An Audience-Oriented Approach to Hebrews 10: 19–22

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Abstract:

This article applies the so-called audience-oriented approach (a literary exegesis which focuses on how the implied audience understands and responds to the narrative on the basis of its presupposed knowledge and what the audience has heard so far in the narrative) to the reading of the Epistle to the Hebrews 10: 19–22. Scholars have argued for the significance of sacramental allusions (particularly Baptism and the Eucharist) in this passage. This article shows that within its narrative context, the implied audience listens to Hebrews 10: 19–22 as a reminder that, because of the merit of Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross, they are worthy to approach God with a true heart and unwavering faith—a theme that the author of Hebrews has developed so far in the epistle. Thus, from an audience-oriented point of view, the passage is not primarily sacramental but exortatory.

I. State of Research

Scholars have often dealt with the passage of Heb 10: 19–22 from a sacramental point of view. A. Vanhoye, who takes this passage as a part of the final exhortation in Hebrews (10: 19–39), claims that one can easily recognize an allusion to Baptism in 10: 22.1 The twofold aspect of material rite, namely “body washed in pure water” and “hearts cleansed from evil conscience,” according to Vanhoye, clearly points to the baptismal rite. He also thinks that one may as well recognize an allusion to the Eucharist in 10: 19–20. The two verses not only mention “flesh” and “blood” but the entire sentence closely corresponds to the reality of a eucharistic celebration. Taking Hebrews as a sermon intended to be pronounced aloud in the Christian gathering, in Vanhoye’s view, this passage particularly suggests that the author had in mind a gathering that included a eucharistic celebration.2

Peter J. Leithart also agrees that 10: 22 speaks about Christian Baptism.3 He argues that since this passage implies that the OT priestly task and privilege have been conferred to all the baptized, it can be concluded that “Baptism fulfills and replaces ordination,” which is the rite of

1 A. Vanhoye, Our Priest is Christ: The Doctrine of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1977) 228.
2 Vanhoye, Our Priest is Christ, 228.
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initiating a priest in Israel. In the OT, the consecration of priests involves the sprinkling of blood and the washing with water (Exod 29: 4, 20–21; Lev 8: 6, 23–24, 30). Leithart believes that Christians, because they have been sprinkled and washed in Baptism, are qualified to enter through the “veil” (10: 22), which was supposed to be the privilege of the high priest. Nils A. Dahl further explains the relationship between the baptismal “washing of bodies” and the “sprinkling of the heart and conscience” as “the application of the work of Jesus to the individual.” The sprinkling of the heart identifies the “inner significance” of the reality which Baptism ritually imparts.

Thus, this passage has attracted scholars and commentators to argue for its sacramental allusion. A few scholars, however, reject the reference to Baptism in this passage. Others emphasize its hortatory aspect. V. Koperski, for example, reads this passage as an encouragement to the audience that their past unfaithfulness is not decisive. The great high priest will cleanse them as long as they respond to the opportunity given to them.

While one may see sacramental allusions in this passage when it is read from a sacramental point of view, in my view this is not the primary concern of Heb 10: 19–22. The present study, which takes an audience-oriented approach, will focus on how the implied audience, based on the memory of what they have heard up to this point of the epistle, respond to this passage as they hear it unfold. It will show that the passage reminds the audience of the benefits of Christ’s sacrificial act, and, because of their relationship with Christ in faith, calls them to share the privilege of approaching God in their worship with an unwavering faith.

II. Literary Context

The first ten chapters of Hebrews lay the groundwork for the argument in 10: 19–22. In the first four chapters the author primarily focuses on revealing the identity of Jesus and his relationship with the audience. The audience hear about the superiority of Jesus and his privilege as the Son of God. Jesus is the Son through whom God now speaks to “us,” to the

6 Scholars who refuse the baptismal allusion in this passage, see Leithart, “Womb of the World,” 52–53.
9 Leithart, "Womb of the World," 58.
audience as well as the author (1: 2), and through whom God created the universe (1: 3). After accomplishing purification of sin, Jesus sits at the right hand of the majesty on high (1: 3). He is superior to the angels because of his sonship (1: 4–2: 2).

Then in 2: 9, when the name of Jesus is mentioned explicitly for the first time, the audience hear that Jesus suffered death on behalf of all. In doing so he “leads many sons to glory” (2: 10). In fact, Jesus, who sanctifies, and “the many sons,” who are sanctified, are “brothers” because they share a common origin (2: 11, 12). Then the audience hear the title of “high priest” applied to Jesus for the first time in 2: 17. Jesus is the merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of “people.” In 3: 1, when the author addresses them as “brothers,” the audience confidently identify themselves as the “brothers,” the “sons,” and the “people,” who are sanctified and led to glory by Jesus. Through his suffering and death, Jesus, the initiator of salvation, brings all—including the audience—into a holy fraternity.

The identity of Jesus is further explained in chapter 3 in a comparison with Moses. Jesus deserves more glory than Moses (3: 3), because Moses is faithful “in all his house” as a “servant” (3: 5). Christ, however, is faithful as a “son” over “the house” which belongs to God (3: 6). Then the audience are reminded that “we” are the house, if we hold fast in our “boldness” and pride in our hope (3: 6).

The audience then hear the Holy Spirit warn them, through the quotation from Psalm 94, not to harden their hearts (3: 7–8). Those who do not know God’s way and lack faith will not enter into God’s rest (3: 10–11, 19). The audience are encouraged to obey the will of God and have faith in him because only “we” who believe can enjoy the promise “to enter into the rest” (4: 3, 11). In 4: 14–16, where the audience hear again the reference to Jesus as the high priest, they are encouraged to hold fast in their confession and to “approach” with boldness the throne of grace (4: 14–16). Then, in the following chapters, the author develops the theme of Jesus’ priesthood, sanctuary, and sacrifice.

Using the comparison with the priesthoods of Aaron and of Melchizedek, the author defines the characteristics of Jesus’ priesthood. Just as Aaron was called by God, Jesus did not glorify himself by becoming the high priest but was chosen by God (5: 5). Although he is a Son, Jesus learned obedience from what he suffered. When he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was declared high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (5: 8–10). On behalf of “us” Jesus, the high priest, enters into the interior behind the “veil” (6: 19–20). As a Melchizedekian priest, Jesus’ priesthood is above the priesthood of Aaron and Levi because these are the descendants of Abraham who paid tithes to Melchizedek. Jesus’ priesthood is also eternal: as Melchizedek continues living (7: 3), Jesus lives forever to make intercession for the people (7: 17, 21, 25).

The superiority of the priesthood of Jesus is further emphasized in various levels of comparison: the old and the new covenant, the first and the second tent, the priest and the high priest. Jesus is the initiator of the better covenant which is enacted on better promises whereas the old covenant is close to disappearing (8: 6, 13). Under the regulation of the old covenant,

10 Scholars have pointed out that Hebrews 4: 14–16 is similar in both content and structural significance with our passage (10: 19–22). See William L. Lane, Hebrews 1–9 (WBC 47A; Dallas: Word Books, 1991) xc-xcviii.
the priests, who are allowed to enter into the “first” tent, have to offer sacrifice repeatedly. Even the high priest, who has the privilege to enter into the “second” tent once a year with the blood of animals, offers a sacrifice that cannot perfect the conscience (9: 1–10). Jesus, however, enters into the greater and more perfect tent once and for all with his own blood. The sacrifice of Jesus brings eternal redemption and cleanses “our” conscience from dead works to worship the living God (9: 11–14). As the high priest in the heavenly worship Jesus appears before God on our behalf (9: 24).

In Heb 10: 1–18, which immediately precedes 10: 19–22, the audience hear again about Jesus’ once and for all sacrifice. Jesus offered one sacrifice of his own “body” for the forgiveness of sins, and he took his seat forever at the right hand of God. This one sacrifice has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated, those in whose hearts and minds God shall write his laws under the new covenant, as it is testified, not by Moses or any prophet, but by the Holy Spirit.

Thus, up to this point of the text the audience have heard about Jesus’ identity and his relationship with them. They have also been told that the new covenant has become effective. They understand that “the way” to the sanctuary, which was blocked by the first tent (9: 8), has been cleared by the heavenly high priest’s sacrifice of his own blood. The audience, therefore, are ready to be reminded of their calling to approach God in the heavenly sanctuary, a privilege which they share only because of the benefits of Christ’s sacrificial offering.

III. Structure

According to the chiastic structure proposed by John P. Heil, the passage of Heb 10: 19–22 is a part of the parallel pivot of 10: 15–30.11 Hebrews 10: 19–22 can be divided into five parallel sub-units according to its grammatical structure. This passage, which consists of a single sentence, is quite artistically arranged. The main clause is found in the middle (v. 22a), with two participial clauses before and after it. The first two clauses are governed by the same participle ἔχοντες.12 The last two employ the participles ῥεραντισμένοι and λελουσμένοι, respectively. The structure of Heb 10: 19–22, therefore, becomes as follows: 13

1. Having boldness for the entrance to the holy place by the blood of Jesus, which is the new and living way he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, (vv. 19–20)
2. And [having] a great priest over the house of God, (v. 21)


12 The place of the participle ἔχοντες (at the beginning of the sentence but separated with the first clause by οὖν, ἀδελφοί) suggests that it governs both clauses. Hebrews 4: 14 explicitly suggests that the object of the participle ἔχοντες includes the “great priest.” See also Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989) 284.

3. Let us approach with a true heart in assurance of faith, (v. 22a)
4. Having been sprinkled with regard to the hearts from an evil conscience (v. 22b)
5. And having been washed with regard to the body by clean water. (v. 22c)

IV. Meaning

1. Therefore, brothers, having boldness for the entrance to the holy place by the blood of Jesus, which is the new and living way he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh (vv. 19–20)

The audience have heard a thorough exposition on Christ’s distinctive priesthood. Now, employing the conjunction οὖν (therefore) at the beginning of v. 19, the author summarizes the argument he has made so far in order to provide the basis of the exhortation for the audience. The construction of ἐχόντες οὖν reminds the audience of the same construction at the beginning of the exhortation in 4: 14–16, which is very similar to 10: 19–22 in its content and context. In 4: 14, ἐχόντες οὖν draws the conclusion of the previous argument which emphasizes the unique relationship between Jesus and the audience. Jesus, the Son of God, is the great high priest who can sympathize with “our” weaknesses because he has been tempted in every way just as “we” are, yet without sin. The audience are then encouraged to hold fast to their confession. Now the same structure is used in the opening of this passage. It heightens the audience’s expectation to hear similar words of exhortation.

The audience are then addressed as “brothers” (ἀδελφοί). This address not only reminds the audience of their fellowship with the author but also recalls their unique relationship with Jesus. Jesus is not ashamed to call them “brothers” (ἀδελφόνις) because they are of the one origin (2: 11). These are the brothers (ἀδελφοίς) among whom Jesus proclaims God’s name (2: 12). The bond of this brotherly relationship is so strong that Jesus becomes like his “brothers” in every way (2: 17). He even shares with them in blood and flesh (2: 14).

Because of their association with Jesus, the audience are worthy to be called “holy brothers” (ἅγιοι, 3: 1) and are reminded to hold fast to their confidence and hope (3: 6). They are also called “brothers” in 3: 12 and warned that none of them should have an evil and unfaithful heart that forsakes the living God. The direct addresses of the audience as “brothers” in these two previous instances (3: 1 and 3: 12) are followed by the paraenetic words to the audience “to validate its faith by acting upon it.” Thus, in addressing the audience again as “brothers,” the author not only reminds them of their unique relationship with Jesus—who is both the Son of

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14 William L. Lane (Hebrews 9–13 [WBC 47B; Dallas: Word Books, 1991] 282) agrees that the inferential particle οὖν sums up the entire argument to this point, but more specifically the “crowning affirmation” in 8: 1–2 and its development in 9: 1–18. James W. Thomson (Hebrews [Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008] 200) notes that the conjunction clearly marks the shift from exposition to exhortation as a major transition in the argument. He also rightly points out (202) that what the audience have as a result of the work of Christ is the basis for the exhortation later in v. 22. Paul Ellingworth (The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993] 517) agrees that this is a “paraenetic οὖν.”

15 Lane, Hebrews 9–13, 282.
God and the brother of man—but also draws the audience’s attention to hear the further implication of their special relationship with Jesus.

The present participle ἔχοντες, which is placed in emphatic position, has two complementary objects. The first one is “boldness” (παρρησία). So far the audience have heard that despite the good things that they possess (encouragement and hope; 6: 18–19), they have a need for help due to the lack of the qualities they should have possessed. They have a need (χρείαν ἔχετε) of someone to teach them even the basic things. Like a baby they still have a need (χρείαν ἔχοντες) of milk and not solid food (5: 12). But, here they are reminded of an extraordinary quality that they now possess, namely παρρησία.

The term παρρησία originally meant “the right free men had in their cities to assist at the public assemblies and to speak there.” Although the word is basically translated as “boldness” or “frankness,” it does not merely express a subjective psychological state of confidence but it has also the objective meaning of an authority that is given. As a biblical term its usage here has the meaning of “freedom of access to God, authority to enter the sanctuary.” The audience have heard the term used in 3: 6, in which they are reminded to hold fast to the “boldness” and to the hope they take pride in. “To hold fast to the boldness” in this passage implicitly suggests that the “boldness” is something they have to maintain. Later in 4: 15–16, it becomes clearer that this quality is possessed by the audience as something given for the merit of Jesus’ ability to sympathize with them, and not because of their own merit. Now in 10: 19, it becomes obvious for the audience that the παρρησία (boldness, freedom, authority) that they now have is obtained through the blood of Jesus.

This quality empowers the audience for “the entrance” (εἴσοδον) into the “holy place” (ἁγίῳ). The audience know that the way (ὁδόν) to the heavenly holy place (ἅγιον) had not yet been revealed during the time that the first tabernacle—the earthly one—was still standing (9: 8). However, since Jesus, the high priest, has passed through the more perfect tabernacle and entered once and for all into the holy place (ἅγιον), he has obtained the eternal redemption (9: 12) for those who have been called (οἱ κεκλημένοι; 9: 15). The audience, whom Jesus is not ashamed to call (καλεῖν) “brothers” (2: 11), therefore possess the right to enter into the holy place.

The audience know that τὰ ἅγια basically points to the outer part of the tabernacle, into which only the priests have access (9: 2, 6). However, they understand that τὰ ἅγια here points

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17 Vanhoye, Our Priest is Christ, 46; Elingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 211.
18 Some commentators emphasize the subjective aspect of the term, others emphasize its objective aspect, while others rightly note that it is both. See Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 284.
19 G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT) (translated by G. W. Bromiley. v. 5, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) 884, s.v. “παρρησία” (H. Schlier). In order not to lose the objective nuance of the term, the word “παρρησία” has been translated as: complete freedom (TEV), the right to enter (JB), free to enter (REB), free access (BHD), etc. For further treatment on παρρησία, see A. C. Mitchell, “Holding On to Confidence: PARRHSIA in Hebrews,” in Friendship, Flattery, and Frankness of Speech (edited by J. T. Fitzgerald; NovTSup 82; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 203–26.
to the heavenly sanctuary, of which the earthly tabernacle is only a copy and shadow (8: 2, 5). 20 The audience recall that it is into the holy place (τὰ ἅγια) that Jesus the high priest entered once and for all (9: 12) and acts as its minister (8: 2). Thus, having “boldness” to enter into the “holy place” means that the audience now share the privilege that Jesus has, namely to have a direct access to God.

This extraordinary privilege is only made possible by the blood of Jesus (ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ). The audience recall the significance of blood in the earthly sanctuary. The high priest enters once every year into the inner tent “not without blood” to offer sacrifice for himself and for the sins of people (9: 7). Moses sprinkled “blood” on the Book of the Law and on the people to establish the first covenant with God (9: 19). This blood, however, does not perfect the conscience of the worshipers. Jesus, nonetheless, enters into the holy place with “his own blood” (9: 12) which has the power to cleanse the conscience (9: 14). The audience have heard about “the blood of Christ” in 9: 14. Although now they hear of “the blood of Jesus,” it is not difficult for them to understand that the usage of Jesus’ personal name is to emphasize Jesus’ humanity. 21 They recall that the blood which Jesus offers in the holy place is the blood which he shares with God’s children, his fellow human brothers (2: 14).

It is the sacrificial blood of Jesus that becomes the source of the audience’s boldness. The audience cannot understand the particle ἐν in the phrase ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ in the same sense as they heard it used earlier in 9: 25. They were told there that the high priest enters into the holy place every year “with blood” (ἐν αἵματι) which is not his own. However, here the audience understand the particle quite differently based on their correct understanding of the significance of the blood of Jesus. The audience do not think that they are to enter into the holy place “with” the blood of Jesus. They know for sure that it is Jesus himself who, through his own blood, once and for all (ἐφάπαξ; 9: 12), offered himself for the sins of many. It is the sacrificial blood of Jesus that brings forgiveness of sins (9: 28; 10: 12). Because of Jesus’ sacrifice, God no longer remembers their sins (10: 17) and has no need of any offering for sin (10: 18). Thus, the audience may enter into the holy place not only without mediation of a priest, but even without blood. 22 However, it is only possible by or because of the shedding of Jesus’ blood. 23

The audience then hear more about the entrance into the heavenly sanctuary, which has been made possible for them by Jesus. 24 They hear that Jesus has inaugurated (ἐνεκαίνισεν) for them a new and living way. The audience recall Moses who inaugurated (ἐγκεκαίνισται) the

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21 Lane (Hebrews 9–13, 283) rightly asserts that the usage of the personal name “Jesus” is to emphasize the full humanity of Christ and the validity of his redemptive sacrifice on behalf of the human family. See also Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 406.
23 The usage of the preposition ἐν here suggests that it is better to be understood in the sense of cause, giving the reason for an action; in this case the reason to have access to the holy place. See further Rhee, Faith in Hebrews, 162.
24 Lane (Hebrews 9–13, 283) rightly points out that v. 20 is intended to elucidate v. 19. The relative pronoun ἡν in v. 20 refers to εἴσοδον in v. 19. See also Pelser, “A Translation Problem,” 47; Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 285.
first covenant with the blood of animals (9: 18). That “not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood” implies that the new covenant certainly has to be inaugurated with blood. Based on what they have heard so far, the audience know for sure that the blood cannot be other than the sacrificial blood of Jesus, by which they now have the boldness for entrance into the holy place.

The entrance (ἐἴσοδον) that Jesus inaugurated for them is a new and living way. The way (ὁδὸν) reminds the audience of the way (ὁδὸν) to the heavenly holy place that had not yet been revealed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing (9: 8). Jesus, the one who is worthy of greater glory than Moses (3: 3) and the “initiator” (ἀρχηγόν) to the salvation of God’s sons (2: 10), has now inaugurated the new and living way. Thus, the way to the heavenly holy place is now revealed to the audience since Jesus, the “forerunner” (πρόδρομος; 6: 20), has passed through the greater and more perfect tabernacle (9: 11).

The way that Jesus inaugurated is a “new” (πρόσφατον) way. The audience realize that the first tabernacle which blocked the way to the heavenly holy place is only a copy and shadow of the heavenly one (8: 5). It was built according to the regulations of the first covenant that has become old and close to disappearing (8: 13). In fact, Jesus has taken away the first and has established the second (10: 9). He has entered into the true tabernacle which is not made by hands (8: 2) and does not belong to this creation (9: 11). Thus, the audience conclude that a “new” way has been opened. They know that it is “new” because they have been told that Jesus is the “forerunner” (πρόδρομος). There is no one before him who had passed through the way to the heavenly holy place.

The way is not only new but it is also a “living” (ζωσάν) way. The audience have heard that God is the “living” God (3: 12), that God’s word is “living” (4: 12; 9: 14), and that Jesus is always “living” to intercede for them (7: 25). Now they hear that the way inaugurated by Jesus is also a “living” way. They are sure that the way is “living” because it is inaugurated by Jesus, the one who is made priest through the power of an indestructible life (ζωῆς ἀκαταλύτου; 7: 16). The audience also recall the generation who did not know God’s ways (ὁδούς) and lost the opportunity to enter into God’s rest (3: 10–11). The “dead” bodies of these people fell in the desert (3: 17). The audience, therefore, learn from the negative example of the generation in the wilderness. They are to follow the “living” way inaugurated by Jesus, because they have been granted boldness for its entrance by Jesus’ blood, which cleanses their conscience from “dead” works to worship the “living” God (9: 14). The “living” way would certainly lead them to the glorious throne of God, the “living” God.

Jesus inaugurated this new and living way for them through the veil (διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος). The audience know that, on the one hand, the veil in the earthly tabernacle concealed the holy of holies (9: 3). On the other hand, they also have heard that it is by reaching behind the veil that Jesus entered into the heavenly holy place on their behalf (6: 19).

Lane (Hebrews 9–13, 283) thinks that the term “new” in this passage has a temporal and a qualitative nuance. It has not previously existed and is also incorruptibly fresh.

Koperski (“Hebrews 10: 16–25,” 203) rightly points out that the way is “living” because Jesus always lives to make intercession for “those who approach God through him” (7: 25).
Thus, the veil is “the point one must pass to reach the inner sanctuary and the divine presence.”

The author then explains that the veil, through which Jesus opens the new and living way, is nothing other than his own “flesh” (τὸῦτ᾽ ἐστὶν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ). The audience recall Jesus who shares with his brothers in “flesh” (σαρκός) and blood (2: 14). In the days of his “flesh” (σαρκός), Jesus offered prayers and supplication to God who heard him (5: 7). In the hearing of this passage the audience come to realize that Jesus inaugurated the new and living way not through something supernatural but through the very thing that he shares with them, namely “flesh.”

The first participial clause, therefore, presents the audience with a summary of Christ’s sacrificial act as the heavenly high priest as well as its benefits for them. By the sacrificial blood of Jesus the audience have the boldness to enter into the heavenly holy place. Through Jesus’ flesh, a new and living way is opened for the audience to have free access to God. Since the beginning of Hebrews, the audience have been told that Jesus’ sharing of “flesh” and “blood” relates to his salvific death which destroys the power of the one who has the power of death (2: 14). The audience, therefore, conclude that it is the sacrificial death of Jesus that gives the people the right of entering into the presence of God. As they listen the epistle is read to them during their community gathering which includes the celebration of the Eucharist, through which they are now experiencing the benefit of Jesus’ sacrificial death.

The audience, therefore, are not only reminded to maintain the boldness that they have because of the sacrificial blood of Jesus but also they are encouraged to follow Jesus, their brother, who during the days of his flesh has learned obedience through his suffering and was made perfect (5: 7–9). They are to walk in the new and living way inaugurated for them by Jesus, the forerunner, in their pilgrimage to the heavenly holy place.

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27 Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 285. Philip Edgcumbe (A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, 208) agrees with A. Dahl (“A New and Living Way,” 405) that the veil has a double function. On the one hand, it hides the true sanctuary. On the other hand, it makes possible the entrance into the sanctuary.

28 The function of the phrase “τοῦτ’ ἐστιν τῆς σαρκὸς” is much debated. See the article of N. H. Young, “Tout’ estin tes sarkos autou (Heb. X. 20): Apposition, Dependent or Explicative?” NTS 20 (1973–74) 100–14. For a good summary of scholars’ different opinions, see Craig R. Koester, Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 443–44.

29 Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 287.

30 Attridge (The Epistle to the Hebrews, 287) points out that “flesh” refers to Christ’s sacrificial death. The author uses “σάρξ” and not “σῶμα” probably to provide the parallelism of “flesh” and “blood” which have been used together in 2: 14. In 9: 13, the “blood” of animals cleansed the “body” of those who are defiled. “σαρκ,” together with “αἷμα” in this passage probably symbolizes the earthly life of Jesus. D. Peterson (Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the Epistle to the Hebrews [SNTSMS 47; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982] 154) and Hughes (A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, 409) agree that flesh and blood are used as parallel in this passage.
2. And [having] a great priest over the house of God (v. 21)

The audience then hear the second complementary object of the participle ἔχοντες. The audience have not only the “boldness” for entrance into the holy place but also a “great priest” (ἱερέα μέγαν) over the house of God. Even though the participle ἔχοντες is not explicitly used here, the audience have been told in 4: 14 that they “have a great high priest” (ἔχοντες οὖν ἀρχιερέα μέγαν) who has passed through heaven. Therefore, they readily understand that having a great priest is a blessing that they now possess because of Jesus.

Commentators suggest that the expression ἱερέα μέγαν is simply an alternative designation for “the high priest.” To support this they quote the passages (Lev 21: 10; Num 35: 25, 28) where ὁ ἱερεὺς ὁ μέγας is used to denote the high priest. But that as it may, this reason is insufficient for the audience because the author would have used ἀρχιερέα μέγαν which he has employed in 4: 14. The audience, who have a much deeper understanding of Jesus’ priesthood through their hearing of the previous passages, certainly have a better appreciation of the significance of this expression.

The audience have heard that Jesus is a great priest “over the house of God” (ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ). The phrase “over the house of God” recalls the comparison between Christ and Moses in chapter 3. In 3: 5–6, Moses is said to be faithful in all his house as a servant (θεράπων). But, Jesus is faithful “over the house of God” as a son (υἱός). In 4: 14, the audience was told that Jesus, the “Son of God,” is a great “high priest.” Later, Jesus is also repeatedly referred to as a “priest” according to the order of Melchizedek. Here, the title “priest” is applied to Jesus in comparison with the Aaronite and Levite priesthood. As a Melchizedekian priest, Jesus is greater than the sons of Levi (υἱῶν Λευί), the priests who, although they tithed people, are the descendants of Abraham who gave to Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils (7: 4–5). Melchizedek, being made like the “Son of God” as a priest forever, is a great (πηλίκος) and superior (κρείττονος) one who blessed Abraham, the inferior (7: 4, 7).

The audience, therefore, appreciate Jesus, the priest according to the order of Melchizedek, as a great priest, greater than those of the sons of Levi. He is great because as a high priest Jesus has entered into the greater (μεγίστος) and more perfect tabernacle which is not handmade (9: 11). Thus, the expression “great priest” in this verse reminds the audience that they have Jesus not only as a “high priest” based on his divine sonship, but also as a “priest,” the great one, who rules over the house of God. As priests, the sons of Levi minister the “people” of Israel, their fellow “brothers” from the descendants of Abraham (7: 5). Jesus, nonetheless, is the priest, the great one, who rules over the house of God, that is “we,” his people and fellow brothers (3: 1, 6).

Thus, the audience’s knowledge that they have Jesus as priest over “the house of God,” that is they themselves as a community of faith, helps boost their confidence and hope in God (3: 6). They also readily relate “the house of God” with the assembly (ἐκκλησίας) of the people of God, because these people are those whom Jesus calls “brothers,” among whom God’s name is praised (2: 11–12).

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31 Lane, Hebrews 9–13, 285.
32 Attridge (The Epistle to the Hebrews, 287) rightly points out that “house” in this passage has ecclesiological significance.
That Christ is over the house of God confirms the audience’s knowledge of Jesus’ role in relation to the people. Because of his sonship, Jesus rules over the house of God as the one enthroned at God’s right hand (1: 3; 8: 1; 10: 12), always living to intercede on behalf of the people (7: 25). The audience once more realize that it is Jesus’ priesthood, which comes from his privilege as being the son over the house of God, that enables them to have a closer relationship with God. Having such a great priest before God, the audience are encouraged to hold firm to the hope that they have been promised.

3. Let us approach with a true heart in assurance of faith (v. 22a)

The audience then hear the main clause of this exhortatory passage, calling them to approach (προσέρχομεθα) with a true heart in assurance of faith. The subjunctive mood of προσέρχομεθα expresses the hortatory idea in the first person plural, “let us approach.” The audience have heard the previous two participial clauses focusing on the benefits that they receive from Jesus’ distinctive priesthood. Now, in this main clause they are presented with an exhortation, calling them to give the appropriate response to the privilege that they possess through Jesus.

The destination of the exhortation to approach or draw near is not given. However, the audience know that it is God that they are to approach. In 7: 25, God has been explicitly mentioned as the destination of the audience’s act of approaching. The audience have heard that Jesus is always able to save those who approach (προσερχομένους) God through him. The audience also recall the exhortation in 4: 16 where they are encouraged to draw near to the throne of grace, which ultimately belongs to God (1: 8; 8: 1).

The last time the audience heard the verb προσέρχομαι used is in 10: 1 in relation to the inability of the worship in the earthly sanctuary to make perfect those who approach (προσερχομένους). Now, the audience, who have been made perfect because of the sacrificial act of Jesus, are able to approach God through him. The exhortation to draw near as a cultic term suggests a corporate worship. However, the author does not develop the idea here. Instead, the audience are made aware of something very crucial in their drawing near to God, namely that they have to approach God with a true heart (ἀληθινῆς καρδίας) in full assurance of faith.

The audience have heard about the “true” (ἀληθινῶν) tabernacle, into which Jesus enters (9: 24) and acts as its minister (8: 2). They have also been warned so that none of them may have an evil and unfaithful “heart” (καρδία; 3: 12) and a hardened “heart” as their ancestors in the wilderness (3: 8, 10, 15; 4: 7). For it is in their hearts (καρδίας) that God has promised to write down the laws of the new covenant (8: 10; 10: 16), a covenant not like the one made with

Some commentators, such as Peterson (Hebrews and Perfection, 154), suggest that “house of God” also refers to the heavenly sanctuary. However there is nowhere in Hebrews the reference to the heavenly sanctuary as the house of God. See Pelser, “A Translation problem,” 49; Dahl, “A New and Living Way,” 406; Lane, Hebrews 9–13, 285.


The author makes it clear later in 10: 24–25 in the exhortation not to abandon their assembly.
their ancestors. The new covenant has been established by Jesus’ offering (10: 10). Thus the audience are called to approach God with a “true heart,” a heart worthy for the “true” tabernacle, into which they now have boldness to enter. They realize that with an evil, unfaithful, and hardened heart it is impossible to draw near to God and worship him in truth.

The audience are also called to approach God in assurance of faith (ἐν πληροφορίᾳ πίστεως). The truthfulness of the heart is further expressed by the fullness of faith. The “full assurance of faith” echoes the “full assurance of hope” onto which they have been encouraged to hold eagerly until the end (6: 11). The audience know that faith and hope are closely related to each other, since it is through faith (πίστεως) that one inherits the promise (6: 12), the goal of hope. The audience recall Jesus’ faithfulness as a high priest (2: 17) and as a son over the house of God (3: 2, 6), that is, over the audience if they hold firm in their hope. Thus, the audience are to respond to this exhortation by being the imitator of those who have faith (6: 12), particularly Jesus who is faithful (πιστὸν; 3: 2). At the same time, they are to avoid being like the generation in the wilderness who were “unfaithful” (ἀπιστίας) and unable to inherit the promise to enter into God’s rest (3: 11–12).

Faith, therefore, is the ultimate result which is expected from the audience as their response to Jesus’ sacrificial act. They have been receiving such a great benefit through Jesus. The only answer expected from them is a full, undivided, and unwavering faith. Approaching God in faith is their “expression of the new relationship with God in Christ.”

4. Having been sprinkled with regard to the hearts from an evil conscience (v. 22b)

The exhortation to draw near to God is followed by two participial clauses which provide the further basis for approaching God. Both recount the benefit of the sacrificial act of Jesus for the audience. In the first clause the audience are told that they are to approach God with a true heart in full assurance of faith because their hearts have been sprinkled (ῥεραντισμένοι) from an evil conscience. The one who sprinkled their hearts is not mentioned explicitly, but the force of the perfect passive participle ῥεραντισμένοι helps the audience to realize that it is something done by a divine agent in a decisive moment in the past and it has a lasting effect. These words certainly boost the audience’s confidence to approach God in their worship because they have been freed from an evil conscience.

The audience understand to what the “sprinkling” refers. They recall the qal wahomer in 9:

35 See Heil, Hebrews, 310.
37 Johnson, Hebrews: A Commentary, 258. The word πληροφορίᾳ literally means “supreme fullness.” Here, it is the supreme fullness of faith. See, Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds, TDNT, 6.310–11, s.v. “πληροφορίᾳ” (G. Delling).
38 Peterson, Hebrews and Perfection, 155.
39 Lane (Hebrews 9–13, 287) suggests that v. 22b provides the solid basis for the appeal expressed in v. 22a.
40 Rhee, Faith in Hebrews, 163.
41 Qal wahomer is the first of the seven rules (middoth) of Hillel. The term means “light and heavy.” It refers to an argument from minor to major, an argument a fortiori. It is the most commonly employed of all the middoth. See, David
13–14 which compares the sprinkling (ῥαντίζουσα) of the heifer’s ashes that are only able to cleanse flesh with the blood of Jesus that purifies the conscience (9: 13–14). They have been told also that in order to establish the first covenant, Moses sprinkled (ἐρράντισεν) the book of the covenant, the people, the tabernacle and all the vessels with blood (9: 19, 21). They understand, therefore, that it is the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus—the blood of the new covenant—in his sacrificial death that frees their hearts from an evil conscience (συνείδησεως πονηρᾶς).

Although the term “sprinkling” has cultic imagery, the audience also understand it metaphorically because they now hear that the sprinkling does not involve material things but their “hearts” (καρδίας). In hearing the term “heart” repeated again here, the audience learn to appreciate the internal or spiritual effect of Jesus’ sacrifice.2 The sacrifice in the earthly tabernacle purifies the flesh (9: 13) but it cannot make perfect the conscience (9: 9). It is unable to remove the “consciousness of sin” (10: 2). The sacrificial blood of Jesus, however, cleanses the conscience (συνείδησιν) from dead works in order to worship the living God (9: 14). Thus, it becomes clearer for the audience that it is only a heart that has been sprinkled from an evil conscience that can be a “true heart,” a heart that is free from evil (πονηρά) and unfaithfulness (ἀπιστίας; 3: 12).3 The audience, knowing that their hearts have been sprinkled with the sacrificial blood of Jesus, confidently approach God with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

5. And having been washed with regard to the body by clean water (v. 22c)

The audience then hear the last participial clause which is linked with the previous one with the conjunction καὶ. Here, instead of hearing something completely new, they are presented with something closely related to what they have just been told. They are to approach God in faith not only because they have had their “hearts” sprinkled from an evil conscience but also because their “body” have been cleansed (λελουσμένοι) with clean water.4

The perfect passive participle λελουσμένοι helps them to understand that, as in the case of “sprinkling” (ῥεραντσιμένοι), the “cleansing” is also a divine act that has a lasting effect. The audience hear the verb λούω (to wash) only here in Hebrews. However, they are able to understand, even on the basis of daily experience, the effect of washing: it makes things clean. The thing that is washed clean here is the body (σῶμα). The audience are convinced that they are worthy to approach God because their body have been washed with clean water (ὕδατι καθαρῷ).

The audience hear the word καθαρός (clean) only here in Hebrews. But, they have been

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1 I. Brewer, Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE (Tübingen: J.C.B Mohr, 1992) 17.
2 F. F. Bruce (The Epistle to the Hebrews [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990] 254) notes that “the sprinkling of the heart denotes an inward and spiritual cleansing is obvious.”
3 Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, 410.
4 Ellingworth (The Epistle to the Hebrews, 523) rightly points out that “καὶ,” which links the two phrases, is not to be taken as signaling completely new information. Both clauses are closely related to each other. The heart and the body equally represent the whole person.
told that under the law of the old covenant almost everything is cleansed (καθαρίζεται) by blood (9: 22). They also know that under the new covenant the heavenly things are to be “cleansed” (καθαρίζονται) with the better (κρείττοσιν) sacrifice (9: 23). Since the better sacrifice is the sacrifice of Jesus, the better (κρείττονός) minister (8: 6) of the heavenly sanctuary who offered himself “unblemished” to God (9: 14), the audience are ready to relate the “clean water” with the sacrifice of Jesus. As the blood and “water” sprinkled on the Book of the Law and on all the people established the first covenant with God (9: 19), the “clean water” of Jesus’ unblemished sacrifice washed their body to be worthy to approach God under the new covenant.

The washing with clean water echoes the sacrament of Baptism. The audience, based on their knowledge of the OT, can relate the sprinkling of the heart and the washing of the body with the act of consecration or purification (Exod 29: 4, 20–21; Lev 8: 6, 23–24, 30; Ezek 36: 25) that they experience in their baptism, which is one of the foundations of their faith (6: 2). They are now qualified to enter into the heavenly holy place because they have been washed clean by Jesus’ sacrificial act.

The two participles (having been sprinkled and having been washed), which take the accusative of the body and its parts (heart and body), conveys the effect of totality. Jesus’ sacrificial act has its benefit not only upon their hearts but also extends to their body. The audience have been totally cleansed and made perfect by Jesus (10: 14). The audience, therefore, are ready to approach God in their worship with total commitment and faith. When they hear the singular “body” (σῶμα) is used in this clause, they understand that they are to associate their “body” (σῶμα) with the “body” (σώματος) of Jesus (10: 5, 10). Having their “body” washed clean, they are to follow the example of Jesus who offers his “body” as a sacrificial offering in order to do and fulfill the will of God.

V. Conclusion

The exhortation to draw near to God in Heb 10: 19–22, clearly has its basis in Jesus. It is the sacrificial offering of Jesus’ body and blood that grants the audience the right to walk through the new and living way and enter into the holy place. Jesus’ unique role as the great priest over the house of God is the only reason for the audience to hold firm to their hope for the fulfillment of God’s promise. Thus, while sacramental allusions may be seen in this passage, as Vanhoye and others suggest, an audience-oriented approach shows that the passage is

45 See Heil, Hebrews, 311.
46 The majority of commentators think that this passage alludes to the sacrament of Baptism. See Leithart, “Womb of the World,” 49–65. Johnson (Hebrews: A Commentary, 258) thinks that it also carries forward the image of purification of the body as the external symbol of the internal faithful obedience.
47 See, Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds, TDNT, 7.1059, s.v. “σῶμα” (E. Schweizer). Schweizer notes that the word σῶμα itself denotes the whole person in totality. Vanhoye (La Structure Littéraire de L’Épitre aux Hébreux [2nd ed.; Clamecy: Desclée de Brouwer, 1976] 176) points out that both clauses are clearly complementary to one another.
primarily hortatory, as Koperski has underlined.\textsuperscript{48} The audience of Hebrews listen to the passage as a reminder to them that they are worthy to approach God, but this is not on their own merit, but because they have been totally cleansed and made perfect by the sacrificial death of Jesus. Approaching God is a privilege they are called to share because of their relationship with Jesus.

The audience are, therefore, called to respond to such an extraordinary privilege with faith. Faith is the ultimate answer that is expected from those who enjoy the benefit of the sacrificial act of Jesus, the faithful heavenly high priest. Having their hearts and body totally cleansed, the audience are to approach God in their worship, not with an evil and unfaithful heart, but with a true heart and unwavering faith.\textsuperscript{49}

Despite the fact that the audience have been given this extraordinary privilege to enter into the heavenly holy place, the author of Hebrews never employs the title of “priest” or “high priest” for the audience.\textsuperscript{50} It is Christ alone who possesses the fullness of the priesthood. But, through his sacrificial death he gives the opportunity to all whom he calls “brothers” to share in it. The audience of Hebrews of all times and places may include themselves as Jesus’ brothers by obeying him—walking in the new and living way he inaugurated—since Jesus, having been made perfect, has become the source of eternal salvation for “all” who obey him (5: 9).

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\textsuperscript{49} John M. Scholer \textit{(Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews)} [JSNTSup. 49, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991] 113–24), who argued for the cultic context of this passage, underlines that believers, made possible by priestly service of Christ, are given access to God (to the holy of holies) in their prayer and worship. Calaway \textit{(The Sabbath and the Sanctuary: Access to God in the Letter to the Hebrews and its Priestly Context)} [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013] 160 also asserts that in Hebrew “The language of priestly cultic activities is being appropriated and made more broadly accessible to Jesus’ obedient followers.”

\textsuperscript{50} Vanhoye, \textit{Our Priest is Christ}, 235.


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