

REFORMED REVIEW

A Theological Journal of
Western Theological Seminary
Holland, Michigan

Winter, 2003-04

Vol. 57, No. 2

Theme: Hospitality

Hospitality: Mysterious and Mundane

Christine D. Pohl

Sovereignty and Hospitality

Thomas A. Boogaart

Hospitality Remembering Jesus

Allen Verhey

Hospitality in Urban Ministry

Barbara Pekich

The Hospitable Seminary

Dennis N. Voskuil

Book Reviews

Writers in this Issue

Reviewers in this Issue

The views of the writers and reviewers in this issue are their own,
and do not necessarily represent the views of the
Publications Committee or Western Theological Seminary.

Hospitality: Mysterious and Mundane*

Christine D. Pohl

For Christians, hospitality is a practice within which we deal simultaneously with pots of soup and angels, with blankets and holy ground, with the possibility of opening the door and encountering Jesus, and with worries about whether the unexpected guest might be an escaped convict. Hospitality is an unusual practice in that it combines the most extraordinarily supernatural encounters with the most earthly, earthy concerns. The practice of hospitality roots its practitioners in the basics of life. It involves sharing food, providing security or a place to sleep, offering conversation and respect, yet hospitality also connects Christians with the Eucharist, with the eschatological welcome of the kingdom, and with reenacting how God has welcomed us.

Anyone who has been involved regularly in offering welcome knows about this remarkable combination of exhausting work, strange interactions, unpredictable circumstances, and wonderful joy. Practitioners are familiar with the unanticipated blessings of hospitality that come when the needy person they welcome turns out to be someone who helps them right at the point of their need. In interviews with those who welcome people day in and day out – people with disabilities, refugees, homeless people, students, or seekers – I encountered a consistent, repeated refrain. Many of them commented, “I went into this ministry thinking that I was helping them – that I was here to help the refugees or homeless people – but I’ve gotten so much more than I’ve given.”

Such peculiar outcomes can only be the work of God’s grace. Under ordinary circumstances, we do not host a potluck dinner, or make beds for unexpected guests, or scavenge around the neighborhood to find adequate furniture to fill an apartment, or sit down for coffee with a troubled friend and expect heaven to crack open. We carve up our days into the ordinary and the supernatural, the mundane tasks and the things we think really matter for the kingdom. But hospitality as a practice presses us to reconsider some of these divisions and invites us to live into some of the mystery of the gospel.

Hospitality in the Bible

Early in the biblical text, we encounter mystery and hospitality. Genesis 18 recounts the story of Abraham and Sarah and their welcome to three strangers in the heat of the day. They offer their unexpected guests traditional hospitality, expressions of welcome customary in their culture. They give honor and deference, prepare special food, and provide a place to rest. Later in the story,

* This article is based on a presentation of the same title given at The Oak Brook Conference on Ministry, at Christ Church, Oak Brook, Illinois, October 15, 2002.

we learn that they had welcomed angels. In the context of their hospitality, Abraham and Sarah received the joy-filled promise that they would have a son in their old age. Somehow, it was God who came to them as a visitor in the midday heat.

Other stories in the biblical text provide examples of the supernatural or mysterious intimations associated with offering hospitality. In 1 Kings 17:8-24, the widow of Zarephath responds to Elijah's request for food with something less than enthusiastic welcome. At the time of his request, she and her child were anticipating almost certain and immediate death from starvation. Nevertheless, she was persuaded to share what little she had and she, her household, and the prophet had food to spare in the midst of a deadly famine. God provided the oil and the grain miraculously and there was enough.

In many other stories in the Old Testament, we read of unexpected guests who bring their hosts into closer contact with God. In the story of the spies and Rahab (Joshua 2) and the Shunammite woman and Elisha (2 Kings 4:8-37), as hosts meet the needs of their guests, they also find blessing. Many of the biblical stories tie hospitality to promise, blessing, and God's special presence.

In the Gospels, Jesus appears as stranger, guest, and host. John 1 explains that when Jesus came into the world, his own people did not receive him. Instead, the one through whom the world came into being was rejected. Those who did welcome him, however, found themselves welcomed or received as children of God. Jesus, the stranger, the one who had nowhere to stay and had no home on earth, welcomed, hosted, and fed crowds, making a place for them on the hillsides and at the lake shores. In so many stories, Jesus graciously welcomed children, the lost and the least, prostitutes and tax collectors, people with diseases, and people with questions. Sometimes he expressed welcome as their host and sometimes as their guest.

The story of Jesus' encounter with the disciples on the road to Emmaus is particularly interesting (Luke 24:13-35). Jesus meets two disciples after the resurrection and they take him to be a stranger. As the day nears its end and they are still walking together, the disciples invite him home with them as their guest. While at table, Jesus breaks the bread, taking on the role of host; the disciples recognize him (in the breaking of the bread) and they begin to understand what has happened to him and to them.

The image of God as host goes back to the Garden of Eden and certainly to the Exodus. In the wilderness, God directly and miraculously supplied manna every day. Much later we have accounts of Jesus saying that he is himself the bread of life, the bread that has come down from heaven (John 6). Jesus, more than guest

and host, is also our food, our sustenance. And so we recognize the extraordinary enactment of hospitality in the Eucharist, where we remember the cost of the welcome we have received into the kingdom, and where we are regularly welcomed to the table of the Kingdom. Jesus is our guest, our host, even our meal – an incomprehensible mystery, yet a reality central to our identity as his followers.

The earliest Christians understood the importance of hospitality and recognized both its practical necessity and its supernatural character. They welcomed each other into their homes when fleeing persecution and when traveling to share the gospel. They ate together regularly so that the poor would be fed and in order to keep their new Christian identity alive in a hostile world. They reminded one another of the importance of hospitality and that, in welcoming strangers, some had entertained angels without knowing it (Heb.13:2). They challenged each other to keep from becoming grudging in the practice of hospitality (1 Pet. 4:9), an early indication that hospitality had its costs. They recognized that people could get weary and find themselves used, even in the midst of a life-giving practice.

Christians met in homes for worship during the first centuries and so, in the early years, hospitality most frequently took place in the overlap of household and church. The image of the church as the household of God was important in the early writings, and in God's household, hospitality was a requisite for leadership (1 Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:8). Hospitality was the context within which the early church worked through struggles over ethnic and status differences and within which Christians were able to demonstrate that, by God's transforming grace, they could transcend those differences. It was not easy, but the young congregations sorted out how rich and poor believers could be equals in the community of faith, and how Jews and Gentiles could be truly one in Christ. People who had despised each other, viewed the other as dirty, vile, or less than human, worked through their differences in the context of hospitality and especially in the context of shared meals.

They learned to respect and value one another as God valued them. It was difficult, and there were many failures. The struggles are clear in the book of Acts and in the letters to the Corinthians and Galatians.¹ But difficult as it was, Christian hospitality was a central witness to the truth of the gospel in the first centuries. Hospitality, church leaders argued, marked the gospel as authentic. That Christians from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds loved and cared for one another, ate together, shared one another's homes and lives, and welcomed strangers – this was proof of the truth of the gospel. The outside world noticed, and Christian believers knew, that such transformation came only as a result of God's engagement in their lives.²

Hospitality was widely viewed by the ancient world as a foundation on which the moral universe rested. Before inns or restaurants were available, every stranger needed some kind of personal welcome, and most societies considered hospitality to be a form of mutual aid. Most societies also, in some way, connected human hospitality with the divine, with their gods. Only Christianity, however, linked it as closely as is found in Matt. 25:31-46.

In this passage on the final judgment, Jesus describes the separation of the sheep and the goats. That separation is tied to whether or not a person had responded to Jesus' hunger, thirst, need for welcome, or need for care as a sick person or a prisoner. Everyone in the story is surprised, sheep and goats alike, and they ask, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food . . . and when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you?" When did we see you and respond; when did we see you and not respond? Whatever they were doing or not doing, they were surprised that they were somehow attending to, or neglecting, Jesus. His response, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me," is shocking. No matter what the exegetical difficulties of the passage, and there are several, there could be no closer connection between encountering Jesus and responding to a person in need.

Based on Matthew 25:31-46 and Luke 14:12-14, the ancient church was convinced that Christians had to open their doors to the poor and to strangers. In the Lukan passage, during what must have been a very awkward dinner party, Jesus turned to his host and said,

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

A distinctive Christian understanding of hospitality was forged from these two passages and from the verse in Hebrews 13:2: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." Christian hospitality was tied to caring for "the least of these," and to responding to people who could not repay the kindness. It was also profoundly connected to mystery and to God's unexpected presence. Christians offered hospitality because Jesus called on his followers to do so, and because it might be Jesus who was knocking on their doors. The surprising but strong link between the mundane aspects of care for those in need and our care for Jesus and

our encounter with angels is powerfully developed in the first generations of the church.

Hospitality Today

When we juxtapose this very rich and complex historical understanding of hospitality with contemporary Christian views of it, the contrast is striking. Our tendency today is to see hospitality as a duty, task, or strategy, if we see it as significant at all for the Christian life. Many people, Christians included, might be inclined to echo Henri Nouwen's description of contemporary understandings of hospitality. He observed that the word conjures up images of "tea parties, bland conversation, and a general atmosphere of coziness."³ A description such as his helps us realize how far removed we are from understanding hospitality as a risky, awe-filled practice in which we might just be chatting with angels or offering Jesus the best of our soup.

Hospitality certainly involves tasks: sharing food and shelter, offering people respect and recognition, being available for conversation and accompaniment. Specific tasks constitute the practice of opening up our lives and our churches, our homes and our communities to others, making room for them in places that are precious to us. But hospitality is so much more than a task, or a series of tasks. We would do better to see hospitality as a practice that is constitutive of a way of life, a way of life deeply connected to the gospel.⁴

It is vitally important to understand hospitality in this way. Some people react to hearing about the importance of welcome with near despair. They cannot imagine adding another thing to their already out-of-control schedules; they feel crushed under the burden of the challenge to do one more thing for the sake of the gospel. These are often deeply committed Christians, busy with the work of ministry and the church, but something is clearly wrong. Obviously hospitality involves work, but it involves a shift in orientation first. It requires a reprioritizing of how we live as individuals, families, and congregations.

If we can be persuaded that making a place for others is life-giving for us, then we will look at the tasks involved differently. If God is especially present, if we expect to find ourselves on holy ground, we will be more willing to take the risks necessary to open our doors and our hearts to others. If, as we engage in activities of preparing food, planning church dinners, or arranging visits to homebound neighbors or local prisoners, we can see that these activities are part of a larger practice that has rich biblical, historical, and theological meaning, our entire perspective on ministry will be changed.

A particularly poignant exchange between a Salvation Army officer and me captures this point well. After I had led a seminar on hospitality with a group of

Salvation Army officers who provide hospitality daily for some of the most vulnerable populations, one older man came up to me. He commented, “So you are saying that all of those years of preparing food and making beds for people in need mean something?” He knew that it had mattered for the people he had helped, but he had not grasped how his faithful activities fitted into a larger historical and theological practice that was central to the gospel. And that newfound understanding profoundly reframed, even transformed, his own thinking about his daily work. Similarly, after I made a presentation in a monastic setting, a nun said to me: “Cleaning all those apartments for visitors means something to the kingdom, really?” Without a sense of the tradition and of the biblical significance of hospitality, the mundane tasks can overwhelm the wonder of the practice.

Hospitality was a central practice of the church for centuries but, for a number of historical and sociological reasons, much of the transformative character of hospitality was lost after the first fifteen hundred years of the church. During the late Middle Ages, hospitality came to be identified with lavish entertaining of the rich and the powerful, and instead of helping people transcend social and cultural differences, it was used to reinforce social differences, power, and influence. Hospitality’s connection with equality, with the poor, with crossing social barriers, and with the mystery of God’s presence nearly disappeared for centuries. However, this is what had distinguished Christian hospitality in earlier times. During the patristic period, in the first six centuries of the church, Christian leaders had specifically contrasted conventional and Christian hospitality. Conventional hospitality, they said, was ambitious. It was calculated to gain advantage; hosts welcomed those who had the ability to repay the favor in some way. Christian hospitality, in contrast, welcomed those who did not seem to have much to offer, who could not repay the kindness. And yet, because God was present in the practice, a different kind of blessing or reward was promised.⁵

The Protestant Reformers recovered dimensions of hospitality, especially in responding to the needs of the Protestant refugees, but they did not recover the important place of hospitality in congregations. Instead, they located the work of hospitality in the home and in the civic sphere. This is important because, with the shift in location, the transformative potential of hospitality was further muted. Hospitality was eventually domesticated in the household – it became largely a matter of entertaining family and friends.

In the civic sphere, the results were more complicated. Concerns about hospitality and the needs of strangers became some of the philosophical basis for the developing discourse in the political sphere about human rights. Concerns about care for the poor and the vulnerable that had been understood in earlier

centuries as part of the practice of hospitality were eventually reshaped into social services – poor relief, welfare, and municipal hospitals. In the process, care for the poor and for needy strangers became much more bureaucratized, anonymous, and distant. In the economic sphere, hospitality practices were gradually reshaped into the growth of the hospitality industry – hotels, restaurants, and resorts.

During these centuries, a commitment to hospitality as a significant practice for the church and for the Christian life weakened significantly. What is left today are pieces of the practice, scattered over different institutions and spheres of life, but rarely central to the church. What happened to understandings of hospitality was not necessarily the result of evil intentions or a fall from grace; the institutional changes were the result of complex historical and socioeconomic developments. But, as a consequence of the changes, our society has lost a sense of hospitality's importance and its history. In the church, if there is a hospitality committee, it is rarely responsible for more than the coffee hour, ushers, greeters, or parking lot. If there is further discussion of hospitality, it is usually regarding its potential as an evangelism strategy or program.

Such shrunken assumptions about hospitality contrast sharply with the claims of Jean Vanier, founder of the L'Arche communities that minister alongside people with serious disabilities. Vanier writes that hospitality or welcome is "one of the signs that a community is alive. To invite others to live with us is a sign that we aren't afraid, that we have a treasure of truth and of peace to share." A community that offers hospitality to strangers, he notes, is a "sign of contradiction," a sign of hope that love is possible in a fractured and broken world.⁶

In the church today, we rarely recognize the importance of hospitality in our overall ministry and in our presentation and representation of the gospel. Few people in a congregation recognize the fundamental importance of fellowship and friendship to the kingdom. Few understand the crucial importance of community. For many of us, these are all nice extras if we have the time. We think they are good, but certainly not theologically central.

Recovering Hospitality

If, however, we recognized the importance of community and friendship, we would also begin to see how helpful it would be if we were more intentional about our outreach and welcome to others, especially to the lost and the poor. The most vulnerable people in the world – whether homeless, refugees, people with grave disabilities, or children from broken families – are those who are outside of every relationship. When every relationship has failed them, they are, in a profound sense, people without a place. In their disconnection from every

sustaining network, they are strangers. If churches were more intentional about giving each person a place of respect and value, a place to belong, we could make a huge difference in people's lives. More than a handout or a social program, people need a community within which to contribute their gifts.

In a few communities in the last several decades, Christians have been intentional about the practice of hospitality. L'Arche's welcome to people with disabilities, L'Abri's welcome to students and seekers, Benedictine communities, Jubilee Partners and their welcome to refugees, Catholic Worker Houses and their life alongside homeless people – each of these communities has recognized that hospitality is a central Christian practice. They have discovered that in the practice of Christian hospitality, people can truly be restored to life. They have understood the importance of hospitality and community, especially for the people the world mostly overlooks, and they have opened hearts and doors in welcome.

In the process, these communities have reminded us that people need friendships that help them recover a place in the world. Such communities offer a model of relationship that is different from social services, which so often define one person as the provider and the other as the needy recipient. If we are honest, we will acknowledge that many church outreach programs function according to a social service model. But in an intentional recovery of hospitality, practitioners recognize that traditional notions of needs and assets do not fully capture reality. All of us bring both needs and assets to any community and to every relationship.

What might happen if congregations were once again reminded of the significance of welcome? What if parishioners were to reflect carefully on who the invisible people were in their communities? What if they asked regularly, as a matter of spiritual discipline: Who is missing from our fellowship, who needs welcome? Who needs to know that they are precious to God and to God's people? Whose absence is keeping my community and me from being whole? Regular consideration of these questions might help us view differently not just homeless people and refugees, but neighborhood youth, immigrants, single parents, elderly neighbors, foreign students, and people with disabilities.

Recovering the practice of hospitality is important, but not only for the most marginal and needy people in our world. It is important for the congregation itself. Hospitality is a "real means of grace" for the giver as well as for the recipient.⁷ God is present, and despite the frequent difficulties, God is present in miraculous, life-giving ways.

Most of us have personal stories of when we were a guest or a host, a needy traveler, or a visitor to a foreign country where we experienced some of the wonders of hospitality, perhaps along with the difficulties. Most of us can remember a time when there were more hungry people than there was food, and yet somehow there was enough food. Perhaps we can also recall a time when we were providing help, and yet found ourselves the ones who were helped more profoundly. Perhaps we can remember an incident when a group of difficult teens was transformed by the opportunity to share in ministry with people far more needy than themselves. When a troubled soul comes to life, or gains the hope and courage to continue on, because someone took time to share a meal and conversation with her or him, we see the riches of hospitality.

It is far easier to persuade people of the joy and mystery of hospitality after they have engaged in it. It is hard to talk about the mystery outside of the context of the practice. In fact, for most people, the practice of hospitality reinforces itself; once Christians offer welcome, they want to do more. They see its blessings, not so much by reflecting on it as by engaging in it. One of the clues to recovering hospitality is to give congregations opportunities to try it, to learn the practice and the skills, and to discover their gifts while offering welcome.

However, congregations often also need help learning the role of guest. There are times when it is crucial that others have the opportunity to be hosts, so that the gifts they have to offer are honored and valued. Middle-class, well-educated parishioners sometimes have to be reminded that all of the resources should not and do not flow in one direction only. As Henri Nouwen observed, "We will never believe that we have anything to give unless there is someone who is able to receive. Indeed, we discover our gifts in the eyes of the receiver."⁸

Despite the importance of hospitality within the Scriptures, to the Christian tradition, and for the well-being of vulnerable persons and congregations, we struggle with the practice for a number of reasons. Before we can engage in a full-scale recovery of the practice, we need to attend more closely to some of the factors that make it difficult.

Among the most significant challenges to any recovery of hospitality is the reality that few of us have understood hospitality as a central practice. It is, as noted earlier, usually viewed as a pleasant "extra" if we have the time. Few theologians of the last centuries have taken it seriously; they have neither reflected on it nor suggested its importance to our understanding and expression of the gospel. Not surprisingly, few have considered its complexities. While today we find some discussion of hospitality as a framework for concerns about inclusion of various marginalized groups, it is rare that these discussions are theologically or historically rooted.

The practice of Christian hospitality does not involve a boundaryless, wide-open activity; hospitality requires both boundaries and grace, and yet the interaction is complex and difficult in reflection and in practice. In his book, *Exclusion and Embrace*, Miroslav Volf addresses these questions with great insight, but, until recently, there has not been such rich theological engagement.⁹ We have depended more on thoughtful practitioners for insight – people like Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker, Jean Vanier of L’Arche, and Edith and Francis Schaeffer of L’Abri. While enormously helpful, these people have rarely been at the center of pastoral or theological formation.

Another reason that we struggle to grasp the significance of hospitality for our time is that if we do engage it at all, we tend to turn it into a strategy, a means to another end. It quickly becomes the latest evangelism approach, or the hot new strategy for church growth. In fact, hospitality can be very effective in evangelism and church growth, but if it is used as a strategy, it is also very short-lived.

People may be welcomed initially, but then they are dropped because the congregation and perhaps the pastor have not embraced the deepest realities of the practice, nor have they owned its costs. When things become difficult or when congregations go through a stretch where they encounter more troubled souls than angels, they drop the practice and the troubled folks and move on to something else. Increasingly over the past several years, where there has been attention to hospitality, I have heard complaints that churches use hospitality to get people in, but then they do not retain them. As a result, everyone involved feels used and disappointed. Quickly people conclude that “hospitality doesn’t really work.”

Another reason that Christians have not embraced hospitality as a central practice is that it is hard to offer welcome to strangers over the long-term if it is not done in community. Conventional churches do not often function as engaged communities. Welcome takes time, energy, resources, and people. Hospitality can reframe our thinking about church and community, but the practice of hospitality requires skills and attitudes that must be learned by more than a few individuals. If persons offering substantial amounts of hospitality are not supported and sustained within a community, they wear out quickly, grow overwhelmed, and eventually give up, even when they are committed to the practice. It is a demanding way of life.

The best location for the practice of hospitality is in the overlap between household and church. It is primarily here that we see a miraculous integration of the personal and intimate character of the home with the transforming

character of the church as the household of God. But recovering this location today is difficult for a number of reasons, especially because households have changed so dramatically.

Many households are empty most of the time; when people are home, life is often hectic and there are few shared meals into which to invite other people. However, the importance of the overlap of household and church does suggest that we need to be much more attentive to the value of small groups that meet in homes, the importance of creating extended households in the church, and the significance of working hard to come up with imaginative ways of reconnecting household and church.

The fragility of the household also reminds us of how much the recovery of hospitality is connected to mundane issues. Changes in the household, smaller and smaller families, the loss of real neighborhoods, the increasing fragmentation of life, changes in the economy such that most adults are working, and shifts in moral orientation that value measurable results and efficiency over everything else—all of these have a significant impact on how we understand and practice hospitality. These factors must be taken into account because our world is not the world of Abraham and Sarah or of the early church.

One of the distinctive characteristics of our world is its hectic character. It is difficult to add hospitality to overwhelmingly busy schedules. To recover this practice, we need to develop a different set of priorities in which welcome or hospitality is part of how we think about doing and being church, family, and community. We might do better to see hospitality as the framework for all of our tasks, rather than as one more task in a busy day.

Despite countless testimonies that it is a wonderful practice, we are sometimes hesitant to embrace hospitality because we worry that people will take advantage of us, or that some strangers might be troublesome or dangerous, as guests or as hosts. To a certain extent, there is truth here and we need to acknowledge the concerns and the risks. We need to find ways to address the real dangers, and we also need to become willing to live with some level of uncertainty and risk. Interestingly, people have always thought that it was easier to welcome strangers in previous times than in their own day. For example, in the sixteenth century, Martin Luther wrote that hospitality would have been safer and easier for Abraham because “there was not such a large number of vagabonds and scoundrels in the world as there is today.”¹⁰

There are reasons that some risks are heightened in our time. Households are much smaller and more private, and hospitality is safer in the context of

community. But with practice and imagination, we can find ways to reduce the risk and to make hospitality sustainable.

One final reason that we have failed to embrace hospitality as a fundamental dimension of our Christian identity and practice has to do with how we ordinarily respond to the needs of vulnerable strangers. We have generally embraced a social service model of ministry. We are comfortable with distance between providers and recipients; we serve meals, but we rarely sit down and eat with needy people; we provide food pantries and clothing closets, but we do not often invite the people we help into our worship and congregational life. As noted earlier, we have not realized how destructive and artificial such divisions are for everyone. Hospitality challenges us to reintegrate worship, mission, and social ministry.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest several additional reasons that recovering hospitality as a central Christian practice is crucial to the church today:

1. Our society is so highly mobile that most of us see ourselves as strangers in some sense. The most vulnerable strangers are those without resources, but with the breakdown of family and community in the larger society, and with frequent moves, people are generally much more alone than they were in the past. Many people in our churches are thousands of miles from their closest relatives. This suggests another reason why hospitality in the context of the congregation is very important for the wellbeing of church members. Hospitality can help us form new families and new communities.
2. The old forms of apologetics are not very persuasive to this generation of seekers. This generation is less affected by rational arguments than by a living and loving embodiment of community. In his book, *Ancient-Future Faith*, Robert Webber writes that the most significant apologetic Christians will be able to offer in the twenty-first century is the quality of life and welcome within the church. A community that embodies the experience of the kingdom will draw people to itself. He notes, "In this sense the church and its life in the world will become the new apologetic. People come to faith not because they see the logic of the argument, but because they have experienced a welcoming God in a hospitable and loving community."¹¹

The story of Jubilee Partners in rural Georgia gives strong support to Webber's insight. An intentional Christian community of families and single folks, Jubilee Partners is a spin-off of Koinonia Farms. A significant part of their ministry involves offering welcome to refugees, providing

them with a safe place for several months, inviting them into their shared life, and helping them learn English and basic skills for living in a new culture. The community of Jubilee Partners welcomes about thirty-five refugees every three months. What is startling is that they also welcome approximately three thousand visitors a year. These guests are mostly North Americans who have heard about the quality of Jubilee's shared life and testimony and long to see what Christianity looks like lived out in community. Three thousand people come each year to a place in rural Georgia to see a humble, gracious expression of the gospel, embodied by a small group of Christians who have recovered the importance of hospitality and community.¹²

3. Recovering hospitality is important today because of the number of people who are coming to faith from completely non-Christian backgrounds. Churches can no longer count on a cultural reservoir of Christian values. New converts will not quickly learn the practices, attitudes, virtues, and beliefs of the Christian life outside of a personal mentoring relationship, which is so readily fostered in the context of hospitality.
4. A final reason that it is important to recover hospitality is that our culture is open to mystery; in fact, people are dangerously open to mystery today. People know that life has to consist of more than what they can see, buy, or earn. They are looking for meaning and for encounters with God. Often they look in the wrong places and draw the wrong conclusions. But Christians have the wonder and the mystery; followers of Jesus have the story and the practices that bring together community, meaning, and transcendence. Within Christian hospitality, longings to be helpful to others, to be a reconciling presence, and to find personal healing can be met. These are the yearnings of this generation.

Jesus has made a place for us and continues to offer us friendship along with transformation. He welcomes us into a journey toward wholeness and holiness. Out of hearts that are captured by gratitude for the welcome that we have received, we can share hospitality with others.

We have very good news for the world. As we embody it and live out God's welcome, our invitations will be compelling. As we make a place for people in our lives and hearts, homes and churches, we will find our own lives miraculously enriched. And in the midst of our ministry, we might catch glimpses of angels.

ENDNOTES

¹ See, for example, Acts 10-11; Gal. 2:11-14; 1 Cor. 11:17-34; James 2:1-13.

² See “First Apology of Justin,” ch. 14, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, 167. Also, Aristedes, “Apology,” ch. 15, *ANF*, vol. 9, 277. Also, Tertullian, “The Prescription Against Heretics,” ch. 20, *ANF*, vol. 3, 252. For further discussion of the significance of hospitality for the early church, see Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), chapters 2-4, and Rowan Greer, *Broken Lights and Mended Lives* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1986), chapter on hospitality, pages 119-40.

³ Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Image Books, 1975), 66.

⁴ See Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), for a fuller discussion of Christian practices and a way of life.

⁵ For a more complete discussion of historical and sociological developments in relation to hospitality, see *Making Room*, chapters 3-4.

⁶ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 266-67.

⁷ John Wesley describes works of mercy as a “real means of grace” in his sermon “On Visiting the Sick.” *Works*, Vol. 3, Sermons III:71-114 (Nashville: Abingdon), 385.

⁸ Nouwen, 87.

⁹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955), vol. 4, “Lectures on Genesis Chapters 21-25,” 282; also, vol. 3, “Lectures on Genesis Chapters 15-20,” 245.

¹¹ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 72.

¹² For the story of Jubilee Partners, see *With Our Own Eyes*, by Don Mosley with Joyce Hollyday (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1996).

Sovereignty and Hospitality

Thomas A. Boogaart

The Lost Picture of God, the Sovereign

The picture of God as a Sovereign is found throughout Scripture. In passage after passage, Scripture depicts a God who sits on a throne and speaks words that both create and sustain the world. It witnesses that whether people realize it or not, they stand before this Sovereign (*coram deo*). This picture is difficult for us in the West to appreciate for a number of reasons.

First of all, our spiritual ancestors were iconoclastic. The reformers distrusted the use of pictures and images that was common in the Catholic Church. This fact became clear to me when I and my family moved to the city of Groningen in the Netherlands.

Rising above all the other buildings at the center of the city is the great and the ancient Martini Church. In 1975, it was undergoing a major renovation and had been closed to visitors for about ten years. Friends of ours knew the custodian who lived in a house embedded in one corner of the large church. On a Saturday morning, he gave us a private tour and lecture. Among other things, he explained how the Protestants assumed control of the church in the 16th century and whitewashed all the frescoes on the walls and ceiling.

The custodian told us that unknown to the Protestants, the whitewash had a chemical in it that leached into the frescoes and sealed them. Rather than destroying the artwork, the whitewash preserved it for future generations. After the renovators meticulously flaked off the white coating, the frescoes reappeared after four hundred years. I remember the custodian telling this story with relish and gesturing towards the beautiful pictures of biblical scenes.

The reformers were afraid that a beautiful fresco, painting, or sculpture would steal the hearts of believers. Artwork elicited powerful emotions in viewers that all too often attached themselves to the work itself. Such emotional attachments were dangerous because they left people susceptible to idolatry and manipulation by corrupt leaders. Precisely to guard against this kind of corruption, the second commandment warned the children of God not to make any graven images, and Moses' reminded them: "The Lord spoke to you out of fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice (Deuteronomy 4:12)."

Reformed Christians have taken the words of Moses very seriously. They imitate the theophany on Mount Sinai in worship. The windows and the walls of a typical

sanctuary are plain; the focal point of the gathered community is the pulpit with an open Bible. Like the Israelites at Mount Sinai, the worshipping congregation hears the sound of words but sees no form. Since my time at the Martini Church in Groningen, it has often crossed my mind that Protestants not only whitewashed images on the walls of churches, they also whitewashed images on the pages of Scripture, one of them the image of God as the Sovereign.

Reformed Christians have grown accustomed over the years to setting word against image, the ear against the eye, the prophet against the priest. This habit of our heart evidences itself again and again in our theological conversations. Walter Brueggemann, for example, in a collection of articles on Old Testament theology, betrays his roots in Reformed iconoclasm when he describes the development of Israel's understanding of God (**Old Testament Theology**, Fortress, 1992). He reduces the variety and complexity of Israel's religious affections to a conflict between the liberating words of the prophets and the manipulating images of the priests. He tries to uphold both prophets and priests in some essays, but ultimately cannot hide his distaste for the latter: "...Israel knows *images in religion* accompany inequities of social power in society, which inevitably result in disproportions of social goods and social access. The location of God in a place or object proposes that the power of life can be identified and located and, therefore, controlled and administered.... Images in heaven warrant monopolies on earth" (124).

While we have grown accustomed to setting ear against the eye, a word of caution is in order. Images are no more likely to corrupt us than words. The Scriptures often speak of the significance of seeing God (Exodus 24:11; Psalm 27:4; John 1:14; II Corinthians 4:18, to name a few locations) and provide us with numerous images. The Bible does not set the parts of the body against each other, but presents them working in concert to enhance our understanding of God. Isaiah's description of his theophany is but one magnificent example (6:1-8). Often overlooked is his full-bodied experience of God. The prophet sees (I saw the Lord sitting on a throne), hears (one seraph called to another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts"), feels (the pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called), smells (the house was filled with smoke), and tastes (holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs, the seraph touched my mouth). All the senses contribute to Isaiah's understanding of God.

Second, the protracted and unhappy conversation between the Church and the sciences has had the unhappy effect of encouraging Christians to ignore the traditional pictures of how God creates and sustains the world. The discovery of earth as one of nine planets orbiting the sun, the sun as one of myriad stars swirling on the outer edge of the Milky Way galaxy, and the Milky Way as one of countless galaxies flaring forth from a primordial singularity, was not received with religious awe and wonder in the church, but as a blow to its authority and that of Scripture.

Rather than examining the biblical picture of the cosmos in the light of the new information and looking for possible points of correspondence, the church made a strategic retreat. Over the course of centuries, it gradually shifted its attention to God the redeemer rather than God the creator, to history rather than nature.

A privatizing predisposition has deeply affected biblical interpretation and theological discourse in Reformed circles. It was carried out under the banner of covenantal theology. For much of the second half of the twentieth century, covenant was lifted up in Reformed congregations as the central theme of the Old Testament. But this covenant was not like the one described in Deuteronomy 28, which had cosmic dimensions – “The Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your ground in the land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give you.” The connection between covenant and creation dropped from view as creation was seen more and more to be an autonomous, self regulating mechanism, and the biblical picture of creation was seen to be less and less defensible. Nor was this covenant like the one described in Joshua 24 which was solemnized in ritual. The need for ritual to reinvigorate the covenant was seen as decadent – “what to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beast; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats” (Isaiah 1: 11).

In my formative years in a Reformed congregation, I was taught that covenant designated a personal relationship that God had initiated with human beings, and that Scripture recorded the history of this personal relationship. When I arrived at seminary, this personal understanding of covenant guided our journey through the Old Testament. True religion was religion of the heart. It began with the call of Abraham – we did not think much about Sarah in those years: “[Abraham] believed the Lord, and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15); it was revived by the prophets: “...these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me” (Isaiah 29: 13). We never really discussed what in fact constitutes the largest portion of Old Testament material: the altar, the tabernacle, the temple, the priests, and the rituals. These, of course, are all important pieces of the picture of God as Sovereign.

The Reformed tradition in its various incarnations continues to affirm that God is a Sovereign and that Jesus Christ holds all things together. Reformed Christians still encounter in their Bible pieces of the picture of God as a Sovereign – Jesus sitting at the right hand of God, the hosts of heaven, the angels, the divine council, the star of Bethlehem, etc – but they no longer know how these pieces fit together. They no longer have a picture of the world to suggest how God in Jesus Christ actually rules it. Or perhaps more accurately, Reformed Christians have a picture of the world – a big bang or a coalescing of strings – but they no longer see how Jesus fits into it.

Recent translations have even begun eliminating references to the biblical picture of the world. The men behind the New International Version, for example, write in the preface: "Because for most readers today the phrase, 'the Lord of hosts' and 'God of hosts' have little meaning, this version renders them 'the Lord Almighty' and 'God Almighty.'" Translating is extremely difficult and must take into account the world of the reader, but translators, like everyone else, tend to offer up rather easily things which they do not appreciate.

Finally, we have no picture of sovereignty because we have no sovereign. Hated King George III was the last one to hold sway over American territory. The notion that God endows certain families with special graces to rule justly is ludicrous, and even contemptible to us. Despite what the Bible in many places suggests, we have great difficulty imagining how the spirit of God descends upon a chosen one, imputes wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2,3). We associate kingship with tyranny, an antiquated form of governance. The decrees of a sovereign do not bring justice and righteousness to the land, but exploitation and enslavement. We are, therefore, disinclined to pursue to its logical end the claim that Jesus is the Christ, the one sitting at the right hand of God and sustaining the world by sovereign decrees.

If I am at all correct in my assessment of our present situation, we have tended to overlook and underplay the significance of the picture of sovereignty in Scripture. It may prove useful briefly to review the pieces of the picture.

A Review

God is a Sovereign who lives in a magnificent palace of many rooms. Heaven in Scripture is the house and grounds of the great Lord of the universe. Earth is God's estate, and the peoples are his servants, working their assigned lands.

In my Father's house are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? (John 14:2)

On that day Israel will be a third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage" (Isaiah 19: 24-25).

Are you not like the Egyptians to me, O people of Israel? says the Lord. Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans for Kir? (Amos 9: 7-8)

The Sovereign shines, resplendent and glorious. God's being is radiant, filling heaven and earth. Power goes forth from God like light from the sun.

Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth. (Psalm 50: 2)

And one seraph called to another and said, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." (Isaiah 6:3)

And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22: 5)

The Sovereign shines in the faces of his sons. The sons of God, or angels, are the embodiment of God's glory. They are sent from the palace and assume their place in the world. Each one is called and carries a word from the father to a particular domain. There is constant traffic between heaven and earth with the sons of God coming and going. Collectively they manifest the power of God, and they form the infrastructure of the created order.

And he dreamed that there was a stairway set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. (Genesis 28:12)

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. (John 6:38)

For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

Within the palace is a throne room where God and his sons deliberate over the affairs of the world.

The Lord is king; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake. (Psalm 99:1)

God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the elohim/sons of God he holds judgment. (Psalm 82:1)

One day the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" And Satan answered the Lord, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." (Job 1:6-7)

Then Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him. And the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' Then one said one thing, and another said another, until a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, 'I will entice him.'" (I Kings 22:19-21)

At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. (Revelation 4:2-3)

God gives audience to the prophets and calls them to carry his word to the people. The prophets are intercessors like the angels. They ascend into the council with the people's concerns, and they descend from it with the word of God. They call the people to obedience.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on the throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple... . And I said, "Woe is me! For I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." (Isaiah 6: 1)

Remember how I stood before you to speak good for them, to turn away your wrath from them! (Jeremiah 18: 20)

I [God] did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings. (Jeremiah 23: 21-22)

God reveals the pattern of the heavenly palace. Moses makes the tabernacle, and David plans the temple according to the divine blueprints. The temple is the visible manifestation of the invisible palace; its architecture catechizes pilgrims in the truths of sovereignty. The ark represents God's throne, and the holy of holies represents the throne room where the sons gather to deliberate.

In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it. (Exodus 25:9)

All this, in writing at the Lord's direction, he made clear to me [David]--the plan of all the works. (I Chronicles 28:19)

Hospitality

The picture of God as the Sovereign is evident throughout Scripture and was self-evident to the people of Israel. It was the starting point for their reflection on the nature of God and laid the groundwork for their understanding of hospitality. They believed that God dwelt in a house and that God's house was replicated in Jerusalem. In the throne room, God deliberated with the sons of God who in turn carried God's decrees into the world. Jacob saw their movement in his dream:

“And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it” (Genesis 28: 12). In the banquet room, God prepared a feast and ate with his sons. But this feast was not intended for the angelic sons alone. The Sovereign desired that all the people of the world would enter the house, join him at the table, and become his adopted children. The house was a home; the Sovereign a homemaker. Worshippers at the temple dreamed of ascending, of glorified bodies, and of eating with God at the banquet table. The vision of the end times in Isaiah captured this hope:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples,
A feast of rich food,
A feast of well-aged wines,
Of rich food filled with marrow,
Of well-aged wines strained clear (25: 6).

What follows is an analysis of some of the important, if neglected, texts in the hospitality tradition.

Hospitality in the Psalm 23

The people of Israel believed that the realm of heaven and earth come together in the house of God. The house in Jerusalem was an image in the material of wood, cloth, stone, and metal of the immaterial house of God. The preparing of this house was Israel’s attempt to do on earth as was done heaven. It was their attempt to imitate God. Throughout the years, the architecture and rituals performed in the temple taught the people of Israel that God was a gracious homemaker and that they were children of this house.

Psalm 23 is an important text in the hospitality tradition. We are so familiar with this psalm and so captivated by its shepherd imagery that we often lose sight of its larger meaning and function in Israelite life. Notice the language of movement in the Psalm:

*He **leads** me beside still water.
He **leads** me in right paths.
Even though I **walk** through the darkest valley, I fear no evil.*

The shepherd and the flock are on the move. After lying down in green pastures for the night, the flock gets up again. The sheep are on their way to the house of the Lord, where they anticipate a great feast. The Psalm ends:

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy will follow me
all the days of my life,*

*and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.*

Psalm 23 is a song that pilgrims sang on their way to the temple in Jerusalem as they anticipated the great table that awaited them. What images of God did it awaken in their anticipation? You prepare a table before me, they sang. God bustling about the kitchen and banging pots and pans. God scurrying around the table and putting the goblets, plates, and cutlery in the proper order. Perhaps the pilgrims could smell the bread in the oven and the meat over the fire. They could feel the fragrant oil streaming down their hair and face as God wiped away the sweat and grime of travel.

Hospitality in the Stories of Daniel

The teller of the stories in Daniel is working out the meaning of God's sovereignty in the light of the destruction of Jerusalem. Who is Nebuchadnezzar, and what is the relationship between his power and God's power? How could the God of Israel be the creator of heaven and earth and not be able to defend God's own house in Jerusalem? How can the great banquet go on without the house of God and its vessels? With the temple in ruins, the fate of its vessels becomes the focus of concern for the people of Israel, their source of hope, and the ultimate test of sovereignty.

Daniel 1 begins with this remarkable claim: "The Lord let King Jehoiakim of Judah fall into his power, as well as some of the vessels of the house of God" (verse 2). This translation, "let fall" suggests that the Lord was passive in this defeat. The Hebrew makes clear otherwise: "The Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah into his hand." The actual language seems to suggest a monarch who hands over some of his own people to the aggressor, a monarch in negotiation with the enemy. Whatever the case, the narrative informs the hearers that the agency of God envelops that of Nebuchadnezzar. Whether Nebuchadnezzar realized it or not, God gave him captives from the royal house and the vessels.

To the Israelite mind these captives and these vessels are related. They view the world as constantly being filled by the glory of God. God fills the king and his entourage with the Spirit of God in the same way that God fills the vessels of the house of God. Both are filled to serve God's people. Both the leaders and the vessels are means of grace.

The narrative in Daniel 1 begins with Nebuchadnezzar seemingly in control of the vessels. The tension builds with Nebuchadnezzar's desire to usurp the role of God and to use these vessels, not the ones of gold and silver stowed away in the treasury, the ones of flesh and blood. Nebuchadnezzar plans to fill the captured leaders with the food and the wisdom of Babylon. The narrator in

Daniel 1 shows how his desire is subverted unbeknownst to him. Daniel and his friends neither eat the king's fare (verses 8-16) nor do they receive the wisdom of Babylon: "To these four young men God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams" (17). According to the narrator, God exercises sovereignty despite the fact that Jerusalem and the temple have been destroyed. God acts to preserve the integrity of Daniel and his friends, for we can only assume that the power of God made them robust on their sparse diet of vegetables.

The teller of the story in Daniel 1 makes clear to the hearers that God maintains the purity of the leaders taken from Jerusalem. The question, however, whether God is able to maintain the purity of the vessels from the house of God is not resolved; its resolution awaits a second story.

In Daniel 5, we hear that King Belshazzar is organizing a great festival to praise the gods who have supported him, gods who are described sarcastically by the storyteller as nothing rising about the material realm: "gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone" (verse 4). A festival in the ancient world is always a sacrament, for food is understood to be a gift of the gods. The gods imbue the earth with the power to produce food, and they imbue kings and queens with the power to conquer other nations and confiscate their food. Food in all its variety is a manifestation of divine power, and eating transfers that power to human beings. Therefore, eating is a form of communion with the gods. This being the case, the vessels used in these sacraments of communion take on special meaning. They are understood to be the property of the gods, and they become signs and seals in themselves to the people of the gods' power to provide.

King Belshazzar becomes inebriated and decides to use the vessels of gold and silver that had been taken by his father Nebuchadnezzar from the house of God in Jerusalem. What did these vessels mean to him? Nebuchadnezzar's knew that his war with Israel was a war of the gods and he could only conclude that his gods had amply demonstrated their power. They had granted him access to Jerusalem, access to members of the royal family, and access to the temple itself. In other words, his gods had allowed him to peel back the layers of holiness that surrounded the God of Israel; they had allowed him to move closer and closer to the Holy One of Israel. But Nebuchadnezzar had stopped short of the last profanation; he never used the vessels he took from the house of God.

This action, or better inaction, is significant both for the conquering king of Babylon and the conquered people of Israel. For Nebuchadnezzar, the preservation of the vessels represents a form of respect and an acknowledgement perhaps of their continued holiness and power. For the people of Israel, the

preservation of the vessels represents the hope of restoration. Like the ark of Noah, the vessels hold the seeds of all that is holy to the people of Israel. They float on a sea of destruction and carry the hope of a new beginning when the storm has passed.

Fortified by the wine, Belshazzar calls for the vessels and decides to commit the final desecration. He wants to use them in service of his gods. He essentially puts the power of the God of Israel to the test: "Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and began writing on the plaster of the wall of the royal palace, next to the lampstand" (verse 5). From other stories of violation, we might expect that the hand appears to strike Belshazzar down, but in this story he is publicly humiliated before he is killed. He is made to experience his finitude in two ways. First, no one appears before a king without being called, as we know from the story of Esther. The king is the embodiment of all power, and that power permeates everything around him. The place on which he stands is holy ground, as it were, and any who violate it are immediately executed. Now a hand appears in the presence of the king, and he neither summoned it nor controls it.

Second, the hand writes in a language that neither the king nor all the king's men can read. Part of the mystique of kingship is that the king is omnipotent and omniscient. He or she conquers all and therefore knows all. He appropriates the languages and the wisdom of all peoples. That is to say, he takes the Wernher Von Brauns of the conquered peoples into his court and uses their knowledge to advance the interests of his kingdom. The existence of a language that Belshazzar cannot read is evidence of a kingdom he has not yet conquered and wisdom he does not know. If we listen carefully to this story with its impact on the Jewish exiles mind, we realize that the presence of the fingers writing on the plaster of the wall is proof to them that despite all evidence to the contrary Babylon has not conquered them, that in some rarified way the kingdom of God still is intact.

Belshazzar is twice humiliated. When the hand and the mysterious writing first appear, we read: "Then the king's face turned pale, and his thoughts terrified him. His limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together" (6). When the scholars of Babylon cannot read the writing, he has another episode of the shakes. At this point his wife enters, and tells him of Daniel and his prodigious ability. The king decides to call him.

The call of Daniel is meaningful in this story on a number of levels. First, the narrator suggests a correspondence between the fingers of a human hand that come unbidden into the presence of the king and the man – hands, fingers, and all – that comes bidden. Both are present but completely free of the power of the

king. We noted this earlier with regard to the hand, and with regard to Daniel we hear him saying: "Let your gifts be for yourself, or give your rewards to someone else" (17). Both represent the freedom of the people of Israel in the kingdom of God. Perhaps the movement from the fingers of the hand to the person of Daniel, that is, the movement from part to whole, foreshadows the return of this kingdom to its wholeness and place in the world.

Second, the narrator highlights the fact that Belshazzar calls for both the vessels of gold and silver and for Daniel. We know from the narrative in Daniel 1 that Nebuchadnezzar brought two sets of vessels from Jerusalem to Babylon: the vessels from the house of God and the leaders from the house of King Jehoiakim. The question raised by this conquest is whether the Babylonian king will be able to co-opt them and use them in his service. If so, then the God of Israel has been truly vanquished; there would be no trace left of his sovereignty. In Daniel 1, we see that Nebuchadnezzar tried to "fill" the leaders to no avail. His power was subverted. Now his son Belshazzar tries to fill the vessels from the house of God, and he learns that he will soon have neither vessels nor a house. His days are numbered. God may have given the members of the house of Jehoiakim and the vessels of the temple into Nebuchadnezzar's hand, but God was not through with them. God was preserving them for some future purpose.

The vessels of the house of God are an integral part of the stories of Daniel and the biblical story of hospitality. They served the food and wine that God had provided the people of Israel during the great festivals throughout their history. These festivals were a realization of God's hospitality both for the people of Israel and the world. Their preservation and purity became a symbol for the people of Israel of their continuity with the past and God's faithfulness in the future. They were symbols of God's hospitality. The story of the vessels ends with the decree of King Cyrus: "Moreover, let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple in Jerusalem, each to its place; you shall put them in the house of God" (Ezra 6: 5). The great banquet will go on.

Hospitality in the Writing of Paul

Paul knew firsthand of the hospitality of God. He received a personal invitation and was admitted to the house of God. This invitation changed his life and his teaching. We read about all this in Acts 8: 3-6: "Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.'"

Paul refers to this same invitation indirectly in II Corinthians 12: 2-5" "I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows – was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat."

Like many prophets before him, Paul had the experience of ascending into the divine council. There he had a conversation with Jesus and was sent on his mission. This experience and this conversation were the stimuli for his subsequent theological reflection, especially his reflection on the presence of Christ and on adoption.

First, the presence of Christ. Saul's question upon entering into the presence Jesus was: "Who are you, Lord?" The answer was, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." This answer collapses the distinction between heaven and earth in the same way the theophany itself had. Jesus is both in heaven and on earth. To persecute the followers of Jesus is to persecute Jesus himself. Saul learns from the mouth of Jesus that he and his followers are one. These words of Jesus led to the repeated attempts by Paul to explain mystery of Christ's presence in his believers and the significance of this for them and the world. For example, he wrote to the Corinthians: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new" (II Corinthians 5: 17). And to the Galatians: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (Galatians:3: 27-29).

This last quotation from the letter to the Galatians touches on a second theme that Paul drew from his Damascus road experience: adoption. Paul ascended into the house of God; he temporarily joined the rank of angels or sons of God. If we allow the picture of God as Sovereign to guide our thinking, we realize that in the mind of Paul and in the mind of his fellow Jewish and Christian believers ascension is adoption. Paul had a foretaste of a glorified body and what it meant to be a member of the household of God. He knew in his very being the hospitality of God; he had walked through the door of heaven that Jesus had opened for him. He knew from personal experience that those who were in Christ would be raised with Christ.

Therefore Paul could write: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are [sons] children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,

but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him (Rom. 8:14-16). Or in another letter: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as [sons] children. And because you are [sons] children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a [son] child, and if a [son] child then also an heir, through God (Gal. 4:4-7).

Hospitality in the Gospel of Luke

We tend to vilify the Pharisees. We characterize them as legalistic, petty, cold-hearted, and self-righteous, and then we proceed to banish them to the outer regions of our biblical awareness. We do this at our own risk, however. The struggles of the Pharisees to be faithful to God and to create a hospitable world can teach us something about our own struggles. Simon the Pharisee, who is introduced to us in Luke 7:36-50, can teach us much.

The basic truth about the character of Simon is not that he is self-righteous, but that he is a homemaker. From the space available in his world, he marked out his own. Four walls and a roof separated what belonged to him from what belonged to everyone else. He filled his space with all the things that made his life possible. He stored food there and water. He acquired all the clever devices his fellow humans had crafted to make his life more comfortable: chairs, tables, lamps, pots and rugs. He treasured there all the little things that marked the precious moments in his life: the heirlooms passed on from his parents and grandparents, the gifts of loved ones, and mementos of his pilgrimage.

Today we think of a home in terms of stone, brick, mortar, wood, and plaster and consider its value in terms of dollars and cents. But a home is much more than the value of the stuff that went into making it. A home is the stage upon which the drama of living and dying is played out. Simon's world had an inside and an outside. Inside his four walls and beneath his roof was a place of warmth, light, friends, and companionship; outside cold, darkness, strangers, and loneliness. Inside was security and life; outside danger and death.

Six years ago my son called me in the early evening from Gary, Indiana. He was on his way from our home in Holland, Michigan to St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. His 1970 avocado Buick Skylark had broken down on what was to be its last commute between Michigan and Minnesota. Quickly we devised a plan. I would drive to where he had broken down and tow him to my friend's house who lived just north of the Chicago loop. There we would

exchange cars. He would travel on to Northfield in my car, and I would spend the night with my friend, having his Buick repaired in the morning. The plan went wrong. I took a wrong turn in Chicago, the towrope broke in a desolate, war torn area, and a policeman whom we asked for directions threatened to put both me and my son in jail because towing was illegal in Chicago. I was tense and frightened. Chicago at night had turned into a nightmare. When I finally arrived at my friend's house, I collapsed onto his couch in the living room. Sipping something warm, I looked around and took his house in. I felt in a new and different way what a home and a **living** room were really all about. Darkness had been replaced by light, danger by safety, cold by warmth, and strangers by friends. My friend's house was definitely more than stone, wood, brick, plaster, and market value to me.

Any homemaker knows something about the drama of living and dying; the ins and outs of survival. Homes are fragile things. They are constantly threatened by an array of forces from the outside. The roof leaks over time; the porch sags; the paint peels; the window frames get soft and spongy; lightning strikes; fire erupts; dirt penetrates on the feet of visitors and through the air. Thieves break in and steal; people call on the telephone and breathe obscenities into the home. And it is a lot easier to wash a dirty floor than it is to wash away the scum of an obscene phone call; it is a lot easier to replace the stolen television than to replace the lost sense of security.

Inside even a fragile home, people can survive; outside is an entirely different matter. Exposed to the elements people die. This is why the problem of homelessness touches some so deeply. While many draw the covers over their shoulders at night and drift off to sleep protected from the power of darkness and cold, others wander the streets and freeze. We all have read reports like this one from the Associated Press: "MORGANTOWN, W.Va. --An 11 year-old boy's frostbitten feet had to be amputated after he and his father were found living in a remote area in an abandoned bus, their only groceries two bottles of ketchup and mustard." Actually, to label people homeless confuses the issue. Street people are homemakers just like everyone else. They build homes with whatever they have available: an abandoned bus, a blanket, a cardboard box, a park bench draped in newspaper. Unlike most of us, they do not have the resources to build homes that will shelter them. When the wolf comes--as children know from the fairy tale--he huffs and puffs and blows down their homes of straw and stick. The homeless end up in the belly of the wolf in whatever form he takes.

While Simon had built a house to keep the wolf out, it was not his intention to keep everyone and everything out. His house did have a **door** after all. In Luke's story, Simon asked Jesus and other friends to dinner. It is difficult to understand how important dining was to Simon and the people of his day

because it means so little to people today. Friends and families seldom eat together or spend time around the table. In our hurry for self-esteem, promotion, excitement, or whatever it is we believe we need, we abandon our children.

When we do eat at home, we eat like we pump gas at the filling station. Food is fuel; our bodies are machines. We want it quick--the successful hamburger chain is called "Hot 'n Now"--so we can scarf it down and be on our way. Wendell Berry in his book, *What are People For*, calls this industrial eating:

We hurry through our meals to go to work and hurry through our work on order to "recreate" ourselves in the evenings and on weekends and vacations. And then we hurry, with the greatest possible speed and noise and violence, through our recreation--for what? To eat the billionth hamburger at some fast-food joint hellbent on increasing the "quality" of our life? And all this is carried out in a remarkable obliviousness to the causes and effects, the possibilities and the purposes, of the life of the body in this world (147).

For Simon dining was quite different. It was a sacred and life-giving act. A banquet passed life on to others in at least two ways. It offered food to nourish the body and friendship to nourish the soul. In preparing a banquet, Simon was imitating his God and fulfilling the demands of his faith. Just as God had a house in Jerusalem and shared there the abundance of the land with the people, so Simon, the good Pharisee that he was, had a house and shared his abundance with others. Simon desired that people would say of him the same things they said of his God:

They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights (Ps. 36:8);

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Ps. 23:5-6).

Simon was inviting people to dinner and doing his part to build the hospitable community he believed God desired. He was letting people through the door. And this brings us to the central issue of Luke's story: who gets invited to the table and who gets left at the door.

We all have pretty strict rules that govern the door of the house, and other openings to the world for that matter. Homemakers divide the world into insiders and outsiders; people who belong and people who do not; people who are safe, and people who are dangerous. We set people apart, and we do it on a daily basis. Apartheid, after all, is not something just the white South Africans

did. Some people are not welcome in our homes; others have to knock and request entrance; still others walk in the back door and call our name. I keep Jehovah Witnesses at the door; I usually let the child selling candy or cookies in; my friends enter with a perfunctory knock.

Simon the Pharisee had some pretty strict rules about who could enter his house. He believed that cleanliness was next to godliness and that he had successfully swept all the dust and dirt from his domicile. He spent his life cultivating the right thoughts and the right friends. The prophet and teacher from Nazareth was the right sort to have at his table. The woman who followed him in was definitely the wrong sort. She was riffraff from the dark, outer world; she was a sinner. Sin was a contagious disease as far as Simon was concerned. Like tuberculosis, it spread by social contact. He did not want to get in coughing range of this woman.

Not only was she contaminating Simon's house by her presence, but she was contaminating Jesus' body by touching and kissing him. Jesus could not be the person everyone said he was. Simon thought to himself: "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

Simon thought that Jesus lacked the insight of a prophet, but Jesus saw more deeply into this situation than he could ever have imagined. Jesus passed on his insight to Simon with a simple question: "Simon do you see this woman?" On one level, this question is literal and direct. Jesus is pointing Simon to this woman as a prelude to what he has to say about her. On another level, this question is rhetorical. Jesus is confronting Simon's view of reality. Simon has constructed a social world in which certain people do not gain entrance and therefore are never seen. This is the moral dilemma facing every homemaker at every level of society. Busy building a home or a city or a state for themselves, homemakers distinguish between the inside and the outside, and eventually between insiders and outsiders. The outsiders all too quickly lose their visibility and identity--their place at the table--and all too easily become the object of the insiders' fears and their verbal and physical abuse.

In the summer of 1983, I traveled to Exeter, England with my family to spend a year there studying and teaching the Old Testament at the university there. The trip over was a complicated arrangement of plane, boat, and train. We made all our connections until we came to London. There we missed our train and sat down on a bench in Paddington Station to wait five hours for the midnight train to Exeter. With time on our hands and little to do, we listened to the music of life being played under the huge, open-air canopy of the station and took in the sounds and movements of the people and the trains.

At about 11:00 p.m. the music changed. The prim and proper people drifted off to a comfortable destination, and the ragged and grimy people clamored into the station. The street people were looking for a place to spend the night. A tattered man approached our bench pushing a grocery cart with a crooked wheel. In it was slumped a woman. The man tilted the cart and dumped the woman onto the bench next to us like a bag of foul laundry. She righted herself. Her teeth were gapped; her hair was streaked with grease; and her body reeked of urine and other smells I could not identify.

My seven-year-old daughter was sitting between me and this woman so that the gentle lines of Rebecca's youthful face were framed by her old and shriveled body. The contrast was more than I could bear. I felt a revulsion for the ugly woman. She offended me. My eyes and nose sent danger signals to my brain. I wanted to protect my daughter from her foulness, but for some reason I could not move.

The woman turned to face my daughter and smiled tenderly at her. I watched their eyes meet. And from someplace deep inside of me came a strange urge. I felt an urge to embrace the ugly woman. I thought I was going mad; I had to get control of myself and break free of this spell. So I stood up, gathered my family, and removed them from the woman's presence.

There is a direct link between homemaking and apartheid, between gathering your family and friends around the hearth and leaving strangers out in the cold. There is a link between something everyone would recognize as good and something everyone would recognize as evil. We would like to think that good and evil have nothing to do with each other and that we can sort them out like moral accountants. But moral living is not that simple. Our motives are mixed and mixed up. This is why evil is so difficult to isolate and root out of our lives, and why we have such a difficult time confessing our sins. We can always come up with good reasons for doing what is wrong. For example, Simon and his friends can say, "We are maintaining the purity of the home; we are not discriminating against that woman." When we Americans go to war, we can say, "We are defending our national interest, we are not killing innocent civilians."

As homemakers we begin to think that our survival depends on keeping certain people out, but Jesus teaches us that our survival depends on letting them in. The people we have left out in the cold belong. In the house of God, outsiders not only belong, they have something to teach the rest. The unnamed woman in this story understood love in a way that Simon never could have. Her devotion to Jesus was deeper than anything Simon would ever achieve. Jesus said to Simon:

I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

This woman could teach Simon and the rest of us Pharisees something about setting a beautiful table and creating a hospitable world.

Hospitality Remembering Jesus

Allen Verhey

In his fiendish letters to Wormwood, Screwtape once reminded his underling that “all the great moralists are sent by the Enemy, not to inform men, but *to remind them*, to restate the primeval moral platitudes against our continual concealment of them.”¹ Even moralists who fall far short of greatness can take some comfort from that diabolical advice. I know I do. All I want to do in this essay is remind my readers of one primeval platitude: be hospitable to strangers. And I want to do that by reminding my readers of Jesus.

Starting with Suspicion

That hospitality was an ancient platitude there can be no doubt. Many ancient traditions, both religious and cultural, could be cited. And the Jewish tradition is not least among the ancient traditions in extolling the virtue of hospitality. There is the example of Abraham in Genesis 18, who welcomes the visitors who come to his door, offering water to wash, a place to rest, and a generous meal. In that encounter with strangers, the story is, Abraham encountered God, and in the encounter with God there was promise and blessing. Hard on the heels of that story is the contrast between Lot’s hospitality and the treatment of strangers by the men of Sodom. Lot did his best to protect the strangers who had, as he said, “come under the shelter of my roof” (Gen. 19:8). Leave aside, for now, the fact that Lot’s “best” would have surrendered the vulnerable members of his own family to attack. Lot was hospitable to strangers, and the men of Sodom were not; and that marked the righteous from the unrighteous. The poor and powerless, notably foreign women, provided hospitality out of the little they had.² There were not only stories celebrating hospitality but also statutes requiring it: “You shall not oppress the alien. . . . You shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Lev. 19:33-34). And Job’s account of his righteousness included his hospitality (Job 31:32). Hospitality is an ancient virtue, a primeval platitude.

Lately, however, I have noted some suspicion concerning hospitality. I have attempted from time to time to play the role of the great moralist and to remind people of this platitude. I have commended this ancient virtue from time to time as instructive for the common life of the various communities to which I belong. I have usually simply repeated the old platitude: “We ought to be hospitable to those who are different from us. The college (or the church, or the club, or the community) ought to practice hospitality.” Such remarks have sometimes been met with suspicion. I found the suspicion a little surprising, frankly, but I think I am beginning to understand.

The suspicion has taken different forms, of course. Sometimes there is a worry that hospitality is an antiquated virtue, a bit out of date. Hospitality may have been an important virtue once upon a time, but times change. We now have a “hospitality industry,” hotels and motels and restaurants and the like, and neither we nor other people are quite as dependent upon the hospitality of strangers as we once were.

Another worry is that hospitality is, well, a bit too tame. We do tend to think of hospitality sometimes as a matter of inviting family home for Thanksgiving dinner or friends in for coffee. But even if we do not reduce hospitality to kindness to family and friends, it may still be too tame a virtue; the worry is that hospitality is not subversive enough. It leaves the powerless powerless and the powerful in charge. Like charity, hospitality is a poor substitute for justice and the rights of strangers among us.

Like charity, hospitality can sometimes be used to salve the consciences of the rich and powerful, while it leaves the community unchanged and injustices unchallenged. Both charity and hospitality can be corrupted by the conceit of philanthropy. Our acts of charity and hospitality can sometimes serve to divide the world up into the needy beneficiaries and the self-sufficient benefactors – and can reinforce that great divide. Hospitality can thus serve to reinforce both our status and our virtue – and to put (or keep) others in their place as needy and as dependent upon our kindness. By practicing hospitality we can claim the status and virtue of hosts and relegate others to the status of guests. Such “hospitality” is condescending and demeaning. That’s a worry worth taking very seriously indeed!

Finally, there is the quite different suspicion that hospitality may be a threat to the identity and integrity of particular (and cherished) communities. In a club I belong to the members meet for dinner; after dinner one of the members delivers a paper on an item of political, cultural, economic, or political importance; and then we talk about it. About a decade ago this club was called “The Holland Professional Men’s Club.” The name has been changed, but perhaps only to protect the guilty; some of the men are still suspicious that hospitality to women guests and members would be a threat to the little community we appreciate. In a neighborhood I used to live in, one of the homes was considered as a possible residential facility for developmentally retarded individuals. Some neighbors argued against it and were suspicious of arguments reminding us of an ancient platitude because hospitality might change the character of the neighborhood, might threaten the identity of the little area we loved. In the college at which I teach, the Christian tradition is taken seriously, and the language of hospitality is fairly commonplace, but it is sometimes met with the suspicion that our particular common life and our mission may be put at risk if we practice an

indiscriminate hospitality. In churches hospitality is celebrated, at least until hospitality to the stranger is perceived as threatening a particular style of worship or an aesthetic tradition cherished there. The city in which I live cherishes its Dutch traditions and celebrates them. Some who live in it are a little suspicious of efforts to cherish and celebrate the traditions of other groups who also live in the city. Some of these cases are much more difficult to deal with than others, but in each case there is a suspicion of hospitality as a threat to cherished particular identities and communities. Limits to the differences we can tolerate – and to the hospitality we can extend – seem given by particular identities.

It is a daunting set of worries when collected, and I have learned to share them. I too have grown a little suspicious of “hospitality.” It is not that I think one who makes a living as a moral theologian ought to be more original. And it is not that I distrust the primeval platitudes. I suspect, rather, that His Infernal Excellency has adopted a cunning new strategy, concealing the truth of the ancient platitude while paying homage to a counterfeit hospitality. It is a devilishly clever strategy, and against it simply repeating the advice to be hospitable will not be sufficient; it will be necessary to invite people to think again about what hospitality really is and really requires. And to that task I now turn, revisiting hospitality in remembrance of Jesus.

Remembering Jesus

Jesus came announcing the good future of God and already making its power felt in his works and words. “The kingdom of God has come near” he said (Mark 1:15), and he made that future present in his conduct and in his conversation. To that announcement, of course, there was joined the invitation to welcome that good future; to “the kingdom of God has come near” is joined the invitation to “repent, and believe in the good news.” To encounter Jesus was to encounter the good future of God. To welcome Jesus was to welcome that kingdom. To repent was not simply a matter of remorse; the invitation to repent was an invitation to live in discipleship. And to live as a disciple was both a grateful response to the good future of God already made real and present in Jesus and a watchful anticipation of that future.

The good future Jesus proclaimed and performed was the hospitality of God. In Jesus’ announcement of that future he sometimes used the image of the eschatological banquet (e.g., Matt. 8:11, 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24). It was already a familiar image, and it pointed, at least in Isaiah 25:6, to a hospitality that included “all peoples.” God is the host at that feast, and the guests included Gentiles (Matt. 8:11), sinners (Matt. 22:9-10), and those on the margins of Jewish life, “the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame” (Luke 14:21). The parable of the Great Banquet, of course, disclosed not only the good future of God’s

hospitality to sinners and the poor. It also disclosed the judgment on the religious elite who refused the gracious invitation of such a host and on the wealthy who refused to live in grateful response and hopeful anticipation of such a generous hospitality.

Jesus performed that good future and made that future present in his own hospitality, in feeding the multitudes (e.g., Mark 6:30-44, 8:1-10), in serving the guests at the table he had prepared (e.g., Luke 22:14-27), in welcoming children and blessing them (Mark 10:13-16), and even in washing the feet of his guests with his own hands (John 13:3-5). God's lavish hospitality was present already in such conduct. And the guests may simply welcome such hospitality and be grateful for it. Well, there is a little more to it than that. To receive such hospitality and to be grateful for it is also to receive the grace and the vocation to perform it.

To welcome a good future of God's generous hospitality is to be called to be hospitable ourselves, to disclose God's hospitality and to make it present to others. Just as to receive already the good future of God's forgiveness requires that we forgive one another, so to receive God's hospitality requires that we be hospitable. To welcome the kingdom requires that we be hospitable ourselves, that we also give some small token of God's generous hospitality. To be a disciple requires that we be hospitable to children (Mark 9:37), to strangers, to the poor, and to others who don't count for much as the culture counts. And it requires, of course, that we "wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). Grateful response and hopeful anticipation of God's hospitable future requires the performance of a generous hospitality. In Luke's gospel Jesus said to his host,

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

Evidently Jesus had his own suspicions about hospitality, or at least about what sometimes passed for hospitality. The hospitality that was conventionally practiced, the hospitality based on reciprocity, was not the hospitality that Jesus called for. Conventional hospitality did not welcome the poor and others on the margins; a hospitality that was a response to and an anticipation of the hospitality of God's future did invite and welcome strangers and the poor.

We have noted the stories of Jesus as a welcoming host and that in those stories the good future of God's hospitality is manifest. But Jesus is not only the host; he is also the stranger, the guest. He not only signals the hospitality of God; he is

also the one who depends on the hospitality of others. The striking contrast fits a pattern, of course. The kingdom that he announced and practiced was a kingdom in which the exalted will be humbled, and the humiliated will be exalted (Luke 14:11). And it fits a second pattern, as well. To welcome the kingdom is to welcome Jesus; to be hospitable to the good future of God is to be hospitable to Jesus. But the contrast, the reversal, is no less striking for all that, and it undercuts any association of status with the roles of guest and host.

Already in the nativity stories Jesus is the stranger. He came as a stranger to Mary, who becomes a model of hospitality by her readiness to welcome this child. To Joseph, too, of course, he was a stranger. In horrific contrast to Mary and Joseph, Herod refused to welcome him; anxious about his own status, Herod saw this little stranger as a threat and practiced not hospitality but violence. In the prologue of John's gospel, the point is made in a different but no less arresting way. The Word who was involved in the creation of the world comes to the world as a stranger, as unknown, and as the agent of an unknown God. Indeed, as a stranger he "came to his own home" (John 1:11, marginal reading), where he should have been recognized as host, and his own people did not welcome him. As an alien he lived in a tent (John 1:14, cf. also Luke 9:58).³ In his ministry he depended on the hospitality of others (e.g., Mark 1:29, 2:15, etc.). At his death he depended on the kindness of Joseph of Arimathea to provide a place to receive his body (Mark 15:42-47). And even when he was raised from the dead, it was when those disciples on the road to Emmaus practiced hospitality to him and broke bread with him that they recognized that this stranger was the risen Lord (Luke 24:28-35). Jesus was among us – and is among us – as a stranger.

Little wonder, then, that in the magnificent parable of the last judgment he identifies himself with the stranger: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matt. 25:35). Little wonder, but no less shocking. It was surely shocking to those whom Jesus commended. One can almost hear their incredulous responses: "Do you mean to say that that was you, Lord? That that little kid was you? That that lonely old man was you? That person so different from me in so many ways, that strange stranger, was you?" And the answer is always yes, and that answer always calls for a kind of reverence for the stranger. It privileges not the host but the stranger. It reverses conventional assessments and evaluations no less than the axiom that in God's kingdom "the last shall be first." To welcome the good future of God is to welcome Jesus, and to welcome Jesus is to welcome the stranger.

Remembering the Early Church Remembering Jesus

God raised this Jesus up, vindicated this one who displayed and proclaimed God's hospitality, exalted this stranger to a place of honor at God's right hand.

God raised this Jesus up, the firstborn from the dead, and poured the Spirit out, the first fruits of God's good future. It is not yet that good future, of course, but while we wait and watch for it, the Spirit provides a foretaste of it. The Spirit reminds us of Jesus, of his words and way, which made the future present. And the Spirit forms the church as a community of those who remember Jesus and therefore hope, as a community of those who remember Jesus and therefore forgive, and as a community of those who remember Jesus and therefore practice hospitality to strangers and the poor.

On the day of Pentecost the presence and the power of the Spirit overcame the division of languages that had been the curse on humanity since the tower of Babel. People were suddenly and quite remarkably capable of understanding each other. It was a gift, of course, but a gift that established certain assumptions for the practice of hospitality, for dealing with difference. The Enlightenment would (much later) assume that we need to be able to locate universal and rational principles before we can talk together peaceably in the midst of our differences. It settled for a tolerance that leaves us strangers to each other and nurtures a freedom capable of contracts but empty of covenant. Post-modernism (later still) would assume that our values are simply incommensurable, that we cannot really talk together. It settles for a celebration of difference and of a freedom that is ever only a step away from violence. Pentecost teaches us to make different assumptions about difference.

Pentecost teaches us that in the presence and the power of the Spirit, who is never under our control, who comes always and only as a gift to the world, people can talk together even if there is no moral Esperanto, no universal language that simply transcends our particular traditions. Pentecost trains us to hope that in such conversations people may discover in the stranger not only a rival and an enemy but a friend and a sibling. Pentecost evokes a sense of new possibilities for people to discover both themselves and a peaceable community in the context of difference.

The early church as described in Acts was a community that practiced hospitality, tending to the needs of the poor among them as energetically as they tended to their own needs (Acts 2:45; 4:34). They broke bread together and "ate their food with glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2:46). Luke described the community of goods in ways that evoke the hopes of both Jews and Gentiles. When he observed that "there was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34), he alluded to the promise of Deuteronomy 15:4: "There will . . . be no one in need among you." Their hospitality and open-handed generosity fulfilled the ancient covenant hope. Here in the church, by the power of the Spirit was the reformation and restoration of Israel, the fulfillment of God's intentions for Israel, the first fruits of God's good and hospitable future. And when he

observed that they “had all things in common” (Acts 2:44, 4:32) and when he described these people as “of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32), he alluded to what was proverbial wisdom among the Greeks about friendship.⁴ The hopes of the Greeks were fulfilled in this community as well. By their hospitality these strangers became friends. Their hospitality was not the hospitality of patrons and clients, based on reciprocity and nurturing the conceit of philanthropy, but the hospitality of equals.

The Spirit led Peter to Cornelius, the centurion, and then led both Peter to accept the hospitality of this Gentile and Cornelius to accept the generous welcome of God (Acts 10). The testimony to the work of the Spirit among the Gentiles led the Council of Jerusalem to welcome them as Gentiles (Acts 15), and Paul, of course, famously insisted that hospitality to the Gentiles required, well, hospitality, table-fellowship (Gal. 2). The truth of the gospel was at stake in such hospitality (Gal. 2:14).

Throughout the Roman Empire in the first century, the Spirit formed communities of hospitality to the stranger and to the poor, communities of peaceable difference. The Spirit formed communities that included both Jews and Gentiles, and it formed these communities in spite of traditional animosities and suspicions. They were “one new humanity” of Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:15). The Spirit formed communities that included men and women as equals, communities where the curse of patriarchy was being lifted. It formed communities that included both slaves and masters, and it taught them to regard each other as beloved brothers – “both in the flesh and in the Lord,” as Paul said to Philemon (16). There are exhortations to hospitality. For example, Romans 12:13: “Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.” Or, Hebrews 13:2: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” But the exhortations only dimly capture the formative power of the story and of the Spirit that brings remembrance.

It was not easy, and there were no guarantees. But in the presence and the power of the Spirit they learned to welcome one another, to be hospitable to differences, to love one another. The Jew was not required to become a Gentile, or to speak like one, in order to be a member of this community and to have a voice in it. But the Jew was required not to condemn the Gentile for being Gentile. The Gentile was not required to become a Jew or to talk like one, but the Gentile was required not to despise the Jew for being Jewish. Paul exhorted Jews and Gentiles in the Roman churches to hospitality, “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7).

The Spirit formed communities of peaceable difference neither by imposing an authoritarian hierarchy nor by nurturing moral indifference, but by forming communities of moral discourse and discernment. In the presence and the power of the Spirit they learned to talk to each other and to listen to each other. They became communities of mutual encouragement and admonition. It was a part of the welcome, the hospitality that they owed each other. To use Paul's wonderful compliment to the Roman churches, they were "able to instruct one another" (Rom. 15:14). That, too, was a gift of the Spirit, and it engaged the diversity of gifts present in the congregations. They needed each other, including and especially the stranger, the outsider, the one who was different, in order to discern a life and a common life that was worthy of the gospel, appropriate to the story, a life "according to the Spirit."

They talked together about many questions, about eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols, about the collection for the poor in Judea, about marriage and divorce, about this and that, and they did not always agree. But they continued to talk. And you can bet that they talked about the limits of acceptable diversity and the limits of acceptable unity. Permit me to say a word about each of these.

First, consider acceptable unity. The unity and peace the Spirit gave – and gives – were not the unity and peace of the so-called *Pax Romana*. That unity and peace was imposed, coerced, and built upon oppression of the weak and poor. To be sure, hospitality was practiced in the economic and political culture of the empire, but it was the hospitality of client and patron; such hospitality reinforced social status and was performed in expectation of reciprocity. Such a unity, such a peace, such hospitality were not acceptable. The unity and peace the Spirit gave – and gives – were not imposed but received as a gift, as a token of God's future hospitality. The unity and peace that is response to that gift must not be coercive; it must not oppress the weak and poor; it must practice a hospitality formed by the story of God's care and a generosity formed as gift answering to gift.

The unity and peace the Spirit gave – and gives – were also not the unity and peace of the Enlightenment. That unity and peace settled for too little. The virtue of the Enlightenment was tolerance, but tolerance leaves us strangers to each other, and wary strangers at that. If there is a place for hospitality it is a minimal hospitality embracing those with whom we already agree, with friends and family. The Enlightenment response to difference was to be suspicious of it, to attempt to transcend it by identifying universal and rational principles. Such a unity, such a peace, such hospitality were not acceptable. Response to the hospitality of God called the early Christians to be hospitable, not just tolerant, to welcome the stranger into community, not just into contractual agreements between self-interested individuals. Communities formed by the Spirit sought a

conversation about what should be decided, not just a procedural resolution to the question concerning who should decide. A hospitality that remembers Jesus sees the stranger and the rival as (potentially, at least) a friend and a sibling. Members of communities formed in remembrance of Jesus sought not just to protect themselves from the potential violence of strangers and rivals but to perform the hospitality of God, to give some small token of God's good and generous future.

Consider also, however, the limits of acceptable diversity. In the presence and the power of the Spirit these communities sought and celebrated diversity. The Spirit formed them to love the enemy, to be hospitable to the outcast and the "sinner." They were marked by the good future of God's hospitality. These communities and their members found their particular identity "in Christ" and in the generous hospitality he performed and required. They were normatively inclusive communities. How could there be a limit?

I suggest that there were – and are – two limits. The first is this: if mutual love and friendship is to be the mark of such communities, then they must abhor what destroys and thwarts it. What thwarts love is not difference. What thwarts love is envy and pride and greed and self-centeredness. What threatens love is deception and injustice. To such "works of the flesh" neither love nor a community formed by the Spirit will be hospitable. The response of love to such "works of the flesh" is to call for repentance.

Hospitality – both the wide embrace of God's mercy and grace and the human response to that gift that welcomes the poor and the stranger and creates a community of friends – has an important priority. Hospitality to difference is the first word spoken over our creation, when light and darkness are peaceably distinguished,⁵ and in God's good future it will have the last word. Welcoming the other, making room for them, listening attentively to their stories and to their needs, hospitality is prior to any judgment on the stranger. But hospitality in remembrance of Jesus and in the expectation of the good future of God will require sometimes the mutual admonition and encouragement of friends. We welcome both each other and the truth – and we remember that the truth is that God has made us siblings and friends. We embrace both each other and justice – and we remember that God's justice is not the tight-fisted justice that provides a limit to self-interest but the open-handed justice that attends to the hurt of slaves, strangers, and the poor.

When Paul observed that the hospitality of the Lord's table at Corinth had been violated by behavior that humiliated those "who have nothing" (1 Cor. 11:22), he warned that they receive the hospitality of God "in an unworthy manner" (1 Cor. 11:27) and called them to repentance. When John is told that Diotrephes, "who

likes to put himself first" (3 John 9), refuses to be hospitable to strangers and, worse, regards his hospitality to the local house church as conferring the entitlements of a host,⁶ John makes it clear that he is not acting in "a manner worthy of God" (3 John 6). And when the Afrikaner churches of South Africa excluded certain ethnic groups from their fellowship and from their tables, then many other churches quite properly called them to repentance. It is the refusal to repent in such circumstances that crosses the limits of acceptable diversity and leads to exclusion.

The second limit is this: idolatry. We may not give ultimate allegiance to things that are less than ultimate. In the church this limit is expressed positively in the requirement of ultimate allegiance to the God whose story is told in Christian Scripture. The church calls those who confuse God with the nation or the race or the family or wealth to repentance.

Consider, for example, James's suspicion of what surely passed for hospitality in the little community of "the poor" that he addressed. In memory of Jesus' announcement of a great reversal in God's good future and of "good news for the poor" James says, "Let the believer who is lowly boast in being raised up, and the rich in being brought low" (James 1:9-10). This is not said to glorify poverty; it calls the community to identify with Jesus in his identification with (and hospitality toward) the poor, those beaten down and crushed by poverty. The poor are to be welcomed here. The rich are welcomed, too, of course, if they welcome the humble roles of servant and friend rather than the exalted role of patron to poorer clients, if they "boast" about being "humbled." The problem is that the hospitality and honor this church offers to the rich, to those who come "with gold rings and in fine clothes" (2:2), practices favoritism toward the rich. And when these Christians practice favoritism, they express the conventional social attitudes of the rich rather than the reversal of values wrought by and taught by the Lord Jesus Christ. When the rich boast about their futures, thinking that they have secured their future by "doing business and making money" (4:13), then they do not boast in being humbled; then their boasting is the boasting of "the rich" and not a boasting in the Lord; and "all such boasting is evil" (4:16).⁷ The church must form its hospitality in memory of Jesus. It must test its traditions and performance of hospitality, its account of acceptable unity and diversity, by whether they are "worthy of the gospel" of God's generous hospitality.

Hospitality – and Suspicion of It – Revisited

It is still not easy, of course, and there are still no guarantees. But in remembrance of Jesus and in anticipation of God's good and hospitable future, we are still called to hospitality. And in memory of Jesus and in hope for God's

grace, we must continue to test our traditions and performances of hospitality, including our accounts of acceptable unity and diversity.

We are still called as Christians to welcome the stranger, to be hospitable to difference, to embrace the poor, to love one another. This is hardly an antiquated virtue, hardly out of date. That was the first suspicion, you remember. To be sure, times have changed. To perform hospitality in precisely the ways it was performed in the first century would often be appropriately regarded as an anachronistic eccentricity. Fidelity to this tradition of hospitality will require creativity. Fidelity to any tradition requires creativity. But we must find ways to be faithful to it if we would remember Jesus faithfully.

The second worry was that hospitality is too tame a virtue, not subversive enough. In remembrance of Jesus we should share this worry, but it is properly a worry about us and about our conventional performances of hospitality, not about the hospitality that Jesus announced, performed, and commended. We need to test our traditions and performances of hospitality against the story of Jesus, seeking to form and reform our practices until they are “worthy of the gospel” of God’s hospitality. God’s hospitality is hardly tame. It turns the world upside down. The first will be last; the last will be first. The exalted will be humbled; the humiliated will be exalted. Such reversals, signaled indeed by the host who comes to us as a stranger, can hardly be domesticated. The hospitality of God gives power to the powerless and challenges the powerful and the wealthy to “boast in that they are humbled.” It does not neglect or dismiss the legitimate claims of the strangers among us; it will be an advocate and a performer of the justice that hears the cries of the slave, the poor, the powerless, the stranger.

A related suspicion was that hospitality has been corrupted by the conceit of philanthropy, that it serves to reinforce both the status and the virtue of hosts by dividing the community into self-sufficient benefactors and needy beneficiaries and by reminding everyone which side of that divide they stand on. Such hospitality is condescending and demeaning. But this suspicion, too, is properly focused on our traditions and performances of hospitality, not on the hospitality that Jesus offers and commands. Remembering Jesus challenges such self-serving hospitality and should reform our practices. Jesus himself was the host who was stranger and guest. In him and in his words and works the stranger and the poor were given a privileged position. They were exalted, not demeaned. Any hospitality “worthy of the gospel” will reject the division of the community into self-sufficient benefactor and needy beneficiaries. We are all needy beneficiaries of God’s generous hospitality, and our own humble performances are simply gift answering to gift. In God’s good future we are all guests. And while we wait and watch for that future, we receive the stranger as God’s gift to us, as Christ’s presence among us. Far from being self-sufficient

benefactors, we depend on those who are different from us – and on their diverse gifts – to be the community the Spirit forms. There is no place for the conceit of philanthropy where Jesus is remembered. If we boast, we do not boast about being self-sufficient but about the hospitality of God.

Finally, there was that quite different suspicion that hospitality may be a threat to the identity and integrity of particular (and cherished) communities. Unlike the previous worry, this worry may in fact be a worry not just about our conventional and distorted practice of hospitality but about the ancient platitude. The first response to this suspicion must be, I think, that it is right. There are indeed some communities and associations that are inconsistent with God's hospitality and with Christian hospitality in remembrance of Jesus. There are indeed communities and associations that must be called to repentance; sometimes these are particular churches and their traditions, unfaithful to their own identity as hospitable communities; sometimes they are other associations. There are ways of identifying ourselves that must be challenged. Jesus challenged the Pharisees for their elitism, for their readiness to judge the stranger as "sinner," for their narrowness of vision and of hospitality. Paul challenged the Jewish communities who condemned the Gentile Christians and the Gentile communities who despised the Jews. Our churches, too, must be constantly tested and reformed by God's hospitality. And so, of course, must our lives be tested and reformed – and the other communities and associations in which we live and work and play.

This does not mean that there is not a place for particular communities. Because the cause of God is manifold, diverse associations may (and must) focus on limited pieces of it. Diverse associations are called to serve the cause of God in diverse ways. The particular mission will establish particular identities, and particular identities may require certain limitations on participation. This is obvious, I suppose. A retirement home serves the cause of God in a particular way. Its particular mission attends to elderly people and their needs, and a refusal to sell or rent an apartment to a teenager would not be regarded as inhospitable. A college serves the cause of God in another particular way, and fidelity to its mission may require standards that potential students and faculty must meet. It may insist, for example, that students and faculty meet certain academic standards. A club, a neighborhood, a city, a church may serve the complex cause of God in particular ways, and their particular identities and traditions are usually both cherishable and challengeable.

Even the little club I belong to is both cherishable and challengeable. I think the cause of God is large enough and hospitable enough to include the practice of friends to eat together and to talk together about issues of social significance. But while it serves that little piece of the cause of God, it should be welcoming in

ways that fit its “mission” and the hospitality of God, and when it fails to be hospitable, it should be challenged. This is obvious, I say, but how to negotiate our membership and participation and leadership in such communities is frequently far from obvious.

Cherishable and challengeable – we will have to exercise Christian discernment. Christian discernment always happens in community. The mutual admonition and encouragement we owe each other is part of hospitality. Discernment requires attention to diverse voices, including the voices of saints and strangers, including the voices of those who are different from us, including the voices of those whom we would not enlist or invite to pursue a particular piece of the complex cause of God in a particular association. And Christian discernment also always requires attention to the story that is constitutive of Christian identity and normative for discernment, the story of God’s hospitality.

In memory of Jesus and in anticipation of the good future of God, we are responsible for challenging the envy and pride that turn siblings into rivals. We are responsible for practicing the kind of hospitality that is only gift answering to gift. In such hospitality we may discover the stranger as friend – and as the presence of Christ. We are responsible for nurturing a readiness to forgive and to love “the enemy,” and for nurturing a readiness to repent and to receive forgiveness and the hospitality of the one who is different from us. It is not just tolerance toward which we must aim. It is not just a self-serving individual freedom or corporate autonomy that we must serve. We are responsible for enlisting our particular communities and their particular causes in service to God’s cause, and that cause will always be marked, if Jesus is to be trusted, by a generous hospitality to the poor, the outcast, and the stranger. We are responsible, in resistance to the cunning Screwtape, for reminding one another from time to time both of Jesus and of an ancient platitude.

ENDNOTES

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, 118. The emphasis is mine. See my *Remembering Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) for an account of “ethics by way of reminder.”

² Note, for example, the stories of Rahab’s hospitality to the Israelite spies in Joshua 2, the widow of Zarephath practicing hospitality to Elijah in 1 Kings 17-18, and the Shunammite woman’s hospitality to Elisha in 2 Kings 4.

³ To be sure, to say that “he tabernacled among us” is to say that in him is the presence of God, but the *Shekinah* is found in this stranger, and it is the *Shekinah* of an unknown God.

⁴ Aristotle had cited “friends hold in common what they have,” “[friends have] one soul,” and “friendship is equality” as proverbial wisdom. *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 9, ch. 8, 1168b, trans. Martin Ostwald (The Library of Liberal Arts; New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1962), 260.

⁵ One might contrast the violence of the story of the creation in the *Enuma Elish* with the peaceable difference in the story of creation in Genesis 1. In the *Enuma Elish* violence is at the bottom of our world. In Genesis God’s *shalom* is foundational.

⁶ So that he expels those who differ with him from the church that meets in his house. See Abraham Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, (2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 103-110.

⁷ See further Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 297-301.

Hospitality in Urban Ministry

Barbara Pekich

Years ago, I attended a benefit concert for Heartside Ministry held in its small chapel on South Division Avenue in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Located at that time in the Heartside neighborhood of Grand Rapids, the traditional living place for the homeless population of the city, the ministry was little more than a couple of offices, a chapel, a basement full of used clothing, and a soon-to-open free medical clinic. (Today it is a non-denominational church that provides a place for worship and for services to the homeless population.) In the middle of the concert, a disturbance at the door turned the heads of those of us sitting nearby. In came Billy, supported by two friends and drinking buddies, bleeding from the head, dirty, full of the stench of cheap alcohol and an unwashed body, and barely able to stand. A handful of people got up to assist Billy, call an ambulance, and find a place for him to sit. During the wait for emergency personnel, one of the concert-goers asked the two friends what had made them come there. They replied, "People say you can come in here and get help and not be judged." This is perhaps the best definition of hospitality in an urban ministry setting.

In biblical terms, we typically think of hospitality as the offer of a place of rest, food, shelter, and asylum, the idea being that we offer this gift to strangers "for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb.13:2). On another level, a host must offer hospitality because he or she might one day also be a stranger in need of sanctuary. Hospitality is a biblical imperative. At its best, it is the offer of sacred space, holy ground to the stranger in our midst. Our example is God, who lavishes nourishing care on creation and all of its creatures without regard for human valuation. Hospitality delights in and is defined by welcoming the other as a gift. Dorothy Day, tireless advocate for the Catholic Workers movement, maintained that the person we are welcoming *is* Christ, is not merely like him. For Christians, hospitality does not merely tell what we do but defines who we are. It is an intrinsic value, not an extracurricular activity.

How this model is lived in an urban, homeless neighborhood is the challenge. Though Jesus acknowledged in three of the Gospels, "you always have the poor with you," he did not endorse the idea. Poverty might be the reality of social and economic structures, but it was not part of the divine vision. Yet neighborhoods populated by homeless people are a fixture of every major city in the United States. These are the neighborhoods where people driving through roll up their windows and lock their doors, where the curious sometimes venture through to "look at the poor people," the dregs of our society. Urban ministry in these settings is all about giving help and not judging, and offering sacred space to strangers without regard for their condition.

The “strangers” ministries like these welcome are those living in rescue missions; addicts and those who sell to them; the mentally ill; women, often with children, fleeing domestic violence; those with a history of criminal sexual conduct; the recently released from prison; prostituted women, men, girls, and boys, and the pimps who put them on the streets; the chronically alcoholic; the emotionally impaired; and those who *were* one paycheck away from homelessness. Too often, these are the lepers of twenty-first century America. Many in these urban congregations have been in jail or prison, many more have struggled with substance abuse, others live on the fringe, just one scam away from their next bout with law enforcement. Several years ago, new on staff at Heartside Ministry, I requested the Kent County Jail to be allowed to visit as a pastor. The designation meant I could visit any time and would not count toward the number of visits a prisoner was restricted to each week. At that time, the jail allowed only one clergy person per parish. I recall trying to explain the importance of jail visits for our parishioners and the need for an additional pastor from Heartside. I just was not getting through to the person at the other end of the phone. Finally, in exasperation, she asked, “Well, how many people at one time from your church might be in the jail?” I replied, “It’s possible that half the congregation might be incarcerated at once!” The point was that jail did not preclude the extension of hospitality to anyone.

Some of the strangers who come through these inner-city doors are easy to love. Their stories are heartbreaking sagas of grinding poverty, childhood abuse, sexual misuse, poor parenting, and very little love. Some are like Shirley, who arrived one Sunday morning having spent the night in the hospital getting put back together, the victim of a savage beating at the hands of her boyfriend of seven years. Released in the wee hours of the morning, she then took all the pills they gave her for the pain, intending to end her life. When she walked through the doors she was looking for a place to vomit, having suddenly decided her life was worth living after all. Shirley later told of being prostituted by her mother from the age of nine to feed her drug habit, of “working” for her boyfriend to feed his, of losing her children because of homelessness and her own addiction. For some time after that Sunday, Shirley stayed in a women’s shelter, attended two domestic violence groups and regular AA meetings, enrolled in computer classes, and attended church. She was a victim who cried out for help and was receiving it. Five weeks later, Shirley is still a victim in need of help but asking that she not be judged for returning to her abusive relationship.

Others are more difficult still. From the severely mentally ill to the violent offender to those who are prone to disruptive behavior, hospitality extends to them all. Some are like Tim, who is a young man with a nightmarish abuse history, a pattern of mental illness, and a catalogue of nuisance behaviors and

even assault. Most recently he lost his housing for pulling the fire alarm fourteen times for no reason other than to get attention. His inappropriate language and comments to women, his vicious remarks concerning gays and lesbians, as well as his sometimes violent behavior frequently result in his being barred from the very agencies that are there to assist him. His recent attack on a neighbor resulted in his being banned from our space until certain conditions were met; yet even Tim is not beyond our call to provide hospitality. We meet with him off site in an attempt to let him know that he is not beyond God's grace and love and to pave the way for him to seek restoration to the community that he disparages one minute and craves the next.

Hospitality in this urban setting is based on biblical principles of restorative justice. If someone breaks the peace in the community, he or she must work to restore that peace in order to be welcomed back into the community. This can be done through apology, sitting with those "victimized" by the behavior and making restitution, attending counseling to ensure the behavior is not repeated, or a host of other actions. At its heart, restorative justice is hospitality. It requires addressing victims' harms and needs and holding offenders accountable to put those harms right; it is not about judging. The process involves victims, offenders, and the larger community, but it begins within each of us. In her article, "Restorative Justice in Ourselves," Kathleen Denison writes that many people are locked in an inner prison that keeps them feeling ashamed, unlovable, unworthy, and rejected by God. The guiding principle of this inner prison system is security, keeping those "undesirable" parts of us locked away so that no one on the outside can ever see how unlovable, unworthy, and rejected by God we truly are. Keeping ourselves imprisoned protects us from further hurt but keeps us locked in shame, guilt, and a sense of rejection. Restorative justice inside ourselves means we listen and even honor our own stories of inner hurt so that we can become vessels into which God's love can pour. It is this kind of inner restoration, of being hospitable toward one's self, that workers in urban ministry must encourage.

Hospitality means the urban mission church provides a place and an atmosphere where such healing can take place both within us and in others. It is a safe place, a sanctuary, a place of acceptance and not judgment. Nowhere is this more evident than when someone in an area served by the mission church dies. Sometimes they are dear friends and among the faithful who gather each Sunday for worship. More often, the church becomes a place of grace for the family, friends, and neighbors of one who many thought was outside the bounds of faith. Many of those who live in homeless neighborhoods have spent much of their lives, certainly the more recent years, beyond the bounds of "church." Though some of the deaths that occur in these poverty-stricken neighborhoods are "ordinary" (cancer, diabetes, old age, heart disease), many are not. There are

those who freeze to death on a cold winter night, some who die of acute alcohol poisoning or an overdose, sometimes a suicide or a death by shooting, stabbing, or some other violent means. At those times we try to connect with the family through the networking of all the agencies in the neighborhood, piecing together the fragments of a life few in the family knew anything about. We then host a memorial service for neighbors, agency people, and family of the deceased. This is a time for gathering to sing, read Scripture, pray, and share our memories. Some of the memories are funny, some sad or even pathetic, but always they are honored and respected as part of one person's journey, one person, broken but still loved by God.

There was Bob, who arrived in the neighborhood a year ago. Bob had just left prison and could not find housing because of the nature of his criminal record, nor could he find employment, though he had extensive computer skills. Instead, Bob lived at the mission and spent every waking hour working in our computer center, assisting other adults. On Sundays he came to worship, though I suspect sometimes it was only so he could spend some time on the computer first. Bob died suddenly in late October, and his memorial service was full of extended family members and neighbors. Of the two, the neighbors knew him best. Bob was a person who helped them learn a valuable skill, never making them feel stupid or inadequate. They provided a place where his past was behind him and his gifts were appreciated. The family struggled with whether or not Bob knew Jesus. They fretted over his past and what had caused him to do the things he did; they questioned his future and worried about the hereafter. As we moved through the memorial service, the question of whether Bob knew Jesus was answered by the assurance that Jesus knew Bob. He felt it, through the hospitality of a place where he felt loved, forgiven, and appreciated.

The story of Geraldine haunts many in the Heartside Neighborhood. She was only nineteen and had a history of drug abuse and prostitution. A frequent visitor to the ministry, she was always worried about everyone else. Where was Joe going to sleep tonight if he was barred from the mission? Would Keith stop drinking before it killed him? Why did Henry, who craved love, act so belligerently, driving people away? In her own way, she was an advocate for the homeless even as we queried her—What about rehab? What about a program for prostituted women? Would she consider counseling? Then, one day in March, her body was found in a wooded area, stabbed more than twenty times, brutalized by some unknown assailant. Her memorial service was packed with people who loved her, whose lives she had touched. And who could forget the detective on her case sobbing in the back as he listened to stories of someone who was a natural for a helping profession.

Hospitality in this urban setting is frequently rooted in acts of mercy. Jesus defined hospitality in Matthew 25:35-36, saying, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." But biblical hospitality in this setting moves beyond said acts of mercy into acts of justice. It is not enough to help with food, clothing, shelter, and spiritual needs. Addressing the ills of a society and its systems that perpetuate poverty and homelessness is also necessary for true hospitality. Individuals can do acts of mercy; but they can also withhold them or pick who their recipients are. If we work to change unjust systems we are ultimately making many acts of charity unnecessary. For example, we can collect winter coats, work on a food drive, and distribute Thanksgiving baskets to the poor and needy. But hospitality needs to also extend to writing letters to public officials and business owners urging them to become advocates for a living wage so there are no "working poor," advocating for more mental health monies and more extensive programs to care for this fragile population, demanding more in-patient rehab beds and longer stays for a population that is increasingly addicted.

One of our society's biggest pariahs serves as a useful illustration. In the United States, few are more despised than sexual offenders. Often violated themselves, these are the people who prey on children, vulnerable women, young men. To protect others, our states keep lists and make them available to the public to keep known offenders away from potential victims. Because they have difficulty getting employment and housing, those with criminal sexual conduct convictions are a large population in homeless and poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Because of their records, they are not eligible for any public housing. In a city like Grand Rapids, this means they cannot live in any of the low-income properties available to others, even those that do not allow children. This is also true of those with felony convictions for violent or drug-related offenses. Often, people first react to these facts with a feeling of justification, because of the heinousness of the sexual offenders' crimes. But as Christians we are challenged to seek and save the lost. We do not claim that those with sex offenses, or violent or drug-related records, are to be thrown away as people. Nor do we declare "these people" beyond God's saving grace. Despite our horror of their crimes, few Christians would say that they do not deserve a place to live. Yet our actions declare just that. It would be far more merciful to incarcerate them for life than to treat them as subhuman and deny them housing. Hospitality demands that we embrace even these, welcoming them as the stranger and the estranged in our midst.

If hospitality in an urban ministry setting is about providing help and advocacy, it is also about providing an opportunity for worship that is inviting and grace

filled. Worship must be hospitable. Too often those who enter blighted urban neighborhoods in the name of religion do so with the idea of saving people from their sins, frequently beginning by telling their congregants how truly sinful and lost they are. This approach frequently serves to reinforce feelings of failure, inadequacy, and uselessness. Beyond that, it is inhospitable. Nowhere else would we dare to enter someone's space and begin to tell them how bad they are and what they ought to change. This method does not respect people as persons nor does it do much to help them address the issues that have brought them to such neighborhoods. How much more does our God call us to build up, to preach loving each other *as ourselves*? In urban ministry, hospitality means greeting each person as a child of God, born with gifts and loved by the Creator. When entering their space, their neighborhood, it is about accepting hospitality from them first and then offering a sacred space where people can learn to value themselves as well as others around them. Worship then must focus on a celebration of God's love for us, God's involvement in our lives. It must center on our value to God, not our uselessness to society. Lay participation in the service, lay involvement with the Scriptures and in the sermon, empowers people to embrace a God who will never abuse, misuse, or abandon us. At Heartside Ministry, lay people called servant leaders (elders) set up the chapel each week, greet people as they arrive, read Scripture, serve Communion, sometimes provide music, and react to the opening up of Scripture by the pastor. Sermons are dialogical, an opportunity to interact with each other and with the message as together we discuss what the text is saying to each of us. It is a time of empowerment and excitement where we are all strangers, all welcomed by God and invited onto holy ground to be loved and treasured by the One who loves and treasures us all. Worship becomes hospitality at its best, and, beyond that, hospitality becomes worship at its most celebrative.

The Hospitable Seminary

Dennis N. Voskuil

Samuel Carnegie Calian, president of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, recently contributed a provocative study to the growing body of literature devoted to the renewal of theological education. In *The Ideal Seminary* Calian analyzes a broad range of contemporary cultural, institutional, programmatic, and spiritual challenges that theological schools must meet if they are to prepare leaders who will become change agents for congregations desperately needing revitalization. Calian is most arresting when he envisions “the essential characteristics of an ideal seminary.”¹ While they vary greatly in scope these characteristics presuppose a hospitable faith and learning environment.

The underlying assumption of this paper is that the ideal seminary will be a hospitable seminary. What will be offered therefore is a case study of how one institution, Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, has sought to be a hospitable community for the preparation of Christian leaders. While Western in many respects has been a hospitable learning environment since its establishment in 1866 by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, this paper will reflect upon the life of the seminary since 1994, when the author was inaugurated as the institution’s tenth president.

It is important to note that Western Theological Seminary is a flawed community, and that far too often the learning environment has been inhospitable. As Calian has pointed out, not one of the scores of theological schools in North America has become the ideal seminary.² Yet, if we are to prepare leaders for the post-modern, post-Christian, contemporary church we must have the courage to articulate and implement our grandest visions for theological education.

The Biblical Ethic of Hospitality

The biblical virtue of hospitality stems from the practice of welcoming the alien or stranger. In the ancient world the plight of the aliens was desperate, for they lacked familial or community status, which provided means of livelihood, inheritance, and protection. Widows, orphans, the poor, and sojourners from other lands were considered aliens. Hospitality, then, means graciously receiving an alienated person into one’s land, home, or community and providing for that person’s needs.

Among the Israelites, hospitality took various forms: the reception of travelers into one’s home for food, lodging, and protection (Gen. 18:2-8, 19:1-8); permitting the alien to glean from one’s fields (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-22; Ruth 2:2-17);

clothing the naked (Isa. 58:7; Ezek. 18:7, 16); tithing food for the needy (Deut. 14:28-29; 26:1-11); and including the stranger in religious celebrations (Exod. 12:48-49; Deut. 16:10-14). Old and New Testament stories demonstrate that those who welcome strangers are often blessed by their guests. When Abraham received three strangers at Mamre, they revealed that his wife Sarah would give birth to a son (Gen. 18:1-15). When the widow of Zarephath offered food and shelter to Elijah he blessed her with an abundance of oil and food and raised her son from the dead (1 Kings 17:9-24). When the two travelers to Emmaus welcomed a stranger to stay with them through the night, he revealed himself through the breaking of the bread as their Jesus, the risen Christ (Luke 24:13-35).

While the biblical notion of hospitality is rooted in the practice of welcoming the stranger in need, it is a concept which carries deeper and richer theological meaning. On the one hand, hospitality should mark the very manner in which we relate to our fellow human beings. To be hospitable is to welcome, embrace, care for, and value those who become part of our lives – schoolmates, family, friends, and strangers alike.

On the other hand, hospitality defines the manner in which God has related and continues to relate to human beings. In the Old Covenant, God is the gracious host, who continually receives the alienated Israelites and meets their needs, redeeming them from Egypt, caring for them in the wilderness, and bringing them as sojourners into the promised land. In the New Covenant, Jesus Christ is the host who redeems aliens through his suffering, death, and resurrection. Indeed, identifying himself with the symbolic elements of the Passover meal, Jesus associated his body with bread offered to the hungry and his blood with the cup of wine, the cup of salvation. As those who participate in the Supper, we are the aliens who become welcomed and adopted as children of our heavenly parent. As Henri Nouwen suggests, the concept of hospitality, when restored to “its original depth and evocative potential,” is a rich biblical term “that can deepen and broaden” our relationships to God and human beings.³

Understood as a relational ethic, hospitality should mark all Christian communities. In fact, the Greek word for community, *koinonia*, finds its root in the Greek term for “participating in” and “sharing.”⁴ To be a community is to share, to have in common. A true Christian community will welcome and embrace strangers and members alike.

Seminary as a Christian Community

We have argued above that authentic Christian communities will be marked by hospitality. Now we must ask whether theological schools in particular should be identified as such communities. After all, a seminary is a professional graduate school and not a church. Is it truly a Christian community?

Critics of mainstream theological education today often argue that formation for ministry best occurs in the context of the local congregation. They insist that seminaries are at best understood as dispensers of courses, but that authentic pastoral training must occur in the context of a church. Hence a chasm grows between denominational leaders and their own theological schools.

It will be argued here that any perceived dichotomy between faith and learning, or between the church and theological education, is false. At its best, a seminary is a Christian community, and persons are most effectively formed for ministry when such a community is constantly nurtured. The best hope for the future of Christ's church is when seminaries and congregations work together to nurture leaders – when they are both truly hospitable.

Western Theological Seminary has a very clear and simple purpose: "to prepare Christians to lead the church in mission." It is believed that this purpose is best achieved in the context of a hospitable community. If the bottom line of our ministry is to form Christians to lead the church in mission, we do that best when we seek to be the type of missional community we expect our students to lead.

It is important to acknowledge that while we consciously strive to enhance our life together, true Christian community is ultimately a matter of divine grace. When Dietrich Bonhoeffer was considering what life together meant for the confessing church's clandestine seminary in Finkenwalde, he wrote: "we belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ." Bonhoeffer elaborated,

It means, first, that a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ. It means, second, a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, third, that in Jesus Christ we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time, and united for eternity.⁵

The hospitable seminary will recognize that the community cannot be created or manufactured but that it is given in and through Jesus Christ.

Hospitable Community

If the core of the biblical ethic of hospitality is the welcoming of strangers, how is the practice reflected in the hospitable seminary? Recognizing that all members of a community were once strangers, outsiders, or aliens, hospitality must be extended to every newcomer at a theological school – students, faculty members, and support staff – as well as the temporary sojourners.

It is important to emphasize that in North American cultures and in many theological schools, "stranger" may be persons of color from the United States or Canada, or from Africa or Asia or Central or South America, or women from our

own congregations. Western has found ways to welcome each of these groups. First, it has established a Master of Theology program in which international students are awarded a limited number of tuition, housing, and board grants. Over the years, our community has welcomed scores of students from all sections of the world church who have graduated and become teachers of seminaries and colleges. Second, recognizing the great need for well-trained leaders of churches in North America that are African-American, Asian-American, or Latino, Western has made available full-tuition scholarships to gifted students from minority, racial, and ethnic churches. And, third, Western welcomed women into our degree programs years before the Reformed Church in America began to ordain women as Ministers of Word and sacrament. More recently, because there is still resistance to the calling of women as ministers in regions of the Reformed Church, the faculty has covenanted to pray for the placement of female graduates.

At Western Seminary, incoming students are received and embraced during a week-long orientation, during which they worship with other students, learn of formal and informal rituals and practices, and dine with faculty and staff members. They also spend an evening at the home of the president. The orientation is consummated with a day-long retreat at a local retreat center. That day, all members of the community and their families are invited to share communal worship, communal presentations, communal recreation, and communal dining.

New faculty members are also embraced through a series of formal and informal gatherings. At faculty meetings these “strangers” are welcomed to become full participants in this ritual of decision-making. Short-term appointees are embraced and valued by their colleagues.

Because members of a community may, for various reasons, feel like “strangers in their own land,” hospitality must be ongoing. At Western, the president and his wife invite students to two St. Nicholas parties in early December, and they provide butter lambs and buns for the students during an Easter celebration each spring. Graduates are invited to the president’s home for a pregraduation dinner, where they are presented with a wooden prophet that symbolizes their call to service. The student council sponsors a banquet each April, during which the faculty and staff are gently roasted in creative skits. The seminary also sponsors participation in city recreation basketball and soccer leagues, which attract a wide range of students, staff, and faculty. Most Fridays there are informal invitations to pick-up basketball games and soccer matches. Also on Friday afternoons, two or more faculty members gather with students at Via Maria, a local restaurant, where various issues are discussed over refreshments. And, in

May, following final exams, a seminary golf outing for all community members is traditional.

In December, the faculty and staff and their families are invited to a formal Christmas dinner provided by the seminary. The president also delivers a Christmas card to each member of the staff and faculty, one which has normally included a small Christmas bonus. Throughout the year, the president sends staff and faculty birthday cards with notes of appreciation. These are a few of the many small ways that we celebrate our life together in Jesus Christ.

We strive for hospitality for those who are strangers in our midst. Nearly every day we are blessed by visitors: potential students seeking a taste of seminary, representatives of denominations and congregations, drop-ins from the area or members of our larger seminary family, and sojourners from other lands. While a few of these strangers may choose to sit in on a class or two, many more will join us for the daily chapel service at 9:10 a.m. Following chapel, at the daily coffee time in our commons, these visitors are introduced and welcomed.

Strangers are also welcomed to the Community Kitchen, which operates out of the seminary every weekday noon. More than a decade ago Professor Thomas Boogaart helped to establish the Kitchen as a means of meeting the nutritional needs of the poor and hungry in Holland, Michigan. The Kitchen is run by the Community Action House of Holland and is staffed by a chef and volunteers from local churches. On any given day, between 50 and 150 guests are welcomed by the seminary to enjoy a nutritious hot meal, and they are often joined by students, faculty, and staff. Professor Boogaart also helped establish "The Bridge," a gift store located in Holland's downtown shopping district that sells items made by artisans in developing countries.

Hospitable Worship

A Christian community is a worshipping community. Each morning a member of the seminary community, usually a student, leads a chapel service. While attendance is not required, all members of the community, faculty, and staff as well as visitors are welcomed. Although student leaders meet with faculty advisors to plan their services, chapel leadership is not a course requirement and it is not graded. Our worship varies greatly in style, reflecting the various expressions of liturgy and music in the contemporary church. While most liturgies bear the marks of the Reformed tradition, music on any given day may be traditional, praise, or something in between. It may be influenced by Taize, Iona, or any of the rich music of the international church. The setting for daily worship may be in the more formal Mulder Chapel or less formal Semelink Hall, and instruments may include organ, piano, guitar, flute, or others. Normally our leaders follow a lectionary for their Bible lessons and share messages framed in a

variety of styles. Regardless, at Western, we strive to be a community of prayer. Prayer finds forms which are public and private. Students have formed fluid prayer groups. Furthermore, students and the members of the seminary's board of trustees have formed prayer partnerships.

During public worship each Friday, our community celebrates the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, during which one of the ordained faculty members officiates. In 1968 students from Western petitioned the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to permit the celebration of the sacrament although it is not constituted as a congregation with ruling elders. This weekly celebration has been a great blessing for our faith community. Our host is Jesus Christ who welcomes all aliens, strangers, and sinners to feast at the table of redemption and new life. Hospitality begins with Jesus Christ.

The worship experience is carried into the time of fellowship that follows the chapel time. As Dr. Leanne Van Dyk has suggested, this daily coffee time is "a sacred time and space in its own way."⁶ This is a wonderful daily ritual in which students, faculty, staff, and visitors converse around tables, the president invites the introduction of visitors, asks for community announcements, and solicits prayers of concern or celebration. The community is then dismissed in the name of the host: "Grace and peace in Jesus Christ."

The Hospitable Classroom

The hospitable seminary is unapologetic about its primary mission: to prepare persons for ministry. The seminary is a learning institution. It is important to note that learning occurs in a variety of ways and in a variety of contexts. It takes place in classrooms, in the chapel, and at tables at coffee time, in peer groups, at congregational gatherings, with pastor mentors, in faculty offices, at Via Maria, in the halls, in The Journey: A Center for the Continuing Education of the Church. The best teachers are aware that the most significant learning is often unstructured and informal. The best teachers realize that they are called first to inspire and excite students to learn on their own.

Theological education is often perceived as a hostile and painful endeavor. Perhaps this is so because the subject of our learning pertains to our faith, to the very essence of our lives' convictions and callings. Study of Scripture or theology or ethics raises all those questions of truth and reality that make us vulnerable and defensive.

Therefore, in the seminary context it is especially important for the learning environment to be hospitable. Hospitality is best achieved in a community where all of us, teachers and students alike, confess that we are sojourners seeking divine truth and direction and where relationships of trust may be given shape

outside the classroom. At Western, perhaps, this center of trust and respect may be around the tables during coffee time, or in times of worship when we gather together around the table of our host, Jesus Christ. The common Table overcomes those barriers of status, age, degrees, gender, economic wellbeing, color, or ethnicity which diminish genuine hospitality. We all come to the Table equally in need of the embrace of God – sinners seeking God’s grace. This does not mean that there are no functional distinctions between teachers and students, for example. But it does mean that we respect and value one another as equals before our creator, redeemer and sustainer.

Experts in educational process tell us that learning occurs when there is enough space for mutual trust to develop between those who teach and those who wish to learn. Henri Nouwen writes: “When we look at teaching in terms of hospitality, we can say that the teacher is called upon to create . . . a free and fearless space where mental and emotional development can take place.”⁷ In a similar vein Parker Palmer writes of the importance of hospitality in learning: “It means creating an ethos in which the community of truth can form, the pain of truth’s transformations be borne.”⁸

In building trust hospitable teachers will affirm, encourage, and support their students; they will also recognize that the students have much to contribute in the process of learning. Nouwen stresses the fact that affirmation and revelation of a student’s own knowledge and experiences “show that students are not just the poor, needy, ignorant beggars who come to the man or woman of knowledge, but that they are indeed like guests who honor the house with their visit and will not leave it without having made their own contribution.”⁹

A hospitable learning environment is one which honors a diversity of persons as well as a diversity of opinions. Yet, if a seminary is to be an authentic Christian community it will not endorse superficially any or all beliefs or practices. Calian insists: “In the midst of our debates and dialogues let us never lose sight of our common ground in Christ that unites us.” Calian also argues that the ideal seminary provides “safe space for asking questions, expressing doubts, sharing crises, testing curiosity, and allowing experiences of forgiveness to take place with one another.”¹⁰ This can only occur where the community shares basic convictions about Christ and the Christian life.

Western Theological Seminary unapologetically acknowledges a christological foundation. Moreover it cherishes its Reformed, theological heritage and its identity as a seminary of the Reformed Church in America. “Strangers” from many other traditions and lands are welcomed and embraced, and they are not intellectually or spiritually coerced. True hospitality means that there is an authentic community to be welcomed to and received by. The curriculum of

every theological school has been shaped in a particular context during a particular time, by particular people. This has certainly been true of the Master of Divinity curriculum, which was framed and adopted by Western's faculty under the leadership of its academic dean, James V. Brownson, during the mid-1990s. Leanne Van Dyk, dean of the faculty, has written a very insightful article on this curriculum. She suggests that the formation of the curriculum developed through a three-fold process: guiding vision, convergence, and implementation.¹¹ As this curriculum has now been reframed and will eventually be replaced, it will be important for the community to be hospitable to new ideas and approaches.

Conclusion

Recently, Western Theological Seminary implemented a far-reaching strategic plan that included the initiation of a distance-learning Master of Divinity program and a center for continuing education of ordained and nonordained leaders of the church. The bold plan emerged as a result of the willingness of the board of trustees and the faculty to listen to the expressed needs of the church. In this respect the board and faculty were hospitable to a new community of students within the larger seminary community.

Another phase of the strategic plan called for building a new wing for a seminary facility which had become crowded and inadequate for future needs. Now completed and dedicated, this new wing – the De Witt Theological Center – has taught us the importance of hospitable space. A three-story addition, with the Journey Center located on the lower level, classrooms and The Sacred Page, a bookstore, located on the main level, and faculty and staff offices located on the top level, has enhanced our communal life. An atrium that soars from the main level through the top level and to skylights above has already become the emotional center of the seminary – a bright and delightful gathering space that welcomes strangers and visitors to our community.

It is presumptuous, of course, to present Western as a case study for a hospitable seminary. Ours is certainly not an ideal seminary. It is a seminary striving simply to become more hospitable, always recognizing that our host is Jesus Christ.

ENDNOTES

¹ Samuel Carnegie Calian, *The Ideal Seminary: Pursuing Excellence in Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 108-111.

² *Ibid.*, 111.

³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 47.

⁴ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Translated and Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 447-50.

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 21.

⁶ Leanne Van Dyk, "The Formation of Vocation—Institutional and Individual," in L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 225.

⁷ Nouwen, 60.

⁸ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 73-74.

⁹ Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 62-63.

¹⁰ Calian, *Ideal Seminary*, 108.

¹¹ Van Dyk, "Formation of Vocation," esp. 233.

The Art of Listening: Dialogue, Shame, and Pastoral Care, by Neil Pembroke, (reviewed by Troy Nanninga)

Charles Hodge Revisited: A Critical Appraisal of His Life and Work, ed. John W. Stewart and James H. Moorhead, (reviewed by Earl Wm. Kennedy)

Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making, by Peter C. Phan, (reviewed by Daniel J. Adams)

Christology: A Global Introduction, by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, (reviewed by Christopher B. Kaiser)

Confessing and Commending the Faith: Historic Witness and Apologetic Method, by Alan P. F. Sell, (reviewed by Phillip Luke Sinitiere)

Discovering the Narrow Path: A Guide to Spiritual Balance, by N. Graham Standish, (reviewed by J. David Muyskens)

Evocations of Grace: Writings on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics, by Joseph Sittler (ed. by Steven Bouma-Prediger & Peter Bakken), (reviewed by Eric Johnson)

Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture, by William D. Romanowski, (reviewed by Jeffrey Wayne Taylor)

Faith of Our Foremothers: Women Changing Religious Education, ed. by Barbara Anne Keely, (reviewed by Marcia Gibbons)

The Free Church & the Early Church: Bridging the Historical and Theological Divide, ed. by D. H. Williams, (reviewed by Thomas A. Kopecek)

The Future of Protestant Worship: Beyond the Worship Wars, by Ronald P. Byars, (reviewed by J. David Muyskens)

Jesus Driven Ministry, by Ajith Fernando (reviewed by Jess Scholten)

Jesus Remembered, by James D. G. Dunn (reviewed by Robert E. Van Voorst)

Judaism When Christianity Began: A Survey of Belief and Practice, by Jacob Neusner, (reviewed by Sylvio J. Scorza)

Liquid Church, by Pete Ward, (reviewed by Jeffrey Wayne Taylor)

Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity, by Larry W. Hurtado, (reviewed by Christopher B. Kaiser)

The Marks of God's Children, by Jean Taffin (trans. Peter Y. De Jong, ed. James A. De Jong), (reviewed by Glenn Wyper)

The Nonviolent Atonement, by J. Denny Weaver (reviewed by Eric Johnson)

Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition, by Andrew Purves, (reviewed by Tom Schwanda)

Prayer: 50th Anniversary Edition, by Karl Barth, ed. Don E. Saliers, (reviewed by Marcia Gibbons)

Recovering Mother Kirk: The Case for Liturgy in the Reformed Tradition, by D.G. Hart, (reviewed by Glenn Wyper)

The Salvation of Souls: Nine Previously Unpublished Sermons on the Call of the Ministry and the Gospel by Jonathan Edwards, ed. Richard A. Bailey and Gregory A. Wills, (reviewed by Phillip L. Sinitiere)

Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods, by Darrell L. Bock, (reviewed by David W. Jurgens)

Transforming Congregational Culture, by Anthony B. Robinson, (reviewed by Jess Scholten)

The Trinity (Guides to Theology), by Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, (reviewed by Glenn Wyper)

What Does It Mean to be Saved? Broadening Evangelical Horizons of Salvation, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr., (reviewed by Glenn Wyper)

The Art of Listening: Dialogue, Shame, and Pastoral Care, by Neil Pembroke, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. 218pp., \$22.

Neil Pembroke is the lecturer in pastoral care at the School of Theology, Flinders University of South Australia, and the Adelaide College of Divinity. In this book, he provides a practical theology of giving care.

This should be a very helpful work for all who are involved in providing care for God's people. Through the use of the work of philosophers Gabriel Marcel and Martin Buber and ideas such as the biblical understanding of compassion, Pembroke provides a solid foundation for providing deep and meaningful care and what it means to "walk" with people. He also includes numerous case studies and stories, which should be helpful in bringing these ideas to life. While it is written for an academic/pastoral audience, I found the book to be written in a very accessible way that allows the reader to digest what is being said.

For its insightful dialogue on the nature of the relationship between care-giver and care-receiver, as well as its insights into what it means to care for people in a truly pastoral way, I would recommend this book for all who are involved in caring for God's people.

Troy Nanninga

Charles Hodge Revisited: A Critical Appraisal of His Life and Work, ed. John W. Stewart and James H. Moorhead, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. x, 375pp., \$25.

The two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Princeton Seminary theologian, Charles Hodge (1797-1878), was marked by a conference held there, featuring papers by ten contributors. These have now been edited and published, with an introduction and conclusion by the conference's hosts, both church historians currently teaching at the seminary.

During much of the twentieth century, Hodge was either idolized or demonized as the forerunner of B. B. Warfield (1851-1921) and J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937), the "Old Princeton's" leaders in the struggle against modernism. The present volume evinces a more dispassionate approach to Hodge. While the lines between those (evangelicals) who still largely identify with him and those who see him as mostly history can often still be detected, the former can criticize and the latter can appreciate elements of Hodge's thought and life. Reasons for the new era of good feelings about Hodge include the passage of time, the postmodern mindset, and a large crop of evangelical (even Calvinist) church historians.

Editor Stewart contextualizes (for postmoderns) Hodge and many facets of his thought. James Turner places him in the intellectual milieu of the nineteenth century (pre-historicism). Bruce Kuklick, something of an outsider, regrets that Hodge was not where the action was, namely, in philosophical pragmatism. Ronald Numbers emphasizes Hodge's love for and intelligent interaction with the sciences. Brooks Holifield sees Hodge as a fine but typical representative of the professional seminary professor of his era. Brian Gerrish thinks that Hodge did not understand and appreciate Schleiermacher adequately. Louise Stevenson explores Hodge's traditional (Pauline) view of women. Mark Noll laments Hodge's failure to unify his spirituality with his theology adequately. David Kelsey finds Hodge lacking in "historical consciousness." Richard Carwardine traces Hodge's politics from Federalist through Whig to Republican. Allen Guelzo locates three antislavery "moments" in Hodge. He concludes, however, that Hodge was too much influenced by having actually owned a slave and too much motivated by concern to maintain southern support for Princeton Seminary. Coeditor Moorhead concludes by noting that Hodge can now be seen in a more balanced way than heretofore, as neither "a bogey" nor "an icon."

Recurring themes include Hodge's views on slavery, Darwin, women, and Scripture, as well as his wide-ranging interests (beyond theology), his piety, and his Scottish commonsense realism (and Baconianism), with its accompanying tin ear for history. Conspicuous by its absence was Hodge's relation to the earlier Reformed tradition, including Calvin, the Westminster Confession, and the early Princeton Seminary's theological lodestar, Francis Turretin of Geneva (died 1687).

Particularly rewarding for me was the rich use by some contributors of Hodge's unpublished letters. A fine bibliography of works by and about Hodge is a bonus, but there is no index. Not for novices, this book is highly recommended as a refreshing mainline corrective to the outdated image of Charles Hodge.

Earl Wm. Kennedy

Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making, by Peter C. Phan, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003. xvii, 253pp., \$30.

Peter C. Phan, a Vietnamese American theologian, has written a significant book on new directions in theology arising out of the Asian immigrant community. Phan begins by pointing out the statistical realities of the 2000 census concerning Asian immigrant populations in the U.S. — 2.4 million Chinese, 1.8 million Filipinos, 2.6 million Indians, 1.1 million Vietnamese, and 1 million Koreans. Many of these immigrants, especially among the Filipinos, Vietnamese, and Koreans, are Christians, and they are beginning to reflect theologically upon

their immigrant experience. They are both Asian and American, but their theology is both between two cultures and beyond these same two cultures. Phan refers to this as intercultural theology and indicates that this is the direction in which theology is moving. Intercultural theology includes insights gained from various liberation theologies as well as ideas coming from the process of enculturation of the Christian faith into the cultures of Asia.

Since the majority of the Vietnamese Christians are Roman Catholic, Phan gives considerable attention to official documents such as the papal encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason), the apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, statements arising from the six meetings of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, and programs catechesis and the writing of catechisms in Asia. Protestants, who may be unfamiliar with just how Catholics do theology, will discover that there is considerable latitude of theological opinion, including sometimes sharp disagreement with official papal statements. Central to the entire enculturation debate, however, are two firm commitments – compatibility with the gospel and communion with the universal church (207, 213). Of particular interest is the reinterpretation of Christology so that Jesus is understood to be both the eldest son and ancestor.

Readers of the *Reformed Review* will be especially interested in chapter 7, "Jesus with a Chinese Face," in which Phan discusses the theology of Taiwanese Presbyterian theologian and current president of the WARC, C. S. Song. Song places his Christology within the wider context of the reign of God, which has a much greater appeal for Asians than do traditional western Christologies, which tend to be somewhat abstract and philosophical.

Phan draws attention to the fact that recently there has been a shift from the "first evangelization" directed toward non-Christian cultures, to the "new or second evangelization" directed toward western cultures that were Christianized in the past but have now become largely secular (224). In his concluding discussion on the development of an emerging Vietnamese American theology, Phan puts forward the intriguing possibility that perhaps Asian American intercultural theologies may serve as a corrective to the secularization process in the United States, and thus contribute to the second evangelization of North America.

Christianity with an Asian Face is a must read for all who are concerned about ministry within immigrant communities, doing theology ecumenically across cultures, and carrying out mission both to the non-Christian cultures of Asia and to the secularized cultures of the West.

Daniel J. Adams

Christology: A Global Introduction, by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003. 300pp., \$21.99.

Christology continues to be one of the most active and controversial areas of Christian theology. It is impossible for most of us to keep up with all of the new ideas that are developed from biblical studies, socioeconomic analysis, and the emergence of non-Western Christian voices. The variety of approaches is so great now that it is difficult even to know much about the contexts out of which many new books are written.

Fortunately we have several excellent overviews to orient the reader. Generally these overviews are of two types. Some, like Klaas Runia's *The Present-Day Christological Debate* (originally published in 1984) and Scott Cowdell's *Is Jesus Unique?* (1996), focus on Christologies that come out of the European and American universities. Others, like Anton Wessels's *Images of Jesus: How Jesus is Perceived and Portrayed in Non-European Cultures* (1990), Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison's *Jesus in Global Contexts* (1992), and Volker Kuster's *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ* (2001), introduce us to Latin American, Asian, African, Afro-American, and feminist perspectives.

Kärkkäinen's new survey has the great advantage of covering both of these types of review. After a ninety-page introduction to the biblical and historical background of Christology, the author treats a number of representative Western Euro-American (male) theologians like Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Jürgen Moltmann, and John Hick. Then there are four chapters that cover other types of Western Christology: process, feminist, black, and postmodern, and six chapters on non-Western Christologies: Latin American, African, and Asian.

I would recommend this volume as perhaps the most comprehensive account of recent work in Christology. However it does not cover recent New Testament scholars like N. T. Wright and Marcus Borg. For that I refer readers to Ben Witherington's *The Jesus Quest* (1995). And it does not provide a good overall analysis of the reasons for and expressions of recent dissatisfaction with the Definition of Chalcedon. For that I still recommend Klaas Runia's *The Present-Day Christological Debate*, which is now back in print (2002). With the publication of Kärkkäinen's work, pastors should have no trouble catching up on the wide variety of current developments in Christology.

Christopher B. Kaiser

Confessing and Commending the Faith: Historic Witness and Apologetic Method, by Alan P. F. Sell, Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 2002. xi, 550pp., \$90.

The third and final installment of a trilogy on apologetics, Alan Sell's *Confessing and Commending the Faith* is a robust conclusion to masterful analysis of historical and contemporary philosophical currents and the space Christianity occupies in such company. Sell is keen to point out that his system finds its

anchor with the “central [and] distinctive” fact of God’s (historical) free grace in Christ (9).

Sell begins by defining the Christian faith and helpfully warns the thoughtful observer to exercise wariness lest one externalize or fossilize the gospel in antiquarian form (24). The gospel possesses a systematic yet winsome quality, Sell asserts, but in the end the gospel itself is about the one who performed the “redemptive deed” (27). Such is the confession the whole Church must learn to articulate, consonant with the recollection that the gospel is timeless (47). The confessor, contends Sell, must be sensitive to cultural context or fall painfully into “disastrous sectarian consequences” (60).

The middle third of *Confessing and Commending the Faith* considers the delicate and discursive issues of language about God. Before highlighting the superiority of the discourse surrounding confessional worship, Sell painstakingly challenges objectivism, Wittgensteinianism, and postmodernism, three modes of thought that actively seek to silence God’s voice.

The final third of *Confessing and Commending the Faith*, indeed the most intellectually rigorous and therefore satisfying portion of the book, tackles broadly the function of reason and emotion in Christian epistemology. Sell concludes that throughout history God has conveyed knowledge of himself through both reason *and* revelation, of which experience is an integral part.

Ultimately, Sell constructs a challenging apologetic narrative that thoughtfully engages contemporary philosophical debates and draws extensively from diverse (i.e., East and West) traditions to mediate successfully conversations between ancient divines and modern theologians. Such reasoned eclecticism brings honor and glory to the Christ for whom Sell speaks (354).

Phillip Luke Sinitiere

Discovering the Narrow Path: A Guide to Spiritual Balance, by N. Graham Standish, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002. 216pp., \$16.95.

N. Graham Standish is pastor of the Calvin Presbyterian Church in Zelienople, Pennsylvania. He writes to help us negotiate a narrow path of commitment to God to follow wherever God leads us, requiring a willingness to be transformed. Such commitment is hard because there is so much resistance to surrendering ourselves to God, “following Christ through darkness, uncertainty, difficulty and suffering.” We want clarity and certainty. But the only way to discover and serve God is to “walk where God tells me to walk,” to walk on the “narrow path” between extremes as we follow Christ.

Standish points to the mystics as models and guides as people who loved God and sought to follow God’s will. From them we learn to love God above all else, to be humble, detached, surrendered to God, to live in the present moment

and to spend time in solitude. What we need is balance, with God at the fulcrum. Jesus is our model in the way he took time for prayer and retreat in the midst of his ministry. We need integration of the spiritual, mental, physical, and relational dimensions of our lives. Standish says that the narrow path leads us to form a relationship with God in all three persons of the Trinity. We experience God as “Eternal Purpose, Incarnational Presence, and Inspiring Power.”

The author applies principles of balance and integration to paths of healing and of service. He explores the need for integration of theology, spirituality, and religion.

I wish he had done more to apply the principles of balance and integration to the practice of prayer, balancing the various dimensions of speaking and listening and simply being with God. Standish says that contemplative prayer is not for everyone. Yet I believe integration can mean a balanced prayer life that includes both silence and conversation, contemplation and action.

Stories from the author’s own experience and of a variety of people of faith make the book interesting. Sometimes redundant, the book is best read devotionally taking small portions at a time and reflecting on what is said. It will be especially useful as a tool for self-examination. Every chapter ends with reflection questions. The strength of the book is in the many ways it points out how prevailing trends and attitudes run counter to walking the narrow way.

An appendix offers guidance for using the book in a small group.

J. David Muyskens

Evocations of Grace: Writings on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics, by Joseph Sittler (ed. by Steven Bouma-Prediger & Peter Bakken), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. 233pp.

A number of books about the Christian’s relationship to the environment are available today, which means a reader must be somewhat discerning when picking one. Some values distinguish a good Christian environmentalist from a mediocre one. The most compelling Christian ecological convictions begin with a commitment to the Creator rather than an attempt to baptize secular environmentalism. Also, more than enough sermons and books have been written on the first two chapters of Genesis and environmental stewardship. New writings ought to go deeper and offer a broader scope of Christian faithfulness in regard to creation. Finally, a valuable book on a Christian’s relationship to the environment should inspire a way of living.

Sittler’s writings (written from 1954 to 1975) satisfy all these values. As he examines the Christian’s relationship to creation, Sittler is not motivated by the negative consequences of environmental degradation, by apocalyptic fears, or by moralism. Instead, he describes how the relationship of a Christian to the world

should be wed to the relationship to God. Sittler talks about ecology with words like “grace” and “delight.” He approaches environmental issues through the powerful theological themes of God’s redeeming creation and God being a Lord of lovingkindness. As Sittler discusses the central ideas of faith in relation to the world, a uniquely Christian perspective on the environment emerges. He addresses thoroughly the scope of the Christian’s relationship to creation and provides a framework for ethics of living.

For these reasons, Sittler’s writings are exactly the kind of words a Christian environmentalist ought to read. Because the book is a collection of essays, excerpts, and addresses, the reader who seeks a linear path will be disappointed. But for the reader who is open and looking for environmental theology that may convert the church, this book will satisfy.

Eric Johnson

Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture, by William D. Romanowski, Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001. 171pp., \$12.99.

Romanowski is professor of communication arts and sciences at Calvin College, and he writes as a Calvinist. He regards human culture as part of our created humanness, a part of our ongoing participation as cocreators with God. Culture indeed is fallen, like every aspect of our humanity. But, rather than recoil from it, Christians are to seek to redeem culture, thereby glorifying God. Culture includes popular art, that is, entertainment. His goal for this book is to help create a community that can discern and evaluate the worldviews presented in entertainment. Such a community would possess the wisdom to act as faithful consumers and producers of popular culture.

The author accomplishes a lot in a small book. He defines culture and explains its importance, argues that Christians must engage culture redemptively, sketches elements of a Christian worldview (creation, fall, redemption), describes the popular arts and their relation to religion, criticizes “Christian” music and film as dealing with too narrow a range of human experience, presents and critiques common Hollywood perspectives, and models Christian discernment of popular art by examining Bruce Springsteen and the movie *Titanic*. For Romanowski, whether a movie or song presents God or denies God depends upon the worldview assumed by the artwork: Does it portray life honestly? Is it compatible with the Christian understanding of reality as created, fallen, and being redeemed? The discerning Christian must seek to answer these questions, not simply count bad words or note whether God is mentioned or not. (By the way, in Romanowski’s evaluations, Springsteen does well; *Titanic* does not.)

There were a few questions I wish Romanowski had addressed. Are some genres beyond redemption (e.g., slasher movies)? How would a discerning *community* function (e.g., should all Christians be expected to evaluate all of popular culture or would some with discernment be expected to guide the listening and viewing habits of others)? This is a helpful book for all thoughtful Christians. The reading level (college, I think) might limit its direct usefulness with high school and some adult classes, but church educators will be stimulated to begin planning a unit.

Jeffrey Wayne Taylor

Faith of Our Foremothers: Women Changing Religious Education, ed. by Barbara Anne Keely, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997. 192pp., \$15.

While this compilation does, in fact, introduce the reader to the lives and work of a dozen religious educators, to label this collection “biography” fails to do justice to the work. First, Keely provides a framework for understanding the principles of feminist religious education. Second, the individual essays pay a long overdue tribute to these dedicated women whose work has been overlooked in anthologies of religious educators of the twentieth century.

Keely defines as *feminist* any work that presupposes “commitment to the equality of women and men and an understanding of all creation as sacred” (4). She further defines eight “threads” that distinguish feminist religious education: the integration of life and experience into the education; understanding that religious education happens in community; understanding that religious education is liberating (and thus, by definition, political); attention to power within the church; the emphasis on the collegiality of laity and clergy; extending contextual religious education extends beyond the immediate community of learning (for the sake of all God’s creation); theory and practice are integrated; language shapes religious knowing and what it means for us – female and male – to be made in the image of God.

The author of each biography is a woman whose own influential life has been shaped by a personal relationship with the subject. Those highlighted represent a broad spectrum of Christian traditions, as well as a diversity of experience. While their names may be new, chances are your own faith journey has been enriched through the impact of some or all of these remarkable pioneers. The challenge to the church is to recognize the importance of theological education for religious educators, to recognize the broader definition of religious education as the whole of the life of the community of faith, and to continue the transforming work of religious education as defined by these eight important threads.

Marcia Gibbons

The Free Church & the Early Church: Bridging the Historical and Theological Divide, ed. by D. H. Williams, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. xiii, 183pp., \$24.

This collection is a sequel to the editor's *Retrieving the Tradition & Renewing Evangelicalism* (Eerdmans, 1999), the thesis of which was that "patristic Christianity offers a coherent and faithful ecumenicity that provides 'roots' of identity that the Free Church must recover." Williams has engaged seven church historians to write essays related to his vision – three Baptists like himself, one scholar from each of the three branches of the Disciples of Christ/Churches of Christ, and a Mennonite.

In some ways Williams's colleagues share his vision, especially that such Free Church slogans as "No Book but the Bible" lead to misunderstanding both the early church and *sola scriptura* in the Reformation. Pointing out that the canon was consolidated only during the fourth century, F. W. Norris asks, "Does it make . . . sense to say that the fourth-century church was making very good decisions about the Bible but mostly poor ones about everything else?" (15). In a study entitled "*Sola Scriptura* in Zurich?" P. R. Pleasants finds that in the interactions among Grebel, Hubmaier, and Zwingli "there were other factors that ensured that Scripture was not alone" (98). W. Tabbernee contends that "the 'early church,' not merely the 'New Testament church,' was extremely important" to Alexander Campbell, the founder of the Disciples movement (180).

Yet most of the contributors seem more reticent about bridging the divide between Free Church and Early Church than is Williams. For instance, G. W. Schlabach, while engaging the "suspect tradition" of Augustine, titles his contribution, "The Correction of the Augustinians," and writes most passionately when questioning Augustine's appeal to the empire against the Donatists and how normative "just war theory" was to him. D. J. Bingham focuses on a passage in Irenaeus as a "model for Bible reading" that stresses the primacy of the Spirit so important to Free Church approaches (39-46). And Pleasants carefully questions the extent to which Grebel and Hubmaier knew or took seriously Patristic views (84-86). Indeed, Williams himself appeals to Hus, Luther, Bullinger, and Calvin to argue that the Reformation viewed the ancient creeds and Fathers as faithful to Scripture, not to Free Church precedents (110-118). Williams appears to be asking the Free Church to expand its identity rather than just to recover one. This collection leaves one wondering whether Free Church enthusiasm for Williams's project can be sustained.

Thomas A. Kopecek

The Future of Protestant Worship: Beyond the Worship Wars, by Ronald P. Byars, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002. 138pp.

Ronald Byars is professor of preaching and worship at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. In this book he addresses the issues that have led to the “worship wars” over the style of worship in our time. He begins with a description of the anxiety caused by our changing culture and the tension between adapting to the culture and maintaining the integrity of the gospel. Some people who sit in pews on Sunday and others who have left the church are “ritually bored.” They may be able to say what it is about worship they find inadequate, but they are not aware of what they really need. A marketing approach trying to give them what they want will miss the mark of meeting with the risen Christ.

Byars makes a case for all worship being traditional in that it must include the three practices that have been central to Christian worship from the beginning: baptism, the reading and preaching of Scripture, and the Lord’s Supper. In many churches in our time, these three practices have diminished.

Byars also believes all vital worship must be contemporary. It must be expressive of passion and deep personal engagement. People come to worship looking for God. The worship service has to “give evidence that the congregation knows itself to be in the presence of a BIG God.” Christian worship regards highly both Word and sacrament. Byars quotes Howard Hageman (former president of New Brunswick Theological Seminary), who said a diminishment of either of those will result in diminishment of the other. According to Byars, the future of Christian worship requires letting go of our Enlightenment moorings in order to be open to mystery and imagination. We are moving into a new, postmodern era. “The future of our worship must take seriously the communal, the relational, the metaphorical, the symbolic, the sacramental.”

Worship using forms popular at the moment or appealing to one generation will soon be obsolete. In designing a new service, Byars says, we should not just create an anti-service, doing the opposite of what we dislike about the old. Rather we need to start at the center, with the essentials of baptism, Scripture, the Lord’s Supper, and attentiveness to the poor. Byars offers an exciting description of a new paradigm for worship.

This book is a timely and perceptive resource. I highly recommend it to every worship leader.

J. David Muyskens

Jesus Driven Ministry, by Ajith Fernando, Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002. 255pp.

Ajith Fernando's *Jesus Driven Ministry* is a good refresher course on the basic practices of ministry. Fernando, director of Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka, began an in-depth study of Jesus' ministry in the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark, out of which came several lectures and now this book.

Fernando's rich use of Scripture, quotations from faithful Christians and theologians of our past, and his own experiences give the book a personal and genuine feel with sound theology.

But Fernando also provides a challenge for how Christian leaders live their lives. He calls Christian workers back to the basics of being in ministry – being steeped in the Word, identifying with people, retreating from activity, growing in a team, launching disciples into ministry, visiting homes, as well as many other regular practices of Jesus. He is bold in his call. On prayer – a theme throughout the book – he writes, "We simply cannot have a ministry that has spiritual depth, and therefore lasting effects, unless our lives are steeped in prayer" (228).

Fernando challenges the belief that ministers can get by simply by hard work, giftedness, and good organization. He reminds us that ministry is difficult – we must remain faithful to God, depending on the Holy Spirit and the Word to sustain us during hard times or difficult relationships rather than restlessly moving on.

I was particularly struck by his reflection on preaching in the United States. He tells of the experience many pastors have on Sunday morning of hearing feedback about how much people *enjoyed* the message. He writes, "I have feared that the church in the West will disqualify itself from being a missionary-sending region by portraying to its membership a Christianity that is a nice religion but that lacks a radical edge Sermons should disturb, convict, and motivate to radical and costly obedience" (23).

While this book is a bit wordy, its back-to-the-basics reflection on the life of Jesus as a guide for our ministry is a profound reminder of what we should continually be striving for in ministry: being faithful servants of Jesus Christ.

Jess Scholten

Jesus Remembered, by James D. G. Dunn (Christianity in the Making, vol. 1), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. xvii, 1019pp., \$55.

James Dunn is known for comprehensive studies like *Jesus and the Spirit*, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, and *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. This book, the first in a trilogy on the first 120 years of the Christian faith, is a magnificent accomplishment, deserving of a wide reading.

In the first part of the book, Dunn treats the important hermeneutical and historical question of faith and the historical Jesus. In the second part, "From the gospels to Jesus," he examines the sources of our knowledge about Jesus, arguing that we can indeed go from the Gospels to a reliable and significant picture of Jesus. The third part treats the mission of Jesus in his ministry; the fourth, the question of Jesus' self-understanding, an issue that many New Testament scholars prefer to remain agnostic about; and the fifth, the climax of Jesus' mission in his death, resurrection, and the first traditions that formed about him.

Despite its intimidating size, this is a very accessible book. Dunn has made the main text as readable as a book like this could be and confined the scholarly debates, discussion, and apparatus to the extensive footnotes. His conclusions are generally moderate to conservative, but they are carefully thought through and presented in full dialogue with current scholarship on Jesus. Occasionally his editor could have used a sharper pen to deal with wordiness and infelicities (e.g., "Here is it important to grasp the fact that . . .," [288]; "Israel's self-understanding of itself," [289]). However, Dunn regularly offers elegant and important insights that on their own justify the price of this book. To cite one from these same pages: "Little of this [emphasis on monotheism] actually appears upon the surface of late Second Temple Judaism, for the simple reason that it was non-controversial and so could be taken for granted – an important reminder that the fundamental character of an item of belief and practice is not to be measured by the amount of verbiage it engenders, and that what belongs to the foundation may often be hidden from sight" (288-89). Those who debate the New Testament foundations of contemporary issues like sexuality would do well to keep this in mind!

Students of the New Testament and scholars will be grateful to Professor Dunn for this wonderful book, and look forward to the next two volumes in this series. Pastors, if you are looking for something to refresh your knowledge and appreciation of Jesus and the gospels, buy this book and take it and the Bible with you for a week of study leave.

Robert E. Van Voorst

Judaism When Christianity Began: A Survey of Belief and Practice, by Jacob Neusner, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002. 202pp., \$19.95.

Rabbinic Judaism, reflected in the Mishnah, the Talmud of Jerusalem, and the Talmud of Babylonia, ran roughly parallel to the first five formative centuries in the development of the Christian church. Neusner's intent is not a full comparison of the two in theology and practice, but he does not avoid the

confrontation between the church's claim to be the true Israel and the strong answer delivered by the rabbis (93-96).

Another intersection of the two religions is treated in the chapter on "Death and the Afterlife." Neusner interprets the rabbinic position as awarding resurrection only to Israel (physical descendants of Jacob and proselytes to Judaism), and even of those he makes exceptions, denying resurrection to the wilderness generation and to the ten "lost tribes." Of those who do gain the privilege of resurrection, however, not all go to Eden, for Gehenna awaits unrighteous Jews (165-71). None of the rabbis quoted on this topic subscribed to the Sadducees' denial of life after death.

Neusner believes the Oral Torah of rabbinic Judaism to have equal authority with the Written Torah of the Scriptures, since both, according to him, go back to Moses and God on Sinai (109-110). The idea of the dual Torah is contrasted with Jesus' claim, "You have heard it said . . . but I say to you . . ." (23). The Torah in oral and written form also is timeless, so that the same biblical passage can be applied without reference to past, present, or future (83-84).

Neusner also covers issues like holiness, sacred space, sacrifice and atonement, and the efficacy of prayer for miracles. The chapters, however, on the nature of God and of humans made in his likeness leave much to be desired theologically.

Sylvio J. Scorza

Liquid Church, by Pete Ward, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002. 112pp., \$14.95.

"Is it possible to conceive of a Christian community that is not structured around congregation and a central meeting?" Yes, answers Pete Ward. Ward suggests that we call such a community "Liquid Church," which would "reshape itself around worshipers as consumers." Ward offers these provocations from a position inside church life, as a youth minister in Great Britain as well as a teacher at Kings College, Cambridge. His previous books include *Worship & Youth Culture* and *God at the Mall*.

Ward's thought arises from two sources: an analysis of contemporary culture and theological reflection on Scripture. He follows cultural theorist Zygmunt Bauman in seeing our current situation as "liquid modernity," a situation in which individuals must create a pattern for a meaningful life without help from supporting structures. In effect, we all now are consumers shopping for life-choices. Borrowing from James Twitchell's analysis of advertising and culture, he understands consumerism to be a quest for meaning – we buy the meanings associated with things.

From Scripture, in conversation with a number of thinkers, Ward concludes that the church is essentially a set of relationships: first the believer's relationship

with Christ, then, our relationships with one another. If these relationships are the essence of the church, then the forms or structures of the church are accidents of culture. The church itself, then, is adaptable to circumstances; hence, "Liquid Church." The church is not the gathered congregation, or a structure of programs and meetings, but the relationships that occur as Christ is shared. Adaptable does not necessarily mean heretical, asserts Ward, since Scripture regulates the flow of liquid church. Churches that are not continuously adapting, that do not understand themselves to be essentially relationships, he calls "Solid Church," doomed dinosaurs in liquid modernity.

One can appreciate Ward's emphasis on the church as relationships, and on adaptability, while raising several questions, including: To what are individuals saved? I would suggest, perhaps, they are saved into a structure of relationships that has some solidity. I recommend this book as a stimulus to thought and conversation.

Jeffrey Wayne Taylor

Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity, by Larry W. Hurtado, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. xxii, 746pp., \$55.

One of the major events in discussion of New Testament Christology in the late twentieth century was the publication of Larry Hurtado's *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (1988). Hurtado located the origin of the church's belief in the deity of Christ in the fact that Jesus was worshiped alongside God the Father in the church's earliest hymns and prayers. He also placed early Christology (or "Christ-devotion," as he prefers to call it) in relation to Jewish mediator figures like personified divine attributes, exalted patriarchs, and mediating angels.

Now, fifteen years later, Hurtado has supported his ideas with detailed studies of the New Testament and other Christian writings through the second century of the Common Era. He defines his overall purpose as a "historical analysis of the beliefs and religious practices that constituted devotion to Jesus as a divine figure in earliest Christianity" (xiii).

Hurtado demonstrates three main points using historical methods (2-3). The first is that devotion to Jesus emerges at a very early date (an "explosion of devotion") among Jesus' followers; it is not a later development as many earlier, "evolutionary" reconstructions had argued (e.g., Wilhelm Bousset, Reginald Fuller, James Dunn). In fact, the basic outline of orthodox Christology emerged already in the thirties of the first century and was in the ascendant by the middle of the second century (Justin Martyr), long before the time of the Ecumenical Councils (561). Second, the intensity and diversity of expressions of this devotion to Jesus Christ are without parallel in the religious environment – either

Jewish or Greco-Roman. Third, early Christians continued to adhere to the exclusivist monotheism of their Jewish predecessors, particularly in the face of Greco-Roman paganism.

This tome is a rich mine of helpful information and interpretation and will repay anyone with the courage and stamina to read it through. One important contribution is Hurtado's discussion of Old Testament texts about the God of Israel (sometimes called "Yahweh texts") that are applied to Jesus in various strata of the New Testament (e.g., 112-14). Those who have studied theology at Western Theological Seminary will recognize these texts as one of the primary bases for the Christian confession of Jesus as Lord. Although Hurtado's stated purpose is theologically neutral (9), his treatment of these Yahweh texts will strengthen that conviction. This is one of the few available studies that demonstrates their early and widespread usage in the New Testament church.

Another important contribution is Hurtado's mapping of the early pattern of Christ-devotion in several overlapping areas: prayers to Jesus, invocation ("calling upon the name") and confession of Jesus as Lord; baptism in Jesus' name; the Lord's Supper; hymns about Christ; and prophecy inspired by Christ (137-51). Not only are these phenomena rooted in the earliest records of the church, but they later provided theologians like Athanasius with the scriptural basis for their defense of the Nicene faith against the Arians.

Hurtado concludes that the early Christians were pious Jews who believed in the one true God of Israel and refused to worship any other name. Yet they included Jesus as Lord in their confession and worship, always relating him to the one true God (as Son or Messiah or Image of God).

In treating the origin of Christ-devotion, Hurtado is less successful in my view. In describing Jesus as being somehow included in the worship of the God of Israel (3, 48, 72, *passim*), the author appears to overlook the implications of the identification of Jesus as the Lord of Israel in early strata of the New Testament (cf. 375, 577). Taking this identification as a starting point would provide a much simpler explanation for early devotion to Jesus as a continuation of Jewish cultic devotion to Yahweh, and would also suggest a different reading of the role of God as the "God and Father of the Lord Jesus" (e.g., 2 Cor. 11:31; the key point is mentioned in a footnote on 179).

Lord Jesus Christ is designed to be the definitive study on the subject, covering not only all the textual material but all of the recent studies of the subject. It critiques the work of many well-known scholars like James Dunn, John Dominic Crossan, and Raymond Brown and maps out a tentative new synthesis that includes the work of scholars like Jarl Fossum and Richard Bauckham. Hurtado's tome will be required reading for students and scholars of New Testament Christology.

Christopher B. Kaiser

The Marks of God's Children, by Jean Taffin (trans. Peter Y. De Jong, ed. James A. De Jong), Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003. 155pp., \$14.99.

Originally written in Taffin's native French, this little book was translated in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries into Dutch, English, and Latin and, as its numerous reprintings testify, was then widely popular among Reformed Christians. The Dutch Reformed Translation Society intends its series of modern translations of the "old writers" of the Further Reformation not only for pastors and scholars, but for lay people as well.

A brief introduction sets forth the essentials of Taffin's life and ministry and something of the political and social situation in the Low Countries in the latter half of the sixteenth century. It is against the physical and spiritual suffering and turmoil of that period that the book is to be read.

To that end, as an additional help, although not part of the original text, a map of the Low Countries in Taffin's time and several illustrations highlighting the persecutions have been included by the editors.

But is there anything other than historical value for us who by comparison live lives in what Sam Shoemaker used to call "pudgy comfort"? Yes, there is. Just on the level of needed spiritual help, the modern reader will find comfort and encouragement on page after page of this readable translation. Our doubts may not be precisely those of Taffin's contemporaries, yet the apostasy of many present-day leaders of the faith is troubling to us, too. Our oppression for Christ's sake may be far subtler than that in the sixteenth-century Low Countries, but we may need the word of assurance that despite it all, we are the children of God who are loved by him.

In all this it can be said of Jean Taffin, as the Book of Hebrews says of Abel, "he being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. 11:4).

Glenn Wyper

The Nonviolent Atonement, by J. Denny Weaver, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. 228pp.

Gustaf Aulen's classic work, *Christus Victor* (1930), outlined the three most prominent understandings of the Atonement present throughout Christian theology as: (1) Christ the Victor Theory, which pits God against evil in a military metaphor; (2) The Moral Influence Theory, where Christ shows God's love in such a compelling way that the cross draws people to be reconciled; and (3) The Satisfaction Theory, in which the debt humanity owes to God because of sin is too great to be paid until Christ bears the punishment due to all humanity by his vicarious suffering on the cross.

Within each of these models, J. Denny Weaver recognizes a disturbing dependence on violence. Weaver's book offers an alternative atonement model in which the atoning work of Christ takes place without violence. Weaver's model, clearly indebted to the work of J.H. Yoder and Walter Wink, suggests that Jesus' story is thoroughly nonviolent and achieves victory over sin by confronting the power of evil and making visible the reign of God by demonstrating mercy and refusing to employ violence. Weaver calls this model the narrative *Christus Victor*.

This atonement model is nice because it addresses many of the problematic paradoxes of theology, such as incongruities between God's justice and mercy. It also encourages believers to participate in the kind of living that challenges the powers of evil in the world. The narrative *Christus Victor* model also makes more room for minority theologies such as black theology, feminist theology, and womanist theology.

However, a weakness of Weaver's book is his occasional assumption that different atonement models are mutually exclusive. He spends most of the book attempting to replace the satisfaction theory but never completely refutes the strengths of that model or satisfactorily addresses its biblical and confessional sources.

In the end, though, Weaver's work is quite valuable in the breadth of its coverage of various theories on the Atonement and because of its timeliness. In an age when the church is confronted with violence from within and without, from politics of preemptive war to crusader language in hymns to battle imagery in pop Christian apparel, the church could use a dose of nonviolence in some of its most significant theology.

Eric Johnson

Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition, by Andrew Purves, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001. 137pp.

This small but valuable book reflects the integrating principle of Andrew Purves's own ministry. While trained as a systematic theologian, Purves is professor of pastoral theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. According to the author, there are two major deficiencies to how much pastoral care occurs today. On one hand, it is separated from history. This memory lapse diminishes our objectivity and tends to communicate that we are the first generation to struggle with a problem as well as removing ourselves from the collected wisdom of earlier Christians in addressing these issues. The other weakness is our highly therapeutic culture that attempts to fix others and "psychologize" God and life and thereby minimize the biblical wisdom of scripture. The resulting tragedy is that many pastors no longer see themselves as theologians

even though this integration was a perennial requirement for the formation of healthy ministries and churches. Therefore, Purves asserts, “the basic reconstitutive task for pastoral theology today is to establish once again the fundamental connection between the Christian doctrines of God, redemption, and hope, and the pastoral ministry of the church” (4).

The selection of the specific classical texts included in this work grew out of the author’s teaching of Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry course work. Gregory Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, Martin Bucer, and Richard Baxter are each given their voice as guides for this important recovery. Each section begins with a brief biography to introduce and place the respective pastoral theologian in his context. This is followed by an overview of the key themes of each person’s theology. Some of the common themes highlighted are the challenges and difficulties of the pastoral office, the life of the pastor, preparation and piety for service and the importance of self-care, and being a physician of the soul. Purves concludes with a chapter advancing eight summary principles to guide deeper reflection upon the contemporary task of pastoral theology.

Some readers might sense this book is presenting a nostalgic desire to return to the “good old days” of traditional theology. However, Purves’s intent is more realistic and does not expect the contemporary pastor to mimic the methods of earlier pastoral theologians but rather to be challenged and by our assumptions and wrestle to develop more integrated ways of being in ministry. While generations have separated us from these earlier saints, that should not dismiss the wisdom or the necessary questions that they can pose to us today. One possible frustration inherent in the brevity of this fine work is the assumption that key terms are known without adequate explanation. For example, it would have been helpful when exploring Gregory Nazianzus to define *theosis* and place it within its broader Orthodox context. That aside this is a practical book and one that I have used in my own Doctor of Ministry teaching.

Tom Schwanda

Prayer: 50th Anniversary Edition, by Karl Barth, ed. Don E. Saliers, with essays by I. John Hesselink, Daniel L. Migliore, and Donald K. McKim, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002. xx, 134pp., \$12.95.

This delightful book speaks volumes about the theology of prayer and the life of the church. An indispensable resource for the church library, Barth and a distinguished array of present-day Reformed theologians dig deeply for the rich spiritual nuggets to be mined from a persistent and mindful praying of the Lord’s Prayer. In addition, there is much here to inform Reformed preaching on prayer. Most important, however, is Barth’s wrestling with the question of the

congregational prayer, or the prayer of the people, and how to achieve a spirit of freedom or extemporaneous prayer while maintaining an adherence to the necessary structure of prayer. His encouragement to spend at least as much time in preparation for this prayer as for the sermon serves as reassurance it is not necessary to be able to reel off a wordy and impressive prayer at the drop of a hat. Read Barth once, spend some time with the commentaries, then read Barth again with a new understanding and appreciation for his insight and encouragement to allow the living word of God to live in and through lives shaped by the prayer that Jesus taught. The reflective commentaries by a variety of today's prominent Reformed theologians build on Barth's work to give a contemporary insight into the discipline of biblical prayer as well as a more detailed introduction to Barth's theology as shaped by his own life of prayer.

With a plethora of available resources flooding the religious marketplace to tell us how and when to pray, this resource may at first glance seem out of date, and many may be intimidated by large, bold letters spelling out the name of the twentieth century's most illustrious Reformed theologian. It remains, therefore, to be introduced by clergy and an invitation extended to consistories, as well as adult and youth study groups to step into the very heart of the life of discipleship, a life of individual and corporate prayer.

Marcia Gibbons

Recovering Mother Kirk: The Case for Liturgy in the Reformed Tradition, by D.G. Hart, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003. 263pp., \$24.99.

D.G. Hart, who is academic dean and professor of church history at Westminster Seminary in California, has as his focus primarily Presbyterian churches and understands the Reformed tradition to be characterized by three tendencies: doctrinal precision, cultural outlook, and pietism. Largely a reprinted collection of essays by the author, the book advocates a needed fourth emphasis, "Reformed liturgicalism."

By "Reformed liturgicalism" is not meant simply a concentration on ritual or order in worship services. The stated aim is "to persuade fellow Calvinists of the centrality of worship and the visible church to the Christian life." The five principles of Reformed worship are that it centers on the Word of God; it is theocentric; it is the meeting of God with his people; it is simple; and it is reverent. In the life of the church the older outlook regarding the power and authority of the ordained minister, which is understood to flow from the church's confession of faith and the hope of eternal life, is of great importance. In contrast to the individualistic character of much of American Christianity, the Reformed tradition is sacramental and corporate in nature.

This is the heritage that Hart sees the church as in danger of losing.

Appeal is made, as one might expect, to Calvin's theology and to confessions such as the Belgic Confession and the Westminster Confession – especially to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Lengthy discussion is also given to the contributions to Presbyterianism of J. Gresham Machen.

In presenting his argument, Hart takes issue with "low-church Presbyterianism," Protestant ecumenism, Christian feminists, and evangelicalism in various expressions: church growth proponents, Evangelicals and Catholics Together, the National Association of Evangelicals, Praise and Worship services that echo contemporary popular culture, and parachurch ministries.

While attention is mainly on Presbyterians, the Christian Reformed Church comes in for consideration a number of times, and the Reformed Church in America is mentioned once, and that in connection with the churches who cooperated in the production of the 1955 *Hymnal*.

Glenn Wyper

The Salvation of Souls: Nine Previously Unpublished Sermons on the Call of the Ministry and the Gospel by Jonathan Edwards, ed. Richard A. Bailey and Gregory A. Wills, Wheaton: Crossway, 2002. 192pp., \$19.99.

The sermons of Jonathan Edwards have received relatively little attention. This trend is slowly changing, thankfully, due to the exhaustive efforts of the Works of Jonathan Edwards project at Yale, and due to the commendable work by Richard Bailey and Gregory Wills in *Salvation of Souls*.

After a lucid foreword by noted scholar George Marsden (author of *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* [Yale, 2003]), the editors carefully introduce Edwards as minister, concisely set his preaching in an eighteenth-century context, and encourage current ministers to find pastoral edification from Edwards. *Salvation of Souls* contains sermons spanning the breadth of Edwards's pastoral career (1720s–1750s) and contributes uniquely to Edwardsean scholarship by offering sermons that, with one exception, have never before been published and that focus on the role and function of a minister.

While all the sermons merit mention, I will limit my focus to three. In "Ministers Need the Power of God" (delivered in 1729), Edwards pointed out that ministers are "insufficient instruments" who must "go to Christ" in order to faithfully "labor in his vineyard" (51).

In August 1751 Edwards preached to a group of Mohican and Mohawk Indians. "Preaching the Gospel Brings Poor Sinners to Christ" is remarkable in its brevity yet piercing in its expression. Edwards highlighted the reality of sin and pointed the Indians to Christ as the only true savior.

Finally, "The Work of the Ministry is Saving Sinners" (preached in 1754 and again in 1756), is a refreshing reminder for today's over-extended ministers.

Christ offered the ultimate sacrifice, Edwards maintained, and thus all ministers should “exert themselves for the same end” (159).

Just as Edwards edified and encouraged the faithful of the eighteenth century, may his sermons in *Salvation of Souls* inspire a new generation of ministers to shepherd faithfully the souls entrusted to their care.

Phillip L. Sinitiere

Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods, by Darrell L. Bock, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002. 230pp., \$18.99.

Darrell L. Bock received his Ph.D. from the University of Aberdeen and is research professor of New Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. He is an excellent evangelical scholar who is well acquainted with the literature on the topic.

This work briefly describes the background or cultural environment of the gospels and the history of their critical study. Bock’s purpose is to aid beginning students in understanding the subject, give an initial grasp of associated controversies, and to encourage further independent study. While there are many significant details on each subject and some maps, charts, and illustrations, the content is in the main readily understandable.

The introduction deals with the sources of knowledge of Jesus. Part one has four chapters on nonbiblical literary evidence, chronology of Jesus’ life, political history, and sociocultural history. Part two has seven chapters that deal with the different quests for the historical Jesus and six methods of criticism used in studying the gospels, concluding with the genre of the gospels. Bock assesses the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

Bock makes the point that many of Jesus’ teachings treat issues that were not of direct concern to those addressed by the gospel writers. The preservation of the Son of Man title in Jesus’ teaching is an example. This Christological title was no longer used by churches, according to the evidence given in the New Testament epistles, which were written before or at the time of the gospel writing. This fact runs contrary to some earlier form critics, who believed the situation in the church’s life at the time of the gospel writing determined both form and content. Rather, this shows a concern by the writers to preserve authentic sayings of Jesus, even though they no longer addressed the concerns of their readers.

Those beginning with different theological positions than Bock, especially those who begin with the view that God does not act in the world which he has created, will see gospel criticism in a different light (158). But even they should deal with the historical critical arguments which Bock demonstrates with apt ability. I highly recommend this introduction to the study of the historical Jesus.

David W. Jurgens

Transforming Congregational Culture, by Anthony B. Robinson, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. 136pp.

You've had a hunch for a long time that programming and restructuring weren't the answers for revitalizing congregations. And if you read one more book that acknowledges this and yet offers still another program, you'll scream – right? So read this book. It's not about a program – it is about changing the life of a congregation.

Somewhere along the line, we determined as denominations and congregations that our problem was “membership decline,” and with that named problem have come a slew of easy solutions for growth (as in numbers). In *Transforming Congregational Culture*, Anthony Robinson looks at the problem more as an adaptive challenge involving the spiritual work of “learning, authenticity, depth, risk, and change.”

Robinson's observations and ideas put into words what congregational leaders, seminary students, denominational leaders, ministers – anyone who wonders what a congregation should really be about – reflect on and discuss in terms of congregational transformation. In his introduction, he writes, “I am not a consultant; neither am I a guru, nor even an expert. I am a pastor. What I discuss here derives from my pastoral work and experience.” Robinson does an excellent job of reflecting on ministry in a congregation. He uses examples from his own ministry as well as from colleagues to illustrate his points. And he reminds readers regularly that these points are good starting spots for congregational transformation – not just formulas for church growth or prescriptions for ministry.

Robinson moves beyond the “five simple steps” or “three key changes” approach to pastoral ministry in a way that is genuine, insightful, and – most importantly – faithful to Scripture and God's call for us as a church. *Transforming Congregational Culture* reenergizes hope that we, as congregations and their leaders, can live out God's calling to be more than civic gathering places but rather communities of faith – hospitable, discerning, loving, and growing in relationship with God.

Jess Scholten

The Trinity (Guides to Theology), by Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. vii, 156pp., \$15.

This volume is the first in a new series sponsored by the Christian Theological Research Fellowship that presents brief introductions focusing on important themes and issues in systematic theology. The target audience for these guides includes students and the general reader. The topic of the first in the series is a good choice because it counteracts the opinion that the doctrine of the Trinity is too intellectual and too speculative to be of benefit to the church generally.

The authors divide their work into two parts. After a short introduction to the theme, the first part is devoted to a historical overview of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. The second part comprises a thirty-one page annotated bibliography of English language works on the subject that are readily available through bookstores or libraries.

The authors do a good job of reviewing the writings of major thinkers through the centuries. The reviews are succinct yet comprehensive enough that the student or general reader who is coming fresh to the subject will be able to understand the contributions of the various theologians. The works summarized are those of both the proponents of the doctrine and the doctrine's challengers.

The authors have had to be very selective in choosing representative theologians for the twentieth century. They have selected some well-known theologians like Barth, Rahner, and Moltmann, but also some that are not as well-known, such as Catherine Mowry LaCugna and John D. Zizioulas. The criterion for the choice has been the "constructive attention" which writers have given to the doctrine.

Having read the historical summaries, the reader will be able intelligently to assess which theologians will be helpful for further study and use the annotated bibliography.

Glenn Wyper

What Does It Mean to be Saved? Broadening Evangelical Horizons of Salvation, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002. 203pp., \$17.

All too often evangelicalism tends to focus unduly on the individual aspects of salvation. This book is the result of a conference held at Regent College in Vancouver in October 2001 that sought to expand soteriological vistas for evangelicals. Scholars from theological institutions in North America and Britain, representing several nationalities, diverse denominations, and various specialties from biblical studies to political science present topics of interest to them that are related to the general subject. No attempt, however, is made to set forth a comprehensive doctrine of salvation.

Bruce Hindmarsh looks at the life and thought of John Wesley in order to illustrate how evangelicals of an earlier generation approached the implications of the Gospel. Henri Blocher critiques Gustav Aulén's *Christus Victor*, which

portrayed the Atonement as victory over evil. Loren Wilkinson's thesis is that Christians should be converted pagans. Others such as Rikk Watts and Cherith Nordling examine salvation in relation to the image of God. Amy Sherman explores salvation as life in the new city.

John Webster of Oxford University makes the first of two responses to the essays. After surveying common threads to be found among the presentations, he takes note of aspects of Christian teaching that are neglected in the essays. One issue he raises concerns their broad and somewhat loose usage of the word "salvation." He points out that such general use of the term without due attention to the biblical testimony and Christian dogmatics may allow the essayists to devote themselves to salvation's implications for human life. However, he suggests that such usage is the result of uncritically assuming particular views on such material so that in the present moral and political culture such assumptions ought not to be made.

Jonathan Wilson of Westmont College makes the second response. Like Webster, he commends the essay authors for their presentations. The subjects he notes that need further expansion include the church, the doctrine of justification by faith, and that of final judgment and divine wrath.

Despite the limitations Webster and Wilson note, the evangelical reader will find much food for thought here.

Glenn Wyper

Writers in this Issue

Christine D. Pohl is professor of social ethics, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky.

Thomas A. Boogaart is professor of Old Testament, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan.

Allen Verhey is the Evert J. and Hattie E. Blekkink Professor of Religion, Hope College, Holland, Michigan.

Barbara Pekich is pastor/director of Heartside Ministry, an inner-city outreach to the homeless population in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Dennis Voskuil is president and professor of church history, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan.

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Assoc., 250 S. Wacker Dr., 16th Flr., Chicago, IL 60606, E-mail: atla@atla.com, WWW: <http://www.atla.com>.

Reviewers in this Issue

Daniel J. Adams is professor of theology, Hanil University and Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Jeonbuk, Korea.

Marcia Gibbons is a graduate of Western Theological Seminary residing in Coopersville, Michigan.

Eric Johnson is a graduate of Western Theological Seminary residing in Pompton Plains, New Jersey.

David W. Jurgens is a retired minister of the East Iowa Presbytery, the Presbyterian Church (USA), residing in Marion Iowa.

Christopher B. Kaiser is professor of historical and systematic theology, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan.

Earl Wm. Kennedy is professor of religion emeritus at Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa.

Thomas A. Kopecek is professor of religion and philosophy, Central College, Pella, Iowa.

J. David Muyskens is a retired Reformed Church minister residing in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Troy Nanninga is currently pursuing a new church start through the RCA.

Jess Scholten is associate minister, First Presbyterian Church, High Point, North Carolina.

Tom Schwanda is associate professor of spiritual formation, Reformed Bible College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Sylvio J. Scorza is professor emeritus, Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa.

Phillip Luke Sinitiere is a Ph.D. candidate in history at the University of Houston, Houston, Texas.

Jeffrey Wayne Taylor is reference assistant, Jones Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, and minister, St. Paul's U.C.C., Cego, Texas.

Robert E. Van Voorst is professor of New Testament, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan.

Glenn Wyper is professor emeritus, Tyndale College, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Assoc., 250 S. Wacker Dr., 16th Flr., Chicago, IL 60606, E-mail: atla@atla.com, WWW: <http://www.atla.com>.