Coming Home: A Historical Assessment of Private Domestic Space as the Primary Locus of Christian Hospitality

by

Benita Manning Long

Date: 7/23/2016

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in the Divinity School of Duke University

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Subject

Contemporary Christian individuals and institutions seeking direction in a post-Constantinian world have begun turning to the earliest communities of faith for guidance. Theologians, scholars, ecclesial leaders, and laity alike are finding that the concept of hospitality frequently surfaces as an integral dynamic of Christian communal identity, discipleship, and Gospel transmission. They consistently argue that hospitality is a necessary component of Christian life and that it represents a lost discipline worthy of reclaiming. This thesis builds on previous work by arguing that not just in the beginning, but in every epoch of Christian faith, private domestic space has provided the most suitable and effective environment for such practices. Therefore, if there is hope to be found in reclaiming the discipline of hospitality, the home must be restored as integral to the concept. If private domestic space as the primary locus of hospitality disappears from the Christian cultural landscape, the essential and most basic model of the dynamic will disappear with it. Evidence will confirm that throughout its entire history, although in varying degrees, hospitality has served as a central tenet, a consistent thread, and an ongoing leitmotif of Christian faith and witness. It will be established that its ultimate
expression has consistently been found in the intimacy of the personal home, and it is this environment that has most effectively provided a recognizable paradigm for various manifestations of the dynamic. The image of hospitality being offered and/or withheld can be found in numerous areas of human endeavor. The concept emerges politically, socially, economically, and theologically. Thus the question is begged of Christians, “What are the implications of a diminished and weakened physical, incarnational, home-based hospitality, and how might history offer the help necessary in restoring its authenticity?”

**Materials and Methods**

Because readers are encouraged to rethink Christian hospitality as a lost legacy whose original potency has diminished over the course of history, each epoch will be deconstructed, examined and analyzed for clues as to when, how, and why this change occurred. What will emerge are clear and continuous patterns of activity and behavior, patterns that only a historical perspective can bring to light. The evidence, consisting of over one hundred books, peer reviewed articles, and primary sources will not be presented as a simple chronology of “proofs.” In some instances, literary metaphor is considered an acceptable form of persuasion whereas in others concrete models and paradigms are more effective tools. Whereas dozens of voices will enrich the conversation of some periods, individual life models will dominate the discussion of others. Early evidence will not necessarily represent Eastern or Western Christianity, but as the faith expands, geography will become more of a factor. Some evidence is historically accurate; some is ancient but venerated hagiography.
Conclusion

The conclusion of the paper is that although the centrality of private domestic space has clearly declined, there are signs of hope for the recovery of authentic home-based Christian hospitality, as communities of worship and individuals alike are encouraged to seek and find inspiration in successful past practices.
# COMING HOME: A HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT OF PRIVATE DOMESTIC SPACE AS THE PRIMARY LOCUS OF CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

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Benita Manning Long
Duke Divinity School
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INTRODUCTION

IN MY BEGINNING IS MY END: HOME IS WHERE ONE STARTS FROM

Establishing an Agenda

American houses are increasing dramatically in both size and cost. Twice as many houses with over four thousand square feet were built in 2014 than in 1999. The average American home in 1963 cost $150,162. By 2014 the cost had more than doubled, rising to $305,900. Yet Americans today are twenty percent less likely to open their homes to guests or to visit others in their homes than they were two decades ago. On those occasions when they do, they are twenty percent more likely to invite relatives and friends than they are to include neighbors. Instead, they prefer to gather for fellowship with those whom they already know in restaurants, bars, coffeehouses or other public facilities, including churches. There is no indication that Christians differ from Americans of other religious traditions or even from those with no religious leanings. Contrary to popular opinion, there is no evidence that the generally perceived culprits of

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coldbacon.com/.
2 Adjusted from $19,300 (http://www.dollartimes.com).
4 Statistics based on the General Social Survey conducted face to face among randomly selected American households every other year. The survey is administered by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. See Tom W. Smith, Peter Marsden and Michael Hout, Social Surveys 1972-2014, National Science Foundation.-NORC ed.- (Chicago: NORC at the University of Chicago),
gssdataexplorer.norc.org.
television or increased commute times are the causes of this decline.⁵ Should these statistics be of any concern to the Christian community? Why should they in any way cause alarm within the leadership of the church at large? On the following pages it will be argued that this drastic decline in home-centered hospitality reflects more than a sociological or historical shift but rather it carries significant theological implications as well.

Contemporary Christian individuals and institutions seeking direction in a post-Constantinianian world have begun turning to the earliest communities of faith for guidance. Theologians, scholars, ecclesial leaders and laity alike are finding that the concept of hospitality frequently surfaces as an integral dynamic of Christian communal identity, discipleship, and Gospel transmission. They consistently argue that hospitality is a necessary component of Christian life and that it represents a lost discipline worthy of reclaiming. I propose to build on this work by arguing that not just in the beginning but in every epoch of Christian faith, private domestic space has provided the most suitable and effective environment for such practices. Therefore, if there is hope to be found in reclaiming the discipline of hospitality, the home must be restored as integral to the concept. If personal domestic space as the primary locus of hospitality disappears from the Christian cultural landscape, the essential and most basic model of the dynamic will disappear with it. Evidence will confirm that throughout its entire history, hospitality has served as a central tenet, a consistent thread, and an ongoing leitmotif of Christian

faith and witness. It will be established that its ultimate expression has consistently been found in the intimacy of the personal home, and it is this environment which has most effectively provided a recognizable paradigm for various manifestations of the dynamic.

The image of hospitality being offered and/or withheld can be found in numerous areas of human endeavor. The concept emerges politically, socially, economically, and theologically. Thus the question is begged of Christians, “What are the implications of a diminished and weakened physical, incarnational home-based hospitality and how might history offer the help necessary in restoring its authenticity?” Theologian Henri Nouwen powerfully concurs that, “If there is any concept worth restoring to its original evocative potential, it is the concept of hospitality.” It will be demonstrated here that Christian history has taught and proven that a critical dimension of the original authenticity of hospitality is the family home where the best hope for realization of this potential is to be found.

The Perspective of History as Evidence

American Christian seminaries charged with the education and preparation of a new generation of church leaders generally require that students study church history. Yet, emerging clergy and future church leaders sometimes assume that the church is about vision, about moving into God’s preferred future, and that what was done in the past has little relevance for today’s religious institutions, whose numbers are declining at unprecedented speed. They ask how knowing about the past could possibly address the

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interests of the most rapidly increasing segment of the American religious landscape, the so called “nones” who profess to have no formal religious ties or affiliations. Because hospitality will be examined through a lens of Christian history, these valid concerns must be addressed.

Pragmatism is a mighty warrior, often working for us but sometimes to our detriment. It is only fair to acknowledge the demands placed upon contemporary church leaders, who face daily problems of budgeting, personnel, guidance, programming, and so forth. Often little time and resources are left for consideration of what it means to be the church rather than for simply representing the institutional church in the world. Management gurus such as George Barna offer constructive advice by pointing out that swift and pragmatic responses to immediate crises are poor substitutes for what he defines as “principled decision making.” I will demonstrate how Christians who intentionally invite others into their personal homes are not just replicating past practices in a new context which may or may not be appropriate. Instead, they are adhering to, honoring, and directly participating in an essential community-forming “principle” of faith.

Another objection to employing a historical perspective to determine current policy is that it is too difficult to gather the information necessary for effectively transporting age-old practices into contemporary life. If this were a correct assessment, scholars such as Richard Neustadt and Ernest May would not have developed a program

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on the value of history in political decision making at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. The University of Chicago, and the School of Urban and Public Affairs at both Carnegie-Mellon and the Harriman School of Urban and Public Affairs in New York would not have incorporated history as a determinant for public policy. The Graduate School of Business at the University of North Carolina would not teach courses on how historical precedent might inform economic decision making. And certainly the Rand Corporation, directed by some of the brightest and most forward thinkers of our time would not be teaching its PhD candidates how to incorporate history into their projects. In *Ten Great Ideas From Church History*, Mark Shaw cites these and other examples to demonstrate that seriously studying past tradition in order to determine how to move forward is becoming acceptable in the world of politics, economics, education, public policy and innovation. I will demonstrate that this trend has particular relevance for Christianity, whose rich and varied history of faith has as much if not more to offer than the histories of these other important domains of life.

Followers of the three monotheistic, messianic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, often refer to themselves as “People of the Book” because they look to the authority of particular sacred writings for instruction in matters of faith and practice. These sacred writings, like all language, have always been subject to debate in matters of interpretation. Philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had previously

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addressed the ambiguities inherent in both spoken and written words. In fact, it was not until the nineteenth century that the formal disciplines of hermeneutics as the study of human understanding and semiotics as the formal study of signs and communication were academically developed. As successive eras of Christian history are opened and examined, it is interesting to keep in mind the prevailing interpretation of the words of Scripture that dominate each age. Thus in each section a brief discussion of the Scriptural hermeneutics in vogue at that particular time will be offered in tandem with the historically recorded accounts. Repeatedly, what will emerge is a view of hospitality that is relevant to and consistent with the prevailing theology of each epoch. This process will positively reveal that although the concept of hospitality and the understanding of what it means to participate in the dynamic has changed considerably over the centuries, the home has been maintained as integral to the practice. Negatively and unfortunately, the process will demonstrate that the trend away from the home described in the statistics of the opening paragraph is currently proceeding at unprecedented speed.

Readers of this work are encouraged to rethink Christian hospitality as a lost legacy whose original potency has diminished over the course of history. Evidence will confirm that this has happened because when Christians have consistently failed to invite others into their homes they have compromised the essence of what it means to practice hospitality in the name of Christ. For this reason, every epoch will be deconstructed, examined and analyzed for clues as to when, how and why this change has occurred. What will emerge are clear and continuous patterns of activity and behavior, patterns that
only a historical perspective can bring to light. The evidence will not be presented as a simple chronology of “proofs” regarding the significance of home hospitality, but rather each era will be illuminated in its own unique way. In some instances, literary metaphor is considered an acceptable form of persuasion whereas in others concrete models and paradigms are more effective tools. Furthermore, whereas dozens of voices will enrich the conversation of some periods, individual life models will dominate the discussion of others. Early evidence will not necessarily represent Eastern or Western Christianity, but as the faith expands, geography will become more of a factor. Some evidence is historically accurate; some is ancient but venerated hagiography. This varied format is not meant to confuse or to confound but rather to enliven and to delight readers, who will find in the midst of such variety a very clear and indisputable thread of evidence. As Vern Poythress suggests in *Symphonic Theology*, we seek a harmony in truth and the use of a multiplicity of perspectives does not constitute denial of the absoluteness of truth but rather it constitutes recognition of its richness.11

**Hospitality; A Fluid Interpretation**  
_for a Word without a Universal Definition_

Is hospitality a moral good? Is it an essential component of ethics? Or perhaps is it a cultural expression of some sort? Does it work as a relational dynamic, as a ritual, as a concept, as a practice, or as a mere phenomenon? Does it manifest itself as a spiritual discipline? Does it have a _sine qua non_? According to Luke Bretherton, author of

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Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity, it is a general term without a universal definition. Because historically it has been central to most cultures, it is understood within a given tradition and takes on a variety of forms. Accepting his makes analysis it possible to narrow the investigation and to approach unapologetically the subject from the more manageable perspective of Western Christianity as it emerged out of an ancient Near Eastern culture, namely Judaism.

For Christians, perhaps the most universally applicable and acceptable definition of hospitality comes from Jacques Derrida, who posed the haunting question, “Is not hospitality an interruption of the self?” He argued that hospitality affects all human activity and that it provides the only means by which individuals are able to compare themselves as relational beings. Hospitality is thus neither removed from ethics nor a specific area of ethics, but it is the foundation for all ethical behavior. Because the language of hospitality includes ideas of otherness, alterity, unbending and metanoia, it is possible to concur with this assessment without delving into or accepting his Deconstructionist philosophy as a whole. And this idea works compatibly with the Gospel message in that the definition allows that the process of denying oneself for the benefit of others represents “the whole and principle of ethics.” In many of its aspects, Derrida’s position reflects a Christian viewpoint although he does not write from an ostensibly Christian perspective. The laws that govern hospitality are absolute in that

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15 Jacques Derrida, Adieu, 50.
they require one to give willingly without imposing qualifications or expecting anything in return, or what Derrida describes as “an economy of exchange.” The difference is that for Derrida the outcome of such calculation is violence, whereas for the Christian it is, as Bretherton’s work suggests, a matter of grace and holiness. The home is central to Derrida’s concept because it provides the focal point for the relationship between the host and guest to develop, mature, and even reverse. In a physical and visible way the difference between “inside” and “outside” is explained. In this action the walls of the “at-home” are let down, and the visitor is welcomed into the abode in the same manner the Christian, however unworthy, enters the kingdom of God. Derrida contends that at this moment the guest realizes that the language of hospitality “which appeals to the other without condition” is trustworthy. As the following suggests, unconditional hospitality is possible only when the self is interrupted and one’s personal agenda set aside:

To put it in different terms, absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner, but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names.

The role reversal that occurs when a host welcomes into his home someone who has the potential to undermine his sovereignty reenacts the Christian invitation to become a follower of Jesus. And although God’s sovereignty is not an issue, the action mirrors

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19 Ibid., 5.
God’s invitation to the human family in Eden, where otherness, or that which was not God, was first recognized.

**Omissions and Opportunities**

Inherent in any research project are those intentional and unintentional omissions whose subject matter if pursued might have added depth or dimension to the work at hand. This paper is no exception, and I would like to enumerate particular areas of future study which have the potential to strengthen the claims I am making. Although this is typically done in conclusion I will initially concede what might be considered as deficiencies in advance so that my argument will proceed more smoothly. Foremost would be the human research that could expand upon the work done by social service organizations to help determine why it is that people are less inclined to open their homes to outsiders than they were in times past. Some work in Muslim studies dealing with home hospitality as one of the tropes that define Arab cultures has been done, opening a path of investigation which Christian scholars might do well to follow.\(^\text{21}\) Secondly, sociological research surrounding group behavior might reveal under what physical conditions people most effectively communicate. A wide variety of both secular and religious small groups appear to function in ways that effectively validate their reasons for existing. It would be helpful to determine what the groups that flourish have in common regarding meeting places. For example, is there a greater cohesiveness within the membership of book clubs, garden clubs, political parties, or church cells that meet in

private homes than is found within those that meet in public spaces? Along these lines, in the wake of 9/11, scholars such as Tim Cresswell have made significant advances in place studies, an emerging new subdiscipline of geography. Particularly relevant to this study would be his Aristotelian insistence that place has to come first ontologically, or as he succinctly expresses it, “For something to exist it has to be someplace, so place, necessarily provides the basis for existence.”

Another area for future investigation would be in the area of the biblical languages. Although some scholarly research has been done in the past there still remain significant unresolved lexigraphical questions surrounding biblical references to concepts related to the field of hospitality, specifically to the words family, house, household, host, stranger, and so forth.

The study of home hospitality would be greatly enriched by delving into its artistic dimension as represented in areas such as hymnody, architecture, and even the emerging genre of Christian fiction. Because space constraints make it impossible to incorporate Eastern influences after the Schism of 1053, it would be useful to examine and compare what emerged out of that tradition with what emerged out of the West. And finally, inquiry into the relationship between home hospitality and Eucharistic hospitality would be theologically beneficial.

**Implications**

No matter how interesting or thought provoking the following pages prove to be, they will have been researched and written in vain if they do not in some way contribute

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to the church’s discourse about the ministries and practices of Christian communities. My goal is to persuade readers that intentional home-based hospitality has the potential to offset and perhaps ameliorate the drastic decline in the size and effectiveness of the American institutionalized church. The plethora of little known or forgotten facts that will be presented do not represent a mass of data being dumped on the unsuspecting reader.\textsuperscript{24} Because they are sufficient, representative, and accurately reported from authoritative sources they establish a pattern of positive and effective behavior that hopefully will change what and how Christians think about what it means to be hospitable.\textsuperscript{25} The ultimate purpose of this work is to open a conversation with the past that will be continued in turn by those who read it.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{24} Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, \textit{The Craft of Research}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 54.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 135.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 8.
Cultural Precedents

Hospitality in its broadest sense is a relationship between host and guest. It can then narrow down to host and stranger, or more succinctly, the stranger as guest. In *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission*, John Koenig suggests that Mediterranean people in the ancient world attached so much importance to table fellowship that hospitality formed a “pillar of morality upon which the universe stands.”\(^1\) Yet when drawing parallels between biblical and extra-biblical sources one must proceed with caution in order to avoid what Samuel Sandmel, a former president of the Society of Biblical Literature described as “that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and deviation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction.”\(^2\) While respecting this admonition, it must first be determined which characteristics were similar to and which set the Israelite practices apart from those of their pagan counterparts in the ancient Near East. Secondly, evidence must confirm that private domestic space was understood to be the primary focus and locus of such practices.

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Although surviving ancient Near Eastern literature and nonliterary material alike abound with the imagery and language of hospitality, the extant sources are more mythological than historical in nature. Typically the stories deal with hungry gods in need of appeasement or with greedy humans expecting something in return. Yet the accounts are helpful in establishing the importance of private domestic space in the dynamic, even if the contexts and motives for hospitality vary considerably. What follows is a small sampling that in every instance indicates that the home was considered integral to the concept of hospitality. For example, the Sumerians were “fully convinced that man was fashioned of clay and created for one purpose only: to serve the gods by supplying them with food, drink and shelter so that they might have full leisure for their divine activities.” The inclusion of a dwelling in the formula implies the importance of domestic space. One of the most illuminating stories from Akkadian literature is that of the Enuma Elish epic in which the Babylonian god Marduke invites everyone to a feast in his personal home, the Esagila Palace.

In the Ugaritic Epic of Gilgamesh, Enkidu becomes human after receiving hospitality in the home of a harlot. This all stands in stark contrast to YHWH, the God of Israel who has no nutritional needs, refers to his altar as “my table” (Ez 44:16) and extends to the human family an invitation to make its home with Him. (Ex 25:8, 29:45). The household imagery associated with God’s own home, the Tabernacle, reflects this premise.

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Ethos or Ethics?

Typically ethos is understood as the character or personality of a people or culture whereas ethics concerns the rules and regulations that determine what is right or wrong within the group. Ideally the two are interchangeable and in terms of how the ancient Israelites viewed personal space, the Old Testament suggests that in that particular culture, the laws governing hospitality did in fact reflect the character of the group. John Barton maintains that the Hebrew Bible, whether at the level of individual books and sections of books or at the redactional and even canonical level, is more than “just a jumble of isolated precepts with no underlying rationale.” He then goes on to say that the surface details of ethical systems in the Old Testament are generated by deeper and more fundamental structures of ethical thinking, even though they may be relatively inarticulate by comparison with those of Western moral philosophy. He argues that the basics of such ethics are dependent upon three distinct motives: obedience to God’s declared will, natural law, and imitation of God.6 Because so many of the examples of home hospitality in the Old Testament reflect these basic ideas it is appropriate to elaborate upon them. Karl Barth for example maintained that obedience to God was not just a predominant ethic, one among many, but that it established the governing norms of faithful human behavior, a point on which Barton concurs. The ancient Israelites operated under the premise that they should act as God instructed them and their sacred texts reflect this view. The second idea, natural law, Barton defines as “an accommodation of human action to principles seen as inherent

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in the way things are.” Barton believes that this viewpoint has become more valid in recent years because of an enhanced respect for the Wisdom literature, in which natural order finds acceptance, and because of the popularity of presenting creation over covenant as the primary focus of Hebrew theology. The idea of natural law as a model for biblical ethics has also found support among scholars, Norman Wirzba for example, who are increasingly integrating a system of creation ethics into the ecological movement. Because of the misconception that natural law is in some way antithetical to obedience to God, it has been suggested that this term be replaced by new phrasing such as “natural morality.”

The third motive for ethical behavior, imitation of God, finds favor among those who respect the work of Martin Buber, including John Barton. They maintain that this does not conflict in any way with the admonition in Genesis 3 that human beings should not aspire to the divine, but rather as Barton maintains, the task of human beings and the Israelites in particular is to “take God’s character as the pattern of their character and God’s deeds as the model for theirs.” Quoting Eckart Otto he concludes that “God’s dealings with humans can be a model for the way humans should deal with each other: this testimony is the core of an Old Testament ethic.”

The common denominator among the three models just described is that they all project human beings as agents of God, as a people called and set apart to live in a special way. Thus the people of Israel viewed hospitality as obedience, as a natural morality and

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8 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
as an opportunity to serve as image bearers who were privileged to welcome God into their homes. As recipients of such practices they acknowledged human dependence upon God for shelter and protection all the while acknowledging divine sovereignty and judgment. The hospitable practices performed by Old Testament characters illuminate the consistent and unified thread of revelation in which private domestic spaces are used to form and maintain a communal life of faithfulness. They also provide appropriate venues for them to worship, to give thanks and to learn to discern good from evil. It is intriguing to note that these specific practices of hospitality are not random but intentional in that often an episode takes on the character of and conforms itself to the particular genre or biblical division in which it is located. The authority of the Torah establishes hospitality as a normative expectation of God and the Historical Books describe how Israel responded to the mandate. The Poetical Books and Wisdom Literature imagine home-based hospitality as a dimension of righteousness within the contemporary setting and the Prophetic Books envision the home as integral to God’s projected and preferred future. Being aware of this literary context should make it somewhat easier in attempting to deal with the more disturbing home encounters such as those narrated in Genesis 19 and Judges 18.

It has been established that although the hospitality portrayed in the Old Testament found cultural precedent in the broader ancient Near East, it simultaneously reflected qualities that were unique to the land of Israel. Scrutiny of selected Old Testament texts will now provide numerous examples confirming that personal home based hospitality was integral to this tradition. It sometimes manifests itself as God’s action and command. It is often withdrawn by YHWH and abused by His human creatures. It involves strangers,
aliens, orphans, widows, and neighbors. It is sometimes physical, depicting real provisions and shelter for real people. Other times it is implied, used as imagery or as a means of remembrance. It is offered as welcoming, as gifting and as sending forth. It is withheld or abused in order to teach. The picture that emerges is not an idealized history but one that offers a theological witness to what was and remains, significant in human life. And although each episode offers an independent source of information and illumination, it is important to keep in mind that the purpose here is to establish the significance of this thread as an integral part of a larger whole.

The Power of Metaphor

The argument of this paper is that in both understanding and practice, physical private domestic space is the starting point and locus, for all hospitable endeavor. Throughout Christian history not only is proof to be found in narrative accounts but the home also surfaces in metaphorical expression. Because so much of the evidence presented not just in this chapter but in subsequent ones as well comes in metaphorical form, it is of first necessity to establish that such expression does not represent an ornamental element of style but that it is equally valid as a source of legitimate evidence. This is important not only because metaphors are employed so frequently but also because they often serve as the “tip of submerged models” which will subsequently be brought to light.¹² These metaphors offer more than information in that they stir the human

imagination in a way that enables texts to do what the writers intended them to do. They teach, they provide pedagogical insight, they direct, and most significantly in this case they enhance the readers’ relationship with and understanding of God. Metaphorical statements are comprehended differently and with more complexity than literal ones but this difference has nothing to do with truth or falsehood.

Having suggested in the Introduction that Derrida’s view of hospitality is accurate, it is ironic that we will now turn to his philosophical nemesis, Paul Ricoer, for help in validating the use of metaphors as legitimate evidence for substantiating the claim regarding the significance of the home in the practice of hospitality. In The Rule of Metaphor, Ricoeur writes that “in service to the poetic function, metaphor is that strategy of discourse by which language divests itself of its function of direct description in order to reach the mythic level where its function of discovery is set free.” For Ricoer, it was the creative capacity of languages that give human communication its greatest potential. According to Don R. Swanson, a metaphor is an “invitation to discovery” rather than a “relief from reality” as was the case in ancient works such as the Homeric literature which sought to displace reality. If we refuse to be thus subjected, we are in a sense rebels. This heuristic understanding of linguistics is critical to Scriptural interpretation given that the Bible was written at a time when rhetoric was a respected medium of communication. For

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14 Ibid.
the Greek rhetoricians a metaphor was a valid tool of persuasion and not just an element of style, as it later came to be regarded. It carried cognitive as well as ornamental importance. The familiar terminology employed by metaphor elevates the listener from a position of observance to one of actual participation. Thus in terms of this study of the home, according to Peter Macky, author of *The Centrality of Metaphors to Biblical Thought*, the recipient of the Biblical communication becomes involved in a way that “is required if the speaker’s higher purposes are to be accomplished.” He explains it in this manner:

The Biblical writers did not appeal simply to readers’ rational intellects, intending only to provide ideas and arguments. Those were the foundation but more important was their intention to move readers, to change them, to attract them to a Lord, a community, a way of life. Thus the Biblical writers often appealed to readers’ imaginations, consciences and wills, trying to explore the depths of personal and spiritual life that the Biblical writers knew by their own experience.18

One central method used by the Biblical writers to open up these existential depths was to propose profound metaphors.19 Subsequently, when people directly relate to the metaphor, it becomes effective because the fluid nature of language makes it possible for the literal and the metaphorical to maintain equanimity, and in terms of faith a “known” factor is used to explain the divine “unknown.”20 This act of comprehension may produce an uncognitive sense of community between the speaker and the hearer who ultimately accepts the invitation to discover a new perspective.21

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19 Ibid., 2.
formation is powerful in any application but is particularly relevant to metaphors surrounding forms of hospitality in which an inside/outside home dynamic is found. Max Black, in developing a “grammar of metaphor” defined the word which is being used in this way as the “focus,” a fact that was considered when selecting a title for this research. Black’s greatest contribution was his redefinition of metaphor not as a substitution or a comparison, but as a new way of thinking, a “distinctive mental accomplishment,” a way of saying something that could not be said literally. Yet how can this defense be used in the instance of private domestic space of which the Old Testament has numerous, undisputedly literal examples? How can Biblical reference to the home be simultaneously literal and metaphorical? There are very few Biblical metaphors that are what is termed “twice true,” filling both niches simultaneously and God as a Host is one of them. Typically they are not found in the form of brief sayings but as part of lengthier stories. The complicated Old Testament account of God hosting the human family certainly meets this criterion, as the numerous and specific references cited in subsequent sections of this chapter will substantiate. And finally, the fact that home generated hospitality is not found in the lexiconography of Old Testament scripture does not weaken the argument that it existed because metaphors cannot always be translated into literal language. Ricoeur defined as a “root” metaphor those in which concepts were assembled and radiated. Luke Bretherton applies this root concept to hospitality when he states that its motif “is a root metaphor and

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25 Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation of Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 64.
practice embedded in the Christian tradition that encapsulates its crucial elements with regard to how the church relates to its neighbors.” He points out that the term does not “denote an abstract ideal, principle or middle axiom; rather the term arises out of the witness of Scripture and the social practices and doctrines of the Christian tradition.” In the end, “it depends upon the recipient; those who have eyes to see will do so.” The remainder of this chapter and the one that follows will present such an opportunity. It is important to keep in mind that the biblical references are representative and no attempt is made to include every reference to private domestic space or to hospitality in general.

The Pentateuch Establishes a Covenant Direction

It is appropriate to acknowledge that scholarly thinking on the significance of hospitality in the Torah develops along distinctly different trajectories. Theologians such as Christine Pohl and Amy Oden are most concerned with the biblical record and the subsequent response by the early Christian church. Others, such as Raymond T. Hobbs, see it as a process of transformative leadership which separates animals from humans, strangers from guests, and public from private spaces. The home is its sine qua non and every exchange carries political and economic overtones. He argues that hospitality is ultimately about power. Those who agree see the biblical study of hospitality as burdened by a Western perspective which Hobbs describes as a “teleological fallacy, a tendency to

26 Luke Bretherton, Hospitality as Holiness, 128.
27 Peter Mackay, The Centrality of Metaphors to Biblical Thought, 297.
use ancient documents as a springboard for a modern polemic” on the subject.29 A third perspective, seen in the work of John Perry, argues persuasively that the church’s understanding of the ethical significance of the Torah is best accomplished through the Torah’s own internal distinctions, not by imposing external categories (ceremonial/moral; old/new covenant) on it. By recognizing themselves as aliens who live in the midst of a people, *geirei toshav*, early Christians, particularly Gentiles, continued to be shaped and formed by the Mosaic Law which welcomed them as holy.30 Whatever the theological perspective or hermeneutical filter, one of these or one of many others, it remains possible to agree that private physical space is both present and influential.

Genesis 15:13 establishes that for four hundred years the Hebrews were aliens and strangers. During this period Abraham, whose life was the unwritten law,31 offered the quintessential model of hospitality (Genesis 18), but there are other supporting models. In Genesis 3:17 God’s hospitality is withdrawn, yet in 3:21 it is extended to include clothing, and in 9:2, meat. Verse 14:8 describes the bread and wine offered by Melchizedek, founder of the royal priesthood. The often misread account of Chapter 19 is as much a story of leadership as it is one of distorted home hospitality. Similarity with Ugaritic texts indicate that as a patriarchal gatekeeper responsible for communal safely, it was Lot’s duty to arrange for a house arrest in which it might be determined whether the travelers were to be granted hospitality or approached with hostility. The crowd’s demand to know them

was an affront to Lot’s established authority. In the sacrificial act of hospitality, offering his daughters, he is in turn protected by God.\textsuperscript{32} Other stories of hospitality are more straightforward. In 20:14 Abimelech gives Abraham who is acknowledged as a prophet, land and provisions. The Hittites provide a burial home for Sarah (23:6). Laban receives a servant with the full honor due any guest (24:31) and extends the hospitality of his home to Jacob for a full month (29:13). In 26:30, Isaac and Abimelech, whose name implies king, enjoy a feast. Reading through a lens of hospitality, the book of Genesis beautifully concludes as it opens, moving from God’s creating a home for his human family to describing in detail the generous hospitality which Joseph offers his family. (43:31, 47:12, 50:20).

The hospitality described in the next four books, while continuing the concepts introduced in Genesis, is amplified as a means by which practitioners are afforded the opportunity to move into a life with God reflective of covenantal faithfulness. The dominant view of hospitality is one in which the leaders who emerge constantly remind their followers of God’s continuing hospitality and the dangers of disobedience that will result in its withdrawal. The alien is a consistent image in this narrative and represents who the Israelites would also be were it not for their chosen status. Here there is a challenge to reconcile God’s repeated warning against foreign pollutants with the idea that just as God made room in the garden for what was not God, the struggling nation is to receive hospitably that which was not Israel (Ex 2:22, 18:13, 22:21, Lv 19:33, 23:7, 24:22, 32:3 Scott Morschauser, “Hospitality, Hostiles and Hostages: On the Legal Background of Genesis 19:1-9,” \textit{Journal for the Study of the Old Testament} 27/4 (2003): 464.
Nm 9:14, 15:29, Dt 1:16, 10:18, 24:17, 27:19). There appears to be a mandated distinction between those who wished to enter the community of faith (Ex 12:48, 23:12, Lv 19:10, 23:33, 25:35, Dt 5:16, 14:29, 24:14) and those who were considered a threat to it (Dt 12:30, 18:9, 20:18, 29:16). Albeit selective and cursory, this analysis of hospitality as it is portrayed in the Pentateuch confirms that early in its history the people of Israel understood its significance. Contemporary Christians struggling with issues such as immigration and homelessness will find direction in these ancient but in so many ways similar narratives.

**Historical Accounts of Israel’s Response**

Much of what is revealed in the Historical Books harkens back to the precedents set in stone at Sinai. The picture that emerges is one of a rebellious people who ultimately end up in exile. When hospitality is interjected as a metric for covenantal faithfulness, a brighter light illuminates what is an otherwise dismal story. In its bleakest hour, human beings rise up in the image of their God who never fails to provide a home for His people. The historical books of the Old Testament do not offer a self-explainable history of what has happened in the past. They convey an assessment of the significance of those things which were important to those particular people within the framework of a given time. As often as not the reader is negatively advised what not to do rather than positively instructed what to do. Given the sheer number of episodes which are set within a framework of home-based hospitality, it can be argued that this dynamic must have been important to these people. Leaders often emerge as kinsmen and household leaders who protect those whom they are called to serve. This reality, that so many of the story protagonists are men
and women in positions of communal authority gives the argument additional heft. As the following independent accounts from the twelve books verify, much of the narrative source includes a snapshot of leadership characterized in part by a willingness to open ones’ private home to others.

- Joshua opens with the story of Rahab’s kindness in welcoming spies into her home and of their subsequent protection of her. (2:1, 6:17, 22). Yet this story of hospitality pales in significance when compared to the book’s grand narrative of the conquest of Canaan in which God provides the home and material prosperity promised to Abraham and sampled but for a short while in Eden.

- There is perhaps no story of hospitality in history, biblical or otherwise, more disturbing than the one found in Judges 19 in which after several evenings of excessively lavish hospitality offered by the Levite’s father in law, his concubine is raped and cut into pieces while accepting the hospitality of an old man described as a master. Comparing this episode to similar ones in Genesis 19 and 1 Samuel 11 allows the reader to recognize that a world in which there is no king and in which people do what is right in their own eyes forms “an inverted world where actions are often ludicrous, absurd and self defeating.”33 It demonstrates to the people what might happen to those seeking their own power and revenge rather than deferring to the acknowledged authority, human or divine. Even the revered

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institution of hospitality is perverted and the sanctity of the home is threatened by those who remain stubbornly oblivious to what is right in the eyes of YHWH.\textsuperscript{34} The Levite receives in Gibeah what he went there to avoid and a community is shattered as a result. By telling a story of home based hospitality in this way, the reader is reminded of the reality of sin. This serves as an example of how when a narrative aims to correct a warped perspective on a subject, the reader’s perspective is corrected as well.\textsuperscript{35}

- The story of Ruth opens in communal famine and closes in personal plenty. The intervening time is one characterized by extravagant personal hospitality, especially on the part of the communal leader Boaz who exceeds the legal requirements of hospitality “in response to the way Ruth has gone well beyond the Torah’s expectations.”\textsuperscript{36}

- Although King David extends the gracious hospitality of his own table to Mephibosheth (2 Sm 9:7), in 2 Samuel 12:4 the prophet Nathan indicts him, using a parable of hospitality in which a rich man abuses a servant in order to serve his guests.

- The stories of Elijah and Elisha firmly establish that it is God, not kings or rulers who are in control of Israel’s life. Elijah’s receiving a double portion of food is a significant reminder of Israel’s receiving bread in the wilderness

\textsuperscript{34} Lasine Stewart, “Guest and Host in Judges 19,” 46.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
(I Kg 17:6) and bears witness to the concept that he should do likewise, as he later acted in regard to the widow of Zarephath. The II Kings 4 account of Elisha and the Shunnemite woman similarly “opens a delightful window on an Israelite community at its best.”37 The woman’s description as great is an indication of her authority in this community.

- The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are a source of information on the rebuilding of the Israelite community based on its original identity as a people of the Law and hospitality is taken seriously by the leaders of the community. Provisions are restored (Neh 5:17) and the emphasis on reestablishing the Torah as authoritative culminates with instructions to extend hospitality to those for whom nothing is prepared (Neh 8:12). This order of events may be seen as a reflection of the legal prescription which made the hospitality of the Promised Land contingent upon obedience to the law. The people are subsequently reminded of God’s generous provision during which time they ate and grew fat (Neh 9:25). By orchestrating such communal activity, leaders insured that the joy of those who obeyed YHWH was heard far away (Neh 12:43).

- The book of Esther contains a number of feasts in which many guests are served and entertained in her home. This regal display of lavish hospitality serves as the vehicle for the real story which is one of retribution and justice.

Because a vehicle such as military conflict would be more expected and likely, the argument regarding the central place of hospitality in Israelite society is strengthened.

**Domestic Hospitality is Integrated into the Wisdom Tradition**

If Torah sets the standard and the Historical Books represent Israel’s past response to it, it can be suggested that the Poetical and Wisdom Books form a compendium of advice on how communities, both past and present, best function. For the moment at least, law and history are replaced by universal human concerns and it is this theme that holds an otherwise loosely coherent section together.

Job opens and closes with a picture of a community that eats and drinks together in home settings. The suffering protagonist reminds God that he has always been a man of hospitality (31:31). In one of the most beautiful creation accounts of Scripture (Chapter 38) God reminds Job that He has been also. Thus hospitality is the medium for the message that the righteous, in this instance the leader, must often suffer.

The book of Psalms incorporates an image of hospitality into the liturgical life of the Israelite community, figuring prominently in the prayers of both lament and thanksgiving. If the traditional headings which were later added to the book are seen as parallel to the life of King David, the argument for a strong connection between leadership and hospitality is exponentially strengthened. God’s hospitable providence is mentioned specifically in the headings of Psalms 65, 104, and 147. Additionally, the headings Psalms 15, 84, 91, 122, 127, 132, 134, and 137 all refer to dwelling places or houses. In addition
to these headings, the monarch repeatedly and specifically acknowledges the extravagant hospitality of God’s original creation and of His ongoing provision. Psalm 13 celebrates that God has been bountiful with him, and 36:7 extends this bounty to all people who are invited to feast upon the abundance of God’s house. In 65:11 this hospitality is set within a framework of time, and in Psalm 145 the story of hospitality is passed along to the next generation. In Chapter 16 David chooses God’s cup, an ultimate symbol of hospitality. In Psalm 23 God Himself prepares the table for His human guest. Psalm 104 is a self-contained creation story in which God offers ongoing hospitality to everything He creates.

The message of Proverbs in which the righteous prosper offers a perspective opposite from that of Job. The tension between wisdom and folly found in Chapter 9 uses table fellowship, or rather hospitality, as a metaphor for choosing good over evil. Proverbs 23 is representative of a common form of instructional writing found throughout the ancient Near East, especially in Egypt. In this scenario, the royal mother writing to her son, King Lemuel, devotes a good bit of space to the table etiquette appropriate for the elite. It is pertinent and contemporary advice that surely demonstrates that such habits and practices of hospitality learned in the home were an important factor in one’s identity. Proper hospitable engagement is presented as one of the traditional protective tasks assigned to rulers. Manners are not mere formalities but are an essential demonstration of regard for another person. The inclusion of this passage in the Old Testament would suggest that such attitudes were important. Proverbs 31 is not a delineation of tasks that

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39 Ibid., 39.
must be performed by a woman in order to be deemed virtuous. Rather the virtuous woman who provides food for family and poor alike (31:31) indicates that an ideal exists. This ideal includes creating a hospitable home environment.

The *leitmotif* of Ecclesiastes is that life consists of a series of contradictions which are reconciled only by obedience to a sovereign God. Outside of this kingship, all is futile vanity. In three key passages hospitality is used to explain this human predicament. The admonition of 3:13 is to enjoy the fruits of one’s labor, to partake of the good of eating and drinking, a sentiment reinforced in 9:7: to eat with enjoyment and drink in merriment. These are words with overtones of hospitable engagement. Feasts are said to be for laughter (10:19) and everyone is encouraged to include others in the celebration by sending out bread upon the waters (11:1)

The Song of Solomon concludes the Wisdom and Poetical Books by setting hospitality within the framework of a ceremonial love feast, harkening back to the liturgical tone set in Psalm 136:25 in which the food offered within the framework of God’s hospitality is viewed as a sign of love that endures forever. The eating and drinking found within the dynamic of hospitality are carried along by an erotic sentiment (5:1), and the banqueting house is aligned with affection (2:4). Servants and leaders are separated by their habits of hospitality in 10:16.

And so, thus far it has been demonstrated that throughout the Old Testament a language of hospitality is employed in order to create communities in which God’s own continued hospitality repeatedly reflects his sovereignty.
The Prophets Offer Bread in the Wilderness

In the Prophetic Books, perhaps even more than in the previous sections, the notion of hospitality acquires the DNA of the source. The following examples will illuminate the ways in which hospitality represents both judgment and restoration. In keeping with the literature of this genre it is often conditional, “if” and “will” being operational expressions. The wording and writing style, like much prophetic literature, is imaginatively flamboyant, and the tone is often visionary. The Prophetic Books often tell something about the personal life of the prophet under consideration, and hospitality appears as a recurring theme in these oral, public accounts. One prophetic role is to decry various human violations of their relationship with God, and a wide variety of metaphors describing this relationship is used.\(^{40}\) As the following suggests, hospitality is frequently appropriated for this purpose. More pragmatically, by presenting hospitality as a dimension of the overall theme of righteousness and justice, concrete and specific actions of persons in actual relationships are explored. It is then possible to conclude that when others are accorded what is due them, the foundations of a society at its best are realized.\(^{41}\) Repetition of words such as “wall,” “dwelling,” “home,” and “house” reverberate the message and help confirm the ongoing claim of this paper, that private domestic space is a critical part of the dynamic.

In prophetic tradition, Isaiah contrasts the feast of rich food with well-aged wines that the Lord will prepare for the faithful (25:6) to the dried up conditions which await the


disobedient (Ch.24). In making the comparison as to who will receive or be denied this hospitality, those in positions of leadership such as the priest, the master, the mistress, the seller, the lender and the creditor are all held culpable (24:2). In Chapter 21, after referring to the blessing of Abraham, the prophet indicates that for the righteous, the original hospitality and protective shelter offered in Eden will be restored. Furthermore, the faithful will be invited to participate in the personal hospitality in God’s own holy court (62:9). The hospitable image of being within God’s walls is universally extended to the faithful (56:5). God’s favor is contingent upon sharing one’s space and bread with those who are in need of it (58:7). All who satisfy these needs (58:10) can expect God to do likewise for them (58:11).

Jeremiah continues this thinking by adding that God will honor those who are hospitable by dwelling with them in their own home (7:6), an indication that the acceptance of hospitality carries weight as does its extension. Jeremiah expands upon the conditional concept by saying that the homes of those who house aliens will prosper (22:3). On a negative note, negligent leaders, identified as shepherds, will be punished (23:4). God identifies Himself as a neglected traveler (14:2) in order to illustrate that hospitality will be withdrawn from those who neglect to heed His words (29:17). The prophet Ezekiel likewise contrasts judgment for those who fail to be hospitable (22:7) with a vision of the Eden-like hospitality that awaits the obedient. These visions are consistently employed as a means of demonstrating what it means to know who God is, that He is the Lord (36:38).

The story the book of Daniel tells is reminiscent of those recounted in Ruth and Esther in that the hospitality extended by the person in power is actual, not imagined.
Refusing to accept that hospitality symbolizes a refusal of evil. Throughout the minor Prophetic Books Israel is chastised for its failure to be hospitable (Zec 7:8, Mal 3:5) and its subsequent restoration is often symbolized as a restoration of God’s hospitality, which includes essentials such as grain and grapes, bread and wine (Jl 3:18).

Conclusion

It has been argued that home-based hospitality as practiced and reflected upon by Old Testament personalities was integral to the understanding of the normative ethics of the time. Its proper appropriation represented obedience to God’s will, natural morality, and an imitation of God. These norms have their foundations in cultural precedents, in the ethos as well as the ethics of Judaism, and in the biblical narrative. Does it not follow that within the implied cultural mandate\(^\text{42}\) of Scripture there exists a directive that such ideals and practices should be embraced and adopted by the contemporary worshipping community at large?

\(^{42}\) For elaboration on this idea, see Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008). The work of Dutch Neo-Calvinist theologian Abraham Kuyper is also influential in this regard.
CHAPTER 2

THE CENTRALITY OF PRIVATE DOMESTIC SPACE
IN THE TIME OF NEW TESTAMENT

Departure from the Traditions of the Old Testament

Just as it was necessary to place the hospitality of the ancient Israelites in context, it is now appropriate to do likewise with the earliest Christian individuals and communities of faith who were living in a world dominated by the history, traditions, laws and mores of the Roman Empire. Historically, in the myth infused Greco-Roman culture that believed in the supernatural visits of deities, one was always prepared to receive the stranger. Homeric literature dating from perhaps as early as the twelfth century BCE offers numerous examples. According to ancient Greek etiquette, one was not to ask the name of a stranger until the guest had been received, his or her feet had been washed and food had been offered. Pilgrims on their way to oracles were beneficiaries of such hospitality. By Roman times hospitality had become a recognized virtue of civilization and in the pragmatism that characterized that culture it was often seen as a means of disarming strangers and as Roman law advanced it became a tool of diplomacy. In fact, individual hospitality was a key factor in helping the Romans overcome xenophobia and ultimately form strategic alliances.¹ Although space constraints prohibit elaboration at this juncture, communal meals featured prominently in Greco-Roman antiquity, and Mediterranean people typically attached to the table, to the hearth, and to the home very high symbolic as

well as actual value. It is not insignificant that when people of that time and place gathered in a home for whatever reason, the assembly was generally in the dining room and a communal meal constituted the central act of meeting. The great Roman orator Cicero, though not reflecting specifically on hospitality but rather on the centrality of the home in society in general, concluded:

> What is more sacred, what more inviolably hedged about by every kind of sanctity, than the home of an individual citizen? Within its circle are his altars, his hearths, his household gods, his religion, his observances, his ritual; it is a sanctuary so holy in the eyes of all, that it were a sacrilege to tear an owner therefrom.

Yet in a world where hospitality was the norm, the hospitality extended by the first members of the Christian community was not based solely on tradition, or on law, or even as was the case among the Romans, on class distinctions. Instead, their hospitality presented itself more distinctly as a compelling example of human love. It was, as Arthur Sutherland points “a profession of faith in the rule of God – being useful to Caesar was secondary.” Although rooted in Old Testament tradition, law and obedience, the hospitality of the New Testament era was simultaneously fluid. In Greek, the prevailing language of the New Testament era, *xenos*, guest, host, and stranger are interrelated. In Latin, which would eventually become the official language of the church in the West, the words *hostis*, enemy, and *hospes*, stranger, are also related. *Philoxenia* is not just a love of the stranger but rather a delight in the whole guest/host relationship. This interchange of

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roles in Christian hospitality is a natural reflection of Christ as the archetypical wanderer who is simultaneously the head of God’s own household. The following New Testament passages are relevant examples.

- Luke 7 tells the story of Jesus who receives hospitality in the home of a Pharisee and simultaneously grants a sinful woman admission into God’s kingdom.
- In Luke 19 Zacchaeus receives salvation as a result of his hospitality towards Jesus who was his guest.
- At the wedding in Cana (Jn 2:1-11) Jesus the guest becomes the Host as He replenishes the wine supply.
- In the John 4 encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus asks for water, is invited to lodge with the community and in role reversal, offers living water in return.
- The Emmaus story found in Luke 24 ostensibly portrays Jesus as a table guest but reveals that it was in His ultimate role as their Host, distributing and serving the bread that allowed the followers to see their Savior.

Gone are the earlier restrictions on cleanliness and purity, which are replaced by a Jesus-inspired universal form of hospitality that often upset the status quo. Pertinent examples can be seen in the stories of home based table fellowship found in Matthew 9:9-13, 8:28-34, 13:53-58, 10:38-42, Luke 14:1-14, and 19:1-9. The relationship between
holiness and hospitality thus became inverted. Through acts of kindness toward pagans, the unclean and sinners, Christians were and are made holy.\(^5\)

**The Medium is the Message**

Not only did homes and the implied hospitality which was extended in them feature prominently the New Testament, they became an integral component of its overall message. Houses are mentioned almost two hundred times in the New Testament text. Although there are admittedly numerous references to genealogical “houses” of lineage the following selected examples will establish that more often than not reference was being made to a specific private residence.

In Acts, the homes of Mary (12:2), Lydia (16:40), Jason (17:5), and Philip (21:6) are singled out by name as are those of Chloe in 1 Corinthians 1:11 and of Stephanas in 16:15. The homes of Nympha in Colossians 4:15 and Onesiphorus in 2 Timothy 1:16 offer more evidence. This claim is further confirmed by the use of the Greek words, *oikos* and *oikia*, which translate as “domestic abode.”

Thinking more broadly, the Gospel of Mark contains thirty-nine references to houses, the book of Acts opens and closes in homes and mentions them thirty five times in between. The social significance of private domestic dwellings is subtly embedded in 1 Corinthians 11: 22 where Paul asks with passion, “Do you not have houses in which to eat.” This inquiry relates to the supposition that early Christians were primarily lower class laborers. It also figures into the scholarly debate over Bruce Winter’s suggestion that the

“haves” were householders and that those without homes, however prosperous they might otherwise be, were considered “have nots.”

More specifically, the impending birth of Jesus was revealed during a hospitable encounter in the house of Zechariah (Lk 1:40), as was the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Lk 2:1). In the time intervening, Jesus participated extensively in home-based hospitality. He ate with close friends (Mt 8:4, Mk 1:29, Lk 10:38, Acts12:2), those on the margins (Mt 9:10, Lk 7:36), and leaders alike (Mt. 9:23, Mk 5:38). He expected that his disciples would do likewise and gave detailed instructions on how to proceed (Mt. 10: 5-15, 26:7). The apostle Paul relied heavily on private domestic hospitality, and his letters often refer to those involved by name (I Cor 1:11, 16:15, Col 4:15). In fact, without home hospitality there may well have been no Pauline letters as his “correspondence, an integral part of his mission, was made possible by a network of houses scattered throughout the entire region.”

Every letter he sent needed one or more carriers who were dependent upon a “sending” oikos for the resources necessary to start the trip, and along the way, on the hospitality of several additional houses for lodging and resources (Phil 2:25, 4:10-18, 1 Cor 16:16). Although the homes of the earliest believers were sometimes used as primitive churches, they were more often used for traditional hospitality (Acts 16:40, 17:5, 21:6). For the earliest followers of Jesus, every gesture of hospitality encompassed a dynamic of

8 Ibid.
Christology, ecclesiology, or eschatology: every interaction was a reflection of Christ, His Church, or his Kingdom.

The influences that affected the formation of the Pauline and subsequent house churches, the ecclesia were many and varied, and continue to be a subject of debate. Popular among suggestions is that they may have derived their organization, such as it was, from Hellenistic synagogues and/or from the extended family structure of Greco-Roman life. As hospitality provided an environment in which to establish a new identity, it subsequently emerged as a key factor in the process of Gospel transmission. In his book on New Testament hospitality, John Koenig introduces the appropriate term “banquet community” as a social description of the early Christians who formed these worshipping communities. The groups were able to act as units, extending welcome and hospitality to an increasing number of traveling missionaries, wanderers, and residents, all of whom shared in the same prophetic vision.9

A Language of Welcome

“You’re welcome “ as a response to “thank you” is a twentieth century aberration of a word whose original etymology literally denoted the pleasure derived from receiving a guest in one’s home. From a Christian perspective, its quintessential expression is found in Matthew 25, as Jesus explains that only those who have welcomed others into their earthly homes will be welcomed into His heavenly one. Philemon 1:10-16 is particularly illustrative of the symbolic power of this language of welcome as Paul requests that

Onesimus be greeted in such a manner. In fact, he employs the same term of hospitable welcome, *proslambanesthai*, in describing the act of salvation in Romans 14:13.10 The Luke 14: 25 images of “the owner of the house” judging those “standing outside” and “knocking at the door” reinforce this concern. The line of demarcation between insiders and outsiders represents an ongoing concern of the New Testament narrative and in the act of welcoming this division is often softened or even erased. These are not stories of almsgiving, communal sharing, or charity, although the New Testament certainly has much to say on those issues. These are stories told in private places where the setting and the message reinforce one another. This connection is particularly apparent in Luke’s gospel account (5:27, 7:37, 10:38, 14:1, and 19:1). Many of the parables and stories about home hospitality might just as easily have been told in unrelated settings such as in fields, on mountaintops or even in synagogues but they were not. Stories of hospitality were intentionally and effectively told in homes where more often than not they were simultaneously being reenacted and improvised.

Jesus presents Himself as both a stranger (Jn 1:10) and as homeless (Mt 8:20, Lk 9:58), underscoring to his followers that home hospitality is an important practice. The New Testament, particularly the book of Luke, contains numerous stories of outsiders being welcomed into private domestic spaces. Conversely, in the role reversal typical of these encounters, the host is an outsider who welcomes Jesus into his home. In each instance Jesus becomes the host and in turn embraces the host as a guest. The accounts of

the Pharisees in Luke 7:37 and 14:4, the tax collectors in Matthew 9:13, Mark 2:15, Luke 5:27, and the well known story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19 are all examples of this domestic interplay. The Samaritan woman in John 4 in whose home Jesus stays for two days also represents a class of people who for a variety of reasons are forced to live on the margins of society. But perhaps the most dazzling story of a domestic setting carrying the message of God’s impartiality is found in the Acts 10 account of Peter’s visit to the home of faithful Cornelius. This all serves as evidence that then, as now, the Gospel message of a new and shared identity in Christ is best communicated in a private home, where the Scriptural text is in effect actualized. This process was and is difficult if not impossible in a more public setting, however personal or intimate it may appear to be on the surface. Arthur Sutherland summarizes it in this way:

> The offer and acceptance of hospitality can take place anywhere there is apace to share and authority to share it. Yet the household is the essential sphere for hospitality: it is the place where host and guest meet in a way that is not duplicated in other forums. When we say, “Come to my house,” we are saying something fundamentally different from when we invite someone into our country, into our town, or into our neighborhood. Although those settings, or circles, invite the stranger to know us in ever-narrowing and more intimate ways, the intimacy of my home can never be usurped. This perspective suggests that the New Testament’s emphasis on the home, on the household, is of seminal significance for understanding the [third] foundation of theological hospitality.\[11\]

He concludes with a near indictment of the contemporary church’s “process of institutionalizing care” at the expense of hospitality that reflects the “ad hoc and personal” vision that Jesus personified.\[12\]

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11 Arthur Sutherland, *I Was A Stranger*, 41.
12 Ibid., 79.
Yet in *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Christine Pohl maintains that the dynamic just described has lost its moral dimension and is no longer viewed as a spiritual obligation or as an expression of faith. She goes on to suggest:

> And so over the years, important older understandings and stories of hospitality have nearly disappeared. Because of this we know little of how earlier generations of Christians struggled with issues of recognition and dignity, transcending social differences, building community, distributing limited resources and negotiating the tensions between maintaining identity boundaries and welcoming strangers.\(^{13}\)

She believes that if recovered these stories might help American Christians in particular respond to homelessness, immigration and even a detached younger generation that does not associate or affiliate with mainline denominations. She then asks, “If we cannot recover the stories, is there a clue embedded in the stories we do have?”\(^{14}\) The claim of this paper is that the embedded clue is the personal, private and domestic space generally considered to be “home.” This assertion is based in part on the fact that in order to convey its message, the writers of the New Testament often relied on models, much in the same way the writers of the Old Testament turned to metaphors for pedagogical help. And the models they chose were often related to the easily identifiable concepts of family and home. But in order to grapple effectively with the most obviously pressing question, “What models illuminate private domestic space as the consummate model for Christian hospitality?” it is first necessary to establish the value of models in general.

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\(^{14}\) Ibid.
Models Matter

According to Christine Pohl whose work is mentioned above, the incipient challenge she faced as she began her study of Christian hospitality was that at the time she did not “have access to a vocabulary of hospitality” which led her to question whether or not such a language actually existed.\textsuperscript{15} This is hardly surprising, given that that the word hospitality or derivatives of it appears only six times in the New Testament text. Yet as was true in the previous Old Testament analysis, a paucity of lexemes should not be construed as a lack of valid evidence. In instances such as this, models, like metaphors, are useful because they introduce a much needed new language, like a dialect or idiom, in which the original is described without actually being constructed. And if they have the power to suggest a new language, they bear explanation.\textsuperscript{16} Models may be construed as metaphors that have “gained sufficient credibility and scope so as to present a pattern.”\textsuperscript{17} This pattern, often interchanged with the concept of a motif, may be a one-line comparison, may become an extended analogy, or may be fully developed as an ongoing theme.\textsuperscript{18} I am arguing here that the numerous and complementary New Testament models of home hospitality represent such a theme because, as universally recognizable

\textsuperscript{15} Christine Pohl, \textit{Making Room}, ix.
\textsuperscript{17} Robert D. Stallman, “Divine Hospitality in the Pentateuch: A Metaphorical Perspective on God as Host” (PhD Doctoral Dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1999), 60.
“established symbols” of Christian community, they were conventionally used to illuminate a particular aspect of the faith.19

Having justified the use of models as a source of truthful and valid evidence, it is possible to proceed on the assumption that the home represents more than a geographical focus of Christian hospitality. Private domestic space is the primary locus of a uniquely Christian hospitality because it provides a central paradigm from which numerous essential models of Christianity emerge. When the people of the New Testament opened their private domestic spaces for hospitable encounters, they were able to reenact or in more inclusive terms, improvise the tenets of their faith.20 In one bold gesture, there was a synthesis of doctrine and everyday life that became simultaneously contagious and compelling. The private home offered New Testament Christians a readymade venue for participation in the process. However, it is impossible to imagine any particular form of domestic space as “typical” of the period. Country dwellings ranged from villas to peasant huts and those in the urban areas ranged from smart town apartments, to rooms connected to a shop, and on to the ramshackle dwellings of the poor.21 But unlike many contemporary American homes described in the Introduction, domestic spaces in the first century were for the most part small, uncomfortably crowded, and stood in startling juxtaposition to the magnificent, expansive, and generally accessible public areas.22 Yet early believers, again unlike many contemporary Americans, were quick to extend

21 Todd D. Still and David G. Horrell, ed., After the First Urban Christians, 42.
hospitality to others within their often humble abodes. Why did they do this? The crux of the claim of this entire paper lies in successfully answering this question and in offering convincing evidence that no other environment offered or offers now such potential for introducing and communicating the Gospel story.

The Household Model

When the New Testament was written, household imagery was not limited to the domestic sphere. Because it was regularly applied to political as well as religious positions of honor in the public world, its subsequent Christian appropriation is not surprising. Household language occurs throughout the New Testament, particularly in the Pauline tradition, where it is noticeably more prevalent in Colossians, Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles. In these books its use is explicit as a model for structuring social relationships within communities. The household is projected as the context in which Christian discipleship is given practical expression and as such, the codes which governed them functioned in “yoking Christianity to the household as the locus of its routine expression.”

Roger Gehring, whose research on early house churches is the most comprehensive to date, points out that scholarly interest in the fundamental social and

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economic importance of the household in the ancient world is growing, and the New Testament has a great deal to contribute to the field of study. He concludes:

Scarcely anything determined daily life more than the *oikos* with its network of relationships. By belonging to an *oikos*, each individual gained a sense of identity within society as a whole; it provided them an “inside” and an “outside”, not only a dwelling place but a home. This small *oikos* fellowship provided a basic building block for the entire society as well. It was from this point that individuals entered into relationships with one another.\(^\text{26}\)

This reality had a great impact on how the original followers of Jesus presented themselves and their faith to the outside world. When the first Christians hospitably invited others to participate in their personal household experiences, they revealed and illuminated critical elements of Christian faith. And although few would advocate a unilateral return to the male-dominated household structures characteristic of first-century Palestine, it does not take much imagination to suggest that the benefits derived from the home hospitality of that era still exist. First of all, guests were prepared to understand what is implied by the term “household of God” as mentioned in 1 Timothy 2:1, Titus 2:1, and 1 Peter 5:1. Therefore the opening and sharing of private space represented the first step in building community\(^\text{27}\) and allowed the guest to experience firsthand “a most concrete reminder of what it meant to belong to the *ekklesia* of God that could offer welcome to one as a brother or sister.”\(^\text{28}\) This brotherhood-like nature of the larger Christian fellowship was initially embedded in household structures.\(^\text{29}\) Guests received into a well ordered household were given a glimpse of what the larger fellowship of a well managed church had to offer, “a

\(^{26}\) Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission*, 17.
\(^{27}\) Ibid., 122.
\(^{29}\) Karl Sandnes, “Equality Within Patriarchal Structures,” 150.
household ordered by God in Christ.”

Although there were certainly interruptions such as that described at the house of Jason (Acts 17:6), the intimacy of private space was more likely to provide privacy where seekers could observe and inquire without fear. Most homes, even those used as gathering places for the church, did not (outwardly at least), project a sense of sacred space. The relative stability of the home projected a message of permanence. The variety of ages involved in the dynamics of a household both embodied and communicated the practice of passing tradition from one generation to the next, and because households existed in every strata of society, they were positioned to reach everyone. Finally, and perhaps most interesting and relevant for today, is the fact that although Scripture offers numerous examples of whole households being converted, Christian identity was individual and varied within the household. The presence of multiple perspectives within a home was less intimidating than the prevailing insider/outsider view experienced in the church proper, even if the setting for such a church was also a house.

**The Family Model**

In arguing that home-based hospitality offers more potential than that practiced in public spaces, I am proceeding on the premise that family units act as the operative agents within given household structures. Understandably, families in the first century were more extended and less nuclear than they are today, but like today, they took on a variety of forms. In addition to this variety, the New Testament text presents the concept of a family as having two distinct aspects. The Gospels tend to portray them in terms of their

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30 Roger Gehring, *House Church and Mission*, 292.
interaction, as caring units that share resources. The picture found in the book of Acts and in the Pauline corpus is more structure oriented and deals with issues of organization. In both cases the family illuminates the communal nature of the believer’s life. Through practices of family-oriented home-hospitality, the guests described in the text as well as subsequent readers of it are given insight into what Richard Hays refers to as “the moral vision of the New Testament.” The language of kinship, family and belonging in the New Testament is widespread, often fictive and affectionate. Words such as “sister,” “beloved,” “children,” and “brethren” figure prominently. As an example, in the letters that are undisputedly Pauline, the word “brother” alone is introduced sixty-five times. Within this framework the family is responsible not just for passing along traditions and rituals as mentioned above, but is also responsible for religious training and education.

Wayne Meeks in *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* points out that one of the common characteristics of the early Christians their social mobility. As a result many sometimes found that their position in society was ambiguous, a factor which may have made them anxious and even lonely. He then suggests that the intimacy of Christian groups became a welcome refuge, and that the “emotionally charged language of family and affection” and the accompanying image of a caring, personal God offered a powerful antidote to their feelings of alienation. Christianity, with a master symbol of the crucified Savior, thus “crystallized a believable picture of the way the world

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seemed to really work.” As a model, the concept of “the family of God” suggests that “integration into the family like community of a house [church] can fulfill the universal need of all humankind to be at home, to belong, to be in a family with a sense of safety and security.” The family of God thus became the “social model” of Christian community where brotherly love was inwardly practiced and outwardly displayed.

Concluding Thoughts on Ancillary Models

It has been shown that early Christians who practiced home-based hospitality offered their guests a firsthand experience of membership in both the household and family of God. It was suggested that the same opportunities are open to contemporary Christians and their guests. Although not as fully developed as the two models introduced above, the following ancillary ones are certainly valid and hold merit and potential. First of all, the hospitable households described in the New Testament modeled training grounds of discipleship and guests were offered ample opportunities to observe and learn. Often within the home context unconverted visitors and seekers witnessed organizational, administrative, teaching, pastoral and ministerial skills in action. As mentioned above, the New Testament portrays Jesus using private homes as His pedagogical as well as material base of operations. The same is true of Paul and by implication, all of the messengers who traveled from oikos to oikos. Secondly, participants in home-based hospitality became as Abraham in the Genesis 18 account, models of servant leadership. Zacchaeus may have

36 Roger Gehring, House Church and Mission, 304.
37 Ibid., 293.
been called “son” for this reason. Andrew Clarke points out in Serve the Community of the Church, that although the designation diaconia may have linguistically implied the lowly occupation of waiting tables, in the new Christian context of servant leadership it carried connotations of honor and dignity. Thirdly, as models of devotion, homes established an “inner distance” from the rest of the world and silently yet powerfully communicated what qualities defined a community “set apart.” And finally, in keeping with the admonitions of I Thessalonians 4:11, Colossians 4:5, and Ephesians 5:15, Christians who were radically hospitable reflected a model of wisdom. They adhered to a standard that outsiders recognized as good, they behaved in a manner that was in accord with the moral norms of the emerging community, and they honored the will of God.

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38 Andrew Clark, Serve the Community of the Church, 237.
39 Roger Gehring, House Church and Mission, 85.
CHAPTER 3
FROM APOSTOLIC WITNESS TO PATRISTIC EXPRESSION:
TWO BRIEF BUT FORMATIVE ERAS

The Ken Burns Effect

In the fall of 1990, for five consecutive evenings from September 23 to September 27, forty million Americans gathered in front of their television sets to watch what remains the most popular series to ever air on public broadcasting: Ken Burns’ *The Civil War*. What was it that attracted such interest? The brilliant young artist had managed to transform what was typically presented as a story of bullets, brigades, and battles into a completely human expression of conflict. Using a technique that would later be dubbed “the Ken Burns effect,” he created a sense of movement and wonder as he “panned in” on still photographs of adolescent warriors, weeping children and bereft mothers. “Voices” brought their stories alive. By placing this sad epoch of history in a social context, he enlivened it for a whole new generation of Americans. Over forty awards were given to the project, and even today, when one hears strains of Jay Unger’s *Ashokan Farewell*, images of the film come to mind.

The following pages, in a very limited way, will focus in on the human aspect of a subject that has thus far been viewed in a more theological, historical or sociological manner. Amy G. Oden, who devoted a year to compiling a sourcebook on the hospitality of the early Christians, writes, “It is in the actual stories of the actual people that the
richness of the tradition comes through.”¹ Different voices tell different stories that reveal that although Christian practices of hospitality during this period took on a variety of forms and interpretations, the home remained a constant and central feature. Houses continued to provide a physical setting or “focus,” and the family households they sheltered operated as a nuclear “locus” of a uniquely Christian form of hospitality.²

**Time and Geography**

The Apostolic Age is traditionally considered as consisting of the seventy years between the day of Pentecost described in Acts 2 and the death of the Apostle John in 100 CE. The following years are sometimes referred to as Post-Apostolic but because of the influence of the early Church Fathers, the designation Patristic is generally preferred and will be used here. Some end the Patristic period with the Council of Chalcedon in 451; others extend it to the Eighth Century Second Council of Nicaea. Here the earlier date will apply because it was at that time that a general consensus was reached on the most important doctrinal and administrative issues confronting the emerging Church. Chalcedon established and confirmed almost all of the elements necessary for what was to become Medieval Roman Catholicism. Based on this analysis, the discussion of home-based hospitality in this chapter will end at that time. Also, scholars of these eras typically separate that which emerged out of the Latin West from that of the Greek East. In order to

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preserve the chronological flow of the case and because no formal division had yet occurred, no differentiation will be made until the following chapter, which will progress along a line that is decidedly Western and Latin, leaving the Eastern Greeks for further study.

**The Significance of the Home in the Apostolic Age**

In the first centuries of Christianity shared meals eased tensions and helped incorporate Jews and Gentile into the emerging new church. According to Christine Pohl who is perhaps the foremost authority on the subject, hospitality was a means of portraying a clear message of equality, transformed relations and a common life.³ As discussed earlier, even worship was centered in households as the separate church buildings that gradually evolved out of home structures did not exist independently until the late third century. The hospitality offered in private domestic spaces provided an environment in which possible converts could safely explore and eventually establish a new identity as Christians, making it a key factor in the process of evangelism. Rowan Greer in *Broken Lights and Mended Lives* contends that the models of Christian life found in these homes were probably more persuasive to unbelievers than was the actual proclamation of the Gospel message. In other words, the church grew more rapidly because the common life of the adherents acted as a magnet than because Christians were effective in their public

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preaching. A communication of Emperor Julian in 362 bears this out. “Why do we not observe that it is their benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead, and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done the most to increase atheism?” (Here atheism is equated with Mosaic monotheism.)

The literature of this period illuminates the significance of hospitality at the time. The number of ancient writers who deal with the hospitable episode in Genesis 18 is indicative of the importance that the earliest Church Fathers placed on the welcoming of people from the outside. Philo of Alexandria (10BCE – 45CE) emphasizes Abraham’s piety as he embellishes the scriptural account of his receiving angels whom he believes to be strangers. By anticipating guests and repeatedly hurrying to accommodate them, Abraham sets an example of how men are to welcome God into their homes.

The Jewish writer Josephus (37BC – 100 CE) furthers expands this hospitality by having Abraham, the undisputed master of the home, personally prepare the food. The earliest Christian writing after the close of the New Testament era was a letter to the Corinthians written by Clement I (fl. 96). Its theme is the virtue of hospitality as faithfulness, but more important to this study, all of the cases he cites are centered in and around private domestic space. After claiming that “because of Abraham’s faith and hospitality” a son was given him, he links the inverted hospitality of Lot’s house with holiness. He then goes on to recount the story

of hospitable Rahab who shelters the spies under her own roof.⁸ Lest these encounters be interpreted as isolated incidents, the writer of the first or second century pseudepigraphic text of *The Testament of Abraham* informs readers that the patriarch “was righteous in all goodness, having been hospitable and loving to the end of his life.”⁹ Home and the family dynamics integral to it clearly play a central role in all of these interpretations.

In addition to the exegetical works, other extant literature of the period indicates how homes were to be opened and welcoming. The *Didache*, also referred to as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, is a first-century catechism of sorts that contains prayers, instructions, and primitive liturgies. That there is an underlying assumption that believers will be opening their homes to others is seen in the document’s instructions on how to detect falsehood and insincerity in that regard. But in spite of these hesitations, believers are instructed to welcome everyone “who comes,” and the work includes what might well be the first written table prayers.¹⁰ Passages from the Greek writing of the presumably Egyptian texts of Hermas the Shepherd indicate that hospitality required more than almsgiving. Everyone was expected to participate, most particularly bishops, who “always gladly received into their houses the servants of God.”¹¹

Writing in 1883, Dr. Gerhard Uhlhorn, Abbot of Loccum, encouraged his “modern day” believers to integrate into their current context the hospitable practices operative in

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⁹ Andrew Artebury, “*Abraham’s Hospitality,*” 367.
¹¹ Amy Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 123.
the Apostolic age. More generally, his thoughts are certainly relevant to any of the historical eras considered thus far:

This state of things could not continue. It was the springtime, which, like every earthly spring passed away. It was the time of childhood, which with its glow and brightness disappears. It is a mistake to look upon the Apostolic age as in such wise a model for after ages as to make its institutions always a standard. It is only the disposition then prevailing that furnishes a standard. As for institutions, it is only their foundation that was laid and upon this future ages have to build.12

The goal of this study is to establish that private domestic space is “foundational” to the concept of Christian hospitality and that contemporary Christians are called to adopt such a “disposition” as necessary for obedience.

**Patristic Expressions:**
* A Radiant Symbiosis of Models and Metaphors.

In examining this time frame, there exists a very pleasant problem in terms of primary source material. It is extraordinarily extensive. Hundreds of Patristic writings were collected and preserved in their original languages by French priest Jacques Paul Migne (1800-1875) in his 221 volume *Patrologia Cursus Completus: Series Prima* (Latin text) and in his 85 volume *Patrologia Cursus Completus: Series Graeca* (Greek text). Many of these were studied and analyzed by Amy Oden, mentioned above. Here the initial task was to isolate those that contain specific reference to the home as the primary locus of Christian hospitality. Because so many meet this criterion, the subsequent challenge was to identify those authors who wrote most prolifically in this particular vein. The final task

12 Gerhard Uhlhorn, *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1883), 95.
was to choose from those who presented evidence in distinctive ways. For example, many
writers establish a connection between welcoming a guest and welcoming God so it was
important to include a variety of other and perhaps more distinctive perspectives in order to
substantiate the claims of this work.

One of the most prominent voices of this era was that of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons
(130 – 202 CE). He suggested that the initial hospitality of God, in which a home for
humanity was created, represented a redemptive act on behalf of immature and imperfect
human beings and that it carried the “warrant of an eschatological hospitality” as well.\footnote{Hans Boersma, “Redemptive Hospitality in Irenaeus: A Model for Ecumenicity in a Violent

God’s provision of a home would keep humanity mindful and even fearful of his
sovereignty. Communal eating was meant to be a reminder of this dependency which was
never to be forgotten. Inviting outsiders into one’s private domestic space effectively
established hospitality as both a function and characteristic of faithful humans who profess
to be image bearers of God. That instructing the community in these matters was an
essential function of the priesthood (Dt 33:10) indicates its significance.

The apologies of Lactantius (240 - 320) appealed to educated pagans and his
familiarity the ancient philosophers comes through in his writings. For example, he is most
likely referring to Plato’s concept of justice as the greatest virtue when he writes, “What is
more consistent with the heart of justice than our affording to strangers through kindness,
the things we freely give to our own relatives through affection.”\footnote{Amy Oden, And You Welcomed Me, 89.}

He also suggested that because all humanity bears the \textit{Imago Dei}, hospitality should be expanded to include final
homes of rest for the dead. He pointed out to believers that this transaction represents the only time that the host can be sure that his or her motive was not one of receiving something in return. His theology as a body of work reads compatibly with contemporary creationist theology, ever mindful that when he calls for an opening up of private space to outsiders he is doing no more than asking that we receive our human brothers and sisters who are actually connected to us by blood relationship.\textsuperscript{15}

Gregory of Nyssa (330 - 395) likened hospitality in general to taking care of one’s body; the healthy parts help heal those that are struggling. He uses this as a metaphor for the church at large, the weak helping the strong. In words of indictment, he goes on to say that sending money and provisions to those not “involved in our lives” is inadequate. Christians are called to enter into relationships and detached demonstrations of mercy are “nothing more than an outward show in order to remove such persons from our presence.”\textsuperscript{16}

And although much of his writing on hospitality borders on almsgiving, the imagery he employs testifies to the significance he places on the home-like qualities inherent in hospitality. He speaks of the poor as being “at our door,” asks Christians to “open your gates,” and offers vivid descriptions of the meager homes of those in need. He uses the metaphor of home in writing that the Word of God should become “home” for all who hear


\textsuperscript{16} Gregory of Nyssa, “As You Did It To One Of These, You Did It to Me,” \textit{Two Homilies on Almsgiving}, trans. Richard McCambly, The Gregory of Nyssa Homepage, \url{www.bhsu.edu/dsaloman/nyssa/home.html}.\n
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But it is *On the Making of Man* that contains Gregory’s strongest endorsement of home-based hospitality as he places it within the context of imaging God:

> For this reason humanity was brought into the world last after the creation….We all know that a good host does not bring a guest into his house before the preparation of the feast, but, when he has made all due preparation, and decked with their proper adornments his house, his couches, his table, brings his guest home when things suitable for his refreshment are in readiness.\(^\text{18}\)

Often hospitality is misconstrued as entertainment, but writers such as Ambrose of Milan (339-397) point out that welcoming those considered as peers is equally important. He cites Job, whose home “was open to everyone,” as an example. He reminds readers of Abraham who not only received but “looked for,” such guests. He even went so far as to suggest that it is best for Christians to extend hospitality at home rather than elsewhere because it is easier to maintain control over the conversation and the amount of wine consumed than it might be in a more public setting. And finally, for Ambrose an outward display of the spirit of hospitality was witnessed “in the eyes of the whole world” and thus “should not fail at our table.”\(^\text{19}\) His contention was that there was actually no such thing as private property because the followers of Jesus “hold the world in common” anyway.\(^\text{20}\)

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Jerome (342-420), who translated the Bible into Latin, encouraged hospitality by insisting that guests be welcomed “to your homely abode, that with them Christ may be your guest.” And along with Ambrose and Gregory of Nyssa, he cautions against allowing others to perform hospitable tasks and against giving money in lieu of service. In a letter to a faithful nun, he extends praise for the way she not only opened her home to others but added space in order to accommodate more people “who might find the welcoming Mary and Joseph had missed.”

The sermons of John Chrysostom (347-407) often dealt with the importance of home hospitality, and he suggested that it was important that the church not be expected to carry that burden when there were individuals who could receive guests in their homes. “Open your house,” he admonishes the faithful. His eschatological premise is that Christ will say, “as you received me into your lodging, I will receive you into the kingdom of my Father.” He also speaks of how important it is to serve guests yourself and not delegate responsibilities. As a result of such endeavors, your perspective on your own space will

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be transformed, your house will “shine,” and your bedchamber will become a “haven.”

Chrysostom advocated building special rooms for receiving guests with the hope that “our house be Christ’s general receiving place.” And with sentiments that reflect the statistics presented in the Introduction to this paper, he laments and asks, “But what excuse is there for us, when we do not even receive those whom we know, but shut our doors against all?”

One of the most interesting stories of this era is that of Paulinus of Nola (353-431), who with his wife founded a hostel for pilgrims and travelers. Not only were the poor well received, but so were the well-to-do among whom it became a widely known religious retreat center. They were in accord with Ambrose in advocating the extension of hospitality to friends and peers, not just the poor and misbegotten. In a 396 letter to his friend Pammachius, Paulinus writes, “let us also open our homes to our brothers,” offering as evidence the suggestion that in Abraham’s “hospitable tent” Christ was revealed.

One cannot help but wonder if Jacques Derrida was familiar with his writing, so close are the two in their definitions of hospitality as a complete surrender of self and home to others. He commends his friend Sulpitius Severus for playing “host in your house so that your house may be a hospice,” adding, “the temporary lodging which is your dwelling you do

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not possess like the father of a household, but you lodge there like a mercenary or a lodger, paying the Lord a regular rent for the favor of the lodging by serving your neighbors with body and mind.”

Although the name Maximus, Bishop of Turin (dd. ca. 408), is not as well known as some of the other early theologians, his contributions to the concept of private hospitality are valuable and in some ways unique. For example, in a sermon on Matthew 10:11, his exegesis is that “a faithful household and worthy host” represent the best of the church in the world. In another sermon he states that when Christians indiscriminately and unreservedly open up their homes to outsiders, they participate in a cultural diversity that will be realized “when people of different races [to] dwell in the one hospice of heaven.” For Maximus, hospitality is holiness as the following beautiful words reflect: “You see, then, how great the grace of hospitality is, that it even makes a son of God out of one who welcomes the Son of God in the guesthouse of his heart.” For this reason, accepting hospitality is as important as extending it. When a guest “abandons the house that he had greeted in peace,” he not only “saddens the host” but he violates the relationship. And like so many others he does not limit this hospitality of the home to the needy, as he writes, “Who would not wish to welcome a holy person into his home, so that,

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33 Maximus of Turin, “Sermon 34,” 82.
by sharing a dwelling place with him, he might share in his holiness?"  

He is also unique in placing the virtue of hospitality over that of charity and almsgiving.  

**Conclusion**  

The evidence presented in this chapter confirms that Christians living in the first five centuries after the death of Christ perceived and embraced hospitality as essentially a domestic activity. Even theologians who were more concerned with establishing formal church doctrine and who may not have devoted much attention to the subject concurred in spirit. Tertullian (155-230) in a letter “To His Wife” celebrates Christian marriages that allow women to visit “in other men’s homes” for service and worship. In the same letter he points out that only in homes where both partners are Christian can visitors feel welcomed and not “alien.”  

The African poet Commodianus (fl. ca. 250), relates hospitality to private domestic space through table imagery, projecting the idea that God’s honor is contingent upon welcoming others. He cautions against an overemphasis on words and urges believers to follow through with real “meat and drink.”  

And as a fitting conclusion to this section we turn to Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430) who reiterates the sentiments of his remarkable contemporary Paulinus of Nola. They both leave us with the notion that the reason we have possession of a physical home at all is so that we might act as

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35 Amy Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 139.  
faithful stewards, helping others who are earthly strangers just as we are, stating that “everyone, even in his own house is a stranger.”

CHAPTER 4

CANDLES IN THE DARK; MEDIEVAL MANIFESTATIONS
OF RADICALLY PERSONAL HOSPITALITY

Focus on the Latin West

Until this point, in presenting evidence that private domestic space is central to the concept of Christian hospitality, no attempt has been made to differentiate between Eastern and Western models and examples. In the years leading up to the Schism of 1053 and of course in the years that followed great differences in theology and practice emerged. Because it is not within the scope of this paper to incorporate both, henceforth, all evidence derives from a Western perspective. In the Latin West, the years between Chalcedon and the Schism of 1053 were characterized by the emergence and increasing authority of the state-church, theological reconstruction based on Augustinian thinking, the rise of monasticism, and conversion of Germanic peoples. Although monastic, institutionalized hospitality replaced that of the worshipping community, institutions retained many homelike qualities. Similarly, although nuclear families and devout individuals replaced extended family units as a source of such practice, again, the traditions surrounding residential space as the primary venue remained intact. As emerging practices departed from earlier ones, new common qualities emerged, all of which indicate that domestic space, even that which may have been less private than before, retained its importance. A number of surviving accounts describe people of wealth who lived on grand estates, thus

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giving Christian hospitality an outward aura of *noblesse oblige*. This is in stark contrast to the early years of the faith when it was the obligation of everyone, including bishops, women and poor widows. The increasing emphasis that the Roman church placed on penance and merit would account in part for such a shift. Universally, the two trajectories of hospitality, as care for the needy and as the welcoming of one’s peers, continued to develop along different tracts. As a result, hospitable entertainment and charitable hospitality eventually became completely different concepts. It was also at this time that the monk and his female counterpart, the cloistered nun, both living in communal homes, became the hospitable ideal throughout all of Christendom. Keeping these developments in mind, it will be interesting to now deviate from the strict chronology that has driven this investigation thus far in order to focus more clearly on the specific political entities that defined the geography of the Western Medieval period. It is essential that the personalities under examination be placed in context and this format makes it possible.

**The Late Roman Empire**

At the first mention of Medieval hospitality the name Benedict of Nursia (480 -547) will most likely come to mind. As the apparent father of Western monasticism, his Rules set the standard for welcoming and receiving guests. Yet within the context of this paper it is interesting to approach him as a unique individual called to serve God. Few are equally familiar with the name Sidonius Apollinaris (430 - 489), by birth a Gallo- Roman, whose writings offer a glimpse into the more secular aspects of life in late antiquity. Both men were of aristocratic background and chose to enter the clergy. Both wrote extensively
about hospitality, but from entirely different perspectives. For Sidonius, hospitality was a Roman virtue based on friendship, the *amicitiae* described so well by Cicero. The usual center for such activity was the family-owned country villa where food, fun, and amiable conversation were of utmost importance. It would seem that this type of hospitality had little to do with that being offered by the Christian communities in the same time frame. This may not be an accurate assessment however. As Senators and other nobles, seeing the end of society as they knew it, gravitated toward the Church, it appears that they took their concept of hospitality with them. Travelers in the imperial court had always found accommodation at the *mansiones* of the *cursus publicus*, so it would seem natural to develop a home-like monastic system of hospitality that would receive the brethren. Equally natural would be a shift from *hospitium privatum* based on friendship to a religious welcoming based on love. A brief comparison of the writings of Benedict and Apollinaris will make the point. Both emphasize the honor that comes from receiving guests. Sidonius tells the story of two servants lying in wait for travelers so as to assure they would come to the homes of their respective masters. They then “had a charming contest to decide which of the kitchens would be privileged to prepare his meals.”

Benedict’s Rule 66 shares this sentiment: “And as soon as anyone knocks…let him answer, ‘Thanks be to God.’” Both are attentive to hierarchy, be it the *cursus hospitium* described in Apollinaris or the strict clerical order found in the monastery. Both pay close attention to the details of food preparation, baggage, bathing, and beds. Both indicate that integral to hospitality was

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the sending forth, whether by horse as Apollinaris suggests or with provisions as was the
custom in the monastery. This all serves to illustrate that hospitality in late antiquity
represented a synthesis of ideas surrounding the family home.

Two Bishops of Rome, Leo 1 (400-461) and Gregory 1 (540-604) provide additional
case studies from the same general time and place. Leo’s concept of hospitality is that
because we have received such bounty from God, we are commanded not just to share with
the poor or the stranger but to be “succoring to the needs of the brethren” as well. His
thoughts on serving others have a tone that would characterize the Reformation a thousand
years later:

Not only are spiritual provisions and heavenly gifts received through the
bounty of God, but even earthly and bodily resources issue from His largess.
He will have every right to ask for an accounting of these things since He
gave them more by way of trusting them to be spent rather than handing
them over to be kept.5

A year later, he calls for hospitality “Not only to those who are joined to us by friendship or
kinship but [to] all people with whom we have a common nature ….To the end that we
might imitate our Creator.”6 Throughout his writing he employs the beautiful imagery of
the hospitality of home that God offers on the earth He created. Even when not addressing
the subject directly, he often alludes to it. For example, in his famous Tome, he speaks
about how Christ ate and lived with his disciples.

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4 Leo the Great, “Sermon 10,” in The Fathers of the Church, ed. Jane Freeland and Agnes Conway
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 51.
Gregory I shows an even more direct interest in hospitality, and much of his writing addresses clergy serving at the outposts of Christianity. He consistently urges them to practice hospitality, and the following examples indicate his range of his concerns. To a subdeacon named Peter he issues a voucher for “ten coins in gold, thirty jars of wine, two hundred lambs, two area of oil, twelve sheep, and one hundred hens” so that everyone in the town can enjoy a dedication festival. To Janarius, an archbishop, he advises “not to refuse your protection” to a widow. He did not want converted Jews who were alienated from their native homes to “suffer from a lack of food” and refers to many of them, along with their children, by name. In keeping with the hospitable traditions of the early Church, he advocated extending hospitality and assistance to prisoners and requested that clerics “make out a list containing their names and where they are staying.” This individualized attention to names and domiciles is indicative of Gregory’s pastoral care and is reminiscent of the Apostle Paul, who often did the same thing. In all these instances Gregory not only made suggestions but agreed to pay the costs. He was also concerned with the way in which the Church practiced hospitality and wanted to be sure that the local people thought well of the clergy. In Epistle 32 he rebuked a cleric named Romanus for his unsavory reputation in these matters, and in Epistle 2 chastised Vitalis, the Guardian of Sardin, for the conditions of his guest houses. On the other hand, Epistle 6 is a very complimentary letter to Brunichild, Queen of the Franks, who built private guest facilities in conjunction

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8 Ibid., 96.
9 Ibid., 157.
10 Ibid., 200.
with a church. To put the emphasis he placed on home hospitality in even greater perspective, it should be noted that in Epistle 6, written to the Emperor Mauricius, he gave approval to divert funds intended for the blind to use for assisting persecuted nuns in exile who needed homes in which to stay.

**Southern Gaul and North Africa**

Sidonius Apollinaris, mentioned above, once dined with the Visigoth king Theodoric II. He recorded in great detail that the treatment of guests “combined the best of several worlds: Greek elegance, Gallic plenty, and Italian briskness.”\(^{11}\) His accounts read as eulogies for the Roman way of life that was disappearing. In great contrast, further south lived Caesarius, Bishop of Arles (468-542), who was born just a few years after Apollinaris. He became well known for his hospitality, especially to the poor and ransomed victims of the incessant fighting among the Visigoths, Ostrogoths, and Franks. Particularly controversial was his practice of helping even the barbarians, whom he felt were welcome in God’s kingdom. He was highly concerned with formal protocol, especially in the convents, but balanced this with sincere sympathy, as the following indicates. Homes are to be opened for both meals and shelter:

> Let each one redeem himself with abundant almsgiving, for as water quenches a fire, so do alms resisteth sins. Distribute among the churches and the poor every year tithes of all the fruit you gather….feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and seek those who

are in prison. Receive strangers in your homes, wash their feet, and dry them with linen, kiss them tenderly, and prepare beds for them.12

Three North Africans were also known to be particularly given to hospitality; Fulgentius of Ruspe (465 - 533), Julianus Pomerius (fl.ca. 500), and John V of Alexandria (552 – 620), often referred to as John the Almsgiver. In all three are found ideas of domestic hospitality that are compatible with what is known about North African culture at the time. Perhaps more than in any other location the key component is the fluidity of the hospitable relationship. For example, Fulgentius was a long-term guest of Bishop Eulalius of Syracuse. After his own needs were generously met, he became a host in the same house, offering meals and lodging to other guests who arrived. The Bishop himself was moved by the charitable endeavor. (Later he does not make such a clear distinction between hospitality and almsgiving. Writing to a layman named Peter, he called upon such giving all the way through life, and on his own deathbed, Fulgentius bequeathed support to a variety of people whom he called by name.)

To Julianus Pomerius, who was most likely a student of Caesarius, can be attributed the phrase “unbending oneself,” a phrase still commonly associated with the practice of hospitality. There is a politeness in North Africa not readily detected in other areas, and the “whole love of the neighbor” is emphasized whereby “the good you would like conferred on yourself you wish also for him.”13 The following excerpt from his

writing shows the value he attached to such behavior when extending hospitality to one’s peers:

If, for instance, interrupting my fast, I give refreshment to some visitors, I do not break my fast but I fulfill a duty of charity. Again, if by my abstinence I sadden my spiritual brethren, who I know derive enjoyment from my unbending myself, my abstinence should not be called a virtue but a vice because continued abstinence and fasting, unless interrupted when occasion requires, actually makes me vainglorious and saddens my brother whom charity requires me to serve; and it certainly shows that I have no fraternal charity. For charity alone without abstinence makes any Catholic perfect; and abstinence without charity either brings about ruin of all or perishes itself.¹⁴

For Julianus Pomerius, hospitality was not only generous but gracious as well. As he once wrote, “Accordingly, if we show charity to God and our neighbor with a good heart and a good conscience and an unfeigned faith it becomes easy for us to accomplish…. Even with delight all that is difficult or troublesome for human frailty.”¹⁵

The final example of individual hospitality in North Africa comes from John the Almsgiver, who approached the topic in yet another way. He viewed not just his closest neighbor, but all humanity, slave or free, as being created just as he was, that is in God’s image. All breathed the same air and lived in the same light so all were entitled to the same provision. For this reason, he instructed clerics who were concerned about extending hospitality to those with means and perhaps not in need to remember that everything belonged to God and was simply being distributed. His views on hospitality were clearly defined. For example, he was particularly interested in providing bed rest for new mothers

¹⁴ Julianus Pomerius, The Contemplative Life, 98.
¹⁵ Ibid., 136.
and felt that the sick should have beds made for them, both of which imply a home-like setting.

**Moving North: The Concept of Hospitality Begins to Weaken**

As evangelistic attention shifts north to the British Isles, the Mediterranean ideals that had typically inspired Christian hospitality all but disappear. As Christianity took hold there was a gradual synthesis, but the underlying Anglo Saxon and Celtic concepts remained. Two particularly complementary sources that offer a picture of how the synthesis occurred will be examined here. Alban Gautier’s article entitled “Hospitality in Pre-Viking Anglo-Saxon England” draws extensively upon ancient secular sources in order to elaborate on indigenous practices.¹⁶ Venerable Bede’s eighth century *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* describes in some detail the hospitality or lack thereof which Augustine encountered as he began to evangelize in the area in the sixth century.¹⁷

According to Gautier, Anglo-Saxon hospitality was offered as a gift and satisfied an obligation. Contrary to the Roman view, it was neither spontaneous nor freely given but represented a compulsory act in a free-market society. It consisted of food, fodder, roof, and bed for any length of time, but after three nights its obligation was reconfigured to include some sort of repayment or allegiance. It represented a binding exchange, not a relationship. It may have been provided to a single traveler or to a royal entourage.

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Customs such as that of the open table were strictly followed. The institutional xenodochia and hospitia, known in the more urbanized Roman Empire, were not seen in England, which remained primitively rural during the same time frame, although isolated converts to Christianity are known to have offered similar accommodations for the transient, the poor, and the sick. According to Gautier, there was a marked difference between the spontaneous feasting of friends as witnessed in a fortress or mead hall and the compulsory guesting that usually accompanied title and land ownership. It was shown earlier that Roman politeness and formality affected the development of hospitality in late antiquity. It would thus seem that the loyal camaraderie experienced in the mead hall might likewise seamlessly translate into a fellowship of Christian believers, but this transition would be gradual rather than immediate.

In 596, Gregory sent Augustine to convert the “English nation.” Upon commencement of the journey, Gregory wrote the bishop of Arles requesting that Augustine, travelling as another servant of God, should be assisted “with priestly zeal” and given “all comfort.” An entry dated a year later describes the manner in which the Christians were actually received by the king of Kent. Although they were “furnished with necessaries,” they were not allowed to enter private homes lest “they practiced any magical arts.” This depiction is notably far removed from the repeated pictures of the earliest Christians who offered such affectionate, intimate, and immediate assistance. Yet the concept of hospitality obviously took hold because in letters dated between 597-601

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18 The Venerable Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 42.
19 Ibid., 44.
20 Ibid., 46.
Gregory advises Augustine that one-fourth of the monies collected should be directed to “the bishop and his household, for hospitality and entertainment of guests.”\textsuperscript{21} And the once suspicious king eventually assigned them a “dwelling place.”\textsuperscript{22} That hospitality had become more the norm can be seen in Gregory’s exasperation that it should be further discussed:

Why shall we need to talk now about dividing portions or showing hospitality or giving a full measure of alms? For anything left over should be spent on pious and religious purposes, as the Lord and master of all things teaches us.\textsuperscript{23}

By the time of Gregory’s death, great strides had been made. Bede records that Pope Gregory’s epitaph is a reminder of his deeds and of providing “food and raiment”\textsuperscript{24} to those in need. Bede’s subsequent portrayal of St. Cuthbert (720) shows how the Anglo-Saxons eventually were to add the uniquely Christian concepts of hospitality to those traditions of their own:

….while a neophyte, he was at once elected by the community to minister to guests on their arrival. Among these, on the morning of a certain day when the weather was wintry and snowy, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in the form of a well built man…Then having received him kindly in accordance with his wont, still thinking him to be a man not an angel, he washed his hands and feet and wiped them with towels, and having in his humility, rubbed the guest’s feet with his own hands to warm them on account of the cold, he invited him most urgently to wait until the third hour of the day to take food.\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{21} The Venerable Bede, \textit{The Ecclesiastical History}, 50.
\item\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 46.
\item\textsuperscript{24} The Venerable Bede, \textit{The Ecclesiastical History}, 81.
\end{itemize}
Several other Christians living during this time offer brief but revealing glimpses into the hospitality practices of the general location. The last will of Bishop Wilfred (633-709) who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 668, shows how important hospitality had become. The norm in settling an ecclesiastical estate was that one-fourth should go to the diocese for the purposes of hospitality, differentiating it from the fourth allotted to the poor. In keeping with this tradition, Wilfrid left one fourth of his estate to his favorite abbeys so that through hospitality they might establish the friendship of kings and clergy. Alcuin’s *Life of St. Willibrod* (658-739) includes the story of how the saint and his party of travelers, tired and thirsty, had prayed for water. Having been offered such hospitality by God, they felt privileged to share what they had left with twelve beggars. Although of debatable historical accuracy, the story communicates the slowly evolving spirit of hospitality mentioned earlier. Another story is found in the life of St. Willibald (700-787) who pilgrimaged to the Holy Land and was imprisoned in Jerusalem:

A man was there, a merchant, who wished to redeem them and release them from captivity, so that they should be free to continue their journey as they wished. He did this by way of alms and for the salvation of his soul, but he was unable to release them. Every day, therefore, he sent them dinner and supper, and on Wednesday and Saturday he sent his son to the prison and took them out for a bath and took them back again.

Every Sunday he took them to church through the market place so that if they saw anything on sale for which they had a mind he could buy it for them and so give them pleasure.\(^{26}\)

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German Lands

Hospitality in the German-speaking lands traditionally fell into five general categories which were more clearly defined than elsewhere. *Gastfreundschaft*, or hospitable friendship, implied equality between host and guest. *Gastlichkeit ohne verpflegung* was a less personal form of hospitality that provided the shelter of a home but no food for people, and fodder for travelers’ horses. *Liebesgaslichkeit* was typically an institutional form of hospitality offered to those who were poor or sick. *Herrschaftsgastung*, or sovereignty hospitality, was compulsorily given to kings or soldiers. And finally there was *gewerbliche gastlichkeit*, a commercial form of hospitality. Christian hospitality fell into the first and third categories, that among equals, or that extended by institutions to the weaker and more vulnerable members of society. Boniface (680-755), who was later to become the patron saint of the entire German nation, was largely responsible for its Christianization. Born in Wessex, England, he worked tirelessly to harmonize relations between Rome and the emerging Carolingian powers. Just as his predecessor, Pope Gregory, had written introductory letters on behalf of Augustine requesting hospitality, the later Gregory II wrote on behalf of Boniface. Notice the shift in motivation from receiving Christ Himself to heavenly reward. This pattern was becoming more and more universal:

> We exhort you, then, for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and the reverence you bear to His apostles, to support him by all the means at your disposal and to receive him in the name of Jesus Christ, according to what is written of His disciples: “He who receives you, receives me.” See to it that he has all he requires; give him companions to escort him on his journey, provide him with food and drink and anything else he may need, so that with the blessing of God the work of piety and salvation committed to him may proceed without hindrance, and that you yourselves may receive the reward
of your labors and through the conversion of sinners may find treasure laid up for you in heaven.\textsuperscript{27}

Boniface shows agreement in his own records. Missionaries were dependent upon the hospitality of households. Boniface records this letter sent out in 718 from Bishop Daniel of Winchester on behalf of a priest named Wynfrith:

Though the commandments of God should be observed by all the faithful with sincerity and devotion, Holy Scripture lays special stress on the obligation of offering hospitality to travelers and shows how pleasing to God is the fulfillment of this duty. As a reward for his kindly hospitality, Abraham was judged worthy of receiving the blessed angels in person and enjoying their holy converse. Lot also on account of this same service was snatched from the flames of Sodom. So it will redound to your eternal welfare if you extend to the bearer of this letter, Wynfrith, a holy priest and servant of almighty God, a warm welcome such as God loves and enjoins.\textsuperscript{28}

Another letter which Boniface wrote home to Archbishop Egbert of York spotlights the acts of humility that he felt were integral to every hospitable encounter. “I am sending you also a cloak, and a towel to dry the feet of the brethren after you have washed them.”\textsuperscript{29}

Perhaps one of the most important accomplishments of Boniface was to persuade a young nun by the name of Leoba to accompany him on his mission to the German people. She became very influential in ecclesial circles, and her biography was written by a monk of Fulda in the ninth century. About opening her home to guests, he wrote:

She preserved the virtue of humility with such care that, although she had been appointed to govern others because of her holiness and wisdom, she believed in her heart that she was least of all. This she showed in both her speech and her behavior. She was extremely hospitable. She kept an open house for all without exception, and even when she was fasting gave

\textsuperscript{27} Boniface, \textit{The Correspondence of St. Boniface}, in C.H. Talbot, \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany}, 71.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 127.
banquets and washed the feet of her guests with her own hands, at once the
guardian and the minister of the practice instituted by our Lord.\textsuperscript{30}

Another communication of Boniface offers additional insight into the value attached to
hospitality in the newly Christianized area. A messenger was sent to Fulda along with
instructions from Boniface to the abbot that the messenger should be kindly received. This
meeting was recorded by a monk named Eigel. Noteworthy is the honor attached to
receiving the messenger as guest, a dynamic not typically observed in any of the five
traditional views of Germanic hospitality:

I give thanks to God that so great a bishop should be mindful of my lowly
self and should deign to send his messenger to me in this wilderness.” Then
calling his brethren to him, he commanded them to show all kindness to the
messenger. Carefully carrying out his bequest, they set a table before him
and offered him such food as they had; and when he had eaten, the brethren
asked his leave to withdraw. Then the man of God summoned the
messenger, thanked him for his labor and said: “Greet the holy bishop
Boniface in the name of his servants and say that I will hasten to him as
quickly as I can.” Then he blessed him and allowed him to return.\textsuperscript{31}

The Iberian Peninsula

Isidore of Seville (560-636) was one of the most politically influential clerics of his
time. His liberal view of hospitality, indicated below, may have aided him in his
conversion of the Visgothic Arians to Roman Catholicism:

Among these things it will be fitting that, with solicitous dispensation, he
[the bishop] exhibit care for the poor, feed those who are hungry, clothe the

\textsuperscript{30} Rudolph, \textit{The Life of Saint Leoba}, in C.H. Talbot, \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany}

\textsuperscript{31} Eigel, \textit{The Life of St. Sturm}, in C.H. Talbot, \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany} (New
naked, receive pilgrims, redeem captives, care for widows and orphans, exhibit in all things vigilant care, providence, and discreet distribution. In him also there ought to be hospitality so distinguished that he will receive all with goodness and charity. For if all the faithful desire to hear that passage, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” [Matt 25:35], how much more so should the bishop, who ought to be the one who receives people of all kinds. For the lay person who receives one or two persons has fulfilled the duty of hospitality, but a bishop is inhuman unless he receives all.  

Two principles can be seen at work here. The first is that almsgiving and hospitality are distinct functions. Secondly, the clergy is held to a higher standard of piety than the laity, reinforcement of the emerging concept of the monk as the ideal Christian.

To the west, in modern-day Portugal, lived Fructuosus of Braga (dd. 665). Because the rules and punishments for those living in the monastery he controlled were so severe, it is especially interesting to note the importance he attached to hospitality. What is known about him comes from the Vita Sancti Fructuosi, written shortly after his death by an unknown author. He seems to have been sincerely concerned about polite behavior, indicating that eating meat was considered unnecessary except for strength when traveling. In this dictate can also be seen vestiges of the self-denial associated with the early Pricillianists. Yet if one is being entertained by a prince or bishop and is offered meat one should accept it for “the sake of blessing and obedience.”

He elaborates on this:

Monks are to live on vegetables and greens alone and beans, and rarely on fresh or salt fish, and, then, only when the hospitality shown to guests or the festivity of some holy day makes it possible…

The attention extended to guests is lavish:

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With the greatest devotion of love and service are attentions to be bestowed on brothers who are guests or travelers and at Vespers their feet are to be washed, and if they are tired from a journey, they should be anointed with oil. Beds, lamps, and soft mattresses are to be provided, and when they leave, they are to have traveling expenses within the means of the monastery. The sick are to be nourished with all care and compassion, and their pains are to be relieved by the proper attentions. Suitable attendants are to be provided to make careful preparation of food and to aid them with loving concern; and no one shall steal from their possessions or make himself guilty of eating forbidden food. 

It is of note that the biblical message of the Samaritan (Lk 10:25-27), making future provision for his charge, is integral to this particular account of hospitality. Also of interest is the utmost attention to otherness found in the hospitality extended by residents of a monastery whose order requires walking with one’s head looking down.

**Merovingian and Carolingian Hospitality:**
**An Unfolding Drama with a Female Cast**

During this period, particularly in the Frankish kingdoms of the area that were once called Gaul, hospitality takes on a peculiarly female quality. It is in many ways an antithesis to the rampant male violence of the age. Women of noble birth who flocked to the convents often brought family support to these institutions. Many built their own. Women who remained married but felt called to a life of sacrifice had clerical support in dealing with irascible husbands. In ways greater than heretofore observed, hospitality takes on a strong penitential as well as eschatological character. The historical difficulty is that much of the surviving evidence comes in the form of hagiography that often is not

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34 Fructuosus of Braga, *Viti Sancti*, 165.
verifiable. Yet these accounts clearly capture the theological spirit of their day and offer a
glimpse into the hearts of those who were called to serve God in this manner. Although
there was great emphasis on good works and on almsgiving in general, the accounts that
will be examined here deal specifically with hospitality in which guests are received into
private residences. As mentioned earlier, is also during this time that the medieval concept
of lavish entertainment as a separate entity apart from faith begins to take shape. In some
monasteries and in great households, hospitality reinforced the bonds of friendship among
the rich and/or the powerful. Although nominally Christian, it clearly bore little
resemblance to the hospitality that is described on the following pages.

One of the best documented lives of the time is that of Radegund (520-586), the
Frankish princess who married King Clothar I and founded a monastery at Poitiers. Her
circle of friends included the poet and her biographer, Venantius Fortunatus, and the
historian and hagiographer Gregory of Tours. The following three selections are all taken
from *The Life of the Holy Radegunde* by Venantius Fortunatus:

1:4. Turning her mind to further works of mercy, she built a house at Athies
where beds were elegantly made up for needy women gathered there. She
would wash them herself in warm baths, tending to the putrescence of their
diseases. She washed the heads of the men acting like a servant. And before
she washed them she would mix a potion with her own hands to revive those
who were weak from sweating. Thus the devout lady, queen by birth and
marriage, mistress of the place, served the poor as a handmaid.35

1:8. If she received a report that any of God’s servants was on his way to see
her, either of his own accord or by invitation, she felt full of celestial joy.
Hastening out in the nighttime, with a few intimates, through snow, mud or
dust she herself would wash the feet of the venerable man with water she had

heated beforehand, and offer the servant of God something to drink in a bowl.\textsuperscript{36}

2:10 For she was eager to fill the needs of everyone. She washed the feet of all with her own hands, cleansing them with her veil and kissing them. If it had been permitted, like Mary, she would have wiped them clean with her own loosened hair.\textsuperscript{37}

Everything that is known about Sadalberga (ca. 605-670) comes from a ninth-century biography whose authorship is still disputed. Medieval sainthood tended to run in families, and in her case, she was the daughter, sister, and mother of other saints. As the following account indicates, in a marriage that later produced five children, she and her husband initially separated in order to live contemplatively:

Thus she was joined with a worthy man. Although under marital law, they both performed Christian works and kept themselves in baptismal purity. For they were hospitable and following the greatest of preachers the blessed Paul, gave alms to the great household of faith, and to pilgrims, obeying the servants of Christ with greatest veneration, mindful of the Savior’s precept: “As you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me.” And that of the Blessed Apostle Peter, “Use hospitality without grudging.”\textsuperscript{38}

Another more humorous and most likely fictional story further accentuates the importance Sadalberga attached to hospitality. This occurred near Langres at one of the two monasteries that she had established and at which she was the resident Abbess:

One time, when a visit from blessed Waldebert was expected and there was not enough wine, she ordered a drink called beer to be made from wheat or barley meal which, brewed by human skill, is much used in the nations of the west. When it was poured into one of those vessels which the vulgar call a tun, the strong liquor did not fill to the brim. That handmaid of Christ who was in charge of the cellar that year came to the venerable mother and said, “Lady, Mother, what can we do? The brew didn’t fill the vessel and is

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 93.
fermenting in the air. If the holy abbot’s arrival is delayed, I fear the drink will turn to sour vinegar.39

After a great deal of female flying about, “divine power reached out to make the short draft grow longer”40 and the integrity of the upcoming visit was thus protected.

Sadalberga’s daughter Anstrude (645-708) offers another portrait of Christian hospitality in the so-called Dark Ages. After her mother’s death she became the Abbess at Laon:

She proved herself to be humble and pious to her subjects and hospitable to guests. Her doors were open to the needy and to pilgrims. She took care of those who were confined to prison or held in chains. She was untiring in her mercy for widows and orphans, wards and paupers, expending offerings of food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, consolation to the bereaved, cheer to the sorrowful, visiting the sick, calming the angry, restoring disputants to peace, and finally burying the dead. And her good works spread her fame among the kings of Francia and the great ones of the land and her name was great with honor for love of God.41

The closing example of hospitality in the Carolingian period is Aldegunde, Abbess of Maubeuge (dd. 684). Her life is included because it focuses on a dimension of home hospitality sometimes overlooked and less relevant today, that of providing clothing. A number of stories of the Medieval period indicate that before food was offered appropriate clothing was provided:

And when she was still a little girl in her parental home, she grew in love for the celestial life and care of alms for Christ’s poor….and when she was mother of the community…[she] sent a servant to buy garments for the poor from that money. And he went and did what he was told and what remained was returned to God’s servant [Aldegund]. The moment she placed the

39 Ibid., 189.
remainder of the purchase price on the scales she found the weight and even as she and her sister stood wondering, the weight grew. And immediately they recalled the place in Scripture where it says, “Whoever has, to him shall be given.” That is the fruit of what you give as alms for the needs of Christ’s littlest brothers, you will gain many times over in eternal coin.\footnote{Disputed authorship, “Aldegund, Abbess of Maubeuge”, ed., Jo Ann McManara and John Holborg, Sainted Women of the Dark Ages (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 237.}

The final words of this excerpt convey an indication of the theological shift that had begun to escalate. Until this point, hospitality had for the most part been perceived as a joyous and holy means of imaging and receiving Christ and as a way of participating in His Kingdom on earth, all the while experiencing the eschaton in advance. Gaining “eternal coin” introduces an economy of exchange or rather “works” oriented theology that will in part pave the way for the Protestant Reformation, to which attention will now turn.
CHAPTER 5

THE REFORMATION STORY OF LUTHERHAUS;
A LEGACY AND A LODESTAR

An Unforeseen Casualty

In the early years of the twentieth century, the great editing genius Maxwell Perkins offered some salient advice to one of his protégés, Ford Maddox Ford. A negative title never sells, he admonished him. Thus what was to appear as The Saddest Story Ever Told was published as The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion. It set a new standard for narrative, and students of English Literature still regard it as one of the genre's most influential works. In a similar manner, it is tempting to present the hospitality of the Reformation years as a dismal rendition of what had once been a brilliant reflection of faith. In the years between 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the church in Wittenburg, Saxony and the Counter Reformation Council of Trent (1545-1563), the socially transformative power of hospitality seems to have been lost. Gone were the days in which Christians had seen in every hospitable transaction a measure of Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. In keeping with the view that Christ was at once a host and archetypal wanderer, former Christians had seen in the entire guest/host relationship a means of imitating Christ, emanating his gospel and foreshadowing the feast of the eternal kingdom, all of which has been previously covered. By the end of the sixteenth century, institutions were in upheaval and the worshipping community, be it lay, clerical, or
monastic, was no longer a significant site for extending hospitality.¹ As Protestant denominations became more diverse and independent, there emerged no institutional setting or communal ethos in which believers were pressed to welcome into their private domestic spaces those who were significantly different from themselves. The “community chest” concepts, which were springing up in the German lands, and the comparable Statutes of Charitable Uses, which appeared in the British Isles, as well as similar developments elsewhere, illustrate emerging new attitudes. Many felt the ongoing instability was economically driven² and new religious doctrines reflected changes in attitudes toward the poor that encouraged support of the industrious and punishment of the idle.³Ability to work was established as the metric, and the Christian solution to poverty and vagrancy connected relief to the state. Hospitality to the poor could no longer be offered as a means of merit, and hospitality to one’s peers or equals encompassed a different dynamic. The ubiquitous and popular so-called manners literature of the period bore no resemblance whatsoever to the rules of hospitality established by Benedict a thousand years before or to the magnificent treatises on the subject written by his forefathers. Not only were the policies that had been in effect for centuries set aside, the tradition of indiscriminate hospitality had faded. The impact of religious change and demographic growth over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had fragmented and marginalized its very ideal.⁴

Following the direction of Puritan propagandists such as Robert Crowley (1518-1588) in England and his Continental counterparts, there was an increasing consensus that a new social and economic order should accompany religious reform. In light of these developments one can only ask “why?” Did this change in attitude of Christians regarding the practices of hospitality occur as a result of the religious reforms or did the same set of factors that set the Protestant Reformation in motion create an environment in which this shift was all but inevitable? If hospitality was indeed a casualty of the Reformation, the story was in Ford’s words the “saddest one ever told.” In order to determine culpability, in true *ad fontes* spirit, it is helpful to turn to the genius, the mastermind, and a major source of the Reformation, Martin Luther. Many of his contemporaries such as Jean Calvin, Philip Melanchthon, and Martin Bucer had something to say about the importance of private residential hospitality but none of them was able to articulate or incorporate their ideas into an organic theology to the extent that Luther did. For this reason he will be held up as the Reformation paradigm for guidance and direction. In this instance, a paradigm has more power than even the models previously discussed because as a *paradeigma*, in the Greek philosophical sense of the word, Martin Luther could perhaps be considered as a light for the future. Whether or not that proves to be the case, the story of his personal life certainly forms an enduring legacy of his that should be incorporated into the contemporary understanding of the history and the heritage of Christianity.
The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion

“The table is full” began an apologetic letter from Martin Luther to Kaspar Muller, who was not only a friend, but also godfather to his first son Johannes. He then went on to say sadly that he could not “expel” any of the other guests, but should a “vacancy” occur, he would “gladly notify” him.\(^5\) Lest this be confused with a profitable hostelry, it must be pointed out that Luther was referring to the personal home he owned, the former Black Cloister Monastery, in Wittenberg, Saxony, in what is now unified Germany. In the years he lived there (from 1508 until his death in 1546), the only other time in which he was known to deny the hospitality of his home was to a friend who asked that he host a wedding reception and only then because his strong-minded wife, Katarina von Bora, absolutely forbade it. Anger over the episode prompted Luther to write, “If I were to court a girl again, I would chisel myself an obedient wife from a rock.”\(^6\) This small vignette offers more than an introduction to Martin Luther’s passion for home hospitality. It reveals his view on marriage, which he saw as “more than eating and drinking, sleeping and waking”. It was for him “a Christian vocation which offers rich opportunity for faithful exercise of loving service to one’s relatives and neighbors.” The home was to be a place where “faith can be put to work for the benefit of others.”\(^7\) For Martin Luther, “nothing is more hideous than inhospitality” because “by it you shut out from your house not just a

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\(^6\) Ibid., 89.

human being but the Son of God who suffered and died for you on the cross.\textsuperscript{8} In his exegesis of Genesis 1, Martin Luther alludes to hospitality in the creation narrative as he writes that God:

\begin{quote}
provided such an attractive dwelling place for the future human being.\ldots Thus afterwards, when man is created, he finds a ready and equipped home into which he is brought by God and commanded to enjoy all the riches of so splendid a home.\ldots On the third day he provides kitchen and provisions.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}

Martin Luther believed that as beneficiaries of this initial act of hospitality on God’s part “like a vessel or pipe, man should act as a channel through which the fountain of God’s gifts flow.”\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{“For Where There is No Home There Can Be No Hospitality.”}\textsuperscript{11}

Given the claims of this paper, that the home provides the quintessential expression of Christian hospitality, these strong words penned by Luther himself call for a closer reading. As stated above, the Reformation years of turmoil and transience called for the human hospitality of the earliest years of the faith, yet such practices were not forthcoming. It is ironic that Luther’s followers who were anxious to join his religious movement along with its accompanying economic and social implications do not appear to have caught on to this aspect of his vision. It is generally accepted that the writings of a given time and place reflect what is important to a given culture. Because there is so much less evidence than

\textsuperscript{9} Jaroslav Pelikan and H.T. Lehman, \textit{Luther’s Works}, vol.1, 39.
\textsuperscript{10} William Lazareth, \textit{Luther on the Christian Home}, 95
\textsuperscript{11} Jaroslav Pelikan and H.T. Lehman, ed., \textit{Luther’s Works}, vol.3, 179.
that surviving from earlier periods, we can only conclude that Martin Luther’s ideas on the importance of the home in rendering Christian hospitality were never fully embraced in his time. It therefore behooves us to delve deeply into the personal and at times colorful insights available to us. Illuminating the challenges which open hospitality placed upon a family in the past will encourage contemporary Christians dealing with those same issues to emulate the faith of the Luther family in this regard. Out of this it is hoped that more good soldiers with their own tales of passion will emerge.

**Lutherhaus**

“Lutherhaus”, as the Luther family residence was called became during the early years of the Reformation, was a haven of radical hospitality. The seemingly endless list of visitors included princes, itinerant students, foreign envoys, unemployed school masters, poor widows, ousted preachers, escaped monks and freed nuns. Englishmen, Frenchmen, Bohemians, Hungarians, Africans, and all manner of relatives and friends found welcome there for a day, a week, or even years. 12 What irony it is that given the immense amount of writing that has been done on Martin Luther, rarely is there found in any topical index any sort of entry or reference to his “hospitality” or to his view of the subject in general. Yet, as the subsequent accounts will validate, his life reveals a near reverence for the practice.

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The hospitable if often chaotic atmosphere of the Luther home was finely captured in a letter to Prince George of Anhalt, from one of his subordinates who advised “His Grace” to forestall a visit. He described it as:

occupied by a motley crowd of boys, students, widows, old women, and youngsters. For this reason there is much disturbance in the place and many regret it for the sake of the good man, the honorable father. If but the spirit of Dr. Luther lived there this house would offer you an agreeable, friendly quarter for a few days so that your Grace would be able to enjoy the hospitality of that man. But as the situation now stands and as circumstances now exist in the house of Luther, I would not advise that Your Grace stop there.\textsuperscript{13}

It was erroneously inferred that the commotion was not of Luther’s own doing, yet at any given time, no fewer than nine of Luther’s blood relatives were in residence: two daughters and four sons of his deceased sister, another sister’s son Hans Polner, his brother Jacob’s son Martin, and a great niece. These were in addition to his own six children. Then of course there were the relatives of his wife, the most predominant one being Aunt Lena, a former nun who became an indispensable helpmate in the household. These were dangerous times and many guests remained anonymous. Writers, poets, musicians as well as abused members of the nobility such as Elizabeth of Brandenburg were among the friends who found shelter at Lutherhaus.

In addition to these personal connections, many people who came to the Black Cloister had been forced into exile or ostracized because of their faith. “By God’s grace, the wretched exiles now have a place,” Martin Luther recounted.\textsuperscript{14} They were as “saints with needs not visible.” Luther regarded them with the same respect of the early martyrs,

\textsuperscript{13} E.G.Swiebert, \textit{Luther and His Times} (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 597.
“when they are pressed down under private poverty and are ashamed to beg or publicize their need.”

Yet Luther was not prone to any sort of discrimination. “If some Turk or Tatar were to come among us, even if he isn’t persecuted, he should be assisted with bread and water; that is with love and hospitality.”

On a more humorous note, he was known to take in animals, such as the horse of the English martyr, Robert Barnes, a fact which some have suggested played a part in the Anglican inclusion of so much Lutheran theology. Sickness had no affect on the hospitality of Lutherhaus. During the plagues of 1527 and 1535 the Luther family did not evacuate but instead took in victims. Martin and Katarina’s generosity seemed boundless, once sending two guldens to a “new mother in the childbed so that she can drink wine and have plenty of milk.”

In addition to the rotating roster of Lutherhaus residents, there was a steady stream of daily visitors. The over six thousand entries in Table Talk confirm this. The accounts and conversations of such guests were first recorded by an exile of Hungarian background, Konrad Cordatus. Dinner was often served to a wide social circle of friends. It was largely because of his marriage that Martin Luther could afford such generosity. He called his wife, a former nun, the “boss of Zulsdorf”, reminiscent of their small farm which supplied many of their necessities. Her competent management produced an income as well, making her “the balance wheel in the midst of chaos.”

As Wittenberg University’s most prominent professor, Martin Luther’s salary was higher than most, and he received

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16 Ibid.
17 Rudolph Markwald and Marilyn Markwald, A Reformation Life, 146.
18 Ibid., 142.
certain other honoraria. Though he refused to accept royalties on his writings which would have helped defray the enormous expenses, people often sent the Luthers gifts, “honoring their hospitality serving the cause of the Reformation.”

19 Their elector, Frederick, and later his son, John, often donated medicine, fabrics, and household supplies. They eventually gave the Luthers outright title to the Cloister where they lived. The town of Wittenberg was also generous, donating building supplies such as bricks, lumber and lime. Often, in order to raise money, luxury items received as gifts would be sold: “The cups will have to pay for this one!” Dr. Luther would sometimes retort. 20 These examples all serve to reveal in Martin Luther an ongoing sense of hospitable living that was indeed personal, generous, and gracious, even if sacrifices had to be made in order to extend it.

Attention will now turn to the aspect that seems to be a bit more “concealed.” Living in the midst of the apathy toward hospitality described initially, where did these ideas originate?

**Abraham Learned Hospitality From His Own Experience**

As unbelievable as it seems, Martin Luther’s writings yield no direct evidence that his views on hospitality stem from his own personal experiences as a beneficiary of such practices. Yet the above excerpt from his commentary on Genesis 18 may offer some insight as to how important such experiences may have actually been. In the exegesis he continues, “Abraham had lived in exile for twenty four years and through hardship and peril he learned to be gentle, kind, and generous toward exiles, and bounteous toward

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brethren afflicted because of their profession of the word.” In a later analysis of Genesis 18, Luther finds in the hospitable activities of Abraham “a very beautiful moral example of hospitality,” and he goes on to suggest that “All these details are recorded by Moses for the purpose of stressing that glorious faith of Abraham, whose undoubting conscience persuaded him that he had had the God of heaven and earth as his guest… In this way he bestows praise on the love or hospitality of Abraham.”

Luther as a young student of formative age attended the Pharschule in Eisenach and was befriended by the wife of prominent businessman Heinriche Schalbe, as well as the de Cotta family with whom he apparently boarded. As a young novitiate he received cloistered rest and time for reflection and meditation in Erfurt before taking his vows. He continued this pattern of receiving and subsequently offering clerical refuge throughout his life. His writings contain numerous accounts of asking for protection or requesting accommodations. His friend George Spalatin was often the facilitator. As a young monk in Wittenberg, one of his first tasks was to organize clerical visits to the various monasteries. Although his responsibilities were for the most part secretarial, there appears no evidence that he sought lodging in any commercial establishments, which though rudimentary did exist. (Later, John Calvin was to partially blame the loss of Christian hospitality on their very existence.) Centuries later, the Lutheran Church emerging from

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23 Ibid., 196.
the yoke of Communism went so far as to publish a record of the vast number of localities which Luther visited during his lifetime.²⁴

A cursory overview of Luther’s activities during the Reformation indicates how often he was welcomed and received by others. On his way to Worms he was greeted as a hero all along the way. At Leipzig, the magistrate offered him a ceremonial welcoming cup and at Erfurt, the rector, in Benedictine tradition, went out to meet him at the city wall. The subsequent Edict’s ban on extending “hospitality” to him was largely ignored. During his well known seclusion at the private residence of Wartburg Castle, one of his many writings was a book on confession, which he dedicated to Franz von Sickingen who had sheltered him at Ebernberg Castle in 1520. In 1530, while Phillip Melanchthon stood in his stead at Augsburg, he remained as a guest in the Prince’s private lodgings in Coburg. When the Schmalken League convened in 1531, he fell ill and was taken in by the Hessian Treasurer Balthasar Wilhelm, who not only attended to his needs but welcomed his steady stream of visitors as well. Accounts such as these provide a consistent picture of Martin Luther’s life. When he died in 1546, it was in Eisleban, in the home of a friend.

Equally Well Could He Recall the Classics, the Writings of the Church Fathers²⁵

Hospitality played a powerful role in Martin Luther’s life, yet it cannot be conclusively drawn from the facts that his personal experiences were the source of his opinions on the subject. Could it be that Luther’s view of hospitality, which at its core was

²⁴ Christoph Munchow, Lutherstatten und Reformationgedenken im Gebiet des Freistaates Sachen; Eine Übersicht (Dresden: Evangelish-Lutheriche Sachens 3/25/10).
²⁵ E.G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times, 578.
Christian, grew out of respect for the practices of the early Church, practices developed in an era of Church history with which he found little fault? He was certainly aware of the Patristic traditions regarding hospitality. How important was this thinking to Luther? Under his influence, a new awareness which “favored Biblical Theology in accordance with the Church fathers over Scholasticism” developed at the University in Wittenberg. Luther strongly supported the work of peers such as Johannes Lang, Nicholas von Amsdorf, Andreas Carlstadt, and Bartholomeus Bernhardi, all of whom set the Church fathers over the Scholastics. In the “new” theology of the “new” Church there was a call for the “return to a Biblical and Patristic understanding of hospitality which had focused on care for poor people and needy exiles.” They criticized elaborate, extravagant welcome to the rich as well as unrestricted, wasteful alms to the poor, both of which some felt had characterized medieval hospitality.

Martin Luther granted to historical knowledge a respectable measure of authority and veracity as well as utility. History did not exist apart from God and was therefore a form of moral philosophy. As regards the topic at hand, Christian home-based hospitality, he wrote of its history, that when “Godly men are driven from their homes,” Christians should “follow the instruction of the saintly patriarchs” and “receive the wretched heads of households together with their wives and children, in an hospitable

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manner and to treat them as though they were little birds cast out of their nest.”

The responsibility is seen as “domestic and civil” rather than as ecclesiastic.

As tempting as it is to do so, before ascribing Luther’s hospitable proclivity to tradition and history, further examination is necessary. He often cautioned against exemplarism, “lest such imitation of a great religious figure not only obscure the redemptive action of Christ” but lead to a “fatal righteousness from good works.” In 1522, Luther wrote, “We should imitate their faith, not their works.” He later expanded upon this idea: “It is not the external but the inner event that must be appropriated.” In his reflections on John 21:22, Luther offers scriptural insight into this position. “It is practically a universal custom in our day to imitate the work of the saints. Yet Christ speaks against this. Do not think that I want the same from you as I want from him. Wait until I command your responsibilities. I desire many servants and they will not all have the same work to do.”

According to Martin Luther, faith made “a good life an ordinary one.” Thus with all due respect to the early Church and its traditions, Luther and most of the Reformers gave “limited but explicit” attention to it. No matter what he read from the Fathers and teachers of the Church, he would always relate it to the Bible and compare it to the original message, thus studying “with proper distance.”

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30 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 46.
33 John Headly, *Luther’s View of Church History*, 50.
35 Ibid.
36 John Headly, *Luther’s View of Church History*, 52.
model and a paradigm for Christian hospitality. Unable to satisfactorily explain such behavior in any other way, attention must of necessity now turn to Luther’s theology.

The Rule That Holds:
That Because God Does Not Need Our Good Things
He Commands That We Give Them to Our Neighbor

According to Martin Luther, the Christian is free from the law by faith, yet bound to it in love. Christ frees man from having to sacrifice good works toward God, allowing him in love and gratitude to redirect those efforts towards his neighbor. In contrast to Roman Catholic clericalism, all Christians participate in the priesthood. These brief remarks not only illuminate the essence of Luther’s theology as it relates to one’s neighbor, they offer, at last, some insight into what it was that gave the great reformer such a passion for hospitality. It also becomes clear why the subject is so rarely mentioned; to a true believer, it is an obvious manifestation of faith in Christ. “We should say, Oh Lord Jesus, come to me; enjoy my bread, wine, silver, and gold. How well it has been invested by me when I invest it in you.”

“Those who are hospitable are not receiving a human being, but are receiving the Son of God Himself.” This certainly reflects Luther’s acceptance of the traditional Church view of hospes venit, Christus venit, when a guest comes, Christ comes. It also explains his subsequent admonition to the Pope, whom he warns “will hear a stern judgement on the Last Day when Christ will accuse them of …casting Him out of His

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38 Donald Ziemke, Love for the Neighbor in Luther’s Theology (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 28.
39 William Lazareth, Luther on the Christian Home, 90.
41 Ibid., vol.3, 177.
abode, driving Him into exile.”42  It can thus be established that although Luther distained any sort of adherence to early Church principles on the basis of their inherent authority, his views certainly reflected some of its earliest theology.

Another theological premise can be found in Luther’s discourses on Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. One cares for one’s neighbor not only because one has been set free for that purpose but also because as a member of the body of Christ, this is how the body responds. Hospitality thus becomes a relationship that should be “maintained in the household” and not left as a function of the church proper.43  In Two Kinds of Righteousness, Martin Luther asserts that people are called to be servants of one another in order to preserve the overall health of the body of believers.44  This concept was beautifully expressed when Luther’s great benefactor fell ill. In Fourteen Points of Consolation, he explained that when one makes the infirmities of other Christians one’s own one is in actuality changed into the other and brought into fellowship by love. Luther’s The Freedom of a Christian expands the idea even further by saying that these social relationships fostered within the sacramental body give “form” to the Christian life.45 “There is hospitality where ever the Church is. We should always show kindness so that both the spirit and the flesh may find refreshment in the Church.”46

As early as 1510, reflecting upon Matthew 7, Luther had applied yet another theological reasoning to the obligations of Christian hospitality. Compliance was not just

44 Donald Ziemke, Love for the Neighbor in Luther’s Theology, 45.
45 Donald McKim, The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther, 134.
an ethical response to the satisfaction delivered in Christ, but failure to do so “is as evil” as any other sin:

If a man were in a position to help his neighbor and did not help when his neighbor needed it, the result would be the same as if he had forcibly taken something from him. Man thus has a choice in how to conduct himself and do good, when he gives food, clothing, protection. If you were able and refused drink, you made him thirsty. If you failed to take in a stranger, you expelled him.47

Luther goes on to point out that true hospitality exists when one places oneself in his neighbor’s position and asks what one would want in that same circumstance. This is an extremely important point because it reflects the general nature of Luther’s entire theology, which was never systematic but rather organic, growing out of specific situations.48 Consistent with this point is the argument that God who appears hidden (Deus absconditus) in the meal, is in fact revealed (Deus revelato) in the hospitable act. In spite of earlier writings, the further Luther got from the monastery and began to develop his own theology, the more he determined that Christian ethics was only “tangentially concerned with the inner state and more concerned with objective problems.”49 Within Luther’s theology is thus revealed a clear interpretation of human hospitality. It is a means of receiving Christ, it reflects the purpose for which His sacrifice was made, and it enables the believer to function as a member of the body of Christ, following the head of the body.50 So thus how better to conclude this multi-perspective look at Christian home hospitality at its finest

47 Donald Ziemke, Love for the Neighbor in Luther’s Theology, 17.
48 Donald McKim, The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther, 88.
49 Donald Ziemke, Love for the Neighbor in Luther’s Theology, 42.
50 Ibid., 48.
than with the voice of the plainspoken and often humorous great reformer himself, who in one instance proclaimed, “Let this be enough about the account!”\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{51} Jaroslav Pelikan and H.T. Lehman, ed., \textit{Luther’s Works}, vol. 3, 191.
CONCLUSION

ENLIGHTENMENT NEGLECT, MODERN APATHY, POST MODERN HOPE

An Unexpected Development

Regrettably, in the years following the Reformation, practices of hospitality weakened and became truncated, institutionalized, and less personal. As a consequence, the colorful and descriptive literature surrounding such practices also began to decline in both quantity and quality. It can be concluded that the more compromised hospitality became, the less public interest it generated, and therefore less was written about it. Thus, the last five hundred years of Christian history fail to offer the abundance of evidence provided by the earlier times previously considered. And in the paucity of material that is available, private domestic space does not surface as a significant factor. Additionally, contemporary analyses of the decline in personal hospitality described in the opening lines of this work tend to focus on cultural trends of late modernity. They fail to take into account the critical developments of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries that profoundly affected the Christian practices of hospitality. And although some of the broader issues affecting hospitality were addressed in Chapter 5, the ones mentioned do not account for the decline in the centrality of the home in regard to such practices. To be clear, the purpose of the next sections is not to determine why Christian hospitality began to decline so rapidly. Rather, the objective is to determine why, in the instances where hospitality is described and practiced, it is no longer primarily home-based.
John Wesley: Man in the Middle

On the first page of *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, editors Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers state that “the number of Christians who can be regarded as Wesley’s spiritual or ecclesiastical descendants is staggering.”\(^1\) They quickly add, “Transcending this role as a founder of a significant Christian movement, John Wesley has come to be regarded widely as a saint of the church.”\(^2\) Later in the compendium, Kenneth Cracknell suggests that, “John Wesley stands alone among the originators of the major protestant denominations in his concern for the world lying beyond the boundaries of the old Christendom.”\(^3\) He goes on to explain that, “Unlike the sixteenth-century reformers, he had been an overseas missionary.”\(^4\) Given these broad pronouncements it would seem appropriate to examine Wesley’s concept of hospitality in the context of his time, as was done with Martin Luther in the previous chapter. As an evangelist *par excellence*, surely he followed the lead of his earliest predecessors in the faith, perhaps even recognizing that the way Christians lived and worked might carry more evangelical import than public preaching. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

According to Rebekah L. Miles, author of “Happiness, holiness, and the moral life in John Wesley,” Wesley believed and taught that true religion is the love of God and the love of the neighbor. The goal of all people is to move in holiness, and there should be no differentiation between theology and ethics. Thus the idea of a social ethic would have

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2Ibid.
4Ibid.
been alien to Wesley.\footnote{Rebekah L. Miles, “Happiness, holiness, and the moral life in John Wesley” in The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley, Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 208.} She explains his attitude toward helping others in the following manner:

John Wesley was a master of small details – founding and overseeing schools, relief agencies, and orphanages; organizing accountability groups and subgroups that provided structure for Christian holiness and devising rules and mechanisms to encourage members of these groups to maintain their disciplines. Wesley left little to chance. He did not just recommend that his people go about doing good, he set about organizing goodness.\footnote{Ibid., 209.} Wesley and the early Methodists were passionate about caring for the needs of others. They provided clothing to widows and orphans, food to the hungry, housing for the homeless, and medicine for the sick….One could no more be a Christian and refuse to love and care for a neighbor than one could be a Christian and refuse to love God.\footnote{Ibid., 210.}

Wesleyan Methodism grew rapidly in America, but hospitality does not appear to have been an important factor. Instead, its expansion might be attributed to its mobile structure, its reflection of the ideals of the new republic, its traveling preachers who brought church to people rather than people to church, and the popularity of its camp meetings. Emerging congregations could easily move into spaces vacated by fleeing Anglicans, and they soon became an outward manifestation of a theological revolution that repudiated Calvinism and tirelessly proclaimed the “inexhaustibility of transforming grace.”\footnote{Kenneth Cracknell, “The Spread of Wesleyan Methodism” in The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley, Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 243.}

In spite of these realities, it is still possible to attribute to John Wesley a limited measure of credibility as a witness for the practice of hospitality, even more specifically, that which is centered in the home. He certainly grew up in the midst of such practices,
and his mother often conducted Bible classes in the kitchen of their Epworth, Lincolnshire home, as did his father, an Anglican clergyman. In his well known 1748 letter to Rev. Perronet he mentions the importance of domestic housing numerous times, although it is more often from the perspective of a guest than that of a host. He instructed leaders of the movement to visit everyone “at his own house” and requested that “names and places of abode” be sent to him.\(^9\) He viewed his movement as “copied after the primitive church”\(^10\) and thanked God for the houses where hospitality was clearly being offered.\(^11\) The issue here seems to be semantic. Christine Pohl, who figures so predominantly in this work, surmises that “John Wesley and the eighteenth-century Methodists have a significant but ambiguous role in the history of Christian hospitality”\(^12\) because “by not calling their work ‘hospitality,’ they actually contributed to the loss of the tradition.”\(^13\) When John Wesley was born in 1703, the Enlightenment had not yet begun, and when he died in 1791, the Industrial Revolution was well underway. Wedged in between these powerful influences, it could be surmised that the individualism and commercialism that dominated the thinking of these times also influenced his attitudes regarding hospitality.

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\(^10\) Ibid., 24.

\(^11\) Ibid., 27.

\(^12\) Christine Pohl, *Making Room*, 53.

\(^13\) Ibid., 55.
A Changed World

When and how did we change? Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, studying the years between 1960 and 1980, pose this exact same question. They believe that the time for their period of examination can actually be pinpointed to a Sunday evening in 1963, in Greenville, South Carolina, when as blue laws were thrown aside, movie houses opened up, and rather than attend church, many people opted to “join John Wayne at the Fox.”

In terms of home-centered hospitality, the pivotal moment might rightly be an evening in 1766 on the Rue St. Honore in Paris, when Mathurin Roze de Chantoiseau opened the first modern restaurant. In that instant, this self-made gentleman who signed himself “A Friend to all the World,” did indeed change the world, at least in terms of hospitality. If earlier apathy and neglect are viewed as death knells, this singular event would be the nail in the coffin, so to speak. Lest this sound overly dramatic, it must be kept in mind that this new eating establishment bore no resemblance to the cookhouses, cafes, inns, taverns, and so forth that evidence documents as existing throughout most of recorded history. These earlier establishments featured a table d’hôte, or “host’s table,” where at a set time diners ate what was set before them at a communal table and paid a fixed price. To the contrary, the new restaurant was open at all hours, served only restorative bouillons in fashionable china, charged for what was consumed and for the most part, catered to health conscious Enlightenment elites. This was in keeping with their newfound interest in scientific inquiry, physiology, and individual taste. Prior to this time,

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and according to the French *Dictionary Universel* of 1708, a restaurant was simply “a food or remedy that has the property of restoring lost strength to a sickly or tired individual.”\(^{15}\) It was in this moment that something to eat became a place to consume food. According to Rebecca Spang whose book, *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture* is considered by many to be the most scholarly account to date, this restaurant “invention” of Mathurin Roze de Chantoiseau resulted in “the creation of a new market sphere of hospitality and taste.”\(^{16}\) She goes on to devote over three hundred pages to telling the story of how this came to “be among the distinctive features of modern life.”\(^{17}\)

**The Product of our Modern Way of Life**\(^ {18}\)

Most literature regarding restaurant culture is internal in perspective and deals with issues such as clientele, quality, service, and price. Rebecca Spang’s questions are more complex, as she inquires, “What are restaurants,””? “Why do people go to restaurants,””? and, “What do they do there”? Grappling with such questions may offer some insight into the subject at hand, the decline of home-based hospitality in Western culture in general and more particularly, in Christian practice. Spang shares the opinion of a lawyer, writing in 1786, who suggested that the emerging restaurant phenomenon was a natural byproduct of the times.\(^{19}\) By the early eighteenth century, cities such as Paris “had a restaurant on every


\(^{16}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Rebecca Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant*, 11.
corner” that catered to every conceivable taste.\textsuperscript{20} One hundred years later, by 1920, eight percent of Americans “dined out on a regular basis,” an impressive number, given the fact that fifty percent of the country was still rural.\textsuperscript{21} But conceding that the popularity of restaurants was consistent with the Enlightenment idea of the ultimate logic of personal choice does not adequately explain why so many people at one time began making the same decision to dine and extend hospitality at restaurants rather than at home.

E.M. Rogers’ \textit{Diffusion of Innovations} examines the process of messaging, persuasion, and decision. His theory is that a message, or in more modern vernacular, an advertisement, is relevant and persuasive only in light of a perceived need. Thus, individuals seldom expose themselves to messages about innovations unless they have already experienced a felt need. Additionally, the innovation must be consistent with the individual’s personal attitudes and beliefs.\textsuperscript{22} This begs the question, why, in the mid-eighteenth century did individuals feel the need to abandon their homes in order to dine in restaurants. Ironically, it was at this time that the “dining room” as a separate architectural entity was becoming popular on the Continent, in England, and in America, so unlike the hospitable early Christians living in the Roman Empire, space does not appear to have been a significant problem. Nor can it be argued that restaurants became popular because so many skilled chefs and caterers were unemployed as a result of the political and social revolutions of the period. In this context, assigning the restaurant to “modernity”


\textsuperscript{22} See E.M. Rogers, \textit{Diffusion of Innovations} (New York: Free Press, 1083.)
constrains its history to a revered attachment to gastronomy at the expense of more careful analysis. Such an approach also compromises an understanding of the order in which events took place. It may be expedient to argue that the increase in public dining facilities brought about a decline in home hospitality, but the evidence indicates that the reverse may be true. In other words, people began frequenting restaurants because home hospitality, for a variety of social and economic reasons, was declining. In “The Rise of the Restaurant and the Fate of Hospitality,” Michael Symons explains that the intricate social rules which governed guest/host relationships were being replaced by a new spirit of commerce and as a result, traditional hospitality was disappearing. Consequently, the “bonds of benevolence between private individuals” was shattered. And Christians, unlike their ancient predecessors, chose not to go against the trend, but to follow it.

Although travel accounts of the period do not describe what was happening in a given locality, they do give insight into the prevailing attitudes and sensibilities. At first Europeans found eating publicly an affront to “homey domesticity,” and their American counterparts felt that the Continental trend toward such practices made America all the more “substantial.” In a letter written in 1790, Helen Maria Williams, an English woman traveling in Europe, dramatically conceded that in the absence of private hospitality, public facilities “could move most English people to suicide.” In a similar tone, as the American Revolution was in full swing, British author and intellectual Phillip

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23 Rebecca Spang, The Invention of the Restaurant, 7.
25 Spang, The Invention of the Restaurant, 4.
Thickness indicated that in Europe it was “extremely difficult for even the most important foreigners to gain invitations to homes.”

His copious letters consistently convey feelings of animosity to “strangers,” a word he frequently employs. Given the biblical mandate to receive such people, these attitudes seem to reflect a developing approach to theology as relative. Also, these few examples cannot help but explain how restaurants gained so rapidly in popularity, committed as they were to satisfying the need, desire, and taste of each and every individual.

In the final analysis, Christians who once invited friends, neighbors, and even strangers into their homes and sent them on their way with all due provision, gradually fell victim to the new mode of hospitality that in all objectivity, they had helped create. Human welcoming and leave taking were in effect replaced by the paper bookends of a printed menu and a bill. Granted, individual tastes could be more easily accommodated, but the price was and remains great.

**Intentional Communities as Keepers of the Holy Grail**

Peter Maurin (1877-1949) was a social activist, who in 1933, with Dorothy Day, formed the Catholic Worker Movement. In 1936, he wrote, “We need Houses of Hospitality to show what idealism looks like when it is practiced.” Written at the height of the Great Depression, this seemingly innocuous remark might be interpreted as a glaring indictment of Western Christianity as it existed at the time. Certainly good and God-loving

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people everywhere, from every walk of life, responded to needs as they were able, yet Maurin seems to be calling forth an institutional rather than an individual response to the crisis. Should not the sentence have read in the reverse, that Christian homes might provide a model for the larger community? The truth is, that by this time, Christian hospitality as a radical embrace of otherness had all but disappeared from Western thinking and practice. So Peter Maurin was in fact correct: Intentional communities were needed to remind people of what was involved in the practice of authentic Christian hospitality. Subsequently, houses of hospitality did spring up all over Europe and America, many of which are still in existence. Maurin’s appropriation of the word “house” confirms the ongoing premise of this paper, that the concept of home is integral to the understanding of the essential dynamic of “belonging” found in hospitality. Jean Vanier inquires into the concept more fully:

It can seem hard for a believer to be happy in the face of all that is going on in the world today. But isn’t there still the joy of belonging to a ‘body’? And even in our time it is still joy that attracts us. Jesus says: ‘I give you my joy so that your joy becomes complete’. The new evangelization, it seems to me, doesn’t consist only in seeking personal conversion through announcing Jesus; it must also invite people to enter into a community where people love each other. This means offering places where people celebrate together and experience a feeling of belonging.\(^\text{29}\)

In this spirit, a little less than forty years later, Jim Wallis was instrumental in organizing the Sojourner Community that evolved into a broader movement. He later became editor of its magazine. In his Introduction to Luther Smith’s *Intimacy and Mission; Intentional Community as Crucible for Radical Discipleship*, he discusses how much

intentional communities have changed in recent decades. Portraying Sojourners as typical, he relates how they are less communal, less sectarian, less inwardly focused, and at the same time, more inclusive, open, outward looking, and engaged in mission in the world. But what has changed most is the context of the church. In the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, when many such intentional communities were formed, people were leaving the institutional churches and joining the communities as an alternative. Today, even though the institutional church is declining in adherents, many congregations are openly embracing the ideals that were earlier assumed could only exist in residential form. Wallis explains it this way:

I believe Christian communities have lifted up an alternative voice and witness in both the church and the society. But today, more than two decades later, many of the commitments found in communities like Sojourners can also be found elsewhere. They are present in local congregations and parishes and more traditional religious communities. They are evident in ecumenical organizations and church bodies in virtually every denomination and all over America. The Spirit has been working in many places, some of them quite unexpected.

I once believed that intentional Christian community would be the primary new wineskin for a transformed church. I was wrong. New forms and expressions of community are indeed essential to that transformation, but there are a myriad of models and examples. For instance, we have discovered that nearly all of Sojourners magazine readers are involved in a local church. More than half are part of some small community circle or group. Yet few are in residential communities…Real community is the key rather than any particular form of it.30

Wallis then concludes that “the principles and lessons” embraced and lived out by authentic intentional communities are “now for the whole church.” 31 Traditionally, as previously

31 Ibid.
noted, home hospitality has been accepted as a core value of Christian community. Therefore, the image of these organizations as keepers of the flame is not only appropriate but inspiring. But has the time not come for Christian individuals and families to reclaim and reestablish the home as the quintessential expression of authentic Christian hospitality?

This takes us full circle to an initial claim of this work that communities of faith are turning to their predecessors for direction. The evidence presented in this paper has offered historically based, bold, and assertive insights into the practices of Christian hospitality. It has been recognized that the dynamic can certainly be experienced in a variety of ways. Simultaneously, a strong case has been made that it is the intimate and sacrificial self offering that accompanies the invitation to enter one’s home that best reflects the commitment to sincerity that comes when a follower of Christ extends hospitality to another member of the human family. Interestingly, gathered evidence reveals that in both the biblical record and in the recorded history of the years that follow, the practices of home-based hospitality are often found within traditions of leadership. Old Testament patriarchs, prophets, priests, and kings, as well as New Testament community leaders employed hospitality in the formation and maintenance of communal identity. The Church Fathers who became a veritable army for the cause, came largely from an erudite upper class, and in the dark times of the Middle Ages, it was the well to do who were able to continue such practices. The Reformation paradigm, Martin Luther, might easily have delegated matters of hospitality to the academy or the church where he worked, yet he consistently and freely opened his own home to others. Similarly, as Enlightenment and Modern era leaders clearly ceased to practice home hospitality, their followers did likewise.
This brings us back to an opening question of the project, asking if faith leaders need to be concerned with the facts of a diminishing home-based hospitality. When leaders in ministry today embrace qualities found in effective, albeit historic, Christian leadership, they illuminate the process for others which in effect, invites them to participate. Might we conclude that the intentional commitment to preach and practice home-based hospitality represents one of those essential qualities of Christian leadership?

**Hospitality as Translation**

In “Hospitality as Translation,” James Taylor, basing his ideas on those of Paul Ricoeur, writes:

Hosting the stranger is a formidable task. To open our lives to any guest is to allow our comfortable patterns of behavior to be interrupted, at least for a time, as we attempt to provide a welcoming place for the other to dwell… How might host and stranger enter into a relationship that isn’t fraught with misunderstanding, resentment, and discord, and that doesn’t result in more suffering than it alleviates? 32

He suggests that we must accept our limitations, acknowledge that some suffering is inevitable, and “open our doors anyway.” At this point in time, when the doors are open, the process of “translation” begins. As the world of the guest, with its symbols, stories, rituals, and practices is translated into the world of the host, the world of the host is likewise translated into the “foreign idiom” of the guest. This encounter, unlike any other, allows the host to understand the self not as an autonomous ego but as a “stranger among

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others”, a resident alien in need of God’s own hospitality.33 This of course challenges Derrida’s position that hospitality is in fact a hostile endeavor, rendered impossible because of the vulnerable nature of the self, but using the Jewish experience of homelessness as a frame of reference, the opposite proves to be true.

“The work of building a home and of cultivating the capacity to be at home are perfectly compatible with the problems that can result from the home... With a home and a sense of being at home, one can and indeed must attend to the other, for one’s self is for the other. Yet without a home and thus also, in a sense without a self, such attending seems impossible. One must have a home – and presumably perform all the many kinds of work having a home requires – in order to be hospitable.” 34

In this “work of mourning” we lose or surrender our desire for “perfect or ideal hospitality” and consequently become capable of imperfect but real hospitality to the actual strangers that knock on our doors looking for food or shelter and asking to share our homes, lives, traditions, cultures, and religions. Thus, to truly welcome guests, we need to have a home.35

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, an American descendant of nineteenth century Hasidic Polish Jews, became a leading theologian of his time. In applying the sanctity of the home to prayer, he leaves us with a poignant and concluding reflection on the power of the home, both to those who inhabit it and to those who are invited to enter as guests.

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33 James Taylor, “Hospitality as Translation,” 11.
How marvelous is my home. I enter as a suppliant and emerge as a witness: I enter as a stranger and emerge as next of kin. I enter spiritually shapeless, inwardly disfigured, and emerge wholly changed. It is in moments of prayer that my image is forged, that my striving is fashioned. To understand the world I must love my home. It is difficult to perceive luminosity anywhere if there is no light in my own home. It is in light of prayer’s radiance that I find my way even in the dark.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel
(1907-1972)  

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