

# GOD WHO IS RICH IN MERCY



*Essays presented to*  
Dr. D. B. Knox

*edited by*

Peter T. O'Brien  
*Vice Principal,  
Moore Theological College,  
Sydney, Australia*

*and*

David G. Peterson  
*Head of the Department of Ministry,  
Moore Theological College,  
Sydney, Australia*

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## Chapter 13

# THE MINISTRY OF ENCOURAGEMENT

DAVID G. PETERSON

In the current concern to develop patterns of congregational ministry for all believers, there is an obvious preoccupation with those passages of the NT dealing with gifts. This often leads to an unbalanced emphasis on the importance of certain *charismata* and leaves many Christians wondering whether they have anything of significance to contribute to the life of the body of Christ! However, there are many passages that deal with the subject of mutual ministry amongst Christians where the focus is not particularly on gifts. There is need of a comprehensive study of the use of certain key ministry words such as "exhort", "encourage", "admonish", "comfort", and other terms in the same semantic field. These refer to activities that are apparently the responsibility of all Christians. The limited aim of this essay is to begin such exploration in connection with the use of *parakalein* and *paraklēsis* in the NT, with particular reference to Paul and Hebrews. It is dedicated to Broughton Knox, whose ministry of encouragement to me as student and colleague has extended over twenty years.

### I. Use of the Terminology Outside the New Testament

In common Greek usage, the verb *parakalein* was employed with the following senses:<sup>1</sup>

- a. to call to, to summon to help, to invite
- b. to beseech (men or gods), to request
- c. to exhort, to encourage, to admonish
- d. to comfort (mostly at the level of exhortation or encouragement to those who sorrow).

The noun *paraklēsis* was similarly employed.

In the LXX the verb was chiefly used to render the Hebrew *naham* meaning:

- a. to comfort (cf. Gen 37:35; Ps 119:50 [LXX 118:50]; Isa 40:1)
- b. to be moved to pity, to have compassion (cf. Deut 32:36; Judg 2:18; Ps 135:14 [LXX 134:14]). In some contexts the reference is to a sympathy which repents (cf. 1 Sam 15:11; 2 Sam 24:16).

Although the use of *parakalein* meaning "to comfort" is rare in other literature, this is "by far the outstanding sense" in the LXX.<sup>2</sup> The noun is similarly employed. Clearly there is an expectation in the OT that friends and relatives will offer comfort to those in need (cf. Gen 37:35; 2 Sam 10:2; Job 2:11; 42:11). However, in a number of ways the truth is asserted that "the true consolation" (*paraklēsis alēthinē*, LXX Isa 57:18) comes from God alone.<sup>3</sup> God's comfort is available to individuals (cf. Pss 23:4 and 71:21 [LXX 22:4 and 70:21]) and to his people collectively (cf. Isa 40:1-2; 51:3, 12, 19-23; 61:2). In the context of Isaiah 40-66 God's comfort involves the deliverance and re-establishment of his people. In Rabbinic Judaism the word "comfort" or "consolation" (*nehāmāh*) thus became a comprehensive term for the Messianic salvation expected in the end-time.<sup>4</sup> The Gospel of Luke significantly introduces us to a representative group of pious Jews in Jerusalem, "looking for the consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25 *paraklēsin tou Israel*, cf. v38).

## II. Use of the Terminology in the Pauline Writings

In the Pauline corpus, including the Pastorals, the noun *paraklēsis* is used 20 times and the verb *parakalein* 55 times. The noun is used on two occasions with the ordinary sense of "request". In 2 Cor 8:4 the apostle refers to the request of the Macedonians to take part in the collection for the relief of the saints in Jerusalem and in v17 refers to his own request to Titus to deal with the collection in Corinth. The verb is similarly used in 8:6 and on numerous occasions in the Synoptic Gospels when people come asking for help from Jesus (e.g., Matt 8:5; 14:6; Mark 1:40; 5:18, 23; Luke 7:4; 8:41). On one occasion Paul writes of his beseeching the Lord in prayer (2 Cor 12:8). However, he mostly uses the terminology to refer to the appeal which he or other Christians make, urging or encouraging one another to respond in a variety of ways (e.g., Rom 12:1; 15:30; 16:17; 1 Cor 1:10; 16:12, 15; 2 Cor 2:8; 5:20; 6:1; Eph 4:1). The sense of consolation or comfort, so prominent in the Septuagint, is also found in Paul's use of the terminology (e.g., 2 Cor 1:3-7; 2:7; 7:4, 6, 7, 13; Phil 2:1; 2 Thess 2:16; Phlm 7). In this essay, there will be a concentration on those references where the meaning is exhortation, entreaty or appeal. However, it is first necessary to say something about the consolation or comfort of God.

### (a) *The Divine Comfort*

In Rom 15:4, Paul writes of the Scriptures being written "for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement (*paraklēseōs*) of the Scriptures we might have hope". The following verse suggests that the Scriptures can function in this way because they put

us in touch with "the God of steadfastness and encouragement". The collocation of divine encouragement or comfort and hope is also found in Paul's wish-prayer in 2 Thess 2:16-17. In a context like this "comfort" is a perfectly acceptable translation because the expression is a virtual equivalent for the eschatological gift of salvation. Although the expression "who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace" agrees formally with "God our Father" in v16, in sense it relates also to "our Lord Jesus Christ himself". The two aorist participles in this verse point to the same saving act of God in Christ: by this means he demonstrated his love and by this means he gave his people the promised eschatological comfort as a "good hope through grace". As believers wait to inherit that final salvation, Paul is confident that he can pray to God to comfort or encourage their hearts and "establish them in every good work and word" (v17). In other words, the idea of "encouragement" is close at hand when the terminology is being used rather technically to refer to the true and lasting comfort found only in a relationship with God in Christ.

A close connection between God's comfort and his salvation is also made in 2 Cor 1:6. The mention of peril, affliction and deliverance in this passage makes it clear that *paraklēsis* and *parakalein* are to be understood in the sense of comfort. God is called "the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (vv3-4). The context suggests that Paul saw his own comforting and deliverance "not as a single act of God wrought out of special favour for himself but as part of the total messianic comfort and deliverance".<sup>5</sup> Although it is not possible to be certain about the exact nature of the affliction and deliverance mentioned in vv3-10, we may discern that the sufferings are endured in the course of his ministry of the gospel (cf. 4:8-15; 6:4-10; 11:23-33). For this reason Paul speaks of sharing abundantly "in Christ's sufferings" (cf. Col 1:24). Consequently, the comfort or consolation he receives in this situation is said to be "through Christ" and is viewed in the light of the ultimate comfort of eschatological salvation. Thus, in 2 Cor 1:9-10 he describes how his experience brought him to abandon human comfort, security and confidence and to depend in a new way on "the God who raises the dead". Having experienced afresh God's power to deliver, Paul is able to express a confident hope for future deliverance. Once again the connection between divine *paraklēsis* and hope is expressed. Paul's comfort overflows to the Corinthians (vv6-7): because his affliction and comfort is experienced in connection with his ministry to them he knows that as he shares his experience and insights with them it will be an

encouragement for them to share in his sufferings and so to share in his comfort.

Although the apostle does not use the terminology very extensively to refer precisely to the divine comfort, it would appear that the concept is nevertheless basic to his thinking. If God is the source of true comfort through the Scriptures and ultimately through salvation in Christ, Christian ministry involving exhortation or appeal on that basis will be the means of mediating the divine comfort to mankind. One of the ways of describing the tremendous privilege of being "in Christ" is to speak as Paul does in Phil 2:1 of the comfort or encouragement that is his gift to his people. If, on occasions, something like the visit of Titus with news from Corinth (2 Cor 7:6-7, 13; cf. 1 Thess 3:7; Phlm 7) is viewed as a special provision of the divine comfort, it is because Paul views such matters within the context of God's saving purposes, having to do with the work of the gospel (cf. Acts 9:31).

### (b) *The Apostolic Appeal*

In 1 Thess 2:3 Paul uses *parakl sis* with the sense of "appeal", referring to his ministry of declaring to them "the gospel of God" (v2). In this case the appeal does not spring from one needing help but from one claiming to be the messenger of God, urging his hearers to respond appropriately to the message of God. Specifically in the case of the Thessalonians we may discern that Paul's initial appeal was for them to turn to God from idols, "to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1:9-10). The verb is similarly used in 2 Cor 5:20 where Paul asserts that in his preaching of "the message of reconciliation" (v19) it is as if God is "making his appeal through us". In C. K. Barrett's words, "where Paul is at work, Christ, whom he represents, is at work; where Paul speaks, God speaks".<sup>6</sup> This usage of the noun and the verb really belongs to the category of exhortation. However, it is clear that such a rendering in English would really be inadequate since the reference in both cases is not simply to his task of drawing out the implications of the gospel. Paul uses two other words to indicate that his presentation of the message of God's reconciling work in Christ *has the character of an earnest entreaty to be reconciled to God* (v11 *peithomen*, "we persuade", and v20 *deometha*, "we beseech"). If there is a particular point in the sermon when Paul actually says "Be reconciled to God" we are not to conclude that this alone is "the appeal", for it is as Paul acts as an ambassador of Christ, declaring the message of reconciliation, that God makes his appeal.<sup>7</sup> The apostle's total presentation of the gospel has the character of an appeal. It may similarly be observed that although the exhortation to respond to Christ occurs specifically at the

end of Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:38-40), the preceding argument is an integral part of his appeal to his audience.<sup>8</sup>

As Paul reminds the Corinthians of the central truths of the gospel it becomes clear that his particular purpose is to entreat them (*parakaloumen*) "not to accept the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor 6:1). This will mean working out the practical implications in their lives of the gospel they profess and not adhering to another gospel (cf. 11:4).<sup>9</sup> Here, as elsewhere, we may observe that Paul's use of *parakalein* meaning "to exhort" is distinguished from a mere moral appeal by reference in the context to the work of salvation as the basis of the appeal (cf. Rom 12:1). The gospel is a motivation for holy living because it is a revelation of the gracious character and purpose of God. However, the saving work of God in Christ also provides a pattern or model to which Christians must respond (cf. 2 Cor 5:15; Phil 2:1-11). The method by which Paul exhorts his converts on the basis of gospel truths is a subject of great importance, which cannot be explored in depth here.<sup>10</sup>

### (c) Congregational Preaching

It is clear from the Pastorals that the ministry of exhortation was required of the apostle's fellow-workers (1 Tim 4:13; 5:1; 6:2; 2 Tim 4:2; Tit 1:9; 2:6, 15). In the first reference, the three words describing Timothy's task are each preceded by a definite article, suggesting that they are recognized technical terms. "The reading" will refer to the public reading of OT Scripture, following the custom of the synagogue service (cf. Luke 4:16; Acts 13:15; 15:21), and probably also the reading of apostolic writings (cf. Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27; Rev 1:3). In this context, "the exhortation" (*tē paraklēse*) will refer to the *exposition and application of the Scripture readings for the day*, again following the model of the synagogue (cf. Acts 13:15 *logos paraklēseōs*, "word of exhortation").<sup>11</sup> "The teaching" probably signifies "catechetical instruction in Christian doctrine".<sup>12</sup> The noun *didaskalia* is used several times in the Pastorals in the sense of "doctrine" (cf. 1 Tim 1:10; 4:1, 6; 2 Tim 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1, 10), but in 1 Tim 4:13, 16; 5:17 and 2 Tim 3:16, *didaskalia* refers to the act of teaching that doctrine. Although there is a distinction made between *paraklēsis* and *didaskalia* in 1 Tim 4:13, it is clear from Tit 1:9 that the basis of Christian *paraklēsis* is "the sure word as taught", presumably by the apostle. The task of "the overseer" in the congregation is to "hold fast" to the apostolic teaching "so that he may be able to exhort (preach?) on the basis of sound doctrine" (*parakalein en tē didaskalia tē hugiainousē*) and "to refute objectors". Associated with the task of exhortation is the task of refuting error by reasoned argument and rebuking when censure is called for (2 Tim 4:2).

It appears from the Pastorals that a pattern of public exhortation based on an exposition of Scripture and apostolic teaching was emerging in the Pauline churches. The use of *parakalein* and *paraklêsis* in connection with what we call congregational preaching suggests something about the nature and purpose of this activity. In the NT, *kerussein* is the verb normally translated "to preach". This verb is used in contexts where the emphasis is on the proclamation of the great events of salvation.<sup>13</sup> The inadequacies of C. H. Dodd's classic distinction between preaching and teaching have been shown by a number of critics. J. I. H. McDonald concludes that "*kerygma* and *didache* can still be used as complementary terms to denote the central complex of Christian utterance but because of their peculiar interrelatedness they cannot provide a basis for a proper operational analysis of Christian communication".<sup>14</sup> McDonald argues that the basic elements of early Christian communication can best be investigated under the headings *propheteia*, *paraklêsis*, *paraenêsis* and *paradosis*. The *paraklêsis* practised by Paul involved the proclamation of the mighty acts of God in Christ, often with some exposition of the OT, and a drawing out of the practical implications for the audience in question — believers or unbelievers (cf. Acts 13:15-41). The terminology itself suggests that the activity had the nature of a summons to decision or an encouragement to persevere in the Christian way. Although systematic teaching is clearly involved, the address is not simply to the intellect but also to the affections and the will.

#### (d) *Mutual Ministry Amongst Christians*

Returning to 1 Thessalonians, we may further note how Paul describes his ministry amongst them: "like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you (*paramouthoumenoi*) and charged you (*marturomenoi*) to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory" (2:11-12). In the context of his teaching about the return of Christ, Paul instructs the Thessalonians to exhort or encourage one another "with these words" (4:18) and thus to continue to "build one another up" (5:11), just as they are doing. The RSV translates *parakaleite* with "comfort" in 4:18 (NEB "console") but by "encourage" in 5:11. Paul clearly uses the terminology in the sense of comfort or consolation in passages outlined above. However, the NIV rendering "encourage" at 4:18 and 5:11 is probably to be preferred. The apostle's purpose here is not simply to console but to encourage them to a certain lifestyle on the basis of this teaching. His *paraklêsis* here involves drawing out the theological implications of Jesus' death, resurrection, and return, to deal with the specific question of believers who have "fallen asleep" (4:13-17). His *paraklêsis* also involves a practical challenge to live in readiness for the

return of Christ (5:1-11). It is clear from this epistle that *the ministry of encouragement is the responsibility of all Christians* and that it is a matter of following apostolic example and is to be based on apostolic teaching.

The ministry of admonition should be understood as a related activity. Paul does not apparently use *parakalein* or *paraklēsis* in the sense of warning, although the verb could possibly be translated that way in Rom 16:17 and 2 Cor 13:11. He does, however, use *nouthetein*, which can simply mean "to impart understanding", "to teach", or more particularly "to set right" or "to have a corrective influence on someone" (Rom 15:14; 1 Cor 4:14; Col 1:28; 3:16; 1 Thess 5:12, 14; 2 Thess 3:15; cf. Acts 20:31).<sup>15</sup> The noun *nouthesia* can simply mean "instruction", but it generally denotes correction or warning on the basis of instruction (1 Cor 10:11; Eph 6:4; Tit 3:10). The verb is coupled with *didaskein* in Col 1:28 to describe the apostolic ministry with its goal of presenting "every man mature in Christ". The syntax suggests that "it is through teaching and warning of every man that the proclamation of Christ is carried out".<sup>16</sup> The same two verbs are coupled in 3:16, where it is clear that the ministry of admonition is the responsibility of every member of the congregation (cf. Rom 15:14, "filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another"). The syntax again suggests that Paul has in view a particular way in which the word about Christ (cf. Col 1:5, "the word of truth, the gospel") is proclaimed and allowed to have its way "richly" or "abundantly" in their lives: it is as they "teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, by means of Spirit-inspired psalms, hymns and songs, singing thankfully to God with (their) whole being".<sup>17</sup> In 1 Thess 5:14, having indicated that admonition is the special task of those who lead the church (v11), Paul exhorts all his readers to "admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all".<sup>18</sup> The community must warn the idlers that their conduct is inconsistent with apostolic teaching (cf. 4:9-12) and likely to bring the congregation and its gospel into disrepute.

Thus the ministry of admonition, like the ministry of exhortation/encouragement, is to be *based on apostolic teaching and follow apostolic example* (cf. 2 Thess 3:14-15; Acts 20:31). The NT is not encouraging Christians to moralise or to engage in some form of psychotherapy by the use of this terminology. Like the apostle we are to work at the task of applying the gospel message and the teaching of Scripture (cf. Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11; 2 Tim 3:16-17), individually and corporately. Effective *paraklēsis* in the form of congregational preaching will clearly be an encouragement to effective *paraklēsis* in other more informal ways.

Referring to Rom 12:8, O. Schmitz says "one might even speak of a charisma of pastoral exhortation".<sup>19</sup> In the list of gifts graciously bestowed by God for the benefit of his people, *paraklêsis* is placed after *propheteia*, *diakonia* and *didaskalia*. In such a context, the distinctive task of *paraklêsis* might be described as helping Christians "to live out their obedience to the gospel".<sup>20</sup> Although the implication of vv4-8 is that a special gift of pastoral exhortation is given only to some, other contexts show that mutual exhortation in some measure is the responsibility of the whole body of believers. The link between teaching and *paraklêsis* has been examined above but the link with prophecy remains to be explored.

In 1 Cor 14:3, prophecy is said to have the potential for upbuilding (*oikodomên*), encouragement (*paraklêsin*) and consolation (*paramuthian*). In v31 Paul says "you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged". While any Christian might be inspired to prophesy, it appears that there were some who were so frequently inspired that they were regarded as *being* prophets and forming a distinct group of persons (cf. 1 Cor 12:28-29; Eph 4:11). Yet, "prophecy is a function rather than an office".<sup>21</sup> The prophecy envisaged in 1 Corinthians 14 is a means of teaching Christian truth (v31) and instructing others (v19) with words that encourage and edify. However, a number of recent writers on the subject are in agreement with the view that "the prophet was distinguished from the teacher by the immediacy of his inspiration: his utterance was the result of a particular revelation".<sup>22</sup> W. Grudem makes an interesting distinction between a prophet like Paul, who claims divine authority for his words, and the prophets at Corinth, who "must not have been thought to speak with a divine authority of actual words, but rather with just a divine authority of general content, which made the prophecies subject to evaluation and questioning at every point".<sup>23</sup> Certainly it is clear that teaching and prophecy cannot be equated because they both result in the edification of the hearer. We may similarly conclude that *paraklêsis* and prophecy cannot simply be equated. Prophecy will involve exhortation or encouragement, but not exclusively. Exhortation or encouragement will be carried out in other ways beside prophecy.

It may be concluded from the Pauline writings that *paraklêsis* takes place amongst Christians in a variety of ways. God himself is the source of true comfort and the ultimate consolation is found in the saving work of Jesus Christ. Paul finds expression of the divine comfort in the gospel message and in the events of his life and ministry. God's appeal to men and women to respond appropriately to his saving work in Jesus takes place when the Scriptures or

apostolic teachings are formally expounded and applied, when the gift of prophecy is exercised or when believers informally encourage or exhort one another to live out their obedience to the gospel. With regard to each of these activities, it may be suggested that Christians will only be encouraged, edified and strengthened when the ministry is truly Spirit-inspired.

### III. Use of the Terminology in Hebrews

There are four contexts in Hebrews where *parakalein* is used (3:13; 10:25; 13:19, 22) and three where *paraklēsis* is found (6:18; 12:5; 13:22). A survey of these references will show the significance of the terminology for the argument of Hebrews and enable us to develop further a NT theology of the ministry of encouragement.

#### (a) *The Importance of Mutual Exhortation*

In the midst of the writer's second warning passage (3:7-4:14) we find these words: "take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today', that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (3:12-13). The RSV rightly translates *parakaleite* "exhort" since the context demands something stronger than "encourage" (so NEB, NIV); the need for warning on the basis of Scriptural teaching is on view, together with the sort of encouragement to persevere suggested by the writer's own arguments.

The imperatives of these verses follow a citation of Ps 95:7-11, with its warning not to "harden your hearts as in the rebellion", as did those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses. The writer introduces the citation with the words "as the Holy Spirit says" (Heb 3:7) and stresses its continuing relevance to Christians with the words "while it is said" (*en tō legesthai*, v15). Both of these expressions emphasize the seriousness of the warning: "it is none other than the Holy Spirit who is admonishing them through this passage of Scripture".<sup>24</sup> Like Paul in 1 Cor 10:11, Hebrews takes the OT record of the experiences of Israel in the wilderness as a warning for Christians on the march towards the promised "rest" of God (Heb 4:1-11), elsewhere described as "the city which is to come" (13:14). "Each succeeding day is a fresh 'Today' in which they may heed the psalmist's warning to hear the voice of God and render him heart-obedience."<sup>25</sup> It would be unwarranted to conclude from the expression *kath' hekastēn hēmeran* ("every day", 3:13) that the writer necessarily envisaged a regular daily meeting of the readers for teaching and prayer. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that each day provided opportunities for informal exhortation of one or another member of their group.

In no other context in the NT is mutual exhortation highlighted as a means of dealing with the problem of "an evil, unbelieving heart"<sup>26</sup> and avoiding apostasy. The purpose clause in 3:13 expresses the importance of this ministry in terms of not being "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin". The encouragement to persevere is not simply found by meeting together regularly with other Christians. The writer's statement about the ministry of the Spirit through the Scriptures and his own use of Psalm 95 as a means of exhorting his readers in Hebrew 3 and 4 suggest that a *similar use of the Scriptures is implied as the means of mutual exhortation*. As they read the Scriptures together and apply them in the manner illustrated by the writer himself in his "word of exhortation" (Heb 13:22) they will be challenged and encouraged to hold their "first confidence firm to the end" (v14).

One of the features of Hebrews is its emphasis on the care that members of the church should have for each other. They should take care lest there be in *any* of their number (*en tini humōn*, 3:12) an evil, unbelieving heart, and exhort one another lest *any* should be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (v13). The writer's desire for *each one* of them to show "the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end" (6:11, *hekaston humōn*) leads him to challenge them to minister to one another again in 10:24-25 and in 12:12-17. The last passage echoes particularly the sentiment of 3:12-13 by challenging them to "take care" (*episkopountes*, 12:15) lest *anyone* "fail to obtain the grace of God" and *any* "root of bitterness" spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled". P. E. Hughes comments on 3:13: "if there should be a concern of the individual for the community ('exhort one another'), there should also be a concern of the community for the individual ('lest any one of you . . .'), in line with the teaching of Paul that 'if one member suffers, all suffer together' (1 Cor 12:26)".<sup>27</sup>

In this connection it is interesting to recall the writer's statement about his readers in Heb 5:12. Sufficient time has elapsed since their conversion to Christ (*dia ton chronon*, "by this time") for him to say "you ought to be teachers". Nevertheless, he continues, "you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God". Although some writers have argued that *didaskaloi* here indicates that the recipients of Hebrews were a special group within the Christian community such as priests converted from Judaism, such theories have not commended themselves widely to scholars. It is better to conclude that *didaskaloi* is used quite informally and to agree with H. W. Montefiore that "anyone who is instructed in his faith

may be expected to explain it to others (1 Pet 3:15; cf. Rom 2:21).<sup>28</sup> However, the wider context of Hebrews would suggest that the writer is not simply concerned about their professing and propagating the faith to unbelievers but about their *teaching one another by means of mutual exhortation to hold fast the confession of their hope without wavering*. It is possible that the rest of Heb 5:12 reflects a need expressed by the readers themselves for further teaching concerning "the first principles of the oracles of God".<sup>29</sup> Even if this verse reflects the writer's judgement of their need, it is clear from what follows that he wants them to leave "the elementary doctrine of Christ" (6:1, *ton tēs archēs tou Christou logon*) and to build upon the theological foundation already laid (hence the metaphor of v2).<sup>30</sup> He apparently goes on to give them "solid food" to meet their need and not "milk"! In his own use of "the oracles of God" and his exposition of the message about Christ the writer provides a model of how Christian teaching as *paraklēsis* is to be carried out.

At the conclusion of the central doctrinal section of Hebrews the exhortations of 10:19-25 draw out the practical arguments of the writer's teaching about the death of Jesus and his heavenly session. The third hortatory subjunctive in the sequence urges the readers: "let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near". The appeal to "consider one another" (*katanoōmen allēlous*) implies thoughtful reflection and recalls the use of the same verb in 3:1 ("consider Jesus") and the challenge of v12 to "take care" (*blepete*) with respect to the spiritual health of the congregation. The expression *eis paroxusmon agapēs kai kalōn ergōn* indicates the need for Christians to be constantly roused or provoked by one another to godly living, no matter how much they have demonstrated "love and good works" in the past (cf. 10:32-4)! Such a stimulus to godliness will not simply come by the setting of a good example. The participial clauses in v25 indicate that this will mean not forsaking their assembly but positively using such occasions as a means of mutual encouragement or exhortation. The verb *enkataleipō* in this context "conveys the notion not simply of leaving, as no longer taking part in the assembly, but of abandoning, leaving the assembly exposed to peril in the conflict".<sup>31</sup> In 13:5 the same verb is used in a quotation from the LXX, asserting that God will never fail or abandon his people (Deut 31:6). The concept is not that of self-protection by staying in the fold but of a positive responsibility to minister to other Christians. As in Heb 3:13, the context is the temptation to withdraw from Christ (10:16-39), expressed in this case practically by the abandonment of

the Christian fellowship. Although a number of commentators have argued for a special meaning to be given to the word *episunagōgē* in this context, the majority view it simply as "the regular gathering together of Christian believers for worship and exhortation in a particular place".<sup>32</sup>

It may be suggested from the syntax of 10:25 that encouragement can be given to other Christians at the most basic level by *not abandoning the assembly*. Looking more positively at the benefits of Christian assembly, F. F. Bruce asserts that "every opportunity of coming together and enjoying their fellowship in faith and hope must be welcomed and used for mutual encouragement".<sup>33</sup> However, remembering what was said above in connection with 3:12-13 and 5:12 it would seem that the writer intended such meetings to be opportunities for mutual teaching and exhortation. It is perhaps best in the context to render *parakalountes* more generally as "encouraging (one another)", but the provoking of one another to love and good works clearly demands more than just being present at the assembly and participating enthusiastically! O. Michel suggests that where mutual exhortation takes place one member is not set over another but "the Word stands over both".<sup>34</sup> The nearness of the Day of Christ's return makes the obligation to pass on the divine encouragement especially urgent.

### (b) *The Encouragement of the Scriptures*

On two occasions Hebrews speaks of the *paraklēsis* available for Christians from the Scriptures (6:18; 12:5). In 6:18 the context shows that the noun is to be understood as "encouragement to maintain with boldness a position beset by difficulties and not simply *consolation*".<sup>35</sup> The basis of the "strong encouragement" available for God's people here is "two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false". The first unchangeable fact is God's *promise* to Abraham, which still awaits its complete accomplishment for us in the "city" or "inheritance" which is our hope (cf. 6:11-15, 11:8-16, 13:14). This is described in 6:17 as God's "immutable will" and is clearly the starting point for the writer's soteriological and eschatological teaching. The second unchangeable fact is God's *oath*, confirming that promise (6:13-17; cf. Gen 22:16-17). On the basis of this promise and the accompanying oath, Abraham patiently endured and "obtained the promise" (Heb 6:15). However, the promise and the oath were intended to be a source of encouragement and hope to all his spiritual offspring ("the heirs of the promise", vv 17-18). At this point of the argument, the writer seems to be preparing the readers for the teaching of 7:20-22 about Christ's high-priesthood being confirmed with an oath. The latter oath shows how the first oath was to attain

fulfilment: all the nations are blessed with the blessing promised to Abraham by means of the high-priestly work of Christ (6:19-20). As in Rom 15:4-5, the encouragement of the Scriptures is essentially to *steadfastness in view of the hope set forth by the promises of God* (cf. 2 Thess 2:16, 17). In the language of Hebrews, hope "enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek".

In Heb 12, as a climax to his exhortation to steadfast endurance, the writer urges his readers to consider Jesus, "who endured from sinners such hostility against himself" (vv1-4). He then turns their attention to the words of Prov 3:11-12 and asks "have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons?" The Greek could be read as a statement, as in the NEB or NIV, but the interrogative, as in the RSV, gives "the most forcible sense".<sup>36</sup> The use of the verb *dialegetai* in the present tense ("addresses") indicates that the written word continues to convey to believers the *paraklēsis* of God. The writer's declaration in Heb 12:7 ("God is treating you as sons") makes it clear that he envisages God speaking in the text as a father to his son (*huie mou*). Although in Prov 3:11 "son" may simply be read as the pupil of the sage, in the following verse sonship with respect to God is in view. Since Christians are in fact sons of God, God addresses his children directly through such Scriptures.<sup>37</sup> The specific challenge of the text is not to "make light" of the discipline of the Lord nor to "lose courage" in the face of any suffering that may have to be endured as God's children. The following verses in Hebrews relate this challenge more specifically to the situation of the readers. The word *paraklēsis* in this context is best rendered "exhortation" (RSV) because of the earnest entreaty contained in the first verse of the citation. However, Proverbs 3:12 provides the greatest possible encouragement for such a response by its teaching about sonship and the significance of divine discipline. As in Hebrews generally, the writer's intention is to urge his readers to a certain course of action but he does this not simply by warning them but by providing them with every encouragement from the Scriptures and his own teaching about the person and work of Christ.

### (c) *The Hortatory Method of Hebrews*

A number of observations have been made about the way the writer of Hebrews himself engages in *paraklēsis* and it has been suggested that the writer implicitly commends his own method to the readers as he encourages them to minister to one another. The fact that the document itself is characterized as "a word of exhortation" (13:22) is relevant to this thesis.

Against those who see 13:22 as referring only to the concluding admonitions of 13:1-19, many scholars argue that *logos paraklēseōs* is the writer's way of designating the form as well as the purpose of his work as a whole.<sup>38</sup> It has often been noted that the same expression occurs in Acts 13:15 in the invitation to Paul to preach in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch. Hebrews has consequently been described as "a homily in written form, with some personal remarks at the end".<sup>39</sup> The expressly hortatory passages are "integral to the design of the material, not mere interpolations".<sup>40</sup> Theology is in the service of exhortation in the argument and structure of Hebrews.<sup>41</sup>

Looking more precisely at the writer's method, G. B. Caird has suggested that Hebrews is "one of the earliest and most successful attempts to define the relation between the Old and New Testaments".<sup>42</sup> He contends that the argument falls into four sections, each having as its core an OT passage which declares the ineffectiveness and symbolic or provisional nature of the OT religious institutions. All other Scriptural references are ancillary to these four passages. R. N. Longenecker has suggested a helpful modification of this theory, proposing that the argument is built around five biblical portions: (a) Heb 1:1-2:4 is based on a catena of verses drawn from the Psalms, 2 Samuel 7 and Deuteronomy 32(LXX); (b) Heb 2:5-18 is based upon Ps 8:4-6; (c) Heb 3:1-4:13 is based upon Ps 95:7-11; (d) Heb 4:14-7:28 is based on Ps 110:4; (e) Heb 8:1-10:39 is based on Jer 31:31-34.<sup>43</sup> All the exhortations of Hebrew 11-13 depend upon the exposition of these five biblical portions. The writer views the OT from a Christocentric perspective and constantly demonstrates to his readers that they are living in the era in which the promises and institutions of the OT find their fulfilment. The aim of this complicated exegetical and theological argumentation is always to exhort his readers to hold fast to Christ and not to "shrink back" (cf. 10:35-39).

G. Hughes has investigated more extensively the hermeneutical method of Hebrews and related this to the situation of the original recipients, particularly as this is portrayed in 5:11-6:20. The writer addresses them as he does because they "have not attained the level of Christian maturity at which deep and sustained reflection on the meaning of the Word of God takes place".<sup>44</sup> He is concerned that they should be motivated to press on in their Christian lives by hearing correctly the Word of God. Hughes makes the interesting observation that in the theological-Christological sections where the meaning of the death of Jesus is explored, the eschatological viewpoint is a realised one, but in the paraenetic passages, Hebrews assumes a futurist aspect. Thus, "in the theologically oriented passages ('realised eschatology') the discontinuity with the old covenant is written large:

in the exhortatory passages ('futurist eschatology') the continuity between old and new covenant is such that one might almost think the Christian era had never dawned".<sup>45</sup> The bipolarity of Christian existence has become "a hermeneutical screen which has been placed across the OT Scriptures" by the writer of Hebrews "to let them speak to different elements within the Christian experience". This is described as "the hermeneutic of eschatological existence", and in the concluding chapter of his book Hughes relates this hermeneutical technique to modern problems in the field of biblical interpretation.

Enough has been said to conclude that there is obvious value in further exploration of the method of exhortation or encouragement used by the writer of Hebrews. In particular, his use of the OT in a Christocentric way, balancing theological exposition with urgent entreaty for persistence in faith, hope and love, has much to teach us. The need for a biblically-based ministry of *parakl sis* in Christian congregations is as vital and urgent as it ever was.

#### IV. Conclusions

The limited but significant application of *parakalein* and *parakl sis* in the NT to the divine comfort provides a helpful starting point for systematizing the exegetical conclusions of this study. As in the OT, God is shown to be the source of true comfort and the ultimate expression of that comfort is the salvation of his people. God in his love has provided "eternal comfort and good hope through grace" by means of his reconciling work through Christ. When the message of reconciliation is proclaimed God makes his "appeal" for people to "be reconciled" and so to receive the benefits of that work.

Although the terminology is more regularly used in the NT in the sense of "exhort" or "encourage", it is clear that Christian exhortation is distinguished from mere moral appeal by constant reference to the work of salvation. The ministry of exhortation and encouragement is exercised by apostles and congregational leaders primarily through teaching and preaching. However, in a variety of ways, a similar ministry is urged upon all Christians. It takes place when the Scriptures or apostolic teachings are formally expounded and applied, when the gift of prophecy is exercised, or when believers informally encourage or exhort one another to live out their obedience to the gospel.

Hebrews teaches that mutual exhortation in a congregation is essential as a means of dealing with problems of unbelief and temptations to apostasy. It is the divinely appointed means of

encouraging believers to persevere in the faith. The writer's emphasis on the encouragement of the Scriptures and his own use of particular texts as a means of exhorting his readers suggests that a similar use of the Scriptures is being commended as the means for mutual exhortation. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit the written word continues to convey to believers the *paraklesis* of God. As they exercise the gifts given to them by God and apply the Scriptures to every situation in which they find themselves, they are channels of the divine comfort to one another.

## Notes

1. O. Schmitz, "parakalein", *TDNT* 5 (1967) 774. The manifold linguistic use of this verb goes back to the sense "to call to oneself".

2. *ibid.*, 777.

3. *ibid.*, 789. In comparison with this all other is "empty consolation" (Isa 28:29 [LXX only]; Zech 10:2; Job 21:34). "Apart from God, man, nation and world are without comfort."

4. *ibid.*, 792. Cf. *Str-B*, II:124-5.

5. C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1973), 60. Cf. O. Schmitz, "parakalein", 798.

6. Barrett, *Corinthians*, 178. He follows Bultmann in asserting that, in Paul's view, his preaching was itself part of the eschatological event he proclaimed.

7. The *hōs* with the genitive absolute in v20 is best rendered "seeing that", indicating that God does in fact entreat through his ambassadors (so A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1915], 185).

8. Note that the parallel expression in Acts 2:40 ("he testified with many other words") includes the promises and challenge of the preceding verses in the testimony, as well as indicating that there were "many other words" used to testify and exhort on this occasion.

9. P. E. Hughes (*Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT; London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1962] 216-19) provides a helpful assessment of four possible interpretations of the expression "not to receive the grace of God in vain".

10. Cf. C. J. Bjerkelund, *Parakalō: Form, Funktion und Sinn der Parakalō-Sätze in den paulinischen Briefen*, Bibliotheca Theologica Norvegica 1 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1967).

11. On the form and style of Jewish preaching see J. I. H. McDonald, *Kerygma and Didache* (SNTSMS 37; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1980) 43-8. Philo refers to the role of the synagogue sermon or homily in *Mos* 2.39.216; *Spec* 2.15.61-2, and *Hypoth* 7:13.

12. J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1963), 105. He points out that "a great deal of catechetical material is embodied in the NT writings including the Pauline letters". However, note that in 2 Tim 3:16 teaching is also expected on the basis of Scripture.

13. Cf. G. Friedrich, "kerussein", *TDNT* 3 (1965) 703-14 and "euangelizomai", *TDNT* 2 (1964) 717-21.

14. McDonald, *Kerygma*, 6.

15. J. Behm, "nouthetein", *TDNT* 4 (1967) 1019-1022. F. Selzer makes the point that the verb describes "the exertion of influence upon the *nous*, implying that there is resistance", *NIDNTT* 1 (1975) 568.

16. P. T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word Commentary; Waco: Word, 1982) 87. This statement is based on an observation of the relationship of the two participles in 1:28 to the finite verb *katangelomen*.

17. *ibid.*, 195, 206-210.

18. Against those who argue that the words in v14 are addressed again to leaders see F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Word Commentary; Waco: Word, 1982) 122. Bruce points out (pp.118-19) that *proistamenous*, from its position as the second in a series of three participles, of which the first and third are not official designations, is "plainly not an official designation". It refers to the function of leading, protecting and caring for the church (cf. 1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12; 5:17).

19. O. Schmitz, "parakalein", 796.

20. C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; 2 vols; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975-9) II:623-4. He suggests that "the eyes of the exhorter had to be firmly fixed not only on the gospel but also on the concrete situation of his hearers".

21. C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC; 2nd ed.; London: A. & C. Black, 1971) 31. He observes that "it is not any human decision that makes a man a prophet, or prevents him from

being a prophet. The decision lies wholly within the freedom of the Holy Spirit".

22. C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans*, II:620. Cf. McDonald, *Kerygma*, 32-8 and D. Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1979) 9.

23. W. A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Washington: University of America, 1982) 142.

24. P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 141.

25. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1964) 67.

26. The expression *kardia ponēra apistias* will mean "a heart that is evil because it is unbelieving". B. F. Westcott (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [3rd edn; London: MacMillan, 1914] 84) rightly notes that "unbelief (*apistia*) finds its practical issue in 'disobedience' (*apeitheia*)". Cf. 3:18-19 and compare 4:6.

27. Hughes, *Hebrews*, 148.

28. H. W. Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1964) 102. I have examined this passage more fully in "The Situation of the 'Hebrews' (5:11-6:12)", *RTR* 35 (1976) 14-21 (cf. especially pp.16-17).

29. Against Westcott (*Hebrews*, 135), G. Delling ("stoicheia", *TDNT* 7 [1971] 687) argues that the idea of *ta stoicheia* ('first principles') is "strengthened or brought to expression by *tēs archēs*". It seems most likely that the expression *ton logion tou theou* refers specifically to the promises of God in the OT (cf. Rom 3:2; Acts 7:38 and S. K. Williams, "The 'Righteousness of God' in Romans", *JBL* 99 [1980] 266-7). Heb 5:12 suggests a failure to understand the teaching of the OT in relation to Christ and the gospel.

30. The injunction in 6:1-2 is not to leave the fundamentals of the faith in an absolute sense but to build upon them in the way the writer himself does, for example, with respect to "faith in God" (6:1) in chap. 11. Cf. D. G. Peterson, "Situation", 17-19.

31. Westcott, *Hebrews*, 327. Cf. 2 Tim 4:10, 16; 2 Cor 4:9; Matt 27:46.

32. Hughes, *Hebrews*, 418 (concluding a helpful excursus on the subject).

33. Bruce, *Hebrews*, 253.

34. O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (MeyerK; 13th edn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975) 348.

35. Westcott, *Hebrews*, 163.

36. *ibid.*, 401. Cf. J. Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924) 199-200.

37. Michel, *Hebräer*, 438. Cf. Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 200.

38. Bruce, *Hebrews*, 413-14, Michel, *Hebräer*, 542 and Hughes, *Hebrews*, 592.

39. *Hebrews*, 413. This conclusion is endorsed by McDonald (*Kerygma*, 171-2, n.153). However, see n.40 below. F. V. Filson (*Yesterday. A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13* [SBT; London: SCM, 1967] 17-21) criticizes this view and yet his final statement on p.21 is very similar in sense to the conclusion of Bruce and others. Cf. J. Swetnam, "On the Literary Genre of the 'Epistle' to the Hebrews", *NovT* 11 (1969) 261-9.

40. McDonald, *Kerygma*, 172, n.153. On pp.59-60 he argues that the writer of Hebrews has used smaller and originally independent units of *paraklēsis* to construct the total document (e.g., he shows the formal structure of a thematic homily in the style of popular Jewish preaching in 1:1-4:13 and then again in 4:14-10:31).

41. Michel, *Hebräer*, 27. He insists that "the point of the theological reflection lies in the parenetic sections", which summon the original recipients to obedience in their own particular situation. Hebrews is not a theological treatise with warnings for Christians in general attached at appropriate points. The relationship between doctrinal exposition and parenetic sections is most carefully examined by A. Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de l'épître aux Hébreux* (2nd edn; Paris-Bruges: Desclee De Brouwer, 1976).

42. G. B. Caird, "The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews", *CJT*, 5 (1959) 45.

43. R. N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 175. The use of these texts in the various sections of Hebrews is discussed on pp.176-85. See also n.40 above.

44. G. Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics. The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament example of Biblical Interpretation* (SNTSMS 36; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1979) 50.

45. *ibid.*, 70. Cf. the whole section "The Word of God in the present and its meaning for the future: history and eschatology", 66-74.