

## **Item #26 (The Institution of the Church in Hebrews 3,3-4)**

This was Entry #25 in my previous website. It is here presented again with minor changes.

My research in the Epistle to the Hebrews has resulted in the writing of a number of brief articles concerned with Heb 1,5 – 3,6. They may be found at Bibliography §208 (“ἐξ ἐνός in Hebrews 2,11”), §211 (“ὁ ἀπόστολος in Hebrews 3,1”), §216 (“τῶν λαληθησομένων in Hebrews 3,5”) and §216 (“The Crux at Hebrews 2,9 in Its Context”). This latter is particularly significant, for it bases its force on an interpretation of Heb 2,8a-9 // Heb 2,14-16 as explicitly involving Christ as victim, in contrast to Christ as priest in 2,10-12 // 2,17-18. These notes, involving as they do interpretations which center on the Eucharist (Heb 2,12 is taken as the Christian *tôdâ*) prepare the way for an interpretation of Heb 3,3-4. All of this, of course, is found in my book on Hebrews, *Hebrews—An Interpretation* published by the Gregorian & Biblical Press (Subsidia Biblica 47) in 2016.

3,1 has a particularly important role to play in the passage, for its designation of Jesus as ἀπόστολος and ἀρχιερεύς, with its call to “regard him closely” (κατανοήσατε), indicates that what is to follow has to do with worship. (Cf. Bibliography §211.) But the words used in addressing the recipients are also important (ἀδελφοί, ἅγιοι and κλήσεως ἐπουρανίου μέτοχοι), for they tie the passage more explicitly still into Heb 2,11-12 and Jesus as heavenly high priest who sanctifies his brother Christians in the Eucharist. With these words the cultic function is associated explicitly with community, an association, however, which is implicit in the use of ἀπόστολος and ἀρχιερεύς. 3,2 sets up the comparison between Moses and Jesus in the context of οἶκος, “house”. 3,3 says that Jesus is worthy of more honor than Moses just as the founder of a “house” is worthy of more honor than the “house” itself. Here Jesus is implicitly said to have founded a “house”. And Moses, by implication, is not. Viewing 3,3 in the light of 3,1 leads inevitably to the conclusion that the “house” Jesus founded is the cultic community constituted by the “brothers” of Jesus who are being sanctified by him. 3,4 announces that every “house” has a founder, and the one who “founds” everything is God. This is not a truism or a parenthesis but is an essential part of the argument involving Jesus as founder of a community of worship, for it implicitly authenticates that community with God’s approval. But it does more. It also implicitly identifies God as the “founder” of the “house” in which Moses served as minister of worship (θεράπων). Now there is a continuity between the “house” “in which” Moses is “faithful” as servant and the “house” “over which” Christ is faithful as “son” (vv. 5-6). (This is evidenced in

Hebrews by the way in which the word “people” (λαός) is used [cf. Paul Ellingworth in his 1993 commentary on Hebrews, p. 190].) Moses is “faithful” in “the whole of God’s house” (ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ), that is to say, in the “house” of the old dispensation and in the “house” of the new (i.e., the Christian community of worship), for he serves in the entire “house” as faithful witness of Jesus’ word’s of institution of the Eucharist, whether that house is the “house” of the old dispensation or of the new. And this because in the old dispensation he inaugurated the Sinai covenant with expiatory blood (cf. Heb 9,19-22 and Bibliography §211). In Heb 2,3 the author of Hebrews alludes to this institution of the Eucharist by the Lord; it is to this institution that Moses gives witness to in 3,5. *Heb 2,3 and Heb 3,5, in other words, refer ultimately to the same act of Jesus by which he inaugurates the Christian worshipping community. And it is this worshipping community which is the Church.*

There are other ways to view the Church, of course. But Hebrews views the Church as a worshipping community celebrating the Christian Eucharist. And constituting the “house” which is thereby founded, as Heb 3,6 makes clear. **(5 November 2009; modified slightly 4 August 2019)**