One of the main problems of New Testament research in our day is that of method. The need for developing a sound method of research is beyond any doubt one of the most important problems facing New Testament scholars. This is particularly true of New Testament word studies. In view of the insight of modern linguistics it is absolutely necessary to pay special attention to the method of studying New Testament words. The aim of this paper is to discuss the meaning of parrēsia in the Epistle to the Hebrews in the light of some of the findings of modern linguistics.

Hardly any other discipline of New Testament science is so complicated by misconceptions as that of the linguistics of the New Testament, particularly the semantics of New Testament language. This can among other reasons be ascribed to the fact that semantics is undoubtedly the most complicated aspect of linguistics. Furthermore, the problem is intensified by the many existing theories on the subject.

A remarkable amount of work has been done in the field of word study. Much of the work is based on the method and insight underlying the monumental semantic work on the New Testament, viz. the Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament (ThW). It is, however, well known that this work has been severely criticised for its method and it is evident that one can learn much from criticism in connection with the study of the word in the New Testament.

The normal approach would be to study the history or rather the historical background of the New Testament vocabulary as thoroughly as possible. The usual pattern is the following: the background of a word would be investigated in the Old Testament, Rabbinic Literature, the LXX, classical and hellenistic Greek and sometimes even in the early Christian literature. The problem and hence the danger of such an approach is that the meaning of a word in a specific instance would be regarded as the sum of the meanings of the word in some or all the instances being investigated. Unfortunately this is not imaginary. It is mainly due to the confusion between “word” and “concept”. The impression is given that the New Testament consists of “concepts” and not of words being used in sentences. “Gewöhnlich versteht man unter Begriff das bei einem Wort Gedachte, die abstrakte Zusammenfassung von verschiedenen Merkmalen, durch die das Wesen einer Sache bestimmt wird . . .”\(^4\). Much more is read into words and their meanings.
than is linguistically and theologically admissible. Barr quite justly maintains that words function in sentences and that their meanings are determined by their application in a context. It is of course true that single words have meaning but the meaning of a word i.e. the referential, linguistic or emotive meaning, is determined by the context in which it appears. Robins is correct in saying that "... the meanings of the (component) words must be taken as the contribution they make to the meaning of the sentences in which they appear". A very common misconception in the study of the meaning of a word is the search for a so-called "Grundbedeutung" i.e. the "original" or "common" meaning of the word assuming that such a meaning is inherent in the word each time it occurs, even in a different context. This approach is basically wrong because it over-estimates the value of etymology and furthermore presents a wrong impression of the meaning of words. By studying the history of a word one can undoubtedly learn much in connection with its meaning. It should be kept in mind however, that one is informed about history. and as such about the history of the meaning of a word and not necessarily about the meaning of a word in the particular instance being investigated. There are many important implications which are not to be overlooked when it comes to the method of studying the meaning of New Testament words. One should take into account the fact that the semantic function of a word is largely determined by its application in a context, and for that very reason it is essential to investigate the meaning of a word in a particular context on differing levels. In view of some of the findings of structural linguistics, I would suggest that the meaning of a New Testament word in a particular context be investigated on the following levels 1. the semantic 2. the syntactic and 3. the contextual level.

The meaning of parrēsia has been subjected to various scrutinies in the past. Apart from the entries in the lexica on the different aspects of Greek literature, quite a number of monographs exist on the word. In 1929 the article of E. Peterson, "Zur Bedeutungsgeschichte von parrēsia" was published in a volume of essays in honour of Reinold Seeberg. That author made an important contribution to the study of the meaning of the word and is therefore very often quoted by other investigators. He drew attention to various interesting aspects of the application of the word in Greek literature. H. Schlier was responsible for the article on the word in ThW and H. Jaeger's article on parrēsia and its translation substitute in the Vulgate viz. fiducia was published in 1959. W. C. van Unnik dealt with the meaning of the word in two articles, "The Christian's Freedom of Speech in the New Testament" and "De Semitische Achtergrond van PARRHESIA In het Nieuwe Testament". One of the latest contributions is the book
of G. Scarpat, *PARRHESIA. Storia del termine e delle sue traduzioni in latino*¹¹. He made a study of the application of the word over a long period, including the New Testament, and gave special attention to the translation substitutes in profane and Church Latin.

By the time the word was used by the New Testament authors it had already been employed in Greek literature for a long time. It occurs for the first time in the writings of Euripides and Aristophanes in profane Greek literature, where the word usually refers to the freedom of speech in the Athenian democracy¹². Van Unnik wrote: “Ontstaan in de sfeer van de Atheense volksvergadering, waar ieder vrij burger het recht had om alles-te-zeggen, speelde het later zijn rol in de onderlinge verhouding van vrienden, die elkander niet als vleiers naar de mond praten om tenslotte als een “brutale bek” de hoogste deugd der cynische filosofen te worden”¹³. Philo and Josephus used the word often in referring to the boldness of man before God (Jos. Ant. 2, 52; 5, 38) — i.e. in a different sense to the regular meaning in the earlier Greek usage. The twelve occurrences of the word in the LXX are rather few in comparison to the thirty-one times it can be found in the New Testament. Under the influence of the writings of the New Testament the word entered the vocabulary of early church literature. It was translated into Latin as *audacia, constantia, confidentia, libertas* and *licentia*. In the Peshitta it occurs in transcribed form and was taken up as a loan-word into Aramaic and Syriac.

Quite obviously the meaning of the word in the Epistle to the Hebrew has also been investigated. The usual approach has been to discuss its meaning in the light of its application in earlier literature e.g. in profane Greek or in the Old Testament or the Judaic - hellenistic usage. As such there can be no objection to this approach as long as the investigator uses the background information only to elucidate the instances in question i.e. if he intends to draw attention to the similarities and differences in application when the various instances are compared.

Michel regards the view of Peterson as questionable. The latter maintained, “Der neutestamentliche Sprachgebrauch von *parrēsia* ist sowohl vom Hellenismus als auch vom hellenistischen Judentum aus zu verstehen”¹⁴. According to Michel the word is used in the Epistle to the Hebrews in connection with the cult and denotes the conviction of the eschatological community rather than the privilege of a particular group of pious people or of philosophers¹⁵. He claims “... immer spielt der alttestamentliche Hintergrund eine Rolle, der sich im hellenistischen Judentum mit ausser-jüdischen Elementen verbinden kann, aber im Hebr werd gerade in ihm das Spezifische des Neuen Bundes und der auf ihn bezogen *parrēsia* gesehen”¹⁶. Referring to the
data given by C. Spicq and W. Bauer he objects: . . . "die grundsätzliche Bedeutung der parrēsia tritt immer noch nicht genügend heraus". Michel amplifies the statement of Käsemann that "parrēsia ist mehr als ein bloss subjektives Vertrauen, nämlich das freudige Eintreten für eine von Gott bereits in einem objektiven elengchos verbürgte Sache", saying "parrēsia ethält beides, das objektive und das subjektive Moment, die innere Gabe und die nach aussen tretende Stellungnahme zu ihr".

It is doubtful whether these statements bring us any nearer to an understanding of the meaning of the word in the Epistle to the Hebrews. What then did the author have in mind when he used the word in various sentences in his epistle? The following discussion is an attempt to elucidate the meaning of the word parrēsia in the Epistle to the Hebrews. For this purpose every occurrence of the word in the epistle will be analysed thoroughly.

Parrēsia occurs four times in the Epistle to the Hebrews, viz. in 3:6; 4:16; 10:19 and 10:35. In order to determine the referential meaning of the word in the various instances, the author of this paper made a componential analysis of the possible meanings of the word in the New Testament. The analysis revealed that the main semantic markers distinguish between an action, i.e. the way of performing an act, and a quality or characteristic feature. In the first group the act can be directed towards persons or things and the word has the following meanings:

1. Frankness-, plainness (of speech) in the sense of (speaking) openly frankly, without keeping back information. Cf. Mk. 8:32; Joh. 7:13, 26; 10:24; 11:14; 16:25, 29; Acts 2:29; 28:31; Eph. 6:19. The word is usually combined with a verb of "saying".
2. (to act) without limitations, to go around freely, unhindered, cf. Joh. 11:54.

In the second group the following meanings are indicated:

1. frankness, boldness, fearlessness, courage. Cf. Acts 4:13, 29(31); 2 Cor. 3:12; 7:4; Phlm. 8; 1 Joh. 2:28; 4:17.
2. freedom Eph. 3:12.
3. conviction Phil. 1:20; 1 Tim. 3:13; 1 John. 3:21; 5:14.

A scrutiny of these instances in the Epistle to the Hebrews reveals that our author used the word in agreement with its application in the rest of the New Testament. Before any definite statement is made in connection with the meaning of the word in the Epistle to the Hebrews, however, an analysis should be made of the contexts in which the word occurs.
In Heb. 3:6 the word is used in a conditional phrase of which the contents are syntactically aimed at the preceding relative clause and the arguments developed in the preceding sentences (3:1-6a). Heb. 3:1-6 is skilfully composed as a structural unit. The author of the Epistle starts his argument with a call on the readers to pay special attention to their Apostle and High Priest. He develops an argument for the uniqueness of Christ by comparing him to Moses. The latter had been appointed over the household of God and was faithful, but Christ’s faithfulness surpassed that of Moses.

In comparison to Moses, Christ is worthy of greater honour. While Moses was a faithful servitor in God’s household who had to bear witness to the words God would speak, Christ is a faithful son set over his household. He concludes with the remark that if the readers retain their parrēsia and glorious hope, they are his household. In other words, he visualises that the readers would hold fast their parrēsia and partake in the household of Christ and his people.

For the moment this will suffice. The exact meaning of the word in this instance will be discussed further in connection with 10:35. This will follow after an analysis of the other instances in which the word occurs.

The main part of the epistle, ch. 5:1-10:18 which deals with Jesus as the superior High Priest, is preceded and followed by exhortations (cf. 4:14-16 and 10:19-35), forming an interesting structure. The three other instances where the author uses the word come from these exhortations. In analysing the structure of Heb. 4:14-16, one finds two statements about Jesus as High Priest, each being followed by an exhortation. The first is formulated positively and is followed by kratomen tēs homologias. The second if formulated negatively and followed by the exhortation proserchometha oūn metà parrēsias tō thronō tēs chāritos ktl. In each case the exhortation is founded upon the preceding statement and therefore gives the reasons why the author exhorts his readers. They are being commanded to approach the throne of God with frankness because their High Priest enables them to do so. He is able to have sympathy with their weaknesses and therefore they should approach God with boldness. Parrēsia refers to a way of acting i.e. the way of approaching God. This is evident from the syntactic grouping of the words:

\[\text{proserchometha oūn metà parrēsias tō thronō tēs chāritos}\]

The readers are called upon to approach the throne of God without reserve in order to receive mercy and grace.
The word is used in 10:19 in a participle-clause of which the content is aimed at the exhortation in 10:22. The structure is again remarkable. Recently Jeremias has drawn attention to the similarity in structure of verse 19 and 20. In 19 the author deals with the parresia and in 20 with the way which has been provided for the believers by the death of Christ. In 21 he took up the échontes leading to the exhortation in 22:

- échontes oûn adelphoi, parresian
  a. eis têν eisodon
  b. tôn hagîôn
  c. en tî hâimati lêsou,

  hên enekâinisen hêmin
  a. hodôn prósphaton kai zôsan
  b. diâ tōû katapetásmatos,
  c. toûî' éstin (dia) tês sarkôs autoû,

  kai hierâa mégan epî tôn oîkon toû theou

  proserchômetha.

The structure is important because it reveals the connection between parresia and the death of Christ and what this implies. It appears from the syntactic grouping of verse 19 that parresia is qualified as a

parresia eis têν eisodon,

in other words the believer has parresia to enter the sanctuary (en tô hâimati lêsou). The latter expression, which as such is clear, is elucidated by the parallel structure of verses 19 and 20. The believer has the freedom to enter the sanctuary and appear before the throne of God in and through the death of Christ. This must be seen against the background of the exposition of Jesus as High Priest. Jesus replaced the high priesthood of the Old Testament and through him the believer has free entry to the Most High without the intercession of a high priest. This gives rise to the exhortation in verse 22: Since we have freedom to enter the sanctuary . . . let us approach . . .

In 10:35 the word occurs in a command which should be considered in connection with the preceding verses. The command has its cause in the statements in 32 ff. Perhaps the most important question is whether apobâallein têν parresian has the ‘idiomatic’ meaning of
'lose courage' or the stronger literal sense 'throw away parrēsia'.25 Referring to P. Flor. 384, 91 where parrēsia refers to the breaking of a contract, Jaeger observed. 'Dans plusieurs passages de l'épître le terme parrēsia est lié avec des mots tels que prosagein, apoballein, misthapodosia mots du vocabulaire juridique trouvés dans des papyri de certaines provinces orientales de l'empire romain.26 This implies that apoballein has a technical meaning in Hb. 10:35, being taken from a juridical context, the correctness of which can only be determined by the context of 10:35.

It has already been remarked that there is a connection between verse 35 and the preceding statements. This follows from the ouăn in 35. The readers are reminded of their earlier sufferings and are called upon: mē apobάλετε . . . Apart from this, verse 35 should be regarded as a unit in which there is a relationship between the components. There is a syntactical relation between apoballein and parrēsia. Parrēsia is, however, also connected to megalēn misthapodosian which is evident from the relative clause qualifying parrēsia. There is no reason for assuming that the expression apoballein tēn parrēsian has the meaning of 'loose courage'. Apoballein parrēsian should rather be interpreted as the opposite of katēchein parrēsian which we find in 3:6.27 It follows that here the expression does not have a technical meaning.

The author appeals to his readers not to throw away their parrēsia for it offers a great reward. The statement is aimed at the future. The readers should keep their conviction (3:6) that they have freedom to partake in the whole cult, a freedom which they have acquired by the death of Christ. Furthermore, they have even suffered for their convictions. This call is more than mere encouragement. It is also a warning.

To summarise, it appears from the analysis of the meaning of parrēsia in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that the word in 3:6 and 10:35 refers to the 'conviction' of the readers that they have free entrance to God through Christ. It is a conviction the believer has before man and which he should keep and not throw away. In 4:16 it refers to the 'boldness' or 'frankness' of the believer to approach the throne of God and in 10:19 to the 'freedom' of the believer, to appear before God.

The final question concerns the theological implications of this investigation of the meaning of the word. The answer is to be found in the sentences in which the word appears. From these sentences we learn what the author of the Epistle had in mind and what his message was. Contrary to the believer in the Old Testament, the one who confesses Christ is free to appear before God without the intercession of
a priest (10:19). Since the believer has Christ as High Priest, it is his duty to approach the throne of God with frankness (4:16). He has a freedom which he should keep with conviction, because it is a sign of the members of the house of God (3:6). *Parresia* carries a reward and for that reason the believer should persist in his convictions, keeping in mind what he has suffered for the sake of his convictions (10:35). This, in short, is the message found in the sentences in which the word occurs.

REFERENCES (FOOTNOTES)


11. See note 2 on page 29 of this book for additional literature. The book was published in Brescia.


15. Idem. See also R. Bullmann who wrote "parresia bezeichnet in Hb die Situation der Gemeinde vor Gott und gewinnt dadurch wie *kauschema* jenen kultischen Sinn. den es neben *kauschema* auch 1 Cl 34, 3: Act Andr 1 hat" in: *ThW* 111, 653 footnote 48.


17. Michel. The italics are mine.

18. Michel, op. cit., p. 179.


22. Note the semantic value of the subjunctive.

23. *Proserchometha metà parresias* forms a structural unit.


27. See also Michel, op. cit., p. 360.