



O'Gorman, K.D. (2007) Monastic hospitality: the enduring legacy. In: Annual Conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth, 10-13 April 2007, London, U.K.

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# MONASTIC HOSPITALITY: THE ENDURING LEGACY

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## INTRODUCTION

Hospitality research continues to broaden through an ever-increasing dialogue and alignment with a greater number of academic disciplines. This paper demonstrates how an enhanced understanding of hospitality can be achieved through synergy between social anthropology with philosophical and practical theology. It extends O’Gorman’s (2005; 2007) investigation of textual evidence of hospitality within Classical Antiquity (generally accepted as the period between 770 BC – 529 AD) and O’Gorman’s (2006) focus on the provision of monastic hospitality as prescribed by St Benedict’s Rule (c. 530 A.D) that revealed the illuminatory capacity of critical historical investigation, and the continuity of hospitality management practices over the last 1,500 years. The research reported on in this paper develops those studies by exploring the hospitality relationship within the modern monastery. It is an empirical investigation combined with the author’s considerable previous knowledge and experience of monastic life.

## BACKGROUND TO MONASTIC HOSPITALITY

St Benedict established the Rule of monastic life that was later to be adopted by most Western monasteries. This foundation was also to become the basis of all western European religious hospitality. It would influence the monastic approaches to caring for the sick (hospitals), the poor (hospices and charities) and the provision of education (the establishment of the first universities), all of which were originally part of the monastic tradition. The Rule, which stressed communal living and physical labour, was also concerned with the needs of the local people, and the distribution of

alms and food to the poor. During the lifetime of St Benedict, his disciples spread the order throughout the countries of Central and Western Europe. As Vogüé (1977) and Regnault (1990) note the Benedictines were also to have wide influence both within the Roman Catholic Church and later within the secular society.

The monks distance themselves from the distractions of the outside world as much as is possible; their life is one of solitude and separation that should lead to spiritual enlightenment. By leaving the secular society, Böckmann (1988) notes that the monks sets up an alternative world in which people from the secular world might wish to share. Within St. Benedict's Rule, Western monastic hospitality takes its direction from Chapter 53 which is entitled '*De Hōpitibus Suscipiendis*' – 'The Reception of Guests'. During the mediaeval period hospitality offered by monasteries was comprehensive. It included lodging for travellers, accommodation and treatment for the sick, and charitable services for the poor. The usual period, during which hospitality was freely provided, was two complete days; and some similar restriction, against the abuse of hospitality, seems to have been prescribed by most of the orders, friars, as well as monks. Lenoir (1856) observes the guesthouse had prominence in all monastic buildings, however Holzherr (1982) states that monks have historically not always been completely faithful to Benedict's demand that all guests be accorded full respect. Society was much more sharply stratified in medieval times, and it was virtually impossible to host nobles and peasants in the same manner: a clear example is given in Horn and Born (1979) when they demonstrate that the plan of the monastery of Abbot Adalhard (c760AD) shows completely separate guest quarters for rich and poor.

The monasteries have always been peaceful retreats for scholars and were the chief centres of Christian piety and learning. During the Middle Ages the monasteries (as well as being the custodians of civilisation, knowledge and learning) had provided detailed and formalised rules for religious hospitality. Wolter (1880) shows that they were also centres for the care of the sick and the poor, and had responsibilities for refugees. The Middle Ages was also the period of intellectual and cultural development. New educational institutions, such as cathedral and monastic schools, were founded, and universities were established with advanced degrees being offered

in medicine, law, and theology. When there were few urban centres, the monasteries represented the most stable and well-endowed institutions in the countryside. The spread of Western monasticism (primarily based on the Rule of St Benedict for monastic life) together with its influence on religious life generally, and also throughout society, led to generally accepted and well-understood principles of hospitality. These principles were to become the foundations of the provision of hospitality that were later to be adopted and modified within the nation-states and by secular organisations as they took over greater responsibilities for the full range of hospitality activities.

## METHODOLOGY

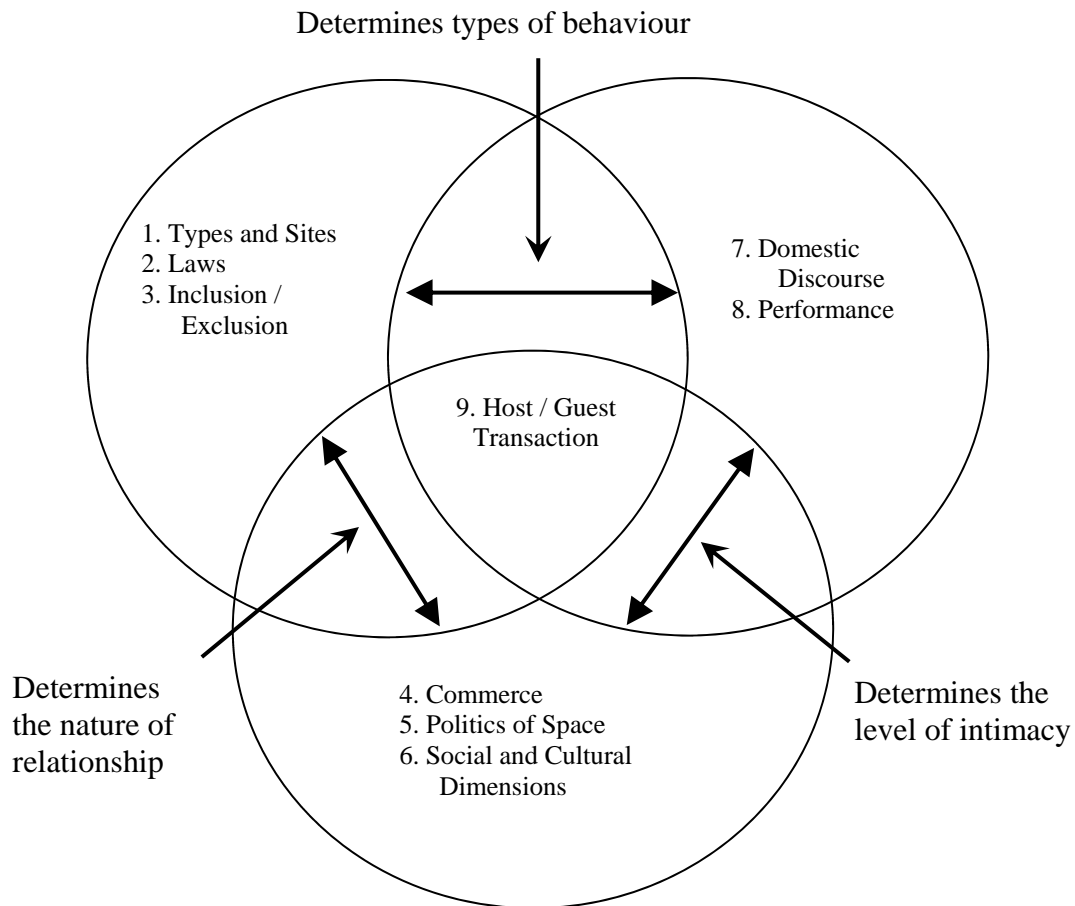
For a period of six years, whilst undertaking academic studies across Europe, primarily in Spain and Rome, I had the opportunity to live frequently in a monastic environment. These experiences and the contacts allowed me privileged access in order to gather information and for familiarity with the environment as well as a level of access that would not otherwise have been available. The information on present day monastic hospitality summarised in this chapter is based on empirical studies in Europe during 2006, which included: participant observations; interviews with the Monks and of course guests; and documentary evidence. This took place in eight different monasteries for about five days at a time. The empirical data was gathered by living in the monastic cloister with the monks themselves, sharing their day, their life, and their work.

Lashley et al. (2007) present the hospitality conceptual 'lens' as a framework for research into the phenomenon of hospitality. This 'lens' contains nine robust themes with the host/guest transaction seen as the central focus of the hospitality phenomenon. The 'lens' can be "employed to examine social situations where hospitality is involved in order to understand aspects of the society in which the hospitality act occurs". The content of these themes are presented in summary form in Table 1. In the event the hospitality conceptual lens has proved to be a useful framework for the critical analysis of the data, for the presentation of the findings and also to summarise the conclusions.

Theme	Descriptive Summary
1. Types and Sites	Differentiates between and acknowledges the multi-manifestation of forms and locations for experiencing hospitality and the host/guest transaction.
2. Laws	Socially and culturally defined obligations, standards, principles, norms and rules associated with hospitality, that define the duties and the behaviours of both host and guest.
3. Inclusion/ Exclusion	Symbolism of the host welcoming of an 'other' (guest) across thresholds to signify inclusion: the converse is the exclusion or leaving unwelcome 'others' on the outside.
4. Commerce	Commercial hospitality where the host/guest transaction explicitly contains economic dimensions alongside those of the social.
5. Politics of Space	Concept of boundaries and meanings of a social, spatial and cultural nature that denote inclusions/exclusions, and defines the level of intimacy/distance within the host/guest transaction once across the thresholds.
6. Social and Cultural Dimensions	Hospitality provides the opportunity for the host and guest to construct a temporary common moral universe; involving a process of production, consumption, and communication that defines the host/guest transaction.
7. Domestic Discourse	Reflects the domestic roots of hospitality and symbolic connotations of practices, language and gendered roles relative to the host/guest transactions.
8. Performance	Host/guest transaction interpreted as actors performing their respective roles on a stage to convey symbolism and meaning; thus highlighting authenticity.
9. Host/Guest Transaction	The extent to which a host takes responsibility for the care and management of a guest and the guests acceptance or rejection of the authority of the host.

**Table 1: Framework of the nine themes in the hospitality conceptual lens (based on Lashley et al. 2007)**

However after the first two visits it became clear that themes as originally presented in the 'lens' needed to be reordered for the purpose of this research so that data could be gathered and presented in a logical order. Although the 'lens' proved to be a useful framework it is not a dynamic model. The model constructed in Figure 1 has been developed from the framework. This model allows for the comparison and contrasting of the themes of the 'lens' and to draw conclusions on three specific dimensions: types of hospitality behaviour; nature of the hospitality relationship and the level of intimacy; all of which define the Host / Guest relationship.



**Figure 1: Dynamic Model of Hospitality**

## CONTEMPORARY MONASTIC HOSPITALITY: INVESTIGATION

### TYPES AND SITES

All the eight monasteries visited were different, some receive no more than 100 day visitors a month whereas others can welcome in the region of a million visitors throughout the course of the year. Monasteries are all different, and the hospitality relationship within the modern monastery exists on many levels and locations, for example there are day visitors who do not stay, there are people who stay in the separate guesthouse (often women, families and groups) and those that stay in guest rooms within the monastic cloister normally only men.

The hospitality relationship that the monks have with the guests that are resident the monastic cloister is the most intimate and the summary of the monastic hospitality

being presented is focused on that. The guests are male and live in similar accommodation to the monks. They eat in the monastic refectory and normally have open access to the library and to some of the areas that are closed to other guests. These male guests also have a separate lounge, normally a small kitchen with tea and coffee making facilities and a fridge full of items such as homemade bread and jam, free range eggs and milk.

Guests are formally welcomed by the Abbot, although this normally takes place after the first meal. On arrival the guests are greeted by the guest master, one of the monks, who is often the first monk that many of the guests have ever met. The guest masters were very welcoming but some guests felt that they holding back. One guest observed that a monk-host spoke in a normal voice but “you felt that he was not normal”; they were perceived to be of this world but not in the world. From the guest masters felt they knew what their guests were experiencing but perceived that normally the guests were not immediately at ease as they were in a strange environment.

## LAWS

The life of the monastery is governed by the Rule of Benedict, adapted to the modern age. Fifteen hundred years ago when the rule was written there were no public run faculties for the sick or the homeless; now things are different. Various guest masters noted that it is not uncommon for the local police to drop off people with social problems such as drug addiction or homelessness. If they arrive at the monastery, they are given soup and sandwiches and are invited to sleep in a lodging in the grounds just a few minutes away from the monastic cloister and main guesthouse. It is “simply not practical to the running of the monastery...we are not here to be saints; we are monks, that is the path we have chosen”. The monks tend to be very practical and hard working men, working in the buildings and on the land, often the monasteries have active farms attached to them, run by the monks.

One guest master said “there are no ground rules here, do whatever you want, just change the bed and clean the room when you leave.” This of course was not entirely true. Although there were very few written rules within the monastery, guests on the whole know how to behave by following the behaviour of other guests. Guests are

not expected to help out with the daily duties although it is very much appreciated. Roughly a quarter of the guests offer to help with daily chores but only a quarter of that number again actually do any work. Silence is observed in the Church, refectory and other monastic areas; guests are also encouraged to keep silence in the individual rooms. In some of the monasteries the monks, with the exception of the Abbot and the guest master, are not permitted to talk to the guests. One monastery had a sign indicating that this does not imply rudeness but was a means of allowing the monks to carry on their daily life.

#### INCLUSION/EXCLUSION

All guests are invited to join in the religious celebrations throughout the day; often they observe that prayer in the monastic church is a very profound experience that seems to gain greater significance at daybreak or during twilight and darkness. As one guest commented:

“One of the things I will always remember from my visit is sitting on a church pew at 4:45 in the morning smelling sweet incense and watching the rising sun caress the stained glass windows and project jewelled colours through the smoke onto the church walls; I felt welcomed and relaxed”

Guests are neither forced nor obliged to attend the services. None of the monks will even notice if they are there or not and guests are free to come and go as they wished. Attending was considered useful because it removed guests from what they normally did and allowed their daily life to be put into perspective. When actually attending, guests tended to feel included and at ease and often happy during the services, but liked knowing when it was going to end.

The monks’ day is centred around Mass and eight other choral services (often all in Latin) starting as early as 4:00 in the morning and continuing at intervals throughout the day until about 8:30 at night; a typical monastic day is given in Figure 2.

Time	Activity
4.45am	Rise
5:00am	Vigils and Lauds (Prayers during the night and at dawn)
7.00am	Prime (1st prayer of the day); Pittance (Breakfast); Private Prayer.



8:30am	Mass and Terce (Prayer during the morning)
9.45am	Work, and Classes for Novices
12:45am	Sext (Midday Prayer)
1:00pm	Lunch
2:15pm	None (Afternoon Prayer), followed by work
4:30pm	Tea
4.45pm	Private Prayer
6:30pm	Vespers (Evening Prayer)
7:00pm	Supper, followed by Recreation (can include conversation)
8:30pm	Compline (Prayer before bed)
9:00pm	Retire

**Figure 2: Typical Monastic Timetable**

Everyone is welcome in the church, but women are not allowed inside the monastic cloister. This means that there is no opportunity for woman to eat with the Monks in the monastic refectory. The male guests who are allowed within the refectory are set a place at table, normally with name card placed on top of a napkin; before the meal is served there are short prayers (often in Latin). The meals are typically simple and wholesome, giving the monks enough calories to keep healthy so that they can continue in their daily work. There is not too much and there is not too little. The majority of meals in the monastery are vegetarian but on feast days and Sundays, as a celebration, meat is served. On major feast days on the Monks take particular joy in the high quality of food provided. The guest table is served immediately after the Abbot, as required in the Rule. All the food is served on trays in serving dishes and the guest merely helps themselves. The guest has to do nothing but eat during the meal; the individual does not even have to wash up. Guests often perceive that normal interaction time with the monks would be during the meals. However, despite sharing the same space any interaction is removed by the silence. Some guests commented on feelings of isolation and an obligation to keep their head down and eat quickly, despite being surrounded by some 40 other people.

#### COMMERCE

The monks make no charge for staying in the guest monastery, however common courtesy should dictate that a donation would be appropriate. This is a difficult issue for some of the guests, as the monks do not seem to care about what is left. Some

monasteries did have signs suggesting donations, always with caveat that it was optional; deed of covenant envelopes were always available to allow the tax to be claimed back.

On the whole guest masters did not keep detailed statistics of how many people had stayed the total number of guest nights, as this information may have been interesting but of no real relevance to them. That said, the monasteries did operate at the commercial level in other areas, for example: conference facilities; apiaries; brewing and distilling; public commercial restaurants; stained glass window manufacturing; printing and publishing; illumination and illustration; farming and agriculture; and retail. The vast majority of these activities were run by a paid professional staff who reported to the monastic bursar on their commercial activities. All monasteries were however very careful to make sure that these distinct and separate activities did not encroach into the hospitality offered to their guests.

#### POLITICS OF SPACE

In the public areas of the monastery there were signs that clearly stated where visitors were not allowed to go: parts of the church, access to the monastic cloister and gardens were restricted. However different guests have different levels of access. Those who were living in the monastic cloister had privileged access and it is often not clear to others as to why they are going to particular areas and that they had keys (sometimes electronic swipe cards with different levels of access) that allowed them to open doors that were off limits to the day visitors. Limitations in access also meant that many day visitors could pass through the monastery and not even see a monk.

Of course, it seems innate within human nature to be curious: the day visitors wondered what happened in the cloister and the resident guests were intrigued as to what a monk's cell looked like. As one guest stated:

“I know I am just been nosey but just as I want to open all the old books in the library and try and read the Latin on the pages, I want to open all the doors and see inside too”

The guests and the monks have a shared environment, but limited shared space, they pray together in separate parts of the church and dine together, in silence, at separate tables in the refectory. Some guests commented that although they enjoyed joining with the monks at meal times and at prayer, they would also like to have seen them at their daily duties and jobs; they gained great solace and comfort from their interactions with the monks. Another guest stated:

“I’ve been to many places travelling over the past 20 years... I’ve slept in the church of the Nativity at Christmas time but nowhere compares to these guys... there is nothing like this place they are so accommodating”.

#### SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

The monks welcome Roman Catholics, other Christians and indeed all people of Good Will and do not differentiate between them. The guests are welcomed into the monks’ domain, however the monks live within an ordered hierarchy and a strictly controlled culture dimension, but they know that their guests do not normally live this way. As long as the guest behaviour does not disturb the life of the monastic community, the Monks keep their own council. On one occasion some guests went out in the evening to watch a football match in the local town, the following morning the monks sought out these guests to find out what the score was! The guests were embarrassed that the monks had realised they had gone out, but quickly realised that the monks did not mind, and a greater understanding of their hosts was realised by the guests.

#### DOMESTIC DISCOURSE

Throughout the Middle Ages monasteries were often the major source of employment for the local community and this still happens with some of the larger ones today. Gendered roles however do not play a major part in monastic life, as all the monks are male and the Abbot is the principal host and the head of the community. Bells, not the Abbot, control everybody’s behaviour, as one monk wryly observed, “we live in God’s house and the bell is the voice of God, it wakes us up in the morning, calls us to prayer, meals and work and then tells us it is time to go to sleep at the end of the day”. With the assistance of paid staff, the monks fulfil the different jobs (cook,

cellarer, guest master, gardener, bursar etc.) within the monastery for periods of at least a year, and all the monks who are able serve each other at table on a weekly rota with the Abbot serving on Good Friday.

#### PERFORMANCE

In the bigger monasteries the monks are often confused with paid guides / actors dressed as monks who are there to enhance the tourist experience. One monk recalled being reprimanded by an objectionable day visitor who complained about the monk's lack of name badge. When the monk patiently explained to the tourist that this was actually his way of life, the tourist was stunned, amazed and then genuinely moved. In most of the monasteries the services are conducted in Latin and intoned in Gregorian Chant. During the day the monks could often find a congregation behaving more like "an audience at a pantomime." This does not bother the monks: "if we reach out and touch even one person's life, that has made a difference, if not we are still serving God." In the guesthouse, one guest commented, "I don't like it when the services are conducted in English, it sounds better in Latin. I know it's silly but I can't help thinking that God hears the prayers better when they are in Latin and there is a lot of incense."

The resident guests rarely question the monks' sincerity. Time and lived experience within the cloister brings much greater understanding. One guest, who found the lack of conversation at meals difficult at first, found each meal got easier. Every week a monk is given the task of reading throughout the meal. In some monasteries this reading is the only source of news and world affairs that the monks hear. During one of the meals, a guest who had just arrived was surprised that instead of some religious work, they were listening to an article discussing the blossoming opium trade in Afghanistan and the effects it is having on the West.

#### CONTEMPORARY MONASTIC HOSPITALITY: CONCLUSIONS

The research set out to explore the hospitality relationship within the modern monastery. It began with a short background to monastic hospitality and then

presentment the results of an empirical investigation into life within the monastic guesthouse. From the results of this investigation, the dominant themes of modern monastic hospitality are summarised in Table 2, using the framework of the hospitality conceptual ‘lens’ created by Lashley et al. (2007). By applying the model in Figure 1 conclusions are drawn on three specific dimensions of hospitality: types of hospitality behaviour; nature of the hospitality relationship and the level of intimacy and then overall conclusions on the Host / Guest relationship.

Theme	Summary of Monastic Hospitality
1. Types and Sites	The hospitality relationship that the monks have with their resident (male) guests within the monastic cloister is area under investigation, however other guests can include day visitors, couples and families.
2. Laws	Monastic hospitality is governed by the 6 <sup>th</sup> Century Rule of St Benedict, adapted for the modern age.
3. Inclusion/ Exclusion	Interaction and full welcome in the daily life of the monastery is as much dependant on the guest seeking it as on it being offered by the monks. The guests can accept or reject the different hospitality offered.
4. Commerce	Commercial activities exist within the monasteries, but the prime purpose of monastic hospitality is not commercial, hospitality is offered as part of the monastic vocation.
5. Politics of Space	Boundaries, delimited by St Benedict 1500 years ago, are necessary for the smooth running of the monastery.
6. Social and Cultural Dimensions	The monastery as well as being the House of God, is also the monks’ home. Guests are welcome to visit or stay but not to interfere with the running of the monastery.
7. Domestic Discourse	The monks, sometimes with employed staff, fulfil all the roles required in running the guesthouse
8. Performance	The sincerity and strength of purpose of the monks is manifest and often has a profound effect on the guests.
9. Host/Guest Transaction	The monks provide for both the spiritual and temporal needs of the guests. Hosting take places at various levels with different people (the Abbot, the guest master or other guests) taking the role of host depending on the circumstances.

**Table 2: The nine themes hospitality conceptual lens applied to monastic hospitality**

Nature of relationship

The Rule of St Benedict is clearly evident in the running of the modern monasteries, older and more solid than even the buildings. However, as with the buildings, an element of change has been necessary to ensure the continuing survival of the monastery and its way of life. During the Middle Ages the monasteries had provided detailed and formalised rules for religious hospitality, the care of the sick and the poor, and responsibilities for refugees. However monasteries no longer need to look after the sick as there are state hospitals, nor should they be expected to look after refugees or those with drug or alcohol problems, as other agencies exist for this purpose. All the monasteries, to a greater or lesser extent, engage in commercial behaviour that generate income for the monks. However the provision for guests to stay in the monastic cloister is motivated by their monastic vocation.

During the research it became clear that the monastic environment is extremely complex. There were different layers of the commercial home within the monastery and differing levels of hospitality provision. Areas of investigation included the use and division of space for the monks and their guests, levels of accommodation and hospitality rules and rituals. Within the monastic guesthouse the hospitality that is offered to meet the guest's physical and metaphysical needs is not a simple concept. It exists and is offered on many levels and it is up to the guest how much they wish to engage with the hospitality on offer.

#### Types of behaviour

The fundamental rules of behaviour are governed by the Rule and the monks have no real opportunities for incidental interaction with the guests, and as the monks proceed through their daily life there is no impression given that they are interested in interaction. However, any guest wishing to talk to a monk is welcomed and accommodated; interaction with the monks is dependant on the guest seeking it rather than it being offered by the host. Defined thresholds are necessary in a monastery, especially for one with thousands of guests, in order to protect the privacy and the peace of the monks, who quickly become exhibits for garrulous visitors.

#### Levels of intimacy

The monks continually managed to confound the inhibitions and expectations that an average individual may have of them, their authenticity is rarely questioned.

Sometimes the guests, at first, claim that they feel pressured to conform at first by attending all the services, however they quickly realise that no one cares if they do. The monks believe they are carrying out God's work on earth and hospitality an integral part of this work so it would be true to say that a visitor to a monastery is not just the guest of the monks but a guest in God's house. Through the behaviour and personal integrity of the monks, everything that the guest experiences within the guesthouse and beyond is a symbol for how guests should be treated. The creation of a shared space for hospitality does allow the host and guest to construct a temporary common moral universe. For example, when a guest can be a 20 year old agnostic student and the host is a 70 year old monk, they would normally inhabit very different moral universes. Although welcoming, the monks gave definite suggestions of otherness, not least by wearing their monastic habits; one guest expressed disappointment that they did not find a habit on the back of their bedroom door that they could wear for the weekend! Acceptance as a guest in no way suggests equality with the monks or membership of the monastic community.

#### Host / Guest Relationship

Making God the ultimate host, the Rule of Benedict makes it clear that the Abbot is the host responsible for meeting and welcoming the guests, however there are two other different levels of hosting within the monastery. There is the guest master who has hour-by-hour care of the guests making sure they are in and seated for communal meals at their place and in their particular place in the church. There is also other guests already staying in the guest house who take responsibility for hosting newer guests, showing them where to be at certain times and making them coffee on arrival, washing up after them and in general helping them to relax and feel welcome. Guests asked questions of each other and learned from their experiences, serving as mutual sounding boards to check what they should be doing.

From the research it is clear that the prima-facie purpose of a monastery is not to offer hospitality, it is to house the monks in a community environment so that they can dedicate their lives and live their vocation to the service of God. The separation of the monks from their guests (and by definition the separation of the monks from the world in general) is not an act of inhospitaleness, rather it is mandated by the Rule

and necessary for the monastery to function. Therefore, the ritual reception of guests and the provision of hospitality play an important role by being both the bridge and the barrier between the monastic and secular worlds.

### Conclusions

This paper set out to demonstrate how an enhanced understanding hospitality can be achieved through synergy between social anthropology with philosophical and practical theology by investigating the hospitality relationship within the monastic cloister both in the previous papers that examined its origins and history and the research reported on here that examines current practice. What is remarkable is that reconnecting with the past highlights significant relevance to the modern world of hospitality management. However, the purpose of this type of research is not to replicate the past, but to provide meaning, context, and greater understanding of the phenomenon of hospitality not previously realised, for example the monasteries themselves needed to change and adapt their hospitality provision whilst staying true to their original mission; the original Rule has obtained over 1500 years. Importantly, for contemporary graduates of hospitality management, this form of research allows for the intellectual pursuit of social and cultural dimensions that transcend artificial disciplinary boundaries. Connecting with the origins of hospitality enhances the learning of the professionals of tomorrow.



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