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**With and Without Boundaries:  
Christian Homemaking Amidst Postmodern Homelessness**

Brian J. Walsh, University of Toronto  
Steven Bouma-Prediger, Hope College

Home ... hard to know what it is if you've never had one  
Home ... I can't say where it is but I know I'm going home  
That's where the hurt is

U2, "Walk On," from the album *All that you can't leave behind* © 2000  
Universal International Music

**On the Problem of Boundaries**

"Secret video exposes plight of homeless" So read the headline in *The Toronto Star* on May 21, 2002. And there on the front page of the newspaper were pictures of body-to-body conditions in one of Toronto's homeless shelters. While the United Nations stipulates that refugee camps should allow for at least 4.5 to 5 square metres per person, here in this shelter as many as four people could be found lying in such a space. The problems here are complex and they go to the very heart of the character of our society. But they are also fundamentally problems of boundaries.

While notions of "personal space" are culturally constructed and differ throughout the world, it seems to be a universal human requirement that some sense of personal space is necessary for all people. Invasion of that space, transgression of such boundaries invariably causes tensions, often violence, and sometimes the spread of disease (especially tuberculosis in Toronto shelters). Indeed, one of the tragedies of homelessness is precisely the stripping of homeless people of all sense of boundaries so that "they have no stabilizing walls against which they can lean for the identity and security so critical for personal and family dignity."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline Westerhoff, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality* (Boston: Cowley Press, 1999), 15. It is for this reason that folks who work with street people are careful to recognize and respect

Boundaries, it would seem, are constitutive to life. Clear boundaries need to be established in order to determine the distinction between friendliness and sexual harassment. Churches and volunteer organizations working with children need to establish clear behavioural boundaries in the relation between adults and children. Professors must either have windows on their office doors, or those doors need to be kept open when they are alone with a student. Conflict of interest rules need to be established for the ethical conducting of our affairs in business, politics, the church and the academy. And any family knows that rules of the household - agreed, or if necessary, imposed boundaries - are indispensable if the home is to be a place of security and comfort for all.

But how do we talk about boundaries in a post September 11, 2001 context of a xenophobic “war on terrorism” and the American “Homelands Security Act”? When borders and boundaries are guarded with a fortress-like vigilance, fueled by an ideological demonization of the “other”, and when that other – “outside” our borders, “outside” the bounds of our civilization – is seen to be a force of “chaos” that would undermine the well-constructed and self-serving “order” established “inside” our geo-political, economic and cultural boundaries, then how can we meaningfully speak of boundaries and borders as necessary and good dimensions of human life together?

While these problems have been heightened since the tragic events of September 11, 2001 they are not new to anyone paying attention to postmodern discourse. Boundaries require categories of in and out and that means boundaries necessarily marginalize. An “other” who is not “in” is relegated “out” – on the margins of the space constructed by these boundaries.<sup>2</sup> And the

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what little boundaries they are able to erect around themselves - whether it be their grocery cart, doorway, park bench or squat in the woods.

<sup>2</sup> A quintessentially American metaphor for all of this is provided by baseball. This is the game about leaving home and trying to find one’s way back to home. If one is ruled “out” then there is

ethical impulse of postmodernity is to overcome this allergic reaction to alterity, this violent marginalization, and bring an end to this homogenizing terrorism.<sup>3</sup> But since the other is constituted as other by the imposition of someone else's notion of boundaries, something has to be done about boundaries. And the postmodern turn is to recognize the constructed character of all such boundaries and therefore their inherent deconstructability. In his book, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* Henry Statten argues that "deconstruction is not a defense of formlessness, but a regulated overflowing of established boundaries." Statten's point "is *not* that we can get along without demarcating boundaries, but rather that there is no 'boundary fixing,' that cannot itself be questioned."<sup>4</sup> And the questions that will be raised will come from the perspective of the marginal – those who are relegated to the outside. But there is another question that remains begged here. If we still need some sort of demarcated boundaries, then how will they be drawn? What are the criteria by which people draw up boundaries, even if these boundaries are never finally fixed? This is, we suggest, a deeply theological question to which we will return at the end of this paper.<sup>5</sup>

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no path back home. To be "safe" then is to be "in" – still on the path home, if not already "safe at home."

<sup>3</sup> Michael Purcell speaks of a "non-allergic relation with alterity," in "Homelessness as a Theological Motif: Emmanuel Levinas and the Significance of Home," *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 15,2 (Autumn 1994): 89. Walter Truett Anderson speaks of postmodernism as "the age of overexposure to otherness." *The Truth about the Truth: De-confusing and Re-constructing the Postmodern World* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Cited by Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), p. 184. From *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 34.

<sup>5</sup> Mark C. Taylor expresses the deconstructive spirit well when he says, "Settling inevitably unsettles. Since every place presupposes a certain displacement, there can be no settlement(s) without neglect." "Unsettling Issues," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62.4 (Winter 1994): 949. Our question is whether it might be possible to settle, indeed be placed, without neglect – or at least without malicious neglect.

In a postmodern context, then, we find frequent employment of the discourse of boundary or border crossing. The boundaries that have kept various academic disciplines in an apartheid-like arrangement of separation are being dismantled by interdisciplinary discourses such as semiotics. The borders that distinguished cultures are transgressed in the production of “hybrid” art forms, music, styles and even identities.<sup>6</sup> These shifting borders undermine and reterritorialize different configurations of culture, power and knowledge. Since socio-cultural borders, together with ethnic, sexual and behavioural boundaries, map our existence in monolithic, homogenizing and exclusionary ways, Henry Giroux calls for a pedagogy and cultural criticism which engages in a praxis of border crossing. He argues that we need “forms of transgression in which existing borders forged in domination can be challenged and redefined.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Giroux argues that modernity – and its economic muscle man, capitalism – is a culture dedicated to the colonization of difference by creating “borders saturated in terror, inequality and forced exclusions.”<sup>8</sup> In these terms, postmodernism “constitutes a general attempt to transgress the borders sealed by modernism, to proclaim the arbitrariness of all boundaries, and to call attention to the sphere of culture as a shifting social and historical construction.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In his collection of essays, *Border Crossings: Christian Trespasses on Popular Culture and Public Affairs* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2000), Rodney Clapp employs such a metaphor to suggest the fruitful interchanges that happen when such disciplinary, cultural – and religious – borders are crossed.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Giroux, *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (New York/London: Routledge, 1992), 28.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 55. In *Truth is Stranger than It Used to be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh make the point that postmodern critique attends to both the constructed and oppressive character of home. See also Brian J. Walsh, “Homemaking in Exile: Homelessness, Postmodernity and Theological Reflection,” in Doug Blomberg and Ian Lambert, eds., *Reminding: Renewing the Mind in Learning* (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1998).

This does not mean, however, that Giroux's pedagogy of border crossings leaves us in a borderless wasteland with no identity or citizenships. In a world of "lived homophobia, racial oppression, and escalating economic inequality" an apolitical postmodern aestheticism of bricolage and pastiche will not do.<sup>10</sup> Rather, Giroux says that we need a pedagogy that enables students "to be border-crossers in order to understand Otherness on its own terms, and ... to create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power."<sup>11</sup> If all we have is border crossing and boundary blurring in a postmodern context of radical pluralism, then we have no place from which to make ethical/political judgements, no borders or boundaries the transgression of which constitutes oppression, and no ability to discern between the cry of the oppressed and the arrogant exclamations of the powerful. We need to cross borders, says Giroux, and create new borderlands. Again, the question is begged as to what the criteria of the borders of those new borderlands will be and on what basis they will be erected.<sup>12</sup>

Boundaries, we are saying, are constitutive to life (all of life, not just human life), but they are deeply problematic. Let's investigate their ambiguity more deeply by returning to the themes of poverty and homelessness.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, Giroux's postmodern critical pedagogy espouses a discourse which is "multiaccultural and dispersed and resists permanent closure" (29) because it is rooted in no "master narratives" that are "monolithic" and "timeless." (76) Such a pedagogy is to be preferred, he insists, because such multiplicity creates "more democratic forms of public life." (76) It seems to us, however, that his own affirmation of radical democracy is nothing less than a "master narrative" that would appear to carry "timeless authority."

<sup>13</sup> The literature on homelessness in Canada and the United States is voluminous. We bring to the reader's attention four books: Jack Layton, *Homelessness: The Making and Unmaking of a Crisis* (Toronto: Penguin, 2000); John Sewell, *Houses and Homes: Housing for Canadians* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1994); Gerald Daly, *Homeless: Policies Strategies and Lives on the Street* (London and New

Mary Douglas describes “patterning” in a culture as the imposition of a symbolic order “whose keystone, boundaries, margins and internal lines are held in relation by rituals of separation” in which the defiling pollution on the outside of the boundary is kept from infecting the inside.<sup>14</sup> While this anthropological observation has its origins in ancient texts (like Leviticus) and so-called “primitive tribes,” postmodern critical geographers and urbanists discern similar patterning going on in the modern city. David Sibley calls this a “geography of exclusion.”

There is a history of imaginary geographies which cast minorities, “imperfect” people, and a list of others who are seen to pose a threat to the dominant group in society as polluting bodies or folk devils who are then located “elsewhere.” This “elsewhere” might be nowhere, as when genocide or the moral transformation of a minority like prostitutes is advocated, or it might be some spatial periphery, like the edge of the world or the edge of the city.<sup>15</sup>

The boundaries between the rich and the poor are erected by the powerful in order to reduce the threat of their own defilement. Slums are *downtown* as opposed to the suburbs which are *uptown*. The topography of the poor is identified with filth, disease, excrement and foul odors.<sup>16</sup> And all of this

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York: Routledge, 1996); and Doug A. Timmer, D. Stanley Eitzen and Kathryn D. Talley, *Paths to Homelessness: Extreme Poverty and the Urban Housing Crisis* (Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 41.

<sup>15</sup> David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (New York: London: Routledge, 1995), 49. Rosemary Haughton makes a similar point, though without the geographical specificity of Sibley. She says that homeless people are objects of fear and suspicion because “they don’t fit in and their ‘not belonging’ is a threat to the sense of stability everyone wants. It could happen to us: perhaps if we can blame them and remove them we shall feel more secure.” “Hospitality: Home as the Integration of Privacy and Community,” in Leroy Rouner, ed., *The Longing for Home* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 213.

<sup>16</sup> James Duncan and David Ley make this point well: “Topography is also therefore a science of domination – confirming boundaries, securing norms and treating questionable social conventions as unquestioned social facts.” “Introduction: Representing the place of culture,” in James Duncan and David Ley, eds., *Place/Culture/Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993): 1

legitimizes the ideological rhetoric of “clean-up campaigns”.<sup>17</sup> The unhomogenized other is identified with the forces of chaos that threaten from the outside the well-ordered homes of cleanliness and purity of the inside. Boundaries are then violently exclusionary, especially for the most vulnerable – those who do not have the resources to erect their own boundaries and to overcome the boundaries of domination that oppress them.

And so we return to the homeless shelter in which the most basic boundaries of personal space cannot be respected. We could say that these people find themselves in this situation for various reasons, not the least being that the racist boundaries of our society (most of the men in the picture were aboriginal), combined with economic boundaries imposed by a neo-conservative political regime (which abandoned progressive housing and social policy in favour of tax breaks) and not-in-my-back-yard geo-cultural boundaries (which has limited the ability of social service and volunteer agencies to provide shelters spread throughout the city) have all conspired in this geography of exclusion to keep these people out of sight and out of mind in disease-ridden shelters in the inner city. Boundaries put these people in this situation, and yet it is precisely the unconscionable transgression of boundaries of personal space that brought

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<sup>17</sup> Sibley graphically makes his point by citing the character, Travis Bickle, from Martin Scorsese’s film, *Taxi Driver*. Speaking to a presidential hopeful in his cab, Bickle says,

You should clean up this city here because this city here is like an open sewer, it’s full of filth and scum and sometimes I can hardly take it. Whoever becomes the president should just really clean it up, you know what I mean. Sometimes I go out and I smell it. I get headaches, it’s so bad, you know, they just like never go away, you know. It seems like the president should just clean up the whole mess here, should just flush it down the fucking toilet.

Ibid., 61. A further comment on Sibley. While Sibley’s book powerfully unpacks the oppressive dynamics of a geography of exclusion, he has precious little to say about geographies of inclusion. This is the question we have raised in relation to both the deconstructive demarcation of new boundaries and Giroux’s notion of new borderlands and it returns in relation to Sibley. If geographies of exclusion are to be rejected, but boundaries are constitutive to human life (a point which Sibley grants), then how do we make space, which is bounded, more hospitable? What are the characteristics of boundaries that do *not* violently exclude?



public attention to their plight. So, recognizing the profound ambiguity of all boundary construction, we need to reflect further on the necessity of boundaries.

### **The Necessity of Boundaries**

“Strangers,” Walter Brueggemann writes, “are people without a place.” They are “displaced persons” because the “social system ... has ... assigned their place to another and so denied them any safe place of their own.”<sup>18</sup> In ancient Israel they are often people whose “boundary stones” have been moved.”<sup>19</sup> To be placeless is to live in the tenuous vulnerability of life without the bounded security of home and shelter.<sup>20</sup> Boundaries that demarcate in and out, mine and yours, ours and theirs, my body in distinction from other bodies, private and public, are necessary if life is to be secure. Strangers are people who have been stripped of such boundaries.

A boundary, writes Caroline Westerhoff, is “that which defines and gives identity to all kinds of systems.” Such boundaries can be concerned with “physical borders and property lines, as well as names and stories, traditions and values.” Boundaries are constitutive to identity and “unless we can draw a line –

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<sup>18</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Welcoming the Stranger,” in *Interpretation and Obedience: From Faithful Reading to Faithful Living* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 294. For ground-breaking and integrative work on the notion of welcoming the stranger and its implication for foreign language teaching from a Christian perspective see, David I. Smith and Barbara Carvill, *The Gift of the Stranger: Faith, Hospitality, and Foreign Language Learning* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Dt. 19.14; Prov. 22.28-29, 23.10-11; Amos 5.7, 6.12; Is 5.7-10, 10.13.

<sup>20</sup> This is why Ed Loring argues that housing – that is, bounded and secure space for living in – is foundational to life. Reflecting on years of ministry amongst the homeless, Loring argues that housing is foundational to life and therefore precedes employment, sobriety, education, health, evangelization and even the struggle for justice. His provocative article, “Housing Comes First,” was published in *The Other Side* 38,3 (May and June, 2002): 32-33. In the wilderness, shelter is second only to air in the priorities for survival. You can live three minutes without air, three hours without shelter (in difficult conditions), three days without water, and three weeks without food.

a boundary – and say that something lies outside its domain, then we can speak about nothing that lies inside with deep meaning.”<sup>21</sup> Westerhoff continues:

Boundaries are lines that afford definition, identity and protection – for persons, families, institutions, nations.... A boundary gives us something to which we can point and ascribe a name. Without a boundary, we have nothing to which we can invite or welcome anyone else.<sup>22</sup>

Without boundaries there can be no sense of “place” as home, as site of hospitality, security and intimacy with local knowledge. Without boundaries there is no locality, and therefore no sense of membership in a particular community, family, or neighbourhood which has an identity in distinction from other communities, families and neighbourhoods.<sup>23</sup> Without boundaries identity is impossible.

Christine Pohl’s historical/theological discussion of hospitality makes the same claim. “Hospitality,” Pohl writes, “is fundamentally connected to place – to a space bounded by commitments, values, meanings.”<sup>24</sup> Boundaries are

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<sup>21</sup> *Good Fences*, xi.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. All italicized in the original. Providing a phenomenological description of the inhabitation of a room, Edward Casey makes a similar point: “Indeed, to be in an intimately inhabited room is not merely to tolerate but to *require* boundaries.” *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 294.

<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, the agenda of global consumerism is precisely the eradication of such borders – such cultural, political, economic and communal boundaries – in favour of a borderless homogeneity of global consumers who have no attachments to place and no distinct identities. That such an economic/cultural consumerist agenda bears striking similarity to the decentred pluralism of postmodern discourse has been noted by Nicholas Boyle, *Where are We Now? Christian Humanism and the Global Market: from Hegel to Heaney* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); Mark McLain Taylor, “Vodou Resistance/Vodou Hope: Forging a Postmodernism that Liberates,” in David Batstone et. al. eds., *Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity and the Americas* (New York: Routledge 1997); Stanley Hauerwas, “The Christian Difference: Or Surviving Postmodernism,” in Susan and Gerald Biesecker-Mast, eds., *Anabaptists and Postmodernity* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 2000); and J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than It Used to be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 134.

necessary conditions for hospitality because they provide definition of the space being entered, and identity to both host and guest. They also provide “the kind of ordering necessary to life.”<sup>25</sup> Home-making, like world-building, is, of course, a nomic enterprise.<sup>26</sup> To turn space into place, to transform space into what Michael Walzer calls the “dense moral culture” of home,<sup>27</sup> is to establish normative boundaries that bring a certain kind of order to the life lived within those boundaries. Sallie McFague reminds us that ecology has to do with discerning and obeying the “house rules” of the planet.<sup>28</sup> What is true of the *oikos* known as planet Earth is true of any home, any “oikonomic” structure. To be home is to be a site where certain kinds of rules are obeyed, certain kinds of order are constructed.<sup>29</sup>

Of course we are now back to where we started. Boundaries provide nomic ordering to experience and space and that ordering renders certain people and certain behaviours as defiled, polluted, threatening. Some are ruled out of order. So boundaries are constitutive to life, yet also invariably an ideological legitimation of our geographies of exclusion. Edward Said, who knows

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 139. Pohl goes on to say that, “Boundaries are an important part of making a place physically and psychologically safe. Many needy strangers (e.g., refugees, homeless people, abused women and children) come from living in chronic states of fear. A safe place gives them a chance to relax, heal, and reconstruct their lives. If hospitality involves providing a safe place – where a person is protected and respected – then certain behaviors are precluded and certain pragmatic structures follow.” [140]

<sup>26</sup> Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor, 1969), 19-24.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 16.

<sup>28</sup> Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 5.

<sup>29</sup> Kimberly Dovey also describes “home” in terms of the ordering or patterning of environmental experience and behaviour: “Being at home is a mode of being whereby we are oriented within a spatial, temporal and sociocultural order that we understand.” “Home and Homelessness,” in I. Altman and C. Werner, eds., *Home Environments* (New York: Plenum Books, 1985), 35.

something about the reality of exilic homelessness of his own Palestinian people, describes well the ambiguity of boundaries and borders: “Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity.”<sup>30</sup> Rosemary Haughton concurs: “the impregnable home where the only comers are clones of the hosts becomes not a home but a fortress and a prison combined.”<sup>31</sup>

Boundaries used to erect fortresses of self-protection, then, can never be refuges of hospitality. The walls are simply too thick, the barriers too impenetrable. But boundaries that demarcate definite spaces and identities need not be exclusionary. Borders need not create prisons. Heidegger evocatively suggests that “a boundary is not that at which something stops but ... the boundary is that from which something *begins in its essential unfolding*. That is why the concept is that of *horismos*, that is, the horizon, the boundary.”<sup>32</sup> Boundaries can be horizons that provide a sense of orientation, yet are dynamic. Boundaries are not there so much to stop something from coming in – though that remains part of the safety-producing function of boundaries – as to provide a context for a certain kind of unfolding, or opening up, that happens within those boundaries.

Emmanuel Levinas puts it this way. “The privileged role of the home does not consist in being the end of human activity but in being its condition, and in

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<sup>30</sup> Edward Said, “Reflections on Exile,” in R. Ferguson et. al., eds., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1990), 365.

<sup>31</sup> Haughton, “Hospitality,” 215.

<sup>32</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 356.

this sense its commencement.”<sup>33</sup> Human cultural engagement within the world has, as its ontological condition, the dwelling, security and refuge that is the bounded space of home. But this “retreat home within oneself as in a land of refuge ... answers to a hospitality, an expectancy, a human welcome.”<sup>34</sup> What unfolds within the horizon of home – Heidegger’s essential unfolding – is, for Levinas, a cosmic gentleness and intimacy characterized by welcome. “The possibility for the home to open to the Other,” Levinas argues, “is as essential to the essence of the home as closed doors and windows.”<sup>35</sup> Home, as bounded space, must have windows and doors that can be closed. But those are not sealed doors and windows. They can, and must, be opened.<sup>36</sup> An open door is a liminal reality, a threshold both for those entering and those departing. It is the place between places, fraught with anxiety and danger (for people moving in both directions).<sup>37</sup> But whether those departing leave with a spirit of embrace and service to the world and whether those entering feel that they are coming into a safe place of welcome depends on the kind of unfolding, the emerging character, of the bounded place that is here identified as home.<sup>38</sup> A deepening of our

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<sup>33</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 152.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>36</sup> Jürgen Moltmann describes boundaries as living, moving and open frontiers. “Once they are closed, exclusive and self-isolating communities grow up.” “Shekinah: The Home of the Homeless God,” in Rouner, ed., *Longing for Home*, 172.

<sup>37</sup> See Beldon C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, Expanded Edition), 188-187; and Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969).

<sup>38</sup> Westerhoff employs the analogy of the cell membrane to describe boundaries that are open, yet still function as boundaries that provide identity and life:

Like a cell membrane, a boundary must be semi-permeable: admitting and containing what is necessary for sustaining and enriching life, discharging and excluding anything

analysis of boundaries, then, requires some further phenomenological reflection on home.<sup>39</sup>

### **On Home and Boundaries: A Phenomenological Description**

What does it mean to be at-home? What is it that homeless people do not have which renders them homeless? And how would the jet-setting, global-consumerist, postmodern nomad recognize home if she ever found one? Recognizing the dangers inherent in any kind of phenomenological description of such a clearly constructed reality as “home,” and not wanting to crash on either the constructivist shores of Scylla or the essentialist shores of Charybdis,<sup>40</sup> we nonetheless need to reflect on the basic phenomenological contours of what might count as “home.”<sup>41</sup> And at the risk of sounding overly schematized, we offer seven characteristics of home.

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that does not belong within its borders. A membrane that allows for anything and everything to enter and leave is a membrane that is no longer functioning. The cell – the system – is now dead or dying. A healthy boundary is firm enough to hold, but not so tight that it binds, confines and cuts. It is flexible enough to allow movement and change within time and circumstance, but not so loose that it encourages sloppiness and aimless wandering. A boundary that is too rigid fosters stiff and brittle attitudes; it is always in danger of freezing and cracking. One that is too porous encourages attitudes of carelessness and disorder; it will rot and crumble. *Good Fences*, 83.

<sup>39</sup> The phenomenological description which follows was first developed by Steven Bouma-Prediger in “Yearning for Home: The Christian Doctrine of Creation in a Postmodern Age,” in Merold Westphal, ed., *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Beldon Lane attempts to steer the same treacherous course in his discussion of “sacred space” in *Landscapes of the Sacred*, 5.

<sup>41</sup> By “phenomenology” we are not referring to the exact science of apodictic certainty found in the early Husserl. Rather, following the hermeneutical turn in phenomenology identified with Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur, we mean by phenomenology a mode of philosophical reflection, in the words of Merold Westphal, whose “central point has to do with noticing what is too obvious to be seen, with finding the glasses we’ve been wearing.” *God, Guilt, and Death* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 13. This task of noticing the familiar, of seeing the overlooked, “is not motivated by the desire to be rigorously scientific, but rather by a passion for self-understanding that is itself neither detached nor disengaged.” (Westphal, 22) This phenomenology, as Langdon Gilkey puts it, “seeks to interpret the latent *meanings*, i.e., unveil the implicit structures of man’s being in the world....” *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 280. Such a method is certainly not a

First, home is a place of permanence and familiarity. To be at-home somewhere is more than simply having a place to stay. We can also stay in motels and hotels, but these are sites of transience. Home, by contrast, signifies a certain degree of spatial permanence, a kind of enduring presence or residence. Edward Casey's phenomenology of place is instructive here:

To lack a primal place is to be "homeless" indeed, not only in the literal sense of having no permanently sheltering structure but also as being without any effective means of orientation in a complex and confusing world. By late modern times, this world had become increasingly placeless, a matter of mere sites instead of lived places, of sudden displacements rather than perduring implacements.<sup>42</sup>

In a dromocratic, speed bound culture, every highly mobile person is a victim of at least some form of homelessness because there is no time or stability to foster a sense of perduring implacement.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, even traditionally nomadic peoples do not live in a world of sudden displacements. They too function within a context of a permanently sheltering structure of tribe and environment. Remove an aboriginal child from her tribe, strip the people of their trap lines, transport them to a different landscape and you will render them homeless.<sup>44</sup>

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matter of offering decisive proofs of its conclusions, but rather a disciplined descriptive proposal for intuitive recognition. In Heideggarian terms, this is an exercise in disclosure.

<sup>42</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1993), xv.

<sup>43</sup> Deborah Tall rightly comments that "Individualism and mobility are at the core of American identity." "Dwelling: Making Peace with Space and Place," in William Vitek and Wes Jackson, eds., *Rooted in the Land* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 107. In *Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), Scott Russell Sanders resists the "vagabond wind" of his culture (xv), and says, "Only by knocking against the golden calf of mobility, which looms so large and shines so brightly, have I come to realize that it is hollow. Like all idols, it distracts us from true divinity." (117)

<sup>44</sup> See Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

For home to be a place of permanence and familiarity, however, there must be boundaries that distinguish permanence from transience, familiarity from unfamiliarity. These are spatial and geographical boundaries that are constructed from the fabric of family, tribe and culture.

Second, a home is not merely a house, a domicile or an abode. While the occupation of space is foundational for there be an experience of at-homeless, home transforms space into place. As Brueggemann argues, “place is space which has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered and which provide continuity and identity across generations. Place is space in which important words have been spoken which have established identity, defined vocation and envisioned destiny.”<sup>45</sup> A domicile becomes a dwelling place, a house becomes a home, when it is transformed by memories into a place of identity, connectedness, meaning, order, appropriation and care. Heidegger says that “genuine building” is “dwelling” and to dwell is “to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for.”<sup>46</sup> And to bring Brueggemann and Heidegger together we could say that care-ful and protective dwelling is itself always rooted in and directed by those memories, those historical meanings that made this space into the dwelling-place of being at-home. Another way to say this is that the boundary that makes this home the home that it is and gives it the character that it has as this kind of home are the stories that have shaped the

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<sup>45</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 5.

<sup>46</sup> Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 325. Heidegger reverses the simplistic relation which temporally places building before dwelling by saying that “to build is not merely a means and a way toward dwelling – to build is already to dwell.” (324) Levinas also insists on the priority of dwelling to building when he says, “Concretely speaking, the dwelling is not situated in the objective world, but the objective world is situated in relation to my dwelling.” *Totality and Infinity*, 153. Or, as Casey would put it, “the priority of dwelling to building holds *only if building itself is cultivational in character*. . . . Only fully cultivational acts of building will carry cosmic dwelling into the focused dwelling that we call “houses” and above all “homes.”” *Getting Back Into Place*, 177.



memories of life lived here. The boundaries of home-making are narratively formed.<sup>47</sup> Home is a storied place and without stories, without particular memories, there is neither home nor identity.<sup>48</sup> That is why Elie Wiesel says that forgetfulness is always the temptation of exile. “The one who forgets to come back has forgotten the home he or she came from and where he or she is going. Ultimately, one might say that the opposite of home is not distance but forgetfulness. One who forgets forgets everything, including the roads leading homeward.”<sup>49</sup> Once the stories are forgotten, there is no home to return to because there is no place, or even potential place, that could be shaped by those stories.

Third, and again following Heidegger, to dwell is “to be set at peace.”<sup>50</sup> Home is a place of rest. Beyond the insatiability of restlessness, home can be a

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<sup>47</sup> John Berger talks about the homebuilding of the homeless, of the displaced, in terms of memory. “The mortar which holds the impoverished “home” together – even for a child – is memory.... To the underprivileged, home is represented, not by a house, but by a set of practices.... Home is no longer a dwelling but the untold story of a life being lived.” *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 64. Charles Winquist makes a similar point, though not with reference to the socio-economically displaced: “Storytelling can be allied with homecoming because homecoming is more than the collection of actuality. Homecoming is a re-collection of experience. Our remembrance is an interpretation. We tell a story about the actuality of experience to lift it into a context of meaning that speaks out of the reality of possibility as well as actuality.” “To come home to the self we must be able to tell the story of our lives with a memory for reality.” *Homecoming: Interpretation, Transformation, Individuation*, AAR Studies in Religion 18 (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1978), 108.

<sup>48</sup> “The home is a space replete with pasts and memories.” M. Cooper, cited by Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion*, 93, from “Making Changes,” in T. Putnam and C. Newton, eds., *Household Choices* (London: Futures Publications, 1990), 37-42.

Memory, however, is ambivalent, for some homes are precarious, or worse, painful. A home that is rooted in stories of conflict with others becomes a fortress of protection against those demonized others (we think of tribal/ethnic conflicts from Bosnia to Northern Ireland to Rwanda). The narrative foundation functions here to make home a deeply ambivalent reality. Conversely, homes are as precarious as the narratives upon which they are founded. What happens to the identity of a home, or a homeland, when it becomes clear that the narratives which were taken to be stories of bravery, fidelity and discovery are revealed to be narratives of cowardice, broken trust and conquest?

<sup>49</sup> Elie Wiesel, “Longing for Home,” in Rouner, ed., *The Longing for Home*, 24-25.

<sup>50</sup> “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 327.

place of “enough,” of satisfaction, of contentment.<sup>51</sup> When a space becomes a dwelling-place of homemaking, it is received as a gift, not an anxious accomplishment. Edith Wyschogrod says that the metaphor of home as bed or lodging “suggests that home is a milieu of safety, that at home one can drop one’s wariness, allow oneself to fall asleep.”<sup>52</sup> Or as Bruce Cockburn sings, “Make me a bed of fond memories/make me to lie down with a smile.”<sup>53</sup> Home is a place that is constructed in such a way that we are safe to rest. Rest, then, is another boundary marker for homes.

Fourth, if homes are to resist the temptation to become self-enclosed fortresses – that is, if homes are to have windows and doors that are open – then homes must be sites of hospitality. For Levinas, to dwell requires “the non-aggressive and non-allergic advent of the other into my dwelling, ‘not in a shock negating the I, but as the primordial phenomenon of gentleness,’ which affirms my place (*Lieu*) precisely as a home (*maison*).”<sup>54</sup> And just as rest is founded in a

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<sup>51</sup> It needs to be said that this is a normative statement that is hardly descriptive of most “homes” in an upwardly mobile, economically driven society of insatiable affluence. See Paul Wachtel, *The Poverty of Affluence: A Psychological Portrait of the American Way of Life* (Philadelphia: New Society, 1989); David Myers, *The Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: William Morrow, 1992); David Myers, *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); and Alan Durning, *This Place on Earth: Home and the Practice of Permanence* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1996).

<sup>52</sup> Edith Wyschogrod, “Dwellers, Migrants, Nomads: Home in the Age of the Refugee,” in Rouner, *The Longing for Home*, 189.

<sup>53</sup> Bruce Cockburn, “Joy will find a way,” from the album, *Joy Will Find a Way* ©1975, Golden Mountain Music. Brian Walsh has discussed the metaphors of home and homecoming in the lyrics of Bruce Cockburn in “One Day I Shall Be Home,” *Christianity and the Arts* 7,1 (Winter 2000): 28-32.

<sup>54</sup> Purcell, “Homelessness as Theological Motif,” 96; citing Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 150. Purcell sums up Levinas’s contribution well: “Securing the home does not result in the emptiness and coldness of shelter, but in the interiority and intimacy of welcome, for the dwelling refers essentially beyond itself to an other person, who, while remaining absolutely other and transcendent with respect to me, beyond my acquisitive grasp, and while contesting my happy possession of the world, yet always draws me in intimacy, inviting my response and actually rendering me *responsible* subjectivity.” (96)

sense of home as gift, so is hospitality – arising in grateful response to the gift – its own giving. Indeed, Levinas says that such welcome – such extraterritoriality that is necessarily constitutive of the interiority of the home, such intimacy with the other – is nothing less than “an event in the oecumena of being,” the coming together of the household in the oikos of the home.<sup>55</sup> It is in the welcome of the other that the home does not degenerate into self-protective isolation.<sup>56</sup>

Haughton notes that “hospitality means a letting go of certainty and control – and paradoxically it’s only this letting go that allows the richness of growth and change that makes real and not pretended continuity possible.”<sup>57</sup> Or we could say that hospitality is the unique boundary that constitutes home as home, yet keeps that home open, keeps the boundaries suffused with welcome and protection, not exclusion.<sup>58</sup>

A fifth characteristic of home could be called inhabitation. Following David Orr, we distinguish between a resident who is “a temporary occupant, putting down few roots and investing little,” and an inhabitant who “dwells ... in an intimate, organic, and mutually nurturing relationship with a place.” “Good inhabitation,” Orr says, “is an art requiring detailed knowledge of a place,

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<sup>55</sup> *Totality and Infinity*, 150.

<sup>56</sup> Such hospitality was, of course, at the heart of Dorothy Day’s vision for the Catholic Workers Communities. Day was dependent in her views on the philosopher Emmanuel Mounier who argued that property was an extension of the body of a human being. In capitalist societies, however, “the tendency is for property (or place) to be used simply as the physical extension of one’s sphere of control. It becomes a protective shell, making oneself less vulnerable to the intrusion of the world.” “By using property (or space) in a protective, defensive manner, one becomes unavailable to the outside world. His property insulates and isolates him.” Cited by Beldon Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, 206.

<sup>57</sup> Haughton, “Hospitality,” in Rouner, *The Longing for Home*, 214.

<sup>58</sup> These themes are discussed in greater depth by Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

the capacity for observation and sense of care and rootedness.”<sup>59</sup> Inhabitation is a matter of being “not merely *at* our destination but fully *in* it.”<sup>60</sup> Home, we have said requires care and cultivation, but that care and cultivation is always located in a particular place.<sup>61</sup> Inhabitation requires an attention, intimacy and even love of a particular place – only then are we at-home in that place and only then do we respect the integrity of that place.<sup>62</sup> The place itself, then, functions as another boundary for homemaking.<sup>63</sup>

The sixth characteristic of home is that it is a point of orientation. This has been our theme all along. Home is a nomic structure that provides order and direction for life. It functions, as Eliade has put it, as an *axis mundi* for life.<sup>64</sup> Bringing together themes from our discussion of inhabitation with this question of orientation, Edward Relph says that, “home in its most profound form is an attachment to a particular setting, a particular environment, in comparison with

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<sup>59</sup> David Orr, *Ecological Literacy* (Albany: SUNY, 1992), 130. We have discussed the implications of inhabitation further vis a vis higher education in our article, “Education for Homelessness or Homemaking? The Christian College in a Postmodern Culture,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* (forthcoming). Bouma-Prediger has discussed Orr’s views further in *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), esp. ch. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 121.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>62</sup> See Wes Jackson, *Becoming Native to the Place* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1994); Wendell Berry, *The Gift of Good Land* (San Francisco: North Point, 1981), and *Home Economics* (New York: North Point, 1987).

<sup>63</sup> One could say that the sin of Ahab’s power grab of Naboth’s vineyard did not just transgress the boundaries of covenantal law and inheritance rights – though it certainly did that! – but also failed to respect the integrity of *this* place in distinction from other places. This was a vineyard and Ahab wanted a market garden. These are two very different uses of land, and it would seem that for Ahab one piece of land is as good as another. That it would have taken several generations to nurture this place into a vineyard, as opposed to the overnight roto-tiller job that it would take to convert it to a market garden (a sort of vegetable Seven/Eleven store for the royal household), means nothing to the acquisitive king. See 1 Kings 21.

<sup>64</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959).

which all other associations with places have only a limited significance. It is the point of departure from which we orient ourselves and take possession of the world.”<sup>65</sup>

Finally, home is a locus of belonging, acceptance and affiliation. Moltmann states it well: “I am “at home” where people know me, and where I find recognition without having to struggle for it.”<sup>66</sup> Home is “a place where you feel you belong, and which in some sense belongs to you.”<sup>67</sup> In homemaking a process of appropriation takes place in which the place and the relationships within that place are taken as one’s own. And this appropriation seems to go both ways. The place somehow belongs to us and yet we belong to the place. We belong to the web of interconnected relationships that make up this place, and yet they belong to us. And herein there are, again, boundaries to be erected and respected. To belong here is to not belong elsewhere. To be on the inside of this locus of affiliation necessarily entails that there are others who are on the outside of this home, who do not “belong” in the same way.

And, again, we return to the problem with which we began. While it is worthwhile to suggest a phenomenology of home that focuses on placed permanence, dwelling, rest, hospitality, inhabitation, orientation and belonging, all of this amounts to little more than what David Sibley calls a “happy

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<sup>65</sup> Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), 40. Relph connects such orientation to the notion of “roots:” “To have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one’s own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular.” (38). See also Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952).

<sup>66</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 46. Bouma-Prediger has discussed Moltmann’s theology of creation as the home of God further in “Creation as the Home of God: The Doctrine of Creation in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 32,1 (1997). See also Brian J. Walsh, “Theology of Hope and the Doctrine of Creation: An Appraisal of Jürgen Moltmann,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 59,1 (January 1987).

<sup>67</sup> Frederick Buechner, *The Longing for Home* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 7.

phenomenology of home”<sup>68</sup> which is too cosy, romantic and benign unless we take seriously the realities of home as exclusionary space in which “a fear of difference is projected onto the objects and spaces comprising the home or locality which can be polluted by the presence of non-conforming people, activities or artefacts.”<sup>69</sup> Or, as Cockburn would put it: “O sweet fantasia of the safe home/where nobody has to scrape for honey at the bottom of the comb/where every actor understands the scene/and nobody every means to mean/catch in a dream, catch it in a song/seek it on the street you find the candy man’s gone/I hate to tell you but the candy man’s gone.”<sup>70</sup> A mere glance at the street or the homeless shelters, indeed a mere glance into the heart of family violence and alienation in this country, and we discover that home often degenerates into a precarious site of deception, anxiety, violent enclosure, disrespect, disorientation and alienation. Even if our phenomenology does disclose real and normative dimensions of homemaking, we are still left with a culture of homelessness with little or no resources, it would seem, to begin a process of rebuilding that might construct a life hospitable to all and therefore a home for all.

For anyone literate with biblical literature, this might sound familiar. Indeed, the condition in which we find ourselves bears some parallel to that of the returning Jewish exiles after the Babylonian captivity. Perhaps by listening to one of their prophets we might find resources, at least within a Christian community and perhaps also with our Jewish and Muslim neighbours, for a rebuilding project that would address our homeless predicament.

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<sup>68</sup> Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion*, 94.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>70</sup> Bruce Cockburn, “Candy Man’s Gone,” from the album, *Trouble with Normal* ©1983 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

## **Story, Sabbath and Streets for Dwelling in Isaiah**

Home, we have suggested, is always storied place. Stories, however, are plural and therefore contested. Which stories will shape the construction of space into home, and whose home will this be? Exilic Jews returning to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile found themselves in a context in which there was debate about which stories would serve as foundations for their reconstruction projects and their praxis. We could say that the post-exilic community was attempting to construct a nomic framework, a sacred canopy, a home as *axis mundi*, in the face of the anomic deconstruction and decentering of their lives. If home is a matter of living in a place of permanent familiarity, a dwelling place embedded in memory, where one can rest, offer hospitality, live in a way that respects the integrity of the place, and find a grounding point of orientation and a profound sense of belonging, then in a post-exilic context nothing is familiar anymore, memories are broken, things are too tenuous to be able to rest, life is too dangerous to risk hospitality, one is alienated from place, and disoriented while struggling to reconstruct relationships of affiliation and belonging. All of the nomic structures of home that had served to provide identity, vision and hope before 587 BCE had collapsed. The sacred canopy of temple, monarchy and land inheritance that had given cultic, political, economic, agricultural and societal order to their lives was buried under the rubble of Babylonian conquest. And now, they were in the midst of that rubble and beginning the reconstruction. But where to start? Which nomic structures ought to have priority? What stories can be life-giving memories upon which to rebuild home?<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> That such images bear striking similarity to the rubble of the World Trade Center after September 11, 2001 and to the serious questions of what might rise from those rubbles is here noted, though not developed.

If it is home that you need, it was reasoned, and if your fundamental identity is that of the chosen people of the God of Jacob, then the first priority must be to engage in a repentant mourning for the loss of God's house. And so Israel instituted fast days to mourn the destruction of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem. The centre did not hold. The city of the great king, the seat of David, the house of God – indeed the very centre of the universe – is in ruins. That memory must be painfully kept alive if the community is to rebuild.

But a prophet who stands in the tradition of Isaiah of Jerusalem begs to differ. This prophet is unimpressed with this fast because he is unimpressed with the kind of nomic structures and practices it nostalgically remembers and seeks to reinstall.

Shout out, do not hold back!  
Lift up your voice like a trumpet!  
Announce to my people their rebellion,  
to the house of Jacob their sins.  
Yet day after day they seek me,  
and delight to know my ways,  
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness  
and did not forsake the justice of their God;  
they ask of me righteous judgments,  
they delight to draw near to God.  
“Why do we fast, but you do not see?  
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” (Is 58.1-3)

Employing language that echoes the blowing of the trumpet on the day of atonement (Lev. 23.23-32) and the advent of the Jubilee year (Lev. 25.8-12), and which recalls the only day of fasting commanded in the Torah, the prophet proclaims that this fasting in memory of the Temple and monarchy is not a practice that can reconstruct life in the ruins because it is rooted in a memory that is not liberating. The repressive, domesticating domicile of a God who served as the ideological legitimation for the imperial aspirations of the monarchy, is a memory – a narrative – that was the cause of Jerusalem's collapse and therefore



cannot be part of the solution. This is a fast, says the prophet, which functions as a boundary marker and ritual of identity formation, but which (by the people's own admission) has not succeeded in recreating a sense of the presence of God in their midst. And that is because they are a people who offer a cheap imitation of the Torah requirements of righteousness (tsedekah) and justice (mishpat) while the praxis on the street bears witness to something else.

Take a look! You serve your own interests on your fast day,  
and oppress all your workers.  
Take a look! You fast only to quarrel and fight  
and to strike with a wicked fist. (58.4)

Fast in nostalgic remembrance of a regime of violence, long for the good old days of royal oppression under temple sanction, and you will reinscribe the same boundaries of exclusion, regardless of your piety. You call this a fast, asks the prophet? You think that *this* is an acceptable day of the Lord?

An alternative praxis, an alternative fast, an alternative way of inscribing the boundaries of the covenant people, rooted in an alternative memory, is necessary. And this reconstruction project is rooted in the deepest memories of Torah and directed by the most radical traditions of a hospitality infused by justice.

Is not this the fast that I choose;  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and to bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked to cover them,  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin? (58.6-7)

If the constructed home that has collapsed was indeed a home that objectified the other and violently suppressed her when she raised her voice of dissent against the terror-saturated boundaries that had been imposed upon her, then any home-

rebuilding project that would be healing must see her face, be confronted by her otherness, and hear her cry. What the prophet is saying is that those bonds, those boundaries, that enslave, marginalize and keep silent, must first be loosened. This was a form of homemaking that was too constricted. But beyond just untying the yoke, beyond adjusting the nomic structure so that it is less oppressive, the prophet even more radically calls the community to break such yokes, to dismantle the societal, cultic, political and economic structures that oppress, and to deconstruct such nomic constructions.

This is not, however, a call for indiscriminate border crossing just for the postmodern fun of it. Rather, the prophet calls for the most radical structure of hospitality – Jubilee. Blow the trumpet! The day of atonement has arrived! And fast. But this is a Jubilee fast. This is an atonement, a fast, of return and repatriation, of emancipation of slaves and economic redistribution. This, he proclaims, is the nomic structure – the home-constituting boundary – that transforms the rubble of Jerusalem into a home of covenantal renewal. Subject to the orientation provided by such Jubilee-shaped hospitality, home can be reconstituted as a place of belonging for the most vulnerable, a secure dwelling place of permanence. Indeed, under such conditions, and in response to such homemaking praxis, the home-grounding presence of God can replace the devastating absence that has characterized Israel’s life since the Shekinah departed from the Temple (Ezek. 10). The glory (*kabod*) of God will return, but not to sanctify and legitimate our sacred canopies, our temples for exclusionary domestication. Rather, this glory will be our “rear guard” (58.8). This, of course, is an exodus image. Isaiah will not countenance a conservative homemaking of settled arrival. This is a homemaking under the sign of sojourn. A sojourning community will be home because God’s glory accompanies them. They will, like their forebears in Egypt, call for help and the God who liberates slaves will

answer (58.9).<sup>72</sup> They will be hungry in the wilderness and God will feed them (58.11).<sup>73</sup> Indeed, they will will “be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.” (58.11) They will inhabit a covenanted world of rest and sustenance and refreshment.

We see, then, that the prophet counters the ideological memory of temple and monarchy with more ancient memories of Torah, jubilee, exodus and creation.<sup>74</sup> If place is always a site of conflicting stories, then the prophet enters into the reconstruction projects of Jerusalem and proclaims which stories are normative for Israel and which stories are not. Practice jubilee, reinscribe such liberatory structures, reconstruct home on such nomic foundations, rooted in such deep memories, says the prophet, and:

Your ancient ruins will be rebuilt;  
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;  
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,  
the restorer of streets to live in. (58.12)

The cultural, economic and political ruins must be rebuilt and the breach in the boundaries of life must be repaired because otherwise life is too precarious and too dangerous for the most vulnerable amongst us. But the walls of Jerusalem – the constructed boundaries of our communities, churches, nations, families and identities – are not rebuilt with bricks and mortar, but with justice-directed hospitality rooted in life-giving and home-constituting memories. Only then, says the prophet, will the streets be secure enough to be sites of dwelling. Only

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<sup>72</sup> Exodus 2.23-25, 3.7-10.

<sup>73</sup> Exodus 16.1-21.

<sup>74</sup> That the older critical dichotomy between exodus and creation is untenable has been convincingly demonstrated by Terence Fretheim in his commentary, *Exodus* (Louisville: John Knox, 1991); and two of his articles, “The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus,” *Interpretation* 45,4 (1991); and “The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110,3 (1991).

then will we construct a “city of homes, a city for people to feel at home in, a city where no one is hungry because we are nourished by the practice of justice, and where no one is thirsty because our thirst for righteousness has been met.”<sup>75</sup>

Only then will we no longer need secret videos recording body-to-body conditions in Toronto shelters. And only then will people be able to lie down in safety to take their rest.

This prophet’s vision is rooted, we have argued, in narratives of exodus and creation. This is a Torah-shaped vision of homemaking. Not suprisingly, then, he concludes with sabbath.

If you refrain from trampling the sabbath,  
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;  
if you call the sabbath a delight  
and the holy day of the Lord honorable;  
if you honor it, not going your own ways,  
serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;  
then you shall take delight in the Lord,  
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;  
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. (58.13-14)

The God who orders space for hospitality, orders the rhythms of time by sabbath.<sup>76</sup> Richard Lowery puts it this way: “Creation climaxes and finally coheres in sabbath rest. It is the glue that holds the world together.”<sup>77</sup> “Sabbath is the final piece of the creative process by which the world comes into being. It is the crowning touch, the cosmic sign that God’s universal and benevolent dominion is fully extended and secure.”<sup>78</sup> Those who “trample the sabbath” will

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<sup>75</sup> Sylvia Keesmaat, “Talman’s Story,” (Toronto: unpublished paper, 2000).

<sup>76</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, “Shekinah: The Home of the Homeless God,” in Rouner, ed., *The Longing for Home*, 176.

<sup>77</sup> Richard H. Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 82.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

necessarily also trample the poor because they will never grant to the poor the rest from their labours that sabbath requires.<sup>79</sup> Nor will they ever countenance the restoration of the poor to their own bounded space called home that the sabbath year, and the sabbath of sabbaths – Jubilee – requires of covenantal people. Therefore, Lowery argues that sabbath rejects the “natural law of scarcity, poverty and excessive toil for the laboring majority alongside luxury, leisure and excessive consumption for the court-connected few. It assumes instead a divinely sanctioned social and cosmic order characterized by social solidarity, natural abundance, and self-restraint.”<sup>80</sup> Bruggemann puts it this way:

Sabbath observance is understood as a deep rejection of imperial patterns of exploitation. It is the dramatic act whereby this people asserts to itself and announces to a watching world that this is Israel, a different people with a different way in the world, who will not behave according to the expectations of the imperial world. In the purview of covenant, the stability of political life and the effectiveness of worship depend on sabbath, an act that hands life back to God in trusting obedience. If life is not handed over to God regularly, with discipline and intentionality, then the entire political-religious system will end in destruction.<sup>81</sup>

In radical contrast to all homemaking rooted in autonomous self-construction and anxious labour, sabbath proclaims that the world is a “creational gift, and as such nurtures an attitude of basic trust.”<sup>82</sup> Trust in such a gift, and deep trust in the Giver, frames all of our homemaking activities, for sabbath insists that the world ultimately depends not on our striving but on

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<sup>79</sup> See Amos 8.4-6.

<sup>80</sup> Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee*, 102.

<sup>81</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience*, 159.

<sup>82</sup> Sylvia Keesmaat, “Sabbath and Jubilee: Radical Alternatives for Being Human,” in Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative, *Making a New Beginning: Biblical Reflections on Jubilee* (Toronto: CEJI, 1998), 15.

God's generous world-sustaining love. Moreover, sabbath is a boundary marker which itself is a curb on the propensity of boundaries to privilege the powerful. Sabbath is a radically egalitarian ordering of time and culture that is "the alternative to a restless, aggressive, unbridled acquisitiveness that exploits neighbor for self-gain."<sup>83</sup> The Creator's generosity celebrated in sabbath calls us to construct homes of generosity, borders of welcome, dwelling-places of love.

With and without boundaries. Boundaries, we have said, are necessary. They are constitutive to life. And yet certain boundaries exclude, imprison, oppress. Neither postmodern celebration of border-crossing nor modernist retrenchment into walled fortresses of fear will make streets for dwelling. Only sojourning homes of hospitality shaped by a sabbath-vision of trust in a gift-giving God will repair the breach.<sup>84</sup> Only such homes of generosity, welcome and love can be a healing balm for where the hurt is.

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<sup>83</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1998), 193.

<sup>84</sup> Is. 58.12