The Literary Structure of the Book of Hebrews

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The past 30 years have witnessed considerable discussion over various aspects of the Epistle to the Hebrews.¹ This article and one to be published in the following issue focus on two areas of the discussion, namely, the literary structure of the epistle and the doctrinal center of the epistle. The first of these topics, the epistle's literary structure, is of importance in that it affects one's understanding of how the book is to be divided and of the author's development of his argument.² This article summarizes the traditional approach to the epistle's structure and then examines contemporary contributions to the discussion.


Conceptual Analysis

Traditionally most presentations of the argument of Hebrews have divided the epistle in Pauline fashion into a section that is mainly doctrinal (1:1-10:18) and one that is mainly paraenetic (10:19-13:25). In some of the traditional presentations the doctrinal section is subdivided into two or more parts. Also the proponents of this traditional structure hold that there are paraenetic passages within the doctrinal section and doctrinal contributions within the paraenetic section.

The traditional presentations of the argument divide the epistle "into sections and subsections so as to reveal the development of the argument." They attempt to map out the conceptual structure of the epistle, highlighting the author's themes such as the sonship of Christ, the deity and humanity of Christ, the "rest" of God, the high priesthood of Christ, the New Covenant, the sacrifice of Christ, and the need for faithfulness and perseverance in the Christian life. While most commentators have noted these basic themes, they have failed to agree on all the details "for the simple reason that the author [of Hebrews] composes like a musician intertwining one theme with another."

Literary Patterns in the Book

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF SUBJECT

Dissatisfied with the ways most previous scholars have analyzed the epistle, Albert Vanhoye, a French Jesuit, has argued that


4 A paraenesis is an exhortation, a call for action.

5 "The writer is unwilling, even in the development of Truth, to allow the loftiest conception of the Gospel to appear to be a theory only" (Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. li).


7 Ibid.
The key to the structure is to be found in six literary devices used by the author. Vanhoye's thesis has been widely discussed and has influenced a number of modern commentators.

The first of these devices he called *annonces du sujet* (announcements of the subject) or "signpost passages." These are brief statements before a section that indicate the main subject to be treated. For example 1:4, "much better than the angels"; 2:17, "that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest"; 5:9-10, "having been made perfect . . . designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek"; 10:36-39, "you have need of endurance . . . we are . . . those who have faith"; and 12:11, "discipline . . . yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

INCLUSIOS
An inclusio marks off a literary unit by using the same word or phrase at the end of a discussion that was used at the beginning. The passage 1:5-13, for example, begins and ends with the phrase "to which of the angels?" Other examples are 2:5-16 ("for . . . not . . . angels"); 3:1–4:14 (which begins and ends with "heaven[ly]," "Jesus," "high priest," and "confession"); 5:1-10 ("high priest"); 5:11–6:12 ("dull" or "sluggish," *nwqroix*); 7:1-10 ("Melchizedek" and "met"); 12:14–13:20 ("peace"). Shorter examples are "look" (*blep*), and "unbelief" (3:12, 19); "enter" and "rest" (4:1, 5); "word" (*ologo*) (4:12-13); "priest" (7:1, 3); "Abraham" (7:4, 9); "perfection" and "law" (7:11, 19); "oath" (7:20, 28); "first" (8:7, 13); "regulations" (9:1, 10); "Christ" (9:11, 14); "covenant" (9:15, 17); "without blood" (9:18).

Structure may be defined as the arrangement of the several parts of a written text according to criteria discernible on literary grounds" (James Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6," *Biblica* 53 [1972]: 368, n. 1).


22); "Christ" (9:24, 28); "year by year" (10:1, 3); "offering" (10:11, 18); "terrifying" (10:27, 31); "not seen" (11:1, 7); "not . . . afraid" and "king" (11:23, 27); "through faith" (11:33, 39); "sons" (12:5, 8); and "leaders" (13:7, 17).

HOOK WORDS

A hook word is a word at the beginning of a paragraph repeated from the end of the preceding paragraph which links or hooks the two units together in a smooth transition. The main hook words in Hebrews are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1:4, a@geloi (&quot;angels&quot;)</th>
<th>8:13, prwth (&quot;the first&quot;)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:5, a@geloi</td>
<td>9:1, prwth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:13, paidiσ (&quot;children&quot;)</td>
<td>9:23, tαpouraμia (&quot;the heavenly things&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:14, paidiσ</td>
<td>10:39, pistoj (&quot;faith&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:17, piskoτ (&quot;faithful&quot;)</td>
<td>11:1, pistoj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:2, piskoτ</td>
<td>11:7, klhronomoj (&quot;heir&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:17, aξiereuκ (&quot;high priest&quot;)</td>
<td>11:8, klhronomoj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:19, els erxomai i (&quot;enter&quot;)</td>
<td>11:39, marturew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:1, els erxomai i</td>
<td>(&quot;gain approval,&quot; i.e., having been witnessed to)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:5, els erxomai i</td>
<td>12:1, marturoi (&quot;witnesses&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:6, els erxomai i</td>
<td>11:40, hμaμ (&quot;us&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:14, e@w (&quot;have&quot;)</td>
<td>12:1, hμeiμ (&quot;we&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15, e@w</td>
<td>12:24, lαlew (&quot;speaking&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:12, epaggelισι (&quot;promises&quot;)</td>
<td>12:25, lαlew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:13, epaggelισι</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

CHARACTERISTIC TERMS

These are terms that are repeated for emphasis within a particular section. Vanhoye cited as examples the word a@geloi in 1:5-2:18 and the word pistij in 11:1-40.

ALTERNATION OF LITERARY GENRES

The text of the epistle, Vanhoye noted, alternates between doctrinal exposition and exhortation. For example the two paragraphs of exposition in the first part of Vanhoye's outline (1:5-14; 2:5-18)

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15 Lightfoot, Jesus Christ Today, p. 49.
16 Vanhoye, A Structured Translation of the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 4.
are separated by a paragraph of exhortation (2:1-4). In his overall analysis of the epistle he saw the following pattern:

1:1-4  Introduction
1:5-14  Exposition
2:1-4  Paraenesis
2:5-5:10  Exposition

5:11-6:20  Paraenesis
7:1-10:18  Exposition
10:19-39  Paraenesis
11:1-40  Exposition
12:1-13  Paraenesis
12:14-13:19  Paraenesis

13:20-25  Conclusion

In a more recent study Fenton has made the same observation and has divided the epistle as follows:

1:1-4  Introduction
1:5-14  Exposition
2:1-4  Exhortation
2:5-18  Exposition
3:1-4:16  Exhortation

5:1-10  Exposition
5:11-6:20  Exhortation
7:1-10:18  Exposition
10:19-39  Exhortation
11:1-40  Exposition
12:1-29  Exhortation

13:1-25  Conclusion

Fenton made three significant observations about this pattern of alternation: (1) Verbs in the imperative are more common in the exhortations than in the expositions. (2) The author used third person

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17 According to Vanhoye's scheme Hebrews 5:11-6:20 introduces a new section. This suggests, however, that paraenesis is presented before exposition, "surely a reversal of the normal procedure" (Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6," p. 385).
expressions in the expositions (e.g., 1:14; 2:11; 5:9; 9:15, 28; 10:1, 14), but he used the first and second persons in verbs in the hortatory passages. (3) Four of the five exhortations are introduced by "therefore" (dia tou to, 2:1; ohen, 3:1; ou#, 10:19; toigaron, 12:1).19

SYMMETRICAL ARRANGEMENTS (I.E., CHIASMUS)

Vanhoye argued that the structure of the epistle, both as a whole and in its parts, shows numerous chiastic patterns (symetries concentriques).20 By way of example he pointed to the central section of his outline (8:1-9:28) where, he argued, the six subdivisions "mutually correspond, two by two, according to a concentric order (the first with the sixth, the second with the fifth, the third with the fourth)."

c. The old worship, earthly and figurative (8:1-6)
   b. The first covenant, imperfect and provisional: (8:7-13)
      a. The old and powerless institutions of worship (9:1-10)
         A. The new, efficacious institutions (9:11-14)
         B. The new covenant (9:15-23)
      C. The entrance to heaven (9:24-28)21

Other examples of chiastic structure are given by Lightfoot.22 First he cites 1:5-8:

Son--------| |---------------angels
----------|--|---
angels --------          ----------Son

He also mentions 4:16:
that we may receive ---| |----mercy
-------------|--|---
and grace  -----------------|  | --- we may find

19 In 5:11-14 the author shifted from the third person (5:9) to the first and second, so Fenton included this paragraph in the third hortatory section (i.e., 5:11-6:20). He noted that 6:1 begins with "therefore" (dio, but conceded that this probably refers back to 5:11-14 and not 5:1-10 (Fenton, "The Argument in Hebrews," p. 176). It might be added here that the author used a number of additional "therefores,' "wherefores" or "thens" to introduce shorter exhortations (dio3:7; ou#, 4:1; ou#, 4:11; ou#, 4:14; ou#, 4:16; dio12:12; dio12:28; toimun, 13:13; ou#, 13:15). Cf. C. J. Sanford, "The Addressees of Hebrews" (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1962), pp. 68-69. Cf. also W. C. Linss, "Logical Terminology in the Epistle to the Hebrews," Concordia Theological Monthly 37 (June 1966): 365.
21 Ibid., pp. 4, 20-23.
Vanhoye's chiastic analysis of the entire epistle is as follows:  

a Introduction (1:1-4)  
1 The name above that of angels (1:5-2:18)  
2a Jesus, the faithful one (3:1-4:14)  
2b Jesus, the compassionate high priest (4:15-5:10)  
—Preliminary exhortation (5:11-6:20)  
3a Jesus and Melchizedek (7:1-28)  
3b Jesus attained fulfillment (8:19-28)  
3c Jesus, cause of salvation (10:1-18)  
—Final exhortation (10:19-39)  
4a The faith of men of old (11:1-40)  
4b Endurance is necessary (12:1-13)  
5 The fruit of righteousness (12:14-13:19)  
z Conclusion (13:20-25).  

Unquestionably Vanhoye rendered a valuable service to students of the Epistle to the Hebrews. His emphasis on the alternation between exposition and paraenesis is a significant one, and his observations concerning announcements and hook words demonstrate the careful structure of the epistle. Much of his outline is correct. For example, 1:1-2:14 and 7:1-28 are distinct units; 8:1 begins a new division; 10:19 introduces an exhortation; and 11:1-40 is a distinct unit. Nevertheless particular aspects of his study have been criticized. The following observations may be made. (1) "Literary principles alone are not a sufficient basis for analyzing structure." Such principles cannot be considered in isolation from content. To cite just one example, it is unlikely that the phrase "peaceful fruit of righteousness" (12:11) announces a major division in the argument. (2) The titles assigned to the sections do not reflect the development

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23 Vanhoye, *A Structured Translation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 7. The typographical arrangement given here is adapted from Ellingworth and Nida (*A Translator's Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 342). It is designed to show Vanhoye's concentric or chiastic view of the epistle.  
of the author's thought, that is, they do not indicate the direction the argument is taking.\textsuperscript{29}

(3) While a number of small chias tic patterns are to be found, the existence of a large-scale pattern embracing all sections of the epistle is to be questioned for several reasons. First, Vanhoye concluded that 13:19 and 13:22-25 were not originally a part of Hebrews in that they do not fit his chiastic structure.\textsuperscript{30} Any proposal, however, that eliminates part of the original document must be considered a failure.\textsuperscript{31} Second, Vanhoye's concentric structure led him to see correspondences between sections I and V and between II and IV according to the scheme Eschatology-Eschatology and Ecclesiology-Ecclesiology with the central section (III) being devoted to sacrifice.\textsuperscript{32}

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Eschatology</td>
<td>Ecclesiology</td>
<td>Sacrifice</td>
<td>Ecclesiology</td>
<td>Eschatology</td>
</tr>
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</table>

These categories are somewhat forced, however. One might ask for example, how 13:1-6 can be included under eschatology when 11:1-40 is omitted (cf. especially vv. 1, 9-10, 16, 40). Further there is no clear parallel between section 1 (entitled "A name so different from the name of the angels") and section 5 (entitled "The peaceful fruit of righteousness").\textsuperscript{33} Third, Vanhoye's work seemed to assume that the epistle was composed by using modern literary conventions (chapter headings, clearly marked paragraphs, punctuation, and modern typographical layout). The epistle, however, was written without any breaks, subdivisions, punctuation, or other modern writing aids. It was written to be read aloud, not silently. None of the first listeners would be able to appreciate the elaborate symmetrical patterns Vanhoye envisioned.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 175.
\textsuperscript{31} Buchanan felt that Vanhoye's outline would be improved if Hebrews 13 were eliminated. Buchanan believed that Hebrews originally had only 12 chapters ("The Present State of Scholarship on Hebrews," p. 316).
\textsuperscript{33} Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13," p. 345.
\textsuperscript{34} Thornton, "Reviews," pp. 139-40.
(4) Not all of Vanhoye's literary devices, therefore, are of equal value. Swetnam, for example, singled out announcements, genres of exposition and exhortation, and length as primary criteria and cited inclusios, hook words, and characteristic terms as subsidiary.\(^{35}\)

The complexity posed by the convergence of all the criteria (inclusios, hook words, announcements, characteristic words, and chiastic patterns) is a problem to even the most alert minds.\(^{36}\)

**COMPARATIVES**

In addition to the six literary devices noted by Vanhoye, six others have a bearing on the author's argument. It has been observed, for example, that the author used a large number of comparatives to support his argument (which runs through the entire epistle) that the new revelation in Christ is superior to the old. The following comparatives are used:\(^{37}\) 

- \(\text{diaf} \, \text{orwterwj}\) ("more excellent," 1:4; 8:6); 
- \(\text{elatw}n\) ("lesser," 7:7; cf. \(\text{elattow}\), 2:7, 9); 
- \(\text{kriettwn} / \text{krei}\,\text{s}\,\text{swn}\) ("better," 1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6 [twice]; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24); 
- \(\text{maflon}\) ("more," 9:14; 10:25; 12:9, 13, 25); 
- \(\text{meizwn}\) ("greater," 6:13, 16; 9:11; 11:26); 
- \(\text{perissoteron}\) ("even more," 6:17; 7:15); 
- \(\text{perissoterwj}\) ("all the more," 2:1; 13:19); 
- \(\text{pleiwn}\) ("more," 3:3 [twice]; 7:23; 11:4); 
- \(\text{teleioteroj}\) ("more perfect," 9:11); 
- \(\text{tomwteroj}\) ("sharper," 4:12); 
- \(\text{u\,yhloteroj}\) ("exalted, above," 7:26); and 
- \(\text{xeizwn}\) ("severer," 10:29).\(^{38}\)

**TERMS DENOTING FINALITY**

It has also been observed\(^{39}\) that a number of terms (viz., "new," "once," "eternal/forever," "perfect") in Hebrews suggest that the author is arguing the superiority or finality of the new revelation as compared with the old. Christ has established a New (\(\text{kainh}\,\text{Covenant}\) which has made the first obsolete (\(\text{pepalaiwen}\), 8:13; cf. 9:15). He has inaugurated (\(\text{ekainizw}\)) a new (\(\text{prosfatoj}\)) way into God's presence (10:20).

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\(^{36}\) Ibid., p. 346.


\(^{38}\) Other comparative terms occur: \(\text{wj}\) (22 times), \(\text{ouw}j\) (9 times), \(\text{kaqwj}\) (8 times), \(\text{tosoutoj}\) (5 times), \(\text{wsper}\) (3 times), \(\text{oqmoiow}\) (3 times), \(\text{w}j\,\text{ekkaqa}\,\text{per}, \text{kaqwsper}, \text{wste}\) (once each). Cf. Linss, "Logical Terminology in the Epistle to the Hebrews," p. 368.

Besides this revelation through Christ being "new" it is also unique, as the author illustrates by his use of εἰδα παρ' αὐτῷ and ἀπέπαντσα. Christ has been once (ἀπέπαντσα) manifested to put away sin (9:26). In sharp contrast to the daily sacrifices and unending service of the Old Testament priests (9:6; 10:11), Jesus has offered Himself once for all (εἰδα παρ' αὐτῷ, 7:27) and has once for all (εἰδα παρ' αὐτῷ, 9:12) entered the heavenly sanctuary.  

The new order is also eternal. Under the Old Covenant the priests died, but under the new there is a Priest who abides forever (εἰδα τὸν αἰώνα, 7:23-24). The new order, in contrast with the old (cf. 7:19; 10:1), "perfects" (τελειώσε) the worshipers of God (10:12-14; cf. 7:11).

A FORTIORI ARGUMENTS

Building on the accepted assumptions of his readers (i.e., on the authority of the Law, the efficacy of the Old Testament sacrifices, and reverence for one's father) the author used a series of a fortiori arguments to demonstrate the supremacy of the new revelation in Christ:  


FORMAL CONTRAST

The author also used adversative particles to delineate the contrast between the old and new revelations. He contrasted the angels and the Son of God in 1:7-8 (μετὰ ... δεξιόν, angels and man in 2:5-6 (οὐλίγα ... δεξιόν), the Son and Moses in 3:5-6 (μετὰ ... δεξιόν), Jesus and the Levitical high priest in 4:15 (οὐλίγα ... δεξιόν, the sons of Levi and Melchizedek in 7:5-6 (μετὰ ... δεξιόν), and 7:8 (ῳδὲ μην ... εἰκεῖ ὅτι), the physical requirement of the Law and Christ's indestructible life in 7:16 (οὐλίγα ... ἀλλὰ) the weak commandment and the better hope in 7:18-19 (μετὰ ... δεξιόν), the authority in back of the Levitical priests and the Son in 7:20-21 (μετὰ ... δεξιόν), the transitoriness of the Old Testament priesthood and the permanence of that of Christ in 7:23-24 (μετὰ ... δεξιόν), the earthly ministry of the Levitical priesthood and the heavenly one of Christ in 8:4-6 (μετὰ ... οὐνικεῖ δεξιόν), the earthly tabernacle of the Old Testament and the perfect tabernacle of Christ in 9:1-5, 11 (μετὰ ... Χριστὸν διδάσκει), and the Old Testament sacrifices and the sacrifice of Christ in 9:23-24 (δεχόμεναι δὲ δὲν), 9:25-26 (ουδεμίσθη διδάσκει) and 10:11-13 (ουδεμίσθη διδάσκει ... δεξιόν).


42 Ibid., pp. 61-82.
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REPEATED THEMES

In discussing Vanhoye's work, Buchanan noted that certain themes echo throughout the epistle: (1) the origin of the ages (1:2; 11:3), (2) exaltation (1:3; 4:14; 7:26; 8:1), (3) high priest (2:17; 3:1-2; 4:14-15; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11), (4) holding fast (3:6; 3:14; 10:23), and (5) the promises (4:1; 6:11-12, 15, 17; 8:6; 9:15; 10:36; 11:9, 13, 17, 39). The author of Hebrews, Buchanan said, was a literary artist who did not say all that he had to say on a subject in one place, even though his units were well structured. Instead he "composed his document as intricately and as carefully as a musical composer might, with many themes woven throughout." 43

TOPIC SENTENCES

Stine has argued that the epistle falls into three sections: 1:1-7:28; 8:1-10:18; and 10:19-13:25. He noted that each is introduced by a topic sentence: 1:1-4; 8:1-2; and 10:19-25. 44

Scripture Citations in the Book

A number of North American scholars, approaching the Epistle to the Hebrews from another angle, have contended that the author's argument is structured around several Old Testament citations. These interpreters disagree, however, on which Old Testament passages are key: Caird suggested Psalms 8, 95, 110, and Jeremiah 31; Kistemaker had Psalms 8, 95, 110, 40; Longenecker mentioned the catena of citations in Hebrews 1, Psalms 8, 95, 110, and Jeremiah 31; and Johnson offered Psalms 2 and 110, Jeremiah 31, and Psalm 40. 45

43 Buchanan, "The Present State of Scholarship on Hebrews" p. 316.
spite of this minor disagreement, however, these writers agree that the major sections of the epistle all have at their core an Old Testament passage that controls the drift of the argument.\textsuperscript{46} Adopting a composite list, including the suggestions of all four scholars, one might outline the epistle as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section in Hebrews</th>
<th>Old Testament Passage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:1-2:4</td>
<td>Psalms 2 and 110 (cf. 2 Sam. 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:5-18</td>
<td>Psalm 8:4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:1-4:13</td>
<td>Psalm 95:7-11</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:14-7:28</td>
<td>Psalm 110:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:1-9:28</td>
<td>Jeremiah 31:31-34</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:1-18</td>
<td>Psalm 40:6-8</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Habakkuk 2:3-4?).\textsuperscript{47}</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

Interpreters of Hebrews have differed widely in their analyses of the overall structure of the epistle. Mackay's observation that exegesis of Hebrews have "always been happier with the trees than the wood"\textsuperscript{48} is well taken.\textsuperscript{49} Nevertheless each interpreter must


\textsuperscript{46} Caird, "The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews," p. 47. Caird said of other Old Testament passages in Hebrews: "All other scriptural references [in Hebrews] are ancillary to these" Old Testament passages.


\textsuperscript{49} James Moffatt (\textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews}, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924], pp. xxiii-xxiv) implied that it was artificial to divide the epistle into formal divisions and subdivisions, yet he went ahead and gave a general plan:

A. The personality of the Son (1:1-4:13)
B. The Son as high priest (4:14-7:28)
C. The sacrifice of this high priest (8:1-10:18)
study the epistle for himself, carefully evaluate the observations of
others, and then set forth a structure that helps the reader make the
most sense out of Hebrews.⁵⁰

The present writer suggests the following conclusions: (1) The lit-
erary devices suggested by Vanhoye provide the interpreter with a
measure of certainty in determining the "joints" of the epistle's struc-
ture. (2) Of the literary devices Vanhoye suggested, announcements,
hook words, and the alternation of literary genres are primary, yet
the others, though subsidiary, help the interpreter see how the au-
thor constructed his units of thought. (3) Any presentation of the au-
thor's argument must make clear that his expositions lead to exhor-
tations in five major sections (2:1-4; 3:1–4:16; 5:11–6:20; 10:19-39; 12:1-29).⁵¹ (4) Content—that is, the basic themes or concepts of the author
as recognized in the history of the exegesis of the epistle—as well as
literary devices must be taken into account when presenting the argu-
ment. If literary principles and content are divorced, then the
content will be distorted.⁵² (5) The author's use of comparatives,
terms denoting finality, a fortiori arguments, and adversative par-
ticles make clear the overall thrust of his argument, namely, that
the priesthood, covenant, and sacrifice of Christ are superior to the
priesthood, covenant, and sacrifices of the Old Testament. (6) It is
evident that the entire argument is built around several key Old
Testament passages (viz., Pss. 2; 8; 95; 110; Jer. 31; Ps. 40; Hab. 2).

⁵¹ On the basis of the threefold occurrence of oμoλoγίας ("confession," 3:1; 4:14; 10:23)
Swetnam argued for three paraenetic sections (3:1-4:13; 4:14-6:20; and 10:19-39) ("Form
⁵² Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6," p. 369. The two articles by Swetnam
are helpful in achieving a balance between form and content. He warned, however,
that though a measure of certainty is possible in structuring and tracing the argument,
absolute certainty is not. He wrote, "Scientific 'certitude' as this term is applied to
literary interpretation ... can be positively misleading; any attempt to achieve a
quasi-mathematical certainty by isolating 'objective' factors which can then be pre-
sumed reliable for determining meaning is to try to impose on words an alien
methodology" ("Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13," p. 348).
It is possible Paul wrote the book of Hebrews. Clement of Alexandria suggests that Paul wrote the book originally in Hebrew and that Luke translated it into Greek. He was a highly educated Alexandrian who would have been schooled in the literary style exemplified by Hebrews. Moreover, as a Jewish believer (Acts 18:24), he had the thorough knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures in their Greek version that the book of Hebrews exclusively uses. In spite of the weight of scholarly inference, the book of Hebrews does not in fact name its author. And so if you were ever asked about the authorship of Hebrews, the correct answer is well expressed by the church father Origen (AD 185? – 254?), who said, according to Eusebius, "Who wrote the epistle of Hebrews?"