

"Amtscharisma": Through the Eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14)

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The article argues a new approach to the elusive language of Heb 9:14. The phrase "eternal Spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit bestowed upon Christ for the specific purpose of carrying out his sacerdotal (that is, high-priestly) appointment. This notion of Amtscharisma is well documented in relevant Jewish literature, where the presence of the Spirit is viewed as the "insignia" of the high priest's office. The author of the epistle has modified this tradition with his own eschatological understanding of the significance of Christ's entry into the heavenly sanctuary.

Key Words: Amtscharisma, eschatology, Holy Spirit, pneumatology

Heb 9:11-14 (arguably) expresses the central thought of the Epistle to the Hebrews.¹ While there is a general consensus that these verses deal with Christ's sacerdotal function, the conspicuous biblical hapax πνεῦμα αἰώνιον (9:14) continues to fuel controversial discussions among scholars.² What exactly is it that we are told when the letter's author claims that (Χριστὸς) . . . διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου ἑαυτὸν προσήνεγκεν ἄμωμον τῷ θεῷ? The present study attempts to afford a new perspective on this crucial statement.

1. DIVINE VERSUS HUMAN (OR: CHRIST'S OWN) SPIRIT

Our phrase "through eternal Spirit"³ is part of an *a minori ad maius* argument that covers 9:13-14: "For if the blood of goats and bulls . . .

1. This view has drawn considerable support from commentators of various convictions since Albert Vanhoye's groundbreaking structural analysis of the epistle. He argued that the letter evinces a concentric fabric, with 9:11-14 forming the governing concept of the document (*La Structure littéraire de l'Épître aux Hébreux* [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963]).

2. Of course, the same can be said about the phrase "through the greater and more perfect tent" (9:11). For a brief summary of the debate surrounding this phrase, see Norman H. Young, "The Gospel according to Hebrews 9," *NTS* 27 (1981) 198-210.

3. So far as this phrase is referred to in this article, I decided to consistently capitalize "Spirit" for my own convenience. I acknowledge that many scholars would object

how much more (will) the blood of Christ (cleanse). . ." The readership is thus assured that Christ's superior sacrifice accomplished the complete removal of every encumbrance "to serve the living God" (9:14b).

In regard to "through eternal Spirit," Albert Vanhoye has revived Chrysostom's view by arguing that πνεῦμα αἰώνιον is a figure of speech derived from the perpetual fire that was to burn on the (OT) altar of burnt offering (see Lev 6:9).⁴ In particular he contends that

il semble permis de conclure que le rapprochement entre l'«Esprit éternel» de He 9, 14 et le feu des sacrifices anciens ne manque pas de fondement. Plusieurs indices dans le texte même et le contexte fournissent un appui à cette exégèse: l'allusion à la «cendre» (9, 13) fait penser au feu; l'expression «Esprit éternel» semble calquée sur celle de «feu continue!» (1 Esdr 6, 23; Lv 6, 5-6); parler de «l'oblation du corps de Jésus Christ» (He 10, 10), c'est mettre l'événement en rapport avec un holocauste. L'interprétation ainsi obtenue s'insère parfaitement dans les perspectives de l'accomplissement de l'Ancien Testament par le Christ, telles que les comprend l'auteur de l'épître.⁵

But Vanhoye seems overly confident in contending that our text "fait penser au feu." First of all, the fire of the altar is never mentioned in the epistle, and it seems too far fetched to suggest that the author here used such an oblique (if not to say "obscure") reference to it without ever having introduced it. His appeal to 1 Esdr 6:23 ([ἐπιθύουσιν] διὰ πυρὸς ἐνδελεχοῦς is juxtaposed with διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου) hardly qualifies as adequate proof for his hypothesis. There is simply no precedent for claiming that the author's readership could have understood "eternal Spirit" to point to the "perpetual fire." In addition to this, Harold W. Attridge rightly draws attention to the fact that "fire does not play a major part in the Yom Kippur ritual which is the basis of the imagery in this pericope."⁶ Vanhoye's exegesis on this crucial verse is less than convincing.⁷

Jacques Bonsirven sees διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου as designating Christ's inner disposition in offering himself for sinners: "Il convient que l'expression désigne une disposition intérieure du Christ."⁸ This inner disposition corresponds with the Pauline πνεῦμα πράτητος (see 1 Cor 4:21; Gal 6:1),⁹ and the adjective αἰώνιος is believed to describe

to this but, again, this is only a convenient measure that is not intended to impose or favor a priori any one view.

4. "Eternal spirit" is thus seen as some sort of spiritual counterpart to the altar's fire.

5. Vanhoye, "Esprit éternel et feu du sacrifice en He 9, 14," *Bib* 64 (1983) 263-74, 274.

6. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989) 250.

7. I do not know of any scholar who has lent Vanhoye substantial support for his thesis. Nonetheless, in a later contribution he reaffirmed his own conviction (cf. "Le Saint Esprit dans l'Épître aux Hébreux," *DBSup* 11.327-34).

8. Bonsirven, *Saint Paul: l'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Verbum Salutis, 1943) 391.

9. Bonsirven regards the Apostle Paul to have written the Epistle to the Hebrews.

the consistency of Christ's character.¹⁰ But this reading of 9:14 simply fails to explain why one should undertake this leap from "eternal spirit" to "meek spirit." Certainly, this would be an exceedingly awkward way of speaking about Christ's agenda, and it is unlikely to have been the writer's intention.

Another creative but equally remote interpretation has been offered by Joachim Jeremias,¹¹ whose contention is that "eternal Spirit" refers to "das im Tode vom Leibe getrennte πνεῦμα Jesu."¹² The separation of σῶμα and πνεῦμα, according to Jeremias, took place when Jesus died. The spirit then became the medium for presenting the sacrificial blood in the presence of God (hence: διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου) and was reunited with the body at the resurrection. Jeremias compares this concept with the spirits (πνεύματα) of the deceased believers in heaven (12:23), insofar as their bodies too await the reunion with their spiritual complements at the resurrection. Now the question whether or not πνεῦμα here denotes Christ's spirit may be suspended for a moment.¹³ It is the claim that 9:14 implies the separation of the said entities that seems most troublesome in Jeremias's approach. Since the text's language does not appear to suggest such a notion, there is no necessity to introduce this concept of separation at this point. More importantly, Jeremias's interpretation deconstructs the author's paradigmatic use of the levitical ritual pertaining to the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:2ff.): Christ's high priestly approach parallels that of the corresponding Aaronic officiant. It is but plausible to suppose that the author had a "whole person" in mind (and not a mere "spirit") when he depicted Christ's entry before the throne of God as the priest who made an atonement for sin. Viewed in this light, it is also clear that 12:23 can hardly be relevant for the exegesis of the present verse.

A number of scholars have suggested to take the expression as referring to the divinity of Christ.¹⁴ Attridge, for example, adopts this view and says that the language of 9:14

10. See Samuel Benetreau's comment: "Nous proposons: qui s'est offert lui-même avec la détermination d'un esprit éternel" (*L'Épître aux Hébreux 2* [Vaux-sur-Seine: Édifac, 1990] 82).

11. Jeremias, "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern: Descensus und Ascensus in der Karfreitagstheologie des Neuen Testaments," *ZNW* 42 (1949) 194-201. Otfried Hofius has adopted Jeremias's view (cf. *Katapausis: Die Vorstellung vom Endzeitlichen Ruheort im Hebräerbrief* [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1970] 181 n. 359).

12. Jeremias, "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," 201.

13. After all, others have advanced a similar view by arguing that "eternal Spirit" refers to Christ's (divine) nature—namely, that part of his person that was inherently his own (for a discussion, see below).

14. To name just a few, see Brooke E Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1903) 263-64; Eduard Riggenbach, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1922) 266-67; John Moffat, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*

suggests something about the quality of the offering and helps to define what it is that is really being offered under the symbolism of Christ's "blood." Although it would be anachronistic to find here a developed "two-nature" christology, the spirit here most likely refers to Christ and to the interior or spiritual quality of his sacrificial act. Christ's self-offering was thus made with that portion of his being that was most truly himself.¹⁵

However, if in fact "eternal Spirit" is to denote "that portion of his being that was most truly himself," one would expect the text to read διὰ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ αἰωνίου.¹⁶ Without the personal pronoun (provided the author really *did* think of Christ's *own* being or divine nature) the language is highly ambiguous at best, though it is otherwise evident that the writer weighed his words very carefully in this pivotal passage.¹⁷ Be that as it may, Attridge himself anticipates the most serious objection to this view when he concedes that a fully developed "two-nature christology" is unlikely to have been in the author's mind (which does not keep Attridge from tendentiously arguing for a case that approaches what he calls a "two-nature christology"). This interpretation, no matter how nuanced it is, smacks of reading the church's systematization for a much later period into our text. It is true that 1:1-4 affirms the divine quality of the Son (see also 5:8), but the epistle never makes an explicit claim about his carrying "the divine nature of his preexistent life into his earthly existence."¹⁸

Even the often-cited (alleged) "complement" to our verse, namely 7:16 (Christ has become a priest of the Melchizedekian order κατὰ δύναμιν ζωῆς ἀκαταλύτου),¹⁹ is open to question. A contextual analysis shows that "indestructible life" should not simply be equated with "eternal Spirit." Chapter 7 features an extended discussion of the person and priesthood of Melchizedek (7:1-10), with the emphasis being on his *enduring* office (μένει ἱερὺς εἰς τὸ διηνεκές, 7:3;

(ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924) 124; Ceslas Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux II* (Paris: Gabalda, 1952) 258-59; John J. McGrath, *Through the Eternal Spirit: An Historical Study of the Exegesis of Hebrews 9:13-14* (Rome: Pontificio Universitas Gregoriana, 1961) 90-103; Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Göttingen: MK, 1949) 314, etc.

15. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 251.

16. The same criticism obtains for Jeremiah's approach (see above). Jeremiah contends that the crucial phrase has reference to Christ's own spirit separated from the body.

17. See Frederick F. Bruce's assessment: "As regards . . . 'through his eternal spirit,' it may be said that if our author had meant this, he could have said so quite simply" (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991] 217).

18. Cf. Robert McL. Wilson, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 155.

19. Cf. Erich Grasser, *An die Hebräer [Hebr 7:1-10:18]* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993) 159: "Viele Exegeten sehen daher richtig, daß 9, 14 auf 7, 16 zurückweist."

see also 7:8) and, consequently, on the superior quality of his priestly order (7:4-9). In 7:11-25 the author explains why the shift from the levitical order to that of Melchizedek was necessary: the levitical priesthood failed to (or could not) bring about τελείωσις (7:11). Christ, the eschatological high priest of the superior class (that is, Melchizedek), has achieved this perfection (see 7:19). In other words, the main reason given for Christ's installation is that his office is not a *temporary* one (in contrast to that of Aaron's descendants): καὶ οἱ μὲν πλείονες εἰσιν γεγονότες ἱερεῖς διὰ τὸ θανάτῳ κωλύεσθαι παραμένειν· ὁ δὲ διὰ τὸ μένειν αὐτὸν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ἀπαράβατον ἔχει τὴν ἱερωσύνην· ὅθεν καὶ σωζεῖν εἰς τὸ παντελὲς δύναται τοὺς προσερχομένους δι' αὐτοῦ τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε ζῶν εἰς τὸ ἐντυγχάνειν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν (7:23-25).

The language here echoes what has been said earlier about Melchizedek ("remains a priest forever," 7:3). Indeed, the notion of a lasting priesthood is even notably amplified, and it is against this background that 7:16 must be understood. The predication "power of an indestructible life" corresponds with the refrain that reverberates throughout this latter part of the chapter: σὺ ἱερεὺς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (7:17, 21) and describes the (superior) *nature* of Christ's priesthood.²⁰ The expression is certainly not meant to communicate the means of atonement. Heb 7:25b makes clear that at this point the author's concern is not with Christ's decisive entry into the heavenly sanctuary (πάντοτε ζῶν εἰς τὸ ἐντυγχάνειν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν bespeaks an ongoing intercession at the present time). It is important to notice that Christ's atoning death (see 7:27) does not come into play here until 7:26-28. The immediate context of 7:16 does not tally with 9:14 and should caution us from assuming a connection as close as many interpreters would have it.²¹

20. This idea is in fact already anticipated in the words of 6:20: (Ἰησοῦς) ἀρχιερεὺς γενόμενος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

21. Compare Wilson's reasoning on this point: "the 'indestructible life' is most naturally understood as the life which the risen Jesus *now* possesses" (*Hebrews*, 155). However, while the emphasis is surely on the life that Christ now possesses, I wonder whether we can preclude the possibility of an application to Christ's life prior to his exaltation. After all, Christ's death has cultic significance—that is, he offered himself in accord with his high priestly appointment: he already *was* a priest after the order of Melchizedek when he approached God (and in fact he *had* to be to gain access into the heavenly realm; on this point see Ulrich Luck, "Himmlisches und Irdisches Geschehen im Hebräerbrief," *NovT* 6 [1963] 192-215, 211; Pace Westcott, who argues: "the offering upon the cross was a high-priestly act, though Christ did not become 'high priest after the order of Melchizedek,' that is, royal high priest till the Ascension" [*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 199]; I do not know where Westcott gets this twofold distinction in regard to Christ's high priesthood in the epistle [cf. 1:6, indicating that Christ had royal status before his ascension; also: 2:17 makes it very difficult to drive a wedge between Christ's high priesthood and his earthly life). It is therefore difficult to deny him the quality of having "indestructible life" at that junction. The point here is that the context simply

In determining the precise meaning of διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου, we should also keep in mind how theologically fundamental it is for the author to depict the Christ event as a salvific intervention in which God himself acted: God appointed the Son as high priest (5:4-6), perfected the Son through suffering (2:10; 5:8-9), brought him up from the dead (13:20) and finally confirmed his priesthood εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (7:20-25). Correspondingly, "eternal Spirit" in 9:14 is likely to denote God's Spirit.²² This, of course, does not carry with it trinitarian implications,²³ since elsewhere the author's pneumatology falls short of suggesting a trinitarian theology as we know it from later Christian documents.

The adjective αἰώνιος lends an eschatological nuance to the activity of πνεῦμα. Christ's becoming the αἴτιος σωτηρίας αἰωνίου (see 5:9) involved a decisive intervention of the heavenly realities, one that is inherently pertinent to the "powers of the world to come" (see 6:5). The word can thus be seen to set up a contrast with the world of σάρξ (see δικαιώματα σαρκός, 9:10; σαρκός καθαρότης, 9:13),²⁴ which belongs to the old and imperfect order.²⁵ In attempting to throw this concept into relief, some commentators have even gone so far as to translate the phrase in question with "through the eschatological Spirit."²⁶ In any event, 9:14 is remarkable, because it is the only verse

does not deal with his once-for-all atonement. This is why 7:16 is not as strong a parallel to 9:14 as has been suggested.

22. Cf. Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1990) 139-40; Paul Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 457; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (Dallas: Word, 1991) 240; Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 217; Hans-F. Weiss, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991) 473; Harald Hegermann, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1988) 180; David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the "Epistle to the Hebrews"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 138.

23. This interpretation goes back to patristic exegesis (cf. McGrath, *Through the Eternal Spirit*, 17-22). McGrath argues for it (pp. 90-103; cf. also Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, 314).

24. Cf. Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997) 130.

25. Grässer interprets the phrase "through eternal Spirit" to mean "through the heavenly sphere." In his view, the genitive has a locative force: "Jesu Selbstopfer vollzog sich nicht im Bereich der σάρξ, sondern des πνεῦμα, es hat himmlischen, nicht irdischen Charakter" (*An die Hebräer [Hebr 7:1-10:18]*, 159). But he seems to overlook that for the author of the epistle the said contrast also entails a comparison between the levitical dispensation and the "time of (eschatological) reconstruction" (9:10). Moreover, his case would be stronger if the text would involve the use of ἐν, which seems more suited to conveying the idea of "sphere." Robert H. Smith's analysis agrees with Grässer's (cf. *Hebrews* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984] 112).

26. So Werner Bieder: "Man wird gerade in diesem Zusammenhang die Anregung von W. Michaelis positiv aufnehmen können, nach der αἰώνιος nicht «ewig», sondern mit «eschatologisch» übersetzt werden sollte. Man hatte zu warten, bis die eschatologische Zeit, der «Endpunkt dieser Tage» (1, 2), kam Da wurde die Darbringung von

in the NT that affirms the Spirit's involvement in the atonement.²⁷ As we shall see, the reason why Hebrews features such a reference may be wrapped up in the epistle's preoccupation with priestly matters.

Some scholars who read διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου as a reference to the Holy Spirit have seen an allusion to the Isaianic servant of Yahweh theme in the language of 9:14.²⁸ Bruce affords the most eloquent defense of this view:

Behind our author's thinking lies the portrayal of the Isaianic Servant of the Lord, who yields up his life to God as a guilt offering for many, bearing their sin and procuring their justification. When this Servant is introduced for the first time, God says: "I have put my Spirit upon him" (Isa 42:1).²⁹ It is in the power of the Divine Spirit, accordingly, that the Servant . . . accepts death for the transgression of his people,

Opfern und Gaben im Sinn der alttestamentlichen Kultreligion außer Kraft gesetzt und trat die neue Hingabe des Christus «durch den eschatologischen Geist» in Funktion" ("Pneumatologische Aspekte im Hebräerbrief," Neues Testament und Geschichte [ed. H. Baltensweiler and B. Reicke; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1972] 251-60, esp. 251).

27. It is true that Rom 1:4 connects the πνεύμα ἁγιωσύνης with Christ's resurrection, but the text does not suggest an engagement in the atonement. See Hegermann, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, 180. Another issue is open to question (and it is surprising that no one has raised it so far), namely, whether the phrase of our present interest qualifies the grammatical subject ([Χριστὸς] ὃς . . . προσήνεγκεν—that is, Christ as high priest) or the grammatical object (ἑαυτὸν . . . ἄμωμον—that is, Christ in his function as spotless sacrifice [the term ἄμωμον is reminiscent of the Mosaic prescriptions for sacrificial rituals; the LXX uses the word to translate Heb. מִן־מַעֲרָה, "absence of defects," Exod 29:1; Lev 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6, 9; 4:3, 14, 23, 28, 32, etc.]) or even both. In the first case ("through eternal Spirit" qualifying the grammatical subject), the reference would be to the Spirit sustaining Christ in his priestly task, while the alternative would suggest that the operation of πνεῦμα effected the perfection of Christ's self-offering (ἄμωμον). The proximity of διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου to the subject (ὃς as opposed to ἄμωμον διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου) tends to favor the former option. Χριστὸς . . . προσήνεγκεν squares with Χριστὸς . . . εἰσῆλθεν (9:11-12) and develops the preceding assertion: Christ . . . *entered* (and) Christ . . . *offered*. Since the διὰ-phrases in 9:11-12 denote the concomitant circumstances (tent, blood) of his (high priestly) entry, an analogous reading of "through eternal Spirit" seems to obtain for Christ's (high priestly) act of sacrificing. Heb 9:11-14 thus defines Christ's unique office in terms of three main ideas: *where* he did officiate—in the heavenly sanctuary; *what* he did offer—his own blood; *how* he did officiate—through the eternal Spirit.

28. Peterson sees a "likelihood that our writer was influenced in his presentation of Christ by the Isaianic Servant theme" (*Hebrews and Perfection*, 138); see also Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 240; Joachim Gnilka, "Die Erwartung des Messianischen Hohenpriesters in den Schriften von Qumran und im Neuen Testament," *RevQ* 2 (1960) 395-426, 420-21: "Die Hohepriestergestalt des Hebräerbriefes ist eng verknüpft mit dem Bild des deuterocesajanischen *Ebed-Yahweh* . . . Gerade indem Jesus sich opfert und die tiefste Erniedrigung auf sich nimmt, übt er die göttlichste Funktion aus, die man in Israel kennt, nämlich die des hohepriesterlichen Mittlers."

29. See also Isa 11:2; 61:1, see below.

filling the twofold role of priest and victim, as Christ does in this epistle.³⁰

Once we acknowledge "through eternal Spirit" to be a reference to the Spirit of God, it is difficult to deny our text's conveying some notion of a divine empowerment for Christ's critical self-sacrifice. But it is not at all certain that Isaiah's Servant of Yahweh was "behind our writer's thinking" here.³¹ While the three passages that mention the Spirit in connection with the Servant (Isa 11:2; 42:1; 61:1) do in fact affirm that the Spirit functions as a source of empowerment for the Servant, it is paramount to take a closer look at what exactly this notion entails, in order to draw conclusions with respect to authorial intention in 9:14.

Both in Isa 11:1-5 and in 42:1-4 the prophet develops an imagery of a coming savior figure that will inaugurate an era of blessing. Again, both texts affirm that he will establish peace and justice in the land/earth, that he will (successfully) plead the case of the underprivileged of the people and judge the "wicked" (see 11:3-4; 42:3-4). In regard to the man's equipment for this lofty task, both passages foretell his being aided by the Spirit (11:2; 42:1, 4).³² There can be no doubt that these verses envision the savior figure as a future king. In fact, 11:1 informs us that Isaiah saw this deliverer as a "shoot" from the Davidic line. Royal ideology, however, is not the theme that governs Hebrews 9: here it is Christ's sacerdotal appointment that is at stake, and the kingship motif is never so much as hinted at.³³ The above-mentioned two texts from Isaiah do not cohere sufficiently with the exclusive (that is, cultic) concern that shapes the content of Hebrews 9 to warrant the supposition that they influenced the author's choice of language in 9:14 to any significant degree. If διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου is to be understood in terms of "Amtscharisma," then the endowment with "eternal Spirit" should—if viable—better be related to the high priest's office. The possibility of a more precise point

30. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 217.

31. Ellingworth too expresses his misgivings about this idea but prefers not to elaborate on the issue (cf. *Commentary on Hebrews*, 457).

32. Notice that *1 En.* 49:3 draws from Isa 11:2 in its depiction of the Messiah as one possessing the "Spirit of wisdom." On this text, see Matthew Black (ed.), *The Book of Enoch* (Leiden: Brill, 1985) 212-13. *The Psalms of Solomon* portray the Messiah in very similar terms (cf. *Pss. Sol.* 17:37; 18:7); see Robert P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 71-73.

33. To be sure, the most emphatically used OT text, namely Psalm 110, combines both royal as well as priestly motifs (cf. 110:1-3, 4). The author of Hebrews would thus have seen these two notions united in the person of Christ. Nonetheless, the royal motif, briefly broached in 1:8, 13, and 2:7-9, disappears from the letter after chap. 2 (except for another passing remark about Christ's enthronement in 12:2).

of reference that links the Spirit's agency to high priestly duties should thus be considered.³⁴

An appeal to Isa 61:1-3 also lacks specificity to eliminate serious doubts about whether this text provided the scriptural model for the author of Hebrews. The "Spirit of the Lord" (πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ' ἐμέ, LXX 61:1a) is presented as an anointing on Yahweh's Servant to "proclaim good tidings" (61:1b), the "year of release," and the "day of vengeance" (Isa 61:2). Πνεῦμα as the anointing of Yahweh's herald invites us to understand this reference to the Spirit in terms of the prophetic Spirit³⁵ and has little or nothing in common with the discourse in Hebrews 9. But if "empowerment by the Holy Spirit" is the only apparent common denominator between this passage (not to mention the other pertinent passages from Isaiah) and Heb 9:14, then it is appropriate to search for possible alternative explanations for the intriguing expression διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου in a text that hinges on the cultic, intermediary role of Christ as high priest.

2. THE SPIRIT AND THE OFFICE OF THE HIGH PRIEST IN JEWISH LITERATURE

Late biblical texts (2 Chr 20:14; 24:20; cf. also Sir 45:17; *L. Patr.* 22:2; 23:1-2) connect πνεῦμα with bearers of the high priest's office. In these cases, however, it is the prophetic Spirit that is in view,³⁶ and this type of spontaneous oracular activity cannot be said to form the nucleus of the high priest's cultic duties (that is, the high priest's foremost function never was that of a *prophet*).³⁷ By the same token, prophets were often attached to the temple and delivered their messages in its

34. Of course, one could argue that the author took the liberty of innovating messianic pneumatology by applying the concept of Spirit-endowment to Christ as high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Gnllka propounded this view and saw a "wesentliche Umprägung der jüdischen Erwartung" in regard to the concept of the Servant of the Yahweh ("Die Erwartung des Messianischen Hohenpriesters," 420; cf. also 421). Yet, again, if it can be shown that there was a precedent for connecting the Spirit with the office of the high priest, it seems more plausible that the author put an already existing tradition to work.

35. Cf. Robert N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 239.

36. See 2 Chr 20:14-15: καὶ τῷ Οἰσηλ . . . τοῦ Λευίτου ἀπὸ τῶν υἱῶν Ασαφ, ἐφένετο ἐπ' αὐτὸν πνεῦμα κυρίου . . . , καὶ εἶπεν . . . , τὰδε λέγει κύριος. The latter expression, of course, is a typical prophetic idiom (Heb. כְּבֹד־יְהוָה; cf. Isa 7:7; 10:24; 44:2; Jer 2:2, 5; 13:1, 9, 12, 13; Ezek 3:11, 27; 6:3, 11, 12; 38:3, etc.). It is also used in 2 Chr 24:20.

37. On the other hand, the high priests *did* fulfill a consultant role and functioned as instructors in matters that concerned the law (cf. Num 27:21; Deut 33:8, 10; Neh 8:7). The elusive question as to what exactly the ephod and the urim and thummim were, or how they were used, need not detain us here.

precincts (see Amos 7:10-17; Jer 7:1-8:3; 36:4-8), but they did not do so as "cult functionaries."³⁸

Nevertheless, there are a number of documents that suggest a link between possession of the Holy Spirit and the office of the high priest, and it is rather surprising that these have not been adduced by scholars who have contemplated the language of Heb 9:14.

To begin with, it is of paramount importance to bear in mind that holiness was the distinguishing characteristic of the high priest('s office). Access to the sacred domain required a corresponding degree of holiness on the part of the officiant, "because Yahweh's very presence, his 'Shekinah; rested on the holy of holies, and spread out with a diminishing intensity in concentric rings from there."³⁹ Among the priests who were serving in and around the sanctuary, the high priest was considered (or, again, required) to possess an elevated degree of holiness,⁴⁰ since of all the cultic functionaries only he was permitted to penetrate the inner compartment of the sanctuary on the day of atonement (Lev 16:2ff.). In a real sense, therefore, the high priest was the key link between the divine and the human spheres, and this mediatory function,⁴¹ which was based on atoning sacrifice, came to be viewed (so it appears) as involving the sanctifying and empowering assistance of the divine Spirit. Heb 9:14 arguably draws on this idea, which, by the first century, could already have been well known, if not traditional.

In *T. Levi* 18 (ca. 250-100 BC)⁴² the characterization of the eschatological high priest, likely to have been modeled after the Maccabean royal high priests,⁴³ also involves the bestowal of the "Spirit of sanctification" (18:6-7):

The heavens will be opened, and from the temple of glory sanctification will come upon him, with a fatherly voice, as from Abraham to Isaac. And the glory of the Most High shall burst forth upon him.

38. Cf. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville: John Knox, 1996) 223; cf. also Menahem Haran, "From Early to Classical Prophecy: Continuity and Change," *VT* 27 (1977) 385-97, 386-88.

39. Cf. John M. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 15.

40. A specially rapturous celebration of the high priest's exceptional status is found in Sir 50:1-15 (here: Simon, son of Onias).

41. Cf. William Horbury, "The Aaronic Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *JSNT* 19 (1983) 43-71, 45.

42. On the question of dating, see Robert A. Stewart, "The Sinless High Priest," *NTS* 14 (1967-68) 126-35, 127-28.

43. Cf. Howard C. Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol. 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1983) 794 n. 18a. Kee also affirms Psalm 110 as providing the paradigm for the portrayal of the high priest.

And the Spirit of understanding and sanctification shall rest upon him.⁴⁴

The "glory of the Most High" depicts the Shekinah and is juxtaposed with the "Spirit of understanding and sanctification." The sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit is thus a prerequisite for meeting the sacral qualification for the office (that being possession of exceptional holiness as the high priest in nearing the very presence of God).

The Qumran community also seemed to have been aware of this concept. It is almost certain that the Dead Sea sect consisted of penitents who had repudiated the (allegedly) corrupt religious elite and its repugnant practices (perhaps including repressive measures against the sectarians) at the Jerusalem temple, in order to start a counter-movement that defined itself as the new, or rather, "real (albeit symbolic) temple" (see 1QS 8:5-8; 9:3-6; CD 3:18-4:10, the covenanters are called the "holy place") with rival priests (see 1QS 2:19-22; 6:4-8).⁴⁵ Among the "sons of Zadok" (see 4Q 174 3:17), as the sectarians preferred to call themselves, the Teacher of Righteousness was regarded as high priest of the desert community (see 4QpPs 37 3:5).⁴⁶ He stood in direct opposition to the community's public enemy number one, the "Wicked Priest," high priest of the established cult at Jerusalem (see 1QpHab 7:8). The main cultic role of the Teacher (as well as the whole *yahad*) was to make atonement for the Jewish nation (see 1QS 5:1-7), a function that traditionally was connected with the temple cultus at Jerusalem.⁴⁷ The notion of sacrifice, of course, was reinterpreted, in that the means of atonement here was not blood but intercessory prayer and holiness (see 1QS 10:3ff.). As 1QH frg. 2 1:13 indicates, the Holy Spirit was considered to be intimately involved in

44. Because of the affinities with the synoptic accounts of Jesus' baptism (cf. Matt 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11), this portion of the text could represent an early Christian interpolation. Even if we concede this, the text demonstrates that the correlation of Spirit and the high priest's office was a concept known not only to the author of Hebrews.

45. Cf. Bertil Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament: A Comparative Study in the Temple Symbolism of the Qumran Texts and the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) 7-19; John Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Reappraisal* (New York: Penguin, 1990) 104. The community did not see itself as a permanent replacement for the temple service at Jerusalem. Rather, in the "new age," it was held, the temple cult would be reestablished (although it is not clear whether the sectarians expected the restoration of the *physical* as opposed to a spiritual one; see Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament*, 121).

46. See the pesher commentary on Ps 37:23-24: "This refers to the priest, the Teacher of R[ighteousness, whom] God [ch]ose to be his servant." The title "priest" was not transferred to all members of the community. Qumran retained a hierarchical priestly order analogous to the arrangement at the Jerusalem temple (cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Cultic Language in Qumran and the NT," *CBQ* [1976] 159-77, 164).

47. Cf. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*, 37.

the atonement for sin: "You have spread out your [Holly [Spirit], atoning for guilt." Although the text is defective at this point, the reference is certainly to the Holy Spirit, since the words can be complemented with the help of the parallel expression, "You have spread out [your Holy] Spirit over the dust" (1QH frg. 21:9). Moreover, the Teacher of Righteousness is conscious of the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit ("I thank you, O Lord, for you have sustained me with your strength, and your Holy Spirit you have spread out over me so that I will not falter" [1QH 15:6-7]),⁴⁸ particularly in his intercessory function: "I will find the proper reply, prostrating myself . . . , strengthening myself by [your] H[oly] Spirit, clinging to the truth of your covenant. . . . I entreat you by that Spirit which you have given [me]" (1QH 8:15-16, 20).⁴⁹ Therefore, although the evidence is somewhat circumstantial (as it is for all the peculiarities of the Qumran atonement theology), it is safe to conclude that the Teacher of Righteousness believed the Holy Spirit to sustain him in his priestly duties, besides his function as the Spirit-inspired interpreter of Scripture.

Josephus viewed πνεῦμα as the dispenser of esoteric wisdom and the source of prophecy.⁵⁰ It is interesting that, in the historian's opinion, one of the reasons why Yahweh chose Aaron to minister in the high priestly office was that he possessed the gift of prophecy (see *Ant.* 3.192: "Aaron was, of them all, the most deserving of this honor, διὰ τε τὸ γένος καὶ τὴν προφητείαν"). Now, there is no need to conclude that Josephus believed that all high priests were also prophets, but this remark does indicate that the man who occupied this most eminent position among the Israelites had to be—in his mind—a man of the Spirit. Josephus furthermore records how the presence of God was specially manifest in the execution of the high priest's sacrificial duties in the form of a "bright ray" (ἀύγη φαεινομένη) emanating from the priest's breastplate (see *Ant.* 3.215).⁵¹ And insofar as he regarded

48. Since the psalmist voices affirmations that indubitably identify him as the leader of the community, researchers have concluded that the bulk of the material in the *Thanksgiving Scroll* was written by the Teacher of Righteousness. On this point, see Martin G. Abegg, "Thanksgiving Psalms (The Thanksgiving Scroll)," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (ed. M. Wise, M. G. Abegg, and E. Cook; San Francisco: Harper, 1996) 84-86.

49. The Spirit is also said to be responsible for the psalmist's personal transformation: "As for me, your servant, you have favored me with the Spirit of understanding . . . to abhor every unjust way. So I love you freely and with all [my] heart [I bless you]" (1QH 6:25-26).

50. Cf. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology*, 58-61.

51. Josephus concludes his discourse on the priesthood of Aaron with the following words: "This breastplate . . . left off shining two hundred years before I composed this book, God having been displeased at the transgressions of his laws" (*Ant.* 3.218). Could this idea be linked to the removal of the Spirit from Israel because of the nation's

the bestowal of the divine Spirit as part of the sanctuary's "inventory" (see Solomon's prayer: πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἵκετεύω καὶ μοῖράν τινα τοῦ σου πνεύματος εἰς τὸν ναὸν ἀποικίσαι, "send some portion of your Spirit to dwell in the temple," *Ant.* 8.114),⁵² the office of the high priest too, whose function was linked to his attachment to the sanctuary, seemed to have been viewed as being associated with the Spirit.

Philo's contribution to the subject is difficult to assess, because his treatment of the priesthood is pregnant with allegorical expositions. Although he acknowledges the validity of the ordinary priesthood of the levitical order, he is keen on divulging the symbolical significance of the priesthood.⁵³ Thus, Philo sees the high priest's entering the inner sanctuary as a symbol of the *logos* (see *Somn.* 1.215-17). Like the high priest, the *logos* serves a mediatory purpose, in that it is the point of contact between the divine and the human sphere.⁵⁴ On the literal level, Philo underscores the officiant's exceptional purity and the lofty, absolutely unique position held by the high priest (see *Spec. Leg.* 1.113-14, 116). He never actually states that the high priest is assisted in his cultic function (particularly on the day of atonement) by the divine Spirit, but the following references strongly suggest that he assumed this. In *Gig.* 53-55 Philo elaborates on Moses' superior disposition, and although he (again) allegorizes the account, he explicitly claims that the πνεῦμα θεῖον rested on him when he came to God in worship:

As, therefore, among men in general, that is to say, among those who propose to themselves many objects in life, the divine Spirit does not remain (οὐ καταμένει τὸ θεῖον πνεῦμα), . . . but it remains among one species of men alone (μόνῳ δὲ ἀνθρώπων εἶδει ἐνὶ παραγίνεται), namely, among those who, having put off all the things of creation, . . . come to God in their unconcealed and naked minds. Thus also Moses, having fixed his tent . . . outside of all the corporeal army, that is to say, having established his mind so that it should not move, begins to worship God, and having entered into the darkness, . . . remains there, performing the most sacred mysteries; . . . therefore the divine Spirit is always standing by him, conducting him in every right way (τούτῳ μὲν οὖν τὸ θεῖον ἀεὶ παρίσταται πνεῦμα πάσης

sins (on the removal of the Spirit, see Peter Schäfer, *Die Vorstellung vom Heiligen Geist in der Rabbinischen Literatur* [Munich: Kösel, 1972] 89-111)? The language is suggestive! On the shining breastplate see William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987) 93 note f.

52. On this text, see Ernest Best, "The Use and Non-use of Pneuma by Josephus," *NovT* 3 (1959) 218-25.

53. Cf. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*, 66.

54. Cf. Marie E. Isaacs, *Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992) 196.

ὀρθῆς ἀφηγούμενον ὁδοῦ): but from other men, . . . , it very soon separates itself.

Philo calls those who reach this blissful state of worshipful contemplation in the divine presence "men of God." What is of interest to us is that he knows of only two kinds of such people (*Gig.* 61):

Lastly, those who are men of God are priests and prophets (θεοῦ δὲ ἄνθρωποι ἱερεῖς καὶ προφήται, who have not thought fit to mix themselves up in the constitutions of this world, . . . but who, having raised themselves above all the objects of the mere outward senses, have departed and fixed their views on that world which is perceptible only by the intellect, . . . being inscribed in the state of incorruptible incorporeal ideas.

It seems all but inevitable to conclude that Philo regarded the high priest (and maybe even the subordinate priests),⁵⁵ who had renounced worldly matters and approached God in his critical function as mediator, as being Spirit possessed. Philo also saw the bestowal of πνεῦμα as the defining moment in the (far less prestigious) office of the seventy elders. He argues that the Spirit came upon them "for the sake of making them differ from, and be superior to the rest of the Israelites, who could not possibly be elders in real truth (ὅτι οὐδε πρεσβυτέροις πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἔνεστι γενέσθαι, unless they had partaken of that all-wise Spirit (μὴ μεταλαβούσι τοῦ πανσόφου πνεύματος ἐκείνου)" (*Gig.* 24). Since, therefore, eldership was connected with the presence of the Spirit, it is plausible to presume that Philo viewed the unction of the divine Spirit as prerequisite for the office of the high priest.

If the above references fail to make the connection between the Spirit and the high priesthood *explicit* (though it is certainly *implicit*), the rabbinic literature abounds with statements that link the Spirit to the said office.⁵⁶ In his 1972 landmark monograph on pneumatology in the rabbinic literature Peter Schäfer observed that

Es ist nicht zu bezweifeln, daß nach rabbinischer Auffassung nicht nur der Prophet im üblichen Sinne, sondern auch der Hohepriester kraft seines Amtes bzw. bestimmter Funktionen seines Amtes mit dem hl. Geist begabt ist. Der Hohepriester darf als einziger das

55. The case is difficult to judge, because Philo "is not particularly careful in his use of ὁ ἱερεὺς as distinguished from ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς. Many times when the high priest is being referred to, the mention will be of ὁ ἱερεὺς" (cf. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*, 65).

56. The antiquity of these rabbinic traditions (texts see below) is indisputable; that is, as the above-cited corroborating evidence shows, they have their origin in the pre-Christian era. On the issue of comparative rabbinic studies and the question of assessing the material with a view to biblical interpretation, see Renee Bloch, "Methodological Note for the Study of Rabbinic Literature," *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice* (ed. W. S. Green; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978) 51-75.

Allerheiligste betreten und empfängt nicht selten im Heiligtum bestimmte Offenbarungen.⁵⁷

For the rabbis, the high priest's investiture with the Holy Spirit followed from the fact that the sanctuary as the locale of the priest's activity was the "Ort des hl. Geistes."⁵⁸ This form of "Amtscharisma" comes to expression in *b. Ber.* 31b (1 Sam 1:15):

And Hannah answered and said, "No my lord." Said Ulla, and some say R. Yose b. R. Hanina, "She said to him, 'You are not a lord in this matter, and the Holy Spirit does not rest on you (לֹא אֲדוֹן אַתָּה בְּדַבַּר זֶה) (ולֹא רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ שׁוֹרֵה עֲלֶיךָ), that you should suspect me of doing such a thing. "' There are those who say that this is what she said to him: "You are not a lord. The Shekinah and the Holy Spirit are not with you (לֹא אֲדוֹן אַתָּה לֹא אִיכָּא שְׂכִינָה וְרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ גַּבְךָ), for you have judged me without charity and did not judge me charitably."

Eli's harsh treatment of Hannah fell short of the behavioral standards for a high priest, and, consequently, the presence of God is said to have left him in this case. The language clearly shows that the Holy Spirit was understood to be intimately connected with the sacerdotal office. The same is true for *b. Yoma* 73b, which counsels that guidance is not to be sought from a high priest "who does not speak through the Holy Spirit and on whom the Shekinah does not rest." This advice assumes some sort of negligence or disloyalty on the part of the priest, on account of which he is deprived of the presence of God. Such negligence stripped Phinehas of the divine presence when he refused to come to Jephthah's aid in the matter of the incautious oath (so the rabbis thought; see *Gen. Rab.* 60:3; see also *Lev. Rab.* 37:4, stating the same). It is obvious that here too the presence of the Holy Spirit is viewed as the "insignia" of the high priesthood. Accordingly, a tradition recorded in *Lev. Rab.* 11:6 claims that the שְׂכִינָה, remained on Aaron after his official initiation.

3. CONCLUSION

All in all, data from a variety of documents allow us to conclude tentatively that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews could have

57. Schäfer, *Die Vorstellung vom Heiligen Geist in der Rabbinischen Literatur*, 135.

58. *Ibid.*, 136. In rabbinic writings the Shekinah is often used as a synonym for the Holy Spirit and vice versa; this clause, "the Shekinah departed from David" (*t. Yoma* 22b), is certainly a reference to the Holy Spirit. It is therefore true to say that the sanctuary was the "place of the Shekinah" as much as it was the "place of the Holy Spirit." I would argue that the concept of the linkage "Spirit-high priesthood" took its cue from the pentateuchal correlation of *רוּחַ* and sanctuary (cf. Exod 29:43, the tabernacle is sanctified by the divine כְּבוֹד; 40:34-38; Lev 16:2, etc.). The high priesthood as the office that was most intimately identified with the sanctum thus came to be viewed as presupposing the presence of the Spirit.

drawn on a (more or less) traditional pneumatological concept that linked the office of the high priest with the Holy Spirit. Διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου thus indicates the Holy Spirit sustained the high priest (here: Christ entering εἰς τὰ ἅγια, 9:12) in the execution of his most critical cultic appointment. The Spirit is called "*eternal Spirit*" to bring out the (extraordinary) eschatological significance of the Spirit's assistance in Christ's once-for-all priestly action ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων (see 9:26). In fact, the agency of the Spirit in Christ's atoning approach becomes part of the "time of reconstruction" (9:10) mentioned earlier in the discourse.

Stewart's inquiry into the notion of the "sinless high priest" has shown that Hebrews' characterization of Christ ("merciful and faithful," 2:17; "able to sympathize in our weaknesses," 4:15; "able to bear reasonably with the ignorant," 5:2, etc.) tallies with Jewish literature concerning the moral excellence associated with the high priesthood.⁵⁹ We may add to this (provided the foregone conclusion is correct) the letter's linking of Christ's sacerdotal occupation with the Holy Spirit, for this idea too seems to harmonize with respective Jewish sources.

59. Cf. Stewart, "The Sinless High Priest," 126-35; cf. also Jerome Smith, *A Priest For Ever* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1969) 83-127; Horbury, "The Aaronic Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews," 43-71. Horbury expands on Stewart's work. Scholer's section on extrabiblical material on the subject is also helpful and rather thorough (*Proleptic Priests*, 13-81).