

# THE TRANSLATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF 'O ΘΕΟΣ IN HEBREWS 1:8-9

By Murray J. Harris

The epistle to the Hebrews is a 'word of exhortation' (Heb. 13:22) addressed to a group of Hellenistic Jewish Christians, probably in Rome, who were facing a crisis of loyalty during the rising tide of Jewish nationalism before the revolt of A.D.66. The readers were in danger of losing their confidence and hope (Heb. 3:6, 14; 6:11-12,19; 10:35), and of suffering from spiritual malnutrition (6:1-2; 13:9) and sclerosis (3:7-8, 13; 5:11), and of relapsing into Judaism, if not drifting into virtual paganism (2:1-3; 3:12; 4:1; 6:4-6; 10:39). The author responds to this pastoral need first by a doctrinal exposition (1:1-10:39) that establishes the superiority and finality of Christ and Christianity<sup>1</sup> and then by sustained practical exhortation (11:1-13:25) that issues a clarion call to the pilgrim's life of faith and endurance.

In the author's presentation of his argument the OT plays a crucial role.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on the proposal of

1. Correspondingly the author demonstrates the inferiority and impermanence of the pre-Christian order. In a brief but influential article G.B.Caird shows that each of the four OT pillars on which the argument of the epistle is built (*viz.* Pss.8, 95, 110, and Jer. 31) 'declares the ineffectiveness and symbolic or provisional nature of the Old Testament religious institutions' ('The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews', *CJT* 5 [1959] 47).
2. A convenient summary and analysis of statistics regarding the author's use of the OT may be found in G.Howard, 'Hebrews and the Old Testament Quotations', *Nov T* 10 (1968) 208-216. For bibliographical data on the subject, see H.J.B.Combrink, 'Some Thoughts on the Old Testament Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews', *Neotestamentica* 5 (1971) 33 n.1, to which may now be added R.N.Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 158-185, and J.C.McCullough, 'The Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews', *NTS* 26 (1979-80) 363-379. M.Barth distinguishes four types of reference to the OT in Hebrews: direct quotations (*e.g.*, 1:5); indirect quotations or allusions (*e.g.*, 11:5); summaries of or reflections on the OT (*e.g.*, 1:1; 10:1-4); names (such as 'Jesus', 'Christ') and topics (such as 'priest' or 'blood') ('The Old Testament in Hebrews', in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation*, ed. W.Klassen and G.F.Snyder [London: SCM, 1962] 54).

G.B.Caird,<sup>3</sup> R.N.Longenecker points out that the argument of the letter revolves around five OT portions: (1) a chain of verses drawn from five Psalms, 2 Samuel 7 and Deuteronomy 32 (LXX), that forms the basis of 1:3-2:4; (2) Psalm 8:4-6 (Heb. 2:5-18); (3) Psalm 95:7-11 (Heb. 3:1-4:13); (4) Psalm 110:4 (Heb. 4:14 - 7:28); and (5) Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Heb. 8:1 - 10:39). The exhortations found in Hebrews 11-13 depend on the exposition of these five portions and other OT verses cited are ancillary to these.<sup>4</sup>

## I BACKGROUND AND STRUCTURE OF HEBREWS 1

Although Hebrews ends as a letter with the customary personal notes, greetings and benediction (13:23-25), it begins as a sermon. Instead of giving the usual epistolary salutation and thanksgiving, the author begins with a stately exordium (1:1-4), comparable to the prologue of the Fourth Gospel (Jn. 1:1-18) or the christological hymns in Philippians 2:6-11 and Colossians 1:15-20, in which he summarises many of the themes that are developed in the course of the 'sermon'. In particular, v.4 introduces the theme of the superiority of Christ to angels, an idea immediately developed in 1:5 - 2:4 (as Son of God Christ is superior to the angels in his deity) and then 2:5-18 (as Son of Man Christ is superior to the angels even in his humanity).

Behind this emphasis on Christ's superiority to the angels may lie a heterodox view of Christ held by the letter's recipients.<sup>5</sup> If the letter was written to warn Christian Jews who were in danger of lapsing back into Judaism, they may have held a quasi-Ebionite view of Jesus, according to which he was an angel, more than human yet less than divine.<sup>6</sup>

---

3. 'Exegetical Method' 47.

4. *Biblical Exegesis* 175. Alternatively, S. Kistemaker finds in four Psalms citations (viz. 8:4-6; 95:7-11; 110:4; 40:6-8) the central core of the four successive stages of the letter's argument down to 10:18, the subject of each phase being mentioned consecutively in summary form in 2:17 (Jesus' humanity, faithfulness, priesthood, propitiation). These four subjects are then elaborated consecutively in the didactic part of the letter (*The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Amsterdam: van Soest, 1961] 101, 130-131).

5. See C. Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Gabalda, 1953) II.50-61, Excursus I.

6. For the views of the Ebionites and the Elkesaites, see J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964) 55-67; and especially A.F.J. Klijn and G.J.Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Leiden: Brill, 1973) 19-43, 54-67.

'If Philo the Jew could frequently write of the *Logos* as an angel, it would have been comparatively easy for a Christian of the Diaspora to think of the Incarnate Word as an angel.'<sup>7</sup> Such a view would be attractive to a Christian Jew for it would not compromise his belief in either the unity of God (since an angel was less than divine)<sup>8</sup> or the distinctiveness of Jesus (since an angel was more than human). Against any such misconception the author insists that Jesus was both fully divine (1:5-13) and truly human (2:5-18). Although this insistence on the real humanity of the Son might at first sight seem to invalidate our author's argument about Christ's superiority over angels, he affirms that it was precisely the Son's being made for a little while lower than the angels (2:9) that enabled him, as God's obedient servant, to become the pioneer of human salvation (2:10) and a merciful and faithful high priest (2:17), roles that were never granted to angels.

Others find the reason for the repeated references to angels in chapters 1 and 2 in the prevalence of a gnostic cult of angels (cf. Col. 2:18), in the exalted status and exceptional glory accorded angels as mediators of divine revelation (cf. 2:2; Acts 7:38; Gal. 3:19),<sup>9</sup> in the suitability of angels, who were commonly regarded by Jews and Christians of the early Christian era as quasi-divine beings, to serve as a foil for the truly divine Son of God,<sup>10</sup> or in a tradition

- 
7. H.W. Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Black, 1964) 40-43 (quotation from p.41), followed by D.A. Hagner, *Hebrews* (London: Harper & Row, 1983) 10, 16. On the possible influence of Jewish angelology on the NT and the early Christian formulation of Christology, see J. Barbel, *Christos Angelos* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1944); W. Michaelis, *Zur Engelchristologie im Urchristentum* (Basel, 1942); J. Daniélou, *Les anges et leur mission d'après les Pères de l'Église* (Brussels: Chevetogne, 1953<sup>2</sup>).
  8. Montefiore, *Hebrews* 42.
  9. Spicq, *Hébreux* 2.14. Cf. A.B. Davidson (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, n.d.] 51) who believes that the author is interested in the angels 'not in themselves but only as symbols of the pre-Christian age, to which they are mediators of revelation and over which they are heads.'
  10. J. Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981) 149-150; 'Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6', *Bib* 53 (1972) 370-371.

in which Melchizedek was regarded as an angel (cf. 11 Q Mel).<sup>11</sup>

Within the section (1:5 - 2:4) that follows the exordium (1:1-4), 2:1-4 is the first of several exhortations that are interspersed throughout the doctrinal section of the letter.<sup>12</sup> 1:5-14 elaborates v.4<sup>13</sup> in demonstrating that Christ's exaltation gives him a dignity and status far superior to the angels (cf. Eph. 1:20; 1 Pet. 3:22), with v. 13 actually citing, in a form of *inclusio*, the passage (viz. Ps.110:1) which lay behind vv. 3b-4. An examination of repetitions, conjunctions and particles in 1:5-14 shows that the passage falls into three segments. Each part begins with a form of λέγειν and a reference to οἱ ἄγγελοι. *Part I* (vv. 5-6). In v. 5a γάρ shows that the name which Jesus

- 
11. R.G.Hamerton-Kelly, *Pre-existence, Wisdom and the Son of Man* (Cambridge: CUP, 1973) 244-245, who believes that in Heb. 1:5-14 the author forestalls any possibility that his readers might confuse Christ with the angel Melchizedek because of his subsequent use of Ps. 110:4 and the Melchizedek tradition to interpret the person of Christ. On the other hand, C.Rowland tentatively suggests that in arguing for the superiority of Jesus, especially as the possessor of the divine name (Heb. 1:4), the writer of Hebrews may have borrowed from Jewish angelology a tradition that tended to elevate into prominence one particular member of the heavenly hierarchy (*The Open Heaven* [London: SPCK, 1982] 111-113). But this assumes that in depicting the exaltation of Jesus the writer is propounding the apotheosis of an angelic figure rather than the elevation to full divine honours of an already divine figure, who, as a man, had secured the redemption of humanity.
  12. 3:6b-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39.
  13. There is much to commend the suggestion of W.Manson that the catena of OT quotations in vv. 5-14 forms a commentary on the christological confession of vv. 1-4 (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [London: Hodder, 1951] 91-92), provided too precise a correlation between text (vv. 1-4) and commentary (vv. 5-14) is not sought.

has inherited (v. 4b) is 'Son'<sup>14</sup> (υἱός occurs at the beginning and end of the citations in v.5), while καὶ πάλιν joins the two OT quotations that illustrate his sonship. In v.6 δέ may be conjunctive ('moreover'), indicating the further point that the Son is also the Firstborn whom angels worship, or adversative ('but'), highlighting the difference between the angels who are never called 'son' and the Son who is called Firstborn.

*Part 2* (vv. 7-12). In v.7 καὶ introduces another contrast (vv. 7-8a) between the angels and the Son, that is marked by πρὸς μὲν (v.7a) ... πρὸς δέ (v. 8a). Two further affirmations about the Son (vv. 8b-9 and vv. 10-12) are each introduced by καὶ.

*Part 3* (vv. 13-14). Here δέ (v.13) has the sense of καὶ πάλιν ('and again') (v. 5b), leading to fresh antitheses, many of them implicit, between the Son and the angels.<sup>15</sup>

- 
14. Thus, e.g., E. Käsemann, *Das wandernde Gottesvolk* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961<sup>4</sup>) 58; O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966<sup>12</sup>) 104-106. For a defence of the view that the ὄνομα of v. 4 is κύριος (cf. v. 10), see J.H. Ulrichsen, 'Διαφορώτερον ὄνομα in Hebr. 1,4. Christus als Träger des Gottesnamens', *ST* 38 (1984) 65-75. L.K.K. Dey regards the 'name' as in fact a series of names, viz. Son (v.5), Firstborn (v.6), God (v.8), Lord (v.10), and, by implication, King (v.9) (*The Intermediary World and Patterns of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews* [Missoula, Montana: Scholars, 1975] 147, 149, 153-154)-and this against the background of the ascription to Moses of the titles 'King' and 'God' and of certain divine prerogatives (*ibid.* 134-138).
  15. See below, n. 73. L. Dussaut, however, finds four sections in vv. 5-14, dividing vv. 7-12 into vv. 7-9 and 10-12 (*Synopse structurelle de l'épître aux Hébreux. Approche d'analyse structurelle* [Paris: Cerf, 1981] 19-24). On the literary artistry of vv. 5-14, see A. Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de l'épître aux Hébreux*. (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963) 69-74.

## II THE TEXT OF HEBREWS 1:8-9

Recent studies of the use of the LXX in Hebrews suggest that we may safely assume that the author was using a text of the Psalter that was almost identical with the primitive LXX text<sup>16</sup> (as represented, for the Psalms, by A. Rahlfs' text<sup>17</sup>). On this assumption, Hebrews 1:9 reproduces exactly the LXX text of Psalm 44:8 (MT 45:8). In both places some authorities read ἀδικῶν instead of ἀνομῶν,<sup>18</sup> but the meaning is unaffected. In 1:8, on the other hand, there are two textual issues, which are interrelated and are sometimes thought to determine how ὁ θεός is to be construed in vv. 8 and 9.

## A. Relation of 1:8 to Psalm 44:7 (LXX)

Psalm 44:7a ὁ θρόνος σου, ὁ θεός, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος, (Rahlfs' LXX text)

Hebrews 1:8a ὁ θρόνος σου, ὁ θεός, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος,<sup>19</sup> (UBS<sup>3</sup> text)

Psalm 44:7b ῥάβδος εὐθύτητος ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου

Hebrews 1:8b καὶ ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου<sup>20</sup>

Although the author reproduces the first line of the LXX exactly, there are two significant changes in the second line.

- 
16. Thus McCullough ('Quotations' 367), who cites two unpublished theses: E. Ahlborn, 'Die Septuaginta - Vorlage des Hebräerbriefes' (Göttingen, 1966) 135 and J.C. McCullough, 'Hebrews and the Old Testament' (The Queen's University, Belfast, 1971) 476. On the form of the LXX text used in Hebrews in general and the relation between LXX<sup>A</sup> and LXX<sup>B</sup> in the Prophets and the Writings (from which 19 of the 29 direct citations of the OT in Hebrews come), see K.J. Thomas, 'The Old Testament Citations in Hebrews', *NTS* 11 (1964-65) 321-325 (who believes that the author used a more primitive form of the LXX than is represented by codices A and B); and F. Schröger, *Der Verfasser des Hebräerbriefes als Schriftausleger* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1968) 247-251.
17. *Septuaginta Societatis Scientiarum Gottingensis. X. Psalmi cum Odis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931).
18. In the LXX, 2013<sup>7</sup> A; in Hebrews, κ A pc Or.
19. B 33 t have only εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. In Ps. 44:7 (LXX) B has αἰῶνα αἰῶνος. See G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles* (London: British Academy, 1953) 111.
20. Thus p<sup>46</sup>κ A B 33 1739, but most manuscripts reproduce the LXX text (see Zuntz, *Text* 64).

First, there is the addition of καὶ at the beginning of the line.<sup>21</sup> In v. 10a καὶ joins separate quotations (Ps. 45:6-7 [EVV] in vv. 8-9, and Ps. 102:25-27 in vv. 10-12) while in 2:13, 10:30 and 10:37-38 the insertion of καὶ (πάντων) marks a division of a single quotation into two distinct parts. In a similar way the insertion of καὶ in v. 8 has the effect of separating two lines of a single quotation so that two distinct but complementary points are made: the unendingness of the rule of Jesus the Messiah (v. 8a); the scrupulous rectitude of his administration (v. 8b).<sup>22</sup> Secondly, there is the transposition of the article from the second ῥάβδος to the first, with the dependent genitive εὐθυτητος then becoming articular (on the canon of Apollonius). This change has the effect of inverting subject and predicate: instead of the LXX's 'the sceptre of your kingdom is a sceptre of equity', we now have 'the sceptre of equity is the sceptre of your kingdom'. Thus parallelism is created between ὁ θρόνος σου and ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθυτητος, indicating that v. 8b is to be construed with v. 8a rather than with v. 9: in administering his kingdom that is eternal, 'God' (whether ὁ θεός here refers to the Father or the Son) shows perfect equity.

- 
21. Καὶ is omitted, following the LXX text (although minuscules 39 and 142 have καὶ), by some manuscripts (see Nestle-Aland<sup>26</sup> 564).
22. Similarly, B.F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Macmillan, 1920<sup>3</sup>) 26; McCullough, 'Quotations' 369, 378n. 103. In view of the parallel function of καὶ in 2:13; 10:30, 37-38 just mentioned, this explanation of the added καὶ is to be preferred over alternative proposals - that καὶ does not mark a fresh quotation (as in v. 10a) but simply introduces the parallel line (as in v. 10b) (J. Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924] 13 n.1); that καὶ is a simple connecting link, not a wedge splitting a single citation into two segments (F.J.A. Hort, 'Hebrews 1.8' [n.d., from the 1894 R.L. Bensly Collection in the Cambridge University Library] 3); that the insertion of καὶ merely confirms the symmetry that the author has created by transferring ἡ from the second to the first ῥάβδος; or that καὶ was necessary to make possible or to ease the transition from second person (ὁ θρόνος σου) to third person (ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ) (see II.B below).

B. αὐτοῦ / σου in 1:8<sup>23</sup>

Does the verse end with the third person or the second person singular pronoun? The arguments in favour of each variant may now be discussed.

## 1. Arguments in favour of αὐτοῦ

- (a) This variant has proto-Alexandrian support in p<sup>46</sup> & B, a combination of witnesses which, according to K.J.Thomas,<sup>24</sup> has the original reading in eleven other cases of minority readings in Hebrews.
- (b) Αὐτοῦ is the more difficult reading since it differs both from the MT (ךָ לְךָ) and from the LXX text being quoted (σου) and creates an awkward transition from ὁ θρόνος σου (v.8a) to ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ (v. 8b).
- (c) A scribe, finding αὐτοῦ, would tend to make the text conform to the LXX quotation, which includes three other uses of σου, thereby removing an exegetical difficulty.

- 
23. The Palestinian Syriac version lacks any equivalent for either αὐτοῦ or σου. In spite of the tendency of scribes to add pronouns to remove ambiguity and the difference of this reading from the LXX text, it may safely be regarded as a secondary variant, perhaps designed to avoid the awkward αὐτοῦ or what was taken to be a redundant σου after ὁ θρόνος σου in the previous line.
  24. 'Citations' 305 n.3. G.Zuntz points to Heb. 1:8b (καὶ ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς ἐξουότητος ῥάβδος); 8:12; 12:13 as other instances where, p<sup>46</sup> agrees with 'the bulk of "Alexandrian" witnesses' and gives the correct reading against all or almost all the other textual evidence (Text 64). Other defenders of the originality of αὐτοῦ include Hort, 'Hebrews 1:8' 3-5; A.Nairne, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: CUP, 1917) 33-34; Spicq, *Hébreux* 1. 418; 2. 18, 19; Kistemaker, *Citations* 24-25; F.F.Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Marshall, 1964) 10 n. 45 ('probably'); Schröger, *Verfasser* 60 and n. 4; G.W.Buchanan, *To the Hebrews* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1972) 11, 20.



- (d) If αὐτοῦ is original, the insertion of καί may be readily explained as an attempt to ease the transition from second to third person.
- (e) It is possible that the author of Hebrews was influenced in his decision to alter the σου of the LXX by a passage (viz. 2 Sam. 7:12-17) that is closely related to Psalm 45 (44) and v. 14 of which he has already cited (Heb. 1:5). In that passage we read ἐτοιμάσω τῇ βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ . . . καὶ ἀνορθώσω τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ (MT, יְהַלְכֶמָּה מִדָּבָרֶיךָ) ἕως εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα . . . καὶ ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ (MT, יְהַלְכֶמָּה) ἕως αἰῶνος ἐνώπιον ἑμοῦ, καὶ ὁ θρόνος αὐτοῦ ἔσται ἀνωρθωμένος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

## 2. Arguments in favour of σου

- (a) The external evidence supporting σου is both ancient (cop<sup>sa</sup>, <sup>bo</sup>) and, unlike that for αὐτοῦ, widely distributed geographically.
- (b) This variant agrees with the LXX text which is being cited and accords with the other four instances of the second person singular pronoun (σε or σου) in the quotation.
- (c) There is no other instance of αὐτοῦ in the LXX of Psalm 44, whereas σου occurs twelve times at the end of a phrase or sentence in vv. 3-12.
- (d) Σου may have been changed to αὐτοῦ because ὁ θεός in v. 8a was taken as a nominative (either subject or predicate) and therefore supplied a natural antecedent for αὐτοῦ.
- (e) Even if the addition of καί in effect created two separate quotations in v. 8, a change of person from ὁ θρόνος σου (v. 8a) to αὐτοῦ (v. 8b) to ἡγάπησας (v. 9a) is decidedly awkward.
- (f) If θρόνος signifies 'reign' and βασιλεία 'kingly reign', this parallelism between v. 8a and v. 8b would lead one to expect τῆς βασιλείας σου to match ὁ θρόνος σου.

These two sets of arguments are more evenly balanced than some writers have recognised, but with most textual critics and the vast majority of commentators<sup>25</sup> we opt for σου as the more

---

25. For exceptions, see n. 24 above. In the 25th edition of the Nestle-Aland text αὐτοῦ was preferred (p. 549), but in the 26th (=UBS<sup>3</sup>) σου (p.564).

primitive text. However, a decision about the more probable original reading in v. 8b does not determine how ὁ θεός is to be taken in v. 8a, for just as it is possible to read σου yet translate ὁ θεός as a nominative (e.g., J. Moffatt<sup>26</sup>), it is also possible to prefer αὐτοῦ yet take ὁ θεός as a vocative (e.g., JB<sup>27</sup>). With this said, it remains true that σου accords better with a vocative and αὐτοῦ with a nominative.

### III 'O ΘΕΟΣ IN HEBREWS 1:8

#### A. As a Nominative

If ὁ θεός is nominative, it may be either subject, 'God is your throne', or predicate, 'Your throne is God'.<sup>28</sup> Almost all proponents of the view that ὁ θεός is a nominative prefer the former translation,<sup>29</sup> which is reflected in the English translations of Moffatt<sup>30</sup> and Goodspeed, in *The Twentieth*

- 
26. *Hebrews* 11: '... he says of the Son, God is thy throne for ever and ever, and thy royal sceptre is the sceptre of equity.'
  27. '... but to his Son he says: 'God, your throne shall last for ever and ever; and: his royal sceptre is the sceptre of virtue.' So also NEB, NASB; Kistemaker, *Citations* 25. Those who affirm that the reading αὐτοῦ requires that ὁ θεός be construed as a nominative (Westcott, *Hebrews* 26; Hort, 'Hebrews 1:8' 5; Thomas, 'Citations' 305; B.M.Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [London: United Bible Societies, 1971] 663) have overstated their case.
  28. The range of possible renderings is narrower than is the case with עֲלֵהּ in Psalm 45:7 (see M.J. Harris, 'The Translation of *Elohim* in Psalm 45:7-8', *TB* 35 [1984] 65-89). 'O θεός σου ὁ θεός could not mean 'your divine throne' (which would require ὁ θεός σου ὁ θεός) or 'your throne is divine' (= ὁ θεός σου θεός or possibly ὁ θεός σου τοῦ θεοῦ), far less 'your throne is God's throne' (possibly = ὁ θεός σου τοῦ θεοῦ, but note ἡ ῥάβδος ... ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου in v.8b) or 'your throne is like God's throne'.
  29. E.g., Westcott, *Hebrews* 24, 25-26; G. Milligan, *The Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899) 90-91, but cf. 77 and n.1; Moffatt, *Hebrews* 11 (but cf. 13-14); T.H. Robinson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1933) 10 (tentatively); Thomas, 'Citations' 305.
  30. Moffatt renders Ps. 45:6 'Your throne shall stand for evermore', probably following J. Wellhausen, B. Duhm and others who take עֲלֵהּ to be an Elohist alteration of an original הָיָה read as יָהִי (cf. Moffatt, *Hebrews* 13). See further Harris, 'Elohim' 69 and n. 13.

*Century New Testament*, and in the margins of the ASV, RSV and NEB. No modern English version, it seems, has the translation 'Your throne is God' and very few commentators support it,<sup>31</sup> although it has word-order in its favour as well as the parallel structure (viz. subject-predicate) of v. 8b.

This view that ὁ θεός is a nominative is generally defended on three grounds.

### 1. *Old Testament Parallels*

B.F. Westcott observes that 'the phrase "God is Thy throne" is not indeed found elsewhere, but it is in no way more strange than Ps. lxxi.3 "[Lord] be Thou to me a rock of habitation ... Thou art my rock and my fortress"' and other comparable passages.<sup>32</sup>

A distinction must be drawn, however, between affirming that God is a person's rock, fortress, refuge or dwelling-place and that he is a person's throne. As a 'rock of refuge ... towering crag and stronghold' (Ps. 71:3, NEB) God provides secure protection, a 'safe retreat' (Ps. 91: 2,9), for his people. But whether 'throne' signifies dynasty, kingdom, or rule, the concepts of 'God' and 'throne' are too dissimilar to permit a comparable metaphor. That is, unlike these other affirmations, 'God is your throne' is elliptical,<sup>33</sup> and must mean 'God is the foundation of your throne'.<sup>34</sup> In a similar way 'your throne is God' must mean 'your throne is founded on (or, protected by) God', for whatever θρόνος may signify by metonymy it does not belong to the category of the divine.

- 
31. Of the commentators consulted, only Hort ('Hebrews 1:8' 3-5) and A. Nairne (*Hebrews* 31, 33-34; *The Epistle of Priesthood* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1915<sup>2</sup>/306] opt for 'Thy throne is God'.
  32. *Hebrews* 26. He also cites Deut. 33:27; Ps. 90:1; 91:1-2, 9; Is. 26:4 (RV); cf. Is. 22:23 and Zech. 12:8.
  33. 'God is your stronghold' means 'God protects you', but 'God is your throne' means neither 'God rules you' nor 'God occupies your throne'.
  34. Significantly, Westcott paraphrases 'God is Thy throne' (or, 'Thy throne is God') by 'Thy kingdom is founded upon God, the immovable Rock' (*Hebrews* 25-26), and Hort by 'Your kingdom rests on God' ('Hebrews 1:8' 3).

## 2. Syntactical and semantic considerations

- (a) If ὁ θεός is a vocative, αὐτοῦ in v. 8b is left without an antecedent, 'θρόνος and αἶών being out of the question'.<sup>35</sup>

We have already seen that even if αὐτοῦ be *vera lectio*, ὁ θεός can be construed as vocative (see II.B above), for the καί which the author adds to his LXX text effectively creates two distinct citations in v.8 so that the movement from a second person (σου) to a third person (αὐτοῦ) within this verse occasions no particular difficulty. Therefore the antecedent of αὐτοῦ could be the Son (τὸν υἱόν, v. 8a) who has been addressed as θεός.

- (b) Since in v. 7a λέγει πρὸς can mean only 'say about', not 'say to', it is probable that the parallel [λέγει / εἰρηκεν<sup>36</sup>] πρὸς in v. 8a should have an identical sense, which would indicate that ὁ θεός is nominative, not vocative: 'But about the Son [he says], "God is your throne".'

This argument is robbed of its validity if the contrast between vv. 7 and 8 that is marked by μὲν ... δέ includes the repeated πρὸς as well as ἄγγελοι - υἱός. Λέγειν πρὸς in v. 13 (cf. τύνη ... εἶπεν in v. 5) clearly means 'say to', so that πρὸς in v. 8a may mark a transition from one meaning of λέγειν πρὸς (viz. 'say about') to another (viz. 'say to'), especially since we must understand 'to the Son he says' before the unambiguous vocatives Σὺ ... κύριε in the intervening v. 10. We shall return to this point below (III. B). In any case, it would not be improper to translate v. 8a 'But with respect to the Son [he says]: "Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever"' (similarly RSV [text]).

## 3. Context

- (a) The contrast between vv. 7 and 8 does not relate to being but to function. The author is not comparing the

35. Hort, 'Hebrews 1:8' 4.

36. G.Kittel speaks of the 'arbitrary interchange' of the tenses of λέγειν in vv. 5-13 (εἶπεν, v. 5; λέγει, vv. 6-7; εἰρηκεν, v. 13) ('λέγω', *TDNT* 4. 109 n. 160).

ever-changing being of created angels with the eternal nature of the divine Son but rather their transient service with his eternal kingship. As F.J.A.Hort expresses it: 'to the Son, unlike the angels ... is ascribed first the function of Divine kingship (8,9), and then the function of Divine creation (10ff.)'.<sup>37</sup>

There can be little doubt that one emphasis in these two verses is the contrast between the angels' service and Christ's dominion; they perform radically different functions. But function cannot be divorced from being. The mutability of angels' functions as servants of God - first wind, then fire - implies the dependent creatureliness of angelhood. So also the eternality of Christ's reign implies the immutability of his person (cf. Heb. 13:8). If there is, then, this dual contrast in vv. 7-8,<sup>38</sup> the ascription of the title θεός to Jesus to denote his Godhood cannot be deemed inappropriate.

- (b) If ὁ θεός is a vocative ('O God') and the Father thus addresses the Son, this must be the climax of the argument, so that any further development would have the effect of weakening or obscuring, rather than strengthening, the case.<sup>39</sup>

In that v. 4 states the central theme that the writer develops in Hebrews 1-2, it may be said to represent the focal point of the two chapters, what follows being an explication of the Son's superiority over angels. If it contains an address to the Son as 'God', v. 8 may be described as pivotal, since in that case it applies to Jesus the divine title implied in v. 3a and it is the first of three terms of address (in vv. 8, 10, 13) in which the Father speaks to the Son. Certainly vv. 10-12, introduced by the address σὺ ... κύριε, cannot be deemed anti-climactic, for the title κύριος, as applied to Jesus, is no less elevated than the title θεός, and the verses from Psalm 102 cited there in reference to Jesus originally applied to Yahweh (as also in the case of v. 6). The role of Jesus as God's agent in

37. 'Hebrews 1:8' 6; cf. Westcott, *Hebrews* 26.

38. See further the discussion below (III.B.4).

39. Thus E.C.Wickham, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Methuen, 1910) 8.

creation (vv. 10-12) and as God's co-regent (v. 13) is an implication of his sonship as significant as his essential divinity (v. 8a); the verses that follow v. 8 further illustrate the theme of the Son's consummate superiority and therefore strengthen the writer's argument.

## B. As a Vocative

The strength of the case for taking ὁ θεός as a vocative (= ὦ θεέ, as in 10:7)<sup>40</sup> certainly does not rest solely in the weakness of the alternative. Several converging lines of evidence make that case particularly strong.

### 1. Psalm 45:7 (MT) = 44:7 (LXX)

From our analysis of five proposed translations of Psalm 45:7a,<sup>41</sup> we concluded that 'the traditional rendering, "Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever", is not simply readily defensible but remains the most satisfactory solution to the exegetical problems posed by the verse.'<sup>42</sup> In the LXX version it is even more probable that ὁ θεός is a vocative, for the king is addressed as a 'mighty warrior (δυνατός) not only in v. 4 but also in v. 6 where there is no corresponding נָלֵךְ in the MT. This dual address heightens the antecedent probability, given the word-order, that in the next verse ὁ θεός should be rendered 'O God'. We may therefore affirm with a high degree of confidence that in the LXX text from which the

- 
40. The articular nominative of address is an established NT usage (BDF 81-82 § 147), although the pre-Christian papyri seem to lack instances of this enallage of case (N. Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek. Vol. III. Syntax* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963] 34). It should be observed that the element of harshness, superiority and impersonality that sometimes attaches to the use of the idiom in classical Greek is lacking in the almost 60 NT examples (cf. J.H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek. Vol. I. Prolegomena* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908] 70; Turner, *Syntax* 34). On the vocative of θεός in the LXX, see Harris, 'Elohim' 89 n. 89.
41. Harris, 'Elohim' 65-89.
42. *Ibid.* 87.

author of Hebrews was quoting<sup>43</sup> ὁ θεός represents a vocative  $\text{ὁ θεός}$ .<sup>44</sup>

## 2. Word order

If ὁ θεός were a subject nominative ('God is your throne'), we might have expected the word order ὁ θεός ὁ θρόνος σου κτλ to avoid any ambiguity of subject. Alternatively, if ὁ θεός were a predicate nominative ('Your throne is God'), ὁ θρόνος σου θεός κτλ or ὁ θρόνος σου εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος θεός might have been expected (cf. Heb. 3:4, ὁ δὲ πάντα κατασκευάσας θεός).<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, a vocative immediately after σου would be perfectly natural.<sup>46</sup>

## 3. Meaning of λέγειν πρὸς and the structure of vv.8-13

We should note, first of all, that of the 35 NT uses of λέγειν πρὸς, only in two cases (Rom. 10:21; Heb. 1:7),<sup>47</sup>

43. That the author was following the LXX closely is shown by (i) the identity between v. 9 and Ps. 44:8 (LXX); (ii) the reproduction of the Septuagint's εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος in v. 8a, a *hapax legomenon* in the epistle (cf. εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, 13:21; εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, 13:8; εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21 [all citations of Ps. 110:4]; 7:28; and the distinctive εἰς τὸ διηνεκές, 10:12, 14); and (iii) the fact that adequate reasons may be suggested for his departure from the LXX reading in v. 8b (see II.A above).
44. In the Psalter there are 63 instances of ὁ θεός as a vocative.
45. When θεός is predicative NT writers prefer the anarthrous nominative (16 uses) to the articular (8 uses), whether εἶναι be expressed or unexpressed. Moreover, of these 8 articular uses, all but one (Heb. 11:10, where ὁ θεός is predicate in a relative clause) have some qualification added to θεός, such as a noun in the genitive (e.g., Acts 7:32), an adjective (e.g., 1 Jn. 5:20), or a substantival participle (e.g., 2 Cor. 4:6).
46. Cf. σὺ ... κύριε (1:10); πεποισμεθα δὲ περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀγαπητοῦ (6:9); [ἡ παράκλησις] ἥτις ὑμῶν ὡς υἱοῦ διαλέγεται, Υἱέ μου (12:5); παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί (13:22).
47. Possibly also Mk. 12:12 = Lk. 20:19, if the Matthean parallel (21:45), where περὶ replaces πρὸς, indicates that πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἶπεν means 'speak with reference to' rather than 'speak against' (see BDF 125 §239.6).

Hebrews 1:8a apart, does the expression mean 'say / speak about'. Elsewhere the sense is either 'say to' (26 examples) or 'say / speak (something) for / against' (6 examples<sup>48</sup>). If the parallelism between v. 7a and v. 8a suggests that πρὸς should bear the same sense in v. 8a as in v. 7a (viz. 'about, concerning, in reference to'),<sup>49</sup> predominant NT use of λέγειν πρὸς points equally strongly in the opposite direction, namely, that the preposition should be translated 'to' in v. 8a (as in 7:21; see RSV).

This latter presumption is considerably strengthened by considerations of structure in vv. 8-13.

- (a) Where λέγειν is used with τινί or τίνι (as in v. 5) or with πρὸς τινα (as in 5:5; 7:21) or πρὸς τίνα (as in v. 13) and is followed by a second person address (σύ, v. 5; [σύ] κἀθου, v. 13; 5:5; 7:21), the meaning must be 'say to', not 'say about'.
- (b) Accordingly, when we find in v. 10a a second person address (σύ ... κύριε) after an implied πρὸς τὸν υἱὸν λέγει (supplied from vv. 7a and 8a), it is likely that the sense is '[to the Son he says,] "You, O Lord ..."'.<sup>50</sup>
- (c) But verses 8-9 and v. 10 are joined by a simple καί, indicating that the quotation in vv. 10-12 makes points comparable to those of vv. 8-9,<sup>50</sup> so that [λέγειν] πρὸς in v. 8a probably has the same meaning as in v. 13 ('say to') and the ambiguous ὁ θεός that immediately follows will probably be a second person address.

---

48. Mk. 12:12; Lk. 12:41; Acts 23:30; 1 Cor. 6:5; 7:35; 2 Cor. 7:3.

49. Thus, e.g., F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886), I. 72, 75; Westcott, *Hebrews* 24, 25; Kistemaker, *Citations* 148-149; Vanhoye, *Structure* 71; Buchanan, *Hebrews* 11.

50. This point is not vitiated by the view that the inserted καί in v. 8b introduces what is virtually a separate quotation (see II.A above), for it remains true that vv. 8-9 technically form one quotation, being introduced by the single introductory formula πρὸς δὲ τὸν υἱόν.



## 4. Context

In establishing the superiority of Jesus over angels, the author draws a series of contrasts between them in vv. 4-14. The antithesis between v. 7 and vv. 8-9 that is marked by the strongly adversative μὲν ... δέ is twofold: the angels serve (τοὺς λειτουργοῦς), but the Son reigns (ὁ θρόνος σου ... ἡ βάσις); in their service of God the angels change their form (πνεύματα ... πυρὸς φλόγα),<sup>51</sup> but in his rule of equity the divine Son continues for ever (ὁ θεός, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος). One contrast relates to function, the other to nature.<sup>52</sup> Over against the variability of angelic function, the author sets the stability of the Son's throne and the constancy of his rectitude. Over against the evanescence and impermanence of angelic form, the author sets the eternality and

- 
51. In v. 7 ποιεῖν may mean 'cause to be like' or, more probably, 'cause to change into' (but not 'cause to act through'). In one case the writer is saying that the functions angels perform as God's subordinate agents are as varied and transitory as the natural elements of wind and fire or that the angels are like wind for swiftness and fire for strength (as in the Targum of Ps. 104:4). In the other case, the point is that angels themselves are transformed first into winds and then into fiery flames. A.B.Davidson comments: 'This idea is not to be pressed so far as to imply that the angelic essence undergoes a transformation into material substance, but only that the Angels are clothed with this material form, and in their service assume this shape to men' (*Hebrews* 48). K.J.Thomas observes that the addition of ὡς ἱμάτιον to the Septuagintal text of Ps. 101:27b cited in Heb. 1:12 'emphasizes the frequency and casualness with which creation (which includes the angels) is changed: the creation will be changed even "as a garment". This is surely a special reference to the angels, of whom it has been said, "They are new every morning" (Ḥagigah 14a)' ('Citations' 305 - 306). See further Bruce, *Hebrews* 18 and n. 81.
52. Similarly G.Lünemann, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1882) 91-92.

divinity of the Son's person.<sup>53</sup> Whereas the angels are addressed by God, the Son may be addressed as God.<sup>54</sup> On this view vv. 10-12 reinforce and extend the antitheses. While angels are creatures of divine fiat, the Son himself is the divine creator. While they are mutable, he is immutable (οὐ δὲ διαμένεις ... οὐ δὲ ὁ αὐτὸς εἶ). Never could it be said concerning the Son, ὁ ποιῶν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸν λειτουργῶν αὐτοῦ πυρὸς φλόγα. From this we conclude that to interpret ὁ θεός as a vocative does full justice to the flow of argument in the immediate context.

Some scholars are reluctant to express a preference as to whether ὁ θεός is nominative or vocative in v.8, declaring that both interpretations are admissible and make good sense.<sup>55</sup> But the overwhelming majority of grammarians,<sup>56</sup>

- 
53. If the objection be raised that v. 8a says merely that the Son's throne, not his person, is eternal, it should be observed that θρόνος here means 'reign' (cf. ῥάβδος, v. 8b) rather than 'dynasty', and that an eternal reign (v. 8a) implies an eternal ruler (cf. 5:6; 7:3, 28; 13:8).
  54. The author avoids the use of even the collective titles θεός (cf. מֵלֶךְ in Ps. 8:6 [LXX, ἀγγέλους]; 97:7; 138:1) and υἱὸς θεοῦ (cf. מֶלֶךְ in Gen. 6:2, 4; and Job 1:6; 2:1 [LXX, οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ]) in reference to the angels.
  55. E.g., A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman, 1934) 465; *Word Pictures of the New Testament* (New York: Long & Smith, 1932), V, 339; M. Dods, 'The Epistle to the Hebrews' in *EGT*, IV, 255.
  56. G.B. Winer, *A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament* (Andover: Draper, 1872) 182; A. Buttmann, *A Grammar of the New Testament Greek* (Andover: Draper, 1873) 140; B. Weiss, 'Der Gebrauch des Artikels bei den Gottesnamen', *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 84 (1911) 335; *BDF* 82 § 147(3); C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: CUP, 1960<sup>2</sup>) 32 (although ὁ θεός is 'conceivably' a true nominative); N. Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek. III. Syntax* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963) 34 (ὁ θεός as a nominative is 'only just conceivable') *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1965) 15; M. Zerwick and M. Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament. Vol. II* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1979) 655. Also *BAGD* 357 s.v. θεός.

commentators,<sup>57</sup> authors of general studies<sup>58</sup> and English

- 
57. J. Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963 reprint) 13-14; H. Alford, *The Greek Testament* (London: Rivingtons, 1880) IV, 20; Lünemann, *Hebrews* 84, 92; F.W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: CUP, 1894) 38; Delitzsch, *Hebrews* I, 76-77; E. Rüggenbach, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1913) 21-22; H. Windisch, *Der Hebräerbrief* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1913) 16, 17-18; Spicq, *Hébreux* I, 288; II, 19; O. Kuss, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1966<sup>2</sup>) 37, 45-46, 146-147; J. Héring, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Epworth, 1970) 10; H. Strathmann, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963<sup>9</sup>) 79-80; Michel, *Hebräer* 118; T. Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Tyndale, 1960) 56-57; Montefiore, *Hebrews* 47; Bruce, *Hebrews* 19-20, 23; 'Hebrews', in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (ed. M. Black and H.H. Rowley) (London: Nelson, 1963) 1009 §881b; P.E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 64; D. Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Leicester: IVP, 1983) 76; Hagner, *Hebrews* 13-14.
58. B.B. Warfield, *The Lord of Glory* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1907) 278; J. van der Ploeg, 'L'exégèse de l'Ancien Testament dans l'Épître aux Hébreux', *RB* 54 (1947) 206; E. Stauffer, 'θεός', *TDNT* 3.105; *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1955) 114; A.W. Wainwright, 'The Confession "Jesus is God" in the New Testament', *SJT* 10 (1957) 286-287 (= *The Trinity in the New Testament* [London: SPCK, 1962] 58-60); V. Taylor, *The Person of Christ in New Testament Teaching* (London: Macmillan, 1958) 95-96; 'Does the New Testament call Jesus "God"?', *Exp T* 73 (1961-2) 117 (= *New Testament Essays* [London: Epworth, 1970] 85); B. Reicke, 'πρός' *TDNT* 6.723; Synge, *Hebrews* 4-5; A. Snell, *New and Living Way* (London: Faith, 1959) 42, 58; O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1959) 310; Kistemaker, *Citations* 25-26, 98, 137; M. Barth, 'Old Testament' 72; C.F.D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament* (London: A. & C. Black, 1962) 78, and third edition (1982) 99; W. Barclay, *Jesus As They Saw Him* (London: SCM, 1962) 25-26; Vanhoye, *Structure* 71; A.T. Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*

translations<sup>59</sup> construe ὁ θεός as a vocative ('O God'). Given the affirmation of v.3 that the Son is the effulgence of God's glory and the visible expression of his being, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that when the author affirms further that God the Father addresses<sup>60</sup> his Son as

(London: SPCK, 1965) 162 ('in all likelihood'); R.E.Brown, 'Does the New Testament call Jesus God?', *TS* 26 (1965) 562-563; M.de Jonge and A.S.van der Woude, 'IIQ Melchizedek and the New Testament', *NTS* 12 (1965-66) 316; T.F.Glasson, '"Plurality of Divine Persons" and the Quotations in Hebrews 1.6ff.', *NTS* 12 (1965-66) 271; F.V.Filson, 'Yesterday'. *A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13* (London: SCM, 1967) 39, 43; L.Sabourin, *The Names and Titles of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1967) 303; Schröger, *Verfasser* 61-62, 262; E.Schweizer, 'υἱός', *TDNT* 8.370 n. 255; R.N.Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (London: SCM, 1970) 137, 139; *Biblical Exegesis* 178-179, 180; J. Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981) 143, 153; Dey, *Intermediate World* 137, 147-149, 153; F.L.Horton Jr., *The Melchizedek Tradition* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) 168; J.W.Thompson, 'The Structure and Purpose of the Catena in Heb. 1:5-13', *CBQ* 38 (1976) 358; *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1982) 135; A.F.Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven* (Leiden: Brill, 1977) 213, 215 n.91; J.D.G.Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1977) 260; W.R.G.Loader, *Sohn und Hoherpriester* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981) 25 and n.19, who cites Ahlborn, *Septuaginta-Vorlage* 113-114; Dussaut, *Synopse* 21; L.C.Allen, 'Psalm 45: 7-8 (6-7) in Old and New Testament Settings', in *Christ the Lord. Studies in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie* (ed. H.H.Rowdon) (Leicester: IVP, 1982) 240; Ulrichsen 'Hebr. 1,4' 66.

59. KJV, RSV, NEB, NASB, JB, GNB, NIV, NAB, Weymouth, Berkeley.

60. It seems probable that in each of the seven OT passages cited in vv.5-13 God is the speaker (thus also Schröger, *Verfasser* 252; R.Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Leiden: Brill, 1970] 512, 513-4; Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis* 164, 168). This must be the case in vv.5a, 5b, 6, 10-12, 13. In v.7 it would be permissible to translate 'and concerning the angels it [Scripture] says' (similarly Buchanan, *Hebrews* 11) were it not for the fact that nowhere does the author use the expression ἡ γραφή λέγει (or even the noun γραφή). For him the words of Scripture

θεός<sup>61</sup> at his resurrection<sup>62</sup> he intends to signify that, equally with the Father, Jesus possesses the divine nature<sup>63</sup>.

## IV 'Ο ΘΕΟΣ IN HEBREWS 1:9

Given the precise parallelism between σου ὁ θεός (v.8) and σε ὁ θεός (v.9) and the high probability that ὁ θεός is vocative in v.8, it would seem eminently reasonable to suppose that v.9b should be translated 'Therefore, O God (=Jesus), your God (=the Father) has anointed you ...'. Not surprisingly, a considerable number of exegetes have adopted this view and therefore maintain that Jesus is

---

are words spoken by God even where the OT does not describe them as such (as in 1:8) and even where the words cited are about God (as in 1:7) (cf. B.M. Metzger, 'The Formulas introducing Quotations of Scripture in the New Testament and the Mishnah' *JBL* 70 [1951] 306 n.16).

61. The presence of the article is demanded by grammatical considerations (see n.40 above) and has no special theological significance.
62. We need not suppose that the author believed either that vv.8-9 were spoken by the Father only once or that the Son was appropriately addressed as θεός only after his resurrection, but it seems probable that he was thinking particularly of the exaltation of Jesus at his resurrection. The verbs ἡγάπησας and ἐμίσησας (v.9) probably refer to the earthly life of Jesus (see V.B below and n.102). If so, the consequent 'anointing' would allude to the unsurpassed jubilation of Christ upon his re-entry into heavenly glory (cf. 12:2; Jn. 17:5) and his endowment with full messianic dignity and honours. But vv.8-9 form a unit (even if the inserted καὶ of v.8b in effect creates two quotations) since there is a single introductory formula, so that v.8a belongs principally to a post-resurrection setting.
63. That the expression ὁ θεός refers to the Son's possession of the divine nature is recognized, *inter alios*, by G.B. Stevens, *The Theology of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T.&T.Clark, 1911<sup>2</sup>) 504; Spicq, *Hébreux* II.20; Montefiore, *Hebrews* 47; Swetnam, *Jesus* 149-150, 153, 154; Hagner, *Hebrews* 14.

addressed as 'God' in two successive verses.<sup>64</sup> The only modern English version that reflects this interpretation is the NEB,<sup>65</sup> although it does not render  $\text{יְהוָה}$  in Psalm 45:8 (45:7, EVV) as a vocative.<sup>66</sup>

But there are several compelling reasons why this view, although 'eminently reasonable' and grammatically admissible, should be rejected in favour of the translation that takes  $\acute{\omicron}$   $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$  as a nominative and the following  $\acute{\omicron}$   $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$  σου as being in apposition: 'Therefore God, your God, has anointed you ...'.

First, in the LXX (as in the MT) there is a significant parallelism between Psalm 44:3c and 8b:

$\text{οὐ}\alpha\text{ τοῦτο εὐλόγησέν σε ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (v. 3c)}$   
 $\text{οὐ}\alpha\text{ τοῦτο ἔχρισέν σε ὁ θεὸς ὁ θεὸς σου (v. 8b)}$

In v. 3c  $\acute{\omicron}$   $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$  cannot be vocative, which suggests that in the parallel v. 8b it should be construed as nominative, not vocative. While we cannot be sure that the author of Hebrews had a copy of the Greek text of the whole psalm before him or had recently read it, it would not be inappropriate to suggest, given the verbal identity between Hebrews 1:9 and Psalm 44:8, that this parallelism within the Psalm influenced his understanding of the phrase  $\acute{\omicron}$   $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$  ὁ  $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$  σου.

Secondly, since the author was not averse to adjusting the

- 
64. Lünemann, *Hebrews* 93-94; Delitzsch, *Hebrews* 80; B. Weiss, 'Gebrauch' 335; Windisch, *Hebräerbrief* 16; H. Schlier, 'Ἐλευον', *TDNT* 2.472; van der Ploeg, 'L'exégèse' 206; Spicq, *Hébreux* I, 288; II, 19-20; Kuss, *Hebräer* 45-46, 146-147; Héring, *Hebrews* 10; Stauffer, 'θεός' *TDNT* 3.105; *Theology* 114; Strathmann, *Hebräer* 79; Cullmann, *Christology* 310; Michel, *Hebräer* 118; Vanhoye, *Structure* 71, 176-177; Montefiore, *Hebrews* 47; Bruce, *Hebrews* 19 (quite possible); R.E. Brown, 'Jesus' 562 and n.40 ('perhaps'); de Jonge and van der Woude, 'IIQ Melchizedek' 314, 316; Filson, *Yesterday* 39, 43 and n. 17 ('probable'); Sabourin, *Names* 303; Schröger, *Verfasser* 63-64; Longenecker, *Christology* 139; Swetnam, *Jesus* 153; W. Grundmann, 'χρῶ', *TDNT* 9. 564; Dunn, *Unity* 54, 260; Loader, *Sohn* 25 n. 24; Dussaut, *Synopse* 21.
65. 'Therefore, O God, thy God has set thee above thy fellows, by anointing with the oil of exultation.'
66. 'So God, your God, has anointed you above your fellows with oil, the token of joy'. On the difficulty of rendering  $\text{יְהוָה}$  here by 'O God', see Harris, 'Elohim' 86 and n. 80.

LXX text to avoid ambiguity,<sup>67</sup> we might have expected him, just as he altered the subject-predicate order in v. 8b to create parallelism, to alter the position of ὁ θεός in v. 9b to read διὰ τοῦτο, ὁ θεός, ἔχρισέν σε ὁ θεός σου in order to remove ambiguity, had he regarded the first ὁ θεός as a vocative.

Thirdly, the phrases ὁ θεός, ὁ θεός μου (Ps. 21:2; 42:4; 62:2; cf. 50:16, LXX), ὁ θεός, ὁ θεός ἡμῶν (Ps. 66:7)<sup>68</sup> and ὁ θεός, ὁ θεός σου (Ps. 49:7) are sometimes found in the LXX Psalter, and in each case the first ὁ θεός is nominative. The author of Hebrews generally derives his OT quotations from the Greek OT.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, the reason that the author cites v. 8 as well as v. 7 of Psalm 44 (LXX) may not simply be that ἔχρισεν corresponds to Χριστός or that παρά introduces a further comparison (cf. παρ' αὐτοῦς, 1:4) between Christ and the angels,<sup>70</sup> but primarily to demonstrate that to address the exalted Son as 'God' is to compromise neither the primacy of the Father nor the subordination of the Son. It is as appropriate for the Son to address the Father as 'my God' as it is for the Father to address the Son as 'God'. What is more, the phrase 'God, your God' may reflect the author's awareness that he has given ὁ θεός a distinctive application in v. 8 and his consequent desire to affirm that while the Son is *totus deus* he is not *totum dei*.

---

67. J.C. McCullough classifies the modifications of the text of OT quotations that may safely be traced to the author of Hebrews into three groups: adjustments (i) to make the quotation fit into the context more easily; (ii) to emphasise important points in the quotation; and (iii) to avoid ambiguity ('Quotations' 378).

68. Ps. 66: 7b is the closest parallel to Heb. 1:9b in the Psalter: εὐλογῆσαι ἡμᾶς ὁ θεός ὁ θεός ἡμῶν.

69. Thomas, 'Citations' 303, 325.

70. It is unclear whether μέτοχοι in 1:9 refers to angels (thus e.g., Lünemann, *Hebrews* 94-95; Schröger, *Verfasser* 64 ['very probably']; Héring, *Hebrews* 10) or Christians (cf. 2:11; 3:14) (Bruce, *Hebrews* 21) or all who have fellowship with God, especially the angels (Hewitt, *Hebrews* 58) or men in general (Spicq, *Hébreux* II.20; H. Riesenfeld, 'παρά', *TDNT* 5.735).

## V SIGNIFICANCE OF A VOCATIVAL 'Ο ΘΕΟΣ IN HEBREWS 1:8

A. *Within Hebrews 1-2*

Just as the whole doctrinal portion of the epistle (1:1-10:39) focuses on the superiority of Jesus, so its first segment (1:1-2:18) seeks to establish the superiority of Jesus to angels. After the exordium (1:1-4) he is shown to be superior *because of his Godhood* (1:5-14): he has obtained a vastly superior title and office (ὄνομα) (1:4) as the divinely begotten Son (1:5);<sup>71</sup> as pre-eminent heir ('firstborn') he enjoys unrivalled dignity and a unique relation to God (v.6a; cf. v.2, 'heir of all things'); he is the object of angelic worship (1:6b);<sup>72</sup> in his person he is divine (1:8a); in the exercise of his divine sovereignty he is scrupulously just (1:8b); he has a superior joy (1:9); he is the unchangeable Lord of creation, which includes the angels (1:10-12); and he is God's exalted

- 
71. The εἶπεν of v.5 alludes to (γάρ) τὸ γενόμενος of v.4, suggesting that Jesus' receipt of the incomparable name of 'Son' preceded or was coincident with his exaltation (v.3b). It is not that his sonship was inaugurated at the resurrection, but the full exercise of the rights and privileges attaching to that name began with his enthronement (cf. Rom. 1:4).
72. Angelic service (v.7) involves the worship of the Son (v.6) (cf. Rev. 5:11-13) as well as ministry to and for Christians (v. 14). It is uncertain when this service of worship is rendered. If πάλιν is construed with εἰσαγάγη, the reference will be either to Christ's return from death or to his second advent ('when he again brings ...'); but if πάλιν is taken with δέ, it introduces a new quotation ('and again, when ...') (cf. 1:5; 2:13; 4:5) and the phrase may refer to God's bringing his Son into the world by the incarnation or God's 'introducing' his Son to the world as rightful heir of the universe at the exaltation.



co-regent (v.13).<sup>73</sup> Then, after the first of the several exhortations (2:1-4) that are interspersed throughout the letter, the author demonstrates the superiority of Jesus over the angels *in spite of his manhood* (2:5-18)<sup>74</sup> : God has subjected the world to come to the Son of Man (2:5-8), not to angels; although temporarily 'lower' than the angels he is now permanently 'higher', being 'crowned with glory and honour' (2:7, 9); because he assumed human nature and died, he emancipated humanity, and became 'a merciful and faithful high priest in God's service', roles that angels could never perform (2:14-17).<sup>75</sup>

- 
73. In his successive contrasts, some explicit, some implicit, between the Son and the angels in vv. 4 - 13, the author's intent has been to show his readers the incomparability of the Son, not to call into question the divinely ordained function of angels. He concludes, therefore, with a positive assessment of their role: they are 'all ministering spirits sent out to serve, for the benefit of those who are to inherit salvation' (v.14). Yet even here there are implicit contrasts. The Son, too, was sent, but whereas he came but once (1:6; 10:5) they are repeatedly sent (ἀποστελλόμενα). His mission also was to serve, but whereas they are ministering spirits, he was God's incarnate servant (10:5-7, 9). Whereas their role is to support those destined to receive salvation, his service was actually to achieve that salvation (2:10; 5:9).
  74. J.Swetnam, however, contends that 2:5-18 treats of the Son's inferiority to the angels, his humanity, while 1:5-2:4 focuses on his superiority, his divinity ('Form' 372-375).
  75. For the author of Hebrews there is no question of Jesus' having assumed angelic nature and therefore of being merely equal to angels. He voluntarily assumed human nature and became for a short period 'lower than the angels' because it was both appropriate (v. 10) and necessary (v. 17) for the Son to be completely identified with God's 'sons to be' if he was to perform high-priestly service on their behalf. The rank he assumed was inferior to that of angels but the function he performed was certainly not. Heb. 2:16 seems to mean either that Jesus did not 'take to himself' angelic nature but human nature, or that it was not his concern to bring help to angelic beings but to humankind.

We may therefore isolate the contribution of v.8 to the argument of Hebrews 1-2 as being to show that the superiority of Jesus to angels does not reside simply in his having distinctive titles, or an exalted status, or redemptive functions, but preeminently in his belonging to a different category - that of deity.<sup>76</sup> Just as he is set apart from sinners because he is 'holy and without fault or stain' (7:26), so he is set apart from angels because he may be appropriately addressed as θεός<sup>77</sup>: to which of the angels did God ever say 'Your throne, O God, will endure for ever and ever'? No angel was ever dignified by the title θεός because no angel shared intrinsically in the divine nature.<sup>78</sup> This use of θεός in reference to Jesus

76. Similarly Spicq, *Hébreux* II.20.

77. But W. Robertson Smith has argued that 'the adjective κρείττων ... is used not of natural but of official superiority ... The whole argument turns not on personal dignity, but on dignity of function in the administration of the economy of salvation' ('Christ and the Angels. Hebrews 1', *Expositor*, second series, 1 [1881] 26-27, 29).

78. πάντες (1:14) excludes the possibility of an exceptional angelic figure such as Michael or Melchizedek eclipsing the supremacy of Christ: 'Are they not all ministering spirits ...?'. IIQ Melchizedek, a document that may be dated c. A.D.50, illustrates the fact that in the use of at least one representative of one stream of first-century A.D. Jewish thought - a stream that may be designated 'non-conformist Judaism' - the term אלוהים ('heavenly one') could be applied to Melchizedek and other angelic beings in the heavenly court (cf. Ps. 82:1): '(9) ... as it is written (10) concerning him [Melchizedek] in the hymns of David who said, "Elohim [has taken] his stand in the congregation of El, in the midst of the Elohim he gives judgment" ...' (cf. אלוהים in reference to Melchizedek in lines 24 and 25, alluding to Is. 52:7; and אלוהים in line 14 referring to heavenly beings). Melchizedek is exalted high above (line 11) the angelic assembly of God (10) who are his helpers (14) in exacting the judgment of God (13) in the year of jubilee (9) from the hand of Belial and 'all the spirits of his lot' (12-13, 26). See further de Jonge and van der Woude, 'IIQ Melchizedek' 301-323; Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, *passim*, esp. 64-82, 152-172.

is all the more significant because the author carefully avoids using the term unnecessarily in 1:1-14, preferring to use a circumlocution (1:3; cf. 8.1) and to leave the subject of successive verbs of saying unexpressed (vv. 5-7, 13).

In addition, from one point of view 1:8a serves as a fulcrum within Hebrews 1. If ὁ θεός is a vocative, it is the first of three terms of address in this chapter, all referring to Jesus and all within OT quotations drawn from the Psalms: ὁ θεός (v.8 = Ps. 44:7, LXX), κύριε (v. 10 = Ps. 101:26, LXX),<sup>79</sup> and [σὺ]<sup>80</sup> κἀθου (v.13 = Ps. 109:1, LXX). Whether these OT passages had already been associated in a 'testimony book' of christological texts or in the liturgical usage of the early church, it is impossible to say, but the christological confession of Thomas (ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου, Jn. 20:28) shows how readily the titles θεός and κύριος could be juxtaposed in the worship of Jesus.

But v.8a looks backwards as well as forwards. When the Son is said to be 'the radiant light of God's glory' (JB) (τὸν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης, v.3) and to bear 'the imprint of God's nature' (χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, v.3), he is being described as the intrinsic possessor of the nature of God<sup>81</sup>

79. On the differences between the MT and LXX in this citation, see Bruce, *Hebrews* 21-23; Schröger, *Verfasser* 66-71.

80. It could plausibly be argued that κύριε should be supplied here, since the psalm begins ἔλεεν ὁ κύριος τῷ κυρίῳ μου.

81. So also Sabourin, *Names* 286. In patristic exegesis the former phrase was taken to imply that the Son was consubstantial with the Father (community of essence), and the latter that the Son should not be identified with the Father (distinction of persons). However, 'to the degree that God's glory is His nature', δόξα and ὑπόστασις may be synonymous (U.Wilckens, 'χαρακτήρ', *TDNT* 9.421), 'both words ... describing God's essence' (H.Köster, 'ὑπόστασις', *TDNT* 8.585). According to G.Kittel, δόξα denotes 'the divine mode of being', a sense that 'is true of all the NT authors. Even writers like Lk. and the author of Hb., who have such a feeling for Greek, are no exception' ('δοκέω', *TDNT* 2.247).

without actually being given the generic title of 'God'. What v.3 implies v.8 makes explicit: the Son is rightly addressed as θεός inasmuch as he is the exact representation of the very being of ὁ θεός. Verse 8 also alludes to the expression ἄγγελου θεοῦ in v.6,<sup>82</sup> where θεοῦ and αὐτῷ refer to different persons.<sup>83</sup> It is wholly appropriate, indeed imperative, that the angels of God worship Jesus, the Firstborn, for he is by nature included within the generic category denoted by θεός and therefore is a legitimate and necessary object of adoration.<sup>84</sup>

If in fact v.8a makes a distinctive and forceful contribution to the argument of Hebrews 1 in the manner suggested, it is scarcely adequate to claim, as V.Taylor does, that 'the divine name is carried over with the rest of the quotation' and the writer 'has no intention of suggesting that Jesus is God',<sup>85</sup> so that 'nothing can be built upon this reference'.<sup>86</sup> Even if the author was not consciously applying a divine title to Christ, we cannot assume that he failed to recognise the theological import of such an incidental application. Further, we would suggest that even the more positive assessment of A.W.Wainwright that 'the Deity of Christ, which is relevant but not necessary to the argument, is only mentioned in passing'<sup>87</sup> fails to do justice to the significance of this address in the flow of the argument. O.Cullmann, on the other hand, seems justified in his claim that the psalm is quoted by the author precisely because of this address, 'O God' (which he finds also in v.9).<sup>88</sup>

But to suggest that v.8a is pivotal within the chapter is not to claim that the address ὁ θεός is the zenith or the

---

82. On the OT source of the quotation in v.6, see Schröger, *Verfasser* 46-53.

83. On this latter point see T.F.Glasson, '"Plurality of Divine Persons" and the Quotations in Hebrews 1:6ff.' *NTS* 12 (1965-6) 270-272, esp. p. 271.

84. Cf. Vanhoye, (*Structure* 71): 'Si les anges de Dieu (1,6) doivent se prosterner devant le premier-né, c'est qu'il partage la dignité de Dieu lui-même'.

85. *Essays* 85 (= *Exp T* 73 [1961-62] 117).

86. *Christ* 96.

87. *Trinity* 60 (= *SJT* 10 [1957] 287).

88. *Christology* 310.

principal affirmation of the chapter. Of the three main titles given to Jesus in Hebrews 1, υἱός is the title on which attention is focused (vv.2,5 *bis*, 8a), so that θεός (v.8) and κύριος (v.10) may be said to explicate two aspects of that sonship, viz. divinity and sovereignty. The principal point in the chapter is that the exalted Son is vastly superior to the angels (vv. 4-5,13) as a divine king who is worshipped (vv. 6-9) and as a sovereign creator who is changeless (vv.10-12). In that v.4 enunciates the theme of the superiority of the Son to angels that is to be developed, it forms the focal point of Hebrews 1-2.

The reference to the Son as 'God' in 1:8 occurs within a citation from Psalm 45,<sup>89</sup> one of seven OT quotations in 1:5-14. Five or possibly six<sup>90</sup> of these are drawn from the Psalms, the author's favourite mine from which to quarry passages that illuminate the nature of the person and work of Christ. Of the seven quotations, only 2 Samuel 7:14, Psalm 110:1 and perhaps Psalm 2:7 seem to have had messianic overtones in any Jewish circles at the beginning of the Christian era.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless the author of Hebrews, whose exegetical method was 'unashamedly Messianic',<sup>92</sup> proceeded on the assumption that his Christian addressees would recognise the validity of his handling of the OT, even if the messianic application of some of the texts had not yet become common Christian tradition. There is little to support the conjecture of F.C.Synge that in Hebrews 1 the author has made use of a Testimony Book collection of 'Son' passages that already was deemed authoritative in the Church.<sup>93</sup> More plausible, but still incapable of

---

89. In other OT citations in Hebrews, ὁ θεός does not refer to Christ - 2:13 (Is. 8:18); 9:20 (Ex. 24:8); 10:7 (Ps. 40:8) (Kistemaker, *Citations* 137 n.3).

90. The uncertainty arises from the fact that the citation in v.6 may be dependent on Deut. 32:43 (LXX) or, less directly, on Ps. 97:7 (LXX, 96:7). See n.82 above.

91. See the discussion of Kistemaker, *Citations* 17-29.

92. R.Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 1970) 535.

93. *Hebrews* 1-7, 53-54. Synge notes that all the passages cited in Heb. 1 represent God as speaking to or of someone who shares heaven with him, someone whom Synge calls 'the Heavenly Companion'. On this 'Testimony Book' hypothesis, see Kistemaker, *Citations* 91-92; Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis* 179-180.

demonstration, is the proposal of R.G.Hamerton-Kelly that before their use in Hebrews 1 to demonstrate Christ's superiority to angels, the seven quotations formed a 'block' of traditional christological texts, selected primarily to interpret Jesus' resurrection and exaltation but then applied to prove his 'protological' pre-existence.<sup>94</sup> We prefer the view that the author inherited as christological 'proof-texts' the two or three passages that probably were interpreted messianically in some contemporary Jewish exegesis (viz. 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 110:1 and perhaps Ps. 2:7) while the other scriptural illustrations of Christ's supremacy were the product of his own Spirit-directed exegesis.<sup>95</sup> Yet the possibility should not be excluded that all five or six Psalms cited in Hebrews 1 were already grouped together, not in a Testimony Book or as an orally transmitted set of christological texts, but as portrayals of the exalted status and roles of Jesus that were sung or recited in early Christian worship.<sup>96</sup>

As for the use made of Psalm 45:7-8 in Hebrews 1, there is both '*shift of application and modification of text*', as B.Lindars describes the phenomenon.<sup>97</sup> A poet's address to the king at the royal wedding becomes the Father's address to his Son at the resurrection-exaltation. The eternity of the 'throne' no longer denotes the perpetuity of the Davidic dynasty but the endless character of Christ's dominion (v.8). The Psalm pointed forward to the coming King-Messiah of David's house who would personally embody all aspects of the ideal theocratic rule. In Hebrews 1 the attributes of this ideal king - love of justice, hatred of iniquity - have become the past accomplishments of the Messiah-Son,<sup>98</sup> so that he is exalted by the Father to his right hand to receive incomparable heavenly accolades

---

94. *Pre-existence* 243-247.

95. Similarly Dey, *Intermediary World* 153.

96. Just as Jesus had used the Psalms in his prayers (Lk. 23:46; cf. Ps. 31:5) and worship (Mt. 26:30), so the early Church did in their prayers (Acts 4:24-30) and worship (Rev. 15:3-4).

97. *Apologetic* 17.

98. The term *πάβλος* (v.8b), denoting the royal sceptre rather than the shepherd's staff, points not only to the divine sovereignty of the exalted Jesus but also to his messianic status (see *SB* III, 679).

(v.9).<sup>99</sup> Modification to the text we have already discussed (II.A above).

## B. *Within the Whole Epistle*

What contribution does a vocative, 'O God' in the context of 1:8-9 make to wider themes or emphases in the epistle? There are three principal areas of contribution: the paradox of Jesus' deity and humanity;<sup>100</sup> the subordination motif; Christ's eternality.

In 1:8-9 we find juxtaposed an explicit assertion of Jesus' intrinsic deity ('O God') and the clear implication of his real humanity: 'you have loved righteousness and hated iniquity' (v.9a). The aorists ἠγάπησας and ἐμίσησας are not so much gnomic, implying that the Son is always devoted to the maintenance of the divine justice,<sup>101</sup> as constative, indicating that during his earthly mission the Son had been constantly committed to upholding justice and doing God's will.<sup>102</sup> In Psalm 45 the unsurpassed joy of the king on his wedding-day is seen as a fitting consequence of his love of justice and repudiation of evil. Here in Hebrews 1 the Father's exaltation of his Son to heavenly glory and honour is viewed as the natural outcome and divine acknowledgment (ὁὐδ τοῦτο) of his earthly life spent in 'fulfilling all righteousness' (cf. Mt. 3:15).

Sometimes the elements of this divine-human paradox are expressed elsewhere in the epistle in close juxtaposition,<sup>103</sup> but generally the author is content to

---

99. For an attempt to trace in Heb. 1:5-2:4 the various stages of a royal enthronement ceremony of the (putative) OT pattern, see Swetnam, *Jesus* 142-145, 148; similarly M.Barth, 'Old Testament' 72-73.

100. On the two basic ways in which pre-Chalcedon Greek commentators dealt with the deity-humanity christological paradox as presented by the data in Hebrews, see F.M.Young, 'Christological Ideas in the Greek Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews', *JTS* n.s. 20 (1969) 150-163.

101. As, perhaps, in the LXX (see the MT).

102. These verbs are interpreted as referring to the earthly life and ministry of Jesus by, *inter alios*, Lünemann, *Hebrews* 93; Westcott, *Hebrews* 26-27; Riggenbach, *Hebräer* 23 n.53; Windisch, *Hebräerbrief* 18; Spicq, *Hébreux* II.19; Strathmann, *Hebräer* 80; Michel, *Hebräer* 119; Hughes, *Hebrews* 65.

103. E.g., 1:1-3; 2:17; 4:14; 5:8-10; 7:14; 10:29.

stress one or other aspect as his argument demands. That he believes in the full deity of Jesus is clear: Jesus is described as the perfect representation of God's glory and nature (1:3); he not only existed before he appeared on earth (10:5) or before Melchizedek (7:3) or before human history began (1:2) or before the universe was created (1:10), but he also existed and exists eternally (7:16; 9:14; 13:8); like his Father<sup>104</sup> he may be called 'Lord';<sup>105</sup> he is creator (1:10), sustainer (1:3) and heir (1:2) of the universe, that is, everything in time and space (τοὺς αἰῶνας, 1:2); he is 'Son' (υἱός)<sup>106</sup> and 'the Son of God' (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ),<sup>107</sup> the timeless ὦν of 1:3 pointing to a natural, not adoptive, sonship;<sup>108</sup> he is worshipped by angels (1:6) and the object of human faith (12:2); he is sovereign over the world to come (2:5); and passages referring to Yahweh in the OT are applied to him.<sup>109</sup>

No less evident is the writer's emphasis on the real and complete humanity of Jesus. He assumed human nature with all its weaknesses and limitations (2:11, 14, 17), apart from sin (4:15; 7:26); he belonged to the tribe of Judah (7:14) and 'Jesus' was his human name;<sup>110</sup> he experienced human emotions (5:7), temptation (4:15), suffering (5:8; 13:12), and death (2:9; 12:2); he believed in and feared God (2:13; 5:7) and offered prayer to him (5:7); he exhibited human virtues such as fidelity (2:17; 3:2) and obedience (10:7); he gave teaching while on earth (2:3); he endured the hostility of sinners (12:3).

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of 1:8-9 is the sequence ὁ θεός, . . . ὁ θεός, ὁ θεός σου. The God who addresses his Son as 'God' is also God to his Son, even his exalted Son. Whether ὁ θεός in v.9 is nominative or vocative, the ὁ θεός σου remains. In addition, the eternal sovereignty that Jesus now exercises was accorded him as a gracious gift of God (v.8a), λέγειν πρὸς here referring not simply to the imparting of information but rather to the

104. 7:21; 8:8, 11; 10:16, 30.

105. 1:10; 2:3; 7:14; 13:20.

106. 1:2,5; 3:6; 5:5,8; 7:28; cf. ὁ υἱός in 1:8.

107. 4:14; 6:6; 7:3; 10:29.

108. Westcott, *Hebrews* 425.

109. 1:6; 1:10-12; 3:7-11, 14, 15.

110. 2:9; 3:1; 6:20; 7:22; 10:19; 12:2, 24; 13:12, 20. For emphasis, 'Ἰησοῦς is always placed at the end of a clause (except in 13:12).



granting of a gift and the assignment to a special task (cf. v.13).<sup>111</sup> Also it was the Son's God who anointed him with the 'oil of gladness' (v.9). This element of the subordination of Jesus to his Father, a characteristic of NT christology,<sup>112</sup> is much in evidence elsewhere in Hebrews. The Son was dependent on God for his appointment as heir of the universe (1:2) and to the office of high-priest (3:2; 5:5, 10), for his 'introduction' into the world (1:6), for the preparation of his body (10:5), for his resurrection (13:20), and for his exaltation to his Father's right hand (1:13).

Finally, Christ's eternality. 'Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever' affirms that Christ's personal rule is eternal and implies that Christ, as ruler, is also eternal.<sup>113</sup> Εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος (v. 8a) anticipates the phrase εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα of Psalm 110:4 (109:4, LXX) cited three times by the author in reference to the eternity of the Melchizedekian order of priesthood (5:6; 6:20; 7:17).<sup>114</sup> Jesus is a priest 'for ever' after the order of Melchizedek, and the treatment in Hebrews of the relationship between these two figures constitutes 'the culmination of the epistle's argument',<sup>115</sup> 'the kernel and focus of the entire Epistle'.<sup>116</sup> Other statements that are reminiscent of this theme of Christ's eternal

- 
111. Similarly, B.Reicke, 'πρός', in *TDNT* 6.723, who compares πρὸς τὸν Ἰσραὴλ λέγει (Rom. 10:21).
  112. E.g., for Paul, see 1 Cor. 3:23; 11:3; 15:24, 28; for Peter, 1 Pet. 1:21; 2:23; cf. Acts 3:13, 26; for the Fourth Evangelist, Jn. 5:30; 10:36; 14:28. Here, as elsewhere, this letter is (in the words of Williamson, *Philo* 579-580) 'in the centre of the mainstream of primitive Christian theology'.
  113. The translation 'God is your throne for ever and ever' asserts the permanence or eternality of God's support or protection of Christ's dominion. The implication of Christ's personal eternality is present but less obvious.
  114. L.C.Allen notes also that ... τῆς βασιλείας σου. ἡγάπησας δικαιοσύνην (vv. 8b-9a) foreshadows the explanation in 7:2 of the meaning of Melchizedek's name, βασιλεὺς δικαιοσύνης ('Psalm 45:7-8 (6-7)' 238-239). 'For the author the royal, righteous and eternal Son of Hebrews 1:8-9 would hardly have failed to suggest the Melchizedek-type priesthood' (*ibid*).
  115. Spicq, *Hébreux* II.203.
  116. B.Demarest, *A History of Interpretation of Hebrews 7,1-10 from the Reformation to the Present* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1976) 2.

nature are 'your years will never end' (1:12); 'the power of an indestructible life' (7:16); 'he continues for ever ... he is able for all time (εἰς τὸ παντελές) to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them' (7:24-25); 'through his eternal spirit' (διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου, 9:14);<sup>117</sup> 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever' (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, 13:8).<sup>118</sup>

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Two general conclusions may now be stated. First, although some slight degree of uncertainty remains as to whether מֵלֶכִּי in Psalm 45:7 is a vocative, there can be little doubt that the LXX translator construed it so, and that the author of Hebrews, whose quotations of the OT generally follow the LXX, assumed that the Septuagintal ὁ θεός in Psalm 44:7 was a vocative and incorporated it in this sense into his argument in chapter 1, an argument that was designed to establish the superiority of the Son over the angels. The appellation ὁ θεός that was figurative and hyperbolic when applied to a mortal king was applied to the immortal Son in a literal and true sense.<sup>119</sup> Jesus is not merely superior to the angels. Equally with the Father he shares in the divine nature (ὁ θεός, v.8) while remaining distinct from him (ὁ θεός σου, v.9). The author places Jesus far above any angel with respect to nature and function; and on a par with God with regard to nature but as subordinate to God with regard to function. There is an 'essential' unity but a functional subordination.

Secondly, given the vocative ὁ θεός in 1:8, it cannot be deemed impossible for the comparable ὁ θεός in 1:9 to be translated 'O God', but this interpretation seems improbable.

---

117. On the interpretation of this ambiguous phrase, see Hughes, *Hebrews* 358-360.

118. See further on this theme, Thompson, *Beginnings* 134-140; 'Structure', *CBQ* 38 (1976) 358-363.

119. Similarly Spicq, *Hébreux* II.19.