

The epistle to the Hebrews

General conclusion

“The Lord is my helper: I will not fear what man shall do to me. Remember your prelates who have spoken the word of God to you; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, yesterday, and today; and the same for ever. Be not led away with various and strange doctrines. For it is best that the heart be established with grace, not with meats; which have not profited those that walk in them.”¹

Since we started this general overview about the epistles of St Paul, the more we went in, the more we discovered how St Paul was still teaching us, even 2000 years later. The thirteen epistles we went through helped us to understand this universal teaching across the ages.

Willingly, we left aside the Epistle to the Hebrews, which will lead our treaty to a greater conclusion. In the general introduction, you may remember we said the style was different from the other epistles, looking more like a long homily, than a letter. It is one of the differences, and why its study was left apart since then, and is traditionally done so, when the pauline epistles are read.

1 General overview of the Epistle

1.1 Differences with the other epistles

From the very difference of the other epistles, the Epistle to the Hebrew doesn't open with a special address or greeting and blessing.

The general style is also very different, with long and well-structured sentences, which is completely different to the other 13 epistles, built with short and elliptic sentences.

The biblical quotations are following the Septuagint, and not the Hebrew text of the Bible.²

The text only mentioned two persons: Timothy (Hb., XIII, 23) and the Italian brethren (Hb., XIII, 24).

¹ Hb., XIII, 6-9.

² The Septuagint referred as the Greek Old Testament or The Translation of the Seventy (Η μετάφρασις τῶν ἑβδομήκοντα), and often abbreviated as LXX, is the earliest existing Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible from the original Hebrew.

“King Ptolemy once gathered 72 Elders. He placed them in 72 chambers, each of them in a separate one, without revealing to them why they were summoned. He entered each one's room and said: "Write for me the Torah of Moses, your teacher". God put it in the heart of each one to translate identically as all the others did.” (Tractate Megillah of the Babylonian Talmud)

1.2 To whom is it written?

The title itself might have been added later, after its writing, but before the canon of the Holy Scriptures was fully established and completed. However, this title, *Πρὸς Ἑβραίους*, as well as the numerous references from the Old Testament, and the allusion to the liturgy of the Temple, allow us to say that the letter was most certainly written to Christians who converted from Judaism, and were living in Italy, probably Rome.

The reasons for such certainty are:

- The word about the Italian brethren.
- The word *ηγούμενοι*, which refers to the leader of this community.
- The 1st Letter of St Clement of Rome, who echoes the epistle.

It is also most certain that the letter is not written to newly converted Christians, but to some other, who, attracted to lukewarmth and apathy, could be tempted to go back to their former faith and Moses' Law.

Therefore, the author is trying to bring them back to their initial fervour, recalling their faith and memory about the events of the Redemption, but also about their past fidelity in previous trials.

Until recently, the Epistle to the Hebrews was dated as one of the latest texts of the New Testament, mainly because it is written to long-time converts, who are enduring the trial of fidelity in time. The second reason was that the doctrine expressed testifies a long-matured theology.

However, it must be before the year 100, as it would contradict the Tradition, and mainly St Clement of Rome, who quoted it in his 1st Letter, which we know was written in 95.

We can say that the letter was even written before the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in 70, because of the references to its liturgy. The description of the Temple would be meaningless, if it were no longer existing. Moreover, the letter is predicting a calamity to come, which could well be its destruction.

A date for writing could therefore well be said to be 63-64, especially if we accept the good opinion that the last chapter and its last greetings have been written by St Paul himself.

1.3 The author

We don't know for certain who is the true author of the epistle. Several hypotheses were made, and we will do our best to present some of them. Since the beginning, two main channels are facing each other:

- St Paul is the real author. So speaks St Clement of Alexandria.
- The others, who acknowledge a Pauline influence, but deny he was the only true author. This second category is the most admitted today. So speaks Origen, the father of biblical studies, who says the author could be St Clement of Rome, or St Luc.

The great Abbot Dom Paul Delatte, we already quoted in our studies, agrees in that last opinion, which seems quite true. Comparing the structure of his Gospel, and also the one of the Acts of the Apostles, we can easily see a great similarity.

From the 6th century until the 16th, everyone admitted the epistle into the Canon of the Holy Scriptures, despite some slight discordance amongst the fathers of the church before that time. The epistle was, at that time, said to be from St Paul

Luther started again this debate about its authenticity but was not taken seriously amongst catholic scholars. Mid-20th century, discussions about the author went deeper, using the new tools of biblical criticism. The outcome was about the one who wrote the text itself, being a scribe, more than the author.

Generally speaking, it is now commonly admitted that the author was a disciple of St Paul, most probably St Luc, according to the opinion of Dom Delatte, previously mentioned.

1.3.1 Why this epistle could not be from St Paul himself?

- The style is different from St Paul's usual style. We do not find the same display in this epistle, as we found in the others.
- An important number of words (153) are only found in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and not in any other text of the New Testament.
- The quotations from the Old Testament are taken from the Septuagint and are introduced in a very different way.
- We do not recognize the pharisaic way of argumentation that were used with the other epistles.
- The difference of the epistles to the Romans and Galatians, explanation about the law, of Christ's Priesthood are seen under a worship angle, less than a moral point of view.
- Some may say that the epistle is more centred upon the Ascension, but it seems not that obvious, as setting apart the Ascension from the Paschal mystery would be a nonsense.

1.3.2 How this epistle looks like the other epistles?

Unfortunately, we most of the time stress the differences between the Epistle to the Hebrews and the others, rather than their resemblance. However, we need to rest upon those, as, per our previous affirmation, this epistle belongs to the pauline texts, at least in its inspiration.

- The second half of the letter, and especially the conclusion looks like the other writings of St Paul, following a very similar display.
- The mention of Timothy, who, as we know, was so close to the Apostle. He's not mentioned here by accident.
- All the doctrinal points of the epistle are the same Pauline inspiration, the difference being more in the wording and style than in the ideas themselves. Let's give a few examples:
 - o Christ is the mediator; He existed before, and is creator
 - Hb., I, 2-6
 - Col., I-15-17
 - o Incarnation; Christ lowered himself to become the expiation victim
 - Hb., II, 14-17
 - Phil., II; 7; Rm., VIII, 3; Gal., IV, 4
 - o Redemption through sufferings and death
 - Hb., II, 18; V, 7-8
 - Rm., III, 25; Phil., II, 8
 - o Divine filiation
 - Hb., V, 7-8; IX, 14-18
 - Phil., II, 8, Gal., IV, 1-10

- The Son of God has been exalted and sits at the right Hand of God
 - Hb., I, 3-4 Rm., VIII, 34; Col., II, 10; Eph., I, 20-21; Phil., II, 9
- The old covenant has been replaced with the new one
 - Hb., VII, 7-12; VIII, 6 II Cor., III, 9

Even if the author quotes the Septuagint, he uses the Holy Scriptures in the same way and meaning of the Apostle, using the triple method of the allegory, comparison, and casuistry. Moreover, he uses the same texts and references St Paul uses.

1.3.3 A possible solution about the author

1.3.3.1 What differs between St Paul and the author:

St Paul	The author
Irregular and fighting style in writing	Calm and quiet
Frequent and strong oppositions	Prefers smooth transitions
Often uses his own person to justify his work	Disappears behind his work
Defend his authority as an apostle	Denies being an apostle (Hb., II, 3)
Often says: in Christ, In Christ Jesus	Does not use such expression, but new and original ones ³
When quoting the Old Testament, often introduces with “it is written”	Never uses such wording
Quote the Hebrew text of the Bible	Uses the Septuagint
Never mentions the High Priest, or the theology about the Priesthood, even in the Pastoral epistles	The epistle to the Hebrew is the theological source for our doctrine about the Priesthood

1.3.3.2 What makes them very similar

- Both are strong polemicists against the Law
- They insist upon the obedience of Christ, as part of the Redemption
- They express in a same way the Glory of Christ
- The doctrine about the Priesthood is prepared in St Paul's other writings
- Several words (65) are only found in St Paul's and are in common with the Epistle to the Hebrew
- Timothy, the beloved disciple
- The conclusion

1.3.3.3 Let's try!

If the author is not St Paul himself, however, we must say he is very near to him, and knows a lot about the Jewish people and traditions. Amongst various possible candidates, only

³ “Consider the apostle and high priest of our confession, Jesus.” Hb., III, 1.

“Having therefore a great high priest that hath passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God” Hb., IV, 14.

“Looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith.” Hb., XII, 2.

three match these criteria: St Luke, St Barnabas, and Apollos. Some people even said the Virgin Mary wrote the epistle, which can't be, but confirms the opinion we would follow about St Luke being the author.

St Luke was a practician, faithful disciple of St Paul. The Greek language of his Gospel is very similar to the one of the epistles. Doctrine about the Priesthood, liturgy and Jerusalem can be found in both. This opinion was the one most followed before the 6th century.

St Barnabas could be a possible author, because he was from Levi's tribe, and was a disciple of St Paul. But they separated after the 1st missionary trip. It's Tertullian's opinion.

The modern critics chose the 3rd solution about Apollos, who was a rhetorician, disciple of St Paul, Jewish origin. The same common points were said about St Luke too. Moreover, this opinion does not have any support from the patristic age, and only became known since the 16th century through Luther's invention.

That's why we prefer to follow the opinion of Dom Delatte about St Luke. However, this question about the true author remains quite secondary, as it is clear enough that St Paul's influence can't be denied from the ideas and doctrine of the epistle. This last comment upon the author is supported by an answer from the biblical commission on the 24th June 1914⁴

1.4 Structure of the Epistle

It seems quite difficult to give a clear layout of the epistle, as it appears to be a succession of teachings upon bullet points in doctrine and moral. The letter is a long homily, to which St Paul most probably added his final touch, in the concluding chapter.

Following St Thomas, we would like to read the epistle with two general ideas:

- Christ's primacy (I, 1 - X,39)

⁴ Concerning the Author and Manner of Composition of the Epistle to the Hebrews (June 24, 1914 (AAS 6 [1914] 417f; EB 429ff; Dz 2176ff))

I: Are the doubts about the divine inspiration and Pauline origin of the Epistle to the Hebrews which influenced certain minds in the West in the first centuries, chiefly because of its abuse by heretics, of such importance that, bearing in mind the unbroken, unanimous, and unwavering affirmation of the eastern Fathers supported after the fourth century by the entire assent of the whole western Church, due weight also being given to the acts of the Popes and sacred Councils, especially that of Trent, and to the constant usage of the universal Church, it is lawful to hesitate about reckoning it definitively not only among the canonical Epistles-which has been defined as a matter of faith -but also among the genuine Epistles of the Apostle Paul?

Answer: In the negative.

II: Can the arguments commonly based either on the unusual absence of Paul's name and the omission of the customary introduction and salutation in the Epistle to the Hebrews-or on the purity of its Greek, the elegance and perfection of its diction and style-or on the character of its quotations and arguments from the Old Testament-or on certain differences alleged to exist between the doctrine of this and the other Pauline Epistles, in any way invalidate its Pauline origin? Or rather do the perfect unanimity in teaching and thought, the resemblance of the admonitions and exhortations, and the agreement in phrase and even in words pointed out also by some non-Catholics, which are seen to exist between it and the other writings of the Apostle of the Gentiles, clearly indicate and confirm the same Pauline origin?

Answer: In the negative to the first part; in the affirmative to the second.

III: Should the Apostle Paul be considered the author of this Epistle after such manner that he must necessarily be said, not only to have conceived and expressed it all under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, but also to have given it the form that it actually has?

Answer: In the negative, saving the further judgement of the Church.

- Upon the angels (I – II)
- Upon Moses (III – IV)
- Upon the priests of the Old Covenant (V – X)
- The virtue of Faith unites members to the head of the Mystical Body (XI – XIII)
 - The virtue of faith in itself (XI)
 - The works of Faith (XII – XIII)

2 The teaching of the Epistle

The Epistle to the Hebrews looks like a Homily upon the exodus, or better upon the priestly Christology, enlightened by the liturgy and the priesthood of the Old Testament. It is a long explanation upon Christ, *Heri et Hodie*,⁵ yesterday and today.

2.1 Similarities with the other Apostles

2.1.1 St John

In his Gospel, St John tries to comfort the Faith of his readers, as the author of the epistle tries to strengthen or even wake up again their Faith.

In a similar manner, St John and the author stress their teaching with the central figure of Christ, not as the Word nor the Lord, but as the High Priest, and unique mediator.

The Faith is also put under trial, through time and persecutions, but brings at the end the eternal reward of the heavenly Jerusalem. Both the Apocalypse and the Epistle conclude with this same glorious picture.

“But call to mind the former days, wherein, being illuminated, you endured a great fight of afflictions. And on the one hand indeed, by reproaches and tribulations, were made a gazingstock; and on the other, became companions of them that were used in such sort. For you both had compassion on them that were in bands, and took with joy the being stripped of your own goods, knowing that you have a better and a lasting substance. Do not therefore lose your confidence, which hath a great reward. For patience is necessary for you; that, doing the will of God, you may receive the promise.”⁶

“He that shall lead into captivity, shall go into captivity: he that shall kill by the sword, must be killed by the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.”⁷

Christ, as He is presented in the Hebrews looks very similar to Christ in St John’s Gospel, 1st Epistle and Apocalypse: Christ is the innocent unblemished victim.

⁵ Hb., XIII, 8.

⁶ Hb., X, 32-36

⁷ Apoc., XIII, 10.

2.1.2 St Peter

There are also similarities with St Peter's 1st Letter, especially regarding the quotations of the Old Testament, and the way to urge the readers to fidelity, stressing the coming event of Parousia.

2.1.3 St Paul

We already said a lot about them. Let's never forget that the similarities are more important than the differences here. In the Epistle to the Hebrew, Christology is presented under a new angle, but remains highly dependent on the doctrine taught in the other Pauline epistles, especially in the Pastoral epistles. The epistle to the Hebrews is a continuation of the explanation about Christ, and the hypostatic union of the two natures, divine and human, into the unique person of Christ.

2.2 Main theme: Christ the High Priest

2.2.1 The priesthood

The Epistle to the Hebrews is **the** text of the New Testament about the Priesthood, and especially through Jesus Christ, perfect High Priest, perfect Pontiff. He is the only Priest of the New Covenant. We know very well this chapter 5 of the epistle, as we hear it every first Thursday of the month at the mass of Jesus the High Priest.

With Jesus, the priest is no longer a public servant only, but becomes a mediator between God and men. His first duty is an intercession through his prayer and sacrifice. The secondary task to teach is immediately subordinated to this first one. That why, "Neither doth any man take the honour to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was. Christ is priest and shepherd."⁸

Jesus is Priest "for ever, according to the order of Melchizedek."⁹ This precision about Melchizedek adds a dignity which the priest of the old covenant didn't have. Melchisedek was the King of Salem who offered the sacrifice in thanksgiving for Abraham's victory over his enemies.

Therefore, Christ's Priesthood sits above all the Levitical priests of the Old Covenant. His Priesthood is royal,¹⁰ universal,¹¹ holy, heavenly,¹² eternal,¹³ one¹⁴ and forever.¹⁵ Ornated with all those attributes, the Priesthood of the New Covenant is above and fully replaces the one

⁸ Hb., V, 4.

⁹ Hb., VII, 17.

¹⁰ Hb., VII, 2.

¹¹ Hb., VII, 3.

¹² Hb., VII, 20.

¹³ Hb., VII, 3.

¹⁴ Hb., VII, 23-25.

¹⁵ Hb., VII, 3.

of the Old Covenant, which wasn't eternal, nor forever,¹⁶ nor universal,¹⁷ nor unique,¹⁸ nor immaculate,¹⁹ nor heavenly.²⁰

This total superiority is due to the perfect Charity of Christ, and his complete renouncement upon the Cross, with the complete obedience to His Father. Perfect love and perfect obedience produced a perfect sacrifice, once for all. This sacrifice is not done again, but only renewed through the Sacrifice of the Mass. The priests of the new Covenant act *in persona et virtute Christi*, but do not physically redo the Sacrifice of the Cross, which was the accomplishment of the Redemption for all sins. The Sacrifice of the Mass brings to us the fruits of the unique sacrifice of the Cross.

Using the example of the liturgy of the Temple, chapter 9 of the epistle made clear this intercession of Christ on behalf of mankind, once for all:

“The Holy Ghost signifying this, that the way into the holies was not yet made manifest, whilst the former tabernacle was yet standing. Which is a parable of the time present: according to which gifts and sacrifices are offered, which can not, as to the conscience, make him perfect that serveth, only in meats and in drinks, And divers washings, and justices of the flesh laid on them until the time of correction. But Christ, being come an high priest of the good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hand, that is, not of this creation: Neither by the blood of goats, or of calves, but by his own blood, entered once into the holies, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and of oxen, and the ashes of an heifer being sprinkled, sanctify such as are defiled, to the cleansing of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who by the Holy Ghost offered himself unspotted unto God, cleanse our conscience from dead works, to serve the living God? And therefore he is the mediator of the new testament: that by means of his death, for the redemption of those transgressions, which were under the former testament, they that are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance.”²¹

In Christ are gathered all the different gestures of the priests of the Old Covenant:

- Intercession for men before God
- Offering gifts and sacrifices to God for the sin of men²²
- Vocation comes from God²³
- Helper for ignorant and lost people²⁴
- Rite of expiatory blood²⁵

¹⁶ Hb., VII, 11 & 23.

¹⁷ Hb., VII, 11-12 & 22.

¹⁸ Hb., VII, 23-28.

¹⁹ Hb., VII, 26-28.

²⁰ Hb., VII, 23-26.

²¹ Hb., IX, 8-15.

²² Hb., V, 1 & VII, 3.

²³ Hb., V, 4.

²⁴ Hb., V, 2.

²⁵ Hb., IX, 7-12sq.

2.2.2 The Shepherd

Christ is the mediator between God and men, practicing the holy and divine mercy towards them. The priesthood of the old covenant was a preparation in figure of the Priesthood of Christ.

With the reference to Melchizedek and to Psalm 109, Christ is declared as king and shepherd of the flock, as the king guides his people. Following the images of Moses and David, as well as the parable of the Good Shepherd,²⁶ and the suffering servant of Isaiah,²⁷ Christ is called “the great pastor of the sheep.”²⁸ As He offered Himself on behalf of the flock, Christ walks first ahead of it, guiding all men toward eternity.

Christ is all together a new Moses, a new Joshua, a new David, but also much more than they were.

2.2.3 Sacrifice of Christ / Sacrificial immolation

The Chapter 11 of the epistle offers us several figures of the Old Testament, predicting the Sacrifice of Christ: Abel,²⁹ Henoah,³⁰ Noah,³¹ Abraham,³² Isaac,³³ Jacob,³⁴ Joseph,³⁵ Moses,³⁶ Rahab,³⁷ and the prophets.³⁸

Abraham immolated his son, who was the token for the Promise. Moses is in the meantime the one who prefers contempt, and who also institutes the rite of the paschal lamb. The author continues the list of the figures, finishing with the kings, prophets, and martyrs, who suffered. All of them are moved with one common virtue: Faith in God, and confidence in the promise of a better world in the future. Those heroes of the Old Testament suffered in Faith, announcing the Death and Resurrection of Christ, expecting their reward, because of the promise that was made to them.

With their heritage, less than a rupture, we need to read a continuation and perfection of their sacrifice and priesthood in Christ. Christ is the only One who gather all these figures of Melchisedek, the King and Shepherd, all the patriarchs and prophets, in one unique figure of the High Priest. Jesus is the Priest-king and the Priest-prophet, who brings peace and reconciliation amongst men. As servant of God, he also willingly offers himself as a victim for all sins, to reconcile men with God.

Christ's Priesthood is manifest through His Sacrifice, demonstration of his perfect obedience to His eternal Father.³⁹

²⁶ Jn., X.

²⁷ Is. LIII.

²⁸ Hb., XIII, 20.

²⁹ Hb., XI, 4.

³⁰ Hb., XI, 5.

³¹ Hb., XI, 7.

³² Hb., XI, 8-19.

³³ Hb., XI, 20.

³⁴ Hb., XI, 21.

³⁵ Hb., XI, 22.

³⁶ Hb., XI, 23-29.

³⁷ Hb., XI, 31.

³⁸ Hb., XI, 32.

³⁹ Hb., V.

2.2.4 Christ's Obedience: he is the mediator

This perfection of Christ's Priesthood, is not only due to all the figures which announced Him, but is to be understood as per His dignity of being the Son of God. This dignity makes Him sit above all of them, and also above the Angels.⁴⁰

As the priests of the old covenant were, Jesus was instituted as the High Priest. This institution is found in his perfect obedience to the Father's Will.⁴¹ This obedience offers the only chance to unite the action of the Sacrifice and His status as a victim.

The obedience of Christ is offering both the ministry of the priesthood and the actions of the priests of the Old Testament, but also surpasses them. He gathered in one unique figure all the attitudes and powers of the priests before Him. As the perfect servant, Christ does not intend to show evidence of his own dignity, but introduces Himself as the protector of God's Promise, and recapitulates in Himself the three powers of king, priest and prophet. Moses announced them as the guide, prophet, mediator and suffering servant.

2.2.5 Consequently, the priesthood in the Church

The high dignity of the Saviour assumes all functions of the priest of the Old Covenant. Because He lowered Himself, He completed this Priesthood, and allowed the Church to benefit from it.

This is the new priesthood, founded upon the divine filiation of the Son, but which also links to the old traditions of Israel. The people of God are still walking towards the rest of the Sabbath. Only the Son arrived there.

All the great petitions of the epistle shows that salvation is not fully obtained for the people. They are moving and willing to have it, but still expecting.

Looking at how the author speaks about the priests of the Old Covenant, it seems obvious a new order of priests is wanted. So speaks the rest of the New Testament.

Following the example of Christ, this priesthood is a mediation, a service. But at the difference of the Old Testament, Christ associated men He chose to His service, to be placed at the head of communities, and being united to Him, the only priest. This new ministry is not coming from men, but from God, which makes it much superior to the old one. They are at the service of God and His people, guiding it and making it resound for the call of God to salvation.

⁴⁰ Hb., I, -13-14. "But to which of the angels said he at any time: Sit on my right hand, until I make thy enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them, who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?"

⁴¹ Hb., V & VII.

2.3 The influence of the Old Testament

Several references to the Old Testament, and especially to Moses and Exodus, allows the author to present the constant pilgrimage of the people of God towards Heaven: Christians are pilgrims,⁴² who are not to lose themselves,⁴³ always aiming for Heaven.⁴⁴

This new Exodus of God's people is articulated with three main themes:

2.3.1 Revelation

In the Old Testament, the word of the Revelation is the common departure of everything. It invites the people of God to believe in God's promise. Welcoming with Faith and confidence this promise, the heavenly pilgrim accepts the unknown events⁴⁵ of his trip, following the holy examples of Abraham⁴⁶ and all the holy men of the Old Testament. They showed the way: Faith will guide to the end and paradise.⁴⁷

2.3.2 Trials

To obtain this reward, Christians must endure the trials, crucible of the Faith, but also know and remember the knowledge of the mysteries of Faith. Listen, keep in heart and memory, and then practice.

“But call to mind the former days, wherein, being illuminated, you endured a great fight of afflictions. And on the one hand indeed, by reproaches and tribulations, were made a gazingstock; and on the other, became companions of them that were used in such sort. For you both had compassion on them that were in bands, and took with joy the being stripped of your own goods, knowing that you have a better and a lasting substance. Do not therefore lose your confidence, which hath a great reward. For patience is necessary for you; that, doing the will of God, you may receive the promise. For yet a little and a very little while, and he that is to come, will come, and will not delay. But my just man liveth by faith; but if he withdraw himself, he shall not please my soul. But we are not the children of withdrawing unto perdition, but of faith to the saving of the soul.”⁴⁸

2.3.3 Faith's victory

Faith will be the compass to keep right the walk towards paradise, and the joint victory of all the faithful people of God.

⁴² Hb., XI, 13. “All these died according to faith, not having received the promises, but beholding them afar off, and saluting them, and confessing that they are pilgrims and strangers on the earth.”

⁴³ Hb., XIII, 9. “Be not led away with various and strange doctrines. For it is best that the heart be established with grace, not with meats; which have not profited those that walk in them.”

⁴⁴ Hb., XIII, 14. “For we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come.”

⁴⁵ Hb., XI, 8.

⁴⁶ Hb., VI, 15-17 & XI, 17.

⁴⁷ Hb., XI.

⁴⁸ Hb., X, 32-39.

2.4 Call to holiness

This theology allows the author to introduce the people of God as a community of worship. Seeing this pilgrimage just as a walk is incomplete without Faith. If Faith is guiding, the divine worship will open the doors of the Temple.⁴⁹

2.4.1 Christ, our model

Christ is fully God and Man. He endured our weaknesses and limitation, even temptations, but of course, never sinned.

As the incarnated Son and priest, Christ is above Moses and the priest of the Temple, because he is priest according to the order of Melchizedek, and not of Aaron. If he's above them, His Sacrifice is above too. His Glory is coming from and with the Cross, as It brings eternal salvation to the world.

Christ's Priesthood is unique and forever, as is His Sacrifice. All of us are invited to participate, according to the part they received, until they come to the Joy of the eternal Kingdom.

2.4.2 Sin

This idea is present all along the epistle, as it directly links with the redemption. It is so strong in the text that some heretics of the first centuries tried to use its content to say some sins were unforgivable. More recent scholars used this same idea to reject the epistle, because they thought it being too rigid.

Sin is the cause for the Sacrifice of Jesus. Sin is setting us apart from God, because it goes against Him and His law. The Redemption offers us forgiveness and satisfaction, but only with conditions. Let's not forget whom the author is speaking to: some Christians who might be tempted with lukewarm, and spiritual laziness.

“For it is impossible for those who were once illuminated, have tasted also the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, Have moreover tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, And are fallen away: to be renewed again to penance, crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making him a mockery.”⁵⁰

This excerpt about lapsed people is quite severe. Do we have to understand that such sin could not be forgiven? This is how some heretics took it, but can we truly think that the apostle would willingly throw into despair, those who fell away from the Church, out of weakness? This would contradict what was said previously about the universal call to Salvation through the mystery of the Blood of Christ.

Here the apostle is obviously not speaking about those who abandoned faith in their weakness, but strongly condemned those who, knowing everything, willingly and proudly chose

⁴⁹ Hb., VII, 25; IX, 28; XII, 22-24. “But you are come to mount Sion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the company of many thousands of angels, And to the church of the firstborn, who are written in the heavens, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the just made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new testament, and to the sprinkling of blood which speaketh better than that of Abel.”

⁵⁰ Hb., VI, 4-6.

to leave the shelter of salvation, saying a real no to the Grace of the Lord. This is what we call the sin against the Spirit, and this one is not forgivable, as it is dragging the sinner straight to Hell, as he refuses the forgiveness and the Mercy of the Lord.

Jesus wants to save all men, but unfortunately some are refusing his help. The sinner is freely and willingly rejecting Him, and that's why this sin can't be forgiven.

2.4.3 Prayer

The Epistle insists upon prayer. Prayer of Christ, but also prayer of the Christian. The sacred text invites all of us to a contemplative prayer, fixing our look upon Jesus, as we read at the beginning of Chapter 3:

“Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly vocation, consider the apostle and high priest of our confession, Jesus.”⁵¹

This contemplation of Christ will help us in following the model He offered us. It would also be our answer to the command of the Father on Mount Thabor: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him.”⁵²

Looking at Him, listening to Him: Here is the double invitation of the epistle for the Christian. We contemplate His glory, meditating upon His sufferings. Christian prayer is centered upon Christ, who, from Heaven continues to intercede for us, opening always to mankind the opportunity for Salvation.

2.4.4 Eucharist

This mediation of Christ and His Sacrifice is offering the opportunity to anyone to become himself an oblation, a victim for the Love of the Father. Chapter X of the epistle clearly indicate the eucharistic celebration, linked to the Sacrifice of the Cross.

The baptised people are invited to unite themselves to Christ through their participation in the Sacrifice, in receiving the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist.

3 Conclusion

The epistle to the Hebrews is probably written to ancient priests of the Temple, who converted to Faith, but found time long, and were tempted to go back to their original chains, looking back to their past.

This is sometimes our lot too, and that's why this epistle remains accurate still today. When we feel assailed by various troubles, if we do not remain faithful, we may not find the right answer to our problems.

The mediation of Christ will help us to remain focused, and faithfully guided by His figure of priest and shepherd, we will find the right path in midst of trials, rocks and thorns.

⁵¹ Hb., III, 1.

⁵² Mt., XVII, 5.

4 General conclusion on St Paul

With his high mystic and theological wisdom, St Paul is the model of all theologians, who, following his example, tried always to explain more the mystery of the Redemption, imitating the perfect model: Jesus-Christ.

His 14 epistles demonstrate his activity as ambassador for Christ across the Mediterranean Sea, and through the ages of the History of the Church.

Faith in Christ and Salvation is the key St Paul brought to us, especially through the Epistle to the Romans. He always explained the events of the New Testament, using the Old Testament, marking the continuity between the two parts of the same book, the same history of Salvation. Jesus accomplished all prophecies, fulfilled them, and recreated the world through His sacrifice.

This Sacrifice gave us the Justice for our sins. Our sins were forgiven, washed, and a new life of grace has been given to us all. This grace is poured from the Cross, from the Head to the members of one unique body: the Church.

The Church, People of God, is united with his Chief, Master and Saviour: Jesus the High Priest and Good Shepherd. St Paul gave us the teaching of the New Covenant and the new Priesthood, both founded in the blood of Christ, poured out from the Cross. Without this blood, redemption is not possible. Without this redemption, sin is not annihilated.

All the time St Paul preached the words which conclude the Epistle to the Hebrews, and will also conclude our overview of the Pauline Epistles, as they seem to be the perfect summary of St Paul's teaching:

« *Christus heri et hodie, ipse et in saecula* »

“Jesus Christ, yesterday, and today; and the same for ever.”⁵³

⁵³ Hb., XIII, 8.