Ministering in the Tabernacle: Spatiality and the Christology of Hebrews[1]

by

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Abstract

Two of the perplexing features of Hebrews, its Christological comparisons and the spatial emphases are intertwined. Application of appropriate sociological and literary theories in Spatiality to examine the expositions in the epistle will demonstrate that the author used the spaces of the Pentateuchal wilderness camp and tabernacle as his heuristic and typological tool for the Christological expositions. This served as the primary vehicle for channelling his pastoral teaching aimed at addressing the problems of social liminality and spiritual malaise of the congregation. The author's approach should serve as template for our understanding and applications of the theology of the tabernacle.

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1.   Introduction

Two of the dominant phenomena in the epistle to the Hebrews whose authorial purposes have eluded scholars are the Christological comparisons and the spatial emphases of the expositions. Scholars agree that the expositions focus on the superiority of Jesus the Son of God and our Eternal High Priest by employing an elaborate comparison and contrast of Jesus with the Angels, Moses, Joshua, Aaron and the Levitical priests. What remain disputed however are the author's reasons for the comparisons, his criteria for choosing these persons and how the contrasts fit with the exhortations and harsh warnings in the other parts of the epistle. The commonest and oldest assumption that the comparisons constituted an anti-Judaist polemic now appears flawed (Williamson 2003:266 & Isaacs 1996:145). Recent advances in the application of Rhetorical Criticism to Hebrews have brought helpful insights to understanding the rhetorical nature of the comparisons, but have not adequately explained the authorial purpose(s). DeSilva's (2000) application of ancient social anthropological insights such as honour and shame and patron-client paradigm to the epistle, though offers an interesting explanation, has been rightly criticized for being "strained" (Nongbri 2003:269). C Koester's (2002:103-123) suggestion that the comparisons are part of a rhetorical device to encourage perseverance in suffering, though useful, does not completely address all the issues at stake.

Similarly, the spatial pre-occupations of the author have attracted various explanations, from Spicq's (1977) Mid-Platonic dualistic cosmology, Isaacs' "vehicle of eschatology" (2002:12) to MacRae's suggestion that the spatial ideas are a mixture of "Alexandrian imagery with their [the community's Jewish] apocalyptic presuppositions" (1978:179). In addition, spatial imageries dominate the metaphors employed by the author throughout this epistle. Yet there is lack of consensus regarding their relevance and whether the author's thoughts are primarily along spatial or temporal categories (Koester 2001:97). The paradoxical movement of the theological argument into the inner sanctum of the tabernacle (Heb 8-10) against an opposite movement in the exhortations of Heb 13, "Outside of the Camp," has been noted

(Koester 2001:576, Isaacs 2002:159), but its relationship with the rest of the epistle has not been sufficiently clarified. The author's emphatic summary in Heb 8:1-2 has equally baffled interpreters, since the tabernacle is only explicitly mentioned for the first time as part of the summary of what he has already said. Commentators have therefore tended to limit the meaning of κεφάλαιον (sum) in Heb 8:1-2 (Ellingworth 1993:400, Koester 2001:375).

These two phenomena, the spatial emphases and the Christological comparisons, are closely intertwined in the epistle and should not be extricated from each other. In Heb 1, Jesus the Son is compared with the angels in heaven. In Heb 2, He is compared with the Angels, in relation to humankind and the devil, in what the author calls, οἰκουμένην, "the inhabited world." In Hebrews 3-4 the comparison with Moses is framed in the spatial context of the "house of God." The comparisons and contrasts with the Aaronic High Priesthood in Hebrews 5-7 are framed in the spatial setting of the Holy of holies. Remaining in the Holy of Holies, the author in Heb 8-10, examines the various Day of Atonement rituals associated with this space and compares them with the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, before proceeding to make his practical applications in Hebrews 11-13. Clearly, the author conducts the Christological comparisons based on an *a priori* spatial framework and this spatiality preconditions and constrains his choices. An examination of these two phenomena in the epistle through the lens of appropriate spatial theories may therefore yield some helpful answers.

Immanuel Kant (1929), described space as an *a priori* concept, or subtext that allows us to structure, systematize and understand our experiences. In Toulmin's words, space is the "intellectual scaffolding" (1990:116-117) on which societies frame their understanding of the world. Perhaps this is what is happening in the epistle's spatiality. Ideological arguments and narratives are sometimes structured according to spatiality[4] and that in these spaces; human relations are represented as hierarchical and are infused with elements of power

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[4]   The Garden of Eden narratives in Gen 2-3 (Levenson 1985) and Luke-Acts (Filson 1970) are two well-known examples of spatially framed narratives.

and territoriality. As Harvey posits, "Places are constructed and experienced as material ecological artefacts and intricate networks of social relations. They are the focus of the imaginary, of beliefs, longings, and desire…" (1996:316). Hebrews, we recommend, is an illustration of the truism in this statement and Spatiality is therefore particular suited as an investigative tool for the epistle.

In what follows, we will demonstrate that appropriate spatial theories adequately explain the spatiality and Christological comparisons in the epistle to the Hebrews. We will show that the author conceptually begun with an *a priori* spatial typology of the tabernacle and wilderness camp as depicted in the Book of Numbers and that this constrains his choices and theological interpretations. He interprets these in the light of the death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Jesus and uses the lessons to apply to the pastoral situation of his congregation. The comparisons of Jesus with the angels, Moses and Aaron, we postulate, are a reflection of the contested nature of spaces.

2. Spatiality and Biblical Studies

A "space" may be defined as an aspect of reality which incorporates ideas of distances, directions, time and orientation and which is intimately affected by and reflected in human perceptions and conceptions of it, and their relationship with each other. When space is discussed in terms of human interaction with parts of it, it is called "place," which when referenced in relation to other places is termed "location." Spatiality is the paradigmatic framework that studies the conditions, perceptions, conceptions and practices of persons and their social life in relation to their spaces.

The inter-disciplinary paradigm of spatiality has of late seen a renewed interest across the academic disciplines. It is now recognised that the various spatial theories reflect a predictable pattern of human-place relations that may be employed as heuristic tool for study. Until recently, the commonest spatial theory that was employed in Religious and Biblical Studies was Eliade's (1959) categorization of spaces as being either Profane or Sacred, characterized by the heirophany, the *axis mundi* and the chaos-cosmos dichotomy. Isaacs (1992) applied this

theory to Hebrews and suggested that the author's theology of pilgrimage to heaven was designed to help the congregation to refocus their *axis mundi* from the recently destroyed Jerusalem temple to the indestructible heavenly tabernacle. The anachronisms in Eliade's theory and its strict binarism have however limited its usefulness (Smith 1987). Other theories and models have demonstrated that human conceptions of space are derived from its basic social utility as "home" (Johnson and others 2000) and these have been fruitfully applied in Biblical Studies (Matthews 2003, Balch 2004). Three important theories in Spatiality[5] will find valuable application as investigative tools in Hebrews, those of Michel Foucault, Robert Sack and Yuri Lotman's concept of Spatial Forms.

2.1 Spatiality in Michel Foucault

It was Foucault who astutely observed the change in modernity's obsession with temporality to a new sense of awareness in spatiality. "The nineteenth century found its essential mythological resources in the second principle of thermodynamics. The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space… Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites" (1986:22). Thus Foucault proposed that spatiality essentially involves studying the interactions and relations between persons and objects in a space. This concept is not new but coincides with some of the earliest Greek and Ancient Near Eastern philosophical ideas about space, from Anaximander to Zeno, Aristotle etc. (Casey 1997 & Hugget 1999). Pointing out the inadequacies in the binaric categorization of spaces, and the fact that they have dialectical relationships with each other, Foucault (1986b) classified spaces into three types: (i) Real Places,

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[5] There is the question of how methodologically correct it is to apply twenty first century sociological and post-modern theories to a first century ancient Mediterranean situation The view however that spatiality in the post-modern era mimics more the spatiality of the Biblical times than those of the modern period is perhaps one major support for the application of spatial theories to the Biblical data (Flanagan 1999). Sociological exegesis will always have its reductionistic faults but as Domeris (1991:225) and Cook & Simkins (1999) have shown, its comparativist epistemology actually enhances its utility in Biblical Studies.

which he qualified as "simultaneously represented, contested and inverted" (1986b:24), (ii) Utopias and (iii) Heterotopias, which he defined as "counter sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopias in which the real sites, all the real sites can be found within the culture…" (1986b:24). He proposed the concept of the "hybridization" of spaces, where, for example, the person standing before a mirror acquires a hybrid spatial image made up of him/herself standing in a real place and a virtual, utopian image on the other side of the mirror.

Foucault regarded space as "fundamental in any exercise of power" (Rainbow 1984:252) and in his major work, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), he suggested that spatial positioning and arrangement leads to empowerment of certain individuals and groups to the disadvantage of others. Foucault's understanding of power is an area of dispute among sociologists but generally, his characterization of power as an aggressive and coercive relational dynamic in his earliest works gave way to a more positive and less belligerent sociological view of power as the dynamics of influence between persons (Janicaud 1992, Strenski 1998). It is this later understanding of power as inter-human influence that is particularly pertinent to Hebrews. The power, which operates within spatial dimensions, according to Foucault, is embedded in a hierarchical system, which involves proximity, distance, inclusion and exclusion and is often expressed in terms of contests between the persons in the space. This contest may be overt or subliminal, expressed in behaviour, attitude, discourses and cultural codes and signals. In *Panopticon* (1979), for example, he observes that the convicts of a prison are arranged in a certain spatial relationship "to induce in the inmates a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (1979:201).

Foucault also links the power relations in spaces to knowledge by coining the hybrid word, "power-knowledge." By knowledge, Foucault refers to the knowledge of the techniques of transforming people's behaviour, the effects of ideological information, which works through people in a place to influence their behaviour. The author of Hebrews would disagree with Foucault and define "knowledge" as "Revelation Knowledge," that is, the revelation that God has given or spoken through the prophets, in the Scriptures, through the Holy

Spirit, and "in these last days … by His Son" (Heb 1:1). It is this view of knowledge that informs our approach to the epistle.

2.2   Territoriality in Robert Sack

Sack (1986:19) defines territoriality as "the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area …." This involves a system of social classification and ordering, with the use of cultural rules, boundary setting and social organization (See Neyrey 2002, 2003 for some applications). Sack's model has three foci: firstly, the way space is classified has territorial undertones. Binary classifications such as private against public, mine against yours, sacred against profane, male against female are all systems that enable persons to claim control of the power dynamics in places. Secondly, the way these classifications are communicated, mostly by discourses, signals, symbolic gestures, and other such behaviour and attitude. These are, thirdly, meant to control access to the places and maintain the delimitation of the space as expression of the power and territorial claims of the persons.

2.3   Semiospheres in Yuri Lotman

Yuri Lotman's (1977) literary theory of Spatial Form Devices has helpful utility in the examination of the spatial phenomenon in Hebrews. These devices are spatial techniques used by an author to delay, suspend or even disrupt the chronological sequence of the narrative, in order to enable him/her develop the characters and spatial settings more fully. Lotman asserts that spatial forms have important semantic and semiotic significance; "these language of spatial relations (within narrative) turns out to be one of the basic means of comprehending reality…the structure of the space of a text becomes a model of the structure of the space of the universe of possible meanings of signs in the narrative" (1977:217-218). He called this semiotic spatial framework, Semiosphere and asserted that they provide a typology of the deeper message of the narrative. Dozeman has for example employed this concept to examine Exodus 19 and

concluded that the spatial forms here direct the reader's attention to God's cosmic mountain. He described the effects of spatial forms as comparable to an orange; "like an orange, such a narrative is structured into individual pieces—similar segments of equal value—in which the movement is circular, focused on the single subject, the core" (1989:88).

The spatial analysis of a biblical text then, should initially foreground the spatiality of that text, and then apply a non-binaric structural analysis to examine the text's superficial and deeper semantic and semiological components, investigate the topographical aspects of the spaces, their boundaries and relatedness and the nature of the social relationships within the spaces. In addition, the impact of the text's spatiality on its theological argument should be assessed. We now proceed to apply these to the expositions of Hebrews.

3.   The Spatiality of the Christology of Hebrews

The Christological arguments of Hebrews are concentrated in its expositions, which may be correctly isolated for spatial analysis (Levensohn 2001:184). The prologue (Heb 1:1-4) interweaves themes of high Christology, spatiality, temporality and territoriality in both the created order and the heavenly realm. Hebrews 1:1-2 is concerned with the relationship between revelation knowledge, time, spaces, prophetic discourse, hierarchy and creative power. Hebrews 1:3-4 introduces us to the comparison with angels, based on the Son's exalted and unique spatial relationship in the Godhead, "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High." He has a more excellent name and an inheritance, denoting a hierarchical order and territorial claims in the heavenly realm. The step-by-step thematic expositions of Hebrews 1-7[6] act as spatial forms, linked together "like an orange … structured into individual pieces… focused on the single subject, the core" (Dozeman

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[6]   Based on Guthrie's (1998) proposed structure of the epistle which combines the strengths of the linguistic, literary, thematic and rhetorical-critical methodology, the expositions of the epistle are found in: 1:1-4, 1:5-14, 2:5-18, 3:1-6, 4:14-16, 5:1-10, 7:1-10:18.

1989:88). They are particularly amenable for examination using the lens of spatiality as we now demonstrate.

3.1 *The Son is Greater than the Angels in Heaven (Heb 1:5-14)*

There are several indications that the spatial focus of the author of Hebrews in the catena is heaven. Firstly, the heavenly realm is depicted as having territorial boundaries, since the Son's entrance into "the world" is marked by angelic worship (1:6).[7] This is one of the typical portrayals of the breech of the heavenly barrier in the Scriptures[8]. As Schmidt (1992) has shown, the penetration of the heavenly barrier was invariably associated with divine disclosure, often in the form of God's voice, and angelic worship. The catena also refers to another breech of the boundary of heaven, by the angels (Heb 1:14). Unlike that of the Son however, there is no razzmatazz accompanying the angelic breech. Secondly the prevalence of the kingship and royal themes and the use of some of the major royal Psalms (Psa 2, 45, and 110, and 2 Sam 7:14) depict heaven as an imperial palace.[9] In Hebrews 4:16, the author exhorts the audience to approach the "throne of grace" to "obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Thus the heavenly space is not an ordinary palace, but a form of imperial temple. The reference to "footstool" in Hebrews 1:13 is not just in the kingship motif but is also to serve as a hint about the author's semiological intentions (cf. Heb 10:12-13).

The relationships among the persons in this space are shown to be hierarchical and expressed in territorial terms. The heavenly space, like

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[7]   There are differences of opinion on the interpretation of this verse, whether it refers to Jesus' ascension to the heavenly world or His incarnation (Ellingworth 1993:117, Koester 2001:192-193). For our purposes, it is the crossing of the boundary that is significant.

[8]   Gen 5:24, 28:12, Ps 24:7-10, John 1:51, 3:13, 20:17, Eph 4:8, Rev 7:2

[9]   A common biblical depiction e.g. Ex 17:16, 1 Kings 22:19, Job 26:9, Ps 9:4,7, 11:4, 47:8,103:19, Is 6:1, 66:1, Ezek 1:26, Dan 7:9 Mat 5:34, 19:28, 23:22, 25:31, Rev 1:4, 3:21, and 4

all spaces is contested, and God through the catena provides the reasons why the Son is better than the angels in this space. He is better because He is divine, everlasting king, (Heb 1:8) and creator of all things (Heb 1:10) whereas the angels are created servants (Heb 1:7). He is better because He is immutable, unchanging and unchangeable (Heb 1:11-12) whereas the angels are mutable. In declaring that Jesus is first-born (Heb 1:5), heir, king and creator of the universe, God, in Sack's definition of territoriality, "is delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area" (1986:19) and at the same time communicating, "the social ordering" in this space. The Angels are on the other hand depicted as "ministering spirits" (Heb 1:7, 14), servants and messengers who worship the Son (Heb 1:6) and are sent out from His presence (Heb 1:14). The heavenly space is thus depicted as a regal temple, with God and His Son Jesus as occupiers of the throne of grace and the angels as the senate or *familia* and royal servants of the throne[10]. The function of the catena in the epistle, it appears, was to provide a summary of the state of knowledge of the congregation and to intimate the author's intention to explore the cultic implications in what followed.

The nature of the discourse in the catena also portrays a relationship of power in the heavenly realm. The manner of the divine discourse has been described as a "colloquy…" in which "The seven quotations are presented as a succession of words spoken by God to the Son" (Lane1991:32). The Father does not speak to any angel in this catena, hence the author's two rhetorical questions in Hebrews 1:5, 14. When the Father speaks about the angels, it is as a command (Heb 1:6), a description of their nature (Heb 1:7) and functions (Heb 1:14). In other words, the angels are talked about but never spoken to. They are referred to with the third person pronoun, "they," and never with the Son's "my" and "you." This is one of the characteristic features of

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[10]   The depiction of a heavenly court with God and His angels occurs frequently in the Old Testament and Revelation in the New Testament, and is a common motif in the Jewish inter-testamental Literature. See Gen 1:26, 1 Kg 22:19-23, Ps 89:5-7, Ex 24:9-10, Is 6:1-8, Jer 23:18-22, Job 1:6-12, Ps 103:19-22, Job 15:8, Ezek 1, Zech 3:1-5, Ex 15:11, Deut 32:8, 33:2, Ps 29:1, Neh 9:6, Dan 7:9-14, Job 38:1-7 Jubilees 30:18, 1 Enoch 71, Ascension of Is 6-11, Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice.

discourse portraying power relations in Greco-Roman society. As Seneca points out for example, slaves in this society and especially in public functions "were normally required to curb their tongue" (Seneca, *Epictetus* 47.3). This is in sharp contrast to the free citizen's fundamental freedom of speech "for which Greek had a special word, παρρησία" as Fitzgerald has observed (2000:75). The author's notable restraint in exegesis is another indication of his intention of depicting the heavenly assembly and its power relations. As Zech 2:13 and Rev 8:1 among other passages show, and as Wick (1998) has noted, silence and often, restricted speech typify important occasions of a sometimes, "noisy" heaven.

The spatial representation of the supreme authority of Jesus, as He sits on the right hand of God on the throne is a powerful symbol of His divinity and power. Power is being expressed here in terms of proximity, distance and orientation. Thus whereas the Son is "brought" (Heb 1:6) into the world, the angels are on the other hand "sent" (Heb 1:14) from the presence of God. Jesus' exalted position should induce in the angels, in Foucault's words, "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (1979:201). The exposition moves on to the inhabited world in Heb 2.

3.2 *The Son was made lower than the Angels in the World (Heb 2:5-18)*

It is clear from Hebrews 2:5 that the author's attention in his argument shifts from the heavenly realm to the world. Unlike the heavenly realm in Hebrews 1, Hebrews 2:5-18 describes the territorial boundary of the world and its crossing in a different way. The author had already alluded to the Son crossing the boundary in the Hebrews 1:6a. The other boundary to the world is death, and the devil exploited the power inherent in the nature of this boundary to keep humanity in bondage to its fear. Gray (2003) has discussed the possible apologetic intentions of the author in highlighting the fear of death in Hebrews 2, but death in this passage should not be seen only as a way of dealing with superstitions. Being the ultimate nemesis of humanity and the boundary out of this world the devil finds the fear of death such a powerful tool of subjugation.

The depiction of Jesus in this passage goes through a number of stages. He is firstly made a little lower than the angels in camaraderie with humankind. His lowering was both in terms of the shortness of the time and His hierarchical position in relation to the angels. It enabled him to share in the total nature of humanity by partaking in their "flesh and blood" (Heb 2:14). It was also "for the suffering of death" (Heb 2:9). The sacrificial death of Christ is the most significant event in this space and the author explored several dimensions of it. He noted for example, that Jesus' death was for his "perfection." The use of the word τελειῶσαι to describe the suffering of Christ has several semantic undertones ranging from telic to cultic relevance. Lindars has pointed out that the idea of perfection is more related to the completion of God's plan rather than ethical perfection (1991:44). Perfection means that Jesus' death makes Him completely suitable as the sacrifice for our sins. His death is, thirdly, described in ritual terms. By His death, Jesus sanctifies humanity and makes us one with Him. As noted by Nelson, "Hebrews reflects the complexity of Israelite sacrifice by describing the sacrificial act of Jesus as a ritual script that entailed three episodes: the death of the victim, passage by the priest into the realm of the holy, and the use of blood to effect purification and to create a covenantal relationship" (2003:252). The author thus discussed the significance of the death of Jesus in such a way that it conformed to the three episodes: His death as victim identifying with the sacrificer occurs in this space, His movement as High Priest into the Holy of Holies is noted in the transitional Hebrews 2:17-18, and Hebrews 4:14-16, and His presentation of His own blood to God as High Priest in the heavenly Holy of Holies in Hebrews 5-10.

A complex network of relationships is depicted by the author in the space of the inhabited world, characterized by the dynamics of power, hierarchy and contests. The relationship between the angels and humanity may be seen as comparable to the situation of temporary governors sent out to an unruly state to administer and take charge until order is restored. It is a relationship characterized by territoriality. Humankind has lost the territorial claim to be the persons "set over the works of your hands" (Heb 2:7). It is the angels who administer on God's behalf until the world, "which is to come." The relationship between humankind and God's creation was intended to be

hierarchical but is rather disrupted and unfulfilled (Heb 2:6-8, cf. Ps 8:4-6). That between humanity and the devil is even worse, characterized by the worse coercive use of power. The devil is depicted in Hebrews 2:15 as "executioner in chief" (Bruce 1990:86, n. 80) and unredeemed humanity is like a slave bound to his/her master, gripped with the fear of the full effects of death. The relationship between Jesus and humanity is depicted as one of solidarity and camaraderie. He is their senior brother, ἀρχηγός, Captain, Path-breaker or Pioneer of their salvation; He delivers (Heb 2:15), rescues (Heb 2:18), sanctifies (Heb 2:11) and leads them into glory (Heb 2:10). He is therefore their Kinsman-Redeemer (Lev 25). Thus the reason for Jesus' identification with humanity was to make him a suitable sacrifice, to "taste death for all" (Heb 2:9). The relationship between Jesus and the angels is depicted as an ironic contest with a hint of subversion to it. In taking on the nature of humankind, Jesus achieved for humanity, what the angels, though higher up in the hierarchical order, could not achieve i.e. humankind's redemption. The relationship between Jesus and the devil is depicted, as more than a contest, it is actually a combat. This portrayal of the relationship as a cosmic battle has connotations of the classic myth in Plutarch's *Theseus*, in which Pollux and Castor team up to invade Attica in order to rescue their sister Helen from Theseus; or that of Hercules in *Iliad* (Koester 2001:239).

There are several pointers in the deeper semantic and semiotic levels of the passage, which suggest that the author of Hebrews saw a typological correspondence between this space and the parts of the wilderness camp in which the sacrificial animal was ritually identified with the sacrificer and killed. This space extended from the camp itself to the worshippers' square in the eastern front gate of the tabernacle, near the altar for burnt offerings (Exod 27:13-16). The author's interpretation of the sacrificial death of Jesus into separate stages, or better put, spaces, so that its significance in the space of Hebrews 2:5-18 matched the first component in the three episodes of the sacrificial ritual is one reason for this conclusion. In this first episode, the animal victim must be identified with the one on whose behalf the sacrifice was being made. Likewise, Jesus' death in this space (i.e. in the inhabited world) is depicted as a means of identifying with humanity. The division of the significance of Jesus' death into spaces by Hebrews

has perplexed some commentators. E F Scott has for example unfairly criticized the author for engaging "in pouring new wine into old bottles, which are burst under the strain" (1922:124). The author of Hebrews was however following a literary approach typical of spatial form devices, which allowed him to decouple "time" from "space," freeze "time" and focus on "space" as he discussed the atoning death of Jesus in typological terms. Commentators do not frequently appreciate this Bakhtinian phenomenon of the intermittent dissociation of space from time in Hebrews but as Reed has demonstrated, the epistle at certain points assumes a "static view of time" (1993:161).[11]

Moreover, just as the animals for the Day of Atonement and the Red heifer rituals were sacrificed elsewhere outside the tabernacle enclosure, the author was to emphasize in Heb 13:12 that Jesus' death was "outside the gate." Thus the camp symbolized to the author the inhabited world where Jesus was killed. Furthermore, the fact that death is the boundary to this space is significant, since apart from the Levitical priests, no other member of the public was allowed to cross the boundary of this space into the holy realm. Any trespasser was to be put to death (Exod 19:20-24, 20:19-20, Num 3:38). From the inhabited world, the author moves the exposition into the "house" in Hebrews 3.

3.3 The Son is Greater than Moses in the House of God (Heb 3:1-6).

The contrast between Jesus and Moses in Hebrews 3:1-6 has been pivotal to the school of thought which interprets the theology of Hebrews as a polemic against Judaism, and yet when we closely examine the passage, we realize that the emphasis is on continuity of the people of God more than discontinuity. Both Moses and Jesus are members of the same household of God, together with the first hearers of this sermon. Jesus is the Son and heir, Moses is a servant in the house, and both are faithful to God. Thus a strong ecclesiological

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[11] As J Meier (1985:168-189) and D Via (1999:230) have shown in various ways, Hebrews handling of temporality is not straightforward. This in itself points to a spatial emphasis by the author that makes the epistle open to spatial analysis.

theme may be found here. The author's frequent use of the metaphors, "house" (six times) and "built" (three times) in a seemingly awkward fashion in this short passage is for an important semiotic figuration that contributes to the overall spatial picture of the epistle. Three different forms of the Greek word for "house" are used, each of which is repeated twice, οἴκῳ (Heb 3:2, 5), οἴκου (Heb 3:3, 6a) and οἶκός (Heb 3:4, 6b). Hebrews does not use the other two Greeks word for "house," namely, οἰκία and οἰκεῖος (household). In addition, the formation of the house is described with the use of κατασευάζεται that has a transitional sense that the house is built and being prepared for use. Our author has played on words to keep all three senses of "house" together in this passage, that of a people (or nation) of God, a family of God and a cultic building. On several occasions in the homily for example (Heb 3:1-2, 6, 4:14, 10:21-23) he links the "house of God" with the High Priestly functions of Jesus. The strict distinction between house as a structure and house as a community is more of a modern pre-occupation of exegetes and not necessarily that of the author of Hebrews. In first century Mediterranean societies, communities were defined, more by the social network among the people than the structural spaces they occupied. This worked in both ways so that a group of people was equivalent to the space they occupied. As Malina puts it, in first century societies, "people moved through other people, not through space" (1993:370).

The concept of the people of God as a transitional house also gives it a flavour of intermediary security and protection since members of God's house have left the world behind them and "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Heb 6:18). It is therefore a secure holding house but not the final resting place, a notion that has strong echoes with the wilderness tabernacle. The hope that is ahead is "an anchor of the soul…which enters into that within the veil" (Heb 6:19). Thus the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies marks out the "exit boundary" of the house. This boundary opens the way to the eventual goal, i.e. "the end" (Heb 3:6, 14). Entering this "end" is also described as entering into God's "rest" (Heb 3:18, 4:1), or "the heavens" (Heb 4:14), where "the throne of grace" (Heb 4:16) is. As MacRae observes, in the author's peculiar use of "hope" and "faith" in his pilgrimage interpretation of the tabernacle; "hope is the goal and

faith is a means toward its full realization" (1978:192). The veil separates the two.

Hebrews calls the members of God's household, "holy brothers." They are holy because they have now been separated from the world and crossed the line into the purity zone. The house then takes on Foucault's characterization of a Heterotopia, an enacted utopia in real places. The members of the house, like Jesus (Heb 5:4, 10), Aaron (Heb 5:4) and Abraham (Heb 11:8), are called by God into His very presence. In a sense therefore, all the members of the household are called to be servants and priests of God.

Hebrews also explores God's evaluation of Moses within the confines of the tabernacle "as a servant" (Num 12:1-8). θεράπων in Num 12:7 and Hebrews 3 has connotations of a temple servant. Though Ellingworth has suggested that it was Moses' "prophetic rather than a cultic role" (1993:207) that is being referred to in Hebrews 3, the prophetic role is fused with priestly functions in Hebrews, as is seen for example in the dual titles of Jesus as Apostle and High Priest in this passage. Consequently, the cultic connotations of the description of Moses as a servant in the house should not be discounted. In Hebrews 9 the author equates the Mosaic Covenant to the Holy Place and describes the cultic functions of Moses that he performed in the priestly courtyard and the Holy Place with its vessels and furniture. He also notes the dominant role of Moses here in sprinkling the tabernacle and vessels with blood (Heb 9:21). He however does not describe any major functions performed by Moses in the Holy of Holies. Clearly, he took a serious view of the priestly functions and leadership of Moses and yet restricted those functions to the Holy Place and the priestly courtyard. The writer interpreted the symbolic representation(s) of the priestly courtyard and Holy Place as of temporary and transitional nature, as something that is about to change, disappear or be withdrawn (Heb 9:8-10, 26).

As Son over God's house, Jesus is the heir, and like His Father, is builder of all things (Heb 3:4, 6). Once again Christology is being expressed in terms of territoriality. The writer is unambiguous that in this space Jesus has absolute claim of ownership, for He is the Son, the heir; he built it; it is his own house. He is thus worthy of more glory

than Moses. This house, like all other spaces is contested and the relationship between Jesus and Moses is hence presented as a contest. They were both appointed and sent by God. They were both faithful in the house. Jesus however "was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, because he who has built the house has more honour than the house." Jesus is greater than Moses because, He has territorial claim to God's house. The superiority of Jesus is also expressed in spatial terms, so that whereas Jesus is Son "over" God's house, Moses is servant "in" the house. Jesus' relationship with the members of the house is that of leadership, as Apostle and High Priest.

There are indications in the passage that the author of Hebrews saw a typological correspondence between the "house" and the parts of the tabernacle that were accessible only to the Levitical priests; i.e. the priestly courtyard and the Holy Place (Exod 29:42-43, 30:6-8, Num 18:1-8, Heb 9:6). The priests entered this area daily for ritual washings, sacrifices, dedications and fellowship, in "accomplishing the service of God" (Heb 9:6). In this sphere, Moses exercised considerable authority and leadership as he established and consecrated Aaron and his sons for the ministry (Lev 8). The transitional or liminal nature of the "house" as a temporary secure holding "house," the characterizations of the members of the house as "holy brothers," the exit boundary as the veil, the tabernacle connotations of "faith" and "hope," Moses as a temple servant and the general cultic functions of Moses as restricted to this space all indicate the author's spatial interpretations here. Another indication may be found in Hebrews 13:9-14. The statement that believers "have an altar of which they have no right to eat, those who serve the tabernacle" (Heb 13:10) indicates that our author metaphorically represented the people of God as the priestly community occupying the priestly courtyard and Holy Place, ministering at its altar and eating from its sacrifices.

3.4 Jesus the High Priest Greater than Aaron in the Holy of Holies (Heb 5-7)

From Hebrews 4:14 onwards, we encounter the major thesis of the author that Jesus is our eternal high priest who ministers in the heavenly holy of holies in the very presence of God enthroned at His

right hand of Majesty. Having gone through the other spaces, the author unveils to them what he had hinted regarding the cultic functions of Jesus in the heavenly space in the catena. By drawing Aaron into the discussion, he used the Holy of Holies as a metaphor for heaven. This heaven where Jesus, the "Forerunner has entered for us" (Heb 6:20), is "within the veil" (Heb 6:19). The veil hence constitutes the entry boundary of this space. It is not necessary to regard the veil solely as corresponding to the sky, since believers may, even now, draw near, approach and enter through the veil (Heb 10:19-22). What the author is referring to here is not so much the ascension of Jesus but rather the fact that Jesus' ministry as our High Priest is effectual because He, in cultic terms, has crossed the line into the very presence of God.

Aaron ministered in a different space from that which Jesus has entered; the two are however compared in the same hybrid spatiality. This hybrid space is also contested; Aaron's space was earthly, fleshy, temporary and clearly ineffectual. Jesus' space is utopian, heavenly, eternal, spiritual and there, He saves to "the uttermost those who come unto God by Him" (Heb 7:25). Whereas Aaron *stood* in the Holy of Holies while ministering, Jesus *sits* on God's right hand as He ministers (Heb 10:11-12). Their spatiality is hence inverted; Jesus performs an inverted and perfect function to Aaron's ineffective ministry. Jesus' space is utopian and His functions more powerful, for He provides access into the very presence of God. The discussion of the priestly order of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7 is in the service of the depiction of this contest.

Whether the tabernacle imagery in Hebrews is primarily one of a whole tabernacle in heaven or just the Holy of Holies is debated by commentators (Isaacs 2002:107-108 and Koester 1989). Since Hebrews does not give any attention to a Holy Place in heaven, the author's emphasis that Moses was instructed by God to "make all things according to the pattern shown to you" (Heb 8:5) should not be understood in Platonic terms but rather as a statement of his typological style of exegesis. Beyond the veil Jesus has entered as our Purifier (Heb 1:3), Propitiation and Rescuer in temptations (Heb 2:17-18), Forerunner (Heb 6:20), Great High Priest ((Heb 6:20), our "hope" (Heb 6:19) and intercessor (Heb 7:25).

4. The Significance of Hebrews' Use of the Tabernacle as a Semiosphere in its Expositions

It is thus demonstrated that the wilderness camp and tabernacle[12] lies in the deeper semantic levels of the expositions of Hebrews. The camp and tabernacle was the semiosphere in the epistle's expositions; that is, it provided "the possible universe of meanings" (Lotman 1977:218) to the expositions and the author used its spatiality as a vehicle to address the social and pastoral problems of the congregation. This finding has important implications of textual, theological, sociological and pastoral nature.

Textually, it explains the sudden and baffling summary of Hebrews 8:1-2. Various commentators of the epistle have limited the interpretation of κεφάλαιον (sum) in Hebrews 8:1, ranging from Manson's "crowning affirmation" of the argument that follows (1951:123) to Koester's "main or principal point" of the exposition (2001:375), or Isaacs' summary of "the author's argument in the previous chapter" (2002:105). Appreciating the presence of the spatiality of the tabernacle as a semiosphere in the expositions of Hebrews 1-7 explains the rhetorical force and meaning of the statement in Hebrews 8:1-2. The author uses the tabernacle-camp complex as a heuristic device[13] for his exposition, and Hebrews 8:1-2 is the climatic

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[12] It is assumed that the wilderness tabernacle is the same as the tent of meeting or tent of testimony. See Lewis, (1977:537-548) who suggests that two different traditions of the "prophetic" and earlier Tent of meeting and the "priestly" and later Tabernacle containing the ark are combined in the Pentateuchal narratives.

[13] A heuristic device is a provisional conceptual model that fruitfully directs a search for answers to more complex questions and they play important pedagogical and rhetorical functions in aiding the communication of complex ideas. In their simplest forms, symbols, metaphors and simple narratives such as parables constitute heuristic devices. In their more complex forms, typological and allegorical presentations are sometimes used for heuristic purposes to direct one to discover and grasp more complex ideas. The tentative manner in which the author approaches the whole concept of the High Priestly functions of Jesus in the heavenly tabernacle, suggests that this was a major novelty on the part of his audience. It was a theological proposition that the author regarded as "solid food" (Heb 5:12) and which was "hard to be explained" (Heb 5:11) to the

announcement typical of such pedagogical devices. The author in Hebrews 8:1-2 is basically summarizing in explicit terms what he had been saying implicitly throughout the expositions from the beginning of the homily.

Theologically, it explains the nature of the author's theology of the tabernacle. He asserts that the wilderness tabernacle and ministry was a "sign" (Heb 9:8) from the Holy Spirit and a "figure" (Heb 9:9) of what Jesus was going to do. His use of "copy," "pattern," "example"(Heb 8:5), "shadow" and "very image" (Heb 10:1), was not so much in Platonic logic as has been assumed, but a reflection of his analogical style of exegesis (Bruce 1990:235). He follows a typological exegesis that allowed him multiple interpretations of the tabernacle. His flexible language was, as Koester rightly points out, "similar to the way the LXX uses terms in relation to the tabernacle" (1989:156). In Hebrews, the tabernacle is interpreted in at least five ways; the Holy of Holies is interpreted as heaven, the Eschaton, "the conscience," the presence of God and the new covenant.[14] Hope and Faith also have a parallel relationship with the two chambers of the tabernacle. The veil is equally interpreted as the Body or Flesh of Christ (Heb 10:20). This phenomenon of multiple interpretations of the tabernacle/temple theological complex was not peculiar to our author, but is also reflected in Luke-Acts and John's gospel (Hutcheon 2000:3-33; Sylvia 1986:239-250; Hickling 1983:112-116).

In addition, the use of the tabernacle as the heuristic tool for the homily explains the constraining factors in the author's selection of theological themes. Virtually all the predominant themes in Hebrews are related to the theology of the tabernacle. Pilgrimage, worship, faith and hope, sanctification, sacrifice and atonement, Sabbath Rest, Apostasy, ecclesiology, eschatology, heavenly session, covenant, perseverance in suffering and divine revelation are all related directly or indirectly to

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congregation. This accounts for the allusory manner of the author's references to the tabernacle in Heb 1-7.

[14] Given that the author's theology of Rest consists of the dual aspects of an already fulfilled enjoyment of God's covenantal blessings and a future eschatological life of believers in the very presence of God (Gleason 2000:296), "Rest" in Heb 4:1-11 also has some correspondence with the Holy of Holies.

the theology of the wilderness tabernacle. Understanding these themes is greatly aided by appreciating the theology of the tabernacle.

Furthermore, it demonstrates an interesting relationship between Hebrews and the Book of Numbers that helps explain the epistle's structure and style. The tabernacle played crucial cultic (Num 1:53, 4:15), military (Num 10:35-36, 31:6), social (Num 7:8-9) and judicial (Num 11) roles in the Book of Numbers. It acted as both a symbol of God's mercy (Num 1:53, 18:5) and also of the burning fire of God's wrath (Num 16). Numbers places the tabernacle at the centre of the life and activities of the people of God and reference is made to it on more than a hundred occasions. The whole camp was arranged in a concentric manner around the tabernacle; in Wenham's words, "Both at rest and on the move the camp is organized to express symbolically the presence and kingship of the Lord" (1981:56). Thus we get a multi-dimensional picture of the role of the tabernacle among the people of God, a lesson which the author of Hebrews draws on, perceiving that his congregation were in a similar Liminal state as the wilderness generation.

Several parallels exist between the two books that suggest that Numbers may have influenced the author of Hebrews in significant ways. The two books share similar reputations as being among the most difficult books of the Bible to survey and Numbers 1:1 begins with God speaking to Moses in the tabernacle just as Hebrews 1:1 begins by referring to the final speech of God through His Son. The phrase, "the LORD spoke to Moses" occurs more than 50 times in Numbers, and is paralleled by the generous nature of Hebrews' references to God's speech. Direct quotations of, and allusions to Numbers are also found in Hebrews 3:5 (cf. Num 12:7), 3:17 (cf. Num 14:29), 8:5, 9:4 (cf. Num 17:8-10), 9:19, 10:26-29 (cf. Num 15:22-31) and 12:21. The wilderness theme, which in Numbers, tells the story of the guiding presence of God through the tabernacle and the overshadowing cloud (Num 9:15–23; 10:11–12, 33–36; 11:25; 12:5, 10; 14:10, 14; 16:42) is also explicitly treated in Hebrews. In addition, many of the cultic imageries in Hebrews are drawn from Numbers. These parallels would suggest a high degree of influence of Numbers on Hebrews.

The narratives in Numbers are not arranged chronologically but in a thematic fashion; the exposition of the Laws alternate with narratives of rebellion, disobedience, strife and faithlessness; in a similar fashion to Hebrews' alternation of erudite expositions with harsh exhortations. Mary Douglas (2001) has for example demonstrated a regular concentric ring structure[15] to the way the laws and narratives are arranged into twelve pairs in Numbers. It appears therefore that the author of Hebrews used the picture of the encamped Exodus generation around the tabernacle as depicted in Numbers; to generate the homily that addresses the social and pastoral problems of the congregation.

Finally, the presence of the spatiality of the tabernacle as the semiosphere in the expositions of Hebrews explains the link between the expositions and the social and pastoral circumstances of the community that is reflected in the exhortations of the epistle. Examination of the exhortations of Hebrews suggests that the author saw a typological relationship between that community and the exodus generation. Based on this he used the theology of the tabernacle as a heuristic device in his expositions. Sociologically, the Hebrews congregation was in a state of Liminality that parallels the Exodus and Wilderness generations (Dunnill 1992). Just as the ritual laws of the Pentateuch were designed to preserve the cultic separation of God's people from the other nations, to maintain their continued relationship with God and to prepare them for their final inheritance in the land of promise, Hebrews interprets them in the light of the Christ event to address the major pastoral problems of spiritual malaise and inadequate understanding of the continuing work of Christ in providing access to God's presence. The common connection between the two communities—Exodus generation and the Hebrews congregation, was the theology of the tabernacle. Our author has produced a very imaginative sermon that on all levels, address a dangerously looming spiritual disaster and thus provided us with a

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[15] The similarities between the concentric ring structure of Numbers and Vanhoye's (1963) symmetrically concentric structure of Hebrews is striking, and may not just be coincidence.

template on how we may understand and apply the theology of the tabernacle.

5.   Conclusion

Two of the difficult phenomena in Hebrews, the Christological comparisons and the spatial emphasis are intertwined in the author's spatiality of the wilderness camp and tabernacle and can be adequately explained using sociological and literary spatial theories. Judging that his congregation's problems typologically corresponded to those of the Exodus and Wilderness generations in Numbers and employing the lens of the Christ event, the author constructed a sermon that utilizes the spatiality of the camp and tabernacle as a heuristic device. Considering the epistle's continuing influence, one is certain, that the first readers would never have forgotten this sermon, especially with the picture of the encamped people of God around the tabernacle as its semiosphere. We may also find the epistle easier to understand when approached this way.

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