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REPENSER LA RÉTRIBUTION

RETHINKING RETRIBUTION

ÉDITÉ PAR / EDITED BY

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IT IS A FEARFUL THING TO FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE LIVING GOD

RETRIBUTION IN HEBREWS

Throughout this volume, the difficulty of defining retribution in the Bible is manifest. At best, stories, images, and metaphors might illustrate the idea, but they need to be interpreted; at worst, one has the impression that the notion itself is absent from the canonical writings. There is, however, a counterexample to this general law, namely the Epistle to the Hebrews. Indeed, this is a text that takes retribution seriously! Three times it employs the word *μισθαποδοσία*, which is easily identifiable as a compound of *μισθός*, wage, pay, reward, and *ἀποδοσία*, giving back. It is the exact equivalent of the Latin word *retribuere*, which also indicates a reciprocal exchange. On one occasion the term *μισθαποδότης*, “the one who retributes” is used to refer to God. The author even makes a conceptual distinction within the lexical field of retribution itself, as he distinguishes *ἀνταποδοσία* from *μισθαποδοσία*. To discuss the concept of retribution in the two Testaments, it is therefore essential to make a precise study of the vocabulary displayed in Hebrews. What do *ἀνταποδοσία* and *μισθαποδοσία* mean? A specific examination of the terminology of retribution will help to give a definition of this elusive concept.

I. FEE: ΜΙΣΘΑΠΟΔΟΣΙΑ

The first term encountered is *μισθαποδοσία*, which recurs four times in the letter, in both negative (retributive punishment) and positive (retributive reward) meanings.

1. The Occurrences of *Μισθαποδοσία*

The first occurrence the reader encounters in the Epistle to the Hebrews is negative:

² εἰ γὰρ ὁ δι' ἀγγέλων λαληθεὶς λόγος ἐγένετο βέβαιος, καὶ πᾶσα παράβασις καὶ παρακοή ἔλαβεν ἔνδικον *μισθαποδοσίαν*, ³ πῶς ἡμεῖς ἐκφευξόμεθα

τηλικαύτης ἀμελήσαντες σωτηρίας, ἥτις, ἀρχὴν λαβοῦσα λαλεῖσθαι διὰ τοῦ κυρίου, ὑπὸ τῶν ἀκουσάντων εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐβεβαιώθη (Heb 2:2-3).

² For if the message declared through angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, ³ how can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him.

The parallelism of the structure (proclaimed [...] confirmed; εἰ γὰρ [...] πῶς) shapes an *argumentum a fortiori* based on a gradation of sanctions. If the Law foresaw retribution (negative ipso facto) for the faults by omission (παρakoή, unwillingness to hear) and the faults by commission (παράβασις, crossing the line) against rules that were confirmed by the angels, one can guess¹ the more dramatic consequences of any violation of a statement validated by the Lord... Yet the parallel is not total. It is interesting that a word is provided to characterise the repercussions of legal faults (μισθαποδοσία), but no words to signify the outcomes of infractions against the salvation that came from the Lord. They are left in abeyance by the *a fortiori* argument, as if there could be no word to voice them.

The other three occurrences of retribution in the Epistle are positive, a nuance that the Latin text had already seen, even before the Vulgate. Indeed, the Itala had distinguished between *retributio* in presenting the negative consequence and *remuneratio* in expressing the positive outcome². The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews confirms that there is a recompense for παρρησία, an attitude of frankness or assurance:

Μὴ ἀποβάλλετε οὖν τὴν παρρησίαν ὑμῶν, ἥτις ἔχει μεγάλην μισθαποδοσίαν (Heb 10:35).

Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward.

He then uses the word to describe the reward of Moses' choice of a Christ-like life of humiliation over the life in Pharaoh's court:

μεῖζονα πλοῦτον ἡγησάμενος τῶν Αἰγύπτου θησαυρῶν τὸν ὀνειδισμόν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀπέβλεπεν γὰρ εἰς τὴν μισθαποδοσίαν (Heb 11:26).

He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward.

1. According to the term of J. MASSONNET, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Commentaire biblique: Nouveau Testament 15), Paris, Cerf, 2016, p. 81.

2. H.J. FREDE, *Epistula ad Titum, Philemonem, Hebraeos* (Vetus Latina 25.2), Freiburg i.Br., Herder, 1983-1991, p. 1121 and 1491.

Finally, we find a very interesting occurrence in Hebrews 11, which displays the agentive derivative noun:

χωρὶς δὲ πίστεως ἀδύνατον εὐαρεστῆσαι, πιστεῦσαι γὰρ δεῖ τὸν προσερχόμενον τῷ θεῷ ὅτι ἔστιν καὶ τοῖς ἐκζητοῦσιν αὐτὸν **μισθαποδότης** γίνεται (Heb 11:6).

And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

As Spicq said, this line is central to the theology of the Epistle since it sets up two things: the existence of God's remunerative providence, and also the necessity of coming to him with faith during this life³. God shows himself here through the image of the treasurer who rewards those who approach him with all the punctiliousness of an accountant⁴.

2. Μισθαποδοσία: Retribution as Fee

Indeed, if the term *μισθαποδοσία* can have a negative as well as a positive meaning, it suggests the idea of a proportion in retribution. *Μισθαποδοσία* entails a kind of accounting logic: it is a fee. Let us look at the term itself. It is composed, as we said previously, of *μισθός* and *ἀποδοσία*. The word is a *hapax* in the Greek language before our author, which might indicate that he is making a neologism here. The invention is not very adventurous, however, since *μισθός* often enters into composition with other words in classical Greek. Hence: *μισθοαρνός*, the one who receives a salary, *μισθοδότης*, the one who pays the wages, and especially *μισθοφόρος*, a key term in the Median wars, the mercenary. The classical word for the reward is *μισθοδοσία*⁵. The term *μισθός* stems from an Indo-European *mizdhó root signifying the award for a brilliant action⁶. When money was invented, it naturally came to mean "wages", and to refer only to the monetary exchange.

The choice of this term is most interesting. In all civilisations where a unit of account is introduced, monetary exchange tends to be the metaphor for all transactions, to the point of designating the exchange itself. In the New Testament, *μισθός* became a quasi-synonym for reward. Thus, in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, the phrase *ἀπέχουσιν τὸν μισθὸν αὐτῶν*, "They have received their reward", recurs three times (Matt 6:2, 5, 16; see 6:1) to denote

3. C. SPICQ, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Études bibliques), Paris, Gabalda, 1952, p. 344-345.

4. W.L. LANE, *Hebrews 9-13* (World Biblical Commentary 47B), Dallas, TX, Word Books, 1991, p. 338.

5. SPICQ, *Hébreux* (n. 3), p. 26.

6. J. POKORNY, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bern – München, Francke, 1959, p. 746; P. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1977, p. 705-706.

the divine retribution of human deeds. The same is true of the exhortation to hospitality in Matt. 10:40-42, where *μισθός* occurs three times. In Paul (1 Cor 9:18), as in John (John 4:36), the work of evangelisation prepares a payback.

The most interesting passages are obviously those that distort the metaphor or play with it. This is the case in the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, in which the workers' wages resurface as a simile for the recompense promised to the faithful. It is also the case in Luke's very subtle use of *μισθός* in the exhortation to love one's enemies (Luke 6:27-35). What an irony indeed to utilise the very word of accounting logic to preach a purely disinterested practice! Another interesting use of *μισθός* is in its negative sense, exemplified by this statement in Revelation: Ἴδού ἔρχομαι ταχύ, καὶ ὁ μισθός μου μετ' ἐμοῦ, ἀποδοῦναι ἑκάστῳ ὡς τὸ ἔργον ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ, "See, I am coming soon, my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work" (Rev 22:12). *Μισθός* has become so much the rigid metaphor for transaction that it relinquishes all positive value (the sum paid), to describe exchange in itself, whether good or bad.

This quick survey of the occurrences demonstrates that retribution is reckoned in a purely compensatory logic. To understand this, we must briefly recall that Hebrews' main goal is to prevent his readers (or the hearers of the original sermon) from making decisions that the author deems contrary to the gospel they have received. He eventually depicts these bad choices as a fall away (*παρὰπесόντας*, Heb 6:6), in other words, apostasy⁷. Henceforth, he sets up a binary vision structured by *μισθός*. The term means at the same time punishment for apostasy, and reward for faithfulness. This positive recompense is described as rest (4:3), salvation (9:28), and entrance into the Kingdom (12:28). Faith – in its double Greek sense – is the agent of this process. As faithfulness, it is rewarded; as trust, it becomes fulfilment.

II. THE TWO ASPECTS OF RETRIBUTION: ΑΝΤΑΠΟΔΟΣΙΑ AND ΜΙΣΘΑΠΟΔΟΣΙΑ

A binary perspective does not necessarily mean that the two pillars of reward are opposed. Do the two poles of retribution, positive and negative, simply mirror each other or is there some kind of difference between them?

7. B. LINDARS, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (New Testament Theology), Cambridge – New York, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 10-11; G.E. RICE, "Apostasy as a Motive and Its Effect on the Structure of Hebrews", *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23, 1985, p. 29-35; S.D. TOUSSAINT, "The Eschatology of the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews", *Grace Theological Journal* 3, 1982, p. 67-80.

The exhortative passage at the end of chapter 10 provides the occasion to see how retribution works, since a new term, ἀνταποδοσία, is introduced.

1. Ἀνταποδοσία: Negative Retribution

The author of Hebrews addresses a very concrete problem: “let us not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some” (Heb 10:25). He makes this lack of community events attendance a major fault: ἐγκαταλείπω has the strong sense of surrendering⁸. In a very implicit way, he equates it with this apostasy that he constantly talks about from the beginning of the Epistle. He does not hesitate to belabour his point:

²⁶ Ἐκουσίως γὰρ ἀμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν μετὰ τὸ λαβεῖν τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας, οὐκέτι περὶ ἀμαρτιῶν ἀπολείπεται θυσία, ²⁷ φοβερὰ δέ τις ἐκδοχὴ κρίσεως καὶ πυρὸς ζῆλος ἐσθίειν μέλλοντος τοῦς ὑπεναντίους (Heb 10:26-27).

²⁶ For if we wilfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

We can read in this passage an allusion to Num 15:30 dealing with the voluntary sin, the “high-handed sin”⁹. This desertion is formulated in the present tense to suggest it is a conscious and permanent rejection¹⁰; “See how he does not say: those who have sinned, but: those who sin, that is, who remain in sin without being converted”, Theophylactus once explained¹¹. The underlying reasoning can already be found elsewhere in the letter. In Heb 3:12, the author previously said: “Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God”. And in 6:4-6: “For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt”. The claim that there is no longer a sacrifice for such voluntary sins simply reaffirms the outcomes of the consideration of the unique offering of Christ. For the author of the Epistle,

8. SPICQ, *Hébreux* (n. 3), p. 319.

9. F.F. BRUCE, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (New International Commentary on the New Testament), Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1990, p. 260; H.W. ATTRIDGE, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia), Philadelphia, PA, Fortress, 2001, p. 292.

10. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews* (n. 9), p. 292; MASSONNET, *Hébreux* (n. 1), p. 290.

11. Quotation in SPICQ, *Hébreux* (n. 3), p. 322.

this ultimate sacrifice had put an end to the very system of sacrifice and thus supplanted any other means of reconciliation with God¹².

So, what is the consequence of this situation?

²⁸ ἀθετήσας τις νόμον Μωϋσέως χωρὶς οἰκτιρμῶν ἐπὶ δυσὶν ἢ τρισὶν μάρτυσιν ἀποθνήσκει. * ²⁹ πόσω δοκεῖτε χείρονος ἀξιωθήσεται τιμωρίας ὁ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καταπατήσας καὶ τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης κοινὸν ἡγῆσάμενος, ἐν ᾧ ἡγιασθή, καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς χάριτος ἐνυβρίσας; (Heb 10:28-29).

²⁸ Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy “on the testimony of two or three witnesses”. ²⁹ How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?

This explanation, obviously, returns to the *a fortiori* argument. Its first step is quotations from Deut 17:6 and Deut 19:15. This text has been used extensively, especially by Philo, to condemn blasphemy (*Fug.* 84) and apostasy (*Spec. Leg.* 2.255). Repeated in Matt 18:16; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19, it may represent a Christian adaptation of a Jewish topos. The second stage is the “for good reason”. This operates on two levels. On the one hand, on the side of the wrongdoer, once there is a simple violation of the Law, the apostate’s attitude is dramatised, especially by using the term *καταπετεῖν*, “trampling”. It recalls the Homeric phrase of oath-breaking (*καταπετεῖν ὅρκια*, lit. “Trampling the oaths under his feet”)¹³ or the pig that treads seeds (Herodotus 2.14)¹⁴: it is a vigorous metaphor of contempt. On the other hand, on the side of God, the *auctor ad Hebraeos* speaks of *τιμωρία*, a New Testament *hapax* found in documentary papyri, meaning punishment or torment¹⁵.

What is this punishment? As usual, the author does not give any precision. His definition hangs from the question mark that avoids being carefully characterised. And what follows is hardly more precise:

³⁰ οἶδαμεν γὰρ τὸν εἰπόντα· ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις, ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω. καὶ πάλιν κρινεῖ κύριος τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ. ³¹ φοβερὸν τὸ ἐμπεσεῖν εἰς χεῖρας θεοῦ ζώντος (Heb 10:30).

³⁰ For we know the one who said, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay”. And again, “The Lord will judge his people”. ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

12. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews* (n. 9), p. 293.

13. J. MOFFATT, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (International Critical Commentary 40), Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1924, p. 151.

14. MASSONNET, *Hébreux* (n. 1), p. 291.

15. SPICQ, *Hébreux* (n. 3), p. 324.

These two quotes from the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32) were a treasure trove for Christians when they sought to blame the Jews' lack of belief (Rom 10:10; 1 Cor 10:20)¹⁶. The privileges Israel enjoyed as God's covenant people meant that their responsibilities were greater and the chastisements more severe if they engaged in injustice.

Two elements are of particular interest. On the one hand, the second citation, which conforms strictly to the text of the LXX, brings out a new term of retribution, ἀνταποδώσω, "to restore to the same". When confronted with the fault, God only retaliates. On the other hand, the discourse does not seek to specify the punishment left open by the *a fortiori* argument, it merely refers to our prior acquaintance with God. It suggests that the hearers know the character of the one who speaks in Scripture and who has acted in Christ – namely, an essential attribute of God which is that he does not tolerate sin¹⁷. But is this, as Bruce said, the "revelation of the consuming righteousness of God"¹⁸? The original text, as Spicq correctly noticed, contains a maxim of mercy according to which God will be just with his people and will avenge their enemies for them¹⁹. What a contrast with the clausula, which obviously makes any reader feel terribly uncomfortable and to which I will return later.

2. Μισθαποδοσία, Positive Retribution

Let us now turn to the positive retribution that follows:

³² Ἀναμνησθεσθε δὲ τὰς πρότερον ἡμέρας, ἐν αἷς φωτισθέντες πολλὴν ἄθλησιν ὑπεμείνατε παθημάτων, ³³ τοῦτο μὲν ὀνειδισμοῖς τε καὶ θλίψεσιν θεατριζόμενοι, τοῦτο δὲ κοινωνοὶ τῶν οὕτως ἀναστρεφόμενων γεννηθέντες. ³⁴ καὶ γὰρ τοῖς δεσμίοις συνεπαθήσατε καὶ τὴν ἄρπαγὴν τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ὑμῶν μετὰ χαρᾶς προσεδέξασθε γινώσκοντες ἔχειν ἑαυτοὺς κρείττονα ὑπαρξίν καὶ μένουσαν. ³⁵ Μὴ ἀποβάλλετε οὖν τὴν παρρησίαν ὑμῶν, ἥτις ἔχει μεγάλην μισθαποδοσίαν. ³⁶ ὑπομονῆς γὰρ ἔχετε χρεῖαν ἵνα τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ποιήσαντες κομίσησθε τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν (Heb 10:32-36).

³² But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting. ³⁵ Do not, therefore,

16. BRUCE, *Hebrews* (n. 9), p. 264.

17. ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews* (n. 9), p. 295.

18. BRUCE, *Hebrews* (n. 9), p. 265.

19. SPICQ, *Hébreux* (n. 3), p. 326.

abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward.³⁶ For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

Curiously, the Epistle to the Hebrews revives the practice of the Pauline letters: convincing through memory²⁰. The author constructs a hypotyposis, a brilliant depiction that places the spectator in the position of an eyewitness²¹. However, far from being a fictitious picture of an event, it is a living reminder of an ecclesial journey. The metaphor of the games, then that of the theatre, points towards the language of performance, a display of dishonour and suffering²². It implicitly admits that this first, unrepeatably confrontation with the divine word through the intermediary of its apostolic messenger constitutes, to some extent, the very foundation of the Christian self. As in Paul's case, it contains in itself all the potentialities of the future life²³ and has this strange characteristic that its mere anamnesis is enough to make anyone adopt a right conduct and a right thought.

Let us return to the pair ἀνταποδοσία and μισθαποδοσία. What does it reveal about the author's vision of retribution? Let us recall what has been made clear: 1° μισθαποδοσία can function positively and negatively, on the model of an accounting logic of profit and loss. But 2° when μισθαποδοσία is opposed to ἀνταποδοσία, it denotes the antagonism between punishment and reward, and μισθαποδοσία is put on the side of the reward.

The simplicity in this depiction of reward is striking. It suffices to open any dictionary to realise that the philosophy of law classifies, following Aristotle, retributive justice under compensatory justice; while corrective justice is concerned with correcting harm, commutative justice with considering each person according to their merits, and distributive justice with establishing differences in treatment for the greater benefit of all, retributive justice

20. R. BURNET, "L'anamnèse: structure fondamentale de la lettre paulinienne", *New Testament Studies* 49, 2003, p. 57-69.

21. For a rhetorical description of hypotyposis (ὑποτύπωσις, *evidentia*), see H. LAUSBERG, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik* [1960], München, Hüber, 1973, § 810-819.

22. L.T. JOHNSON, "Hebrews 10:32-39 and the Agony of the Translator", in S.E. PORTER – M.J. BODA (eds.), *Translating the New Testament: Text, Translation, Theology* (McMaster New Testament Studies), Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2009, p. 168-183. Republished in L.T. JOHNSON, *Contested Issues in Christian Origins and the New Testament: Collected Essays* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 146), Leiden – Boston, MA, Brill, 2013, p. 423-438.

23. L. CERFAUX, *Le Chrétien dans la théologie paulinienne* (Lectio divina 33), Paris, Cerf, 1962, p. 132-134; B.R. GAVENTA, *From Darkness to Light: Aspect of Conversion in the New Testament* (Overtures to Biblical Theology 20), Philadelphia, PA, Fortress, 1986, p. 42-45; A.J. MALHERBE, "Conversion to Paul's Gospel", in ID. – F. NORRIS – J. THOMPSON (eds.), *The Early Church in Its Context: Essays in Honor of Everett Ferguson* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 90), Leiden – Boston, MA – Köln, Brill, 1998, p. 230-244.

is concerned with punishment²⁴. Philosophers (mostly utilitarian) have even brought nuances to this position²⁵. But this text is far from such subtleties. The concept of retribution formulated by the author of Hebrews does not seem to go beyond the *lex talionis*: good for good, evil for evil, in a uniform and undifferentiated way.

III. CONCLUSION: "IT IS A FEARFUL THING TO FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE LIVING GOD": THE RHETORICAL WEIGHT OF RETRIBUTION

Is it really without nuance? We have repeatedly observed that parallels are usually incomplete and that situations are often exaggerated. It is time to return to the famous formula, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God". This, certainly, inspired a profound dread that has spanned the centuries and frightened all those who heard it. It has generally been inferred from this maxim that sin was banished from the early Christian Church, which would make it the exact opposite of the degenerate institution in which we are living. But of course, the whole literature of the first centuries is there to convince us of the contrary²⁶. And if there is a Tertullian who promotes a superb rigorism, we must not neglect the prudence of the *Pastor of Hermas* 2.2.1, who accepts a second sin, exactly on the same basis: the absence of a possible sacrifice²⁷. The later Church, aware of the problem, found the liturgical solution of renewing the sacrifice on the altar in the Eucharist²⁸.

Should we take this anxiety-provoking phrase literally? The effects employed are a bit thick. Why this appeal to the "living God" to say a death intervention? It all seems far too exaggerated not to be intended. Hebrews' argument adopts every scholastic rhetorical device to stir indignation (*δελνωσις*): the pathetic questions recommended by Quintilian (*Institutes of Oratory* 9.2.10), the emphasis on the good will without which mercy is powerless (Cicero, *Inv.* 1.53§ 102), and above all, a pathetic *amplificatio*

24. A.P. IANNONE, *Dictionary of World Philosophy*, London, Routledge, 2001, p. 437.

25. See J. COTTINGHAM, "Varieties of Retribution", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 29, 1979, p. 238-246. See also L. ZAIBERT, *Punishment and Retribution (Law, Justice, and Power)*, Aldershot – Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2006, p. 96-126.

26. Swetnam's hypothesis, which tries to show that the nuance of meaning is positive, shows the confusion of commentators about this expression. J. SWETNAM, "Hebrews 10,30-31: A Suggestion", *Biblica* 75, 1994, p. 388-394.

27. BRUCE, *Hebrews* (n. 9), p. 263.

28. C.E. CARLSTON, "Eschatology and Repentance in the Epistle to the Hebrews", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78, 1959, p. 296-302, p. 301.

designed to awaken in the minds of the addressees fantastic images (φαντασίαι) to confront them with an abstract guilt as vividly as possible (cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 6.2.24)²⁹. To postulate a theological eternity (the exclusion of any second repentance) based on this brief moment of rhetoric would be to miss the pragmatic intention of Hebrews³⁰. The author consciously constructed this not-so-subtle theory of retribution. Even if it does not please our modern mind excessively, he had in his heritage the terror of divine justice³¹. He did not eliminate it, but he made it useful through argumentation. His purpose was not to proclaim the ultimate truth about death and judgment. He simply integrated the old concept of retribution into a complex rhetorical device, switching back and forth between fear and hope. By instilling the dread of the impossibility of any future repentance, he exhorts his listeners to confidence.

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29. K. BACKHAUS, "Zwei harte Knoten: Todes- und Gerichtsangst im Hebräerbrief", *New Testament Studies* 55, 2009, p. 198-217, here p. 213.

30. *Ibid.*

31. Tanner's analysis shows that this fear may still be taken seriously in the twenty-first century: J.P. TANNER, "For Whom Does Hebrews 10:26-31 Teach a 'Punishment Worse than Death'?", *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 19, 2006, p. 58-77.