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Hospitality

Editorial

Gordon Zerbe

"Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." With these words (Rom. 15:7), Paul brings to conclusion the practical exhortation of his letter to the feuding house churches in Rome, grounding it in the theology of God's own welcome through Christ. Apparently, factions within the network were refusing to sit at common table. Earlier, Paul had invited his readers "to pursue the befriending of the stranger/other" (12:13), including the persecutor and enemy, and culminating in a shared meal (12:14–21). Paul himself regularly relied on the hospitality of others, as when he requested that Philemon prepare the "guest room" for his use (Philem. 22), and that the Corinthians provide for his stay and his travels (1 Cor. 16:6–7; Rom. 16:23).

These are but a couple examples of the pervasive theme of hospitality in Scripture. Perhaps we could say that hospitality, like peace, is not an add-on to the gospel; it is the heart of the gospel.

The articles in this issue of *Vision* explore various aspects of this theme—from its biblical, poetic, and even cinematic expressions, to its liturgical, pastoral, ecclesial, and missional dimensions. We hope they stir your imagination.

And we invite your response. Send us a comment, reaction, or suggestion (vision@cmu.ca or vision@ambs.edu).

Many thanks go to all the contributors to this issue of *Vision*, for taking time and energy to write engaging and substantive essays. And special thanks to Barbara Nelson Gingerich, our managing editor, for her exceptional work in putting it all into attractive form.

Biblical theology of hospitality

Waldemar Janzen

Hospitality has recently been rediscovered not only as a Christian virtue but as a prominent theological theme in the Bible.[1] The Old Testament has no term corresponding to our *hospitality*, while the New Testament uses several Greek words sparingly.[2] Both testaments, however, present the God-human relationship metaphorically as a host-guest relationship and call on human beings to extend God's hosting role toward other human beings. As always, we must remember that the metaphorical appropriation of such human realities for God-language is selective and adaptive.

To understand the meaning of the host-guest language, we need to consider briefly the essentials of hospitality on the human plane as practiced in the ancient Mediterranean world, including Israel and Judaism.[3] Hospitality was governed by widely accepted conventions. To observe these earned honour for host and guest alike, while their disregard brought shame. Guests were outsiders: strangers, such as travellers or fugitives, or resident aliens who had attached themselves to a clan or extended family. Having passed some initial testing, the outsider would be accepted by the host—normally a family head—as a guest, usually by a ceremony such as footwashing or anointing. The central obligations of the host were to provide food, lodging, and protection with a generous spirit and a readiness to incur inconvenience, cost, and sometimes danger. Guests, on the other hand, were to accept gratefully what was offered, refrain from demanding or assertive behaviour, and not overstay their welcome.

Theology of hospitality in the Old Testament

God as host, and God's creatures as guests in God's universe

The host-guest relationship between God and people is nowhere expressed more explicitly and succinctly than in Lev. 25:23: "The land (*'erets)* shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine;

with me you are but aliens and tenants" (NRSV). This verse defines the status of human beings—primarily Israel, here—with respect to God and to the earth.[4] This land belongs to God, not to humans. Our text stands in the context of the legislation for the Jubilee year (Leviticus 25), which provides that every fifty years reforms should take place to restore land to the families who had originally received it as their share of the promised land. Land could change hands, but not in perpetuity, or finally.

"The land (*'erets*) shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants" (Lev. 25:23).

If God owns the land, what are its human occupants? Our text (NRSV) says they are "aliens and tenants" (*gerim we-toshabim*; RSV: "strangers and sojourners"). We could say "long-term guests" or "landed immigrants." This characterisation has grave consequences for how the guests are to live. Israelites are forbidden to sell the land they occupy as if it were a commodity they owned. In addition, God's land ought to be distributed fairly to *all* God's resident guests. Legislation stipulating periodic land redistribution offsets the deep-seated human desire to be owners rather than guests, to be able to dispose of God's earth without restriction or accountability.[5]

Hospitality extended, hospitality refused

In Genesis 1, God offers the newly created world as living space and its plants and trees as food to all living creatures; they are to be guests in God's world and at God's table.[6] Humans receive the special commission to be God's image, to be God's representatives or caretakers of creation. Genesis 2 reinforces this picture, but adds one feature important for our theme: the restriction that the humans are not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In other words, while enjoying God's gracious provisions, God's human guests are to preserve awareness of and respect for God's ultimate ownership.

Genesis 3 shows humans in rebellion against these limits set by the owner. We usually think of Adam and Eve's eating from the forbidden tree as an act of disobedience. So we define sin as disobedience. But more specifically, what form does their disobedience take? Adam and Eve say, in effect, "We want unlimited use and control of the world." In this light, sin can be

described as the human attempt to be owners rather than guests. The result is their expulsion from the garden, though not from God's world. They may still live off the fruits of God's earth, but they will have to work for their bread by the sweat of their brow, fighting thorns and thistles as they do so.

Chapters 4–11 expand this theme of human takeover. Cain treats his brother not as a fellow guest but as one whose life he owns. Even the flood changes little in this human desire for ownership. In the covenant with Noah it is God who accommodates his unruly guests and grants them more control. Specifically, God now allows Noah and his descendants to use the animals as food (9:1–7). But again, God institutes a reminder of God's ultimate ownership: The blood of the slaughtered animals, symbolizing their life, is to be poured out on the ground, not eaten. By granting humans the right to eat meat, God does not abandon nonhuman life to human ownership.

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Finally, the people construct a great monument—"a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens"—to claim the earth for humanity. But this effort is driven by fear: "Otherwise we shall be scattered around upon the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:4). Their fear is of not owning, of impermanence of place, of having the status of those who need hospitality, of being "aliens and tenants." God's judgement on the tower builders is precisely what they wanted to avoid: "The LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth" (Gen. 11:9; cf. Cain, whose punishment was to "be a fugitive and wanderer on the earth" [Gen. 4:14]).

Hospitality extended anew

This sets the stage for the call to Abram and his family to take on themselves the uncertainties of leaving their homeland and their kindred to set out as aliens (Gen. 12:1–3; cf. 15:13; 35:27; Exod. 6:4). But with them goes the promise of God, the great owner and host, to give them a homeland where they will be able to live and multiply by God's grace. In the language of hospitality: God

extends an invitation to them to come and be God's guests in the part of God's land that God will give them.

Exodus is the story of God leading Israel from a foreign land, Egypt, toward the land promised to Abraham. That journey continues beyond Exodus, until Joshua conquers the promised land and distributes it to the tribes of Israel.[7] Even before the Israelites reach the land promised to Abraham, however, God invites them to come into his own presence at Mt. Sinai: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings *and brought you to myself*" (Exod. 19:4; italics added). God's invitation "to myself" has precedence even over the promised land.

Like Mt. Sinai, the place where God receives and hosts Israel, the tabernacle is a symbol of hospitality. It is the place where Israel can receive God, but even more, where God invites Israel into his presence.

The journey from Egypt to Mt. Sinai is already marked by the hallmarks of hospitality, God's provision of food (manna and quails), water, and protection (Exodus 15–17). Two rituals confirm the conclusion of the covenant at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24): One is a sacrifice, but the other is a kind of communion meal: "Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel.… God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, *and they ate and drank*" (Exod. 24:9–11; italics added).[8]

The latter part of Exodus (25–31; 35–40) tells of the construction of the tabernacle or sanctuary. Like Mt. Sinai, the place where God receives and hosts Israel, the tabernacle is a symbol of hospitality. It is the place where Israel can receive God, but even more, where God invites Israel into his presence.

The temple, as successor to the tabernacle, later becomes the place to which God invites representatives of the people to make a pilgrimage three times a year. Israel is invited to be God's guests. To the rituals there belongs feasting with each other, as fellow guests, in the presence of God. Deuteronomy 16 establishes the festal calendar. Here we read: "Rejoice before the LORD your God—you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you—*at the*

place that the LORD *your God will choose as a dwelling for his name*" (Deut. 16:11; italics added; "the place" points to the temple in Jerusalem).

That Israel was conscious of its guest status in the temple is also evident in the psalms. Psalm 39:12 expresses it in a pleading mood:

> *Hear my prayer, O* LORD*,*
> *and give ear to my cry;*
> *do not hold your peace at my tears.*
> *For I am your passing guest,*
> *an alien, like all my forebears.*

Psalm 23:5–6, on the other hand, basks in the security of the host's protection and provision:

> *You prepare a table before me*
> *in the presence of my enemies;*
> *you anoint my head with oil;*
> *my cup overflows.*
> *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me*
> *all the days of my life,*
> *and I shall dwell in the house of the* LORD
> *my whole life long.*

Isaiah 25:6–9 looks ahead to the coming of the day of the Lord (kingdom of God) in its fullness and describes it in terms of God's eschatological banquet:

> *On this mountain [Mt. Zion]*
> *the* LORD *of hosts will make for all peoples*
> *a feast of rich food, a feast of well aged wines,*
> *of rich food filled with marrow,*
> *of well aged wines strained clear....*
> *It will be said on that day,*
> *Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him,*
> *so that he might save us.*
> *This is the* LORD *for whom we have waited;*
> *let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.*

A redeemed humanity is entertained at the Lord's table in a mood of fulfillment and rejoicing.

God's hospitality as a call to human hospitality

If God's relationship to Israel, and by extension to all humanity, can be described as that of the divine host to his human guests, it follows that all human beings are fellow guests in the host's house, the created world. The challenge placed before Israel in the Old Testament's covenant laws is to live out in daily life this understanding of being fellow guests in the promised land after its occupation. One can say that hospitality embraces virtually all of Old Testament (biblical) ethics.[9] To put it differently: What do I owe my neighbours? To share my livelihood (my life) with them. And that is the essence of hospitality.[10]

Of the abundant examples from Old Testament laws and other texts I will cite only a few. Many laws specifically direct Israelites to show concern for strangers or aliens. For example: "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (Exod. 22:21; see also 23:9, et al.) And: "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; *you shall love the alien as yourself*, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 19:34; italics added). Other laws, often associated with those concerning the alien, assure good treatment of other weak members of society, especially the widows, the orphans, and the Levites: "Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns; the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake" (Deut. 14:28–29; see also Deut. 24:19–22; 26:12–15; et al.). Those for whom God has provided richly are to provide for the less advantaged among them.

Hospitality embraces virtually all of Old Testament (biblical) ethics. To put it differently: What do I owe my neighbours? To share my livelihood (my life) with them. And that is the essence of hospitality.

Other texts demonstrate, praise, and encourage hospitality. Abraham hosts three strangers with model hospitality, not

knowing that they are divine guests (Gen. 18:1–15). As so often, it turns out that the hosts receive more than they give; in this case Abraham and Sarah receive the promise of a child.

Job's oath of innocence, listing all the sins he has not committed, places special emphasis on his practice of hospitality:

> *If I have withheld anything that the poor desired,*
> *or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail,*
> *or have eaten my morsel alone,*
> *and the orphan has not eaten from it….*
> *if I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing,*
> *or a poor person without covering,*
> *whose loins have not blessed me,*
> *and who was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep;*
> *…then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder,*
> *and let my arm be broken from its socket….*
> *The stranger has not lodged in the street;*
> *I have opened my doors to the traveler.*
>
> *(Job 31:16–23, 32)*

In an unusual example of peacemaking, the prophet Elisha exhorts the king of Israel to treat his Syrian prisoners of war to a meal, then send them home. The account concludes with the strikingly relevant words: "And the Arameans [Syrians] no longer came raiding into the land of Israel" (2 Kings 6:23). For even the killer (perhaps wrongly accused or having unintentionally caused another's death), cities of refuge are to be provided (Num. 35:1–34; Deut. 4:41–43; 19:1–13; Josh. 20:1–9).

In sum, in the Old Testament, God the great host invites his guests into his house, the created world, to enjoy its riches and blessings. But God also expects these guests to follow God's example and share their livelihood, their life, with their fellow guests on God's earth.

Theology of hospitality in the New Testament

Jesus as host

In the New Testament as in the old, God, the source and owner of all good things, is the host *par excellence*. Jesus, as God's Son, extends God's invitation and welcome to all. It is "noteworthy

that the images of God's kingdom that predominate overwhelmingly in Jesus' teaching are those associated with the production of food and drink or homelike refuge for God's creatures."[11] This is particularly true of Jesus' parables, which repeatedly present the kingdom as a banquet or feast (e.g., Matt. 22:1–14; Luke 14:15–24). In God's kingdom, the hungry shall be satisfied (Luke 6:21).

Jesus exemplified the kingdom's inviting openness to all.... The image of Jesus as host was so distinctive that the disciples of Emmaus recognized him "in the breaking of bread" (Luke 24:35).

Jesus exemplified the kingdom's inviting openness to all. It is surely significant that his only miracle reported in all four gospels is the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14:13–21 and parallels). The mood of his ministry was festive, earning him sharp criticism from his opponents (see Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34; Matt. 9:14–15). The image of Jesus as host was so distinctive that the disciples of Emmaus recognized him "in the breaking of bread" (Luke 24:35).

Jesus' host role climaxes, of course, in the Last Supper, which he introduced, according to John's Gospel, with the welcoming act of footwashing (13:1–20). This supper is linked explicitly to the Old Testament covenant as well as to the future eschatological or messianic banquet (Matt. 26:20–29; Mark 14:17–25; Luke 22:14–20).[12]

Jesus as guest

Jesus, the Son of God and host on God's behalf, is also the fully human one, who cannot be understood apart from his role as guest. The inns of David's hometown have no room for the Son of David (Luke 2:1–7). While "foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests," he has nowhere to lay his head (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58). A wandering and homeless prophet, sent by God but rejected by many (Luke 4:16–30; John 1:11), he finds refuge with those willing to take him in. Women minister to him (Matt. 27:55). To feed the five thousand, he accepts the loaves and the fish given to him (Mark 6:38–41 and parallels). Even the hosting of the Last Supper takes place in a borrowed hall (Mark 14:13–16 and parallels), and eventually Jesus' body is hosted in the grave of Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:42–46 and parallels). This pilgrim existence is continued by his emissaries and followers, as we see

especially in Acts, but also elsewhere (Heb. 11:38–40; 1 Pet. 2:11; 3 John 5–8).

In his very homelessness, however, Jesus gathers around him a congregation of those who open themselves to him. Mary and Martha are paradigmatic (Luke 10:38–42), but Joseph of Arimathea belongs here, too, as well as many others. In fact, hospitality to the homeless Jesus becomes the gate into the kingdom. "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me" (Rev. 3:20; cf. John 13:20). The parable of the last judgement portrays Christ the king separating the sheep from the goats on the basis of hospitality extended or refused (Matt. 25:31–46).

Inversion of roles

The themes of Jesus the host and Jesus the guest belong inseparably to each other through a characteristic inversion. The guest who is offered hospitality turns into the host from whose blessing the hosts-turned-guests can live a new life. We noted this inversion theme in the case of Abraham, whose guests turned out to be divine bearers of promise (Gen. 18:1–15). The writer to the Hebrews sees such an inversion of roles as an ever-present possibility: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb. 13:2). Jesus' parable of the last judgement assumes the same (Matt. 25:37–45).

According to accounts of Jesus' earthly ministry, those who invite him find themselves becoming guests at God's table. Zacchaeus is a prime example (Luke 19:1–10), but nowhere do we see this more clearly than in the raising of Lazarus. This friend who repeatedly hosted Jesus receives his very life at the hands of his guest (John 11:1–44). The blessing of the host through the guest does not stop with Jesus, but continues with his disciples, as we read in Acts (8:26–40; 10:23–48: 16:13–15; 16:29–34; 17:10–12; 18:7–8; 28:1–10).

Jesus' hospitality as good news and as offence

Central to Jesus' message is the identity of those he invites and those from whom he accepts hospitality. Here lies both the good

news and the offence. On behalf of God, Jesus invites all; if any are given preferential treatment, it is those with greater need. The general openness to all, characteristic of hospitality in the ancient world and evident in the Old Testament, has by the time of Jesus been heavily overlaid by careful distinctions between the worthy and the unworthy. Social status, religious purity, national origin, wealth, and power are systematised into rules regulating hospitality.[13] When Jesus refuses to be restrained by these rules regarding whom to invite or visit, he evokes release and joy in some, and deep enmity in others.[14]

Hospitality after the manner of Jesus ceases to be a pleasant Sunday afternoon function and turns into a reordering force in society. It becomes also the arena of risk, battle, suffering, and martyrdom.

Hospitality after the manner of Jesus ceases to be a pleasant Sunday afternoon function and turns into a reordering force in society. It becomes also the arena of risk, battle, suffering, and martyrdom. The cross is the extent to which Jesus and God go on behalf of the invited guests.

A word to present-day believers

For the followers of Jesus, extending hospitality remains a central way of continuing our master's mission, of realizing the presence of the kingdom even while we are travellers on the way to our final home where the messianic banquet awaits us.[15] The communion table remains the central and constant symbol of this hospitality. It is also a symbol of sacrifice, of the body and blood of Jesus given on the cross. His followers are not allowed to forget that our calling to be guests and hosts is a calling to share our life, to take up the cross. But beyond the cross is the welcoming realm of the host who has prepared a table for us in the sight of our enemies (Ps. 23:3; cf. John 14:2).

Notes

[1] See Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality As a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), with a select but rich bibliography.

[2] Our *hospitality* derives from Latin *hospitalitas*. The New Testament uses several words related to *xenos* (meaning both *stranger* and *host*) to express our concept of hospitality: *xenia (place of lodging, hospitality); xenizein (entertain as a guest); xenodochein (show hospitality); philoxenia (hospitality, love of hospitality/stranger); philoxenos (hospitable).*

While these terms indicate that there is a certain coherence of understanding of the diverse aspects of hospitality in the New Testament, a concordance search for hospitality-related texts is more productive if focused on words such as *guest, table, bread, banquet, stranger, alien, sojourner.*

[3] For the Old Testament, these are presented succinctly in Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, "Hospitality," in *Social World of Ancient Israel, 1250–587* BCE, ed. Matthews and Benjamin (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Pubs., Inc., 1993), 82–7. For the New Testament world, but with an eye to the Old Testament also, see Bruce J. Malina, "Hospitality," in *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, rev. ed., ed. John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Pubs., Inc., 1998), 115–18. It is widely recognized, however, that a common tradition of hospitality—albeit with variations depending on time and place—permeated the ancient Mediterranean world. With respect to the two testaments, one notices a slightly greater emphasis on the meeting of needs of travellers or disadvantaged people in the Old Testament, while the New Testament world was more concerned with status and religious purity. But this may be due, at least in part, to the character of texts preserved.

[4] The Hebrew *'erets* can mean both *land* and *earth*. Addressed to Israel here, the accent should fall on *land,* i.e., the promised land, but in the background stands the wider meaning. That God is also the owner of the earth is well attested to elsewhere in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps. 24:1).

[5] From Elijah on (in the story of Naboth's vineyard, 1 Kings 21), the prophets announced God's judgement on those who, in keeping with the economic trends, attempted to turn land into a saleable commodity (e.g., Isa. 5:8; Mic. 2:1–5). For a detailed study of this Jubilee legislation, see Ben C. Ollenburger, "Jubilee: 'The land is mine; you are aliens and tenants with me,'" in *Reclaiming the Old Testament: Essays in Honour of Waldemar Janzen,* ed. Gordon Zerbe (Winnipeg: CMBC Pubns., 2001), 208–34.

[6] Walter Brueggemann calls Genesis 1 "a song of praise for God's generosity" ("The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity," in *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a Post-Christian World,* ed. Patrick D. Miller [Minneapolis: Fortress Pr., 2000], 69). He contrasts living by God's generosity and abundance (blessing) with a mentality of a self-centered consumerism, powered by the myth of scarcity, that drives us to a Pharaoh-like obsession with control that "makes us greedy, mean, and unneighborly" (72). Note also the praise of the creator's bountiful provision for all creatures in Psalm 104 and Job 38–39.

[7] In the canonization process, the faith community of Israel did not include the occupation of the land in the Torah, or Pentateuch (the five books of Moses). Thus the Torah defines true Israelites as "aliens and tenants," those still on the way, with God's ultimate goal still before them. See James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Pr., 1972).

[8] In this central covenant text, God is presented as hosting—entertaining at a meal—the representatives of the people of Israel. It affirms the host-guest relationship between God and Israel in a forceful way. This text is one of the Old Testament's chief anchoring texts for the Lord's Supper instituted by Jesus. The Lord's Supper passages in the New Testament take up covenant language (rare in the New Testament, except in Hebrews) to present Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, as the divine host who invites to the Lord's table. In both testaments, therefore, entering into covenant with God can be expressed as accepting God's invitation and receiving God's hospitality through fellowship at the Lord's table.

[9] Thomas W. Ogletree makes the daring—but in my opinion correct—claim that "to

be moral is to be hospitable to the stranger" (*Hospitality to the Stranger: Dimensions of Moral Understanding* [Philadelphia: Fortress Pr., 1985], 1). See also note 10 below.

[10] I have argued elsewhere that *hospitality* is in many ways a more fitting term for the comprehensive responsibility often designated in Christian circles as *justice;* see Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Pr., 1994), 42–4, 55–7, 209, and throughout.

[11] John Koenig, "Hospitality," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freeman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:301. For the New Testament, John Koenig has traced in detail the ubiquity and central function of hospitality as a theological motif, in *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers As Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress Pr., 1985). Cf. also "Hospitality," *Anchor Bible Dictionary,* 3:299–301. For an in-depth study of one gospel from the vantage point of hospitality, see Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Pr., 2000). Byrne highlights the infancy stories, the visit to Nazareth, the visit in the house of Simon, the story of the good Samaritan, Martha and Mary, the banquet in 14:1–35, the prodigal son, the visit with Zacchaeus, the Lord's Supper, and the visit at Emmaus. The New Testament section of this paper is to a large extent an adaptation of my treatment of the subject in Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics*, 206–9, with special indebtedness to Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*.

[12] See also Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 38–42, 117–19.

[13] See note 3 above.

[14] "Part of the offence [of ignoring strictly drawn religious convention] was the joyous freedom of Jesus' table practice" (Bruce Chilton and J. I. H. McDonald, *Jesus and the Ethics of the Kingdom* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 96; cf. also 96–9). Similarly Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus, a New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 101.

[15] A thoughtful and biblically rooted sample of the growing literature on the practice of Christian hospitality is Michele Hershberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality: Expecting Surprises* (Scottdale: Herald Pr., 1999). Cf. also Fred Bernhard and Steve Clapp, *Widening the Welcome of Your Church: Biblical Hospitality and the Vital Congregation,* rev. ed. (Elgin, Ill.: Andrew Center, 1997).

About the author

Waldemar Janzen learned to value hospitality as a Christian practice during his refugee and immigrant years more than half a century ago, and has in recent years come to see it as a pervasive theme in the theology of both the Old and the New Testaments. Professor of Old Testament, Emeritus, at Canadian Mennonite University, Janzen has written several books, including the Believers Church Bible Commentary on *Exodus* (Waterloo and Scottdale: Herald Pr., 2000), and *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Pr., 1994).

The welcome year of the Lord

Dorothy Jean Weaver

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the welcome year of the Lord."
(Luke 4:14–18 [NRSV, alt.])

The welcome year of the Lord. Welcome. As Luke tells the story, this is the theme of Jesus' entire ministry. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus opens his public ministry (4:14–30) with an inaugural address at the synagogue in his hometown, Nazareth, an address focusing prominently on this theme. And throughout his public ministry Jesus demonstrates the welcome year of the Lord in his interactions with people.

Welcome! It's a heartwarming word, one we love to hear from others. It's a comforting word, a safe word that lets us know we are at home, we are family, we are loved and cared for.

But for Jesus this word must mean more than home and safety and good feelings. By the end of the story in Luke 4, events have

taken a drastic turn. An angry lynch mob has grabbed Jesus, dragged him to the edge of a cliff, and nearly thrown him to his death. Such is the response to Jesus' proclamation of welcome.

If welcome is the theme of Jesus' ministry, we need some major redefining of terms.... At every turn in Luke's Gospel, Jesus is getting himself into trouble.... And all, evidently, in the name of welcome.

How can a word, an entire message of welcome, transform an admiring crowd into a lynch mob in the space of a moment? What does the word mean? And how can it be so dangerous?

One thing is clear. There is more to this word than first meets the eye. If welcome is the theme of Jesus' ministry, we need some major redefining of terms. The evidence is abundant. At every turn in Luke's Gospel, Jesus is getting himself into trouble with other folks, principally the ones with power and control. Jesus is continually pushing the limits, scandalizing the upstanding members of the Jewish community, challenging the status quo, overturning social customs of the day, telling outrageous stories, and doing shocking deeds. And all, evidently, in the name of welcome.

So what is the welcome year of the Lord? And why does Jesus get into trouble for proclaiming it? A search through the Gospel of Luke yields a variety of clues.

Clue #1

The welcome year of the Lord is God's initiative. Welcome is, above all else, what God does for humans. This is God's agenda, God's project. It is the Spirit of the Lord who anoints Jesus for his ministry (4:18), and it is God's welcome that Jesus is sent to proclaim (4:19). A short time after his proclamation in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus announces the same thing to crowds near Capernaum who have come to find him and keep him from leaving: "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose" (4:43). For Jesus and for those who hear him, welcome is above all God's doing.

One key word Luke uses throughout his Gospel to describe God's welcome is *forgiveness*. And, like welcome, forgiveness is a term primarily used to describe what God does for humans. Jesus'

words in the synagogue make this clear. "[The Spirit of the Lord] has sent me," Jesus says, "to proclaim release [forgiveness] to the captives" (4:18). Forgiveness is God's message for the human family. So in pronouncing forgiveness throughout his ministry, Jesus is in fact proclaiming God's act of welcome toward humankind.

Three of Jesus' stories in Luke 15 beautifully illustrate God's welcome and forgiveness. Jesus tells about a shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep behind to go searching for one that got lost (15:4–7). He tells about a woman who meticulously sweeps her entire house to find a lost coin (15:8–10). And he tells about a father who goes to extraordinary lengths to extend a welcome to his two lost sons (15:11–32). These parables are all about God. God is the one who searches for what is lost, God is the one who rejoices in the finding, and God is the one who welcomes home a lost family member.

The welcome year of the Lord is God's initiative.... God is the one who searches for what is lost, God is the one who rejoices in the finding, and God is the one who welcomes home a lost family member.

Welcome is indeed God's act toward humankind. This message is good news. Surely none among Jesus' listeners would have challenged him on this score. So if Jesus had stopped with this message, he might not have gotten into trouble.

But we have more clues to consider.

Clue #2

The welcome year of the Lord is more than simply God's initiative. *The welcome that God is offering to humankind is a welcome that comes through Jesus*. Jesus is God's appointed agent on the ground to carry out God's welcoming project. And the trouble starts here.

God's welcome agenda is above all forgiveness. And Jesus in turn identifies forgiveness as a central piece of his own task. So Jesus goes around proclaiming forgiveness to folks. And every time he does, the result is major trouble.

The story of the paralyzed man whose friends bring him to Jesus (5:17–26) is a case in point. Before he heals the man, Jesus pronounces the forgiveness of his sins (5:20). And this act sets off

an immediate firestorm of protest from Jesus' opponents, the Pharisees: "Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (5:21). Jesus' opponents recognize, along with Jesus, that forgiveness comes from God. But what they don't recognize is that God has entrusted this task to Jesus.

The same thing happens when Jesus attends a banquet at the house of Simon the Pharisee (7:36–50). Here again Jesus announces the forgiveness of sins (7:47, 48). And here again Jesus' opponents challenge him with the words, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" (7:49).

For many who witness Jesus' ministry, the word *welcome,* and the word *forgiveness* along with it, are blasphemous words. In the world of Jesus and his opponents, blasphemy is a serious charge.

The picture is clear on this point: If Jesus would leave the welcoming and forgiving task to God, he might get on just fine. But he doesn't. He can't, because proclaiming forgiveness is precisely what God has commissioned him to do. Welcome may be a good word. But it is not a safe word. For many who witness Jesus' ministry, the word *welcome*, and the word *forgiveness* along with it, are blasphemous words. In the world of Jesus and his opponents, blasphemy is a serious charge, with serious consequences. And if Jesus keeps doing blasphemous things, forgiving sins on God's behalf, Jesus may well have to live with—or die by—those consequences.

The picture is getting more complex, and more dangerous. But we have more clues to examine.

Clue #3

Jesus may already be in big trouble as he makes his way throughout the countryside proclaiming the forgiveness of sins. In the eyes of Jesus' opponents, what comes next is even worse. Not only does Jesus act with unbelievable audacity by pronouncing forgiveness of sins in God's place, but his personal life adds insult to injury and a note of scandal to the whole welcoming project.

Luke's Gospel has no more persistent and no more vivid motif than that of Jesus' scandalous social habits and his disreputable social companions. To begin with, Jesus is a confirmed and self-acknowledged party-goer, with the reputation of "a glutton and a drunkard" (7:34). But it's not just the parties that get Jesus into

trouble. It's the people Jesus parties with. Most of them are folks with bad reputations, people to be avoided at all costs. If Jesus is notorious as a glutton and a drunkard, he also gets in trouble for being "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (7:34).

Take the woman who crashes Simon's party and makes an uninvited and unseemly appearance, exhibiting inappropriate emotions in public and letting her hair down in front of a group of men (7:36–50). Simon the Pharisee knows this woman is a sinner, a woman whose touch is to be strictly avoided. But Jesus allows her to complete her scandalous anointing service. And he even commends her for her actions and pronounces the forgiveness of her sins!

Then we note Jesus' frequent party companions, the tax collectors, those despicable and dishonest collaborators who betray their compatriots by collecting taxes for the enemy, the Roman occupiers. Worse, they skim a handy living off the top to line their own pockets, even as they reduce their neighbors to abject poverty. One can find nothing good to say about these folks. And yet Jesus joins Levi and his crowd for a banquet (5:27–32) and invites himself to the house of Zacchaeus (19:1–10). And the entire community of tax collectors and sinners gathers around Jesus to listen to his teachings (15:1). This is clearly scandalous in the eyes of Jesus' opponents. "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" (5:30), they ask on one occasion. Another time they complain, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them!" (15:2). And if that were not enough, Jesus tells a story in which he commends the righteousness of a tax collector over that of a Pharisee (18:9–14). Outrageous is hardly too strong a word for this kind of social behavior. Jesus has gotten his reputation the old-fashioned way: he has earned it, fair and square.

Luke's Gospel has no more persistent and no more vivid motif than that of Jesus' scandalous social habits and his disreputable social companions.... It's not just the parties that get Jesus into trouble. It's the people Jesus parties with.

Jesus makes no apologies for his scandalous behavior and his disreputable companions. In fact, as he explains it, this

behavior is the essence of welcome. *Jesus' radical and scandalous solidarity with sinners lies at the heart of his ministry*. In Jesus' words, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance" (5:31–32). And showing solidarity with sinners is what it takes to do so. It's that simple.

This is not yet the end of the matter. The scandal increases.

Clue #4

It is bad enough that Jesus goes partying with the scum of Jewish society. But then he takes things one step further and reaches out to foreigners, the people beyond the Jewish community, the enemies. And this is what nearly costs him his life before he even gets started with his ministry.

My ministry, Jesus says in effect, is for all people, and yes, that includes even our enemies. It's when Jesus' townspeople hear this that the lynch mob takes shape.... Now welcome appears to be not merely blasphemous but unpatriotic as well.

It all goes back to that scene in the synagogue at Nazareth (4:14–30). Jesus' neighbors and townspeople gathered at the synagogue are all ready to receive him with open arms as the hometown boy made good. And then Jesus makes a near-fatal blunder in his sermon: "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.' …Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha. And none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian" (4:23–27).

Jesus' hometown folks are happy enough to see him come back, and they would love to see him do great things in their midst. But Jesus' ministry, he tells them, is not just for the homefolks. My ministry, Jesus says in effect, is for all people, and yes, that includes even those people from beyond our borders,

even our enemies. It's when Jesus' townspeople hear this that the lynch mob takes shape. Clearly these good folks of Nazareth are deeply threatened by good news that is for everyone and not just for the hometown folks or the Jewish people. Welcome is not merely a blasphemous word or a scandalous reality. Now welcome appears to be unpatriotic as well.

This is the character of the good news. The good news that Jesus has come to proclaim and the healing and forgiveness that Jesus has come to bring are a gift not merely to the Jewish people, to the hometown and the home country. *This good news, this healing, this forgiveness is a gift to all people, regardless of their hometown or their country of origin. It is for all people, whether they are friends or enemies.* Jesus' words only a short time later make this clear: "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (6:27–28). Jesus' townspeople have not mistaken his meaning. It is hardly surprising that they rise up on the spot and escort him to the nearest cliff. Welcome has become a dangerous word! Jesus should know better!

But the matter does not end here. Now the clues begin to involve Jesus' disciples and his listeners as well.

Clue #5

Welcome may well be, before and above all else, God's act toward humankind. *But God's welcome, the welcome proclaimed and acted out by Jesus in his ministry, calls for response, human response, the response that Jesus calls repentance.* And repentance is a costly response, one that is not cheap or easy.

Repentance is first of all the call to profound humility and absolute honesty before God. Peter's words in the face of the holy are, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" (5:8). The young man who has publicly shamed his father and recklessly thrown away his own life returns home to say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (15:18, 21). And the tax collector that Jesus tells of in his parable stands with his face to the ground and cries out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (18:13). Such transparency and such confession don't come without effort. And the road back home, the road to such radical honesty before God, is surely not easy.

Repentance involves something more. Beyond honesty and confession to God is the call to make things right on the human level, the call to put righteousness (justice) into practice. This response can be costly, in more ways than one. Take, for one example, the case of Zacchaeus, that richest of all rich tax collectors, that short man who lived in Jericho and wanted a look at Jesus when he came through town. The desire to see Jesus cost Zacchaeus dearly: "Look! Half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much" (19:8). This is how Zacchaeus responds to the welcome Jesus extended him.

The flip side of God's welcome agenda is the call for humans to extend God's welcome to others by making right what has been wrong and by acting out the extravagant grace of God in tangible ways.

The flip side of God's welcome agenda, then, is the call for humans to extend God's welcome to others by making right what has been wrong and by acting out the extravagant grace of God in tangible ways. This is welcome as viewed from the human perspective. It is a profoundly challenging call. Why else does that other rich man, the one who wants to inherit eternal life, turn Jesus down when Jesus offers him the answer to his quest (18:18–25)? Living out God's welcome agenda in human relationships is the call to discipleship of the most courageous and costly character.

But we have one final clue.

Clue #6

God's welcome project all comes down to the big celebration! As Luke tells the story, in Jesus' world celebrations and festive meals are always going on. And Jesus is always in the middle of them (5:27–32; 7:36–50; 10:38–42; 14:1–6; 19:1–10). If Jesus is not at a party, he's telling folks about one (14:15–24; 15:11–32). For Jesus this is the meaning of welcome: the big party God is throwing for humankind. At this celebration God welcomes home the one who has been lost and is now found, God kills the fatted calf, God leads the guests into singing, dancing, and uninhibited rejoicing over the return of the lost child (15:11–32). This image sums up what God wants to do with all people everywhere.

Welcome! It is a word filled with challenge and danger, a call to a life beyond imagination, an invitation to a rich and extravagant celebration. Welcome! And let the party go on!

About the author

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Competing visions

Can we keep Isaiah and Ezra in the same Bible, and you and me in the same church?

Gary Harder

The good words *diversity* and *unity* have been much worn recently and provoke a negative reaction in some circles. For some folks diversity feels like a threat to faith and community whereas for other folks unity suggests pressure to conform and enforced agreement. Perhaps both diversity and unity can be a blessing to the church and both are sometimes a curse to the church.

The Scriptures themselves contain a healthy tension between the impulse to exclude people who shouldn't belong in the community of faith, and the startling invitation to some people to enter the community of faith despite their seeming unsuitability.

The theme of this issue of *Vision* may help us as we struggle with the complexities of our differences and similarities. Hospitality. How far does our hospitality extend? Whom do we include in our community and whom do we exclude? Who are the insiders and who are the outsiders? Who belongs in our community of faith and who doesn't belong? To whom do we extend the invitation to enter and who gets the messages that they are not welcome?

I suggest that the Scriptures themselves contain a tension—a healthy tension, I believe—between the impulse to exclude people who shouldn't belong in the community of faith, and the startling invitation to some people to enter the community of faith despite their seeming unsuitability. Can we live with this tension? Can we keep Isaiah and Ezra in the same Bible, and you and me in the same church?

I write these reflections as a pastor. I do not approach the theme or the texts in a scholarly way but make observations from my reading of the texts and from my experience in a diverse church. These thoughts need testing and challenge.

The newly integrated Mennonite Church

In the Mennonite Church across North America we are struggling with a classic dilemma about who belongs inside and who should be outside. Two conflicting impulses, both powerful, seem to be on a collision course in this newly integrated Mennonite Church. Two emphases seek to capture the church's agenda: Will we devote ourselves to becoming a missional church or to becoming a pure church?

On one hand, the powerful new emphasis on being missional makes mission central to who we are and how we organize ourselves. We want to "be mission" rather than only "do mission." We want to reach out to others. We want to be open to outsiders. We want to welcome them in. We want to be hospitable. We want to share our understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ. We want to respond to people in need, people in pain. We want to invite outsiders to become insiders. At the 2001 Mennonite Church Canada Assembly in Abbotsford, B.C., we listened for several days to conference leaders explaining how the conference has been totally restructured. Our conference is being rebuilt on the framework of being a missional church. We enthusiastically approved the new proposed structure.

On one hand, the powerful new emphasis on being missional makes mission central to who we are and how we organize ourselves.... On the other hand, we are paying a great deal of attention to membership rules.

On the other hand, in the new Mennonite Church North America we are paying a great deal of attention to membership rules, to who can be a member and who can't. Some say that we should frame membership guidelines around what unifies us, around common understandings of what it means to be a Mennonite Christian. We should emphasize what we hold in common and the things that hold us together. But others say that we need to be clear about what separates us, about who should not be allowed in: "We have to be a pure church that takes sin very seriously and prevents at least certain kinds of sinners from entering and contaminating the church."

The issue most debated is whether church membership should be denied to non-celibate homosexuals, and whether membership

in the conference should be denied to those churches who accept gay couples. But the thing goes deeper, I think. Can we live with diversity? Can we live together with people who think differently, perhaps believe somewhat differently, interpret the Scriptures differently, and perhaps behave differently?

Can we live with different understandings of how to use the new *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* adopted by the Mennonite Church some half dozen years ago? For some the confession is a helpful summary of what Mennonites generally believe today. For others it has acquired an authority almost like that of Scripture: Any new member of the church and any new pastor or staff person in the conference should have to confess that they believe everything it says exactly as it says it.

So we have two opposing impulses. We want to be missional and reach out and be welcoming and hospitable and invite outsiders to become insiders. But we also want to be pure, careful not to get contaminated or have our faith watered down, so we are wary of allowing in strange people who will inevitably change the church.

The issue of insiders and outsiders is universal. All churches and probably all groups wrestle with it. It was the major issue for the exiles returning home to Jerusalem after seventy years in captivity in Babylon.

The promise of Isaiah 55

Isaiah 55 points to the homecoming from exile in Babylon. The text's invitations to everyone who thirsts to "come to the waters" (v. 1) and to "seek the Lord while he may be found" (v. 6) resonate deeply within me. The exile is ending. The people of Judah can go home. After seventy years in captivity in Babylon they can return to Jerusalem. The prophet, in an outburst of poetic exultation, shouts,

> *For you shall go out in joy,*
> *and be led back in peace;*
> *the mountains and the hills before you*
> *shall burst into song,*
> *and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*
>
> *(Isa. 55:12)*

It is wonderful to be going home. But the euphoria of homecoming and images of an idealized holy city can carry you only so long, until you have to deal with organizing life again in a difficult environment. Reality sets in for the returning exiles. Jerusalem isn't going to be much of a home, at least not at first. It has been mostly destroyed. It is an awful, barren mess, filled with poverty and despair and little rule of law. And strangers are living there, people who moved in to fill the void, occupying abandoned homes. They will probably be upset with exiles who lay claim to land and homes the new occupants have lived in for seventy years now. And most of the originally exiled generation have died, so almost all the returning exiles were born not here but in Babylon. For the returnees Judah is a foreign land, known to them only through the memories and traditions and stories of their elders.

The exiles are now home, and two visionaries, Isaiah and Ezra, try to bridge the 700-mile gap between Babylon and Jerusalem. They each spell out a vision for how to organize their community life here. The two visions have little in common. They are essentially competing visions.

Ezra's vision

After returning "home" to Jerusalem, Ezra, a religious leader, is deeply troubled. When the exiles get back to Jerusalem and try to reform their faith community again after everything has come apart at the seams because of the exile, what Ezra sees is the threat of assimilation with the pagans who have flooded the vacant land. The returning exiles' identity as a people of Yahweh God, as a people of the covenant, is fragile. What do you do when your very identity as a distinct community is threatened by assimilation, when it looks like you might be absorbed into the general mass of pagan society?

Says Ezra in despair: "After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, 'The peoples of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations.… For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands, and in this faithlessness the officials and leaders have led the way.' When I heard this, I tore my garment and my mantle

and pulled my hair from my head and beard, and sat appalled" (Ezra 9:1-3). Ezra prays a long, impassioned prayer of repentance. "O my God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens" (Ezra 9:6). Then Ezra tries to lead his people to repentance. They read the Torah and pledge themselves to follow it. And that leads to action.

Ezra has been shocked to hear that so many Jews, including many leaders, have married non-Jewish wives. He holds a census and discovers that 113 Jews have in fact married alien women (chap. 10). He is deeply troubled and cries out, "Now make confession to the LORD the God of your ancestors, and do his will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives. Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, 'It is so; we must do as you have said'" (Ezra 10:11–12).

Ezra's vision makes sense in his context.... Sometimes you need to look to the outer perimeters of your sense of peoplehood and close the porous boundaries that let in people who will threaten your identity.

A few people oppose Ezra's commands and vision, but the opposition seems to have little impact: "Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levites supported them" (Ezra 10:15). The editor of the book of Ezra offers a description of what Ezra said and did, but doesn't comment positively or negatively. The last verse in the book says simply, "All these had married foreign women, and they sent them away with their children" (Ezra 10:44). They were excluded from the community being newly formed and established in Jerusalem.

Ezra's vision makes sense in his context. The threat of assimilation into a foreign culture and religion is real. The community's sense of identity as a chosen people of Yahweh God is precarious. Sometimes you need to look to the outer perimeters of your sense of peoplehood and close the porous boundaries that let in people who will threaten your identity and your purity.

But to our sensibilities the action taken seems extreme. Send away all the foreign wives with their children? What about the women who married foreign husbands? Not mentioned. Perhaps they were already excluded. The writer of Ezra notes some

opposition to this decree within the community. And Isaiah offers an alternate, even competing, vision.

Isaiah's vision

Isaiah 56 spells out Isaiah's vision for rebuilding the covenant community after the return from exile. Isaiah claims that this vision comes from the Lord.

> *Thus says the LORD:*
> *Maintain justice, and do what is right,*
> *for soon my salvation will come,*
> *and my deliverance be revealed.*
> *Happy is the mortal who does this,*
> *the one who holds it fast,*
> *who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it,*
> *and refrains from doing any evil. (Isa. 56:1–2)*

The vision begins with fundamentals as old as Abraham (Gen. 18:19) and revisited by prophet after prophet. The basis of God's community needs to be "justice and righteousness" (see also Amos 5:7, 24; 6:12). There is an ethical center to being God's people. This command is central to the tradition.

Living ethically and anticipating fuller salvation is rooted in keeping the sabbath. Keeping the sabbath is a sign that you have faith that God is working and you don't have to make it all come out right. You can rest because God, not you, is Lord of the world. You can break the cycle of competitive production and consumption and just rest and worship. The theme of the sabbath will return as a central theme in Isaiah's vision of who should be included in the reconstituted community.

The specifics of Isaiah's vision come with stunning, controversial force.

> *Do not let the foreigner joined to the LORD say,*
> *"The LORD will surely separate me from his people";*
> *and do not let the eunuch say,*
> *"I am just a dry tree."*
> *For thus says the LORD:*
> *To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,*

who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,
I will give, in my house and within my walls,
a monument and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
that shall not be cut off.
And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the sabbath and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant—
these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar. (Isa. 56:3–7)

Who will be included and who will be excluded? Who will be an insider and who an outsider? Isaiah's vision is shockingly inclusive, especially given the context of chaos and confusion and general struggle with the many foreigners who had inhabited Jerusalem. Ezra and others are setting boundaries and putting up fences and purifying membership lists, but Isaiah sets about including people who had always been excluded. Among those he specifically includes are the eunuch and the foreigner, both excluded by Moses himself: "No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD" (Deut. 23:1); "No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants will be admitted to the assembly of the LORD" (Deut. 23:3–6).

Ezra and others are setting boundaries and putting up fences and purifying membership lists, but Isaiah sets about including people who had always been excluded. Among those he specifically includes are the eunuch and the foreigner, both excluded by Moses.

By admitting the eunuch and the foreigner, Isaiah is apparently moving beyond the boundaries set by Moses; he welcomes those Ezra took pains to exclude. Walter Brueggemann suggests that this is the clearest case, perhaps the only case in the entire Old

Testament, in which a Torah provision of Moses is explicitly violated for the sake of the future community.[1] Not until Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said [by Moses]… But I say to you…" (Matthew 5) does another claim explicitly to move beyond what Moses said.

Isaiah offers criteria for determining who should be welcomed into the community. The criteria have accountability built in. Those the LORD includes "keep my sabbaths" and "hold fast my covenant" (Isa. 56:4). These precepts have to do with the center of faith. Keep the sabbath. Acknowledge that your own efforts to make a go of life aren't enough; you need to rest and depend on God who is after all working for you. Hold fast to the covenant. Commit yourself to a relationship of trust in God. Acknowledge the salvation God has brought. Respond by keeping the commandments. That is all, nothing more, though that is quite a lot. It doesn't matter that you are an eunuch or a foreigner or.... What matters is that you keep the sabbath and hold fast the covenant.

The tension

I confess that I am drawn more to the inclusive vision of Isaiah than to the exclusive vision of Ezra, more to the vision of a missional church than to the vision of a pure church. It seems to me that Jesus quotes Isaiah more than he quotes Ezra. In fact, Jesus takes a major quotation from Isaiah 56. After saying that the foreigner who keeps the sabbath and holds fast to God's covenant will be "joyful in my house of prayer," Isaiah notes that

> *My house shall be called a house of prayer*
> *for all peoples.*
> *Thus says the Lord* GOD*,*
> *who gathers the outcasts of Israel,*
> *I will gather others to them*
> *besides those already gathered. (Isa. 56:7–8)*

Jesus quotes this text when he cleanses the temple.

In the Bible Ezra and Isaiah exist side by side, and their respective visions exist side by side in the church today. Should we eliminate one or the other? Or do they each offer a necessary

corrective for the other? Are they meant to exist side by side, in creative tension with each other?

Note

[1] Walter Brueggemann, *Using God's Resources Wisely: Isaiah and Urban Possibility* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Pr., 1993), 56.

About the author

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Hospitality, a practice and a way of life

Christine D. Pohl

Offering welcome is basic to Christian identity and practice. For most of the church's history, faithful believers located their acts of hospitality in a vibrant tradition in which needy strangers, Jesus, and angels were welcomed and through which people were transformed. But for many people today, understandings of hospitality have been reduced to Martha Stewart's latest ideas for entertaining family and friends and to the services of the hotel and restaurant industry. As a result, even Christians miss the significance of hospitality and view it as a mildly pleasant activity if sufficient time is available.

Recognition of the consequences of the loss of this practice has prompted some communities and Christian traditions to attempt to recover a fuller understanding of hospitality. In particular, since the 1930s, Catholic Worker communities have made hospitality central to their vision and practice. Benedictine communities, guided by *The Rule of St. Benedict* and anticipating that they might be welcoming Christ, have opened their doors to strangers since the sixth century and have more recently made their wisdom available to the larger church. The emphasis on both hospitality and community among Anabaptists has provided an important resource for many who recognize that a steady welcome of strangers requires a more communal understanding of the Christian life and its requisite practices.

For many people today, understandings of hospitality have been reduced to Martha Stewart's latest ideas for entertaining family and friends and to the services of the hotel and restaurant industry.

The Bible is rich with accounts of hospitality and with encouragement toward its practice. Whether we open to the story of Abraham, Sarah, and the angels (Genesis 18) or to the account of the widow of Zarephath and Elijah (1 Kings 17), we cannot miss the blessing and mystery that accompany the practice. When

we turn to the law and the prophets, we frequently encounter exhortations to care for the stranger and to open our hearts, homes, and resources to the vulnerable ones. The very identity of the people of God as sojourners and aliens is a deep reminder of our dependence on God as host and of responsibility to deal graciously with literal aliens in our communities.

A quick review of Jesus' life and ministry finds hospitality at the center. Jesus is both guest and host, dependent on others for welcome and startlingly gracious in his welcome to outsiders, seekers, and sinners. Meals were central to Jesus' ministry and a shared meal soon became the center point of Christian worship. Hospitality is a lens through which we can read and understand much of the gospel, and a practice by which we can welcome Jesus himself.

In ancient times, hospitality was viewed as a pillar on which the moral structure of the world rested. It was a highly valued moral practice, seen as an important expression of kindness, mutual aid, neighborliness, and a response to the life of faith. Hospitality addressed the physical needs of strangers for food, shelter, and protection, but also included recognition of their worth and common humanity. It almost always involved shared meals; table fellowship was historically an important way of acknowledging the equal value and dignity of people.

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Based on the biblical teachings, and especially on Jesus' identification with the stranger in Matt. 25:35 and his teaching on the necessity of welcoming "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" to our dinner tables (Luke 14:12–14), a distinctive understanding of hospitality emerged in the first centuries of the church. Leaders insisted that although in conventional hospitality people welcomed family, friends, and influential acquaintances, Christian hospitality ought to focus on welcoming the vulnerable and the poor into one's home and community of faith. Followers of Christ should offer a generous welcome to "the least of these," without

concern for advantage or benefit to the host. Such hospitality would reflect God's greater hospitality that welcomes the undeserving, provides the lonely with a home, and sets a banquet table for the hungry.

Hospitality to needy strangers distinguished the early church from its surrounding environment. Noted as exceptional by Christians and non-Christians alike, offering care to strangers became one of the distinguishing marks of the authenticity of the Christian gospel. Concerns about the needs of strangers and poor people eventually gave rise to hospitals and hospices and these, along with substantial changes in the church itself, eventually resulted in an institutionalization of care which distanced response to basic needs from community. Increasing specialization of care meant that needy people were less frequently incorporated into a local body of believers and more often cared for at a distance by paid workers. Eventually, hospitality came to be understood primarily as welcoming friends and family, the activities of the hospitality industry, and the work of committees that arranged coffee hours at church.

As a result, the best resources that individual Christians and churches have to offer to the most vulnerable people are often least available. Those who are poor, refugees, homeless, have significant disabilities, or are gravely ill are often detached from the connections that give people a safe place in the world. They are without the networks of relations and the various ties to institutions that usually protect us and provide settings in which we can share our gifts.

But the loss of connections need not be so comprehensive to demonstrate the importance of hospitality. Because our society is highly mobile and because families are often deeply fractured, there are many other people who also need welcome into our homes, churches, and communities: elderly people, alienated teens, international students, immigrants, etc. Followers of Jesus have a rich tradition within which to respond, if we could only recognize how important our welcome is.

While concerns about hospitality have implications for public policy, human rights, institutional practices, and social services, the focus of this article will be on home- and church-based hospitality and especially on the characteristics of welcoming

places, gestures that communicate welcome, and the qualities of a good host.

Hospitality as a way of life in the church and the home

Hospitality is not so much a task as it is a way of living our lives and sharing ourselves. Although it involves responsibility and faithful performance of duties, hospitality emerges from a grateful heart; it is first a response of love and gratitude for God's love and welcome to us.

Hospitality will not occur in any significant way in our lives, homes, or churches unless we give it deliberate attention. Because the practice has been mostly forgotten and because it conflicts with a number of contemporary values, we must intentionally nurture a commitment to hospitality. It must also be nurtured because its blessings and benefits are not always immediately apparent. Because hospitality is a way of life, it must be cultivated over a lifetime. We do not become good at hospitality in an instant; we learn it in small increments of daily faithfulness.

Many people who practice hospitality describe it as the best and hardest thing they have ever done. In their experience, its difficulty and its joys lie close together. They find it to be the best thing because of how often they sense God's presence in the practice, because it is filled with unexpected blessings, because it is richly satisfying, and because of the opportunities it provides to become friends with so many different kinds of people.

Hospitality is difficult because it involves hard work. People wear out and struggle with limits. Our society places a high value on control, planning, and efficiency, but hospitality is unpredictable and often inefficient. We insist on measurable results and completed tasks, but the results of hospitality are impossible to quantify and the work of hospitality is rarely finished. Hospitality is also difficult today because of our overwhelming busyness. With already overburdened schedules, trying to offer substantial hospitality can drive us to despair. Most of us have significant responsibilities and hospitality cannot simply be added onto already impossible agendas. To offer hospitality, we will need to rethink and reshape our priorities.

Understanding the church as God's household has significant implications for hospitality. More than anywhere else, when we

gather as church our practice of hospitality should reflect God's gracious welcome. God is our host, and we are all guests of God's grace. However, in individual churches, we also have opportunities to act as hosts who welcome others, making a place for strangers and sojourners.

Churches are crucial settings for nurturing a life of hospitality. In some churches, expanding the hospitality that members offer to one another would be an important first step. Churches that have not nurtured a common life among members will find hospitality to strangers difficult. But churches that do have a rich common life can sometimes overlook strangers in their attention to and care for one another.

Because the practice has been mostly forgotten and because it conflicts with a number of contemporary values, we must intentionally nurture a commitment to hospitality. It must also be nurtured because its blessings and benefits are not always immediately apparent.

Congregations committed to ministering to people in need sometimes overlook their own greatest resource, the fellowship of believers. Churches have generally done better with offering food programs and providing clothing closets than with welcoming into worship people significantly different from their congregations. Because we are unaware of the significance of our friendship and fellowship, our best resources often remain inaccessible to strangers.

Churches, like families, need to eat together to sustain their identity as a community. The table is central to the practice of hospitality in home and church. The nourishment we gain there is physical, spiritual, and social. Whether we gather around the table for the Lord's Supper or for a church potluck dinner, we are strengthened as a community. Meals shared together in church provide opportunities to sustain relationships and build new ones. They establish a space that is personal without being private, an excellent setting in which to begin friendships with strangers.

Jean Vanier, founder of the L'Arche communities, writes that "Welcome is one of the signs that a community is alive. To invite others to live with us is a sign that we aren't afraid, that we have a treasure of truth and of peace to share." He also offers an important warning: "A community which refuses to welcome—

whether through fear, weariness, insecurity, a desire to cling to comfort, or just because it is fed up with visitors—is dying spiritually."[1]

Families shaped by deep Christian faith and strong love for one another can offer an extraordinary gift in welcoming people into their homes. In living their lives in front of their guests, they provide a model of a healthy family, warts and all. They allow people to see what the Christian life looks like in the daily give and take of loving and forgiving. Around a dinner table, family and guests share food and life, and talk of that which gives meaning to their lives.

Similarly, single people who live together in intentional community have important opportunities to welcome those who need a safe place and room for friendships to grow. A household can be modest, with little space and few amenities, but it can be the site for wonderful hospitality. Welcome does not require many resources; it does require a willingness to share what we have, whether food, time, space, or money.

Characteristics of hospitable places

Welcoming places are comfortable and lived in. Even under difficult circumstances, they are settings in which people flourish. Although not necessarily beautifully maintained or decorated, they are cared for. Such places provide the people that inhabit them with shelter and sanctuary in the deepest sense of these words, not only with the shelter of physical buildings but also with the shelter of relationships.

In such places life is celebrated, yet the environment also has room for brokenness and deep disappointments. These places make faith and a hospitable way of life seem natural, not forced. Hospitable settings are often enhanced by the simple beauty of creation, where body and spirit are fed by attention to small details such as attractively prepared and good-tasting food, or flowers from a nearby garden. Hospitable places allow room for friendships to grow. Food, shelter, and companionship are all interrelated in these settings. In such environments, weary and lonely people can be restored to life.

When we have opportunities to design or to construct physical environments, it is important to choose the types of architecture

and physical arrangements that enable hospitality to occur. Inviting entrances, accessible facilities, comfortable furnishings, and adequate lighting communicate a sense of welcome. Designing layouts that are somewhat public yet encourage personal conversation can foster easier interactions among strangers.

Gestures that communicate welcome

Besides sharing food and drink with someone, which is central to almost every act of hospitality, the most important practice of welcome is giving a person our full attention. It is impossible to overstate the significance of paying attention, listening to people's stories, and taking time to talk with them. For those of us who feel that time is our scarcest resource, often this requires slowing ourselves down sufficiently to be present to the person. It means that we view individuals as human beings rather than as embodied needs or interruptions.

Hospitality can be inconvenient and we must be careful not to be grudging in our welcome. It is possible to invite someone in but also to communicate to them "in a thousand small ways" that we have other things we need to be doing, or that we are making a substantial sacrifice to be with them.[2] Obviously we cannot give any one person unlimited amounts of undivided attention, but often we are distracted and some of us pride ourselves on the number of things we can do simultaneously.

We communicate welcome and our appreciation for people when we remember their names, and when we make sure they are oriented to the practices of the group. When people are easily included in celebrations, when we invite participation in the life of the community, and when there is mutual sharing of lives and life stories, gracious welcome is evident. When we give people time and space, and create an environment that is respectful of them, strangers know they have found a safe place.

We also communicate welcome and respect when we allow guests to be gracious, when we value their contributions and invite them to share their gifts and insights. Henri Nouwen noted that "we will never believe that we have anything to give unless there is someone who is able to receive. Indeed, we discover our gifts in the eyes of the receiver."[3]

Qualities of a good host

Good hosts sort out priorities regarding time and resources and work through attitudes toward property and possessions. It is hard to open our lives to others if we are not willing to risk loss and damage to the things we value. Sustained hospitality requires a commitment to a simplified lifestyle and a light hold on possessions.

Good hosts also recognize their own frailties and weaknesses. When we offer hospitality, our faults as well as our strengths are open to scrutiny. Hospitality to strangers, especially when practiced in community, has a way of laying bare our lives and surfacing our inadequacies. Hosts who recognize the woundedness in themselves and their ongoing need for grace and mercy, and yet continue to open their lives to others, find in God their sufficiency.

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Good hosts do not recoil from human suffering; they are willing to be present and share burdens even when they cannot solve problems. They do not insist on quick evidences of success, but rather understand the value of small acts of grace and "little moves against destructiveness."[4]

People who have never experienced need or marginality, or who are uncomfortable with their own vulnerability, often find it easier to be hosts than guests. But the helper must also be able to receive, especially from those who look as if they have little to offer. Gracious hosts are open to the gifts of others and allow themselves to accept and enjoy their expressions of generosity.

Good hosts are, in some way, marginal to the larger society. Often, they choose to distance themselves from prevailing understandings of power, privilege, status, and possessions. However, they are not loners. They locate themselves within households, churches, or intentional communities that cultivate a countercultural identity that nurtures a distinct way of life and a strong commitment to welcome.

Good hosts often face difficulties posed by limited resources. Energy, space, food, time, identity, and the cohesion of family and

community can be strained when we welcome numbers of guests. In offering hospitality, hosts live between the vision of God's kingdom in which there is enough, even abundance, and the hard realities of human life in which doors are closed and locked, and some people are turned away.

So if we are concerned about the needs of strangers, offering hospitality requires both courage and humility. It involves not only a willingness to take some risks in welcoming others, but it also requires the kind of courage that lives close to our limits, continually pressing against the possible, yet always aware of the incompleteness and the inadequacy of our own responses. At the same time, living so close to the edge of sufficient resources increases our dependence on and our awareness of God's interventions and provision.

When hospitality is not practiced widely in the larger society, or when resources are not distributed fairly or adequately, personal hospitality cannot respond to every need. It can, however, meet some needs; it can be a living demonstration of what is possible when people care.

A welcoming place is rich with stories, rituals, and a history. It is never simply a physical space but a place alive with commitments and relationships—a space bounded by particular values and meanings.

Good hosts resist temptations to use hospitality as a means to another end. To use hospitality instrumentally is antithetical to seeing it as a way of life, as a tangible expression of love. When we use hospitality as a tool, we distort it, and the people we welcome know quickly that they are being used. Because today we worry so much about calculating costs and benefits, we readily apply this orientation to hospitality. We ask, sometimes as an expression of good stewardship, "What will it accomplish?" "How is it useful?" Hospitality is rich with blessing, but such benefits come as gifts, and even churches must be wary of efforts to turn hospitality into some form of commercial exchange.

Good hosts allow the wideness of God's mercy and the generosity of God's welcome to frame their thinking about limits and boundaries. Nevertheless, they do struggle with the tensions that surface when seeking to sustain a particular identity and to

welcome strangers. A welcoming place is rich with stories, rituals, and a history. It is never simply a physical space but a place alive with commitments and relationships—a space bounded by particular values and meanings. Boundaries help define what a household, family, church, or community holds precious. The practice of hospitality challenges the boundaries of a community while it simultaneously depends on that community's identity to make a space that nourishes life.

Offering hospitality in a world distorted by sin, injustice, and brokenness will rarely be easy. Good hosts need a combination of grace, spiritual and moral intuition, prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit, the wisdom of a tradition, and skills to assess each situation. Recognizing that their strength and hope come from God and are renewed in community, good hosts are careful to nourish their lives in the Scriptures and in the practices of the church. Good hosts discover the divine mystery in hospitality—that as they welcome strangers, they are themselves beloved guests of God's grace.

Notes

[1] Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth,* rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Pr., 1989), 266–7.
[2] Ibid., 267.
[3] Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 87.
[4] Philip P. Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon, and How Goodness Happened There* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 85.

About the author

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Reflections on hospitality and the missional church

Robert J. Suderman

Scene #1

The day of the family Christmas gathering has finally arrived. After weeks of preparation, grandmother and grandfather are eagerly anticipating the arrival of their guests. The house will be abuzz with activity. Children and grandchildren are coming. Aunts and uncles, cousins and in-laws have also been invited. Some of the younger folks will surely bring special friends, and the family is ready to warmly embrace them as well. This year will include something else. A refugee family, confused and lonely, has connected with the family. They have been invited today, too, and their gratitude will add a note of celebration and meaning to the day.

The smells are predictable. Soups, chicken dinner, fresh garden salads, and lots of pies and other delicious desserts add to the homey and comfortable feeling in the home. Christmas lights are on, the fireplace crackles in the corner. The wind and snow outside only enhance the warmth, comfort, and anticipation inside. All express their gratitude to the hosts, and wish them much joy in their generous acts of hospitality.

Scene #2

In the confusion of civil war, massacres, and unthinkable atrocities, a church community declares its modest facilities a safe haven for all, a sanctuary where those in danger can come to find food, safety, rest, and a listening ear. When the fugitive is a member of one of the guerrilla movements, the military sees the offer of refuge as abetting the enemy. When the fugitive is a member of the military, the guerrillas understand the offer as abetting the oppressor. When the fugitive is a member of the paramilitary movement, the church is labeled a target of war by all sides.

A fugitive cautiously enters the church building. The pastor welcomes him but asks no questions. The man's clothes, weapons, and bearing provide enough hints to enable the pastor's experienced and discerning eye to peg the man's probable allegiance. Despite angry shouting outside, the pastor's attention remains resolutely focused on the stranger. He offers soup, simmering in the kitchen. Bread and water help quiet the visitor's anxiety. Over a cup of coffee, he begins to unravel his complex story as the pastor listens.

The pastor extends an invitation to sleep in the pews that night. Food and warmth will be provided. The church community will gather in a few hours to worship, to sing, and to discern Scripture together in their weekly meeting.

The next day, the guerrilla commanders knock on the door of the church. They tell the pastor that if the church community persists in its offer of sanctuary to the members of the paramilitary groups, the pastor and his family will be killed, and the building will be destroyed. The pastor asks for an opportunity to visit the guerrilla camp, to converse with the leaders about the church's understanding of sanctuary. They accept his offer. He travels a whole day, and talks with the commanders. They begin to see him not as an enemy but as a sincere person dedicated to helping people in need. For the moment they withdraw their threats.

At their regular meeting that week, congregational members hear the stories of sanctuary activities for that month. They are encouraged by the pastor's testimonies. The presence of the fugitive only serves to strengthen the community's resolve to continue its sanctuary ministry. They determine to extend hospitality to the many others seeking refuge. They pray for the safety of all the members, the pastor, and especially for the many fugitives in search of refuge.

Hospitality: A closer look

As Canadians and Americans, we use the word hospitality primarily in the sense revealed by the first scene. Hospitality is the careful art of hosting. It means providing warmth, embrace, and pleasant surroundings to friends and relatives. It is making acquaintances feel at home not only in our place but in our presence. Hospitality is observing Martha Stewart's exacting

standards for entertaining. It is the art of properly hosting colleagues, at times in more formal settings, at times in informal get-togethers.

Even a cursory glance at the word *hospitality* will indicate that this common understanding is missing something. The root word of hospitality is hospital. A hospital is an establishment for healing. When something is broken and in need of repair, when we are ill and require therapeutic treatment, we go the hospital. A hospital is a place of restoration, a place for reconciling what is with what is meant to be. Hospitality also has the same root as hospice, a word that, in common use, means accompanying someone to death's door. Hospice workers commit themselves to hospitality as they accompany a dying person as far as they can humanly go. Hospice care also involves carefully and deliberately allowing death to come. It means making people as comfortable as possible even as they move inevitably towards death.

The usual meaning of hospitality in our context is far from the rich possibilities it embraces in its original language, and from its biblical meanings. Hospitality is the provision of safe spaces for strangers and enemies to learn from each other.

In the Latin roots of the word we find additional meaning. Hospitality (L. *hostia, hostis, hoste, hospit, hospes*) implies relationships with strangers and enemies. It can be related to the host of the Eucharist and, by extension, to suffering for friends, strangers, and enemies. When related to numbers (an army as a host), it usually implies a hostile environment, a potential clash of enemies. The Latin word for guests also suggests that the guests may be strangers or even enemies of the host.

When we look at the Greek New Testament, we begin to see an even deeper level of meaning. The words most often translated as hospitality come from roots of *filo-xenia* (literally: love of strangers). On closer examination, however, it is clear that the word for stranger (*xenia*) in a number of contexts has a stronger meaning. It refers to a stranger who represents danger, an enemy (Acts 17:18; Matt. 25:35, 38). It can also refer to the host (Rom. 16:23) and the guest (Philem. 22). It is a rich concept: first, because guest and host are somehow interchangeable; second,

because guest and hosts are strangers to each other; and third, because these strangers could inject danger into the relationship. Love of strangers is therefore openness to enemies. As guest and as host, we have a reciprocal mission to each other. When Jesus broke bread with the disciples he met on the Emmaus road, in their lodging, he actually became the host and they the guests. This demonstrates another aspect of *xenia:* unexpected and surprising things may happen, because when guest and host connect, often as strangers, sometimes as enemies, we cannot predict the results.

When we see that God wants us to be a hospitable people, we understand this in the sense of introducing new alternatives, new possibilities, into our relationships with strangers and enemies.

We do not need to go further in examining the word itself. Suffice it to say, the usual meaning of hospitality in our context (see scene #1) is far from the rich possibilities it embraces in its original language, and from its biblical meanings. Hospitality is the provision of safe spaces for strangers and enemies to learn from each other. It is similar to the Old Testament provision for sanctuary, a holy space (L. *sanctus*). This is a safe place commissioned by God for all who seek refuge and safety. It is not difficult to see that this sense of hospitality underlies scene #2 above. And when we see that God wants us to be a hospitable people, we understand this in the sense of introducing new alternatives, new possibilities, into our relationships with strangers and enemies. God's people demonstrate what incarnation means: injecting divine substance into the same darkness that rejects it. The Word comes to its own, though its own do not receive it (John 1:11). Hospitality suggests moving into darkness with life-giving alternatives even when that darkness rejects this presence.

The missional church

How is hospitality thus understood related to the broader vision for a missional church? The connections are not difficult to make.

At the heart of missional ecclesiology is the extraordinary affirmation that transcendence has become immanent, that God has surrendered divine purpose to human hospitality. God has not only moved into enemy territory, God has won over a remnant of

the enemy with sacrificial love and has enlisted this remnant as co-workers in the divine plan for healing, restoring, and reconciling the enemy. This process subverts the intentions of the enemies. While the norm in our world seems to be hostility to God's purposes, refusal to extend human hospitality to God's presence (e.g., the manger and the cross), God's intentions are not thwarted. As divine guest in our midst, God becomes the host, inviting strangers and enemies into the alternative camp. God is recruiting for healing and saving purposes. And God has invited and empowered a chosen people to participate in recruiting others into this healing alternative.

This recruitment is not simply one of inviting people into someone else's reality. It is an invitation to enter, to experience, and then to extend the hospitality of God's community. This invitation injects light into darkness; it is a willingness to remain hospitable within a context of hostility and rejection.

At the heart of missional ecclesiology is the extraordinary affirmation that transcendence has become immanent, that God has surrendered divine purpose to human hospitality.

In a missional church, ecclesiology is missiological, and all missiology is ecclesial. The essence and character of the church (ecclesiology) are inseparable from the purpose and activity of the church (missiology). The purpose of the church is not divorced from the being of the church. The church defines its own purpose according to the purposes of God. God's activity is the framework for the purpose of the church.

This means that we need to discern, as well as we can, what God is doing, and how this activity flows out of the very character of God. When we understand this, our purpose as God's people is clarified. Our task is to do what God is doing.

We can identify a number of important characteristics of God, and therefore the church:

Being missional is being incarnational. We have already noted that the extraordinary characteristic of the Christian faith is that our transcendent God enters into human history. In one sense, God is a guest of human history; in another, God is host of this history. As guest, God takes initiatives that are rejected more

often than not; as host, God constantly infuses hope through new alternatives. In both roles, God is often seen as a stranger and sometimes as an enemy. We think we know best, and we often experience God's infusion of alternatives as an unwelcome shock to our preferred way of doing things.

Being incarnational is being hospitable. While God's desire to relate to the enemy is most clearly seen in God's self-revelation through Jesus Christ, we witness this intention in other places as well. The rich text from Romans 5, often used to invite people to an individualistic and internal faith in the saving power of Jesus, is actually a profound statement about how seriously God's incarnational and hospitable intentions are to be understood: "But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners [enemies] Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

God's initiative does not depend entirely on the hospitality of the human host. While we were sinners God initiated the reconciling work through Christ. Nor did God's initiative ignore human anti-hospitality: Christ died because of the inhospitable reception. Such incarnational hospitality is the foundation of our purpose as a peace church. It reflects God's character, ethic, and missional purpose.

As guest, God takes initiatives that are rejected more often than not; as host, God constantly infuses hope through new alternatives. In both roles, God is often seen as a stranger and sometimes as an enemy.

Being hospitable is being hopeful. The possibility of being a different kind of host and a different kind of guest, in the midst of inhospitable conditions, is the foundation of hope for a broken and weary world. God's sanctuary movement inspires similar sanctuary in the violent country of Colombia (see scene #2 above), and so injects hope into seemingly hopeless situations. Hope continues to be unseen to the naked eye, but is dramatically real to the eye of imagination. It is so real that the church begins to act according to the potential of what it hopes for. When the church does so, hope take on flesh, it is incarnated, and it becomes a new possibility.

Conclusion

When we actively imagine the possibility of all God's people being incarnational, hospitable, and hopeful in all their activities,

and in the whole world, we begin to see the potential witness of a missional church. God has led and is leading the way. Jesus Christ, as the incarnation of God, demonstrates an alternative road of hospitality to enemies, strangers, the outcast, and family. The vulnerability of God's Word becoming flesh, in the midst of enemies, is the key to the church's understanding of its missional nature. The Holy Spirit provides the discernment and accompaniment for the church to live out its mission of being guest and host in a broken world.

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About the author

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Church planting strategies and Anabaptist values
A British perspective

Stuart Murray

One of the practices that distinguished sixteenth-century Anabaptists from the Reformers—and which infuriated the Reformers—was church planting. While the Reformers concentrated on reforming existing churches, the Anabaptists became convinced that reform was inadequate and that it was crucial to establish new churches. These new churches would be believers churches rather than territorial churches, free from state control, and committed to mission. They would be churches characterized by multivoiced worship, the exercise of church discipline, mutual aid, truth telling, evangelism, and nonviolence.

Anabaptists planted hundreds of new churches. Although these new congregations shared fundamental values and convictions about the nature of the church, they were diverse in style and ethos. Some were communitarian, supporting missionaries who traveled across Europe planting new churches; some were charismatic, stirred by visions and enjoying exuberant worship; some were more sober, devoted to biblical study. Relationships among these churches varied; some were characterized by great warmth and some by sharp disagreement. Another feature these new churches shared was that they were unauthorized, and thus subject to persecution and closure. Church planters were in particular danger of arrest, imprisonment, torture, and execution. They regarded church planting as vital, but it was costly.

Nearly five centuries later church planting is less costly, but it may again be vital for the mission of God in western culture. The practice of church planting still infuriates some church leaders, who regard it as an unhelpful dilution of resources, a hindrance to ecumenical relationships, or an opportunity for empire building. But these are minority voices in a context where most denominations have endorsed church planting as a significant aspect of mission in a post-Christendom society.

But as people who subscribe to the values expressed in the tradition that emerged from the sixteenth-century Anabaptist church planting movement, how do we assess contemporary church planting initiatives? Can we endorse their values and strategies? Could we make contributions from the Anabaptist tradition that might enhance such initiatives? At the least, if we plant churches in contemporary society, will we do this distinctively because of the values of our Anabaptist heritage?

Different forms of church planting

We can identify four different forms of church planting:

Pioneer planting is the practice of establishing churches in areas previously unreached by the gospel but now being evangelized. Wherever missionaries have advanced geographically, this kind of church planting has occurred. This type of church planting is the least controversial among Christians.

Replacement planting refers to the practice of establishing churches in areas where churches had been planted but no longer exist, because of factors such as persecution or decline. Many regions where churches had flourished in previous generations now need to be re-evangelized. This too is widely accepted.

Sectarian planting refers to the practice of establishing more churches in areas where churches already exist in order to express and embody distinctive doctrinal, spiritual, or ecclesiological convictions. Although "sectarian" can be used sociologically without the negative overtones it often carries, this form of church planting is highly controversial.

Saturation planting refers to the practice of establishing more churches in areas where churches already exist in order to enhance the ability of the churches to engage in mission within these areas. The new churches may differ in certain ways from existing churches, but these differences tend to be pragmatic rather than ideological.

Sixteenth-century Anabaptist church planting was sectarian in the sense set out above. Although Anabaptists were deeply committed to evangelism and discipling new believers, they also planted new churches—not because there were too few churches in Europe, but because Anabaptists were dissatisfied with the kinds of churches around them.

Contemporary church planting

The contemporary western church planting movement appears to be concerned primarily with replacement and saturation church planting. New churches are planted to replace those that are closing and to increase the density of churches per capita of population. This movement is unusually ecumenical and cooperative, when compared to most previous church planting initiatives. Through interdenominational congresses, citywide strategic consultations, and local networking, proponents attempt to work together. Sectarian and competitive elements, though present, are not prominent. Discussion concentrates on the number and location of new churches needed, methods of accomplishing this goal, and practical concerns about finance, personnel, leadership, and accountability. Little is said about the kind of churches that will be planted beyond general phrases such as "living, growing, Christ-centered congregations."[1]

We should not underestimate the impact of the church planting movement on the development of a grassroots ecumenicity that promises to achieve more practical progress towards the unity of the church than decades of denominational consultations have produced.

Church planters display positive features of this ecumenical spirit. If the goal is to see as many churches planted in as short a time as possible, cooperation is vital and discussion about the kinds of churches to be planted may hinder this. And there may be other benefits. We should not underestimate the impact of the church planting movement on the development of a grassroots ecumenicity that promises to achieve more practical progress towards the unity of the church than decades of denominational consultations have produced.

But if church planting is not just about numbers, if it raises vital questions about the kinds of churches needed for the post-Christendom and postmodern environment of the third millennium C.E., if it invites creative thinking about the priorities of the church and the structures needed to facilitate these, then perhaps the lack of discussion about the kinds of churches being planted is too high a price a pay for this cooperation. While we will not want to encourage sectarian attitudes, we may be

concerned to reflect more carefully than many church planters do on questions of ecclesiology.

But the pressure to plant many churches quickly and the concern not to put cooperation at risk by asking too many questions about the kinds of churches being planted have hindered the church planting movement from generating many such theological insights. Most new churches are similar to existing churches. There has been some experimentation, but often this relates to evangelistic methods and styles of worship rather than engaging with deeper questions about the nature and purpose of the church. Such experimentation is rarely energized by theological debate and discovery.

Anabaptist contributions to ecclesiology

Is it possible to ask questions about the kinds of churches being planted without jeopardizing the unity and cooperation that has characterized recent church planting initiatives? Might those who trace their spiritual roots to the Anabaptist sectarian church planting movement of nearly five centuries ago have some contributions to make on these issues? Is there an Anabaptist way of planting churches? Are there Anabaptist values that can help us discriminate among the many church planting strategies currently on offer?

Anabaptists might encourage church planters to remember that church planting is not just about *more* churches. It is about the renewal of the church and the development of new ways of being church that are biblically rooted and contextually appropriate.

Perhaps the fundamental Anabaptist contribution to contemporary church planting initiatives is simply to encourage deeper and more radical reflection on the kinds of churches that should be planted. Whether or not all of these churches ultimately embody values and practices that Anabaptists would endorse, they will be healthier and more likely to engage effectively in mission and ministry if they have emerged from a process of questioning about the kind of churches they should be.

There is evidence that those who most strongly opposed Anabaptist principles and practices in the sixteenth century were nevertheless stimulated by this irritating movement to think more

deeply about the nature of the church than they would otherwise have done.

In the sixteenth century, the Anabaptists reminded the Reformers that reformation was not just about theology, but included issues of ecclesiology. Today, Anabaptists might encourage church planters to remember that church planting is not just about *more* churches. It is about the renewal of the church and the development of new ways of being church that are biblically rooted and contextually appropriate. Engagement with biblical teaching and careful reflection on the cultural context within which new churches are being planted take time and may result in fewer churches being planted. But those that are planted will have more secure foundations and greater potential for sustainable witness.

By way of illustration, here are a few questions that I as a British church planting strategist suggest the Anabaptist tradition might pose for contemporary church planters:

- What understanding of the nature and purpose of the church undergirds your church planting strategy and expectations?
- What principles will you build into the new church in relation to leadership, accountability, and church discipline?
- Through whom will you expect the Holy Spirit to speak and direct the church?
- What expression of the gospel and what forms of evangelism are appropriate for encouraging radical discipleship rather than need-oriented congregations?
- What missiological principles will undergird your practice of baptism and the Lord's Supper?
- How large and how quickly can the new church grow without jeopardizing its community life? Is numerical church growth always a sign of health?
- In what ways will this new church be "good news to the poor"? How might the challenging but liberating principles of Jubilee and *koinonia* be applied?
- Will the focus of this new church be on the church or the kingdom of God? How will a church-centered mentality be averted?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of owning a

church building and of planning towards this?
- How might issues of peace and justice be built into the foundation of the new church rather than being tacked on at a later stage?

So an Anabaptist contribution to the contemporary church planting movement might be to urge deeper reflection on the nature and ethos of the churches being planted. Mennonite and Brethren church planters may be encouraged to draw more explicitly on their own roots in order to establish churches that are as radical in contemporary society as the Anabaptist churches were in the sixteenth century. Church planters working in other denominations may be invited to consider Anabaptist perspectives on church and mission as they explore new ways of being church in a changing culture.

Anabaptist contributions to church planting strategy

But the Anabaptist tradition might also offer helpful perspectives on church planting strategies, as well as on the kinds of churches being planted. There is evidence in Britain that church planting has slowed down as churches with the resources and energy to plant a "daughter" church discover that this is a major investment and not one to be repeated often. There is evidence, too, that few new churches are being planted where the church is weak, especially in inner city areas.

Are there ways of planting churches that will make an impact in areas with the greatest social needs and lowest church membership? Are there ways to start new congregations that will enable churches to sustain a church planting strategy over a long period without the drain on their personnel and finances that "mother-daughter" church planting involves?

No one method will suit every situation, but an alternative way of planting a new church is to use a small, self-funding team. Quite small churches can initiate such church planting ventures, larger churches can send out several teams, or teams can be built with members from several churches. The teams may operate financially on a "faith" basis, praying for the resources they need, or some members of the team can be released and supported financially for pioneer evangelism and pastoral ministry through

shared finances with team members who are in paid employment. Urban Expression, a church planting initiative in London, operates in this way and is rooted in Anabaptist values.[2]

This method is not new; it has an honorable history that includes the apostolic teams of the New Testament, the Celtic missionary monks who re-evangelized Britain after the collapse of the Roman Empire, and the pioneering work of many missionary organizations. It is also a method deeply congruous with Anabaptist values. Unlike the Reformers, who operated with a one-person ministry model and insisted that all ministry must be parish-based, the Anabaptists recognized people with itinerant ministries and released them, individually and in teams, to evangelize and plant churches. If congregations are to be established in areas where churches are weak but mission opportunities are great, similar flexibility and radical simplicity will be needed.

Simple living and economic sharing… have the potential to release the resources needed for teams of church planters. Community living can release significant finance for mission.

What kind of gifts and training would church planting team members need? How would teams be funded? To whom would they be accountable? These and other practical questions will need to be carefully considered if this is to be recovered as an effective strategy for planting new churches. The Anabaptist tradition offers models and practices that may be helpful, although they will need to be adapted to the contemporary situation. Among these is recognition of apostolic ministry that is different from a settled ministry. Denominations that want not only to engage in church planting but to become missionary movements would do well to look afresh at the neglected apostolic ministry that has been recovered by several church planting movements, including sixteenth-century Anabaptism. Anabaptism also emphasized simple living and economic sharing, which have the potential to release the resources needed for teams of church planters. Community living can release significant finance for mission, as our teams in London have discovered. And Anabaptism has a long tradition of accountability in relationships, which could offer guidelines for the oversight of contemporary church planting teams.

Small teams are a riskier form of church planting than methods where a large team is used and a "mother" church exercises supervision. But an advantage of this method of church planting is that the team has greater freedom and incentive to be creative. Operating in relatively unchurched areas encourages reflection on why churches have not been established or have not flourished there. Perhaps the relative rarity of this method of church planting is a further reason for the lack of ecclesiological creativity among church planters. What emerges may or may not be Anabaptist, but this method of church planting has strategic importance if church planting is going to reach beyond suburbia to make an impact on many levels of society.

If we are to plant Anabaptist churches, we must return finally to the question of definition. What are Anabaptist churches? If they were anything like the Anabaptist churches planted in the sixteenth century, they would certainly not be uniform.

What about Anabaptist churches?

A question the UK Anabaptist Network has often been asked is whether we plan to plant Anabaptist churches in Britain. We have given various responses: that the network is too loosely-knit and diverse to be an organization capable of implementing such a policy, that our main concern is to provide resources for Christians who are and remain members of existing local churches, that Anabaptism as such is not a denomination and so it is not easy to know what an Anabaptist church would look like. Rather than planting new churches and adding another denomination to the already crowded ecumenical scene, our hope has been that Anabaptist values might contribute to the reformation and renewal of Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, and many other kinds of churches.

Christians from these traditions are already drawing on Anabaptist perspectives. Some churches are developing new patterns of worship, new styles of leadership, new commitments to peace witness, new understandings of community, and new forms of mission as a result of their interaction with Anabaptist ideas and values. Why plant new churches rather than working for renewal?

This was the question Anabaptists faced in the sixteenth century. We need not agree with their answer, and our response in a different context need not be the same as theirs. They faced monolithic Catholic or Protestant state church systems, where reformation and renewal were slow and fraught with difficulties. We face a bewildering array of churches and denominations, many of which are believers churches and have already, wittingly or unwittingly, been influenced by the Anabaptist tradition. Encouraging further engagement with this tradition may be the most sensible course of action.

But is this a defensible position? Anabaptism was a church planting movement. Can we recover and advocate Anabaptist perspectives without planting new churches? The early Anabaptists were convinced that church planting was crucial if they were to build the kinds of communities they believed were envisaged by Jesus. The state churches were not prepared to face certain issues. Are there questions that most churches today will not address? What are the sticking points? How radical can the renewal of existing church structures be?

Perhaps this is not an either/or choice. It may be possible for the network to continue providing resources for existing churches while also planting new churches. In an environment where new churches are being planted by many denominations, it may be appropriate to establish new churches that embody Anabaptist values. These can both contribute to the contemporary concern for replacement and saturation church planting and provide opportunities to explore what a contemporary British Anabaptist church might look like. Creative interaction between these new churches and longer-established churches that are drawing on Anabaptist ideas could be mutually beneficial. The new churches may be free to experiment in ways that would be unrealistic in existing churches. The older churches have traditions of their own that will enrich and guide emerging churches.

But if we are to plant Anabaptist churches, we must return finally to the question of definition. What are Anabaptist churches? It is easier to say what Anabaptist churches would not be. They would not be attempts to restore some mythical sixteenth-century congregational pattern. They would not necessarily be modeled on contemporary churches that have

historic Anabaptist roots, though they would surely draw on the experience of these. And, if they were anything like the Anabaptist churches planted in the sixteenth century, they would certainly not be uniform.

All we have done thus far is to attempt to summarize the core values at the heart of the Anabaptist movement in the UK.[3] Our hope is that these values, rather than any strategy or methodology, may be helpful to existing churches and church planters in Britain as they grapple with the challenges of contemporary culture. And perhaps this is the primary contribution of Anabaptism to church planting: to underscore the significance of values rather than techniques, quality rather than quantity, relationships rather than programs.

Notes

[1] From the mission statement of the UK Challenge 2000 movement.
[2] For details, visit the web site: www.urbanexpression.org.uk.
[3] For these core values and more information about the UK Anabaptist Network, visit the web site: www.anabaptistnetwork.com.

About the author

Stuart Murray works as a consultant and trainer with emphasis on church planting. An associate lecturer at Spurgeon's College in London, he is also involved in the Anabaptist Network, a growing ecumenical network of people in the UK drawn together around their common discovery of Anabaptist history and values. In 2001, Herald Press published his book, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations*.

Dare to become a global church

Gilberto Flores

For early Christian believers, following Jesus' imperatives to "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15) and "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19) entailed facing certain risks and cultural difficulties. The disciples had to live through the painful experience of change to understand the scope of the gospel. They also had to recognize the limitations of their cultural boundaries. The church that obeys the commission to go to every part of the world will always experience weakness and strength: weakness because it is made vulnerable by each encounter with a new reality, and strength because it is enriched with each response to a new culture.

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The other Mennonites

Cornelius receives the gospel. An Ethiopian is baptized. A church grows in Samaria. Christian communities flourish in Asia Minor among people of Greek ancestry. Antioch and Ephesus become missionary centers. The "others" have become part of God's family and heirs of the same commitment to mission.

What does this mean for Mennonites? After the missionary fervor of the early Anabaptists waned, Mennonites turned inward. Some churches stayed alive only by the grace of biological growth. When they eventually decided to open the curtains and unlatch the windows, they found many people were open to the gospel. These others embraced Anabaptist faith with enthusiasm and devotion.

However, these new Mennonites are children of a different reality. They live in different conditions, their search reflects other

questions and worries. Violence, poverty, lack of opportunity, and political instability mark the experiences of many of these Mennonites. Their faith and practice, ethics and values often differ from that of their spiritual parents. Brothers and sisters of these cultures take on the life-giving values of the kingdom of God: active pacifism, a prophetic voice, involvement with the social realities of the communities in which they develop their ministry, a productive evangelism, and dialogue with other faiths. Theirs is a spirituality that walks in the profane, a faith that becomes flesh in order to become the bread of life.

The consequences of this kind of faith have been both good and bad. These Mennonites have had an impact on society and have been heard by governments. They have contributed to peace talks and lived the ecumenical experience. They have been persecuted and suffered violence and death.

Perhaps this explains why Mennonites of the South feel closer to their Anabaptist ancestors who suffered persecution than to Mennonite churches in North America today. Mennonites in the South have had fruitful discussions about the Bible and Anabaptist history. The conversation with North Americans has been mainly a business conversation, and an administrative relationship. This uncomfortable situation has many asymmetries:

- political power in the North, political weakness in the South;
- economic power in the North, weakness in the South;
- a church that supports the system in the North, a church in conflict with the system in the South;
- a church inside the dominant culture in the North, a marginal church in the South;
- a church that does not evaluate itself critically in the North, a church that is evaluated critically by the South;
- an established church in the North, a church in progress in the South.

The church in North America has been a blessing to the South, but these unresolved asymmetries frighten the South even as we walk together.

North American tribalism

Mennonite identity in North America has strong connections with tribal paradigms. This identity reflects strong family ties and European Anabaptist inheritance, in both a genealogical and a

cultural sense. In the North, one speaks about frugal Mennonite lifestyle, Mennonite dress, Mennonite negotiation styles (involving countless committees). North American Mennonite identity is evident in musical traditions and in resistance to contemporary worship.

Mennonite identity also has roots in monastic traditions: simplicity and asceticism are not cultural in a social sense but express the spirituality that drives the Mennonite church and becomes Mennonite culture. Emphases such as peace, justice, and service are part of the traditional Mennonite profile but are not reflected in the church's walk.

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Mennonites of others countries cannot appeal to their Anabaptist genealogy; their identity has come from different paths. Their walk as a church has forced them to rethink Mennonite theology and the nature of the church. This is why these brothers and sisters often appeal to diverse traditions of sixteenth-century Anabaptism to confirm their ideas and actions. Perhaps the best place to reread Anabaptist history and theology now is in the South. North American Mennonites, with some exceptions, have turned Anabaptism into an honorable but archaic subject to study in seminary.

In the South, Anabaptism sets a course for the practice of faith in daily life; it becomes an evangelization that disturbs the social conscience. Mennonites in the South use different words to name traditional emphases: they express peace in an aggressive way, and they describe themselves not as pacifists, but as peacemakers. They view solidarity with the poor as a signal of justice, and evangelization is a political voice in certain circumstances. Hans Denck, Dirk Philips, and other rebels of the Anabaptist movement become notable figures. These radical reformers emphasized conversion of the sinner, and they invited new believers to become part of the great project of God.

Worship should be a celebration of life, not a ceremony that came from the North. Both sides of the world agree on a common

faith, with roots in the gospel of Christ, and in the sense of a global family. They need each other to inspire change and they can support each other in doing better the things that concern faith and mission in the world. Their Anabaptist legacies, inherited from the same source but interpreted in different ways, should inspire unity. Asymmetries that cannot be changed immediately can be softened, and we can seek to abandon ways of working that have created these asymmetries.

What is a global church?

The term *globalization* is used to indicate a world economically united for production and consumption. Globalization connects the owners of the economies of poor countries with those of rich countries and allows greater control of unstable countries. The poor are pawns that serve the global economy.

Why should the Mennonite church in the North move toward globalization? How do we do it without following the oppressive patterns of the system within which the church exists? Globalization for the church involves generating hope in a world that gets smaller and at the same time more complex and asymmetric, a world where contradictions make social communities more defensive and skeptical.

For the church, globalization means being vulnerable in order to learn from others, and at the same time teaching the best we have. It means listening to what the Spirit is saying through different voices. It means cooperating, being accountable to others, and being flexible organizationally, as demanded by relationships with partners who live in a world where revolutionary changes occur from day to day.

Globalization means searching for common objectives with the church in the South, not fulfilling needs that North Americans perceive, as has been the custom. Globalization means working in a spirit of humility and adopting approaches that depart from previously established responses. Humility does not use the power of money, education, or race to set the terms of the relationship. Humility understands that others also have vision for a global church.

Mennonite World Conference is making efforts to value the resources of a global Mennonite church, but the United States

and Canada continue to be great islands. The church in North America has given the impression that it can survive without other Mennonites. It believes it has the resources and knows how to use them. Though this belief is only partially true, it influences the way Mennonites around the world see the church in the North.

A globalization worthy of the church must ensure that the maturity of the church in other parts of the world is recognized. It should ensure greater fluidity in exchanging resources that already exist in all the churches. Churches outside North America can make valuable contributions in evangelism, church planting, opening missionary borders. They also offer examples of suffering and witness for peace. The church in North America can offer education, opportunities for service, economic resources, and global strategies to help the other churches understand globalization and bring a systematic approach to church work.

The churches in the South want a relationship with the churches of the North and the North has sent administrators. The churches in the South have asked not to be used as folkloric curiosities or missionary trophies; they demand to be seen as adults in a common faith.

Listening to the church in the South has always been difficult for the North. The same missionary errors continue to be made, with the North's insistence that dependence and subsidy are essential to mission. The churches in the South want a relationship with the churches of the North and the North has sent administrators. The churches in the South have asked not to be used as folkloric curiosities or missionary trophies; they demand to be seen as adults in a common faith.

A new incarnation

Globalization favors a new incarnation of the church in the world. The church is in the world as a witness of the kingdom; its identity is missional. Globalization is not a matter of sending missionaries. People who come as missionaries do not come from the North or from the South. They come to a local church and that congregation introduces them in the real context where the church is incarnated. The local church helps that missionary to

embrace the new realm with the same passion Christ shows us from the cross. In the theological sense of mission they are no longer strangers, but part of the missional act of the church that receives them.

I believe that we need to remove the appearance that the church's globalization is a purely functional or structural process. Instead, we need to think more theologically and courageously about being a global church.

About the author

Gilberto Flores is a Guatemalan pastor and church leader who now serves in Newton, Kansas, as Denominational Minister in the Office of Ministerial Leadership of the Mennonite Church, USA. He brings cross-cultural experience and a global perspective to North American churches and ministry. This essay is adapted from his address to the annual assembly of Mennonite Church Canada, Lethbridge 2000.

Welcoming the Muslims in our midst

Brice Balmer

In the past ten years, the Muslim community in the Waterloo region has increased significantly as refugees have resettled here and Muslims have found vocational opportunities in businesses and at local universities. Mennonite congregations—along with other churches and federal government programs—welcomed the refugees by sponsorship. We were the "hosts."

House of Friendship, a large multiservice community organization begun by Mennonites and now enjoying major support from the larger Christian community, serves approximately 30,000 people per year. During the past five years, the House of Friendship staff have noticed a significant increase in Muslim participants in our community centres and at our Emergency Food Hamper Program. We have adapted as much as possible by trying to find out which food products have pork and by changing Christmas programs to January potlucks. During the past several years, we have been aware of the month of Ramadan, which has fallen close to Advent and Christmas.[1] Staff are asking how we can celebrate secular and religious holidays for all the program participants.

Henri Noewen has reminded us that hospitality is a movement away from hostility to a place where guest and host are indistinguishable. Power differentials decrease as the guest changes the dynamic of the relationship by helping the host.

Henri Nouwen has reminded us that hospitality is a movement away from hostility to a place where guest and host are indistinguishable. Power differentials decrease as the guest changes the dynamic of the relationship by helping the host, having essential knowledge the host needs, or introducing the host to new people and customs. Though the supporting congregations and the House of Friendship have not been hostile toward Muslims, few understand Muslim theology and practices. How can

Canadian staff interpret the variety of Muslim cultures as participants come from Somalia, Jordan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries? Staff and other Canadian hosts need Muslim guests to explain customs and theology.

At the House of Friendship Emergency Food Hamper Program, most food is donated by businesses, churches, schools, and community groups. When participants requested Halal (lawful) food, staff did not know where it could be obtained. We could prepare vegetarian hampers, which meet Muslim spiritual and nutritional requirements, but we had no Halal meat. We have since learned that many products have preservatives and that some prepared food products have added ingredients. We did not know that some gelatin products contain banned substances. Who could tell us how to classify foods, so Muslim food hamper recipients could follow Halal? Who would donate Halal meats?

As chaplaincy director, I began to develop relationships within the Muslim community in the Waterloo region. My first calls to the mosque were futile, as we had no obvious relationship to build on. So I began with a Muslim restaurant owner and an acquaintance who taught at the university. They opened doors to the leadership at the Sunni mosque.[2] At a community board meeting, a fellow board member was Muslim and directed me to the Shi'a imam (religious leader). The imam agreed to come to the emergency food hamper with several leaders from his mosque. The leaders were surprised to learn that so many Muslims were coming for emergency food. The imam said that Islam asks Muslims to be concerned about all the hungry or poor in the community. He thanked House of Friendship staff for serving Muslims and all hungry people.

These leaders contacted two local Halal butchers and began bringing ten kilos of beef once a month. Later the imam and his associate conducted training for the House of Friendship community and family services staff and helped staff understand Islam better and distinguish between cultural and religious requirements. A Muslim woman was hired at the Emergency Food Hamper Program and was an obvious welcoming presence for Muslims recipients. We hope that some Muslim volunteers will be joining the community programs as role models, welcoming hosts, and co-workers with staff.

As this relationship was developing, the Kitchener Waterloo Mennonite Ministerial invited two Muslim theologians from Qom, an Iranian city with seventy Muslim seminaries and schools of theology, to attend the ministerial and to have Muslim-Mennonite theological dialogue. Mennonite Central Committee had sponsored the two theologians and their families to come to North America. They attended Toronto School of Theology and were earning their doctorates while a Mennonite worker was studying and teaching in Qom. This was an important peace initiative for both faith communities.

Discussion among Mennonite pastors and Muslim theologians created an atmosphere of deeper understanding and impetus for more gatherings. Host and guest roles were shifting.

The Muslim restaurateur, who prepared the meal for the Muslim-Mennonite discussion, asked when other Muslims could participate in this dialogue. The discussion among Mennonite pastors and Muslim theologians created an atmosphere of deeper understanding and impetus for more gatherings. Host and guest roles were shifting.

Mennonites have been active in welcoming refugees to the Waterloo region through Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, the Refugee Reception House, and the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support. Many churches have sponsored refugees. Significant numbers of refugees in the last ten years have been Muslims from Somalia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Jordan, and other countries. The Waterloo region has one of the three highest influxes of refugees in Canada. The region's culture is changing dramatically as new ethnic and faith communities gain population because of sponsorship not only by Mennonites but also by United Church, Lutheran, Catholic, Presbyterian, and other faith communities.

We have welcomed peoples to our area, but has the region and the religious community found ways to encourage open discussion about traditions, theology, and cultures? Do people from other cultures and faith traditions have voices in public discussion? Can the host and guest relationship be more hospitable and can relationships change?

In response to the changing community, the Kitchener Waterloo Council of Churches has decided to create an interfaith

committee and has appointed two or three leaders from each of the non-Christian communities and one each from the Christian traditions. Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, Unitarian, Buddhist, and Jewish communities have been eager to participate. Their leaders contact others in the community who have been overlooked by the council. The group expands because it is inclusive; guests have invited other guests from other faith traditions.

As a result of the Kitchener Waterloo Inter Faith Association —the name initially chosen by the committee—new friendships are being formed by the House of Friendship chaplain with additional Muslim groups. These Muslim leaders have assisted the House of Friendship in making contacts with a major producer/distributor of Halal meat products. Skids of Halal products arrive, and all Muslim participants can have Halal meats as part of their emergency food hamper. This is an important contact, as requests for Halal are increasing dramatically. In 2000, there were 980 requests for Halal; from January through August of 2001, the Halal requests totaled more than 1500. The Waterloo Sunni mosque's youth have volunteered at the emergency food hamper; the mosque has started collecting food for the hamper program. This increased activity assists not only Muslims but all food hamper recipients.

We are thankful that this interaction began before September 11, 2001, so these groups could extend hospitality to each other as both faith communities encountered fears and apprehension. Phone calls, letters, and gatherings now happen among people who know each other and trust each other.

The provision of food hampers is a charitable activity to sustain individuals and families during a crisis. It does not prevent future hunger nor does it create more just relationships in the community. Yet as Muslims and House of Friendship staff work together, community is formed across barriers of race, ethnicity, and religion. Hostility born of stereotypes and misinformation is broken down as individuals, mosques, and churches work together. Hospitality is demonstrated as Muslims, Mennonites, and House of Friendship staff find a new working relationship where all are hosts and guests.

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as both faith communities encountered fears and apprehension. Phone calls, letters, and gatherings now happen among people who know each other and trust each other enough to be honest and forthright. Working together, we can be a force for increased hospitality in a world that seems increasingly hostile.[3]

Notes

[1] During Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, Muslims fast daily from dawn until sunset.

[2] Sunni and Shiite are the two great religious divisions of Islam. Shiites regard Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad, as the prophet's legitimate successor, while Sunnis regard the first four caliphs as his legitimate successors; Sunnis also stress the importance of the Sunna as a basis for law. The Sunna is the traditional portion of Muslim Law, claimed to be based on the words and acts of Muhammad, but not attributed directly to him.

[3] This Canadian story of hospitality in the midst of religious diversity is written in a style similar to many USA experiences detailed by Diana L. Eck in *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001). Dr. Eck is director of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University. This book focuses on the history and development of Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim communities in USA. Other religions are acknowledged but without historical detail. Americans and Canadians have been both hostile and welcoming to immigrants and refugees from different religions. Dr. Eck has many illustrations of initial hostility being transformed into hospitality.

About the author

Brice Balmer is chaplaincy director at House of Friendship, Kitchener, Ontario. He is a dual citizen of the US and Canada, and has worked in community ministry and congregational pastorates in Denver and Kitchener. He and his wife, Karen, have two grown sons.

The worship leader as host

Ruth Boehm

Since I left pastoral ministry several months ago to finish seminary studies, my husband and I have worshiped in more than twenty-five settings, including a prison, a synagogue, a home, and various churches. As guests, we have new appreciation for the role of the worship leader in offering hospitality.

Leading worship involves more than showing up and getting all the words out right. It entails keeping the main purpose of gathering for worship in clear view: not merely to catch up on the news, or to be inspired for acts of justice, or to study the Bible, but to worship the Holy One. How one sees the role of worship leader and acts within it does nothing less than enhance or inhibit the people's encounter with God.

When you plan to have guests in your home, your preparations include issuing invitations, deciding on a menu appropriate to the people and the occasion, shopping, preparing food, setting the table, perhaps getting out toys, lighting the fire, arranging flowers, turning on music, taking a few minutes to catch your breath. When your guests arrive, you greet them, attend to their needs, serve the meal, engage their interests, enjoy their company, deal with the unexpected.

The tasks of leading worship are similar. The leader who sees her role as hosting an encounter between God and people will prepare carefully, and will draw on a variety of skills—her own and others'—to offer hospitality in all parts of the service. The leader does not act alone in offering hospitality in worship. Valuing their contributions is part of making people feel welcome.

God has already invited everyone to a feast, and the table is laden. The host's advance preparations involve prayer and study, to discern what God has in store for the congregation. The leader will also consider the guests who are coming and their particular spiritual needs and gifts. He will set the theme, prepare the materials to be used, and create a conducive environment.

On the day of the service, during a moment of silence, two simple acts can help prepare worship leaders. The first is naming distractions and concerns that need to be placed in God's hands for the next hour, and the second is asking God for what is needed. Others who are helping host the encounter with God may be included in this time of spiritual preparation.

People have high expectations for worship. They expect teaching, prayer, singing (the music they appreciate), community building, sharing, visioning. Congregations want worship that is meaningful for children and youth and young adults and parents with young children and people in midlife and seniors and newcomers and old-timers, and those who are ill and well and hurting and joyful and disabled and whole, and the list goes on. They expect a service to include a multitude of things and people. But the principal task of the host is to lead the people in worshiping God, to make space for attending to God together. In our culture, it is amazing that people are in church on Sunday morning and not out having pancakes or playing hockey, so it is the privilege of the worship leader to invite people to stop and notice God and offer their worship to the Holy One.

In our culture, it is amazing that people are in church on Sunday morning and not out having pancakes or playing hockey, so it is the privilege of the worship leader to invite people to stop and notice God and offer their worship to the Holy One.

The worship leader should anticipate the needs of guests. Assume that people may be present who are newcomers not only to the congregation or the denomination, but even to being inside a church. Use gestures and words (spoken or in writing) to help people find their way. Consider how to do this in ways that help people enter into worship rather than calling attention to the mechanics of the service. Give names of people participating in the service, in the bulletin or at the end or the beginning of the service. During announcements and sharing time, identify people by name and make sure all can hear. If necessary, provide a context so those who weren't here last week or last month know what is happening. Use language that includes men, women, children, youth, seniors, un/employed, those of varied abilities, orientations, and ethnicities.

Different parts of the service require different hosting skills. At the outset, remember to offer a warm, sincere welcome. The call to worship should then draw the congregation to their purpose in coming together. Hosting praise requires an ability to move into the enjoyment of God's presence: freedom to be expressive invites expression from others. Leading public confession demands sensitivity, and comfort with the role of priest, praying "We are sorry, Lord; have mercy," and assuring the people "Christ forgives our sins." Leading a congregation in prayer is one of the most difficult tasks of the host because it involves preparation and spontaneity, reading the newspaper and listening to the needs of the congregation, drawing the concerns of the world and the people together. Good pastoral prayer takes humility, diligence, and practice.

Unexpected things often happen in worship. A well-prepared host can respond with calm assurance and help the congregation welcome surprises and find in them grace-filled moments in which God's Spirit can work. Recently, when a man fainted in a worship service, the worship leader identified the cause of the disturbance, and asked the congregation to sing until the medical personnel could respond appropriately. A prayer for the man, his companions, and the medical personnel was offered. The worship leader welcomed the unexpected, and responded in a way that was consistent with what a worshiping community does.

The task of hosting a worship service is a big undertaking. But it can be summed up simply as welcoming people and inviting them into an encounter with the living God. The host helps to create space for this meeting; she prepares and invites but does not force people to open themselves to God. Worship is about paying attention to God together. And in a world where we do so many things on our own, this is an awesome thing. Together we praise, confess, listen, grow, share each other's burdens and blessings, pray, and are blessed to go on our way. Worship forms individuals into God's people. The task of the worship leader is to be a host at this transforming encounter.

About the author

Ruth Boehm was associate pastor at Bethel Mennonite Church (Winnipeg), 1989–2001. After she completes her M.Div. in May 2002, Ruth and her husband, Barry Bergen, plan to go to Nigeria where they will teach at Gindiri College of Theology.

When Love sits down to the banquet

Paul Keim

Adapted from a sermon preached at Assembly Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., on October 7, 2001.

> *On this mountain*
> *the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples*
> *a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,*
> *of rich food filled with marrow,*
> *of well-aged wines strained clear.*
> *And he will destroy on this mountain*
> *the shroud that is cast over all peoples,*
> *the sheet that is spread over all nations;*
> *he will swallow up death forever.*
> *Then the LORD GOD will wipe away the tears*
> *from all faces,*
> *and the disgrace of his people*
> *he will take away from all the earth,*
> *for the LORD has spoken.*
> *It will be said on that day,*
> *Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him,*
> *so that he might save us.*
> *This is the LORD for whom we have waited;*
> *let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.*
> *For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain.*
> *(Isa. 25:6–10)*

Imagine, if you will, a banquet. A feast. And you're invited. At first you think it must be some kind of mistake. But no, there's your name in black and white: *cordially invited…honor of your presence…tie optional* (hmm, excellent!).… *Be There Or Be Square.* Yes indeed.

Ah, I love a good banquet. No more feeding at the trough at the local all-you-can-eat. Quality food. Quality drink. Quality people, no doubt. And the service? Divine! Just close your eyes

and smell that aroma as you get close, before you can even see the table setting. What is that, ham? Does Moses know about this? Mashed potatoes and gravy. Green bean casserole. And fresh bread—crusty bread that's never seen plastic wrap or a grocery shelf! Not worthy. Not worthy! And just look at those bottles of well-aged sparkling grape juice. I need to clear my palate and my goblet's almost empty. The view from this mountain is spectacular. You can see the people winding their way up the path to the table. Taking their places. Sampling the dishes. Tipping the cups.

When I was a kid I heard bishop John Steiner preach about a time when he went with his dad to town to get some supplies at the hardware, and the man behind the counter gave them each a glass of homemade dandelion wine. At 11:30 on Sunday morning our beloved bishop was describing in vivid detail the sensation of that liquid flowing like fiery silk down his throat and warming organs he didn't know he had. In the sanctuary the sound of growling stomachs rose to a low rumble. I felt my tongue go limp, and I lifted my eyes to the pulpit. Brother Steiner went on to describe the evil power of that insidious ecstasy, and his firm conviction that had he ever allowed another drop to pass his lips he would have ended up in the gutters of Kansas City. As I listened, I could not imagine one thing I wanted more than a sip of that homemade dandelion wine. The feeling stayed with me through the closing hymn and the doxology, and lingered as I stumbled out of church, back into the real world. I had learned something about the spirituality of the body. The dualism I would later be trained to describe in philosophical terms, and defend as gospel truth, didn't stand a chance against John Steiner's homemade dandelion wine.

To this day, I haven't tasted dandelion wine. But it's being served at this banquet. My family and all my friends are here, of course. Over there's our congregation's section. We're used to this. All those potlucks. Oh! Reserved seating for Mennonite Church USA. Hey, there's that guy who tried to get us kicked out of conference. How'd he get in here? Can't say I mind, though. I see liberals and fundamentalists, invitations in hand, dancing up the path toward the summit arm in arm!

Wait a minute, isn't that one of the Taliban on the other side of the table? Look at him! Noodles in his beard. A self-righteous

smirk on his face. I'd like to go right over there and… Oops, he just caught me looking at him. Whoa, those soft eyes. And that's not a smirk at all. It's more like a gentle smile, tinged with sadness, regret, forgiven-ness.

My adversary's face has ceased to put me on my guard; it no longer fills me with fear and loathing. Its lines have softened, its features have become as familiar as my own. People are lifting their glasses to each other.

Who are your worst enemies, the people you never want to sit down beside and share a meal with? In your mind's eye, you can see them here. But the hurt and anger you usually feel in their presence has evaporated. *The shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations is lifted and destroyed* (Isa. 25:7). My adversary's face has ceased to put me on my guard; it no longer fills me with fear and loathing. Its lines have softened, its features have become as familiar as my own. People are lifting their glasses to each other. Did you know that the Hebrew word for feast comes from the verb meaning *to drink?* People are engaged in conversation across the table. They're saying, *This is Yahweh, for whom we've waited. Look, this is our God, for whom we've waited* (Isa. 25:9).

A nineteenth-century short story from the Jewish shtetels of Russia begins: "Another pogrom had broken out, and God was silent as only God can be silent." This is Yahweh, for whom we've waited. Patiently waited. Ours is not a culture that likes to wait. We're in a hurry. Things to do. Places to go. People to see…in passing. Can't wait. Gotta go. See you later. Wait. Wait. What are you waiting for? Ah, nothin'. Can't really say. Whatever it is, it's not here yet. Just wait. Hurry up and wait.

Well, the waiting is over. This is our God, come to save us. This is Yahweh, for whom we have served, and suffered, and denied ourselves, and emigrated, and worn strange clothes, and talked German, and worked rocky fields, and protested wars and poverty and killing and racism and abuse, and helped to rebuild and develop. Yahweh has come to save us from all that, too. And God sits us down at the banquet table and fills our glasses, waiting on us—hand and foot.

This image reminds me of *Babette's Feast,* a film directed by Gabriel Axel and based on a short story by Isak Dineson. In his recent book, *Faith and Film,* Bryan Stone provides a theological

interpretation of this compelling tale that I use here to evoke our reading of Isaiah's transformative banquet.[1] It tells the story of a French chef who flees the violence of the 1871 Communard uprising in her native Paris and takes refuge in an isolated village on the coast of Danish Jutland. Babette is given lodging in the home of two pious sisters in exchange for service as their cook and housekeeper. They are ignorant of her exceptional culinary gifts, as is the rest of their village.

The sisters are leaders of a small puritanical sect begun by their austere and deeply religious father. The other members of the community are likewise ascetic, strict, and exclusive. The two sisters have devoted their lives to continuing the work of their now dead father, giving up careers and suitors along the way. They see to the needs of the congregation and attempt to maintain the spiritual integrity of the community. Over the years, however, the small community has become engulfed in bitterness, jealousy, and guilt. People hold grudges against each other and harbor resentments that just seem to fester.

For fourteen years, Babette graciously serves the two sisters and their ever-diminishing flock, never asking for a thing. She readily accepts the task of preparing meals for the community's weekly services, and she continues the sisters' tradition of delivering food to the needy of the community. In keeping with the puritanical lifestyle of the community, Babette is allowed to make only the blandest of foods—boiled fish and a staple known as ale bread, bread soaked in ale and water and cooked into a gruel. She makes no complaint.

One day Babette receives word that she has won 10,000 francs in a lottery. She decides to prepare an extravagant French meal for the entire community on the hundredth birthday of the deceased pastor. The sisters are reluctant, but Babette begs them to allow her this one privilege. Of course, many of the foods are far too exquisite, even sinful, in the eyes of the aging and sensually challenged congregation. They fear for their own spiritual well-being. Not wishing to hurt Babette's feelings or reject her good intentions, however, they agree among themselves to eat the meal, but determine not to allow themselves to enjoy it. The food may pass their lips, but their spirits will be elsewhere. Such is their resolve.

Babette pulls out all the stops. Imported into her kitchen are all sorts of sumptuous food and exquisite drink: turtle soup, blinis demidoff, quail stuffed with truffles and foie gras, baba au rhum, Veuve Clicquot. The table is elegantly prepared and the dinner guests are summoned to begin. By coincidence, the decorated General Lowenhielm, accompanying his aged aunt, is also a dinner guest for the occasion. He had once vied for the hand of one of the sisters and been rebuffed. Having spent time in the fanciest restaurants in Paris, he alone recognizes Babette's virtuoso artistry, and his praise and admiration overflow.

Though the general is the only one fully able to appreciate the grace and beauty of this seven-course meal, the congregation gathered around the banquet table gradually becomes aware that they are being treated to something extraordinary. More is going on during the meal than the mere satisfaction of appetite and the effect of the champagne's heady effusiveness. In spite of their pious disclaimers, the guests bit by bit overcome their apprehensions about the feast and start to experience joy and communion. They extend acceptance to one another and begin to forgive each other for sins committed long before. Even sins hidden or forgotten. Their resistance is broken down by this exquisite spiritual assault on their physical senses. As the film draws to a close, the villagers file out of the house rejoicing and join hands to form a circle as they sing a hymn of praise. They nod and smile together, affirming each other and the world God has allowed them to enjoy. They have experienced spontaneous, sacrificial, extravagant love, and they cannot help but respond with joy and acceptance. The feast becomes an occasion of radical transformation.

Babette is a Christ-figure.... She has so willingly emptied herself into this meal that the feast takes on eucharistic significance. As her own substance is consumed by those around the table, the entire community is transformed.

In this wonderful representation of the eschatological banquet, Babette is a Christ-figure—or, in Isaianic terms, a Yahweh-figure. For this former refugee who has been dependent entirely on the mercy of others, a servant who takes her meals alone in the kitchen, the feast is her last hurrah. Through her total and unselfish sacrifice she paves the way to reconciliation and

salvation for a community rife with bitterness and fear. Babette has so willingly emptied herself into this meal that the feast takes on eucharistic significance. As her own substance is consumed by those around the table, the entire community is transformed.

> *The wine of Love is music,*
> *And the feast of Love is song.*
> *And when Love sits down to the banquet,*
> *Love sits long.*
>
> *James Thomson (1834–1882)*

And then Yahweh will wipe away the tears from all faces. And the disgrace from this and every people Yahweh will take away from all the earth (Isa. 25:8). Amen.

Note

[1] Bryan P. Stone, *Faith and Film: Theological Themes at the Cinema* (St. Louis: Chalice Pr., 2000).

About the author

Paul Keim is Associate Professor of Old Testament at Goshen College. He enjoys studying languages, ancient and modern. He may also be found, often against the advice of significant others, playing basketball, making music, and engaging in vigorous debate with his two daughters and one son, who range in age from 21 to 3 years old.

"Love bade me welcome"
Hospitality in earth and in heaven

Paul Dyck

Letty Russell delivered Canadian Mennonite University's annual J. J. Thiessen lectures in October 2001. Her topic was "Hospitality in an age of difference," and she argued that hospitality should be the primary way the church understands who we are in the world and in relation to God. Even as our culture increasingly draws us into xenophobia, hospitality asks that we not only treat the other well (whether that other be across religious, cultural, racial, or gender lines), but that we delight in the host/guest relationship.

Soon after Russell's lectures, I was teaching the poems of one of my favorite writers, George Herbert, the early seventeenth-century Anglican minister. As I came once again to "Love" (1633), I had occasion to rethink the poem and Russell's lectures, each in light of the other. For all their differences, these two Christians speak the same language, not understanding hospitality as a duty of faith, but faith as hospitality. Herbert addresses here the spiritual core of our life in the world: our life in Christ. If we are to host, we can only do so because we have been, and continue to be, hosted. Herbert's poem helps us think about how human hospitality should both imitate and not imitate divine hospitality.

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lack'd anything.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.

I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

The poem works through two layers of metaphor. We first encounter Love as a host, and then realize that Love is in fact Christ. Within Herbert's historical context, the literal level of the poem describes an aristocratic lord, a noble house, and an unworthy guest, presumably of lower social status. In this context, hospitality functioned not only as an exercise in community, but also as an occasion of courtly power negotiation. By hosting, a powerful person would exercise generosity and also display his or her power to be generous and command loyalty. Attending guests themselves would bring gifts and return favor for favor. The entire event enacted a political economy in which, whether one was a host or a guest, one could advance in the world by giving and receiving. Herbert's poem alludes to and then stands in contrast to this cultural backdrop, for it is precisely not about giving and receiving. Rather, it presents divine hospitality as distinctly other than that of humans.

The host of "Love" differs from an earthly host almost immediately in the poem. While earthly hosts concern themselves with display, this host first bids the poem's speaker welcome and then observes, "quick-ey'd," the speaker's discomfort. The questions and responses that follow demonstrate the loving host: Love is graceful, never making the speaker feel out-of-place; Love is gentle and intimate and not afraid of touch, first drawing near, then taking the speaker's hand and guiding him to the table; Love is also persistent, growing neither impatient nor dismissive of the speaker's objections. Instead, those objections lead only to an ever greater unfolding of Love's depth, both in the words Love speaks

and in the way Love says them. Love combines our two meanings of the word *grace:* Love is both graceful and full of grace.

So, what do this poem and Russell's lectures combine to say to me, to us? It seems to me that we too easily fall into thinking that we understand grace and even deliver it without being very graceful. The church's hospitality in the world must be filled with a delight in the host/guest relationship; hospitality is not simply a duty, but is a joy-filled way of being.

At the same time that the poem demonstrates to us Christian hospitality, it also demonstrates a hospitality that is uniquely Christ's. Russell points out that Christian hospitality is not done solely on the host's terms, but is a two-way, open encounter. So, the church cannot simply choose to whom it will show hospitality, on what conditions, and to what ends, and then deliver that hospitality. Instead, living hospitality means being vulnerable to the stranger, and even finding Christ in that stranger. Such hospitality does more than offer reward points to the Christian; it becomes a mode of spiritual growth, a continual prodding and pulling ourselves out of ourselves and into real engagement with others, and through them, with God.

Hospitality does more than offer reward points to the Christian; it becomes a mode of spiritual growth, a continual prodding and pulling ourselves out of ourselves and into real engagement with others, and through them, with God.

The difference between Christian hospitality and Christ's hospitality is that Christ does welcome us on his terms, rightly rejecting ours. When the speaker of "Love" finally runs out of reasons why he cannot receive hospitality, when he finally offers to receive it, he proposes his own terms: "My dear, then I will serve." The speaker insists on helping. Why does Love reject the offer? At this feast, there is nothing for the human to do but receive, to "sit and eat." Within the courtly culture Herbert knew, giving was a way of getting, and the speaker here can hope to earn favor by serving. In the end, though, both the speaker's excuses of unworthiness and his offer to help stand in the way of fully encountering Love. They are exertions of autonomy when Christ requires that we let go.

What does the poem imply about human hospitality? We cannot host as Christ hosts, but we can host in light of how Christ

hosts. We can recognize that when we host, we are in fact inviting others to the table of Christ, into the presence of Love. In the presence of Love, we can delight in the other. Such delight resonates with Christ's persistent, tender grace, and not with the anxieties of display or fear, of giving to get. Our recognition that in Christ we are always guests should help us exercise a radically Christian hospitality.

About the author

Paul Dyck is a professor of English at Canadian Mennonite University, and finds—as on the occasion of Letty Russell's lectures at CMU—that new ideas emerge in his engagement with other disciplines. His primary research subject is Renaissance devotional literature, and he is particularly interested in comparing the way Christians were in that time and place to the way we are now.

Book review

Brad Schantz

Reclaiming the Old Testament: Essays in Honour of Waldemar Janzen, ed. Gordon Zerbe. Winnipeg: CMBC Pubns., 2001.

The title of this collection articulates well the primary passion of its honoree. This brief review will attempt to address whether the contents achieve Waldemar Janzen's desire: Just how useful are these essays in helping readers reclaim the Old Testament?

Overall, the Festschrift's contributions will be appreciated by a range of readers. The first section, "Freeing the Old Testament to speak," loosely addresses issues of how the Old Testament has been used by selected Anabaptists, as well as suggesting why and in what ways it should be reclaimed as authoritative canon. The second, "The Old Testament speaks," attempts to flesh out "reclaiming the Old Testament as conversation partner."

In the first section of the book, Waldemar Janzen's excellent introductory article summarizes his concern with a brief but comprehensive review of Anabaptist history and praxis in regard to Old Testament usage. Elmer Marten's piece on canonical theology offers a helpful discussion of the need for a pan-biblical theology (as well as a concise history of such theologies). John Neufeld's article contends effectively for an expanded use of the Old Testament in preaching. Wesley Bergen's attempt to exemplify a narrative style of reading Scripture is less useful in meeting the goal of the first section. The other articles in this section are simply statistical summaries and analyses of Old Testament references in selected Anabaptist writings, past and present.

It is interesting to note that at least two articles in the first section seem to evidence a trace of the very attitude that troubles Janzen. Helmut Harder's review of *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* notes that "the Confession does take a significant step forward in reinstating the appropriation of the Old

Testament," while acknowledging that it "may not have gone far enough." Yet Harder's own terminology and approach throughout appear to view the former testament more as a tool to be used than as an authoritative canon on par with the New Testament (see p. 46, point 5). Less explicitly, Neufeld demonstrates a similar attitude. While advocating Janzen's position, Neufeld comments that his "own position is that we ought to interpret the Old Testament in light of the New" (p. 61, n. 32).

This Festschrift is itself somewhat reminiscent of the Bible, its diverse voices suggesting multiple interpretations of the issue at hand. Still, it is just that chorus that makes this book worth reading.

Most articles in the book's second section are excellent. Ben Ollenburger's contribution on Jubilee (a thorough and panoramic piece) deserves special notice, as does Gordon Zerbe's article on forgiveness. Both elucidate broad theological themes birthed and given substance in the Old Testament and finding continued maturation in the New. Dorothy Jean Weaver's piece on political advocacy begs for application. Similarly, the pieces by Lydia Harder (on using the whole of Psalm 139 in our worship), Gary Daught (on the state of farming and land in the Bible), and Daniel Epp-Tiessen (on criteria for discerning true and false prophecy in the Old Testament) invite interaction, as they reflect on what the Old Testament might say to us today. Using literary theory (as do Janzen and Jo-Ann Brant), Mary Loewen Reimer addresses the imaginative power of the Old Testament. Her challenge to the way we "protect" Scripture is sure to provoke needed discussion.

In the end, the collection admirably calls us to reexamine the role we give Old Testament Scriptures in our life and work. This Festschrift is itself somewhat reminiscent of the Bible, its diverse voices suggesting multiple interpretations of the issue at hand. Still, it is just that chorus that makes this book worth reading. As Mennonites, we believe we discern the voice of God in community and in listening to one another speak: these are the voices of our community.

About the reviewer

Brad Schantz is a May 2000 graduate of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, now working there in instructional technology support and as a language assistant. He plans to begin doctoral studies in Hebrew Bible this fall.

Book review

Joshua P. Yoder

Peace and Justice Shall Embrace: Power and Theopolitics in the Bible, ed. Ted Grimsrud and Loren L. Johns. Telford, Pa.: Pandora Pr.; Scottdale: Herald Pr.,1999.

Peace and Justice Shall Embrace is a Festschrift for Millard Lind, professor emeritus of Old Testament at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and author of *Yahweh Is a Warrior*, an important treatment of warfare in the Hebrew Bible from a peace church perspective. The book features nine essays from an impressive range of Millard Lind's students, many now teaching at the seminary level themselves. The book also includes an exhaustive bibliography of Lind's published work, assembled by his daughter, Sarah Lind.

As the title suggests, the essays focus on the political dimension of the Hebrew Bible, a theme in Lind's teaching that made a deep impression on many of his students. Some of the articles are more autobiographical, others more topical; some are wide-ranging, others more narrowly scholarly. They cover an impressive range of biblical texts, from the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos to wisdom writings such as Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom of Solomon. Less well represented are the books of the Pentateuch.

***Peace and Justice Shall Embrace* is an interesting read, giving a sense of the current thinking of Mennonite biblical scholars and theologians and their engagement with the work of the previous generation.**

Peace and Justice Shall Embrace is an interesting read, giving a sense of the current thinking of Mennonite biblical scholars and theologians and their engagement with the work of the previous generation. None of the articles is so scholarly as to be inaccessible to the average pastor, and most are short enough and readable enough to be consumed in under an hour, making ideal reading for busy pastors without a

lot of time to invest. I found little that is strikingly original in the broad themes addressed, but much of interest in the elaboration of specific Scripture texts.

Despite the wide range of texts covered, the book lacks any treatment of the Mosaic law. This surely is an important part of theopolitics in the Hebrew Bible. Many Christian readers may not notice the absence of any studies on Leviticus or Deuteronomy among the offerings, but in my view these books are an important voice in the biblical conversation about what constitutes justice and righteousness in human societies.

Perhaps a more serious weakness of the Festschrift is the absence of any women's voices. Did Millard Lind have no female students who would have been qualified to contribute to the book? The lack of articles by women (save for the bibliography by Sarah Lind) is puzzling and seriously limits the strength of the whole enterprise. I would love to know how some of Millard Lind's female students would reflect on his teachings on power and politics in the Hebrew Bible.

I particularly appreciated J. Denny Weaver's contribution, "Making Yahweh's Rule Visible." This essay made the strongest connection of any of the articles between an understanding of the Bible and contemporary political action rooted in it. Pastors operate on the threshold between exegesis of the Bible and action in the world. We are constantly challenged to articulate how biblical texts can be translated into actions, practices, and structures in the lives of Christian disciples and Christian communities. We need more of this kind of incarnated exegesis from scholars who are able to relate the biblical story to concrete work in churches and in the wider world.

About the reviewer

Joshua P. Yoder is pastor of Fellowship of Hope, Elkhart, Ind.

Resource events

Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary

▶ ***Leading a Conflict-Healthy Organization***

An event sponsored by the Peace and Justice Collaborative
May 9-11, 2002
Presenters: Carolyn Schrock-Shenk, Associate Professor of Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies, Goshen College; and David Brubaker, provider of facilitation and conflict transformation services, former Associate Director for Mennonite Conciliation Service
Register with dfast@ambs.edu or 574 296-6236.

▶ ***Planning Worship Rituals***

A continuing education event
June 3, 2002
Presenters: Marlene Kropf and June Alliman Yoder, AMBS
Register with bsawatzky@ambs.edu or 574 296-6207.
Discount available for registrations before May 1.

▶ ***Choosing Music to Fit Your Congregation***

A continuing education event
June 22, 2002
Presenters: Rebecca Slough, AMBS, and Mike Zehr, Associate Pastor of North Clinton Mennonite Church, Wauseon, Ohio, who has been instrumental in forming a praise band for the congregation
Register with bsawatzky@ambs.edu or 574 296-6207.
Discount available for registrations before June 1.

▶ ***Basic Family Mediation***

An event sponsored by the Peace and Justice Collaborative
July 11-12 and 15-17, 2002
This workshop acquaints participants with issues surrounding divorce and custody mediation. Participants with B.A.s may be eligible for the state and county courts' Registry of Domestic Relations Mediators.
Register with dfast@ambs.edu or 574 296-6236.

▶ ***Left Behind by the Book of Revelation?***

Responsible Interpretation for Preaching and Mission

A continuing education event
July 26, 2002
Presenters: Nelson Kraybill and Loren Johns, AMBS
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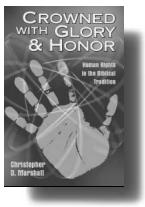
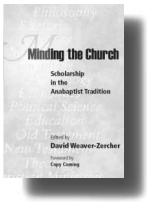


Crowned with Glory and Honor: Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition, Studies in Peace and Scripture Series 6, Chris Marshall. "Builds the bridge between the secular language of human rights and biblical perspectives on *shalom* that has been sorely lacking," says Mary Schertz. "A wonderful book," says Glen Stassen; "Enormously helpful to Christians who love 'the least of these.'" *5.5 x 8.5, 160 p; $13.95 US/20.95 Can., all books 6 x 9 tr. pap. unless noted.*



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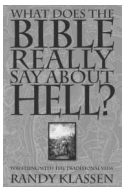
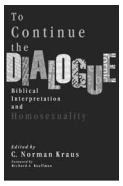


What Does the Bible Really Say About Hell? Wrestling with the Traditional View, Living Issues Discussion Series 2. In its affirming review of Randy Klassen's study of hell, *Publishers Weekly* concludes, "Klassen's voice is gentle and pastoral as he analyzes reasons why many individuals need a belief in hell to scare them into heaven." *5.5 x 8.5; 144 p; $13.95/20.95*



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