

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

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**Introduction**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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about hospitality in the Gospel of Luke set the theological foundations for the hospitality exemplified in Acts.<sup>2</sup>

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

## I. Travel and Hospitality in the First Century

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>6</sup>See the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:29-37.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>9</sup>Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 30.

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

serves to abolish differences between group members and strengthens group cohesion.”<sup>11</sup>

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

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

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<sup>11</sup>Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom*, 33-34.

<sup>12</sup>Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 31.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>21</sup>Mathews, 180-189.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

<sup>32</sup>On the need for hospitality in the Church, see Mathews, 198-206.

<sup>33</sup>Riddle, 151.

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

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

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## II. A Redactional Look at Luke

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Also unique to Luke is the episode at the home of the two sisters Mary and Martha in 10:38-42.<sup>49</sup> Of the two sisters, Martha is the one concerned about being the good hostess, “distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.” Mary is unconcerned about such matters. Becoming indignant, Martha accuses Mary of being a bad hostess. Jesus then reverses the roles and he Himself becomes the host to Martha as he had been to Mary all along.<sup>50</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Distinct to Luke is the formation of a travel narrative in 9:51-19:27 which begins with Jesus' resolution to set out for Jerusalem and ends with the Triumphal Entry. Several interesting notations can be made concerning the narratives of this section. To begin with, as Jesus sets out for Jerusalem, he sends messengers on ahead to a Samaritan village (9:52-56). The people there refuse to host Jesus. The disciples' reaction shows the seriousness of inhospitality towards Jesus: "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven and consume them?" This inhospitality leads to a two-way rejection: Jesus passed on by the village and went on to another, and the settled way of life of Jesus and his disciples was ending. Luke also shows the need for hospitality in the community when Jesus sends out the seventy in 10:1.<sup>54</sup> This large group could meet opposition as some had in the Samaritan village. In the verses that follow, many elements are common with the parallel passage in Matthew (9:37-38; 10:7-16), though in different order. But what is interesting in Luke's account is that this passage comes directly after several people express a desire to follow after Jesus but with certain conditions attached. Following Jesus must be unconditional, just as preceding him in preparation must be unconditional.<sup>55</sup> The seventy meet success not by their own means but through the power of God (10:17-

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

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



20). Several times Jesus encounters opposition. In 13:10-17 he heals a crippled woman on the Sabbath and restores her to a life of health, much to the chagrin of the Pharisees. In 13:31-33, the inhospitality of Herod appears when some Pharisees say to Jesus, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." Conflict between Jesus and Pharisees over hospitality occurs in 14:1-14 and 15:1-7.<sup>56</sup>

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

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

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

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

honor of the community is saved by the combined hospitality of the two friends.<sup>58</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>62</sup>Stein, *Parables*, 121; Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 181.

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

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

<sup>65</sup>Moxnes, 85.

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

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

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

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<sup>66</sup>Moxnes, 88.

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

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

<sup>69</sup>Cf. the explanation in vv. 41-48 and the seriousness of readiness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **IV. Implications of Hospitality for Our Ministry Today**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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<sup>79</sup>Jones, “Welcoming the Stranger,” 60.

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>81</sup>Park, “Hospitality as Context for Evangelism,” 386.

<sup>82</sup>Park, “Hospitality as Context for Evangelism,” 387.

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

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

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<sup>83</sup>Park, “Hospitality as Context for Evangelism,” 387.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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