

8. THE TRINITY'S HOSPITALITY TO THE OTHER IN MISSIO DEI

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Author's Profile

Jennifer's passion has always been mission-related and her family was involved in cross-cultural work in Central Asia. After returning, she participated in anti-human trafficking efforts in Penang, migrant ministries, and is currently involved in the Malaysian Diaspora Network. She encourages local church engagement with marginalized diasporic groups through workshops and networking. She finds joy in making a positive difference in the lives of others and helping them reach their full potential. On the home front, Jennifer is married to Matthew, and mom to Aidan and Jemima, along with a dog, cat, turtle, and a school of fish.

Abstract

This reflection used the motif of hospitality to the Other, an integral and summative concept for relationality, as a lens to examine the Trinity's economies in the missio Dei narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. It traced significant concepts regarding the roles of each trinitarian member in salvation history to highlight the nature of God's hospitality that goes beyond the social norms of human cultures. It also explored the Trinity's interplay of host and guest roles in the biblical narratives. In doing so, the Trinity's holistic, empowering, inclusive, and transformative hospitality toward His creation, evidenced by His presence, was revealed. Some other themes that emerged included the value of attentive listening, the image of God, justice for the marginalized, the pivotal role of choice, and the significance of friendship. This reflection argued that, as the triune God extends hospitality to His creation—the “Other” of Him—His followers, who have committed to honoring Him with their lives, should likewise offer hospitality to their own “Others.”

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the resurgence in trinitarian missiology occurs concurrently with the turn to relationality in trinitarian discourse. In Mark Love's quest for a post-colonial missiology, he writes, "*Missio Dei*, to the extent that it moves beyond classical notions of the Triune God rooted in philosophical notions, serves as a vital impulse in the renewal of both theological and missional practice."¹ Alan Roxburgh concurs with his call to rethink trinitarian missiology, which he considers "foundational to engaging the cultures of a pluralized, post-modern world."² Mark Oxbrow gives a helpful review of sources on trinitarian missiology as he traces its development for future missiological direction.³ He highlights the call for trinitarian-focused missiology as Christians realize "mission is not a programme of the church, but rather an attribute and activity of God, bringing God's redemption to all creation."⁴ Moreover, with the "spiritual center of Christianity" shifted to other communal-focused

¹ Mark Love, "Missio Dei, Trinitarian Theology, and the Quest for a Post-Colonial Missiology," *Missio Dei: A Journal of Missional Theology and Praxis*, 1, August 2010, <http://missiodeijournal.com/issues/md-1/authors/md-1-love> (accessed June 20, 2021).

² Alan Roxburgh, "Rethinking Trinitarian Missiology," in *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue*, William D Taylor, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 183. See also Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

³ Mark Oxbrow, "Trinity and Mission— a Review of Sources," *Mission Round Table, Occasional Bulletin of OMF Research*, Sept 2012, vol.7, no.2, https://www.academia.edu/2564969/Tinity_and_Mission_a_Review_article (accessed June 20, 2021). In his review on contemporaneous theological and missional developments, Oxbrow highlights works by John Fleet, Stephen Holmes, Miroslav Volf, Lesslie Newbigin, David Bosch, Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder. He also presents books by contemporary theologians such as Colin Gunton, Timothy Tennent, and Chris Wright and those contributing to an ecclesiological understanding, such as works by Jürgen Moltmann, Leonardo Boff, and Paul Fiddes. Oxbrow also reviews theological works focusing on interreligious engagement by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen and Ajith Fernando, works by Roman Catholic theologians such as Gerald O'Collins and Michael Downey, and those by Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas. From a pastoral perspective, he recommends works by Catherine Mowry LaCugna and Tim Chester.

⁴ Mark Oxbrow, "Trinity and Mission," 1.

and pluralistic cultures of the majority world, this movement toward trinitarian relationality is apt and timely to address such contexts.⁵

Therefore, to contribute to the conversation in this area, this reflection centers on the Trinity's economies by examining the relational motif and grammar of hospitality within the *missio Dei* narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.⁶ It first elucidates leading ideas surrounding the roles of each trinitarian member in salvation history.⁷ With that, implications arising from these trinitarian roles provide insights into the nature of God's hospitality and why believers need to emulate him in extending such hospitality to the Other. This reflection leads to the argument that since the triune God extends hospitality to his creation, that is, the "Other" of him, God's people who have committed to honor him with their lives can do likewise to the "Others" of them.⁸

Creation

God as Creator is the Divine Host that provides for the needs of his creation. The Genesis narrative of creation reveals the details of his care (Gen 1). He forms and fills the universe, setting into place

⁵ Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 106. Many of these theological efforts also stem from contexts of suffering and persecution.

⁶ For usage of hospitality as a summative concept, see George Newlands and Allen Smith, *Hospitable God: The Transformative Dream* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 22. They write, "Though we may not find the word 'hospitable' on every page of the doctrinal tradition about God, we suggest that hospitality provides a summative term which may express eloquently affirmations and concerns which lie at the heart of the Christian gospel."

⁷ Although the reflection may highlight a trinitarian member's distinctive role, this focus does not imply the other divine persons play non-contributory roles in that particular historical event.

⁸ Although the term Other can generally mean someone who is different from us, as in the other person, in defining the term Other for marginalized groups such migrant workers and refugees, I will follow Staszak's sociological definition of Other which is: a member of a dominated out-group, whose identity is considered lacking and who may be subject to discrimination by the in-group. Jean-Francois Staszak, "Other/otherness," *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, 2008, <https://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/geo/files/3214/4464/7634/OtherOtherness.pdf> (accessed June 19, 2021).

ecosystems that nourish and sustain the earth. Regarding his creatures, the author of Proverbs rightly observes, “When you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things” (Prov 31:20). With the Divine Host’s care, plant, animal, and human never lacked anything in the Garden.

Moreover, the kind of care that the Divine Host extends to his creation is holistic, not just providing physical comfort but empowering. He provides care for the human soul, the “deepest, most vital part of the human self.”⁹ Scriptures reveal that God meets with Adam and Eve in the coolness of the garden (Gen 3:8). This account alludes to a regular communion between Creator and creature, host and guest. Moreover, the Divine Host also involves Adam and Eve in the work of his garden.¹⁰ In doing so, he enables both to take an active part in the giving-receiving, thus extending to them dignified, meaningful hospitality that is not in any way patronizing.¹¹ He is truly the exemplary host that empowers his guests by entrusting stewardship of the earth to them.

From reflecting on God as the Divine Host in creation, one deliberation arises: how can God’s people wholly experience this bountiful hospitality and soul nourishment in the Father’s world, and be empowered to share this goodness with others?¹² Although

⁹ Dallas Willard, “Dallas Willard–Renovation of the Heart,” Interview by Lyle Smith Graybeal, Renovaré.org, <https://renovare.org/articles/interview-dallas-willard-renovation-of-the-heart> (accessed January 6, 2021).

¹⁰ Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*. 1st ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998, 264–265. Foster writes of God’s call to sacramental living within the spheres of home, work, and society as a continuation of the “cultural mandate,” that is “deeply rooted in the creation narrative, where God gives the human pair stewardship authority to care for and manage the earth (Gen. 1-3).”

¹¹ Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 48–49. Pohl notes that by the medieval period, households of influential persons were “responsible for providing hospitality; but welcome was often fashioned according to the status of the guest. While hospitality provided a crucial form of general welfare, it explicitly reinforced existing patterns of wealth and power.”

¹² There have also been increasing discourses on spirituality’s role in *missio Dei* with the turn to relationality. See Johannes Reimer, “Trinitarian Spirituality:

communion with God, whether on a group or individual basis, has historically been word-oriented in Evangelical tradition, other Christian traditions have experienced God in other ways, for instance, while contemplating creation in silence.¹³ Evangelicals are also learning from such contemplative traditions about drawing close with God.¹⁴ Evangelicals can thoughtfully ground the practice in the word of God to dispel fears that it is nebulous and mystical.¹⁵ In Psalm 19, it is written nature itself “speaks,” “declares” the glory of God, “pours out speech,” and “reveals knowledge.” One can be attuned to hear God through the beauty and grandeur of nature by our attentive listening. Experiencing God’s hospitality through practicing his presence and being attentive to him can undoubtedly enrich the evangelical’s devotional life. Most significantly, regular listening to God and learning to discern his will can also empower the believer to right action toward the Other.

And who is the Other, the recipient of such right actions? An essential outcome of experiencing God’s hospitality in creation is a

Relational and Missional,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 75(1) July 2019,https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334245059_Trititarian_spirituality_Relational_and_missional (accessed June 20, 2021). Also Kirk Franklin, “Mission and Spirituality,” in *Spirituality in Mission: Embracing the Lifelong Journey*, eds. John Amalraj, Geoffrey W. Han, and William D. Taylor (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishing, 2018), 21-30.

¹³ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*. For a contextualized Malaysian approach towards contemplation in silence, see Matthew K. H. Leong, *Word to Silence: Facilitating Contemplative Silence among Mandarin Speakers in the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary*, DMin diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2019, <https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1366&context=dmin> (accessed June 9, 2021).

¹⁴ Joyce Huggett, *The Joy of Listening to God: Hearing the Many Ways God Speaks to Us* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986). Huggett is considered a pioneer in contemplative spirituality among Evangelicals.

¹⁵ Ruth Haley Barton, “Make a Joyful Silence,” *Sojourners Magazine*, February 2009, vol. 38 (2), 32, <https://transformingcenter.org/2009/02/make-a-joyful-silence/> (accessed January 6, 2021). See also Christine Raquel Taylor Warner, “Spiritual Formation: The Contours, Ways, and Means of the Journey,” in *Spirituality in Mission: Embracing the Lifelong Journey* by John Amalraj, Geoffrey W. Han, and William D. Taylor (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishing, 2018), 83. She writes, “Creation and Scripture are powerful places of encounter with God and self, as is authentic Christian community and engaging the broken, vulnerable, and poor of our world as Jesus spoke of in Matthew 25.”

growing awareness that God also extends this hospitality to *all* peoples, peoples made in his image. If God's hospitality is offered to *all* humanity, then the theological construct of *imago Dei*, that God made all humans in his own image, becomes even more meaningful.¹⁶ It is thought-provoking that "all" involves not just those who identify themselves as His people, but even those who are hostile to Him. The Father's attentive and considerate care toward his creatures does not end with the fall of man. He continues to show care for humanity, even to those who are antagonistic toward him. Figuratively speaking, these individuals are the most distant "Others" from him.

God extends hospitality to fallen men because he deems the human person worthy to receive it, and he is also the Father to all. The Psalmist asks rhetorically, "Lord, what are human beings that you care for them, mere mortals that you think of them?" (Ps 144:3). The revelation that humans are made in the image of God demonstrates the value of every human being. God is also the Father of all peoples.¹⁷ Scriptures reveal the generous and gracious heart of this Father that even extends love to an enemy. They remind his people that the Father continues to "cause his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matt 5:45). As such, the Father's hospitality goes beyond reciprocity and does not obligate the guest to return the favor. This hosting by God is significantly different from human hosts who historically have used hospitality to make duty-bound guests give back something similar.¹⁸ God is the waiting Father

¹⁶ Greg Voiles, "Windows of Infinite Welcome: The Iconic Nature of Hospitality," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 42, 183-198. Voiles highlights Gregory of Nyssa's thoughts on the practice of hospitality as "an avenue for the renewal of the *imago Dei* or *imago Trinitatis* in humanity."

¹⁷ Although from the perspective of creation there appears to be some scriptural evidence that God is Father to all, from the perspective of redemption, only Christians call him Father. As such, not all evangelicals believe that the Bible teaches the universal Fatherhood of God. Some helpful articles underneath the topic "God the Father" or "Fatherhood of God" are found in James Orr et al., eds., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online*, The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE), Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939, www.internationalstandardbible.com (accessed October 7, 2021).

¹⁸ Pohl, *Making Room*, 17-19. Pohl highlights that while "hospitality was a significant context for transcending status boundaries and for working through issues of respect and recognition," in the early church, the Greek and Roman cultures of that time "stressed formal reciprocal obligations between benefactor and recipient."

whose heart is open toward and does not exclude the worst of sinners. Instead, he is waiting for them to return to him (Luke 15:11-32).¹⁹

Regrettably, the Fatherhood of God is not often addressed by Christians beyond the context of Christianity because of its implied universalism.²⁰ Nonetheless, when Christians see beyond the salvific implications of this notion, it can be a timely reminder of a shared humanity, of belonging to the same human family in the face of escalating racism and xenophobia in communities.²¹ This filial identity should remind Christians of the Father's love toward those who have yet to acknowledge him. As recipients of God's hospitality, Christians are to also welcome and include others, others who are different from them yet made in the image of the same Creator. This welcome expressed in acts of hospitality and inclusion can be an avenue for affirming the *imago Dei*, demonstrating the worth and dignity of human life, especially in a world where respect for life is eroding.

Fall

God did not stop extending his hospitality and care toward humankind when decay and death entered the world through the willful disobedience of man. After the fall of man, God gives the proto-evangel, promising deliverance through the seed of the woman, the coming Messiah who will usher in God's reign and make all things right (Gen 3:15). Meanwhile, God prepares in a fallen world, through the exodus' defining events and the sojourning in the desert, a chosen nation from which this Messiah will come. God calls his people out of

¹⁹ Luke 15:11-32. The biblical narrative of the Prodigal Son, or perhaps more aptly retitled, the Waiting Father.

²⁰ Elmer L. Towns, *Theology for Today* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2001), 151.

²¹ Lee Roy Martin, "Old Testament Foundations for Christian Hospitality," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 35 (1), Art. #752, 2014. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1.752> (accessed January 28, 2021), 6. Martin writes, "The practice of hospitality within a multi-faith context requires a transformation in our thinking about the Other. . . . Through training and through prayer we can come to see all people as bearer of God's image and therefore worthy of our respect and our hospitality."

bondage and forms a nation over which he becomes its Father, the nation's source and authority.²²

The Father of Israel continues his hospitality through his presence and providence during the years of desert wandering (Exod 13:21-22, Ps 105:39-41). For the next forty years, his presence is evident as he leads them with a pillar of cloud in the day and a pillar of fire during the night. The Father remains the consummate host by his attentive presence. Despite the people's rebellion, he spreads for his people a "table in the wilderness" by providing water in the dessert, with quail and manna for food. He makes sure that their clothes do not wear out and their feet do not swell (Deut 8:4). Moreover, he continues to protect his people from the enemies that surround them.

In an unrighteous fallen world, the Father of Israel, besides providing for physical needs, also holistically provides moral and spiritual guidance on living righteously.²³ The Mosaic Law, given to Moses, the Patriarch of the nation, guides his people. God gives the Ten Commandments to show his people how to live righteously, not just before him but also with each other (Deut. 6, Matt 22:37-40). God chooses Israel to demonstrate to other nations how God wants all people to live well. As such, Israel becomes a beacon to draw others to him and know him as Yahweh, the one true God.²⁴ This welcoming and inclusive act is a reflection of God's heart for those from every nation, tribe, and people.

²² This section examines God's economies in dealing with Israel primarily using the lens of hospitality. This limitation does not lessen the significance of judgment and warfare during the birthing process of this nation. For example, was God inhospitable to the Canaanites and discriminated against them? William Ford attempts a nuanced response to the negative biblical portrayal of the Canaanites as discriminatory in his article. See William Ford, "The Challenge of the Canaanites," *Tyndale Bulletin* 68.2 (2017), 161-184, <https://www.belfastbiblecollege.com/media/uploads/Ford-24.pdf> (accessed June 19, 2021). God will, therefore, in some situations "limit" his hospitality to work for the good of those who love him. Scriptures such as Psalm 135 show that God strikes out against enemies who threaten his people to vindicate those he loves. However, this section's focus will be on the hospitality of the Father of Israel, reflected in the interactions with his chosen people.

²³ Towns, *Theology for Today*, 151.

²⁴ The centripetal drawing of people to faith, as opposed to the centrifugal concept of going to the people to share the faith.

In a fallen world, the righteous living that God wanted for his chosen people involves treating the foreigners among them well. When the Israelites were in the wilderness, God commands his people to treat the sojourners or strangers who were with them as native-born.²⁵ God reminds the Israelites of their foreign and slave status in Egypt and how he delivered them from this yoke of slavery (Exod 6:6-7; Deut 10:19). God wants His people to remember his generous hospitality that sustains their continual status as foreigners and strangers in his land (Lev 25:23, Deut 16:9-12).

Therefore, God's people are to do the right thing to exercise justice by showing consideration to the foreigners and helpless among them.²⁶ His people are not to exploit the aliens' vulnerable situation and marginalize them.²⁷ God expects the Israelites to practice hospitality as a host nation, treating the foreigners among them with respect and dignity, and providing for their needs, just as he has provided for them. They are to do this not just in obedience to the laws but also in gratitude to God for showing care to them.

Redemption

In salvation history, Christ demonstrates in his life and teaching what it means to be hospitable to others and how to receive hospitality from others. In the Old Testament, God as Creator and Father is portrayed more as a host. However, Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God as man, is interchangeably both host and guest. In his encounters with people, Jesus was sometimes the host, while at other times, he became the guest. For instance, he was the host who

²⁵ See Lev 19:33-34.

²⁶ Justice is a prevailing theme in the prophetic books of the Bible. For example, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Mic 5:8)."

²⁷ The book of Ruth gives an intimate portrayal of the risks faced by the vulnerable during the times of the judges. In upholding Levitical laws through righteous action, Boaz, a type for Christ, likely averted a tragic future for Ruth the Moabitess, a widow and a foreigner in the land.

shared life through stories and taught with authority (Mark 1:22), who extended non-judgmental grace to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11),²⁸ and who engaged in social and theological discourse with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:1-26). In other situations, Jesus became the needy guest when he identified with the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and the prisoner (Matt 25:31-46) in his parable of the sheep and the goats.²⁹ He then underscored to his audience the eternal consequences of hospitality toward his “distressing disguise.”³⁰

The life of Christ also shows a dependence on the hospitality of others (Luke 9:58, 10:38). Jesus was the friend of saints and sinners, wealthy and needy, and readily received their hospitality (Mark 2:15; Luke 14:1, 19:1-10). Moreover, it is often in the context of such reciprocal encounters in hospitality, for example his encounter with Zacchaeus, that God’s work of transformation and redemption was effected (Luke 9:1-10).³¹

The incarnation of Christ also reveals the pivotal role of choice. While the act of the infinite God becoming finite man is a mystery, the choice to do so is astounding and continues to confound humanity. This element of choice is also demonstrated throughout the Christ story and moves it from conception to resurrection. For instance, Jesus depended on the hospitality of the human womb and heart even

²⁸ Modern scholars have shown that this narrative on the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11) is “absent from virtually all early Greek manuscripts. . . . representing great diversity of textual traditions.” See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 333. However, Carson notes that “there is little reason for doubting that the event here described occurred, even if in its written form it did not in the beginning belong to the canonical books.”

²⁹ Arthur Sutherland, *I was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006). This parable provides the framework for Sutherland’s systematic theological approach toward hospitality in his book.

³⁰ Teresa Benenate and Becky Benenate, *In the Heart of the World: Thoughts, Stories, & Prayers* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1997) 55ff. See also “Distressing Disguise,” song by Michael Card, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFphyC8WQZc> (accessed January 6, 2021).

³¹ In his encounter with Zacchaeus, Jesus offers himself as a guest, and by default, the tax collector becomes the host. Considering that the Jews viewed tax collectors as corrupt traitors and sinners, what Jesus the rabbi did was unthinkable. And likewise, the resultant transformation in Zacchaeus was astounding.

at his conception. Mary's accedence to an out-of-wedlock pregnancy paved the way for the birth of the Savior. Moreover, Joseph's obedience to take Mary as his wife and foster Jesus as his son demonstrated courage to rise above the law and hospitable parenthood that goes beyond the biological. Throughout church history till today, godly men and women's choice to demonstrate courageous hospitality in the face of ridicule, scorn, and persecution continues to testify to the empowering nature of the gospel.³²

Christ makes known his identity and redemptive role to his listeners during encounters of hospitality and inhospitality. For example, in the seven "I am" statements of Jesus recorded in John's Gospel. Jesus' statement, "I am the Bread of Life" (John 6:35), was made after the feeding of the five thousand, while "I am the Light of the World" (John 8:12), "I am the Door" (John 10:7), and "I am the Good Shepherd" (John 10:11) were made during disputes with the Pharisees who were inhospitable to him. Jesus made his statement of "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (John 11:25) specifically to Martha, the competent but harried hostess, at home upon Lazarus' death. Jesus made the statements "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6) and "I am the Vine" (Jn 15:6) at the Last Supper, which he hosted. Just as God reveals himself often through acts of hospitality, God's people also gain a deeper understanding of who he is through their hospitality to others. Even when they face inhospitality and rejection in doing so, God's people have the privilege of knowing him more and sharing in the fellowship of his sufferings (Phil 3:10).

At the Last Supper, it is salient to note that Jesus reiterates friendship, a resounding theme in his life and a motif intrinsically linked to hospitality. When he paid an ultimate price by offering his body and blood as a sacrifice for his friends, it realizes the value Jesus places on friendship (John 15:13). It is at the cross where Jesus loved

³² Amy Oden, *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001). Today, God's people continue to extend hospitality to the refugee and the displaced, often at a high cost to themselves.

strangers as friends and willingly gave His life for them (Rom 5:6-8). Kosuke Koyama writes,

The “form of Christ” (Gal 4:19) is the form of “extending hospitality to strangers.” This form is the essence of the Christian gospel . . . It rejects the language of threat. It proclaims the ultimate power of self-giving love (hesed, agape).³³

Jesus made friends of strangers and died to redeem them because of his great love for all. These powerful insights on Christ's inclusive love by taking the stranger “seriously” are found in Koyama's stranger-centered theology in which he posits God's ultimate act of hospitality which he extended to the Other – the oppressed, the marginalized, and even the enemy, was at the crucifixion of Christ.³⁴

Accounts of the post-resurrected reveal Christ's continual role as guest and host. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus appears to two disciples who have been discouraged by the crucifixion event (Luke 24:13-35). During this encounter, Jesus draws them out to share their grief and perplexity. He is both listener and presence and a stranger who is welcomed by the two to be their guest. However, “the hosts are hosted” when Jesus does the customary breaking and sharing of bread, an act that moves these two disciples from confusion to certainty.³⁵ Ruth Padilla DeBorst writes that it is “at the table their eyes were opened” and rightly points out that when the hosts “divest themselves of their power” and grant the “outsider” the “opportunity to offer them something, does the veil drop from their eyes. They are then ready to

³³ Kosuke Koyama, “Extend Hospitality to Strangers: A Missiology of Theologia Crucis,” *Currents in Missions*, 20, no.3 (1993), 285-286.

³⁴ Koyama, “Extend Hospitality to Strangers,” 288.

³⁵ Ruth Padilla DeBorst, “‘At the Table their Eyes were Opened’: Mission as Renouncing Power and Being Hosted by the Stranger,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol.39, No.4, October 2015, 200.

enter into the story of God's Good News.”³⁶ She rightly discerns it takes humility for this to happen.

Likewise, Jesus makes another post-resurrection appearance on the shores of Galilee (John 21:1-14). Peter and the disciples recognize the Lord when he hosts them to a big catch just like before and cooks breakfast for them. Moreover, Scripture reminds us that Jesus continues to offer himself as the Divine Guest who stands knocking on the hearts of man (Rev 3:20).

Restoration

Since the Holy Spirit's activity in creation, he continues to play a pivotal role throughout salvation history as both Divine Host and Guest. He is the host that invites all to fellowship with God. However, he is not a host that waits for his guests to come. Instead, he is a host on mission, one that is active on the move. The Holy Spirit's role is evident in the book of Luke-Acts where he convicts people's hearts by a “divine quickening” and invites them to the Father, regardless of race, culture, and social status.³⁷ He searches human hearts and issues the invitation to God's feast, and those who respond are drawn to God directly, sometimes even without Christian witness.³⁸ In contexts of persecution, Lesslie Newbigin observes that “the church grew not through its ‘works’ of witness, but instead through the active

³⁶ DeBorst, “At the Table,” 200. The humble act of divesting power by the host addresses the potential challenges identified by Kim in the ‘mission as hospitality’ approach. Christians need to think and work out within their own contexts what ‘divesting power’ entails to avoid having a paternalistic ‘host mentality’ in churches. See Kirsteen Kim, “Migration in World Christianity: Hospitality, Pilgrimage, and Church on the Move,”

Fuller Studio, Fuller Magazine: Issue 19, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/theology/migration-in-world-christianity-hospitality-pilgrimage-and-church-on-the-move/> (accessed October 7, 2021).

³⁷ Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998) 448.

³⁸ “More Than Dreams: Muslims Coming to Christ Through Dreams and Visions,” in *Perspectives*, Lausanne World Pulse Archives, issue: 01-2007 <https://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/perspectives-php/595/01-2007> (accessed June 6, 2021).

power of the Spirit drawing men and women to recognize in this human weakness the presence and power of God.”³⁹ However, though the invitation by the Spirit is issued to many, not many answer this invitation. Nonetheless, those who do come to the table, often in surprising ways, are welcomed by God to partake in his life-feast of abundance (John 10:10).

Although table fellowship and feasting are often associated with the life of Christ, they also appear prominently as eschatological imageries that present the fruition of the Spirit’s hospitality. While the Last Supper, the penultimate table fellowship of Christ, is often portrayed with Jesus and his twelve disciples, it points to the eschatological event of the Lamb’s marriage supper in which the Spirit will draw people from all nations.⁴⁰ Scriptures vividly reveal the ultimate union of God and his people at the marriage feast of the Lamb, where *missio Dei* reaches its fulfillment, the restoration of all things to their right place (Rev 19:7-10). This eschatological vision is also memorably presented in the sacred art of Hyatt Moore, an American painter. In his reflection on this event, he portrays a table fellowship of twelve people of diverse ethnicities sitting around Jesus in his oil painting entitled “Unlimited Guest List.”⁴¹ This painting with representatives from different tribes and languages evokes feelings of inclusion and the embrace of different ethnic groups at God’s ultimate and eternal feast (Rev 7:9-10).

In line with the Spirit’s role in transcending ethnic differences, Amos Yong presents a pneumatological approach to the theology of hospitality in order to “provide a coherent framework for thinking

³⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 119. Rob Hughes examines Newbigin’s understanding of the Spirit’s role in mission in his article. See Rob Hughes, “Life in the Spirit: An Overview of Leslie Newbigin’s Pneumatology of Mission,” *The Asbury Journal* 68/2: 95-105, 2013, <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1202&context=asburyjournal> (accessed January 6, 2021).

⁴⁰ The presence of all nations at this event is a fulfillment of the Abrahamic blessing in Gen 12:1-3.

⁴¹ See <https://www.hyattmoore.com/thelastsupper/> for Moore’s explanation on the background of the painting (accessed June 21, 2021).

about many tongues and many practices in an interfaith context.”⁴² With “pneumatological imagination,” he writes of “three strands” to anchor his arguments—the relationship between a theology of hospitality with a theology of religions in a pluralistic world, the employment of hospitality to revise Christian ideas and practice in the interreligious encounter, and the pneumatological framework that “holds together the other two strands.”⁴³ He addresses both Christians and non-Christians and argues for the “virtue of hospitality” to advance the “interfaith encounter.”⁴⁴ In an increasingly complex pluralistic and postmodern world, Yong’s theological work has much to contribute to Christian mission today.

The Holy Spirit’s hospitality is inclusive and transformative, and the Spirit empowers the restoration of humanity to wholeness. When believers welcome the Spirit as Divine Guest in their lives and offer him complete control of their lives, they can go beyond themselves to do things not thought possible. Dallas Willard writes, “by not walking in terms of the flesh but in terms of the Spirit, we are increasingly able to do the things that Jesus did and taught (Romans 8:4). We move toward the place where both the spirit is willing and the flesh is strong for God because the Spirit has now occupied *it*. We have presented the members of our body ‘as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification’ (Romans 6:19).”⁴⁵ The Spirit indwells the hearts of welcoming and willing believers and brings about a transformation that moves them toward Christlikeness in thought, word, and action.

Moreover, acts of hospitality corporately done by the Spirit and spirit are transformative, opening hearts to sense God’s presence in the moment. Amy Oden, who has written a sourcebook on hospitality in early Christianity, highlights hospitality’s spiritual

⁴² Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), iv, 99-128.

⁴³ Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor*, xiii-xiv.

⁴⁴ Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, xvi.

⁴⁵ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 166.

dynamics.⁴⁶ She surmises that “at its heart, the spiritual power of hospitality rests in simple presence,” and the practice of hospitality is a “spiritual discipline that directs our attention to God’s life, opens our hearts to participating in that life toward holiness and abundance . . . (an) opportunity to give our lives away in order to gain it, to lose it in order to find it.”⁴⁷

She writes that early texts detailing authentic Christian hospitality “draw our eyes not to the acts of host and guest, but to the presence of God and the grace that imbues all of life.”⁴⁸ Therefore, the “larger spiritual context of God’s movements in the world provides the landscape in which all kinds of things can happen . . . transformation of host, of guest, of community, even of creation, when hospitality is shared. No one is left unchanged.”⁴⁹ As such, acts of hospitality led by the Holy Spirit can bring about a restoration of life to all its God-ordained possibilities on a personal, communal, and societal level.

Conclusion

With its turn to relationality, the recent trinitarian renaissance calls to re-visit the doctrine because of concerns on its “continuity with and interpretation of the Christian tradition” and the “actual direction of Trinitarian application.”⁵⁰ This focus comes with increased efforts to relate the doctrine of the Trinity to various contextually pragmatic issues in society and to studies focusing on how trinitarian relations are

⁴⁶ Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 86-141.

⁴⁷ Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 30-31. See Matt 10:39, 16:25-26; Mark 8:34-39; Luke 9:23-27.

⁴⁸ Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 30.

⁴⁹ Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 30. A small act’s considerable impact is like the biblical analogy of the yeast, or perhaps the spiritualized version of the “butterfly effect.”

⁵⁰ Rian Venter, “Taking Stock of the Trinitarian Renaissance: What Have We Learnt?” *HTS: Theological Studies* 75, no.1 (2019): 1-2, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337634945_Taking_stock_of_the_Trinitarian_renaissance_What_have_we learnt (accessed June 9, 2021).

interpreted in the light of “theologies representing *marginalised voices*.⁵¹

In salvation history, the triune God extends divine hospitality to the Other – his creation, and in particular humanity. He astoundingly also receives hospitality from the human creature. In the interplay of roles between host and guest in the Trinity’s economies, the trinitarian members work for the redemption and restoration of a fallen world, and toward the final reconciliation of Creator with his creation in the eschaton. By using the lens of hospitality to the Other to examine trinitarian roles, the following insights distilled in the reflection will help believers respond appropriately to others, especially the marginalized, in their lives.

First, God’s hospitality is holistic. As Divine Host, the triune God provides, cares, nourishes, sustains, and protects his guests as a whole person–body, soul, and spirit. Likewise, God’s people who minister to the Others are to do so holistically. For example, even though dedicated ministries such as feeding the poor are necessary and helpful, much more can be accomplished when synergistic partnerships form with others ministering in areas such as advocacy, medical, and counseling, pastoral or otherwise. A multi-dimensional approach is required to address the systemic nature of individual and societal needs. Thus, a kingdom mindset toward ministry is essential for partnerships to develop.

Second, God’s hospitality is also empowering, and he provides guidance that helps his people make good choices in their lives. It is noteworthy that God’s hospitality to his guests is not based on control and obligation but out of love. The triune God involves his people in his work, despite their human limitations, and imbues dignity and meaning into their lives through this empowerment. When God’s people extend hospitality to others, especially those who are marginalized and disenfranchised in society, they need to be aware of and work at the dynamics between empowerment and control. Despite

⁵¹ Venter, “Taking Stock of the Trinitarian Renaissance,” 2.

good intentions to share the gospel, there is an unconscious tendency to obligate others into the kingdom. Authentic hospitality should reflect the unconditional love of God and be divest from power and control. John the Baptizer's words, "He must increase but I must decrease" (John 3:10) are pertinent for believers to exalt Christ and not themselves in encounters of hospitality, especially where there is an asymmetrical distribution of power and status between host and guest.

Third, God's hospitality to the Other involves presence. Hospitality and communion are intricately linked, and the triune members are hospitable by their perpetual communion with each other. Scripture reveals their hospitable presence in communion with man through their attentiveness and consideration. In a fallen world, God listens to the cries of his people and is a refuge, an ever-present help for those in times of trouble (Ps 46:1). God's people can realize his presence when they extend hospitality to the Other. Although, in many instances, it is easier to support someone else by proxy or just by using finances, presence demonstrates authentic hospitality. This hospitality found in coming alongside the Other is often costly in terms of time and effort, making it all the more valuable.

Fourth, the hospitality of God is inclusive.⁵² God will continue to extend his hospitality to outsiders—those living on society's margins or not belonging to any collective at large. In the Asian worldview, kinship, clanship, and family ties often result in clear boundaries between who is in and out of the fold. Even Asian theologians have used the metaphor of family to articulate trinitarian thinking, which helps believers who come from family-oriented cultures.⁵³ While these contextual efforts are laudable, perhaps the more challenging work of thinking through God's relation, and

⁵² The focus here is on the extension of hospitality and not on the response to it. For example, God's hospitality is for all, but there will be those who reject this hospitality. Therefore, God's hospitality extends also to the terrorist, gay, transgender, atheist, and others.

⁵³ George N. Capaque, "The Trinity in Asian Contexts," in *Asian Christian Theology: Evangelical Perspectives*, eds. Timoteo D. Gener and Stephen T. Pardue, Asia Theological Association (Cumbria, UK: Langham Publishing, 2019), 75-79. Also, see Lee Jung Young, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996).

subsequently the believer's relation, with the broader human family in all its cultural and religious plurality remains.

Asian believers in particular need to be aware that there are many "questionable" biblical examples when God offers his hospitality to "undeserving" or marginalized individuals with surprising (positive) consequences.⁵⁴ God sees the human heart in a way that is different from how humans see it (1 Sam 16:7). With this reality in mind, God's people need to be reflective of their attitudes and motives. Do they extend hospitality only to like people? Do they have varying standards of treatment toward different kinds of people? Does race, culture, or social status affect who and how they practice hospitality? The reflection highlights the element of choice. God chose to become a guest in our world. Will God's people humble themselves to become a guest in the world of the Other?

Last but not least, the hospitality of God is transformative. He effects change in people through his role as host, as well as guest. Likewise, on the human level, hospitality encounters bring about transformation in both the host and the guest. When God's people practice authentic hospitality, the dynamics between host and guest leads to a change in thinking and a broadening mindset. When God's people willingly and humbly invite the Other to enter their "narrow, provincial worlds," they find that the "stranger does not simply challenge or subvert our assumed world of meaning; she may enrich, even transform, that world."⁵⁵ When the hospitality is genuine and unconditional, the guest will also be impacted and changed by the interaction. These are just some of the insights on the Trinity's hospitality for God's people to consider. While these insights are by no means exhaustive, they point the way to how God's people can emulate

⁵⁴ "Underserving," as in the eyes of the beholder. In Asia, a person's social status often determines how others treat him or her. Narratives of God's hospitality to the marginalized in scriptures include Rahab, the prostitute and foreigner (Joshua 2); and Ruth the Moabitess, who was a foreigner in Israel during the dangerous times of the judges, when "everyone did as they saw fit" (Judg 21:25).

⁵⁵ Thomas Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger: Dimensions of Moral Understanding* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 3.

his generous hospitality, live a worthy life, and be a blessing in a world they share with the many Others.

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