



# House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity

*Roger W. Gehring*

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For nearly three hundred years, early Christians met almost exclusively in private homes initially built only for domestic use. In this study, Roger Gehring investigates the missional significance of house churches from the time of Jesus through Paul in light of both theological and sociohistorical considerations. All church structures take shape in the tension between preestablished theological requirements and the concrete social situation. Even in the New Testament, the emergence of separate house churches involved the potential danger of splintering the Christian movement. Nevertheless their essential family based foundation has proven to be the lifegenerating cell and fundamental core of the missional church. The development of early Christian ethics, the emergence of leadership structures, and the growth of ecclesiological concepts were all noticeably influenced by the households in which believers lived and gathered. In the last twentyfive years the house church phenomenon has generated a great deal of interest among New Testament scholars and church practitioners. Research has focused primarily on the architecture of these homes and on its corresponding social and theological implications. House Church and Mission offers scholars the first comprehensive summary of evidence concerning home churches in the New Testament and supplies pastors and lay leaders with a wellcrafted discussion of the nature of "church" that explores the practical implications of house churches on outreach.

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