JESUS AND THE BANQUETS:
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN TRADITION
CONCERNING
JESUS’ PRESENCE AT BANQUETS
WITH
TOLL COLLECTORS AND SINNERS

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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ABSTRACT

The topic is approached from the perspective of table fellowship, the primary focus being Jesus’ commensality with toll collectors and sinners. The fundamental hypothesis is that Jesus typically arrived ἀκλητος at meals as an itinerant stranger, and that this explains the epithet “glutton and drunkard.”

Part One sets the parameters, and delineates the materials, methods, and approach adopted in the study. In Part Two, ancient traditions of hospitality and feasting are examined, providing the background material for exegesis of relevant NT texts in Part Three.

It is found that toll collectors represent hosts to Jesus, while “sinners” gain entry to meals as his umbrae. Both groups are eligible for the kingdom, as are παιδία, (young slaves/servants), who exemplify humility. Some possible reasons are advanced for Jesus’ criticism of Pharisees, but it is emphasised that they are not implicated in his death.

The importance of hospitality is indicated by the fact that reception of Jesus and/or his disciples necessarily entails an invitation to a shared meal. In contrast, merely giving alms to strangers/wayfarers who seek hospitality signifies rejection. Any such breach of hospitality mores will incur harsh punishment at the final judgment.

The supposition that Jesus was a guest at the Last Supper allows for an innovative interpretation of his words and actions, particularly since it is proposed that as well as the Twelve, ἀκλητοι were present, viz. women, slaves/servants, and possibly Gentiles.

It is suggested that the depiction of Jesus in the Synoptics may have been influenced by a pre-existing literary archetype that facilitated the combination of some fictional characteristics with historical elements. The proposed reconstruction of the historical Jesus demonstrates the centrality of hospitality, commensality, and humility in his teaching and practice, a finding that is consistent with the ideals and table fellowship of early Christian communities. The apparent dichotomy between hospitality and hostility indicates a need to follow Jesus’ injunction to love one’s enemies, i.e. to practise φιλοξενία.
In loving memory

of

Alan and Hilda
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Bibliography
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ABBREVIATIONS AND STYLE

As far as possible, the abbreviations and style employed in this work comply with the guidelines provided in Patrick H. Alexander et al., eds, *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999). However, Australian rather than American spelling is utilised.