

JUSTICE FOR THE OTHER: RE-IMAGINING THE HOSPITABLE SELF
IN GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

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“Hospitality is the ethical praxis of God’s justice.”¹ – Carol Dempsey

In the fourth chapter of Luke’s gospel, Jesus succeeds at a task which has confounded countless pastors and church boards: laying out a clear statement of mission that is true to the scriptural narrative. Jesus, newly baptized, tested, and full of the power of the Spirit, returns to Galilee and standing before the Jews in Nazareth, Jesus reads the Isaiah scroll:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’²

Rarely have we seen a clearer statement of mission and picture of God’s salvific plan for creation through Christ. Jesus’ activity in the Father’s salvific plan for creation is aimed at the poor, the prisoner, the blind, and the oppressed. The mission is one of restoration for all of creation in the vision of Jubilee, where the people of God welcome all who are wearied by the injustice of the world to join in the Sabbath celebration of rest in God’s provision and goodness. Strangers, aliens, orphans, widows - even the land and the animals - participate in that Sabbath rest. Despite the celebratory nature of the Jubilee, unfortunately, Jesus’ announcement to the people of Nazareth resulted in the first attempt on his life.

Curiously, Western Christians continue to struggle with this clear mission of God’s salvific plan for creation. The Isaiah text from which Jesus reads addresses seeking justice for the other. Modern Christianity, however, has been characterized by a “deep individualism that isolates us from one another,” by separating the self from the other.³ In a post-enlightenment context, salvation has often been conceived as a work done for a collective of individuals, and as such, is thought to affect the eternal soul of the individual and have little or nothing to do with the material world, the communities in which the individual participates, or the environment the individual inhabits. Consequently, Christians are encouraged to tend to the non-material and neglect the justice which Jesus so clearly demands in Luke 4.

Popularized modern soteriology, in which God sent Christ to pay the ransom for our sin and save individual souls from torment, is difficult to trace back to one particular thinker, event, or paradigm shift. Certainly, Descartes will take much of the credit. After Descartes, ontology is

¹ Dempsey, Carol. *Justice; A Biblical Perspective*. St Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008. 53

² NRSV Luke 4:18-19

³ Smith, James K.A. *Who’s Afraid of Post Modernism; Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006. 56

constituted on the individual's capacity for self recognition; being-for-the-self. Subsequently, any word one might say about God's salvific plan is assumed to be directed at individual selves, who are largely disconnected from the one another.

The modern depiction of the self, which has grave implications on Christian participation in the salvific plan of God for creation, does not align with the Triune Godhead confessed in Christian creeds. The life of God, three unique persons in one Godhead, is an ever giving exchange of love.⁴ The distinct life of the Trinity encourages both separation and unity. God, who is radically Other-than creation, has always been creating space for the other and welcome the other without coercing or assimilating otherness into sameness; being-for-the-Other. Cartesian ontology does not allow for such hospitality. Nor does the Cartesian "self" comprehend the salvific mission Jesus set out in his reading of the Isaiah scroll before the people of Nazareth. Like the Nazarenes of ancient Galilee, Western Christians wrapped up in modern conceptions of self-hood continue to writhe under the radical words of Jesus.

In order to reimagine the conversation around God's salvific work in creation, Cartesian ontology cannot rule the day. A different understanding of the self born in the image of God is necessary to capture the fullness of salvation as depicted in Luke 4. The danger in attempting to dethrone Descartes lies in the human propensity to create new idols. Therefore, the task at hand must first begin with the life of God rather than creation and second, be approached with great humility.

The following work proposes to reimagine God's salvific plan for creation in light of a hospitable self, a move which seeks to rehabilitate the post-Enlightenment notions of the self as autonomously constructed. As we have seen above, the relational life of the Trinity itself is the hospitable framework in which the self is understood in proximity to the divine Other. Thus, to understand God's work in creation as hospitable suggests that God's *work* is not divorced from God's *being* but that the former is essentially linked to the latter. Likewise, to understand the creature as a hospitable self also concludes that creation is the handiwork of a generous God and bears the marks of a gracious creator. In this mode, we shall see that the enactment of and participation in Jesus' mission in Luke 4 requires a self which is constituted by its proximity and responsibility for the other – a self which is truly hospitable. Such a task will be supported by the work of Emmanuel Levinas, who has contributed much to the development of the concept of self in the face of the other. We will then see that Hans Boersma's reappropriation of Irenaeus' recapitulation theory will provide the framework for understanding salvation as divine hospitality. Finally, I will demonstrate that hospitality must be embodied through communal and personal practices of the church, seen particularly in the work of the Catholic Worker Holy Family House.

⁴ Milbank, John. *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*. New York and London: Routledge, 2003.

Hospitable Self

As noted earlier, the aim of discussing the self is a way to locate the self in the life of God. Hospitality always suggests two participants: host and guest. However, in hospitality the center of gravity lies neither in the home nor the stranger, neither in the host nor the guest, but in the God of both who is discovered redemptively in their meeting.⁵ Pursuing the hospitable self as a means to an understanding of salvation aligned with Luke 4 must begin and end in the life of God. The following examination is more interested in how an understanding of self in terms of hospitality frees us to reconsider God's salvific plan for creation, rather than unpacking a full argument for the hospitable nature of God. However, the self always stands before the Absolute Other, to whom the self is and must be given.

Self and Other

Conversation around hospitality easily lends itself to abstraction and obscurity. Levinas' location of the self in the *face* and hospitality in the *home* is most helpful in grounding the concepts in some sense of particularity. The face is that which is common to all humans and yet it is our face which uniquely marks each one as distinct from all other humans. Community and individuality are seen in one feature. Furthermore, it is two faces that meet when the self encounters the other.

The hospitable self, briefly put, is the face of one who is faced by the other and begged to extend a gracious welcome. The very being of the self is constituted by the encounter with the other. In the Christian affirmation of creation *ex nihilo*, the being of the cosmos is called into existence before the One who is radically other. It is in this encounter that the self is born. In other words, "I am," not because I think but because "I am" before the other. Therefore the hospitable self is not an isolated autonomous individual, but constantly permeated by the other while both parties retain separation.⁶

The hospitable self is much like David Ford's description of the Psalmist who speaks as an "I" and yet joins in songs of praise with a chorus of different voices, faces, and stories. "To see the faces of the others who perform their identity through singing the psalms" is a practice of the hospitable self recognizing both its uniqueness and the extent to which the self is held captive by the other for whom "I" am responsible.⁷ To say that salvation understood in terms of the hospitable self is communal rather than individual would over simplify the deep implications for selfhood, uniqueness and welcome we find in hospitality. Having made that disclaimer, the hospitable self is never isolated but always faced with the other. Therefore, the communities in which the self participates and finds identity cannot be disconnected from persons. "I" am not without the other.

⁵ Reynolds, Thomas E. *Vulnerable Communion; A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Books, 2008. 243

⁶ Levinas, Emmanuel: *Totality and Infinity; An Essay on Exteriority*. Pittsburg, PA; Duquesne University Press. 1969. 104-105

⁷ Ford, David. *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 127

The relationship between the self and the other, for Levinas, is marked by desire. Desire draws the self toward the other. Yet, the hospitable self does not assimilate the other into sameness with the self, just as a truly gracious host does not coerce the guest. As Levinas writes,

The other metaphysically desired is not “other” like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate, like, sometimes, myself for myself, this :”I”, that “other.” I can “feed” on these realities and to a very great extent satisfy myself, as though I had simply been lacking them. Their *alterity* is thereby reabsorbed into my own identity as a thinker or a possessor. The metaphysical desire tends toward *something else entirely*, toward the *absolutely other*.⁸

In the presence of God, (who is for Christians the Absolute Other) the other does not exist for the satisfaction of the self. Rather, the other calls the self to an ethical response. Simple proximity without relationship requires no ethical response toward the other at all. The relationship between the two separated parties is found in the dynamic of desire, desire for the other. Desire gives birth to the recognition of being-for-the-Other.⁹ And this desire turned into being-for-the-Other ultimately turns the self from its interiority toward a radical exteriority, an orientation toward the other.

The ethical exteriority of the hospitable self marks this concept of self by certain practices which embody a concern for the other over the self. This reaffirms the earlier statement that the hospitable self is constituted in the other. It is the other that makes the self a communal being, not the self’s need for social contact or personal relationships.

The neighbor concerns me before all assumption, all commitment consented to or refused.... It is not because the neighbor would be recognized as belonging to the same genus as me that he concerns me. He is precisely other. The community with him begins in my obligation to him. The neighbor is a brother.¹⁰

The hospitable self is deeply communal in nature because it is obliged to the other and follows the desire for the other into exteriority. Any claims made about salvation must involve this most basic relationship between the self and other.

The Place of Hospitality

The hospitable self, constituted in an encounter with the other must be localized in a particular place and context in which the encounter occurs. For Levinas, the hospitable self is localized at the site where food and shelter are offered, in other words, the home – a particular place for a

⁸ Levinas, TI. 33

⁹ Ward, Graham. *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 165

¹⁰ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being Or Being Beyond Essence*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991. 87

particular life.¹¹ Levinas writes, “No human or interhuman relationship can be enacted outside of economy; No face can be approached with empty hand and closed home. Recollection in a home to the Other” is the basis of hospitality.¹² Locating hospitality in the home suggests an intimacy and vulnerability when faced with inviting the other. The home is the place where life happens. Welcoming a stranger into the home always entertains the possibility that the stranger could take the very life of the host. But there is also the possibility that without this invitation, the stranger will die. When Lot welcomes strangers into his home, he saves their lives at the cost of his daughter’s.¹³ Hospitality is a delicate gift of life itself.

For Levinas, the encounter with the other in a particular place calls us to respond with an invitation. This invitation should be an act of justice on behalf of the other who is before me. The framework of hospitality routes this encounter in a particular place, sphere, community, polis, or politic but the result of the encounter should always be a just invitation or action for the sake of the other.¹⁴ Therefore the hospitable work of God on the behalf of creation is understood to extend beyond the interiority of the self and take seriously the exterior places and communities where the other is encountered.

Responsibility

The event in which the self is faced with the other requires a response. Will the other be welcomed as a gift or totalized into sameness with the self; myself for myself rather than being-for-the-other? Will justice be pursued for the sake of the vulnerable other even at the expense of the security of the self?

The face of the other begs for justice with every available energy the self contains. The hospitable self is responsible for all the resources at one’s disposal and “counters any tendencies to separate body and spirit or to play down corporeality or materiality.”¹⁵ The encounter is a call to empty ones self for the other. Self emptying doesn’t take place merely psychologically or emotionally, but in the unconditional giving of all that a person is and possesses for the sake of the one who requires justice.

Hospitality dares to pry away any possession to which one might claim a right or ownership. Inviting a stranger to briefly partake of possessions which are already spoken for, smacks of a conditionality which true hospitality cannot afford. As Edith Wyschogrod writes,

¹¹ Wyschogrod, Edith. “Autochthony and Welcome” *Derrida and Religion*. Ed. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart. New York, NY: Routledge, 2005. 56

¹² Levinas, TI. 172

¹³ While this is an example of the vulnerability of hospitality, further studies in hospitality lead us to affirm that the host is obligated to protect the vulnerable ones in ones own household. Lot sacrificing his daughters for the sake of the strangers is not an ideal hospitality but of vulnerability that comes with hospitality. However, hospitality in the home suggests not only vulnerability but also, accountability to the particular community that shares this space.

¹⁴ Wyschogrod, 58

¹⁵ Ford, 44

When [hospitality is] conditional, the mastery of the host is asserted, in that it is he who invites, whose house, city, and nation control the relation to the guest. When hospitality is unconditional no invitation is issued. The other, his coming a pure surprise, simply arrives and is welcomed with no thought given the possible consequence.¹⁶

Being faced with the other releases the self of all claims and rights to possessions, privilege, or association. Much like a catechumen before baptism, the self is stripped of all that would identify and secure selfhood and is truly opened to the other in this unconditional welcome.

Welcome, for the hospitable self, is always in pursuit of justice for the other. Carol Dempsey argues that the New Testament writers, particularly Matthew and Paul, call readers to a hospitality of the heart which avoids interiorizing the alterity of desire for the other. She argues, "...a hospitality of the heart that not only welcomes all life but also works to sustain it and free it from the jaws of injustice is absolutely necessary if the web of violence is to be broken, and the vision of 'new heavens/new earth' is to be realized."¹⁷ Dempsey rightly recognizes the call to justice for the other is eschatologically oriented. Derrida and Levinas both decline to assert that true hospitality is presently practically possible between two strangers. Likewise, Christian eschatology often looks far too much like the practical pessimism we see in Derrida and Levinas. However, if we think in terms of the God's hospitality toward creation, there is a real possibility that as we welcome God's kingdom, we hopefully anticipate and even participate in God's vision of Jubilee.

Salvation

Understanding salvation in terms of the hospitable self assumes both the abundance of God as the Absolute Other and gracious host. Salvation for the hospitable self does not comprehend accounts of salvation which function deterministically out of limitations placed on God. An example would be atonement theories which claim there was only one way for God to save creation, i.e. to give the only perfect sacrifice: Jesus. Salvation for self who is faced by the other is a measure of the awesome plenty the host provides. Additionally, salvation in terms of hospitality takes seriously the self as constituted by and in communion with the other, the self in a particular place, and the responsibility for the other.

The place of salvation is the kingdom of God breaking into creation. In Reynolds' consideration of hospitality offered to the disabled, he notes, "In the kingdom of God all persons are gifts to be welcomed, not simply because of neediness but because each human being is loved into being by God in the image of God... It is not scarcity that governs the Kingdom of God but abundance."¹⁸ Likewise, God offers salvation not out of a scarcity which drives the Son to the cross, but from an abundance of love for creation. Christ's body is the ultimate host, laying claim to nothing, not even life itself, but giving up everything for the sake of the other. The hospitable self is both a recipient of God's gift of salvation as well as a gift of hospitable selfhood offered back up to God through welcoming the neighbor.

¹⁶ Wyschogrod, 59

¹⁷ Dempsey, 46

¹⁸ Reynolds, 219

While so much of scripture points to the abundance of God's love for creation, so much of Christian history has understood salvation in terms of violence, ransom, and penalty. Hans Boersma struggles with soteriological questions which quietly welcome Levinas as a conversation partner:

Can we really speak of Divine hospitality and cruciform hospitality? Or is the violence of exclusion always present? And does this violence render the cross the ultimate instance of divine violence rather than divine grace? In that case there is no hope that the communal practices of the Church could be manifestations of Divine hospitality... Could it be that violence and exclusion are inscribed in the very heart of the Church's faith: in the divine face of violence on the cross? ¹⁹

If, as Anselm and Abelard assume, the cross is the sole salvific act, it is very difficult indeed to glimpse hospitality through violence. Boersma engages a rare ancestor of the faith who holds a view of selfhood unaffected by Augustine and subsequent Western ideology. Irenaeus' theory of recapitulation opens an avenue toward a more holistic and hospitable understanding of the work of Christ.

Irenaeus holds that Jesus is the recapitulation of Israel and all humankind. Where Israel failed, Christ succeeded. Where Adam died, Christ lives on. Violence and death were a part of the created order's historical and temporal limitations. Jesus' obedience in life and death is the means by which Christ triumphs over sin and death.²⁰ Jesus lived as the obedient, true human being in a way that Adam and all of Israel could not. In doing so, Christ opens up the possibility for all creation to share in his victory. Therefore it is not only the death of Christ but also the life and resurrection, by which we are saved and welcomed into the life of the Trinity, the kingdom of God.²¹ Redemption looks like a welcoming; an empowering act of divine hospitality.²²

When salvation is understood as hospitality, opening up the possibility for creation's redemption, a vulnerability lurks. Salvation is a gift which can be received or rejected. As Boersma states the case, "God's redemptive move of hospitality can only have the desired effect of homecoming if and when human beings look to Christ as their example."²³ In other words, hospitable salvation is a gift which must be received in order to be life-giving, much like John Wesley's charge to respond to grace.²⁴

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ Recapitulation is uniquely at home in Wesleyan theology. In contrast to substitutionary atonement, Wesley also emphasized the merciful grace of God that pardons us through the merits of Christ's obedience. Maddox, Randy. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press/Kingswood Books, 1994. 169

²¹ Boersma, 124

²² Reynolds, 19

²³ Boersma, 126

²⁴ It seems to me that this point finds a way around the Calvin/Wesley debate of election and works. God is the only one to extend the gift but we must receive it. However, Boersma goes into great detail defending Calvin's view of election as means of God's hospitality. The argument is well made. I simply wonder if it was necessary.

Hospitality “bears a relational vulnerability that exhibits the unseemly power of God in human weakness and in ability.” It is the display of God’s redemptive work as seen in Christ, manifest, not in power, but in vulnerability.²⁵ The giver of gifts always stands vulnerable before the recipient just as the host is always opened to the guest in vulnerability.

The reception of the salvation gift is not only an interaction between an individual and God. The hospitable self receives salvation from the Other on High as that self is faced with the other who is her neighbor. Luke 10 ought to come to mind at this point. When Jesus is asked how one might receive eternal life, the original inquirer is pointed to the law: loving God with all your heart mind soul and strength and loving neighbor as yourself. Then Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, in which we realize that the face of the other in need is where Jesus points creation to see God. Just as the self is constituted in the encounter with the other, so is salvation caught up in our pursuit of justice for the other.

For salvation in terms of the hospitable self to encompass justice for the other, there must also be redemption of the place where welcome is extended to the other. As strangers who have received welcome into God’s kingdom, we delight in the goodness of God’s created world. Our earth is the most general and yet most particular place where we both receive and extend hospitality. Therefore, redemption should also extend to the earth. Sadly, when it comes to humanities relationship with the earth, we find ourselves faced with this other and fighting the temptation to consume her. But if we are to participate in God’s salvation, we must answer the call to seek justice for the environment. Destroying the earth not only diminishes the home in which we welcome the one in need, it practices the very self-absorption which cannot engender hospitable living. The Israelites understood their call to care for the land through the practices of Jubilee as life giving for the community and the strangers she welcomed. Care for the earth is life giving to both stranger and guest and points to the God who is discovered in this redemptive meeting.²⁶

Salvation re-imagined in terms of the hospitality and the hospitable self is a generous welcoming into the kingdom of God where the other, the strangers, the one in need of justice, finds redemption personally, communally, and environmentally. Irenaeus’ theory of recapitulation lays the ground work for an understanding of salvation that is much more than a pardon from sin and interior act for the soul. Just as Christ has recapitulated all of humanity through his life, death, and resurrection, so are we invited completely into the divine work of redemption. The salvific plan for creation as declared by Jesus in Luke 4 and embodied by his ministry, death, and resurrection, is an invitation to all of creation to participate in the coming of the Kingdom of God. God’s hospitality opens up possibilities of renewal through the communal practices of the church which bear the marks of divine hospitality.²⁷ Therefore hospitality must entail concrete communal practices which reflect the welcome God extends to creation in Christ, through the Spirit.

²⁵ Reynolds, 20

²⁶ Reynolds, 243

²⁷ Boersma, 121, 219

The Practice of Hospitality

Danny began his volunteer work at Holy Family Catholic Worker House nine months ago. He describes hospitality as being present with others and available to their needs. The house where he serves welcomes nearly two hundred people through their doors every day, serving breakfast and dinner with an open hospitality time in between. Prayers and mass also give structure to their days. It is particular places like these where we see salvation as divine hospitality unfolding. As this community encounters the other in need of justice, they respond with a gracious welcome.

Three components of the hospitable self will significantly come into play for the practice of hospitality: self constituted in the encounter with the other, creating space for the other, and the vulnerability of hospitality.

Encounter with the other

Speaking of the guests Holy Family welcomes each day, Danny says, “The more you get to know and love your friends, the more you want to fight on their behalf and would do anything for them.” They are working to break down invisible divisions between the volunteers and the “friends” or “guests” of the house. It is in the meeting of the two that the true community of Holy Family is constituted.

Danny and the community members of Holy Family House recognize that there are “dirty rotten systems” in our world that continue to oppress the poor. And there is a need to respond to such realities with hospitality. Danny and the Catholic Worker see social justice and hospitality intricately connected. When faced with the cries of the other the hospitable self must respond with justice. As the Holy Family house shares common meals with the poor and oppressed they forfeit an ignorance that might give them an excuse to neglect the present needs. In their relationships they are “working out a just way of relating with people.” Danny says that sometimes it is overwhelming and you wonder, “How far can I go? How much can I help?” but ultimately he is driven to do all that he possibly can. He doesn’t see himself as an autonomous individual, unaffected by the needs of others. Nor are his actions spurned by a desire for self-glorification. Rather, his deep connection with those who he ministers with and among, call him toward justice for the other.

Christine Pohl claims, “We rarely see the consequences of life-styles that have little room for strangers... We do not encounter the same soaked person the next morning or know that the one coughing at breakfast slept in the rain the past night.”²⁸ When we open our home and lives to others in need of shelter, food, and friendship, we encounter Christ who opened and shared himself for our greatest need.

Creating space for hospitality

When I asked Danny what kinds of hospitable practices he engages in at Holy Family House, he told me about “preparing to receive guests.” The actual practices he mentioned sounded more

²⁸ Pohl, Christine. *Making Room; Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns Publishing Co, 1999. 131

like chores to me. But he didn't see them that way. These were the practices that create space for the community to extend welcome to strangers and friends.

Hospitality never occurs merely metaphorically or transcendently. Hospitality requires space within which strangers are welcomed. Creating space for others can generate real complications. Eventually, every hospitable community is forced to ask questions about boundaries. Who can we serve and who can we not serve? When can we serve and when can we not serve? Pohl's research on hospitable communities shows that there is a need for boundaries. Yet, each community struggles to set them because boundaries are "concession to human finiteness, and they were never imposed without regret for the cost and loss involved."²⁹

To create hospitable space through boundary settings one must consider the hospitable nature of salvation. God works out salvation, not through lack or scarcity but through abundance. Therefore Christian communities must also approach the spaces marked out by boundaries with the mindset of God's abundance rather than one of scarcity of resources. Danny remarked that he was surprised, after only working at the Holy Family house for a few months, to see the abundance that was there. Occasionally, at a meal, they will run out of one food item but they have never run out of food. There have even been moments when they were concerned about a shortage just to find a friend at the back door of the house coming to bring more supplies. The Holy Family house almost never has to buy supplies. The challenge they face is, along with many other hospitable communities, knowing how best to distribute the resources they are given.³⁰ Creating space for the other out of the abundance of God, for Danny and the Holy Family house, is always a surprising gift of God's grace.

Vulnerability of hospitality

Understanding hospitality as a gift means that one cannot ensure welcome. Rather, knowing that we are welcomed by God in an act of super-abundance, we are invited to break our obsession with controlling and guaranteeing welcome and instead work in terms of the Spirit, who is by nature, gift.³¹ As we receive this gift, we are caught up into the life of God in an endless exchange of love.

Recognizing the delicate nature of the hospitable self is a humbling process. Last year, I taught a class on Christian hospitality to the adults at the church where I was serving. The class was well received and people were inspired to take action. Toward the end of the eight week class, we began to ask how our church could take small steps toward becoming a more hospitable community of faith. But the participants were constantly stunted by all the variables. The task of setting everything in place to guarantee the kind of efficient hospitality the members desired seemed impossible.

Perhaps it seemed that way because it is. Hospitality opens up a world of vulnerabilities for the guest, host, community, and resources. Often the answer to these difficult solutions comes in systematized, institutionalized hospitality: social services. As important as soup kitchens may be,

²⁹ Ibid, 128-129

³⁰ Ibid, 130

³¹ Reynolds, 241-242

the hot meal alone cannot completely welcome the other into the kingdom of God. Just as the kingdom is always breaking in but has not finally come, so to hospitality is not a thing which can be grasped and assimilated. But this vulnerable weakness should not be considered as an impairment of the Christian witness. Our practice of hospitality reflects the gracious welcoming of the Spirit's presence in our life as gift, surprising at every turn. Reynolds reminds us, "There is a strange logic to the Christian witness, one that gives testimony to a strength that comes through weakness, a wholeness that manifests itself in brokenness, a power that reveals itself in vulnerability. The logic here is paradoxical and subversive."³²

In the face of the other, one is always provoked to respond in justice. Hospitality is the ethical praxis of God's justice.³³ It is often tempting to relegate the practices of our faith to the dark corners of our interior life. William Cavanaugh's *Torture and Eucharist* depicts the dangers brought upon the Catholic Church in Chile when, "The kingdom hovers above history entering it only in the soul. Christians enter the temporal world as individuals; the church does not act as a body in the temporal realm. The church does not have a political body only a religious body a mystical body which unites all Christians above the rough and tumble of temporal."³⁴ The hospitable self refuses such a suggestion and points toward the visibility of the kingdom of God. Faced with the other, we are driven from our interiority toward a radical ethics of justice for the other. The gift of the Spirit is given witness as the recipients of God's gracious invitation are turned toward the other in such a way that radically alters social networks, environmental behavior, economic structures, and much more.

Concluding Thoughts

Thinking of our selfhood and even salvation in terms of hospitality is a humbling notion. Ultimately, humanity is not the host, but an undeserving guest in the Kingdom of God. Indeed, our self is called into being and continues to be constituted in the encounter with the other. And this encounter calls us to justice for the one in need. The kind of hospitality which welcomes just practices is always located in a particular place. Like the Holy Family House, the particularities of our home causes the hosting party to be concerned about the care taking of that space, on a small and large scale.

Understanding the self as hospitable is a way to understand our lives wrapped up in the story of God's salvation. However, it does not allow us to conceive of salvation solely in terms of pardon for an individual's soul. If salvation is a divine welcoming, we must look to the whole life, death, and resurrection of Christ as our source of life, as did Irenaeus, who rightly saw that Christ recapitulated all that God desires for creation. When we concern ourselves with justice for the other – preaching good news to the poor, freeing the prisoner, giving sight to the blind, release for the oppressed – we are participating in that salvation.

The Holy Family House is but one example of a community living out this missional call to welcome the stranger, understanding their hospitality to be intricately connected with God's justice. Daily, they live in the presence of the other, face to face with the cries of justice which

³² Reynolds, 19

³³ Dempsey, 53

³⁴ Cavanaugh, William. *Torture and Eucharist*. Oxford: Blackwell. 1998, 79.

flow from ones in need. Their response is a warm welcome and pursuit of wholeness. It is this welcome, which we see fully in Christ's life and death, which leaves an indelible mark on those who are vulnerable enough to receive it.

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