

Journey and Rest: Hebrews, Pilgrimage, and the Work of Theological Education¹

Abstract

This article explores the relationship between the motifs of ‘journey’ and ‘rest’ in Hebrews with a view to highlighting the importance and characteristic features of the text’s vision of theological education. The importance of παιδεία in Hebrews is affirmed, and contrasted with the related but distinct perspective of the *Gospel of Truth*. The article concludes by highlighting five features of Hebrews that are suggestive of continuing priorities in the work of theological education today.

Keywords

Hebrews; Gospel of Truth; theological education; pilgrimage; Pilgrim Theological College

Introduction

The New Testament text that used to be known as the ‘Letter to the Hebrews’ never uses the term ‘pilgrim’, and is not concerned with theological education in any direct or obvious way.² Nevertheless, I hope to show in what follows that it offers both a

¹ This paper is a revised version of an opening lecture given on the 19th February 2015 to mark the start of the first academic year at Pilgrim Theological College within the University of Divinity. I am grateful to my colleagues Geoff Thompson and Catherine Playoust for their helpful feedback on earlier drafts.

² Hebrews is neither a letter, nor is it necessarily written to ‘Hebrews’ and, of course, Paul is not its author. For a good introduction to the critical issues surrounding the genre, date, authorship and real and implied audience of Hebrews see Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 1–20, William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* (WBC 47a; Waco TX: Word,

theological vision that relates closely to the notion of pilgrimage as well as a scriptural resource for thinking through questions about the nature and purpose of theological education. Hebrews provides us with this vision and resource in so far as it is a text that, as Ernst Käsemann noted long ago, takes its basis ‘from the motif of the wandering people of God’.³

The bulk of this article will be spent exploring the dynamic interaction between ideas of ‘journey’ and ‘rest’ in Hebrews. In order to highlight the importance of this dynamic, I briefly compare its treatment of the ‘rest’ motif with that contained in the *Gospel of Truth*, a text in which the other part of this dynamic (that of ‘journey’) has collapsed to the point of redefining what is meant by ‘rest’. This analysis and comparison confirm the basic insight made by Käsemann that ‘the form of existence in time appropriate to the recipient of revelation can only be that of wandering’, which in turn generates the proposal that Hebrews as a text is intended to sustain this ‘wandering’ by means of theological reflection.⁴ Five aspects of the theological and rhetorical texture of Hebrews will then be identified, along with the suggestion that these five aspects might continue to determine the nature and purpose of theological education today. I argue that the theological work being performed in

1991), lvii–lxxv, Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 3–33, 50–62. Recently Gabriella Gelardini (‘Hebrews, An Ancient Synagogue Homily for *Tisha be-Av*: Its Function, Its Basis, Its Theological Interpretation’, in Gabriella Gelardini (ed.), *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights* (BIS 75; Leiden: Brill, 2005, 107–127) has re-articulated the case for seeing Hebrews as a ‘synagogue homily’ with a clear educational function (see pp.115-116). On the importance of Hebrews 6:1–3 see below.

³ Ernst Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville and Irving L. Sandberg (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 240.

⁴ See n.9 below.

the text of Hebrews sets before us a description of the nature of the theological tasks facing the Christian community ‘on the journey’ today. When pursued, they together become a means of ‘entering the rest’. The journey/rest dynamic, along with the five themes, helps us to understand a ‘conceptual space’ within which theological education can, or I would argue should, take place.

Journey and Rest in Hebrews

Hebrews offers a sophisticated and coherent theological vision. There is common agreement that the text is a ‘masterpiece of early Christian rhetorical homiletics’.⁵ To read Hebrews is to be addressed with a vision of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ (Heb 1:2; 2:3–4, 10; 5:9; 9:28) and of Jesus’ true identity as God’s ‘son’ (Heb 1:2, 5, 8; 3:6; 4:5; 5:5, 8) and appointed ‘high priest’ (Heb 2:17; 4:5–10; 7:3, 26–28; 9:11–28). This vision is intended by the author to determine the self-understanding of the Christian community for whom he or she writes, who in the light of Christ’s sonship are called ‘children’ and ‘brothers and sisters’ (Heb 2:10, 13–14; 12:5–8). The text’s self-identification as a ‘word of exhortation’ (λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως) suggests that it aims to generate patterns of faithful obedience fitting for those for whom Christ is the ‘pioneer and perfecter’ of such faith.⁶

In 1937 Ernst Käsemann published the influential study *Das wandernde Gottesvolk* in which he argued that the christological and ecclesiological vision of

⁵ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 1.

⁶ The pattern of imperative verbs in Hebrews is interesting in so far as the dominant exhortation is to a form of christological apprehension or comprehension: see Heb 3:1, 4; 7:12; 12:3 cf. Heb 8:5, 11; 10:32; 12:5. It is only in the concluding section in 12:7–13:25 that the imperatives take on concrete ethical significance: see Heb 12:7, 12–14, 25; 13:1–3, 7, 9, 16–18, 22–23.

Hebrews, along with associated themes and motifs, all coalesced around the ‘principal’ motif of the ‘wandering people of God’.⁷ Taking Hebrews 3–4 as his starting point, Käsemann demonstrated that the comparison between, on the one hand, Christ and Moses (3:1–6; 4:14–15) and, on the other, the text’s implied audience and Israel (3:7–13) establishes a dynamic in which the way of Christ into the world and Christ’s subsequent enthronement at the right hand of God constitute a *revelation* to the community that makes possible their own journey in faithful discipleship. The Christian community are those who have been ‘evangelised’ (εὐηγγελισμένοι, Heb 4:2 cf. 4:6) by the ‘message that was heard’ (ὁ λόγος τῆς ἀκοῆς, Heb 4:2) which addresses the community as both ‘assurance’ (ὑπόστασις Heb 3:14) and ‘promise’ (ἐπαγγελία, Heb 4:1). This gospel word ‘grants no final revelation. It calls to a way.’⁸ As Käsemann famously put it: ‘the form of existence in time appropriate to the recipient of revelation can only be that of wandering’.⁹

If we take a closer look at Hebrews 3–4 we can see this dynamic interaction between Christ’s journey and the journey of the people of God being explored. These chapters revolve around an initial contrast between Christ and Moses, and then a subsequent comparison of Israel’s wilderness wanderings with the journey of the

⁷ Any citations from the German in what follows are from the 4th edition: Ernst Käsemann, *Das wandernde Gottesvolk: Eine Untersuchung zum Hebräerbrief* (FRLANT n.f. 37; 4th edn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961). The importance of the theme is also emphasised by Ceslas Spicq OP, *L’Épître aux Hébreux I: Introduction* (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 1952), 269–280.

⁸ Käsemann, *The Wandering People*, 19 (emphasis removed).

⁹ Käsemann, *The Wandering People*, 19 (emphasis removed), translating ‘die dem Offenbarungsempfänger gemäße Existenzform in der Zeit einzig die Wanderschaft sein kann’ [Käsemann, *Das wandernde Gottesvolk*, 6].

people of God for whom Christ is now ‘son’ (Heb 3:6) and ‘high priest’ (Heb 3:1; 4:14–15).¹⁰ The chapter begins by describing the community as ‘partners (μέτοχοι) in a heavenly calling’ (3:1). As partners, the audience are invited to consider Jesus who is ‘apostle and high priest of our confession’, a characterization that relates closely to the earlier use of the epithet ‘the pioneer of our salvation, perfected through suffering’ (τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας αὐτῶν διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι) who brings the children of God to glory (Heb 2:10).¹¹

Three observations about 3:1 make it clear that the author is therefore connecting the journey of the people towards their ‘heavenly calling’ with the journey of Jesus Christ from incarnation to exaltation. First, the language of partnership has already been used of Christ in Hebrews 2:14. Christ is there described as the one who shares in (μετέσχευ) the human condition.¹² This statement of Christ’s identification with humanity is followed by two purpose clauses indicating the consequences or perhaps the express purpose of the incarnation. In destroying ‘the one who has the

¹⁰ Albert Vanhoye, ‘Longue marche ou accès tout proche? Le contexte biblique de Hébreux 3,7–4,11’, *Biblica* 49 (1968), 9–26, challenges this reading of the text, insisting that the author of Hebrews situates the audience not ‘en plein desert, mais au contact de la Terre promise’. However, the proximity of the promised rest does nothing to negate the need for pilgrimage towards it.

¹¹ The ‘perfection’ motif in Hebrews, when applied to Christ and to believers, connects closely to the notion of ‘pilgrimage’. For a detailed study see David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (SNTSMS 47; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

¹² The verb μετέχω is likely synonymous with κοινωνέω which is used in the preceding clause to specify the sharing of all people in a common humanity. The use of the term *παραπλησίως*, ‘likewise’, makes it clear that Christ shares with humanity exactly what members of the human race share with each other. Cf. Heb 2:17.

power of death, the devil' and 'freeing those whose lives were held in slavery by the fear of death', Christ acts as liberator (Heb 2:14–15). This redemptive act provides the grounds upon which believers are made 'partners in a heavenly calling' (Heb 3:1). Secondly, the reference to Christ as 'apostle', while extremely rare, is theologically decisive in so far as it construes Christ as one who is sent into the world.¹³ As Ellingworth puts it: 'Jesus is sent by the Father in order to enable humanity to have access to God'.¹⁴ Thirdly, the notion of Christ as 'high priest' and the comparison with Moses only make sense in so far as they identify Christ as God's true and superior intermediary *in the world and on behalf of the people*.¹⁵ This 'journey' of Christ into flesh-and-blood humanity and death constitutes Christ's 'faithfulness' to the one who 'appointed' him (3:2), and thus anticipates the reciprocal life of 'faith' that the author of Hebrews regards as the appropriate response to the Christ-event (see 4:2–3 and especially 11:1–12:2).¹⁶ In this way, we have here and elsewhere in Hebrews an early delineation of what would later become the doctrine of recapitulation: God appoints Christ as the one who shares our flesh, blood and death, in order that through his intermediary work, we can share in his heavenly calling.¹⁷

¹³ For a survey of the possible explanations for this distinctive usage see Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 75–6.

¹⁴ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 199.

¹⁵ See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 107 and n.35 noting the possibility that the tradition preserved in *m. Yoma* 1:5 might explain the collocation of the 'apostle' and 'high priest' titles here.

¹⁶ On Christ's faith in the argument of Hebrews see Christopher A. Richardson, *Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith: Jesus' Faith as the Climax of Israel's History in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (WUNT 2/338; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012). In 3:6 the author makes it clear that Christ's faithfulness relates directly to that of the implied audience: οἰκός ἐσμεν ἡμεῖς, ἐάν ... κατάσχωμεν.

¹⁷ Recent studies of the christology of Hebrews include Brian C. Small, *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews* (BIS 128; Leiden: Brill, 2014), R. J. McKelvey, *Pioneer and Priest: Jesus*

The christological and ecclesiological vision of Hebrews therefore oscillates between language that evokes the journey (that Christ has taken and that we are called to take) and various images connoting its destination (a return to God's presence): journey and rest.¹⁸ In Hebrews 3:7–11 the author moves to a further comparison, picking up from the motif of Christ's faithfulness to draw a contrast between Israel's infidelity and the anticipated faithfulness of the audience. The citation of Psalm 95:7–11 in Hebrews 3:7–11 provides the narrative of Israel's disobedience, ending in the climactic declaration that 'they will not enter my rest'. Hebrews 3:12–4:11 then provides a commentary on Israel's experience in three sections. 3:12–19 exhorts the community to take care, lest they also become 'unfaithful' (3:12, 19). Lack of faithfulness results in a failure to enter the rest that God has promised. 4:1–5 emphasizes that the path to this 'rest' is still open, and is now the promise offered to all 'who have been evangelized' (4:2) and who have heard the 'word'. Those who believe are now to enter that rest (4:3). 4:6–11 draw out the consequences of this vision of a promised rest for the readers: 'let us make every effort to enter that rest' (4:11). The tone throughout is one of confident proclamation in the ongoing reality of the divine promise, and urgent exhortation to the readers of Hebrews to take up the opportunity to enter it.

Although the epistolary argument is complex and the imagery perhaps unfamiliar, the two basic ideas at work in this passage are clear.¹⁹ First, the language

Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2013),

¹⁸ Images of 'destination' in Hebrews include the 'homeland' (πατρίς, 12:14); 'city' (πόλις, 11:16), further identified with Mount Zion/Jerusalem (12:22), and the 'assembly of the firstborn gathered in heaven' (ἐκκλησία πρωτοτόκων ἀπογεγραμμένων ἐν οὐρανοῖς, 12:23).

¹⁹ For a detailed analysis of the structure and rhetoric of Hebrews 3:7–4:11 see Judith Hoch Wray, *Rest*

of ‘rest’ serves as a complex symbol for the vision that Hebrews sets before its readers. It is a way of talking about God’s presence, our salvation, and eschatological hope.²⁰ Secondly, the readers are called to ‘enter’ that rest by ‘making every effort’. The implied audience of Hebrews is construed as a people on a journey which has been inaugurated by the word of God addressed to them, is prefigured by the journey that Christ has taken to the cross and thereafter to the throne of God (12:2), is marked by the virtues of endurance, patience, faithfulness, suffering, and hope, and is directed towards the throne of grace (4:16).

It is clear that these themes of journey and rest map neatly onto the overall rhetorical dynamics of Hebrews as a whole. Harry Attridge has argued persuasively that the paraenesis of Hebrews shifts between ‘more “static” qualities of stability and resolution’ and the exhortation to ‘a more “dynamic” virtue, to movement in various directions’.²¹ If we look at 4:14–16 more closely we can see that the text contains two ‘hortatory subjunctives’: ‘let us hold fast’ (κρατῶμεν) and ‘let us approach’

as a Theological Metaphor in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Gospel of Truth: Early Christian Homiletics of Rest (SBLDS 166; Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), 51–94, although Wray’s conclusion to the effect that the ‘rest’ motif is really only a sermon illustration and thereby disconnected from the christology of Hebrews is, I think, wide of the mark.

²⁰ See the earlier study of C. K. Barrett, ‘The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews’, in W. D. Davies and D. Daube (eds.), *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 363–393, the excursus in Attridge, *Hebrews*, 126–128 and Wray, *Rest as a Theological Metaphor*, 9–49 for details of the metaphorical use of the term in Jewish, Greco-Roman and early Christian literature. In addition see the recent study by Jared C. Calaway, *The Sabbath and the Sanctuary: Access to God in the Letter to the Hebrews and its Priestly Context* (WUNT 2/349; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

²¹ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 21–22.

(προσερχώμεθα). The first term positions the Christian community in relation to the reception of and unwavering fidelity to the message of Christian proclamation. They are exhorted to hold on to the message that they have received, to maintain their confession, to not waiver, to endure, to stand firm (see 2:1; 10:23, 32–34; 12:3). The second suggests a more dynamic view: readers are to approach, strive to enter, run the race and go forth (see 4:11; 12:1, 12, 18, 22). Taken together the static and dynamic elements produce Hebrews’ distinctive understanding of Christian faith:

Faith is at once the virtue which assures continuity and preservation of traditional hallmarks of Christian commitment and that which undergirds the movement of the addressees to their divinely appointed, but vaguely defined, goal.²²

The question that remains for consideration is the extent to which the notion of ‘pilgrimage’ is an adequate term to describe these central themes in Hebrews.

Hebrews and Pilgrimage

William Johnsson’s 1978 article on ‘The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews’ offers a clear argument to support the adequacy of the notion of pilgrimage for understanding Hebrews.²³ Johnsson points out that, while the idea of pilgrimage may

²² Attridge, *Hebrews*, 22.

²³ William G. Johnsson, 'The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews', *JBL* 97 (1978), 239–251.

Some have critiqued Käsemann’s use of the term ‘wandering’ rather than ‘pilgrimage’ because of its suggestion of aimlessness. See I Howard Marshall, 'Soteriology in Hebrews', in Richard Bauckham et al. (eds.), *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 253–277, p.257, n.16.

be only implied in 3:6–4:11, it becomes the explicit focus of Hebrews 11.²⁴ There we find an intensity of spatial terms such as ‘place’ (τόπος, 11:8), ‘land/region/country’ (γῆ, 11:9), ‘foreign land’ (ἀλλοτρίος, 11:9), ‘homeland (πατρίς), ‘city’ (πόλις, 11:16), along with verbs of motion like ‘departing/travelling’ ([ἐξ]έρχομαι, 11:8), distance (πόρρωθεν, 11:13), residence (παροικέω, 11:9), waiting (ἐκδέχομαι, 11:10), ‘return’ (ἀνακάμπω, 11:15), and the identity terms ‘strangers and foreigners’ (ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοί, 11:13).²⁵

Together these terms emphasise two key themes associated with pilgrimage: movement and expectation.²⁶ Building on these linguistic foundations, Johnsson goes on to demonstrate that Hebrews reflects a ‘phenomenology’ of pilgrimage that can be identified on the basis of comparison with modern accounts of the Islamic *Hajj*.²⁷ The notion of pilgrimage includes at least four key elements, all of which are present in Hebrews’ eschatological and ecclesiological vision: (1) ceremonial separation from ‘home’ (see 6:2; 10:22; 11:15–16); (2) journey towards a sacred place (see 11:10, 16; 13:14); (3) a specified purpose for the journey (see 12:14); (4) the necessity of

²⁴ Many of these themes are discussed in more detail, with greater attention to the dynamic tension between the notion of ‘travelling/journey’ and ‘waiting/rest’ in Matthew C. Easter, *Faith and the Faithfulness of Jesus in Hebrews* (SNTSMS 160; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²⁵ Johnsson, ‘The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews’, 239–241. Johnsson notes that Hebrews 12 seems to shift focus onto Israel’s presence at, rather than journey to, Zion (though note 12:18, 24–26) and also points to 13:12–14 as connected to the pilgrimage motif.

²⁶ Johnsson, ‘The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews’, 241.

²⁷ Here, Johnsson relies on the unpublished dissertation by H. B. Partin, ‘The Muslim Pilgrimage: Journey to the Center’ (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1967).

hardship and the threat of failure (see 3:12–18; 5:11–6:2; 10:23–26; 12:4).²⁸ As a rite of passage, leading the pilgrim through the stages of separation, transition and incorporation, the pilgrim’s journey embraces past, present and future.²⁹ The author of Hebrews exhorts the audience to connect this journey directly to the Christ-event, whereby Jesus is the pioneer (2:10; 6:20; 12:22).³⁰ As Barrett puts it: ‘in Jesus the “end”, in which all believe and towards which all move, has been anticipated, and proleptically disclosed.’³¹ The result is that the audience of Hebrews is envisaged as a ‘cultic community on the move’.³²

This is, of course, not yet an account of theological education. Yet, Hebrews offers a vision of the identity of the people of God as a wandering people, located on a journey between the word that has been proclaimed and the rest that is promised.³³ Before we consider the theological and educational resources that Hebrews offers to such a people, it is instructive to compare its distinctive vision of the Christian life with subsequent reception of the rest motif in the *Gospel of Truth*.

Journey and Rest in the *Gospel of Truth*

The striking and distinctive nature of the vision of the church in Hebrews comes into

²⁸ Johnsson, 'The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews', 244–247.

²⁹ Johnsson, 'The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews', 246.

³⁰ Johnsson, 'The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews', 247–248.

³¹ Barrett, 'Eschatology', 383.

³² Johnsson, 'The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews', 249.

³³ Thus Hebrews, for all its theological distinctiveness, is located centrally within the broader tradition of Jewish and early Christian two-age eschatological schemes. See Scott D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (WUNT 2/223; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

even clearer view when we consider a later example of the dynamic between journey and rest in Christian tradition. This comparison serves to reveal the consequences of an eschatology, and consequent ecclesiology, in which the notion of ‘rest’ comes to dominate and thereby mute any notion of the church as a ‘people on the way’.

The *Gospel of Truth* shares generic features with Hebrews, in so far as it seems to be an early Christian sermon. It is possibly from the 2nd century, belonging most likely to the Valentinian school within the movement that some are now learning not to call ‘Gnosticism’.³⁴ As well as broad generic parallels, the work also makes substantial use of the motif of rest, and thereby demonstrates, in the opinion of most scholars, literary dependence on Hebrews.³⁵ It is noticeable, however, that in the *Gospel of Truth* the notion of rest plays out in such a way as to reconfigure the image of ‘journey’, thus altering text’s construal of Christian faith, discipleship, and community. While the text does portray the human condition as one of ‘ignorance’ and ‘error’ (see e.g. 17:1, 10–20; 26:26–27; 28:32–30:16), for which the antidote is ‘searching’ (17:5; 18:13) leading to ‘ascent’ to the Father (see e.g. 21:10–25; 22:1–7), the text’s soteriology conveys a largely realised eschatological vision: ‘If the Father comes to be known, oblivion will not exist *from that moment on*’ (18:10–11, emphasis

³⁴ The critical edition (used here for the translation) is Harold W. Attridge and George W. MacRae, ‘The Gospel of Truth: 1,3:16.31–43.24’, in Harold W. Attridge (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices* (NHS 22; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 55–117, Harold W. Attridge and George W. MacRae, ‘The Gospel of Truth: 1,3:16.31–43.24’, in Harold W. Attridge (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Notes* (NHS 23; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 39–135. The problems associated with the use of the blanket term ‘Gnosticism’ and the case for finding other descriptors is set out in Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking ‘Gnosticism’: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

³⁵ See the discussion in Wray, *Rest as a Theological Metaphor*, 141–149.

added). Within this framework, ‘rest’ is less something that is open, travelled towards, or yet to be fully reached; it is already attained on the basis of knowledge that is already received (22:1–2): ‘Having knowledge, he does the will of the one who called him...he receives rest’.³⁶ The *Gospel of Truth* lacks the kind of eschatological tension that we explored in Hebrews. In an extensive reflection on the idea of God’s children as a ‘fragrance’ in 33:33–34:34, the author aims to ‘make the gifts and graces that belong to the children of the Father so vivid, so embodied, that those who hear will let go of striving for the good, let go of the stress and weariness of endless searching for truth and simply REST in these things that belong to them already’.³⁷ Life in this world for the people of God is marked not by striving, patience, endurance, or faithfulness, but by ‘tranquility’.³⁸ One particular quotation from the *Gospel of Truth* amply demonstrates the consequences of this emphasis on rest.

They do not go down into Hades nor have they envy nor groaning nor death within them, but they rest in him who is at rest, not striving nor being twisted around the truth. But they themselves are the truth; and the Father is within them and they are in the Father, being perfect, being undivided in the good one, being in no way deficient in anything, but they are set at rest, refreshed in the Spirit ... This is the place of the blessed, this is their place ... it is not fitting for me, having come to this resting place,

³⁶ Wray defines ‘rest’ (*mtan*) here as ‘the consequence or present reward of knowledge ... part of the present life of the one who is called’, Wray, *Rest as a Theological Metaphor*, 112.

³⁷ Wray, *Rest as a Theological Metaphor*, 122.

³⁸ *sgraht* and related lexical forms are used in 33:33–34 to denote the tranquillity that belongs to the Father. In 19:10–20 it is used of Jesus. In 25:19–24 the author draws on the image of the church as a ‘tranquil house’ (cf. Heb 3:3–6). Thus the Father’s tranquillity ‘becomes the model for the gnostic’s presence in the world’, Wray, *Rest as a Theological Metaphor*, 123.

to speak of anything else. (*Gospel of Truth* 42.17–43.3).

These words come almost at the climax of the sermon. The repeated use of the present tense connotes ‘a present life status that does not partake of the things of death’.³⁹

Rest is less a destination and more an inhabited place, or space.⁴⁰ Without a journey, the motif of rest leaves us with no need to speak of anything else. It implies ‘an end to the labor of search for the Father’.⁴¹ Within this vision there is little need of the central components of theological education: asking questions, embracing work, and venturing speech appropriate to our location on the way *towards* our promised rest.

This brief diversion into the alternative vision of the *Gospel of Truth* serves to clarify the ecclesial and eschatological vision of Hebrews. Pilgrimage becomes a defining image of the church’s existence in the world and Hebrews is written both to hold this vision before the community and to sustain it on its journey. A church shaped by this dynamic of journey and rest will direct its life and work towards the one who called us out, travelled before us, and awaits our arrival.

³⁹ Wray, *Rest as a Theological Metaphor*, 137. Cf. Attridge and MacRae, ‘Gospel of Truth: Notes’, 134. For the contrary view see Jan Helderma, *Die Anapausis im Evangelium Veritatis: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung des valentinianisch-gnostischen Heilsgutes der Ruhe im Evangelium Veritatis und in anderen Schriften der Nag Hammadi-Bibliothek* (NHS 18; Leiden: Brill, 1984), 223–228.

⁴⁰ Wray, *Rest as a Theological Metaphor*, 125, demonstrates the strong association of rest with the language of ‘place’ in the *Gospel of Truth* 36:35–39 (cf. 19:10–20, 40:30–41–31). This fits in well with the broader account of the Valentinian transformation of eschatology into protology described in Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the ‘Valentinians’* (NHMS 60; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 315–329.

⁴¹ Wray, *Rest as a Theological Metaphor*, 114 (emphasis removed).

Hebrews and the Work of Theological Education

By way of contrast, in Hebrews 5:11–6:3 the author directs the readers' attention to their need of what we might call educational progress. Although the metaphorical dimensions of this passage are potentially confusing (are they infants in need of milk as in 6:13, or adults in need of exercise as in 6:14?) the fundamental exhortation is clear: 'keep moving' (φερώμεθα). The great danger facing the audience is that they have or might become 'sluggish' (νωθροί, 5:11, cf. 6:12), a term denoting intellectual lethargy. Attridge summarizes the point well:

The remarks on their intellectual backwardness suggest that the addressees have not, in the author's opinion, been making the sort of theological effort that the christological reflection of his work represents. Without such effort, their Christian commitment is in danger.⁴²

The remedy for this condition is the recognition that the community is called to draw its sustenance not only from the 'basics' or 'foundation' of their faith (5:12–13; 6:1–3) but also from 'solid food'. The 'milk/food' metaphor of 5:12–14 derives from a commonplace notion in Hellenistic educational theory: the notion of staged levels of instruction. The same background explains the use of athletic imagery in 6:14.⁴³ The readers of Hebrews are characterized as those who have demonstrated their commitment to work, love, and service (6:10), but who are called to the renewal of

⁴² Attridge, *Hebrews*, 158.

⁴³ For details, and discussion of the primary source material (especially Philo of Alexandria) see James W. Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (CBQMS 13; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1982), 17–40.

their ‘zeal’ (6:11) in order to counteract the potential descent into ‘sluggishness’ (6:12). The appeal for the audience to grow in understanding through education is explicit and is strongly connected to other aspects of Christian faith and practice.

It seems, then, that the eschatological and ecclesiological vision of Hebrews offers an account of the church’s identity that makes the work of theological education necessary. To put it another way, a church that ceases to need or practise theological education would stop being the church, at least as imagined in Hebrews.

The notion that the church is a ‘pilgrim people’, or a community ‘on the way’, continues to be influential, both ecumenically and within specific denominational forms of Christian identity, witness, and service.⁴⁴ It provides us with an important reminder that there is no finality to the church’s institutional life or earthly achievement. Of equal significance, however, is that this vision of the church creates the necessity for theological education for the whole people of God, now understood as the very means by which they travel towards the promised goal and seek the city that is to come. If the notion of pilgrimage is to be a defining image of the church’s present existence, there are questions to be asked and there is work to be done and

⁴⁴ Along with the notion of ‘participation/*koinōnia*’ the notion of ‘pilgrimage’ has informed the ecclesiological work of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. Within the Uniting Church in Australia, the idea of the church as a pilgrim people lies at the heart of the ecclesial vision of *The Basis of Union*. See especially paragraph 3, making explicit the intertextual relationship to Hebrews, specifically 13:14: ‘The Church lives between the time of Christ’s death and resurrection and the final consummation of all things which he will bring; she is a pilgrim people; always on the way towards a promised goal; here she does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come. On the way Christ feeds her with Word and Sacraments, and she has the gift of the Spirit in order that she may not lose the way.’ See Robert Bos and Geoff Thompson (eds.), *Theology for Pilgrims: Selected Theological Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia* (Sydney: Uniting Church Press, 2008).

speech to be ventured. If Christ continues to address the church as God's definitive Word (Heb 1:1–4), feeds the church through the words of Scripture and in the gifts of the Sacraments, and if the church has received creedal and historical texts and traditions as a means of regulating its own understanding and articulation of the faith, then the church is called to deep and sustained immersion into the study and interpretation of these gifts.

What does Hebrews as a 'word of exhortation' seek to offer the community whose form of existence is that of wandering? Hebrews 12, which begins with the emphatic and rare *τοιγαροῦν* 'therefore', provides one answer in its identification of the need for the community to undergo *παιδεία*: 'training' or 'discipline'. Clayton Croy has demonstrated that this term, used in Hebrews 12:7–11, refers to 'a regimen, a period of training and testing, through which the readers will learn endurance, be assured that they are, in fact, God's sons and daughters, and enjoy the peaceful fruit of righteousness and God's holiness.' Far from being a punitive form of discipline, *παιδεία* is an 'formative/educative' term.⁴⁵ It is 'education into sonship'.⁴⁶ One way of reading the overall nature and purpose of Hebrews is to see it as a text designed to foster this *παιδεία*.

The connection between Hebrews and *παιδεία* encourages us to consider a number of important emphases in the text with a view to their potential importance

⁴⁵ N. Clayton Croy, *Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12.1–13 in its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context* (SNTSMS 98; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 213, summarising the extensive discussion on pp.77–213.

⁴⁶ Croy, *Endurance*, 220. The focus of this article means that I cannot treat the obvious issues raised by the gendered nature of the language in Hebrews here.

for the work of theological education.⁴⁷ In the brief comments that follow, I identify five components of the paideutic work that I see taking place in Hebrews and suggest their ongoing importance for the work of theological education today.

The Centrality of the Christ-Event

The christology of Hebrews is complex and distinctive, but clearly central. There can be no doubt that the author seeks to sustain the wandering people of God primarily by means of a renewed focus on the importance, meaning and significance of the Christ-event.⁴⁸ These reflections on the identity, incarnation, life, suffering, death, exaltation

⁴⁷ Mention must be made here of the important studies by Ellen Aitken which overlap with the concerns of this paper at crucial points and which deserve to be better known. See Ellen B. Aitken, 'An Early Christian Homerizon?: Decoy, Direction, and Doxology', in Richard Armstrong and Casey Dué (eds.), *Classics@*, Issue 3, <http://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/displayPdf/332> (accessed 15th December 2015), and 'Wily, Wise, and Worldly: Instruction and the Formation of Character in the Epistle to the Hebrews', in Ian Henderson and Gerbern S. Oegema (eds.), *The Changing Face of Judaism, Christianity and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism 10; Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2006), 294–305. The notion that theological education might be deemed a form of παιδεία is central to Peter C. Hodgson, *God's Wisdom: Towards a Theology of Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999).

⁴⁸ John Webster criticizes Käsemann's detaching of Jesus' sonship from the sphere of divine relations in favour of a strong attachment to the letter's parenesis. The two notions of 'sonship' clearly belong together: 'The Son relates to the sons as their pioneer and perfecter only because he is eternally and by nature the bearer of a more excellent name.' See John Webster, 'One Who Is Son: Theological Reflections on the Exordium to the Epistle to the Hebrews', in Richard Bauckham et al. (eds.), *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 69–94, here p.74. Richard Hays also confirms Käsemann's basic insight [Richard B. Hays, "'Here We Have No Lasting City": New Covenantalism in Hebrews', in Bauckham et al. (eds.), *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 151–173,

and enthronement of Jesus Christ are the key means by which the author enables the audience to reorient their relationship to Jewish history, scripture and tradition, sustain patterns of faithful discipleship, endure persecution and suffering, organise their common life, and anticipate the resurrection of the dead.⁴⁹ They are grounded in the conviction that ‘God’s self-disclosure found its ultimate expression in Jesus of Nazareth who was the Son of God incarnate.’⁵⁰ Above all, the writer’s witness to Christ is intended to strengthen their ‘confession’ (4:14; 10:23; 11:13; 13:15) and thereby to grasp its significance and meaning in a new way.⁵¹ Likewise, theological education for pilgrims will consistently and centrally engage with the narrative of God’s journey into the full reality of this world in Jesus Christ.

The Interpretation of Scripture

For the author of Hebrews the key resource for telling that story is Scripture.⁵² The preponderance of explicit citation, implicit allusion, echo and appropriation rightly

here p.166]. Stephen Holmes regards Käsemann’s proposal as ‘convincing’: see Stephen R. Holmes, ‘Death in the Afternoon: Hebrews, Sacrifice, and Soteriology’, in Bauckham et al. (eds.), *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 229–252, here p.240.

⁴⁹ Resurrection language in Hebrews is usually directed towards the future eschatological hope of believers: see 6:2; 11:19, 35. On the resurrection of Christ in Hebrews see now David M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (NovTSup 141; Leiden: Brill, 2011).

⁵⁰ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, cxxxvii.

⁵¹ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, cxxxviii.

⁵² Of course, for the writer of Hebrews this means a Greek translation of the Old Testament. For a recent full study see Susan E. Docherty, *The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews: A Case Study in Early Jewish Bible Interpretation* (WUNT 2/260; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

leads Lane to conclude that Hebrews is ‘impregnated with the OT’.⁵³ While scriptural saturation is important in and of itself, the witness of Hebrews to the value of exegetical and interpretative effort in relation to Scripture offers us a further challenge. The argument of Hebrews consistently engages in disciplined forms of hermeneutical and exegetical enquiry, strategies of interpretative practice learned from Jewish exegetical tradition.⁵⁴ Paul Ellingworth offers a suggestive summary of the author’s approach to Scripture:

This is of course not the modern historical-critical approach; but neither is it a random, subjective, or arbitrary procedure. On the contrary, it was based on a careful and sensitive examination of the text as a whole; it was a ‘searching’ of the scriptures (Acts 17:11), intensely creative though in continuity with Jewish exegetical tradition; a use of scripture which in its own setting fully deserves to be called scholarly, though it is much more besides.⁵⁵

For the author such work is necessary in order to enable the words of the text to address the situation of the community. It is the means by which the word of God becomes ‘alive and effective’ (4:12) for the people of God on this stage of their journey. Likewise, theological education for pilgrims will continue to regard immersion in and interpretation of Scripture as the central task.

The Utilization of Intellect

Hebrews is, by some margin, the most intellectually sophisticated of all New Testament texts. Earlier generations of scholarship identified its Greek style as ‘purer

⁵³ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, cxv.

⁵⁴ See the summary of exegetical strategies and techniques in Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, cxix–cxxiv.

⁵⁵ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 42.

and more vigorous than that of any other book of the N. T.', deploying an extensive vocabulary and using of language in a way most typical of a 'practised scholar'.⁵⁶

Contemporary readers of Hebrews face a particular challenge by virtue of the author's obvious knowledge of, and engagement with, a number of the major philosophical, cultural and religious traditions of their own day: most obviously Platonism, perhaps especially of the Alexandrian, Philonic variety, but also a variety of sectarian and esoteric Jewish traditions.⁵⁷ It is also evident that the text's macro-structure and astute patterns of argumentation reveal explicit rhetorical skill, whether or not this was acquired through a process of formal education in rhetoric.⁵⁸ In short, Hebrews is an early example of theology in the hands of someone who places all of their intellectual capacity and educational resources in service of articulating the Christian faith.⁵⁹

Likewise, theological education for pilgrims will not eschew such gifts, but will value learning, intellect and, dare I say it, a degree of rhetorical elegance, not because these things are the gospel, but because the gospel can and must take form in ways that appeal to the intellect.

⁵⁶ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: the Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1903), xlv–xlvii. Westcott concludes that Hebrews represents 'the mature conclusions of human reflection' (xlvii).

⁵⁷ Again, Lane provides a good overview of the scholarship, with bibliography: Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, ciii–cxii.

⁵⁸ On the structure of Hebrews see George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (NovTSup 73; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994). DeSilva concludes that the author of Hebrews was 'fully equipped in the art of persuasion', David A. deSilva, *Perseverance and Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "To the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 35.

⁵⁹ Lane points to the author's 'architectural mind', formal rhetorical training and high educational level, see Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, xlix–l.

Continuity and Contextuality

We have little way of knowing exactly who Hebrews was written for, or about the precise circumstances that elicited this distinctive theological vision.⁶⁰ Yet it is clear that the vision itself arises from and is intended to address the real and relevant questions that face a fragile Christian community towards the end of the first century. What is striking is the way in which the specific articulation of Christian faith and practice in the text, the product of these concrete questions and circumstances, remains contiguous to other expressions of Christian faith from the earliest period (the same might be said about the Johannine tradition). The explanation for this is that the circumstances faced by the author and their community called forth an original articulation of Christian faith that was, at the same time, both deeply immersed in the tradition of Jewish and Christian theological reflection that preceded it, and deeply connected to the lives and experience of a group of early Christian disciples.⁶¹ Continuity with the broad, developing tradition of the early Christian movement is combined with creative and contextual originality. Likewise, theological education for pilgrims will always take the life and experience of the pilgrim seriously. It will resist the temptation to merely repeat the language or mimic the voice of those who have walked that journey before us: theology is not ventriloquy. But it will also recognise

⁶⁰ For a survey see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 9–13.

⁶¹ The notion that the vision of Hebrews connects to the theological legacy of the Hellenists is attractive, but depends on a reading of Stephen's speech in Acts 7 as a reliable account of that legacy. See {Manson, 1951 #7466} followed by Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, cxliv–cl. The close relationship with 1 Peter is explored in detail by Spicq OP, *L'Épître aux Hébreux I*, 139–144, followed by Attridge, *Hebrews*, 30–31.

that that it is a dangerous thing to imagine that we are the first to ask our questions, work through the issues, or attempt to speak faithfully. Even in the midst of the demands of the present context, theological work is also done in the context of a great cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1).⁶²

Enacted Transformation

Finally, we should note that the depth and complexity of the theology at work in Hebrews are not ends in themselves. The strong paraenetical thrust, woven through the discursive exegetical and Christological argument, culminate in the extensive exhortations of 13:1–19 and generate the author’s identification of the work as a ‘word of exhortation’ in 13:22.⁶³ For a text so taken up with more abstract and speculative modes of theological reflection, it is striking to note the ways in which the author envisages the practical consequences of that theology. Mutual love, hospitality to strangers, identification with the prisoner, upholding marriage, resisting greed, support for leaders (13:1–17); these are just some of the ways that the vision of Hebrews translates into action. By providing the audience with a clearer vision of Jesus Christ, it seeks change in the lives of those who name him as Lord. Likewise, theological education for pilgrims will be directed towards transformation into forms of Christian community and service that are shaped by the story of Christ. And calls for transformation of the church, or of the church’s mission in the world, will recognise that theological education is central to that process.

⁶² Attempts to recontextualise the message of Hebrews into the present day can be found throughout deSilva, *Perserverance* and {Craddock, 1998 #7467}.

⁶³ In rhetorical terms we are dealing with a text that combines epideictic and deliberative topics and, thus, purpose. See deSilva, *Perserverance*, 46–58.

Conclusion: A ‘Pilgrim’ Theological College

Of course, this analysis of the work of παιδεία that is taking place within the text of Hebrews can do little more than remind us of the importance of theological education today, and perhaps provoke us to think through the priorities that might shape teaching and learning in theological institutions. 2015 was the first year of operation for Pilgrim Theological College within the University of Divinity. In developing a vision for the College, its Faculty and Board affirmed a statement which summarised key elements of a new curriculum and which, it seems to me, is broadly consistent with the vision for theological education that I have outlined above.

Theological education provides an opportunity to:

engage the scriptural and historical **SOURCES** of the Christian faith;

embrace the **VISION** of the reconciled world announced in the gospel;

explore the pathways of ancient and contemporary **WITNESS**;

provoke **PROPHETIC** discipleship;

lead the church in constant **RENEWAL**.⁶⁴

Taking the vision of Hebrews as our cue, we can say that theological colleges are, in essence, a tangible, visible, intentional, and institutional expression of the church’s commitment to its own journey. With this vision in place, the work can now begin.

⁶⁴ This ‘narrative’ was originally drafted in 2014 by my colleague Geoff Thompson, affirmed by the Faculty at Pilgrim Theological College, and included in the application and strategic planning documents that led to the Collegiate Agreement with the University of Divinity.