

THE OLD TESTAMENT CONCEPT OF SOLIDARITY IN HEBREWS

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Summary

Despite the criticisms of some, the concept of solidarity is an important one in the Old Testament. It is seen in kinship, marriage, common residence and occupations, covenants and, more subjectively, in affection. It applies to Yahweh's relationship with Israel in terms of covenant and representation and has many-sided consequences and implications. In the New Testament it is particularly important for Hebrews, which applies it in its inaugurated eschatology. Christ's oneness with his people as the true human being, high priest and sacrifice are central to the author's thought, and the people of Christ are shown to be one with each other as members of the city of God.

I. Introduction

The great debt of the Epistle to the Hebrews to the Old Testament is not simply a matter of general background and copious quotation. It extends to fundamental Old Testament ways of thinking which are constantly presupposed and which underlie passages otherwise quite diverse. This article will argue that the concept of solidarity is one of these.

Solidarity may be defined as 'an entire union of interests and responsibilities in a group', involving communal 'interests, objectives or standards'.¹ The term 'solidarity' is not much in fashion, but because it has a well-defined meaning and because any alternatives are verbose, I propose to use it here. In particular, solidarity highlights the way in which God has given humanity in general and his people in particular a common life with common concerns and responsibilities, so

¹Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1961) *ad loc.*

that the actions of one may deeply affect others for good or ill. The Epistle to the Hebrews is not unique in its debt to this Old Testament concept, but is a particularly striking example of its application, particularly in the way that it portrays Christ's solidarity with humanity.

II. The Concept of Solidarity in the Old Testament

Thirty years ago, earlier work done by scholars like H. Wheeler Robinson, S.H. Hooke and S. Mowinckel,² which viewed Israelite religion as dominated by a mystical primitivism in which the group was everything and the individual almost nothing, was still influential. Changes in the social sciences, however, have undermined this. 'Mystical primitivism' has been thought to be an inappropriate term to describe Israelite religion, with more recognition being given to individual freedom.³ Nevertheless, J.W. Rogerson, one of the concept's chief critics, admits the following:

It remains likely that Israelites saw society as an aggregate of groups rather than as a collection of individuals, that in worship the king could embody the aspirations of the whole community, and that individuals in worship or prayer could feel that their experiences were those of the whole group.⁴

In what follows, some aspects of this inter-relatedness will be examined.

²E.g. H.W. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964); S.H. Hooke, *Myth, Ritual and Kingship* (Oxford: OUP, 1958); S. Mowinckel, *He that Cometh* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954).

³See esp. J.W. Rogerson, 'Anthropology and the Old Testament', and A.D.H. Mayes, 'Sociology and the Old Testament', both in R.E. Clements (ed.), *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, anthropological and political perspectives* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989); also B.R. Wilson, *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

⁴Robinson, 'Anthropology and the Old Testament', 25.

1. Solidarity at the Human Level

Social phenomena, like kinship, marriage, common residence, common occupation or covenant, involved solidarity. Solidarity is particularly evident in Levirate marriage, in which a close relative stood in for the deceased. But it is also a feature of family life in general; even a resident alien was often associated with a particular family and, if circumcised, could eat the Passover (Ex. 12:43-49; Dt. 10:18-19). In the wider family, the terms 'father' and 'son' may refer to any in the line of direct descent (Nu. 1:10; Jos. 21:4, 5, 10). 'Seed' can refer not only to progeny but to kinsmen generally, including collateral connections (Est. 10:3). A 'brother' was any male relative (Gn. 16:12; Nu. 25:6), a member of the same tribe (Nu. 8:23-26; Judg. 18:2, 8) or nation (2 Sa. 2:27; Je. 34:9ff), even simply another person (Gn. 9:5). The terms 'household', 'fathers' house', 'clan' and 'tribe' are sometimes used to identify groups much larger than they would today.⁵ 'People' occasionally applies to a group smaller than a nation (Dt. 33:7; Jos. 17:14-17; 2 Sa. 19:40), even being used of one man's descendants (Gn. 48:19; Dt. 33:7).⁶

Inter-relatedness is also featured in locational solidarity. In Deuteronomy 23:7 we hear: 'Do not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you lived as an alien in his country.' Occupying Canaan produced tension between Israel's covenant solidarity and the pull exercised by the attitudes and customs of their pagan neighbours. We also find opposing tendencies to provincialism and national unity both before and after the division of the kingdom (Judg. 5:13-18, 23; 1 Ki. 12; 2 Ch. 35:18, *et al.*). Prophecies addressed to cities like Jerusalem or Samaria imply common interests and responsibilities in their citizens.

⁵'Clan' may be used of a tribe (Judg. 13:2; 17:7), the two sections of Israel (Je. 33:24) or a nation (Am. 3:1-2; Zc. 14:16-19). All the descendants of a common ancestor are called his 'house' (Ps. 115:10; Ex. 16:31.). For a study of these terms, with a special interest in 'tribe', see C.H.J. de Gues, *The Tribes of Israel* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1976). N. Gottwald plays down their fluidity in *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of liberated Israel 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (London: SCM, 1980) 338-41.

⁶'People', 'nation' and 'kingdom', however, show less fluidity than terms primarily applicable to smaller groups.

Moreover, a common vocation often unites people. The Levites had both tribal and vocational solidarity, and the 'sons of the prophets' were communities under a prophetic leader (1 Sa. 19:20; 2 Ki. 6:1). A covenant might either strengthen (Gn. 31:44) or initiate a relationship (Gn. 21:27; Ho. 12:1), and breaking it offends against 'brotherhood' (Am. 1:9).

Sometimes solidarity was more subjective, with affection (2 Sa. 1:26; Ps. 55:12ff) strengthening existing ties (Gn. 44:3) or cutting across them. Jonathan's friendship with David bound him closer to him than to his father, Saul (1 Sa. 20:30-34; 2 Sa. 1:26), and Ruth's love for Naomi united them even after their objective tie ended through bereavement (Ru. 1).

2. Solidarity at the Divine/Human Level;

God established a covenant with all humanity (Gn. 9:8-17), but the Old Testament emphasis is on Yahweh's relationship with Israel, and divine names frequently depict this aspect of solidarity: 'The God of the Hebrews' (Ex. 7:16; 13:3), 'the Mighty One of Israel' (Is. 1:24), 'the God of Israel' (Is. 21:10) and 'the Rock of Israel' (Is. 30:29).⁷

Israel's relation to Yahweh was not based on natural kinship as in some ancient ethnic mythologies, but on a covenant he initiated.⁸ Israel's consciousness of national solidarity became firmly based on its corporate covenant with Yahweh.⁹ Kinship terms used of covenants were simply analogical:¹⁰ Yahweh and Israel are husband and wife (Is. 50:1ff.; Je. 2:2; Ezk. 16:8ff.),¹¹ so Hosea's experience of grief through Gomer's unfaithfulness can illustrate God's attitude to Israel's harlotry. (Such language was peculiarly apt against the background of the Canaanite fertility cult.) Israel is collectively

⁷See especially G. Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion* (trans. D.E. Green: London: SPCK 1973) 186-87.

⁸How and when the word 'covenant' was first used need not concern us here.

⁹See R.E. Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant* (London: SCM 1965).

¹⁰Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant*, 105-106. Fohrer comments on both the father/son and husband/wife images in *History of Israelite Religion*, 187-88.

¹¹For a recent exploration of this analogy, see D. Instone Brewer, 'Three Weddings and a Divorce: God's Covenant with Israel, Judah and the Church', *TynB* 47 (1996) 1-25.

God's son (Is. 61:7; Ho. 11:1-2; Mal. 1:8), while Yahweh is Israel's 'next of kin' with redemption rights (Ex. 6:1-8; Ps. 78:35).

3. Corporate Personality

The term 'corporate personality' indicates the corporate aspects of a group, conceived as one person.¹² The term has drawn criticism as exaggerating the communal primitivism of the Hebrew mind,¹³ but is useful nonetheless as a linguistic signifier of fundamental inter-relatedness.¹⁴

Group personification of this sort occurs in various texts. This is true, for instance, of Ezekiel 16, where the ancestry and history of Jerusalem is recalled as if the city were a single figure (cf. 2 Sa. 20:19).¹⁵ Robinson used the categories of corporate personality to interpret the Servant Songs, maintaining that the servant could be both the nation and an individual summing it up personally by fulfilling its proper mission.¹⁶ Elsewhere, a people may be identified with its ancestor, as in Genesis 25:23 and 36:1, and Rahab is said to have dwelt in Israel 'to this day' (Jo. 2:1ff), presumably through her descendants. Later generations are treated as if they experienced the Exodus (e.g. in Am. 3:1). King and nation can have a common identification (Nu. 20:14-21; 22:5); accordingly, some scholars have argued that the 'I' of the Psalms is the voice of the king as the representative of the nation.¹⁷

¹²The term was made fashionable by H.W. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (rev. edn.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). See also Mayes, 'Sociology', 60, n.8.

¹³See criticisms of it in J.W. Rogerson, 'The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality', *JTS* 21 (1970) 1-16; also P. Joyce, 'The Individual and the Community', in J.W. Rogerson (ed.), *Beginning Old Testament Study* (London: SPCK 1983) 74-89.

¹⁴B.W. Anderson, in the fourth edition of his *Living World of the Old Testament* (Harlow: Longmans 1988) 493, still makes uses the term, referring his readers to Robinson's works.

¹⁵Corporate personality is also evident in Ezk. 25-28; cf. Am. 1:7, 11; 2:1.

¹⁶H.W. Robinson, *The Cross in the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1955) 78-79.

¹⁷S.J.L. Croft (*The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986]) gives the history of this debate.

Numerical and gender oscillation is common.¹⁸ There may be oscillation between the collective and the distributive within a few verses (Dt. 32:15-18;¹⁹ Je. 31:32). Personification and gender change may be combined. When Israel is represented as a woman (e.g. Je. 18:13; Ho. 2:2ff; cf. Ho. 5:3), the personification has become so conventional that it completely overshadows the gender of individuals.

One may act or be acted upon as a group's representative. Such was the kinsman who redeemed and perpetuated the family name by Levirate marriage. Most social representation, however, is connected with headship. The father, as family head, represented it (Gn. 49:1,18; Jos. 24:15). All twelve spies were heads of the people (Nu. 13:1-16). Representation of this sort is of major theological importance, for God often dealt with a people along these lines, as with Noah (Gn. 9:8ff) and the patriarchs (Gn. 12:1-3; 26:1-5), who were also the ancestors of those for whom they stood. Mediation involved a divinely chosen representative, so that priests and kings owed their offices to divinely given prescriptions and prophets to a divine call.

4. The Varied Consequences of Solidarity

Solidarity is also operative when a household head acts responsibly and representatively (Jos. 24:15; 1 Sa. 20:42); or when a covenant secures blessing for later generations (Dt. 4:37; Ps. 105:8-11, 42-45; Ps. 132); or often in guilt and punishment (e.g. Ex. 20:5; 2 Sa. 21:1-14; 23 1 Ki. 8:26). Even in public prayer, people confessed the sins of past generations (Ezr. 9:56ff; Ne. 1:4ff; 9:6ff; Dn. 8:4ff; cf. Lv. 26:40).

Often descendants experienced blessings or curses inherited from previous generations. Occasionally, consequences were thought to pass the other way, as from a priest's daughter to her father (Lv. 21:9). Consequences could

¹⁸Cf. R.P. Shedd, *Man in Community: A Study of St. Paul's Application of Old Testament and Early Jewish Conceptions of Human Solidarity* (London: Epworth 1958) 38-41; A.R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961) 11.

¹⁹See the discussion in P.C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) *ad loc.*

be thought of as collateral, as in the work of the kinsman-redeemer. At times a whole nation may be affected, even when an offender is not a normal representative, as with Achan.²⁰

How did group responsibility operate? Sometimes by unconditional substitution, as when Saul's sons were punished in his place (2 Sa. 21:1-14; cf. 2 Ki. 20:16-19), but this could be done by God alone (Dt. 24:16; 2 Ki. 14:6). Unconditional sharing is frequent both in punishment (e.g. Gn. 20:7; Jos. 22:20; Je. 29:32) and blessing (Nu. 25:12f; Je. 35:18f). This too was determined by God's sovereign purpose.²¹ If the kinsman-redeemer's intervention depended on willing acceptance by the needy kinsman, this is conditional substitution, but it is conditional sharing when the punishment or blessing depends on the active identification of others (e.g. Lv. 39ff; Ps. 103:17-18).²²

5. Limitations of Solidarity

The view that true individualism was a late development and that the prophets repudiated institutional religion is now less widely held than was previously the case.²³ The new covenant had an important individual dimension but was still with the houses of Israel and Judah (Je. 31:31-34). Ezekiel 40-48 presents the vision of a new temple for corporate worship. Collectivism and individualism are both general features of Old Testament religion, even if individual responsibility is more emphasised in some later Old Testament books.

A gentile like Rahab or Ruth might become incorporated within Israel (Jos. 2:12ff; Ru. 1:15-17), and so too the resident alien, if circumcised (Ex. 12:43ff. Jos. 8:35). If a sin undermined the basis of the covenant, God would remove the offender (Gn. 17:14; Lv. 7:19-21). Multiple group relationship could produce conflict of interest. In Deuteronomy 33:8-11, Levi made an important choice, in favour of God rather than his parents (cf. Ps. 69:8).

²⁰See further the comments by Shedd, *Man in Community*, 35.

²¹Contrast Gn. 18:22-33 and Je. 5:1 with Ezk. 14:12-20.

²²In 2 Chr. 22:7-9, we see two principles in conflict.

²³J. Wellhausen undoubtedly overemphasised the individualism of the prophets, e.g. in his *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh: A. and C. Black, 1885) 32-33.

6. Sacrifice and solidarity

In the Levitical system, representation and probably substitution are symbolically envisaged in the laying on of the offerer's hands (Lv. 4:1; 16:21). Human sacrifice is condemned (Lv. 20:4; Je. 7:31ff),²⁴ yet Isaiah 53 uniquely applies sacrificial language to a single person (Je. 11:19 is no real parallel).

III. Solidarity Concepts and Eschatology in Hebrews

The presence and importance of solidarity concepts can be seen throughout the New Testament.²⁵ This is especially true of Hebrews. This is not surprising, in view of the many and all pervasive character of Old Testament quotations, allusions and general thought-forms that rest on solidarity concepts within the epistle itself. The extent to which solidarity pervades the epistle has not been adequately recognised, although scholars do make mention of it when elucidating particular passages.²⁶ In the examination that follows, the notion of solidarity will be shown to be a significant feature of the epistle.

1. Eschatology

Inaugurated eschatology permeates Hebrews. The last days have in some sense come with the arrival of God's son, whose era succeeds that of the anticipatory prophets (1:1-2). The expression 'the world to come' in 2:5 probably has the same basic sense as 'these last days' in 1:2.²⁷ The two consecutive sections of the epistle in which they are found, stressing as they do first the deity and then the humanity of Jesus, are therefore at one in asserting that the final phase of God's purpose for his

²⁴Passages like Gn. 22 and Judg. 11:29ff are only apparent exceptions.

²⁵On the importance of inter-relationship for Paul, see Shedd, *Man in Community*; Sweet-Hwa Quek, 'Adam and Christ According to Paul', in D.A. Hagner and M.J. Harris (eds.), *Pauline Studies. Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980) 73.

²⁶G. Hughes (*Hebrews and Hermeneutics: The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Example of Biblical Interpretation* [Cambridge: CUP, 1979] 16), appeals to 'Hebraic solidarity principles' in interpreting 7:9-10.

²⁷See the discussion of 2:5 in P. Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) *ad loc.*

people has been introduced by Christ. This is fundamental to the epistle's whole argument. Already Jesus is crowned with glory and honour (2:9), already his people have tasted the powers of the age to come (6:5).²⁸ However, Christ's work already accomplished does not exhaust the author's eschatological outlook. With his readers, he believed in 'the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment' (6:3), and for him judgment has to be faced after death (10:27).

These two aspects of eschatology are not unrelated.²⁹ Certainly Jesus has already entered heaven on behalf of others, but this is to give a secure hope for the future (6:17-20). As high priest he has not only offered the final sacrifice at the end of the ages, but from heaven he will come a second time, 'to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him' (9:24-28). The author in fact knows three great moments in the work of Christ: the past with its sacrifice, the present with its heavenly reign and intercessory ministry, and the future with its demonstrated victory over every enemy (10:11-14).³⁰ That future day is approaching (10:25), and the readers, if they persevere, will receive a rich reward (10:35-39). So they are encouraged, in virtue of the atonement already effected, to live as God's people and look for the city that is to come (13:11-14). The inaugurated and uncompleted elements find their integration in Christ, whose advents form the two great eschatological events.

2. Solidarity

Solidarity and eschatology are closely integrated in the epistle. The divinely-ordained natural oneness of human beings is important in Hebrews and soon begins to affect the argument. Not only is Christ one with God but the writer shows that he is also one with his people, who with him constitute one family

²⁸H.W. Attridge (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989] 28) writes: 'The eschatological focal point in Hebrews is clearly in the past, at the death and exaltation of Christ.'

²⁹The tension between the two aspects of his eschatology, and yet their union with each other, is well expressed by D.A. Hagner, *Hebrews* (Peabody: Hendrickson 1990) in his comments on 2:5-9 *ad loc.*

³⁰Ellingworth (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 77) writes: 'No New Testament writing preserves a better balance than Hebrews between the past, present and future aspects of God's work in Christ.'

(2:10-18). In fact Christ's high priestly ministry depends on this. Without this solidarity he could neither be high priest nor atone for the sins of his people. Moreover because his work involved him in temptation and suffering, he is able to help those who, like him, are tempted.

Perhaps the importance of solidarity for the letter is due in part to the particular situation of its readers. An example of faithfulness and endurance was needed, because, through persecution and perhaps general discouragement, some were on the verge of giving up their profession of Christ. As W.L. Lane writes:

Exhortations to covenant fidelity and perseverance are grounded in a full understanding of the significance of Jesus and his sacrifice. As high priestly Son of God in solidarity with the human family, he is the supreme exemplar of faithfulness to God and endurance, whose sacrificial death secured for his people unlimited access to God and the assurance of the help that arises at the right time.³¹

Locational solidarity too finds a place in the letter, for the writer anticipates the future, not so much as a salvation individually conceived, but rather as a city. God's people in ancient days lived as aliens and strangers on earth (11:8-9, 13). Such a situation was, of course, anything but ideal for people made for community, but they anticipated a divinely-built city of the future (11:10, 13-17). Christians too look for the city that is to come (13:14; cf. 12:22). As J. Dunnill points out, the letter's recipients had put themselves outside of the Jewish community and needed a sense of community rootage.³² Important for the letter's recipients, then, would be the motifs of exclusion (Heb. 11) and the promise of a new city and better homeland (11:9,

³¹W.L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books 1991) xlvii.

³²J. Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992) 22. He writes: 'The evidence (above) is consonant with a failure of nerve, or perhaps with a parallel tendency towards a more individualistic and spiritualized concept of salvation, by which the cohesion and purposefulness of the group is sapped.' See the full discussion on pp. 18-22.

13).³³ According to Dunnill, the author wants 'to confirm the readers' positive sense of identity as *a community of outsiders*, to which end the author employs the concept of the "stranger and sojourner" and that of the "household".³⁴

Vocational solidarity too is evident. How can the writer apply verses that speak of Isaiah and his children to Christ and his people (2:12-14; cf. Is. 8:17,18)? The presupposition for this application is clear as early as 1:1-2, that the prophets and Christ (for all their differences) have a vocational commonality, for God speaks through them all. (Similarly, the words of David can be applied to Christ [2:12; cf. Ps. 22:22; 68:26].)

In Hebrews 7, the argument rests on both family and vocational solidarity, for, by God's expressed will, Israel's priests owed their divinely-given vocation to membership of Aaron's family within the tribe of Levi. The author argues that, although Christ belonged to another tribe, the existence of another divinely-recognised order was precedent for his priesthood.

As we have seen, although Jesus shows spiritual solidarity with God in his complete faithfulness to God's will, he is also in solidarity with his people because, as a human being himself and one subject to temptation and suffering, he could feel with them and, as their heavenly high priest, help them from the divine throne. The chief concept employed in connection with divine/human solidarity is covenant. This is important in Hebrews 8-10, which, along with Hebrews 7, constitute the epistle's theological heart. S. Kistemaker has shown that most of the writer's key Old Testament quotations are from the Psalms,³⁵ but Jeremiah 31, with its emphasis on the new covenant and quoted in Hebrews 8, is a notable exception. The new covenant has an important individual dimension, but

³³Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice*, 30. He refers readers to the work on the ethos of sects by B.R. Wilson, 'An analysis of sect development', *ASR* 24 (1959), reprinted in B.R. Wilson, *Patterns of Sectarianism: Organisation and Ideology in Social and Religious Movements* (London: Heinemann, 1967) 22-45.

³⁴Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice*, 17-18.

³⁵S. Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Amsterdam: Van Soest, 1961).

its corporate aspect is not lost in Hebrews, for the covenant is still recognised as having been made with the two houses of Israel. Fundamental to the covenant is the corporate people of God.

The theme of representation is also evident in Hebrews, as is clear from this quotation from W.L. Lane:

Identification and representation were key considerations in calling the community to renewed commitment and fidelity. The images and constructs introduced in Hebrews to describe Christ cluster around these emphases. The champion identified himself with those enslaved through the fear of death and represented them in combat with the devil (2:10-16). The high priest identified himself with his people and represents them even now in the heavenly sanctuary (2:17-18; 4:15; 5:7-10; 7:23-25; 8:1-2).³⁶

In chapter 2, Christ tastes death for everyone and shares their humanity to become their high priest and to atone for their sins. His human oneness with them was essential to this ministry. As high priest he represents them (5:10).³⁷ Not only did he die for us, but now he appears in God's presence for us (9:24), carrying on an intercessory ministry (7:25). The readers might have been aware already that functions of a priestly type were exercised by Jesus,³⁸ but not as a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. Accordingly, the writer wants to establish that, although Christ does not belong in the divinely-established vocational order of Aaron, he does nevertheless belong to an order God has recognised.³⁹

On solidarity principles, the writer saw Levi as one with Abraham when the latter paid tithes to Melchizedek (7:6-10). Physically and therefore in terms of lineal descent, Levi

³⁶Lane, *Hebrews* 1-8, cxliii.

³⁷Lane (*Hebrews* 1-8, cxi) points out that 'son' and 'priest' are the primary models of the writer's christology, with the former dominating 1:1-4:14 and the latter 4:15-10:22, and with sonship being interpreted in terms of priesthood. If this is so, then priesthood is the more controlling category for the thought of the author of the epistle.

³⁸There are possible traces of such a concept in passages like Jn. 17:19; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 Jn. 2:1.

³⁹Cf. Lane, *Hebrews* 1-8, cxi-cxliii.

was still in the body of his ancestor Abraham. Also Christ is declared to be the mediator of a new covenant (9:15; 12:24) having presumably the same representative character in relation to it as Moses had for the old.

In Hebrews the consequences of solidarity are almost all conceived of as blessing. It is because Christ as high priest made atonement for his people's sins (2:17) that those for whom he acted are brought to glory (2:10), receive salvation (2:10; 5:9; 7:25), are made holy (2:11; 12:10), are freed from enslavement to the devil (2:14-15), and are brought to perfection (7:11ff; 10:14). Because his priesthood is based on his solidarity with humanity, he can sympathise and strengthen Christians in suffering and temptation (2:18; 4:14-16).

Despite his strong emphasis on the objectivity of Christ's work for his people, the author also finds an important place for their responsible attitudes and actions. Hebrews 11 highlights the individual character of the faith of many of the Old Testament godly. In view of his interest in faith under the old covenant, it is perhaps surprising that the author does not use the new covenant passage in Jeremiah 31, which strongly influences his argument in Hebrews 8 and 9, to promote the idea of individual relationship to God. Faith for him is more like hope, and is not used in connection with conversion.

In Hebrews 3-4, however, the author deals with apostasy from the group, drawing lessons from Israel's experience in the wilderness. Professing Christians may, like Israel, fail to enter God's rest by unbelief and disobedience, and so may be excluded from the spiritual land of promise. In 6:4-6, he shows concern for those once enlightened who fall away and sees no hope of renewing them again to repentance. In 10:26-31, he warns against deliberate sin, for this treats the blood of the covenant, Christ's shed blood, as an unholy thing, and exposes to judgement. Perseverance is necessary to receive what is promised (10:35, 36). In all this, the finality of Christ's sacrifice is important. Under the old covenant, animals would take the place of the sinner, while in the new covenant Christ's sacrifice avails for his people. This is, of course, a major theme of the epistle, and we need only to note that it is wholly dependent

upon the notion of solidarity. It is because of Christ's oneness with his people that he is able to make atonement for them.

Finally, the notion of corporate solidarity comes to impressive expression in Hebrews 12, with its graphic contrast between Mounts Sinai and Zion, which stand for the old and new covenants.⁴⁰ The readers are said to have come to 'the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God...to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven' (12:22-23). So the Old Testament notion of solidarity, far from being absent from this epistle, animates at least the first and decisive phase of its great consummation.⁴¹

Just as Paul stressed that Abraham was the father of all who are justified by faith in Christ (Gal. 3-4; Rom. 4), thus establishing that Old and New Testament believers had a oneness transcending their differences, so our author had his own ways of expressing the solidarity of the two. This is clearly seen in Hebrews 11, of which G. Hughes writes:

These men and women looked for exactly the same heavenly city as the Christians do (11:10, 13-16; 13:14). In this sense they may be described as an 'eschatological' community, one might even call them 'Old Testament Christians'.⁴²

In line with this, the writer exhorts them to have brotherly concern (10:24), not to neglect to meet together (10:25), and to have no internal strife in their community (12:15).

⁴⁰Hagner (*Hebrews*, 224) writes: 'It would be difficult to find a more impressive and moving expression of realized eschatology in the entire New Testament.'

⁴¹According to Dunnill (*Covenant and Sacrifice* 22), it is the group, the elect community of the end-time, which is chiefly in view throughout the apocalyptic literature, and it is with the maintenance and self-understanding of this group that our writer is chiefly concerned.

⁴²Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics*, 43. See also Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 68-69.

IV. Concluding Summary

We have seen that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews held to certain fundamental concepts based on the idea of solidarity, which mattered very much to him and were intrinsic to his whole outlook on the Christian faith. As is clear from the Old Testament, God brought into existence a human race, not simply a collection of individuals, giving them a whole network of relationships, and with collective as well as individual privileges and responsibilities. Under the old covenant, he established a special covenant relationship with a people. He acted on their behalf, largely (although not entirely) through representative persons and with great consequences of blessing for them. According to the author of Hebrews, under the new covenant too, he has a people, joined to him by faith in Christ, in whom he acted decisively, as their representative and substitute, as their high priest and sacrifice, with many-sided consequences filled with blessing. In these ways, Christians are shown not simply to have an individual relationship with God, but membership in a community with as much sense of common interests as was the case in Old Testament days.⁴³

⁴³This article is an abbreviated version of the 1997 Tyndale Biblical Theology lecture.