

# Hospitality in necessitudine: Hospices, hostels and hospitals

In the continuing series reflecting on hospitality **Mario Conti, Kevin O’Gorman** and **David McAlpine** explore an aspect of hospitality often overlooked – the constantly evolving religious practice of providing hospitality to those in most need. They present an overview of the evolution of hospitality for the needy and consider how throughout history, even when religion is under attack, there has always been recognition of the importance of charitable hospitality: *hospitality in necessitudine*.

## Charitable hospitality in classical antiquity

**T**HROUGHOUT THE LAST 2,000 years, the biblical instruction to be hospitable has been interpreted and developed in different ways, often at the forefront of medical as well as spiritual advances in hospitality. This began with the letter of St Paul<sup>1</sup> to an apostolic delegate sent to oversee the Church in Ephesus.<sup>2</sup> The instruction in the letter is: ‘A bishop then must be blameless, faithful, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality...’<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Bishop, as ‘overseer’ of the local Church, has been mandated from the beginning of the Christian faith to offer charitable hospitality.

Two fourth century writers articulated the unmistakably Christian concept of charitable hospitality.

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The first was Lactantius, a Christian apologist, who explicitly contrasted Christian hospitality with Greco-Roman practices. He used the example of the gods assuming human form to go into the world to exercise their right to hospitality. Recognising hospitality as a ‘principal virtue’ for philosophers and Christians alike, Lactantius criticised those philosophers who

tied it to advantage. Noting that the ‘houses of illustrious men should be open to illustrious guests’<sup>4</sup> he then rejected the argument that hospitality must be bestowed upon suitable persons; he reasoned instead that a Christian’s hospitality must be open to the lowly and abject in other words—reinforcing hospitality as a charitable act.

The other writer was St John Chrysostom, one of the leading voices within the Christian community; he was one of the great Greek Fathers and Bishop of Constantinople to whom is ascribed the Orthodox Liturgy used throughout the East in both Orthodox and Catholic Churches. He described exactly how a Christian was to conduct himself:

*He must be well awake; he must be fervent in spirit, and, as it were, breathe fire; he must labour and attend upon his duty by day and by night, even more than a general upon his army; he must be careful and concerned for all, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality.*<sup>5</sup>

This was not prearranged hospitality. Christians were to be ready at all times to receive and welcome guests; due preparations were always to be in place.<sup>6</sup> Embracing earlier teachings Chrysostom highlighted this hospitality was not to be left to the servants; it must be carried out by the masters of the household.<sup>7</sup> He was a realist and he recognised the earthly benefits Christians could gain from entertaining persons of high status. However, he



The Hostal dos Reis Católicos in the Plaza do Obradoiro (left) Santiago de Compostela forms, together with the adjoining cathedral, one of the world's remarkable urban settings. The *hostal*, built as a royal hospital in 1499 to house pilgrims arriving in Santiago, is now a Parador and could be one of the oldest hotels in the world; it is also one of the most luxurious and beautiful. It has four beautiful cloisters, elegant public rooms, spectacular bedrooms and a luxurious dining room (overleaf) offering Galician delicacies. (Paradores)

also criticised such a practice. He developed his teaching by showing that generous hosts, as long as they are not seeking gain, would nevertheless find themselves blessed in the hospitality relationship. Central to his teaching was the idea that by offering hospitality to a person in need one ministered to Christ.

Reinforcing the role of the Church for charitable hospitality, the Ecumenical Council held at Carthage

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in AD 419 decreed that hospitality was an exception to what was otherwise regarded as forbidden, namely the use of church buildings for festal meals. Canon 42 was entitled 'Concerning the not having festal meals under any circumstances in churches' and it stated as an exception:

*That no bishops or clerics are to hold festal meals in churches, unless perchance they are forced thereto by the necessity of hospitality as guests pass by. The people too, as far as possible, are to be prohibited from attending such feasts.<sup>8</sup>*

## Recognition and reinforcement in classical antiquity

History credits Emperor Constantine with the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity after his victory over his stronger rival Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge on 28 October AD 312. With Constantine's support of the Christian Church, it became richer and undertook substantial responsibilities, not least in charitable hospitality through the care of the needy. In AD 362 the Emperor Julian, although attempting to suppress the Christian Church and reintroduce paganism across the Empire, explicitly urged his governors to maintain the Christian practice of the *xenodochein*.<sup>9</sup> In a letter to the Hellenic Archpriest Arsacius, he wrote:

*If Hellenism is not making the progress it should, the fault is with us who practise it... Do we not see that what has most contributed to the success of atheism [Christianity] is its charity towards strangers...? Establish numerous hospices in every city, so that strangers may benefit from our charity, not only those of our own number, but anyone else who is in need ... For it is disgraceful that not a single Jew is a mendicant, and that the impious Galileans [Christians]*

*maintain our poor in addition to their own, and our needy are seen to lack assistance from us.*<sup>10</sup>

Julian then went on to give the specific command ‘Teach those of the Hellenic faith to contribute to public service of this sort.’ Thus he gave clear witness to the significance of Christian institutions to care for society as a whole. Christians carried on establishing many more *xenodochia* to care for strangers—particularly for poor strangers who had no other resources—and for the local poor. Gradually, these were differentiated into separate institutions according to the type of person in need: orphans, widows, strangers, sick and poor.

The *xenodochia* led to ‘a social classification built on poor versus rich with poverty not only a material and economic condition, but also a legal and social status’. This arrangement constituted ‘a privileged establishment for the Church’, endowing ‘it with the means of sustaining the burden of relief which the Byzantine Emperor [Justinian]

could henceforth devolve on it’.<sup>11</sup> Beggars and travellers were treated by the law as total strangers and therefore did not enjoy protection—unlike slaves, who were some citizen’s property and, as such, enjoyed



A layman has fulfilled the duty of hospitality by receiving one or two; a bishop, however, unless he shall receive everyone ... is inhuman

the protection of the law.<sup>12</sup> The *xenodochia* treated these legal non-persons as legitimate inmates, forcing Emperor Justinian to grant them legal status (c. AD 530).

## Monastic influence

St Benedict’s Rule (c. AD 530) is recognised as one of the key foci for Christian and subsequent Western European monastic hospitality provision.<sup>13</sup> Recent research and analysis of St Benedict’s Rule shows that it is possible to construct and order a taxonomy of hospitality principles that would be recognisable to modern professional hospitality managers;<sup>14</sup> thus highlighting that by the sixth century St Benedict had already codified the provision of hospitality within

the monastic guest-house. These rules were to underpin hospitality provision in Europe for at least the next 900 years, until the Protestant Reformation.

St Bede the Venerable (d. 735), in his work *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, records the correspondence between St Augustine of Canterbury and Pope Gregory regarding how a bishop was to run his household. *The First Question of Augustine, Bishop of the Church of*

*Canterbury. Concerning bishops, how they are to behave themselves towards their clergy? Or into how many portions the things given by the faithful to the altar are to be divided? And how the bishop is to act in the Church?*

*Gregory, Pope of the City of Rome, answers. Holy Writ, which no doubt you are well versed in, testifies to this, and particularly St Paul’s Epistle to Timothy, wherein he endeavours to instruct him how he should behave himself in the house of God; but it is the custom of the apostolic see to prescribe rules to bishops newly ordained, that all emoluments which accrue, are to be divided into four portions; one for the bishop and*

*his family, because of hospitality and entertainments; another for the clergy; a third for the poor; and the fourth for the repair of churches.*<sup>15</sup>

Episcopal hospitality was also common across Europe. Early seventh-century St Isidore, Bishop of Seville, emphasises the bishop's special role:

*A layman has fulfilled the duty of hospitality by receiving one or two; a bishop, however, unless he shall receive everyone ... is inhuman.*<sup>16</sup>

## Further mediaeval influences

In around AD 700 the Christian community in Damascus aided the local Islamic community in the construction of a hospital, probably the first prominent Islamic hospital.<sup>17</sup> Muslims were actively engaged in alms-giving, with the *waqf* (a donation system) allowing for pious gifts as part of a contract between Allah and the *waqif* (donor). Founding a hospital or a *caravanserai* (accommodation for travellers) allowed prominent Muslims to display their prosperity and benevolence and the hospitals flourished in some of the most important Islamic cities: Cairo (874), Baghdad (918) and Granada (1366).<sup>18</sup> This meant that by the time that great urbanisation and population growth occurred, Eastern civilisations appeared better equipped to deal with the changing demographics. So much was this the case, that 'by the 12th century a hospital was an essential feature of any large Islamic town.'<sup>19</sup> Islamic hospitals also seem to have been far superior at that time, as they included separate areas for men and women, wards for different ailments and even the creation of psychiatric units.

Although within the Christian monasteries the *xenodochia* were not as elaborate as the Islamic hospitals, a two-fold provision began to appear.<sup>20</sup> The plans for the monastery at St Gall included not just a hospital for the monks, but also some sort of public *xenodochlein*, which would operate under more traditional values offering rest and respite to the needy, travellers and pilgrims. A hostel for pilgrims had already been in existence in Jerusalem by 1070.<sup>21</sup> The members of the Order became known as Knights of St John or Hospitallers. The hospitality was based around hostels, or pilgrim hospices, and caring for the sick for spiritual reward. A chronicler, Rabbi Benjamin from

Navarre, who visited Jerusalem in 1163, described the hospital in Jerusalem 'as supporting four hundred knights, and affording shelter to the sick; these are provided with everything they may want, both during life and death.'<sup>22</sup> When, in 1187, Saladin recaptured Jerusalem he allowed a small number of Hospitallers to stay and care for their sick until they could travel; he then enlarged the hospital and appointed a staff of Islamic physicians.<sup>23</sup>

After leaving Jerusalem the Knights established themselves for a while in Rhodes where they built a large hospital, the ruins of which can still be seen today. They were driven out of Rhodes by Suleiman the Magnificent and eventually found refuge on the island of Malta, which they also fortified. Their hospital buildings are still extant today although now used as a museum of the work of the Order. The standards set in that hospital greatly influenced standards in hospitals throughout the rest of Europe. The Order continues today and now has its main seat in Rome.

The mediaeval poor laws highlight the very close connection between clerical hospitality and the relief of the poor:

*The word 'hospitality' is of some importance because the phrase most commonly used by the medieval canonists to describe the poor relief responsibilities of the parish clergy was tenere hospitalitatem—they were obliged, that is, to 'keep hospitality'. The primary*

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*sense of the word referred to the reception of travellers, the welcoming of guests, but the canonists very often used it in a broader sense to include almsgiving and poor relief in general.*<sup>24</sup>

The importance of hospitality was again emphasised and enshrined with compilation and publication of the code of laws after the second Lateran Council in 1152. This formed the basis of Canon Law until 1917. It has a section dedicated to hospitality and the role of a bishop and this makes clear that if any priest is found to be lacking in hospitality, he cannot be ordained a bishop.<sup>25</sup>

As the population grew within Europe, the need for

following the religious model of providing hospitality for travellers and care for the sick based on public charity was emphasised; by around AD 1250, civil hospitals started being built across Western Europe. The designs for these were mainly taken from the descriptions passed down from pilgrims, crusaders or travellers about the vast and impressive hospitals in the East.

As Eastern European nations were expanding, their hospitals grew rapidly during the 12th and 13th centuries. Western civilisations started to build more and more civil hospitals. Many travellers, pilgrims and crusaders were returning from the East, and with them the need for the growth of hospitals increased. The role of the monk and monastic houses also started to change within this period. During the 12th century bishops in Germany started building new *xenodochia* beyond any form of monastic rule, including during the early part of the 13th century special hospitals to deal with the plague and leprosy.<sup>26</sup>

The 12th-century hospitals were vast in comparison to the earlier *xenodochia* and included more specialist medical requirements; however, their mission of hospitality to the sick remained.<sup>27</sup> The Church's direct contact with hospitals was to change with the Council of Clermont (1130) when monks were forbidden to practice medicine as this was thought to undermine their spiritual goals. This rule was confirmed by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).<sup>28</sup> Although the running of hospitals was taken out of monastic hands, the new hospitals were still staffed throughout by monks and nuns. With these changing roles there was the greater need for the expansion of medical learning, although monasteries remained important in servicing this expansion, until the more comprehensive rise of universities in the mid-14th century.

## The effects of Protestant Reformation

The diminishing responsibility of monasteries to hospitality accelerated in the 16th century; the Protestant Reformation effectively ended monastic charitable hospitality in Britain for a period of some 300 years.<sup>29</sup> However, monastic hospitality has continued in those countries which remained Catholic at the time of the

Reformation and was revived in countries where, following the Reformation, the Catholic Church had to an extent re-established itself; as in Scotland, for example, where Pluscarden and Nunraw continue the tradition.

Although the medieval monastic hospitals had smaller capacity in terms of medical treatment, they still offered a place of shelter for the old and the needy. Many of the mediaeval hospitals were closed.<sup>30</sup> This event though did not happen in isolation. In the German states, the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 saw the confiscation of religious property to the benefit of Protestant princes, and in later centuries a similar situ-

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ation was to arise throughout the Iberian Peninsula, in France and in the Italian states. The Protestant Reformation had a transforming effect on religious hospitality, hospitals, poor relief and the responsibility to refugees, not least because the sacramental character of hospitality was diminished. Hospitality gradually became separated from Christian roots as the state increasingly took over more responsibility for the care of the sick.

One example of religious hospitality being subsumed into the modern age is *El Hostal de Los Reyes Católicos* in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, originally founded in 1499 as a hostel and hospital for pilgrims that had just completed the *Camino de Santiago*. Since 1953, as a five-star hotel, it has formed part of the network of *Paradores de Turismo de España*. The *Hostal*, in an attempt to be true to its founding mandate of care of the pilgrim's body and soul, on a daily basis still offers free breakfast, lunch and dinner to the first ten pilgrims who have completed (on foot) the final 100km of the *Camino*.

## The changed role of charitable hospitality

Until recently several religious orders provided hospitals in Britain though the last surviving Catholic hospital in London, established and served by the Sisters



Archbishop Conti visits one of the Mungo Foundation's centres and talks to artists Mary McBride and Jaqui Gillies. (Paul McSherry)

of Mercy, is now under lay control—the hospital of St John and St Elizabeth—to which is attached the chapel of the Order of Malta in St John's Wood. Among the nurses who assisted Florence Nightingale in the Crimea were Sisters of Mercy. Catholic hospitals still exist especially in Germany, Italy and the United States.

Following the revival of the Catholic Church in Scotland (1878), various religious orders came to Scotland and particularly to Glasgow, which became the centre of the expansion of Catholicism in the West of Scotland through immigration. They recruited many from the immigrant community, and provided schools and a wide range of what we now call social services, mainly based on visitation of the homes of the poor and the sick.

During the episcopate of Archbishop—subsequently Cardinal—Thomas Winning and with a change of government policy to seek the support of and to fund the private sector, it was decided to give more formal shape to the social activities of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Glasgow. Administered directly by the Church was a wide range of services which could be considered to be in line with traditional charitable hospitality. They came under the title of Archdiocese of Glasgow Community Social

Services. In 2002 the department obtained independent trust status and became the Mungo Foundation with its own legal persona and a measure of autonomy. The Mungo Foundation now has the opportunity to develop its own marketing and fundraising strate-

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gies, create its own distinctive ethos in the marketplace of care and carry on the traditions of Christian caring in the modern world. The Foundation provides a wide range of social-care services and is run by a board of trustees, which employs a large operational staff of around 700 full-time and part-time people. Its comprehensive mission to offer support to those in *necessitudine* includes:

*to promote welfare, relieve poverty and advance education for the public benefit by the provision of wide-ranging social services to children and adults with care and support needs within Scotland.*<sup>31</sup>

With a generated income of approximately £14m, the Foundation is able to support over 1,000 people in its community-based care and support services

throughout the West of Scotland. The services help many people with learning disabilities, sensory impairment, dementia, mental-health problems, people

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affected by drug and alcohol misuse and young homeless people, including asylum seekers from countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Somalia and Kenya.

Today, much of the work of the Mungo Foundation in Scotland is funded by local authorities. The organisation also depends on the efforts of staff, volunteers and families who raise funds to support local work. The Mungo Foundation continues to depend on donations from the wider community and remains committed to its founding values of life, justice and community.

## Evolving but unchanged: the essence of charitable hospitality

What is evident from the preceding historical survey of hospitality for the needy is that even when religion is attacked there has always been recognition of the importance of hospitality *in necessitudine*. Emperor Julian, when attempting to suppress the Christian faith, emphasised the importance of preserving and adapting for use by the state the Christian institutions of charitable hospitality. Emperor Justinian had been forced to give legal status to beggars and travellers due to the protection that they received in institutions of hospitality. The Protestant reformers had also moved those institutions out of religious control into the secular realm of society just as Julian had attempted to do 1,100 years earlier. However, most recently, instead of trying to subsume charitable hospitality, the government chose to support and partially fund the Church's efforts. In every case the influence of the underpinning ethos remains even though the governance of the institutions may have changed.

Although society has changed and evolved over the last 2,000 years, despite the continually evolving practice of providing hospitality to those in most need, St Paul's mandate of hospitable behaviour is

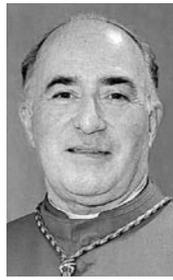
still being interpreted and followed today. One of the latest projects being developed, for example, by the Archdiocese of Glasgow is a new cloister garden, next to the city centre cathedral, that will offer a welcoming, tranquil and hospitable sacred space in the heart of the city. Hospitality provision for those *in necessitudine* has always continued to change and develop. As people's needs continue to change it remains the duty

of the Bishop and the Church, and now for society in general, to care for those needs in a practical and compassionate manner.

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