

The

Mediator



A Journal of Holiness Theology for Asia-Pacific Contexts

**ASIA-PACIFIC NAZARENE
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

Bridging Cultures for Christ
1 Timothy 2:5

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PREFACE

The Mediator resumes publication with this issue after a lengthy hiatus. This has been a time of change and growth for Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary. It is our privilege to present the inaugural address of Floyd T. Cunningham as the fifth President of APNTS. It is a challenging address that gives a view of the tremendous opportunities for ministry in our region of the world and beyond. In Cunningham's inaugural, "Building New Bridges", we are reminded that as followers of Christ and as Christian educators in a theological seminary, "we must not crawl into our own little enclave, educate the elite, refuse contact with outsiders, maintain personal piety and doctrinal integrity, and totally miss the mission of God." Let this address challenge you afresh in your own areas of ministry!

You will enjoy articles by one of our long-time faculty members: Professor Beverly Gruver. Professor Gruver draws our attention to the core concepts of faith and holiness. She reminds us of John Wesley's own admonition that the "transforming work of God is not to be accomplished in 'careless indifference nor indolent inactivity,' but rather in a rigorous discipline that would include keeping of the commandments, denying oneself and taking up one's cross, and in earnest prayer and fasting."

Former faculty member and now consulting editor for *The Mediator*, Dr. David Ackerman gives us "No Room in the Inn: A Glimpse at Early Christian Hospitality Through Lukan Redaction." It is a timely reminder of the powerful role of hospitality in the Christian community. My wife, Johanna, and I so appreciated the gracious hospitality lived out by David and Rhonda and family this past summer!

Long-time adjunct faculty member, Charles Seifert, presents "The Master Musician." All who have known "Dr. Charles" have been blessed by the flow of inspiring music from a life moved by the touch of the Master Himself. He reminds us that "as instruments of love, peace and compassion we emulate the virtues of Christ Jesus and are like divine music filling 'the inner ear' with a spiritual symphony of love for God and one's neighbor."

New faculty member, Dr. Darin Land, New Testament scholar, is introduced to our readership in this issue with his article, “Incarnational Interpretation: Hearing the Word of God in the New Testament.” Dr. Land reminds us that, “The church, then, rightly states that the New Testament is God’s Word. It is not merely the Word about God.” He makes the point that scripture and faith are intertwined: “Incarnational interpretation rightly begins with faith; it also ends with it. Since the believing exegete receives the text as God’s Word, he or she does not stop working until God’s message for today has been explored.”

It is our intention to offer *The Mediator* first on-line at our APNTS website: www.apnts.edu.ph. At present we do intend to make printed copies available as well. We hope readers will take advantage to avail themselves of both editions.

Robert C. Donahue, editor

BUILDING NEW BRIDGES

Floyd T. Cunningham

Inauguration Address

Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary

November 20, 2008

Introduction

Our school slogan, since its founding, has remained, “Bridging Cultures for Christ.” There is one (only one) bridge across campus. The present bridge was erected over the old one, which you can still see below it. It is much stronger than the previous one. It was used for the construction of the Nielson Center of Education and Evangelism, and you can drive a dump truck over it. It is built to last. Whereas winding steps led down to the previous bridge, this new bridge makes both sides of our campus accessible for wheelchairs. Practically everyone crosses the bridge on a daily basis. The bridge is so routinely used that we forget there are two sides of our campus, indeed two property deeds. Think of how difficult it would be for us if there were no bridge! We would remain two segmented, divided communities. Furthermore, the bridge reminds us daily of the world in which we live—it floats by, outward to the sea.

Building bridges has been the theme of APNTS and the focus of our vision statement: “Bridging cultures for Christ, APNTS equips each new generation of leaders to disseminate the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout Asia, the Pacific, and the world.” The initial thought in Donald Owens’s mind in the phrase “Bridging Cultures for Christ” was that many people groups remained enemies of each other—or, if not enemies, estranged from each other or misunderstood. Indeed there are few earthly reasons for fellowship: different languages, different religions, and past wars separate people. But those who come to APNTS from the Philippines, Korea, Japan, Myanmar, the United States, and many other countries are one if they are in Christ. APNTS brings together divided people, and establishes new relationships transcending old estrangements.

Owens may have been influenced by a classic little book by Donald McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, published in 1955.¹ McGavran criticized a “mission station approach” to evangelism, and sought, rather, to find how God has already implanted “eternity in the hearts” of people, and how God is already at work. McGavran focused on reaching groups of people, not individuals, with the gospel—which was a strategy peculiarly fit for India, where McGavran served as a missionary, and Korea, which Owens knew well, as well as other parts of Asia and the Pacific.

While many missions in the last 50 years have adopted McGavran’s approach, seminaries have remained stations or compounds, somewhat like monasteries, rather than life-giving movements of God. The church, late General Superintendent Raymond Hurn wrote that the church must not crawl into its “own little enclave, polish the saints, refuse contact with outsiders, maintain personal piety, and totally miss the real mission of Christ in the world.”² Seminaries are not churches, but the same admonishment pertains: we must not crawl into our own little enclave, educate the elite, refuse contact with outsiders, maintain personal piety and doctrinal integrity, and totally miss the mission of God. How can we best “prepare men and women for Christ-like leadership and excellence in ministry,” as our mission statement directs? By our school finding out what it means to be a holy people of God, and ministering right here in Taytay.

Foundations

Bridges require foundations. Christ himself is the sure foundation. As a proudly denominational school, strongly loyal to the Church of the Nazarene, our biblical, historical and theological foundations are unshakeable.

¹Donald McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (New York: Friendship, 1955). The APNTS library has Owens’s personal copy.

²Hurn, *Mission Possible: A Study of the Mission of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: NPH, 1973), 82.

Christian Foundations. The Bible remains the means by which we understand Christ, the rule under which we construct theology. By it we judge all other sources of knowledge of God. The Bible, as our Articles of Faith affirm, contains “all things necessary to our salvation.”

Nazarenes rightly have been concerned about right doctrine, grounded upon the Word spoken to humankind. We have as Articles of Faith not ones that either John Wesley or Phineas Bresee composed or called councils to decide. The doctrines were given to Nazarenes, as if a gift, from the centuries. Our possession of Articles of Faith indicates our indebtedness to the catholic tradition of the Christian Church. Ours are the great Christological and Trinitarian affirmations of the Church.

Wesleyan Foundations. We read the Bible through the lens that we inherit, shaped by John Wesley. In different times and places, I note as a historian of the church, Nazarenes have embodied the legacy somewhat differently, yet remain unabashedly Wesleyan. As Wesleyans, the heart of our faith is grace flowing to us all from God through the atoning work of Christ and applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

We affirm free grace *from Christ* for all. This democratic grace knows no distinctions of race, gender or economic standing. Nazarene evangelism builds on this, extending the gospel invitation to all, and Nazarene theological education also builds upon this, endeavoring to be accessible to all of those who are called, no matter their place or station in life.

We affirm prevenient grace leading *toward Christ*, calling everyone to salvation. Through prevenient grace, God allows human beings moral choice and enables us to exercise faith. Through prevenient grace God allows human beings to understand nature, and to look for God’s self-disclosure in the world. The Holy Spirit actively prepares the way for the gospel.

We affirm the assurance of grace *in Christ* to our salvation. Our sense of the Holy Spirit’s presence is close. At the same time, our expectation is that there are repeated times in our lives of spiritual outpouring and blessing. Though we teach the importance of understanding God rightly, our direct awareness of God’s love floods and fills our own hearts with love.

We affirm sanctifying grace. We possess such an optimism of grace that we believe that men and women can be transformed and made holy *by Christ* and kept holy by the Spirit of Christ, in this life. A gracious moment of entire sanctification, and a subsequent walk *in Christ*, produces Christ-likeness among us.

Nazarene Foundations. What is the point of having a solidly built bridge with firm foundations that no one uses? It might be magnificent, beautiful—but useless. What would be the point?

To possess doctrines of grace that we have not experienced, and yet pass on, will not do. This is *not* Nazarenes' passion or calling, to pass on theology divorced from experience. The consuming desire among Nazarenes for one hundred years has not been to transmit doctrine; it has been, rather, to draw many into the transforming presence of God through Christ's sanctifying Spirit to produce Christ-like disciples in the nations.³

The Church of the Nazarene has its own ethos, set by careful balances. In education, the foundations of our church seek a balance between holiness of heart and well-prepared minds. The objective, as stated in the philosophy of education developed between 1948 and 1952, is “a fusion of holy character and sound education.”⁴ The Church of the Nazarene affirms the balance between revelation and reason, and stresses the liberal arts. We are not intimidated by any sincere search for truth. Ministerial education is built upon the assumption that pastors must possess a wide spectrum of knowledge in order to understand and to communicate to the current generation.

In our early history, almost as soon as we Nazarenes entered a new country, we established schools for educating pastors and Christian workers—and (no matter that we thought Jesus would soon appear a second time) not short-term, fast-track training schools, but real four-year programs, often at the baccalaureate level (especially here in this part

³From the conclusion to the forthcoming centennial history of the Church of the Nazarene.

⁴The Commission on Education presented a report that was adopted by the General Board in June 1952.

of the world). Eventually the church established graduate programs in key areas, the first being APNTS. Our school is built upon firm foundations and has been the bridge linking people together on this region and to other parts of the world.

Our bridge's foundations link us to the past and shape our mission, vision and current objectives. If we appreciate our heritage and if we are loyal to it, we will want to seek all possible means of conveying its message to people.

Building Bridges

In his book, *Creative Ministry*, Henri Nouwen noted that often theological students begin with the “how” questions—how do I preach?, how do I be of help to a couple facing marital crises?, how do I assist a dying patient? But this is soon overwhelmed with the realization that there is an “I” asking these questions who must possess psychological and spiritual awareness—must grapple with personal history, with weaknesses, temptations, frailties. Whenever ministry education pulls away from the personal experience of the teachers and the learners, Nouwen warns, it becomes disembodied, and learners become “blind to what is happening right in front of them.”⁵ Though building competencies in ministry are necessary, no act can really be called “ministry,” Nouwen says, unless competency is grounded in the “radical commitment to lay down one’s own life in the service of others.”⁶

APNTS provides a place for enacting such radical commitment. We at APNTS have the joy and privilege of being more easily like a community than some seminaries are able to be—facing as we do the cycles of life, courtships and marriages, the miracles of birth, the joys of baptism, the fears of cancer, undergoing suffering, healing, even death. APNTS offers opportunities for knowing oneself as well as knowing God by interacting with fellow learners with those from other cultures. Living daily with each other, interpersonal and intercultural conflicts serve either to drive us apart or to further us in Christ-likeness.

⁵Henri Nouwen, *Creative Ministry*, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 16; 6.

⁶Nouwen, *Creative Ministry*, 116.

Furthermore, APNTS has the opportunity, like churches, to build bridges beyond its walls, to evangelize, to find how God is working in those around us, to engage flesh-and-blood people, not just “the world” in some abstract sense: we are a breathing, living, pulsating community—not preparing to be, but here and now the body of Christ.

The Seminary, as any body of Christ, must embody holiness corporately, corporeally. Within this body, even here, we possess different roles, which, as described in Ephesians 4:2-13, are intended to glorify Christ, not ourselves as individuals. Even here, within our own community, some are called to be apostles, others prophets, some evangelists, others pastors and teachers. We do not need to hope as individuals to possess each calling, or to be jealous of others with different roles in the body of Christ. We rejoice in what we are called to be, and equally rejoice, when we are mature enough, in the calling of our sisters and brothers. Only together, the body is whole. Singly, we do not accomplish the mission of Christ. The apostle Paul pleads for the corporate obedience of the church: within its essential way of being, embodying holiness; within its administrative and leadership, embodying holiness; within its ways of witnessing to the world, embodying holiness.⁷

Building bridges to our own churches. Our loyalty and responsibility is to actual local churches, primarily those of the Church of the Nazarene. We do not exist for the sake of existing; we exist to serve local churches and districts. In order to serve them, we must not talk so much as listen, not seek so much to be understood as to understand. It is necessary for a Nazarene seminary to re-express our theological heritage. To do so effectively we must understand the minds and hearts of people in the world, and in the pews, and the daily pressures of pastors. We must earn the privilege of guiding the church and not assume it as a right. We cannot come before people and long-suffering pastors with relevant answers before we have listened to the questions.

⁷J. Ayodeji Adewuya, *Holiness and Community in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1: Paul's View of Communal Holiness in the Corinthian Correspondence* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 169, drawing upon Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 196-197. See also *Embodied Holiness: Toward a Corporate Theology of Spiritual Growth*, eds. Samuel M. Powell and Michael E. Lodahl (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999).

What is our role in equipping the church—both laypersons and those called out—for ministry? We here are rich in resources, people, land, books, time, and so much else, but these are not ours to hoard. How can we effectively share what we have—how can we be part of the bridges God is building? I see APNTS as becoming “experimental” in the way that every body of Christ must be, availing of rapidly paced technology (which helped secure the election of my country’s new president), while engaging people in traditional, interpersonal ways: conversing with women at wells, washing one another’s feet, and, by all means, saving some.

Building bridges to other churches. Wesley said “if your heart is right, give me your hand.” This statement came in a sermon after a long list of essential Christian beliefs. What unites Christians confessing Christ as Lord is greater than that which separates them. As a seminary that warmly accepts persons of other denominations while resolutely retaining our distinctiveness, our non-Nazarene students often have journeyed to deeper understandings and appreciations for their own denominations, and, at the same time, have taken back to their churches high aspirations of teaching, preaching and interpreting Christian holiness.

Building bridges to our community. Seminary education must not only convey knowledge, build competency, and shape character, but direct attention to our immediate context of ministry. Through going out to seek and touching those surrounding us we lessen the distance between the Seminary and the world. Even if we wished, we do not live in isolation—there is a symbiotic relationship between the seminary and the larger community. *We* are the “creek” community as much as those neighbors who share our walls. We must think outside the walls and reach beyond whatever seals off the church, by bridging the walls that separate us from the people among whom we live.

In order to take the message entrusted to us, we must build bridges in this local community, in this barangay, in Taytay. I know we are called to the whole world; I know we are international; that will not change. But as we go to “Samaria,” and to the “uttermost parts of the world,” we must not neglect our own “Jerusalem.” We need to learn how to engage in actual conversation with our immediate community. What can we contribute to this city? What can we add to its leaders, how

can we bless its tinders, how can we enable its educators, how can we impact its business people, how can we touch its street children. We have no silver or gold. That is good. Other agencies, other parts of the body of Christ have such resources. What is it that we, particularly, as a multi-national graduate theological seminary in the Wesleyan tradition, what is it that we have to offer? Where others draw circles to keep people out, we can enlarge circles to encompass them. The circles we draw will be inclusive of both us and them—by movements of God’s grace dissolving any distinction between “us” and “them.” We are to be one in Christ.

Bridges build relationships among previously separated people. That means destroying attitudes of superiority and condescension between rich and poor persons, or even between teachers and students, and any other distinctions that objectify others. The bridge we want to build is not a one way bridge. People come and go on it.

Our bridges will instill self-worth and self-esteem in all with whom we are in conversation on the bridge. Building bridges means giving, but not only giving, also receiving from those among whom we live, teachers learning from students, those deemed poor giving to those deemed rich. Such bridges demand that before “doing” compassion we must have compassionate bilateral relationships.

As a community, we are trying to discern what it means collectively to follow Jesus. Can we find out what this means in an orderly processed, pre-packaged, handed-down fashion? No. No, no, no; we cannot. Count on holy disarray (hopefully not total chaos), and plenty of mistakes as together we find out what it means to be a holy people of God here and now.

My assumption and hope is that if we are endeavoring to discover what it means to be the body of Christ here and now, to build bridges in this particular place, our students will take that same stance and ask that same question in any place of ministry: what does it mean for us, here and now, to be the holy people of God?

Building bridges to this generation. We embrace children and youth with both our arms and the academic programs we together construct. Encompassing both women and children, in Matthew 18 Jesus speaks of the *mikron*, the seemingly insignificant ones, and warns,

“See that you do not look down on one of these little ones.” Our Wesleyan heritage gives us a kind of homing instinct toward those without advantages in society. This is the mission of the Church of the Nazarene and other holiness churches in the world: to go to the neglected people and remote quarters of the world and irregardless of race and ethnicity establish centers of holy fire. We are called to go to the despised of this world and embrace them with the love of Jesus Christ our Lord. Is it hard for we disciples to change and become like a little child, as Jesus demands? Perhaps less hard if we live among such as these.

Regarding youth, Mildred Bangs Wynkoop reminded my generation that “the very thing which our [holiness] forefathers had, essentially, was the spirit of revolution. They were not quiet, comfortable, placid, undisturbed people. They seethed with energy. They saw visions which sent them crashing through barriers of impossibilities. They dreamed dreams and brought forth sold realities.” Wynkoop described “essential Wesleyanism” as “sanctified revolution.” “This is a young person’s religion,” she suggested. “There is life in it.”⁸ My own sense of that life and spirit in the Church of the Nazarene inspired me then and inspires me now.

If we Nazarenes consider ourselves still to be a movement, and if we are loyal to holiness as life and doctrine, we will want to seek all possible means of conveying that to this generation, which is increasingly alike around the globe. Our attention to the contexts of ministry demands that we not just preach and teach but that we demonstrate our message to this generation. We as a community seeking to be holy must grab the attention of this generation. To do so we need to personally examine the conditions, the thoughts, the aspirations, the languages of youth.

Sociologist Wade Clark Roof asserts that this is a seeking generation, one repulsed by a “we have found it” mentality.⁹ Though strengthened by firm foundations, we are still a movement, not

⁸Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *John Wesley: Christian Revolutionary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1970), 14-15.

⁹Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1999), 163, 307, and throughout.

considering ourselves as yet having arrived at its final destination; and we hope that as we walk along a road together, with Christ in our midst, he will still be talking to us, whispering to us about himself, until the end of the age. As Paul puts it, Ephesians 2:22, we are being built—we are not yet completed—we are in the process of rising to become a holy temple in the Lord, as a community, collectively, a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

The Future

I am tempted to talk about building bridges to the future. I know that five- or ten-year plans are necessary. But sometimes, perhaps, Jesus says, “You are here and now and every moment that you spend planning for, thinking about, worrying about the future robs you of essential moments today with those immediately around you. Then when tomorrow arrives, you will still be thinking about the future, instead of ever enjoying my immediate presence and those of your brothers and sisters.” Jesus seems to say, “I will be there just as now. Just rest; celebrate my presence. Just be.” If we rest and “be” just now, we will be stronger in the days ahead. We will not miss the question, “What are we to be here, now, in this place?” We are walking along a path, building bridges, with eyes fixed on the end, but would not Jesus say, “I am not only your past and your future, I am the one beside you, here, now; the Eternal present. Look at those beside you just now, right here; look at those at your doors; what present moment is there to seize?”¹⁰

Conclusion

“Bridging Cultures for Christ” remains our motto. There is one (only one) Bridge that can unite cultures, one Bridge between God and human beings, the man Jesus Christ. Across campus, we are united because of that one Bridge between us and others, Jesus Christ. That Bridge far surpasses any other relationships that might try to bring people together. Yes, you can still see the old cultures, as you can see the old

¹⁰Wess Stafford, *Too Small to Ignore*.

bridge, but Christ, like our new bridge, is strong and surpasses what rests underneath. He will last forever. You can drive a dump truck of sin over him; his grace is sufficiently strong. He reminds us, as our bridge, of a broken and hurting world, for which he died. He builds no barriers, no winding steps: all men and women, and children are accessible to him. “Do not hinder them,” he says. “Come unto me.” In Christ the Bridge we forget that we are many, for out of many we have become one. We come to each other because of Christ. We would not function as one community without this Bridge. We would remain segmented—divided, two. But in him we become one.

Having seen here at APNTS the indispensability of the bridge, we are compelled to build new bridges to others, build new bridges on sure foundations, build bridges that will bring people to oneness in Christ. These new bridges will not be our own workmanship: we are trying to discern where God already is constructing them. These are bridges of God. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, we may join him in his work. With new dreams comes revitalization, and I have dreams of new bridges.¹¹

¹¹Anthony F. C. Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Random House, 1969).

FAITH AND HOLINESS

Beverly Gruver

The people of God are commanded to be holy. Leviticus 19:1-2 says: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.”’” And in Leviticus 20:7-8 the injunction is given again, “‘Consecrate yourselves and be holy because I am the Lord you God. Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the Lord, who makes you holy.’” The command is repeated by Peter in 1 Peter 1:13-16: “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”¹ And Hebrews 12:14 summarizes these commands by saying: “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”

These commands from both the Old Testament and the New Testament indicate that the harmonious relationship between God and humankind must be on the basis of holiness, righteousness, and purity. This is the relationship that existed from the initial creation of the world. Genesis chapter one says after each unit of creation God declared that what had been created was good. Humankind (both male and female) were created in the image of God and God pronounced that the creation was “very good.” Runyon describes the original creation as a harmony of ecological balance. All parts of the universe were in orderly connection with each other, constituting one system where each had sufficiency of food for its inhabitants so that none had any need of temptation to prey upon the other.² Genesis three then gives the account of the human fall into sin and the separation from God that this fall caused. From that time on not only humankind but even the earth itself has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the

¹All scriptures are quoted from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984).

²Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 210.

present time, seeking to be liberated from its bondage to decay (Romans 8:21-22). John Wesley says that “By turning from God to seek happiness independent of God, . . . he threw not only himself but likewise the whole creation, which was intimately connected with him, into disorder, misery, death.”³

The whole of the scriptures is the story of this dilemma and the solution to the problem of sin and separation from God. From Genesis onward the stage was being set for the coming of the Messiah who would bring peace and reconciliation with God. Jesus told his disciples in John 16:33, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” And Peter picked up the same thread of thought when he spoke to Cornelius’s household in Acts 10:36: “You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.” Verse 43 continues, “All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

In this theme of reconciliation, redemption, justification, atonement, and grace, something is needed to be the spark that brings it all together. I would postulate that faith is that element which is needed to bring to fruition this reconciliation between God and humanity. A song by Samuel T. Scott popularized several decades ago expresses that idea poetically:

Prayer is the key to heaven,
but faith unlocks the door;
Words are so easily spoken, a prayer
without faith, is like a boat without an oar.
Have faith, when you speak to the Master,
that’s all he asks you for,

³ Wesley’s Sermon 56, “God’s Approbation of his Works,”” quoted in Runyon, *The New Creation*, 19.

Yes, prayer is the key to heaven,
but faith unlocks the door.⁴

While it could be argued that the song is trite and does not plumb the depths of the relationship between God and mankind, it does prick the surface of the topic I wish to pursue in this paper: namely, that without faith, the grace of God provided through the work of the trinity cannot be appropriated. Thus was the revelation to Martin Luther in his struggle to come to terms with his experience and the teaching of the church of his day that “the just shall live by faith” and “Justification by faith” became through him, a distinctive principle of Protestantism.”⁵

Before considering the connection between faith and holiness, both terms need to be examined and defined.

What is Holiness?

To answer this fundamental question, several angles will be discussed. They fall into two major categories. The holiness that is God’s holiness and that is given to the believer as an inward working of God’s grace is the first of these categories. The second category is the outward appearance of Christlikeness that follows the inward working of God’s grace and is the outward manifestation of God’s holiness within.

Dr. Greathouse explains the concepts of holiness through the use of the Greek terms used in scripture. The first term he explains is *hagios* which is the term for “holy.” It carries two meanings, namely, “separation” and “the Holy One.” He says that this word signifies the holiness which cannot be separated from God. It is used when Isaiah announced, “the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness” (5:16).⁶

⁴“Prayer Is the Key to Heaven,” ed. Samuel T. Scott, <http://www.usc.salvationarmy.org/prayer.nsf/9c1bbf1e422b692d86256b3c0076222d/ef560db97e3590386256b430064c327?OpenDocument> [accessed November 5, 2006].

⁵Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, Prince Press Edition ed., Two vols., vol. Two (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1975), 706.

⁶William M. Greathouse, *Wholeness in Christ: Toward a Biblical Theology of Holiness* (Kansas City: Beachon Hill Press, 1998), 201.

The essential nature of God is holiness. As noted above from Leviticus to Peter, we read that God is holy so his people are commanded to be holy. Throughout scripture God is referenced as Holy. Exodus 15:11 asks, “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” I Samuel 6:20 asks, “Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God?” Typical of references in the Psalms is the one in Psalm 99:9: “Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy.” Perhaps most notable of the references in Isaiah is the one in chapter 6: “And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’” The theme is repeated in Revelation 15:4: “Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.” The overriding characteristic of God is that of holiness.

That which separates humankind from this holy God is sin which came into the world by human choice. As preparations were being made for the voice of God to be heard in the giving of the Law, limits were set around Mount Sinai to set it apart as holy so the people would not cross the limits; for if they did, God would break out against them, Exodus 20. The central story of holy scripture is the means by which humankind can be reconciled to the Holy God. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 encapsulates this central theme.

The second concept of holiness that Dr. Greathouse emphasizes is the Greek root word *hagios*. Its cognates are used in the Epistles to describe the moral purity and godlikeness characteristic of saints.⁷ 2 Corinthians 7:1 indicates that degrees of holiness exist for the believer: “since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God.” Greathouse goes on to explain that only God is holy in himself; all holiness in humans is derivative. We are holy only as we become partakers of his holiness.⁸ He explains that the Torah defines

⁷Greathouse, 202.

⁸Greathouse, 203.

holiness as life lived in relationship to God in praise and in grateful, obedient love. The very heart of the Law is love—divine love finding a responsive human love.⁹

What is Faith?

The first definition that is generally cited when the question of the concept of faith is mentioned comes from Hebrews 11:1 and 6: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see . . . And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Several words in the English language are nearly synonymous with the word faith. We commonly use the words *trust* and *believe* in a verb form when we talk about faith. Both of these words are generally verbs but do have a noun form and usage; believe can be rendered belief when we talk about the substance of what one believes; trust takes on a noun usage when it relates to legal and monetary matters being held in benefit of another. The word *confide* implies that more than one is involved in the transaction and seems to relate to equals. It also has a noun form, confidence, which indicates a character trait of assurance and readiness to move ahead. But in the case of the word “faith,” it does not have a common verb form or usage. It is always used as a noun. While these words seem to be focusing on a similar concept, they are not precisely the same concept.

Within Christendom several concepts use the word “faith” for their expression. One of these concepts is the set of beliefs held by a Christian community. Within the Church of the Nazarene, we have sixteen articles of faith that are the heart of who we declare ourselves to be. Staples says that what is decisive in history for faith is the appearance of Jesus Christ in the midst of history as the One who incarnates and reveals God. Christianity is a historical faith.¹⁰ Thus we have a

⁹Greathouse, 57.

¹⁰Rob L. Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1991), 115.

profession of faith or a confession of faith and a community of faith, but neither of these is the actual heart of faith.

While belief is an act, as Tillich indicates, “of something more or less probable or improbable being affirmed in spite of the insufficiency of its theoretical substantiation, faith is more than trust in even the most sacred authority. It is participation in the subject of one’s ultimate concern with one’s whole being.”¹¹ Luther’s concept of the faith which he found to be the absolute essential for Christianity is an actual communion with the living God.¹² According to Jacques Ellul, belief talks and acts; in contrast, faith waits and listens until the silence is filled up with the indisputable word of God.¹³ Therefore, faith is not something that can exist on its own. Rather it is always bound to that with which it is ultimately concerned, to use Tillich’s terminology. Evidence of faith is peace with God, but peace is not equivalent to faith. Man as man in relationship with God as God is the essence of peace. Man’s waiting upon God alone. The object of this waiting is the essential point of what constitutes faith.¹⁴ Barth declares that:

Faith assumes with implicit confidence, that the invisible existence of men in God has veritable and concrete reality. Faith is the incomparable and irrevocable step over the frontier separating the old from the new. . . Faith presents itself in a series of paradoxes: human vacuum—divine fullness; human speechlessness, ignorance, and expectation—divine words, knowledge, and action; the end of all things human—the beginning of divine possibility. Faith is the divine revolution and upheaval by which the

¹¹Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, ed. Niels et al Bohr, board of editors, World Perspectives, vol. Ten (New York: Harper & Brothers 1957), 31.

¹²Wilhelm Herrmann, *The Communion of the Christian with God*, ed. Leander general editor Keck, Lives of Jesus Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 209.

¹³Jacques Ellul, *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World*, trans. Peter Heinegg (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 103.

¹⁴Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, Sixth ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 151.

well-known equilibrium between ‘Yes’ and ‘No,’ grace and sin, good and evil, is disturbed and overthrown.¹⁵

The emphasis of faith is not faith itself, but in the object of that faith. Wesley stated that this faith in something does not necessarily involve any change in action, but rather involves a relationship. Faith does not save, but faith in Christ does because Christ becomes the central object of one’s love and obedience.¹⁶ Luther indicates that love does not exactly result from faith, but it is the chief element in faith itself.¹⁷ Wynkoop asserts that the antithesis to saving faith is not “no faith,” but rather active rejection.¹⁸

The Gift of Faith

Having presented an overview of the definitions of holiness and of faith with implication of the importance of both of these concepts in Christianity, subsequent questions then arise. First, How does one come into the possession of this faith? And secondly, What part does faith have in holiness as it is lived out in the life of the Christian?

The first consideration is the attainment of a faith whereby belief and trust are exercised in obedience and love. In Romans 7:18 Paul states, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.” Furthermore in Romans 3 Paul has declared that all alike are under sin, both Jew and Gentile. He then proceeds to quote from the Psalms: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” Although humankind were created in the image of God, they fell into sin and became separated from God. Runyon points out that it is

¹⁵Barth, 201.

¹⁶Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1967).

¹⁷Hermann, 277.

¹⁸Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1972).

important to avoid the common misunderstanding arising from the Protestant emphasis on faith, that it is human belief that makes one acceptable to God; that personal faith is the agent of justification. To say this turns faith in to a work and distorts the doctrine.¹⁹

Tillich also comments on this idea saying that human calculation of something more or less probable or improbable being affirmed in spite of insufficient evidence is often misnamed faith.²⁰ Jesus remarked to his disciples in the incident of the storm on the sea, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” (Mark 4:40-41). This would affirm that in and of oneself, faith is not produced since Jesus questioned that they still had no faith. Nor was having encountered Jesus sufficient for them to have faith. Something more was needed.

Whence then is the source of faith? It is the grace of God that brings faith. It is a gift given in the whole package of grace. Romans 10:17 affirms, “Consequently, faith comes through hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” Ephesians 2:8-9 puts it this way: “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works so that no one can boast.” John Wesley stated that reason cannot produce faith. Although faith is consistent with reason, yet reason alone cannot produce faith in the scriptural sense of the word. “Faith, according to Scripture, is ‘an evidence,’ or conviction, ‘of things not seen.’ It is a divine evidence, bringing a full conviction of an invisible eternal world.”²¹ Wynkoop says that “faith is a most vital aspect of human life in its relation to God.” She further comments that it was at the point where faith in God broke down that sin began.²² Therefore, it is at the point where faith enters that eternal life begins. She affirms that faith is the most vital aspect of human life in its relation to God. She, like Wesley,

¹⁹Runyon, 56.

²⁰Tillich, 31.

²¹ “Sermon #70: The Case of Reason Impartially Considered,” from *The Works of John Wesley* Volume VIII, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1979).

²²Wynkoop, *Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology*.

puts it together with reason saying that “it is a rational like between the tangible and intangible, between the divine and the human, between the objective and subject aspects of atonement as well as between all events and meaning, fact and interpretation, in all of rational life.”²³

That faith is given as a gift is further affirmed by Paul’s words to Timothy when he said, “The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 1:14). Runyon says that the trusting which is inherent in the response in faith is created in the heart by the prior action of God—so that one senses the love for God because a prior sense of God’s love has been received.²⁴

The giving and receiving of the gift of faith involves both the giver and the receiver. Wesley admonished his hearers to “lift up your hearts to him who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. He alone can give that faith, which is he evidence and conviction of things not seen. . . . He alone can shed his love abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost given unto you. Ask, therefore, and it shall be given to you!”²⁵ From another source, Ebeling asserts that faith comes into being as the consequence of the witness of faith.²⁶ One that has faith gives witness so that faith and another then receiving that witness of Jesus Christ being preached so that faith may be imparted. It is the attestation of an event of faith. Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus is the author and perfecter of faith. While faith is given or formed anew in each receiver, it also is historical and comes from the preaching and witness of those who already know and have confidence (faith) in the ultimate concern, to use Tillich’s expression—from those who already knows that God is the Father and so is filled with fear and even dread.²⁷

The gift of faith is given, but it is not given indiscriminately

²³Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, 227-8.

²⁴Runyon, 55.

²⁵*The Works of John Wesley Volume Viii.*

²⁶Gerhard Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith* (London: Wm.Collins Sons & Co., Ltd., 1961), 25.

²⁷Ellul, 112.

without the receiver being aware of the gift and wanting to receive it. Wesley said that “we receive it by simple faith: But God does not, will not, give that faith, unless we seek it with all diligence, in the way he hath ordained.”²⁸

We turn now to the second of our questions: namely, What part does faith have in holiness as it is lived out in the life of Christians? Faith does not operate in a vacuum. One does not have faith in faith. Faith is always associated with its object, or as Tillich calls it, one’s ultimate concern. Christian faith is faith in Jesus Christ. Ebeling states that the double name by which we refer to him, Jesus the Christ, is the most succinct form of Christian confession of faith for the name Jesus refers to the man who lived in Palestine two thousand year ago, and Christ is the title of honor by which faith confesses him as present Lord and Saviour—Christ the awaited messiah.²⁹ Ebeling also points out that it is only faith that can recognize Jesus as the Christ.

Hebrews 11:6 again states that anyone who comes to him (God) must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. The rewards of seeking God are many. Faith is the connection that brings one into a reconciled relationship with God. Romans 4 discusses Abraham whose faith was credited as righteousness. The promises that Abraham received were through the righteousness that comes by faith (vs. 13). Greathouse discusses the whole of our salvation that comes through faith. It is through faith in him that we are restored to a right relationship with God. This is our justification or righteousness.³⁰ John Wesley in his sermon on the First Fruits of the Spirit declared, “It is God who hat wrought thee to this selfsame thing. But, doest thou now believe? Hath he again enabled thee to say, ‘I know that my redeemer liveth;’ ‘and the life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God?’ Then that faith again cancels all that is past, and there is no condemnation to thee.”³¹ Wynkoop reaffirms this concept by reminding

²⁸*The Works of John Wesley Third Edition Complete and Unabridged*, 14 vols., vol. Volume XI Thoughts, Addresses, Prayers, Letters (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1979).

²⁹Ebeling, 45.

³⁰Greathouse, 78.

³¹*The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols., vol. III (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1979).

us that faith is not the cause of salvation but rather the condition of receiving it. She says that faith is not what saves us but we are saved only by Christ in whom we have faith.³²

Beyond justification which is accomplished by Christ Jesus through faith in Him, is the cleansing and sanctification through the baptism of the Holy Spirit whereby the holiness of God resides in us. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit whom we have received from God (I Corinthians 6:19). We have this treasure in “jars of clay.” The treasure that Paul is speaking about in 2 Corinthians 4 is the light of the glory of God that he has made to shine in our hearts. This glory of God is his holiness that resides within us by faith and cleanses and transforms. Greathouse expounds upon this concept from Romans when he says that “Christ Jesus is our sanctification or holiness. By faith we die and rise with Christ and receive the Spirit, who makes us truly holy in this present age.”³³ Like the glory of God, his very presence, filled the temple in Solomon’s day, so the glory of God fills his temple today as by faith people receive his holy presence into the jars of clay which are our bodies. This is the first concept of holiness as defined by Greathouse above.

The second concept of holiness in our previous definitions involves the idea of “Christlikeness,” or taking on the character of Christ. This is the outworking of the inner presence of God’s holiness within. This is also accomplished by faith as the gift of faith is nurtured. As with the receiving of any gift, one chooses what to do with that gift. Having received the gift, a relationship with the giver is established. The gift itself is not the essence of the relationship; rather, it is the symbol of that relationship. Jesus said in John 15: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” The gift of faith is nurtured through remaining in the vine which is Jesus himself. Paul continues the metaphor of the branches and the life-giving tree in Romans 11 when he talks about the grafting in of branches so they could share in the nourishing sap from the olive root. “You do not support the root, but the root supports you” (Romans 11:18).

³²*Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology*, 104.

³³Greathouse, 78.

The nurture of one's faith is accomplished by various means. Psalm 46:10 seems an appropriate place to begin for it says "Be still and know that I am God." One does not learn to know God primarily by increased activity and a flurry of service. Rather, knowing God comes first of all by waiting upon Him. Isaiah 40:29 to 31 tells us that God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. The weak are not only the infirmed or the very young or the very old, but also youths will grow wear and stumble and fall if they do not increase their strength. This increase of strength comes by waiting upon God—hoping in the Lord. Isaiah 41:1 admonishes those who would know God to be silent before Him. Isaiah 26:3 affirms that the one who trusts in God with a steadfast mind will be kept in perfect peace. And again in Isaiah 30:15 the prophet reminds his hearers that "In repentance and rest is your salvation; in quietness and trust is your strength."

This waiting on God is not accomplished in a vacuum. Wesley in his discussion on Christian perfection said that our waiting on the transforming work of God is not to be accomplished in "careless indifference nor indolent inactivity," but rather in a rigorous discipline that would include keeping of the commandments, denying oneself and taking up one's cross, and in earnest prayer and fasting.³⁴ Paul's admonition to the Colossians was, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Faith came by hearing the word of God (Romans 10), and it is also nourished by the word of God. The Psalmist emphasized the importance of God's word—God's laws, his precepts, his commands, his statutes, his decrees—and knowing and obeying it especially in Psalm 119. Verse 9 asks the question, "How can a young man keep his way pure?" and then answers that question by replying, "By living according to your word." The knowledge of God's word provides input for the quiet meditation which will serve as a guard against sinning against God. Wesley summarizes the need for nurture by saying, "Indeed it has been my opinion . . . that one great cause why men make so little improvement in the divine life is their own coldness, negligence, and unbelief."³⁵ Wynkoop quotes Wesley in her discussion of faith and sanctification by saying, "It is both the condition and the instrument of (sanctification).

³⁴Wesley, *Perfection*, 27.

³⁵Wesley, *Perfection*, 31.

When we begin to believe, then sanctification begins. And as faith increases, holiness increases, till we are created anew.”³⁶

In Luke 17 the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith, giving the indication that faith is not something static, but rather dynamic with the possibility for nurture and development. Jesus’ response to them was to compare faith metaphorically with a mustard seed. In Matthew 13 Jesus had given the full parable about the growth of the mustard seed into a plant large enough to support the perching of birds in its branches. The Luke passage indicates that such faith is capable of overwhelming exploits. In the verses following (7 through 10), it seems that Jesus is giving the real answer to the disciples question of how their faith can be increased. It is the parable of the servant master relationship whereby faith seems to be increased through individuals taking on the role of servant/slave and pouring out their lives with no expectation of recompense or reward or even a simple “thank you.” Rather, it is becoming more and more like Christ who “being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant. . .” (Philippines 2:6-7). In becoming such servants individuals actively participate in the outworking of the Christlikeness of holiness in their lives.

The disciplines of nurturing one’s faith are not all personal. Of the personal dialogue with God, Ellul observed that “faith isolates;” and it is belief that gathers together. “The church is the gathering in and through love of those who have been called individually, have been separated, set apart as individuals to fulfill the function assigned them by God . . . and the only gathering place is love.”³⁷ So it is that the nurturing of faith is also dynamically carried out in the context of a faith community. Wesley often asserted that there is no holiness but social holiness. He was convinced that Christian faith is nurtured in a social context. For that reason he organized bands and classes whereby those who had experienced the new birth might be nurtured by others.³⁸ The writer of the book of Hebrews admonished believers to consider “how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds . . . and not to

³⁶Wynkoop, *Theology of Love*, 225.

³⁷Ellul, 108.

³⁸Runyon, 114-15.

give up meeting together . . . but to encourage one another—and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25). When Paul wrote to the Romans, he said that he longed to see them “so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” (Romans 1:11-12).

Means of grace such as baptism and holy communion are practiced only in community. It is in the faith community that individuals affirm faith and declare their affinity with the body of believers. The love of God that has been shed abroad in the hearts of believers is not only vertical between the individual and God, but it is also horizontal encompassing the community of faith and beyond. Thus Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love everyone of you has for each other is increasing” (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

On more than one occasion Paul used the human body as an analogy of the spiritual body—indicating that one part does not act or live in isolation from the whole. Ephesians 4 is typical of this concept where Paul states that each one should “speak the truth in love so we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ;from him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Faith is not an end in itself. Faith must act. This is what Jesus told his disciples when they asked about increasing their faith. “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you” (Luke 17:6). In John 14 Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (12-14).

James addressed the issue of whether faith can exist in and of itself when he said, “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (3:17). He then proceeded to give the examples of Abraham offering Isaac his son and of Rahab giving lodging to the spies in Jericho.

Wynkoop reiterates this same idea of faith not being an end in itself but rather a means to an end in referring to faith as a living, dynamic exercise serving the ongoing function in the Christian life—being a servant.³⁹

Luther's transforming revelation that the "just shall live by faith," is the welding together of faith and actions. Barth's comment on this matter is that "where the faithfulness of God encounters the fidelity of men, there is manifested his righteousness."⁴⁰ "Justification is by faith; . . . the heart is purified by faith; sanctification is by faith in Jesus; by faith we stand; we walk by faith; we receive the promise of the Spirit by faith; we are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; Christ dwells in the heart by faith; and faith shields us from the fiery darts of the enemy."⁴¹ Wiley also discusses the necessity for faith to act, to be exercised. He says that "[faith] refers to the power in man by which he is enabled to see the invisible, and therefore differs from mere sense perception."⁴²

Hebrews 11 is filled with accounts and references to those who acted on the certainty of their faith. Wiley points out that two ideas of the power of faith are operative—the "faith of achievement and the faith of endurance."⁴³ Morrison asserts that "none of God's power is released except over someone's faith . . . that all God's power is released over human faith."⁴⁴ Tillich speaks of the "courage of faith," he says that a tension exists between participation and separation where there is faith. This is a tension between the faithful one and his ultimate concern. Participation acts on certainty while separation faces the idea of doubt. It is courage that meets doubt with confidence in the "ultimate concern."⁴⁵ Picton-Turberville echoes this necessity of courage in stating that the world wants a faith that is a reality and not just a concept talked about. It is that faith that comes when in a critical moment one dares to act. "Faith rises in its most dynamic form when at some inmost vision souls

³⁹Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, 236.

⁴⁰Barth.

⁴¹Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, 236.

⁴²H. Orton Wiley, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1959), 358.

⁴³Wiley, *Hebrews*, 334-35.

⁴⁴Morrison, "Achieving Faith," 69.

⁴⁵Tillich.

dare to take what appears a fatal leap . . . that lands them into a kingdom of new power.²⁴⁶

In summary, a vital connection exists between faith and holiness. In this paper both concepts have been defined: Holiness as being both the holiness of God that indwells the believer and as being the holiness of Christlikeness worked out in the life of the believer; faith defined as being that gift of God that allows one to make dynamic connection with the Almighty and be filled with God himself, transformed, and given power to live out the holy life that indwells the “jars of clay” that are humanity. Faith grows and develops and is nurtured not only in personal discipline, but also in community. The courage of faith unleashes the mighty power of God for re-creation holiness as the person of faith acts. Thus it is, that faith not only unlocks the “door to heaven” but also releases the power of God to act on behalf of those who courageously act in confidence upon the ultimate concern—the Triune God himself.

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⁴⁶Edith Picton-Turberville, *Should Women Be Priests & Ministers* (London: The Society for the Equal Ministry of Men and Women, 1953), 51-2.

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**NO ROOM IN THE INN:
A GLIMPSE AT EARLY CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY THROUGH
LUKAN REDACTION**

David A. Ackerman

Introduction

The power of the biblical text comes alive to readers willing to let the text speak for itself. These readers, however, must be engaged in the listening process. Part of this process involves recognizing the cultural symbolism inherent in the text. Culture influences language. The more one becomes familiar with the culture behind and within a text, the more one enters into dialogue with the text, the world of the text, and the author of the text.

This paper attempts to listen to the Gospel according to Luke through the cultural lens of hospitality. When Luke looked back on his missionary travels and the traditions of Jesus (Luke 1:1-4), he saw hospitality as an essential virtue of the Christian community. In both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, Luke shows the practice of hospitality as an indispensable element in the mission of the Church. By examining the passages peculiar to the Gospel of Luke, the structure of Lukan narratives, and significant notations about community, we can get a glimpse of hospitality in the early Christian community.¹ Passages

¹A basic presupposition of this paper is that the authors of the gospels did not arbitrarily piece together unrelated sayings with no clear purpose. Unfortunately, this understanding can result from an improper appropriation of the emphasis of form criticism on individual pericopes. To the contrary, these authors had a theological purpose in writing as they did. According to Robert Stein (*Gospels and Traditions: Studies on Redaction Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981], 21-34), redaction criticism seeks to answer these four questions:

What unique theological views does the Evangelist present that are foreign to his sources?

What unusual theological emphasis or emphases does the Evangelist place upon the sources he received?

What theological purpose or purposes does the Evangelist have in writing his Gospel?

about hospitality in the Gospel of Luke set the theological foundations for the hospitality exemplified in Acts.²

Hospitality is a theme relevant to many cultures of the world, and in particular, many cultures in Asia and the Pacific. Unfortunately, a lack of hospitality often mars how people view Christians, the Church, and the God whom we serve. In many respects, a lack of hospitality lies at the root of many divisions within believing communities. Jesus' model of friendship and invitation holds profound implications for how we interact with each other in the church and with those in our mission fields. Imitating Jesus involves how we interact with the stranger, the disenfranchised, the neglected, the rebellious, and the hurt. Luke's Gospel opens the door for us to re-examine the practice of our theology of love.

I. Travel and Hospitality in the First Century

Except in modern times, never in human history was travel as easy as during the first century. The Mediterranean world shrank with the eastward conquests of Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C.E., establishing important links between East and West and issuing in the Hellenization of the Mediterranean region. Language, trade, and migration pulled people together. After becoming Emperor in 30 B.C.E., Caesar Augustus built and refurbished roads, established fortifications, and founded a navy, thereby opening up new, unprecedented possibilities for travel by both land and sea for government, economic, religious, and

What is the *Sitz im Leben* out of which the Evangelist writes his Gospel?

These questions will guide our method as we explore hospitality in Luke.

²According to John Koenig, "Luke highlights hospitality in order to help residential believers, whose faith and life are centered in house church communities, take their rightful place alongside itinerant prophets in the worldwide mission initiated by Jesus. For him, cooperation is the key to missionary success" (*New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 86).

personal reasons. By the first century C.E., a continuous road system surrounded the Mediterranean region.³

Through Augustus' *Pax romana* emerged a secure and united empire with a unified coinage, regular army patrols, paved highways to many major cities, cultural unity, and standard languages of Greek and Latin, making it possible for the average citizen to travel relatively unhindered. A Roman road made it possible for the average person to walk, and for those with the means, to ride donkeys, horses, camels, or for the most fortunate, chariots.⁴ Traveling by road meant packing food, clothes, shelter, fighting equipment for soldiers or trading materials for merchants. On a good day, one could walk up to twenty miles or ride by mule or horse back twenty-five to thirty miles. Travel by sea proved to be much simpler and quicker.⁵

Travel, though, was not without its difficulties. The Roman military presence made the major highways relatively safe, but on minor roads, one was always in danger of highway robbers.⁶ Though piracy was curbed to a great degree, storms, shallow water, disease, and fatigue could still endanger the sea-bound.⁷ Because of these and other dangers, the

³Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1974), 115f.

⁴John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 37-38. Casson notes that the Romans learned road building from the Etruscans who settled in Tuscany in the ninth century B.C.E. They taught the Romans how to build sewers, aqueducts, bridges, and drained roads (163-164).

⁵According to Stambaugh and Balch, the journey from Alexandria to Rome could take as little as ten days, but the return trip up to two months (*Social Environment*, 39).

⁶See the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:29-37.

⁷Paul describes his ordeals of travel in 2 Cor. 11:25-27: “. . . three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.” For further descriptions of travel during this period, see Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, or D. A. Dorsey, “Travel,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. IV, 891-897. See Wayne A. Meeks, *The First*

traveler needed hospitable contacts along the journey. Meeks describes how these contacts were made:

When a stranger arrived in a city, then it is taken for granted that he [or she] knew, or could easily learn, where to find immigrants and temporary residents from his [or her] own country or *ethnos* and practitioners of his [or her] own trade. Nothing could be more natural, for these were the two most important factors in the formation and identification of neighborhoods.⁸

The household was the basic unit of the city. According to Meeks, the household functioned as “family,” incorporating two types of relationship: one of dependence and the other of subordination.

Within the household, a vertical but not quite unilinear chain connected unequal roles, from slave to paterfamilias, in the most intimate strand, but also included bonds between client and patron and a number of analogous but less formal relations of protection and subordination. Between this household and others there were links of kinships and of friendship, which also often entailed obligations and expectations.⁹

The household family functioned as the dominant economic unit which strengthened the internal solidarity of the group.¹⁰ As a consumption unit, the household shared its resources. Moxnes calls this form of sharing as “pooling.” “It is a constituting activity of the group; it

Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul (New Haven & London, 1983), 17-18, for the major routes taken by Paul and other early Christians.

⁸Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 29. For a further description see John B. Mathews, “Hospitality and the New Testament Church: An Historical and Exegetical Study” (Th. D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1965), 33-36.

⁹Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 30.

¹⁰For the economic impact of hospitality, see Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 75ff.

serves to abolish differences between group members and strengthens group cohesion.”¹¹

In antiquity households sometimes served as voluntary associations, clubs or meeting places. Persons gathered friends or associates together, drew up a constitution, and met in a house. Groups were usually small—less than forty. Various types of clubs existed depending upon the interests and needs of the members, such as trade guilds, religious cults, or burial societies.¹² These types of organizations provided a model for the *ekklesia* communities of early Christians. The urban household served as a microcosm of the city and as “the basic cell” of the early Christians.¹³ Community living provided adequate care for the members, cohesiveness to the group, and reinforcement of beliefs.¹⁴

Hospitality was central in a Middle Eastern household, with roots far back into antiquity.¹⁵ The travels of Odysseus provided the Greeks a model for the virtue of hospitality in the malevolent or kind treatments he received from those who served him as hosts.¹⁶ Dio Chrysostom,

¹¹Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom*, 33-34.

¹²Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 31.

¹³For a description of these house churches, see the works of Stambaugh and Balch, *Social Environment*, and E. A. Judge, *The Social Pattern of Christian Groups in the First Century* (London: Tyndale, 1960). Commenting upon *ekklesia*, Meeks states, “By depending upon the hospitality (*proxenia*) of a patron-householder they followed a well-tried pattern by which clubs, guilds, and immigrant cults found space in the cities. These were groups that backed on their own both the standing that would grant them use of the public spaces of the polis and the means for establishing private facilities” (*The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* [New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993], 49).

¹⁴Derek Tidball, *The Social Context of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 53. Judge adds, “Not only was the conversion of a household the natural or even the necessary way of establishing the new cult in unfamiliar surroundings, but the household remained the soundest basis for the meetings of Christians. In several of the cases above the preachers were entertained and begged to carry on their activities from that platform. The Christians in a particular city are thought of not as an undifferentiated unit; individual household groups are commonly singled out” (36).

¹⁵See *TDNT*, V, 25, or Meeks, *Origins*, 104-106, for a list of ancient sources. To these can be added those to which Mathews refers (2ff).

¹⁶Meeks, *Origins*, 104. See the *Odyssey*, XV.53-54; 74; 78-79. Mathews notes two reservations about hospitality in the *Odyssey*: (a) hospitality is largely that of the princely

referring to “the poet” Homer, said that the greatest good was to provide hospitality for a guest.¹⁷ Furthermore, “hospitality was to be extended, not to one’s own profit, but out of fear of the gods and love of [people].”¹⁸ Important in the patronage system of Rome was the *hospitium*, the relation of host and guest. This relation among equals was often formalized by a contract for mutual aid which could be valid for generations, and “so long as a party remained in the city of the host, protection, legal assistance, lodging, medical services, and even an honorable burial were his [or her] due.”¹⁹ These types of relationships of extended family often served as a source of honor and as the primary economic, religious, educational, and social network.²⁰ Hospitality may

aristocracy, (b) the stylized narrative tends to show imaginary ideal instead of a living portrayal of reality (30-31).

¹⁷Dio Chrysostom says, “Is it not, then, most unfitting to admire wealth as the poet does and regard it as really worth seeking? He says that its greatest good lies in giving to guests and, when any who are used to luxury come to one’s house, being in a position to offer them lodging and set such tokens of hospitality before them as would please them most” (*Oration 7.97-102*, quoted by Abraham J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], 116).

¹⁸TDNT, V, 18. Mathews gives three possible motives for hospitality to a stranger: (a) the fear of injury from the stranger, (b) the desire for gain from the stranger, (c) compassion for the plight of the stranger (140-141). Moreover, the gods served as examples to humans of hospitality, hence, as the origin of hospitality (155-160).

¹⁹Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh continue, “Tokens of friendship and obligation were exchanged which sealed the contractual arrangement and could be used to identify parties to such covenants who had never met (e.g. descendants). Such agreements were considered sacred in the highest degree” (*Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 328). A good illustration of this can be seen in Lucius’ stop-over at Milo’s house, in Apuleius, *The Transformation of Lucius Otherwise Known as The Golden Ass* (trans. by Robert Graves, NY: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1951), 19ff. Lucius brings a letter of introduction from Demeas the Corinthian as a reference. Milo functioning as a host, though, is an irony because he acts contrary to how a good host should. He provides little food and poor conversation at the table for Lucius, and Lucius has to feed and care for his own horse. On his second day in town, Lucius says, “At nightfall I returned to Milo’s hospitable house . . .” (24). He probably said this with a sneer of disgust.

²⁰“Loss of connection to the family meant the loss of these vital networks as well as loss of connection to the land. But a surrogate family, what anthropologists call a

have begun to decline in the Graeco-Roman world by the first century C.E.²¹

Hospitality functioned as a virtue also for ancient Jews.²² For example, the idea of lodging and hospitality can be found in many places in the Hebrew Bible. Abraham and Lot served as models of ancient hospitality (Gen. 18:4; 19:2).²³ God promised the Israelites during the Exodus that he would dwell with them in the desert tabernacle (Ex. 25:8) and later, the more permanent dwelling in the form of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6). God's dwelling among the Israelites became part of the covenantal formula (Lev. 26:11-13).²⁴ God also serves as host with the invitation to the righteous to dwell with him (Ps. 15:1; 23:6). Hospitality continued to form part of the cultural milieu of Intertestamental and Rabbinic Judaism.²⁵

fictive kin group, could serve many of the same functions as a biological family" (Malina and Rohrbaugh, 335).

²¹Mathews, 180-189.

²²For hospitality as a virtue and moral obligation in antiquity, see Mathews 45-60.

²³For other OT passages on hospitality, see Gen. 18:1ff; 19:1-11; 24:31; Ex. 2:20; Lev. 19:33-34; 25:23; Judges 4:17-22; 13:15; 19:20; 1 Kings 10:1-13; 2 Kings 4:8; 20:12-13; Neh. 5:17; Job 31:32; Ps. 39:12; Amos 9:13-15; Joel 3:18.

²⁴Lev. 26:11-13 reads, "I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high."

²⁵See the Testament of Levi 18:11-16; 1 Enoch 62:14; and Midrash Ex. 25:7-8. Josephus described hospitality as a virtue which should be extended without expecting a reward. He writes concerning the story of Isaac and Rebecca, when the Isaac's servant went looking for a wife for him: "He [the servant] also besought that he might lodge with them, night prohibiting him from journeying farther, and, being the bearer of women's apparel of great price, he said that he could not entrust himself to safer hosts than such as he had found her [Rebecca] to be. He could guess from her own virtues that the kindness of her mother and brother, and that they would not take his request amiss; nor would he be burdensome to them, but would pay a price for their gracious hospitality and live at his own expense" (*Jewish Antiquities* [trans. by H. St. J. Thackeray, Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978], I, 250).

Likewise, early Christians understood household hospitality as an important element of their ethic.²⁶ According to Riddle, all passages which speak of hospitality in the New Testament are paraenetic, relating “to the generalized pattern of behavior which was expected to apply universally.”²⁷ Hospitality is basic for the Christian (Rom. 12:13; 15:7), should be practiced equally among those at community meals (1 Cor. 11:17-34), and should be shown towards those in need because they could be angels in disguise (Heb. 13:2; cf. Gen. 18, 19). Inhospitability could be a weapon used against those with false belief or improper behavior (2 and 3 John). Hospitality served as a crucial element in the mission and outreach of the Church. Hosts provided safe and inexpensive housing to the traveling missionaries (Rom. 15:24; 16:23; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:6, 10-11; 2 Cor. 1:16; 8:16-24; Phil. 2:19-23; Philem. 22).²⁸ The method of early missionaries often entailed first visiting synagogues (16:13-15; 18:2), then possibly the houses of individuals (16:15; 17:5-9; 18:2-4; 7), or even speaking directly to crowds in public places (17:17, 19-34; 14:8-18; 16:16-34; 19:11-20).²⁹ Paul and his fellow missionaries appeared as traveling sophists or Cynic philosophers finding audiences in public and private places.³⁰ Often, however, these evangelists needed lodging, which, if they went to inns built along many of the highways,

²⁶Mathews investigates the various word usages in the New Testament for hospitality (166-174)

²⁷Donald Wayne Riddle, “Early Christian Hospitality: A Factor in the Gospel Transmission,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 57(1938): 143.

²⁸Meeks states, “Housing and feeding visiting prophets and apostles not only made their ministry feasible, it also reminded the hosts both of the movement’s self-proclaimed identity as ‘resident aliens’ on earth and of its professed unity as a single ‘people of God’ throughout the world” (*Origins*, 105).

²⁹Meeks says that this is general and may not be totally accurate of Paul’s method (*The First Urban Christians*, 26).

³⁰*Ibid.*, 27. See Epictetus, *Diss.* III, 22, 69 for a description of a Cynic preacher. On the wandering itinerant evangelists, see Gerd Theissen, *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics, and the World of the New Testament*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 33ff, and his work, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, ed. and trans. by John H. Schutz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 28-67.

could be inadequate, unsafe and even immoral.³¹ To avoid this, the evangelists sought lodging in the private homes of fellow believers.³² Travel from house church to house church supplied a communication network for the dissemination of the gospel.³³ According to the *Didache*, Christians began to regulate hospitality towards wandering prophets by examining their genuineness.³⁴ Hospitality, though, continued to remain a virtue to be practiced even towards “aliens,” widows, orphans, and the destitute.³⁵

³¹Abraham J. Malherbe states, “The mobility of Roman society required provision for the lodging and entertainment of travelers. This was done by inns, which were built in the cities and along the highways. The inns, however, were regarded as barely adequate and were avoided whenever possible by the upper classes. Innkeepers were frequently associated with magical practices, and it was commonly assumed that a traveler could obtain ‘commercial’ female companionship in the inns. Therefore this institutionalized form of hospitality, widespread as it was, did not completely take the place of private hospitality, which had been regarded as a virtue since classical times by pagans as well as Jews” (*Social Aspects of Early Christianity* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 66). For a further description and for the rise of inns in antiquity, see Mathews, 21-28.

³²On the need for hospitality in the Church, see Mathews, 198-206.

³³Riddle, 151.

³⁴*Didache* 11:1-3 reads, “Whoever, then, comes and teaches you . . . receive him. . . . If his presentation is for the increase of justness and knowledge of the Lord, receive him as the Lord. . . . Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord, but he is not to remain with you more than one day, or a second if necessary; if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. And when an apostle goes away, let him take nothing but bread until he reaches his night’s resting place; if he asks for money he is a false prophet.” *Didache* 12 states, “Receive anyone who comes in the name of the Lord. But when you have tested him you shall know him. . . . If he who comes is indeed a traveler, help him as much as you can. But he shall not remain with you more than two days, or three, if necessary. But if he wishes to settle down with you, and if he has a trade, let him work for his food. But if he does not have a trade, provide for him according to your judgment, so that no one who is a Christian shall live among you in idleness. But if he will not do this, he is trading on his Christianity; beware of such people.”

³⁵In the *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Mandates* 8.10, it reads, “To minister to widows, to look after orphans and the destitute, to redeem God’s slaves from distress, to be hospitable, for in hospitality may be found the practice of good.” And in the *Similitudes* 9.27.2, can be found, “bishops and hospitable persons who at all times received God’s slaves into their houses gladly and without hypocrisy, and the bishops always ceaselessly sheltered the destitute and the widows by their ministration.”

II. A Redactional Look at Luke

Luke joins in with these traditions and weaves the theme of hospitality into the fabric of his retelling of the stories about Jesus and his followers. Luke opens his gospel with the themes of estrangement and the need for hospitality: Jesus and his family appear as both strangers and hosts. Luke begins his “orderly account” with the promises and fulfillments of the births of John and Jesus. Unique to Luke’s Gospel is the story of the birth of John the Baptist. In the section on the promise of John’s birth (1:5-25), Zechariah’s inability to speak during Elizabeth’s pregnancy (1:20) alienates him from his peers. Elizabeth becomes estranged (or disgraced) in a direct sense by her lack of offspring (1:25),³⁶ and in an indirect sense in her seclusion for five months (1:24).³⁷

With the announcement of the birth of Jesus (1:26-38), Mary also experiences cultural alienation when she becomes pregnant out of wedlock. Her pregnancy without a husband certainly would raise eyebrows and could potentially damage her standing in her community and family.³⁸ But in God’s sight, she is “highly favored” and is invited to bear the future Messiah (1:28; 30-33). God serves as Mary’s host through his grace towards her. God’s hospitality is expressed in the *Magnificat* (1:46-56) with his showing mercy (50), performing mighty deeds (51), lifting up the humble (52), filling the hungry (53), being merciful and helping his servants (54).

³⁶According to Malina and Rohrbaugh, a woman’s status in a husband’s family was secured only with the birth of a son. The woman stayed on the periphery of the family as a “stranger” until such birth (287).

³⁷Malina and Rohrbaugh comment concerning Elizabeth’s seclusion: “There is no record of any custom in the Mediterranean area requiring seclusion of a woman during pregnancy. It is more likely that Elizabeth, being old and hitherto barren, is afraid the village would not believe the good news that she is pregnant and thus waits in hiding until her pregnancy is obvious” (285).

³⁸A female’s honor was rapped up in her sexuality—once lost it could not be regained. “It is the emotional-conceptual counterpart of virginity, and any sexual offense on a woman’s part, however, slight, would destroy not only her own honor but that of all males in her paternal kin group as well” (Malina and Rohrbaugh, 311).

Upon the birth of John (1:57-80), the estranged Zechariah is enabled to speak again (1:64). In his song (1:67-80), Zechariah also describes God as host, calling him redeemer (68), savior (69-71), demonstrator of mercy, keeper of covenant (72), and rescuer from enemies (74). John acts as a stranger, at least to society, with his desert habitation (80). He is an extreme prototype of the wandering evangelist, preparing the way for the chief wanderer, Jesus of Nazareth.³⁹ Unique also to Luke is the saying in 3:10-14 where John is concerned about such matters of hospitality as the giving of tunics and food to those with none, the honesty of tax collectors, and the contentment of soldiers.

In the section on the birth of Jesus (2:1-20), Luke subtly presents Jesus as a stranger. He is born as a stranger, in a strange town (though in the hometown of his ancient ancestor David), as the guest of an inn with no room (2:7).⁴⁰ Yet, he is warmly received by a group of shepherds whose only homes are fields (8-17). Matthew describes the adoration as coming from a group of Magi from the East who presumably have homes and who bring expensive gifts of veneration. The shepherds, however, only bring themselves.

³⁹Hans Conzelmann states, "Apart from the prologue Luke recognizes no typological correspondence between John the Baptist and Jesus. One might even wonder whether he did not deliberately exclude any indication of it. The fact is that two epochs meet at this point, and although they have a connection, they have to be all the more clearly distinguished because even in the new epoch it is a question of a continuation of the one redemptive history. . . . As it is his ministry rather than his person that serves as a preparation for Jesus, he is subordinate to the work of Jesus in the same way as is the whole epoch of the Law" (*The Theology of Luke* [Trans. by Geoffrey Buswell, New York: Harper & Row, 1961], 24). According to Koenig, "Luke wants his readers to think of Jesus as a *wandering prophet messiah*. Not only is He the heir and fulfillment of all those great figures from Israel's past who have called it to repentance; he is also the eschatological traveler who crisscrosses the land, making sure that everyone has the opportunity to hear God's gracious invitation (Luke 4:14, 43-44; Acts 10:38)" (93).

⁴⁰Matthew has no mention of an inn; cf. Matt 1:18-25. Malina and Rohrbaugh describe the "inn" as probably a guest room of a peasant house since it was unlikely that there were any inns in the proper sense (see Luke 10:34) in Bethlehem. They state, "The fact that there was no 'place' for Joseph and Mary in the guest room of the home thus meant that it was already occupied by someone who socially outranked them" (297).

The theme of hospitality also appears in the circumcision and presentation of Jesus in the temple (2:21-28). Simeon has been waiting for the Messiah, and after seeing the baby Jesus, recognizes that God's answer to the alienation within the world lay before him. Knowing this, he could now die in peace. Likewise, the old widow (two strikes against her⁴¹) Anna, who has remained constantly at the temple fasting and praying, also realizes that redemption and the end of estrangement rest with the baby Jesus. Luke's final scene of Jesus' childhood takes place at the temple in Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old (2:41-52). This story suggests that Jesus is a stranger even in his own home and family, and that his real home is in his Father's house, the temple.⁴²

Jesus appears as a stranger in other sections of Luke as well. According to Luke, at the advent of his public ministry Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth (4:16-30). In the synagogue Jesus opens the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and reads a passage concerning his mission of hospitality, which includes preaching to the poor (those most likely to be overlooked), proclaiming freedom to the prisoners (those most likely to be abused), restoring sight to the blind (those estranged from the beauty of their surroundings), and releasing the oppressed (those estranged from any number of circumstances). This reading amazes the people. Then Jesus gives the proverbial, "no prophet is *welcome* in his home town,"⁴³ which symbolizes the ultimate estrangement of a wandering prophet (for

⁴¹Because of the high death rate and the low life expectancy, it was quite an achievement to live beyond the mid-forties. Only 3 percent lived beyond sixty (Ibid., 305). Her age may have been a mark of honor, but left little for a means of income or livelihood; her husband of seven years must have left her some means for survival. As a widow, Anna had no prospect of inheritance by Hebrew law, for "widows became the stereotypical symbol of the exploited and oppressed" (Ibid., 397).

⁴²It is interesting that Luke leaves out the perfect stranger/host story of the flight to Egypt which Matthew describes in 2:13-21.

⁴³Both Matthew (13:53-58) and Mark (6:1-6a) include Jesus preaching at his home town and the quoting of this proverb. What seems to be unique about Luke is that he elaborates upon the acceptance and rejection of Jesus. Mark (6:2) and Matthew (13:54) describe the crowds as being "astonished" (*ekplessomai*), but Luke says that the crowd "wondered at the gracious words which proceeded from his mouth" (4:22). Also, only Mark (6:5-6) and Matthew (13:58) describe Jesus' inability to do miracles in Nazareth due to the crowd's unbelief. Luke elaborates upon the rejection and describes the crowd's vehement attempts to dispose of Jesus by throwing him off the brow of a hill.

Luke-Acts, the itinerant evangelist). His hometown crowd turns on him and the would-be-host becomes stranger. Moreover, Jesus as stranger often withdrew to the wilderness to pray, to be alone and away from the crowds (4:42; 5:16). Luke hints that Jesus frequently spent nights outside (6:12; 9:28-37; 21:37), often with the purpose of praying; yet Luke subtly hints that Jesus had no place to lay his head (9:58 and context; cf. Matt. 8:20 and context).⁴⁴

Jesus functions as host in the pericope of the feeding of the five thousand in 9:12-17. Though little itself is Lukan in this narrative (since it appears in all four gospels), what becomes significant is its position in the narrative. Matthew and Mark have this story appearing directly after the beheading of John the Baptist. In John, Jesus begins a new trek through Galilee after having spoken about his authority. In Luke, however, this narrative comes after the twelve disciples have been sent out with nothing but the clothes on their backs. They desperately need hospitality from those with whom they come in contact. Upon the disciples' return, the crowds also need hospitality, but the disciples are unable to provide. Only Jesus can fulfill the role of host for such a large crowd.

In 23:42-43, Jesus once again serves as host, this time to the repentant criminal hanging on a cross next to Him. Where Matthew and Mark give only a short phrase concerning the thieves,⁴⁵ Luke elaborates and gives a dialogue between Jesus and the two criminals. Luke wants to emphasize the recognition by and acceptance of the criminals, and the forgiveness and hospitality provided by Jesus towards the disenfranchised, even at the point of his death.

Several passages unique to Luke also show role reversals—Jesus the guest becomes Jesus the host.⁴⁶ For example, in 7:36-50, Jesus (the

⁴⁴If space would allow, Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount could be illuminating concerning hospitality. For example, Luke makes the Beatitudes seem "earthly" with his emphasis upon the existential human situation, whereas, Matthew's version seems more "spiritual."

⁴⁵Matthew 27:44: "And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way." Mark 15:32b: "Those who were crucified with him reviled Him."

⁴⁶Important in regard to these role reversals is the fact that guests often highly honored, almost to the point of being master of the house (Mathews, 45).

guest) is invited to the house of a Pharisee (the host) for dinner.⁴⁷ While there, a woman described as “sinful” anoints the feet of Jesus with an alabaster jar of perfume. Even as a guest Jesus serves the role of host and savior to the repentant woman.⁴⁸

Also unique to Luke is the episode at the home of the two sisters Mary and Martha in 10:38-42.⁴⁹ Of the two sisters, Martha is the one concerned about being the good hostess, “distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.” Mary is unconcerned about such matters. Becoming indignant, Martha accuses Mary of being a bad hostess. Jesus then reverses the roles and he Himself becomes the host to Martha as he had been to Mary all along.⁵⁰

Another role reversal occurs in 11:27-28 when Jesus reverses the words of a woman who calls his mother blessed for bearing Him. For Jesus, blessed are those who allow themselves to be hosts (i.e. to be obedient) to the word of God. In 14:1-24, Jesus is again invited to dine with Pharisees. As a guest Jesus becomes the host of a man suffering from dropsy.⁵¹ He then begins a discourse about allowing oneself to be hosted as a humble guest (14:8-11) as well as serving as host (14:12-14) to the less fortunate. A host should serve the “poor, crippled, lame and blind” without asking for any recompense.⁵²

⁴⁷According to Mathews, in antiquity the arrival of a guest was opportunity for a feast and often a special meal was prepared in his or her honor (36ff). For a description of guest-meal encounters, see Mathews, 215-228.

⁴⁸Though all three other gospels give an account of Jesus being anointed by a woman with perfume (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8), only Luke gives the house as a Pharisee’s (Matthew and Mark give the house as that of Simon the leper, and in John, Jesus is at the house of Lazarus). Luke develops conflict with the Pharisees in a unique fashion. See Moxnes, 139ff.

⁴⁹Cf. John 12:1-3, though this could be at a different occasion.

⁵⁰According to Malina and Rohrbaugh, a woman’s honor rested upon her ability to manage a household, and in this passage, Mary was a failure as a female but a success as a male host because usually the eldest male member present acted as host (348).

⁵¹Again we can see conflict with the Pharisees for it was the Sabbath when Jesus healed this man.

⁵²Moxnes writes, “Thus, someone who had experienced good fortune and was in a position to feast was under obligation to share this celebration with other members of the village: this was the honorable thing to do. The main moral issue is the way in

Jesus again becomes the host in the narrative about Zacchaeus in 19:1-10. Jesus takes the initiative to be the guest, though Zacchaeus does not refuse the invitation. The role reversal occurs when Jesus becomes the bearer of salvation to the sinner host-turned-guest, Zacchaeus. In Luke, Jesus is not afraid to be host to sinners and tax collectors.⁵³

A final unique pericope showing role reversal occurs in the narrative about the experience of two travelers on the road to Emmaus (24:13-35). The resurrected Jesus appears to the travelers on their way to the village of Emmaus. After a dialogue about the recent events in Jerusalem, the two invite Jesus to their home for a meal, much as any host would have done. Jesus assumes the position of master of ceremonies by breaking the bread before the two. Not only did Jesus serve as host at the meal, but during the walk, he hosted their ideas. To be a host in Luke is to be a guest of the Lord Jesus.

Though the passage concerning the calling of Levi in 5:29-30 is not unique to Luke (see Matt. 9:9; Mark 2:14), it too can serve as an example of role reversal. When the narrative begins, Jesus serves as the ultimate host, inviting Levi to follow him without any reservations with the implication that Jesus would take care of Levi's needs, much as the

which somebody who has been fortunate spends his or her fortune" (88, see 128-138). Only in Luke does Jesus engage in table talk with Pharisees (7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-14) (Koenig, 88). Malina and Rohrbaugh comment, "In a society in which power brought wealth . . . being powerless meant being vulnerable to the greedy who preyed on the weak. The terms 'rich' and 'poor,' therefore, are not exclusively economic. Fundamentally they describe a social condition relative to one's neighbors: the poor are the weak, and the rich are the strong" (325). They also point out, "A talmudic comment on hospitality suggests that a host will serve the better food early in a guest's stay, but finally 'gives him less and less until he serves him vegetables' (*Pesiqta de Rab Kahana* 31)" (340).

⁵³Norval Geldenhuys states, "Among the Jews it was an unheard of thing for a rabbi or any other religious leader to lower himself (in their eyes 'pollute' himself) by staying at the house of a 'publican.' So they were greatly offended at his allowing Himself to be entertained in the house of Zacchaeus, a prominent member of this despised class" (*The Gospel of Luke* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 470). Theissen draws attention to the fact that Jesus and his followers accepted hospitality from the outcast (note Matt. 11:19; Mk. 2:15ff; Lk. 8:3) (*Social Setting*, 34). In Luke-Acts salvation and redemption is closely linked with hospitality (note Luke 5:32 7:50; 19:9-10; Acts 10:23, 48; 16:15, 34).

traveling evangelists relied on the hospitality of fellow Christians to take care of many, though not always all, of their needs. Yet, Levi in his gratitude becomes the host by inviting Jesus to his house. But at Levi's house, the roles reverse and Jesus again serves as the host of "tax collectors and sinners" and as the bearer of salvation.

Distinct to Luke is the formation of a travel narrative in 9:51-19:27 which begins with Jesus' resolution to set out for Jerusalem and ends with the Triumphal Entry. Several interesting notations can be made concerning the narratives of this section. To begin with, as Jesus sets out for Jerusalem, he sends messengers on ahead to a Samaritan village (9:52-56). The people there refuse to host Jesus. The disciples' reaction shows the seriousness of inhospitality towards Jesus: "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven and consume them?" This inhospitality leads to a two-way rejection: Jesus passed on by the village and went on to another, and the settled way of life of Jesus and his disciples was ending. Luke also shows the need for hospitality in the community when Jesus sends out the seventy in 10:1.⁵⁴ This large group could meet opposition as some had in the Samaritan village. In the verses that follow, many elements are common with the parallel passage in Matthew (9:37-38; 10:7-16), though in different order. But what is interesting in Luke's account is that this passage comes directly after several people express a desire to follow after Jesus but with certain conditions attached. Following Jesus must be unconditional, just as preceding him in preparation must be unconditional.⁵⁵ The seventy meet success not by their own means but through the power of God (10:17-

⁵⁴In verses 5-12 Jesus gives the procedure for the wandering disciples. These disciples should accept whatever is placed before them. Hinted in v. 7 is that the disciple will be taken care of if he or she is genuine ("the worker deserves his wages"). On how the evangelists may have supported themselves, see Theissen, 47-56, though his broader goal here is to explore the transmissions of Jesus sayings in early Christianity.

⁵⁵Cf. the cost of discipleship in 14:25-33. This theme will be played out many times in Acts in that the wandering evangelists must be willing to follow after God's direction no matter what price must be paid (note the many prison accounts, 12; 16:16; etc.). Theissen notes that as circumstances changed, someone like Paul could not practice radical renunciation because planning, foresight, and collecting of money were needed in making travel arrangements (*Social Setting*, 38).

20). Several times Jesus encounters opposition. In 13:10-17 he heals a crippled woman on the Sabbath and restores her to a life of health, much to the chagrin of the Pharisees. In 13:31-33, the inhospitality of Herod appears when some Pharisees say to Jesus, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." Conflict between Jesus and Pharisees over hospitality occurs in 14:1-14 and 15:1-7.⁵⁶

Several parables in the Travel Narrative deal with matters of hospitality. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:29-37), Jesus responds to the question of who is a "neighbor," that is, towards whom should one be hospitable. Those with religious and legalistic status reject the beaten man by passing him by. A Samaritan, an ethnic and religious enemy of the battered traveler, goes against social norms and rescues the stranger, bandages his wounds, and takes him to an inn for recuperation. Reversal occurs when the stereotyped outcast provides compassion and hospitality to the disenfranchised. This story shows that love should be the basis of hospitality, a love that goes beyond accepted social and religious barriers.⁵⁷

In 11:5-8 Jesus illustrates prayer through the Parable of the Friend at Midnight. Three friends are involved. The first represents a traveler in need of a meal. He visits the second who serves as host. He, however, does not even have the basic necessities to feed the first. Out of desperation, this poor host seeks the help of the third friend, who, though reluctant at first, gives in to the pleading of the second. Thus, the

⁵⁶Much of the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees may have centered on matters of purity. The Pharisees emphasized ritual purity. Jesus was not reluctant to touch (or, be host to) lepers (5:13), menstruating women (8:43-48), or corpses (8:54), or to eat with tax collectors and sinners (5:29-30). See Malina and Rohrbaugh for a "map of uncleanness" (320).

⁵⁷See Malina and Rohrbaugh on "Purity and Pollution" (318). There were good reasons for the priest and Levite not to rescue the beaten man. Concerning the priest, "he cannot approach closer than four cubits to a dead man without being defiled, and he will have to overstep that boundary just to ascertain the condition of the wounded man" (Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasants Eyes: More Lukan Parables, Their Culture and Style* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 45). The Levite may have passed by because the priest did, or he may have feared the robbers, but "nothing in his total orientation leads him to help the wounded man" (Ibid., 47). On the animosity between Jews and Samaritans, see John 4:9.

honor of the community is saved by the combined hospitality of the two friends.⁵⁸

In the Parable of the Rich Fool (12:16-21), the theme of limited good appears: if someone gained, someone else lost. The rich man selfishly hoards his abundant wealth and is condemned for it. The understanding behind this parable is that true disciples will share their possession and in this, be rich toward God.⁵⁹

Jesus' hospitality towards sinners and tax collectors prompts a series of parables in chapters 15-17 which are unique to Luke.⁶⁰ At least two of these deal with themes of hospitality. In the Parable of the Waiting Father (traditionally called the "Prodigal Son") in 15:11-32, the hospitality of God towards alienated, rebellious humanity can be seen.⁶¹ The community would have been hostile to such a prodigal and treated him with scorn and rejection, but the father restores him to his rightful

⁵⁸Bailey states that a crucial element is that the guest is guest of the community, not just of the individual. Moreover, bread is the very basis of the meal for it serves as the eating utensil for dipping into a common dish (*Poet and Peasant: A Literary Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], 122-123). In addition, as Moxnes says, "A surplus of food is primarily associated with meeting social obligations in the form of meals" (87).

⁵⁹See Robert Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981], 266-268. See Eccl. 2:1-11; Job 31:24-28. Sir. 11:19-20 contains a similar story. Malina and Rohrbaugh comment, "An honorable man would thus be interested only in what was rightfully his, meaning what he already had. He would not want 'more.' Anyone with a surplus would normally feel shame unless he gave liberally to clients or the community. By keeping everything to himself and refusing to act as a generous patron, the rich man in the parable reveals himself as a dishonorable fool" (359).

⁶⁰Parable of the Lost Coin (15:8-10); Parable of the Waiting Father (15:11-32); Parable of the Unjust Steward (16:1-12); Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31); and Parable of Unprofitable Servants (17:7-10).

⁶¹The waiting father clearly is a picture of God. Craig L. Blomberg states that two of the main points of this parable are: "(1) Even as the prodigal always had the option of repenting and returning home, so also all sinner, however wicked, may confess their sins and turn to God in contrition. (2) Even as the father went to elaborate lengths to offer reconciliation to the prodigal, so also God offers all people, however undeserving, lavish forgiveness of sins if they are willing to accept it" (*Interpreting the Parable* [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1990], 174).

place of honor.⁶² With the slaughtering of a calf in the celebration feast, the repentant son is treated with high honor before the father and community.⁶³

In the Parable about Poor Lazarus in 16:19-31, Jesus develops an extreme contrast between a certain unnamed rich man and a poor man named Lazarus. The rich man wallows in his abundance while Lazarus lies at the rich man's door wishing for even the crumbs from the table. Lazarus definitely is in need of hospitality, but the rich man totally ignores his needs. In the after life, Lazarus receives the comforts refused to him while on earth, while the rich man is tormented in hell longing for even Lazarus to dip his finger in cool water to touch his tongue. This saying shows the seriousness of neglecting hospitality to those in need who may even be at one's doorstep.

Once Jesus arrives in Jerusalem with the Triumphal Entry (19:28ff), all opportunities to show him hospitality have ended; the cross looms before Him. Jesus meets inhospitality from the sellers in the Temple (19:45-48), teachers of the law and elders (20:1-19), Judas (22:1-6), the disciples on the Mount of Olives (22:39-46), Peter (22:54-62), the soldiers (22:63-65), the Council of Elders (22:66-71), Pilate and Herod (23:1-25), and the thief on the cross (23:39). Finally, the cross leads to total rejection.

Meal hospitality also plays a significant role in Lukan redaction.⁶⁴ According to anthropologists, meals can be called "ceremonies" since they are "regular, predictable events in which roles and statuses in a community are affirmed or legitimated." In antiquity, social relations governed the logistics of a meal; those eating together often shared the same ideas and values.⁶⁵ Meals functioned as a central element in the

⁶²Stein, *Parables*, 121; Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 181.

⁶³Bailey states, "The calf means at least a joy so great that it must be celebrated with the grandest banquet imaginable. The purpose of such a banquet includes a desire to reconcile the boy to the *whole* community" (Ibid., 187).

⁶⁴Moxnes sees food as such an important theme in Luke that it could serve as an excellent starting point for the study of community, social relations, and missions in Luke (127).

⁶⁵Moxnes, 85.

social and economic exchange of a village.⁶⁶ Significantly in Luke, Jesus draws together people of different social and religious classes in community-building experiences in the setting of shared meals. Moxnes offers,

In most instances, however, and certainly when used as metaphors for the kingdom to come, Jesus' meals have the function not of creating distinctions, but of bridging them and including people. Meals are expressions of hospitality and giving, of gathering people from the outside into the smaller household circle. Thus, the main interest is upon who is invited to participate and for what purpose a host has gathered people together for a meal.⁶⁷

In 13:22-30 Luke focuses upon the eschatological meal when those “from the east and west, and from the north and south, will sit at the table in the kingdom of God.”⁶⁸ A brief survey of the passages dealing with meal hospitality will illustrate Luke’s emphasis upon the Christian community’s bridging of social barriers in their fellowship. In 5:29-32 the new disciple Levi invites other “despised tax collectors” and Jesus to a banquet.⁶⁹ At a different social level, in 7:36-50 Jesus is

⁶⁶Moxnes, 88.

⁶⁷Many common elements can be found between Luke 13:22-30 and Matthew 7:13-14; 7:22-23; 8:11-12; 19:30; 20:16; and 25:10-12, 41. In Luke, the eschatological Jesus functions a householder who rejects those who are “workers of iniquity.” He is, though, hospitable to those who are last. Luke’s emphasis appears to be ethical. Those who live without iniquity, even if they be from the Gentiles (i.e. coming east, west, north, and south), will meet a hospitable reception in the kingdom of God.

⁶⁸The Pharisees and teachers of the law complained that Jesus ate with such a low and despicable people as tax collectors and “sinners.” The tax collector was often looked down upon by the rich and educated (such as the Pharisees). Some tax or toll collectors abused their power and made a profit (such as Zacchaeus, 19:1-10). For the average collector, however, things may have been different. Malina and Rohrbaugh write, “Evidence from the late imperial period suggests that cheating or extortion on their [the average collector like Matthew] part would be less likely to benefit them than the chief tax collector [Zacchaeus] for whom they worked” (388). It appears that among the opponents of Jesus tax collectors were synonymous with “sinners” from the often association of the two in Luke.

⁶⁹Cf. the explanation in vv. 41-48 and the seriousness of readiness.

anointed by a woman while eating at a Pharisee's house. Jesus settles familial friction during the dinner with Mary and Martha in 10:38-42. Jesus calls the disciples to readiness for his imminent return in 12:35-40 with the parable of the watchful servants. In this saying occurs a role reversal: the servants will be the ones served by the master.⁷⁰ In 14:7-14 Jesus again bridges social categories by healing a man with dropsy while dining with a prominent Pharisee. Jesus' eating with sinners and tax collectors and the Pharisees' complaints against such action prompts the parables in chapters 15-17 which we have already explored. Jesus' social taboos reach a climax with the meal at Zacchaeus' house in 19:2-10, because Zacchaeus was the "chief tax collector and wealthy," that is, the worst "sinner" of the neighborhood.⁷¹ Significantly, Luke links the Last Supper with the eschaton and the future kingdom of God by beginning his passage in 22:15-20 with Jesus saying that he will not eat or drink of the Passover with his disciples again until the eschaton.⁷² A foretaste of the eschaton can be seen, though, when the resurrected Jesus breaks bread with the two travelers in Emmaus in 24:30-31, and when he eats fish with his disciples in 24:41-43.

III. Application in Acts of the Hospitality of the Gospel of Luke

In Acts Luke shows how the early Christian community began to combine the concept of hospitality from the surrounding culture with that from the Jesus-tradition. A brief excursus will illustrate this. Clearly

⁷⁰See note 63. Zacchaeus may have become wealthy because he extorted the tax payers. In verse 8, *ei* plus the aorist indicative *esukospantesa* indicates a high degree of possibility; the fact is assumed.

⁷¹A similar saying can be found in Matthew 26:29 and Mark 14:25, but significantly it occurs after the bread and wine have been passed. In Luke the saying comes before. Luke could be emphasizing Jesus' desire for one final moment of genuine hospitality when he could function as the host and the disciples as the guests. For, from that moment on, they would have to function as hosts, not only to other believers, but also to the entire world.

⁷²Riddle states, "It became regarded as the right of travelling or migrating Christians to expect entertainment by fellow Christians where they stopped *en route*" (151).

Jesus is the model of hospitality for Luke. First, Jesus began and ended his earthly life as a stranger, yet he was always ready to serve as host to all who welcomed Him. In Acts, Luke praises the many who serve as hosts for the evangelists (especially for Peter, Paul, and Barnabas) by giving their names seemingly for no other reason than to show their hospitality.⁷³ Examples include Judas (9:11), Simon the Tanner (9:43; 10:6), Mary the mother of Mark (12:12), Jason (17:5-9), Titius Justus (18:7), Mnason (21:16), Julius (27:1-3), and the inhabitants of Malta and its administrator Publius (28:1-10).

Second, Jesus as the forerunner for the wandering evangelists of the early Christian communities was rejected both by many of the religious authorities (Pharisees) and by the common people (Samaritan village). Luke recounts some of the opposition and inhospitality faced by the disciples during their travels. They encountered mocking (2:13), trials before religious and civil authorities (4:1-22; 7:1ff; 12:1-3; 17:6-9; 18:12; 23:1ff; 24:1ff; 25:1ff), frequent imprisonments (5:18; 12:4; 16:23; 23:35; 26:10), persecution (12:50; 17:5, 13; 19:28ff; 21:1ff), and sometimes death (7:54-60).

Third, Jesus hosted people from all walks of life and bridged social barriers by his hospitality. As followers of Jesus, disciples should model this type of hospitality. The best model of this is the house church with its close-knit fellowship (9:18-19; 13:1-3; 18:1-3 [see 1 Cor. 16:19]; 20:20).⁷⁴ Barnabas (4:36), Ananias (9:10-19), the Ephesians (18:23-28), and Paul (16:25-32; 27:21-36; 28:17, 30-31) also function as bridge builders through their hospitality.

Fourth, Jesus transformed the lives of sinners who then in turn invited him to a meal of celebration and honor. In Acts, new converts

⁷³Malina and Rohrbaugh comment, "The Christian group acting as a surrogate family is for Luke the locus of the good news. It transcends the normal categories of birth, class, race, gender, education, wealth, and power—hence is inclusive in a startling new way" (335-336). See also Floyd V. Filson, "The Significance of the Early House Churches," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 58(1939): 105-112.

⁷⁴The need for organizing hospitality increased for the Church. During the days of Chrysostom the church in Antioch cared daily for 3000 widows, sick, strangers, etc. (*TDNT*, V, 24). For hospitality towards the poor, see 3:1-10; 6:1; 9:36; 10:2-4; 11:27-30; 24:17; and 20:33-35.

often serve as hosts to evangelists such as Cornelius (chapters 10-11), Sergius Paulus (13:7-12), Lydia (16:14-15, 40), the jailor of Philippi and his family (16:25-34), Priscilla and Aquilla (18:1-4, 26), and Philip (21:8-14).

Fifth, Jesus spent much time in fellowship over a meal without regard to the social position of his host. Meal-fellowship becomes important for the early community as well. The resurrected Jesus eats with the disciples before his ascension (1:4); breaking bread together marked the community (2:42, 46; 20:7-12); crisis over the distribution of food resulted in a division of labor (6:1-3);⁷⁵ food provides the convert Saul with energy (9:18ff); Peter's dream about "unclean" food opens up fellowship with Gentiles (10:1-11:3); the Philippian jailor hosts Paul and Silas to a meal in fellowship (16:25-43); food provides encouragement to the shipwrecked (27:33-36); Acts ends with the hospitality of Paul towards all who come to visit him (28:30-31).

Luke's emphasis on hospitality becomes clear with a quick, redactional reading of his work. In Luke-Acts we learn that hospitality is a broad concept incorporating many elements of the gospel message and affecting the early Christian community in many profound ways. For Luke, Jesus functions as the prototype of the ideal host. In Acts, Luke draws attention to the hospitality shown in the community as well as the estrangement experienced by many within the nascent Church. Finally, the Gospel of Luke provides the theological model which the evangelists and the Christian communities could use to fulfill their commission of going into all the world as witnesses.

IV. Implications of Hospitality for Our Ministry Today

Jesus' model for hospitality provides profound implications for our ministry today; only a few suggestions can be given at this point. So much of what we do as disciples of Jesus is related to hospitality. That may be why Luke gave such an emphasis to it in his writing. Our world

⁷⁵<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/statistics>; accessed 5/5/05. The Internet is replete with sites dealing with refugees. Examples include <http://www.refintl.org/>; <http://www.refugees.org/>; www.unhcr.ch/. The pictures on these sites should be enough to move anyone to action.

is not too unlike the world of the first century. Rome's conquests displaced thousands of people. The newly enslaved were ripped from their homelands to serve the conquerors in far away places. People were looking for answers, and the message of Jesus the Christ answered the deep need of their souls.

Displacement is a common challenge today. Some countries are overwhelmed by dislocated people. According to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, there are 17.1 million refugees in the world right now.⁷⁶ Governments are at a loss of what to do. As the religious have their eyes turned away, the world grows lonelier. The problem of isolation troubles not only people in Congo but even those within thriving metropolises like Manila, Tokyo, Beijing, and Bangkok. There are a million lonely hearts in a crowd of a million people. A general sense of alienation possesses the twenty-first century human heart. Modern societies have little concern for the individual. As Albert Camus articulated in *The Stranger*, our struggle against the absurdity of life's circumstances results in estrangement, isolation, and exile.⁷⁷ When we struggle to find meaning outside of God, we end up with a humanism devoid of foundation.

Consequently, the era of individualism in which we live leads to isolation and loss of identity. Consumerism and materialism have caught the passion of people. The pursuit of the comfortable and secure leads to the victimization of the powerless who supply the raw material to satisfy the appetite of the powerful. The pursuit of gain alienates us from needing the hospitality of others. Jones cautions, "We organize our lives to protect ourselves from vulnerability."⁷⁸ Only God's grace can counter this force.

One might argue that some cultures are perhaps stronger at some aspects of hospitality than others. For example, Eastern or Asian hospitality is well-known. Indeed, sometimes I am overwhelmed by the

⁷⁶Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969).

⁷⁷L. Gregory Jones, "Welcoming the Stranger," *Christian Century* Jan. 19, 2000 (117): 59.

⁷⁸Hampton Morgan, "Remember to Show Hospitality: A Sign of Grace in Graceless Times," *International Review of Missions* 87 (Oct. 1998): 536-537.

kindness and openness of the cultures of Asia. There may be deep down in the psyche of many Asian and Pacific cultures the concept of hospitality. Perhaps it is related to the idea of honor and shame, very similar to the world of the first century. On a trip to Korea a few years ago, people went out of their way to make sure I was comfortable and well-fed. Likewise, it is not difficult to think of many times when Filipinos have offered hospitality to me and my family out of their own meager rations. However, in these same cultures, it is not too uncommon to be cut off in traffic or in a line in the grocery store.

Yet, hospitality is not natural. Even within the most hospitable cultures one finds people caught in the trap of self- or group-aggrandizement. Morgan comments, “. . . traditional cultures, whether receptive of Christianity or not, practice hospitality in a way that non-traditional cultures—those influenced by modernism or post-modernism—generally do not. . . . it is the nature of modernism to discourage, in the cultures that accept it, the practices and attitudes that make it easier for people to form and foster community and active hospitality.”⁷⁹ People and cultures are reacting against isolation and loneliness through nationalism, ethnocentrism, and racial prejudice. Hospitality fights against the grain of self-preservation. The connection is not hard to make between finding one’s identity in self or group—what could be labeled “sin”—and inhospitality. One well-known definition of original sin is the self turned in on itself. In shame oriented cultures, the self may be replaced by group where a person’s identity is lost in the crowd. Both of these perspectives have serious consequences in lives devoid of God. Hospitality wars against finding one’s identity in any other than the Other.

For those who have found their identity as disciples of Christ, hospitality becomes a matter of lifestyle and inner motivation of life. An important connection needs to be made between the life of hospitality and the life of holiness. Holiness can be viewed in two ways: as a barrier defining insiders and excluding outsiders (commonly understood as the “priestly” aspect of holiness), and as love that pulls the outsider in (considered the “prophetic” aspect of holiness). It is difficult to balance

⁷⁹Jones, “Welcoming the Stranger,” 60.

these two—but it is most critical that a balance be maintained. Emphasizing the priestly side leads to legalism and lack of compassion. Stressing the prophetic side may blur morality. As Christians in a world unilaterally fleeing from God, have we erred by leaning too much on holiness as a boundary marker? Jones asks some probing questions: “How do we sustain a sense of boundaries, of restrictions, of the guidelines and standards necessary for rightly ordering communities while also sustaining an unambiguous welcoming of strangers? How do we understand the very description of ‘strangers’ when it has been so significantly altered by the landscape of modernity?”⁸⁰

Acts shows that the early church was challenged to cross barriers of ethnocentrism and homogeneity. The disciples sought to be known by their love (John 13:35). In the ancient world it was a sacred duty to welcome the stranger. Hospitality is closely linked to love—it draws the stranger in. A few years ago, the theme for the Church of the Nazarene was, “Our church can be your home.” People long for “home,” a place of comfort, *shalom*, love, respect, attention, fellowship, consistency, and where a person needs to be needed.

Hospitality involves giving worth to those deemed worthless by the world. In welcoming the least, we welcome Jesus Christ (Matt 25:31-46). Hospitality and the Gospel cannot be separated. The ultimate host when we share the Gospel is Christ. Park writes, “We as Christians do not invite unbelievers to the table of our own resources, but to the table of Christ.”⁸¹ People come to God not through logic or argumentation but through loving, inviting lives of hospitality. Just as when the prodigal son was welcomed back to the table of his father, we too welcome the sinner in. Park adds, “Evangelism is to be practiced in the context of the welcome table, which is a sign of acceptance, inclusion, and equality.”⁸²

Issues of whether to eat or drink effect not only the Japanese Christian business man trapped with the need to attend a drinking party in order to keep his job. Every day we are faced with whether or not to

⁸⁰Joon-Sik Part, “Hospitality as Context for Evangelism,” *Missiology* 30 (July 2002): 386.

⁸¹Park, “Hospitality as Context for Evangelism,” 386.

⁸²Park, “Hospitality as Context for Evangelism,” 387.

“eat” with “strangers.” According to Park, evangelism as hospitality is a boundary-crossing event. He writes, “Evangelism in the context of hospitality recognizes the equal worth of every person and does not accommodate the gospel to the discriminations based upon cultural and socioeconomic differences. Thus, it could defy prevailing practices of society and thus be countercultural.”⁸³ Perhaps hospitality is countercultural precisely because it speaks of giving and not receiving; it counteracts the power and pull of sin in the world. Hospitality presumes one has something to offer the estranged. Unfortunately, this is easily abused by power holders who mask injustice behind selfish corruption. It is not a coincidence that liberation theology emerged in the throes of an age of materialism. Liberation theology offers the church the opportunity to rediscover the poor as a hermeneutical focus.⁸⁴

Hospitality provides a venue for us to hear God speak to us. There is an intrinsic connection between welcome and the word.⁸⁵ When Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors, by his presence he was bringing the Word of God to desperate, lonely people. We bring Jesus to people as we model Jesus’ hospitality. Hospitality is closely related to many other Christian virtues and is almost synonymous with some. It is too bad Paul did not include it as a fruit of the Spirit because perhaps then we would give it more attention. To be hospitality like Jesus involves every fruit of the Spirit along with compassion, acceptance, forgiveness, and acts of charity, to name a few. Hospitality must spring from lives transformed by the Holy Spirit. The sanctified life ought to be characterized by hospitality. To be inhospitable in any of its forms contradicts holy love. This sobering thought ought to cause us to carefully look at our lives. The implications are profound. In the local church, are we open to the “least of these brothers of mine,” or have we created a conclave of “insiders”? Are there relatives within our families to whom we have not spoken for years? Do we go out of our way to

⁸³Park, “Hospitality as Context for Evangelism,” 387.

⁸⁴Mary W. Anderson, “Hospitality Theology,” *Christian Century* July 1-8, 1998 (115): 643.

⁸⁵See her book, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

welcome new people on campus and invest in the lives of our colleagues? If not, we need to seek the forgiveness and filling of the God of love.

Christine Pohl has provided significant insight into the issues of Christian hospitality.⁸⁶ I would like to conclude with some of Pohl's thoughts summarized in a recent article. First, concern for the physical, social and spiritual well-being of migrants and refugees should be central to the Christian witness. Second, the best hosts are those who understand themselves to be aliens and strangers. Third, hospitality is a way to demonstrate healing and forgiveness. "Hospitality is an important expression of recognition and respect for those who are despised or overlooked by the larger society. When we offer hospitality, when we eat and drink together, and when we share in conversation with persons significantly different from ourselves, we make powerful statements to the world about who is interesting, valuable, and important to us." Fourth, hospitality should be seen as a way of life and not a task or strategy. "Hospitality is not a means to an end; it is a way of life infused by the gospel." Is not love when we offer something without expecting anything in return? "Embodying the hospitality of the gospel requires a radical, costly reorientation of our lives, where we share not only our gifts, resources, and message, but also our very selves." Fifth, hospitality can reintegrate church, mission, and social ministry into community formation. These are not separate departments or alternatives of church life but are intricately connected with fulfilling the Great Commission. Finally, hospitality necessitates liminality in space and identity where roles are not entirely predictable and resources do not necessarily flow one way.⁸⁷

Paul's words ring true: "Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom 15:7).

⁸⁶Christine D. Pohl, "Biblical Issues in Mission and Migration," *Missiology* 31 (Jan 2003): 10-11.

⁸⁷Christine D. Pohl, "Biblical Issues in Mission and Migration," *Missiology* 31 (Jan 2003): 10-11.

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THE MASTER MUSICIAN

Charles E. Seifert

Music is God's gift to us.¹ As believers we offer our gifts of music to him with praise and thanksgiving. It is significant that of all the arts, music has the most continuous positive relation with Christian theology.² This is evident in the allegories found in theological and religious literature depicting Christ the Master Musician playing on the souls of Christian believers like musical instruments. These allegorical writings symbolically present Christ as Master Musician and describe symbolically the role Christians play as musical instruments in the Master's hand. This literature may unfold the formative spirituality of the great saints and other gifted authors.

The early church fathers used their knowledge of music and musical instruments in their theological writings concerning music. Despite their strong convictions concerning music and their prohibitions of musical instruments being played in public worship, they reflected their knowledge of Aristotle and other Greek philosophers, by citing preferences for the *cithara* and lyre in their allegories. These ancient string instruments, ancestors of the harp, were played to accompany the priestly choir during worship at the Temple in Jerusalem until daily sacrifices ceased after the destruction of Herod's Temple in A.D. 70 by the Roman legions.³

It is fascinating to see the depictions of Christ as Orpheus playing the lyre adorn the walls and early Christian *saracophagi* in the catacombs of Rome. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, as musician continues to impart rich meaning for us as a traditional theme in religious art and literature.

When the human voice was considered the complete instrument, all musical instruments were united into the human being by praising

¹ *Luther's Works*, vol 53, *Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 321.

² Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Melody of Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 165.

³ Alfred Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1969), 431-432.

God and leading a life of good works. St. Augustine commented that the lyre or *psaltarium* and the *cithara* are an indivisible idea within the doctrinal concept that “Christ’s body is integer” (*duo organo video, corpus autem Christi unum video*).⁴ In his sermons, St. Augustine explained the Ten Commandments in terms of the ten strings of the lyre or harp.⁵

Besides being functional, musical instruments are also non-functional objects of reflection, symbolizing invisible spiritual realities. For example, Cassiodorus reasoned: The lyre or *psalterium* makes known the incarnation of God and “signifies divine love leading to conversion (while the *kitara* signifies movement, “passion”).⁶

St. Augustine commended music as being “valuable in comprehension of spiritual things.”⁷ An example of this particular symbolism was cited by St. Gregory of Nazianzen, a fourth century bishop in Asia Minor in comparing the spiritual soul of the person to an instrument played by the Holy Spirit: *organum pulsatum a Spiritu Sancto*.⁸ We are aware as Christians that the melodies and harmonies drawn from the well-tuned strings of a human personality are a perfection that the individual could never aspire to in their own strength and will. It is the empowering of the Holy Spirit that can make this possible.

A strikingly similar allegory by St. John Chrysostom expresses his counsel to his readers:

You may yourself become a *cithara*, mortifying the members of the flesh and making a full harmony of mind and spirit, but has submitted to its orders and has been led at length

⁴ St. Augustine, quoted in Margaret J. Kartomi, *On Concepts and Classifications of Musical Instruments* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 138.

⁵ George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols on Christian Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 176.

⁶ Kartomi, 139.

⁷ James McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 165. Many examples of musical imagery and allegory can be found in the psalm commentary of the patristic fathers.

⁸ Tomas Merton, *The Ascent of Faith* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1951), 181.

into the best and most admirable path, then will you create a spiritual melody.⁹

Practically speaking, what part does the believer play in this silent music? The function of the individual is to tune the strings. St. Gregory sees the Holy Spirit as the master showing the person of reason, his servant, how to do this and leaves with this work.

The present day counterpart to these ancient string instruments is the piano with the musician playing the keys and thereby striking the strings with its hammer action. The role of the musician illustrated by Thomas Merton (1921-1968) expands further on this analogy saying if Christ comes to play and “finds the piano still out of tune, he does not bother to play anything on it. He strikes a chord and goes away.”¹⁰ The spiritual person with God’s grace is able to judge what must be done to keep the instrument in tune. The soul of the mature Christian is like the ears of a well-trained musician that can recognize the slightest deviations of pitch in the instrument.

The immature Christian like the beginning pianist does not know for sure when their instrument is out of tune, man-made rules that go beyond those given by God result in an attempt to play or sing truer than the pitch given by God: they have the effect of a loud voice singing sharp in a flat choir, where only the organ is true.¹¹

Keeping an instrument in tune is comparable to each believer’s responsibility in maintaining the spirit of renewal in their hearts. Thomas Merton speaks of the discretion of soul to keep the piano in tune. The tuning of the instrument involves tightening the strings so they will sound at the designated pitch. The individual will and reason must “judge the right measure of self-denial that will keep the soul responsive to the

⁹ Oliver Strunk, *Source in Music History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1950), 70.

¹⁰ Merton, 182.

¹¹ Merton, 182.

keys when they are struck by God.”¹² This is clearly the work of the Holy Spirit since keeping an instrument in tune and in good playing is comparable to each believer’s responsibility in maintaining the spirit of spiritual renewal in their hearts.

Further elaboration on this theme reveals the importance of tuning all the tones since no pure melodies and harmonies will be heard if they are played on an out-of-tune instrument. Carefully tune your individual instrument accurately. Tune your own instrument first before attempting to tune other instruments, or else you will share your discord with others.¹³ The melody of theology, to paraphrase Friedrich Schleiermacher, finds expression in the special calling of a person and is at the same time the melody of that person’s life. However, it remains a simple series of notes unless our religious experience with its endless variety, accompanies it with all its notes and raises the simple song to a full-bodied harmony.¹⁴

In the sixteenth century, St. John of the Cross heard this spiritual music as

silent music,
sounding solitude,
the supper that refreshes, and deepens love.¹⁵

In a series of meditations on “The Spiritual Canticle” by St. John of the Cross,” Susan Muto finds new beauty in this silent music for it “engenders a harmonious symphony.” In the core of her being, the soul enjoys a “symphony of spiritual music so consonant that every sense in her body responds to its melody. Each faculty sounds through with a new spiritual sensitivity.”¹⁶

¹² Merton, 182.

¹³ J. F. H. con Dalberg, quoted in *Music, Mysticism and Magic* (London: Arkana, 1986), 118.

¹⁴ Friedrich Schleiermacher, quoted in Pelikan, *The Melody of Theology*, 167.

¹⁵ Saint John of the Cross, quoted in Susan Muto, *Deep into the Thicket* (Pittsburgh: Epiphany Association), 66.

¹⁶ Muto, 70, 71.

Our divine Master proves his perfect mastery of men and women by fitting the most imperfect human instruments to sound his praise. The Master Musician finds no perfect instruments ready to play, but with the miraculous skill he triumphs over our sinful imperfections, transforms our social and mental imperfections.¹⁷

As we are formed in the image of Christ, each individual Christian is nourished when he or she is dependent upon the Holy Spirit to guide and direct our spiritual lives. “The most skilled and experienced hands will draw no more from it than vulgar songs if the Spirit does not guide them, nor the Divine Breath embrace the Spirit.”¹⁸

It is then that music may transport us into God’s presence. Indeed, music can draw us to Himself and prepare us for the life to come when we will be with Christ in the New Jerusalem. Heaven may become “the original archetype of all musical instruments, tuned for no other purpose than that the hymns sung in honor of the Universal Father may have a musical accompaniment.”¹⁹ In the book of Revelation, John the beloved Apostle describes his vision of the twenty-four elders falling down before the Lamb, each holding a *cithara* and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayer of the saints. And they sing a new song saying: “Worthy art Thou to take the scroll and open its seals.”²⁰

Recently Pope John Paul II enunciated the meaning of music for us in an address to the International Youth Orchestra:

As with prayer, every artistic expression—especially music—lifts the soul beyond mere earthly existence; it allows us to face life and God who created it with humble devotion, open to the splendor of its truth.²¹

¹⁷ J. Paul Taylor, *The Music of the Pentecost* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1951), 39.

¹⁸ George Sand, quoted in Joscelyn Godwin, *Music, Mysticism and Magic* (Hammondsworth: Arkana, 1986), 230.

¹⁹ Philo, quoted in *Music, Mysticism and Magic*, 57.

²⁰ Revelation 5:8-9.

²¹ Pope John Paul II, quoted in Basil Cole, *Music and Morals* (New York: Alba House), 98.

The instrument our Lord uses then becomes a means of glorifying God in our prayers and praise offered in heart-felt adoration. Pope John Paul's praise of music reflects Thomas Aquinas' statement that "man is much affected by music; hence its value in exciting devotion at prayer."²²

The allegory of music with its genres, forms and musical instruments is the subject of a remarkable book entitled *The Music of Pentecost*, by Bishop J. Paul Taylor, former bishop of the Free Methodist Church. It is with fond remembrance that I recall his eloquent sermons that form the basis of this book. Bishop Taylor points to the lives of the saints as evidence of God's transforming grace.

The personality that is in the hands of God becomes a source of peaceful harmonies, as the stringed instruments of ancient times. We recall the lives of the Saint Augustine, the John Newton's, who have been lifted from the miry clay to sing the "new song" that was put in their mouths until the world was charmed by their music.²³

A religious poem by an unknown author, "The Touch of the Master's Hand," simply tells the folk-like story of an old violin being sold at an auction and how the price of the instrument increases greatly when it is played by a master violinist. The spiritual application is stated directly for the Master changes us by the touch of his hand on our personal lives.

The Touch of the Master's Hand

"Twas battered and scared, and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth a while
To waste much time on the old violin
But held it up with a smile
"What am I bid, good folk," he cried,
"Who'll start bidding for me?"

²² Cole, 75.

²³ Taylor, 38, 39.

A dollar, a dollar—now two, only two—
Two dollars. and who'll make it three?

Three dollars once, three dollars twice,
Going for three, but no!

From the room far back a gray-haired man—
Came forward and picked up the bow;

Then wiping the dust from the old violin,
And tightening up the strings,
He played a melody, pure and sweet,
As sweet as the angel's sing.

The music ceased and the auctioneer
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said, "What am I bid for the old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.

"A thousand dollars—and who'll make it two?
Two thousand dollars—and who'll make it three?
Three thousand once—three thousand twice—
And going—and gone," said he.

The people cheered, but some of them cried:
"We do not quite understand—
What changed the worth?" The man replied,
"The touch of the master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune
And battered and torn with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd,
Much like the old violin.

A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine,
A game—and he travels on,
He's going once, and going twice,
He's going—and almost gone!

But the Master comes, and the foolish
Crowd never can quite understand
The worth of a soul, and the change that is wrought
By the Touch of the Master's Hand.

— *Author Unknown*

This poem illustrates the ancient idea of musical instruments, “adapted to making the invisible known.”²⁴ The moral effects of musical instruments consist of their spiritual significance for believers.

Like St. Thomas Aquinas, Adrian van Kaam, contemporary theologian of formative spirituality, writes poetry that sheds light on the transformation we encounter when our lives become a song of praise and adoration in the radiant revelation of Christ’s splendor.

You are the vibration of my soul.
 Make me a priest of the universe
 Blending all creatures inwardly
 Into a song of praise and adoration.
 Let the radiance of your worship
 Shine upon my daily doings.
 Change the world before my inner eye
 Into a revelation of your splendor,
 Shining forth most brightly
 The destiny of all that is.²⁵

Father van Kaam’s poem can be considered a poetic and spiritual commentary on John Milton’s triumphant lines:

And keep in tune with heaven, till God ere long
 To his celestial concert us unite,
 To live with Him, and sing in endless morn of light.²⁶

In conclusion, these examples of musical allegory may unfold the creative use of imagery in the believers response to Christ’s message of spiritual formation and discipleship. In the beloved hymn of consecration, “Lord Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace,” commonly attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, we sense that we are as musical

²⁴ Kartomi, 139.

²⁵ Adrian van Kaam, “The Grace of Worship,” in *The Woman and the Well* (Epiphany Association, 1990), 87.

²⁶ John Milton, “At a Solemn Music,” quoted in Murray J. Levith, ed., *Musical Masterpieces in Poetry* (Neptune, NJ: Paganiniana Publications, Inc., 1984), 25.

instruments in the hands of Christ bringing to fruition our Divine Master's call to holiness.

This music of holiness in the testimony of Mother Teresa of Calcutta in her book of daily devotional meditations:

“Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace” is our motto. The most important part is that we keep the work as his work and that we do not spoil it by any claims. It is impossible, humanly speaking, for your young and inexperienced sisters to do what they must do but for the fact that we are just instruments to do God's work. Our task is to allow Jesus to use us. It is he who is doing the work with us, through us and in us.²⁷

As instruments of love, peace and compassion we emulate the virtues of Christ Jesus and are like divine music filling “the inner ear with a spiritual symphony of love for God and one's neighbor; of faith, hope, and charity.”²⁸ In doing this we will echo the words of Charles Stanford's resounding hymn: “When In Our Music God is Glorified.”

When in our music God is glorified
 And adoration leaves no room for pride,
 It is as though the whole creation cried
Alleluia!

How often, making music, we have found
 A new dimension in the world of sound,
 As worship moved us to a more profound
Alleluia!

Let every instrument be tuned with praise
 Let all rejoice who have a voice to raise!
 And may God have us faith to sing always
Alleluia!²⁹

²⁷ Mother Teresa, *The Joy of Loving: A Guide to Daily Living with Mother Teresa*, eds. Jaya Chaliha and Edward Le Joly (New York: Viking, 1996), 413.

²⁸ Adam Scott, quoted in *Music, Mysticism and Magic*, 101.

²⁹ *The Hymnal 1982* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1985), 420.

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INCARNATIONAL INTERPRETATION
HEARING THE WORD OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Darin Land

The New Testament constitutes a paradox in Christian thought. God is its author, but it was written by humans. Just as Jesus is fully human and fully divine, so also is the authorship of the New Testament. The theological language used to describe this mystery is *incarnation*, which denotes a transcendent reality embodied within a finite entity. Thus, with respect to the New Testament, the divine message is incarnated within human language. This incarnational character determines the most appropriate approach to the text. On the basis of its divine nature, the church rightly accepts the New Testament as authoritative. Concurrently, its human nature means that it comes to us in the trappings of a culturally conditioned document, the components of which proceed from and are addressed to a particular historical-cultural moment. This essay explores the implications of the dual authorship of the New Testament, beginning with the divine and followed by the human. The interface between the two aspects emerges under the rubric, incarnational interpretation.¹

The Divine Authorship of the New Testament

In many respects the divine authorship of the New Testament is accepted as an axiomatic article of faith in the church. One objection to starting with faith is that it might open the floodgates to religious relativism. If the New Testament is not proved to have God as its author,

¹The conviction that the authorship of the New Testament has a dual human-divine nature distinguishes Christian thought from that of many other religions. For instance, Muslims affirm only divine authorship of their sacred book, the *Qurʾān* (Cf. Joseph M. Mutei, “The Bible: Classical and Contemporary Muslim Attitudes and Exegesis,” *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 31 [2007]: 207-220). The present essay, therefore, may serve as a resource in inter-religious dialogue for promoting deeper understanding between Christians and others. Moreover, this essay may empower Christian missionaries who sometimes struggle to explain to potential and recent converts why Christians seemingly obey or disobey scriptural mandates in arbitrary fashion.

how can we know it is true? The problem is profound, yet I would argue for divine authorship on the basis of both internal and external evidence. Any one of the arguments might not be convincing in and of itself. Still, when taken together, they form a solid foundation.

Frequently cited internal evidence includes 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (NASB), and 2 Peter 1:21, “For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (NASB). While these two verses do not refer specifically to the New Testament, the church has applied them by analogy to the whole Bible. External evidence includes the general historical reliability of the texts and the fact that the Bible has sustained the spiritual life of the church for some twenty centuries.

Similarly, the religious experience of multitudes of Christians, including my own, seems to be genuine. The core of ethics in the New Testament, moreover, corresponds with the highest ideals of humankind. For these reasons, faith in divine authorship is a sound starting point for understanding the New Testament.

The church, then, rightly states that the New Testament is God’s Word. It is not merely the Word about God. Nor is it the record of the lofty thoughts of humans as they contemplated the truths of life. Rather, the New Testament is God’s self-revelation. It contains the truth about God: his character, his desires, and his purposes. In the New Testament, God has revealed that he loves humankind and that he has acted within history to redeem people unto himself. Above all, God has revealed Jesus Christ as his unique representation through whose death and resurrection he has purchased our redemption.

The New Testament also communicates ultimate, objective truths about good and evil and about the nature and destiny of humankind. By it we know how to please God and how to relate to one another. In short, the New Testament is authoritative. It is a binding compendium of truth and righteous conduct. It is the infallible rule for faith and life, thereby furnishing the church with everything needed for its wholeness.

When we say that the New Testament is of divine authorship, we do not mean to say that it is divine, a claim which would be tantamount to idolatry. The New Testament does not embody all the fullness of

God, nor does it convey all that will be known about him in the life to come. It does, however, seem to communicate exactly what God wants us to know at this time. It is the sufficient guide for his people.

The Human Authorship of the New Testament

God authored the New Testament, but it also had human authors. The divine Word comes to us through the vehicle of human communication. Therefore, the New Testament can be profitably studied according to the strictures of conventional human writing. The better we understand this component of the text, the more clearly we can hear the message that God intends for his people. Thus, there are at least four aspects of the human dimension that can be examined for each particular New Testament writing: (1) the selection and transmission of the text as canon, (2) the cultural context of the human author and the first recipients, (3) the literary context and the genre (type of writing, e.g., letter, history, biography), and (4) the presence and function of figurative language.

Selection and Transmission of the Text. The selection and transmission of the New Testament text also displays both human and divine dimensions. The process by which writings were included in the New Testament (canonization) was complex and lengthy. At the risk of oversimplification, church councils selected texts on the basis of their apostolic origins and/or the edifying qualities inherent in the text. A closer investigation reveals that some texts were first accepted but later excluded, while others were initially rejected but subsequently included. There were disagreements over the merits of certain documents, and different groups proposed competing canonical lists. This complexity raises at least three crucial questions: (1) Are all New Testament documents equally authoritative, or should we have a “canon within the canon”? (2) Are there other documents which should be part of the New Testament? Are other canonical lists to be preferred? (3) Why is the canon closed? Does God not speak authoritatively today? These issues are profound and will require continuing reflections. At this time, my working hypothesis is that God used human processes to assure that exactly the right documents were included in the New Testament.

The texts themselves have also undergone complex processes as they were transmitted through the centuries. In the main, New Testament texts were copied and dispersed in the same way as other documents. The extant New Testament manuscripts exhibit the same kinds of copyist errors as copies of merely human writings. However, it is not stretching credulity to assert that errors in the text are remarkably few and relatively minor. We can have a high degree of confidence that the text we have today is exceedingly close to the original autographs. The Church asserts that this degree of reliability is the direct result of the Holy Spirit safeguarding the transmission of the text. Even so, a certain amount of work remains in sorting out textual variants and determining the original text.

Cultural Context. The books of the New Testament were written within the Greco-Roman world. More particularly, much of the New Testament reflects a Jewish background as influenced by the politics of imperial Rome and the cultural imperialism of Greco-Roman society. The tensions arising out of this diversity vexes those who seek today to understand the divine message. For example, precedent for the “Word” (Logos) language of John 1 might reside in Jewish Wisdom literature or in the writings of Greco-Roman philosophers. It is also possible that the author incorporated both perspectives. Whatever the solution, an understanding of the cultural background enriches our appreciation of the message. Other cultural issues which likewise inform our reading of the New Testament include attitudes toward marriage and family; the value placed on wealth and the means of its acquisition; expectations of magic, spirits, and healing; expectations for moral living; and conventions of writing and authorship. This list could be expanded, but the point is simply that the more deeply one imbibes the cultural milieu of the first century, the greater will be his or her understanding of the New Testament.

Another salient feature of the historical-cultural context of the New Testament is that certain perspectives diverge from the attitudes and activities of today. Indeed, some practices accepted in the New Testament, such as slavery, seem completely immoral in contemporary society. Conversely, by today’s standards the prohibition of other practices in the New Testament seems oppressive. Are some parts of the New Testament culture-specific and not universally applicable? If so,

how does one distinguish between them? As we shall see below, certain principles can help to differentiate the contingent from the universal.

Literary Context and Genre. The New Testament employs ordinary human language. Sentences obey the accepted rules of grammar, thoughts emerge in familiar ways, and arguments proceed according to the conventions of first century literature. Similarly, the types of literature in the New Testament conform to the genres used in the ancient world. The gospels, for example, display many of the characteristics of other ancient biographies, such as the use of direct speech and the selection of material for narrative impact. Likewise, the epistles utilize stylized introductory formulae, standard epistolary topoi (topics typically discussed in letters), and other techniques of letter writing in antiquity. For these reasons, the methods applied to writings with only human authors—such as analysis of grammar, comparison of word usage, identification of rhetorical techniques, and examination of conformity or non-conformity to genre expectations—also illuminate the meaning of the New Testament.

Figurative Language. Like other writers, the human authors of the New Testament used figures of speech such as metaphor (e.g., fishers of men, Matthew 4:19 and Mark 1:17), simile (e.g., “The Kingdom of heaven is like . . .,” Matthew 13:31 and others), symbol (e.g., seven lampstands, Revelation 1:12, 20), and even irony (e.g., Caiaphas’s prophecy, John 11:49-52). In order to understand the intended meaning, the modern reader must recognize the figure and interpret it accordingly. If a particular text was intended figuratively, to read it as non-figurative might lead to gross misinterpretation. However, it is not always clear whether a phrase was originally intended as figurative. As a result, debates erupt over the proper interpretation of passages. For example, one’s view of the end-times rests in part on whether the millennium mentioned in Revelation 20 is intended as symbolic. As more light is shed on the use of figurative language in the ancient world, such debates might be resolved.

Incarnational Interpretation of the New Testament

It follows from the preceding discussion that a thorough familiarity with the New Testament demands interpretation of the text.

The incarnational nature of the Word of God necessarily molds this interpretation, requiring awareness of both divine and human dimensions. Understanding the human dimension entails navigating the cultural distance between ourselves and the original (human) authors—a distance compounded by the passage of time. Scholars have devised a diverse palette of methods to assist in overcoming this distance and to enhance the accuracy of the interpretation. These methods include text criticism (What is the original wording of the text?), source criticism (What sources—eye witness testimony, Old Testament quotations, hymns, traditional material, etc.—did the final writer use to construct the text?), form criticism (How was the text originally used in the ministry of Jesus and/or in the life of the early Church?), redaction criticism (What was the final writer trying to communicate by the way sources were used?), and rhetorical criticism (What techniques did the writer use to persuade his or her readers?).

These and other critical methods are just specific questions asked of the text in a rigorous manner. As such, the methods are neutral and need not be shunned as inimical to historic Christianity. However, practitioners of critical methods do bring presuppositions to their task. Naturally, these assumptions color one's interpretive conclusions. Many New Testament scholars approach the text assuming that miracles and other supernatural manifestations do not occur. Many of the same scholars presuppose that the Bible is the word about God, not the Word of God. Yet a scholarly approach to the New Testament does not require such assumptions. Rather, a faith commitment is a legitimate presuppositional stance for the New Testament scholar.

The Role of Faith in Incarnational Interpretation. Incarnational interpretation begins with a faith commitment. Although skeptics often provide valuable insights into the meaning of the New Testament, beginning from a standpoint of faith makes a difference in one's interpretation. The faithful interpreter accepts the historical accuracy of the text unless there is compelling evidence to the contrary. For example, minor inconsistencies and even apparent contradictions might be perceived as the variations of eyewitness testimony, not as evidence of fabrication. Similarly, the believing interpreter assumes that the authors (both human and divine) never intended to deceive. The human authors, moreover, were capable writers who wrote with conviction and

intentionality, not with carelessness or ineptitude. Clearly, a faith commitment places certain constraints on the options for interpretation.

Incarnational interpretation rightly begins with faith; it also ends with it. Since the believing exegete receives the text as God's Word, he or she does not stop working until God's message for today has been explored. When all is said and done, taking a faith stance toward the New Testament means that one submits to its authority. Therefore, the faithful interpreter lives in light of its truth-claims, modifying personal beliefs and behavior to more nearly conform to those claims.

At this point, however, a difficulty arises. As we have seen above, the New Testament worldview differs from the modern one. Must today's faithful interpreter adhere even to those perspectives and practices considered outmoded or immoral? Some Christians argue that every detail of the New Testament must still be followed. Such a stance may be consistent in principle, but in practice it is difficult to maintain. For example, very few Christians adhere strictly to the command in 1 Corinthians 11 for women to pray with covered heads. Other Christians believe that church tradition must distinguish between what is universal and what is culturally relative. On this view, however, the tradition is normative, and the New Testament is no longer useful for confronting traditional beliefs and behaviors. Without denying the importance of tradition, a better approach is to discover principles by which one can consistently determine what is universally binding.

The Role of Reason in Incarnational Interpretation. In assessing what is of universal validity in the New Testament, it is easy to lose sight of the text's incarnational nature. One is tempted to say that certain parts contain purely human words (and are therefore cultural specific) while other parts contain the divine (and are therefore universally valid). Instead, all the human words together convey the divine message. Still, that message is always spoken within a particular historical context. Because the New Testament is God's Word in written form, we today are privileged, as it were, to eavesdrop on God's word spoken to diverse times and places many centuries ago. In other words, the biblical message is always culturally determined and directed. This does not mean, however, that it no longer has relevance. Rather, the task of the believing interpreter is to discover the divine message for today within

the message spoken for that day. It can be recognized in one or more of the following ways: (1) The message regarding the nature of God and his redemptive activity, including the Gospel of Jesus, is universally valid and objectively true. Of course, I refer here to the meaning as intended by the author, recognizing the referents of any phenomenological language, figures of speech, symbolism, and so forth. (2) Ethical prohibitions and prescriptions which are consistently maintained in a plurality of historical and cultural moments are binding today. (3) The motivations behind behavior praised or condemned—either explicitly or implicitly—are to be emulated or avoided, respectively.

But we have been speaking in idealized terms. In fact, the New Testament utilizes more than direct statements about God or direct commandments. It is more complex both in terms of its subject matter and its means of communication. Practically speaking, then, how does one discover the universal norms within the cultural-specific text? Dr. David M. Scholer, late New Testament scholar at Fuller Theological Seminary, offers some helpful guidelines in this regard. The following table is adapted from his article, “Issues in Biblical Interpretation,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 60 (1988): 19-20.

TABLE 1: Historical-Cultural Contingency v. Universality

Contingent	<—————>	Universal
Peripher	<—————>	Central to Redemptive Message
De-Emphasized/Infrequent	<—————>	Emphasized/ Frequent
Descriptive Narratives	<—————>	Normative Teachings
Diverse Perspectives	<—————>	Uniform, Consistent Witness
Applications	<—————>	Principles
Intra-canonical reversals	<—————>	No reversals
Reflects Common Cultural	<—————>	Prefers One of Several Cultural
Options		Options
Current Practices Differ	<—————>	Current Practices Similar to
from Bib. Culture		Bib. Culture

Each of these eight criteria forms a continuum: a particular passage may lie closer to one side or the other, or it may belong somewhere in the middle. Therefore, each criterion requires discernment in addition to an investigation into the Biblical texts and/or historical-cultural contexts. A simple example illustrates how these criteria function. The command to greet one another with a holy kiss may be analyzed as follows (see Table 2): (1) According to Dr. Scholer, this command is peripheral, not central. (2) In my judgment, the command is de-emphasized— even though it is repeated five times—because it occurs at the end of the letters and is not developed with any explanatory comments. (3) Although—the statement is in the form of a command, its context suggests it is neither a descriptive narrative nor normative teaching, but rather an expression of fraternal fondness. (4) The five occurrences of the command form a uniform witness, but all are in a similar context. (5) The command seems to be an application of the general principle of love and unity among Christians, not a principle itself. (6) There seem to be no intra-canonical reversals. (7) Greeting with a kiss reflected the common cultural practice. (8) Our North American culture does not generally practice greeting with a kiss.

TABLE 2: Greet With a Holy Kiss

Contingent	<—————>	Universal
Peripheral	<—————>	Central to Redemptive Message
De-Emphasized/Infrequent	<—————>	Emphasized/ Frequent
Descriptive Narratives	<—————>	Normative Teachings
Diverse Perspectives	<—————>	Uniform, Consistent Witness
Applications	<—————>	Principles
Intra-canonical Reversals	<—————>	No Reversals
Reflects Common Cultural Practice	<—————>	Prefers One of Several Cultural Options
Current Practices Differ from Bib. Culture	<—————>	Current Practices Similar to Bib. Culture

The majority of the criteria point to the command as a historically contingent one, not one with universal validity. Still, the command as stated was God's message to the early church. When we overhear that message, we still recognize the ideal of fraternal warmth among the body of Christ and are encouraged to respond to our contemporaries with a similar genuineness.

The above discussion demonstrates that reason plays a vital role in determining what is universally valid. It helps establish the criteria, assemble the relevant data, determine the meaning of that data, and draw conclusions. This is not to deny, of course, the importance of other factors, including faith, as we have already seen. Nevertheless, reason is essential in this and other areas of New Testament interpretation.

That being said, however, it must be noted that human reason is fallible. Judgments are only as good as the quality of information received. Even given all the information, wrong judgments are still made. Yet in many cases we do not have all the desired information, and sometimes the data is ambiguous. This requires humility on the part of the interpreter as he or she approaches the text. The exegete must realize that the "assured results" of critical scholarship are based on fallible judgments. He or she must employ the methods but acknowledge the possibility of error. This is not to say, of course, that we can have no confidence in any interpretation. Many interpretations are supported by a wealth of data, while others can be confidently eliminated. Where uncertainty remains, the interpreter must conclude that the available evidence seems to point in this or that direction and must acknowledge that other possibilities still exist. Then he or she ought to explore all the possibilities for their theological implications. Often two or more interpretations can be combined. For example, Jesus' teachings regarding the Kingdom of Heaven probably have both religious and social dimensions. Reason, then, should guide the interpreter to look for the possibility of more nuanced interpretations based on the combination of earlier proposals.

Reason is also helpful in discovering and evaluating presuppositions. We have already noted that a faith commitment is a legitimate presuppositional stance. In addition to faith, the interpreter often brings other presuppositions, both acknowledged and

subconscious. He or she maintains certain assumptions that form a rudimentary interpretive framework. As the meaning becomes increasingly clear, these presuppositions are either affirmed or disproved by the results of the study. The corrected perspective leads to more refined interpretations, which in turn can correct the interpretive paradigm further. The process is not endless, but it moves from the possibility of radical changes initially to subtle refinements later. As noted above, it is my conviction that the presuppositional stance most consistent with a genuine interpretation of the New Testament is that of a faith commitment.

Therefore, reason and faith together form the integrative core of incarnational interpretation. Recognizing both divine and human dimensions of the New Testament, incarnational interpretation is the most appropriate way to approach the text. It begins from a standpoint of faith, and its practitioners come to the text expecting to hear from God and to obey what he says. They are prepared to have their presuppositions challenged, their convictions refined, their motives purified, and their deeds rectified. Incarnational interpretation employs every available means to assist the humble exegete to hear the Word of God in its power, richness, and depth. The New Testament is profound. Together with the Old Testament, its joint divine-human authorship makes it unique among World Literature. More than that, it offers a message of hope and life to all who believe. As Jesus himself says in John 6:63, “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (NASB).

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