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The Search for Valid Orders: The Melchizedek Christology in Hebrews

Michael Tait

A Priestly Christology: Fundamental Questions

In a recent examination of the role of Melchizedek in Hebrews,¹ I found myself asking some fundamental questions about the priestly Christology in that Epistle. Whether there are two priestly Christologies, one based on Melchizedek and one on Aaron, or simply one of dual aspect,² the very idea of Christ as *High* Priest is distinctive in the New Testament. Whereas other texts may offer the tiniest hints in the direction of a priestly Christology,³ Hebrews emphasises repeatedly⁴ that Jesus is the Christians' High Priest who has offered his single sacrifice (7:27, 10:12), passed into the heavenly sanctuary (4:14, 6:19-20, 9:12) and now sits at the right hand of God (10:12). He lives for ever to make intercession for his people (7:25) and so is the cause of their eternal salvation (5:9). Given the rarity of such a *theologoumenon*, we must assume that Hebrews, or possibly a tradition on which the author⁵ depended, somehow made a series of intellectual steps unnoticed or avoided both by previous Christians and by his contemporaries.

The Pauline Approach

We can assume that the starting point for most Christian theologians in the second half of the first century AD was something like the simple *kerygma* recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.⁶ It is a 'creed' like this upon which Paul himself builds in his letters and which we also see behind the more fleshed-out accounts in the Gospels. But the resulting edifice is very different from that constructed by Hebrews or its tradition. When Paul explores the statement that 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,' he is led to view Jesus' death as a sacrifice against the pervasive background of the Exodus.⁷ Thus it is a sacrifice which has echoes both of the Passover⁸ and of the covenant-making at Sinai.⁹ It is likely that Paul was pushed in this direction both by the given datum of Jesus' death having taken place at Passover and by the central place of the Exodus not only in the past salvation-history of Israel but also as *the* type of future eschatological deliverance.¹⁰ Once down this road, however,

it was difficult to think of Jesus in priestly terms.¹¹ It is true that another very basic component of the early kerygma was the use of Psalm 110:1¹² and that in theory it would have been possible for Paul to have developed a doctrine of Jesus' priesthood on the basis of verse 4 of that Psalm.¹³ Indeed, according to Koester, it is but a small step from Psalm 110:1 to identify Christ as the priest like Melchizedek mentioned in the same Psalm.¹⁴

However, this is not so. Many things predisposed Paul *not* to do this. Apart from the fact that to see Jesus as sacrifice *and* priest is a paradox for which he may not yet have been prepared,¹⁵ there were solid reasons for not realising the full implications of the Psalm. In the first place, of course, Jesus was known not to have been of Levitical descent¹⁶ and, therefore, could not have been a priest in the ordinary way of things.¹⁷

Secondly, both Passover and Covenant, if sacrifices—and Paul may have been stretching this¹⁸—were about the most unpriestly sacrifices you could get. In Exodus, it is the families in Egypt who sacrifice the Passover¹⁹ and the young men and Moses who make the covenant sacrifice at Sinai.²⁰ In both cases this is not least because the priesthood had not yet been instituted.²¹

Thirdly, as a general principle, the role of the *victim* in the Jewish sacrificial system was much more significant than that of the priest.²² Although the latter may have been essential to the 'validity' of the rite, it was the victim which was regarded as effecting deliverance/sealing the covenant/taking away sin.²³

Fourthly, where the image of the Suffering Servant had any substantial influence,²⁴ the emphasis once again was on the victim—the Lamb led to the slaughter.²⁵

Fifthly and finally, other things being equal, the tradition of the Church would have tended to look unfavourably on priesthood, as the priests, and *a fortiori* the high priests, were seen to be among the chief enemies of both Jesus and his followers.²⁶ A priestly Christology might have been as unwelcome as a Pharisaic or Procuratorial Christology!²⁷

In view of these persuasive factors against seeing Jesus as a priest, it is unlikely that traditions of a priestly Messiah²⁸ could have provoked a significant re-

assessment. In the first place, in the New Testament, Jesus' Messiahship is viewed in strongly Davidic and, therefore, royal terms. Secondly, even where the tradition of a priestly Messiah was strong, as at Qumran, the role was seen as hierarchical rather than sacerdotal.²⁹ There was no emphasis on this priest offering sacrifice, still less offering himself.

John and other New Testament Writers

This, if you like, is the main road as far as the interpretation of Jesus' death was concerned, and Paul was not the only one to take it. John and his community are also to be found travelling in the same direction. Twice in the crucial opening chapter of the Fourth Gospel, when Jesus' main titles are being flagged up, Jesus is hailed by the Baptist—*the* Witness, the 'burning and shining lamp'³⁰—as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'.³¹ Here we see once more the primitive *kerygma* that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures explained in terms where he is seen as the sacrificial lamb, a theme massively reproduced in Revelation with its recurring image of the divine Lamb that was slain.³² The same emphasis on the victim is found in 1 John where Jesus is described as the propitiation/expiation for our sins (2:2; 4:10).³³

Now it is true that it is in the Johannine literature that the strongest hints of Jesus' priesthood are to be found, whether in the 'High Priestly Prayer' of John 17 or in the seamless robe of the Passion (19:23).³⁴ However, even if intended, these play a very subordinate role to the main theme of Jesus as sacrifice.³⁵ In the Gospel of John it is *Caiaphas* who is marked out as 'High Priest that year' (11:49) and he it is who makes the fateful decision—under divine inspiration (11:51)—that the sacrifice be offered, that one man die for the people.³⁶ For the sake of completeness, we should also note briefly that in 1 Peter 1:19, Jesus is held out as 'a lamb without blemish or spot', another acknowledgement of his role as victim.³⁷ It is true that 2:5 goes on to refer to Christians as a 'holy priesthood,' but this is not connected with any theory of participation in the priesthood of Christ. Rather, as Lindars observes, it is an application to the new People of God of the priesthood of Israel announced in Exodus 19:6.³⁸

Why was Hebrews different? Two possible answers

The contrast with Hebrews could not be greater. Not that Hebrews is travelling in the opposite direction. He too is dependent on the basic *kerygma* as we see from his version of it in 1:3—'making purification for sins';³⁹ and he too

shared in the common belief that part of the explanation of this purification was that Jesus' death was a sacrifice (9:26, 10:5). His originality lies in his finding another equally good route to the destination: his description of Christ as the High Priest. The question is: how on earth did he take this 'B-road' when he and everybody else already had another perfectly good route to follow? It seems to me that there are two possible explanations for this 'diversion'. In the first scenario, our author came to see that the commonly accepted interpretations of Christ's death as a Passover or Covenant sacrifice were inadequate as descriptions of the 'purification for sins'.⁴⁰ They *could* be interpreted in this way with a bit of tweaking, but it was not their most obvious significance. This would have led him to consider the expiatory sacrifice *par excellence*, the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement.⁴¹

Such consideration, however, would have revealed to him that expiatory sacrifice was not the sole feature of this rite, for, in order to complete the rite, the High Priest entered the Holy Place and thus the very presence of God. This was a real bonus for our author because it accounted for a further aspect of the *kerygma*, the exaltation of Jesus,⁴² and also conveyed an important message about the destination of believers.⁴³ At the same time, it transferred attention from the victim to the priest, and indeed the High Priest, for this was very much the High Priest's offering. It was he who gave unity to the different 'movements' of the rite. This development of thought also tied in neatly with the author's concept of the eternal and exalted Son, an active figure who shows none of the more passive characteristics of the heavenly Lamb that was slain in John's Apocalypse.

From this it was now a much easier step to go back to Psalm 110:4 and see that this was what it was really driving at. It then became clear that Jesus' lack of Levitical descent was no longer an obstacle to his sacerdotal role, for was he not priest after the order of Melchizedek and that by divine declaration? In other words, in this model, the type of the Aaronic High Priest on the Day of Atonement came to the author first, as an explanation of Jesus' death superior to previous explanations, and the obvious difficulty of Jesus' different descent was dealt with precisely by bringing in Psalm 110:4. Thus the author's thinking would have taken place in a reverse direction from the presentation of his thought in Hebrews where it is necessary to establish first that Jesus was a priest—a super-priest—before going into the question of this priestly activity.

The alternative possibility is that Hebrews *started* with the Psalm text and worked from there to Jesus' priesthood,⁴⁴ rather in the manner of a Qumran exegete working on his peshet of Scripture. It was only then that he fastened on the concept of the great priestly sacrifice which made atonement for sins. In other words, the presentation of his thought in the Epistle exactly mirrors the workings of his mind. This is by no means impossible. We know that Psalm 110 was of crucial importance to Hebrews as it was to other early Christian authors.⁴⁵ We know too that Hebrews liked to dwell in some detail on the Scriptures, teasing out texts or parts of texts that had not been used by others.⁴⁶ Thus, carefully reading through this Psalm, which opened with the exaltation of the Messiah, he would have come across verse 4 with its 'you are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek'. He would then have worked from Jesus' priesthood to his atoning sacrifice. The question would then be: why did *he* take note of this and develop it when others before him had obviously regarded it as inappropriate to Jesus and discarded it?⁴⁷ After all, he too was aware of Jesus' Judahite descent.⁴⁸ What made him press on? We can only speculate. For someone so aware of Jesus' eternity,⁴⁹ the *eivj ton aiwna* ('for ever') may have started bells ringing. At the same time, the paraenetic needs of his addressees⁵⁰ may have already led him to think along the lines of Jesus as a priestly helper in some vague way⁵¹ (which still needed more precise formulation), perhaps along the lines of the intercessor of Romans 8:34 or the Johannine 'Advocate with the Father' (1 John 2:2).⁵² At any rate, from what he has written, it is clear that, whatever the details of his thought process, the words 'according to the order of Melchizedek' were able to give the green light for a priestly Christology to be developed. The fact that the Melchizedek of Genesis was both king and priest could only have helped—although this is not emphasised—as could the fact that he was the first priest in the Torah.⁵³ Once it was admitted that (the exalted) Jesus was a priest, he could surely be none other than High Priest. From there it is a short step to seeing him perform the principal High Priestly task, the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement.

The more Probable Solution

Which of these two scenarios⁵⁴ is the more likely? In my view, the former, and for a number of reasons. In the first place, while Hebrews respects the textual integrity of Psalm 110 and calls Jesus simply 'priest' in quotations,⁵⁵ his preferred title, established early on, well before the quotations of Psalm 110:4, is 'High Priest'.⁵⁶ This would suggest he was operating already with at least the

beginnings of a *high* priestly Christology when he turned to Psalm 110 for Scriptural back-up. If he had started with Psalm 110, the high priest development would have come later. In fact, Melchizedek's being only a priest and not high priest in both Psalm 110 and Genesis 14 would not necessarily have led him to the Day of Atonement at all. Moreover, whatever the merits of the Testimony hypothesis, which would have restricted our author to 'set' texts,⁵⁷ it is doubtful whether our author ever submitted the whole of Psalm 110 to the kind of detailed atomistic exegesis which might have led him inexorably from verses 1-4. In fact, these are the only verses of the Psalm that he quotes. While it could be argued that verse 2 is basically a parallel to verse 1 and therefore redundant for his purposes,⁵⁸ verse 3 is a far more telling 'proof' of the pre-existent eternity of the Son than Psalm 2:7 which is used for that purpose in 1:5. Had Hebrews subjected Psalm 110 to the kind of exegesis required by our second, 'pesheristic' model, it is incredible that he did not use verse 3. What could have been more clinching for his argument in chapter 1 than to have said: 'For to what angel did God ever say: before the morning star I brought you forth'?

Or even better, when linking the Son and the High Priest in 5:5-6: 'So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made high priest but was appointed by him who said to him: "Before the morning star I brought you forth"; as he says also in another place....' At least this eliminates the need to bridge the two passages with an implicit reference to Psalm 110:1.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the whole balance of the priestly Christology in Hebrews is shifted towards the discussion of how Christ fulfilled the type of the *Aaronic* High Priest in chapters 8-10.⁶⁰ This is a far larger section than that devoted to the Melchizedekian priesthood, and it is clear that the material in Chapter 7 is introduced simply to facilitate the argument in 8-10. It is impossible to discuss Christ's atoning role as High Priest until it is proved that he is a priest despite his disadvantaged descent. We should also note that the first mention of Christ as High Priest in 2:17 is linked to his work of expiation and not to Melchizedek.⁶¹

Finally, we would in any case expect our author to be more interested in the priestly role and actions than in the abstract nature of the priesthood as this was the Old Testament way of looking at it. Much space is devoted in the Torah to

detailing what a priest *does*: very little, if any, to what he *is*. We can assume, therefore, that the context for the Melchizedek remarks in chapters 5, 6 and 7 is the need to establish (1) that Jesus is a priest and (2) the nature of his priesthood, prior to the much more important task of giving an account of his priestly activity. These three factors suggest that the author turned to Psalm 110:4 only *after* he had already come to the notion of Jesus' fulfilling the type of the Aaronic High Priest on the Day of Atonement and required a way of explaining how this could be so for one who was 'from another tribe from which no one had served at the altar'.⁶² Given that this is the likely *modus operandi*, we should be wary of attaching too much significance to the figure of Melchizedek who serves such a clearly defined and limited purpose in the author's thought.⁶³

How new is all this?

This is perhaps the place to discuss briefly the question of just how new these arguments were both to the author and his addressees. Given the extent and complexity of the argumentation that Christ is (a) a priest and (b) offers an atoning sacrifice which both forgives sins and provides access to God, given too the uniqueness of these notions in the New Testament, we have to assume that they were new to the addressees at least and probably to the author as well.⁶⁴ However, the three occasions in which Hebrews links Jesus as 'high priest' to 'our confession'⁶⁵ have led some to claim that the author presupposes this to be part of a tradition which he and his readers share, particularly when this is joined to the fact that the very first mention of Christ as High Priest in 2:17 is abrupt, as if requiring neither introduction nor explanation.⁶⁶

A compromise between these two positions would be to hold that at least some kind of concept of Jesus' priesthood, basic, vague even, was familiar to the addressees, and that the author then worked to develop this in his own way.⁶⁷ It is hard, however, to envisage just what such a basic and vague concept could be when we recall that the author has to argue so carefully for Christ's priesthood *per se*. Attridge reckons that there was already a tradition of Jesus as high priestly intercessor which Hebrews developed into a self-sacrificing priesthood.⁶⁸ He argues further that the roots of this lie in Jewish traditions of angelic priestly intercessors.⁶⁹ This is not convincing. It is true that other New Testament authors speak of Jesus' heavenly intercession,⁷⁰ but this is conceived of in neither angelic nor priestly terms, and, where Hebrews is concerned, the notion of Jesus as a super angelic-priest accords ill both with his view of angels

as *sent out* to minister⁷¹ and of Jesus as *far greater* than the angels. If these are the roots of the idea, they are very deep, and much soil lies between them and the mature plant!⁷²

Furthermore, it is not clear just how closely bound up intercession is with the priestly or high priestly roles so that the one could have led to the other. We have already seen that no such connection is made by the other New Testament authors, but the question goes deeper than this. Higgins and Loader, among others, claim that intercession is a high priestly function, but they do not give any references with which to substantiate this claim. Kurianal cites 2 Maccabees 15:12 where Onias, the high priest, prays for all the Jewish people,⁷³ but this is in the context of a dream which seems to locate Onias in heaven with the prophet Jeremiah who himself does most of the praying. This is not typical high priestly activity. What is? Scholer lists the basic priestly functions as mentioned in the Blessing of Moses (Deut. 33:8-10) as oracular consultation, instruction in the rights and law of God and cultic ritual. *Secondary* functions include the offering of prayers, blessings and the sounding of trumpets.⁷⁴ These are not included in any formal list but are deduced from various Old Testament narratives. Whether or not such prayers can be classed as ‘intercession,’ the latter is by no means restricted to priests, as Best points out, citing the examples of Abraham, Isaiah and Elijah,⁷⁵ so it can hardly be said to be a distinguishing characteristic of priesthood.

In any case, in Hebrews, Christ *sits* at the right hand of God, not the posture of an intercessor.⁷⁶ Indeed our text pays very little explicit attention to intercession as a priestly ministry of Christ. Kurianal thinks that such a ministry is clearly indicated in 9:24.⁷⁷ This is unlikely. The verb *emphanisthenai* is generally taken to mean ‘appear’ not ‘intercede’,⁷⁸ and virtually all the commentators see it as a reference to the consummation of the sacrifice.⁷⁹ In fact, the major non-sacrificial feature of Jesus’ high priesthood, and the one which appears prominently in the early passages, is that of his mercy and compassion. This is even harder to pin down than the theme of his intercession, but this is not the place to explore an elusive and not strictly relevant, subject. Suffice it to say that I cannot find any satisfactory explanation for it in Jewish tradition.⁸⁰ It seems much more likely that the author, regarding Jesus as the model High Priest, retrojects the compassionate features of his earthly ministry into his ideal of the high priestly role.⁸¹

Nor is the tradition of the priestly Messiah a possible antecedent for Hebrews' development of the theology of Jesus sacrifice. Like the other New Testament writers, on the rare occasions when he expresses any interest in Jesus as Messiah, this is apart from any consideration of his priestly role.⁸² Moreover, as we have seen, the Messianic priesthood of Qumran and elsewhere was totally different from the self-sacrificing High Priest of Hebrews.⁸³

If the hypothesis of a 'vague notion' of priesthood is dismissed, how, then, do we account for the references to Jesus as the 'High Priest of our confession'? 10:21-3 presents no difficulty since it follows on after the detailed arguments of 5:1-10:20. The earlier references, in my view, operate in a fashion similar to Vanhoye's pre-announcements:⁸⁴ that is to say, they arouse the attention, they herald an important topic that is shortly to be discussed and, by linking it with 'our confession,' they prepare for its acceptance by the readers.⁸⁵ They are references forward to the author's thesis rather than backwards to an existing tradition. There is, therefore, no evidence that, with his priestly Christology, the author was doing anything other than breaking new ground,⁸⁶ for his readers certainly, but in all probability for himself as well. Like his Master, he was a 'pioneer' of our faith.

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ENDNOTES

1. M. B. Tait, *Why Melchizedek? An Examination of his Contribution to the Christology of Hebrews* (Unpublished Dissertation for the degree of SSL, Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, 2004) obtainable from the author on request at michaeltait@btinternet.com
2. G. L. Cockerill, *The Melchizedek Christology in Hebrews 7:1-28* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, Virginia, 1976) argues *passim* that the Melchizedek Christology represents a different Christological tradition from the Aaronic. We shall argue that it is an essential preliminary to the Aaronic Christology.
3. Cf *infra*, pp 129, especially the discussion on John.
4. From 2:17-10:25.

5. Most commentators line up with Origen's 'God alone knows' judgement on the authorship. In view of the handling of Scripture in the text, I incline to Montefiore's (and Luther's) identification of Apollos. Cf H. Montefiore, *Hebrews* (BNTC; London: A & C Black, 1964), pp. 9-11. As he observes, it is incredible that a work of this stature should have been produced by someone otherwise unknown. Cf *idem*, p. 3.
6. That this was the primitive kerygma, that of both Peter and Paul, is corroborated by the speeches in Acts if they have any independent value.
7. Cf particularly 1 Cor. 10.
8. 1 Cor. 5:7.
9. 1 Cor. 11:25.
10. As, for example, in Deutero-Isaiah, e.g. Is. 51:9-11.
11. Particularly when Paul is focused on the blood of Jesus, e.g. Rom. 3:25, 5:9. We should note Paul's possible references to sin-offerings (Rom. 3:25, 8:3, 2 Cor. 5:21), but these are not developed and certainly not in the direction of the Day of Atonement. Cf. M. Isaacs, 'Priesthood and the Epistle to the Hebrews', *HeyJ* 38 (1997), p 55. Similarly, references to Jesus' 'giving' himself (e.g. Gal. 2:20) are hardly priestly since God too 'gives,' even 'puts forward' (Rom. 3:25), his Son but is hardly a priest. The theme of 'giving' is often associated with the *aqedah*. Cf *infra*, p. 3, n. 3.
12. This Psalm was surely 'Messianic' in first century Judaism. It may not appear as such in any sources (apart from Mark 12:35-7) but it is a 'twin' with that other royal-enthronement psalm, Ps. 2, which is generally accepted as 'Messianic'. It would be hard to see why one was taken and the other left! According to M. J. Paul, 'The Order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4 and Heb. 7:4)', *WTJ* 49 (1987): 210, following Str-B 4/1.461-464, it is clear that the Jews of the NT period read Messianic overtones in Ps. 110. They rejected them in an immediate reaction to Christian interpretation but later resumed them.
13. The other 'oracular' verse alongside Ps. 110:1. It is not clear from the text, however, nor are commentators agreed that the two oracles are addressed to the same person.
14. C. R. Koester, *Hebrews* (AB 36; NY: Doubleday, 2001), p. 109.
15. This would be especially the case if he were at all influenced by the *aqedah* where the victim and the person offering are distinct. Cf. Rom. 8:32. Moreover, in this model, Abraham, the offerer, was not a priest.
16. Cf. Rom. 1:3; cf also 2 Tim. 2:8. It might have been possible to argue from Luke's tradition that Mary was the kinswoman of Elizabeth herself married to the priest Zacharias that Mary herself was of priestly stock, a development made in some of

the apocryphal texts where Mary is born into a priestly family in Jerusalem. This would have neatly solved the problem by making Jesus both king and priest. However, the earliest tradition along with Paul focused solely on Jesus' Davidic and hence Judahite descent.

17. It would not have been immediately clear to a first century reader that *κατά τὴν τάξιν* referred to an 'order' of priesthood..
18. Certainly neither is described as an expiatory sacrifice in the Pentateuch though later tradition tended to attach expiatory significance to both.
19. Exod. 12:3, 6. This usage had been modified by the first century insomuch as the lambs were killed by the Temple personnel. However, they were not offered in the Temple as a sacrifice like the other sacrifices.
20. Exod. 24:5-6.
21. This would not have inhibited the Priestly revisers of the Pentateuch had they wished to make these sacrifices priestly because in at least one case they do portray priests operating before their institution (cf. Exod. 19:22, 24)! S. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfilment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 141 & 462, n. 138, reckons that these and the young men of Exod. 24 were priests as firstborn sons in line with patriarchal practice.
22. Hence for example the multiplicity of victims but the one priesthood.
23. Of course, this emphasis on the victim may hark back to the pre-priesthood days when sacrificing was carried out by the head of the family.
24. Interestingly, Paul never quotes explicitly from the 'Servant Songs', but his language contains frequent echoes of them, such as Rom. 4:25, 5:19; Phil. 2:7.
25. This fits in with the, possibly dependent, Synoptic accounts of the Passion where Jesus is displayed as silent and largely passive, very much the victim. Some have seen a priestly aspect in the Servant's role, e.g. F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 32 who claims that the Servant is introduced as a priest destined 'to sprinkle many nations' (Is. 52:15). It is true that this is the first meaning the Hebrew verb, but the LXX, which our author seems to have used, has *thaumasontai* ('caused to wonder') which parallels well the next clause about kings shutting their mouths. Moreover, even if 'liturgical' sprinkling is intended, it is hardly a priestly prerogative, and the same can be said for intercession (cf. *supra*, pp. 134) which Bruce adduces as another piece of evidence with reference to Is. 53:12 (Bruce, [1964] p. 174).
26. This is especially the case in Acts where the priests are key opponents of both the early Apostles and Paul.

27. It is, of course, true that recent scholarship has become more interested in the possibility of an 'Imperial Christology'. Cf N. T. Wright, *Paul: Fresh Perspectives* (London: SPCK, 2005) especially pp 64-5, 95. Of course, the description of the Emperor as Son Of God and *Pontifex Maximus* could in theory have cut either way. The evidence is that Christians welcomed it rather than rejected it
28. Cf. J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star; The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Ancient Literature* (ABRL; NY: Doubleday, 1995), especially pp. 74-135.
29. Not least, in the case of Qumran, because the priesthood was divorced from the Temple and so in all probability from the sacrificial system.
30. John 5:35.
31. John 1:29, 36. This insight is carried right through to the Passion narrative where in the Johannine chronology Jesus dies at the hour of the Paschal sacrifice. Cf R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel* (OUP,1956), p. 20: '[Jesus] is the Lamb of God...the thought of this last feast is especially prominent: it might almost be said to dominate the Gospel.' Not everyone would accept Paschal overtones here, e.g. and especially C. H. Dodd, *The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1963): pp. 230-4, but cf E. Harris, *Prologue and Gospel, The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist* (JSNTS 107; SAP, 1994):165, n. 1. In the Johannine Passion, Jesus plays a more active role than in the Synoptics, but this is kingly rather than specifically priestly. Incidentally, it would be hard to imagine the Baptist—himself of Levitical descent according to Luke (with interesting, but almost certainly unconscious, implications for his cousin, Jesus' descent, cf *supra* n. 16)—saying: 'Behold the great High Priest who takes away the sin of the world!'
32. Though we should not forget the figure of Jesus in Rev. 1:13-16 which has been regarded as priestly because of his clothing. The description is very dependent on Ezekiel, especially Ezek. 1, but the 'long robe' is a significant, possibly priestly addition. However, nothing is made of this in the ensuing material.
33. This is moving in the direction of a more priestly sacrifice. John's *hilasmos* is probably more strictly sacrificial than Paul's *hilasterion* in Rom. 3:25.
34. Commentators often link the seamless robe of Jn 19:24 with the prescriptions for the garments of the high priest in Exod. 28:4 & Lev. 16:4 together with the description in Josephus, *Ant* III.7.4 Cf R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (AB 29A; NY: Doubleday, 1970), II, pp. 920-1. We should note too John 9:36: 'him whom the Father consecrated...' And possibly, as we have noted above, Rev. 1:13. Cf *supra*, n 32.
35. We could perhaps say that John regards Jesus, sent by the Father, as the Apostle rather than the High Priest of his confession!

36. J. P. Heil, "Jesus as the Unique High Priest in the Gospel of John," *CBQ* 57 (1995), sees Jesus set as the true High Priest in antithesis to Caiaphas, an example of Johannine irony. However, he does not make out his case, not least because of an uncritical equivalence between Jesus as the good shepherd and high priest. This is a case where 'narrative criticism' seems to merge with reader response criticism and end up with pure eisegesis! Cf. B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: John Murray, 1881), p. 6: "It fell to Caiaphas to bring about unconsciously the one sacrifice of atonement for sin."
37. A further reason for the New Testament authors' focus on Jesus as the victim is the parallel, perhaps originally drawn by our Lord himself, between his expiatory death and that of the Maccabean martyrs. The latter were seen very much as victims and not at all as priests, though Eleazar happened to be one according to 3 Macc 6:1. Interestingly, Hebrews seems to make reference to these martyrs among the catalogue of heroes of the faith. Cf. Heb. 11:35-8.
38. Cf. B. Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (CUP, 1991), p. 126. However, in theory, one avenue to the idea of Christ as High Priest could be from his position as head of a kingdom of priests.
39. That this was 'according to the Scriptures' is evident from his general attitude to the Old Testament.
40. Sin and its remedy were very important to the author. His concern that the past and present sins and failings of his readers should not hold them back from their heavenly journey is a constant feature of his paraenesis, cf *infra* n 5 and Tait (2004), Supplementary Note A, pp. 171-2.
41. It is possible that there was a certain fluidity in his mind between this and the daily sin-offering. Hence the *crux interpretum* in 7:27 where he speaks of the high priest offering sacrifices daily.
42. Cf. Heb. 1:3.
43. The intertwining of doctrine and paraenesis is a constant feature in Hebrews, but it is far more evident in the sections dealing with the Aaronic rather than the Melchizedekian model of priesthood. Cf. Tait (2004), Supplementary Note A, pp. 171-2.
44. Koester's supposedly 'small step' cf. *supra*, p. 128.
45. Cf D. M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (SBLMS 18: Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), especially pp. 130-53.
46. Cf Tait (2004), p. 67. Whatever we think of the Testimony argument of Synge and his predecessors (cf *infra*, n. 57), it is inconceivable that Hebrews was unaware of the text of the whole of Psalm 110 even if he did not subject it to atomistic exegesis,

cf *infra*, p. 10.

47. Cf. *supra*, pp 131-2.
48. 7:14.
49. Cf the opening Scriptural catena which highlights the eternity of the Son contrasted with the transience of the angels. Cf J. W. Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy*, (CBQMS 13; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1982): 128-40.
50. Cf *supra*, p. 7, nn 2 & 5.
51. Especially if he were addressing priests as some think, e.g. Gianotto who has revised his opinion of 1984. Cf Gianotto, 'Qumran e la Lettera agli Ebrei', *RStB* 9 (1997), p. 218 & p. 230.
52. Note that this is also a verse that describes Jesus as a sacrifice! Cf *supra*, n. 33.
53. This would not have needed elaborate exegesis as it was probably common tradition as represented in Philo and Josephus. Cf Philo, *Leg. All.* 3, 79; Jos, *Ant.* I, 180: *BJ*, VI, 438.
54. A third possibility is just conceivable—the use of Genesis 14 as a starting point. This is unlikely. Not only is it subordinate in Ch. 7, cf Tait (2004), p. 133-4; there is also no reason why the author should have attached any significance to it apart from the Messianic oracle in Ps 110:4.
55. E.g. 5:6, 7:17.
56. From the first mention of priesthood at 2:17.
57. Cf F. C. Sygne, *Hebrews and the Scriptures* (London: SPCK, 1959), following in the steps of J. R. Harris, *Testimonies* (CUP, 1916) and C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: the Sub-structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952).
58. Though note the possible echo in the quotation from Ps. 45, 1:8. The two are linked by *rhabdos* (sceptre); perhaps the reference to the sceptre's coming out of (earthly) Zion deterred the author. A further association through Ps 110:2 with the Messianic Gen 49:10 is possible but only in the Hebrew text of which Hebrews seems to have been unaware. Cf Tait (2004), pp 69-70.
59. Cf D. A. Hagner, *Hebrews* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1990), p. 81: 'Psalm 110:1 may be understood as the [implied] bridge between Ps. 2:7 and Ps. 110:4.' More generally, it is a mystery why Psalm 110:3 is not quoted by Christian authors until Justin.
60. Rather as Gen. 14 is brought in at the beginning of ch. 7 to facilitate discussion of Psalm 110. Cf Tait (2004), pp. 133-4.
61. Even in 6:20, the atonement ritual is already hinted at so that 'one might almost say' that ch. 7 is a digression!

62. This conclusion is shared by Marie Isaacs, "Why bother with Hebrews?" *HeyJ* 43 (2002), p. 64: 'The depiction of Jesus as high priest ... is the product of Hebrews' use of the Day of Atonement ... In order to develop his analogy between the death of Christ and the Day of Atonement he has first to justify his designation of Jesus as priest since he did not qualify.' However, she presents this thesis summarily without any detailed argumentation as to the process involved. We should note that E. Best, "Spiritual Sacrifice: General Priesthood in the New Testament," *Int* 14 (1960): 298, sees a similar process at work with regard to the theology of the general priesthood of believers where, he claims, the Scriptural back-up from Exodus 19 came after the doctrine had been 'found or formed.'
63. In Tait (2004), especially pp. 5-61, I reject totally that the author was dependent on traditions of an eschatological Melchizedek, traditions that are in any case largely the creation of twentieth century scholars.
64. This is an opinion widely found among the commentators. Cf. Cockerill (1976), p. 336: 'The labour to which he goes to make the meaning of this title quite clear would indicate that the readers did not attribute this title to Christ, or at least that they did not have an adequate concept of its meaning'; and Koester (2001), p. 109: 'The way the author seeks to demonstrate that Christ can be considered a priest indicates that this idea was new to the listeners.' Koester goes on to contrast Hebrews with (the later) 1 Clement where the idea is no longer argued for but presupposed.
65. 3:1, 4:14, 10:21-3.
66. Cf A. J. B. Higgins, "The Priestly Messiah," *NTS* 13 (1967): 235 and W. R. G. Loader, "Christ at the Right Hand—Ps. CX.1 in the New Testament," *NTS* 24 (1978): 205-7. Cf also J. Kurianal, *Jesus our High Priest: Psalm 110:4 as the Substructure of Hebrews 5:1-7:28* (European University Studies XXIII; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 258, n. 872.
67. Cockerill (1976), p. 353, seems to turn towards this position when he says; 'Even if this title was known to them, it probably stemmed from a different Christological tradition.' Kurianal similarly modifies his view of p. 258 (cf. *supra*, n. 66) on p. 257.
68. H. W. Attridge, *Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Phila: Fortress, 1989), p. 214.
69. Attridge (1989), p. 100.
70. Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1.
71. 1:14.
72. Professor J. L. Houlden points out (in private correspondence) that in cases like 9:24, 'intercession' is probably conceived of more in terms of mediation in general than prayer in a formal or liturgical sense.

73. Kurianal (2000), p. 217 n. 725.
74. J. M. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests* (JSNTS 49; SAP, 1991): 17.
75. Cf. Best (1960), p. 275. The great intercessory prayer in Neh. 9:6-37 is offered by Ezra, a priest, but that of Dan. 9:4-19 by Daniel, a 'layman'.
76. Cf. Acts 7:55-6 where the standing Son of Man/Jesus is often regarded as interceding. But interestingly David sits to pray in 2 Sam. 7:18 after receiving Nathan's oracle.
77. Kurianal (2000), p. 136, n. 446.
78. BAGD, I; LSJ s.v. *emphaneia*. Consistent with this, the Fathers use the word for either appearances of God in the Old Testament or post-resurrection appearances of Christ in the New. Cf. G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic-Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), s.v.
79. Only Koester (2001), p. 422, sees it as an allusion to intercession pointing out that in the Old Testament 'appearing before God' referred to people coming to the sanctuary to seek God's help in praying.
80. W. Horbury, "The Aaronic Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *JSNT* 19 (1983): 43-71:65, claims that 'the compassion of the high priest and his solidarity with mankind ... are Pentateuchal themes which received comparable development in the post-Biblical sources'. However, most of the references he gives are much later than Hebrews.
81. I have recently revised this opinion to see the influence of Hellenistic presentations of Moses, such as that of Philo, as being primary in this sphere. Cf. *supra*, pp. 128-9.
82. The situation is, however, much more complex if the author intends his concept of Jesus' Sonship to embrace both Messianic and priestly roles, as is possible by his linking of the two quotations in 5:5-6.
- 83 Cf pp. 4-5.
84. Cf A. Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (*SubBib* 12; Roma: EPIB, 1989): 20.
85. The attempt to explain away 3:1 linguistically by saying that 'of our confession' applies to 'apostle' but not 'high priest' is unconvincing as are similar arguments applied to 4:14.
86. Cockerill (1976), pp. 277-354, goes extensively into the form-critical arguments for various blocks of pre-existing tradition in Hebrews. These are not strictly relevant to our purpose here.