CONFLICTING CONSTRUCTIONS OF DIVINE PRESENCE IN THE PRIESTLY TABERNACLE

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The sign is born at the same time as imagination and memory, at the same moment when it is demanded by the absence of the object for present perception.

It has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside it*. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality ... the totality *has its center elsewhere* ... The concept of centered structure ... is contradictorily coherent. And as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire.

—Jacques Derrida

Structuralists have taught us that any sign has meaning only within a larger sign system. Hence, it is entirely possible that one signifier may refer to opposing signifieds in different contexts. If those contexts overlap, however, so that the sign means itself and its opposite in a single complex system, the observations of poststructuralists must come to the fore; when the sign opposes itself, its self erasure points towards some larger absence. A case in point is evident through the analysis of one sign, the priestly tabernacle, in two overlapping contexts, the Torah and the Tanakh.

Both priestly and nonpriestly texts in the Pentateuch describe a tent in which the divine manifests itself. These tents differ, however, and thus the Torah presents conflicting depictions of the divine presence during the wilderness period. According to the priestly authors, the divine presence or הֵרָדָה entered and subsequently resided in what P variously calls the “tabernacle” (טֵבֶן).
which simply means “dwelling”), the “tent of meeting” (בָּאֵר הַמִּשְׁמָרָה) or “tent of the pact” (בָּאֵר הַרְשִׁיָּה). Num. 9:15-23 stress that the cloud and fire indicating the immediate presence of God was always located in or above this tabernacle. Thus, the priestly tabernacle was the site of an unceasing and ever-accessible theophany. Behind the curtains of the holy of holies stood the ark and its cover, which served as God’s footstool and throne respectively, above, or perhaps within, the tabernacle was the שֹׁפֶה itself, which was usually hidden from sight by the עַל or cloud. It was at (or from) the tabernacle that God’s presence would become manifest at times of crisis (see Num. 14:20; 16:19; 17:7; 20:6). Priestly literature repeatedly highlights the tabernacle’s centrality. On a

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4 The precise location from which the שֹׁפֶה emerged (that is, the precise spot where the שֹׁפֶה generally resides) is not made fully clear. The שֹׁפֶה may have emerged from within the Holy of Holies, into which it presumably had moved after the dedication ceremony for the tabernacle had been completed. This interpretation may be indicated by Lev. 16:2, 13, and cf. the closely related tradition in Ezek. 10:4, where the שֹׁפֶה was located within the Holy of Holies; so Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies (CB[OT] 18; Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1982), p. 89, and Moshe Weinfeld, שֹׁפֶה, kibůḏ, “kibőḏ,” in C. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry (eds.), Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-1997), vol. 7, p. 32. Alternatively, the שֹׁפֶה may have been located atop the tabernacle, where it was generally hidden from sight by the עַל, becoming brighter at times of crisis so that it was visible to all the people through the cloud; so Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16, pp. 588-90. David Frankel argues that older priestly traditions located the שֹׁפֶה within the sanctuary, where it was not visible to the people; thus the Holy of Holies was Yhwh’s throne room. Later priestly documents, he argues, locate the שֹׁפֶה above the tabernacle, where it was visible to the whole nation; thus, for the later priestly tradents the tabernacle was a throne, not a throne room. See his article, “Two Priestly Conceptions of Guidance in the Wilderness,” JSOT 81 (1998), pp. 31-37. His reading is intriguing, but his reasoning seems based on a questionable conflation of the שֹׁפֶה and the עַל (see especially his remarks on p. 32), against which see Mettinger, p. 89, and Frank Moore Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 166-67.
literal level, the tabernacle was located in the midpoint of the Israelite camp, as P’s elaborate map in Numbers 2 makes clear. More significantly, the tabernacle plays a principal role in the cosmos. For P, creation was not quite complete until the tabernacle was built. In ancient Near Eastern cosmogenies (of which the priestly creation account in Gen. 1:1–2:4a is a typical example) the apogee of creation is the construction of a sanctuary for the creator god, but in P this apogee is deferred to Exodus 39–40, which describe the erection of the tabernacle. The extensive verbal parallels between Gen. 1:1–2:4a and Exodus 39–40 (which several scholars have noted) form an inclusio, indicating that world-creation and tabernacle-construction belong to a single narrative that culminates in the latter.

Two inaugural ceremonies for the tabernacle also attest to its pivotal position in priestly literature. The first was an eight-day dedication service, described in Exodus 40–Leviticus 10, during which the tabernacle was completed; the divine presence entered it; its altar was purified; and its priesthood was installed. For P, this ceremony constitutes the highlight of all Israeliite history, even more than the exodus from Egypt or the event at Sinai. Indeed,

5 For descriptions of these parallels, see M.D. (Umberto) Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1944), pp. 333-34, 38 (Heb.); Martin Buber, “People Today and the Jewish Bible,” in Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, Scripture and Translation (trans. Lawrence Rosenwald with Everett Fox; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 18-19; Franz Rosenzweig, “Scripture and Luther,” in Buber and Rosenzweig, Scripture and Translation, p. 62; Erhard Blum, Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990), pp. 306-11; and especially Moshe Weinfeld, “Sabbath, Temple Building, and the Enthronement of the Lord,” Beth Mikra 69 (1977), pp. 188-93 (Heb.). Weinfeld also cites midrashim that point out these parallels (pp. 188-90 n. 4, and see also Blum, p. 310 nn. 83-85), and he emphasizes the ancient Near Eastern background to this connection between creation and sanctuary. Cf. also A.J. Heschel, The Sabbath (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1951), pp. 9-10, 96.


Erhard Blum points out, P states quite clearly in Exod. 29:36 that the goal of the liberation from slavery was none other than God’s arrival to dwell among Israel, which is to say, the completion of the tabernacle. The second ceremony was a highly orchestrated twelve-day service, described in Numbers 7, during which each of the twelve tribes brought identical gifts to the tabernacle. According to P, the tabernacle is also the place from which God’s law code is revealed (Lev. 1:1). Further, it serves as the single legitimate place of regular worship for Israelites in the desert; not only does God approach Israel there, but Israel approaches God as well. In short, the priestly tabernacle is a sacred center, the capstone of the universe; and there God is constantly and reliably manifest.

The conception of divine presence in the E collection of documents is wholly different. E’s “tent of meeting” (הֵיכָל הָעֵד—never “tabernacle” and never “tent of the pact”) was located outside the Israelites’ camp, indeed at some distance from it, as Exod. 33:7 makes clear. God did not dwell there but popped in on appropriate occasions to reveal himself to Moses or other Israelites; see Exod. 33:9-11a; Num. 11:16-17, 24b-30; and Num. 12:5-10. The wording of Num. 12:9-10 is especially important, since these verses narrate the departure of the presence from the tent. Rather than


9 This ceremony may have occurred immediately after the eight-day dedication, in which case the whole complex of inauguration ceremonies was a grand event lasting twenty days (so Milgrom, *Leviticus I-16*, p. 693). But the exact date of this ceremony is not clear. The words יָדוּצְתָא אֲמַלְעֲהָא יָדוּצְתָא הָעֵד אֶלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל in Num. 7:1 may simply mean “when Moses finished establishing the tabernacle,” not “on the day Moses ...” (so Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers* [JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989], p. 364).


11 I need not enter into the vexing question of the nature of E and the extent to which it can be separated from other non P material; suffice it to say that the passages under discussion (Exod. 33:7-11; Num. 11:16-17; Num. 12, as well as Deut. 31:13-15, which is not as relevant to my remarks) share a consistent view of the object in question, whatever their relationship to other E or JE or non P or KD passages may be. On the provenance of Exod. 33:7-11, see the still-useful summaries of the issue in J. Carpenter and G. Harford-Battersby, *The Hexateuch According to the Revised Version* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1900), vol. 2, p. 135, and S.R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), pp. 358-59.
being surrounded by Israel, this tent was isolated. Only one person, Joshua, resided there as a caretaker (Exod. 33:11b). Thus E does not portray God as permanently immanent; and even when the presence manifested itself, it did so outside the Israelite camp. (On a single occasion the divine spirit—and even then not the pillar of cloud denoting the actual Presence—worked within the camp itself. This event became a cause of scandal; see Num. 11:26-29.) E’s tent contains no ark and no divine throne.

The contrast between the priestly and elohistic views of the tent becomes especially clear in their use of the word יְהִי, which refers to the cloud that indicates the presence of God. In E texts (Exod. 33:9; Num. 11:25; 12:5), the יְהִי is the subject of the verb יָרָד (descend)—that is, it comes and goes. Priestly texts emphasize that the יְהִי (by day) and the fire (by night) were always present at the tent, rising up only when Yhwh wished to indicate that the Israelites should break their camp and move to a new location (Exod. 40:36-38 and Num. 9:15-23). In Num. 9:16 P stresses that from the time the יְהִי first covered the tent, the יְהִי never moved from there. The insistent tone of Num. 9:15-23 on this point may be a priestly response to the alternate viewpoint found in E.

The P and E tents exemplify two different religious ideologies described by the historian of religion, J.Z. Smith, in his revision of Mircea Eliade’s grand theory of archaic and post-archaic religions. A locative or centripetal view of the universe underscores

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13 See Haran, Temples, pp. 263-65.

14 While older priestly literature (i.e., priestly texts belong to PT) seem to be completely unaware of other Pentateuchal documents (cf. Schwartz, “Priestly School,” in Fox, pp. 103-34), the priestly texts whose use of יְהִי I cite here belong to the later stratum of priestly literature, HS, which does recognize and react to other documents. My source-critical analysis and my use of the terms HS and PT as components of P follows Israel Knohl, The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). On the late date of Num. 9:15-23, see also Frankel, “Two Priestly Conceptions of Guidance,” p. 36.

15 See especially Smith’s essays collected in Map Is Not Territory (Leiden: Brill, 1978); the following summary relies especially on his comments in “The Wobbling Pivot,” pp. 101-102, and “Map is Not Territory,” pp. 292-93, 308. Smith’s category of the locative is nearly identical with Eliade’s archaic ideology of center, but Smith emphasizes that these two viewpoints are not simply early and late, ancient and modern. Rather, each may be available even within a single culture (see especially p. 101).
and celebrates that which is primeval and central. All times and places have value or even reality only insofar as they relate to, borrow from, duplicate, imitate, or acknowledge the moment of creation or the axis that connects heaven and earth, which may be a temple or a sacred mountain and is likely to be both. Such a mentality expresses an ideology of immanence, for it is based on the conviction that the divine irrupts into space and time—more precisely, into specific places and at specific times. An alternative view of the universe emphasizes not the center but the periphery, not immanence but transcendence (for no place fully comprehends the divine); it recognizes the reality, the unavoidability, and even the value of reversal, liminality, and chaos. Smith terms this a utopian viewpoint in the basic sense of the word: lacking place.

The tents described by P and E conform to Smith’s categories in a strikingly clear fashion. The P tabernacle presents a classic example of Smith’s locative model: God is immanent at a sacred center, whose construction effected the recurrence—in fact, the climax—of *illo tempore*, the moment in which the world came into being. E’s tent outside the camp, on the other hand, represents a utopian worldview. It locates religious value in the periphery rather than the center and endorses a constrained model of immanence. Utopian cultures, Smith explains, “express a more ‘open’ view ... in which beings are called upon to challenge their limits, break them, or create new possibilities.”

This description is especially relevant to Num. 11:26-29. In those verses E articulates an ideal view of prophecy, according to which all Israelites, regardless of geographic or social location, will break into prophetic ecstasy—a possibility that threatens the established powers and those who expect to inherit them (*viz.*, Joshua).

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16 Smith describes the locative viewpoint as “centrifugal” in “Wobbling,” p. 101, but, so far as I can tell, he meant centripetal when he wrote centrifugal and vice versa.


18 On the tension between the priestly tabernacle and the tent of meeting in E texts, see also Israel Knohl, “Two Aspects of the ‘Tent of Meeting,’” in M. Cogan, B. Eichler, and J. Tigay (eds.), *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), pp. 73-79. Knohl connects the P tabernacle to Eliade’s ideology of sacred center (on which Smith’s locative model is based), and he connects the E tent to Victor Turner’s descriptions of liminality (which in some respects recall Smith’s category of the utopian). An analogous distinction appears in Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), vol. 1, p. 237, where a “theology of manifestation” is associated with the old tent tradition and a “theology of pres-
A similar dichotomy between locative and non-locative models of divine presence appears in the Tanakh as a whole, and again P’s tabernacle represents one pole. Surprisingly, however, in this dichotomy its position is reversed: the פֹנָתָן no longer represents the locative model.

In the thinking that Tryggve Mettinger has called the “Zion-Sabaoth theology,” God was conceived as permanently present in the Jerusalem temple, which contained the throne seat of YHWH. That temple was located, significantly, in the center of the land of Israel, roughly half way between the Mediterranean and the Jordan and near the border between northern and southern tribes. Texts that enunciate this ideology, Mettinger maintains, disclose a “mythical concept of space” (e.g., Pss. 14; 48; 76; Isa. 6), which entails the identity of the temple and heaven. Such a view moves beyond a merely analogical typology in which the earthly temple is a copy of the heavenly. The fixed location of the


ence” with the ark; in P, these two conceptions are fused. Von Rad argues (vol. 1, p. 239) that in P the former predominated. See the critiques of this view in Knohl, Sanctuary, p. 130; S.D. McBride, “Deuteronomic Name Theology” (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1969), p. 30, and Blum, Studien zur Komposition, pp. 298-99. As we shall see, von Rad is both right and wrong: in any event, none of the verses he cites in this connection (vol. 1, p. 239 n. 117) in fact support his view. On the contrast between the different models of the tent, see also de Vaux, “Ark,” pp. 145-46, and Haran, Temples, pp. 262-69. Note also the insight of August Dillmann, Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 2nd edn, 1880), p. 335: “Immerhin wird auch bei B [=E] die Lade mit dem Zelt ein Ersatz für die jetzt zu verlassende unmittelbare Gottesnähe auf dem Sinai gewesen sein ... wie bei A [=P] nach Erbauung der Hütte Gott nicht mehr auf den Sinai, sondern von der Hütte aus (Lev 1,1) mit Mose redet.” Thus, in P, the people build the tent before departing from Sinai because the tent becomes the new Sinai—that is, a sacred center. In E, the they build a tent as they are told to withdraw from Horeb because they desire a surrogate for the sacred center or locus of immanence they are forever leaving behind.


20 Mettinger, Dethronement, p. 30; cf. Levenson, Sinai, pp. 123-24. It must be stressed that this outlook did not imply that YHWH was only or exclusively present
temple on top of Mount Zion, the conception of that mountain as a focal point connecting or in fact merging heaven and earth, and the geographically and conceptually preeminent place of the temple all identify this ideology as locative.

When set against texts that glorify the Jerusalem temple, the priestly tabernacle appears to express a different notion of divine presence. The tabernacle, after all, is not limited to one place, for it wanders with the Israelites. Thus P texts, in comparison to the Zion/Sabaoth theology, seem not locative but what I would describe as *locomotive*: there is a sacred center, but it moves. R.E. Clements points out that the priestly description of the tabernacle does not know any notion of a singular sacred space, in contrast to biblical texts that mention Jerusalem explicitly (Zion psalms; Ezekiel) or allude to it (Deuteronomy). For P,

no longer is the presence of Yhwh associated with a particular place at all, but instead it is related to a cultic community ... The Priestly Writing has no mention of a particular place, except that Yhwh speaks with Israel from above the cover of the ark, from between the two cherubim. The ark ... is not a place, however, but a piece of cult-furniture, which, like the tabernacle in which it is set, is portable and moves about with the people.\(^{21}\)

We might further note that the tabernacle, like the law itself, has its origins in the wilderness outside the land of Israel; according to P (and the other Pentateuchal sources), the most important manifestation of Yhwh occurred within the Israelite community, but not within their land. In this sense, P may be said to display an interest in periphery. To be sure, P’s theology is not wholly utopian; it presents a belief in immanence. But the divine presence or יְהוָה is not associated with any one locus, and it first became visible to Israel and first took up residence among them in the wilderness, not in the land of Israel. The axis linking heaven and earth (or at least heaven and the nation Israel) is an ambulatory one. The locomotive model, then, combines aspects of locative and utopian ideologies: the center moves towards the

in the temple. Clements points out that “far from conveying the belief that Yhwh was an earth-bound God, tied to his abode in Jerusalem, the whole outlook and purpose of the temple was to stress his creative and universal action” (*God and Temple*, p. 67). The notion that Yhwh dwells in the temple “did not preclude the idea that he was a God of the skies, whose true dwelling was in the heavens but rather presupposed it” (p. 68). See Ps. 11:4, cf. 14:2, 7; 30:3, 7. Levenson makes the same point, pp. 138-40.

\(^{21}\) Clements, *God and Temple*, p. 120.
periphery, while points in the periphery can become, temporarily, a center.

The polarity between locative and locomotive conceptions of divine presence can be sensed elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as well. For example, the cherubim denote God’s physical presence throughout the Hebrew Bible. In the priestly tabernacle and in the Solomonic temple described in 1 Kings, the cherubim serve as a divine throne (Lev. 37:7-9; Num. 7:89; 1 Kgs 6:23-28; 8:6-7); further, the walls and tapestries in the throne room of the tabernacle and of the Temple are adorned with images of cherubim (Exod. 36:8, 35; 1 Kgs 6:29-35; 2 Chron. 3:14). In Ezekiel, cherubim accompany God whether God is in the temple or on a journey (e.g., 9:3; 10:1-20; 11:22); similarly, in Ps. 18:11 God rides a cherub through the sky. Eden is God’s garden (Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 28:3), and hence a figure of divine presence; after all, God strolls about there (Gen. 3:8). Thus it is significant for our purposes that cherubim stand at Eden’s entrance (Gen. 3:24), or that a cherub once stood in its midst (Ezek. 28:14). Wherever one finds a cherub (whether as a decorative feature or a mythical creature), one finds divine presence. But Mettinger points out that the language used to describe God’s place above the cherubim varies. In texts that articulate the Zion–Sabaoth theology, God is—he who sits on the cherubim.” Texts using that phrase are often suffused with locative terminology. The phrase appears in the first verse of Psalm 99, which goes on to refer to Zion, the sacred hill (vv. 2, 9), the royal footstool denoting God’s enthroned presence (v. 5), and the pillar of cloud (םִינְי הַנַּחַל) signifying the divine indwelling (v. 7). The phrase also appears 2 Sam. 6:2, which describes the arrival of the ark and hence of God in Jerusalem, and in 1 Kgs 6:23-35 and 8:6-7, which posit the presence of God in the holy of holies at the Jerusalem temple. But Ps. 18:11 (=2 Sam. 22:11) describes Yhwh as riding a cherub, and thus it con-

22 See Haran, Temples, pp. 251-54.
23 Mettinger, Dethronement, p. 36.
24 Mettinger argues that the very common epithet, יים is a short form of the longer title, יים וּ- (Dethronement, p. 24). Indeed the short form often appears in texts connected to the notion that the temple is Yhwh’s throne (e.g., Isa. 6:3, 5; Isa. 8:18; Ps. 24:10; 46:5-8; 48:9-12; 84:2, 4, 9; and cf. Isa. 1:8-9; 2 Sam. 7:26-27; Isa. 48:2; Hag. 1, passim).
25 The same root is used with other nouns to portray Yhwh as moving through the skies in Deut. 33:26; Isa. 19:1; Ps. 104:3.
nects the cherub—and with it the notion of divine presence—to the locomotive rather than locative model.\(^{26}\)

Similarly, Clements distinguishes between the Jerusalemite theology of sacred center, with its single great temple, and a more decentralized theology in the religion of the patriarchs, which he (following Albrecht Alt) views as focusing on gods associated with the patriarchs. “The important feature of this religion for our study,” he says,

is that the gods were not thought to be connected with specific places, as was general for the Els and Baals of the Canaanites, but to certain groups of people ... For the patriarchs, their gods were not associated with the soil, nor with special holy places, but were bound together with their worshipers and were believed to accompany them on their wanderings. In accordance with the semi-nomadic life of the ancestors of the Israelites, so their gods also were believed to move from place to place as the leaders of their adherents ... Thus the gods of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were markedly different from the gods of Canaan, and a particular feature of this distinctiveness lay in the manner and nature of the divine presence ... In the one the presence of the gods was linked with definite persons, and in the other with certain definite places.\(^{27}\)

Further, Clements argues, in premonarchic Israel, the main conception of YHWH’s presence involved the re-enactment of Yhwh’s arrival at or from Sinai.\(^{28}\) Thus God’s presence was not linked to any one site in the land of Israel but to an event outside the land in which community, not place, was of paramount importance; and God was conceived as being present only temporarily. After the establishment of a strong centralized monarchy with its seat in the formerly Jebusite city of Jerusalem, a more settled idea of presence crystallized in Israel. Clements connects this more loca-

\(^{26}\) Later traditions combine these two types of imagery. In Ezekiel, God rides a cherub out of the Temple so that it may be destroyed (Ezek. 9:11); later the deity returns on cherubim and is re-enthroned there (Ezek. 43, esp. v. 3), and cherubim line the walls of the divine palace (Ezek. 41:18). Thus Ezekiel sees the locomotive model as fitting for a temporary period, but the locative is ultimately restored. 1 Chron. 28:18 refers to the throne in the Jerusalem as a הַיְלָת, thus using a locomotive term to describe a locative situation. The association between hechalot and merkabah mysticism also shows the combination of these two models. The hechal (palace) exemplifies the locative. The merkabah utilizes the vocabulary of the locomotive (תּוֹם) to describe God’s throne, which is really a manifestation of the locative.


tive model to Canaanite (specifically, Jebusite) influence, while the decentralized theology, with its connections both to the patriarchal and the Sinai periods, was more originally Israelite. This whole approach to the history and derivation of these two ideas is, of course, quite untenable. Alt’s thesis regarding the “gods of the fathers” has been debunked; the very existence of the patriarchal period is a matter of doubt among historians; many scholars today would reject the neat opposition between Israelite and Canaanite culture on which Clements’ reconstruction rests. (In fact the model that Clements terms more Israelite has strong Canaanite affinities. The root רַּבָּ֛ר [“rides”] expresses the locomotive model in Deut. 33:26, Isa. 19:1, Hab. 3:3-8, and Pss. 18:10-11; 68:5; and 104:3. The same root, in the phrase רַבָּ֛ר עַ֖לָּה refers to the Canaanite god Baal in Northwest Semitic texts.) Nonetheless, his description of a tension between two types of thinking in the Hebrew Bible remains useful. Regardless of whether there ever was a patriarchal period, the book of Genesis does portray Israel’s ancestors as practicing a religion in which divine presence was less oriented towards space than towards clan, and the activities of these ancestors provide a model for their descendants. Genesis uses narratives about the patriarchs in order to represent a particular religious ideal, and this ideal demands our attention even if it is a product of the Iron Age rather than the Late Bronze Age; even if it reflects the values of a settled

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29 Clements, God and Temple, pp. 35-66. Clements maintains that even before David’s conquest, Jerusalem was already a sacred axis associated with the cult of El-Elyon, whom the Jebusites to some extent identified with Baal (pp. 36-47). As a result, Zion was seen as equivalent to Baal’s home on Mount Zaphon. With the Israelite conquest, El-Elyon now merged with the Israelite Yhwh. Consequently, an Israelite text can identify Zion with Zaphon (Ps. 48:3).


31 For the many references in the Ugaritic texts, see Joseph Aistleitner, Wörterbuch der Ugaritischen Sprache (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2nd edn, 1965), pp. 293. See other examples cited in Mettinger, Dethronement, p. 35; Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic, pp. 10 n. 32, 67, 151. In other respects, Canaanite El displays even more pronounced locomotive tendencies, since he lives in a tent, while Baal lives in a more permanent house; see Richard Clifford, “The Tent of El and the Israelite Tent of Meeting,” CBQ 33 (1971), pp. 223-25.
people rather than the lifestyle of nomads; and even if it originated within the land of Canaan rather than outside it.\textsuperscript{32} Similarly, poetic and priestly texts do portray God as travelling from the desert south of the land of Israel, in contrast to royal and Jerusalemite models of presence. The Torah and some psalms, then, present a locomotive notion of divine presence at odds with the locative model associated with the temple in Kings and Zion psalms.

Context, then, is all: the priestly tabernacle can be read to symbolize both locative and locomotive worldviews, depending on whether we set it against E’s tent or the Jerusalem temple. Against this assertion, however, one might argue that the tabernacle was intended as a symbol for the temple to begin with. According to this objection, P (like D) limits sacrifice to a single site, and to represent that site P uses the tabernacle.\textsuperscript{33} Its location in the center of the camp (recalling the location of Jerusalem in the center of the land of Israel) could be said to demonstrate this linkage; so too the similarities of its design to Solomon’s temple.\textsuperscript{34} Several factors militate against this objection.

First, even if the tabernacle does constitute what we might term a proleptic allusion to the Jerusalem temple (more on this conjecture below), the fact remains that P never mentions the possibility that a temple will one day be built, and, in contrast to D, P

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. Albertz’s contention that patriarchal religion is not a preliminary stage of Israelite religion (so Alt) nor a complete fabrication (so some of Alt’s critics) but a substratum of Israelite religion as it existed in the Iron Age (\textit{History}, vol. 1, p. 29). Further, while Clements’s thesis that temples were not originally important in Israelite religion and became prominent only after the rise of monarchy is based on problematic reasoning, William Dever tentatively suggests a similar conclusion for completely different reasons (\textit{viz.}, archaeological ones): “It is perhaps significant that no pre-tenth century B.C.E. temples have yet been found, only household shrines and small open-air sanctuaries. The early [i.e., pre-monarchical] Israelite cult seems to reflect a simple, agrarian, nonurban society” (William Dever, “The Contribution of Archaeology to the Study of Canaanite and Early Israelite Religion,” in P. D. Miller, et al. [eds.], \textit{Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross} [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987], p. 233).

\textsuperscript{33} This argument is very widespread in modern biblical studies. See the classic statement by J. Wellhausen, \textit{Prolegomena to the History of Israel} (New York: Meridan, 1957 [1885]), pp. 34-38. See further bibliography in Haran, \textit{Temples}, p. 194 n. 10. Haran himself argues that the priestly tabernacle originally symbolized the temple in Shiloh, not Solomon’s Temple, but he agrees with Wellhausen that the priestly tabernacle is essentially a cipher for a centralized, and centrally located, temple; see pp. 198-204.

\textsuperscript{34} On these similarities, see Haran, \textit{Temples}, pp. 189-94.
never even suggests that the divine presence or some representative thereof will be located exclusively in one spot.\textsuperscript{35} The rhetoric P uses to describe the tabernacle carries weight that interpreters must take into account, and this rhetoric valorizes that which is portable and utopian, while studiously avoiding any reference to a specific or permanent sacred spot.

Second, the idealized blueprint that P presents in Exodus 25–39 draws on two architectural models: portable tent sanctuaries used by ancient Semitic nomads and Canaanite temples (or the Solomonic temple, which in any event exemplifies a Canaanite shrine architecturally). Indeed, in some respects the tabernacle’s plan is closer to that of a genuine ancient Semitic tent-shrine than to Solomon’s temple.\textsuperscript{36} Hence the tabernacle cannot be regarded solely as a token for the temple. The tabernacle’s architecture plan reflects its two-fold significance. To the extent that it alludes to the temple, it highlights a stable center, but to the extent that it recalls a desert tent, it emphasizes the periphery.

Third, the hypothesis that the priestly tabernacle symbolizes the single legitimate temple is built on exceedingly shaky foundations, since it finds no support in the text of P itself. One of the hypothesis’ key proponents, Julius Wellhausen, acknowledges as much when he states, “In [Deuteronomy] the unity of the cultus is commanded; in the Priestly Code it is presupposed. Everywhere it is tacitly assumed as a fundamental postulate, but nowhere does it find actual expression.”\textsuperscript{37} Wellhausen notes one exception: Leviticus 17, according to which animals can be slaughtered only at the entrance to the tent. Most biblical scholars view this law as a veiled

\textsuperscript{35} As Haran points out (\textit{Temples}, p. 196), “P appears to be completely unaware of any other house of God which might be built at any other time, under other conditions.” On traces of anti-temple ideology in P, see Haran, 197 n. 14 and references there. See also Yehezkel Kaufmann, \textit{Toledot ha-Emunah ha-Yisraelit} (Tel Aviv: Mosad Bialik and Devir, 1937-56), vol. 1, p. 116 (Heb.).


\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Prolegomena}, p. 35.
command to centralize the cult at the temple in Jerusalem (a command which thus prohibits the eating of meat outside that city). However, the legislative significance of this chapter for the settled Israelites is difficult to determine. Leviticus 17 does not actually mention centralization (in contrast to D); it only decrees that slaughter must take place at the tent, where a priest can sprinkle the animals’ blood on Yhwh’s altar. A command to slaughter only at an altar is not the same as a command to build only one altar, and thus the crucial question is: does the entrance to the tent in Leviticus 17 represent a single temple, or does it stand for sundry Yahwistic altars in Israelite towns and villages? In the absence of any reference to a temple in the text of Leviticus 17 itself, the latter possibility must be examined. Yehezkel Kaufmann suggests that composition of P preceded cult centralization, and thus P does not presume that only one temple exists. In this case, the legislative hint in Leviticus 17 does not insinuate that animals can be slaughtered only on Mount Zion. Rather, it implies that one can slaughter animals only at a legitimate altar—of which there are many throughout the land of Israel. Kaufmann further points out that in Lev. 26:31 P explicitly affirms that Yhwh has many sanctuaries in which sacrifice takes place:

39 We might add that even the architectural parallels between the priestly tabernacle and Solomon’s temple are not a decisive indication that the former symbolizes the latter specifically. The basic three-part, long-room plan that they share is conventional for Syro-Palestinian temples of the Bronze and Iron Ages. Further, while the priestly

38 In addition to Wellhausen’s discussion, see most of the commentaries, as well as Blum, Studien zur Komposition, pp. 337-38. The thesis appears even among scholars who regard Leviticus 17 as older than Deuteronomy 12 (and who thus see cult centralization as a priestly rather than Deuteronomic innovation), e.g., Menahem Haran, “The Idea of Centralization of the Cult in the Priestly Apprehension,” Beer Sheva 1 (1973), pp. 114-21 (Heb.), and Alexander Rofé, Introduction to Deuteronomy (Jerusalem: Akadmon Press, 1988), p. 15 (Heb.).

39 See Kaufmann’s detailed, if neglected, reasoning, Toledot, vol. 1, pp. 126-37.

40 Toledot, vol. 1, p. 133. The Samaritan Pentateuch, the Peshitta, and the consonantal text of some MT manuscripts (though not their vocalization) read the singular (דֶּרֶךְ). However, the plural noun (דֶּרֶךְיָי), which occurs in most MT manuscripts as well as the versions other than Peshitta, is to be preferred as the lectio difficilior, since that reading represents a contradiction within the redacted Torah.

41 For convenient summaries of these features, see Volkmar Fritz, “Temple Architecture: What Can Archaeology Tell Us about Solomon’s Temple?” in
tabernacle in some respects recalls Solomon’s temple, in others it is quite close in plan to the Iron II period Judean temple in Arad. Thus P may intend to link the tabernacle with Israelite temples generally, not the Jerusalem Temple exclusively.

If Kaufmann is correct, then the tabernacle differs from the single Jerusalem temple; it represents a prelude not to a locative map of the land of Israel, in which there is one *axis mundi*, but to a land full of axes, a land in which the periphery spawns centers. P’s silence on the issue of the temple or the sacred city makes it impossible to decide between Kaufmann and Wellhausen on this issue, and other possible readings of the crucial passage exist as well; it is possible that P’s tabernacle did not originally stand for any one sacred site but came to represent the Jerusalem temple as priestly tradition developed. But the fact remains that P does not explicitly connect the tabernacle to the Jerusalem temple or even to multiple Israelite temples. It only describes a wandering shrine that is located at the center of the camp, thus suggesting both locomotive and locative understandings of that shrine.


43 This explanation, which mediates between Wellhausen and Kaufmann, appears in Knohl, *Sanctuary*, pp. 112-13, 204. According to Knohl, PT does not command centralization but HS (to which Lev. 17 belongs) does. However, Knohl does not present an argument to support the assertion that Lev. 17 forbids multiple altars; he merely states that Lev. 17:1-9 “is a clear order to centralize the cult” (p. 204), which is not at all clear to me. In any case, if Knohl is right that PT does not envision centralization and HS does, then the P document as a whole presents a tabernacle with a dual, in fact contradictory, symbolism, and thus Knohl’s argument leads to my thesis via a slightly different route. The same my be said of the altogether unlikely suggestion of earlier scholars who regard H as predating P and who argue that H does not require centralization but P does (on whom see the references in Knohl, p. 112 nn. 1-2). Incidentally, while I am skeptical of Knohl’s suggestion regarding Lev. 17, it is nonetheless worth noting that his suggestion meshes well with a thesis propounded by Aharoni. He maintains that the priestly tabernacle was originally based on a temple plan exemplified by the Arad sanctuary. Later it was altered to conform to the Solomonic temple. (See Aharoni, “The Solomonic Temple,” p. 8.) Thus both Knohl and Aharoni view P as originally independent of influence from the Solomonic temple but subsequently committed to it.
The dual value of P’s tabernacle is also indicated by its two names. Menahem Haran points out that a fundamental distinction [between the P and E tents] is already evident in the very names of the two institutions: the word mishkān, tabernacle, indicates the place where God ʿökën, dwells, i.e., his abode; whereas ʿōhel mōʾēd (the latter noun being derived from the root yʿd) describes the place to which he comes at an appointed time, the tent to the entrance of which he descends in response to prophetic invocation, only to leave it when the communion with him is over.\(^{44}\)

It is significant, then, that P also uses the term ʿōhel mōʾēd for the tabernacle. Looked at within the Torah’s sign system, P’s tabernacle is a mishkān, in opposition to E’s ʿōhel mōʾēd; but within the larger sign system of the Tanakh, P’s tent is an ʿōhel mōʾēd, in opposition to the divine dwelling place built by Solomon. Although Haran claims that P uses these terms “indiscriminately, without intending any difference in meaning,”\(^ {45}\) in fact the use of the two terms discloses an important friction within P.\(^ {46}\) The tension between two orientations towards divine presence in the Hebrew Bible, then, exists within P itself.\(^ {47}\)

\(^{44}\) Haran, *Temples*, p. 269.


\(^{46}\) Verbs used to describe divine speech at the tabernacle also reflect this duality, as has been proposed to me: the qal verb šûʿ in Lev. 1:1 (as in Exod. 19:3, 20 and 24:16) suggests a sudden summons of a punctual nature; this depiction of divine speech is reminiscent of E’s דְּבָרָה, for God’s voice is thrust upon Moses as specific moments. But the hitpael in דֶּבָרֵי in Num. 7:89 (as in Ezek. 2:2 and 43:6) may be durative in nature, suggesting (the reader points out) “a constant background of divine speech to which Moses tunes in.”

\(^{47}\) Some elements of this duality are present even in the temple, though only faintly. The cherubim in the temple may echo the locomotive model, both in light of Ps. 18:11 and because their wings inevitably recall motion and hence the potentially episodic nature of God’s presence. Similarly, the ark located in the temple remains, at least vestigially, an element of mobility. Further, the term מִשְׁמַר typically refers to a tent in contrast to a temple; see 2 Sam. 6:7, and note also its parallel to מִשְׁמַר in the Hebrew Bible and in Ugaritic texts (Num. 24:5, etc.; 2 Aqht [=CAT 1.17], column V, lines 32-33; the second tablet of Kirta [=CAT 1.15], column 3, lines 18-19; see further Mitchell Dahood, “Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs,” in Loren Fisher (ed.), *Ras Shamra Parallels: The Texts from Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible*, [Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1972-75], vol. 1, pp. 102-103). But the Hebrew Bible sometimes uses the term as a synonym for the temple (Ps. 74:7; Ezek. 37:27; 1 Chron. 6:33; 2 Chron. 29:6). This emphasis on the episodic nature of the divine presence in the temple comes to the fore especially in Ezek. 8–10, though Ezekiel returns to a strongly locative model in chs. 40–48. If Richard Elliott Friedman is correct that the temple actually contained the old tabernacle (see *The Exile and Biblical Narrative* [HSM, 22; Chico, CA: Scholars
The double or reversed place of P in the dichotomy we have examined is very provocative. This inner-priestly incongruity does not result from multiple layers of composition (though there can be little doubt that P is a complex amalgamation of traditions) or from exilic or postexilic recasting of older texts. Indeed, a failure of many studies of divine presence in P lies precisely in the fact that they begin with an exilic or postexilic dating of P and proceed to find a reading that allegedly fits the preordained time period. This problem is especially clear in the work of the many modern scholars (for example, Clements, G.E. Wright, and Frank Moore Cross) for whom P’s notion of divine presence involves God’s “tabernacling.” Scholars use this verb frequently, no doubt in order to call John 1:14 to mind and hence rightly to emphasize the parallel between the tabernacle, the temple, and Jesus. This verb seems intended to differ somehow from “dwelling” in that it is not permanent. The lack of permanence implied by the divine presence’s tabernacling is said to result from the destruction of the temple in 586 BCE. This event forced priestly circles to admit that God was not always resident in Zion, and that divine immanence (associated with the root נָשָׁה) was always subject to divine transcendence and God’s permanent dwelling in heaven.

Press, 1981], pp. 48-61), then the whole tension found in the tabernacle is present within the temple. Further, in light of Friedman’s proposal one might conclude that the tension is resolved in favor of the locative model, since ultimately the tabernacle comes to rest on Zion. See, however, the detailed critique of Friedman’s theory in Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, “The Form and Fate of the Tabernacle: Reflections on a Recent Proposal,” JQR 86 (1995), pp. 127-51.

While PT and HS display deep differences of religious perspective in regard to several questions (as Knohl demonstrates in Sanctuary, pp. 124-98), it seems to me that they share a single attitude towards the tabernacle. If Knohl is right that HS introduces the idea of cult centralization in Lev. 17 (see above, n. 38), then locative elements of the tabernacle may ultimately take precedence in the HS strand of P. On the other hand, Robert Kugler argues that the attitudes toward the נָשָׁה differ in PT and HS; see “Holiness, Purity, the Body, and Society: The Evidence for Theological Conflict in Leviticus,” JSOT 76 (1997), pp. 3-27. According to Kugler, HS located sacrality not only in the נָשָׁה but in the people as a whole. If Kugler is right, then HS returns to the viewpoint Clements and Buber find in patriarchal religion (see above, nn. 27 and 28): divine presence abides in community, not place. In this case, PT is more locative and HS is more utopian. A detailed evaluation of Kugler’s revision of Knohl is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say, in both Kugler’s proposal and Knohl’s, the final P work encompasses each of these tempers (locative and locomotive/utopian), and either one will come to the fore depending on the context in which one chooses to read P, the Torah or the Tanakh.
Thus for Cross, Clements, and others it was (could only have been?) the army of Nebuchadnezzar who compelled the priestly writers to recast their Zion-centered theology of ongoing immanence.

I propose an alternative perspective for several reasons. First, while these scholars sense that P’s דְּבָרִיָּה theology navigates a tension between immanence and transcendence, their insistence on dating this theology to the exile obscures the timeless nature of the religious dilemma at hand and limits their explanation to a narrowly historical one. Second, any dating of P is by definition speculative and, in light of the lack of consensus on this issue among biblical scholars, questionable. Consequently, one would do better to analyze the P texts on their own, without starting from the presumption that they are post D or post 586. Finally, by restricting themselves to categories of immanence and transcendence, they overlook the extent to which these texts are grappling with conceptions of sacred place, which are better approached through Smith’s more supple models of locative and utopian mindsets.

The opposition embodied in the priestly tabernacle results from

49 For example, Cross sees a post-586 response to the rupture of the Zion covenant in the priestly notion of tabernacling: “Theologically speaking, they strove after a solution to the problems of covenant theology; the means through which the breached covenant might be repaired, and the conditions under which a holy and universal God might ‘tabernacle’ in the midst of Israel” (“Priestly Tabernacle,” p. 228). See the kindred approach of Clements, God and Temple, pp. 116-20; of G.E. Wright, “God Amidst His People: The Story of the Temple,” in his collection, The Rule of God: Essays in Biblical Theology (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960), p. 71; and of Mettinger, Dethronement, p. 96, 113. Similarly, the decision to date P later than D spurs some of these scholars to view P’s tabernacle as a response to the deuteronomistic Name theology. The deuteronomists rejected the notion of divine presence in the temple and created a sublimated theological idea with the notion of God’s Name residing there; in response P proposed that God does not dwell (בָּיָתָה) but tabernacles (דְּבָרִיָּה) in the tabernacle/temple. For such a view, see Wright, “God Amidst His People,” p. 71, and Cross, “Priestly Tabernacle,” pp. 226-27. If one is less sure that P is later than D, then there is little reason to see the term דְּבָרִיָּה as a some sort of theological sublimation. For reservations regarding the distinctions between “dwelling (בָּיָתָה)” and “tabernacling (דְּבָרִיָּה)” suggested by these scholars, see further Mettinger, Dethronement, pp. 90-94. By way of contrast, it is worth noting that Moshe Weinfeld argues, I think persuasively, that D’s Shem theology is a response to the anthropomorphism of the older Kabod theology, which finds expression in P. See Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 191-208.
the tension between two religious impulses, neither of which is confined to a particular period, place, or culture.\textsuperscript{50} One impulse emphasizes the Ottonian \textit{fascinans}, which produces a desire to approach the divine and hence a hope that God is locatable, even in a physical sense.\textsuperscript{51} This impulse reflects (or implies) the view that the divine can become confined, and hence usable. Such a divinity is the foundation of order. The other impulse is rooted in \textit{mysterium} and \textit{tremendum}. For this viewpoint, the divine realm must be a realm of absolute freedom, and hence the divine cannot be confined to a single place and can never be confidently located by humans. Examples of these impulses can be found throughout the history of religions, often in a single tradition. In some religions, each one becomes associated with particular gods; thus in Mesopotamia, the former is aligned with Tammuz and with personal gods, and the latter with the high god, Anu.\textsuperscript{52} In Israel,

\textsuperscript{50} Here we should recall Smith’s insistence (against Eliade) that these models, though competing, need not belong to different periods or cultures; a single culture can incorporate both of them (see, e.g., “Wobbling,” p. 101). In our case, a single symbol embodies them.


\textsuperscript{52} On Tammuz and the element of \textit{fascinans}, see Thorkild Jacobsen, \textit{Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 73-101. On the distance of Anu, for whom there was little or no cult in most periods of Mesopotamian religion even though he was still recognized as high god, see David Marcus, “An,” in \textit{The Encyclopedia of Religion} (New York: Macmillan, 1987), vol. 1, pp. 246-47; Erich Ebeling, “Anu,” in \textit{Reallexicon der Assyriologie} (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928), vol. 1, p. 116. This is not to say that Anu was otiose; he continues to figure in Mesopotamian myth and in rituals for lower-ranking, but more important gods. Nonetheless, little cultic activity centers around Anu himself. See, e.g., the collection of Middle and Neo-Babylonian texts in Herbert Wohlstein, \textit{The Sky God An-Anu} (Jericho, NY: Paul Stroock, 1976), pp. 85-97, and cf. Assyrian texts in pp. 140-41. The same might be said of El at Ugarit. While the nature of El’s status remains a vexing question, the sense of distance between worshipers and El (as opposed to Baal) is clear; see E. Theodore Mullen, \textit{The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature} (HSM; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1980), pp. 9-11. On the remoteness of El in Ugarit see further Conrad L’Heureux, \textit{Rank among the Canaanite Gods: El, Ba’al, and the Repha’im} (HSM; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), pp. 4-7. This remoteness probably ought to be understood as an abundance of the Ottonian categories of \textit{tremendum} and \textit{mysterium} and an absence of \textit{fascinans}. Thus it is probably wrong to use El’s remoteness as evidence of El’s alleged dethronement or decline, on which see the dated but clear presentation of the issue in William Foxwell Albright, \textit{Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: An Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths} (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), pp. 119-21, 140-45; the somewhat inconclusive study of Marvin Pope, “The Status of El at
both are associated with a single divinity, and various texts emphasize one or the other. The genius of P’s model of the tent is that it encompasses both, that it is at once centripetal and centrifugal. The term “tent of meeting” is thus quite apt for P’s tabernacle: for it brings together two opposed conceptions of divine presence.

The construction of divine presence in the texts that describe the priestly tabernacle literally moves in two opposing directions, towards the center and towards the periphery, and hence it works against itself. By linking a symbol or predecessor of Israelite temples or perhaps of the Jerusalem temple with a nomadic tent that belongs to no one place, the priestly document opens the door for a critique of its own theology of presence. Thus our analysis suggests the question: does P’s description of the tent, which is often understood as the classical expression of the notion of divine immanence in the Hebrew Bible, mask anxieties regarding divine absence, or at least regarding the constancy of divine presence? I suggest that it does. In P, God becomes present only due to heavy preparations and through complex forms of mediation. The tabernacle must be built according to painstakingly exact specifications described in Exodus 25–31. It is inaugurated in a long and involved set of ceremonies described in Exodus 40–Leviticus 10, and worship there must follow very precise protocols. Moreover, we should recall, the inaugural ceremonies ended in disaster with the death of Nadab and Abihu, who were incinerated.

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Ugarit,” in Mark Smith (ed.), Probative Pontificating in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature (UBL, 10; Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 1994), pp. 58-60; Mullen, pp. 109-10; and L’Heureux, pp. 18-28. Alternatively, the sense of distance may be connected with a god and the sense of approachability with the hypostasis of some aspect of the god. For example, the goddess Tinnit among the Canaanites in Carthage is identified as הָעִיֵּה, “the Face/Presence of Baal.” Shmuel AYituv argues that Baal, as a high god, was too distant for worshipers to approach, and that his hypostatized and feminine face was approached instead (S. AYituv, “The Countenance of YHWH,” in Cogan, Eichler, and Tigay [eds.], Tehillah le-Moshe, p. 7).

In contrast to the more transcendent model of Deuteronomy, in which God dwells in heaven and His name represents Him in the Jerusalem Temple. See Mettinger, Dethronement, pp. 48-77; Clements, God and Temple, pp. 91-95. On this contrast between P and D, see Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School, pp. 191-209. Regarding P’s notion of immanence, note also the somewhat different formulation of Blum, who sees God’s quest to come close to creation (specifically, by dwelling among one people) as the dominant theme in the priestly composition (Studien zur Komposition, pp. 329-32).

See Clements, God and Temple, p. 115; Cross, Canaanite, p. 299.
by a fire that came “from God’s presence (תֵּמָתָו)” (Lev. 10:2). Fire in the tabernacle’s dedication ceremony not only serves as a token of divine presence but as a reminder of divine unpredictability; in this divine fire the *fascinans* that attracts humans is brutally tempered with *mysterium* and *tremendum*. All this gives us the sense that divine immanence in P is a terribly fragile thing, and that any receptacle of divine presence, no matter how carefully built, is essentially jerry-rigged. The God of creation stands outside of that creation (i.e., God in Gen. 1 pre-exists the world and thus is not part of the world that is created, at least initially). Hence the deity’s attachment to a particular location represents an incongruity—and a dangerous incongruity at that. If this is so, then P’s God, the God who belongs in the tabernacle, does not really belong there at all. It is for this reason that the tabernacle, an epitome of the locative, incorporates elements of the utopian; it is for this reason that the P’s version of the *axis mundi* wanders from place to place. The tabernacle, like the cosmos it represents and whose creation it culminates, is God’s home, a place God desires to inhabit, for in P’s theology God attempts to overcome the gulf separating divinity from humanity by establishing an abode among a particular people. But the tabernacle also constitutes a place of divine exile; the ambivalent rhetoric surrounding this peripatetic center implies that God cannot be at home there. This exile demands explanation not in terms of the events of 586 BCE but with reference to the events of the year zero *anno mundi*, as the verbal links between texts describing the tabernacle’s construction and the world’s creation suggest. Thus the priestly document reveals the beginning of a notion that developed much more fully, and much more boldly, in the postbiblical Jewish tradition: to wit, the notion of God’s own exile in the world God created.

55 On the story of Nadab and Abihu as a deconstruction of the locative model, see Sommer, “Expulsion as Initiation.”
57 This is the case also in narratives regarding the construction of the temple. When David brings the ark to reside Jerusalem, God’s presence in the ark strikes Uzzah dead though he is at no fault (2 Sam. 6:6-8). The construction narrative in Chronicles begins only following the plague in 1 Chron. 21. It may be precisely for this reason that E locates the tent outside the camp: the people must be protected from the divine presence. See AYituv, “Countenance,” p. 4.
58 The notion of God’s exile at the moment of creation in Lurianic kabbalah, like the tensions regarding divine presence in P, should not be described as a
In presenting this argument that P augurs the motif of divine exile, I do not deny that P intends to portray divine manifestation as reliable, constant, and productive. P does assert that God carved out a space on earth that encompasses the דוד. Indeed, according to P, God chose Israel precisely in order that divinity might dwell among at least one group of humans. What I suggest, nonetheless, is that various elements of P’s portrayal of that space are problematic, especially when viewed from within P’s own system of thought. The tabernacle invites comparison with later temples, and this comparison shows how limited and how tentative P’s conception of immanence in fact is. In contrast to Zion-Sabaoth texts, priestly literature consistently refrains from locating the divine presence in any one place for any length of time; divine presence in P does not permanently connect itself to a particular locale. In Leviticus 26 and elsewhere the HS strand of P asserts that human sinfulness renders the divinity’s presence volatile, but it seems to me that HS does not tell the whole story. Rather, given P’s portrayal in Genesis 1 of a creator God who is not part of the cosmos, the very notion of a terrestrial center of immanence entails grave difficulties; the assertion that the divine can be localized involves P in some degree of inconsistency. The elaborate arrangements P enjoins for the construction of the tabernacle and the implementation of its cult mask these difficulties but do not resolve them.

When I contend that P implies a critique of its own theology of presence, I am not stating that P rejects its own theology, nor am I maintaining that in the end P lacks a notion of immanence. Rather, I am pointing out that certain threads in the fabric of P’s depiction of presence attract attention: the constantly dual manner in which the tabernacle signifies; the absence of any explicit reference to a single temple that will replace the tabernacle; the mobile nature of the tabernacle; the lack of connection between the land of Israel and the tabernacle, in light of which the tab-

meme reaction to historical factors. It must be understood, rather, to represent a particular religious outlook. See Moshe Idel, Kabbalah: New Perspectives (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 264-66, and especially note his programmatic statement on p. xii, which my article attempts to implement. The concept of divine exile appears in rabbinic literature as well, but these texts do explicitly link this notion to the destruction of the Second Temple; for a listing of relevant sources and a discussion of them, see Abraham Joshua Heschel, Torah min Ha-shamayim (3 vols.; London: Soncino, 1965 and New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1990), vol. 1, pp. 65-92 (Heb.).
The tabernacle described in the Pentateuch’s P source yields two distinct and opposing interpretations. When compared with the tent found in the E collection of documents, P’s tabernacle represents a classic example of what the historian of religions Jonathan Z. Smith terms a “locative” worldview. As an ideology of the center, this understanding of the priestly tabernacle asserts divine immanence and celebrates the sacrality of a particular space. When compared with the theology of the Jerusalem temple, however, P’s tent seems to exemplify what Smith terms a “utopian” worldview, or what we might call a “locomotive” ideology. This construction of the tent eschews the notion of sacred center and emphasizes the periphery. Tension between texts exemplifying each of these two theoretical models is found throughout the Hebrew Bible (and throughout the history of religions), but in P, a single symbol encompasses both. The significance of this symbol depends on which of two different overlapping contexts (Torah and Tanakh) a reader privileges and which elements of its presentation in P one accentuates. Thus the priestly tabernacle works against itself, at once presenting and critiquing a theology of immanence. This ambivalent symbol suggests that God is present even as it intimates that God’s presence in the world is inappropriate. Thus P is forerunner of postbiblical texts that describe God’s exile in the created world.

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