Hospitality

Christian Reflection

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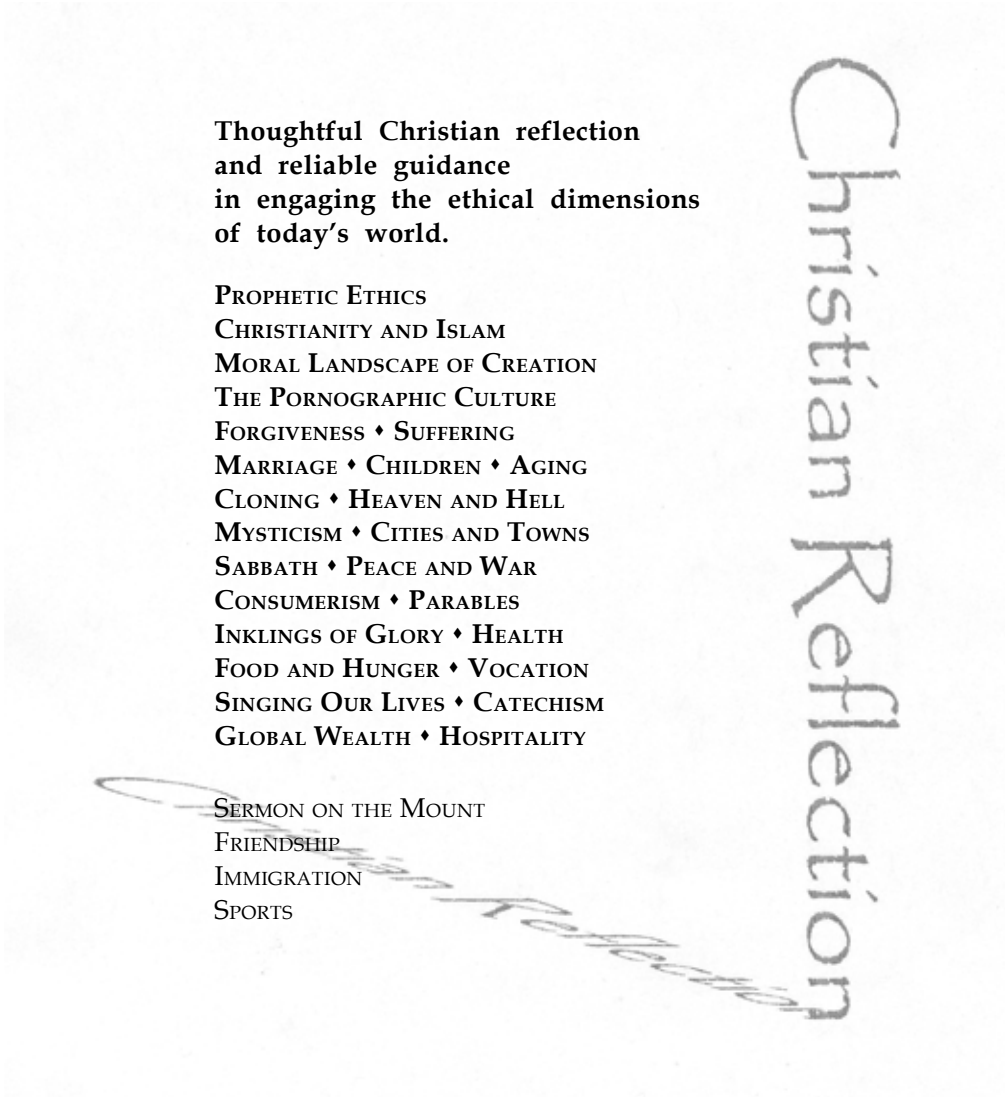

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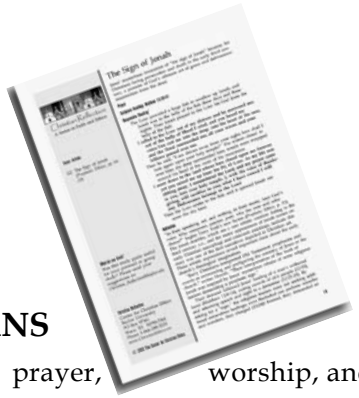

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Study Guides & Lesson Plans

These six study guides integrate Bible study, prayer, worship, and reflection on themes in the *Hospitality* issue.

Untamed Hospitality

While our culture reduces "hospitality" to friendliness and private entertaining, Christian hospitality remains a public and economic reality by which God re-creates us through the places and people we are given. How do we shift gears to practice this untamed hospitality?

Entertaining Angels

In the books of Luke and Acts the ancient practice of hospitality—the custom of welcoming travelers or strangers into one's home and establishing relationships with them—becomes the prism through which Jesus' disciples can view one another and others as valuable children of God.

Building a Place for Hospitality

Hospitality quickly takes on very earthy dimensions—buildings, beds and blankets, pots and pans—as we share our place, make use of what is available, or create new places. How can we sustain personal, small-scale places of welcome along with more institutionalized expressions of care?

Dorothy Day's Radical Hospitality

The Catholic Worker movement's endurance and influence are due to more than its aid to people in need or support for workers' unions. It has been a consistent witness that hospitality and nonviolence are at the heart of the gospel and are the basis for critiquing our culture.

Toward a Welcoming Congregation

In a world that has grown frighteningly guarded and harsh, Christian congregations are called to imitate the "table manners" of Jesus by being sacraments of God's hospitality in the world. How do we become these kinds of congregations *in the Church* and *for the world* today?

Boundary and Hospitality

In an increasingly pluralistic society, our words and practices of inclusion often reflect sentimental, sloppy thinking. To say everyone is included in our family of faith confuses inclusion with welcome—receiving others with pleasure, delighting in their being among us for a time, being hospitable.

Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

Hospitality once was central to Christians' life together. But we have tamed, Disneyfied, and Martha Stewartized this radical practice of graciously welcoming one another, especially the stranger, as God has welcomed us. Can genuine hospitality be recovered, or is it a lost art?

Can genuine hospitality, which once was central to Christians' life together, be recovered? Today we have tamed, Disneyfied, and Martha Stewartized this radical practice of graciously welcoming one another, especially the stranger, as God has welcomed us. Has it become a lost art?

Recovering this ancient tradition is essential in a world that has grown defensive and harsh. "Through the practice of Christian hospitality the church participates in God's peaceable kingdom," Darrell Gruder has observed. "Such hospitality indicates the crossing of boundaries (ethnic origin, economic condition, political orientation, gender status, social experience, educational background) by being open and welcoming of the other. Without such communities of hospitality, the world will have no way of knowing that all God's creation is meant to live in peace."

In public worship we learn to be both guests and hosts as "God recreates us through the places and people we are given," writes Elizabeth Newman in *Untamed Hospitality* (p. 11). Then as worship spills over into all of life, we learn to share our resources in gratitude to God, "stay put" in commitment to others, and even honor and learn from those whom society has abandoned. Yet "Christian hospitality is not about...heroic self-effort," she reminds us. "Hospitality is rather a life we receive as we rely upon and respond to God and one another for the sake of God's Kingdom."

Andrew Arterbury, in *Entertaining Angels: Hospitality in Luke and Acts* (p. 20), provides biblical resources to recover Christian hospitality, "a truly

interdependent and reciprocal relationship that requires disciples, whether they are hosts or guests, to view the stranger as a valuable child of God." Luke's writings on hospitality remain timely for us today, he suggests, because "even more than in the ancient world, we encounter travelers and strangers from vastly different regions and cultures. Some are traveling by choice (e.g., students and immigrants), while others travel by necessity (e.g., evacuees from natural disasters and refugees from war-torn regions)."

From the beginning of the Church, Christians developed minimum rules and roles for hospitality to protect congregations from abuse and encourage disciples to remain faithful in this practice. Yet in subsequent centuries as they formed hospitals, monasteries, and other institutions to care for the poor, the sick, and the wayfarers, their hospitality became "increasingly disconnected from the life-giving bonds of congregational life and from the personal warmth of household-based care," Christine Pohl laments in *Building a Place for Hospitality* (p. 27). This trend has continued "so that today we have many large-scale institutions that offer assistance without providing community." In response, Pohl explores how "followers of Jesus can be especially attentive to opportunities to reconnect hospitality and community in our homes, congregations, and social ministries."

The Catholic Worker houses of hospitality, begun by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin to serve immigrants and the poor during the Great Depression, remain an important model for integrating Christian community with social ministries in an industrialized society, Coleman Fannin writes in *Dorothy Day's Radical Hospitality* (p. 37). We can learn much from this modern witness, including how Day placed worship and a focus on faithfulness, not results, at the center of these remarkable communities of service. The Catholic Worker movement flourishes today, Fannin believes, because "it has been a consistent witness that hospitality and nonviolence are at the heart of the gospel and are the basis for critiquing our culture."

Jesus' hospitality in the gospels has inspired great art. In *Revelers* (p. 46), Heidi Hornik recounts the controversy surrounding Veronese's *Feast in the House of Levi* (cover), which the Inquisition deemed too raucous for a Last Supper painting, but embraced as a depiction of Jesus' radical hospitality. In *Host and Guest* (p. 50) as she studies Allori's *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, Hornik reflects on the relation between contemplation and active service in our discipleship. In *Protecting the Innocents* (p. 64), she observes that Filippo Brunelleschi's architecture for the Ospedale degli Innocenti (the hospital for abandoned children in Renaissance Florence) must be judged as "more than an aesthetically beautiful building." It represents a significant "milestone institution of Italian hospitality and Christian love."

Learning our dual roles as a guest in God's Kingdom and host to one another and God, which Newman describes in her article and Hornik finds exemplified in Allori's painting, is the focus of Michele Herschberger's service of worship (p. 56). She weaves the liturgy around the themes in "Come,

Brother, Sit with Me," a beautiful new hymn by David Wright with a simple melody and counter melody by James Clemens (p. 53).

True hospitality is always more than helping a friend or providing for the stranger, it is an attitude of heart "that moves over to allow true space for the other," writes Kathy Callahan-Howell in *Finding Home* (p. 67). It is "the ability to set self aside and welcome the other person into authenticity, to welcome them home." Such hospitality is infectious—when people open themselves to us in this way, we want to open ourselves to others—and Callahan-Howell describes how she caught the bug from her Granny. It's an infection Jimmy Dorrell hopes his teenagers will catch as three homeless men join them at the family dinner table. Describing the experience in *Pass the Potatoes, Please* (p. 71), Dorrell marvels "how the mystery of God's upside-down ways, experienced through acts of hospitality to strangers, supersedes cultural standards and brings us closer to him."

"In a world of terrorism and war, school shootings, and road rage, it is no wonder that concern for security often triumphs over hospitality to the stranger," Paul Wadell admits. "But is that the kind of community the Church should be?" he asks in *Toward a Welcoming Congregation* (p. 75). Wadell describes how congregations can move beyond safe neighbor love—"love that is calculating, selective, and restricted to all those we prefer to love because they are easy to love"—to risking "the dangerous love" of Christian hospitality.

In our increasingly pluralistic society, we confuse *welcome* with *inclusion*. We fear that as our congregations welcome those who are different, we will lose our distinctiveness and identity, Caroline Westerhoff notes in *Boundary and Hospitality* (p. 84). Yet the most welcoming communities have boundaries that clearly say, "This is who we are; this is what we do and don't do." She concludes, "Like Jesus, we are to welcome strangers and sinners into our midst, just as we ourselves have been welcomed into God's hospitable company. But we first must have the baptismal identity and its boundaries intact before we can genuinely welcome all those who choose to come."

In *A Tradition of Hospitality* (p. 90), Scott Moore reviews three recent books that help us "recover the rich tradition of hospitality and, by extension, the Christian faith that requires its practice." Christine Pohl's *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* summarizes the imperatives of Scripture and then surveys Christian attempts to embody them over the centuries. Amy Oden's *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity*, a treasury of reflections on hospitality, "reads like a travelogue through some of the great texts of Christian spirituality and practice." And Elizabeth Newman sets hospitality in the context of worship and community in *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers.* She urges us to allow hospitality once again to become a radical practice—central to the Christian faith and challenging to our culture.

Untamed Hospitality

BY ELIZABETH NEWMAN

While our culture reduces "hospitality" to friendliness and private entertaining, Christian hospitality remains a public and economic reality by which God re-creates us through the places and people we are given. How do we shift gears to practice this untamed hospitality?

My grandfather, a Baptist pastor who served small rural churches in Louisa County, Virginia, for forty years, bequeathed to me upon his death a number of books from his student days at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. One of these, *A Short History of the Baptists* (1907), opens with a colorful picture of Perpetua, a saint in the early Church who was brutally mauled by wild beasts as punishment for her conversion to Christianity. Her father, holding Perpetua's young son, desperately pleaded for her to renounce Christianity, but she refused.

The oddness of including Perpetua in a history of Baptists is as strange as beginning an essay on hospitality with the gruesome death of an Christian martyr. After all, hospitality typically brings to mind, as Henri Nouwen notes, "tea parties, bland conversation and a general atmosphere of coziness."[1] Many in our culture readily equate hospitality with a generic friendliness. The picture of God that sustains such hospitality, if there is one, is that God is a kind of therapeutic nice guy who asks only that we be nice too.

Yet a saint like Perpetua was not martyred for being too nice. Rather she *refused* to sacrifice to the gods, a sacrifice required by the Roman emperor, Severus, for his health and safety. In other words, Perpetua would not offer hospitality to pagan gods. Her refusal was grounded in the conviction that the Triune God alone is worthy of the sacrifice and gift of our lives.

DISTORTED IMAGES OF HOSPITALITY

Such a witness—the meaning of "martyr"—makes it clear that Christian hospitality is not a private practice. Yet popular magazines such as *Southern*

Living or *Ladies' Home Journal* assume hospitality has to do with delicious dinners and polite conversation in one's own beautiful home. Hospitality is reduced to private entertainment, almost always extended to people more or less like oneself in terms of status and class. This notion of hospitality as a private practice has led us to construct a public space where Christian hospitality seems not to belong.

Why could Perpetua not satisfy the emperor's concern that all citizens sacrifice to pagan gods in public (thereby securing the emperor's own power) and still worship their own personal god(s) in private? I imagine most of us would be tempted to do this, especially if the prospect of being torn apart by wild beasts were hanging over our heads. Perpetua rightly understood, however, as did the early Church more broadly, that Christian hospitality, like other Christian practices, constitutes a public way of life together. This way of life includes all "spheres" so that Christ's body will be visible to the world on its behalf. If Perpetua had given in to her father's pleas and worshiped foreign gods for the sake of the empire, the Church increasingly would have been erased from public view. She would have practiced "empire hospitality"—giving and receiving on behalf of the emperor—rather than Christian hospitality, which embodies faithfulness to Christ.

Given that any institution (including the Church) is grounded in "house practices,"[2] when its practices weaken or decline, then the institution will follow suit. The privatizing and sentimentalizing of hospitality has opened the door for other distorted conceptions of this practice, which have in turn distorted the Church.

An institution that has hijacked hospitality in a public and visible way today is the market. Google "hospitality" on the Internet and thousands of sites appear having to do with the "hospitality industry": cruises, hotels, and other such services. I recently was on a cruise in Hawaii, a wonderful gift from my parents to our family in honor of their fiftieth wedding anniversary. While we enjoyed the time together and the beautiful surroundings, I could not help but reflect on the cruise "experience" and how the hospitality industry marketed this to us.

For example, the "cruise hospitality" carried us into a different time, as reflected in some of my family's questions: "Was today Sunday?" "When was Christmas?" "Was Christmas when we were at the luau?" A marketed hospitality depends upon each day being just like every other, so that all days are interchangeable. Time is defined by consumption rather than by history, tradition, or personal relations.

What the market conceals, however, is telling. On New Year's Day morning I overheard one crewmember say to another, "I think it should be a rule that adults have to clean up their own barf." A marketed hospitality, focused on consumption, does not know or even care what goes on in time "behind the market scene."

WORSHIP AS HOSPITALITY

By contrast, and simply put, Christian hospitality serves God and not the market. Further, unlike the market, all days are *not* interchangeable. Christian hospitality rather relies upon an understanding of time and space as given and redeemed by God. This means that the Christian calendar and Sabbath keeping matter. Nowhere is the gift and redemption of time and space more fully enacted than when we gather to worship on the day of the Lord's resurrection.

Rightly understood, worship itself *is* hospitality. We do not gather ourselves; God gathers us; God invites us in. More fully, we are brought by the power of the Holy Spirit into a worship already taking place in the life of God. As Geoffrey Wainwright states, "The classical movement of Christian worship has always meant a participatory entrance into Christ's self-offering to the Father and correlatively being filled with the divine life."[3] To say that worship itself is our participation in divine hospitality is also to say that worship is the primary place where we learn to be guests and hosts in God's Kingdom.

In worship, then, God is our host. To describe God as host, however, is not to domesticate God. We only need to recall the familiar burning-bush scene from the life of Moses to see that God's hospitality challenges our typical expectations. God does not superficially welcome Moses, but rather commands him, "Come no closer!" (Exodus 3:5). Even more, God demands that Moses remove his sandals since he is standing on holy ground. Upon hearing God say, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," Moses hides his face, for he is "afraid to look at God" (Exodus 3:6).

We do not gather ourselves in worship; God invites us in. We are brought by the Holy Spirit into a worship already taking place in the life of God. This is where we learn to be guests and hosts in God's Kingdom.

In this instance, hospitality involves not our usual pleasantries but rather command, terror, and, not least of all, a puzzling calling from God—a *political* rather than private calling through which God works to create and sustain the nation of Israel. And unlike marketed hospitality, this divine hospitality extended to Moses is defined not by consumption as personal choice but by relationship and identity with God and a people.

As divine host, God through Christ in the Spirit draws us into communion with himself and others, giving us desires we had not previously even imagined. We are like the woman at the well (John 4:1-42)—we are blind

and confused about what we really need. Jesus, the perfect host, knows the true needs of the guests and offers gifts to meet those needs: "The water that I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (John 4:14b). Baptism is the living water that transforms. As host, God offers food in the form of word and table. But will this food satisfy? The Psalmist exclaims, "O taste and see that the LORD is good!" (Psalm 34:8). When guests taste God through word and table, they are nourished and satisfied.

If we worship faithfully, we will extend the hospitality that is worship through all the other days of the week to our neighbors, to strangers, and even to enemies.

But what if persons are physically hungry? Is worship a spiritualized hospitality that ignores their material needs? In our scientific world, we might be tempted to think that worship/hospitality is not real in that it does not meet the physical needs of the hungry and the poor. Seen in this light, worship is little more than a kind of idealized dream world with little connection to our real lives. Yet, as Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer rightly reminds us, life together in Christ is not "an ideal but a Divine reality."[4] Life together is not an ideal that we must strive to realize; it is rather a reality that God creates through Christ in which we are invited to participate. Far from being otherworldly, this Christ-centered hospitality is as deeply worldly as is possible since through it we are enabled to see and live in the world truthfully—seeing Christ in the poor, the hungry, and the naked, and addressing their physical needs (Matthew 25).

In worship or the liturgy (understood as the work of the people) then, we receive more fully the truth of *whose* we are even as we offer in return our prayers and thanksgiving, indeed our very lives, to God. Such hospitality is not an individual or even a communal achievement. It is rather a gift to be received, and its faithful reception makes us part of something larger than ourselves: Christ's own body.

To sum up, worship is the most important thing there is because it is what gathers, forms, and feeds the people of God. We know ourselves in and through this gathering, this living water, and this sacrificial meal. Apart from worship, we would not know what Christian hospitality as a way of life looks like.

Yet even in worship, to the degree that worship itself is less than full, we can still get a distorted picture of hospitality. Like many Southern Baptists, I grew up celebrating the Lord's Supper infrequently (four times a year) with a sip of grape juice and a 'chiclet' of bread. A far more enduring image of the abundant feast of God's hospitable Kingdom were the seeming *miles* of tables at our Sunday "dinner on the grounds," all of them groaning

under the weight of the wonderful dishes of food. For me, that great day when God gathers people from north, south, east, and west will look like one of those dinners. What it will not resemble is the sip of grape juice and the crumb of bread that was my portion when we observed the Lord's Supper. In worship, as God's guests, we open ourselves and delight in the abundance of God.

HOSPITALITY AS ECONOMIC

Such hospitality, of course, does not stop when the worship service ends. The Orthodox Church has a phrase to describe the time after the church gathers: "the liturgy after the liturgy." If we worship faithfully, we will extend the hospitality that is worship through all the other days of the week to our neighbors, to strangers, and even to enemies. This hospitality is at once economic and political.

Today we tend to think of economics on a grand scale—as having to do with things like the stock market, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and so on—and we suspect that only Harvard MBAs can really understand it. Indeed, this grand-scale view is one of the ways our advanced capitalist economy disempowers us. From this perspective it is easy to believe that hospitality has nothing to do with economics. However, that economics and hospitality are both related to *oikos,* the Greek word for "household," gives us a different perspective. Rightly understood, "hospitality" names the kind of giving and receiving that enables the *oikos* or household to flourish, and "economics" describes the rules that govern this practice. As we will see, the kind of *oikos* we envision as our primary dwelling makes all the difference in the world for how we understand and practice hospitality.

As we have seen above, the place of Christian hospitality is marked by an extraordinary abundance. Stated theologically, God creates not because God has to but because God desires to. That is, God as Trinity already has perfect and sufficient fellowship. Therefore, God's creating of the world, Israel, and the Church are fully gifts. Rightly understood, "the love displayed in God's life is not a zero-sum game but one of overflowing plentitude."[5] Abundance rather than scarcity and competition mark the *oikos* and economics of Christian hospitality.

We have difficulty hearing and accepting these straightforward claims because we have been so deeply formed by living in a market society, a society completely dominated by market forces. Consumerism, competition, and individualism already shape our lives. How do we shift gears and truly practice a different hospitality?

While this is no doubt a large question, we might begin by considering the practice of "staying put." Our current economy shapes us to believe that any move for more money is a good one. Or moving to a new congregation because it meets "our needs" is better than staying in a place where one is

unfulfilled. Or getting out of a marriage that is unhappy only makes sense. If we do not like one place, thing, or person, why not choose another? Such an ideology is grounded in the conviction that through our choices we are our own creators, which is exactly what a market society with its relentless advertising campaign would want us to believe. Yet this kind of detachment fostered by our late modern economy makes it almost impossible to sustain the bonds and sense of place necessary to practice hospitality well.

The politics that sustains Christian hospitality is not based on "individual rights" and "legislative procedure." Rather it looks to the good of the Body of Christ.

By contrast, one of the most profound biblical accounts of hospitality, Jesus' washing the feet of his disciples, is possible because the disciples stay put. Despite their confusion, their perception that Jesus was not meeting their needs, and their trials, they remain with Jesus. That they do so is made possible by Jesus' faithfulness to them, a faithfulness embodied in his washing their feet (John 13). In this act Jesus shows them that even as he is their servant, they too are to be servants, looking to the needs of others. He wants them to know, with his time to depart drawing near, that he "loved them to the end" (John 13:1). Jesus remains faithful to his disciples to the end, even though they will not be entirely faithful to him. But as we know, the story unfolds: their lack of faithfulness cannot thwart the faithfulness of God, and the disciples eventually gain a deeper sense of their place before Jesus.

Christian hospitality does not aim for self-fulfillment through autonomous choice, but for staying put with Christ in the places we are given. It aims not for detachment from people, institutions, and traditions, but for allowing God to re-create us through the places and people we are given. The Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco, for example, not only practices economic sharing (twenty-four members own only seven cars), but they also practice "stability," moving to another place in the city *only if* it will build the church. Such an example reminds us all that Christian hospitality flourishes when there is stability in the *oikos* or dwelling of Christ.

Pilgrimage and movement, of course, are also crucial for economic flourishing in the household of Christian hospitality. The practice of "staying put" is not intended to deny the idea that hospitality involves journeying together toward deeper faithfulness. In terms of economics, this involves looking for ways to practice both giving and receiving.

Jacques Ellul has said, "One way to subvert the power of money is to give it away." Stated more broadly, one way to subvert the power of dominant economic forces is to look for alternative ways of both giving

and receiving in the household or dwelling of Christ.

Gilbert Bond tells of one such journey when he served as assistant pastor at Chicago First Church of the Brethren, where the congregation participated in a government-sponsored program to distribute surplus agricultural commodities to the poor. The government required the church to obtain a "proof of poverty" from every person who came through the door—usually the card issued to those poor enough to participate in the Medicaid program. "The comic absurd part of the requirement became apparent when one reflected upon who else would wait in the Chicago winter outside a church for several hours to receive a five-pound brick of processed cheese if they could afford to buy it or a better grade of cheese in a grocery store."[6] In this situation, counting and quantifying the really poor became terribly dehumanizing. As one young man who "failed to prove that he had failed" angrily erupted, "What in the [blank-blank] do you think all these people come here for?… Everybody lining up here is poor. If we weren't poor we wouldn't be here."[7]

After much painful discernment, the congregation came to realize that this program, based on calculating who was really poor, was inherently violent and that some institutional structures are incapable of mediating God's hospitable Kingdom. Bond goes on to tell how the congregation developed an alternative ministry of neighborhood fellowship meals that involved eating, singing, and praying together. (The Brethren practice that formed the basis for this alternative ministry was the Anabaptist love feast, which includes a foot-washing ritual and an agape meal.) Fewer people were served, but neighborhood children eventually started coming to church. Sitting down at a common meal with the folks in their neighborhood was much more risky (and less controlling) than giving food to people in line, yet it also made possible genuine hospitality. The economic practice of First Church moved from an impersonal handout to a faithful hospitality that enabled receiving as well as giving.

HOSPITALITY AS POLITICAL

As this story also illustrates, hospitality is political as well. The use of the word "political" to describe a practice like hospitality might sound rather jarring. Doesn't politics have to do with elections, legislation, and procedural polity? A more ancient understanding, however, defines "politics" in terms of how a community, a *polis*, is ordered to produce a common good. Indeed the purpose of a *polis*, Aristotle believed, is the creation of a people who are better than they could be without the *polis*. The politics that sustains Christian hospitality is not based on "individual rights" and "legislative procedure." As the previous story shows, reliance upon rights protected by the state does not insure faithful hospitality. Even more, as Perpetua well knew, the politics that sustains the empire or the nation-state differs from the politics of Jesus.

The politics of Christian hospitality looks to the good of the Body of Christ. This politics is ordered so that "the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor" (1 Corinthians 12:22-23a). In the Brethren story, the gathering around the table honored those most deeply in need in a way that the distribution of cheese did not. Such hospitality is a way of *being* before it is a way of *doing*. Rightly understood, the faithful practice of hospitality begins with what our larger society will tend to regard as of little consequence. As a political practice, it attends to what in the world's eyes might seem inconsequential but from the perspective of the gospel is a manifestation of God's politics: the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps no one today better displays this politics of "small gestures" than Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche Communities, places where those with handicaps live in community with those without such handicaps. Vanier emphasizes the importance of "being with" rather than "doing for" the handicapped, which to outsiders might appear to be wasting time. Vanier's emphasis, however, is not first on giving, but on learning to receive. "We have discovered that we have a common spirituality of humility and presence, close to the poor and the weak; a common call to live with them, not to change them, but to welcome them and share their gifts and their beauty; to discover in them the presence of Jesus—Jesus, humble and gentle, Jesus, poor and rejected."[8] The politics of L'Arche hospitality embodies the conviction that discerning the common good involves learning to receive from the other, especially the other who by society's standards appears to have nothing to offer. Such hospitality, as Vanier readily admits, is not normal.

Vanier tells a delightful story about "Mr. Normal" and a mentally handicapped young man.

> I don't know whether around here you have some normal people, but I find them a very strange group. I don't know—I remember—well, one of the characteristics of normal people is that they have problems. They have family problems, they have financial problems, they have professional problems, problems with politics, problems with church, problems all over the place. And I remember one day a "normal" guy came to see me and he was telling me about all his problems. And there was a knock on the door and entered Jean Claude. Jean Claude has Down's syndrome and, relaxed and laughing, …he just shook. I didn't even say, "Come in." He came in, and he shook my hand and laughed and he shook the hand of Mr. Normal and laughed and he walked out laughing. And Mr. Normal turned to me and he said, "Isn't it sad, children like that."
>
> He couldn't see that Jean Claude was a happy guy. It's a blindness, and it's an inner blindness which is the most difficult to heal.[9]

Christian hospitality flows from the strange truth that in Christ God has entered and redeemed our time and place. This truth frees us to practice the spontaneous and joyful hospitality of Jean Claude. Christian hospitality is not about the extraordinary deed nor about heroic self-effort. Neither is it something we accomplish. Hospitality is rather a life we receive as we rely upon and respond to God and one another for the sake of God's Kingdom.

In so doing, might we, like Perpetua, witness to a political hospitality that makes martyrdom possible?

NOTES

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2 James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), 193.

3 Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 23.

4 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, translated by John W. Doberstein (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1954), 26.

5 Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 222.

6 Gilbert I. Bond, "Liturgy, Ministry, and the Stranger," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, edited by Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 142.

7 Ibid., 143.

8 Jean Vanier, *An Ark for the Poor: The Story of L'Arche* (Toronto, ON: Novalis, 1995), 57.

9 Jean Vanier, *Our Journey Home: Rediscovering a Common Humanity Beyond Our Differences* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 4-5.

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Entertaining Angels: Hospitality in Luke and Acts

BY ANDREW ARTERBURY

In Luke's writings the ancient practice of hospitality—the custom of welcoming travelers or strangers into one's home and establishing relationships with them—becomes the prism through which Jesus' disciples can view one another and others as valuable children of God.

Today we think of hospitality as the custom of feeding family, friends, and neighbors in our homes or hosting these people for a night or two. The writers of the New Testament, however, were working with a significantly different definition of hospitality or *xenia*. The ancient custom of hospitality revolved around the practice of welcoming strangers or travelers into one's home while promising to provide them with provisions and protection.[1]

Hospitality in the first century could be a very risky venture, just as taking strangers into one's home is a dangerous decision in many corners of the world today. Nevertheless, in the books of Luke and Acts we see an appeal for Jesus' disciples to practice hospitality in their lives and ministries.

ANCIENT HOSPITALITY

Strangers who were traveling in a new region did not always find a hospitable reception in antiquity. For starters, they were easy prey for thieves and robbers who trolled the roadways in sparsely populated areas. Furthermore, many townspeople saw mysterious strangers as threats and therefore sought to shun, abuse, or eliminate these outsiders before they could harm the community. Recall, for instance, how the men of Sodom (Genesis 19:1-11) and the men of Gibeah (Judges 19:14-26) wanted to take advantage of strangers and selfishly abuse them in violent ways. As a result, one of the

core features of ancient hospitality included the host's implicit vow to provide the stranger with protection.

In essence, the custom of hospitality in antiquity grew out of a desire to neutralize potential threats—both threats to strangers and threats to one's community. Not only were generous hosts protecting strangers from thieves along the road and from townspeople inclined toward mob violence, they were seeking to protect their household and community from the wrath of the stranger. In the event that a traveler had either military resources or "magical" powers, it was thought that a host's abundant generosity might neutralize the potential threat while cultivating the stranger's favor (see, for example, the story of Joshua's "spies" being hosted by Rahab in Joshua 2:1-21 and 6:22-25). As a result, the leading citizens of a community often bore the primary responsibility for hosting strangers.

Ancient hosts also were obligated to meet their guests' needs by supplying them with necessary provisions. Upon their guests' arrival, meritorious hosts fed strangers an initial meal and at times provided them with lodging without asking their guests questions about their identity or place of origin. In addition hosts would often provide them with water for cleaning their feet and with new clothes if they needed them. Then, after the guests had finished the meal, hosts finally were free to inquire about their guests' identity, home region, and travels.

If they both agreed, a host and guest might exchange valuable gifts that symbolized the formation of a long-term, reciprocal guest-friendship or alliance between the two of them and their families (see, for example, *Iliad* 6.215-231). In this way, both people took on the permanent responsibilities of a host and a guest. Each one vowed to provide protection and provisions for their counterpart whenever the other was traveling in one's region. Indeed, during the time periods when Abraham was alive and the *Odyssey* was first written, "guest-friends" generally showed more loyalty to their counterpart than to the people of their own region. Finally, the host would "send the guest off" with enough provisions for at least a day's journey and often would provide a guide to accompany the guest until he or she had traveled safely out of the region.

Why would anyone extend such hospitality to a stranger since it was both a dangerous and potentially expensive practice? In a Greco-Roman context, hosts were likely motivated by fear of an ominous stranger, by fear of Zeus, the god of hospitality, or by a desire to create politically advantageous alliances with powerful counterparts. In Hebraic and Christian contexts, however, the motive for hospitality more often grew out of the desire to please God by showing love toward a fellow worshiper. For example, Abraham and Lot are revered for showing kind hospitality to travelers (Genesis 18:1-16 and 19:1-23, respectively). In each case they graciously welcome complete strangers into their homes seemingly unaware that their guests are actually Yahweh or Yahweh's angels.[2] In the end, however, Yah-

weh rewards their attempts to show love toward their fellow human beings by blessing them. One or both of these stories apparently provides the background for the Christian instruction, "Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:1-2).

In Hebraic and Christian contexts, then, a follower of God showed love for God and others by extending hospitality to complete strangers. In addition, though it was not the primary motivation, some followers of God likely were motivated to extend hospitality to strangers by their desire to cultivate God's blessings upon their own lives and households.

HOSPITALITY IN LUKE-ACTS

Early Christian authors taught that while it was advisable for Christians to minimize the risks and even the abuses inherent in this ancient custom, they should not neglect to extend hospitality to those in need.[3] For most early Christians, an absence of hospitality would mean an absence of love for God and neighbor. This perspective is especially vivid in Luke's writings. Let's explore Luke's emphasis on hospitality in three passages that are unique to his work: Luke 10:1-16, Luke 24:13-35, and Acts 9:43-10:48.

In *Luke 10:1-16* Luke describes Jesus' commissioning of seventy disciples who will travel in pairs to various towns to spread the news about his message and ministry. (While Mark 6:6b-13, Matthew 10:1-15, and Luke 9:1-6 narrate Jesus' commissioning of "the twelve," only Luke goes on to relate this appointment of the "seventy others.") Jesus instructs the seventy to depend on the hospitality of the townspeople they encounter. For instance, he prohibits them from carrying their own provisions. Instead, the blessing and peace of God will rest upon those hosts who extend hospitality to Jesus' servants (10:4-6). He forbids the disciples, after they enter the home of a gracious host, from moving about from house to house. Rather than seeking for more prestigious or luxurious accommodations, they are to accept willingly the provisions they have received (10:7).

Finally, Jesus commissions the seventy to minister to their host families and communities. Rather than merely receiving provisions and protection, the traveling missionaries are to meet the needs they encounter along the way and to proclaim the Kingdom of God. "Whoever listens to you listens to me," Jesus concludes, "and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me" (10:16). The townspeople's response to these strangers, Jesus' disciples, will function as their response to Jesus himself.

The ethical implications of these instructions are enormous for Christian guests in a context of hospitality. First, Jesus requires his disciples to participate in the custom of hospitality (10:4). He wants them to be dependent upon their hosts, who in this case seem to be unaware of Jesus' ministry. Their willingness to stay in the homes of people who are not yet disciples

of Jesus opens a door for God's blessing and work in their lives and communities. Clearly Jesus does not want his disciples to operate from a position of superiority. Rather he teaches them to work from a position of equality if not dependency as they seek to carry out his ministry and message.

Furthermore, Jesus demands that his disciples be grateful to their hosts and content with what they have been provided. They must not seek out wealthier or more prestigious hosts within the same community. This would be very countercultural for a first century Greco-Roman audience and likely even for a Jewish audience. In essence, Jesus forbids his disciples from evaluating their hosts based on the status they hold in society. To carry out their mission properly, Jesus' disciples must form deep and loyal bonds with those whom they encounter along the way. Christian guests cannot constantly be looking for better offers and more advantageous hosts.

Finally, Jesus teaches his disciples that his ministry and message are far more important than the identity of the messenger (10:16). As we have seen, it was common in antiquity to refrain from asking about a guest's identity until after the guest had been welcomed and fed. Jesus builds on this practice when he informs the disciples that their potential hosts' reaction to them is not about their own identity or status. It is not even about how articulate or charismatic they are. Rather, Jesus' identity and message will provide the focal points in the hospitality relationships that his disciples forge.

In *Luke 24:13-35* we read about a pair of disciples walking from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus after Jesus' crucifixion. These two, Cleopas and another, had heard reports about Jesus' resurrection, but they were slow to believe (24:18-25). A "stranger" joins them on their journey (24:18). Unbeknownst to them, the stranger is none other than the resurrected Jesus in an unrecognizable form (24:15-16). In this respect Jesus' actions resemble the visit from Yahweh in Genesis 18 or his angels in Genesis 19. As the disciples arrive at their home in Emmaus, the stranger continues to travel onward. However, the disciples insist that the stranger accept their hospitality, especially because the day is drawing to a close (24:28-29). Once inside, the hosts prepare a meal for the traveler. When the stranger breaks the bread, the disciples' "eyes [are] opened" and they recognize Jesus. At that point he vanishes from their sight (24:31). As a result, the two disciples believe fully in the resurrected Lord and return to Jerusalem to spread the good news to "the eleven and their companions" (24:33-35).

Jesus forbids his disciples from evaluating hosts by their status. Christian guests must form deep and loyal bonds with people they encounter and not be looking constantly for better offers and more advantageous hosts.

This story presents Luke's readers with implicit ethical directives for Christian hosts. The burning question in this passage is: Why does Jesus take on the form of a stranger? Surely Jesus' dramatic appearance and his interpretation of the Scriptures would have been just as effective and memorable had he appeared in a recognizable form from the beginning. (In several other post-resurrection appearances recorded in the Gospels and Acts, the risen Jesus is recognizable from the outset.) Moreover, if Jesus is to take on an unrecognizable form, why does he not choose a more prestigious one—perhaps appearing as a priest or government official?

Initially, Cleopas and the other disciple think the stranger is foolish, uninformed, and slow to understand. Yet, to discover the truth about the resurrected Jesus, they are forced to listen to and learn from the unassuming stranger. It is only as these two disciples journey with the stranger, listen to him, extend hospitality to him, and break bread with him that they are able to experience the risen Lord and receive his message for them and for the other disciples.

These two disciples in Emmaus become prime examples of Christian hosts. Rather than shunning strangers, Jesus' disciples would do well to journey alongside them. Rather than exclusively *speaking* to those they encounter along life's journeys, Jesus' disciples would do well to *listen* first. Rather than deeming others to be foolish, ignorant, and of no benefit, Jesus' disciples would do well to assume that God might have revealed himself to strangers. Rather than taking things at face value, Jesus' disciples should realize that the Spirit is at work in the world around them. Almost certainly Luke is inviting his readers to conclude that if they extend hospitality to strangers like these two disciples did on the road to Emmaus, they too might "entertain angels without knowing it" and experience the resurrected Jesus in the process.

In *Acts 9:43-10:48* Luke weaves together three hospitality encounters: Peter accepts the hospitality of Simon the tanner in Joppa (9:43 and 10:6), Peter extends hospitality to Cornelius's messengers despite the fact that Peter is already a guest in someone else's home—Simon the tanner's (10:17-23), and Peter accepts hospitality from Cornelius, a Roman centurion living in Caesarea (10:24-48). In describing this crucial juncture in the spread of early Christianity, Luke draws attention to the custom of hospitality. Here I will limit my discussion to the third hospitality encounter, which is easily the most important one in the book of Acts.[4]

The narrative tension in Acts 10-11 revolves around the identity of Cornelius: he is a Roman soldier who fears God, but this Gentile has not chosen to become a practicing Jew (10:1-2, 11:3). After an angel of God speaks to Cornelius in a vision about Peter (10:3-6), Cornelius sends for Peter and invites him to lodge in his house. Surprisingly, Peter accepts the invitation to receive hospitality in Cornelius's house. It is surprising precisely because Jewish travelers tended to seek hospitality exclusively among their fellow

Jews (10:28; 11:2-3; cf. Judges 19:12). Yet Peter, after pondering the vision that God gives him (10:9-16), comes to realize that he should not consider any person "profane or unclean" (10:28; cf. 11:12). As a result, he accepts hospitality from Cornelius and enters his home. Once inside, Peter explains the good news of Jesus Christ to him (10:34-43) and the gift of the Holy Spirit falls upon Cornelius and the other Gentiles gathered in his home (10:44-46). Subsequently, Cornelius and the other Gentiles are baptized.

Hospitality becomes the vehicle through which the evangelization and incorporation of the Gentiles into the life of the Christian community are first realized.[5] In addition, the custom of hospitality functions as the prism through which Jewish Christians are able to see Gentile converts in a new way—no longer as "profane or unclean," but rather as covenant partners in the community of Christians. Hence, Luke creates a direct link between the custom of hospitality, which bridges the gap between people of different regions and cultures in antiquity, and the integration of the Gentiles into the life of the Church.

Here, too, Luke's earliest readers would have discovered a sure foundation on which to establish their understanding of Christian hospitality. Jesus' disciples must not allow cultural differences (e.g., food laws) to blind them to the work of God. Peter initially resists the vision of the clean and unclean animals in 10:9-16. Similarly, as long as Jesus' disciples are imprisoned by the categories of clean and unclean people, they will never be able to enter into equitable hospitality relationships that allow for the spread of the gospel. God's first step in reaching out to the Gentiles consists of overturning the prejudices of God's messengers.

The cross-cultural practice of hospitality provides an ideal vehicle for sharing the gospel with unbelievers and unifying the Christian Church despite its disparate membership. By entering into an alliance or covenant with those from cultures that are foreign to them, Jesus' disciples are forced both to give and to receive benefits from those God has called them to love. Acts 9:43-10:48 demonstrates how they are to function as host and guest in a reciprocal hospitality relationship. Peter moves seamlessly from guest to host and back to guest again while God provides the "gift" that seals the permanent relationship among those who worship him.

The Apostle Peter moves seamlessly from guest to host and back to guest while God provides the "gift" that seals the permanent relationship among those who worship him.

Ultimately, this passage teaches that Jesus' disciples in all generations must allow God to move them past their prejudices. Through the ministry of Christian hospitality God can forge permanent, interdependent bonds

among his followers and with those who have previously been seen as "strangers."

CONCLUSION

Luke repeatedly focuses on the ancient practice of hospitality, the custom of welcoming travelers or strangers into one's home while committing to provide them with protection and provisions. This custom functions as an effective bridge for evangelization and the unification of the early Church. Yet this custom is not a one-sided ministry for Jesus' disciples: they are called to be both exemplary hosts and exemplary guests as they carry out the ministry of Jesus in word and deed. Hospitality establishes a truly interdependent and reciprocal relationship that requires disciples, whether they are hosts or guests, to view the stranger as a valuable child of God.

These Lukan hospitality texts remain relevant for Christians today. Even more than in the ancient world, we encounter travelers and strangers from vastly different regions and cultures. Some are traveling by choice (e.g., students and immigrants), while others travel by necessity (e.g., evacuees from natural disasters and refugees from war-torn regions). In Luke's writings, we hear a call to extend hospitality to these strangers in creative ways.

With the early Christians we should take wise steps to guard against those who might abuse generous hosts (*Didache* 11-12), but we may not neglect the Christian ministry of hospitality. As Jesus' disciples, we should proactively seek to extend protection and provisions to strangers. As we do this, we may encounter God's presence in the midst of our hospitality. We may well "entertain angels without knowing it."

NOTES

1 Andrew Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in its Mediterranean Setting,* New Testament Monographs, 8 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 131-132. For a more complete description of hospitality in antiquity, see pages 15-132.

2 Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, edited by Leander Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), I:462. Fretheim suggests, "From the narrator's point of view, Yahweh appears to Abraham at his home (v. 1). From Abraham's point of view, however, three men stand near him (v. 2)."

3 See, for example, the early second century instruction in *Didache* 11.4-6 and 12.1-2.

4 I examine these encounters in more detail in *Entertaining Angels*, 135-181.

5 John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 86-87, 103.

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Building a Place for Hospitality

BY CHRISTINE D. POHL

Hospitality quickly takes on earthy dimensions—buildings, beds and blankets, pots and pans—as we share our place, make use of what is available, or create new places. How can we sustain personal, small-scale places of welcome along with more institutionalized expressions of care?

Because hospitality involves sharing food, shelter, protection, recognition, and conversation, it usually also involves particular places. Unless understood exclusively as a sentiment or an attitude, hospitality has very earthy dimensions—buildings, beds and blankets, pots and pans. In offering welcome, we share our place, make use of what is available, or create new places.

Often when we think of hospitality, homes or households immediately come to mind. Throughout history they have been the primary location for offering welcome. Before inns, hotels, and restaurants, every stranger needed someone's hospitality. Whether or not they had resources, when people were away from home, they were dependent on the kindness and generosity of others, often strangers.

Because of this, hospitality was viewed as a central virtue and practice in most cultures and, at times, even as one of the pillars of morality on which society was built. Hospitality was understood as a form of mutual aid, often rigorously observed, and usually associated with caring for the needs of strangers.

BIBLICAL ROOTS

Most ancient understandings of hospitality suggest that it was viewed as important, but also as episodic and occasional—providing food and shel-

ter for a few days to those passing through a region or a community. The biblical texts reflect this understanding in numerous places, but particularly in the account of Abraham and Sarah offering hospitality from their home to the three strangers who turned out to be angels (Genesis 18:1-16).

Another dimension of caring for strangers is evident in the Old Testament. Sojourners and resident aliens were offered protection and provision under Israelite law (e.g., Exodus 22:21; Deuteronomy 24:14-15). Hospitality was expressed through the laws about gleaning and by making the triennial tithe available to resident aliens along with the Israelite poor (e.g., Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 26:11-13). These arrangements are early indications of a formalized, communal provision for strangers. But this provision was tied to personal expressions of hospitality in that faithful Israelites were also instructed to make a place for sojourners within their families when they celebrated holidays (Deuteronomy 16:9-15).

New structures that encouraged hospitality while protecting the communities from abuse helped early Christians avoid becoming grudging or negligent regarding this aspect of discipleship.

Much of Jesus' life and many of his activities were tied to giving and receiving hospitality. He came as a stranger into the world, vulnerable to the welcome and rejection of people (e.g., Luke 9:51-53; John 1). He was a guest in many different homes and at numerous meals (e.g., Luke 4:38-39, 5:29-32, 7:36-39, 10:38-42, 11:37, 14:1-14, 19:1-10). Although without a place of his own, he acted as a host to individuals, small groups, and huge crowds, making use of places that were available to him (e.g. Luke 9:12-17, 18:15-17, 22:7-23). Sometimes an encounter began with Jesus as a guest, but he later became the host (Luke 24:13-35). Jesus' practices of hospitality were often brief, intense, personal, and countercultural.

In a setting in which Jesus was a guest at a dinner party, he pushed conventional understandings of home-based hospitality outward when he challenged the host by saying:

> When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. (Luke 14:12-14)

And in Matthew 25:31-46, when Jesus identified the care offered to the "least of these" with care given to himself, he again challenged followers

to put their focus on those who do not appear to have much to offer. He identified responses to the most vulnerable ones (those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, sick, or in prison) with responses to his own needs. In this extraordinary passage, he did not identify a specific place for hospitality, but opened up the possibility that, in every setting, his followers might see an opportunity for offering hospitality to those ordinarily overlooked or undervalued.

As the early Church grew in size and influence, hospitality remained a central practice (Romans 12:13, 15:7; Hebrews 13:2). Because Christians traveled to spread the gospel and to escape persecution, hospitality continued to be an important part of their shared life. Christians regularly received others into their homes (e.g., Acts 2:44-47, 16:15; Romans 16:23; 3 John 1:1-8). Early gatherings for worship were often household-based, and the image of the church as the household of God had powerful resonance (e.g., Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15). Because converts came from many backgrounds, shared meals—usually in homes—became an important location for building unity and a new identity, for transcending social differences, and for making sure that the local poor were fed (e.g., Acts 2:46; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34). Hospitality was practically necessary and theologically central.

Not surprisingly, difficulties accompanied the generous practice of hospitality. Some people took advantage of the welcome offered by the early Christians, and communities could become weary with the practice (1 Peter 4:9). Christian leaders struggled to balance teaching and mentoring new believers with the numerous responsibilities included in hospitality (Acts 6:1-6). Quickly some minimal rules and roles were developed. Most travelers could count on welcome for a few days; those who claimed to be prophets or teachers were held to fairly rigorous tests—they revealed themselves as false if they asked the communities for money or if they stayed too long without sharing in the work (Acts 20:32-35; 2 Corinthians 11:8-9; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; *Didache* 11:1-6, 12:1-5). Deacons took over some of the practical aspects of providing hospitality, and letters of reference were used to introduce people as they moved from one community to another (Acts 18:27; Romans 16:1-2; 1 Corinthians 16:3; Philippians 2:29-30).

These structures were early efforts at making it possible to sustain hospitality over the long term. Encouraging the practice of hospitality while simultaneously protecting the communities from abuse was important in helping faithful Christians avoid becoming grudging or negligent regarding this aspect of discipleship.

ANCIENT CHURCH STRUCTURES

The early congregations distinguished themselves as communities that cared for poor people and strangers, especially strangers who were sick or destitute. In an early second-century defense of the Christian faith to unbelievers, Aristedes commended the Christians on the basis of their lives:

> They love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him into their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but brethren after the spirit and in God.[1]

In another defense of the faith from the second century, Justin Martyr described the Christian community's weekly practice of collecting offerings and depositing them with the leader who "succours the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need."[2]

Pressures increased on the congregations as the gospel spread and as the numbers of converts, access to resources, and needs of the general population grew. Christian communities became known for their care for strangers, and so needy strangers came to them for assistance. When persecutions ceased and Christianity was more favorably recognized by the governmental authorities, those authorities turned to Christian communities to provide more organized, predictable care for those in need.

The comments of a pagan emperor from the fourth century suggest how widely recognized Christian practices of hospitality had become. In an effort to reestablish Hellenic religion in the Roman Empire in 362, Julian instructed the high priest of the Hellenic faith to imitate the Christian concern for strangers and poor people. Referring to Christianity as atheism, he asked, "Why do we not observe that it is their benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase atheism?" He instructed the priest that hostels in every city should be established for strangers and ordered a distribution of food for the poor, strangers, and beggars. He wrote: "For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans [Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us. Teach those of the Hellenic faith to contribute to public service of this sort."[3]

This early description of Christian hospitality as "public service" suggests an important development in the provision of hospitality. It is in the fourth century that we see significant growth of hospitals and other institutions, which over the next centuries become increasingly specialized. In addition to the more specialized roles and tasks that emerge during this period, there are also separate buildings established for the purpose of caring for those in need.

A glowing description of one of the first hospitals to be established by Christians in approximately 370 is found within a document celebrating the life and work of Basil, bishop of Caesarea. In response to terrible suffering

caused by a severe famine, Basil had gathered victims of the famine and what food he was able to collect, "combining personal respect with the supply of their necessity, and so giving them a double relief."[4] Gregory Nazianzen described the hospital as a "new city, a storehouse of piety" and went on to declare that it was the finest wonder of the world. He rejoiced that a place had been established where those decimated by disease could have a city of their own, no longer objects of hatred and exclusion because of their infirmities.[5] During his lifetime, Basil developed a variety of institutions to provide care for the sick, travelers, and poor people.

Also from the fourth century, John Chrysostom provides us with important insight into the tensions that are associated with corporate, organized responses to need. In addressing his parishioners' claims that the church was able to provide hospitality through special apartments, hospitals, and hospices, Chrysostom argued that it also remained a personal, individual responsibility. Even if the stranger could be fed from common funds, he asked, "can that benefit you? If another man prays, does it follow that you are not bound to pray?" He instructed his parishioners to make a guest chamber in their own houses to respond to the needs of strangers and to experience the blessings connected with offering hospitality. During his lifetime, he helped to establish numerous specialized institutions of hospitality, but continued to urge believers to offer hospitality personally, with their own hands, and from within their own homes. For him, hospitality was an essential part of Christian identity, a wonderful conduit of blessing and transformation, and a practical necessity.[6]

John Chrysostom was sensitive, however, to the ways individual and corporate provision of care could demean recipients. He wrote at length on the importance of maintaining respect for persons as they were given assistance. He insisted that the administrators in the newly formed institutions of hospitality needed discernment, generosity, sensitivity, and graciousness in responding to those in need.[7]

Christians became known for their care for strangers. When governmental persecutions ceased, authorities turned to Christian communities to provide more organized, predictable care for those in need.

In the ancient Church, the monastic life became an important expression of deep Christian commitment, and many monasteries offered hospitality to strangers as a part of their identity and work. *The Rule of Benedict*, from the sixth century, is particularly attentive to the character of the monks that filled roles associated with hospitality. The guest-master, gatekeeper, and cellarer were expected to be mature, generous, wise, and humble.[8] The

detailed attention to roles and qualifications related to hospitality suggests how central it was to the monastic communities. Many monasteries established hospices and hostels for strangers, pilgrims, the poor, and the sick, while they simultaneously tried to protect a distinctive monastic lifestyle.

Leaders in the churches and monasteries assumed many of the responsibilities of hospitality. Over time, the giving and receiving of hospitality became an important aspect of complex political relationships among bishops, abbots, and the lay aristocracy. Gracious, intimate hospitality was increasingly reserved for those with power and influence, while persons with few resources received minimal assistance at a distance from the community. Over the centuries, expectations decreased that congregational gatherings would be sites of hospitality. Although service might be provided by church leaders or godly lay people, it was increasingly disconnected from the life-giving bonds of congregational life and from the personal warmth of household-based care.

One of the important distinctives of the earliest Christian practice of hospitality was its location—within the overlap of household and church, a place that was personal without being private. In this setting, expressions of hospitality strengthened community bonds, guest/host roles could be fluid, and persons of different rank and status were received into the same place. It was also a setting in which Christian women, whose roles in the public world were constrained, had significant opportunity for ministry.

MODERN INSTITUTIONS

Efforts to make hospitality more widely available and predictable had unintended consequences. The benefits that came with the establishment of hospitals were inseparable from the difficulties created by specialized institutions. In hospitals, those who received assistance were often disconnected from family and community and hidden from public view. Roles were flattened and persons were viewed as either providers or recipients. There was little room for mutuality and little expectation that the recipient had something to contribute. Caregiving eventually became quite anonymous.

During the later Middle Ages in Europe, some hospitals came under municipal control. While godly persons might work in such places, increasingly hospitals were detached from the Church and from their roots in hospitality. Poor relief, originally administered by the Church or its leaders, gradually became a responsibility of the civic community. Its connections to hospitality also became more tenuous.

After the Reformation, some concerns about respecting and protecting strangers that had originally been articulated in the language of hospitality were recast as concerns about human rights. Also in this period we see more widespread use of inns by people who were traveling. Some of these changes were helpful—for example, in broadening the availability and predictability of provision and in distancing assistance from the vagaries of

individual or congregational generosity. But these changes were also implicated in the loss of the earlier associations of hospitality with breaking down social boundaries, forming community, expecting transformation, and welcoming Jesus and angels.

Today few associate hospitality with hospitals, hospice care, human rights, or welfare assistance. Occasionally we might connect it to refugees and immigrants but, generally, hospitality is equated with entertaining family and friends or the hospitality industry of hotels, restaurants, and resorts. If there is a hospitality committee in church, its responsibilities usually include the coffee hour, ushers, and greeters. The church as a primary site for hospitality, and its important connection with the household, is overlooked. Rarely do we consider engaging in a kind of hospitality that helps people recover a place in the world and find healing within community.

We can appreciate the importance of governmental protection of human rights, state provision of benefits, and specialized programs and hospitals without imagining that they adequately capture the various dimensions of hospitality. Ancient accounts of hospitality give us insight into the biblical roots of these concerns, but also help us to challenge contemporary assumptions, practices, and institutions when they have become destructive.

Structured or institutionalized expressions of hospitality remain important for many reasons. For one thing, the numbers of strangers and people in need of welcome or care can wear out individual hosts who want to be generous and gracious. Long-term, substantial expressions of hospitality are impossible apart from community, structures, and guidelines.

Furthermore, the risks involved when strangers or hosts have malevolent intentions are reduced if there are some structures in place and if settings are somewhat public. Places that foster personal relationships but are not completely private or hidden are safer for both hosts and strangers. Having more than one or two persons involved in offering welcome also reduces risk.

The church as a primary site for hospitality, in connection with the household, is overlooked. Rarely do we engage in hospitality that helps people recover a place in the world and find healing in community.

In contexts of significant need, the vagaries of personal hospitality are problematic. Individuals can grow tired or bored and can abandon hospitality, even when persons continue to desperately need welcome. More structured, communal responses limit that kind of unpredictability.

Defined roles allow persons to develop skills that help a community operate smoothly and effectively. Having some individuals responsible for

particular aspects of hospitality can be helpful, as long as a community's practice of hospitality does not become exclusively their responsibility.

When individual hosts have many more resources than their "guests" have, very hierarchical models of dependence and even domination can result. Provision can be offered in ways that assume recipients have only needs, and hospitality can be reduced to a demeaning form of charity. The historic move toward more anonymous and institutionalized assistance was partly an effort to avoid the humiliation that can be associated with dependence on certain forms of personal generosity or largesse.

But structured and institutionalized forms of hospitality can also be problematic. When we move toward formal programs and separate institutions as primary expressions of care and hospitality, there is a tendency to create increasing levels of bureaucracy, regulations, and rules. Especially if we are fearful that some guests or recipients will take advantage of hospitality, or that they might not be "deserving," we subject recipients to more and more scrutiny before providing welcome or assistance. Structures and requirements that address every contingency can be humiliating and can undermine the very purpose behind our efforts. Soup kitchens, assistance programs, and homeless shelters often struggle with these tensions.

In formal, institutional expressions of hospitality, recipients are often defined by their need. Hospitals can lose sight of the person as they treat the disease, and special programs for those with disabilities are often differentiated according to disability. While specialization can be very helpful, people are far more than their needs, and places or communities in which a person's gifts can be noticed, received, and valued are terribly important.

Finally, emphasis on specialization is closely tied to expectations regarding qualifications. In this culture, emphasis on roles and qualifications has made ordinary Christians feel inadequate and fearful about offering hospitality to strangers in need. Nevertheless, human beings, especially when ordinary networks of relationships have failed them, need friendship and community more than anything, and these forms of hospitality do not require a special skill set.

RESTORING PLACES FOR HOSPITALITY

What can we learn from a history of hospitality that suggests that personal, small-scale places of welcome are crucial along with more institutionalized expressions of care?

In every setting in which hospitality is offered, whether personal or institutional, the character of the persons offering welcome is crucial if hospitality is to be life-giving. A combination of discernment, wisdom, flexibility, humility, and generosity is particularly important.

There is blessing and mutuality in hospitality. Both recipients and hosts benefit when gifts are shared. In every form of hospitality, it is important to resist flattening roles to provider and recipient and instead find ways to

nurture and value mutuality in relationships. Assistance and welcome can be provided in ways that value persons and give them a place in the community. Our tendency, even in congregational life, is to move from personal or community-based hospitality to organized programs of helping. But the personal and communal responses are crucial, and if there is a move toward programming, it should be with programs that open into relationships.

Contemporary cultural emphases on efficiency are very powerful, but life-giving hospitality is rarely efficient and often inconvenient. Opportunities for hospitality frequently come to us as "interruptions" in our task-oriented culture. Hospitality is countercultural and requires a rethinking of our priorities.

We cannot eliminate all of the risks that are present in offering and receiving hospitality. People will sometimes misuse generosity. Efforts to protect ourselves and our communities from every possible contingency and risk can result in inhumane rules and demeaning practices.

Finally, because today we have many large-scale institutions that offer assistance without providing community, followers of Jesus can be especially attentive to opportunities to reconnect hospitality and community in our homes, congregations, and social ministries.

Within the household, families often do not recognize how much their welcome can mean to others. Making a place for a neighbor recovering from surgery, international students, alienated teens, or refugee families can be wonderfully life-giving. Sharing meals and holiday celebrations with those who are usually overlooked is an important part of extending hospitality. By welcoming people into the ordinary parts of our lives and communities, we keep hospitality from becoming "entertaining" and reduce the stress and expense often associated with it.

In our congregations, recovering hospitality as a central practice of church life is important for congregation members as well as for strangers or newcomers in need of welcome. Sharing meals in congregational settings can break down some of the boundaries between private and public space and create threshold places where relationships among strangers can begin. Reestablishing closer connections between home and church can recreate that most important place for hospitality. Congregational leaders can become more intentional about connecting hospitality to worship, and especially to communion or Eucharist. The reminder that all of us—members, guests, and strangers—are guests at God's table can powerfully shape our practices of hospitality.

In congregationally based social ministries—as congregations host soup kitchens, clothing closets, or programs for young mothers and children—we sometimes overlook our own best resources. Welcoming people into our lives, communities, and friendship networks, as we meet particular needs, transforms ordinary spaces into places of hospitality and transformation.

NOTES

1 Aristedes, *Apology*, chapter 15, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 9, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1867-1872), 277.

2 *1 Apology of Justin*, chapter 67, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, 186.

3 *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, volume 3, *Loeb Classical Library*, translated by Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 67-71.

4 Gregory Nazianzen, *Panegyric on St. Basil, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series*, volume 7, edited by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1952), 407.

5 Ibid., 416.

6 John Chrysostom, *Homily 45 on Acts, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series*, volume 11 (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1892), 277; *Homily 14 on 1 Timothy, NPNF1*, volume 13, 455; *Homily 66 on Matthew, NPNF1*, volume 10, 407.

7 John Chrysostom, *Homily 21 on Romans, NPNF1*, volume 11, 502; *Homily 45 on Acts*, 276; *Homily 14 on 1 Timothy*, 455; *Treatise Concerning the Christian Priesthood, NPNF1*, volume 9, 55-56.

8 *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, edited by Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981), chapters 31, 53, and 66.

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Dorothy Day's Radical Hospitality

BY COLEMAN FANNIN

The influence of the Catholic Worker movement, founded during the Depression by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, is due to more than its aid to people in need or support for workers' unions. It has been a consistent witness that hospitality and nonviolence are at the heart of the gospel and are the basis for critiquing our culture.

The late Baptist scholar James McClendon observed that "the hope of ethics, both secular and religious, lies in the recovery of what may be called an ethics of character," an ethics that understands that our selves are intimately related to our actions *and* our communities. "By recognizing that Christian beliefs are not so many 'propositions' to be catalogued or juggled like truth-functions in a computer, but are living convictions which give shape to actual lives and actual communities, we open ourselves to the possibility that the only relevant critical examination of Christian beliefs may be one which begins by attending to lived lives."[1]

We develop an authentic Christian ethics, McClendon reminded us, by investigating *witnesses*—those persons recognized by the Church as embodying the gospel in particular times and places. "Christian existence is both individual and social, both a journey of individual selves each uniquely qualified as a follower of Jesus and at the same time a journey together, a communal pilgrimage to realize the world newly disclosed in gospel light." Further, this existence "is always missionary, possessed only to be imparted to others," and for those who have crossed into the "unknown realm" of the Kingdom of God, what constitutes faithful witness in the old realm is "a Christian critique of its culture." The United States is now a mission field

and the Church's *policy* of evangelism must be restated as a *problem*: "What ties cement the people of the journey to the old, broken peoplehood in which once they did and now in a new way still do have a part?" As McClendon contends, Dorothy Day (1897-1980), cofounder (with Peter Maurin) of the Catholic Worker movement, provides just such a witness.[2]

HOUSES OF HOSPITALITY

The publication of the first issue of the *Catholic Worker* in May 1933 was, on the surface, a minor event in the midst of the Depression, but the newspaper's office in New York's Bowery neighborhood quickly blossomed into a nationwide network of "houses of hospitality." By early 1938, the paper's circulation had grown to 190,000, around thirty houses were in operation, and Dorothy Day, the editor, had become the spokesperson for a movement.

The Catholic Worker houses—today there are nearly two-hundred of them, including several outside the United States—were diverse from the beginning and continue to be so. Each house is independent and requires no approval from the Catholic Church or any central organization.[3] Still, they usually are started by men and women who are inspired by and seek to live up to Day's ideals. In the first issue she had announced the newspaper's purpose as "an attempt to popularize and make known the encyclicals of the Popes in regard to social justice and the program put forth by the Church for the 'reconstruction of the social order.'" As the movement grew, she broadened its purposes to include the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, especially "feeding, clothing and sheltering our brothers" and "indoctrinating," which included not only publishing the paper but engaging in what Peter Maurin termed "clarification of thought"—gatherings to study Scripture and theology. Most houses of hospitality adopt a similar approach and, following Day's emphasis on "a correlation between the material and the spiritual," place worship at the center of their life together.[4]

Catholic Workers volunteer part-time or full-time; some work for short periods, while others continue for many years. The houses of hospitality may receive income from members' other jobs or their own cottage industries, but almost all depend on donations (of food and clothing as well as money). Members practice a simple and communal form of life, at the heart of which is serving the marginalized people in the mostly urban areas where they are located.

The movement's endurance and influence within the Church, however, have been due to more than its aid to people in need or support for workers' unions. Dorothy Day was a consistent witness that welcoming the poor also requires pacifism. For this view she faced heavy criticism, and by late 1944 subscriptions had plummeted to 50,500 and only nine houses were still open. Yet precisely in this connection is her witness most applicable to Christian ethics, for it reveals that hospitality and nonviolence are at the heart of the gospel and are the basis for critiquing our culture.

SOLIDARITY AND THE MYSTICAL BODY

Although Dorothy Day was baptized into the Episcopal Church, art, books, and nature were her substitutes for religion. Long walks on the streets of Chicago convinced her that her life would be identified with the poor, and later she dropped out of college and went to work for the *Call,* a socialist paper in New York. However, Paul Elie notes, "Her comrades said she would never be a good Communist, because she was too religious—a character out of Dostoevsky, a woman haunted by God."[5] Day could not shake her attraction to faith or to the poor and became mired in the loneliness that became the title of her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness* (1952). Indeed, her rebellions can be seen as an Augustinian search for God and for peace, as her early life was marked by conflict—work as a nurse during the Great War, arrests for protesting, loss of employment, a failed marriage, the suicide of a friend, her own attempted suicide, an abortion.

Day turned to Catholicism in part out of disillusionment with the impersonal nature of radical movements. While she was wary that the Catholic Church offered charity to the poor without challenging the social order that oppressed them, she also perceived that it was the church that welcomed the poor and the immigrant. The birth of Day's daughter, Tamar, overwhelmed her hesitation about joining the Catholic Church. Her ecclesial life was initially quite isolated, but her relationship with Tamar slowly reformed her understanding of solidarity with others, and although she knew little of its doctrine or social teaching, the Catholic Church's practices—especially the liturgy of the Mass—introduced her to its great tradition.

However, it was not until she met Peter Maurin, a fifty-five-year-old Catholic street prophet in New York City, that Day was able to reconcile her radical convictions about the plight of the poor with the Roman Catholic tradition and to utilize its resources to transform those convictions. As McClendon has explained, for those who are not only hearers but doers, "Following has become not mere attentive perception, but life itself; now following is called *discipleship*. Moreover, the Christian story being what it is, such active followers will follow *by the Christian rules for following*." Traditions endure because they maintain a continuity of orientation and conviction—a narrative that bears truth as it progresses to a shared end. Of course, traditions are not simply content; they require persons to live them out. That is, witnesses such as Day reshape their received traditions by enacting them.[6]

Most Catholic Worker houses of hospitality, following Dorothy Day's "correlation between the material and the spiritual," place worship at the center of their life together.

Peter Maurin's goal was "to make the encyclicals click." He had been particularly influenced by *Rerum Novarum* (1891), in which Leo XIII argued for the right to associate, earn a living wage, and hold property, and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), in which Pius XI called for changes in economic systems and challenged the laity to transform the social order. Maurin's plan for the Catholic Worker movement was a direct response to this challenge, and under his direction Day came to believe that private property, economic cooperation, and community are essential pillars for peace and that their true foundation is the unity of persons in the mystical body of Christ.[7]

Maurin believed the "dynamite" of the gospel was obscured by the idea that natural aspirations to transform the social order, when pure and genuine, could be fulfilled without the supernatural life of Christ in the Church.

Day affirmed Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac's contention that Christianity should form not *leaders* but *saints*. "The saint does not have to bring about great temporal achievements; he is one who succeeds in giving us at least a glimpse of eternity despite the thick opacity of time." Because evil is often overwhelming on the earthly plane, the only solution is to become oriented to the spiritual plane. Day understood that doing so means not to reject material existence but to "give up over and over again even the good things of this world to choose God."[8] After attending the spiritual retreat of Father John Hugo in the 1940s—her "second conversion"—she took up the spiritual practices (such as contemplative prayer) that would sustain her for four more decades at the New York Catholic Worker house.

THE PERSONALIST CENTER

Central to Maurin's diagnosis of the modern world was his belief that the "dynamite" of the gospel had been obscured by the idea that natural aspirations to transform the social order, when pure and genuine, could be fulfilled without the supernatural life of Christ in the Church. The Church's "spiritual" mission, however, "signified specific practices and a specific form of social life" (as expressed in the hospitality houses) that provided a social critique. While the *Catholic Worker* published notable scholars with this perspective, Michael Baxter notes, "it was Day who was able to articulate it in terms of specific practices that make up a supernaturalized life."[9]

Maurin taught Day to view voluntary poverty as a sign of compassion and a means to perform the works of mercy. For them it was a response to the gospel and thus distinct from destitution—the condition facing those served by Catholic Worker houses and created by physical disability, men-

tal illness, or lack of capital and education. Modern nation-states had lost any sense of transcendent purpose, social life was organized around production and profit rather than the development of persons, and Christians had turned to the government to solve social problems. Since a "Christian state" is not possible, they concluded, Christians are called to address the immediate needs of those who are suffering, and by living in community they can realize a bit of the Kingdom of God in the present.

Beneath Maurin's simple program was a sophisticated philosophy culled from several schools of thought. William Miller describes this philosophy as a series of "concentric circles in which the dynamism moved outward from the personalist center."[10] Personalism had originated in France after World War I and been popularized by, among others, Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier, both committed Catholics. The personalists revolted against capitalism and socialism; their goal was to encourage free and active persons "to unite with others to create a society in which the structures, customs, and institutions are rooted in and revolve around the person as center." In short, they celebrated the dignity of the human person—created in the image of God, united with Jesus in the Incarnation, and (at least potentially) part of the mystical body. They taught that personal freedom requires "taking on responsibility for others" and (following Thomas Aquinas) that the common good has to do with persons, not the state.[11]

Day fashioned Maurin's personalism into a critique of capitalism and socialism's shared method of using "the masses" to achieve an equally impersonal end, "the state." She advocated revolution not through slogans about solidarity but through the works of mercy and the sacraments. She rarely missed daily Mass, arguing that the Eucharist is "the one immediate step to be taken towards peace." "I can sit in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and wrestle for that peace in the bitterness of my soul…and I can find many things in Scripture to console me, to change my heart from hatred to love of enemy."[12]

LOAVES AND FISHES

Day diagnosed the logic of "total war" early on and posited the spiritual and corporal works of mercy as the only solution. Father Hugo taught her that "weapons of the spirit" directly counter weapons of war, for "if peace is to rule human affairs, then peace must be waged with as much preparation, as much determination and as much sacrifice as the waging of war."[13]

Day's pacifism, which was guided by Christ's Sermon on the Mount, is an example of what John Howard Yoder has called "utopian pacifism"—the view that pacifist action, "if everyone did it, would bring a new order." This order is achieved "not by compromising with the present but by confessing a faith which makes the future real in symbolic ways today."[14] Day understood that the Kingdom, though already present in real ways, is a work of God with a future supernatural fulfillment. And this fact frees the Catholic

Worker volunteer from attempting to build a utopia on earth—the quest that has had devastating consequences for humanity and undermined Christian efforts such as the Social Gospel movement.

In other words, the Worker's primary concern is faithfulness, not results, and one is able to focus on one action—one *person*—at a time. Yet such work often produces good results, if only "little by little" and through the grace of Christ. "What we do is very little," Day admitted, "But it is like the little boy with a few loaves and fishes. Christ took that little and increased it. He will do the rest. What we do is so little we may seem to be constantly failing. But so did he fail. He met with apparent failure on the Cross. But unless the seed fall into the earth and die, there is no harvest. And why must we see results? Our work is to sow. Another generation will be reaping the harvest."[15]

Since a Catholic Worker's primary concern is faithfulness, not results, she can focus on one action—one person—at a time. Yet such work often produces results, if only "little by little" and through the grace of Christ.

As early as 1940 Day objected that war tactics such as carpet-bombing and poison gas could not be defended as "just" or "loving." "Love is not the starving of whole populations. Love is not the bombardment of open cities. Love is not killing, it is the laying down of one's life for one's friend."[16] William Cavanaugh explains, "While most saw the Mystical Body as that which united Christians in spirit above the battle lines which pitted Christians in Europe against one another, Dorothy interpreted the Mystical Body as that which made Christian participation in the conflict simply inconceivable."[17]

The wars of the twentieth century, during which many people abandoned nonviolence for "realism," crystallized Day's conviction that all war is social sin. While she was among the first to denounce anti-Semitism and fascism, she also argued that the Allies in World War II did not recognize the presence of Christ in their enemies or God's work in the midst of evil. She never retreated from the position that every citizen of the United States stood guilty before God for Hiroshima, Vietnam, and other atrocities. In other words, if we are united with all persons—the poor, our allies, *and* our enemies—in the mystical body of Christ, then solidarity with them implies that we share their sin.

DISARMAMENT OF THE HEART

How does a Catholic Worker's experience reinforce this understanding of the mystical body of Christ and prepare the Worker for heroic pacifism? "We know that men are but dust, but we know too that they are little less

than the angels. We know them to be capable of high heroism, of sacrifice, of endurance," Day observed. "They respond to this call in wartime. But the call is never made to them to oppose violence *with non-resistance*, a strengthening of the will, an increase in love and faith. We make this call, and we feel we have a right to make this call by the very circumstances of our lives. We know the sufferings which people are already able to endure."[18]

Worker life is certainly unromantic, but the lesson it teaches is not that one achieves holiness through a certain amount of suffering. Rather, it is that voluntary poverty and nonviolence reveal interconnectedness with one's "neighbors," including one's enemies. Worker life is an attempt to understand the precariousness of the life of the poor and, by extension, the dependence of all persons on the grace of God; thus it discourages pretense and encourages humility. Many residents recount stories of aggressive, even armed, visitors and the effectiveness of nonviolent responses. Day chronicled these experiences, offering not only Catholic Workers but saints such as Thérèse of Lisieux and Francis of Assisi as models. "If we had any possessions, we should need weapons and laws to defend them," Francis had declared, and Day noted that relinquishing material security allows one to relinquish the state's protection, for "the only way to live in any true security is to live so close to the bottom that when you fall you do not have far to drop, you do not have much to lose."[19]

Further, Workers are unable to ignore the ill effects of our economic and political systems. Instead of merely acquiescing to these systems, Workers are trained and supported in resisting them. As Patrick Coy explains, "The experience of living in a Catholic Worker house in solidarity with the poor softens the aversions many people have to presuming to know a 'truth,' and to speaking that truth to the world through nonviolent action."[20] Workers also learn to resist ecclesial missteps and abuses. Although she was a loyal and orthodox servant of the Catholic Church, Day recognized that its structures at times blinded it to the realities of those in its care. When priests failed to address poverty, she urged them to study Thérèse's "little way"—"the only alternative to the mass approach of the State."[21] She also criticized clergy who unquestioningly supported American military endeavors.

Above all, Day saw clearly that to choose the supernatural requires *training* of the human self.

> We must prepare now for martyrdom—otherwise we will not be ready. Who of us if he were attacked now would not react quickly and humanly against such attack? Would we love our brother who strikes us? Of all at *The Catholic Worker* how many would not instinctively defend himself with any forceful means in his power? We must prepare. We must prepare now. There must be a disarmament of the heart.[22]

CONCLUSION

The witness of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement is a hard word for us to hear. While Day noted that voluntary poverty is not the calling of every Christian, all of us can learn to alter our consumer habits, help the poor, and strengthen our communities. In doing so, we will see that nonviolence follows from hospitality and be drawn into a form of life with different presuppositions and goals from those of the modern world.

We can also learn from the organization of the Worker houses, which maintain a diversity of opinion and action precisely because they are connected to a visible body that transcends state boundaries. That is, the Catholic Worker movement endures *because it is Catholic.* Its local and lay radicalism is possible because members are formed by a received tradition, even while they also are re-forming that tradition.

The Catholic Worker consistently undermines our accepted notions of economics, politics, and the Christian life with another vision of the common good—modeled on the gospel—that does not isolate Christians from the world, but allows us to engage the world in a more faithful way.

NOTES

1 James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1974), 14, 30-31, 37-38.

2 James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology,* volume 3, *Witness* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 20. McClendon includes a chapter on Day in *Systematic Theology,* volume 1, *Ethics,* second edition (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002).

3 For a list of Catholic Worker communities, see *www.catholicworker.org/communities/commlistall.cfm* (accessed August 28, 2007).

4 Dorothy Day, "To Our Readers," *Catholic Worker* (May 1933), 4; "Aims and Purposes," *Catholic Worker* (February 1940), 7. These and other articles from the *Worker* are available online in the Dorothy Day Library at *www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/* (accessed August 28, 2007). In the Christian tradition, the *corporal* works of mercy are to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit those in prison, and bury the dead. The *spiritual* works of mercy are to instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive injuries, and pray for the living and the dead.

5 Paul Elie, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 17. As a girl, Day was inspired by Jack London's essays on class struggle and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (set in her native Chicago). Later she developed an attachment to the writings of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy. She never joined the Communist Party or studied Marxist theory.

6 McClendon, *Witness,* 356-357.

7 Regarding the controversial (at mid-century) image of the mystical body, Day followed Henri de Lubac's view that the mystical body supposes a prior natural unity and that the Church's mission is "to reveal to [persons] that pristine unity that they have lost, to restore and complete it." Thus the Church and the mystical body are neither the same nor separate. In this way the Church stands in solidarity with *all* persons. See Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man,* translated by Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1988), 53.

8 Dorothy Day, *Selected Writings: By Little and By Little* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 102; *On Pilgrimage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 163.

9 Michael J. Baxter, "'Blowing the Dynamite of the Church': Catholic Radicalism from a Catholic Radicalist Perspective," in *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement: Centenary Essays,* edited by William Thorn, Phillip Runkel, and Susan Mountin (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001), 81-84, 86.

10 William D. Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1982), 378.

11 Thomas R. Rourke and Rosita A. Chazarreta Rourke, *A Theory of Personalism* (New York, NY: Lexington Books, 2005), 7-8, 10. Maritain occasionally visited the New York house of hospitality, and the Rourkes note that it was largely through the *Catholic Worker* that personalism became widely known in the United States. As Geoffrey Gneuhs explains, "According to Aquinas, we are most free then when we love, when we act for the good, because then we are acting in God, the source of our being and the one to whom we are called to return" ("Radical Orthodoxy: Dorothy Day's Challenge to Liberal America," in *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement,* 212).

12 Dorothy Day, "In Peace Is My Bitterness Most Bitter," *Catholic Worker* (January 1967), 1-2.

13 Mark Zwick and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), 261-262.

14 John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless: The Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism,* revised edition (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 74-75.

15 Dorothy Day, "Aims and Purposes," 7.

16 Dorothy Day, "Why Do the Members of Christ Tear One Another?" *Catholic Worker* (February 1942), 1, 4, and 7.

17 William T. Cavanaugh, "Dorothy Day and the Mystical Body of Christ in the Second World War," in *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement,* 457.

18 Dorothy Day, "Wars Are Caused by Man's Loss of His Faith in Man," *Catholic Worker* (September 1940), 1-2.

19 Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 86. "Another Catholic newspaper says it sympathizes with our sentimentality," she observed. "This is a charge always leveled against pacifists. We are supposed to be afraid of the suffering, of the hardships of war. But let those who talk of softness, of sentimentality, come to live with us in cold, unheated houses in the slums. Let them come to live with the criminal, the unbalanced, the drunken, the degraded, the pervert" (Day, "Why Do the Members of Christ Tear One Another?").

20 Patrick G. Coy, "Beyond the Ballot Box: The Catholic Worker Movement and Nonviolent Direct Action," in *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement,* 179.

21 Dorothy Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* (December 1965), 1, 2, 7.

22 Dorothy Day, "Explains CW Stand on Use of Force," *Catholic Worker* (September 1938), 1, 4, 7.

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This photo is available in the print version of *Hospitality*.

Why was Veronese called before the Holy Tribunal of the Inquisition to answer for this hedonistic portrayal of Jesus' hospitality? Not because it featured Jesus as the guest (and host) at a feast with a party atmosphere.

Paolo Veronese (1528-1588), *Feast in the House Of Levi, 1573. Oil on panel. 18'3" x 42'. Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice. Photo: © Scala, Venice / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.*

Revelers

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

The painting on the cover of this issue, now known as *Feast in the House of Levi*, is one of the most controversial depictions of Jesus' hospitality in the history of art.

The artist, Paolo Veronese, is considered to be one of Venice's most famous painters alongside Titian and Tintoretto. This phenomenal colorist, who excelled in huge fresco and oil paintings, specialized in depicting biblical feasts in monastery refectories, or dining halls, and creating illusionistic ceilings for churches and palaces.

Veronese had a "noble and open character, as is shown in his work; he dressed with dignity and bore himself as a great lord," wrote Marco Boschini (1605-1681), a near-contemporary biographer. Boschini also made a point of noting that the artist's reputation was not tainted by scandals.†

Although there were no scandals, Veronese was called before the Holy Tribunal of the Inquisition in Venice on July 18, 1573, to answer for this painting.

Earlier in 1573, Veronese had been commissioned to paint a Last Supper for the convent of San Giovanni and Paolo. The Inquisition, which was authorized to interpret and apply the Council of Trent's decree from 1563 that Christian art should instruct the faithful and be appropriate or decorous in its nature, judged that certain details in Veronese's painting were an irreverent treatment of the religious subject. The placement of dogs, cats, midgets, Germans, and drunken revelers in the composition were considered indecorous. (See the detail on page 48.) When questioned about the inclusion of these figures, Veronese responded that he knew that only Christ and his apostles were present at the Last Supper, but he adorned the rest of the large picture with figures of his own invention and that these figures may have been outside the room.

Though his responses to the inquisitors had been penitent and humble, Veronese still was very surprised when they told him that he was free! They instructed him that within three months he must replace the dog with an image of Mary Magdalene and blot out the German soldiers.

His testimony before the Inquisition, besides demonstrating his ability to deal diplomatically with others and to protect himself, bears witness to his standing as a man of faith. However, Veronese never changed his image.

Instead, he removed any irreverence for the Last Supper scene by cleverly renaming the painting *Feast in the House of Levi*, a reference to this story in Luke 5:27-32 (cf. Mark 2:13-17):

> After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up, left everything, and followed him.
>
> Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance."

This photo is available in the print version of *Hospitality*.

Paolo Veronese (1528-1588), *Feast in the House Of Levi, detail, 1573. Oil on panel. 18'3" x 42'. Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice. Photo: © Cameraphoto Arte, Venice / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.*

Veronese depicts the elaborate banquet table—now in a tax collector's lavish house—with considerable artistic freedom from the biblical text, situating it under a huge arched portico. Jesus, in the center of the composition, is surrounded by revelers quite full of life and enjoying themselves. The sumptuous colors, diverse figural groupings, and overall merriment

within this architecturally organized composition succeed in entertaining us and maintaining our interest.

It is no surprise that this hedonistic portrayal of Jesus' hospitality would draw the attention of the Inquisition. Yet we should realize that even the Inquisition had no problem with Jesus being the featured guest (and host) at a feast with a party atmosphere—as long as it was not identified as the more solemn Last Supper.

NOTE

† Diana Gisolfi, "Veronese, Paolo," Grove Art Online (Oxford University Press, 2006), (*www.groveart.com,* accessed September 3, 2007).

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Alessandro Allori depicts Martha as a virtuous host and Jesus is not rebuking her. Yet Mary is doing something even better than being a host: she is a guest, learning at Christ's feet.

Alessandro Allori (1535-1607), Christ in the House of Mary and Martha, 1578-1580. Oil on panel. Palazzo Portinari-Salviati, Florence. Photo © Collezione Privata Palazzo Portinari-Salviati – sede Banca Toscana, Florence.

Host and Guest

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

AND MIKEAL C. PARSONS

Jesus' visit to the home of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) is a familiar, if puzzling, account of Christian hospitality. While Mary listens attentively to Jesus' teachings, Martha plays the good hostess and cares for his needs. Martha goes so far as to ask Jesus to instruct her sister to help her. But instead of chastening Mary, Jesus informs Martha that it is Mary who has chosen the better activity. This is the moment in the story that Alessandro Allori depicts in *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha.*

Was it appropriate in the first century to visit with your guests before you made them comfortable? Probably not any more than it would be today to not take a coat or offer a drink to a guest arriving at your home. So, what is Jesus teaching us about hospitality?

In Luke's narration of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-19:27), many stories like this one feature the ancient Mediterranean practice of hospitality, in which it was the custom for good and generous people to welcome, feed, house, and extravagantly provide for travelers.[1] Luke presents Martha as a virtuous host who "welcomed [Jesus] into her home" (10:38) and immediately tended to his needs. In this light, Luke's original audience would not interpret Jesus' praise of Mary to be an implicit criticism of Martha's hospitality.

Indeed, Mary and Martha engaged in the complementary actions appropriate for all servant-disciples, studying at Jesus' feet and showing hospitality, though hearing is clearly the more important activity.[2] Theologians beginning with Augustine, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great would interpret Mary's and Martha's actions (and, by extension, the two women) as representing the crucial *vita contemplativa* (life of contemplation) and *vita activa* (life of action) respectively.

Allori's *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* (1578) hangs above the altar in a chapel in the Palazzo Salviati, Florence, which was dedicated to the life of Mary Magdalene.[3] Since at least the third century, the character in Luke's story had been confused with the sister of Lazarus who lived in Bethany (John 11:1), the disciple Mary Magdalene who had been cured of seven demons and discovered Jesus' empty tomb (Luke 8:2, 24:10, and parallels), and the "sinful" woman who anointed Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-50).

By the sixteenth century Allori was taught the "composite Mary" view declared by Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540-604): "he whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark."[4] The Council of Trent (1545-1563) reaffirmed this composite picture and further assigned to Mary Magdalene the role of a penitent sinner to be admired by the faithful. A Roman missal in 1570 affirmed the Council's position as it emphasized the doctrine of penance and merits over the Protestant Reformation's doctrine of grace.[5]

Allori had learned the elegance, color palette, and complex composition of *la maniera*, or style of the day, from Mannerist painter Agnolo Bronzino, an artist popular with the Medici. Allori was a colleague of important artists like Michelangelo, Giorgio Vasari, and Michele Tosini. In 1563 he participated in establishing the Accademia del Disegno, one of the first art schools that expanded the education of artists beyond the craftsman and workshop tradition of previous centuries.

In *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, Allori evocatively suggests we must balance the contemplative Christian life with active work in our Christian communities. He depicts Martha as a virtuous host and Jesus is not rebuking her. Yet Mary is doing something even better than being a host: she is a guest, learning at Christ's feet. These two activities—thoughtful action (like welcoming the stranger) and meditation on Scripture—are complementary. Discipleship requires both.

NOTES

1 For more on this text and painting, see Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons, *Illuminating Luke: The Public Ministry of Christ in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Painting* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 110-133, and Andrew E. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in its Mediterranean Setting (*Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005).

2 Pamela Thimmes, "Narrative and Rhetorical Conflict in Luke 10:38-42: A Cautionary Tale," *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 20 (2000), 51-60.

3 The Salviati family were cousins to the powerful Florentine Medici. The Palazzo serves today as the headquarters of the Banca Toscana in Florence. We greatly appreciate the bank administrators' allowing us to study and photograph the chapel.

4 Gregory the Great, Homily XXXIII, cited in Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1993), 96.

5 Hornik and Parsons, *Illuminating Luke*, 118.

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Come, Brother, Sit with Me

BY DAVID WRIGHT

Come, brother, sit with me,
sharing this simple bread.
Come, sister, to my home,
drink till you've had your fill.
Who gives these gifts of friendship and table?
None but the living God.

Come, stranger, walk with me,
sharing the narrow road.
Come, wise one, talk with me,
show me the better way.
Who gives these gifts of wisdom and wonder?
None but the living God.

Go, children, sing with joy,
praising the risen Lord.
Go, servants, to the world,
borne on the Spirit's strength.
Who gives these gifts of worship and service?
None but the living God.

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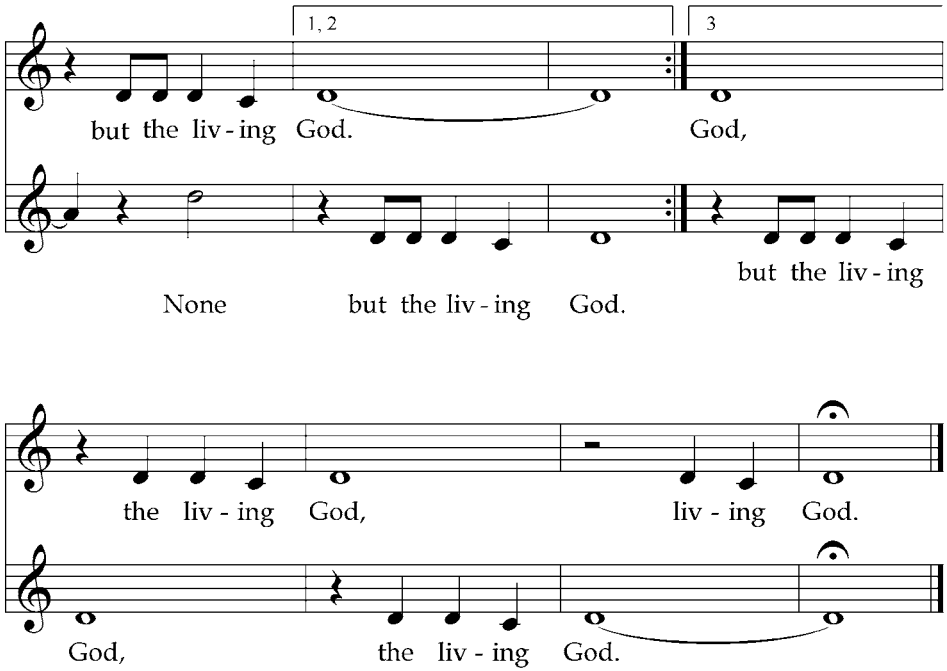
Come, Brother, Sit with Me

DAVID WRIGHT JAMES E. CLEMENS



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HOSPITALITY
6.6.6.6.10.6.

Worship Service

BY MICHELE HERSHBERGER

Prelude

Call to Worship

(This hymn may be sung as a duet, with one singer at the front of the sanctuary and the other singer, singing the descant, walking up to the front during the singing.)

"Come, Brother, Sit with Me" (verses 1 and 2)[1]

Come, brother, sit with me,
sharing this simple bread.
Come, sister, to my home,
drink till you've had your fill.
Who gives these gifts of friendship and table?
None but the living God.

Come, stranger, walk with me,
sharing the narrow road.
Come, wise one, talk with me,
show me the better way.
Who gives these gifts of wisdom and wonder?
None but the living God.

David Wright (2006), © Copyright 2006 David Wright
Tune: HOSPITALITY, *James E. Clemens* (2006)
(pp. 53-55 of this volume)

Invocation

Living God,
Giver of food and friendship,
Giver of wisdom and wonder,
Holy God our Host,
be our guest this day.

We welcome you
and seek your welcoming presence among us.

Hymn of Praise

"God Is Here Among Us"

God is here among us: let us all adore him
and with awe appear before him.
God is here within us: soul, in silence fear him,
humbly, fervently draw near him.
Now his own who have known God in worship lowly
yield their spirits wholly.

Come, abide within me; let my soul like Mary
be your earthly sanctuary.
Come, indwelling Spirit, with transfigured splendor;
love and honor will I render.
Where I go here below, let me bow before you,
know you, and adore you.

Gladly we surrender earth's deceitful treasures,
pride of life, and sinful pleasures.
Gladly, Lord, we offer yours to be forever,
soul and life and each endeavor.
You alone shall be known, Lord of all our being,
life's true way decreeing.

Gerhard Tersteegen (1729), altered
Tune: ARNSBERG (WUNDERBARER KÖNIG)

HEARING THE WORD: GOD AS HOST

The Jesus of Luke's Gospel always enters upon the scene as a guest in need of hospitality. He has nowhere to lay his head, unless a kind host obliges. But on another level this man without a home is obviously the supreme host, the welcomer par excellence to God's kingdom.[2]

John Koenig

Antiphonal Reading: based on Psalm 23 and Ephesians 1:3-14

The LORD is my shepherd,
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
I shall not want.
who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
in the heavenly places.
He leads me beside still waters;
He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

He restores my soul.
He destines us for adoption as his children
He leads me in right paths
according to the good pleasure of his will.
for his name's sake.
In him we have redemption through his blood,
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
the forgiveness of our trespasses,
I fear no evil;
according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.
For you are with me;
With all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will
Your rod and your staff – they comfort me.
to gather up all things in him.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
In Christ we have obtained an inheritance
You anoint my head with oil;
so that we might live for the praise of his glory.
My cup overflows.
We are marked with the seal of the Spirit,
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
the promised Holy Spirit.
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD *my whole life long.*

Hymn of Assurance

"The King of Love My Shepherd Is"

The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never.
I nothing lack if I am his,
and he is mine forever.

Where streams of living water flow
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and, where the verdant pastures grow,
with food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me,
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home, rejoicing, brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill
with thee, dear Lord beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and O what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never.
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house forever.

Henry W. Baker, Hymns Ancient and Modern (1868)
Tune: ST. COLUMBA

Hearing the Word: God as Guest

Stories from the Community

(These may be read dramatically by four readers.)

Let all guests who come be received as Christ would be, because he will say, "I was a stranger and ye took me in"…. By bowed head, or body prostrate on the ground, all shall adore Christ in them, who, indeed, is received in their persons.[3]

St. Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-543)

One of the things I enjoyed most about Uganda was the opportunity to walk on meandering paths through gardens, up and down hills, and long streams. Walking was almost synonymous with conversing because invariably I would meet someone along the path or at work in their garden and we would talk.

One afternoon I came across my friend Ruth, busy pulling weeds. After chatting a while, she took me to one corner of her garden to see what she had grown. She was excited because she had planted eggplant for the first time and they were just beginning to bear; two lovely fruits dangled on the stem.

Later that evening two unexpected visitors arrived to spend the night at my home. Word soon spread that we had guests, and before long Ruth appeared at the kitchen door. In her hands were the two eggplants. She gave them to me, saying, "Please prepare these for your friends tonight."

I wanted to say, "No! No! You must keep your eggplant. We have plenty of food, and you have so little." But I could not do that. I could not deny Ruth the opportunity to give of her literal firstfruits. She was giving so joyously.

So I accepted the eggplants with much gratitude, a tear in my eye, and a new humbleness, for once again a Ugandan had taught me a lesson of generosity.[4]

From a missionary in Uganda

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.

John 1:10-12

Lord, we see that you'll be coming
through the line today.
So Lord, help us to treat you well,
help us to treat you well.[5]

A prayer from a worker at a food-line a mile and a half from the White House

Prayer of Confession

For the times we are afraid of the stranger,
for the times we refuse the stranger,
because we think our resources are just too meager,
Lord, forgive us.

For the times we stereotype the stranger
as enemy,
as dangerous,
as inferior somehow,
Lord, forgive us.

For the times we are too busy trying to impress our guests—
the times we think we are being hospitable,
but instead serve only our own needs—
Lord, forgive us.

For the times we miss the gift of the stranger,
for the times we close our door in fear,
for the times we miss your face in the other,
Lord, have mercy. Forgive us.

Assurance of Pardon: Ephesians 1:7-8a

In him we have redemption through his blood,
the forgiveness of our trespasses,
according to the riches of his grace
that he lavished on us.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

"Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

"Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Sermon

Responding to the Word

The Giving of Tithes and Offerings

Hymn of Preparation for Communion

"Come, Brother, Sit with Me" (verses 1 and 2)

Invitation to Celebrate Communion

God the gracious Host,
we are gathered in your presence
to celebrate and remember the best of all gifts,
the broken body and shed blood of your Son.
Make us worthy, through the Holy Spirit,
to sit at Christ's table as his friends.
In this supper, let our hungry souls so be fed,
that nurtured in your hospitality,
we may feed others
both physical bread
and the bread of true friendship.
Through the gift of the Holy Spirit,
may Christ live in us and we in him
so that we may in turn be hosts to others
and in so doing
entertain you.

Celebration of the Eucharist

(To nurture hospitality during communion, members may serve one another as they gather in small groups around a table.)

Hymn of Response

"I Bind My Heart This Tide"

I bind my heart this tide
to the Galilean's side,
to the wounds of Calvary,
to the Christ who died for me.

I bind my soul this day
to the neighbor far away,
and the stranger near at hand,
in this town, and in this land.

I bind my heart in thrall
to the God, the Lord of all,
to the God, the poor one's friend,
and the Christ whom he did send.

I bind myself to peace,
to make strife and envy cease.
God, knit thou sure the cord
of my thralldom to my Lord!

Lauchlan M. Watt, The Tryst, A Book of the Soul (1907)
Tune: UNION

Sending Forth

"Come, Brother, Sit with Me" (verse 3)

Go, children, sing with joy,
praising the risen Lord.
Go, servants, to the world,
borne on the Spirit's strength.
Who gives these gifts of worship and service?
None but the living God.

David Wright (2006), © Copyright 2006 David Wright

Postlude

NOTES

1 Reprinted with permission from James E. Clemens and David Wright, *A Field of Voices: Hymns for Worship* (Champaign, IL: Table Round Press, 2007). This collection is available online at *www.tableroundpress.com*.

2 John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Stranger as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1974), 90.

3 St. Benedict, *The Rule of Saint Benedict,* translated by Cardinal Gasquet (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1966), 91.

4 Joetta Handrich Schlabach, *Extending the Table* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 19-20. Used by permission.

5 Schlabach, *Extending the Table*, 100. Used by permission.

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The Ospedale degli Innocenti, the hospital for abandoned children in Renaissance Florence, is more than an aesthetically beautiful building. It is a milestone institution of Italian hospitality and Christian love.

Ospedale degli Innocenti, exterior, begun 1419 and completed mid-fifteenth century. Florence. Photo © Heidi J. Hornik. Used by permission.

Protecting the Innocents

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

The Ospedale degli Innocenti, one of the most famous buildings in Florence, demonstrates the hospitality toward orphaned children in fifteenth-century Italy. This foundling hospital is named in memory of "the Innocents," the children of Bethlehem massacred by King Herod when he had been tricked by the wise men (Matthew 2:16-18). It is on the not-to-be-missed list for tourists to Florence because the portico is one of the first works of Renaissance architecture.

Filippo Brunelleschi, creator of the dome on the Florentine Cathedral, or Duomo, designed the structure on a modular, geometric system using the square and the circle. This style would be replicated in palace architecture commissioned by the Medici and the Rucellai families, among others. For the triangular areas between the arches, sculptor Andrea della Robbia fashioned beautiful medallions with glazed terracotta reliefs depicting swaddled infants.

The initial funding for the hospital came from a charitable bequest made by the philanthropist Francesco di Marco Datini, from the nearby town of Prato. Datini entrusted one thousand florins to the Arte della Seta (the silk guild) in 1419, deliberately selecting the civic guild instead of a church or religious order. The guild officers were good stewards of the donation and raised thousands of florins for the Innocenti. They supervised the construction of the building and administration of the hospital. The Innocenti opened in 1445 and admitted sixty-two infants.[1]

Unlike other Florentine hospitals that accepted some children along with the sick and poor, the Innocenti was totally devoted to newborns and foundlings from the countryside as well as the city. Its construction demonstrated the city's commitment to the welfare of children who were abandoned by their parents for a variety of reasons, including war, high grain prices, destitution, or illness. Females were abandoned more frequently because their poor parents could not afford a dowry.

Although most Western art history courses consider the structure of the Ospedale degli Innocenti, a thorough study of its civic function was neglected until Philip Gavitt's *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence* (1990). Gavitt investigates unpublished hospital documents, wills, private account books, and municipal legislation. He considers these newly discov-

ered archival documents in light of humanist writings of the day—Leon Battista Alberti's *Della famiglia* (1435-1444) and Matteo Palmieri's *Della vita civile* (1429). He concludes that the children in the Innocenti were not victims of brutality and abandoned knowingly by their parents. Even if the "child-centered culture" he describes is somewhat sentimental, he refutes the theory that childhood as a social institution did not develop until the eighteenth century among the nobility and bourgeoisie.[2]

The care of the children required a large and varied staff that included a prior, prioress, chaplains, servants, doorkeepers, cooks, doctors, accountants, lawyers, notaries, and wet nurses. Also involved were *commessi*, or married couples, who vowed to serve the institution and its children for life and to transfer their property to it.

Too often when art historians study a painting, sculpture, or building for its aesthetic value, we neglect to consider its cultural function. But the Ospedale degli Innocenti does not let us off the hook: it is truly a milestone institution of Italian hospitality and Christian love. Today, as a preschool day care center, it continues to serve the youngest Florentine citizens.

NOTES

1 All factual information on the Ospedale degli Innocenti is from Philip Gavitt, *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence: The Ospedale degli Innocenti, 1410-1536* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1990).

2 Julius Kirshner, Review of *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence: The Ospedale degli Innocenti, 1410-1536* by Philip Gavitt, in *Italica*, 69:4 (Winter, 1992), 534.

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Finding Home

BY KATHY CALLAHAN-HOWELL

The key to true hospitality is an attitude that moves over to allow space for the other, the ability to set self aside and welcome the other person into authenticity, to welcome them home.

Sitting under the hairdryer at Granny's house meant being treated like a princess, complete with refreshments to ward off the tedium of being still for such torture.

"Madam," she would say, treating my ten-year-old self as a fully adult patron in a beauty salon, "what would you prefer today while your hair dries? Grilled cheese or peanut butter?"

My sandwich would arrive with trimmed crusts, cut on the diagonal, a few chips on the side, and even a small garnish of parsley.

Granny was born in a house in a small town in eastern Kentucky and lived in that town for over ninety years. She and her maiden sister lived with their father, the pharmacist for the community. Her mother once owned a small tearoom, and in that place my grandmother learned the finer points of Southern hospitality.

Dinner at Granny's included a table set with linen cloth and napkins, a centerpiece of collected household items, a full set of silverware at each place setting, and even personal salt cellars. Everyone felt like royalty at Granny's table.

But hospitality at Granny's house extended far beyond cloth napkins and fancy silverware. Hospitality was a way of life, an attitude that honored the guest no matter who that person might be or how unexpected their appearance. A guest always received an offer of food and a cool refreshing glass of iced tea or a warm cup of coffee, depending on the season.

With the food and drink came easy conversation—catching up on family events and travels, the growth of children, or local politics. Granny knew how to listen. Guests not only felt welcome, but even valued. Time stood

still there in Granny's living room as the visitors lingered, despite having said, "I'd better be going," multiple times.

Finally as stars shone over the house the guests would reluctantly gather their belongings and head for home. That is, if they hadn't been persuaded to spend the night, another extension of Granny's hospitality. She was always ready to make a bed for the weary traveler. As the guests departed, promises would be solicited to return another time, a promise easily kept since Granny's house attracted guests magnetically, daring people to walk past without stopping, like an epicenter of calm in the hectic storm of life, drawing people into its peace.

After I married and moved to Cincinnati to live in an urban neighborhood, I struggled with the meaning of home. Was home this strange house I now inhabited in a city of alien noises and sights? Was home the house where I grew up in the suburbs of Lexington with my parents? Or was home Granny's house, in the mountains, where peace reigned unendingly? Granny's house seemed the most convincing answer, but I knew somehow I had to convert my new house into a home. Peace must reign here too.

Home could not be restricted to green mountains and star-lit skies. It must be available in the city, in a northern state, full of noise and chaos. Home had to be that attitude—the acceptance of the guest, the honoring of the visitor, the hospitality represented by food and drink, yet much deeper.

Granny's house felt like home not because of soft beds, but because of her welcoming attitude. For my new house to be a home, I had to re-create that sense of welcome.

Jesus says to all of us, "Listen, I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you and you with me" (Revelation 3:20). This verse has represented salvation, the ultimate hospitality, the welcoming of Jesus into our very lives. He is the guest, yet he brings with him hospitality. He accepts our food and that becomes a symbol of our fellowship. We have but to open the door and offer ourselves. He not only accepts our welcome, but he also welcomes us.

Notice the invitation begins with listening. We have to be listening to hear Jesus' voice outside the door. To begin to be hospitable, we must be listening for the person who wants entrance into our space.

Hospitality continues with listening. The most welcome a person ever feels is when he or she is truly being heard. When I talk to my friend Erin, I feel like I am the only person in the world. She is totally absorbed in what I am saying. Her eyes fill with sympathy and compassion. She asks relevant questions that show me her depth of interest and understanding.

Erin models the kind of listening and hospitality once practiced by Saint Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-543). Indeed, his Rule for intentional communities

starts with the word "listen." Recent interpreters draw the connection between hospitality and listening in Benedict's work. "Hospitality is a way to counter the thousands of other times another human being has felt less than human because others didn't listen. Listening is the power of hospitality; it is what makes hospitality the lifegiving thing it is. When you listen, you get past yourself too. That is something we all need to do a little more. In the listening stance, the focus switches from the self to the other."†

To truly listen is to abandon our selves, to enter fully into the expression and experience of the other person. Too often listening is simply a pause in our speech while we construct the next installment, narrate the next story, or explain the next principle. Rather than using that moment of listening to formulate a response, we ought to be thinking about what others are saying and how to draw them further into their explanation. During their speaking, think of relevant questions and observations that will help the person arrive at their needed destination, that of being truly heard and understood.

Jesus excelled at this skill, for example, when he encountered the woman at the well (John 4:1-42). Rather than explain his own mission or issues, he asked leading questions that exposed her need and resulted in her receiving the ultimate gift of hospitality, salvation. She was so enthusiastic about Christ she ran into the village to share the gift of hospitality with others.

In Revelation 3:20 we also see the significance of food, of sharing a common meal. The food we eat becomes part of all who share it, symbolizing fellowship and unity. Jesus promises to eat with us and for us to eat with him. Often eating with others provides the perfect outlet for hospitality, the opportunity to share our physical needs and discuss our deeper concerns.

Some people open their homes but not their hearts. A couple I know often welcomes guests to their home. They provide scrumptious meals and luscious beds, but the wife remains polite and detached from her visitors. In that setting I feel I have permission to be a guest, but I am not at home.

Home is a place where you feel welcome to open the refrigerator or pantry and find something to eat. We also create that kind of accessibility through listening, allowing the other person to open our hearts and be nourished.

We can easily feel that a ministry of hospitality requires money to share food or lodging, when really the greatest treasure to offer is welcome. That requires little monetary expense but great personal risk, the risk of vulnerability. We expose ourselves to misunderstanding, lack of appreciation, and rejection. We face loss, as the people we have welcomed into our lives move on, whether to a new town, a new relationship, or even to their final home.

Yet despite the risks, hospitality is our calling if we are following Christ. As we welcome people into our homes, but more importantly into our

hearts, we must provide a space where they can be heard and understood, accepted and loved. In a grocery store line, at a soccer game, around a dinner table, after a tough meeting at work, we are called to be the listening ear, the open heart, the conduit of hospitality. When we set ourselves aside and focus on the other, they will know they are at home. They will feel welcome to dine as they are in need, to search until they are satisfied. Our families are often the people the most in need of this gift of hospitality.

Granny knew how to put people at ease. Our physical environment can help people feel welcome. But beyond the externals, the key to true hospitality is an attitude that moves over to allow true space for the other, the ability to set self aside and welcome the other person into authenticity, to welcome them home.

NOTE

† Lonni Collins Pratt and Father Daniel Homan, O. S. B., *Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2000), 215-216.

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Pass the Potatoes, Please

BY JIMMY M. DORRELL

In the mystery of God's upside-down ways, God uses common acts of hospitality to strangers to overcome cultural barriers with others and bring us closer to him.

I chuckle to myself as I gaze around the dinner table. Alongside my wife and four children sit three men who look, act, and even smell strange. These are dinner guests most households would report to the police if they walked up their front steps. All three either have been or are presently homeless and it certainly shows. One wears filthy jeans and has a long, unkempt beard. Another has tattoos engraved all over his face and sports an Elvis-like hairdo. The third sits in his wheelchair, propping his dirty, amputated leg against the chair rail. We join hands for the mealtime prayer and the food begins to fly around the table.

The evening is like few traditional family meals and not like anything my parents modeled for me. The bearded fellow, Kruger, is an ex-offender who has spent time in prison for stealing cars. When he returned from the Vietnam War addicted to drugs, he had to find a way to support his habit. Though his appearance and social skills suggest he is uneducated, quite the opposite is true. He has taken classes at a community college for over ten years, with no intention of graduating; he just enjoys learning about chemistry, physics, and other sciences. While he talks for hours about the unique properties of acids, bacteria, and atoms, he spills gravy down his shirt.

Next to him sits the tattooed man with a personality like no one else. Between bites of food he makes jokes and nonverbal expressions to draw attention to himself and away from the tedious chemistry lesson of Kruger. His story is amazing. Darrell grew up in a bar with his mother filling drink orders. He considers himself the "bad apple" of the siblings and tells the stories to validate his assessment. All over his body are scars from knife fights and several car wrecks. He even has been hit by an eighteen-wheeler as he tried to cross an interstate on foot while intoxicated. Add to his physical scars and tattoos the challenges of his adult-life schizophrenia, and the

mix was intriguing. To combat his mental battles, Darrell will self-medicate and binge drink for days, at least until he blacks out. After he awakens from his slumber and initial embarrassment over this "crazy" behavior, he will return to the pawn shop to retrieve his bicycle and once again begin his dumpster-diving routine.

Craig hardly raises his head during the entire meal; he just keeps eating and eating and eating some more. No wonder that his appetite is so large, because he has spent most of his adult life in the streets, usually looking for a meal or place to sleep. Like Darrell, he has a lifelong alcohol addiction that influences his every action. One night, drunk under a local bridge, someone attacked him with a knife and cut his upper leg so deeply that it had to be amputated to save his life. After a miserable recovery time in the nursing home, he was back on the streets, but now wheelchair bound forever. "Pass the potatoes, please," he says, and he continues eating.

Who sits at our dinner tables is an important indicator of our spiritual condition, though it is often ignored today. Indeed, Scripture measures spiritual maturity not by our use of religious language, church attendance, or Bible knowledge, but by common acts of feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and entertaining strangers. These are the unquestionable outward signs of inward faith that lead to the prepared Kingdom (Matthew 25:34-36). According to Jesus, our "neighbor" is the one who stops to help the person in need, not the one who lives next door. A rejected half-breed Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and old widows (1 Timothy 5:9-10) normally shoved to the fringes of society become models of the truth for their simple acts of compassion in the face of religious bigotry. Their unpretentious, sacrificial kindness to those in need identify them as the children of God. Common acts of kindness, especially to the stranger, are the ways of God and his call to us.

Jesus' "working lunch" with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) both exemplifies true hospitality and reveals our aversion to rubbing shoulders with strangers. The Master initiates the visit instead of being invited, but Zacchaeus joyfully complies and is "happy to welcome him" into his home (19:6). During the unscheduled visit, conviction, repentance, and salvation come to the chief tax collector's house. Yet instead of celebrating the transformation of their economic nemesis, the community responds by condemning the Son of David for eating with the sinner. How blind we are to the work of God!

Biblical hospitality has little to do with prepared invitations and dinner parties for selected guests. Instead it involves spontaneous common acts of daily life, especially with those with whom we rarely share life together. Eating a meal together, drinking a cup of coffee, or going to the zoo with a homeless person, an international, an ex-offender, an addict, or an agnostic

is the stuff of hospitality. Sharing common acts of life with those who are different socially, racially, economically, and even morally creates an environment of mutual love, understanding, and growth among people separated by prejudice and cultural distance. In the parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:15-24), Jesus encourages us to quit trying to solve all the calendar conflicts of the usual guests for our house parties, but to "go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame" to fill our homes for a more heavenly-type banquet.

We resist these simple acts of hospitality, however. Reared in a culture of fear—of television broadcasts of crime, threats of litigation, and insurance disclaimers—we dismiss these scriptural appeals as out of touch with reality. The haunting question "What if…?" drives our decision making. How can we bring poor, crippled, blind, or mentally ill people, ex-offenders, immigrants, or addicts into our homes, yet still protect our family and possessions? Surely God does not expect us to risk such a significant level of exposure.

Yet God does just that! Risking beyond cultural norms is exactly the stuff of faith. Willingness to appropriately love and show compassion to people who are different and in need is the beginning of spiritual vitality. In those encounters, the Holy Spirit can bring new confidence in our purpose and joy in our vocation. As our fears are overcome, our prejudices are challenged and frequently our presuppositions are erased. In these common acts of hospitality, like sharing a simple meal of hamburgers, we begin to see others as uniquely fashioned creations of God with names and stories. Often these encounters teach us more about God and his Kingdom than all the Sunday school classes we have attended.

Reared in a culture of fear—of television broadcasts of crime, threats of litigation, and insurance disclaimers—we dismiss the scriptural appeals for hospitality as out of touch with reality.

Like most spiritual discipleship, movement toward hospitality to the stranger comes through baby steps, through consistent and growing acts of kindness in guided institutional settings. Before we invite the homeless man into our home, we can visit the local soup kitchen or shelter to gain a new level of comfort among people who may come from a completely different background. We can volunteer at the food bank, lead a Bible study at an alcohol and drug treatment facility, mentor the child of an incarcerated parent, or tutor a young person in juvenile detention. With each visit, familiarity overcomes formerly imagined fears; we begin to notice our common-

alities instead of our differences. With new confidence and call, we are much more prepared to open our homes, share our possessions, and overlook the differences that divide us. Like Jesus' initiative with Zacchaeus, we can boldly go into settings that were formerly uncomfortable to us and where others disapprove.

As our homeless guests prepare to leave, I glance again around the table at my own children who are finishing their meal and giggling at each other. I wonder what this kind of experience means to them in their adolescent worldviews where coolness is determined by whom one hangs around and what clothes are worn. These ragtag men, eating at our dinner table, are anything but acceptable by their peers' standards. Yet as we see Kruger, Darrell, and Craig to the door, one of the teens says, "Dad, this was sort of cool. Let's have them back soon." The others chime in, "Yeah, this was sort of fun!"

Later I wonder at how the mystery of God's upside-down ways, experienced through acts of hospitality to strangers, supersedes cultural standards and brings us closer to him.

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Toward a Welcoming Congregation

BY PAUL J. WADELL

In a world that has grown frighteningly guarded and harsh, Christian congregations are called to imitate the "table manners" of Jesus by being sacraments of God's hospitality in the world. How do we become these kinds of congregations IN THE CHURCH and FOR THE WORLD today?

In a world increasingly characterized by fear and suspicion, what is the Church called to be? I recently saw an icon that gave a poignant and eloquent answer to this question. It was in an abbey in Austria. In the background of the picture was a small town or community. People could be seen walking the streets of the town as they attended to the tasks of the day. In the foreground was a large table. Seated around the table were people sharing a meal. Everyone in the icon looked quite ordinary except for one thing—a glow or halo encircled the head of each person. The icon was entitled "Xenophilia," love and friendship for strangers.

This title invited me to look at the icon differently, for it suggested that not everyone walking those streets or sitting at that table was a citizen of the town. Some were strangers and outsiders, immigrants from elsewhere. But they were able to enter the town because there were no walls surrounding it, nothing to suggest that some were welcome but others were not. Anyone could feel at home in this town because everyone was welcomed as friend. Instead of "xenophobia," the fear of the stranger that increasingly grips our society, this little town embodied the befriending hospitality of God. Everyone who walked its streets glowed with holiness because they truly had learned to love whatever neighbors came their way, especially those neighbors it is easy to fear and, therefore, exclude. Everyone in the painting radiated the goodness of God because whether they were host or

guest, citizen or stranger, love was being given and received. It was a holy exchange that characterizes all true hospitality.

How do we convert hostility to hospitality, exclusion to embrace? How do we create Christian congregations and communities that do not mimic and mirror the discords, divisions, and discriminations of our societies, but work to overcome them by witnessing something more hopeful and promising, something truly of God? How do we forge bonds of friendship with the very persons we are trained to view suspiciously? The fundamental work of God in Jesus, particularly through Jesus' cross and resurrection, was reconciliation and peace, and anyone baptized in his name is called to do the same. God works to open our world by taking down the walls and barriers that divide us (Ephesians 2:11-22). We build barriers because of ethnic and racial differences. We build barriers on the basis of economic, social, or political differences. Barriers pop up when differences of gender, physical or mental ability, education, or religion render us closed and inhospitable. Or we settle behind barriers on account of prejudice, grudges, unhealed hurts, or painful memories. Instead of nurturing friendship and intimacy, we foster disconnection and estrangement.

In a world of terrorism and war, school shootings, and road rage, it is no wonder that concern for security often triumphs over hospitality to the stranger. But is that the kind of community the Church should be?

We live in a world of insiders and outsiders, a world where some are welcome and others are permanently shunned. Human beings are experts at exclusion because we prefer the comfortable and familiar neighbor over the "stranger" whose presence may not only challenge us, but also completely remake our world, which is always a risk with hospitality. This desire for the comfortable and familiar also impacts our faith communities. Like society, churches too have walls that shut people out. We may not consciously construct these walls—in fact, we are probably hardly aware of them—but they are there. Most Christian congregations are fairly homogeneous. As Patrick McCormick writes, "Christians tend to break bread within socio-economic monocultures, homogenized enclaves where nearly everyone is of the same color and tax bracket."[1] There may be many explanations for this but it is, at least from the gospel's perspective, a dangerous predicament because it directly contradicts the behavior of Jesus who gladly sat down at table with anyone. Sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, they were all welcome at the table of the Lord.

In a world that has grown frighteningly guarded and harsh, Christian congregations are called to imitate the "table manners" of Jesus by being

sacraments of God's hospitality in the world. But this is not easy because the hospitality of God is radically unlike the hospitality of Martha Stewart. *Christian* hospitality is modeled on the hospitality of a God, who "even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:5), and patterned on the hospitality of Jesus, whose fearless love knew no bounds. Christian hospitality is a matter of welcoming, caring for, and befriending the stranger, the poor and needy, the homeless and destitute, the unloved and the unlikable, the weird and the strange, in gratitude to God and in imitation of Christ. It may be the most important Christian calling for our times, but it is one we easily neglect unless we are part of faith communities who make it their aim. For Christians, hospitality is not an occasional gesture but a whole way of being. It is not an interruption to our normal way of life but a habit, practice, or virtue that ought consistently to characterize our lives. How do we become this kind of person and these kinds of congregations *in the Church* and *for the world* today?

EMBRACING HOSPITALITY IN A CULTURE OF FEAR

We need to recover the conviction that hospitality is essential to the Christian life. In *A Christian Theology of Hospitality* Arthur Sutherland says, "Hospitality is the practice by which the church stands or falls."[2] Sutherland suggests that hospitality *makes* the Church, so much so that the Church disappears without it. He argues that the Church, as Christ's body in the world, comes to life through hospitality; that it lives and flourishes when it participates in, imitates, and extends the hospitality of God, but withers when it neglects it. Far from being a gospel option—something more socially conscious Christians can embrace but the rest of us ordinary Christians can ignore—hospitality is a quintessential practice of the Christian life that is a responsibility of all the baptized. Traditionally, Christians have spoken of four crucial identifying marks of the Church: the Church is one, holy, catholic or universal, and apostolic. But hospitality should also mark the Church because it is the practice by which we continue to bring the generosity, love, and compassion of God to life in the world.

There may be no better and more urgent way today for Christians to follow Jesus' command to love our neighbors than to become communities skilled in the risky hospitality of God. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called his followers to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-14). He envisioned his disciples forming communities of faith whose very way of life stood in hopeful contrast to the often deep darkness of the world.

Today that darkness commonly takes the form of distrust and suspicion, of fear and anxiety. In a world of terrorism and war, school shootings, road rage, and pervasive anger and discontent, it is no wonder that concern for safety and security frequently triumphs over hospitality to the stranger. It is no wonder that we are encouraged to build walls around our homes and

communities, along the borders of our country, and even around our hearts. But is that the kind of community the Church should be? More and more people view life through a lens of fear, anxiety, and suspicion. And while this may be understandable, it is toxic for the hospitality and generosity that enables us to see the poor, the homeless, the hungry and the needy, immigrants and refugees and prisoners, not as dangerous threats, but as Christ's presence among us (Matthew 25:31-46).

The "human way out" of the despair of our age is through hospitality because a person well practiced in Christian hospitality chooses love over fear, trust over suspicion, and even risk over security.

Fear constricts our world. Fear teaches us to pull back, to become wary and disengaged. And fear, fueled by anxiety, teaches us to attend to our own needs before ever considering the needs of others. In a culture of fear, the open hand of hospitality easily becomes the clenched fist of hostility. Too, fear and uncertainty imperil the generosity required for hospitality because by insisting on the priority of one's needs and security over the needs of others, they foster the accumulation and hoarding that make us increasingly oblivious to our neighbors. Fear counsels that we cannot afford to think of our neighbors without first having secured all the wealth and possessions needed for ourselves. Too, the constant refrain of a culture of fear is that we cannot risk openness, we cannot risk vulnerability, and we cannot risk generosity and sharing because the resources of the world are scarce and each person must look out for his or her self.

Unlike the people in the gospel story who shared the bread and fish that they had, and whose generosity made Jesus' miracle of feeding the tired and hungry crowd possible, fear of scarcity closes our hearts and tightens our grip on what we have. Anxiety's central message is that we cannot afford to share because we can never have enough. Put more strongly, in a culture marked by anxiety and fear, the very things we have traditionally called sins or vices (hoarding, greed, suspicion) become wise and prudent virtues. Fear, rather than love, governs our lives. But such fear is a kind of idolatry because it suggests we are giving more attention to our own security than we are giving to God. As Scott Bader-Saye warns, "the ethic of security produces a skewed moral vision. It suggests that suspicion, preemption, and accumulation are virtues insofar as they help us feel safe. But when seen from a Christian perspective, such 'virtues' fail to be true virtues, since they do not orient us to the true good—love of God and neighbor. In fact, they turn us away from the true good, tempting us to love safety more than we love God."[3]

The primary aim of the Christian life is not to feel safe but to be faithful. If hospitality to the poor and needy, the homeless and the troubled and the stranger, distinguished the early Christian communities from their surrounding society and became a characteristic of authentic discipleship, then perhaps that is the calling of Christian congregations today.[4] Societies built on strategies of exclusion, societies that train their citizens to be anxious and fearful, hardly give us confidence for the future. Human beings are not created to be anxious, they are not created for fear and isolation; rather, human beings are created for the communion and intimacy that are the fruit of an ever-expanding love. The "human way out" of the despair of our age is through hospitality because a person well practiced in Christian hospitality chooses love over fear, trust over suspicion, and even risk over security.

By embracing a vocation of hospitality, Christians help move the world "from the 'destructively familiar to the creatively strange.'"[5] To those who first heard his message—and to those of us who hear it today—Jesus' proclamation of the reign of God sounds "creatively strange" precisely because it is marked by unbounded hospitality. In the reign of God, all are welcome and all are embraced. There is no fear in the Kingdom of God because there are no strangers there. To suggest that there ought to be communities in the world today that aim for such trust and concord can sound not only farfetched and utopian, but after September 11, 2001, perhaps even irresponsible. After that Tuesday morning in September, the temptation is to retreat to our churches as places of safety and security in an increasingly frightening and dangerous world, instead of seeing our churches as centers for challenging and transforming that world. Hospitality is the vocation of every Christian because it is through hospitality that we offer the most compelling witness of who God is, who we are called to be, and what the world through God's grace can become.

ENCOUNTERING GOD'S HOSPITALITY IN WORSHIP

It is principally through worship that Christian congregations learn, are formed in, and become living instruments of the hospitality of God. But this only happens when worship is rightly understood and enacted. Too often today Christians forget that the focus of worship should be God, not ourselves. We deform and diminish worship when we think the primary aim of worship is to uplift us, to satisfy us, to entertain us, or to meet our needs and make us feel good about ourselves. Such worship is a sham, an affront to God, because it turns worship away from praising and glorifying God to consoling and affirming ourselves. When this happens, worship is little more than an act of communal self-deception.

Real worship is different. In a memorable sentence Robert Webber and Rodney Clapp wrote, "The Eucharist, like God, is good—but not safe."[6] Worship should never be safe because genuine worship schools us in the upside-down ways of God. At worship we hear the story of a God who is

passionate about justice to the poor, vigilant in concern for widows, orphans, and refugees, and jealously protective of the vulnerable of the world. But we hear the story of God in order to become part of the story of God. Worship is a ritual of remembering; however, we remember the great deeds of God—God's justice, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and endless generosity—in order to reenact them in our lives today. If at worship we hear stories of Jesus forgiving sinners, showing justice to the poor, the shunned, and the forgotten, then we who have been baptized in his name are to witness those same gospel virtues in our lives.

In the household of God we are not owners but stewards, people entrusted to do good with whatever we have, especially to those strangers who are most in need.

Nothing schools us in the divine hospitality more than Christian worship and the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the preeminent sacrament of hospitality because at the Eucharist God is the host who gathers us in order to feed us. Worship *is* the hospitality of God because at worship God welcomes us into the divine life, nurtures us, forgives us, and blesses us. Too, at the Eucharist we rehearse stories of God's hospitality as we hear again of God rescuing the Israelites when they were strangers and aliens in a foreign land, feeding them with manna in the desert when they were famished, and constantly watching over them. We see God's hospitality enacted when Jesus not only feeds the multitudes, but also calls despised tax collectors to follow him, sits down at table with people known to be sinners, and is lavish with forgiveness. Christian worship is centered around a meal, but it connects us to all the biblical scenes of feeding, welcoming, sheltering, and caring—scenes that vividly reveal *who God is* and *who we are called to be*.

So many of Jesus' parables involve hospitality being given or ignored. There is the famous story of the Good Samaritan where a wounded and beaten man is ignored by two who should know better but is rescued by one compassionate enough to allow the needs of another to rearrange his life (Luke 10:29-37). By contrast, there is the baffling and troubling story of the rich man whose sumptuous lifestyle has so blinded him that he does not even acknowledge the starving beggar Lazarus who sits outside his door (Luke 16:19-31). Jesus makes it clear that it was the rich man's lack of hospitality that placed him outside the life of God. Thus, hospitality is not only a definitive quality of Christian discipleship, but is also the love that makes us most like God. By contrast, to lack hospitality, to show little or no regard for the needs of others, is to live an ungodly life.

Worship should help us become hospitable persons and hospitable congregations by reminding us that everything we have, including our lives, is

a gift. Each of us lives in and from the hospitality of God; we live only because God never stops sharing life with us. Our life is not our possession because it is always something we continue to receive from the extravagant goodness, creativity, and generosity of God. As Elizabeth Newman puts it in her marvelous book, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers*, "Our lives are always gifts of God; the divine spring continually supplies what we need. There is never a time when we can sit back and say, 'Ahh, now my life is mine.' Such a way of thinking distorts not only our lives but more fundamentally the nature of God, whose superabundant giving never ceases because it lies at the heart of God's triune identity."[7] Newman suggests that hospitality *names* God because God *is* an endless outpouring of grace, life, and love, because God is most rightly understood as gift-giver, a God whose most hospitable act to us is the redemptive gift of Jesus his son.

Knowing this should make Christians people of gratitude and generosity. Gratitude must inspire and accompany hospitality if hospitality is not to be seen as an onerous burden and duty. With gratitude hospitality rightly remains an expression of thanksgiving and love to God for God's extravagant and delightful blessings toward us. With gratitude, hospitality is not so much something we ought to do, but something we want to do so that our lives are lived in grateful remembrance of God. But devoid of gratitude our hospitality, even when it serves and meets the needs of others, is much more likely to be given grudgingly, and such resentful hospitality "exhausts hosts and wounds guests even as it serves them."[8] But it also dishonors God whose hospitality toward us is always joyfully and liberally given, never grudgingly bestowed.

More than anything, worship should foster gratitude and generosity because it teaches us that the whole universe reflects an economy of grace and abundance, not one of stinginess and scarcity. Worship should help us see that to know life is to know a gift, and that we are given one another as gifts, entrusted with one another as each day we live from, and hopefully extend, the hospitality of God. In this respect, worship should free us from the depressing dynamics of consumerism and materialism by enabling us to trust in God's never ending abundance and by loosening our hold on all that we own. Persons and congregations formed in the hospitality of God know that nothing we have is really ever our own because the earth and all that is in it belongs to God. In the household of God we are not owners but stewards, people entrusted to do good with whatever we have, especially to those strangers who are most in need.

RISKING A DANGEROUS LOVE

Finally, a third way of growing in the hospitality and generosity of God is by becoming persons and congregations formed in charity. This may sound like a rather limp recommendation because we typically equate

charity with people who are thoughtful, nice, tolerant, and kind. Things do go better in the world when people are thoughtful, nice, tolerant, and kind, but none of these admirable qualities sufficiently describes charity. Thomas Aquinas famously defined charity as a life of friendship and fellowship with God through which the "friends of God" model their lives on the incomparably expansive love of God.[9] If to love someone is to make a place for her or him in our lives, then God is the exemplary lover because God makes a place for all of us—indeed, the whole of creation—in the divine life. That is the world of charity and it is what the friends of God strive to do. Animated by charity, they work to show to others the same befriending love that God shows to us. Any love modeled on the divine love cannot be cautious, narrow, or safe. It must always be willing to make room for the other, especially those others who come to us hungry, forsaken, homeless, or alone. Any love modeled on the divine love must continually expand (and never shrink) the horizons of our love.

Any love modeled on the divine love cannot be cautious, narrow, or safe. It must always be willing to make room for the other, especially those others who come to us hungry, forsaken, homeless, or alone.

The antithesis of charity is "safe neighbor love," a love that is calculating, selective, and restricted to all those we prefer to love because they are easy to love. Safe neighbor love is easy to practice because it does not ask much of us, least of all that we make space in our lives for those sons and daughters of God who might need our attention, our resources, and our time. Safe neighbor love sets up the barriers and boundaries that God's love works to tear down. Safe neighbor love is a temptation for all of us (and all too often a habit), but it sabotages the fearless and expansive love of God that inspires true Christian hospitality.[10] And perhaps most importantly, safe neighbor love is at odds with the love we see in God, a love so bold and adventuresome that it entered our world and became one of us in Christ.

Christian congregations will be hospitable and welcoming when they envision themselves as fellowships of charity, communities of the friends of God who persevere in the creative and hopeful ways of God. Such a community inspired the icon "Xenophilia." We need more such communities today if we are not to be defeated by the dismaying and unpromising strategies of a culture of fear. Christian congregations have another calling. Instead of being communities marked by fear and mistrust, they ought to be communities formed in the charity and hospitality of God, communities that do not see the strangers of our world as threats to overcome, but as

guests to welcome just as God always welcomes us. When our churches become skilled in this liberating hospitality, they will be like the people in that captivating icon. They will glow with the goodness and holiness of God. And everyone who comes to them will see it, even if they do not see it themselves.

NOTES

1 Patrick T. McCormick, *A Banqueter's Guide to the All-Night Soup Kitchen of the Kingdom of God* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 51.

2 Arthur Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 83.

3 Scott Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 102.

4 Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 33.

5 Robert E. Webber and Rodney Clapp, *People of the Truth: A Christian Challenge to Contemporary Culture* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1988), 61.

6 Webber and Clapp, 83.

7 Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 170.

8 Pohl, 172.

9 I develop this theme in Paul J. Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 39-41.

10 Paul J. Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 32.

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Boundary and Hospitality

BY CAROLINE A. WESTERHOFF

In our increasingly pluralistic society, our words and practices of inclusion often reflect sentimental, sloppy thinking. To say everyone is included in our family of faith is to confuse INCLUSION with WELCOME. To welcome is to receive with pleasure, to delight in another's being among us for a time, to be hospitable.

I began my summer's sabbatical leave with a three-day silent retreat at the Cistercian Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Monastery about thirty-five miles from my home. I longed for this solitary venture of extended silence with God before I embarked on three months of thinking and writing. Still, the prospect of sitting with God for three days, and especially for three nights, loomed a daunting one. Suppose God were to say things I did not want to hear? Or worse, suppose God said nothing at all? Suppose the silence went both ways?

Upon arrival and checking in, I easily found my sparsely furnished, pleasant room. A single sheet of information on the small desk told me where I could go and provided the schedule for meals and times of prayer. A graciously worded paragraph reminded me that while I was welcome to attend daily community masses, as a non-Roman Catholic, I could not receive communion; prayer for the unity of the Church would be appropriate. I spent the rest of the time before vespers at 5:30 p.m. exploring my surroundings, soon discovering that signs on doors and fences gave me all the directions I needed: "Women's Toilet," "Women's Shower Room," "To the Church," "Silent Area," "Please Do Not Enter—Cloistered Area." I began to feel more at ease: paradoxically welcomed, greeted hospitably, as I became aware of the boundaries.

The monastery day begins with vigils in the church at 4:00 a.m., and on my first morning, I presented myself at a door connecting the retreat house

with the church. After thoroughly dousing myself with holy water from the baptismal font at the entrance, I slipped into the dark space and made my way to the pews assigned to visitors and those on retreat. One by one, the monks, attired in their black and white Trappist habits, began to emerge from the shadows and take their places in the stalls. Little lights blinked on as they opened books and arranged music.

The five prayer services of the daily office and the community mass ordered my days and nights. Between them, I sat in the church and prayed or walked the peaceful grounds, and in the end, only one of us was silent. In the chanting of the monks, the reading of the Word, and the silence of the garden and the peaceful lakeside, God spoke clearly. Or perhaps I should say that in *my* silence, I could hear what I suspect God says to me all along.

One of the things my visit to the monastery stirred up in me was my long fascination with boundaries, grounded in years of work with church systems and my early training as a biologist. The notion of boundary is complex and one that we ignore to the peril of our valued relationships. I further believe that the concept of boundary, put in a theological framework, can give us guideposts for faithful participation in God's reign.

A boundary is a line drawn that defines and establishes identity. All within the circumscription of that line makes up a whole, an entity. Neither good nor bad in its own right, a boundary determines something that can be pointed to and named: a person, a family, a geographical region, a city, a town, a nation, a parish church, a denomination, a faith. A boundary provides essential limits, for what is not limited, bounded, merges with its context and ceases to exist in its own particular way.

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Some boundaries can be seen or touched; others cannot. Among the former are the lines determined and set down by surveyors or the paved streets encircling plots of city land or the dusty roads outlining field and pasture. The border is the line between country and country, and we call ourselves citizens of either one side or the other. The doors and fences marking the monastery's cloister were lines I could reach out and feel, even though I was not to pass through them. The four surrounding walls defined my room there.

The horizon is the ultimate line that we can see though never touch. For me, the horizon is God's line, a divine border, if you will, drawn to distinguish between sea and sky, earth and heaven, for me a symbol of future

hope and expectation. I stare at it for hours when I am at the seaside, trying to sort things out and regain perspective, to take back into myself some sense of God's order, God's limits.

There are other lines, a second category of boundaries, that are invisible but can be named or put into words. Time provides a good example. While we can measure time with watch, clock, or calendar, we cannot see or touch it. Nevertheless, the boundary of time is real and potent. Our acknowledgment and thoughtful management of it enhances our credibility; our cavalier disregard of time causes us to lose the trust and confidence of others.

These invisible lines are the cords encircling those who share certain beliefs, understandings, and values or who have agreed to abide by the same rules, regulations, and guidelines. Such a boundary is the Benedictine Rule of community prayer, engagement with the Word, and manual labor, all apart from the world, by which the Trappist monks order their lives. These lines are the bands encircling family and church; wrapped around team, political party, military unit; around gang or cult. *This is who we are; this is what we do and don't do.* And while we cannot literally see the cord around all who have been baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is implicit in Paul's assertion of one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

These spoken and written lines take on shape and power often through stories. I posit that an ultimate definition of humankind lies in our ability and longing to tell and listen to stories. We pass on stories from generation to generation to shape and form character, to pass on the godly and moral code. When children ask again and again to hear a story, they are really asking us to tell them who they are, to remind them of the fundamental definitions giving meaning and shape to their lives. But even if the story itself is slight, lacking in substance, the act of storytelling itself sets boundaries that speak volumes about safety and consistency. Any parent trying to cut short the bedtime ritual and stopped cold in the process can attest to this.

A shared common story is necessary for a community of faith. At the family observance of the Jewish Passover, the *Seder*, the foundational narrative of the Jewish people is told once again by the head of the household: the great story of the Exodus. For us in the Christian family, every time we gather for worship we are remembering the foundational story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and making it ours anew.

I enter a community whose boundary is difficult to put into words when I take my two-mile walk, a morning ritual that sparks energy for the day. The route includes a trail around a large office park. Nearby is an apartment building providing subsidized housing to older women and men, many of whom have emigrated from Eastern Europe. They regularly stroll the path, stopping to sit on benches scattered along the way and chat together.

I have come to recognize faces, and they recognize me as well. We nod and wave. They may attempt to say hello in English, while I motion with my arms and hands. I take notice when I have missed seeing someone for a

time, and they seem to notice when I have been absent. A mutual spirit of hospitality binds me to these people, a daily confirmation that we are alive together at this time, in this place, and glad to be so. I consider them my neighbors and friends, and I am grateful for our relationship.

If you ask me to describe the essence of this community, I would say that it is marked by greetings repeatedly received and given. I do not know the names of my fellow members or much about them, other than what I manage to piece together and imagine. Since we do not share a common language, extended conversation is impossible. Still, I have come to understand that the connection I have with them is an integral part of my daily rule for mental, physical, and spiritual health. A boundary of spirit ties us together.

Some boundaries are visible and tangible, some can be portrayed in word and story, and some are lines of spirit, often revealed in ways transcending ordinary means of expression. Such are the cords of passion binding lover to beloved. Such is the ring God wraps around the whole created order, the band best realized through sign and symbol: rainbow and dove, cloud and fire, water and wind, bread and wine. This ultimate boundary, approached through the deep and wondering eyes of imagination, dream, and prayer, bursts forth in poem and symphony, on the painter's canvas, and in the visions of the mystics. It shines through the jeweled colors of stained glass windows and grazes the heights of cathedral vaults in musical tones so achingly clear we almost cannot bear to hear them.

These categories of boundaries can be likened to our skin. They separate and differentiate what is inside from what is out. They highlight the differences among us: those of size and skin tone, gender and sexual orientation, age and intellect, language and culture, interest and personality, differences that are plainly visible, as well as those that only become apparent when we brave engaging each other deeply and over time. I think God delights in our differences and the rich creation they provide. How bleak our existence would be if we were to look around and see only duplicates of ourselves.

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Paul's words to the Galatians might seem to contradict this. He writes, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). But we would be wrong to think Paul is ignoring the truth and beauty of our

peculiarities with these words. His key phrase is "in Christ Jesus." Paul is talking about baptism.

He is saying that among us, the baptized, the neat compartments do not hold, the old hierarchies should not count. No one of us is better in the eyes of God. Each human being, says Paul in his first letter to the church in Corinth, is precious beyond measure: "Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many" (12:14). Still, we must ask who we are who gather around the table of the Lord's Supper, the meal of the baptized. What does it mean to be there? What makes us different, not better, but different? The answer is that we preach Christ Jesus and try to model our lives after his.

But while we attempt to stand strong in our identity, our understandings of who we are and for what we stand do mature and change with the passing of time. We can be dead wrong: past positions on racial segregation and the place of women are cases in point. We currently struggle with issues of sexual orientation, and outcomes are yet to be seen. God continues to offer us new and surprising opportunities to amend our ways, modify our boundaries, and practice hospitality, and we must pray for a continuing willingness to make our confessions of sin and grow to maturity in Christ.

But even with this warning against prideful inflexibility in our stands, we must have a rock-solid foundation if we are to be and act with vitality and meaning. We must have something to which we will give our lives if the Church is to endure with integrity and perform with courage, if the Church is to be at all different from the culture in which it finds itself. We preach that Jesus is Lord of the Church, his Body.

Many talk a great deal about inclusion in our increasingly pluralistic society. But although well intended, our words and practices of inclusion too often reflect sentimental, sloppy thinking. When we say that everyone is included in our family of faith or at the table, I think we are confusing *inclusion* with *welcome*. True, if we are to be the ones whose particular work is the restoration of all people to unity with God, each other, and the creation in Christ, then we must welcome all into our company. To welcome is to receive with pleasure, to delight in another's being among us for a time, to be hospitable.

But an inside requires an outside. We must have something into which we can extend authentic invitations. In this light, inclusion and exclusion paradoxically become opposite sides of the same coin. Neither makes sense without the other. The word "inclusion" comes from the Latin *inclusio*: to shut in, to confine, to commit. To include goes beyond a willingness to welcome, to receive. Rather, it means to take in as a member. If anyone and everyone are too easily included, we are saying in effect that anything goes. We are disclaiming our boundaries, and without bounds, we do not exist. The cost is that of identity.

Granted, commitment, like conversion, is not a singular happening. Our commitment to a community or a family grows (or diminishes) over time.

We are included or include at deeper and deeper levels as we live in that community and come to understand what belonging means. But if initial membership is without qualification, then we stand for little other than being nonsensically "inclusive." This is why the Church's requirements and preparation for baptism are so important; why obligations of financial stewardship and participation in worship go far deeper than merely being means to pay bills and fill pews; why I believe the Lord's Supper is the meal of the baptized, not a social occasion of hospitality. This meal re-members us into the Body of Christ.

Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They give him a number of interesting answers. Jesus presses on with the ultimate boundary question each and every one of us will have to answer for ourselves, "But who do *you* say that I am?" Peter answers, "The Messiah of God." This is the ground on which we are to stand: Jesus is the One. In Jesus, God came among us to show us what matters most. In Jesus, God came among us to reveal the shocking power of love. If we are to come anywhere close to being who we say we are, we must not lose grasp of this central assertion: Jesus is our way and our truth and our life.

But to profess that Jesus is the Christ finally is not a matter of doctrine and belief, not a matter of verbal assent. We are to reveal the shocking power of love. We are to challenge the principalities and powers, particularly when we are the principalities and powers. We are to be willing to suffer with and for the other, to give away when we think we can give no more. Like Jesus, we are to welcome strangers and sinners into our midst, just as we ourselves have been welcomed into God's hospitable company. But we first must have the baptismal identity and its boundaries intact before we can genuinely welcome all those who choose to come.†

NOTE

† This essay is excerpted by the author from Caroline A. Westerhoff, "Inside and Outside," *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2004), 7-31, and is reprinted here with permission of Morehouse Publishing.

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A Tradition of Hospitality

BY SCOTT H. MOORE

Long before there was a "hospitality industry," the practice of welcoming strangers was central to faithful discipleship. Three recent books can help us recover this rich tradition of hospitality and, by extension, the Christian faith that requires its practice.

Long before there was a "hospitality industry"—think of the scores of books on hotel management, travel and leisure, and the entertaining of guests (not a few of them are authored by Martha Stewart and her armies of copycat designers and decorators)—the practice of welcoming strangers was central to the Christian faith. Today a growing number of Christian theologians and historians are turning toward understanding hospitality as an essential Christian practice that integrates the moral and intellectual virtues.

Christine Pohl, who teaches social ethics at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, is one of the most articulate leaders in the recent reflection on this ancient practice. Her *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999, 205 pp., $18.00) is must reading for anyone seeking to understand the theological significance of hospitality. She divides her account into Remembering, Reconsidering, and Recovering the practice of hospitality. The introductory section is an overview of the ancient and biblical accounts of hospitality as well as a short history of hospitality in the Church.

In the second division on "Reconsidering the Tradition," she turns from biblical exegesis and church history to a more properly theological consideration of hospitality. For Pohl, hospitality becomes the means by which we *see* the world and others as they actually are, as marked by the image of God. Hospitality enables recognition, and this recognition affords the dignity that can be so easily hidden within those in need of hospitality. We begin

actually to notice the stranger in our midst and to see Christ in the least of these. Pohl notes that by being hospitable, barriers of class, ethnicity, and credentials are overcome as we seek to build a welcoming community together. In the concluding division, "Recovering the Practice," she considers how hospitality is put into practice. She is well aware of the fragility of hospitality and the obstacles (both actual and perceived) which stand in the way of its appropriation. In an appendix she describes a number of Christian communities—like L'Abri Fellowship, The Catholic Worker, and The Open Door Community—devoted to hospitality.

Pohl's volume is an excellent starting point for churches, families, and individuals who have become convicted of the imperative that we share our lives with the strangers in our midst, including those strangers that we thought we knew. The deficiencies of *Making Room* are a consequence of its virtues. In the attempt to introduce and recover the practice, Pohl must necessarily work for breadth rather than depth. Biblical scholars and church historians may find the treatment brief and cursory, theologians and philosophers may wish for a more rigorous argument that considers alternatives, and social workers and practitioners probably will find it all too theoretical and not sufficiently practical for their needs. Nonetheless, *Making Room* is an important book that has made a substantial impact on the recovery of the practice of hospitality.

Amy G. Oden, a church historian at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, has edited a marvelous companion volume to any serious reflection on the Christian practice of hospitality. *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Abingdon Press, 2001, 316 pp., $27.00) is a collection of readings on hospitality from early Christian writers. Oden begins with an excellent overview of the practice of hospitality in the ancient Near East, focusing on hospitality as a moral category while reminding her readers of its important roots in Hebrew, Greek, and Roman practice. She then offers a compendium of writings on hospitality from the first eight centuries of the Church. Not merely drawing on conventional theological treatises and scriptural exegesis, the excerpts come from a wide diversity of sources, including letters, sermons, prayers, saints' lives, diaries, communal instructions and rule books, and more. Before each excerpt Oden provides a brief, but helpful, summary statement about the author and historical context of the text.

Oden divides her rich primary source material into thematic chapters organized around various dimensions of the practice of hospitality. She begins with writings on Christian identity that demonstrate that Christians understand themselves as those who are in need of the Divine hospitality—they describe themselves as pilgrims, strangers, sojourners, and the poor. She then turns toward texts that address cultivating "eyes that can see" the stranger, and especially recognize the stranger as Christ. Since the reciprocity of hospitality transforms both host and guest, Oden also includes a col-

lection of texts that seek to understand the spiritual dynamics of hospitality and its participation within the life of God. It is God who is at work within us and it is God whom we welcome and by whom we have been changed. Not treating hospitality as a merely abstract category, Oden includes a section on the specific activities within hospitality: welcoming, foot washing, feeding, and lodging. These practices require institutionalization, and she turns toward the many texts that address the concrete needs and demands for adequate buildings, priestly offices, and the rules for monastic communities. In the final section, she offers some wonderful examples of stories that describe great models of hospitality, whether found in creation (as through examples in the animal kingdom), in biblical figures (like Abraham), or in the lives of early Christian saints.

And You Welcomed Me is hard to put down. It reads like a travelogue through some of the great texts of Christian spirituality and practice. Other duties may be calling, but I find myself wanting to read just one more excerpt. Moreover, this book directs our attention back toward the great texts from which they were taken. It is not enough to sample a bit of Basil or merely a portion of Lactantius's *Institutes*. One wants to read the whole. Most important of all, *And You Welcomed Me* reminds us in a multitude of ways of how central hospitality is (and always has been) to Christian faith. Hospitality is not optional. It is not an act of supererogation; it is a practice essential to the faith given once unto all the saints.

If there is a deficiency to this volume, it is that it not easy to use as a "sourcebook," as the title suggests. The index includes primary source authors but not titles, subjects, or biblical passages. If one is looking for a particular subject or attempting to cross-reference texts or concepts, it is difficult to do here. These are small complaints, however, for a volume so rich and rewarding.

Perhaps the finest recent book to be published on hospitality is Elizabeth Newman's *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Brazos Press, 2007, 234 pp., $22.99), a volume in "The Christian Practice of Everyday Life" series. Newman, a theologian at Baptist Theological Seminary of Richmond in Virginia, weaves together exegesis, exposition, and argument into a persuasive tapestry of reflection and contemplation on hospitality. After examining many of the contemporary distortions of hospitality, Newman considers the "strange hospitality of Christian worship." In short, she shows that worship, properly understood, is hospitality. "To sing, to pray, to pass the peace, to listen to God's word, to eat at God's table is to share, through the gift and power of the Spirit, in God's own giving and receiving. Such a vision of worship…enables us to practice hospitality more faithfully" (p. 42). Her examination of the relation of hospitality to worship is one of the most refreshing and inspiring sections of the entire volume.

In the second part of *Untamed Hospitality*, Newman turns toward understanding the vigilance necessary to practice hospitality amidst the contem-

porary challenges presented by science, economics, ethics, politics, and education. For Newman, our practice of hospitality challenges the way Christians should think about these ever-present domains of our contemporary lives. Responding to Richard Rorty's criticism that views (like hospitality) that substantially challenge liberal democracy's self-understanding must be understood as "crazy" because they cross the limits of "what *we* can take seriously," Newman argues that the "practitioners of Christian hospitality must accept…how radically differently they are called to live, teach, and learn, and be from what modern politics…allows" (p. 124). Hospitality will indeed appear to be "madness," but only because "*we*" have a different understanding of the ends toward which human beings are called. Each of these chapters integrates thoughtful theological reflection with a clear-eyed analysis of the socio-political world.

In the concluding section, Newman addresses the necessity of hospitality for unity in the Body of Christ. Bringing her argument back to the question of worship with which she began, she explores how the celebration of the Eucharist can transform and heal our divided communion. *Untamed Hospitality* is an exceptional volume that deserves a wide readership.

Is the fact that these three books are authored by leading women theologians relevant to the subject matter of hospitality? As each book amply demonstrates, the hospitality imperative found in Scripture and exemplified in the history of Christian faith is not directed only to women. It may be, however, that in recent centuries men have been less inclined to see hospitality as an essential task, and we men have abstracted ourselves from the nitty-gritty work of welcoming, feeding, and tending to the weak and the vulnerable. To the extent that is the case, then we have also failed to worship faithfully. Perhaps women have eyes to see the stranger, eyes not blinded or deceived by "more important matters." In any case, these three women have made extraordinary contributions to our understanding of hospitality and, by extension, to the Christian faith that requires its practice.

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