The Boundaries of Christian Hospitality in a Postmodern Setting

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Australian fire fighter David Tree stopped his truck and offered a bottle of water to a singed and dazed koala walking the ash-strewn roadside during the February 2009 bush fires in Victoria, Australia.[1] Thanks to a colleague's mobile phone photo, this simple act of cross-species interaction has been broadcast worldwide. Neither fire fighter nor koala seemed aware that their brief hospitality encounter refuted a much-publicized assertion by the world's best-known postmodernist philosopher that 'pure hospitality,' free from ulterior motives, the demands of conventionality, or other contaminants, does not exist in this world.[2]

The ethics and philosophy of hospitality have received considerable attention during the past twenty years by postmodern philosophers, led by Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). The purpose of this essay is to compare Derrida's influential construct of 'pure hospitality' with the model of hospitality inherent in monotheistic, revealed religion, particularly in its Judeo-Christian form. The essay will argue, first, that 'pure hospitality' actually exists in this world. Second, it will argue that this 'pure hospitality' is a core ethical component of revealed religion, and third, that it exists only within boundaries, conditions and limits. This concept will be designated 'boundaried hospitality.' The essay concludes by suggesting a few implications of boundaried hospitality for selected Christian modes of engagement with society.

Hospitality in European philosophical thought

Does hospitality cease to be hospitality if it is limited by any boundaries? This question, traditionally at home among ethicists and political philosophers, was brought into widespread prominence by Jacques Derrida in the 1990s. But it has occupied western thinkers at least since Plato (427-347 BC), whose life experience in Athens impacted his view of hospitality to strangers. Early in his life Athens attracted visitors and intending immigrants due to its cultural and economic success, but after a devastating thirty year war with Sparta, as Athens resigned herself to defeat, a different sort of intending immigrant arrived: desperate refugees seeking security. Plato, writing his *Laws* near the end of his life, called for strict limitations to the hospitality offered to refugees, and for restrictions on the numbers

[1] Sam the Koala, who turned out, after further scrutiny, to be Samantha, now has her own website at http://koalasam.com.

[2] Derrida expressed disbelief in the existence of 'pure hospitality,' among other places, in Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, transl. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 77.

allowed to settle.[3] His work has influenced subsequent thinking and policy about hospitality, refugees, and intending immigrants.

A more tolerant and open attitude towards strangers developed among Stoics around the beginning of the Christian era, at a time when the old, largely independent Greek city-states had given way to the socially unifying consequences of Alexander the Great's conquests, followed by Rome's political expansion. Focus among some thinkers turned away from local, ethnic and tribal, and more in the direction of national and international.[4] As a corollary to this process, the concept of the autonomous individual emerged, fostered by social developments in the expanding cities of the empire, giving rise to early expressions of the concept of the brotherhood of all humans. Stoics captured this development in their slogan *caritas humani generis* 'love for humankind.'[5] In this changed climate the concept of 'stranger' underwent change. While Plato had championed the concept of boundaried hospitality, Stoics can probably be credited with laying the foundation for the postmodern notion of extending hospitality to all humans without limits, in order to avoid violence, or at least neglect. Plato's boundaried hospitality was adopted by German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), while Derrida carried the Stoic position to its logical conclusion in his concept of 'pure' hospitality.[6]

Immanuel Kant's landmark 1795 essay *Zum ewigen Frieden* ('Perpetual Peace') provided the modern political concept that there is a natural human right to hospitality, a hospitality that was clearly boundaried.[7] In his essay's 'Third Definitive Article for a Perpetual Peace' Kant spelled out hospitality boundaries for both host and stranger. He designated hospitality only within these conditions to be a right, and he located the stranger seeking hospitality somewhere between the extremes of 'enemy, to be treated with hostility' and 'fellow inhabitant for a certain length of time.'[8] Kant employed the terms 'temporary sojourn' and 'right to associate' to further describe his view that hospitality is boundaried. He declared that the guest

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3 Plato, *Laws* 12:952D-953E. For an easily accessed translation, see Plato, *The Laws*, transl. Trevor J. Saunders, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), 503-505.

4 John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in its Social Environment* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986), 55.

5 The phrase is from Cicero's ethical treatise *De Finis Bonorum et Malorum* ('About the Ends of Goods and Evils') 5.23.65 and is expounded with comment by Ladislaus J. Bolchazy, *Hospitality in Antiquity: Livy's Concept of its Humanizing Force* (Chicago, IL: Ares Publishers, 1995), 55-64.

6 Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 28-38. See also Thomas E. Reynolds, 'Welcoming Without Reserve?: A Case in Christian Hospitality,' *Theology Today* 63 (2006): 98-99.

7 Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: With an Introduction by Nicholas Murray Butler*, transl. Nicholas Murray Butler (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939).

8 Ibid., 23.

had no 'right to be a permanent visitor,' thus clearly differentiating hospitality, which to his thinking was temporary and dependent on mutual obligation, from permanent residency or citizenship, which rested on a quite different conceptual foundation from that of hospitality.

The two centuries separating Kant from Derrida were laden with the rise and decline of European colonialism and industrialisation, accompanied by social upheavals and wars. By the 1920s radically pessimistic views of human nature began to quench both Enlightenment humanistic optimism and classic Christian hope. It was in this atmosphere that Derrida worked. His main reason for insisting that pure hospitality must be free from limits was to acknowledge the potential for violence in every human encounter. For Derrida, denial of hospitality amounted to, or could quickly lead to, violence.[9] The only violence-free hospitality, for him, was the pure hospitality which exists only when a host gives everything, including himself, to a guest. Paradoxically, Derrida's 'pure' hospitality, while avoiding violence to the guest, would ultimately obliterate the host by an unboundaried drain of his resources. In one frank declaration of the ultimate consequence of his pure hospitality, Derrida declared that, if it actually existed, pure hospitality would lead to death: 'It is to death that hospitality destines itself ...'[10] Elsewhere he identified the stranger (whom he labelled 'the other'), whose arrival is anticipated by the host, with death.[11]

Biblical hospitality in cultural context

Whether one reads in Genesis chapter 18 of the biblical patriarch Abraham's hospitality to approaching strangers, or of the hospitality experiences of strangers in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the components of hospitality, and the sequence in which they are offered, are strikingly similar. The definition of hospitality employed in this essay, informed by biblical and Graeco-Roman sources, specifically excludes entertainment of family, friends and acquaintances, and entertainment to facilitate business or politics. The typical components of ancient hospitality in biblical and Graeco-Roman sources, including the respective roles of the stranger and host, will be sketched below.

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[9] For Derrida's own words see his strangely-titled essay 'Hostipitality.' He produced this peculiar neologism by joining 'hostility' to 'hospitality.' Jacques Derrida, 'Hostipitality,' in *Acts of Religion*, Gil Anidjar, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 361. See also his 'Step of Hospitality/No Hospitality,' in: Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, 77. For discussion see Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 309-310. Hent deVries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 22. Boersma, *Hospitality and the Cross*, 31. Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).

[10] Derrida, 'Hostipitality,' 360.

[11] Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of Religion,' as cited by deVries, *Turn to Religion*, 311-312.

Stranger/guest

In the ancient world the 'stranger' (Hebrew *gēr*; Greek *xenos*; Latin *peregrinus*) was exposed to risks which are hardly imaginable to today's typical western travellers and sojourners. Stranger vulnerability was therefore the point of departure for ancient hospitality, as was the belief that strangers came under divine protection.[12] Stranger protection was the responsibility of the chief God himself—Yahweh in the case of the Hebrews, Zeus in the case of the Greeks.

Conversely, fear of the stranger was also a feature of ancient hospitality which is now being explored by Christian writers.[13] Strangers evoked mixed, sometimes powerful, emotions which tended towards polarisation. They evoked fear because of their unknown identity, origin and mission. Fear must be overcome before hospitality could be accepted or offered, as in the case of fire fighter David Tree and Sam the koala. To help overcome this fear, several ancient cultures worked with the belief that strangers could be gods, or god's representatives, in disguise.

Host

The role of ancient host typically fell to the chief family of a settlement or town, whose gate would have been the point of initial contact for a stranger seeking hospitality. The prestige and social standing of the host family would be influenced by the quality, dignity and safety of hospitality offered to strangers.[14]

The first and most fundamental obligation of the host was to prevent harm to the stranger. For Greeks a major role of Zeus, chief god of the Greek pantheon, was reflected by one of his titles, *Zeus xenios* ('Zeus protector of hospitality').[15] Zeus had responsibility for strangers, and woe betide the person who exploited one of his charges! Greek authors from Homer (circa eighth century BC) to Plato and beyond agreed that 'all strangers ... come under the protection of Zeus.'[16] A concise theology of hospitality is articulated later in the same work when Homer's main character, Odysseus, reminded a potential host, from whom he requested hospitality: 'You know the laws of hospitality: I beseech you good sir to remember your duty to the gods. For we throw ourselves on your mercy; and Zeus ... is the traveller's god: he guards their steps and he invites them with their rights.'[17] Plato,

[12] Briefly sketched by Otto Hiltbrunner, *Gastfreundschaft in der Antike und im frühen Christentum* (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 46.

[13] See the discussion in John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 3-5.

[14] For reflection on the concept of a Christian host, see Christine D. Pohl, 'Hospitality From the Edge: The Significance of Marginality in the Practice of Welcome,' *Annual for the Society of Christian Ethics* (1995): 127-136.

[15] 'In this role the father of gods and men ... overseeing the behaviour and needs of the *xenos* ('stranger') 'according to John Taylor, *Classics and the Bible: Hospitality and Recognition* (London, UK: Duckworth, 2007), 2.

[16] Homer, *The Odyssey* 6.207-208. For a convenient translation see Homer, *The Odyssey*, transl. E. V. Rieu, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1946), 146.

[17] Ibid., 9.269-273.

centuries later, at the high watermark of classical Greek culture, echoed this perspective when he declared that Zeus was the god of strangers, and that, assisted by intermediary spiritual powers known as *daimones*, Zeus would punish most severely those who violated the sacredness of agreements with strangers, including hospitality.[18]

Hebrews were likewise under divine obligation to protect the stranger. This was a repeated theme in Pentateuchal legislation. 'A stranger you must not exploit, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt' (Ex 22:20).[19] Nearly identical commands are found in Ex 23:9 and Lev 19:33. Old Testament strangers sometimes experienced innovative protection under this provision of Torah. The Syrian army which invaded Israel, and was marched in a state of divinely-inflicted blindness to Israel's king by the prophet Elijah (flourished 875 BC), was protected from harm when he re-badged them as 'guests,' thus requiring the king to protect them and extend hospitality (2 Kgs 6:21-24).

Divine punishment for breach of hospitality could be severe, and in some cases was visited on entire cities. The Greek destruction of Troy was sparked when Paris seduced Helen, the wife of his host. The salutary Old Testament instance was Sodom, whose male population made a brazen attempt to molest the strangers offered hospitality by Abraham's nephew Lot (Gen 19). While the destruction of Sodom was the consequence of additional transgressions, breach of hospitality was central. Later Jewish re-telling highlighted this reason for divine destruction of the city.[20] Recent interpreters concur: 'The transgressions of Sodom's inhabitants mainly consist in sexual debauchery, human hubris, and violation of (the law of) hospitality.'[21]

The act of hospitality

Ancient hospitality accounts nearly always include an offer by the host of water, a bath and fresh apparel, followed by food and drink, then rest. Medical help was offered if needed. Hospitality typically concluded with an offer of food for the next stage of the journey, and an escort or guide if warranted by circumstances. These constitute standard acts of hospitality which any self-respecting ancient householder extended to every traveller on request, without question or cost. Woven

[18] Plato, *Laws* 5.729e translation from Plato, *Laws*, 193-194.

[19] This assumes the validity of the definition of Hebrew *gēr* to include 'stranger.' For a counter view see T. R. Hobbs, 'Hospitality in the First Testament and the Teological Fallacy,' *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 95 (2001): 20-21.

[20] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.200. The anti-hospitality of the inhabitants of Sodom received its strongest statement in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Gen 18:20 which included the legend of the girl *Pĕlētīth* who was punished for taking bread to a poor man, according to Martin J. Mulder, 'Sodom and Gomorrah,' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 102.

[21] Ibid., 100.

into the act were occasions for the stranger to disclose his identity, origin and mission. The host would reciprocate with personal information, or by providing local information to the stranger. Multitudes of narrated hospitality acts in ancient literature support this sketch.[22] Within this framework were nested attitudes and practices governing the stranger-host relationship. The host did not 'pry' into the stranger's business, and the stranger did not appropriate for himself anything in the household which the host did not explicitly offer. Quality of food served, quantity of food consumed, and appropriate length of stay were among the boundaries governed by the shared concept of hospitality.

In summary, ancient hospitality was a short-term, custom-governed, non-commercial, non-reciprocal symbiosis or 'triangle' of host, stranger, and the divinely-sanctioned, stranger-protecting theology of hospitality.[23] 'Social dyad' is another designation for stranger and host within hospitality's mutually-applicable set of boundaries.[24] Ancient hospitality reduced, but did not obliterate, the distinction between host and guest.[25]

The basis for hospitality

The belief in divine command as the basis for hospitality emerges clearly in a range of ancient sources.[26] One modern specialist employs the expression *ius hospitii, ius dei,* 'the right to hospitality which is established by God' to indicate this widespread belief in divine-command hospitality.[27] Divine protection of strangers as a sacred duty of a host is well attested among Roman authors. They also wrote admiringly of its practice among people groups they encountered. They viewed the ancient northern European *Germani,* for example, as actively modelling divine-command hospitality, including protection of strangers. Julius Caesar (100-44 BC) observed that among the *Germani* 'divine command (Latin *fas*) prohibits violation

[22] Andrew E. Arterbury, 'The Ancient Custom of Hospitality, the Ancient Novels, and Acts 10:1-11:18,' *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 29 (2002). See also Amy G. Oden, *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 145.

[23] This definition of hospitality, as well as the term 'triangle' is drawn from Taylor, *Hospitality,* 12.

[24] The argument in favour of the necessity of a social dyad for genuine hospitality to exist has been stated by Anthony J. Gittins, 'Beyond Hospitality?,' *Currents in Theology and Mission* 21 (1994): 164-82. He argues that an isolated individual, without social context, is not a stranger, but an anomaly. The implications of this understanding of biblical hospitality for Christians is explored by Reynolds, 'Welcoming Without Reserve,' 196-200.

[25] For a judicious integration of cultural evidence with theological construct on Christian hospitality's limitations, see Yong, *Hospitality and the Other,* 122-124. Reynolds, 'Welcoming Without Reserve,' 197-198. See also Igor Lorencin, 'Hospitality Versus Patronage: An Investigation of Social Dynamics in the Third Epistle of John,' *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 46 (2008): 172-173.

[26] See for example the survey of Homeric hospitality in Taylor, *Hospitality,* 1-35.

[27] The Latin expression is used by Bolchazy, *Hospitality in Antiquity,* 14, and frequently elsewhere in his monograph.

of strangers; whoever comes to them for any reason they guard from injury, and relate to as sacred.'[28] Roman historian Tacitus (55-117 AD), in his description of the *Germani* theology of hospitality, stated their view that strangers were under the protection of the gods, and that it was *nefas* ('violation of divine command') to turn away a stranger requesting hospitality.[29] These Greek and Roman accounts provide context for the following survey of biblical hospitality references.

Biblical hospitality as divine command

The purpose of this section, after exploring selected accounts of hospitality in Scripture, is to argue that hospitality is a revealed, divinely-commanded dimension of biblical faith and life.[30] Hospitality references appear throughout the Hebrew Bible.[31] So important is divine-command hospitality that it appears in the heart of the Decalogue's fourth commandment, extending Sabbath rest to the stranger (Ex 20:10; 23:12; Deut 5:14).[32] Divine-command hospitality is implied even by the imagery of the best known Hebrew Psalm: 'You set a table for me in view of my enemies; you anoint with oil my head; my cup overflows' (Ps 23:5). Here Yahweh leads by example, modelling the sort of hospitality he commanded in Torah.[33]

In the New Testament, Matthew's intricately structured and repetitive account of Jesus' parable of the final judgement (Mat 25:34-46) employs hospitality to the stranger as the basis for the final judgement. The clearly-identifiable components of hospitality—welcoming the stranger at the door, offering food, drink, and clothing—testify to the centrality of divine-command hospitality in the teaching of Jesus. When the Sadducee lawyer questioned Jesus about which command of the law was greatest (Lk 10:25-27), Jesus' reply, whether he intended it or not, echoed a Greek legal formulation preserved in ancient inscriptions: 'Hospitality [is] the greatest of the laws.'[34] As further evidence for divine-command hospitality, Jesus quoted the Pentateuchal summary of the Decalogue, 'love your neighbour as yourself,' then went on to redefine 'neighbour' to include 'stranger' (Lk 10:25-37).

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[28] Julius Caesar, *Gallic War* 6.23.

[29] Tacitus, *Germania* 21.

[30] For the biblical material see, in addition to standard Bible dictionary articles, Andrew J. Arterbury and William H. Bellinger, 'Returning to the Hospitality of the Lord: A Reconsideration of Psalm 23, 5-6,' *Biblica* 86 (2005): 388-391. For an excellent summary of both Graeco-Roman as well as biblical hospitality as divinely-commanded see Hiltbrunner, *Gastfreundschaft*, 22-33.

[31] For limited discussion and references, see Hobbs, 'Hospitality in the First Testament,' 3-4.

[32] This assumes the validity of the definition of Hebrew *gēr* to include 'stranger.' For a counter view, see Ibid., 20-21.

[33] The hospitality features of this passage have been exegeted by Andrew J. Arterbury and William H. Bellinger, 'Returning to the Hospitality of the Lord: A Reconsideration of Psalm 23, 5-6,' *Biblica* 86 (2005): 387-395.

[34] Inscriptiones *Graecae* 1193, 1331, cited by Bolchazy, *Hospitality in Antiquity*, 20.

While the rest of the New Testament lacks explicit divine commands to be hospitable to the stranger, its presence operates in the background of dozens of passages in the gospels, Acts, Pauline and other epistles, and Revelation. It emerges into the foreground at times: 'Do not forget to be hospitable to strangers; by being so, some, without knowing it, have had angels as their guests' (Heb 13:2).[35] Based on the widely distributed biblical evidence from Old and New Testaments, a conclusion is offered here that there is biblical support for a Christian theology of hospitality as divine command.[36]

Boundaried nature of divine-command hospitality

Divine-command hospitality in Scripture is, like its ancient Greek equivalent, always boundaried. Christian hospitality therefore, like certain other divine benefits, is not entirely open or unconditional. Its practice is hedged with necessary features which guard the honour of God and prevent abuse of either stranger or host. Because much recent Christian literature on hospitality overlooks evidence that biblical hospitality is boundaried, this essay will now sketch its key elements.[37]

1. Boundaried hospitality in the New Testament

Studies of New Testament hospitality typically fail to do justice to explicit references to boundaried hospitality.[38] Probably the most explicit New Testament demand for boundaried hospitality is that of the Elder, who instructed his congregation to deny hospitality to anyone not holding the correct understanding of the nature of Christ. 'If someone comes to you not maintaining this teaching, do not let him into the house, and do not speak a greeting to him' (2 John 10). Unfortunately this provoked a response in kind from the opposing party: '[Diotrephes] himself will not welcome the brothers, and those wishing to do so he prevents, and puts them out of the church' (3 John 10). While interpreters have examined in detail

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[35] Translation by Donald Wayne Riddle, 'Early Christian Hospitality: A Factor in the Gospel Transmission,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 57 (1938): 141.

[36] Hospitality as a Christian obligation is supported by Letty Mandeville Russell, 'Postcolonial Challenges and the Practice of Hospitality,' in: *A Just and True Love: Feminism at the Frontiers of Theological Ethics. Essays in Honor of Margaret A. Farley*, Maura A. Ryan and Brian F. Linnane, eds. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 123. While several theologians cited in this essay agree that Christian hospitality is not optional, some deny that it is based on a divine command. See for example Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 127.

[37] Pioneer exploration of Christian hospitality's boundaries by Caroline Westerhoff has as its thesis that 'Boundaries and hospitality go together: they are in a necessary but irresolvable tension with each other.' Caroline Westerhoff, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1999; reprint, Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, PA, 2004), xii.

[38] Development of the concept of hospitality's boundaries is absent for example from Koenig, *Hospitality*. Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, second, enlarged ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983). Taylor, *Hospitality*, 113-146. Arterbury, 'Hospitality in Acts 10.' Lorencin, 'Hospitality Versus Patronage,'165-174.

most features of this exchange, little has been noted on these two explicit references to denial of hospitality.[39]

Paul wrote to Roman Christians 'now you must offer hospitality (*proslambanō*, designating the host's role in hospitality) to the weak-in-faith one, but not for the purpose of heated debates over arguable views' (Rom 14:1). His imperative 'offer hospitality!' is boundaried by the limitation 'not for debates'! New Testament hospitality occasions were not to be hijacked by doctrinal and ethical debating. Paul repeats his initial directive in 15:7. In 14:1 to 15:7 he sketched two conflict-separated groups of Christians which have preoccupied interpreters ever since—the weak and the strong. By contrast, less exegetical effort has been expended on the opening and closing commands of this section. Some read the second imperative (15:7) as part of a preliminary conclusion to the epistle, rather than as a continuation of 14:1.[40] Whether this is correct or not, the second command to show hospitality is often overlooked. Food and drink, key elements of hospitality, are prominent in 14: 2f, 14f, 17, 20-23. Paul, by the exclamation 'The kingdom of God is not food and drink' (14:7) deliberately highlighted the role of meals and hospitality.[41]

A clear violation of boundaried hospitality is behind 2 Tim 3:6. 'For among [the persons impacted by last-day moral decay] are those who make it a habit to gain entry by devious means (*endunō*, 'to creep, sneak, insinuate oneself') into homes and take over for their own ends little women loaded down with sins, led about by a range of longings, always receiving instruction but never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.' This blunt and colourful glimpse of an unsavoury aspect of early Christian life depicted persons who targeted and exploited others by gaining access to their homes and instructing them. Such a practice could potentially violate several aspects of hospitality. The author's advice for his readers is equally blunt: 'Keep firmly turned away from such types!' (vs 5, where the present imperative of *apotrepō* plus accusative implies 'remain turned away from'). Jude 4 employs the verb *pareisdunō*: 'certain persons, ungodly ones, infiltrated ...' The precise transgression of hospitality is hinted at later in the epistle. During the *agapē* fellowship meals these 'ungodly persons were devoid of reverence' (*aphobōs*), and they 'shepherded themselves,' probably in the sense that they lived at the expense of their followers (Jude 12). The passage's translation is complicated by the richly allusive wording, but its reference to abuse of hospitality is clear.[42]

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[39] The hospitality issue behind this passage has recently been addressed by Lorencin, 'Hospitality Versus Patronage.'

[40] This is the position taken by James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, vol. 38a, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 844.

[41] See Koenig, *Hospitality*, 56.

[42] For an account of the history of interpretation of this passage, along with the options for translating its metaphors and allusive expressions, see Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, vol. 50, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 84-87.

Boundaried hospitality is implicit several places in the New Testament where it is not explicit. According to John 10:1 the stranger is under obligation to approach the main door of the sheepfold when requesting hospitality, to avoid being misidentified as a thief. In Rev 3:20 the risen Jesus announced: 'I stand at the door and knock ...' Only if a host voluntarily opened would Jesus enter for hospitality. As a respectful stranger, he did not force entry, but waited at the door for the host's initiative.

2. Boundaried hospitality in the early church

Several recently-published histories of the early spread of Christianity omit reference to hospitality's role. This is the case for works on conversion and evangelism.[43] It is also true for general histories of early Christian mission.[44] This omission is as unfortunate as it is surprising. One hundred and thirty years ago church historian Adolf Harnack (1851-1930) demonstrated the importance of early Christian hospitality in a two-part journal article, which appeared later in expanded form in his *Meisterwerk* on the mission and expansion of early Christianity.[45] Brief but informative surveys of early Christian hospitality have recently begun to appear.[46]

The presence of boundaried hospitality among early Christians is illustrated from two post-New Testament sources. The first is the earliest surviving church manual, the *Didachē*, ('Teaching of the Twelve Apostles'), composed about 100 AD. The section on visiting strangers demonstrated that early Christians practiced boundaried hospitality. The document's author suggested simple indicators to help congregations distinguish true from false itinerant teachers and lay believers. Concerning itinerant teachers (designated 'apostles and prophets') the *Didachē* instructed: 'Let every apostle, when he cometh to you, be received as the Lord; but he shall not abide more than a single day, or if there be need, a second likewise; but if he abide three days, he is a false prophet. And when he departeth let the apostle receive nothing save bread, until he findeth shelter; but if he ask money, he

[43] There is no serious discussion of hospitality in Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church, rev. ed.* (Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway Communications, 2003). He refers to hospitality extended to Paul during house arrest in Rome on page 332, and quotes Richard Baxter (*The Reformed Pastor*) on the success of hospitality evangelism. Hospitality's role in early church expansion is not discussed in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[44] Hospitality is not seriously discussed in Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986). The word does not occur in the index to Eckhard J. Schnabel, ed., *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004). I could find no treatment of the role of hospitality in W. V. Harris, ed., *The Spread of Christianity in the First Four Centuries* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2005).

[45] Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, transl. James Moffatt, vol. 1 (London, UK: Williams & Norgate, 1908; reprint, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 177-180.For details of his seminal 1879/80 journal articles on early Christian hospitality, see 177, n. 1.

[46] See Hiltbrunner, *Gastfreundschaft*, 165-81. Pohl, 'Hospitality from the Edge,' 121-136.

is a false prophet' (11.4-6). Another test was given in the chapter: 'And no prophet when he ordereth a table in the Spirit shall eat of it; otherwise he is a false prophet' (11.9). By adhering to well-known and widely-acknowledged boundaries of hospitality, early church leaders endeavoured to shield hospitable congregations from exploitation.

A similar test was to be applied to lay Christian travellers seeking hospitality from a congregation. 'But let everyone that cometh in the name of the Lord be received ... If the comer is a traveller, assist him, so far as ye are able; but he shall not stay with you more than two or three days, if it be necessary. But if he wishes to settle with you, being a craftsman, let him work for and eat his bread. But if he has no craft, according to your wisdom provide how he shall live as a Christian among you, but not in idleness. If he will not do this, he is trafficking upon Christ. Beware of (*prosechō*) 'be on guard against such men' (12.1-5).[47] This passage, again, employs standard components of hospitality to determine frankly the genuineness of strangers seeking hospitality in the name of Jesus. Through these guidelines in the *Didachē*, church leaders offered a simple, culturally-relevant test of stranger authenticity—did they respect, or violate, boundaried hospitality?

The second case is from a remarkable account of a peripatetic philosopher and holy man, Peregrinus, who took his own life in an extravagant self-immolation at the end of the Olympic Games in 165 AD. The account of his life by the pagan author Lucian of Samosata (born c. 120 AD) is useful for its account of the conversion of Peregrinus to Christianity. Lucian acknowledged the important place accorded to hospitality by early Christian congregations when he mocked: 'So if any charlatan and trickster, able to profit by occasions, comes among [Christians], he quickly acquires sudden wealth by imposing upon simple folk.'[48] In this caricature of early Christian hospitality Lucian contrasted the craftiness of Peregrinus with the naïveté of the Christians. But even they practiced boundaried hospitality, as Lucian acknowledged when he narrated that 'after [Peregrinus] had transgressed in some way against [the Christians]—he was seen, I think, eating some of the food that is forbidden them—they no longer accepted him (16).'[49] Here again is a case of the violation of a clear boundary, which incidentally seemed to be food-related, resulting in the withdrawal of Christian hospitality.

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[47] Translation by J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers: Revised Texts with Short Introductions and English Translations*, second edition (London, UK: Macmillan and Co, 1893; reprint, 1926), 233-234.

[48] Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus* 13 (A. M. Harmon transl., Loeb Classical Library, vol. 5, 15).

[49] The historicity of Peregrinus is vouched for by contemporary scholarship, as for instance Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius* (London, UK: Duckworth, 1988), 104-05. C. P. Jones agrees: 'The essentials [of the life of Peregrinus] are above suspicion' according to C. P. Jones, *Culture and Society in Lucian* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 121.

The main argument of this section of the essay has been that for the Christian, hospitality is divinely commanded, but that even divine-command hospitality has boundaries. This is in contrast to Derrida's assertion that in order to be pure, hospitality cannot have boundaries. Derrida's notion that hospitality leads to death, however, does overlap somewhat the Christian doctrine of the atoning death of Jesus. According to John's gospel, the ultimate measure of love is one's willingness to lay down one's life for a friend (John 15:13).[50] Under the influence of Derrida's pure hospitality the doctrine of the Atonement is now being viewed as an act of divine hospitality that leads to death—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—which then enables others to experience the joy of life-nurturing, divine hospitality.[51]

Boundaried hospitality and Christian engagement

The thesis that Christian divine-command hospitality even in its purest form remains boundaried will now be employed in order to scrutinise aspects of selected Christian modes of engagement with society. Such a step seems required because even boundaried divine command Christian hospitality can be 'vulnerable to distortion and misuse.'[52]

1. 'Virtual church' in the light of boundaried Christian hospitality

The arrival of 'virtual church' has cast a cloak of anonymity over congregational member and visitor alike, removing the member-visitor distinction usually visible in traditional, face-to-face congregational worship gatherings. 'Virtual church,' whether created by the sheer enormity of contemporary super churches, or by the electronic media, inhibits or prevents some forms of hospitality. When worshippers anonymously assemble in enormous audiences instead of in congregations, or when they sit outside the church building in the family car viewing proceedings on a giant outdoor screen, or when they lounge at home viewing televised worship, they are denied the personal encounters so central to the Pauline model of the body of Christ. This removes opportunities to give and receive human hospitality. It also cancels the uniting impact of Christianity's central celebration of God's hospitality in communion, or Eucharist.

2. Public evangelism in the light of boundaried Christian hospitality

Public evangelism encounters hospitality, including its boundaries, especially at the point of the evangelist's physical or media-enabled virtual arrival on the doorsteps of potential hosts. I once pastored a congregation whose members, when I raised the possibility of a public evangelistic effort, bristled with resistance

[50] For additional statements of this motif of John's gospel, see 10:15, 17; 13:39; 1 John 3:16.
[51] See especially Boersma, *Hospitality and the Cross*.
[52] Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Comp., 1999), 127.

and resentment because, years earlier, a forceful visiting evangelist insisted on removing the church's exterior signboard, along with any other indication of the confessional affiliation of their building. From the perspective of hospitality, their resistance was justified. For a guest to interfere with his host's identity, especially to the extent of concealing identifying features of the dwelling, would overstep one of hospitality's boundaries.

Electronic media enables the public evangelist, as stranger, to seek simultaneous entry into multiple homes. Entry is important—in the words of Alfred C. Fuller, founder of America's legendary Fuller Brush Company, 'getting in is the trick.'[53] He continued: 'Assume a welcome. Never say "May I come in?" but rather, "I'll step in a minute."'[54] At this point it is important to recall the New Testament image of Jesus as stranger on the doorstep (Rev 3:20). Like Jesus, the evangelist has a message of life-and-death importance for the householder. But the evangelist coming in the name of Jesus should not violate the boundaries of hospitality in gaining entry to homes, and should make appropriate disclosure about his identity and mission. A doorstep approach that conceals more than it reveals breaches hospitality.[55] The hospitality components in Jesus' instruction to the earliest travelling evangelists (Mat 10; Mk 3; Lk 6) is worth reviewing in this connection.

Another serious challenge to hospitality arises for the tele-evangelist. The process of televising or filming imposes a series of reality-limiting filters between evangelist and viewer. These range from simple make-up, studio lighting, backdrop and camera viewing angles, to more profound cognitive and emotional filters and props. These can be used to conceal as effectively as to reveal. As a result, the viewer who invites in the tele-evangelist sees only what the evangelist chooses to reveal. By comparison, ancient hosts, through routine hospitality acts of bathing and re-clothing, feeding and table talk, gained considerable insight into their guest's identity. Concealment was more difficult with face-to-face ancient hospitality than with today's tele-evangelist, who can assume an on-camera *persona* which may differ significantly from off-camera, unfiltered reality. The potential for deception due to inadequate or misleading personal disclosure calls for the highest integrity from the tele-evangelist.

Finally one must ask, in light of the pronouncement noted earlier in the *Didachē* that strangers who asked for money breached hospitality: Should the tele-evange-

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[53] Eddie Stride, *C.E.N.* March 10, 1966 citing the Fuller Brush Co. training manual, quoted by George W. Target, *Evangelism Inc.* (London, UK: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1968), 236.

[54] Ibid., 237.

[55] Marketing experts recognize the damage done to commerce by concealed identity. For a discussion of honest versus dishonest representation for marketers, see http://womma.org/

list solicit money while 'in' a home as stranger/guest? However one answers, the need to ask this question illustrates the significant gap between face to face hospitality as a form of gospel witness on the one hand, and the evangelist's virtual presence in homes facilitated by mass media on the other.

3. Multiculturalisation in the light of boundaried Christian hospitality

Diverse regions of today's world experience what is designated by the newly-coined term 'multiculturalisation'—the rapid mingling of cultures previously separated by custom, law or distance. 'The world is truly becoming a global village in terms of mobility and economic and social life.' These words are from a booklet summarising half a century of official Roman Catholic social teaching on hospitality to refugees. It makes repeated calls for recognition of their rights, and for their basic human needs to be met by state and church.[56] Its author quotes a challenging papal statement on the role of congregations which is highly relevant to this essay: 'The parish, which etymologically means a house where the guest feels at ease, welcomes all and discriminates against none, for no one there is an outsider.'[57]

Local church hospitality efforts seem so feeble in the face of mass migration, whether caused by disaster, or due to a wish for social and economic improvement. Those with experience delivering hospitality to immigrants and refugees confess to being overwhelmed, and their work compromised, if they and those to whom they provide hospitality do not observe adequate boundaries. A sensitive, Scripture-based account of this complex and sometimes painful process by Christine Pohl named one of the consequences of offering even boundaried Christian hospitality: 'By welcoming strangers, however, the community's identity is always being challenged and revised, if only slightly. While this is often enriching, it can occasionally stretch a place beyond recognition.'[58] She referred to the stress arising from such stretching, before outlining some key boundaries established in Scripture for ancient Israel when absorbing strangers. 'Incorporation into membership in Israelite society was possible when strangers identified fully with the social meanings of the Israelite community.'[59] For ancient Israel, circumcision completed and summed up the total social and spiritual integration package expected of the stranger who intended to stay. With the passage of time, in the experience of the early church, parts of the package ceased to accomplish its original spiritual and social purpose, and the Holy Spirit guided the apostles in reframing it in light of their experience of Jesus Christ.

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[56] Sandie Cornish, *The Call to Hospitality, Catholic Social Justice Series No. 44* (North Sydney, NSW: Australian Bishops Conference, 2002), 17.
[57] John Paul II, 'World Migration Day Message 1999,' as cited by Ibid., 23.
[58] Pohl, *Making Room*, 136.
[59] Ibid., 137.

The pages of the New Testament record the struggle to find what Pohl terms a suitable set of 'minimal boundaries that would allow good relations among converts' in a changing social climate.[60] She acknowledged the vital role of group identity for Christians, and their emotionally-charged responses when that identity is threatened: 'When strangers are welcomed in, especially if they come in significant numbers or if they are quite different from the welcoming community, there will be strains on identity. The community will be transformed by the people it welcomes ... There is less impact if strangers stay only briefly, but if strangers stay long-term ... then a fairly complex set of questions about beliefs and behaviours emerge.'[61] The practice of Christian hospitality today is clearly challenged by rapid multiculturalisation. Integrating long-stay immigrants into congregations is a process which extends beyond the doctrine and practice of Christian hospitality. It needs to be informed by, and allowed to draw on, the resources of the separate biblical motif of 'the sojourner.'

Other Christian activities that could be profitably examined from the perspective provided by the motif of hospitality include church growth, ecumenical relationships, mission, and long-term foreign aid. In fact, just about every dimension of Christian life could benefit from scrutiny from the perspective of boundaried hospitality.

Conclusion

This essay has argued support for the following interconnected propositions: first, that hospitality is a foundational biblical motif for the divine-human relationship; second, that 'divine-command' hospitality should be part of Christianity's mode of being; third, that even God's 'pure hospitality' is boundaried. The essay has also examined some of the possible impacts of divine-command, boundaried hospitality on 'virtual church,' on public evangelism, and on multiculturalisation.

Christians who accept the necessity of 'divine-command' hospitality as a dimension of Christian living will be sensitive to the Spirit's guidance in discerning which of Christian hospitality's boundaries are relevant at particular times and places. 'We are travellers, pilgrims and strangers, on earth,' declared Ellen White. 'Let the churches arise as one, and work earnestly as those who are walking in the full light of truth for these last days. Let your influence impress souls with the sacredness of God's requirements.'[62] Boundaried hospitality is one of God's expectations. It seems unwise to ignore, violate, or over-extend its bounds in the very activity of bringing the hospitality of Christ to people who have not experienced it.

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 141.
[62] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* vol. 6 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1900), 452.

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