

## “Make Yourself at Home”

### The Tensions and Paradoxes of Hospitality in Dialogue with the Bible

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#### Abstract

Hospitality is a well-identified biblical theme; the consensus among most modern Christian authors is that it is both demonstrated by the deity and expected of humanity, throughout both Old and New Testaments. Often, however, such discussions rely on an assumed transparency of the nature and definition of hospitality, and on the assumption that the biblical attitude to the subject is univocal. However, the biblical witness is not unambiguous, but demonstrates tensions reflecting both the complex nature of hospitality, and the development of the theme through the Bible. In recent years the ambiguous nature of hospitality has been argued in theoretical terms by the deconstructionist Jacques Derrida, and its complexities of praxis by post-colonial critics. This paper sets out to bring these modern critical voices into dialogue with the biblical texts, and it will be shown that when read with a sensitivity to the paradoxes enunciated by these contemporary theorists, the biblical understanding of the hospitality theme is more complex than it at first appears. It will be argued that a more subtle understanding of the developing and complex biblical view of hospitality will aid the development of a more robust Christian ethic, especially in the light of the contemporary challenge of migration.

#### Key words

Hospitality; Derrida; Postcolonial theory; Biblical theology; Biblical studies; Emmanuel Levinas

Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends, even though they are strangers to you; they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God; for they began their journey for the sake of Christ, accepting no support from non-believers. Therefore, we ought to support such people, so that we may become co-workers with the truth. (3 John 5-8)<sup>1</sup>

Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God; whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (Anglicized).

the Son. Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person. (2 John 9-11)

Hospitality is a well-identified biblical theme; the consensus among most modern Christian authors is that it is both demonstrated by the deity and expected of humanity, throughout both Old and New Testaments. Often, however, such discussions are relying on an assumed transparency of the nature and definition of hospitality, and on the assumption that the biblical attitude to the subject is univocal.<sup>2</sup> But as shown in these two quotations from the Johannine letters, the biblical witness is not unambiguous, and in fact under certain circumstances, hospitality is understood within the biblical worldview to be unethical. These uncommon instances (1 Cor. 5:9-11 could also be included) are often taken to be exceptions to the general rule. Rather, they should be seen as reflecting both the complex nature of hospitality, and the variant, perhaps developing, biblical attitude to the subject.

The ambiguous nature of hospitality has been argued in theoretical terms by the philosopher Jacques Derrida, and its complexities of praxis by post-colonial critics. This paper sets out to bring these modern critical voices into dialogue with the biblical texts, and it will be shown that when read with a sensitivity to the paradoxes enunciated by these contemporary theorists, the biblical understanding of hospitality is more complex than it at first appears. It will be argued that a subtler understanding of the developing and complex biblical view of hospitality will aid the development of a more robust Christian ethic, especially in light of the contemporary challenge of migration.

Whilst this paper is, to some extent, seeking a definition of hospitality, or at least seeking to clarify its meaning, a working definition is offered here, taking the lead from Luke Bretherton (2006, 138-51). Hospitality is an *accommodation of the vulnerable stranger*; the term accommodation is used in the sense of “making room” or “adapting to,” in contrast to mere tolerance, co-existence or entertaining. It is therefore a costly action, involving change within the host for the benefit of the guest.

### **Derrida, postcolonial theory, and the tensions of hospitality**

First, we consider the inherent contradictions in the nature of hospitality, as demonstrated by Jacques Derrida. Interested in the way that words contain their own contradictions, Derrida uses the French word *hôte* as a test case, showing that it carries the double meaning of both guest and host. For Derrida, the guest/host dichotomy is not as rigid as it might appear, for it is only in the act of receiving the guest (in the “interruption of the self”; 1999, 51) that the host becomes a host. The act of hospitality turns the home inside-out, for the guest is, as it were, the means by which the *host* (rather than the householder) enters:

We thus enter from the inside: the master of the house is at home, but nonetheless he comes to enter his home through the guest—who comes from

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the discussions in Field (1995) and Francis (2012, 7-16).

outside. The master thus enters from the inside *as if* he came from the outside. He enters his home thanks to the visitor, by the grace of the visitor. (Derrida 2000a, 125; emphasis original.)

Considering this further, new challenges to our usual frames of considering hospitality begin to emerge. If the home is turned inside-out, then receiving (hosting) is not the only form that hospitality can assume. Nor is it, *de facto*, a static phenomenon, but it can also be an act of movement. And one can—arguably, should—exercise hospitality when in another’s territory.<sup>3</sup>

There is a further inherent contradiction in the concept of hospitality, and this relates to the question of whether hospitality is conditional or unconditional. For Derrida, hospitality is a paradigm of what he refers to as a possible-impossible *aporia*. It is both totally unconditional at its root but utterly conditional in all its possibilities. Unconditional hospitality would be utterly without limits, boundaries, or prerequisites. But this is not only practically impossible, but also theoretically so. For example, as Derrida says, “the welcomed guest is a stranger treated as a friend or ally, as opposed to the stranger treated as an enemy” (2000b, 3-18). Therefore, to the host belongs the privilege of drawing the distinction. Likewise, the very nature of hosting presupposes the concept of possession, and thus the assertion of ownership barriers. The invitation to “make yourself at home” simultaneously affirms that “this is my home and therefore it is not yours.” So, hospitality is intrinsically an act of power; it is not being passively over-run by another, but an active choice to welcome, made by one party “over” the other. Hence hospitality always, intrinsically, asserts its limits to the guest.<sup>4</sup>

But for Derrida, these oppositions are not placed in reducible relationship with one another, but exist in a continual double-bind: “This is the double law of hospitality: to calculate the risks, yes, but without closing the door on the incalculable, that is, on the future and the foreigner” (2005, 6-9). So, hospitality always carries within it its own antithesis—hostility—a notion he encapsulates with the term *hostipitality*.

Derrida’s is inherently an ethical investigation, and by no means detached from issues of real life, as evidenced by his written words and practical actions on behalf of undocumented migrants.<sup>5</sup> It is the post-colonial theorists, however, who have provided the most valuable insight into the praxis of hospitality in the situation of immigration. With the stripping away of the structures of empire over the last hundred years, it has become increasingly apparent that its toxic legacy continues, all the more so where the existence of this legacy is denied rather than acknowledged (MacPhee 2011, 2). This has been the concern of the emerging discipline of post-colonial theory. Within this subject, migration studies have identified the tension

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<sup>3</sup> Derrida would, perhaps, have been pleased with the American use of the word to *visit*, foreign to British ears. Where British English understands the word simply to refer to the act of paying a call, for Americans “visiting with” can refer as much to the action of the host as of the guest.

<sup>4</sup> Luce Irigaray’s suggested answer to this conundrum is instructive: “Nature itself provides us with some teachings about what hospitality could be in our time. For example, if a woman can give birth to a child ... this is possible because, thanks to the two, a place in her is produced ... that does not belong to the one or to the other, but permits their coexistence: the placenta” (2013, 44).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the account of his political involvement in Peeters (2013).

between integration and retention of identity. A good host naturally wants their guest to “feel at home.” But what does this mean in terms of their behaviour, cultural customs, or language?

Arguably, it was the expansion of the great colonial powers in the nineteenth century, and the rise of modernity which saw the birth of the modern concept of nationhood and nationality (Hobsbawm 1990).<sup>6</sup> However, in the second half of the twentieth century, this was overtaken by a growing consciousness of “identity.” In this climate, the expectations upon immigrants gradually changed; from an expectation of complete assimilation in the 1950s, through a developing understanding of the importance of retained ethnicity in the 60s and 70s, to the variety of outcomes which are seen and expected today (Diehl and Schnell 2006, 792). Among second generation immigrants, there is often a loosening of cultural and ethnic ties with the country of origin, but conversely, a sense of coercion to assimilate can result in so-called “reactive ethnicity,” a heightened expression of ethnic and cultural distinctiveness as a rejection of the host culture (Fiske 1997, 56-66; Diehl and Schnell 2006, 786-816).

When analysing this situation, it is important to bear in mind the extent to which historically subordinate groups have been stripped of their identity through slavery, colonization, or domination. For these groups, their “identity” has been imposed upon them by other dominant groups. For this reason, John Fiske argues, it can be important for a degree of separation to exist temporarily, in order to facilitate the secure establishment of resilient identity. This, in turn, should in due course enable full participation as citizens; neither wholly assimilated, nor wholly culturally other (Fiske 1997, 64).

There is, however, another tension in the multicultural, mutually tolerant society described above. This is that members of the host culture either become fascinated or obsessed with the guest culture, or choose to pretend that all cultural differences are purely cosmetic. The first option can result in inappropriate cultural appropriation or even commodification. Theologian Elizabeth Newman cautions against amalgamating the notions of “hospitality” and “inclusivity.” To do so, she argues, leads to a distortion of hospitality shaped by the culture of consumption, where the “other” is included for the use of the “includer” (Newman 2007, 32). Similarly, Fiske writes, “While the multiculturalist will talk of diversity and difference, the multinational CEO turns the coin over and talks of product diversification and market segmentation” (1997, 70).

Writing in the American context, Newman gives the example of the adoption of the idealised figure of a Mexican mother by the marketing department of a “Tex-Mex” fast-food chain. What a cursory glance might consider laudable cultural diversity is, in reality, a market-driven act of cultural appropriation. Using Stanley Fish’s term “boutique multiculturalism,” she writes:

The boutique multiculturalist therefore cannot really take seriously the particularity of a given culture or tradition but sees these as mere differences

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<sup>6</sup> For an alternative view, see Hastings (2012).

... Diversity is “offered” but only when it conforms to the rule of the market; a homogenising consumption ultimately triumphs. (Newman 2007, 32-3)

On the other hand, theorists of neo-colonialism warn against the power dynamics inherent in the assertion of colour-blindness.<sup>7</sup> The well-meaning assertion that “race is irrelevant to us” is actually an appeal to a dominant white discourse, which discounts the possibility of identifying and combating white privilege, and excludes the problematization of race by denying its existence. White power is maintained by patterns of invisibility, and augmented by the ideology of colour-blindness. Differences must not be flattened; complete assimilation can be a form of imperialism.

Having very briefly considered these tensions in the nature and act of hospitality, we will now turn to consider these themes as they arise within the developing biblical account.

### **Old Testament**

The creation narratives in Genesis provide a vivid account of a cosmic act of hospitality by the deity. In other ancient Near Eastern creation epics, humans are made to relieve the gods of toil, or as an incidental “sideshow.” By contrast, in Genesis everything is made by God for humankind’s benefit, the cosmos is being set up and designed and planned to be a hospitable home for humankind (Wenham, 2015, 6-15; 1998, 36-40). For Paul Fiddes (2001), God is here choosing to limit himself in order to make room for the created world; it is a supreme act of hospitality; or as Reinhard Hütter (2002, 219) puts it, “the sharing of the divine life with those who are dust.”

A key Old Testament narrative in the developing hospitality theme is Genesis 18, where Abraham hosts three men under the tree of Mamre. A stranger in the land, who does not even possess enough territory to bury his wife (Gen. 17:8; 23:4), he nonetheless offers hospitality, and discovers that he is hosting the Lord. This episode is in stark contrast with the aggressive lack of hospitality offered by the men of Sodom to two of the men in the following chapter, causing Abraham’s nephew Lot to offer his own daughters to the would-be rapists in fulfilment of his role as host (Gen. 19:1-8). In turn, this Sodom narrative finds a reflection in Judges 19,<sup>8</sup> where the Levite and his household fail to receive hospitality from the people of Benjamin, and his concubine suffers the fate from which Lot’s daughters are so narrowly rescued. The inhospitality in the Judges narrative, which is highlighted by the intertextuality, serves as a striking part of the indictment against the people of Israel, who have no king and each do as they see fit (Jdg. 21:25).

But Abraham’s actions are not a “simple” act of hospitality. Derrida’s guest-host interpenetrability is clearly in evidence here. Theodore Jennings (2006, 113), following Derrida on the subject, writes, “The name and so the identity of the host

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Jackson (2009, 156-92); Leonardo (2002, 29-50). For an analysis of power structures within discourse, see Foucault (1971, 7-30).

<sup>8</sup> The nature of intertextuality between two evolving texts with a long history of pre-textual orality is complex, and I am not here claiming that either of the accounts, in Judges 19 or Genesis 19, is wholly dependent on the other.

is transformed (from Abram to Abraham), as is that of his wife (from Sarai to Sarah). The coming of the guest, the reception of the guest, does not leave the ‘host’ unchanged.”<sup>9</sup>

In similar vein within the New Testament, the actions of Abraham under the tree at Mamre are probably echoed in the words of Jesus and more clearly in the letter to the Hebrews.<sup>10</sup> The act of hospitality is seen as a richly spiritual action in which the host may find herself in a deep encounter with—and hence guest of—the Lord himself:

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matt. 25:37-40)

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Heb. 13:2)

The creation theme of divine hospitality is continued in the Pentateuch, when God provides manna, quails and water in the desert for the people *en route* to the Promised Land, where, according to the Deuteronomist, Moses promised that they would receive:

fine, large cities that you did not build, houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant. (Deut. 6:10-11)

Prior to the conquest, however, it is at the establishment of the covenant and the giving of the law that the ethical imperative for hospitality clearly begins to emerge.<sup>11</sup> Care for the *ger*, the alien, is mandated in Exod. 23:9 and Lev. 19:33–4; and later in Deut. 10:19. Provision for the alien was to be made in terms of physical provision (Lev. 19:9-10), and legal protection (Num. 35:15; see also Deut. 1:16). The rationale given for this, as I have argued elsewhere (Paynter 2016a), lies in both the prior generosity of God towards Israel, and Israel’s own experience of being aliens.

But throughout the Old Testament, hospitality is held in tension with holiness. In this context, we find more challenging texts, often conveniently overlooked by those who wish to use the Old Testament law to “prove” the requirement for hospitality. Thus, for example, in Deut. 7:1-6 we read:

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<sup>9</sup> A similar point is made by Waldemar Janzen (2002, 10).

<sup>10</sup> The close relationship between the texts in Hebrews and Matthew is clearly demonstrated by William Lane (1998, 511). Additionally, John Nolland (2005, 1029) demonstrates how Jesus’s words in Matt. 25:37-40 are linked with Job 22:6-9; Isa. 58:6-7; Ezek. 18:6-9; and with the Testament of Joseph 1:5-7.

<sup>11</sup> A good summary of the Torah’s attitude to the *ger* is given in Pohl (2000).

When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you—the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you—and when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But this is how you must deal with them: break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God.

The exact intention of this text, especially given its likely dating long after the disappearance of the nations named, is debated.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless it clearly demonstrates that hospitality is regarded as a threat to holiness, and that due attention to holiness will limit the nation's capacity for hospitality.

But despite this polemic against the idolatrous nations around, there are still remarkable episodes of inclusion into the nation—all the more remarkable, perhaps, given this theological background. Indeed, full membership of the nation of Israel is far more flexible than it first appears. At the defining event for the nation of Israel, the exodus from Egyptian slavery and miraculous escape through the Red Sea, the nation of Israel is accompanied by many of non-Israelite origin (Exod. 12:38). As the nation begins the conquest of Canaan, we find the extraordinarily juxtaposed narratives of Rahab, the pagan who escapes the ban to find a welcome in the nation, and Achan, the Israelite who comes under the ban through his disobedience (Joshua 6 and 7). The Torah makes provision for non-Israelites to join fully in the religious life of the nation, observing the Sabbath (Exod. 20:10), and even—once circumcised—participating in the Passover (Exod. 12:48-9, Num. 15:15-16). There are many more examples of such blurred boundaries: we could consider David's request for Moabite hospitality and protection for his family (1 Sam. 22:3), or the highly unexpected and often hospitable attitude displayed towards Aram (Syria) during the time of Elisha.<sup>13</sup> Even the strongly anti-Nineveh polemic of Nahum is counterpoised with the extraordinary story of God's tenderness towards Nineveh in the book of Jonah.

For Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1994), this theme of outrageous welcome becomes a paradigm for the generosity of God's people. With reference to the Talmud, he uses three verses from the Hebrew Bible to demonstrate the astonishing ethical summons of hospitality towards Egypt, the erstwhile enemy.

You shall not abhor any of the Egyptians, because you were an alien residing in their land. The children of the third generation that are born to them may be admitted to the assembly of the Lord (Deut. 23:7-8).

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Moberly (2013, 41-74).

<sup>13</sup> 1 Kgs 21:15-2 Kgs 8:15. See Paynter (2016c, 22-4).

Kings bear gifts to you ... Let bronze be brought from Egypt (Ps. 68:29-31).

Praise the Lord, all you nations! Extol him, all you peoples! (Ps. 117:1).

How can it be that the nation which oppressed and enslaved Israel should be permitted to bring gifts to the Messiah of Psalm 68? How can Psalm 117 countenance that the Lord receive praise from all peoples—even Egypt? Because, says Levinas, the psalmist remembers that:

[Egypt] is the country of servitude, but also the place where Abraham and Jacob found refuge in time of famine; where Joseph was able to assume universal political and economic responsibilities at the very core of Holy History; and where, at the hour of exterminating cruelty, Pharaoh's daughter saved Moses from the waters. (1994, 97-8)

And, ambiguous as to whether he is referring to Israel or Egypt, Levinas adds:

To shelter the other in one's own land or home, to tolerate the presence of the landless and homeless on the "ancestral soil," so jealously, so meanly loved—is that the criterion of humanness? Unquestionably so. (1994, 98)

The holiness-hospitality tension in the Old Testament would seem to be an example of Derrida's possible-impossible *aporia*. Unconditional hospitality into the nation of Israel might be considered the ideal, but it is impossible without the assertion of certain boundaries (which define and delineate the nation from those around it), and which *de facto* introduce limits to that ideal. Nowhere is this starker than in the narratives of the expulsion of the foreign wives in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13 out of concern for racial purity. In his extended analysis of "Othering" in the Bible, Lawrence Wills suggests that these texts "present a narrative arc of opposition-and-identity. The We of ideal Israel is constituted in response to the Other" (2008, 80).<sup>14</sup>

## **New Testament**

A larger piece of work would be required in order to trace out the distinctive contribution of each gospel to the hospitality theme, in relation to the tensions described. The present study will consider the combined witness of all four gospels, on the basis that they all demonstrate Jesus as the source and beneficiary of hospitality. Where a particular gospel seems to have a distinctive voice, I have attempted to indicate this within the overall discussion. Attention will also be given to the praxis and teaching of the early church, as understood through the epistles, and in the eschatological expectation set out in the Revelation of John.

For many commentators, the hospitality theme continues more or less without interruption into the New Testament, where the same tensions and imperatives are found in gospels and epistles. Luke Bretherton, however, argues that the boundary between the testaments is characterised by both continuity and discontinuity (2006, 129). The continuous elements are clear: the ongoing

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<sup>14</sup> This process of abjection and othering, and the construction of self-identity therefrom, are described in Kristeva (1982).

imperative to be hospitable, exemplified by Jesus and more or less successfully lived out by the early church. The element of discontinuity relates to the tension between hospitality and holiness described above. Whereas in the Old Testament hospitality *is a threat to* holiness; within the life and teaching of Jesus, Bretherton suggests that hospitality *is a means to* holiness (130). More particularly, through Jesus' acts of hospitality two things happen: his own holiness is demonstrated, and the unclean are made clean. As Marcus Borg (1998, 147) says, "In the teaching of Jesus, holiness, not uncleanness was understood to be contagious."

Each gospel characterizes the life of Jesus as one of hospitality towards those who were excluded by the over-zealous application, or sometimes the misapplication, of the Torah. These actions, while sometimes feted by the crowds, often get him into trouble with the recognised interpreters of the law:

Social status, religious purity, national origin, wealth, and power [have become] systematised into rules regulating hospitality. When Jesus refuses to be restrained by these rules, he evokes release and joy in some, and deep enmity in others. (Jenzen 2002, 13.)

Particularly notable is Luke's triple use of the "crippled, blind, lame" motif, especially in view of the Levitical prohibition on such people accessing the cult, and on similar prohibitions in the Qumran documents (cf. Nolland 1998, 751):

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and say: No one of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the food of his God. For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, one who is blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or one who has a broken foot or a broken hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a blemish in his eyes or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles. (Lev 21:16-20)

And no lame, blind, paralysed person nor any man who has an indelible blemish on his flesh, nor any man suffering from uncleanness in his flesh, none of these will go out to war with them. (1QM 7:4-5; trans. Martiñez and Tigchelaar, 1997-98)

And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. (Luke 7:22)

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. (Luke 14:13)

So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame." (Luke 14:21)

This last quotation is from the parable of the Great Banquet, which has intertextuality with the messianic feast of Isa. 25:6-9 and connections with Enoch 1 (Bailey, 1980, 90; Bretherton, 2006, 131-5). The inclusivity of the Lucan text is in continuity with Isaiah's feast, but in contrast to the Targum of the Isaiah passage, and in contrast with the exclusion of the gentile kings in Enoch:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. (Isa. 25:6)

Yahweh of Hosts will make for all the people in this mountain a meal; and though they suppose it is an honour, it will be a shame for them, and great plagues, plagues from which they will be unable to escape, plagues whereby they will come to their end. (Aramaic Targum on Isa. 25:6, in Stenning 1949, 78).

And He will deliver [the kings of the earth] to the angels for punishment, to execute vengeance on them because they have oppressed His children and His elect ... And His sword is drunk with their blood. And the righteous and elect shall be saved on that day ... And with that Son of Man shall they eat and lie down and rise up for ever and ever. (Enoch 62:11-14; trans. Charles 2013)

One of the key non-Jewish groups welcomed by Jesus was the Samaritans. The origins of this people group are variously described in the Old Testament in 2 Chronicles 30, 2 Kgs 17:24-33, and Ezra 4:1-5. Although these accounts are not wholly consonant (Cogan 1988), the clear attitude of all three writers is negative:

So they worshipped the Lord but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away. (2 Kgs 17:33)

So [Hezekiah's] couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun; but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. (2 Chronicles 30:10)

You shall have no part with us in building a house to our God. (Ezra 4:3)

With regard to this last quotation, Lawrence Wills (2008, 77) argues that these "people of the land" are subjected to significant "othering" in the Ezra text.

This is indicative of the biblical and historical background that lies behind Jesus' conversations with and about Samaritans. Whereas the lawyer cannot even bear to name the fictional Samaritan whose actions he is obliged to endorse (Luke 10:37), Jesus not only sets a Samaritan as the hero in that parable, he has prolonged conversation with a Samaritan woman (John 4:7-42) and instructs his disciples to take the gospel to Samaria as the first step of world evangelisation (Acts 1:8).

But even Jesus' welcome is not unconditional. However, instead of being on racial or ethnic grounds, the exclusion he practices is provoked by religious hypocrisy, flagrant harm to one who is weak, or stiff-necked opposition to the work

of God. See for example, his ferocious denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23), his harsh words towards those who lead a “little one” into sin (Matt. 18:6), or his warning about the sin against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31). Thus, the conditional-unconditional tension of hospitality is both reconfigured and preserved in the gospel accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry.<sup>15</sup>

Even in the New Testament eschatological texts, the themes of exclusion for the sake of inclusion seem to persist. Divine hospitality is reflected in the vision of Revelation 7, where the throne of God is surrounded by “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (v. 9). But this needs to be held in tension with Rev. 22:15, where those who are incorrigibly impure are excluded from the New Jerusalem, “Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”<sup>16</sup> The kingdom of God is radical in whom it includes and whom it excludes.

We discussed previously Jacques Derrida’s exposition of the mutually interpenetrated functions of host and guest. This is amply demonstrated in the life and teaching of Jesus, where the roles of guest and host, of need and generosity, of receiving and giving, of stasis and journeying appear to be inextricably mingled.

The story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) is essentially a story of divine welcome.<sup>17</sup> The father’s reacceptance of his son is demonstrated by his active movement towards the prodigal, an action which in the ancient world of its setting was highly remarkable:

The word *run* in Greek (*dramōn*) is the technical term used for the footraces in the stadium ... Luke is a well-educated man who chooses his words carefully. Thus we can translate the phrase, “His father saw him and had compassion and *raced*.” It is not just a slow shuffle or a fast walk – he races! In the Middle East a man of his age and position *always* walks in a slow,

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<sup>15</sup> The conditionality of hospitality in the life of Jesus is also a practical phenomenon. It is clear that pragmatic factors provided genuine constraints even upon the hospitality exercised by Jesus. So, on several occasions, the pressure of the crowd drives Jesus out of an area; and in Mark 1 we see his ability to provide healing for the sick and needy in one town being limited by the needs of the neighbouring ones:

That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons ... In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” He answered, “Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” (Mark 1:32-8)

Similarly, for theologian Christine Pohl (1999), it is practical factors which make modern hospitality conditional, and its limits are largely determined by such matters: the strains upon hosts, the limitation of resources, and the necessary boundaries that define commitment to the community as opposed to what one might term “guest privileges.”

<sup>16</sup> This “excluding” element of the Apocalypse of John is the standard understanding (e.g. Aune 1998, 1236-8), but it has been disputed by Simon Woodman (2015).

<sup>17</sup> Of course, it cannot be denied that the older brother in the story would describe it as one of divine partiality.

dignified fashion. It is safe to assume that he has not run anywhere for any purpose for forty years. (Bailey 2010, 67; emphases original)

This element of the parable exemplifies what Bretherton terms the “journeying guest/host” theme in the life of Jesus (Bretherton 2006, 134).

In similar fashion, the apostle Paul describes the hospitality of the Christ-event as a journey of the Son to the earth “while we still were sinners” (Rom. 5:8). This downward trajectory is highlighted by Paul’s stepwise description of Jesus’ humiliation in Philippians 2; an “interruption of the self”<sup>18</sup> *par excellence*: “Though he was in the form of God ... [he] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness ... he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8). The New Testament description of divine hospitality is characterised by its active movement, not its passive receptivity.

In all four gospels, the life of Jesus is characterised by table fellowship with the most unsavoury of characters, so that in Matthew he is dubbed “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 11:19). But it is clear that, even while beholden to others, he always becomes the host. At the wedding of Cana-in-Galilee (John 2:1-12), he arrives as guest but ends up being the provider of many litres of wine. At both the feeding of the five thousand and of the four thousand, Jesus is the recipient of someone else’s hospitality (John 6:9; Mark 8:5), before hosting a picnic for a multitude. He asks the Samaritan woman at the well for a drink (John 4:6-7), he allows a “loose” woman to anoint his feet (Luke 7:36-9), he invites himself to the home of the hated Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Each of these incidents constitutes a blurring of the distinction between guest and host, where, by means of receiving a service from outcasts, he flouts societal conventions to witness to the radical inclusion of the kingdom of God. In the upper room (Luke 22:13-20) and at Emmaus (Luke 24:28-35) he participates in a meal that someone else has prepared, breaks bread and by this richly symbolic act summons his disciples into fellowship with him.<sup>19</sup>

It might therefore be argued that in the life of Jesus as told in the gospels, there is no act of generosity which is not positioned within the context of his own need; nor is there a moment of need which lacks an expression of generosity from him. Indeed, his teaching suggests that the two are inextricable.

Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, “Peace to this house!” And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid ... Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” (Luke 10:4-9)

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Derrida (1999, 51).

<sup>19</sup> The blurring of the guest/host distinction in these events is well described; see, for example, Janzen (2002, 12).

The most striking instance of Jesus' neediness and hospitality is, of course, found at the cross, itself the paramount act of self-donation, resulting in the most utter privation. And yet even here, generosity and hospitality find expression:

Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise (Luke 23:43).

Woman, here is your son ... Here is your mother (John 19:26–7).

Hans Boersma argues that in an imperfect world there can be no hospitality without exclusion, and hence violence, asking rhetorically, “Is the violence of exclusion a *necessary counterpart* to the practice of hospitality?” (2004, 28; emphasis added). In this model, Boersma finds a parallel with the violence of the atonement. The supremely violent event of the cross is the supreme moment of unconditional hospitality. If there truly is no hospitality without exclusion, it is in the Godforsakenness of Jesus upon the cross that the way is opened for the unconditional welcome of broken sinners.<sup>20</sup>

This pattern established by Jesus is followed by the apostles. We have the most biographical information about Paul, and it is clear that the typical model of his missional journeys was that he stayed in the house of willing believers.<sup>21</sup> When he broke the pattern, such as in his refusal to accept patronage in Corinth, this was for particular local reasons, and was clearly exceptional (Gorman 2001, 188-90).

Christine Pohl (2000, 563) describes the importance of hospitality to the early church, referencing the three dimensions of destruction of status boundaries; care for the physical needs of travelling missionaries and the poor; and the hosting of local assemblies of believers. However, John Koenig (1985) rightly places most emphasis on the early church's theological understanding of the importance of their actions of inclusion and hospitality—as an expression of new humanity in Christ:

If God's own dwelling is being built on earth through gift exchanges among humans, then the visiting of one's sisters and brothers for the purpose of a mutual, charismatic strengthening turns out to be not just a courtesy but *the very work of the gospel*. (1985, 59; emphasis mine.)

The temptation for the early church to reject Gentile Christians is clear in the accounts of the early days of its mission (e.g. Acts 11:1-2; 15:1-2). However, once the collective decision was made to admit them, the temptation then became what we might term religious imperialism: an impulse to absorb them completely and deny them their distinctive culture. This is most evident in Acts 15:5, 20-21 and the letter to the Galatians, both of which make it clear that there was a strong internal pressure to make the Gentile Christians conform to Jewish religious and cultural practice. This would have been akin to the model of Gentile assimilation into the

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Jürgen Moltmann (1974, 276): “He humbles himself and takes upon himself the eternal death of the godless and the godforsaken, so that all the godless and the godforsaken can experience communion with him.”

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Acts 16:15, 34; 18:3, 7; 21:8, 16; 28:14-15; cf. Galatians 4:13-15. Indeed, Joshua Jipp has argued that the motif of hospitality forms a structural framework within Acts, by which receptivity to the gospel is coupled with the degree of hospitality towards the apostle and his companions (2013). Once again, hospitality is received in the action of offering hospitality.

Jewish nation practiced under Moses and Joshua and set out in the Torah. It is in the context of this struggle that the apostle Paul writes in Galatians 3:28-9:

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Paul is here simultaneously affirming and relativizing cultural and ethnic difference. Male/female and slave/free categories clearly still exist, and so, by inference, do Gentile-Jewish ones. But these are no longer decisive in determining a believer's status or role. For Paul, belonging to the Church is a matter of shared identity, not identity; of acceptance, not of assimilation (cf. Bretherton 2006, 137; Volf 1996, 48).

It is within this new paradigm that the writer of the epistle to the Ephesians "enlarges this vision of the new humanity to even more mystical proportions" (Koenig 1985, 58). Eph. 2:11-14 says:

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

The subsequent call to live worthily (beginning in Eph. 4:1, but logically dependent on this whole section) is based upon this recollection of one's own prior status as stranger and God's act of inclusion. This is reminiscent of the pattern we noted in the Torah, and is, I have argued elsewhere (Paynter 2016b), akin to primitive virtue ethics. Neufeld sees in this passage echoes of Isa. 57:19 ("Peace, peace to the far and the near"), and hence of return from exile:

We should not fail to marvel at the author of Ephesians using this "welcome home" text ... By recasting the estrangement of Gentiles as exile from home, this text is surely a profound act of peacemaking. Gentiles are invited to make the family history of their enemies their own, in effect, to come home.

Notwithstanding these theoretical considerations, the practical outworking of the identity-assimilation tension discussed above was very challenging for the early church. In this regard, Theodore Jennings (2006, 115-7) points to the relevance of the idol-meat controversy addressed by Paul in Romans. This is set within the "welcome" inclusio of Rom. 14:1 ("Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions") and 15:7 ("Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God"). Faced by the significant threat to hospitality posed by the ethically and culturally-based

differences in principle, Paul commands that “identity” be set aside for the purpose of welcome.

In Paul’s admonition directed to the strong ... for the sake of what is really important, for the sake of the coming of that justice that is based on gift or grace, one must put aside one’s “identity” in order to receive one another (Jennings 2006, 117).

### **Towards a better ethic of migration**

I have attempted to demonstrate that reading the developing biblical narrative of hospitality with attention to the paradoxes described by recent or contemporary theorists of hospitality can facilitate the emergence of a nuanced understanding of the “biblical view” of hospitality. This, in turn, might assist the development of a robust Christian ethic of hospitality, particularly in relation to the controversial issue of hospitality towards migrants. This ethic would need to be developed in detail and with care, but in these concluding remarks, I bring in some new dialogue partners: Miroslav Volf and Esther Reed, in an attempt to outline some areas where such an exploration might be fruitful.

First, the inclusion/retained distinctiveness theme is very relevant for the development of a healthy ecclesiology in a multicultural society. Most churches in the UK are still fairly monocultural. How should such a local church respond to the increasing diversification of the community it serves? A typical response is to aim to be welcoming and accepting; a laudable aim in itself, of course. But if “inclusion” simply means acceptance on one’s own terms and an expectation of absorption into one’s own church culture, it is yet another example of neo-colonial “colour-blindness,” or something very like it. And it is an example of passive “receptive” hospitality, rather than active “travelling” hospitality. The challenge to the church of the twenty-first century will be to learn how to develop church cultures that truly embrace and include the cultural backgrounds of the whole body; that take seriously the eschatological nature of the new humanity which the New Testament sets out.

Second, we need to consider carefully the nature and purpose of national boundaries. Derrida has reminded us that the action of welcoming simultaneously asserts a threshold or boundary. While much of the Old Testament hospitality theme is predicated on the existence of ethnic and geographical boundaries, the account is also peppered with incidents where those boundaries are compromised or transgressed. In the New Testament, the idea of geographical boundaries defining and containing the people of God is developed into a spiritual phenomenon, “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet. 2:9). Thus, Esther Reed (2013, 217-52) argues, national borders cannot be sacralised with biblical legitimacy. Rather, they should be regarded as divine provision, within the fallen cosmos, for the social benefits they are able to confer. However, they also contain great inherent capacity to oppress and exclude, and should be judged according to how well they serve the better purpose.

Of course, the notion of “boundary” is much more complex than building a wall or establishing a national border. Boundaries lie within nation states as much as around them. They can be economic, cultural, religious, and ethnic. The ongoing

presence of difference in a society, neither to be deprecated nor over-emphasised, can in fact prove a source of creative engagement. It is this which Miroslav Volf (1996, 65-8) envisages taking place across (cultural) boundaries, based on a theological understanding of Genesis 1-2. He argues that these chapters establish a principle of differentiation, given before the fall, which assists us in the navigation of the differentiation-exclusion-judgment axis within relationships. With reference to the work of Cornelius Plantinga, he describes how the creative act in Genesis principally consists of separating and binding: the separation of light from darkness, water from land, male from female and so on; the binding of humans to creation, and male and female to each other. Volf argues that this “binary logic” of separation and binding, exclusion and inclusion, is the mechanism by which we form our own identity. Neither is dispensable in this process:

To avoid becoming caricatures of one another and, caught in the vortex of de-differentiation, finally ending in a “formless void,” we must refuse to consider boundaries as exclusionary. Instead, what is exclusionary are the impenetrable barriers that prevent a creative encounter with the other. (Volf 1996, 68).

This creative encounter is a visible phenomenon in societies where migration occurs: borders are culturally porous, and over time, cultures tend to bleed into one another and hybrid identities emerge (Fiske 1997, 64).

Third, the interpenetration of the roles of “guest” and “host” may provide a useful model for understanding the dynamics of immigration. Moving from the dichotomy of native “hosts” and immigrant “guests” can open one’s eyes to the possibility of two-way hospitality; and hence of the enrichment which immigrants bring to a culture. Such an understanding can help move the immigrant away from a sense of indebtedness and the native from one of moral superiority.

Most modern political theorists agree that the “shared culture” which binds a group of peoples into a nation should be understood more in terms of shared ideology than ethnic uniformity (Reed 2013, 230). This political agreement is constructed between proximate individuals; in other words, what constitutes a nation is always changing and evolving depending on the movements of people. So, the idea of achieving a cultural stasis is fictional, and there will always be new challenges of inclusion.<sup>22</sup>

Fourth, with regard to the conditional-unconditional aporia described by Derrida and seen throughout the biblical record, Miroslav Volf’s theological exploration of reconciliation with the enemy opens up profitable areas of reflection which may be comparable. For Volf (1996, 29), the “will to embrace” is always prior to any truth or virtue of the other; that is, unconditional. However, the struggle against oppression, deception, and violence is too important to ignore, and thus the actual “embrace” is deferred until truth has been expressed and injustice resolved.

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<sup>22</sup> This idea is similar to Karl Barth’s argument for fluidity of nationality: “In every land there are many native features, traditions and customs which would benefit greatly from superior foreign influences. In short, we must understand the concept of people dynamically and not statically even from the standpoint of geographical determination” (2009, vol. III, part 3, 283-4).

Extrapolating Volf's principle to the issue of hospitality to the immigrant might suggest that the will to welcome may precede the actual welcome, with the "space between" occupied with matters appertaining to truth and justice. But it does not permit the delay to be a bureaucratic one; by this argument it may only take place on matters of safety and justice. Volf is not providing for a limbo where quasi-judicial processes can pursue their lackadaisical course. Further, this principle cuts both ways. If the "space between" is provided for the immigrant to demonstrate truthfulness (prove their credentials), it is also provided for the host to prove their intentions, and demonstrate their commitment to genuine hospitality.

In the worlds of ancient Israel or of the early church, travel was dangerous and therefore limited. Notwithstanding some enormous episodes of (mainly forced) migration, the majority of people lived and died in the same area. Not so nowadays. Around a quarter of a billion people in the world today live in a country where they were not born (International Organization for Migration 2017). In this context, it is important that the Bible not be pressed into service in an uncritical fashion. In this article, I have argued that bringing it into dialogue with critical theorists from the deconstructionist and post-colonial disciplines enriches our understanding of its developing and complex attitude to hospitality. It is to be hoped that such an engagement will assist the ongoing project of developing an ethic of hospitality which is sufficiently robust for our age.

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