

A LITURGICAL APPROACH TO HEBREWS 13

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The thirteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews has long been a source of contention.¹ Its apparently heterogeneous content is a source of perplexity.² Its relation with the rest of the epistle has been subject to a variety of interpretations.³ It would seem advisable to try to come to grips with what the chapter says in itself before trying to assess its place at the end of the entire work. The present study will therefore confine itself to trying to arrive at a plausible interpretation of what the chapter is trying to convey. Subsequent study will be needed to evaluate its place in the structure of the entire epistle.⁴

The relevant portion of chapter 13 for purposes of the present study comprises vv. 1–21. This means that for the present writer, the benediction at vv. 20–21 is part of the text to be elucidated. Verses 22–25, on the other hand, are a brief set of remarks and a valediction, not uncommon in letters of the period, and to be evaluated accordingly.⁵

This article is composed of three parts: First, vv. 1–21 are viewed in terms of the chapter's structure. Secondly, vv. 1–21 are viewed in the perspective of the biblical sacrifice known as *tôdâ*. Finally, these verses are viewed in the context of the Latin Rite Mass of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Structure of Heb. 13:1–21

The following, preliminary assessment of structure is offered:

- 1 "One of the key literary problems of Hebrews is the relationship between chap. 13 and what precedes. . . . Many scholars have maintained that all or part of the chapter is a secondary addition to the text. Some have argued that this addition was made by a pseudepigraphist, in order to bring the whole document into conformity with the Pauline corpus; others, that an authentic Pauline text has been appended." H. W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 384. See also: W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 495–497; P. Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans / Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1993), 692–693.
- 2 "A formless collection of the ethical precepts and theological reflections scarcely seems congruous with the careful development of argument in chaps. 1–12." Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 496.
- 3 Some have even argued that chapter 13 is alien to Hebrews: ". . . it is asserted that considerations of coherence, form, and content call into question the integrity of Hebrews and the authenticity or appropriateness of chap. 13." Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 496.
- 4 It seems desirable at this point to make explicit the presuppositions with which the present writer approaches this text. They are those of a believer in the traditions and teaching authority of the Roman Catholic Church.
- 5 Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 408–409.

Verses 1–5a form a section composed of a series of admonitions concerning conduct;

Verses 5b–6 form a section composed of two citations from Scripture; vv. 7–17 form a section composed of a series of statements framed by mention of the community’s “leaders” (hgoumenoi); this section stands, obviously, at the heart of the chapter by reason of its length and position.

Verses 18–19 form a section composed of a personal appeal for prayer by the author of the epistle.

Verses 20–21 form a section composed of a blessing.

The challenge, then, is to find a coherent structure for these five sections which will indicate a plausible explanation for the role of each of them in the chapter as a whole. Further, the central section, framed by mention of the community’s leaders, needs a coherent structure itself, given its length.

A Call to Brotherly Love (Heb. 13:1–5a)

With Hebrews 13:1, a series of moral admonitions suddenly becomes the center of attention. These admonitions follow from what immediately precedes, 12:29, with its reminder that the addressees, like all Christians, stand under God’s judgmental fire. But this sobering thought, in turn, would seem to follow in the mind of the author of Hebrews from the liturgical context expressed in 12:28, with its mention of worship with “reverence” (eulabeia) and “awe” (deo~). Thus 12:28, with its overtones of worship, is the underlying introduction to vv. 1–5a.⁶

The passage in question would seem to consist of four couplets, combining direct admonitions with explanatory comments:

First Couplet: “Let love of the brethren remain. Hospitality do not forget, for through this some have played host to angels unawares” (vv. 1–2).⁷

Second Couplet: “Remember those who are in chains as chained with them, those who are ill-treated as being yourselves in a body”⁸ (v. 3).

6 “The connection of 13:1–21 to the preceding section, 12:14–29, is established through 12:28. There the community is summoned to be thankful, and through thanksgiving to serve God in an acceptable manner.” Lane, *Hebrews* 9–13, 496.

7 Translation of Scripture is by the present writer.

8 There seems to be no reference to Christ’s mystical body. See Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 696. But there may be theological implications in the context of Hebrews. See J.

Third Couplet: "Let marriage be honored by all and let the marital bed be undefiled, for God will judge fornicators and adulterers" (v. 4).

Fourth Couplet: "Do not be a money-lover, be content with what you have" (v. 5a).

In the light of Hebrews 12:28–29, which would seem to be the introduction to the admonitions, these moral strictures are designed to respond to the call to show gratitude for the gift of an unshakeable kingdom. The addressees are to offer to God worship like the faith which motivated Jesus in his suffering.

An Exhortation to Courage (Heb. 13:5b–6)

For he himself has said, "I shall not desert you and I shall not abandon you," hence we should take courage and say, "The Lord is my helper and I shall not fear. What will a human do to me?" (vv. 5b–6)

After the admonitions of 1–5a the author introduces two citations from Scripture. The use of the word *gar* ("for") coupled to *auto~* ("he himself") seems to refer implicitly to what is understood in the final admonition: one should be content with what one has because, as expressed in v. 5b, each one is under God's providential care.

The source of the citation in v. 5b is not clear. One view traces it back to Genesis 28:15 as modified from Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; another is that it is dependent on Joshua 1:5 as modified by Deuteronomy 31:8. In the context of a writing by and for persons who were, clearly, deeply versed in the language of the Greek Old Testament, such fine distinctions are probably misleading. All the sources can be adduced as playing a part.

The language of v. 5b is intriguing. God is presented as speaking to an individual. The individual, in the context of Hebrews, would seem to be Christ understood as the new Joshua who is leading the new people of God into God's definitive rest.⁹

Verse 6 contains a citation from Psalm 118:6. It is in the singular number,

Thurén, *Das Lobopfer der Hebräer. Studien zum Aufbau und Anliegen von Hebräer 13* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1973), 210–211, n. 721.

9 See the comment by Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 520: "The writer could have understood the oracle as the word of God to a new Joshua who will lead the people into rest (4:8). It is important in any case that the singular of address ('I will never fail you; I will never forsake you') has in view an individual who represents the whole people. If the writer read the oracle in this manner he may have understood it as the word of God addressed to the Son (so Thurén, *Lobopfer*, 218). Christians share in this word and its response, in so far as they are partners with Christ (see 3:14)."

and should thus be best taken as the response of the individual addressed in v. 5b, Christ. Christ responds to the word of God, but in the name of the entire community. This is to be inferred from the introduction to the citation in the first part of the verse, “hence we should take courage and say.” The words of the psalm, cited as they are in response to the more particularized context of the citation in v. 5b, have the effect of generalizing and radicalizing the attitude of both Christ and the Christians so that they are without fear in any context.¹⁰

With Christ “Outside the Camp” (Heb. 13:7–17)

After the admonitions and the citations comes the portion of the chapter which is central, as is indicated by its placement and size. The section is bounded by the mention of the “leaders” (hgoumenoi) in vv. 7 and 17.¹¹ Further, the phrase “outside the camp” (exw th~ parembolh~) would seem to act as frames for v. 12 with its mention of the sacrificial death of Christ, the only mention of such an important teaching of the epistle in this section of the chapter framed by “leaders.” Further, the phrase “outside the gate” (exw th~ pulh~) would seem to occupy a central position with regard to the two occurrences of “outside the camp”. That is to say, it is not simply the death of Jesus which is of basic concern to the author, but the fact that this death occurred outside the camp/city.

The result looks like this:

Verse 7: Principal framing verse (“leaders”);

Verse 11: Secondary framing verse (“outside the camp”);

Verse 12: Central verse portraying the death of Christ (“outside the gate”);

Verse 13: Secondary framing verse (“outside the camp”);

Verse 17: Principal framing verse (“leaders”).

A translation of the passage which reflects the arrangement presented above is as follows:

⁷ Remember your *leaders*, who spoke to you the word of God;
in reflecting on the outcome of their conduct imitate their faith.

⁸ Jesus Christ yesterday and today the same, and forever.

10 See Lane, *Hebrews* 9–13, 529: “The Christian is to be free both from the love of money and from the fear of death (see 2:14–15).”

11 Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 390–391: “The central section of chap. 13 concludes the thematic development of Hebrews and provides a climactic exhortation. The boundaries of the section, which have been analyzed in a variety of ways, are indicated by an inclusion formed by the references to leaders past (v. 7) and present (v. 17).”

⁹Do not be led astray by a variety of strange teachings; for is good that the heart be sustained by grace, not by foods in which those who live by them are not helped. ¹⁰We have an altar from which those serving the tent have no right to eat. ¹¹For while the blood of the animals is brought as a sin-offering into the Holy of Holies by the high priest, their bodies are burned *outside the camp*. ¹²For this reason Jesus also, so that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered *outside the gate*.

¹³For that very reason, then, let us go to him *outside the camp*, taking on his shame. ¹⁴For we have not here a city which remains but one which is to come.

¹⁵Through him, then, let us offer up a sacrifice of praise regularly to God, that is, fruit of lips which confess his name. ¹⁶The doing of good and fellowship do not forget. Now with such sacrifices as these is God pleased. ¹⁷Obey your *leaders* and be subject to them, for they are vigilant over your souls as ones having to give an account, that they may do this with joy and not sighing, for this would not be of any help to you.

The cruces in this passage are numerous. Among them are:

Verse 8: Its mention of Jesus Christ seems gratuitous; the precise force of the time references is not clear.¹²

Verse 9: Its mention of “strange teachings” and “foods” has provided bases for endless discussions, some of which touch on the Eucharist.¹³

Verse 10: The nature of the “altar” has been the cause of much controversy as well; again, some of it touches on the Eucharist.¹⁴

Verse 13: The point the author wishes to make with the emphasis on the need to go “outside the camp” is much debated.¹⁵

Verse 15: The precise nature of the “sacrifice of praise” has

¹² Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 393.

¹³ Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 393–396.

¹⁴ Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 396–397.

¹⁵ Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 398–399.

been discussed, again with reference to the Eucharist in some cases.¹⁶

It would seem desirable to discuss these cruces later in this paper, from the standpoint of the *tôdâ* (Part II) and from the standpoint of the Latin Rite Mass of the Roman Catholic Church (Part III).

A Request for Prayer (Heb. 13:18–19)

These two verses contain a request for prayer. A translation follows:

Pray for us: for we are persuaded that we have a clear conscience, desiring to behave well in all matters. I in particular urge you to do this so that I may be restored to you all the sooner.

The plural has been interpreted as “authorial,” that is, the author is speaking for himself alone, as he does elsewhere in the epistle.¹⁷ But in view of the apparent reference in v. 23 to Timothy’s release from prison, it seems more appropriate to view it as a genuine plural. This gives to the verses a more justifiable tone, avoiding connotations of self-pitying pleading. The author thinks that not only he, but his fellow Christians in prison as well, are there unjustly. In v. 19 he personally hopes that, as an individual, the prayer which he requests may result in his visiting the addressees sooner than he could otherwise foresee.

Blessing and Glory (Heb. 13:20–21)

This passage contains a benediction (vv. 20–21a) and a doxology (v. 21b). A natural question is whether this passage serves to end the theological content of the epistle and is to be linked structurally with this general content somehow, or structurally is part of chapter 13.¹⁸

From the structure given above, the present writer would opt for the latter position. The death of Jesus is clearly the center of the chapter. This death stands within the frame indicated by the word “leaders.” Before the verse in which the word “leaders” occurs (v. 7), there occur two sections, vv. 1–5a and vv. 5b–6, each with its distinct physiognomy. Hence, it would seem reasonable, in a work so obviously crafted with care, that two sections should follow the verse in which the word “leader” occurs (v. 17). These are vv. 18–19 and vv. 20–21.

This does not prevent the benediction and doxology of vv. 20–21 from also serving as a fitting conclusion to an intensely theological writing. The verses in question are extraordinarily rich:

16 Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 399–401.

17 Heb. 5:11; 6:9. See Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 402–403. In Heb. 4:13 the author seems to be speaking for himself and all Christians.

18 For a view linking it with other epistles, see Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 404–405.

Now may the God of peace, the one who led up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep in the blood of the eternal covenant, our Lord Jesus, provide you with every good thing to do his will, as he brings about in you that which is pleasing before him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

The word, "Amen," is a fitting conclusion to the contents of the chapter as a sign of a break with the four verses of a personal nature which follow and which terminate the epistle.

A proper commentary on these verses is beyond the scope of this paper, but one question seems worth discussing: the antecedent of the relative pronoun "whom" in v. 21. Does it refer to God or to Jesus? In the context of the epistle, the answer would seem to be Jesus. That the phenomenon of glory is proper to God is taken for granted in the epistle (see Heb. 1:3). But a major point of the epistle is that the man Jesus becomes the Christ by being invested with God's glory (2:7, 9, 10; 3:3). The explicit mention of "Jesus Christ" immediately before the relative, as opposed to the use of the simple "Jesus" in the previous verse to refer to Jesus who was raised from the dead, would seem to indicate this meaning.¹⁹

The Tôdâ and the "Sacrifice of Praise" in Hebrews

The זֶבַח תּוֹדָה (*zebach tôdâ* or *tôdâ* for short) is one of the more moving cultic practices of the Old Testament.²⁰ This is a type of bloody sacrifice proper to the worship of the temple which is intrinsically connected with ceremonies which in themselves are not bloody. These ceremonies consist of a ritual offering and consumption of bread that is accompanied normally by a hymn or hymns of praise and thanksgiving. These non-bloody ceremonies constitute, with the bloody temple sacrifice, an integral religious ceremony of public praise and thanksgiving. It is offered by a Jewish male, priest or layman, as a public act in order to acknowledge with his friends a signal act of salvation (for example, from war or disease) performed by God in his favor. This signal act of salvation can be of the past or of the future. In the latter instance, of course, it is a sign of trust in God's saving designs on his behalf.

The full expression, *zebach tôdâ*, and the abbreviated expression, *tôdâ*, occur a number of times in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. The basic texts are found in Leviticus.²¹ There are also several important occurrences in the Psalms.

19 For the present writer the title "Jesus" indicates Jesus' earthly priesthood, while "Jesus Christ" indicates his heavenly priesthood in which the earthly priesthood is, of course, subsumed. See James Swetnam, "Christology and the Eucharist in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Biblica* 70 (1989), 75–79.

20 H. Gese, "Der Herkunft des Herrenmahls," in *Zur biblischen Theologie. Alttestamentliche Vorträge* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989), 107–127.

21 For a full discussion of what is here presented in summary fashion, see James Swetnam, "Zebach

Arguments have been mounted to show that the use of *tôdâ* in these psalm texts is “spiritualized,” that is, the texts do not refer to physical ceremonies but only to the spirit of the physical ceremonies. But a study of the arguments shows that they are by no means conclusive. There is no reason to suppose that the ceremony outlined in Leviticus was not a regular feature of Jewish life into the Second Temple period and as such plays a part in the prayers of the Psalms.²²

The Hebrew expression *zebach tôdâ* was translated *qusia ainesew~* by the Septuagint translators. There is no indication that the translators distinguished between a “material sacrifice” and a “spiritual sacrifice”.²³

The warrant for the introduction of the *zebach tôdâ* in the present study is that it appears in its standard Greek translation, *qusia ainesew~*, in Hebrews 13:15.

This article will argue that, given the occurrence of *qusia ainesew~* in the section of chapter 13 framed by the word “leaders,” the section is centered on the Christian version of the *zebach tôdâ*. The principal reason for this line of argument is the fact that the three aspects of the *zebach tôdâ* are found in the section, delineated with reasonable clarity. Verses 9–10 refer to the ritual consumption of bread; vv. 11–13 refer to the bloody sacrifice; vv. 15–16 refer to the accompanying hymns and prayers. The central element is the bloody sacrifice of Jesus; the bloody or expiatory aspect is explicitly mentioned.

The *zebach tôdâ* has been modified, of course. It is no longer a Jewish ceremony, but a Christian ceremony. To emphasize this change, the fact that Jesus suffered “outside the camp/gate” is repeated. This not only indicates the connection of Jesus’ sacrifice with the expiatory offering of the Old Testament, but serves as a metaphor for the change from Judaism to Christianity.²⁴ That is to say, those who, with regard to the fourth *crux* mentioned above, hold that the emphasis on going “outside the camp/gate” refers in part to a going out of the world of Judaism, would seem to be correct. The Old Testament matrix still serves as the recognizable basis for the sacrifice, but the content has been radically changed, and the image of going out of the camp is used, in part, to indicate this.

The fact that the author of Hebrews seems to make use of the three aspects of the *tôdâ* would seem to indicate several things:

First, that the *tôdâ* was in use among the Jews of the time as part of their own ritual. To assume that the author of Hebrews invokes it as part of an exercise in archaizing seems improbable, given the way he seems to presume the contemporary

Tôdâ [זבח תודה] in Tradition. A Study of ‘Sacrifice of Praise’ in Hebrew, Greek and Latin”, *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 15 (2002): 65–86.

22 Swetnam, “*Zebach tôdâ* in Tradition,” 76.

23 Swetnam, “*Zebach tôdâ* in Tradition,” 77–78.

24 Lane, *Hebrews* 9–13, 545–546.

existence of the Levitical priesthood in chapter 7 and the contemporary existence of those “serving the tent,” that is, the temple (v. 10).

Secondly, it indicates that the *tôdâ* was the background, or at least a background, for Jesus as he instituted the Eucharist.²⁵ Otherwise the coincidence between the three aspects of the *tôdâ* and these three aspects in regards to the Eucharist would seem highly improbable—the Eucharist involving, as it does, among other things, the consumption of food, the bloody sacrifice of Christ, and the use of verbal prayer/hymnody.

Finally, the *tôdâ* is used in Hebrews 13 in the same integrity that it has in Leviticus 7, that is, there is no indication that the bloody death of Jesus is being “spiritualized,” and thus there is no reason to think that the other two aspects are being “spiritualized” either.

These general considerations are not sufficient to settle the controversies in regards to vv. 9, 10, and 15, mentioned above, but would seem to warrant a renewed investigation of these alleged allusions.

Specifically, in v. 9, the contrast is not between foods and non-foods as a means of strengthening the heart, but between Christian food and non-Christian food. That is to say, the relative clause beginning *en oi~* is restrictive, not non-restrictive.²⁶ In v. 10, the “eating” indicated by *f agein* is physical, and the altar is the eucharistic table.²⁷

In v. 15, the use of the term *qusia ainesew~* in connection with the phrase, “that is, fruit of lips which confess his name,” has been taken as a certain indication of the “spiritualized” interpretation being given to the “sacrifice of praise” in the verse. However, a “sacrifice of praise,” taken in the restricted sense indicated here, given the context, of necessity takes in the other two aspects by implication. There are other difficulties with this “spiritualized” interpretation. The phrase *dia pantō~* in the Old Testament is used, for, among other things, an indication of the

25 For a preliminary and incidental attempt to situate the *tôdâ* as background for the institution of the Eucharist in Matthew and Mark, see James Swetnam, “The Crux at Hebrews 5:7–8, *Biblica* 81 (2000): 347–361.

26 Against Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 393–394; Lane, *Hebrews* 9–13, 530–537. Ellingworth (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 708) makes this interesting observation: “The parallel with [the use of *brwma*] in 9:9f suggests that the reference is to the place of food in the Levitical cultus,” but does not elaborate. As is clear from the mass of material marshaled by Lane, the background for this discussion is complicated. The interpretation involving the *tôdâ* which is being proposed in the present paper is intended to provide a new and perhaps decisive element in the discussion.

27 Against Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 396: “As the exposition develops it becomes clear that ‘altar’ is used in a symbolic fashion typical of the early church to refer to the sacrifice of Christ in all of the complexity with which that is understood in Hebrews”; Lane, *Hebrews* 9–13, 538: “. . . [the word *qusias thrion*] is employed metaphorically for the event of the sacrificial death of Christ outside the city gate.” Ellingworth (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 708–712) is less categorical and holds for a “flexible” interpretation of *qusias thrion*. He and Lane give a wealth of references to background material.

occurrence of the daily sacrifices of the temple, where it is appropriately translated “regularly” (Num. 28:15, 23, 24, 31).²⁸ To translate the phrase as “continually” or “constantly” on the assumption that it refers to a “spiritualized” reality is unwarranted.²⁹ On the supposition that a distinct ceremony is involved—the Christian “sacrifice of praise”—the translation “regularly” in imitation of the regularity of the temple sacrifices, makes good sense.

This apparently minor detail in the understanding of the text can lead to a major change in the interpretation of v. 16, for it implicitly indicates that *qusia* is plural: the sacrifice of praise is to be offered regularly, that is, a multiplicity of sacrifices are to be offered. This suggests that the plural of *qusia* in v. 16 could refer appropriately back to the *qusia* of v. 15. What seems to stand in the way of this is the clause *th~ de eupoiia~ kai koinwnia~ mh epilanqanesqe* (“The doing of good and fellowship do not forget”) in 16a. But this clause need not negate the basic reference which the *qusia~* of v. 16 has to the *qusia* of v. 15: a sacrifice of praise made with fixed regularity and made with a spirit of doing good and fellowship pleases God.³⁰ The interposing clause, “the doing of good and fellowship do not forget,” would be a legitimate addition making explicit what should be understood in any community sacrifice, but in this instance preparing the way specifically for the author’s request for prayer in vv. 18–19. The comment, “now with such sacrifices as these is God pleased,” is a fitting summary for the whole section comprising vv. 9–15 and outlining the Christian sacrifice of praise.

From Hebrews to the Canon of the Roman Mass

The translation history of *זָבַח וְתוֹדָה* and *qusia ainesew~* can be traced on to the Latin versions of the New Testament for Hebrews 13:15. For the Old Latin, the translations found are *laudes hostias*, *hostias laudis* and *sacrificium laudis*.³¹ In the Vulgate the principal reading is *hostiam laudis*, and the principal variants are *sacrificium laudis* and *laudes hostias*.³²

A study of the phrase in the Latin tradition would not be complete, however, without noting that the version *sacrificium laudis* is also found in the Roman Canon of the Latin Rite Mass. It occurs in the remembrance of the living:

28 Lane, *Hebrews* 9–13, 559–560.

29 Against Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 390; Lane, *Hebrews* 9–13, 522. The translation “continually” could be justified in the sense of “fixed regularity,” referring to discrete sacrifices repeated on a constant basis.

30 A case could be made that *th~ de eupoiia~ kai koinwnia~ mh epilanqanesqe* is parenthetical, as, for example, clauses introduced by *de* at 3:4 and 4:13.

31 Swetnam, “*Zebach Tôdâ* in Tradition,” 83. A study of the Latin versions of the Old Testament would obviously be useful as well, but in the context of the present article it seems sufficient to consider how the Old Latin and the Vulgate translate the phrase *qusia ainesew~* in the context of the interpretation being given Heb. 13:7–17.

32 Swetnam, “*Zebach Tôdâ* in Tradition,” 83.

*Memento, Domine, famulorum famularumque tuarum
 Et omnium circum adstantium,
 Quorum tibi fides cognita est et nota devotio,
 Qui tibi offerunt hoc sacrificium laudis
 Pro se suisque omnibus,
 Pro redemptione animarum suarum,
 Pro spe salutis et incolumitatis suae,
 Tibi reddunt vota sua aeterna Deo vivo et vero.*³³

*[Remember, Lord, your people.
 Remember all of us gathered here before you
 You know how firmly we believe in you
 and dedicate ourselves to you.
 We offer you this sacrifice of praise
 for ourselves and those who are dear to us.
 We pray to you, our living and true God,
 For our well-being and redemption.]*³⁴

The use of the phrase “sacrifice of praise” in the heart of the Latin Rite Mass would seem to indicate that the Mass was considered as such a sacrifice. This fact does not weaken the case of those who would see allusions to the Eucharist in chapter 13 of Hebrews.

But the use of “sacrifice of praise” in the heart of the Latin Rite Mass might yield a valuable clue to the structure of chapter 13 of Hebrews as well. For the structure of chapter 13 as outlined above seems to mirror the basic structure of the Latin Rite Mass:

Verses 1–5a mirror the examination of conscience which is part
 of the beginning of every Latin Mass;³⁵

33 Text and arrangement after C. Giraudo, *La struttura letteraria della preghiera eucaristica. Saggio sulla genesi letteraria di una forma. Toda veterotestamentaria, beraka giudaica, anaphora cristiana* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 345–346.

34 This translation of the Latin found in *Daily Roman Missal*, ed. James Socias (Chicago: Midwest Theological Forum, 1993), 683–685.

35 See J. A. Jungmann, *Missarum Sollemnia. Eine genetische Erklärung der römischen Messe*. Erster Band. *Messe im Wandel der Jahrhunderte. Messe und Kirchliche Gemeinschaft. Vormesse* (Wien: Herder, 1949), 370–386 (“Confiteor”). Jungmann’s treatment is largely centered on the Mass as it existed in medieval times. Much would need to be done to verify a relationship between chapter 13 of Hebrews and the early eucharistic celebrations that were later codified as the Mass of the Latin Rite. But the coincidences between the structure of Hebrews and the structure of the Latin Rite Mass are too striking to ignore.

Verses 5b–6 mirror the second main part of the Mass, the readings from Scripture;³⁶

Verses 7–17 mirror the central, sacrificial part of the Mass;³⁷

Verses 18–19 mirror the “Remembrance of the Living” in which the phrase *sacrificium laudis* occurs, as cited above;³⁸

Verses 20–21 mirror the final blessing given by the priest at each Mass.³⁹

Thus, chapter 13 appears to be structured according to a liturgical pattern similar to, if not dependent on, what came to be established as the Roman Latin Rite Mass. Further, the central section of chapter 13 would seem to be dependent on the Jewish *זבח תודה* (*qusia ainesew*~, *sacrificium laudis*) for its historical antecedents.

Instead of being an apparent welter of unrelated material, chapter 13 thus emerges as a tightly organized and well-conceived literary unity centering on the physical death of Christ and its sacramental participation by the Christians in the Eucharist. As the concluding climax of the epistle, the chapter would thus seem logically to presume previous discussion of the Eucharist. This has been the contention of the present writer for decades, but progress in his thinking his way into the mind of the author of Hebrews has been slow.⁴⁰

If—granted, a large “if” but one not made recklessly—there is some connection besides coincidence between the early eucharistic celebrations which became codified as the Mass of the Latin Rite and chapter 13 of Hebrews, the discussion of possible eucharistic references would seem to be placed in a new perspective. This new perspective, when added to the new perspective of the *tôdâ*, calls for fresh

36 Jungmann, *Missarum Sollemnia*, Erster Band, 484–562 (“Der Lesegottesdienst”). Other elements are treated by Jungmann under this heading at. 563–610.

37 J. A. Jungmann, *Missarum Sollemnia. Eine genetische Erklärung der römischen Messe*. Zweiter Band. *Opfermesse* (Wien: Herder, 1949), 123–332 (“Der Canon actionis”).

38 Cf. Jungmann, *Missarum Sollemnia*, Zweiter Band, 194–207 (“Der Memento für die Lebenden”). This part of the Latin Rite Mass occurs within the Canon, but is placed here outside the section devoted to the Canon because the author of Hebrews has chosen to stress the sacrificial, strictly sacramental aspect of the Roman Canon in vv. 7–17. Mention of the remembrance of the living there would have interfered with the three-fold pattern based on the *tôdâ*. The use of the word “pray” (*proseucomai*) as a request for prayers from the addressees is not unusual in Paul, where it is used in connection with a plea for freedom from danger (Rom. 15:30–31; 2 Thess. 3:1–2). It is also found in connection with “word” (*logo*~) (2 Thess. 3:1–2; Col. 3:2–4). Here, in Hebrews, it is incorporated into a presentation of the Latin liturgy.

39 Jungmann, *Missarum Sollemnia*, Zweiter Band, 532–541 (“Der priesterliche Schlußsegen”).

40 James Swetnam, “A Suggested Interpretation of Hebrews 9:15–18,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1965): 375, n. 8; James Swetnam, “Hebrews 9:2: Some Suggestions about Text and Context,” *Melita Theologica* 51 (2000): 163–185.

discussion. With regard to the five cruces involving chapter 13 the following points suggest themselves:

In regards to verse 8, where the mention of Jesus Christ seems gratuitous, and the precise force of the time references is not clear, perhaps the following suggestions may be useful. Verse 7 states that the leaders of the community “spoke to us the word of God” (elalhsen umin to logon tou qeou). The use of the verb ties in with the use of the same verb at 2:3. There, the author says a “great salvation” was first spoken (laleisqai) through the Lord, confirmed by those who heard it, that is, the first generation of Christians, and is now heard by the present generation, those addressed in the letter. The leaders of the community spoken of in 13:7 are the leaders of the first generation, and their speaking the “word” to “us” is simply another way of saying what 2:3 says. The Lord himself is indicated by this “word” (logo~), that is the “salvation” spoken of in 2:3.

This would explain why the mention of Jesus Christ at the beginning of 13:8 is not gratuitous. Perhaps the famous crux posed by the temporal sequences of the verse could be explained by thinking of the Jesus Christ of “yesterday” (ecqe~) as being the Jesus Christ—the heavenly Jesus as distinguished from the earthly Jesus—spoken of by the first generation of leaders, referred to in v. 7. The Jesus Christ of “today” (shmeron) is the Jesus Christ spoken of by the second generation, referred to in v. 17. But each eucharistic Jesus Christ is “the same” (o auto~) and will be the same forever, no matter where the eucharistic *tôdâ* is celebrated.

In v. 9, where the mention of “strange teachings” and “foods” has provided bases for endless discussions, the relevance of “foods” becomes clearer in the perspective of the possible relevance of the *tôdâ* and the Roman Mass. Real food and real physical eating are in question, but the difference is between the Jewish foods and the Christian Eucharist. Likewise, in v. 10, where the nature of the “altar” has been the subject of dispute. In the possible perspective of a Christian *tôdâ* and the Roman Rite Mass, Paul’s use of “altar” (qusias thrion) at 1 Corinthians 10:18 in the context of his discussion of the Eucharist takes on a greater relevance.

The supposition of a *tôdâ* background to the Eucharist may also contribute to discussions of v. 13, where the author’s point in stressing the need to go “outside the camp” is much debated. The emphasis of vv. 11–13 on the death of Jesus “outside the camp/gate” and the call to Christians to go out to him “outside the camp” is more intelligible in the light of this supposition. Other aspects of the theological connotations of Jesus’ death “outside the camp/gate” are, of course, not to be overlooked: the basic symbolism of the rites of expiation for sin and the shame involved in following Jesus outside the traditions of Judaism are of fundamental importance for the understanding of these verses.

Finally, the inadequacy of a “spiritualizing” interpretation of the *tôdâ* in its Christian version as presented in v. 15 should be clearer in the context of possible

allusion to the Roman Canon, particularly in view of the play on the singular and plural of "sacrifice" (*qusia*) in vv. 15–16.

The Meaning of Hebrews 13

The primary goal of this article was to see if Hebrews 13:1–21 could be made more intelligible, preparatory to seeing if its place in the epistle as a whole could eventually be more securely assessed. This attempt to make chapter 13 more intelligible was made in three successive stages, each of which was based on a perspective.

The first stage approached the text in the perspective of its structure. Any text is presumed to have a structure or at least a non-structure. Determining the structure of a text generates perspectives, for a structure indicates the author's points of view. The structure which emerged from a study of formal criteria as well as content showed that the author was basing his exposition on the centrality of the death of Jesus and its role in Christian liturgy (vv. 11–14). Flanking this central concern were verses concerned with eating (vv. 9–10) and verbal prayer (vv. 15–16). Serving as a frame for all of this were verses which emphasized the role of the leaders of the community (vv. 7 and 17). Verses 1–5a indicated the author's concerns about moral conduct; vv. 5b–6 indicated his concern for Scripture; vv. 18–19 indicated the author's personal reliance on the community in prayer; and vv. 20–21 indicated his concern to invoke God's blessing in Christ on the addressees.

The second stage of the attempt to make chapter 13 more intelligible, approached the central portion of the text, vv. 7–17, from the perspective of the Jewish *tôdâ* ceremony. This resort to the *tôdâ* was justified by the occurrence of the phrase *qusia ainesew* in v. 15. Thus the perspective of the "sacrifice of praise" was used to evaluate the structure resulting from a study of formal indications in the text combined with content. This use of the *tôdâ* perspective seemed confirmed by the apparent coincidence of its three elements—bloody sacrifice, food, and verbal prayer/hymns—with the three elements of eating, bloody death, and verbal prayer resulting from the analysis of structure.

The third and final stage approached the entire text, vv. 1–21, from the standpoint of the Latin Mass of the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church. The justification for this approach was the coincidence of the five sections of these verses with the basic outline of the Latin liturgy: act of repentance; reading from Scripture; central sacramental action; prayer based on remembrance of the living; final blessing. No statement was made about whether the epistle was influenced by the liturgical act or vice versa. The only thing asserted was that a coincidence in so many variables of such a varied nature seems improbable.

The interplay of these three perspectives makes possible a coherent exegesis of the entire chapter. Verses 1–21 are seen as a sophisticated presentation of the eucharistic liturgy of the Church, carefully structured and carefully argued. As such, the verses clearly were intended by the author to provide a concluding climax

for the entire epistle. How such a climax is related to the rest of the epistle will require the elaboration of more perspectives which seem to reflect the mind of the author of the epistle in all of its several parts.

Chapter 13 of Hebrews will not become adequately understood until it is studied in detail so that the interplay of its sentences becomes plausibly coherent and until this adequate understanding of chapter 13 is shown to be plausibly coherent in the context of the entire epistle. The present study was written as a help for the first of these goals, that is, to provide a defensible hypothesis for an initial assessment of the chapter's meaning.

