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HOW TO ENTERTAIN ANGELS:
ETHICS IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS*

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> A *religious* question is either a life-and-death-question or it is *(empty)* talk. This language game – you may say – is played with life-and-death-questions only. Just as the word "ouch!" has no meaning – except as a cry of pain.
>
> Ludwig Wittgenstein[1]

1. *Under Discussion*

1.1. *"Self-Referential and Trivial": Disproportion Between Theology and Ethics*

The theological mountain is in labor – but what is born is a moral mouse! It is this impression one may get reading the Epistle to the Hebrews in order to piece together its instructions into an ethical whole. On the one hand, there is widespread agreement that the demanding concept of this λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως (Heb 13:22) aims from the outset at a moral purpose. This view is strengthened by the key passages Heb 4:14–16; 10:19–25; and 13:20–21, which have the form of an exhortative appeal,[2] and by the paraenetic

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[1] LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Denkbewegungen: Tagebücher 1930–1932, 1936–1937* (part 1, *Normalisierte Fassung,* ed. Ilse Somavilla; Innsbruck: Haymon, 1997), n. 203.

[2] The *propositio* Heb 4:14–16 concludes the first major section and leads up to the *argumentatio* (Heb 4:14[5:l]–10:18); Heb 10:19–25 opens the third major section, which is directly orientated towards exhortation. Thus both of these passages frame the christological central section. In the form of a concluding prayer, Heb 13:20–21 recapitulates the paraenesis of Hebrews. For structural and rhetorical analysis of Hebrews, see KNUT BACKHAUS, *Der Neue Bund und das Werden der Kirche: Die Diatheke-Deutung des Hebräerbriefs im Rahmen der frühchristlichen Theologiegeschichte* (NTAbh 29; Münster: Aschendorff, 1996), 47–64.

tendency of the particular pericopes[3] as well as of the overall structure.[4] It seems clear that the author tries to master a serious crisis of his addressees by providing an elaborate Christology that may give guidance and motivation for a Christian ethos.

There is, however, some embarrassment as far as the particular form of such an ethos developed in Hebrews is concerned. The exhortations of the first and second major sections (Heb 1:1–4:13; 4:14–10:18) mostly urge the community[5] in a self-referential manner to adopt the *homologia* worked out in the epistle.[6] Nevertheless, readers today are far from being impressed by the specific instructions eventually offered in the last major section, especially in Heb 13: Let us do good works (Heb 10:24)! Attend Sunday service (Heb 10:25)! Let the marital bed be undefiled (Heb 13:4)! Respect the church authorities (Heb 13:7, 17)! Keep to orthodox doctrine (Heb 13:9)!

To arrive at exhortations of this kind, it may seem, the intellectual level of the Epistle of Jude would suffice. Further, when ethics is seen as not only the desired result but the starting-point of the christological reflection,[7] it is hard to avoid the impression that Hebrews imposes on the massive base of doctrinal exposition the statue of an ethical dwarf in heroic bearing.[8]

Thus it is not difficult to understand that, on the other hand, the excess weight of theory arouses doubts about the author's paracletical purpose: "Pastoral care, to be sure, is the only business he does not manage."[9] The epistle is said to be more interested in

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[3] On the interrelationship between expository and exhortatory sections, see HANS-FRIEDRICH WEISS, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (KEK 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 42–51; and recently GEORGE H. GUTHRIE, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (NovTSup 73; Leiden: Brill, 1994), esp. 112–147.

[4] Analogous to the *peroratio* of deliberative rhetoric, the last major section, in particular the final chapter, Heb 13, responds *directly* to the pragmatic situation of the addressees, thereby differing distinctively from the first major sections.

[5] In my understanding the "community" of Hebrews is a relatively autonomous group with its own educational status within urban Roman Christianity; for discussion, see WEISS, *Hebräer*, 75; KNUT BACKHAUS, "Der Hebräerbrief und die Paulus-Schule," *BZ* 37 (1993): 183–208, esp. 196–204.

[6] On ὁμολογία in Hebrews, see HEINRICH ZIMMERMANN, *Das Bekenntnis der Hoffnung: Tradition und Redaktion im Hebräerbrief* (BBB 47; Cologne: Hanstein, 1977), 44–52; FRANZ LAUB, *Bekenntnis und Auslegung: Die paränetische Funktion der Christologie im Hebräerbrief* (BU 15; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1980), esp. 9–50.

[7] So FLOYD V. FILSON, *"Yesterday": A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13* (SBT 4; London: SCM, 1967), 25–26, 82; JUKKA THURÉN, *Das Lobopfer der Hebräer: Studien zum Aufbau und Anliegen von Hebräerbrief 13* (Åbo: Akademi, 1973), 246–247; BARNABAS LINDARS, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 101.

[8] See WILLIAM WREDE, *Das literarische Rätsel des Hebräerbriefs* (FRLANT 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), 16–20; RICHARD PERDELWITZ, "Das literarische Problem des Hebräerbriefs," *ZNW* 11 (1910): 59–78 and 105–123, here 61.

[9] HANS-MARTIN SCHENKE, "Erwägungen zum Rätsel des Hebräerbriefes," in *Neues Testament und christliche Existenz: Festschrift für Herbert Braun zum 70. Geburtstag am 4. Mai 1973* (ed. Hans Dieter Betz and

speculation than in ethics and to develop a general conception that obviously exceeds the needs of any paraenetical purpose.[10] Several scholars even challenge the integrity of the awkward ch. 13 (esp. vv. 22–25), which they suppose to have been appended in order to suggest Pauline authorship to the readers.[11]

1.2. "Separationist and Esoteric": Disproportion Between Universal Claim and Group Ethic

It rarely happens that the exhortation of Hebrews is made the subject of special studies, except as a case of theological criticism. It was Rudolf Bultmann's skeptical judgment that has set the standard: poorly immunized against legalism, the ethics of Hebrews abandons the indicative foundation of the moral imperative. The baptized are transposed into the heavenly realms on the basis of the sanctification performed by Christ, with no explanation of the desecularization they have to acquire under their own steam (cf. Heb 13:13–14). In the epistle's expository effort Bultmann cannot help seeing a typological delight in speculation, and he does not expect the author, who may enjoy his interpretation, to reveal its use to us.[12]

As a characteristic example of the prevalent tendency to attach importance to the ethical program of Hebrews chiefly for the sake of *Sachkritik*,[13] let me outline Wolfgang Schenk's extensive essay (1985).[14]

> The semiotic analysis starts from the exhortation Heb 13:16; this choice is justified by both the contextual function of the segment and its representative meaning. With sound arguments Schenk qualifies the first noun in the prohibition Heb 13:16a, τῆς δὲ εὐποιΐας καὶ κοινωνίας μὴ ἐπιλανθάνεσθε as "charity," in the sense of an institutionalized project

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Luise Schottroff; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1973), 421–437, here 422; see also HANS-MARTIN SCHENKE and KARL MARTIN FISCHER, *Einleitung in die Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (2 vols.; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1978/1979), 2:259–263.

[10] PHILIPP VIELHAUER, *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1981), 243; HELMUT FELD, *Der Hebräerbrief* (EdF 228; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), 61–62.

[11] For discussion, see THUREN, *Lobopfer der Hebräer,* 49–55; HAROLD W. ATTRIDGE, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 384–385; ERICH GRÄSSER, *An die Hebräer* (3 vols.; EKKNT 17; Zürich: Benziger and Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990–1997), 3:343–345; BACKHAUS, "Paulus-Schule," 192–196; and ALEXANDER J. M. WEDDERBURN, "The 'Letter' to the Hebrews and Its Thirteenth Chapter," *NTS* 50 (2004): 390–405.

[12] RUDOLF BULTMANN, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (ed. Otto Merk; 9th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984), 113–114, 517–519.

[13] So emphatically JACK T. SANDERS, *Ethics in the New Testament: Change and Development* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 106–110; SIEGFRIED SCHULZ, *Neutestamentliche Ethik* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1987), 632–640; more cautiously WOLFGANG SCHRAGE, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (2d ed.; GNT 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 325–329.

[14] WOLFGANG SCHENK, "Die Paränese Hebr 13,16 im Kontext des Hebräerbriefes: Eine Fallstudie semiotisch-orientierter Textinterpretation und Sachkritik," *ST* 39 (1985): 73–106.

of social aid (73–74), and the second one as an active demonstration of fraternal fellowship (74–75). In conjunction with its parallel in Heb 13:1–2a, this instruction proves to be part of a stabilizing paraenetical process that aims at cohesion within the community as well as solidarity between different Christian communities (cf. Heb 10:33–34; 11:36). Thus, in comparison with Paul (cf. Gal 6:10), inclusive love of neighbor is reduced to love of brethren reserved for Christian associates. Schenk concludes that, in contrast to the communities of the apostolic age, "the mystic conventicle addressed in Hebrews" regards itself as a "new cultic club" in an esoteric way (78).[15]

The following causal clause, τοιαύταις γὰρ θυσίαις εὐαρεστεῖται ὁ θεός both in its passive construction and in placing "God" at the end, draws the readers' attention to human conduct before God, so that Schenk offers us the translation: "For it is God who finds satisfaction in such 'sacrifices.'" It is at this point that Schenk feels uneasy with the Christian spirit of this notion of God being deeply influenced by the *tremendum* of the "Old Testament-numinous" way of thinking, which he also finds in the "terrors of the New Covenant" developed in the whole epistle (cf. 85–87) and which in his opinion reduces the newness of the universalistic approach which takes Easter as its starting-point. This theological shortcoming leads to a separationist ethical approach "that is no longer capable of considering the Christian community as vanguard of God's new world" (89). Under the influence of its ethics of gratitude inspired by Stoic philosophy (cf. 12:28) the epistle fails to maintain a sense of mission *ad extra.* It is an ideology limited to the present time and obedience towards the authorities that replaces both hope as "passion for what is possible" and prophetic searching for a community of the risen Lord (90–92). Thus the community of the readers settles down contemplating its existence as a family of priestly mystics gathered round the high priest, and securing its ethics by means of sacrificial imagery. By demanding a permanent attitude of προσέρχεσθαι Hebrews aspires to "some vision of 'sober-minded ecstasy' that lets the readers fathom the mystery elaborated by itself" (93; cf. 92–97). In Schenk's view the crucial point, then, of the "separationist ecclesiology and ethics" of Hebrews is the "fear of not being on the right side" (89).

There is little reason to object to this understanding as far as the descriptive analysis of the text is concerned. What I do not hold to be legitimate, however, is that Schenk, following a general trend, stops trying to understand the text at this point and switches over immediately to *Sachkritik.* He concludes that the segment Heb 13:16 as well as the ethical passages of Hebrews in general, marked by esoteric group consciousness, at best may serve as an instructive example to illustrate the weight and profile of the theology of the Apostle Paul (cf. Gal 6:6–10; Rom 12) (97–98).

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[15] For similar views, see RICHARD VÖLKL, *Christ und Welt nach dem Neuen Testament* (Würzburg: Echter, 1961), 358–359; SCHULZ, *Neutestamentliche Ethik,* 638–640; SCHRAGE, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments,* 329.

1.3. *The Problems at Issue*

Let us summarize the objections raised against the ethical program of Hebrews in the form of questions that do not suggest normative theological claims but historical investigation of the social setting and theological shape of our epistle:

(1) What is the relationship between the ethical exhortations of Hebrews and its general theological conception? In this regard both the self-referential character (esp. Heb 1–12) and the pragmatic triviality (esp. Heb 13) of the epistle are subjects of critical discussion.

(2) Why are the ethical exhortations of Hebrews restricted to the boundaries of the Christian community? In this regard we have to pay attention to the impression of a separationist and esoteric theology.

We will do justice to the exegetical points at issue if we not only answer the historical questions but also explain in what way they are intimately related to each other. In short: What, from an ethical point of view, does it mean within the context of a Christian community when the addressees hold the belief that Jesus has become far superior to the angels, that he has entered with his own blood through the veil into the sanctuary, that he intercedes on behalf of his people as the high priest according to the order of Melchizedek?

What we are going to ask, therefore, is the only *sachkritische* question which in the field of ethics really gets at the point at issue: "Don't tell me what you believe in, tell me what *changes* because you believe in it!" (as Bertolt Brecht would have asked us). To summarize, in what way does the *auctor ad Hebraeos,* beyond doubt a *virtuoso* of faith, change the ethos of his addressees?

2. Interpretation

2.1. The Semantic Features

First of all we have to examine the semantic features of Hebrews as far as they are part of the paraenesis,[16] taking the form of an imperative, cohortative, or a functional equivalent (participial or δεῖ-construction, etc.) or directly supporting the paraenesis.

(a) The first strand, which marks the paraenetical train of thought, consists of *cognitive instructions* providing the (re-)organization of religious knowledge. In this regard the impression of the self-referential character of Hebrews is confirmed, for it is the epistle itself that furnishes the readers with the organizing principles by working out the

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[16] By the text type "paraenesis," I understand a communicative act, for the purpose for providing counsel, that habitualizes and motivates individual or communitarian practice on the basis of the evidence of an instruction and within the framework of an authoritative relationship; for details, see WIARD POPKES, *Paränese und Neues Testament* (SBS 168; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996), 13–52.

Christian *homologia.* These paraenetical clauses are often connected with the theological passages by means of causal conjunctions.

There is a significantly frequent use of instructions concerning orientation by virtue of acquired religious knowledge,[17] conscious acquirement of such knowledge,[18] stability defined by confession,[19] and mutual control of loyal practice of faith.[20] The standard "possessive" expression ἔχομεν has a similar purpose, though it is not directly in the form of an exhortative appeal. It serves to affirm the knowledge of the religious perspective and way of life: "We *have* (viz. in the form of the *homologia* we have acquired) a high priest (Heb 4:14–15; 8:1; cf. 10:21), strong encouragement (Heb 6:18), an anchor for the soul (Heb 6:19), boldness for entrance into the sanctuary (Heb 10:19), a greater and abiding possession (cf. Heb 10:34), a great reward (cf. Heb 10:35), a cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1), an altar (Heb 13:10)."

It is in this context, i.e., the organization of the knowledge and practice of faith, that the *exempla,* which are characteristic of the ethical concept of Hebrews, ought to be seen. Thus the widespread opinion that Hebrews reveals a clearly discernible ethics of imitation should be put more precisely in so far as the author introduces models to follow only in order to illustrate the right attitude of faith. The epistle does not deal with examples of virtues or acts of morality nor does it appeal to its readers to imitate some special realization of faith. What it calls for is positive or negative *exempla* of a proper endurance in the faith that one has once espoused or an endurance that is required, in order to hold out with the necessary patience and hope to that which is promised imperturbable by rival interpretations of the world; in short, *exempla* of *stabilitas fidei.*

> The absolute paradigm is Jesus, who has shared in the temptations of his people (Heb 2:18; 4:15), who, with prayer, learned obedience through what he suffered (Heb 5:7–9), and who, after having endured cross, shame, and hostility "for the sake of the joy which lay before him" (cf. Heb 12:1–3), stands before "us," who are running with patience "the race which lies before us," as τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸς καὶ τελειωτής.[21] Further, the "cloud of witnesses"

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[17] "Therefore (διὰ τοῦτο), it is necessary for us to pay attention (προσέχειν) all the more to what has been heard" (Heb 2:1); see Heb 12:25; 13:7.

[18] "Wherefore (ὅθεν), holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider (κατανοήσατε) the apostle and high priest of our confession (ὁμολογία), Jesus" (Heb 3:1); see Heb 7:4; 12:2–3.

[19] "Let us hold fast to the confession (ὁμολογία) of hope unwavering" (Heb 10:23); see Heb 3:6, 14; 4:14; 6:4–6, 18–19; 10:28–29, 32.

[20] "Let us have consideration (κατανοῶμεν) for one another with an aim of provoking love and good works" (Heb 10:24); see Heb 3:12–13; 10:25; 12:15.

[21] See ANSELM SCHULZ, *Nachfolgen und Nachahmen: Studien über das Verhältnis der neutestamentlichen Jüngerschaft zur urchristlichen Vorbildethik* (SANT 6; Munich: Kösel, 1962), 293–298; GRAHAM HUGHES, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics: The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Example of Biblical Interpretation* (SNTSMS 36; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 75–100; FRANZ LAUB, "'Schaut auf Jesus'

(Heb 11:1–40) serves as a paradigmatic catalog to shape the pilgrimage of the faithful Christian people towards the promised land. Worthy of imitation, moreover, is the consistency of faith shown by the departed leaders of the community (Heb 13:7). The author wants his addressees to be "imitators (μιμηταί) of those who through faith and perseverance inherited the promises." Besides Esau (cf. Heb 12:15–17), it is the wandering generation of the desert that serves as a negative example of deafness, apathy, and apostasy (cf. Heb 3:7–4:11).

These instructions serve to transform the readers' perspective (permanently).[22] It is the christological *homologia* that serves as the organizing center of the transformed view: the heavenly high priest is, so to speak, the sun in the interpretative universe arranging all the particular aspects of religious knowledge in its ethical orbits so that the plausibilities of the dominant culture, into which the addressees are in danger of relapsing,[23] lose their attraction.

(b) The second strand, which is concentrated in particular in the main paraenetical passages, links instructions to dynamic verbs. This semantic field overlaps with the cognitive one in so far as it describes an inward movement, that is to say, an orientation, aimed at the system of Christian knowledge developed in Hebrews.[24] In this respect the compounds προσέρχεσθαι (Heb 4:16; 10:22; 11:6; cf. 7:19, 25) and εἰσέρχεσθαι (Heb 4:1, 3, 11; cf. 6:20; 10:19) are of decisive relevance. Approaching or entering are depicted as leading to different destinations: the throne of grace, eternal Sabbath rest, the heavenly sanctuary. What connects these images is the motif of the accessibility of God's presence in the sacred space of the crucified Lord.[25] "Approaching" as well as "entering," therefore,

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(Hebr 3,1): Die Bedeutung des irdischen Jesus für den Glauben nach dem Hebräerbrief," in *Vom Urchristentum zu Jesus: Festschrift für Joachim Gnilka* (ed. Hubert Frankemölle and Karl Kertelge; Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1989), 417–432; THOMAS SÖDING, "Zuversicht und Geduld im Schauen auf Jesus: Zum Glaubensbegriff des Hebräerbriefes," *ZNW* 82 (1991): 214–241, esp. 228–234; DAVID A. DESILVA, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (SBLDS 152; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 165–178.

[22] In some passages Hebrews indicates the circumstances when the new perspective was first acquired, e.g., as far as the history of mission (Heb 2:3–4), catechetical aspects (Heb 5:11–6:2), or the biography of the community (Heb 10:32–34) are concerned.

[23] In my view, the paraenetical instructions in their convergence show clearly that the widely discussed "relapse" is related not to the ancestral religion of former Jews but to the social home reality of the (pagan) Roman milieu; for discussion, see BACKHAUS, *Der Neue Bund,* 264–282.

[24] Remarkably, the adjective used to indicate the attitude of the readers, νωθρός, is related to both the cognitive process of hearing (Heb 5:11) and the whole movement of faithful existence (Heb 6:12).

[25] On the soteriological thrust of these dynamics, see LAUB, *Bekenntnis und Auslegung,* 265–272; JOHN M. SCHOLER, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (JSNTSup 49; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 91–149 (προσέρχεσθαι), 150–184 (εἰσέρχεσθαι); HERMUT LÖHR, *Umkehr und Sünde im Hebräerbrief* (BZNW 73; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), 250–285; WILHELM THÜSING, "'Lasst uns hinzutreten…'

describe the Christian experience of reality, in so far as the usual way of seeing the world is transcended in the direction of God.

The readers are stimulated to a consistent practice of faith not only by imagery from the sphere of athletics and battle (Heb 12:1, 4, 12–14)[26] but also with reference to the semantic fields of ways and wandering (cf. Heb 2:1; 3:7–4:11; 10:20; 11:8–10, 13–16, 27; 12:18–24; 13:13–14) concentrated in the idea of the socially homeless pilgrim people of God. The Christians form God's "cultic community on the move,"[27] whose whole existence may be summarized in the statements of the goal in Heb 9:14 and Heb 12:28: λατρεύειν that is, "to worship amid the everyday world."[28]

The purpose of these dynamic instructions is once more the redefinition of competing realities. The addressees are led into their own cognitive world, whose ways are unequivocally defined by the *homologia.* This *eisodos* into the sacred space (Heb 10:19) corresponds to the *exodus* from the space of the urban dominant culture (Heb 13:13; cf. 11:8, 27, 29).[29]

So again an inward counter-world is established or worked out, in which the readers may take up – in Martin Heidegger's sense – "ethos," that is, "an abode, a dwelling-place. The noun designates the open space in which one lives."[30] This sort of living, to be sure, must be put into effect. The problem Hebrews primarily deals with is not that the addressees do not know what they should do but that they do not do what they should

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(Hebr 10,22): Zur Frage nach dem Sinn der Kulttheologie im Hebräerbrief," in idem, *Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologie* (ed. Thomas Söding; WUNT 82; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 184–200; KNUT BACKHAUS, "Per Christum in Deum: Zur theozentrischen Funktion der Christologie im Hebräerbrief," in *Der lebendige Gott: Studien zur Theologie des Netten Testaments: Festschrift für Wilhelm Thüsing zum 75. Geburtstag* (ed. Thomas Söding; NTAbh 31; Münster: Aschendorff, 1996), 258–284.

[26] See DAVID A. DESILVA, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 361–364.

[27] WILLIAM G. JOHNSSON, "The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews," *JBL* 97 (1978): 239–251, here 249.

[28] See ERNST KÄSEMANN, *Das wandernde Gottesvolk: Eine Untersuchung zum Hebräerbrief* (4th ed.; FRLANT 55; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961); JOHNSSON, "Pilgrimage Motif"; ERICH GRÄSSER, "Das wandernde Gottesvolk: Zum Basismotiv des Hebräerbriefes," in idem, *Aufbruch und Verheissung: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Hebräerbrief* (ed. Martin Evang and Otto Merk; BZNW 65; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992), 231–250; MARKUS BOCKMUEHL, "The Church in Hebrews," in *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology in Honor of J. P. M. Sweet* (ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 133–151, esp. 140–143; DESILVA, *Perseverance,* 70–71, 394–395; IUTISONE SALEVAO, *Legitimation in the Letter to the Hebrews: The Construction and Maintenance of a Symbolic Universe* (JSNTSup 219; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 296–305.

[29] See HAROLD W. ATTRIDGE, "Paraenesis in a Homily (λόγος παρακλήσεως): The Possible Location of, and Socialization in, the 'Epistle to the Hebrews,'" *Semeia* 50 (1990): 211–226, here 221–223.

[30] MARTIN HEIDEGGER, "Brief über den Humanismus," in idem, *Wegmarken* (vol. 9; Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), 313–364, here 354, 354–357.

know.[31] Cognition, therefore, must gain an active dimension, that is to say, an aspect of movement.

(c) Proceeding now from the exhortations to the imagery that structures the epistle we at once notice the affinity: the imagery is primarily shaped in cultic or sociomorphic style. In its soteriological center the epistle outlines, with a delight in typological details, the symbolic counter-world of the heavenly sanctuary. Thereby it pursues the intention to show to God's pilgrim people the "new and living way" from the "pro-fanum" through the veil into God's most holy presence, from the transitory sphere to the eternal one, from the earthly world of shadows to the divine light (cf. Heb 8:1–10:25; esp. Heb 9:6–14; 10:19–22).[32]

The images for salvation are often taken from the political or social order so that the contrast between the homeland of faith and the earthly realities may come to light. The goal of the Christians is the promised land (cf. Heb 11:9), the *polis* with foundations whose maker and fashioner is God (Heb 11:10), the better, that is, heavenly fatherland (Heb 11:14, 16), the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven (Heb 12:22–23),[33] the unshakable kingdom (Heb 12:28), the city which remains and which is to come (cf. Heb 13:14).

Thus, it is the dynamism of change in the readers' view and (inward) position that characterizes the overall argumentation of Hebrews. The experience of this earthbound life and the participation in heavenly reality confront one another. While worldly experience is fading away, the pilgrim's path is illuminated by the kindly light of heaven. Hebrews, to be sure, does not call upon its readers to *withdraw from the world* but it pleads for *superiority to the world*.[34] When God's reality alone is absolute, then the faithful wandering through this life will pass through things of relative importance only. Christians will not abandon this world but they will learn to deal with it with greater detachment.[35]

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[31] See FRANK J. MATERA, "Moral Exhortation: The Relation between Moral Exhortation and Doctrinal Exposition in the Letter to the Hebrews," *TJT* 10 (1994): 169–182, here 170–171; on lethargy as the ethical crux of Hebrews, see THOMAS E. SCHMIDT, "Moral Lethargy and the Epistle to the Hebrews," *WTJ* 54 (1992): 167–173.

[32] On the "theology of access," see MARIE E. ISAACS, *Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (JSNTSup 73; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).

[33] On the political background of this image, see ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews,* 375; WEISS, *Hebräer,* 678–680; DESILVA, *Perseverance,* 466–467.

[34] See the chapter on Hebrews in VÖLKL, *Christ und Welt,* 350–360: "Das Ethos der Wanderer."

[35] For more detail, see KNUT BACKHAUS, "Das Land der Verheissung: Die Heimat der Glaubenden im Hebräerbrief," *NTS* 47 (2001): 171–188.

2.2. The Customary Paraenesis

2.2.1. Group-Ethical Orientation

Throughout our exploration of the semantic features of the paraenesis of Hebrews it became evident that the impression of a certain self-referential character of the epistle's ethics is justified: Hebrews does not deal with general love of one's neighbor or enemy nor the church's world mission. Rather, it aims at introducing its readers deeper into the "mystery" which it itself has unfolded. Nevertheless, in the same way it became evident, too, that this "mystery" serves as the (intended) referential system providing the standards for the addressees' ethical orientation in general. The customary paraenesis[36] is meant to safeguard the basic social conditions of this referential system.

In my view, the approach of social history will do more justice to the ethics of Hebrews than criticism based on theological aesthetics. Before we examine whether the admonitions of Hebrews may spread out in all directions with a seemingly Pauline impetus, so that the community finds itself to be the "vanguard of God's new world," let us take a closer look at how such a vanguard might in concrete terms be formed.

In a sense, it is not unfair to suggest that Hebrews is driven by "fear of not being on the right side," for in the inevitable decision between the formative church and the dominant culture threatening its self-definition, the epistle urges its readers to opt for the right side and to realize it by means of social organization.[37] The crucial question, then, is whether the exhortations fulfill their purpose to construct and secure the symbolic counter-world that may direct and strengthen the cognitive self-affirmation of Christians confronted with the claims of pagan society. From this point of view, triviality does not seem to be a surprising feature of ethical instruction. After all, the sense of a proposition in religious and ethical speech is gained from the concrete, that is, socially embedded, form of life of the one who speaks.

Viewed from the perspective of individual ethics, in the judgment of many interpreters the exhortations of Heb 13 are lacking any recognizable plan. If we, however, take into consideration their group-ethical function, a clear purpose is revealed. This purpose is not inspired by pleasure in literary composition, to be sure, but by the deliberate intention to establish Christian community within the social world of the first century.

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[36] The adjective "customary" does not indicate any contrast with "topical" but emphasizes the conventional character of the exhortations. It is paraenetical convention that serves social habitualization and so it is of topical relevance to Christian communities in the making. For discussion, see WEISS, *Hebräer*, 72–74.

[37] On the social function of "line drawing" between right and wrong sides, see BRUCE J. MALINA, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (3d ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 27–30.

The *transitus* Heb 12:28–29 indicates the subject of the following chapter. In Heb 13, vv. l–5a then deal with the social stabilization of the community, while vv. 7–17, framed by the instruction on the "authority of the leaders," primarily regulate the organization of knowledge. The "inserted" and at-first-sight incoherent passage Heb 13:5b–6 defines Christian "courage" as the decision for the "right side." It is exactly this idea which is worked out in the cohortative vv. 13–14, in which the ethics of Hebrews is summarized from a theocentric point of view. Throughout twelve chapters the readers, repeatedly called to change their usual perspective, have been prepared for such a theocentric definition of Christian ethos. Now they learn in the closing paraenesis which everyday factors may work to ground and to secure the normative referential system of a Christian community model.

2.2.2. Social Stabilization (Heb 10:24–25a; 13:1–6)

(a) *Heb 10:24–25a:* There is only one explicit admonition prior to ch. 13, and it is programmatically set into the prelude of the *peroratio:*

> Let us have consideration for one another (κατανοῶμεν ἀλλήλους) with an aim of provoking love and good works (εἰς παροξυσμὸν ἀγάπης καὶ καλῶν ἔργων), not forsaking our own assembly (ἐπισυναγωγή), as is the custom of some, but encouraging (one another) (παρακαλοῦντες). (Heb 10:24–25a)

This exhortation aims at the community's cohesion: first, by means of mutual control ("take consideration for one another"), promoting ("provoking") a practice of *agape* that performs "services for the saints," and motivation of "good works" that may build up the community (cf. Heb 6:10);[38] secondly, by means of regular attendance at the community's worship, which is the only way of consolidating the cognitive system of a religious minority in the long run;[39] and thirdly, by means of the triad "consolation, support, admonition," which Hebrews lets us hear in the verb παρακαλέω (cf. Heb 3:13; 13:19, 22). In short, the author pleads for cohesion by means of assembling, practical building up of an in-group, and affirmation of a corresponding self-awareness. The Christian community (re-)establishes itself as a social reality.

What these verses present *in nuce* is explicated in Heb 13. Although it may seem as if the instructions do not follow a clear direction they are arranged most purposefully in three ways: they deal with modes of social obligation within the community; the several

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[38] The noun ἀγάπη is used in Hebrews only at 10:24 and 6:10, and in both cases the noun ἔργον refers to human action with a positive connotation.

[39] On the interdependence between loyal attendance at worship and *stabilitas fidei,* see GRÄSSER, *An die Hebräer,* 3:26–30.

ways of Christian practice they postulate seem to be threatened; and they complement each other so that the coherent shape of a socially efficient minority behavior is visible.

(b) *Heb 13:1*: "Let brotherly love (φιλαδελφία) remain." The opening verse presents the *cantus firmus* of the epistle's paraenetical catalog. The community regards itself as a fraternal association forming "fictive kinship."[40] Hence it provides the emotionally anchored solidarity, the conformity of interests, and those particular ethical rights and duties of mutual support which were obligatory family values in the Mediterranean society of the first century.[41] This self-definition, to be sure, is common Christian heritage, but by reflecting on the motif of the *syngeneia* of the faithful with their high priest (cf. Heb 2:10–18) Hebrews gives christological substantiation to it.

By "converting" to the "right side," Lucian of Samosata (ca. 120–180 CE) states, Christians become "brethren." How such a familial ethos marked the community's everyday life, Lucian satirically illustrates by telling the story of the charlatan Peregrinus, who has climbed the ladder fast among Christians and is eventually put in prison by the public authorities. Several exhortations of Heb 13, and most of all the reversal of significant values, are reflected and elucidated in this pagan observation of early Christian σπουδή (*Peregr.* 12–13; cf. Heb 4:11; 6:11).

> From the very break of day aged widows and orphan children could be seen waiting near the prison, while their officials even slept inside with him after bribing the guards. Then multifarious meals were brought in, and sacred books of theirs were read, and excellent Peregrinus – for he still went by this name – was called by them "the new Socrates." Indeed, people came even from the cities in Asia, sent by the Christians at their common expense, to succor and defend and encourage him (παραμυθησόμενοι). They show incredible speed whenever such public action is taken; in short, they lavish it all. So it was then in the case of Peregrinus; much money came to him from them by reason of his imprisonment, and he procured not a little revenue from it. The poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death (καταφρονοῦσιν; cf. Heb 12:2) and even willingly give themselves up to the authorities, most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living according to his laws (κατὰ τοὺς ἐκείνου νόμους βιῶσιν). Therefore they despise (καταφρονοῦσιν) all things indiscriminately and consider them common property, receiving such doctrines

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[40] See DESILVA, *Perseverance,* 485–486; on the biblical background, GEOFFREY W. GROGAN, "The Old Testament Concept of Solidarity in Hebrews," *TynBul* 49 (1998): 159–173.

[41] On the ideal and the reality of family in the Roman empire of the first century, see KEITH R. BRADLEY, *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); HALVOR MOXNES, ed., *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (London: Routledge, 1997); MALINA, *New Testament World,* 134–160.

traditionally without any definite evidence. So if any charlatan and trickster, able to profit by occasions, comes among them, he quickly acquires sudden wealth by imposing upon simple folk. (Harmon, LGL, with slight variations).

(c) *Heb 13:2*: "Do not forget hospitality, for through this some have inadvertently entertained angels." From φιλαδελφία the view turns to φιλαξενία. This basic attitude of urban communities met the demands of a most lively culture of traveling and communication that was characteristic of early Christianity, thereby advancing the Christians' empire-wide interconnection to a remarkable degree (cf. Rom 12:13; *Peregr.* 16). Alluding to scriptural, Jewish, and pagan narratives about the inadvertent accommodation of "divine guests" (e.g., Gen 18–19; Ovid, *Metam.* 8.620–724) the brief causal clause extends the familial relationship to the community of heaven:[42] those who are socially marginalized experience close solidarity and partake in the boundless family of faith.

(d) *Heb 13:3*: "Remember those who are in bonds, as if bound with them, and those who are ill-treated, as if you yourselves were in (their) body." The tendency to marginalize cognitive minorities or to put them under pressure to become assimilated may, if need be, assume the form of imprisonment or public violence (cf. Heb 11:36–38). Looking back on some persecution in the past, the passage Heb 10:32–34 provides the nearest comment on this admonition. The scene is similar to that drawn by Lucian: formerly the addressees have shown themselves as sharers with those who were imprisoned, and the seizure of their possessions they accepted "with joy." The stronger the pressure the out-group exerts, the closer must the solidarity of the in-group be.

(e) *Heb 13:4*: "Let marriage be esteemed (τίμιος) among all and let the marital bed be undefiled, for God judges fornicators and adulterers." Once more we will hardly do justice to the group-ethical train of thought if we interpret this appeal for the appreciation of marriage "among all" with regard to private morality only[43] or reduce its meaning to the history of ideas as being "a consequence of Jewish-Christian sexual radicalism."[44] Rather, what is at stake here, put forward by means of conventional language, is the insight that the *intimate* decision for living in marriage is of extensive *public* relevance.

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[42] For discussion, see GRÄSSER, *An die Hebräer*, 3:349–352. On the history of the motif, see DANIELA FLÜCKIGER-GUGGENHEIM, *Göttliche Gäste: Die Einkehr von Göttern und Heroen in der griechischen Mythologie* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1984); on the social value of hospitality, see BRUCE J. MALINA, "Hospitality," in *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (ed. John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina; 2d ed.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000), 115–118.

[43] So HARALD HEGERMANN, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (THKNT 16; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1988), 269 (sanctification); GRÄSSER, *An die Hebräer*, 3:353–357 ("private life").

[44] So KURT NIEDERWIMMER, *Askese und Martyrium: Über Ehe, Ehescheidung und Eheverzicht in den Anfängen des christlichen Glaubens* (FRLANT 113; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 162–163.

Matrimonial stability after the model of Jewish monogamy forms an essential condition for a community that differs in lifestyle from the dominant pagan culture and whose normative system is not endangered by the promiscuity of its members. Such a community may hand down its interpretative standards to the following generation without being directly influenced by the traditions of out-groups, and, not least, its appreciation of familial values in the "ecclesiola" of one's own household supports the familial self-affirmation of the community in general.

(f) *Heb 13:5a*: "Let your conduct be unmercenary and be content with what you have." As Lucian has shown in satirical exaggeration, it was a distinctive feature of an early Christian community that "all" was considered "common property." The moderation of the faithful and their consequent readiness to give financial support to their group, its economic system, and its social network have often been named among those factors that made the Christian model of life an attractive one in the Mediterranean society of the first centuries.[45] Nevertheless, the experience of "up and out" was a most serious problem to the third generation: wherever the church lives at the bottom of contemporary culture, those who climb up the ladder in society are in danger of leaving the church. Therefore this admonition is not aimed at individual modesty only but at the establishment of a community that proves itself socially viable and ready for competition.

(g) *Heb 13:5b–6*: While the exhortations are designed to establish the conditions required to strengthen the social plausibility of the symbolic universe in which the Christian minority lived, the causal clauses look loosely affixed and lack, as it seems, any plan: an allusion to possible experience of the transcendent world (v. 2b); an appeal to self-consciousness (cf. v. 3b); a fierce warning of judgment (v. 4b). The motive the author names at the close, however, unifies what has been said before: God is unswervingly on the side of those who believe in him and proves himself the only normative court, so that in comparison with him any human opinion turns out to be of limited importance. It is this theological self-affirmation that gives courage to Christians to show indifference to the majority opinion in the dominant culture:

> For he himself has said, "I will not abandon you, nor will I forsake you" [Deut 31:6, 8]. So we should take courage and say, "The Lord is my helper, and I shall not fear; what will any human being do to me?" [Ps 117:6 LXX] (Heb 13:5b–6).

2.2.3. Organization of Knowledge (Heb 13:7–17)

(a) *Heb 13:7, 17 (cf. Heb 13:18, 24)*: Early Christian communities were essentially places for imparting religious knowledge. This had an attractive effect on those who had been

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[45] See DOUGLAS E. OAKMAN, "Self-Sufficiency," in *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (ed. John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina; 2d ed.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000) 181–183.

socialized in pagan culture, for neither the established nor the popular religions provided any social or ethical knowledge that might give direction in times of growing confusion.[46]

Thus the significance of the ἡγούμενοι[47] is intelligible. The framework of the paraenetical catalog that treats of the Christian stock of knowledge presents them as bearers of cognitive competence and moral authority. Acceptance of a new code of behavior depends fundamentally on the reference-persons whom the subjects of a social group allow to determine binding standards of orientation. The role of such "significant others" (George H. Mead) in the process of second socialization grows even more important where one's whole perception of reality undergoes a religious transformation.

Verse 7 calls for *anamnesis* that may establish tradition and for *mimesis* that may stabilize values by imitating those leaders of the founding generation who have laid down the foundations of Christian self-definition. It emphasizes their competence in the field of faith, in terms of how they proclaimed the word of salvation or accepted its consequences in an exemplary manner (ἀναστροφή).[48] Verse 17 directly stratifies the community, referring to "obedience" and "subordination" based on an ethics of responsibility. Accountable to God for those entrusted to them, the leaders represent the one who is the "significant other" per se. Verse 18 strengthens the author's own claim to significance by alluding to his exemplary and attractive manner of conduct (ἀναστρέφεσθαι); v. 24 links the author and the body of leaders. The personal constellation arranged in this way secures the form of interaction that is necessary for the affirmation of knowledge and values.

(b) *Heb 13:8–10*: Starting with Christ as the reference-person with regard to Christian continuity and identity (v. 8), the *auctor ad Hebraeos* warns the addressees in a rather general way against the temptation of being carried off "by diverse and strange teachings." He contrasts the Christian treasure, the "altar" as the cultic symbol of immediate access to God, with the useless foods of earthbound worship (vv. 9–10).[49] Only the reality of salvation that may be reached in the Christian community will give entrance into the divine counter-world. Indeed, "the altar," that is to say, a coherent doctrine developed from the christological center, was of no little importance to the attractiveness of early Christianity. Unlike the competing cults, which seldom got beyond a few

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[46] See JOCHEN BLEICKEN, *Verfassungs- und Sozialgeschichte des Römischen Kaiserreiches* (vol. 2; 3d ed.; Paderborn: Schöningh, 1994), 118–121.

[47] On this noun, see LAUB, *Bekenntnis und Auslegung,* 47–50; ERICH GRÄSSER, "Die Gemeindevorsteher im Hebräerbrief," in *Aufbruch und Verheissung,* 213–230.

[48] For discussion, see ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews,* 391–392; GRÄSSER, *An die Hebräer,* 3:367–370.

[49] For discussion, see ATTRIDGE, *Hebrews,* 393–397; GRÄSSER, *An die Hebräer,* 3:372–382; MARIE E. ISAACS, "Hebrews 13.9–16 Revisited," *NTS* 43 (1997): 268–284 esp. 273–284.

speculations, Christian theology, deeply rooted in religious practice, was able to elaborate a symbolic world that might be experienced as home of the homeless.[50]

(c) *Heb 13:11–14*: Inspired by the axiomatic thinking of platonizing metaphysics, the cultic typology of Hebrews localizes this homeland "outside the camp."[51] Here we are entering the center of the epistle's paraenesis. Four times ἐξ- designates the place of Jesus and his sacrificial saving death, the basic movement of those who follow him, and, indirectly, the place of the city which is to come. The entrance into the divine presence, the imitation of Christ, and the search for the eternal homeland assume the form of an exodus from urban Roman culture (ἐξερχώμεθα), thereby leading to the social stigmatization of the "wandering people" (τὸν ὀνειδισμὸν αὐτοῦ φέροντες). The fate of those who find themselves marginalized reveals their christological and ecclesiological status: the community is παροικία amidst the world. The history of this idea may scarcely be overestimated.[52] The call for social exodus shows an illuminating parallel to the appeal of John the Seer (Rev 18:4), who urges the people of God to come out from the sinful city (εξέλθατε).[53] Both authors plead for an attitude that refuses any integration into the dominant culture. The *auctor ad Hebraeos,* however, gives this refusal the less aggressive note of a hopeful, worshiping *eisodos* into the sacred space of Christ's counter-world (ἐξερχώμεθα πρὸς αὐτόν!).

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[50] See BLEICKEN, Verfassungs- und Sozialgeschichte, 176–177.

[51] On the metaphysical aspects here, see JAMES W. THOMPSON, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (CBQMS 13; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1982), 141–151.

[52] On the motif of "wandering between the worlds," see ERICH GRÄSSER, "'Wir haben hier keine bleibende Stadt' (Hebr 13,14): Erwägungen zur christlichen Existenz zwischen den Zeiten," in *Aufbruch und Verheissung*, 251–264; KURT NIEDERWIMMER, "Vom Glauben der Pilger: Erwägungen zu Hebr 11,8–10 und 13–16," in *Zur Aktualität des Alten Testaments: Festschrift für Georg Sauer zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Siegfried Kreuzer and Kurt Lüthi; Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1992), 121–131; with special emphasis on the *polis*, MICHAEL THEOBALD, "'Wir haben hier keine bleibende Stadt, sondern suchen die zukünftige' (Hebr 13,14). Die Stadt als Ort der frühen christlichen Gemeinde," *TGl* 78 (1988): 16–40.

[53] In the view of HANS-JOSEF KLAUCK ("Das Sendschreiben nach Pergamon und der Kaiserkult in der Johannesoffenbarung," in idem, *Alte Welt und neuer Glaube: Beiträge zur Religionsgeschichte, Forschungsgeschichte und Theologe des Neuen Testaments* [NTOA 29; Freiburg i. Ue.: Universitätsverlag and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994], 115–143, here 137–141), this appeal summarizes the purpose of Revelation; see KNUT BACKHAUS, "Die Vision vom ganz Anderen: Geschichtlicher Ort und theologische Mitte der Johannes-Offenbarung," in *Theologie als Vision: Studien zur Johannes-Offenbarung* (ed. Knut Backhaus; SBS 191; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2001), 10–53, here 25–30. Insightfully, DESILVA, Despising Shame, 315–317: "Despite its eloquence, its cultured, literary Greek, Hebrews is less interested in making a place for Christianity within Greco-Roman society than Luke or even Paul." It is hard to see how Sanders (*Ethics in the New Testament*, 110) might give reasons from the text for his judgment that the ethics of Hebrews is congruent with "good citizenship." Even less convincing is the suggestion by RICHARD W. JOHNSON (*Going Outside the Camp: The Sociological Function of the Levitical Critique in the Epistle to the Hebrews* [JSNTSup 209; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], 146–153) that Hebrews aims at "world mission."

(d) *Heb 13:15–16*: It is in this sense that the sacrificial imagery for ethical behavior in the frame of the double instruction v. 15a and v. 16b returns to the basic interpretative system that underlies the central part of Hebrews. The calling for prayers of praise and confession, beneficence and fellowship (vv. 15b–16a) once again aims at both the cognitive and the practical construction of Christian reality. Rooted in God's prior activity, such realization is considered to be thankful re-action (cf. Heb 12:28).[54] The common world of early Christians – their worshiping, their self-awareness as described in the *homologia,* their solidarity under pressure, and their practical *koinonia* in everyday life – takes part in the great drama between heaven and earth performed by the Son and high priest Jesus Christ. While the dominant culture will remain captured in a self-referential system, what opens above the marginalized existence of the undistinguished Christian minority is the heavenly reality. And it is at this very point where the imperative is literally rooted in the indicative: Δι' αὐτοῦ ...

3. Sociological Considerations

3.1. Legitimation of the Christian Model

The interpretation of the paraenetical passages of Hebrews allows us to give an answer to our opening questions:

Ad (1): The general theological conception of Hebrews legitimates the referential system that safeguards and determines both the perception of reality and the self-understanding of the community. The ethical exhortations aim at the segmentation of Christian identity by providing the basic social conditions for this referential system. So the general theological conception as well as the particular ethical instructions serve the same purpose, i.e., the systematic and practical conceptualization of an interpretative sphere that protects the self-definition of the community from the cognitive majority and the pressure of cultural assimilation and enables the individual to internalize specifically Christian standards of practice.

Ad (2): The ethical exhortations of Hebrews recommend the efficient self-organization of an in-group in a crisis of interpretation and motivation produced by the experience of being socially stigmatized. What is required in this liminal phase between society and community is first of all a concentration upon the internal realm of one's own cognitive group.[55] Marginalization gains a dignity of its own by being regarded as entrance into

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[54] On thankfulness as a basic feature of the patron-client relationship in the Mediterranean society of the first century, see DESILVA, *Perseverance*, 474–476.

[55] See POPKES, *Paränese*, 42–44.

God's sacred space so that a symbolic universe may be established that no longer depends on what is plausible in the view of the dominant culture.

So, to ask Brecht's question again, what is changed by the ethics of Hebrews? It is the referential system, the social self-definition, and the practical horizon of faith. In short, the faithful are "changed." "Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living according to his laws." Let us consider Lucian's satirical comment from the point of view of the sociology of knowledge.[56]

The interpretation above has revealed how Hebrews works out structures of legitimation in order to establish and safeguard an autonomous sub-universe of both referential and social interrelationships that provide the individual Christians with an order of meaning. It is this cognitive, normative, and emotional orientation that is of ethical relevance, either directly in the biographical process of the second socialization or indirectly by means of habitualization and institutionalization.[57] It goes without saying that Hebrews relativizes the significant values of the dominant culture in this way so that in the view of those responsible for the definition of society this different sub-universe will be separationist and esoteric.

This explains why the reasons Hebrews puts forward in support of the ethical exhortations seem to be loosely and unsystematically connected. The author is less concerned to give ethics a logically coherent foundation than to give those who are going to practice the ethics an inward homeland secured by multiple reference: harsh sanction[58] against conversion to the competing system, arousing both *metus* and *spes* in order to give

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[56] For the following reflections, see PETER L. BERGER and THOMAS LUCKMANN, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1991), esp. 97–146, 157–166. This treatise may in part be read as a sociological comment on the ethics of Hebrews. Therefore the recent monograph by SALEVAO (*Legitimation*, esp. 170–249) enters a very important field, though I seriously doubt if it takes the right way by reaffirming the classical relapse theory. For critical discussion of the sociology of knowledge approach, see ibid., 11–94; ATTRIDGE, "Paraenesis," 217–221 (reserved); DESILVA, *Perseverance*, 7–16; recently, with a problematic interpretative framework, JOHNSON, *Going Outside the Camp;* in general, LEO G. PERDUE, "The Social Character of Paraenesis and Paraenetic Literature," *Semeia* 50 (1990): 5–39.

[57] Legitimation and socialization should not be considered as different functions of paraenesis. Rather, the difference lies in the point of view: legitimation provides the relevant social segment with a conceptual machinery of objective reality; and (second) socialization arranges the subjective internalization of this reality and the role-specific activity it demands. On the social setting of the community of Hebrews, see the important insights of CRAIG R. KOESTER, *Hebrews* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 64–79.

[58] The violence of this defensive procedure seems to be proportional to the seriousness with which the threat caused by the alternative reality was felt; cf. BERGER and LUCKMANN, *Social Construction*, 104–105, 175–176.

emotional support to social boundaries (cf. Heb 6:4–8 and 6:9; 10:26–31 and 10:39);[59] allusions to the experience of transcendence and group solidarity; references to scripture; historical insights and moral examples; imagery of athletics and battle. The symbolic world of the theological exposition and the paraenetically stimulated practice prove to be interdependent: Practice that seems to be trivial at first sight turns out to be profound from the perspective of eternity; social functions that serve group maintenance obtain points of orientation and motivation; the "significant others" substantiate and limit their claims in view of the "Son and high priest" or God as the "significant other" per se; the individual death may be integrated within a meaningful reality (cf. Heb 2:15); history is ordered in a cohesive unity that includes the cognitive "ancestors," present collective experience, and the hoped-for reality of the generation that is to come, so that the individual may transcend the finitude of isolated existence (cf. Heb 11:1–12:2); "an inferior ontological status, and thereby a not-to-be-taken-seriously cognitive status,"[60] is assigned to competitive definitions of reality (cf. e.g., Heb 7:11–28; 8:1–13). Religious "alternation"[61] as a comprehensive form of second socialization rebounds on the individual's home reality by reshaping familial ethos and rearranges knowledge of world and history within the new system of reference (cf. Heb 5:11–6:3).[62] This extensive counter-definition of reality is summed up in the way Hebrews reorganizes the ethical patterns of social acceptance.

3.2. Transformation of Social Acceptance

Individuals as well as groups that are, by religious conversion, widely disconnected from the dominant plausibility structure will develop their own value system, which may be considered as an elaborate counter-world of the home reality that has been abandoned. From an external point of view, those values may seem subversive, but within the community they strengthen both self-awareness and immunity to social ostracism and to the rejection of their own identity concept by the dominant culture.

Lucian *(Peregr. 12–13)* remarks that having been thrown into prison gave Peregrinus "no little reputation" (οὐ μικρὸν αὐτῷ ἀξίωμα περιεποίησεν), while the Christians

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[59] On the problem of sin, which is not systematically developed in Hebrews, see LÖHR, *Umkehr und Sünde,* 11–135; on the "impossibility of second penitence" see ibid., 215–235; from a sociological point of view, SALEVAO, *Legitimation,* 250–338.

[60] BERGER and LUCKMANN, *Social Construction,* 132.

[61] See BERGER and LUCKMANN, *Social Construction,* 176–182.

[62] On the instruction presupposed in Heb 5:11–6:3, see THOMPSON, *Beginnings,* 17–40; LÖHR, *Umkehr und Sünde,* 164–187; WILHELM THÜSING, "'Milch' und 'feste Speise' (1Kor 3,1f und Hebr 5,11–6,3): Elementarkatechese und theologische Vertiefung in neutestamentlicher Sicht," in *Studien,* 23–56.

"despised" property and death (καταφρονέω). This observation draws our attention to a basic revaluation of ἀξίωμα that is mirrored in the ethics of Hebrews. Fixing public worth and social acceptance, the pivotal values "honor" and "shame" are the core determinants in the group life of Mediterranean culture in the first century.[63] It is this value system that Hebrews consistently redefines.[64]

Thus the epistle focuses on the minority status of Christians. In previous persecution they were "made a public spectacle through reproaches and afflictions" (ὀνειδισμοῖς τε καὶ θλίψεσιν θεατριζόμενοι) because of their "illumination" (φωτισθέντες) or they shared the fate of those who were treated in this way (Heb 10:32–33). "Shame" proves to be an identity marker of being a Christian: Moses, a prototype of faith, already deemed the "shame of Christ" to be "wealth greater than the treasures of Egypt," therefore leaving the land of exile like one seeing Him who is unseen (Heb 11:24–27). The call for social exodus at Heb 13:13–14 is specified by a participle that depicts the Christians bearing the "shame" of Jesus (τὸν ὀνειδισμὸν αὐτοῦ φέροντες), because with him they find both the *polis* that remains and their real "civic pride." The initiator and perfecter of faith, Christ, is the example of being a Christian because he has endured the cross despising (καταφρονέω) shame and disregarding all the hostility to himself "on the part of sinners" (cf. Heb 12:2–3).

It is at this point that Hebrews refers to the totally different, viz. heavenly, system of values: all the splendor of power is transposed to the cross, which has to all appearances been the place of ultimate humiliation.[65] The *mors turpissima crucis* is revealed as an act of enthronement to the right hand of God, and here the central passages present Jesus to the readers (Heb 1:3, 8; 4:16; 8:1; 10:12–13) as being superior to the angelic retinue (Heb 1:5–14) and crowned with glory (δόξα) and honor (τιμή) (Heb 2:7, 9; cf. 3:3; 5:4–5; 13:21).

When those who belong to him follow him, they will obtain their own *doxa* (Heb 2:10), for he will not be ashamed (ἐπαισχύνεται) to call them "brethren" (Heb 2:11), thereby changing them into "partakers of a heavenly calling" (Heb 3:1).

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[63] See DAVID A. DESILVA, *The Hope of Glory: Honor Discourse and New Testament Interpretation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999); JOSEPH PLEVNIK, "Honor/ Shame," in *Social Values,* 106–115; MALINA, *New Testament World,* 27–57; a more (and probably too) skeptical view is taken by F. GERALD DOWNING, "'Honor' among Exegetes," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 53–73.

[64] For details, see the instructive monograph by DESILVA, *Despising Shame,* esp. 145– 208; summarized in DAVID A. DESILVA, "Despising Shame: A Cultural-Anthropological Investigation of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *JBL* 113 (1994): 439–461.

[65] See OTTO KUSS, "Der theologische Grundgedanke des Hebräerbriefes: Zur Deutung des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament," in idem, *Auslegung und Verkündigung* (vol. 1; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1963), 281–328, here 305–320.

Thus Hebrews redefines the standards that provide social acknowledgement (ἀξίωμα) and so transforms the values that give orientation to ethical practice. The "court of reputation"[66] for those who "approach" is no longer the plausibility structure of the urban majority but God as the founder of the better or heavenly homeland (cf. Heb 11:8–16).

In ironical reversal of the conventional standards, God is not ashamed (ἐπαισχύνεται) to be called the God of those who believe in him (Heb 11:16), and the world is not worthy of those it considers to be marginal (Heb 11:38). Public opinion loses any relevance as an ethical court, because the only court Christians allow is that of heaven (cf. Heb 13:5b–6). It is in this light that the concentration on God's reward, which is a characteristic of Hebrews and which is so often criticized,[67] should be seen: Hebrews does not aim at human reward, but acknowledgement *sub specie aeterni*.[68] It is not the Christians who are contemptible, but their shame (cf. Heb 12:2).

> The counter-definition of reality and the resultant devaluation of public opinion may find special support in the Platonic way of thought shared by Hebrews (cf. Plato, *Crito* 44c; 46c–47d; *Gorg.* 526d–527e).[69] There is an illuminating parallel in the first contact between Platonizing philosophy and Roman *pietas* in the *Somnium Scipionis* dealing with the very subject of true reward. Glory among people *(ista hominum gloria)*, Scipio Africanus maior tells his grandson from his eternal point of view, is of little value compared to infinity: "If you will only look on high and contemplate this eternal home and resting place, you will no longer attend to the gossip of the vulgar herd or put your trust in human rewards for your exploits. Virtue herself, by her own charms, should lead you on to true glory *(ad verum decus)*. Let what others say of you be their own concern; whatever it is, they will say it in any case. But all their talk is limited to those narrow regions which you look upon, nor will any man's reputation endure very long, for what men say dies with them and is blotted out with the forgetfulness of posterity." To this Aemilianus responds: "If indeed a path to heaven *(limes ad caeli aditum)*, as it were, is open to those who have served their country well,

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[66] For this term, see JULIAN PITT-RIVERS, "Honour and Social Status," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (ed. John G. Peristiany; London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 19–77, here 21–39, esp. 27; for the relevance of this term to Hebrews in detail, see DESILVA, *Despising Shame,* 276–313.

[67] VÖLKL, *Christ und Welt,* 358–359; HERBERT BRAUN, "Die Gewinnung der Gewissheit in dem Hebräerbrief," *TLZ* 96 (1971): 321–330, here 322–323, 330; SCHULZ, *Neutestamentliche Ethik,* 633–635; SCHRAGE, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments,* 326–327.

[68] A sociological approach may show that the motif of reward has a function of its own in the Roman patron-client relationship; see in detail DESILVA, *Despising Shame,* 209–275, 304–307; DESILVA, *Perseverance,* 59–64.

[69] See DESILVA, *Despising Shame,* 82–86, 320.

henceforth I will redouble my efforts, spurred on by so splendid a reward *(tanto praemio exposito)*!" (Cicero, *Resp.* 6:23/25–6:24/26; Keyes, LCL).[70]

Faith according to Hebrews is Christian loyalty towards this invisible universe, a loyalty based on the "things unseen" that have been proved (Heb 11:1). The internalized standard this "court of reputation" applies is the Christian's συνείδησις (Heb 9:9, 14; 10:2, 22; 13:18).[71] It is conscience that marks the inner commitment to the value system once accepted; "purified" and "perfected," it leads the individual as well as the community into God's immediate presence.[72] It is not a moral change only that is at stake here, but the comprehensive orientation of mind, heart, and practice according to God's sanctity, a fundamental renewal within the magnetic field of a heaven that has been opened by Christ, although under the weighty conditions of everyday fidelity.[73] The ethics of Hebrews turns the religious question into a question of life, a point of honor, and a matter for conscience.

Peter L. Berger entitled his classic treatise on the sociology of religious knowledge *A Rumor of Angels.* He was inspired by a verse from the final paraenesis of Hebrews, which has so often been a subject of exegetical criticism: "Do not forget hospitality, for through this some have inadvertently entertained angels" (Heb 13:2).[74] Berger shows that the consciousness of secularism, as any other plausibility structure, is no absolute taken-for-granted certitude. The consistent relativizers will in the end of all relativizing relativize

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[70] For interpretation, see KARL BÜCHNER, *M. Tullius Cicero: De re publica: Kommentar* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1984), 435–508, esp. 484–502; on our passage also MICHAEL VON ALBRECHT, *Meister römischer Prosa von Cato bis Apuleius* (2d ed.; Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1983), 127–137.

[71] On συνείδησις in Hebrews, see GRÄSSER, *An die Hebräer*, 2:136–139; DESILVA, *Perseverance*, 300–301; on conscience being an inward court in Philo, see WALTHER VÖLKER, *Fortschritt und Vollendung bei Philo von Alexandrien: Eine Studie zur Geschichte der Frömmigkeit* (TU 49/1; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1938), 95–105; CHRISTIAN MAURER, "σύνοιδα, συνείδησις," *TWNT* 7 (1964): 897–918, here 910–912; DAVID WINSTON, "Philo's Ethical Theory," *ANRW* 21.1 (1984): 372–416, here 389–391.

[72] On the complex term τελείωσις, which must not be reduced to a concept of moral development, see DAVID PETERSON, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the "Epistle to the Hebrews"* (SNTSMS 47; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), esp. 126–167; SCHOLER, *Proleptic Priests,* 185–200; LÖHR, *Umkehr und Sünde,* 276–285; DESILVA, *Perseverance,* 194–204. On perfection in Philo, see VÖLKER, *Fortschritt und Vollendung,* esp. 318–350; for comparison with Hebrews, see CHARLES E. CARLSTON, "The Vocabulary of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews," in *Unity and Diversity in Hew Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd* (ed. Robert A. Guelich; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 133–160.

[73] See also HORST NITSCHKE, "Das Ethos des wandernden Gottesvolks: Erwägungen zu Hebr. 13 und zu den Möglichkeiten evangelischer Ethik," *MPTh* 46 (1957): 179–183, esp. 179–180. A sensitive observation is contributed by THOMAS G. LONG, "Bold in the Presence of God," *Int* 52 (1998): 53–69, here 63: "Every event in the visible world, every experience, every seemingly tangible reality is attached to a cord of words that leads behind the curtain, and only there, in what cannot be seen, is the truth. That is why 'we must pay greater attention to what we have heard…' (2:1)."

[74] PETER L. BERGER, *A Rumor of Angels: Modem Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 95.

their own thinking. The way, therefore, is open to set out to explore those rumors of angels and to follow them up to their source.

In Berger's view, this endeavor will start with basic human experience that leads to an inductive theology revealing "in, with, and under" religious projection the crucial dimension of transcendence. Wherever the construction of reality is oriented in the light of a symbolic universe that is not a room closed to the world outside but has open windows for the realization of transcendence, everyday life will burst its limits and its truly "other" reality will be rediscovered. The moral challenge of the moment is not dispelled in this way. On the contrary, each human gesture in the everyday dramas of life, however meaningless it may seem, becomes infinitely meaningful and gains an immeasurable ethical relevance. In the midst of human affairs we "entertain angels," keepers of transcendence in a disenchanted world. The theological mountain is in labor – and what is born is an ethical universe.

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