

κρείττων *and the disproportionate typology*

Laurențiu Ionescu

Introduction

Word studies certainly do not fulfil the ultimate goal in New Testament exegesis, but nevertheless they are basic and essential for an accurate interpretation of the New Testament. The goal of this study is to show the semantic nuance of the word κρείττων and the typological value¹ of this term in Pauline epistles.

Several assumptions about the nature of language as a vehicle of communication are implied in this work:

- (1) An author uses written language signals in an attempt to communicate cognitive content, emotive feelings, and desires for an appropriate response from his audience.
- (2) An author shares a vast amount of information with his intended audience, such as world view, culture, and specific circumstances involved in the communication situation. Much can therefore be left unexpressed because the author is confident the audience will infer it aright.
- (3) Although a biblical author's purpose and meaning are largely available to us today only through the written text, his purpose and the meaning he intends to communicate are antecedent to and have priority over the written surface forms he uses.
- (4) Meaning is conveyed through a hierarchically arranged set of units which are related in semantically appropriate ways to other units.
- (5) Within a given unit, some constituents of meaning are nuclear (central) and others satellitic (supportive) of them. The units that are nuclear have natural prominence.

1. The question of emphasis or the doctrinal centre of Hebrews is a vital one. It is generally agreed by the interpreters that the epistle have one "master idea" to which all others sections of theology are subordinate. For a detailed discussion see William G. Johnsson, "Issues in the Interpretation of Hebrews," *Andrews University Seminary Study* 15 (1977) 169-188; P.P. Saydon, "The Master-Idea of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Melita Theologica* 13 (1961) 19-26; David J. MacLeod, "The Doctrinal Center of the Book of Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (1989) 291-300.

- (6) An author can use various grammatical and lexical devices to signal that certain meaning units have marked prominence.

The occurrence and the usage

In determining the meaning of a word, the inductive method is the only really scientific one. In the study of the usage of a word in the New Testament, there is a general rule that was followed. The nearer the occurrence of the word is chronologically and contextually, the more influence it has in determining the meaning of the word in the passage being studied. If the word occurs in the same paragraph, it normally will have more bearing on its meaning than if it is found several chapters later. The word should be studied in the book in which it is found, then in all of the writer's books, and finally in the entire New Testament.

Forms

There are two forms in which the term under study can be encountered in the New Testament text: κρείττων or κρείσσων. The two forms reflect the alternative pronunciation specific to different regions of Greece. The alternation of τ and σ can be found in other cases² in New Testament vocabulary.

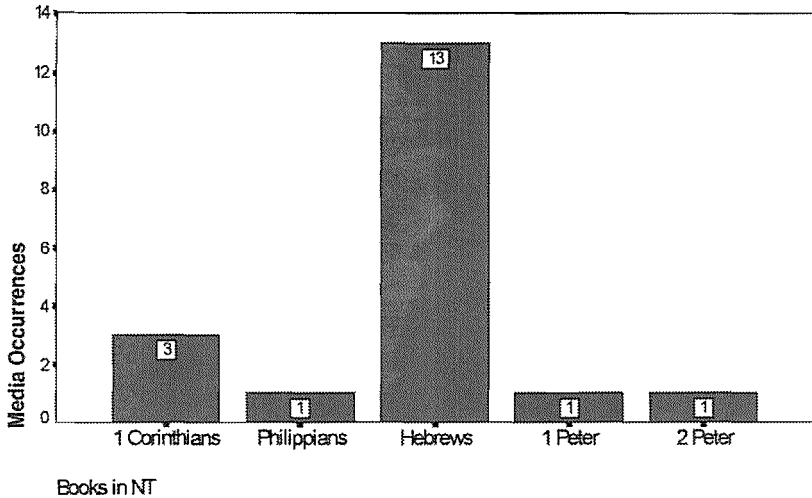
Occurrence

The root κρείττων is found 19 times in NT in 18 verses. From 19 occurrences, 2 are in the First and the Second Epistle of Peter and 17 in the epistles of Paul.

It is interesting to note that the majority of occurrences are found in the Pauline epistles. The occurrence in the Pauline epistles is distributed in following proportion: 3 occurrences in 1 Corinthians, 1 occurrence in Philippians and 13 occurrences in Hebrew.

The following graphic shows the disposal of the occurrence in the books of NT.

- Example: γλωσσα-γλωττα. For a methodological approach of Greek phonology see Margaret E. Dean, "The Grammar of Sound in Greek Texts: Toward a Method for Mapping the Echoes of Speech in Writing." *Australian Biblical Review* 44 (1996) 53-70.



The semantics of the root

The ANLEX³, the latest New Testament dictionary, describe κρείττων as being the comparative of κρατύς (*strong*). The possible translation is *better, more advantageous, more useful, etc.*⁴

The term is used to qualify different things, persons, and actions. In this type of context ‘greater’ must be understood in the sense of “more important,” or “of higher rank,” or “of greater authority”.

3. Timothy Friberg and Barbara Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament ANLEX*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2000.
4. κρείττων, ον, gen. ονος and κρείσσω comparative of κρατύς (*strong*) used as a comparative of ἀλαθός (*good*); (1) of persons *superior, better, higher in rank* (Heb 1,4); substantively *more important person* (Heb 7,7); (2) of what is *more advantageous, better, more useful* (1Cor 7,9); neuter as a substantive τὸ κρείττων *the advantage, the more profitable thing* (1Cor 11,17; perhaps Heb 12,24), opposite τὸ ἥσσω (*the worse*); τὰ κρείσσωνα *more useful things* (Heb 6,9); (3) neuter as an adverb (*in a better way*) (probably Heb 12,24).

The LNLEX⁵ describes two semantic levels that define the root κρείττων:

- a) **Value** – κρείττων, ον or κρείσσων: being superior to something else in characteristics or function - better, superior.
- b) **Status** -κρείττων, ον, gen. ονοϋς: having a higher status in comparison to something else - *better, greater, superior to*.

The distinction that exists between these two levels of semantics is important in the context of the exegesis of Epistle to Hebrews.

The pattern “shadow-reality”

Types are pictures, object-lessons, by which God taught His people concerning His grace and saving power. A person, event or thing is so fashioned or appointed as to resemble another; the one is made to answer to the other in some essential feature; in some particulars the one matches the other. The two are called ‘type’ and ‘antitype’; and the link which binds them together is the correspondence, the similarity, of the one with the other.

It is somewhat difficult to give a satisfactory classification of Biblical types⁶, but broadly they may be distributed under three heads:⁷

- (1) Personal types, by which are meant those personages of Scripture whose lives and experiences illustrate some principle or truth of redemption. Such are Adam, who is expressly described as the “figure of him that was to come” (Rom 5,14), Melchizedek, Abraham, Aaron, Joseph, Jonah, etc.
- (2) Historical types, in which are included the great historical events that under Providence became striking foreshadowing of good things to come, e.g. the Deliverance from the Bondage of Egypt; the Wilderness Journey; the Conquest of Canaan; the Call of Abraham; Deliverances by the Judges, etc.
- (3) Ritual types, such as the Altar, the Offerings, the Priesthood, the Tabernacle and its furniture. There are typical persons, places, times, things, actions, in the

5. J. P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* United Bible Society, New York 1988.

6. Chad L. Bird, “Typological Interpretation Within the Old Testament: Melchizedekian Typology,” *Concordia Journal* 26 (2000) 36-52; Edward Glenny, “Typology : A Summary of the Present Evangelical Discussion,” *JETS* 40 (1997) 627-638.

7. Peter V. Legartha, “Typology and its Theological Basis,” *European Journal of Theology* 5.2 (1996) 143-155.

Old Testament, and a reverent study of them leads into a thorough acquaintance with the fullness and the blessedness of the word of God.

The literary structure and the rhetorical procedure used in Hebrews follows the pattern of a comparative typology. In Epistle to Hebrews the term κρείττων is the heart of this typology.

A short survey of the structure of the epistle reveals that its content is structured and organized using the comparative model. The role, service, faith, nature of Christ are defined by this comparative qualification.

The analysis of the 12 verses where the term κρείττων occurs, gives a large picture of this comparison.

The objects of comparison are:⁸

- the angels⁹ - 1,4 τοσούτω κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν αγγέλων
- better things [that accompany salvation] – 6,9 τὰ κρείσσενα καὶ ἐχόμενα σωτηρίας
- the less, insignificant¹⁰ [person] – 7,7 τὸ ἔλαττον ὑπὸ τοῦ κρείττονος εὐλογεῖται.
- the hope¹¹ - 7,19 κρείττονος ἐλπίδος
- the covenant¹²/testament¹³ - 7,22; 8,6 κρείττονος διαθήκης
- the promises – 8,6 κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίαις
- the sacrifices – 9,23 κρείττοσιν θυσίαις
- the substance/possessions¹⁴ – 10,34 κρείττονα ὑπαρξιν

8. Based on Gerald L. Borchert, "A superior book: Hebrews," *Review & Expositor* 82 (1985): 319-322; Thomas G. Smothers, "A superior model: Hebrews 1:1-4:13," *Review & Expositor* 82 (1985): 333-343; Alan Culpepper, "A superior faith: Hebrews 10:19-12:2," *Review & Expositor* 82 (1985) 375-390.

9. The phrase κρείττων γενόμενος 'having become better' is translated 'having been exalted'. The superiority relates to position and power and is a difference of kind, not of degree.

10. It refers to status.

11. It emphasizes quality and implies contrast as well as superiority

12. Roger L. Omanson, "A superior covenant : Hebrews 8:1-10:18," *Review & Expositor* 82 (1985) 361-373

13. It is emphatic by word order.

14. It indicates superior quality and given separate identity

- the better¹⁵ [heavenly] country – 11,16 κρείττονος ἑπουρνίου [πατρίς 11,14]
- the resurrection¹⁶ - 11,35 κρείττονος ἀναστάσεως
- the thing¹⁷ - 11,40 κρείττον τι προβλεψαμένου
- the blood¹⁸ - 12,24 καίϊματι ῥαντισμοῦ κρείττον λαλοῶντι παρὰ τὸν Ἄβελ¹⁹

A short analysis of the elements of this comparison discovers that the use of comparison and the subject of comparison imply:

- a superiority to position and power
- a difference of kind, not of degree

The relations between the elements that are compared have different semantic nuances.

There are some aspects that the comparison delineates and underlines:

- it refers to status
- it emphasizes quality
- it implies contrast as well as superiority
- it indicates separate identity
- it is qualitative

All the subjects of the comparison are related to Christ – the Son. The two semantic levels mentioned by LNLEX provide the basis for understanding the nature of this

15. They refer to πατρίδα 'homeland' in the preceding verses
16. It is qualitative. The phrase κρείττονος ἀναστάσεως 'better resurrection', refers to resurrection to a different and better life. For a detailed discussion see Peter R. Jones, "A superior life: Hebrews 12:3-13:25," *Review & Expositor* 82 (1985) 391-405.
17. It refers to the fulfilment of the promise in Christ, full fellowship with God through the work of Christ, the new covenant with its blessings, the superiority of the Christian revelation. It includes a better high priest, sacrifice, covenant, and country.
18. What does κρείττον 'better' modify? a) It can be the predicate of λαλοῦντι 'speaking': speaking a better thing than Abel or b) it can be adverbial, modifying λαλοῦντι 'speaking': speaking more effectively than Abel. This adjective is also translated as an adverb: 'more eloquently', 'more effectively', 'and more insistently'
19. παρὰ τὸν Ἄβελ 'than Abel'. Two meanings with some variants are possible: a) 'than the blood of Abel': with these nuances a) could mean 'than Abel's blood spoke'; b) it could mean '(better) than Abel's blood was'; or b) 'than Abel': (speaking better) than Abel (spoke).

comparison. The superiority of the Son must be understood in two manners:

- a) The Son is superior in value
- b) The Son is superior in status

This double aspect (value and status) have a profound significance in understanding the theology of Hebrews. The apostle Paul draws the typology *shadow-reality* using this contrastive method. This typology consists in an *unbalanced/ disproportionate antithesis*. This kind of antithesis is not new in the literature of the apostle Paul.

The pattern of a *disproportionate comparison* can be found in three types of antithesis that Paul introduces in Romans.

Here is the summary of these antitheses:

The Christological Antithesis:

Christ is superior to Adam. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men... by one man’s offence death reigned by one; **much more** they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ”(Rom 5,12.17).

The Soteriological Antithesis:

The grace is greater than the sin. “But where sin abounded, grace did *much more* abound” (Rom 5,20)

The Eschatological Antithesis:

“Romans 5,9-11 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, *we shall be saved from wrath* through him. ...when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God... *much more*, being reconciled, *we shall be saved* by his life. And not only so, but *we also joy in God* through our Lord Jesus Christ... (Rom 5,9-11).

The relational coherence of the passage consists of its having two basic parts: *one*, the *problem* (12b–14) of the universality of spiritual death brought on by Adam and, *two*, the *solution* (15–21).

The 5,12–21 paragraph consists of a series of contrasts between the effects on humankind arising from what one man, Adam, did, and what another man, Jesus Christ, did. The contrasts are indicated by the use of the recurring word ‘one’ to refer to these two individuals, which device makes the set of contrasts prominent.

- (15–19) contrast the sin of Adam with the greater righteous act of Christ and its universal effects;
- (20–21) contrasts the sin of human beings with the greater grace of God.

The Epistle to Hebrews is the culmination of theological thinking that has its roots in the epistle to Romans.

Conclusion

Despite the controversy about the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews, it seems that the typology of disproportionate antithesis is specific to Pauline literature. It was not the aim of this paper to establish who the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is. It meant only to suggest a thematic connection between the typological patterns of Pauline theology and the rhetorical device of the Epistle to Hebrews from the point of view of the use of κρείττων. The usage of the term receives a preponderant value in the epistle. Beyond the semantic value, the rhetorical usage of κρείττων is the main pattern of the argumentation used in Hebrews. The *disproportionate antithesis* between Christ and the past form or agents of revelation (Moses, angels, prophets, Abraham, covenant) permits the author to introduce the superiority of the sacerdotal service of Christ.

The *disproportion* does not destroy or undervalue the less significant element of the comparison. It puts a special emphasis on Christ’s service and his role in salvation. This approach gives to the reader the certainty, the sureness, of the Christian faith.

The use of κρείττων in Hebrews proves the crystallization of Pauline theology. It represents the mature work, the climax of this theology. The rhetorical elements are used to show to the reader, in an artistic manner, the superiority of Christ’s service in favour of mankind. The resemblance with the human experience must be understood not in the way of similarity or identity but in a *disproportionate* likeness in which Christ always is κρείττων - *better, greater, superior*.

Str. Decebal 11-13, Cernica, Ilfov,
Romania.
Email: laurentiuionescu@adventist.ro //
laurentiuionescugabriel@gmail.com