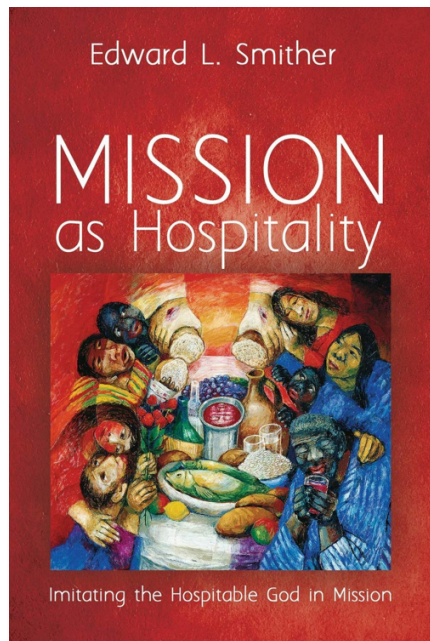


REVIEW: *Mission as Hospitality: Imitating the Hospitable God in Mission* by Edward L. Smither

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REVIEWED BY
JESSICA UDALL

Smither, Edward L. *Mission as Hospitality: Imitating the Hospitable God in Mission*. Eugene: Cascade, 2021. viii + 139pp, ISBN: 978-1-7252-5731-3. \$20 paperback.



In his concise and engaging *Mission as Hospitality*, missiologist and professor, Edward Smither asserts that “Christian mission is a hospitable endeavor because God is hospitable” (p. 4). Hospitality, then, is not simply a practice of the church but an imitation of God, displaying his glory through echoing his welcoming character.

Chapter one and two of *Mission as Hospitality* cover examples of missional hospitality in the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the early church. Before delving into specifics, Smither frames the discussion in terms of hospitality: humans are invited and welcomed by God to know Him through the pages of Scripture, and by approaching Scripture with a desire to know God, believers are inviting and welcoming Him into their lives.

Employing a “hermeneutic of hospitality” (p. 8), the thread of missional hospitality is traced through stories that readily come to mind and some that are less obvious. In order to grasp the full meaning of Old and New Testament hospitality, Smither argues, all these examples must be “understood in light of God’s gracious hospitality at the Messianic Banquet to come” (p. 19).

Indeed, when the Messiah was on earth, his ministry was characterized by his hospitality toward sinners—both as host and as guest—that will continue even into the eschaton. After Jesus’ commission to his followers and ascension into heaven, “Hospitality became an important means for the young church to invite new believers into the community” (p. 45).

Chapter three cogently explains that “the Eucharist exists because of God’s mission” (p. 78). Smither points out that when receiving the Eucharist, a believer “is invited to a table,” just as the disciples were when Jesus first broke the bread and shared the wine during the Last Supper (p. 54). This chapter also explores the integral nature of celebrating the Eucharist as part of the mission of the growing church as seen in New Testament writings, the *Didache*, and Justin Martyr’s *Apology*.

Chapter four explores the hospitable aspect of the many-faceted history of monasticism, particularly focusing on the missionary monasticism which was characterized by the “value” of “neighbor-preferring love” which understood that when caring for a visitor, “their worship was not actually interrupted but simply took another form” (p. 97). The chapter concludes with biographical sketches of various monks and monastic groups who exemplified hospitable mission.

Chapter five surveys six more contemporary case studies of missional hospitality being practiced in the global church today. Smither delves into diverse examples ranging from a well-known haven for spiritual seekers in Switzerland to the little-known hospitable affinity between Brazilian missionaries and Arab Muslims growing in friendship in the Middle East.

Chapter six seeks to reflect upon the previous content and suggest applications for current-day missionary work in light of the fact that “Christian mission is inherently hospitable” (p. 118). By practicing missional hospitality, we are inviting others “to a feast that begins now and stretches on into eternity” (p. 127).

Mission and Hospitality concisely yet convincingly conveys that throughout Scripture, Christian history and the practices of the global church today are vivid examples of table fellowship being a key component in people receiving and rejoicing in the message of Christ. A strength of the book is its efficiency; clear and brief explanations, a strong logical flow and a robust bibliography mean a complex topic can be digested easily in a short period of time with options for studying further according to interest. Smither also goes beyond current literature on the topic of Christian hospitality in order to explore “the crossroads of hospitality and mission and the hospitable nature of Christian mission” (p. 6) so as to emphasize the importance and encourage the practice of hospitality in missionary efforts today.

Yet while engaged by the fast-paced nature of the book, I found myself pausing at a simple and almost offhand person example which concluded: “The ministry of hospitality begins when I deliberately stop what I am doing and say with a smile, ‘Please

come in.” This simple sentence effectively summed up the entire book and begged for more examples like it. Perhaps there was not space in this slim volume, but by leaving us wanting more, Smither uncovers a need for much more writing on the personal and practical outworkings of missional hospitality in the midst of the daily grind.