and dialogue. Therefore, this is not a general reference to ‘all leaders,’ but a specific reference to the leaders of the addressees’ social group.

Sixth, the author’s descriptions of or designations for the addressees are an indication that the addressees belonged to a distinct social group.³⁹² For example, he refers to the addressees as ‘brothers’ (Hebrews 3:1; 3:12; 10:19; and 13:22),

³⁸⁸ P.E. Hughes 1977: 417.

³⁸⁹ Montefiore 1969: 242.

³⁹⁰ D. Guthrie 1983: 270.

³⁹¹ C. Koester 2001: 566-568.

³⁹² As explained in Chapter 1, some believe that the designations indicate the identity of the addressees. For example, many who hold the ‘traditional view’ argue that that designations are a signal of a ‘Jewish Christian’ audience. However, others argue that the designations are equally appropriate for ‘Gentile Christian’ addressees. See: McGiffert 1897: 465; Kümmel 1975: 399-400.

'brothers [of Christ]' (Hebrews 2:11-12), 'descendants of Abraham' (Hebrews 2:16), 'partners in a heavenly calling' (Hebrews 3:1), 'partners in Christ' (Hebrews 3:14), 'the ones having faith' (Hebrews 4:3), 'the people of God' (Hebrews 4:9), 'beloved' (Hebrews 6:9), the 'house of Israel' (Hebrews 8:8, 10), the 'house of Judah' (Hebrews 8:8), the ones 'having been called' (Hebrews 9:15), the ones 'having been sanctified' (Hebrews 10:10, 14), and 'sons' (Hebrews 12:5). Such designations indicate that the addressees belonged to a distinct social group for three reasons. First, many of the designations imply an awareness of and commitment to one another. For example, the addressees are described as 'brothers' (cf. Hebrews 3:1; 3:12; 10:19; and 13:22). Second, every description or designation offered by the author is given in the plural. In other words, he always refers to the addressees as a group. Third, not only does he use collective or corporate designations for the addressees, but several of the designations give clear indication that the author understood himself to be a part of the social group. For example, the author referred to the addressees as 'partners in a heavenly calling' (Hebrews 3:1)³⁹³ and 'partners in Christ' (Hebrews 3:14).

Seventh, the author's references to the 'past' or antecedent experiences of the addressees are an indication that the addressees belonged to a distinct social group.³⁹⁴ While I will discuss the 'past' or antecedent experiences of the addressees in Chapter 7, it is helpful at this time to recognize that each reference indicates that the addressees, as a group, shared mutual experiences. In Hebrews 6:1-2, the author encourages the addressees not to lay again their foundation, or re-learn the basic teaching about Christ. In Hebrews 10:33, he reminds the addressees that they had been 'enlightened' and that they have experienced a 'hard struggle with sufferings.' In both examples, the author reminds the addressees of their shared ingroup experiences.

Eighth, the author's references to Timothy and to 'those from Italy' are an

³⁹³ Craig Koester explains that 'holy brethren' refers to members of the 'Christian' community, both men and women. C. Koester 2001: 242.

³⁹⁴ For the discussion of the past or antecedent experiences of the addressees of Hebrews, see section 7.1.

indication that the addressees belonged to a distinct group. In Hebrews 13:23, the author refers to ‘our brother Timothy.’ While little can be known about the addressees’ relationship with Timothy, this reference indicates an ongoing relationship. Likewise, the mention of ‘those from Italy,’ in Hebrews 13:24, indicates an ongoing relationship.³⁹⁵ Both examples rule out the possibility that Hebrews was written to a general audience, for not all Christ-followers had ongoing relationships with Timothy or ‘those from Italy.’

Lastly, the author’s reference to the ‘plundering of property’ in Hebrews 10:34 is an indication that the addressees were a distinct social group. Here, interpreters commonly make a distinction between ‘official’ seizure and ‘unofficial’ seizure of property.³⁹⁶ Official seizure was the legal confiscation of goods, usually when an individual was convicted of a major crime or went into voluntary exile. Unofficial seizure was the plundering of property during outbreaks of violence. With regard to the Hebrews 10:34, interpreters generally debate the nature of the plundering (i.e. whether it was official or unofficial)³⁹⁷ or the impact that the plundering would have had on the addressees (i.e. a loss of honour).³⁹⁸ What is important in the discussion of the addressees as a distinct social group, however, is that the plundering occurred. Such an event, whether official or unofficial, was not experienced by all Christ-followers. This reference, then, indicates that the addressees were a distinct group that experienced the distinct event of the ‘plundering of their property.’

To summarise, the addressees of Hebrews understood themselves as having been a distinct social group. The author addressed them as a group. They

³⁹⁵ This verse is often referred to in the discussion of the possible location and identity of the addressees. Read one way, those who are currently in Italy, possibly Rome, send their greetings to the addressees. Read another way, those Italians, possibly Romans, who are away from Italy send greetings back to Italy, to the addressees. Carl Mosser provides a recent, thorough discussion of this issue, concluding that “... Hebrews 13:24 is most appropriately understood to be the greeting of Italian Christ-followers who were likely in Italy when the epistle was composed.” Mosser 2005: 156.

³⁹⁶ Attridge 1989: 299; deSilva 1995: 160-161; C. Koester 2001: 460.

³⁹⁷ For a review of this debate, see: C. Koester 2001: 460. Here, Koester concludes that “the evidence is ambiguous because official confiscation could be construed as plunder by the victims, and lines between legal and illegal actions were not always clear.”

³⁹⁸ DeSilva 1995: 160-161.

were instructed to 'encourage one another' and 'to meet together.' They, as a group, had leaders. The author used collective designations when referring to them. And, they had shared 'past,' or antecedent, experiences (including the experience of having their 'property plundered'). In short, the majority of interpreters are correct with their assumption that Hebrews was, indeed, written to a specific social group. The next and more difficult question concerns the social identity of the addressees. How did this group of addressees understand themselves? In order to understand the social identity of the addressees, we must understand their process of social categorisation. In other words, we must answer the following question, 'What categories did the addressees use to simplify and systematise their environment?'

5.3 Social Categorisation

As we would expect from a text written in a collectivist, comparative culture, the author used an 'us/them' process of social categorisation. In fact, he referred to the ingroup, 'us' and 'you,' over one hundred times³⁹⁹ and the outgroup, 'them,' fifteen times.⁴⁰⁰ In addition, the author described in dramatic language the identity descriptors of each group. So, how does the author describe the ingroup, 'us,' and the outgroup, 'them?'

Throughout Hebrews, the author emphasises 'faith.' He uses the noun thirty-two times⁴⁰¹ and the verb twice more.⁴⁰² In addition, he uses the negative, 'unbelief' or 'un-faith,' in Hebrews 3:12 and 3:19. A striking feature of Hebrews, is that the author repeatedly describes the ingroup and the outgroup in relation to 'faith.' The ingroup are reminded that they have heard the word of God, and importantly, that the good news was met with faith. In sharp contrast, the author describes the outgroup as those who also heard the word of God, but that the good news was not met with faith. In Hebrews 4:2, the author tells the addressees that

³⁹⁹ See footnotes 381 and 383 for the textual data.

⁴⁰⁰ For examples of the author's references to the outgroup, or 'them,' see: 3:8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19; 4:2, 3, 5, 6; 8:9; and 12:25.

⁴⁰¹ The noun, 'faith,' occurs in Hebrews thirty-two times: 4:2; 6:1, 12; 10:22, 38, 39; 11:1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 39; 12:2; and 13:7.

⁴⁰² The verb, 'have faith,' occurs in Hebrews twice: 4:3 and 11:6.

'good news came to *us* just as to *them*; but the message which *they* heard did not benefit them, because it did *not meet with faith* in the hearers.' This verse proves critical for our understanding of the social categorisation process of the addressees. The author compares 'us' with 'them.' While both groups heard the good news, their responses were quite different. The addressees received the good news with faith, while 'they' did not. I will argue below that the author's description of the ingroup, description of the outgroup, comparison of the groups, and description of the intergroup boundary are all based upon this important difference. However, before I relate social identity theory to the data in Hebrews in a general way, I will present an overview of the discussion of the meaning of faith in Hebrews.

That the author emphasises 'faith' throughout the text has not gone unnoticed. In fact, interpreters have long debated the meaning of faith in Hebrews. With regard to this discussion, six generalisations may be made regarding the various interpretations.⁴⁰³ First, the meaning of faith in Hebrews is understood by many to be unique, or distinct, within the New Testament. This is especially true when compared to Paul's understanding of faith.⁴⁰⁴ Second, many interpreters define faith in Hebrews in terms of 'hope.'⁴⁰⁵ Third, some interpreters define it in terms of 'endurance,'⁴⁰⁶ 'fidelity,'⁴⁰⁷ 'trust,'⁴⁰⁸ or 'confidence' in

⁴⁰³ For a recent discussion of the meaning of 'faith' in Hebrews, see: Rhee 2001. According to Rhee, there are three different views regarding the orientation of faith in Hebrews: (1) the 'ethical view,' (2) the 'eschatological view,' and (3) the 'Christological view.' Rhee offers three examples of interpreters who he understands to hold an 'ethical view:' Attridge 1989; Grässer 1965; and Lindars 1991. He offers four examples of interpreters who he understands to hold the 'eschatological view:' E. Käsemann 1984; Lindars 1991; Longenecker 1977: 207-210; and Thompson 1982. Finally, he offers two examples of interpreters who he understands to hold the 'Christological view:' Hamm 1990; Miller 1987: 131-40.

⁴⁰⁴ For examples of the difference between the meaning of 'faith' in Hebrews and Paul's understanding of 'faith,' see: Fuller 1995: 17; Herring 1970: 98; Montefiore 1969: 5, 186-187; and R. Smith 1984: 12-13.

⁴⁰⁵ For examples of interpreters who have defined 'faith' in Hebrews in terms of 'hope,' see: Attridge 1989: 308; Davies 1967: 106-107; Fuller 1995: 17; D. Guthrie 1983: 226; Herring 1970: 98; P.E. Hughes 1977: 428; Moffatt 1975: xlv; Montefiore 1969: 186-187; and R. Smith 1984: 12-13.

⁴⁰⁶ For examples of interpreters who have defined 'faith' in Hebrews in terms of 'endurance,' see: Davies 1967: 106-107; Ellingworth 1993: 563; Fuller 1995: 17; C. Koester 2001: 126; and R. Smith 1984: 12-13, 138.

⁴⁰⁷ Attridge 1989: 104, 308.

⁴⁰⁸ C. Koester 2001: 110-111.

God.⁴⁰⁹ Fourth, some interpreters define faith as being the 'affirmation of dogmatic propositions.'⁴¹⁰ Fifth, some interpreters define it as being an explicitly 'Christian' faith.⁴¹¹ Sixth, many interpreters understand faith as having a future temporal dimension, or as having been 'eschatological' in nature.⁴¹² In addition, it is essential to note that the generalisations above are not mutually exclusive. In fact, many interpreters make a combination of the above observations. For example, Victor (Sung-Yul) Rhee concludes that faith in Hebrews is 'ethical,'⁴¹³ 'eschatological,'⁴¹⁴ and 'Christological.'⁴¹⁵

While there is great diversity in the various interpretations of the meaning of faith in Hebrews, there is one dimension (or omission) which nearly all definitions hold in common. In short, interpreters overlook the role of faith in the social categorisation process of the author and the addressees. As noted above, the author differentiated the ingroup, 'us,' from the outgroup, 'them,' based upon a comparison of the relative 'faithfulness' of each group (Hebrews 4:2). Faith, therefore, has an important social function in the text. In short, while most interpreters identify the author's emphasis on faith in Hebrews (and attempt to define its meaning), they do not identify the role of faith in the social categorisation process of the author and the addressees.

An additional problem with many definitions of 'faith' lies in the categories or interpretive frameworks employed by the modern readers of Hebrews. For many, 'faith' in Hebrews is defined in terms of 'eschatology.'⁴¹⁶ Unfortunately, the term 'eschatology' is rarely defined. In fact, the term is used in

⁴⁰⁹ Kistemaker 1984: 310.

⁴¹⁰ For an example of an interpreter who defined 'faith' in Hebrews in terms of the affirmation of dogmatic propositions, see: Fuller 1995: 17.

⁴¹¹ For examples of this conclusion, see: F.F. Bruce 1990: 9; Ellingworth 1993: 317-325; Gordon 2000: 73; and Kistemaker 1984: 160.

⁴¹² For further examples of interpreters who understand 'faith' in Hebrews to have a future orientation, see: F.F. Bruce 1990: 276; Davies 1967: 106; Herring 1970: 98; C. Koester 2001: 110-11; Moffatt 1975: 160-161; R. Smith 1984: 12-13; and Thompson 1982: 80.

⁴¹³ Rhee 2001: 35, 224.

⁴¹⁴ Rhee defined the eschatological nature of faith in Hebrews to be that of 'already' and 'not yet.' Rhee 2001: 252-253.

⁴¹⁵ Rhee 2001: 252-253. For additional examples of Rhee's conclusion that faith in Hebrews is Christological, see: Rhee 1998: 327-345; Rhee 2000a: 174-189; and Rhee 2000b: 75-88.

⁴¹⁶ For a thorough defence of the 'eschatological' nature of Hebrews, see: Barrett 1964: 363-393.

so many different ways, that it is rendered virtually empty of meaning. A similar observation is made by Philip Esler with regard to the use of 'eschatology' in the reading of Romans.⁴¹⁷ For Esler, " ... the problem with the word 'eschatology' is twofold: it is arguably so capacious of meaning as to be almost vacuous, and, to the extent that it does still signify, it is riddled with implicit assumptions concerning time and the cosmos of uncertain relevance to the first century CE."⁴¹⁸

In addition, many interpreters understand 'faith' to have a 'future' orientation.⁴¹⁹ Unfortunately, such a conception of time is likely based upon the future temporal orientation of the interpreters, rather than the probable present temporal orientation of the addressees. For example, in his analysis of the 'eschatology' of Hebrews, Craig Koester notes that, "Hebrews speaks of the future in order to shape the present."⁴²⁰ For readers of Hebrews with a future temporal orientation, such an explanation is most reasonable. However, if one takes seriously the probable present temporal orientation of the addressees, this explanation proves most problematic. Rather than describing the 'future' to shape 'present' behaviour, the author and the addressees likely understood that their 'present' behaviour brought 'forthcoming' results. In the case of Hebrews, the promised 'rest' is described as that which is forthcoming, *if* the addressees remain faithful.⁴²¹ If left unquestioned, such interpretive frameworks will continue to be freely used. However, once questioned, the limitations of such interpretative frameworks become recognizable. Therefore, the entirety of Chapter 7 will be dedicated to the exploration of the probable present temporal orientation of the addressees and its impact on the interpretation of the text.

Finally, because I will use the terms 'faith' and 'faithfulness' throughout this chapter, a discussion of the relationship between the terms is necessary.⁴²²

⁴¹⁷ Esler 2003b: 251-252.

⁴¹⁸ Esler 2003b: 252.

⁴¹⁹ For further examples of interpreters who understand 'faith' in Hebrews to have a future orientation, see: F.F. Bruce 1990: 276; Davies 1967: 106; Herring 1970: 98; C. Koester 2001: 110-11; Moffatt 1975: 160-161; R. Smith 1984: 12-13; and Thompson 1982: 80.

⁴²⁰ C. Koester 2001: 104.

⁴²¹ For an analysis of the role of the 'forthcoming' in Hebrews, see section 7.4.

⁴²² Pauline interpreters have given a great deal of attention to the terms 'faith' and 'faithfulness' over the past two decades. Specifically, there has been debate over the meaning of the phrase

Within the history of the interpretation of Hebrews, there has been very little discussion regarding the distinction between 'faith' and 'faithfulness.'⁴²³ In fact, most interpreters use the terms interchangeably. For those who have attempted to make a distinction between the terms, the discussion has been brief and has often remained quite vague. However, a generalisation may be made regarding the commonly understood distinction between 'faith' and 'faithfulness.' 'Faith' is understood as either 'belief,' 'hope,' or 'trust,' while 'faithfulness' is understood to include the act of 'fidelity' or 'loyalty.' In other words, 'faithfulness' is often understood as holding firm in one's commitments, or holding firm in one's 'faith' (i.e. holding firm in one's belief, hope, or trust). For example, Craig Koester notes, "Faith means hearing and receiving the gospel message (4:2-3), turning from sin to God (6:1), and drawing near to God with confidence (10:22)."⁴²⁴ Faithfulness, "...entails perseverance (6:12) and holding fast to the confession of the Christian community without wavering (10:23). Faithfulness is a way of life for the people of God."⁴²⁵ In this thesis, the term 'faithfulness' represents the behaviour of the addressees which adheres to, or is compatible with, the dominant identity descriptor of the group. Since the author and the addressees understood

πίστις Χριστοῦ. While some have argued in favour of the objective genitive ('faith in Christ'), others have argued in favour of the subjective genitive ('faith of Christ'). Within this debate, some who have argued in favour of the subjective genitive have translated Πίστις Χριστοῦ as the 'faithfulness of Christ.' Here, a distinction is made between the 'faith' or 'faithfulness' of 'believers' in Christ, and the 'faith' or 'faithfulness' of Christ. While this discussion remains at the centre of Pauline interpretation, it has not informed the discussion of 'faith' and 'faithfulness' in Hebrews. Hebrews does not include the phrase Πίστις Χριστοῦ. Therefore, while I acknowledge the presence of this discussion within Pauline interpretation, it has not proven relevant to the interpretation of 'faith' and 'faithfulness' in Hebrews. For a summary of the history of this discussion, see: Pollard 1997: 213-228.

⁴²³ For examples of interpreters who have made a distinction between 'faith' and 'faithfulness' in Hebrews, see: C. Koester 2001: 125-127; and R. McL. Wilson 1987: 201.

⁴²⁴ C. Koester 2001: 125.

⁴²⁵ C. Koester 2001: 126.

themselves as having been the 'faithful,' the behaviours which were consistent with the group's norms and beliefs were categorised as 'faithfulness.' Likewise, those behaviours which did not adhere to the group's norms and beliefs were understood as 'unfaithfulness.'⁴²⁶

To summarise, the author of Hebrews employed the categories of 'us' and 'them.' In addition, the author of Hebrews emphasised faith through the text. Importantly, the author defined the ingroup, 'us' and the outgroup, 'them,' in terms of their relative faithfulness. While the addressees met the good news with faith, 'they' did not. I will argue below that this important difference shaped the social categories employed by the author and the addressees. The addressees understood themselves in terms of 'faithfulness.' In turn, the addressees understood the outgroup, 'them,' in terms of 'unfaithfulness.' Faith, therefore, served as the dominant identity descriptor of the addressees.

5.4 The Ingroup and the Outgroup in Hebrews

Were the addressees 'Jewish' or 'Gentile Christians?' Can we even know the identity of the addressees? While interpreters struggle to match the data in Hebrews with an appropriate social or 'religious' group, nobody has challenged the categorisation process itself. Are we using appropriate categories for the discussion of the identity of the addressees? The author did not use the term, Ἰουδαῖοι, nor did he use ἔθνη or Χριστιανός. However, the author placed significant emphasis on faith, and in so doing, revealed significant data concerning the ingroup.

In Hebrews 4:2, the addressees are reminded that they have heard the good news and that it was met with faith. In Hebrew 6:1, the author describes the addressees' 'elementary doctrine of Christ' which includes 'faith toward God.' In

⁴²⁶ This description of the relationship between 'faith' and 'faithfulness' has some similarities between the philosophical discussion of the correspondence between 'virtues' and 'principles.' For example, the principle of 'gratitude' corresponds to the virtue of 'gratefulness.' Likewise, the principle or duty of 'non-deception' corresponds to the virtue 'non-deceptiveness.' However, this analogy must not be pressed too far, for the description of the relationship between 'faith' and 'faithfulness' has been described in terms of social identity theory. For an example of the discussion of the correspondence between virtues and principles, see: Beauchamp 1982: 163-166.

Hebrews 10:39, he stresses that they are ‘those who have faith and keep their souls.’ While the addressees are described as ‘those who have faith,’ they are also repeatedly encouraged to remain ‘faithful.’ In Hebrews 6:12, the author warns them to not be ‘sluggish,’ but to be ‘imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.’ In Hebrew 10:22, he calls the addressees to draw near to the house of God ‘with a true heart in full assurance of faith.’ In Hebrews 13:7, he calls the addressees to ‘imitate the faith’ of their leaders. Similarly, the author emphasises the faithfulness of ‘past’ or antecedent witnesses.⁴²⁷ In Hebrews 3:1-6, the author asks the addressees to consider the faithfulness of both Moses (faithful as a servant) and Jesus (faithful as a Son). In Hebrews 11, the author repeatedly emphasises ‘past’ or antecedent witnesses, using the term, ‘faith,’ twenty-four times in forty verses.⁴²⁸ In Hebrews 12:1-2, he calls upon the example of Jesus, the ‘pioneer and perfecter of faith.’ Finally, the author makes clear that the forthcoming result of faithfulness is the promised ‘rest.’⁴²⁹ In Hebrews 4:3, the author explains that ‘we who have been faithful enter that rest.’ In short, the addressees are described throughout Hebrews as the ‘faithful.’

While the author uses the term, ‘faithful,’ to describe the addressees throughout the text, he also uses an additional term to describe the ‘faithful’ experience of the addressees. In Hebrews 6:4 and 10:32, he refers to their ‘enlightenment.’ Here, he uses the term to refer to their initial ‘faithful’ response to God’s word. Craig Koester notes that “the verb is in the passive voice, since God’s Spirit moves people from sin to faith (6:1), from ignorance to ‘knowledge of the truth (10:26), and from death to life (2:14-15; 9:28).”⁴³⁰ Indeed, the author himself makes explicit the relationship between ‘enlightenment’ and ‘faith.’ In Hebrews 10:32-39, he begins by reminding the addressees of their ‘enlightenment’ (Hebrews 10:32) and continues by urging them to remain ‘faithful’ (Hebrews 10:38). Finally, he explains that they are ‘those who have

⁴²⁷ A thorough analysis of the author’s use of the antecedent is provided in Chapter 7.

⁴²⁸ Hebrews 11:1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, and 39.

⁴²⁹ A thorough analysis of the both ‘rest’ and the author’s use of the forthcoming is provided in Chapter 7.

⁴³⁰ C. Koester 2001: 313.

faith and keep their souls (Hebrews 10:39). Paul Ellingworth notes that 'enlightenment' is "commonly thought to include a reference to Christian baptism."⁴³¹ Ellingworth seems to have overstated his conclusion, for while some do understand the term to refer to baptism, others prefer a 'metaphorical' reading.⁴³² In either case, 'enlightenment' is understood to refer to "... the relation of God's message to man."⁴³³ In this case, the author makes clear that the addressees are those who heard God's word and who met the good news with faith (Hebrews 4:2). In summary, the author uses the term 'enlightenment' twice in Hebrews to refer to the faithful response of the addressees to God's good news. This observation will be of particular importance in the discussion of the intergroup boundary and the interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-8 below.

The author, in writing to the ingroup, also describes the outgroup.⁴³⁴ Again, he places an emphasis on faith, and in so doing, reveals significant data concerning 'them.' In Hebrews 4:2, 'they' are described as those who heard the word of God, but who did not meet the good news with faith. Further, because of their lack of faith, they were unable to enter God's rest (Hebrews 3:19). The author emphasises this point by stating it five times in twenty six verses.⁴³⁵ But, who are 'they?' In Hebrews 3:7-4:13, there is a thorough description of this group. 'They,' are the 'wilderness generation,'⁴³⁶ the members of the 'rebellion,' the 'disobedient' ones (Hebrews 3:8, 9, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19; 4:2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8). At this point, an astute reader may be filled with questions. Is the author referring to a past group (i.e. is he referring literally to the 'wilderness generation')? Does the 'wilderness generation' refer to a contemporary group (i.e. the 'Jews')? The answers to these questions play an essential role in the discussion of the social categorisation of the author and the addressees of Hebrews.

Is the author using an example from the 'past?' The answer to this

⁴³¹ Ellingworth 1993: 319.

⁴³² For an example of a 'metaphorical' reading, see: D. Guthrie 1983:141.

⁴³³ D. Guthrie 1983: 141.

⁴³⁴ For examples of the author's references to the outgroup, or 'them,' see: 3:8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19; 4:2, 3, 5, 6; 8:9; and 12:25.

⁴³⁵ See: Hebrews 3:11, 18-19; 4:3, 5, and 6.

⁴³⁶ See also: Hebrews 8:9.

question is, of course, 'yes.' He recounts in vivid and recognizable language the wilderness generation. The author describes the 'testing in the wilderness' (Hebrews 3:8), where 'your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years' (Hebrews 3:9). In unmistakable language, the author describes 'past' acts of unfaithfulness. Is the author *only* using an example from the past? In this case, 'no.' I will explain below that author's only use of 'us' and 'them' language occurs in relation to the wilderness generation. In fact, the only intergroup comparison in Hebrews is between the addressees and the 'unfaithful.' Later in this chapter, I will explain that the only use of boundary language is used in relation to faithfulness. In short, the author does not only envision a past group of unfaithful wilderness wanderers. Instead, the author describes the unfaithful in all times and places in terms of the wilderness generation, in terms of those who have heard the good news, but who have not met God's word with faithfulness. Evidence of this interpretation is found in the intergroup comparison in Hebrews 3:7-4:13. Here, the threat of unfaithfulness is still quite real. The author moves freely between the 'past' wilderness generation and the present risk. In Hebrews 3:11, the author reminds the addressees that the wilderness generation will never enter God's rest. In the next verse, he warns the addressees not to have 'evil, unfaithful hearts' (Hebrews 3:12). The author repeats this pattern several times throughout Hebrews 3:7-4:13 (cf. Hebrews 3:19-4:1). For the author, there is a very real threat that the addressees will become unfaithful, that they will become the 'wilderness generation' of their time and place.

If the wilderness generation are a 'present' reality, is the author referring to a contemporary group (i.e. the 'Jews')? To begin, the text itself eliminates the possibility that the author envisages the wilderness generation as 'Jews.' Such a reading could only be based upon the understanding that the 'past' example of unfaithfulness came from the followers of Moses and therefore the present unfaithful must also be the 'Jews.' This, however, is not consistent with the rest of the text. In Hebrews 6:12, the author urges the addressees to be 'imitators of those who by faith and patience inherent the promise.' In the very next verse, he provides Abraham as an example of such faith and patience. In Hebrews 12:1, he urges the addressees to 'run with perseverance the race.' Such perseverance is

possible because the addressees are surrounded by so great a 'cloud of witnesses.' In every example, the author makes a distinction between the faithful and the unfaithful, rather than members of specific social groups (i.e. the 'Jews'). How, then, do the author and the addressees understand the 'unfaithful?'

As explained in Chapter 3, ingroups may choose to compare themselves to either 'real' outgroups or 'symbolic' outgroups. I have argued above that the addressees were a distinct social group. They were aware of and committed to one another. They had leaders. They met together. They had shared experiences (including the apparently rare experience of the 'plundering of their property'). But, were the 'unfaithful' a group in the same sense? Were 'they' aware of and committed to one another? Did they have leaders, meet together, and share common experiences? Or, were 'they' a 'symbolic' outgroup? The comparison with 'symbolic' outgroups was quite common in the first-century Mediterranean world. For example, Romans compared themselves with the 'uncivilised other,' Greeks with the 'barbarian,' and Judeans with the 'non-Judeans.'⁴³⁷ In each example, the 'uncivilised other,' the 'barbarian,' and the 'non-Judean,' functioned as a symbolic outgroup. There were not groups which defined themselves as 'uncivilised,' 'barbarians' or 'non-Judeans.' On the contrary, those people who were 'non-Roman,' 'non-Greek,' and 'non-Judean' would have understood themselves in terms of their own ethnicity (i.e. Samaritans).

In the case of Hebrews, the 'unfaithful' were quite likely a 'symbolic' outgroup. This is not to suggest that there were not actual people who were 'unfaithful.' Just as there were non-Romans, non-Greeks, and non-Judeans, there were most certainly 'non-faithful.' However, just as the 'non-Romans' did not understand themselves as having been 'uncivilised,' the 'non-faithful' would not likely have understood themselves as having been 'unfaithful.' In fact, it is quite possible that 'they' understood themselves as 'faithful.' In this case, what is important is not how 'others' actually understand themselves, but how the ingroup

⁴³⁷ An additional example may be found in the War Scroll. It is possible that the author compared the ingroup, the 'children of light,' with a 'symbolic' outgroup, the 'children of darkness.'

understands *itself* in comparison to *them*.

In summary, the author of Hebrews used an ‘us/them’ process of social categorisation. Indeed, such a process is to be expected in a collectivist, competitive culture. Further, the author compared the ingroup with a ‘symbolic’ outgroup. Again, there is significant evidence of this in the first-century Mediterranean world. Finally, the dominant identity descriptor of the addressees was that of ‘faithfulness.’ In short, the addressees understood themselves to be the ‘faithful.’

5.5 Ingroup and Outgroup Comparison: Hebrews 3:7-4:13

According to the criticism and refinement of social identity theory by Hinkle and Brown, social groups that are collectivist and comparative in nature, tend to establish and maintain identity through a process of intergroup comparison and differentiation.⁴³⁸ Therefore, it is not surprising that the author of Hebrews compared the ingroup with a relevant outgroup. However, before I proceed with an analysis of the intergroup comparison in Hebrews, it is helpful to review the history of the interpretation of Hebrews 3:7-4:13. As I will show below, this is the only section of the text in which the author makes an ‘us’ and ‘them’ distinction. Therefore, this section proves uniquely appropriate for the analysis of intergroup comparison.

To begin, many interpreters understand Hebrews to include a comparison of two ‘religious’ groups. For many interpreters, the addressees are believed to be ‘Jewish Christians’ and the outgroup are the ‘Jews.’ Hebrews, then, is understood to present a comparison between ‘Christianity’ and ‘Judaism.’⁴³⁹ For others, the addressees are believed to be ‘Gentile Christians’ and the outgroup are the ‘pagans.’ The comparison, therefore, is between ‘Christianity’ and ‘heathenism’

⁴³⁸ Hinkle and Brown 1990: 48-70.

⁴³⁹ For examples of this position, see: Bristol 1967: 25; Brown, John 1862: 15-36; Cross and Livingstone 1984: 625; Gayford 1937: 597; Hagner 1990: 11-12; Lightfoot 1976: 35-38; Livingstone 1997: 742; May and Metzger 1977: 1455; McCaul 1871: 2; Montefiore 1969: 20; Pink 1954: 11-13; Salevao 2002: 113; Saphir 1902: 1-19; Stibbs 1970: 10-11; and Vine 1965: 7.

or 'paganism.'⁴⁴⁰ For still others, the members of a shamed ingroup are understood to be at risk of returning to their previous, higher status social group. The comparison here is between the actual honour of each group.⁴⁴¹

While many interpreters understand Hebrews to include multiple social groups, few entertain the possibility that Hebrews 3:7-4:13 includes an intergroup comparison. For example, Donald Guthrie begins his commentary by placing an emphasis on how 'Christians' saw themselves in relation to their 'Jewish background.

Christians who had come from a Jewish background would naturally compare their new-found faith with the richness of their Jewish heritage. This letter sets out to show them the greater richness of their Christian position. At every stage of the argument the keynote is that their new faith is better.⁴⁴²

Based upon his introduction, it is reasonable to assume that Guthrie will conclude that Hebrews 3:7-4:13 involves a comparison between 'Jews' and 'Christians.' However, Guthrie notes, "The writer is mindful of the fact that some of his readers were in danger of doing what the Israelites had done." Guthrie concludes, then, that the author used the example of the wilderness generation to encourage faith among the addressees.

Guthrie's conclusion is not unique. In fact, most interpreters understand Hebrews 3:7-4:13 as a reference to the wilderness generation and do not believe there to be a comparison between groups present in the text.⁴⁴³ For example, F.F. Bruce understands this section to terms of a 'new Exodus.'

The New Testament bears witness, in a number of places, to a primitive and widespread Christian interpretation of the redemptive work of Christ in terms of a new Exodus ... This typology was familiar to our author, and quite probably to his readers as well; he uses it, therefore, to warn them against giving up their faith and hope.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁰ Vos 1956: 18.

⁴⁴¹ deSilva 1999a: 144-177.

⁴⁴² D. Guthrie 1983:61.

⁴⁴³ See: R. McL. Wilson 1987: 73-90.

⁴⁴⁴ F.F. Bruce 1990: 96. See also: C. Koester 2001: 262. Koester writes, "The motif of God's people sojourning in the desert is one of the three great cycles of images in Hebrews, along with entering the sanctuary and journeying to Zion."

Again, the addressees are imagined to be at risk of the same ‘unbelief’ as the wilderness generation. Therefore, the author uses an example from the ‘past’ to prevent such faithlessness.

David deSilva augments this understanding with a discussion of deliberative rhetoric and the use of ‘historical precedents.’

Examples from historical precedents were especially valued by orators in deliberative situations, in which the goal was to convince the hearers that a certain course of action would entail certain consequences (whether positive or negative, depending on whether or not one’s goal was to promote the course of action or dissuade the hearers from taking such a course). How could one convince people concerning events yet to happen? The “quickest method of securing assent” was to point the audience to historical parallels, for which the consequences are a matter of record (Quintilian *Inst.* 3.8.36). According to Aristotle, the future is held to resemble the past - that is, there is a certain continuity in the fabric of human history such that “similar results” are expected naturally to “arise from similar causes” (*Rh.* 1.4.9; see also 2.20.8).⁴⁴⁵

While deSilva’s contribution to this discussion helps to answer ‘why’ the author described the experiences of the ‘wilderness generation’ (i.e. a ‘past’ example of unfaithfulness will help to dissuade ‘present’ unfaithfulness), he does not entertain the possibility of an intergroup comparison. In addition, deSilva lacks an appropriate framework with which to interpret the relationship of ‘past’ events to ‘present’ behaviour. It is true that the use of ‘historical precedents’ was persuasive in deliberative situations precisely because the listeners likely possessed a present temporal orientation. In other words, they imagined their ‘future’ based upon their experiences in the ‘past.’ I will discuss this temporal dynamic, known as ‘foresight,’ in Chapter 8.

Significantly, the author’s only use of ‘us-them’ language in the entirety of Hebrews occurs in reference to the wilderness generation.⁴⁴⁶ The author refers to ‘them’ thirteen times in Hebrews 3:7-4:13 and again in 8:9 and 12:25. For this reason, it is important to examine this section in terms of intergroup comparison. Indeed, the author provides an extended comparison between the faithful and the

⁴⁴⁵ DeSilva 2000a:141.

⁴⁴⁶ For examples of the author’s references to the outgroup, or ‘them,’ see: 3:8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19; 4:2, 3, 5, 6; 8:9; and 12:25.

'symbolic' unfaithful. In Hebrews 3:16, the author asks the addressees, 'who were they who heard and were yet rebellious?' Immediately after, he answers 'was it not all of those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses?' After establishing their rebellious nature (Hebrews 3:17-18), he concludes that 'they were unable to enter because of a lack of faith' (Hebrews 3:19). In sharp contrast, the author explains that 'the promise of entering his rest is still open' (Hebrews 4:1). Further, the author warns the addressees to 'take care that none of you should fail to reach it.' The author continues by comparing the forthcoming rest for the faithful (Hebrews 4:3, 6, 9, 11) with the lack of rest for the unfaithful (Hebrews 4:3, 5, 6).

If the author is understood to compare the addressees with the 'symbolic unfaithful' in Hebrews 3:7-4:13, does this inform the interpretation of the text? To begin, social identity theorists note that the process of social comparison rests upon two important assumptions. First, social comparison provides meaning and significance to social groups. Second, individuals desire a positive social identity.⁴⁴⁷ To better understand the intergroup comparison in Hebrews and its relationship to the social identity of the addressees, we must examine both assumptions.

First, social comparison provides meaning to social groups. This basic assumption rests upon the understanding that when examined in isolation, social categories are without meaning or significance. For example, being 'Roman' was given meaning when compared with being a 'barbarian.' In the case of Hebrews, 'faithfulness' achieves meaning and significance through its comparison with 'unfaithfulness.' Here, too, we are made aware that the single social identification that is emphasized by the author is that of 'faithfulness.' Second, individuals desire a positive social identity. The second assumption rests upon the understanding that individuals desire a positive evaluation or outcome from the process of group comparison. If the process of comparison provides a context within which to understand social categories, individuals wish that the group in which they are members will receive a more positive evaluation than the relevant

⁴⁴⁷ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 21-23.

outgroup. For example, from the Roman perspective, a comparison with the 'barbarians' would have yielded a positive social identity. In the case of Hebrews, the positive social identity of the addressees is associated with the forthcoming rest of the faithful. We come to this conclusion based upon the structure of the intergroup comparisons as presented in Hebrews. The addressees, if they remain faithful, will receive the forthcoming promised rest. However, what is forthcoming for the unfaithful is not the promised rest, but an exclusion from that rest (cf. Hebrews 3:19; 4:6).

In addition, the proposal that the author compared the addressees with a 'symbolic' outgroup is new and has important consequences for the interpretation of the text. Namely, when an ingroup compares itself with a 'symbolic' outgroup, it need not compare itself with the characteristics or behaviours of a 'real' group. In the case of Hebrews, the author compares the addressees with the 'symbolic unfaithful' (cf. Hebrews 3:7-4:13). Rather than revealing the unfaithfulness of a distinct outgroup or revealing only the unfaithfulness of the wilderness generation, I propose that the comparison actually reveals the dominant identity descriptor of the addressees. Simply, the fact that the author compared the addressees with a symbolic outgroup, the 'unfaithful,' confirms that 'faithfulness' was a dominant identity descriptor of the ingroup.⁴⁴⁸

To summarise, the author compared the ingroup with the symbolic outgroup exclusively in terms of their relative faithfulness. This comparison provided meaning for the social categories employed by the addressees. For example, faithfulness is given social meaning in light of its undesirable opposite, 'unfaithfulness.' In both cases, the meanings of the categories are described in terms of the promised 'rest.' 'Unfaithfulness' receives a negative evaluation

⁴⁴⁸ This proposal also informs the debate over the possible presence of a 'Jewish-Christian' polemic present in Hebrews. For those involved in this debate, there is an assumption that the comparisons present in Hebrews must necessarily be between two 'real' groups. If this is the case, there is naturally a desire to identify both groups. This desire has had a profound influence on the reading of Hebrews. Ironically, this assumption has also led previous interpreters away from the evidence of the dominant identity descriptor of the addressees. In short, while interpreters have attempted to determine the identities of the addressees and the outgroup, they have overlooked the central role of 'faithfulness.'

because the forthcoming result of unfaithfulness is the prohibition of the promised rest. 'Faithfulness,' on the other hand, receives a positive evaluation because the forthcoming result of faithfulness is the promised 'rest.'

5.6 The Ingroup-Outgroup Boundary: Hebrews 6:4-8

The nature of the ingroup-outgroup boundary in Hebrews serves as an appropriate tool for testing the conclusion drawn regarding the social categories of the addressees. I have proposed above that the social categories of the addressees were that of 'us' and 'them,' of 'faithful' and 'unfaithful,' and that the social comparison found in Hebrews was between the faithfulness of the addressees and the unfaithfulness of the 'symbolic' outgroup. Therefore, we would also expect the ingroup-outgroup boundary to be described in terms of faithfulness. There are two important questions, then, concerning the nature of the boundary language in Hebrews. First, does the boundary language in Hebrews support the proposal that the social categories employed by the addressees were that of the 'faithful' and the 'unfaithful?' Second, what else can be learned regarding the specific nature of the boundary between the ingroup and the 'symbolic' outgroup? While the answers to these questions will prove illuminating for the discussion of the social identity of the addressees, we must first investigate the history of the discussion of Hebrews 6:4-8.

Interpreters do not specifically address the nature of the ingroup-outgroup boundary and its impact on the identities of the addressees. However, much can be learned from previous interpretations of Hebrews 6:4-8. Here, the author warned the addressees that it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have been enlightened and have fallen away. Three generalisations may be made regarding the various interpretations of these verses. First, the author is often understood as having been warning against the threat of 'apostasy.'⁴⁴⁹ Second, the addressees are often understood as having been at risk of falling away

⁴⁴⁹ For examples of this conclusion, see: Attridge 1989: 166; F.F. Bruce 1990: 144; Davies 1967: 58; Ellingworth 1993: 317-325; Fuller 1995: 20-21; D. Guthrie 1983: 143; Herring 1970: 45-48; Hughes 1977: 218; Kistemaker 1984: 160; Lane 1991a: 142; Montefiore 1969: 109; R. Smith 1984: 81-82; and R. McL. Wilson 1987: 109.

from 'Christianity.'⁴⁵⁰ Third, the act of 'falling away' or 'apostasy' is often understood as 'irretrievable,' or that there are 'no second chances.'⁴⁵¹ In addition, the interpretation of these verses is largely determined by the conclusions an interpreter makes regarding the identity of the addressees and their specific social situation. For example, the majority of interpreters, those who maintain a version of the 'traditional view,' conclude that the 'Jewish-Christian' addressees were in danger of 'apostasy.' Therefore, Heb 6:4-8 is thought to be a warning against this danger. For example, Donald Guthrie concludes that the addressees of Hebrews were 'Jewish-Christians.'⁴⁵² Further, Guthrie notes that in Heb 6:4-8, the author has made clear the 'irretrievable nature of apostasy.'⁴⁵³ Finally, Guthrie defines such apostasy in terms of moving from 'Christianity' back to 'Judaism.' He observes, "Anyone who turned back from Christianity to Judaism would be identifying himself not only with Jewish unbelief, but with that malice which led to the crucifixion of Jesus."⁴⁵⁴ For Guthrie, then, Heb 6:4-8 is an example of the author's exhortation against the addressees' threat of apostasy from 'Christianity' to 'Judaism.'

What then might we conclude regarding the various interpretations of Heb 6:4-8? First, it is clear that many of the questions within the text are inter-related. In this case, how an interpreter categorises the addressees and understands their social context directly impacts his or her understanding of Heb 6:4-8. Second, many historical critics employ 'religious' categories which are familiar to modern interpreters (i.e. 'Christianity' and 'Judaism').

In contrast, I have argued that modern interpreters must strive to understand the social categories used by the author and the addressees of Hebrews. Further, if the decisions one makes regarding the identity of the

⁴⁵⁰ For examples of this conclusion, see: F.F. Bruce 1990: 9; deSilva 2000: 225; Ellingworth 1993: 317-325; Gordon 2000: 73; D. Guthrie 1983: 144; Hughes 1977: 212-224; Kistemaker 1984: 160; Lane 1991a: 142; Moffatt 1975: 78; Montefiore 1969: 20, 109; and R. Smith 1984: 81-82.

⁴⁵¹ For examples of this conclusion, see: F.F. Bruce 1990: 144; Davies 1967: 58; Ellingworth 1993: 317; D. Guthrie 1983: 143; Herring 1970: 45-48; Kistemaker 1984: 160; and Lane 1991a: 142.

⁴⁵² D. Guthrie 1983: 22-25.

⁴⁵³ D. Guthrie 1983: 143.

⁴⁵⁴ D. Guthrie 1983: 144.

addressees informs the interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-8, a reading which takes seriously the social categorisation process of the author and the addressees will necessarily produce an interpretation of these verses which is consistent with the social identity of the audience. If the addressees understood themselves as having been the 'faithful,' how might an interpreter read Hebrews 6:4-8?

As noted above, there are two important questions concerning the nature of the boundary language in Hebrews. Regarding the first question, the boundary between the ingroup and the outgroup is described in terms of 'enlightenment,' or as previously explained, in terms of the addressees' 'faithful' response to the word of God (cf. Hebrews 4:2). In Hebrews 6:4, the author proclaims that 'it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened.' Here, he notes that for those who have responded 'faithfully' to the good news of God, or have been 'enlightened,' it is impossible to restore again if they should 'fall away.' In Hebrews 6:6, he uses a dramatic image to make this point. He notes that this is to 'crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt.' Next, the author provides an example from nature. It is as if ground has drunk up the rain, but has produced thorns and thistles (Hebrews 6:7-8). Again, the author emphasises the good offering of God (i.e. God's word is likened to rain), the faithful response of the addressees (i.e. they drank up the rain), and their subsequent 'falling away' (i.e. producing thorns rather than vegetation).

How does social identity theory and an awareness of the social categories employed by the author and addressees inform a reading of this text? Here, the boundary between 'us' and 'them,' between being 'in' and being 'out,' is described in terms of remaining enlightened, or remaining faithful. In other words, if you receive the good news of God with faith, but in time you 'fall away' (i.e. become 'unfaithful'), you can not be restored to your previous 'enlightened' or 'faithful' relationship with God.

Regarding the second question, the specific nature of the boundary was one of 'uni-directional' permeability. In other words, while it is possible for the 'enlightened' to become 'unfaithful,' it is impossible for these individuals to return to their 'faithfulness.' In terms of social identity theory, it is possible for

the addressees to become a member of the 'symbolic' outgroup (i.e. to become unfaithful), but it is impossible to be restored to the ingroup. Once you have moved from being one of 'us' to being one of 'them,' 'we' will no longer welcome you back.

While Hebrews 6:4-8 proves to be a helpful example of the 'uni-directional' boundary separating the ingroup from the 'symbolic' outgroup, two other examples of the uni-directional boundary are evident in the text. First, the author again presented the consequences for deliberate sin in Hebrews 10:26-31. In Hebrews 10:26, he writes that 'if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.' In the same way that 'enlightenment' is described as the 'faithful' reception of God's word, the author here refers to 'receiving the knowledge of truth.' If a member of the faithful ingroup (cf. 'we,' Hebrews 10:26) deliberately 'fall away' there is only the 'fearful prospect of God's judgment' (Hebrews 10:27-31).

Second, the author explained that Esau was not given a chance to repent after he had sold his birthright for a single meal (Hebrews 12:16-17). William Lane relates the judgement of Esau to the warning in Hebrews 6:4-8.⁴⁵⁵ Likewise, Craig Koester relates this short warning to the 'issue of the limits of repentance in Hebrews 6:4-8 and 10:26-31.'⁴⁵⁶ Again, the author of Hebrews emphasises the 'uni-directional' nature of the intergroup boundary. Once a member of the ingroup has become unfaithful, they could not be restored to faithfulness.

While the author's description of the 'uni-directional' nature of the ingroup-outgroup boundary appears to be quite unique within the New Testament, similar boundary descriptions may be found elsewhere. Harold Attridge provides many examples of such boundaries in his excursus, 'The Impossibility of Repentance for Apostates.'⁴⁵⁷ While Attridge provides a host of examples, I will provide another helpful example from a period several centuries after the writing of Hebrews. Jim Alexander, in his analysis of the Donatists of the 4th and 5th

⁴⁵⁵ Lane 1991b: 457.

⁴⁵⁶ C. Koester 2001: 532.

⁴⁵⁷ Attridge 1989: 168-169.

centuries, describes a similar understanding of group boundaries. Alexander explains that during the persecution of Christians, a number of individuals renounced their Christianity. Later, the Catholics welcomed them back, while the Donatists did not. Alexander offers a helpful summary of the theology of the Donatists.

The apostles too are shown to have expelled sinners from their midsts, and even Christ's own toleration of Judas, the archetypal apostate (*traditor*), is neatly turned back against the Catholic side when it is pointed out that Judas remained as unknown sinner as far as the other apostles were concerned: when exposed, he was immediately expelled. The Lord's toleration of Judas does not therefore open the apostolic ministry to apostates.⁴⁵⁸

I am in no way proposing that the boundary language in Hebrews and the theology of the Donatists are connected. However, the Donatists may serve as an appropriate early example of another 'uni-directional' boundary.

To summarise, the boundary language in Hebrews serves two important functions within the discussion of social identity in Hebrews. The emphasis placed upon the forthcoming result of the lack of faithfulness confirms that the dominant identity descriptors employed by the addressees were those of 'faithfulness' and 'unfaithfulness.' Further, the description of the nature of the boundary provides valuable insight in the forthcoming result of a loss of 'faithfulness.' There is no way to restore to repentance an ingroup member who has been enlightened and has fallen away.

5.7 Conclusion

Who were the addressees of Hebrews? This question has been scrutinized by many and abandoned by some. The problem, however, is not a lack of information present in Hebrews. Rather, the problem lies in the categories commonly employed by historical critics. If Hebrews is closely examined in light of social identity theory, the identity of the addressees is made clear. The author and the addressees of Hebrews simplified and systematised their world into two

⁴⁵⁸ Alexander 2000: 966-967.

social categories, 'us' and 'them,' the 'faithful' and the 'unfaithful.' Importantly, the author and addressees of Hebrews envisioned a symbolic outgroup. Similar to the comparisons between the Greeks and the 'barbarians,' the Romans and the 'uncivilised others,' or the Judeans and the 'non-Judeans,' the author and the addressees compared themselves with the 'other,' the 'non-faithful.' The author compared the faithfulness of the addressees with the unfaithfulness of this 'symbolic' outgroup. He understood the boundary between the two groups in terms of faithfulness. If the addressees lost or fell away from their faithfulness, they would move from being an ingroup member, one who is 'faithful,' to being a member of the 'symbolic' outgroup, one who is 'unfaithful.' Furthermore, once this move has taken place, it was impossible to once more become an ingroup member, to become 'faithful.' Therefore, it is possible to answer the question, 'Who were the addressees of Hebrews?' The addressees would have provided the following answer, 'we are the faithful.'

Chapter 6

The Faithfulness of Jesus in Hebrews

Comparison plays a significant role in Hebrews. For example, Jesus is compared to prophets and then to angels in the first chapter (Hebrews 1:1-2; and 1:5-14). He is compared to Moses in the third (Hebrews 3:1-6). The Levitical priesthood is compared to the new priesthood in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:1-28). The first covenant is compared to the new covenant (Hebrews 8:1-13). The earthly sanctuary is compared to the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 9:1-10:18). In addition, each example of comparison directly informs a reader's understanding of the 'role' or 'nature' of Jesus. For example, the author describes the faithfulness of Jesus as that of a 'Son,' while the faithfulness of Moses was that of a 'servant' (Hebrews 3:1-6). How an interpreter understands each 'role' and the comparison between the two examples of faithfulness impacts upon a reading of the text. It is important, then, for interpreters to work with an appropriate conceptual framework for understanding this comparison. Is the comparison of Jesus with Moses an 'intergroup' comparison? Or, is the comparison of Jesus with Moses an 'intragroup' comparison, the comparison of two members of the same group? Does an emphasis on the superiority of one person necessitate that the other is 'insufficient' or 'inadequate?' Perhaps more importantly, what is the function of such comparison in Hebrews?

In this chapter, I will employ two related areas of social identity theory as a framework within which to analyse the author's use of comparison: (1) a theory of shared life story or narrative; and (2) a theory of prototypicality. I will conclude that the author of Hebrews integrates Jesus and the addressees into an on-going story of faithfulness. Further, he emphasises the superiority of the faithfulness of Jesus (he acts as the prototype of faithfulness) and describes the faithfulness of other 'witnesses' in relation to Jesus.

6.1 Hebrews as a Shared Life Story or Narrative: Hebrews 1:1-4

Interpreters commonly identify the first four verses of Hebrews to constitute an exordium.⁴⁵⁹ Here, the author is thought to prepare the addressees to be receptive to his words and to introduce key themes which will be developed later in the text. While there is a consensus that Hebrews 1:1-4 acts as an exordium, there is diversity over the proposed themes. For example, William L. Lane notes, "It introduces the theme of the superiority of God's Son to all other previous modes of revelation."⁴⁶⁰ For Craig Koester, the message of the exordium stands in tension with the perspective of the intended audience.

If the exordium declares that the Son of God is the "heir of all things" (1:2) and that he is "bearing all things by his word of power" (1:3), the proposition recognizes that "we do not yet *see* all things subjected to him" as God had promised (2:8). The lordship of Christ appears to be contradicted by the listener's conflicted experiences of life in the world. Nevertheless, in declaring that God has spoken by a Son, who is heir of all things, the author establishes a position from which he will later challenge those who are tempted to drift away from their Christian confession.⁴⁶¹

Harold Attridge also concludes that the exordium presents the key themes of Hebrews. He notes, "Here, the decisive nature of God's eschatological salvific action in and through Christ is affirmed."

Like most other interpreters, I too understand the first four verses of Hebrews to serve as an exordium, a short introduction which introduces the key themes of the text. My understanding of the key themes, however, varies significantly from other readings of Hebrews. I understand Hebrews 1:1-4 as the introduction to a shared life story or narrative. The author, in writing to the 'faithful,' worked to integrate both Jesus and the addressees into a broad and ongoing narrative. While I will provide a detailed analysis of the text below, I will first provide an explanation of shared life stories from a social identity perspective.

Marco Cinnirella theorises that "social groups will create shared 'life

⁴⁵⁹ For examples, see: Attridge 1989: 36-37; C. Koester 2001: 174-190; and Lane 1991: 5-9;

⁴⁶⁰ Lane 1991a: 9.

⁴⁶¹ C. Koester 2001: 183.

stories' or narratives of the group which tie past, present and predicted futures into a coherent representation."⁴⁶² According to Cinnirella, social groups tend to re-interpret and even re-construct their own past, present, and possible futures in order to achieve a sense of temporal continuity. This sense of temporal continuity is understood to be a necessary component in the construction of the group's shared life story or narrative. Cinnirella further notes that since representations of the past always have the potential to inform identity construction in the present and the future, the past may be reinterpreted in order to achieve consistency with the group's present social identity or with the group's desired future identity. Likewise, a social group may focus upon a positive past identity in order to achieve a positive social identity in the present or in the future.

Regardless of the specific situation, it is believed that groups will desire a coherent representation of their past, present and future and will use this representation in the construction of a shared life story or narrative. Further, the desire for a coherent temporal representation may affect the behaviour of the members of the social group. Cinnirella explains that "potential future changes to identities and groups are often collectively evaluated in terms of whether the proposed change is compatible with the group's past. Perceived incompatibilities can lead to collective resistance to change or re-interpretation of the past to construct a revised and coherent memory."⁴⁶³ In summary, Cinnirella's theory proposes that (1) groups will create shared life stories or narratives; (2) that these stories will present a coherent temporal representation of the social group; and (3) the desire for a coherent temporal representation may affect the behaviour of the group.

Similarly, Stephen Cornell, speaking of ethnic identity yet in a way that extends to other types of groups, explains that when people form or maintain identity, they do so by forming or maintaining a story or narrative that captures the central characteristic of the group.

⁴⁶² Cinnirella 1998: 235.

⁴⁶³ Cinnirella 1998: 236.

When people take on, create, or assign an ethnic identity, part of what they do - intentionally or not - is to take on, create, or assign a story, a narrative of some sort that captures the central understanding about what it means to be a member of the group. It is a story that can be told in many ways, but ultimately it can be reduced to something along the lines of "we are the people who ..." (alternatively: "they are the people who ..."), in which the lacuna becomes a tale of some sort, a record of events. The story has a subject (the group in question), it has action (what happened or will happen), and it has a value: it attaches a value to its subject. It makes group members feel good or bad or guilty or self-righteous or superior or justified or something else. Its primary idiom is events: the things the group does or did or will do or had done to it. These need not be major events, although they typically are; they could be accumulations of minor, eminently forgettable events. The point is that the narrative is an event-centered conception of the group. The label group members carry or assign to others is a referent or symbol, in effect a condensation of that narrative.⁴⁶⁴

Based upon the conclusions of Cinnirella and Cornell, it is reasonable to expect that the author of Hebrews would integrate Jesus and the addressees into a shared life story or narrative.⁴⁶⁵

Was the author attempting to place the life story of Jesus into a broad, ongoing story? In Hebrews 1:1-2, he notes that previously God spoke to the fathers through the prophets, but now God has spoken through the Son. For the author, the word of God is a continuing process. He does not envisage an 'old' message and a 'new' message. Rather God has spoken in many and various ways. He spoke to the fathers through prophets. Now, God has spoken through a Son. Therefore, from the first verses of Hebrews, the author places Jesus into a continuing story, into the continuing speech of God. This is an essential observation for the interpretation of Hebrews. If the author sought to integrate Jesus into a continuing story, a shared narrative, how does this affect our reading of the text? Did the author understand Jesus to be 'opposed to' or 'in tension with' the previous message? If not, how might an interpreter understand the many comparisons throughout the text? I will address each of these questions in

⁴⁶⁴ Cornell 2000: 42.

⁴⁶⁵ Philip Esler has proposed a similar thesis with regard to Ezra-Nehemiah. For Esler, Ezra-Nehemiah may be understood as having been a narrative which was written to re-invent Israelite identity. Esler 2003b: 413-426.

my analysis of Hebrews 3:1-6; 7:1-28; and 12:1-2.

In addition, the author also places the addressees within the same continuing story. In Hebrews 1:1-2, he notes that previously God spoke to *the fathers* through the prophets, but now God has spoken *to us* through the Son. As noted above, the author describes the word of God as a continuing process. God spoke of old to the fathers. Now, God has spoken to the addressees, to 'us,' through a Son. Therefore, the author places the addressees into the same continuing story, a story which reaches back to God's previous speech and back to the fathers, and a story which is alive in the 'present,' a story which includes the speech of the Son and the lives of the addressees. If the author sought to integrate the addresses into a continuing story, how does this bear upon our reading of the text? Did the author understand the addressees to be 'opposed to' or 'in tension with' the fathers? If not, how might an interpreter understand the many comparisons throughout the text? Again, I will address each question throughout this chapter.

6.2 Jesus and 'Faith Prototypicality:' Hebrews 3:1-6

A critical question lies at the heart of the history of the interpretation of Hebrews 3:1-6: Does the comparison of Jesus with Moses represent a comparison between two groups (i.e. 'Christians' and 'Jews') or do Jesus and Moses serve as 'examples of faithfulness?' In other words, are two 'groups' represented in the comparison? If not, what does this comparison represent? Perhaps Jesus and Moses are meant to serve as examples of faithfulness. This, however, does not account for the author's use of comparison. If both Jesus and Moses are meant to serve as examples of faithfulness, how is a reader to understand the relationship between the two? Is Moses an example of insufficient faith? Is Moses an example of a 'different' faith (i.e. 'Jewish' faith)? And so we are back to the beginning. What is the role of the faithfulness of Jesus in Hebrews 3:1-6?

Some interpreters understand the comparison of Jesus with Moses in Hebrews 3:1-6 to reflect two groups or two 'religions.' For example, F.F. Bruce argues that the 'old economy' is inferior to the 'new order.' Bruce notes, "Yet, great as Moses was, his status was inferior to Christ's. The implication for the

recipients of this epistle is plain: the old economy, inaugurated by Moses is inferior to the new order introduced by Christ.⁴⁶⁶ For William L. Lane, Moses was an example of the faithfulness of the Mosaic cult. Jesus, on the other hand, was an example of a new and better faithfulness. Lane explains, "The figure of Moses as the mediator of Israel's covenant and cult is of critical importance in Hebrews. The writer contrasts the Mosaic era, the Mosaic covenant, and the Mosaic cult with the new situation introduced by God through Jesus."⁴⁶⁷

Reginald H. Fuller observes, "Moses is always a negative witness in Hebrews. He represents solely the Levitical priesthood which is done away with in Christ."⁴⁶⁸ Fuller further explains that, "the point of the argument is the superiority of Christ over Moses as the institutor of the old covenant and the Levitical priesthood. Hence the priesthood of Christ is superior to that which Moses instituted."⁴⁶⁹ Likewise, Robert P. Gordon notes, "Again, as he has already done in 1.14, the author appears finally to elevate not only Christ but also the body of Christian believers above the other party whom he has contrasted with Christ."⁴⁷⁰

Westcott, Bruce, Fuller, and Gordon are examples of interpreters who work with the assumption that the comparison in Hebrews 3:1-6 is indicative of a context of two groups or two 'religions.' For them, the persons of Jesus and Moses are understood to represent 'covenants,' 'priesthoods,' or 'bodies of believers.'⁴⁷¹ The comparison of Jesus to Moses, then, is understood to represent the comparison of one covenant with another, of one group with another. In addition, most who hold this view understand the author to have emphasised the superiority of Jesus over Moses, and therefore, to have emphasised the superiority of 'Christianity' over 'Judaism.'

It is clear from the examples above that the interpretation of Hebrews 3:1-

⁴⁶⁶ F.F. Bruce 1990: 92.

⁴⁶⁷ Lane 1991a: 73.

⁴⁶⁸ Fuller 1995: 9.

⁴⁶⁹ Fuller 1995: 9.

⁴⁷⁰ Gordon 2000: 57.

⁴⁷¹ J.H. Davies offers another example of this view. For Davies, Heb 3:1 refers explicitly to Christian 'religion,' which he notes was perhaps in contrast with 'Judaism.' Davies 1967: 35.

6 is intimately connected with the discussion of the identity and social context of the addressees. If an interpreter understands the addressees to have been 'Jewish Christians' in danger of returning to 'Judaism,' it might seem appropriate to understand the comparison of Jesus with Moses as an argument against such a move.

Significantly, if an interpreter understands Hebrews 3:1-6 to represent an 'intergroup comparison,' an option not tried so far, he or she might feel free to employ social identity theory as an interpretive framework. In this case, the interpreter might conclude that the comparison between the Christ-followers and the Judeans provided meaning for both social groups. The faith of the 'Son' represents that of the Christ-followers, while the faith of the 'servant' represents that of the Judeans. Next, the interpreter might conclude that the comparison provides a positive evaluation or outcome for the addressees. Their faith, after all, is that of the 'Son.' However, such use of social identity theory would be problematic at best. Social identity theory provides a conceptual framework with which to understand intergroup comparison. However, there is no evidence from the text that Jesus and Moses are meant to represent groups. The author does not make an 'us' and 'them' distinction. Further, the author himself prevents such a reading. In the comparison that follows, Hebrews 3:7-4:13, he makes an important distinction between Moses and the wilderness generation. In Hebrews 3:1-6, Moses is described as faithful (Hebrews 3:5). In sharp contrast, the wilderness generation are described as unfaithful (Hebrews 3:19; 4:2). If an interpreter works with the assumption that Hebrews 3:1-6 (or even Hebrews 3:1-4:13) includes an *intergroup* comparison, an interpretive choice must be made. Does Moses, who was faithful, represent the faith of the Judeans? Or do the wilderness generation, who were unfaithful, represent the unfaithfulness of the Judeans? Fortunately, this choice is not necessary. There is no evidence that Jesus and Moses were meant to represent groups. In addition, there is no evidence that the wilderness generation were meant to represent 'the Judeans.' If Hebrews 3:1-6 is not an example of intergroup comparison, what is the role of the faithfulness of Jesus in Hebrews 3:1-6?

For some interpreters, the role of Jesus in Hebrews 3:1-6 is best described

as an 'example of faithfulness.' The second chapter of Hebrews ends with a description of Jesus' suffering and temptation (Hebrews 2:18). Immediately after, the author refers to the faithfulness of Jesus (Hebrews 3:1-6). Finally, the author urges the addressees to remain faithful (Hebrews 3:7-4:13). For interpreters who reject the assumption that Hebrews 3:1-6 reflects a comparison between groups or 'religions,' the explanation seems obvious. The context and content of this section indicate that the author meant to emphasise the faithfulness of Jesus. In short, Jesus was faithful, even when tempted. Therefore, 'you' must remain faithful, even when tempted. R. McL. Wilson provides an example of this interpretation.

It is therefore open to question whether proof of superiority to Moses is the author's primary concern in this passage. It is beyond doubt that Jesus *is* superior: exalted above the angels, crowned with glory and honour, he occupies 'the highest place that heaven affords'; but this is now taken for granted. In this section the author invites his readers to contemplate this Jesus, consider him more closely, observe him carefully, and the particular point to which attention is directed is his faithfulness.⁴⁷²

A difficult question arises, however, for those who conclude that the author emphasises the faithfulness of Jesus in Hebrews 3:1-6. Namely, why does he compare the faithfulness of Jesus with the faithfulness of Moses? For some interpreters, the author is understood to have emphasised the superiority of Jesus and the inferiority of Moses. Donald Guthrie explains this position.

Because of the great importance of Moses as the lawgiver, a comparison of him with Jesus would have been of great significance to both Jewish and Gentile Christians, but particularly to the former. The writer shows that Moses' status as servant is greatly inferior to Jesus' status as son.⁴⁷³

For other interpreters, the author is understood to have emphasised the superiority of Jesus, but not the inferiority of Moses. For Hugh Montefiore, the author does not denigrate Moses.

It is noteworthy that our author never attempts in any way to denigrate Moses. He might, for example, have pointed out that Moses' faithfulness was imperfect (Nu. xx. 7-13). But he casts no aspersions on him

⁴⁷² R. Wilson 1987: 68.

⁴⁷³ D. Guthrie 1983: 96.

whatever. Such is not his way. He accepts the excellence of the old dispersion, and he proves that the new is 'better.'⁴⁷⁴

In short, there has been no agreement regarding the relationship between the faithfulness of Moses and the faithfulness of Jesus. This is not surprising. In fact, some *social identity theorists* have also lacked the conceptual framework for understanding the comparison of group 'prototypes.'

In 1990, Eliot R. Smith and Michael A. Zarate offered a theory of 'prototypes' and 'exemplars.'⁴⁷⁵ According to Smith and Zarate a 'prototype' is a summary representation that is believed to capture the central tendency of a social category. Further, such a 'prototype' will be represented by a group member, often from the past. Similarly, an 'exemplar' is a current member of the group that is thought to capture the central tendency of a social category. Therefore, both prototypes and exemplars tend to represent either how the group perceives itself, or they may be an ideal representation of the group. For Smith and Zarate, however, the central tendency of a group was described in 'static' or in 'fixed' terms. For example, if 'faith' was the central tendency of the ingroup, a member who exemplified faith may be understood to have been a faith prototype. Further, to exemplify faithfulness, one must be faithful in the same manner as the prototype. For example, if Jesus served as a faith prototype, in order to be faithful, one must 'be faithful like Jesus.' In this case, the faithfulness of Moses must be understood to be 'insufficient' or 'inadequate,' since it was necessarily different from the faith of Jesus (i.e. the faith of a servant and the faith of a Son).

However, just as some interpreters of Hebrews have not been happy with the conclusion that the author emphasised examples of 'sufficient' and 'insufficient' faithfulness, some social identity theorists have not been happy with Smith and Zarate's description of 'static' or 'fixed' group tendencies. Their description does not account for different 'expressions' of the central group tendency. Further, their description does not account for different 'levels' of the central group tendency. For these reasons, social identity theorists have turned

⁴⁷⁴ Montefiore 1969: 71.

⁴⁷⁵ Smith and Zarate 1990: 243-62.

away from 'prototype' theories and toward a theory of 'prototypicality.'

The concept of prototypicality may be traced back to the work of E. Rosch and her colleagues in the 1970s.⁴⁷⁶ Rosch found that "comparisons *between* categories reveal that they vary in their relative inclusiveness, for example 'dalmation,' 'dog,' 'animal,' 'living thing,' are categories of increasing inclusiveness."⁴⁷⁷ Rosch also found that "*within* categories, members vary in their typicality, for example robins are seen (by American subjects) as more typical of the category 'bird' than are ostriches, but both robins and ostriches are recognized as sharing membership in the one 'bird' category."⁴⁷⁸ Penelope Oakes, Alexander Haslam and John C. Turner summarise that "it appears that categories have an internally *graded structure*, rather than members possessing an even level of shared defining attributes."⁴⁷⁹ Oakes, Haslam and Turner conclude that it was the finding of Rosch that led to "the idea of a category of *prototype* (a best example of the category), and the argument that category membership requires a certain level of similarity to the prototype."⁴⁸⁰

Based upon the important observation that categories have an internally 'graded structure,' Oakes, Haslam and Turner note that, "the more a group member differs from outgroup members and the less he or she differs from other ingroup members (that is, the more this person exemplifies what ingroup members share and what they do not share with the outgroup), the more that individual will be perceived as prototypical of the group."⁴⁸¹ Therefore, prototypicality depends upon both inter- and intragroup comparison. Here, the work of Oakes, Haslam and Turner differs greatly from the prototype theory of Smith and Zarate. For Smith and Zarate, prototypes are 'fixed' or 'static.' Oakes, Haslam and Turner conclude that fixed prototypes are 'fictions'. Further, they favour a theory which "emphasizes context-dependent *judgements of prototypicality* rather than fixed prototypical images which represent the group as constants across changing

⁴⁷⁶ See: Rosch et al. 1976; Rosch 1978; Mervis and Rosch 1981.

⁴⁷⁷ Oakes, Haslam, and Turner 1998: 75.

⁴⁷⁸ Oakes, Haslam, and Turner 1998: 75.

⁴⁷⁹ Oakes, Haslam, and Turner 1998: 75.

⁴⁸⁰ Oakes, Haslam, and Turner 1998: 75.

⁴⁸¹ Oakes, Haslam, and Turner 1998: 80.

contexts.”⁴⁸² To summarise, “the degree to which a person is perceived to be representative of a group is not simply a function of properties of that person considered in isolation. Instead, *the very same individual* will be perceived as more or less prototypical of a social category depending on the social context within which he or she is defined.”⁴⁸³

Oakes, Haslam and Turner’s contribution to the discussion of prototypicality proves especially helpful in a reading of Hebrews 3:1-6. Relying solely upon the work of Smith and Zarate, one is forced to understand faith as a static quality. Further, if a group member is believed to have exemplified that quality, he or she was perceived as ‘faithful’ However, a reading which integrates the conceptual framework of Oakes, Haslam and Turner necessarily understands faith as ‘dynamic.’ Further, individuals may be understood as having been more or less prototypical of the social category based upon their relative comparison with other individuals. In the case of Hebrews 3:1-6, Jesus is portrayed as being more prototypical of faithfulness, for he was faithful as a Son (Hebrews 3:6). Moses is portrayed as being less prototypical of faithfulness, for he was faithful as a servant (Hebrews 3:5). This comparison, therefore, does not negate the faithfulness of Moses. Rather, the comparison describes the faith of Moses relative to the faith of Jesus. In this case, Jesus was more prototypical of the latter two examples of faithfulness.⁴⁸⁴

This interpretation of the comparison of Jesus with Moses is supplemented by the interpretation of Hebrews as a shared life story, or narrative. In this case, the author integrates the faithfulness of Jesus into the well-known story of Moses. The addressees, we might presume, recognised the faithfulness of Moses. Jesus is now introduced into this story of ‘antecedent’ faithfulness, through a comparison. Just as Moses was faithful, Jesus is faithful. However, while Moses is faithful in

⁴⁸² Oakes, Haslam, and Turner 1998: 80.

⁴⁸³ Oakes, Haslam, and Turner 1998: 87.

⁴⁸⁴ Paul Ellingworth describes the comparison between Jesus and Moses in Hebrews 3:3 as an argument that is ‘proportional.’ He observes “Praise of Jesus does not entail blame of Moses (→ 3:2; 11:27). Jesus’ faithfulness is more honoured than that of Moses, not because Moses’ faithfulness was in any way defective, but because that of Jesus was displayed in a higher office.” Ellingworth 1993: 203.

the house of God as a servant, Jesus is faithful as a Son. The relative faithfulness of Jesus, then, is placed into the continuing story of the faithful. Jesus, is now, the prototype of faithfulness.

The author's emphasis of Jesus as the prototype of faithfulness and his integration of Jesus into the continuing story of faithfulness is brought together in one striking image, that of God's 'house.' The author introduces the theme of God's house in Hebrews 3:2. Here, he explains that 'Jesus was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in God's house.' He describes the relationship of Jesus with Moses in terms of the house and the builder of the house (Hebrews 3:3). Next, he describes the relative faithfulness of both Moses and Jesus in terms of the roles that each play in God's house. Moses is faithful as a servant (Hebrews 3:5), while Jesus is faithful as a Son (Hebrews 3:6). Finally, he describes the addressees as God's 'house.'

The discussion of the 'house' in Hebrews 3:1-6 generally includes two questions. First, whose house is it? Second, how are we to interpret the 'house?' In other words, is it God's house or is it the house of Jesus?⁴⁸⁵ While a few interpreters have argued that the 'house' may be the 'house of Christ,' most have concluded that it is, indeed, the 'house' of God.⁴⁸⁶ With regard to the second question, Harold Attridge summarises the various possibilities for the interpretation of the 'house.'

This term could simply designate the temple, although it was also used of various communal groups or 'households,' including the whole people of Israel, the Davidic dynasty, and various Jewish and Christian communities. It is also a designation for God's heavenly household, the created world, and the individual soul.⁴⁸⁷

Attridge concludes, "That God's 'house' is in fact God's people is made clear from the relative clause that specifies the house as 'ourselves' (ἡμεῖς)."⁴⁸⁸ Attridge is correct in his assessment that the author describes the 'house' as God's people. However, he does not identify the significance of this central image. For the

⁴⁸⁵ For an example of this discussion, see: Ellingworth 1993: 196-197.

⁴⁸⁶ For a defence of this conclusion, see: Ellingworth 1993: 196-197.

⁴⁸⁷ Attridge 1989: 109.

⁴⁸⁸ Attridge 1989: 111.

author, both Moses and Jesus were faithful in the *same* house. Further, the addressees are described as that very 'house.' *With one image, that of the 'house,' the author integrates Moses, Jesus, and the addressees into the same ongoing story of faithfulness, they are all three faithful in God's house.*

6.3 Jesus and the Priestly Order of Melchizedek: Hebrew 7:1-28

The presentation of Jesus and the priestly order of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:1-28⁴⁸⁹ presents three distinct examples of comparison. First, the author compares Abraham with Melchizedek. Second, most interpreters conclude that the author compares Jesus with Melchizedek. Third, he compares the Levitical priesthood with the priesthood in the order of Melchizedek.

To begin, the comparison between Abraham and Melchizedek has presented few problems for interpreters. In short, most interpreters conclude that the author makes clear the superiority of Melchizedek to Abraham.⁴⁹⁰ He explains that Melchizedek receives tithes from Abraham (Hebrews 7:2, 4, 6). In return, Melchizedek blessed Abraham (Hebrews 7:6). Here, he notes, 'It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior' (Hebrews 7:7). In addition, the conclusion that Melchizedek is superior to Abraham is not met with reluctance or hesitancy. It seems reasonable for most to assume that Abraham was inferior to this priest and king. From a social identity perspective, this is another case of relative prototypicality. The author's emphasis on the superiority of Melchizedek does not exclude the faithfulness of Abraham. In fact, the addressees are urged to follow the patience and faithfulness of Abraham (Hebrews 6:12-13). This example of relative prototypicality, similar to the comparison of Jesus with Moses (Hebrews 3:1-6), shows that this practice is an habitual approach of the author.

The second comparison, that of Jesus with Melchizedek, has invited a

⁴⁸⁹ Neither 7:1 nor 7:28 are 'natural' divisions in the text. For example, the verses immediately preceding this section work as a necessary introduction to the discussion of Jesus and Melchizedek. In addition, the verses immediately following this section work as a necessary continuation of the discussion of Jesus as high priest. This is, unfortunately, the difficulty with interpreting Hebrews. Quite simply, there are very few natural divisions in the text (cf. Hebrews 10:19). Therefore, while I will limit my discussion of Jesus and Melchizedek to Hebrews 7:1-28, I am aware of the artificial boundaries that I am establishing.

⁴⁹⁰ For an example of this view, see: Montefiore 1969: 120-121.

variety of readings. For some interpreters, Melchizedek is understood to be inferior to Jesus. P.E. Hughes concludes that the author's assertions concerning both the genealogy and the eternal nature of Melchizedek apply to Christ, not to Melchizedek.

The description *without father or mother or genealogy*, accordingly should not be taken literalistically to mean that Melchizedek had no parents or family, nor does the statement that he had *neither beginning of days nor end of life*, intend us to understand him as an eternally existent being who experienced neither birth nor death. The point is that these assertions apply positively to Christ, not to Melchizedek. The significance of the biblical silence is that it marks Melchizedek out as a type who in these respects *resembles the Son of God*, who alone exists everlastingly, from eternity to eternity.⁴⁹¹

Craig Koester, notes that the claims about Melchizedek create tensions. He explains, "The author says that Melchizedek has no genealogy (7:3) even though he knows that Jesus was descended from Judah (7:14) and that Melchizedek has 'no beginning or days nor end of life' even though Jesus' life upon earth (5:7) began with birth and ended with crucifixion."⁴⁹² Koester attempts to relieve this tension with this conclusion that, "The author is apparently not comparing Melchizedek to the earthly Jesus, but to the exalted Son of God, who existed before the world was created and who will endure after it has ended (1:2, 10-12)."⁴⁹³ In this case, Koester concludes that the tensions are relieved and the superiority of Jesus is made known.

An important theological assumption undergirding Hebrews is that God raised Christ from the dead and exalted him to heaven, and the author of Hebrews explicates these events in light of the Scriptures that foreshadow them. The exalted Christ is like a person who stands before the sun and casts a shadow upon earth. Those who look at the shadow can discern in it the contours of the one who made it. Similarly, Hebrews considers Melchizedek to be an earthly shadow that the risen Christ casts back on the page of OT Scripture, and the author will speak about Melchizedek in order to bear witness to the Son of God whom he represents.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹¹ Hughes 1977: 248.

⁴⁹² C. Koester 2001: 348.

⁴⁹³ C. Koester 2001: 348.

⁴⁹⁴ C. Koester 2001: 346.

Hugh Montefiore, in contrast, provides a detailed description of the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham and the superiority of Jesus' priesthood over the Levitical priesthood, but ignores the comparison between Jesus and Melchizedek. For him, there are no problems concerning the relationship between the two figures.⁴⁹⁵ Finally, Paul Ellingworth does not believe that a comparison even exists between the two persons. He notes, "Melchizedek is unique among OT figures in Hebrews in that his status is neither contrasted with that of Christ nor directly related to that of believers."⁴⁹⁶

There is again some consensus regarding the author's third comparison. To begin, he explains that the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical priesthood because it is permanent (Hebrews 7:3). For this assertion, the author explains that the priesthood of Melchizedek was established before the Levitical priesthood (i.e. he was a priest at the time of Abraham, cf. Genesis 14:18-20). In addition, by reading Genesis 14 through the lens of Psalm 110:4, the author implies that the Levitical priesthood did not replace the order of Melchizedek. Next, the author explains that Melchizedek received tithes from Levi (Hebrews 7:9-10). He also asserts that the authority of the Melchizedek priesthood is based upon the 'power of an indestructible life' rather than upon genealogy (Hebrews 7:3, 15-17). Finally, he notes that while Levite priests die, Melchizedek is immortal (7:23-25). There is little debate that the author places significant emphasis upon the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood. He writes, 'Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron (Hebrews 7:11)?'

The difficulty in interpreting the third comparison is not whether the author emphasised the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood, but why he made this emphasis. The 'traditional view' informs most readings of Hebrews 7:1-28. Here, it is asserted that the addressees were 'Jewish Christians' in danger

⁴⁹⁵ Montefiore 1969: 117-131.

⁴⁹⁶ Ellingworth 1993: 351.

of 'falling away' from 'Christianity' and returning to 'Judaism.' The comparison of the two priesthoods, then, is understood to have been an argument for the superiority of 'Christianity' and the better way to approach God. Craig Koester further explains that while the reasons for discussing the priesthood and Law are disputed, two generalisations may be made⁴⁹⁷ First, "some consider the discussion of the Law to be mainly theoretical, since Hebrews - unlike Paul (Gal 5:1-12; Phil 3:2-3) - is not contending with Judaizing opponents."⁴⁹⁸ Second, "others ... assume that questions concerning the Jewish Law and priesthood must have emerged from continuing contact with Judaism."⁴⁹⁹ In either case, interpreters commonly work with the assumption that the author emphasised the superiority of Christianity in light of some 'Jewish' threat, whether 'real' or 'theoretical.'

While the 'traditional view' continues to dominate the discussion of the priestly order of Melchizedek, David deSilva offers an alternative for the interpretation of this text. He begins by acknowledging that while the majority of interpreters continue to hold the 'traditional view,' the author may have had other 'alternative goals.'⁵⁰⁰ He notes, "One purpose may be to make the priesthood of Jesus more real for the hearers."⁵⁰¹ He explains that the Levitical priesthood was earthly, the priesthood of Jesus, on the other hand, was heavenly and perhaps more difficult to imagine. Hebrews 7:1-28, would make this priesthood more real. DeSilva continues, "The second purpose involves elevating both the honor of Jesus (which was the principal function of *synkrisis* in rhetoric) and the advantages that Jesus' mediation has brought to the hearers."⁵⁰²

DeSilva further notes that, "a persistent feature of Hebrews scholarship is the assumption that the comparison between Jesus and the Levitical priests implies a polemic against the latter figures." Attention to classical rhetoric, however, provides a solution. "Encomia (speeches in praise of some person and

⁴⁹⁷ C. Koester 2001: 357.

⁴⁹⁸ C. Koester 2001: 357.

⁴⁹⁹ C. Koester 2001: 357.

⁵⁰⁰ DeSilva 2000a: 261.

⁵⁰¹ DeSilva 2000a: 262.

⁵⁰² DeSilva 2000a: 262.

his or her achievements) regularly included comparisons between the subject of the speech and others persons of renown.”⁵⁰³ DeSilva concludes that the author of Hebrews selects the Levitical priests as material for his *synkrisis* for a number of reasons.

They provide the ‘type’ or ‘pattern’ from which the priestly activity of Jesus beyond the heavens can be credibly ‘reconstructed.’ They are a revered part of the work of God in the past, and their limitations can be used to highlight the surpassing honor of Jesus and value of having this Jesus as one’s mediator of divine favor. Additionally, a comparison with the levitical priesthood affords a salvation-historical perspective that will also amplify the value of Jesus’ priesthood. Hitherto the author has been largely eschatological in his orientation (looking ahead to entering God’s promised rest and the believers’ final glory or to the judgement of God and subjugation of Christ’s enemies, among which the addressees should not wish to find themselves). Now the author approaches the believers’ favored place in God’s unfolding plan by contrasting the access afforded to God’s people in prior times with the access afforded the Christians ‘in these last days’ through the Son’s mediation.⁵⁰⁴

In summary, Hebrews 7:1-28 consists of three distinct comparisons. For most interpreters, it is evident from the text that Melchizedek is superior to Abraham. In addition, this assertion is not met with reluctance or hesitancy. The (possible) comparison of Jesus with Melchizedek is interpreted in a variety of ways. For some interpreters, Jesus is understood to be superior to Melchizedek. For others, the author does not compare the two. Finally, while there is a general consensus that the author emphasised the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood over the Levitical priesthood, there is diversity in the explanations of the purpose of this comparison. For most, the author was writing to dissuade the addressees from returning to ‘Judaism.’ DeSilva, in contrast, understands the goals of the author to have been two-fold: (1) to make the priesthood of Jesus more real to the addresses; and (2) to elevate the honour of Jesus and the advantages that Jesus’ mediation has brought to the hearers.

Like most other interpreters, I understand the author of Hebrews to have emphasised the relative superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham. Likewise, I

⁵⁰³ DeSilva 2000a: 263.

⁵⁰⁴ DeSilva 2000a: 263.

understand him to have emphasised the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood over the Levitical priesthood. I differ, however, in my reading of the purpose of such comparisons. From a social identity perspective, Melchizedek is presented as the prototype of perfect priesthood. He is the king of Salem and priest of the most High God (Hebrews 7:1). His priesthood is not based upon genealogy, unlike the Levitical priesthood to follow (Hebrews 7:3). He has no beginning nor end of life, his priesthood continues forever (Hebrews 7:3). Abraham, who is described as faithful and patient and the recipient of the promises (Hebrews 6:12-20), recognizes the greatness of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:1-2). Likewise, the author of Hebrews emphasises his greatness (Hebrews 7:4). Abraham, and in turn Levi, gave him tithes (Hebrews 7:5-10). He, in return, blessed Abraham (Hebrews 7:6-7). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the priesthood of Melchizedek precedes and is not replaced by the Levitical priesthood. In short, the author of Hebrews thoroughly describes his superior, and prototypical, priesthood.

The author tells this story through the lens of Psalm 110:4 (Hebrews 7:15). This has an important implication for the comparison of Jesus with Melchizedek. For the author, another priest will arise in the likeness of Melchizedek. The priesthood of Jesus, then, is described in relation to the Melchizedek priesthood. The priesthood of Jesus, like that of Melchizedek, is not based upon genealogy (Hebrews 7:16). The priesthood of Jesus, like that of Melchizedek, is a priesthood that lasts forever (Hebrews 7:17). According to Oakes, Haslam and Turner's theory of prototypicality, Jesus is now also a prototype of perfect priesthood. This conclusion is shown in the text. For the author, perfection was not attainable through the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 7:11). Instead, another priest in the Melchizedek order was required. Jesus, according to the author, is this priest (Hebrews 7:15-19).

Interpreters have difficulty with the comparison of Jesus with Melchizedek because this comparison is unique in Hebrews. Paul Ellingworth is correct with this conclusion that, "Melchizedek is unique among OT figures in Hebrews ...". He is incorrect with his conclusion that this uniqueness is due to the fact that, "... his status is neither contrasted with that of Christ nor directly related to that of

believers.”⁵⁰⁵ In Hebrews, the comparison between Melchizedek and Jesus is unique because it describes Melchizedek as being a prototype of perfect priesthood. In turn, when Jesus is introduced to the story, he is not described as superior to Melchizedek. Rather, the priesthood of Jesus, like the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical priesthood. This is completely unique in Hebrews. As noted above, the author affirms the faithfulness of Moses (he was faithful as a servant). However, he emphasises the superiority of Jesus (he was faithful as a Son). I will explain below, the author affirms the faithfulness of the ‘great cloud of witnesses’ (they surround the addressees and enable them to run their race with perseverance). However, he emphasises the superiority of Jesus (he the ‘pioneer and perfecter’ of faith). In Hebrews 7:1-28, however, Jesus is not described as superior to Melchizedek. On the contrary, both are described as equally prototypical of perfect priesthood.

Again, this reading of Hebrews is supplemented by Cinnirella’s theory of shared life story or narrative. In Chapter 7, the author places Jesus into an ongoing story of perfect and imperfect priesthoods. The story begins with an encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek. Abraham recognizes the superiority of Melchizedek and the author emphasises this superiority for the addressees. Next, he introduces the Levitical priesthood, a priesthood in which perfection was not attainable. Finally, he brings the story back to the Melchizedek priesthood. He explains to the addressees that a new priest in the order of Melchizedek has arisen. Jesus, then, is to be viewed within an ongoing story of priests and priesthoods. Jesus, for the first and only time in Hebrews, is not described as the superior or most prototypical actor in the story. Melchizedek is already perfectly prototypical as a priest. In accordance with Oakes, Haslam, and Turner’s theory of prototypicality, Jesus cannot be more prototypical. All that remains is to align Jesus with him. In other words, they are equally, perfectly prototypical as priests. Here, we have a good example of how a sophisticated social scientific approach to well known and puzzling data in the text produces an exegetical solution of a kind that has so far eluded interpreters.

⁵⁰⁵ Ellingworth 1993: 351.

6.4 Jesus, the 'Pioneer and Perfecter of our Faith:' Hebrews 12:1-2

The discussion of Jesus as the 'pioneer and perfecter of our faith' (Hebrews 12:1-2) closely echoes the discussion of the faithfulness of Jesus and Moses (Hebrews 3:1-6). Again, a critical question lies at the heart of the history of the interpretation of these verses: Does the comparison of Jesus with the 'great cloud of witnesses' represent a comparison between two groups or 'religions,' or do Jesus and the 'witnesses' serve as 'examples of faithfulness?'

As noted above, some interpreters understand the persons of Jesus and Moses in Hebrews 3:1-6 to represent 'groups' (i.e. 'Christians' and 'Jews'). Further, these interpreters often understand the author to emphasise the superiority of Jesus (and, therefore, the superiority of one group over the other). Similarly, some interpreters understand both Jesus and the 'great cloud of witnesses' in Hebrews 12:1-2 to represent 'groups.' For William L. Lane, the 'witnesses' represent faithfulness under the 'old covenant.' Jesus, then, represents faithfulness under the new and superior covenant.

The parenetic intention of the catalogue of faithful men and women in 11:1-40 becomes transparent in 12:1-13. The writer resumes the more direct mode of appeal he had used in 10:35-39 and urges patient and trusting perseverance in spite of hardship as the proper response of Christian faith. There is both a logical and dramatic connection between the reference to the martyrs in 11:35b-38 and the foundation of 12:1. The writer recognizes, however, that an earnest appeal for Christian endurance cannot finally be based upon the antecedent exposition of faithfulness to God under the old covenant. There can be an appropriate response to the appeal only in the light of the struggle and triumph of Christ.⁵⁰⁶

For Lane, the assumption that the 'witnesses' represent the 'old covenant,' seems to justify the assertion that the faithfulness of the 'witnesses' must be insufficient. This would seem especially true when compared to Jesus, the 'pioneer and perfecter' of faith. However, the author uses the term 'faith' twenty-four times in forty verses (Hebrews 11:1-40).⁵⁰⁷ Further, he directly relates the faith of the

⁵⁰⁶ Lane 1991b: 406.

⁵⁰⁷ Hebrews 11:1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, and 39.

'witnesses' to the experiences of the addressees. He notes, 'therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely; and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us ...' (Hebrews 12:1). Finally, it is hard to imagine that the author would dedicate over one-tenth of Hebrews to examples of insufficient faithfulness. One is drawn to conclude that either the author of Hebrews was an incompetent communicator or that Lane has seriously misconceived his meaning. The latter seems more likely. In the end, there are two shortcomings to Lane's interpretation. First, there is no evidence that the 'witnesses' are meant to represent the 'old covenant.' In addition, such a reading seems to force unintended 'insufficiency' on the examples of the witnesses. Second, Lane's interpretation is based upon his lack of an appropriate conceptual framework within which to understand the comparison between Jesus and the 'witnesses.' For Lane, the superiority of the faithfulness of Jesus must imply that the faithfulness of the 'witnesses' is inferior and insufficient.

For other interpreters, Jesus and the 'great cloud of witnesses' are not understood to represent 'groups.' On the contrary, Hebrews 12:1-2 is thought to be the culmination of many and various examples of faithfulness. In Hebrews 10:32-39, the author reminds the addressees of their enlightenment, urges them to remain faithful, and describes them as 'those who have faith and keep their souls.' The author continues to emphasise faithfulness by presenting a 'definition' of faith (Hebrews 11:1). The remaining thirty-nine verses of Chapter 11 are dedicated to 'antecedent' examples of faithfulness. In Hebrews 12:1-2, the author finally urges the addressees to run their race with perseverance, 'being surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses' and 'looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.' For interpreters who reject the assumption that Hebrews 12:1-2 reflects a comparison between two groups, the context and content of this section indicate a preferred reading. Namely, both the 'witnesses' and Jesus serve as examples of faithfulness.

Again, however, a question arises: What is the best way to describe the difference between the faithfulness of the witnesses and the faithfulness of Jesus? Here, most interpreters take a similar approach. F.F. Bruce summarises, "The

earlier witnesses supply incentive in abundance; but in Jesus we have one who is *par excellence*.⁵⁰⁸ The eagerness to validate the witness of the 'great cloud' and to understand their faithfulness in relation to the faithfulness of Jesus is surprising when compared to the various interpretations of Hebrews 3:1-6. For Bruce, and countless others, it is easy to consider that the earlier witnesses of Hebrews 11 supplied incentive in abundance, but it is difficult for them to consider that the earlier witness of Moses supplied 'incentive in abundance.' In short, while Bruce, and many others, understand Moses to represent the 'old economy' in Hebrews 3:1-6,⁵⁰⁹ they do not understand the 'witnesses' (of which Moses is included) to represent the 'old economy' in Hebrews 12:1-2. I, on the other hand, understand the comparison between the 'great cloud of witnesses' and Jesus in Hebrews 12:1-2 to echo the comparison of Jesus with Moses in Hebrews 3:1-6. In both cases, the faithfulness of others is described in relation to the prototypical faith of Jesus. Therefore, Oakes, Haslam and Turner's theory of prototypicality⁵¹⁰ serves as a helpful and appropriate conceptual framework for the interpretation of Hebrews 12:1-2.

In the case of Hebrews 12:1-2, Jesus is portrayed as being more prototypical of faithfulness, for he is the 'pioneer and perfecter of our faith' (Hebrews 12:2). The 'great cloud of witnesses' are portrayed as being less prototypical of faithfulness, for apart from the addressees they 'should not be made perfect' (Hebrews 11:40). This comparison, therefore, does not negate the faithfulness of the 'witnesses.' In fact, they are described as 'well attested by their faith' (Hebrews 11:39). Rather, the comparison describes the faith of the 'witnesses' relative to the faith of Jesus. Again, Jesus was the prototype, or best example of faithfulness.

Again, this reading is supplemented by the interpretation of Hebrews as a shared life story or narrative. Stretching back to the faithfulness of Abel, through Noah, Abraham, Moses and many others, the author offers a vivid description of

⁵⁰⁸ F.F. Bruce 1990: 337. See also: D. Guthrie 1983: 248; and R. McL. Wilson 1987: 220.

⁵⁰⁹ F.F. Bruce 1990: 92.

⁵¹⁰ Oakes, Haslam, and Turner 1998: 75-92.

an ongoing story of faithfulness. In Hebrews 12:1-2, he integrates both the addressees and Jesus into this ongoing narrative. The addressees are to run their race while surrounded by the 'witnesses.' Here, the author integrates the race of the addressees, and the faithfulness of the addressees, into this great faith narrative. Likewise, the author places Jesus into this great faith story. While there have been many examples of faithfulness, Jesus is now the 'pioneer and perfecter.' Within this long and still evolving faith story, Jesus stands in the place of honour.

The author's description of Jesus as the prototype of faithfulness (i.e. the 'pioneer and perfecter of faith') and his integration of Jesus into the continuing story of faithfulness is brought together in one striking image, that of the 'race.' Similar to his use of 'house' imagery in Hebrews 3:1-6, the author's use of 'race' imagery places the 'witnesses,' the addressees, and Jesus into the *same* story. Here, the witnesses are spectators of a great race. The addressees are the participants in this race. Finally, Jesus is that person upon whom the runners are to fix their gaze. They are all, therefore, integrated into the same stadium and integrated in to the same narrative. In addition, the image of the 'race' places the 'witness' and Jesus in relation to one another. Just as Moses and Jesus are members of the same 'house,' although with very different roles, the witnesses and Jesus are members of the same 'race,' again with different roles. In short, the author's use of 'race' imagery serves the dual purpose of integrating Jesus into an ongoing narrative and describing the 'witnesses' in relation to Jesus, the prototype of faithfulness.

6.5 The Relationship Between Jesus and the Addressees of Hebrews

The relationship between Jesus and the addressees of Hebrews is commonly analysed in terms of the 'content' of the group's beliefs. Here, many interpreters use the term, 'Christology.' In other words, how did the addressees understand Jesus? Did they have 'faith in Jesus?' To be sure, similar questions were of interest to the author of Hebrews. From the first verses of the text, he describes Jesus as the one 'appointed the heir of all things, through whom he [God] created the world' (Hebrews 1:2). He continues, Jesus 'reflects the glory of

God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of Majesty on high' (Hebrews 1:3). There is no question that the person of Jesus occupied an essential place in the beliefs of the author and the addressees. While this is an exciting area for consideration, there is another important dynamic in Hebrews regarding the relationship between Jesus and the addressees. Namely, *Jesus served as the prototype for the identity descriptor of the addressees, that of faithfulness.*

In chapter 5, I explained that the author and the addressees of Hebrews simplified and systematised their social world into two categories, 'us' and 'them.' I further noted that the identity descriptor of the addressees was that of 'faithfulness.' In other words, they understood themselves as having been the 'faithful.' In this chapter, I examined the faithfulness of Jesus. Utilising two important areas of social identity theory, the theory of 'shared life story' and the theory of 'prototypicality,' I concluded that the author integrated Jesus into an ongoing story of faithfulness. Further, the author described the faith of Jesus as prototypical and described the faith of other 'witnesses' in relation to that of Jesus (i.e. Moses was faithful as a servant, Jesus was faithful as a Son). An additional feature of Hebrews, then, is the integration of the addressees into the same faith story. This observation has important implications for the interpretation of the text. Since faithfulness is described as a continuum, or is understood in terms of 'relative faithfulness,' the author places the addressees into this continuum. The author describes the faithfulness of the addressees in relation to the prototypical faithfulness of Jesus.

In Hebrews 3:1-6, the author uses the image of the 'house' of God to describe the relationship between Moses and Jesus. In short, while their roles are different, one is a servant and the other a Son, they are nonetheless members of the same 'house.' Importantly, the author describes the addressees as members of that very same 'house' (Hebrews 3:6). In Hebrews 12:1-2, the author uses the image of a 'race' to describe the relationship between the 'great cloud of witnesses,' the addressees, and Jesus. Here again, one image brings together all of the faithful in one ongoing story. While the addressees are running their race,

they are surrounded by 'witnesses.' It is the support of these spectators that allows the addressees to run with perseverance. Finally, the addressees are to run their race with their eyes fixed on Jesus, the 'forerunner' and 'perfecter' of faith. In both cases, the author describes the witnesses, the addressees, and Jesus to be members of the same 'house,' the same 'race,' members of the same story of faithfulness.

Importantly, just as the faithfulness of Moses and the faithfulness of the 'great cloud of witnesses' is described in relation to Jesus, so is the faithfulness of the addressees. Throughout the text, the author describes the addressees as the 'faithful' (cf. Hebrews 4:2; 10:39). However, they are also described as 'dull of hearing' (Hebrews 5:11) and 'sluggish' (Hebrews 6:12). Because of this, the author constantly urges the addressees to consider the prototypical faithfulness of Jesus. In Hebrews 2:18, the addressees are told that Jesus is able to help those who are tempted. In the following verse, they are called upon to 'consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession' (Hebrews 3:1). Why are they to consider Jesus? Because 'he was faithful to him who appointed him' (Hebrews 3:2). In Hebrews 4:14, the addressees are instructed to hold fast to their confession. Why? Again, because they have a 'great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.' Likewise, in Hebrews 10:21-22, the addressees are to 'draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.' They are to do this because they 'have a great priest over the house of God.' In short, the addressees, while faithful, are repeatedly asked to consider the prototypical faithfulness of Jesus. He is the supreme and perfect example of faithfulness.

If the author integrates the 'witnesses,' the addressees, and Jesus into the same ongoing faith story and into the same continuum of faithfulness, is there evidence of the relationship between the faithfulness of the addressees and that of the 'witnesses?' After recounting the faithfulness of the 'great cloud,' the author explains, 'And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect' (Hebrews 11:39-40). Here, the author makes clear the relative faithfulness of the both the addressees and the 'witnesses.' In short, the addressees are described as more prototypical of faithfulness, because

the 'witnesses' were not made perfect without them. Therefore, it is possible to place each of the members of God's 'house,' each of the participants in the 'race,' along the continuum of faithfulness. Jesus is the prototype, the perfect example of faithfulness. The addressees are faithful, they are members of God's 'house' and participants in the 'race.' However, they are not as faithful as Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. The 'great cloud' are also faithful. Moses is faithful as a servant (Hebrews 3:5). Likewise, Abraham is patient and faithful (Hebrews 6:12-13). Throughout Chapter 11, the author describes the 'witnesses' in terms of their faithfulness (Hebrews 11). However, they are not as faithful as the addressees, for without the addressees they had not been made perfect.

6.6 Conclusion

Comparison plays a significant role in Hebrews. Jesus is compared with Moses, Melchizedek, and the 'great cloud of witnesses.' While many interpreters have identified the importance of comparison in the text, few have employed an appropriate conceptual framework within which to understand this important dynamic. However, when social identity theory, and in particular the theories of 'shared life story' and 'prototypicality' are related to Hebrews, the meaning of such comparisons is made clear. Jesus is described as the prototype of faithfulness. In return, all other faithful members of God's 'house,' are described in relation to Jesus. While the addressees and the 'great cloud' are faithful, their faithfulness is understood only in relation to the prototypical faithfulness of Jesus. In addition, the author integrated both Jesus and the addressees into an ongoing story of faithfulness. They, like Moses and many others, are members of God's 'house,' participants in the 'race.'

Chapter 7

Present Temporal Orientation and Faithfulness in Hebrews

Why is it necessary to consider issues of temporality within the discussion of social identity in Hebrews? In short, the author thoroughly integrated issues of identity and time. As explained in Chapter 5, the author and the addressees categorised the world into two groups, 'us' and 'them,' the 'faithful' and the 'unfaithful.' Faithfulness, then, served as an identity descriptor for the addressees of the text. In short, the addressees understood themselves as having been the 'faithful.' This conclusion, however, is incomplete without the additional consideration of where the addressees stood in relation to time. In this chapter, I will begin with a review of 'time' in Hebrews. Second, I will offer a summary of the history of the interpretation of both 'time' and 'rest' in Hebrews. Third, I will provide a brief review of present temporal orientation. Fourth, I will provide an analysis of the four areas in which the author integrated issues of identity and time. Namely, I will examine his use of the 'antecedent,' the 'forthcoming,' the role of 'foresight,' and the use of 'imaginary time.' Finally, I will present an overview of the social functions of God's 'rest.' When the chapter is complete, a more developed picture of the identity of the addressees will have emerged.

7.1 'Time' and Hebrews

The discussion of 'time' in Hebrews is often limited to the meaning of *κατάπαυσις* (Hebrews 3:11, 18; 4:1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11) and *σαββατισμός* (Hebrews 4:9). With respect to both terms, interpreters ask whether the 'rest' is a 'future' promise or an 'already/not yet' reality. While a thorough analysis of this discussion is provided below, it is important to note at this point that the author emphasises throughout the text that time is experienced as a process of 'unbroken duration.' The addressees had been enlightened (Hebrews 10:32), they had received the message with faith (Hebrews 4:1-2), they are therefore to remain confident (Hebrews 3:14) and to show endurance (Hebrews 10:36), for the 'rest'

is the forthcoming promise to those who remain faithful (cf. Hebrews 4:1). In addition, this process is not that of 'past' (i.e. received the message with faith), 'present' (i.e. remain confident), and 'future' (i.e. promised rest), but is part of an organic whole, the 'present' as understood by those with a present temporal orientation. While an analysis of present temporal orientation was provided in Chapter 4, and the theory is related to the text in a general way below, it is helpful at this time to highlight a number of examples of the author's use of 'time' in Hebrews. In each example, the 'past,' the 'present,' and the 'future,' are not understood to be three distinct and separate realities. On the contrary, 'time' is understood in terms of an 'unbroken duration.'

In Hebrews 1:10-11, the author describes the passing of time, the destruction of the earth and the heavens, in 'organic' terms. Just like a garment will grow old and wear out, so will all of God's creation.

1:10-11 καί· σὺ κατ' ἀρχάς, κύριε, τὴν γῆν ἐθεμελίωσας, καὶ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου εἰσιν οἱ οὐρανοί· αὐτοὶ ἀπολοῦνται, σὺ δὲ διαμένεις, καὶ πάντες ὡς ἱμάτιον παλαιωθήσονται,

1:10-11 And, "In the beginning, Lord, you established the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment;

Here, the author describes time as a process of 'unbroken duration.' Just as clothing once new will eventually wear out, the earth once new will eventually be destroyed. Just as clothing wears out gradually, over time, so will the earth be destroyed. Understanding this organic image is important for understanding the author's description of time. There are not three distinct periods in the 'life of a garment.' There is not the 'past' (i.e. when the garment was made), the 'present' (i.e. when the garment is worn), and the 'future' (i.e. when the garment will wear out). Instead, the life of a garment is experienced as an 'unbroken duration.' As soon as a garment is made, it begins to wear out. As a garment is worn, it is gradually worn out. So it is with the earth and the heavens. So it is with the experiences of the addressees. As will be explained below, the 'past' experiences of the addressees are not separate realities, isolated from their 'present' experience. Rather, the antecedent experiences continue to inform and shape the

experiences of the addressees (i.e. just as a garment once new is not separate from the garment now worn). Further, the 'future' experiences of the addressees are not separate realities, isolated from their 'present' experience. Rather, the forthcoming naturally follows the experiences of the addressees (i.e. just as a garment now worn is not separate from the garment that will eventually wear out).

The author provides many examples of time as a process of 'unbroken duration.' In Hebrews 10:36, he explains to the addressees that with endurance, by continuing to do the will of God, they will receive what is promised. Here, the author does not describe the 'future' as a distant and separate temporal reality. The addressees will receive what was promised if they continue to do the will of God.

In Hebrews 10:39, the author explains that he and the addressees are those who have faith and, therefore, are those who preserve their souls. Again, the author does not describe the 'future' as a distinct reality. The faith of the addressees is connected to the forthcoming, 'keeping their souls.' In the same way that a garment now worn cannot be separated from a garment that will eventually wear out, the faith of the addressees cannot be separated from their forthcoming reception of the promise.

As will be seen throughout this chapter, the author thoroughly integrates this understanding of time into the text. For example, it is difficult to understand his call for 'endurance' (cf. Hebrews 10:36) and 'confidence' (cf. Hebrews 3:14; 10:19-25, 35) outside of the conceptual framework of present temporal orientation. In Hebrews, 'endurance' and 'confidence' always imply 'unbroken duration.' The addressees are to endure, for the forthcoming experience of their continued faithfulness is the reception of the promise (cf. Hebrews 10:36, 39). 'Confidence,' then, is the certainty with which the addressees are to understand this forthcoming experience. Just as one can be confident that the garment now worn will wear out, so can one be confident in the forthcoming promise.

Before the text may be related to the theory of present temporal orientation, a review of the investigation of the nature of 'time' and the meaning of 'rest' in Hebrews is necessary. Therefore, I will examine other interpretations of 'time' and 'rest' in Hebrews and will follow this with a review of present

temporal orientation and the author's use of the antecedent, the forthcoming, foresight, and imaginary time.

7.2 The Nature of 'Time' and the Meaning of 'Rest' in Hebrews: A History of Investigation

In 1973, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. began his article, "The Promise Theme and the Theology of Rest,"⁵¹¹ with a telling quote from Gerhard Von Rad. In 1933, Von Rad observed, "Among the many benefits of redemption offered to man by Holy Scriptures, that of 'rest' has been almost overlooked in biblical theology ..."⁵¹² Kaiser then noted, "Forty years have not substantially changed that assessment of the situation. In fact, except for the brief and conflicting opinions delivered in commentaries on Hebrews 3 and 4, only a few major articles in the journals and fewer graduate theses have been devoted to the concept of 'God's Rest' in the last century. Most biblical theologies of the Old Testament and New Testament, biblical encyclopedias, theological workbooks, Festschriften, and systematic theologies are ominously silent on the topic. The question is why?"⁵¹³

Since Kaiser's call to attention, surprisingly little has been written regarding 'rest.' Jon Laansma⁵¹⁴ and Judith Hoch Wray⁵¹⁵ have published works on the topic of 'rest.' In addition, a small number of journal articles have been written.⁵¹⁶ However, the truth of Kaiser's words remains. Concerning the issue of 'rest,' interpreters remain 'ominously silent.' Again, the question is, 'Why?' According to Kaiser, "While reasons may vary, the overriding cause lies in the sheer difficulty of the concept."⁵¹⁷ In this section, I will provide a brief overview of the discussion of 'rest' and will propose that the 'sheer difficulty of the concept' is overcome with an understanding of present temporal orientation.

⁵¹¹ Kaiser 1973: 135.

⁵¹² Von Rad 1966: 94.

⁵¹³ Kaiser 1973: 135.

⁵¹⁴ Laansma 1997.

⁵¹⁵ Wray 1998.

⁵¹⁶ For examples of recent contributions to the discussion of 'rest,' see: Attridge 1980: 279-288; deSilva 2000b: 25-43; Dixon 1995: 95-112; Gleason 2000: 281-303; Lincoln 1982: 197-220; Oberholtzer 1988: 185-196; Thompson 1982: 81-102; Weiss 1996: 674-689; and Yeo 1991: 2-33.

⁵¹⁷ Kaiser 1973: 135.

Generally speaking, the interpretation of 'rest' in Hebrews centers around three questions or areas of discussion. First, since the author did not describe or define 'rest,' from what source did the addressees derive their meaning? Second, if 'rest' has a spatial dynamic, what is the nature of this promise? Thirdly, since 'rest' seems to have a temporal dynamic, when will the addressees receive the promised 'rest?' In addition, it must be understood that the three discussions do not represent three distinct views of the nature of 'rest,' but three discussions which interpreters often 'mix and match.' For example, one might conclude that the addressees understood 'rest' within the context of the Old Testament, that 'rest' has a spatial dynamic which is quite similar to 'heaven,' and that the addressees will receive their 'rest' in the 'future.'

The first discussion commonly associated with the meaning of 'rest' is that of context. Since the author did not describe or define 'rest,' from what source did the addressees derive their meaning? The majority of interpreters argue that the addressees derived their meaning of 'rest' from the Old Testament.⁵¹⁸ Randall C. Gleason provides a recent, thorough defence of this position.⁵¹⁹ Gleason, like Von Rad and Kaiser before him, notes, "although the concept of rest has been important in the teaching of the church throughout the centuries, it has received comparatively little attention by biblical scholars until recently." Seeking to provide this long over-due attention, Gleason examines the author's use of the Old Testament in Hebrews 3:7-4. For Gleason, the exodus generation in Hebrews 3:7-4:11 may be traced back to Psalm 95. He writes, "In Psalm 95 David cited the unbelief and the judgment of the wilderness generation as a warning for the people of his day. Then by using David's psalm the writer of Hebrews passed the same warning on to Jewish believers, their descendants in the first century."⁵²⁰ Gleason further provides a review of the 'redeemed status of the exodus generation' (cf. Exodus 14:30-31), an analysis of the 'sin of the exodus

⁵¹⁸ For examples of those who have concluded that the meaning of 'rest' is best understood within the context of the Old Testament, see: Hofius 1991: 265; Kaiser 1973: 135; Lincoln 1982: 207; Lombard 1971: 63; and Yeo 1991: 10.

⁵¹⁹ Gleason 2000: 281-303.

⁵²⁰ Gleason 2000: 287.

generation' (cf. Exodus 14:7-9; 17:7; Numbers 11:4-6, 18-23; 14:7-9, 11; Deuteronomy 9:23-24), and a study of the 'judgment of the exodus generation.' In addition, Gleason traces the Old Testament concept of rest in Hebrews 3:7-4:11 to Psalm 95 and Genesis 2. Finally, Gleason concludes that, "The Old Testament background of Hebrews 3-4 indicates that those warned by the author were genuinely redeemed like the people of Israel in the Exodus. The readers were warned against committing the same sin of unbelief in the life-sustaining presence of God that Moses, Aaron, and the wilderness generation committed. That sin could result in the failure to enter into 'God's rest,' which meant that they would lose the opportunity to worship God joyfully in the safety of His presence and to enjoy the covenantal blessings."⁵²¹

While the majority of interpreters argue that the addressees derived their meaning of 'rest' from the Old Testament, a few interpreters continue to defend a Gnostic context. In 1939, Ernst Käsemann proposed a Gnostic context for the meaning of 'rest' in Hebrews. For Käsemann, the use of *katapausis* ('rest') and the Melchizedek tradition are best understood within a Gnostic context.⁵²² Likewise, Gerd Theissen proposes a Gnostic context for the high-priestly Christology (or the Melchizedek tradition) and the heavenly *katapausis* ('rest').⁵²³ James W. Thompson, in his short review of 'Rest as a Gnostic Category,'⁵²⁴ notes that, "The Gnostic ἀνάπαυσις speculation is so variegated and the Gnostic systems so diverse that it would be difficult to find a consistent Gnostic concept of rest."⁵²⁵ With this in mind, Thompson does however provide three helpful observations regarding the Gnostic understanding of 'rest.' First, "the word ἀνάπαυσις is often used for God."⁵²⁶ Second, "this 'rest' is the original home of the Gnostic, who now finds himself homeless in the midst of the unrest characteristic of the material world."⁵²⁷ And, third, "Ἀνάπαυσις, mediated by the redeemer, is thus the

⁵²¹ Gleason 2000: 303.

⁵²² Käsemann 1984.

⁵²³ Theissen 1969: 123-145.

⁵²⁴ Thompson 1982: 88-91.

⁵²⁵ Thompson 1982: 88.

⁵²⁶ Thompson 1982: 89.

⁵²⁷ Thompson 1982: 89.

goal of the Gnostic.”⁵²⁸

The second discussion associated with the meaning of ‘rest’ is that of spatiality. As with the previous discussion, two opposing views are offered. For some, ‘rest’ is best understood to include a spatial dimension, often likened to ‘heaven’ or a ‘heavenly resting place.’⁵²⁹ A.T. Lincoln notes, “Now in Hebrews the final goal of salvation can be depicted in spatial terms. The consummation rest is pictured in terms of a heavenly resting place, the antitype of the resting place in the promised land referred to in Psalm 95:11. Again, as we have seen, this fits the pattern of the letter of Hebrews where the salvation of the life to come is viewed in terms of heavenly localities such as the sanctuary and the city.”⁵³⁰ Similarly, Khiok-Khng Yeo argues, “the term ‘rest’ used in this pericope is most probably under the influence of rabbinic exegesis and Jewish apocalyptic literature on Psalm 95:11 to mean an eschatological resting place associated with the heavenly promised land, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the heavenly sanctuary.”⁵³¹ For others, namely those who argue for a Gnostic context, the discussion of ‘rest’ involves a different conception of spatiality. Rather than imagining ‘rest’ in terms of a ‘heavenly resting place,’ they imagine that humans return to the ‘rest’ from which they previously emerged.

The third discussion commonly associated with the meaning of ‘rest’ is that of its temporal nature. Here, interpreters ask, ‘When will the addressees receive the promised rest?’ Again, two conclusions dominate the discussion. For many, the ‘rest’ of the addressees lies in the ‘future.’⁵³² For example, Harold Weiss notes, “For Hebrews ... God’s eternal rest has been available within creation since the time when he completed his work, and believers will not enjoy God’s rest until they cease from their own labors.”⁵³³ For Walter C. Kaiser, the

⁵²⁸ Thompson 1982: 89.

⁵²⁹ For examples of those who have argued that ‘rest’ includes a spatial dimension, see: Hofius 1991: 266; Lincoln 1982: 210; and Yeo 1991:11.

⁵³⁰ Lincoln 1982: 210.

⁵³¹ Yeo 1991: 11.

⁵³² For examples of those who have argued that the ‘rest’ of the addressees is a future event, see: Baurneind 1965: 628; Hofius 1993: 219; Kaiser 1973: 149; Oberholtzer 1988: 194; and Weiss 1996: 687.

⁵³³ Weiss 1996: 687.

'rest' for God's people does not begin when their labours cease, for such 'rest' remains a 'future' event even today. On the contrary, the dead enter into this rest after their resurrection. Kaiser explains, "The rest of God, lost in the fall, again rejected by the older wilderness generation and subsequently by their erring children is still future to us in our day." Not all interpreters, however, understand the 'rest' to be an entirely 'future' event. For some, the addressees of Hebrews are understood to have been experiencing an 'already/not yet' dynamic with respect to the 'rest.'⁵³⁴ H.A. Lombard defends this position, "By the power of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, this reality of 'rest' converges at the Eschaton (End time) and is solely realizable in the closest communion with God here and also hereafter (i.e. the present and the future-present). The 'rest' which has always existed in God since the beginning of time, exists in part in this un-'rest'-ful life *and* is perfected in the Hereafter as a possession of the people of God."⁵³⁵

While each of the three questions concerning the meaning of 'rest' in Hebrews is important, the third area of the discussion holds particular importance for this thesis. If the 'rest' in Hebrews has a temporal dynamic, is such rest a 'future' or an 'already/not yet' reality? As noted above, interpreters have long debated this question and have been far from unanimous with regard to an answer. This is not because of an ambiguity within the text, but is because both interpretations are based upon problematic conceptions of time. For an interpreter with a future temporal orientation, there is often great confusion over a text which seems to show a connection between the 'present' and the 'future.' In fact, such a temporal dynamic has been described as 'paradoxical.' How can something be both a 'present' reality and a 'future' promise? For interpreters with a future temporal orientation, the 'present' and the 'future' are commonly understood to be two separate periods of time. How then can something (i.e. the promised 'rest') overlap both periods of time?⁵³⁶ Such an understanding of time,

⁵³⁴ For examples of those who have argued that the 'rest' of the addressees has an 'already/not yet' dynamic, see: Barrett 1964: 372; Lincoln 1982: 210; Lombard 1971: 67; Kenneth Schenck 2003: 10-12; and Yeo 1991: 3.

⁵³⁵ Lombard 1971: 67.

⁵³⁶ For a critique of the 'now and not yet' understanding of time in Romans, see: Esler 2003b:

'already/not yet,' is quite insufficient when dealing with a text which likely reflects a present temporal orientation.

At this point, a crucial observation must be made. While neither the 'future' nor the 'already/not yet' understanding of the nature of time in Hebrews is appropriate, a greater problem lies with the culturally biased assumption of future temporal orientation. *Most interpreters have worked with the understanding that all cultures understand the nature of time in the same way (i.e. in the same way that the interpreters understand the nature of time).* This assumption is surprising, given the attention that temporal orientation has received in various other disciplines. As noted in chapter 4, anthropologists,⁵³⁷ sociologists,⁵³⁸ and social psychologists⁵³⁹ have all provided extensive analyses to the issue of temporal orientation. This thesis, therefore, stands in sharp contrast to other interpretations, for I will provide a reading of Hebrews which takes seriously the probably present temporal orientation of both the author and the addressees.

Finally, in my analysis of the meaning of 'faith,' I observed that the author emphasised its social function. Rather than a focus upon modern theological concerns, such as 'Christology' or 'eschatology,' the author emphasised the role of faith as a dominant identity descriptor of the addressees of Hebrews. Faith is what defined the identity of the addressees and it was faith that differentiated the ingroup from the 'others.' Therefore, I concluded that an adequate analysis of faith must include an analysis of the social function of faith in the Hebrews. Similarly, the author did not describe or define 'rest.' Again, rather than a focus upon modern theological concerns, such as 'eschatology,' the author emphasised the social function of 'rest.' For example, the forthcoming result, or consequence, of the addressees' continued faithfulness would be entrance into God's 'rest.' Throughout Hebrews 3:1-4:13, the author repeatedly

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⁵³⁷ For a thorough discussion of the anthropology of time, see: Gell 1992.

⁵³⁸ For an overview of the discussion of time from a sociological perspective, see: Adam 1990; Adam 1994: 503-526.

⁵³⁹ For a thorough introduction, see: McGrath and Tschan 2004.

compared the faithfulness of the addressees to the faithlessness of the wilderness generation. Further, the author's comparison of faithfulness was directly related to the entrance or prohibition of God's promised 'rest.' As will be seen below, it was here that the author placed singular emphasis concerning 'rest.'

7.3 Present Temporal Orientation: A Brief Review

Pierre Bourdieu defines the 'present' as "the lapse of time which constitutes ... the whole of an action seen in the unity of a perception including both the retained past and the anticipated future."⁵⁴⁰ For example, the life of a garment extends back to the time it was made and extends forward to the anticipated, or forthcoming, future. Further, the forthcoming is not conceived of as including a number of possibilities for which the individual may select and control. Rather, the forthcoming is conceived of as the consequence of continued existence. In the case of the life of a garment, the forthcoming is the decay of the garment. The consideration of the forthcoming, or foresight, is based upon an imitation of antecedent events. For example, when one considers the forthcoming decay of the garment, this foresight is based upon antecedent experiences (i.e. the life of previous garments) or the wisdom and values transmitted by the ancients (i.e. teachings regarding clothing). While the decay, or wearing out of the garment, is that which is forthcoming, or anticipated, there may also be an 'imaginary' future. The 'imaginary' future is that time which lies beyond the horizon of present experience. This 'imaginary time' is separated from the concrete experience of the social group and is expressed in abstract terms. Furthermore, the imaginary time is closed to human beings. There are several examples of imaginary time in the New Testament (cf. Matt 24:36; Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7). In Mark 13:32, the author notes that nobody knows when heaven and earth will pass away. Just as 'imaginary time' exists beyond the anticipated, or forthcoming, 'imaginary time' also existed before the antecedent, or retained, past. Again, the 'imaginary' is that which is separated from concrete experience and is closed to human beings. The creation of the world is an example of an

⁵⁴⁰ Bourdieu 1963: 59-60.

event which took place in imaginary time.⁵⁴¹

7.4 The Role of the 'Antecedent' in Hebrews

There are two types of antecedent experiences in Hebrews. First, the addressees of Hebrews had shared, or collective, experiences. For example, the addressees had 'laid a foundation' in the basic teachings of Christ (Hebrews 6:1-2). Further, the addressees had been 'enlightened' and had 'struggled with suffering' (Hebrews 10:32-33). The addressees had shown 'compassion to prisoners' and had 'joyfully accepted the plundering of their property' (Hebrews 10:34). While such experiences might shed light on the identity of the addressees and their social context, the references are unfortunately quite vague. In short, while the author acknowledged that the addressees had been enlightened and had suffered, little else can be known. A second type of antecedent experience, on the other hand, received significant emphasis in Hebrews. The faithfulness of 'past' or antecedent ingroup members was meant to inform the faithfulness of the addressees. In Hebrews 3:1-6, the faithfulness of both Moses and Jesus was meant to encourage the faithfulness of the addressees (Hebrews 3:7-4:13). Just as, the faithfulness of the 'great cloud of witnesses' in Hebrews 11 was meant to encourage that of the addressees (Hebrews 12:1-2.). In this emphasis upon the antecedent faithfulness of 'past' ingroup members, we encounter an example of the author's integration of time and identity. The dominant identity descriptor of the addressees, that of 'faithfulness,' was encouraged and strengthened by antecedent faithfulness. While the analysis of antecedent faithfulness and its relationship to identity will inform the discussion of the social identity of the addressees, we must first investigate the history of this discussion of the 'antecedent' in the interpretation of Hebrews 12:1-2.

Not surprisingly, there has been no discussion of the 'antecedent' in Hebrews. This is, of course, due to the fact that there has yet to be an interpretation of the text which takes seriously the present temporal orientation of

⁵⁴¹ For an examples of an interpreter who has included a description of 'imaginary time,' see: Malina 1996b: 179-214.

both the author and the addressees. While there has not been a consideration of the 'antecedent' in Hebrews, there has been some debate over the nature of the 'past' examples of faithfulness in Hebrews. However, it is precisely here that the limitations of previous interpretations become most visible. When an interpreter concludes that the 'great cloud of witnesses' served as 'past' examples of faithfulness, the interpreter is bound to a conception of time in which the 'past' and the 'present' are understood to be two separate periods. In addition, the interpreter is bound to a conception of time in which the 'past' does not directly inform the 'present.' In other words, the nature of the 'past' examples of faithfulness in Hebrews has only been considered from the perspective of future temporal orientation. With this in mind, it is nonetheless important to consider the previous interpretation of such 'past' examples.

In Hebrews 12:1-2, the author describes the relationship between the 'great cloud of witnesses' and the addressees of Hebrews. While the reference to the relationship is brief, three distinct discussions arise from the verses. First, what is the dominant image used by the author? Second, what is the 'nature' of the relationship? And, third, how is one to interpret the contrast (or comparison) between Jesus and the 'great cloud of witnesses?' With regard to the first question, two proposals are offered. Some interpreters understand the author as describing the relationship in terms of a race, with the 'witnesses' serving as spectators and the addressees acting as the runners, or participants.⁵⁴² Other interpreters understand the author as describing the 'great cloud' as 'witnesses' to the power and place of faith.⁵⁴³ With regard to the second question, the discussion may be tracked along a sort of continuum. While some interpreters understand the nature of the relationship to have been one of continuity (i.e. the addressees were to understand themselves to be in 'real community' with the 'great cloud of witnesses'),⁵⁴⁴ others understand the nature of the relationship to have been one of

⁵⁴² For examples of the interpretation of 'witnesses' as 'spectators,' see: Davies 1967: 118; and D. Guthrie 1983:248.

⁵⁴³ For examples of the interpretation of the 'great cloud' as examples of faithfulness, see: F.F. Bruce 1990: 333; Gordon 2000: 148; and R. Smith 1984: 155

⁵⁴⁴ R. Smith 1984: 17.

discontinuity (i.e. the 'great cloud of witnesses' were insufficient examples of faithfulness).⁵⁴⁵ Finally, the third question, perhaps ironically, produces a sort of consensus. Jesus is understood by most interpreters to have served as the supreme example of faithfulness. This consensus is ironic, for most interpreters of Hebrews arrive at this conclusion after taking very different paths.

What was the dominant image employed by the author in Hebrews 12:1-2? Many interpreters answer this question by focusing upon the athletic or racing theme which is present in the text. For example, Donald Guthrie notes, "Although the first two verses are a continuation of the preceding chapter, they bring out in a more direct way the difference between the old order and new. The heroes of the past are now viewed as spectators, whereas the Christians are in the arena. The focus shifts to the present, but the value of the examples of the past is incorporated into the total picture."⁵⁴⁶ For Guthrie, the addressees of Hebrews were 'Jewish Christians.' Further, Guthrie concludes that the 'great cloud of witnesses' were meant to represent the old covenant, or 'Judaism,' while the addressees are to be understood as having been 'Christians.' The relationship then is between two distinct groups. Further, while the examples of the past have 'value' for the 'Christians,' the two are still to be interpreted as two distinct groups or 'religions.'

While many interpreters acknowledge the author's use of athletic or racing imagery in Hebrews 12:1-2, others find the author to have used another, or a different, dominant theme or image. For Robert Smith, the author placed an emphasis not upon the 'witnesses' as 'spectators,' but upon the 'great cloud' as 'witnesses' to faithfulness and endurance.

It may be that our author pictures them as spectators sitting in the bleachers watching Christians run their race, keeping their eyes on them. But another interpretation is at least as likely. The author certainly regards those heroes of the past as 'well attested by their faith' (11:39), people who bear the stamp of God's approval because of their faithful endurance, people who bear witness to the greatest of faith, people whose stories must surely inspire faith and perseverance. They have borne witness in their

⁵⁴⁵ Lane 1991b: 406.

⁵⁴⁶ D. Guthrie 1983:248.

own lives to the grandeur of faith, and so their lives cheer the readers on.⁵⁴⁷

Regardless of how one answers the first question, one must still address the second question. What is the 'nature' of the relationship between the 'great cloud of witnesses' and the addressees? As noted above, there are a great variety of possible answers to this important question. For some, the relationship is one of continuity. For example, Robert Smith observes, "... the author never uses the words *Jews* or *Christians*. Indeed this familiar distinction is foreign to his outlook. One of his high hopes is that his readers will prove to be in real continuity and community with the faithful heroes of the past, Hebrews as well as non-Hebrews, like Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Melchizedek."⁵⁴⁸ Quite dissimilar to Smith's emphasis upon continuity is the conclusion of William Lane. For Lane, the examples of faithfulness 'under the old covenant' are finally insufficient.⁵⁴⁹

Ironically, the variety of answers to the second question actually produces a sort of consensus with regard to the third question. How does one interpret the contrast (or comparison) between the 'great cloud of witnesses' and Jesus? For those who see a continuity between the faith examples of Hebrews 11 and the addressees, the role of Jesus has not proven problematic. Jesus is the 'supreme' faith example. This conclusion does not require the interpreter to dismiss the witness of the 'past' faithful. On the other hand, for the interpreters who understand the faithfulness of those under the 'old covenant' as insufficient, the role of Jesus is again made clear. Jesus is the supreme (and the only 'sufficient') example of faithfulness. Therefore, regardless of the path taken to this discussion, most interpreters conclude that Jesus serves as the supreme example of faithfulness. In this case, a few examples should suffice.

Simon Kistemaker notes, "As contestants engaged in running the race, we have no time to look around. We must keep our eyes focused on Jesus and must

⁵⁴⁷ R. Smith 1984: 155.

⁵⁴⁸ R. Smith 1984: 17.

⁵⁴⁹ Lane 1991b: 406.

do so without distraction.”⁵⁵⁰ Therefore, “The writer of Hebrews does not place the name *Jesus* among those of the heroes of faith; he gives him special recognition, for he calls him ‘the author and perfecter of our faith.’”⁵⁵¹ For J.H. Davies, “He [Jesus] is the supreme example of faith, and the climax of the list of heroes.”⁵⁵² Likewise Robert. P. Gordon notes, “Yet if the ‘Hebrews’ are to run their race mindful of the examples of these ‘witnesses’ to faith, they must nevertheless focus on Jesus who, having himself triumphed, was exalted to the heavenly throne.”⁵⁵³ Later, Gordon observes, “He [the author] does not put Christ on the same level as those whose faith has been celebrated in ch. 11; instead, he describes him as ‘the pioneer and perfecter of faith,’ by which he probably means something like ‘the one with whom faith begins and ends’ - itself a paraphrase that is not completely transparent.”⁵⁵⁴ Jean Héring concludes, “12:2 at last adds Jesus Himself to the cloud of witnesses of the old covenant. He is the head or leader (‘archegos’) of faith (‘tes pisteos’), which means that He is something like the team-captain of Christians.”⁵⁵⁵ Finally, R. McL. Wilson calls Jesus the ‘supreme exemplar’⁵⁵⁶

In summary, Hebrews 12:1-2 has produced a variety of different readings. While some emphasise the athletic theme of the text, others emphasise the faithfulness of the witnesses. While some emphasise the continuity between the ‘great cloud’ and the addressees, others emphasise the insufficient nature of the witness of those under the ‘old covenant.’ Finally, most interpreters, regardless of their perspectives on the first issues, conclude that Jesus serves as the supreme faith example. In contrast to other interpretations of Hebrews 12:1-2, I will read this section employing a model of present temporal orientation. When the probable temporal orientation of the addressees is considered, the second and third questions, or discussions, become quite clear.

⁵⁵⁰ Kistemaker 1984: 368.

⁵⁵¹ Kistemaker 1984: 368.

⁵⁵² Davies 1967: 119. See also: Ellingworth 1993: 639; and P.E. Hughes 1977: 518-525.

⁵⁵³ Gordon 2000: 148.

⁵⁵⁴ Gordon 2000: 149.

⁵⁵⁵ Héring 1970:111

⁵⁵⁶ R. McL. Wilson 1987: 220.

What is the role of the antecedent, or retained 'past,' in Hebrews from the perspective of present temporal orientation? The author describes the faith of the 'great cloud of witnesses' as an antecedent to the faithfulness of the addressees.⁵⁵⁷ The author does not describe the faithfulness of the 'witnesses' as being in the 'past,' removed from the experiences of the addressees. Rather, the author's description of this faithfulness is that of an antecedent, faithfulness which directly bears upon, and even brings about, faithfulness in the addressees. Just as making a garment is the antecedent to wearing the garment (and eventually wearing out the garment), the faithfulness of the witnesses acted as the antecedent to the faithfulness of the addressees. Evidence of this use of the antecedent is found in Hebrews 12:1-2. Immediately after offering numerous examples of faithfulness, the author describes the addressees as having been surrounded by 'so great a cloud of witnesses.' Further, being surrounded by the faith witnesses, the addressees are to 'run with perseverance the race that is set before them.' Therefore, the witnesses are not described as 'past' examples, but as antecedents, examples which still surround the addressees and still affect the experiences of the ingroup. In short, the faith of the antecedent 'witnesses' makes possible 'running with perseverance.'

Hebrews 12:2 continues by emphasising the faithfulness of Jesus. As with the 'great cloud of witnesses,' the faith of Jesus continues to inform the experiences of the addressees. In the same way that the faith of the antecedent 'witnesses' makes possible 'running with perseverance,' the faith of Jesus informs the manner in which the addressees will 'run their race.' The faith of the witnesses and the faith of Jesus, therefore, are not simply past examples, things to learn from, but are expressions of an active faith which continues to serve as an antecedent to the faith of the addressees.

For modern readers of Hebrews with a future temporal orientation, conceptualising the nature of an antecedent may be difficult. However, Hebrews

⁵⁵⁷ For examples of the references to the 'great cloud of witnesses,' and their antecedent experiences, see: 1:1; 3:1, 2, 5, 6; 4:7, 8; 5:1, 4, 6, 10; 6:13, 20; 7:1, 5, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 20, 23, 27, 28; 8:3; 9:6, 7, 19, 25; 10:2, 11; 11:2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 17, 20, 22, 23, 24, 29, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36; 12:1, 21, 24; and 13:11

12:1-2 offers an insightful example of the retained past. Within future temporal orientation, the past holds less significance than the future or even the present. When the past is considered, it is mined for 'lessons' or 'wisdom.' Within present temporal orientation, however, the past holds greater significance. When past actions are considered, they are believed to be an important part of one's current experiences. For example, 'we could not be clothed if we had not made our garments.' The act of sewing is not a remote past event to be forgotten or to be considered only when relevant. The act of sewing is an integral part of the 'present experiences of the one clothed.' Hebrews 12:1-2 describes the 'great cloud of witnesses' from such a present temporal orientation. The characters who populate Hebrews 11 are not simply past examples that one can learn from, they continue to surround the addressees. Further, because of them, the addressees have the strength to 'run their race.' In short, the witnesses are an integral part of the 'present.'⁵⁵⁸ Modern Christians might even choose to describe their faith in terms of 'faith antecedents.' For example, 'I am faithful because my parents are faithful.' In this case, parents do not serve simply as past examples, examples which one might choose to follow. Rather, the faith of previous generations directly bears upon the faith of subsequent generations. In this case, families literally pass along their faithfulness from one generation to another.

There are two additional observations regarding the author's use of the antecedent which prove to be critical in the discussion of social identity in Hebrews. First, the description of the antecedent compliments the discussion of prototypicality in Hebrews.⁵⁵⁹ Rather than understanding the faith of Jesus as being 'prototypical' and the faith of Moses and the 'great cloud of witnesses' as having been superseded, the discussion of relative prototypicality describes the faith of Jesus as being the 'prototype' with all other examples of faithfulness held in comparison with this perfect expression of faith. This means that while Jesus was faithful as a Son, Moses was still faithful as a servant (Hebrews 3:1-6).

⁵⁵⁸ Philip F. Esler provides an example which is similar to this understanding of antecedent faithfulness. Esler argues that the author of Hebrews regards the 'great cloud of witnesses' as alive and living in the heavenly city. Esler forthcoming, c: 199-208.

⁵⁵⁹ For the discussion of prototypicality in Hebrews, see section 6.8.

Further, the faith of both Jesus and Moses (and the 'great cloud of witnesses') serves to inform the faith of the addressees. Second, an understanding of the author's use of the antecedent in Hebrews makes impossible a 'Jewish-Christian' polemic within the text. As explained in Chapter 6, many interpreters understand the comparison of the faith of Jesus with the faith of Moses as a comparison between 'Judaism' and 'Christianity.' Further, this comparison is understood to be an argument for the superiority of 'Christianity.' However, when both the faith of Moses and the faith of Jesus are understood to be antecedents to the faithfulness of the addressees, the author can no longer be viewed as having offered an argument for the superiority of the faith of Jesus at the expense of the faith of Moses (or the 'great cloud of witnesses').

Finally, it is also possible to analyse the antecedent experiences of the outgroup. The author describes the outgroup, the unfaithful, as having antecedents or a retained past. In fact, the central image of the unfaithful in Hebrews is that of the 'wilderness generation' or the 'rebellious.' In Hebrews 3:16, the author describes those who heard and yet were rebellious.

In the same way that the faithfulness of the 'great cloud of witnesses' serves as an antecedent for the faithfulness of the addressees, the unfaithfulness of the 'wilderness generation' is described as an antecedent to the unfaithfulness of the outgroup. As noted in Chapter 5, the outgroup was likely a symbolic group. So, can symbolic groups have antecedents? Yes, just as the ingroup understands the 'other' as unfaithful, they also understand that this unfaithfulness was passed along (i.e. 'they were unfaithful, they are unfaithful, and they will be unfaithful').

To summarise, the author described the faith of both Jesus and the 'great cloud of witnesses' as antecedents to the faith of the addressees. This observation holds a two-fold significance. First, just as an individual with a present temporal orientation might view the present as including both the retained past (making a garment) and the anticipated future (the decay, or wearing out of the garment), the author describes the faithfulness of the addressees as including both the retained past (the faith of Jesus and the 'great cloud of witnesses') and the anticipated future (the promised 'rest'). Second, just as the retained past of the individual makes possible the anticipated future of the garment, the retained past of the

addressees (the faith of Jesus and the 'great cloud of witnesses') makes possible the anticipated future of the addressees ('running the race with perseverance').

7.5 The Role of the 'Forthcoming' in Hebrews

There are two types of forthcoming experiences in Hebrews.⁵⁶⁰ First, the author indicates that the addressees are experiencing (or will experience) some type of suffering (cf. Hebrews 10:32-39). Such suffering is described as a forthcoming result of their faithfulness. While such suffering may inform the discussion of the identity and the social context of the addressees, it is unfortunately quite vague. A second type of forthcoming experience, on the other hand, receives significant emphasis in Hebrews. The author repeatedly refers to the forthcoming promised 'rest.' While the analysis of the forthcoming 'rest' and its relationship to identity will inform the discussion of the social identity of the addressees, we must first investigate the history of the discussion of the 'forthcoming' in Hebrews.

Just as there is not a discussion of the 'antecedent' in Hebrews, there is not a discussion of the 'forthcoming.' In addition, just as the 'past' in Hebrews is considered from a perspective of future temporal orientation, the 'future' is also considered from this perspective. Therefore, as with the discussion of the 'past' in Hebrews, the discussion of the 'future' employs a conception of time in which the 'present' and the 'future' are two separate periods of time. Again, it is precisely here that the limitations of other interpretations become most visible. As noted above, whether an interpreter concludes that the promised 'rest' in Hebrews is in the 'future,' or whether it is decided that the 'rest' has an 'already/not yet' dynamic, the interpreter is bound to a conception of time in which the 'present' and the 'future' are understood to be necessarily separate from one another. In addition, the interpreter is bound to a conception of time in which 'future' goals inform 'present' behaviour. This means that the 'future' goal of the promised 'rest' is meant to inform the 'present' faithfulness of the addressees. In

⁵⁶⁰ For examples of the references to the forthcoming, or anticipated, future of the addressees, see: 4:1, 3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 15, 28; 10:25, 35, 36, 39; and 11:26.

short, for individuals with a future temporal orientation, the 'future drives the present.' Such an assumption is clearly visible in the interpretation of William L. Lane. Lane observes, "The group is exhorted to steadfast endurance. They are to exercise eschatological faith, which appropriates the future and acts in the present in the light of the certainty of that future (11:1-12:3)."⁵⁶¹ A.T. Lincoln works with the same assumption. Lincoln notes, "Now in Hebrews the final goal of salvation can be depicted in spatial terms."⁵⁶² By describing 'salvation' as a 'goal,' the future temporal orientation of Lincoln is made clear. For him, the 'future' holds the goal toward which all 'present' behaviour must strive. Within this understanding of time is an equally important assumption, the 'present' and the 'future' are two separate periods of time. While one can strive in the 'present' toward a 'future' goal, that goal remains separate regardless of its temporal proximity.

So what is at stake when an interpreter reads Hebrews with a future temporal orientation? Interpreters with a future temporal orientation tend to place an emphasis upon the 'future goal.' In the case of Hebrews, an emphasis has often been placed upon the promised 'rest.' However, an interpretation which takes seriously the probable present temporal orientation of the author and the addressees will place an emphasis upon the 'present.' In the case of Hebrews, the antecedent faithfulness of both the 'great cloud of witnesses' and of Jesus was meant to inform the faithfulness of the addressees. The 'rest,' then, is that which comes forth from this continued faithfulness. This is, together, understood to be the 'present.' Most importantly, the emphasis of the author was on the 'faithfulness' of the addressees (i.e. the author described antecedent faithfulness and the forthcoming result of their faithfulness), rather than upon the 'rest.' In short, an understanding of the intended emphasis of the author is at stake when one employs a future temporal orientation.

What, then, is the role of the 'forthcoming' in Hebrews? In Hebrews, the author describes the promised rest as being a consequence for continued

⁵⁶¹ Lane 1991a: ci.

⁵⁶² Lincoln 1982: 210.

faithfulness.⁵⁶³ In Hebrews 10:36, he explains that by ‘doing the will of God’ the addressees ‘will receive what is promised.’ In Hebrews 10:39, he explains that the forthcoming future of those who ‘shrink back’ is destruction while the addressees are those who have faith and will preserve their souls. In both examples, the forthcoming (i.e. ‘that which is promised’ and ‘keeping their souls’) is described as the consequence for continued faithfulness.

In Hebrews, *the author never attempts to motivate the addressees to remain faithful by emphasising a future goal. Rather, the author emphasised that present faithfulness brings about the future goal.* As noted above, this distinction appears quite subtle. However, the difference is most significant. If this text were written to a social group with a future orientation, we would expect the author to emphasise the attractive qualities of a future goal in order to motivate the addressees to perform a desired behaviour. In Hebrews, on the other hand, the author continually emphasises that faithfulness achieves what is promised. In Hebrews 4:3a, the author describes himself and the addressees as those who have been faithful. Further, he notes that the ‘rest’ is the forthcoming result of that faithfulness. Similarly, he continually emphasises that the forthcoming result of rebelliousness, or faithlessness, is the prohibition of the promised rest. In Hebrews 3:18, he makes clear the relationship between the unfaithful and the inability to enter God’s rest. The implications of this observation are two-fold. First, the emphasis upon the forthcoming rest as a consequence of faithfulness serves as evidence that the addressees were, indeed, a present oriented social group. Second, this emphasis helps a modern reader to understand the motivation of the author and the addressees. They were not motivated to remain faithful in order to achieve a distant goal, on the contrary, they understood that the promised rest was the consequence of their faithfulness.

In Hebrews, the author asserts a conception of low internal causal attribution. In other words, he had little belief in personal control over future

⁵⁶³ For examples of the description of the promised rest as being a consequence of continued faithfulness, see: 3:18, 19; 4:2, 6; 10:26, 27, 29, 38, 39; 11:6, 7; 12:17, and 25.

outcomes.⁵⁶⁴ This observation may appear to directly contradict the above two observations concerning the promised rest. If the promised rest was understood to have been the consequence of faithfulness, how could the author and the addressees have had little belief in personal control? In fact, would not the addressees have felt greater control? While such questions seem reasonable to a future oriented individual, the present oriented individual does, in fact, feel little personal control over the forthcoming. For example, while antecedent experiences will tell the garment owner that the decay is forthcoming, or the consequence of continued wear, the owner does not feel personal control over whether or not the decay occurs. In the case of Hebrews, the author emphasises that the promised rest is the consequence of continued faithfulness. However, God served as the judge. It is God who is ultimately in control over who will be judged worthy of the promised rest (cf. Hebrews 4:1).

Perhaps most importantly, a thorough understanding of the concept of 'forthcoming,' is necessary for a reading of Hebrews 11:1. This verse, this definition of 'faith,' is also based upon the idea of the certainty of the forthcoming. Here, the author describes faith as 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.' From a future temporal perspective, this is a quite difficult concept. How can one be 'sure' of something that is in the 'future,' that is 'unseen?' From a present temporal perspective, however, this is another example of the 'forthcoming.' As sure as one is that the clothes he is wearing will 'wear out,' a Christ-follower is that the promised 'rest' will follow a life lived faithfully. In this case, then, 'faith' is the certainty with which one understands the forthcoming promise.

Finally, it is also possible to analyse the forthcoming experiences of the outgroup. The author describes the forthcoming or anticipated future of the unfaithful. In Hebrews 3:18-19, he indicates that the forthcoming future of the unfaithful was the inability to enter the rest. In the same way that the promised 'rest' is described as the forthcoming experience of the addressees, the prohibition

⁵⁶⁴ Individuals with a present temporal orientation tend to have low internal causal attribution. For a discussion of this, see: Jones 1988: 21-38.

from such 'rest' is described as the forthcoming experience of the outgroup. As noted in Chapter 5, the outgroup was likely a symbolic group. So, can symbolic groups have forthcoming experiences? Yes, just as the ingroup understood the 'other' as unfaithful, they also understood that this unfaithfulness had dire consequences (i.e. 'they are unfaithful and the consequence of their unfaithfulness is prohibition from the God's rest').

To summarise, the role of the 'forthcoming' in Hebrews plays an integral part in understanding the social identity of the addressees. Both the author and the addressees understood that the consequence of faithfulness was the promised rest. This understanding was meant to motivate the addressees to continue in their faithfulness. However, neither the author nor the addressees believed that they were in control of the anticipated future. It was God, acting as the judge, who was in control of the forthcoming promised rest.

7.6 The Role of 'Foresight' in Hebrews

Individuals with a present temporal orientation and individuals with a future temporal orientation tend to consider their futures in very different ways. In their analysis of American culture, Lowell D. Holmes and Ellen Rhoads Holmes explain that the United States is future oriented.⁵⁶⁵ Their description of future orientation is placed within a discussion of differences in temporal orientation. While those with a present temporal orientation tend to consider their own futures by considering the experiences of their ancestors and traditions, Americans do not. Holmes and Holmes explain, "Each generation lacks confidence in the methods of the former [generation] but has no dependable solutions of its own."⁵⁶⁶ Because future oriented individuals tend to neglect examples from the past and the traditions or norms of their social groups when exploring their future, they are constantly required to devise new solutions for repeating experiences.

It is precisely at this point that many modern interpreters of Hebrews have

⁵⁶⁵ Holmes and Holmes 2002: 12.

⁵⁶⁶ Holmes and Holmes 2002: 13.

problems with the text. Because modern interpreters tend to work with the assumption of future temporal orientation, they tend to examine the text for evidence of a future 'goal.' Next, they tend to expect that the author would have written to convince the addressees to pursue and eventually achieve that goal. Implicit in this assumption is the expectation that such 'exhortation' would have involved a description of the advantages of the future 'goal.'

However, *every time the author of Hebrews mentions the forthcoming 'rest,' it is done within the context of 'past' or antecedent faithfulness.* As will be argued below, the description of the 'rest' in Hebrews 3:7-4:13 is placed within the context of the antecedent faithfulness of both Moses and Jesus (and is contrasted with the antecedent unfaithfulness of the 'wilderness generation'). The description of addressees' forthcoming future in Hebrews 10:32-38 is placed within the context of their own antecedent endurance and faithfulness. In Hebrews 12:1-2, the author urges the addressees to run their race with perseverance. In this case, the author does not describe the 'prize' or the 'goal,' but rather describes their antecedents in faithfulness (i.e. both the 'great cloud of witnesses' and Jesus).

So, how does the assumption of future temporal orientation misinform modern interpretations of Hebrews? In short, it leads to two 'problems' with the interpretation of the text. First, some modern readers attempt to identify the nature of the future 'goal' in Hebrews. As outlined above, some interpreters struggle with the meaning and nature of the 'rest.' From what source did the addressees derive their understanding of the 'rest' (i.e. Gnostic or Old Testament)? What was the temporal nature of the 'rest' (i.e. 'future' or 'already/not yet')? Does the 'rest' have a spatial dynamic? As further noted, many other interpreters avoid this discussion, perhaps as Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. notes, because of the 'sheer difficulty of the concept.' In the end, both the debate over the nature of the 'rest' and the silence regarding the subject may be due to one simple observation. The author did not describe the 'rest.' Rather than place an emphasis upon the 'rest' as a future goal, as an individual with a future temporal orientation might have done, the author emphasises antecedent faithfulness. This observation introduces the second 'problem' with modern

interpretations of Hebrews. Stated simply, while most interpreters acknowledge the presence of faith 'examples' or 'heroes,' few, if any, provide an explanation for their presence which takes seriously the probable present temporal orientation of the addressees. As noted above, many interpreters acknowledge that the author described the 'great cloud' as either 'spectators' who were watching the addressees run their race, or as 'witnesses' who showed the power and place of faithfulness. This, unfortunately, is where the analysis ends. As will be seen below, if one takes seriously the present temporal orientation of both the author and the addressees, an interpreter is able to better understand why the author described the faithfulness of the 'great cloud.'

What is the role of 'foresight' in Hebrews? To begin, the discussion of foresight seems to present another contradiction within the model of present temporal orientation. As explained above, present oriented individuals tend to localize goals and actions in the present, with their behaviour occurring in the present to achieve proximal goals. Further, they tend to believe that they have little personal control over the outcomes of their actions. And yet, we know that present oriented individuals speak of and are concerned with their anticipated futures. In fact, the author gives great attention to the anticipated futures of both the addressees and the unfaithful. If present oriented individuals do, indeed, localize their goals and actions in the present, how are we to account for their consideration of and preparation for their anticipated futures? It is the concept of 'foresight' that addresses this important issue. In short, how do present oriented individuals conceptualise their anticipated futures?

Here, the work of Pierre Bourdieu is especially helpful. Bourdieu explains that "to have foresight is to follow a well marked road and not to explore new ways; it is to conform to a model transmitted by the ancestors and approved by the community."⁵⁶⁷ For example, when the wearer of a garment considers the anticipated decay of the garment, he does not seek new and inventive ways to wear his garment. On the contrary, the behaviour of the individual conforms to the practices of the ancestors. This observation is critical to the reading of

⁵⁶⁷ Bourdieu 1963: 64.

Hebrews. If the addressees were to consider their anticipated futures, the promised rest, they would likely have relied upon the experiences of their ancestors. This is, in fact, the case in Hebrews. I argued above that the 'great cloud of witnesses' act as antecedents to the 'present' experience of the addressees. While this is true, it appears that they also act as the antecedents upon which the foresight of the addressees was based. For example, both Hebrews 3:7-4:13 and Hebrews 10:19-39 are sections in which the author encourages the addressees to remain faithful and warn of the forthcoming fate of the unfaithful. Further, they are both sections in which the author reminds the addressees that the promised rest is the forthcoming future for the faithful. More importantly, both sections ground the foresight of the addressees in the antecedent's experiences of faithfulness. Immediately before the first section, Hebrews 3:7-4:13, the author compares the faith of Moses with the prototypical faith of Jesus (Heb 3:1-6). Furthermore, he explicitly links this description of the faithfulness of both Moses and Jesus with the 'present' faith of the addressees. This explicit link between the foresight of the addressees and the experiences of the ancestors, or antecedents, is accomplished in three ways. First, in Hebrews 3:1, the author begins by asking the addressees to 'consider Jesus.' By asking the addressees to 'consider Jesus,' he links the discussion of the faithfulness of the addressees with the prototypical faithfulness of Jesus. A second example occurs in Hebrews 3:6. As noted earlier, in Hebrews 3:1-6, Moses is described as faithful in the house of God as a servant. Christ is described as faithful in the house of God as a Son. In Hebrews 3:6, the addressees are described as the house of God if they remain confident. Here, the author again describes the faithfulness of the addressees and their anticipated future with the examples of both Moses and Jesus. Finally, the transition between Hebrews 3:1-6 and Hebrews 3:7 makes clear that the examples of the faithfulness of both Moses and Jesus are to be called upon as the addressees consider their forthcoming future. Hebrews 3:1-6 describes the faith of both Jesus and Moses. In Hebrews 3:7, the author begins with the transition word, 'therefore' (Διό). This transition connects the previous examples of faithfulness with the author's command that the addressees remain faithful.

In Hebrews 6:12, the author warns the addressees 'not to be sluggish, but

to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.’ Immediately following this warning, he describes God’s promise to Abraham and Abraham’s response (Hebrews 6:13-15). Again, the addressees are to consider their own faithfulness and the forthcoming promise, by ‘looking back.’

In Hebrews 10:19-39, the author again explicitly relies upon the experiences of the ancestors in his description of the addressees’ forthcoming future. When the addressees are to consider their anticipated future, when they are to use foresight, their thoughts are to turn again to examples of faithfulness from the ‘past.’ This is most clearly seen in the transition between Hebrews 10:39 and 11:1. In Hebrews 10:39, the author describes the addressees as ‘ones who have faith.’ Further, he describes the anticipated future of the faithful as those who ‘keep their souls.’ Next, he provides a short description of faith (Hebrews 11:1) which is followed by the explanation that by faith the ‘ancestors received divine approval’ (Hebrews 11:2). This statement is followed by many examples of ancestral faithfulness. As with Hebrews 3:1-6, the author relies upon examples of faithfulness from the ancestors to create a notion of the addressees’ anticipated future.

Similarly, the author encourages the addressees to consider their own retained past.⁵⁶⁸ In this case, the foresight of the addressees was based not only upon the antecedent experiences of their ancestors, but also upon their own retained experiences. Specifically, he reminds the addressees that after their enlightenment they endured hard struggles with sufferings (Hebrews 10:32). However, even through this suffering, the addressees continued to show compassion on prisoners and joyfully accepted the plundering of their property (Hebrews 10:34). Next, he reminds the addressees that all of this was done because they knew that they had a better and abiding possession (Hebrews 10:34). Finally, and most importantly for the discussion of the foresight of the addressees of Hebrews, he follows with a direct plea for the addressees not to throw away their confidence. In Hebrews 10:35-36, he specifically bases the foresight of the

⁵⁶⁸ For examples of the retained experiences of the addressees, see: 6:10; 10:32, 33, 34; 12:9, and 10.

addressees regarding their need for endurance upon their own retained past. In short, the addressees had remained faithful in light of suffering in the 'past,' therefore, they are to continue in their faithfulness.

Finally, it is also possible to analyse 'foresight' in relation to the outgroup. In fact, 'foresight' is perhaps the most significant dynamic concerning the outgroup. Since Hebrews was written to the ingroup, the 'faithful,' and not to the (symbolic) outgroup, the 'unfaithful,' it is concerned with the ingroup's foresight of the outgroup's forthcoming future. With this in mind, how does the author integrate the outgroup into the foresight of the addressees? As we would expect, the author looks 'forward' by looking 'back' Just as the foresight of the addressees' own anticipated future is conceived of in terms of their ancestors, the forthcoming of the outgroup is conceived of in terms of the antecedents to their unfaithfulness. This observation may provide another helpful answer to the important question, 'Why does the author only refer to the past or antecedent unfaithful?' Rather than speak of the contemporary unfaithful, the forthcoming of unfaithfulness is framed in terms of unfaithful ancestors. In Hebrews 3:7-4:13, the author repeatedly and exclusively describes the anticipated future of unfaithfulness in terms of the wilderness generation, ancestral examples of unfaithfulness.

To summarise, modern interpreters of Hebrews, working with the perspective of future temporal orientation, have been less inclined to identify the nature of 'foresight' within the text. Neither the author nor the addressees of Hebrews were likely to conceive of their futures as an array of possibilities from which the most attractive option was to be identified and pursued. Rather, the author describes the 'rest' as that which was forthcoming, as the anticipated future of the faithful. Furthermore, when the addressees were to consider their forthcoming rest, they were to rely upon the antecedent experiences of their 'ancestors.' In short, the addressees were to look 'forward' by looking 'back.'

7.7 The Role of 'Imaginary Time' in Hebrews

It should come as no surprise that there has been no discussion of the role of 'imaginary time' in Hebrews. In short, individuals with a future temporal

orientation do not work with the concept of 'imaginary time.' While the 'present' is perceived to be 'this very moment,' time itself is perceived to extend indefinitely into the 'past' and into the 'future.' Distinctions might be made regarding temporal proximity (i.e. 'near future' versus 'distant future,' or 'recent past' versus 'distant past'), however, there is no concept of the 'imaginary' as described by Bourdieu. What, then, is at stake when one reads Hebrews without an understanding of 'imaginary time?' Namely, interpreters are unable to adequately discuss the temporal nature of the 'rest.' As will be shown below, the author locates the 'rest' in the anticipated futures of the addressees rather than in 'imaginary time.' In other words, the 'rest' was described as the horizon of the addressees 'present' experience. Or, the 'rest' was the anticipated future for those who continued in their faithfulness.

What is the role of 'imaginary time' in Hebrews?⁵⁶⁹ Bourdieu explains that, "beyond the horizon of the present begins the imaginary world which cannot be linked with the universe of experience."⁵⁷⁰ In the case of Hebrews, the promised rest is the anticipated or forthcoming future of the addressees. In other words, the promised rest is the horizon of the experience of the addressees. Further, the antecedent, or retained past, of the addressees extends back as far as Able. In Hebrews 11:4, his faith is called upon as the earliest example of ancestral faithfulness. However, is there any evidence of the 'imaginary,' that which is beyond the horizon of the 'present?' The author does offer several interesting examples of the imaginary. In Hebrews 1:10-12, he looks to Psalm 101. Here, he describes both the creation, the imaginary that came before the experiences of the ancestors, and the destruction of the earth and the heavens, the imaginary that will fall beyond the experiences of the addressees.

He also refers to the imaginary in some of his descriptions or designations of God and Jesus. For example, in Hebrews 2:10a, he notes that all things exist through God. As with the earlier example, Hebrews 1:10-12, creation lies beyond

⁵⁶⁹ For examples of imaginary time in Hebrews, see: 1:8, 10, 11, 12; 2:10; 4:3, 4; 6:20; 7:3, 21, 24, 28; and 13:8.

⁵⁷⁰ Bourdieu 1963: 60.

the experiences of the addressees, creation occurred, therefore, in imaginary time. Jesus is also described as functioning in imaginary time. For example, Jesus is described as being a priest 'forever' (Heb 6:20; 7:17, 20, 24, 28). Further Jesus is described as being the same 'yesterday, today, and forever' (Heb 13:8). The author's use of 'forever' was meant to extend beyond the experiences of the addressees and into imaginary time. Interestingly, Melchizedek is also described as having existed in imaginary time. In Hebrews 7:3, Melchizedek is described as being 'without father or mother' and without 'beginning of days or end of life.' *What is most striking about the author's use of the 'imaginary' in Hebrews is that it never refers to the promised rest.* According to him, there have been events and will be events which fall outside of the experiences of the addressees. The creation of the world and the destruction of the earth and the heavens both occur in imaginary time. Further, God, Jesus and Melchizedek are without beginning or end. However, the author is consistent in his description of the promised rest. It is always described as the consequence of the continued experience, the continued faithfulness, of the addressees.

Bruce Malina explains that "in the New Testament writings, we can see how the forthcoming became future, how the experienced became imaginary."⁵⁷¹

So for members of Jesus movement groups, God's Kingdom was forthcoming, Jesus' emergence as Messiah with power was forthcoming, the transformation of social realities in favour of God's people was forthcoming. Yet for the audiences of Mark, Matthew and Luke, things obviously changed. The coming of Jesus is moved now into imaginary time. For the coming of the Son of Man with power in Mark and Matthew, for example, was now future, a piece of imaginary time known only to God: 'But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not the Son, but only the Father' (Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:36). And the same with hopes for social transformation in Luke's group: 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority' (Acts 1:7).⁵⁷²

Based upon Malina's observation, it may be possible to read Hebrews in light of the broad experience of Christ-followers. In the first-century, the forthcoming

⁵⁷¹ Malina 1996b: 193.

⁵⁷² Malina 1996b: 193.

became the imaginary, the return of Jesus moved from anticipated future to imaginary future, beyond the horizon of the experiences of the Christ-followers. However, throughout Hebrews the promised rest is described as being forthcoming, anticipated.

7.8 The Social Function of 'Rest' in Hebrews

What conclusions, then, can be drawn regarding the meaning and social function of rest? First, the author places an emphasis upon 'faithfulness,' not upon 'rest.' This is perhaps the most critical observation to be made in an interpretation of Hebrews 3:1-4:13. In Hebrews 3:1-6, he compares the faith of Moses with the faith of Jesus. In Hebrews 3:7-4:13, he encourages the addressees, like Moses and Jesus, to be faithful. Here, he explains that the forthcoming result, or consequence, of faithfulness is 'rest.' To refer again to the words of Kaiser, 'the sheer difficulty of the concept' is eliminated when one considers this section within a present temporal orientation. For most modern North Atlantic interpreters, this section is read through the lens of future temporal orientation. In this case, the future holds various options, some desirable and some undesirable. The achievement of a desirable goal (or future option), then, dictates one's present actions. Therefore, we would expect the author to describe the future goal in desirable terms and encourage the addressees to act in a manner which will make the attainment of that goal possible. In short, we would expect the emphasis to be placed on the 'future' goal, on 'rest,' rather than upon the 'present' activity, on 'faithfulness.' Within a present temporal orientation, however, action is localised in the present. This means that the addressees likely understood 'rest' as that which was the forthcoming result of their faithfulness. Similar to the decay of a garment being the forthcoming result of wear. Moreover, individuals with a present temporal orientation tend to have a conception of low internal causal attribution.⁵⁷³ In other words, they tend to believe that they have little control over future outcomes. For example, it is God who is the final judge of who enjoys the 'rest,' not the addressees (cf. Heb 4:1,

⁵⁷³ Jones 1988: 21-38.

12-13). The addressees, then, can only remain faithful. An emphasis upon faithfulness, rather than upon 'rest,' is appropriate within this context. In addition, while 'rest' has a social function within the text, there is no data which refers to the 'content' of the 'rest.' Again, rather than describe its content, the author places a singular emphasis upon its 'forthcoming' nature.

Second, the 'foresight' of the addressees regarding 'rest' is based upon the experiences of the antecedent 'unfaithful.' If we take seriously the conclusions made above, we are aware that individuals with a present temporal orientation tend to use 'past,' or antecedent, experiences to inform their thoughts regarding the 'future,' or the forthcoming. Worded differently, those with a present temporal orientation tend to 'look forward by looking back.' In the case of Hebrews, this is precisely the case. We would expect that the descriptions of 'rest' would be based upon past, or antecedent, experiences. Indeed, the author describes the forthcoming rest of the addressees in reference to the unfaithfulness of the wilderness generation and their prohibition from the 'rest.' While individuals with a future temporal orientation would expect the author to describe the desirability of a future 'goal,' the author places an emphasis upon past unfaithfulness. Again, an emphasis upon 'past' or antecedent faithfulness, rather than upon a desirable 'future' goal, is appropriate within this context.

Finally, as explained in Chapter 5, the author did compare the addressees with the outgroup on the grounds of faithfulness. Further, faithfulness is to be understood as positive, for the forthcoming result of faithfulness is 'rest.' Likewise, unfaithfulness is to be understood as negative, for the forthcoming result of unfaithfulness is the prohibition from 'rest.' I then noted that this comparison might have encouraged a positive social identity among the addressees. This conclusion, based upon the appropriate conceptual framework of social identity theory, is consistent with an understanding of present temporal orientation. In short, the addressees are encouraged to have a positive social identity in the 'present,' because their 'present' faithfulness differentiates them from the 'other.' They are like good soil which is drinking up the rain and will eventually produce good fruit. The unfaithful, on the other hand, are like bad soil which will only produce thorns.

To summarise, while 'rest' plays a significant role in Hebrews, the study of 'rest' has been limited. The question is, 'Why?' In this section I have proposed that the difficulty surrounding 'rest,' is not due to a lack of information regarding the nature of rest, but with the assumptions that accompany a future temporal orientation. However, when one employs an appropriate model of present temporal orientation, much of the difficulty surrounding 'rest,' is eliminated. Within this context, 'rest' is described as the forthcoming result of continued faithfulness. An emphasis is, therefore, placed upon the necessity of continued faithfulness, rather than upon a 'future goal' and the probability for its attainment.

7.9 Conclusion

To summarise, the discussion of social identity in Hebrews is necessarily informed by temporal orientation. Since it is probable that both the author and the addressees had a present temporal orientation, this conception of time would necessarily have informed the content and meaning of the text. As we have seen, the addressees understood Jesus and the 'great cloud of witnesses' to have been antecedents to their faithfulness. Rather than remain in the 'past,' Jesus and the witnesses surrounded the addressees and helped enable them to 'run their race.' The author also described the forthcoming, or anticipated, future of the addressees. The promised 'rest' was described as having been a consequence of the continued faithfulness of the addressees. This anticipated future, while a consequence of the addressees' actions, was, however, not perceived to be controlled by the addressees. God, acting as a judge, was in ultimate control of the addressees' anticipated futures. Finally, both the author and the addressees employed foresight. They considered the horizons of their own experiences. Unlike those with a future orientation who rarely rely upon the examples of ancestors or the norms or traditions of social groups, the author and the addressees relied on their retained past to inform their anticipated future. With this in mind, it should be expected that examples of faithfulness, and faithlessness, would be antecedent examples, or examples from the 'past.'

Chapter 8

Faithfulness and the Purpose of Hebrews

Why was Hebrews written? What was the purpose of the text? Throughout Chapters 5, 6, and 7, I have laid a foundation upon which to answer this question. In Chapter 5, I concluded that the author emphasised 'faithfulness,' the identity descriptor of the addressees' ingroup. He also compared the addressees with a 'symbolic' outgroup, the 'unfaithful,' and described the nature of the intergroup boundary in terms of 'uni-directional' permeability. In Chapter 6, I argued that the author integrated both Jesus and the addressees into an ongoing story of faithfulness. In addition, he portrayed Jesus as the prototype of faithfulness, and described the faithfulness of others in relation to the perfect faith of Jesus. In Chapter 7, I related the text of Hebrews to a theory of present temporal orientation. Here, I concluded that the author called attention to the 'antecedent' faithfulness of Abraham, Moses, and many other witnesses. In addition, he encouraged the addressees to use 'foresight,' to consider their 'future' by looking to the 'past.' Finally, while the author described some events in 'imaginary time' (i.e. creation), he portrayed the promised 'rest' as that which was 'forthcoming,' on the horizon of the 'present' experience of the addressees. Alone, each chapter offers a helpful description of the addressees of Hebrews, their social categorisation process, how they understood Jesus, and their perception of time. Together, they provide a appropriate framework with which to consider the purpose of the text.

What was the social context of Hebrews? In this chapter, I will argue that Hebrews was written to prevent or oppose a 'crisis.' While most interpreters conclude that this crisis was either that of 'spiritual immaturity' or the threat of 'apostasy,' I will show that the addressees likely had (or were at risk of having) a negative social identity. In this case, social identity theorists note that there are two broad options available for those with a negative social identity: 'social mobility' and 'social creativity.' I will, therefore, analyse each option, relating

the text of Hebrews to the theory. Finally, I will conclude that the purpose of Hebrews is best understood in terms of 'social creativity.' The author compared the faithfulness of the addressees with the unfaithfulness of a 'symbolic' outgroup in order to encourage a positive social identity.

8.1 The Addressees of Hebrews: A Negative Social Identity

The social context of Hebrews is often described in terms of a 'crisis.' While the specific crisis envisioned by interpreters varies, the historical background to the crisis is often the same.⁵⁷⁴ They begin by noting that the addressees were a group who had never seen or heard Jesus in person, but learned of him (as the author also did) from someone who had themselves listened to Jesus (Hebrews 2:3). Next, they explain that shortly after their enlightenment they had been exposed to persecution (Hebrews 10:32). While the text does not describe this suffering in detail, many interpreters believe that it does provide a rough outline of this 'initial crisis:' the addressees had had to endure public abuse, imprisonment, and the plundering of their property (Hebrews 10:33-34). They had not, however, been called upon to die for their faith (Hebrews 12:4). Interpreters also highlight the response of the addressees to this initial crisis. They observe that the addressees served the 'saints' with 'work and love' (Hebrews 6:10) and that they had 'compassion on the prisoners' (Hebrews 10:34). Finally, interpreters recognize that despite the initial response of the addressees, their development or 'maturity' had been limited; instead of 'spiritual growth,' they had become 'dull of hearing' (Hebrews 5:11), were in need of 'milk, not solid food,' (Hebrews 5:12) and had become 'sluggish' (Hebrews 6:12). For some, then, the current crisis is understood in terms of 'spiritual immaturity.' For most, this 'immaturity' is only a symptom of a much greater crisis. Namely, the addressees were in danger of 'falling back' to a 'religion' which they had left behind.

In Chapter 2, I provided an overview of the four most common proposals

⁵⁷⁴ For examples of such a 'history of the crisis,' see: Attridge 1989: 12; Bruce 1990: 9. See also: Koester 2001.

regarding the purpose of Hebrews. Importantly, each proposal corresponds to the crisis envisioned by the interpreter. For example, if the crisis facing the addressees is thought to have been 'sluggishness,' the purpose of the text may have been to 'strengthen faith.'⁵⁷⁵ If the crisis is thought to have been the danger of 'falling back' (often to 'Judaism'), the purpose of the text was to prevent 'apostasy.'⁵⁷⁶ In addition, an interpreter's conclusion regarding the identity of the addressees directly informs his or her understanding of the nature of the crisis. Paul Ellingworth provides a helpful example of the inter-relatedness of these issues.

If, as suggested above, (1) the majority of the readers had come from Judaism to faith in Christ, and (2) the readers lived in some centre such as Rome, where Judaism (but not Christianity) was well established and officially tolerated, there could well have been a constant temptation to de-emphasize, conceal, neglect, abandon, and thus in a crisis reject and deny the distinctively Christian dimension of their faith.'⁵⁷⁷

For Ellingworth, his conclusion regarding the identity of the addressees (the majority were 'Jewish Christians') informs his conclusion regarding their current crisis (reject and deny the 'Christian' dimension of their faith). Finally, his conclusion regarding the nature of the crisis shapes his understanding of the purpose of the text. He explains that a purpose of Hebrews was to prevent the addressees from committing 'apostasy from the Christian faith.'⁵⁷⁸

To summarise, the assumptions made regarding the identity of the addressees directly informs an interpreter's conclusions regarding the crisis facing the addressees. The purpose of the text, then, is understood in terms of that crisis. Unfortunately, the various conclusions made regarding the identity of the

⁵⁷⁵ For examples of this position, see: Bristol 1967: 25; Brown, Raymond 1982: 13; Filson 1978: 325; Guthrie, George 1998: 22; and Klijn 1967: 143.

⁵⁷⁶ For examples of this position, see: Barnes 1848: iv; Bruce, A.B. 1899: 9; Bruce, F.F. 1982: 1008; Bruce, F.F. 1990: 9; Davidson, A.B. 1882: 19; Davidson, S. 1848-1851: 266-276; Gouge 1866: 6; Gundry 1979: 334-335; Hagner 1990: 11-12; Kent 1972: 25; Lauersdorf 1986: 4; Lightfoot 1976: 35-38; Livingstone 1997: 742; W. MacDonald 1971: 9-13; May and Metzger 1977: 1455; McCaul, 1871: 2; Montefiore 1969: 20; Nairne 1913: 20-21; Peake 1906: 8-16; Peake 1910: 1-19; Pfeiffer 1962: 9; Salevao 2002: 113; Saphir 1902: 1-19; Snell 1959: 27-28; Stibbs 1970: 10-11; Stuart 1864: 265-272; Vine 1965: 7; Williamson 1964: xii-xiii.

⁵⁷⁷ Ellingworth 1993: 80.

⁵⁷⁸ Ellingworth 1993:25.

addressees are the products of an inappropriate methodology. As argued in Chapter 1, historical critics commonly understand the identity of the addressees based upon problematic categories (i.e. 'Jewish Christians' or 'Gentile Christians'). In turn, the diversity of proposals regarding the identity of the addressees and the commonly voiced frustration over the question, carries over into the discussion of the social context of the addressees and their 'present crisis.' In short, since the discussion of the identity of the addressees has not been based upon an appropriate conceptual framework, the conclusions drawn regarding the 'crisis' have likewise lacked an appropriate conceptual framework. In the end, interpreters are left frustrated and without clear answers to several important questions. Who were the addressees of Hebrews? What was the nature of their 'crisis?' Finally, what was the purpose of the text?

As explained in Chapter 3, social identity theorists understand there to be three components of group identification: (1) the 'cognitive component,' or the awareness of group membership; (2) the 'evaluative component,' or the notion that one's group membership has a value connotation; and (3) the 'emotional component,' or the sense that the cognitive and evaluative aspects of one's group membership may be accompanied by emotions directed toward one's own group and towards others which stand in relation to it.⁵⁷⁹ In Chapter 5, I analysed the cognitive component of the group identification of the addressees. In short, the addressees understood themselves to be a distinct group. Further, 'faithfulness' served as the identity descriptor of that group. The addressees, therefore, understood themselves as having been 'the faithful.' So, what was the nature of the crisis which threatened the 'faithful?' The answer to this question is made evident through an analysis of both the 'evaluative component' and the 'emotional component' of the group identification of the addressees.

What value did the addressees place upon their group membership? In addition, how did this value inform the emotions of the addressees? The addressees likely placed a negative value, or were at risk of placing a negative value, on their ingroup membership. In Hebrews 2:1, the author urges the

⁵⁷⁹ Tajfel 1978a: 28.

addressees (and himself) to 'pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.' In Hebrews 3:1-2, he urges them to 'consider Jesus,' because Jesus was 'faithful to him who appointed him.' In Hebrews 3:8, the author warns the addressees not to harden their hearts (cf. Hebrews 3:12, 13). He describes them as 'dull of hearing' (Hebrews 5:11), in need of 'someone to teach them' (Hebrews 5:12), and in need of 'milk, not solid food' (Hebrews 5:12). In Hebrews 6:11-12, he urges them not to be 'sluggish,' but to imitate those who are faithful and patient. In Hebrews 10:23-25, he urges them to 'hold fast their confession.' Again in Hebrews 10:32-36, he urges them not to 'throw away their confidence' and that they will have 'need for endurance.'

Throughout the text, the author urges the addressees to 'hold on' to their faithfulness (Hebrews 3:14; 4:1, 3, 6, 9, 11; 6:11; 10:23; 35-36) and not to 'fall away' (Hebrews 2:1; 3:12). In light of these repeated warnings, it is reasonable to assert that the author's emphasis upon the faithfulness of the addressees was not because they exemplified this identity descriptor, but because they were at risk of giving (or, indeed had already given) their 'faithfulness' a negative value connotation. In fact, there is evidence that the evaluative component of the addressees' group identification had also led to ambivalent (and possibly negative) emotions toward one another. The author urged the addressees to 'encourage one another' (cf. Hebrews 3:13; 10:25) and to 'stir up one another to love and good works' (Hebrews 10:24). Importantly, he urges them not to 'neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some' (Hebrews 10:25). Alone, such words of encouragement do not seem to shed light upon the addressees or their 'crisis.' However, when coupled with the conclusion that the addressees likely possessed a negative social identity (or were at risk of possessing a negative social identity), the words indicate that the addressees (or at least some of them) had ambivalent emotions toward one another.

The conclusion that the addressees likely assigned a negative value to their group membership (or were at risk of assigning such a value) is precisely the 'crisis' threatening them. In short, while the addressees defined themselves as 'the faithful,' this identity descriptor was understood to have a negative value. This conclusion is essential for identifying the purpose of Hebrews. Social

identity theorists note that there are two options available for those with a negative social identity: 'social mobility' and 'social change.' In the following two sections, therefore, I will introduce the theories of both 'social mobility' and 'social change' and will relate the theories to the text of Hebrews. The conclusions of this analysis will prove helpful in determining the nature of the crisis and the purpose of the text.

8.2 'Social Mobility:' Possible in Theory, Difficult in Practice

For most interpreters, the crisis which threatened the addressees was that of 'apostasy.' In other words, the addressees are thought to have been at risk of moving from 'Christianity' to another 'group' or 'religion.' The purpose of the text, then, was to prevent the addressees from 'falling back.' For example, David deSilva assumes that the addressees were in danger of abandoning the Christ-movement and attempting to re-enter their previous social group. In turn, the addressees would re-gain lost honour.⁵⁸⁰ For deSilva, a purpose of the text was to prevent such a move. For those who hold the 'traditional view,' the addressees are understood to have been in danger of moving from 'Christianity' back to 'Judaism.'⁵⁸¹ The assumption that the addressees were in danger of moving between 'groups' or 'religions,' is problematic, not only because of the unsatisfactory assumptions regarding the nature of the groups in question, or because the addressees were unable to move between social groups, but because such a move was probably more difficult to achieve in practice than in theory.

Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams explain, "People can possess a *social mobility* belief system, that intergroup boundaries are permeable, and that it is possible to move between groups."⁵⁸² However, for such a belief system to exist, the individual must possess a low degree of identification with the original group. Further, sometimes these transitions are more difficult to achieve in practice than in theory. Hogg and Abrams note that "groups may exert pressure

⁵⁸⁰ DeSilva 1999a: 144-177.

⁵⁸¹ For an early example of the 'traditional view,' see Alford 1864: 4/62. For recent examples, see: Lindars 1991: 4-15; Cockerill 1999: 15-20.

⁵⁸² Hogg and Abrams 1988: 54.

on their members in order to prevent them from leaving (as in the case against families of defectors). The difficulty is even greater when group membership is externally designated by attributes such as sex, skin colour, age and so forth.”⁵⁸³ Therefore, according to Hogg and Abrams, there are both internal and external constraints which might limit the reality of social mobility.

In the context of the addressees of Hebrews, social identity theory provides an appropriate conceptual framework for the discussion of social mobility. In order to defend the assumption that the addressees were free to move, one must first presume that the author and the addressees envisioned movement between two distinct ‘groups’ (i.e. movement from ‘Christianity’ to ‘Judaism’). Next, one must assume that the addressees had a low degree of identification with the Christ-movement and that there were no, or minimal, internal or external constraints to limit social mobility. Further, one must assume that the boundary of the Christ-movement was permeable, allowing for free movement.

Did the author and the addressees envision movement between two distinct social groups? As argued in Chapter 5, the outgroup, the ‘unfaithful,’ were probably a symbolic group. There are many examples from the first-century Mediterranean world of the creation and maintenance of identity through the comparison of a group with a symbolic outgroup (i.e. the Romans with the ‘uncivilised other,’ the Greeks with the ‘barbarians,’ the Judeans with the ‘non-Judeans’). In each case, the members of the symbolic outgroup did not understand themselves as having been a group (i.e. the non-Romans understood themselves in terms of their own ethnicity, rather than being an ‘uncivilised other’). Further, while it was theoretically possible to move from the ingroup to the symbolic outgroup, the ingroup did not envision the member moving into another group, but rather as being lost to ‘them,’ the ‘uncivilised, the ‘barbaric,’ the ‘non-Judean.’ In the case of Hebrews, the author does not link his warning to not ‘fall away’ with a specific group. Rather, the warning not to ‘fall away’ is linked to ‘faithfulness.’ In other words, just as the author and the addressees

⁵⁸³ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 56.

categorised the world in terms of 'us' and 'them,' movement was also understood within this framework. The addressees were warned not to 'fall away,' to become 'unfaithful.' Based upon this conclusion, it is unlikely that the addressees envisioned movement between two distinct social groups. Rather, they envisioned the possibility of becoming 'unfaithful.'

Did the addressees have a low degree of identification with the Christ-movement? As previously noted, the addressees probably had, or were at risk of having, a negative social identity (cf. Hebrews 5:11-14; 6:11-12; 10:23-25, 32-36). In addition, there is evidence that the addressees (or at least some of them) had a low degree of identification with the Christ-movement. The author urged the addressees to 'encourage one another' (Hebrews 3:13; 10:25). This likely indicates a need for greater intragroup identification and commitment. In addition, he called for them 'not to neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some' (Hebrews 10:25). Again, this likely indicates that some of the members were displaying a low degree of identification with the Christ-movement.

Were there, however, internal or external constraints which were meant to limit social mobility? First, the emphasis placed upon the ingroup identity descriptor of faithfulness would have acted as an internal constraint. For example, the author compared the faithfulness of the ingroup with the unfaithfulness of the symbolic outgroup. Here the addressees were reminded that God's 'rest' was the forthcoming experience for those who were faithful. In contrast, the unfaithful would be prohibited from that 'rest.' Second, the author's integration of the addressees into an ongoing story of faithfulness would have acted as an internal constraint. By describing the addressees as members of God's 'house,' as participants in the 'race,' the author attempted to eliminate the option of 'social mobility.' If they were to become 'unfaithful' they would no longer achieve that which was promised to the people of God. Third, the author repeatedly urged the addressees to maintain their faithfulness (cf. Hebrews 2:1; 3:12-14; 4:1; 6:1-12; 10:35, 39; 13:9). This constant call to commitment would likely have served as an internal constraint. Fourth, the author explained that the antecedent 'witnesses' would not be made 'perfect' without the addressees (Hebrews 11:40). Again, the addressees were to understand that they were an

integral part of God's message, God's continuing faith narrative. In short, the author emphasised a number of persuasive constraints meant to limit the addressees' desire for 'social mobility.'

The final, and perhaps most important, question concerns the nature of the boundary of the Christ-movement. Was the boundary of the Christ-movement permeable, allowing for free movement? Here, we have a conclusive answer. According to the author, once a member of the Christ-movement has left the social group, he or she may not return (Hebrews 6:1-8). In graphic language, the addressees are reminded that 'it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened' (Hebrews 6:4). In this case, the author's description of the nature of the intergroup boundary served as an additional internal constraint against the addressees leaving the group.

What then may we conclude regarding the possibility of social mobility and the addressees of Hebrews? Even if an interpreter understands the author and addressees to have envisioned movement between two distinct social groups, such movement was probably much easier in theory than it was in practice. While some might suggest that the addressees had a negative social identity and perhaps a low degree of identification with the Christ-movement, there were internal constraints which limited social mobility. Such internal constraints were the first of two important purposes of Hebrews. The author, however, did not only attempt to prevent the desire for 'social mobility,' he also offered the addressees a positive social identity through the strategy of 'social creativity.'

8.3 'Social Creativity' and the Purpose of Hebrews

'Social change' refers to a belief that the boundaries between groups are rigid, and that the only realistic options are those strategies which are aimed at improving the group's social status. Hogg and Abrams define this belief system.

In contrast to social mobility, people can possess a *social change* belief system, which rests on the acceptance of the impermeability of intergroup boundaries and the relative impossibility of psychologically passing from a low- to a high-status group. In this case, negative implications of group membership (i.e. a negative social identity) cannot be escaped simply by redefining oneself out of a group and into a dominant group. They can only be overcome by group strategies aimed at accomplishing a relatively

positive re-evaluation of the ingroup.⁵⁸⁴

Henri Tajfel and John D. Turner outline two strategies of 'social change' which may be adopted: 'social competition' and 'social creativity.'⁵⁸⁵

The first strategy is that of 'social competition.' This refers to those strategies which are employed when the group seeks to alter the status quo, and by doing so, improve its social identity. Here, the lower status group projects itself in direct competition with the dominant group, Hogg and Abrams note that this "...can involve relatively constitutional politicization of discontent (e.g. the black civil rights movement of the 1960s), violent terrorism (e.g. the Black Panther, and Bader-Meinhoff movements of the 1970s), civil war (e.g. Northern Ireland), revolution (e.g. Iran), and passive resistance (e.g. Ghandi)."⁵⁸⁶ Significantly, the only time a low status group may challenge or compete with a high status group, is when the legitimacy of the high status group is in question. If the legitimacy of the high status group is in question, a low status group may believe that their relative status ought to be changed.

In the case of Hebrews, there is no evidence of 'social competition.' In fact, the symbolic 'unfaithful' are the only group which is compared with the addressees. This is a significant observation in the interpretation of Hebrews, for symbolic groups are by nature a product of 'social creativity.' For example, when Romans compared themselves with the 'uncivilised other,' it was not a call for revolution. On the contrary, the comparison was meant to provide a positive social identity for the Romans, for they were not 'uncivilised,' like 'them.'

The second strategy, therefore, is that of 'social creativity.' "*Social creativity* strategies occur when intergroup relations are subjectively perceived to be *secure* (legitimate and stable, if not necessarily desirable). New forms of intergroup comparison which can bolster ingroup identity may be sought."⁵⁸⁷ Tajfel and Turner suggest three possible strategies: First, groups may find *new*

⁵⁸⁴ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 56.

⁵⁸⁵ Tajfel and Turner 1979: 33-47.

⁵⁸⁶ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 29.

⁵⁸⁷ Hogg and Abrams 1988: 56.

dimensions on which to compare themselves. If a group compares itself with other groups on a dimension which yields a negative social identity, the group may select a different dimension upon which to compare itself. Here, the group will attempt to compare itself on a dimension which it perceives will yield a positive social identity. Second, group members may *redefine the value* attached to various attributes. If a group compares itself with other groups on a dimension which yields a negative social identity, the group may decide to re-evaluate the relative worth of that dimension. Third, groups may select *new outgroups* for intergroup comparison. If a group compares itself with other groups on a dimension which yields a negative social identity, and the group is unwilling to compare itself on a different dimension or re-evaluate the relative worth of that dimension, the group may select a different group with which to compare itself. Importantly, a symbolic outgroup may be a good candidate for such comparison. In this case, the ingroup will identify a characteristic which it values (i.e. faithfulness) and will, in turn, envision an outgroup with a corresponding negative characteristic (i.e. faithlessness). A comparison between the two groups, between the ingroup and the symbolic outgroup, will necessarily encourage a positive social identity.

In the case of Hebrews, the author engaged in a form of ‘social creativity.’ To begin, it is likely that at least some of the addressees possessed a negative social identity (Hebrews 5:11-14; 6:11-12; 10:23-25, 32-36). In response to this negative evaluation of the ingroup, the author attempted to redefine the value of the identity descriptor of the addressees. By focusing upon the faithfulness of the addressees (cf. Hebrews 10:39), the unfaithfulness of the symbolic outgroup (cf. Hebrews 3:7-4:13), and the forthcoming result of both faithfulness and unfaithfulness, he provided a dimension by which the addressees are favourably compared with ‘them,’ the ‘unfaithful.’ In this case, the author provided the addressees with an intergroup comparison which encouraged a re-evaluation of their social identity. Through the comparison of faithfulness with unfaithfulness and the comparison of the promised rest with the prohibition from that rest, the author defined the social identity of the addressees as being positive, rather than negative.

To summarise, 'social mobility' was a possibility for the addressees of Hebrews. Indeed, the author warned the addressees not to 'fall away.' However, such mobility was probably easier to achieve in theory than in practice, because there were internal and external constraints which made such movement difficult. The author described the consequences of 'falling away' (i.e. prohibition from the 'rest'). The author described the boundary between the addressees and the unfaithful as being 'uni-directional' (i.e. they could leave the ingroup, but they would not be welcomed back again). Lastly, the addressees themselves were to encourage one another not to 'fall away.' In short, social mobility was probably quite difficult for the addressees of Hebrews. For this reason, the author employed a strategy of 'social creativity.' The author encouraged a positive social identity among the addressees by comparing them to a symbolic outgroup on the dimension of faithfulness. The addressees, the faithful, were part of a long line of faithful witnesses. Further, the forthcoming consequence of the addressees' faithfulness was entrance in the promised 'rest.' Therefore, rather than to seek to leave the ingroup, the addressees were to understand the ingroup as possessing a 'positive social identity.'

8.5 Conclusion

Why was Hebrews written? What was the purpose of the text? The discussion of the purpose of Hebrews has traditionally been connected to the discussion of the identity and social context of the addressees of Hebrews. In other words, it has often been assumed that to answer the question, 'Why was Hebrews written?', it must first be established, 'To whom was Hebrews written?' Herein lies the problem at the heart of this thesis. There has been little, if any, consensus regarding either the identity of the addressees or the purpose of the text. In Chapters 1 and 2, I offered an analysis of the diverse theories regarding both identity and purpose. At the end of each chapter, I concluded that the problem was not due to a lack of information in the text, but was due to the use of inadequate social categories. While modern interpreters continue to ask whether the addressees were 'Jewish' or 'Gentile,' neither the author nor the addressees were concerned with such social categories. In order to answer the question, 'To

whom was Hebrews written?', a modern interpreter should use the social categories of the author and the addressees. But how does a modern interpreter determine the social categories employed a first-century Mediterranean social group? In this thesis, I employed social identity theory as a conceptual framework within which to examine the social identities of the addressees. After relating the text to the theory in a general way, I have proposed that the addressees understood themselves as having been the 'faithful.' Based upon this conclusion and upon further insights from social identity theory, I have proposed that the purpose of the text was to provide internal constraints limiting the addressees' desire for 'social mobility.' In addition, the author used 'social creativity' to redefine the value attached to faithfulness. The addressees were to attach a positive value to faithfulness, for they were part of an ongoing faith story and the forthcoming result of their faithfulness was the promised rest.

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