

Discourse Analysis of the NT
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therefore their writings were the result of a process of development, which must be studied historically. The literary work was seen as a historical document of a specific time, which needed to be described in terms of causality. The real object of study was not the literary work as such, but its origin, its *genesis*.¹

In the seventies this historical approach was challenged by various text-immanent approaches, with their focus on the text as a literary work. The underlying philosophy of these approaches is phenomenology, where the text is seen as a phenomenon that must be understood and explained in terms of itself. Not the history of the text but the text itself, not the situation behind the text but the text as an autonomous object of study, not the intention of the author but the intention of the text comes to the fore.² The result of this shift was that various text-immanent approaches came into existence among linguists and literatists. They may be classified in three groups, each with its own subdivisions: French structuralism, literary criticism and discourse analysis.³

The last approach has received enthusiastic attention and support within South African New Testament studies. Virtually all scholars in this country who study the Greek text use it in their research. Discourse analysis is the one field where South Africa has made a significant contribution to New Testament scholarship in general.

b. *Discourse Analysis as Method*

The type of analysis referred to in the above section was originally called semantic discourse analysis.⁴ The shift from word to sentence

1. C.J. Den Heyer, *Exegetische methoden in discussie: Een analyse van Markus 10:46-13:37* (Kampen: Kok, 1979), pp. 89-90.
2. W.S. Vorster, 'De strukturaal-analyse', in A.F.G. Klijn (ed.), *Inleiding tot de studie van het Nieuwe Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 1982), pp. 127-52, esp. p. 128.
3. For a discussion see Vorster, 'De strukturaal-analyse', pp. 127-52; A.H. Snyman, 'A Semantic Discourse Analysis of the Letter to Philemon', in P.J. Hartin and J.H. Petzer (eds.), *Text and Interpretation* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), pp. 83-99.
4. In 1973 J.P. Louw published his 'Discourse Analysis and the Greek New Testament', *BibTrans* 24 (1973), pp. 108-18. Since then numerous publications have emerged: H.J.B. Combrink, *Structural Analysis of Acts 6:8-8:3* (Cape Town: DRC Publishers, 1979); A.B. du Toit, 'Die praktyk van eksegeese in die lig van nuwe wetenskaplike ontwikkeling', in *idem*, *Die nuwe-testamentiese wetenskap vandag* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1980), pp. 119-36; *idem*, 'Strukturele eksegeese en die Suid-Afrikaanse reedvoeringsanalise', *Skrif en Kerk* 2 (1981), pp. 3-14; J.P. Louw, *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (Philadelphia: Fortress

HEBREWS 6.4-6: FROM A SEMIOTIC DISCOURSE PERSPECTIVE

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1. *Introduction*

New Testament scholarship (and especially hermeneutics) is in a process of methodological definition and redefinition. A common aspect of all the discussions on methodology is that they fall under one of the three poles in communication theory, namely the *sender* (author), the *text* and the *receptor* (the reader). The focus in this essay will be on the text, and the approach adopted a specific type of discourse analysis developed within the New Testament Society of South Africa.

The first part of the essay will deal with the setting or background from which this approach has emerged, followed by a description of the method itself. In the second part the approach will be applied to the hotly debated Heb. 6.4-6, which seems to provide a basis for denying the possibility of repentance for Christians who apostatize.

2. *Methodological Considerations*

a. *The Setting of Discourse Analysis*

All disciplines interested in communication regard discourse analysis as part of their field: sociology, psychology, semiotics, speech act theory, etc. As far as New Testament scholarship is concerned, it developed within a structural approach to linguistics. Text-linguistic discourse analysis, as it is practised today, reached its height in the seventies and early eighties and coincides with an important shift in the field of biblical studies: the movement away from a historical and towards a text-immanent approach to the New Testament.

At the heart of this shift lie two different philosophies. The historical approach was based on positivism, according to which the understanding of a text was sought in a genetic-causal process of origin and devel-

and from sentence to paragraph in modern text linguistics paved the way for this method of analysis. The basic premise is that meaningful relations not only exist between the words in a sentence, but also between larger parts of a text such as sentences, groups of sentences (clusters), pericopes and chapters. It is therefore important to grasp these relations in order to follow the trend of the argument and to understand the meaning of the text. As the method developed, it became clear that a semiotic approach to discourse analysis was necessary, since discourse involves more than words and sentences.⁵ It involves the recognition of multiple signs, which are interrelated and allow for more than one level of meaning. These signs function as multiple layers, which may be grouped into three significant macro levels: the declarative, structural and intentional. Each communicates certain information, but together they convey the real purpose and sense of what a text has to say.⁶

The *declarative* level entails the division of a text into cola. A colon is a syntactic unit, which has a central matrix consisting of a nominal element (subject) and a verbal element (predicate), each having the possibility of extended features. As long as all these features can be grouped under one N plus V, it forms one colon.⁷ A colon constitutes the smallest semantic unit. The analysis of a text's syntactic features is important, since they constitute ways in which basic relationships between fundamental units are clearly marked by the text itself. The declarative is the level of the mere statement, where the bare facts are lexically and syntactically predicated.

University of Zululand, 1984), etc. Also editions of *Neotestamentica*, the official journal of the New Testament Society of South Africa: Volume 8 (1974), 11 (1977), 13 (1979) and 16 (1982). The method has been successfully applied to argumentative material like the letters of Paul and long discourses in the Gospels. The best examples—among many others—are the two volumes by J.P. Louw on Romans, *A Semantic Discourse Analysis of Romans* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1979), and the dissertation by H.C. van Zyl, 'Matteus 18:15-20: 'n dia-chroniese en sinchroniese ondersoek met besondere verwysing na kerktlike dissipline' (University of Pretoria, 1987).

5. J.P. Louw, 'Macrolevels of Meaning in Lk 7:36-50', in P.J. Hartin and J.H. Petzer (eds.), *A South African Perspective on the New Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), p. 129.

6. Louw, 'Macrolevels', p. 131.

7. http://www.infocentrum.org/HC_de/Toit, 'What Is a Colon?', *Neot* 11 (1977).

Another level consists of the grouping of cola into clusters or pericopes, mainly on semantic considerations. In doing this, logical and stylistic markers are also taken into account, because they contribute in various ways to the demarcation of a pericope and the formulation of its theme.⁸ Louw calls this the *structural* level, since compositional features suggest particular groupings or clusters of information which, along with their mutual interrelationship, signify the focus of a discourse.⁹

A third level of meaning is the *intentional*. It refers to the purpose of the discourse, 'that is, what the author, or perhaps rather what the text seems to convey within a particular frame of reference—in short, what is the message'.¹⁰ On this level cognizance is taken of all possible signs (linguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic) that may be relevant to understanding and interpreting a text. This intentional level is very prominent in the works of Eugene A. Nida¹¹ and by incorporating it into the method, the scope and applicability of the latter are extended considerably.

The type of discourse analysis described above has, of course, its limitations. As is the case with many types of discourse analysis up to the present, it has not yet developed a comprehensive theory of its own. Nor can it be presented as an exegetical method complete in itself. It is liable to the subjectivity of the reader, no matter how objectively he has been led by instructions from the text. It only explains how the reader understands the text.¹² On the other hand, the analyst must guard against philosophical trends like structuralism and phenomenology, according to which the meaning of a text lies completely within the text itself.¹³ Despite these limitations, however, this type of discourse

8. An indispensable aid in this regard is the publication of E.A. Nida, J.P. Louw, A.H. Snyman and J.V. Cronjé, *Style and Discourse, with Special Reference to the Text of the Greek New Testament* (Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa, 1983).

9. Louw, 'Macrolevels', p. 131.

10. Louw, 'Macrolevels', p. 131.

11. See for example his *Signs, Sense, Translation* (Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa, 1984), pp. 3-5, as well as the above-mentioned *Style and Discourse*, pp. 145-48.

12. F.E. Deist, 'Oppe vrae aan die diskoersanalise', *Nederduitse-Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 19 (1978), pp. 260-64.

13. G.J.C. Jordaan, 'n Kritiese evaluering van die Stuid-Afrikaanse diskoer-

analysis has proved to be a viable method in demarcating pericopes, in describing the structure or layout of a text and in following the trend of the argument. It also provides a sound framework for discussing the various interpretations of a text.

3. An Application: Hebrews 6.4-6

a. *A Crux Interpretum*
 Hebrews 6.4-6 has been selected for illustration because it has presented a crux interpretum for exegetes and theologians since early times. A literal translation of these verses reads:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame (AV).

These verses seem to contradict many others, which declare that 'God will keep his promise: he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out' (1 Cor. 10.13); or Jn 10.28: 'I will give them eternal life, and they shall never die. No one can snatch them away from me'; or the promise that God, who has begun a good work in us, will perform it until the very end (1 Cor. 1.8; Phil. 1.6).

The question is how Heb. 6.4-6 must be understood in terms of all these promises and assurances in the rest of the New Testament. What must be done with this text, which seems to contradict numerous promises and denies repentance for those Christians who have 'fallen away'? In an attempt to answer this question I first want to contextualize 5.11-6.20 within the argument of the letter, then divide the relevant passage (6.1-8) into cola and finally discuss the proposals of Michel¹⁴ and Sabourin¹⁵ in the light of this information. A semiotic discourse analysis will conclude this part of the essay.

14. O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975).

15. J. Sabourin 'Crucifivine Afresh for One's Repentance (Hebr. 6:4-6)', *BTB*

b. *The Argument of the Letter*

According to Van Zyl, Hebrews can be divided into two phases.¹⁶ The first is the overall argument, in which the author wants to encourage his readers to persist in their faith by focusing on the elevated position of Christ as the only and eternal High Priest. The High Priest theme is first mentioned in 4.14-5.10, and Christ is presented as the perfect one (7.28), the one to be followed (2.10; 12.23). This line of argument, however, is interrupted by 5.11-6.20, because the author first wants to attend to the readers' reluctance to grow spiritually. This reluctance is a stumbling block in his teaching about the High Priesthood of Christ.

The interruption in 5.11-6.20 constitutes the second phase in the argument. The author warns his readers against their inability to consume the solid food of Christian doctrine; they are like small children who still have to drink milk (5.11-14). Nevertheless, the author wants to go forward to mature teaching, leaving behind the first lessons of the Christian message (6.1-3).

In pursuing this aim there may be a serious obstacle that prevents him from achieving this purpose: the fact that his readers could abandon their faith to such an extent that a second repentance becomes impossible—in spite of their former participation in Christ's salvation (6.4-6). With an illustration from nature the author continues to explain the impossibility of a second repentance from apostasy (6.7-8). He is, however, convinced that they have not deteriorated to such an extent; therefore, he urges them to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors and to persist in their faith (6.9-12).

In 6.13-20 the author describes their predecessors' faith and perseverance, as well as the basis thereof, especially the fact that Christ acts as our eternal High Priest. And with this theme the author returns to the basic argument, the High Priesthood of Christ.

Hebrews 6.4-6 forms part of the interruption in the main argument, namely 5.11-6.20. It must be understood within this context. The exposition of 5.11-6.20 above can be summarized as follows:

16. H.C. van Zyl, 'God se genade voorloëbome? Nieuwsoort Ouderdom', *BTB*

Theme: *Go forward to perfection*

A	5.11-14	Babes in the faith
B	(i) 6.1-3	Aim: perfection
	(ii) 6.4-6	Obstacles
	(iii) 6.7-8	Illustration from nature
C	6.9-12	Wish for the readers: diligence, faith, perseverance
D	6.13-20	Examples of perseverance

c. *A Colon Analysis of 6.1-8*

Since Heb. 6.4-6 forms part of a distinct unit (B above), I will restrict myself to an analysis of this unit, followed by a literal English translation (see opposite). This will enable us to follow the proposals of Michel and Sabourin. These two scholars were selected from many others¹⁷ because Michel wrote a standard exegetical commentary on Hebrews, while Sabourin approached the problem from a point of view closely related to the type of discourse analysis proposed in this article. Just to repeat the main problem in this passage: It seems as if 4 above, the impossibility that those who abandon their faith can be brought back to repent again, is irreconcilable with the central message of the gospel. If this interpretation of 6.4-6 is correct, it creates a serious problem for exegetes and theologians, in fact for all believers, since it would mean that God's grace can be irretrievably lost.

d. *Explanations Offered by Michel and Sabourin*

The impossibility of a second baptism. From the fifth century to the Middle Ages the church interpreted ἀδύνατον as referring to a second baptism. Those who had fallen away were not allowed to be baptized again, although their sins could still be forgiven by penance.¹⁸ What is impossible is not to repent again, but to be baptized for a second time.

The basis for this interpretation is the meaning of φωτισθέντας in colon 4.1. Justin understood it as referring to baptism—a strong possibility, since the adverb ἄπαξ qualifies it as a specific, unique event. Furthermore: ἀνακαταίξις is taken as referring back to φωτίξω and meaning 'to be renewed by baptism'.¹⁹ The argument is then: those who have been baptized once (τοὺς ἄπαξ φωτισθέντας) and fallen away may not be renewed to repentance by a second baptism (πάλιν ἀνακαταίξις).

17. Van Zyl, 'God', pp. 339-43.

18. Michel, *Der Brief* n. 247.

<p>1.0 διό αφέντες τὸν τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ λόγον ἐπὶ τὴν τελειότητα φερόμεθα</p> <p>2.0 μὴ πάλιν θεμέλιον καταβαλλόμενοι</p> <p>(i) μετάνοιας ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων</p> <p>(ii) καὶ πίστεως ἐπὶ θεὸν</p> <p>(iii) βαπτισμῶν διδασχῆς</p> <p>(iv) ἐπιθέσεως τε χειρῶν</p> <p>(v) ἀναστάσεως τε νεκρῶν</p> <p>(vi) καὶ κρίματος αἰωνίου.</p> <p>3.0 καὶ τοῦτο ποιήσομεν ἂν ἄνπερ ἐπιτρέπῃ ὁ θεός.</p>	<p>1.0 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection</p> <p>2.0 not laying again the foundation</p> <p>2.1 of repentance from dead works</p> <p>2.2 and of faith toward God</p> <p>2.3 of the doctrine of baptisms</p> <p>2.4 of the laying on of hands</p> <p>B1 2.5 of the resurrection of the dead</p> <p>2.6 and of eternal judgement.</p> <p>3.0 And this will we do if God permit.</p>
<p>4.0 ἀδύνατον γάρ</p> <p>(i) τοὺς ἅπασι φωτισθέντας</p> <p>(ii) γευσαμένους τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανοῦ</p> <p>(iii) καὶ μετοχοῦς γεννηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου</p> <p>(iv) *καὶ καλὸν γευσαμένους θεοῦ ῥῆμα</p> <p>*δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος</p> <p>(v) καὶ παραπεσόντας</p> <p>πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν.</p> <p>(vi) ἀνασταυρόντας ἑαυτοῖς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ</p> <p>(vii) καὶ παραδειγματίζοντας.</p>	<p>4.0 For it is impossible</p> <p>4.1 for those who were once enlightened</p> <p>4.2 and have tasted the heavenly gift</p> <p>4.3 and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost</p> <p>4.4 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come</p> <p>4.5 and fall away</p> <p>B2 4.6 to renew them again unto repentance</p> <p>4.6 seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh</p> <p>4.7 and put him to an open shame.</p>
<p>5.0 γῆ γάρ ἢ πιούσα τὸν ἐπ' αὐτῆς ἐρχόμενον πολλὰκις ὕετον καὶ τίκτουσα βοτανὴν εὐθετον ἐκεῖνοις δι' οὓς καὶ γεωργεῖται μετὰ λαμβάνει εὐλογίας ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ</p>	<p>5.0 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it and brings forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed receives blessing from God</p>
<p>6.0 ἐκφέρουσα δὲ (γῆ) ἀκάνθας καὶ τριβόλους</p> <p>7.0 ἀδόκιμος (ἐστίν) καὶ κατάρας ἐγγύς</p> <p>8.0 ἢς τὸ τέλος εἰς καύσιν.</p>	<p>B3 6.0 but that which bears thorns and briers</p> <p>7.0 is rejected and is nigh unto cursing</p> <p>8.0 whose end is to be burned</p>

A Colon Analysis of 6.1-8

The main problem with this argument centres around the meanings of φωτίζω and ἀνακαίνιζω. According to the *Greek-English Lexicon* of Louw and Nida φωτίζω has two meanings:

- (1) 'to cause light to shine upon some object, in the sense of illuminating it'—to illuminate, to shine upon;
- (2) 'to cause something to be fully known by revealing clearly and in some detail'—to make known, to make plain, to reveal, to bring to the light, to disclose.²⁰

The second meaning is applicable in this context. There is no evidence in the New Testament, however, that the term refers to baptism. The same applies to the meaning of ἀνακαίνιζω, which is described as 'to cause a change to a previous, preferable state'—to renew, to restore, to bring back.²¹

Another problem with this argument is the direct link drawn between the two terms φωτίζω and ἀνακαίνιζω. According to my analysis above, πάλιν ἀνακαίνιζεν refers back not only to colon 4.1 (τοὺς ἄπαξ φωτισθέντας), but to cola 4.1-4.5 as a whole. The renewal (or its impossibility) is not only meant for those who have been enlightened, but also for those who have tasted the heavenly gift, who were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, etc., and have fallen away.

The proposal of Michel and others does not solve our problem, since it only deals with the technical point whether the Church has the right to rebaptize those who have apostatized. In this way the problem is not solved, but explained away. The point of 6.4-6 is that it is impossible for believers who have abandoned their faith to be renewed unto repentance. And this is the meaning that must be understood within the context of 5.11-6.20.

An alternative translation. In an interesting article Sabourin offers an alternative translation by regrouping the words in 6.4-6. His analysis of these verses corresponds to my proposal above, except for the division between cola 4.5-7. According to Sabourin εἰς μετάνοιαν does not qualify πάλιν ἀνακαίνιζεν (colon 4.5), but ἀνασταυρῶντας ἑαυτοὺς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ in colon 4.6.

20. J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), pp. 173, 170

His analysis of cola 4.5-7 reads:

καὶ παραπεσόντας
πάλιν ἀνακαίνιζεν
εἰς μετάνοιαν ἀνασταυρῶντας ἑαυτοὺς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ
καὶ παραδειγματίζοντας.²²

This gives him the translation:

and having fallen,
[it is impossible]
to restore a second time,
crucifying afresh for oneself the Son
of God with a view to repentance,
and mocking [him].²³

This translation presupposes the following:

- (1) There are two groups of persons in colon 4 (vv. 4-6): those who are described by the five aorist participles and who apostatized, and those who would make themselves new a second time.
- (2) ἀνακαίνιζεν is a transitive verb, meaning 'to renew' or 'to restore'. It must not be read with εἰς μετάνοιαν; this will give to the verb the weak sense of 'renovate spiritually'. ἀνακαίνιζεν is strong enough to stand on its own, as is proved by the participles in the accusative.
- (3) The focus is on the definitiveness of Christ's saving work. His crucifixion cannot be repeated, since his sacrifice was offered once and for all. If anyone renounces Christ's salvation, he cannot count on another one to rescue him from his fall.

Although one appreciates the attention Sabourin pays to the Greek text and its syntax, the following can be brought in against his proposal:

- (1) It is grammatically incorrect to distinguish two groups of persons in colon 4. All the participles in the accusative are direct objects of the infinitive ἀνακαίνιζεν, and refer to the same persons. The only difference between the participles in 4.1-5 and 4.6-7 is that ἀνασταυρῶντας and παραδειγματίζοντας in 4.6-7 provide the reason for the impossibility of bringing those who have fallen away back to repentance.

22. Sabourin, 'Crucifying', p. 264.

- (2) The grouping of εἰς μετάνοιαν with ἀνασταυρῶντας ... instead of with ἀνακαθίζειν is not supported by any edition of the Greek New Testament and complicates the translation considerably (see point 4 below).
- (3) Focusing on the uniqueness and definitiveness of Christ's saving work is in order, except that it does not fit the trend of the argument. Van Zyl correctly points out that Sabourin removes these verses from the *locus* of perseverance to that of soteriology. And soteriology is not the point of the argument here.²⁴
- (4) Sabourin's translation at the end of his article is highly problematic. It reads:

'For it is impossible to crucify afresh the Son of God for the sake of one's repentance, mocking him, so as to restore a second time those who have once been enlightened ... and have apostatized.' From a grammatical point of view, the only mood that can follow ἀδύνατον is an infinitive (ἀνακαθίζειν), not a participle (ἀνασταυρῶντας).

Sabourin based his article on one by P. Proulx and L. Alonso Schökel.²⁵ Their attempt to solve the problem of 6.4-6 by offering an alternative translation, however, is not successful. Difficult passages like 6.4-6 must not be dogmatized or translated away, but understood within their context. This is one of the main principles of discourse analysis.

e. *A Semiotic Discourse Approach to Hebrews 6.4-6*

Declarative level. The first level of reading a text, the declarative, deals with the facts of the communication. This has already been described in the above section on the argument of the letter, where we dealt with the second phase in the argument of the letter (5.11-6.20). Also important on this level are the lexical terms used and their meanings. These received attention in the discussion of Michel's and Sabourin's proposals (see above).

What it boils down to is that Heb. 6.4-6 must not be softened or put in the so-called correct dogmatic perspective. These verses must be understood with the relations and meanings described above, without an attempt to change the grouping of the words or explain their mean-

24. Van Zyl, 'God', p. 341.

25. Proulx and L. Alonso Schökel, 'Heb 6:4-6. eis metanoiaian anastauroun-

ing by referring to other contexts in the New Testament. Hebrews 6.4-6 was used in this context for a specific purpose, and it is our task to determine that purpose. On the declarative level the meaning is clear—those who have tasted of the heavenly gift, etc., and then abandoned their faith cannot be brought back to repentance again.

Structural level. A structural analysis reveals the focus of the discourse. The structure of 5.11-6.20 was summarized above. For our purpose now, the first two components are important:

- | | |
|-------|----------------------------------|
| A | Babes in the faith (5.11-14) |
| B (i) | Go forward to perfection (6.1-3) |
| (ii) | Obstacles (6.4-6) |
| (iii) | Illustration from nature (6.7-8) |

A prepares the readers for the warning in B. B (i)-(ii) warns them against apostasy and B (iii) illustrates the disastrous results of not bearing fruit. B (i)-(ii) is thus the central or pivotal point of the passage.

Put in more detail: The trend of the argument is the concern of the author about the reluctance of the readers to grow in their faith. In spite of this, he urges them to a fuller understanding of the High Priesthood of Christ. But before doing so, the readers must be warned against the real danger of apostasy.

Intentional level. In reading the letter to the Hebrews one must distinguish clearly between the expository or dogmatic, and the paraenetic or hortatory, sections. They are to be read differently. In Heb. 5.11-6.20 we do not have an exposition of the Christian faith, but a warning against abandoning it. The purpose of the discourse is not to build the readers' knowledge of a specific topic, but to challenge them to right action by eliciting an emotional response from them.²⁶ An important feature of paraenetic sections such as this one is the use of forceful expressions and style. One such expression is to be found in 6.4-6 (repentance impossible for apostates). Hebrews 6.4-6 must be understood within this context. It serves the purpose of the discourse, that is, what the text seems to convey within a particular frame of reference.²⁷ It serves the message of 5.11-6.20.

26. G.H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), p. 139.

Other features strengthening the impact of 6.4-6 are the following:

- (1) ἀδύνατον is placed first in colon 4 to emphasize the impossibility of a second repentance. According to Longinus the first word in a sentence carries more weight than the rest.²⁸
- (2) The use of ἀδύνατον seems to be an instance of hyperbole, in view of the warnings against apostasy.²⁹
- (3) Michel argues that there is a 'Steigerung' from cola 4.1 to 4.4, with 4.4 carrying the most weight: 'to taste the good word of God and the powers of the world to come'.³⁰ The lengthening of commata is an impressive stylistic technique.³¹
- (4) There is a hyperbaton with καλὸν ... ῥήματα in 4.4. Stacy regards this stylistic figure also as forceful.³²
- (5) Two metaphors strengthen the impact of this passage: φωτισθέντας ('to be enlightened') in 4.1 and γευσσάμενους ('to taste' the good word of God and the powers of the world to come) in 4.4. Longinus, *inter alia*, refers to the powerful effect of metaphors.³³
- (6) In cola 4.1-5 we have a syntactic structure known as *periodos*. The reader must wait until the end of the sentence to know what is impossible. The function of a *periodos* is to hold the reader's attention.³⁴
- (7) πάλιν ἀνακαταίξειν in 4.5 is tautological, but used for a purpose. It emphasizes what is impossible: to be renewed *again*.
- (8) παρὰδειγματίξειν in colon 4.7 is a stronger term than δειγματίξω. Although Louw and Nida draw no distinction between them,³⁵ Newman translates δειγματίξω as 'disgrace, expose',³⁶ while παρὰδειγματίξω means 'to expose to public

28. Longinus, *Peri Hypsoes* 38.3.

29. Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, p. 669.

30. Michel, *Der Brief*, p. 242.

31. Cf. Demetrius, *Peri Hermeneias* 1.18.

32. R.H. Stacy, *Defamiliarization in Language and Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1977), pp. 60-61.

33. In his *Peri Hypsoes* 32.1-8. See also J.V. Cronjé, 'Demetrius on Forcible Style', *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 4 (1993), p. 40.

34. For a discussion of the structure and function of a *periodos*, see Demetrius, *Peri Hermeneias* 1.10-26.

35. Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, p. 311.

ridicule'.³⁷ A preposition attached to a verb may strengthen its meaning, especially in a fervant discourse.

- (9) Cola 5 and 6 are linked to 4 by γάρ. It is an illustration from nature that one who perseveres will be blessed, but one who apostatizes will be punished. This is a form of amplification, known as *comparatio*. Amplification is used when an author wants to emphasize a point or stress the importance of the argument.³⁸

Hebrews 6.4-6 thus forms part of a paraenetic section, characterized by forceful expressions and stylistic techniques in order to

- (1) underline the warning that the author wants to convey, and
- (2) exhort his readers to take the right action, which is to endure in their faith.

Besides the point and on a dogmatic level: Is it possible for a Christian who apostatizes to be brought back to repentance or not? Michel³⁹ and Van Zyl⁴⁰ both distinguish between the warning as such, and the final judgment, which is God's. Christians must know that they can lose God's grace. On the other hand: God speaks the final word. The Christian's responsibility is to endure until the end, whatever comes his or her way. Evidence for this distinction is found in other parts of Hebrews, as well as in 6.3.⁴¹

4. Conclusion

Semiotic discourse analysis has proved to be a viable method in describing the layout of a text and in following the trend of the argument. It is (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 40.

37. Newman, *Dictionary*, p. 132.

38. Cf. J.V. Cronjé, 'Αὐξησις as stylistiek in die tyd van die Nuwe Testament', in L. Cilliers and A.H. Snyman (eds.), *Varia Studia in honorem W.J. Richards* (Acta Academica, 22; Bloemfontein: University of the Orange Free State, 1987), pp. 204-207. Cronjé refers to Quintilian, who distinguished four types of *amplificatio*: *incrementum*, *comparatio*, *ratiocinatio* and *congeries*. In all of them the author uses his knowledge of everyday life to strengthen his argument by relying on the fact that certain things are generally accepted, or that his readers have consensus on them, especially as far as their emotional experience thereof are concerned.

39. Michel, *Der Brief*, pp. 246-47.

40. Van Zyl, 'God', pp. 346-47.

also useful to describe the cohesion of a text and to determine its purpose, that is, the message that it intends to convey.

Hebrews 5.11–6.20 is a warning against apostasy. As such, the problem created by 6.4–6 must not be explained or translated away, but its function must be understood within its immediate context. It is a forceful expression which, together with other techniques, strengthens the impact of this paraenetic section.