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Eschatology in Philemon: An Analysis of 'ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν' for a Southern African Context

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Abstract

First-century hospitality customs can provide a window through which ancient social identity is observed. When these symbols are analysed against the backdrop of implied eschatology in Philemon, there emerges a composite picture that interweaves theological discourse with first-century cultural norms. Using social-scientific criticism, this paper remaps Philemon's socio-cultural world, centred on the theme of hospitality. Paul's rhetorical use of this cultural norm in relation to implied eschatology in the apostolic Parousia, is explicated within Philemon's and Onesimus' identity struggles. The implicit change of status for Onesimus, and the honour garnered, forms a departure point for Southern Africa as implications of what was exclusively reserved for social equals are appropriated in a context gripped by chronic social disparity. In this appropriation, unjust legacies are evaluated with an aim of reimagining a context built on equity and justice.

Keywords
Hospitality
Social-scientific Criticism
Masters and Slaves
Patronage and Clientism

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1. Introduction

Southern Africa,[2] like the ancient Mediterranean world, is a heavily stratified society with realties that trace anchorage back to imperial and colonial enterprises. It is, therefore, a central claim of this essay that a correlative reading of ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν in *Philemon*, can provide socially attentive theological answers to a context engulfed by polyvalent social dislocation. Using Philemon's and Onesimus's identity transformation, this correlative reading aims to underscore the function of hospitality in both the ancient household and the typical Southern African home. Through an investigation of the *apostolic parousia,* matters of social identity, social identity complexity, and the potential for upward social mobility are underscored and described, using an overarching social-scientific hermeneutic. From this methodological framework, a fraction of *Philemon's*[3] nuance is appropriated in a context currently asking ancient and contemporary questions from a text rich in themes of transformation, redemption, and reconciliation.

2 The term *Southern Africa* is preferred because (a) the authors are nationals of two Southern African countries, Zimbabwe and South Africa, respectively; (b) the issues that this paper will address, are not exclusive to a single country in the region. Rather, they affect the region with variable weighting; and; (c) the region is, arguably, a bloc populous with an economy that relies on shared socio-cultural phenomena. Examples of such phenomena include, labour, borders, languages, and people groups.

3 We distinguish the person of Philemon from the epistle, by italicising the latter.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

2.1. A brief definition of social-scientific criticism

Social-scientific criticism is a hermeneutical approach that presupposes texts as units of meaningful discourse (Van Eck 2009:5). Elliot (1993:7) defines it as 'that phase of the exegetical task which analyzes the social and the cultural dimensions of the text and of its environmental context through the utilizations of the perspectives, theory models, and research of the social sciences.' While social-scientific criticism is situated within the broad universe of hermeneutics and is characterised by an investigation of the world behind the text, it remains an exegetical approach rooted in the social-sciences and cultural anthropology. It employs a 'thick description', a method made popular by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz,[4] in its socially attentive exegesis of the biblical text (Barton 1993:894; Taylor 1995:128). This approach stands in contrast to *social history*, which does not consider social interpretive models credible tools for the study of the first-century Mediterranean world. Where *social-scientific criticism* traces its definition from models advanced by Malina (1993), Neyrey (1990), and Elliot (1993), *social history* launches from the correlative approaches stemming from Meeks (1983) and Theissen (1982). 'Social historians' regard models to be anachronistic, an imposition on first-century texts, and too general in composition to account for the variegated contexts and customs from whence the Bible emerges. Wright (2015: 239–240) comments: 'the systematization

4 Geertz, C.,1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*; New York: Basic Books. See chapter 1, which is entitled 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture.' Perhaps the following statement is axiomatic and quintessentially definitive of Geertz's central theory, 'Whatever the ultimate sources of faith of a man or group of men may or may not be, it is indisputable that it is sustained in this world by symbolic forms and social arrangements.' It is from Geertz's 1973 publication that Wayne Meeks' (1983) monumental *The First Urban Christians* drew some of its insights, heralding the rise in socially attentive interpretations of the Bible.

of such analogies into 'models' is always in danger of squeezing out the possibility of radical innovation. And all the signs indicate that the first Christians were, in some respects at least, radical innovators.'

In response to this indictment, Esler (1995:4) has long upheld that, '[m]odels are heuristic tools, not ontological statements. … they are either useful or not, and it is meaningless to ask whether they are "true" or "false."' He continues, 'we all use models in our work; the only question is whether or not we acknowledge them and bring them out into the open for critical scrutiny.' With such binary between social interpretations of the Bible and social historical exegesis, 'social historians' such as Horrell (2009) have gone as far as dismissing the continued usefulness of social-scientific criticism, because they consider it difficult to delineate. This is based on a perception that the method has been extensively assimilated into the 'mainstream' of biblical studies. Horrell (2009:17) posits:

> Since the kinds of questions and approaches introduced by the pioneers of social-scientific criticism have spread into the mainstream of the discipline, it is impossible to draw any boundary between what does and does not count as social-scientific work—just as it is impossible to say, for example, where history gives way to historical sociology or historical geography.

Horrell's argument is formidable. However, it neither considers nor accounts for the continued usefulness of social-scientific criticism in the Global South, the new locus, and arguably, emerging hub of theology and Christian thought. While our body of literature is fixed, it remains a body of literature read by interpreters originating *from* and functioning *in* different cultural contexts; contexts demanding unique and variegated answers from the New Testament corpus. How then can social-scientific criticism remain useful and relevant in Southern Africa?

Firstly, Elliot (1993:58) comments,

> Social-scientific criticism is concerned not only with the original meanings of the biblical documents but also with the aggregations of meanings down through the centuries. It also asks how and under what conditions the Bible continues to be meaningful for modern readers. As an operation of exegesis and theological understanding, it seeks to link present Bible readers with distant but sacred heritage of the past and to explore as precisely as possible where different horizons of perception, experience, meaning might eventually merge.

Contrary to the 'curtain call' signalled by many a social-historical stage manager, this approach remains useful to Southern African

interpreters because of its correlative benefits, as somewhat alluded to by Elliot. The non-cumbersome correlations between separate yet dialogical non-Western contexts (the world of the text and the world of the writers), facilitated by an appropriate application of models, provide enormous potential in retaining the *kerygmatic meaning* of the text while demanding responsible appropriation in contexts non-Occidental. As Wright (2015:241) says (while borrowing from Meeks), 'the hermeneutical circle is not completed until the text finds a fitting social embodiment.' Perhaps Esler's (1995: 4) view rings clearest, when he states:

> Although New Testament critics may be able to unveil the nature of the original connection between text and context and even advocate, at a general level ... how such connections might be brought into dialogue with contemporary experience, the contextualization of the kerygma can only be achieved by a community.

Secondly, since social-scientific criticism uses a thick description in its interrogation of biblical texts, this renders it a credible candidate for hybridization. This is enriching for interpreters across the board, since balanced dialogue would potentially ensue from such an enterprise. Contemporary Southern Africa is in desperate need of interdisciplinary theological research presupposed by an integrated approach (Smith 2013). Arguably such a method is stringently attentive to the world of the Early Christian, the history of Christian communities across the ages, and the modern world. It is therefore a subsidiary thesis of this essay, that the chosen hermeneutical approach is the most appropriate methodology for the task at hand, and by extension, this is an encore to what has been deemed obsolete by some.

2.2. A Sociology of knowledge

As a sub-category of social-scientific criticism, a sociology of knowledge is specific to worldviews as they relate to the fabric and stratification of a society. Rhoads (1994:139) says, 'The first aspect of this approach is to reconstruct the worldview, the everyday assumptions, of a given culture or group. The second aspect is to see how this worldview gave legitimacy to and maintained the particular social order of the group from which it emerged.' In a general description of the approach, Coser (1968:428) offers the following definition, 'The sociology of knowledge may be broadly defined as that branch of sociology which studies the relation between thought and society. It is concerned with the social or existential conditions of knowledge.' Although both Coser and Rhoads underscore similar aspects in relation to a sociology of knowledge, this description is problematic. For instance,

Rohrbaugh (1987:104–105) underscores latent shortcomings, in the approach, by saying:

> Phenomenologists … complain that the conventional sociology of knowledge is too intellectualized, treating only the articulate, usually literary, beliefs of a small segment of society while leaving out the everyday, often vague, but nonetheless critical knowledge *everyone* requires in order to function in the world.

Concerning this difficulty, Rohrbaugh (1987:109) cites Berger and Luckmann (2011), who view a sociology of knowledge from the premise of a broader categorization that is inclusive of common sense, morals, and beliefs. Arguably, such diversification in the 'location' of knowledge is inclusive of the custodians and non-custodians of power. It is in view of such inclusivity and complication that this paper will form a departure point that employs a nuanced form of a sociology of knowledge to trace the role of hospitality in the first-century Mediterranean world as seen unfolding between Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon, via a contextual analysis of ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν, *Philemon* 22a.

2.3. Social identity and social identity complexity

Like a Sociology of Knowledge, Social Identity Theory (henceforth, SIT) can be considered an offshoot of social-scientific inquiry. This sub-category traces its origins to Henri Tajfel (1979:61–63) who defines it as follows: 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.'

Although SIT has been beneficial to the reconstruction of identities in biblical scholarship, it remains linear and flat in its espousal of ancient identities, especially when matters of multiple group membership are considered. Antithetically, Kok (2014:2) advances Social Identity Complexity (henceforth SIC), which unlike SIT, underscores the fact that ancient group identity, for any given individual, was not limited to a single assembly, but could be nested, hybridized, or even be communal and competitive depending on context or value ascribed to each identity. Drawing from the work of Roccas and Brewer (2002), Kok (2014) identifies four stations in social identity make up. Firstly, he notes *intersectionality*; a basic 'in-group' and 'out-group' dichotomy, which defines all other identities held, through a primary social identity. He comments (Kok, 2014:2), 'Such people would rather tend to be exclusive and less likely to transcend social boundaries.' Next, Kok (2014:3) identifies *dominance* and says, 'Another strategy of dealing or coping with different (competing) social

identities is to make one of the identities the dominant one, and construct all others in a subordinate relationship to the dominant social category.' Third, he notes *compartmentalisation* and states, 'a person would activate multiple identities and express those identities *contextually* in a process of isolation and differentiation … Consequently, the context determines which identity will be the primary basis for social identity.'

Finally, Kok (2014:3–4) identifies the *merger* station, and describes it as being highest in SIC measure. This station aims to integrate competing, and divergent social identities, thus facilitating the transcendence of social boundaries. Commenting on sub-groups in 1 Corinthians, Barentsen (2011:12) shares Kok's view. He regards Paul's treatment as motivating 'nested social identities in an overarching Christian social identity with its focal point in Christ crucified.' Thus, when Paul, Philemon and Onesimus's relationships are treated through the SIC matrix, it becomes apparent that the simplistic (and static) 'master-slave', 'apostle-convert' designations are limited in their description of the three. Here, the flattening of multiple identities into the transactional relationships between Paul, the *paterfamilias,* and a δοῦλος, becomes incompatible with the complex nested identities presented throughout the epistle. We therefore posit an analysis of *Philemon* 22a informed by such complexity, operating from the broad premise that hospitality involves identities interacting within a given social setting.

3. A Social-scientific Analysis of ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν

3.1. The rhetorical significance of Philemon 22a

The final instruction that Paul gives Philemon within the peroration[5] is ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν, ἐλπίζω γὰρ ὅτι διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν ὑμῶν χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν (Phlm. 22). At a surface level, the meaning of the verse is clear enough, being conveyed idiomatically by the NIV: *And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.* While the meaning of the words may be clear, their rhetorical role in the argument might be interpreted as either a simple travelogue or as a Pauline *parousia*.

If the argument of the letter concludes in verse 21, then verse 22 should be understood as a conventional *travelogue*. If this is the case, then his motivation for telling Philemon to prepare for his planned visit would be entirely pragmatic. However, if verse 22 is

5 Koester (2001:554) says, '"Peroration" is the term for the conclusion of a speech, according to the canons of classical rhetoric … the peroration gave the speaker a final opportunity to influence the listeners by reviewing key arguments and appealing to the emotions.'

itself the climax of Paul's argument, then the force of the instruction is more psychological than practical. In this case, Paul's announced coming is intended to put psychological pressure on Philemon—Paul is coming to see if Philemon has complied with his directives regarding Onesimus.

The evidence favours interpreting verse 22 as an *apostolic parousia*. The main objection to this reading is that that would be contradictory to verse 21 and unethical on the part of the apostle to resort to seemingly coercive tactics. However, the rhetorical strategies that the apostle employs throughout the letter dispel both objections. Paul consistently juxtaposes confidence that Philemon will freely choose to do what is right (σοι τὸ ἀνῆκον, v. 8; τὸ ἀγαθόν σου, v. 14) with social and theological pressure to do what is right.[6] Therefore, we contend that taking ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν as a warning that Paul is coming to inspect Philemon's obedience is not only a plausible interpretation of the phrase's role in the epistle; it is also the preferred interpretation.

6 τὸ ἀνῆκον denotes less what is right in legal or ethical principle than what is fitting, proper, or appropriate in a social or relational setting. We might even speak of what is honourable. Although Paul has no doubts about *what is required* in the situation, it is a counter-cultural implication of the gospel that he cannot presume will be immediately apparent to his brother and partner, Philemon.

3.2. The social-scientific significance of *Philemon* 22a

Since *Philemon* 22a is considered an *apostolic parousia* akin to Paul's injunction in 2 Corinthians 13:1–10, when this verse is considered from a social-scientific perspective, the force of the rhetorical strategy underscores a few fundamental factors.

Firstly, the futuristic presence harkens a 'quasi-inaugurated eschatological' judgment motif, somewhat analogous to the second coming of the Christ. Through this motif, the person of Philemon is 'put on trial', perpetually, by Paul's intended visit during which the apostle will assess Onesimus's standing in the household, subsequent to penning the letter. Furthermore, καὶ τῇ κατ' οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ (Phlm. 2) functions as the public court of reputation (henceforth PCR) in the intermediary period between the delivery of the letter and Paul's intended visit.

Secondly, how Philemon responds to Paul's request regarding Onesimus becomes a platform for honour preserved or an avenue towards shame for the *paterfamilias*. When read in relation to *Philemo*n 8–9, Peterson (1985:301) underscores the somewhat perplexing contradiction through which *Philemon* 22 is delivered. Here, he demonstrates 'the paradox that to defend the equality of the brothers Paul had to exercise his superiority among them,' a clear shift in the way non-authoritarian familial language is employed throughout the letter, up until this point.[7] By using relational rather than authoritarian language, Paul confers honour upon Philemon.

7 *Philemon* 1, 8-10, 14, 16, 20a.

Thirdly, when the ξενίαν is considered as both a space for meting out hospitality and an uninhabited symbol preserved for Paul's arrival, a graphic tempering and transformation of Philemon's behaviour towards Onesimus is underlined. Here, the empty room brings to consciousness the authority Paul clearly withholds in the penning of the letter. Both the ξενίαν and the PCR then function as watchdogs, ready to blow the whistle on any misdeeds suffered by Onesimus, at the appearing of the apostle.

Fourthly, when *Philemon* 22a is read alongside εἰ οὖν με ἔχεις κοινωνόν, προσλαβοῦ αὐτὸν ὡς ἐμέ (Phlm. 17), it becomes conceivable that some measure of hospitality could have been awarded Onesimus by Philemon, upon Onesimus's return. When a social-scientific hermeneutic is applied to this possibility, a few factors become apparent. Onesimus gains honour through a conversion experience, an experience alluded to by παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου, ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς, Ὀνήσιμον (Phlm. 10). Also, Onesimus's identity, vis-à-vis Philemon, is translated beyond the linear and flattened designation of slave-to-master. Instead, Onesimus garners more honour by being a member of the ἐκκλησία that meets in Philemon's home, and assumes a nested social identity, where being a slave exists in social tension with being ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν (Phlm. 16). Dunn (1996:328) corroborates one of the poles of this tension by commenting on the prevalence of Onesimus's name; the name Onesimus was generally associated with people of abased social status. Furthermore, the anaphoric play on words, in verse 11, regarding the slave's former uselessness (ἄχρηστον), and newfound usefulness (εὔχρηστον) suggests Christ's involvement in Onesimus's conversion, especially when these words are juxtaposed with γεννάω in the preceding verse. Tucker (2016:420–421) here emphasises the duality of Onesimus's identity, who, although now a member of ἐκκλησία, based on Paul's ministration, remains a slave, albeit a slave with honour enough to be received as Paul was (Phlm. 17). Onesimus's is a hybridized identity, slave and dear brother, coexisting in fluid tension, demanding skilled navigation of the social terrain. Arguably, this duality affords Onesimus access to honour, and the shedding of shame in a nuanced manner, making him an eligible participant in honour transactions, in social strata previously inaccessible. Simultaneously, he remains a slave locked in a social categorization predetermined and policed by Empire.

Fifthly, when Philemon's home is correlated with Paul's residence (i.e. prison), something of transformative hospitality could be identified. In Philemon's household, the slave Onesimus neither experiences upward social mobility nor does he experience identity

transformation, save that which brought him into servile relationship with his master.[8] Philemon's household with all its social privilege is purposefully presented as a non-conducive environment for social identity transformation as far as Onesimus is concerned. Rather, the prisoner Paul identifies with Onesimus in the very opening of the letter, Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (Phlm. 1),[9] and extends identity transformative hospitality from a place of shame, thus rendering Onesimus not merely a slave, but a dear brother. The NIV's *no longer as a slave, but better than a slave* fails to capture the subtle nuance. Paul's point is not that he is no longer a slave (οὐκέτι δοῦλον); it is that he is no longer *merely* a slave (οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον). He remains a slave, but he is simultaneously much more than just another slave. He has become *a beloved brother* (ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν).

Based on these counts, Onesimus's social location and social identity undergo radical upheaval in hybridity, with great implications on hospitality in Philemon's home. Perhaps then, the more pressing question is not whether Onesimus's honour status changed, but rather, 'to what degree did Onesimus remain a slave within Philemon's household?' considering the implicit honour conferred upon him by the implied conversion experience.

4. Appropriating ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν into Southern Africa

Historically, South African households, could trace their location, composition, and interaction to the passing of the Group Areas Act of 1950. This Act relegated non-Whites from affluent and better developed residential and business areas, thus creating a socially dislocated, and socially stratified society whose effects still linger in post-apartheid South Africa. In reading *Philemon* from a Southern African context, correlation between stratified first-century Asia-Minor and the world of the reader could be brought into discursive theological dialogue centred on matters such as social stratification, the social identities of contemporary domestic workers, and the social cohesion enhanced or diminished by hospitality proffered or withheld, respectively.

4.1. *Philemon* 22a, social inequality, and social stratification

Regarding social-stratification, Friesen (2004:341) and later Longenecker (2009:44) uses a seven-point socio-economic profile of the ancient world and places the number of imperial, regional or provincial, and municipal elites at 3% of the entire Greco-Roman population. Longenecker (2009:44) calls this group ES1-ES3.[10]

8 Presuming that a traumatic experience such as war, kidnapping, or debt, brought Onesimus into Philemon's household, as was common in the first century. If, however, Onesimus was born into slavery, in Philemon's home, the lack of a kinship memory prior to slavery could itself be regarded as a historically traumatic experience reducing Onesimus's identity to a transactional one.

9 This is the only letter in which the designation δέσμιος (*prisoner*) occurs. Paul designates himself ἀπόστολος (Rom. 1:1, 1 Cor. 1:1, 1 Cor. 1:1, Gal. 1:1, Eph. 1:1, Col. 1:1, 1 Tim. 1:1, 2 Tim. 1:1, Titus 1:1) and δοῦλος (Rom. 1:1, Phil. 1:1, Titus 1:1); no designation is used in 1-2 Thess.

10 According to Longenecker (2009:44); the ES4 group comprised merchants, some traders, some free persons, and some military veterans and was 17% of the Greco-Roman population. The ES5+ comprised traders, regular earners, artisans, large shop owners, freedpersons, and some families it was 25% of the population. The ES6-ES7 groups made up 55% of the entire population (30% and 25% respectively), and they comprised small farm families, labourers, artisans, wage earners, most merchants, unattached widows, orphans, beggars, the disabled, unskilled labourers, and prisoners.

Gorman (2004: 5), however, provides an alternate representation of the strata, based on Lenski's (1966:284), *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification.* Unlike Friesen (2004) and Longenecker (2009), Gorman (2004:4–5) numbers the elites at no more than 5% of the entire population. Added to this difference, is the numbering of slaves within the statistical mapping of the Greco-Roman population; a stark difference in approach. Nevertheless, both sets of figures bring the range of socio-economic disparity and social stratification, into sharp focus, while statistically giving a basis for each rung's disposition towards upward mobility.

Although the idea of a middle-class was non-existent in the ancient world, common to both *Philemon's* historical context and the contemporary Southern African reality is the fact that chronic social stratification was born of imperial dominance. In South Africa, this stratification can be measured socio-economically by the observance of the Gini coefficient. According to this coefficient South Africa's socio-economic polarity fluctuates between 0.63 and 0.7 (Oxfam International 2014:38). The Palma ratio, an alternative to the Gini coefficient, approaches inequality in a more refined manner. Barr (2017) describes it as:

> [a] ratio takes the richest 10% of the population's share of gross national income (GNI) and divides it by the poorest 40% of the population's share. This measure has become popular as more income inequality research focuses on the growing divide between the richest and poorest in society.

Under both measuring systems, South Africa features as one of the most socially unequal countries in the world, together with Namibia (another Southern African country with a volatile colonial narrative) and Haiti. Like the polarized social reality in *Philemon*, appropriating ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν in Southern Africa brings into sharp focus a deeply stratified and polarized society on both micro and macro levels. Paul's world and Southern Africa here converge providing opportunity for the embodiment of meaning in a new horizon.

4.2. *Philemon* 22a and social identity complexity

Regarding the social identities of contemporary Southern African domestic workers, another point of possible correlation emerges. Onesimus's nested social identity is at the fore of the triadic reordering of honour, in Philemon's household. Gorman (2004:460-461) underlines at least four identities belonging to Onesimus, post his conversion. He sees Onesimus as Paul's son fathered in chains; Onesimus as Paul's fellow worker; Onesimus as Paul's very heart,

making him a dual proxy for both Philemon and Paul; Onesimus as son of God; and Onesimus as a fully-fledged member of the ἐκκλησία in Philemon's household.

Like Onesimus, domestic workers' social identity was forged by a historic colonial experience similar in scope to empire,[11] and like Onesimus, they barely earn a living wage[12] to fuel upward mobility, thus creating a highly unequal and sharply stratified society. According to Oxfam (2014:49), this stratification is the bedrock of social incoherence. Southern African domestic workers are custodians of complex hybridized identities that include 'immigrant-worker',[13] 'woman-household head/ bread winner-servant', 'spiritual formator and disciplinarian', and 'slave-confidant-proxy.' When these facts are correlated with ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν, it becomes apparent that although not every aspect of first-century slavery and Southern African domestic work can be paralleled, what does fit the correlation is how social stratification prompts and exacerbates social identity complexity (SIC) for those at the bottom rungs of society. Onesimus is a nested -hybridized social identity, and so is the Southern African domestic worker, thanks to, or no thanks to Empire.

11 It must be noted that this correlation is not fully analogous of the two groups. Ancient domestic slavery was not formal employment as known in the contemporary world. Therefore, although the correlation departs from social stratification and social polarity, it remains limited regarding the injustices faced. Nevertheless, the causes of slavery and Southern African domestic work are rooted in an imperial injustice common to both epochs.

12 The minimum wage in South Africa was adjusted to R 3500 per month, yet domestic workers on average earn less than R 2500 per month. A living wage is, however, pitched at R 5000. See www.mywage.co.za/main/salary/minimum-wages (accessed 21st February 2018), and National Minimum Wage Panel (2016:9).

13 The geo-political realities of the region have brought 'low skilled' workers into South Africa from neighbouring countries, so much so that it is not uncommon to hear of Malawian domestic gardeners and Zimbabwean cleaners being the most coveted type of worker.

4.3. *Philemon* 22a, eschatology and hospitality

Regarding hospitality in *Philemon's* context, Dunn (1996:345–346) comments:

> [I]n the ancient world hospitality played a much larger role in traveling than today; inns were generally places to be avoided if at all possible, so that householders would generally expect to provide hospitality for their compatriots … That Philemon had 'a guest room' … not '*the* guest room,' confirms that he was a man of means with a house capable of hosting more than one visitor at the same time (ἑτοίμαζε implies that the guest room is within Philemon's control).

When these facts are correlated with the contemporary Southern African reality, universal parallels are again impossible. However, this difficulty must not devolve into a zero-sum game, since parallels in hospitality do exist between *Philemon's* world and that of the authors. The universal extension of hospitality to a member of the ἐκκλησία with limited honour in *Philemon* can be seen to converge with the need to do the same within Southern Africa, especially between domestic workers and employers belonging to the same faith community. Arguably, such a contextual correlation is consistent with Esler (1995:4), who says:

> Although New Testament critics may be able to unveil the nature of the original connection between text and context and

> even advocate, at a general level … how such connections might be brought into dialogue with contemporary experience, *the contextualization of the kerygma can only be achieved by a community*.[14]

14 Italics are our addition.

Therefore, the ἐκκλησία in *Philemon* provides a *kerygmatic injunction* to faith communities across interpretive epochs on matters of hospitality, social cohesion, and transformation. This means that faith communities whose hospitality is restricted and selective stand against the grain of the Pauline ethic seen in the rhetorical flow of the epistle. Such faith communities stand in expectation of future rebuke, as would have been the case had Philemon not adhered to Paul's recommendation. Thus, a reading of ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν in Southern Africa views hospitality as an instrument for social cohesion, transformation, and healing based on the contextualized power of the *kerygma*. It, however, provides another dimension in interpretation: the reality of future judgment witnessed by the PCR, as was the case with Philemon.

5. Conclusion

This paper read *Philemon* 22a using a social-scientific hermeneutic hybridized with SIC. The continued effectiveness of the former, within a majority world context was motivated, together with the hybridized methodologies of SIC. Using a discursive approach, the meaning of ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν as an *apostolic parousia* loaded with relational and warning motifs was seen as a regulating force on Philemon's possible deviant behaviour. From these findings, social disparity born of the historic injustices was challenged from the premise that hospitality and eschatology function as sentinels of transformation, policing and regulating behaviour in the full understanding of a future reckoning.

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