

## Living Away from Home – and Loving It: Tweaking a Christian Metaphor\*

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**Abstract:** Motivated by recent world and local events, this article puts the case for rethinking the notions of “home” and “homing” in both their human and specifically Christian dimensions. The metaphor of “home” sustains subversion in two contexts: the philosophico-literary, and the spiritual-theological. In this light, both the “is” of common experience and the “ought” of the Gospel message provide a nuanced interpretation of “heading for home”. Taking this interpretation seriously allows us to celebrate “living away from home”, by drawing upon its values and energies while escaping its tyrannies.

THE COSTS OF DEFENDING OUR HOMELANDS are making themselves felt. Three recent international events, spanning both hemispheres, have played intriguingly off each other to raise the question of the meaning and value of home. In the U.S.A. the terrorist acts of 11 September 2001 achieved proportion in the national psyche, not least because for the first time, their mainland had been effectively invaded.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, even before this, another effect of the longstanding political conflict in Afghanistan had taken centre stage in the Antipodes. From July 2001 until the present, the Australian Government has refused to let refugee boats, most of them bearing Afghan asylum seekers, land on the Australian mainland. In both cases, what has been touched in the host country is the gamut of emotional associations, both rational and irrational, that attach to the thought of home, and its invasion. What has also been evident is the plight of particular humans caught on the wrong side of this vice – in the United States, many ordinary Arabs now find themselves subject to indiscriminate popular suspicion and, in Australian and Pacific island detention centres, Afghan families who

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1. “Effectively” here carries the sense that American lives were lost there to a hostile military-style operation.

arrived as victims are further victimised by their incarceration. What is implicitly invoked as justification in each case is the need to make homelands secure for the many and/or the deserving at the expense of the few. And finally, the current violence in Palestine can be cited as the third tragic event for which “home” – its attainment and protection – serves as the broad reason motivating the warring sides.

How might free societies and individuals address these powerful, eminently understandable, and yet invariably conflictual expressions of the desire for home – to preserve it, on the one hand, and to gain it, on the other? “Bandaid” political and military cures notwithstanding, one direction in which wholesome treatment might be pursued is that of a radical rethinking of the notion of “home” itself.

#### PROBING THE INDISPENSABILITY OF HOME

In one sense it is surprising that the vast advances in physical mobility and scope for communication that have marked our age have not come with any fundamentally revisioned understanding of home, and its attractions. We move faster and more often. Likewise, we discover more rapidly, and are required in shorter order to vacate, intellectual or scientific positions that we have adopted. Yet in spite of this – or perhaps because of it in some compensatory way – homes, physical or metaphorical, might have become to us more sacred than to our forebears. They are more psychologically susceptible of invasion, less amenable to being genuinely shared. It is this contradiction between mobility and rigidity – which threatens in our time to become, if anything, starker – that I wish to confront in what follows.

The confrontation necessitates my pursuing the experience of home in the two key interpretative spheres wherein it is more or less secretly bolstered. First, in the philosophico-literary sphere, every story promises to take us “home to the truth”. Then, in the spiritual-theological sphere, both life and its constitutive spiritual journeys are inevitably interpreted as voyages “home” to the self, and/or to God. However, closer inspection of both contexts reveals that neither ever provides a home *simpliciter* but always a “home away from home”.

More telling still is an equivalent deconstruction – for that is the word to which the analyses tend – of the notion of home in both the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel. This leaves Christians with an attitudinal paradox – one, however, which is most fruitful. To embrace it involves employing those energies naturally released by “heading for home, while accepting also the “holy dispossession” in play at each point of arrival, preventing its fortification *as* home. This attitude of “Living away from home – and loving it” recasts both ordinary and (hitherto) theologically informed construals of home. It involves revisioning what has hitherto been regarded as “my home”, as being, if both life’s stories

and scriptural ones are taken seriously, not my home at all, but God's home, for ever in the process of being (re) built. Such an attitude might, if adopted, not only mirror experience itself, but help in providing the much-needed opening of hearts, homes and homelands towards which our times strain.

With that rather evangelical anticipation, it is time to examine the attractions of home.

## 1. THE LURE OF HOME

### A. Travelling home, I speed

Home has its own, virtually self-evident, lure. The comedian Bob Hope, known for the "Road" movies he made, as well as for his abundant travels to entertain American service men and women around the world, once wisecracked, "People ask me why I keep moving around so much. My stock answer is, 'With the kind of act I've got, it's safest!'" Levity aside, it always seems a reasonable question as to why anyone whose "act" does not demand it and who could be settled in a single place keeps moving on. Further, this bias in our expectations – a bias of rest over motion – is heightened when the place of rest is "home".

Philological clues fail to do justice to the attractions of home. Both the Latin *domus*, from which we get "domicile" and "domestic, and the Greek *oikos*, from which we get "ecology", double for "house", as well as "home". But there will be few who feel the need to delve further into philology to determine what makes a house a home. The difference between the former and the latter is nicely captured by the transition between the four meanings given for the word "home" in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. First there is "dwelling place, fixed residence of family or household"; that is, something like a mere house. But then come in order: "native land of oneself or one's ancestors"; "place where a thing is native or most common"; "institution of refuge or rest for persons needing care". To complete the transition to a definition which does justice to the emotional connotations of "home", there is the *Oxford's* definition of the term "at-home": "in one's own house or native land"; "at ease, as if in one's own home". Here we have home – home, as most of us do not need to have it further explained to us; home as it arouses the warm feelings associated with origin, familiarity, ownership, rest and security.

"Origin", "familiarity", "ownership", "rest" and "security" – again, a set of virtually self-explanatory desiderata. To be had if one can have them, to be mourned if one cannot. No wonder then, that, other things being equal, heading for home has its own, natural attraction. So natural is this pull that it comes with an accompanying physico-psychological "law" of travel, which readers are invited to verify for themselves:

"When no unusual external force acts upon a person in leisurely transit, the return leg of his or her journey is likely to take less time than the outward leg". In other words: all, other things being equal, "On a leisurely round-trip, one speeds travelling home".

One can generalise this law, I think, to presume its application to those metaphorical journeys to which the term "home" might be applied. One speeds, or at least, is energised, getting to familiar territory in a speech or essay, or to a hobby-horse in conversation. I take the law to be part of a wider law, inscribed seemingly upon the animal psyche, and concerning which human poets have waxed lyrical for ages: "East or West, home is best".

There is not the scope here to verify this law for those who seriously doubt it. It describes an attraction that thoughts of home foster in our hearts, and for which the greatest in our literary tradition have provided superior expression. Walter Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* has left its cadences in many of our childhoods:

Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,  
Who never to himself hath said,  
This is my own, my native land!  
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,  
As home his footsteps he hath turn'd,  
From wandering on a foreign strand.

Or Robert Louis Stevenson's stanza, which became his real life epitaph:

This be the verse ye grave for me  
Here he lies where he longs to be  
Home is the sailor, home from the sea  
And the huntsman home from the hill.

Others are more restrained, less gushing, as befits modernity. Thus Robert Frost's definition of home, "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in."<sup>2</sup>

#### B. Life as homeward journey

In their own ways, Stephenson and Frost are suggesting that life can be, and even ought to be, a homeward journey. This is well in keeping with what I have just been saying about home. Home is a place towards which I go to seek comfort, rest and welcome. I might certainly hope for these things from life itself. But other echoes can also be heard here: homecoming and rest are metaphors for arrival at an origin and destination in another great quest: the quest to know, and to know things fully, to know what is and to know it as it is. Formally, in the

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2. From *The Death of the Hired Man* in Geoffrey Moore (ed.), *Penguin Book of American Verse* (Revised edition. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983) 219.

West at least, it is with Descartes that this search becomes justified in a thoroughgoing way as a more particular search: a search by the self for knowledge of itself.

Can one come home to the world by coming home to oneself? It was Descartes, in the seventeenth century, who made it possible for philosophers to make systematised sense of the claim that to know the self is to know the world. But, of course, there are poets, philosophers and thinkers both before and after Descartes who have not particularly felt the need for that systematisation in order to regard self-knowledge as a decisive coming home to the self, and in the world. The eighth century BCE inscription on the Delphic oracle said simply, "Know thyself". By contrast, it was twenty-six centuries later, through and beyond Descartes, before Immanuel Kant suggested that immediate emotional and intellectual self-encounter are impossible. The mind, permanently wearing the "spectacles" of the categories, through which it sees all reality, can never see anything as the thing itself is.

But Kant's depiction of the self as, for all we can ever know, a function without an essence has failed to discourage the search for self as an origin that is also a destination. If the search cannot be requited, then it can proceed unrequited, with as much, or even greater, desire, since now it has become romantic, a quest for something always already lost: a place where I am revealed to myself as myself, without the possibility, or even the need, of "play-acting, or "putting on side". After Kant there is Husserl and the phenomenologist attempt to redefine reality so as to make the mental encounter with the thing the thing itself. But phenomenological essences retain an aspect of construction, leaving the uncomfortable suspicion that "play-acting" and "putting on side" are perhaps all that we have.

### C. Story-making as a quest for home

This ambivalence in the status of the metaphor of home is written, it seems, into experience itself. Home and homing are metaphors for revelation and encounter of the self and the world, and of the self-as-the-world. But home and homing may thus betray experience in both senses of the word "betray". On the one hand, they "betray" – show forth – the inner structure of experience, with its impetus towards discovering the "original" and "final" dimensions of self and world. On the other hand, they "betray" experience in the sense of traducing it, handing it over to something other than it is.

The response to this ambivalence can be a psychological defensiveness. When elements of the latter betrayal (as traducing) surface, there is at least the temptation to exclude heterogenous elements, to "throw out what doesn't fit", or to reshape it so that it belongs. It is at this point that "heading for home" – a home presumed to lie elsewhere – has

become “building a home” – a home presumed to be here, where I’m standing, and around which I hereafter erect my fences. If in this present essay I am pursuing the deficiencies and discontinuities which also attend the “homing metaphor”, it is not in order to discredit the energies which homing generates. It is rather in order to redirect these energies so that they respond to the “as if” of home. This requires a new understanding – a new consciousness – of where it is we are when, having headed for home under one description or another, we have arrived. In fact, I want to argue – or continue arguing, because I’ve already begun – that we acknowledge our occupancy of this new space always and everywhere in the places we live in and in the stories by which we locate ourselves. The new self-awareness also calls for a new metaphor, which I call, for want of a more succinct expression, “Living away from home”.

There are some hurdles to be surmounted in elaborating upon this expression. Understood as I intend it, the metaphor exhibits a curiously ruptured structure. Firstly, it fits uneasily with the metaphor of “heading for home”, as regards describing what life’s journeys are all about. If one is living away from home, then one has, no matter how temporarily, suspended the act of “heading for home”. And yet, if what I have suggested already is true – if there is a homing infrastructure that is already part of storytelling, or the search for knowledge, or the search for self – then, under one description we cannot but be heading for home. So, the suspended state of “living away from home” is just that – not an abandonment of homing but a suspension of it: a postponement, a hiatus, a caesura.

Still and all, it is living away from home of which I speak, not existing away from home. That is, I am speaking of consciously accepting one’s “away from homeness”, and taking time out to “live” in this space, rather than merely tolerating it or mourning the absence (from home) it requires. In other words, one enjoys keeping open the space which would close up and close around one, and close one in were one to call it “home”. “Living away from home – and loving it” is therefore an apt name for this state. It offers a difficult space in which to remain, the alternatives on either side being far more common: “Living at home, and loving it”, or, at the other extreme, “Living away from home, and hating it”.

The questions attending the rupture already alluded to find their answers in relation to this description. What is to be done with the energies that come from “heading for home”? And what of home-making and the “virtues” that go with it? Neither of these is abandoned in one’s attempt to “live away from home”. Where they might fit in will be a subject I take up presently, in the form of a suggestion that looks to the Gospels. But first I successively consider the problematic aspects of

home (and homing) in both untheologised and theologised experience. Beginning with untheologised experience, I offer some reflections on “home” as occasioning a displacement of self and other.

## 2. HOME AS DISPLACEMENT OF THE SELF AND THE OTHER

### A. Homing as displaced within narrative

The unpacking of any experience relies on stories: those we tell ourselves and those we tell others. As I have suggested, any story contains an implicit notion of home or analogues of home in its ostensible purpose of presenting “what is” or what is true. In this sense it purports to “take us home to the truth” – a place of rest, from which there will be no good reason to journey further, and to which elements of the narrative might be related, as origin or end. This correlation between home and truth – which incidentally finds unconscious representation when we call something a “a home truth” – would again take more time to establish than I have at my disposal here. What is interesting, though, is that if a story is a way of taking one home to the truth, then the concept of “home” as a location of truth might well be compromised from the start, to the extent that the concept of “story” is itself compromised.

For example, the word “story” itself cannot help hovering in meaning between its replicative and creative connotations. As replicative, a story re-presents truth, or “what actually happened”, or “what is the case”. As creative, however, a story fictionalises and cannot escape the connotation of so doing. So someone might say passionately, “Let me tell you my life’s story”, to which one reply is “Thank you, yes, I would like to know the truth about you”, but another is, “Oh don’t tell me a story; tell me the truth!” This latter is given potency by the observation that any story about experience edges towards distorting the very experience it reports, and which, by reporting, it creates. My experience is thereby “betrayed” – not only in one sense, but also the other (“traded”) – by the words I find for it.

In this way, even the subject of experience – “subject” in the dual sense of the person having the experience and also of what is experienced – is lost. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger refers to this by distinguishing between *Erfahrung* (roughly speaking, lived experience, experience as it is actually had, in the unrepresentable medium that precedes explicitation) and *Erlebnis* (experience as processed by consciousness and explicitated).<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida,

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3. Hubert L Dreyfus says, “Heidegger holds that *experience* (*Erfahrung*) discloses the world and discovers entities in it – and yet this does not entail the traditional conclusion that human beings relate to objects by means of their *experiences* (*Erlebnisse*), that is, by way of mental states.” Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: a Commentary on Heidegger’s “Being and Time*,

famously – or, as some might think, infamously – has no doubt that the meaning of any story about experience cannot be “totalised”, or given without remainder, because the key words upon which the totalisation relies will themselves betray ambiguity of meaning.<sup>4</sup>

But, among recent writers, the one who best names the gap between an event of writing and the subject (again in either sense) that writing purports to report is the Strasbourg philosopher Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. Lacoue-Labarthe speaks of the moment when

perhaps not writing what we want to write, we experience a weakness, a powerlessness, that is no longer the effect of an excess of power but rather like the obscure work of a force that is foreign to what we say.... We write, we are dispossessed, something is ceaselessly fleeing, outside of us, slowly deteriorating.<sup>5</sup>

#### B. How notions of home and homing misreport and prejudice experience

*We write, we are dispossessed ....* I think Derrida and Lacoue-Labarthe are right. But, if this general account of the experience of writing and storytelling as “failed homing” does not seem convincing, a few more specific examples might do better. In fact, let us consider the accounts on the basis of which we locate home itself as an experience. On what basis for instance does one’s country count as one’s home? Not merely as one’s place of origin, if by origin one means birth. To take Australia as one, by no means atypical, Western example: many who are born in this country but who experience marginalisation by virtue of their ethnic origins do not feel at home here. Others born here – the children of non-residents, or asylum seekers – are not even de jure citizens. What seems to be the case, when all permutations of entitlement and actual experience are taken into account, is that finding home here, or anywhere, is about being granted it – by and within a political or social dispensation.

The same vagaries apply to experiences of home justified directly on the basis of that other origin: parentage, or adoptive parentage, or other real or surrogate sources of family identity. When we consider the discrepancies between where we are meant to find familial nurture and where we actually do, “origin-ation” seems less a work of nature than a self-protective art practised by life, in which parents and homemakers are not themselves but figures of themselves. When Kahlil Gibran said

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*Division I*” (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991) 45-46 (Dreyfus’ emphases).

4. See Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play”, in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) 289.

5. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Subject of Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993) 11-12.

“Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of life’s longing for itself”,<sup>6</sup> he might as well have added, “Your home is not your home, it too is the product of life’s longing for a cosy place in which to foster itself.”

But if so called “objective” or “natural” circumstances cannot guarantee the successful creation of home, once we ascribe such creation to life, as artist, the problem to which Lacoue-Labarthe adverted shows itself again. Life, albeit for its own purposes, grants us the experience of home at the cost of distorting much of the experience we actually have.

Is this a problem? When Lacoue-Labarthe points to the “loss of power” experienced by the human artist it is precisely the “foreignness of the force” employing the artist that he blames for this loss. And when “life” produces my experiences, be they of home, or of anything else, something of the experience that “I” have is inevitably traduced, even in its becoming “experience”. The outsider is silenced, even if only in myself. If this is problematic, it is so not only when it finds expression on the large, social scale – say, when we turn away desperate asylum seekers from “our home”. In fact, I suspect that both this problem, and the solution to it that I am proposing, may find their deepest lodging in another place – one’s personal spiritual life. For it is there that metaphors of home and homing abound, awaiting employment and mis-employment. Admittedly, there are as many examples of spiritual life as there are persons. Nevertheless a representation of the difficulties involved there with the homing metaphor is available through a consideration of how the metaphor fares within the framework that formally undergirds spiritual self-understanding, namely, spiritual theology.

Of course, spiritual theologies themselves are many; here, I can mention only one indicative instance, which is nevertheless well-known enough, and comprehensive enough in its recognition of all experience as potentially spiritual to serve my purposes.

#### C. Home and homing in spiritual theology: The *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola.

Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* proceed from the proposal that “The goal of our life is to live with God forever”.<sup>7</sup> The goal Ignatius outlines clearly derives from the narrative that underpins all mainstream Gospel catechesis: the story of exile through sin and return to God through conversion and Christ’s redemptive grace. And if

6. Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923) 17.

7. I am employing David L. Fleming’s acceptably accurate modern paraphrasing of the *Spiritual Exercises*, with which many who have recently undergone them will be familiar; see David L. Fleming, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978) 23.

Ignatius is drawing spiritual fruit from this spiritual-theological narrative, there is a theological master, Augustine, who was himself hardly inventing a new framework of belief in his famous exclamation, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (*Confessions*, I,1).

The person who makes the Ignatian *Exercises* partakes of this framework in both its aspects of homing, a coming home to him or herself, and a coming home to God. In the light of prayer, and within a contemplative encounter with the scenes from the Gospels, he or she seeks the presence of God, and hopefully finds it. Quite often, as those who have made the Exercises will attest, the encounter is enlightened by a moment of discovery about God or self that has the aspect of a revelation of something which was always true about the retreatant's self or actions but which has remained invisible till now. In other words, it is for the retreatant "a coming home to self". Here he or she can rest – until, later on, a further meditative event uncovers another shell of interpretation and identity, a further homeward move.

One can probe the value of the homing metaphor here. It is useful to ask whether "homecoming" is the best framework under which to interpret these advances, each of which has, admittedly, its own aspect of finality – until, that is, its successor appears. On the other hand, if the finality is taken too seriously, a successive experience might be impossible. Perhaps this is why that which is called "discernment of spirits" – committed, constantly renewed assessment of spiritual experience – advisedly accompanies all reflection on prayer during time of retreat. Otherwise, any resting point may become too finally "home", yielding the unattractive concomitants of this destination: moral certainty presenting as smugness or intrinsic superiority; theological firmness presenting as rigidity; embrace of one lifestyle presenting as prejudicial judgement about others.

But what, it might well be asked, is an alternative interpretation of these journeys? And, more fundamentally, to what extent is it even possible to re-work the overarching metaphor of exile and return – of leaving home and returning home – on which individual theological and spiritual frameworks rely? It is time to look at what happens to the metaphor of home in the Gospels themselves.

### 3. LOVING LIVING AWAY FROM HOME: THE GOSPEL LEGACY

#### A. The notion of heaven as home in the Gospels – its deconstruction

One caveat is necessary here. Being not by profession a scripture scholar, my excursion into textual interpretations is not by way of proposing conclusive exegetical frameworks for the passages chosen.

Rather I hope to broach a necessary conversation about the deconstructive elements in texts, particularly as these relate to the unravelling of the metaphor of home. With this in mind, I also approach the Gospels through a particular, perhaps overly leading, question. Is it possible that the development in Christian theology which has formed and then reinforced the notion of heaven as a final home for exiled humans, has failed to do justice to the treatment of home which we find in the Gospels? Naturally, this question expects an affirmative answer. To reinforce its thrust, I want to sketch – extremely broadly – one particular trajectory found in the New Testament notion of home, beginning with the Synoptics.

Firstly, I take it as uncontroversial that the Jesus of the Synoptics is much more concerned with describing and prescribing in relation to this life than the next. True, sometimes he presents the kingdom of heaven as here already, and at other times, as not yet here. But even when it is not yet, the kingdom that is yet to come has already “incurred” in the now; it is to be seen as continuous with radical changes that are being fulfilled “today, even as you listen” (Luke 4:21).

Again it is obvious that, in the first instance, these changes relate to leaving home, not to arriving home. The disciples must leave home physically, and Jesus, to begin his ministry, does so definitively, both physically and metaphorically speaking. Further, and most evidently in Luke’s Gospel, there is effected a curious subverting of the notion of home, and the familial. To see this, one must take Jesus’ redefinition of the terms associated with familial relationship, “My mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:21) in conjunction with the redefinition in the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10: 29-37) of the term “neighbour”. The subversion appears to work like this: what is more or less a *supplementation* of the notion of home in the first story, becomes a veritable *supplantation* of the notion of home in the parable. Those who are familiar with the language of deconstruction used by Derrida, will recognise its trademark elements in this reference to “supplementation which becomes supplanting”.<sup>8</sup> To explain: deconstruction in a text can occur when a seemingly secondary meaning added to the meaning of a key concept merely to complete that concept’s denotation, then in fact is seen to take over the concept itself. Due to this “playful effect”, the meaning of the concept in the text “hovers”, as it were between original meaning and its supplantation,

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8. See Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983) 89. For Derrida, any possibility that the meaning of a text might be totalisable (i.e., determinable without remainder) is already precluded “structurally” by the ever ambiguous relationship between speech and writing. Writing, “invented” to supplement speech, has supplanted speech as a determinant of textual meaning. This means that, even in a spoken context, meaning is not totalised; rather, it always becomes referred further to the limitless other contexts from which the given phrase borrows its signification.

thus becoming unavailable to be “totalised” – rendered absolute – as either meaning. As a result and because it is a key concept which has been thus subverted, the text itself is said to have undergone deconstruction.

In the Lukan Gospel, deconstruction would occur as follows, operating on the key notion of “home”, and working through both texts. In the first text, the notion of home receives a supplementation to complete its meaning. Jesus’ home – as identified by his family – is to be associated not only with his blood relatives but with those others who are also family: “My mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.” As far as I can tell, it is not uncontroversial to presume that what is occurring here is supplementation, not any supplanting, of the notion of family. Jesus’ mother and brother are not refused familial status; rather, others have been added to the family, and a new criterion created, into which Jesus’ original family might well fit.<sup>9</sup>

In the second passage, however, the supplement *has* effected a supplantation because it is clear that – in the description offered of the Samaritan’s assistance to the traveller – “doing the will of God”, or its equivalent, “being a neighbour to one in need”, has become the sole criterion for “nearness to home”. Other bonds which might qualify unaided, notably religious or geographical association, are specifically rejected as the priest and the Levite pass by. The net effect is one which occurs even more clearly elsewhere in Luke. What was on the margins – imported in order to enhance – has itself been moved to the centre and that which was central has been moved to the rim, a “reversal motif” present in all the Synoptics but is most evidently a leitmotif in the Gospel of Luke.

#### B. The Gospel’s confession of the dispossession of the Son of Man

Reinforcing the foregoing is the mystery of Jesus’ origin as it is presented in the Fourth Gospel. I am here of course mining a very different and later style of theologising than that evident in the Synoptics. But there is no reason why what it does in the area of discussing “home”, and especially Jesus’ home, should not be accepted as drawing out a thread which occurs in the earlier Gospels, especially as the question of the relationship between Jesus’ origin and his authority is not insignificant in them as well.

Arguably, the deconstruction of the concept of home is even more directly accomplished in the Fourth Gospel than in the Synoptics. Here it is *Jesus’* home that is in question. It is a home to which the disciples, including ourselves, are invited – “They (asked him), ‘Master, where do

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9. See, e.g., Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina 4; Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 1991) 133, 135.

you live?" He replied, "Come and see" (John 1: 38-39)– but, as the question of Jesus' origin deepens, the question of whether this home is with humans, or with Jesus' Father, or in some continuous transport between the two realms, also deepens. In the simplest terms, it is evident that "home" involves *two homes*. Home is with the Father, from whom Jesus has come, and to whom he will return: "My father's house has many rooms" (14:2). But explicitly too home is *us*, the human race: "He came unto his own and his own received him not" (1: 11).

In a way both puzzling and ambiguous, in leaving his Father, Jesus is going, not from home to a foreign land, but from *home* to *home*. One might say, with reference back to a memory of Jesus carried by Matthew's Gospel, "Well then, it's no surprise that he has no place to lay his head (cf. Matt 8:20), since having two homes is indeed like having none." To be at home with us is immediately to be challenged by the urgency of returning "home" to the Father. Equally though, for Jesus to be at home with the Father is for him to be away from his own. Here, another mode of deconstruction (again I invoke Jacques Derrida) occurs by way of an ambiguity, an undecideability, between alternate meanings for the same term "home".

#### C. A theological resolution of the "Two-Homes" discrepancy

What does this ambiguity betoken? It undermines the metaphor of home as a place of origin and end, either human or divine. Or, more precisely, since the metaphor remains, it brings the signification of the metaphor to an impasse. One can tease out the elements of the ambiguity. What they reveal, I think, is that the broken notion of Jesus' own homelessness, coupled as it is with the notion of his heading for home, parallels the notion of a cheerful "living away from home" that I'm advocating as a Christian response to the Gospel.

The Fourth Gospel ascribes two distinct homes to the Son of Man, which however, find communication with each other through the person of the Son: "I tell you most solemnly: you shall see heaven thrown open, and, above the Son of Man, the angels of God ascending and descending" (1:51). But if the Son of Man is never at home, there is nevertheless a way in which he himself, through and as his Word, is to constitute home for his disciples. "Make your home in me, as I make mine in you" (15:3). Or, "If you make my Word your home, you will indeed be my disciples" (8:31). The homeless Word provides a home for others, a home that is to attract them, that is to instigate their homing.

So, why is the Word homeless? One is tempted to think that it is because this word is constantly on the move to where the Father's will is to be done, or his word is to be heard. In this sense the Word is the Son of Man, yes, but it is also, as it were, an impetus *within* the Son of Man, keeping him homeless, taking him to where it itself is due to go. What

comes to mind and captures the situation exactly is a text from Isaiah written to another people who by the agency of the Word are returned from exile: "the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out what it was sent to do" (Isa 55:11). The Word, as home, is always both with itself and ahead of itself, being drawn on. I have been talking about the Fourth Gospel, but a similar urgency and restlessness is attributed to Jesus already in the earliest Gospel, that of Mark:

When (Simon and his companions) found him, they said, "Everybody is looking for you". He answered, "Let us go elsewhere, to the neighbouring country towns, so that I can preach there, because that is why I came" (Mark 1:36-39).

Home, then, is where Jesus' Father's work is being done, always here but always also elsewhere. There is a particular reason why this thought can be taken in a theological direction that is properly *philosophical* at the same time. The theological reflection explains why Jesus and those who would follow him in the Gospels are always away from home and always heading home. Because Jesus' Father is father of all, the Gospels in more or less explicit ways look towards a version of home that will be home in the sense of the Father's own house. Here the criterion for belonging will be the most inclusive understanding of "family" possible. Then, those who have hitherto made smaller homes – a precondition of which is the exclusion of other humans – will break down walls, physically and psychologically, to become part of this final, non-exclusive domicile. The philosophical version of this "inclusive" home trades on the notion of the *world* as home. This home is always elsewhere, always being built at the expense of the actual (more or less exclusive) homes we *also* want to call homes.

#### D. Living away from home – and loving it

In this sense theology and philosophy concur in respect of the Home from which we are separated and to which we are heading, but at which we can never arrive except at the cost of a radical dissolution of homes which are smaller, notionally as well as really. These latter are homes built *by exclusion*, homes become familial by way of exclusion of a prescribed set of outsiders. The world home would be uncompromisingly different. Not only would lions lie down with lambs, but communists (or former communists) would be found relaxing with capitalists (or former capitalists), first world citizens with those of the third world, and who knows, maybe even Australian mainlanders with Afghan refugees – the former no longer mainlanders, of course, and the latter no longer refugees.

The Gospels, if I am right, anticipate steadfastly this world to come, refusing to call anything that is not it home. Home is never here, except incipiently, as God's home, the only Home there really is. The places where the Word is active in creating this home are themselves Home in a limited sense. If you or I are to be found there – and hopefully we sometimes are – we are encouraged to remember that they are not our own homes but the Father's house, under construction.

This attitude requires a struggle against all the ordinary ways in which "home" and "homing" insinuate themselves into our lives and the stories that construct them. I have called it "Living Away From Home – and Loving It". In the end, more than anything, it might require courage, and a humility towards the offer of productive insecurity continuously made to us by experience, and which so often remains unaccepted. For me, it is best expressed in a quotation from the seventeenth century Cartesian philosopher Nicholas Malebranche, quoted by Kevin Hart in a groundbreaking work on the deconstruction of theology. Introducing himself as guide to an audience no doubt longing for a theological home, Malebranche promises only this:

I will not take you into a strange country, but I will perhaps teach you that you are a stranger in your own country.<sup>10</sup>

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10. Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 1.