The Encomiastic Topics of Syncrisis as the Key to the Structure and Argument of Hebrews

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This study examines comparison in Hebrews in the light of ancient rhetorical theory of syncrisis, identifying five epideictic syncrises: the messengers/angels vs. Jesus (1.1-14; 2.5-18), Moses vs. Jesus (3.1-6), the Aaronic high priests vs. Jesus (5.1-10), the Levitical priestly ministry vs. the Melchizedekian priestly ministry (7.1-10.18), and Mt. Sinai vs. Mt. Zion (12.18-24). The study shows that these comparisons collectively function as a single syncritical project that argues for the superiority of the new covenant to the old, and that the project, like most of the individual comparisons, is arranged topically in accordance with ancient rhetorical theory.

Keywords: Hebrews, syncrisis, *synkrisis*, encomium, structure, rhetoric

Discerning the structure of Hebrews is a perennial issue.[1] Previous studies addressing the question may be categorized under two broad methodological approaches. The first involves a close reading of the text of Hebrews often coupled with a modern literary-critical or discourse-analysis theory. This approach has dominated the most significant and extensive analyses of the structure of Hebrews in modern scholarship. The leading studies, in this regard, have

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1 For comprehensive surveys of the history of research on this issue see G. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (NovTSup 73; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 3–41; C. L. Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship between Form and Meaning* (Library of New Testament Studies 297; London: T&T Clark, 2005) 1–21; and Gabriella Gelardini, *'Verhärtet eure Herzen nicht': der Hebräer, eine Synagogenhomilie zu Tischa Be-Aw* (BIS 83; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 1–84.

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been by A. Vanhoye,[2] W. Nauck,[3] and G. Guthrie.[4] None of these proposals, however, have won the day.

Each of these studies has provided significant insights into Hebrews' arrangement but none begin with the methodological question that is the concern of this study—namely, in what way and with which categories would the author of Hebrews and his audience have conceived of the structure of this Christian 'word of exhortation'. This question recognizes that there were rhetorical and compositional categories and strategies peculiar to the historical context of Hebrews that would have guided the compositional practices of the author and informed the expectations of his audience.[5] Modern text-linguistic or discourse theories fail to account for these categories and strategies since they are specific to the author's context.[6]

2 The most influential literary-critical study on the structure of Hebrews in the twentieth century has been by A. Vanhoye (*La Structure Littéraire de l'Épître aux Hébreux* [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2nd ed. 1976]) who proposed a five-part concentric structure based on five textual cues: announcement of the subject, hook words, inclusions, characteristic terms, and change in genre. Recently, Gelardini ('*Verhärtet eure Herzen nicht*', 83) has attempted to defend a five-part concentric structure for Hebrews that shares some similarities with Vanhoye's own structure.

3 W. Nauck's ('Zum Aufbau des Hebräerbriefes', *Judentum Urchristentum Kirche: Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias* [ed. W. Eltester; BZNW 26; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1960] 199–206) proposal accounts for the other major structural analysis that has gained traction in the recent studies on Hebrews. Following the original proposal by O. Michel, Nauck proposed a tripartite division of Hebrews taking as his structural clues the parallel exhortations in 4.14-16 and 10.19-23. This tripartite structure has had significant influence on the German interpretation of Hebrews and is followed with slight modification by H. Zimmermann, *Das Bekenntnis der Hoffnung: Tradition und Redaktion im Hebräerbrief* (Cologne: Peter Hanstein, 1977) 18–24; W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (trans. H. C. Kee; Nashville: Abingdon, 1975) 390–2; O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (KEK 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966) 29–35; H.-F. Weiss, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (KEK 15; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991) 42–51; and K. Backhaus, *Der Neue Bund und das Werden der Kirche: die Diatheke-Deutung des Hebräerbrief im Rahmen der frühchristlichen Theologiegeschichte* (NTAbh 29; Münster: Aschendorff, 1996) 63. This tripartite arrangement also provides the structural framework for the discourse analysis of Hebrews by Westfall (*A Discourse Analysis*, 299-301) and for the commentary by J. W. Thompson, *Hebrews* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 19. Though he does not advocate a tripartite structure for Hebrews, Guthrie (*The Structure of Hebrews*, 117) does treat these exhortations as significant textual markers for the outline of Hebrews in his 'text-linguistic' approach.

4 Guthrie's work is approvingly cited in the commentaries by W. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* (WBC 47A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991) xc–xcviii, and the recent commentary by P. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 34.

5 Under such an approach, the significance of literary features like those identified by close readings and modern linguistic or discourse analysis theories becomes apparent strictly in relationship to the compositional-rhetorical outline followed by the writer, and in any case, those features are regarded as secondary clues to the structure.

6 Of the literary devices Vanhoye identifies only three are acknowledged to have precedent in ancient rhetorical instructions: hook words, chiasmus, and inclusios. But as Nauck ('Zum

By contrast, the second methodological approach attempts to gain facility with the rhetorical templates learned and used in the ancient world, reading Hebrews in the light of ancient textbooks devoted, in part, to compositional arrangement. In this regard, scholars such as K. Nissalä, W. Überlacker, and C. Koester have all attempted to outline Hebrews via speech headings or topics learned in these textbooks and employed widely by ancient orators (e.g., *prooemium*, *narratio*, *argumentatio*, and *peroratio*).[7] The issue here concerns identifying the boundaries of these divisions in Hebrews,[8] which are only discernable once the rhetorical argument is identified. Concerning Hebrews, syncrisis is a universally recognized key feature of its rhetorical argument. What is more, there is significant discussion from the ancient handbooks on how syncrises were to be composed and arranged. On the basis of these instructions, we propose that the organizing architectural feature of Hebrews is its use of syncrisis, and that Hebrews is structured as a five-part epideictic syncrisis spanning the length of the work and proving the superiority of the new covenant to the old covenant via comparisons of representative figures. The syncrisis is ordered, the study shows, both chronologically and topically, each of the five syncrises taking up headings prescribed for syncrisis in ancient rhetorical handbooks. Evident across the length of this argument is a narrative progression through covenant life, from ultimate origins to ultimate eschatological ends. Such progression, we argue, accords with ancient syncritical theory, which requires that 'inanimate things' be contrasted beginning to end,

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Aufbau des Hebräerbriefes', 201) points out, these devices do not provide a sufficient foundation for the overall arrangement and logic of the material in Hebrews. Additionally, Vanhoye's overall approach to Hebrews is eclectic and does not attempt to ground itself comprehensively in the compositional methods contemporaneous with Hebrews.

7   K. Nissilä, *Das Hohepriestermotiv im Hebräerbrief: Eine exegetische Untersuchung* (Schriften der Finnischen Exegetischen Gesellschaft 33; Helsinki: Oy Liiton Kirjapaino, 1979) 74–8, 143–7, 239–44; W. Überlacker, *Der Hebräerbrief als Appell: Untersuchungen zur Exordium, Narratio und Postscriptum (Hebr 1–2 und 13,22-25)* (ConBNT 21; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1989) 224; and C. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 36: New York: Doubleday, 2001) 84–5. Also see A. Lincoln, *Hebrews: A Guide* (London: T&T Clark, 2006) 24–5. While Backhaus (*Der Neue Bund*, 63) and Thompson (*Hebrews*, 19) adopt Nauck's tripartite structure, they both attempt to integrate the rhetorical components of a speech into this framework.

8   E.g., Überlacker (*Der Hebräerbrief als Appell*, 224): *prooemium = exordium* (1.1-4), *narratio* with *propositio* (1.4-2.18), *argumentatio* with *probatio* and *refutatio* (3.1-12.29), *peroratio* (13.1-21), *postscriptum* (13.22-25); Backhaus (*Der Neue Bund*, 63): *exordium* (1.1-4), *narratio* (1.5-4.13), *propositio* (4.14-16), *argumentatio* (5.1-10.18), and *peroratio* (10.19-13.21); Koester (*Hebrews*, 84-5): *exordium* (1.1-2.4), *propositio* (2.5-9), *argumentatio* with digressions (2.10-12.27), *peroratio* (12.28-13.21), and epistolary postscript (13.22-25); Lincoln (*Hebrews*, 24-5): *exordium* (1.1-4), *argumentatio* (1.5-12.17), *peroratio* (12.18-29), and epistolary conclusion (13.1-25); and Thompson (*Hebrews*, 19): *exordium* (1.1-4), *narratio* (1.5-4.13), *propositio* (4.14-16), *probatio* (5.1-10.31), and *peroratio* (10.32-13.25).

using the headings or topics analogous to those normally used to compare human lives in their entirety. Each stage of the five-part comparison, we argue, can be explained in terms of these topics.

Though this architectural feature has not been identified previously in rhetorical studies, there are important precedents, most notably the studies of T. Olbricht and T. Seid, which point to some of the same epideictic syncrises identified in this study and which argue for the use of encomiastic topics as the structuring principle of these individual syncrises.[9] Whereas, however, these studies focus on Christ and the various figures of the past with which he is comparatively paired as the primary subjects of the running syncrisis,[10] this study argues that the new and old covenants are the primary subjects, and that Christ and the various past figures are merely representatives of their respective covenants, as are other paired subjects featured in the comparison (Levitical Priesthood/ Melchizedekian priesthood, Sinai/Zion). As a consequence of this insight, this study is able, in contrast to Olbricht's and Seid's studies, to provide a rhetorical rationale for the arrangement of the overall syncritical project. Only when the covenants are identified as the ultimate subjects of comparison is it possible to see that the project is itself chronologically and topically ordered, as are also some of the individual syncrises that comprise it.

It is important to clarify from the outset that we limit the present analysis to the five *epideictic* syncrises comprising what we will call in this study 'the syncritical project' (i.e., the syncrisis of the old and new covenants) and do not offer a thesis concerning the relationship of these five syncrises either to the surrounding hortatory materials or to the *deliberative* syncrises (2.2-3; 4.2-3; 6.13-18; 10.28-29; 12.25) found within those materials. Neither do we, consequently, set forth a comprehensive outline of the overall argument and structure of Hebrews. This we leave for a later study, believing that the outline of the syncritical project's argument is foundational to the outline of the larger argument of Hebrews and, therefore, should be clearly articulated first.

The study will proceed in two parts. First, we attend to the ancient rules for syncrisis most relevant, in our view, to an analysis of Hebrews. Secondly, we set forth in light of these rules our thesis concerning the argument and structure of the syncritical project in its five parts.

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9 T. H. Olbricht, 'Hebrews as Amplification', *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht; JSNTSup 90; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993) 375–87 (377); T. Seid, 'Synkrisis in Hebrews 7: Rhetorical Structure and Analysis', *The Rhetorical Interpretation of Scripture: Essays from the 1996 Malibu Conference* (ed. S. E. Porter and D. L. Stamps; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999) 322–6.

10 The 'Christ is superior' motif has been a dominant approach in the history of interpretation. Cf. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 1-20.

1. Syncrisis in Ancient Rhetorical Theory

The art of epideictic syncrisis was learned by ancient students from the progymnasmata, or 'preliminary exercises'. These textbooks of composition and rhetoric taught students the basic literary forms considered preliminary not only to the practice of declamation, but also to written composition—a matter about which the rhetorician, Theon, is insistent (Theon, 70).[11]

Each of the four extant Greek progymnasmata contain an exercise wholly devoted to the art of syncrisis. These are the textbooks of Theon, Ps. Hermogenes, Aphthonius, and Nicolaus.[12] Though these progymnasmata lay down a number of rules for conducting syncrisis, four are of particular consequence for an analysis of Hebrews:

(1) Comparisons are conducted not whole to whole, but part to part. On this matter, all four progymnastic theorists agree. Aphthonius provides the rationale for the method, insisting that comparison by parts is more persuasive: 'It is not necessary in making comparison to contrast a whole with a whole, for that is flat and not argumentative, but compare a heading to a heading; this at least is argumentative' (Aphthonius, 43; cf. Nicolaus, 59). Thus one does not simply state that Achilles is superior to Hector, for such a simple or 'flat' declarative statement does not argue for what it claims. One must rather select topics from the lives of Achilles and Hector to compare in order to demonstrate who is the superior.

(2) The parts to be compared are the encomiastic topics employed in praise of a person. On this matter, again, all four theorists agree. Each provides a list of the topics to be taken up in the comparison, and a cursory examination of the lists (see below) shows, moreover, that despite their idiosyncrasies, the lists are in general agreement concerning a core set of topics to be considered.

(3) The encomiastic topics, chronologically arranged, serve as the compositional outline of the syncrisis. On this matter at least three of the four theorists—and

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11 All translations of the progymnasmata are from G. A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta: SBL, 2003); citations for Theon and Aphthonius refer to the page numbers of the critical editions in L. Spengel, ed., *Rhetores Graeci* (3 vols.; Leipzig: Teubner, 1854–56), citations for Ps. Hermogenes to the page numbers of H. Rabe, ed., *Hermogenis Opera* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1931), and citations for Nicolaus to the page numbers of J. Felten, ed., *Nicolai Progymnasmata* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1913; repr., Osnabrück: Zeller, 1968).

12 For the recent proposal that Theon's progymnasmata are attributable to the fifth-century rhetorician and not the first, see Malcolm Heath, 'Theon and the History of the Progymnasmata', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 43 (2002/3) 129–60. Though most, if not all, of the textbooks derive from after Hebrews was written, the forms they teach derive from classical Greek literature, and the curriculum they preserve derives from no later than the early Hellenistic period (Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, xi). More importantly, Quintilian's overview of the progymnasmata (2.4.21) shows that by the first century CE, syncrisis was an established exercise in the Latin curriculum, which is itself dependent on—and therefore later than—the Greek curriculum.

probably all four—agree. That is, Ps. Hermogenes, Aphthonius, and Nicolaus arrange the topics chronologically and require students to follow their lists as a template for their syncrises. Theon's list, by contrast, arranges topics in the traditional (i.e., Platonic; cf. Nicolaus, 50) manner according to the three goods of personhood: goods of the mind (i.e., virtues), goods of the body, and goods external to the person.[13] Theon's instruction concerning the actual arrangement of syncrisis in a speech or composition, however, though unclear, probably commends a chronological arrangement.[14] The following chart arranges each list side by side so that their commonalities and differences are readily apparent.[15]

The differences among the lists—and especially between Ps. Hermogenes's longer encomion list and his summational syncrisis list—show that the exact number and order of topics was not a matter of wide agreement. Indeed, it appears as though some theorists were drawn to expansion, while others were attracted to brevity. The theorists drawn to brevity, however, assist us in highlighting a core set of topics widely employed in syncrisis, encomion, and invective: origin, upbringing, deeds, and comparison. Examination of the lists for multiple attestations yields an only slightly larger core set of topics: origin, birth, nurture, education, pursuits (= office), deeds (bearing some manner of relationship to the three goods), death, and comparison—a core set widely attested in lists

13 Cf. Nicolaus's discussion (51) of both arrangements.
14 So J. R. Butts, 'The "Progymnasmata" of Theon: A New Text with Translation and Commentary' (PhD diss., The Claremont Graduate School, 1985) 491.
15 The summational list Ps. Hermogenes provides in his syncrisis exercise differs from the list he provides in the encomion exercise; thus we include both in the chart below.

Table 1a. Chronological Arrangements of Ps. Hermogenes, Aphthonius, and Nicolaus

Ps. Hermogenes: Encomion	Ps. Hermogenes: Syncrisis	Aphthonius: Encomion, Invective, Syncrisis	Nicolaus: Encomion, Invective, Syncrisis
		1. Prooemion	Prooemion (not numbered as a heading proper)
1. National origin		2. Origin 2a. nation 2b. homeland 2c. ancestors 2d. parents	1. Origin 2a. nationality 2b. native city 2c. ancestors
2. City	1. City		
3. Family	2. Family		
4. Marvelous Occurrences at Birth	----	----	2. Circumstances of Birth
5. Nurture	3. Nurture	3. Upbringing (= nurture and training)	3. Circumstances of Upbringing (= nurture)
6. Upbringing (= training)	----		4. Activities in Youth (= training)
7. Body	----	4b. body 4a. mind (= virtues) 4. Deeds (referred to all 3 goods) 4c. fortune (= externals)	5. Deeds (referred to virtues)
8. Mind (= virtues)	----		
9. Pursuits and Deeds	4. Pursuits and Deeds		
10. Externals	5. Externals		
11. Time	----	----	----
12. Manner of Death	6. Manner of Death	Not listed, but modeled	----
13. Greatness of the One Who Killed the Subject	----	----	----
14. Events after Death	7. Events after Death	----	----
15. Comparison	----	5. Comparison	6. Comparison
----	----	6. Epilogue	----

Table 1b. Theon's Arrangement by Goods[1]

Prooemion (not numbered as a heading proper)
1. External Goods (arranged chronologically)
a. good birth (= origin)
i. city, tribe, constitution
ii. ancestors and other relatives
b. education
c. friendship
d. reputation
e. official position
f. wealth
g. good children
h. good death
2. Bodily Goods
3. Goods of the Mind (Virtues), and Actions Referred to Virtues

[1] Tables 1a and 1b appeared originally in Martin, 'Progymnastic Topics List' (© 2008 Cambridge University Press), and are reprinted with permission.

outside the progymnasmata.[16] These are the topics, we argue, generally employed in Hebrews' syncrisis both at the macro-level (the larger syncritical project comparing covenants) and at the micro-level (the five individual syncrises that comprise the project)—excluding, of course, the topic of comparison itself, which the theorists say is to be eliminated when encomiastic topics are used in a full syncrisis (as Aphthonius helpfully explains, 'There is no comparison in it, since the whole exercise is a comparison'; 43).

Also of note in connection with this third rule above is that the theorists advise using the lists flexibly, tailoring them so that only those topics that serve the writer's purpose are featured (Theon, 111; Nicolaus, 51, 61). Moreover, the theorists clearly envision occasions in which comparison by a single topic will suffice for a syncrisis (Nicolaus, 61). In view of these considerations, we should not expect to find in all ancient syncrises a rigid conformity to any list of topics—or even the use of more than a single topic. Nonetheless, the writer of Hebrews, as we shall see, makes fairly consistent use in his comparisons of most of the core topics identified above.

16 Cf. *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* 3.6.10-11; Cicero *De Inventione* 1.24.34; 2.59.177; *De Partitione Oratoria* 22.74-75; Quintilian, 3.7; Menander Rhetor, 2.368-77.

(4) When comparing things, one employs topics analogous to those used in comparing persons. This is a course that Theon (113-14) advises, that is widely attested (cf. Ps. Hermogenes, 16-18, 19; Quintilian, 3.7; Menander Rhetor, 346-347), and that goes back at least to the time of Aristotle, who advises that in examining a commonwealth's origin, one might look, for example, at its founders (Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1.5.5)—or if examining the good children of a commonwealth, one might look at its good young men and their individual qualities, topic by topic (Aristotle 1.5.6). Similarly, Ps. Hermogenes teaches that a comparison of plants' origins might consider the gods who gave them (19), or that praise of a city's education might mention how 'the people have been taught by the gods' (83). Aphthonius, too, employs the method Theon describes in his model 'Encomion of Wisdom', taking up the topics of his own encomiastic topic list as though it were intended for use in the case of things. Thus in praising Wisdom's origin, he declares it a descendent of Zeus (Aphthonius, 38), and in praising Wisdom's deeds, he praises the deeds of wise armies (the Greeks' capture of Troy) and wise individuals (Odysseus's destruction of the Cyclops's eye; Aphthonius, 39). From these examples, it is clear that 'analogies of topics' are found by considering a corresponding element from the inanimate thing's 'lifespan'—as when founders, inventors, or gods from which the thing derives are considered in place of and analogous to origins. These same four rules govern comparison in the syncritical project of Hebrews, to which we now turn.

2. The Syncritical Project of Hebrews

There are five epideictic syncrises in Hebrews, each of them comparing and contrasting two subjects and pointing to one as the superior:

  I. Messengers/Angels vs. Jesus (1.1-14; 2.5-18)
 II. Moses vs. Jesus (3.1-6)
III. The Aaronic High Priests vs. Jesus (5.1-10)
 IV. The Levitical Priestly Ministry vs. the Melchizedekian Priestly Ministry (7.1-10.18)
  V. Mt. Sinai vs. Mt. Zion (12.18-24)

Several commonalities among these five syncrises suggest that they function together coherently as part of a single syncritical project, advancing a common syncritical argument for the superiority of the new covenant to the old covenant:

First, each syncrisis juxtaposes an old covenant subject with a new covenant subject, arguing for the superiority of the latter.[17] This is in keeping with rhetorical

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17 In Aelius Aristides's (second century) encomium of the city of Rome (an inanimate object), the city becomes a metonym for Rome's imperial rule. In a manner similar to Hebrews, Aristides

theory, which requires a writer arguing for the superiority of one subject to another to do so not directly (which would be 'flat and not argumentative') but indirectly, juxtaposing 'part' to 'part' and not 'whole' to 'whole'. To read the five syncrises of Hebrews only for their individual syncritical verdicts[18] is to over-look the overarching purpose that binds them together as a project—namely, to show which covenant is greater.

Second, each syncrisis contributes, by virtue of the role it features, to a chrono-logical progression that follows the lifespan of a covenant from beginning to end. To put it simply, there is a chronology to the pairings. The first pairing, in juxtaposing the covenants' heavenly mediators, focuses on the moment of the covenant's ulti-mate origins in heaven. The second pairing, in juxtaposing the covenant inaugu-rators and their faithful witness to God's house, focuses on the covenant's earthly beginnings. The third pairing, in juxtaposing the high priests and their respective ministries on behalf of the people, moves beyond covenant beginnings to the life and ministry of the covenant. The fourth pairing, in juxtaposing the priestly min-istries of each covenant, continues the focus on the life and ministry of the cove-nant. As we shall see, however, the focus of the third pairing is on high priestly sacrifice as training preparatory for the vocation of priesthood (cf. 5.7-10; cf. 5.11-6.1), while the focus of the fourth pairing is on priestly deeds carried out upon entrance into the vocation of priesthood—hence there is even chronological progression within the two syncrises devoted to covenant priests. Finally, the fifth pairing, in juxtaposing Sinai and Zion as contrasting ends to which the people are led by each covenant—Sinai, a shakable *telos* of marginal access to God, and Zion, an unshakeable (= heavenly and eternal) *telos* of complete access to God—focuses on covenant eschatology (see the discussion below), bringing the chronological progression to a close.[19]

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praises the rule of Rome through representative subjects such as its Princeps (32–33), its citi-zens (36), its army (72), and its constitution (90). The text and translation consulted here is J. H. Oliver, 'The Ruling Power: A Study of the Roman Empire in the Second Century after Christ through the Roman Oration of Aelius Aristides', *TAPS* 43/4 (1953) 895–907, 982–91.

18 As has happened often in the reception history of Hebrews (see n. 10 above). That is, the thesis that the 'Christ is superior' motif is key to the structure of Hebrews has dominated the history of interpretation, and undoubtedly because Jesus is featured as the new covenant subject in four of the five syncrises—and as the sole representative in three of the five comparisons. While this thesis is correct in seeing a common purpose among the syncrises, it is too narrowly focused on the several verdicts concerning Jesus' superiority and not on their collective impli-cation for the larger comparison of covenants in which they participate.

19 This type of progression is in accord with Koester's (*Hebrews*, 83) observation that the imagery in Hebrews 'moves in a...linear fashion' by which the audience is directed towards a goal. Koester sees this linear progression, however, repeated in three major movements (2.10-6.20; 7.1-10.39; 11.1-12.27) and not as a topical progression.

Third, each syncrisis contributes, by virtue of the role it features, to a topical progression that follows the lifespan of the covenant from beginning to end. That is, the chronological progression described above is attributable to the syncrisis' topical arrangement: (1) The comparison of heavenly covenant mediators, by virtue of its focus on the moment of covenant origins in heaven, takes up a heading analogous in the lifespan of a covenant to a person's 'origins'. (2) The comparison of covenant inaugurators, by virtue of its focus on the moment of covenant beginnings on earth, takes up a heading analogous in the lifespan of a covenant to a person's 'birth'. (3) The comparison of high priests, because of its depiction of high priestly sacrifice as an apprenticeship undertaken in preparation for the vocation of priesthood, has taken up a topic analogous in the lifespan of a covenant to 'education'. (4) The comparison of priestly ministries, because of its focus on 'deeds' performed in connection with the vocation of the priesthood, has taken up a topic analogous in the lifespan of a covenant to a person's 'deeds'. Together, comparisons 3 and 4, by virtue of moving beyond covenant beginnings to covenant life and priestly ministry, take up a topic analogous in the lifespan of a covenant to 'pursuits'—comparison 3 examining the education preparatory for covenant priestly ministry and vocation, and comparison 4 examining deeds performed in and through covenant priestly ministry and vocation. Finally, comparison 5, by virtue of its focus on the contrasting eschatological ends to which each covenant leads, takes up a topic analogous in the lifespan of a covenant to 'death' and 'events after death'.

Thus we may outline the syncritical project of Hebrews in terms of topics prescribed for syncrisis, or to be more precise, in terms of topics analogous to those prescribed for use in the syncrisis of persons:

 I. Origins: Syncrisis of Covenant Heavenly Mediators
 II. Birth: Syncrisis of Covenant Earthly Inaugurators
III. Pursuits—Education: Syncrisis of the Priestly Apprenticeships of Each Covenant
IV. Pursuits—Deeds: Syncrisis of the Priestly Deeds of Each Covenant
 V. Death/Events after Death: Syncrisis of Covenant Eschata

Chronological progression such as this—via topics analogous to those used for persons—is widely prescribed and exemplified by the theorists for encomia, invectives, and syncrises of 'inanimate things' (Theon's terminology; 112, 113).[20] Thus most educated persons would have been familiar with the method.

20 See, e.g., Theon, on encomion of honey, health, virtue, etc. (112), and on syncrisis of honey and health (113); Menander Rhetor, on encomion of cities (346.26–367.8); Ps. Hermogenes, on encomion of dumb animals (17), activities (17), growing things (17–18), and cities (18), and on syncrisis of plants (19) and activities (19); Aphthonius, on encomion of things (justice, self-control), occasions (spring, summer), places (harbors, gardens), dumb animals (horse, ox), plants (olive, vine) (35–36) and of wisdom (38–40), on invective of things,

Its logic, essentially, was that since 'inanimate things' (such as covenants) have lifespans of sorts, with beginnings, middles, and ends, they can be lauded, censured, and compared chronologically and topically in the same manner as persons.

The syncritical project as we have outlined it above is grounded, it should be noted, in Jer 31.31-34, which constitutes the longest scriptural quotation in Hebrews (8.8-12). Of particular interest to the writer are Jeremiah's comments concerning the failure of the first covenant, owing to the people's disobedience, and the resulting need for a new one based on the internalization of the law in the heart and the mind and the non-remembrance of sins once for all (cf. 10.14-17). This comparative interest is expressed most clearly in the writer's introduction and conclusion to the quotation, which focus on the obsolescence of the old covenant and the resulting need for a new one. The quotation in Hebrews of Jer 31.31-34 and its accompanying interpretative remarks make explicit what up until that point has been consistently, if only implicitly, argued—that the new covenant is superior to the old covenant. Thus it would be a mistake to characterize the quotation of Jeremiah as appearing 'quite abruptly without any preparation or further explanation'.[21]

In short, we take the five epideictic syncrises of Hebrews as a coherent, chronologically ordered and topically arranged argument for the superiority of the new covenant to the old covenant, and one that is rooted in Jeremiah's prophecy itself.[22] The specific manner in which Hebrews' syncritical argument is carried out can be further explicated by attending more closely to each of the five syncrises

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occasions, places, dumb animals, and growing things (40), and on syncrisis of things, occasions, places, dumb animals, and plants (42); Nicolaus, on encomion of activities (57), and on syncrisis of goods, evils, and things (60–61); and, in the Latin tradition, Quintilian, on encomion of cities (3.7.26). In Libanius' comparison of seafaring and farming, his syncrisis starts with the beginnings of each activity and concludes with the manner of death of those who participate in each activity (*Libanius's* Progymnasmata: *Model Exercises in Greek Prose Composition and Rhetoric* [trans. C. Gibson; WGRW 27; Atlanta: SBL, 2008] 343–5).

21 P. Gräbe, 'The New Covenant and Christian Identity in Hebrews', *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Context* (ed. R. Bauckham et al.; LNTS 387; London: T&T Clark, 2008) 121. Cf. S. Lehne, *The New Covenant in Hebrews* (JSNTSup 44; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990) 103, who observes that, through the cultic reinterpretation of the covenant, the author of Hebrews makes the covenant motif the organizing principle of his sermon.

22 Supporting our thesis is the early Christian reception of Hebrews' syncrisis by Chrysostom who not only identifies each of the comparisons of Hebrews as 'syncrisis', but also interprets the comparison for their representative value—as comparisons ultimately of the old and new covenants. See *On Heb.* 1.2; 5.1-3; 8.1; 12.1; 13.1, 5; and 32.1 (Philip Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* [14 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1889]).

individually, noting not only the specific manner in which they advance the topically driven argument of the larger syncritical project, but also their own arrangement, which in most cases is, like the larger project, topically ordered.

2.1   *Origin: Syncrisis of Covenant Heavenly Mediators*

According to the theorists, one begins a comparison of persons by contrasting their 'origins'—that is, the *people* from whom the subjects derive (fathers, ancestors, families), or the *places* from which the subjects derive (native cities, nations, homelands).[23] Comparison of 'inanimate things', according to the theorists, should begin similarly, by contrasting something analogous to the persons or places from which the things derive. The theorists' examples of possible analogies, noted above, are illustrative. One could compare as an analogous treatment of the things' 'origins' their inventors or founders—or, perhaps, the gods from which they derive.

This is, essentially, what the writer of Hebrews has done. That is, the writer begins the macro-level syncrisis of covenants by first examining the persons from whom the two covenants derive, namely, Jesus and the messengers/ angels. That the writer thinks of Jesus and messengers/angels as the covenants' respective mediators is clear from the exhortation of 2.1-4: whereas the old covenant was 'declared through angels', the new covenant was 'declared at first through the Lord' (2.3-4).

The comparison begins with a prooemion declaring the superiority, generally, of Jesus to old covenant messengers (1.1-4). The opening lines establish the parallel relationship of each to the people: 'Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son...' (v. 1-2a). The subsequent encomion of Jesus (vv. 2b-3) concludes in an explicit declaration of Jesus' superiority to the heavenly messengers that serves as the thesis of the section: '...having become as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs' (v. 4).

The superiority of Jesus to the angels is then demonstrated in 1.5-14 with reference to the same four topics structuring the overall work: origin (v. 5), birth (v. 6), pursuits (vv. 7-9), and death/posthumous events (vv. 10-14). Such consistency is not required by the theorists, as writers are encouraged to use only those topics that help their rhetorical cause. And some subsequent comparisons in Hebrews take up a more limited number of topics. Nevertheless, such consistency does lend insight into the topical headings with which the writer was generally working, both at the macro- and micro-levels of the syncritical project. The

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23 The theorists are consistent in dividing this topic by geography and family. See Theon, 110; Ps. Hermogenes, 15; Aphthonius, 36; Nicolaus, 50; cf. Quintilian, 3.7.10; Menander Rhetor, 2.368-70.

argument, which depicts Jesus' enthronement[24] in terms of each of these topics and on that basis shows his superiority to the angels, may be mapped as follows:

Origin (1.5): Jesus is 'begotten' as the 'Son' of the 'Father' on the day of his enthronement—the angels are not.

Birth (1.6): Jesus is the 'firstborn' in the coming world and worshipped by angels as such.

Pursuits (1.7-9): The angels are 'servants', but Jesus is the enthroned 'anointed'.

Death/Posthumous Events (1.10-14): The heavens and earth will 'perish', but the Son, as founder of heavens and earth, will 'remain', and his 'years will never end'. Jesus, not the angels, is exalted to God's right hand until his enemies are subjected to him in the future.[25]

The comparison then gives way to exhortation in 2.1-4, and with the readers having been brought into view, the syncrisis is resumed in 2.5-18; only now the focus shifts, appropriately, to the readers: that is, the demonstrated superiority of Jesus' destiny over that of the angels is extended to the redeemed humanity just addressed in the exhortation. Citing Ps 8.4-8 as his proof text, the author argues that humanity, though temporarily made lower than the angels, awaits a future of glory, honor, and exaltation over 'all things' (including the angels). This destiny is made possible, the author argues, because of Jesus' pioneering work. Though in his incarnation he, too, was temporarily made lower than the angels, he has since been exalted over them, being 'now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death'. Thus Jesus' present superiority to the angels ensures redeemed humanity's superiority to the angels.[26] Hebrews 1.1-14 and 2.5-18, it should be noted, is the only syncrisis in the sermon that is divided by intervening exhortation (in every other instance, the accompanying

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24 Cf. K. Schenck, 'A Celebration of the Enthroned Son: The Catena of Hebrews 1', *JBL* 120 (2001) 469–85.

25 While Heb 1.5-14 in its entirety treats the post-mortem exaltation of Son (= events after death), that exaltation is depicted as an entrance into a new life in a new world (cf. v. 6: 'when he brings the firstborn into the world'). Thus it is possible for the writer to depict this new life from beginning to end, chronologically and topically, starting with Jesus' origin as the Son and his birth into the new world, proceeding to his pursuits in that new world (his heavenly kingship), and ending with his non-death and the final post-mortem event, the subjugation of his enemies at the eschaton. Contra J. P. Meier, 'Symmetry and Theology in the Old Testament Citations in Heb 1,5-14', *Bib* 66 (1985) 529, who attempts to argue that the Christological affirmations of the catena move concentrically from exaltation, back to creation, back to preexistence, forward to preservation, and finally again to exaltation. For the problem of preexistence in Heb 1.1-15 see K. Schenck, 'Keeping his Appointment: Creation and Enthronement in Hebrews', *JSNT* 66 (1997) 91–117.

26 Cf. Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews*, 54-9.

exhortation appears at the syncrisis' conclusion). This departure from the pattern arises, however, organically—with the move to exhortation providing the occasion to draw the readers into the syncrisis and the superiority of Jesus, whose destiny they will also share.

2.2   *Birth: Syncrisis of Covenant Earthly Inaugurators*

Only half the theorists list birth as a topic to be employed in comparison (Ps. Hermogenes, 15; Nicolaus, 51-52; but cf. Ps. Hermogenes, 19)—though it is more widely attested outside the syncrisis exercises in various encomiastic topic lists (see, e.g., Quintilian, 3.7; Menander Rhetor, 2.368-377). From the theorists' examples of the topic, it is clear they are interested to contrast extraordinary signs or indications of a subject's greatness at birth.[27]

In the case of the macro-comparison of covenants, the writer has taken up a topic analogous to birth by focusing on covenant beginnings, and the extraordinary sign or indication of the new covenant's superior beginning is that it enters the world via the superior earthly inaugurator (cf. the similar focus on entrance 'into the world' in the treatment of Jesus' birth in 1.6). That the writer thinks of these two figures as earthly inaugurators is evident from their depiction as 'faithful' witnesses (3.1-6) on behalf of 'God's household' to 'the good news' (cf. 4.2)—Jesus literally, Moses typologically through the old covenant (3.5). Consequently, Moses' testimony via his proclamation of the old covenant typologically bears witness to Christ and his testimony (= deeds)—that is, to 'all the things that would be spoken later' (3.6)[28]—and in syncritical practice, the one witnessed to is always greater than the witness.[29]

In these two points of contrast, a syncritical dilemma facing the macro-comparison of covenants is solved. That is, in the case of the topic of birth, the old covenant possesses a seeming mark of superiority: it precedes the new and therefore can potentially claim firstborn status. The writer addresses this problem first by exclusively granting the new covenant a derivative firstborn pedigree: it has its beginnings with the firstborn of the house, while the old covenant has its beginnings merely with the servant of the house. Secondly, the writer robs the potential argument concerning the old covenant's priority of its potential strength: the old covenant enters the world first only because it is typological testimony to the good news of the new covenant—'to all that would be spoken later'—while the new covenant enters the world as the anticipated good news itself.

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27 Cf. Ps. Hermogenes, 15; Nicolaus, 51–2.

28 Cf. M. D'Angelo, *Moses in the Letter to the Hebrews* (SBLDS 42; Missoula: Scholars) 248.

29 See, e.g., the numerous comparisons of John the Baptist and Jesus, which assume the principle (Mark 1.7-8; Matt 3.11-12; Luke 3.16-17; John 1.15, 26–34; *Recognitions* 1.60; 3.3).

2.3   *Pursuits: Syncrisis of Covenant Priesthoods*

Though all the theorists attest in some way to the topic Ps. Hermogenes calls 'pursuits' (ἐπιτηδεύματα), they generally treat it in tandem with other topics and not by itself. Ps. Hermogenes, for example, treats it together with deeds. He writes: 'After this you will draw on his pursuits; for example, what sort of life he led: Was he a philosopher or an orator or a general? Most important are deeds; for deeds are included among pursuits; for example, having chosen a soldier's life, what did he accomplish in it?' (16). From his illustration of the topic, it is clear Ps. Hermogenes has in mind what Theon calls 'office' (110; 113; cf. Cicero's 'public offices' in *De Inventione* 2.59.177). Aphthonius and Nicolaus, by contrast, treat 'pursuits' in connection with their topical equivalents of nurture or education. Aphthonius lists 'pursuits' (ἐπιτηδεύματα) as a subheading of 'upbringing' (ἀναστροφή). Nicolaus, meanwhile, employs the phrase 'pursuits in youth' (ἅπερ ἐν τῇ νέᾳ ἡλικίᾳ ἐπετήδευσεν) as the topical equivalent of education in his list. That is, his illustration of the topic ('for example, did he practice rhetoric or poetry or anything like that'; 52) makes it clear he has in mind training preparatory for pursuits (orator, poet, etc.) such as those listed by Ps. Hermogenes. Interestingly, Hebrews treats pursuits topically in connection with both education *and* deeds, as we shall see.

In Hebrews, we encounter an exhortation in 4.14-16 introducing the high priestly theme that will be followed through 10.23, and because of its parallelism with the exhortation of 10.19-23, the two texts have been taken together, as we have seen, as an *inclusio* bracketing the exposition in between—an exposition that contrasts the two covenants' respective priestly ministries.

In terms of rhetorical theory, the exposition that falls within these two brackets may be described as a treatment of a topic or heading analogous to pursuits in the life of the covenants, focusing as it does on office or vocation—that is, on the high priestly ministries of the covenants' respective priests. At the level of the macro-comparison of covenants in Hebrews, the priests in this comparative exposition not only represent their respective covenants indirectly as 'parts' do 'wholes' in rhetorical theory, but their priestly ministries may also be seen more directly as the priestly ministry of the *covenants themselves*, as something analogous in the 'lives' of the covenants to their 'pursuits'.

The exposition between the brackets falls, moreover, into two parts (5.1-10 and 7.1-10.18, which are themselves separated by the exhortation of 5.11–6.20), and these deal respectively with the two topics inherently related to pursuits: education, because it is preparatory for one's pursuits, and deeds, which are accomplished, according to Ps. Hermogenes, in connection with pursuits. Since these syncrises come, respectively, immediately after the opening hortatory bracket and immediately before the closing hortatory bracket and take up the brackets' common priestly theme, they may be viewed as the further evidence supporting Nauck's *inclusio* thesis, though clearly we do not understand the *inclusio* to

provide the structural clue for the whole of Hebrews as did Nauck. In any case, we will treat these syncrises separately under their respective topical subheadings, education and deeds.

2.3.1   Pursuits—Education: Syncrisis of the Priestly Apprenticeships of Each Covenant

According to the theorists, the next topic or topics to be employed in syncrisis after origins and (for those who include it) birth are those pertaining to a person's nurture and/or training.[30] The third syncrisis in Hebrews, in our reading, takes up the subject matter of these topics, highlighting Jesus' apprenticeship of obedience (= education) preparatory for his priestly ministry (= pursuits) as the mark of his superiority.[31]

The argument of the syncrisis in 5.1-10, which contrasts the high priesthoods of Aaron and Jesus, is made chiastically and may be mapped as follows:

A   Aaronic high priests sympathetically sacrifice for sins, both their own and others (1-3)

> Bi   Aaronic high priests do not take the honor of priesthood (4a),
> Bii   but are called by God to their vocation (4b)
> B'i   Jesus does not glorify himself in becoming a high priest (5a),
> B'ii   but is glorified/appointed as the Father's begotten Son (5b) to an eternal Melchizedekian priesthood (6)

A'   Jesus sympathetically (cf. 4.15) sacrifices himself for sins (7-10):

- he prays in the days of his flesh for salvation from death (7a)
- he is heard because of his reverent submission (7b)
- he learns obedience through suffering (8)
- and having been perfected, becomes a source of eternal salvation as a Melchizedekian priest to those who obey him (9-10)

This arrangement simultaneously introduces points of similarity and points of contrast. The points of similarity derive from the pursuit common to both subjects, the vocation of priesthood: both sacrifice for sin (A and A'), and both are called by God to their vocation (B and B'). The points of contrast derive from

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30   Cf. Theon, 16; Ps. Hermogenes, 16; Aphthonius, 36; Nicolaus, 52.

31   Scholars such as Backhaus (*Der Neue Bund*, 54) have recognized a chronological and logical progression from 5.1-10.18. Though we think the topic at hand for 4.14-5.10 is not '*die Menschenlickeit des Hohepreisters Jesus*' as Backhaus proposes, Backhaus does see a movement from humanity of the high priest Jesus (4.14-5.10) to his priestly office (7.1-28) then to his priestly ministry (8.1-10.18). These latter two topical progressions describe well what the rhetoricians would label as pursuits.

what makes Jesus' priestly ministry unique and superior, and these points are introduced following a topical outline:

Origin: Jesus, not Aaronic priests, is appointed as the Father's Son (5)
Pursuits: Jesus, not Aaronic priests, is appointed to an eternal Melchizedekian priesthood (6)
Deeds: Jesus, not Aaronic priests, prays in the days of his flesh for salvation from death (7a) and is heard because of his reverent submission (7b).
Death: Jesus, not Aaronic priests, learns obedience from what he suffers (8)
Posthumous Events: Jesus, not Aaronic priests, is perfected and becomes a source of eternal salvation as a Melchizedekian priest to those who obey him (9-10)

While it is possible to view these marks as a chronologically ordered, topical argument *strictly* for the new covenant's superiority with regard to its pursuits— that is, with regard to its high priestly ministry—the important thing to note is that the priestly ministry depicted here is that of an *apprentice-priest still in training*, one who learns his vocation at the feet of the Father and whose sacrifice serves as the crucial moment of learning that leads to his perfection as a Melchizedekian priest. That is, it is Jesus' priestly apprenticeship—his education—that is being surveyed chronologically and topically, from beginning to end.

First, Jesus is called as a Son by his Father (origin) to his never ending, Melchizedekian vocation (pursuits). In antiquity, sons commonly served as apprentices under their fathers in order to learn their vocations—a perspective reflected in Heb 12.7-8, which calls readers to accept trials as *paideia* from their Father,[32] and a perspective reflected in both Luke (2.40-52) and John (5.19-21; 7.16-18; 12.47-5), which similarly cast Jesus as a son-apprentice learning obediently at the feet of the Father.[33] Given that Jesus' priestly ministry is depicted in its entirety in vv. 7-10 as a *Son's* education at the feet of the Father (see below), we may view vv. 5-6, with its summons of the Son to the priestly vocation by the Father, as the beginning of the apprenticeship.

Second, Jesus reverently submits to the Father in the days of his flesh (deeds) and learns obedience through what he suffers (death). This cluster of obvious pedagogical images—a Son submitting to and learning obedience from Father—has long been acknowledged in scholarship as a depiction of Jesus' education. David deSilva even notes the significance of this depiction in terms of rhetorical

32 M. Thiessen, 'Hebrews 12.5-13, the Wilderness Period, and Israel's Discipline', *NTS* 55 (2009) 366–79.

33 On Luke 2.40-52 as the treatment of the encomiastic topic of 'nurture and training' in the life of Jesus, see M. Martin, 'Progymnastic Topic Lists: A Compositional Template for Luke and Other *Bioi*?', *NTS* 54 (2008) 18–41. On the texts in John as topical treatment of 'nurture and training' in the life of Jesus, see J. H. Neyrey, 'Encomion versus Vituperation: Contrasting Portraits of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel', *JBL* 126 (2007) 529–52.

theory, stating that Heb 5.8-10 'focuses on Jesus' "education" (a topic of encomia in general, even though the specific curriculum of Jesus' education—suffering—was not the norm) and the virtuous fruit his education bore, namely, "obedience" toward God'.[34] We would add, despite deSilva's qualification, that 'learning from suffering' is commonly attested as a curriculum of sorts in Greek literature, owing in part to the play on words it entails (μαθ- / παθ-; cf. 5.8 ἔμαθεν ἀφ' ὧν ἔπαθεν).[35] Ancient readers then would have recognized suffering as a well-known curriculum of learning.

Third, Jesus is perfected and becomes a source of eternal salvation as a Melchizedekian priest for those who obey him (events after death). Less often noted is that the image of 'being perfected' is also drawn from the classroom. More importantly, it is treated in the milieu precisely as it is treated in v. 8, as the ultimate goal of *paideia* or philosophical studies (Epictetus *Diatr.* 1.4.1, 4, 18-21; Philo *Post.* 132; *Leg.* 3.159; *Somn.* 2.234-235; and *Vita Pachomii* 2, 28, 43).[36] Philo, for example, speaks of the 'progress' of a philosopher-in-training—specifically, the movement from 'folly' to 'wisdom' and 'virtue'—as 'advancing toward perfection' (*Somn.* 2.234-235), and elsewhere identifies 'perfection' as the end-goal of the more generic 'pupil' (*Post.* 132). In a similar fashion, the image of Jesus' 'being perfected' brings the portrait of Jesus' apprenticeship to its appropriate conclusion. Perfection, here, is the culmination of his studies, the status that results in his becoming a source of salvation to others (v. 9) as a Melchizedekian priest (v. 10).

The mention not only of Jesus' perfecting, but also of the resulting salvation for 'those who *obey* him', continues the pedagogical imagery from the preceding verses, and if there is any doubt that Jesus' priestly *apprenticeship* has been portrayed in 5.5-10, it is removed by the exhortation of 5.11-6.1. In these verses, the writer extends the educational theme via a series of pedagogical images and terms, calling the readers ultimately to 'leave behind the basic teaching about Christ' and 'go on toward perfection' themselves.

In view of the above, we may summarize the syncrisis of 5.1-10 in terms of both pursuits and education. Whereas Jesus in his high priestly ministry (= pursuits) undergoes an apprenticeship of obedience (= education), Aaronic high priests in their priestly ministry (= pursuits) do not, but instead share in the 'weakness' of the 'ignorant' and 'wayward' (5.2)—two additional pedagogical terms commonly used to depict the unlearned prior to undergoing *paideia*[37] (= education).

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34 DeSilva, *Perseverence in Gratitude*, 191.

35 Cf. Philo *Mos.* 2.280; *Her.* 73; *Fug.* 138; *Spec.* 4.29; *Somn.* 2.107; Aeschylus *Ag.* 177; Aesop *Fab.* 370.

36 For these citations and further discussion, see C. H. Talbert, 'The Way of the Lukan Jesus: Dimensions of Lukan Spirituality', *PRSt* 9 (1982) 237–49.

37 That training and discipline remedy 'ignorance' is, naturally, widely attested. On these as a remedy for 'waywardness' (root: πλανα-) in the LXX, see Prov 1.8-10; 10.17; 29.15; Job 6.24; Wis 17.1; Sir 16.23-25.

Also, we may observe that the elect people are drawn into the comparison. Whereas they remain 'ignorant and wayward' (= education) under the sympathetic ministry of the similarly weak Aaronic high priests (5.2-3), they (should, at least) come to reflect the obedience (5.10), learning (5.11-14), and perfection (6.1) of Jesus (= education) as a result of his high priestly ministry.[38]

2.3.2   Pursuits—Deeds: Syncrisis of the Priestly Deeds of Each Covenant

Ps. Hermogenes, Aphthonius, and Nicolaus all treat deeds immediately after the topic or topics devoted to education,[39] Ps. Hermogenes treating it simultaneously with pursuits (see Ps. Hermogenes, 16). The fourth syncrisis in our reading (7.1–10.18) takes up this topic, highlighting Melchizedek's and Jesus' accomplishments (= deeds) as priests (= pursuits) as the mark of the new covenant priesthood's superiority. Once again, in the macro-comparison of covenants that spans the sermon, the writer has taken up topics analogous to those used for comparing persons, viewing the covenants' respective priestly ministries and the deeds accomplished in those ministries as something analogous to the covenants' pursuits and deeds.

The comparative argument of this section can be briefly summarized in terms of the deeds contrasted:

(1) Melchizedek is superior to Levi and Abraham, the ancestors of the Levitical priestly order, because of his superior deeds. That is, Melchizedek (a) blesses Abraham, showing he is superior to Abraham; (b) receives tithes as one who 'lives' rather than as a mortal being, showing he is superior to Levitical priests; and (c) receives tithes *from Levi* through Abraham, proving his superiority to Levi (7.1-10).

(2) Jesus 'arises' in a fashion superior to old covenant priests—'not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent, but through the power of indestructible life'—ushering in a change in priesthood and a change in law (7.11-18).

(3) Jesus takes the office of priesthood with an oath—and in contrast to old covenant priests, who take their office without an oath—thereby becoming 'the guarantee of a better covenant' (7.20-22).

(4) Jesus 'holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever', and in contrast to old covenant priests, who are 'prevented by death from continuing in office'; hence Jesus 'is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he *always lives* to make intercession for them' (7.23-25).

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38 The sacrifice that results in Jesus' own perfection perfects others internally, enabling them to follow (9.9, 14; 10.15-17); cf. J. Whitlark, *Enabling Fidelity to God: Perseverance in Hebrews in Light of the Reciprocity Systems of the Ancient Mediterranean World* (PBMS; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008).

39 Ps. Hermogenes' treatment of body and mind should be viewed as an expansion of his treatment of nurture and training, which mold the person physically and mentally.

(5) Jesus, as a sinless priest appointed by the word of the oath to be 'a Son who has been made perfect forever', sacrificed for others' sins once for all when he offered himself; old covenant priests, by contrast, are law-appointed priests who are subject to weakness and therefore must make daily sacrifices 'first for their own sins and then for others' (7.26-28).

(6) Jesus ministers in a heavenly, spiritual tent, mediating a 'better covenant'; old covenant priests, by contrast, minister in an earthly, physical tent ('a sketch and shadow of the heavenly one'), mediating an 'obsolete' covenant (8.1-13).

(7) Jesus enters 'the greater and perfect tent' with a sacrifice that purifies not only the body/flesh (cf. 10.22) but also the conscience; old covenant priests, by contrast, enter the first tent with a sacrifice that purifies only the body/flesh, one that 'cannot perfect the conscience' (9.1-14).

(8) Jesus inaugurates the new covenant with the superior blood sacrifice required for the heavenly sanctuary; Moses, by contrast, inaugurates the old covenant with the inferior blood sacrifice required for the 'sketches of the heavenly things' (9.15-23).

(9) Jesus enters the true sanctuary of heaven with the sacrifice of himself once for all, and therefore will appear a second time at the end of the age not to deal with sin, but to bring salvation; the high priest, by contrast, enters 'the copy' of the true sanctuary 'again and again' with 'blood that is not his own' (9.24-28).

(10) Jesus offers once for all time a single sacrifice for sins that is desired by God and that abolishes the first sacrifices; old covenant priests, by contrast, make repeated sacrifices of bulls and goats that cannot take away sins, are not desired by God, and therefore are abolished by the second sacrifice (10.1-18).

The overall effect of the ten comparisons is that the new covenant priestly ministry is shown to be superior at every point in its 'life' from its very beginnings with Melchizedek to its eternal, never-ending ministry, performed by Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.[40]

2.4 *Death/Events after Death: Syncrisis of Covenant Eschata*

Of the four theorists who provide syncrisis exercises, only Theon and Ps. Hermogenes include topics pertaining to the end of the life (death and/or posthumous events). Outside the progymnasmata, a similar division is seen: Cicero (*De Inventione* 1.24.34; 2.59.177; *De Partitione Oratoria* 22.74-75) and Menander Rhetor (2.368-377) do not include death/posthumous events in their lists; *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* (3.6.10-11) and Quintilian (3-7) do. This division is probably not one of opinion but circumstance—namely, whether the list in question is

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40 Space does not allow us to present here both the topical and chronological arrangement of the syncrisis of the Levitical and Melchizedekian priestly ministries in Heb 7 via their representative priests. Cf. Seid, 'Synkrisis', 326-47, who rightly attempts to identify the encomiastic topics that structure the syncrisis in Heb 7 but does not recognize the chronological progression of the topics therein.

designed primarily for eulogizing someone who is dead or alive. Aphthonius, for example, does not include either death or posthumous events in his topic list, but in his model syncrisis of Achilles and Hector (44) and in his model invective of Philip (42)—deceased subjects all—he nonetheless takes up the topic of death, and even cites it by name in the invective of Philip. The theorists are also divided concerning whether to treat life's end under death, posthumous events, or both.[41] Theon even alternates between two of these methods.[42] What we will see here in Heb 12.18-24 is that the topics of death and events after death are employed in the comparison of two 'approaches' to God.

In Hebrews' running comparison of covenants, the final comparison (12.18-24) juxtaposes Sinai and Zion as contrasting destinations of the people's 'approach' under the respective covenants.[43] If previous comparisons have focused on the beginnings (covenant mediators and inaugurators) and middle (covenant priestly ministries) of covenant life, this final comparison brings the focus to the end—and, specifically, the eschatological end (see below)—of covenant life. Thus the comparison may be viewed as the treatment of something analogous in covenant life to death/posthumous events—that is, to the headings normally used to treat the end of life in a comparison of persons.

The use of numeric symbolism contributes to the portrait, hinting at the eschatological dimensions of the comparison: rather than employing topics to contrast his two subjects as he has in every other comparison in Hebrews, the writer instead structures the comparison via parallel, seven-part depictions of each mountain—seven being, appropriately, the number of completion and perfection.[44] A literal translation and arrangement illustrate the effect:

You have not come

    [1]   to something touched

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41 Cf. Theon, 110; Quintilian, 3.7; *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* 3.6.10-11; Ps. Hermogenes, 19; cf. 16-17.

42 Cf. Theon, 78.

43 Lincoln (*Hebrews*, 25) in his structural outline identifies 12.18-24 as part of the *peroratio* but also sees these verses as a final comparative exposition which is focused upon the two covenants, old and new. See also Michel, *Hebräerbrief*, 459-61.

44 Michel (*Hebräerbrief*, 462) understands there to be seven old covenant items paralleled to eight (7 + 1) new covenant items in four pairs. The difference between the numbering of Michel's list and our list lies in whether Mt. Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem are counted as one item or two. If we follow Michel's enumeration of the lists here, we might have a case where the superiority of the new covenant is reflected in the numeration ('plus one' being an indication of superiority, cf. Homer *Od.* 9.159-60). Moreover, eight being the number used by early Christians to symbolize resurrection might be used here to reflect the end to which the new covenant leads (for the significance of the number 8 as the number for resurrection see F. Bovon, 'Names and Numbers in Early Christianity', *NTS* 47 [2001] 283). Whether we number both lists according to sevens or seven and seven plus one, the author is clearly comparing, via these closely aligned descriptive lists, the approach to God via the old covenant (Sinai) and the new covenant (Zion).

[2]   and to something that has been burned with fire

[3]   and to darkness

[4]   and to gloom

[5]   and to storm

[6]   and to trumpet sound

[7]   and to the voice of words,

which (voice) made the hearers beg that no further word be spoken to them, for they could not endure the order that was given, 'If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death'. Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear'.

But you have come

[1]   to Mt. Zion and the city of the living God, to heavenly Jerusalem

[2]   and to a myriad of angels in a festal gathering

[3]   and to the assembly of the firstborn children enrolled in heaven

[4]   and to a judge, the God of all

[5]   and to the spirits of the righteous who have been made perfect

[6]   and to the mediator of a new covenant, Jesus

[7]   and to the sprinkled blood that speaks better than Abel's blood.

That Zion is an *eschatological* destination or *telos* in the theology of the writer is clear from its characterization elsewhere in the sermon as 'the city to come' (13.14) and the object of the ancestors' hope (11.13-16)—the 'homeland' beyond death for those who 'died in faith' (11.13-14).[45] This perspective was evidently common in early Christianity at this time (cf. Gal 4.26; Phil 3.20-21; Rev 21), and it manifests itself in this comparison in at least three points of contrast, each of which shapes Sinai symbolically as Zion's eschatological opposite.

First, whereas Sinai is characterized by limited access to God, Zion is characterized by the full and final access depicted earlier in the sermon as an eschatological hope (6.19-20).[46] In the preceding syncrisis of priestly ministries, a key point of comparison was the contrasting abilities of the covenants' respective priests to perfect the people so that they might approach God in a perfected state (cf., e.g., 7.11). This perspective is continued in the present comparison of Sinai and Zion as contrasting mountains of approach. Whereas at Sinai the people cannot

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45 Aristides's encomium of Rome ends focusing on the *telos* to which Rome has brought the whole world. The world has achieved its ideal state under Roman rule (94-99), a Golden Age of peace (69, 89, 103, 106). Similarly, in Heb 12.22-24 we have the *telos* to which God leads believers through Jesus Christ and the new covenant he inaugurates. See also Libanius' encomium of righteousness which employs the topic of events after death with regard to those who possess righteousness: 'for the just alone, life is good, but the afterlife is better' (*Progymnasmata* 249).

46 Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 162.

approach God in their unperfected state without being struck down (holiness 'preserved by exclusion'[47]), at Zion the readers approach God not just fearlessly but in festal procession, and they see the 'perfected' spirits of those who have gone before them in faith already assembled together with God.

Second, whereas Sinai is earthly and temporal, Zion is heavenly and eternal. Of the seven descriptors of Sinai, only two are not drawn from the Sinai traditions but rather are added by the writer. These are telling redactions and may be taken as clues to the way the writer shapes Sinai as Zion's eschatological opposite. The first of these concerns us presently, the description of Sinai as 'something touched' (ψηλαφωμένῳ). As deSilva observes, this word is 'chosen by the author to contrast with the "heavenly" (and therefore beyond the material realm) aspect of the hearer's approach to God' at Zion.[48] For the writer, moreover, the heavenly/material polarity is not just a spatial one, but also a temporal one: Sinai, because it belongs to the earth (12.25), will be shaken and removed with the earth (12.26-27); by contrast, Zion, because it belongs to the 'heavenly' realm, cannot be shaken or removed (12.28). It is in this sense that it is the 'lasting city' (13.14).

Third, whereas Sinai is a mountain marked by 'underworldly gloom' and the fear of death, Zion is a mountain of life beyond death both for the approaching readers and for the spirits of the deceased. The writer's second telling redaction of the Sinai traditions is the description of Sinai as a mountain of ζόφος, the 'gloom of the underworld'.[49] Here the writer has likely replaced γνόφος in LXX Deut 4.11 // 5.22 with ζόφος (though it is possible he is in possession of a version of the LXX that has made this substitution). This likely redaction, together with the mention of the fear of death that pervades the approach at Sinai (12.21), is chosen by the writer to contrast with the images of life that pervade the portrait of Zion, and particularly those that correspondingly relate to life beyond death for humanity: the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, the perfected spirits of the righteous deceased, and the approaching readers who are about to join them.

On the whole, Sinai in the writer's depiction is the very image of where the story of the old covenant would end apart from the new covenant ministry it proclaims[50]—at a *telos* of marginal access to God in a world that is not lasting, a *telos*

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47 Attridge, *Hebrews*, 373-4.
48 DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 465.
49 Cf. *Od.* 20.356; 2 Pet 2.4, 17. On this redaction, see deSilva, *Perseverence in Gratitude*, 465; cf. Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 162.
50 This is a hypothetical *telos* only. The old covenant does not exist, in the view of the writer, apart from the new covenant, since its institutions are a shadow of the heavenly, new covenant realities and patterned on those realities. Thus the writer can speak of the old covenant as typological 'good news' (4.2) and of Moses as a witness 'to the things that would be spoken later' (3.5).

burdened by the fear of death and shrouded in under-worldly gloom. By contrast, Zion in the writer's depiction is the very image of where the story of the new covenant will end, not only for the faithful of the present generation, but also for Moses (11.23-28), the wilderness generation (11.29), and all the faithful of past generations (11.1-39) who are perfected by Christ not apart from but together with the present generation (11.40; cf. 11.15-16). It is a *telos* of complete and final access to God in a world that is un-removable and, therefore, for the perfected spirits who call it home and the faithful living who are drawing near to it, lasting into eternity.

3. Conclusion

In sum, this study has examined epideictic syncrisis in Hebrews, identifying five comparisons that collectively span nearly the full length of Hebrews: the messengers/angels vs. Jesus (1.1-14; 2.5-18), Moses vs. Jesus (3.1-6), the Aaronic high priests vs. Jesus (5.1-10), the Levitical priestly ministry vs. the Melchizedekian priestly ministry (7.1-10.18), and Mt. Sinai vs. Mt. Zion (12.18-24). These comparisons, we have argued, collectively display an internal coherence evident from their consistent juxtaposition of old covenant and new covenant subjects, their consistent argument for the superiority of the new covenant subject in question, and their common contribution—by virtue of the particular roles featured—to a chronologically ordered progression of topics (origin, birth, pursuits/education, pursuits/deeds, death and posthumous events) through covenant life. Such internal coherence accords with rhetorical theory and is evident not only among the five syncrises collectively, but also within several of the individual syncrises. Such internal coherence shows, moreover—and especially in the light of rhetorical theory—that the five syncrises should be read not just individually, but collectively, as a single syncritical project that argues for the superiority of the new covenant to the old. What is more, this project serves to structure the discourse in accordance with compositional canons of the time.