

SOCIAL IDENTITY IN HEBREWS AND THE AKAN COMMUNITY OF GHANA

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)

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Faculty of Theology
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April 2017

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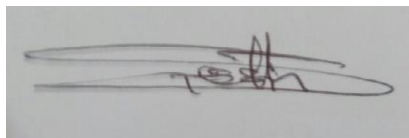
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17th November 2016

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to God for granting me the grace and good frame of being that enabled me to accomplish this study. I owe special gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Ernest van Eck for his enormous friendly and welcoming attitude in guidance, and for his diligent and prompt responses to my work and inquiries. Prof. van Eck is the best blessing I found in my PhD study. I should also be grateful to Trinity Theological Seminary, particularly to the President, Rev. Prof. J.O.Y. Mante, for the support in my trips to Pretoria and in the payment of fees. Very Rev. Prof. J.D.K. Ekem deserves a special mention for his interest in my work, his encouragement, and for taking time to read portions of my work and offering valuable suggestions. I should also express special thanks to Prof. Emeritus J.H. Kwabena Nketia and Prof Florence A. Dolphyne for their valuable contribution to my work in the area of information on Akan culture. Rev. Patrick Manteaw also deserves special mention for sharing some important experience needed for the study. In a similar vein, Rev. Martin Obeing, Mr. Reymond Agbanato and Joseph Adiok deserve gratitude for information they provided on issues about their ethnic groups. I also thank all colleagues, friends, students and family members who showed interest in my PhD studies and urged me on in various ways. Reserved for special emphasis is my gratitude to Mavis, my dear wife. I cannot thank Mavis enough for her loving support, understanding and encouragement. She has indeed been a strong pillar and support of my life and work for which I remain eternally grateful.

Summary

'Social identity in Hebrews and Akan Community of Ghana' is a social-scientific study of Hebrews. It explores how the warning passages of Hebrews can be understood in the light of social identity in both first-century Mediterranean society and Akan society of Ghana. To achieve this, the argument in the warning passages are examined by means of theories on social identity, ethnicity and personality of the Mediterranean society while relying on the data of the text of Hebrews for information on the social situation being addressed. The summary of findings is then examined through the lens of Akan concept of social identity for comparative purposes.

The study involves definition and description of social-scientific criticism and its use of theories and models for biblical interpretation. It assesses the strength and weaknesses of the approach and how to mitigate its weaknesses. It also delineates the socio-cultural context of Hebrews to provide a background against which Hebrews should be understood. The Akan people of Ghana, and some of their relevant socio-cultural issues, are also given attention. A discussion of theories on ethnicity, ingroup and intergroup behaviour, as well as personality in the Mediterranean society comes with outlines of their relevant aspects for the study of Hebrews. These theories are applied to the study of the warning passages, after Hebrews 1 has been discussed in the light of social identity as the introduction to the study that sets the tone for the warning passages. A discussion of social identity in the Akan society is undertaken, and later becomes a lens for looking at the summary of social identity issues that emerged from the application to the warning passages the theories of ethnicity, ingroup/intergroup behaviour, and personality in the Mediterranean society. In the end, it was realised that the social institutions and scripts of both the Mediterranean and Akan societies offer similar perspectives for understanding the warning passages. The few differences that were seen had to do with some details about the related social institutions and scripts, but these differences did not make any difference in the way the broader social institutions and scripts of both societies give meaning to the warning passages. The study established that the author found the social institutions and scripts in ethnicity,

ingroup and intergroup behaviour and personality of the Mediterranean world appropriate ways of making his appeal to his audience for the desired responses to God and the Christian group. It further established that it is possible to understand the appeal of the author of Hebrews to his audience entirely in the light of social identity in the Akan society of Ghana. Such an Akan reading of Hebrews is possible only while holding the distinctively Jewish and Christian elements introduced into the author's arguments in one hand, and the social situation that necessitated the writing of Hebrews in the other hand.

Chapter 1

Background and introduction to the study

This introductory chapter gives the background to the study. It explains the conceptual framework and establishes the research gap after a review of relevant literature. It ends with the statement of the methodology and the structure of the study.

1.1 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The letter to the Hebrews (hereafter referred to simply as Hebrews) is generally accepted as a difficult book to understand in the New Testament canon. The ambiguity surrounding its author and audience creates difficulties for many scholars. The questions of the situation being addressed in Hebrews, the purpose and how the author sought to achieve this purpose are the subjects of many scholarly discussions which are all inseparably bound to the identity of the audience. Traditionally, the author's intensive use of examples from the Jewish scriptures and religious tradition has given the impression that the author's rhetoric was against the Jewish religion. This was built on the belief that the purpose of Hebrews was to stem the tendency of some Jewish Christians to return to the Jewish religion. Three important questions on the purpose of Hebrews are bound to the identity of the audience: 1) Does the author's extensive use of the Jewish scriptures and religious traditions indicate that the author was trying to work against the pull of his audience back to Judaism? 2) Was his use symbolic, such that it implicitly has rhetoric against the pull of other competing groups from which the believers had previously come? 3) In what sense is the author working against attempts by the group(s) concerned to pull back the believers from the Christian group?

A shift from the traditional view that Hebrews was addressed to a group of Jewish Christians has been observed in biblical scholarship. The growing conviction now is that Hebrews was addressed to a mixed group of Jewish and non-Jewish Christians in an urban Graeco-Roman city. Ellingworth (1993), Ekem (2008), Schenk (2003), and DeSilva (2012) are among scholars who represent the view of mixed ethnic audience.

With this development comes the realisation that some social issues facing the readers concerned both Jewish and non-Jewish readers. In all the attempts that have been made in respect of this development, the application of social-scientific criticism to the study of Hebrews has yielded the most revealing results in so far as social identity issues are concerned. Social-scientific criticism brings to light not just the *Sitz im Leben* of Hebrews as the traditional historical critical methods yielded. Of the methods that fall under historical criticism (source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism), form criticism was the one that sought to give the historical background information close to the social context of the text. However, as has been observed by Mark Allan Powell (2009:56), its focus has been the description of the setting in the life of the church in which the material, according to its nature, is likely to have been used. At best, the historical critical process, as Matthew J. Marohl (2008) has observed, deals with differentiation of groups by their presumed unique characteristics. Social-scientific criticism, however, does something more; it brings to bear on the interpretation of the text the very social institutions, interactions and scripts that both gave rise to the text and give meaning to it. Since social-scientific criticism applies a variety of theories and models from the social sciences for the interpretation of ancient texts like Scripture, a variety of opportunities exist for the interpretation of a particular biblical text. It is within such a development and realisation that the current study is being conducted with a view to looking at Hebrews from other perspectives of social identity in addition to what others have done.

Social identity in Hebrews and Akan society of Ghana is therefore a study that seeks to achieve two major objectives. While it seeks to explore how social identity in ancient Mediterranean society provides a perspective for the interpretation of the work of Hebrews, it also endeavours to establish how the concept of social identity in the Akan society can give meaning to the same text.

1.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study supports the conviction that the social context of the audience of Hebrews provides a credible way of interpreting Hebrews. Though his arguments are theological,

the author was primarily dealing with a social issue – namely, the tendency of his readers to leave the Christian group as well as his concerns and efforts to stem that tendency which held disastrous social consequences for the Christian group. It is therefore a viable option to attempt an understanding of Hebrews from the perspectives of the social institutions, interactions and scripts of the time and context of the audience. Failure to do this will reckon the audience and their situation as far removed from the experiences of human existence. This however, is not to say that Hebrews was written as a social identity piece of work, for instance. Rather, it is to assert that the social experiences of the audience provide the framework in which the writer's thoughts are consciously or unconsciously articulated. The same social experiences of the audience offer the framework for understanding Hebrews on the part of the audience. As David A. DeSilva maintains,

The author talks so much about the sacred past and the invisible activity in the heavenly realm that we are tempted to forget that he is addressing flesh-and-blood people living somewhere around the Mediterranean basin wrestling with real-life concerns and seeking to come to terms with some very mundane realities in their changing social circumstances, and that he is probably concerned very much with their responses to and within those circumstances.

(DeSilva 2012:xi)

Social-scientific criticism is therefore going to be applied to the study of Hebrews in the conviction that the social experiences of the readers hold important perspective from which one could understand Hebrews.

1.3 THE RESEARCH GAP

Social-scientific criticism is a relatively new and evolving approach to biblical exegesis. It involves the use of models and theories from the social sciences for the study of biblical texts. This approach has so far not seen much application to the interpretation of the letter to the Hebrews. Among the few that have been done, some have employed theories in social identity, while others have preferred other theories and models. In order to situate this study in the field of Hebrews and social-scientific criticism, a review of works done so far is undertaken. The review will be presented in three parts. The first will comprise works done with interest in social identity of the audience without explicit application of social-scientific theories. The second will deal with those that do employ

social-scientific theories in their treatment of Hebrews. The final part reviews works that do not necessarily focus on Akan concept of social identity, but have elements that can be used complementarily with others for constructing social identity in Akan.

Scholars who have dealt with the identity of the audience of Hebrews without the explicit application of social-scientific theories include Hans-Josef Klauck, David Moffitt and Ole Jacob Filtvedt. The identity of the readers of Hebrews as seen by Klauck (2006) is defined by the author's concern for realising the inherent moral values of his group in a life consistent with those values. His aim was to elucidate the relationship between ethics, ethos, and identity in Hebrews. It is from shared identity in participation and solidarity expressed through the language of family relationships, solidarity within the community, and transcendent solidarity with the heavenly that Klauck defines the identity of the audience. Hebrews' ethics, for him, is steeped in the distinction between good and evil with no room for the 'indifferent' classified by Sextus Empiricus as the third category of ethics. His ethics neither makes room for the suspension of judgement favoured by the sceptic philosopher as a perfect state of mental rest. Hebrews' framework, for Klauck, is one in which reality is seen in a sphere other than the earthly, as in Middle Platonism.

Without denying that the social context of suffering provided the framework for Hebrews' definition of the identity and ethos of the readers, David Moffitt (2014) insists that the author's view of the audience in the light of Jewish apocalypticism and his eschatological outlook provided the main incentive for the readers' identity and ethos presented in Hebrews. Due to this conviction, Moffitt overlooks some important prevailing social scripts with which one could look at the question of identity presented in Hebrews. His focus on Hebrews' presentation of the audience's identity only in terms of their purity as a people ready for the coming new age is due to this perspective.

Ole Jacob Filtvedt (2015) demonstrates how Hebrews portrays the identity of the readers as God's people through the Christ event. He demonstrates that Hebrews should be read as a genuine attempt at situating the audience in an intrinsic relationship

to Israel's heritage, seeing Hebrews' tension between newness and continuity as belonging to a redemptive historical conception.

Though without the application of social identity theories, the works of Klauck, Moffitt and Filtvedt underscore the importance of social identity in Hebrews for academic discussion. Of the authors who have applied social-scientific theories to the study of Hebrews, mention can be made of Steven Muir, David A. DeSilva, who has done a number of works in this respect, and Matthew J. Marohl.

From the perspective of some social-identity theories, Muir (2014) outlines important features of Hebrews that show that the author's rhetoric is not only against the Jewish religion, but also the polytheistic religion and the Roman imperial system. Though briefly outlined as one would expect in the article in question, Muir, nonetheless, applies theories based on three aspects of social identity, namely, group formation, intragroup relations and intergroup relations. He selectively argues that intragroup competition could disturb the unity of the group of the audience at a time of suffering and that the author employs strategies to minimise it. He gives attention to the intergroup issues in which competition was encouraged. Here, he finds Hebrews portraying other groups as inferior to that of the readers. Muir's treatment of social identity in Hebrews focuses mainly on descriptions relating to intragroup and intergroup relations. This focus on intragroup relations within the Christian group and intergroup relations with the Jewish religion, as well as the polytheistic religion and Roman imperial system accounts for the absence of any examples of ethnic descriptions of the audience though Muir observes that the author uses family terms as well in reference to his group. What engages Muir in this article is how the author seeks to draw boundaries for his audience by his rhetoric in the expressions used to describe the Christian group and others. In this treatment of the social identity of the audience, apart from intragroup and intergroup dynamics, many social institutions and scripts that bring insight from the Mediterranean world to bear on our understanding of the social identity of the readers are yet to be explored.

The one whose work takes seriously the social institution, interactions and scripts of the Mediterranean world for appreciating the social identity of the audience is David A. DeSilva (2012). He looks at Hebrews from a social-scientific perspective using theories that speak to strategies used in Hebrews to serve the author's purposes. These models relate to 1) negating social shame which involves honourable examples of despising shame and reinterpretation of experiences of social shame; 2) appeal to God's grace and the need for reciprocal response from the audience in the light of patron-client relationship of the Mediterranean world; and 3) reinforcing group identity and commitment through redefining the court of reputation, and other commitment mechanisms such as sacrifice and investment, renunciation, communion, mortification and transcendence.

DeSilva's earlier work (2000b) applies a socio-rhetorical approach which invites conversations among the disciplines of literary and narrative criticism, rhetorical analysis, intertextual analysis and social-scientific criticism. As the approach suggests, no particular models were chosen for the study of Hebrews. This notwithstanding, the treatment of a number of passages benefit in piecemeal fashion from social-scientific theories and models that throw light on the social and cultural situations that produced the text and give meaning to it.

Before this work, DeSilva (1996) had applied patron-client relationship as a model to his consideration of the subject of apostasy in Hebrews, arguing that the ancient Mediterranean society was a patronal society in which the giving and receiving of benefactions is that practice that constitutes the chief bond of human society.

Matthew J. Marohl (2008) finds social identity theory a useful way of not only identifying the identity of the audience, but also the purpose of Hebrews. He finds this a better approach than the historical-critical process that deals with 'differentiation of groups by their presumed unique characteristics.' Marohl describes the identity of the audience mainly in the light of intergroup competition. This explains why he gives attention to words that describe the audience and their outgroups in 'us' and 'them' terms. Due to

this line of course, Marohl finds no reason to give attention to social scripts associated with ethnicity and personality in the Mediterranean society that speak to the identity of the audience in Hebrews.

Marohl's perspective follows theories of Marco Cinnirella and Stephen Cornell by which he holds that groups create or reinterpret their past stories to create a coherent temporal representation of their social group in which their members are expected to act in a particular way. This leads him to draw some conclusions that can be challenged. Firstly, he sees Hebrews 3:7-4:13 as the only place where Hebrews uses the 'us' and 'them' language of ingroup and outgroup comparison. This cannot be the case, since in Hebrews 10:39 a clear expression is used to the effect of 'us' – 'them' intergroup comparison. There the author declares, '[b]ut we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.' Again, to further strengthen his position that group competition is absent from Hebrews 3:1-6, Marohl overlooks the author's clear statement that Jesus is counted of greater honour than Moses and rather focuses on the statement that Jesus, like Moses, was faithful. He argues that reading group competition into this text makes Moses' faithfulness representative of the faithfulness of the wilderness generation, and the faithfulness of Jesus representative of that of the Christian group. His perspective, however, does not allow him to see in the text the clear appeal of the author to ascribed honour which is a very important social category in social identity of the Mediterranean society. Intergroup comparison does not always have to be between the positive and the negative, but also between the positive and the comparative – that is, for instance, between honour and greater honour, or the powerful and the more powerful, the effective and the more effective. By saying Jesus is counted of greater honour than Moses, Hebrews was speaking to a kind of 'us' and 'them' intergroup comparison which one finds throughout Hebrews between Christ and other figures associated with God's previous speaking (revelation) such as Moses, the angels, the high priest and the prophets. On the basis of these positive-comparative expressions, Hebrews builds the readers social identity that enables him to demand from them more positive response than the recipients of God's previous speaking. This same positive-comparative comparison allows him to tell

his readers to expect much greater punishment for their disobedience. Hebrews' approach is such that all the comparative expressions between Jesus and other figures should be understood in the appropriate social categories that find meaning in the appeals that accompany such comparisons. One agrees with Marohl that in some instances, the author seeks to tell a coherent story in which God's people, in the past and the present as well as the future, are the faithful people. The author, nonetheless, tells the story in a way that brings in many points of positive-comparative comparisons precisely because he wants his audience to appreciate the greater privilege they have in Christ for which reason their greater response of gratitude and faithfulness is required. This greater privilege and responsibility for greater response as well as greater reward or punishment is basically presented with the recipients of God's previous speaking as the objects of comparison throughout Hebrews. Without such positive-comparative comparison, the author would find no basis for his call for the higher response he demands from his audience scattered throughout Hebrew as witnessed in his *qal wahomer* arguments. It should also be argued that in social comparison, the explicit use of 'us' and 'them' language does not need to be present at all times, as Marohl suggests. It is in this sense that Muir (2014) finds Hebrews' rhetoric relating to high priest, temple (tabernacle), sacrifice, as well as kingdom, King and Son of God (used of Christ) as not only against the Jewish religion, but also the polytheistic religion and the Roman imperial system even where no 'us' versus 'them' comparative language is used.

Now, why should another study on social identity in Hebrews apply social-scientific criticism? The justification comes in two ways – conceptual and methodological – both of which are interwoven. In social identity, as held within the Mediterranean society which gave birth to Hebrews, ethnicity and personality are very essential elements. However, none of the studies reviewed treated them as major components of social identity in Hebrews. These studies, as a result, give partial and incidental treatment to aspects of ethnicity and personality in their look at social identity in Hebrews. For this reason, this study explores the related theories on ethnicity and personality for the appreciation of social identity in Hebrews in addition to ingroup behaviour and

intergroup competition. In this way, the various related concepts that emerge in Hebrews can receive adequate attention. Again, the focus on the five warning passages of Hebrews which are chosen to include the immediate arguments within which the warnings make sense removes the arbitrariness that one could be tempted to apply in the selection of passages. The choice of the warning passages is also based on the conviction that, it is in the author's warning that the heart of the author's appeal to the audience is found. For this reason, the relation between the identity of the audience and what they are called upon to do in the warning passages are issues for critical consideration.

Another point of departure for this study is the exploration of the related concepts of social identity within the Akan society of Ghana for the appreciation of the author's appeal to his audience. Will the Akan society offer appropriate concepts with the needed social scripts that give meaning to the author's appeal in much the same way as that of the first-century Mediterranean society? Are the concepts of social identity in the Akan society similar or different from that of the first-century Mediterranean society? These are questions that are yet to be answered for which reason this study is going to be done. The use of this Akan lens for reading Hebrews is a matter of interest and curiosity.

A number of works have been done to various degrees on the Akan person, the motivation for the conduct of the Akan person, and characteristics of Akan clans and family groups. There is, however, virtually no work on the social identity of the Akan which deals with Akan ingroup behaviour and intergroup competition. If anything exist in this respect at all, it is incidental, partial and sketchy or merely related to than on the subject of social identity. Nkansa-Kyeremanteng (2010) mentions qualities that are characteristic of the Akan person as civilised and foremost among those with whom the Akan lives. Nkansa-Kyeremanteng (2010) and Tiekou (2016) note the qualities associated with the various Akan *nton* and clans and how Akans want to be given the right response that identifies them as members of their respective *nton* or clan. Gyekye (1995) speaks of how crucial honour and disgrace are for the consideration of one's

behaviour in the Akan society. He argues that Akan ethics has at its core the pursuit of honour and the avoidance of shame. Some information on the individual and collective selves of the Akan are found in various portions in the works of Gyekye (n.d.), Deng (2008) and Opoku (1977). Battin (2015) mentions some of the things associated with honour, while Rattray (1929) gives indications of some acts people do to wipe away the shame that come upon them. Tiekou (2016) also mentions acts associated with honour and shame. Wingo (2006) discusses the Akan person as one who acts for the promotion of trust, cooperation and responsibility to the community in cultural practices. Sarpong (2002), Appiah (1992), and Opoku (1977) speak of the composition of the Akan person and the influence of each component on the conduct of the person. These components have relevance for the place the Akan occupies in the family, as well as the self they sample in the Akan. Mbiti (1989) writes about the Akan person as one who understands oneself as embedded in one's family or community. All these writings on the Akan person and Akan social and cultural life have important information on the social identity of the Akan which can be complemented with information from oral and practical experiences for a construction of Akan concept of social identity. In spite of this, nothing has been written on social identity within the Akan society.

This study finds it necessary to put together some Akan concepts of social identity in order to use it as a lens through which Hebrews' appeal to the readers can be looked at. Such a construction of Akan social identity is even more appropriate when one considers the fact that the Akan is very conscious, deliberate and explicit on social identity. These find expressions in proverbs that speak to the need for positive evaluation of one's group as well as the negative evaluation of one's opponent or outgroup. The Akan adage *[o]bi mfa ne nsa benkum nkyere n'agya akura* (no one points to his or her father's village with his or her left hand) speaks to the consciousness of the Akan that one must speak well of one's group. The fact that the use of the left hand in public is a sign of impoliteness and disrespectfulness gives significance to the adage in terms of the Akan concept of social identity it holds. Similarly, *[s]e woressua wo tamfo asa a, wokya wo pa* (you twist your waist when imitating your enemy in dancing [to give

the impression that your enemy is deformed]) speaks to Akan view on social identity in which one presents others (of outgroups) unfavourably.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

As hinted earlier, the study employs social-scientific criticism as exegetical tool for the interpretation of Hebrews. Detailed discussion of social-scientific criticism and its use of theories and models are given in Chapter 2, while the specific theories of social identity to be applied in this study are dealt with in Chapter 5. To address the social identity issues in Hebrews, theories on ethnicity, ingroup/intergroup behaviour and personality are used as perspectives from which Hebrews' appeal to the audience is to be appreciated. The application of these theories brings to light social institutions, interactions and scripts of the Mediterranean society which are both reflected in and give legitimate lenses from which to understand Hebrews. The study therefore involves the explanation of the theories and the outlining of their aspects that are applicable to the study of Hebrews. These theories are applied to the warning passages after discussing the flow of thought in each warning passage. The warning passages are chosen because in them the author makes appeals that show how the author expects the audience to behave in the light of the social identity he presents of them. The warning passages are therefore chosen to embrace the immediate theological arguments in which they are located, so that strictly speaking, they involve more than what one would describe as warning passages. Social identity within Akan society is then used for the reading of Hebrews by focusing on the summary of findings of the social identity issues resulting from the application of the three theories to the warning passages. An assessment is then undertaken of the similarities and differences between the use of concepts of social identity in the Mediterranean society for the interpretation of Hebrews, and the use of the concept of social identity in the Akan society for the same purpose.

Unless otherwise stated, all quotations in this study are taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible (ESV).

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The study will be organised in nine chapters. Chapter 1 consists of the background and introduction to the study, the conceptual framework, identification of the research gap, the approach to be followed, and chapter organisation. Chapter 2 will define social-scientific criticism, its history, and the description, definition and functions of social-scientific models and theories as well as some critical views on social-scientific criticism and their responses. Chapter 3 will deal with the question of the context of Hebrews in terms of the author, intended readers, social context, aim and time of writing. Chapter 4 will give an introduction to the Akan society of Ghana. Topics to be given attention include the Akan people, their origin, Akan ethnicity and ethnic identity, the concept of the family, responsibility and authority within the family. The rest are the communal orientation of the Akan society, honour in the Akan society, the Akan person, knowledge and right conduct, training and integration into the society, control of people's conduct, religion as integral to Akan society, and salvation in Akan thought. Chapter 5 gives the reading scenarios of ethnicity, identity and personality where the relevant theories are treated with outlines of the aspects of the theories applicable for the study of Hebrews. Chapter 6 will take up the discussion of the five warning passages of Hebrews in the light of the theories for the understanding of the author's appeal. Chapter 7 returns to the Akan society for a construction of the concept of social identity. This will be followed in Chapter 8 by a discussion of the summary of the social identity issues in Chapter 6 from the perspective of social identity in the Akan society. Chapter 9 will then close the study with a summary and conclusion. This Chapter assesses the similarities and differences between social identity in the Mediterranean and Akan societies as applied to the interpretation of Hebrews.

Chapter 2

Social-scientific criticism as exegetical approach

This Chapter presents a brief history of social-scientific criticism. It deals with the description and explanation of social-scientific criticism as well as its use of social-scientific models and theories. The final part examines opinions that are critical of social-scientific criticism and responses to those critical views.

2.1 HISTORY OF SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC CRITICISM

It has been observed that '[s]ocial sciences emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries as the study of humans as social creatures' (Jokiranta 2013:5). Social sciences embrace a number of fields including 'anthropology, archaeology, cultural studies, demography, economics, ethnography, information science, political science, psychology, social psychology, social work, and sociology' among others (Jokiranta 2013:5). The social-scientific approach to biblical studies is therefore a multidisciplinary approach drawing mainly from the social sciences but with interest in literary approaches to the study of ancient texts.¹ As Elliott (2001:7) has observed, social-scientific criticism is 'a method that merges exegesis and historical research with the resources of the social sciences.' Similar observations have been made by Horrell (1999:3) and Chalcraft (1979:17). The approach is 'an expansion of the conventional historical-critical method with the research theory and models of the social sciences' (Elliott 2001:10). Admittedly, some scholars who have applied this approach to the interpretation of Scripture have had different descriptions for their approach. Elliott, for instance, had termed the approach 'sociological exegesis' in his 1981 study of 1 Peter, *A home for the homeless* (Elliott 2001:7). It was not until Malina convinced him that an analysis that included

¹ Horrell (1999:24) argues that '[S]ince the study of the New Testament, whatever else it may be, is certainly the study of literature, tools for literary analysis and criticism can hardly but be important to socio-historical investigations. Any responsible historical or social-scientific study must take account of the literary character of the texts which comprise the primary evidence, and must consider carefully how historical evidence can be drawn from texts that are written to exhort and persuade, often with a polemical and argumentative thrust.' He further indicates how in recent times some scholars have sought to develop methods which incorporate both literary and social-scientific approaches to interpretation; this is described as 'important and timely, and point to an important direction for continuing research' (Horrell 1999:24).

anthropology as well as sociology was more appropriately termed social-scientific criticism that Elliott began using the label social-scientific criticism (Elliott 2001:7). According to Esler (1994:4), '[t]he various New Testament critics who have engaged in social-scientific exegesis adopt, not unnaturally, a variety of starting points and preferred theoretical positions' (Esler 1994:4).

Horrell (1999:4-10) offers a historical sketch of the development of interest in the social aspects of early Christianity going back to the later years of the nineteenth-century through its decline from the second decade of the twentieth-century to its revival in the 1960's. He notes how issues of the social context of the New Testament have become important for a variety of scholars. For example, he mentions the Old Testament scholar Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932), who pioneered form criticism, and Martin Dibelius (1883-1947) and Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) who applied form criticism to New Testament studies (Horrell 1999:4). The concern of form criticism, according to Horrell (1999:4) was 'to relate different types of textual material to their particular *Sitz im Leben*, or setting in life' as it sought to find out the social setting in which the early church had used the text. As Horrell relates, it was this development that led in 1925 to Oscar Cullmann's insistence 'that form criticism would require the development of a "special branch of sociology devoted to the study of the laws which govern the growth of popular traditions"' (Horrell 1999:4; citing Cullmann 1925). Horrell (1999:4) notes the contribution of Adolf Deissmann (1866-1937), an influential German scholar who in the early decades of the twentieth-century worked on 'the recently discovered papyri and their implications for understanding the social world of the New Testament, especially that of Paul.' Other works that represent 'German interest in the social dimensions of early Christianity' were that of early Marxist scholars including Friedrich Engels (1820) and Karl Kautsky who had 'a large work published in 1908 on the origins of Christianity.' But interest in the sociology of early Christianity, according to Horrell (1999:4), was not restricted to the Germans only since it was pursued as well in America especially in the work of the so-called Chicago school.

Horrell (1999:5) speaks of a period of decline in the interest in the social dimensions of early Christianity which he attributes mainly to the failure of form criticism to explore the social context in which the traditions were preserved and developed as it failed to focus on 'the wider social context, as might be implied by the term *Sitz im Leben*.' This was particularly so in the hands of the most prominent proponent of form criticism, Rudolf Bultmann who rather pursued what Horrell (1999:5, following Theissen 1993:6-10) calls *Sitz im Glauben*, 'the setting in faith, or the setting in the life of the church.' Bultmann's approach to the Gospel resulted in a situation in which the work of God 'becomes essentially detached from its socio-historical context, just as does its contemporary reformulation' (Horrell 1999:5).

Another person whose work contributed to the decline of interest in the social dimension of early Christianity is Karl Barth (Horrell 1999:5). This influence of Barth is to be found in the fact that, for him, 'the revealed Word of God is radically "other" than all humanly and socially constructed patterns of religiosity.' The Gospel therefore 'stands as a radical challenge to all forms of human society and can never be identified with any particular social organization' (Horrell 1999:5).²

Notwithstanding the decline in interest in the social aspects of early Christianity in the post Bultmann and Barth era, a revival of interest in the social aspects of early Christianity began in the 1960's (Horrell 1999:6). Mention is made of Edwin Judge's landmark book, *The social pattern of the Christian groups in the first century*, published in 1960, which, according to Horrell, 'played a significant role in encouraging the revival of this interest' (Horrell 1999:6). Other notable works were done by Martin Hengel (e.g., 1969; 1973; Horrell, 1999:6; citing Scroggs 1980, 168-171). The difference in these later works from the previous ones 'was the creative and varied use of methods, models and theories from the social sciences in New Testament studies' (Horrell 1999:6). Horrell attributes the revival of interest in the social aspects of early Christianity during the

² It is noted that 'Barth's aversion to a connection between theology and society, was profoundly related to the specific social context in which Barth was located, and the struggles of the Confessing Church against National Socialism and the German Christians' (Horrell 1999:5, agreeing with Theissen 1993:8-15).

1970's to 'dissatisfaction with the established methods of New Testament study' which appeared, in the words of Scroggs (1980:165-166, in Horrell 1999:6) 'as if believers had minds and spirits unconnected with their individual and corporate bodies.'

In the spirit of this revival of interest in the social aspects of early Christianity, a subgroup of the Society of Biblical literature (SBL), 'devoted to the study of the social world of the New Testament,' was formed in 1973. This saw ground-breaking publications of founding members like Wayne Meeks whose essay in 1972 on John's gospel used 'perspectives from the sociology of knowledge to argue that the Christology of the Fourth gospel reflects and legitimates the social situation of a sectarian community which is alienated and isolated from the world.' Jonathan Smith, also a founding member, wrote what he saw 'as the major tasks and opportunities in the field' (Horrell 1999:7). Other important work were done by Gerd Theissen between 1973 and 1975, Robin Scroggs and John Gager in 1975, and many others (Horrell 1999:8). Horrell has offered an extensive survey of the developments that took place around this and the period that followed (Horrell 1999:7-27). Apart from the SBL, he mentions the contribution of the Context Group and gives an overview of the contribution of scholars across a large spectrum of fields related to social-scientific criticism and of scholars across the globe (Horrell 1999:7-27).

The formation of the Context Group, described by Pilch (2001:2) as 'a project on the study of the Bible in its cultural context,' deserves some special mention here. The importance of this group, for me, does not only lie in its contribution to social-scientific criticism, but also in the fact that I was introduced to the approach through one of its members, Ernest van Eck of the Department of New Testament Studies at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. The man at the centre of the formation of the Context Group was Bruce Malina. Pilch (2001:2-3) recounts that in 1977, Malina presented a research report in which he had 'creatively integrated the social scientific theories of Talcott Parsons, Mary Douglas, and Michael Polanyi into a model that would be helpful in understanding early Christianity' at a National Endowment Humanities Summer Seminar facilitated by Wayne Meeks at Yale University. He subsequently

shared these insights ‘in a Task Force on Healing at the annual meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association of America in Detroit in the summer of the same year’ (Pilch 2001:3). Two important publications came out of that research: *The New Testament world: Insights from cultural anthropology* (1977) and *Christian origins and cultural anthropology* (1986). Following the start of a working relationship with Elliott at the Catholic Biblical Association (CBA) meeting, the two together with other colleagues who had been exploring the use of social-scientific approaches to interpret texts of the Bible resolved to shape the new direction of the Social-scientific Task Force at the CBA-meetings (Pilch 2011:3). It was this ‘collaborative approach to scholarship and research,’ which developed into the Context Group (Pilch 2001:3). It is also important to note that before the formation of the Context Group, the scholars ‘had been collaborating in annual meetings of Continuing Seminars and Task Forces of the Catholic Biblical Association, of various sections at the Society for Biblical Literature, and for a short while in the Social Facets Seminar of the Westar institute’ (Pilch 2001:3). With the aim of enhancing publication by sharing insight and other resources, the Context group has been meeting every year since 1990 in Franciscan Renewal Centre, Portland, Oregon, and for international meetings, it meets periodically in Europe and South Africa (Pilch 2001:3).

The historical sketch of the development of social-scientific criticism shows that it is an evolving approach to biblical studies with new interest in the social and cultural aspects of the biblical text. This history has seen a lot of development in scholarly involvement which is widespread enough to make it a global involvement. As an evolving approach, attempts are constantly underway to fine-tune and improve it since no method of study is without weaknesses. What is required of users of social-scientific criticism is an awareness that an evolving approach needs more diligence in its application to mitigate any pitfalls in order to maximize its usefulness. Ways should be found to deepen the cooperation and mutual encouragement among scholars such as exists in the Context Group, since these are crucial if the future for social-scientific criticism would be bright.

2.2 DESCRIPTION, DEFINITION AND FUNCTION OF SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC MODELS AND THEORIES

An extensive and comprehensive description and definition of social-scientific criticism is offered by Elliott (2001:10-12) and Chalcraft (1997:12-19) who traces the development to a period before the works of Durkheim and Weber with particular interest in Old Testament studies. Elliott defines social-scientific criticism as ‘that phase of the exegetical task, which analyzes the social and cultural dimensions of texts and their environmental contexts through the use of the perspectives, theory, models and research of the social sciences’ (Elliott 2010:10). The approach, according to him, ‘investigates biblical texts as meaningful configurations of language intended to communicate between composers and audiences.’ He identifies three areas which the social-scientific criticism investigates:

- 1) the social features of the form and content of texts and the conditioning factors and intended consequences of the communication process;
- 2) the correlation of the text’s linguistic, literary, rhetorical, theological-ideological, and social dimension; and
- 3) the manner in which this textual communication was both a reflection of and response to a specific social and cultural situation – that is, how it was designed to serve as an effective vehicle of social interaction and an instrument of social as well as literary and theological consequence (Elliott 2010:10).

The biblical texts, for Elliott (2001:10), ‘encode information about, and derive their plausibility, meaning, and persuasive power from the social and cultural systems in which they were produced.’ For this reason, the method ‘requires examination of the salient and interrelated properties of the society and culture, the institutions and cultural codes that governed ancient thought, institutionalised behaviour and conventional modes of interaction.’

In this light, Elliott (2001:10) finds a close relation of the operation of the social-scientific exegetical enterprise ‘to other disciplines with a broader focus not on specific texts but on ancient social and cultural systems in general as investigated by historians,

sociologists, anthropologists, and archaeologists.’ The task of the social-scientific criticism may be summarized in the following words of Elliott (2001:11): ‘This is an approach ... that focuses on both texts and contexts and which seeks to understand how texts in given social and cultural contexts are designed to communicate meaning, narrate plausible and persuasive stories and move their audiences to concerted social action.’

Elliott (2001:11) further points out four roles played by the empirical research, theory, and models of the social sciences. Firstly, ‘the cross-cultural research of ethnographers, anthropologists, and sociologists provides the necessary material and models for distinguishing ancient patterns of social, economic, and political organization and cultural scripts typical of pre-industrial, agrarian societies from those of the modern-day interpreter.’ According to Elliott (2001:11), ‘[s]ensitivity to this fundamental distinction helps to avoid anachronistic and ethnocentric errors; for instance, of imagining in the ancient world the existence of a middle class, or the possibility of societal revolution or an egalitarianism like that sponsored by the American and French revolutions or a post-enlightenment notion of individuality.’

Secondly, it also helps in making ‘distinctions between “emic” and “etic” perspectives; that is differentiations between the perspectives and construals of human organization and behaviour from the vantage point of the native, on the one hand, and the modern researcher, on the other; the persons populating the texts of the Bible, on the one hand, and modern Bible readers, on the other.’ This, for Elliott (2001:11), ‘allows us to validly gather, organize, and ultimately explain raw material in terms of concepts and theories that are different from those of our biblical informers.’

Thirdly, the approach provides means of understanding how the social systems and other elements of the society such as ‘climate, material resources, economic, social, and political activity’ interrelate (Elliott 2001:11). By these, one is ‘more ably prepared to examine and explain, for instance, how Roman taxation, combined with the expropriation of peasant lands, the policies of the Temple aristocracy, and famine

together placed an unbearable burden on the Palestinian peasantry and collectively set the stage for the first Judean war' (Elliott 2001:11).

Fourthly, the elements of the Mediterranean value system such as 'honour and shame, kingship loyalty, patronage and clientism, hospitality and generosity, male/female behavioural codes, group oriented personality, perception of limited good and the like,' practitioners of the approach 'are equipped for a culturally sensitive reading and understanding of the social dramas presented in the New Testament' (Elliott 2001:11-12).

The sum of all this, for Elliott (2001:12), is that models of social organization and cultural codes provided by the social sciences equip practitioners with a 'set of lenses for seeing the big social picture and for cueing in to the cultural scripts and latent meanings conveyed by the biblical documents.' The advantage is that it puts interpreters of ancient texts in a better position for assessing both the manner and limits for appropriating these biblical writings and applying them to the urgencies of their own day (Elliott 2001:12).

In nuce, one may describe the approach as a method that employs both the traditional methods of exegesis and the social sciences to analyse biblical texts. It sees the biblical text as a product of social interactions within the context of social and cultural life of ancient people (which is distinct from that of our world today). The aim of the approach is to find out from the text not only how the contextual elements are reflected in the text, but more importantly, how the social situation produced the text, and what intended effect the text was supposed to have on the recipients. Such understanding becomes crucial for the appropriate application of the biblical message to our own context.

This description and definition of social-scientific criticism should not suggest a well-defined sphere of approach. There are scholars, like Meeks, who describe themselves as 'social historians,' but adopt social-scientific theories (both sociological and anthropological) – 'piecemeal, as needed, where it fits' (Meeks 1983:6, in Horrell

1999:16). The concern for Meeks, for instance, is ‘to appreciate the particularities of the early Christian communities, something he sees as essentially a historian’s concern.’ (Meeks 1982:266; 1983:1-7, in Horrell 1999:16). But for Horrell, ‘the contrast between a search for what is distinctive or for what is typical, between open-ended theoretical frameworks or cross-cultural models, may be related to two sides of a debate within the social sciences about the nature of social science, rather than to a supposed contrast between history and social science’ (Horrell 1996:9-32, citing Garrett 1992). He agrees with those who find no difference between the methods employed in history and social sciences (Horrell 1999:16). On historians who are sceptical of social theories, Horrell maintains that ‘[h]istorical studies which avoid any discussion of theory or any use of social-scientific insights ... merely impoverish their analyses, or conceal the implicit theoretical presuppositions of their approach’ (Horrell 1999:17). It is clear from the foregoing that the lack of clarity in what constitutes social-scientific criticism stems mainly from differences in views regarding how models may be used or whether models should be used in the first place.

A discussion of the social-scientific models and theories will be apt here. This will involve the general discussion, description, meaning and functions of models. Malina calls patterns of abstract thought, or patterns of relationships among abstractions as ‘models,’ or ‘theories,’ but ‘paradigms’ when they are very high abstractions (Malina 2001:18). He describes models as ‘abstract, simplified representations of more complex, real-world objects and interactions;’ explaining that ‘like abstract thought, the purpose of models is to enable and facilitate understanding’ (Malina 2001:18). Models, for him, ‘are generalisations or abstract descriptions of real-world experiences;’ seen as ‘approximate, simple representation of more complex forms, processes, and functions of physical and nonphysical phenomena’ (Malina 2001:18; see also Duling 2012:63). Chalcraft (1997:83) describes the simple representation as *reductionism*. To understand the New Testament writings and the behaviour of the people portrayed in them, what we need, Malina maintains, ‘are some adequate models (reading scenarios) that would enable us to understand cross-culturally and force us to keep our meanings and values out of their behavior, so that we might understand them on their own terms’ (Malina

2001:19). To aid our understanding, 'models formulate relationships among the persons, things, and events that we want to study. These relationships between various persons and groups, or persons and things, as well as the interactions and activities such person and groups undertake, have to be named and described' (Malina 2001:19). Using 'mother' for an example, he argues that 'mothers do not exist except in terms of children, so mother presupposes child, and child presupposes mother.' Since the normal behaviour of mothers to children is termed nurturing, he holds that 'we might generalize by saying mothers nurture their children.' He insists that what this mother-child interaction means in the context of a group and its implications for responsibilities must be identified (Malina 2001:19). Malina identifies three models, namely, *structural functionalism*, *conflict theory*, and the *symbolic* model (Malina 2001:19-23).³

The model that sees society as a 'still picture,' Malina calls *structural functionalism* (Malina 2001:19). In this model a society is perceived as 'cohesive and integrated by consensus on meanings, values, and norms' (Malina 2001:19-20). 'The various smaller social systems, such as family, government, economics, education, and religion, are bound together by common values and norms, and these smaller systems – *social institutions* – interact with each other in a cooperative and harmonious way' (Malina 2001:20).⁴ This is what brings stability to society (Malina 2001:20). The important thing about this theory is that '[c]hanges in one institution lead to changes in others' (Malina 2001:20). The presupposition of structural functionalist model is that 'every society is a relatively persistent, stable, well-integrated structure of elements' (Malina 2001:20). Any attempt to pursue social change makes one become a social misfit in such a setting

³ Duling identifies two types of models, namely, 'isomorphic' and 'homomorphic' models. Isomorphic 'models are built to scale' so that the model becomes a smaller replica (same type) of the larger reality. Homomorphic models, on the other hand, select and highlight only representative aspects of something or someone (Duling 2012:63). He further identifies 'macroscopic' and 'microscopic' levels of models; from the macro to the micro are the following sequence – world systems, societies, organisations, groups, interaction, and individual thought and action. 'The higher the level of abstraction, the more the specific details of a historical situation tend to lose their focus. The lower the level of abstraction, the more important such particularities become' (Duling 2012:65-66).

⁴ 'A social institution consists of a group of people who have come together for a common purpose. These institutions are a part of the social order of society and they govern behavior and expectations of individuals,' according to *Your Dictionary*, viewed 15th November 2016, from <http://examples.yourdictionary.com/social-institutions-examples.html>.

(Malina 2001:20). To understand biblical characters ‘is to find out what sort of structures or patterns of behaviour were typical in their society, what norms expressed the “oughts” for this sort of behavior, and how such behaviour supported and fulfilled a useful social function’ (Malina 2001:20).

The next theory, the *conflict theory* or ‘coercion,’ ‘power,’ or ‘interest’ model or theory,⁵ ‘emphasizes constraints human groups put on each other’ (Malina 2001:20). The theory imagines ‘social systems as consisting of various groups (e.g., groups instancing the institutions of family, government, economics, education, religion) that have differing goals and interests and therefore use coercive tactics on each other to realize their own goals’ (Malina 2001:20). How groups maintain their interest against pressures from other groups become important in the competitive strain and tactical cooperation that characterise intergroup relationships (Malina 2001:20-21). For this, theory, change is inevitable unless something is done to stop it (Malina 2001:21). The model also finds constraint necessary for the cohesion of the various systems of the society (Malina 2001:21). To understand the people we read about in the New Testament, we need ‘to find out what elements or factors interfere in the normal process of change with the understanding that absence of conflict would be surprising and abnormal’ (Malina 2001:21). The type of conflict that is associated with the behaviour of people in the New Testament becomes important for this theory because ‘there is an unending process of change in society – as in the individual human being. Hence, social change or deviance is normal’ (Malina 2001:21).

The ‘symbolic model’ (also called ‘interpretative model,’ ‘symbolic theory,’ or ‘symbolic interpretationist theory’) sees ‘the social system’ as ‘a system of symbols that people hold and that hold people’ (Malina 2001:22). Using the words of Clifford Geertz, he describes the social system according this model as ‘a system of symbols that acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in people, formulating conception of value-objects, and clothing these conceptions with such an

⁵ He describes the ‘conflict theory’ as ‘the flip side theory’ or ‘a slow-motion film’ (Malina 2001:20).

aura of factuality that the moods and motivations are perceived to be uniquely realistic' (Malina 2001:22). The symbols include 'meanings and values, as well as feelings about these meanings and values,' as they relate to persons things and events (Malina 2001:22). Malina explains that '[e]ven situations that confront people are not simply a backdrop for their behavior' but are to be 'interpreted in terms of symbolic meaningfulness,' so that 'people do not simply respond to situations; rather they respond to the way they read and define the situation in terms of their symbolic expectations' (Malina 2001:22). For a vivid illustration, he uses someone exiting from a supermarket to show the range of meanings within a situation as may be interpreted symbolically by those who are defining the situation – the symbolic meanings here include for example, 'the person exiting just shoplifted, purchased groceries, quit her job in the supermarket, or made out in the back room with the manager' (Malina 2001:22). '[L]eaving his house, building a garage, or operating on a cancer victim' are symbolic meanings that cannot be applicable to this scenario. The meanings of the symbols derive from the 'social expectations' and common knowledge of people in the society (Malina 2001:22). Here, 'human individual and group behaviour is organised around the symbolic meanings and expectations that are attached to objects that are socially valued, such that any existing person or group is a complex of symbolic patterns that at least temporarily maintains both personal and social equilibrium (like the structural functionalist model)' (Malina 2001:22). He adds that this 'requires continual readjustment in new and shifting situations (like the conflict model)' (Malina 2001:22). 'These adjustments include slight to great alterations of ideas, values, moods, attitudes, roles, and social organization.' Each person within specific social systems therefore can identify his or her roles in the given relationship in which he or she stands with others, and in the light of the symbolic meanings those relationships have (Malina 2001:23). So to understand people in the Bible from the standpoint of symbolic model, one has to find out 'what roles, significant symbols, gestures, and definitions of situations our documents express or imply.' It also requires that we know what 'symbols embody the cultural cues of perception,' 'what sorts of interaction take place between elites and the low-born, and how people define themselves in their various statuses' (Malina 2001:23).

The three models given by Malina should be seen together in any application of models to the study of the biblical text. This is because our social interactions are as a result of the interplay of the forces of all the socio-cultural dimensions represented in the three models. In looking at any biblical text, it is important to look at whether or not the players are working for social cohesion and integration by consensus on meaning, values and norms, and whether or not deviance is being avoided or pursued. Such a perspective comes from the structuralist theory. It is also important, at the same time, to look at whether or not there are competing group interest and values, and whether there is the use of coercive tactics by one group (usually the older and bigger group) on the other in order to protect the interest of the former. Are there moves by the latter to maintain a balance between its interest among its members and that of the former? Is there the presence of conflict, and how may this conflict be explained? What is the state of cooperation within a given group, or how is cooperation being achieved, or urged? This is what the conflict theory requires us to do. From the perspective of the symbolic theory, we need to find out what roles, significant symbols, gestures, and definitions of situations the biblical texts express or imply. We also need to identify what symbols lie in the cultural cues of perception, what sorts of interaction take place between elites and the low-born, and how people define themselves in their various statuses. How these lead to keeping people together or separating them is to be identified. In this case, it is not only how our text shows these that is important, but how they are responded to in the social interactions of the biblical people.

2.3 CRITICAL VIEWS ON SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC CRITICISM AND RESPONSES

On what might be the weakness of social-scientific criticism, the most common issues have centred on the use of theories and models. Oversimplification and undue generalization of theories have been the main concerns. Critics of the use of Mediterranean theories from anthropology and sociology have criticised many social-scientific works of their failure to recognize the individual variations, nuances, and competing meanings of the biblical text (Duling 2012:56-59).

The use of scientific theories and models for the interpretation of biblical texts is the main distinguishing feature of social-scientific criticism. Horrell draws a distinction, in terms of published works, ‘between works of social history which explicitly eschew the use of social-scientific theories or models’ (in Horrell 1999:10, citing Clarke 1993; Gooch 1993), ‘and those who employ them as tools in the task of historical investigation’ (Horrell 1999:10, citing Meeks 198). He further distinguishes ‘between those who may be termed “social historians” yet who use social-scientific methods, and the “social scientists,” who have developed a rigorous and model-based approach’ (Horrell 1999:10). He nonetheless question ‘the legitimacy of a claim to eschew the discussion of theory,’ insisting that ‘[a]ny approach to history is guided by the methods, presuppositions and convictions of the researcher, and the adoption of a merely empirical interest in the data must be seen as a concealment of (implicit) theory, which theoretically-conscious works aim to render perspicuous and therefore open to critical scrutiny’ (Horrell 1999:10).

Horrell (1999:10-26) presents detailed discussions about the weaknesses and strengths of the use of models and theories in social-scientific criticism. These include:

- 1) The question as to ‘whether the ancient sources yield adequate data of a kind suitable for sociological analysis (compared with the contemporary opportunities for interviews or observation;’ Rodd 1981, in Horrell 1999:10). The danger, for Rodd, is that ‘a theory or model may be used to fill in the gaps and assume things for which evidence is lacking’ (Rodd 1981, in Horrell 1999:10). A related observation is that of Edwin Judge (1980:120, in Horrell 1999:10-11), whose concern is that ‘sociological models or theories may be imposed upon the ancient evidence without the painstaking study of that evidence necessary to ascertain the “social facts of life characteristic of the world to which the New Testament belongs.”’ Esler’s response to such criticisms is that the models are meant ‘for social comparison and analysis, which have a close fit to the biblical data under consideration’ (Esler 1994:23). He further explains that ‘they are merely tools used in what is essentially a comparative process,’ giving ‘fresh agenda of questions to put to the texts.’ He insists that ‘it is the texts themselves that must provide the

answers' (Esler 1994:23). As Duling has observed, 'models are not a form of absolute truth but "heuristic," that is, ways of imagining complex information, and can be adjusted when 'fit' does not occur' (Duling 2012:65; see also Chalcraft 1997:90).

- 2) Reductionism is the second criticism, 'that is, the idea that social-scientific theories will "explain" religious phenomena purely in terms of social or economic forces (Horrell 1999:11). Horrell (1999:11) cautions that 'the reductionist criticism cannot be dismissed quite as easily as some suppose.' He observes that 'the social sciences prioritise certain aspects of human experience and interactions – the "social" – and regard human knowledge and culture as essentially "socially-constructed" (see, e.g., Berger 1969). In the ongoing dialogue between theology and sociology, 'there are important theoretical presuppositions underpinning various forms of social theory which should be carefully and critically appraised' (Horrell 1999:11). '[S]ociology and theology offer "narratives" about human society with fundamentally different priorities and assumptions at their heart, and that *some* forms of social science offer explanations of early Christianity which stand in tension with "theological" perspectives' (Horrell 1999:12; citing Milbank). Horrell advocates the avoidance of 'the naïve belief that any form of social science can be used to study the early church without any serious theoretical conflict between that perspective and more theological understandings' (Horrell 1999:12). He concludes:

These various criticisms should not therefore be too lightly dismissed. But neither do they require the abandonment of the enterprise. Those who practise social-scientific criticism, in whatever form, themselves often stress the need for ongoing methodological reflection and critical discussion. Important theoretical issues need to be clarified, but in the context of ongoing and creative attempts to use social-scientific resources in New Testament studies. At the very least, the social sciences surely offer tools for exploring the social context within which the 'theology' of the New Testament was forged. And resources for investigating the ways in which early Christian writings formed and shaped patterns of interaction within the congregations.

(Horrell 1999:11)

It has been observed that there seem to be over-dependence on the basic set of models outlined in Malina's work of 1981 among members of the Context Group. Malina's work, in the view of Horrell (1999:14, in agreement with Gager 1983:195-196),

lacks ‘reference to extra-biblical ancient sources necessary to demonstrate the model’s validity as a representation of ancient Mediterranean culture.’ But this, of course, is not true, or for the benefit of the doubt, has changed. Many examples exist that indicate the use of extra-biblical sources by members of the Context Group. Among them is Van Eck (2011) who has a lot of extra-biblical sources in his article ‘Do not question my honour: A social-scientific reading of the parable of the minas (Lk 19:12b–24, 27).’ Van Eck cites Josephus (*J.W* 2.55–65) and Horsley and Hanson (1985:111–127), for instance, to demonstrate that ‘[t]he participants in messianic movements were primarily peasants with the goal to overthrow the Herodian and Roman domination and to restore the traditional ideals for a free and egalitarian society.’ Baker (2012) also cites the Roman historian Tacitus (*Hist.* 5.5; *LCL*) and Ovid (*Trist.* 5.10.29-38; *LCL*) to show that social comparison was part of life in the ancient Mediterranean (Baker 2012:133-134). In the same way, Esler (1998) cites a lot of extra-biblical data from Strabo, Josephus and many others. Still more examples abound in the work of Halvor Moxnes (1996).

Critics further note that, in spite of its advantages, the ‘models have sometimes become somewhat inflexible tools, which lead to a rather “homogenised” view of “Mediterranean culture” and give too little opportunity for the subtleties and variations of local contexts to emerge’ (e.g., Garret 1988; 1992; Chance 1994:146-149; Meggitt 1998, in Horrell 1999:15). While a number of the anthropological studies employed by Malina and others are of the modern Mediterranean with the implicit assumption that modern and ancient Mediterranean cultures are broadly continuous and similar, ‘recent anthropological studies stress the variety of ways in which honour or shame (and not necessarily both),’ for example, ‘may be instantiated in particular contexts,’ thereby encouraging ‘the researcher to be open to the rich diversity of local cultures, rather than adopt or assume a single model’ (Horrell 1999:15). Rodd (1997:33), Herion (1997:83), and others raise similar concerns about the complex nature of the application of social-scientific theories.⁶ The logical question posed by Horrell then is ‘[s]hould a social-scientific

⁶ Rodd (1997:33) agrees with Martin’s (Martin 1978:2,4-5) observation that ‘general theory simply states that in given circumstances, certain developments tend to occur, other things being equal, but that other things are never equal and the universal process operates differently according to the complex in which it

approach involve the testing of cross-cultural models or a more inductive, interpretive approach?’ (Horrell 1999:15). Further to this discussion, Horrell (1999:22) has suggested that much is ‘to be gained from continued critical engagement with recent anthropological work on societies which bear closer comparison with the New Testament communities than do the industrialised market economies of the contemporary developed world.’ Following such critical assessment of the approach, some have found ‘anthropology and ethnography more and more interesting’ than sociology which appears ‘less and less helpful’ (Horrell 1999:22). In this pursuit, some, avoiding a model-based approach, have adopted ‘cross-cultural studies and drawing briefly on theories of ideology, which illustrates how ancient sources may be used to reconstruct the diverse and contrasting ancient views of the social and individual body, of disease in the body, thereby also stressing the gap between that social world and our own’ (Horrell 1999:22).

It is obvious that social-scientific criticism has challenges when it comes to the application of models and theories from sociology and anthropology. But as has been suggested, this does not necessitate the abandonment of the approach (see Chalcraft 1997:90),⁷ but rather a more rigorous use of the method which will pay attention to individual differences, peculiarities, nuances and competing meanings that the biblical text gives clues to (see, e.g., Duling 2012:58). As noted, earlier, in the end, no predetermined conclusions of models should be imposed on the biblical data; but as Esler advocated, the biblical text itself should provide the answers. Helpful in this respect is the need to keep one’s eye on materials that may need other models for plausible meanings than the interpreter’s chosen model. As Chalcraft has noted, social-scientific criticism should not be restricted to the application of models and predictive theories in an effort to reconstruct the world ‘behind the texts;’ rather, it should embrace a whole range of questions, theories, concepts and methodologies, involving sociological and anthropological ‘ways of thinking’ (Chalcraft 1997:17). Very pertinent

operates. The influence of historical and geographical chance must not be ignored.’ See also Herion (1997:83).

⁷ Chalcraft argues that the study of any real social phenomena would be difficult if not altogether impossible without the aid of models (Chalcraft 1997:83).

also is the observation that no interpretation of biblical documents with historical, social or cultural interest can claim to be free of the use of models. The truth, as observed, is that models are usually concealed and used arbitrarily by interpreters who claim to eschew them because the interpreters themselves may not be conscious of the models with which they carry out their interpretation (see Duling 2012:63; Chalcraft 1997:17).⁸ It is in this respect that the specific and deliberate use of models and theories becomes a better option since the models, once named, can be checked for accuracy or pitfalls, or for what Duling (2012:64) calls ‘test for fit,’ thereby standing the chance of doing better and more diligent service to the interpretative enterprise.

⁸ Duling is emphatic that we perpetually construct ‘models’ of reality in our heads and then interpret, rearrange, and adjust them. He insists models are indispensable. He states: ‘We use them [models] whether we are conscious of doing so or not. We can often consciously construct them if we would like to represent them, as we do when we draw a street map for a friend on a napkin’ (Duling 2012:63).

Chapter 3

The context of Hebrews

This Chapter follows the example of Esler (1998) titled *Galatians* in the *New Testament Reading Series*. Before outlining the social identity theory to be applied to the study of the letter to the Galatians, Esler first briefly sets the scene with a discussion of the destination and time of composition of the letter and a summary of why Paul wrote the letter (Esler 1998:29). His rationale for doing this lies in the idea that social-scientific approaches to biblical interpretation should always be closely related to the ancient setting (Esler 1998:29). The interest in this Chapter therefore is to provide some information about the situation being addressed in Hebrews. Of particular interest are the circumstances of the audience and the purpose of the letter. However, the issues of uncertainty like author, audience and destination will also receive some attention. The intention is not to give detailed information relating to the uncertainties surrounding Hebrews since those arguments have adequately been taken care of by many scholars (see, e.g., Ellingworth 1993:3-36; Bruce 1977:xxiii-lvii and Lane 1991:xlix-clvii).

3.1 AUTHOR

One of the major areas of uncertainty of Hebrews is to be found in its authorship. Several conjectures have been made, but none has proven to have sufficient support (Ellingworth 1993:3-36). Thirteen possible authors have been proposed (Ellingworth 1993:3-21). The first six are those to whom other writings have been attributed. The seventh person has a recorded sermon in Acts 7. Their names are given as Paul, Clement of Rome, Luke, Barnabas, Peter, Jude, and Stephen. Those that have no books attributed to them are Philip the deacon, Aristion, Priscilla (and Aquila), Mary the mother of Jesus, Epaphras, and Apollos (Ellingworth 1993:3-21).

Hawthorne (1979:1501) draws attention to the Authorized Version (AV) which, following a tradition going back to the late second-century, answers the question of authorship with its informative title, 'The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.' He, however,

maintains that the evidence is not sufficiently conclusive to answer the question unhesitatingly (Hawthorne 1979:1501).⁹ He is of the view that the Eastern Church, claiming Pauline authorship for Hebrews (as far back as the second-century), did help to give it standing; yet in the final analysis, its own intrinsic worth won for it the place it holds in the canon (Hawthorne 1979:1501; DeSilva 2012:1).

Several factors have been pointed out as working against Paul's authorship of Hebrews. DeSilva (2012:1-3) lists a number of them. He notes that the author includes himself among those who came to faith through the preaching of other apostles (Heb 2:3-4) and insists that '[t]his is perhaps the strongest argument against Pauline authorship' since 'Paul adamantly insists that he came to faith through a direct intervention by Jesus and not through any human being's words' (Gl 1:11-17; 1 Cor 15:3-10; DeSilva 2012:1-2). Secondly, he argues that none of Paul's writings 'come close to the rhetorical finesse and stylistic polish of Hebrews.' He calls attention to the fact that Paul 'refused to rely on well-crafted rhetoric ("the loftiness of words or wisdom;" 1 Cor 2:1) lest persuasion come through the speaker's art rather than the Spirit's conviction' (1 Cor 2:1; DeSilva 2012:2). For DeSilva, 'the author of Hebrews clearly had a different philosophy of preaching than did Paul' (DeSilva 2012:2). Thirdly, though he admits that Hebrews 'shares many topics with Paul (the examples of Abraham and Jesus and the Mosaic covenant), they are often developed in different ways.' Though he finds the subject of Jesus' high priesthood unique, he admits that Paul may have provided a sort of seed for it when he spoke of 'Christ ... who is at the right hand of God, who intercedes on our behalf' (Rom 8:34; DeSilva 2012:3). His final argument is that the debates over Hebrews' canonicity attest to the fact that 'Paul's name was not attached to the letter from the beginning, either in writing or by tradition.' 'If it were, there would not have been such discussions concerning authorship and canonicity as we find before the Synod of Hippo in 393 CE' (DeSilva 2012:2). For authorship considerations, the best conclusion is probably to go back to what Origen is frequently quoted as having admitted, that 'But who wrote the

⁹ To clarify what Hawthorne says on the title, we should note what Drane has observed that, like all the titles appended to the New Testament books, it was added for convenience in later centuries (see Drane 1999:422).

epistle only God knows' (Maier 1999:227). The fact that the author is not known should not deny one of some knowledge about him. Hebrews itself has a lot to tell us about who wrote it. Gleaning from Hebrews, Bruce concludes that: 'The author was a second-generation Christian, well versed in the Septuagint, which he interpreted according to a creative exegetical principle' (Bruce 1977:xlii).¹⁰ 'He had a copious vocabulary and was master of a fine rhetorical style, completely different from Paul's' (Bruce 1977:xlii). He also describes him as 'a learned man ... mighty in the scriptures.' In a similar vein, DeSilva (2012:3, 9) is convinced that the author, has the best of formal education among New Testament writers.¹¹ His use of high levels of rhetorical strategies, his employment of striking alliteration, repeating the sound 'p' five times in Hebrews 1:1-4, and other evidence of his high level of education have been pointed out in Hebrews (DeSilva 2012:2-8). There is also indication that he held the view of Hellenists as found in Acts 6-8 and 11:19 (Bruce 1977:xlii; DeSilva 2012:10). His citation in Hebrews 1:6 brings together a number of Old Testament quotations that shows his reliance on the Septuagint than on the Hebrew text (DeSilva 2012:10). This is to say that no matter how obscure the identity of this writer may seem, it is still an identity about which certain facts are known.

3.2 INTENDED READERS

With respect to the audience of Hebrews the same ambiguity is encountered. There have similarly been many suggestions as to who they were and their location but almost all of them are contentious. Ellingworth observes that 'the most important question in this area, and the one about which there is the deepest division among scholars, is whether the original readers of Hebrews were Christians of Jewish or Gentile origin.' He further notes that '[u]ntil modern times the general assumption, perhaps too much influenced by the title, was that their background was Jewish' (Ellingworth 1993:22). According to Ladd, this community of Jewish Christians, probably living in Rome (Heb 13:24), was considered to be 'apostatizing from Christ and going back into Judaism in

¹⁰ Perhaps Bruce's 'second-generation Christian' is to be understood in the words of Lane as 'those to whom the immediate hearers of the Lord delivered the gospel (2:3-4),' and not generation in terms of a period of years. See (Lane 1991: xlix). Drane (1999: 421) explains this point explicitly.

¹¹ DeSilva (2012:3-18) has a wide range of arguments in support of his claims here.

the face of threatening persecution' (Ladd 1974: 571).¹² However, among other things, 'the warning against "falling away from the living God" (Heb 3:12) has been found to point to Gentile-Christian rather than to Jewish-Christian readers (Ladd 1974:571).

Ekem calls attention to the fact that

In the wake of the extensive and pervasive influence of Hellenism on Jewish and non-Jewish communalities of the then Greco-Roman World, as well as the constant influx and cross-fertilization of world-views facilitated through the *Pax Romana*, it was illusory to conceive of a 'pure Jewish-Christian' or a 'pure Gentile-Christian' identity.

(Ekem 2005:79)

He concludes that both author and readers were aware of competing worldviews as regards true salvation (Ekem 2005:79). In support of a mixed Jewish and Gentile audience is the following observation by Ellingworth:

The argument for a mixed Jewish and gentile readership is strengthened by the systematic exclusion, from the author's OT quotations and verbal allusion, of negative references to Israel, and also references to gentiles, present in the OT contexts.... It could be argued that the writer avoids the negative references to Israel because he does not wish to offend his readers, or divert them from the main thread of his argument. This however, would not explain the fact that, within the main line of argument, he does not hesitate to point out the failings of earlier generations of Israelites, and the inadequacy of the institutions of the old covenant.... It is more likely that the author is avoiding references which might reawaken earlier tension, now resolved, between Jews and gentiles within the Christian community ... the avoidance of potentially divisive references points to a mixed community.

(Ellingworth 1993:25)

Ellingworth, in the foregoing quotation, identifies a conscious effort on the part of our author to avoid issues that may offend Jewish sensitivity and awaken a potentially divisive tension in a mixed community. This for Ellingworth, favors a mixed Jewish and Gentile audience. In a similar vein Ekem has argued for a mixed audience. He is convinced that readers probably, include 'non-Jewish/non-Christian inquirers who were attracted to the synagogue worship and had access to the Septuagint' (Ekem 2005:108-109).

With a social-scientific lens, DeSilva argues against some traditional assumptions about a Jewish audience (DeSilva 2012:33-36). The first of these assumptions has to do with the extensive use of the Old Testament (the Jewish Scriptures) which presumes, for

¹² Ladd indicates that the title 'To the Hebrews' is not original (Ladd 1974: 571).

some, a Jewish-Christian audience. Arguing with Galatians and 1 Peter, DeSilva points out that that Gentiles Christians too respected the authority of the Old Testament and were able to make sense of its use (DeSilva 2012:33). He maintains that texts like Galatians and 1 Peter also ‘demonstrate that Gentile Christians would specifically be interested in how those Scriptures could illumine their standing within a covenant relationship made between God and a particular (Jewish) people and their relationship to the particular institutions found within Israel, the historic people of God’ (DeSilva 2012:33).

Secondly, DeSilva challenges the claim that Gentile Christians would hardly take interest in the Jewish cult or its implication for their Christian faith. This assumption like the former, DeSilva argues, does not take seriously the place of the Jewish Scriptures in the faith and worship of Gentile believers (DeSilva 2012:33-34).

The third assumption holds that the readers face a pull back to Judaism and worship in the temple (DeSilva 2012:34). DeSilva contends that ‘the lengthy argument in Hebrews 7:1-10:18 concerning the Levitical cult does not necessarily presuppose a return to temple worship as the pressing problem among the addressees.’ Its relevance is to indicate the special position all believers have in relation to historic Israel as the people of God (DeSilva 2012:34). He holds that ‘reading Hebrews as if it addressed a primarily Jewish Christian audience tended to prevent readers from perceiving how the sustained comparison of Jesus with the mediators of access to God under the Torah and Levitical cult contributed positively to the formation of Christian identity’ (DeSilva 2012:34-35).

The argument for a mixed congregation of Jewish and Gentile Christians comes to a head in the following analysis that tends to tilt more in support a Gentile audience.

DeSilva argues that

The language of Hebrews and the author’s familiarity with and reliance on the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures (rather than a known Hebrew textual tradition, as one finds in James and Jude) seriously undermine the appropriateness of the title ‘To the Hebrews,’ at least in relation to the traditional distinction between Hebrews and Hellenists in the early church (as in Ac 6:1-6). But there are two positive indications of Gentile Christians included among the audience. First, in Heb 6:1-6, the author refers to a catechism of topics that would be familiar already to Jewish converts, but which would be important to

introduce to Gentile converts. Second, the mention of Timothy and inclusion of the same in the author's travel plans (Heb 13:23) strongly suggests that the particular congregation addressed was formed as part of the Pauline mission. This Pauline mission had as its explicit goal the raising up of Gentile Christians and forming mixed communities of Gentile Christians and Hellenistic Jewish Christians, hence the history of Paul's confrontation with James, the Judaizers, and other Jewish Christians like Peter and Barnabas in Antioch. It seems prudent, therefore, not to allow the secondary title to obscure the likelihood that the author addresses a mixed congregation of Jewish and Gentile Christians.

(DeSilva 2012:35-36)

In DeSilva's arguments above, the use of the Septuagint, the list of foundational lessons for the readers and the mention of Timothy as part of the author's travel plans hold important indication for Gentile inclusion in the audience. Other indications about the audience include the presence of learned people who could appreciate the elegant writing style of the author (DeSilva 2012:36). The fact that the possessions of some of them were plundered points to the fact that there were some wealthy members among them. Such people were capable of providing hospitality (Heb 13:2; 10:33b-34a; 13:16; DeSilva 2012:36). The warning against love of money (Heb 13:5) and status (Heb 13:14) become relevant in this respect (DeSilva 2012:36).

It can be concluded that even if Hawthorne (1979:1503) is right in contending that Hebrews may have been written (as an epistle) for distribution beyond a particular congregation, it is still important for social-scientific purposes to have some amount of certainty concerning the audience to be able to identify the socio-cultural import of the message for the audience. It is in this respect that the identification that they were a mixed Jewish and Gentile Christian and of mixed social status of rich and poor is important. For the social-scientific reading of the message of Hebrews, understanding the circumstance and purpose of Hebrews will be helpful. The position of this study on the intended recipients will be stated after a discussion of the social context and aim of Hebrew to which we now turn attention.

3.3 SOCIAL CONTEXT AND AIM

The focus of this Chapter is the identification of the situation which Hebrews addresses and the end it seeks to achieve. This should provide a significant lens with which to understand Hebrews. Regarding the circumstance and purpose, there is no consensus

among scholars (Ekem 2005:96). Yet in almost all the suggestions put forth, it is generally accepted that there was pressure on the audience to fall back from their Christian faith, and that it was the aim of the writer to prevent the readers from such backsliding. Previously, many of the authors assumed the tendency of the believers to fall back to Judaism in the face of some external pressure.

Among those who assume a tendency to fall back to Judaism are Ellingworth (1993:80), Hawthorne (1979:1501), and Schenck (2003:103). Ellingworth (1993:79-80) acknowledges and enumerates the issues that make the identification of the purpose of Hebrews a difficult one. Based on the assumption that majority of the readers were Jews who lived in a place like Rome, Ellingworth suggests that there was the tendency on the part of the readers always to 'deemphasize, conceal, neglect, abandon, and thus in a crisis reject and deny the distinctively Christian dimension of their faith.' Similarly, Schenck, in making 'educated guesses,' concludes that the main problem of the audience was 'waning confidence in the Christian message' (Schenck 2003:103); the factors being 'the delay of Christ's return, the pull of mainstream Judaism, and especially the anticipation of persecution.' The possible charges for this persecution include 'unlawful assembly,' 'failure to pay the Jewish tax – even if the Christians were not Jewish' (Schenck 2003:104). 'They could also be accused of atheism for failure to participate in the state religion' (Schenck 2003:104). He identifies 'the Levitical cultus in particular as holding a competing claim for their allegiance.' Hence it was the aim of the writer to inspire in them 'confidence in Christ's atonement and ... the boldness with which they might approach God's heavenly presence' (esp. Heb 4:14-16; 10:18-23; Schenck 2003:103).

Scholars like DeSilva (2012) and Muir (2014) hold that Judaism could not have been the only group that held a pull back on the audience. Writing from social-scientific perspective, they present the situation of the audience in the light of competing group worldviews, beliefs and practices. In such an environment, ethnic, religious, philosophical and other groups and associations compete for acceptance of their values. The recipients of Hebrews are believed to have come from some dominant

groups mostly respecting the Greek culture and or the Jewish religion. Their embrace of the values and way of life of the smaller Christian culture makes them deviants in the eyes of their former group members. Members of their former associations therefore employ some social strategies to put pressure on the believers to return and abandon the minority Christian group and its values. At the same time the author of Hebrews tries similar social strategies that will enable him insulate his audience from the effect of the pressure from their former dominant groups.

The treatment of the social context of Hebrews by DeSilva (2012) is of particular relevance and deserves attention here. In his recent assessment of the situation of the audience, DeSilva (2012:59-64) sees apostasy to Judaism not as the overriding problem (see also DeSilva 2012:154). He situates the condition of the audience in the period of 'imperialistic expansion beginning with Babylon's invasion of the West, but particularly exacerbated by Alexander, his successors, and finally Rome,' where 'other groups were promoting alternative values and practices as honourable and shameful among their adherents, and creating thus a public witness of these alternative values, challenging the 'givenness' or 'taken-for-grantedness' of any one group's delineations of the values and practices that are 'truly' honourable or disgraceful.' In such a situation, groups would find ways of strengthening their position and interest in related matters. 'The ultimate 'Greek' defence, for example, was the ideology that all non-Greek cultures were 'barbaric,' not just 'strange' or 'foreign,' but 'non-Greek' and therefore inferior, savage, in need of the civilizing influence of the newly dominant Greek culture.' In such a situation, 'subordinate groups had to work considerably harder to insulate themselves where their core values and practices, honoured and prized within their group, would be censured as shameful in another group, especially a more powerful group.'

DeSilva goes a great length to show that minority cultures whether they were philosophical or religious like Christianity had to develop strategies for insulating themselves from the pressures of the dominant societies (DeSilva 2012:62). These minority cultures developed similar strategies by 'defining the circle of others that constituted the "court of reputation" whose grants of honour and shame would exercise

effective social constraints upon the individual.’ The giving and withdrawing of honour or shame therefore became powerful tools in the various groups for controlling behaviour.

Against this backdrop, DeSilva (2012:162-165) finds the writer of Hebrews writing within an environment in which the readers found themselves as minority groups with alternative ‘world-views and plausibility structures.’ The readers had come from groups whose values they no longer hold. The implication is that they stopped practices like the sacrifices to ‘the traditional gods of the city (perhaps including both the Greco-Roman pantheon and local, indigenous gods) and in the ideology of Roman rule’ which served the interest of the Roman Empire. The Jews among them would also stop ‘those practices that upheld the Jewish people’s interest in the covenant that defined them as a distinctive people.’ The response of their previous associations would be to resort to some social pressure to discourage their members from continuing to join the Christian group. DeSilva maintains that the Christians

Boldly persevered in their new commitment to the new social body, the *ekklēsia* of God, in the face of this social pressure, but the steady pressure and experience of living in the margins had begun to erode commitment to the point that some had pulled back from the plausibility structure of the Christian gospel, presumably to return to participate in the plausibility structures of the wider dominant Greco-Roman population (or other indigenous Gentile population) or the Jewish subculture.

(DeSilva 2012:163)

In response to Christians who find themselves in such an environment, DeSilva understands the author of Hebrews to be crafting ‘a sermon to effect some social engineering of his own.’ His principal aim was ‘to strengthen commitment to the Christian group among those who are wavering, who might themselves be moving toward defection (thus eroding the Christian plausibility structure further, and jeopardizing exponentially the commitment of those who remain thereafter.’ One can see from DeSilva’s treatment of the social context of Hebrews that the problem the author faced was more of the socio-cultural implications of the faith of his audience than theological disputes though the latter could have contributed in some ways to the situation. The theological sections of Hebrews therefore only served to offer the author a means to address his social concerns of the situation of the audience.

It is believed that the writer himself discloses the nature and purpose of his letter when he calls it a word of exhortation (τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως; Heb 13:22). It is from this that many scholars including Schenck (2003:2), Koester (2011:99), and DeSilva (2012:xi), see Hebrews as a ‘sermon.’ The implication for Hawthorne (1979:1503-1504) is that ‘the many paragraphs of warning and admonition interspersed throughout the work are not to be considered parenthetical but primary.’ He argues that the writer saw the problem of his readers as related to deception by sin (Heb 3:13), abandoning the Christian message (Heb 2:1), and apostasy (Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 3:12). The writer of Hebrews, for Hawthorne, saw the grave implications of his readers committing apostasy since it implied the abandonment of ultimate divine revelation and a fearful judgement (Heb 10:27). The writer is seen to be writing to salvage a situation like this.

One can conclude that the situation of the audience, in the estimation of the author, was a critical one – they were in danger of apostatizing. The author was convinced that presenting Christ and all about him as superior to all that went before him would give the believers reason for not abandoning the faith. In doing this, he employs techniques of social engineering, to revive or maintain the confidence of his audience and ensure continued faithfulness to the Christian faith. He tries to achieve this by presenting arguments that are meant to ground their confidence in the court of opinion of the Christian subgroup with the view to making the believers content with the approval and affirmation of their subculture to the end that neither the desire for honour nor to avoid the reproach of shame from the dominant society would be able to pull them back.

Avoiding the speculative matters about Hebrews, this study assumes a setting that fits the data Hebrews gives in which the audience lived in an urban centre where some of them were rich enough to have possessions that were plundered. Many of them were learned to warrant the elegant nature of the letter addressed to them. As a mixed group of Jewish and Gentile Christians, they lived in a social situation shared by most of the cities in that Greaco-Roman world where as adherents of a religion that frowned upon the worship of many gods and reverence of the emperor brought pressure to bear on them as deviants. The situation of the recipients involved but not limited to economic

and social stress as witnessed in the suffering of public abuse and the plundering of their possessions (Heb 10:32-4) in which believers who had stood strong in past time were at the verge of falling from their faith. In this situation, the tendency to deemphasise their Christian identity and revive their previous social identity related to the subgroups to which they previously belonged or abandon the Christian group altogether was very high.

3.4 TIME OF WRITING

Scholarly consensus on the date of Hebrews is that there is hardly any proof for a certain date. However, majority of scholars propose a period before the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Among such scholars is Ellingworth (1993:29-33), who after an extensive review of other scholarly positions, concludes that ‘the apparent threat of renewed, possibly more severe persecution may suggest a date not long before 70 CE. He maintains that if Hebrews was written in (or to) Rome, a date not long before 64 CE is possible. Acknowledging that neither the case for nor the case against a pre-70 CE is decisive, DeSilva (2012:58) maintains that Hebrews reads more naturally in a pre-70 CE setting when the second temple had not been destroyed. One key indicator for DeSilva’s position is the fact that the writer speaks of the Levitical sacrificial system with the present tense (DeSilva 2012:57). He nevertheless points out that the author of Hebrews focuses on the archaic cult of the tabernacle rather than the temple, and rightly so since Diaspora Jews (and his audience in general) have readier access to Exodus and Leviticus than to the actual precincts of the temple in Jerusalem (DeSilva 2012:57).

Schenck, nonetheless, thinks that this is not a decisive argument against a post 70 CE date. He points out that while writing in the 90s, Josephus still spoke of the temple in the present, as did Clement (Schenck 2003:98). He argues that while ‘the Jerusalem temple never resumed operation after 70 CE, ... both Jewish and Christian writers of the 90s give no sense that *they* thought of the sacrificial system or even the Jerusalem temple’ as having ceased. He is emphatic that ‘the Levitical atonement remained operative in theory well after the Jerusalem temple stood in ruin’ (Schenck 2003:98). On the basis of the following argument, Hawthorne (1979:1503) suggests a wider range of time than a

pre-70 CE: He observes the fact that Hebrews was written to believers who had existed in a congregation long enough to have become teachers (Heb 5:12). They also had former leaders to be remembered (Heb 13:7). Hawthorne therefore dates Hebrews loosely between the middle of the first-century and the time when 1 Clement was written (AD 95-96 or no later than 120, a date some suggest for 1 Clement).

One can confidently say that by the time Clement of Rome wrote to the Church in Corinth in what has come to be known as *1 Clement* (whether 95, 96 or the less likely 120 CE), Hebrews had been written because Clement quotes in this work from Hebrews (Davis 1967:6). This study assumes that Hebrews was written in a post 70 CE period. This period allows for a church that had been in existence long enough to have former leaders and Christians who are expected to have become teachers of the faith. Again, to the extent that there are no indications that the impending persecution was an officially well organised one, the reason for the waning of their faith and zeal could be attributable to general social pressure that had mounted on the believers from the social groups from which they had joined the Christian minority group. Such pressure could be sustained well beyond the destruction of the temple in the 70's. Hebrews should therefore be dated as a post 70 work written before 1 Clement.

Chapter 4

The Akan society of Ghana

This Chapter provides some basic information concerning the Akan society of Ghana. It talks about who Akans are, their origin, the nature of their ethnicity and ethnic identity, the concept of their family and the communal nature of Akan society. It also looks at honour in the Akan society, Akan concept of a person, knowledge and right conduct, training and integration of the individual into the community, control of people's conduct, the place of religion in the Akan society and Akan concept of salvation. These are presented as the foundation for the treatment of social identity in the Akan society as it relates to ethnicity and personality.

A number of scholars have written on the Akan people of Ghana covering almost all important aspects of their history and culture. Chief among such authors are Rattray (1929), Busia (1954), Meyerowitz (1958), Danquah (1968), Fortes (1975), Opoku (1977), Appiah, (1992), Gyekye (1996), Buah (1998), Sarpong (2002), Nkansa-Kyeremanteng (2010), and Awinongya (2013). While a repetition of their work is unnecessary, this study requires the establishment of those aspects of the Akan society on the basis of which social identity, ethnicity and personality within Akan society can be discussed. The discussion of these three concepts in Chapter 7 will provide the lens for an Akan reading of Hebrews in Chapter 8.

4.1 THE AKAN PEOPLE

Akan is the largest ethnic group with 47.3% of the population of Ghana (National Statistical Service 2013:61). The following are the tribes of Akan: Bono, Asante, Adanse, Twifo, Asen, Fante, Akuapem, Akyem, Akwamu, Kwahu, Sehwi, Awowin, Nzima and Ahanta (Buah 1998:8). The name Akan, according to Danquah (1968:198), means 'foremost, genuine' (from *kan*, first,) and is 'the corrupted form of Akane or Akana,' 'corrupted by the early Arabs of the Sudan into Ghana and the early Europeans who visited the coast of West Africa in Guinea.' 'The best known representatives of the

Akan race are the Ashanti, Fanti, Akim, Akuapim, Assin and several of the present (Twi-speaking) races of the Gold Coast' (Danquah 1968:198).¹³

Common language with dialects that share to various degrees 'vocabulary and other linguistic elements' is an important marker of Akan identity. Kofi Agyekum, a professor of Linguistics lists Akan dialects that are 'mutually intelligible' which include: Asante, Akuapen, Akwamu, Fante, Akyem, Agona, Assin, Denkyira, Twifo, Wassaw, Kwahu, Bron and Buem (Agyekum 2006:206). Dolphyne (n.d.:1), also a professor of Linguistics¹⁴, notes the use by some scholars of the name Akan to refer to the 'languages spoken by various groups' in such a way that their use of the term coincides more or less 'with the ethnographic use of the name' Akan (Dolphyne n.d.:2). Agyekum provided a list of six regions where 'Akan is spoken as a native language.' They are: Ashanti, Eastern, Western, Central, and Brong Ahafo Regions (Agyekum 2006:206).¹⁵

On the language divisions of Akan, Buah, a Ghanaian scholar of history has the following observation,

The Akan speak dialects of a common language also called Akan, which is enriched by local varieties of vocabulary, expression and idiom. The two main varieties of the Akan language are Twi and Fante, which are very closely related. Fante is spoken in the coastal parts of the country, and Twi by most of the Akan in the hinterland. In addition to these two major variants of the Akan language there are four other inter-related dialects which differ significantly from Twi and Fante. These are Nzima, Ahanta, Awowin and Sehwi, all spoken in the Western Region of the country.

(Buah 1998:8)

The Twi and Fante dialects are the most widely spoken of all the Akan dialects. They are also the dialects that most non-Akans tend to speak due to the large geographical

¹³ Salm and Falola (2002 :6) divide Akan into two groups of the Fante and the Twi without identifying any basis for the division.

¹⁴ Dolphyne is an Akan who hails from Achinakrom in Asante and has profound knowledge of the Akan people and their culture. She is a Professor of Linguistics who worked and retired as Head of the Department of Linguistics of the University of Ghana.

¹⁵ Though he mentions six, he ends up listing five. It is only when Brong Ahafo is understood as two groups made up of Brong and Ahafo, as is traditionally done, that one can reckon 6 regions, but as the case is, Brong and Ahafo do not constitute two political regions in Ghana. Politically, therefore, one can speak of five regions where the Akan language is spoken.

area occupied by Akans who speak these dialects.¹⁶ The numerous varieties of dialects within the Akan language is a pointer to the complex history, developments and nature of the Akan community. The widespread use of the Akan language in Ghana is evidence of the dominance of the Akan community and its influence on the Ghanaian society. Currently, the most popular radio stations (that is stations with the greatest listenership) are those who use the Akan language. This is in spite of the fact that English is the *lingua franca* in Ghana.

4.2 ORIGIN OF THE AKAN PEOPLE

There is hardly any consensus on the origin of the Akan people. Scholars have put forth suggestions some of which have no historical evidence. Some of the suggestions hold that the Akans may have come from some parts the Sudan, the old Mali Empire, Burkina Faso and even Mesopotamia where they had close connection with Israel. The inclination of majority of scholars is towards the southern part of the Saharan region whether it is identified with the old Ghana or Mali Empires. Danquah (1968) and Meyerowitz (1958) favour the southern part of the Saharan hypothesis. So are Davidson (*et al.* 1965:87) who presume western Sudan. Buah's (1998:9) guess is the southwest region of the present day Republic of Burkina Faso. Tiekou (2016:118), for his part, notes oral traditions that identify the origins of the Akan people with places like old Mali Empire and even to Mesopotamia. There is, however, greater agreement that it was in the southern part of West African forest region that the ethnogenesis of the various Akan groups took place. Some of these hypotheses are noted below.

According to Danquah, the

Akan people were driven from their ancient home in Ghana, on the bend of the Niger, by the Almoravides (Molaththemum or Muffled Moslems) in A.D. 1076. There was a tradition in Ghana (*vide* Flora Shaw, Lady Lugard: 'A Tropical Dependency'), that the people of Ghana had originally come to the west Sudan from a country beyond or near the Taurus mountains (Taurudu). The current theory that the Ghana or Akane in Taurus was the same as the old Babylonian race known as Akkad, Agade or Akana, who lived on the Tigris and Euphrates, is strongly supported by the evidence of common features in the language of the ancient race and of the modern, as also in their customs. Archaeology and anthropology have as yet revealed little, but Sir Henry Rawlinson and other Assyrologists bear testimony

¹⁶ These are issues of common knowledge.

to the similarity between the language of Sumer and Akkad and certain African languages, an ancient group which is not Semitic. The Akan people of the Gold Coast have not been written up as well as they could be, but there is everything in favour of the hypothesis that they are an ancient race; that their institutions and customs are of ancient origin, e.g., the seven-day week, and that their sojourn in the Gold Coast, which is less than 900 years, is much shorter than their traceable sojourn as a people in the ancient and modern worlds.

(Danquah 1968:198)

Danquah appears certain on the ancient Ghana origin of the Akans and still finds strong linguistic evidence as grounds for the association of Akan origin with the old Babylonian race of Akkad. Similarly, Tiekou (2016:118) tells about traditions that have traced the origin of Akan people to the old Mali Empire and the possible derivation of the Akan language from a language close to modern Arabic. Some oral traditions go as far as locating Akan origin in Mesopotamia where they had close boundaries with Israel (Tiekou 2016:118). Such oral traditions point to similarities between Akans and Israelites in the 'great respect they have for their dead,' their common use of the word "Amen" and their association of God with Saturday. While Akans call God as a Saturday-born and their family heads offer sacrifices to God on Saturday, the Israelites observe Saturday as their Sabbath and worship God on that day (see Tiekou 2016:118). Linguistic and other cultural similarities between Akans and other people, taken seriously, could serve to point to the view that Akan is a mixed race, an evolution resulting from their long movement and assimilation of other people from one place to the other before coming to their current settlement.¹⁷ Fortes describes a process that makes such mixed race possible among the Asantes which includes movements and assimilation of aliens due to economic, religious and political reasons.¹⁸

¹⁷ Meyerowitz (1958:17) describes the Akan as people with mixed ancestry noting that names such as Agwas (used by the Tuareg of Air), Gua (used by the Tuaregs of the Fezzan) and Baun (by the Tebu) are all found as names of peoples among the Akan – that is, Dja, Agwa(s), Gua and Braun. It appears to Meyerowitz (1958:18-19) that the founders of Akan states were the descendants of Dia, or Za (Diaga or Zaga), Libyan Berbers, and Gara of the Tibesti region, who emigrated when the Arabs conquered North Africa and pushed the Lemta Tuaregs from the Fezzan into their territory. They incorporated many of the inhabitants into their clans as they settled along the Niger bend as was the custom among matrilineally organized peoples. Though the people were originally of much the same stock as themselves, in the course of time they had intermarried with Negro aboriginals (Meyerowitz 1958:18-19).

¹⁸ As noted by Fortes (1975:253), the Ashanti state was organised as a national state with autonomous chiefdoms and this led to the local allegiance of individuals and groups as opposed to citizenship of the confederacy. People captured in war and others who had sought refuge or had migrated for economic and other reasons into the chiefdoms introduced alien elements into there. (Fortes 1975:253).

Their movement from the south of the Saharan region to their present locations was due to quest for arable lands for farming, avoidance of war, and religious freedom (Davidson *et al.* 1965:87-88; Tiekou 2016:119). As Akans kept moving southward, they settled below the Black Volta River, where Asaman, their leader, founded the Bono Kingdom, which became the first great Akan State in Ghana (Buah 1998:9; Meyerowitz 1958:20) and the cradle of the Akan people with 'nearly all the different groups of the Akan tracing their original homes to Bonoland' (Buah 1998:9).

History about the origins of the Bono Kingdom and their immigration to their present place, according to Buah, are not clear. His educated guess on the subject is that Bonos were led from the north, 'possibly from the south-west region of the present day Republic of Burkina Faso' by King Asaman, the first ruler remembered in the traditions. Though the date is not certain, 'by about the beginning of the fourteenth century the kingdom's capital at Bono-Manso was growing as the capital of an important kingdom and the centre of the Akan civilisation' (Buah 1998:9). Their great ruler, Akumfi Ameyaw I, is credited for the expansion of 'Bono-Manso into a prosperous kingdom.' He is also noted for exploiting the abundant gold mines and for the introduction of 'gold dust as currency' with 'gold weights as measure of value' for the first time in the Akanland before the Asantes and other Akan states used the gold currency and weights of measurement. The wealth of King Akumfi Ameyaw I is legendary in stories in which he is said to have 'supported yams in his royal garden with sticks made of pure gold.' The greatness of the kingdom was achieved 'through trade, commerce, tolls and tributes received from vassal kingdoms before the kingdom declined in the mid-eighteenth century.' Several factors accounted for the decline of the kingdom. There was the movement of several Akan groups within the kingdom to the south to found new settlements. This was necessitated by 'population expansion,' 'internal struggles' and 'the desire for independent existence.' Among these groups were the Denkyira, Twifo, Akwamu, Asante, Akyem and Fante (Buah 1998:9).

4.3 THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF AKAN ETHNICITY

With their insistence on maternal bloodline as the defining factor of the Akan clan, it is not unexpected that distance can hardly deprive one of his/her ethnicity. Fortes explains that the descendants of a woman captured in war could return to occupy a vacant stool they are entitled to or to claim land. Similarly, non-local Ashanti women who come into a village as wives or captives automatically adhere to the lineage of their own clan. If their matrilineal descendants remain in the village they become an attached segment of the local lineage. 'For most social purposes they are treated as true members of the lineage; but they are not eligible for any office held by the lineage' as they 'are known to be of alien origin.' Yet it was an insult to refer to their origin in public as the saying goes *obi nkyere obi ase* (one should not tell about the origins of other). Fortes further notes that 'foreign slave women gave rise to many attached branches of authentic lineages because the lineage principle is so dominant that a person or group cannot be completely absorbed by an existing lineage but is always treated as an actual or potential lineage segment. He observes that 'Asantes are reluctant to admit to outsiders that lineage kinship is a matter of degree,' insisting on 'identification with one another of all lineage kin.' Yet 'in personal matters and in relations of lineage members among themselves, degrees of matrilineal connexion are closely observed' (Fortes 1975:254-255).

4.4 ETHNIC IDENTITY

The discussion of ethnic identity here does not suggest a static identity. Like all other identities, the ethnic identity of the Akan is subject to change in the face of changing social and political developments, especially in a globalised world. Shumway (2011:19) observes that 'ethnic identity in Ghana, as elsewhere in Africa, is neither an unchanging relic of the distant African past nor a recent colonial invention applied arbitrarily to a population.' Ethnic identity is the product of developments of a group of people over a long time. With this changing nature of ethnic identity in mind, the interest of this work is centred on the views that are known to be operational in many Akan thought in terms of who Akans are. In most cases such views could be traditional and not necessarily what all Akans now hold.

Nkansa-Kyeremanteng (2010:26), one of the most cited historians on Akan people, gives some indications about the name *Akan*. His discussion of the subject first points to the meaning of the Twi word *kan* which means 'first' and the suggestion that the Akans were the first settlers of Ghana. Associated with this view is the notion of superiority which is reflected in the Akan saying '[a]nimguase mfata Okani ba (The Akan does not deserve disgrace). Related to this notion is the view that Akans were 'the most polite people' among those with whom they lived. According to Danquah (n.d.:n.p., in Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 2010:26), '[t]he word Akan, ordinarily means a nice, refined, well-mannered man: civilised or cultured person.' In respect of what is characteristic of the Akan in general, Nkansa-Kyeremanteng (2010:27) mentions 'comeliness,' 'bravery,' and 'their regard of sycophancy as disgraceful, ignoble and immoral' as well as 'their love for freedom.'¹⁹ These are the reasons why Akans esteem and honour their sons and daughters who exhibit bravery. Nkansa-Kyeremanteng (2010:26) describes the Akans as people who 'exhibit vast homogeneity, linguistically and culturally, factors which have served to assimilate their immediate neighbours because of the superior political authority they exercised over them.' Adu Boahen (1966, in Dolphyne n.p:3), a professor of History, lists the use of 'common calendar, common religious beliefs, naming ceremonies, marriage institutions, and matrilineal systems of inheritance.' He adds monarchical system of government and language as cultural traits and institutions identical with all Akans.

The seven matrilineal 'clans' called *abusua*, and seven patrilineal groupings called *nton* or *kra*, are common features of the Akan people.²⁰ Buah (1998:8) identifies inheritance through the maternal line as one peculiar practice of the Akan people (Buah 1998:8). This is true whether in terms of property or stools (Tieuku 2016:87). It has, however, been noted that though the Akuapem's are Akans, they inherit from the patrilineal side (Eshun 2011: 9-10).²¹ An exception to the rule of Akan matrilineal inheritance is the

¹⁹ Nkansa-Kyeremanteng (2010:27) believes that it is in their love for freedom that their regard of sycophancy as disgraceful, ignoble and immoral is exhibited.

²⁰ While Buah has seven without listing them, Nkansa-Kyeremanteng (2010:33-35) lists twelve of Akan *nton*.

²¹ This is, however, not true with all Akuapem people. The people of Akropong have matrilineal inheritance. Those who have patrilineal inheritance like the people of Adukrom do not consider

case in which at the creation of a stool it was stated that it is ‘for the first occupant and his children.’ In this case the inheritance of the stool becomes patrilineal (Tieku 2016:87). Chieftaincy used to be a unique mark of the Akan communities according to Dolphyne. She intimates that on the coast, the Gas and Ewes were ruled by their local priests and that chieftaincy among them was introduced for the convenience of governance by the British (Dolphyne, pers. comm., 4th July 2016).

Oral tradition account of the origins of Akan people that speaks of mysterious origins of some Akan groups has been noted (Crentsil 2007:32). Some of such oral traditions have historical foundations in packs in which states had to swear never to teach their children about their origins in order to strengthen the unity of the states. Claims by some Akan groups that they came out of a hole in the ground or the skies could be ways of concealing their real origin for such purposes (see Tieku 2016:120). This, notwithstanding, to dismiss such oral traditions is to dismiss important glimpse into the self-concept of an ethnic group. This is because, regardless of the reason or authenticity of such traditions, their effect on later generations of the groups concerned could be profound. For a study like this, all such stories are important in so far as they help in understanding how people of a particular group who believe in such stories think of themselves. A few examples might be helpful. According to Nkansa-Kyeremanteng (2010:23), the Adanse claim that God began creation with them on their land, and that all other people evolved in their land. The Hani, Wankyi and Takyiman people claim to have emerged out of holes at different points in the Bono region. Some Aduana groups as well as the Eguafu claim to have descended from heaven in gold/brass pans. The statement *Asante Kotoko, wokum apem a, apem beba* (thousands of Asante Porcupine Warriors appear after thousands have been killed) could have a powerful effect on the identity of an Asante whether or not the one knows how the saying came about. The saying tends to give a sense of mystery, power and strength about Asante identity.

themselves Akans. Some of them who were spoken to, indicated that they are Guans (personal communication with Pamela and others 22nd July 2016). Dolphyne (n.d.: 2) notes that the Guans do not belong to the Akan ethnic groups though some scholars include them in the language family of the Akan, Volta-Comoé or Volta-Bendama. Another interesting exception is the fact that the people of Anum, though Guans, have matrilineal inheritance, the only exception among the Guans as related by Martin Obeng, (pers. comm., 6th August 2016), a Guan from Anum and a lecturer at Trinity Theological Seminary.

Asante warriors had this appellation following the experience resulting from their war formations that made it possible for their warriors to appear in successive lines so that while their enemies thought that they had killed all the Asante warriors, other Asante warriors, as numerous as the ones before, emerged.

In so far as ethnic identity is very important for the Akan, several attempts are made to project and strengthen the desired identities of the various groups within the Akan society. One of the ways in which Akans seek to realise their ethnic identity is through the use of totems. Eshun (2011:34; following Quarcoopome 1978) intimates that 'animals are chosen as totems based on the qualities of the animal a particular clan wants to emulate.' To the extent that character traits are considered to be passed on to children by their parents, some particular character traits are associated with particular clans or families. Though the mother's line determines the clan (*Abusua*) to which a person belongs, every individual also belongs to an *nton* of his father believed to be the spirit of the father that protects the person. It is believed that the bond established by the *nton* between the individual and the father determines the characteristics that the child takes such as intelligence, wisdom, knowledge and general character (Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 2010:33). People who belong the same *nton* share some common features. There are twelve *nton* and each has its own totem, taboos, peculiar characteristics and responses to their greetings. This study is interested only in the characteristics of the members of the various *nton* and the responses they receive for their greetings for the reason that they are important indicators for their ethnic identity. These are presented below as given by Nkansa-Kyeremanteng.

- 1) The people of the *Bosommuru Nton* are said to be noble and smart. People respond to their greetings with *Oburu and Akudonto*.
- 2) The members of the *Bosompri Nton* are said to be very hardworking. The response to their greeting is *Anyaado, Aku, or Ahenewa*.
- 3) The people of *Bosomtwe* are very hospitable, patient, truthful, and power loving. *Ahenewa* is the response to their greeting.
- 4) The members of *Bosompo* are said to be snobbish and arrogant. Their greetings are responded to with *Opeafo or Amen*.

- 5) The members of *Bosomafram* are hospitable and their greetings receive the response *Amu* or *Osua*.
- 6) The members of *Bosomyesu* are said to be snobbish and *Afi* is the response to their greeting
- 7) The people of *Bosomakomfo* are gregarious (extroverts) and their greetings are responded to with *Adwo*.
- 8) Members of the *Bosomakonsi Nton* are said to be honourable, humble and good. Their greetings receive the response *Obere*.
- 9) Members of the *Bosomsika* are meticulous and *Afi* is the response to their greeting.
- 10) Members of *Bosomkrete* are brave. *Ahenewa*, and *Ason* are the response to their greeting.
- 11) The *Bosomafi Nton* has neatness as the characteristic of its members. Their greetings receive the response *Afi*.
- 12) Members of the *Bosomadwerebe Nton* are gregarious (extroverts). The response to their greetings is *Adwo*.

(Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 2010:33-35)

Since all the *nton* have a peculiar response to their greetings, one could simply identify the *nton* to which one belongs by simply listening to the response to one's greetings. Many people are proud to identify with their *nton* in many ways and the response to their greeting is one of such ways. It is customary for people to indicate the appropriate response to their greeting after they have greeted in order to avoid receiving inappropriate response. In this way, they show with pride the *nton* to which they belong.

It is not only from the *nton* which is inherited from the father that one can acquire some character traits. Each clan (*abusua*) is said to have its own characteristics. Akans have seven clans (Buah 1998:8). The characteristics of these clans are sometimes connected to the legendary stories about the clan concerned. A dog with fire in its mouth is said to have led the Aduana clan out of a hole. This legend gives the people of the *Aduana* clan the appellation 'Offspring of Fire' (*Ogya asefo*, Tiejū 2016:87). It is from this legend that the *Aduana* Clan has as its totem the 'dog and fire.' Their Patriarch is said to be Nana Bomaa Kusi of Wam. The symbolic qualities of *Aduana* people are

honesty and industriousness (Tieku 2016:88). The ancestors of the *Asona* Clan are said to have been 'led out a cave by a snake and protected by the elephant to their various destinations like Buabinso in Akyem and Edweso in Asante' (Tieku 2016:88). The totem and symbol of the *Asona* Clan is the crow. It is a taboo for *Asona* people to see the red snake which is called by the name of the clan as *Asona wowo*. When a member of the clan comes across this snake, it is believed to signify the death of a member of the clan (Tieku 2016:89). Their Patriarch is said to be Nana Kuntunkununku II of Akyem Abuakwa. 'The symbolic qualities of the *Asona* clan are statesmanship and patriotism,' characteristics demonstrated even by their women, making the *Asona* clan one of the few clans in which women were given the privilege of ruling their people. Among such women are Nana Abena Boaa who ruled Offinso from 1610 to 1640, Nana Afia Dojuaa who ruled Akyem Abuakwa from 1817 to 1835, and Nana Yaa Asantewaa who ruled Edweso from 1896-1900 (Tieku 2016:90). It is also said of the *Asona* people that they are beautiful. The expression *won atiko na ete se obi anim* (the rear of their head is as beautiful as someone else's face) is usually used in their appellations (see Tieku 2016:90).

The totem of the *Ekoona* clan is the buffalo (Ekuo Tieku 2016:91). Honesty and uprightness are their symbolic qualities (Tieku 2016:92). 'The *Oyoko* clan is the most powerful family in the Asante Kingdom because it is the ruling family and occupant of the Golden Stool' (Tieku 2016:92). With the hawk as their totem, they have statesmanship, patience and bravery as their symbolic qualities (Tieku 2016:93). The *Bretuo* clan is said 'to have descended from the skies' and aided by a turkey buzzard 'to settle at Behenasan from Adansi' (Tieku 2016:93). While their totem is the leopard, bravery and aggressiveness are their symbolic characteristics (Tieku 2016:94). Being known in oral tradition as powerful in statesmanship and governance, the *Agona* has the parrot as their totem with the symbolic qualities of eloquence and perfect management (Tieku 2016: 95-96). The *Asene* clan has the bat as its totem and the symbolic qualities of diplomacy and faithfulness. It is said that one can always rely on their loyalty and support (Tieku 2016:97-98). The *Asakyiri* clan, the last and smallest of all the clans has the vulture as its totem with calmness and patience as their symbolic

qualities (Tieuku 2016: 99). Just as members of each *nton* receives particular response(s) to their greeting, so does each clan (see Tieku 2016:87-99).

4.5 THE CONCEPT OF THE FAMILY, RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTHORITY

The concept of the family in practise is broader and actively involves more people in the social life of the Akan than in Western societies. The idea of the family that makes possible the active participation of many more members is expressed in the following observation made by Buah.

While in the non-Ghanaian sense of the word the family includes only the parents and the children of the home, in Ghanaian society it embraces a whole lineage. Among the Akan, the family includes all the maternal relatives; with the other groups, the family takes in all the members of the paternal lineage. Yet it is also true that in both the Akan and the non-Akan societies, both the paternal and the maternal relatives are, in a loose sense, also accepted as blood relations, enjoying and accepting some mutual rights and duties. Thus, inasmuch as blood relations in Ghana embrace many more persons than in the western and other civilizations, it is usual to refer to members of the blood relations as the 'extended family.'

(Buah 1998:43)

Every unit of lineage has a male head (*abusua panin*) chosen on the basis of 'personal qualities of tact, leadership, intelligence, and knowledge of affairs,' qualities that often make him one of the chiefs councillors (Fortes 1975:255-256). Among his duties is 'to watch over the welfare of' the members with the advice of the older men and women and settling 'private disputes between any of his fellow members' to ensure 'peace and solidarity' within the group (Fortes 1975:256; see also Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 2010:54). He acts as the 'chief's representative' to his people, leads in the organisation of corporate obligations such as funeral of a member. '[T]he male ancestral stool' he keeps is the symbol of his authority. 'These ancestor shrines comprise the consecrated stools of his predecessors in office and belong to the lineage as a whole' (Fortes 1975:256). 'Such a lineage also has its god or gods (*obosom*) whose shrines are vested in the lineage' (Fortes 1975:256).

On the issue of authority and responsibility within the family, Fortes gives some insightful information. He observes that a 'father has no legal authority over his children' and 'cannot even compel them to live with him.' In spite of this, it is regarded as 'the

duty and pride of a father to bring up his children, that is, to feed, clothe, and educate them and set them up later in life.’ The fathers generally tend to be stricter than mothers ‘in exacting obedience, deference, and good behaviour from their children.’ Children cannot inherit their father’s property, but that does not prevent the father from making provision for them. Abusing one’s father in any form is a serious offense which brings ‘ill luck (*mmusuo*).’ The mother’s binding obligation for the up-keep of her children stems from the fact that the children belongs to her family from which the child inherits. This also explains the duty and interest her brothers have in the raising of her children. ‘While there is no legal obligation on a son or daughter to support a father in old age, it would be regarded as a shame and an evil act if he or she did not do so’ (Fortes 1975:268).

4.6 THE COMMUNAL ORIENTATION OF THE AKAN SOCIETY

The clan system of the Akan people provides a very important means for their communal living. The fact that Akans have seven clans has already been noted.²² The taboos a person observes are that of his father’s lineage because every person has the *nton* of his father (see Buah 1998:8, Ekem 2008:29). The purpose for the observance of the taboos is to strengthen the spiritual bond between father and son (Busia 1954:199). The fact that the father is held responsible for his sons’ moral behaviour and liable for any damages claimed for the offenses committed by his son served to emphasise the spiritual bond between father and son (Busia 1954:199).

The matrilineal and patrilineal connection of the individual within one’s family affords one some rights and obligations that go beyond one’s immediate family or clan. Buah (1998:8) intimates that ‘[i]n respect of all institutions proper to men, like the military organisation called the *asafo*, the Akan belongs to his father’s group.’ Consequently, in the event of war, an male Akan knows the division in which he must fight (Nkansa-

²² Though Busia (1954:196) recognises the assertion by some writers that there are eight clans. He, nonetheless, follows ‘some of the best authorities on Ashanti custom’ and lists seven Akan clans as follows: (1) Oyoko and Dako, (2) Bretuo and Agona, (3) Asona, (4) Asenie, (5) Aduana, (6) Ekuona and Asokore, and (7) Asakyiri. Ekem follows the list of seven clans as found among the Fantes. They are given as follows: (1) Anona, (2) Aboradze, (3) Kona, (4) Nsona, (5) Adwenadze, (6) Twidan and (7) Ntwea (Ekem 2008:29).

Kyeremanteng 2010:76). 'Wherever an Akan travels, these bonds of maternal and paternal affinity follow him' so that an Akan 'is received as a member of the local *abusua* or the extended family, enjoying all privileges and rights, and sharing in the customary obligations with one's 'brothers' and 'sisters' there' (Buah 1998:8). An Akan also 'looks to the protection and embraces the rights and duties of his paternal *nton* in the area' (Buah 1998:8).

In the Akan society, communal interests generally far outweigh that of individual interest in terms of definition of acceptable conduct. Consequently, 'a person's membership of the community is emphasised more than his individuality' (Opoku 1977:11). Gyekye observes ethics in the Akan context is defined in terms of what promotes the good of society, namely, 'social welfare, solidarity and harmony in human relationships.' This defines what is good (Gyekye 1995:132). For this reason, obligation precedes individual rights so that 'one assumes his or her rights in the exercise of his obligations, which makes society a chain of responsibilities.' (Opoku 1977:11). It is therefore understandable that '[t]he solidarity of the community is maintained by a strong sense of corporateness, undergirded by laws, customs, taboos and set of forms of behaviour which constitute the moral code.' The application of oneself to these is what brings good conduct and the failure to apply oneself to them produces moral evil, defined in terms of what one does against his fellow person (Opoku 1977:166).

In chapter eight of his book *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme*, Gyekye argues convincingly against the notion held by such scholars as Opoku (1978:152), Sarpong (1972:41), Busia (1967:10, 16), and Danquah (1968:3) that religion is the foundation of Akan morality. He maintains that '[i]n Akan moral thought the sole criterion of goodness is the welfare or well-being of the community' (Gyekye 1995:132). Conversely, evil (i.e., moral evil) 'is that which is considered detrimental to the wellbeing of humanity and society.' In this light, what is 'evil is determined by members of the community and not *Onyame* [God]' (Gyekye

1995:133).²³ Using the explanation offered by Sarpong (*Ghana in retrospect*: 57) for why sexual intercourse in the bush is a taboo, Gyekye demonstrates that though the religious rights performed to avert any undesirable effects of the practice creates the impression that the acts is tantamount to offending the gods, yet it is its undesirable social consequences that underpin the tabooing of the practice. If the practice of having sex in the bush is a taboo, it is because of the likelihood that misapprehensions could be conceived about the conjugal act itself with obvious detrimental effect to the human species in the likely event that any of the culprits are bitten by venomous creatures like snakes or scorpions (Gyekye 1995:134-135). To further establish the communal orientation of social norms and values, Gyekye argues that even conscience (*tiboa*) is the product of the society:

But I maintain that *tiboa*, whether as moral sense (conscience) or as moral will, is not innate to man, but something acquired through socialization, through habituation, through moral experience. It is the cumulative result of the individual's responses to past moral situations. Thus, I interpret *tiboa* as nothing mysterious or supernatural in its origins. This interpretation appears consonant with the generally empirical orientation of Akan philosophy.

(Gyekye 1995:143)

In favour of the communal considerations underlying morality and against the view that religion provides the basis for Akan morality, Gyekye makes the following analysis.

Because God is held by the African people not only to be the overlord of the human society but also to have a superbly moral character, and because the ancestors are also supposed to be interested in the welfare of the society, including the moral life of the individual, religion constitutes part of the sanctions that are in play in matters of moral practice. Thus, religion cannot be totally banished from the domain of moral practice, notwithstanding the fact that the moral values and principles of the African society do not derive from religion.

(Gyekye 2013:223)

Following Gyekye's observation, the point can be made that Akan social interests and sanctions instituted to promote the welfare of the community have, over the years, given birth to conscience and religious regulations that govern moral conduct in the Akan society.

²³ 'The thought that God is good and what is good comes from God as well as the religious sanctions associated with morality represent a complex sociological system by which morality gains religious basis whether or not God is the originator of the moral rule' (Gyekye 1995:138, 141).

Some of the etiquettes the Akan child is taught at the very early stages of the child's development are taught because of their communal significance. Ikuenobe (2006:129) argues that we can appreciate why greetings, respect, and show of courtesy are placed in a moral category in African traditions if we understand the role they play in enhancing communal ethos, human relationships, and welfare.

The communal orientation of the Akan society finds expression in the way they practically go about some of their customs. In this respect the solidarity demonstrated on some particular occasions are instructive. On such occasions as funerals, all the members of the family, and indeed the entire community, see their participation as obligatory. The fulfilment of their obligation finds expression in solidarity expressed in mourning the dead and the sharing of funeral expenses. Along with funerals, puberty ceremonies are occasions during which Fortes (1975:156-157) finds a 'high degree of equality between male and female members of the lineage.' The truth is that all members of the small town community (even those outside the lineage) are expected to contribute to the funeral expenses (see Buah 1998:47).²⁴ Sanctions against those who fail to pay their contributions may come in different ways and forms no matter how long it takes. Culprits may be denied the opportunity to organise the funerals of their own kinsmen unless penalties have been paid.

Keeping custody of the stool is a practice in which the communal interest of the Akan society is experienced. In his discussion of the relevance of the Akan Black Stools from variety of sources, Opuni-Frimpong (2012:148-152) notes among others that the stools serve as 'the documentation of traditional leaders and their performance,' representing 'the values that are associated with Akan traditional leadership' for which reason it is indispensable 'in Akan leadership formation.' The stool is a symbol of political authority, Akan identity, unity and continuity. It is also because of its significance that the stool is

²⁴ In respect of such communal life, Buah calls attention to the obligation that is laid on the families that have been brought together into an extended family relationship by the two parties of a marriage. He observes that in keeping with the social practice which knits the Ghanaian extended families closer than in most other parts of the world, all adult members of the extended families contribute towards the funeral expenses (Buah 1998:47).

defended in wars. Rattray (1929:330) observes, '[t]he stool was in every sense greater than the man or woman who "sat" upon it. The lives of the kings or queens or war captains were of little value compared with the overriding necessity for guarding and preserving these shrines upon which were thought to depend the very existence of the Nation, tribe, or kindred group.' In this respect, one is not far from right to conclude that when it becomes necessary for the survival of the group, individual interest or survival may be sacrificed. This is in line with the spirit of Gyekye's statement that in Akan moral thought the sole criterion of goodness is the welfare or well-being of the community

4.7 HONOUR IN THE AKAN SOCIETY

Honour is a basic virtue cherished by all Akans. It is one virtue actively sought and defended in every Akan family or clan. Actions and achievements that bring honour are usually encouraged and praised no matter how hard their attainment could be. People whose accomplishments give their families or clans honour are celebrated. It is in the area of honour that one finds one of the incentives for the acts that people endeavour to engage in or avoid. In this light, withholding honour is a powerful tool in the control of the conduct of people. This is because, for people who live 'in a communal society like the Akan containing a network of complex relationships, the opinions of kinsmen, parents, and heads of lineage and clan powerfully influence the moral behaviour of the individual' (Gyekye 1995:139). Gyekye's observation is that

[t]he possibility of undergoing shame, disgrace, or dishonour in consequence of unethical behaviour is a real sanction in Akan moral practice. The moral maxim "it is unbecoming of the Akan to be in disgrace" (or "Disgrace does not befit the Akan": *animguase mafata Okanniba*), is so ever-present in the consciousness of every adult Akan that it undoubtedly constitutes a potent influence on moral conduct. A similar moral maxim is "Given a choice between disgrace and death, one had better choose death" (*aniwu ne owu, na efanim owu*). That one ought to behave so as not to bring dishonour or disgrace to oneself and one's group is ingrained in the moral consciousness and motivation of the Akan.

(Gyekye 1995:139)

To the question of the grounds for moral actions of the Akan, Gyekye answers that the Akan avoids acts because they are disgraceful and not necessarily because the acts are wrong in themselves. This for Gyekye, gives Akan morality 'a consequentialistic stamp' (Gyekye 1995:139). Though conscious efforts are made to teach the Akan child in many traditional ways to pursue honour, by mere observation and familiarity of what

conducts and achievements are praised or reproved, one learns the virtues that one must pursue as an Akan. Treason and cowardice (violating ‘the oath of allegiance and oath taken by commanders before setting out on a campaign’) were considered capital sin punishable by death (Rattray 1929:312). If one was allowed to ‘buy his head’ in the case of cowardice, he still was ridiculed (Rattray 1929:312). The abuse or slander of a Head-Chief attracted the death penalty because the abuse of the Chief amounted to the abuse of the ancestors who demand that the chief acts to protect their good image (Rattray 1929:309-310). Going to war was a way to demonstrate one’s strength and bravery in the past such that ‘a man who had never been to war and brought back a human head as trophy was counted among women and could not dance to certain drums’ (Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 2010:63). Because war was central to survival of a group, a lot of value was placed on virtues that encouraged men to dare to fight. Even the organisation of Akan State was designed for the purposes of war in such a way that every male had his place in the formation which consisted of the following as given by Nkansa-Kyeremanteng:

- 1) The Central columns of scouts (*Akwansrafo*)
- 2) Advance Guard (*Twafo*)
- 3) Main Warriors (*Adonten*) under the Commander-in-Chief and Bodyguard (*Adontenhene*)
- 4) The Right Wing (*Nifa*)
- 5) The Left Wing (*Benkum*)
- 6) Carriers and Camp Followers
- 7) Rear Guard (*Kyidom*)
- 8) Guard of Royal Property (*Ankobe*)

(Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 210:63-65)

Due to such definite division of the Akan state, every male Akan, right from birth, knows ‘in which division he is to fight’ in the event of war, ‘being taught’ from age ten ‘to adapt himself in preparation’ for war as he learns ‘to shoot in hunting expedition’ (see Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 2010:76).

The fact that Akans cherished the display of courage and bravery did not take away from them the fear of death. For this reason they sought protection against many misfortunes and death. Nkansa-Kyeremanteng (2010:76) observes that apart from training young boys ‘to imbibe the requisite traditional ideas and beliefs,’ they were also

introduced to 'juju and war-medicine' in which they were 'often bathed to immunise' them 'against bullets' and were 'provided with talismans of invincibility.' When one dies in a war, it is regarded as honourable and the person is given a respectable funeral celebration (Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 2010:78; Crentsil, 2007:34).

As has been noted of the Akan community, honour is the one consideration that drives most of the decisions and the endeavours that people pursue. An Akan lives bearing in mind that he/she is carrying the name of the family, clan and village and should do everything to bring honour to it. They always have grave concern for things that would bring their family into disrepute (Awinongya 2013:60). Even in the decision to have larger families (which affects attitudes to marriage and childbirth) lies the quest for honour. As Mbiti (1989:139) notes

[i]t is instilled in the minds of African peoples that a big family earns its head great respect in the eyes of the community. Often it is the rich families that are made up of polygamous marriages. If the first wife has no children, or only daughters, it follows almost without exception that her husband will add another wife, partly to remedy the immediate concern of childlessness, and partly to remove the shame and anxiety of apparent unproductivity.

Honour was also associated with other things. Generally, suicide was considered a capital sin but not all forms of suicide was regarded as sins. Battin (2015:598) intimates that under certain circumstances taking one's life was considered as honourable and acclaimed as praiseworthy; example, 'to kill oneself in war by taking poison, or sitting on a keg of gunpowder to which a light was applied rather than fall into the hands of the enemy or return home to tell of the defeat.' '[T]o take one's own life in order to accompany a beloved master or mistress to the land of the spirits; and finally, in a situation where a man commits suicide to wipe out what he considers his dishonour and because he cannot stand the ridicule of his companions' (see also Rattray 1929:299).

It was a shame for a man to refuse to go to war when the call came. Such a person would be disgraced and called *Ko-sa-anko-bi* – that is, one who runs away from war (Tieku 2016:143). 'Those who retreated during war were given sword marks on their foreheads by the sword bearers' so that they could be humiliated after the war. The '[c]hiefs among such people were destooled' (Tieku 2016:143). It is said that the reason

Nana Osei Kwadwo, of the Asante Kings, took ‘to wars instead of concentrating on internal stability’ of the Kingdom was the notion that a king who did not go to war was not a brave man (Tieku 2016:162). On the 30th of March 1900, Yaa Asantewaa is said to have made a remarkable speech which showed her view of those who fail to fight to defend the heritage and pride of their people. This speech was made during the formation of her war council in preparation to fight the British upon British provocative demand for the Golden Stool. As Tieku intimates, Nana Yaa Asantewaa declared among others:

I am asking you all here, shall we sit down as cowards and let these rouges take away our pride? We should rise up and defend our heritage because it is better to perish than to look on sheepishly while the White man whose sole business in our country is to steal, kill and destroy and shamelessly demand for our sacred stool. Arise!! Arise! Men of Osei Tutu and Opoku Tenten, because I am prepared to lead you to war against the White men. I am urging all the “women” here to go home and stay behind because “we” the “men” are ready for War. Should anyone of you be afraid to fight: may he be punished for his shameful act by the great Asante god *Odomankoma*.

(Tieku 2016:244-245)

In this speech, Nana Yaa Asantewaa, the only woman in this meeting, regarded all the chiefs who were afraid to fight in defence of their pride and heritage as cowards and women.

4.8 AKAN CONCEPT OF A PERSON

Akan concept of a person has its focus on the promotion of healthy communal living such that the questions it answers about identity, freedom, and morality are in favour of communalistic living, promoting trust, cooperation, and responsibility to the community in cultural practices (see Wingo 2006:n.p.). This way of life has evolved as a rational adaptation to the exigencies of survival under harsh conditions. But the concept is also informed by what the Akan believes the human being is composed of.

Akans believe that a person is made up of *okra*, *honhom*, *sasa*, *saman*, *sunsum*, *nton* and *mogya* (see Sarpong 2002:90; see also Opoku 1977:96).²⁵ The *okra*, the soul,

²⁵ Not every writer includes every one of the seven elements. Opoku (1977:96) does not include *honhom*, *sasa* and *saman*.

determines one's destiny and has divine source. It distinguishes humans from non-humans (Sarpong 2002:91). While Opoku (1977:96) finds constancy in the *okra*, Sarpong (2002:91) finds in it the principle of luck which makes one happy or sad. It can, for instance be said that one's '*kra* has run away (*ne kra aguan afi ne ho*) when one is overcome by excessive fear.' It is believed that the 'soul could become sick when grieved,' when one beats or abuses one's father or mother or when a dependant insults the one depended on (Tieku 2016:134). Opoku (Opoku 1977:102-103) calls attention to 'a two-sided view of destiny: while it is 'unalterable,' it 'can be modified or altered under certain conditions.' This is why 'what happens to a person cannot be explained with any degree of finality; it may be one's destiny, the working of evil forces or what one has brought upon oneself.' Insofar as people take steps to correct 'an unhappy destiny' means for Opoku that 'Akans do not take a fatalistic attitude towards' life in spite of their concept of destiny.' The realisation of one's destiny therefore depends also on one's own cooperation in which one's character is important. 'Even when one seeks assistance from a divinity to influence one's destiny, one still has to cooperate by making offerings and taking the advice offered' (Opoku 1977:102-103).

The *sunsum* 'accounts for the character (*suban*), disposition and intelligence of a person,' and contrary to 'the *okra* which is always constant and unchangeable, the *sunsum* is subject to change,' and 'is capable of being trained' to be strong and resilient (see Opoku 1977:96). The *sunsum* is derived 'from the father at conception' and 'is the main bearer of the personality' (Appiah 1992:98). It is the *sunsum* which is 'reflected in the appearance of the person and in the qualities peculiar to the person's individuality, especially moral qualities' (Opoku 1977:96: cf. Appiah 1992:98). The real person is thought of as contained in the *sunsum* such that when one dreams that one has committed an offense like having sex with another man's wife the one is liable to pay the fees that are required to be paid for the offense (Appiah 1992:98). It is believed that the *sunsum* can leave a person at night in sleep and dreams are thought to be a reflection of the *sunsum*'s night journeys (Appiah 1992:98). One's *sunsum* can be subject to evil forces or come under a person's own evil thought which usually results in

the person falling sick (Opoku 1977:97). Though the *sunsum* can be bewitched, 'a strong *sunsum* one can withstand any evil spirit' (Sarpong 2002:91).

As already noted, the *nton* is inherited from the father and gives characteristics like nobility, respectability, courage and other inherited characteristics to the individual. The *nton* 'determines one's totems, totemic relationships, taboos and response' to one's greetings (Sarpong 2002:91-92). The father's influence on the child through the *nton* is believed to extend even beyond puberty when the child's own *nton* is supposed to have taken over (Opoku 1977:98). *Mogya* is the blood which the child receives from the mother and is responsible for defining the child's ancestry, the clan and family (*abusua*) of the child (see Busia 1954:196). This explains why succession is matrilineal as well as the motivation behind the mother's clan taking the responsibility for the child's upbringing in terms of the provision of food and water (see Sarpong 2002:90). Members of a clan are believed to have come from one ancestor no matter their geographical location and as such are forbidden from marrying each other.

Sarpong (2002: 91) describes *honhom* as 'the Breath of Life' that comes from God. He identifies it as 'the principle of life in the human being.' At death, the *okra* returns to God, 'the *sunsum* becomes *saman* (ghost) and the *bogya* is buried in the ground.' The *sasa* 'protective' and 'vengeful.' It may for instance, compel the one responsible for a person's death to confess and own up the crime. While alive, a person's *sasa* may force a culprit to confess an evil committed against a person. It can even kill or make the culprit mad (see Sarpong 2002:91). Danquah (1968:115) describes the relationship between the *sunsum* and the *okra* in terms that makes the *sunsum* a conscious counterpart of *okra* with the function of preparing for the *okra* to be realised.

4.9 THE AKAN AS A SOCIAL PERSON

The understanding of oneself as an Akan has strong basis in one's connection with the rest of the community. The Akan person has a self that is considered mostly in relation to other persons in the social order especially of one's family or other significant social

groups. This is the self at work in most African communities including that of the Akan.

As Mbiti has noted,

the philosophical awareness of the individual is 'I am because we are; and since we are therefore I am.' The existence of the individual is the existence of the corporate; and where the individual may physically die, this does not relinquish his social-legal existence since the 'we' continues to exist for the 'I.' This continuity is of great psychological value: it gives deep sense of security in an otherwise insecure world in which African peoples live. Viewed in this light, the elaborate kinship system acts like an insurance policy covering both the physical and metaphysical dimensions of human life.

(Mbiti 1989:141)

In essence, when the Akan speaks of *I* or *me*, what might be meant is what one is in expectation and for the good of one's group informed by the awareness of one's relationship with others in one's community. All this is due to the complex interlocking nature of the person in the participatory life of the Akan community. On this perspective Awinongya states:

[T]he sense of belonging to community created the awareness of solidarity and participation in the life of others. What is a human person, if he cannot participate in the communal life of the society in which he lives? The traditional society survived on this sense of participation, be it in religious sacrifices; work on the farm, the building of a new house, marriage or child-naming ceremony. Participation in this sense served as the pivot of community life where the person brought his potential to bear and was available to his family and/or community members. In other words, the Ghanaian thought of a person based on participation is that 'the very being of a man [or woman] in a society is derived through participation. This is because every individual person and his community, which is the embodiment of the individual, is ontologically interlocked.

(Awinongya 2013:60)

The emphasis on the individual as imbedded in and integrated into one's society does not necessarily make the Akan a product of one's society who functions like a robot by the views and promptings of other members of the society. Akan concept of personality emphasises both the collective and the individual selves of a person. Awinongya maintains that the individual is called to book for their misdemeanour or rewarded for good deeds because one's misconduct in the community could lead to the ancestors getting angry with the whole community. This further explains the theory that the individual in Ghanaian societies is part of others but not absorbed into the anonymity of the whole. In this way the balance between the individual self and the communal self is upheld. Even a person's individuality is expressed in relation and association with

others and not apart from them, depicting individuality and the thought of interdependence characteristic of life in a community in the traditional setting of the Ghanaian (see Awinongya 2013:63). Whether one is wicked or kind, is expressed in one's relationship and dealings with others. Because the individual is embedded in the community he owes his existence to other people. The community therefore makes, creates or produces the individual because the individual depends on the corporate group (Mbiti 1989:106). It is possible to conclude that the community is interested in the life of the individual in so far as the good of the community is concerned rather than the good of the individual as an isolated person. This is to say that though one has the capacity, like every other person in any other culture, to independently express oneself as an Akan, the individual knows that society is not simply interested in the self-fulfilment and expression of the individual but only as they meet the expectations of society.

In an article titled 'Person and community in African thought,' Gyekye questions the view that Akan/African society is communal and collectivist through and through. He maintains that such a perception ignores the individualist elements in that society. He maintains:

African conceptions about the ontological and social status of the person *vis-a-vis* that of the community have been misconstrued and distorted by most scholars, African and non-Africans, simply because the assumption has always been that the African society is communal and collectivist through and through, an assumption that is not wholly correct as it ignores individualist elements in African social thought. What Akan/African social thought attempts to do is to integrate individual desires and social ideals; it attempts, that is, to integrate and keep in creative balance individual uniqueness and social participation. It is this kind of perspective on the nature of human society which, according to Akan thinkers, would most effectively conduce to the social, material and mental liberation of the individual person.

Gyekye (n.d.:n.p.)

Gyekye's conclusion on the subject is that 'Akan social thought holds that the human person is complete in his/her nature, and that he/she is a unique individual, with particular interests, wills and desires, capacity and dispositions for self-expression, and with ability to think and act autonomously.' By nature the Akan person is a social being with the natural inclination to relate to other persons. As the individual's interaction with

others create the community, the being of the individual is primary and the community, secondary, making the individual take precedence over the community (Gyekye n.d.:n.p.). Primary as the individual is, as asserted by Gyekye, right conduct of one tends to sample one's collective self in most cases since it is in the collective interest that one thinks of acceptable conduct. It is in this sense that Deng's conclusion should be understood. He concludes that the Akan view sees personhood as constituting an individual self with a larger social self, which in turn is reflected in successively expanding selves such as family, lineage, clan, nation, country, and collective humanity (Deng 2008:86).²⁶

The consequences of one's action (good or bad) do not affect the individual alone but others in the person's community (see Opoku 1977:162). A person acting in accordance with social norms therefore contributes to the welfare of the entire community since these norms are meant for that. 'Even nature is believed to revolt when men do wrong' so that 'when the rains fail, the malicious deeds of people are held to be responsible.' In a similar vein, '[t]he success or failure of such human endeavours as hunting or fishing may also be used as a yardstick for judging the moral standards of a village' (Opoku 1977:162).

4.10 KNOWLEDGE AND RIGHT CONDUCT

Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, whose PhD thesis was based on traditional systems of knowledge in the Akan society, offers insightful thoughts on the relationship between one who is knowledgeable and the conduct that is expected of such a person. He explains that *Nimdefo* (knowledgeable people) are those considered to possess the relevant knowledge and values of the society. *Nteteē* is the training one goes through in order to exhibit acquired knowledge in community participation. People who have acquired *nteteē* or *nimdeē* (knowledge) are respected people in the Akan society.²⁷ Any

²⁶ In respect of the individual and collective self, he maintains that while respecting the individuality of a person, the emphasis is on the person's 'membership of the community' (Opoku 1977:160).

²⁷ Opuni-Frimpong (2012:104-105) explains that 'Akan society has much regard for people considered to have received *nteteē* and disapproves of persons who are considered to have not gone through proper nurturing.'

misbehaviour by an individual reflects on the extended family much the same way as the effect of misconduct of a family member is borne by other members of the family. In view of the fact that family identities are defined by the values that members exhibit, the background of a person one wants to marry is investigated to see if the kind of people in that family are what one wants to have in one's family. Hard work, concern for others, fairness, respect for elders, temperance and faithfulness are some of the values of Akan society. For traditional leaders, courage, faithfulness and respect for leaders and traditions are the key values while their institution abhors bribery, sexual immorality and too much desire for alcohol (Opuni-Frimpong 2012:104-107).

On pursuit of goals, Opuni-Frimpong observes that one is expected to pursue one's achievement in the larger interest of the community. In a sense, an 'individual's achievements should not be dissociated from that of the community.' One's failure to conform to the norms of society is indicative of lack of proper training. The Akan symbol '[o]bi nka obi [no one bites the other] is to encourage harmonious living' (Opuni-Frimpong 2012:108). Some of the acts are considered very grave offences: these include a son assaulting his father, a crime described literally as clubbing oneself with a stick, an euphemism for cursing oneself (*w'abo wo ho dua*). In the same way a child should not make his or her mother weeps so that her tears fall on her breast (Rattray 1929:16). Since people are expected to behave as informed and responsible members in order to bring honour to their families, there are deliberate attempts to train and integrate young ones into the society.

4.11 TRAINING AND INTEGRATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL INTO THE SOCIETY

An Akan proverb states, *Onipa tese brode a eda egyam;* *w'ankisa a, ehye* (a human being is like a plantain being roasted on coal fire, it burns when you fail to keep turning it). This proverb underscores the importance not only of training, but emphasises also the need to maintain efforts aimed at moulding the character of members in one's charge in a family or household. Before the advent of Western education in Ghana, Akans had informal and formal ways in which they educated and trained their children. The informal ways involved observation and participation while the formal ways took the

form of institutionalised periods during which specific lessons and skills were imparted to young ones. Akan children learned as they observed and practiced what they saw their parents do. They were also required by their parents to do specific work at home and on the farm and run some errands. As they carried out these tasks and errands, they were corrected whenever they went wrong. Lessons on the wisdom behind having to do things in a particular manner were also given to enlighten the child. Most of the lessons the child needs for responsible participation in communal living are learnt through observation and participation.²⁸ 'Children received their first education from their parents,' and this was by way of parents training their children in their own trade. Children therefore mostly took after the trade of their parents (see Tieku 2016:263). In this way it was not only the character traits of parents that children were to take but their parents' vocation as well. Even with the influence of postmodern life of the 21st century, this is true of many families where many politicians, lawyers, doctors, teachers and farmers have their children taking after the professions of their parents.

The Akan child is exhorted in many ways to obey elders. It is held that heeding the advice of elders can influence a person's destiny, for elders are generally regarded as repositories of communal wisdom. Opoku calls attention to the fact that Akans find it prudent to take the words of older people seriously. '*Opanyin ano sen suman*, (the words of an elder are greater or more potent than an amulet)' is a proverb that speaks to this (Opoku 1977:102). The belief in the power of the utterance of elders also has influence on how the young are expected to relate to the words of the elders. The elders should not be provoked to pronounce a curse on the young since such a pronouncement is considered potent. In this light the elderly reckon it their duty to give pieces of advice to their young ones or to others sharing no blood relations with them, especially when the young are seen doing wrong.

²⁸ Awinongya notes that the child is integrated into the family in many ways to ensure that it develops a character to live as a virtuous and responsible person in the family and society. This is achieved through the process of participation in the family and social life of one's people right from one's naming ceremony which involves the participation of members of the family and others in the community. The child also participates in and observes other members' participation in social activities for the common good of family members. The name given to the Child also has family significance and may be related to events in the history of the family (see Awinongya 2013:62)

The use of symbols, which are usually visible in many homes, is one important way by which Akans educate their children. The traditional symbols known as *Edinkra* portray values that are cherished by the Akan society. For instance, '*Eti nta* (two heads symbol)' depicts the wisdom in taking counsel, that is to say, two heads are better than one. The symbol '*Obi nka obi* (no one bites the other)' encourages 'harmonious living' (see Opuni-Frimpong 2012:108). Similarly, proverbs play a very important role in the education of the child because of their value in teaching 'common sense and good manners such as ... *self-control, humility, patience, respect and loyalty*' (Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 2010: 28).²⁹ Other ways of educating the child include folktales and cultural songs (ed., Dei & Darko: 2015:85). In respect of folktales, Nkansa-Kyeremanteng (2010:86) notes that they focus mainly on 'vices and wrongs that point to particular concepts characteristic of the Akan way of life.' In these folktales and in other ways, some of the norms of the community are taught indirectly or directly to young ones. The norms of the community help to regulate human conduct and are based on the community's own convictions, experience, and native good judgement in which the individuals share (Opoku 1977:160, 162).

Though one traditionally learns by observation and practice in the daily experiences of life, there are specific periods devoted to the training of the child to enable the child assume responsible roles later in specific areas of adult life in the community. These special occasions are usually associated with the rites of passage. According to Mbiti (1991:102), the period of seclusion during initiation rites involves the training of the child to overcome difficulties and pain, and to cultivate courage, endurance, perseverance and obedience, equipping them mentally, bodily, emotionally and morally for the adult life.³⁰ Some of the lessons girls learn at puberty is 'how to sleep with their husbands, when to refrain from sex, how to be attractive as a wife, how to bring up children.' Others include how to be industrious, lessons about the weather, and 'returning borrowed articles' (Mbiti 1989:126). These rites continue throughout the physical life of

²⁹ Emphasis in original work.

³⁰ An *obaa panin* (elderly woman) is also chosen to take responsibility of settling disputes and training the girls in feminine matters such as puberty, which she does with assistance from some other elderly women in the lineage (Fortes 1975:257; Ekem 2008:29).

the person during which the individual passes from one stage of corporate existence to another. The final stage is reached when the individual dies and even then the one is ritually incorporated into the wider family of both the dead and the living (Mbiti 1989:106). Mbiti's describes this process of socialisation in the words '[j]ust as God made the first man, as God's man, so now man himself makes the individual who becomes the corporate or social man.' Whatever the person becomes then depends on this making by the society of the child since it is from it that one becomes aware of 'one's being, duties, privileges and responsibilities towards oneself and towards other people' (Mbiti 1989:106). The nature of the corporateness of one's self-awareness also leads to a consciousness in which there is a shared fate with one's community. As Mbiti notes:

When he suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, his neighbours and his relatives whether dead or living. When he gets married, he is not alone, neither does the wife "belong" to him alone. So also the children belong to the corporate body of kinsmen, even if they bear only their father's or mother's name. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual.

(Mbiti 1989:106)

In addition to these ways of education and integration of the individual into the society, Tiekou intimates that there was what was called *Aheneahene*, a kind of yearly traditional school organised in some communities for their children during which children were made to play the roles of adults in a mock fashion. The children involved in such schools were made to practise everything in such roles as husband and wife (except sex) and elders of the city. The boys would follow their 'wives' to the farm and work for their 'in-laws' on the farm. In the evening they would have such things as meeting of elders to settle disputes among members of the society. They would also learn to communicate through drumming, dancing, and Adinkra symbols (Tiekou 2016:263-265).

4.12 CONTROL OF PEOPLE'S CONDUCT

The control of people's behaviour is the responsibility of both the living and the dead and this is because both have interest in the conduct of the individual the consequences

of whose actions affect them.³¹ The control of people's lives consequently involves institutions based on belief in what the spirit beings are capable of doing and the actions of human beings – both deliberate and spontaneous. Opoku (1977:166) states that 'supernatural agencies also have a keen interest in keeping harmony in the society.' For instance, 'Asase Yaa, the Earth Spirit, abhors suicide and the spilling of blood, and cohabitation in the bush' as '[s]uch acts are considered *mmusu*.' Such *mmusu* may result in calamities which come upon the whole community (Opoku 1977: 157). Rattray (1929:374) mentions various agencies that may carry out supernatural sanctions:

- 1) The sanction of the Nsamanfo (ancestral spirits)
- 2) The sanction of *Nyamkopong* (the Supreme Being), more especially by his subordinates, the abosom or lesser manifestations of his Spirit.
- 3) The sanction of *suman* (fetishes)
- 4) The sanction of Asase Yaa, the Earth goddess
- 5) The sanction of the male transmitted totemic spirit (the *Nton*)
- 6) The Sanction of the *sasa* (spirit) of men, animals, plants, and trees
- 7) The sanction of *abayifo* (witches), *mmoatia* (fairies), *sasabonsam* (forest monsters) and black magic in general.³²

According to Rattray, '[t]he real power in all these sanctions lay in the fact that they were supposed to be operative not only against the individual, but, if occasion demanded it, collectively.' It is because one's blood relations and one's kindred hoped to become indirectly involved in the results of the offender that corporal punishment as sanction was meted out to certain offenders. It is from this that one sees the deterrent nature of corporal punishment (see Rattray 1929:374-375).

³¹ Opoku notes that '[t]he Akan distinguish between *bone* or what may be broadly termed wrong-doing, wickedness, evil or sin, and *mmusu*, acts that bring disaster or cause misfortune. Bone is wrong-doing which may bring about conflict or disharmony between a person and another and may be settled without involving the entire community; yet, the settlement may be completed with the pouring of libation. *Mmusu*, however, has a wider implication, because its consequences go beyond the offender and threaten the entire community. Such acts, therefore concern the state and the gods, and settlement in these cases always requires the pouring of libation and the offering of blood sacrifice' (Opoku 1977:157).

³² In respect of supernatural punishment, Opoku calls attention to the involvement of the ancestors in punishing and rewarding those who break the 'traditionally sanctioned code' and those who comply with it respectively (Opoku 1977:156).

In respect of deliberate measures taken to control the behaviour of individuals, correction by way of punishment seems to be the main measure. Some members of the community or family are vested with the authority to exercise this sanction.

Though the general rule is that the father has limited control over his children who belong to the clan of their mother from which they inherit their blood, in practice, the father exercises some appreciable control over the children. This is due to the fact that the children have the *Nton* of their father which exercises considerable influence on the life of the children even in death.³³ The father is accused of failing to train his children well in the event that the children displayed some unacceptable behaviour. It was customary for the father to punish his children with the cane, for instance, in order to correct them.³⁴ The child stays with his or her father up to the youthful stage in obedience and affection. However, 'these are later to be weakened by the materialistic and kindred considerations which are to draw him [the child] ever farther from his natural parent and towards his uncle' whose successor he/she becomes (Rattray 1929:17). Agents for discipline in the family include an older sibling who not only punishes with deference but also helps the younger ones (Fortes 1975:272). In the larger community several offenses attracted corporal punishment. They included treason and seducing the wife of the king (which attracted death in the cruel execution called *Atopre*). The recalcitrant 'in society could be punished with castration to discharge the role' of bathing the wives of the king and serving as servant to her (Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 2010:62). Other offenses which do not escape the attention of the civil authorities may receive physical penalty or the imposition of a fine (Opoku 1977).

With regard to the spontaneous attempts to control conduct by the society, one potent sanction is public ridicule. Akans share 't]he fear of being ostracised in [their]

³³ The *nton* of the father could harm the children if they disrespect their father. Because of this, decisions involving children leaving their father was not carried out without the consent of the father (see Rattray 1929:8-9).

³⁴ For a discussion of this, see Rattray (1929:8-14).

communalistic societies' (Opoku 1977:160). '[O]n account of this, vices are avoided and certain virtues pursued.'³⁵ On this Rattray states:

If I were asked to name the strongest of the sanctions operating in Ashanti to enforce the observance of the "traditional rule of the community", I will think I would place the power of ridicule at the head of these forces of law and order. Indeed, as will have been observed by an examination of the substantive law which has now been reviewed in these pages, the power of the sharp-edged weapon of derision seemed often the only sanction behind the law. Even where we find the supernatural or corporal sanctions in the form of punishments inflicted by the gods or by man, for breaches of tribal regulations, it appears probable that fear of ridicule was also ever present, and it is doubtful if even the worst of humanly inflicted punishments was more dreadful than this subtle weapon which came in laughing guise to rob a man of his own self-respect and the respect of his associates. In the social world in which the Ashanti live, there was not any escape for one who had incurred this penalty. What among ourselves, therefore, would be, at most, an unpleasant state of affairs, from which we might be glad to escape elsewhere for a time, became a punishment to an Ashanti from which there was not any escape, and one he could not face.

(Rattray 1929:372)

Gyekye (1995:141-142) makes a similar observation. He maintains that the fear or thought of shame, of disgrace, of loss of social esteem and opportunity, and so on, constitutes a real influence on moral conduct, and as such can be regarded as a kind of sanction, if an obscure one. He, however cautions that to think of Akan morality as consequential alone would be wrong. He cites the role played by the conscience (*tiboa*) with its self-sanctioning in moral conduct as one reason to speak of doing an act on the basis of being right in Akan thought.³⁶ This caveat of Gyekye does not rule out the consequential nature of moral decisions that Akans make.³⁷ Whichever, the case, people make decisions bearing in mind, among other things, the social consequences their actions may bring and chief among these social consequences is the social sanction of ridicule. It was usual and not unexpected for one who came under the public

³⁵ Opoku argues that this makes communal feeling an important factor in considering moral values and that the important role which communal feeling plays in determining moral values originates from the notion that a person is never alone, and that to be a real human being one must belong to a community.

³⁶ Gyekye (1995:141), nonetheless, recognizes that 'some sanctions are so subtle that they may not be felt as such. What seems to have happened is that, as a result of the process of habituation, thought or fear of sanctions in making moral decisions may have receded so far back in our moral psychology that we hardly think of sanctions in deciding to do the right or to avoid the wrong. The right moral choice thus appears to be spontaneous and motivated by no other considerations than the rightness of the action itself.'

³⁷ He has made the point elsewhere to this effect (see Gyekye 1995:141).

sanction of ridicule to end one's life than endure the constant shame and ridicule. Such a choice of death over shame appeared to be the ideal as is represented in the maxim *ferie die efanyinam owuo* (appearing in other variant renderings) meaning 'shame is worse than death.'³⁸

4.13 RELIGION AS INTEGRAL TO THE AKAN SOCIETY

To understand the place of religion in the Akan society is to appreciate the Akan view of the individual and the family in relation to the spirit world as well as the utilitarian nature of religion in Akan thought. Akan cosmology is one in which the spirit world and the world of the living are infused into each other.³⁹ What happens in each sphere does affect or have repercussions on the other. In the first place, the human being is material well as immaterial (spiritual) and at death the material part dies while the immaterial part (the soul) lives on (Opoku 1977:10). In death therefore 'is an extension of life' in which 'a community of the dead exists alongside the community of the living' (Opoku 1977:10). This spiritual understanding of the Akan community sees the dead, the living and the yet unborn in a single continuous family (Opoku 1977:10-11; Mbiti 1989:105; Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 2010:89).

The clan or family (*Abusua*) therefore includes not only the living, but also the dead and the unborn. It is in this respect that birth, 'naming of the child, puberty, marriage, death and the veneration of ancestors' are 'important rites and ceremonies' in the religious life of the Akan. 'It is in the proper observation of these rights that life and prosperity of the clan is preserved' (Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 2010:89). The place of religion in the Akan society is therefore derived from the spiritual view of the Akan community as well as the practical benefits of religion for communal life. As an integral part of the community and believed to have power to promote the wellbeing of their living members in which they have great interest, the ancestors, the spiritual members (the living dead) of the family, need to be consulted and appealed to for help in all important matters of the family.

³⁸ For an example of the choice of death over shame and further discussions, see Rattray (1929:372-373).

³⁹ In the Akan society religion is pervasive and finds expression in all facets of life (see Opoku 1977:11).

Ekem notes that there is

a qualitative differentiation of the dead and that not all dead people are accorded the same honour and significance in society. Depending on the impact they made on society during their lifetime, some may be entirely forgotten or lapse into insignificance whilst others may long be remembered and held in honour by posterity. These honoured ones, properly termed ancestors – *nananom nsamanfo/ewuakor ampanyim*, would have led exemplary lives, and contributed immensely toward society's well-being

(Ekem 2008:37).

It is from this view of the ancestors' moral excellence that an Akan chief is called *Nana* (grandfather) because he has a special relationship with the ancestors (called *Nananom*, grandfathers) and is expected to emulate their example.⁴⁰ 'Fertility and procreation as well as good harvest,' come from the goodwill of the ancestors as with the gods too (see Ekem 2008:38; Gyekye 1996:162; Busia 1954:201). Gyekye (1996:162) is, however, critical of the view held by many scholars that the ancestors are necessarily people who lived morally upright lives. Maintaining that some of the ancestors who are mentioned in libation were wicked, He argues to the effect that it is our respect for the traditions the ancestors have handed to us that ancestors are respected, so that the ancestors who are really revered comprise all the past generations of a people with the exception of those who died very young. This is because traditions (as cultural heritage) are the product of not a few individuals but of the entire society.⁴¹

On the question of whether the ancestors are worshipped or simply venerated, Ekem concludes after a discussion of some scholarly views that both worship and veneration may be present. He, however, cautions that they are not regarded as 'ends in

⁴⁰ 'The title *Nana* used to address Akan chiefs affirms their special relationship with the ancestors whose noble examples the chief is expected to emulate' (Ekem 2008:30).

⁴¹ He argues that there are among our ancestors 'chiefs who are known to have been corrupt and tyrannical rulers who led morally unworthy lives.' He maintains that if the names of individual deceased persons invoked in libation prayers are an indication of the place such individuals have in the constellation of the ancestors, then, it would be true to say that all departed members of a lineage who lived to old age – at least into their fifties – are considered ancestors by the living members. For more discussion on this, see Gyekye (1996:164-168).

themselves' but as servants who execute the will of God (*Nyame*), making them 'co-workers with the *abosom* [gods] in the execution of Onyame's purposes (Ekem 2008:38). Key to the belief in ancestors is the notion that they are not only 'interested in 'the welfare of their living relatives,' but are 'ever willing and ready to help them,' taking 'interest in the moral conduct of' the living and being 'custodians of the traditional moral order' which they 'helped to create' (Gyekye 1996:162). The ancestors are believed to be 'watching over living relations' 'to punish those who break custom' and 'protect and help those who observe them' (Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 2010:92; cf. Ekem 2008:38;).

In the Akan belief of the spirit world is the belief that one continues to live after death the kind of life one was living on earth. As Nkansa-Kyeremanteng intimates, if a one was a chief or a hunter, the one continues to live as such in the other world. The killing of the favourite wife of the chief and some of his servants at the death of a chief was to ensure that they would accompany and continue to serve the chief in the other world as when he was on earth. Those whose lives were cut short on earth (i.e., those who died early) are believed to reincarnate to fulfil their lives on earth (Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 2010:91).

Akans also believe in other spirits from whom they seek help in various matters of life. Because of the powers of such spirits and the respect accorded them, their rules and restrictions are also respected by their adherents in many spheres of their lives. Buah's observation is helpful here:

In addition to the cult of the Supreme Being, each of the early kingdoms in Ghana recognised and developed the cult of a national deity, and towns and individual families maintained local gods. The people held in highest esteem priests of the various gods who served as intermediaries between them and the deities. These religious leaders not only led the people in worship, but also interpreted the oracles at the shrines of the different deities. In unsophisticated societies, both in Ghana and elsewhere, the worship of the supreme God and of the inferior deities has had a great social and moral impact on men's lives. The people observed the dictates of moral values and well defined codes of conduct. The strict observance of these values and codes was sustained by the belief that a breach would have grave evil consequences for both the offenders and society.

(Buah 1998:50-51)

In the light of the above quotation, the observation of religious rules and moral values is done not just for the sake of it but because of the consequences on the members of the

community of either their observation or failure to observe them. In this sense, the religious rules have their roots in the communal wellness of the people, emphasising the link between religious regulations and the promotion of the good of the community.⁴² Another point worth making is that the infusing of religion and politics into the family life of the Akan means that functions of office bearers in a family can hardly be divorced from these two aspects of Akan life – religion and politics. One’s descent from a particular lineage therefore entitles one not only to inherit property, but also to certain offices and to perform special sacred rites for ancestors of the lineage (Ekem 2008:29). For instance, the chief, combining both political and religious roles, not only directs the daily affairs of his subordinates but also acts as intermediary between his people and their members of the spirit world. This function of the chief is clearly evident on special occasions like the *Akwasi* of the Asante people and the *Eguadoto* of the Fantes (Ekem 2008). In these ceremonies, the chief’s role in making intercession and petitions on behalf of his people is carried out alongside the offering of food and drink sacrifices to the ancestors (Ekem 2008:30).

Any good thing that happens to the living is understood in terms of the blessing of the ancestors and the gods. Religious occasions are therefore times to thank the spirits and ask for more blessings for the times ahead. For this reason a number of religious ceremonies are built around socio-political and agricultural events to thank the ancestors and the spirits for their blessings. While the religious ceremonies gave meaning to the occasions as understood by the people, they also provided occasions for the people to give attention to other social events of family and communal importance. Buah notes:

Connected with the religious cult was the observance in each kingdom or state of an annual festival which generally marked the beginning of the harvest or new fishing season, and of the new year of the indigenous calendar. On this occasion, libation was poured and the first

⁴² It is noted that, the communal form of religion in the Akan worldview revolves around three important concepts according to Nkansa-Kyeremanteng: '(1) The indissoluble bond linking the *Abusua* (family) in life and death, that is, the ancestors in the world beyond. (2) Concern for abundant life in this world expressed in terms of “increase” of children, crops and goods. (3) Sin as neglect of the ancestors, that is, whatever disturbs the right balance of duties and obligations to endanger life and well-being of the group. In this light, Nkansa-Kyeremanteng concludes that the events of human life, from birth to death, which promote the total wellbeing of the community constitute the Akan’s religious concerns’ (Nkansa-Kyeremanteng 2010:90).

fruits and sacrifices of domestic animals were offered to God and the inferior deities, in acknowledgement of their blessings in the past and to implore their help and protection in the ensuing year. The national festival, which was observed with pomp and pageantry, was also an occasion when most Ghanaians living away from home went back to their home towns for a family reunion. The departed members of the family were mourned, any existing disputes in the family were settled, and the family joined in a communal meal prepared from the new harvest, after they had offered portions of the meal to the departed dear ones and their family deities. In recent times, the annual festival has offered the people an occasion to plan and take in hand communal services for the improvement of the place.

(Buah 1998:51)

Because blessings and favour from the ancestors and the spirits are needed for peace and prosperity of the living, all attempts to maintain cordial relationship with the spirits are made. Key to maintaining this relationship is the appeasing of the ancestors and the spirits. The concept of defilement that could bring communal disaster resulting from contamination due to the failure to observe the customs of the ancestors is one prominent and common concept among Akan societies. The *Odwira* Festival is one of the occasions on which the community or state is purged of any defilement so that the good relationship with the spirit world can be maintained. With the spirits appeased, their benevolence and favour could still be relied on for the welfare of the community of the living. The annual festival of *Odwira* is a purificatory ceremony which lasted for not more than two weeks. During the ceremony, sacrifices are made to the gods and the ancestors (Busia 1954:203). It saw the performance of elaborate rituals to realise the objective of the ceremony. Busia gives the following details,

The rites of cleansing and purification usually took place in a stream where the chief took a ritual bath, and water was sprinkled on the shrines and on all who were present, as a symbolic act of cleansing. A peculiar sacrifice of a black hen symbolized the removal of all that had defiled the tribe, and the new year was begun with a ritual feast which the living and the dead were believed to share. All who partook of this feast were believed to receive strength and health and blessing.

(Busia 1954:204)

In Akan thought, lack of productivity is believed to be a sign of curse on the affected individual or family. In this sense, a fruitful marriage is regarded as a blessing in much the same way as a marriage which is not blessed with children for a considerable period of time is considered a curse (Buah 1998:45). When the deities are approached, it is for

the provision of needs to ensure the survival, peace and prosperity of the people and their families. In this light, allegiance to a deity is not necessarily a permanent one. Having a utilitarian nature, such allegiance is dependent on how useful a deity is in the provision of the needs of the people. This means that if a deity fails to fulfil the needs of the people, the deity is abandoned. Gyekye intimates:

There is much evidence to indicate that should a deity fail to deliver on a request sought in prayer, that deity will be censured, treated with contempt, and ultimately abandoned by the people. This means that, as far as the followers of the religions are concerned, the deities exist, and are to be called upon, to supervise and enhance the well-being of human beings. This fact underlines the perception that religion is founded on morality and must have a social relevance. Religious faith is, thus, perceived as utilitarian and practical, rather than as a means for spiritual upliftment or the union of the human soul with God.

(Gyekye 1996:16)

The ancestors, however, are indispensable members of the family who cannot be abandoned. They, together with the living, continue to strive for the peace and wellbeing of their community.

Another aspect of Akan life where one can appreciate the utilitarian nature of religion is the formation of early Akan union of states. A case in point is the role played by Okomfo Anokye in uniting the Asante states into a kingdom. According to Tiekou, Nana Osei Tutu called a meeting of the chiefs of all the states. The purpose was to unite all the chiefs under one chief to whom the rest of the chiefs would swear allegiance. Okomfo Anokye's role was to appoint the paramount chief through divination. The question was to be settled by the priest who would make a stool descend unto the lap of the appointed chief. When Okomfo Anokye conjured the stool, it rested on the lap of his friend Nana Osei Tutu. Nana Osei Tutu was then deemed chosen by the ancestors to be the paramount chief of the Asante Kingdom. Having collected and burnt the finger nails and some hair from each of the chiefs, he sprinkled some of the ashes on the stool and mixed the rest with palm wine for all the chiefs to drink. Now the chiefs were made to understand that the Golden Stool contained the spirit of the Asante Kingdom. By drinking the concoction, they swore an oath to forget their past individual histories. It was also an oath of allegiance to the stool and to Nana Osei Tutu, implying that none of them would ever take up arms against the Golden Stool. This was the beginning of the

Asante Kingdom with Nana Osei Tutu as its first King (Tieku 2016:132-133; see also Buah 1998:24).

In other states, similar use of religion was employed. Before the Asante experience,

The authority of the Denkyira kings was symbolised in the *Abankwadwa*, the mythical stool of beads and the executioner's sword which was called *Sasatia* (Buah 1998:11). The beads-stool is believed to have descended from heaven; in it resided the spirits of the Denkyira. It is probable that this idea was copied by Okomfo Anokye for the Asante when he created a similar myth connected with the Golden Stool.

(Buah 1998:11)

A powerful ruler of the Adanse state, Awirade Basa in an attempt to unite his people is said to have created a mystical sword, the *Afenakwa* (like the later *Sasatia* of the Denkyira or the Golden Stool of Asante) which passed on from father to son and from one stool to another whenever the holder had a son by a woman from another state (Buah 1998:17). Whoever held the sword led the combined Adanse men to the battlefield in times of war and was a custodian of it during times of peace (Buah 1998:17). The Adanse groups held common allegiance to the *Afenakwa* in addition to their tutelary god, the Adanse *Bona*, said to reside in a cave in a grove between Akrokyere and Patakore (Buah 1998:18). It is said that,

People from all parts of Adanse worshipped together and consulted the oracles at the shrine. At the annual grand festival, the chief priest of Bonsam at Patakoro sent the *Bonsasuo* (water from the *Bona* cave) to all the chiefs of Adanse to be used in the purification of their stools and states. To this day, other Akan people who originated from Adanse have kept the practice of erecting *Bonsambu* (*Bonsam's* shrine [the devil's shrine]) in front of the chief's house.

(Buah 1998:18).

4.14 SALVATION IN AKAN THOUGHT

The concept of salvation as held by Akans is one that relates to life in this present existence. Salvation is experienced in deliverance from sickness, threat to life, misfortunes and from anything that works against the realization of good life. When deities are consulted, it is for the purposes of ensuring protection against evil forces that can work against one's wellbeing. It is not uncommon for families and individual to insure themselves with powerful deities, pledging to pay specific sums of money or

other items (sometimes as demanded by the deity) to the deity at specific periods if all went well with the people insured. The idea of insuring one's self or family with a deity stems from the Akan belief in various spirits that are believed to have the power to do good or harm to people. On this Ekem intimates that '[s]ingle households or individuals can own minor spirit agencies: *asuman*, made up of manufactured substances and concoctions. These are meant for private protection against misfortunes, and may also be used for destructive purposes' (Ekem 2008:38). Many Akans still believe that misfortunes happen to people because some enemies (especially within one's own family) have manipulated some evil powers to that end. The popular Akan saying *obi benya wo a na efiri fie* (no one can harm you unless the person is from your household) is usually quoted in the event of some adverse happenings to people. The evil forces that can harm a person, as mentioned by Ekem (2008:38-39), include *mmoatia* (dwarfs), *sasabonsam* (a forest monster) and *abayifo* (witches and wizards). It is in terms of protection against the evil effects of such forces that the Akan defines salvation. Conversely, when the Akan seeks salvation, it is for wealth, abundant harvest, procreation, health and other life-enhancing qualities and experiences. Salvation is therefore about a good life in this present life. To understand the Akan concept of salvation is to examine a typical Akan prayer as is offered during libation. The request made of the gods and ancestors constitute the quality of life the Akan sees as Salvation. Akan libation prayer follows a structure of four elements and no matter the occasion and need, prayers are offered freely and creatively along and around these four elements as given by Akhan (n.d.:23):

- 1) Invocation (of the forces of beneficence)
- 2) Message (the occasion and purpose of the prayer)
- 3) Solicitation (for spiritual, moral and material wellbeing of the lineage or society)
- 4) Curse (pronouncement of curses on the forces of evil)

The example of Akan libation prayer given below illustrates the point being made here.

Otwereduampon drink, Thursday Earth drink,
River Afram drink, Paha drink, Asunsu drink.
Ancestros of the Aduana family drink, Biretuo drink.
Dente Deity drink, Dwerebe drink, Buruku drink,
Thousands ancestors and thousand gods come and receive drink

When I call one, I call all of you,
Soul Bosomptra her is drink! Soul Bosomptra he is deink!
There is nothing wrong that I call you/
It is my son Ntiamoa Amankuo
You are aware of the sickness that befell him a month ago.
It is through your grace and great prayers, that he has recovered.
Receive wine and drink today this Monday.
Stand behind him with good standing
We pray for long life and prosperity
Bless him with living water
Any evil person who wish Ntiamoa Amankuo
To pass away from this world
So that I become lonely,
Hand him over to the Divine Executioners
Nobody blesses his enemies,
Blessing to all who have assembled here.

(Akan n.d.:24)

It is particularly in the second and third elements (but not limited to them) that what constitutes salvation for the Akan comes out most clearly. In this particular example the message announces the occasion as deliverance from illness which in itself is salvation in Akan thought. The solicitation which involves request for the spirits to stand behind Ntiamoa with good standing is meant for the provision of long life and prosperity – important components of salvation. The last element of the prayer deals with the forces that work against what constitutes salvation for the Akan. The way to deal with such forces is to curse them.

4.15 CONCLUSION

This Chapter has attempted to bring to light the aspects of Akan society that have relevance for the discussion of Akan ethnicity, personality and social identity. This was done bearing in mind the aim of using such information to appreciate from an Akan perspective the discourse of the warning passages of Hebrews. The arguments of the warning passages which employ the three concepts of ethnicity, personality and social identity have therefore informed the discussion in this Chapter. This Chapter therefore answers the questions of who the Akan people are and their origin as well as of ethnic identity and the concept of the family, responsibility and authority. The communal orientation of the Akan society, with honour as its basic value, is given expression, as

well as the concept of the Akan person. Knowledge and right conduct and the need for training and integration into the Akan society received attention in addition to the religious orientation of that society.

Chapter 5

Reading scenarios: Social identity, ethnicity and personality

In this Chapter, the reading scenarios of the theories of social identity, ethnicity and personality are delineated, pointing out their relevant aspects for the study of Hebrews. It does so by indicating how the data of Hebrews lends itself to the readings scenarios.

5.1 SOCIAL IDENTITY

Henri Tajfel is identified as the founder of social identity theory (Esler 2014:13). Though the seminal experimental results that led to social identity theory were reported by Tajfel and others in an article published in the inaugural volume of the *European Journal of Social Psychology* in 1971, it was not until 1978 that a work with his colleagues at Bristol University edited by Tajfel on social identity was published (Esler 2014:13; Jokiranta 2013:77). This initial work was elaborated in the 1970's and 1980's, especially by Tajfel's student and follower, John C. Turner who is credited with self-categorization theory (Jokiranta 2013:78).

As observed by Clarke and Tucker (2014:43), 't[h]e most widespread definition of social identity theory in use by New Testament scholars is that offered by Tajfel.' He defines social identity as 'that *part* of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (Tajfel 1982:2). That is to say one's membership of a group provides a sense of one's worth which can be positive or negative. Prior to Tajfel's idea of one's self-value derived from one's membership of a group, Festinger (1954, see also, Festinger [1954] as cited in Wesner 2008:2), had come to the conclusion that social comparison is interpersonal between individuals, that is, individuals evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparing them to those of other individuals. In this sense, even the positive or negative identity one derives from one's membership of a group can come into play in such social comparison. The focus of social identity theory, however, is the self-concept and evaluation of the individual by

oneself or by others that is derived from one's membership of a group. We should distinguish between one's social identity and personal identity. Social identity 'refers to self-descriptions related to formal and informal group memberships such as sex, nationality, occupation, and religion' (Turner 1984:526). It is 'the sum total of a person's social identifications where the latter represent socially significant social categorization internalized as aspects of the self-concept' (Turner 1984:527). On the other hand, 'personal identity refers to the self-descriptions that are more personal in nature, reflecting personality traits and other individual differences, specific attributes of the individual such as feelings of competence, bodily characteristics, intellectual concerns, personal tastes and interests' (Turner 1984:527). Turner cautions that one can hardly draw clean lines between a person's social identity and personal identity (Turner 1984:527). At best, the distinction is whether we are looking at ourselves as relates to our social groups or as relates to something personal to us (Turner 1984:527).

5.2 CATEGORIZATION, IDENTIFICATION, AND COMPARISON

Three stages are identified in the formation of social identity. These are 'categorization,' 'identification' and 'comparison' (Kuecker 2014:69). By categorization is meant 'the division of the social world into assessable group entities and involves depersonalization in which personal identity is subsumed by the characteristics of the group category in view' (Kuecker 2014:70). When categorisation takes place, the individual is no longer dealt with as an individual. Rather, he or she is taken as part of a whole group so that what is held of that group also applies to that individual. With such categorisation, it can be said, for example, 'All Americans are loud,' 'Cretans are always liars' (e.g., Tt 1:12; Kuecker 2014:70). It is by such 'stereotyping of outgroups that group identity is constructed and maintained' (Esler 1998:168). The way people describe outgroups mostly in a negative light is through this basic process of categorisation which is necessary in the process of social identity (Kuecker 2014:70). Turner (1984:523) reviews two important studies on similarities and differences between people and ingroup-outgroup membership orthogonally and comes to the conclusion that group membership is the crucial determinant of social categorisation effects, rather than interpersonal similarities and differences. Categorisation results in two important

social identity processes. In the first place, it helps the individual to ‘define his position in society as a member of the group(s) to which he/she belongs’ (Van Knippenberg 1984:561). Secondly, it helps the individual to identify the ‘characteristics others ascribe to him, how his behaviour will be interpreted and how to understand reactions of others towards him’ (Van Knippenberg 1984:561). This knowledge of one’s position in society and the characteristics people ascribe to one affects the way one behaves towards others (Van Knippenberg 1984:561).

‘Identification is a process that follows social categorization.’ Once people have categorised themselves as belonging to a group, they begin to identify with the group (Kuecker 2014:70). The members of the group now begin to share the views of their groups and share many of the things that are common to the group in terms of how others see them and what they themselves think of themselves as members of that group (Turner 1984:536). ‘To achieve positive social identity which implies positive group identity, a process of comparison and evaluation is maintained in which the ingroup favourably differentiates itself from outgroups’ (Kuecker 2014:71). Esler observes (in following Tajfel 1978:28) that ‘our sense of belonging to a group actually has three dimensions, namely, “the cognitive,” which is the simple recognition of belonging to a group; “the evaluative,” which covers the positive or negative connotations of belonging; and “the emotional” which refers to attitudes members hold towards insiders and outsiders’ (Esler 1998:42). From the perspective of this theory, one’s membership in a group is an important factor when it comes to one’s relationship with others, one’s attitudes, values, norms and roles (Turner 1984:518). In this sense, groups define for their members what is expected of them in terms of their attitudes and conduct by way of group norms and values which become the norms and values of the individual members.

5.3 SOCIAL COMPARISON AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

Most scholars recognize that social comparison was part of life in the ancient Mediterranean (Baker 2012:133). Citing the Roman historian Tacitus (*Hist.* 5.5; Loeb) and Ovid (*Trist.* 5.10.29-38; Loeb), Baker shows how Tacitus, and presumably many

Romans, perceived Judeans in comparative terms, and how Ovid describes Romans living with 'barbarians' in comparative terms (Baker 2012:133). Social identity makes the following assumptions, according to Tajfel & Turner n.d.:16):

- 1) Individuals strive to maintain or enhance their self-image: they strive for a positive self-concept.
- 2) Social groups or categories and the membership of them are associated with positive or negative value connotations. Hence, social identity may be positive or negative according to the evaluations (which tend to be socially consensual, either within or across groups) of those groups that contribute to an individual's social identity.
- 3) The evaluation of one's own group is determined with reference to specific other groups through social comparisons in terms of value-laden attributes and characteristics. Positively discrepant comparisons between ingroup and outgroup produce high prestige: negatively discrepant comparisons between ingroup and outgroup result in low prestige.

From these assumptions, Tajfel and Turner derive some related theoretical principles:

- 1) Individuals strive to achieve or to maintain positive social identity.
- 2) Positive social identity is based to a large extent on favourable comparisons that can be made between the ingroup and some relevant outgroups: the ingroup must be perceived as positively differentiated or distinct from the relevant outgroups.
- 3) When social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group and/or to make existing group more positively distinct (Tajfel & Turner n.d.: 6).

Given all these, pressures to evaluate one's group positively through ingroup/outgroup comparisons lead social groups to attempt to differentiate themselves from each other. The aim of differentiation is to maintain or achieve superiority over an outgroup in some dimensions and any such act is essentially competitive.

5.4 RELEVANT ASPECTS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY FOR THE STUDY OF HEBREWS

Turner identifies three 'important empirical features of psychological group membership.' These are the perceptual or 'identity' criterion, 'interdependence' criterion and the 'social structure' criterion.

In the 'identity' criterion of psychological group membership, 'a collection of people should define themselves and be defined by others as a group; they should share some collective perception of themselves as a distinct social entity of "us" as opposed to "them" (Turner 1984:518). This is evident in Hebrews. Though some aspects of the ethical admonition especially towards the end of Hebrews could be regarded as personal, there is a heavy presence of group language and identity in Hebrews. The writer refers to his audience with personal pronouns which include him as a member of the group; for instance, 'God spoke to our fathers' (Heb 1:1), and 'he has spoken to us' (Heb 1:2). At the same time Hebrews refers to other as opposed to the group of the writer. For instance 'But we are not those who draw back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and obtain life' (Heb 10:39).

The second criterion is 'interdependence' – 'that they should be (positively) interdependent in some way, for the satisfaction of needs, achievement of goals, consensual validation of attitudes and values, in terms of social influence, social interaction, and mutual attraction, etc.' (Turner 1984:518-519). In Hebrews, the writer desired such positive interdependence within the body of believers to the extent that they should be mutually encouraging each other to stand, to guard against sin and by implication, move each other unto good words (Heb 13:12, 13). Such a need was so urgent since some of them had become weary and had given up attendance at their meetings (Heb 10:25). Even those who were supposed to be teachers to fulfil the needs of a small group still needed others to teach them (Heb 5:12). The interdependence for need-satisfaction, according to the theory, tends to produce cooperative or affiliative interaction, mutual influence, and social cohesion between individuals in the group (Turner 1984:19). The desired end of the writer of Hebrews was clearly to achieve this

social cohesion within the group. This explains his appeal to his audience not to fall back. Following Shaw (1976), Turner argues that the interdependence and mutual need satisfaction criterion applies only to smaller groups (Turner 1984:520). We have every reason to believe that the Christians to whom Hebrews was written constituted a small group. Though one cannot be sure of the number of believers in that group, it certainly was a minority group in which the dynamics makes these theories of group psychology relevant.

The third is the criterion of 'social structure' which states that 'social interaction between the individuals should be stabilized, organized and regulated by a system of role and status differentiations and shared norms and values.' Hebrews presents the readers as belonging to a group in which members interact according to their roles and statuses. The readers as members of the Christian group are called upon to obey their leaders and submit to them (Heb 13:17). In this statement, we see two clear statuses and roles of members and leaders. The members are expected to obey their leaders and submit to their instructions. The role of instruction then is that of the leaders. A number of the instructions the writer gives to the readers are only reminders of the norms of the group. They are urged, for instance, to be grateful and offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe (Heb 12:28). The call on them to continue in brotherly love, to show hospitality to strangers, to remember those in prison, to hold marriage in honour and others (Heb 13:1-5) are all norms and values known and practiced already among members of the group.

The manner in which the writer of Hebrews addresses the situation of his readers touches on a number of aspects of social identity theory which need some in-depth discussion that will later be done in this study. In spite of the uncertainties surrounding the audience of Hebrews, its location within the first-century Roman Mediterranean world is certain. The legitimacy of applying social identity theory to Hebrews lies in the realization that '[f]irst-century Roman Mediterranean societies were very significantly stratified and categorized by group identities with a large measure of discrimination between groups' (Clarke & Tucker 2014:44). And it should be observed that social

psychology of human groups in conflict informed much of the initial work on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978:1, in Esler 2014:15-16). Hebrews deals with a situation of conflict insofar as the audience was suffering from discrimination and persecution to the extent that not only did they suffer public abuse and sufferings, but their property was also plundered (Heb 10:32-24).

In trying to stem the tendency of his audience of falling back, the writer confronts this dire situation with his words of exhortation which deals with a number of issues that can be elucidated in the light of the theory of social identity. Social identity theory, aside explaining the social dynamics from which individuals' identities and conduct are derived from their knowledge of their membership in groups, also explains the dynamics by which groups maintain and enhance the positive evaluation of their identity and ensure that their members do not leave the groups in times of intergroup competition and pressure. Group here is of many kinds such as 'national,' 'ethnic and linguistic,' 'sex,' 'occupation,' or 'sports teams' (Tajfel, in Esler 2014:15; see also Esler 1998:43). Hebrews was written in a context of intergroup competition with pressure (either directly or indirectly) mounting on the smaller group of Christians in an urban Greco-Roman city. The result was that the believers stood the risk of withdrawing back into their former groups of affiliation. These groups would include a community involved in the practices of Hellenistic Polytheism and the Roman Emperor cult on the one hand, or that of practicing Jews and former Proselytes and God-fearers who cherished the Jewish law and relied on and/or respected the cultic practices of the Jewish religion (see Muir 2014:427).

5.4.1 Group distinctiveness

Citing Tajfel, Brown states that '[s]ocial identity theory starts from the assumption that people's social identity derive from their membership of various groups,' and 'assumes that individuals are motivated to achieve a positive self-image and that such may be enhanced by a positive evaluation of one's own group' (Brown 1984:608). To the extent that evaluations of one's ingroup 'are assumed to be mainly achieved by comparison with other groups,... there is a general tendency for people to seek positive differences

between the ingroup and relevant outgroups on various dimensions' (Brown 1984:608). If group distinctiveness is necessary for positive social identity, the tendency for groups to engage in establishing differences among them in areas where there are similarities becomes high (Brown 1984:608). 'The cardinal proposition in the theory is that groups must have some superior distinctiveness to contribute positively to group members' identities,' hence '[s]tatus similarity, which implies a *lack* of distinctiveness on some value dimension, should therefore act as a stimulus for intergroup differentiation and divergence' (Brown 1984:609, citing Turner 1978). The writer of Hebrews set an agenda, which is obvious from his introduction, to demonstrate the distinctiveness of the message his group of Christians had come to believe. He does that by contrasting the media (angels, Moses, prophets; see Heb 1:1-4, 3:1-16) through which God had spoken in the past to the Jewish people with that through whom God has spoken to the writer's audience in these last days (i.e., one who is son in relation to God). The writer does not find it enough to make a comparison that leaves his audience to draw the conclusion, he goes ahead to actually draw the expected conclusion for his audience, partly because he finds them to be slow in learning and in becoming mature, and also because he does not want them to miss the fact that they stand in a more privileged position than what they are drifting back into (Heb 5:11-14). Words like κρείττων (better, superior; e.g., Heb 1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 7:19, 7:2; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 11:35, 11:40; 12:24), μείζωνος (greater; Heb 9:11; 11:26), διαφορωτέρας (unlike, different; Heb 1:4; 8:6) are his favourites when talking about the revelation and message that had come to his audience through the son as well as things related to the son's ministry. A number of the theological expositions of the author was aimed at showing the distinctiveness of the minority Christian group as belonging to a more superior group.

5.4.2 Group difference in status and power

Tajfel maintains that '[wh]en social groups differ in status and power, strategies aiming to maintain a satisfactory social identity and to achieve positive distinctiveness from other relevant groups on certain relevant dimensions of comparison do undoubtedly continue to play an important role in collective behaviour' (Tajfel 1984:699). Citing Eiser and Van der Pligt (1984) and Van Knippenberg (1978), Tajfel shows how the beliefs and

opinions of groups cannot be properly understood without considering ‘the context of social evaluations in which they are inserted’ (Tajfel 1984:701). ‘The evaluations and functions these beliefs and opinions serve need not by any means converge upon consensus and conformity, rather, they reflect social conflict, social divergence and the defence of competing interests of social groups’ (Tajfel 1984:701). In Van Knippenberg’s studies cited, ‘there was the general and consensual acceptance of the status superiority of one of the groups. Second, there were the obviously discrepant attitudes of the two groups towards this acknowledged state of affairs.’ The challenge for the groups was ‘what kind of social myths could be used, created or developed’

- (1) ‘To preserve or enhance their distinctive and positive self-image, and’
- (2) ‘To defend the *status quo* in the case of the ‘higher’ group and to offset it in the case of the “lower” group’ (Tajfel 1984:701).

In Hebrews, the difference in status and power stood against the audience of the letter. The groups that were powerful and held in honour were the dominant polytheist citizens of the city and more or less the Jewish community whose religion was tolerated by the state. The lot of the weaker and dishonoured Christian group was shame, ridicule, plunder of property, and threat of persecution, among others. It therefore became important for the writer to explain their situation in terms that would boost confidence in the group and offset the position of negative status and power resulting from the apparent disadvantaged position of their group. The aim of the writer was to foster perseverance and faithfulness to the Christian minority group. The adversaries of the minority Christian group in the advantaged position are presented as the enemies for whom the severest of punishment is reserved (Heb 10:27). The fathers of the Jewish people failed to enter God’s rest but this rest has been reserved for the minority Christian community (Heb 3:17-19; 4:3) and God had decided that he was not going to make the faithful fathers perfect without the Christian community (Heb 11:40). The author touches on more of issues related to differences in status and power and these will deserve further attention later.

5.4.3 Social mobility

One of the options open to members of a group which has a lower status in comparison with other group(s) is social mobility. Social mobility is a movement from lower to higher status and involves members of one group leaving their group to join one perceived to be higher in status (Esler 1998:50). 'A measure of permeability existing across intergroup boundaries' is a necessary condition that makes social mobility possible (Esler 1998:50, following Hogg & Abrahams 1988:54). In Hebrews there appear to be a high level of permeability of social mobility which created a high possibility of members of the Christian minority group moving out of their group to join others perceived to have higher social status and power (Heb 6:4-6; 12:3). The main thesis of Muir on social identity in Hebrews is that there were fuzzy boundaries between groups in an environment in which the believers were not aware they had 'to convert to anything or entirely give up other memberships' (Muir 2014:129). In such a situation, 'people drifted in and out of degrees of affiliation with polytheist temples, the synagogue and the Christ-assembly' (Muir 2014:129). Burke (1991:10) observes 'that people have multiple identities, all of which are not 'activated at the same time.' In this sense, 'all identities are *episodic in nature* and the continuity of their processes is routinely interrupted,' and 'therefore a certain amount of distress is built into the functioning of all identities' (Burke 1991:10). This resonates with Baker's assertion that 'social identity is a fluid construct rather than a static condition; individuals and groups may emphasize one aspect of their identity while downplaying the others' (Baker 2012:130). This is because when one aspect 'of a person's or group's identity becomes more salient, the others become less salient' (Baker 2012:130). But all these occur in some degree of variations (Burke 1991:10). The Christian group in Hebrews stood at a disadvantage in terms of status and power. Some of the members have already been involved in social mobility against which the rest were being urged to stand. The writer intimates that some had stopped attending the meeting of the group (Heb 10:25). Their social identity with the Christian group was not what they wanted to make salient in the circumstances. A situation like this explains the urgency with which the writer of Hebrews responds to the situation. To confront this state of affairs, some strategies are usually resorted to in intergroup competition.

5.4.4 Drawing boundaries

The Christian minority group in Hebrews can be described in the words of Fraser and Foster (1984:492) as an 'emergent' group. When groups emerge from a larger social group(s), boundaries are less likely defined (Fraser & Foster 1984:492). In the same way, 'norms and structural relations are also likely to be' less 'clearly evident from the early stages' (Fraser & Foster 1984:492-493). In the assessment of Muir, the Christian group had not made much improvement in defining its boundaries. In the fluidity of boundaries the audience saw themselves in, the author finds it crucial to draw clearer boundaries for his audience (Muir 2014:129). The area of norms is one the avenues the author finds to do this. This explains the ethical tone of the words of the writer given especially towards the end of Hebrews. The call for brotherly love, hospitality, care for those in prison and those who are ill-treated, the exhortation to keep the marriage bed undefiled and the warning against greed (Heb 13:1-5) could be an expression of the writer's fears of or recognition of the tendency of his audience going back on some of the norms, which at some points in the past characterized their conduct. This is in view of the fact that they are reminded of their former days when they had been enlightened, endured a hard struggle with sufferings among others (Heb 10:32-34). As Klauck (2006:438) has noted, 'trivial' as the exhortation in Hebrews 13 may seem, 'it nevertheless helps to form a closely-knit community and to define its boundaries with respect to the outside world.' He notes how the writer demands that they imitate their former leaders (Heb 13:7); should not give in to strange teachings (Heb 13:9), imitate Jesus and bear abuse with him (Heb 13:13); to offer sacrifices of praise and confession (Heb 13:15); to do good deeds and acts of solidarity with those who suffer (Heb 13:16), and to obey their current leaders (Heb 13:17; Klauck 2006:438).

One of the ways in which ancient societies built boundaries between them and others was through rituals. Rituals have to do with the clean and unclean, and as noted by Baker, '[m]argins and boundaries represent the division between the clean and the unclean, or in Social Identity terms, that which belongs and that which does not' (Baker 2012:131). In Hebrews ritual language is used in drawing clear boundaries between the Christian group and other outgroups. The believers are those who enter through the

blood of Jesus, by a new and living way He has opened through the curtain which is his flesh (Heb 10:19-20); and their hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and their bodies washed in pure water (Heb 10:22). These are strong terms that establish the identity of the Christian minority group since the other more powerful groups do not share in these ritual identities mentioned here. In addition to drawing clean ritual boundaries for the believers, stronger ingroup cohesion is urged. They are to be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, neither should they stay away from their worship meetings as some were habitually doing (Heb 10:24, 25). They should encourage each other and do so even more as they see the day (coming of the Lord) drawing near (Heb 10:25). And the time to do this even more was now since they were already living in 'these last days' when the Lord is expected to return (Heb 1:2).

5.4.5 Stern warnings

When members of a particular group are seen to want to leave the group, they attract the disapproval of the rest of the members (Esler 1998:51; see also Van Knippenberg 1984:561). In intergroup relationships such movements could even be engineered by competing groups in order to weaken their competitor(s) (Esler 1998:51, following Hogg & Abrams 1988:56). Esler notes that '[g]roups often exert pressure on members to prevent them from leaving' (Esler 1998:51; see also Van Knippenberg 1984:561). In the case of Hebrews, the pressure is mounted from the leader who writes to them. He presents strong warnings that are intended to deprive the audience of any incentive to leave the group. He describes leaving the group as deliberately sinning and warns that once such a sin is committed, there is no chance of coming back (Heb10:26, 27). What awaits them is a terrible judgement and the fury of a fire to consume them together with their adversaries. That is to say, by leaving the Christian group, they are joining their adversaries in the judgement the Lord would bring upon them.

The severity of this judgement is unlike any other as it is the worst (Heb 10:28-30). The writer reminds them that it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:30), but that is what their leaving the group would bring upon them. The absolute

severity of the warnings the audience is confronted with is hardly one that can escape a reading that employs social identity theory. Klauck (3006:423) is surprised that the author has ‘forgotten that God’s last word contains good news for his people (the caveat of Heb 6-9 notwithstanding)’ (Klauck 2006:423). He believes the author has ‘fallen prey to the illusion which many preachers of morality cherish, namely, that harsh admonishing and stern warning are the best way to educate people’ (Klauck 2006:423). While the warnings could be negative pressure, there was also a kind of positive pressure mounted on them by the writer, namely, the promise of surpassing blessings. They are reminded of such a great salvation which they would not want to miss (Heb 2:3); the benevolence of God whose throne they can approach boldly to find grace and mercy (Heb 4:16); the sacrifice that is able to achieve purification of their sins, and the fact that their conscience is cleansed, something the old sacrifices could not achieve (Heb 1:3; 9:9, 13, 14).

5.4.6 Social creativity

One of the strategies employed by groups to resist social mobility is social creativity usually in a situation where ‘individual mobility fails or is thwarted by the existence of impermeable intergroup boundaries’ (Ball, Giles & Hewstone 1984:673). In social creativity, ‘the ingroup-outgroup comparisons are redefined in various ways’ (Ball, Giles & Hewstone 1984:673). The strategy usually involves the changing of the group which is the object of comparison for a weaker group in order for the comparing group to feel better (Ball, Giles & Hewstone 1984:673, following Asante 1981 and Tajfel 1979; see also Esler 1998:53). The redefinition is usually done so that ‘what was previously regarded as a weakness is now seen as a strength’ as in the case of “Black is beautiful” assertion which flourished in the USA in the 1960’s’ (Esler 1998:53). Though in Hebrews one can hardly talk of impermeable intergroup boundaries, the author nonetheless engages in some social creativity. He resorted to a redefinition of their experience, a redefinition which involved reinterpretation of their experience such that what was negative and despised by the dominant competing groups of the city and the Jewish community would be seen in a positive light, providing incentive for continued membership of the weaker group. It was therefore important for the author to explain

their suffering in terms of a necessary condition for the good things they were to expect in their vindication and reward. They should know that the source of their salvation is made perfect through suffering (Heb 2:10). The one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have one Father so he is not ashamed to call them brothers (Heb 2:11). Again, they should remember that God crowned the son with glory and honour and subjected everything under his feet after temporally making him a little lower than the angels (Heb 2:5-8). They should therefore keep their eyes fixed on Jesus as the pioneer and perfecter of their faith so that just as Jesus suffered for a while and was gloried, they too will share in his glory after their period of suffering (Heb 12:1,2). They are reminded that they are not among those who shrink back and are destroyed (Heb 10:38, 39). Suffering in this light is not something they should shy away from; they should therefore go outside the city and suffer shame with Jesus (Heb 13:13) who despised shame himself for the sake of the joy set before him and consequently sat on the right of the throne of God (Heb 12:2). This is a call for them to consider him who suffered such hostility at the hands of sinners so that they do not grow weary and lose heart (Heb 12:3). Suffering becomes for them God's παιδεία (training of his children which involves discipline; Heb 12:5). Hence, the discipline (παιδεία) here 'is not punitive, but formative and educational' (Klauck 2006:430). Van Houwelingen (2014:243) finds in this redefinition (reinterpretation) 'an attempt to shift the thinking of the audience from earthly things to heavenly things.' In this redefinition, the 'promised land,' the 'tent of meeting,' and the 'city' Jerusalem – themes that are characteristic and non-negotiable for orthodox Judaism – in better forms (heavenly) have their true inheritors in the Christian minority group whose focus must be set on them for encouragement and hope (see Van Houwelingen 2014:243). Now, their security is not in these early things so they can forgo them as their security is in the Son of God, a mediator who is better than Moses (Van Houwelingen 2014:244).

5.4.7 Ingroup prototype

Prototypical roles of some important members of a group are useful in the process of embodying the identity of a group as symbolised in the virtues of the prototypical members (Baker 2012:132). Following Rosch (1975:245), Baker explains a prototype as

a representation of a person that embodies the identity. This prototype may not necessarily be an actual or current member of the group, but rather an ideal image of the group's character (Baker 2012:132).⁴³ 'The prototypical ingroup members from the past must be remembered and commemorated in various ways for their prototypical status to remain effective' (Baker 2012:132). Because the needs of groups change demanding specific qualities and virtues at specific times, the choice of prototypical members also change in response to the needs with a corresponding change in the identity of the group as reflected in the changing virtues demanded at each point in time (Baker 2012:132). In the process of identification with the group, the members become influenced in their thought and ways by the group's prototype (Liht & Savage 2008:13). This produces a situation in which members seek to become like their group's prototype (Liht & Savage 2008:13). Being careful to be like the group's prototype happens when group membership becomes very important to members (Hogg & Gaffney 2014:168). In Hebrews, the writer presents a number of prototypes for his audience to identify with and embody their ideals in their critical condition. Everything the author draws attention to about these prototypes centre around faithfulness and endurance. The list of these prototypes is to be found in Hebrews 11 of Hebrews where the faith (faithfulness) of the prototypes are highlighted. Chief among the prototypes is Jesus himself whose example follows in chapter 12 with specific call on the audience to imitate him. The sense in which these figures are prototypes to the audience cannot be taken up in this session intended only to outline the relevant portions of the theory of social identity. A detailed treatment of the prototypes will be given in the next chapter.

5.4.8 Superordinate identity

Superordinate identity refers to the state of a group's identity which has been made so important that members' affiliation to other groups (subgroups) is not a threat to the group. The creation of a superordinate identity could 'result from naturally occurring circumstances, for example, when nations band together to fight a common enemy, recategorisation may also occur from deliberate attempts to encourage in-group and

⁴³ Moreland, Levine and McMinn (2012:96) define prototype as 'a mental image of the type of person who best represents the group.'

out-group members to view themselves as part of a larger category' (Leonardelli, Cynthia, Pickett & Hess 2011:118). 'Although there may be pragmatic reasons for selecting particular superordinate identities over others, the success of recategorisation attempts may depend critically on how inclusive the superordinate category is perceived to be within the particular social context' (Leonardelli, Cynthia, Pickett & Hess 2011:118). When it comes to race and ethnic identities which have deep seated sentiments, the creation of any superordinate identity that calls for the abandonment of these identities can be met with resistance (Dovidio, Gaertner, Esses & Brewer, 2003:497). The result could be counter-productive, as members tend to reaffirm these identities they have to abandon (Dovidio *et al.* 2003:497). Following Huo (*et al.* 1996:44-45), Dovidio *et al.* conclude 'that having a strong identification with a superordinate group can redirect people from focusing on their personal outcomes to concerns about "achieving the greater good and maintaining social stability."' It is undisputable that there existed subgroups within the Christian minority group in Hebrews. Mention can be made of Jewish Christians, proselytes and God fearers who previously had various degrees of affiliations with the Jewish religion and finally Gentiles converted straightway to Christianity who had their immediate background in the Graeco-Roman pantheon and Emperor Cult. In a situation where their common ground of faith in Christ had become the reason for the social pressure they were going through, their individual subgroup identities could begin to emerge salient endangering differences among their common Christian group. The tendency could be to deemphasize their identity as Christians and reassert their individual subgroup identities. Ellingworth thinks that there previously existed tension between Jewish and Gentile subgroups among the Christians and finds the author cautious on subjects that might reawaken such tensions (Ellingworth 1993:25). Therefore, in both his theological exposition and parenetic, the author presents Christianity as a superordinate group which fulfils the ideals held in all of the subgroups. In this attempt, Christianity becomes the religion that satisfies par excellence all the hopes and aspirations represented in themes like high priest, sacrifice, and tabernacle of all the subgroups whether Jewish or Graeco-Roman. As Muir (2014:128) has pointed out, Roman polytheism also had high priests, sacrifices and temples. The superordinate identity becomes so important in the light of the

author's presentation of related themes in such absolute terms that leave the audience with no option anywhere in their previous and other affiliations. Christianity is the choice and not a choice. Whatever people sought in that world by pursuing religion is only available in Christianity so that there is nothing in any of their subgroups except very terrible judgement and denial of rest. As Christians, they should emphasise only one thing, their Christian identity which then unites them in such a trying moment.

5.5 ETHNICITY

According to van Eck, '[t]he word/concept "ethnicity" was coined in 1942 by sociologist W.L. Warner and was taken up in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a noun for the first time in 1953' (Van Eck 2014:51, n. 4). 'The noun is derived from the Greek ἔθνος (*ethnos*)' (Van Eck 2014:52 n. 4). In its initial usage, it referred to groups, for instance 'men, women, or the citizens of a town' (Van Eck 2014:52, n. 4). Duling shows how ancient Judean (Jewish) literature often used the term to refer 'neutrally to the "people" of the world" and how Judeans 'used it for themselves occasionally' (Duling 2010:69). Later developments saw the negative use of *ethnos* and *ethnē* (plural) to describe outsiders (Duling 2010:69) with *genos* becoming 'the preferred word for insiders' (Duling 2010:69). Duling distinguishes between three terms that overlap, namely, race, ethnicity and nationalism (Duling 2010:70). 'Race,' for him, 'calls forth mainly biologically inherited physical ("phenotypical") identity;' "ethnicity" refers to mainly social and cultural identity; and "nationalism" refers mainly to national identity and loyalty' (Duling 2010:70). Buell (2005:2) holds that

Whether translated as "race", "ethnicity", "people", "lineage", "kind", "class", or "sex", *genos* is a term that ancient readers would have understood to signal a group classification. While it has a broad range of possible meanings in Greek, it frequently demarcates groups whose members apparently share certain characteristics (which can include ancestors, rights of inheritance, knowledge, ritual practices, and ways of life, among other things)

Ethnicity is a complex concept embracing many aspects of one's social life. A number of literature show that ethnicity is a dynamic process influenced by different cultural, social, political and economic factors (see, e.g., Horboken 2004:215; Yntema 2009:146; Hall 2014:51; Chae & Seton 2001/2002:19). Buell has observed that

There is no single way that all people think or speak about race and ethnicity. Most of us are familiar with the perception that race and ethnicity are 'given.' Whether defined in terms

of biology, our family background, cultural inheritance, and so on, race and ethnicity are often spoken of as attributes about which we have no say, something we are born with. At the same time, most are also probably familiar with the view that race and ethnicity are social construction, meaning that they exist and have real significance in our lives because the societies in which we live organise and classify humans into 'races and 'ethnicities.' This classification process is social and cultural. Even if race and ethnicity seem to point to 'real' and fixed human differences, changes in how races and ethnicities are defined over time indicates that they are in fact social creations and not eternal realities.

(Buell 2005:5)

In Buell's analysis above, there seem to be no fixed factors that must necessarily be present for ethnic articulation. Even the ones that appear as the most enduring can become irrelevant in some instances in so far as the members of an ethnic group choose to emphasise other factors instead of the supposedly fixed ones in the determination of a group's ethnic identity. In this case, many factors can be indispensable at one time and at another, become dispensable. On this position, Buell writes:

Following Stoler, I define the necessary criterion of ethnicity/race as the dynamic interplay between fixity and fluidity. Appeals to kinship and descent are one significant way in which the 'reality' and 'essence' (or fixity) of ethnicity/race is articulated. Just as 'blood' is a powerful symbol for the relationship implied by the concept 'kinship' in our culture, but is not in fact its essence, so too are 'kinship' and 'descent' symbols for the fixity or enduringness implied by the concept of 'ethnicity.' When kinship and descent participate in the fluid aspect of ethnicity, insofar as descent and kin relations shift and can be redrawn (discursively or ritually) to exclude and include individuals and groups, these signs of fluidity are often accounted for by asserting that ethnic claims of descent and kinship are 'fictive' rather than 'real.' But this distinction falsely implies that there is an intrinsic content to kinship or descent, when in fact these are analytical categories created by scholars to account for a diverse range of social organizations, practices, and cultural symbols.

(Buell 2005:9)

For Buell, then, the very fixed factors of ethnicity such as kinship and descent also participate, sometimes, in the fluid aspect of ethnicity when descent and kin relations are made to shift and redrawn either discursively or ritually to exclude and include individuals and groups in an ethnic group. In this sense, there is virtually no intrinsic content to kinship or descent. What we have are analytical categories which scholars create to show that there exist a range of social organizations, practices and cultural symbols.

Buell further observes,

Most definitions of ethnicity acknowledge that other factors (language, religion, place,

foodways) may be claimed by a given community as more central than kinship or descent. Nonetheless, when kinship and descent are privileged as necessary to ethnicity, these other factors are dismissed as mere 'markers' or attributes of ethnicity, rather than being ethnicity's constitutive elements.

(Buell 2005:9)

It is important to explore some of the ways in which ethnicity has been defined following Buell's observation above. Scholarly definitions of ethnicity have tended to regard culture as a major defining factor. After a discussion of many such definitions, Van Eck concluded that ethnicity 'has to do with cultural differences – hence the term "cultural ethnicity" which is commonly used in studies on the differences between groups' (Van Eck 2014:52). In a footnote, he explains that 'most studies on ethnicity show that the term can be understood in terms of the attributes of a specific culture and how that culture differs from other cultures' (Van Eck 2014:52, n. 6).

A similar observation has been made by Barth. He notes that the term 'ethnic group' is generally understood in anthropological literature to designate a population which

- 1) is largely biologically self-perpetuating;
- 2) shares fundamental cultural values, realised in overt unity in cultural forms;
- 3) makes up a field of communication and interaction; and
- 4) has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order (Barth 1969:10-11).

Barth's critique of such a definition relates to the sharing of a common culture which is given central importance in the definition of ethnic group. He is of the view that much can be gained by regarding this very important feature as an implication or result, rather than a primary and definitional characteristic of ethnic group organization (Barth 1969:11). He argues that with the emphasis on culture as the defining element, the classification of persons and local groups as members of an ethnic group must depend on their exhibiting the particular traits of the culture (Barth 1969:12). In this sense, differences between groups become differences in trait inventories, which means the attention is drawn to the analysis of cultures but not to analysis of ethnic organization

(Barth 1969:12). The fact is that cultures change over time, and other external circumstances to which actors must accommodate themselves also create situations where people of the same ethnic group may exhibit different cultural traits at different locations at the same time (Barth 1969:12-13). Derks and Roymans (2009:1-2) observe that '[d]espite frequent claims by ethnic groups to the contrary, all ethnic formations are intrinsically unstable and dynamic over time' (and 'much of this dynamism is to be understood in close association with conflict, violence and changing constellations of power'). The critical focus of investigation from this point of view is the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the 'cultural stuff' (Barth 1969:15). Therefore, the boundaries to which we must give our attention are social boundaries, though they may have territorial counterparts (Barth 1969:15).

Barth's view of ethnicity is one of selective, deliberate and incidental group self-definition as well as how the identification of that group is done by others. He argues that, when defined as an ascriptive and exclusive group, the nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear: it depends on the maintenance of a boundary (Barth 1969:14).⁴⁴ He explains that the cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, as also the organizational form of the group may change – yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity, and investigate the changing cultural form and content (Barth 1969:14). By concentrating on what is socially *effective*, ethnic groups are seen as a form of social organisation. Van der Spek agrees with Barth, but adds 'one thing' to Barth's theories on ethnicity, that is, the criteria by which a group defines its ethnic identity are not chosen at random (Van der Spek 2009:102). For Van der Spek, 'language, religion, physical features, and common history are often recurring boundary marks' (Van der Spek 2009:102). He contends that 'the notion of a common descent, though often fictitious, but mostly with a kernel of truth, always plays an important part in the perception of ethnicity' (Van der Spek 2009:102). It is pointed out that in antiquity, the situation was not very different, citing

⁴⁴ Derks and Roymans (2009:3) note that continuity of ethnic identity is not to be equated with a continuity of culture or even material culture.

the dichotomy between Greeks and barbarians (Van der Spek 2009:102). He explains that,

The Greeks formed an ethnic group. They had a common proper name (Hellēnes), they had a myth of common ancestry (descent from Hellen), they shared important historical memories (the Trojan war, the Persian wars), they shared important elements of common culture (religion, customs, and language), they felt a link with a common homeland, Hellas, although they lived all over the Mediterranean and in the Hellenistic period far into Asia, and they more or less felt some sense of solidarity, although they were very frequently at war with each other.

Van der Spek recalls Heroditus' definition of *to hellēnikon* as 'being of one blood and one language, honouring the same gods with sanctuaries and sacrifices, having the same customs (*ēthea*)' (Van der Spek 2009:102, citing Barth 1969). Since Barth's seminal work, anthropological thinking has moved away from ethnicity defined as a cultural unit to ethnicity as the organising principle of that unit (Sparks 1998:10). Further to Barth's work, some modifications have resulted in other theories that are worth considering at this point.

5.5.1 Some theories of ethnicity

Duling's treatment of three theories (or two with modification of the second) is helpful for consideration here. He identifies Primordialism, Constructionism, and the modification of the latter in Instrumentalism, Social Psychology, and Ethno-symbolism (Duling 2010:71-74).

5.5.1.1 Primordialism

The 'term "primordial" refers to what has always existed from the very beginning' (Duling 2010:71; see also Siapkas 2014:67). According to this theory, 'members of ethnic groups usually have powerful, deep-seated feelings for each other, feelings that they believe are natural, sometimes even sacred, and have been there from the very beginning' (Duling 2010: 71). It is in times of social change especially that such bonds of affection come to play in the expression of solidarity within one's group as against members of other groups. In primordialism, ethnic sentiments are usually built around 'language, family, place (land) of origin, custom and religion' (Duling 2010:71). Duling explains that since these elements are culturally generated, this view might better be

called '*cultural primordialism*' (Duling 2010:71). In addition to this, Duling speaks of *sociological primordialism* (Duling 2010:71). This theory identifies 'certain tendencies in human behaviour such as altruism, aggression, war, and criminality' as traits that 'tend to run in families.'

5.5.1.2 Constructionism

Duling (2010:72) credits the Norwegian sociologist Fredrik Barth with challenging the representatives of cultural primordialism. He explains that while not denying the importance of 'observable cultural features such as language, dress, and food' (which Barth calls 'cultural stuff'), Barth argues that 'they do not produce ethnic identity; rather, *groups use these features to describe themselves and thereby to differentiate and separate themselves from other groups in their immediate social environment*' (emphasis original 2010:72). The key for Barth, Duling explains, is not the 'cultural stuff,' but 'the *social organisation* of cultural difference(s).' The implication is that 'ethnicity is not natural, inherent, fixed, and unchangeable, but freely chosen, fluid, and changeable – continually constructed – in new contexts in relation to outsiders' views' (Duling 2010:72). The fact that how an ethnic group defines itself is a choice made in times of social stress for marking group boundaries is emphasised (Duling 2010:72). Duling acknowledges, nonetheless, that 'certain features of ethnic identity remain relatively constant – otherwise, there would be no ethnic distinctions – ethnic identity changes over time (Duling 2010:72). He, however, calls attention to the fact that ethnic identity features can change, and indeed, members of an ethnic group can change.

In a related sense, Cromhout tends to emphasise the participatory nature of what might be called cultural ethnicity. Though he argues that '[e]thnicity is about cultural differentiation' (Cromhout 2014:538), he maintains that it 'involves the communication of similarity and difference, that is, visibly engaging in socio-cultural activities' (Cromhout 2014:538). In this case, it is the participation in the cultural activity that defines one's ethnic identity. He calls attention to Constructionist's view of how 'groups construct their ethnic boundaries ... in relation to like-minded, like-practiced peers, a "we" *aggregative* self-definition and ... in relation to *others*, a "we-they" *oppositional* self-definition'

(Cromhout 2014:538; Duling 2005:127). Following his stance on the participatory nature of ethnicity, he maintains that ‘engaging in cultural activities, ... when appreciated within the context of collectivist societies, puts emphasis on *orthopraxy*, rather than orthodoxy.’ In this way, ‘if you perform the proper rituals, dress in the right way, participate in festival or eat the right kind of foods, these are the vital elements which illustrate you are an integral part of the community’ (Cromhout 2014: 538-539, following Bell 1997: 193).

5.5.1.3 Instrumentalism, social psychology, and ethno-symbolism

The following represent modified forms of Barth’s constructionism. *Instrumentalism* states that ‘when an ethnic group constructs its identity, it is consciously attempting to advance its own socio-political self-interests’ (Duling 2010:72; citing VArshney 1995). ‘An example would be stressing one’s ethnic identity to win a scholarship designed for students of a certain ethnic heritage’ (Duling 2010:72). The modification developed in *social psychology*, ‘stresses that in competition with other ethnic groups the one that is victorious tends to develop kinship myths about its own collective honour and to stereotype outsiders ethnocentrically as dishonourable’ (Duling 2010:72, citing Horowitz 1985). A third modification, *ethno-symbolism*, ‘examines an ethnic group’s longing for its past “golden age”, illustrated by its myths of origin and election and its capacity to endure, yet adapt’ (Duling 2010:72, following Armstrong 1982).

Further to Barth’s definition that shifts the focus from ethnicity as a cultural unit to ethnicity as the organising principles usually called ‘ethnic boundaries,’ Sparks suggests that our comprehension of a given ethnic community is achieved primarily as we come to identify its discursive strategies of self-definition, and also as we understand the devices it uses to distinguish itself from other communities (Sparks 1998:18).

5.5.2 Features of ethnicity/ethnic sentiments

In partial agreement with Wallerstein’s core/periphery thesis, Sparks holds that ‘ethnicity arises, or at least becomes more salient, in the context of multicultural contact and also

with the notion that ethnic sentiments intensify when “peripheral” groups live under the domination of a powerful “core” civilisation’ (Sparks 1998:21).

On the question of what contributes to ethnic sentiments, Sparks identifies language, culture, religion, and history, but cautions that these alone are not indicators of ethnic sentiment (Sparks 1998:19). A discussion of the views of scholars on the features of ethnicity has been undertaken by Duling (2010:73). The features that came up include: family, territory, language, custom, religion, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotypical (observable physical features), common proper name, myths of common ancestry (including heroes and heroines, real or imagined), shared historical memories (real or imagined). By placing family, tribe and nation in the same general ‘kinship’ field, Duling (2010:73) comes out with a socio-cultural model that stresses nine cultural features.

They include:

- 1) Kinship
- 2) Myths of common ancestry
- 3) Homeland
- 4) Customs
- 5) Language
- 6) Shared historical memories
- 7) Religion
- 8) Phenotypical features, and
- 9) Name

The following are illustrations of the nine features in various Mediterranean cultural and social contexts as given by Duling (2010:74-76):

- 1) *Kinship*: The most important indication of status was family (Malina 2001:ch. 5). Except for magical texts, genealogies usually followed a single male line (‘unilinear patrilineal descent’); the most common form of identity was ‘X son of Y (son of Z),’ as in ‘James son of Zebedee’ (Matt 4:21).
- 2) *Myths of common ancestry*: Herodotus wrote that ‘nations’ traced their origins to their ancestral gods and heroes (Hall 1997:41-43). Wealthy Greeks paid temple

- priests to fabricate family genealogies to enhance their social status (Hood 1961). Biblical genealogies traced family origins to famous ancestors, even to the First Man Adam, called the 'son of God' (Lk 3:23-38).
- 3) *Homeland*: The Greeks usually associated other peoples with their homeland (Hall 1997:45; Esler 2003a:58-59). Israelites believed they lived in a 'promised land' (Gen 15:18-21). The ancient Judean historian Josephus identified peoples by their lands (*Against Apion*) and so did the New Testament (Mk 15:21; Lk 23:36). Ethnocentric stereotypes of others are usually related to land of origin.
 - 4) *Customs* (see *Religion*): The sixth-century BCE Greek poet, Anakreon, reports that Dorians were recognizable by their clothing (Hall 1997:38). Religious customs – circumcision, kosher food, insider marriage, fasting, Sabbath laws, festivals, male beards – distinguished Judeans from other peoples, as did tassels (*tsitsit*) on Rabbis' clothes and small boxes of scripture ('phylacteries,' *tefillin*) on their heads (e.g., Ex 13:1-16; Mt 9:20-22; 23:5; Cohen 1999:28).
 - 5) *Language*: Greeks considered outsiders to be 'babblers' (*barbaroi*, 'barbarians;' Geary 1999). Egyptians called non-Egyptian speakers 'other tongued.' Judeans had sacred books written in antique Hebrew and spoke Bible-influenced speech (Hamilton 1995).
 - 6) *Shared historical memories*: The Greeks had Homer's *Iliad*; Romans had accounts of the founding of Rome (Plutarch, *Lives of Romulus*). Greek and Latin historians wrote to reinforce ethnic identity. The Hebrew Bible contains stories about ancestors, the land, and the monarchy. In Paul's day, Josephus retold Judean history (*Antiquities*; *Wars*) and the New Testament contains many 'historical' memories.
 - 7) *Religion* (see *Customs*): Religion was embedded in family (household religion) and politics. Greeks were recognized by their myths, festivals, processions, and athletic contests (Neils 1992). Roman religion included ancestor veneration, myths, and the vestal virgins, both in the household and in public ceremonies. Both Romans and Judeans considered themselves to be God's 'chosen people' (Carter 2001:22).
 - 8) *Phenotypical features*: Knowing nothing about the modern scientific view of

‘phenotypology’ (Greek *phainein*, ‘to appear’) in modern genetics (genes combined with environmental factors), the ancients explained physical features based on observation. Ethiopians were said to have had dark, curly beards and hair because they had been scorched by the sun and Europeans had frosty skin and straight, yellow hair because they had less exposure to the sun. The ‘physiognomic’ literature extends such features ethnocentrically to character types: Corinthians and Leucadians, said to have small limbs, a small face, and small eyes, were judged to be small-minded (Pseudo-Aristotle, *Physiognomics* 808a:30-33e; Malina & Neyrey 1996:[1]).

- 9) *Name*: Greeks (‘Hellenes’), Romans, and Judeans identified ethnic groups by their names (Hall 1997:47), especially as related to homeland, and often appositionally. Herodotus labels Persians, Egyptians, Scythians, and Libyans ‘*barbaroi*.’ Romans considered Greeks and Egyptians inferior. The Bible identifies many outsider groups (Canaanites, Midianites, Romans, and Samaritans). *Ioudaios*, ‘Judean,’ originally a non-Israelite’s pejorative name, was adopted by Judeans for themselves (Von Rad, Kuhn & Gutbrod [TNDT] 1965:360-61; Kraemer 1989; Harvey 1996; Hanson & Oakman 1998; Cohen 1999:70; Elliott 2007).

From what we know about ethnicity, especially in light of constructionist understanding, a group, to identify itself as an ethnic group, would use not all of the nine features at any given time. Depending on the context, some of the features would be highlighted as essential elements for identification with a particular group’s ethnic identity.

5.5.3 Ethnicity and power

It is observed that ‘ethnic sentiments do not arise in a vacuum, but as distinctive behaviours in contrast to other social groups, and both the members and non-members usually recognise these sentiments’ (Sparks 1998:19). It is further argued that people do not necessarily think of their ethnic story at all times, but as a story underlies ethnicity (and often comes to the surface during times of trouble or when the ethnic identity is questioned)’ (Easter 2014:29-30). Sparks emphasises the role of competition between groups in the creation or intensification of distinctive ethnic identity (Sparks

1998:19). Following Wallerstein, Sparks (1998:20) observes that ethnic sentiments intensify when 'peripheral' groups live under the domination of a powerful 'core' civilisation. Conflict and power issues are usually associated with the formation of ethnic identity (Derks & Roymans 2009:1-2). Sparks (1998:19) draws attention to Wallerstein's (1979) argument that 'imperialist and colonial structures tend to create ethnic groups in order to justify exploitation of them.' Under conditions of political, social and economic repression, it is possible for people to abandon their own language and go for that of others, usually of their oppressors (Dorian 1999:39).

Within such socio-political dynamics of power, ethnic stories are told (or formulated) and retold, and the telling and retelling is done with the interest of the one telling the story in mind. These stories have the focus of identifying the narrating group in a more positive light with the hope of obtaining advantage in the given socio-political situation of power. As Easter has emphasised, 'such identity narratives and their production are bound up with power in regard to who gets to tell the story, what version of the story is told, and what this story means' (Easter 2014:30). Attention is called to an occasion on which 'Tiv elders appear to have invented a genealogical relationship between two groups for the purpose of avoiding participation in a border conflict' (Sparks 1998:20).

It becomes apparent that ethnicity is a weapon in the hands of people either to obtain or to continue wielding power over others, or as a tool to resist the power of dominating groups or to ensure the survival of dominated groups. Still, ethnicity has been found to be a card people play (sometimes negatively) in order to pursue their interest in many different ways. The telling and retelling of the story of a group's ethnicity is dictated by the interest of the one telling the story. It is therefore important to determine the interest of the group telling the story by identifying the position the group occupies in the dynamics of the power situation in order to appreciate what the ethnic story is being told to achieve.

5.5.4 Multiple ethnic identity

It has been noted that 'ethnic affiliation may be expressed at different scales of social

organisation' (Derks & Roymans 2009:6). It is possible for individuals to have many ethnic affiliations (Derks & Roymans 2009:6). 'Such identifications were tiered rather than mutually exclusive. Greeks, for instance, "had many different loyalties, of which being a Hellene was only one, and usually less important than loyalty to family, village, polis or to wider, ethnic groups (such as Arcadians)"' (Derks & Roymans 2009:6, following Whittaker 2009). 'Context was all important as to which label was claimed' (Derks & Roymans 2009:6, citing Whittaker 2009). To emphasise that multiple ethnic identity was common in the Hellenistic Roman period (Van der Spek 2009:102; Whittaker 2009:193; Derks 2009:241), Van der Spek explains that 'when the Jerusalem high-priest Jason wore Greek clothes, or sported nakedly in the gymnasium, he certainly felt Greek. When he put on his high-priestly official robes, conducted the ceremonies on Sabbath in the temple, he was the Jew Jehoshua or Jeshua' (Van der Spek 2009:102). In a similar vein, a 'Greek-speaking farmer in Ptolemaic Egypt may have regarded himself to be Greek, and was treated that way there, but when he travelled to the city of Alexandria, he would have been despised as a backward Egyptian' (Van der Spek 2009:102).

5.5.5 Israelite ethnicity

Looking at Israelite ethnicity is important for two reasons. Firstly, writers of the New Testament present Christianity as a legitimate culmination of the religion of historic Israel. Secondly, Hebrews, on which our discussion of ethnicity focuses, contains a number of features which one can identify with the ethnicity of historic Israel. Cromhout (2014:530-543) gives a socio-cultural model of Israelite ethnicity outlining six dimensions of this ethnicity. These are presented as follows:

- 1) Israelite ethnicity is a form of social identity and relation, referring to a group of people ('Israel') who ascribe to themselves and or by others, a sense of belonging and a shared cultural tradition. They were socialised into a symbolic universe filled with positive identity characteristics, which was believed to set them apart from the nations. There was the belief of being the most honourable of all people because they lived according to God's law (e.g. *Sir.* 10.19, 24). Their identity encoded attributes such as righteousness, purity, moral superiority, superiority in character,

values and intelligence, a distinguished ancestry, divine favour, and monotheism. Gentiles, on the other hand, were generally stereotyped by Israelites/Judeans as 'sinners,' 'unclean,' and 'idolaters' with whom table fellowship should be avoided (e.g. *Jed* 22.16; 23.24; *Let. Aris* 139-142; *Gl* 2.12). Such Israelite attitudes towards outsiders were frequently commented upon by gentile authors (e.g. Tacitus, *Hist* 5.5.1; Juvenile, *Sat* 14.103-104).

- 2) Israelite ethnicity is socially (re)constructed, the outcome of enculturation and socialization, as well as the social interaction with 'others' across the ethnic boundary. In antiquity Israelite identity was about loyalty to God or the gods, and honouring the traditions and customs of the ancestors, but 'remembering' the past always has to do with negotiating social realities and constructing identities in the present to ensure the ethnic group's survival (Dunn 1990:193). So the Israelites would have lived in a world, a space of 'habitual dispositions' (*habitus*) where everyday life was regulated by their divine patron, YHWH, the requirements of the Torah, and the values and norms of their society, where honouring the customs of the father's would have been paramount (cf. Josephus, *C. Ap* 2.204). Cromhout again notes that ethnic (re)construction is also the outcome of social interaction with 'others' across the ethnic boundary. The boundary between an ethnic group and others is negotiated or (re)constructed, using various symbols and cultural practices. Depending on the context, either the more traditional or the invention of new emblems of identity can be given greater emphasis. For example, during the Maccabean crisis covenantal praxis such as circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath gained prominence in Israelite identity and self-understanding in the service of boundary maintenance of (re)construction (cf. *Let. Aris* 139-140).
- 3) Israelite identity is about cultural differentiation, involving the communication of similarity *vis-à-vis* co-ethnics (aggregative 'we') and the communication of difference in opposition to ethnic others (oppositional 'we-they'). When Israelites observed covenantal praxis, their 'ancestral customs,' they were not being 'religious,' but were communicating their identity, that is, their belonging and similarity *vis-à-vis* co-ethnics and difference in opposition to ethnic outsiders. That is why Israel was also defined more by orthopraxy than by orthodoxy (Cohen

1987:61, 103). Being an honourable Israelite required that you communicate that identity in the proper way in order to help preserve the integrity and boundary of Israel as a whole. For example, before the onset of the Maccabean revolt and during the introduction of a gymnasium in Jerusalem, Israelite males who performed an epispasm to participate in the novelty were said to have forsaken the 'holy covenant' (*1 Macc* 1:15), meaning, they were disloyal to their ancestral customs and betrayed their ethnic identity.

- 4) Israelite ethnicity is concerned with culture – shared meaning. The most widespread of the features of ethnicity when it comes to culture – shared meaning are kingship relations and myths of common ancestry, while a connection to an ancestral land is also recognised as a primary cultural feature (Hall 2002: 9-10). But in various ways these cultural features, in varying degrees of importance, contributed towards Israelite 'knowledge' or their world of meaning.
- 5) Israelite culture is no more fixed than the culture of which it is a component, or the situation in which it is produced and reproduced. The Israelites lived in a 'high context of society' where there is very little social change over time (Rohrbaugh 2007:8-10). The culture of the time also valued stability and constancy of character and the willingness to conform one's actions to cultural standards (Malina & Neyrey 1996:39). In the wake of the Judean Revolt (66-70 CE) and its devastating consequences, most of the Mediterranean world would have seen the Israelites as a dishonoured people. It is proposed here that when we deal with first-century Israel we are dealing with *primordial identity (re)construction*, balancing an etic (outsider) and emic (insider) perspective. On the whole this approach interprets Israelite ethnicity being as a more 'fixed' than 'fluid' phenomenon in the first-century, yet change could occur, as the emergence of the various Jesus-movements clearly demonstrates.
- 6) Israelite ethnicity is both collective and individual, externalised in social interaction and internalised in personal self-identification. The bonds that hold Israelites together were social through the observance of ancestral customs (Barclay 1996). In other words, ethnicity was externalised in social interaction through which relationships with significant others resulting in collective identity, was maintained.

For example, Josephus (*Ant.* 4.203-204) and Philo (*Spec. Laws* 1.70) testify to the sense of community that pilgrimage festivals created. Social bonds would also be engendered through the gatherings in the synagogue or assemblies on the Sabbath, preparing food according to the laws of *kashrut* (food laws), or celebrating common meals, such as the ‘pure supper’ (*cena pura* or *prosabbaton*), which in the diaspora denoted a communal dinner before the onset of the Sabbath (Borbury 2006). Through the process of socialization which is also categorisation (Jenkins 1997:166) Israelites internalised their ethnic identity, a process which begins from childhood as individuals develop a sense of self in the *habitus* (name, language, kinship, land, covenantal praxis [customs], and religion) and as other people identify them as Israelites.

From Cromhout’s analysis, it is evident that Israelite ethnicity conforms to the role and functions of ethnicity in the life of a people and reflects the broader culture of the region in which Israel is located. As such it tends to be more fixed than fluid, insisting on the ways of life of their ancestors in religious practices not merely to be religious, but essentially as honourable members preserving the sanctity of their ethnic group. A departure from the religious practices of their ancestors is then seen as a betrayal of their identity as ethnic Israelites. Their social identity in the Mediterranean world related to how they regarded themselves as the people of God and the positive distinctive self-image this gives them in contrast to other ethnic groups in the region. Maintaining those practices that mark them out as special and therefore distinct from others is therefore crucial for a sense of who they are as the people of God.

5.5.6 Christianity and ethnic identity

There is much to say about how Christians used ethnic reasoning to create a collective identity in the early years of Christianity. In defining and redefining themselves as a people in the Graeco-Roman world of the first-century, many New Testament writers used concepts of ethnicity to draw out a distinctive identity for believers. While identifying Christians in terms that were familiar in dominant, powerful and respected groups like Israelites and Romans, the writers presented Christians as superior to such

groups. The Christians found in the concepts and language of ethnicity of the time an avenue from which they could establish the legitimacy of their claim to how they presented themselves (See Buell 2005:2).

The use of language to define themselves sought to project the Christians as being 'comparable to groups such as Jews, Greeks, and Romans' (Buell 2005:2). Attention is called to Paul's argument on how Gentiles could be considered true Israelites (Buell 2005:46). Religious practices were also important expressions of ethnic identity in the imperial period (Buell 2005:48). The adoption of particular religious practices,' therefore 'as in the case of becoming a Jew, could produce ethnoracial transformation' (Buell 2005:44).

There is, therefore, a participatory nature of ethnicity in religious practices whereby by participating in the appropriate religious practices one assumes the ethnic identity of the ethnic group associated with that particular religion. Buell (2005:43) explains:

The observance of particular religious practices can create or indicate group identity that can also be asserted through genealogical connections to deities. Abraham's covenant with God and adoption of circumcision creates a relationship that was simultaneously genealogical and religious, a tradition that early Christians adapted to define themselves. The dynamic function of religiosity in ethnoracial discourse is also evident in Hellenistic and Roman-period texts that discuss Jewishness (or Judaeanness). Piety and observance of customs and law reinforce both ends of the fluid/fixed spectrum, and are interwoven with other criteria for defining membership, including appeals to kinship and ancestry. In the book of Judith, for example, Israelites are described as a people (an ethnos and a genos). The "essence" of this people is largely defined by their relationship to a deity, which is intertwined with genealogical definitions.

Buell notes two ways in which religion in Mediterranean antiquity is depicted in current scholarship: (1) 'religion in antiquity was practice-centered, not belief-centered; and (2) religion was embedded in, not distinct from, a larger social matrix (that is, it is difficult to speak of distinct religious communities that are not fully implicated in the rest of one's life)' (Buell 2005:59). Various aspects of one's ethnic identity such as 'race/ethnicity and civic identity' are to some extent characterised by religion in this sense (Buell 2005:59).

We are reminded that according to Constructionists, one of the ways groups construct their ethnic boundaries is ‘in relation to like-minded, like-practiced peers, a “we” *aggregative* self-definition’ (Cromhout 2014:538, following Duling 2005:127). In this respect, Christians, had common practices in which their faith were expressed and by which they identified themselves and were identified as a group of people. Buell (2005:60) recalls that ‘Christians refuse participation in practices such as ritual sacrifices or offerings on behalf of the emperor but make actions such as martyrdom itself, prayer, sexual abstinence, and the performative declaration “I am a Christian” central to their definitions of Christianness.’

According to Buell (2005:90-91),

[e]arly Christians used biblical sources (and traditions of biblical interpretation) as well as what Elias Bickerman called the “Greek ethnological method” of imagining human history in universalizing terms (and traditions of its interpretation) to define themselves. From both biblical and “Greek” explanations about human history (and their respective adaptations and interpretations by Judaeans, Greeks, Egyptians, and Romans among others), Christians learned ways of classifying human groups in historic relation to one another that emphasized an original unity (‘universal history’) while also explaining differences among human groups despite original unity. By producing variations on this totalizing framework, Christians explained their recent historical emergence, asserted their superiority, and articulated universalizing ideals (that the diverse, particular communities were/should be a unified *ekklēsia* and that humanity ought to be reunified in and as the “Christian” people, or whichever descriptive is used to define this people).

This is to say that Christians were not alone in drawing on biblical and Greek explanations, adaptations and reinterpretations of human history in a bid to explain their emergence on the historical scene, the assertion of their superiority and the universalizing ideas of their group. In the same way it has been pointed out that, like non-Christian groups, ‘Christian appeals to the past’ are ‘attempts to authorise a collective identity in the present by devising a common past’ (Buell 2005:93). In doing so, they followed ‘master narratives’ (Buell 2005:93). Religion has been found to be a very effective way of *collective self-definition* with ethnic reasoning. It has been pointed out that Christians adapted ways of reasoning that made connection between ethnicity and religious practices as they reinterpreted their identity depicting some important groups in their society. Buell (2005:2,3,164) observes:

Early Christians found ethnic reasoning useful in their projects of self-definition for many reasons... [R]ace/ethnicity was often deemed to be produced and indicated by religious practices. Early Christians adapted existing understandings of what ethnicity and race are and how they relate to religiosity by reinterpreting the language of peoplehood readily available to them in the biblical texts they shared with (other) Jews, as well as political and civic language used broadly to speak about citizenship and peoplehood in the Roman Empire. Nonetheless, early Christians were consistent with the views of their contemporaries when they emphasize a close link between religious practices, cult membership or participation, and ethnoracial identity. Ethnic reasoning offered Christians one way to negotiate their identities in the imperial landscape.

Buell (2005:2, 3)

The reinterpretation of language of people groups was far reaching to the effect that even those aspects of ethnicity and race (such as birth, and for that matter lineage) that appear to be fixed are no longer fixed. In the reinterpretation of the essential aspects of ethnicity, fixed factors that are determined involuntarily by birth become fluid as others can also be born into a family or a nation by virtue of one's faith and participation in religious practice. Buell (2005:3) notes:

[A]lthough ancient authors frequently refer to membership in a *genos*, *ethnos*, *laos*, and *phylon* as a matter of one's birth and descent (that is, as fixed or ascribed), such membership was nonetheless seen to be mutable. Early Christians capitalized on this dynamic character of ethnicity/race as being both fixed and fluid in a range of ways. The common description of conversion as rebirth illustrates one central way in which Christians depicted Christianness simultaneously in terms of "essence" and transformation.

Buell (2005:3)

The flexible use of ethnic indicators enabled 'early Christians to use ethnic reasoning to make universalizing claims, arguing that everyone can, and thus ought to, become a Christian.' It also enabled them to 'define Christianness both as a distinct category in contrast to other peoples (including Jews, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, etc.) and also as inclusive, since it is a category formed out of individuals from a range of different races' (Buell 2005:3).

In employing ethnic reasoning for their collective self-definition, Christians were not only concerned with how distinct they were from other non-Christian groups, but equally important was the quest to show the legitimacy of the Christianness of competing Christian groups. Buell (2009:5) writes:

Christians also used ethnic reasoning polemically, especially to compete with one another. In the first few centuries of the common era, Christianity was a work-in-progress with no official form; those whom we study as early Christians actually make up a broad range of different groups, practices, and beliefs. Either by condemning the religious practices and beliefs of rival Christians to encapsulate Christianness ... by accusing rival Christians of overstating the “fixity” of one’s identity and thus limiting the possibilities for transformation ... or by construing rival Christian groups as particular rather than universal ... early Christians wielded ethnic reasoning both to authorize their own visions of Christianness and to caricature and exclude competing alternatives. Christians could tailor each of these arguments to criticize non-Christian groups as well.

Buell (2009:5)

Buell (2005:9) holds that ‘Christians could define conversion as both the transformation of one’s ethnicity and the restoration of one’s true identity.’ Based on this, they ‘universalized this ethnoracial transformation’ by stressing that it was accessible to all (Buell 2005:9). The way Christian writers depicted Christians as a race are evident in ‘Hebrews, Revelation, and many of Paul’s letters’ (Buell 2005:9).

The claim of common ancestry is a very important way in which Christians have been seen to share in Israel’s ethnic identity. On this, Buell (2005:9) has the following to say:

It is fair to say that the majority opinion about ethnicity among anthropologists and sociologists, as well as by other scholars who draw upon their work, is that ethnicity entails claims of common kinship or descent from a common group or ancestor. That is, such claims are generally viewed as a necessary criterion of ethnicity – if we find these claims, we might have “ethnicity”; if we do not, then we do not have ethnicity. If we use this definition of ethnicity, then we find that early Christians do largely conform to it, insofar as many wrote about Christians as united by common ties of kinship to a range of figures – God, Christ, Abraham, Seth – and to other groups, such as the Hebrews or Israelites.

Buell (2005:9)

Easter suggests that ‘[i]n light of the power dynamics involved in narrative, we may see Paul’s letters (and Hebrews) as running arguments with opponents about what story to tell and how that applies to their present situation’ (Easter 2014:30). He argues that though ‘the author of Hebrews is not making an ethnic argument, but he does make arguments about corporate identity’ and makes identity arguments with story (Easter 2014:30). He draws attention to how the author of Hebrews impresses upon his readers that the rest which historic Israel could not obtain are for them to enter as Hebrews 3-4 shows (Easter 2014:30). DeSilva (2000:3) observes that the Gentile entering the

Christian community became an ‘heir of the promise,’ a ‘child of Abraham,’ the ‘Israel of God,’ the ‘circumcision,’ and the ‘royal priesthood, God’s holy nation’ (Gl 3:29; 6:6: Phlp 3:3; 1 Pt 2:9). This for DeSilva (2000:3) means ‘the Gentile Christian was socialised to view himself or herself as the heir to the titles and promises that belonged to God’s chosen people (historically, the Jewish people).’

5.5.7 Relevant aspects of ethnicity theory for the study of Hebrews

5.5.7.1 Kinship

We recall from Duling (2010:74, Malina 2001: [5]) that ‘the most important indication of status in the Mediterranean world was family and except for magical texts, genealogies usually followed a single male line (“unilinear patrilineal descent”); the most common form of identity was “X son of Y (son of Z),” as in “James son of Zebedee” (Matt 4:21).’ In Hebrews the author employs ethnic expressions of kinship to describe his audience in addition to other characters like Jesus. For example, God spoke to ‘the fathers’ (Heb 1:1); it was their fathers who tried God and God was displeased with them (Heb 3:9); the new covenant is not according to the covenant God made with their fathers (Heb 8:9). Also, Jesus is Son to God (Heb 1:2, 5). DeSilva calls attention to the fact that the author identifies his audience as ‘God’s household’ (Heb 3:6) and God’s ‘many sons and daughters’ (Heb 2:10, 14; 12:5-10), ‘brothers and sisters’ to Christ and to one another (Heb 2:11; 3:1, 12; 10:19; 13:22). Again, they are joined by a common genealogy (as God’s ‘children’ [Heb 2:10] and ‘Abraham’s descendants’ [Heb 2:16]) into a single family (DeSilva 2012:156). We are reminded that the conception of people of God as kin takes a particularly Christ-centred focus (DeSilva 2000a:200). ‘It is now attachment to Jesus that determines whether or not a person is in the family, rather than the person’s bloodline or natural lineage’ (DeSilva 2000a:200). Now since God promised to establish the new covenant with the household of Israel and of Judah (Heb 8:8), the audience who have now become heirs of that covenant are now the household of Israel and Judah. The promise of rest Israel looked forward to is presented in Hebrews as a promise to Abraham and his co-heirs (Isaac and Jacob Heb 11:8, 9). But the heavenly city they were looking forward to is still to come (Heb 13:14), and yet believers already have access to it (Heb 12:22). As Steyn has noted, ‘the heavenly rest

is both still to be realised and yet accessible' (Steyn 2011:438; following Lincoln 2006:95). The believers in this sense are the true inheritors of what was promised to Israel and the true descendants of the Patriarchs of Israel for that matter.

5.5.7.2 Homeland (city)

One's homeland was very important in the definition of one's ethnic identity so that separation from one's homeland meant 'the loss of status that a person enjoyed in that native land, particularly the status that came from the honour developed by the family over generations' (DeSilva 2012:74). DeSilva observes that '[t]he stranger or foreigner generally lacks citizenship in the new locale, and thus lacks the rights and protection citizenship afforded against insult, abuse, and assaults on property or honour' (DeSilva 2012:75).

It has been established in chapter 3 that the audience of Hebrews suffered a fate that showed that they lacked citizenship in the city where they lived. This is evident in the way they were treated whether or not they were native citizens of the city. The public abuse they suffered and the plundering of their possessions could not be sustained if they had the protection of the city authorities. Their treatment as strangers would make sense in the light of the fact that even those who naturally were citizens of their city and of the Roman Empire had given up the essential things that marked them as Roman citizens and citizens of the city. That is to say, they no longer participated in the sacrifices to the gods that sought the peace and progress of the empire (and for that matter their city). In addition, they had given up the veneration of the emperor, an act which could be seen as a political threat to the empire. Even when we assume that there was fluidity of boundaries which allowed the believers to move in and out of many groups, as Muir (2014:129) argues, the peoples' association with the Christian group sent clear signals to the non-Christian citizens of the city. As Kippenberg (1990:119) has noted, 'for the citizens of Smyrna the term *christianos* implied a rejection of traditional ancestral religion, and this implication was recognised by those to whom this name was applied as well as by the officials of the Roman Empire (Kippenberg 1990:119). For Jewish Christians, they were now sojourners in a foreign land and had

no citizenship in this Roman city. By joining the Christian group, they had lost the tolerance which they enjoyed as Jews in the Roman Empire. Even those who may have acquired Roman citizenship would now share the fate of the Christian group. The writer of Hebrews was very much aware of this and did not envisage a time when they could regain their Roman citizenship and protection of the city. Rather, he tries to set their minds on another city for which they should strive so that they could endure their current loss of citizenship. For the author, though the city lies in the future for his audience (Heb 13:14), it still is a present reality for they have actually come to Mount Zion, the city of the Living God and the Heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22). In this sense they are just like Abraham who sought an abiding city when he lived as a sojourner in tents because he was looking for an abiding city (Heb 11:8-10). The point in talking about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Sarah was to show that they were people who were not concerned about where they came from (natural homeland) to which they could have returned. Instead, they desired a better city prepared for them by God, and as a consequence, God is not ashamed to be called their God. Thus:

These all died in faith without having received the promises, but they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth. Now those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they were thinking about where they came from, they would have had an opportunity to return. But they now desire a better place — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

(Heb 11:13-16)

We can see from the quotation above that the audience of Hebrews not only have a better homeland, they also have a God who is called their God. There is legitimacy for them to identify themselves in ethnic terms with a homeland and a God – essential elements of ethnic sentiment. They now acquire this new citizenship in the same way as Abraham did – for Abraham got the ethnic identity of the father of the people of Israel simply by belief in God and by accepting the promise of God to a new homeland. The result was that Abraham ceased to be a Chaldean and became the father of a new nation. Now the audience of Hebrews are identified with a new God and a new homeland and therefore have acquired a new identity also. In doing this, the audience are still following Abraham who decided to live as a sojourner even in the promised land. We know that in the Constructionist theory of ethnicity, no features are fixed; all

that matters is how people decide to define and identify themselves as well as how others in turn recognise them. In this theory even the features that appear fixed such as birth (descent) and homeland still participate in the fluidity of ethnic identification. This is precisely the situation we find in Hebrews where non-Jews and Jews share in a new ethnic identity by virtue of their faith in one God and a promised homeland. In effect then, both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians have acquired a new ethnic identity which is now better than what they had before.

5.5.7.3 Religion/custom

In our earlier discussions about the features of ethnicity, we noted that religion in the Mediterranean world was embedded in family and politics and that one could speak of household religion. It was therefore not surprising that elements of ethnicity such as myths of origin, ancestors, homeland and many others reflect in the religion of many people. But since religion is about faith in a god(s), loyalty to the god(s) of a people features prominently in many religions, especially Israelite religion. Moreover, elements such as priests, sacrifices, worship and their related practices are found in most religions of the Mediterranean world. Hebrews presents Christianity as taking its roots in the religion of the people of Israel and provides an important link between the readers and Israelite history in the expression of faith in the God of Israel and continuity with the religion of the same people (Heb 1:1-2). We find in Hebrews the use of strong religious language that identifies the believers as participants in the true religion God promised the people of Israel. The audience are identified as beneficiaries of the new covenant, of the high priest who ministers in the true and heavenly tabernacle, and of the sacrifices (Heb 7-10:18).

The audience of Hebrews are the 'holy brothers and companions' in a heavenly calling, therefore they should consider Jesus, the 'apostle and high priest' of our confession who was faithful to the one who appointed him just as Moses was in all God's household (Heb 3:1-2). Calling here resonates with the call and election of Israel as a people in the calling of their ancestor Abraham (and by extension, Isaac and Jacob). In the New Testament, these ancestors are recalled not only for their importance for

Israelite kinship (Jn 8:39) but also for the legitimacy of the Christian religion. The self-identification of the Israelites as a people set apart and holy underscores the identification of the recipients of Hebrews as 'holy brothers and companions' in a heavenly calling. Their mediator was faithful to the one who appointed him just as Moses was faithful in all things in the house of God. It is this faithfulness of Jesus that the recipients are called upon to imitate.

Sacrifice was an integral part of the religion of the Jews. The author of Hebrews presents Christ's death as a sacrifice in terms of the Jewish sacrificial system and shows how more effective the sacrifice of Christ is. Since Christ has performed the sacrifice *par excellence*, the believers have no other sacrifice to offer except a sacrifice of praise (Heb 13:11-15). Even this is in line with Israel's cultic practice because the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the most holy place by the high priest as a sin offering are burned outside the camp. The believers should therefore go outside the camp where Jesus was also crucified and share reproach with him, offering a sacrifice of praise there since they have been sanctified by that sacrifice of Christ (Heb 13:11-15). The author speaks of a redemption that took place by the blood of Messiah which was more effective than that of animals in the old covenant (Heb 9:12, 13). By the sacrifice involving his blood those who are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Heb 9:15) because a death has taken place for redemption from the transgressions committed under the first covenant (Heb 9:15b). In these verses, the redemption the believers have through the blood of the Messiah and mediator of the new covenant is actually meant to effectively cleanse the people from all the transgressions committed under the first covenant. The recipients of Hebrews are made to have an identity that both resonates and has contiguity with that of the people of Israel in their promise of the eternal inheritance and their redemption and cleansing from sin. There is no doubt that the promise of the inheritance and redemption that the believers now have are part of the ethnic heritage of the people of Israel. Paul's statement in Romans 9:4-5 is instructive: 'They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple service, and the *promises*. The ancestors are theirs, and from them, by physical descent, came the

Messiah, who is God over all, praised forever. Amen' (emphasis added; see also Heb 7:6 which identifies Abraham as the one who had the promises).

In the discussion of the treatment of the Passover tradition reflected in Exodus 12 and what seems to be conscious evocations of liturgy such as Deuteronomy 29 and Psalm 81 by some writers, Dunnill observes that Hebrews does not offer, 'consciously or unconsciously, any kind of reconstruction of an existing rite, although the elements of many rites will be found here, drawn from the traditions and practice of Judaism and from the worship of the early Church' (Dunnill 1992:122-123). The author of Hebrews recalls the necessity of the sprinkling of the scroll and the people and all the items used in the worship service of the tabernacle (Heb 9:19-23), and indicates that it is necessary also for the blood of Christ (a better sacrifice) to be shed for the cleansing of their sins and their salvation as people who are waiting for him (Heb 9:23b-28). Since the effect of this blood is continuous, it can be thought of as a present sacrificial practice for it was done once and for all to remain an effective sacrifice. Therefore the Christians have a sacrifice in the present age in the once for all sacrifice performed by Jesus (Heb 7:27; 9:12, 26; 10:10).

5.5.7.4 Myth of common ancestry

Tracing the origin of an ethnic group to a god or ancestors is a very important factor in ethnic sentiments of people. We are told Herodotus wrote that "nations' traced their origins to their ancestral gods and heroes' (Hall 1997:41-43). Speaking of Israel's ethnicity as 'socially (re)constructed,' Cromhout (2014:537-538) reminds us that '[i]n antiquity Israelite identity was about loyalty to God or gods, and honouring the traditions and customs of the ancestors, but "remembering" the past has to do with negotiating social realities and constructing identities in the present to ensure the ethnic group's survival.' This 'god factor' in ethnic sentiment was so important that both 'Romans and Judeans considered themselves to be God's "chosen people"' (Duling 2010:75, citing Carter 2001:22). We are also reminded of how Greek and Latin historians wrote to reinforce ethnic identity (Duling 2010:75). The author of Hebrews traces the origin of the Christian group to the same God who spoke to the ancestors of Israel (Heb 1:1, 2) and

draws on examples from the ancestors of Israel to exhort his people (Heb 11). Whatever purpose this was meant to serve, there is no doubt that it would produce an identity for his readers in which they share a common God with Israel, and for that matter, sharing in his promises to his people for a better homeland and rest. The ethnic dimension and effect of the writer's argument may not be intentional but that does rule out effects of ethnic identity for his readers. As Johnson (2006:65) has observed, '[f]or Hebrews, those who confess Jesus find their ancestors in the story of Israel.'

The author of Hebrews emphasises a strong continuity between the heroes of faith (Heb 11) and his hearers in such a way that makes his hearers part of the original plan and inheritors of what God had planned for the people of Israel. At the end of the list of heroes of faith of historic Israel, the author is emphatic that '[a]ll these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us' (Heb 11:39,40). In these words of the writer his audience became part of the inheritance of Israel not as an afterthought but as it was originally designed. The ethnic tone we find in the record of the heroes of faith in the chapter is profound: it deals with the calling of the patriarch Abraham, his son Isaac through whom the promise was to be fulfilled, and Jacob and Esau blessed by Isaac concerning things to come. Other figures include Joseph, Moses and the role he played in the redemption of the people of Israel. Here the institution of the Passover is recalled with the destruction of the firstborn and the crossing of the Red Sea. In recalling the myth of their origin, the audience of Hebrews are made to feel they are the true people of Israel in whom is fulfilled all that God's people were to expect in their redemption.

5.5.7.5 Shared historical memories

An important feature of ethnicity in the Mediterranean world was shared historical memories. Romans had accounts of the founding of Rome (Plutarch, *Lives of Romulus*; in Duling 2010:75). 'Greek and Latin historians wrote to reinforce ethnic identity' (Duling 2010:75). In Hebrews 10:32-36, the author reminds his audience of some aspects of their past experience as a group with the view to encouraging them not to give up. The

essence of reminding them of the past was to show that, what he was going to ask them to do was something they had done before. Moreover, there are many things they could recall from the past to encourage them to remain faithful to their faith in Christ in spite of their suffering. In recalling this history, the author reminds them of how after they had been enlightened, they endured struggle with sufferings, how they were sometimes publicly exposed to taunts and afflictions, and at other times they were companions of those who were treated that way. They sympathised with the prisoners and accepted the confiscation of their possessions, knowing that they have better and enduring possession. They were therefore not to throw away their confidence which was a great reward. For this reason they need endurance, so that after they have done God's will, they may receive what was promised.

They are also to remember their leaders who spoke God's word to them (Heb 13:7). These leaders now belong to the past (not their current leaders). In remembering them, they are to observe the outcome of the lives of the leaders and imitate them. Similarly, they are to remember the suffering of Jesus when He was tempted (Heb 2:18; 4:15, 16) since He is one of their own and their Brother in sharing with them the same flesh (Heb 2:14).

The author also narrates more remote history of Israelite heroes whose faith and endurance should be an example for his audience (Heb 11). The writer's aim was to show that by faith (faithfulness), these people won God's approval. The language used by the author to describe these heroes of faith ends up making the heroes the ancestors of his audience as well: 'For our ancestors won God's approval by it' (Heb 11:2). In effect, Israel's ancestors become the ancestors of the Christians as well. It is therefore not only in the immediate experience of the believers that they have reason to remain faithful and endure, but in their shared history with the historic people of Israel also. To the extent that the writer recalls at various instances aspects of the history of historic Israel, his aim was to draw some continuity with his audience as a foundation for his exhortation. Examples of these can be found in the following: the speaking of God to the fathers through the prophets (Heb 1:1); the rebellion in the wilderness (Heb 3:7-19);

Abraham's payment of tithe to Melchizedek and the priesthood of the Levitical order *vis-à-vis* that of Christ (Heb 7); the promise of a new covenant (Heb 8:7-13); and the regulations for worship in the tabernacle (Heb 9).

5.5.7.6 Name

We have already noted that name was one of the ways employed in ethnic reasoning to differentiate between groups in the Mediterranean world of the first-century. Duling (2010:74-76, following Hall 1997:47) tells us that 'Greeks ("Hellenes"), Romans, and Judeans identified ethnic groups by their names, ... especially as related to homeland, and often appositionally.' This naming and labelling of people was done usually to show that the group doing the labelling was better or superior. Duling reminds us of how Herodotus labels Persians, Egyptians, Scythians, and Libyans '*barbaroi*' and Romans considered Greeks and Egyptians inferior (Duling 2010:76). The writer of Hebrews does not clearly use such words to indicate superiority of the Christian ethnos nor inferiority of the outsiders, nonetheless, he has a description of his audience and references to outsiders that suggest that his audience are better (or superior). His readers are not those who draw back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and obtain life (Heb 10:39). They are also receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken as opposed to the kingdom of their oppressors, the believers are those who serve God acceptably unlike those who have failed to receive God's approval (Heb 12:28). The reason they are to hold on to the grace they have is that God is a consuming fire but he will only consume them when they act in faithlessness like the outsiders (Heb 12:28).

5.5.7.7 Multiple ethnic identity

We have observed that people could have multiple ethnic identity in which their ethnic affiliations are expressed at different scales of the social organization, and that it is possible for individuals to identify with different ethnic groups in various degrees. The Hellenistic and Roman periods in particular saw multiple ethnic identity as a striking feature (Van der Spek 2009:102; Whittaker 2009:193; Derks 2009:241). The audience of Hebrews, as we saw in the previous chapter, was a mixed race of Gentiles and Jewish converts to Christianity. Some of the Gentiles who converted to Christianity were

proselytes and God-fearers who already shared to some degree Israelite identity in some or all of the following: faith in the God of Israel, participation in cultic practices and boundary markers like circumcision, dietary restrictions, observance of the Sabbath, ritual washings, meetings in the synagogues and the reading of the Jewish scriptures. Conversely, Many Jews at the Roman period were Hellenised as much as the Roman citizens especially those in the Diaspora. Cromhout (2014:536) tells us that Israelite identity encoded attributes such as righteousness, purity, moral superiority, superiority in character, values and intelligence, a distinguished ancestry, divine favour, and monotheism. We are told how the Romans considered Greeks and Egyptians to be inferior (Duling 2010:76) and how the Romans considered themselves as God's 'chosen people' (Carter 2001:22; Duling 2005:73-74 in Duling 2010:75). The author of Hebrews does not find any of these existing ethnic sentiments in themselves important for his cause. When he recalls any history or custom related to their past, his concern was to create a superordinate identity in which all existing ethnic sentiments are subsumed so that his audience can be united in their faithfulness to the God who now speaks to them in his Son. The author appears very deliberate in this respect especially when one considers his avoidance of any qualification of τοῖς πατράσιν (giving us 'the fathers' instead of 'our fathers,' Heb 1:1); the fathers to whom God spoke are the fathers of all the audience no matter their ethnic affiliations. Johnson (2006:65) has noted the absence of ethnic identity of the audience here.

5.5.7.8 Ethnicity and power

We observed that when ethnic sentiments arise, they necessitate the drawing of group distinctiveness in contrast to other groups in contexts where one's ethnic identity is questioned, or in times of trouble, social competition, conflict, times of violence, domination, social discrimination and economic deprivation. As Easter has shown, in such situations ethnic stories are retold to serve the interest of the one telling the story, and the interest is mainly to obtain advantage in the situation by portraying the narrating group in a more positive light (Easter 2014:30). We noted in chapter 3 that the socio-political situation of the audience of Hebrews was such that the believers stood at a

disadvantage. The powers of the state was not on their side and pressure was mounted on them to return to the norms of the rest of the society by withdrawing from the Christian group. Having lost the protection of the state, their possessions were plundered, and there were other threats including persecution, a situation which had lingered long enough for some of them to have grown weary (Heb 12:12,13) and stopped attending the Christian meetings (Heb 10:25). They had actually endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes publicly exposed to taunts and afflictions, and at other times they were companions of those who were treated that way (Heb 10:32-42).

Now some of them were showing signs that they could even go back on their faith in Christ – the very reason for which Hebrews was written (Heb 10:26-31). In addressing the situation, the author does not disregard nor dispute the disadvantaged position of his audience. His concern was how to encourage them to remain faithful in the midst of their difficult situation. One of the ways in which he does this was to retell the story of redemption from the source respected by all the subgroups within the Christian group with the view to impressing upon his readers that they are not really disadvantaged as it might seem. In fact, a terrible end rather awaits the people outside the Christian group whether they are Israelites who have failed to attain the promised rest or Gentiles who have failed to heed the voice of the Son. The writer is emphatic – ‘how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was first spoken by the Lord and was confirmed to us by those who heard him. At the same time, God also testified by signs and wonders, various miracles, and distributions of gifts from the Holy Spirit according to his will’ (Heb 2:3, 4; see also Heb 12:25,26). In the end the ones with real trouble awaiting them are their oppressors hence they are not to be envied. After all, their citizenship of the present city is of temporal value; their citizenship right, their city and their possessions look secure in the present but will not remain for ever, and while the kingdom of their oppressors will be shaken, the kingdom the believers will inherit cannot be shaken (Heb 12:27-29). The believers on the other hand have come to a better city which is heavenly and enduring forever (Heb 12:22). Their saviour and Lord is the judge of all including their oppressors (Heb 12:23). Whatever custom or history the author recalls is

reinterpreted to reverse the power dynamics and reverse the perception of status of power and honour of the Christian group. Even the shame they bear is to be desired and so they should go outside the city to bear it with Christ as a precondition for the joy ahead just as Jesus did (Heb 12:1, 2).

The author of Hebrews can be said to have exhorted his audience to faithfulness with arguments which end up constructing – consciously or unconsciously – ethnic identity for his readers in many respects. His audience are identified with many ethnic features that identifies them with the God of the people of Israel, their ancestors are the very ancestors of Israel, they are the very people of God, they are the inheritors of everything God promised his people, – the promised rest, the homeland, the new covenant, the real sacrifice that achieves the purification of sins – and all these came not as an afterthought but as originally planned by God; his audience then are originally part of the people of Israel for that matter. It is in these ethnic arguments that the author hoped to achieve the effect of dissuading the believers from their tendency to fall back.

5.6 PERSONALITY

The objective of this Section is to explore what constitutes a person in the first-century Mediterranean society. Attention will be given to what informed people in perceiving themselves, their choices, their goals in life, and their attitude towards the norms of society – all of which would constitute their behaviour and define their person. This is needed in order to ensure that we avoid the error of reading our current Western concept of a person back into the world of New Testament people (i.e., to avoid being anachronistic and ethnocentric). The difference between the persons we encounter in first-century Mediterranean society and our current Western culture has been established by scholars like Malina (1996:42), Hartin (2009:10), and Crook (2004:48). The following quotation is an apt description of the concept of a person in our western society:

The psychology of personality is a discipline which so often begins from the assumption that the individual as a separate entity from others is a fact given in nature. The isolated individual therefore becomes not a historical and social product but a biologically given entity whose individuality is contained inside itself from birth. This is a particularly persuasive branch of psychology, because such an image of humans corresponds closely to the everyday understanding we have of ourselves in the West, which forms part of our “common sense”. Such an image of individuals is found most clearly in trait theory, which claims that those traits which

make up the personality or character are part of a genetic inheritance uniquely combined inside each individual.

(Burkitt 1991:17)

Of course, there are theories that try to explain the personality system as a product of some social interactions in some western scholarship (see Burkitt 1991:4-16), yet the dominant and respected view of the human person in the West is one that is seen from a purely individualistic and psychological perspective.⁴⁵ Malina's statement on the issues is helpful here:

The men and women who people the pages of the Bible are imagined to act like "religious" Americans – individuals in pursuit of "salvation" as they attempt to control other people and things so that they might find success. Modern Bible readers generally believe that the people around Jesus saw him as their personal Lord and Saviour, their personal Redeemer. So long as Jesus's followers found that their consciences did not bother them, what they did was good. Good intentions were what counted. While only God gave success, God did help those who helped themselves, those who took the initiative, and those who persevered in their resolve.... But in fact none of these traits that Americans normally associate with persons and personhood is to be found among the people described in the Bible.

(Malina 1996:42)

While the emphasis of the human person is individualism in the Western world, that of many agrarian cultures including the Mediterranean is collectivism. The following explanation of individualism and collectivism is useful.

Individualism means that individual goals precede group goals. In contrast, collectivism suggests that group goals naturally precede individual goals. As a cultural orientation, American individualism was, and still is, a way of being a person that is totally alien to the scenarios of the ancient Mediterranean world. In the contemporary world individualism can be found among the affluent, socially, and geographically mobile segments of society. Individualistic cultures as a whole emerged only where Enlightenment values have permeated society and agriculture has become the occupation of extremely few people. Since the contemporary version of the individualistic self emerges rather late in human history, it surely was not available in the first-century C.E. Mediterranean area.

(Malina 2008: 257-258)

Malina's observation does not deny the existence of some forms of individualism prior to the period of Enlightenment. His focus is on individualism as it exists now. Citing Murdock and Provost's (1973) index of cultural complexity related to individualism-collectivism, Triandis (*et al.* 1988:324) argue that,

⁴⁵ As Hartin (2009:12) notes, "in Western societies, people have been given a sense of the self that stresses interiority and an inwardness that produces an awareness of oneself as an entity that reflects on itself as a psychological unity, "an inner being" that is an organising principle of experience.'

[I]n extremely simple societies (e.g., the Mbuti Pygmies) there is a proto-individualism, in which the individual is closely related to very few others and has considerable freedom to act independently of others. At higher levels of complexity (e.g., the Romans, Aztecs, Chinese) collectivism is very high. The individual relates to a few very important ingroups, organized in concentric circles (e.g., nuclear family, extended family, clan, city, state). Although the control exerted by these ingroups diminishes as we move from the nuclear family to the state, it is generally more pronounced than the control in even more complex cultures. In extremely complex cultures (e.g., modern industrial cultures), the number of ingroups that one can have is much greater than in the collectivist cultures. Modern cultures are neoindividualistic, characterised by both independence from ingroups and distance (emotional detachment) from ingroups. Thus, one is able to 'do one's own thing' and get away with it. A problem for one's ingroup may not have much consequence for the individual.

To further throw light on the issue, it is worth noting the observation by Triandis (*et al.* 2002:138) that,

among hunters individual action is often more valuable than collective action, whereas among agricultural people collective action (e.g., building an irrigation system) is often extremely valued. The result is that hunting cultures are more individualist than farming cultures ... and the latter are more conforming than the former, an attribute that is associated with collectivism.
Triandis (*et al.* 2002:138)

Following all this, the point Malina makes on individualism should be understood in terms of the individualism we find in our twenty-first-century Western society which has an industrialized, rather than, a hunting kind of economy.⁴⁶ Malina writes,

Americans live in an individualistic culture that centres on the value of self-reliance. Individualism may be described as the belief that persons are each and singly an end in themselves, and as such ought to realise their "self" and cultivate their own judgement, notwithstanding the push of pervasive social pressures in the direction of conformity. In individualist cultures most people's social behaviour is largely determined by personal goals that often overlap only slightly with the goals of collectives such as the family, the work group, the tribe, political allies, coreligionists, compatriots, and the state. When a conflict arises between personal and group goals, it is considered acceptable for the individual to place personal goals ahead of collective goals. Thus individualism gives priority to the goals of single persons rather than to group goals. What enables this sort of priority is focus on self-reliance, in the sense of independence, separation from others, and personal competence.
(Malina 1996:46)

Hartin (2009:10, in following Harris 1989:599-612) explains the difference between the concepts of the individual, the self and the person by comparing these notions as they existed in first-century Mediterranean society against that of the twenty-first-century

⁴⁶ Singelis (*et al.* 1995:241) observes that many United States minorities such as Hispanics (Marin & Triandis 1985) and Asians (Triandis *et al.* 1986), tend to be collectivist. Modern, industrial-urban, fast-changing cultures tend to be individualistic, whereas traditional, agricultural-rural, static cultures tend to be collectivist.

Western society. Our interest here lies in the difference drawn between the three concepts in the two societies (Mediterranean and Western) rather than the difference between the three concepts themselves (of the individual, the self and the person). The view taken in this study is that these are all dimensions of the individual's personality which is the focus and interest in this study. The individual is defined in terms of a member of the human race with a 'biologistic' mode of conceptualisation; and while the first-century Mediterranean society places the stress on the group/collective (where the individual is valued only as part of that group), the stress of the twenty-first-century Western society is on the individual with rights and duties (Hartin 2009: 10). The self is defined as the locus of human experience with 'psychologistic' mode of conceptualisation; and while the stress in first-century Mediterranean society is on the exterior experience, that of the twenty-first-century Western society is on the interior influences where importance is placed on respecting every individual's integrity, enabling them to give expression to their own thoughts, feelings, and opinions (Hartin 2009:10,11). The person is defined as the agent functioning as a member of the society with 'sociologistic' mode of conception; and while the stress in the first-century Mediterranean society is conformity of the agent to group actions (acting as group members are supposed to), that of the twenty first-century Western society is on freedom of expression and choices of the individual (Hartin 2009:10). This is to say, for the Mediterranean person, exterior experiences, respect for group integrity, group opinions, and conformity to group action, are the indicators for personality. But for the twenty first-century Western person, interior influences, respect for individual integrity, personal thoughts, feelings and opinions, freedom of expression and choices of the individual, are the markers.

Malina (1996:43) suggests that if we are to understand ancient Mediterranean persons in some comparative way, our main tool should be a social psychology. It should be built on 'a circum-Mediterranean 'modal' or typical personality, while at the same time taking into account the idiosyncrasies of the culture and distinctiveness of social structure in any given time and place (Malina 1996:43). Before the distinctives of distinctive cultural groups within the Mediterranean region are given attention, we first need some understanding of the circum-Mediterranean personality in general (Malina 1996:43). The following stages of the investigation has been given (Malina 1996:44):

- 1) The need for a general orientation concerning what Mediterranean societies have in common with much of the rest of the world, that is, with collectivistic cultures rather than individualistic cultures. This deals with the 70 percent of the world's population that believes in the group rather than the individual as the primary focus of human living (see also Esler 1994:29). Here the value of family (or kin group) integrity far outweighs that of self-reliance.
- 2) A perspective on Mediterranean persons as collectivistic persons. This perspective deals with the Mediterraneans as anti-introspective, not psychologically minded, and dyadic personages bent on honour and shame.
- 3) A consideration of some typical social-psychological scripts shared by Mediterraneans in antiquity. This considers the ancient Mediterranean descriptions of persons and their orientation toward the world in terms of physiognomic stereotypes, encomia, ingroup concerns, public selves, and three-tiered personhood.

That circum-Mediterranean cultures share some features is, for Herzfeld (2005:52), to be expected as the result of all those millennia of contact within the region. Herzfeld (2005:53) notes the consistency with which the stereotype appears within the Mediterranean area – that is, from Morocco to Turkey, and Thessalonica to Toulouse, we hear more or less the same list of traits that supposedly characterize Mediterranean peoples.

5.6.1 The collective self and social behaviour

According to Malina, '[a]ll normal humans are born with the capacity to think of themselves and to behave as either individualists or collectivists' (Malina 1996:45). 'Enculturation (or "education" is the social process that builds this capacity (Malina 1996:45).⁴⁷ 'Due to their socialisation, ancient Mediterraneans simply learned that they needed at least one other person to feel that they knew who they really were' (Malina 1996:45). What others say about them was important for them to know who they were; hence the question, "who do people (others) say that I am?" is a typical (though most often unexpressed) Mediterranean question' (Malina 1996:45). The Mediterranean is described as having 'group-oriented

⁴⁷ This is in accord with Kippenberg's (1990:104) statement that assigns the concept of person to 'the social drama.'

selves, very concerned to adopt the viewpoints of the groups (their in-groups) whose fate they shared' (Malina 1996:45). Malina notes that, 'the Mediterranean person would never have considered Jesus as a personal Lord and Saviour or as a personal Redeemer' (Malina 1996:45). 'To them Jesus was the church's (the group's) Lord and Saviour, and it was by belonging to the church (the group) that one experienced the presence of the Lord' (Malina 1996:45).

In their collectivist culture, the group in which a Mediterranean person is embedded is singly an end in itself, 'and as such ought to realise distinctive group values notwithstanding the weight of one's personal drive in the direction of self-satisfaction' (Malina 1996:47). In such collectivist cultures, 'most people's social behaviour is largely determined by group goals that require the pursuit of achievements that improve the position of the group' (Malina 1996:47; see also Burnett 2001:48; Hartin 2009:22).⁴⁸ This is because people are oriented 'towards the group to which they belong' and not towards themselves as individuals (Esler 1994:29). The groups to which they are oriented include the family, which is by far the most important, as well as craft associations, religious cults or even military units (Esler 1994:29). 'The defining attributes of collectivist cultures are family integrity, solidarity, and keeping the primary ingroup in "good health"' (Malina 1996:53).

Triandis (*et al.* 2002:141) argue that in all cultures there are both idiocentrics⁴⁹ and allocentrics,⁵⁰ in different proportions. 'Generally speaking, in collectivist cultures there are about 60 percent allocentrics, and in individualist cultures about 60 percent idiocentrics' (Triandis *et al.* 2002:141). 'The allocentrics in individualist cultures are more likely than the idiocentrics to join groups—gangs, communes, and unions. The idiocentrics in collectivist cultures are more likely than the allocentrics to feel oppressed by their culture and to seek to leave it' (Triandis *et al.* 2002:141).

⁴⁸ Typically, in collectivism, there is a much greater emphasis on the needs and goals of the group rather than personal ones, and there is a greater readiness to co-operate with group members (Burnett 2001:48, see also Hartin 2009:22).

⁴⁹ The idiocentric person has his or her interest centered on him or herself.

⁵⁰ An allocentric person has his or her interest and attention centered on other people.

Following Triandis' theory on individualism and collectivism, Burnett concludes that '[e]very person, regardless of what type of society he or she lives in, is a fully self-conscious, creative individual with his or her own individual objectives and goals and inner means of processing and making sense of the shared values, or culture of the society in which he or she lives,' regardless of whether the society is more collective or individualist (Burnett 2001:49). Whether a person's actions will give priority to collective goals or not depends on the person's socialisation (Burnett 2001:49). 'But the inner self remains discrete and autonomous' as the results of anthropological studies in cultures in Chinese indicate (Burnett 2001:49). Triandis (*et al.* 2002:145) is emphatic that all 'humans have access to both individualist and collectivist cognitive structures, but the accessibility to these structures differs. In individualist cultures people have more access to the individualist cognitive structures and are idiocentric, whereas in collectivist cultures people have more access to the collectivist cognitive structures and are allocentric.' In effect, access to either individualist or collectivist cognitive structures is a product of the socialisation processes of every society.

There are other complex dynamics relating to whether or not one is consistent in conforming to the norms of the society. The following is insightful:

Allocentric persons in collectivist cultures feel positive about accepting ingroup norms and do not even raise the question of whether or not to accept them. Acceptance of ingroup norms is an unstated assumption of the culture that they do not challenge. However, idiocentric persons in collectivist cultures feel ambivalent and even bitter about acceptance of ingroup norms. They wonder if this or that norm is necessary, or if they should comply with it. Thus, they challenge the idea that they should comply. Nevertheless, since most people in such cultures comply, they tend to comply too. Consequently, whereas allocentric persons in collectivist cultures may experience consistency among the behavioural, effective, and cognitive elements of their social behaviour, idiocentrics may experience discrepancies: The behavioural elements may comply to the norms, but the affective and cognitive elements usually question the norm.

(Triandis *et al.* 1988:325)

Triandis and other note, '[i]n collectivist cultures the relationship of the individual to the ingroup tends to be stable, and even when the ingroup makes highly costly demands the individual stays with it.⁵¹ On the other hand, in individualist cultures people often drop those

⁵¹ Singelis (*et al.* 1995:244, citing Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi & Yoon, 1994) explains that among collectivists, relationships are of the greatest importance, and even if the cost of these relationships exceeds the benefits, individuals tend to stay with the relationship. Among individualists, when the costs exceed the benefits, the relationship is often dropped. Schimmack (*et al.* 2005:21) also argue that

ingroups that are inconveniently demanding and form new ingroups' (Triandis *et al.* 1988:324). This explains the segmented nature of group demands on individual contribution in individualistic cultures as opposed to collectivist cultures which have diffused group demands (Triandis *et al.* 1988:324). Triandis (*et al.* 2002:141) state that 'people in collectivist cultures see the environment as more or less fixed (stable norms, obligations, duties) and themselves as changeable, ready to "fit in." People in individualist cultures see themselves as more or less stable (stable attitudes, personality, rights) and the environment as changeable (e.g., if they do not like the job they change jobs)' (Chiu *et al.* 1997, Chiu & Hong 1999, Hong *et al.* 2001, Su *et al.* 1999).

5.6.2 Psychological versus personal causation

It is explained that ancient collective persons (much as collective persons today) 'were enculturated to be anti-introspective' so that 'if persons felt badly or well, they should look outside themselves to persons around them rather than inside, into the psyche, the soul, the mind, for the cause of their feeling' (Malina 1996:47, see also Esler 1994:30). It was only from the outside 'that one could find an answer to why one felt depressed or elated, anxious or at ease, worried or excited, fearful or confident, and the like' (Malina 1996:47). Not being 'psychologically minded at all,' for first-century Mediterranean persons 'positive and negative feelings were always believed to be triggered by causes outside a person' (Malina 1996:47). '[S]ince feelings were perceived to deal with something personal, Mediterranean persons sought the causes of feelings among persons, visible and invisible,' 'human and non-human, such as a spirit, a demon, or a 'genius,' making 'personal causality' the rule' (Malina 1996:47).

The results of the work by Goitein (1988:2) gives similar indications about the control of one's behaviour. The main sources for his work are *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders Translated from the Arabic*, and is based on the assumption that the phrases constantly used in a society are indicative of what it regards as 'natural,' as universally valid, and as accepted standards (Goitein 1988:2). His study attempts to 'draw a composite picture of the

cultures in which the rights of an individual are highly valued de-emphasize obligations to groups and subordination.

Mediterranean personality of medieval culture which emerges from the letters and documents of Cairo Geniza.' With few exceptions, the authors of those writings originated and lived in the Mediterranean area, predominantly its Muslim region and belonged to a special group – Jews (Goitein 1988:1). The study concluded that a person's character was regarded as a force over which he had little power, and it was thought that one's character could not be changed (Goitein 1988:187). It is understood that a person 'is compelled to act in accordance with his innate disposition ... determined by 'the totality of a person's traits,' ... seen as the work of God the creator (Goitein 1988:187). The logical conclusion on this is, for instance, that by a person's make up, God had determined how the persons should feel and behave. Feelings and character are therefore determined by outside forces and not by the person's psyche.

5.6.3 Control of peoples' lives

Another feature of the collective culture of the Mediterranean world was 'that individuals are not in control of their lives; rather, the ingroup or dominating out-groups control a person's life' ... through their central personages: the father or surrogate father, the oldest son (or the mother in the father's absence), the father's male relatives, and the like' (Malina 1996:48). Individuals can, however, be held responsible for their actions (Malina 1996:48). 'Where commonly held values are normally realised by group members, individual responsibility is held; but where commonly held values are often not realisable, individuals are not responsible for their actions such as in Romans 5 and 7' (Malina 1996:48). It can be concluded that the overriding incentive for the control exercised over people is the need to protect the family honour as well as the need to reciprocate the kind gestures of parents for giving birth and taking care of the individuals in the family. In respect of these reciprocal gestures for the good image of the family, most members conformed to the expectations of their family. As the theory goes, where commonly held values are normally realised by group members, individual responsibility is held. Hence personal responsibility was demanded from individuals for how they conducted themselves in this way.

5.6.4 Evaluating persons

In a world where all significant events in one's life are caused by persons, the most important thing to learn was how to evaluate other people (Malina 1996:49). This evaluation is based on 'what is typical' of people depending on 'their family and place of origin;' for 'just as animals looked and behaved the way they did because of their genetic source and place of origin, so too with people.' (Malina 1996:49). These traits are retained regardless of people's geographical location (Malina 1996:49). 'What was characteristic of parentage is that parents hand down outstanding qualities to their offspring, such as honour, strength, reliability, and beauty.' Hence, 'the kin group is the most significant ingroup' (Malina 1996:49). Consequently, kins share common qualities and make enemies because they share these qualities (Malina 1996:49). As Moxnes (1996:20) observes, '[o]ne's basic honour level, usually termed *ascribed* honour, is inherited from the family at birth,' and 'each child takes on the general honour status that the family possesses in the eyes of the larger group' (see also Hanson 1996:66). Because of this, '[a]ffronts to the honour of one member are affronts to the honour of all' (Esler 1994:31). For this reason '[f]emales are embedded in dominant males, either father, husband or brother, and must be constantly watched lest they do anything which might dishonour the family' (Esler 1994:31). The point is that a man who seduces a woman 'wins honour for himself and brings dishonour on her male relatives' (Esler 1994:31). A female who deliberately 'loses her virginity (her 'shame'), both she and her lover might be killed so as to repair the profound dishonour such an act brings on the dishonoured family' (Esler 1994:31). In this way, one is assessed based on how people see the ingroup to which one belongs. Given the anti-introspective nature of Mediterranean persons, the opinion of other people is what is most important in assessing oneself or in evaluating a situation. As Malina points out,

Individuals are always playing to an audience from which they expect approval. Approval results in a feeling of honour; disapproval results in a profound sense of shame. People generally do not have to face the social sanction of internalised guilt, which is not a feature of the anti-introspective, collectivistic personality. Since persons are expected to be co-dependent on a range of others who dominate their ever-changing ingroups, Mediterraneans may be described as dyadic persons. They need other people to continue to know who they really are.

(Malina 1996:48)

5.6.5 Assessing Mediterranean selves and knowing each other

For ancient Mediterraneans, the outward look of a person was what determined one's internal state (Malina 1996:51). 'Knowing, hating, loving, judging, and the like are "internal" states that take place in some psychological arena such as the mind or feelings. ... to know something is to experience it. "To know one's wife" is to have sexual relations' (Malina 1996:51). 'To know right from wrong' means to be able to do what is right and what is wrong (Malina 1996:51). Goitein notes that 'when blaming a person for what he has done, one would say to him: "Your exterior betrays your spirit", that is, you act in conformity with your character'(Goitein 1988:188). Similarly, '[t]he expectation or exhortation addressed to a person to live up to the proved excellence of his character is a very common topic, especially in personal letters and in recommendations for people seeking help: "Be the person people think you are!" "Be as you are known!" (Goitein 1998:189).

As noted by Van der Watt (2000:166), 'the bloodline into which a person was born and the family in which he or she was raised, played crucial roles in the eventual expected behaviour of that person.' The conclusion on all this is that, for the Mediterranean world, 'genetics determined character' (Malina 1996:53). In such a world it was considered impossible for the individual to develop or grow through his or her own power or self-control. Any such development was always attributed to the action of the gods (Hartin 2009:15). This way of describing people results in classification by stereotypes (Esler (1994:30). Crook maintains that 'when you know someone's family, or their ethnic origin, you know all you need to know about them' (Crook 2004:48; see also Van der Watt 2000:166). For example, the good of Jesus could not be assessed by his own merit. See, for example, the question 'Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' (Esler 1994:30). Similarly, Nathanael remarked, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' (Jn 1:46; Esler 1994:30).

Because dyadic persons perceive themselves in terms of qualities specific to their ascribed status, they tend to presume that human character is fixed and unchanging (Malina Neyrey 1991:75). Every family, village or city would be quite predictable, and share the qualities of

a family, village, or nation (Malina & Neyrey 1991:75). Neyrey concludes that notice of someone's genealogy, ancestors, clan, and parents contributed essential pieces of information about the person (Neyrey 2008:91, citing Cicero, *Inv.* 1.24.34-35; Quintilian, *Inst.* 3.7.10-11; Pelling 1990).

Though people in collectivist societies tend to have collectivist view of themselves, this is not always the case. The prevailing situation may promote some private tendencies even in collectivist cultures. The social factors in such a situation may be quite complex. As stated earlier, people, no matter which culture they find themselves in, have the capacity to be individualistic or collective. Triandis explains some of the factors that inform the choice people make either in becoming collective or individualistic. He states that one major distinction among aspects of the self is between the private, public, and collective self (Triandis 1989:507, citing Baumeister 1986b; Greenwald & Pratkanis 1984). Thus, we have the following: the private *self* – cognitions that involve traits, states, or behaviours of the person (e.g., 'I am introverted,' 'I am honest,' 'I will buy X'); the *public self* – cognitions concerning the *generalised other's* view of the self, such as 'People think I am introverted' or 'People think I will buy X'; and *the collective self* – cognitions concerning a view of the self that is found in some collective (e.g. family, co-workers, tribe, scientific society); for instance, 'My family thinks I am introverted' or 'My co-workers believe I travel too much' (Triandis 1989:507).

Salience of a unit of the self increases its probability of being sampled. People sample these three kinds of selves with different probabilities, in different cultures, and that has specific consequences for social behaviour. The private self is an assessment of the self by the self. The public self corresponds to an assessment of the self by the generalised other. The collective self corresponds to an assessment of the self by a specific reference group (Triandis 1989:507). When a unit of the private self (e.g., I am bold) is activated, it increases the chances that other units of the private self (e.g., 'I am fearless,' even 'I am confident') will become more salient (Triandis 1989:507).

The probability of sampling refers to whether the element that will be sampled is more likely to be an element of the private, public, or collective self. Thus, if the private self is complex,

there are more 'private-self units' that can be sampled, and thus the probability that the private self will be sampled will be high; correspondingly with the other selves, if they are complex they have a higher probability of being sample (Triandis 1989:507).

The factors that determine the probability of sampling a particular self depend, among others, on the socialisation of the person, the resources of the ingroup, the number of ingroups that one has, and ingroups in conflict. Triandis (1989:507) concludes that in cultures in which specific groups are emphasised during socialization (e.g., 'remember you are a member of this family,' or 'you are a Christian'), the collective self is likely to be complex, and the norms, roles, and values of that group acquire especially great emotional significance. 'When ingroups have resources that allow them to reward those who conform with ingroup norms and provide sanctions to those who do not conform, one expects individuals to sample the collective self more than when ingroups do not have such resources' (Triandis 1989:513). An ingroup with large resources (e.g., a rich family) can 'control the individual even when other ingroups make conflicting demands' (Triandis 1989:513). 'When individuals have few ingroups, they are more dependent on them.' A situation in which one has fewer ingroups then increases the chances of sampling the collective self (Triandis 1989:513). 'When many ingroups are salient, conflicting norms lead individuals to turn inward to decide what to do,' increasing the chances of sampling the private self (Triandis 1989:513). But the resources available to the ingroups will moderate this tendency (Triandis 1989:513). 'As conflict among ingroups increases, the individual will be more aware of the ingroups in conflict and hence will be more likely to sample the collective self' (Triandis 1989:513).

5.6.6 Obligation to return favour

Commenting on the four macarisms in Luke 6:20-23, Neyrey (2008:93) suggests that the sanctions the disciples of Jesus faced were more than formal judicial acts such as exclusion from the synagogue. This is because loyalty to Jesus entails loss of honour in the family and kinship network as a result of the violation of the honour code between father

and son (Neyrey 2008:96).⁵² More often than not, it involved ‘the informal ban employed by every community toward those whom it despises.’ It possibly had to do with ‘banning or exclusion: family sanctions against a rebellious son’ (Neyrey 2008:93). In this case a son could be ‘disinherited by his father and shunned by his family,’ resulting in the son becoming poor and hungry due to the loss of not only the land of the family, but its honour and wealth as well (Neyrey 2008:93-96). This is because, in most cases, the well-being of the son depended on the family and surviving without one’s family was an uphill task.

We should understand all this in the context of the practice of honouring parents. The concept of honouring parents (implicitly into old age) was basic value of the ancient Mediterranean person (MacDonald 2010:41, following Plevnik 1993:97). Parents were indeed seen as agents of God (Van der Watt 2000:168). ‘God also is distressed at acts of effrontery to a father, since he is himself Father of the whole human race and regards himself also partner in the indignity done to those who bear the same title as himself, when they do not obtain from their children that which is their due’ (Van der Watt 2000:168, n. 262, citing Josephus *Ant.* 4.8.24).

‘Receiving something from somebody in the ancient Mediterranean world obliged the receiver to respond accordingly and fittingly towards the giver’ (Van der Watt 2000:167-168). The honour children in being submissive and obedient is supposed to give to parents is in return the life and nurture they had received from their parents (Van der Watt 2000:167). In denying or ignoring this obligation, the child indeed acted against his or her social nature, and was consequently viewed in a negative way (Van der Watt 2000:167-168). ‘The parents were often regarded as God’s agents who should care for the child’ (Van der Watt 2000:167-168). ‘The reason for obeying and honouring the father was consequently not just a command, but could also be religiously explained. By showing honour to them, and *vice versa*, honour was paid to God’ (Van der Watt 2000:167-168).

⁵² DeSilva (2012:50) explains how one’s allegiance to Jesus, more widely viewed as a messianic pretender at best, a blasphemer and sorcerer at worst, would have reinforced the problematic nature of one’s conversion to that particular sect.

5.6.7 Honour and personality

In a society where honour was the most important virtue, one's personality was shaped, to a large extent, by one's desire and attempts to acquire honour and avoid shame. According to Watson (2010:15),

from an ancient Mediterranean perspective, honour involves not only the way in which I think about myself, but the way in which other people think about me. Moreover, some opinions matter considerably more than others. Specifically, the opinions of my immediate family, and then other blood relatives, are of the highest importance. In general, the opinions of other people take on less significance as the relationship of those people to me becomes more distant. Exceptions to this rule were, for the most part, limited to high-ranking people who could bestow honour or shame even on people with whom they previously had only the most distant relationships.

In the honour ethic of the first-century Mediterranean society, 'a person's value as a human being depended on the estimation of others; the value of self was seen through the eyes of others, not through one's own eyes' (Hartin 2009:13). 'Self-worth depends on what others think of a person, not what one thinks of oneself' (Hartin 2009:15). 'Action and glory were central to the lives of all who lived within this framework' (Hartin 2009:15).

Honour, as 'a masculine attribute, depends on valour, hospitality and similar virtues' (Leerssen 2007:334). The honour one member brings to the family is the honour every member of the family enjoys (Lessen 2007:334). 'Honour can be lost through shame – cowardice, or, in particular, the loss of sexual virtue among the female members of the household (through seduction, elopement, or adultery). As a result, honour and shame standards combine a proud and watchful masculine bearing with the strict repression of women' (Leerssen 2007:334). This explains why 'women were expected to adhere to honourable ideals of female shamefastness while the ideal of masculine behaviour read this shamefastness as something to be overcome – if necessary, through force' (Flannery 2010:53). 'Female honour was believed to be governed by shame'... 'in the sense of modesty, or the ability to feel shame was depicted as a virtue appropriate to the female sex' (Flannery 2010:53-54).

Masculine honour is attained through action in the public sphere and rests on the dominant biological character; however, 'it can only be maintained through avoiding the conduct which would destroy it – in other words, through female restraint' (Flannery 2010:55).

Honourable and chaste women shun the public arena; only ‘shameless’ or dishonourable women – women with little or no apparent sense of or sensitivity to shame – inhabit it (Flannery 2010:55). ‘In the Middle Ages, whereas a man’s honour was won through activity on the battlefield, at court, and elsewhere in the public sphere, a woman’s honour was preserved through restrained behaviour and spatial confinement’ (Flannery 2010:55).

Conformity to norms may occur more frequently in collectivist cultures when the norms are clear, and sanctions are likely to be imposed for deviant behaviour. However, when the norms are unclear, and sanctions are unlikely to be imposed, we might observe anti-conformity (Triandis *et al.* 1988:324). The following further explains the issue,

There are three moral codes: community, autonomy, and divinity.... Community codes are especially important to people in collectivist cultures, whereas autonomy codes are important in individualist cultures. They evoke different emotions. Violation of communal codes, including hierarchy, evokes contempt; violation of the autonomy code (e.g., individual rights) evokes anger. Violation of the divinity code (purity, sanctity) evokes disgust. Data from Japan and the United States support the theory.

(Triandis *et al.* 2002:144)

‘Among collectivists, social behaviour is best predicated from norms and perceived duties and obligations’ (Singelis *et al.* 1995:244, see also Bontempo & Rivero 1992; Miller 1994).

‘Among individualists, social behaviour is best predicted from attitudes and other such internal processes as well as contracts made by the individual’ (Singelis *et al.* 1995:244).

The discussion of personality has brought to the fore the kind of selves usually at work among Mediterraneans who share in a collectivist society. It has also highlighted a number of factors that account for the sampling of one self or the other. The fact that each individual has the capacity be individualistic or collectivist and the social processes that predispose one either persons have also been insightful. How relevant the theory can be for the study of Hebrews is what attention is now turned to.

5.6.8 RELEVANT ASPECTS OF PERSONALITY THEORY FOR THE STUDY OF HEBREWS

5.6.8.1 Group goals and personality

The point has already been made that for individualist persons, individual goals precede group goals whereas group goals precede individual goals for collectivist persons (Malina

2008: 257-258). For collectivist persons the value of family (or kin group) integrity far outweighs that of self-reliance (Malina 1996:44). Was the author of Hebrews concerned about the integrity and goals of the Christian ingroup? The answer to this question is in the affirmative. It is clear from Hebrews that the believers had demonstrated very honourable acts in the face of difficult times of persecution in the past. This they did by having compassion on those in prison (Heb 10:34a). It is observed that '[p]risoners in the Greco-Roman world relied on family and friends from the outside to provide for their basic needs (food beyond subsistence, clothing, medicine),' an act which involved the risk of drawing suspicion to the visiting family members and friends and often led to death (DeSilva 2012:47, citing Wansink 1996:80). Having compassion on prisoners certainly involved visible acts which most likely included visits to those in prison and providing for their needs. As noted earlier, the way to know the internal state of a first-century Mediterranean person was to watch what the person did externally. Having compassion on those in prison for Mediterranean persons invariably involved external acts that showed such inner state. In addition to this, they had joyfully accepted the plundering of their property (Heb 10:34), another visible public act. In doing all these they had defied conditions that were meant to intimidate them to abandon their faith. Such public acts of courage and bravery are honour laden. Hence, though persecuted, the Christians had demonstrated publicly acts that must have brought honour and respect to them in a culture in which honour was the greatest value. The effect was that in spite of the hard times they endured, the group had continued to exist. Now this honour, which accounted in part for the group's continued existence was about to be lost because some members were showing signs of wanting to leave the group under pressure.⁵³ All the appeals to endurance were meant to avoid this withdrawal. In recalling their honourable acts in the past, the aspect of their personality that becomes salient is the communal one in which the members recall their own acts of courage, bravery and honour that makes their group leader proud of them. We recall here that what others say about a person was important for one to know oneself. Recalling this aspect of their self-perception from the words of the writer was deemed important to engender more of

⁵³ DeSilva (2012:53) notes that their earlier fervour has cooled and their earlier certainty has been eroded by their prolonged exposure to their neighbours, the agents and witnesses of their degradation, who probably continued to disparage the believers as subversive and shameful.

such actions which the author was working hard to see. The group integrity was so important to the author since the group's survival and possible growth depended on this. It was therefore crucial for the writer to urge them to pursue the honourable. He reminds them of how the leaders are desiring 'to act honourably in all things' (Heb 13:18b). Likewise, the members should not neglect to do good and to share what they had, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (Heb 13:16). They should not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares (Heb 13:1). They should remember those in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated. The exhortation to let marriage be held in honour among all, and for the marriage bed to be undefiled (Heb 13:4), has a particularly strong bearing on doing the honourable. As noted earlier, it was in the area of sex, especially, that a member who misconducted himself or herself could do the great damage to the honour of his or her family and ingroup. As pointed out earlier, for the sake of group integrity and honour, a member could even be killed to repair the damage he or she has done to the group's image (Esler 1994:31).

Once the believers continued to show such honourable acts, it was even possible for others to join them in spite of the current pressure on them. That this is possible is not farfetched if one considers the situation that gave rise to the saying 'the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church; and the more they were cut down, the more they grew; the exquisite cruelty that was used to destroy them, did only allure greater numbers to come over to their party' (Bingham 1726:326). McKinion (2001:116) adds the following in this regard:

During times of persecution, whether sanctioned by the government or merely proceeding from anti-Christian bigotry in society, the church actually grew in number and expanded in its reach. Tertullian explained that the increase was due to the influence martyrs' faith had on witnesses to their deaths. Rather than frightening those who saw the suffering and convincing them either to abandon or to reject the faith, oppression caused many to take up the cause. This led Tertullian to conclude that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church, meaning that martyrdom typically, and ironically, produced an increase in the community.

The author of Hebrews hoped to have his audience pursue achievements that would improve the position of the group. His ethical appeals in Hebrews 13 were meant for them to do that which was honourable since their honourable acts impacted directly on the honour of the ingroup. As Leerssen (2007:334) observes, 'honour, as a masculine attribute, depends on valour, hospitality and similar virtues.'

5.6.8.2 Shared group fate and viewpoints

As noted previously, 'group-oriented selves are very concerned to adopt the viewpoints of their in-groups whose fate they shared' (Malina 1996:45), and 'the Mediterranean person would never have considered Jesus as a personal Lord and Saviour or as a personal Redeemer' (Malina 1996:45). 'To them Jesus was the church's (the group's) Lord and Saviour, and it was by belonging to the church (the group) that one experienced the presence of the Lord' (Malina 1996:45). All this is, at least, true for the writer of Hebrews for whom the promised rest for his audience would only be a reality so long as they remained among the Christian ingroup. For the author, if the members shrink back the Lord's soul, has no pleasure in them (Heb 10:38). He reminds them 'But we are not of them that shrink back unto perdition; but of them that have faith unto the saving of the soul (Heb 10:39). That is to say, their withdrawal from the ingroup would mean the loss of the salvation of their souls.

This makes sense when we remind ourselves that Mediterranean people are oriented towards the group to which they belong and not towards themselves as individuals (Esler 1994:29). In the crucial times the audience found themselves in, it was important for the author to once again remind them of who they were, and to reinforce their orientation and socialisation towards the ingroup. In such a situation, the unit of the self which becomes salient and likely to be sampled is the collective self which takes into consideration the views of the ingroup. The fact that their present condition was due to their belonging to this group in itself makes that part of their selves salient. This explains why the language the author employs in his address to them is intended to have strong group effect with reinforcement of their collective self. They are reminded that they are not illegitimate children to be left without discipline (Heb 12:8). If their earthly fathers disciplined them and they respected them for their discipline, how much more should they be subject to the Father of spirits (Heb 12:9)? They are also reminded that they are God's house and need to 'hold fast their confidence and their boasting in their hope' (Heb 3:6). Their relationship with Jesus as the high priest is recalled with some emotional sentiments of his ability to sympathise with their weakness and intercede for them (Heb 4:15). They are those who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit (Heb 6:4). They have

tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come (Heb 6:5). So far they have done well and God is pleased with them: 'For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do' (Heb 6:10). The expected effect on the believers was this: 'we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises' (Heb 6:11, 12). All these should serve to reinforce their socialisation and orientation towards the ingroup and heighten their collective selves so as to have them act appropriately as expected of members of the ingroup.

5.6.8.3 The self and ingroup demands

We should recall that 'in collectivist cultures the relationship of the individual to the ingroup tends to be stable, and even when the ingroup makes highly costly demands the individual stays with it' (Triandis *et al.* 1988:324). Furthermore, 'people in collectivist cultures see the environment as more or less fixed (stable norms, obligations, duties) and themselves as changeable, ready to "fit in"' (Triandis *et al.* 2002:141). For the recipients of Hebrews, at least, at the time of writing, they may have found the cost of remaining in the Christian ingroup (in the face of their crisis) to be unbearable, and contrary to the view that collectivists persons would remain no matter what demands are made on them by their ingroup, they were showing signs to the contrary – to leave the ingroup. Most likely, the 40 percent idiocentrics present in the collectivist culture may have shown this tendency to leave the group. Under such pressure as the readers found themselves, some apparently had begun to sample their private selves in deciding to leave the group. Here, there was clear attempts to place personal interest before that of the group. The situation may be explained by the persistence of their struggles and the waning of the initial honour their past action had brought to the group. Without much resources of the group to encourage loyalty, some were beginning to consider leaving. The other factor that should account for this state of affairs is the availability of options for the believers. The fact is that there existed a number of groups with which the believers were previously associated some of which they may not have completely abandoned. Reverting to these groups, and concealing their membership with the Christian ingroup, was a high possibility. We are reminded that 'when

many ingroups are salient, conflicting norms lead individuals to turn inward to decide what to do' (Triandis 1989:513). The fact that the pressure on the believers came from some of the groups to which these believers previously (and possibly currently) belonged, these other groups would be salient together with the Christian ingroup. Thus, they are more likely to sample the private self in such a situation according the theory (Triandis 1989:513).

5.6.8.4 Control of people's lives

Another feature of the collective culture of the Mediterranean world was that 'individuals are not in control of their lives; rather, the in-group or dominating out-groups controlled a person's life through their central personages: the father or surrogate father, the oldest son (or the mother) in the father's absence, the father's male relatives, and the like' (Malina 1996:48). The role of the author of Hebrews should be seen in the light of the Father's (God's) surrogate trying to control through his words of exhortation the lives of the believers who are about to do the dishonourable. This was important, since their dishonourable acts invariably affect their ingroup. The author's authority in giving this exhortation stems from his being a leader recognised by the group (Heb 13:8), a member of the group himself (for which reason he uses the second person plural; see Heb 2:1, 3; 3:14; 4:3, 13, 14, 15; 5:11; 6:3; 7:26; 10:10, 21, 26; 11:1; 12:1, 10; 13:6, 14), and the fact that he speaks on behalf of, and on the authority of God, who is the Father of all in the Christian ingroup (Heb 13:17,18). The stern warnings and promise of great reward for faithfulness to the group could be seen as ways of engineering this control through the writer's words of exhortation.⁵⁴ The exhortation in Hebrews 13:17 and 18 is revealing in this respect: 'Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.' These words reminded the members of their need to obey and submit to their leaders. The reason is that the leaders have a charge to keep watch over the members, and have an obligation to give account of the members to God. The line of their authority as leaders, therefore, is traced to God. For this reason, the members should obey

⁵⁴ One can imagine how the author hoped to affect his audience with his words of exhortation knowing them to be allocentric persons. Marohl (2008:88-89) demonstrates, with examples from data collected from the texts of Hebrews, that the addresses were likely allocentric individuals in a collectivist culture rather than individualists and idiocentrics.

and submit to them (including the writer), more especially when that would be to the advantage of the members.

5.6.8.5 Interpersonal obligation within the ingroup

Malina notes that 'in-group dimensions are very important because interpersonal obligation bind ingroup members only,' whereas 'out-group members are fair game for challenges, deception and lies, or general non-concern' (Malina 1996:49). 'Ingroup boundaries often follow the fences of originating parentage (kinship) and originating place (village mates, city quarter mates),' but 'may be expanded to include fictive kin such as clients, friends, contractual partners, and the like' (Malina 1996:49). The fact that the recipients of Hebrews constitute a people who relate to one another as brothers (and sisters) with Jesus, and with God as their Father, is clear in Hebrews (Heb 1:2, 5; 2:11, 17). Exhortation to hospitality in Hebrews should be understood as a way of urging interpersonal obligation within the ingroup. The exhortation to do good and be hospitable necessarily involves interpersonal obligations (and for that matter interpersonal relationships). It is in this respect that one can contend with Marohl's view that the author of Hebrews is concerned only with intergroup relationships, and that the only behaviour the author mentioned is intergroup rather than interpersonal in nature (Heb 3:13, 10:24; 12:13; Marohl 2008:88).

Though strangers are mentioned, it is very likely a reference to believers from other places who had the need to come to their city (Heb 13:2). This is more likely the case, because the introductory sentence is 'Let brotherly love continue' which is understood as love for the members of the ingroup (Heb 13:1). Furthermore, the subsequent appeal to hospitality is also directed to people belonging to the ingroup (Heb 13:3). This interpersonal obligation is crucial in these critical times when the group's survival is at stake. Further, in a situation where there may not be much material resources for the group to encourage loyalty to the ingroup, hospitable acts of members towards one another would compensate for the lack of resources of the group.

5.6.8.6 Obligation to return favour

It was mentioned earlier that 'What was characteristic of parentage is that parents hand down outstanding qualities to their offspring, such as honour, strength, reliability, and beauty.' (Malina 1996:49). 'Receiving something from somebody in the ancient Mediterranean world obliged the receiver to respond accordingly and fittingly towards the giver' (Van der Watt 2000:167-168). 'Because parents cared for their children and gave them what they needed, especially giving them birth, the children were obliged to return these gestures by being responsive and obedient, thus honouring their parents' (Van der Watt 2000:167). 'In denying or ignoring this obligation the child indeed acted against his or her social nature and was consequently viewed in a negative way (Van der Watt 2000:167-168). The author of Hebrews presents God to his readers as their Father to whom they should return the favours they have received from him.

The audience are brothers with Jesus, and God is the Father of both Jesus and his brothers (the believers; see Heb 1:2, 5; 2:11, 17). It was not enough for the author to remind the believers that God was their Father; he goes a step further to show how much they have received from their Father for which they ought to return those gestures by being responsive and obedient. In Christ they have the purification of sins which purifies the conscience of believers – what the Levitical sacrifices could not afford them (Heb 1:3; 9:9, 14; 10:22). There is also a great salvation which cannot be neglected in Christ (Heb 2:3, 10; 5:9). The believers have the promise of entering God's rest (Heb 4:1, 3, 11). Moreover, they have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb 12:22-24). They should therefore be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken and offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe (Heb 12:28). Again, since God is their Father, they should accept discipline as sons (Heb 12:7, 9), rather than abandon him for his discipline.

5.6.9 Concluding remarks

In this Chapter an attempt has been made to explain the theories of social identity, ethnicity and personality. The aspects of the various theories that are applicable to Hebrews were identified with examples from the text of Hebrews that illustrate aspects of the theories. It was established that the writer used expressions in his arguments that resonates and appeals to aspects of the social identity of members in respect of these theories, and therefore, may have provided the frame in which the authors arguments may have been understood. The author of Hebrews was aware of the social cultural dimensions of the society in which he and his audience lived, and certainly was aware of the socio-cultural relevance of the words and expressions he used. Knowing the relevance of his words and argument for his exhortation, he expected his stated objective of the members' faithfulness to the Christian group to be achieved. In Chapter 6 the focus will be on how the theories of social identity, ethnicity, and personality, feature in some of the major arguments in Hebrews.

Chapter 6

Hebrews: Social identity, Ethnicity and personality

The focus of this Chapter is to apply some relevant aspects of the theories of social identity, ethnicity and personality to the study of the warning passages. It must be pointed out that, to be able to follow the discussion meaningfully, one must keep in mind the fact that any discussion about social identity is dominated by ingroup and intergroup behaviour. This is justifiably so because social identity is understood in terms of a person's self-concept *as is derived from the person's membership of a group or groups* (Tajfel 1982:2).⁵⁵ One's social identity is therefore always related to a group or groups to which one belongs. It is in the positive evaluation of that group or groups that a person derives positive social identity and *vice versa*. It is in this light that ethnicity is treated in this study – it provides one basic way (group) in which the social identity of the readers of Hebrews is portrayed in Hebrews. The positive description of various aspects of their ethnic identity is meant to enhance their social identity. It will be realised that the treatment of personality also has very close links with one's kin group to the extent that one's kin group determines one's qualities and virtues of life and what people expect of one as a member of one's kin group. It is in this sense that ethnicity and personality are identified as part of the readers social identity and as important ways in which the author of Hebrews makes his appeals to his readers. While indicating the better social identity of the audience, the ethnic expressions and personality together with their related social institutions and scripts are used by the author to make his appeals and warnings meaning and urgent. For the sake of emphasis, it should be pointed out again that the focus of this study is not simply to point out the social identity of the readers, but the author's use of the related social scripts for his appeals. Much of the discussions under social identity issues will therefore be centered on how the author uses these in his appeals.

⁵⁵ Emphasis is mine.

The fact that the ancient Mediterranean society was a world in which social competition and comparison existed especially between groups for the purpose of positive evaluation of one's social identity is evidenced in Hebrews. When it comes to the description of the Christian group, the writer makes statements that present it in a more positive light as against others. Similarly, in his presentation of Christ, he makes statements that present him as superior to all those who have been mediators of God's word. The surpassing privileges and rewards for the audience are basis for which their continued loyalty to Christ is urged. The severest punishment for faithless in Hebrews are all presented in a spirit that extols the special privileges of the readers because they belong to a group of the highest dignity and rank in matters of concern for the members. It is for this purpose of indicating the highest dignity and rank of the Christian group in the social structures of the Mediterranean world that the *qal wahomer* arguments we find in Hebrews make sense. The effect of the *qal wahomer* arguments on the audience (whether intended or not) is not just theological, but social.⁵⁶ It is not just the positive presentation of Christ nor the Christian group that is of interest here. The interest is the competitive comparison with others for the purpose of the positive evaluation of the social identity of the audience meant to achieve the author's pastoral concerns. In this Chapter, an attempt is made to explore how the theories of social identity, ethnicity and personality can inform our understanding of the warning passages of Hebrews.⁵⁷ The choice of these warning passages is informed by the fact that the author makes very essential statements in them that describe the audience in a manner that can be illuminated by the three theories. Strictly speaking, the warning passages are quite limited, covering only a few verses. Yet they are situated (in their immediate context) in arguments of the author that give significant meaning to them as they relate to the audience. Broadly speaking, the warning passages make sense when looked at in the

⁵⁶ It can be argued that such social interests informed the use of *qal wahomer* arguments in most cases among writers in the Mediterranean world. Definitely, the author was concerned about the prospects of his audience leaving the Christian group – an act that meant going back on their faith. Logically then, the apostate act that was feared was the social act of withdrawal from the Christian group. It is in the prevention of this intergroup movement that the *qal wahomer* arguments are employed to uphold the dignity, respect loyalty for the Christian group.

⁵⁷ The designation 'warning 'passages,' for Easter (2014:46), prejudices the nature and purpose of the passages. He contends that these passages may be as much (or more) about encouragement to obedience as about discouragement against disobedience. For this reason, 'warning may be a bit strong' (Easter 2014:46).

argument of the entire epistle. This notwithstanding, the immediate context in which the author locates these passages have some specific indications about the author's view of his audience for which these warning passages are important. It is therefore necessary that in looking at the warning passages broader scopes are given to them than what could strictly be described as warning.

The reading scenarios begin by first looking at Hebrews 1 as the introductory statement that sets the tone for the author's arguments that employs social identity as it relates to ethnicity and personality. The positive things the author establishes about Christ as the head of the Christian group in this introductory statement have direct relevance for the social identity of the readers and gives meaning to the privileged position in which they stand as God's people in relation to others outside the group. Of particular importance for this study is how the readers are described in kinship terms in relation to God and Christ, and the implication of this for their personality – that is, how they are assessed as persons and what goals they are urged to pursue. The five warning passages would be given similar treatment after the introductory chapter has been dealt with. After the exegetical discussions of the chosen passages, a summary is made of the social identity issues. It is important to note that these social identity issues are to be appreciated in the light of the positive evaluation of the Christian group as it relates to Christ and the privileges accessible to the members. It is still to be appreciated from the positive social image the readers can derive from such positive evaluation of the group.

6.1 THE INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT: A SUPERIOR MEDIATOR OF GOD'S MESSAGE IN A CONTEST OF MEDIATORS (HEB 1:1-14)

It can be argued that the whole of Hebrews 1 establishes the basis for why God's message through the Son should be taken more seriously than God's earlier message through the angels. The writer makes this clear in the following: 'Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it' (Heb 2:1). Διὰ τοῦτο⁵⁸ (because of this) at the beginning of Hebrews 2 finds its premise in Hebrews 1,

⁵⁸ Bateman (2007:29) notes that Hebrews 2:1-4 serves as a logical conclusion (Διὰ τοῦτο) to Hebrews 1:1-14.

where the concern of the author is to show that the Son is superior to the prophets and angels as agents of God's speaking. Before making the superior message explicit in Hebrews 2, the author first takes time to establish the superiority of the Son in two ways: (1) by seven statements about the unique and divine nature of the Son in Hebrews 1:1-4 and (2) by a *catena* of seven quotations from the Old Testament in Hebrews 1:5-14. The role of these Old Testament quotations is to give scriptural proof to the statements made earlier showing the Son's exalted state after his humiliation – themes anticipated in the seven earlier statements about the Son.

6.1.1 The Son's mediation of God's message – unique and divine

The writer begins first by establishing continuity between God's message that came to the fathers through the prophets, on the one hand, and God's message through the Son to the author and his audience, on the other hand (Heb 1:1, 2). The writer identifies the period during which God spoke to the fathers through the prophets as *πάλαι* (old), and *ἐπ' ἑσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων* (these last days) as the period in which God speaks to the author and his audience. Wuest (1947:32) explains that there are two words meaning old: *παλαιός* (*πάλαι* [pl.]) is used in the sense of old in point of use, worn out, ready to be replaced by something new, and *ἀρχαῖος*, signifying old in terms of point in time. By using *πάλαι*, therefore, the author, for Wuest, was indicating that God's speaking in *πάλαι* is now replaced by his speaking *ἐπ' ἑσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων*. In establishing the continuity between the old and the new, the author qualifies the manner in which the previous message came, indicating his assessment of the previous message against which he compares the message given through the Son. The introductory phrase *Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως* (in many parts and in many ways) in which God spoke to the fathers through the prophets serves to point out the piecemeal (fragmentary and difficult-to-make-clear) nature of the previous message (Heb 1:1).⁵⁹ The message through the Son, however, comes simply *ἐν υἱῷ* (in one who is Son). Just after *ἐν υἱῷ* (Heb 1:2), all the seven subsequent clauses (up to the end of Heb 1:3) are defining qualities of the Son that set him high above the human (and angelic) agents through whom God spoke in the past:

⁵⁹ See Nielsen (2014:395) on the piecemeal nature of the message to the fathers.

- 1) ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων, (whom he appointed heir of all things)
- 2) δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας (through whom he made the ages)
- 3) ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης (who is the radiance of his glory)
- 4) καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ (and the exact image of his nature)
- 5) φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ (also upholding all things by the word of his power)
- 6) καθαρισμόν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος (having made purification of sins)
- 7) ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς (sat at the right hand of the majesty on high)

Beside these qualifying clauses, ἐν υἱῷ itself establishes the distinctive nature of the son. If he is the one who relates to God as son, then his personhood is definitely defined by his parentage as divine.⁶⁰ This together with all the seven defining clauses, present the unique nature of the medium through which God now speaks to the audience. It is here that the connecting comparative demonstrative τοσοῦτω at the beginning of Hebrews 1:4 draws its significance. Expressing how much or how many in comparative terms, τοσοῦτω serves to show by how much the Son has become greater than the angels in Hebrews 1:4. By its position and function, τοσοῦτω refers back to all that has been said about the Son as the basis on which the Son becomes greater than the angels. Each of what has been said about the Son underscores his divine nature: thus, He is heir of all things, agent of creation (Heb 1:2), the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of God's nature, He upholds the universe by his word of power, He has made purification of sins and now sits at the right of the Majesty on high (Heb 1:3). The function of τοσοῦτω is to the effect that by all these qualifications of the Son, He is assessed to be superior to the angels. The angels here recalls angelic mediation in the giving of the law of Moses as we have it in some Jewish thought (see Attridge 1989:65; Yisak 2007:75; Johnson 2006: 84; see also Gal 3:19).⁶¹

⁶⁰ In ancient Mediterranean society, one's parentage determined the nature of the person, his characteristics and expected behavior as we saw in the theory on personality. Jesus as Son is therefore divine, and this is derived from his divine parentage.

⁶¹ Attridge (1989:65) states that the notion that angels accompanied Yahweh at Sinai is common, and that Jewish tradition eventually made these angels intermediaries in the delivery of the Torah, a tradition that was appropriated by the early Christians. Schenck (2003:108) also notes that the angels were overarching mediators between God and the earth during the old covenant.

The correlative pronoun ὡς (as much/many as), preceding διαφορώτερον παρ' αὐτούς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα (Heb 1:4), provides a second standard by which the Son's superiority is measured, and here, it is the name He has inherited. The name itself is a subject of great debate (see Westcott 1889:17; Lane 1991:17; Ellingworth 1993:104; Moffatt 1979:8), but most important is the inherited nature of the name, and hence the derivative nature of what the author wants to communicate about the Son. In the theory on personality we saw how one's self is assessed on the basis of one's family in a stereotypical way. It is from the family that one inherits honour or shame. Most scholars are inclined to believe that the name the Son has inherited is 'Son' (see Lane 1991:17). In spite of the difficulty Ellingworth has with this position, he is still able to argue that in some ways the name could be a reference to 'Son' (Ellingworth 1993:17). Moffatt observes that ὄνομα is not only emphatic by its position at the close of the sentence, but it carries the general Oriental sense of 'rank' or 'dignity' (Moffatt 1979:8). One cannot but agree with Moffatt, since not only the name but everything the author says about the Son here is meant to establish that rank and dignity the author hints explicitly at in Hebrews 1:4, namely, γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων (He has become greater than the angels).

Hebrews 1:1-4 constitutes a single sentence in the Greek text and serves as the introductory statement of Hebrews. It can be argued that this introductory statement (which some consider the exordium/prologue of Hebrews)⁶² sums up, explicitly or implicitly, all that the author sought to write about in Hebrews. In this introductory statement, the author indicates the group identity of his hearers and himself as the people to whom God has spoken in these last days. He indicates their group identity in contrast to those to whom God spoke through the prophets in the past. There is some connection between the two groups in the sense that those to whom God spoke in the past are the fathers. 'Fathers,' as a word with relational significance, here is a subject of

⁶² Schenck (2003:108) favours this position arguing that Hebrews 1:1-4 encapsulates the main themes of the sermon (see also Mackie 2007:40; Vanhoye 1977:18). Ellingworth (1993:90), however, thinks it is misleading to think of Hebrews 1:1-4 as stating a thesis to be proved, or as giving a précis of the following argument. He argues that the author proceeds rather by an interweaving of themes, as in musical composition (Ellingworth (1993:90).

debate in terms of whom it relates to (Allen 2010:100). Since there is no indication of distinction among the audience as to who the fathers relate to or not, one is inclined to believe that this could be an expression of the author's sensitivity to the mixed nature of the audience and the inclusive intentions of the author in his use of the term. Johnson (2006:65) argues that for 'Hebrews those who confess Jesus find their ancestors in the story of Israel' (cf. Allen 2010:100).⁶³ The 'fathers' then, should have a relational significance for all the audience.

The difference the author establishes between those to whom God spoke through the prophets and those to whom God speaks in these last days, is extremely important for the purpose of the author. The group in a better position in their competitive Mediterranean society was the group to which the author and his audience belong. The message that has come to them came through one who stands in relation to God as Son (divine). This is in contrast to the prophets (human agents) through whom God spoke to the fathers, to none of whom what has been said about the Son is applicable. Since it is the same God who spoke in the past who now speaks in these last days to the writer and his audience, even the non-Jewish members of that group have this God as their God. It is significant that having the same god was one of the important indicators of one's ethnic identity. The rest of Hebrews 1 is a further expression of the point made in the introductory statement with a *catena* of quotations from mainly the Psalms and other Old Testament writings. The author presents this chain of quotations in the fashion of *gezerah shewa*⁶⁴ in support of his argument that Jesus as Son has much more dignity and is superior to the angels (and for that matter the human agents of God's previous speaking – the prophets).

⁶³ On the word 'fathers,' Johnson (2006:65) maintains that we cannot conclude anything about the ethnicity of either author or audience, since Paul – writing to a mixed congregation in Corinth – can also speak of the wilderness generation as 'our fathers' (1 Cor 10:1; cf. Acts 7:39, 44). He also indicates that Hebrews does not use the distancing 'your fathers' found in Luke 11:47-48 and Acts 7:52 (Johnson 2006:65). Arguing in a similar vein, Allen (2010:100) adds that in Romans 4:11 Abraham is described as 'the father of all who believe,' indicating an expansion in the New Testament of the usage of *patrasin* to describe spiritual ancestry.

⁶⁴ *Gezerah shewa* is a Jewish practice by which the Rabbis argued using texts chosen and welded together on the basis of the use of a key common term, assuming that the usage in each text can illuminate the exegesis of the other (see Witherington 2009:63).

6.1.2 Seven declarations about the Son's superior rank and dignity

In Hebrews 1:5 the author presents the words of Psalm 2:7⁶⁵ as addressed to Jesus in which God declares 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.' But the writer does not present the declaration simply as addressed to the Son; rather, he is concerned to show that none of the angels ever had these declarations addressed to them. Citing 2 Samuel 7:14 (see also Ps 89:26-27), the writer gives the second proof text for his claim that Jesus is God's Son: 'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son' (Heb 1:5). He cites Deuteronomy 32:43 (see also Ps 97:7^{LXX}) to the effect that God's angels should worship him as God's first born in the world (Heb 1:6). Citing Psalm 104:4 (see also Ps 45:6), he argues that angels, who are winds and flames of fire are the ministers of the Son whose throne is forever, and the sceptre of whose kingdom is righteousness (Heb 1:7-8). It is pointed out that Psalm 45 as used in Hebrews bestows the title 'God' on the Son (Steyn 2004:1101).⁶⁶ His use of Isaiah 61:1, 3 was to show that the Son has been anointed with the oil of gladness beyond his companions because he loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Heb 1:9). The declarations in Psalm 102:25-27 are used to the effect that both the earth and the heavens are the handiwork of the Son, but unlike his creation that will perish, the Son remains forever (Heb 1:10, 12). In Psalm 110:1, the author finds the words to say that it was the Son (and not any of the angels) who was told to sit at God's right hand until his enemies are made his footstool. As for the angels, they are sent to minister for the sake of those who will inherit salvation (Heb 1:13-14). In all these, the Son is presented variously as divine, highly favoured by God and exalted above all, making him unique in comparison to the other media of God's previous message.

⁶⁵ It is important to note that the author usually quotes from the Greek text of the Old Testament.

⁶⁶ Steyn (2004:1101) explains that the quotation from Psalm 45^{LXX} (Ps 44) bestows the title 'God' on the Son. The introductory formula taken into account, it is God himself who calls the Son 'God' too (Steyn 2004:1101) – that is if the vocative is preferred. He argues that this issue of the Son as God should be seen within the context of that time (Steyn 2004:1101). On the one hand, the Roman rulers were partly worshipped as gods (Steyn 2004:1101). On the other hand, Philo referred to the Logos, one of the divine powers, as God (Steyn 2004:1101). It might then be that the 'author's understanding of the Psalm may have been influenced by his high christology with its sapiential roots' (Steyn 2004:1101). The author of Hebrews uses Psalm 45:6-7 as confirmation of the divinity of Jesus as God's Son (Steyn 2004:1101). It means that the Son is God, that the throne of the Son is eternal ('unlike the transitory angels;' Attridge 1989:59), and that his rule is righteous (Steyn 2004:1101). His sceptre, according to Scriptural language, is a symbol of legitimate rulership (Steyn 2004:1101).

There is almost a consensus that the exaltation of Jesus provides the reason for the author's use of the *catena* of citations here (see Thompson 2011:38; Johnson 2006:71; Schenck 2003:7). Johnson (2006:71) notes that '[w]ith the statement that the Son "has taken a seat at the right hand of the majesty on high" [Heb 1:3], Hebrews initiates the theme of Jesus' exaltation by alluding to Psalm 109:1.⁶⁷ Thompson (2011:38) also argues that 'the citation of Ps 110:1 in 1:3, 13 forms an *inclusio* (rhetorical "bookends") indicating that the exaltation provides the framework for reading the citations.' He argues that the author uses Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 'to affirm that the exaltation is also the coronation of Jesus as Son (1:5; see also 5:4-6, 10) when all the angels worship him (1:6)' (Thompson 2011:38, 39). This claim, for Thompson (2011:39), 'is of special importance' insofar as it indicates the one who is superior as the receiver of the homage (Heb 7:4-8). The portrayal of the divinity of Jesus on the occasion of his coronation, besides the ascription of the title 'Son' to him, is even more explicit in the author's use of Psalm 45.⁶⁸ Cockerill (2012:109) argues that, like the term 'Son,' the ascription of the title 'God' to the Son 'has much greater significance when used to address the one at God's right hand than when applied to the Davidic King.' He notes that this affirmation of the Son's deity will be substantiated and augmented in Hebrews 1:10-12 by his identification as sovereign Creator and ultimate Judge (Cockerill 2012:110).

The royal wedding setting of the original context of Psalm 45:6-7 has been established

⁶⁷ Johnson (2006:71) explains that Psalm 109:1 ('The Lord said to my lord, "Sit at my right hand (*ek dexiōn mou*) until I make your enemies a footstool at your feet") is the classic resurrection proof text of the earliest Christian movement (see Mt 22:44; 26:24; Mk 12:36; 14:62; 16:19; Lk 20:42; 22:69; Ac 2:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1).

⁶⁸ The divinity of the Son expressed in his being addressed as God should not come as a surprise. This had already been expressed in many of the seven attributes (tributes) of the Son in Hebrews 1:2-3 where among other things He is presented as the agent of creation who also sustains all things by his word of power, being the exact imprint of God. Portraying him as being addressed as God should serve to further strengthen this ideal of his being divine indeed. Schenck (2003:51) argues that the 'title "God" here is probably yet another way of expressing what the titles "Son" and "firstborn" have already expressed' in the previous verses. He explains that the one whom this verse addresses initially as 'God' is subordinate to yet another 'God' who anointed him, as was the case with the king the Psalm originally addressed (Schenck 2003:51). This king may have been God's representative on earth to the people, but he was still responsible to the supreme God who had anointed him as king in the first place (Schenck 2003:51). He wonders whether the author had any thought of the original context in his usage (Schenck 2003:51). This point by Schenck, however, should not weaken the point the writer (who is concerned with showing the superior dignity and rank of the Son in his divinity and permanence) seeks to make here.

by Harris (1985:158) and Steyn (2004:1086).⁶⁹ The Psalm is perhaps one of the most debated within the *catena* of seven quotations when it comes to its use in Hebrews. The debate relates to the companions beyond whom the Son has been anointed with the oil of gladness. What does the anointing with the oil of gladness mean? Is the word ‘companions’ a reference to angels or believers? Cockerill (2012:110) understands anointing with the ‘oil of gladness’ as a clear reference to the Son’s exaltation. He believes that the ‘[a]nointing with the “oil of gladness” anticipates the “joy” set before Jesus in Hebrews 12:2 and is festive joyful “anointing” suitable for the celebration described in Hebrews 12:22-24.’ ‘The Messianic nature of the Psalm, according to Cockerill (2012:111), suggests a royal anointing.’ Cockerill believes that ‘beyond your companions’ solidifies reference to the exaltation’ (Cockerill 2012:111).⁷⁰

6.1.3 The Son, the victorious companion

On the question of who the ‘companions’ refers to, Hawthorne (1979:1508) holds that it is a reference to all those who have received the royal unction before and since. Cockerill (2012:111) and Johnson (2006:80) are among those who argue that the ‘companions’ is a reference to believers. Cockerill (2012:111), for instance, suggests that ‘[t]he “companions” are probably not the angels who have been categorically distinguished from the Son’ but ‘God’s people – the “sons and daughters of God” with whom the Son identifies in his incarnation (Heb 2:5-18) and thus owns as his “brothers and sisters”’ (Heb 2:11). His argument is based on the fact that the same word μέτοχοι is used for ‘companions’ in Hebrews 1:9 and ‘partakers’ or ‘companions’ of Christ in

⁶⁹ Harris (1985:158) finds the Psalm a poet’s address to the king at the royal wedding becomes the Father’s address to his Son at the resurrection-exaltation. The eternity of the ‘throne’ no longer denotes the perpetuity of the Davidic dynasty but the endless character of Christ’s dominion (Ps 45:8).

⁷⁰ For more on the anointing with the oil of gladness, the discussion by Allen (2010:180) is helpful. For Allen (2010:180), the anointing with the oil of gladness could refer to Jesus’ anointing at his baptism by John, symbolized by the Holy Spirit’s descent on him (even though the Gospel writers did not use anointing terminology), or to Jesus’s statement in Luke 4:18 where he quotes Isaiah 61:3 – although the LXX renders the Hebrew *šemen šāsōn* ‘oil of joy’ with terms different from our author (Allen 2010:180). He further believes that it could be a symbolic reference to his anointing by God as king (and priest) at his exaltation (Allen 2010:180). He maintains that although any of these three is possible, it is likely that the reference is of a more general nature and thus symbolic of the Son’s eternal supreme joy (Allen 2010:180). He expands the argument to say that the genitive construction ‘oil of gladness’ can be taken appositionally, ‘the oil which is gladness,’ in which case the meaning would be the oil is a symbol of gladness (Allen 2010:180). Taken as qualitative, ‘gladness’ would describe the joyous occasion of the anointing (Allen 2010:180).

Hebrews 3:14 (Cockerill 2011:111, n. 65). A similar observation has been made by Johnson (2006:80), who sees Hebrews exploiting the ‘messianic associations of “anointing” ... and who will later refer to the readers as “companions of the messiah”’ (Hebrews 3:14; 3:1; 6:4; 12:8; Johnson 2006:80; see also Weinandy 2003:182, n. 80).

Those who think the companions can apply to more than believers include Schenck (2003:51) and Ellingworth (1993:124). Schenck (2003:51) observes that the companions of Christ could be a reference to his brothers as in Hebrews 2. He further argues that the companions could be a reference to the angels of the immediate context (Schenck 2003:51). For him, Christ has become higher than the angels before their very eyes, in their very presence (Schenck 2003:51). Following this line of thought, he maintains that both believers and angels fit with a focus on the enthroned Christ (Schenck 2003:51). The point of contrast, for Schenck (2003:52), is one of role or status; while the angels are ministers and servants of God, Christ, on the other hand, is a king of higher status than that of his companions. The other point of contrast, he argues, is between the transitory nature of the angels and the eternal nature of Christ (Schenck 2003:52). Ellingworth (1993:124) also holds that it is uncertain whether the author of Hebrews thought of μέτοχοι (companions) as (1) other rulers, as probably in the Old Testament context; (2) the angels, as in παρ’ αὐτοῦς (Heb 1:4); παρ’ ἀγγέλους (Heb 2:7, 9); or (3) believers, like μέτοχοι in Hebrews 3:1, 14 and Hebrews 6:4 (cf. μετέχω Heb 2:14). He argues that the possibility of other rulers finds little support in Hebrews (Ellingworth 1993:1124). Against angels, as the second possibility, it is argued that the angels are not ‘anointed,’ but this is not decisive if the ἔλαιον is here a symbol, not of kingship or messiahship, but of joy (ἀγαλλίασις; cf. Heb 12:2; Ellingworth 1993:124). Hughes’ (1977:66) is one of those who argue against the angels as the companions of the Son. His objection to this position stems from the difficulty of finding other instances in which angels are described as Christ’s comrades, and as recipients of unction (Hughes’ 1977:66). In all these, the relevance of the royal wedding setting of the Psalm to what the writer of Hebrews seeks to achieve is not readily available. In respect of understanding the use of the Psalm, Schenck observes,

We must always be careful when interpreting the meaning of a quotation from the Jewish Scriptures in the New Testament. New Testament authors were not at all limited to original

meanings. In many cases the original meaning played almost no role in the use of Scripture. The most important question of New Testament interpretation is how a New Testament author reads a verse, not what it meant originally.

(Schenck 2003:117, n. 28)

This observation by Schenck relates particularly to Hebrews and hence, the author's use of the Psalm must have meaning within the argument the *catena* of quotations are meant to support. Right from the prologue, the author begins an important competitive comparison between two groups of mediators of God's message – the prophets (Heb 1:1) and the angels (Heb 1:4) *vis-à-vis* the Son (Heb 1:2). Right from the prologue, the writer establishes the divine nature of the Son with a dignity and rank that is far above the other objects of comparison (the mediators of God's speaking in the past) named in the prologue. Throughout the *catena* of Old Testament quotations, the author continues to draw a competitive contrast of the dignity and rank between the Son (his divine nature and permanence) and that of the previous media of God's speaking (the angels as creatures and transitory). The author's use of the chain of quotations was simply to give support for the point made in the prologue contrasting the rank and dignity of the Son with that of the angels. In this sense, the contrast in *παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους σου* in Hebrews 1:9 between the Son and his companions will be abrupt, unrelated, and almost meaningless, if it is understood as a contrast between the Son and believers. Where does such a competitive comparison between Christ and believers fit in the author's argument? Nowhere! The whole confusion appears to be centred on the term *μετόχους* ('companions' or 'participants'). Here, the term should not be understood in terms of ingroup and friendly relations as many commentators take it. It should rather be understood in terms of colleagues in competition where the competition is about mediating God's message to his people.

In this sense of mediating God's message, the prophets, the angels, and later, Moses and the Levitical priests,⁷¹ and Christ, are participants in a competition in which Christ emerges victorious – the very sense that *παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους σου* (competitive

⁷¹ On angels, Moses, and the Levitical priests being mediator figures in the Jewish tradition, see DeSilva (2012:126).

comparison similar to παρ' αὐτοῦς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα in Heb 1:4) carries in relation to the angels. This sense of Christ emerging victorious among the prophets, angels, Moses, and the Levitical priests, is heavily present in Hebrews (Heb 1:1, 2, 4; 2:5, 9; 3:3, 5; 10:28, 29). A number of verses become relevant here, indicating the idea of the Son emerging victorious in the spirit of the competitive comparison of Hebrews:

- 1) The phrase καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς (Heb 1:3) speaks of the Son sitting at the right of the majesty on high after achieving the purification of sins. This carries a sense of emerging from a previous status to occupy a higher one at the right of the majesty (in the exalted place) following this achievement of purification of sins.
- 2) κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων (Heb 1:4a) is even more instructive as it speaks of the Son 'becoming' (emerging) greater than the angels following everything mentioned about him in Hebrews 1:2, 3 to which τοσοῦτω refers back as basis for the Son becoming greater than the angels.
- 3) In Hebrews 1:9, it was after the Son had loved righteousness and hated wickedness that God anointed him with the oil of gladness beyond his companions – an assumption of a status above other colleagues following victorious display of love for righteousness and hatred for wickedness.
- 4) In Hebrews 5:5 the Son did not exalt himself to become (γενηθῆναι) a high priest, but it was God who made him become a high priest.
- 5) In Hebrews 6:20 he becomes (γενόμενος) a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.
- 6) In Hebrews 7:16 he becomes (γέγονεν) a priest, not on the basis of the law of commandment (like that of the Levitical priests), but on the basis of an endless life.
- 7) In Hebrews 7:22 he becomes guarantee of a better covenant, contrasted with the Levitical priests who were prevented by death from continuing in office (Heb 7:23).

In all these examples, what the Son becomes in his exaltation is presented in a context of assuming a higher status in comparison with the mediators of God's previous message represented mainly by the angels, the Levitical priests, the prophets and Moses.

We should therefore conclude that, what the Son becomes in his exaltation, is set in a context of one rising among others as superior especially when we consider that Jesus is made a little lower than the angels (Heb 2:7), only for him to emerge with a greater dignity and rank (Heb 2:9), so that the angels now worship him (Heb 1:6). Though in becoming lower than the angels he also becomes like his brothers (and sisters) in the flesh, yet no such competitive comparison is made between him and his brothers (and sisters) as we find in the case of the angels.⁷² Rather than any competitive comparison, what we find in Hebrews between the Son and his brothers (and sisters) is a common sharing of the benefits of his exalted state. For instance, angels are sent to minister to believers as those who will inherit salvation (Heb 1:14) in addition to ministering to the Son as ἀγγέλους (messengers) and (λειτουργούς) ministers (Heb 1:6). Believers are to draw near to the throne of grace in order to find mercy and grace (Heb 4:16); the Son comes for the benefit of his brothers (believers) but not angels (Heb 2:16). Again, He was tested so he would be able to help believers who are being tempted (Heb 2:18). If we understand loving righteousness and hating wickedness in terms of the Son's faithfulness to God and resisting the temptation of giving up on God in the face of his own temptation of suffering and death,⁷³ then this can illuminate a later warning the author gives to the audience. The Son's loving righteousness and hating evil should be understood as a public action in which he obtains honour by refusing to break loyalty with God under the pressure of suffering and death. We should recall that in the Mediterranean world, masculine honour is attained through action in the public sphere and rests on the dominant biological character (Flannery 2010:55). Christ's suffering and death then becomes a public action of loyalty that brings him honour, and denies all

⁷² This point of comparison and contrast has been clearly made by Schenck (2003:52). He maintains that the point of contrast is one of role or status: while the angels are ministers and servants of God, Christ, on the other hand, is a king of higher status than that of his companions. The other point of contrast, he argues, is between the transitory nature of the angels and the eternal nature of Christ (Schenck 2003:52).

⁷³ Cockerill (2012:111) argues that the writer anticipates the earthly obedience of the Son when he says, 'You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness.' He further argues that the way in which his loving 'righteousness' is reinforced by his hatred of 'lawlessness,' aptly represents the Son's complete obedience unto death which the author will describe as the means of his exaltation in Hebrews 5:7-8. McCrudden (2011:221) maintains that the repeated reference to the sinlessness of Jesus (Heb 4:15; 7:26) seem to refer to the idea of experiential struggle of Jesus to live a life of fidelity to, and openness before, God. Jesus is perfected, therefore, in the sense that his continual response of faithfulness to God both matures into, and brings to realisation, the faithfulness that God desires in every human being (Heb 13:21).

the others that honour. The author would later warn that if the believers are not faithful, they would be crucifying Christ all over again to their own harm while holding him up to contempt (Heb 6:6). Faithfulness to God then is righteousness and unfaithfulness to him is wickedness or lawlessness (as ἀνομίαν means). Crucifying Christ all over again would be a lawless act which the believers must avoid remembering that when Jesus loved righteousness and hated wickedness he was anointed above his companions with the oil of gladness. Here, between the Son and believers, there is an implied invitation to the anointing with the oil of gladness by a call on them to maintain their faithfulness to Christ (loving righteousness and hating lawlessness) just like the Son. It is logical then to conclude that the anointing with the oil of gladness above his companions set in this competitive comparison makes sense only when the companions are understood as a reference to the angels. Just like the other declarations, this particular one is said of none of the angels. Again, in all the seven *catena* of quotations, the focus is the portrait of the Son as one favoured by God above the angels, and the anointing above his companions cannot be the exception, especially when the exception would be unrelated, meaningless and abrupt. What sense can we make of all these competitive comparison between the Son and the angels in the context of the Mediterranean world the product of which the writer and his audience are?

6.1.4 Social identity issues

Given the aim of the author to foster loyalty to Christ and encourage continued membership to the Christian ingroup within a collective society of the Mediterranean world, our author finds concepts of social identity (among others) readily apt for his argument. A closer look at his arguments from the outset makes this very clear. The theory on social identity states that people's social identity derive from their membership of various groups and assumes that individuals are motivated to achieve a positive self-image that may be enhanced by a positive evaluation of their own group (Brown 1984:608). This evaluation of one's ingroup is mainly assumed to be achieved by comparison with other groups, hence there is a general tendency for people to seek positive differences between the ingroup and relevant outgroups on various dimensions (Brown 1984:608). The derivation of social identity from one's membership in a group,

which finds expression in seeking positive evaluation of that group, is expected in the discussion of the ensuing social identity issues. The positive description of the Christian group and Christ (the important head figure of the group) is significant in this respect. It is in this respect also that the ethnic (kin group) descriptions of the audience and the implications of their relationships and membership within the group for their personality become relevant for their social identity. No attempt is made to group the discussion under 'social identity issues' into ethnicity and personality. It is at the end of the discussion of the five warning passages that a summary will be made under separate headings.

In Hebrews 1 the author engages in a highly positive evaluation of the Christian ingroup in comparison with some competing outgroups. For the Jewish Christians, proselytes, God-fearers, and other non-Jewish people of the city converted to Christianity, the relevant outgroups could include one or more of the following: the Jewish religion, family groups, other groups within the city such as trade associations and the entire city that practiced sacrifices to the gods and veneration of the emperors.⁷⁴ The comparison with the other groups is less explicit at the surface than that of the Jewish religion in Hebrews 1, and perhaps in the entire epistle. But considered against the socio-cultural structures of the Mediterranean society, the comparison with the other groups apart from the Jewish religion is apparent. The identification of Jesus as the Son of God would ring loud bells in the ears of the readers who knew the emperors as the sons of God. The same can be said about the address of the Son as 'God' by God himself. It is observed that the Roman rulers were partly worshipped as gods (Steyn 2004:1101),

⁷⁴ As has been explained by DeSilva (2012:49, 50), '[n]on-Christian Jews would have disapproved of seeing their own coreligionists joining the Christian sect for other reasons. While joining the church may have brought Gentiles closer to the God of Israel, in many instances it would have been seen to draw Jews further ways, particularly in terms of their diligent observance of the terms of the Mosaic covenant (DeSilva 2012:50). Their allegiance to Jesus, more widely viewed as a messianic *pretender* at best, a blasphemer and sorcerer at worst, would have reinforced the problematic nature of their conversion to that particular sect' (DeSilva 2012:50). In relation to non-Jewish outgroups, it is explained that '[p]eople who failed to acknowledge the gods' claim on their lives and service could hardly be counted upon to honour the claims of the state, law, family and traditional values' (DeSilva 2012:49). It is further explained that '[a]cts of piety towards one or another god or goddess constituted a part of almost every political, business, and social enterprise in the Greco-Roman world. Withdrawing from such settings – especially in numbers – would have been considered antisocial and even subversive' (DeSilva 2012:49).

and that Philo referred to the Logos, one of the divine powers, as God (Steyn 2004:1101). It is possible for the readers of Hebrews to juxtapose all that have been said about Jesus as the Son of God and as 'God' with the emperors to whom these titles had been applied. This would make them feel the better evaluation of their Christian ingroup as well as the positive evaluation of their social identity. The words of Psalm 110:1, with which the author finds God declare concerning the Son ('Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'; Heb 1:13), in particular would be seen as indicating the subjection to the Son his enemies who are responsible for the suffering of the members of the Christian ingroup. These enemies would include first and foremost, the general citizens of the city and the Jews, as well as some families and members of trade association who may have been putting pressure on their members to withdraw from the Christian group (see DeSilva 2012:163). The imagery of the kingdom of the Son whose sceptre is righteousness, and whose throne is established forever should be important for an audience under pressure from the powers of a kingdom with thrones that are transient in nature. But for the Son, he himself, his throne and his kingdom are forever. Thiselton (2003:1456) believes that 'the sceptre' is reminiscent of a king dispensing justice on behalf of the oppressed. This Psalm in Hebrews should be a very positive news to the readers as it assures them of justice and vindication against their enemies in the outgroups responsible for their suffering, especially when it is the Son, the king of their kingdom who dispenses this justice on their behalf.

Many of the words and expressions used to describe the superior dignity and rank of the Son are connected to concepts that are very relevant for people in the Mediterranean world when it comes to ethnicity and personality. Words like 'king,' 'kingdom,' 'throne,' 'sceptre,' 'anointed with the oil of gladness above his companions,' 'those who are to inherit salvation' (as a reference to the believers to whom angels are ministers), and 'the fathers,' are not merely descriptive of persons, but important indicators of the group to which the believers belong. Put together, the effect of these words is to indicate the honour of the Christian ingroup over which the Son is head. As was noted earlier, in collectivist cultures such as first-century Mediterranean society, all

that one needs in order to know someone (or oneself) is to know the group to which one belongs. One can argue that the author begins to shape the image, dignity and honour of the Christian ingroup right from Hebrews 1 by using superior qualities to describe the kingdom, throne, and the sceptre of the group's king as one who stands tall above all others. These words of the author are likely to awaken the collective aspect of their personality necessary for the group goal the author wishes for them to uphold at the opening of Hebrews 2, namely, paying closer attention (remaining faithful) to the message (and for that matter, the ingroup). We have here a kind of preparatory work for the social engineering intended for the believers to sample their collective self by reminding them of the social rank and dignity of where they belong.

That the son has been anointed with the oil of gladness beyond his companions because he loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Heb 1:9) needs to be looked at in the light of the socio-cultural context of first-century Mediterranean culture. What meaning could this statement bring to a people who lived in a world of limited good and competition in which one's honour means the others are left without honour? Johnson (2006:37) finds an acute appreciation for honour and shame as that which helps us understand why the composition focuses on the glory that the Christ now possesses because of his exaltation (Heb 1:3-4, 9), and the efficacy of his death in establishing a firm and better hope for his followers (Heb 2:10; 6:19-20; 8:1-2). 'Anointed with the oil of gladness' is used by the author to indicate the emergence of the son as victorious among others in the context of mediating God's message to his people. By implication, then, the message mediated by the one anointed with the oil of gladness is the one to be taken most seriously (Heb 2:1). The voices of other mediators whose members are putting pressure on the believers to leave the Christian group should not be heeded as they have lost the competition. It is the son who has won God's approval for mediating his message to his people. All the seven Old Testament quotations testify to this. The son's voice is therefore to solely engage their attention in a world of competing delivery of 'divine messages.' This is most likely to be the way the readers in first-century Mediterranean world would understand the words of the writer. If angels are mediators of God's message in the Jewish religion, the fact that they are commanded to worship

and serve the Son indicates the superior nature of not only the son to the angels, but of the message and ingroup of the son to those of the Jewish religion. As Thompson (2011:39) observes, it is axiomatic for the author of Hebrews that the inferior pays homage to the superior.

From the perspective of ethnicity, the believers are now Israelites as their fathers are the fathers of Israel. This anticipates the later identification of the believers with the city of the living God and the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22) and the kingdom the foundations of which cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28). There is a reversal of values here where Jesus who died a shameful death is now the celebrated one who before all others is anointed with the oil of gladness for his achievements. The death on the cross of shame becomes the victorious display of loyalty to God which brings honour to Christ and his people. The author wants the believers to rethink their situation as followers of Jesus and have reason to be positive about what they are going through. Seeing Jesus glorified is meant to change the whole picture for the believers as to their king, their kingdom, his rule of justice, and their citizenship with all their relevance for their self-understanding. If all these are dependent on their continued obedience to the message mediated by the son and about him, then they should be willing to remain faithful in the midst of their suffering so that it will all remain theirs for ever.

6.2 THE WARNING PASSAGES

As noted earlier, the application of the theories on social identity, ethnicity and personality to the warning passages is informed by the fact that in their immediate supporting arguments the author makes very essential statements that describe the audience in a manner that can be illuminated by these theories. In this light, the scope of the warning passages to be dealt with will be determined primarily by the immediate supporting arguments with a focus on what they say about the audience and how that makes the warning relevant to them. In wondering what the warning passages are, Bateman gives two possible indications of what they might be. He asks, 'are they *reiterations of certain key topics*, placed in between the author's expositional sections (Bateman 2007:24)? Or are they well-developed *deliberative exhortations*, strategically

placed among the author's epideictic topics that underscore Jesus' nobility as a divine king-priest (Heb 1:1-14), his moral excellence (Heb 4:14-15; 5:7; 7:28), and his illustrious position as king-priest (Heb 5:5-10; 7:1-28), his courageous death (Heb 2:14-15; 9:11-18; 12:2), which serve to motivate the readers to persevere?' (Bateman 2007:24) The questions raised by Bateman about the warning passages are certainly worthy of critical theological discussion. Indeed, they are suggestive and throw light on some positions and perspectives on the passages. The interest of this work, however, is not to engage in any debate regarding the questions posed here by Bateman. Its focus is rather to examine each of these warning passages and identify how the author addresses his audience in respect of the theories of social identity, ethnicity and personality.

On the number of warning passages, Bateman (2007:27) identifies five all of which, for him, appear in the form of deliberative speech. Although he limits the warning passages to Hebrews 2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39, and 12:14-29,⁷⁵ he nonetheless thinks that it is not reasonable to limit them to smaller units (Bateman 2007:27). In agreeing with him, it should be pointed out that limiting the warning passages to just these verses deprives them the light in which they must be seen in order to make sense of them. As Bateman argues, 'these warning passages are strategically placed throughout the author's expositions, or epideictic topics, about Jesus' (Bateman 2007:27). They are further seen "to facilitate reflection on an explicit course of action, generally providing two options with clearly defined consequences' (Bateman 2007:27). He concludes that 'all the warning passages exhort the readers to persevere in honouring God's message via the Son, lest some sort of divine judgement befall them' (Bateman 2007:28). With these introductory statements about the warning passages, we should now take a look at the first warning passage.

6.2.1 Warning passage 1: Warning against drifting away from a superior message and such a great salvation (Heb 2:1-18)

6.2.1.1 The need to pay closer attention to what has been heard

⁷⁵ The same list of verses of warning passages has been provided by Easter (2014:46) and Schreiner (2015:35).

The purpose of all the theological arguments on the dignity and rank of the Son as mediator of God's message with the support of the *catena* of seven quotations in Hebrews 1 is made explicit in Hebrews 2. The author does not mince words at all: 'Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it (Heb 2:1). The warning in Hebrews 2:1 is against drifting away from the message heard. In Hebrews 2:3, it is against neglecting such a great salvation. In both cases the warnings are focused on getting the believers to keep holding on to what they already have (what they have heard and such a great salvation). The author may have identified a possible underestimation of what they have as the cause of the tendency of the believers to drift away. This position is justified by the attention he gives to the message and the salvation. Not much attention was given to 'what has been heard' in Hebrews 1 apart from the hint that in these last days God has spoken to us in one who is a son (Heb 1:2). The focus of Hebrews 1 was the superior mediator of the message in competitive comparison with the previous mediators. Now in Hebrews 2, the author pays some attention to the message itself and continues with his competitive comparison of the Son with the angels. Even in this comparison, the author could still be understood as dealing with the message since the message is also about what the Son has done for their benefit – the very thing the rest of Hebrews 2 gives attention to. The opening statement in Hebrews 2:1 reflects two important concerns of the writer which receive sustained attention in Hebrews, namely, obedience and faithfulness, represented respectively in the words περισσοτέρως προσέχειν ἡμᾶς τοῖς ἀκουσθεῖσιν (closer attention to what we have heard) and μήποτε παραρυῶμεν (lest we drift away from it). The reason for this call to obedience and faithfulness is to be found in 'what we have heard.' Apart from what the audience stand to gain by being faithful to what they have heard (such a great salvation), the author presents a negative reinforcement for their faithfulness, namely a severer punishment than what they knew in relation to the message mediated by the angels, which they cannot escape if they neglect such a great salvation.

The author establishes the proven reliability of the message delivered by angels and the fact that every transgression of it received a just retribution. It is against such a proven

reliability and severity of the punishment for the transgression of that message that the message mediated by the Son is compared to. The message delivered by the Son is now presented as ‘such a great salvation’ (Heb 2:3).⁷⁶ The greatness of the salvation should be seen in relation to the fact that (1) it was first declared by the Lord; (2) attested by those who heard; and (3) God bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to God’s will (Heb 2:3, 4).

With these few but loaded words about the message mediated by the Son, the author returns to the competitive presentation of the Son against the angels with a focus on what the Son has done for the liberation of the believers. The author points out that it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come but to the Son who having been made temporarily lower than the angels is now crowned with glory and honour, having everything put under his feet. It was from Psalm 8:4-6 that the writer finds the words to establish this point (Heb 2:6-8).⁷⁷ Hagner (2002:55) sees in the author’s use of the Psalm an example of *sensus plenior*, giving ‘a deeper meaning of the passage that goes beyond what the original writer intended’ (see also Attridge 1989:70).⁷⁸ The author acknowledges that we do not as yet see everything in subjection to the Son, yet we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone (Heb 2:8b-9). The humiliation of Christ with its intended benefit for the believers is what is in view here. It is about tasting death for his brothers. Though we do not see all things in subjection to him, the fact that he is crowned with glory and honour is evidence that the subjection of all things to him will be a future reality. Hebrews 2:10-11 establishes the necessity of suffering for the ‘founder’ of salvation of

⁷⁶ Attridge (1989:66) notes that what was delivered by the Son is not characterized as ‘a word,’ but as ‘such a great salvation.’ The fact that this salvation is ‘spoken’ suggests for him that the new word of God has salvific effect (Attridge 1989:66).

⁷⁷ The Psalm states: ‘What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet’ (Ps 8:4-6).

⁷⁸ Hagner (2002:55) notes that ‘Psalm 8 is a poem of praise to the Creator that marvels at the wonder of creation. In comparison with the heavens created by God, the Psalmist expresses wonder at God’s concern for mere humans beings (Hagner 2002:55).

the audience from God's perspective. His suffering was necessary for the Son's own perfection, and in order to bring many sons to glory. Both the sanctifier and those who are sanctified have one source; hence the sanctifier is not ashamed to call them brothers. Psalm 22:22 and Isaiah 8:17-18 offer the author the words that identifies those sanctified as brothers of the sanctifier (Heb 2:12, 13).⁷⁹ The reason the Son took on flesh and blood was so that he could be like the children (of God – the believers) and through death destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. It was also so that he could become a merciful high priest to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Heb 2:14 – 17).⁸⁰ The chapter ends with the author stating that because the Son himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Heb 2:18). In Hebrews 2 therefore, the call on the believers to pay closer attention to the message they have heard is premised on two important considerations all of which are part of the same thing – the integrity of God's family. Firstly, it is because God, their Father, has sent the Son to come to the aid of his brothers and sisters, and secondly, in coming to their aid, has brought them great benefits for which they should be grateful in obedience and faithfulness to God and the family.

6.2.1.2 The Son goes to the aid of his brothers and sisters

The call on the audience to pay greater attention to what has been heard is not simply hinged on the superior nature of the Son, but also on what the message has for them in the accomplishment of the Son – represented in the words 'such a great salvation.' Hebrews 2 therefore establishes the trustworthiness of the message and shows how God acts through the Son to bring about this salvation. Bateman (2007:29) is correct in this respect when he describes the message as 'mediated through or about the Son.' Indeed, it is both! That is exactly what the author tries to portray in Hebrews. In Hebrews 2 in particular, what God does with the Son is the message they need to pay

⁷⁹ The Psalm states, 'I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you' (Psalm 22:22); 'I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion' (Is 8:17-18).

⁸⁰ Cockerill (2012:146-147) believes that '[i]t is the subjection of God's people to the fear of death' that makes Jesus' suffering of death relevant as a way to deliver the readers from death.

attention to since it amounts to such a great salvation. The way the author presents this message is closely related to the situation of the audience. The audience, for fear of death, stood in danger of forfeiting such a great salvation, therefore it becomes important for the writer to offer a message that deals with their fear in order to ensure their continued confidence in and access to such a great salvation.⁸¹ In this message of such a great salvation, the author presents Jesus as one who has shared in the very experience the audience were going through and has overcome it. Now the Son offers the same victory to the audience. All this, according to the author, did not happen by chance but as God designed it for the sake of the audience who are destined for salvation.

To be able to help those to be saved from the fear of death, God made the Son a little lower than the angels for a short while (Heb 2:7) in order for him to share the human experience of those God wants to bring to glory (Heb 2:10), the very people for whom the Son is the founder (source) of their salvation (Heb 2:10). Cockerill (2012:147) notes that 'because of the Son's God-given bond with the 'children' [Heb 2:13], he took on their human condition, here described in all its frailty and brokenness as "blood and flesh."' He observes that 'the Son did not assume an artificial or idealised humanity, but one characterised by the brokenness of the actual humanity which his people shared' (Cockerill 2012:149). Pfitzner (1997:65) captures the total effect of the word play in Hebrews 2:10 in two thoughts:

- 1) The translation 'pioneer' rightly suggests that Jesus went ahead to blaze the trail from suffering to glory. Thus Hebrews 6:20 calls him the 'forerunner'.
- 2) Because he has completed his course from beginning to end, he is the 'source of salvation' (cf. Heb 5:9) in the sense of its beginning or origin. That is why he

⁸¹ On the fear of death see Cockerill (2012:148) and Attridge (1989:93). Cockerill observes that '[t]he angst of the human condition is rightly described as a bondage to the "fear of death" that haunts every aspect of human life from beginning to end. This anxiety agrees with the biblical tradition, was widespread in the Hellenistic world, and is the perennial and universal human concern. Thus the pastor strikes a chord of continual and contemporary human relevance' (Cockerill 2012:148).

can be called the ‘pioneer of salvation’ or the ‘pioneer and perfecter of our faith’ (Heb 12:20; Pfitzner 1997:65).⁸²

Attridge (1989:96) is convinced that ‘Hebrews is not interested in developing a doctrine of the incarnation or the atonement. Its aim is pastoral, not theoretical. Hence, it refers to the fact that Christ in his suffering was “tested” (πειρασθείς), because his brothers too are “being tested” (πειραζόμενοις), and the one who had led the way can now lend a hand’ (Attridge 1989:96). In the light of these discussions, one can conclude that the author effectively establishes that both Jesus and the believers share one thing – temptation (test), but whereas Jesus has it as a past experience which he has overcome, the believers have it as a present reality which they must also overcome. It is in order to help the believers overcome the same experience of suffering and death that the Son has come to their aid. The benefit that Christ brings to his brothers and sisters is achieved by their liberation from that which is likely to keep them from obtaining that benefit.

6.2.1.3 Christ’s victory over temptation as liberation for his brothers and sisters

To understand the author’s argument that Christ’s victory over his temptation helps him to liberate the believers, we should first understand Christ’s temptation (testing).

Attridge (1989:96) maintains that ‘the testing in view is not located in the temptation of Jesus [by the devil as found in the gospels] but in his suffering’ (Attridge 1989:96). He maintains that in his suffering ‘Christ “is able” to give aid because, as a fellow sufferer, he is merciful and sympathetic and has been brought to that position of honour and glory whence true help comes’ (Attridge 1989:96). By this Attridge understands the suffering (the passion) of Jesus as the way he was tempted. He argues that ‘[t]he context of the “test” will be graphically portrayed at Hebrews 12:2-3, in a way that clearly suggests its paradigmatic relevance to Christ’s followers’ (Attridge 1989:96). For

⁸² On ἀρχηγός, translated ‘founder,’ ‘pioneer,’ see the discussion by Attridge (1989:87). On the designation of Christ as ἀρχηγός of salvation, Attridge’s comments are helpful. He notes that ἀρχηγός could mean ‘founder’ of a city, family, school, colony, or nation, the ‘leader’ or ‘scout’ of an army, an ‘instigator’ of trouble, the source or ‘author’ of good things (Attridge 1989:87). As used in Hebrews, Attridge sees Christ the ἀρχηγός as God’s instrument in God’s action of ‘leading’ (ἀγαγόντα) many to glory (Attridge 1989:88).

Ellingworth (1993:144), however, 'it is clear that it is precisely through Christ's temptation, suffering, and death that he was and is able to help human beings, and so carry out the work for which God has exalted him.' Thus while not denying that Christ's testing involves his suffering, Ellingworth, nonetheless, understands it to include his temptation as we read about in the gospels. We should understand that in talking about the testing of Christ, what the author of Hebrews has in mind was everything that could undermine Christ's faithfulness to God in a similar way as the situation faced by the audience of Hebrews.

How exactly does the Son deliver those who for fear of death have become slaves all their lives? DeSilva (2012:17) maintains that '[w]hile this passage [i.e., about destroying the one who has the power over death; Heb 2:14] resonates with Jewish apocalyptic traditions of the Messiah's victory over demonic forces, it also draws upon Greek philosophical discourse on being set free from the fear of death by the courageous example of key teachers facing their own deaths' (DeSilva 2012:17). He sees the the author presenting 'Jesus in a manner reminiscent of Seneca's portrayal of Socrates (*Ep.* 24.4): "Socrates in prison ... declined to flee when certain persons gave him the opportunity ... in order to free humankind from the fear of two most grievous things, death and imprisonment' (see DeSilva 2012:17). He also calls attention to how Peregrinus (a wandering sophist) 'burnt himself to death upon a pyre' in order to teach people to learn 'to despise death and what is fearsome' (Lucian, *Peregr.* 23; see also *Peregr.* 33; DeSilva 2012:17). It is in such an image that DeSilva finds the author of Hebrews presenting Jesus as a model for how the believers should also despise and overcome shame and death in taking a stance of faithfulness to God (DeSilva 2012:17-18).

On the nature of the death of Jesus, Long maintains,

Taken by itself, the story of Jesus is a mournful story of a victim overpowered by his enemies. Taken alone, the narrative of Jesus from birth to the cross is the moving but finally despairing story of one who courageously took on the powers that be but, in the end, was no match for them. We easily forget that the central narrative of the Christian faith is, on the face of it, a deep embarrassment. Often we have turned the passion story into harmless sentiment and the cross into a piece of costume jewellery, losing touch with

what early Christians painfully knew, that Jesus died in shame [Heb 12:2] and that the cross is, to reasonable eyes, an inexplicable foolishness and a stumbling block to faith (Long 1997:25-26).

As DeSilva (2012:67) notes, '[c]rucifixion was associated with 'the lower classes, i.e., slaves, violent criminals, and the unruly elements in rebellious provinces.' Citing Hengel (1977:87), he writes, 'By the public display of a naked victim at a prominent place ... crucifixion also represented his uttermost humiliation' (DeSilva 2012:67).⁸³ In the public eye, Jesus' crucifixion destroyed his honour and memory (DeSilva 2012:68). But for the author of Hebrews, 'this same death exemplifies the perfection of the virtue of faith and the pattern that leads to the rewards of faith' (DeSilva 2012:68). For DeSilva (2012:68), this is a paradox of 'the path to honour before God' that entails the "despising of the shame" that human society could inflict.' He explains that '[t]he phrase "despising shame" does not merely indicate that Jesus "braved" the experience of humiliation that the cross entailed, but that he counted it no "shame" at all on account of enduring it for the sake of obedience to God and of bringing benefit to many' (DeSilva 2012:68). One can conclude that, for the author of Hebrews, it is at the point of counting shame 'no shame' that one can obtain victory over the pressure (bondage) of shame; and it is precisely by failing to fear death that one obtains victory over the pressure (bondage) of death. This is not to say that death is no more frightening, nor shame no longer shameful. Rather, it is the attitude of the mind that makes the very fear of death no more a deterrent to what one has to do so that one can endure death in spite of its pain and fear. It is the attitude of the mind that makes the 'shame' of shame no more a hindrance to what one ought to be, so that one can endure shame. This way of obtaining victory is the path Jesus trod, and those to be liberated from lifelong bondage in the fear of death are to tread the same path. Cockerill (2012:148) concludes that '[t]here is no longer any need to practice the many ways in which humans deny or evade the reality of death, for by his incarnation and death Christ has set God's people "free" from its intimidating power.' Attridge (1989:93) observes that 'Hebrews does not explain precisely how it is that Christ's death frees human beings from such fear. This is in part, due to the fact

⁸³ DeSilva maintains that crucifixion 'was a gruesome, shameful death that left nothing of the crucified's honor intact, with no possibility of redress' (DeSilva 2012:67-68).

that liberation was a fixed part of the underlying tradition and no explanation of it was felt to be required' (Attridge 1989:93). Attridge (1989:93) maintains that '[i]nsofar as the Christological exposition of the text does implicitly provide one, it consists of two elements. On the one hand, as in the myths of a hero's victory over death, Christ's death is an example of endurance.⁸⁴ On the other hand, his exaltation definitely confirms his victory and provides an access to God that renders death and the fear it inspires irrelevant' (Attridge 1989:94). In this sense, key to being able to discount the fear of death is the assurance of victory over death and the guarantee of a better life in glory. And this is precisely what the author says Christ has done for the believers. DeSilva (2012:67) calls attention to the close connection between Christ's death and the 'hostility' (*antilogia*) in Hebrews 12:4, 'recalling the insults and ridicule that Jesus had to endure during his trial and crucifixion.' He maintains that '[h]is aspect of the passion resonates deeply with the addressees' own experience of "reproaches and sufferings"' (Heb 10:32-34; DeSilva 2012:67). Cockerill (2012:151) thinks that the writer was aware of the general 'temptations to sin and testing by hard times, but his primary concern is with the pressures of the world that would lead his hearers to withdraw their loyalty and fall away from the faith.' For Cockerill, the way the author presents Jesus' solution means that 'the author does not want his audience to seek the society's approval or be subverted by its rewards' (Cockerill 2012:152).

In the light of all this, what the author wants Christ to be for the audience is a model. As the believers strive to be like Christ, the hostility of their oppressors would be of little or no effect in getting them to go back on their faith by leaving the Christian group. DeSilva (2012:161) is of the opinion that 'perhaps, most prominently (indeed, from the very opening of the sermon), the author fixes the audience's mental eyes on the glorified Jesus, in whom the human condition itself is transcended' (DeSilva 2012:161). He believes that since 'Jesus exists now in glory beyond death, living an "indestructible life" (2:6-9; 7:16), those who follow him as pioneer will share in such a life as well, sharing also in the glory that radiates from the Son, the firstborn of many "sons and daughters"

⁸⁴ Pfitzner remarks that, '[h]e who has been "perfected" brings others to faith's goal.' This is achieved as believers follow his course (Heb 10:20; 12:1; Pfitzner 1997:65).

that he leads on to glory beyond death' (Heb 2:10; DeSilva 2012:161). Fixing the attention of the audience on the glorified Christ and on sharing his glory accounts in part for the author's reserve in speaking about the death of Christ.⁸⁵ 'As the audience fixes its eyes on Jesus (Heb 12:2), and identifies with him, they are empowered to overcome the present limitations of a life subject to suffering by focusing on the one who has been exalted above all' (Heb 2:5-9; DeSilva 2012:161).⁸⁶ This kind of liberation from fear is a powerful one since it overcomes even fear of death. The words that come to mind are those used by Paul in extolling the victory of Christ over death: 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting.... Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor 15:55, 57). If the believers do not drift from this message but continue to embrace such a great salvation, then they have indeed become victorious over the hostility of their persecutors just like the founder of their salvation, and all the blessings of glory and honour, of sonship, of being brothers and sisters with Christ are truly theirs. With these benefits before them, their response is expected.

6.2.1.4 A response of obedience and loyalty demanded

What is the author's expected effect on his audience as he addressed them in the message of such a great salvation? Loyalty to Christ and the Church! Attridge (1989:90) observes that '[t]he first clause of the Psalm, where the speaker promises to proclaim the name to his "brothers and sisters" (τοις ἀδελφοῖς μου), serves to demonstrate the solidarity between the sanctifier and the sanctified.' He argues that '[i]f that were all that the text was meant to suggest, it could have ended there, but it goes on to say that the speaker will hymn God "in the midst of the assembly"' (ἐν μέσῳ ἐκκλησίας). ἐν μέσῳ ἐκκλησίας, for Attridge (1989:90), 'suggests for the first time where the "sonship" spoken

⁸⁵ Ellingworth notes that '[t]he author always speaks of Christ's death with a certain reserve (θάνατος of Christ's death, Heb 2:14; 5:7; 9:15; more generally in 2:15; 7:23; 9:16; 11:5; cf. θανάτου γενομένου in Heb 9:15). The plain language of the primitive kerygma (e.g., ἀποθνήσκω, 1 Cor 15:3; ἀποθνήσκω, Ac 3:15) is almost totally absent in Hebrews (except for σταυρός, Heb 12:2 where it is indirect' Ellingworth 1993:155). Ellingworth (1993:155) maintains that 'death is implied whenever Christ's suffering is mentioned in Hebrews. Suffering then becomes a softer way of talking about the death of Christ as something that can be overcome.'

⁸⁶ Attridge (1989:93) argues that the liberation of those in death's power is seen to be not a literal release from Hades, but a release from the 'lifelong' (διὰ παντός τοῦ ζῆν) fear of death (φόβῳ θανάτου) (Attridge 1989:93).

of earlier is actualized, in the “assembly” where the confession of Christ’s passion is made and his example imitated.’ He maintains that ‘[a]lthough the author says little explicitly about the church, he is clearly concerned that his addressees remain faithful to their community of faith. Hence, the ordinary Christian connotation of ἐκκλησία should not be ignored’ (Attridge 1989:90). But how are they to move on in their present situation? Trust God and the one who liberates them from the fear of death! Attridge (1989:90) explains that ‘[t]he speaker’s undertaking that he will trust in God [Heb 2:13] is not simply, if at all, a reference to the frailty of Christ in his human condition, nor a simple mirroring of the situation of Isaiah.’ He argues that ‘[t]he citation is rather an allusion to that which above all is or ought to be the characteristic of all God’s children, their faithful reliance upon God’ (Attridge 1989:90). ‘The citation thus alludes to the theme of faith or fidelity that will become increasingly important as the text develops’ (Attridge 1989:90). This loyalty is very crucial because everything they stand to benefit from depends on it. As Attridge (1989:90) points out, Christ’s brothers and sisters, as derives from the use of Isaiah 8:18, suggests a specification of the ‘sons and daughters’ who ‘are God’s children not simply in virtue of their humanity, but above all because they have been “given” to Christ in that community of faith’ (Attridge 1989:90). There is therefore an inseparable connection between belonging to Christ and remaining in the assembly of his people – one implying the other – and this amounts to a single precondition for the salvation and glory to which the believers are brought. Hebrew’s aim is to give the audience a new self-understanding in the work accomplished by the Son on their behalf, a sense of belonging to a family with the honour, glory and freedom that makes their loss of belonging in the larger society irrelevant to them. As DeSilva (2012:156) observes, the author continues to nurture the experience of communion by speaking of them in terms of kinship group. They are ‘God’s household’ (Heb 3:6) and God’s ‘many sons and daughters’ (Heb 2:10, 14; 12:5-10), ‘brothers and sisters’ to Christ (Heb 2:11; 31, 12; 10:19; 13:22; DeSilva 2012:156). They are joined by a common genealogy as God’s ‘children’ (Heb 2:10), and ‘Abraham’s descendants’ (Heb 2:16) into a single family enjoying a share in the honour of its divine Head of the household (DeSilva 2012:156). Attridge (1989:83) holds that

God's sons and daughters have "glory" (δόξαν) as their destiny, the glory that the Son has had from all eternity (1:3) and with which He was crowned at his exaltation (2:7-9). That glory then is a heavenly and eschatological condition, as it is generally in Jewish and early Christian tradition, and it contrasts sharply with the circumstance of suffering and death by which it is achieved.

(Attridge 1989:83)

There is no doubt that the honour and glory of Christ they are to fix their eyes on are meant to have a present impact on their condition of loss of honour and glory and thereby weaken the effect of this lack in their current situation. The benefits Christ has brought to his brothers and sisters (the help he has brought them) are to be seen in this respect also.

The help He brings (Heb 2:16, 18) is the destruction of the one who has power over death (Heb 2:14) and the liberation of those who for fear of death are subjected to life-long bondage (Heb 2:15). It is also to be found in the bringing (ἀγαγόντα – 'take hold of'; Cockerill 2012:149) of many sons to glory (Heb 2:10), the many sons who have the same source with the one who sanctifies them so that he is not ashamed to call them brothers (Heb 2:11). Cockerill (2012:148) believes that '[t]he Son fulfils God's covenant faithfulness by "taking hold of" this people of God in order to bring them into "glory" (2:10), just as God "took hold" of his people in order to bring them to the Promised Land.' He maintains that '[t]his "take hold" in the present tense describes all that the Son does from beginning to end to bring God's people into their eternal heritage' (Cockerill 2012:148-149). 'He does not superintend their journey from a distance, but he "takes hold" of them and guides them by the hand' (Cockerill 2012:149).⁸⁷ Ellingworth 1993:164) explains that ἀγιάζω 'to make ἅγιος,' is used primarily to indicate dedication or consecration of a people as belonging exclusively to God and secondarily, to purify from sin (Heb 1:3; 9:14). It is therefore in this sense of dedication and consecration of a people to God that the believers are the family of God's people. The warning against neglecting such a great salvation becomes more significant in this respect. Neglecting

⁸⁷ Ellingworth (1993:144) speaks of 'the people' of God (Heb 2:17) as it has been 'taken hold of' (Heb 2:16) and united to him in a family relationship (Heb 2:11-13) in his incarnation (Heb 2:14a, 16) and victorious death (Heb 2:14:-15).

such a great salvation would amount to a violation of their consecration and dedication to God as his people in kin relationship with him as Father and with the Son. This violation will receive greater attention in yet another warning passage in another dimension.

6.2.1.5 Social identity issues

As we learnt from the theory of ethnicity, first-century Mediterranean people were identified by their kinship relations, such as ‘X son of Y (son of Z),’ as in ‘James son of Zebedee’ (Matt 4:21), the most important indication of status being the family (Duling 2010:74). Hebrews’ identification of the believers as God’s ‘many sons and daughters’ (Heb 2:10, 14) and ‘brothers and sisters’ to Christ (Heb 2:11) gains significance for the audience in this respect. The language used by the author in Hebrews 2 has a strong family tone for the believers as people belonging to God’s family as children. Though family as one of the features of primordialism tends to be fixed, original and rooted in bloodline, yet we are reminded in constructionism that all these features are merely the way a group of people choose to identify themselves and be known as distinct from other ethnic groups.⁸⁸ We noted that ancestry and myth of origin could be original or fictive; but what matters is how the group uses these to describe themselves as distinct from others. The particular case we are dealing with in Hebrews makes much sense in the light of constructionist theory of ethnicity. The words used by the author to identify the Christian ingroup should be understood as the way the author sees the Christian ingroup. But this should not be seen as an invention by this particular author; rather, in describing the group this way, the author stands in a common tradition with other New Testament writers. In such traditions, the fictive genealogical connection with Abraham is common.⁸⁹ For our author and other New Testament writers, ethnic language and associations were important in so far as ethnicity functions as the ‘organising principle of that unit’ (Sparks 1998:10). If the believers are part of the family of God, then

⁸⁸ Duling (2010:72) emphasises the dynamic nature of ethnicity and the fact that times of social distress see the fluidity of ethnicity as people resort to ways of defining and redefining themselves with the various features of ethnic sentiments and features (Duling 2010:72).

⁸⁹ In Galatians 3:7-18, for instance, Paul argues to the effect that Abraham is the father of the non-Jewish believers as well.

implications can be drawn for their conduct and responsibility towards the Christian group and for their attitude and conduct.

In the light of the theory on personality, the fact that the believers are the sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters of Christ is important for how the audience are expected to behave. In the collectivist culture of the Mediterranean world, one's action was generally expected to both reflect and maintain the family honour (ascribed honour). Behaviour was predictable in so far as one was expected to behave according to given patterns of one's family. Malina (1996:49) notes that 'kins shared common qualities and made enemies because they shared these qualities.'⁹⁰ For the author of Hebrews, the believers and Jesus all shared the same source in God, their Father. Jesus's qualities portrayed in this chapter are intended to be typical not only of God but of other members of the family of God (the audience in this particular case).⁹¹ In Hebrews 2, specific quality of Jesus that must characterise the life of the audience as sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters of Christ is mentioned. This appears in many parts but they all indicate his attitude towards suffering. The one word that captures this attitude is faithfulness to God. Hence he trusted in God (Heb 2:13) and submitted to him in tasting death for the sake of his brothers and sisters (Heb 2:9), and as a result he became perfect through suffering (Heb 2:10). Since they belong to the same family, the same qualities that their source and founder has should characterise their own lives too.

Everything Jesus did in his humiliation and exaltation was done for the benefit of the children of God, Jesus' brothers and sisters. It is important to note that God inflicted his Son with the severest form of suffering in order to perfect him and to bring many sons (the audience included) to glory. The generic use of ἀδελφός (brothers) as in Hebrews 2:11, 17, 3:1, 12, and 10:19 and 22 has been noted by Bateman (2007:24). The term therefore includes sisters as well. But keeping our eyes on the masculine gender of the generic term

⁹⁰ Because of this, 'affronts to the honour of one member were affronts to the honour of all' (Esler 1994:31). Crook (2004:48), maintains that 'when you know someone's family, or their ethnic origin, you know all you need to know about them' (see also Van der Watt 2000:166).

⁹¹ 'What was characteristic of parentage is that parents hand down outstanding qualities to their offspring, such as honour, strength, reliability, and beauty' (Malina 1996:49).

is important because gender spelt out rights and obligations in the Mediterranean world. When it comes to inheritance, 'sons inherit property from their fathers and typically incorporate wives into their own line' (Hodge 2007:22). For the right impact on both male and female members of the Christian ingroup, it is important that the author identifies them as heirs of God's inheritance by the use of the masculine term ἀδελφός. In addition to the inheritance of the father, every family member shared in the status of the family (ascribed honour).⁹² Such inherited benefits always came with a reciprocal responsibility on the part of the beneficiary. They were not to show contempt for the favour. It was required of the beneficiary members of the family to return such favours with responsiveness and obedience. DeSilva (2012:105) notes that 'Mutual bonds of favour and obligation provided the glue that maintained social cohesion. In such a society, gratitude becomes an essential virtue, and ingratitude the "cardinal social and political sin."'

In this regard, the appeal to the audience not to neglect such a great salvation, and to pay greater attention to the message they have heard takes on much meaning. Certainly the Father has great benefits for the family which the members must jealously safeguard and show gratitude for: a superior message that brings such a great salvation, the liberation from the fear of death and lifelong slavery to death, the benefit of being sons and daughters of God, and of being brothers and sisters of Christ, of the glory into which they are being carried, of the sympathy and intercession of the high priest who was made to suffer the very things in which they are currently being tempted. Indeed it was to liberate them and help them out of their present situation that the Son was made to endure all the things in which they are being tempted now. How could they throw all this favour back in the face of the head of their family - insults in response of kindness? A neglect of such a great salvation would be contempt and a great affront to God and the family of God's people. As indicated earlier, in the collective Mediterranean culture, a person could even be killed in order to repair the damage the person had done to the honour and pride of the family. In the light of this, there were more

⁹² As Moxnes (1996:20) observes, 'one's basic honour level, usually termed *ascribed* honour, is inherited from the family at birth. Each child takes on the general honour status that the family possesses in the eyes of the larger group; ascribed honour comes directly from family membership' (see also Hanson 1996:66).

implications for a member leaving the Christian ingroup which made such intended action more serious to the author than one could appreciate from afar. The words of the author in later warning passages will throw more light on the seriousness of the prospect of some members leaving the Christian group. The warning in Hebrews 2 could be paraphrased as follows: See what great salvation God (your Father) has brought you and do the honourable thing. Consider the extent to which your Brother, the founder of your salvation, had to be subjected to suffering and death; can you really afford to make all that useless? The honour and glory he has brought should make you do nothing to bring shame on him and his family. Meanwhile, you know you cannot do the dishonourable thing and be better off; it certainly comes with the severest of conditions to which no punishment can be compared! Don't forget how you ought to behave as people belonging to God's family; look at Jesus, your Brother, and remember what he did when he went through the same experience. Do what he did for which he has now been crowned with glory and honour. That is the only way to be liberated from the power of death and the life-long bondage it brings so that you can be what your Father wants you to be.

A deeper understanding of what was expected of a grateful person in the ancient Mediterranean world will be helpful for appreciating the warning of the author to his audience. DeSilva (2012:109) notes that 'gratitude involves more than a subjective feeling and words. The recipient of a favour seeks opportunity to be of service to the patron, and should place loyalty to the patron above any considerations of personal advantage.' Citing Seneca (*BE*. 4.24.2), he notes, 'It is the ungrateful person who thinks: "I should have liked to return gratitude, but I fear the expense, I fear the danger, I shrink from giving offense; I would rather consult my own interest"' (DeSilva 2012:109). This underscores the reality that the expected way of showing gratitude in the Mediterranean society could be at great cost to the receiver of favour. The powerful picture of the intense bond that gratitude ought to create is provided in the following words of Seneca (*Ep* 18:27; cited in DeSilva 2012:109-110): 'No one can be grateful unless he or she has learned to scorn the things which drive the common herd to distraction; if you wish to make a return for a favour, you must be willing to go into exile,

or to pour forth your blood, or to undergo poverty or ... even to let your very innocence be stained and exposed to shameful slanders.'

Reading the warning passages of Hebrews, no one would doubt that the author expected his audience to go such great extent to show gratitude to God for such a great salvation – gratitude no matter the cost. Though the socio-cultural system of the Mediterranean world offers such plausible structures for understanding Hebrews, to simply limit it to mere showing of gratitude will be to miss the point being made by Hebrews. For the author, his warning is premised on the fact that the very act in which the audience would prove their ingratitude constitutes the loss of the very benefit for which they should be grateful. It is therefore not just a matter of being ungrateful; their ingratitude amounts to losing such a great salvation which leaves the audience with the severest punishment. The socio-cultural picture that depicts their intended act of ingratitude would be of a son who leaves the family to join an outgroup opposed to his family. The family benefits he forfeits and the hard times he endures as a result are bound to the act; they constitute a choice he makes by leaving the family. Leaving the family of God's people certainly comes with the loss of such a great salvation; moreover, the condition outside the family of God is comparable to no other in severity as punishment. Whichever group from which the pressure was mounting on them and into which they may have been tempted to move should be seen as an option promising greater distress than what they find themselves in presently. If the author takes to this course of action, it is because he wants to forestall the loss of salvation and distress for his audience – a situation that amounts to affront to God and the family of his people. his aim is for the audience to maintain an honourable response to God in spite of the pressure of society against such honourable response.

6.2.2 Warning passage 2: Warning against missing the promised rest for a better group with greater honour and hope (Heb 3:1-5:10)

The second warning passage is set within a competitive comparison between Jesus and Moses, and between the audience and the wilderness generation of Israel. In this competitive comparison Jesus and the audience clearly appear to be in a better

position: Jesus has greater honour than Moses, and the audience are more privileged than the wilderness generation. It is within this competitive comparison that the warning against missing the promised rest is given. As hinted in the introduction to this Chapter, the choice of the scope of the warning passage goes beyond what can strictly be termed as warning. The choice of Hebrews 3:1-5:10 is informed by the fact that the scope provides the immediate context within which the argument of the author makes sense in the light of the social identity interest on which this work focuses.

The author begins this section with a call to this audience to consider Jesus who is identified as the apostle and a 'high priest of our confession.'⁹³ Craddock (1998:45) explains that confession may refer to both the act of confessing and the content of the community's faith (cf. Heb 4:14; 10:23). In making this call, the audience is identified as holy brothers who are partakers of a heavenly calling (κλησεως ἐπουρανίου μέτοχοι Heb 3:1). It is observed that the address 'holy brothers' is found only here in the New Testament (Morris 1981:31). What they are to consider about Jesus is his faithfulness to the one who appointed him. This faithfulness of Jesus is presented in a manner that puts both Moses and Christ on the same level as far as faithfulness *per se* is concerned.⁹⁴ It is at the level of their roles in God's house that the distinction between Jesus and Moses is found. Hence the faithfulness of Moses is not downplayed in this comparison. Jesus' faithfulness does not surpass that of Moses, but is like (ὡς) that of Moses. This notwithstanding, the Son is counted worthy of more honour than Moses. The author argues this point as follows:

- 1) Jesus was faithful just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house (Heb 3:2b). Here the competitive tone is absent. Jesus is just as faithful as Moses.
- 2) Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of the house has more glory than the house itself (Heb 3:3). The difficulty in this statement lies in the attempt to compare Jesus to the builder of the house and Moses to the house. Craddock (1998:46) cautions that the analogy should not be

⁹³ The designation of Jesus as 'apostle' appears 'only here in the NT,' but the idea that God sent him is more frequent, especially in the fourth gospel (Morris 1981:31).

⁹⁴ Craddock (1998:46) holds that the single quality of Jesus as apostle and high priest underscored here is fidelity to God (Heb 3:2).

pressed too much that Moses is the building and Jesus the builder.⁹⁵ But Cockerill (2012:166-167) suggests that ‘the builder of everything is God’ refers to Christ, affirming his divinity once again and showing that the Son surpasses Moses as Creator. He argues that ‘[f]ailure to accept this verse as confirmation of the Son’s divine creatorship leaves it as a foreign body in the text’ (Cockerill 2012:167). Cockerill’s position is accepted here as fitting the logic of Hebrews and in line with the author’s identification of the son as God (cf. Heb1:9) with little distinction between their roles in creation in Hebrews 1 and here over God’s house. Jesus as Son is over God’s house as the builder of the house (God’s people and the source of their salvation; Heb 5:9). One here sees that the author returns to the competitive tone in speaking about Jesus as worthy of greater honour than Moses.

3) Jesus is faithful over God’s house as a Son, but Moses as a servant in all God’s house, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later (Heb 3:5, 6). This comparison is clearer than the preceding one. If Jesus is worthy of greater honour, it lies in his position as the Son of God’s house, a position that is obviously of greater honour than that of a servant. The puzzle of comparing Moses to the house is explained by the definition of the house in Hebrews 3:6 where the believers are identified as the house of God. The house then is made up of people, an idea common to some New Testament writers like Peter (cf. 1 Pet 2:5). Morris (1981:32) explains that ‘Moses was at all times a member of the people of God, that and no more.’ It is this that sets the Son high above Moses, for as Son, he is heir and owner of the house.⁹⁶ The faithfulness of Moses upheld by the author is related to the testimony of Moses as a reference to what the Scriptures foretold, especially concerning what the author says to his audience.

It should be noted here that though the author calls the audience to fix their attention on the faithfulness of Christ, which he obviously wants them to internalise in their own attitude, he nonetheless ends up fixing their gaze on the greater honour the Son is

⁹⁵ Craddock (1998:46) holds that it is not necessary to press this analogy to say that Moses is the building or that Jesus is the builder in the sense of being the one through whom God made the worlds (Heb 1:2)

⁹⁶ Morris (1981:32) notes that the word θεράπων is found only here in the New Testament, denoting an honoured servant above a slave.

counted worthy of. While one can say that the author is concerned with the faithfulness of Jesus, he appears to be equally concerned with his greater honour. The connection the author makes between the faithfulness of Jesus and the greater honour he is worthy of is striking as it follows no immediate premises. The support is, however, given in the subsequent verses. This striking connection may suggest that for the author it will take the fixing of the audience' eyes on Jesus' greater honour to induce the same faithfulness from the audience. The author answers the question of what God's house is by identifying it to include the audience and himself. But for him it is in holding fast their confidence (παρρησία; 'boldness') and boasting (καύχημα) of their hope (τῆς ἐλπίδος, Heb 3:6) that they are truly God's house. In this the author sets a hallmark of being a member of God's household, a hallmark that finds expression several times as a motif of Hebrews. On the basis of what has been said here the author now gives his words of exhortation and caution. He presents them with quotations that refers to the disobedience and faithlessness of the wilderness generation which resulted in the wrath of God that destroyed them in the wilderness, instead of experiencing the promised rest. With their sad and disappointing example, the author warns the audience not to be like that generation in disobedience and faithlessness.

Psalm 95:7-11 is the text in which the writer finds the words to give this caution, presented as a speech by the Holy Spirit.⁹⁷ The audience is urged not to harden their hearts upon hearing the Spirit's voice as in the day of rebellion and on the day of testing in the wilderness where their fathers put him to the test and saw his works for forty years (Heb 3:7-9). They are reminded that God was provoked by that generation as people who always went astray in their hearts and who did not know his ways (Heb 3:10). Because of this God swore in his wrath 'they shall not enter my rest' (Heb 3:11). The warning that follows is: 'Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God' (Heb 3:12). On the contrary, the audience are to exhort one another daily as long as it is called today, that

⁹⁷ The text of Psalm 95:7-11 is as follows: 'For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways." Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."'

none of them may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 3:13). The warning against being hardened is important for people who have come to share in Christ, knowing that they share in Christ only when they hold their original confidence to the end (Heb 3:14). The writer uses the first person 'we' and 'our' in reference to the Christians, thereby including himself as those addressed in the exhortation. He repeats the first statement quoted from Psalm 95:7 in Hebrews 3:7-8: 'Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion' (Heb 3:15). The repetition of this part of the Psalm indicates the emphasis of the writer's exhortation. His exhortation is against the hardening of their hearts. The author asks three questions and answers them in a bid to buttress his point with the example of the wilderness generation:

- 1) For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?
- 2) And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?
- 3) And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?

The point of the author's argument is that the people who provoked God to anger, and fell in the wilderness as a result, were the people of God in every respect. God had done so much for them, for which they should have trusted him. It is their failure to trust him that brought the destruction upon them instead of the promised rest they were to enjoy. On this, Cockerill (2012:191) sees a reference to those who disobeyed God at Kadesh-Barnea as recorded in Numbers 14. 'They had "heard" God's promise that he would bring them into the promised "rest," but had refused to heed Caleb's warning (Nu 14:9) and "rebelled" against God' (cf. Nm 14:35; Cockerill 2012:191). 'The magnitude of God's promise,' he explains, 'brought awesome responsibility' (Cockerill 2012:191). The signs they witnessed in Egypt (Nm 14:22; Cockerill 2012:191), the deliverance from Egypt and how God had sustained them (Heb 3:1-6) left the wilderness generation without excuse (Cockerill 2012:191). Hebrews 3 ends with the words: 'So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.' This statement holds up to the audience a negative example with the unspoken caution that it could happen to the audience too.

The reason for this caution is that the wilderness generation was the people of God (just like the audience), and God had done so much with blissful promises for their future just like the audience.

So far two examples have been held up to the members of God's house. The first is Jesus and his faithfulness with a greater honour than Moses. The second is the wilderness generation and their distrust and disobedience that brought them destruction instead of rest. They need to hear these contrasting examples so that they would not throw away their hope, but hold on to their confidence in it to the end.

The logical imperative from these two contrasting examples is given in Hebrews 4. The introductory $\Phi\omicron\beta\eta\theta\omega\mu\epsilon\nu\ \omicron\upsilon\acute{\nu}$ serves to highlight the fear the author expects the believers to have when considering the failure of the wilderness generation to enter the promised rest (Heb 3). The expected fear is intended to steer the believers off the fate of the wilderness generation so that none of the believers fail to enter the rest. The author thinks that the situation of his audience is similar to that of the wilderness generation to warrant the caution and exhortation he gives them. He maintains 'For the good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened' (Heb 4:2). Both groups received the message, but the wilderness generation did not combine faith with the message. The author's statement 'we who have believed enter his rest' (Heb 4:3) is meant to establish his preferred choice of attitude for his group in contrast to that of the wilderness generation. What should distinguish his group from the wilderness generation is faith ($\pi\rho\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$). The wilderness generation could not mix what they heard with faith, but the believers are $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\alpha\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$ (those who have believed). The author's call on the audience to consider the faithfulness of Jesus is meant to reinforce the faithfulness of his audience. Being $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\alpha\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$, the promised rest is for them to enter. This is why they should fear so that none of them fail to enter it. Psalm 95:11, already quoted in Hebrews 3:11, is repeated twice in Hebrews 4:3 and 5. It is presented as though it were the sure proof that the rest is for those who believe to enter, drawing a contrast between believing and those who did not believe and so failed to enter God's

rest. For the author the failure of the wilderness generation to enter that rest shows that the rest is still left open to be entered. This becomes the basis for his statement that the rest remains for some to enter. Disobedience was the reason for the failure of the wilderness generation to enter that rest, but God appointed a certain day which is 'today,' saying through David so long afterward, '[t]oday if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts' (repeating Ps 95:6 in Heb 4:6-7). Still on the failure of the wilderness generation as the occasion for the rest that remains for the believers to enter, the author draws attention to the fact that if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on (Heb 4:8). Following this is his explicit statement that there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his (Heb 4:9-10). It is at this point that the eschatological nature of the rest becomes apparent. It is a rest in which no work is ever to be done, hence the entry into Canaan could not ensure this rest as the people continued to labour. On this basis, they are urged, including the writer himself, to strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall away by the same sort of disobedience. In Hebrews 4:12-13 attention is called to the power of the word of God to search and lay bare everything, including the thoughts and intentions of people. The power of the word makes all things within people bare before God. In other words, God knows what is going on in the thoughts and intentions of the audience. Hebrews 4:14-16 gives some clue in respect of the thoughts and intentions of the audience and how they are supposed to handle them. Their thoughts and intentions appear related to their weaknesses in respect of their temptations. In other words, it is about their tendency to lose faith in what they have heard like the wilderness generation. Now they must come boldly with all their weakness to the high priest on the throne of grace because he is able to sympathize with their weaknesses and offer them the needed grace and mercy in their time of need. In this way they will be able to hold fast their confession and not miss the promised rest like the wilderness generation.

The author now turns attention to the qualifications of Christ as high priest. He lists the qualifications in general terms, and does not care to show how Jesus qualifies in respect of each of the qualities. Some of the qualifications of Christ not identified here

have already been mentioned elsewhere, while others are yet to be given attention. The author lists the general qualities of a high priest as follows:

- 1) A high priest is chosen from among men on behalf of men to offer gifts and sacrifices (Heb 5:1)
- 2) He should be able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness (Heb 5:2)
- 3) He should offer sacrifices first for his own sins just as he offers for those of the people (Heb 5:3)
- 4) He must not take the honour of the office upon himself but must be called by God (Heb 5:4).

On the fourth qualification the author indicates that Christ did not exalt himself but God called him to be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:5-6). He says nothing about the sacrifices Christ offers here. This will receive attention in Hebrews 9. He also says nothing about the need for Christ to first offer sacrifices for his own sins before others. The author will later show that Christ has no need to offer sacrifices for himself (Heb 7:27), since he was tempted in all possible ways like the audience, but without sin (Heb 4:15). Regarding his appointment from among men and his ability to sympathize with the weakness of his people, the author already addressed in Hebrews 2:7, 9, and 17.

What the writer says in Hebrews 5:7-10 about Jesus is meant to be typical of the audience. They have previously been asked to consider Jesus (Heb 3:1). What is said about him in these verses are the very things the author expects his audience to do. He observes that in the days of his flesh Jesus offered prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. His brothers and sisters too have been asked to come boldly to the throne of grace so they can receive grace and find mercy to help them in times of need (Heb 4:16). Now they are being told that Jesus did the same in the days of his flesh. He went before the One who is able to save him from death with loud cries and tears. He was heard because of his reverence (εὐλάβεια; caution); the audience too

need to fear (φοβέω, which involves caution). The author does not explain this caution, but the meaning in context is most probably caution against the consequences of distrust (faithlessness) and disobedience to God. It is the same sense of caution that drove the Son to the One who was able to save him that must drive his brothers and sisters to the throne of grace. In spite of the fact that he was a son, Jesus had to learn obedience through what he suffered (Heb 5:8). It is this same obedience the audience are required to learn in what they are suffering too. If Jesus is a competent high priest they can count on, it is because He was made perfect through suffering and became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. It was this same perfection through suffering that resulted in his designation by God as high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:9-10). Learning obedience through suffering therefore must not be shunned, since it works for the good of God's people.

6.2.2.1 Social identity issues

With social identity as the focus a number of issues needs to be discussed from Hebrews 3:1-5:10 to show how the social script⁹⁸ of the ancient Mediterranean society gives meaning to the text. The social identity issues touch on the better assessment of the Christian group which is presented in this passage as the house of God over which Jesus is set as Son. The assessment of this group is done comparatively against the wilderness generation of the Israelites with Moses as their leader. The author's assessment of these groups is not restricted to the groups and includes the leaders as well. The author begins with the assessment of the leaders in a competitive mood and extends it to the groups. The better assessment of the Son's group has paramount significance for the social identity of the audience and is expected to encourage them to give the expected response to the message of Christ. Attention is also given to the provisions made by God for his house through the agency and instrumentality of his Son. Calling attention to these provisions is intended to impact on the kind of people the audience are meant to be and show the privileged position and state in which they find

⁹⁸ 'A behavioral or social script is a series of behaviors, actions, and consequences that are expected in a particular situation or environment. Just like a movie script we know what to expect in many social settings. Individuals learn from past experiences and use these expectations to build scripts that make things easier for us cognitively' (see *Psychology Glossary*, n.p.)

themselves both in the present and the future. On how the Son's group should conduct themselves in the face of their current crisis, the author engages in a comparison of their situation with that of the wilderness generation that paints a picture of the Son's group as with better opportunities for which they must give better response than the wilderness generation. The better response is expected to be stereotypical after the example of their model and prototypical member who is the Son.⁹⁹ The way their model dealt with his suffering should be the way the members of God's house must also behave in their suffering, since family members share common characteristics. Finally, as a family, the members owe each other a responsibility to ensure that they conduct themselves as is becoming of their family. This responsibility is laid on the members, a responsibility that is to be executed in daily exhortation and encouragement of one another. A more detail discussion of each of these aspects of the social identity issues is now undertaken.

6.2.2.1.1 A better assessment of the Son's group

In Hebrews 3:1-5:10 the author gives a picture of the Christian group that sets it high in evaluation over the outgroup of the people identified with Moses. The audience are identified as the holy brothers who share in a heavenly calling (Heb 3:1). Jesus is the Son over them (the house of God), and he is counted worthy of more honour than Moses who led the wilderness generation (Heb 3:3). In God's house Moses was no more than a servant and therefore part of the house, but the Son lords over the house. The Son's honour is as of the honour of the builder of the house, whereas that of Moses is comparable to the house (Heb 3:3, 5-6). As Cockerill (2012:168) explains, 'One who is "Son," Creator and Redeemer, cannot be described even as the highest servant "in" God's house.' He takes his place with the Father 'over' the house of God (Cockerill 2012:168). He notes that the phrase '[w]hose house we are' identifies the believers as

⁹⁹ Baker explains a prototype as 'a representation of a person that embodies the identity of the group, but may not necessarily be an actual or current member of the group, rather an ideal image of the group's character. These prototypical ingroup members from the past must be remembered and commemorated in various ways for their prototypical status to remain effective' (Baker 2012:132). 'The prototypical ingroup members, and thus the identity of the group, are not static but are capable of change depending upon the situation of the group as the group remembers its prototypical figures in new ways to address new situations' (Baker 2012:132).

‘privileged members of this household over which Christ is Son and in which Moses serves as steward’ (Cockerill 2012:169).

The discussion of the honour of Moses and Jesus should not be divorced from their roles as mediators appointed by God to represent the people before him. The higher their calibre the greater their effectiveness. DeSilva’s analogy is helpful here: ‘Because Jesus is God’s Son, he is a better placed mediator within the household of the Father God, just as those seeking the emperor’s favour through the mediation of a member of his close family would enjoy greater assurance of the success of their suit than those approaching him through a servant or lower-level administrator’ (DeSilva 2012:127, 128). The kinship terms that describe the audience’s family relations with God and Jesus is worth noting. The believers are not only the house of God, but holy brothers and sisters in heavenly calling. In a society where the basic form of identification is one’s family, this identification should be important to the audience, especially when their present predicament is due to their loss of not only citizenship of the city, but also family members of earthly kin relations as well as trade associations.

When it comes to the group with which Moses is identified as leader, the evaluation is comparably lower. Identified as the wilderness generation, this group put the Lord to the test for forty years; they always went astray in their hearts and did not know the ways of God (Heb 3:9-10). God swore in his wrath they shall never enter his rest (Heb 3:11). Moreover, it was a rebellious group (Heb 3:16), those who sinned and disobeyed as a result of which their bodies fell in the wilderness (Heb 3:17, 18). As Cockerill (2012:191) intimates, “Fallen corpses” describes a death appropriate for apostates (Is 66:24). Those who died thus suffered an accursed death (Gn 40:19; Dt 28:26) and were often left unburied’ (1 Sam 17:46; Lv 26:30; Cockerill 2012:193). This awful place of death contrasts with what Hebrews 3:18 says concerning the blessing from which they were excluded (Cockerill 2012:193). It is this blessing from which Moses’ group was excluded that the believers have as their hope and must strive to enter (Heb 4:3, 11).

From the beginning of Hebrews the divinity of Jesus has been one of the distinguishing qualities for the author. In this section where he engages in a competitive evaluation of Jesus and Moses, the writer continues to press this quality as that which sets Jesus apart and makes his high priesthood surpass that of what went before him (Heb 4:14). Buchanan (1972:80) remarks that in the author's use of the term 'Son of God' he clearly relates 'the attributes of the Son in royal terms; thus he was thinking of Jesus as both priest and king.'¹⁰⁰ Following all these, the Son and his group have higher ranking in the assessment than Moses and his group. The Son is of greater honour over God's house in contrast to Moses as servant of God's house. Moreover, the members of God's house are faithful (believing), and are urged to maintain this as against the wilderness generation which proved faithless, provoked God and fell in the desert as cursed people. Whereas their fate is sealed because God swore an oath on that, the Son's group are urged to enter the rest which remains for them.

6.2.2.1.2 The Father's provision for his house

The author identifies his audience and himself as God's house. As the owner of the house, God makes essential provisions which impact directly on what sort of people they turn out to be as well as what inheritance awaits them. More importantly, all the provisions God makes as the Father of the house come through the agency and instrumentality of one person, Jesus the Son. In Hebrews 3:14, μέτοχοι is used to describe the believers as 'participators in Christ.' The same noun is used for sharing in the heavenly calling (Heb 3:1) and in the Holy Spirit (cf. Heb 6:4; see Morris 1981:36).¹⁰¹ In trying to identify the Father's provision for his house two questions must be answered: (1) what has the Father made the Son for the sake of his people? and (2) what privileges do the members of the house have through the Son?

¹⁰⁰ Buchanan (1972:80) notes that "'Son of God" was a name ordinarily given to kings, but Philo said the high priest was not a man but a divine word (*logos theios*), whose father was God (*Fuga* 108).' Yet the identification of Jesus as 'Son of God' is expressed in terms uncommon to neither the kings to whom the title was applied nor as in Philo's application of the term to the high priest (Buchanan 1970:80). This is to say that in the author's presentation, neither the kings nor the high priests come close to Jesus as Son of God.

¹⁰¹ Morris notes that μέτοχοι can mean 'participators in Christ' as in sharing in Christ or participators with Christ' as in partnership with Christ. While finding the sense of sharing in Christ in Hebrews 6:4, he finds partnership with Christ in Hebrews 1:9.(Morris 1981:36).

It is not possible to answer these two questions as distinct from the other, since in some cases by addressing one the other is addressed too. Jesus is presented in Hebrews 3:1-5:10 as the apostle and high priest of the confession of his people (Heb 3:1). The designation of Jesus as apostle carries '[t]he basic idea of mission; Jesus was sent by the Father to accomplish his purpose. High priest brings before us the sacrificial nature of that mission' (see Morris 1981:31). Morris (1981:46) observes that 'great high priest' is 'a title that suggests' Jesus' 'superiority to the Levitical priests.' Also, 'gone through the heavens'¹⁰² signifies the supreme place he occupies whereas 'Son of God' further emphasises his greatness (Morris 1981:46).

Secondly, the Son is the builder of the house of God (Heb 3:3). In respect of κατασκευάζω,¹⁰³ Cockerill (2012:166) is of the view that the author deliberately uses the word 'to express the relationship between Christ and God's people.' Hence it can refer to the 'building' of a house, but 'it can also refer to the completion of the house, to its being "furnished" or "equipped" for use' (Heb 9:2, 6, see also Mk 1:2; Lk 7:17; Cockerill 2012:166). He maintains that as 'the fulfilment of revelation and the provider of redemption the Son brings God's people to their inheritance and intended end, thus it is proper to call him 'the one who established' the people of God' (Cockerill 2012:166).

Furthermore, Jesus is their high priest and Son of God who has passed through the heavens and is able to sympathise with their weakness (Heb 4:14-15). But he did not take this honour upon himself; it is God, the Father of the house, who appointed him (Heb 5:5). Craddock maintains that '[a]s one in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters,' Jesus 'is able to serve as our priest with sympathy and patience; and as one who experienced life as we know it with faithfulness and full obedience.' It is in this way that 'he is the pioneer and model for the Christian pilgrimage' (Craddock 1998:63, 64).

¹⁰² On the concept of many heavens, such as the third heavens in 2 Corinthians 12:2 and the seventh heaven in the Talmud (*Hagigah* 12b), see Morris (1981:46), Buchanan (1972:80) and Schenck (2003:111 n. 2).

¹⁰³ Translated as 'establish' by Cockerill (2012:166).

The members of God's house are holy brothers who share in a heavenly calling (Heb 3:1). Lane (1991:80) notes that the believers 'are addressed as those who have been summoned to the highest reaches of the heavens, where they enjoy open access to God through their high priest.'¹⁰⁴ It is for this that God ordained the mission of Jesus as the apostle and high priest of their confession. The fact that he is the source of their eternal salvation cannot be overlooked here (Heb 5:9). God has made Jesus the one from whom their salvation should be derived and it is through him that this heavenly calling and identity as holy brothers and sisters is possible. For Morris (1981:31), the address to the audience as 'holy brothers' 'combines the notes of affection and consecration.' They are both dear to the writer and set apart for the service of God (Morris 1981:31). He maintains that 'the reference to "the heavenly calling" shows that the initiative comes from God' (Morris 1981:31). 'The Son makes them "holy" so that they can truly be "partakers in the heavenly calling"' (Cockerill 2012:158). The identification of the audience with the heavenly realm is both important and prevailing in the thinking of the author. Later when he speaks of a heavenly Jerusalem and a city whose foundations cannot be shaken, it is this heavenly identity that he still has in mind. This heavenly identity supplies a much needed hope for an audience engaged in the struggles of a transient society.

Again, they have a hope they can boast of (Heb 3:6). On the courage and hope of which we boast, Morris calls attention to *kauchēma* as signifying something one can boast about as against *kauchēsis*, the act of boasting itself. He observes that one has a matter for pride in the Christian hope so that believer's position as God's 'house' is something of which they may boast (Morris 1981:33). He insists that '[w]e have a good gift from God. Instead of being ashamed of this gift, we should glory in it' (Morris 1981:33). For the author therefore, the hope of the audience in Christ is not to be taken lightly, nor must it be concealed. It is something to be publicly owned up, exhibited and be proud of. This is the honour Christ deserves and it must not be denied.

¹⁰⁴ Lane (1991:74) notes that 'holy brothers' denote consecration to the service of God and Christ is the agent of this consecration (Heb 2:11). For Lane (1991:74), Hebrews 3:1 pictures the readers as people have been called into the presence of God where they enjoy privileged access to him.

Another provision for God's people is the promised rest (Heb 4:11) which they must enter; those who believe enter that rest (Heb 4:3). Craddock (1998:52) argues that taking the present tense in Hebrews 4:3 into account, 'rest is not only an eschatological future but also a present favourite state, as the sermon will unfold later.' In linking the promised rest to the idea that 'God rested' (Heb 4:4), the author, for Craddock (1998:52) 'moves beyond the idea of a land in that we participate with God.' He is of the view that the author makes the same interpretative move in treating the word 'house' in Hebrews 3:1-6. "'Rest' now becomes a synonym for salvation, the presence of God now and in the future' (Craddock 1998:52). On the future dimension, (Colijn 1996:678) has observed that rest in Hebrews is 'an eschatological concept which implies that the believer proleptically shares the "rest of God", i.e., the kingdom blessings of peace and security promised for the "last days".' In addition to all these provisions by God, the believers can confidently approach the throne of grace to find grace and mercy to help in times of need (Heb 4:16). All this is on account of the fact that the Son's group has a high priest who has passed through the heavens (Heb 4:14), unlike the high priests of the wilderness generation who only minister in the earthly realm. Their high priest is also without sin and has no need to offer a sacrifice first for his own sins before making sacrifice for his people. Moreover, He is able to sympathise with their weakness (Heb 4:15).

As hinted earlier, in speaking about the provision God has made for the people of his house, the focus has been on what God has made his Son for the sake of his people, as well as what privileges are available to his people as a result. Our vision of God's providence should not be blurred because of how the provisions are presented. As DeSilva notes, '[t]he fact that the heart of Hebrews speaks in the idiom of priesthood, sacrificial ritual, and sacred spaces (5:1-10; 7:1-10:18) should not obscure the fact that the discussion is still entirely focused on the benefits Jesus has brought the hearers, establishing a grace-relationship between God and human beings, and on the cost to himself of his mediation' (DeSilva 2012:128).

In summary, the Father's provision for his household is presented in the sacrificial mission of the Son when the author identifies him as apostle and high priest of our confession. It is in this capacity that the Son is able to sympathise with their weakness. It is also through him that they can approach the presence of God (the throne of grace) to find grace and mercy in times of need. The designation of the audience as holy brothers who share in a heavenly calling is also related to this. As the builder of God's house, the Son makes the members of the house participants in his house and therefore they are rightly identified as people who share in Christ. Since the promised rest is for God's people, it is certainly meant for them as people of his house. This is a hope of which they were confident and boastful from the beginning – a confidence and boasting which they must not allow to wane. In all these, the relationship between the audience, the Son and God is expressed in two important features of ethnicity, namely family and religion. The audience are not only brothers and sisters but also holy brothers and sisters – the term holy emphasising their consecration to God. In addition, Jesus is their high priest who provides the religious connection between them and the place to find help in God's presence.

6.2.2.1.3 A better response, after the Son's example, to the Father's provisions

As noted before, a response of gratitude and obedience was expected in return for the good things one enjoys from one's family. In Hebrews such responsive gesture of obedience is not only expected, but also demanded. The demand for the response of obedience is set within the stereotypical character of the members of God's family exemplified by Christ, the Proto-Son and maker of the house of God. It is the conduct and attitude of this prototypical member that must characterise the conduct of all the people in God's house. Every example that must be followed, if not directly from the prototypical member, must be in line with his. Any example that does not fall in line with his is to be avoided, because it belongs to the outgroup that is either opposed to God's house or has been rejected by God. In Hebrews 3:1-5:10, when Jesus is held up, he is to be considered as a model. When the wilderness generation is held up, it is a bad example the audience must avoid.

From the outset of Hebrews 3:1-5:10 the audience is called upon to consider Jesus. What they should consider about him is his faithfulness to the one who appointed him (Heb 3:1-2). As Cockerill (2012:162) has observed, “[b]eing faithful” is truly adverbial, describing the circumstances in which the hearers were to consider Jesus: that is, his being faithful.’ He maintains that the faithfulness includes both the incarnate obedience of ‘Jesus’ and the resultant continuing trustworthiness of the exalted ‘Apostle and High priest’ (Cockerill 2012:162). The deliberate use of the present participle – being faithful (πιστὸν ὄντα) – encompasses for him both past earthly and present heavenly faithfulness in one continuous reality (Cockerill 2012:162).

On the current experience of suffering of the audience and their expected obedience in this situation, Jesus is held up as one who also went through the same experience and maintained obedience to God. It is important here to recall that the audience have been appointed (called) as their brother Jesus was appointed by God (Heb 3:1, 2). The believers therefore share the calling initiated by God with Jesus. Craddock has called attention to Jesus’s attitude of obedience in suffering as a model for the audience. He notes that being God’s Son did not exempt Jesus from learning, from obedience and from suffering, and that so complete was his identification with all who share flesh and blood (Craddock 1998:63). He observes that learning is strikingly joined to obedience and obedience to suffering in Hebrews, recalling that ‘learning’ and suffering were joined in popular wordplays, and the usual sense was, ‘we learn from our mistakes’ (Craddock 1998:63). He believes that ‘the writer clearly has in mind the readers who must learn that old proverbs that join obedience with bliss and disobedience with suffering are broken by the experience of Christ and their own’ (Craddock 1998:63). That is to say, in the experience of Christ and of the members of his house, obedience does not necessarily bring bliss as people usually expect. Conversely, disobedience may not necessarily bring suffering. In spite of this admission of suffering for obedience, the author does not fail to recognise the ultimate blessedness of the state and future of the obedient. Craddock’s (1998:63) recognition that ‘[b]y learning obedience through suffering, Jesus is qualified as both intercessor and model,’ falls in line with the ultimate blessedness of obedience.

Considering and following the example of their apostle and high priest, the holy brothers ought to hold fast their initial confidence and boasting of their hope (Heb 3:6). They should take care so that no evil, unbelieving heart is found in any one of them, leading them to fall away from the living God (Heb 3:12). This is because they have come to share in Christ, if indeed they hold their original confidence firm to the end (Heb 3:14). The emphasis here is on the connection between their sharing in Christ and the obligation to hold fast their confidence to the end as a mark of their sharing in Christ.

DeSilva underscores the relationship between gift and response in Hebrews. He observes that '[a]t key points in the sermon, the causal nexus between gift and response is explicitly expressed: "since we have such a great high priest ... let us"' (Heb 4:14, 16; DeSilva 2012:100). The father's provision must elicit a positive response from his children in obedience, trust and faithfulness to him. It is in this respect that the wilderness generation failed and lost the promised rest which now remains for the Son's group. The generation in the wilderness had failed to trust God for his promises, in spite of the many acts of God they witnessed. Cockerill (2012:190) notes that '[i]n the light of the wilderness generation's experience of God's grace [Heb 3:16], the refusal at Kadesh-Barnea was justly called a "rebellion" which deserved God's wrath' (Heb 3:17-18) and ultimate exclusion from God's blessing (Heb 3:19). This rebellion (Heb 3:16) is described as 'sin' (Heb 3:17), 'disobedience' (Heb 3:18) and finally as 'unbelief' (Heb 3:19; Cockerill 2012:190).

In the application of this to the situation of the Son's group, the audience are urged to avoid specifically the distrust the wilderness generation showed in the face of all that God had done for them which should have given them continued trust in his ability to save them and fulfil all his promises to them. The warning in Hebrews 4:11 is to the effect that none of them should fall by the same sort of disobedience. What they must do is to hold fast their confidence and boasting amidst their suffering. Above all, an appeal is made to the Son's conduct in his own suffering. In the days of his flesh, he offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence (Heb 5:7). Although

he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered (Heb 5:8). Learning obedience through suffering yielded the result of his perfection as he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, as God designated him as a high priest (Heb 5:9-10). The current suffering of the members of the Son's group should not be a surprise, but must be seen as part of the experience of people who belong to God's house, an idea that will later receive attention in Hebrews. As has been observed earlier, being God's Son did not exempt Jesus from learning, obedience and suffering (Craddock 1998:63);¹⁰⁵ neither will the other sons and daughters be exempted from these. All these are the ways of the Son's faithfulness which the members of God's house must consider and emulate (Heb 3:1-2). Faithfulness in Hebrews means among others keeping faith with God to the end; this what the Proto-Son did in his suffering to qualify him to be faithful. In speaking in this manner about the Son, the author presents him as a prototypical member who embodies the characteristics the members of the group are expected to have as distinctive features of their group.¹⁰⁶ As has been noted, the use of prototypical members is one of the effective ways of giving a group an ideal image. The prototypical members are remembered and commemorated in various ways for their prototypical status to remain. The author of Hebrews is doing exactly this in the number of images in which he presents Jesus. Typical of the use of prototypical members, the author presents Jesus in ways that meet the current needs of his group. The author also draws clear boundaries for his audience in the things they are called upon to do by way of emulating Jesus. They are to stay within the boundaries of the Christian group by doing what Jesus did when in the days of his flesh he went to the One who was able to save him from death with loud cries and tears instead of turning away from God. The implication for them is to remain faithful to the Christian community as a demonstration of their faith, while encouraging one another to hold on to the end. The drawing of such boundaries is important and significant, since it was only by their

¹⁰⁵ Jesus is said to have known the force of temptation in a way that we who sin do not (Morris 1981:46). It is explained that '[w]e give in before the temptation has fully spent itself; only he who does not yield knows its full force' (see Morris 1981:46).

¹⁰⁶ Moreland, Levine and McMinn (2012:96) define prototype as 'a mental image of the type of person who best represents the group. Any characteristic (e.g., appearance, background, abilities, opinions, personality traits) that makes a significant contribution to the meta-contrast ratio on which a self-categorisation is based will be incorporated into the group's prototype. A prototypical member, whether real or imaginary, is thus someone who embodies whatever characteristics make the group distinctive.'

continued membership with the Christian group (the family of God) that salvation and the realisation of God's promises is possible.

In a number of instances the author appeals directly to ethnic expressions to distinguish his audience from others. Kinship expressions such as many sons and daughters of God, brothers of Jesus (Heb 2:17), and the house of God may be readily recalled. On other occasions he simply uses strategies employed in ethnic reasoning to call on his people to stand out as distinct people belonging to God. The audience is called upon to participate in certain socio-cultural practices that publicly show that they belong to the Christian group. This is in line with Cromhout's observation of the participatory nature of cultural ethnicity in which visibly engaging in socio-cultural activities defines one's ethnic group and the community of which one is a part (Cromhout 2014:538). The emphasis here is orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy. The definition of one's ethnic group/community by common participation in socio-cultural activities is the way by which people are marked as belonging to a group distinct from others. For the author of Hebrews, the members of the Christian group must show their membership of the Christian community in their participation in the faithfulness that is characteristic of the group as represented in the life of their prototypical member. For example, they have come to share in Christ if only they hold fast their confidence to the end (Heb 3:14). It is therefore important for the author to show that the outgroup(s) represented by the wilderness generation is negatively distinct and different from the Christian group who practise the faithfulness of their prototypical member. The common participation in the faithfulness Christ by members of the Christian group has implications for their group meetings and their encouragement of one another to hold on to the end when their hope would be fully realised. Such common participation in faithfulness is demonstrated in their love for God's name, and in their service to the saints. This takes us to language and name as features of ethnicity. Language and name as features of ethnicity describe an ingroup favourably while at the same time describing outgroups negatively. This is exactly what the language and names used to describe the Christian ingroup does in Hebrews – what they are the others in the outgroup are not. They are sons and daughters of God, the holy brothers and sisters who share in a heavenly calling,

beloved, the house of God, those who have believed and entered God's rest while the outgroup(s) are those who disobeyed and are unbelieving and so fell in the desert as cursed people who could not enter God's rest on account of God's wrath provoked by their distrust of God.

6.2.2.1.4 Implications for conduct within the household of God

Responsibility towards members of the house of God does not only come from the Father or the Son to the believers. The members of God's house, who have received God's providence, have responsibilities towards one another. In their current circumstance their responsibilities should be geared towards stemming the danger of falling away from the living God. This falling away also means leaving the Son's group which has negative implications for the group's integrity. As a faith community they 'are to persevere in the faith because, according to Hebrews 3:14, only those who persevere show themselves to be partakers of Christ and truly saved' (see Compton 1996:167). While '[t]his does not mean that perseverance in the faith is a condition for salvation,' it is 'the mark of those who are saved' (Compton 1996:167).¹⁰⁷ Individual as the act of falling away from the living God (and leaving the group) is, the responsibility for stemming this is a corporate one for the whole group. It is a corporate responsibility in which each member has a role to play. For Morris (1998:36), the appeal in Hebrews 3:13, namely that the believers 'must encourage one another constantly and urgently' stresses the importance of Christian fellowship. Lamb (2003:186) argues that the writer of Hebrews, using family image, 'was speaking about a set of relationships where people are speaking to one another about the dangers of sin, calling each other to repentance, and clarity for the sake of their hearts.' The strategy is about asking people to be involved in their family members' lives in this manner on a daily basis (Lamb 2003:186). For the writer, exercising this corporate responsibility can help the audience maintain their original confidence.¹⁰⁸ By insisting on their continuing service to the saints, and encouraging one another against deviant attitudes, the author is building

¹⁰⁷ The paradox of 'we have come' and 'if we hold firmly' is seen by Morris (1981:36-37) as stressing the importance of believers holding firmly to what God has given them.

¹⁰⁸ The original confidence, according to Morris (1981:37), is that experience when the readers first believed; they had no doubt then, nor should they have any now (Morris 1981:37).

clear boundaries around his group to keep them from any potential tendency to drift into other competing groups.

6.2.2.1.5 Summary

In discussing the second warning passage attempts have been made to identify the social identity issues the author deals with in respect of the audience. A higher and more positive evaluation of the Son and his group has been presented against a lower and more negative one for Moses and the wilderness generation. The provision God has made for the members of his household also holds them up as in a better and more privileged position than that of the wilderness generation. When it comes to their expected behaviour, a better response in the manner of the Son is expected of them, a response that is worthy of members of a house over which the Son as its prototypical member. In following the example of the prototypical member, the members would be staying within clear boundaries drawn to keep them loyal to the Christian community. To ensure that they are able to do this, the author identified the need for daily exhortation and encouragement of one another within the household of God, an attitude expected of responsible membership in a family. In this way the Christian group is sure to give a better response than the response of the wilderness generation to the provisions of God and make good the encouragement and warning not to miss the promised rest. In terms of personality, the expected effect of all this is the sampling of their collective selves in which considerations of family goals and integrity should come before any personal tendencies. If the writer calls their attention to their expected response to the provisions of God, it is in the hope that as allocentric people, what is expected of them would become important for their consideration of how they decide to act in the face of God's goodness to them and their current crisis.

6.2.3 Warning passage 3: Warning against a response that wastes God's goodness and holds the son up to contempt (Heb 5:11-6:20)

In the previous section the Son was identified as the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Heb 5:9). He was also the one designated by God as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:10). The subject of the high priest has received brief

treatment in Hebrews 2:17 and 4:14-16. In this section the author asserts that he has much to say about this, but the dullness of his audience in hearing makes it difficult for him to explain it.¹⁰⁹ He contends that they have been instructed long enough to have become teachers by now, yet they still need someone to teach them again the basic principles of the oracles of God.¹¹⁰ According to Craddock, the author's expectation was common in educational circles in the Hellenistic world. What the people concerned can eat is milk and not solid food (Heb 5:11, 12).¹¹¹ The author concludes that everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. For Morris (1981:52), the 'word of righteousness' refers to the conduct God expects from believers. The mature, unlike the infant, feed on solid food, and they are those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.¹¹² The concept of being grown-up in relationship to physical age and stature was used metaphorically to describe religious growth.¹¹³ The same was true of the expression 'to discern good and evil' (see Buchanan 1972:102). Hebrews 5:10-14 gives the author's assessment of the state of his audience with particular reference to hearing God's word and their ability to discern good from evil. By this time it should become clear that the good and evil they should be able to discern are in respect of their right or wrong responses to God's offer of immense benefits to them as beneficiaries.

Their state of affairs, according to the author, is due to the dullness of the audience in hearing God's word. This is clearly not what the author desires for his audience and he

¹⁰⁹ The expression πολὺς ὁ λόγος (Heb 5:11) is a common literary phrase for 'there is much to say' (e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom* 1.23.1; *1 Amm.* 3; Philo, *Heir* 133, 221; see Lane 1991:136).

¹¹⁰ Buchanan intimates that, '[f]or many sects of Judaism and Christianity there was a certain length of time allowed for moving from one degree of initiation to another. The first step was baptism, which probably required initial training. Then a more extensive and through training was required before full admission' (Buchanan 1972:101).

¹¹¹ Craddock maintains that "milk" and "solid food" were common terms for referring to levels of educational development (Craddock 1998:68). Here milk is an image for "the basic elements of the oracles of God", while solid food is "the word of righteousness" which is the capacity in the believer "to distinguish good from evil."

¹¹² Morris (1991:52) explains that mature people (*teleioi*) 'in the mystery religions were the initiates' but maintains that it is unlikely that 'this is its meaning here.'

¹¹³ 'The term "perfect," according to Buchanan, 'held a wide range of meanings, one of which described a person who was chronologically mature, no longer a minor, an adult, or a married person (*teleioi hoi gegamēkotes*)' (Buchanan 1972:101-102). "Perfect" also described a full member of a sect in good standing. Only those who walked perfectly ... were admitted into the sect of the Rule' (*IQS* 1:8; Buchanan 1972:102).

makes this clear in the statement in which he calls on them (including himself) to leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity. These elementary doctrines are listed as:

- 1) Repentance from dead works (works from which believers had repented)¹¹⁴
- 2) Faith towards God
- 3) Instructions about washings
- 4) The laying on of hands
- 5) The resurrection of the dead
- 6) Eternal judgement

The context, according to Buchanan (1972:103), suggests that these teachings are the earliest Christian teachings to which catechumens were exposed, and therefore would be the beginning teachings about Christ. The progression of the author so far has been one from a recognition of the state of his audience to one of a call to leave that state (Heb 6:1-2). In their current state they are immature, defined in terms of dullness in hearing God's word which leaves them eating milk and not solid food. Now the call is to leave immaturity and move unto maturity with the implication that the audience are no more dull in hearing but more earnest, eating solid food and not milk, digesting higher doctrines other than the elementary ones listed above. It is about these higher doctrines that the author writes, specifically as introduced in Hebrews 5:10 – the high priesthood of Jesus after the order of Melchizedek. But it is more than that; it is about all the benefits the audience has enjoyed from God, the Father of the house, through the agency and instrumentality of the Son and the expected response to this in their current situation.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Buchanan notes, "Dead works" referred to the life Christians had lived before they were baptised into the community. "Dead" described those people who were outside of the covenant, living as other pagans. When a person entered the covenant, he passed from death to life, repented of the work he did as a pagan, and was baptised to cleanse him from this defilement' (Buchanan 1972:103).

¹¹⁵ On the subject that is hard to explain, Morris (1981:51) argues that while the demonstrative "this" is quite general, it might be masculine and so could refer to Melchizedek or Christ. On the whole, it seems best to see a reference here to the way Melchizedek prefigures Christ '(Morris 1981:51). Lane (1991:135-136) explains that '[i]n the expression Περὶ οὗ it seems preferable to consider the relative pronoun οὗ as a neuter, having reference to the priesthood of Christ in its totality (i.e., "about the subject") rather than as a masculine relative, which has for its antecedent "Melchizedek" in Hebrews 5:10 (i.e., "about him." He

The writer gives the response to this invitation since he is part of those who have to respond ('us'). He says we will indeed move on to maturity if God permits (Heb 6:3). In the next verse he appears to be saying, 'yes God has permitted so let's move on' He now begins to teach them the doctrines that the mature should be hearing and digesting. The subject here comes with a tone of caution (warning). He insists that certain people cannot be restored to repentance when they fall away. Such people are those who:

- 1) Once have been enlightened
- 2) Tasted the heavenly gift
- 3) Shared in the Holy Spirit
- 4) Tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come.

The seriousness of such people falling away is premised in the understanding that they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt (Heb 6:4-5). The description of the state of such people is given in an agricultural imagery of a land that has drunk the rain that falls often on it. Instead of bearing a good crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated and receiving blessings in return, it produces thorns and thistles. It is therefore worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned (Heb 6:7-8).

After painting such a gloomy picture of a people, the author says that he had better expectations of the audience. Here, the author gives the impression that the situation just described in the agricultural imagery is hypothetical and does not necessarily apply to his audience. Lane argues for the hypothetical nature of this agricultural imagery, and insists that it does not apply to the audience. However, Morris (1981:56) notes that 'unless the writer is speaking of something that could really happen, it is not a warning about anything. Granted, he does not say that anyone has apostatized in this way, nevertheless, he surely means that someone could, and he does not want his readers

maintains that '[i]t is the whole subject under discussion, and not simply the priesthood like Melchizedek's that requires the skill of the writer and the attention of the community' (Lane 1991:136).

to do so' (Morris 1981:56). Similarly, Craddock argues that the state of affairs must be applicable to some if not all of the members of the group (Craddock 1998:69).¹¹⁶ Compton (1996:142), however, believes that some in the audience had already committed the apostasy the writer is talking about. He argues that in the fourth warning passage, Hebrews 10:26–39, the author warns the readers not 'forsaking' their 'assembling together' (Heb 10:25). In the following verses, he refers to the prohibited activity as a 'sinning wilfully' (Heb 10:26), and identifies the consequence as the wrath of God which is meted out against his 'enemies' (Heb 10:27). Since the two warning passages are parallel, it is assumed that the warning in Hebrews 6:6 about 'falling away' is parallel to the forsaking' in Hebrews 10:25 and 'sinning wilfully' in Hebrews 10:26. Since this forsaking is already the habit of some (Heb 10:25), the warning about apostasy in Hebrews 6 is in direct response to certain ones (Compton 1996:142). The position of Lane is that the author is using irony to summon his audience to resume their status as adults and its corresponding responsibilities. We may conclude that if some of the members had left the group then they were no more part of the recipients of Hebrews, hence the address that is applicable to them is not applicable to the audience. The fact that some actually had left the group meant that there was the possibility of others going in the same direction, a possibility that gives the author the concern for which he writes to his audience. For the author's words to be relevant to his audience as warning or exhortation, it must apply to them at least by way of a situation to be avoided. This is in line with the observations made of the similarity between the audience and the wilderness generation in the second warning passage. The author reminded them that the word of God came to both groups, but that the wilderness generation did not meet this word with faith. The author has no doubt that if his audience do not mix the word of Christ with faith, the fate of the wilderness generation could befall them as well. Also in the third warning passage a similar caution is given.

¹¹⁶ Craddock (1998:69) argues that '[g]iven earlier warnings about neglect, drifting, inattention, hardening, and falling short, Hebrews 5:11-14 must be taken as reflecting a real malaise among some if not all the members of the church being addressed. A lethargy has overtaken a community once healthy, active, and courageous' (6:9-11; 10:23-36). Morris (1981:51) concludes similarly when he notes that this is an acquired state, not a natural one. He maintains that '[t]he readers ... were not naturally slow learners, but had allowed themselves to get lazy' (Morris 1998:51).

The emotive language the author uses is worth noting here: ‘Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things – things that belong to salvation’ (Heb 6:9). The readers are beloved to him and he feels sure of better things in their case. The words of the author here, whether they are warning or exhortation, should be seen as stemming from his love and affection for them. The author appears to locate his basis for his assurance of better things that belong to salvation in two things – God’s faithfulness, and the good work and love of the audience for God’s name (Heb 6:10). His use of γὰρ (for) makes this clear. Their good work and the love they have shown for God’s name is expressed in service to the saints, something they still do. It is this that gives meaning to the author’s desire that each one of them show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end (Heb 6:11). This, for the author, will produce a situation in which they would no longer be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Heb 6:12).

At this point the author turns attention to the trustworthiness of God, which is one of the cardinal basis of his assurance of better things felt about the audience. From Hebrews 6:13-20 the author demonstrates God’s faithfulness with his promises to Abraham as the case in point. When God promised to bless and multiply Abraham, he did it after Abraham had waited patiently for it. In making this promise, God swore by himself since he had no one greater by whom to swear. The oath, for the author, was to show convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of God’s purpose. This is because in all their disputes an oath is a final confirmation for people (Heb 6:16-17). The effect is that the believers who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before them in two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie (Heb 6:18). The two unchangeable things recall God’s promise and his oath that confirmed it. This is a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul of the believers, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain (Heb 6:19). This is the place where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on their behalf after becoming a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 6:20).

6.2.3.1 The group's experience of the Father's provision

Throughout Hebrews the author finds the recipients' experience of the goodness of God as an important basis for calling on them to give the appropriate response to God. In this section, the author recalls their experience of some of the benefits of God as basis for such a call. DeSilva (2012:117) finds Hebrews 6:4-6 articulating a scenario involving patron-client roles and expectations. God is the patron and the audience are the beneficiaries of the patron's benefaction. In the previous section, where we dealt with Hebrews 2:11-3:19, God was identified as the Father of the house (the audience) over which Jesus is the Son. This family image of the relationship between the audience and God should not be lost here since the author is building his argument cumulatively. The things presented in the hypothetical statement of Hebrews 6:4-6, which apply to the audience, are explained as benefits the people of God's house have enjoyed from God, their Father.¹¹⁷ As DeSilva (2012:119) notes, '[t]he author presents this group of people as those who have received God's gifts, who have been benefitted by God's generosity.' DeSilva notes the use of the rhetorical device of 'accumulation' which serves to impress God's goodness towards the readers over and over again (DeSilva 2012:119-120). The things listed in Hebrews 6:4-5 are certainly better things that the audience had experienced; but the author also had in mind the certainty of God's promises and the role of their high priest (Heb 6:9, 13-20).

Firstly, the audience are those who have been enlightened. Cockerill (2012:269) takes 'those who have been enlightened' as a reference to conversion. He notes that 'Ephesians 1:18 speaks of spiritual enlightenment, and that the term was used in the second century as a description of baptism' (Cockerill 2012:269). Buchanan (1972:106) understands enlightenment as frequently used for instruction with reference to the illumination it brings.¹¹⁸ For DeSilva (2012:119) 'enlightenment' ... is 'a common term in Christian culture for reception of the Christian gospel and its positive effects (see Jn 1:9;

¹¹⁷ Hawthorne (1979:1515) notes that '[t]he things listed here by the writer to describe the 'fallen' are most certainly things which characterise all true Christians.'

¹¹⁸ Buchanan calls attention to the use of enlightenment for instruction so that teachers are 'those who make shine' (Dn 12:3) and those instructed are 'children of light.' (1QM and 1QS). Justin Martyr is said to have referred to baptism as illumination the accompanying lessons illuminated the minds of adherents (Apol 1.61, 65 and Dial 122; Buchanan 1972:106).

1 Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 4:4-6; Eph 1:18; 2 Tim 1:10; 1 Pet 2:9; 2 Pet 1:10), implying a distinct advantage over those who remain “in the dark” about the requirements of God and the future of the world’ (DeSilva 2012:119).

Secondly, they have tasted the heavenly gift. For DeSilva (2012:119) the exact content of this gift is elusive.¹¹⁹ Buchanan (1972:106) explains that the ‘heavenly gift’ may have been ‘the common meal,’ sometimes called the ‘holy meal’ (*sanctus*) to which sectarians were admitted as a final step of initiation (Buchanan 1972:106). He, however, notes that ‘tasted’ is used metaphorically in Hebrews 6:5 to mean ‘sampled’ or ‘had been introduced to,’ as Josephus used it in reference to those who had once tested (*J.W.* 1.158) the Essene philosophy (see also Ps 34:8; 119:103; Job 34:3; 1 Pt 2:3; Matt 16:28; Buchanan 1972:106). Johnson (2006:152) maintains that ‘[t]he use of the word ‘taste’ (*geuomai*) for “the heavenly gift” and “the noble word of God” does not suggest the Eucharist or other cultic meal; rather, as in Hebrews 2:9; “taste” means simply to experience’ (see also Compton 1996:149). The phrase ‘taste the heavenly gift (δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου),’ therefore, may well be another way to say, ‘enlightened/baptised’ (Johnson 2006:152). The same is true of ‘become partakers of the Holy Spirit (μετόχους πνεύματος ἁγίου).’ It can be lined up next to ‘partakers in a heavenly calling’ (κλήσεως ἐπουρανίου μέτοχοι, Heb 3:1; Johnson 2006:162). Johnson notes that participation in the life and power given by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2:4) – which is surely a “heavenly gift” – is commonly associated with baptism and the laying on of hands in early Christianity (see Jn 3:8; Matt 28:19; Ac 2:38; 8:18; 10:44-47; 19:6; Gl 4:6; Eph 1:13; Johnson 2006:163).’ Hawthorne argues that if Christ is this gift from above (cf. Jn 4:10; Rom 5:15; 8:32), and if ‘tasted’ means to have ‘experienced’ or ‘come to know’ in the fullest sense, then ‘grace and divine life procured by Christ’ are in view here (Hawthorne 1979:1515).

¹¹⁹ DeSilva (2012:119) observes that ‘the exact content of “the heavenly gift” is elusive, but which takes us directly into the social intertexture of patron-client scripts.’ The author, for DeSilva, was setting up certain expectations concerning their response.

Thirdly, they are said to have shared in the Holy Spirit. DeSilva (2012:119-120) identifies this as 'one of the principal benefactions lavished on the early Church.'¹²⁰ For Hawthorne (1979:1515), this points to the fact that 'these may have been recipients of the Holy Spirit much the same as were the disciples of Jesus when he breathed on them (Jn 20:22), or the Samaritans when the apostles laid their hands on them (Ac 8:17) – recipients of the essence of the Christian life' (Rom 8:9b). A connection is identified between the powers of the age to come and sharing of the Holy Spirit as well as the miracles associated with the preaching of the Gospel (Mathewson 1999:219). Hawthorne (1979:1516) sees this as a sign of the nearness or presence of the messiah (Ac 2:11-12). Compton (1996:153) finds the powers of the age to come as a reference to salvation or the miracles that confirmed the preaching of the early church. Buchanan (1972:106) maintains that 'associated with membership initiation was the reception of the Holy Spirit, which occurred whether at baptism or later, perhaps when new members had the hands of full members laid upon them. At that time they became "sharers of the Holy Spirit".

Fourthly they have tasted 'the goodness of the word of God.' Buchanan (1972:106) holds that tasted the goodness of the word of God 'refers to God's favourable promises.' He calls attention to the fact that after God had 'given rest on every side' to the Jews when they had possessed the land, it was said that 'not one word fell from the good words(s) which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel (Jos 21:44-45; cf. Jos 23:14-15; Buchanan 1972:106).' Buchanan finds the readers in a similar situation in which they too 'had only tasted' but were yet to enter the promised rest. So that he finds the author of Hebrews urging the readers not to make the mistake of the wilderness generation One would want to argue that the goodness of the word of God should be understood in terms of the blessings the gospel brings to those who believe it. In this way it encompasses all blessings ensuing from believing the gospel of Christ. This position is based on the conclusion that the verb 'taste' is to be taken in terms of one's

¹²⁰ They have 'become sharers of the Holy Spirit,' for him, reflects the benefits the readers had enjoyed from God as their benefactor (Gl 3:1-5; 4:1-7; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Jn 14:15-17; 16:13-15; Ac 10:44-48; 11:15-18; DeSilva 2012:119-120).

experience of something. The caution raised by Johnson is important here. He warns that '[t]he struggle to find definite answers to the puzzles provided by these allusive lists is, to be sure, a distraction' (Johnson 2006:163). He is of the view that the list is to emphasise the greatness of the experience of the people in the things of God. He argues that '[t]he main point is perfectly straightforward: the enormity of apostasy is measured by the greatness of the experience of God it abandons' (Johnson 2006:163). This explains the singularity of repentance the author of Hebrews speaks about (Johnson 2006:163).

In a nutshell, the experience of the people of God's provisions described in the expressions above can hardly refer to favours distinct from each other as the discussion has shown. Johnson (2006:162-163) cautions that the 'author is manifestly fond of mixing and matching his characterizations and thereby resists our efforts at an overly precise determination.' One may conclude that these benefits are favours received when the believers received the gospel and experienced the miracles and signs that accompanied the preaching of the gospel. It is also clear that they all relate to salvation, things of which the author described as better things, and the promises of God which had given them their initial hope. It was of this hope that they have been confident and boasted initially as noted in the discussion of the second warning passage. The writer, as observed earlier, has in mind a matter of grace and divine life procured by Christ and enjoyed fully by the Christian in so far as this list of benefits is concerned (Hawthorne 1979:1515). If such is the greatness of the favours God has bestowed on his household, what kind and level of response does he deserve from the members of his house?

6.2.3.2 Discerning good and evil as beneficiaries of the Father's goodness

The author's disappointment with the audience is not simply with the fact that they still need someone to teach them though by now they should have become teachers. The author is particularly concerned that they should have become mature, showing by now that they can discern good and evil. Buchanan finds the same thing being expressed in knowing 'good and evil,' being 'perfect' or having 'their perceptions' adequately 'trained' (Buchanan 1972:103). Good and evil here refers to how the believers are to act in

response to God's goodness and promises which are sure. The appropriate response means that they know how to discern good from evil. But for now, the author has some concerns. In the theory on personality we noted that one feature of the Mediterranean society is the obligation to return favour (reciprocity), an obligation that defines right conduct.¹²¹ The author's concern for the right response to God's goodness and promises finds several expressions in this section. 'The word of righteousness' as knowing what God expects of his people also speaks to this. Those who are well instructed must know how they ought to behave in response to God's benefits.¹²²

For DeSilva (2012:117), the analogy in Hebrews 6:7-8 implies that, whereas those who receive the gifts and give appropriate response are like the land that has received rain and cultivation and has produced the expected crop, those who receive the gift and fail to give the appropriate response are like a land that has received rain and cultivation but has not borne the appropriate crop. While the latter is blessed, the former is cursed and burnt (DeSilva 2012:117-118). For DeSilva (2012:121) an inappropriate response is 'the product of a value judgement that sets more store in society's friendship than God's beneficence' (DeSilva 2012:121). Other than that, '[t]hose who have enjoyed these very great privileges, gifts, and promises – who have been granted every incentive and resource to remain connected with the giver of such gifts – should never "fall away"' (Heb 6:6; DeSilva 2012:120). DeSilva concludes that in the face of 'God's bountiful and persistent cultivation of these recipients,' 'the response of a crop of gratitude (honouring God, serving God, standing up for God's name)' becomes 'all the more pressing – and amplifies the disgrace and injustice of disrupting the dance of grace that God's generosity has initiated' (DeSilva 2012:120).¹²³

¹²¹ Receiving something from somebody in the ancient Mediterranean world obliged the receiver to respond accordingly and fittingly towards the giver (Van der Watt 2000:167-168).

¹²² Buchanan intimates that the *Shepherd of Hermas* listed among the most important deeds a Christian should always do 'words of righteousness' (ῥήματα δικαιοσύνης, *Mand* 8:9; Buchanan 1972:101).

¹²³ DeSilva calls attention to Seneca who wrote that 'an ingrate might not be punished by law, but he or she will certainly be punished by the public court of opinion and by his own awareness of being branded as ungrateful (*Ben.* 3.17. 1-2)' (DeSilva 2012:121). Dio Chrysostom, 'Just as a person refuses to have dealings twice with a dishonest merchant, or to entrust a second deposit to someone who has lost the first one, so, Chrysostom claims, the person who acts ungratefully should expect to be excluded from future favors' (*Or.* 31.38.65; DeSilva 2012:122).

The expected response to God's goodness and promises, according to the author, is for the members to have full assurance of hope that would make them wait for the final revelation of what they had hoped for (Heb 6:11). Failure to do that would be contemptuous to the goodness of God and his trustworthiness. In respect of *plērophorian* and *elpis* (Heb 6:11), views are divided. While some think of having the full assurance of hope till the end as in the ESV, others like Buchanan (1972:114) and Johnson (2006:167) think the writer was urging the audience to show forth zeal for the fulfilment of what they hope for. Though Buchanan and Johnson sound very convincing, it should be noted that if the lack of zeal of the audience concerning the hope is due to the waning of their confidence, then the full assurance of their hope, which relates to their mental state is what the author is urging. The certainty of God's promises given in Hebrews 6:13-20 gives credence to this view. The effect is to say that the promises of God are sure so you can continue to have full confidence in it.

The weight and seriousness of an inappropriate response is also presented in the imagery of crucifying Christ all over again. Cockerill (2012:274) explains that '[t]heir blatant disloyalty is like crucifixion in that it holds Christ 'up' and exposes him to the public shame deserved by none but the worst criminal.' He contends that those who abandon Christ out of shame expose him to greater shame (Cockerill 2012:274-275). He notes that '[h]is language is all the more forceful because the author does not speak of crucifixion elsewhere in this sermon' (Cockerill 2012:275). The impossibility of the restoration of the apostate is found in the 'the magnitude of the salvation they have rejected and the finality of their rejection' (Cockerill 2012:275). 'They have definitively turned from God's final, once-for all, provision in Christ which was the climax of all that God had previously done' (Cockerill 2012:275).

Failure to keep faithfulness with the giver of the good things is serious in so far as it implies apostasy. The problem here is that once this faithfulness is broken, it is not possible to restore it (Heb 6:6). The difficulty of this verdict has endured till date.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ DeSilva (2012:118) contends that it is inappropriate, '[o]n this basis alone, to force theological categories of contemporary (Protestant) interest – are these people "save" or "not yet save"? – unto the

Bowman (1962:43), while maintaining that the expression could be a hypothetical one meant to be used as a warning, also sees the impossibility of repentance in the enormity of the act of crucifying no other person than the Son of God. But the tense used in the warning makes the puzzle simple for Bowman: 'The tense of the Greek verb here suggests that, "as long as men crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt," they are not in a condition to repent' (Bowman 1962:43). If the latter view is taken, then it is the continuing state of breaking faithfulness with God that makes repentance impossible and not the impossibility of repentance itself after breaking away. Theologically this appears sound and in conformity with the position held by many New Testament writers in which a second chance is possible after acts of apostasy. The social script of the Mediterranean world, however, shows that no second chance can be expected of one who holds his benefactor to public ridicule. DeSilva (2012:121) finds the reason for the impossibility of repentance in the rejection 'of God's gifts and promises,' which amounts to 'insult to' and 'disgrace upon their benefactor.'¹²⁵ Johnson (2006:161) notes that it is the 'extraordinary character of the gift received and the cost to Christ of its giving' that makes apostasy so devastating.

One may conclude that the last thing the author expects of his audience is a withdrawal from the faith in any form at all. The absolute nature of any withdrawal with absolute punishment of burning is intended to make any withdrawal an unlikely consideration for the audience. This is the case because the author, rather than addressing apostates, was addressing an audience who had so far kept faith with the Lord. The question that should be of interest to us at this point is this: Had the author met a large number of this group who had fallen away, would he make any attempt to address them? If he would, what would he say? Such questions belong to a new research altogether. But for now,

textt rather than allow the author to determine how we categorise the people to whom he refers in this hypothetical argument (hypothetical, because the author himself affirms in Heb 6:9 that it does not apply to the addressees themselves, at least not for the present)' (DeSilva 2012:118-119).

¹²⁵ Johnson (2006:161) maintains that '[t]heir rejection of the gift won by his death is equivalent to participating in his state execution. They also "mock" (*pardeigmatizein*) him. The verb is used outside the New Testament precisely for a shameful exposure through public hanging (see Nm 25:4; Ezk 28:17; 3 Macc 7:14; Plutarch, *On Curiosity* 10 [Mor 520B];' Johnson 2006:161).

any form of withdrawal is as serious as a land bearing thorns and thistles in response to cultivation and worthy of curses and burning.

6.2.3.3 The reliability of God and the love of the audience as basis for feeling better things

The author's expression of confidence in better things that belong to salvation for his audience is premised on two things, namely the trustworthiness of God and the demonstrated work and love of his audience for God's name for which God will reward them (Heb 6:10).¹²⁶ The author's call on them to continue to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end is only logical to what he acknowledges of them. They have done it before and they must continue to do it. What they are expected to do as mature members of the group they have already demonstrated. They are therefore, mature and capable. They only need to continue in the same vein.

Buchanan (1972:112) observes that 'numerous biblical references show that love was very closely related to work, serving, giving, being responsible, and providing.' He notes that 'the importance of "love" in early Christian communities was its relationship to "work", which could be "demonstrated for his name" (Buchanan 1972:112). Cockerill (2012:821) understands their 'work' to 'encompasses the full scope of their past faithful conduct' (cf. Heb 10:32-34; Cockerill 2012:281). As they served other believers some of whom were in prison, they 'demonstrated their love for God' (Heb 10:33-34; Cockerill 2012:281). The fact that the present condition of the audience is one in which they still show good signs of the expectations desired of them is important to the author.

Cockerill (2012:821) argues that 'the use of both aorist and present participles' (Heb 6:10) 'makes it plain that their past demonstration of love continues into the present' (Cockerill 2012:281). For Cockerill, the acknowledgement of their love was the author's way of affirming the sincerity of their faith (Cockerill 2012:281-282). If what the author is urging them to do is what they have already been doing, and if this is the behaviour

¹²⁶ Cockerill holds that the author's 'confidence is founded on two of his favourite themes: the faithfulness of God and the corresponding faithfulness due from God's people' (Cockerill 2012:281).

expected of the mature, then the statement about their immaturity is indeed hypothetical and ironic and must have been intended to awaken a fresh sense of their maturity and the responsibilities that go with that status.

Essentially, then, the author is not concerned about what the audience is not doing here. His concern is about their continuing to do what they are doing. The author sees the tendency for them to abandon their good works and their love for his name which gives him grave concerns. In this tendency to abandon their good works, the cause, for the author, is a weakening of their confidence in their hope. It is therefore important that the author tries to build this confidence in their hope by calling their attention to the trustworthiness of God. As Cockerill (2012:284) comments, 'if the hearers would persevere through 'faith and patience' they must be assured that the promises undergirding their faith are valid.' This is precisely what he finds the author to be doing (Cockerill 2012:284). With the promise God made to Abraham, the author tries to establish the reliability of God's promises. God promised Abraham and reinforced the promise with an oath (Heb 6:13:14) at the centre of which was God's own proven unchangeable character of trustworthiness. Moreover, the promise was fulfilled (Heb 6:15). The certainty of God's promises demonstrated this way should provide the audience the full assurance to hold fast their own hope as people who have fled for refuge in the Lord. What is more, Jesus, has gone ahead as high priest and forerunner into the place where he works to ensure that all God has promised comes to pass for those who hold their confidence to the end. Moreover, this high priest and forerunner helps the believers in their weakness with the grace and mercy needed to hold on to the end.

6.2.3.4 Social identity issues

The seriousness of members of the Christian group falling away from the group can be better appreciated within the social script of the ancient Mediterranean society. The damage such actions of falling away do to the affected group's image and fortunes is enormous. The author of Hebrews knew this impact so well and this explains in part the urgency with which he addresses the situation. DeSilva (2012:16) makes this

observation when he noted that the author's 'principal aim is to strengthen commitment to the Christian group among those who are wavering, who might themselves be moving toward defection (thus eroding the Christian plausibility structure further, and jeopardizing exponentially the commitment of those who remain thereafter).' The reason for this state of affairs is that in such social mobility, people usually leave the group with lower status and join the one perceived to be higher in status or power (see Esler 1998:50). In this wise, the movement alone tells a negative story about the group left and a positive one about the group now to be joined. No leader of a group would therefore take kindly to any tendency on the part of members of his group to move out. In the case of the author of Hebrews, the implication for the audience who are beloved to him are too expensive for him to do nothing since moving out of the Christian group means the loss of all the benefits they share in Christ beside the damage to the image of the benefactor.

6.2.3.4.1 Control of members' behaviour

That the achievement of group goals that seeks to improve the position of one's group drives the behaviour of people in collectivist cultures has been observed (Malina 1996:47; see also Burnett 2001:48; Hartin 2009:22). This determination of people's behaviour by group goals comes with responsibilities that are not left in the hands of the individual alone. The group as a corporate body has a responsibility to ensure that members' behaviour are in line with group goals. Group leaders in particular would do all in their means to ensure this. Esler (1998:51) notes that '[g]roups often exert pressure on members to prevent members from leaving' their group (see also Van Knippenberg 1984:561). In Hebrews, the author's warnings to his audience should be seen in line with such moves. His warning to the audience in this section becomes urgent in the face of the grave effect their moving out of the group would have on the Christian group. Withdrawal from the Christian group would seriously jeopardise rather than improve their group's position in that competitive society. It is like crucifying Christ again and holding him up to public ridicule, an apt description of the damage to the public image of the Christian group and the honour of its head. Conversely, their

continued allegiance to the group would be an expression of honour to the head and improvement of the position of the group in the society.

6.2.3.4.2 The call to right response for God's investment

In Hebrews the idea that the audience belong to God is captured in a number of images. In this particular instance the audience is identified as the field on which God has made rain fall often. God is the owner who cultivates the land and waters it in expectation of a good crop yield. The expected yield of crops would be to the pleasure of God (the owner) and bring blessing to the land (the audience). The audience are supposed to see themselves as God's possession and investment in this way. Their affiliation to God's group becomes important in the sense that the group to which one belongs is crucial for how one perceives oneself and is perceived by others in the Mediterranean society. This description of a land that receives the rain that falls on it often is hardly a description of the readers but fits the wilderness generation. Its use here is to help the readers see themselves as God's investment and to caution them against the attitude depicted in the description. But the description also serves another purpose by way of contrast in defining the identity of the readers.

6.2.3.4.3 Living in line with the image of their social identity

The author attempts to define the social identity of his audience is by using language and names that contrasts them with others. In this use of language and names the author sets the audience above the objects of comparison and presents them as more privileged. The author speaks of a people who have shown contempt to God after tasting all his blessings. They are described as a land that has received all the needed cultivation and yet yielded thorns and thistles. The author positively contrasts his audience with the people he had described. He feels better things in the case of his audience, things that belong to salvation (Heb 6:9) – things they have as God's people. Mathewson (1999) has argued extensively that the wilderness generation of the second warning passage lies in the background of this third warning passage. If this is accepted, the wilderness generation would still be the object of contrast here. But to understand the situation only in terms like this is to fail to appreciate the social context

of the text. As DeSilva (2012) argues, the contest is between the plausible structures of the various groups to which people belonged and among which competitive relationships existed. In Hebrews, any comparison of contrast between the audience and others, no matter the imagery in which it is presented, should be seen as a comparison in which the plausible structures of the Christian group is set as better over all other relevant plausible structures of the society. In this light, it is only the Christian group that is seen to be responsive to God's investment in a fruitful manner. All the others, just like the Jews and non-Jews in the Christian group, have been given the same opportunity to respond to Christ, God's final word to the world. But all the others have made useless this God-given opportunity. But the Christian group is not like them. Of the Christian group, the author feels confident of better things that belong to salvation. And God is just to take into account their good work and reward them appropriately. In all these, the author, by implication, was urging the readers not to behave like people of their outgroups but as people depicted in the various expressions used to describe them.

6.2.3.4.4 Appeal to shared historical memory

One of the strategies of encouraging group behaviour is an appeal to good historical examples of the group that heightens their group identity and encourage group-oriented behaviour. An important feature of ethnicity in the Mediterranean world was shared historical memories (Duling 2010:75). Here in Hebrews, the author recalls their shared historical experience to reinforce their group identity as people who belong to God with obligations to the group in ministry to one another. The members are people who have demonstrated their love in the service of the saints in the past for which God will reward them. They are people who give the right response to God for his goodness. This is what is required of people who have been instructed in the word of righteousness, knowing good and evil. As allocentric persons in a Mediterranean society, what has been said about the audience is important for understanding who they are. It is important to note that the group images used by the writer are usually not one in which the audience are free to leave the group. The relationship between God and the audience in these images are one of involuntary choice on the part of the audience. It

can be likened to the kind of relationship one has with the head of a kinship group into which one is born. The members simply come to enjoy the benefits of good name and resources of the group (ascribed honour) and show gratitude for it in appropriate ways. In the imagery of the land as representing the audience and God as the owner who cultivates that land as well as the household imagery, once the audience has come to believe in the gospel and joined the Christian group, they have become God's land of investment and God's house, they have all his benefits and cannot cease to be his own. That is why apostasy can be serious as a sin. It is like breaking away from a family into which one is born and nurtured where ascribed honour has been mutually enjoyed with pride within strong family ties on which members counted for joy, support and strength. It is like a land which fails to respond to careful cultivation and bears thorns. It has no excuse! Closely connected to this is the patron-client relationship between God and the audience with their respective roles and responsibilities in terms of reciprocity. With careful expressions the author establishes the great extent God has gone in his benefaction to the audience for which a response of gratitude, loyalty and honour is required of the audience. Since the audience know the right conduct under such social contract and have demonstrated such response in the past, the author is confident that they will continue to do what is right in their response to God's benefaction.

6.2.3.4.5 Appeal to personality

We are reminded that '[t]he expectation or exhortation addressed to a person to live up to the proved excellence of his character is a very common topic, especially in personal letters and in recommendations for people seeking help.' Some of the expressions used are: '[b]e the person people think you are!' or '[b]e as you are known' (Goitein 1998:189)! In recalling the past behaviour of the audience, the writer of Hebrews was not only praising them but was urging them to maintain such proven excellence of character, which is the expected characteristic of the Christian group. In this also we find a strategy of sampling their collective selves as members of the Christian group. The audience are reminded of their love and works for the benefit of the saints (other members of the group). Here they were not just being reminded of what they have done before – what they have done before should be instructive when it comes to how they should behave now. In effect they are

being told to remember who they are as members of the Christian group and to act accordingly in their proven character.

6.2.3.5 Summary

In summary, the third warning passage has shown that though the author had concerns about the tendency of his audience to fall away, he ends up showing confidence and hopeful expectations of them as people who can live up to expectation. The audience have done it all before. They bore the right fruits as a land that has not received the rain that falls often on it in vain. They have been enlightened, they have tasted the heavenly gift, they have shared in the Holy Spirit, they have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come. Now they have proven to be worthy recipients of the goodness of God in the love they have shown for his name and in serving the saints as they still do. In these they are behaving appropriately as clients who have enjoyed great benefaction from God their benefactor. Once they are still doing all that, they should not waver. They should show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end. The author is not denying that times are hard; it was actually in similar hard times that the audience did all for which they are commended now. So now the way to continue in this positive response is to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. It was God's faithfulness and the unchanging character of his promises that made it all possible for people like Abraham to patiently wait and possess the promise. The same faithfulness of God and the unchangeable nature of his promises are available to the audience. Moreover, Christ has gone ahead of them as forerunner and high priest to offer them help so that they are able to obtain the promises. They should therefore hold onto their faith to the end.

One can conclude that though we speak of warning here, the author preoccupies himself with words of encouragement which provide the audience with the positive reinforcement they need to hold on to the end. Though he uses strong words of warning at some points, he nonetheless shows that sometimes soft words of encouragements work even better. In making his point, the author does not forget strategies that enhance the social identity of his audience as well as strategies that promote the pursuance of

group goals and positive evaluation of the Christian group. In the end, it is the privileged position they occupy as a group of people belonging to God in a competitive society that should give them full confidence to hold on to their hope to the end.

6.2.4 Warning passage 4: Warning to enlightened members of god's house against falling into the hands of the living God (Heb 9:11-10:39)

In Hebrews 9:11-14 the author speaks of Christ's sacrifice of which the scene is set in Hebrews 9:1-10. As Craddock (1998:106) observes, '[t]he place is the holy of holies, the sole liturgist is the high priest, the central act is the sprinkling of blood on the seat of mercy, and the time is the Day of Atonement.' In Hebrews 9:1-10, the author merely describes the scene and the regulations regarding the earthly sacrifices in the tabernacle which he uses as his basis for presenting Christ's sacrifice as much more superior. The author does not simply describe what Christ did in his sacrificial work. His use of παραγενόμενος (having appeared) creates the mental image of one who presents himself publicly for action, probably, of contest. His action comes after the description of the earthly mediation of the Levitical order so that what Christ presents becomes better forms of what had been there. Christ appears as a high priest of the good things that would come, entered into the holy places by his own blood, not with that of goats and calves, securing eternal redemption (Heb 9:11-12). The author speaks of the efficacy of the sacrifices made with goats, bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer as sanctifying for the purification of the flesh (Heb 9:13). This is the first part of his *a fortiori* statement which ends with: 'how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God' (Heb 9:14; cf. 9:9-10). It is because of this (διὰ τοῦτο) that Jesus has become the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, and this on account of a death that has occurred to redeem them from transgressions committed under the first covenant (Heb 9:16). For the author, Christ becomes the mediator of a new covenant on account of his achievement, namely, being able to effect the purification of our conscience from dead works to serve the living God through the offering of himself without blemish to God through the eternal Spirit. That is to say his

appointment as mediator results from his exceptional accomplishment of his sacrifice. A connection between the new covenant and the sacrifice of Christ is made in Hebrews 9:15. It is observed that 'whereas an atonement sacrifice deals with past sins, a covenant sacrifice inaugurates a permanent arrangement for the future' (Lindars 1991:95). He maintains that '[o]nce a covenant has been solemnly inaugurated with the sanctions of a sacrifice, it can be expected to remain in force' (Lindars 1991:95). The author of Hebrews establishes the necessity of death for a will to take effect (Heb 9:17) as well as the necessity of blood for cleansing and forgiveness of sins (Heb 9:18-22; cf. Heb 9:7). While it is necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with animal sacrifices, the heavenly things themselves are purified with better sacrifices. Christ's sacrifice pertains to heavenly things; hence he entered not into holy places made with hands (copies of the true things) but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on behalf of believers (Heb 9:23-24). For the same reason of pertaining to heavenly and better things, Christ does not have to offer himself repeatedly as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not of his own. Rather, Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Heb 9:25, 26). Johnson (2006:344) notes that the author uses the word 'many times' (πολλάκις) to draw attention to the contrast between repetition and singularity. 'Anyone sharing a Platonic worldview would immediately grasp that the one is superior to the many' (see Heb 10:11; Johnson 2006:244).¹²⁷ Now just as it is appointed for man to die once and after that comes judgement, so Christ, after he has been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin again but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (Heb 9:27, 28).

The author now speaks about the ineffectiveness of the law as having a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities.¹²⁸ He argues that the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year cannot make perfect those who

¹²⁷ 'The purpose of this language' according to Johnson, 'is to assert that the cult based on the law was only the shadow and not the reality, and therefore was not efficacious' – an understanding that is of the author, not the Torah (see Johnson 2006:249).

¹²⁸ The future of the expression 'the good things to come' (Heb 10:1) makes sense in the time when the promise was made. It is the same as the 'good things that have come' (cf. Heb 9:11).

draw near. That is why they are repeatedly offered and the worshippers continue to have consciousness of sin with a constant reminder of sin every year. This is because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb 10:1-4). By making Jesus speak the words of Psalm 40:6-8,¹²⁹ the author indicates that God is not pleased with sacrifices and offerings (Heb 10:5-7). The author's replacement of the phrase 'but you have given me an open ear' with 'but a body you have prepared for me' enables him to lay the foundation for his claim of God's preference for Christ's sacrifice made with his body. The statement '[b]ehold, I have come to do your will O God, as it is written in the scroll of the book,' serves to emphasise this preference of God for Christ's sacrifice (Heb 10:8-9). To clarify the issue the author explains, '[he] does away with the first in order to establish the second (Heb 10:9b) so that believers have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all' (Heb 10:10). The priests have to daily stand to offer repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins, but Christ has offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins after which he sat down at the right hand of God (Heb 10:11-12). What he does now is to wait until his enemies are made a footstool for his feet because by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified (Heb 10:13-14). The Holy Spirit also testifies about those who are being saved by declaring '[t]his is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds'¹³⁰ (Heb 10:16). The difference here is one of the material (laws on tablets) and the spiritual (laws on their hearts), indicating not only the efficacy of the new covenant but also its superiority. The Holy Spirit again declares with the words of Jeremiah 31:34, 'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more' (Heb 10:17). With these words the Holy Spirit testifies to the efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ as being able to completely remove sin. The conclusion of the author on this is that once forgiveness of sins is achieved, there is no longer any offering for sin (Heb 10:18).

¹²⁹ The text of Psalm 40:6-8 reads: '[i]n sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."'

¹³⁰ The text which is presented as the Holy Spirit's testimony is Jeremiah 31:33: 'For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'

This exposition in Hebrews 9:11-10:18 is the immediate theological basis for the author's exhortation and warning in Hebrews 10:19-39).

The picture the author paints of Christ and his sacrifice before the warning and exhortation is one of a victor in his mission cast in a contest. After appearing gallantly fully aware of the ineffectiveness of the sacrifices and covenant of the law, Jesus not only declares God's preference for a body which God had prepared for him, but also goes ahead to do God's will with that body. He succeeds in achieving God's will by offering himself, replacing the repeated sacrifices with a once for all sacrifice, the one that cleanses only the body with the one that cleanses the conscience so that worshippers can approach God. After this gallant performance, God gives his approval of him and honours him for his victory by giving him a place at his right hand. The gallant entrance and victory of Jesus in the contest of mediating God's presence to worshippers through sacrifice becomes the basis of the author's call for confidence in approaching God within which the warning and exhortation are given.

Attention is called to ἀδελφοί (brothers, Heb 10:19) which is 'sparingly used in Hebrews' and 'functions both as a discourse marker, calling attention to a major turn in the argument' within which the warning of Hebrews 10:26-31 is set, and having 'an appeal to the distinctive solidarity of Christians' (Ellingworth 1993:517). The writer believes that by this time he has established enough bases for the confidence of his audience in the sacrifice of Christ. Consequently, he urges them to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus by the new and living way that Christ opened for them through the curtain, that is, through his flesh (Heb 10:19-20). This confidence is premised on the fact that they have a great priest over the house of God (Heb 10:21), and because their hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience. Further, their bodies are washed with pure water, therefore they should draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith (Heb 10:21-22).¹³¹ With this privilege, what the audience need to do is to hold fast the confession of their hope without wavering because He who promised is faithful. In

¹³¹ Brown (2002:63) argues that 'having your bodies washed with pure water' is an allusion to Christian baptism.

addition to this, they should consider how to stir up one another to love and good works (Heb 10:23-24). To facilitate what they need to do, they should not neglect to meet together as some of them have already done, but they should encourage one another and even more as they see the day of judgment drawing near (Heb 10:25). In exhorting the audience to all good acts here, the author has his eyes on a danger which they can only avoid by doing those acts to which they are exhorted. The principle appears to be 'if you fail to do the good, you will fall prey to doing the evil.' In Hebrews 10:19-25 the author spells out what the believers ought to do by taking advantage of the privileges offered them by the victorious achievement of Christ in the contest of mediating God's presence to worshippers. They are to draw near with a true heart in confidence and full assurance of faith, counting on the faithfulness of the one who has promised. As they hold on to their hope, it should make them stir up one another to love and good works. Living by the words of the exhortation is the way to avoid the possible danger the author fears.

In the assessment of the author, the danger is to go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth in which case there remains no longer a sacrifice for sins (Heb 10:26). While others try to understand this in the light of passages that speak of intentional sins (for which no sacrifices are available) and unintentional sins (for which sacrifices are available, see Johnson 2006:261-262),¹³² Cockerill (2012:484) argues that the distinction made by Hebrews must be understood within the context of the author's argument rather than as an unadapted derivation from another source. The author is speaking of that laxity, drifting, and neglect of both spiritual things (Heb 2:1, 3; 5:11-6:1; 6:12) and the Christian community (Heb 3:12-13) about which he has been warning his hearers from the beginning (Cockerill 2012:484). Wiersbe (2001:316) argues that this 'exhortation is not dealing with one particular act of sin, but with an attitude that leads to repeated disobedience.' He notes that '[t]he tense of the verb indicates that Hebrews 10:26 should read, "[f]or if we wilfully go on sinning"' (Wiersbe 2001:316). But looking at the author's concerns for his people that engage his attention here, the tense alone is insufficient for what he means by sinning deliberately. The best

¹³² See Numbers 15:22-31 (see also Dt 17:12-13).

way to look at this sin is to take into consideration the problem of the audience the author is dealing with as Cockerill (2012:484) points out – their ‘laxity,’ ‘drifting,’ ‘neglect of both spiritual things ... and the Christian community.’ This is more so when the solution he prescribes here by inference is not one of guarding against any specific sin apart from those of leaving the group and failure to identify with it. His call on them not to neglect to meet together as has become the habit of some (Heb 10:25) gives credence to this. When he tells them to stir up one another to love and good works (Heb 10:24), what he has in mind is the revival of the show of love and good works that publicly identifies them with the Christian group, showing a bold solidarity with that group in a manner that brings honour than reproach to the group (Heb 10:32-35). The love and good works here should be expressed as they did formerly in being partners with those publicly treated to reproach and affliction, thereby exposing themselves to the same fate also, showing compassion to those in prison, and joyfully accepting the blundering of their property (Heb 10:32-35) – all these being acts of public identification with the Christian group. The readers know that this is how they ought to continue to act in response to God’s benevolence because when they became enlightened (i.e., when they came to know the truth) they acted rightly in this way in accordance of their enlightenment. So to stop acting this way in response to God’s goodness will be to sin deliberately, exposing the Son of God to public ridicule in withdrawing from his group – an act that will mean the rejection of God’s goodness, a throwing back in his face his goodness and therefore outraging the Spirit of grace (Heb 10:29). The sin expressed in withdrawal from the group has the effect of diminishing the group of God’s people in which his honour is to be seen in the eyes of the people. This further gives meaning to the warning against those who shrink back and get destroyed in the same chapter (Heb 10:38-39). The interpretation of the deliberate sin in other ways unrelated to the author’s concerns in Hebrews 10 is problematic especially when his concerns here are the overarching focus of Hebrews. This does not rule out his concerns for other moral issues related to such things as sexual purity, marriage and money as in Hebrews 13. Even there the priority is still given to the concerns in Hebrews 10 such as hospitality, remembering those in prison and those mistreated.

To appreciate the enormity of this sin and its punishment, both must be set within the context of the *a fortiori* argument that follows. What remains for sinning deliberately is a fearful expectation of judgement and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries (Heb 10:27). If those who set aside the law of Moses die without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses,¹³³ how much worse punishment will be the lot of those who have trampled underfoot the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace (Heb 10:28-29)? The warning here is reminiscent of Hebrews 6:4-8. This terrible punishment can be expected because we know him who said, '[v]engeance is mine; I will repay.'¹³⁴ And again, '[t]he Lord will judge his people' (Heb 10:30).¹³⁵

The writer calls attention to how terrible it is to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31). These are words that should warn against any attempt to lessen the seriousness of either the sin or the punishment described by the author. They both are intended to be in the severest of terms. The author does not want his readers to withdraw from the Christian community (a non-negotiable symbol of expression of their faith, a place where alone all their privileges are available) whether in a single, temporally act or continuous act of withdrawal.

At this point, the author reminds his readers of some of their previous experiences during which they had demonstrated attitudes in which he wants them to continue.¹³⁶ They are asked to recall the former days when after they had been enlightened, they endured a contest of many sufferings. Sometimes they were publicly exposed to reproach and affliction; at other times they were partners with those so treated (Heb 10:32-33). They did this because they had compassion on those in prison and joyfully

¹³³ Wiersbe thinks this is no sacrifice intentional sins (Ex 21:12-14; Nm 15:27-31; Wiersbe 2001:316).

¹³⁴ Quoted from Deuteronomy 32:35: 'He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people.'

¹³⁵ Quoted from Psalm 50:4: 'He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people.'

¹³⁶ DeSilva notes that speakers would recall a group's past accomplishments to encourage the completion of its current task (DeSilva 2012:83).

accepted the plundering of their property,¹³⁷ knowing that they had a better possession – an abiding one (Heb 10:34). Hebrews is believed to be making use of materials from primitive Christian tradition prepared in response to the crisis of persecution.¹³⁸ The author believes that all these acts his readers are to recall were all inspired by their confidence in the promises of God (Heb 10:34). Now there are fears that they may abandon this confidence in the face of sustained hardships.¹³⁹ Lindars (1991:107) observes that the main reason for this state of affairs is the delay of the *parousia* for which they were not prepared. The author urges them not to throw away their confidence, so that when they have done the will of God they may receive what is promised (Heb 10:35-36). Hebrews 10:37-38 touches on two possible conducts of the righteous – one positive and the other negative, conducts which the author has consistently been addressing – living by faith (faithfulness) or shrinking back. Combining words from Isaiah 26:20 and Haggai 2:6, the author calls attention to the expectation that the coming one will come in a little while. God’s righteous one shall live by faith, but if he/she shrinks back, God has no pleasure in him/her. Faith here is faithfulness to God and what he has done through Christ which finds expression in continuously belonging to the community created by faith in this act of God in Christ. The author ends here on a note of affirmation of his positive expectation of his audience as he did earlier in Hebrews 6:9. Here in Hebrews 10:39, the author is emphatic that the audience are not part of those who shrink back and are destroyed but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ For DeSilva, seizure of property could refer ‘to plundering the unoccupied properties of the imprisoned or the still-occupied properties of those whose unpopularity would assure that they would never get a fair hearing before local magistrates. It could also refer to ‘a court’s or local official’s cooperation with popular shaming by the imposition of some kind of fine upon individual Christians’ (DeSilva 2012:47-48; see also Cockerill 2012:501).

¹³⁸ ‘Although source analysis is always difficult in Hebrews, it is possible to recognise the writer’s indebtedness to a primitive Christian tradition in the formulation of Hebrews’ 10:32-35 (Lane 1991:281). By means of a formal analysis of tradition in 1 Peter and elsewhere in the New Testament, E.G. Selwyn (1947:439-458) identified what he called a ‘persecution-form.’ This refers to catechetical material that was prepared in response to the crisis of persecution. Selwyn recognised that Hebrews reflected this traditional teaching, particularly in a form that stressed persecution as a ground of rejoicing (see Lane 1991:281). In drawing upon this tradition the writer has selected and adapted those features of the form appropriate to the situation of the Christians addressed (Lane 1991:281).

¹³⁹ Craddock intimates, that ‘citizens of the many provinces of the Roman Empire did not wait for imperial edicts to make life miserable for minority groups, ethnic or religious’ (Craddock 1998:125).

¹⁴⁰ Lane observes that the use of both warning and encouragement was not peculiar to Hebrews but was found also in Jewish synagogue homilies (see Lane 1991:280).

6.2.4.1 Social identity issues

Any understanding of the author's exhortation to the believers should be placed in the context in which the author is trying to reverse the effect of the social pressure on the readers to abandon their membership of the Christian group which presented them as deviants in the eyes of the larger society. In his bid to do this, the author also engages in some social engineering to ensure the continued loyalty of his audience to the Christian community. His social engineering involves the use of some strategies to reawaken a spirit of confidence in the fortunes of the Christian community, boldness and defiance of the social pressure from the larger society. Understood within the social script of the ancient Mediterranean society, these strategies involve and have the effect of ethnic reasoning, personality and the dynamics of ingroup/intergroup behaviour that invariably affect the social identity of the audience. These strategies are now discussed below.

6.2.4.1.1 Redefinition: Ritually transformed into God's people

To counter the social engineering of the larger society, the author engages in a redefinition of the experience of the readers that gives their group a positive evaluation. Through ritual transformation the audience has been put in a special realm with God. The description of the condition of the audience in Hebrews 10:32-34 shows that by their conversion the believers have moved from the place of comfort of the society to a place where their lot is hard struggle with suffering, public exposure to reproach and affliction, as well as the plundering of their possessions. For the author, this experience of shame is expressive of a reality – the fact that the believers are ushered into a new realm where God is encountered. By their conversion, their evil bodies and conscience have been washed with pure water (baptism; Heb 10:22) and the blood of Jesus (Heb 9:14) by which also they have access to the holy places. This access to the holy places is also possible because they have a great priest over the house of God (made up of the believers). By moving out of the comfort of the society in their conversion, the believers, according to the author, have ritually transformed their status and become God's house over which the great priest is set. This amounts to a reversal of the perception of their status in shame and suffering to one of transcendent privileges as

members of God's house in all that are available to them through the instrumentality of Christ. DeSilva convincingly describes this experience in terms of transcendence as part of the author's rhetorical strategies (DeSilva 2012:159-161).¹⁴¹ In the light of this ritual transformation into the people of God, theirs is the heavenly inheritance and status – an inheritance and status that have enduring nature.

For the author, the work of Christ as the great high priest has put members of God's house in a special position of privilege to enjoy surpassing blessings that cannot be found in any other community. The victorious accomplishment of Christ in the contest of mediating God's presence to worshippers has opened an unprecedented access to God from whom they can obtain grace. 'The access to God which believers have through Christ is no less close than that which Christ himself has attained' (Ellingworth 1993:517-518). Johnson (2006:243) finds 'the phrase "before the face of God" (τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ; [Heb 9:24]) ... a biblical anthropomorphism for God's presence.' This, for him, 'makes explicit what Hebrews has meant by "heaven" all along: it is the "place" of God's presence and power' (Johnson 2006:243). Christ is able to accomplish this for God's household because his sacrifice and mediation are the real things of which the old sacrificial system is a shadowy copy. The author's identification of the house of God as the sphere over which Jesus exercises his high priesthood (Heb 10:21) is instructive. We saw in Hebrews 3:6 that the house is made up of believers. For Lane (1991:285), the assertion that Christ exercises an administration over his own household informs the congregation that the Church is the sphere of his activity as high priest enthroned in the presence of God (cf. Heb 10:12-14). Believers in effect live and dwell in the very presence of God where Christ exercises his ministry of intercession as high priest. If they are urged to draw near to God, it is in this consciousness they should live and pray to draw the needed grace for living in their present situation. God is found

¹⁴¹ He defines transcendence as 'a process whereby an individual ... surrender[s] to the higher meaning contained in the group and submit[s] to something beyond himself or herself' (DeSilva 2012:158-159, in following Kanter 1972:74). He refers to 'the ritual journey for which the group members have fitted (being cleansed in body and conscience by the waters of baptism and the blood of Jesus), and which is now 'in progress' for them.'

and experienced in the community of the Christians, the place in which the audience is urged to remain.

The ritual transformation of the readers then puts them in a grace relationship with God. The author emphasises the grace relationship in which the audience stand with God through Christ. Any violation of the relationship becomes the violation of the Spirit of grace (Heb 10:29). Johnson (2006:265) calls attention to the assertion that ‘it was by the grace of God that Christ tasted death in behalf of all, and in Hebrews 4:16 those who belong to Christ can “approach the throne of grace” and “find grace.”’ Attention is called to ‘falling short of the grace of God’ (Heb 12:15), being secured by grace (Heb 13:9) and the wishes of grace upon all the readers (Heb 13:25) (Johnson 2006:265). Everything the author says about what God has done through Christ is for the benefit of no other than the members of God’s household. The extensive nature of the treatment of God’s action in Christ for his household shows how far the author is willing to go to impress upon his readers the goodness of God towards them. For Johnson (2006:244), the author wants to show that ‘Jesus’ entire existence is dedicated to his brothers and sisters.’

The idea of having a great priest over God’s house (Heb 10:21) in ‘[t]he immediate context refers both to the believing community here on earth [Heb 10:25], and to an eschatological hope soon to be fulfilled’ (Heb 10:25b; Ellingworth 1993:522). What this means for him is that ‘God’s people are one in heaven and on earth (cf. 11:39f), united by Christ who has already entered the heavenly sanctuary [Heb 10:19] as the πρόδρομος (forerunner) [Heb 6:20] of believers’ (Ellingworth 1993:522). Believers are therefore God’s people on earth sharing in heavenly citizenship because the community of the believers is the sphere of his activity as high priest enthroned in the presence of God (cf. Heb 10:12-14; Lane 1991:285). Taking into account kinship and religion as two important features of ethnicity, the ritual transformation of the readers into the people of God provides them with transcendent ethnic identity as members of God’s family. The ritual transformation of their status has implications for them in the concept of their personality. Their personality derives from their basic social unit of kinship – the family

of God. How they regard themselves and act should be informed by who they are. Living as such means they will be recognised as such. Their social identity will therefore be defined by this self-awareness and its expression among those with whom they live as members of God's house.

6.2.4.1.2 Enlightenment as basis for appeal to right and honourable conduct

It is expected that enlightened people (φωτισθέντες) of the community are able to identify right and honourable conduct within the social context of the community. The author of Hebrews expects this quality from his readers. Acting responsibly within the community is to demonstrate respect for the privileges made available to them through the victorious mediation of Christ, the great priest over God's house. Such responsible action enhances the dignity, the image, and the fortunes of the community by honouring God and Christ through whom God gives the community all the privileges. Since God's people are enlightened, to act irresponsibly is to sin deliberately. The grievousness of 'sinning deliberately' is elaborated by three parallel phrases that exhort themes established earlier in the composition (Johnson 2006:264). First, such sin shows contempt toward the Son of God. Second, if the verb καταπατέω were read literally, the phrase would mean trampling underfoot as in the 'trampling underfoot' of seeds by swine (Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.14; Johnson 2:14), thirdly, it 'has the extended meaning of defeating another.' As used in Hebrews, it means showing contempt towards – as used elsewhere for scorning oaths that had been taken and scorning the law (Johnson 2006:264). Its use in Hebrews 10:29 is particularly striking in that this is only the fourth time that the author uses the full solemn title for Jesus, 'Son of God' (see Heb 4:14; 6:6; 7:3; Johnson 2006:264). As in Hebrews 6:6, the full title emphasises the shocking character of apostasy: it is not merely falling from grace, but 'it mocks the giver of the grace' (Johnson 2006:264). In as much as the author is concerned with showing the enormity of the privileges God has made available to the members of the community, it is by the same measure of the privileges scorned and trampled that apostasy is grievous. To the extent that the apostate violates great benevolence from God, he or she can expect a punishment so severe that no provision for repentance is to be found along with it. In the punishment is the reflection of the seriousness of the sin of apostasy

committed.¹⁴² The author's way of presenting this is – trampling underfoot the Son of God, profaning the blood of the covenant by which one was sanctified,¹⁴³ and outraging the Spirit of grace (Heb 10:29).

Touching again on the devastating effect of apostasy (as inappropriate conduct within the community), the seriousness of the sin does not only lie in the punishment of the apostate, but also in the weakening of the Christian community as a plausible social structure. As observed by Cockerill (2012:499), throughout Hebrews the author has been concerned that his hearers not fail to identify with the people of God. 'Their lethargy and apparent fear of disfavour from the surrounding world has weakened this identification to the point where some are no long participating in the worship and fellowship of the community' (Heb 10:24-25; cf. Heb 3:12-13; Cockerill 2012:499). Similarly, DeSilva notes that the writer's 'principal aim was to strengthen commitment to the Christian group among those who are wavering, who might themselves be moving toward defection – thus eroding the Christian plausibility structure further, and jeopardizing exponentially the commitment of those who remain thereafter' (DeSilva 2012:163). The call to take collective action against any tendency to apostatize makes sense in the light of the grievousness of the act of apostasy and its devastating effect on the group, its position, and image in the society. The call is for a collective action to protect a collective interest. The image and honour of God and his Son cannot be trampled underfoot without its devastating effect on the members of the community since their social identity derives from the community over which the Son is set. The community is the family (house) of God. The image of God and his house are bound together and one cannot be dragged in the mad without the other.

The author, certain that his readers are enlightened, reminds them of how they have conducted themselves appropriately in the past (Heb 10:32-35). They are simply being

¹⁴² In the face of all the grace dimensions of the believers' relationship with God, 'the apostate insults everything that has come from God, and therefore also insults God' (Johnson 2006:265).

¹⁴³ Lane notes, '[w]ith biting irony, the writer envisions such a person as regarding Christ's blood as *κοινὸν* ("defiled"). This, for him, is an indication of '[a] deliberate rejection of the vital power of the blood of Christ to purge sins decisively' (Lane 1991:294).

reminded that they are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed but those who have faith and preserve their faith (Heb 10:39). Hebrews 11 comes in handy here for the author to show how the faithful people of God persevere in faith in the face of their suffering. The inspiration the audience is to take from Hebrews 11 is one that should spur it to 'identify with the faithful people of God who have gone before them – even if it involves the kind of suffering described in Hebrews 11:35b-38'¹⁴⁴ (Cockerill 2012:499). If in their enlightenment the special privileges they have from God is a reason for the appropriate conduct of honouring God and his son, God's faithfulness is certainly another reason. In talking about the privileges enjoyed by the audience, the author emphasises their eternal dimensions and enduring nature which brings into focus the future aspects of the privileges and sets the focus on God's promises. It is in these promises that the readers are to sustain their confidence. For this purpose the author calls attention not only to the efficacy of the accomplishment of Christ as mediator of God's presence to the audience, but also to God's faithfulness. The right conduct of the group in their current circumstances is therefore premised on the faithfulness of God. The community possesses a strong incentive for fidelity in the faithfulness (πιστός) of God who does what he has promised (Heb 10:23b). What their faithfulness holds for them in the future is not only the fulfilment of the blissful promises, but the avoidance of the most terrible judgement. This line of reasoning and acting is something the audience are expected to know as enlightened people. If they are wavering due to prolonged exposure to suffering in the face of the delay in the Lord's coming, their attention must be recalled to the knowledge they appear to be ignoring – and that is exactly what the author does. Here too the social identity issue is strong – you are enlightened people of God hence act appropriately in the face of not only the privileges you enjoy but also because of God's faithfulness to his promises.

¹⁴⁴ It states: 'Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth' (Heb 10:35b-38).

6.2.4.1.3 Shared historical memory

Shared historical memory is an important feature of ethnicity in the ancient Mediterranean society in so far as it was used to reinforce ethnic identity. The author of Hebrews employs shared historical memory in his exhortation to the audience to strengthen their commitment to the Christian community. As Johnson (2006:268) has noted, the act of memory is not a simple recall of facts from the past. 'It is rather making present to mind and heart the experiences that shaped and continue to shape their identity' (Johnson 2006:268). The expected effect then is to engender the reaffirmation of their communal identity with the reawakened passion and emotion which characterised the memory now recalled. In this act of remembrance of group history, the author is calling on his audience to relive their identity as represented in their past conduct. The author hopes to sample the collective selves of the audience exhibited in the shared historical memory required for pursuing this group goal. Fulfilling group goals for collective persons is important in so far as their social identity derives from the group to which they belong. The recall of their shared historical memory is simply to tell them, 'you are, therefore continue to be who are – namely, members of God's family' – your identity! Enduring such public ridicule confidently in the past in itself speaks to their moral excellence – the proven character expected of them.¹⁴⁵ Here, the material needed to reinforce their social identity as God's people who stand up to the challenge of difficulties for the honour of God and his household lie right in their own shared historical memory.

6.2.4.1.4 Evoking emotions of confidence, fear and shame

Another strategy the author employs in his social engineering is the use of the emotions of confidence, fear and shame. These have been given some fine treatment by Ewing-Weisz (2011). He argues that '[t]he overwhelming emotion the author seeks to evoke is confidence – confidence in the promises of God, in the work of Jesus on our behalf, and in our ability to walk the walk' (Ewing-Weisz 2011:n.p.). He believes that the author was

¹⁴⁵ As observed by Cockerill (2012:496-497), athletic competition was an imagery commonly employed by Greeks in relation to excellence of mind and virtuous life in which endurance of suffering was crucial (Cockerill 2012:497).

concerned to show the audience that there are more deadly things to fear from God if they rejected him than the hostility of the public (Ewing-Weisz 2011:n.p.). For '[n]ot only do apostates now lack a way of being reconciled with God, they face the same destiny as God's enemies' who 'will be placed as a footstool beneath his [Jesus'] feet' (Heb 10:13; Johnson 2006:262). The author's combination of positive and negative use of 'fear and shame' as 'potent weapons' and 'encouragement and expressions of trust in the readers' are noted with the later being what the author sought to inspire in his readers for the appropriate response of faithfulness (Ewing-Weisz 201:n.p.). Ewing-Weisz's treatment of invoking emotions in Hebrews makes meaningful the frequent appeals of the author to confidence (full assurance or boldness), reverence, fear and despising shame (Heb 4:1; 11:7; 13:6; 5:7; 12:28; 12:2; 3:6, 14; 4:16; 10:19, 35). The combinations of the emotions of confidence, reverence, fear and despising shame in the author's strategy affords the audience with relevant emotional considerations they can fall on in diverse ways to work out their way into fidelity to the Christian community required of them as they endure the open abuse and reproach of the larger society.

Another way to speak of the author's strategy of evoking the emotions of confidence, fear and shame is to talk of positive and negative reinforcement. The severity of God's punishment is presented as a negative incentive for the right response of obedience and faithfulness to God. In some biblical texts, falling into the hands of God is preferred to falling into the hands of human beings (2 Sm 24:14; 1 Chr 21:13; Johnson 2006:266). In the case of Hebrews, this is different; it is far more dreadful to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31). To God belongs vengeance (ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις; Heb 10:30). Johnson (2006:266) explains that ἐκδίκησις is 'to exact vengeance for a wrong and is frequently associated with God's actions' (see Ex 7:4; 12:12; Nm 31:2; 33:4; Jdg 11:36; 2 Sm 4:8; Ps 17:47; 93:1; Lk 18:7-8; Acts 7:24). God is also the one who will give the recompense (ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω; Heb 10:30). Whereas the severity of falling into the hands of the living God is presented as a negative reinforcement for the right conduct of the members of the community, the special and surpassing privileges the members have from God through the agency of Christ are presented as positive reinforcement for the same purpose. The author finds useful both words of encouragement and warning,

of the sweet and the sour. While the one focuses on the special privileges made available to them by God for which they must remain faithful to him, the other dwells on the painful punishment that God will impose on them for rejecting his favour – which amounts to scorning and holding him up to contempt.

We should recall that one feature of the collective culture of the Mediterranean world was ‘that individuals are not in control of their lives; rather, the ingroup or dominating out-groups control a person’s life’ ... through their central personages: the father or surrogate father, the oldest son (or the mother in the father’s absence), the father’s male relatives, and the like’ (Malina 1996:48). The overriding incentive for the control exercised over people is the need to protect the family honour as well as the need to reciprocate the kind gestures of parents for giving birth and taking care of the individuals in the family. In Hebrews 10:21 as in Hebrews 3:6, the Christian community is described as God’s house. The author, in writing to the audience had his eyes constantly on stemming the tendency of his audience to fall away from the faith, an act that would do great harm to the honour of God’s house to which the author also belongs. Hebrews should therefore be seen as the writer’s way of exercising the control placed within his role a leader respected within the group. His strategy in exercising this control consists of positive and negative reinforcements as is typical of the warning passages. In terms of social identity considerations, it is because both the author and readers belong to the same household of God that the need to ensure appropriate behaviour of the members of this household becomes imperative for the author by virtue of his position and role as a leader.

6.2.4.1.5 Sacrifice and investment

The approach of the author’s social engineering could win for him the effect of sacrifice and investment in the dynamics of group membership. In commending his readers for their past bold public stand with the Christian community, he recalls not only the cost to their honour (shame) and comfort (struggle with suffering), but also the loss of their

property (economic cost).¹⁴⁶ These could be felt as the sacrifices made in their becoming members of the Christian group. If Kanter's theory is anything to go by, then the awareness of how much their membership has cost them could generate more motivation to remain members of the Christian community. Kanter explains that '[t]he process of sacrifice asks members to give up something as a price of membership (Kanter 1972:76). Once members have agreed to make the 'sacrifices,' their motivation to remain participants increases' as 'membership becomes more valuable and meaningful.'¹⁴⁷ Conversely, the cost of becoming members of the Christian community could be viewed as their investment into the community. Apart from the public abuse and the physical and economic hardship they have endured, they have also shared their resources with their members in need. They have invested time and resources in attending their meeting, in encouraging one another, in visiting those in prison, and in meeting the needs of other members of the community. The effect of such investment is similar to what is noted about sacrifice. Kanter (1972:81) explains that '[t]hrough investment, individuals are integrated with the system since their time and resources have become part of its economy.' They have, in effect, purchased a share in the proceeds of the community and now hold a stake in its continued good operation (Kanter 1972:81). To the extent that people seek positive evaluation of their groups from which they derive their social identity, the feeling of holding a stake in the continued good operation of the group is relevant.

6.2.4.1.6 Drawing boundaries

With a number of virtues to which the audience is exhorted, the author creates the effect of drawing boundaries for this audience. The boundaries are drawn by insisting on the qualities that are characteristic of people belonging to God. The author touches on the

¹⁴⁶ Burkitt (1844:601) summarises the suffering of the believers in three headings: shame, pain, and loss. They suffered in their names, by being disgraced; in their persons, by being scourged; in their estates, by the spoiling of their goods (Burkitt 1844:601).

¹⁴⁷ Kanter concludes, '[re]gardless of how the group induces the original concessions or manages to recruit people willing to make them, the fact is that those groups exacting sacrifices survive longer because sacrifice is functional for their maintenance. Sacrifice operates on the basis of a simple principle from cognitive consistency theories: the more it "costs" a person to do something, the more "valuable" he will consider it, in order to justify the psychic "expense" and remain internally consistent' (see Kanter 1972:76).

participatory nature of the identity of the audience in stressing who they are. In a sense the author employs constructionist ways of ethnic reasoning in which a group of people, given their needs in a particular circumstance, tend to emphasise certain features as that which distinguish them from others. It is in the possession and participation in those features that makes one a member of the ethnic group. This is why the author of Hebrews speaks in no uncertain terms concerning what he demands from his audience. He tries to draw clear boundaries that he hopes will preserve his readers in the faith of the Christian community. He is emphatic that the believers are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls (Heb 10:39). They are not those who embrace worldliness in preference to the Christian community as apostates, reaffirming the values of the world which permit those who stand outside the community to regard Jesus Christ with contempt (cf. Hebrews 6:6). In Hebrews 11, the author presents a list of people whose lives are characteristic of the people of God to reinforce his call on them to persevere in the qualities he is extoling. If God's people endure hardships and reproaches as well as identify with those who go through the same experiences (Heb 10:32-34, 36), then taking inspiration from God's people in Hebrews 11 will help since that is what those heroes of faith did. God's people continue to keep faith with him (Heb 10:38). These qualities are set against that of those who have trampled underfoot the Son of God and have profaned the blood of the covenant with which they were sanctified, and in the process have outraged, violated the Spirit of grace. In Hebrews 10:36-39 the author invites his hearers 'to take their rightful place in the history of God's faithful people' (Cockerill 2012:514). The exhortation to the audience outlines some of the practical implications for walking the way the people of God walk. '[T]he exhortation is organised around three cohortatives: "let us continue to draw near" [Heb 10:22], "let us continue to hold fast" [Heb 10:23], and "let us keep on caring" [Heb 10:24]' (Lane 1991:281). 'Each of these verbs is qualified by reference to the triad of Christian virtues: "fullness of faith" [Heb 10:22], "the hope we profess" (Heb 10:23), and "the stimulation of love" [Heb 10:24]' (Lane 1991:281-282). The call on the members to continue to hold fast the confession of their hope without wavering, to consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, and to continue with the habit of meeting together, is meant to reinforce the communal identity

that is now threatened. These are the virtues that distinguish the people of God and draw the boundary between them and others. In terms of social identity, the author could be understood as calling on the readers to stand out and be counted as the people of God which defines their identity both in the eyes of others and of their own.

6.2.4.1.7 Summary

In exhorting his readers to remain faithful to the Christian community, the author employs a number of strategies that appeal to the social identity of his audience. He employs ethnic reasoning to sample their collective selves needed to make them give precedence to group goals and interest in how they act in the face of their current situation of public abuse and suffering. Their social identity is derived from being the house of God as a result of their ritual transformation through the victorious achievement of Christ in performing a sacrifice that is able to cleanse their conscience for them to be able to approach God. In this way they have transcended their earthly kinship identity and become members of a heavenly family of God's people, God's house over which Christ is set as the great priest. The privileges that are available to them are transcendent and eternal just as the punishments that await the enemies of Christ are eternal and transcendent. Since they are God's enlightened people they must act appropriately in the face of God's faithfulness and great privileges so that they do not suffer the same fate with Christ's enemies who must become his footstool. The appeal to their shared historical memory is to reawaken in them the kind of conduct that reinforces their identity as God's people. It should remind them of the sacrifices and investments they have made in the Christian community, giving them a share and a stake in the continued good operation of the group, making their membership more meaningful and valuable. The emotions that are invoked in them involve confidence in God's promises – the emotion that arises from acting appropriately as enlightened members of God's house who know that God is faithful. Fear of the judgement of God is invoked to warn them against any tendency to lose their confidence. By clearly spelling out the conduct worthy of them as enlightened people of God, the author drew clear boundaries for his audience to strengthen its identity with the Christian community. Living this ways has implications for their social identity as God's people, sharing in a

heavenly kinship with God, marked by stiff defiance of the public abuse of the larger society in order to bring honour to God who gives all the privileges they enjoy.

6.2.5 Warning passage 5: Warning against rejecting him who warns from heaven (Heb 12:1-29)

Hebrews 11 presents us with the examples of the faithful people of God and ends on the note that they did not receive what was promised because God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (Heb 11:40). But it is instructive that all those people were commended for their faith (Heb 11:39); τοιγαροῦν (therefore)¹⁴⁸ in Hebrews 12:1 takes its premise in Hebrews 11. '[S]ince we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses' assumes that the cloud of witnesses has already been identified, a clear reference to the men and women of faith in Hebrews 11. These people of faith are the basis for the authors exhortation in Hebrews 12. They are a cloud of witnesses that have surrounded the audience including the author. In what sense are they witnesses, are they spectators watching and cheering the readers as they run their own race or are they witnesses to the faith to which believers are urged to hold fast? Most commentators argue for both.¹⁴⁹ Morris (1981:133) argues that both meanings are present here. While finding witnesses to the faith here, the author, for him, 'is picturing athletes in a footrace, running for the winning post and urged on by the crowd.'¹⁵⁰ He thinks scene is one of 'a relay race where those who have finished their course and handed in their baton are watching and encouraging their successors' (Morris 1981:133). With both meanings in mind, Lane (1991:408) argues convincingly and concludes that the emphasis lies in what the readers see in the witnesses rather than what the witnesses see in the readers (see also Craddock 1998:148). Hawthorne (1979:1528) maintains that the heroes of faith 'are more than spectators; they are witnesses ... interpreting the meaning of life to him [the believer].' The lives of the heroes are meant to encourage the readers and assure them of the

¹⁴⁸ Lane (1991:407) argues that τοιγαροῦν should be rendered 'consequently.'

¹⁴⁹ They include DeSilva (2012:88), Morris (1981:133), Lane (1991:407-408), Hawthorne (1979:1528), Craddock 1998:148) and Johnson (2006:316).

¹⁵⁰ Morris (1981:133) concludes that both ideas are present. That '[p]erhaps we should think of something like a relay race where those who have finished their course and handed in their baton are watching and encouraging their successors.'

success that persistence brings (Hawthorne 1979:1528; see also Johnson 2006:316). The author thinks that once the readers obtain the right inspiration from the crowd of witnesses, they should be able to lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and run with endurance the race set before them. This is precisely what the heroes of faith have done, making it possible for them to become objects of inspiration to people such as the audience. The role of both the weight and sin is one of hindrances to the race (Heb 12:1). The quality of the sin as clinging so closely gives the picture of clothes clinging closely as one runs to impede one in the race. As impediment, the 'sin' against which the audience is fighting in Hebrews 12:3-4, according to Craddock (1998:151), 'refers to those hostile forces that opposed Jesus and now beset the church. This is not to imply that the members were sinless, plagued as they were by apathy and loss of zeal.' It is for this reason that the author does not ask them to '[p]ut to death the sins within' them, but rather they should '[e]ndure in the face of hostility, verbal abuse, and public shame' (Craddock 1998:151). It is in the light of a similar understanding that Johnson (2006:316-317) identifies the sin with rebellion and the offer of temporary advantage that draws one away from the people of God just as the pressure of the larger society seeks to achieve.¹⁵¹

Lane (1991:409) finds in the author's use of the participle ἀποθέμενοι a 'formulation that recalls the usual preparation of stripping for a race where contestants removed all of their clothing before running so that nothing could impede them running the race' (Heb 12:1). The weight 'might have reference to the love of wealth, attachment to the world, preoccupation with earthly interests, or self-importance. Christians are to divest themselves of any association or concern that would limit their freedom for Christian confession' (Lane 1991:409). Johnson includes in his list of impediments 'property, safety and honor.'¹⁵² In Hebrews 12:2, Jesus becomes a model for running the race the

¹⁵¹ He argues that '[i]t is possible that "inhibiting sin" is simply a way of making "impediment" more specific, but it more likely refers to the spirit of rebellion that the author in Hebrews 3:13 associated with sin (ἁμαρτία), or the way in which ἁμαρτία can offer a temporary advantage that draws one away from the oppressed people, a similar situation as in the case of Moses' (Heb 11:25; Johnson 2006:316-317).

¹⁵² He maintains that '[i]f we are to take seriously the entire preceding argument, we would have to list all the possessions that could tempt them to avoid the sort of suffering that following in the path of Jesus involves, including property, safety, and honour (see Heb 10:32-34)' (Johnson 2006:316).

way the author advocates; the recipients are to keep looking to Jesus,¹⁵³ the founder and perfecter of our faith,¹⁵⁴ who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. The attitude denoted by καταφρονήσας, 'to scorn,' acquires in this context a positive nuance: 'to brave' or 'to be unafraid' of an experience in spite of its painful character (Lane 1991:414). Johnson (2006:317) finds 'a reversal of perception – despising that which was antiquity's greatest source of shame – was possible because Jesus looked to God as the source of his honour and glory, rather than to the court of human opinion.'¹⁵⁵ The phrase ὃς ἀντὶ τῆς προκειμένης αὐτῷ χαρᾶς can be translated in two ways (Heb 12:2). On the one hand, it can mean Jesus endured the cross for the sake of the joy set before him, the joy being the incentive for his enduring the cross. On the other hand, it can mean Jesus endured the cross instead of the joy set before him in which sense the joy set before him is a present reality. While recognising the two possible meanings, Johnson argues for the meaning that it was for the sake of the joy set before him that Jesus endured the cross, making him a model for those who endure with their eyes on the reward 'God gives to those who seek him.' His understanding makes the joy a future reality. Lane argues to the contrary, insisting that the joy set before Jesus was a present reality which involved deliverance from or avoidance of 'an impending and degrading death.'¹⁵⁶ One may

¹⁵³ Craddock (1998:148) has some insightful meaning of the expression: the race is to be run 'looking away to' which implies looking away from everyone and everything else and concentrating on a single object. The same word described the Maccabean martyr as looking away to God while enduring torments (4Macc 17:10). The Christian readers of Hebrews are to look way to Jesus, who is not only the focus of their attention but also the one they "look to" in the sense of guidance and aid' (Craddock 1998:148-149; see also Buchanan 1972:207).

¹⁵⁴ Lindars (1991:136-137) explains that 'Jesus is the pioneer because he is human, and has trodden the way that everyone must tread, remaining faithful in time of temptation and offering his will to God even in death. This is the way that is set before the readers, and is one aspect of the response of faith. Jesus is also perfecter, because as the agent of God's predetermined will to effect salvation (Heb 1:1-4) the process has been completed in himself first through his death and exaltation to God's right hand, and is open to all who confess his name. They too will reach completion of the salvation process if they maintain faith, which is the active response to the assurance given by the inauguration of the new covenant.' See also Lane (1991:411), who explains 'pioneer' in terms of the athletic imagery as champion of faith as well as with a leadership motif that sees Jesus as an example to follow in the struggle with suffering. The perfecter, for him, makes Jesus 'the one who brings faith to its ultimate expression.'

¹⁵⁵ DeSilva calls attention to the fact that '[h]e phrase "despising shame" neatly encapsulates the author's goal of detaching his audience from valuing the larger society's approval or disapproval, since it is concern for reputation in the eyes of non-group members that pulls believers away from the group and its values, leading them to assimilate back into the dominant culture' (DeSilva 2012:66).

¹⁵⁶ 'An undeniable parallelism exists between τὸν προκειμένον ἡμῖν ἀγῶνα "the race set before us," of Hebrews 12:1 and τῆς προκειμένης αὐτῷ χαρᾶς "the joy set before him" in Hebrews 12:2 (Lane

argue that both meanings are present. The social context of the time supports Lane's position: Jesus' endurance of the cross made him forsake the relief from that painful and humiliating death which was a present reality he could have obtained simply by avoiding the cross. But given the athletic imagery employed by the author, the imagery of competing for the sake of a named prize is more likely in the mind of the author. The joy set before him therefore is the prize which becomes a reality only after the contest has been won. Jesus consequential exaltation to the right hand of God which is added immediately to the exhortation (Heb 12:2) makes this meaning certain. Craddock (1998:149) observes that before the 'Protestant reformation the rendering 'instead of' was predominant, a rendering which avoided the moral ambiguity that Jesus endured the cross because of a joy he wanted to obtain later.¹⁵⁷ As the readers look to Jesus, they need to consider that he endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that they may not grow weary or fainthearted in the similar struggle they are engaged in (Heb 12:3). If Jesus endured hostility to the point of shedding blood, they have not yet resisted to that point in their struggle against sin (Heb 12:4). The sin against which the believers' struggle makes sense if understood in terms of their present struggles in which the shedding of blood is a possibility, and that would mean a struggle against the pressure on them to abandon their faith.¹⁵⁸ The author now finds an exhortation to sons appropriate for his purpose: he reminds his readers of the exhortation that addresses them as sons – 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every

1991:413). 'In both phrases προκείμενος relates not to something future but to a present possibility (as in Hebrews 6:8); the joy was within Jesus' grasp' (Lane 1991:413). 'Understood in this way, the joy to which reference is made cannot be the eternal felicity that Jesus shared with the Father, of which he voluntarily divested himself in his incarnation. ... It has reference to a precise historical circumstance in which Jesus was confronted with a humiliating death upon a Roman cross ... He deliberately chose to renounce the joy proposed to him in order to share in the contest proposed for us ... The "joy" that was within his grasp' was that of being delivered from an impending and degrading death' (Lane 1991:413).

¹⁵⁷ Craddock (1998:149) offers some exposition on the two views and settles on joy as a future reality: The key term is the proposition *anti* variously translated 'for,' 'for the sake of,' 'instead of.' 'Until the Protestant Reformation, the most common translation was "instead of." This rendering accords with a frequent meaning of the word, it avoids the moral ambiguities embedded in the alternate view (Jesus suffered for the sake of or in order to obtain the reward), and it presents Jesus as self-consciously choosing to suffer (Heb 10:5-7) instead of maintaining the joy of his pre-incarnate life' (Heb 1:2; Craddock 1998:149).

¹⁵⁸ Morris (1981:136) argues that sin here does not refer to sin the readers might be tempted to commit (though some think apostasy is in mind) but to the sin of oppressors who tried to terrorize them into abandoning their faith.

son whom he receives' (Heb 12:5-6).¹⁵⁹ It is for discipline that they have to endure for God is treating them as sons because there is no son whom his father does not discipline (Heb 12:7).¹⁶⁰ Those who are left without are illegitimate children and not sons. It is therefore the participation in the discipline that makes one a son (Heb 12:8). The writer supports his argument with an *a fortiori* argument which maintains that if our earthly fathers discipline us and we respect them, how much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live? (Heb 12:9). Whereas our earthly fathers discipline us for a short time as it seems best to them, God disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness. The writer acknowledges that all discipline seems painful for the moment, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Heb 12:10-12).

The readers are therefore urged to lift their drooping hands and strengthen their weak knees, and make straight paths for their feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. In this exhortation the readers hear 'their own condition being addressed, a congregation stumbling and faltering, with some of them on the verge of dropping out of the race altogether' (Craddock 1998:153). The message to them was for them to '[r]ecover you strength, stay on course, avoid careless worsening of your condition, and accept the healing that will enable them to finish the race' (Craddock 1998:153). The author urges them to strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:13-14). The call to 'strive for peace with all men' here suggests, for Lindars (1991:114), 'the internal disruption of the Hebrews church.' Due to sustained pressure on the believers and the growing weary of some of the members, differences between those who find reasons to leave the group and those who have cause to continued loyalty to the group could result in some tension within the Christian group. The emphasis on peace with everyone, however, may not make Lindars position the only possibility since the appeal goes beyond the Christian community. The author is more likely urging a peaceful attitude towards even outsiders that does not return the hostility encountered from the outsiders. The call to

¹⁵⁹ The text quoted here is Job 5:17: 'Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.' Compare Psalm 94:12 and 119:67, 75.

¹⁶⁰ The author quotes Deuteronomy 8:5 (cf. 2 Sm 7:14; Pr 13:24; 19:18; 23:13).

holiness 'is perhaps indebted to the thought of the example of Jesus, seeing that "he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin" [Heb 2:11], but it is meant to apply to holiness of life in general' which 'requires avoidance of both idolatry and sexual immorality' (Lindars 1991:114). They should also see to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness'¹⁶¹ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birth right for a single meal. Buchanan (1972:217) finds the influence of a celibate ascetic group to which the writer probably belongs here. In this sense he understands the 'root of bitterness' as a term used by the celibate sect to describe Christians who married, and harlotry for unacceptable social mingling (Buchanan 1972:218).¹⁶² Lindar's (1991:114) insistence that the emphasis of the 'root of bitterness' falls on immorality is grounded on his conviction that Hebrews shares the common ideal that the vision of God is the goal of approach to God.¹⁶³ Perhaps the most convincing interpretation of the term is the one offered by Craddock. His position best fits the overall concern of the author for his readers' unwavering loyalty to Christ and the Christian community. One would want to agree with Craddock that the term refers to the behaviour of those who show the tendency to leave the community since such behaviour could be infectious with destructive effects on other members; it is a 'root of bitterness,' a meaning that is akin to the original use of the term. Craddock (1998:154) is certain that the term refers to breaking covenant relationships and breaking with the

¹⁶¹ The term 'root of bitterness' is taken from Deuteronomy 29:17: 'Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit.'

¹⁶² Buchanan argues, '[th]e "root of bitterness" in Deuteronomy 29:18 [17 LXX] probably referred to anything that led to idolatry and apostasy (Buchanan 1972:217). In New Testament times, however, this term came to be identified with the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gn 2:9), and this was considered marriage' (Buchanan 1972:217). Buchanan draws attention to how the phrase could be used to refer to 'marrying Christians' among some sects of celibates who called such marrying Christians 'fornicators.' Attention is also called to the OT's metaphoric use to mean 'social mingling' (Buchanan 1972:217-218).

¹⁶³ Lindars thinks that '[i]dolatry is suggested here by the reference to the "root of bitterness" (see Dt 29:18), but the emphasis falls on immorality (cf. Heb 13:4). Jewish ethical thought held that visions of God could be obtained only in conditions of sexual purity. Thus according to Jubilees 4.19-20 Enoch had his vision into heaven before his marriage. In Exodus 19:15 Moses commands the Israelites to observe sexual abstinence for three days in preparation for the theophany on Sinai (Lindars 1991:114). Hebrews shares the common ideal that the vision of God is the goal of approach to God (cf. Ps 27:4, 7-9; Mt 5:8)' Lindars 1991:114).

community.¹⁶⁴ Buchanan's (1972:219) understanding is that Hebrews 12:16 is a repetition and elaboration of Hebrews 12:15 in which sense the root of bitterness is the fornicator who is also the immoral person.¹⁶⁵ In a similar vein Lane (1991:455) argues for the immoral person to be understood in terms of its metaphoric use of 'unfaithful to God' or apostate (Lane 1991: 455). What the author sought to indicate about Esau is the character of one who for immediate gain sacrifices something of infinitely greater importance (see Morris 1981:140, cf. Lindars 1991:114; Lane 1991:455). When Esau desired later to inherit the blessing, he was rejected because he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears (Heb 12:15-17). The lesson for the audience is clear: some of the members of the Christian community are in danger of foregoing their eternal inheritance for something relatively worthless.

The warning that follows is premised on the surpassing privileges the readers have as compared with what the wilderness generation had, presented in another *a minore ad maius* (from the lesser to the greater) argument. The readers have not come to what may not be touched, a blazing fire and darkness, gloom and a trumpet, a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. The wilderness generation could not endure the order that was given: 'if even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned' (Heb 12:18-20).¹⁶⁶ The sight was so terrifying that Moses said 'I tremble with fear' (Heb 12:21).¹⁶⁷ In contrast to this fearful sight, the

¹⁶⁴ What is clear for Craddock is that Deuteronomy 29 from which the terms is taken 'deals with covenant relationships and warns against breaking covenant relationships and warns against breaking covenant with the community. The one who does so is not a single fatality; such a person is a "root" (a metaphor for a dangerous element in a society, 1 Macc 1:10), a source of community disruption, in this case, bitterness. The bitterness may arise as a response to persecution, but more likely from resentment in the membership over tensions between those who are beginning to drift away and those still bearing the abuse heaped on the faithful. If unchecked the bitterness can spread to the entire church, with the result that "many become defiled" (Craddock 1998:154).

¹⁶⁵ Buchanan thinks that Hebrews 12:16 'is partly repetitious and partly an elaboration of' Hebrews 12:15. 'Thus the "root of bitterness" is in parallel construction to "a fornicator or defiled person" which is a hendiadys composed of two synonyms. In this context, the root of bitterness is the fornicator who is also the defiled person – different names for the same offender' (Buchanan 1972:219).

¹⁶⁶ The text is taken from Exodus 19:12-13: 'And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, "Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live." When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.'

¹⁶⁷ From Exodus 19:16: 'On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled; and

audience has come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb 12:22-24). The import of all this for Johnson (2006:326) is that '[n]o matter how great and fear-inspiring the events accompanying the covenant under Moses, the realities of the new covenant mediated by the blood of Jesus are greater, for they have to do with the actual experience of the living God.' Because of these, they should see that they do not refuse him who is speaking. For if the wilderness generation did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will they escape if they reject him who warns from heaven (Heb 12:25). At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens'¹⁶⁸ The author argues that the phrase '[y]et once more' indicates the removal of things that are shaken – that is, things that have been made – in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain (Heb 12:26-27). The audience should therefore be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire¹⁶⁹ (Heb 12:20-29).

6.2.5.1 Social identity issues

At the end of the discussion of the five warning passages in Hebrews, it becomes clear that the author argues on similar lines using different expressions and imageries to impress upon his readers the value of what God has accomplished for them in Christ. It is the enormity of the favour of God that demands the unwavering response of obedience and gratitude to God in continued faithfulness to him and membership in the Christian community. The author consistently finds avenues for making his appeals and warnings within the social institutions of the collectivist culture in which their identity as

Deuteronomy 9:19: For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure that the Lord bore against you, so that he was ready to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me that time also.'

¹⁶⁸ From Haggai 2:6: 'For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure that the Lord bore against you, so that he was ready to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me that time also;' and Haggai 2:21: "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth.'

¹⁶⁹ From Deuteronomy 4:24: 'For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.'

God's people play an important role in comparison with other outgroups. In this light he engages in social creativity that involves the redefinition of the experience of his readers to inspire new perspectives and renewed strength required for the expected response from his audience. How the author makes use of these in Hebrews 12 is discussed below.

6.2.5.1.1 Legitimate children of God

One feature of ethnicity which has consistently been part of the author's exhortation is kinship. In Hebrews 12 the audience is identified as legitimate children (sons) of God. Since they are sons with title to the Father's inheritance, they must be properly trained to be capable of playing the role of heirs when the time comes.¹⁷⁰ It is this training that God is achieving through their suffering (Heb 12:5-7).¹⁷¹ This is not something new; earthly fathers do that for some temporary benefit and we appreciate them for it. Should the audience not accept much more the training of the Father of spirits?¹⁷² Even Jesus had to go through the same discipline in order to become perfect for what God wanted him to do (Heb 2:10; 5:9). The suffering is not incidental because it is the race 'set before us' which the readers need to run with endurance. It is actually because God loves his children that He chastises them (Heb 12:6).

¹⁷⁰ Morris notes, '[i]n the ancient world it was universally accepted that the bringing up of sons involved disciplining them ... The Roman father possessed absolute authority. When a child was born, he decided whether to keep or discard it. Throughout its life he could punish it as he chose. He could even execute his son and, while this was rarely done, the right to do it was there. Discipline was only to be expected' (Morris 1981:136-137).

¹⁷¹ On discipline (παιδεία), Johnson (2006:319) observes that the 'verbal clues point us in the direction of the ancient gymnasium as the locus both of sports and education, where the "training" (*gymnazein*) of body and mind went together, where the exercising of physical muscles and the exercising of moral faculties (see 5:4) were learned through instruction and practice and discipline. The gymnasium was the place of preparation for participation in a great athletic contest (Heb 10:32) before a great cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1), and it was the place as well for the preparation of the mind and will of young men who were to take up full participation as citizens in the life of the Greek *polis*. The main point here is that the physical and mental activities were so intertwined that the term παιδεία could be used for the entire process of instruction, as well as for the "instruction" that addressed the mind and the "discipline" that addressed the body. So central was this institution and its practices to Greek life that it is no wonder that the term παιδεία can mean 'education' and also 'culture' in the broadest sense, for the entire point of the process of education/training was to socialise young men into the mores and values of Greek culture' (Johnson 2006:319; see also Craddock 1998:148; Buchanan 1972:211).

¹⁷² Morris is of the view that '[th]e certainty of suffering encourages the believer rather than dismays him because he knows that it is God's discipline for him' (Morris 1981:136).

6.2.5.1.2 Superior group

The author shows the superiority of the Christian group over other groups by contrasting the experience of the Christians with that of the wilderness generation and demonstrating the more privileged position of the Christians. If the wilderness generation came to what may not be touched, a blazing fire, darkness and gloom, a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them, the audience has come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb 12:18-24). If the wilderness generation encountered God speaking from Mount Sinai, the believers now hear God from heaven. If they were moving towards the earthly city of Jerusalem, the believers have actually come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. If the wilderness generation was promised a kingdom that can be shaken (as the events of the fall of Jerusalem proved), the readers have come to a kingdom that cannot be shaken. If the experience of the wilderness generation with God was so fearful and expelling, that of the believers is joyful and welcoming – it is to the festal gathering of innumerable angels, to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect. The judge of all on whose side they are should be the greatest joy and assurance of their vindication and comfort. In a society in which social identity was so important, the expected effect of the positive assessment of the Christian group on the social identity of the audience is obvious – they are better off belonging to the Christian group than the wilderness generation. The court of opinion of the Christian group is being reinforced with a clear attempt of the author to shift the focus of the audience away from the court of opinion of the dominant societies from which the audience received the pressure to withdraw from the Christian group. In collectivist cultures group opinion is important for members since most people lived with collective selves that placed group opinion and interest before personal opinion and goals.

For all the surpassing privileges of the readers, an alternative choice of surpassing outcomes is expected of the readers (Heb 12:25-29). They should either choose a surpassing response of obedience and gratitude, or one of refusal of him who speaks from heaven. While the response of obedience and gratitude yields acceptable worship and awe and gives them continued entitlement to the surpassing benefits in which they stand, that of refusal entitles them to surpassing punishment because the privileges refused are surpassing. Since one of the key elements that helps in understanding ancient Mediterranean persons is obligation to return favour, particularly to parents, children were expected to honour their parents by being responsive and obedient for parental care and for giving them birth. Family sanctions for a rebellious son included banning or exclusion, that is the son could be disinherited by his father and shunned by his family resulting in the son becoming poor and hungry due to the loss of not only the land of the family, but the family's honour and wealth as well (Neyrey 2008:93-96; cf. Van der Watt 2000:167). It is this social script that finds expression in the authors warning that the failure of the readers to give appropriate response of gratitude, reverence and awe in return for the surpassing favours of God (their Father) would result in surpassing punishment.

6.2.5.1.3 Group responsibility

It has been established that Mediterranean people are oriented towards the group to which they belong and share the fate of the group (Esler 1994:29; Malina 1996:45). The author of Hebrews takes advantage of this quality of their collective selves to reinforce the integrity, solidarity, and health of the group. He places a huge responsibility on the members of the group for the sanctity of group members. This responsibility is to ensure that no root of bitterness is found among the membership of the group to infect the others with the same bitterness (Heb 12:15).¹⁷³ The purpose of this responsibility is to ensure that all the members, including those showing signs of the root of bitterness, remain loyal to the group. If the root of bitterness is the tendency to break covenant relationship with God and the Christian community, the members should see it as their

¹⁷³ Morris notes that the implication of the verb rendered 'see to it' (ἐπισκοποῦντες) is oversight for one another among the brethren (Morris 1981:139).

responsibility to heal everyone who displays such tendencies. In this light the root of bitterness is the disaffection with the community that makes one want to leave the group. Perhaps the way to achieving this great communal task of the group is to follow the example of the writer in his words of exhortation. The easiest ways of dealing with people with threatening attitudes resorted to by many churches – suspensions and excommunications – appears not to be the right way for the author. This is because they have the semblance of the very thing he is trying hard to avoid – leaving the Christian group. Exhortation involving all the strategies of warning and positive reinforcement – encompassing all the appeals involving social identity reasoning – is the example for them. The exercise of these group responsibilities should be appreciated in terms of efforts to ensure positive group image which has relevance for their social identity.

6.2.5.1.4 Myth of common ancestry

The author regards his audience as sharing a common myth of ancestry with the Jewish people. To serve the needs of his readers who need endurance in their current situation of suffering, the author goes to the historical memory which the readers share with earthly Israelites and finds some relevant stories to retell. The audience stand in line with the historical experience of the heroes of faith as in a relay race because on the one hand, the heroes have run the race of faith before, and on the other hand, their perfection depends on what God is doing now in Christ in which the readers have their current experience (Heb 11:40).¹⁷⁴ The inspiration from the heroes of faith should inspire in the readers endurance as the heroes of faith did.¹⁷⁵ Again, we find the author's retelling of the story of Esau a typical reformulation (probably drawn from some traditions) to reinforce the ethnic identity of his audience. The story of Esau in itself might not represent one of the golden age episodes of the Israelites. However, it falls squarely within the historical memory of the people of God which in the hands of the writer has the capacity to effect in the readers the heroic acts of the heroes of faith and

¹⁷⁴ The emphasis here for Craddock is on their common sharing rather than the superiority of one faith community over the other (Craddock 1998:145).

¹⁷⁵ The appeal to their example is designed to inspire heroic Christian discipleship (Lane 1991:408).

help them adapt appropriately to their current situation. Esau in this story becomes an example of an immoral character to be avoided because he made a hasty decision for the pleasure of the moment and lost his more valuable and enduring right to inheritance which he later sought in tears to regain but in vain. To the two stories of historical memory is added that of Jesus whose story now belongs to the historical memory of the people of God. He is the sole model on whom the gaze of the audience should be constantly fixed. The readers are urged to look away from all the distractions of their suffering to him so that, like him, they too might be able to despise the shame and endure their suffering in faithfulness to God (Heb 12:2). This means that just as Jesus endured the cross despising its shame for the sake of the joy set before him, they too, for the sake of the surpassing promises of God should have endurance and despise the shame of their current abuses. That the appeal to Jesus and others as models is made from the myth of common ancestry of Israel provides significant indications for the social identity of the readers, and becomes important means for the author to make his appeal.

6.2.5.1.5 Homeland

In their present situation, one of the realities of the experiences of members of the Christian community is a constant reminder of their loss of homeland. Their suffering of hostility with no protection from either the state or the city authorities serves this reminder. The author, however, does not think that they are without a homeland; they have one, and it does not even lie in the future – they have actually come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22). The readers do not need to wait to see themselves as people of such a city in the future; it is their current homeland, the place from which their ethnic identity is derived. If any social identity is to be derived from this homeland, it cannot be divorced from the quality of the homeland as a kingdom that cannot be shaken in comparison with the earthly kingdoms that have or can be shaken (Heb 12:28). This is even more relevant when considered against the background of the fall of Jerusalem which had taken place by the time of writing Hebrews. Homeland as a feature of ethnicity was important in so far as people were associated with their homeland (Hall 1997:45; Esler 2003a:58-59) and it was in relation

to their homeland that an ethnic group was named (Hall 1997:47). Within the culture of such ethnic reasoning, the identification of Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem as the homeland of the Christians gains significance for their privilege and social identity.

6.2.5.1.6 Social creativity: Athletic imagery – redefinition of group experience

Since Mediterranean persons are concerned with the positive social identity they derive from the groups to which they belong, groups make every attempt to ensure they have the positive assessment from which members can derive their positive social identity. Social mobility (movement of members out of one group to join another) had a negative effect on the image of the group left, weakening its plausibility as a social structure. One of the strategies employed by groups to resist social mobility of their members is social creativity. This involves, among other things, redefinition of the experiences of the members so that what was previously seen to be disadvantageous now appear advantageous. The author of Hebrews in many instances engages in strategies like this as he does in Hebrews 12. The aim of the author is to turn the attention of his readers from the values of the dominant society that has the potential of making them feel the effects of the things they have lost in the eyes of the larger society.

In a society which has honour as its primary value, an attack on the honour of people in the public eye is one of the severest forms of measures that can be applied to reverse deviant behaviour. The expression ‘being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction,’ speaks specifically to the experience of the audience of such deviancy-control measures (Heb 10:33; see DeSilva 2012:46). If the suffering the believers are engaged in is the race set before them to run (Heb 12:1), then they must go through their suffering not only with the aim of winning the race and taking the honour that comes from it, but to go through with the attitude of an athlete. The display of bravery and courage in the public sphere is an honourable act (see Leerssen 2007:334) and the author expects his readers to show in the public contest of their race and wrestling (Heb 12:1,4) a display of courage in resisting and defying the pressure of the members of the dominant society by continuing to publicly take a stand for the faith as they have demonstrated in their previous actions (Heb 10:32-35). The readers can lift up their

heads in so far as their display of boldness and courage is honourable though in the context of suffering. Within the Christian community, those who have taken such bold public stance for the faith will be held in honour as daring even to be martyrs. We know that martyrs were honoured figures among the Christian communities. Those who publicly take a bold and courageous stance for the faith, without doubt, become models of honourable conduct among the believers. As we know of the phenomenon of martyrdom, public display of stance for the faith in suffering ends up strengthening and increasing the Christian community in numbers rather than diminishing it (McKinion 2001:116). In this light the author could have the effect of an urge on his members to pursue honour in resisting the social pressure mounted on them with the understanding of themselves as people engaged in some athletic competition.

The second likely effect of the athletic imagery on the audience is positive evaluation and perception of themselves in their current situation. They are not victims of such harsh treatment in which they look with pity on themselves as helpless, mournful people; they are rather people who have stepped out boldly to contend with the members of the larger society against their contempt, abuse and infliction of physical and economic hardships. Their attitude should be to fight back in resistance and standing firm since no contest is easy. They will win the contest and receive the honour of their victory not by giving in to the pressure of the society to withdraw from the Christian community but by successfully resisting and nullifying the intended effect of the pressure of the society, and to continue to stand in their membership with the Christian community instead of withdrawing from it.

In using the athletic imagery to reinterpret the experience of his audience here, the author is not doing something new. It was characteristic for many leaders of minority groups to employ athletic imagery to help their members deal with the shame and abuse they experienced. 'Philosophers such as Epictetus make extensive use of athletic imagery, recasting the struggle against hardships or the reproach of outsiders as a wrestling match in which the philosopher who endures is promised an honourable victory' (cf. Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.24.1-2; 1.18.21; DeSilva 2012:89). Cynics are also said to

have regarded their life as '[o]lympic contest' apparently against public opinion (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.22.52; DeSilva 2012:89-90). They saw all they subjected themselves to in their anti-conventional ways as 'divine training by Zeus to enable them overcome weaknesses of character' (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.22.56) and as participation in a noble competition for virtue (Dio, *Or.* 8.11-13; DeSilva 2012:90). 'Jewish authors put athletic imagery to similar use, ... as an image by which to turned the degradation and suffering occasionally inflicted upon faithful Jews into a competition for honour before God.' Their motivation was therefore not for the avoidance of shame but refusing to let the adversary deny them of God's promised honour (DeSilva 2012:90). Christ himself had done a similar thing by disregarding the shame and fear of death that was meant to prevent him from obeying and fulfilling God's will (Heb 12:2; cf. 2:14-15; 5:7).

Still in relation to the athletic imagery, the values of the dominant society are now presented as weight that prevents the readers from running their race in a manner that will make them win. The pressure from the dominant society to break their loyalty to the faith is now the sin against which the readers are struggling (Heb 12:4). The readers should therefore strip themselves completely naked for the race; sin, any close fitting clothes will be a hindrance and any weight would be an impediment for the race (Heb 12:1). The desire for the approval of the society, property, safety and honour are weights that must be laid aside. This means that love of wealth, attachment to the world, preoccupation with earthly interests, or self-importance are impediments in the kind of race they are engaged in. The sin of rebellion and the offer of temporary advantage that draws one away from God's people must be put away. The readers are to run the race in the manner of their model, Jesus, with their eyes on the prize which the Lord will award them once the race is won (Heb 12:2). As they contend against sin – the pressure on them to abandon their faith and embrace the offer of immediate temporary comfort of the larger society – they have not done that to the point of shedding blood as Jesus did. The author's redefinition of his readers' experience of suffering in terms of athletes engaged in a public competition as discussed is likely to have four effects on his readers – the urge to pursue honour (the primary value of the society) even in their suffering, a positive attitude of facing their public abuse not as victims but as gallant

people in a contest, seeing as weight to be laid aside the very things the love of which could be a hindrance to their Christian cause, and finally, seeing their yielding to the pressure on them as sin against which they are struggling.

Moreover, the author's redefinition of their struggle with suffering gives them a new meaning of God's way of raising them as legitimate children. They should therefore embrace their suffering with the goal of their good as intended by God in mind (Heb 12:7, 10 -11). They had previously been told that it was through suffering that Jesus, their prototypical member was made perfect for all his roles that the audience is benefitting from. The author expects this reinterpretation of their suffering to result in a renewed resolve and strength for the audience to continue in the struggle with suffering. They should therefore lift their drooping hands and strengthen their weak knees, and make straight paths for their feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed (Heb 12:12-13). The fact that there is much more benefit in continuing to suffer as members of the Christian group than to leave the group is a pointer to the positive evaluation of the Christian group in relation to the benefits available in other groups. The relevance of this for their social identity is obvious.

6.2.5.1.7 Group boundaries/distinctiveness

In this final warning passage of Hebrews 12, the writer continues to draw boundaries for his audience with the call to ethical living that must mark out the Christian group as distinct from the Jewish and Greco-Roman citizens of the city. His call on them to pursue peace should set them as distinct from the other citizens of the city and non-Christian Jews whose attitudes towards the believers are characterized by hostility. In the same vein the call to holiness is to mark the believers as distinct from the members of the dominant society marked by loose moral life. The believers are aware that their holiness proceeds from the superior achievements of the sacrifice of Jesus that is able to cleanse the conscience of the worshippers to appear before God's real presence. They are therefore to pursue the holiness that commensurate their kind. The call to the attitude of enduring hostility from members of the larger society is a reminder that God's faithful people are those who endure to the end such hostilities as opposed to those

who give up (Heb 12:3-4; cf. Heb 12:7). It is for this same reason that the readers must keep their gaze consistently on Jesus who pioneered this same attitude that distinguishes God's faithful people from all others. In learning to despise the shame they are treated to as Jesus did, they set themselves apart as people who stand for their God no matter the cost. In this light, any sign of weakness and disaffection for the Christian group makes the affected members unhealthy and unacceptable members of the group – 'roots of bitterness.' If God's legitimate children are distinct from all others, it is in their display of unflinching loyalty to God and his household. They recognise their heritage of the kingdom that cannot be shaken, the festal assembly of angels and the spirits of the righteous made perfect. Since they know all these as legitimate children of God, their distinctive lives are characterized by gratitude to God, the offer of acceptable worship to him, and by reverence and awe, knowing that their God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:28-28).

6.2.6 Summary of findings

The discussion of the five warning passages reveal that the author consistently combines warning with words of encouragement to urge his readers to his desired responses. The social identity issues gathered throughout the discussion relate to ethnicity, ingroup behaviour/intergroup comparison, and personality. As is characteristic of the dynamics of social identity, the tendency of individuals to have a positive social image that is derived from positive evaluation of the group to which one belongs is persistent in Hebrews. In the theories on ethnicity we noted that the honour of a group is usually one attained through some action in the public sphere by a dominant male character. This explains why right from the beginning of Hebrews, Jesus, the prototypical member of the Christian group is described in ways that show his honour. The relevance of this in the social script of the audience is the ascribed honour that members of the Christian group enjoy from Christ's honour. The description of Christ's honour is presented in a competitive manner that sets him high above every prototypical member of any other competing group within the society – whether the Jewish religion, family groups, trade associations or the entire city that practices sacrifices to the gods and veneration of the emperors. It is not only Jesus' superiority to the angels (Heb 1:4)

who mediated the giving of the Law to Moses that is in view here but also the subservience of the angels to the believers in Christ as they serve those who are to inherit salvation (Heb 1:14). If some of the emperors were called ‘sons of god’ and ‘gods,’ the identification of Jesus as son of God (Heb 1:2) and as ‘God’ (Heb 1:8) far surpasses theirs given all his attributes in Hebrews 1:2-13. Jesus not only shares the very nature of God but is also the agent of creation who also successfully achieves the purification of sins as a result of which he is exalted to sit at the right hand of God. With words like ‘king,’ ‘kingdom,’ ‘throne’ and ‘sceptre (Heb 1:8-9), Jesus is presented as an eternal king over his people, anointed with the oil of gladness because he loved righteousness and hated wickedness in making the right response of faithfulness rather than breaking faith with God in his suffering (Heb 1:9). His eternal kingship makes his people an eternal kingdom (Heb 1:8-9). On the basis of their faith in Christ the believers have come to share in the historical memory of the people of God so that the ancestors of the Jews become their ancestors too to whom God spoke in the past (Heb 1:1). In this way the author establishes for his audience genealogical connections with the same deity of the Jewish people. Jesus remains on his throne until all his enemies are made a footstool for his feet (Heb 1:13). These enemies are the people of outgroups responsible for the suffering the members of Christ’s group are subjected to. Jesus was anointed with the oil of gladness also because he emerged victorious in the contest of mediating God’s message to his people as well as in his achievement of purification of sins that resulted in his exaltation (Heb 1:2-3, 9) – the reason for which the call is later made that the message delivered through him must be taken most seriously. This positive evaluation of Jesus, and for that matter the Christian group, sets the tone for the presentation of the warning passages, giving meaning to the arguments from the lesser to the greater in which the blessings for obedience to the son far surpasses all others in much the same way as the punishment for ignoring him is surpassing. Having set the tone with this picture of Christ and his group in Hebrews 1, the author proceeds with his arguments in which he presents warnings against inappropriate response to God for what he has done for his people in Christ and exhortation to appropriate response of obedience, faithfulness and gratitude to God.

Though the findings from the discussion of the warning passages are presented under the headings ethnicity, ingroup/intergroup behaviour, and personality, it must be remarked that these three headings interrelate in so far as they all are components of one's social identity. Issues discussed under one component can have significance for (an)other component(s) as was seen in the main discussion of the passages. In such cases, it is the relevance of the issues as they relate to the component of social identity that attention is focused on.

6.2.6.1 Ethnicity

In ethnic reasoning, people define themselves on common terms that establish their distinctiveness as a group in contrast to others who do not belong to that group. The fact that fixed features of ethnicity such as kinship and homeland could still be fictive means that almost all the features of ethnicity are fluid and depends on how a people define themselves as a group distinct from others. As observed earlier, Christians adapted ways of reasoning that made connection between ethnicity and religious practices as they reinterpreted their identity to depict some important groups in their society. This was one of the ways Christians created ethnic identity for themselves in the Roman world (Buell 2005:2, 3). This helped them to distinguish themselves as superior people of God from all other people. In the discussion of the warning passages of Hebrews, the author is seen to be describing the members of the Christian group in some common ethnic terms that distinguish them from others who do not belong to the group. The ethnic descriptions with which he speaks about the group are intended to set the minds of members on the social institutions that make possible and compelling his call on them to participate in the attitudes that are characteristic of the group.

The author calls his audience in kinship terms of God's 'many sons and daughters' (Heb 2:10, 14) and 'brothers and sisters' to Christ (Heb 2:11). They are identified as the holy brothers who share in a heavenly calling (Heb 3:1), combining the notes of affection and consecration in their identity – that is, family and religious sentiments which are both features of ethnicity. Moreover, the believers and Jesus all share the same source in God, their Father (Heb 1:11). Throughout the passages, everything Jesus did in his

humiliation and exaltation was done for the benefit of the children of God, Jesus' brothers and sisters. He came to destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and to deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery (Heb 2:14-15). He brings many sons to glory (Heb 2:10) and makes propitiation for the sins of his people. He suffered when he was tempted so that he is able to help those who are being tempted (Heb 2:17). The believers are now people who share in Christ (Heb 3:14). They are those who enter God's rest because they believe in Christ (Heb 4:3). They can draw near with confidence to the throne of grace to receive mercy and grace because they have a high priest who is able to sympathise with their weakness (Heb 4:15-16). They have been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come (Heb 6:4-5). Their hope in Christ gives them a better possession, an abiding one (Heb 10:34). Even the suffering they are going through is God's discipline that is meant for their good (Heb 12:7-11). Theirs is the heavenly city (Heb 12:22) and the kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28). All these benefits are available to the members because God through Jesus, their Brother, made them possible.

If what was characteristic of parentage was that parents hand down outstanding qualities to their offspring – such as honour, strength, reliability, and beauty (Malina 1996:49), then the qualities of Jesus portrayed in Hebrews are intended to be typical not only of God but of other members of the family of God (the audience in this particular case). Throughout Hebrews, these qualities of Jesus define what must be the right attitude to suffering as faithful people of God. Jesus suffered death, tasting death for everyone as a result of which he was crowned with glory and honour (Heb 2:9). He is faithful over God's house as a Son (Heb 3:6). He was tempted but no sin was found in him (Heb 4:15). Jesus succeeded in his faithfulness because he took to a number of ways: In the days of his flesh He offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence (Heb 5:7). He learnt obedience through what he suffered and being made perfect, He became the source of salvation to all who obey him (Heb 5:8). For the joy set before him Jesus endured the cross scorning its shame and is now seated at the

right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:2). By all these he managed to endure such hostility against himself from sinners so that as the believers consider him they will not grow weary or fainthearted (Heb 12:3).

The author also speaks of the audience in ways that describe them in religious terms. The significance of this for our purpose is that in ancient Mediterranean society, religion, embedded in family and politics, is one of the features of ethnicity. To talk about one's religion is to talk about one's family. Jesus is presented as the apostle and high priest of the confession of his people (Heb 3:1; cf. 9:11). They have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens (Heb 4:14). He is the source of eternal life to those who obey him (Heb 5:9). Their consciences are purified through the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God (Heb 9:24). He enters the holy places not made with hands to appear before God on behalf of his people (Heb 9:24). He has perfected them as those who are being sanctified by a single offering (Heb 10:14). Their hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and their bodies washed with pure water (Heb 10:22). They have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb 10:10). He is the founder and perfecter of their faith (Heb 12:2). In these words, the author describes his audience as participants in the religion and custom of the people of God, and this is significant in so far as religion as a feature of ethnicity was embedded in the family. These religious descriptions set the audience apart as a people consecrated to God, further creating the effect of setting boundaries for the audience: if these are characteristic of the people of God, then any associations and conduct with implications against these religious marks of the people of God must be avoided.

Name and language as features of ethnicity describe an ingroup favourably while at the same time describing outgroups negatively. The author of Hebrews does the same in many ways. He describes the readers as God's house (Heb 3:6). They have come to share in Christ (Heb 3:14). The wilderness generation rebelled, provoked God, sinned, their bodies fell in the wilderness, God swore they would not enter his rest, they could not enter God's rest because of unbelief – a fate in which the author finds the Jews (Heb 3:16-19). But the believers can draw near to the throne of grace (Heb 4:16). The

author feels better things in the case of his audience, things that belong to salvation rather than things that make them comparable to a land that has received all the needed cultivation and yet yielded thorns and thistles (Heb 6:7-9). The readers are not those who embrace worldliness in preference to the community as apostates, reaffirming the values of the world, which permit those outside the community to regard Jesus Christ with contempt (cf. Heb 6:6). Rather, they are the enlightened people of God (Heb 6:4-5) as opposed to those outside the group considered to be in the dark (cf. Heb 10:32). They have also tasted the heavenly gift emphasising their present experience of the reality of the heavenly blessing. They share in the Holy Spirit, implying that their experiences are not of the material but spiritual. They have also tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, an expression that situates their experience in the blessings of the expected eschatological kingdom which they apparently experienced in the miracles and signs that characterised the preaching of the gospel. All these are the better things felt about the believers of which the author is sure— things that belong to salvation (Heb 6:9). They have further demonstrated good works for which God will reward them, therefore they should continue to show the same earnestness (Heb 6:10-11). They will receive what has been promised by doing God's will in their endurance (Heb 10:35). They are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and preserve their souls (Heb 10:39). They are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses who bear testimony to the possibility of successfully running the race. These witnesses also cheer the readers on as they run their own race (Heb 12:1). In speaking of the heroes of faith as witnesses that surround the audience, the author makes the readers share a common myth of ancestry with the Jews in which the Jewish heroes of faith become the heroes of faith of the readers too. The use of this myth of common ancestry for practical purposes is typical as they are usually meant to reinforce ethnic identity and to encourage specific attitudes that meet the particular needs of the group. Elsewhere the readers are described as having a common source with Christ in God as well as in Christ (Heb 2:11; 5:9; cf. 4:6; 3:18-19). They are God's legitimate children and suffering is God's discipline, the way he trains his children whom he loves (Heb 12:8). Suffering as discipline is not incidental but expected since it is the race set before them.

The recall of shared historical memory is a feature of ethnicity that the author of Hebrews uses often to reinforce the group identity of his audience as people who belong to God. While this enables him to strengthen his readers' identity and reawaken heroic deeds of past generations (and of their own) in the audience, it also helps him to stress their obligations to the group in ministry to one another. The members are people who have demonstrated their love in the service of the saints in the past for which God will reward them (Heb 6:10). The recall of historical memory enables the author to show that the audience stand in line with the historical experience of the heroes of faith as in a relay race because on the one hand, the heroes have run the race of faith before, and on the other hand, their perfection depends on what God is doing now in Christ in which the readers have their current experience (Heb 11:40). Still in the shared historical memory of the people of God, Esau becomes an example of an immoral character to be avoided because he made a hasty decision for the pleasure of the moment and lost his more valuable and enduring right to inheritance which he later sought in vain to regain. The believers under the pressure of the moment stand in a similar situation as Esau but they should guard against any decision to go for the ease of the moment and miss the eternal reward God has for them. Jesus's own example is also recalled from their common historical memory to which it now belongs, and he becomes the sole model on whom the gaze of the audience should be constantly fixed. This makes Jesus the prototypical member of the group holding the ideal image of the group's character. In his character is embodied the ideals of the group, hence being like him is being a true member of the group. As they look away to him they should be able to run the race the way Jesus did, despising the shame and enduring their suffering in faithfulness to God (Heb 12:2).

6.2.6.2 Ingroup/intergroup behaviour

The focus of this section is on how the tendency to strive for positive evaluation of one's social identity shapes one's attitude towards one's group and other outgroups. When this tendency takes place in contexts where groups differ in status and power, it gives rise to strategies aimed at maintaining satisfactory social identity and achieving positive distinctiveness from other relevant dimensions of comparison. Within such dynamics, as

noted before, social myths could be used, created or developed' 1) to preserve or enhance their distinctive and positive self-image, and 2) to defend the *status quo* in the case of the 'higher' group and to offset it in the case of the "lower" group (Tajfel 1984:701). This is usually achieved through redefinition of their experiences involving some reinterpretation that makes what used to be seen as a disadvantage appear as advantageous.

In Hebrews, the difference in status and power stood against the audience. The groups that were powerful and held in honour were the dominant polytheist citizens of the city and more or less the Jewish community whose religion was tolerated by the state. The lot of the weaker and dishonoured Christian group was shame, ridicule, plunder of property, and threat of persecution, among others. It therefore became important for the writer to redefine their situation in terms that would boost confidence in the group and offset the effect of their lower status and lack of power resulting from the apparent disadvantaged position of their group. The aim of the writer was to foster perseverance and faithfulness to the Christian minority group. The reinterpretation of their suffering in terms of athletic competition (Heb 12:1, 4) and God's discipline (Heb 12:7-11) is meant to achieve this effect. In addition to this, when the author speaks positively about the group to which his audience belong and negatively about others, he seeks to achieve a similar result of offsetting the effect of their lower position in the social context. The following descriptions of the group of the readers gains significance in this respect. Jesus, the prototypical member of the group is crowned with glory and honour (Heb 2:9). He is the Son over his people who are the house of God, and he is counted worthy of more honour than Moses, the leader of the wilderness generation (Heb 3:3). This makes Jesus' honour that of the builder of the house with very little difference between the role and honour of God and the Son; but the honour of Moses is comparable to the house (Heb 3:3, 5-6). The wilderness generation put the Lord to the test for forty years; they always went astray in their hearts and did not know the ways of God (Heb 3:9-10). God swore in his wrath they shall never enter his rest (Heb 3:11). Moreover, it was a rebellious group (Heb 3:16) – those who sinned and disobeyed as a result of which their bodies fell in the wilderness (Heb 3:17, 18). Whereas their fate is sealed because God

swore an oath on it, the hope of the readers is the blessing from which Moses' group was excluded, that is, the rest which they must strive to enter (Heb 4:1, 3, 11). The description of Christ's sacrifice is given in a competitive comparison that favours Christ. His performance comes after the description of the earthly mediation of the Levitical order, so that what Christ does becomes better forms of what had been there. Christ appears as a high priest of the good things that have come, entered into the holy places by his own blood, not with that of goats and calves, and he is able to secure eternal redemption (Heb 9:11-12; cf. 9:9-10, 14; cf. Heb 1:3). As members of God's house, the readers are of the faithful (believing) and are urged to maintain their faithfulness (Heb 10:39). The adversaries of the Christian group, represented by the more powerful and higher status group (and those who withdraw from the Christian group) are the enemies for whom the severest of punishment is reserved (Heb 10:27).

The prominence of the role of mediation the author assigns to Christ suggest that the reason the audience came to faith in Christ is related to effective access to God. Now that their faith in Christ has brought trouble upon them from the dominant society, it is important that they are made to feel that they have taken the right decision in coming to faith in Christ. The author does this by showing God's approval of Christ as the mediator between God and his people. God's approval of Christ in any way becomes a justification of the choice made by the audience. God's exaltation and honouring of Jesus becomes relevant here (Heb 2:9). Jesus is also the high priest and Son of God who has passed through the heavens and is able to sympathise with their weakness (Heb 4:14-15). But he did not take this honour upon himself; it is God, the Father of the house, who appointed him (Heb 5:5). Their high priest is without sin (Heb 4:15) and has no need to offer a sacrifice first for his own sins before making sacrifice for his people (Heb 5:3). In the efficacy of his mediation, the presence of God is already accessible to them: the believers can confidently approach the throne of grace to find grace and mercy to help in times of need (Heb 4:16). The wilderness generation's experience with God at Sinai was so fearful that they would have God speak no more to them. In contrast, the experience of God by the readers through Christ is joyful and welcoming in the heavenly assembly of God's real presence. It is on the side of the Judge of all that

they have come – an assurance of their vindication and vengeance upon their oppressors.

Since positive evaluation of one's group is the goal of people concerned about their social identity, anything that has a negative impact on the image of one's group is to be avoided. It is for the sake of the negative effect on the group that the tendency of some of the members to leave the Christian group is a grave concern to the author. Because social mobility usually took place in the group with lower status and power, the movement alone tells a negative story about the group left. For the author, such social mobility is like crucifying Christ again and holding him up to public ridicule. This is not only damage to the image of Christ but also to the public image of the Christian group. Leaving the Christian group is like a land that has drunk the water that often falls on it but fails to produce the expected crop, and instead, yields thorns and thistles (Heb 6:7-8). Such a land is cursed, and its end is to be burned (Heb 6:7-8). Those who leave the group are like people who have trampled the Son of God underfoot, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were once sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace (Heb 10:29).

The presentation of the Christian group in a manner that reasserts it as a superordinate group is a way by which the author deals with one important issue. It helps him to deal with his readers' multiple identity which has the tendency for them to deemphasize their Christian identity while reasserting the identity of their individual subgroups. In a situation where their common ground of faith in Christ had become the reason for the social pressure they were going through, their individual subgroup identities could begin to emerge salient endangering differences among their common Christian group. If the Jewish Christians were Hellenists, then they shared Greek identity as well. In the same way, if the Gentile Christians were Proselytes and God-fearers prior to their conversion, then they had Jewish identity as well in their association or involvement with the Jewish synagogues and Jewish customs such as circumcision, dietary laws, cultic practices, Sabbath observation, ritual washing and the Jewish Scriptures. Both Jewish and Hellenistic identities were associated with elements of pride. When he recalls any

history or custom related to their past, his concern was to create a superordinate identity in which all existing ethnic sentiments are subsumed so that his audience can be united in their faithfulness to the God who now speaks to them in his Son. In this attempt, Christianity becomes the religion that satisfies par excellence all the hopes and aspirations represented in themes like high priest, sacrifice, and tabernacle as held in all the subgroups whether Jewish or Graeco-Roman. This is meant to redirect members from focusing on their personal outcomes to concerns about achieving the greater good and maintaining social stability of their group.

6.2.6.3 Personality

The emphasis of the theories on personality is on the self that is at work in people leading them to the goals that are important to them. These goals serve as the driving force for their actions. By this interest the factors that affect the selves of people is brought into focus. We observed that people of the ancient Mediterranean society mostly have collective selves, placing group goals before personal goals. They are also dyadic persons who need what people think of them to be able to know who they are. A number of the appeals made by the author to his readers can be interpreted in terms of his attempts to sample their collective selves for the fulfilment of their group goals of loyalty and positive group image. The description of the audience as ritually transformed into the people of God provides them with transcendent ethnic identity as members of God's family with implications for their concept of personality. Their personality derives from their basic social unit of kinship – the family of God. The importance of this identity should be seen against their loss of family and other affiliations due to their membership of the Christian group. How they regard themselves and act should be informed by who they are as the members of the family of God. Living as such means they will be recognised as such. Their social identity will therefore be defined by this self-awareness and its expression among those with whom they live. The expected effect on their conduct in many instances are explicitly stated by the author. By such explicit expected conduct that, for the author, must characterise God's people are ways by which the author draws boundaries for his audience in an attempt for them to remain in the Christian group.

Throughout Hebrews, the readers are variously called to the attitude of enduring hostility from members of the larger society whose actions are meant to put pressure on the readers to abandon their membership of the Christian group. The author combines the thoughts of what God has done for his readers and what he has made them in order to urge them to continue in the attitude of faithfulness. What is at work here is the obligation to return favour which influences the choices of people in the collectivist culture of the Mediterranean society. God has given them a kingdom that cannot be shaken, therefore they should offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe. This response implies their continued membership of the Christian group even in their suffering. For the author, God's faithful people are those who endure hostilities to the end as opposed to those who give up (Heb 12:3-4; cf. Heb 12:7). The emphasis on what God had done for them and the need for them to show gratitude speaks to the social requirement that the beneficiary members of the family are to return the favours with responsiveness and obedience (Heb 12:28). They should recognise their heritage of the kingdom that cannot be shaken. The legitimate children of God know all these; hence their distinctive lives should be characterized by gratitude to God, the offer of acceptable worship to him, and by reverence and awe (Heb 12:28-28). God is the owner who cultivates the land and waters it in expectation of a good crop yield (Heb 6:7-8). Being the land, the audience are supposed to see themselves as God's possession and investment and therefore yield the crops of loyalty to him. The author calls attention not only to the efficacy of the accomplishment of Christ as mediator of God's presence to the audience, but also to God's faithfulness (Heb 10:22-23; cf. 6:12-15). The community possesses a strong incentive for fidelity in the faithfulness of God who does what he has promised. Such responsible response of faithfulness on the part of members enhances the dignity, the image, and the fortunes of the community by honouring God and Christ through whom God gives the community all the privileges. Since God's people are enlightened, to act irresponsibly is to sin deliberately. Here too the identity issue is strong – you are enlightened people of God hence act appropriately in the face of not only the privileges you enjoy but also because of God's faithfulness to his promises (Heb 6:4-11; cf. Heb 10:23).

If suffering is God's discipline meant for their eternal good for which reason it is the race set before them, then they must have renewed strength to go through it, striving for peace and holiness without which no one will see God (Heb 12:14). For if God's legitimate children are distinct from all others, it is in their display of unflinching loyalty to God and his household. Moreover, Jesus, their source of salvation and model had to endure the same suffering for him to be perfect. The audience is called upon to consider the faithfulness of Jesus to the one who appointed him (Heb 3:1-2) so that they will behave like him in the way he endured his suffering without abandoning God (Heb 12:1-3). As they keep their gaze consistently on Jesus who pioneered this same attitude that distinguishes God's faithful people from all others, they too will live in a manner that befits God's people. They should therefore keep their gaze away towards him alone to be able to run the race set before them (Heb 12:2; cf. Heb 2:10, 5:9-10). It is in this light that any sign of weariness and disaffection for the Christian group makes the affected members unhealthy and unacceptable members of the group – 'roots of bitterness' – due to their possible negative effect on other members. They should also see themselves as athletes competing for the honour of winning the race. To achieve this, the values of the dominant society are presented as weight that prevents the readers from running their race in a manner that will make them win. The attitude of the members of the dominant society with its effect is the sin against which the readers are struggling. The readers should therefore strip themselves completely naked of these for the race. Any close fitting clothes will be a hindrance and any weight would be an impediment for the race (Heb 12:1). The desire for the approval of the society, property, safety and honour are weights that must be laid aside. This means that love of wealth, attachment to the world, preoccupation with earthly interests, or self-importance are impediments in the kind of race they are engaged in. The sin of rebellion and the offer of temporary advantage that draws one away from God's people must be put away.

We are reminded that the expectation or exhortation addressed to a person to live up to the proved excellence of his character is a very common topic, especially in personal letters and in recommendations for people seeking help. Some of the expressions used are: '[b]e the person people think you are!' or '[b]e as you are known' (Goitein 1998:189)! In recalling

the past behaviour of the audience, the writer not only praised them but also urged them to maintain such proven excellence of character which is the expected characteristic of the Christian group – a characteristic that had marked them in the past. After they were enlightened, they endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. They had compassion on those in prison, and joyfully accepted the plundering of their property, their motivation was that they knew they had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore they should not throw away their confidence, which has a great reward (Heb 10:32-35). In effect they are being told to remember who they are as members of the Christian group and to act accordingly in their proven character of the past.

Social creativity refers to the strategies that are employed to resist social mobility which includes among other things a redefinition of the experience of the group such that what was negative and despised of a lower status group would be seen in a positive light, providing incentive for continued membership of the weaker group. The reinterpretation of the suffering of the readers as God's discipline is one of the ways the author does his social creativity so that suffering produces desirable effects. Another way of doing this is the author's use of the athletic imagery to describe their suffering. This is likely to have had two effects on the audience – the urge to pursue honour (the primary value of the society) and a positive attitude of facing their public abuse not as victims but as people bent on winning a contest for honour. Since the display of bravery and courage in the public sphere is honourable, the audience can lift up their heads in so far as their display of boldness and courage in their firm stance for the faith is honourable though in the context of suffering.

In all his warnings, the author seeks to awaken in the audience some emotions that he hoped could induce in them his expected response. The terrible fate those who reject God would face and the encouragement in God's faithful promises as well as what God has done for his people are meant to produce in the audience a character of confidence (full assurance or boldness), reverence and fear that despises shame (Heb 4:1; 11:7; 13:6; 5:7; 12:28; 12:2; 3:6, 14; 4:16; 10:19, 35). When they consider the consequences

of rejecting God – sharing the same fate with God’s enemies, their next-door neighbour’s disapproval of them would mean nothing to them. The author’s use of stern warning and encouragement forms part of the author’s strategies to control the lives of the members of the group to make them avoid the conduct that would bring reproach to the group.

‘[I]n collectivist cultures the relationship of the individual to the ingroup tends to be stable, and even when the ingroup makes highly costly demands the individual stays with it’ (Triandis *et al.* 1988:324). However, some of the recipients of Hebrews found the cost of remaining in the Christian ingroup to be unbearable and were showing signs of leaving the group. Most likely, the 40 percent idiocentrics of the collectivist culture may have shown this tendency to leave the group. Under such pressure as the readers found themselves, some apparently had begun to sample their private selves in deciding to leave the group. The way the author addressed this issue was to work from the other side of the cost to their membership of the group. They have come too far to throw in the towel seem to be what the author is telling them (Heb 10:32-35). The cost of their membership and investment in the Christian group should consequently make not only valuable their membership but give them a stake in the continued good of the groups (Heb 10:35-36). This is particularly so when one considers the connection between their collective responsibility of ensuring the integrity and continued existence of the group and their share in Christ (Heb 12:12-14).

Mediterranean people are oriented towards the group to which they belong and share the fate of the group (Esler 1994:29; Malina 1996:45). The author takes advantage of this quality to place a huge responsibility on the members of the group for the sanctity of group members. They are to take care so that there is no evil, unbelieving heart, leading them to fall away from the living God. Rather, they should exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” so that none of them may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 3:12-13). It is also important for them to consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. They should not neglect to meet together as is the habit of some, but they should encourage one another, and all the more as they see the

Day drawing near (Heb 10:24-25). They should also make sure that no root of bitterness springs up among them that will create disaffection for God's discipline and make many fall (Heb 12:7-17). The purpose of this responsibility is to ensure that all the members, including those with signs of root of bitterness, remain loyal to the group.

6.2.6.4 Conclusion

The discussion of the warning passages of Hebrews has shown that the words of the author in urging his readers to respond appropriately to God in faithfulness and obedience take on a variety of meaning and significance in the light of the social institutions of the ancient Mediterranean culture. The ethnic reasoning of the period, the dynamics of ingroup/intergroup behaviour and personality offer the lenses with which the social identity issues in the words of the author come to light.

Chapter 7

Social identity, ethnicity and personality in the Akan society of Ghana

This Chapter gives a concise account of the concepts of social identity, ethnicity and personality in the Akan society, bearing in mind how these concepts have been used in advancing the argument of the writer of Hebrews in the warning passages. Based mainly on the discussion in Chapter 4 on the Akan society, this Chapter outlines the basic ideas and principles by which the three concepts may be understood within the Akan society. The Chapter lays the foundation for an Akan reading of the warning passages in Hebrews as these three Akan concepts are brought to bear on our understanding of those passages.

7.1 ETHNICITY IN THE AKAN SOCIETY

7.1.1 Kinship

Kinship provides the basic form of identification in the Akan society to the extent that some people are identified entirely in terms of their kin relationship or even when their names are mentioned, their kin relationship is the way to clarify the identity of the persons named. In some local communities parents are identified by the names of their children, usually by the name of the most popular child so that some parents are hardly known by their real names. It is not uncommon for parents to be called by expressions like *Kwame Maame* (Kwame's Mother) or *Akosua Papa* (Akosua's Father). Within the extended family, members are referred to in kinship terms like *Me Nakuma* (My younger Mother), *Me Siwaa* (My female Father), or *Me Papa Panin* (My elder Father). In the vocative, these relations are addressed in such expressions without their names. It is only when they are used in the third person that such expressions are clarified by adding the person's name in a situation where there are many older brothers of one's father. Where the need arises for one's identity to be clarified, depending on what one perceives to be the easiest form of identification for the one to whom one's identity is being described, the clan, the house owner, or some other immediate family relation is

used. For instance, one may say *Asona ni Manu*, (Manu of the Asona Clan) or *Manu a owo Opanin Kwakye fie* (Manu of the house of Kwakye). Other kinship expressions used include *Agya Kwakye ba Manu* (Father Kwakye's son Manu) or *Ayirebi wofase Manu* (Ayirebi's nephew Manu). Akans do not have nieces and cousins. All relations within the external family are expressed in terms of Father or mother and brother or sister relationships. The brothers of one's father are either the elder fathers or younger fathers (*Agya panin* or *Agya Kuma*). The usual way to express this avoids the qualification of elder or younger; they are simply referred to as *M'agya* (My father). To add the qualifying elder or younger is give too much detail which one is usually not comfortable with. All the sisters of one's father are similarly one's female fathers (*Siwaa*). In the same vein the sisters of one's mother are all one's mothers. It is common in this particular case to hear *Me Napanin* or *Me Nakuma* (My elder Mother or My younger Mother). It is only the brothers of one's sister who are referred to as uncles (*Wofa*) and they are those whose property one inherits as a nephew (*Wofase*). Though one inherits from the Mother's clan whether in terms of personal property of the deceased or stools, it is not uncommon to find fathers making provision for their children and even their wives. As Dolphyne intimates, a responsible father may build a house with enough rooms for both his wife and children and present it to them as a gift. This gift should be sealed by a delegation from the woman's family going to thank the husband in the presence of some witnesses from the husband's family. In such a case no dispute arises over the ownership of such a house in the event of the death of the husband (Dolphyne pers. comm., 4th July 2016).

7.1.2 Homeland

By knowing where a person comes from one can tell whether the person is an Akan or not. One from Obo is a Kwahu and therefore an Akan just as one from Apedwa is an Akyem and an Akan. Beyond their current settlements and apart from some enduring traditions for the purposes of defining traditional authority that link people of a particular traditional area to where they migrated from, Akans are reluctant to talk about their origins or the origins of others absorbed into their family. This is to avoid division and enhance peaceful coexistence. Nketia (pers. comm., 5th July 2016) intimates that Akans

have come from various ethnic groups to live together as one people and so do not indicate the origins of each other as the expression *obi nkyere obi ase implies*. It is enough to indicate one's hometown which is enough to define where one belongs to in terms of ethnic affiliation. In one's hometown may be older members of one's kin relations. As citizens of one's hometown, one has the obligation to attend funerals and support other developmental programmes of the town. Families may own land and other property to which members have title in their hometown. Within the families members usually have knowledge of their village from which their parents or grandparents had moved to their current hometown. In these villages such families may still have lands and property and may have some of the members taking care of them. In some cases such property may be in the charge of caretakers on behalf of the family or some individual members of the family. Title or right to homeland and property then is an important indicator of one's ethnic identity as one's belonging to a family comes before one's title to what the family has.

7.1.3 Religion/custom

Same religious beliefs are identified as one of the marks of Akan peoples. As indicated in Chapter 4 on the Akan society, religion is infused into all aspects of Akan life due to the spiritual understanding of both the Akan concept of a human being and the family. Because the human being is both material and spiritual and lives in a community of both the living, the living dead as well as the yet unborn, the daily life as well as all important landmarks of the Akan finds expression of this spiritual perception of life. Not only did people (and some older folks still do) put some pieces of the food they ate on the ground for the ancestors who are believed to be present with them, but also all transitions from one stage of life to the other (including from the world of the spirits to the world of the living – i.e., birth, and from the world of the living to the world of the spirits – i.e., death) are marked by important religious rituals to enhance smooth transition and incorporation into the next state of existence. Apart from the education that accompanied rites of passage such as puberty, all the rites of passage necessarily include prayers to the ancestors and the spirits for their assistance in successful

incorporation of the individual into the next stage of life to enable one play one's role as a responsible member of the family.

Akans believe that the ancestors, the gods and other spirits have the power to either do good or evil to people. Akans therefore find it imperative to conduct themselves in ways that ensure the maintenance of cordial relationship with these spirits so as to attract their favour rather than their wrath. It is in this light that the observance of customs and taboos is important to the Akan. These customs and taboos express, for the Akan, the will of the ancestors and the spirits who are not only interested in the life of the living but are also active participants, providing the living with the needed spiritual assistance. When the living observe these customs and taboos the spirits are pleased and harmonious relationship with the spirits is maintained for the peace and prosperity of the community. When the living take these customs and taboos for granted they disturb this harmonious relationship with the spirits with disastrous consequences for the community. The daily or occasional pouring of libation to the ancestors and the spirits as well as rituals performed in the event of breaking taboos or customs are ways to appease the ancestors and the gods to ensure continued peaceful relationship with them.

Some of the gods are considered the possession of the families which have them and they must be retained from one generation to the other (see Fortes 1975:256). The *Bonsambu* is associated with the Adanse people such that to date, 'other Akan people who originated from Adanse have kept the practice of erecting *Bonsambu* (*Bonsam's* shrine, the devil's shrine) in front of the chief's house' (Buah 1998:18). Smaller families may have their own gods as well. Apart from this and the ancestors who are more or less part of the family, the Akan sees the gods (emanations of the Divine Being) as being there to provide them the needed assistance to achieve a good life here and now. Their attitude towards these gods is defined mainly in terms of the help the gods are able to provide for them. In most cases these gods are specialists in the provision of particular help in specific areas of life to the adherents. Which god one consults is dependent on the kind of help one needs. There are gods for the provision of war

medicine for power and protection against cutlass wounds and gunshots. For fertility, agricultural productivity, riches and wealth, and against enemies and adversities, some specific gods are believed to be capable of offering assistance and are consulted. The expression *neti hye obosom Akonodi ase* (literally, his/her head is under the Akonodi shrine) implies that one has insured oneself with the deity so that when all goes well the insured at specific times pays to the deity what has been pledged or as demanded by the deity. It was observed in Chapter 4 that the utilitarian nature of the relationship between adherents and the deity meant that if the deity failed to perform, the adherent could abandon it and go for another that could provide what is sought.

Akans believe that one can primarily be destroyed by members of one's family. *Obi benya wo a na efiri fie* is an expression that holds this belief. It is believed that members of one's family with evil powers of witchcraft can destroy another member of the family. Other members of the family may employ other powers such as *suman* or juju for the same purpose. It is again believed that one can employ the powers of a god or some other spirits to harm someone whom one has no family relations with. *Wabo no dua* (lit., he has been hit with a stick) is the way to say one has been cursed. One could suffer a terrible disease all of one's life as a result of being cursed. Death could also be the result of being cursed. Usually, one would be cursed for an offence committed against another. It is, however, believed that sometimes one is simply cursed by others who are envious of the fact that another is doing well in life. The attitude of the Akan towards religion is shaped by the belief that the spirits can be made to do one either good or bad. This belief is so powerful that in most cases even after one has become a Christian one still may be driven to some shrines for help in this respect. If the Pentecostal and Charismatic ministry is popular in the African context in which such beliefs are endemic, it is because the Pentecostal and Charismatic ministry takes these beliefs seriously, offering alternative solution to them in Christianity. Church denominations which have aversion to such beliefs because of their implications for interpersonal relationships and personal responsibility are not as popular among those who hold such beliefs. The truth is that such beliefs exist in almost all Akans though to varying degrees in terms of the level of challenging situation in which one would sample such beliefs.

7.1.4 Myth of common ancestry/Shared historical memory

Akans as a whole do not have common ancestry as they are a mixed people, yet the members of each clan trace their ancestry to one person such that though such persons are not usually known, the members of the clan consider themselves as brothers and sisters. Some clans remember some of the earliest people in the line of their common ancestors but these exist only in oral traditions. Tiekou (2016:87-99) records a number of these. This belief is so strong that to date it is a taboo for a man and a woman from the same clan to marry and Akans do everything to avoid breaking this taboo. When this taboo is broken, it comes with serious consequences.

As confirmed by Dolphyne (pers. comm., 4th July 2016), historians generally claim that all Akan groups migrated from the region of Od Ghana and Songhai Empires as the discussion of the subject in Chapter 4 indicated. But this is not popular among many ordinary Akans and is due to the fact that one should not talk about one's origins. Each Akan tribe has its own historical memory. In Chapter 4 on the Akan society of Ghana, the history of the origins of the Bono State and the Ashanti states were discussed. Historical memories shared by the various Akan tribes are recalled at specific times to stir the needed sentiments in members of the tribes concerned for the desired results. Asantes may recall their exploits in war with other tribes and their political power and dominance to stir boldness and courage in their members. Fantes have historical memories of leaders who made great sacrifices for the wellbeing of their people. Agya Ahor is remembered for voluntarily offering himself for a sacrifice that averted a famine and a deadly epidemic that threatened the entire Abura-Mfante community (see Ekem 2005:62). The Asantes also remember Tweneboah Kodua for offering to lead the war with the Denkyira people having been asked not to fight though armed and so sacrifice himself for the victory of the Asantes (see Tiekou 2016:141-143). Heroic stories about the powerful priest Okomfo Anokye and Nana Yaa Asantewaa who led the Asantes to war against the British army were recounted in Chapter 4 of this work. These stories are traditionally documented in the institutions of the black stool and the historical memory of the elders who pass it on to the royals and use them in the education, mentorship and preparation of candidates for chieftaincy. Apart from common historical memories

of the tribes, each town or local clan as well as smaller families within the clans have their own shared historical memories which they recount from time to time for various purposes. In a recent re-emergence of the crisis between the Zongo community and the indigenous people of the Tafo Township in Asante, the chief of Tafo, Nana Agyen Frimpong spoke to the effect that it was because they were peaceful that they did not respond with violence to the provocations of the Zongo community. He declared: *Asanteman yede oko na ekyekyeree. Oko biara nni ho a Tafoman yeanko bi* (the Asante Kingdom was established through wars. There was no war that Tafo did not take part). He insisted that the people of Tafo were not afraid of fighting but they sought peace (Tafohene, Nana Agyen Frimpong, Peace FM, 6 pm news, 3rd July 2016). Though the chief sought peace, in the face of what he saw as provocation, he could not help but remind himself and his subjects of their bravery by recalling the constant participation of the Tafo people in all the wars fought by the Asante Kingdom. His message is clear – they are not cowards! One could imagine what the chief is capable of doing with their historical memory in the event that he finds need to stir bravery and courage in his subjects.

7.1.5 Superordinate identity in the clan system

The clan and *nton* systems provide important avenues for the expression of superordinate identity which cuts across all Akan tribes whether Fante, Akuapen, Asante, Kwahu, Akyem, or any other Akan tribe. This is to say, when it comes to the clan or *nton*, the identities of the various Akan tribes become insignificant. What is important is that the members of a clan are one people no matter the Akan tribe to which they belong. The superordinate nature of the clan and *nton* systems are usually appealed to for practical utilitarian reasons. A case in point is the following incident as narrated by Dolphyne, an Asante who hails from Akyina and belongs to the Asona Clan.

A cousin of mine married a man from Aburi. When the man died she was accused of being the cause of the man's death. While we were keeping wake during the funeral we recognised that the head of the family of the deceased (*Abusua Panin*) held a staff of the Asona Clan. When we got to him as we were greeting, my mother knelt before him and told him, Nana, my brother is the Asona Chief of our hometown. The *Abusua Panin* responded with *O me nua bea* (O my sister) and held her up. Meanwhile, the sister of the deceased had given some boys of the town wine to drink so that after they had become drunk they would punish the widow. As the boys rushed on the widow to beat her up, the

Abusua Panin put her in his room and put one of his older sons in charge to guard her. Had it not been for the protection she enjoyed from the head of the Asona Clan, no one knows what would have happened to my cousin.

(Dolphyne pers. comm., 4th July 2016)

This story demonstrates how insignificant the differences in tribes and hometowns become in the face of the superordinate identity of the clan. In this particular case, their identity as of the Akan tribes of Asante and Akuapem as well as of their hometowns of Akyina and Aburi become irrelevant in the face of their common identity as members of the Asona Clan. The practical utilitarian use of such superordinate identity is not restricted to the clan of the mother's side only. A minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in the hometown of the current writer (Obo-Kwahu) gives account of his positive use of the superordinate clan identity from both his mother's and father's sides in his ministry as a non-indigenous person at Obo.

I am *Oseneni ba* because my father belongs to the Asene Clan but I belong to the Bretuo Clan, the Clan of my mother. My father is from Tapa Amanfrom, near Wrawra beyond the Volta River among the Ewes though my father's family is Akan. My mother is an Asante from Abuontem near Gyaakye Pramso. Now, I am in Obo-Kwahu and I identify with members of the Asene Clan by making them know I am a Son of an Asene man. In the same way I identify with the members of the Bretuo Clan because that is where I belong. I use my clan affiliations very effectively in my ministry. There was a marriage problem between an Asene man and a Bretuo woman in which the parties proved very difficult for settlement of the case. Realising their clans, I told the man I would inform the head of his clan if he did not help to find a peaceful resolution to the problem. The man then changed his attitude and began to cooperate for the resolution of the problem. When there is a funeral involving members of the church the Elders usually go to greet the affected family and urge them to make the funeral devoid of troubles. We donate a carton of soft drinks and a box of bottled water to the affected family. If it involves either the Bretuo or Asene Clans I usually identify myself as either a member of the Bretuo Clan or the Son of an Asene Man to underscore the fact that the funeral is my own, therefore they should do everything possible to make a peaceful and successful funeral. I tell you if they do well I would commend them but if they do not, I would not forgive them. After identifying with and exhorting them, the members do everything to make things work and when they are failing some them would remind them of what I, as their member in the clergy, told them. I also join them on the Monday when they meet to give financial account of the funeral, settle bills and appoint the successor; here I supervise the processes and give advice. In times of difficulties, the members of my clans give various forms of assistance for my relief or serve as my informants, giving important pieces of privileged information that I may need for my work because they want me to succeed as a member of their clan. The members are also proud that they have a clergy brother who has identified himself with them. I have registered with the Bretuo clan so I pay my dues. This means that in good times and bad times they are there for me. You remember the day we went to the house of one of the members of the Asene Clan for accommodation for your guests during your brother's funeral. When I identified myself as a son of an Asene Man and you as a member

of the Asene Clan, the response of the woman was “[t]his house is your own house then”. Traditionally, when one travels to a place, the first person one should introduce oneself to is the head of one’s clan in the place. It was also customary to be accommodated by the head of the clan if one would spend just one or two nights there.

(Ntim Manteaw, pers. comm., 1st August 2016)¹⁷⁶

Just like in the first illustration, the Asante and Kwahu tribes as well as the different hometowns dissolve in significance in the face of the superordinate identity of the clan which unites them all as one people. Instrumentalism as a theory of ethnicity finds expression in these two examples from Dolphyne and Manteaw. Ethnic affiliation is being used for the practical purposes of securing what one needs.

7.1.6 Name/Language

Akans feel that they are civilised. They call every other person who does not speak Akan, *Opotoni*, that is, a babbler (Dolphyne, pers. comm., 4th July 2016). Yet among the various Akan tribes there are some stereotypical ways in which Akan groups refer to each other. This is one of the manifestations of the truth that Akans were not one unified people prior to their coming under British rule.¹⁷⁷ Most of the stereotypical expressions are derogatory descriptions of the groups so described. It is often said that Kwahu people are tightfisted (*pepee*) and boastful (*huhuu*) as well as skilful in doing business. Akyem people are said to be litigants (*mansotwifo*). Nketia (pers. comm., 5th July 2016) observes that Akyem people are not very assertive (*anioden*) but are confident. Akuapem people are noted for their extreme show of respect to the extent that they beg before insulting someone. Asante people are said to have a sense of superiority and are boastful. The Fantes are described as fancying Western style of life in both their speech and taste for food. They mix the Fante Twi with English and have preference for Western dishes like pastries and drinks. They are very good at comedy as well.

¹⁷⁶ Rev. Patrick Ntim Manteaw is the Minister in charge of the Riis Congregation of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana at Obo-Kwahu. The writer had enjoyed tremendous assistance from him when he lost his younger brother in August 2015. He accompanied the current writer to the house of an Asene woman to seek accommodation for some of the guests of the current writer during which Manteaw played the clan card and made things easy. This episode was recalled when dealing with this aspect of the research and when he was consequently called on the phone, he gave this piece of information.

¹⁷⁷ It is intimated that though they all speak dialects of a common language and have a common culture, the Akan peoples were never politically united until they all come under the rule of British colonial government in 1903 (Fortes 1975:252).

Generally, Akans see themselves as noble people. This is expressed in the adage *animguase mfata Okani ba* (the Akan does not deserve disgrace).

7.1.7 Multiple ethnic identity

Ethnic affiliation may be expressed at various levels of the social organisation in such a way that one could express loyalty to different tribes, clans, cities and extended families. The discussion under Superordinate identity within the clan system shows how possible it is for an Akan to express loyalty to different clans at different times. Dolphyne speaks of the possibility of expressing loyalty to different tribes. She cites the example of Nana Omaabo of Amanokrom whose mother was Akuapem and whose father was Ga. The implication was that he could inherit from the family of his Akan mother as well as from the family of his Ga father since Gas inherit from their father's family. Dolphyne calls people in the position Nana found himself 'double inheritors.' Generally, as hinted in Chapter 4, though the Akan belongs to the family of the mother, he or she still belongs to the family of the father though without any right to inheritance there. An Akan can therefore express loyalty to both mother's and father's families and hometowns for some practical purposes. When it comes to social activities such as traditional marriage, naming and funerals, the expression of loyalty to both families come to play. What is in view here is the possibility of showing loyalty to an Akyem family or city at one time, for instance, and to a Kwahu family or city at another time because each of one's parents comes from a family and city that belongs to the Akyem and Kwahu tribes respectively. In the same way it is possible to speak of an Akan expressing loyalty to one Akan family and city as well as to an Ewe or Ga family or city for the same reason of a parent each coming from one of the two families or cities.

7.1.8 Ethnicity and power

Before and during the early part of our colonial experience as a nation, the power of some ethnic groups was much more a reality than the situation we have in the post-colonial period. The pre-colonial period witnessed the conquests of one ethnic kingdom or state by another that proved more powerful. While the lot of the conqueror kingdom or state was honour and wealth, that of the conquered kingdom or state was humiliation

and economic hardship. Besides having to pay tribute to their overlords, the conquered kingdoms and states had to endure exploitation as they could hardly deal directly with merchants coming from the coast. Their overlords became richer by making themselves middlemen for the trade between the conquered kingdoms or states and the merchants. Moreover, slaves taken from the conquered kingdoms or states were made to serve chiefs and other significant persons in the kingdom or states of the overlords. Fortes (1975:253) writes that captives and fugitives from defeated tribes, slaves as well as subjects of rebellious chiefs sought refuge in other chiefdoms, thereby introducing alien elements into every chiefdom.

The advent of the post-colonial era with the centralised system of governance meant that such ethnic power is now a thing of the past. What might be in vogue is the residue of complexes such as superiority and inferiority of the pre-colonial experience of ethnic dominance, power and influence. Some of these complexes may account for the stereotypical ways in which some ethnic groups perceive and refer to each other.

Dolphyne has the following on the sense of pride among some of the Akan tribes:

Asante pride derives from the military power that they had and the political unity that is attributed to Okomfo Anokye's ingenuity. Fantes respect themselves due to the fact that they had education earlier than the other tribes. Akaupems derive their pride from the presence of the Presbyterian Church there which brought to them schools and the development of their language into a literary form. Bonos have issues with how people looked down on their language and this affected their sense of pride. Asantes are greater in number and dominated the area, indeed the Bonos were initially part of the Asantes, and they felt very uncomfortable.¹⁷⁸

(Dolphyne, pers. comm., 4th July 2016)

7.2 SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE AKAN SOCIETY

Social identity is defined as 'that *part* of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (Tajfel 1982:2). How important social identity is in the Akan society can be appreciated from the way Akans

¹⁷⁸ She explains that any Bono who went to school would speak their native Bono language only among their own people without the presence of others. As an Akan dialect, the intonation and some aspects of the pronunciation of the Bono language is close to the Fante of Mankessim. History has it that the Fantes came from somewhere around Takyiman from among the Bonos (Dolphyne, pers. comm., 2016).

speak fondly of their group when it is their source of pride. Group members make efforts to avoid anything that does not enhance the honour and pride they derive from their groups. The fact that Akans in general have a sense of pride by virtue of their being Akans has already been established. The saying *Aninguase mfata Okanni ba* (disgrace is not becoming of an Akan) expresses the sense of pride that Akans have. This sense of pride is even more pronounced in the adage *Aninguase de efanyinam owu* (disgrace is worse than death). It has also been noted that the self-understanding of the Akan is one of a civilised person, a foremost person as the word *kan* (first) implies. It is from this sense of pride that others who do not speak the Akan language are described as *Apotofo* (babblers).¹⁷⁹

The discussion of Akan clans, their characteristic traits and responses to their greetings in Chapter 4 offers important glimpses into how the members of the various clans perceive themselves. The use of these character traits as appellations by members of the clans concerned shows the pride they take from their membership of these clans. It is not uncommon to hear members of the Asona Clan priding themselves in the beauty associated their clan. It is said of the members of the Asona Clan that they are beautiful to the extent that the rear of their head is as beautiful as someone else's face. The saying *won atiko na ete se obi anim* gives expression to this pride (see Tieku 2016:90). If Akans greet and demand that specific responses of their clan are given to their greetings, it is not merely to identify with their clans or *nton* but also because of the pride of associating with the positive evaluation of the image of the respective clan or *nton*.

Within the extended family as also is the case with the nuclear family, members enjoy

¹⁷⁹ It must be observed that all the ethnic groups in Ghana have some derogatory ways of referring to each other. According to Reymond Agbanato (pers. comm., 2nd August 2016), an Ewe and a security man at Trinity Theological Seminary, Ewes call the tribes in the north Dzugbeawo (Northerners). The term, according to him, is a negative term since it describes them in terms of where they come from. Ebluawo is the term Ewes use for the Akans who are usually called Asantes. The term means they are neither Fantes nor Gas. They also call Gas Egeawo meaning foreigners. Joseph Adiok (pers. comm., 2nd August 2016), a Bulisa from the North and also a security man at Trinity Theological Seminary explains that Ewes are referred to as Zoburig his tribe in the North, a negative expression that means that they cannot be trusted. They also call Asantes (an expression they use for all Akans) Kabonga, a term which recalls their activities as violent captors of slaves in the north during the times of slave trade.

some positive or negative social identity depending on the social image of the family concerned. Families which have members working or studying overseas see that as a source of pride. The same can be said of families which have members occupying significant public and social positions in such fields as politics, public and civil services. People who have made good names in any respect become a source of pride for their families and members of these families are proud to identify with the families. On the other hand, those families which have rampant records of murder, thefts and other vices become a reproach and their members hardly want to identify with them.

7.2.1 Social mobility/drawing boundaries/stern warning

The practice of moving from one social group with lower economic, political or social power or status to one of a higher power or status is what is referred to as social mobility. Within some groups, social mobility is virtually impossible. For instance, it is unimaginable to speak of leaving one's clan for another. At worst, one may deemphasise or go silent on one's affiliation of a clan and emphasise, instead, one's affiliation with another clan as relates to the clans of one's father and mother. There are, however, voluntary ethnic associations usually called *Mmoa Kuo* (Help Group). These groups are formed by migrants Akans living in other parts of the country other their own homeland. These are either based on tribes or clans of the Akan people and members of the tribes or clans concerned are free to join or leave. Assistance from the group is extended only to registered members in good standing with the group.

As with many other social clubs and association, friendship among members and benefits derived the group are the main binding factors of continued membership such that when one decides to leave the group, other members in the friendship network within the group persuade him or her to remain. In many local groups when one moves away to settle in another locality, the friendship network within the group still hold many of such people to the group. It is not uncommon to find members traveling several kilometres to attend meetings of groups which have their branches located within less than a kilometre in their locality. It is only when there is hardly any satisfying friendship network, especially when a member is in disaffection with the group or when the cost of

continued membership is far more than discontinued membership that social mobility is experienced in such groups. Under normal circumstances, group members would want to retain and increase their membership as that symbolises success and positive group image.

We could speak of other ways of social mobility other than physically leaving one's group. When a member of a group appears to be behaving in a manner inconsistent with the approved conduct of the group, we may speak of psychological mobility. In situations where physical movement from the group is hardly imaginable as one finds in the case of membership within the family or clan, there are attempts to impress upon members not to behave as outsiders. Boundaries are drawn for members by spelling out what one ought to do or refrain from as members of the group. Families know how they behave and tell their members who go contrary 'we do not behave this way, this is unlike us.' Expressions like *Okanni nkasa saa* (an Akan does not speak this way) are ways by which boundaries are drawn for an Akan found to be misbehaving. In drawing boundaries this way, one tends to insist on members of a group behaving in accordance with their approved character.

When a member of a family is about to travel to another town or country for further studies or work, it is customary for the members of the family, especially, the parents, to tell the member concerned to remember who he or she is as a member of the family and behave as such. If the family is poor, the person is reminded of how the family is looking up to him or her to work hard and behave well so as to be able to provide the expected support to the family. If is a prestigious family, the advice is usually to behave in a way that will enhance the dignity of the family. Stern warning is another way by which members of a family may seek to keep a member in check. A parent may threaten a recalcitrant member not to step foot at his or her funeral if one does not stop doing something untoward. In a similar situation, a family may threaten to disown a member if the member did not repent from an act considered detrimental to the family. Since suffering the fate of expulsion from the family is so terrible, one would usually want to give heed to the warning.

7.2.2 Ingroup prototype

Prototypical members of a group are chosen for the purpose of urging members of a particular group to take to some desired behaviour or conduct that embodies the ideals of the group. In this sense prototypical members are chosen according to the needs of the group at a particular time. A deviant member in the Akan society may be urged to consider a sibling or other relative whose life stands out in a particular virtue and exhort the member to be like this virtuous person. Depending on the need of the situation, certain individuals who symbolise the desired value or attitude may be recalled to urge the people to remember which kind of people they are so as to be stirred for the right response. At a time when the Asante chiefs had become intimidated, Yaa Asantewaa used Nana Osei Tutu and Nana Opoku Tenten as prototypical members in whom the virtue of courageous defence of their heritage is symbolised in order to urge the chiefs to courageously defend their heritage. To encourage members in the attitude of sacrifice for the good of the society, people of the Kumawu traditional area frequently appeal to the voluntary sacrifice made by Nana Tweneboah Koduah that, in part, ensured the success of the Asante Kingdom in their War against the Denkyira Kingdom.

7.2.3 Social creativity

Abrabo ye animia (life is not easy) and *Obra ye oko* (life is war) are Akan sayings that are used to encourage one going through hard times in life (Nketia, pers. comm., 5th July 2016). These sayings are meant to urge the person to adapt the attitude that helps one to go through life successfully in spite of difficulties. In social creativity, creative ways are employed to reinterpret one's unfortunate lot or experience in a new light so that what is negative now appears to be positive. The intention is to generate a positive attitude towards the situation in the one concerned. The way Yaa Asantewaa urged the Asante Kingdom to rise and fight the British army when the British authorities demanded the Golden Stool expresses how one could use figures and imageries to reinterpret one's experience and encourage the right response to a situation. As was noted in Chapter 4, Yaa Asantewaa addressed the gathering of intimidated chiefs of the Kingdom as follows:

I am asking you all here, shall we sit down as cowards and let these rouses take away our pride? We should rise up and defend our heritage because it is better to perish than to look

on sheepishly while the White man whose sole business in our country is to steal, kill and destroy and shamelessly demand for our sacred stool. Arise!! Arise! Men of Osei Tutu and Opoku Tenten, because I am prepared to lead you to war against the White men. I am urging all the “women” here to go home and stay behind because “we” the “men” are ready for War. Should anyone of you be afraid to fight: may he be punished for his shameful act by the great Asante god *Odomankoma*.

(Tieku 2016:244-245)

This speech was given at a time when all the chiefs felt helpless, the reason for which Yaa Asantewaa, a woman decided to lead the Kingdom to war. The words used in this speech were calculated to inspire courage to fight. A few of her words are analysed in order to appreciate how she managed to inspire the attitude of courage in the kings to fight:

[S]hall we sit down as cowards and let these rogues take away our pride? In these words she describes their current attitude as the expression of cowardice. She then calls attention to what this attitude of cowardice is going to cause them – their pride. Their enemies are presented not as the powerful forces they are but as rascals who want to deprive them of their pride. The enemies must therefore be dealt with as rascals.

We should rise up and defend our heritage because it is better to perish than to look on sheepishly while the White man whose sole business in our country is to steal, kill and destroy and shamelessly demand for our sacred stool.

In these words Yaa Asantewaa reminds them of their duty to defend their heritage which in this particular case is the Golden Stool. The words of Rattray (1929:350) should be recalled here that ‘[t]he stool was in every sense greater than the man or woman who “sat” upon it. The lives of the kings or queens or war captains were of little value compared with the overriding necessity for guarding and preserving these shrines upon which were thought to depend the very existence of the Nation, tribe, or kindred group.’ Yaa Asantewaa reminded the kings of this obligation to fight and be prepared to perish for the sake of their heritage.

Arise!! Arise! Men of Osei Tutu and Opoku Tenten, because I am prepared to lead you to war against the White men. Yaa Asantewaa invokes the courageous spirit of the Asante Warrior Kings Osei Tutu and Opoku Tenten to stir the kings in the gathering to rise to the task of fighting to defend what is theirs. It was after this that she urges all the cowards whom she describes as *women* to return home. She does not fail to point out that failing to fight would be a shameful act against which she invoked curses in the name of the Asante god Odomankoma. In this way, Yaa Asantewaa managed to reinterpret the situation of the Asantes from one of helpless victims of the oppression of the powerful British authorities to one of mighty men of valour able to arise in the spirit of their great warrior kings to defend their heritage and pride.

7.3 PERSONALITY WITHIN THE AKAN SOCIETY

7.3.1 Group goals and personality

The interest in personality in the Akan society lies in the self that informs the conduct of people. It is concerned with the goals that take precedence in the decision a person makes. The discussion of the Akan person in Chapter four shows that both the collective self and private self are present in the Akan person. The degree to which each of the selves is activated is, however, dependent on the situation one finds oneself in as well as the anticipated consequences of the decision. In so far as individual desires, hopes and aspirations are pursued in the light and consideration of social norms, the collective self is much more sampled in the Akan person than the private self. Key to the social considerations that determines which self one employs is the pursuit of honour. Acts that may attract honour are usually pursued while those that may attract the social sanction of withdrawal of honour are usually avoided.

7.3.2 Shared group fate/Control of people's lives

The Akan believes that one's conduct has either positive or negative effects on other people in one's group. If one's actions bring honour, it brings honour not only to oneself but to one's group as well. This fact of shared group fate may be applicable to a number of cultures around the globe. However, the Akan has a spiritual dimension to this shared group fate. For the Akan, certain actions by individuals may bring social calamities of woe

(*musuo*) to one's community as a whole. It is for this reason that when taboos or customs are broken they are taken seriously. The religious rituals that are performed to mitigate the effect of the broken taboos and customs on one's community is expressive of Akan belief in shared group fate. It is from this belief in shared group fate that social sanctions are exercised either spontaneously or deliberately. As the discussion in chapter 4 shows, persons in authority ranging from elderly siblings, parents, family heads, elders of the town and chiefs are expected to act in ways that help individuals to behave responsibly for the common good of their communities. It was also noted that supernatural beings with interest in the society exercise some sanctions on the living for the same purpose of sharing in group fate with the living. The ancestors, the living dead, who are considered integral part of the Akan society, should be singled out for mention here. If the elders of the community are meticulous with protecting the traditions and customs of the community, it is precisely because they sit on the stools of the ancestors whose interest they must protect in the protection of the traditions (Rattray 1929:309-310).

7.3.3 Interpersonal obligation within the ingroup/Obligation to return favour

Every Akan is expected to know his or her obligations and rights within the social system. These are not written codes but are known through traditions and are both observed and expected of others. It is observed that the Akan society is based more on obligation than on individual rights and so one assumes his rights in the exercise of one's obligations, a practice which makes society a chain of interrelationships (Opoku 1977:11). It is therefore understandable that the solidarity of the community is maintained by a strong sense of corporateness, undergirded by laws, customs, taboos and set of forms of behaviour which constitute the moral code. Right conduct means keeping the laws, taboos, regulations and customs, and infringement of these constitutes moral evil, which is defined in terms of what one does against his fellow person (Opoku 1977:166).

Recall should be made of Forte's observation that a father has no legal authority over his children and that he cannot even compel them to live with him. In spite of this, it is regarded as the duty and pride of a father to bring up his children – that is, to feed,

clothe, and educate them and set them up later in life. Fathers are said to be generally stricter than mothers in exacting obedience, deference, and good behaviour from their children. Fortes further observes that a father wins his children's affection by caring for them. They cannot inherit his property, but he can and often does provide for them by making them gifts of property, land, or money during his lifetime or on his death-bed. To insult, abuse or assault one's father is an irreparable wrong, one which is bound to bring ill luck (*mmusuo*). For the mother, Fortes maintains that she has an absolutely binding moral relationship with her child in which her duty is to provide the child food, clothing and nowadays schooling, jealously watching her brother, instead of her husband to discharge the duties of legal guardian faithfully. The mother expects obedience and affectionate respect from her children and to show disrespect to one's mother is tantamount to sacrilege. While there is no legal obligation on a son or daughter to support a father in old age, it would be regarded as a shame and an evil act if he or she did not do so (Fortes 1975:268). Dolphyne explains that those who take care of their parents are considered good children for they do what is expected of them, and those who fail to do that are not good children. The saying that most expresses this obligation of children to parents is, *wo awofo hwe wo ma wosi fifi a, wo nso whe won ma won se ntutu* – literally meaning 'after your parents have nurtured you to grow your teeth, you should also take care of them while they lose their teeth' (Dolphyne, pers. comm., 4th July 2016).

7.3.4 Sunsum as a determinant of one's personality

The *sunsum* (spirit) of a man accounts for the character, disposition and intelligence of a person, and contrary to the *okra* which is always constant, the *sunsum* is subject to change, and is capable of being trained to be strong and resilient (see Opoku 1977:96). The *sunsum* is derived from the father at conception and is the main bearer of the personality (Appiah 1992:98). It is the *sunsum* which is 'reflected in the appearance of the person and in the qualities peculiar to the person's individuality, especially moral qualities' (Opoku 1977:96: cf. Appiah 1992:98). It is believed that the *sunsum* can leave a person at night in sleep and dreams are thought to be a reflection of the *sunsum*'s night journeys (Appiah 1992:98). Not only can a weak *sunsum* be attacked by witchcraft

with evil things such as illness but it can also be overpowered by a person's evil thoughts, causing the person to become ill. It is the *sunsum* that can be bewitched but if one has a strong *sunsum* one can withstand any evil spirit (Sarpong 2002:91). Closely related to the function of the *sunsum* is the *nton*. As already noted, the *nton* is inherited from the father and gives characteristics like nobility, respectability, courage and other inherited characteristics to the individual. It should be noted that both *sunsum* and *nton* are derived from the father and are both associated with the character of the person. This does not mean that what one becomes is altogether programmed. What happens to a person cannot be explained with any degree of finality as it may be one's destiny, the working of evil forces or what one has brought upon oneself (see Opoku 1977:102-103).

7.4 CONCLUSION

Kinship, homeland, religion and custom provide Akans important determinants of their ethnicity. It is from these that myth of common ancestry and historical memory are derived with the clan system making possible a superordinate identity which cuts across all Akan tribes. The name and language used by Akans to describe their ingroups tend to be more positive than what they use in describing others – a phenomenon which is also true of other ethnic groups. The Akan society also makes it possible for one to have multiple ethnic identity in which it is possible for people to express loyalty to more than one ethnic group. Though ethnic dominance in terms of power appears to be a thing of the past in the postcolonial era, complexes resulting from past experience of ethnic dominance still abound. In terms of social identity, it is discovered that Akans derive a sense of pride from their ethnic affiliation, giving expression to it in a variety of ways. In terms of social mobility, not much can be said about the clan system and the tribes except that in the case of multiple ethnic identity, one may choose to emphasise one ethnic identity and deemphasise another for utilitarian purposes. Psychological mobility as a description of members of a group behaving like outsiders is a phenomenon that may be controlled by the drawing of boundaries (in terms of the insistence on the behaviour characteristic of the ingroup) and the use of stern warnings. Ingroup prototypical members are used as symbols of the character to which members

are urged because such a character is considered representative of and cherished by the family. Social creativity finds expression in the reinterpretation of situations in which individuals are encouraged to develop positive attitudes in the face of difficulties in which their current posture tends to be leading to defeat.

In respect of personality, it was realised that both collective and private selves are at work in the Akan. Much as both selves are at work in the individual, the quest for acceptable conduct and what is honourable tend to make Akans sample their collective selves in most situations, pursuing personal goals within the framework of the larger goals and expectations of the society. The Akan belief in the communal nature of the society in which the living, the living dead and the yet-to-be-born share common interest and fate makes it imperative for measures to be taken either spontaneously or deliberately to control the behaviour of members of the family. A good person is defined in terms of knowing and fulfilling one's obligation. Akans do not believe in a fatalistic state of a person since they believe that even destiny can be altered by dint of training and good behaviour. The *sunsum*, the determining factor of the individual's character (as it is with the *nton*), can therefore be trained to become strong and resilient. The fact that the *nton* received from the father determines what a person observes as taboo shows the extent to which one's attitudes are shaped by one's fatherly influence. With these concepts as lenses, an Akan reading of the warning passages in Hebrews can now be undertaken and this is taken up in Chapter 8.

Chapter 8

An Akan reading of the warning passages

With insights from the Akan society as pertain to social identity, this Chapter looks at the warning passages of Hebrews. Without any attempt to reinvent the wheel in discussing separately the five warning passages under the lens of social identity in the Akan society, the focus will be on looking concisely at the summary of the earlier discussions, bearing in mind the related theories and concepts. This concise approach should afford us the advantage of quick appreciation of the author's argument from an Akan perspective. It should be recalled that the warning passages chosen to be discussed in this study are not what one would strictly call warning passages since they embrace the immediate frame of the author's argument in which such warnings make sense. Since Hebrews 1 is presented by the author of Hebrews as the foundation and introductory chapter for all the arguments in the warning passages, it is imperative that the summary of Chapter 1 is first looked at before the summary of the findings from the warning passages. All of these are done through the lens of social identity in the Akan society.

The Akan reading Hebrews comes to it primarily with the Akan worldview. This reader, however, also needs to deal with the worldview and experience of the recipients of Hebrews who lived in first-century Mediterranean society, as well as the Jewish religious background that come into play in Hebrews. If an Akan were found among the audience of Hebrews, what Akan insights would be brought to bear on his or her understanding of the author's exhortation, and what challenges would the exhortation of Hebrews present to him or her? It was noted, as is characteristic of the dynamics of social identity, that the tendency of individuals to have a positive social image that is derived from positive evaluation of one's group is persistent in Hebrews. Throughout Hebrews Jesus is presented in such a way that gives greater honour (ascribed honour) to his group. This is consistent with the theories on ethnicity that argues that the honour of a group in the Mediterranean society is one usually attained through some action in the public sphere by a dominant male character. The description of Christ's honour is

presented in a competitive manner that sets him high above every prototypical member of any other competing group within the society – whether of the Jewish religion, family groups, trade associations, or the entire city that practices sacrifices to the gods and veneration of the emperors. A look at the summary findings of Chapter 1, as well as the warning passages in the light of reasoning in Akan social identity, is now undertaken without a recap of these summaries.

8.1 An Akan perspective on Hebrews 1

What sense will an Akan make of the things with which the author argues for Jesus' superiority and for that matter, the better evaluation of his group? Jesus's superiority to angels as mediators of the law to Moses and servants of those who are to inherit salvation (Heb 1:4, 14) are concepts foreign to the Akan. Angels are not part of traditional Akan cosmology.¹⁸⁰ The concept of inheritors of salvation which has salvation of one's soul in the hereafter, among others, in mind is also foreign to the Akan. For the Akan, salvation is obtained in the here and now and is about the life of the human being as he exists now. But these must be interpreted in the light of an Akan Christian who has been presented with the gospel of Jesus Christ to whom the Christian concept of salvation has been given, and against the background of the Jewish religion in which the concept of angelic mediation is present. To understand the angels as one group of the spirit beings is not difficult, since Akans have a cosmos that is heavily populated by spirits. Jesus's superiority over the angels should serve to indicate a higher status of Jesus' spiritual authority. Angelic servitude to believers straight away will place the angels very low on the hierarchy of the spirit beings for the Akan. The gods and ancestors are not seen as servants of the living members of the community. The ancestors are regarded highly among Akans as elders to whom one looks for inspiration, and from whom assistance is sought. They are integral part of the life of the human community. The spirits that serve the living in Akan cosmology are those powers

¹⁸⁰ Opoku (1977:9-10) places the ancestors next to God, the ancestors are followed by supernatural entities like the gods with special powers from God to offer assistance in specific areas of their specialty to people. Then follows the totemic animals and plants, before agents of witchcraft, magic and sorcery. Then finally, charms, amulets, and talismans called *suman*, used for protective as well as offensive purposes.

that can be employed at will to serve one's purposes such as *suman* (among which are charms, amulets and talisman), and these are at very low levels of the hierarchy of the spirits.

To appreciate the import of the author's argument, the angels should be placed high within Akan cosmology to show that by becoming superior to them, Jesus has surpassed a highly esteemed level of spiritual significance and authority. The angels should be presented as very close to *Onyamkopon* (God), and as the direct messengers of *Onyamkopon*. In this case, the angels should be placed just after God and before the ancestors in Akan cosmology. In this sense Jesus's superiority over them becomes more meaningful. It is also in this sense that the angels as servants to believers who are to inherit salvation makes the sense the author endeavours to make. Believers in Christ, then, according to the author, should be seen as having the direct messengers of God serving them. Even before believer's identification as children of God, by the designation of the angels as their servants, the believers' special place with God is already hinted. Those who serve are traditionally known as *nkoa* or *mfenaa* (slaves) or *asomfo* (servants) in the Akan society, and they serve the significant people of the household. This puts believers among the significant people of God's household as they are those who are served. It is not just their service that is in focus here, but more importantly, the calibre of those who serve believers – angels, special spiritual beings who serve the Divine One. If there are reasons to see the believers as special, the enjoyment of angelic servitude is certainly one of them, and the author of Hebrews finds it necessary to establish this right from the beginning for a people who have lost the needed positive social identity. Against the Jewish community, from which some of the believers had come, the believers in Christ should appreciate the better place they have in Christ as the mediators of the Jewish law are now their servants. Moreover, by this, believers have a mediator far better than those of the Jewish religion. The spokesperson and messenger of God to the believers, Jesus, is greater than that of the Jews and, by implication, all others associated with other religions. The implication for the Akan is that one who is greater than their traditional priest (*Okomfo*) is the one through whom God now speaks to us. This is because the *Okomfo*'s role in mediation is

only between the living and the gods who themselves occupy a lower level in the hierarchy of the spirits than where the angels are now placed.

The title 'Son of God' (Heb 1:2) *per se*, which the author uses for Jesus may not mean much to the Akan who believes that all people are God's children. Jesus as the Son of God, distinct from all other 'sons [children] of God,' comes to light only when he is considered against the attributes the author mentions of him. It is also these attributes that make the title 'God' (Heb 1:8), as used for Jesus, meaningful for they are mostly divine attributes (Heb 1:2-4). Jesus not only shares the very nature of God, but is also the agent of creation who successfully achieves the purification of sins as a result of which he is exalted to sit at the right hand of God. The concept of purification as it relates to sin is present in Akan thought and practice. As noted earlier, the Odwira Festival is a sin-cleansing festival for the entire community. The end of purification, however, is not basically for access into the presence of the deity as it is for harmonious living in the community and prosperity of the Akan. This, notwithstanding, for the *Okomfo* who plays a mediation role, appearing before the deity requires the observation of some sin-cleansing rituals. Appearing before a deity is hardly the end of Akan religious aspiration for the common people. Direct access to God's presence as Hebrews assures the believer should be seen as a distinctive Christian and Jewish element which requires purely Christian and Jewish thought to appreciate. Once that appreciation is done, the Akan now begins to see the special high position occupied by Christ, since it is his presence with God that makes believers' access to God's presence possible.

Related to this high place of Christ, is his unique position at God's right hand which He assumed following God's approval. When Jesus had successfully achieved the purification having to do with sin, he is approved and exalted by God to a place at God's right hand. This should be understood in terms of a special place distinct and superior to those occupied by Akan ancestors and the gods. The place of the ancestors is usually conceived of in terms of their power by virtue of being in the spirit realm rather than of their place with God in the intimate way that Jesus finds himself. This is in spite of the

fact that the ancestors come next to God in Akan cosmology. The position of the ancestors is also usually conceived of in terms of their presence with the human community part of which they are. Hebrews' identification of the place of Jesus at the right hand of God makes Jesus enjoy an enviable place which none ever has occupied in Akan thought – the singularity of position with God at God's right hand.

Hebrews' use of words like 'king,' 'kingdom,' 'throne' and 'sceptre (Heb 1:8-9), presents Jesus as an eternal king over his people. He is anointed with the oil of gladness because he loved righteousness and hated wickedness in making the right response of faithfulness in his suffering rather than breaking faith with God (Heb 1:9). His eternal kingship makes his people an eternal kingdom (Heb 1:8-9). Akans know what it means to be under powerful kings; such kings fight with the subjects to establish and defend their powerful kingdoms. Jesus's kingdom is not one established by wars involving the subjects, but solely by him who loved righteousness and hated evil in his choice of the cross over freedom from it. By loving righteousness and hating evil, the believers too will make a choice that makes them fight to defend the cause of God's kingdom against those who seek to make them take the course of action that rather goes to defeat God's kingdom. Loving righteousness and hating evil is what they are required to do in order to make them faithful citizens of God's kingdom as Christ is. Furthermore, Akan believers, by virtue of their faith in Christ, have come to share in God's kingdom and the historical memory of the people of God so that the ancestors of the Jews to whom God spoke in the past (Heb 1:1) become their ancestors too. In this way the author establishes for his audience ethnic connections with the same deity of the Jewish people. Jesus remains on his throne until all his enemies are made a footstool for his feet (Heb 1:13). The Akan understands enemies basically in two ways: those who wish evil for a person, and in terms of opposing kingdoms or states with which one's kingdom is in conflict. With the mention of king and kingdom, as they relate to Christ and his people, the most likely interpretation for the Akan will be that of opposing kingdom. In their history of wars with other tribes, the subjection of defeated kings to shameful, humiliating and painful death is a ready lens for an Akan understanding of Hebrews' assertion that Jesus is exalted to sit at God's right hand until all his enemies are made

his footstool. Jesus is therefore presented as the King who will subdue all those who oppose him and his faithful ones. This provides the framework for appreciating the intergroup dynamics in which the believers are experiencing suffering. That is to say, the believers are suffering because those who subject them to public abuses are of the kingdom in conflict with the kingdom of their king.

Jesus was anointed with the oil of gladness because he emerged victorious in the contest of mediating God's people to God as seen in his achievement of purification of sins and his exaltation as well as in loving righteousness and hating evil. Due to this, God now speaks through him as a Son instead of the prophets (Heb 1:2-3, 9). Victory in a contest comes with praises and celebrations in the Akan society. White powder is poured on the victor in great quantity so as to make him (or her) appear white. In the community where the victor lives, his lot and that of his family are honour and pride. The praise of the victor becomes the subject of discussion of the community, especially among women. In cases where the victory is of benefit to the entire community, such as victory in war, songs are composed in honour of the hero and sung while women are out playing. In this light, the positive evaluation of Jesus as one who emerges victorious in the contest of mediation of his people to God, and for that matter, of the Christian group, becomes obvious. The one occupying such a unique and high position as the victorious mediator with honour from God cannot be obeyed or ignored without the corresponding high level of reward or punishment as the argument in the subsequent chapters of Hebrews shows.

8.1.1 Summary of Chapter 1 in the light of Akan social identity

It can be realised that in Chapter 1, which sets the tone for all the arguments of the warning passages, the introduction of the concept of angels into Akan cosmology, where the angels must be placed next to God and before the ancestors, enables the Akan to have the sense the author seeks to make. Once this is done, it makes both Jesus and believers superior to the angels who are presented as servants of believers and to whom Jesus is superior. Also, the concept of Son of God, though not entirely new to the Akan, can only be fully appreciated as it applies to Jesus when seen against

the accompanying attributes that define him as God in Chapter 1. It is only in this sense that Jesus's sonship as distinct from the sonship (children) of all human beings to God (as held by Akans) can be understood. The social identity of the readers here is built around the superiority of both Jesus and the audience spoken of as above the angels, as well as the identification of Jesus as a unique Son of God. The kingdom of Christ and the subjection of his enemies under his foot recalls powerful Akan kings and kingdoms that subdued their enemies. As members of Christ's kingdom, Akans should appreciate the need to fight on the side of their King while upholding the hope that their oppressors, belonging to the kingdom of their King's enemies, would be subdued, humiliated and destroyed by their King in the end. The ethnic significance of this self-understanding for the Akan person with implications for their conduct within Christ's kingdom samples the believers' collective selves. The anointing of Christ with the oil of gladness is also appreciated in the light of the joy enjoyed by the victor from the sprinkling of white powder on him or her amidst songs of celebration and the hailing of the victory in the society. The implication that the Akan believer is on the side of the victor comes with the emotive significance for one's social identity. In this way Hebrews 1 lays the foundation for the author's positive evaluation of the social identity of his audience on the basis of which the appeal for continued loyalty to the Christian group and to Christ is presented in the warning passages that employ reasoning in ethnicity, ingroup and intergroup behaviour and personality.

8.2 An Akan reading of Hebrew's ethnic appeal

The conclusion on the warning passages from the perspective of ethnicity showed that the author described the members of the Christian group with specific ethnic terms that distinguished them from others who do not belong to the group. These ethnic descriptions were intended to set the minds of the members on the social scripts that make possible and compelling his call on them to give specific responses. On the basis of these social scripts, the believers are required to participate in the attitudes that are characteristic of the group. At the same time these social scripts drive home how evil it would be for the believers to break faith with the Christian group. These scripts further justify the severity of the punishment that must be expected in the event of breaking of

faith with the group. The question that should engage our attention now is how can the ethnic appeal of the author be understood within the Akan understanding of ethnicity?

By calling believers 'many sons and daughters' (Heb 2:10, 14), and 'brothers and sisters' to Christ (Heb 2:11), the author identifies the believers in familiar Akan kinship terms that convey a great sense of communion as one finds in the life within the Akan family and clan. As sons and daughters, they have one Father who is God, and Jesus is their Brother. The introduction of 'holy brothers who share in a heavenly calling' (Heb 3:1) adds something new for the Akan. The world of the Akan does not include heaven as a place of abode that one can belong to. The place of the ancestors is *Asamando*, a very distant place for ghosts and yet the Akan believes that the ancestors who live there have daily experiences with the living. The important point of contact here is the sharing in a life with members living in a spiritual realm. This spiritual realm now expands to include heaven from which Akan believers now receive their calling. The note of holiness associated with 'holy brothers' may convey a sense of ritual purity performed for harmonious relationship with the spirit beings and for the peace and prosperity of the community. But the Christian perspective on holiness here is related to the sacrifice of Christ by which believers are set apart for God. Neither the concept of sacrifice for cleansing, nor the use of human victim, is foreign to the Akan. We have already noted how powerful sacrifices performed with human victims in high and powerful positions could yield tremendous results. The voluntary sacrifice of Akan Chiefs like Agya Ahor of the Abura-Mfante people, and Tweneboah-Kodua (paramount chief) of Kumawu in Asante, may be recalled as examples. Though Hebrews describes believers in familiar ethnic terms of brothers and sisters and sons and daughters, their relationship with God gives them a dimension that transcends the earthly just as their calling is heavenly.

The ethnic description of the audience provides one frame in which to appreciate what God does for the audience. Throughout the warning passages, everything Jesus did in his humiliation and exaltation was done for the benefit of the children of God – Jesus' brothers and sisters. He came to destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and to deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong

slavery (Heb 2:14-15). This deliverance, on the surface, should make a strong appeal to the Akan who sees deliverance from death as salvation. Those who consult deities for protection do so for protection against death (pre-mature death usually resulting from an enemy's action) among other things. But Hebrews is talking about something more than deliverance from death as in the prevention of an impending death. Hebrews speaks here of deliverance from death as in overcoming the fear of death so that one can go through death standing by what is right when need be. In their history, Akans know of the courage to face death. Great chiefs who offered themselves for the sake of their communities did it having overcome the fear that should have made them decide otherwise. If properly understood, the author's call should make the Akan believer take inspiration from the liberation that Jesus gives from the fear of death and like their great ancestors – Agya Ahor and Tweneboah Koduah – be willing to go through death on account of their faithfulness to Christ and, for that matter, the Christian community. Just as Akans believe that death introduces them to a new phase of life with the ancestors, Hebrews, sharing in the common faith of first-century Christianity, believes that death is not the end of life. Indeed, Jesus, the Brother of the many sons and daughters of God, went through death only to be exalted to sit at the place of power at the right hand of God. Now, it is this Jesus who brings many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). Akan believers can identify with this glory into which Jesus brings them. In the first place, if death is about joining the members of the community who have gone ahead as ancestors, then death should mean a reunion with their honoured Brother, Jesus, who has done so much for them. Secondly, by becoming his brothers and sisters, Jesus' glory has become their glory even now. The truth is that, as Hebrews spoke about Christ bringing many sons and daughters to glory, his intention was not for the audience to imagine this glory as something stored up for them after death. His primary purpose was the positive evaluation of the social identity the believers should derive from such thought by which their loyalty to Christ and his group could be strengthened here and now.

Consistent with the idea that whatever Jesus did was for the benefit of his brothers and sisters, Jesus is presented as suffering when he was tempted so that he is able to help those who are being tempted (Heb 2:17). Key to Jesus' temptation was the option to

avoid death on the cross, hence his suffering includes his endurance of death on the cross. Against this understanding, his suffering as he was tempted should remind the Akan believer not only of the death some of their past chiefs went through for the good of their communities, but also the mental agony of contemplating the fact that they had to go through death together with all that they would lose in terms of their possessions and family. Hebrews says Jesus is able to help believers who are facing even worse situations than that of these chiefs, worse because added to the trauma of possible impending death and separation from family is the constant ridicule, shame and all forms of abuse endured from members of the society. It is in this terrible situation that the Son comes to their aid. Furthermore, the believers share in Christ (Heb 3:14) and enter God's rest because they believe in Christ (Heb 4:3). The sharing in Christ possess no difficulty to the Akan because it brings to mind Akan concepts of sharing in one's possessions as in inheritance as well as the privileges of ascribed honour. Entering God's rest can only be understood by placing it in the Jewish concept of God's promised rest now applied to the believers in Christ. The same should be said about believers being called to draw near with confidence to receive mercy and grace from the throne of grace because they have a high priest who is able to sympathise with their weakness (Heb 4:15-16). No concepts of throne of grace and receiving grace and mercy, as in this context, exist in Akan thought. The closest one can come to is receiving pardon from a chief for a misdeed and especially, in the event that one supposed to be executed is allowed to 'buy his or her head.' Hebrew's use of receiving grace and mercy to help in times of need has in view the help needed to continue to remain faithful while enduring hostility and persecution.

The sympathising high priest hardly has any similar Akan concept and is to be appreciated both from the perspective of Jewish cultic practices, as well as Christian description of Jesus' ministry in which he is both the high priest as well as the victim of the sacrifice. Akan priests perform rituals for the benefit of adherents including rituals for cleansing. These rituals are done for a fee. There are no known qualifications for traditional priests that prescribe the ability to sympathise with one's brothers and sisters. A sense of responsibility can surely be expected of Akan traditional priests while

absence of their sympathy for adherents cannot be claimed even if such sympathy may not be granted to all. The identification of Jesus as the high priest takes ethnic relevance, not only in his designation as their own Brother, but also in the fact that religion is imbedded in Akan ethnic groups such as the household, family, or even an entire Akan tribe as was noted of the Adanse tribe and the Bonsam Shrine. The identification of Jesus as a Brother and a high priest creates the impression that Jesus plays the role of the high priest for his own kin people, holding the wellbeing of his family at heart.

Very important for the argument of the author is his indication that his audience are enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come (Heb 6:4-5). The Akan understanding of an enlightened person (*nimdefo*) carries the notion of one who has gone through the right training (*nteteē*) so that the one knows exactly how to behave in a given situation. Akan understanding of *nimdefo* is akin to Hebrew's use of the 'enlightened,' and perfectly serves Hebrew's employment of the expression as basis for demanding the appropriate conduct from his audience in their current circumstances. Since they have shared in the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come (Heb 6:4-5), they are required as enlightened children of God to return the favour to God their Father. The Akan adage that speaks of children's obligation to take care of their parents after their parents have nurtured them, imply that children should not abandon their parents in trying moments. It would therefore not only be a shame but also evil in Akan thought if the believers should abandon their Father (God) who through their Brother (Jesus) has granted them all the benefits mentioned. The benefits the believers enjoy from their Father are expressed elaborately in a variety of expressions (sometimes with many of such expressions referring to the same benefit) to underscore the evil of believers' inappropriate response to God's manifold goodness. It was noted, for instance, that sharing in the Holy Spirit and tasting the powers of the age to come are different ways of speaking about the same benefit (Heb 6:4-5). It is in the light of the Father's great beneficence and believers' obligation to return favour that all the benefits in Hebrews should be considered. Their hope in Christ gives them a better possession, an abiding

one (Heb 10:34). Even the suffering they are going through is God's discipline that is meant for their good (Heb 12:7-11). Theirs is the heavenly city (Heb 12:22) and the kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28). All these benefits are available to the members because their Father through Jesus, their Brother, made them possible. The Akan adult child who fails to take care of his or her parents in their old age is never forgiven the evil of their action. Not only do parents complain and sigh over the thought of such ingratitude but also members of the community never cease to decry such a person. It is therefore not difficult for the Akan believer to appreciate Hebrews' argument that God has done so much for his children to make their abandonment of him in their suffering an unforgivable offense.

Hebrews' line of argument based on the conviction that believers must behave in a manner characteristic of the people of God can be understood in the light of Akan belief and expectation that people behave in a manner consistent with that of the group to which they belong. The usual phrases such as *Akanni nkasa saa* (an Akan does not speak like this) and *Akanni nnye saa* (an Akan does not do that) express this belief and expectation. As noted of the character of the Akan person, the *sunsum* inherited from the father determines the character traits of the child. The *nton*, also of the father and to which the child belongs, has strong indications for one's character and determines, among others, one's taboos and prohibitions. The fact that steps are taken to inculcate the expected character traits in the child also provides further basis for expecting children to exhibit these traits as the writer of Hebrews does of his audience. The qualities of Jesus portrayed in Hebrews are intended to be typical not only of God, but also of other members of the family of God (the audience in this particular case). As noted earlier, throughout Hebrews these qualities of Jesus define what must be one's right attitude to suffering as faithful children of God. Jesus suffered death which he tasted for everyone, and he was crowned with glory and honour as a result (Heb 2:9). He is faithful over God's house as a Son (Heb 3:6). He was tempted but no sin was found in him (Heb 4:15). Jesus succeeded in his faithfulness because he took to a number of ways: In the days of his flesh he offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard

because of his reverence (Heb 5:7). He learnt obedience through what he suffered and being made perfect, he became the source of salvation to all who obey him (Heb 5:8). For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross scorning its shame and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:2). By all these he managed to endure such hostility against him from sinners so that as the believers consider him they too will not grow weary or fainthearted (Heb 12:3). The implication for the believers is clear: They too, like Jesus, must not be afraid to taste death as Jesus did and was crowned with glory in the end (Heb 2:9). They should also be found faithful in the household of God (Heb 3:6) so that as they are tempted, no sin (in terms of breaking faith with God) would be found in them (Heb 4:15). To be able to do this they, like Jesus, should come to him who is able to save them from death with tears and loud cries and be heard for their reverence (that is, their respect for God which makes it impossible to break loyalty with him no matter the situation; Heb 5:7). They can also learn obedience from what they are suffering so that they can be made perfect (Heb 5:8). Like Jesus, they too for the joy of entering God's rest (Heb 4:3 cf. Heb 12:2) set before them should endure the cross and scorn its shame. These are the ways by which they are expected to consider Jesus who endured such hostility against him from sinners so that they will not grow weary or fainthearted (Heb 12:3). These are the sure ways of exhibiting the same faithfulness characteristic of God.

Hebrews uses religious expressions that underscore the fact that believers are God's people and highlights God's goodness towards them. These religious descriptions of the audience provide concepts that may not be wholly appreciated in terms of Akan thought, yet Akan concepts offer important glimpses into what the author sought to establish. Hebrews' description of Jesus as the apostle and high priest of the confession of his people (Heb 3:1; cf. Heb 9:11), recalls the Akan concept of household allegiance to a people's god in which the members of the household are the beneficiaries of the religious activities done with the deity. As noted earlier, the concept of a high priest is not present in Akan thought. The same can be said of the confession that qualifies the high priest. Yet the Akan knows of the priest who performs the needed rituals to solicit the help of a deity for one's family whether they are priests or merely people who have

been taught to perform such rituals for their people. The association of some of the deities with specific families and clans also speaks to the ethnic significance of Jesus as high priest for the Akan. To understand Christ as the apostle, the concept of *Osomafo* might be helpful. *Osomafo* is one sent with specific mission. Understood this way, the Akan should see Jesus as sent by God to fulfil everything the author indicates that Jesus has done for his brothers and sisters.

However, Jewish and Christian understanding of the concepts must be employed by the Akan Christian in order to appreciate what the author means by 'high priest of our confession' and of the heavenly dimensions of the arguments. Their great high priest has passed through the heavens (Heb 4:14) and is the source of eternal life to those who obey him (Heb 5:9). For the Akan, the idea of eternal life could be understood in terms of the cycle of life which continues even in death with the ancestors. Such a life involves the wellbeing of the family in this present life shared by both the living and the living dead. However, Hebrews' use of the term expresses a quality of life with God which liberates one from all forces to enable one to live in all conditions, assured of better life with God after death. Hebrews' concept of eternal life does not necessarily imply a life without suffering and hostility, as the Akan concept holds. Jesus being the source of eternal life, for the Akan, may readily find expression in the Akan thought in which the ultimate goal of all consultation with a deity is the peace and prosperity of the family in this present life. As noted earlier, eternal life should be understood in terms of the unbroken life which continues with the ancestors even in death. This is where the difference lies: for the Akan, eternal life must imply a good life which should be free of all ills in this present life, but for Hebrews, eternal life can be experienced in the here and now even in the midst of adversity. For both the worldview of the Akan and Hebrews, life continues even after death. The difference lies in where one spends the life; whereas it is with the ancestors for the Akan, for Hebrews, it is with God. The Akan adage, *akokoba a oben oni no na odi abebe sre* (the chick that stays with the hen gets the thigh of the grasshopper) speaks to need for allegiance to one's leader in order to get the best from the leader. Conversely, *siantie ne onwam atikopo* (the block at the back of the head of *onwam* [a wild bird] is due to its disobedience) points to the evil

consequences of disobedience. These two adages reflect the social requirement that parents in particular and elders in general should be obeyed. At the same time they speak of the blessing of obedience and the evil consequences for disobedience. This Akan social requirement of obedience should give meaning to Hebrew's insistence that it is for those who obey Jesus that he is the source of salvation.

With his emphasis on what God has done for his people in religious terms, the author further indicates that the consciences of the audience are purified through the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God (Heb 9:24). He enters the holy places not made with hands to appear before God on behalf of his people (Heb 9:24). He has perfected them as those who are being sanctified by a single offering (Heb 10:14). Their hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and their bodies washed with pure water (Heb 10:22). They have also been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb 10:10). The concept of a once for all sacrifice is Christian and unknown to the Akan in so far as it has to do with the purification that deals with sin and defilement. Yearly and other occasional rituals need to be performed to achieve ritual cleansing from sin and defilement in Akan thought. As noted earlier, the concept of human victim for the performance of highly potent sacrifices is not foreign to the Akan. The idea of cleansing one's conscience from guilt and sin is also present in the *Odwira* festival, which is done for the purification of the people. Its intent is, however, not primarily for approach to a deity as it is for harmonious living in the community that involves both spiritual and the human members. The description of Jesus as the founder and perfecter of the faith of believers makes Jesus the model in his religious life and attitudes for believers in how they should pursue their faith journey in their present situation (Heb 12:2). *Osatwafo* is the vanguard who leads and clears the path to be followed. As the pioneer, Jesus is the *Osatwafo* who leads for his people to follow and his final destination becomes the final designation of his followers. Peculiar to Christian belief is the idea that Jesus performed his priestly ritual for cleansing in a heavenly place not made with hands. For the Akan, the sphere of the spiritual is not the place for the performance of ritual. Rituals are performed by the living members of the community to spirit beings who respond with their benevolence.

Hebrews' identification of the heavenly sphere as the place of the sacrifice of Christ is meant to underscore the superiority of his sacrifice to all that are performed in the world of human existence. The Akan believer can hardly miss this import. By its superiority to all sacrifices made in the sphere of human existence, the greatness of God's beneficence towards his people is underscored. Within Akan thought, the religious descriptions of what God has done for his people should communicate God's benevolence and the transcendent nature of God's action for his people – the very point the author seeks to make.

As has already been noted in theories of ethnicity, name and language are used to describe an ingroup favourably and outgroups unfavourably. Akans share in this use of name and language. It has already been observed that Akans see themselves as the most civilised and foremost among their neighbours. Sayings such as *[a]ninguase mfata Okanni ba* (The Akan does not deserve shame) speak of the positive self-description of the Akan. All who do not speak their language are described as *Apotofo* (Babblers). Even among Akan tribes negative descriptions of outgroups exist as noted in Chapter 7 of this study. As noted before, Hebrews has many instances in which his audience has positive language and expressions that sets them in a better light than their opponents. The import of such use of names and language is not difficult for the Akan to appreciate. Hebrews' description of his audience as God's house (Heb 3:6) and as people who have come to share in Christ (Heb 3:14) is set against the unbelieving Jews represented by the wilderness generation, described as rebellious people who provoked God and sinned, resulting in their bodies falling in the wilderness. The result was that God swore they would not enter his rest (Heb 3:16-19). In contrast to the unbelieving Jews, the believers, of whom the author feels better things that belong to salvation (Heb 6:7-9) can draw near to the throne of grace (Heb 4:16). The believers are enlightened people of God (Heb 6:4-5) as opposed to those outside the group considered to be in the dark (cf. Heb 10:32). Moreover, they have demonstrated good works for which God will reward them (Heb 6:10-11). Unlike the wilderness generation, they will receive what has been promised by doing God's will in their endurance (Heb 10:35) because they are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but those who

have faith and preserve their souls (Heb 10:39). They have a common source with Christ in God as well as in Christ (Heb 2:11; 5:9; cf. 4:6; 3:18-19). For the Akan Christian, the author's intent should be clear. He wants the believer to appreciate how better placed believers are so that they would persevere in their current difficult situation on account of how much God has accomplished for them which must not be made to be in vain. If they should endure suffering, it is because it is God's way of training them as legitimate children (Heb 12:8). In the Akan society, *ntetee* (training) is required of all who are expected to know their obligations and fulfil them as responsible members of the family. Candidates for chieftaincy go through rigorous training because of the importance of the charge they will assume. If the Akan believer is to inherit all the immense privileges and benefits so described in Hebrews, then the best training must be obtained, and as Hebrews indicates, such training is not meant to be easy (Heb 12:11).

Shared historical memory as a feature of ethnicity is recalled for a variety of purposes. It was noted of the Tafo Chief, Nana Agyen Frimpong, that he recalled the participation of the people of Tafo in all the Asante wars to underscore the fact that Tafo people are not cowards. When Yaa Asantewaa called the chiefs of the Asante Kingdom to arise as men of Osei Tutu and Opoku Tenten, she recalled the memory of the military exploits of Nana Osei Tutu and Opoku Tenten and succeeded in getting the chiefs go to war against the British even though they had initially shown cowardice. By recalling their shared historical memory, the chiefs were not only reminded of the community of brave people to which they belong but also had their courage restored and stirred for the desired response.

The author of Hebrews often recalls shared historical memory to reinforce the group identity of his audience as people who belong to God as well as reawaken heroic deeds of past generations (and of their own) in the audience. It also helps him to stress their obligations to the group in ministry to one another. Hebrews describes the recipients as people who have demonstrated their love in the service of the saints in the past for which God will reward them (Heb 6:10). The audience stand in line with the historical

experience of the heroes of faith as in a relay race because on the one hand, the heroes have run the race of faith before, and on the other, their perfection depends on what God is doing now in Christ in which the readers have their current experience (Heb 11:40). The life of Esau is recalled as an example of an immoral character to be avoided because he made a hasty decision for the pleasure of the moment and lost his more valuable and enduring right to inheritance which he later sought in vain to regain. The believers under the pressure of the moment stand in a similar situation as Esau but they should guard against any decision to go for the ease of the moment and miss the eternal reward God has for them. Jesus's own example is also recalled from their common historical memory to which it now belongs, and he becomes the sole model on whom the gaze of the audience should be constantly fixed. This makes Jesus the prototypical member of the group holding the ideal image of the group's character. In his character is embodied the ideals of the group, hence being like him is being a true member of the group. As they look away to him they should be able to run the race the way Jesus did, despising the shame and enduring their suffering in faithfulness to God (Heb 12:2). In this way, the author finds in the historical memory shared by the believers with the Jews a strong ethnic appeal for courageous stance for one's family as is found in the Akan society.

8.2.1 Summary on Akan reading of Hebrew's ethnic appeal

With the lens of Akan thought on ethnicity, the author is seen to be arguing with familiar kinship terms that express close family relationships as within the basic family unit headed by the father or of an entire state. The exception is the distinctive Christian and Jewish thought that must be understood on their own terms and which usually point to the superiority of the Christian privilege. The brave voluntary embrace of death by some Akan chiefs on behalf of their people forms important points of contact for appreciating what it means to overcome the fear of death and how Christ helps the believer to overcome worse situation than what the Akan chiefs were confronted with. If the believers' Brother is glorified at the right hand of God and brings many sons and daughters to glory, the Akan experience of sharing the honour of a person by one's association with him/her as well as joining the honoured ancestors in death provides a

useful lens to appreciate what Hebrews is saying. Akan understanding of sharing in the possessions of one's kin makes relevant the author's statement that believers have come to share in Christ. The Akan understanding of *nimdefo* gives meaning to the author's designation of believers as enlightened people and helps to understand the efforts made by God their Father to give them the needed training (*ntetee*) so that the right outcome of conduct can be expected. The role of *otwafo* gives insight into the role of Christ described as the author and perfecter of faith so that Christ does not only cut the path but leads and makes his final designation that of the believers too. When the author's statements about the religious achievements for the believers are considered against Akan religious pursuit for wellbeing of the family, the ethnic significance of the author's statement is made clear. The Akan proverb that spells out the responsibility of adult children towards their parents particularly speaks to the author's appeal for the audience not to abandon their Father (God) after all he has done for them, and points to the evil of doing otherwise. Names and language used by Akans to describe themselves positively and that of others negatively offer insight into Hebrews' use of names and language to describe the Christian group and that of their oppressors. Similar to Akan use of common historical memory to stir up virtues and right conduct in people is Hebrews' use of the same, thereby offering the Akan believer a familiar perspective on the author's use of names and language.

8.3 An Akan reading of Hebrews' appeal to ingroup/intergroup behaviour

Ingroup and intergroup behaviour is usually characterised by competition and attempts to positively project one's group in a better image and consequently for one's positive social image. The author of Hebrews is seen to be doing exactly this and in a variety of ways. His use of strategies to promote positive evaluation of the group of the audience can be understood by the Akan Christian not only in the light of Akan's respect for the Akan tribe but also in the light of efforts made to ensure that nothing is done to negatively affect the positive evaluation of the Akan people. The usual expressions such as *Akanni nnye saa* (An Akan does not do that) represent the self-awareness in which Akans strive to maintain the positive evaluation of their social identity.

Akans have ways of reinterpreting the negative perceptions and derogatory remarks made of their tribes. For instance, the people of the Kwahu tribe are described as stingy, and that much of their wealth comes from juju (*Sikaduro*).¹⁸¹ Members of the Kwahu tribe reinterpret this very popular negative description to mean that they are prudent with funds and resources, the very reason for which they are very successful in business. Following such resultant self-understanding from the interpretation, they pride themselves of having wisdom and good sense for doing business. With such understanding, Kwahu people take lightly such derogatory descriptions and allegations and are not ashamed to own and enjoy their wealth. This way of relating positively to their wealth has also earned them another derogatory impression that they love to show off their wealth. The Akan expression [*W*]o huuhuu se Kwahu ni a wato car presents the Kwahu person as the standard against which those who show off are measured. The expression literally means ‘you show off like a Kwahu person who owns a car.’ We have also noted the attempts made by Nana Yaa Asantewaa to redefine the situation of intimidation and cowardice of the Asante chiefs in terms that made them see themselves as mighty warriors with a sense of pride to defend their heritage. As a result of this reinterpretation, their oppressors, who hitherto had been seen as powerful and intimidating were now reduced to rascals who must be dealt with. It is against such Akan reinterpretation of negative experiences for the desired outcome of attitude and conduct that the Akan believer could appreciate the attempts made by the author to redefine the experience of his audience. Hebrews’ reinterpretation of the suffering of his readers in terms of athletic competition (Heb 12:1, 4) and God’s discipline (Heb 12:7-11) is meant to achieve similar effect.

To understand the author’s projection of the image of the Christian group in a positive light, the Akan needs to remember how they try to present themselves in a manner considered to be consistent with their image as the most civilised and foremost of all the people among whom they live. The author of Hebrews expected his readers to know the conduct that was consistent with members of the Christian group and demanded that

¹⁸¹ It must be noted that the notion that much of their wealth comes through juju is no more that popular as it used to be.

from them. To do this, it was important for the author to paint a picture of the honour and dignity of the Christian group in consonance of which they were to conduct themselves. This positive picture of the honour and privilege of the Christian group comes against a negative one for outgroups with whom the Christian group is in competitive relationship. The following descriptions of the Christian group in its dignity, privilege and appropriate conduct gain significance in this respect: Jesus, the prototypical member of the group is crowned with glory and honour (Heb 2:9). Jesus is counted worthy of more honour than Moses, the leader of the wilderness generation (Heb 3:3). His glory is that of the builder of the house but the honour of Moses is comparable to that of the house (Heb 3:3, 5-6). The readers are of the faithful (believing) and are urged to maintain their faithfulness (Heb 10:39). The wilderness generation, however, put the Lord to the test (Heb 3:9-10) and missed God's rest (Heb 3:11) as a rebellious group (Heb 3:16) whose bodies fell in the wilderness (Heb 3:17, 18). The hope of the readers is the blessing from which Moses' group was excluded, that is, God's rest (Heb 4:1, 3, 11). The description of Christ's sacrifice is given in a competitive comparison in which what Christ does becomes better forms of what had been there (Heb 9:11-12; cf. 9:9-10, 14; cf. Heb 1:3). As members of God's house, their adversaries, represented by the more powerful and higher status group (and those who withdraw from the Christian group) have the severest of punishment reserved for them (Heb 10:27).

It was noted that for practical utilitarian purposes, Akans look for common grounds to dissolve ethnic differences among members of different Akan tribes by highlighting their common ethnic identity in the clan system which cuts across the various Akan tribes. The example already cited in this study noted how the head of the Asona Clan at the Akuapem town of Aburi went to the defence and rescue of the Asona member of Asante Akyina. The author of Hebrews does a similar thing by highlighting the common identity of believers as Christians in order to diffuse the tendency of his members to emphasise their individual ethnic identity which could have the effect of breaking their loyalty to the Christian group. The presentation of the Christian group in a manner that reasserts it as a superordinate group over their ethnic subgroups is a way by which the author deals

with one important issue. It helps him to deal with his readers' multiple identity which has the tendency for them to deemphasize their Christian identity in a situation where their common faith in Christ had become the reason for the social pressure they were going through. If the Jewish Christians were Hellenists, then they shared Greek identity as well. In the same way, if the Gentile Christians were proselytes and God-fearers prior to their conversion, then they had Jewish identity as well in their association or involvement with the Jewish synagogues and Jewish customs such as circumcision, dietary laws, cultic practices, Sabbath observation, ritual washing and the Jewish Scriptures. Both Jewish and Hellenistic identities were associated with elements of pride.

In times when their Christian social identity has become a source of distress, taking pride and positive self-image in these subgroup was of a high probability. When the author recalls any history or custom related to their past, his concern was to create a superordinate identity in which all existing ethnic sentiments are subsumed so that his audience can be united in their faithfulness to the God who now speaks to them in his Son. His arguments in this respect seek to create the needed emotive sentiment and sense of responsibility that makes the good of the Christian group paramount to them. For instance, in his recall of the heroes of faith, the author argues that the heroes of faith cannot be made perfect without the audience and this is because God had provided something better for the audience (Heb 11:40). Similarly, when he recalls the theophany of the wilderness generation he indicates that the audience has not come to a fearful scene of things like the blazing fire that makes the people fear but to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem and to a blood that speaks better than that of Abel (Heb 12:24). With such use of their historical memory the author makes Christianity become the religion that satisfies *par excellence* all the hopes and aspirations represented in themes like high priest, sacrifice, and tabernacle as held in all the subgroups whether Jewish or Graeco-Roman. This is because he recalls all such concepts and practices from Jewish practices only to show that better forms exist in the ministry of Christ for believers. The author does this to redirect members from focusing on their personal outcomes to achieving the greater good and the maintenance of the social stability of

their group. It is possible for the Akan Christian to appreciate the need to act in the interest of the common and superordinate identity of the Christian once the related collective self has been effectively sampled with the needed emotive sentiment that goes with the sense of responsibility for the success of the Christian endeavour. The case of the defence of the widow at Aburi on the basis of common identity in the superordinate group of the Asona Clan is a pointer to this possibility.

8.3.1 Summary of Akan reading of Hebrews' appeal to ingroup/intergroup behaviour

The discussion on ingroup and intergroup behaviour in the Akan society makes possible to a great extent the understanding of the author's exhortation and warning presented with reasoning in group and intergroup behaviour. The Akan self-understanding as civilised and foremost of the people among whom they live, and their insistence of what is undeserving or unlike an Akan gives important ways to look at Hebrew's attempt to project a positive image of the Christian group. The success of the people of the Akan tribe of Kwahu in relating positively to their wealth by reinterpreting all the derogatory and negative perceptions and expressions against them offers a good way to look at the author's attempt to reinterpret his audience's experience of suffering. The use of the superordinate nature of the Akan clan to dissolve barriers between Akan tribes and secure common grounds between members of different Akan tribes for utilitarian purposes helps to understand how the author makes salient the common identity of the believers as Christians. It also help to appreciate how the author tries to stem any tendency on the part of his readers to sample their subgroup identities at a time when their suffering makes that a high possibility. Akan experience and understanding of ingroup and intergroup behaviour therefore offers effective means of appreciating the author's use of ingroup and intergroup behaviour as related to social identity to advance his cause of getting the right attitude of his audience towards the Christian group and Christ.

8.4 An Akan reading of Hebrews' appeal to personality

The author of Hebrews employs arguments that assume that his audience should conduct themselves in accordance with their nature. In other words, it is what they are that must determine how they act. The author's way of presenting his appeal shows that he believes what is said or expected of his audience is important for their conduct as dyadic persons who more often than not sample their collective selves in their decisions. The Akan perspective that makes sense of the author's arguments sees the *sunsum*, derived from the father as the determining factor of the individual's character. Further to this, the *nton* of the father determines the taboos of the child. Children therefore, are expected to behave by showing the fatherly influence on their lives, at least in the taboos they observe. Key in the author's persuasion of his readers to desist from acts that would threaten the existence of the Christian group is his appeal to them to act as is expected of them as children of God. It is in this light that the author demands that they consider Jesus, their Brother who endured from sinners such hostility against him so that they may not grow weary or fainthearted (Heb 12:3). In other words, the readers should behave like their Brother, who knowing what was expected of him conducted himself appropriately. This is because in enduring hostility from sinners against him, Jesus was displaying the same faithfulness of God, Heb 10:23, cf. Heb 2:17; 3:2), a virtue which must characterise all the children of God. For the author then, God's faithful people are those who endure hostilities to the end as Christ, who bears his Father's nature did (Heb 12:3-4; cf. Heb 12:7).

Though they have both collective and private selves, the quest for acceptable conduct and what is honourable tends to make Akans sample their collective selves in most situations as they pursue personal goals within the framework of the larger goals and expectations of the society. Hebrews' emphasis on what God has done for the believers and the need for them to respond appropriately speaks to the social requirement that the beneficiary members of the family are to return the favour with responsiveness and obedience (Heb 12:28). The Akan expectation that obliges children to return the care their parents gave them comes in handy for the appreciation of the author's demand that the readers to return God's favour. It is possible from this perspective to appreciate

the author's demands that the readers be characterized by gratitude to God, the offer of acceptable worship, and reverence and awe (Heb 12:28-28). Still connected to this social obligation to return favour, God is presented as the owner who cultivates the land and waters it in expectation of a good crop yield (Heb 6:7-8). Being the land, the readers are supposed to see themselves as God's possession and investment and therefore yield the crop of loyalty to him. A good person in the Akan society is the one who considers his or her decisions in the light of the expectation of the larger society and conducts himself or herself appropriately. In this light, the Akan believer should appreciate the author's expectation that the readers as land on which God has caused his rain to fall often, yield a good crop as well as show gratitude and responsiveness in faithfulness for God's goodness. It is also expected that the promise of faithful people be trusted, especially when they are one's parents. The believers should therefore trust in God's promises and demonstrate faith with him as their Father (Heb 10:22-23; cf. Heb 6:12-15). If they fail to do this they sin deliberately against the social expectation of them (Heb 10:26).

Further to the author's expectation of his audience in the social institution of the family, he expects the audience to embrace their suffering as God's discipline (training) that is meant for their eternal good (Heb 12:7). This is because training is good for them as legitimate children. The Akan thought on this is helpful. Akans do not believe in a fatalistic state of a person since they believe that even destiny can be altered by dint of training and good behaviour. It is in this sense that the *sunsum*, the determining factor of the individual's character can be trained to become strong and resilient. When one has a strong *sunsum*, one is able to overcome many adverse situations. It is for this reason that seen as God's training, the suffering of the believers should be embraced for their intended good. As Hebrews points out, even Jesus learnt obedience through what He suffered (Heb 5:8) and the audience needs to learn in the same way. The audience should therefore consider the faithfulness of Jesus to the one who appointed him (Heb 3:1-2) so that they also would behave like him in the way he endured his training (suffering) without abandoning God (Heb 12:1-3). This makes it imperative for them to keep their gaze consistently on Jesus, their Brother and the embodiment of the

attitude that must characterise the children of God. Against this background, they should see any sign of weariness and disaffection for the Christian group as 'roots of bitterness' (Heb 12:15). This should also help them appreciate the need to put away every weight of love for the very things the society had deprived them of since these are the only things that can prevent them from running the race set before them (Heb 12:1-2). The desire for the approval of the society, property, safety and honour are weights that must be laid aside.

The Akan sense of pride provides the basis for appeal to right conduct. *Akan ni nkasa saa* (an Akan does not speak this way) is a direct way of reminding an Akan of who one is so as to make one act in consonance with one's nature. The writer of Hebrews similarly appeals to who the believers are in order to remind them of how they ought to act accordingly. He reminds them that after they were enlightened, they endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction; sometimes they became partners with those so treated. They had compassion on those in prison, and joyfully accepted the plundering of their property. Their motivation was that they knew they had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore they should not throw away their confidence, which has a great reward (Heb 10:32-35). In insisting on what the audience must do in consonance with their nature as displayed in the past the author draws boundaries for his readers in their conduct.

The success of the Kwahu tribe in offsetting the effect of the negative description of their tribe by reinterpretation proves that once an effective reinterpretation of one's social image is done, the person stands a great chance of relating positively to his or her social image. This is what the writer of Hebrews seeks to achieve when he describes his readers' experience in terms of athletes engaged in a race, making them contestants rather than victims of their suffering. This should give the audience a goal of contest to pursue in their suffering rather than complaining and counting themselves unfortunate. The goal is for them to remain faithful to Christ and the Church against the apostasy intend by their oppressors. They win the contest only when they refuse to shrink back from their faith because of their suffering.

As earlier observed, the attempt to control the behaviour of members in the Akan family is due to the social reality that what affects one member affects all the other members of the family (shared group fate). This shared group fate provides the strongest incentive for all attempts to control a person's conduct. The application of corporal punishment as well as capital punishment (in the community) is done for the same reason of shared group fate to ensure members' responsible conduct for the common good of the entire family or community. Beside the use of punishment of offenders as a deterring measure, threats of punishment for those who show propensity towards irresponsible conduct is also employed. It is only in warning against the commission of very serious offenses that a parent may threaten that his or her child (adult or not) should not be part of his or her funeral. The threat of exclusion from one's family similarly comes as a threat against the tendency to commit a serious offense. The usual effect of such severe threat on the person warned is the exercise of restraint. In Hebrews, one comes across a similar situation which the Akan believer can rightly relate to in the light of the Akan understanding of shared group fate. The seriousness of the threats in the warnings of Hebrews shows how serious the author perceives the acts the readers were displaying the tendency to commit. The audience is warned of extreme forms of punishment worse than those ever experienced by the wilderness generation with the reminder that God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:25, 29). He speaks of fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume those who oppose God (Heb 10:27). The author expects his audience to restrain themselves in their tendency to apostatise in the face of the terrible judgement that awaits apostates. It is against the background of shared group fate and group responsibility for members' conduct that the author of Hebrews calls on the readers to take action to ensure the continued good of the Christian group at a time when their tendency was to withdraw from the group – an act that was certainly going to have deadly consequences not only for the group but also the salvation of the members. In this light, the believers are urged to take care so that there will be no evil, unbelieving heart, leading them to fall away from the living God. Rather, they should exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' so that none of them may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 3:12-13). It is also important for them to consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. They

should not neglect to meet together as is the habit of some, but they should encourage one another, and all the more as they see the day drawing near (Heb 10:24-25). They should also make sure that no root of bitterness springs up among them that will create disaffection for God's training (as their suffering is seen) and make many fall (Heb 12:7-17). It is in doing these that the readers will prove to be responsible members of the community who are aware of their common fate for which reason attempts should be made to control one another's behaviour.

8.4.1 Summary of Akan reading of Hebrews' appeal to personality

The practice of insisting that Akans act in a manner expected of them which usually samples their collective selves provides an excellent way to appreciate the point in Hebrews' argument for the believers to act according the expectation of them as relates to a variety of social institutions. Firstly, the expected influence that the *sumsum*, derived from the father (as well as the *nton* of the father) should have on the conduct of the Akan child gives the right perspective on the author's expectation that the believers act appropriately as is consistent with the conduct of the children of God and as is symbolised in Jesus.

Secondly, Akan children have an obligation towards their parents who nurtured them which demands that they return to their parents the favour they have received. With this as a lens, it is not difficult to appreciate the obligations towards God (as their Father) that the author enumerates for his audience.

Thirdly, since the *sunsum* can be trained to be strong and resilient so as to succeed in the struggles of life, training, hard as it might be, is cherished by the Akan. It is in this light that Hebrew's reinterpretation of the suffering of the believers as God's training becomes meaningful. Furthermore, if the author draws boundaries for his audience in what they must or must not do, Akans' insistence on doing what is becoming of them as the foremost and civilised among the people with whom they live gives a perspective from which to look at what the author does. The success of the Kwahu tribe in relating positively to their wealth resulting from reinterpretation of the negative perception and

expressions against them should help in understanding the author's attempt to reinterpret the situation of the readers as athletic contestants in their struggle with suffering. The attempts by Akans to control the conduct of members of the family due to their belief in shared group fate speaks aptly to Hebrews' use of threats to stem the tendency of his readers from any actions that goes against the good of the group and his insistence on members' responsibility to ensure that no one becomes a 'root of bitterness' among them.

8.5 Conclusion on Akan reading of the warning passages

The author's appeal to his audience in the warning passages is presented from the perspective of social identity. The arguments from ethnicity, ingroup/intergroup behaviour and personality all speak to what the writer wants the believers to think of themselves and in accordance of which they are expected to act. If the believers would act in the light of the social identity the author presents of them, they would behave differently from how they were acting currently as well as how their oppressors expected them to behave as victims of oppression. Akan thought and practice on social identity offer important insight into the argument of the author that helps the appreciation of the author's appeal to a large extent, showing much similarity between the Mediterranean social script employed in the author's arguments and that of the Akan society of Ghana. This is quite apart from the aspects of the author's arguments which require distinctively Christian and/or Jewish perspectives to understand.

Chapter 9 will attempt a summary of the findings in which a comparison is made between the social scripts of the Mediterranean world and that of the Akan society and how they offer insight into the appeal Hebrews makes to the audience. A conclusion to the entire study is then drawn.

Chapter 9

Summary and conclusion

This study applies social-scientific criticism to Hebrews. Using theories on ethnicity, ingroup behaviour and intergroup competition as well as personality, the study examined how social identity provides the means by which the author of Hebrews is able to make specific appeals to his audience for the desired attitudes to God and the Christian group. These theories reveal the social institutions and scripts of the Mediterranean society that throw light on how Hebrews makes sense within its social context. A construction of the concept of social identity in the Akan society provided a means of looking at Hebrews in the light of Akan social context. The summary of findings in this study therefore brings together the social institutions and scripts of the Mediterranean world that provide the framework for understanding Hebrews' appeal to his audience in the light of social identity. This is done in comparison with the institutions and scripts of the Akan society that have been used in the study to understand the same appeal. The intention here is not to deal with every bit of detail of the social institutions and scripts that are at work in Hebrews. Rather, the summary dwells on the larger frame of the social institutions and scripts for the purposes of the comparison. In the end, an attempt will be made to assess the similarities and differences that exist between the social institutions and scripts of these two societies as used for the interpretation of Hebrews. These summaries and comparison are now presented under the topics of ethnicity, ingroup behaviour and intergroup competition, and personality.

9.1 ETHNICITY

The study observed that the concept of ascribed honour is present in both the Mediterranean and Akan societies. In both societies ascribed honour is about the honour members of a group enjoy from the honour associated with their group. This honour is usually the result of the achievement of one member of the group. The positive self-image and pride members derive from such ascribed honour provide an

important frame in which people of both the Mediterranean and Akan societies can appreciate Hebrews' description of the achievement of Christ and his honour. It also helps to appreciate the import of Christ's achievements and honour for the audience as people who have lost positive social image among members of the larger society.

The ethnic expressions of kinship by which the author describes the believers has important social expectations familiar to both Mediterranean and Akan societies. Firstly, in calling believers sons (children) of God, the author is able to demand from the audience the conduct and behaviour characteristic of God who is their Father. In the Mediterranean world it was characteristic for parents to hand down outstanding qualities to their offspring – such as honour, strength, reliability, and beauty. In a similar vein, *sunsum* and *nton* of the father are expected to determine the character traits of the Akan child. The detail about how the character traits are handed down may be different in both societies, but what is important here is the expectation of the common character traits that are held in both societies. This social expectation from both the Mediterranean and Akan societies helps to understand why the author expected his readers to exhibit the same qualities of enduring hardship in faithfulness to God and to the Christian group because both God (their Father) and Jesus, his Son (their Brother) are faithful.

Secondly, the kinship description of the readers as sons and daughters of God calls attention to the social expectation in both the Mediterranean and Akan societies that children are obliged to return the favour they have received from their parents. This expectation also emphasises how evil it is for children to refuse to return such favour. The emphasis of Hebrews on all the benefits the readers have enjoyed from God their Father finds meaning in this social expectation of obligation to return favour in which the believers are to reciprocate God's goodness with gratitude and faithfulness.

Still in relation to ethnicity, recall of shared historical memory for the purpose of promoting a particular cause was found to be at work in both the Mediterranean and Akan societies. This offers, for both societies, the means to appreciate the similar use of

shared historical memory of the recipients of Hebrews. The appeal to the conduct and attitudes of the heroes of faith, to Esau, to Jesus and to the past conduct of the readers are meaningful in this light.

Finally, the author of Hebrews uses religious descriptions that emphasise not only what God has made the readers but also speaks of his other acts of benevolence to them. Making sense of this is not too difficult in the Mediterranean and Akan societies in which religion is embedded in the family and used for the wellbeing of the members in such things as preparation for successful transition to another stage in life and seeking the peace, prosperity and safety of the family.

9.2 INGROUP BEHAVIOUR AND INTERGROUP COMPETITION

In both the Mediterranean and Akan societies, some strategies are used to promote positive evaluation of an ethnic group. Firstly, the use of name and language to describe one's group positively and outgroups negatively was observed in both the Mediterranean and Akan societies. The positive description of the group of the readers and the negative descriptions of outgroups gain significance in this use of names and language in the Mediterranean and Akan societies.

Secondly, the creation and use of social myth, which usually involves the reinterpretation of what used to be disadvantageous to a group so that it now appears advantageous, has been found to be present in both the Mediterranean and Akan societies. The reinterpretation of the suffering of the audience in terms of athletic competition and God's training for his legitimate children can be appreciated in both the Mediterranean and Akan societies in the light of their similar use of social strategies.

In both the Mediterranean and Akan societies, there is belief in shared group fate. This produces two effects, namely, the need to exercise responsibility in training and admonition for the promotion of good behaviour, and the exercise of control through threats and punishment. From such perspectives, one appreciates Hebrews' call on the believers to ensure that no root of bitterness arises among them and cause many to fall,

as well as his call on them to meet and encourage each other all the more as they see the day approaching. Again, Hebrews' use of threat of punishment and promise of reward are meant for the members to act in order to ensure and enhance the good of the group in which lies the common fate of members.

The use of superordinate group identity for practical outcome in the interest of a group has also been found to be present in both the Mediterranean and Akan societies. Hebrews' attempt to promote total allegiance to the Christian identity so as to defuse the tendency of his readers to deemphasise that identity can be appropriately considered from similar use of superordinate group identity in these two societies. Everything the author draws on from the ethnic background of the subgroups of the readers ends up promoting the Christian group identity rather than that of the ethnic subgroup from which it is drawn.

9.3 PERSONALITY

We observed that people of the ancient Mediterranean society mostly have collective selves, placing group goals before personal goals. Similarly, the quest for acceptable conduct and what is honourable tends to make Akans sample their collective selves in most situations as they pursue goals within the framework of the larger goals and expectations of the society. The author's call on his readers to consider the interest of his group samples their collective selves. The author draws on some imageries to paint pictures of what he expects of his readers because he knows as dyadic persons, what is said of them is important for their decision and conduct. For instance, they are the land God has cultivated and from which God expects a good crop yield. Again, their unfaithfulness to Christ is as crucifying Christ all over again and holding him up to contempt – a very wicked response to the saviour which they must avoid.

Furthermore, both the Mediterranean and Akan societies are familiar with the appeal made to people on the basis of their nature and what is expected of them. Hebrews similarly appeals in several ways to his readers to act in a manner that is consistent with

who they are. Among others, he reminds his audience that they are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed but those who have faith and preserve their souls.

In all these familiar social institutions and scripts, the author's introduction of concepts from the Jewish religion and customs as well as Christian concepts helps him to emphasise the transcendent nature of what God has made the believers and other things he has done for them. It is on the basis of these social institutions and scripts that the author hopes to help his readers to appreciate the rightness of their appropriate response to God and the Christian group, as well as the immense reward that follows such right response. In these same social scripts, the author hoped to make his readers appreciate how evil it is to break faith with God and the Christian group as well as the severest punishment that cannot be escaped following such unfaithfulness.

9.4 DIFFERENCES

On the front of differences, it should be noted that a few differences exist in some details between the social institutions and scripts of the Mediterranean and Akan societies for the interpretation of Hebrews. Such differences, however, do not do away with the significance of the broader sense of the social institutions and scripts. For instance, the concept of *nton* as one of the determining factors of the common character traits shared by members of a family is peculiar to the Akan. This, however, does not take away the relevance of the common social scripts of both societies that expect members of the same family to share common character traits. Therefore while it is said in the Mediterranean society that 'Cretans are all liars,' it is commonly said in the Akan society that *Kwahufo ye pepeefo* (members of the Kwahu tribe are miserly). In this way, both societies speak to the same broader social institution and script in spite of the differences in their details.

Again, the belief that the ancestors punish the living members of the society for failing to preserve the traditions handed down to them is peculiar to the Akan. However, there exist in both the Mediterranean and Akan societies the broader social expectation that the repercussions from one person's misconduct affect not only the person involved but

also the entire family or community. This is what makes members of both societies feel a responsibility to control the conduct of others for the common good.

Apart from the differences between some details of the Akan and Mediterranean social institutions and scripts, the areas in which differences were encountered in Hebrews related mainly to concepts peculiar to Christianity and Judaism. Heaven as a place from which one receives a calling, a high priest who sacrifices himself to perform a once-for-all sacrifice, and angels as servants to those being saved, the concept of salvation that involves salvation of one's soul and presented as rest that must be entered are some peculiar aspects of the argument of Hebrews that require Christian and or Jewish understanding to appreciate. As has been noted earlier, these Christian and Jewish elements are introduced into the argument to stress the unique privilege and advantage of the Christian for which greater response of gratitude and loyalty is required of them.

9.5 CONCLUSION

It can be realised that the Mediterranean and Akan societies have very similar social institutions and scripts with which Hebrews' warning passages could be understood. These social scripts relate to ascribed honour, kin relationships, expectations of common character traits in the family, obligation to return favour, use of name and language to describe one's group positively and outgroups negatively, use of shared historical memory, and use of religion in pursuit of family wellbeing. In their ingroup/intergroup behaviour, both societies know the use of reinterpretation of negative descriptions and conditions of one's group for positive effect, common belief in shared group fate, and the use of superordinate group identity for practical purposes. As concerns personality, both societies tend to sample the collective self in pursuit of honour and what is socially acceptable. The expectation that one acts in accordance with one's nature finds expression in both societies. It is therefore possible for the Akan reader to appreciate the argument of the warning passages through the lenses of these social scripts within the Akan society, since they are similar to that of the Mediterranean society that produced the text of Hebrews and give meaning to it. This should be done taking into consideration the peculiar Jewish and Christian elements introduced into the

author's presentation. In addition to this, one should bear in mind the context in which the believers had to be admonished to endure suffering in faithfulness to God and the Christian group.

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