The legacy of patristic theology is the use of Greek philosophy to interpret and defend the Christian credo on rational grounds for the benefit of both the cultured despisers and the faithful. Adolf Harnack said of Irenaeus that he did not merely confine himself to describing the fact of redemption, “but he also attempted to explain the peculiar nature of this redemption from the essence of God and the incapacity of man, thus solving the question of cur deus homo in the highest sense.” C. J. De Vogel makes a similar comment about Clement of Alexandria, who employed the metaphysics of Plato and the logic of Aristotle to demonstrate the truth of Christian claims. De Vogel says that Clement more than anyone else “quite consciously laid the foundation on which in the Middle Ages Thomas Aquinas constructed his theology built on the substructure of natural reason.” A Christian philosophy, therefore, began in the second century and dominated Western thought until the Reformation.

Although Clement played a pivotal role in the appropriation of Greek rationalism, he actually built on the foundation of his predecessors in Alexandria, Aristobulus and Philo. They, along with others in the Alexandrian school, employed philosophy to ensure that the interpretation of Scripture was in accord with reason. Clement inherited the traditions of his Alexandrian Jewish predecessors. My purpose in this article is to examine the extent to which this tradition that extends from the background to the foreground of the NT is present in a meaningful way also within the NT. Because the Epistle to the Hebrews has numerous

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4 De Vogel, “Platonism and Christianity,” 1.
5 On Clement’s indebtedness to Philo, see David T. Runia, Philo in Early Christian Literature (CRINT 3.3: Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 137–43.
linguistic contacts with Philo and later becomes an important book in Alexandrian Christianity, it provides a potential link in the Alexandrian tradition that employed philosophy to explain and defend the faith. Consequently, the focus of this article is on the place of the Epistle to the Hebrews within this Alexandrian tradition that Clement inherited. With this study I wish to honor my esteemed colleague and former teacher, Everett Ferguson, who, through his publications and his university courses, has been a major contributor to our knowledge of the NT, its background and its foreground.

**Rational Argument in Hebrews**

Previous studies of the relationship of Philo and Hebrews have analyzed the affinities between the two authors in vocabulary, exegetical traditions, and exegetical method. In this study, I shall examine an aspect of the argumentation of Hebrews that has been noted but not examined in detail: the author's appeal throughout the book to axiomatic principles that appear to be self-evident to the readers. In addition to his appeal to Scripture, he consistently appeals to principles that are "beyond dispute" (cf. 7:7). These principles involve specifically the categories of the fitting, the necessary, and the impossible. With these categories, the author has introduced into the argument an appeal to reason that has no parallel in the Old and New Testaments.

Like his successors in the patristic period, the author supports the Christian confession on rational grounds. In one of the initial soteriological statements, the author says of God that "it was fitting for him" (ἐπρεπεν τῷ αὐτῷ) to make the pioneer of our salvation perfect through suffering (2:10). In 2:17 he says that the savior "ought" (ὅφειλέν) to be like his brothers. In 7:26 he argues that "it was fitting for us" (ημῖν καὶ ἔπρεπεν) that we should have the high priest whose qualities are described.

The author never explains why it was fitting for God to provide this salvation through suffering. Instead, he consistently appeals to "the

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7 John Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews* (SNTSMS 75; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 117: "It is one of the most striking features of sacrificial customs that they persistently defy explanation, yet this author repeatedly refers to ritual matters without explanation or with only a dogmatic reason