

THE OUTSIDER MOVEMENT OF HEBREWS 13

*By John Span*¹

1 Introduction

Recent articles in the magazine like St Francis Magazine (Aug 2006; Aug, Oct 2009; April 2010); the International Journal of Frontier Missions/Missiology (Sept-Oct 2005; Jan-Feb 2006); Evangelical Missions Quarterly (Jan 2009), and on websites such as www.biblicalmissiology.org, along with conferences either promoting (Common Ground-January 2009), or questioning (i2 Ministries- October 2009) the *Insider Movement* suggest this might be a good time to propose an alternative.

This paper will explore the concept of an ‘Outsider Movement’ as advocated by the pastoral injunction in Hebrews 13:12-14. It will demonstrate that the way of the cross is the only one for *Heaven Foreground Believers* (HFB); equally for those who have come out of Islam. For those proponents of insider strategies who critique missionaries for being too doctrinaire and for not identifying with their audience, this passage engages that charge. It will challenge, on scriptural grounds, those who would promote staying on the ‘inside’.

2 Current events

Consider the effect of this passage for the lives of believers in the following situations:

Farshoot, Egypt (AINA) November 21, 2009: After a number of days of having their homes and businesses looted and women abused, Rev. Elisha, Pastor of the St. Michaels Coptic church commented: ‘We have never been so frightened and humiliated as

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Christians in all our lives. The mob made wooden crosses and burnt them in the street.’ According to one witness: ‘Our religion and our Lord were openly insulted.’

Rabat, Morocco (CDN) June 17, 2010 headline reads: “Moroccan Islamists Use Facebook to Target Christians.” The article continues, ‘Facebook user “Gardes Maroc” has posted 32 image collages featuring dozens of Christian converts, calling them “hyena evangelists” or “wolves in lamb’s skins.” “These are some pics of Moroccan convert hyenas,” reads one image.

Algeria (Persecution Blog) January 19, 2010: Believers of the Tafath church in Tizi Ouzou, Algeria whose church had been burned were told, “This land is the land of Islam! Go pray somewhere else”

Doubtless in each of the above situations, believers have experienced what the audience of the book of Hebrews had experienced, namely ‘the elation of conversion and the heat of hostility, but who now must confront the formidable task of remaining faithful in a society that rejects their commitments.’²

3 Hebrews 13:12-14

¹² And so Jesus also suffered death outside the city gate in order to consecrate the people through his own blood. ¹³ So then, let us go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. ¹⁴ For here we do not have a permanent city, but we are expecting intently the city which is to come.³

² Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible v 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), Front flap.

³ William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary v 47b (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), p. 522. Translation by Lane.

3.1 *The passage in context*

In his address to what is likely a house-church of Hellenistic-Jewish-Christians who have experienced what Craig Koester describes as a cycle of conversion, persecution and malaise, and with the prospects of further persecution, the writer of Hebrews encourages them to keep on keeping on.⁴ Rather than looking for ways to ‘fly under the radar’ to avoid any adverse interaction with the local culture, he seems to dare them to move in just the opposite direction. Verse 12 is used to describe the precedents that motivate the action of verse 13, and verse 14 tells the audience why they should act in such a way.

A recent study by Norman H. Young entitled, ‘Bearing his reproach (Heb 13:9 -14)’ suggests, as well, that these verses are addressed to an audience that are ‘still defining themselves too much by their Levitical heritage’ by means of synagogue participation and religious meals. Young’s view is that the injunction to ‘go outside the camp’ is a call to sever their ties with Jerusalem/Judaism, as their problem is that they have not broken sufficiently with their old religion.⁵ It might be objected that using three verses amounts to proof texting. However, as early as 1913, Edward Riggenbach considered this passage as ‘the moment when the basic purpose (*Grundtendenz*) of the writing came once

⁴ Craig Koester, ‘Hebrews, rhetoric and the future of humanity’, in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (Q 64, 2002), pp. 111, 122-123.

⁵ Norman H. Young, ‘Bearing his reproach (Heb 13.9-14)’, in *New Testament Studies*, 48 no 2 (Ap 2002), pp. 243-61 also cited by Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2010), p. 13, fn 48. The call to sever ties with Jerusalem had been noted by P. W. L. Walker in *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 1996), p. 220 and Young, pp. 257-258.

more to expression.’⁶ In 1990, Susane Lehne noted that the verses including and immediately surrounding Heb 13:12 -14, namely 9-16 contain ‘the gist of Hebrews in a nutshell’.⁷ The passage is noteworthy among others that use the ‘let us’ construction to motivate the audience.⁸ John Terveen demonstrates that this passage is the final one of 7 passages (2:3; 2:5-18; 4:14-16; 5:7-10; 7:14; 12:1-3; 13:12) that show the identification of Jesus with humanity, and the call for the listeners to identify with Jesus.⁹ Others have seen this passage in the Biblical context of the migrant or pilgrim people of God, and Annang Asumang and Bill Domeris have even suggested that the migration motif is the unifying theme of the book of Hebrews.¹⁰

3.2 Exposition of the passage

3.2.1 And so Jesus also suffered death

Whenever the book of Hebrews focuses on Christ’s life on earth, the word ‘Jesus’ is used. Terveen has shown that more than any other NT book, Hebrews portrays Jesus suffering in excruciating

⁶ Rhea Jones, ‘A Superior Life: Hebrews 12:3-13:25’, in *Review & Expositor*, 82 no 3 (Sum 1985), p. 402 citing Edward Riggenbach, *Der Brief an die Hebraer* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1913), p. 431.

⁷ Susane Lehne, *The New Covenant in Hebrews* [JSNTSup 44] (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), p. 157 n. 129.

⁸ cf 4:11, 16; 10:22, 23, 24; 12: 1-2 - also known as the hortatory subjunctive.

⁹ John Terveen, ‘Jesus in Hebrews: An Exegetical Analysis of the References to Jesus’ Earthly Life in the Epistle to the Hebrews’ (PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1986).

¹⁰ Annang Asumang and Bill Domeris, ‘The Migrant Camp of the People of God: A Uniting Theme for the Epistle to the Hebrews’, in *Conspectus* 3:1 (Mar 2007), p. 5. David MacLeod sees both the superiority of Christ and the pilgrim motif as two complementary themes running through the book of Hebrews, in his article ‘The Doctrinal Center of the Book of Hebrews’, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 46:583 (Jul 1989), p. 300. See W. G. Johnsson, ‘The pilgrimage motif in the Book of Hebrews’, in *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1978. 97), pp. 239–251.

ways. Prior to his physical death at the cross, he experienced prayer with ‘loud cries’ (5:7), ‘learning obedience through what he suffered’ (5:8), ‘being made lower than angels’ (2:9), ‘tempted’ (2:18; 4:15), ‘enduring hostility from sinners’ (12:3), and being the object of ‘reproach’ or disgrace (11:26). These images form a composite picture of ‘a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief’ (Isaiah 53). Yet, for Jesus, as Delitzsch notes, temporal death was ‘the gate of paradise and the cross of shame a ladder to heaven.’¹¹ To the original audience the words would strike a challenging, yet comforting chord.

3.2.2 ...*Outside the city gate*

We are introduced to the unsettling fact that the ‘archegos’ – ‘Pioneer-founder-victor-leader-ruler-hero’ (2:10) of the faith (12:1-2) – was treated as a sin-offering whose unfit pieces were thrown outside of the ‘holy’ Israelite camp according to Levitical law.¹² Exodus 29.14 commands: ‘But burn the bull’s flesh and its hide and its offal outside the camp. It is a sin offering.’ In John 19:17-20 we see Jesus, the root and offspring of David crucified outside of the gates of the Davidic city of Jerusalem. He fulfilled Roman law which told the convict to be crucified that he must ‘trudge out beyond the gate [...] arms outspread, with your gibbet on your shoulders.’¹³ A.T. Hanson comments, ‘The essence of the Messiah’s reproach was that he should be rejected by his own.’¹⁴

¹¹ Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* Vol. 1, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1874), p. 249 .

¹² Julius Scott Jr. ‘Archegos in the Salvation History of the Epistle to the Hebrews’, in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29/1 (March 1986), pp. 47-54.

¹³ Plautus, *Braggart Warrior* 2.4.6-7 9 (359-60) cited by Koester, *Hebrews*, p. 570.

¹⁴ A. T. Hanson, ‘The Reproach of the Messiah in the Epistle to the Hebrews’, in *Studio Evangelica* VII, (1982), p. 239 cited by Young, p. 245.

For those who would suggest that the life of Jesus is one to be simply imitated, as the phrase ‘Initiating Incarnational Insider Movements’ might suggest, a *caveat emptor*, or buyer beware sign might flash in neon lights. His was not just a life to be imitated; His was an incarnation for atonement. He both suffered *like the people* he came for, but more than that, *for the people* he came for.

3.2.3 ...In order to consecrate the people though his own blood.

To an audience who had lost possessions (10:34), and who had experienced imprisonment (10:34; 13:3), the author uses the instrumentality of Jesus’ own life-blood to encourage them. They are to know that Christ had a purpose for them¹⁵ even though, in their state of liminality, they lived as migrants or refugees, belonging neither here nor there. Jesus’ own blood, not that of some animal as in the OT (9:12-14, 25-26), was the means of their consecration, or being set apart for service (10.10). John Owen, the master expositor of Hebrews, put it most aptly:

The Lord Jesus, out of his incomprehensible love for his people, would spare nothing, avoid nothing, deny nothing that was needful unto their sanctification, their reconciliation and dedication unto God. He did it with his own blood.¹⁶

The service, to which they were being set apart was completely counter-intuitive to the honor seeking culture in which they found themselves. They were being set apart for the service of being ‘sharers’ with those subject to ‘insults’ and ‘afflictions’ (10:33). The school of life had taught them that ‘the price of

¹⁵ Liminality is defined ‘the intermediary state of a person or group of persons who are in transition’ and comes from the word ‘liminal’ derived the Latin *limen*, which means threshold. Asumang, p. 6.

¹⁶ John Owen, *An exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews: with the preliminary exercitations* Vol. 7 2nd ed (Glasgow, Ritchie, 1814), p. 469.

communal intimacy was shared suffering.¹⁷ Now they are being called to identify with Jesus' in his sufferings as well.

3.2.4 So then, [therefore ESV] let us go to him outside the camp

As a consequence, of what only Jesus could do, in a once and for all fashion, the audience is encouraged on with 'so then'. A certain moral lethargy had started to infect the Hebrews, and it seems that they were ready to do anything to fly under the radar. To this group who might 'drift away' (2:1), 'fall short' (4:1), 'fall away' (3:12, 6:6), 'shrink back' (10:32), 'throw away' (10:35), 'spurn the Son of God' (10:29), 'be led astray' (13:9) and 'are neglecting to meet together' (10.25); those who are limping, rather than running the race as did their champion Jesus (12: 1-3), the preacher says, "let us go to him." F.F. Bruce masterfully notes: "Let us go forth", might be hard advice, but "let us go forth to him" should not be a hard thing for any true follower of his to do'.¹⁸

The idea of movement is expressed by a verb literally meaning 'to go out of, or come from'. The same word is used to describe the exodus (3:16), and of Abraham leaving Ur (11:8). Both of these examples imply a definite break with the past and the known, and a destination of an unforeseen and unknown land of promise.¹⁹ In the past, both Abraham and the Israelites also were to forsake the gods of their land of departure (Joshua 24:2, 14). The root of this verb links phrases translated as 'go to him' (this verse), 'draw near' (4:16; 7:25; 11:25), and 'go into/enter' (3:11;

¹⁷ Lane, p. 544.

¹⁸ F.F. Bruce, 'The Kerygma of Hebrews', in *Interpretation* 23 no 1 (Ja 1969), p. 17.

¹⁹ In Hebrews 11 Gareth Lee Cockerill identifies the theme of 'alienation and pilgrim existence' that pervades the story of Abraham and 'alienation that becomes persecution' in the early life of Moses. In 'The Better Resurrection (Heb 11:35): a Key to the Structure and Rhetorical Purpose of Hebrews 11', *Tyndale Bulletin* 51.2 (2000), p. 227.

4:1, 3) God's rest or presence.²⁰ This poses some hard questions for those who would continue to walk 'between the two opinions' of Islam and Christianity, and pragmatically attempt to straddle both.

In a similar fashion Young suggests that the stress on movement throughout the epistle, encapsulated by 'going out/in' (4:16; 6:1, 7, 25; 10:22; 11:8; 12:22; 13:13) and even 'into' (3:11, 18, 19; 4.1, 3, 6, 10, 11; 6:19, 20; 9:12, 24, 25), serves to send a very clear and coherent message. Rather than following the very clear trajectory for the people of God, namely leaving X and going to Y, he suggests that the verses serve as a strong warning for the audience's 'failure to go forward and separate from Judaism completely in the first place'. He sees this expressed in 'timidity in [boldly] expressing their Christian faith' and a 'tendency to fraternise with the synagogue'.²¹ Compare, as well, how the commentator Floyd Filison suggests that the passage:

urges the Christians addressed to break ties with whatever would prevent full loyalty to the Christ who offered himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for sins. Those who believe in Jesus cannot continue to live in the old framework. They must 'go forth,' and since that will bring them under criticism, they must willingly bear the reproach that will come to them as they live in this new situation.²²

Other metaphors serve to reinforce the image of movement. Warnings not 'to drift away' from what the audience has heard and 'to shrink back' serve to put them on notice that they might not 'escape' God's punishment. They are to 'run the race with perseverance' while 'leaving' basic doctrines behind and 'going

²⁰ David A. deSilva, *A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000), p. 502.

²¹ Young, p. 253.

²² Floyd, V. Filison, *Yesterday: A Study of Hebrews in the light of chapter 13* (London, SCM Press, 1967), p. 61 cited by deSilva, *Socio-Rhetorical*, p. 502, fn 55.

on to perfection' enroute to the 'better' country/city, Mount Zion, to which they have already 'come' in one sense, and to which they are 'going' in another.

In this verse, the suggested movement is away from the camp, which Owen described as 'the seat of all the political and religious converse of the church of the Jews... [and to be in the camp gave a right] to all the privileges and advantages of the commonwealth of Israel.'²³ The attraction could not be stronger. Yet this is not a call to forsake earthly existence²⁴ but much more strongly to identify with their Supreme example and benefactor. David deSilva suggests that this movement is the ultimate way that a client could show gratitude to his patron, by associating with Him and his household, even all the way to death, if necessary.²⁵ He quotes Seneca who states:

No man can be grateful unless he 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 (*Ep.Mor.* 81.27).²⁶

Just as Jesus had suffered outside of the city gate with a purpose, now his followers are also called with a purpose to leave their campground of comfort, the place of privilege, the security of their old religion, which F.F. Bruce described as the 'established fellowship and ordinances of Judaism'.²⁷ Doubtless, leaving the

²³ Owen , p. 470.

²⁴ Lane, p. 545 referring to James W. Thompson, 'Outside the camp: a study of Heb 13: 9-14', in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 40 no 1 (Ja 1978), pp 53-63.

²⁵ deSilva, p. 517.

²⁶ David A. deSilva, *Bearing Christ's Reproach: The Challenge of Hebrews in an Honor Culture* (North Richland Hills, Tex: Bibal Press, 1999), p. 80.

²⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964),

comfort of the old implies embracing the potentially threatening unknown. Terveen minces no words about the intention of the author, with respect to their old religion. He suggests that:

..... many [Jewish] Christians maintained some ties with their former religion, as evidenced in the early chapters of the Acts. In a time of hardship and suffering for their Christian faith, their more familiar and established Jewish heritage could have appeared attractive. Such ties were now to be viewed as a compromise of their faith in Jesus...

[Hebrews] is therefore a plea to predominantly Jewish Christian readers to abandon once and for all their Jewish heritage, to establish a distinct Christian worship separate from Judaism.²⁸

As Moses was willing, for the sake of his faith, to forsake the pleasures of Egypt (11:26) and embrace the 'reproaches of Christ', so the audience is called to do the same in their walk of faith.²⁹ Just as Jesus disregarded /despised/thought nothing of enduring the shame of the cross (12:3), in similar fashion the audience is exhorted to do the same.

What might this passage say to *Heaven Foreground Believers* (HFB) who came out of their former religion of Islam?

3.2.5 ...bearing the disgrace he bore.

The community is exhorted to literally '*bear patiently, endure, put up with*' the honor-smashing association with Jesus. The

p. 403, and Harold Attridge describe it as the 'realm of security and traditional holiness, however that is grounded or understood' in *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia, Philadelphia Fortress, 1989), p. 399.

²⁸ Terveen, pp. 261-2.

²⁹ Cockerill (p. 223) notes that Heb 11:37d-38 demonstrates 'climactic position and detailed nature of the description of total alienation from society' and that this 'suggests that the writer may have feared his hearers would face such a situation.'

image of disgrace, which is literally ‘his’, is as Gerhard Forde suggested, ‘one of the most offensive images in all of scripture.’³⁰ Outside the camp: the place of burning the flesh and offal of sacrificial animals (Exodus 29:14; c.f. Lev. 4:12); the place for lepers (Lev. 14:26); a place of dishonorable burial for Aaron’s sons killed for their dishonoring by offering ‘strange fire’ (Lev. 10:4); the place of Achan’s stoning (Josh. 7:24–26); the place for a blasphemer, ostracized from the covenant community (Lev. 24:14, 23; Num. 15:36); and the place to relieve oneself (Deut 23:10). ‘Outside the camp’ was the place of uncleanness (c.f. Num. 5:3); yet ironically, the place where Moses pitched his ‘tent of meeting’ where he spoke face to face with God (Exodus 33).

Helmut Koester coined a phrase to summarize Jesus’ death by calling it ‘an unholy sacrifice’.³¹ Thus the New English Bible translates this part of the verse: ‘bearing *the stigma* that he bore’, and the NRSV ‘and bear the abuse he endured’.

It is the voluntary nature of Jesus’ willingness to take on this disgrace (Gk *oneidismós*) that is the greatest challenge for the audience.³² Whereas the animals were passive victims, Jesus was an active victim, embracing the path of shame while being constantly tempted to forsake his mission.³³ This is the ever-present danger that disciples and disciple-makers in a Muslim context face as well. Jesus not only showed the audience his obedience, but called them to Himself as their object of obedience and loyalty.

³⁰ Edwin. A Schick, ‘Priestly Pilgrims: Mission outside the Camp in Hebrews’, in *CurrThMiss* 16 (1989), p. 375 quoting Gerhard O. Forde, ‘Outside the Gate: Atonement as Actual Event’, in *Dialog* 18 (autumn 1979), p. 250.

³¹ Helmut Koester, ‘Outside the Camp: Hebrews 13:9-14’, in *Harvard Theological Review*, 55 (1962), p. 315.

³² BAGD—*oneidismós* = act of disparagement that results in disgrace, *reproach, reviling, disgrace, insult*.

³³ See Terveen, p. 150 for a quote from Moffat to this regard.

William Lane summarizes the call to radical discipleship demonstrated in this verse:

The exhortation to leave the camp and to identify fully with Jesus introduces a distinctive understanding of discipleship. Jesus' action in going 'outside the camp' (v 12) set a precedent for others to follow. The task of the community is to emulate Jesus, leaving behind the security, congeniality, and respectability of the sacred enclosure, risking the reproach that fell upon him. Christian identity is a matter of 'going out' now to him. It entails the costly commitment to follow him resolutely, despite suffering.³⁴

With pastoral sensitivity, the author delineates the 'why' of this radical discipleship. He was not unaware of their present sufferings and the sense of disjointedness experienced by a congregation who were feeling like they had great promises, and yet did not see their outcome. He directed them to the example of Jesus, who Himself was now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death (2:9a). Thus he places their uncomfortable state of living in an in-between state, or the liminality of a migrant existence, in perspective.³⁵

3.2.6 For here we do not have a permanent city...

To bring conclusion to this part of his argument, the author uses a word-picture that his audience has already heard a few times. Ellingworth calls this verse 'a final, concise statement of a central theme of the epistle'.³⁶ Thus, the verse, like the two previous on-

³⁴ Lane, p. 543.

³⁵ DeSilva, p. 503. Similarly Luke Timothy Johnson states: 'For now, they [the audience] must live light on the earth, willingly embracing their diaspora condition, the marginality and ostracism that come to them for the confession of a crucified Messiah.' Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, The New Testament library (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), p. 349.

³⁶ Paul Ellingworth, *the Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle [England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1993), p. 718.

es, is part of the larger argument of the ‘word of exhortation.’

‘For here’ continues the theme of the contrast between what is ‘here’ and what is ‘there’ throughout the book. The ‘here’ refers to the life context of the congregation that knows both discouragements and foretastes of the ‘age to come,’ and like the heroes of faith, lives in the present on the capital of promises yet unseen - the ‘there’. The ‘there’ is ‘a firm anchor’ (6:19), ‘unshakable things’ (12:27), an ‘unshakable kingdom’ (12:28), and an ‘abiding possession’. (10:34)

Using what might have been an oblique reference to the impressive, man-made supposedly eternal city of Rome also known as ‘Roma Aeterna’, the author shows the transitory character of the city where power and prestige are concentrated. Even more likely, however he is referring to Jerusalem, the city which was the seat of Judaism and the source of Jewish identification. Note how John Calvin makes this connection between a return to the tabernacle/temple/sacrificial system all housed in Jerusalem and the new:

We must follow him [outside the camp], and not return again to the tabernacle in order to avoid reproach; and this reproach will not be long, for we are hastening to another world; and instead of presenting free-will- offerings and eating of them, what we are to offer now are the sacrifices of praise, of thanksgiving, and of good works.³⁷

The writer of the epistle affirms that in spite of appearances to the contrary, due to having ‘no fixed address’ the congregation belongs to the class of ‘haves’ and not the class of ‘have-nots’. Some of their ‘haves’ include: ‘confidence’, ‘a high priest in hea-

37 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the epistle of Paul the apostle to the Hebrews*, tr. and edited by John Owen (Edinburgh, Calvin Translation Society, 1853), p. 411.

ven over the house of God', 'a better possession and an abiding one', 'a clear conscience', 'strong encouragement', 'hope', 'an altar' and a 'better resurrection'.³⁸ Then he goes on to tell them what they do not have, namely 'a permanent city'. Again the pilgrim/migrant motif of 'strangers and aliens' (11:13) is referred to and it goes without saying the audience would have recalled the reference to Abraham looking for a city that only God could build (11:10).

Not content to be outside of the lives of the congregation the wise pastor uses the word 'we' just as he used the collective phrase 'let us' in the previous verse. He introduces a contrast with the words:

3.2.7 ...but we are expecting intently

Encouragement of collective eager expectation for what is ahead is the device used by the author to moves the 'priestly pilgrims' from their present self-focus, to a higher plane.³⁹ For good reason the author uses a present tense verb to convey the idea that with a continual habitual attitude of life, the audience would anticipate the future.⁴⁰ This same tense is used of those who 'continually yearn' for a better country (11:16). Earlier (9:28), this looking forward with eager expectation was associated with those who are 'eagerly waiting' for the promise of Christ who will bring salvation for them. He holds out before them promises which are marked by permanence and guaranteed delivery. It is these promises that 'pull' the audience forward and upward.

³⁸ Ellingworth, p. 718: 'Hebrews often uses [the verb 'to have' Gk *échō*]... with Jesus (4:15; 8:1; 10:21) or other aspects of salvation (6:19; 10:19, 34f.; 12:1; 13:10, 14) as objects; also of Christian behaviour (5:14; 6:18; 10:19; 13:18).'

³⁹ Schick (p. 373) notes: 'They are pilgrims because they are outward bound; they are priestly because they are shaped by the great High Priest.'

⁴⁰ O'Brien (p. 526) suggests that the 'imperfective aspect' of the verb 'suggests a habitual disposition that is the driving force of their lives.'

3.2.8 ...the city which is to come.

For an audience who finds itself on the fringes of society, the author is directing them to a new society, encapsulated in the word-picture of a city. 'The city' is a short form for 'heaven' (12:23), 'an eternal inheritance' (9:15), 'a final resting-place' (3:11), 'a kingdom' (12:28), and 'a fatherland' (11:14), and its delivery is guaranteed by the living God who is the proprietor of that city (11:10, 16; 12:22).

Throughout his 'word of exhortation' the author of Hebrews has made conscious contrasts of temporary and inferior things to permanent and better eternal things. We see this with old and new high priests, old and new covenants, old and new sacrifices, old and new rituals, and old and new cities. He calls his audience to see what is coming with eyes of faith, what Marie Isaacs called, 'the only sacred space worth having', namely heaven.⁴¹ It is for good reason that he described faith as the 'reality of things hoped for and the proof of things not seen.' (11:1)⁴² Asumang and Domeris aptly describe faith as 'an orienting telescope that makes the unseen but heard Promise visible to the migrant.'⁴³

Owen concludes his exposition by describing the Christian's focus: 'The main business of believers in this world, is to diligently to seek after the city of God, or the attainment of eternal rest with him; and this is the character whereby they may be known.'⁴⁴

⁴¹ Marie Isaacs, *Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, JSNTSup (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), p. 64 cited by George H. Guthrie, 'Hebrews in Its First-Century Contexts. Recent Research', in Scot McKnight & Grant R. Osborne, eds, *The Face of New Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House / Leicester: Apollos, 2004), p. 441.

⁴² Translation by George W. MacRae *Hebrews* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1983), p. 46. Also Attridge, *Hebrews*, p. 309.

⁴³ Asumang, p. 26.

⁴⁴ Owen, p. 474.

Samuel Rutherford, whose timeless words still might bring encouragement to the Arabic brothers and sisters cited earlier in this paper, wrote a letter to Lady Hallhill. From prison, which he dubbed ‘my house of pilgrimage’, dated Aberdeen, March 14, 1647, he affirmed:

...Now I weep, but am not sad; I am chastened, but I die not; I have loss, but I want nothing; this water cannot drown me, this fire cannot burn me, because of the good-will of Him ...The worst things of Christ, His reproaches, His cross, are better than Egypt’s treasures.⁴⁵

The author of Hebrews said it even better: ‘But as it is, they continually yearn for a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.’ (Heb 11:16)

4 Conclusion

The outsider movement, as shown in Hebrews 13 is a counter-intuitive concept. This paradigm is the message of the book of Hebrews and the entire scripture as well. The Upholder of the universe voluntarily leaves his camp of heaven to join the ignominies of human life, and physically identifies, to the point of death, with the race he came to set free. He thus invites his followers to identify with Him, and to set their eyes, not on their temporary, disgraceful condition but on a city to which He has already led the way in triumph.⁴⁶ Just as they are not ashamed of Him, He is not ashamed of them. No stranger to the liminality of his followers, Jesus has lived through its attendant frustration of being held in tension between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’, and the ever present temptation to fail in the school of obedience. As

⁴⁵Samuel Rutherford, and A.A. Bonar ed., *Letters of Samuel Rutherford with a sketch of his life* (New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1863), p. 232.

⁴⁶Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977, reprinted 1987), p. 582.

we look for the city that is to come, let us not fear to ‘go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.’ This is the walk of faith.

For further reflection:

1 Norman Young states that the pastoral exhortation of the book of Hebrews directs his audience to ‘a worship detached, distinct and independent from Judaism’.⁴⁷ He also quotes Wilson who observes that ‘the author is trying to wean his readers from the hankering after Jewish thought and practice.’⁴⁸

Do these observations concerning a minority religion in the book of Hebrews have anything to do with a present day Christian minority among a Muslim majority?

2 *The Message* translates v. 13:

So let’s go outside, where Jesus is, where the action is - not trying to be privileged insiders, but taking our share in the abuse of Jesus.

Does this translation reflect the spirit and intent of the passage?

⁴⁷ Young, p. 248.

⁴⁸ S. G. Wilson, ‘The Apostate Minority’ in, *Mighty Minorities? Minorities in Early Christianity – Positions and Strategies: Essays in Honour of Jacob Jervell on his 70th Birthday*’ ed. D.Hellholm et al, (Oslo: Scandinavian University, 1995), p. 205, quoted by Young, p. 249.