

# Hospitality, Pedagogy, and Mission: A Model for Christian Higher Education from Acts 8:26-40, 15:1-35, and 17:16-34

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

At several points in the Acts of the Apostles, Luke<sup>2</sup> narrates the spread of the gospel to Gentiles. In many of these cases, notably in Philip's interaction with the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40), in the deliberations of the Jerusalem council (15:1-35), and in Paul's missionary activities in Athens (17:16-34), the early Christians make use of several approaches to their evangelistic efforts. I will focus on two of these: hospitality and pedagogy. In this brief examination of the early Christian activity narrated in Acts, I will contend that Luke presents the early Christians in Acts as spreading the gospel through a confluence of hospitality and pedagogy in their evangelism. Moreover, I will suggest that this model of mission-driven hospitable pedagogy provides a robust framework to contribute to the flourishing of Christian higher education today.<sup>3</sup>

## Biblical Hospitality

Before turning to the three passages in question, a few comments on biblical notions of hospitality, which differ radically from modern impoverished views of hospitality, provide an important background for understanding issues of hospitality in Acts. Although biblical images of hospitality are rich and varied, at their core, they typically demonstrate a divinely-inspired bridging of differences.

Letty Russell suggests that the biblical witness proffers a richer understanding of hospitality than what she deems "traditional notions of hospitality—such as terminal niceness, charity without justice, and helping others with the underlying intent of making them become like us."<sup>4</sup> Russell points to stories such as Ruth's, where an outsider is granted inclusion, to illustrate that "differences are not hindrances and that God's welcome is a form of partnership with the 'other.'"<sup>5</sup> As Russell suggests, then, biblical hospitality often transcends and challenges modern understandings. Where modern views might suggest that hospitality is limited to serving dinner with the china plates instead of the

plastic ones, biblical perspectives on hospitality tend to emphasize the radical inclusion of those who would otherwise be marginalized.

Russell's observations lead to another conclusion as well: hospitality in the biblical tradition is an action of both human and divine origins. In the Hebrew Bible, God is frequently portrayed as offering the provisions for daily life in a way that suggests a model of hospitality (cf. Psalm 23; Psalm 104). John Koenig suggests that this image is confirmed, for example, in episodes such as Exodus 16-17 with God's provision of food for the Israelites in the form of manna from heaven.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Koenig makes the point that one "feature of hospitality that emerges from the OT record is Israel's deep sense of God as its host."<sup>7</sup> That is, riffing the author of 1 John, we practice hospitality because God first practiced hospitality with us (cf. 1 John 4:19).

This connection between divinity and hospitality emerges again in the four-fold witness to Jesus's own provision of miraculous quantities of food (Matthew 14:13-21//Mark 6:32-44//Luke 9:10-17//John 6:1-15). As one of the very few episodes preserved in all four Gospels, Jesus's feeding of the 5000 emerges as an important event in the early Christian memory of Jesus as a provider of hospitality.<sup>8</sup>

This divine practice of hospitality, then, may undergird the explicit calls for the human performance of similar acts. Later New Testament texts preserve encouragements for believers to engage in hospitable practice (1 Peter 3:9; Hebrews 13:2). Likewise, Acts 10:23 narrates Peter's own hospitality as he invites ambassadors from the Gentile (albeit God-fearing) centurion Cornelius to lodge with him. While this text does not include an explicit imperative, it may be intended to inspire emulation of the same practice.<sup>9</sup> Thus, as Koenig summarizes it, "hospitality, as understood in the New Testament writings, presumes a reciprocity between God's abundance and human acts of sacrifice."<sup>10</sup>

Throughout Acts in particular, the motif of hospitality is recurrent. Furthermore, this practice is often paired with the work of evangelism. As Andrew Arterbury posits,

[T]hroughout Luke's writings, Luke appears to lift up the custom of hospitality to his audience as an effective method for evangelizing those who are not Christians. Yet, while this is true on a general level, Luke appears to heighten his focus upon this social convention even more

when he treats the Gentile mission. As a result, Luke's audience should have been able to conclude that the most effective means of evangelizing the Gentiles in particular may be through the observance of the Mediterranean custom of hospitality. In addition, Luke's readers may have concluded that hospitality can play a helpful role in uniting Jews and Gentiles within the Church and transforming believers into people who better understand the will of God.<sup>11</sup>

Arterbury is undoubtedly correct in observing a connection between practices of hospitality and evangelism. Nonetheless, as will be demonstrated below, in some cases in Acts, this pair is augmented by a third element: pedagogy. In these cases as well, the work of hospitality appears to be ultimately motivated by a divine example.

In sum, hospitality in the biblical imagination connotes a divinely-inspired activity that involves the bridging of differences. Both within the context of ancient Israel<sup>12</sup> and the first-century Greco-Roman world,<sup>13</sup> hospitality played a major role in shaping social interactions and dictating appropriate behaviors.<sup>14</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that conventions of hospitality would be evident in the larger narrative of Acts, including the accounts of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40), the Jerusalem council (15:1-35), and Paul's speech in Athens (17:16-34).

### **Hospitality and Pedagogy in Acts**

With this foundation of biblical hospitality in mind, we turn to Acts to examine three episodes in which hospitality is linked to pedagogy in the service of evangelism. In each of these episodes, the evangelistic efforts of the early Christians is accomplished through a confluence of both hospitality and pedagogy.

#### **I**

#### **Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40)**

Acts 8:26-40 narrates a memorable encounter between Philip and a traveler heading toward Gaza. Being divinely prompted to travel down a deserted way, Philip encounters another traveler, an Ethiopian eunuch, reading from a scroll containing text from Isaiah 53. After Philip asks the traveler if he under-

stands what he is reading, this traveler invites Philip to join him in the chariot to explain the text (8:30-31). Following Philip's proclamation of the gospel, the traveler points out a body of water, and Philip baptizes him before being "snatched away" (NRSV) by the Spirit (8:36-39).

The narrative heaps up descriptors of this traveler: Ethiopian, eunuch, court official, treasurer (8:27). It is difficult to know how to refer to this unnamed individual given his many identifying marks. Indeed, as Tolonda Henderson observes, "[I]t is cumbersome to refer to him continually as the Ethiopian eunuch. While many commentators fall into a pattern of using one marker or the other, calling him either 'the Ethiopian' or 'the eunuch' would fundamentally undermine what I am trying to accomplish in this paper because it would emphasize one part of the character over another."<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, it is difficult to ascertain precisely where early readers of Acts would place him in the broad spectrum of ancient society, whether among the elite (as evidenced by his use of a servant-driven chariot, possession of a scroll, literacy, and high-ranking position) or among the underprivileged (as evidenced by his ethnicity and ambiguous gendering that would have excluded him from Jewish cultic rituals [cf. Deuteronomy 23:1]). In fact, an understanding of his "insiderness" or "outsiderness" would be determined, at least in part, by the intended audience of Acts. Where an ancient Ethiopian may have understood him as occupying a privileged position, a Jerusalem-born Jew may have had a very different understanding.

Nonetheless, it may be that the enigma of this traveler's identity is intentional. As Marianne Kartzow and Halvor Moxnes assert, "It is exactly in the intersection between ethnicity, class and gender/sexuality we may find the clues to understand his ambiguous identity. He is both high status and low status at the same time, and thereby breaks conventional patterns and confuses borders between identity categories."<sup>16</sup> Thus, as Kartzow and Moxnes observe, the Ethiopian eunuch resides at several social boundaries. As such, he may be viewed as an archetype for any potential convert.<sup>17</sup> This complexity of his identity allows him to assume a multiplicity of identities.

Given the Ethiopian eunuch's several identities, this narrative may include the implicit suggestion that hospitality is rightly conferred to *all* people as it demonstrates the practice of hospitality in a missiological encounter. What is surprising, however, is the origin of this hospitality. John Weaver suggests that

the hospitality here is primarily the initiative of the eunuch as evidenced by the eunuch's invitation for Philip to join him. Weaver notes,

Luke's use of the term 'invited' (*parakale*) to describe the eunuch's reception of Philip is a conventional marker of the ancient practice of hospitality, in which a host received the stranger or traveler for room and/or board in conformity with ancient codes for honorable behavior. Hospitality was often associated with the reception of new knowledge and insight in the ancient world, and, elsewhere in Luke-Acts, the disposition for hospitality is determinative of insight into the wisdom and plan of God. As a characteristic of reading, the eunuch's hospitality invites new insight into the meaning and significance of the text, enabling his reception of the gospel and leading to his obedient response in baptism.<sup>18</sup>

At least two of Weaver's observations are especially pertinent here: first, that it is the Ethiopian eunuch (not Philip!) who extends hospitality, and second, that the hospitable practices here are tied to an educational experience. Both observations deserve further comment.

The Ethiopian eunuch's invitation to Philip may challenge conventional ideas of hospitality. When hospitality is imagined as a privileged host's condescension to an inferior guest, it is tempting to see Philip as the practitioner of hospitality. For the intended audience of Acts, Philip could appear to occupy the more privileged social position insofar as he is already a Christian<sup>19</sup> (and thus, an "insider" from the perspective of the intended audience) and because he evidently possesses the requisite insight for understanding the text of Isaiah, a skill that the Ethiopian eunuch confesses to lack.<sup>20</sup> However, a definition of hospitality that allows only for a privileged host's service to an underprivileged guest is flawed. As theologian Letty Russell observes, "Being a misfit allows us to understand the meaning of hospitality and honor difference from the side of the stranger."<sup>21</sup> Thus, it is precisely *because* the eunuch occupies a position of marginalization vis-à-vis Philip that he is equipped to extend hospitality.

Beyond this observation that the "student" in this encounter is the host, it is also worth considering the confluence of hospitality and pedagogy in this episode. Indeed, the Ethiopian eunuch's extension of hospitality is not discon-

nected from this narrative's attention to issues of pedagogy. The missionizing moment that Luke narrates here is fundamentally an episode of education. The Ethiopian eunuch himself is engaged in an act of private learning as he reads the text of Isaiah (8:28). This private act, however, soon transitions to a group project whereby the Ethiopian eunuch initiates a dialogue about the text in question (8:34), and Philip exegetes the text (8:35). The narrative records no other impetus other than this act of learning and teaching to explain the Ethiopian eunuch's sudden desire to seek baptism (8:36). Thus, the pedagogical task is intimately tied to the evangelistic one.

Throughout this encounter narrated in Acts 8:26-40, it becomes apparent that Luke sees hospitality, pedagogy, and evangelism as different strands of the same tapestry. Elements of each of these practices are woven throughout this narrative to suggest that the successful conclusion of this account is due, in no small part, to the combination of these three practices.

## II

### **The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35)**

The account in Acts 8:26-40 could suggest that the nascent Christian community falls quickly into patterns of hospitality and inclusion. However, despite the measure of inclusion suggested by the episode in Acts 8, the unfolding narrative describes an ongoing concern about the incorporation of Gentiles into the burgeoning Christian group. This concern reaches its zenith in Acts 15 as early church leaders gather to discern what should be required of Gentiles who are joining these early Christians.

The question of Gentile inclusion within the emerging Christian group may appear, at this point in the narrative, to have already been resolved. After all, in Acts 10, Peter had already baptized the Gentile Cornelius. Likewise, in Acts 11, Peter provided a fitting defense for his actions and thus seemingly paved the way for future Gentile inclusion. The narrative seems to suggest that this question had already been asked and answered. So, when the issue of circumcision for Gentiles is raised at the beginning of Acts 15, the concern seems like an awkwardly placed backpedaling in the process of incorporating Gentiles. However, as Joshua Jipp observes, this seemingly awkward placement may be intentional on Luke's part. Jipp suggests, "The literary placement of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) is significant for Paul's mission to the Gentiles and

the continuing theme of divine visits and hospitality.”<sup>22</sup> Given the discernible theme of hospitality here, Jipp’s suggestion is appropriate.

Narrative placement aside, Acts 15 reports an important moment in the life of the burgeoning church. The Jerusalem council episode is sparked by an unnamed group who registers concern that Gentile believers are not being circumcised (15:1, 4). This anxiety provokes an all-encompassing gathering of church members and leaders to engage in communal discernment about how to proceed (15:6). The community listens to speeches from Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James who recommend a plan outlining base-level requirements for Gentile inclusion (15:7-21). These requirements include abstention from several things: idols, fornication, anything strangled, and blood (15:20; cf. 15:29; 21:25). As the proposal is deemed acceptable, a letter is drafted and sent off to an audience who proves pleased to hear its contents (15:31). Thus, in what could have become a potentially derailing event in the life of the early church proves, instead, to be a transformative encounter that enlivens the Christian mission.

This account of the Jerusalem council, like that of the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, demonstrates elements of both hospitality and pedagogy. Indeed, Acts 15:1-35 reveals hospitality in several ways: (1) in the narration of the episode itself; (2) in the process that the narrative describes; (3) in the final outcome as decided by the council.

A narrative analysis of Acts 15 suggests that Luke’s narrative structure itself may be an act of hospitality toward Gentiles. The question that is raised in this account concerns the extent to which Gentiles should be required to follow the Mosaic law. While this is a serious issue for the nascent church, Joshua Garroway suggests that there is much about the narrative structure itself that would undermine what may otherwise appear to be a significant challenge:

Luke deliberately organises his narrative in a way that postpones the discussion of circumcision for as long as possible. By allowing the Gentile mission to reach full steam before introducing the issue of circumcision, and by attributing its emergence to a delegation of second-wave Christians from the sect of the Pharisees, Luke acknowledges the presence in the earliest church of a contingent that favoured circumci-

sion for Gentiles while at the same time deligitimising that movement by portraying it as belated, extrinsic and pernicious.<sup>23</sup>

If Garroway is right, Luke's narrative strategy may be understood as an effort aimed at undermining the gravity of the demand that the Gentiles be circumcised and follow the Mosaic law (15:5). Thus, the narrative itself demonstrates a measure of hospitality toward Gentiles even as it narrates a challenge to such hospitality.<sup>24</sup>

The hospitality characteristic of this episode in Acts is evident beyond Luke's narrative strategy in narrating the episode. Rather, the process whereby the church reaches its final verdict is marked by a disposition of hospitality. Hyung Dae Park suggests that "an 'attitude of concession for encouragement and unity to form a better solution' is a characteristic of the Jerusalem council, along with the participants' other attitudes."<sup>25</sup> Park's assessment on this point seems accurate. After shared conversation (15:7), the council considers statements from Peter (15:7-11), the pair Barnabas and Paul (15:12), and finally James (15:13-21). According to Luke's narration, this time of debate and listening is even punctuated with times of (presumably reflective) silence. As Park describes the process that is narrated here, "[The council members] listen to others carefully and trust in the truthfulness of others' speech. They do not doubt their testimonies."<sup>26</sup>

Finally, in addition to demonstrating hospitality in the narration of the council and in the process whereby the council reaches their final decision, the account of the Jerusalem Council is evocative of a spirit of hospitality insofar as the decision that the council reaches allows for the possibility of the full inclusion of Gentiles. Had the council decided to require circumcision of Gentile converts, these early church leaders would have, in effect, created significant barriers to the integration of Gentile believers. Where Jews would not have needed to undergo any significant ritual act to join the community, male Gentile believers would have been required to undergo a substantial change in order to make the same move. Thus, the final decision to allow for the incorporation of Gentiles without the requirement of circumcision demonstrated an attitude of hospitality that created opportunities, not barriers, to full inclusion.

Where the demonstration of hospitality seems fairly evident in Acts 15:1-35, the connection to pedagogy in the Jerusalem Council episode is perhaps



less immediately apparent, especially in comparison to the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Nonetheless, pedagogy does play a role in this episode as well, most prominently in the speeches to the council. In Peter's speech, for example, Peter reminds his audience that he has been chosen as the apostle to the Gentiles (15:7). With this tactic, as C. K. Barrett remarks, "Peter appeals to common knowledge."<sup>27</sup> The strategy of starting instruction with an appeal to pre-existent knowledge can be an effective approach to learning.<sup>28</sup> Insofar as Peter is undertaking the task of educating his audience on the importance of including Gentiles without imposing burdensome "entrance requirements," Peter is undertaking a fundamentally pedagogical task.

Likewise, while the content of Paul and Barnabas's account (15:12) is not provided in the narrative, it appears that their stories from the mission field also serve an educative purpose. The narrative relates that before even arriving in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas have been engaged in on-the-road reporting in Phoenicia and Samaria (15:3). Thus, their additional commentary to the council is a continuation of what has evidently been both an educational and evangelical venture.

Beyond the pedagogy that is present in these speeches, existing pedagogy may have also contributed to the council's final decision. To the extent that public reading can be viewed as part and parcel of the pedagogical task,<sup>29</sup> it appears that the presence of adequate religious education could have contributed to the decision to allow for the full inclusion of Gentiles without the requirement of circumcision. As John Weaver explains,

The power of the practice of reading to reform and re-inscribe the ethnic boundaries of God's people is on full display in Acts 15. The reading of Jewish scripture and its availability to the Gentile Christians in the synagogues warrants new requirements for the Gentiles' inclusion within the Christian community. James' claim is that the Gentiles' hearing of reading in the synagogue is a basis for the Christian community's acceptance of the Gentiles without the requirement of circumcision. In this way, the act of reading reforms the Christian community by articulating a set of shared meanings (the Law of Moses), but also privileging a subset of these meanings (Leviticus 17-18) in order to reshape of [sic] the identity of the reading community.<sup>30</sup>

As Weaver understands it, James's argument that the law is regularly read publicly in the synagogues (Acts 15:21) is what finally clinches the argument that the Gentiles should be granted full inclusion without the imposition of a circumcision requirement. The council is evidently persuaded to extend hospitality because of existing good pedagogy.

Like the episode in Acts 8:26-40, then, the Jerusalem council episode of Acts 15:1-35 appears to reach a successful conclusion because of the combination of hospitality and pedagogy. As the early church discerns how to expand and how to manage its growing populations, these two features remain prominent in the church's mission practices.

### III

#### **Paul's Mission in Athens (Acts 17:16-34)**

As the narrative in Acts continues, the early church's mission and its inclusion of elements of hospitality and pedagogy persists as well. Acts 17:16-34 narrates Paul's encounter with the Athenians and his speech at the Areopagus. Paul begins his missionary efforts in Athens by speaking to whomever will listen in the marketplaces (17:17), but his odd message quickly attracts enough attention that his audience requests to hear him in a more formal venue (17:19). At the Areopagus, the place of the meeting of the philosophers, Paul delivers an impassioned speech on the problems of human ignorance, and he proclaims the good news of Jesus's resurrection (17:22-31). These efforts yield a modest group of new converts (17:34).

The presence of a motif of hospitality is not as clear in this passage as in the accounts of the Ethiopian eunuch and the Jerusalem council. Nonetheless, the hospitality that is present emerges from a rather unexpected location. One might expect that Luke would cast the Christian missionaries in the position of being hosts. In fact, in the episode narrating the Jerusalem Council, Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and James adopt the role of "host" by extending an opportunity for inclusion and welcome to the Gentiles. However, as has already been observed in the case of the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, Luke does not shy away from casting Christian evangelists in the role of "guest." For example, Peter is a guest of Simon the tanner (10:6) when he encounters emissaries from Cornelius, and upon baptizing this Gentile audience, Peter is invited to be their guest (10:48). Likewise, after converting Lydia, Paul enjoys

her hospitality (16:15). In fact, Paul's role as guest even temporarily endangers his host Jason in Thessalonica (17:7).

The seemingly unusual switch in roles on the part of the Christian missionaries may, actually, comport with systematic theological articulations of hospitality, and this move from "host" to "guest" may not be surprising in light of a theologically-rich understanding of hospitality. As Letty Russell observes, "Hospitality is a two-way street of mutual ministry where we often exchange roles and learn the most from those whom we considered different or 'other.'"<sup>31</sup> Thus, while Luke's narrative is not a treatise in systematic theology, it nonetheless evinces an important theological articulation of mutual hospitality.

Given Russell's acknowledgement here, it is understandable that in the account of Paul's mission work in Athens the roles of host and guest appear to be reversed. To the degree that any element of hospitality is present in this episode, the "hosts" are the Athenians. Paul is merely the recipient of this hospitality.<sup>32</sup> In fact, it is the Athenians who engage Paul in debate (17:18), express an interest in hearing more about his teaching (17:20), and who react to his speech with a seeming appreciation for his message and desire to hear more in the future (17:32).

Where the element of hospitality in Acts 17 may be less evident than in the other narratives examined in Acts 8 and Acts 15, the presence of pedagogy is quite clear indeed. The pedagogical element of Paul's mission in Athens may be most visible in terms of his speech's audience and location. Luke specifies that Paul delivers his remarks to "Epicurean and Stoic philosophers" (Acts 17:18). That is, Paul's remarks are addressed precisely to those in the city tasked with educating and being educated. As Richard Pervo notes, even the location in Athens draws attention to the educational thrust of Paul's work. Pervo observes, "Although the essential elements of this speech were set out in 14:15-17 and gentiles have been among the converts since chap. 13, Luke has reserved his detailed justification/description of the theological means of this mission for the symbolic environs of Athens. This prepares the way for the eruption of the gentile mission in Corinth and its explosion in Ephesus and Asia."<sup>33</sup> Thus, although Paul's missionary endeavors in Athens achieve only modest success there (17:34), the fundamentally pedagogical task that Paul begins in the intellectual center of Athens<sup>34</sup> sets a foundation for future evangelistic success.

While the unfolding narrative will highlight future success, the initial response to Paul's teaching is not positive. In fact, the philosophers initially dismiss him as a "babbler" (17:18). The term that Luke uses here (σπερμολόγος) is etymologically related to the words for "seed" (σπέρμα) and "word" (λόγος), and the term itself is evocative of birds pecking at seeds.<sup>35</sup> In other words, this initial evaluation of Paul is not impressive. Nonetheless, as Beverly Gaventa notes, while "[t]his response scarcely constitutes a warm welcome...it does portray Paul as a legitimate proclaimer."<sup>36</sup> That is, the fact that Paul would even evoke a response from these philosophers suggests that he is viewed, in some way, as a fellow pedagogue, even if not a particularly gifted one.

This identification of Paul as a teacher is further underscored by the request of his "students" to continue the lesson (17:20). As C. K. Barrett comments here, "The verse suggests...a desire for information and enlightenment."<sup>37</sup> That is, Paul's audience seeks to be educated, and they recognize in Paul a teacher who can perform that task.

Paul's speech itself highlights the pedagogical nature of his task. By drawing the Athenians' attention to a particular religious structure devoted to "An Unknown God" (17:23), Paul implicitly suggests that the fundamental problem that the Athenians are encountering is one of a lack of knowledge. His speech, then, is aimed at correcting this deficit. Likewise, later in the speech, Paul mounts an argument for what the Athenians "ought not to think" (17:29). The issue, then, is a fundamental misunderstanding of appropriate thought patterns, and Paul aims to correct this misunderstanding through his educative encounter with the people.<sup>38</sup> The very fact that Luke includes the city's philosophers among these people (17:18) suggests a subtle irony in that Paul is placed in a position of educating fellow educators.

The ultimately pedagogical thrust of Paul's efforts become most apparent in his definitive plea in Acts 17:30: "While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent (μετανοεῖν)." The term "repent" here in English masks the Greek's philological connection to the term for "mind" (νοῦς). Thus, what Paul demands of the Athenians is not simply a guilty conscience or an abstention from wrongful behaviors, but a change of mind. Likewise, Paul suggests again that the Athenians' fundamental problem is simply a lack of knowledge.

Like the narratives of Acts 8:26-40 and 15:1-35, Acts 17:16-34 recounts a moment in the early Christian mission when hospitality and pedagogy combined to produce a satisfactory conclusion. In this text, Paul models a missiological approach that recognizes the power of education and the link between education and the Gospel. Thus, these texts may serve as a helpful foundation for reimagining the task of Christian higher education.

### **Hospitable Pedagogy: Implications of the Acts Model for Christian Higher Education Today**

Acts of the Apostles narrates several of the early Christian evangelists' efforts to spread the good news and to add to their numbers. These efforts take several forms, but the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40), the Jerusalem Council (15:1-35), and Paul's mission in Athens (17:16-34) highlight a similar confluence of two themes: hospitality and pedagogy. Thus, we might inquire: Why does Luke couch the success of the Christian mission in terms of the combination of hospitality and pedagogy? Or, put differently, why are the holy trinity of hospitality, pedagogy, and evangelism the successful recipe for Christian mission in the narrative of Acts?

Without being able to read Luke's mind, one can only speculate about the reasoning behind the choice to promote this tripartite recipe for success. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to imagine that Luke may have recognized that the practices of hospitality, pedagogy, and evangelism share in a common motivation to contribute to and improve the lives of those they impact. Insofar as Christian higher education today shares a similar motivation and demonstrates a similar commitment to elements of hospitality, pedagogy, and evangelism, it is worth inquiring how the model in Acts might inform contemporary Christian higher education practices.

The model of evangelism in Acts that combines hospitality and pedagogy suggests some implications for today's Christian educators. To be fair, the goal of the early Christian missionaries in Acts could seem rather different than the goal of most educators today. That is, most Christian educators are not actively trying to create proselytes to their own religious views. Nonetheless, there are certain similarities between the task of the early evangelists and of contemporary Christian educators insofar as a Christian worldview and a focus on pedagogy informs the work of both. Thus, the model of evangelism in Acts that

combines hospitality and pedagogy has much to contribute to an exploration of the theoretical underpinnings of Christian education today.

Not least among the implications of this text for Christian educators today is the suggestion to receive, not only extend, hospitality. In two of the instances examined here (Acts 8:26-40; 17:16-34), the missionaries, not the missionized, were the guests rather than the hosts in the model of hospitality that was present. Both the Ethiopian eunuch and the Athenians, to some degree, took on the role of host rather than guest in their encounter with the Christian evangelists.

This inversion of what might be the expected model (evangelist/educator as host) may lend itself to a more just and more wholistic conception of hospitality that can inform Christian higher education. Letty Russell argues that hospitality is “subject to deformation when it is practiced as a way of caring for so called ‘inferior people’ by those who are more advantaged and able to prove their superiority by being ‘generous,’ rather than using a model of partnership.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, in order to escape the potential for creating an environment of unhealthy power dynamics, Christian educators might do well to model their teaching after the evangelists in Acts who demonstrated a willingness to encounter the “other” in the inferior position of a guest rather than a host. What, then, might it look like to teach as if students are the ones who are inviting their instructors to the pedagogical task?

A framing of higher education as an act of hospitality extended from student to instructor has the potential to reshape the attitudes of both students and instructors. While “student-centered” approaches are to be appreciated for their valuation of learners, such approaches have the downside of occasionally devolving into a capitalistic consumer-driven approach where the “customer” is always right. By reimagining the student as a host, rather than a customer, higher education invests learners with the autonomy to play an active role in the learning process.

Likewise, imagining instructors in the role of guest could yield similar benefits. As guest, the instructor may more readily embrace a position of humility in relation to both their subject and their students. For Christian instructors especially, such a position would be consistent with biblical commendations of humility (cf. Psalm 18:27; Psalm 82:3; Proverbs 3:34; Proverbs 11:2; Zephaniah 2:3; Isaiah 66:2; Luke 1:52; Romans 12:16; James 1:9; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). In short, by exchanging what might be the expected roles in a hospitality

relationship, students and instructors alike can reimagine the task of education. In doing so, both parties can learn from what Christine Pohl recognizes as the complexity of hospitality relationships in which “[r]espect is sustained in the relationships in two related ways – by recognizing the gifts that the guests bring to the relationship and by recognizing the neediness of the hosts.”<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Pohl notes that it is precisely in these hospitality relationships where the host is “at the lower end of the social order” that the “most transformative expressions of hospitality” take place.<sup>41</sup>

The combination of hospitality, pedagogy, and evangelism that emerges in Acts offers another benefit to today’s Christian educators: encouraging them to live less divided lives. As Luke narrates the mission encounters discussed here, there is no sense in which the narratives differentiate among the tasks of pedagogy, hospitality, and evangelism. That is, the work of the Christian missionaries, while encompassing elements of all three of these tasks, is not divided. Although Christian educators today may not view their work *qua* educators as necessarily evangelistic, the model from Acts suggests that the act of teaching need not be falsely separated from the acts of hospitality and evangelism.

This implication, though illustrated in Acts, has been picked up more recently by Parker Palmer. In Palmer’s reflections on teaching, Palmer suggests that one of the marks of an authentic teacher is the ability to bring the teacher’s whole self to the task of teaching. This undivided approach to pedagogy, he posits, is essentially an issue of maintaining identity and integrity: “*Identity* lies in the intersection of the diverse forces that make up my life, and *integrity* lies in relating to those forces in ways that bring me wholeness and life rather than fragmentation and death.”<sup>42</sup> According to Palmer, then, good pedagogy is intimately related to the ability to live an authentic and undivided life. As Palmer puts it, “To live divided no more is to find a new center for one’s life, a center external to the institution and its demands.... The decision to live an undivided life, made by enough people over a long enough period of time, may eventually have social and political impact. But this is not a strategic decision, taken to achieve some political goal. It is a deeply personal decision, made for the sake of one’s own identity and integrity.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, an undivided life recognizes that the pedagogical tasks of Christian higher education are not disconnected from the tasks of hospitality and mission that are enjoined of all Christians.

Moreover, as Quentin Kinnison observes, teaching invites students into the space of the classroom where educators often feel most at home. Because this space can feel foreign to students, Kinnison recommends a practice of hospitality that invites students into sharing with the educator in the undivided life. This could happen, Kinnison suggests, through educators revealing their own biographies and inviting students to share meals and family life in the educator's home.<sup>44</sup> Just as the Christian evangelists in Acts wove together their tasks of pedagogy, hospitality, and evangelism into a single tapestry, so too can Christian educators today be inspired to bring together these aspects of their vocation.

Even beyond the microcosm of classroom dynamics, the model from Acts has the potential to speak to larger institutional structures within Christian higher education as the inversion of host/guest expectations may invite a reimagining of larger university practices. Aaron Perry examines the account of the Ethiopian eunuch in particular to investigate its implications for leadership today. He argues, "Organizational leaders should develop rites and rituals that negate gender advantage and disadvantage, while maintaining gender as an integral portion of a person's identity and role. This work may include the sharing of narratives from all genders in similar positions to see what unique experiences and skills are helpful in the shared role."<sup>45</sup> While Perry couches his suggestions in a particular concern with gender, these recommendations could easily apply to several aspects of identity: ethnic, racial, national, religious, (dis)ability, among others. In other words, we might ask: How are institutions of Christian higher education recognizing differences and celebrating identity in their communities?

Such recognition of difference and celebration of identity can happen both within the microcosm of the classroom environment and the larger campus setting. Within classrooms, faculty can give students a voice in shaping reading lists and can invite students to share their own stories related to course material. Likewise, faculty can allow students to assume the role of "host" in places around campus, such as the cafeteria, student lounges, and coffee shops, where they may feel more comfortable than faculty offices or classrooms. Across larger campuses, attention can be given to the architecture, visual art, and language on signage to ensure that these elements of the campus environment project a hospitality in keeping with that displayed in Acts.



Indeed, this move to larger institutional thinking about hospitality is in keeping with the hospitality that Acts explores on a smaller scale. Reflecting on the place of hospitality within Christian higher education, Elizabeth Newman writes, “The vocation given to Christian institutions is the same one given to Christians individually.... The purpose of education is not only to acquire knowledge or skills, important though these are, but to become a particular kind of person.... [T]rue education seeks to transform persons in light of the true end of education: love and service of God.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, campuses that foster the combination of hospitality and pedagogy seen in Acts are well-equipped to exemplify their mission.

In the narrative of Acts, Luke presents the early Christian evangelists as achieving success in their mission while pursuing hospitality and pedagogy. Although the goals of Christian higher education are often articulated differently than the goals of the early Christians whose efforts are recounted in Acts, the model provided by these early evangelists can nonetheless inform Christian higher education today. Just as hospitality without pedagogy can devolve into superficial niceties, pedagogy without hospitality risks the degradation of learners. However, a hospitable pedagogy, informed by Christian values, practices, and mission, has the potential to shape and invigorate Christian higher education. Just as the hospitable pedagogy of the early Christian evangelists contributed to their success, so too can it contribute to the success of Christian higher education today.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This article arises from work that I presented at a panel presentation at the 2018 Council for Christian Colleges and Universities International Forum. I am grateful to my co-presenters, Kelly Chang (George Fox University), Aminta Arrington (John Brown University), and Ulrike Rikki Heldt (Dordt College) for stimulating my thinking on this topic. I am also grateful to faculty colleagues Darren Duerksen, Brian DiPalma, and an internal peer reviewer as well as my student colleague Sara Gurulé for offering helpful suggestions on earlier drafts of this article.
- <sup>2</sup> Although neither the Gospel of Luke nor the Acts of the Apostles name their shared author, “Luke” is used here as shorthand for “the author of Luke-Acts.”
- <sup>3</sup> This article enters into a strong stream of publications related to hospitality and Christian higher education. For example, Carolyne Call describes an experiment in practicing intentional hospitality within her classroom as she acted as a host for her students (“The Rough Trail to Authentic Pedagogy: Incorporating Hospitality, Fellowship, and Testimony into the Classroom,” in *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning* [eds. David I. Smith and James K. A. Smith; Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2011], 61-79). She credits her idea for this

experiment, in part, to Ellen Marmon, who enacted a similar experiment in an online environment (“Teaching as Hospitality,” *The Asbury Journal* 63, no. 2 [2008]: 33-39). Marmon’s work likewise informs Rebecca Burwell and Mackenzi Huyser’s article, “Practicing Hospitality in the Classroom” (*Journal of Education & Christian Belief* 17, no. 1 [2013]: 9-24). Elizabeth Newman has also done extensive work on hospitality, and her earlier work on hospitality in higher education (“Who’s Home Cooking? Hospitality, Christian Identity, and Higher Education,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 26, no. 1 [1999]: 7-16; idem., “Hospitality and Christian Higher Education,” *Christian Scholars Review* 33, no. 1 [Fall 2003]: 75-93) serves as a foundation for her more wide-ranging work on hospitality in both educational and ecclesial settings (*Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* [Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007]). Looking at the specific manifestations of hospitality in academic settings, John Bennett suggests that conversation can serve as a model for the practice of such hospitality (*Academic Life: Hospitality, Ethics, and Spirituality* [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008]). Similarly, Aminta Arrington points to the need for hospitality in an increasingly globalized setting (“Becoming a World Christian: Hospitality as a Framework for Engaging Otherness,” *International Journal of Christianity & Education* 21, no. 1 [2017]: 26-38). Offering an intriguing counter voice to this call for hospitality in a globalized setting, Rebecca Hernandez suggests that a model of hospitality alone may not go far enough for true inclusion (“Beyond ‘Hospitality’: Moving Out of the Host-Guest Metaphor into an Intercultural ‘World House,’” in *Thriving in Leadership: Strategies for Making a Difference in Christian Higher Education* [ed. Karen A. Longman; Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2012], 223-242). David Anderson frames his discussion of hospitality and pedagogy in terms of biblical hospitality in particular (“Hospitable Classrooms: Biblical Hospitality and Inclusive Education,” *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 15, no. 1 [2011]: 13-27). Thus, the present article joins a strong collection of scholarship on the topic while simultaneously contributing a decidedly exegetical and text-driven approach that has been under-utilized in previous studies.

- 4 Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God’s Welcome in A World of Difference* (eds. J. Shannon Clarkson and Kate M. Ott; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 98-99. Elizabeth Newman offers a similar critique of some modern conceptions of hospitality: “[T]o equate hospitality with generic friendliness or private service is to domesticate it. Such domestication distorts how extraordinary and strange Christian hospitality really is. Most fundamentally, hospitality names our participation in the life of God, a participation that might well be as terrifying as it is consoling” (*Untamed Hospitality*, 13).
- 5 Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 99.
- 6 John Koenig, “Hospitality,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 300. Christine Pohl also points to this episode as illustrative of God’s hospitality (*Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 16).
- 7 Koenig, “Hospitality,” 300.
- 8 Likewise, as Christine Pohl observes, Jesus also “urged his human hosts to open their banquets and dinner tables to more than family and friends who could return the favor, to give generous welcome to the poor and sick who had little to offer in return” (*Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 5).
- 9 According to Andrew Arterbury, Acts 10 as a whole “utilizes traditional hospitality terminology,” suggesting that Luke intends his reader to understand the exchange between Peter and Cornelius as one of hospitality (*Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in its Mediterranean Setting* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005], 11).

- <sup>10</sup> John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 130.
- <sup>11</sup> Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 11-12.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites: Fundamental Institutions* (London: A. & C. Black, 1927), 76.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. Joshua W. Jipp, *Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers in Luke-Acts: An Interpretation of the Malta Episode in Acts 28:1-10* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 59-130.
- <sup>14</sup> Even beyond the first century, early Christians continued to prize the important place of hospitality in their belief and practice. For a collection of writings about hospitality from writers in the early centuries of Christianity, see Amy G. Oden, ed., *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001). For a more developed theology and application of hospitality today, see Amos Yong, *Hospitality & the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008).
- <sup>15</sup> Tolonda Henderson, "'What is to Prevent Me from Being Baptized?': Reading Beyond the Readily Apparent," *Chicago Theological Seminary Register* 93, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 15.
- <sup>16</sup> Marianne B. Kartzow and Halvor Moxnes, "Complex Identities: Ethnicity, Gender and Religion in the Story of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40)," *Religion & Theology* 17 (2010): 199.
- <sup>17</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa says as much: "The Ethiopian is proleptic of all those who will be reached for God through the witness to the gospel" (*The Acts of the Apostles* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2003], 140.)
- <sup>18</sup> John B. Weaver, "Narratives of Reading in Luke-Acts," *Theological Librarianship* 1, no. 1 (June 2008): 29.
- <sup>19</sup> The use of the term "Christian" in the first century is problematic given the burgeoning religion's ongoing relationship with Judaism. Nonetheless, insofar as Luke himself twice uses the term (Acts 11:26; 26:28), I use it here, albeit with the caveat that it is a potentially problematic descriptor at this early historical point.
- <sup>20</sup> However, Philip may also retain a level of ambiguity in this episode. Philip is characterized as something of a lackey taking orders from an angel at the beginning of the episode (8:26-27). Furthermore, unlike the Ethiopian eunuch who rides his chariot, Philip is traveling by foot (8:30). Finally, Philip is simply snatched away when his divine boss decides that he has fulfilled his duties (8:39-40). Thus, Luke's characterization of Philip allows for the presence of some questions related to his status vis-à-vis the Ethiopian eunuch.
- <sup>21</sup> Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 13.
- <sup>22</sup> Jipp, *Divine Visitations and Hospitality*, 241.
- <sup>23</sup> Joshua D. Garroay, "The Pharisee Heresy: Circumcision for Gentiles in the Acts of the Apostles," *New Testament Studies* 60, no. 1 (Jan 2014): 22.
- <sup>24</sup> It should be admitted that the narrative hospitality here is a hospitality *only* shown to the Gentiles. That is, if we follow Garroay in his conclusion that Luke presents the opposition as "belated, extrinsic and pernicious" (*ibid.*), this opposition party is assuredly not receiving the same hospitable narrative reception. Thus, one might argue that this is not a case of narrative hospitality, but of narrative privileging. Nonetheless, even if Garroay's argument cannot stand, it remains the case that the content (if not the structure) of this narrative highlights the motif of hospitality, even if it is a preferential hospitality.
- <sup>25</sup> Hyung Dae Park, "Drawing Ethical Principles from the Process of the Jerusalem Council: A New Approach to Acts 15:4-29," *Tyndale Bulletin* 61, no. 2 (2010): 289.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

- 27 C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 713.
- 28 Susan A. Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 10-39.
- 29 Cf. Cynthia G. Slagter, "Approaching Interpretive Virtues through Reading Aloud," *Journal of Education & Christian Belief* 11, no. 2 (Autumn 2007): 95-107.
- 30 Weaver, "Narratives of Reading," 30.
- 31 Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 20.
- 32 As Amos Yong observes, Paul's role as a guest is in line with Jesus's own. Of Jesus, Yong suggests that he "characterizes the hospitality of God in part as the exemplary recipient of hospitality. From his conception in Mary's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit to this birth in a manger through to his burial (in a tomb of Joseph of Arimathea), Jesus was dependent on the welcome of others. . . . But it is precisely in his role as guest that Jesus also announces and enacts, through the Holy Spirit, the hospitality of God" (*Hospitality & the Other*, 101). Likewise, Yong observes that Paul follows in Jesus's footsteps: "As with Jesus and Peter before him, Paul is also both a recipient and conduit of God's hospitality" (ibid., 104).
- 33 Richard I. Pervo, *Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 430. Likewise, Justo González also notes that the presence of the Academy of Athens distinguished this location as a center of learning (*Acts: The Gospel of the Spirit* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001], 201).
- 34 As C. K. Barrett notes, "Many visitors came to Athens, some as serious students" (*Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 834).
- 35 Although there are no lexical relations between the term here and the vocabulary of Luke's parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-8), one may nonetheless detect a conceptual link between Paul's sowing of seeds among the Athenians with its meager harvest of converts (Acts 17:34) and the parable in which three-quarters of the seed fail to grow but a small percentage produces an unexpectedly abundant crop.
- 36 Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 249.
- 37 Barrett, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 833.
- 38 To some extent, Paul's aim here might not be unlike the author's own aim in penning this narrative. At the beginning of his Gospel, Luke admits that the purpose of his two-volume work is to contribute to Theophilus's education (Luke 1:4).
- 39 Russell, *Just Hospitality* 80.
- 40 Pohl, *Making Room*, 72.
- 41 Ibid., 106.
- 42 Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 13.
- 43 Ibid., 167-168.
- 44 Quentin Kinnison, "Making Room for Students," *Didaktikos* 2 (2018): forthcoming.
- 45 Aaron Perry, "Lift Up the Lowly and Bring Down the Exalted: Gender Studies, Organizations, and the Ethiopian Eunuch," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 14, no. 1 (2015): 64-65.
- 46 Newman, *Untamed Hospitality*, 139.