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The Gift of the Other:
Levinas, Derrida, and a Theology of Hospitality

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Abstract

Despite the celebration of 'difference' and the rhetoric of 'connectedness', the so-called 'global village' of the early twenty-first century is far from a peaceful and harmonious reality. Powerful ideological discourses such as the market and the political 'war on terror' shape a world in which many, classified as Others, are excluded. Conceived of as abstract commodities competing for limited resources, or worse, as potential 'terrorists' coming to 'destroy civilization', Others are seen as threats.

In this world of exclusion and hostility the Christian church is summoned to continue to witness to the good news of God's gracious hospitality. The practice of 'hospitality' – what Christine Pohl refers to as 'an essential part of Christian identity' – is, however, rendered problematic due to the emasculation and distortion of the term by the prevailing ideologies of our time. To engage in this historical and life-giving practice faithfully therefore requires a theological rehabilitation of the concept of 'hospitality'.

This thesis undertakes this rehabilitative task in two ways. Firstly, the work engages with the work of prominent French philosophers Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida. In contrast to Cartesian western philosophical thought which has given primacy to the cogito, Levinas and Derrida claim that the self is constituted by the call of the Other. Instead of disregard or fear of the Other, their 'philosophies of hospitality' assert that authentic human existence is characterised by an 'infinite responsibility' before the face of the Other.

Christine D. Pohl, Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 46.
While finding rich resources in Levinasian and Derridean thought, there are weaknesses and limitations in their respective understandings of selfhood, inter-human relationality, eschatology and teleology, and the differential ontology upon which their ethical philosophies are grounded. Therefore, while continuing the dialogue with Levinas and Derrida, section two of this thesis offers an explicitly theological account of ‘hospitality’.

Whereas Levinasian-Derridean thought implies that tension and hostility are both ontologically intrinsic and insurmountable, the Christian doctrines of Trinity, creation, and sin offer an ontology of primordial communion in which hostility is understood as arising from the failure of humanity to live in communion with others. This hostility is overcome in the ‘once for all’ death of Jesus. This sacrificial and substitutionary action, far from sacralising violence and turning suffering into a virtue, prevails over human enmity and offers the true form of personhood. Those who through faith accept this ‘gift of God’ are indwelt by the presence of the Spirit of the resurrected Christ and incorporated into a new form of sociality – the ecclesia. The alienated self, discomforted by the disturbing Other, undergoes a makeover and is transformed into an ecclesial self; expanded to ‘make room’ for otherness. Fear is replaced by love, and appropriative desire gives way to mutual gift-exchange. Undergoing this gradual transformation, the ecclesia is empowered to participate in God’s redemptive purposes being enacted in the world and thus becomes a witness to God’s hospitality.
Preface

As with all major pieces of writing there are numerous others without whose gifts – time, wisdom and other resources – this project would never have been completed. The earliest steps on the journey of this work occurred in late 2005 when my friend, Mark Forman, introduced me to the music video of New Zealand song-writer Dave Dobbyn’s latest release, ‘Welcome Home’. The powerful lyrics and accompanying images of Dobbyn’s anthem to hospitality – a reflection on the case of an Algerian exile and refugee, Ahmed Zaoui, and his inauspicious reception in Aotearoa / New Zealand – gave renewed impetus to my long-time theological reflections upon the importance of the practice of ‘hospitality’.

All theology takes place in the context of a community of faith and it was those at Kodesh community in Auckland whose provision of emotional and practical support demonstrated the very ethic I sought to write about. I am grateful for our next-door-neighbours and friends, Marcel and Daphne, who provided me with office space, internet facilities and numerous meals, and likewise, for the support of Geoff, Gayle and Sue and the broader Kodesh community, with whom as a family we shared four memorable years.

At the University of Otago, I am appreciative of the friendly and ever-efficient service of the Remote Library Staff – Judy, Renee and Paula and others – who kept me supplied with endless desired reading material. I also owe special thanks to my primary supervisor Dr Murray Rae, and secondarily, Dr Ivor Davidson, whose patience, theological astuteness and erudition throughout the project ensured that the quality of work was of a far higher standard than would have been achieved without their input and guidance. Likewise, I am grateful to fellow post-graduate students who offered comments and reflections on earlier draft versions of the work
and to Ingrid, Mark and Jono for their painstakingly proof-reading. Suffice to say, any mistakes contained within stem therefore from my own oversights or omissions.

Halfway through the writing of this work my family and I left Auckland and moved to our first ‘owned-home’ in a small alpine valley. To live in such a setting has been a ‘gift,’ and it has been a special joy to be able to set up ‘home’ and provide ‘hospitality’ to the many family, friends, and strangers who pass through our lives. The axiomatic nature of the saying “hospitality begins at home” is indeed one that I can testify to. Without the support, aroha and patience of my wife Ingrid and daughters Julia and Kristin, this project would never have been possible.

Finally, but perhaps most significantly, I acknowledge my father’s English foster parents, without whose profound act of radical hospitality during the Second World War – the welcoming of a sick, orphaned infant into their home and loving of him as their own – neither my father, and therefore nor I, would be here today. Accordingly, this work is dedicated to the memory of Ted and Florence Kennell.
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Introduction.

A World for All?

We live in an intriguing period of human history. The last century has seen the exponential growth of the human population – from 1.5 billion in 1900, to 2.5 billion in 1950, to over 6.5 billion today. Yet, along with this burgeoning growth in the human population, there is also perhaps a greater awareness than at any other stage of human history of our essential interconnectivity and inter-relatedness. The collapse of both ideological and physical barriers erected during the Cold War, and the technological and economic ‘developments’ of the last two decades have meant that, notwithstanding the differences and diversity of ‘human civilisations’ spread across the globe, there is a growing realisation of our existence as inhabitants of a single ‘global village’.

This sentiment, that at the beginning of the twenty-first century contemporary human civilisation is characterised by a new reality of ‘connectedness’ and ‘openness’, is conveyed in the script of a recent advertisement screened on New Zealand television for a tertiary education institution, The Open Polytechnic of NZ–Kuratini Tuwhera. Accompanied by the image of a developing baby in a placenta, the advert begins, “Your world, was once a small one. As you grew, it did too. But now your world is bigger than it’s ever been before and it has no boundaries.” To a montage of digitally-animated images – the word ‘Boundaries’ disintegrating into butterflies, closed circles being burst open, and climaxing with the distinctly iconic New Zealand image of new life, a koru – the advert continues its acclamation of this new ‘open’ world, proclaiming:

We are no longer limited by tradition, language or distance.
What once was fixed is fluid and there’s no one path.
We work more jobs, learn more skills and share more ideas than ever before.
And, we don’t have to stop our lives to start new ones.
When we understand this: Our world is infinite.
Everything is possible. Everything is open.¹

Evangelists for this social phenomenon of globalisation and for the new ‘open’ world with no boundaries it gives rise to, are not hard to find.² Commentators such as Thomas Friedman point to the enormous economic growth and the associated increase in quality of life that has stemmed from the implementation of neo-liberal economic theories and an adherence to free-market doctrine. The globalised market, free of the limiting boundaries of economic regulation, is one, such proponents argue, in which all have equal access to the market-place, and thus to greater wealth and happiness. Similarly, American computer scientist Vint Cerf, the so-called ‘Father of the internet,’ in an article in The Observer, speaks glowingly of the way in which the world-wide-web has the capacity to expand and improve people’s world. Echoing the laudatory tone of the Open Polytechnic’s advertisement agency, Cerf asserts that, the ‘social repercussions’ of the internet ‘will take decades to be fully understood, but it has already done much to benefit the world. It has provided access

¹ The television advertisement, part of a campaign designed by advertisement agency Ogilvy, was launched on New Zealand television on 21 September 2008.
² Any attempt to speak of the social phenomenon of ‘globalisation’ is itself rendered problematic by both the sheer complexity and the apparent contradictions contained within the phenomenon. A description of globalisation offered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its Human Development Report 1999, in recognising these competing characteristics of ‘globalisation’ provides a useful working definition:
Globalization, as a dominant force in the twentieth century’s last decade, is shaping a new era of interaction among nations, economies and people. It is increasing the contacts between people across national boundaries – in economy, in technology, in culture and in governance. But it is also fragmenting production processes, labour markets, political entities and societies. So, while globalization has positive, innovative, dynamic aspects, it also has negative, disruptive and marginalizing aspects.
to information on a scale never before imaginable, lowered the barriers to creative expression, challenged old business models and enabled new ones.\textsuperscript{3} Cerf states:

After working on the internet for more than three decades, I'm more optimistic about its promise than ever. It has the potential to change unexpected parts of our lives: from surfboards that let you surf the web while you wait for the next wave to refrigerators that can email you suggested recipes based on the food you already have.\textsuperscript{4}

Cerf concludes his ode to the promise of the internet declaring:

[W]e're at the cusp of a truly global internet that will bring people closer together and democratise access to information. We are all free to innovate on the net every day and we should look forward to more people around the world enjoying that freedom.\textsuperscript{5}

But does the process of 'globalisation' really offer a new world of unfettered promise, a new reality of unlimited opportunities and freedom where 'everything is possible, everything is open'? While living in a world celebratory of difference, is it really true that in such a world 'all voices are heard'? Is the 'global village' of the twenty-first century really the land of promise that many suggest?

While acknowledging that a percentage of the 6.5 billion village inhabitants do now have a higher 'quality of life' in terms of the basic material needs – food, water, shelter and health – than at any other time in human history, there is also no denying that such advances in standards of living, the benefits accrued from participation in the global free-market, are by no means equally, nor universally, shared. Indeed, while Cerf speaks of the promise of refrigerators offering gastronomic inspiration to

\textsuperscript{3} Vint Cerf, "If you thought the internet was cool, wait until it goes space age," \textit{The Observer}, Sunday 17 August 2008, 35. Emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid. Emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid. Emphasis added.
the culinarily-challenged, less than 25 percent of the globe’s population has access to
the internet and, according to World Bank statistics, at least 1.4 billion citizens of the
village living in *extreme poverty* will go to bed each night with neither food in their
non-existent refrigerators nor, more significantly, with sufficient food in their
stomachs. While the minority of individuals living in ‘developed’ Western countries
may indeed feel as though life offers an infinite smorgasbord of new opportunities,
and that their existence is characterised by a multiplicity of ‘open’ paths they can
choose to travel down, for the vast majority of twenty-first century global village
inhabitants life consists of an endless struggle for their very survival.7

Despite the rhetoric of ‘freedom’ and ‘openness’, what is increasingly apparent is that
in the global village, free and equal access to the market-place where goods are
bought and sold is an illusion. Far from the well-lit and palatial architecture of the
village centre, down murky and hidden lanes, one can discover inhabitants with
terrible tales of the dark side of village life. In the global village of the twenty-first
century, ‘the undeniable progress of inclusion’ is, as Croatian theologian Miroslav

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Show 1.4 Billion Live On Less Than US$1.25 A Day, But Progress Against Poverty Remains Strong,
Nations figures only 13 percent of the world’s population have internet access.

7 A small sampling of statistics bears out the sheer inequitable distribution of the benefits that
supposedly flow from the ‘freedom’ and ‘openness’ of this emerging ‘globalised’ world. As the
United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in its *Human Development Report* 2007 observes,
more than 80 percent of the world’s population lives in countries where income differentials are
widening; the poorest 40 percent of the world’s population accounts for 5 percent of global income;
the richest 20 percent accounts for 75 percent of world income. United Nations Development
tree top shareholders of technology transnational corporation *Microsoft*, have greater wealth than
all 600 million people who comprise the continent of Africa; the three ‘richest’ people in the world
have more wealth than the combined Gross Domestic Product of the poorest forty-eight countries
in the world, and the world’s four hundred and fifty-eight ‘richest’ billionaires have a greater
combined wealth than half the of the entire world’s population. Figures drawn from Chuck
Collins and Felice Yeshel, *Economic Apartheid in America: A Primer on Economic Inequality &
Volf suggests, built upon ‘the persistent practice of exclusion.’ In his book *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Volf offers what he sees as three modes of exclusion which feature in the contemporary world: (1) exclusion as *elimination* or in its more benign form as *assimilation*; (2) exclusion as *domination*; and, (3) exclusion as *abandonment*. Volf’s classification of ‘exclusion’ provides a useful framework which we will employ below to reflect further upon the current global reality, and specifically, to understand the plight of those who, rather than enjoying the so-called benefits of the new ‘open world’ are, to use a biblical motif, the contemporary ‘aliens and strangers’, the *Others*, who exist on the margins of global civil society.

**Elimination & Assimilation, Domination & Demonization**

The first mode of exclusion, *elimination*, is undoubtedly the most brutal, and due to its lack of subtlety and sophistication, when exposed, is also widely condemned. From the haphazard clearing of squatter camps and slums on the periphery of the major metropolitan cities of the ‘developing’ world – where millions seek to eke out an existence for themselves from the drips that ‘trickle-down’ from the economic fountain-head higher up – through to the ‘death squads’ that roam the streets of major cities in Guatemala, Brazil, Honduras, Argentina, Colombia and Philippines, engaging in ‘social cleansing’, *elimination* is the macabre, vicious and socially-unacceptable mode of exclusion.

In contrast to the silenced voices of these ‘undesirable’ squatters or street children are another stratum of *aliens and strangers* and new breed of ‘global traveller’: the international migrant worker. Unlike *undesirables*, who with no access to capital have therefore no role either as *producers* or *consumers* in the global village, international

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migrant workers find themselves playing a lowly, but critical role in the functioning of the global economy. Attracted to ‘industrialised/developed’ countries with greater economic rewards than their own countries of origin, these migrant workers provide the cheap and unskilled labour required in industrialised economies – engaging in work that inhabitants of these countries no longer wish to do – and simultaneously assist their ‘home’ economies through the sending back of remittances. Often existing with little or no rights, international migrant workers find themselves subsumed and assimilated into the global world market, their employers ensuring that the slave-wage they receive is earned through their blood, sweat, tears, and often their lives.

And what of those countries, regions, or people who, too visible to be eliminated nor easily assimilated, find themselves on the edge, living an uneasy existence on the margins of the global system? Such is the hegemonic logic of the ideology of ‘social inclusion’ that those outside the global market, construed as threats, must be, for the security of the system, brought back into the fold. Alistair Kee provocatively concludes:

Any group that is described as ‘excluded’ cannot be allowed to get away. They must be brought into the body of mainline society.

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10 In 2008, the United Nations estimated that there were over 200 million migrants worldwide (up from 180 million in 2000), 2.9% of the total global population. Of this figure less than 10 percent are regarded as refugees, the rest are part of the growing phenomenon of migrant workers, leaving their ‘homelands’ in search of lives of greater economic prosperity elsewhere. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2009). Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2008 Revision (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2008).

11 For example, annually, the Philippines receives approximately USD$8 billion – almost 10 percent of its total GDP – from remittances sent home by migrant workers. Quoted on Radio New Zealand ‘World Watch’, 25 June 2005.

12 Multiple reports from the International Labour Organisation, Human Rights Watch and other agencies draw attention to the ongoing use and abuse that characterise the lives of ‘international migrant workers’ in various contexts around the globe. For one example of the plight of such migrant workers – in this case, literally engaged in the construction of ‘islands of happiness’ while living lives of exploitation and abuse – see Human Rights Watch, “The Island of Happiness”: Exploitation of Migrant Workers on Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi,” (May 2009), <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/uae0509web_4.pdf> (22 August 2009).
Attention is focussed on their plight and their problems. Ideology chuckles behind its hand. No evaluation is required of mainline society. Its essential health and virtue are simply assumed. Its part in exclusion is never examined. The possible and potential role of the excluded in the regeneration of society is not even envisaged. The fact of their exclusion is not seen as a symptom of disorder, neither as a witness to corruption.... Blessed are those who exclude. And twice blessed are the excluders who graciously attempt to draw the victims into the kingdom of this world.\(^{13}\)

With the defeat of the old enemy of communism, global capitalism is now the only economic 'game in town'. Yet, despite the celebration of difference and otherness, such is the assimilative and totalising dynamic at work that ultimately capitalism, in a twist of irony, subsumes, conflates and consumes these differences. In a bid to ensure its own perpetuity, those unenthusiastic about this new game must be, either by 'carrot' or 'stick', cajoled or coerced into participation in the global market. Such re-inclusion of the unfortunate 'excluded' occurs in a number of ways. While new legislative bodies such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) penalise nations who are averse or unwilling to abide according to the rules of global capitalism, another mechanism employed is that of military intervention. Countries who refuse to participate in the new 'open' market, whose resources remain 'locked up' unable to be accessed, are perceived as a risk to the stability and security of the global market, and find themselves termed as 'threats to civilization', 'haters of freedom',\(^{14}\) and demonised as 'terrorists'. Such 'rogue states', potential participants in the 'axis of evil' are accordingly brought, through the process of liberation – i.e. Volf's second


\(^{14}\) "[T]hey hate us and they hate freedom and they hate people who embrace freedom." United States President, George W. Bush's dictum explaining the motivation for terrorism, given during an interview on Al Arabiya television, 6 May 2004.
mode of exclusion: *domination* – out of international exile and into the global economy, their oil, gas, and other natural resources now made available to transnational corporations (TNCs). In a seldom noticed irony therefore, despite their supposed differences, both neo-liberal markets (*assimilation*) and neo-conservative foreign policy (*domination*) achieve the same result: *enforced inclusivism*.

Indeed, this close collaboration between the economic interests of TNCs and American foreign policy, far from being ‘conspiratorial’, is rather a frank admission made by ardent advocates of globalisation. Thomas Friedman in his influential book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, stresses that the benefits of capitalism and democracy will not be brought about automatically through the dynamic of the free market. Rather, Friedman sees America as ‘the ultimate benign hegemon and reluctant enforcer’ and contends that ‘[t]he hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist.... And that hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.’ 15 Whether those who have been on the receiving end of this now *unveiled* fist are fully aware of the benefits of capitalism and democracy they have received, is, of course, at least to Friedman, a moot point.

The nonsensical, almost absurd nature of this ideology, in which one is either within the system or demonised as the ‘Other’, a ‘terrorist’ who threatens the established status quo, is observed by British journalist, Robert Fisk. Noting how the face of evil changes depending on one’s perceived enemy at the time and also how ‘us–them’ logic commits one to an endless cycle of conflict, Fisk, in a striking passage worth quoting here in full, writes:

‘Terrorism’ is a word that has become a plague on our vocabulary, the excuse and reason and moral permit for state-sponsored violence – *our* violence – which is now used on the innocent of the Middle

East ever more outrageously and promiscuously. Terrorism, terrorism, terrorism. It has become a full-stop, a punctuation mark, a phrase, a speech, a sermon, the be-all and end-all of everything that we must hate in order to ignore injustice and occupation and murder on a mass scale. Terror, terror, terror, terror. It is a sonata, a symphony, an orchestra tuned to every television and radio station and news agency report, the soap-opera of the Devil, served up on prime-time or distilled in wearily dull and mendacious form by the right-wing 'commentators' of the American east coast or the Jerusalem Post or the intellectuals of Europe. Strike against Terror. Victory over Terror. War on Terror. Everlasting War on Terror. Rarely in history have soldiers and journalists and presidents and kings aligned themselves in such thoughtless, unquestioning ranks. In August 1914, the soldiers thought they would be home by Christmas. Today, we are fighting for ever. The war is eternal. The enemy is eternal, his face changing on our screens. Once he lived in Cairo and sported a moustache and nationalised the Suez Canal. Then he lived in Tripoli and wore a ridiculous military uniform and helped the IRA and bombed American bars in Berlin. Then he wore a Muslim Imam's gown and ate yoghurt and planned Islamic revolution. Then he wore a white gown and lived in a cave in Afghanistan and then he wore another silly moustache and resided in a series of palaces around Baghdad. Terror, terror, terror. Finally he wore a kuffiah headdress and outdated Soviet-style military fatigues, his name was Yassir Arafat, and he was the master of world terror and then a super statesmen and then, again, a master of terror, linked by his Israeli enemies to the terror-Meister of them all, the one who lived in the Afghan cave.\footnote{Robert Fisk, The Great War for Civilization: The Conquest of the Middle East (London: Fourth Estate,}
So, what of those who have nothing to contribute to this all-inclusive global system? What becomes of the Others who cannot, either through elimination/assimilation or co-option/domination, be brought to participate as consumers or producers in this new world order? Speaking of this third mode, exclusion as abandonment, Volf adeptly observes that:

If others neither have the goods we want nor can perform the services we need, we make sure that they are at a safe distance and close ourselves off from them so that their emaciated and tortured bodies can make no inordinate claim on us.17

Such is the plight of the Palestinians. Living for sixty years as refugees, without an officially recognised ‘home’, crammed into small tracts of inhospitable land, the Palestinians find themselves abandoned, their predicament only gaining international attention either when politicians – whether US, British, Palestinian or Israeli – re-initiate the ‘peace process’ arguably for their own electoral purposes, or, when the volatile powder-keg erupts into a new round of tit-for-tat violence thus offering ‘news-worthy’ scenes for public titillation. Likewise, Africa remains the ‘forgotten continent’. While TNCs tap natural resources such as oil in Nigeria and diamonds in the Democratic Republic of Congo and local power-brokers use the revenue from such deals to maintain their control, the vast majority of the population continues to live in dire poverty, wracked by the catastrophic effects of global climate change, natural disasters, civil war, and AIDS.18 Even out-going World Bank President in

17 Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, 75. Emphasis added.  
18 The Democratic Republic of Congo is one example of the structural dynamic in which while TNC’s profit from their access to natural resources, western consumers therefore receive new products, and local militia are provided with funds for armaments to assert their control, the local population remains empty-handed, doomed to lives of ongoing poverty and misery. British journalist, Johann Hari, named in 2007 by Amnesty International as Newspaper Journalist of the Year for his coverage of the conflict in Congo, offers a brief, but chilling exposé of this reality. See Johann Hari, "How We Fuelled the Deadliest War in the World - and It's Starting Again," The Huffington Post, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/johann-hari/how-we-fuellled-the-deadl_b_139096.html> (31 August 2008).
2005, James Wolfensohn, seemed unable to acknowledge that the abandonment of Africa may stem from the fact that its population has little to contribute to the marketised world, when he openly voiced his dismay, stating: 'I don't know why it is that in the developed countries, African lives are worth less than lives in Asia or the Middle-East,' and concluded 'That has to change or the world will face a disaster in Africa.'

Thus, while international worker-migrants are assimilated and ‘rogue states’ dominated, millions of others find themselves abandoned as they flee from the violence, oppression, and starvation that often wrack their countries. These conditions frequently stem either directly from the intervention of their liberators-dominators or begin to emerge as their nation suffers the negative consequences of a forced assimilation into the new free-market economy. While those seen to pose a risk to the security of the system are demonised, becoming ‘larger-than-life’ figures, the abandoned others are for all intents and purposes, invisible. A UNICEF report, reflecting on the ‘disturbing muted response’ to the fact that 25,000 children die each day in the global village, comments:

They die quietly in some of the poorest villages on earth, far removed from the scrutiny and the conscience of the world. Being meek and weak in life makes these dying multitudes even more invisible in death.

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20 Important to note here is the increasing number of a new category of refugees, that of the Internally-Displaced Peoples (IDP’s). In countries like Sudan, Colombia, and as already mentioned, Congo, the forced re-location of people as well as brought about by violence, human rights abuses, or natural disasters, is also often the result of so-called ‘development displacement’. Hence, for example, rural poor in Colombia, who are displaced from their land for the ‘development’ of large palm-oil plantations – a luxury item increasingly found on the shopping list of the world’s rich. See Christian Aid Report – Human Tide: The Real Migration Crisis (May 2007), <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/Images/human-tide.pdf> (20 May 2008).

**Keeping the Other Distant**

If however, we live in a new ‘open’ and ‘fluid’ global village, one with ‘no boundaries’, how is the Other actually held at a *safe distance*? There is a chilling poignancy in a passage written by French economist Jacques Attali, who in the early 1990’s predicted:

> By 2050, 8 billion people will populate the earth. More than two-thirds will live in the poorest countries. Seeking to escape their desperate fate, millions will attempt to leave behind their misery to seek a decent life elsewhere. But neither the Pacific nor the European spheres will accept the majority of poor nomads. They will close their borders to immigrants. Quotas will be erected and restrictions imposed. (Renewed) social norms will ostracize foreigners. Like the fortified cities of the Middle Ages, the centres of privilege will construct barriers of all kinds, trying to protect their wealth.\(^{22}\)

Less than twenty years after being penned, Attali’s frightening vision of the future is one already being played out before our eyes. In a disturbing trend, as the ‘war on terror’\(^{23}\) being waged by ‘free’ countries exacerbates violence and instability in certain regions, thus contributing to the diasporas of global refugees, concurrently the domestic immigration policies of these same countries become more restrictive. In response to the threat of ‘global terror’, border security of these ‘open countries’ is beefed up and legislative bodies pass stringent new immigration policies making access to ‘lands of freedom’ for would-be asylum seekers and refugees increasingly difficult. Indeed, in spite of the rhetoric of freedom, the supposedly open boundaries constitutive of the globalised village, is a reality that, by and large, is limited to the flow of bits and bytes on the world wide web, or to capital transferred in


\(^{23}\) Re-branded during the later years of the presidency of George W. Bush Jr. to: ‘struggle against violent extremism’.  

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international financial markets. Thus, while it is true that the global village is increasingly characterised by a great openness leading to an increased flow of information and capital, it is no less true that it is also characterised by a tightening and reinforcing of physical boundaries, which restrict the movement of people.

The incongruous nature of this new global village is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the construction of the 'US$1 million-per-mile border security fence' on the US-Mexico border, a fence that 'delineates, for the first time, a frontier that was previously just a four-strand cattle fence at best'.

Caroline Moorehead, in her deeply moving book, *Human Cargo*, reflecting on this inconsistency in which wealthy nations desire cheap migrant labour while simultaneously seeking to ensure that the unwanted masses do not pose a threat to their lives of 'privilege' and wealth, speaks of the already existing portion of this fence in California as part of the American's 'myths of arrival'. Moorehead writes:

The fence is part of the myth. It is about a poor country looking across the border and seeing money and opportunities, all the lures that enticed the first settlers, and wanting to have a share in them. It is about the way that, ever since anyone can remember, poor Mexicans have migrated north in search of the American dream, which for them has meant jobs in agriculture, factories, the building and service industries, and the way they have been welcomed and discouraged by turn, and have simply kept on coming, even during times of determined and brutal rejection, and the way that the Americans have feared being swamped and losing their own identities and livelihoods. It is the old and simple story of exclusion.

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The actions of tightening restrictions on refugees and asylum-seekers and the construction of literal fences to prevent the ‘poor nomads’ from entering are not, however, unique to the United States but are, as Attali predicted, a growing global phenomenon.\textsuperscript{26} Citizens of such far-flung countries as Australia and New Zealand have watched – with either disgust or delight dependent on one’s political persuasions and ethical convictions – as asylum-seekers and refugees arriving to their distant shores have experienced similar hostile receptions. In many cases, refugees have been met with imprisonment in solitary confinement – due to the suspected ‘security threat’ they pose – interment in processing camps in the inhospitable environment of the Australian outback, or, relocation to their troubled ‘homeland’ of origin.\textsuperscript{27} The words of Hannah Arendt, written to describe her own sense of statelessness and exile in the turmoil of World War Two, ring as true in the

\textsuperscript{26} UNHCR figures reveal significant drops in asylum applications granted in the five-year period between 2000 and 2004, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Some notable countries and drops included: Netherlands \(-78\) percent; Denmark \(-74\) percent; Australia \(-76\) percent; New Zealand \(-63\) percent and the United Kingdom \(-59\) percent. In the years between 2001 and 2004 the US and Canada recorded a 48 percent drop. Figures drawn from UNHCR and the Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.migrationinformation.org> (26 September 2005).

\textsuperscript{27} Perhaps the most (in)famous cases are those of exiled Algerian academic-intellectual and political dissident Ahmed Zaoui, and the ‘Tampa incident’. Upon his arrival in New Zealand in December 2002, Zaoui, deemed a ‘security risk’, spent two years imprisoned before being released on bail into the care of the Dominican Friary in Auckland. For the way in which disinformation and propaganda influenced the Zaoui case, see Selwyn Manning, Yasmine Ryan, and Katie Small, I Almost Forgot About the Moon: The Disinformation Campaign Against Ahmed Zaoui (Auckland: Multimedia, 2004). While Zaoui became something of a celebrity in New Zealand, his cause taken up by song-writers, lawyers and religious leaders, the same cannot be said in the second well-known case, that of the ‘Tampa’ boat people. In August 2001, a Norwegian cargo ship, \textit{Tampa}, sought to disembark four hundred would-be asylum seekers – mostly Afghans – who had been rescued from an overcrowded and sinking Indonesian ferry headed for Australian shores. Australia refused to allow the ship to bring the refugees to Australia and therefore instead of facing the ignominy of ‘mandatory detention’ experienced by thousands of others, at purpose-built detention centres such as Woomera in the Australian ‘outback’, the refugees were transported to Papua New Guinea and then on to New Zealand and Nauru for processing by the UNHCR. The New Zealand Prime Minister allowed one hundred and fifty of these refugees to settle in NZ, while the Australian government gave a AUD\$10million grant to the small Pacific island of Nauru for services provided! Although New Zealand was praised for its acceptance of these refugees, this intake was subtracted from the country’s UNHCR annual quota – and thus, while serving as a useful international P.R. exercise, the government’s ‘generosity’, did not lead to the acceptance of more refugees that year. Meanwhile, in Australia, it is widely acknowledged that the hard-line stance, by then Australian Prime Minister John Howard, was crucial to his general election victory later that same year.
supposedly new reality of the 'global village' today as the day they were written. 'Contemporary history,' Arendt wrote: 'has created a new kind of human being – the kind that are put in concentration camps by their foes and internment camps by their friends.' Fellow Jewish writer, Elie Wiesel, succinctly summarises the lot of contemporary aliens and strangers: 'Refugees live in a divided world, between the countries in which they cannot live, and countries which they may not enter.'

This fear of the unknown Other and the desire to keep at a distance those seen as a threat to 'centres of privilege' and 'wealth' is not simply the domain of national governments, outworked in immigration policy and the construction of border barriers. Indeed, the very popularity of such political decisions is indicative of the extent to which such a fear has become one of the defining characteristics of life in many affluent western nations. The breakdown of community in contemporary Western societies, which sociologists refer to as a loss of 'social capital' or the decline of 'neighbourliness', is evidenced in the increasing popularity of exclusive 'gated-communities', and the growing fascination with fence-building within suburbia. Despite the statistics showing that physical and sexual abuse is far more likely to be perpetrated by those known by or related to the victim, the myth of 'stranger-danger' continues to be expounded by concerned parents to their children. No longer

29 Source unknown. Quoted in Moorehead, Human Cargo, 1.
30 The classic text on this phenomenon is: Robert D. Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital,' Journal of Democracy 6, no. 1 (1995): 65-78. See also his later and larger book on the same themes: Robert D. Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000). While Putnam sees the decline in volunteerism as evidence of the loss of 'social capital', another indicator of such a shift in societal dynamics is the physical composition of our built environments. 'Gated-communities' and the building of fences are simply physical embodiments of the desire to protect one's own wealth from the threat of others, a desire grounded in a paranoia about the Other, which is nourished by the discourse of fear perpetuated by contemporary media. For a reflection on the way in which an overriding fascination with 'market returns' shapes lived contexts, see Andrew Shepherd, "A Spirituality of Home-Making in a Property-Dealing World," Refresh – A Journal of Contemplative Spirituality (NZ Spiritual Growth Ministries) 8, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 21-25.
allowed to walk to school, children arrive daily at the school gate, disembarking from the safe cocoons of family vehicles.

But if such is the state of our contemporary world, how are we to respond to the plight of the ‘poor nomads’, to those who seem to bear the burden of the benefits that others reap from the new ‘openness’ and ‘freedom’ of global capitalism? What individual and communal practices and virtues are required to respond to the immediate plight of the excluded Other and to provide an alternative way of peace for societies and countries, seemingly destined to be embroiled in an endless ‘war on terror’?

The Philosophy and Practice of Hospitality

Seeking to respond to such questions, in recent years the concept of hospitality has gained eminence in philosophical and religious writings, with the work of philosophers Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida being heralded as of particular merit. In contrast to the conflictual and competitive logic of both capitalism and the discourses of ‘terror’, in which it is the unknown nature of the Other which provides the fertile soil for seeds of fear, Levinas and Derrida affirm and celebrate both the difference and the incomprehensibility of the Other. The Other, they argue, is not first and foremost one to be understood, but rather one whose ethical plight we are called to respond to. Drawing upon the Abrahamic religions which shape their own intellectual and cultural identity, Levinas and Derrida point to the practice of hospitality, the welcoming of the stranger, as the constitutive element of what it means to be human.

But does a philosophy and the practice of hospitality have the capacity to overcome the totalising discourses of global capitalism and the ‘war on terror’ which are relentlessly reinforced by the media of our technological societies? Christian ethicist Christine Pohl, in her book Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition, painstakingly notes the way the rich Christian tradition of hospitality has,
over the centuries, gradually been eroded by other social and economic discourses and dynamics. From its early life as a social movement known for its care of the sick and poor and its attention to the needs of the stranger,\textsuperscript{31} the practice of hospitality has, over time, became increasingly depersonalised and institutionalised. With the development of commercial inns during the sixteenth century, the growing secularisation of civic institutions such as hospitals and ‘poor relief houses’ – originally established by the Church in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth century – and with the State taking on welfare in the twentieth century, the practice of hospitality, Pohl contends, has largely been forgotten by the Ecclesia. This ancient ethical practice has now become the domain of secularised commercial and professional institutions.\textsuperscript{32}

Consequently, for the vast majority of those in western societies, the concept of ‘hospitality’ is immediately associated with the – arguably oxymoronic – term: ‘hospitality industry’. Accordingly, the Other is, at best, construed as simply another producer/service provider, one with whom, in our patronage of bars, restaurants, or accommodation at hotels and motels we enter into contractual agreements to give or

\textsuperscript{31} Christine Pohl points out that such was the impact of the Christian practice of hospitality that Julian the Apostle (A.D. 362) – the Roman Emperor who tried to reverse Constantine’s Christianisation of the Empire – complained about the ‘atheism’ of Christians, asserting that, among other things, this atheism was spreading because of the church’s ‘benevolence to strangers.’ Julian went on, ‘it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans [Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.’ \textit{The Works of Emperor Julian}, LCL, vol.3, 67-71, quoted in Pohl, \textit{Making Room}, 44.

\textsuperscript{32} As Pohl observes, the development of commercial inns during the sixteenth century by those who saw in the practicing of hospitality to strangers a money-making proposition and thus the recasting of one’s relation to the \textit{stranger} along transactional and contractual lines, was seen by Reformer Jean Calvin as a sign of human depravity. See John Calvin, \textit{Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 340. Pohl insightfully notes the paradox that in placing great value on the sacredness of ‘ordinary life’ the Reformers ‘simultaneously undermined some of the mystery that undergirded the potent earlier understandings of Christian hospitality.’ Pohl argues that in contrast to the early church, in which hospitality took place ‘face-to-face’ within the ‘household’ of faith, as the public and civic institutions of hospitality, originally established by the Church – hospitals, poor relief, care for refugees – became detached from their Christian roots and, as the ‘domestic sphere was increasingly privatized,... the understanding of hospitality as a significant dimension of church practice nearly disappeared.’ Ibid., 7, 53.
receive *hospitality* services. Alternatively, with the contraction of the welfare state, and the accompanying emergence of specialised and ‘professionalised’ caring agencies the Other is conceived as a *consumer/client*, to whom ‘professional’ carers, are *duty-bound* to provide quality care and service.

On the other hand, at worst, the Other, is conceived according to the dictates of the respective discourses of paranoia and the market. The Other is thus the dangerous stranger, a potential terrorist or criminal who has come to harm, or ‘destroy our way of life’ and thus is not to be granted welcome, but rather steered clear of, and kept at a *safe distance*. Or, following the atomised logic of the ‘free-market’33 — the Other is construed as a competitor for the limited resources available for consumption, one with whom we may collaborate for mutual advantage but who, once no longer useful for our advancement, we discard.34

**The Project in Brief**
Central to this work, therefore, is the contention that the practice of hospitality, offered as a corrective to the exclusions which blight our ‘global village’, is itself only possible if one first responds to the distortion of the notion of hospitality itself brought about by the ideologies of the contemporary world. That is, the recovery of the life-giving and redemptive practice of hospitality depends upon the concept of hospitality first being freed from its cultural captivity to the dual discourses of the market and fear, and also from the assumptions which underlie many postmodern philosophies offered in the name of ‘hospitality’. Such a freedom is only conceivable if the concept of hospitality is re-established upon theological foundations.

33 Perhaps expressed must concisely in former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher’s famous quip: ‘Society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families…’

34 Television programs such as the reality-show *Survivor* vividly portray such an approach to human relationships in which ‘alliances’ are made and broken depending on whether they best serve one’s own interests.
To undertake this rehabilitation of the term *hospitality*, this project is split into two sections. In the first section we begin by considering the philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas (Chapter One) and Jacques Derrida (Chapter Two). Such has been the significance of their work in drawing Western thought back to questions of ethics, and the plight of the Other, that it would be remiss to undertake such a project while ignoring their contribution. Levinas' belief in the 'infinite responsibility' that the subject has before the 'transcendence of the Other' and Derrida's advocating of a radical 'unconditional hospitality', offer powerful re-interpretations of the nature of human ethics. In engaging with their respective thought, two questions will be addressed: (1) The extent to which their philosophical work is able to respond to the particular problems of the contemporary predicament outlined above, and therefore, (2) the extent to which their philosophical projects offer resources for the development of a more explicit Christian theology of hospitality.

While sympathetic towards the Levinasian-Derridean project, there are particular aspects of their thought about which we raise concerns. Chapter Three, in offering a summary of both the strengths and deficits of the work of Levinas and Derrida, highlights these major areas of concern. Ultimately, it is noted that our unease regarding Levinasian-Derridean notions of selfhood, inter-human relationality, eschatology and teleology, stems from a deeper concern regarding the *differential* ontology upon which their ethical account is grounded.

Section Two is the more constructive part of the work. Drawing upon the rich imagery that saturates Levinas' and Derrida's philosophies of hospitality, while simultaneously responding to potential conceptual weaknesses within their thought, we seek to offer a theological account of the ethic of hospitality. The question of ontology is the focus of chapter four. In contrast to the differential ontology offered by Levinas and Derrida, the Christian Doctrines of Trinity and Creation, we argue, offer an alternative and distinctive ontological account. With particular engagement
with the thought of Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, we contend that hostility and violence, far from being woven into the fabric of being, exist due to the failure of humanity to accept the free gift of the Trinitarian God – the refusal to live in God’s all-encompassing love and grace. It is communion and hospitality, not conflict and hostility, which are primordial.

In chapter five we argue that it is the gift of Christ which overcomes this hostility brought about by humanity. In contrast to moral and exemplarist Christologies, we claim that the life and death of Jesus only has salvific merit if understood ontologically as a gift-giving event of the Triune God. Responding to accusations of violence proffered by our philosophical interlocutors and also by atonement critics, we posit that God’s salvific action of overcoming this hostility, and the responsive action of speaking about this – that is, ‘doing theology’ – are both non-violent, non-coercive activities.

Having outlined an alternative ontology and given an account of how, in Christ, the hostility that exists in the world has been overcome, chapters six and seven extrapolate the nature of human personhood and ethics that flow from this. In chapter six in contrast to the ‘fractured’ and ‘divided’ self offered in Levinasian-Derridean thought, we suggest that authentic personhood is discovered as the self, through the ‘disturbing’ and renovating work of the Spirit, is brought into an ecclesial existence. Our account both affirms the concept of a self-identity while recognising that this identity is shaped by a relation with otherness and, due to its eschatological nature, still awaits a final revealing. Chapter seven then gives an account of the shape that human relations, reconfigured according to this ontology of communion, take. We suggest that lives undergoing the transforming work of the Spirit and incorporated into the Ecclesia are re-narrated and thus drawn into a different script, one in which genuine gift-giving and the welcome of the stranger once again becomes possible. Such gift-giving/hospitality rather than stemming from
duty, becomes a free outward expression of the love that the self, dwelling in Christ, is experiencing.

**A Final Preface**

Finally, before commencing further, it is important also to explicate clearly what this work is, and what it is not. Stemming from our reading of Levinas and Derrida, there is, in what follows, engagement with a number of themes current in contemporary philosophical debate – in particular, *the primacy of the Other* and *the character of a genuine gift*. However, by no means should this work be conceived of as primarily one of ‘pure’ philosophical theology. Neither though, does the work fit neatly into the various categories subscribed to by some, whether that be of systematic theology, political theology, public theology, biblical theology, historical theology, contextual theology, or Christian ethics. Rather, the work itself, one could suggest, is consciously ‘hospitable’. Seeking to respond to the themes outlined above – the issue of hostility and exclusionary violence in the world – the work draws widely upon different theologies and traditions – Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant – to develop its case. As such, if a category is required, then the work could be regarded as an example of constructive theological ethics.

Employing a metaphor from the realm of hospitality, the work could therefore perhaps be best construed as a dinner party. As with all good parties, there are a number of notable – one could almost say ‘distinguished’ guests – who through sheer force of personality and insight, provide a focal point to the conversations that ensue. As well as Levinas and Derrida, other significant contributors to our

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35 Such distinct categories have always appeared, at least in our eyes, as somewhat problematic, in that all theology – the attempt to understand, articulate, and perform the *historical* good news of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – is always inextricably *contextual, political, public* and *ethical*. That is, theology is never done in a vacuum but takes place in a particular context, as the Church seeks to hear and respond obediently to God’s *Word*, spoken to it. With personal and corporate lives deconstructed and rebuilt by the power of this radical gospel, the Church’s response is thus inexorably *political* and *ethical* as it seeks to be a *public* witness to God’s gracious hospitality.
conversation include John Zizioulas, John D. Caputo, Kathryn Tanner, Miroslav Volf, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and John Milbank. However, none of those assembled dominate the conversation, but rather in the collective pooling of their wisdom and reflections there is a greater sense of clarity and coherence. Such, at least, is the hope of the host of this conversation and author of what follows.

Also, akin to good parties, sometimes the intensity of conversation with multiple voices can – particularly if one is an introvert – become a little overwhelming. On such occasions it is often the retreat from the ‘hubbub’ of the party and a secluded one-on-one conversation which often proves to be the most stimulating, provoking and enriching. Accordingly, in the second section of this work between each major chapter, we change pace and tone and accompany side by side a number of Biblical characters, entering, as it were, into a tête à tête. Far from being asides, it is our hope that the ‘deconstructive’ and imaginative re-readings of well-known biblical narratives offered in these interludes will, in reiterating and reinforcing themes already raised, have the effect of further developing the case we seek to put forth.

With such prefatory remarks now made, it is time to swing open the doors, for the guests to arrive, and for the conversation to begin.
Chapter One.

The Transcendence of the Other and Infinite Responsibility: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas

A Brief Biography

Born in Lithuania in 1906, where he received a traditional Jewish education, Emmanuel Levinas began his philosophical studies at the University of Strasbourg in 1923. It was in Strasbourg that Levinas also met and began a lifelong friendship with Maurice Blanchot. In 1928, Levinas moved to Freiburg University to continue his studies in the emerging field of phenomenology being pioneered by Edmund Husserl. Here at Freiburg, Levinas also met and sat under the teaching of Martin Heidegger, whose work Sein und Zeit (Being and Time) (1927) had recently been published. In 1930, Levinas became a naturalised French citizen and with the outbreak of World War Two was ordered to report for military duty. Captured by the German Army, Levinas spent the duration of the war as a prisoner of war, living in separate barracks with other Jewish prisoners. While his wife and daughter, with the assistance of Blanchot, found safe refuge in a French monastery, all of Levinas' extended family, including his mother-in-law, father and brothers, were victims of the holocaust. That such experiences of hostility and hospitality clearly shape Levinas' own philosophical thought, is made overt in his second major work Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l’essence – Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence (1974) which Levinas dedicates:

To the memory of those who were closest among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists, and of the millions on
millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-semitism.¹

After the war Levinas became a teacher at, and then later director of, a private Jewish High School in Paris, but it was not until 1961 that he gained a tertiary academic position, teaching philosophy at the University of Poitiers. Nevertheless, his work was already having a major influence on the thought of other French thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Wahl and Jacques Derrida. An essay on Levinas' thought by Derrida – 'Violence and Metaphysics' (1965) – along with the translation into English of his major works Totalité et infini: essai sur l'extériorité – Totality and Infinity (1961) and Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, led to a growing awareness of Levinas’ philosophy amongst a broader audience.² In recent decades numerous philosophers, religious thinkers and Christian theologians – including notably Pope John Paul II – have shown a keen interest in his thought.³ Levinas died in Paris on December 25th, 1995.

**Totality, Infinity and the ‘Other’**

Levinas was one of the first French intellectuals to draw attention to the work of Husserl and Heidegger, publishing his thesis The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology in 1930 and translating into French a series of lectures given by Husserl at Sorbonne University entitled, Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology in 1931. However, it was the publishing in 1947 of De l'existence à

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³ For a recent work which puts Levinas' phenomenological outline of the Other into dialogue with Karol Wojtyla's (John Paul II) philosophical theology, see Nigel K. Zimmermann, "Karol Wojtyła and Emmanuel Levinas on the Embodied Self: the Forming of the Other as Moral Self-disclosure," *The Heythrop Journal* 50, no. 6 (2009): 982-995.
Existence and Existents – written during his war-time imprisonment, which offers the first sketch of Levinas’ philosophy of transcendental-subjectivity. While showing the influence of Husserl and Heidegger, Levinas rejects philosophy’s traditional preoccupation with metaphysical questions about being and epistemological questions about how we know, instead giving priority in his philosophy to ethics. In contrast to traditional philosophy – the love of wisdom – Levinas seeks through his work to articulate a wisdom of love.

At the heart of Levinas’ philosophy is an attempt to change the nature of the Western philosophical tradition. According to Levinas, the Western philosophical tradition since the time of Plato has been obsessed with questions of ontology. This ontological obsession has resulted in philosophies in which the ethical relations between particular beings is subservient to universal mediators such as the Form/eidos in Plato, Spirit in Hegel or Being/Dasein in Heidegger. For Levinas, the problem is that in attempting to ground meaning in being-ontology, these philosophies have failed to give an account of the relationship between ethical beings.

Levinas contends that the history of Western philosophy from Plato to Heidegger can be interpreted as an attempt at universal synthesis, a reduction of all experience, of all that is reasonable, to a totality wherein consciousness embraces the world, leaves nothing outside of itself, and thus becomes absolute thought. For Levinas, the philosophical exercise has been of a unitary nature in prioritising reason and consciousness over subjectivity and action, ontology over ethics. According to Levinas, the consequence of this philosophical approach is that the ‘Other’ is

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distinguished from the 'I', through the consciousness of the autonomous subject. With the consciousness of the ego as the starting point, the rational-thinking subject places themselves as a 'theoretical spectator' on the world and the exteriority and difference of the Other is grasped and comprehended and thus, assimilated to the 'Same'. Levinas describes this manner of Western philosophy such:

    Philosophy is produced as a form that manifests the refusal of engagement in the Other, a preference for waiting over action, indifference towards others – the universal allergy of the first childhood of philosophers. Philosophy’s itinerary still follows the path of Ulysses whose adventure in the world was but a return to his native island – complacency in the Same, misunderstanding of the Other.7

For Levinas, these ‘totalising’ philosophies, in their quest to find meaning in ontological questions, are indifferent to the ‘Other’ and exhibit anti-humanist tendencies which lead ultimately to the horrors of the Holocaust. Such philosophy, Levinas believes, is not merely incapable of responding to the ethical challenges posed by the post-holocaust world, but is, itself, partly to blame for a world of inhumanity.8 In contrast to these philosophies of Totality, Levinas articulates a philosophy of Infinity, encountered through the transcendence of the Other.

Levinas' philosophical project centres around his use of Descartes' idea of Infinity. In his Third Meditation Descartes argues that when we think of and conceive of infinity, infinity itself exceeds the idea one can have of it. While for Descartes this structure of

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8 While very rarely mentioned by name in his writings, many commentators see Levinas’ work as an extended polemic against his former teacher Martin Heidegger. Initially attracted to the ontological philosophy of Heidegger with its search for meaning in Being (Dasein), Levinas saw Heidegger’s support of National Socialism during the Second World War as the inevitable socio-political-ethico corollary of the totalising and thematising nature of such philosophical enquiry.
infinity was applied to the divine – God always exceeds the concept of God that we as subject think – Levinas takes this Cartesian concept and applies this formal structure of thought, which emphasises inequality, non-reciprocity and asymmetry, to the relationship of the subject to the human Other. For Levinas, the absolute exteriority of the other person means that the Other can never be assimilated or incorporated into a totality. The Other is infinite. This idea of infinity, this pre-ontological alterity, is the core principle around which Levinas' philosophy is gathered. This pre-ontological alterity is beyond essence and being but its formal structure can be seen in the concrete phenomenon of our ethical interaction with the Other. For Levinas, 'the ethical relation with the face of the other person is the social expression of this formal structure.'

*Ethics as First Philosophy*

Levinas shares the concern of other French post-structuralist writers that in seeking to express an understanding of God through the language of ontology, God ceases to be transcendent. Within this perspective western metaphysical philosophy is constantly in danger of lapsing into forms of idolatry. Further, his concern is that such metaphysical thinking draws attention away from the plight of the Other and fails to lead people into ethical action. A long passage from *Totality and Infinity* illustrates Levinas' concern towards these twin problems of potential idolatry and ethical inaction which he sees as inherent in western philosophy, and articulates his response to these problems. He writes:

> To posit the transcendent as stranger and poor one is to prohibit the metaphysical relation with God from being accomplished in the ignorance of men and things. The dimension of the divine opens

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10 See the work of Bruce Ellis Benson who argues that the work of phenomenologists such as Levinas, Derrida and Marion is an attempt to speak of the Transcendent without lapsing into conceptual idolatry. Bruce Ellis Benson, *Graven Ideologies: Nietzsche, Derrida & Marion on Modern Idolatry* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002).
forth from the human face. A relation with the Transcendent free from all captivation by the Transcendent is a social relation. It is here that the Transcendent, infinitely other, solicits us and appeals to us. The proximity of the Other, the proximity of the neighbor, is in being an ineluctable moment of the revelation of an absolute presence (that is, disengaged from every relation), which expresses itself. His very epiphany consists in soliciting us by his destitution in the face of the Stranger, the widow, and the orphan. The atheism of the metaphysician means, positively, that our relation with the metaphysical is an ethical behaviour and not theology, not a thematization, be it a knowledge by analogy, of the attributes of God. God rises to his supreme and ultimate presence as correlated to the justice rendered unto men. The direct comprehension of God is impossible for a look directed upon him, not because our intelligence is limited, but because the relation with infinity respects the total Transcendence of the other without being bewitched by it, and because our possibility of welcoming him in man goes further than the comprehension that thematizes and encompasses its object. It goes further, for precisely it thus goes into Infinity. The comprehension of God taken as a participation in his sacred life, an allegedly direct comprehension, is impossible, because participation is a denial of the divine, and because nothing is more direct than the face to face, which is straightforwardness itself. A God invisible means not only a God unimaginable, but a God accessible in justice. Ethics is the spiritual optics... metaphysics is enacted where the social relation is enacted-in our relations with men. There can be no "knowledge" of God separated from the relationship with men. The
Other is the very locus of metaphysical truth, and is indispensable for my relationship with God.11

Levinas’ response to the perceived problems of idolatry and ethical inaction in Western philosophy is thus structured around twin moves within Levinas’ thinking—his advancing of a form of metaphysical atheism, and the elevation of the Other to a quasi-transcendental position.12 For Levinas, ‘intelligibility of transcendence is not ontological. The transcendence of God can neither be said nor thought in terms of being’13. In place of transcendental ontological philosophy Levinas postulates a form of transcendental-subjectivity in which we encounter the Infinite—the Transcendent in our ethical encounter with the Other. Levinas proposes not only that ‘ethics is the spiritual optics’ but asserts that ‘metaphysics is enacted in ethical relations’14 and states that ‘Morality is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy.’15 According to Levinas, such a philosophy based in transcendental-subjectivity, overcomes the totalising and idolatrous nature of ontological philosophy and leads to ethical obedience. Hence he states:

...ethical signification signifies not for a consciousness that thematizes, but to a subjectivity that is all obedience, obeying with an obedience preceding understanding.16

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12 Note the use of the word ‘quasi-transcendental’. While it is clear that Levinas believes our knowledge and experience of transcendence takes place in the ethical encounter with the Other, it is less clear whether he actually sees the Other as the Divine itself. The blurring of lines between the ‘Other’ that is encountered and a possible Divine Other, beyond essence, is a puzzling aspect of Levinas’ philosophy still greatly debated by scholars.
14 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 79.
15 Ibid., 304.
16 Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 77.
Thus, Levinas seeks to replace a metaphysic of transcendental ontology with a metaphysic of ethical response. His philosophy is, as termed by one of his commentators Edith Wyschogrod, a form of ‘ethical metaphysics’.  

**Heteronomy and Altery as Irreducible Structure**

In his first major and critically acclaimed work, *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas posits that the priority of the ethical, ‘an irreducible structure upon which all other structures rest’, is demonstrated in the Transcendence of the Other. According to Levinas’ account, human subjectivity itself is evidence of the heteronomous and asymmetrical relationship between the subject and the Other, of the pre-ontological relation to and structure of alterity. While post-Enlightenment western philosophical thought emphasised that subjectivity is based on autonomy, Levinas argues that human subjectivity is based on heteronomy. Human subjectivity is grounded not in consciousness – *I think therefore I am* – but in our ‘infinite responsibility’ to the Other – *Here I am!* It is this basic structure of alterity and heteronomy that is the basis for human subjectivity and ethics. Levinas states: ‘My ethical relation of love for the other stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world, within the ontology of sameness.’

If one conceives that one understands or comprehends the Other, and if the relationship with them is based on correlation, reciprocity and equality, then one has actually totalised the Other. Instead, according to Levinas our relationship with the

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18 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 79. This establishing of the primacy of the ethical is one of the stated objectives of Levinas’ work. He writes: ‘The establishing of this primacy of the ethical, that is, of the relationship of man to man – signification, teaching, and justice – a primacy of an irreducible structure upon which all other structures rest (and in particular all those which seem to put us primordially in contact with an impersonal sublimity, aesthetic or ontological), is one of the objectives of the present work.’

Other is based on the absolute priority of the Other and therefore is non-reciprocal and asymmetrical by nature. This transcendence of the Other, the formal structure of the priority of ethics over ontology, is conveyed succinctly when Levinas writes:

The transcendence of the Other, which is his eminence, his height, his lordship, in its concrete meaning includes his destitution, his exile \( \text{[depaysement]} \), and his rights as a stranger. I can recognize the gaze of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan only in giving or in refusing; I am free to go or to refuse, but my recognition passes necessarily through the interposition of things. Things are not, as in Heidegger, the foundation of the site, the quintessence of all the relations that constitute our presence on the earth (and "under the humans, in company with men, and in the expectation of the gods").

The relationship between the same and the other, my welcoming of the other, is the ultimate fact, and in it the things figure not as what one builds but as what one gives.\(^20\)

That the ‘welcoming of the other, is the ultimate fact’ is expressed in Totality and Infinity by Levinas’ assertion that ‘The subject is a host.’\(^21\)

**The Face**

In Totality and Infinity, Levinas attempts to speak of this transcendence of the Other made manifest to the subject, through the complex concept of the Face. According to Levinas, the face of the Other appears to us and demands our response, but its appearance is not a phenomenon as one would normally understand it. ‘The face’ Levinas writes, ‘is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is encompassed. It is neither seen nor touched – for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the alterity of the object, which

\(^{20}\) Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 76-77. Emphasis added.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 299.
becomes precisely a content.' Concerned with the way in which human perception and consciousness seeks to control and 'totalise' phenomenon, Levinas' concept of the face epitomises the broader tendencies of Levinas' philosophy – an emphasis on the flesh and blood of physical reality, but a desire to avoid any system of totality. The face operates, therefore, as an epiphany, an element which is not captured through consciousness, but rather which captures the subject with its ethical demands. For Levinas, the 'gaze' of this face 'supplicates and demands' and elsewhere he states: 'the relation with the Other, discourse, is not only the putting in question of my freedom, the appeal coming from the other to call me to responsibility, is not only the speech by which I divest myself of the possession that encircles me by setting forth an objective and common world, but is also sermon, exhortation, the prophetic word.' For Levinas:

The face with which the other turns to me is not reabsorbed in the representation of the face. To hear his destitution which cries out for justice is not to represent an image to oneself, but is to posit oneself as responsible, both as more and as less than that being that represents itself in the face. Less, for the face summons me to my obligation and judges me. The being that presents himself in the face comes from a dimension of height, a dimension of transcendence whereby he can present himself as a stranger without opposing me as obstacle or enemy. More, for my position as I consists in being able to respond to this essential destitution of the Other, finding resources for myself. The Other who dominates me in his transcendence is thus the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom I am obligated.

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22 Ibid., 194.
23 Ibid., 75. Levinas' concept of the gaze of the Face is more apparent and striking in French – where the word visage means both 'to gaze' and 'face' – than in English translations.
24 Ibid., 213.
25 Ibid., 215. As translator and commentator, Alphonso Lingis notes in his introduction to Levinas' later work Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence, it is Levinas' assertion that this 'relationship with
Infinite Responsibility and Hospitality

The theme of human obligation to the Other, predicated on the theory that human subjectivity is grounded in alterity, that is, the ‘welcoming of the other’, is developed and intensified in Levinas’ ongoing philosophical work. While in Totality and Infinity the response of the subject to the Other appears at times dependent on cognition: ‘To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger. To recognize the Other is to give’26, in his later work, Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence Levinas develops the concept of ‘infinite responsibility’ and argues that the subject is responsible to the Other prior to any consciousness or action. Levinas writes:

Responsibility for the Other is not an accident that happens to a subject, but precedes essence in it, has not awaited freedom, in which a commitment to another would have been made. I have not done anything and I have always been under accusation – persecuted. The ipseity, in the passivity without arche characteristic of identity, is hostage. The word I means here I am, answering for everything and for everyone.27

While in Totality and Infinity the ethical engagement with the Other seemed to be dependent on the cognitive abilities of the subject, in a later work, Humainsme de l’autre home – Humanism of the Other (1972), Levinas allows no such ‘way out’ for the subject. ‘Infinite responsibility’ of the subject to the Other here is predicated on the theory that ‘responsibility’ to/for the Other exists in a pre-ontological, pre-original structure of alterity. Levinas asserts that the ‘infinite responsibility’ of the subject is ‘responsibility prior to freedom.... prior to all free engagement.... It is a responsibility before being intentionality.’28 Later, in the same work, Levinas writes:

the other in his alterity, the ethical relationship, breaks out in the face to face position in which language takes place’. Alphonso Lingis, “Translator’s Introduction” in Levinas, Otherwise than Being, xv.

26 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 75.
27 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 114.
28 Levinas, Humanism of the Other, 52.
No one can stay in himself; the humanity of man, subjectivity, is a responsibility for others, an extreme vulnerability. The return to self becomes interminable detour. Prior to consciousness and choice, before the creature collects himself in present and representation to make himself essence, man approaches man. He is stitched of responsibilities. Through them, he lacerates essence. It is not a matter of the subject assuming responsibilities or avoiding responsibilities, not a subject constituted, posed in itself and for itself like a free identity. It is a matter of the subjectivity of the subject, as non-indifference to others in limitless responsibility, limitless because it is not measured by commitments going back to assumption and refusal of responsibilities. It is about responsibility for others, where the movement of recurrence is diverted to others in the "moved entrails" of the subjectivity it tears apart. Foreign to self, obsessed by others, un-quiet, the Ego is hostage, hostage in its very recurrence of an ego endlessly failing to itself.29

This movement in Levinas' thought, in which 'infinite responsibility' shifts from the ontic world of language and intention to the pre-ontic ultimate transcendence of subjectivity, is summarised well by Robert Bernasconi, who writes:

I am radically responsible for the other prior to any contract, prior to having chosen or acted, indeed prior to my taking up a subject position in relation to an other. In *Otherwise than Being* the responsibility inherent in subjectivity is prior to my encounter with an other, whereas *Totality and Infinity* had located the possibility of

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29 Ibid., 67.
ethics in the concrete encounter that realized the formal structure of transcendence.\textsuperscript{30}

The development of Levinas' ethical metaphysics and the absolute uncompromising nature of his understanding of the 'infinite responsibility' of the subject for the Other are evidenced by the increasingly powerful, emphatic – and arguably, violent – nature of Levinas' rhetoric. Just as the subject as 'host' gives way to the subject as 'hostage', so the epiphany of the face of \textit{Totality and Infinity} that 'supplicates and demands' and that presents itself in discourse as 'sermon, exhortation, the prophetic word' is now replaced by more extreme terms such as 'substitution', 'persecution', 'expiation' and 'obsession'. Levinas now describes the 'infinite responsibility' that one has for the Other, thus:

Vulnerability is obsession by others or approach to others. It is \textit{for others}, from behind the \textit{other} of the stimulus. An approach reduced neither to representation of others nor to consciousness of proximity. To suffer by the other is to take care of him, bear him, be in his place, consume oneself by him. All our love or hatred of one's fellow man as a thoughtful attitude supposes this prior vulnerability this "moaning of the entrails" mercy. From the moment of sensibility, the subject is \textit{for the other}: substitution, responsibility, expiation. But a responsibility that I did not assume at any moment, in any present. Nothing is more passive than this challenge prior to my freedom, this pre-original challenge, this sincerity.\textsuperscript{31}

The corporeal nature of Levinas' philosophical language is not purely figurative or metaphorical. In Levinas' thought, the ethical demand of the transcendent Other, the


\textsuperscript{31} Levinas, \textit{Humanism of the Other}, 64.
‘infinite responsibility’ of the subject to the Other, works itself out in the physical world which we inhabit and his ‘ethics’, as Bernhard Waldenfels suggests, ‘are rooted in a phenomenology of the body.’ 32 The transcendence of the Other is not a mystical transcendence, but rather is a transcendence that calls the subject to ‘infinite responsibility’ and ethical action in the physical world of being. Levinas writes:

But the transcendence of the face is not enacted outside of the world, as though the economy by which separation is produced remained beneath the sort of beatific contemplation of the other (which would thereby turn into the idolatry that brews in all contemplation). The “vision” of the face as face is a certain mode of sojourning in the home, or – to speak in a less singular fashion – a certain form of economic life. No human or interhuman relationship can be enacted outside of economy; no face can be approached with empty hands and closed home. Recollection in a home open to the Other – hospitality – is the concrete and initial fact of human recollection and separation; it coincides with the Desire for the Other absolutely transcendent. 33

The fact that hospitality is seen almost as the archetypal response to the ‘infinite responsibility’ borne by the subject beneath the transcendence of the Other should not be surprising. For Levinas, the enacted and economic action of hospitality in the world of being is the direct consequence of the ‘irreducible structure’ 34 in which ‘my welcoming of the other, is the ultimate fact’ 35. The fact that ‘intentionality, consciousness... is attention to speech or welcome of the face, hospitality and not

33 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 172. Emphasis added.
34 Ibid., 79.
35 Ibid., 77.
thematization'\textsuperscript{36} means that: 'Metaphysics, or the relation with the other, is accomplished as service and as hospitality.'\textsuperscript{37}

It is this irreducible structure of ethical transcendence which expresses itself in the 'infinite responsibility' of the subject as both 'host' and 'hostage' for the Other that, according to Levinas, keeps the world from descending into complete barbarity. He writes:

It is through the condition of being hostage that there can be in the world pity, compassion, pardon and proximity – even the little there is, even the simply "After you, sir." The unconditionality of being hostage is not the limit case of solidarity, but the condition for all solidarity. Every accusation and persecution, as all interpersonal praise, recompense, and punishment presuppose the subjectivity of the ego, substitution, the possibility of putting oneself in the place of the other, which refers to the transference from the "by the other" into a "for the other", and in persecution from the outrage inflicted by the other to the expiation for his fault by me. But the absolute accusation, prior to freedom, constitutes freedom which, allied to the Good, situates beyond and outside of all essence.\textsuperscript{38}

Fellow French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, whose thought we will engage with in more depth later, is heavily influenced by Levinas' understanding of 'infinite responsibility' and sees Levinas' work as a giant treatise on hospitality. In a paper presented at a colloquium held to honour Levinas on the first anniversary of his death, Derrida states:

[I]ntentionality opens, from its own threshold, in its most general structure, as hospitality, as welcoming of the face, as an ethics of

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 299.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 300.
\textsuperscript{38} Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, 117-118.
hospitality, and, thus, as ethics in general. For hospitality is not simply some region of ethics, let alone, and we will return to this, the name of a problem in law or politics: it is ethicity itself, the whole and the principle of ethics.

Derrida concurs with Levinas that the underlying structure of human consciousness and subjectivity is alterity expressed in the act of welcome. Accordingly ethics, which is ‘first philosophy’, is in its nature ‘hospitable’. As this work continues we will reflect further on this claim that hospitality is the basis of human subjectivity and ethics, but firstly we will turn our attention to the style of Levinas’ expression – noting how the very manner of Levinas’ writing reflects his attempt to offer a new form of philosophy.

_The Saying and the Said: The Method of Emphasis and Excessive Ethics_

While Levinas’ basic premise – of the irreducible structure of hospitableness which constitutes human nature – is, in one sense relatively simple, his attempt to communicate this thesis is anything but straightforward. In attempting to articulate the _wisdom of love_, in writing about the pre-ontological structure, the welcoming of the other, which is present in human subjectivity, Levinas recognises that he falls prey to his own critique of the totalising tendencies of discourse. The central problem that Levinas’ philosophy faces is the age-old philosophical quandary of language itself. It is Levinas’ awareness of this dilemma – the necessity of putting into language and therefore bringing into _being_ that which is _beyond being_ – which explains the complex, and for first-time readers, often convoluted and enigmatic nature of Levinas’ prose. Seeking to articulate that which he believes is beyond words involves a stretching of language almost to breaking point. Thus Levinas invents neologisms and employs excessive hyperbole; his writing characterised by

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recurring phrases, and reiterated sentences, each offering a different nuance, as he seeks to expound his point. The difficult yet nonetheless compelling style of Levinas' prose, which Michael Purcell suggests 'verges on a philosophical Midrash', is eloquently expressed by Jacques Derrida, who referring to Totality and Infinity, declares:

The thematic development is neither purely descriptive nor purely deductive. It proceeds with the infinite insistence of waves on a beach: return and repetition, always of the same wave against the same shore, in which, however, as each recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself. Because of all these challenges to the commentator and the critic, Totality and Infinity is a work of art and not a treatise.40

Levinas' own awareness of the dilemma that his philosophy encounters is conveyed in his notion of the Saying and the Said. 'The responsibility for another', Levinas writes, 'is precisely a saying prior to anything said.'41 For Levinas, the pre-ontological condition of infinite responsibility, the welcome of the Other, the saying, cannot be named clearly, defined, or communicated in language, and yet, the saying however must be made 'incarnate' and manifest in language, and thus become the said. For Levinas, however, this manifestation of the saying into the said, and into the condition of ethics, comes at a cost.

[T]his pre-original saying does move into a language, in which saying and said are correlative of one another, and the saying is subordinated to its theme.... The correlation of the saying and the said, that is, the subordination of the saying to the said, to the linguistic system and to ontology, is the price that manifestation demands. In language qua said everything is conveyed before us, be

41 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 43.
it at the price of betrayal.... Language permits us to utter, be it by betrayal, this outside of being, this exception to being, as though being's other were an event of being.42

Levinas' complex writing style stems therefore from the desire to offer a new way of doing philosophy. With human subjectivity as his starting point Levinas seeks not to ground his ethics in a 'foundation' but rather proposes an alternative philosophical method in which 'there is another sort of justification of one idea by the other: to pass from one idea to its superlative, to the point of its emphasis.... The new idea finds itself justified not on the basis of the first, but by its sublimation.'43 In Levinas' post-structuralist account, 'the real world is the world that is posited, its manner of being is the thesis.'44 This understanding that the world is constructed by our language-discourse thus leads to Levinas employing hyperbolic-excessive language in positing the world he is advocating. Levinas writes of this philosophical methodology of 'emphasis' as the 'via eminentiae' and states:

*Emphasis* signifies at the same time a figure of rhetoric, an excess of expression, a manner of overstating oneself, and a manner of showing oneself. The word is very good, like the word "hyperbole": there are hyperboles whereby notions are transmuted. To describe this mutation is also to do phenomenology. Exasperation as a method of philosophy!45

The move beyond foundationalism and the philosophical method of *emphasis* — visible in the excessive and hyperbolic language employed — gives an excessive quality to Levinas' ethical demands. Simon Critchley, commenting on this, writes:

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42 Ibid., 6.
43 Levinas, Of God Who Comes to Mind, 88-89.
44 Ibid., 89.
45 Ibid.
Levinas describes this demand, like other moral perfectionists, in exorbitant terms: infinite responsibility, trauma, persecution, hostage, obsession. The ethical demand is impossibly demanding. It has to be. If it were not so demanding then it would let us off the moral hook, as it were, and ethics would be reduced to a procedural programming where we justified moral norms by either universalizing them, assessing them in the light of their consequences, or referring them to some already given notion of custom, convention or contract.

The excessive and hyperbolic nature of Levinasian ethics is compellingly provocative and simultaneously deeply unsettling. There is, as many commentators suggest, a deeply ‘prophetic’ edge to Levinas’ ethical demands. It is this ‘prophetic’ tendency which provides an immediate point of contact with a more explicitly Christian approach to ethics. The refusal to allow ethics to be reduced to a ‘procedural program’ and instead the pronouncement of excessive demands is, after all, a hallmark of the biblical prophets.

**Levinas’ Ethical Source: The Torah**

That there seems to be more than a passing similarity between the excessive ethical demands of the biblical prophets and those of Levinas should not surprise us. While Critchley points out that it would be a misnomer to call Levinas a Jewish philosopher, it is clear that Levinas’ ethical philosophy is ‘inconceivable without its

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46 Critchley, using Stanley Cavell’s schema, suggests that there are two sorts of moral philosophers: legislators and moral perfectionists. While ‘legislators’ such as Rawls and Habermas ‘provide detailed precepts, rules and principles’ to guide our ethical behaviour, Levinas, Critchley contends, belongs to the species of ‘moral perfectionists’ who seek ‘to give an account of a basic existential demand, a lived fundamental obligation that should be at the basis of all moral theory and moral action.’ Critchley, "Introduction," 27-8. This same sentiment is expressed by Colin Davis, who states that: ‘Levinas offers an ethics without rules, imperatives, maxims or clear objectives other than a passionate moral conviction that the other should be heard.’ Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 144.

Judaic inspiration', and in particular Levinas' reading of the Torah. While Levinas seeks to keep a clear demarcation between his philosophical writings and his explicitly religious Talmudic writings, he openly admits the extent to which his reading of the Hebrew Scriptures shapes his philosophical thought. While maintaining that he has 'never aimed explicitly to "harmonise" or "conciliate" both traditions' Levinas suggests that 'one could say that biblical thought has, to some extent, influenced my ethical reading of the interhuman, whereas Greek thought has largely determined its philosophical expression in language.' The extent to which his project is an attempt to render the ethics of Judaism into the language of philosophy is stated explicitly in Of God Who Comes to Mind, where Levinas states: 'My concern everywhere is precisely to translate this non-Hellenism of the Bible into Hellenic terms and not to repeat the biblical formulas in their obvious sense, isolated from the context that, at the level of such a text, is all the Bible.'

For Levinas, the ethics of Judaism revealed in the Torah is the priority of the Other. It is Levinas' belief that:

...in the entirety of the book, there is always a priority of the other in relation to me. This is the biblical contribution in its entirety.... The Bible is the priority of the other [l'autre] in relation to me. It is in another [autrui] that I always see the widow and the orphan. The

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48 Ibid., 22.
49 In an interview with Richard Kearney, Levinas states:
I always make a clear distinction, in what I write, between philosophical and confessional texts. I do not deny that they may ultimately have a common source of inspiration. I simply state that it is necessary to draw a line of demarcation between them as distinct methods of exegesis, as separate languages. I would never, for example, introduce a Talmudic or biblical verse into one of my philosophical texts to try to prove or justify a phenomenological argument.
50 In an interview with Philippe Nemo, Levinas asserts that, 'I have never aimed explicitly to "harmonise" or "conciliate" both traditions. If they happen to be in harmony it is probably because every philosophical thought rests on pre-philosophical experiences, and because for me reading the Bible has belonged to these founding experiences.' Levinas, Ethics and Infinity, 24. See also Levinas, "Ethics of the Infinite," 57.
51 Levinas, Of God Who Comes to Mind, 85.
other [autrui] always comes first. This is what I've called, in Greek language, the dissymmetry of the interpersonal relationship. If there is not this dissymmetry, then no line of what I've written can hold. And this is vulnerability. Only a vulnerable I can love his neighbor.52

Elsewhere he asserts:

The Torah is transcendent and from heaven by its demands that clash, in the final analysis, with the pure ontology of the world. The Torah demands, in opposition to the natural perseverance of each being in his or her own being (a fundamental ontological law), care for the stranger, the widow and the orphan, a preoccupation with the other person.53

Indeed, for Levinas, the Torah itself provides abundant evidence of his claim that our encounter with the Other is a subjective experience, beyond comprehension and totalisation, with its numerous accounts of characters, who, encountered by the infinite call of the Other, can only respond with the ‘prophetic signification’ “Here I am!”54 For Levinas, the utterance of the Hebrew phrase hineni – “Here I am!” by characters such as Abraham, Moses and Isaiah,55 this pre-consciousness response before the Other, ‘testifies to the Infinite.’56

Thus far we have offered a brief sketch of Levinas' ethical philosophy. How Levinas' philosophy of ethical metaphysics differs from ethics as traditionally construed within the Western philosophical tradition is given greater clarity when his thought is compared and contrasted with that of Immanuel Kant.

52 Ibid., 91.
54 Levinas, Of God Who Comes to Mind, 75.
56 Levinas, Ethics and Infinity, 106.
Kant and Levinas: 
Affection and Reason and the Move Beyond Ontology

Historically, Western philosophy has conceived of ethics as a subset within the broader scope of philosophy. Within this schema, ethics and ethical behaviour is deduced from broader universal maxims grounded in natural moral law – as in the case of Kant – or derived from a transcendental theory of God, or the divine. Levinas' philosophical project turns this traditional structure upside down. For Levinas, ethics is not a conception known a priori, grounded in ontological or metaphysical theories. Indeed, for Levinas, this attempt to ground ethics in a foundation is an act of totalising violence. He writes:

The transcendental method consists always in seeking the foundation. "Foundation" is, moreover, the term from architecture, a term made for a world that one inhabits; for a world that is *before* all that it supports, an astronomic world of perception, an immobile world; rest *par excellence*; the Same *par excellence*. An idea is consequently justified when it has found its foundation, when one has shown the *conditions* of its possibility.57

In contrast to this 'foundationalist' approach, in which ethics is founded upon *being*, Levinas' belief that ethics is 'first philosophy' means that he conceives of ethics as an adjective that describes *a posteriori* an event of being in relationship with the Other that is irreducible to comprehension or explanation. Levinas' post-structuralist approach 'starts from the human, and from the approach of the human who is not simply that which *inhabits* the world, but which *ages* in the world'.58 Ethics for Levinas is not an obligation based on universal laws, maxims or appeal to metaphysical theories, but rather, as Critchley observes:

58 Ibid.
Levinasian ethics... is lived in the sensibility of an embodied exposure to the other. It is because the self is sensible, that is to say, vulnerable, passive, open to the pangs of both hunger and eros, that it is worthy of ethics. Levinas's phenomenological claim is that the deep structure of subjective experience, what Levinas calls the 'psychism', is structured in a relation of responsibility or, better, responsivity to the other. This deep structure, what Levinas calls the 'psychism' and what other traditions might call the 'soul', is the other within the same, in spite of me, calling me to respond.59

While post-Kant, western philosophy has seen ethics as taking place at the level of consciousness – that as rational, autonomous beings we use practical reason to calculate and determine the appropriate ethical action, based on universal laws and appeals to moral theories – for Levinas, ethics is rooted in the subject's sensibility. Critchley concisely captures this distinction, stating: 'Ethics does not take place at the level of consciousness or reflection; it rather takes place at the level of sensibility or pre-conscious sentience. The Levinasian ethical subject is a sentient self (un soi sentant) before being a thinking ego (un moi pensant). The bond with the other is affective.'60

Despite these differences, there is a clear parallel between Kant's moral imperative and Levinas' ethical imperative.61 Kantian ethics sought a basis for morality separate from religion, custom or other social pressures. Moving beyond ontological or metaphysical groundings for ethics, Kant proposed that morality is grounded in

'objective principles' – akin to scientific laws and principles – that are self-evident, universal by nature and discernible by reason. Morality could distinguish between two kinds of imperatives: the hypothetical and the categorical. Hypothetical imperatives characteristically did not concern all people and thus took on the form of a recommendation, while categorical imperatives embodied rational moral principles which were always valid and universally binding, and were encapsulated in the following rule, expressed in two ways:

Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law...

Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature.62

Kant believed that as autonomous rational beings the highest state of humanity is the freedom and ability to act autonomously and to follow these categorical imperatives – that is, to live in accord with the ostensibly self-evident rational moral principles. Levinas’ philosophical project, while vastly different from Kant’s, shares a key resemblance in the attempt to see ethics as separate from any theological or metaphysical theories.63 While for Kant morality is rooted in the notion of ‘the autonomy of the will as the supreme principle of morality’64 and the universal laws of morality are discernible through reason, Levinas locates morality in heteronomy

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63 Despite the major differences in their respective philosophies Levinas clearly regards Kant’s separation of morality from ontology as a defining moment and positive movement in philosophy. Thus he writes:

If one had the right to retain one trait from a philosophical system and neglect all the details of its architecture... we would think here of Kantism, which finds a meaning to the human without measuring it by ontology and outside of the question “What is there here...?” that one would like to take to be a preliminary, outside of the immortality and death which ontologies run up against. The fact that immortality and theology could not determine the categorical imperative signifies the novelty of the Copernican revolution: a sense that is not measured by being or not being; but being on the contrary is determined on the basis of sense. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 129.

and sensibility. Where Kant’s theory of ethics has the subject at the centre of the
ethical event and gives primacy to reason, Levinas inverts this by placing the Other
at the centre and giving primacy to affection. For Kant, morality is a simple given –
in the same way that gravity is simply a scientific law – and thus ethics is an
*obligation*, a *duty* which autonomous rational beings *ought* to obey. For Levinas,
morality flowing from the alterity of the Other is again simply a given, and is
expressed in the concept of ‘infinite responsibility’ – that is, the *duty* we have to the
Other. Levinas describes the inescapable quality of this duty as:

the impossibility of cancelling responsibility for the other,
impossibility more impossible than jumping out of one's skin, the
impresscriptible duty in surpassing the *forces of being*.' A duty that did
not ask the consent, that came into me traumatically, from beneath
all rememorable present, anarchically, without beginning. That came
without being offered as a choice, came as election where my
contingent humanity becomes identity and unicity, through the
impossibility of escaping from election. Duty imposed beyond the
limits of being and its annihilation, beyond death, putting being in its
resources and deficit.65

While Kant sees the zenith of humanity in its fulfilling of the *duty* it owes to the
universal law, as Richard Bernstein observes, according to Levinas it ‘is only by
ethically responding to the evil inflicted upon my fellow human beings that I *become*
fully human.’66 Thus, in both Kantian and Levinasian thought, ethics is separated
from ontological or metaphysical theories and ultimately is expressed as a *duty* – for
Kant, as the *duty* that we owe to the universal moral law that is outside both subject
and the Other, for Levinas, as our *duty* of ‘infinite responsibility’ that stems from the
law issued by the Other.

66 Bernstein, "Evil and the temptation of theodicy," 263.
Accordingly, for Levinas, it is the sheer facticity of the Other, the transcendence of the ethical encounter, 'face to face' with the Other, that is the compulsion and motivation for ethicity. The question for Levinas is not "Why should we respond to the Other?", but rather, "How can we not respond to the Other?" Like Kant, and unlike other ethical theories, Levinas' philosophy is not a justified reasoning of how one should act ethically, but rather an assertion of the basic fact of ethicity - a commendation of our basic humanity. Indeed, for Levinas, any attempt to give a justification for one's ethical actions is in fact, inconceivable. This experience of the transcendence and infinity of the Other - of our infinite responsibility before the 'gaze of the face' is not something that we can give a rational account of, but rather is an inexpressible subjective experience. In the same way that one cannot describe one's experience of 'love' or religious experiences, and likewise cannot give an account for why we behave as oddly as we do in such moments, the encounter with the Other - the givenness of ethnicity - is what it means to be human, and is ultimately beyond the capacity of language to explain.

Unlike other ethical accounts where the subject employs practical reason and deliberation to determine one's ethical response in a given situation, Levinas' assertion is that the subject does not choose to be ethical through an act of consciousness, but rather is, prior to consciousness, already 'elected'. According to Levinas' account, we are, by our very nature as humans, ethical beings with an infinite responsibility for the Other. This responsibility for the Other, prior to ontology or being, is 'irreducible'. Levinas states:

It is by the Good that the obligation to responsibility - irrevocable, irreversible, unimpugnable but not going back to a choice - is not a violence that would collide with a choice; it situates an "interiority" preceding freedom and non-freedom, outside axiologic bipolarity, an obedience to a unique value without anti-value, that is inescapable.
but that, "related" to the subject is neither chosen nor non-chosen, and with the subject is elected, and keeps the trace of election. A value never offered as theme, not present, not represented and that, so as not to be thematized, not begin, is more antique than the principle and, in an immemorial past without present, by the ambiguity and antiquity of the trace, non-absent. A value that, by abuse of language, is named. A value that is named God.  

Nevertheless, such an assertion raises an obvious question. If at the most elemental and inexpressible level humanity is composed by its relation of responsibility to the Other, if humans, by their very nature are constitutively ‘hospitable’, then why is that some people act ethically – hospitably – and others do not? According to Kant, while as autonomous rational beings we can recognise the existence of the moral law, this does not mean we always follow it. For Kant, ought implies can, but in his theory he does not ask why some do not follow the categorical imperative. Similarly, Levinas’ postulating of an ethical imperative recognises that we can respond ethically towards the Other, but gives no account of why some do not.

This question points to the first and most obvious distinction between Levinas’ or Kant’s philosophical accounts of hospitality and a theological account. In both Kantian and Levinasian thought, hospitality is understood as originating in human subjectivity, and is conceived of as a response to duty. Kant understands hospitality as a reasonable and rational act of an autonomous will, while Levinas explains hospitality as an act of human inclination. In Kant, the idea of the categorical imperative appears to be a philosophical form of the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” and thus the motivation for acting hospitably to another ultimately stems from self-interest; the desire that likewise one will receive hospitality in return. Levinas’ placement of the Other at the centre of ethics and his

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67 Levinas, Humanism of the Other, 54.
understanding of hospitality as the base structure of inter-human relationships overcomes the self-interest and contractual nature of a Kantian hospitality, but he is still unwilling and/or unable to give an account for why such ethical and hospitable behaviour is not always present in inter-human relations.

In contrast, as we will explore in more detail later, a theological understanding of the human practice of hospitality finds the source and impulse for this ethical action in the ontological and performative drama of the Triune God, and conceives of hospitality not as a duty or obligation but rather as a free response, as an expression of love in response to this prior divine hospitality. Conversely, while the theological ‘doctrine of sin’ is able to account for why often human action is anything but ethical/hospitable, Levinas’ belief in hospitality as the ‘irreducible’ structure of inter-human relationships, embedded in human inclination, appears, at times, to be less a description of reality than a form of utopian idealism. As Andrius Valevicius suggests:

> It would be wonderful to be able to believe that all men carry within themselves a feeling of responsibility for others, but there is too much evidence to the contrary. We could pour through phenomenological or psychological investigations for reassurance, but more than likely we have already seen in others if not within ourselves, that egoism, oppression and abuse are just as abundant as goodness.68

Valevicius concludes:

> Levinas has attempted to show that we instinctively act responsibly towards others. But to say that we feel a sense of responsibility

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68 Andrius Valevicius, *From the Other to the Totally Other: The Religious Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 89-90.
towards others as an innate, essential part of our being is excessive:
some may feel it, others do not; some serve, others plunder.\textsuperscript{69}

An Evaluation

So what of Levinas’ philosophy? While chapter three offers a more detailed critique, here it is enough to outline some initial strengths, weaknesses, and questions that emerge from our overview of Levinas’ thought. While there are aspects of Levinas’ work which show considerable resemblance to Christian thought and therefore can potentially be integrated into an explicit Christian ethic of hospitality, there are also substantial differences.

A Potential Correlation: The Torah and the Excessive, Affective Nature of Ethics

That Levinas’ ethical account is inextricably shaped by his reading of the Torah, provides an immediate correlation with the Christian ethical tradition grounded in the same texts. The potential affinities between Christian and Levinasian ethics, however, do not merely reside in the common source of the Torah. While within the Christian ethical tradition both the Deuteronomic Law and the prophets of the Torah are reinterpreted in the light of the person of Jesus, there are nevertheless clear parallels between the excessive nature of Levinas’ ‘infinite responsibility’ and the ethics espoused and practiced by Jesus.

The ethical project proclaimed and enacted by Jesus as the fulfilment of the Torah\textsuperscript{70} is itself a response to the procedural programme of laws and regulations as set down by the Pharisees and other religious leaders. Rather than reduce ethical behaviour to the following of laws and regulations, Jesus’ ethical manifesto expressed in the

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 91.

\textsuperscript{70} Matthew 5:17-20.
Sermon on the Mount is loaded with excessive and hyperbolic statements: “if you say ‘You fool!,’ you will be liable to the Gehenna of fire”; “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.... if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away”; “Do not resist an evildoer”; “If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well”; “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Jesus’ excessive ethical demands refuse to be reduced to a procedural system and in doing so challenge the motivating factor behind ethical behaviour, and draw attention to the way in which ethical systems create injustices and abuses of their own.71

Likewise, Levinas’ emphasis on the corporeal-affective and active nature of ethics has particular resonance with language employed in the Synoptic Gospels. The Greek word splanchnizomai – verb of splancha – which expresses the way in which one’s innards-entrails, the seat of emotions, are moved by the plight of others, appears in critical ethical narratives within the Gospels.72 The verb appears a number of times in the Synoptic Gospels to express the emotion and accompanying action of Jesus.73

71 Increasingly, Jesus scholars of the ‘Third Quest’ have come to see Jesus’ ethical program as inextricably connected to his socio-political agenda. Jesus’ socio-politico program, seeking to respond to the challenges facing first-century Judaism posed by Roman political power and the encroachment of Hellenistic culture, expresses and enacts ethical behaviour which differs from that espoused by his contemporaries – Pharisees, Zealots, Essenes – and ultimately leads to confrontation with these groups. This growing realisation of the significance of Jesus’ ethical program is shared by various writers – Marcus Borg, Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright – despite the quite different conclusions they draw regarding the question or nature of Jesus’ divinity. See Marcus Borg, Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984); John Dominic Crossan, The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991); and N.T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God (London: SPCK, 1996).

72 Note Levinas’ use of the words ‘entrails’ in Humanism of the Other, used to describe the physical nature of responsibility and mercy that erupt within human subjectivity. See notes 29 and 31 above.

73 See Mark 1:41 (Jesus’ compassion leads to ethical action of healing of the leper); Mark 6:24 and Matt 14:14 (Jesus, moved by compassion for the crowd, ‘like sheep without a shepherd’, responds by teaching. See also Mark 8:2 and Matt 15:32 for reference to this compassion for the people in direct speech); Matt 9:36 (Jesus’ compassion for the ‘harassed and helpless’ crowds before sending out of the twelve); Matt 20:34 (Jesus responds in compassion by healing the two blind men); Luke 7:13 (Jesus’ compassion for the widow at Nain and resuscitating of her dead son). The verb is also used in the petition to Jesus for the driving out of the demon (see Mark 9:22 and Matt 17:15).
and is also used to describe the actions of the key characters at critical turning points within three parables.\textsuperscript{74} Thus, Levinas' understanding of ethics not as a set of codified principles, but as a concrete action rooted in human affection and sensibility, unable to be reduced to formulaic maxims or principles, bears strong resemblance to the ethics expressed and exercised both by the prophets and Jesus and provides a welcome antidote to overly rationalistic approaches to ethical thought.

There are clear similarities as well between Levinas' understanding of human life and that expressed in historical Christian thought. Levinas' assertion of the 'irreducible structure' of hospitality, his belief that authentic human life is discovered in the 'welcoming of the Other', his emphasis on the basic sociality of human existence, is one that resonates deeply with the Christian understanding that humanity, made in the image of the Triune God, is, by its very nature, hospitable, created for relationships with the Other/others. So too, his understanding of the nature of personhood, the fact that the Other can never be completely understood or comprehended, but remains a mystery, beyond totalisation, is one to be commended.

Nevertheless, while Levinas' account provides a useful corrective to much western ethical philosophy and at a number of levels shows potential for coherence with a more explicit theological account of ethics, there are also major distinctions between a Levinasian and an overtly Christian theory of ethics. Firstly, while the Torah serves as the key source for his ethical philosophy and for his understanding of the priority of the 'transcendence of the Other', Levinas' reading of the Torah is itself shaped by certain philosophical presuppositions, in particular the belief that the 'intelligibility of transcendence is not ontological' and that the 'transcendence of God can neither be

\textsuperscript{74} In the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt 18:23-35), \textit{splanchnizomai} expresses the emotion-action of the merciful master (18:27) in forgiving the indebted servant, while in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) the same word describes the excessive and scandalous actions of the loving father and marks the turning point of the story (15:20). Similarly, in the equally scandalous parable of The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), \textit{splanchnizomai} is used to describe the emotion which seizes the Samaritan and moves him to ethical action (10:33).
said nor thought in terms of being.

The effect of these philosophical presuppositions is that Levinas disregards the theological dimensions which underpin the priority of the Other in the biblical text. While Levinas is correct in seeing the 'priority of the other' as one of the key themes of the Bible, his philosophical presuppositions require him to ignore the theological foundations upon which this priority of the Other is grounded: that is, the holiness of Yahweh and his salvific action in history. Eschewing metaphysical or ontological claims, Levinas states that 'ethical language seems to me closer to the adequate language' and argues that 'ethics is not at all a layer that covers over ontology, but rather that which is in some fashion more ontological than ontology; an emphasis of ontology'.

Subsequently, in contrast to a Christian reading of the Torah in which the priority of the Other is predicated on the Otherness – that is, the holiness of Yahweh – Levinas claims that ethical behaviour stems from the human (subjective) experience of the pre-existing responsibility that is owed to the Other. Thus, human ethics are not actions that find their source and basis in the prior actions of the Transcendent, Divine Other, but rather, according to Levinas, it is our ethical encounter with the Other which opens us to the Transcendent.

But can the Bible really be reduced merely to a communication of the universal basis of ethics? Can the narratives of the Torah be stripped of their metaphysical elements and thus be interpreted as primarily concerned with offering a meta-ethical theory, an expounding of the irreducible structure of hospitality that undergirds inter-human relations? It is the final ethical demand of Jesus' 'excessive ethic' outlined in the Sermon on the Mount that reveals the major point of difference between Levinas' meta-ethical philosophy and that of a more explicitly Christian approach to ethical thought. The excessive ethical demands of the Sermon on the Mount are both summarised and find their basis in

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75 Levinas, Of God Who Comes to Mind, 77.
76 Ibid., 89-90.
Jesus’ final demand: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Ultimately, the extreme ethical demands that constitute Jesus’ ethical manifesto expressed in the Sermon on the Mount are grounded upon a theological foundation. Christian ethics are grounded in the perfection and holiness of the divine Father. That is, *Christian ethics is a call to respond to the ‘mercy’ of the Father, to imitate the mercy that has been bestowed upon us.* The biblical imperatives laying out the priority of the other, the primacy of the alien, stranger, and orphan, are predicated upon the holiness of Yahweh, grounded in His divine mercy and compassion which He has demonstrated in His salvific acts.

Furthermore, the very philosophical presuppositions which shape Levinas’ reading of the Torah are themselves highly questionable. Levinas’ philosophy of ethical metaphysics, as noted earlier, is motivated by two concerns: Firstly, that in attempting to speak of the Transcendent, God ceases to be transcendent, in that human language inevitably leads to a form of conceptual idolatry. And, secondly, that such a ‘metaphysical relation with God’, leads to an ‘ignorance of men and things.’ *But is the exercise of theology, of speaking about God inherently violent and totalising? Does a concern with ontological questions presuppose a disregarding of ethical matters?*

While sympathetic to Levinas’ critique, ultimately our contention, to be expounded in this work, is that in biblical Christianity, the ‘metaphysical relation with God’ does not lead to ‘the ignorance of men and things.’ Rather, holding to the theological

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77 Matthew 5:48 NRSV. Or, as expressed in Luke 6:36: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

78 Thus, the constant refrain throughout the Torah, to care for the *alien and stranger*, is predicated on the *prior* salvific and compassionate actions of Yahweh. Israel, repeatedly reminded of their own plight, as ‘aliens in the land of Egypt’ are told time and again that their ethical treatment of the *alien and stranger* in their midst is the appropriate *imitative response* to Yahweh’s initial liberating actions. It is the fact that “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exod 20:2) that establishes the basis for Yahweh’s instructions that Israel now do likewise to the alien and stranger in their midst. See: Exod 20:2; 20:10; 22:21-27; 23:9; Lev 19:9-10, 33-34; Deut 10:17-19.
understanding that all God-talk and human ethical action takes place in an *a posteriori* fashion, and is simply a response to God’s prior speech and action, we will argue that orthodox biblical faith avoids such idolatrous and unethical tendencies. Levinas’ critique of theology, we will maintain, is aimed not at biblical Christianity, but rather against the god that emerges from a certain form of philosophical metaphysics. Ultimately, Levinas’ critique is intended for, and finds its target in, the thought of his former mentor and later unspoken nemesis, Heidegger.

Our concerns regarding Levinas’ interpretation of the Torah and the philosophical presuppositions that shape his thought point ultimately to a deeper disquiet regarding Levinas’ thought. Despite claims to the contrary, Levinas’ philosophy of ‘ethical metaphysics’, is of course, implicitly at least, shaped by certain ontological assumptions. We will, in chapter three, elaborate further on this point but for now will note how Levinas’ philosophical method seems to call into question the concept of identity itself and therefore puts at risk the very notion of an ethical relationship between the Self and the Other.

*Questions of Identity and Discernment: Who is the Other? Who is the Self?*

While Christian ethics are grounded in the character and actions of the Triune God, Levinas argues that moral obligation stems not from metaphysical foundations nor from a universality and intelligibility grounded in reason, but rather, exists in unmediated obligation stemming from a particularity. A problem arises, however, in that ‘in the very particularity of such an unmediated obligation of the subject there also lies a dimension of universality.’79 As Fabio Ciaramelli points out ‘the prescriptive power of the appeal [of the Other] and its pretention to concern each and every one of us, always and everywhere’ means that the Transcendent Other

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becomes itself a universal. While Levinas argues that moral obligation stems from the uniqueness of each moral situation, the irony is that his idea of the ‘Other’ itself becomes elevated to the form of a Universal. The criticism then arises that this generalised Other, which has lost its particular identity, is an ‘undifferentiable alterity’ and therefore ‘entails an empty universal’.

This criticism of the vacuous nature of Levinas’ Other is especially significant when one seeks to apply Levinas’ thinking to the actual practice of hospitality. All ethical relationships involve questions of discernment and in the practice of hospitality in our contemporary world this process of discernment is especially important. In an age of ‘terror’ where the stranger may be the refugee seeking sanctuary or the suicide-bomber who comes as the harbinger of death, how does one discern between the malevolent and benevolent Other – between the Other who comes in peace and the Other who comes to bring destruction? In the context of civil or ethnic conflict in which many different Others are in conflict with one another, how does the subject in a bond of ‘infinite responsibility’ to the Other(s) determine which of the Other’s needs/demands/rights are most pressing? Are the demands of the Kurds more significant than those of the Shia or the Sunni? Is the desire for a homeland amongst the Palestinians any less valid than that same desire amongst Israelis? That is, how does the universal demand of the Other of Levinas’ account get worked out in the particularities of a world of competing claims amongst different Others? In a world

80 Ibid., 85.
81 The irony being of course that Levinas, in his critique of the totalising ‘philosophy of power’ which is ontology, states: ‘Universality presents itself as impersonal; and that is another inhumanity.’ Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 46.
82 Edith Wyschogrod, “Language and alterity in the thought of Levinas,” in The Cambridge Companion to Levinas, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 188-205, 192. See also John Milbank’s concern at the vacuous nature of such a ‘generalized otherness’ in John Milbank, The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 223. Feminist philosopher, Luce Irigaray, is also critical of Levinas’ ‘nondefinition of the other’ asking ‘Who is the other, if the other of sexual difference is not recognized or known?’ For Irigaray, Levinas’ use of words such as Other (autre) ‘without always defining or redefining them... gives a very insistent hermeneutical, metaphysical, or theological tone to his writings’. Luce Irigaray, “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love,” in Re-Reading Levinas, 109-118, 112-113.
of infinite need, how does a finite person respond to the ‘infinite responsibility’ demanded by the many Other(s)? Increasing technological advances in the areas of media and communication mean that in the course of each day one is exposed to multiple tragic events with impacts on many ‘Others’: mining disasters in China, a boat capsizing in Foveaux Strait, clearance of shanty-towns in Zimbabwe, dying climbers on Everest, civilian deaths in Iraq, a missing tramper in the Hunua Ranges, a massive earthquake in Indonesia leaving thousands homeless. If, as Levinas believes, we have ‘infinite responsibility’ for the countless Others in each of these situations, how, with the finite resources we have at our disposal, do we discern to whom, and how we respond?

In each of these scenarios, an ethical response to the Other requires a process of discernment in assessing and deciphering the claims of each of the Others in the particular situation. However, if as Levinas contends, ethics is purely based on human subjectivity, upon what basis or theory do we discern the malevolent Other from the benevolent Other, assess the competing claims of the many ‘Others’, or determine how under the bond of ‘infinite responsibility’ we are to respond practically? What criteria do we use to guide the process of critical reflection and discernment that is part of all ethical relationships? Does Levinas leave us with the problem of still requiring another theory of justice to assist us in this discernment process? Merold Westphal highlights this same point, asking:

[A]ssuming that the ethical relation does not have its birth in knowledge but in finding myself addressed and put in question by the Other, what is the proper place of reflection, for moral philosophy, more traditionally conceived? Levinas regularly insists that it has a legitimate place, however secondary and derived. But how do we move from the immediacy of the Other’s claim, which in

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83 These examples are all real events that took place during the writing of this chapter in May/June 2006.
its abstractness is absolute but in its historical and empirical concreteness is in conflict with that of other Others, to the mediation in which we seek justice among conflicting claims? Do we just go back to business as usual, perhaps Rawls, for a theory of justice?  

Such questions could well be perceived as unfair. After all, as we have outlined, Levinas does not seek to offer an account of ethical reasoning, but rather simply seeks to give an account of the basic ethicity that constitutes humanness. However, not only does the universalising and generalising nature of Levinas' ‘Other’ raise the question of the process of discernment, but the priority given in Levinasian thought to affection and sensibility likewise appears problematic in our contemporary world. What happens once the bombardment of images and stories of the Others reaches saturation point – when rather than being ‘moved’ by the plight of the Other, the subject reaches what some term ‘compassion fatigue’ leading to a form of ethical paralysis? How do we, as ethical subjects, ensure that we remain open and vulnerable to the face and call of the Other? What are the obstacles that prevent us responding to the plight of the Other? Once again, Levinas' thought, by and large, stays silent on such important ethical questions and one is left to wonder how Levinas' powerful demand to ‘infinite responsibility’ is actually outworked in a world of conflicting and infinite needs.

**Identity and the Nature of Relationships**

As well as this concern over the identity of the Other and related questions of discernment, likewise the very nature of the relationship between ethical subjects envisaged by Levinas also leads to a certain unease. In contrast to what he perceives as the totalising nature of western philosophy that seeks to grasp and comprehend the Other, Levinas argues for the absolute otherness and exteriority, the

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'transcendence of the Other'. As mentioned previously, the relationship between the subject and the Other is not one of equality in which the Other approaches the subject at the same level. Such a relationship for Levinas is impossible due to the totalising nature of the conscious subject. Instead, Levinas posits an asymmetrical and non-reciprocal relationship between the subject and the Other in which the Other approaches us not as an equal, but rather as 'Lord' and 'Master'. To overcome the potential risk of the Other being incorporated into a totality, to prevent the abuse of the Other by the conscious subject, Levinas inverts the ethical relationship. The transcendent Other approaches the subject from height and 'commands' and the subject is 'infinitely responsible' for the Other. But what is the effect of this reversal of power?

We noted above the irony that in focusing on the 'transcendence of the Other', the 'Other' potentially becomes a faceless, generalised universal, devoid of a particular identity, thereby complicating questions of discernment that are critical within the practice of hospitality. Likewise, Levinas' thinking also appears problematic with regard to the identity of the subject itself. In Humanism of the Other, Levinas writes:

The Desire for Others that we feel in the most common social experience is fundamental movement, pure transport, absolute orientation, sense. All analysis of language in contemporary philosophy emphasizes, and rightfully so, its hermeneutic structure and the cultural effort of the embodied being who expresses himself. Hasn't the third dimension been forgotten? The direction toward the Other who is not only collaborator and neighbor of our cultural work of expression or client of our artistic production, but interlocutor: the one to whom expression expresses, for whom celebration celebrates, he who is both terms of an orientation and first signification. In other words, before it is celebration of being, expression is a relation with a wonder whom I express the expression and whose presence is
already required so that my cultural gesture of expression can be produced. The Other who faces me is not included in the totality of being that is expressed. He arises behind all collection of being, as the one to whom I express what I express. I find myself facing the Other. He is neither a cultural signification nor a simple given. There is, primordially, sense because he lends it to expression itself, because only through him can a phenomenon such as signification introduce itself, of itself, into being.85

In Levinas’ thought, the base structure of heteronomy means that the Other is the very basis of sense. Without the Other there is no basis/foundation for the subject to express themselves. As a consequence, Levinas believes that the identity of the subject is ‘host’/‘hostage’ and the subject is formed by its ethical actions. The poststructuralist assumption which shapes Levinas’ thinking does not merely mean, as noted earlier, that the world is constructed by our language-discourse, but further, Levinas’ understanding that heteronomy is the basis of identity means the subject itself only exists as a constitution of its ethical actions toward the Other. Thus, Levinas’ statement that the subject is ‘stitched of responsibilities’ conveys the imagery of a quilt in which each ethical action becomes a new piece of material added to the whole.86 The biblical ethical imperative: “Love your neighbour as yourself”,87 is, Levinas argues, shaped by his hermeneutic of the priority of the Other and the multi-interpretability of the Hebrew syntax, translatable as: “Love your neighbour; all that is yourself; this work is yourself; this love is yourself.”88

85 Levinas, Humanism of the Other, 30.
86 Ibid., 67. See note 29 above.
87 Lev 19:18.
88 Levinas, Of God Who Comes to Mind, 90-91. Emphasis added. While in this passage Levinas sees the identity of the subject as constituted in ethical actions, it is not always clear whether Levinas is also open to a possible monist understanding of identity. While earlier in this specific passage Levinas raises the possible interpretation “Love your neighbour; he is yourself” and appears to turn down such a reading, some Levinasian commentators do see a monist perspective within his work. Richard A. Cohen writes:
Once again there is a disturbing irony that arises in Levinas' work. Levinas' account of the subject's existence being established in ethical actions is designed to overcome ethical imperatives which are rooted in self-love and self-interest. The ethical maxim "Do unto Others as you would have them do unto you" would be anathema to Levinas, placing as it does the subject at the centre of the ethical action. But Levinas' response, in placing the Other at the centre of the ethical event and arguing that the subject's existence is constituted by ethical action leads to new difficulties. If Levinas' ethico-constructionist understanding of identity were to be adhered to, what would this mean for our understanding of those who act unethically – though this begs the question as to what basis and criteria is used for deciding what is and is not ethical/hospitable? – or those, such as infants or others, who are not self-aware of their ethical encounters? In a strange twist, Levinas' philosophy in raising the Other to a generalised universal and making the subject a 'hostage' to this faceless Other, seems to commit the very act of totalisation and dehumanisation he is seeking to overcome. Is Levinas' philosophy simply an inversion of the totalising power structure that he sees at work in western philosophy with the only difference being now that the subject is at the mercy of the Other? Indeed, even the notion of the ethical subject as 'hostage' while admittedly hyperbolic, seems to insinuate that the asymmetrical ethical relationship also contains an element of antagonism. But how appropriate or helpful is it to conceive of the ethical subject as 'hostage' in a world of hostage-taking where those seeking to offer humanitarian assistance to Others find their experience of 'hospitality' hosted by masked gun-men and televised for others.

One is not called on to "love thy neighbour as oneself," according to the biblical precept, as if self-loves preceded other-love and were the measure of other-love. Rather, the proper formulation of Levinas's thought is more extreme, an infinite demand never satisfied even in its fulfilment: to "love thy neighbour is oneself." The moral self is the self-emptying – the "fission" the "denucleation," of selfhood in and as responsibility for the other – up to the ultimate self-sacrifice, to die for the other's welfare. Care for the other trumps care for the self, is care for the self. Nothing is more significant.

Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, xxvii.
to share? Or, where daughters, held captive in their own homes, become ‘hosts’ to the children fathered by their own father?89

These questions regarding identity and relationality are complicated further if we take Levinas’ philosophical methodology of *emphasis*, discussed earlier, and apply it to his concept of the Other. In expressing the idea that ‘the real world is the world that is posited, its manner of being is the thesis’,90 Levinas appears to conceive of the world as a linguistic construction, in which the ideas we posit are more real than the world of *being*. But what happens if in the interests of consistency, Levinas’ methodology of *emphasis*, this linguistic-constructionist approach, is applied to his concept of the Other. If the world we encounter is the world that we have posited in language, is this not also true of the Other? Is the Other that we encounter simply a linguistic construction that we have posited into existence? The problem arises not only in that Levinas’ methodology of *emphasis* is grounded upon the presupposition that our positing will always be positive91 but that if adhered to, the idea of the linguistic construction of the Other undermines the priority of the Other upon which Levinas’ ‘infinite responsibility’ is based. That is, if the Other, like the world, is a linguistic construction, arising from the positing of the subject, then the Other is no longer prior to, but rather is subservient to language.

89 We refer here to the shocking cases of Irish aid-worker Margaret Hassan, who, after almost four decades living in Iraq seeking to assist in the improvement of lives of ordinary Iraqis, was kidnapped and murdered in 2004; and, to the case of Austrian woman, Elizabeth Fritzl, who, held in captivity for twenty-four years by her own father Joseph Fritzl, gave birth to seven children fathered by him, before gaining freedom in April 2008.
90 Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 89.
91 This again suggests there is an element of idealism within Levinas’ philosophy. While Levinas’ concept of linguistic construction presupposes positive positing of the world and the Other, the reality is that we live in a world of propaganda in which the Other can be posited either as a deserving widow, orphan, stranger, or, as a terrorist, depending on who is doing the positing. Richard Flanagan’s novel, *The Unknown Terrorist*, powerfully portrays the ways in which an unsuspecting innocent Other, living in contemporary western society consumed by fear of the Other – a consuming fear nurtured and propagated by the media – is thus transformed into a ‘terrorist’. Richard Flanagan, *The Unknown Terrorist* (Sydney: Picador, 2006).
Derrida, in commenting on Levinas’ philosophy of hospitality, draws the distinction between Kant’s philosophy which ‘retains the trace of natural hostility’ and Levinas’ philosophy of peace. But to what extent does the asymmetrical, non-reciprocal nature of inter-human relationships that Levinas posits really provide a basis for hospitality and peace? Does a philosophical account of hospitality based on a structure of asymmetrical and non-reciprocal relationships offer hope to a world in which such asymmetries, inequalities and inequities already exist? ‘Isn’t there a need’, Merold Westphal writes, ‘especially in a thinker who evokes messianic peace as Levinas does, to talk about the kind of reciprocity that represents both a moral and a social ideal?’ As we will argue later, it is in the theological doctrine of the Trinity that we see a mode of reciprocity in which both personal identity and relationality are able to co-exist, therefore overcoming the problems of an account of hospitality rooted in autonomy (Kant) or heteronomy (Levinas).

Summary

In assessing Levinas’ philosophy – a philosophy of hospitality – we have noted the strengths and weaknesses of his account. There are areas with clear affinities with Christian thought which show the potential to enrich the theological account of hospitality we seek to offer. Clearly Levinas’ dependence on the Torah and his emphasis on the key motif of the ‘priority of the other’ derived from this text provides an immediate point of correlation with an explicit theological basis for hospitality. Similarly, Levinas’ understanding of ethics as an adjective based in human sensibility and affection is a necessary critique of western ethical approaches in which ethics have often been grounded in practical reason and reduced to a set of

procedural laws, and likewise, bears some resemblances to the ethics exercised by the prophets and Jesus.

However, problems emerge in that in attempting to articulate the Judaic ethics of hospitality in the language of western philosophy, Levinas takes on board the presuppositions of western philosophical thought. In eschewing the theological basis for the ethics of the Torah and in renouncing the totalising tendencies of ontological philosophy, Levinas seeks to argue that hospitality stems from a pre-ontological alterity discoverable in a phenomenological analysis of human subjectivity. The consequence of this is that Levinas' poststructuralist account of hospitality is ultimately subjective. Within such a subjective account critical questions remain unanswered: If the 'irreducible structure' is one of 'welcoming the other' how does one account for the fact that ethical care for the Other is not always forthcoming? If one holds to Levinas' assertion of the 'infinite responsibility' that the subject has before the face of the Other how does one discern which of the infinite Others we should, with finite resources, respond to? Further, Levinas' emphasis on the asymmetrical and non-reciprocal nature of inter-human relationships, in which one is held 'hostage' to the Other, far from providing a 'great messianic discourse on eschatological peace',94 arguably has the potential effect of perpetuating the inequalities and abuses which characterise the inhospitable actions in our world.

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Levinas’ ethical philosophy has had a major impact on philosophical and religious thinking of the late 20th century. Notable amongst the number of writers who have been influenced by Levinas’ thought is well-known and controversial French philosopher, Jacques Derrida. In this chapter, we will explore the ways in which Levinas’ commendation of the priority of the ethical, manifested in concepts such as the ‘transcendence of the Other’ and the ‘infinite responsibility’ of the subject, are developed further by Derrida into the theme of ‘unconditional’ hospitality.

Defining and Delineating Derrida’s Deconstruction?

Biographical Philosophy
While clearly pivotal to the development of his philosophy, his thinking ‘dominated by the presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror’, Levinas’ life-experiences are rarely explicitly mentioned in his writings.1 In contrast, Derrida’s unique form of writing blurs the boundaries of ‘academic’ philosophy and autobiography/self-exposure. In Monolingualism of the Other, reflecting on the chaotic cultural configuration brought about by the displacement of French-speaking Jews in Algeria in the 19th and 20th century, Derrida speaks of the creation of what he calls a ‘disorder of identity’. Speaking of himself as a ‘Franco-Maghrebian’, Derrida professes his love of ‘pure French’, a language which paradoxically reinforces his cultural

alienation as an Algerian Jew. In *Circumfession*, his most autobiographical work, Derrida reflects further on this sense of illegitimacy, of being the Other, an exile without a home. This theme of Derrida's not belonging, of his absence even while being present, of his marginality, is also picked up on by Derridean commentators. Giovanna Borradori notes the way in which Derrida's life and writing exists 'at the boundaries of multiple territories: Judaism and Christianity, Judaism and Islam, in Europe and Africa, mainland France and its colonies, the sea and the desert.' Likewise, John D. Caputo writes:

Derrida, whose family came to Algeria in the 19th century from Spain, describes himself as a *Marrano*, inwardly a Jew but outwardly sucked into the French Catholic culture of Algeria, speaking Christian Latin French, but with this twist, that he is a Marrano who is not quite secretly Jewish on the inside either, was not exactly Jewish or not Jewish, who is not Christian and not quite free of Christianity, who is neither Algerian nor not, neither European nor not, neither American nor not. In the logic of Blanchot, Derrida as a Jew *sans* Judaism, Christianized *sans* Christianity, an Arab *sans* Islam, a French citizen *sans* being French, an American "phenomenon" *sans* being an American, a religious man *sans* theism - Derrida *sans* l'être.

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Deconstruction and Differance

Lionised and loathed, Derrida’s philosophical writings are often gathered under the term, ‘deconstruction’. The concept itself is still greatly debated and the impossibility of a clear definition of the term ‘deconstruction’ is itself illustrative of its guiding principle and modus operandi. Like other poststructuralist theories, deconstruction declines the structuralist assumption that structuralist principles are essences. Eschewing any form of essentialism, ‘deconstruction’ seeks to reveal the way in which philosophical language, rather than signifying essences or givens, is itself historical, contingent and temporary. The structures of philosophical discourse and language are disassembled by a re-reading of the text, in which attention is paid to the way in which philosophical constructions depend on seemingly-fixed meanings and definitions, and clear-cut binary relationships which are often hierarchically-ordered, for example: male and female, spiritual and material, universal and particular. Deconstruction operates by inverting these hierarchical structures thereby revealing their ideological or strategic function; by engaging in an etymological quest to find the hidden or suppressed trace within a word; and by

playfully pushing words to their semiological limits to reveal the multiplicity and paradox inherent within language.

As with Levinas, Derrida is critical of western philosophy for its focus on ontological questions. Such philosophy seeking a grounding of being in *essence* reveals itself as a history of totalising violence in which the 'Other' is reduced to the Same. In contrast to such philosophy, Derrida’s deconstruction, according to Caputo: ‘is rather the thought, if it is a thought, of an absolute heterogeneity that unsettles all the assurances of the same within which we comfortably ensconce ourselves.’ At the heart of Derridean deconstruction is the idea of *différance*, a word coined by Derrida, which is itself a pun of the French word ‘*différer*’. In French, the word ‘*différer*’ has two meanings: *to differ* and *to defer*, and thus, Derrida’s invented word is illustrative of his understanding of language: that words have multiple meanings encapsulated within themselves, and that in each context one of these meanings has to be deferred. Implied within Derrida’s concept of *différance* is a belief that openness and temporality, not *essence*, are at the heart of both language and existence itself.

However, in line with other post-structuralist thinking, Derrida does not grant a foundational quality to his concept of *différance*. In an interview with Richard Kearney, Derrida states:

> The notion of 'differance', for example, is a non-concept in that it cannot be defined in terms of oppositional predicates; it is neither *this* nor *that*; but rather *this and that* (e.g. the act of differing and of deferring) without being reducible to a dialectical logic either. And yet the term 'differance' emerges and develops as a determination of

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7 Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 5.
language from which it is inseparable. Hence the difficulty of translating the term. There is no conceptual realm beyond language which would allow the term to have a univocal semantic content over and above its inscription in language. Because it remains a trace of language it remains non-conceptual. And because it has no oppositional or predicative generality, which would identify it as this rather than that, the term 'differance' cannot be defined within a system of logic – Aristotelian or dialectical – that is, within the logocentric system of philosophy.9

Caputo, one of those who has most explicitly attempted to offer a Christianized theological-ethical rendering of Derridean thought, and whose work we draw upon in what follows, suggests: 'it would be a serious misunderstanding to think that differance is a master name, the secret, hidden name of Being beyond Being'.10 Far from being a mystical or transcendental bed-rock on which to ground Being, Caputo asserts that Derrida’s differance operates as a quasi-transcendental. Caputo writes:

Transcendental conditions nail things down, pin them in place, inscribe them firmly within rigorously demarcated horizons; quasi-transcendental conditions allow them to slip loose, to twist free from the surrounding horizons, to leak and run-off, to exceed or overflow their margins. The problem in a transcendental philosophy is how to


"Older" than Being itself, such a difference has no name in our language. But we “already know” that if it is unnameable, it is not provisionally so, not because our language has not yet found or received this name, or because we could have to seek it in another language, outside the finite system of our own. It is rather because there is no name for it at all, not even the name of essence or of Being, not even that of “difference,” which is not a name, which is not a pure nominal unity, and unceasingly dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions.


10 Caputo, Prayers and Tears, 9.
establish communication across the borders; the problem in the quasi-transcendental philosophy is how to keep things from running into each other and contaminating everything. But a quasi-transcendental condition is a condition of or for entities, not an entity in itself; a condition under which things appear, but too poor and impoverished, too unkingly, to dictate what there is or what there is not, lacking the power to bring what it is not into being, lacking the authority to prohibit something from being.¹¹

Using Caputo’s interpretation of differance as a quasi-transcendental, one can see a strong correlation between Derrida’s idea of differance and Levinas’ conception of a pre-ontological structure of alterity, beyond essence and being. Both philosophers seek to overcome what they perceive as the fundamental fault of Western philosophy – its tendency to reduce the Other to the ‘Same’ – by replacing ontological questions of Being with an analysis of the ethical encounter, thus giving philosophical priority not to essence but to heterogeneity.

While many critics see Derrida’s deconstruction as a form of nihilistic-relativism, intent on destruction, Derrida himself states: ‘I cannot conceive of a radical critique, which would not be ultimately motivated by some sort of affirmation, acknowledged or not... deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates it. Deconstruction is therefore vocation – a response to a call.’¹² In another interview, defending deconstruction from its detractors, Derrida asserts: ‘Deconstruction ... is not negative, even though it has often been interpreted as such despite all sorts of warnings. For me, it always

¹¹ Ibid., 12-13.
¹² Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other," 118.
accompanies an affirmative exigency. I would even say that it never proceeds without love.'

In the same way, Caputo, as one of Derrida's most sympathetic commentators, argues that deconstruction is not bent on destruction, but rather, is an attempt to open philosophical discourse up to the Other, serving as a voice of 'prophetic expectation and prophetic passion.' For Caputo:

deconstruction is a "new enlightenment" which raises our level of vigilance about what calls itself a meaning or reference, subjectivity or objectivity – or "truth," "tradition," or "ethics." The impetus and the point of all such work is never destructive, never aimed at simply leveling or razing these structures. The point of deconstruction is to loosen and unlock structures, to let the shock of alterity set them in motion, to allow them to function more freely and inventively, to produce new forms, and above all to say yes, oui, oui, to something whose coming eye hath not seen nor ear heard. Deconstruction gives old texts new readings, old traditions new twists. It urges that regularizing structures and normalizing institutions – everything from literature to democracy – function more freely, more open-endedly. Deconstruction exposes them to the trauma of something unexpected, something to come, of the tout autre which remains ever on the margins of texts and traditions, which eludes and elicits our discourse, which shakes and solicits our institutions.

This impulse of deconstruction to open up the philosophical discourse, to prevent philosophy – and literature, ethics, institutions – from becoming totalising and

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14 Caputo, Prayers and Tears, 114.
15 Ibid., 17-18. Worth noting here is the 'violent' nature of the language, Levinasian in tone, employed by Caputo: 'the shock of alterity', 'the trauma of something unexpected', 'which shakes and solicits our institutions.'
hegemonic, finds expression in three specific concepts which punctuate Derrida’s writings: the idiom *tout autre est tout autre*; his understanding of the messianic structure; and, the idea of the impossible.

*Tout autre est tout autre*

Derrida’s phrase *tout autre est tout autre* operates in a similar manner to the Levinasian concepts of *infinity* and the *transcendence of the Other*, in asserting that the *Other is always wholly other*, is beyond our comprehension. Whether ‘the Other’ is God or another human,16 Derrida’s *tout autre est tout autre* serves as a constant reminder that the ‘Other’ cannot be completely understood or comprehended. A ‘cookie-cutter’ approach to relationships in which the particular Other is always understood in relation to other Others, is overturned by Derrida’s prioritising of the singular. In Derrida’s thought the universal always gives way to the priority of the particular. Caputo concisely summarises this idea:

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16 Whether Derrida – or, for that matter Levinas – sees the concept of the ‘Other’ as encompassing non-human life, is an interesting aside. At times Derrida does hint that responsibility to the Other involves more than responsibility to humanity. He writes:

> the event, the coming of the one who or which comes but does not yet have a recognizable figure – and who therefore is not necessarily another man, my likeness, my brother, my neighbour…. It can also be a “life” or even a “specter” in animal or divine form, without being “the animal” or “God” and not only a man or a woman....


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The *tout autre*, the wholly other: God, for example, or any singularity whatever, no matter what. Like the singularity of an event whose uniqueness makes of each occurrence both an unprecedented first time and an unrepeatable last time.... The wholly other is any singularity whatever, whoever, whose this-ness we cannot lift up, cannot generalize, cannot universalize, cannot formalize, any singularity which fixes us in this place so that we cannot look away, cannot look up to the *eidos* of which it would be “but an example” which would allow us to get on top of it, dominate it, enable us to envisage it instead of finding ourselves fixed by its gaze. Derrida here takes up a uniquely biblical sense of singularity, as opposed to a Greek sense of subsuming the less real particular under the truer universal. *Tout autre* – it does not matter what or who – *est tout autre.*17

Thus, Derrida’s mantra *tout autre est tout autre* serves as both a plea and a structural device to keep philosophy open – prioritising the uniqueness and singularity of the Other, over generalisations and philosophical universals.

**The Messianic Structure**

As well as this prioritising of the singular, the particular over the universal, recurrent throughout Derrida’s thought is the idea of the Messiah – of the Other as a Messianic figure. Derrida’s thought here is strongly influenced by the writings of his friend Maurice Blanchot, who, in *The Writing of Disaster*, retells a story that recurs in Jewish lore:

If the Messiah is at the gates of Rome among the beggars and lepers, one might think that his incognito protects or prevents him from coming, but, precisely, he is recognized; someone, haunted with questioning and unable to leave off, asks him: ‘When will you come?’

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His being there is, then, not the coming. With the Messiah, who is there, the call must always resound: ‘Come, Come.’ His presence is no guarantee. Both future and past (it is said, at least once, that the Messiah has already come), his coming does not correspond to any presence at all.... And should it happen that, to the question, ‘When will your coming take place’ the Messiah responds: ‘It is today’, the answer is certainly impressive: so, it is today! It is now and always now. There is no waiting, although this is an obligation to wait. And when is now? When is the now which does not belong to ordinary time... does not maintain but destabilizes it?....

Derrida is fascinated by the idea of the messianic structure, implied within Blanchot’s writing – the idea of the Messiah as the singular Other whom we await, but whose arrival never occurs. For Derrida, this messianic structure creates a new understanding of time leading to an ethical posture of openness. One awaits the arrival of the Messiah with longing and expectation, but the fact that the Messiah never actually arrives prevents time from being sealed off, the future from being foreclosed. Caputo again offers a useful précis of this Blanchot-inspired feature of Derridean thought:

The very idea of the Messiah is that he is to come, a venir, someone coming, not that he would ever actually arrive. The very function of the messianic idea is to evoke or provoke the come, viens, or venez, in the singular or the plural. The messianic idea turns on a certain structural openness, undecidability, unaccomplishment, non-occurrence, noneventuality, which sees to it that, in contrast to the way things transpire in ordinary time, things are never finished, that

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the last word is never spoken. Were the Messiah ever to show out, that indiscretion would ruin the whole idea of the messianic.¹⁹

_The Impossible_

This concept of a messianic time forms the basis for Derrida’s understanding of the future as the _impossible_. In contrast to the essentialism or idealism that Derrida sees as characteristic of Western philosophy, deconstruction articulates the _impossible_ nature of the future. According to Caputo, in Derridean thought:

The future is not a positive, regulative ideal which admits of gradual empirical approximation; deconstruction is not a form of essentialism or idealism turning on an Idea in the Kantian sense or Husserlian infinite ideal. The _a-venir_ of which deconstruction "dreams" is rather a completely open-ended, negative, undetermined structure – the heart of what I am calling here the generalized apophaticism – that goes along with a non-essentialism, a nominalism, and a generalized _ignorantia_ about what is coming, that cultivates the possible not _as possible_, but _as the im-possible_. For the future present, insofar as it is already pre-envisioned, belongs to the regime of the same, as a "future modality of the living present", which is not the absolutely undetermined surprise that Derrida calls the "messianic hope".²⁰

For Derrida, therefore, deconstruction is not another philosophy built upon essentialism or idealism, expressed in generalisations and universals. Deconstruction is a philosophy that refuses to be closed off, shut down, foreclosed, or reduced to the horizon of the Same. It is, rather, a philosophy of radical openness, an openness to the particular, to the Other as wholly Other, to a messianic hope of the

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¹⁹ Caputo, _Prayers and Tears_, 78.
²⁰ Ibid., 56.
impossible; a philosophy not of absolutes and certainty, but rather, a philosophy of faith.

Caputo interprets deconstruction as a form of philosophy that stands within the tradition of ‘de-hellenization’, a philosophy that has more in common with the Jewish-biblical-prophetic tradition than Greek onto-theology, more concerned with questions of ethics and justice than the theme of being and ousia. Far from being a nihilistic philosophy that delights in destruction, Caputo asserts that deconstruction in its openness to the impossible is the source of a true faith, stating:

Deconstruction takes the form of a general or non-determinable faith in the impossible.... Deconstruction comes down to an affirmation or hope or invocation which is a certain faith in the impossible, and something that pushes us beyond the sphere of the same, of the believable, into the unbelievable, that which exceeds the horizon of our pedestrian beliefs and probabilities, driving us with a passion of the impossible, the unbelievable...21

Unsurprisingly, like his close friend Levinas, whose writings he interprets as an ‘immense treatise of hospitality’, Derrida’s philosophy of deconstruction has similarly been interpreted as a philosophy of hospitality.22 As with Levinas, ethics and hospitality are not peripheral, but constitute the very heart of Derrida’s philosophical enterprise. The interchangeability of the terms is captured by the

21 Ibid., 54.
22 Derrida, Adieu, 21.
23 Caputo writes:

[I]f you are intent on making deconstruction look respectable, it would not be a distortion to say that deconstruction is to be understood as a form of hospitality, that deconstruction is hospitality, which means the welcoming of the other. Deconstruction would thus mean – again in a nutshell - “let the other come!” “Welcome to the other.” If deconstruction had an international headquarters, say in Paris, it would have a large banner hanging over its front door saying “Bienvenue!”

passage below, where Derrida, commenting on the notion of an ethic of hospitality, writes:

‘To cultivate an ethic of hospitality’ – is such an expression not tautologous? Despite all the tensions or contradictions which distinguish it, and despite all the perversions that can befall it, one cannot speak of cultivating an ethic of hospitality. Hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic amongst others. Insofar as it has to do with the ethos, that is, the residence, one’s home, the familiar place of dwelling, inasmuch as it is a manner of being there, the manner in which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners, ethics is hospitality; ethics is so thoroughly coextensive with the experience of hospitality.24

For Derrida, ethics is hospitality and hospitality is ethics25 and therefore according to Caputo’s reading, a philosophy of deconstruction – a Derridean philosophy – is in itself, structurally, a philosophy of ethical hospitality, a philosophy that refuses to be sealed or closed off, but rather that seeks to open itself to the Other and to remain open, waiting in expectation for the tout autre, the Messianic stranger, the impossible. Derrida himself makes this claim, writing:

If every concept shelters or lets itself be haunted by another concept, by an other than itself that is no longer even its other, then no concept remains in place any longer. This is about the concept of concept... hospitality, the experience, the apprehension, the exercise of impossible hospitality, of hospitality as the possibility of impossibility (to receive another guest whom I am incapable of welcoming, to become capable of that which I am incapable of) – this

25 As noted earlier, Derrida, referring to Levinas’ thought, asserts: ‘hospitality is not simply some region of ethics... it is ethicity itself, the whole and the principle of ethics.’ Derrida, Adieu, 50.
is the exemplary experience of deconstruction itself, when it is or does what it has to do or to be, that is, the experience of the impossible. Hospitality – this is a name or an example of deconstruction.

But what sort of hospitality does Derrida’s deconstructive philosophy describe? While Levinas’ philosophy is perhaps best seen as ‘structurally’ a work of ‘hospitality’, Derrida’s writing, particularly his later work, deals explicitly with the concept and practice of hospitality. It is to a closer reading of Derrida’s account of the ethic of hospitality, and in particular his idea of ‘unconditional’ hospitality, to which we now turn.


Derrida himself notes that the theme of ‘hospitality’ in Levinas' work ‘is borne out less by the occurrences of the word “hospitality,” which are, in fact, rather rare, than by the links and discursive logic that lead to this vocabulary of hospitality.’ Derrida, Adieu, 21.

From the late 1980’s onwards Derrida’s writing becomes increasingly and explicitly political, ethical and religious in character. While in Given Time, The Gift of Death and The Politics of Friendship Derrida touches on ‘hospitality’ as it relates to the topics of the gift and friendship, in the late 1990’s in books such as Of Hospitality and Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness he is concerned overtly with the theme. However, it would be a mistake to see ‘hospitality’ only as a theme that develops in later Derridean thought, to divide Derrida’s work into an earlier philosophical period and later ethical-religious writing. Rather, from his earliest works – particularly in the three books published in French in 1967: De la grammatologie (Paris: Editions de Minuit); L’écriture et la différence (Paris: Editions du Seuil); and La voix et le phénomène (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France) – Derrida seeks to point out the way in which western philosophy, with its emphasis on ontology, operates within the Same, and therefore excludes the Other. Being attentive to the ‘middle-voice’ Derrida seeks to deconstruct this totalising logocentrism, revealing the way in which the presence of such texts is dependent on ‘absence’, thereby allowing silenced voices in texts to be heard. In Of Grammatology Derrida writes:

There is no ethics without the presence of the other but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, difference, writing. Arche-writing is the origin of mortality as of immortality. The nonethical opening of ethics. A violent opening.

Thus, while Derrida earlier works are concerned primarily with language and grammar itself, they nonetheless, like his later, more explicitly political-ethical-religious writings, are fundamentally concerned with the plight of the Other. Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 11 ed. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 139-140.
'Hospitality' Deconstructed

Employing a deconstructive method common to his other philosophical writings, Derrida, by playing the usual binaries of hospitality discourse against each other and by engaging in an etymological analysis, exposes the multiple meanings, tensions and aporia that exist within the vocabulary of hospitality. Following the etymology of French structuralist linguist Émile Benveniste, Derrida notes the inherent tensions and paradoxes within the word ‘hospitality’, which, derived from the Latin word hospes, combines the words of hostis – which originally meant stranger, but came to take on the meaning of ‘enemy’ or ‘hostile’ stranger – with potis, to have mastery or power. The multiple meanings of the Latin word hostis is paralleled by the polysemous nature of the French word hôte which means both the one who gives (donne) and the one who receives (reçoit). Through a simple etymological analysis, therefore, Derrida raises a number of intriguing, and potentially unsettling, questions: In the act of hospitality, who is the ‘host’ and who is the ‘guest'? Who is assisting who? – That is, who gives and who receives? And, is it the ‘host’ or the ‘guest’ who poses a potential threat?

Derrida’s etymological analysis provides him with evidence for two important conclusions he makes regarding hospitality. Firstly, the interchangeability of ideas such as ‘host’ and ‘guest’ are, for him, evidence of the law of heteronomy – the fact that ‘the other is my law.’ Drawing from Levinasian thought, Derrida argues that the offering of hospitality is not an act of autonomous, sovereign freedom, but rather is a response to the Other, who is already within us. Heteronomy and alterity, not autonomous freedom, are the basis of human existence. Secondly, Derrida uses another neologism ‘hostipitality’ to express his understanding that inherent within

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31 Derrida writes: ‘what arises unforeseeably, what both calls upon and overwheals my responsibility (my responsibility before my freedom – which it nonetheless seems to presuppose, my responsibility in heteronomy, my freedom with autonomy).’ Ibid.
'hospitality' is the potential for violence. Derrida's indication of the close relationship between 'hostility' and 'hospitality' is summarised well by Caputo, who writes:

The hospes is someone who has the power to host someone, so that neither the alterity (hostis) of the stranger nor the power (potentia) of the host is annulled by the hospitality. There is an essential 'self-limitation' built right into the idea of hospitality, which preserves the distance between one's own and the stranger, between owning one's own property and inviting the other into one's home. So, there is always a little hostility in all hosting and hospitality, constituting a certain 'hostil/pitality.'

Derrida's deconstructive analysis, his listening to the 'middle voice', in drawing attention to the in-built tension of the concepts of which the discourse of hospitality is constructed – ideas of 'host' and 'guest', 'hostage' and 'enemy', 'stranger' and 'benefactor' – leads to the posing of probing questions regarding the nature of hospitality. Does hospitality exist through the act of invitation of the host, or the visitation of the guest? Does hospitality depend on reciprocal giving between 'host' and 'guest' – if such distinctions exist – or does it revolve around an act of unreserved generosity? Is it necessary or desirable to establish boundaries and limits to acts of hospitality, or does hospitality require the acceptance of all-comers?

The Gift

These probing questions regarding the nature of hospitality first begin to emerge in Derrida's treatment of the idea of the 'gift', the dominant theme in his works Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money, and The Gift of Death. In Given Time, Derrida engages

32 Caputo, ed., Deconstruction in a Nutshell, 110.
critically with the influential work of French anthropologist and sociologist Marcel Mauss: *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Mauss' work, using empirical evidence from a number of societies, argues that gift-giving, grounded in obligations and reciprocity, establishes a moral bond enabling the functioning of societies. Derrida responds to Mauss' influential theory of social relations developed around the idea of the gift, by exposing the way in which Mauss' idea of the gift as an economy of exchange of gifts, based as it is in closed circles of obligation and reciprocity, 'begins more and more to look like an essay not on the gift but on the word "gift."' For Derrida, the 'gift', cannot be a concept trapped within the circles of economy and reciprocity, but rather is a moment/event of excess and madness, which opens up closed circles to the impossible. Derrida states:

Now the gift, if there is any, would no doubt be related to economy. One cannot treat the gift, this goes without saying, without treating this relation to economy, even to the money economy. But is not the gift, if there is any, also that which interrupts economy? That which, in suspending economic calculation, no longer gives rise to exchange? That which opens the circle so as to defy reciprocity or symmetry, the common measure, and so as to turn aside the return in view of the no-return? If there is gift, the given of the gift (that which one gives, that which is given, the gift as given thing or as act of donation) must not come back to the giving (let us not already say to the subject, to the donor). It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure. If the figure of the circle is essential to economics, the gift must remain aneconomic. Not that it remains foreign to the circle, but it must keep a relation

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of foreignness to the circle, a relation without relation of familiar foreignness. It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the impossible.

Not impossible but the impossible. The very figure of the impossible. It announces itself, it gives itself to be thought as the impossible.36

In response to Mauss' idea of the 'gift' which operates within the closed circles of exchange and reciprocity, Derrida posits that:

The gift, if there is any, will always be without border. What does "without" mean here? The gift that does not run over its borders, a gift that would let itself be contained in a determination and limited by the indivisibility of an identifiable trait would not be a gift. As soon as it delimits itself, a gift is prey to calculation and measure. The gift, if there is any, should overrun the border, to be sure, toward the measureless and the excessive; but it should also suspend its relation to the border and even its transgressive relation to the separable line or trait of a border.37

Derrida sees the aporetic nature of the concept of a 'gift' as a glimpse of the impossible, of the messianic future yet to come, a philosophical concept that prevents our circles of economy and reciprocity from becoming closed circles, but rather opens these circles up and exposes us to moments of excess and madness. This idea of the 'gift' as a moment of excess, of madness, of a transgressing of borders, plays an important role as Derrida develops the concept of unconditional hospitality in his later works.

36 Ibid., 7. Bold emphasis added.
37 Ibid., 91.
Invitation and Visitation; Conditional and Unconditional

The idea of limitations and borders inherent within Derrida's discussion of the 'gift' is again prominent in Derrida's analysis of concepts central to the discourse and practice of hospitality: *invitation* and *visitation*. Drawing attention to the practice of extending an invitation to another, Derrida notes that intrinsic to such an *invitation* is the ability of the host to set limitations on who is welcome, and when they are welcome, thereby retaining mastery and control. Such behaviour, Derrida suggests, is hardly hospitable, noting: 'If I welcome only what I welcome, what I am ready to welcome, and that I recognize in advance because I expect the coming of the hôte as invited, there is no hospitality.'³⁸ Instead, Derrida suggests that genuine hospitality would require a giving up of this mastery and control, stating that:

*to be hospitable is to let oneself be overtaken [surprendre], to be ready to not be ready, if such is possible, to let oneself be overtaken, to not even let oneself to be overtaken, to be surprised in a fashion almost violent, violated and raped, stolen... precisely where one is not ready to receive – and not only not yet ready but not ready, unprepared in a mode that is not even that of the “not yet.”*³⁹

In contrast to a hospitality of invitation, where the guest is expected, recognised and welcomed, Derrida asserts 'that radical hospitality consists, would have to consist, in receiving without invitation, beyond or before the invitation',⁴⁰ and posits an unconditional hospitality of *visitation*, where the guest, appearing as a messianic ghost-like figure, comes to disrupt and disturb our prearranged and formalised practices.⁴¹

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³⁹ Ibid., 361. Once again, it is worth noting the imagery conveyed by Derrida's choice of vocabulary, the idea – reminiscent of Levinas – that the visitation of the Other comes upon the subject violently.
⁴⁰ Ibid., 360.
⁴¹ The theme of the ghost-guest is an evocative one particularly in light of the Christian tradition and the Emmaus road story (Luke 24:13-35). Caputo, discussing this idea of a messianic-ghost with relation to Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, writes:
But is such a hospitality, a hospitality of the gift and visitation, a hospitality without limits and borders, really possible? Or, is Derrida, reminiscent of Levinas, simply employing hyperbole, to emphasise the radical nature of genuine hospitality? To answer these questions and to gain a deeper appreciation of Derrida’s thought regarding hospitality, it is essential to understand the relationship that Derrida poses between these two forms of hospitality: hospitality as invitation or visitation. For Derrida these two notions of hospitality are not moments or phases of the same phenomenon, but rather belong to two different dimensions. Derrida writes:

It is as if there were a competition or contradiction between two neighboring but incompatible values: visitation and invitation, and, more gravely, it is as if there were a hidden contradiction between hospitality and invitation. Or, more precisely, between hospitality as it exposes itself to the visit, to the visitation, and the hospitality that adorns and prepares itself in invitation. These two hôtes that the visitor and the invited are, these two faces of hospitality, visitation and invitation, are not moments of hospitality, dialectical phases of the same process, the same phenomenon. Visitor and invited, visitation and invitation, are simultaneously in competition and incompatible; they figure the non-dialectizable tension, even the always imminent implosion, in fact, the continuously occurring implosion in its imminence, unceasing, at once active and deferred, of the concept of hospitality, even of the concept in hospitality. To wait without waiting, awaiting absolute surprise, the unexpected visitor, awaited without a horizon of expectation: this is indeed

The ghost, the revenant, is the ever recurrent specter, the messianic prospect of the tout autre who haunts our self-presence, our self-sufficiency, who disturbs the order of the same, who comes to us as the voice of the dead to whom we bear a responsibility, and as the voice of the ones still to come, as those others, other-than-the-living present who lay claim to us.

about the Messiah as hôte, about the messianic as hospitality, the messianic that introduces deconstructed disruption or madness in the concept of hospitality, the madness of hospitality, even the madness of the concept of hospitality.\(^{42}\)

Underpinning Derrida’s account of hospitality therefore is a philosophical structure in which Derrida distinguishes between two different dimensions. One dimension is the ‘finite, relative and historically grounded’\(^{43}\) reality of politics and law of our everyday real world – a dimension of juridical, political and ethical limits – while the other dimension is that of the messianic, of the future to come (l’avenir), of the impossible.

For Derrida, Kant’s \textit{Cosmopolitanism}, with its account of hospitality based on universal rights, but subject to conditions, serves as the archetypal law of conditional hospitality.\(^{44}\) Kant outlines his juridical law of universal hospitality writing:

\textit{As in the preceding articles, our consent here is not with philanthropy but with right, and in this context hospitality (hospitableness) means the right of an alien not to be treated as an enemy upon his arrival in another's country. If it can be done without destroying him, he can be turned away; but, as long as he behaves peaceably he cannot be treated as an enemy. He may request the right to be a permanent visitor (which would require a special, charitable agreement to make him a fellow inhabitant for a}

\(^{42}\) Derrida, "Hostipitality," 362.
\(^{43}\) Borradori, \textit{Philosophy in a Time of Terror}, 164.
certain period), but the right to visit, to associate, belongs to all men by virtue of the common ownership of the earth’s surface; for since the earth is the globe, they cannot scatter themselves infinitely, but must, finally, tolerate living in close proximity, because originally no one had a greater right to any region of the earth than anyone else.... In this way distant parts of the world can establish with one another peaceable relations that will eventually become matters of public law, and the human race can gradually be brought closer and closer to a cosmopolitan constitution.45

Derrida points out the limits inherent within Kant’s juridical account of hospitality, grounded as it is in natural law (droit). While Kant stresses the ‘common ownership of the earth’s surface’, the reality is that habitats, cultures, institutions and States are constructed upon this soil. As a consequence, hospitality is firstly limited to a right of visitation (Besuchsrecht) rather than a right to residence (Gastrecht), and secondly, hospitality becomes dependent on the State. Derrida writes:

[I]n defining hospitality in all its rigour as a law, Kant assigns to it conditions which make it dependent on state sovereignty, especially when it is a question of the right of residence. Hospitality signifies here the public nature (publicité) of public space, as is always the case for the juridical in the Kantian sense; hospitality, whether public or private, is dependent on and controlled by the law and the state police.46

For Derrida, however, the very existence of conditional hospitality, that is, hospitality in the world of concrete realities, as in the form of Kant’s cosmopolitan law of universal hospitality, is dependent on the existence of a realm of pure unconditional

45 Kant, Perpetual Peace, 15-16.
46 Derrida, Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness, 22.
hospitality – and forgiveness. This belief is summarised succinctly in an interview where Derrida states:

An unconditional hospitality is, to be sure, practically impossible to live; one cannot in any case, and by definition, organize it. Whatever happens, happens, whoever comes, comes (*ce qui arrive arrive*), and that, in the end, is the only event worthy of this name. And I well recognize that this concept of pure hospitality can have no legal or political status. No state can write it into its laws. But without at least the thought of this pure and unconditional hospitality, of hospitality *itself*, we would have no concept of hospitality in general and would not even be able to determine any rules for conditional hospitality (with its rituals, its legal status, its norms, its national or international conventions). Without this sort of pure hospitality (a thought that is also, in its own way, an experience), we would not even have the idea of the other, of the alterity of the other, that is, of someone who enters into our lives without having been invited. We would not even have the idea of love or of "living together (*vivre ensemble*)" with the other in a way that is not a part of some totality or "ensemble." Unconditional hospitality, which is neither juridical nor political, is nonetheless the condition of the political and the juridical.⁴⁷

As should be evident, Derrida’s thought here has strong similarities to Levinas’ notion of the Saying and the Said. Like Levinas’ *Saying*, for Derrida, *unconditional hospitality*, is beyond being, unable to be expressed in language or laws. And yet, to be brought into the world of being, both in language and ethical action, this unconditional hospitality must be thus rendered into rules and laws and thus become conditional, reduced, as with Levinas’ *Saying*, to the *Said*. For Derrida, the

relationship between these two hospitalities – a conditional hospitality manifested in the legal, juridical and political realities, and the transcendent unconditional hospitality which is impossible upon which it depends, is one of ‘paradox, aporia... at once heterogeneous and indissociable.’\(^{48}\) Unlike Hegel’s dialecticism, in which tensions are synthesised and thus subsumed within an overarching philosophy, in Derrida’s account it is the very paradox, the aporetic nature of hospitality which provides the impetus for philosophy, the motivation and stimulus for ethical action.

This idea – that it is this tension and aporia that provides the dynamic for philosophising and ethical action – is captured by two recurring images within Derrida’s thinking: poles and circles. Conceiving of the two dimensions of conditional and unconditional hospitality as poles, Derrida writes:

> These two poles, the unconditional and the conditional, are absolutely heterogeneous, and must remain irreducible to one another. They are nonetheless indissociable: if one wants, and it is necessary, forgiveness [hospitality] to become effective, concrete, historic, if one wants it to arrive, to happen by changing things, it is necessary that this purity engage itself in a series of conditions of all kinds (psychosociological, political etc.). It is between these two poles, irreconcilable but indissociable, that decisions and responsibilities are to be taken.\(^ {49}\)

While pure unconditional, messianic hospitality is impossible, the desire for such a reality to arrive necessitates and motivates acts of hospitality, even though such acts are limited by conditions. At the same time the dynamic tension between these poles means that the pole of unconditionality strains against the pole of conditionality,

\(^{48}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 44-45. While the above quotation is actually concerned with Derrida’s distinction between conditional and unconditional forgiveness, our modification of the quotation by replacing the word ‘forgiveness’ with the word hospitality demonstrates the basic structure of Derrida’s philosophical thought, which draws distinction between the dimensions of legal-juridical-political realities and the impossible dimension of the messianic future.
seeking to break free from the constraints and limits that are inherent within legal-juridical-political notions of hospitality. Derrida explains the paradoxical relationship between these two laws – *conditional* and *unconditional* – thus:

The law hospitality, the express law that governs the general concept of hospitality, appears as a paradoxical law, pervertible or perverting. It seems to dictate that absolute hospitality should break with the law of hospitality as right or duty, with the "pact" of hospitality. To put it in different terms, absolute hospitality requires only that I open my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, and I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names. The law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights. Just hospitality breaks with hospitality by right; not that it condemns or is opposed to it, and it can on the contrary set and maintain it in a perpetual progressive movement; but it is as strangely heterogeneous to it as justice is heterogeneous to the law to which it is yet so close, from which in truth it is indissociable.\(^5^0\)

As with magnetic poles which, in constantly attracting or repelling each other, composes a dynamic magnetic field of energy, for Derrida, the two poles of conditional and unconditional creates the field of possibilities in which ethical action is performed.\(^5^1\)

\(^5^0\) Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, 25, 27.
\(^5^1\) Pre-cursory to themes we will raise and address later in this work, John Milbank, in his critique of Derrida's *différence*, asserts that Derrida's concept of dialectal poles and *différence*, far from breaking free from ontology, still stays within the 'same' and thus constitutes an 'ontology of violence'. Milbank writes:
In a similar vein, the notion of the circle, particularly in relation to the ‘gift’, frequents Derrida’s work. In *Given Time*, Derrida writes:

For finally the overrunning of the circle by the gift, if there is any, does not lead to a simple, ineffable exteriority that would be transcendent and without relation. It is this exteriority that sets the circle going, it is this exteriority that puts the economy in motion. It is this exteriority that engages in the circle and makes it turn.\(^{52}\)

In Derridean thought, the economy, the circle of exchange that is gift-giving, is put into motion by the *impossible* nature of the ‘gift’ – the ‘gift’ of excess and aneconomy. Caputo expresses this well:

The dream and the desire for the gift, the passion that the gift impassions, are the passion and the desire to exceed the circle *even while not remaining entirely outside the circle*. But it is no less true that the aneconomic gift keeps the circle turning, so that the circle *depends upon the very thing it excludes, the gift*. The circle needs the gift no less than the gift cannot avoid the circle. For Derrida’s point is not to find a spot of simple exteriority to the circle, but to loosen the circle and to create an opening for the *tout autre*.... The circle cannot turn without the gift, and the gift has nothing to exceed without the circle. The gift will be inevitably drawn back into the circle, but the

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circle will not spin without gifts. Pure gifts without circles are empty; pure circles without gifts are blind. It is not a question of one or the other, of the gift pure and simple, if there were one, or of pure economy, if there were one, but of inhabiting the distance between the two with as much grace and ambiance and hospitality as possible.\footnote{Caputo, Prayers and Tears, 171, 173.}

One way of envisaging what Derrida is trying to express here is to think of the structure of a bicycle wheel. Conditional hospitality – that is, the norms, laws and procedures which shape the operation and practice of hospitality in the real world – are the spokes which provide the structural strength to the wheel, while the rim of the wheel is the realm of unconditional hospitality. Without the rim, there is no recognisable wheel, but similarly without the spokes – hospitality operating within and under conditions – it would be impossible for the wheel to actually function as a wheel, to hit the ground and revolve.

Indeed, it is this notion of the possible being sustained by its impossibility which is one of the central tenets of Derrida’s idea of differ\'ance. In Of Grammatology, Derrida writes: 'Diff\'erance produces what it forbids, making possible the very thing that makes it impossible.'\footnote{Derrida, Grammatology, 143.} For Derrida, the impossibility of an unconditional hospitality does not therefore, lead to paralysis. Rather, it is the very aporetic nature of hospitality, its impossibility, which makes it possible. Caputo again expresses this concisely:

\begin{quote}
Like everything else in deconstruction, the possibility of hospitality is sustained by the impossibility; hospitality really starts to get underway only when we "experience" (which means to travel or go through) this paralysis (the inability to move). Hospitality is
\end{quote}
impossible, what Derrida calls the impossible (the im-possibility of hostil-pitality), which is not the same as a simple logical contradiction. Hospitality really starts to happen when I push against this limit, the threshold, this paralysis, inviting hospitality to cross its own threshold and limit, its own self-limitation, to become a gift beyond hospitality. Thus, for hospitality to occur, it is necessary for hospitality to go beyond hospitality. That requires that the host must, in a moment of madness, tear up the understanding between him and the guest, act with "excess," make an absolute gift of his property, which is of course impossible. But that is the only way the guest can go away feeling as if he was really made at home.55

In his deconstructive attentiveness to the binaries of which the practice of hospitality is composed: host–guest, exchange–excessive gift, invitation–visitation, conditional–unconditional, Derrida illustrates the inherent paradox within the concept of hospitality and points to its antinomic nature. This aporetic relationship between the two dimensions – the real finite world of conditions and limits and the messianic future of the impossible – is not a problem to be resolved by complicated philosophical manoeuvres, but rather, for Derrida, is the very structure that ensures that philosophical discourse remains open. Likewise, the fact that the messiah will never show up, the impossibility of a pure gift, or an unconditional hospitality of visitation, rather than leading to paralysis or inaction, is the very dynamic which empowers ethical action, the practicing of hospitality.

An Evaluation

Having given a general sketch of Derrida's 'deconstruction' and his account of hospitality, we now turn our attention to assess the strengths and weaknesses of his account. In what follows, our evaluation of Derrida's thought will be guided by three questions:

1. What is the nature of ethical action as conceived within Derrida's thought?
2. What understanding of human identity and human-relationality is conveyed within Derrida's philosophy?
3. What is Derrida's understanding of faith?

In each of these three areas we will observe that while there are potential compatibilities and coherences between Derrida's thought and a Christian-theological account of hospitality, there are also clear dissimilarities.

Beyond Duty: Hospitality as an Excessive and Risky Performance

The first area of potential fruitfulness in our dialogue concerns Derrida's understanding of the nature of ethics. Like Levinas, Derrida is uneasy with universal moral projects which ground ethics in metaphysics, espousing universal laws which the moral subject is bound by duty or obligation to obey. For Derrida, duty and obligation grounded in a general law to all men – as in Kant's juridical account of a Cosmopolitan law – are inappropriate motivations for the ethical practice of hospitality. Similarly, contractual understandings of hospitality as in Rawl's 'theory of justice' – in which ultimately the motivation for hospitality stems from debt to a social contract or self-interest, are, for Derrida, likewise a violation of the very nature of hospitality.56 Derrida writes:

For to be what it "must" be, hospitality must not pay a debt, or be governed by duty: it is gracious, and "must" not open itself to the

guest [invited or visitor], either "conforming to duty" or even, to use
the Kantian distinction again, "out of duty." This unconditional law
of hospitality, if such a thing is thinkable, would then be a law
without imperative, without order and without duty. A law without
law, in short. For if I practice hospitality "out of duty" [and not only
"in conforming with duty"], this hospitality of paying up is no longer
an absolute hospitality, it is no longer graciously offered beyond debt
and economy, offered to the other, a hospitality invented for the
singularity of the new arrival of the unexpected visitor.57

For Derrida, the attempt to frame hospitality in legal, political or contractual clauses,
rules and maxims, that is, the attempt to formalise ethics in a programmatic and
procedural form, while necessary, must be constantly deconstructed. Ethical
behaviour, Derrida argues, is hardly ethical if we simply seek to apply pre­
established conduct or laws in each ethical encounter. Rather, to genuinely
encounter the singular particularity of the tout autre, means to give up one’s
preconceived conceptions of ethics based on knowledge and to allow one’s ethical
behaviour to be guided by the request of the other. For Derrida, true moral
behaviour must move beyond the programmed following of laws and maxims, and
entails a move beyond the realm of knowledge and a Kierkegaardian leap of faith
into the abyss of madness, into the experience of ‘undecidability’.

Therefore, according to Derrida, one’s ultimate duty is not the following of laws and
ethical duties, but the absolute responsibility one holds to the other who is wholly
Other. ‘Ethics,’ Derrida asserts: ‘must be sacrificed in the name of duty. It is a duty
not to respect, out of duty, ethical duty. One must behave not only in an ethical or

57 Derrida and Dufourmantelle, Of Hospitality, 83.
responsible manner, but in a non ethical, nonresponsible manner, and one must do that in the name of duty, of an infinite duty, in the name of absolute duty.\(^{58}\)

For Derrida, Abraham is the exemplary figure of such ethics, one who sacrifices his duty to ethics, and demonstrates his absolute duty not to a universal law, but to the singular particularity of tout autre. Derrida suggests that one's ethical action should imitate that of Abraham, whose actions, in being prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac are based, Derrida believes, not on knowledge but on faith. Thus, Derrida writes:

The knight of faith must not hesitate. He accepts his responsibility by heading off towards the absolute request of the other, beyond knowledge. He decides, but his absolute decision is neither guided nor controlled by knowledge. Such, in fact, is the paradoxical condition of every decision: it cannot be deduced from a form of knowledge of which it would simply be the effect, conclusion, or explicitation.\(^{59}\)

In contrast to law-based approaches to ethics which presuppose a universal knowledge, Derrida emphasises the contingency of knowledge and points to the fundamental personal nature of ethics. Ethics, rather than being a fulfilment of duties or obligations, is fundamentally about a personal encounter with a particular/singular individual. Derrida turns the traditional understanding of ethics upside-down by asserting that it is the very alterity, that is, the singularity of the Other, which is the true law of ethics. He states:

\(^{58}\) Derrida, Gift of Death, 67.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 77. Elsewhere Derrida states:

The only possible decision possible is the impossible decision. It is when it is not possible to know what must be done, when knowledge is not and cannot be determining that a decision is possible as such. Otherwise the decision is an application: one knows what has to be done, it’s clear, there is no more decision possible; what one has here is an effect, an application, a programming.

Linking alterity to singularity or to what one would call the universal exception or the law of the exception – *tout autre est tout autre* signifies that every other is singular, that everyone has a singularity, which also means that everyone is each one, a proposition that seals the contract between universality and the exception of singularity.\(^6^0\)

This understanding of ethics expressed not in laws, maxims and procedures, but rather embedded in and shaped by actual physical encounters with the Other, of ethics not as a bound and sealed tome of knowledge, but an action which inhabits the space of temporality and contingency, is one shared by Caputo. Caputo, distinguishing between the concepts of *duty* and *obligation*, writes:

> Ethics is for me highly questionable.... ethics is something to be deconstructed, while obligation in itself, if there is such a thing, is not deconstructible. For obligation transpires in a realm of radical singularity, where every hair on our head, every tear, has been counted. Obligation – the unconditional hospitality owed to the other – is the ethical beyond ethics, the ethical without ethics, the hyper-ethical, the fine point of the ethical soul, the very ethicality of ethics, but always without and against ethics. For ethics stops short with the law or rule while everything that exists is a singularity of which the coarse lens of the law cannot quite catch sight.\(^6^1\)

Such an understanding of ethics – Derridean ethics so to speak – as well as having strong similarities with Levinasian thought, also has certain resonances with the Kingdom ethics espoused and practiced by Jesus. One of the striking features of Jesus’ ministry is the particular nature of the miraculous episodes which punctuate

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\(^6^0\) Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 87.

his public ministry. Far from being run programmatically and having a procedural inevitability, Jesus' ministry, in Lukan terms, of 'preaching good news, proclaiming freedom for the prisoners, recovering sight for the blind, releasing the oppressed, and proclaiming the year of Jubilee', is as diverse and varied as the particular people and communities that Jesus encounters. 62 It is the very singularity and particularity of Jesus' ministry and the way in which his ethical behaviour bends the established laws and customs, which leads to his ongoing conflict with the religious leaders of his day. Two obvious examples are the healing of the man with a shrivelled hand on the Sabbath and Jesus' response to the woman caught in adultery. 63 In each case, Jesus' understanding of the appropriate ethical response, reinterprets or bypasses the legal framework, and adheres to a higher ethical standard. Jesus 'deconstructs' the law by revealing the way in which duty to the law, with its disregard for the singularity of the Other, runs the risk of "destroying, rather than saving life." 64 Derrida's understanding that what is important is not one's adherence to law or a fulfilment of legal duties, but rather how one's ethical behaviour accords with the transcendent nature of pure 'justice', 'hospitality' and 'forgiveness', echoes Jesus' scathing rebuke of the Pharisees for the way in which their stringent adherence to the law blinded them to 'the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness.' 65

Derridean ethics then, cannot be reduced to a programme or a set of pre-determined actions applicable to different contexts, but rather is best understood performatively - a response not to legal, juridical or political duties, but to the absolute obligation one has to the tout autre. One's obligation to the tout autre, like Levinas' infinite responsibility, means that one's ethical duties are never fulfilled no matter how well one upholds or administers laws or procedures. The active nature of this performative

experience of ethics is particularly important. In Derrida’s thought, the problem which arises with many ethical schemas is that so much time is spent discussing and debating what is the appropriate ethical response that nothing is done. In contrast, Derrida’s account of ethical hospitality calls not for endless pontificating, but rather is a summons to ethical action. Caputo expresses it this way:

Derrida likes to say that we do not know what hospitality is, not because the idea is built around the difficult conceptual riddle, but because, in the end, hospitality is not a matter of objective knowledge, but belongs to another order altogether, beyond knowledge, an enigmatic "experience" in which I set out for the stranger, for the other, for the unknown, where I cannot go. I do not know what is coming, what is to come, what calls for hospitality or what hospitality is called. The aporia is not conceptually resolved by a bit of intellectual adroitness but strained against performatively, by an act of generosity, by a giving which gives beyond itself, which is a little blind and does not see where it is going. Hospitality gives to the other with all aporetcs of the "gift," for gifts likewise bind the other to me in gratitude and the need to reciprocate. What is true of hospitality is true, too, of the gift, and of deconstruction itself: it does not come down to knowing anything, but to doing something.66

As with Levinas’ emphasis on affection, Derrida’s emphasis on ethics as performance stems from his contention that ethics stems not from the exercising of reason but from human subjectivity itself. Like Levinas, Derrida stresses that such performing of unconditional hospitality, requiring a movement beyond laws and duties based on knowledge, a leap into the unknown, is, by corollary, a risky undertaking. Derrida’s awareness of and his advocating of ethical action which is inevitably excessive and risky, is made clear when he writes: ‘Pure, unconditional or infinite hospitality

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cannot and must not be anything else but an acceptance of risk. If I am sure that the newcomer that I welcome is perfectly harmless, innocent, that (s)he will be beneficial to me... it is not hospitality. When I open my door I must be ready to take the greatest of risks.\(^67\)

Such an emphasis on the risky and excessive nature of ethical performance is again, one to be commended. In a world where the media is constantly highlighting the potential danger that waits outside one’s hermetically-sealed homes, and where risk-aversion seems to have become the key determining factor for how many order their lives, Derrida’s reminder of the risky nature of hospitality, while discomforting, is also an important reality-check. As we will consider in more depth later, crucial to hospitality is an acknowledgement and acceptance of the risk involved in such a practice.

While Derrida’s description of ethics as a risky and excessive performance, a movement of faith beyond the knowledge-based confines of law and duty, does have some similarities with a Christian-theological account of ethics, there are also elements of Derrida’s account which are more than a little problematic. Firstly, while Derrida makes much of Abraham as the exemplar of faith, there are aspects of Derrida’s interpretation of this narrative – as offered in *The Gift of Death* – which are clearly questionable. In Derrida’s thinking, knowledge is an activity which in totalising, systematising and reducing the Other to the Same often leads to inaction. Genuine ethical behaviour he therefore asserts requires the relinquishment of knowledge and an embracing of faith.\(^68\) But is knowledge always totalising and does

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\(^68\) Derrida does recognise that there is a relationship between faith and knowledge, but stresses the heterogeneous nature of this relationship. He writes: Decision, an ethical or a political responsibility, is absolutely heterogeneous to knowledge. Nevertheless, we have to know as much as possible in order to
faith consist of a complete abandonment of knowledge? While Derridean thought seems to create an exaggerated dichotomy between faith and knowledge, the Christian tradition has always emphasised the ways in which these two elements work together. While knowledge can be oppressive and totalising, the Christian tradition has stressed that knowledge and understanding have an appropriate role if built upon the foundation of faith. Likewise, central to Christian thought is the belief that the essence of such faith – the knowledge of God – is not inactivity, but rather active obedience. As Karl Barth states:

Knowledge of God is obedience to God. Observe that we do not say that knowledge may also be obedience, or that of necessity it has obedience attached to it, or that it is followed by obedience. No; knowledge of God as knowledge of faith is in itself and of essential necessity obedience.

Secondly, as well as these differing conceptions of knowledge, there is also a contrast between Derridean and Christian thought with regard to their respective understandings of faith. While Derrida is to be applauded for highlighting the degree of madness inherent in faith what he fails to recognise is the extent to which...

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69 As one example, one only needs to recall Anselm's famous dictum: fides quaerens intellectum – faith seeking understanding.

such leaps of faith are episodes in ongoing faith journeys. While correct in stressing the element of madness in Abraham’s faithful actions, Derrida fails to take into account the extent to which this action – in this case of preparing to sacrifice his son – takes place after a series of other acts of ‘madness’/faith, such as leaving his homeland and negotiating with God over the future of Sodom and Gomorrah. For Derrida, faith entails a leap into an abyss of not-knowing, with each ethical action being seen as a singular decision cut off from the rest of time and experience. In contrast, the Christian tradition sees faith as an ongoing relationship with the Triune God. Faith so construed, still involves an element of risk, of stepping out into the unknown, but with an assurance that the personal and faithful God who calls and guides, will continue to remain true to his promises. Based on one’s previous experiences of God’s faithfulness one can be confident that one does not take the leap of faith alone. As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, Abraham’s actions are those of a faithful man, one whose leap of faith is based on the confidence that Yahweh is faithful – that is, that Yahweh will stay true to His promises.\footnote{The writer of Hebrews writes: By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents.... By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was old – and Sarah herself was barren – because he considered him faithful who had promised.... By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom he had been told, “It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.” He considered the fact that God is able to raise someone from the dead... Hebrews 11:8-9,11,17. NRSV. Emphasis added.}

It is this understanding that Abraham’s moments of madness/leaps of faith stem from an ongoing relationship with Yahweh which is missing from Derrida’s interpretation. While Derrida speaks of Abraham’s duty to the ‘nameless name of God’\footnote{Derrida, Gift of Death, 67.}, the biblical story sets Abraham’s leap of madness in the context of his ongoing relationship with Yahweh – with the God who has called, promised, and ‘supped’ with Abraham. In disconnecting the story of Abraham and Isaac from the
wider narrative, Derrida fails to recognise the relational component of faith – that faith is founded on faithfulness – and therefore fails to uncover the motivation that underlies Abraham’s faith, expressed in ethical action. Could we venture that the underlying basis for Abraham’s ethical actions, shaped in the crucible of an ongoing relationship with Yahweh, is one of ‘love’?

This failure of Derrida to understand that faith is not primarily to be construed as a leap beyond knowledge, but rather as a summons to enter into relations of faithfulness and trust with others, leads on to a consideration of the second of our questions – that is: How does Derrida conceive of human identity and human-relationality? While Derrida’s belief in hospitality as an excessive and risky ethical practice, beyond duty, does show potential for integration within an explicit Christian understanding of hospitality, his understanding of identity and the nature of relationships, are, we suggest, less amenable to a theological account of hospitality.

**Identity and the Nature of Relationships**

At the heart of Derrida’s account of hospitality and his understanding of relationships and identity is the concept/non-concept of differance. According to Derrida’s account, hospitality is only possible due to difféance. That is, ‘as master and host, the self, in welcoming the other, must interrupt or divide himself or herself. This division is the condition of hospitality.’ In Derridean thinking, the identity of the subject is not one of unity, but rather, identity is composed of ‘self-interruption’ and ‘division’. The significance of this notion of ‘division’ for both an understanding of self-identity and therefore relationality becomes clear in the extract below, where Derrida outlines the two meanings ‘division’ has for him:

The meaning of division itself divides. On the one hand, it is fate,

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74 Ibid.
seen in its painful aspect: the inability to bring together in the one. It is necessity, inevitable. In this sense it is what exposes to dissociation, to dehiscence; and at the same time, on the other hand, in another meaning, division can also be a line of strategy, a profound movement of keeping itself. From the moment one divides oneself, one keeps something always in reserve, one doesn’t expose oneself all at once to the threat. There is always another place, there is not just one side, just one place; there are always several places, and this differentiation is a protection, a strategy of the living. This is not a little calculation, it’s a strategy of desire which divides itself in order to keep something in reserve: I remain free, I am not just there, you will see that I am also elsewhere, and thus that I have resources, I still have a reserve, some life, and that you will not kill me off so quickly. From this point of view, division, inasmuch as it is a structural phenomenon of the living, which can live only by dividing itself up to a certain point (death is also a division, a dissociation), a certain type of division of the living is at once exposure to suffering, but also a measure taken to save and to keep, a kind of reserve or holding back.\(^7^5\)

While in Christian anthropology there is a recognition that the subject evolves and changes, identity is grounded in a fixed given – that is, the subject’s unitive identity is grounded as a relational being, created in the image of God. In contrast, in Derridean thought, with its emphasis on ‘division’, identity is a constantly changing reality, without a fixed centre or foundation. The subject is, in Derridean thought, both inevitably and of necessity, a \textit{divided self}.

This conceptualisation of the subject as a \textit{divided self} has important consequences for

\(^{75}\) Derrida, "Dialanguages," 146-47.
one’s understanding of relationality. While the term ‘division’ expresses Derrida’s understanding of identity, the term ‘dissociation’ describes his conception of the underlying structure of relationality. Like Levinas, Derrida’s philosophy articulates an account of relationality which stresses the transcendence and unknowability of the Other. This radical distinction and difference of the Other is again communicated simply and succinctly by Derrida in an interview format:

Once you grant some privilege to gathering and not to dissociating, then you leave no room for the other, for the radical otherness of the other, for the radical singularity of the other. I think, from that point of view, separation, dissociation is not an obstacle to society, to community, but the condition.... Dissociation, separation, is the condition of my relation to the other. I can address the other only to the extent that there is a separation, a dissociation, so that I cannot replace the other and vice versa.... The structure of my relation to the other is of a "relation without relation." It is a relation in which the other remains absolutely transcendent. I cannot reach the other. They cannot know the other from the inside and so on. That is not an obstacle but the condition of love, of friendship, and of war, too, a condition of the relationship to the other. So, dissociation is the condition of community, the condition of any unity as such.76

As with Levinas, Derrida is suspicious of any ethical behaviour which finds its basis in the consciousness and reasoning of the ethical subject, seeing such ethical action as inevitably self-serving. In Given Time, Derrida draws particular attention to what he calls the auto-affective nature of ethical behaviour, that is, ethical behaviour where the subject performs a certain ethical action – such as offering hospitality – on the understanding and hope that they will get something back in return, i.e. a reciprocal invitation/a reward from God. Derrida suggests the need for an ongoing vigilance

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and awareness that the action of offering hospitality can itself be a form of violence, the practising of hospitality being motivated by a desire for *appropriation*. Thus, Derrida writes:

> To dare to say welcome is perhaps to insinuate that one is at home here, that one knows what it means to be at home, and that at home one receives, invites, or offers hospitality, thus appropriating for oneself a place to *welcome* [accueillir] the other, or, worse, *welcoming* the other in order to appropriate for oneself a place and then speak the language of hospitality…?

For Derrida, it is separation and dissociation, the radical difference between the subject and the Other in the face of such inherent violent self-interest, which ensures that the Other is not captured or categorised by the subject.

While Derrida’s description is motivated by a desire to ensure that the Other is protected from totalising violence, such a structural account raises a number of significant questions: Does an understanding of identity in terms of ‘division’ and relationality in terms of ‘dissociation’ and ‘separation’, provide an appropriate and fitting structure for the development of an ethic of hospitality? How do Derrida’s idea of ‘division’ and the themes of keeping in ‘reserve’ and ‘holding back’ relate to the ideas of excessiveness and risk-taking, which we have observed? And, perhaps most importantly, to what extent is such a structure based on a ‘divided’ self and radical ‘separation’ compatible with the theological understanding of a Triune God – a God of unity and relationality, who in the event of the Incarnation does not ‘hold Himself back’?

As we saw in the previous chapter, Derrida commends Levinas’ thinking as a philosophy of peace in contrast to Kant whose ‘institution of an eternal peace, of cosmopolitical law, and of universal hospitality, retains the trace of natural

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hostility.' But is Derrida's description of identity and relationality inherently peaceful? Despite his condemnation of transcendental and metaphysical philosophy, Derrida's philosophy can be seen itself as a form of metaphysical philosophy which, it has been argued, takes the shape of ontological violence. While Derrida's description of the 'hostility' which inheres within the concept of hospitality and his understanding that the self must divide itself as a condition for hospitality clearly relates to the finite conditional dimension of hospitality, it is not clear whether Derrida also conceives of these same 'hostilities' and 'divisions' existing within the dimension of pure unconditional hospitality. Do hostility and division constitute the ontological essence of hospitality or are they simply evident in the operation of hospitality in the finite-conditional world? And, crucially, is there any hope that this inherent hostility can be overcome?

Ultimately, while, like Levinas, Derrida's emphasis on 'separation' and 'dissociation' stems from a desire to ensure that the Other is not consumed, assimilated and violated by the subject, one does wonder whether such a description of the relational structure based on these core principles can really provide a peaceful, harmonious, and stable basis on which to develop the ethical practice of hospitality.

_Derrida's 'Religion without Religion' and Ethics without Foundation_

Thus far, in evaluating Derrida's understanding of the nature of ethics and his conception of identity and relationality we have noted both areas where his thought offers potentially useful insights, while also observing areas of dissonance. But what of Derrida's own religious thought? To what extent can Derrida's religious philosophy, and in particular his notion of faith, be incorporated into a theological account of hospitality?

78 Derrida, Adieu, 88.
79 See Milbank, _Theology and Social Theory_, 306-311. Milbank's contention that Derrida's philosophy is a form of dialectic Hegelianism and thus, itself, a form of metaphysical philosophy, is one we will examine in more detail in the next chapter.
We noted earlier how Derrida’s philosophical schema and his description of the ethical action of hospitality distinguishes between two dimensions: the ‘finite, relative and historically grounded’ dimension of juridical, political and ethical limits, and the dimension of the messianic, of the future to come (l’avenir), of the impossible. For Derrida, the existence and practice of hospitality in the world – though limited by the conditions of the legal-political world – is dependent on the existence of the idea of a pure, unconditional hospitality. But what is the site/source/origin of this pure hospitality that Derrida envisages? Perhaps surprisingly, Derrida does not avoid such questions. In reflecting on the nature of the gift, Derrida asks what it is that, ‘while not simply belonging to the circle, engages in it and sets off its motion. What is the gift as the first mover of the circle? And how does it contract itself into a circular contract? And from what place? Since when? From whom?’

In seeking to respond to such questions, in developing the concept that the possible is conditional on the impossible, in affirming a belief in a realm of absolute hospitality, pure forgiveness, the pure gift, Derrida is led constantly, much to the horror of many other philosophers, back to the religious and the transcendent. Caputo’s assertion that ‘Jacques Derrida is a man of tears, of faith and tears, for faith is driven by passion and tears are the passion of faith’ is perhaps a more accurate portrayal than that of Derrida as the harbinger of nihilistic anarchy as some others would maintain. Nevertheless, while heavily influenced by Jewish-biblical religious thinking, and while significant Christian theologians act as interlocutors in his

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82 Derrida in this sense is simply representative of the broader ‘theological turn’ within French phenomenological thought, evident in the work of our interlocutors, Levinas and Derrida, and also Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Louis Chrétien and Michel Henry. Dominique Janicaud argues against this ‘turn’, asserting that the ‘new phenomenology’ practiced by such writers is no longer phenomenological. See Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).
83 Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 308.
philosophical work, there are major differences between Derrida’s post-structuralist faith, interpreted by Caputo as a ‘religion without religion’, and the historical Christian faith.\textsuperscript{84} Perhaps the starkest example of the divergence between Derridean post-structuralist faith and orthodox Christian faith can be seen in Derrida’s concepts of the messianic structure and the future as the impossible.

\textit{Messiahs, messianic structures and the telos-less future}

Derrida’s understanding of the visitation of the stranger as a messianic-figure concurs with a rich tradition within the Christian history, in which the receiving of the stranger was commended on the understanding that such a visitor may be a messianic figure or theophany.\textsuperscript{85} But beyond these surface similarities there are fundamental differences between Derrida’s understanding of the Messiah and conception of messianic time and that of orthodox Christian thought.

Central to Derrida’s account of hospitality is his understanding of the messianic structure – of the openness of time created in waiting for the Messiah. It is the openness of time created by an expectation and waiting for the Messiah, which, according to Derrida, prevents foreclosure and therefore keeps us open to a future of the impossible. Derrida’s position seems to characterise – and arguably caricature – historical messianisms as movements in which adherents are closed to new possibilities, whose ‘waiting’ for the potential arrival of their promised Messiah leads to either ethical paralysis, or worse, a totalising violence towards those of other

\textsuperscript{84} Two Christian theologians in particular figure prominently in Derrida’s philosophy: Søren Kierkegaard and St. Augustine. While the influences of these theologians are evident throughout Derrida’s work, they explicitly appear in his close reading of Kierkegaard’s \textit{Fear and Trembling} in \textit{The Gift of Death} and through his commentary on St. Augustine’s \textit{Confessions} in \textit{Circumfession}.

\textsuperscript{85} Obvious biblical examples of this include Abraham’s hosting of the three angels (Genesis 18), Elijah being hosted by the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7-24), and most significantly, the hosting by two disciples of the resurrected Jesus (Luke 24:13-35). Most notable amongst the historical tradition whose practices of hospitality were shaped by the themes of these narratives is ‘The Rule of St Benedict’. Benedict, echoing Matthew 25:35, writes: ‘All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”’ See Benedict, \textit{The Rule of St Benedict}, trans. Timothy Fry (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 51.
messianic faiths/traditions. In contrast, Derrida proposes a messianic structure — without the historical messianisms which contribute to the wars and woes which beset the world — a structure that keeps us perpetually open to the future that is yet to come. But does the arrival of a/the Messiah really close down time and close the ‘faithful’ from the openness of the future? And, can you have a generalised ‘ontological’ messianic structure without a particular ‘historical’ messiah?

To answer these questions it is necessary to understand Derrida’s conception of time, which is integral to his idea of the messianic structure. In Of Grammatology, Derrida argues that the Western conception of time is ‘linearist’, centered around a temporal conception of ‘presence’. In the revolt of deconstruction against the tradition of western metaphysics which grounds meaning in presence, Derrida notes how the ‘linearist’ conception of time gives way to a ‘delinearized temporality’. Derrida concludes that modern philosophy must abandon the classical vocabulary and conception of time, positing that:

The concepts of present, past, and future, everything in the concepts of time and history which implies evidence of them — the metaphysical

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86 For this explicit criticism and the contention that the ‘three... religions of the Book’ are engaged in a ‘war messianic eschatologies’, that the ‘war for the “appropriation of Jerusalem” is today the world war’, see Derrida, Specters of Marx, 58.

87 Caputo summarises this inherent tension within Derrida’s thought, writing:

The conundrum is this. (1) are we to think that the “messianic” — or “messianicity” — is the ontological condition of possibility of any concrete messianism, the formal, a priori structure relative to which Christianity or Judaism, for example, would be the material instantiation? In that case, no historical messianism is possible without the messianic a priori. (2) Or, are we to take the concrete mechanisms as “absolute events” or “singular events,” that is, irreducible singularity that cannot be subsumed under a general, formal category; as unrepeatable happenings that cannot be taken as “cases” of something more universal? In that case, we would know nothing whatever of the messianic without the historical messianisms, so that the messianic instead of being a priori would come later, a posteriori. Derrida emphasizes that this is a serious dilemma for him and that he might perhaps one day find that he will be driven by it beyond the very distinction between messianic and messianism.

Caputo, ed., Deconstruction in a Nutshell, 169.

88 Derrida, Grammatology, 72.

89 Ibid., 87.
concept of time in general—cannot adequately describe the structure of the trace.\textsuperscript{90}

While no theory of time is explicitly outlined by Derrida in either \textit{Of Grammatology} or later works, hints of his conception of time are noticeable throughout his writings, in particular, in \textit{Given Time}. Here, in contrast to the 'linearist' view in which time is orientated towards its end, Derrida posits a circular understanding of time, stating: 'One of the most powerful and ineluctable representations, at least in the history of metaphysics, is the representation of time as a circle.'\textsuperscript{91}

As we noted earlier, it is this notion of the circle which is illustrative of Derrida's belief that the possible is nourished and sustained by its impossibility. For Derrida it is the very impossibility of the gift breaking into the economic circle or the Messiah turning up and entering time which sustains and makes possible both hospitality as gift-giving and time itself. Derrida states this explicitly:

That wherever there is time, wherever time predominates or conditions experience in general, where time as circle is predominant, the gift is impossible. A gift could be possible, there could be gift only at the instance an effraction in the circle will have taken place, at the instant all circulation would have been interrupted and on condition of this instant. What is more, this instant of effraction (of the temporal circle) must no longer be part of time.... There would be a gift only at the instant when the paradoxical instant (in the sense in which Kierkegaard says of the paradoxical instant of decision that it is madness) tears time apart. In this sense one would never have the time of a gift.\textsuperscript{92}

It is this sense of the impossible, the circular nature of time, in which the future is

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{91} Derrida, \textit{Given Time}, 8.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 9.
unknown and therefore always open, which for Derrida prevents the totalisation and univeralisation inherent in western ‘linear’ metaphysical thinking. As Caputo puts it: ‘If the tout autre ever won the revolution, if the Messiah ever actually showed up, if you ever thought that justice has come – that would ruin everything.’

But does such an understanding of time – of messianic time in which the messiah never shows up – really provide the basis for ethical action as Derrida envisages? Can one really speak of ethical action, or ethics itself, without an account of the Good, and the telos to which ethical action is directed? While Derrida and other post-structuralist thinkers see the disappearance of telos as a major philosophical advance, other moral philosophers see the loss of teleology as the single most contributory problem to the fragmented and exclusionary world we inhabit. While we will return to this question later in this work, for now, it is worth simply asking: To what extent do Derrida’s conceptions of the messianic and his notion of time accord with a Christian-theological understanding?

Derrida’s conception of a messiah without presence and of the impossibility of an ‘irruptive’ event / gift which ‘interrupts the continuum of the narrative’ is in stark contrast to a Christian understanding of ethics. Derrida’s thinking does not align with a Christian understanding of the Good.

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93 Caputo, Prayers and Tears, 74.
94 Most significant amongst those who argue that the loss of telos is the single greatest contributory factor to social decay is Alasdair MacIntyre. See Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1994).
95 In a rich passage Derrida writes: There must be event - and therefore appeal to narrative and event of narrative - for there to be gift, and there must be gift or phenomenon of gift for there to be narrative and history. And this event, event of condition and condition of event, must remain in a certain way unforeseeable. The gift, like the event, as event, must remain unforeseeable, but remain so without keeping itself. It must let itself be structured by the aleatory; it must appear chancy or in any case a lived as such, apprehended as the intentional correlate of a perception that is absolutely surprised by the encounter with what it perceives, beyond its horizon of anticipation - which already appears phenomenologically impossible. Whatever the case may be with this phenomenological impossibility, a gift or an event that would be foreseeable, necessary, condition, programmed, expected, counted on would not be lived as either a gift or as an event, as required by necessity that is both semantic or phenomenological. That is why the condition, common to the gift
contrast to the claim of Christianity that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah who has entered historical time. Coming to earth, suffering under Pontius Pilate, being crucified, dead, and buried, the creeds of Christian faith assert that this crucified Messiah has been resurrected, has ascended into heaven, and, will come again. Christian teleology, far from being totalising, with a fixed-determined future which closes down possibilities and results in ethical paralysis is thoroughly eschatological. In the Christian theological tradition the messianic future is neither a Derridean impossibility nor a fixed telos functioning like a regulative Kantian ideal, but rather is a present-reality that has burst into history with the resurrection of Jesus. While Derrida’s messianic structure is founded upon a form of ‘dogmatic agnosticism’, which asserts that the possible is sustained and nourished by the impossible, it is the claim of Christian faith that with God all things are possible. It is in the visitation of the Messiah, in doing what we perceive as the impossible and taking on human flesh that the Triune God has opened time to new possibilities. God has revealed himself in presence, and the telos of the future has broken into the present. As we will see later, it is this irrupting of divine hospitality into the world of presence and time which provides the foundation for Christian hope and therefore establishes the basis for human actions of excessive and risky hospitality.

In contrast to a Christian theology of hospitality grounded in the historical events of the life, death and resurrection of a singular-particular Messiah – the entrance of the ‘gift’, of pure hospitality into the world of being – Derrida’s two-dimensional understanding of hospitality has strongly Platonistic tendencies, with an aversion to

and the event is a certain unconditionality.... The event and the gift, the event as gift, the gift as event must be irruptive, unmotivated - for example, dis-interested. They are decisive and they must therefore tear the fabric, interrupt the continuum of a narrative that nevertheless they call for, they must perturb the order of casualties: in an instant.... The gift and the event obey nothing, except perhaps principles of disorder, that is, principles without principles.

Derrida, Given Time, 122-23.

any kind of incarnation.\textsuperscript{97} In his preference for a generalised concept – that of some sort of ontological ‘messianic structure’ – over the \textit{particular, temporality} of the phenomenon of historical messiahs, Derrida seems to jettison his own philosophical \textit{modus operandi} – of stressing the \textit{particular} over the \textit{universal!} Such action as well as being ironic, is symptomatic of his post-structuralist approach, which seeks a version of faith, religion and morality, without committing oneself to any dogma.

Bruce Ellis Benson captures well the extent to which this ‘undecidability’, heralded by Derrida as authentic faith, can alternatively, be seen as a failure to take ‘the idea of undecidability seriously enough.’ Benson writes:

True, dogma can be a way of avoiding responsibility if one says, “I believe whatever the creeds say. I really haven’t thought about it myself. I just believe the stuff.” But dogma can also be a way of taking responsibility, of saying “Here I stand.” In saying “Here I stand,” one does not necessarily say “All that I believe is 100 percent right: I am unwilling to think about this any further.” One does say, “I am making a commitment to a body of belief and, more important, to God.” After all his talk of responsibility as something that one cannot ultimately justify, it seems odd that Derrida would be so afraid of dogma. For dogma just is that which cannot be ultimately justified. And commitment to it is a way of taking responsibility.\textsuperscript{98}

Derrida’s deconstructive post-structuralist faith, with its belief in the circular nature of time and thus an understanding that every ethical decision is a new singular moment, is ultimately not merely a ‘religion without religion’, but also a faith without content, or foundation. In contrast, as we will expand upon in this work,

\textsuperscript{97} This aversion to a God of Being, of the possibility of an incarnate God, perhaps explains Derrida’s fascination with a spectral-like Messiah. See especially Derrida, \textit{Adieu}, 111-2. For the same critique of the ultimately Platonising impulse of Derrida’s thought see Benson, \textit{Graven Ideologies}, 167.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 165-66.
Christian dogma recounts the narrative of the hospitable Triune God, a God who, remaining faithful to his promises, incarnates himself into time and presence as the Messiah and, in doing so overcomes our hostility. Taking responsibility and committing oneself to the identity-shaping nature of this dogma, one’s life becomes grounded upon a firm foundation. It is from such a launching pad that one can thus, with confidence, take the leap of faith to engage in the risky and vulnerable practice of unconditional hospitality.

Summary

Our dialogue with Derrida’s deconstruction and his account of unconditional hospitality has provided us with some important insights. According to Derrida, ethical behaviour requires more than the observance of juridical laws, the following of universal maxims or adherence to contractual agreements. Influenced by Levinas’ concepts of the ‘transcendence of the Other’ and ‘infinite responsibility’, Derrida asserts that genuine ethical behaviour is an absolute duty to the particularity of the tout autre, an Other that has to be encountered in all their otherness. Such an approach to ethics – by its very nature hospitable – cannot be measured, formalised in programmes or contained in tidy procedures. Rather, authentic hospitality is a performance constituted of risk-taking and vulnerability; a radical gift of excess, a moment of divine madness, an ethical performance which is always pushing the boundaries, seeking to break through the encirclements and conditions placed upon it.

While such a description in all its beauty of expression clearly resonates with theological themes and has potential to contribute to an explicitly Christian recounting of the ethic of hospitality, there are also elements of Derrida’s thought that have left us with some unease and are clearly less compatible. Derrida’s
understanding of identity and relationality, expressed in concepts such as 'separation' 'division' and 'dissociation', appears based upon an ontology of hostility and difference. Such an ontology seems a less than appropriate basis for an ethic of hospitality. Similarly, the assumptions of his post-structuralist faith – the eschewal of knowledge and the denial of a telos – are problematic for any theological understanding of the world.
Chapter Three.

Levinasian & Derridean Hospitality: Ethics beyond Ontology?

In seeking to offer a theological account of the ethical practice of hospitality we have begun our journey by reflecting on the work of Emmanuel Levinas and his friend and compatriot, Jacques Derrida. The choice of Levinas and Derrida as interlocutors is not arbitrary. As well as the far-reaching impact and influence of Levinasian and Derridean thought, not unimportant is the extent to which their respective philosophies have been shaped by their own life-experiences of inhospitality, exclusion and violence. Such experiences of exclusion and violence have led them to the conclusion that not only is Western thought ill-equipped to respond to the inhospitable and unethical events of the late twentieth – and we could now posit, early twenty-first – century, but further, they assert that it is western philosophical thought itself that is to blame for the quandary we find ourselves in.

The problem, according to Levinas and Derrida, is two-fold. Firstly, they contend that western thought with its obsession with ontological concerns is a philosophy of totalisation and sameness. Secondly, within such a structure, ethics is seen as a subset or derivative of philosophy. Their response is to call for something of a Copernican revolution in the way western thought approaches philosophy and ethics. Rather than ethics being of a secondary, subsidiary nature, they seek to replace a metaphysic of transcendental ontology with a metaphysic of ethical response. In response to what they regard as philosophies of inhospitality and

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1 Levinasian, and in particular Derridean thought – deconstruction – has become heavily influential not only in philosophy, religious studies, theology, and ethics, but has been applied to disciplines as varied as geography, law, politics, anthropology, sociology, cultural theory, literary theory, psychology, feminist and development studies.
sameness, Levinas and Derrida offer philosophies of hospitality, in which heterogeneity is emphasised and the ‘Other’, rather than being excluded, is ‘welcomed’. Such philosophies, stemming from the ontic reality of inter-subjectivity, overcome, they claim, the ‘totalising’ and idolatrous nature of ontological philosophy and lead to ethical obedience.

But what of these philosophies of hospitality offered by Levinas and Derrida? To what extent can the philosophical insights of Levinas and Derrida be incorporated into a more explicitly theological account of hospitality? In our opening chapters we have already noted both areas where there is a high degree of commensurability, while also highlighting areas where there appears to be clear disjuncture between Levinasian-Derridean and Christian theological thought. In what follows, in the interest of clarity, we will briefly reiterate Levinas’ and Derrida’s key emphases, noting again, particular areas of resonance. We will then, secondly, turn our attention to areas of Levinasian-Derridean thought with which we have already expressed concern – in particular their notions of identity, inter-subjective relations and eschatology. As will become clear, our concerns in these areas stem from a deeper disquiet regarding the implicit ontology which underlies their respective works.

Revisiting our ‘Jewish-French’ Hosts

The Otherness of the Other and Ethics as a Leap of Faith

In our contemporary world the very concept and practice of hospitality is one that faces significant challenges. How does hospitality proceed in an ‘age of terror’, where

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2 Derrida’s assertions, noted earlier, that ‘ethics is hospitality’ and, in referring to Levinas’s work, that ‘hospitality... is ethics,’ illustrate the way in which within post-structuralist thought the traditional distinction between foundational philosophy and subsequent auxiliary ethics becomes blurred. For these assertions see Derrida, Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness, 16-17, and Derrida, Adieu, 21.
the stranger on one’s threshold may be either the refugee seeking sanctuary or the suicide-bomber bringing unwanted gifts of death? Is it possible to practice a radical ‘unconditional’ hospitality in a world where the ability to discern between the malevolent and benevolent Other is so difficult? What happens to the concept of hospitality in a ‘marketised’ world of consumption where inter-human relations are reduced to monetary transactions between ‘consumers’ and ‘clients’ – where hospitality is reduced to the fulfilment of contractual obligations?

Both Levinas and Derrida in their respective works are sensitive to these concerns. For both writers the activity of discernment and recognition is fraught with danger. In the process of seeking to discern and recognise, the Other is brought within the totalising gaze of the self. The otherness of the Other is no longer affirmed but rather captured and subsumed within the consciousness of the self and its desire to ‘know’, ‘comprehend’ and ‘categorise’. It is this very violation of the transcendence of the Other, the placing of rationality and ontology before subjectivity and ethics, that our interlocutors seek to overcome in their respective philosophies. Thus, for Derrida, genuine ethical hospitality is the welcoming of the Other, without any attempt by the self to recognise or discern the Other. Derrida writes:

> It is necessary to welcome the other and his alterity, without waiting, and thus not to pause to recognize his real predicates. It is thus necessary, beyond all perception, to receive the other while running the risk, a risk that is always troubling, strangely troubling, like the stranger (unheimlich), of a hospitality offered to the guest as ghost or Geist or Gast. There would be no hospitality without the chance of spectrality.³

For Derrida, in pausing to recognise, the subject brings the Other within the confines of perception and representation, therefore violating their otherness and

³ Derrida, Adieu, 111-2.
transcendence. Instead, genuine hospitality requires a move beyond representation, with the Other ‘appearing’ as a ghost-like figure. This belief in the absolute otherness of the Other – of the Other beyond comprehension – is applied not merely to the human Other, but to God. Derrida continues:

But spectrality is not nothing, it exceeds, and thus deconstructs, all ontological oppositions, being and nothingness, life and death – and it also gives. It can give [donner], give order(s) [ordonner] and give pardon [pardonner], and it can also not do so, like God beyond essence. God without being, God uncontaminated by being – is this not the most rigorous definition of the Face of the Wholly other? But is this not then an apprehension that is as spectral as it is spiritual? 

This shared concern of Levinas and Derrida, their belief that human rationality, in attempting to comprehend and categorise the Other, both dehumanises the human Other and turns God into an idol, leads them to stress the radical exteriority of the Other. Accordingly, Levinas and Derrida posit human relationships as being of an asymmetrical and unilateral nature, and secondly, they advocate a form of ‘metaphysical atheism’, a ‘religion without religion’. For Levinas and Derrida it is only the relationship with the Other – whether human or divine – construed in asymmetrical and unilateral ways which prevents the Other from being subsumed or assimilated by the totalising violence of human thought. This asymmetrical and unilateral structure of relationality is expressed in a number of ways in the work of Levinas and Derrida, but in particular through the concepts of ‘infinite responsibility’/‘obligation’ and in Derrida’s analysis of the ‘gift’.

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4 Ibid.
5 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 77.

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Levinas' concern at the totalising and idolatrous impulse within the self, leads him to posit an understanding of the self as constituted by the call of the Other. In place of a Kantian autonomy which makes room for the Other, Levinas argues for the primacy of heteronomy. Responsibility to the Other is prior to freedom of the Self. Levinas writes:

The ethical “I” is subjectivity precisely insofar as it kneels before the other, sacrificing its own liberty to the more primordial call of the other. For me, the freedom of the subject is not the highest or primary value. The heteronomy of our response to the human other, or to God as the absolutely Other, precedes the autonomy of our subjective freedom. As soon as I acknowledge that it is “I” who am responsible, I accept that my freedom is antecedent by an obligation to the other. Ethics redefines subjectivity as this heteronymous responsibility in contrast to autonomous freedom. Even if I deny my primordial responsibility to the other by affirming my own freedom as primary, I can never escape the fact that the other has demanded a response from me before I affirm my freedom not to respond to his demand. Ethical freedom is une difficile liberté, a heteronymous freedom obliged to the other. Consequently, the other is the richest and the poorest of beings: the richest, at an ethical level, in that it always comes before me, its right-to-be preceding mine; the poorest, at an ontological or political level, in that without me it can do nothing, it is utterly vulnerable and exposed.⁶

For Derrida, the unilateral structure of the relationship with the Other is revealed in his reflections on what he regards as the philosophical aporia of the gift. While Derrida affirms that the desire to give is the supreme ethical act, he also believes such

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an act is impossible as the presence and recognition of a gift – 'the economy of perception-consciousness' – traps the gift within a Hegelian economy of circularity and return, within a totality of sameness. Derrida states:

From the moment the gift would appear as gift, as such, as what it is, in its phenomenon, its sense and its essence, it would be engaged in a symbolic, sacrificial, or economic structure that would annul the gift in the ritual circle of the debt. The simple intention to give, insofar as it carries the intentional meaning of the gift, suffices to make a return payment to oneself. The simple consciousness of the gift right away sends itself back the gratifying image of goodness or generosity, of the giving-being who, knowing itself to be such, recognizes itself in a circular, specular fashion, in a sort of auto-recognition, self-approval, and narcissistic gratitude.

Derrida’s understanding that the symbolic equivalence of signification – a circular-economic circle – annuls the gift, leads him to advocate for a ‘pure’ gift, that is, a gift of an anonymous, non-reciprocal and unilateral nature. Derrida states that ‘(f)or there to be gift, not only must the donor or donee not perceive or receive the gift as such, have no consciousness of it, no memory, no recognition; he or she must also forget it right away [a l’instant] and moreover this forgetting must be so radical that it exceeds even the psychoanalytical categoriality of forgetting.’ The gift, for Derrida therefore, is both the supreme ethical impulse, but ultimately, one that cannot be.

To avoid therefore the danger of totalising violence of a philosophy of representation, Levinas and Derrida construe the relation between the self and the Other to be one of radical asymmetry and of a non-reciprocal, unilateral nature. In Levinas’ work, this asymmetry is seen in the stress on the radical exteriority and separation of the Other.

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7 Derrida, Given Time, 15.
8 Ibid., 23. Emphasis added.
9 Ibid., 16.
Paul Ricoeur states that in Levinas' thinking, 'Because the Same signifies totalization and separation, the exteriority of the Other can no longer be expressed in the language of relation. The Other absorbs itself from relation, in the same movement by which the Infinite draws free from Totality.'

While Levinas' work stresses the radical exteriority and separation of the Other, thereby protecting the Other from being assimilated to the Same, Derrida’s work moves between this Levinasian notion of alterity – which stresses distance and separation – and a more traditional phenomenological conception of alterity, in which alterity is, at least to some extent, dependent on and relative to the self. For Derrida, 'there is an irreducible otherness that divides the self-identity of the living present'. Thus Derrida writes:

[t]he other is in me before me: the ego... implies alterity as its own condition. There is no "I" that ethically makes room for the other, but rather an "I" that is structured by the alterity within it, an "I" that is itself in a state of self-deconstruction, of dislocation..... the other is there before me, that it comes before me [previent], precedes and anticipates me.... Which means that I am not proprietor of my "I," I am not a proprietor of the place open to hospitality.

Levinas and Derrida are to be commended for their affirmation that the Other – regardless of their identity or history – is one to be welcomed. While not basing their assertions upon theological grounds, nevertheless, this emphasis on the unconditional

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welcoming of the Other, is one that accords with the Christian understanding of the universality of God's grace. The Triune God does not distinguish between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' Others, but rather we are all 'strangers' who through the 'gift' of Christ are forgiven and summoned to participate in God's ultimate action of hospitality. Similarly, the Levinasian and Derridean understanding that ethical action is not dependent on the development of a comprehensive theory of ethics, but rather precedes such theory as a response to the 'call of the Other', is likewise, to be endorsed. Resonating with the Christian tradition, both Levinas and Derrida see this response to the prior call of the Other, as therefore being by its very nature, excessive and risky. To practice radical unconditional hospitality requires a leap of faith, perhaps even a touch of madness.

However, whether stressing the radical exteriority of the Other, or positing a conception of alterity in which 'the other is somehow always already within the self... always, already encroaching upon the self'¹⁴ there is, nevertheless, something disturbing about the asymmetrical and unilateral relational structure offered by Derrida and Levinas. Our unease revolves around two different but inter-related matters that we have already traced briefly. Firstly, the extent to which Levinasian-Derridean conceptions of alterity potentially lead to a dissolution / dissolving of both an understanding of self-identity and of otherness; and secondly, the fact that in Levinasian and Derridean thought, inter-subjective relationality tends to be understood in adversarial terms.

¹⁴ Reynolds, "The Other of Derridean Deconstruction," 1.
Responsibility: to Any or All?
The Loss of Self-Hood and Identity

David Wood, reflecting on the paradox raised in Derrida’s *The Gift of Death* – that an act of responsibility to the one means a sacrificing and betraying of our responsibility to all the Others, and with it the accompanying belief that such a choice, of one over another, can never be justified – wonders whether such thinking contains within itself an element of ‘hubris’. What worries Wood is that Derrida’s thinking ‘seems to deny my situatedness, it seems to return us to occupying a universal space in which we could be anywhere.’ Wood argues that Derrida’s ‘infinite obligation’ is actually ‘deactualizing obligation’ in that it fails to give ‘privilege to those obligations, precisely that we have not willed, but that we find ourselves in, to those we have voluntarily acquired, to those expectations we have allowed others to have of us.’ That is, Derrida’s move in absolutising ‘absolute duty’ and calling the Abrahamic sacrifice ‘the most common and everyday experience of responsibility’, of arguing that every duty is an absolute duty and every choice is a sacrifice, rather than affirming the singularity and particularity of the Other, reduces all Others to the same level. Mary-Jane Rubenstein, commenting on the same passage, writes:

> It is astounding that a thinker so concerned with difference could efface it so completely. If every other is just as other as every other, then God is different from Fred in the same way that Fred is different from his cat in the same way that the cat’s ball of yarn is different from God. And if all otherness is identical to all other otherness, then every otherness is the same, the singular is no longer singular,

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17 Ibid.
the finite no longer finite, and all difference is identity. Without
different kinds of difference, there is no difference. 18

A further concern raised by Wood is the extent to which Derrida’s ‘infinite
obligation’ seems to slide from a responsibility for any to a responsibility to all. But,
who is capable of having ‘infinite responsibility for all’? Who is able, as host, to offer
unconditional hospitality to all? To understand ‘infinite responsibility’ as a
responsibility for all is, as Wood suggests, ‘surely a huge exaggeration of one’s own
importance.’ 19 Indeed, such an understanding, we would suggest, requires one to
have something of a “messianic complex”. 20 And, how would one actually stay sane
if one were to hold to a Derridean understanding that in each ethical choice one was
sacrificing and betraying all other obligations? 21 Wood wonders whether he is alone
in hearing in these words the ‘voice of guilt?’ 22 Indeed, does the Derridean ‘infinite
responsibility’ run the risk of becoming a ‘bondage to an insatiable monster,’ 23 which,
rather than leading to ethical openness and care of the Other results in a sense of
being overwhelmed, and thus to ethical paralysis?

18 Mary-Jane Rubenstein, "Relationality: The Gift After Ontotheology," Telos Spring, no. 123 (2002): 65-80, 78. This critique, that Derrida’s ‘singularity to the absolute singularity of the other’ (GoD,68) rather than protecting, threatens to actually undermine difference, parallels our earlier comment regarding the way in which Levinas’s ‘Other’ is in danger of becoming a vague universal.
20 This, over-emphasis, arguably, on one’s own importance is evident too in Levinas’ thought when he writes:

From a responsibility even more ancient than that conatus of substance, more ancient than the beginning and the principle, from the anarchic, the ego returned to self, responsible for Others, hostage of everyone, that is, substituted for everyone by its very non-interchangeability, hostage of all the others who, precisely others, do not belong to the same genus as the ego because I am responsible for them without concerning myself about their responsibility for me because I am, in the last analysis and from the start, even responsible for that, the ego, I; I am man holding up the universe "full of all things." Responsibility or saying prior to Being and beings, not saying itself in ontological categories.

Levinas, Humanism of the Other, 57. In contrast to Levinas’ assertion that ‘I am man holding up the universe “full of all things”,’ is our claim, to be expanded upon as we proceed, that it is Christ, the creator of all things, the Messiah who has come, who holds up the universe. See Col 1:15-20.
21 Derrida, Gift of Death, 69.
22 Wood, "Much Obliged," 137.
23 Ibid.
A similar critique is offered by James Olthuis, who expresses the concern that Levinas' 'emphasis on the priority of the other not give birth – albeit contrary to intention – to a guilting moralism'. While the Levinasian emphasis on an asymmetrical relationship with its ethic of self-sacrifice has some resonance with specific Biblical themes, Olthuis wonders whether Levinas' position has the affect of bringing 'into ethical disrepute all concern for self-interest'. And, if this is the case, then does not Levinas, in his concern to challenge 'narcissistic self-interest' threaten the very concept of an identity and therefore the very basis for his inter-subjective ethics? The problematic nature of Levinas' unilateral relationship, in which the self's only interest is that of the Other, is noted too by Thomas Ogletree, who writes:

Levinas seems to have fallen into the opposite error of denying the self any moral right whatever before the other. Egoism, if it has any justification at all, is apparently justifiable solely for the sake of the other and in terms of the other. But if this conclusion is consistently drawn, it is also no longer clear how the other as a subject is himself in a position to make moral claims. Unless a moral right inheres in the other's being as a subject, even as a subject of enjoyment, then that other would seem to have no basis for making a claim on me. He could not properly be identified as being a centre of value. Yet if value attaches to the other by virtue of his subjectivity, then

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24 James H. Olthuis, "Face-to-Face: Ethical Asymmetry or the Symmetry of Mutuality?" in The Hermeneutics of Charity: Interpretation, Selfhood, and Postmodern Faith, ed. James K.A. Smith and Henry Isaac Venema (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 135-156, 143. David Ford also draws attention to the extent to which Levinas' 'infinite responsibility' seems, at times, to stem from a burdensome sense of obligation and seeks to overcome this by synthesising Eberhard Jüngel's notion of 'joy' with Levinas' 'obligation'. See chapters 3 & 4 in David F. Ford, Self and Salvation: Being Transformed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

25 Olthuis, "Face-to-Face," 136. Levinas writes: 'It is my inescapable and incontrovertible answerability to the other that makes me an individual “I”. So that I become a responsible or ethical “I” to the extent that I agree to depose or dethrone myself – to abdicate my position of centrality – in favor of the vulnerable other. As the Bible says; “He who loses his soul gains it.” The ethical I is a being who asks if he has a right to be, who excuses himself to the other for his own existence.’ Levinas, "Ethics of the Infinite," 62-63.

26 Olthuis, "Face-to-Face," 136.
subjectivity would seem to have the same significance for all moral actors. 27

Fellow French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, makes the same observation. While affirming Levinas' ethical primacy of the Other, Ricoeur simultaneously advocates for the concept of self-esteem, the notion that one has to belong to oneself in some sense. For Ricoeur, it is the very idea of a self that has self-esteem – that has some sense of an identity – that enables one to give oneself to the Other. Ricoeur asks: 'But is not a moment of self-dispossession essential to authentic selfhood? And must one not, in order to make oneself open, available, belong to oneself in a certain sense?' He concludes that 'if my identity were to lose all importance in every respect, would not the question of others also cease to matter?' 28

Adversarial Relationality and the Charge of Ontological Violence

Not only does such an advocating of a unilateral, asymmetrical relationality, an emphasis on an ethic of self-sacrifice, seem to rob the self of any essential, inherent moral right, but similarly disturbing is the extent to which Levinasian and Derridean conceptions of alterity tend to view interpersonal relationships in adversarial terms. James K.A. Smith observes that '[b]ecause hospitality is ethics for Derrida, what is at stake in considering hospitality as such is not just international law or immigration but also the nature of intersubjective relationships. It is in the consideration of hospitality, we might suggest, that we get something like Derrida's philosophical anthropology.' 29 And what is the nature of this anthropology and the understanding of inter-subjective relationships offered to us by Levinas and Derrida? Derrida's understanding of the

28 Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, 138-9.
essential adversarial nature of inter-subjective relationships is encapsulated well in an interview with Richard Kearney where Derrida states: 'the rapport of self-identity is itself always a **rapport of violence with the other**; so that the notions of property, appropriation and self-presence, so central to logocentric metaphysics, are essentially dependent on an **oppositional relation** with otherness. In this sense, identity presupposes alterity.'

Derrida's attempt to overcome the potential violence of the Kantian autonomous individual seems itself therefore to be embedded in a violent relationality. As Smith puts it:

...while Derrida seeks to call into question the politics of ethnocentrism, that undergirds (and is undergirded by) logocentrism, and though he seeks to call into question classically liberal notions of the autonomous individual who only 'later' is inserted into intersubjective relationships which will always be a threat, the picture of intersubjectivity that Derrida paints here is one of an **essential** and original inter-relationality, but one that understands these relations as always already violent – thus perhaps retaining some vestiges of the liberal notion of autonomy.

Likewise, as noted earlier, Levinas' conception of inter-human relationality also appears to be construed in adversarial terms. Levinas' understanding that *being* itself is constitutively violent, a struggle for existence, is expressed concisely in an interview, where Levinas states:

This is my principal thesis. A being is something that is attached to being, to its own being. That is Darwin's idea. The being of animals is a struggle for life. A struggle for life without ethics. It is a

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30 Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other," 117. Bold emphasis added.
question of might... the living being struggles for life. The aim of being is being itself.... The law of evil is the law of being.\textsuperscript{32}

For Levinas, the Face of the Other does not appear in this world of \textit{being}, characterised by struggle. 'Being persisting in being, that is nature' but the face is a 'rupture with nature', an in-breaking of 'generosity' 'charity', 'grace', 'love' into being. Levinas contends that, 'In the conatus essendi, which is the effort to exist, existence is the supreme law. However, with the appearance of the Face on the interpersonal level, the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' emerges as a limitation of the \textit{conatus essendi}.\textsuperscript{33}

While at one level his ethical account of subjectivity clearly asserts for the pre-priority of the Good – contra the Hobbesian characterisation of nature as war – Levinas' concept of the Face irrupting into the struggle of being seems to presuppose a primordial, original state of hostility. In \textit{Totality and Infinity}, Levinas suggests that the temptation to kill the Other – ‘The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill’ – is one which is resisted by the 'epiphany of the face'.\textsuperscript{34} Levinas writes:

This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, in his face, is the primordial \textit{expression}, is the first word; “you shall not commit murder.”.... The epiphany of the face brings forth the possibility of gauging the infinity of the temptation to murder, not only as a temptation to total destruction, but also as the purely ethical impossibility of this temptation and attempt.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} Wright, Hughes, and Ainley, “Paradox of Morality,” 172, 175.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 175-176.
\textsuperscript{34} Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, 197-198.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 198. Likewise, in his essay “Ethics and Spirit”, Levinas states:

The face, for its part, is inviolable; those eyes, which are absolutely without protection, the most naked part of the human body, nonetheless offer an absolute resistance to possession, an absolute resistance in which the temptation to murder is inscribed.... The Other is the only being that one can be tempted to kill. This temptation to murder and this impossibility of murder constitute the very vision of
Thus, Levinas’ contention that ‘War presupposes peace, the antecedent and non-allergic presence of the Other; it does not represent the first event of the encounter’ appears to be belied. His logic, in stating that the primordial expression, the first word is “you shall not commit murder,” suggests rather, the primacy of violence. Judith Butler makes the same point when she observes that while ‘Levinas cannot accommodate the notion of a primary set of needs or drives he gestures towards an elementary notion of aggression or murderous impulse when he grants that killing the Other is the temptation against which ethics must work.’

Other writers, attentive to the way in which alterity within Levinasian-Derridean thought is conceived of in ‘oppositional’ or non-relational terms, argue that such an understanding of inter-human relations is representative of an undergirding ‘ontology of violence.’ The belief that human inter-subjective relationships contain violence, that inherent within hospitality is a little hostility – vividly expressed in


Levinas, Difficult Freedom, 8.
36 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 198.
38 J.K.A. Smith argues that the fact Levinasian thought ‘operates on the basis of an oppositional notion of difference (or “differential ontology”)... means that an “ontology of violence” continues to undergird his project, even if it is offered in the name of peace.’ James K.A. Smith, "The Call as Gift: The Subject’s Donation in Marion and Levinas," in The Hermeneutics of Charity: Interpretation, Selfhood, and Postmodern Faith, ed. James K.A. Smith and Henry Isaac Venema (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 217-227, 219. Others who accuse Levinas and Derrida of offering philosophies of ‘ontological violence’ include John Milbank, James Olthuis and Catherine Pickstock. See chapter 10 ‘Ontological Violence’ in Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, 278-325; chapters 1, 7, 12 in The Hermeneutics of Charity; and Catherine Pickstock, After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). Since his Theology and Social Theory, Milbank’s strident criticism that Derrida’s work is an elaboration of a ‘single nihilistic philosophy’ (278) has become slightly tempered. J.K.A. Smith notes that John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Connor Cunningham now concede that ‘Derrida’s thought is not a-moral or apolitical’ but insist ‘Derrida nevertheless works from an ontology that is nihilistic in a more technical sense.’ Smith, Derrida: Live Theory, 134, n.40. For further discussion whether Derrida is, or is not, a ‘straightforward nihilist’ see Graham Ward, "Deconstructive theology," in The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 76-91.

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Derrida's neologism, 'Hostipitality' – is, such writers aver, symptomatic of a less than peaceful ontology. Thus, James K.A. Smith states:

While I could concede that Levinas understands the relationship with the other to be "primordial", it seems to me that it is at best coprimordial with egoism, which makes it co-originary. In other words, even if, as Levinas asserts, infinity is "as primordial as totality," (TI, 23) this seems to still entail that totality is primordial. Hence, there is a way in which relationality is always already inscribed with war. Even if the swirling eddy of egoistic enjoyment is a kind of "second" moment, it seems to be one that grows out of this primordial war. (In other words, there is a sense in which "Cartesian dualism" is "rigorously preserved" by Levinas.) It is against this backdrop that I understand the language and descriptions of Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence pertaining to substitution, persecution, and hostage-taking. Don't we simply have here the inversion of egoism?39

So too, Olthuis suggests that Levinas' philosophy 'seems to valorize the often adversarial quality of interpersonal relations as the inexorable human condition (which we then need to transcend to be ethical), rather than to envisage such opposition itself as the breakdown of relations of mutuality in which my self-interest and the self-interest of the other may interface with each other to the harmonious enjoyment and enrichment of both parties.'40

But is the self totally incapable of being in relation with the Other without violating them? Is ontological self-interest and egoism the sum total of the human self? Does the relationship with the Other, to protect the Other from totalising violence, have to be one of asymmetry,

40 Olthuis, "Face-to-Face," 136.
distance, separation? And, if the relationship between the self and the Other does contain an element of tension, then what of the future? Do Levinas or Derrida offer a possibility, a hope, for the overcoming of this tension? Do they envisage an end to inter-subjective conflict? That is, to what extent do their respective philosophies offer a hope of redemption, a move beyond tension and oppositional conflict, to a bright messianic future? Such questions inevitably lead us to a brief but necessary foray into a consideration of Levinas' and Derrida's understandings of eschatology and teleology.

**Eschatology and Teleology**

Eschatological and teleological ideas are constantly at play, either implicitly or explicitly, within Levinas' and Derrida's thinking, leading commentators such as Richard Kearney to propose that their philosophies are a 'sort of Messianic eschatology.' However, as one would expect, the Levinasian and Derridean understanding of such ideas is complex. Derrida states that while interrogating 'the idea of an eschaton or telos in the absolute formulations of classical philosophy... that does not mean I dismiss all forms of Messianic or prophetic eschatology. I think that all genuine questioning is summoned by a certain type of eschatology, though it is impossible to define this eschatology in philosophical terms.' Similarly, Levinas states that:

> I must express my reservations about the term eschatology. The term eschaton implies that there might exist a finality, an end (fin) to the historical relation of difference between man and the absolutely Other, a reduction of the gap which safeguards the alterity of the transcendent, to a totality of sameness. To realize the eschaton would therefore mean that we could seize or appropriate God as a telos and degrade the infinite relation with the other to a finite fusion. This is

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42 Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other," 119.
what Hegelian dialectics amounts to, a radical denial of the rupture between the ontological and the ethical.\footnote{Levinas, "Ethics of the Infinite," 66.}

For Levinas, ‘the danger of eschatology is the temptation to consider the man-God relation as a state, as a fixed and permanent state of affairs.’ In contrast to his theme of ethical responsibility, described ‘as insomnia or wakefulness precisely because it is a perpetual duty of vigilance and effort which can never slumber’, Levinas argues that ‘ontology as a state of affairs can afford sleep.’\footnote{Ibid.}

Once again, both Levinas and Derrida express the concern that eschatology and teleology, as traditionally understood, stem from an ontology of totality, one which closes down and fixes the future, thereby offering the foundation for ethical irresponsibility and inaction.\footnote{Thus in his essay “The Ends of Man”, Derrida asserts that ‘the Greek thinking of telos... such a discourse, in Hegel as in the entirety of metaphysics, indissociably coordinates teleology, with an eschatology, a theology, and an ontology. The thinking of the end of man, therefore, is always already inscribed in metaphysics, in the thinking of the truth of man.’ Jacques Derrida, "The Ends of Man," in \textit{Margins of Philosophy}, 109-136, 121. Emphasis original.} But do eschatology and teleology have to be construed in such ways? Are eschatology and teleology of necessity totalising and therefore exclusive of the Other, the Infinite? To what extent does a theological account of eschatology and teleology overcome this Levinasian-Derridean critique? We will return to these questions later in this work, but for now, having noted the Levinasian-Derridean concerns, we return to our major consideration – that of Levinas’ and Derrida’s understanding of inter-subjective relationships and the ontology that underpins such thinking. While there is much to affirm in the work of Levinas and Derrida, our anxiety over particular features of their philosophy – the seeming loss of self-identity, the non-reciprocal and adversarial understanding of inter-subjective relationships, and the lack of hope for redemption from such hostility – ultimately appear symptomatic of the ‘ontology of violence’, which their thought implies. To understand this nuanced critique of
Levinas’ and Derrida’s philosophy – the accusation of ‘ontological violence’ – it is necessary to pause momentarily and clearly define what is understood by the terms ‘metaphysics’ and ‘ontology’ in their respective philosophies.

**Ontology and Metaphysics: A Definition of Terms**

Central to Levinas’ and Derrida’s work is a critique of the western philosophical tradition and the pre-eminence given to ontology. It is therefore important to understand the confusing and slippery nature of the terms ‘metaphysics’ and ‘ontology’ as they appear in their writings. For Levinas, ontology is the totalising discourse that legitimates and reifies the sphere of the Same. Whether it be Heidegger’s discourse of Being, or Hegel’s philosophy of Spirit, Levinas rails against an ontology in which the Being of our subjective cogito or the Being of the immanent and finite cosmos is given an all-encompassing universality. Robyn Horner observes:

> Instead of following the ontological path, Levinas suggests that we pursue a genuine metaphysics, one that has an eye, or perhaps an ear for transcendence and the ethical.... Levinas characterizes metaphysics as a radical aiming at exteriority (transascendence), an exteriority that is beyond our theoretical comprehension, beyond the realm of being and of knowledge, beyond what can be reduced to the Same.⁴⁶

Adhering to his contention that ontological thought totalises and causes violence, Levinas offers a metaphysic that gives pre-eminence to the lived experience, to the ethical encounter with the Other. While initially Levinas embraced the thinking of his earlier teacher Heidegger in seeking a philosophy that gave priority to questions of embodied lived experience and existence, he soon turned away from and became

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critical of Heideggerian thought due to the way in which Heidegger’s thought became an ‘all encompassing strategy for grasping life in understanding.’ As John Llewelyn notes: ‘Levinas’s ontology calls into question the fundamentality of the ‘ontological difference,’ the distinction between being and beings, between the ontological and the ontic upon which [Heidegger’s] Being and Time takes its stand.... Levinas’s ontology stands for the ontological significance of concrete empirical, hence ontic experience.’ While for Heidegger the horizon by which all things are judged is being, for Levinas the horizon is the Other.

Important to note here is the fact that Levinas uses the term ‘metaphysics’ in a positive sense. For Levinas, ‘metaphysics’ is the relationship with the Infinite Other that overcomes the totalising violence of ontology. In place of an ontology of sameness – a totality – Levinas offers a metaphysic of otherness and difference – an alternative ontology of infinity. This Levinasian project of developing a philosophy of ethical metaphysics is fundamentally different from Derrida’s project of deconstructing the ‘metaphysics of presence’. While in Levinas’ writing the term ‘metaphysic’ is used positively – in opposition to ontology – in Derrida’s writing, the term ‘metaphysics’ has negative connotations, with Derrida’s ‘metaphysics of presence’ being akin to Levinas’ ontology of sameness.

Derrida’s and Levinas’ critique of the totalising nature of western ontological philosophy leads them to attempt to overcome the capacity for violence that both philosophers see in transcendental, universal accounts reliant on ontological claims. ‘Metaphysics begins’, Derrida argues, ‘when theory criticizes itself as ontology, as the dogmatism and spontaneity of the same, and when metaphysics, in departing from itself, lets itself be put into question by the other in the movement of ethics. Although in fact it is secondary, metaphysics as the critique of ontology is rightfully

47 Ibid., 55.
and philosophically primary. In this sense, therefore, both Levinas' and Derrida's philosophy can be seen as continuing in the stream of the larger philosophical attempts to overcome metaphysics.

But is such a philosophy – a post-metaphysical philosophy – really possible, or for that matter ultimately necessary? And, what are the implications of such a quest for theology? Can one conceive of a post-metaphysical theology?

David Wood points to the fact that Derrida's philosophy, while seeking 'not to retread too many of the paths of metaphysics...' is ultimately itself inescapably metaphysical by nature, contending that 'Derrida's deconstructive strategy...[is] wedded to transcendental modes of thought...'. Indeed, even while seeking to overcome metaphysics of presence, Derrida himself acknowledges the impossibility of escaping from metaphysics. In his famous essay, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', reflecting on Nietzsche's, Freud's and Heidegger's critique of metaphysical concepts such as truth, consciousness and being as presence,

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50 Perhaps the best example of an attempt at developing such a post-metaphysical theology is the work of Derrida's former pupil, Jean-Luc Marion. See Jean-Luc Marion, God Without Being, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991). For a criticism of the impossibility of such a task – the belief that 'a vauntedly non-metaphysical theology always collapses back into the worst metaphysics' – and the argument that one only has to construe of God without Being, 'if Being has already been strictly correlated with knowledge', see John Milbank, "Can A Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," Modern Theology 11, no. 1 (1995): 119-161, 141.
51 David Wood, The Deconstruction of Time, ed. John Sallis (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1989), 297, 311. Horner, while observant of the distinction between Derridean and Kantian understandings of the transcendental, notes the way in which Derrida's thought slips into a transcendental mode in his reflections on the gift. In speaking of exteriority, Derrida insists that he does not mean 'a simple ineffable exteriority that would be transcendent and without relation' and yet, in referring to the gift as the 'first mover of the circle' (Given Time, 30) Horner asks why Derrida uses language 'that has resonated so forcefully in the context of "onto-theology?"' Horner, Rethinking God, 189. Likewise, James K.A. Smith, noting the irony that 'the progenitor of deconstruction and purveyor of poststructuralism' would 'offer a pure, transcendent universal structure of religion,' wonders whether this is not 'a little incroyable, maybe even a little sacrilegious?' James K.A. Smith, "Determined Violence: Derrida's Structural Violence," The Journal of Religion 78, no. 2 (April 1998): 197-212, 203-04.
Derrida concludes that all such ‘destructive discourses are trapped in a kind of circle.’ He continues:

This circle is unique. It describes the form of the relation between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics. There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.\textsuperscript{52}

Derrida concedes that ‘we cannot do without the concept of the sign, for we cannot give up this metaphysical complicity without also giving up the critique we are directing against this complicity’.\textsuperscript{53} Elsewhere, he admits that ‘différance remains a metaphysical name, and all the names that it receives in our language are still, as names, metaphysical’,\textsuperscript{54} and in an interview, candidly states: ‘the idea that we might be able to get outside of metaphysics has always struck me as naïve.’\textsuperscript{55}

This impossibility of escaping from the discourse of metaphysics, the impossibility of escaping ontological concepts, is likewise one acknowledged by Levinas. For Levinas, the emergence of the Third person necessitates a shift from a ‘pure’ ethical relationship into the realm of the ‘political’ and therefore of ontology. Levinas states:

The temporality of the interhuman opens up the meaning of otherness and the otherness of meaning. But because there are more than two people in the world, we invariably pass from the ethical perspective of alterity to the ontological perspective of totality. There are always at least three persons. This means that we are


\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 281.


\textsuperscript{55} Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other," 111.
obliged to ask who is the other, to try to objectively define the undefinable, to compare the incomparable in an effort to juridically hold different positions together. So that the first type of simultaneity is a simultaneity of equality, the attempt to reconcile and balance the conflicting claims of each person. If there were only two people in the world there would be no need for law courts because I would always be responsible for, and before, the other. As soon as there are three, the ethical relationship with the other becomes political and enters into the totalising discourse of ontology.

*We can never completely escape from the language of ontology and politics.*

*Even when we deconstruct ontology we are obliged to use its language.*

Important to note therefore, is that while highly critical of the totalising nature of ontological philosophies, and seeking to continue the Heideggerian task of overcoming metaphysics, both Levinas’ and Derrida’s philosophies of hospitality, like all philosophical discourses, are themselves, trapped in the ‘circle’ of metaphysics. Even their attempts to articulate ethical-hospitable philosophies, in which primacy is given to the ontic ethical encounter with the Other and inter-human subjectivity, while subordinating ontology are still dependent on an ontology.

Wood concludes:

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56 Levinas, "Ethics of the Infinite," 57. Emphasis added. This understanding that it is the emergence of the Third that leads us into the necessity of the ‘political’ is likewise, expressed in Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 68.

57 When addressing the question, ‘Must not Levinas’ ethics depend upon an ontology then?’, Bettina Bergo notes that:

Yes, although the answer to this question is complex, it remains true that ethics subordinates ontology while requiring it. There is a Levinasian ontology, but it is not first philosophy, because the questions, What is Being?, and What is the relationship of Beings to beings? are not the fundamental questions of philosophy for Levinas. The fundamental question of philosophy concerns a way of being of human consciousness whose immediacy escapes thematization and philosophy to a certain extent. This refers to a consciousness *in relation* to the other person. It is not to the comprehension of being that we must look in order to understand what is essential in human existence. Rather, it is to human being-in-relation, or to being-for-the-other that we turn to grasp the sense of being and the ethical.
Derrida has transformed the way we think about, and read (or perhaps write), philosophy, he has transformed our understanding of the relationship between the inside and the outside of philosophy, but his strategic dependence on such metaphysical values as "authorial intention" and on formally transcendental arguments essentially limit his achievement.... his lesson, or the lesson to be drawn from him, is not merely that as he says, there is no sense in doing without metaphysical concepts in trying to overcome metaphysics, but there is no prospect whatever of eliminating metaphysical concepts and strategies. Rather the project of overcoming metaphysics (Merlau-Ponty said of the phenomenological reduction) must be repeated indefinitely.58

For Levinas and Derrida, in the history of Western philosophy, ontology has always been a totality of sameness, and thus their response is to advocate for a metaphysics/ontology of infinity and otherness. However, our analysis and evaluation of the work of Levinas and Derrida ultimately lead to a number of important questions and observations: To what extent is Levinas’ and Derrida’s critique of the totalising, logocentric, nature of Western philosophy also true of the theological enterprise? That is, is theology – the attempt to give an account of the character and actions of God – likewise a discourse of totality and sameness, one that therefore excludes the Other? To what extent is all theology of necessity a form of onto-theology? Do sameness and otherness have to

58 Wood, The Deconstruction of Time, 317. In this sense, the philosophical work of Levinas and Derrida can be interpreted in two ways. While some read Levinas’ and Derrida’s attempt to escape metaphysics as an enterprise inevitably doomed to failure – i.e. John Milbank – others take a more sympathetic view and argue that the work of Levinas, Derrida and Marion functions at the limits of phenomenology. Robyn Horner notes that the distinction between Levinas (and Derrida) and Marion is that while ‘with Levinas... the leap of faith is recognized without our having to commit to it’, for Marion, the theme of the saturated phenomenon as revelatory entails a move from pure description to judgment, and therefore a move beyond classical phenomenology. See particularly chapter 6 ‘The Limits of Phenomenology’, in Horner, Rethinking God, 153-83.
be seen as mutually exclusive or in a constant state of oppositional conflict? Is it possible to conceive of an ontology in which sameness/unity and otherness/difference co-exist peacefully?

As Olthuis asks: ‘Is an ethical asymmetry (with priority of the other person) the only alternative to either manipulative relationships (with the other as object) or the balanced exchange of economic transactions?’59 Or, can we envisage an ethical relationality of genuine mutuality and reciprocity? Might it be that part of the Levinasian-Derridean critique of ontology stems from an assumption that knowledge of what is Other, entails ‘power-over’60 this Other; that knowledge of the Other is inevitably violent and violating; that is, that in Levinasian and Derridean thought it is supposed that epistemology subverts relationality? *But is human knowledge and theorising of necessity violent? Is the very act of conscious representation, of recognising and discerning the Other inherently an act of totalisation and violation? What if knowledge was not understood as ‘power-over’, but rather ‘power-with’, if epistemology, rather than being primary, was seen as inextricably dependent on a prior ontological relationality? What if one began with an ontology that privileged relationality over epistemology, and mutuality and exchange over distance and asymmetry?* Rubenstein suggests that:

Only if ontology is understood as always-already relational can the self give without subsuming the other or destroying it. Only within a non-oppositional scheme of selfhood and otherness (and a non-identical scheme of otherness and Otherness) does the self find itself in the interplay of giving, given selves, constituted and maintained through their participation in divine intersubjectivity, a constant play of unity and difference.61

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59 Olthuis, "Face-to-Face," 153.
60 Ibid., 146.
Such an ontology, as Ricoeur suggests, is 'one that does justice in turn to the primacy of self-esteem and also to the primacy of the convocation to justice coming from the other.'62 In such an ontology the Same and the Other, rather than being in a state of oppositional conflict interpenetrate one another, and 'communication', 'reciprocity' and 'exchange' are construed as the essential and constitutive elements of the relationship between the self and the Other.63 Such an ontology, one of 'benevolent spontaneity' in which 'receiving is on an equal footing with the summons to responsibility',64 is apparent in the Christian accounts of the doctrines of Creation

62 Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, 331.
63 Ricoeur takes issue with Levinas' thought, contending that 'what the hyperbole of separation renders unthinkable is the distinction between self and I, and the formation of a concept of selfhood defined by its openness and its capacity for discovery.' In direct response to Levinas' hyperbole of separation, Ricoeur, in a lengthy but significant passage which summarises many of our key emphases thus far, writes:

Now the theme of exteriority does not reach the end of its trajectory, namely awakening a responsible response to the other's call, except by presupposing a capacity of reception, of discrimination, and of recognition that, in my opinion, belongs to another philosophy of the Same than that to which the philosophy of the Other replies. If interiority were indeed determined solely by the desire for retreat and closure, how could it ever hear a word addressed to it, which would seem so foreign to it that this word would be as nothing for an isolated existence? One has to grant a capacity of reception to the self that is the result of a reflexive structure, better defined by its power of reconsidering preexisting objectifications than by an initial separation. Even more important, must we not join to this capacity of reception a capacity of discernment and recognition, taking into account the fact that the otherness of the Other cannot be summed up in what seems to be just one of the figures of the Other, that of a master who teaches, once we have to consider as well the figure of the offender in Otherwise than Being? And what are we to say of the Other when he is the executioner? And who will be able to distinguish the master from the executioner, a master who calls for a disciple and the master who requires a slave? As for the master who teaches, does he not ask to be recognized in his very superiority? In other words, must not the voice of the Other who says to me; "Thou shall not kill," become my own, to the point of becoming my conviction, a conviction to equal the accusative of "It's me here!" with the nominative of "Here I stand"? Finally, to mediate the opening of the Same onto the Other and the internalization of the voice of the Other in the Same, must not language contribute its resources of communication, hence of reciprocity, as is attested by the exchange of personal pronouns... an exchange that reflects a more radical one, that of question and answer in which the roles are continually reversed? In short, is it not necessary that a dialogue superpose a relation on the supposedly absolute distance between the separate I and the teaching Other?

Ibid., 339. Emphasis added.
64 Ricoeur writes:
and the Trinity. It is the distinct ontology that stems from these doctrines which will be the theme of our next chapter.

Summary

We commenced this work contending that in a world where the Other is increasingly seen as a threat, and where professionalisation and commercialisation are rife, there is the urgent need for a reinvigoration of an ethic of hospitality. The work of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida seeks to respond to such a world by offering an alternative account of human ethical behaviour.

However, while providing an initial stepping stone, a closer analysis of the philosophies of Levinas and Derrida, has raised a number of concerns. Succinctly put, in seeking to overcome the imperialism of the self, Levinas and Derrida offer an account of human relations in which the elevation of the Other appears accompanied by 'a necessary disinterest in self-concern.' That is, the Levinasian-Derridean account of hospitality stresses ethical asymmetry, and relationships of unidirectionality. But does not such an ethic of self-sacrifice and the 'descriptions of self-extolling passivity,' as Olthuis asks, 'risk being understood as the glorification of victimization?' And, is there not, underlying such an account, the belief that not

Our wager is that it is possible to dig down under the level of obligation and to discover an ethical sense not so completely buried under norms that it cannot be invoked when these norms themselves are silent, in the case of undecidable matters of conscience. That is why it is so important to us to give solicitude a more fundamental status than obedience to duty. Its status is that of benevolent spontaneity, intimately related to self-esteem within the framework of the aim of the 'good' life. On the basis of this benevolent spontaneity, receiving is on an equal footing with the summons to responsibility... [I]t compensates for the initial dissymmetry resulting from the primacy of the other in the situation of instruction, through the reverse movement of recognition.

Ibid., 190. Emphasis original.

65 Olthuis, "Face-to-Face," 146.
66 Ibid., 147.
only are inter-subjective relationships inevitably of an adversarial and conflictual nature, but also that such conflict is embedded in the very fabric of the created world?

In contrast to such thinking, we will offer, in section two of this work a theological account in which the human capacity for the practice of hospitality stems from an ontology of peace and communion. From the doctrines of the Creation and the Trinity emerges an ontology of *communion* in which human existence is understood not as primordial struggle, but rather as gift; where relationality is understood not in adversarial or oppositional terms but as characterised by mutuality and reciprocal gift-exchange. The supreme performative action of divine hospitality — the incarnation of Jesus Christ and his life and death — is to be understood not as an act of self-sacrificing violence, but rather as a gift offered back to the Father, which therefore overcomes human hostility. Those who, taking the leap of faith have their lives re-narrated according to this meta-narrative, participate in God’s eschatological hospitality and thus offer nourishing hope to the world. It is to an exposition of this narrative that that we now turn our attention.
Chapter Four.

Gifted, Called & Named:
Trinitarian Personhood and an Ontology of Communion

‘Man, made in the image of the Trinity, can only realize the divine likeness if he lives a common life such as the blessed Trinity lives: as the three persons of the Godhead ‘dwell’ in one another, so a man must ‘dwell’ in his fellow men, living not for himself alone, but in and for others.’

• Timothy Ware

The work of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida has been of major significance in its critique of the modern Western understanding of selfhood and identity. For both Levinas and Derrida, western conceptions of human identity and personhood post-Descartes are deeply disturbing. In placing the *cogito* at the centre of his philosophy, Descartes and his successors give primacy to consciousness and conceive of the human person as a self-constituted entity. Philosophy which gives primacy to consciousness has, argue Levinas and Derrida, always given priority to the ‘I’ and turned the Other into an object. They conclude that such philosophy leads ultimately to the dehumanisation of humanity and the death camps of the holocaust.

In response to such thinking, Levinas and Derrida present philosophies which offer a radically different conception of personhood and identity. In Levinasian and Derridean thought the autonomous *cogito* of the self at the centre of philosophical thought is replaced by the Other. Philosophy and ethics, argue Levinas and Derrida, do not begin with the self-reflexive consciousness of the ‘I’ but rather begin with the call, the address, of the Other. Otherness and difference means that the Other is always beyond the understanding of the self. The relationship between the self and

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the Other is not one of symmetry, of understanding and comprehension, but rather is a relationship characterised by excess. The excess of the Other entails a relationality of asymmetry, in which sameness gives way to separation and the radical exteriority of the Other.

While endorsing the removal of the Cartesian-self from the centre of philosophy, the alternative conception of the self that Levinas and Derrida offer is, we contend, somewhat troubling. The ‘deconstructed self’, put forward by post-structuralist thought, ultimately appears to be a non-self. Such an understanding of selfhood is lauded by Derrida’s friend, Mark C. Taylor, who, in *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology*, speaks of such a deconstructed self as a ‘careless wanderer’. For Taylor, the self is a ‘serpentine character... rootless and nomadic (originless), as well as ex-centric and exorbitant (centreless), the erring trace is purposeless and aimless (endless).’ ‘The wanderer’ Taylor declares enthusiastically, ‘has no certain destination, goal, aim, purpose, or end.’

But does self-hood and identity so conceived, really accord with an understanding and practice of genuine hospitality? While agreeing with the post-modern rejection of the Cartesian self, James Olthuis believes ‘Taylor’s erring wanderer is a scary, sad, desolate figure, nameless, impersonal, and incurably wounded’ and asks whether it is possible for ‘such a postmodern person, without home and without purpose,’ to be ‘called to responsibility?’ Is not ‘such an anonymous person’, Olthuis wonders, ‘a difference that makes no difference – a difference that is the same, because there is no longer any uniqueness?’ Indeed, far from assisting the development of an ethos and culture of hospitality, it has been argued that the non-self of post-modern thought is the inevitable product of late modern capitalism, that the deconstructed post-modern self is the inescapable consequence of the scepticism of the Cartesian self turned

\[\text{\textsuperscript{2}} \quad \text{Mark C. Taylor, } \textit{Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology} \text{ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 157.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{3}} \quad \text{James H. Olthuis, } \textit{"Crossing the Threshold: Sojourning Together in the Wild Spaces of Love," in The Hermeneutics of Charity, 23-40, 28.}\]
upon itself.4 Or, as Colin Gunton puts it: ‘postmodernism is modernity come home to roost.’5 But, if this is the case, does a post-modern conception of self – one with no fixed identity, no sense of ‘home’ – rather than responding to our contemporary malaise in which people are re-branded and labelled, and hospitality reduced to a marketable commodity, actually perpetuate such tendencies? Elizabeth Newman, noting this connection between the empty non-self of post-modern thought and contemporary consumerism, writes:

The very idea of hospitality requires not only a “hospice,” a home, but also a particular kind of giving and receiving. An empty self is unable to conceive of the fact that he or she has something to give, something to offer. Such a self is also, oddly enough, unable truly to receive.... the empty self consumes in order to feed or fix the emptiness. But consuming is different from receiving. Consuming has about it an air of desperation as the consumer seeks to create a persona or satisfy a fabricated need.6

This association between the fragmented empty self of post-modern thought and the culture of consumerism that dominates the contemporary world is also made by Oliver Davies. Davies writes:

In the modern world our encounter with otherness, with the alien or strange, begins not at the borders of the self, but rather within the self, at the very core of our identity, and in a way that challenges the self-possession of the subject. Lacking an uncontested centre, the self comes to its own self-awareness through its acquisitive demands: we exist unequivocally as consumers. Our appetite for goods defines

4 See Nicholas Boyle, Who Are We Now? (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).
our existence, and is reflected in the enticements of the commercial cosmos of advertising and sales.\(^7\)

This understanding, of the fragmented self as both the product, and simultaneously, the philosophical impetus/basis for the culture of commoditised consumerism which prevails particularly in Western societies in the global village, is summarised well by Davies:

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\text{Difference, as 'alterity', 'negation', 'absence', or 'the o/Other', pervades the formations of the modern mind, and is deeply embedded in modern life, consciousness and society. Fracture and individualization, within the specifically modern cosmos of commercialized globalization, are the norms of our Western societies. The deterritorialization and 'schizophrenia' of global capitalism endlessly and orgiastically repeat the alienations of individual desire. Consensus can be little more than pragmatism, and commonality the shared values of nationalism and organized self-defence.}\(^8\)
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With such an understanding of the self, in which personhood is not something we intrinsically are, but rather is an added quality – a new product that we acquire, a new ‘lifestyle’ we adopt – is it any wonder that hospitality becomes reduced – and debased – to a series of consumptive exercises which aesthetic individuals participate in, and that the highest personal virtue emphasised is one of tolerance?\(^9\) Could it be


\(^8\) Ibid., 4.

\(^9\) For an outline of the theological justification for the practice of tolerance, see David Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 72-93. Luke Bretherton, influenced by the thinking of communitarian philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, argues that the problem with tolerance understood as substantive good, is that such accounts of tolerance are based upon a liberal conception of the good and the liberal conceptions of rationality upon which this itself is based. Bretherton is critical of such a notion of tolerance, and offers the theologically specified notion of hospitality as the means of fostering respect for the ‘Other’. See Luke Bretherton, "Tolerance, Education and Hospitality: A Theological Proposal," *Studies in*
that the homeless, deconstructed non-self offered to us by post-structuralist thought, with its accompanying ethos of tolerance and rituals of acquisitive consumption, far from offering hope to the problems of the contemporary world, actually exacerbates the misunderstanding and divisions which seem to beset us and lead to conflict?

Stated simply, our thesis is that while strongly sympathetic with the post-structuralist project, the conception of selfhood offered by Levinas and Derrida, and the ontology upon which this self is based, are less than satisfactory. In seeking to overthrow the history of Western philosophical thought, a history in which ontology is seen as ‘totalitarian’ – a totality of sameness – Levinas and Derrida advocate for a philosophy of infinity and otherness. But does the overthrow of the Cartesian self constituted by self-conscious reflexivity, of necessity require a complete overthrow of ontology? Can we really speak of a non-self, a self, which ironically, appears to be obliterated of its particularity and uniqueness? Can such a self – a self with no fixed identity, devoid of uniqueness, nameless and wounded – really be a hospitable self? For genuine hospitality to exist is there not the need for a recognition and respect of both the guest’s and host’s mutual uniqueness? Indeed, does one not require a metaphysical ‘home’ if one is to provide hospitality to the Other? Such questioning ultimately leads us therefore back to the questions posed towards the end of our first section. That is:

*Do sameness and otherness have to be seen as mutually exclusive or in a constant state of oppositional conflict? Or, is it possible to conceive of an ontology in which sameness/unity and otherness/difference co-exist peacefully?*

*To what extent is Levinas’ and Derrida’s critique of the totalising, logos-centric, nature of Western philosophy also true of the theological enterprise?*

That is, is theology – the attempt to give an account of the character and actions of God – likewise, a discourse of totality and sameness, one that therefore excludes the Other?

John Zizioulas, on whose theology we will draw below, maintains that if we start with the presupposition that personhood is not ‘a quality to be added, as it were, to being’ – that rather than beginning with an assumption that personhood is something that someone has, we assume that personhood is something that someone is – then ‘the assertion of personal identity’, the question “Who am I?”, ‘has the claim of absolute being, that is a metaphysical claim, built into it.’

For Zizioulas, ‘the expression ‘I am’ cannot be understood apart from some kind of transcendence, from what might be called ‘metaphysics.’ Thus, far from being an intellectual dead-end, or the major contributor to the moral morass of our day, it is metaphysics, we will argue, that is central to any attempt to develop an understanding of a hospitable self.

In what follows, we will argue that rather than being implicated in the Levinasian and Derridean critique of ontology, Christian theology – particularly in the doctrines of the Trinity and Creation – provides an alternative ontology which protects the uniqueness and particularity of both the Other and the self, while simultaneously positing peaceful human relationality and communion/unity as possibilities.

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11 Ibid., 100-101.

12 In a similar vein Oliver Davies states: ‘The historical Christian commitment to an implicit metaphysic is such therefore that the wholesale renunciation of an explicit metaphysic would be the significant loss of a higher language by which the Christian and perhaps other religious communities can offer a controlling resource for the shaping of the implicit self who lives and acts in a world of God’s making.’ Davies, *Theology of Compassion*, 9.

13 We have already noted previously the ‘slipperiness’ of the term ontology. While both Levinas and Derrida would argue that their projects are ethical and thus not concerned with ontology, along with others we maintain that underlying their philosophical thought are a number of ontological presuppositions. Our premise is that while offering philosophies that speak of the relation between the self and the Other, even when not making explicit ontological statements, our interlocutors still offer a concealed ontology. In this sense, Oliver Davies provides a useful
and otherness co-exist peacefully, is characterised not by oppositional difference and power, but by freedom and love. It is to the elaboration of such an ontology, an ontology of hospitality, that we now turn.

The Doctrine of Creation: Freedom and Otherness

Our starting point for developing a theological account of hospitality and the elaboration of an alternative ontology of personhood, motivated by the desire to continue our conversation with our ‘Jewish’ interlocutors, begins appropriately with a shared narrative, that of the Judeo-Christian doctrine of Creation. The account one gives of creation reveals one’s ontological views, and from its earliest origins, the Judeo-Christian account of creation was illustrative of an ontology radically divergent from other religions and philosophies. While sharing many stylistic similarities with other Ancient Near East creation narratives – including the Akkadian epic of Atrahasis, the Babylonian creation story Enuma Elish, and other Sumerian-Mesopotamian and Egyptian mythological stories – the Judeo-Christian description of creation in Genesis operated as a polemic against these alternative accounts. Ancient Near East cosmologies, despite their differences, shared similar conceptions of both divinity and humanity and were grounded in a similar ontology. The world was created from existing material, out of the conflict and struggle of the gods, and human beings were either seen as an afterthought, or were created to serve

definition of our ‘slippery’ term. Davies writes: ‘If existence or ‘being’ is the medium of relation between self and other, then ontology can be defined as the thinking of that relation.’ Ibid., 49.

As we have already noted, both Levinas’ and Derrida’s personal life experience – as ‘Jewish’ exiles, who receive the ‘welcome’ of France – and their subsequent writings raise intriguing questions regarding the notion of identity. The extent to which both Levinas and Derrida ‘live in the difference between the Jew and the Greek’ is explicitly raised by Derrida in his essay “Violence and Metaphysics”. Having engaged with James Joyce’s Ulysses, Derrida poignantly concludes by asking: ‘And what is the legitimacy, what is the meaning of the copula in this proposition from perhaps the most Hegelian of modern novelists; “Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet”? Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 153. For a biography on Derrida, which explores Derrida’s in-between identity in Joycean terms, see Hélène Cixous, Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint, (New York: Colombia University Press, 2004).
as slaves to the lazy and unpredictable gods.\textsuperscript{15} In contrast to these polytheistic cosmologies with a low view of humanity, in which conflict and violence are seen as primordial, the Judeo-Christian account of creation spoke of a world that came into existence not through violence or death but rather through the creative word of Elohim. Humanity, in the Biblical account, far from being inconsequential, or consigned to slavery of the gods, is the climax of the creative activity of God.\textsuperscript{16}

The biblical account of creation given in the book of Genesis served a polemic function, providing a distinct and contrasting understanding of personhood from those of the surrounding Ancient Near-Eastern cultures. So too, the doctrine of creation, and the underlying ontological assumptions upon which such an account was founded, were of significant import to the Christian theologians of the first centuries as they sought to reconcile their biblical faith with the assumptions of ancient Greek philosophy. While differing around many themes, all ancient Greek philosophy, from Parmenides, the grandfather of Greek philosophy, through to Plato and Aristotle, essentially held to an ontological monism, in which the real is One and is eternally existent. Accordingly, Parmenides states in Way of Truth:

\textsuperscript{15} See for instance the Babylonian Creation story, Enuma Elish.

\textsuperscript{16} One of the classic works outlining the difference between Mesopotamian and biblical cosmologies is that of J.J. Finkelstein, "The West, the Bible and the Ancient East: Apperceptions and Categorisations," \textit{Man} 9, no. 4 (1974): 591-608. Finkelstein notes that: 'The biblical god is 'wholly other' in a sense that is in sharpest contrast with the otherness of the Mesopotamian gods. Apart from his incorporeality, he is not identifiable with, nor is he immanent in, any single physical or visible force of nature. Yet, in further contrast to the Mesopotamian gods, his presence and immediate accessibility to mankind are intrinsic to the conception of him' (596). While below we will argue that it is these contrasting attributes – otherness and yet accessibility – which provide the basis for a distinctive ontology from which a Christian understanding of selfhood stems, Finkelstein, akin to others whose work we will survey below, sees the biblical question ‘What is Man?’ and its ‘triumphant response’ as problematic (599). Finkelstein argues that ‘Where the biblical consciousness assimilated the not-self to the self, Mesopotamian consciousness was at pains to explain the self in terms of the non-self’ (599). Following the logic of a short but hugely influential – and arguably flawed – work by Lynn White Jr., Finkelstein suggests that the ‘anthropotheological structure’ established upon this biblical view of man, ‘is incompatible with the aim of the preservation of the human species’ (604). See Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," \textit{Science} 155 (1967): 1203-1207.
How could what is perish? How could is have come to be? For if it came into being, it is not; nor is it if ever it is going to be. Thus coming into being is extinguished, and destruction unknown.17

While Plato questioned this extreme view of the Parmenidean One, his recognition of the existence of others within his philosophy was still dependent on the One. In the last of his eight hypotheses, Plato concludes:

If there is no One, but only things other than one, what must follow? The others will not be one; but neither will they be many. For if they are to be many, there must be a one among them; since, if none of them is one thing, they will all be no-thing, and so not many either... Therefore, if there is no One, the others neither are, nor can be imagined to be one or many... If there is not One, there is nothing at all.18

Similarly, while Plato in his work Timaeus professes faith in a creator, the act of creation by the demiurge is not an ontologically free act of creation, but rather, the creative process involves pre-existing material and is determined by adherence to ideas such as Beauty and Goodness and the circumstances and conditions of pre-existing space.19 Likewise, Plato’s most famous student, Aristotle, states: ‘Nothing could have come to be out of what is not, for there must be something present as substrate.’20

Ultimately, it is these ontological assumptions upon which ancient Greek philosophy rested – ex nihilo nihil fit (nothing out of nothing), and the prioritising of unity and Oneness over against otherness and the Many – which seem to shape the thought of

18 Quoted from Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 15, n.4.
19 Ibid., 14-19.
20 Aristotle, Phys. 191A, 23.
Derrida, in particular his concepts of *khôra* derived from Plato’s *Timaeus* and his understanding of *différence*. Thus, according to John D. Caputo, for Derrida, ‘there is another way to be sans l’être, beyond the border of being.’ This place, called *khôra*, ‘is neither form (idée) nor sensible thing, but the place (lieu) in which the demiurge impresses or cuts images of the intelligible paradigms, the place which was already there, which while radically heterogenous with the forms, seems to be as old as the forms.’

Caputo, drinking deeply from the well of *différence*, offers a Derridean-like interpretation of the Genesis creation narrative, positing that ‘creation is not a pure act without a patient, like a pure dance without a partner, not a pure perfect exnihilatory performance, an absolute act carried out entirely in a sphere all its own.’ Rather, Caputo argues, ‘when Elohim began to create the world, things had evidently already begun…. this famous beginning turns out to be a non-original origin, a beginning that, like every beginning, begins where one already is, the absolute origin having already receded from view in a time out of mind.’ For Caputo, ‘the act of creation is inscribed in something that received the creative operation…. the creative act is inscribed, or spoken, in a context or a container, in a receptive medium, received by a receiver’. While the Genesis passage may speak of Elohim as the arche, Caputo asserts, ‘there is something there with Elohim’ and argues that this something, is Derrida’s *khôra*, ‘which is a surname for *différence*’. For Caputo, this *khôra-différence*, ‘an inoriginate medium, or milieu, without truth or falsity, without good or evil, a kind of non-originary origin, a groundless ground,’

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23 Ibid.: 93.
24 Ibid.: 93-4.
26 Caputo, “Before Creation,” 98.
Elohim’s partner in the act of creation – is a ‘quasi-transcendental condition’, is ‘our inescapable condition’, ‘marked by a certain “necessity”’. 27

What emerges from this theology of creation is a Derridean world of deconstruction, a world with ‘no well demarcated beginning or end, no absolute arche, no tidy telos’; 28 a world of binary oppositions held uneasily together in constant tension. In such a world: ‘khôra provides an allegory of or a figure for the necessity that every unity of meaning – from the highest to the lowest – is under to be inscribed within différence, by which it is conditioned and precontained as are all the oppositions that are inscribed within it.’ 29

For all its sophistication Caputo’s theologized reading of Derrida here, entailing a Platonic understanding of creation in which a demiurge works on pre-existing material and where creation occurs through the medium, activity and presence of khôra-différence, is both perplexing and problematic. Within such an account of creation, the self, like all being, has no clear beginning or end, nor a fixed sense of identity, but rather is constantly in the process of being formed, reformed and deformed; endlessly open to deconstruction and reconstruction. 30 But, one wonders, if all our various manifestations of the self are already embedded in khôra-différence, if our lives are already conditioned by the ‘necessity’ of khôra-différence, then what happens to human freedom? Caputo does indeed recognise this troubling question.

27 Ibid. In contrast to the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo which he contends ‘is a creation of metaphysics, a fantasy of power and clean pure acts, a creature that was not formed in Genesis, but much later’, Caputo argues that ‘Elohim is the everlasting comrade of the elements [earth, darkness, wind], not their cause or explanation.’ Caputo, ”Before Creation,” 93 & 95. A more thorough analysis of Derrida’s own thinking regarding khôra is contained in his essay ‘Khôra’. See Jacques Derrida, "Khôra," in On the Name, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 87-127. For a fuller discussion of Derrida’s khôra, as interpreted by Caputo, see "Khôra: Being Serious with Plato." in Caputo, ed., Deconstruction in a Nutshell, 71-105.

28 Caputo, ”Before Creation,” 97.

29 Ibid.: 98. Bold emphasis added. Caputo continues: ‘Conditioned by and inscribed in difference, such unities are both constituted and deconstitutable, both formed and reformable or deformable, both constructed and deconstructible, deconstructible because constructed.’

30 See note above.
Having stated that: "Khôra describes the irreducible condition of our lives, the inescapability of living under the conditions of the elemental spacing", Caputo proceeds to ask the rhetorical question: 'is everything we do condemned to conditionality and can we do nothing but trade one condition for another? Is there nothing unconditional?' His response, as one would expect, is to offer a Derridean form of the unconditional, as the stuff 'dreams are made of, the stuff of prayers and tears', 'always to come', that is, like the impossible gift that can never be given or received, or the Messiah who never arrives.31

In contrast to this Derridean-inspired account of Genesis offered by Caputo, and the endlessly 'deconstructive' ontology upon which it is founded, in what follows we will argue that it is the historical doctrine of creatio ex nihilo which in offering a distinct ontology provides a more stable and secure grounding for an understanding of personhood and identity.

Creatio ex nihilo

According to Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, it is the historical doctrine of creatio ex nihilo that offers us the first of two significant planks in the construction and articulation of a distinct Christian ontology. For Zizioulas, the assumptions upon which ancient Greek philosophy rested - ex nihilo nihil fit (out of nothing, nothing comes), and the prioritising of unity and Oneness over against otherness and the Many – were a significant challenge for the earliest Christian theologians as they sought to communicate biblical faith to the world of Greek philosophy. The problem these theologians encountered was the implication of Greek philosophical thinking: that God and the world were not seen as distinct – other – and therefore, logically following, this would mean God's action in creating was not an act of freedom, but rather one of necessity. Such thought, in which Being was seen as necessary and eternally existent, was, Zizioulas maintains, in direct contrast to the Judeo-Christian

31 Caputo, "Before Creation," 97
belief that creation 'did not always exist but came into being out of a free act of the free and transcendent God.'

The ontological implications of these two contrasting accounts of creation are spelt out by Zizioulas, who writes:

> The absence, therefore, of freedom in the act of creation would amount automatically to the loss of ontological otherness, for both the Creator and his creation. Otherness as an ontological category for both the Creator and his creation emerges as a logical imperative when creation is conceived as an act of freedom, that is, as an act that cannot be explained by being itself; it cannot be attributed axiomatically to being itself, but to a factor other than being itself which causes being to be. Creation *ex nihilo* implies that being does not come from being, which would make it necessary being. This, therefore, is the reason why otherness and freedom are interwoven in ontology with regard, in the case under consideration, to the being of creation. Otherness in this case has to be ontological in character or else freedom in the ontological sense disappears: the Creator would be bound up ontologically with his creation.

Put simply: According to the assumptions of Greek ontological thought – in which Being is seen as natural and eternal – creation is construed as an act of necessity and otherness as a diminution from the One. In contrast, in the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* – in which God is understood as separate and distinct from the world and creates out of nothing – creation is conceived as an act of freedom. Thus it is, as

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32 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 15.
33 Ibid., 16. Emphasis original.
34 There is debate regarding the existence of a theology of creation *ex nihilo* within Judaism, prior to, or contemporaneous with the development of such theology within the early church. Gerhard May argues that there is no evidence of a theology of creation *ex nihilo* in the works of Philo, the
Zizioulas asserts, that an ontology of 'freedom and otherness, are interdependent.' 35

Zizioulas summarises:

Otherness is necessary for freedom to exist: if there is no absolute, ontological otherness between God and the world, there is no ontological freedom allowing each of these two 'beings' to be themselves and thus to be at all. 36

Furthermore, in ancient Greek philosophical thought – as in Caputo's Derridean creation theology – Being, understood as eternally existent, has no clearly defined beginning or end and thus lacks a specific telos. In contrast, the Christian doctrine of creatio ex nihilo as well as providing an ontology grounded upon otherness and freedom, also offers – with its conception that creation has both a distinct beginning and therefore a distinct ending – a clear teleology. Such an emphasis upon telos, in stark contrast to the telos-less nature of Levinasian and Derridean thought, is, in light of MacIntyre's thesis already alluded to, an important theme to which we will return later in this work.

**Creation as Violence?**

As well as the importance of the doctrine of creation in outlining our ontological understanding of otherness, freedom and teleology, the ontological assumptions one
holds in approaching the doctrine of creation are also significant with regard to one's understanding of power and relationality. The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* has in recent times become increasingly unfashionable as theologians – particularly process and feminist theologians – express concern at what they see as the problematic 'power' dynamics inherent within the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Common to many of these theologies is the belief that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* provides the basis for the domination of both the non-human world of nature and women. In response, such theologians seek to reinterpret the biblical account, replacing what they perceive as the power-discourse of creation from nothingness, with a *creatio ex profundis*. In their belief that Genesis offers a 'masculine' account of the world in which 'the Divine exists beyond it, symbolized as a combination of male seminal and cultural power (word-act) that shapes it from above'\(^38\) such approaches often involve the jettisoning of the biblical account altogether and the grounding of their theology in alternative creation narratives.\(^39\)

But a number of ontological assumptions lie beneath these critiques. Firstly, *creatio ex nihilo* can only be construed as an act of violence, if one construes non-being, the

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\(^{37}\) We have already observed above, the way in which the Christian doctrine of *creation ex nihilo*, with its emphasis on otherness, is construed by anthropologists and scientists – i.e. J.J. Finkelstein and Lynn White Jnr. – as the cause of ecological degradation. (See note 16 above). Catherine Keller, along with others, also explicitly connects the doctrine with the abuse of women. Hence she writes:

> [T]hat it is not latent biblical logic but the polemic against "heresy" that crystallized earlier narratives of beginning into the "orthodox" doctrine of origin; that this absolute origin extrudes the Christian metanarrative as a single line stretching from the beginning to the end of history; and that this rhetorical extrusion draws its driving omnipotence from a drama of gender. Cosmology, indeed "the creation," matters in these original arguments only as the arena of salvation – as the eschatological theatre of patristic Christianity. As it hardens, this narrative of omnipotent origin vaporizes any residual, female-tinged chaos.


\(^{39}\) Accordingly, both Ruether and Keller, like Finkelstein, have a strong affinity for Babylonian and Canaanite cosmologies, suggesting that the mythologies of the Ancient Near-East, in which '[t]he Divine is within, not transcendent to, the matrix of chaos-cosmos' provides the material for a more ecological and feminine affirming ethic. See Ibid., 76, and Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 103-123.
'feminine' chaos, as having some form of ontological status – i.e. akin to Caputo's Platonic-Derridean reading of creation. Yet, as Rowan Williams puts it: 'Power is exercised by x over y; but creation is not power, because it is not exercised on anything.' Williams posits that far from imposing 'a definition' on us, God's act of creation, actually 'creates an identity.'

Secondly, in their belief that any exercise of power implies forced control and domination and the accompanying belief that any 'hierarchical chain of being and chain of command' leads automatically to a violation and domination of those lower down the hierarchy, these critiques of the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo hold to the questionable ontological assumption that power and hierarchy are, of necessity, violent. But do power and hierarchy have to be seen, in and of themselves, as violent?

While the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo – in its belief that being is not natural and eternal, but rather is brought into existence through the creative Word of the Creator

An illustration of this distinction appears in Zizioulas' dialogue with Philip Sherrard, an Appendix in Zizioulas' Communion and Otherness. Sherrard takes issue with Zizioulas' rendition of the patristic doctrine of creatio ex nihilo arguing that: 'When we propose an idea or a concept, either it refers to some reality or it does not. If it does not refer to any reality, then it is not worth even proposing it. If, however, it does refer to some reality, then we are justified in asking what this reality is.' For Sherrard, therefore, 'it appears that the concept of the idea of nothing refers, for Dr Zizioulas, to some reality... it has an absolute character: it is the 'ontological absolute', an absolute 'non-being'.' Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 270. Zizioulas responds by explaining that Sherrard has mis-transcribed his 'ontologically absolute' (ontologika apolyto) as 'ontological absolute' (ontologiko apolyto) and therefore mistakenly believes that Zizioulas is referring to 'nothingness' as having an ontological status. However, Zizioulas continues, his contention that nothingness is 'ontologically absolute' means that, 'regarded from an ontological point of view (i.e. ontologically), nothingness is an absolute, that is to say, it has absolutely no relation to being; it is not an existent thing. Therefore, since it has no ontological content, nothingness cannot constitute a reality alongside God – it does not constitute a reality in any sense at all; it has no being (ouk einai).' Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 273. For the complete interchange, see Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 270-285.

41 Ruether argues that 'the whole Western theological tradition' is based upon a 'model of hierarchy that starts with non-material spirit (God) as the source of the chain of being and continues down to nonspiritual “matter” as the bottom of the chain of being and the most inferior, valueless, and dominated point in the chain of command.' Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 85.
God – challenges the assumptions of Greek philosophy regarding the eternal existence of being, it is in the distinctively Christian doctrine of the Trinity, that we are offered an ontology which responds particularly to this critique of power and hierarchy. It is this doctrine of the Trinity – specifically as understood within Eastern Orthodox theologies, in their understanding of Being not as substance (ousia), but rather, as the communion of the Divine persons – to which we now turn, forthwith.

The Doctrine of the Trinity: Communion and Personhood

In Totality and Infinity, Levinas mounts a strident critique of the totalising nature of Western thought. Implicated in Levinas' critique is Western theology in which, he argues, substance and sameness are central concepts. But what role may the Doctrine of the Trinity play in assisting in the formation of an ontology in which unity and difference, communion and otherness are seen not as mutually exclusive, but as interdependent?

It is no accident that the post-structuralist critique of Western philosophy, and in particular the negative appraisal of the self-positing cogito, has coincided with a re-emergence of theological interest in the Doctrine of the Trinity, and in the implications this doctrine has for an understanding of personal identity. While ostensibly Trinitarian, western theology of the early twentieth century – following the influence of Schleiermacher – essentially viewed the doctrine of the Trinity as an irrelevance. The belief, espoused by Kant, that ‘From the doctrine of the Trinity, taken literally, nothing whatsoever can be gained for practical purposes...’ was one seemingly shared, in general, by Christian theologians. Indeed, Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, in his significant work, The Trinity, translated into English in 1970,
commenting on the absence of the doctrine in theological writing, states provocatively that ‘should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.’

According to Rahner, the great problem facing the Western church stems from its failure to realise the ‘existential relevance’ of the doctrine of the Trinity. Rahner argues that the problem with the doctrine of the Trinity in contemporary Western theology is that ‘the treatise on the Trinity occupies a rather isolated position in the total dogmatic system...,’ while such treatises were often of an ‘abstract impractical character.’

Facing the challenges posed by modernity and the turbulence and violence that seemed to stem from ‘modern’ man, the mid-twentieth century saw theologians such as Karl Barth and Karl Rahner begin actively to explore the relevance of the Doctrine of the Trinity to the living of contemporary life. Central to Rahner’s critique, is his assertion that the problem facing Western theology, is rooted in its tendency to dichotomise between the understanding of God as One and God as Trinity (De Deo Uno and De Deo Trino). Such a dichotomy, Rahner believes, originates from the tendency of Augustinian-Western theological thought to begin by stressing the one divine essence of God and then, only afterwards to interpret God as three persons.

Whether or not Rahner and others such as Gunton over-state their case – and many believe they do – a consequence of their thinking has been a burgeoning interest in theologies, particularly of the Eastern tradition, in which the starting point for any

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44 Ibid., 14 & 39.
46 See for example, Brad Green, "The Protomodern Augustine? Colin Gunton and the Failure of Augustine," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 3 (2007): 328-341. Green argues that despite Gunton’s numerous insights, a close reading of Augustine not only exonerates him from the charges Gunton levels against him, but his work may well provide the insights and strengths which Gunton finds in other sources.
discussion on the Doctrine of the Trinity, is not the oneness (essence/ousia) of God, but rather the three hypostases of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It is, Zizioulas believes, the Doctrine of the Trinity which provides the second major plank in the construction of a distinct Christian ontology. According to Zizioulas, it was in the emergence of the Trinitarian tradition within the patristic period, as the patristic theologians engaged with the cosmologies of the Greek philosophers, that one sees the formation of a distinctive Christian ontology. While according to the patristic understanding of creatio ex nihilo, freedom presupposes otherness and otherness presupposes freedom, such thinking was impossible to conceive of in Greek philosophical thought, where being was understood as substance or ousia. However, it was the Cappadocian Fathers, Zizioulas contends, who, through their replacement of a substantialist ontology with a personalist ontology, fundamentally changed the nature of Greek philosophy and therefore offered an ontology in which freedom and otherness is possible.

Zizioulas argues that while early philosophical Patristic theologians such as Justin Martyr, Clement, and Origen, struggled to ‘avoid the pitfalls of a monistic ontology’, pastoral theologians such as Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, and Athanasius, approaching the question of the being of God, not primarily through the employment of academic philosophy, but rather ‘through the experience of the ecclesial community of ecclesial being’, began to develop a new ontological framework. According to Zizioulas, it was out of the Eucharistic experience of the life of the church that these pastoral theologians concluded that, ‘the being of God could be known only through personal relationships and personal love. Being means life, and life means communion.’

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48 Ibid. Emphasis original.
It is, in particular, in the writings of the Cappadocian Fathers – Basil of Caesarea (c.330-379), Gregory of Nazianzus (c.325-389) and Gregory of Nyssa (c.330-c.395) – as they grappled with how to describe the Holy Trinity that we see the emergence of a radical re-thinking of the concept of Being. The Cappadocians, as theologians of the Greek-speaking East, had concerns with the language that the Latin-speaking Western section of the Church was using to describe the Holy Trinity. Tertullian's *una substantia, tres personae*, while gaining wide acceptance in the West, was the cause for alarm in the East due to the fact that the Latin term *personae*, used by Tertullian, was translated into Greek as ‘*prosōpon*’, a term which lacked any ontological content. As such, Tertullian's theology, while safeguarding the unity of the Divine Godhead, for the Cappadocians, tended towards a form of Sabellianism.

The response of the Cappadocians was to take the concept of ‘hypostasis’ with its ontological significance and to identify this with the term ‘*prosōpon***. In identifying these two terms, the Cappadocians transformed the significance of both words and gave them new fields of meaning. While ‘*prosōpon*’ in Greek thought had been seen as secondary to being, the Cappadocians in amalgamating theses terms, asserted:

i. that a *prosōpon* is not secondary to being, but its *hypostasis*; and

ii. the ontological category of a *hypostasis*, is, by its very nature, an irreducible relational entity. That is, it is *prosōpon*.

49 Within Greek thought the term ‘hypostasis’ was closely linked to and explicitly identified with ‘substance’. Indeed, St Athanasius in his Letter to the bishops of Egypt and Libya states: ‘hypostasis is *ousia* and has no other meaning apart from being itself... For *hypostasis* and *ousia* are existence: it is and it exists.’ Ibid., 36, n. 23.

50 While Zizioulas attributes the linking of the terms ‘*prosōpon*’ and ‘*hypostasis*’ and the subsequent transformation of their meaning to the Cappadocians, John Wilks argues that this development actually came about through the Western tradition. See John Wilks, "The Trinitarian Ontology of John Zizioulas," *Vox Evangelica* 25 (1995): 63-88, 74.

51 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 186. Zizioulas summarises, perhaps with more clarity, the significance of the Cappadocian thinking in his earlier book, *Being as Communion*, when he states:

The person is no longer an adjunct to a being, a category which we add to a concrete entity once we have verified its ontological hypostasis. *It is itself the hypostasis of the being.* Entities no longer trace their being to being itself – that is, being is not an absolute category in itself – but to the person, to precisely that
The effect of this Cappadocian thought, Zizioulas argues, was both to introduce ‘a revolution into Greek ontology’, and also to shape the long-term direction of Eastern theologies of the Trinity. According to Zizioulas, the effect of the theology offered by the Cappadocians, was an understanding that Being is ultimately personal and ‘that person is now the ultimate ontological category we can apply to God.’

Within Cappadocian theology therefore – at least as interpreted by Zizioulas – the Trinity is best understood as a communion of persons. Zizioulas writes:

The being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God....

The Holy Trinity is a primordial ontological concept and not a notion which is added to the divine substance or rather which follows it....

The substance of God, “God”, has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion.

A key component to this understanding that the being of God is a communion of persons and therefore of Being itself ‘as communion’, is the patristic concept of perichoresis.

which constitutes being, that is, enables entities to be entities. ... the person becomes the being itself and is... the constitutive element of beings.

Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 39.

52 Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 186.

53 Ibid.

54 The work of John Zizioulas, while achieving broad acclaim, has not been without its detractors. One of the main criticisms has been around Zizioulas’ interpretation and use of the patristic texts. Lucian Turcescu is critical of Zizioulas’ reading of the Cappadocians, in particular Gregory of Nyssa, while Rowan Williams takes issue with Zizioulas’ treatment of Platonism, Western Trinitarian thought, and his understanding of the ecclesiology of the early church. John Wilks also questions Zizioulas’ use and interpretation of historical sources. See Lucian Turcescu, ”Person versus Individual’, and Other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa,” Modern Theology 18, no. 4 (2002): 527-539; Rowan Williams, ”Review of Being as Communion,” Scottish Journal of Theology 42, no. 1 (1989): 101-105; and Wilks, ”The Trinitarian Ontology of John Zizioulas.” Whether Zizioulas’ reading and interpretation of historical sources is accurate is beyond the scope of this immediate work. Along with many of Zizioulas’ actual critics, we would contend that the significance of Zizioulas’ constructive theology, which seeks to respond to the contemporary issues of our day, remains valid even if his claims for patristic warrant are called into question.

55 Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 17.
Perichoresis: Particularity and Love

Originating in the writings of John of Damascus and grounded in the words of the Johannine Jesus, the patristic concept of *perichoresis*, while originally used to reflect on divine unity, offers a significant theological motif for the development of an ontology of personhood. According to the notion of *perichoresis*, the divine persons are not independent, nor even interdependent identities who influence one another, but rather, the divine persons of Father, Son and Spirit are *personally interior* to one another. Within this conception of the Trinity and the belief that 'in eternity Father, Son and Spirit share a dynamic mutual reciprocity, interpenetration and interanimation,' relations between the divine persons are not seen as secondary to the divine *ousia*, but rather are *constitutive* of the very being of God. Colin Gunton, in his *The One, the Three and the Many*, written to respond to what he perceives as the problem of particularity posed by Platonic thought, states that 'the persons [of the Trinity] do not simply enter into relations with one another, but are constituted by one another in the relations.' For Gunton, 'God is not God apart from the way in which Father, Son and Spirit in eternity give to and receive from each other what they essentially are. The three do not merely coinhere, but dynamically constitute one another’s being.'

Within such thought, the doctrine of *perichoresis* — that is the dynamic interrelatedness of the three persons of the Trinity — far from being ‘speculative and

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56 Gunton, *One, Three and Many*, 163.
57 Ibid., 214. Gunton, concurring with Levinas, believes it is the failure of Western thought to engage with the problem of particularity inherent in Platonic philosophy which lies behind the intellectual and moral problems of our modern age. Hence Gunton writes: 'Thus it is that that the modern failure of Plato to give due place to particularity in his vision of things is replicated both in modernism's suppression of the particular through the universal and in postmodernism's homogenizing tendency to attribute to all particulars essentially the same value.' Gunton, *One, Three and Many*, 70.
58 Gunton, *One, Three and Many*, 164. Gunton here suggests that the Latin derivative, *coinherence*, is less satisfactory than the Greek *perichoresis*, in that it seems to suggest 'a more static conception' in comparison to the dynamic mutuality of *perichoresis*. One would suspect that such thinking is inevitable if one’s underlying ontology is substantialist — a critique that Gunton makes of Western/Latin Trinitarian thought.
useless’, is an important theological concept offering the ability to express ‘the unity and plurality of the being of God’, while preserving ‘both the one and the many in dynamic interrelations.\(^59\) It is Gunton’s suggestion that if we understand the concept of perichoresis as having a transcendental status, then we are presented with an understanding of being – an ontology – which is able to hold together the one and the many, the universal and the particular.\(^60\)

According to Zizioulas, it is only this personal-relational understanding of the Trinity – particularly as offered by the Cappadocians and the Eastern tradition – that is able to provide us with an ontology which overcomes the monism of Greek philosophy. To speak of freedom and thus love is impossible within the monistic universe of Greek philosophical thinking – grounded as it is in its impersonal substantialist ontology of necessity. However, in contrast, a Trinitarian ontology – grounded in the free love offered between the Father, Son and Spirit – provides such an ontology. Zizioulas summarises this point thus:

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[T]he \text{only exercise of freedom in an ontological manner is love.} \text{ The expression ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:16) signifies that God ‘subsists’ as Trinity, that is, as person and not as substance. Love is not an emanation or ‘property’ of the substance of God... but is constitutive of His substance, i.e. it is that which makes God what He is, the one God. Thus love ceases to be a qualifying – i.e. secondary – property of being and becomes the supreme ontological predicate. Love as God’s mode of existence ‘hypostasizes’ God, constitutes His being. Therefore, as a result of love, the ontology of God is not subject to the}
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\[\text{Ibid., 163-4.}\]

\[\text{For Gunton it is the doctrine of the Trinity which provides such a transcendental. Gunton states: ‘the doctrine of the Trinity as a dynamic personal ordering of giving and receiving is, in the idea of sociality that it suggests, the key to the matter of transcendentality that we are seeking’. Ibid., 225.}\]
necessity of the substance. Love is identified with ontological freedom. 61

The Question of ‘Causation’

However, while there is significant overlap between Zizioulas, Gunton and others in their articulation of a perichoretic God, who makes room and space for the Other – a Trinitarian God whose Being is constituted by the mutual giving and receiving that takes place between Father, Son and Spirit – there is not necessarily total consensus over their conceptions of Trinitarian relations. While Eastern-Cappadocian theologies have begun to have a significant impact on contemporary Western Trinitarian thought, a number of the theologians who have drunk deeply from the Cappadocian-Zizioulian well express a particular concern at the role that the Cappadocian notion of ‘monarchy’ plays in Zizioulas’ theology. Alan Torrance suggests that Zizioulas’ contention that the Father is the ‘cause’ of the Son and Spirit in the immanent Trinity of personhood, ‘involves projecting a causal ordering into the Godhead.’ 62

On a close analysis, it becomes clear that underlying these concerns expressed regarding Zizioulas’ use of the Cappadocian notion of ‘monarchy’ is a belief that causality, hierarchy, or any form of subordination is antithetical to the concept of communion and therefore to be viewed pejoratively. But is causality, or are forms of hierarchy or subordination, by their very nature contrary to the notion of communion, that is, inhospitable? Zizioulas argues not, and bearing in mind that this critique of causation, hierarchy and subordination has already arisen in the

61 Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 46.
process-feminist assault on the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo discussed earlier, and will appear again later in our discussion on the nature of relationality, it is appropriate and necessary at this point to outline the argument Zizioulas employs as a rejoinder to his critics.

For Zizioulas, causation, hierarchy and subordination are only to be construed as negative if approached from within substantialist ontology. Yet, according to Zizioulas, it is the Cappadocian insistence on the Father as ‘cause’, origin, arche of the Trinity, which underpins their understanding of ontology, not in substantialist, but rather personalistic terms. By understanding the concept of ‘causation’ within the Godhead not at the level of ousia but rather at the hypostatic or personal level, causality becomes a relational term. Subsequently, causation becomes an act of relational freedom, rather than one of substantial necessity. As Zizioulas puts it: ‘Causation is precisely part of God’s dynamic being; it involves movement, not however a movement of substantial necessity, but a movement initiated freely by a person.’

For Zizioulas therefore, causation and hierarchy are not to be seen negatively, but rather are an inherent feature of a personalist ontology. Such a perspective has significant implications for our theological anthropology. Firstly, for Zizioulas, the belief that ‘the Father is the cause of personhood in God’s being’ means:

[T]hat there is not and should not be personal existence which is self-existent, self-sufficient or self-explicable. A person is always a gift

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63 Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 131. Zizioulas argues that the very criticism raised against the Cappadocian concept of the Father as ‘cause’ is evidence that many of his critics have read the Cappadocians through Western eyes. That is, they still see being – ousia – as the ultimate ontological category. With such a substantialist ontology as their basis, they therefore cannot conceive of the hypostasis of the Father as being the cause or arche of the Trinity. But central to the Trinitarian thought of the Cappadocian Fathers, Zizioulas argues, is the belief that the word ‘being’ refers both to the what God is (ousia) and how God is (personhood). For the Greek Fathers ‘there is no ousia in the nude’ and thus ‘to refer to God’s substance without referring simultaneously to his personhood, or to reserve the notion of being only to substance would amount to making a false ontological statement.’ Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 125.
It is demonic to attribute one's own personal identity to oneself or to an a-personal something. The notion of self-existence is a substantialist notion, not a personal one. Persons have a 'cause', because they are the outcome of love and freedom, and owe their being who they are, their distinctive otherness as person, to another person. Ontologically, persons are givers and recipients of personal identity. Causality in Trinitarian existence reveals to us a personhood which is constituted in love.64

Secondly, and significant in echoing one of the insights of Levinas, Zizioulas argues that 'divine causality teaches us that personal otherness is not symmetrical but a-symmetrical.' Zizioulas writes:

There is always in this otherness a 'greater' one (John 14:28) not morally or functionally but ontologically. Otherness is, by definition, 'hierarchical' since... we are not 'other' by ourselves but by someone else, who in this way is 'higher', that is, ontologically 'prior' to us, the giver of our otherness.65

According to Zizioulas therefore, hierarchical ordering is inherent in personhood as all personal relations are asymmetrical, since persons are not self-existent, but 'caused' by another who is there ontologically 'prior' as 'giver'.66 Zizioulas notes that while hierarchy has taken on a pejorative term in our world, it is not hierarchy per se that is problematic. Rather asymmetrical relations and hierarchy are only ontologically problematic, and thus evil, when the 'cause' brings forth an 'inferior' – that is, when the 'cause' fails to allow the other to be fully Other. If however, 'causation' is understood as the 'cause', or the ontologically prior, bringing forth another

64 Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 141-2.
65 Ibid., 143.
66 One only need think here of the example of parenthood and of how parents are ontologically prior to and therefore the 'cause' of their children.
ontologically 'free' and equal Other, then asymmetry is not incompatible with equality.

In summary, Zizioulas offers an account of Trinitarian relations in which there is a formal ordering within the Divine Godhead, and yet simultaneously, an ontological equality. Order does not imply inequality or domination. The very fact that the term 'Father' is a relational term means that when we speak of the 'Father' we automatically think of the Son and the Spirit, and of the relationship that exists between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. That is, the identity of the hypostases within the Trinity is not identical with their relations, but rather is constituted by their relations, one with another. The divine communion of the Trinity is composed of particular persons-hypostases, in free relationship with one another.

A Mid-Point Summary

Our brief survey of the doctrines of creation and the Trinity provides us with a distinct ontological view. In contrast to Greek philosophical thought – in which Being, conceived of as eternally existent and understood substantially, leads to an ontology of necessity and sameness – we have outlined an ontology in which Being is understood in personalist terms. The Christian belief that Being is primordially the communion of Divine persons presents an ontology in which unity and difference are seen not as mutually exclusive, but rather as mutually constitutive. It thus offers an ontology not of necessity and sameness but rather of freedom and otherness.

Zizioulas notes the thought of Gregory of Nyssa who expresses the nature of this mutual relation thus: 'For what mutual relation is so closely and concordantly engrafted and fitted together as that meaning of relation to the Father expressed by the word “Son”? And a proof of this is that even if both of these names be not spoken, that which is omitted is connoted by the one that is uttered, so closely is the one implied in the other and concordant with it; and both of them are so discerned in the one that one cannot be conceived without the other.' Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 122, n. 33.
The anthropological consequences of such an ontological view are extremely significant for our conversation regarding human personhood and identity. Zizioulas claims that 'There is no model for the proper relation between communion and otherness either for the Church or for the human being other than the Trinitarian God.'\textsuperscript{68} Our agreement with Zizioulas' assessment that the 'relation between communion and otherness in God is the model both for ecclesiology and for anthropology'\textsuperscript{69}, requires that our attention now be turned towards tracing out the implications of such an ontology for our conception of the self. How exactly does the Trinity – or more precisely, the dynamic relationality that is the communion of divine persons, in which particularity and communion are seen as mutually constitutive – act as the model for our understanding of human identity and personhood? What does an elaboration of \textit{Being as Communion}, where the primordial ontological concept is of a personal-relational God who makes room for the other, mean for our attempt to offer a theological anthropology? Having reflected upon the Christian doctrines of Creation and the Trinity, there are, at this stage, a number of tentative implications that we can make with regard to the questions of self-identity and human relationality. In light of the Trinitarian ontology that we have offered, we will seek to reinterpret in what follows the motifs of gift, call and address – motifs that punctuate the work of our philosophical interlocutors – and in doing so, lay down some preliminary guiding lines in our sketching of the 'hospitable' self.

**Tracing the Hospitable Self**

There are strong similarities between Levinas’ philosophical reflections on \textit{personhood} and the theological anthropologies of the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Both start, in the words of Corneliu Boineanu, with the premise 'that the person cannot be

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 5.
defined, it cannot be captured, by conceptual thought.' With obvious parallels to Levinasian thought, Eastern Orthodox anthropologies reject 'the rational, substantial, self-sufficient Cartesian subject' replacing it with an 'apophatic, participative, mysterious and mystic notion of person... created in the image of God.' They propose an understanding of personhood based not on rationality but rather 'on a personal, existential encounter with the divine.' This shared starting point of an active renunciation of the attempt to understand the Other rationally and an emphasis on the constitutive role of the call or election leads Zizioulas to state that 'with Levinas we come closer to the patristic understanding of otherness than with any of the philosophers'. However, while there are clear affinities with Eastern theological thought, Levinas' philosophical insights cannot simply be accepted wholesale and used as a basis for developing a theological anthropology. While endorsing many aspects of Levinas' philosophical project, there are subtle but significant distinctions between the Levinasian conception of personhood and personhood as understood from a Christian theological perspective. Below, we will seek to elucidate these differences by offering a theological rendering of the motifs of call/address and election, so central to Levinas' philosophy.

Called, Elected and Named by the Other

In Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence, Levinas writes: 'The word I, means here I am' while, elsewhere he writes: 'I am, as if I had been chosen.' For Levinas, it is not self-consciousness that constitutes the self, but rather, as he states: 'my inescapable

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71 Ibid.: 5.
73 Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 48.
and incontrovertible answerability to the other... makes me an individual ‘I’.75 Such statements are illustrative of the extent to which the understanding of human identity and personhood offered by Levinas are steeped in the biblical motifs of call and election. Terry Veling summarises Levinas’ thought succinctly, writing:

The priority is not with the I constituting itself, but with the call of the other who asks after me. It is this call that comes first, that is always prior, that is always before me, and constitutes my identity as a response-ability and answer-ability. Levinas is converting the “I think, therefore, I am” of modern, Western thought into the “here I am” of biblical, prophetic response. This is the election of the I as chosen and responsible before the face of God and neighbour.76

While Veling is correct in stressing the biblical and prophetic dimensions of Levinas’ work, there are however nuanced differences between the Levinasian notion of call and election and how these concepts are understood from within the tradition of Christian theology.

Central to Levinas’ philosophy is the concept that the call/address of the Other is not expressed within relationship but rather is one that is issued from a place of transcendence and distance. In contrast to the dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber – where the relationship between the ‘I’ and the ‘Thou’ lacks an a-symmetry and where the dialogical relationship itself is granted ontological status – Levinas, deeply suspicious of the potential violence within symmetrical relations, develops a philosophy which prefers separation and distance over relationship, a philosophy in which the Other remains Transcendent.77 Thus, in Levinas’ work, the call is issued by

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77 While for Levinas the Other is primordial, for Buber the ‘Other’ and the ‘I’ are given equal primordiality and it is the relationship between the I and Thou which is seen as having ontological basis. Buber writes: ‘The I exists only through the relationship with the Thou’, and states that the
the Other, transcendent and distant, a call which arises from beyond relationship, calling the self to its fundamental responsibility and answerability to an unknown Other.

But are there only two options available for construing our engagement with the Other? Do we have to choose between the Buberian self – in which it is the dialogical relationship between the I and the Thou which grants ontological status to the self – or the Levinasian self – in which while the self is constituted by the Other, this takes place outside of relationship? Both accounts – whether the self is granted an ontological status by the existence of the relationship, or is constituted outside of relationship – seem incapable of giving an understanding of the self which, while constituted by the Other, possesses a distinctive and unique identity. That is, both the Buberian and Levinasian accounts of personhood struggle to speak of particularity.

However, the choice of Buber or Levinas only appears necessary if one holds to a substantialist ontology in which relationality is seen as potentially ‘violent’, an ontology which struggles conceptually with particularity. In contrast to such thought, we have already contended that Christian theology offers a different ontology – one in which the Divine Other, as a communion of particular persons, remains both transcendent while simultaneously engaging in relationship with his created world and humanity, not as an act of ‘power over’ but rather as an act of ‘love and freedom.’ Thus, in Genesis 2:7 the narrative paints a picture of YHWH, the Divine Other, tenderly and intimately sculpting a creature from the earth (‘ādāmāh) and then exhaling the breath of life into the nostrils of the human-earth Creature (‘ādām). While the Genesis account may indeed offer us a Face which ‘cannot be

dialogical situation ‘is not to be grasped on the basis of the ontic of personal existence, or of that of two personal existences, but of that which has its being between them and transcends both’. Martin Buber, "What is Man?" in Between Man and Man, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 242. See also Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1937). 175
comprehended’ or ‘encompassed’ 78, the emphasis is not on distance and separation, but rather on intimacy and closeness. It is in receiving the breath of life as gift that Adam becomes a living being. 79 In contrast to the Levinasian call, the call of the Trinitarian God is issued by the God who, while beyond total comprehension or encompassing, joyously reveals himself to that which is other. Such a call is not a generalised call, but rather, as we will outline below, a call issued to particular recipients; a call which elects the particular recipient of the call, and establishes them within a covenantal relationship of faithful love. 80 Thus, the call and election issued by the Trinitarian God institutes a relationship with the subsequent call to responsibility and answerability taking place within the context of this relationship. 81

The Hebrew Scriptures, of which Levinas himself is so fond, are full of material illustrative of such a notion of call and election. At the foundation of all three of the Abrahamic faiths is the call and election of Abram. Called by YHWH to leave his own country, to become a pilgrim, the renaming of Abram to Abraham both signifies the covenantal relationship that has been instituted by the call/address of YHWH,

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78 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 194.
79 This imagery of the gift of the breath of life, of the self constituted by relationships, and therefore of the centrality of an ethic/practice of hospitality to genuine human living, is particularly evident within the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand. In participating in a powhiri – a welcome onto marae – one is ‘re-enacting the mythological creation of the world’ (the story of Ranginui, the sky father, and Papatiānuku, the earth mother, being separated by Tāne – god of the Forest – and thus the shift from Pō, the state of darkness and nothingness to Ao, the state of lightness and resolution). The powhiri climaxes and closes with the sacred custom of the hongi, the exchanging and intermingling of the breath of life through the pressing of noses and foreheads. (The hongi itself is a re-enactment of the story of Tāne shaping a woman from the soil at Kurawaka, embracing the figure and breathing into her nostrils. The woman then sneezed exclaiming Tīhei Mauri Ora – literally, “Behold, There is Life!” – and came to life. Her name was Hineahuone – earth formed woman.) In the sharing of the hongi, the manuhiri – visitors, guests, the Other – are now welcomed and enter into the hospitality of the tangata whenua – literally, the ‘people of the land’, the hosts. Through the ceremony of the powhiri therefore, both manuhiri and tangata whenua are reminded of their shared origin and of the fact that their identity is constituted by their relations with each other. For a simple rendering of Maori creation stories and the way in which such stories shape Maori traditions and practices see: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/NewZealanders/MaoriNewZealanders/MaoriCreationTraditions/3/en.>
while also reiterating the promise inherent within this call/address. Thus, Abram, *high Father* – whose name, in light of his lack of progeny, would have sounded like a bad joke – becomes Abraham, *ancestor of a multitude*. The relationship established between Abraham and YHWH is of an asymmetrical nature, characterised by the *responsibility* and *answerability* of Abraham to the radical promise of YHWH. But again, this response-ability and answer-ability takes place not within a mode of distance and separation, but rather occurs within a relationship in which the Divine Other reveals Himself as the God of gracious gift, promise and proximity – a God who arrives uninvited to eat at Abraham’s place and who then enters into negotiation regarding his future actions (Genesis 18). As we have noted earlier, the ‘leap of madness’ of Abraham – not merely of leaving his homeland in response to the call and promise of a previously unknown God, but also the [un]ethical obedience in following through the command to sacrifice his Son Isaac – can only be understood through the eyes of faith. That is, Abraham’s actions only make sense – though not sense according to human sensibilities or rationality – if framed within this broader context of gift and gratitude, promise and obedience, call and response, that is, within a relationship of faithfulness and love. Thus, the biblical conception of *call* and *election*, grounded upon a *personalist* ontology, takes place not outside of relationship, but rather founds the self *within* its relationship with the Other, establishing a covenantal relationship between two particularities.

Perhaps the clearest way to observe this subtle difference between the Levinasian notion and the understanding of *call* and *election* that we are advocating is through a closer reflection on the actual word, *address*. According to the dictionary definition, the word ‘address’, whether used as a noun or a verb, refers to a *particular* and *specific* identity.82 Thus, one goes to one’s *address* book to find ‘the place where a person lives or an organisation is situated’ and especially the ‘*particulars of this*’ if one intends sending a letter (noun). Or, understood in a different context: one delivers an

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address – that is a specific discourse (noun), by actively (verb) directing one’s attention and speech to a specific audience or individual. In contrast to the biblical notion of call and address which we are proposing in which call/address take place between two particular and unique identities, Levinas’ notion of otherness seems to struggle with such specificity or particularity. Thus, his notion of address, in its occurrence outside of relationship, at times appears analogous to one of the scourges of our contemporary technological world – that of e-mail spam. Separated from an underlying relationality, Levinas’ call/address from the Other, like a piece of email spam comes from a source, distant and transcendent, proceeding from an origin we do not know and cannot know, an unknown Other with whom we have no prior relationship nor any hope of the development of genuine relationality or intimacy.

This distinction between Levinasian thought and a theological understanding of call and election, is expressed well by Zizioulas, in a lengthy passage that is worth quoting here in full.

A call involves, indeed establishes, relationship, but it is not a call unless it implies otherness – the recipient who cannot be the same as the calling one – and the invitation to respond with a 'yes' or a 'no', not in a verbal or in a moral sense (freedom of the will) but in an ontological sense, that is, by the sheer acknowledgement, recognition and affirmation of the calling one as other, as an identity other than one’s own, and at the same time as one granting the called one an identity in the form of a Thou (or a name: Adam).

Through the call, Adam is constituted, therefore, as being other than God and the rest of creation. This otherness is not the result of self-affirmation; it is an otherness granted and is not self-existent, but a particularity which is a gift of the Other. Thus, while the rest of creation is other than God and other creatures only in the form of species (God created the plants, the animals, etc. without addressing
them with a call), the human being is singled out, not merely as a species, but as a particular partner in a relationship, as a respondent to a call.

This is the constituent event of humanity.83

**Defining the Other: Naming as Violence?**

Some critics have asked whether the dynamic of election evident in the Biblical narrative implies favouritism and therefore entails an exclusion of the Other? Is not the forming of a covenantal relationship between YHWH and Abraham, Jacob and the other patriarchs, and with the people of Israel, therefore an act of either implicit – and at times – explicit violence? After all, does not the instituting of such relationships of particularity and uniqueness ultimately lead to the exclusion of identities such as Abel, Hagar, Ishmael and Saul, who are not God’s ‘chosen’? And, in the case of the tribes already occupying the ‘promised land’, does not this failure to be ‘elected’ finally lead to explicit violence as God’s ‘chosen’ people commit their own form of ethnic cleansing?84 Likewise, does not ‘naming’, an activity integral to

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83 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 41. Emphasis original. Despite their subtle differences, both Zizioulas and Levinas understand the notion of call/address as distinctive to humanity. It is their freedom to respond to the call, to be participants in hospitality and to receive and offer gifts that distinguishes humanity from the rest of creation. Once again such a distinction – an ordering or hierarchy as it were – is not to be understood pejoratively. Rather, the asymmetrical relationship between humanity and the rest of creation (animals, plants, etc), the very otherness of humanity, is itself a summons to responsibility. Levinas’s distinction between humanity and the rest of creation, that is, his failure to see his dog as the Other, is pointed to by others as one of the failings of his philosophy. (See earlier comments on this in chapter 2, note 16.) Zizioulas emphasises that the distinction between humanity and the rest of creation – humanity’s otherness – rather than leading to the domination and desecration of creation – as Finkelstein, Lynn White Jnr. and our process and feminist theologians have contended – is rather, the very basis for an ethic of ecological responsibility and care. While apparent throughout his writing, Zizioulas deals directly with this theme in a series of published lectures. See John D Zizioulas, "Preserving God’s Creation: Three Lectures on Theology and Ecology - Lecture One," *King’s Theological Review* 12, no. 1 (1989): 1-5; “Lecture Two,” *King’s Theological Review* 12, no. 2 (1989): 41-45; “Lecture Three," *King’s Theological Review* 13, no. 1 (1990): 1-5.

84 This is essentially the argument of Regina Schwartz who sees the nexus between land, monotheism, and monogamy as leading to ‘a doctrine of possession, of a people by God, of a land by a people, of women by men.’ Thus Schwartz, echoing the sentiments of others we have engaged with above, argues that monotheism contains the seeds for the violence perpetrated by humanity upon humanity, by humanity upon creation and by men over women. Regina Schwartz,
each of these episodes of ‘call’ and ‘election’, as Levi-Strauss has demonstrated, consist of the exercising of symbolic power by the addressee/‘the one who names’ over the one who is named? Indeed, it would not be difficult to imagine such questions being raised by our interlocutors, especially Derrida, for whom the biblical doctrine of ‘election’ would appear as anathematic to his call for an ‘absolute hospitality.’

Following in the legacy of Levi-Strauss and his theory of ‘the symbolizing power of language’85, much twentieth century biblical scholarship has indeed understood the practice of ‘naming’ in terms of ‘power’. Gerhard von Rad reflects the consensus of biblical scholarship when stating that: ‘name-giving in the ancient Orient was primarily an exercise of sovereignty, of command.’86 It is the acceptance of this premise that ‘naming’ is an exercise of ‘power’ – a ‘power’ which is therefore exercised by ‘Adam’ over the woman in the account of the creation of humanity in Genesis 2:25 and 3:20 – which has motivated feminist scholars such as Phyllis Trible to engage in the ‘hermeneutical challenge... to translate biblical faith without sexism.’87 Agreeing with the consensus view that ‘naming’ is an activity of control, an exercise of power, and yet wishing neither to dismiss the Bible ‘as inconsequential’ nor condemn it ‘as enslaving’, Trible seeks to demonstrate that ‘Adam’ does not exercise this power over the woman in the account by distinguishing between the activities of calling and naming.88
But have theologians and biblical scholars been correct in taking on board the assumption that the ritual of ‘naming’ in the Biblical narrative is primarily concerned with power and command over the Other? That is, is Levi-Strauss’s understanding of the ‘symbolic power of language’ always the appropriate hermeneutic for understanding the biblical activity of ‘naming’? Does not Levi-Strauss’ structuralist approach – in which he seeks to classify all relations – itself act in a totalising fashion, robbing identities and their relations of their uniqueness and particularity? Can the mystery and wonder of relationships between unique and particular identities be simplified into generalised and comprehensible laws? Indeed, the thought of our post-structuralist interlocutors, and their emphasis on an unclassifiable and transcendent Other, is itself, a response to these generalising and therefore totalising tendencies of structuralist thought. And secondly, even if ‘naming’ does in some sense contain an aspect of the issuing of sovereignty and control by the ‘namer’ over the ‘named’, do such relationships – relationships of an asymmetrical or hierarchical nature, where one partner of the relationship has ‘power’ or primacy over the other – have to be understood as inherently violent by nature?

Once again there are two recurring and questionable underlying assumptions which are at play in the debate regarding naming. Firstly, there is, as noted in the previous chapter, a privileging of epistemology over ontology and thus the conception that language is distinct/separate from relationality. And secondly, flowing from the first, evidence of the corruption of ‘mutuality and equality’ in a post-lapsarian world, rather than the Creators intention for gender relations. Ibid. David Clines, while apparently sympathetic with Trible’s intentions, suggests that Trible’s argument of distinguishing between calling and naming is far-fetched, noting that ‘in Genesis 1 all the naming has gone on exclusively by means of the verb ‘call’, without the word ‘name’ ever being used.’ See David Clines, "What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Irredeemably Androcentric Orientations in Genesis 1-3," in What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1990), 25-48, 38. The significance of this small excursus and its import to our discussion is not as to whether the biblical text is, or is not, androcentric, and thus whether the biblical text offers an egalitarian, complementarian, or hierarchical model for gender relations – as important as these issues are. Rather, what concerns us is, once again, the set of presuppositions which underlie this whole discussion of the biblical concept of ‘naming’.

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there is the recurring Foucauldian presupposition that power is to be understood pejoratively, as an act of ‘power-over’ the Other. With such presuppositions, the action of naming within the biblical text, divorced from a relational-personalist ontology, is therefore understood as an exercise of power, and power is understood pejoratively, as an act of violence. That is, criticisms of both election and naming only have validity when such notions are detached from a personalist ontology of communion.

In contrast, the distinctive Christian ontology we have delineated does not give primacy to epistemology over ontology nor conceive of language outside of, or independent of, a pre-existing relationality. Language is neither independent of being nor creates reality, but rather is itself another gracious gift offered by the Trinitarian God to humanity to aid the development of relationships between the self and the Other. In such thinking, in which language is understood as gift which flows ek-statically from an ontology of relational peace, ‘naming’ is thus not construed as an assertion of one’s power or control over another, but rather, as a celebration of the underlying relationship that exists / has been instituted.

To illustrate this point, one only need think of the activity of naming that takes place in the context of families. Is the naming of children by their parents an act of violent control, an assertion of their sovereignty over their off-spring, or rather, is it best understood as a symbolic action that expresses the joy of the parents, their delight at the new life received as gift, and evidence of the bond of love that exists between parent and child? The very act of choosing a name involves both an intuitive sense of who the child already is, and a hope for who she will yet become. Likewise, one only need consider the naming that takes place between friends and, in the even more intimate setting between lovers, where ‘nick-naming’ becomes a sign of the affection and endearment shared by the two parties.
Similarly, the names of “Father”, “Son” and “Spirit”, which refer to the three hypostases of the Trinitarian God, do not connote dynamics of power and control, but signify the existing intimate relationship of communion that exists within the Godhead. The divine actions of communion/communication – begetting and being begotten, sending and proceeding – which take place within the Godhead, are not functions of a monistic substance but are relational events. The Trinitarian names refer, therefore, not to functionary roles, but to the particular personal identities in their communion with one another. The Father is Father to the Son; the Son is Son to the Father; the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, the go-between God, the very breath of the Father. 89

Such an ontology undergirds, we suggest, the biblical poem of Song of Songs, where the relationship of intimacy and mutual constitution between the two lovers is expressed in the repeated formula: ‘My beloved is mine and I am his’ [2:16] / ‘I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine’ [6:3]. Such a relational ontology composed of mutual pleasure and ecstasy, is one in which, as Luce Irigaray so graphically puts it, ‘the shared outpouring’ leads ‘to the loss of boundaries which takes place for both lovers when they cross the boundary of the skin into mucous membranes of the body, leaving the circle which encloses [the] solitude to meet in a shared space, a shared breath.’ 90 Within such a relational ontology, as Trible recognises: ‘Naming is ecstasy, not exercise; it is love, not control. And that love marks a new creation.’ 91

With such an ontology as our basis for interpreting Scripture, rather than reading Genesis 2:23 as an action of ‘naming,’ in which the man asserts his control and

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89 In describing the Trinitarian relations in such a way – with allusions to both the Western emphasis on the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ and Augustine’s ‘bond of love’, and simultaneously with the emphasis of the Greek Fathers on the Spirit proceeding as breath (ekporeusis) from the Father – it is not our intention to offer a distinct position with regard to the filioque controversy. We seek simply to point to the underlying relational nature of the Trinitarian names.

90 Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas," 111.

91 Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," 44.
authority over the woman – von Rad’s interpretation which Trible seeks to redress – can this passage instead be read as ‘praise speech’? Do we have in this first inter-human encounter echoes of Genesis 1? Just as Elohim praises the goodness of that which He has created so too ‘adham responds in praise for the creation of a partner for him. Could it be that ‘ish, the man, recognises that he is not self-constituted, but rather that his identity is tied up in the instituting of a relationship with ‘ishah’, and thus, his speech is a celebratory exclamation of this discovery of identity constituted within relationships? Nahum Sarna thinks so, stating that:

in naming her ‘ishah, he [the man] simultaneously names himself. Hitherto he is consistently called ‘adam; he now calls himself ‘ish for the first time. Thus he discovers his own manhood and fulfilment only when he faces the woman, the human being who is to be his partner in life.\(^\text{92}\)

Ultimately, despite the corporeal nature of Levinas’ writing and his notion of the self’s existence being dependent upon the address of the Other, the intimacy and mutuality of the relational ontology that we have outlined here is foreign to his thought. In spite of the motif of ‘the caress’ that punctuates his thought, it appears, as Irigaray suggests, that ‘Levinas does not ever seem to have experienced the transcendence of the other which becomes im-mediate ecstasy.... For Levinas, the distance is always maintained with the other in the experience of love.’ Levinas, Irigaray suggests, ‘knows nothing of communion in pleasure.’\(^\text{93}\)

**Election and the Blessing of the Other**

And what of God’s election of specific characters in the biblical narrative? Is election, in its very specificity, therefore, an act of violent exclusion of others? To respond to such a criticism and to deepen our theme developed here – that election,

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\(^{93}\) Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas," 110-111. Emphasis added.
theologically-conceived, stemming from an ontology of communion, is based not on distance and separation, but on mutuality and intimacy – we will briefly return again to the story of Abraham.

From its inception the covenantal relationship instituted by YHWH's call of Abram is not, we would contend, an exclusionary election. Rather, Abram is promised that YHWH will bless him, 'so that you will be a blessing' (Gen 12:2). Shaped by this understanding that chosen by YHWH he is summoned to a responsibility for others, and in the security derived from the divine call, Abraham's life is characterised by the practice of radical hospitality. Two episodes in Abraham's life are particularly significant. While Abraham's action of welcoming the unknown Others who appear at Mamre in Genesis 18 – famously depicted in Rublev's icon – is usually perceived as the exemplary event, this occasion is bookmarked by two other remarkable displays of hospitality.

The first of these episodes appears in Genesis 14, where his confidence in his identity, stemming from his call and election by the Divine Other enables the monotheistic Abraham to accept humbly the blessing of the pagan king, Melchizedek. Having himself been a recipient of the hospitality of the people of the land, it is inappropriate for Abraham to accept the bounty due to him for his defeat of King Kedorlaomer and his allies, and he instead offers it back as a return-gift to those who have hosted him in the land to which he has migrated.94

The second episode of Abraham's life which is particularly significant comes immediately after the well-known theophany in Genesis 18. While Abraham is prepared to offer hospitality to the unknown strangers who appear outside his tent, the
the genuine test of his hospitality is how he will respond to those whom he knows well. Having been assured of an heir, the question the narrative implicitly poses is whether Abraham will continue to stay loyal to his nephew Lot and the inhospitable hosts of his kin. And yet, despite the sheer depravity which characterises the city of Sodom – Genesis 19 gives in graphic detail an account of the way in which even the very practice of hospitality itself has become laced with violent tendencies – nevertheless, Abraham has the confidence to enter into negotiation with YHWH over what he perceives as YHWH’s impending inhospitable actions towards the city. Having received God’s gift of election and blessing, Abraham seeks now to offer the same graciousness to others and pleads for the survival of the city.95

The gracious, hospitable character of Abraham, his understanding that his election is not for himself but is an election for the Other, is evident even in the distressing account of Hagar’s and Ishmael’s exclusion (Gen 21:8-21). Sarah’s inhospitality – manifest in her demand that Ishmael’s legitimate inheritance rights should, after the birth of her own son Isaac, be revoked, and both Ishmael and Hagar sent away – is contrasted in the story with Abraham’s anguish at casting away his own flesh and blood (v11-12). The passage suggests that Abraham has no intention of following Sarah’s demands, and only acts in such an unethical and inhospitable manner, once God has conveyed to him that the protection and future inheritance of Ishmael will be his divine concern. This offering up of his own son Ishmael to the hospitality of God, is preparatory for what therefore is the even more radical call – the sacrifice of Isaac – that awaits Abraham in the following chapter. Such an understanding of

95 The suggestion here is that, in a strange irony, it is often far easier to offer hospitality and to forgive those whom we do not know – strangers – than those closer to home, whom we do know. Our reflections on this passage are influenced by Derrida’s reading of Louis Massignon, in Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 368-380. Massignon’s extraordinary life and his thought seem to have had a profoundly moving affect on Derrida, who speaks warmly of Massignon’s life lived as a hostage in the community of Badaliya, and his desire to awaken – without force – Islam to the truth of Christ. For further reading on Massignon and his remarkable life of practised hospitality see Herbert Mason, Memoir of a Friend: Louis Massignon (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), and Mary Louise Gude, Louis Massignon: The Crucible of Compassion (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).
election – not election instead of the Other, or, apart from the Other, but rather, for the Other – is central not just to the story of Abraham, but rather is a thread woven throughout the Biblical narrative. While having an obvious resonance with Levinas' understanding that the call of the Other is a call to infinite responsibility, nevertheless, the distinction we have highlighted is that such responsibility for the Other stems from the prior reception of the gift of self-identity, the gift of being addressed, named and elected by the Divine Other.

**Human Personhood: Gifted, Unique, the Image of God**

Our re-interpretation of the motifs of call/address/election offers a distinct understanding of the self – that is, an ontology of personhood. Below, we will summarise three foundational theses of the theological anthropology we have begun to develop. While these theses are in reality mutually constitutive and therefore overlapping, we will, for ease of expression and in order to give a greater degree of clarity, deal with each separately.

The first tenet that proceeds from the argument we have outlined above is that self-identity and personhood is a gift. In contrast to the impossible Derridean gift – which comes from no-one and no-where and on reception is annulled – at the heart of the Christian doctrine of creatio ex nihilo is the belief that humanity does not come into existence due to necessity, but rather is a free act which overflows from the love shared between the communion of Divine persons. Creation, thus understood, is not an exercise in violent power 'over' the Other, but rather is a movement of love and freedom, a moment of ekstasis, the free offering of a gift from the absolute Other, an expression of divine hospitality. This understanding that our very biological existence is a gift of the Creator God, that our identity as a person is not self-constituted but rather is constituted by our relations, both with the Creator God and with others around us, is conveyed by Zizioulas, thus:
The person is an identity that emerges through relationship...; it is an ‘I’ that can exist only as long as it relates to a ‘thou’ which affirms its existence and its otherness. If we isolate the ‘I’ from the ‘thou’ we lose not only its otherness but also its very being; it simply cannot be without the other. 96

Accordingly, it is oxymoronic to speak of an individual person. Personhood is not something that happens in isolation. To be a person is to be involved in relationships of love and freedom. Genuine freedom is not freedom from the Other, but rather for the Other.

The important correlation between the cosmological narratives and ontologies of personhood to which we have drawn attention are also observed by John Milbank. In rebuttal of the ontology offered by Levinas and Derrida comprised of a uni-lateral relationality with an unknown Other, Milbank notes that gift-giving between genuinely free identities is itself dependent upon an ontology of relational reciprocity. Milbank writes:

There can only be a gift to someone, if only an imagined someone, else the gesture of giving, even the originating gesture of gratitude, is indiscriminate and inattentive to an other’s reality and needs, such that its outgoing might equally well be the outgoing of poison or destruction. But a gift to someone is a gift to someone already in some sense apparent, someone to whom one is already connected. Therefore, even if (as theology certainly believes, but cannot be apodeictically shown) there is only, in the reality of being, relation and reciprocity where there is gift, it is equally true that there cannot be gift except where there is already relation and reciprocity. (Divine Creation is the exception that proves the rule, because here what is

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96 Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 9.
given to Creation is only the relation to God, by which relation alone
Creation is in being at all.) If the first clause holds, then this also
means that there can only be gift where there is already gift.\textsuperscript{97}

Secondly, the personalist ontology that we have outlined above means that \textit{to be a person is to be unique and particular}. While in historical Western thought the human being has been understood primarily in substantial terms – according to nature (\textit{ousia}) – the Eastern tradition, in its understanding of \textit{Being} as personal, emphasises the particularity of each hypostasis. Within the Eastern Orthodox tradition of theological anthropology, each human is understood as sharing in the same nature of being human – that is, our very existence as humans is an existential fact of the prior relationship, of our being \textit{gifted} – but what it is that makes us persons is our \textit{particularity} and \textit{unique distinctiveness}. Another Orthodox theologian, Christos Yannaras, explains how such a personalist ontology works itself out anthropologically, in this manner:

\begin{quote}
Man [humanity] is one in essence according to his nature, and in many hypostases according to his persons. Each man is a unique, distinct and unrepeatable person; he is an existential distinctiveness. All men have a common nature or essence, but this has no existence except as personal distinctiveness, as freedom and transcendence of their own natural predeterminations and natural necessity. The person is the hypostasis of the human essence of nature. He sums up in his existence the universality of human nature, but at the same time surpasses it, because his \textit{mode of existence} is freedom and distinctiveness.\textsuperscript{98}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{97} John Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity, Part One: Reciprocity Refused," \textit{Modern Theology} 17, no. 3 (July 2001): 335-391, 350-351.
\textsuperscript{98} Christos Yannaras, \textit{The Freedom of Morality}, trans. Elizabeth Briere (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 19. Yannaras' use of the term 'Man' may perhaps be attributed to the translation process. 'Humanity' is, of course, to be preferred.
Thus, when we speak theologically of ‘person’ we are speaking not of generalities – as in Greek thought – but rather of particularities. To be a human person is to recognise both one’s own uniqueness and particularity, but also the uniqueness and particularity of the Other.

Thirdly, as humans made in the ‘image of God’, we are designed to exist as God exists. Central to our argument, and flowing from the tenet above, is the belief that humanity reflects the *imago Dei*, not through our nature – our substance/ousia – that is, through *what* we are, but rather through our mode of being, that is, through *how* we exist. Humanity, as created, and therefore with a beginning and an end, can never be God by nature, but we are ‘called to exist in the way God exists.’

How God exists as Father, Son and Spirit, who freely and in love ‘make room’ and space for the Other establishes and discloses the ultimate and genuine form of human life. Zizioulas summarises this distinction between the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ in this way:

> The ‘image of God’ in man has precisely to do with this *how*, not with the *what* man is: it relates not to nature – man can never become God by nature – but to personhood. This means that man is free to affect the *how* of his existence either in the direction of the way (the *how*) God is, or in the direction of *what* his, that is man’s, nature is. Living according to nature (*kata physin*) would thus amount to individualism, mortality, and so on, since man is not immortal *kata physin*. Living, on the other hand, according to the image of God means living in the way God exists, that is as an image of God’s personhood, and this would amount to ‘becoming God’.

Such an ontology of personhood as we have traced in outline above has profound implications for our understanding of human identity. If our very existence is itself a

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99 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 165.
100 Ibid., 165-6.
result of the gift of life breathed into our nostrils, if our existence stems from the movement of ekstasis within the Godhead, then according to the Christian doctrine of imago dei, our very identity as created humans is one of being gift-receivers and gift-givers. If, as we have contended, the idea of human gift-giving (hospitality) is itself predicated on the gift-giving (hospitality) of God, then, as Miroslav Volf suggests, 'to live in sync with who we really are means to recognize that we are dependent on God for our very breath and are graced with many good things; it means to be grateful to the giver and attentive to the purpose for which the gifts are given.'

While the attempt to construct a theological anthropology and a conception of social relations by starting with an exploration and elaboration of the ontological Trinity has been critiqued, Zizioulas and other Trinitarian theologians offer, we believe, a compelling account of the way in which human relations are shaped by, and should reflect, Trinitarian relations. To be a person is to be a gift-giver and receiver, to acknowledge that we are constituted by the gift/call of the Divine Other, and to recognise that our lives are only fully human as we live, making space for others. Created in the 'image of God' and therefore designed to participate in 'how' God lives, human relationships should be characterised by freedom, mutual self-giving and love.

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102 Some theologians express concerns about drawing one’s theological anthropology from an elaboration of the ontological Trinity. Ted Peters suggests that such theologies, in which it is argued social relations should reflect Trinitarian relations, disregard the fact that ‘God alone is God’ and that ‘we as creatures cannot copy God in all respects.’ See Ted Peters, God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 186. In a different vein, Karen Kilby suggests social Trinitarian theologies are in danger of projecting a social program back onto God. See Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity," New Blackfriars (October 2000): 432-445. Peters’ critique seems to fail to appreciate Zizioulas’ distinction between the what and the how of God. We are not being called to exist according to the nature (the what) of God – as created beings, this is impossible – rather, we are called to exist according to the mode (the how) of God’s being. For a response to these two common critiques of Trinitarian theology see the Preface to Gunton, Promise of Trinitarian Theology.
However, any approach to construct a theological anthropology based purely on the doctrines of creation and the Trinity, as outlined above, would be problematic. While humanity, made in the image of God, bears the imprint of the relational-hospitable Trinitarian God, our createdness – the fact that we are not divine – and the fact that our lives ‘are inescapably marred by sin and saddled with transitoriness’ means that the ability for human relations to correspond with those of the Trinitarian relations has set limitations. Volf describes the relationship between the doctrines of creation and sin and the attempt to construct a theological anthropology based on Trinitarian relations, thus:

By describing God in whose image human beings are created and redeemed, the doctrine of the Trinity names the reality which human communities ought to image. By describing human beings as distinct from God, the doctrines of creation and of sin inform the way in which human communities can image the Triune God, now in history and then in eternity.

While we have already noted the limitations of human createdness – Zizioulas’ argument that it is not the what of God that humanity is called to replicate, but rather the how of God’s existence – it is important now that we turn our attention to the doctrine of sin. In what follows, we will propose that it is the failure of humanity to live as gift-receivers/givers, our inability to participate freely in divine hospitality, and thus our incapacity to enter into genuine ‘personhood’, which provides the appropriate construal of the nature of sin. The underlying adversarial relationality –


104 Ibid., 107. Volf continues in a footnote: 'There is a discrepancy between the vast amount of reflection devoted to the possibility of positive correspondence between the Triune God and human community and the virtual absence of reflection on the inherent limits of all such correspondences.' Likewise, Edward Russell, while in general sympathetic, argues that one of the failings of the anthropology offered by John Zizioulas is a ‘weak doctrine of sin.’ Edward Russell, "Reconsidering Relational Anthropology: A Critical Assessment of John Zizioulas’s Theological Anthropology," International Journal of Systematic Theology 5, no. 2 (July 2003): 168-186.
characterised by hostility, separation-distance and division – such as evidenced in the thought of Derrida and Levinas, we will argue, is thus not to be understood as the creational intent, but rather stems from this failure of humanity to live how God does. To develop this understanding of sin as a failure to receive the gift of otherness we will engage in a brief treatment of Genesis 3.

The Doctrine of Sin: Hostility and the Knowledge that Consumes

While the Christian scriptures begin with the declaration that humanity is made in the ‘image and likeness’ of God (Gen 1:26), by chapter three of this Genesis account things have begun to go awry. Many historical interpretations of Genesis 3 tend to concentrate their reading of this passage around the series of dialogues that take place: Between the woman and the Serpent; the earth woman and the earth man; YHWH’s questioning of the man and woman; and then, the subsequent speech, in this case a monologue, delivered by YHWH to the man, woman and serpent. While there is much to be gleaned from such an analysis of the speech dynamics within the text, in what follows we will take a different approach. Central to an understanding of the narrative and therefore to our conception of ‘sin’, we will suggest, is an appreciation of the emphasis that the narrative places on the eyes, the function of sight and their relationship to knowledge.

In Genesis 3:5, in his conversation with the earth woman, the serpent explicitly connects knowledge with the eyes, stating that should the earth creatures eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree their “eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Subsequent to her conversation with the serpent the woman then ‘saw’ that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes’
(Gen 3:6). The knowledge that the serpent offers is not however a genuine knowledge but rather, is distorted. As Nahum Sarna eloquently puts it:

There is an undertone of irony in the formulation that she “saw that it was good,” for it echoes God’s recurring judgment about his creation in chapter 1. Now, however, good has become debased in the woman’s mind. Its definition is no longer God’s verdict but is rooted in the appeal to the senses and in utilitarian value. Egotism, greed, and self-interest now govern human action.106

Rather than recognising their givenness – that is, living in the knowledge of their existence constituted as gift from the Divine Other, and likewise, living in an appreciation of the gift of each other and the creation around them – appropriative desire is awoken within the earth creatures. Seduced by the cynical and manipulative conjecturing of the serpent, the ‘fall’, is to be understood as humanity’s desire for an all-seeing, all-comprehending, all-encompassing, totalising knowledge.

The consequences of such an appropriative desire – for a knowledge which is gained through one’s own eyes, for an epistemology/episteme derived from the self and grounded in human experience/subjectivity, rather than embedded in and stemming from the ontological reception of gift – are immediate. The eyes of both the earth creatures are indeed opened, but now the fascination, vulnerability and joy which characterised their relationship (Gen 2:25) is replaced by embarrassment, fear and repulsion. In seeking to know the other through the eyes of self, rather than a gift of otherness to be received, attraction gives way to antagonism, openness to opposition, harmony to hiddenness. Not only does the desire for a knowledge acquired through human eyes violate the otherness of both the physical creation and fellow humanity, but even more devastating it leads to a distancing from the original gift-giver, the Divine Other. Thus, as well as hiding their nakedness from one another – for fear of

106 Sarna, Genesis, 25.
being further violated – humanity now also distances itself from its Creator. The hospitable Creator, who in a moment of *ekstasis* so intimately breathed the gift of life into the nostrils of the earth creature, is now to be feared and hidden from. If, as fallen humanity now mistakenly believes, knowledge means ‘control-over’ and a grasping of that which is Other, then what prevents their Creator, the Divine Other – the source of all such knowledge – from violating them? With such a distorted perception of *knowledge*, humanity understandably seeks to hide from its own Creator.

In such a reading, fallenness therefore is understood fundamentally as humanity’s failure to receive its life as *gift*. Stemming from the mistaken belief that identity is self-constituted, the particularity and uniqueness of the Other is thus denied as both creation itself – the fruit – and the human Other, are literally grasped and *consumed* by the self. In seeking to find our identity independent of the Other we devour the Other on our terms. The gaze of loving desire between *'ish* and *'ishah* turns to a leer of lust. To mitigate the devastating consequences of this new-found totalising and exposing knowledge, YHWH, in an act of gracious compassion, makes garments to protect them from further objectification (Gen 3:21). In such a state of *desire*, God, the Divine Other, becomes reduced to an *idol*; the human Other, an object to be feared or assimilated; and the otherness of creation, something to be utilised and dominated.\(^{107}\)

In contrast to Derrida’s gift, that cannot aporetically be acknowledged or received without being annulled, we contend it is the very acknowledgment of the Other, of the gift-giver, which gives the gift its giftedness and therefore prevents it from becoming merely an object that can be assimilated and consumed by the self, independent of relationality. It is, therefore, the refusal to recognise our own giftedness and the giftedness and therefore particularity and uniqueness of the

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\(^{107}\) Our thought here is influenced by the work of Jean-Luc Marion, in particular, his *God Without Being*. 195
Other, which represents the triumph of the Cartesian self, and is itself the 'original sin'.

The consumptive and assimilative nature of the desire for a self-constituted knowledge and identity, a desire that leads to the violation of the otherness of creation and each other, reaches its nadir in Genesis 4. Here, Cain in his desire for an identity constituted independent of others, rather than recognising his life and all he has as a gift and thus offering the first-fruits back to God in gratitude and response, literally consumes the best of his fruit, and then inhospitably offers his leftovers back to God. His desire for a self-constituted identity climaxes in the murdering of the human other – his brother Abel – and as a sign of his complete ingratitude, his ecological host, the ground that had produced his fruit, is now drowned in the blood of the deceased brother.\(^{108}\)

However, as with all desire, once whet it becomes more and more difficult to satiate the voracious appetite now aroused. Consequently, the desire to control, consume and assimilate the Other far from leading to knowledge, has the opposite effect, leading one deeper and deeper into deception. Our propensity to see the Other through our own eyes, stimulated by our desire for a self-constituted identity, ultimately leads to our own loss of identity. Like all unhealthy appetites/addictions unable to be mastered (Gen 4:7) this consumptive desire, once devoid of other others to prey upon, turns inward and ultimately devours itself.\(^{109}\) Thus, while the overthrow of the Cartesian self is a major accomplishment of post-structuralist thought, the

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\(^{108}\) Such an interpretation as we offer here overcomes many of the problems associated with this text. Cain's sin is not simplistically to be understood as an infraction of an arbitrary divine stipulation – the injunction that one offers one's first-fruits back to God – nor is it an indication that YHWH has a particular predilection for meat rather than vegetables. Rather, Cain's failure to follow the prescribed form of sacrifice is illustrative of his actual 'sin', his ingratitude to the Divine Other who has blessed him with the bounty of crops, to the land which is his 'host', and to the broader community who would have shared in the communal 'sacrificial' feast. Such themes will be expanded upon when we return to this narrative in the next chapter.

\(^{109}\) 1 Peter 5:8
‘non-self’ that is offered in replacement of the all-knowing cogito, contains the seeds of its own destruction. While post-structuralist thought unmasks the consumptive and assimilative tendency of the Cartesian self, the ‘non-self’ devoid of any fixed or secure identity now turns inwards and in an endless process of deconstruction – divides itself up, consuming itself.

Summary

What are the implications of this doctrine of sin for our understanding of human personhood and identity? While created by the hospitable God, and designed to participate in the communion of the divine persons by receiving and offering the gift of hospitality, as sinful people there appears an inward drive, an inherent bias, to seek to comprehend and control what is Other than ourselves. In doing so, not only do we do damage to the Other, but we also damage ourselves. But is the human experience to be understood as an unending tension between our desire for experiencing genuine hospitality, and our tendencies to overcome and devour the Other, to assimilate them to the Self? Is all hospitality, as Derrida would tell us, mixed with a little hostility? Is there hope for a new mode of relationality with the Other? Is the embrace of intimacy culminating in a return ‘home’, as depicted in Song of Songs, just a forlorn dream, with our ‘soul’s love’ turning out to be a Derridean Messiah who never shows up? 110

110 Upon my bed at night
   I sought him whom my soul loves;
   I sought him, but found him not;
   I called him, but he gave no answer...

   when I found him whom my soul loves
   I held him and would not let him go
   until I brought him into my mother’s house,
       and into the chamber of her that conceived me. (Song of Songs 3:4), NRSV.
While Derrida sees such ongoing tension, this ‘division’, and restless waiting, as preferable to a world of ‘communion’, and Levinas, faced with the human tendency towards violence, offers a philosophy based on distance and separation rather than relationship, we have contended that separation-distance and division are not part of the ontological fabric of creation but rather, are the result of human brokenness. If, as we have argued, otherness is constitutive of communion, then sin is the human failure to recognise and receive the gift of otherness. The failure to recognise our otherness from God cuts us off from the source of communion – from the Divine Other. Unwilling to accept the giftedness of our life from the Divine Other, cut off from the source of divine hospitality, we become ‘individuals’, who seek to control the Other on our own terms. Accordingly, sin is not to be understood morally, as our failure to live up to divine standards, and nor is death therefore to be understood as a punishment from God handed out as a penalty for humanity’s moral failings. Rather, death is the ontological consequence of a creation – the other – cut off from its Creator – the Divine Other. In our refusal to accept the gift of otherness we are cut off from the ‘breath of life’, from the loving communion and life-giving embrace of the Trinitarian God. Isolated as individuals our ‘biological’ existence slowly decays and moves towards death.

If division stems from this human inability to live in communion with the Divine Other, and is itself an ontological problem, then the solution lies not, as Levinas and Derrida suggest, in human ethicity, but rather in the realm of ontology. According to Christian belief, this division is not overcome by human ethical behaviour, but rather through the giving by God, of the ultimate gift – that of his Son. That is, it is the Christian belief that it is in this gift of the incarnation – in the entrance into a world

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111 Derrida’s preference for this tension and struggle over peaceful communion is stated in an interview, where Derrida remarks: ‘I don’t much like the word community, I am not even sure I like the thing. If by community one implies, as is often the case, a harmonious group, consensus, and fundamental agreement beneath the phenomena of discord or war, then I don’t believe in it very much and I sense in it as much threat as promise.’ Jacques Derrida, 'A 'Madness' Must Watch Over Thinking,' in Points, 339-364, 355.
beset with inhospitality and violence of the Divine Other and through the life, death and resurrection of this 'stranger' Jesus – that *distance-separation* and *division* is overcome. It is through our lives being 'overtaken' and entering into the welcoming embrace of the Divine Other, and thus our entrance into the *ecclesia* – the ‘called out’ community – that we find our true identity as persons. It is these themes – Christ as the hidden stranger, the Church as the community of welcome, and the formation of a christological-ecclesial-eschatological identity – which will be the subject of the forthcoming chapters.
Wrestling with the Other: Getting to Grips with Hostility
(Genesis 29-33)

A few chapters after recounting the relationship between YHWH and Abraham, the Genesis narrative introduces us to Abraham’s grandson, Jacob. From the very beginning of the narrative, in the recounting of Jacob’s birth and the inter-uterine grappling with his twin brother, the reader is made aware of the struggle which will characterise Jacob’s life. Having stolen the birthright and father’s blessing from his brother Esau, and forced to flee for his life to his Uncle Laban, as Jacob’s life progresses it takes on a regular pattern. Despite receiving the blessing of the LORD (28:10-20), for Jacob, unlike Abraham, this experience of divine hospitality is not a reality to be shared with others. Rather, Jacob desires to create a self-constituted identity, an identity in which he receives blessing and in which the Other is used for his own benefit. Such a desire results in a series of destructive relationships characterised by deception and manipulation. As the story unfolds, the reader becomes spectator to a litany of broken promises and deceit, watching as Jacob’s competitive and combative approach to inter-personal relations begins to permeate all those who come into contact with him – the text exposing all the dirty laundry of a dysfunctional family. Hence, one witnesses the relationship between Jacob, the supplanter, and his Uncle Laban, which commences with an exuberant welcome and embrace, degenerate into an economic power-struggle characterised by treachery and dishonesty, as each seeks to gain ascendency over the other.¹ One also observes

¹ The episode describing Laban’s welcome of his nephew Jacob, like the whole narrative, lends itself to multiple and contrasting readings. Laban’s hospitality can be seen as a genuinely warm welcome, highlighted by his exclamation, “Surely you are my bone and my flesh”, reminiscent of the praise-speech we have encountered earlier in Genesis 2:23, (29:13-14). So too, Jacob’s greeting ‘kiss’ of his cousin Rachel and his tears of joy can be interpreted as clear evidence of his delight in encountering kin (29:10-11). But is this necessarily the case? Could it be that Jacob’s theatrical display of affection towards his cousin, Rachel, is designed to ingratiate himself to his new ‘hosts’,
the struggle between sisters Leah and Rachel as they fight for the affection of Jacob; and in the supreme example of disrespect of one's family and ancestors, watches with horror as Rachel 'fleeces' her own Father's household gods (31:19).

Having out-stayed his welcome in Paddan-aram with Laban, Jacob commences his journey to return 'home'. But where is his 'home'? As Jacob nears the end of his 'home'-ward journey, he confronts the reality that, while absent for twenty years, his previous sins, that is, his abuse of the Other – in this case his brother – are yet to be atoned for, and there is no guarantee he will be welcomed. Genesis 32 is thus the climax of the narrative, as Jacob, in his encounter with the angel of the LORD, comes 'face-to-face' with his own life of treachery and struggle.

Though Jacob's life has consisted of receiving blessing and 'kisses' of welcome – of his father Isaac (27:26-29), the Angel of the LORD (28:13-15) and Laban and Rachel (29:11-14) – now, having reached the banks of the Jabbok river, Jacob's life, both literally, and metaphorically, stands at a crossroad. Having been pointedly omitted from Laban's departure blessing (31:55) and uncertain of the welcome that awaits him on the other side of the river, Jacob pauses at the ford of Jabbok. His life of struggling with, and overcoming others on his terms, has led him to a point where, despite his economic success, he now stands isolated and alone. His legitimate concerns over whether his brother Esau, will, after all these years, show 'hospitality' towards him have brought him to a standstill, to a situation of 'homelessness'.

while Laban's welcome stems from recognising the benefits of free family-labour? Is Jacob's overflow of emotion, in meeting his kin – and future wife – Rachel, actually genuine, while Laban's welcome is one of 'calculating eagerness', or vice-versa? See Herbert Marks, "Biblical Naming and Poetic Etymology," Journal of Biblical Literature 114, no. 1 (1995): 21-42, 36, n. 25. The contrasting readings, as we will see, are themselves illustrative of the duplicitous nature of the characters one encounters throughout the narrative and testify to the struggle with hospitality which typifies the fallen human condition.
But how therefore are we to understand the complex passage which narrates the struggle between Jacob and the nocturnal visitor? The physical wrestling match with the unknown adversary, like the narrative full of ‘internal doublings and intertextual echoes’ in which it is embedded, is illustrative of the struggle with an inner hostility, the wrestling with identity that the duplicitous Jacob himself now confronts.  
Having spent a whole night wrestling with an unknown stranger, Jacob, following the pattern of his life and motivated by his current state of uncertainty and ‘homelessness’, demands a blessing (‘welcome’) from his adversary. The response of his adversary – the divine ‘stranger’ – is to ask Jacob his name and Jacob’s subsequent response to this inquiry (32:27) can be read in two ways. Is Jacob’s response a declaration of pride in his own self-constituted identity? – “I am Jacob, the supplanter. I have no need of the Other, but rather, as my life testifies, I am the creator of my own identity and destiny”. Or, rather, is it a confession of the origins of his stolen identity (27:18-19) and an attempt to repeal these actions? – “My name Jacob testifies to my life of seeking to supplant and overcome the Other on my terms, a life which has brought me ultimately to this point of loneliness and ‘homelessness’”.

The choice of reading likewise shapes how one understands the actual ‘struggle’ that precedes the conversation between Jacob and his combatant. English translations render verse 25 as ‘When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he (the stranger) struck him (Jacob) on the hip socket.’ Hebrew pronouns however, are less specific in their reference, and therefore the verse can equally be translated: ‘When Jacob saw that he did not prevail against the man, he (the stranger) struck him (that is, Jacob) on the hip socket.’ In the first reading – usually the one chosen by interpreters – the divine visitor (‘elohim) is viewed as the ‘antagonist’.  
But could it be that Jacob is the aggressor? Such a reading, that is, the second rendering, is given more weight when one considers the divine stranger’s cry for release in the following

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2 Ibid.: 34.
3 See for example, von Rad, Genesis, 315.
verse: ‘Then he [the angel] said, “Let me go, for the day is breaking.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.”’ [32:26].

These alternate readings – Jacob defending himself from the assault of an unknown assailant or, Jacob the aggressor seeking to overcome another Other – and therefore the ambiguous nature of Jacob’s identity, are highlighted further as the narrative moves towards its climax. Having heard Jacob’s declaration/confession of his name, Elohim now proceeds to rename Jacob, ‘Israel’. Variously translated as ‘strife’/’strive’/’rule’/’persist’, the name can accordingly be interpreted as ‘El strives [for you]’ and therefore be understood as an extension of God’s special protection which Jacob has received from YHWH earlier at Bethel (28:13-15). According to such a reading, the acknowledgement of his name ‘Jacob’, and thus the confession of his life’s struggles and the recognition of the dead-end this has led him to, is responded to by a divine ‘re-naming’, where Jacob’s life of struggle against the odds, and the Other, is seen as either forgiven or vindicated. Thus, von Rad states, Jacob ‘is given a new name by the unknown antagonist, a name of honor, in which God will recognize and accept him.’

However, the whole episode of wrestling that has preceded this conversation between Jacob and the unknown Other, as Herbert Marks suggests, ‘undermines this pious fiction.’ Could it be that what we are witnessing is not a re-naming – ‘El strives [for you]’ – but rather, in the designation, ‘Israel’, that is, ‘El strives [against you],’ a re-doubling of Jacob’s original name? Jacob’s aggression in trying to overcome the divine Other – to place him literally in a ‘head-lock’ – simply continues

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4 Ibid., 316-7. In a similar vein Sarna writes: ‘It is the bestowal of the new name that constitutes the essence of the blessing and the climax of the entire episode. Jacob had feared for his posterity; now he is tacitly assured that he will become the patriarch of a nation named Israel.’ Sarna, Genesis, 227.

5 Marks, "Biblical Naming," 40.
his life-long pattern of seeking to control the Other on his own terms. Thus, as Marks notes, even as 'the eponym “Israel” is presented as superseding the birth-name “Jacob,” with which it is thus somehow at “strife,”... its declared “prevalence” reconfirms paradoxically the persistence of the displaced “supplanter.”'

This second reading, far from being contrived, is reinforced by the divine Other's response to Jacob's request for the revealing of his name. Why does Jacob ask for the name of the stranger, when in the act of re-naming Jacob, 'Isra-el', the stranger – el-ohim – has already disclosed his hidden identity to his adversary? Indeed, the stranger, despite Jacob's unequivocal request, refuses to explicitly reveal his own name, perhaps fully aware that anyone prepared to spend an entire night wrestling a stranger, is an individual who is used to having mastery over the Other. Does the stranger fear that in giving up his name, such a foe as he has encountered in Jacob will thus take the opportunity to manipulate and emasculate him through his control of language? Indeed, do Jacob's final actions in renaming and thus supplanting Jabbok's ('emptiness') with the name Peniel/Penuel ('presence') testify to Jacob's logocentrism, his desire for a 'metaphysics of presence', whereby what is Other can be brought within his comprehension and thus mastered? In contrast to the Sinai theophany, where Moses, though having had the Divine Name revealed to him (Exod 3:14), encounters the 'presence' of the forbidden face of YHWH (Exod 33:17-33), at Jabbok, Jacob's final act of 'extraordinary audacity', Marks contends, is to 'dispose of this forbidden face – the pêné'-el – not waiting for the name which the angel conveys, but seizing its most sacred and paradoxical expression and making it a memorial to his own success.'

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6 A further possible translation of ‘Israel’ as ‘Let El Rule’ would also imply such a reading, with the new name being a constant reminder to Jacob to allow God, rather than himself, to shape his identity and destiny.
7 Marks, "Biblical Naming," 39.
8 Ibid.: 40-1.
Even as the narrative draws to its close, the equivocal nature of the text continues to testify to the still unresolved ambiguity of the character Jacob, his ongoing struggle regarding his identity, his wrestling with an inner hostility. Jacob’s final speech, which closes the episode – “For I have seen the God face to face, and yet my life is preserved” (32:30) – is illustrative of this ongoing uncertainty. Sarna, commenting on the ambiguous nature of the idioms employed in this verse writes:

To “see the face” may describe an experience of either cordiality or hostility. “Face to face,” used only of divine-human encounters, may be an adversary confrontation or an experience of extraordinary intimacy. The deliberate ambiguity simultaneously portrays the perilous and the auspicious nature of the furious struggle.⁹

In the end, the prevaricating tendencies within both the text and the character of Jacob are never resolved. Whether the wrestling bout is simply another incidence of self-defiance – an attempt to place God into his own vice-like stranglehold, to subdue the Other and have him on his own terms – or rather, whether it signifies the final battle – where Jacob, after a lifetime of seeking to escape the ‘embrace’ of God, is finally overcome and surrenders his self-constituted identity, replacing it with an identity as gifted by the Divine Other – remains unclear. The question lingers: Who is the victor – Jacob the supplanter/deceiver, or the divine stranger?

Immediate post-bout events seem to suggest it is indeed the divine ‘host’ who has emerged as the victor and that Jacob has begun to learn the lessons of divine hospitality – that is, that welcome and embrace cannot be demanded, but come as a gift, as an expression of grace. Thus, the following morning Jacob’s fears are allayed as his brother Esau’s ‘kiss’ (33:4) comes as the final resolution to the bitter events precipitated by Jacob’s deceitful ‘kiss’, decades earlier (27:26-27). Indeed, it is this reception by his estranged brother; an act of genuine, gracious and forgiving

⁹ Sarna, Genesis, 228.
hospitality – that leads Jacob to declare: “to see your face is like seeing the face of God – since you have received me with such favour” (33:10). Could it be that despite his life of wrestling with Others, and seeking to escape the divine embrace, a ‘re-named’ – and ‘re-born’ – Jacob finally encounters the face of God, in his acceptance both by, and of, Esau? Akin to what Levinas would tell us – ‘The dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face’ – is it therefore through his experiencing of reconciling hospitality with his brother, that Jacob-Israel finally comes to the realisation that he has actually encountered divine hospitality?

While indeed possible, almost immediately the narrative ‘deconstructs’ any such neat resolution. Despite having received a forgiving welcome from his brother Esau, Jacob now proceeds, once again, to mislead his brother. To his brother’s suggestion that they should “journey alongside each other”, Jacob insists Esau should go ahead to Seir, with Jacob implying he will arrive later to enjoy his reunited twin’s hospitality. No sooner has Esau departed southward for Seir, to prepare for Jacob’s ‘home-coming’(?), than Jacob changes his course, turns northward and re-crosses the Jabbok, making camp at Succoth. While Sarna suggests that Jacob’s actions, as he ‘delicately disengages himself from Esau’s presence’, stem from ‘lingering misgivings’ he has about ‘the durability of Esau’s amiable mood’, we are not so sure. Could it be instead that Jacob’s actions, in turning his back on Esau’s hospitality, and in his re-crossing of the Jabbok, are evidence that the struggle within has not yet subsided?

Jacob’s story provides an intriguing counterpoint to our earlier reflection on the life of Abraham. While Abraham, in his obedience to a call, his reception of God’s blessing/welcome and the accompanying blessing by and for Others, serves as an exemplary model of a hospitable life, it is hard not to have a degree of empathy for

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10 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78.
the character of Jacob. Marks, commenting on the Jabbok episode, notes, with a Kierkegaardian allusion, that while Abraham, faced with the uncertainty of what lay ahead 'would have journeyed on', Jacob pauses 'like the too busy knight of Fear and Trembling, who as he is about to leap into eternity discovers he has forgotten something and goes home to fetch it.'\(^\text{12}\) Jacob's faith, 'less tractable, more errantly familiar',\(^\text{13}\) and his lifetime of 'struggle' seems more akin to our human experience – a life, which while seeking to accept the gift of divine hospitality and to accept the otherness of the Other, is often characterised by injustice and violence, perpetrated either upon us, or by ourselves onto others. But are we, like Jacob, condemned to a lifetime of struggle?

\(^\text{12}\) Marks, "Biblical Naming," 37.
\(^\text{13}\) Ibid.
Chapter Five.

‘LOGOS’, ‘Sacrificial Substitute’ and ‘Eikon’: Christology and the Overcoming of Hostility

‘God became man that we might be made god.’
• Athanasius, On the Incarnation •

‘Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.’
• Romans 15:7 •

‘I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.’
• C.S. Lewis

In the previous chapter, our primary concern was to outline the importance of ontology in any attempt to give a Christian account of hospitality. In contrast to Greek philosophical thought, the development of the doctrines of creatio ex nihilo and the Trinity during the third and fourth centuries gave expression to a distinctive Christian ontology. According to Colin Gunton, it is the failure of the church to apply the insights of this distinct ontological thinking into doctrines such as anthropology and ecclesiology which has created a ‘vacuum’, ‘readily filled by rival ontologies.’ Of these rival ontologies, our vision has primarily been focussed on the ontology implicit within post-structuralist thought, especially as articulated in the ‘hospitable’ philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida.

We have posed the question whether these philosophies with their innate ‘rival ontologies’ really live up to their billing as ‘hospitable’? Throughout our engagement with our interlocutors we have been at pains to note, positively, the

2 Gunton, Promise of Trinitarian Theology, 60 & 71.
overriding ethical inclinations that guide their writing. Nonetheless, there are elements of their work we have found troubling and arguably incompatible with the more explicitly theological account we seek to articulate. While highlighting specific aspects of their understandings of identity, inter-subjective relationality and eschatology which cause us anxiety, fundamentally these concerns stem from a deeper disquiet regarding the concealed ontological structure which seems to undergird both Levinasian and Derridean thought. In particular, we have noted that the Levinasian and Derridean stress on differance, division, separation and exteriority exists only because they seem unable to envisage a peaceful ontology – that is, an ontology in which communion and otherness mutually co-exist. The extent to which Levinas and Derrida seem to conceive interpersonal relations as containing inherent 'hostility', the fact that their philosophies appear undergirded by what John Milbank terms 'ontological violence', is succinctly and clearly articulated by James Olthuis.

Levinas is, in fact, accepting the long tradition of envisaging power as fundamentally power-over.... Thus, although Levinas is very critical of this ontology of power, calling it in fact "a philosophy of injustice" (TI 46), his move beyond into an ethical metaphysics of alterity consciously builds on and is dependent on a recognition of an ontology of being-as-power-over. His insistence on the necessity of an ethics of deference to the other (because egoism is wrong) is concomitant with recognition that it is ontologically impossible (because egoism is unavoidable)....

Such thinking seems to take the basic opposition between closed selves with all the ambiguity this involves as the personal interaction as a fundamental characteristic of human nature. In this paradigm [...] there are only two possibilities: dominate or be dominated. In this paradigm of violence, one either exercises power and becomes dominant and independent – that is, selfless – or one
surrenders and becomes submissive and dependent – that is, other-directed.

In this model we have a world of ceaseless conflict and endless competition until one proves him/herself superior. But in such a world, when neither is able to surrender voluntarily, striving eventually becomes empty and meaningless because each person remains alone, disconnected, incapable of change and development. On the other hand, if we choose not to exercise our desire for power and subordinate our needs and interests, we have a relation with another person but at the cost of stifling our own needs and interests.³

In contrast to these relations of differance, division and separation offered by Levinas and Derrida, we have suggested that genuine hospitality is grounded in relations of love and freedom – essential characteristics of an ontology of communion. Within such an ontology, relationality is not understood as inevitably adversarial, as a relationality in which power is used over the Other, hierarchy implies domination, ‘naming’ assumes control, and subordination is understood as subjugation. Rather, within this distinct ontology, ‘power-over’ is replaced with ‘power-with’; causation is understood as a relational term, evidence of our ultimate giftedness and therefore otherness; and distance and separation give way to a mutual sharing, to what Olthuis refers as a ‘sojourn[ing] together in the wild spaces of love.’⁴

However, despite the belief that relationships can be loving and harmonious, we live in a world where every day we are confronted with evidence that this is not the case. Unlike Levinas and Derrida, who offer no explanation for this incongruity, the Christian Doctrine of Sin as we have outlined above seeks to give an account of this

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⁴ Olthuis, "Crossing the Threshold," 37.
failure of humanity to live 'hospitably' with Others. But what resolution is there for such ontological antagonism? How is this hostility, the struggle with the Other, both within and exterior to ourselves, to be overcome? Are we, like Jacob/Israel, destined to an eternity of 'wrestling'?

A Christological Response?

Exemplarist Christologies
Historical Christianity claims that in the person of Jesus Christ – through his life, death and resurrection – the hostility and enmity that besets the world is overcome. But how exactly does the life of Jesus overcome the struggle with the Other that seems to be intrinsic to living in the world? Increasing post-modern sensibilities mean that to speak of the uniqueness of Christ as the saviour who overcomes the world's hostility is seen as inappropriate. Indeed, as Kathryn Tanner notes, the contemporary aversion to theological claims of the universal significance of Jesus means that '[t]he Christologies of ancient Antioch return to favour in modern

5 In a world increasingly aware of plurality with regard to questions of religion and faith, the Christian belief that Christ is the only Saviour of the world is often portrayed as the height of arrogance. It is argued that such an assertion of 'uniqueness' not only commits the ultimate 'post-modern' crime of intolerance, but also, in its totalising character, establishes the philosophical and ideological foundation for actual physical acts of violence towards the Other. In contrast to those whose critique can be summarised into the equation: 'more religion, more violence, less religion, less violence', and who advocate for a postmodern 'religion without religion', we concur with Miroslav Volf, that the problem is not the quantity of religious commitment, but rather the quality of religious commitment. Volf maintains that the 'thinning' of religious practice opens religious convictions to be misused to legitimize violence because it strips away precisely what in 'thick' religious faith guards against such misuse. Miroslav Volf, "Christianity and Violence" (paper presented at the Boardman Lectureship in Christian Ethics, Boardman Lecture XXXVIII University of Pennsylvania Department of Religious Studies, 01 March 2002), 4-5, and 5 n. 7 Available at <http://repository.upenn.edu/boardman/2> (6 October 2005). Our argument below proceeds on the assumption that it is only a 'thick' account of who Jesus is, one which accords with the historical tradition, rather than a Christology driven by modern sensibilities, which is able to provide a secure basis for an ethic of non-violence, peace and hospitality.
Christologies', and thus 'Jesus tends to become nothing more than a human model of compassion, justice seeking, and self-sacrifice, for our imitation.'

One can find such a Christology in the work of the co-chair of the Jesus Seminar, John Dominic Crossan. Crossan portrays Jesus as a Mediterranean peasant Jewish cynic, whose practice of 'open commensality' lay at the heart of his programme of 'building or rebuilding peasant community on radically different principles from those of honor and shame, patronage and clientage.' For Crossan, the strategic combination of free healing and common eating practiced by Jesus and his followers both advocated for and established 'a religious and economic egalitarianism that negated alike and at once the hierarchical and patronal normalcies of Jewish religion and Roman power.' This Jesus, Crossan believes, saw himself as 'neither broker nor mediator, but somehow paradoxically, the announcer that neither should exist between humanity and divinity or between humanity and itself.' Thus, according to Crossan, the practice of 'miracle and parable, healing and eating' that characterised Jesus ministry, were 'calculated to force individuals into unmediated physical and spiritual contact with God and unmediated physical and spiritual contact with one another.' Jesus, Crossan contends, 'announced, in other words, the brokerless Kingdom of God.'

While clearly Jesus' life displayed a radical ethic – one in which the fear and hatred of the Other was replaced by love, one in which the established roles of hospitality were turned upside down and which operated according to the principles of a

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6 Kathryn Tanner, Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 8.
7 Crossan, The Historical Jesus, 344.
8 Ibid., 422.
9 Ibid. Emphasis added.
10 Ibid.
11 As noted earlier – Chapter 1, note 71 – the radical character of Jesus' ethical manifesto, delivered in the 'Sermon on the Mount', is almost universally accepted by biblical scholars, regardless of whether they hold to a 'high' or 'low' Christology.
different economy\textsuperscript{12} – is his significance to be understood primarily in terms of a new ‘ethic of hospitality’ offered to humanity? That is, does the historical Jesus simply serve as a good ethical role model, a profound moral teacher, whose teaching and enacting of a radical egalitarian hospitality – a hospitality which confronted the ‘powers’ of his day – offers inspiration and a strategy for those seeking to respond to a contemporary world of exclusion and inhospitality?\textsuperscript{13}

Such Christologies, for all their appeal, seem to leave a number of significant questions unanswered. How do such exemplarist Christologies deal with the underlying emotions of fear, distrust and envy that, as in the narratives of Cain and Abel and Jacob and Esau, seem to be part of our experience of living in the world? In what sense do such Christologies, with their call to an imitation of the radical ethics enacted in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, respond to the genuine yearnings for justice we have when we have been wronged/violated by the Other? Or, on the other hand, how do they relieve us of the debilitating psychological sense of guilt which so often seems to persist when we, as the perpetrator, violate an Other?\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} New Testament scholars from across the theological spectrum have agreed that Jesus’ ‘table fellowship’ with sinners described in the Gospels is historically reliable, and plays a critical role in understanding Jesus’ earthly ministry. Craig L. Blomberg, engaging with recent scholarly debates, unpacks the significance of Jesus’ practice of ‘hospitality’ and offers some concluding contemporary applications in Craig L. Blomberg,\textit{Contagious Holiness: Jesus’ Meals with Sinners} (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos/InterVarsity Press, 2005).

\textsuperscript{13} In a similar vein to Crossan, Stephen Patterson, focussing on three early Christian understandings of the death of Jesus as ‘Victim’, as ‘Martyr’, and as ‘Sacrifice’, offers an exemplarist Christology. He writes, ‘I hope to show that these three strands, though distinct, work together to point the would-be followers of Jesus back to his life – to his words, his deeds, and his fate – as a life to be embraced as the life, and a fate to call one’s own.’ Stephen J. Patterson,\textit{Beyond the Passion: Rethinking the Death and Life of Jesus} (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 4.

\textsuperscript{14} A particularly vivid illustration of this is the story of Jacob we have just ruminated on, where Jacob’s fear and guilt lead to a life-time of ‘running’. When faced with a potential ‘face to face’ encounter this fear and guilt leads to a physical paralysis at Jabbok. Having wrestled with this ‘flight or fight’ instinct and having finally seemingly ‘crossed over’, Jacob, rather than face the pain of the long journey of reconciliation, flees again, to find solitude, away from the gaze of his brother.
Mediatorial Christologies

It is these questions of guilt and justice and the accompanying desire for retribution and/or forgiveness which typically figure most prominently in the Christologies of Western theology. In contrast to exemplarist Christologies which speak little of 'sin', it is this question of how the moral compass of the world is to be righted in a world punctuated by pain, anguish and injustice, which is of the utmost concern in what could be termed mediatorial Christologies. According to these Christologies, while there is undeniably a clear exemplary ethical dimension to Jesus' life and ministry, the significance of Jesus cannot be reduced merely to his life as an ethical example. In contrast to Crossan, such Christologies argue that Jesus is indeed a 'mediator' and that, paradoxically, it is at the place of extreme violence and inhospitality, the cross, that justice is enacted and forgiveness therefore offered. It is the contention of such Christologies that in Jesus' seemingly inglorious death by crucifixion the hostility that exists between humanity and both the human Other and the Divine Other is overcome and the hospitality of God is revealed.

While offering a broader soteriology than the ethical imitatio Christi of exemplarist Christologies, such mediatorial Christologies still, however, appear somewhat limited in their scope and offer up a new set of awkward questions. While the death of Jesus according to such Christologies overcomes the negative effects of 'sin', what is the positive soteriological content of Jesus' death? Does the salvific nature of Christ's work consist merely in redemption from sin? In what way does a mediatorial Christ meet the aspiration for an eternal overcoming of division and therefore reconciliation with what is Other – with the human other, with creation, and with the Divine Other? That is, to what extent do such Christologies offer us a secure hope that the hostility that bedevils the world will ultimately cease and that the future will be one composed of an authentic and eternal hospitality?
Often in these mediatorial Christological accounts ‘death’ is understood as the punishment for human sin and disobedience which can be removed once God’s justice has been satisfied and the moral law has been upheld by the vicarious death of Jesus. But is ‘death’ best understood as a punishment for man’s violation or transgression of the divine moral law? We have already suggested that death is perhaps best conceived not as a divine punishment that is imposed, but rather as the existential consequence of our failure to fulfil our designated roles as ‘priests of creation’ – of failing to take that which is created and refer/offer it back to the uncreated Divine Giver and therefore to live as ‘persons’ in communion with God, one another, and creation. 15 Within such an understanding, sin is not primarily to be construed along juridical lines but rather is to be understood as a perversion of the personhood to which we are called, and death is the ontological consequence of this failure of humanity to live as ‘persons’, gift-bearers, offering our createdness back in praise and thanks to the Divine Gift-Giver. Zizioulas expresses this distinction well, stating:

The ultimate meaning of the Fall was, therefore, in the fact that by perverting personhood (personhood being the only way of communion with God) man turned difference between uncreated and created natures into division between the two, and thus ruined God’s purpose in creating man: communion. 16

According to Zizioulas, this understanding, that death is not a divine punishment but rather stems from the perversion of personhood, is particularly evident in Orthodox theology which ‘sees that the problem of the created is not moral but

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15 Zizioulas explicitly refers to humans as ‘priests of creation’ in Zizioulas, "Preserving God's Creation: One," 1-5, 2. The phrase also appears in his earlier work. See John D. Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood," Scottish Journal of Theology 28, no. 5 (1975): 401-447, 435. On the subject of death, Zizioulas writes: ‘Death came to him [man] not as a punishment in the juridical sense but as an existential consequence of his break of this communion; it came at the moment that man became introverted, and limited the ecstatic movement of his personhood to the created world.’ Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 228.

16 Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 238.
ontological; it is the problem of the existence (and not the beauty) of the world, the problem of death.'\textsuperscript{17}

In the face of such an understanding both exemplarist and mediatorial Christologies appear inadequate. While exemplarist Christologies may offer us a new ethic of hospitality to attempt to live by, and mediatorial Christologies may soothe our moral consciousness – assuring us of our salvation from sin – neither respond directly to this existential question of death and thus neither tend to speak explicitly of the \textit{positive} dimension of our hoped-for future.\textsuperscript{18} While not denying the negative aspect of Christology in which humanity having fallen from grace requires redemption, Zizioulas reminds us that ‘Christology should not be confined to redemption from sin but reaches beyond that, to man’s destiny as the image of God in creation.’\textsuperscript{19} Zizioulas again succinctly summarises our point:

\begin{quote}
Christology, therefore, does not offer Christ to anthropology as a model for imitation, as an \textit{imitation Christi}, for this would be perhaps of an ethical but certainly not of an ontological significance to anthropology. Neither could Christology be of any real help to anthropology if it offered Christ as the victim for the sins of humanity in a substitutionary manner which would not affect man’s
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 261.

\textsuperscript{18} Generally speaking, exemplarist Christologies tend to view the fundamental problem facing humanity as one of the ‘hardness of our hearts’ and tend to favour \textit{Abelardian soteriologies} in which it is as we look to the moral example of the life and death of Jesus that our hearts are softened to God’s love. For mediatorial Christologies, the fundamental problem facing humanity, the barrier that separates us from God, is God’s wrath towards us due to our moral failings. Christ’s perfect moral life, offered sacrificially back to God, removes God’s wrath and makes us acceptable to God. In the vast majority of Western theologies, redemption from sin and justification leads on to a doctrine of sanctification and an elaboration of the way in which the Spirit of Christ works within believers to enable them to live ‘holy’ \textit{moral} lives. In contrast, Orthodox theology, in its understanding that death and separation is not fundamentally an \textit{ethical} or \textit{moral} problem but rather an \textit{ontological} problem, is primarily concerned with how Christ’s death and resurrection overcomes death and offers a renewed personhood back to humanity. It is this \textit{positive} aspect of Christology, Christ’s provision of the ontological basis for man to enter back into full communion and hospitality with God, that the Greek Fathers called \textit{theosis}.

\textsuperscript{19} Zizioulas, \textit{Communion and Otherness}, 237.
being ontologically. For such a Christology may answer man's needs for forgiveness but not his problem of death. In what follows therefore, we will develop an incarnational Christology in which Christ is understood as more than simply an ethical role model/moral teacher, or as primarily a sacrifice who solves the psychological sense of moral guilt and anguish by redeeming us from 'sin' and granting forgiveness. While Christ does indeed offer moral forgiveness and summons those who have received forgiveness to live lives characterised by a new ethic of peace and hospitality, these moral and ethical implications, we will argue, are predicated on the ontological significance of Christ. Thus, in this schema, the significance of Jesus' life (ethics) and death (atonement) — stem from the ontological significance of the resurrection. It is, we will contend, Christ's resurrection which, in defeating violence and death, creates a new way for humanity to be and thus guarantees for the created being its eternal existence and its particularity. It is the resurrection of Christ which provides the only genuinely secure foundation, an ethic of unconditional hospitality.

In outlining an incarnational Christology, we will pay close attention to both the Fourth Gospel and the Letter to the Hebrews. With the help of motifs that feature prominently in the Fourth Gospel and Hebrews — those of Logos Christology, the Hidden/Homeless Christ whose life climaxes in an act of 'sacrificial substitution', and Eikon — we will seek to offer a portrayal of the 'hospitable' Christ, in whom humanity finds its true home.

The structure of our argument will be shaped by the response to four specific questions:

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20 Ibid., 243.
First: How is it possible for God – who is uncreated – to enter into the world of creation? Our response will involve returning briefly to themes of our previous chapter – the doctrines of Creation and the Trinity – to delineate how Christology is integral to both these doctrines and therefore to the distinctive ontology we have espoused.

Second: What is the nature of the Incarnation? Who is Jesus, the Word become flesh, and what are the characteristics of his divine-human life? Our response will be to contend that Jesus’ life, characterised by both faithful obedience and suffering, while resonating with the lives of the Patriarchs Abel, Abraham and Jacob, supersedes them.

Third: What is the salvific significance of Christ’s death on the Cross? Drawing on the themes that punctuate Levinasian and Derridean thought, we will suggest that Christ’s ‘sacrificial’ and ‘substitutionary’ death, rather than legitimising the myth of redemptive violence or valorising an ethic of self-sacrificial martyrdom, actually provides the basis for a relationality of mutual love and gift-giving.

Fourth, and finally, we will ask: How is this new form of being – what we suggest is authentic personhood – able to be accessed by humanity? That is, how does humanity enter into the hospitality of God found in Christ? Drawing upon Jean-Luc Marion’s understanding of Christ as Eikon – which itself is influenced by Levinas’ concept of the Face of the Other – we will argue it is not human ethical action, but rather the response to God’s initiatory actions, that is, the acceptance of the gift of faith and obedience to the call of the Divine Other, which makes both talk about God and entrance into communion with God a possibility for humanity.
Christology & Being: The Pre-Existent Word, Creation and Eschatology

In Johannine thought, the salvific purpose of the Triune God does not commence as an emergency measure to combat the effects of a post-lapsarian world, but rather, salvation history is seen in its broadest possible schema and, although conceived eschatologically, commences prior to the creation of the world. Accordingly, the Prologue with which the Fourth Gospel opens gives us a glimpse into the Godhead, prior to creation. Raymond Brown translates verses one and two thus:

1. In the beginning was the Word;
   the Word was in God’s presence,
   and the Word was God.

2. He was present with God in the beginning.

Consistent with the ontology of communion that we have been seeking to expound, the Prologue speaks of the relationality which characterises the Triune God. The sense of relational intimacy and closeness Brown attempts to convey is perhaps expressed even more clearly in A.T. Robertson’s translation: ‘the word was face to face with God.’ These sentiments are echoed in verse eighteen, which forms an

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21 While in the earliest New Testament documents, written by Paul, Jesus’ messiahship – the claim for Jesus as the Son of God – is declared at his resurrection, in the Gospel of Mark this claim occurs at his adult baptism, and in Matthew and Luke it is moved forward to his birth. In the Fourth Gospel, the last of the gospels to be written, Jesus’ status as divine Son of God is now traced back to eternity past, prior even to creation.


23 For Brown, the Greek of verses one and two ‘in God’s presence’ (pros ton theon) are ambiguous and can be translated as ‘with God’ = accompaniment, or ‘towards God’ = relationship. Taking a conservative approach, Brown suggests that in verse 1b ‘there is a nuance of relationship... but without the precision of that relationship between the Word and God the Father that some would see’. Ibid., 5. While the intra-Trinitarian relations and conceptions around Trinitarian procession may not have been foremost in the mind of the author of the Prologue, clearly the conception of the relationship between the Logos and God the Father is one of dynamic and intimate relationality.

inclusio for the Prologue. While in verse one we are told that the 'Word is God', in verse eighteen it is 'God the only Son, ([ὁ] monogenēs theos) who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.' Thus, the relationality, intimacy and affection of the relationship between the Logos and God, the Son and the Father, is expressed in their 'face to face' relationship, in which the Son rests in the Father's bosom.

This ‘face to face’ relationship between the Father and the Son is not, however, a self-contained relationship which excludes otherness. Rather, the overflow of love from this relationship of divine affection and mutuality – the communion of Father, Son and Spirit – is the act of creation that the Prologue moves on to describe in verses three and four:

3 Through him all things came into being, and apart from him not a thing came to be.
4 That which had come to be in him was life, and this life was the light of men.

Influenced by Jewish conceptions of the Logos, the Prologue therefore gives a startling account of Christ as the Word who brings all things into existence. In its

25 Brown, John [I-XII], 17, 36. Brown notes that there are three different textual readings of 'God the only Son'. (a) [ὁ] monogenēs theos, 'God the only Son'; (b) monogenēs huios, literally 'the Son, the only one'; (c) monogenes, 'the only Son', but prefers the first. That some see this translation as 'too highly developed theologically' and 'object to the strangeness of the statement that only God can reveal God, and the implication that only God has seen God' stems, as Brown argues, from an assumption that the gospel writer was less theologically-developed than those that followed.
26 While Brown translates v18 thus: 'No one has ever seen God; it is God the only Son, ever at the Father's side, who has revealed Him', he notes that 'ever at the Father's side' literally translates as 'the one who is in the bosom of the Father', with 'bosom' connoting affection. Ibid., 17.
27 Ibid., 3.
28 The distinctive nature of the Prologue means that a number of specific questions are still under debate: What is the relationship between the Prologue and the rest of the gospel? Was the author's/redactor's use of the Logos in the Prologue shaped by the influence of Hellenistic philosophy, Proto-Gnostic sources, or Jewish ideas? Was the Prologue a pre-existing Logos hymn, incorporated by the author into the gospel? And if indeed already in existence, was the hymn of Christian, Jewish, Proto-Gnostic or pagan origins? For a succinct discussion regarding the differing perspectives on these questions see D.H. Johnson, "Logos," in Dictionary of Jesus and the
use of the verb *egeneto* for ‘came into being’ in verse three, the Prologue chooses to employ the word that is used consistently in the LXX of Genesis 1. Verses one to four of the Prologue offer therefore a brief glimpse, one could say a ‘trace’, of the ontology of *communion* that we have sought to outline, and demonstrates the interrelationship between the doctrines of the Trinity, Creation, and Christology. Out of the loving embrace, the communion that exists between the Father, Christ the Word, and the Spirit, creation comes as a gift of revelation. As Brown states: ‘The fact that the *Word* creates means that creation is an act of revelation.’

In Johannine Christology, however, creation does not merely find its *origin* through Christ the Word, but also eschatologically finds its *telos* in Christ. Thus, in Revelation John is presented with the vision of Christ as the Alpha and Omega. This claim that Christ the Word as the agent of creation, is the Alpha and Omega in which the world finds both its *beginning* and *telos*, is one that is expressed by numerous other early Christian writers. The Apostle Paul speaks of the Father and the Son as joint agents of creation stating:

...for us there is one God, the Father, *from* whom are all things (*ta panta*) and *for* whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through* whom are all things (*ta panta*) and *through* whom we exist (1 Cor 8:6).

Elsewhere Paul writes: ‘For *in* him all things (*ta panta*) in heaven and earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things (*ta panta*) have been created *through* him and *for* him.’ (Col 1:16);

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Gospels, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, Il: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 481-484. Brown argues that ‘the Prologue’s description of the Word is far closer to biblical and Jewish strains of thought than it is to anything purely Hellenistic.’ Brown, *John [I-XII]*, 524. Unlike biblical scholars, ultimately we are less concerned with source and form questions and more interested in the theology presented to us in The Prologue. Regardless of its origins, the employment of the Logos imagery in the Prologue, provides the possibility for a conversation between the worlds of Hellenistic philosophy and Jewish thought, and therefore offers a convergence between our earlier ontological discussions and our focus on Christology in this chapter.

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'For from him and through him and to him are all things (\(ta\ \ panta\)).' (Rom 11:36); while the writer of Hebrews states that 'the Son, whom he appointed heir of all things (\(ta\ \ panta\)), through whom he also created the worlds' (Heb 1:2).

From the earliest Christian writings therefore, creation was understood not as an action of a lower, mediatory deity or a Platonic demiurge, but rather as brought about by the agency of Christ, as a free expression of the love within the Godhead.\(^{31}\) The New Testament writers were unanimous in their theological claim that the world of being finds its origin, sustenance and purpose in Christ. As Paul states to the Athenians: 'In him [Christ] we live and move and have our being,' (Acts 17:28) This understanding of Christ the Word, not merely as the agent of creation, but also as the sustainer of all being, and the one in which all being finds its telos, that is, a Christocentric creatio ex nihilo, has two important implications.

First, the affirmation of a Christocentric creatio ex nihilo reinforces our earlier point that Creation itself is an act of freedom and grace and thus, creation itself is a gift, an act of hospitality. As Zizioulas notes: 'To say that the world could just as well not exist means that existence is for us a gift of freedom, a grace. Creation and grace thus coincide.'\(^{32}\)

Second, if being itself is not self-existent, but rather is dependent on communion and stems from the life that is shared within and ecstatically issues forth from the Godhead, then the created world of being, when cut off from this life of communion, moves inexorably to death and returns to non-being. As Zizioulas states: 'Being created means for us that we are mortal and that we are under threat of total and absolute destruction. The threat of death is the threat of nothingness and 'non-

\(^{31}\) This emphasis on the Trinitarian nature of creation is perhaps most keenly expressed in Irenaeus' polemical writings against Gnostic interpretations of creation in his Adversus Haereses (Against Heresies). Irenaeus (ca. 120-202) follows Theophilus of Antioch in arguing that creation was a Trinitarian action involving the two hands of the Father: Logos (the Son) and Sophia (the Spirit).

\(^{32}\) Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 256.
being’, in other words of returning to the state of pre-creation. As created beings, therefore, the only way that our existence can be guaranteed is by being brought into the life and communion of the uncreated Triune God. In Zizioulas’ words: ‘Created being can only survive when united with something uncreated.’

Logos Christology: The Uniting of ‘Created’ and ‘Uncreated’

But how can something uncreated unite with something created? Such thinking is impossible within Greek substantialist ontology, in which each being’s identity is determined by its nature and its otherness from other beings. In contrast, the opening verses of John’s prologue, in revealing a Trinitarian personalist ontology in which otherness and communion is seen not as mutually exclusive but rather as mutually constitutive, states that this uniting of the uncreated with the created takes place in Christ the Word. Within an incarnational Christology, it is Christ, the Logos who, rather than being confined by being is, as Creator of all being, able to enter into the created world. Robert Sokolowski writes:

The reason the pagans could not conceive of anything like the incarnation is that their gods are part of the world, and the union of any two natures in the world is bound to be, in some way, unnatural, because of the otherness that lets one thing be itself only by not being the other. But the Christian God is not a part of the world and is not a ‘kind’ of being at all. Therefore the incarnation is not meaningless or impossible or destructive.

Kathryn Tanner, influenced by the thinking of Karl Barth, argues that it is this radical transcendence/otherness of God – the fact that God is beyond being, is not a ‘kind’ of

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33 Ibid., 257. Emphasis original.
34 Ibid., 260. Emphasis original.
being, but rather is the Creator of being – which enables God to enter humanity without loss to divine nature. Tanner states:

Only what is not a kind – and therefore not bound by the usual differences between natures – can bring together in the most intimate unity divinity and humanity. Because divinity is not a kind, God is not bound by apparent contrasts between divine and creaturely qualities; God is therefore free to enter into intimate community with us, without loss to the divine nature, without sacrificing the difference between God and us.36

For Tanner: 'Rather than coming at the expense of divinity, incarnation is the very thing that proves divinity.'37

The problem with many Christologies founded upon a substantialist ontology is that the Chalcedonian Creed, in which Christ is confessed as both fully God and fully human, without division (adiairētōs) and without confusion (asynchytōs), becomes nonsensical as one is forced, Tanner suggests, to ‘divvy up the life of Jesus into divine and human qualities, to figure out where Jesus’ humanity ends and his divinity begins’.38 But the hypostatic union at the heart of the Chalcedon Creed has as its basis a relational ontology. As Zizioulas states:

God and the world are united without losing their otherness only in the person of the divine Logos, that is, only in Christ. It is a person that

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36 Tanner, Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity, 11.
37 Tanner continues, stating:

Immanence and transcendence, closeness and difference, are simply not at odds in God’s relations with us. What makes God different from us enables closeness with us.... And closeness, from God’s side, establishes difference. Rather than taking away our difference from God, God’s giving to us in relating to us is the very thing that brings about the difference between us; God’s relating to us, God’s coming near, is what gives us ourselves in our distinctiveness. This is true in God’s creating of us – God’s decision not to be alone but to be with what is not God brings about the existence of the creature distinct from God – and it is true in every other case, inclusive of the incarnation.

Ibid., 11, 13.
38 Ibid., 15.
makes this possible, because it is only a person that can express communion and otherness simultaneously, thanks to its being a mode of being, that is, an identity which, unlike substance or energy, is capable of 'modifying' its being without losing its ontological uniqueness and otherness. All other, that is, non-personalist, ways of uniting God and the world, while safeguarding otherness, involve either a non-ontological relationship between God and the world (e.g. ethics, psychology, religiosity, etc.) or an undermining of the Incarnation, that is, of the 'hypostatic (=personal) union' between created and uncreated being. 39

The Logos Christology articulated in John's Prologue provides us, therefore, with the philosophical grammar enabling us to state the significance of Christology to ontology. It is the claim of Christian theology that Christ, the creator of all things, is the one who, through his incarnation, saves all things from their movement towards death. 40 But in what way does the assuming of humanity by Christ the Word have

39 Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 29. Emphasis original.
40 For Catherine Keller, Irenaeus' Christological theology of creatio ex nihilo dependent on the 'intimacy of the infinite,' while preferable to 'a gnostic hierarchy', is still problematic. Keller asserts that 'this 'hands-on immediacy strengthens the imaginary of unilateral, linear and masculine dominance.' She argues that such a Christologically-conceived creatio ex nihilo – one in which Christ as Logos is both the basis for the existence of being and eschatologically the hope of being – is inherently totalising, a theology which is both responsible for, and unable to respond to, the ongoing oppression of both the planet and women. Refuting any attempt to speak ontologically of God, Keller writes:

The Logos is at once the Word of the Creator and the victim of "His" power. But the paradox now solidifies into the unquestionabilities of Nicene Christology. At this point something resembling Derrida's "logocentrism" becomes discernible – "the full presence summed up in the logos," the Transcendental Signified to which all signifiers ultimately refer, is stabilizing history in terms of a beginning and an ending that meet in the unchanging Logos of Being. The pre-Nicene logos/Sophia, unlike Derrida's somewhat generic, Transcendentally Signified Logos, was always both signifier and signified, revealer and revealed. Now, as its Hellenistically derived immutability hardens into the "only begotten" son, "very God of very God," same substance with the Father, the interdimensional oscillations of a more mobile incarnation freeze. Western salvation history tightens its line from proctology through Christology to eschatology; a trajectory driven, or pulled, from the origin by the end. Centering time in Christ, the time-line at once lurches
soteriological consequences? To answer this, our second question, requires us to reflect more deeply on the nature of the incarnation. It is, we will propose, in the event of the Incarnation as the Triune God discloses Himself to the World – a revelation that both unveils while remaining hidden, a revelation that is beyond ‘grasping and comprehension’ and yet simultaneously in its very vulnerability is grasped, violated and suffers – that one discovers the ‘irreducible structure’ of hospitality.

Echoes of Jacob, Abel and Abraham:
The Incarnation as Struggle, Suffering and Faithful Obedience

5 The light shines on in the darkness,
   For the darkness did not overcome it.
8 The true light, which enlightens everyone
   Was coming into the world.
10 He was in the world,
   and the world was made by him;
   yet the world did not recognize him.
11 To his own he came:
   yet his own people did not accept him.41

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forward toward the end – and is pulled back by the power of the origin itself. “The creation” now serves less to open up a universe than to limit its significance to the timeless logos, or rather the dehistoricized past tense, of the Christ event.
Such criticism, requires the discarding of any discussion regarding the ontological significance of Christology, and as such would, if adhered to, seem nonsensical to Christian theology. Can one really speak of Christian faith without the ‘cornerstone’ of Christ and the *telos* that all *being* finds in Him? In the end, it is the essential anti-foundational and therefore ateleological nature of deconstruction that ultimately leads to the collapse of any attempt to build a cohesive *deconstructive* theology. That is, Christology does inevitably seem to become the ‘stumbling block’ upon which a deconstructed Christian faith falters.

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**Christ the Trembling Flame / Dazzling Light**

‘Aesthetics of sight’ and what Brian Robinette refers to as the ‘contrapuntal interplay of light and darkness’ play an important role in the rendering of the salvific story of Christ within the Fourth Gospel. 42 In verse five of the Prologue, the multiple nuances within the Greek verb *katalambanein* hint at the paradoxical nature of the revelation disclosed in the incarnation. On the one hand, *katalambanein* can be translated as ‘to welcome, receive, accept, appreciate’. Thus, the verse would be translated: ‘The light shines in the darkness, yet/for the darkness did not recognise/accept it.’ Such a translation parallels verses ten and eleven, which point to the ‘hidden’ nature of God’s revelation in Christ:

> Though the world was brought into existence by the Word, his presence in the world was not ‘recognised’, though he came ‘to his own home’, he was not accepted. 43

Alternatively, *katalambanein* can be translated as ‘to overtake, overcome’; or to ‘master or absorb’. 44 These twin-readings of this verse – reminiscent of the ambiguity noted in Jacob’s struggle with the divine visitor – testify to John’s ironic reflection and rendering of this strange revelation that is disclosed and yet remains hidden in Christ. Ela Natu, commenting on these two variant readings, states:

> They display two different scores. In the latter, darkness is the stronger, more muscular element; the light is the trembling candle flame, cornered, assaulted, sabotaged by the hounding lightlessness, the all-consuming black hole. The former, on the other hand, is flavoured with irony. The inferior ignorance, the thick denseness cannot understand what is staring it brightly in the (de)face(d). The

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43 Note that ‘to his own home’, is the NRSV’s alternative translation to verse 11: ‘Who came to what was his own’.

44 For the exegetical background on these alternative readings, see Brown, *John [I-XII]*, 8.
light is caught in the defensive/offensive/defensive/offensive motion.\textsuperscript{45}

This theme of the kenotic nature of Christ who, as a ‘trembling candle flame, cornered, assaulted and sabotaged’ is nevertheless the light of the world bringing true illumination and revelation to a world in darkness, is one to which we will return again at the conclusion of this chapter.\textsuperscript{46} However, in the meantime, such an emphasis on the self-effacing nature of Christ is evident too in the juxtaposing of the images of Host and Guest. The ‘power’ of the Host, the Fourth Gospel declares, is displayed in his entrance into the world as ‘homeless guest’.

\textbf{Christ as Hidden Host / Homeless Guest}

Though having brought the world into being by his agency, the entrance of the true Host is not heralded as the arrival of an honoured dignitary. As the Prologue indicates, far from receiving the red carpet treatment and lavish banquets of a VIP, the entrance of the Word is not merely unrecognised (v10), but results in the discovery of closed doors and ‘keep out’ signs (v11). Verse fourteen reinforces both the hostile nature of this reception and also the sense of vulnerability experienced in the incarnation: ‘And the Word became flesh (σαρξ – sarx) and dwelt among us (ἐσκένωσεν – eskēnōsen).’ The Greek word for to dwell (skēnoun) is derived from the word for a tent (skēnē) and the author of the Prologue seems here to be making an allusion to the Old Testament and Israel’s building of the Tabernacle. That the manifest presence of YHWH, his shekinah in the Exodus, (Exod 25:8-9; 33:7-11; 40:34-38), takes place in a temporary structure built by slaves, who, liberated from bondage

\textsuperscript{45} Ela Nutu, \textit{Incarnate Word, Inscribed Flesh: John’s Prologue and the Postmodern} (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 21. Ela Nutu’s comments here – embedded within a fictional drama script which functions as her Postmodern commentary on the Prologue – are spoken by Derrida, who appears as a character within the play.

\textsuperscript{46} The imagery, introduced in the Prologue, of Christ as ‘Light of the World’, (3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9-1; 12:35-36, 46) and yet a Light that is not ‘recognised’ (16:3, John 3:1) and not ‘accepted’ (3:11, 12:37) is one that recurs throughout the Fourth Gospel and Johannine writings.
in Egypt, live as ‘sojourners’ awaiting a new home, is a fact seemingly forgotten both
by those Jews whom the Fourth Gospel castigates for their fixation with the Temple,
but also in our contemporary age where places of worship often resemble
impregnable strongholds. As ornate as the Tabernacle / Tent of Meeting was, its
location in the desert and its congregation of freed slaves is imagery which speaks
not, as Catherine Keller disapprovingly contends, of ‘stability’ and ‘immutability’,
but rather of insecurity and vulnerability. As YHWH had journeyed nomadically
with Israel in the harshness of the desert, so Jesus is born into the inhospitable and
hostile realities of first-century Palestine, a world steeped in violence and political
turmoil.

This vulnerability is not restricted simply to Jesus’ birth, but rather, hostility and
antagonism appear as the hallmarks of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.
Not only do Jesus’ life and actions of radical hospitality raise the ire of the religious
and political elites but his very ministry is both misunderstood and disdained by ‘his

47 See note 40 above. One wonders whether John’s employment of tabernacle-tent imagery is also an
allusion to the prophetic message delivered by the herdsman from Judah, Amos, to the covenant-
breaking Israel. Having pronounced judgement on Israel – including the destruction of their
magnificent ivory homes and the ‘house of God’ at Bethel – Amos, in his last oracle, offers a hope-
filled vision of the future. Continuing with the architectural theme, Amos announces that it is not
from the ‘architectural strongholds of the elite and powerful’ but rather from the raised up ‘booth of
David’, that the promised restoration will emerge (Amos 9:11-15). For an insightful reflection on
this imagery see Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian Walsh, Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a
Culture of Displacement (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 113-120.

48 This sense of vulnerability and defencelessness – of unwelcome otherness – explicated within the
Prologue’s testimony to the Incarnation, also emerges within the Synoptic Gospels. While offering
two differing infancy narratives which concord with their distinctive emphases, both Matthew and
Luke point to the troubled and ‘upside-down’ nature of the entrance of the Christ-child into the
world. Luke recounts in detail Jesus’ entrance into the world – born to an unmarried teenage
mother in an animal barn; his birth heralded by those considered as Others – unclean shepherds.
Meanwhile, the gospel of Matthew contrasts the adoration and gifts received from distant Others –
‘Oriental astrologers’ – with the hostility of the local dignitary and mad despot, King Herod. The
narrative draws particular attention to Jesus’ early years of terror and transience, his life consisting
of fleeing from the infanticide ordered by a Herod and living as a refugee in Egypt, a land full of
own' – both Galileans and his own family. The Host who brought the world into existence, exists, as Michael Frost poignantly suggests, as an 'hombre', 'a shadow person', the 'Other' on the margins of society. Indeed, the gospels give witness to a life lived in all its finitude – testifying to a Jesus who suffers from tiredness, hunger, loneliness, rejection, grief, betrayal, humiliation, torture and ultimately, death.

That Jesus' life should involve such struggle and vulnerability is, according to the writers of Hebrews, critical to its salvific import:

It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. (Heb 2:10); For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect had been tested as we are, yet without sin. (Heb 4:15); Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Heb 5:8-9).

Indeed, that Jesus needed to enter fully into and assume the 'fallen nature' of humanity to overcome the hostility and inhospitality of the human plight, is articulated clearly in the writings of the early Greek Father Gregory of Nyssa, who writes:

By his intimate union with humanity, [Christ] shared all the marks of our nature. He was born, reared, grew up, and went so far as even to taste death.... [I]t was in keeping with his intimate union with our nature that he should be united with us in all our characteristics....

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49 For the misunderstanding and rejection of Jesus by townspeople of Nazareth, see Matt 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:16-30. For the misunderstanding and criticism from his own family members, see Mark 3:21 & 31-35 and John 7:1-9.

That is why, in view of the fact that our life is bound by two extremities (I mean its beginning and end), the power which amends our nature had to reach to both points. It had to touch the beginning and to extend to the end, covering all that lies in between.\textsuperscript{51}

Central therefore to the salvific claims of an incarnational Christology is the Anselmian assertion that ‘only that which is assumed can be saved.’\textsuperscript{52} The Word’s assumption of human flesh involved not the taking on of a perfect life, but rather the assumption of humanity in all of its frailty, fragility, and vulnerability. In assuming the human condition in all its infirmity and weakness – a life plagued by the effects of sin – Jesus, like Jacob/Israel, faced a life of struggle. However, unlike the Jacob-like ‘struggle’ of humanity – characterised by the desire to draw close and yet simultaneously the impulse to escape the embrace of God and/or to control him on our own terms – the life of the Word in human form is characterised by a filial relationship with the Father of deep intimacy and humble obedience. In contrast to fallen humanity, which seeks to find our identity and personhood separate from communion, the Fourth Gospel repeatedly points to this intimate relationship that exists between the Father and the incarnate Son. It is the fact that the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father, that the Father and the Son are one (10:30; also 14:20, 17:11, 21-23), which means that the Son is always doing and saying what is pleasing to the Father (8:29). His words and actions are not his own, but testify to his being sent by the Father (5:36-38) and are demonstrations of the communion shared with the Father (10:37-38; 14:10, 24, 31; 15:10). It is due to this deep sense of intimate communion that Jesus is able to live a life of faithful obedience, a life characterised by its free submission to the will of the Father.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{51} Gregory of Nyssa, 'An Address of Religious Instruction', 304, quoted in Tanner, \textit{Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity}, 27.

\textsuperscript{52} Or, in the words of Gregory of Nazianzus: 'The unassumed is the unhealed.' Gregory of Nazianzus, \textit{Ep.} 101.7

\textsuperscript{53} For a similar and helpful rendition, in which the sinlessness of Jesus Christ is conceived ‘not as a matter of obvious maximal rectitude so much as an unbroken, lifelong commitment to a divine
That this faithful obedience and submission to the Father involves a *struggle* stems therefore not from the seeming failure of Christ's divine nature, but is the inevitable consequence of his assumption of a humanity beset by sin. As Tanner observes:

> The Word's assuming or bearing of all this in Christ means a fight with it, a fight whose success is assured by that very unity of the human with the Word, but a genuine fight nonetheless where success is not immediate but manifests itself only over the course of time.\(^{54}\)

Unlike the climax to the narrative of Abrahamic faith – the *Akedah* episode – that stays strangely quiet over the *struggle* that Abraham must have faced as he climbed Mt Moriah, the Synoptic gospels ensure that their readers are acutely aware of the *struggle* that Jesus experiences.\(^55\) In the Garden at Gethsemane, *wrestling* with the future that awaits him, Jesus, the incarnate Word experiencing the finitude of human existence, prays both that the cup of suffering 'will pass from me' and yet 'not what I want but what you want.' (Matt 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46). In contrast to all other human beings, Jesus chooses not to hold onto his life, but rather to 'lay his life down'; rather than seeking to possess the gift, he offers his life as a gift to God for the benefit of others; instead of 'exploiting' the Other, he 'empties and humbles himself'. Such a life of humility and obedience, of looking 'not to his own interests, but to the interest of others' means, eventually, that 'instead of the joy that was set before him he endures the cross.'\(^{56}\) This leads us, therefore, to a discussion of the vocation in the face of all kinds of ineluctable opposition', see Ivor J. Davidson, "Pondering the Sinlessness of Jesus Christ: Moral Christologies and the Witness of Scripture," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 4 (2008): 372-398, 390.

\(^{54}\) Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 28.

\(^{55}\) It could though be argued that the very absence of commentary in the *Akedah* narrative regarding the emotional, mental and spiritual struggle that Abraham faces, functions as a literary device highlighting this *struggle*. That is, it is the very silence of the text which paradoxically speaks loudly and clearly of the tremendous labour of love/test of faith in which Abraham finds himself engaged.

\(^{56}\) John 10:17-18; Phil 2:3-8; Heb 12:2.
third question posed earlier, that of the salvific significance of Christ’s death on the cross.

**The Cross: An Act of ‘Sacrificial Substitution’?**

As well as playing a significant role in the ethical thought of both Levinas and Derrida, the terms ‘sacrifice’ and ‘substitution’ have, from the earliest days, played an important role in the attempt of Christian theology to explain the soteriological significance of Christ’s life and death. Appearing in scripture and throughout tradition, it is, however, only in Western Christianity after Anselm, that the motifs of ‘sacrifice’ and ‘substitution’ begin to become organised into a cohesive atonement theology which sought to explain the soteriological nature of the Cross.\(^{57}\)

Increasingly though, in contemporary theology there has been growing disquiet amongst theologians – particularly feminist, womanist, liberation, and peace theologians – regarding certain aspects of atonement theology. Principal to many of these critiques is the contention that atonement theologies – and in particular Anselmian ‘satisfaction’ theories – with their grammar of ‘sacrifice’ and ‘substitution’, are inherently violent. Such theories, it is claimed, sacralise violence, turning passive submission to violence and sacrificial suffering into virtues.

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\(^{57}\) Seeking to stay faithful to the unanimous witness of New Testament writers, there has developed throughout Church history a number of different models and metaphors that have sought to explain the soteriological function of the Cross, to elaborate on how the death of Jesus of Nazareth through the action of Roman crucifixion overcomes the sin, death and hostility in the world and brings about ‘at-one-ment.’ Broadly speaking, these metaphors or atonement theories can be divided into three main typologies – Christus Victor, moral-influence (Abelardian) and satisfaction (Anselmian). At the risk of simplification it can be argued that while all three motifs have been evident throughout the history of the church, different motifs have held pre-eminence during different historical periods and in specific contexts, and also have come to hold sway in particular theological traditions. Generally speaking, Christus Victor tended to be the main motif employed well into the Middle Ages, while the theories of Anselm and Abelard have tended to shape atonement theologies of the last millennium.
A recent example of such a critique is Mennonite theologian J. Danny Weaver’s, *The Nonviolent Atonement*. According to Weaver’s analysis, the predominant metaphor of the early church was Christus Victor, in which the cross was interpreted as Christ’s victory over principalities and powers. However, the establishment of Constantinian Christendom and thus the church’s growing relationship with imperial power meant that over time such imagery became superfluous. Weaver argues that ‘the narrative-orientated identification of Jesus’ gave way to ‘the ontological definitions of the fourth- and fifth-century statements’ of Nicea and Chalcedon, thereby rendering Jesus’ ethical actions and teaching – and in particular, what Weaver contends is his ethical rejection of violence – ‘invisible’. Eventually, ‘[n]arrative Christus Victor disappeared from the picture.’

It was, and continues to be, Weaver maintains, the Church’s prioritising of ontological over ethical questions, its emphasis on the death of Christ rather than the life and teaching of Christ, which sets a new and problematic trajectory for atonement theology. In the place of Christus Victor, Weaver argues, emerged ‘satisfaction’ theories, which, at their worst, offer a juridicised, individualised, and de-historicised atonement, in which the atonement is interpreted primarily through a legal paradigm with little emphasis on ethical transformation; with an over-emphasis on individual salvation and hence an ignoring of systematic and structural sin; and, which takes no account of the overall biblical narrative structure of salvation.

Likewise, atonement theories in which the suffering and violence experienced by Jesus seems either to be at the behest of the Father, or, at the least, acceptable to him, are seen as particularly repulsive to many feminist theologians. Joanna Carlson

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59 Weaver’s chief assertion that satisfaction atonement theology depends on a God who sanctions violence is made unequivocal when he states: ‘Make no mistake about it, satisfaction atonement in any form depends on divinely sanctioned violence that follows from the assumption that doing justice means to punish.’ Ibid., 203. Emphasis original. For a rejoinder to Weaver’s thesis on both historical and theological grounds see Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 156-163.
Brown and Rebecca Parker are representative of a number of feminist theologians who argue that atonement theologies turn God the Father into the 'Divine Child Abuser', valorise self-sacrifice and suffering, and, therefore, rather than offering liberation, perpetuate degradation and oppression. While the response of Brown and Parker to the inherent 'violence' they see within all atonement theologies is to jettison atonement theology altogether, Weaver seeks to present an alternative nonviolent atonement model, offered as a corrective to what he perceives as the violent soteriology which characterises satisfaction atonement theologies.

While sympathetic to the general thrust of Weaver's nonviolent atonement model, there are ultimately a number of problematic moves Weaver makes in developing his argument. Firstly, in seeking to underscore his point that violence originates with humans and not with God, Weaver asserts that the death of Jesus was neither God's will nor intention and that likewise, Jesus did not choose to die. Secondly, in his

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60 Joanna Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker argue that divinely sanctioned child abuse (violence) is inherent within each of three traditional atonement metaphors – Christus Victor, Anselm's satisfaction theory, and Abelard's moral influence theory – and assert that the interpretation that Jesus suffers at the behest of the Father 'persuades' many to live lives of 'self-sacrifice and obedience' and 'to endure pain, humiliation and violation of our sacred rights to self-determination, wholeness, and freedom.' Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World?", in Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 1-30, 2. A shorter version of this essay appears as Joanne Carlson Brown, "Divine Child Abuse?", Daughters of Sarah 18, no. 3 (Summer 1992): 24-28. Rita Nakashima Brock also levels the same charge of 'cosmic child abuse' at traditional atonement models in Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 56. While Weaver's argument – that the elevation of the Cross in Christian theology is associated with the fall of the church – is based on historical grounds, Rebecca Ann Parker and Rita Nakashima Brock establish their case against atonement theology on their own first-hand experiences in their Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2001). Parker and Brock's most recently published work follows Weaver in noting that the focus of the early church is not on the death of Christ, but rather on his life and resurrection. Taking their cue from the dearth of images in Christian art of the crucified Christ during the first thousand years, Parker and Brock argue that the emphasis on the death of Christ is a later imperial-Constantinian development and that the redemptive violence portrayed in atonement theology unconsciously perpetuates imperial strategies. See Rebecca Ann Parker and Rita Nakashima Brock, Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2008).

61 Weaver states: 'Jesus came not to die but to live, to witness to the reign of God in human history. While he may have known that carrying out that mission would provoke inevitably fatal opposition, his purpose was not to get himself killed.' Weaver, The Nonviolent Atonement, 211.
contention that it is the life and resurrection of Christ that has soteriological significance, Weaver argues that Jesus’ death:

accomplishes nothing for the salvation of sinners, nor does it accomplish anything for the divine economy. Since Jesus’ mission was not to die but to make visible the reign of God, it is clear that neither God nor the reign of God needs Jesus’ death in the way that his death is irreducibly needed in satisfaction atonement.62

Such assertions – that Jesus’ death was neither willed by God, nor a saving necessity – as Chris Marshall observes, ‘fly in the face of the accumulated weight of New Testament evidence’63 and therefore deny the important biblical and historical theological claim that salvation is affected through the self-donation of God/Jesus.

Essentially, the work of Weaver and other atonement critics involves a couple of key, and we believe questionable, assumptions. Firstly, the concepts of ‘sacrifice’ and ‘substitution’, used in all three atonement theories but particularly prominent in Anselmian ‘satisfaction’ theories, are viewed as intrinsically ‘violent’. Consequently, in seeking to distance themselves from this perceived ‘violence’, models of ‘sacrifice’ and ‘substitution’ are completely discounted. Secondly, and connected to this first issue, Weaver, Parker and Brown, and many others, railing at what they see as the elevation of ontology over ethics, essentially reverse this pattern and offer Christologies which in focusing on the ethical life of Jesus fail to interpret this life and death within its broader incarnational context and thus within the framework of a Trinitarian ontology. Such Christologies, in which Jesus offers a model for us to emulate and in which the salvation of the world depends on our ethical actions, are, in the end, both unconvincing and more than a little discouraging. Offering no ontological basis for a hope that the violence, enmity and death evidenced in the world has been defeated and will therefore ultimately one day cease to exist, such

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62 Ibid., 72.
exemplarist Christologies point rather to some sort of utopian future, which, like a Derridean messiah, deep down one knows will never arrive.

Speaking of their 'new land' of 'Christianity', Brown and Parker state that, 'Peace was not made by the cross.... No one was saved by the death of Jesus.... Suffering is never redemptive, and suffering cannot be redeemed.... God's grief is as ultimate as God's love.... Eternally God sings kaddish for the world.'64 Such an assertion, however, seems to offer an ontology with strong similarities to the thought of our interlocutors, one in which violence and thus grief seem to be inscribed forever into the fabric of creation and God himself. The essential weakness inherent within such exemplary Christological projects is expressed well by Ivor J. Davidson, who writes:

The determinative effects of his personhood are relativized: what matters is not who he – [Christ] – is and what he does, but what we find ourselves inspired to do in response to his historical stimulus. Our responsibility, our action, forms the real centre of gravity. His significance lies in the things he symbolizes, not in the things he secures; he may present us with an existential imperative, but he scarcely confronts us as the person who in himself makes all things new.65

But do the underlying assumptions of Weaver and other atonement critics hold true? Are the concepts of 'sacrifice' and 'substitution' inherently violent? That is, are actions of 'sacrifice' and 'substitution' intrinsically 'violent' or, conversely, can such activities, and therefore the metaphors derived from them, be understood 'non-violently'? Is it possible for the concepts of 'sacrifice' and 'substitution' to still play a legitimate role in a 'non-violent' atonement theology?66 Likewise, rather than being

64 Brown and Parker, "For God So Loved the World?," 27.
65 Davidson, "Pondering the Sinlessness of Jesus Christ," 378. Emphasis original.
66 Responding to Weaver's charge that 'violent' Anselmian theories of the atonement are the culprit behind the loss of hospitality, Hans Boersma, courageously argues that divine violence is
an unhelpful hindrance or the root cause of the myth of redemptive violence, could it be that ontological considerations are essential to a non-violent understanding of the Cross?

In their assumption that ‘sacrifice’ is an act of ‘sacred violence’, many atonement detractors draw extensively on the influential work of René Girard and his thesis that the activity of ‘sacrifice’ both originates in and perpetuates violence. Those seeking to offer ‘non-violent’ readings of the atonement find Girard’s thesis – that the Gospels speak of sacrifice only to reject and subvert it – particularly invaluable. However, while remarkable and insightful, Girard’s work has itself come under sustained critique. One of the most telling rejoinders to Girard’s theory is that his thesis – that all ‘sacrifice’ is inherently ‘violent’ – does not necessarily correspond with historical or ethnographic examples of ‘sacrificial’ rituals. Far from serving as occasions of bloodlust, aggression and human suffering, the vast majority of historical and anthropological material seems instead to point to the opposite conclusion: that ‘sacrificial’ rituals in human history were predominantly moments unavoidable in bringing a sinful world into an eschatological state of pure hospitality, offering a defence of ‘violence’ within penal substitutionary and satisfaction theories, albeit, with some modifications. Boersma, Violence, Hospitality and the Cross. See also Hans Boersma, "Penal Substitution and the possibility of unconditional hospitality," Scottish Journal of Theology 57, no. 1 (2004): 80-94. Similarly, Miroslav Volf argues that an ethic of Christian non-violence is not dependent on the supposition of a non-violent God. Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, 275-306.

67 See René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977); The Scapegoat, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); and Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987). There is an irony here in that in the very moment that Christian theologians are becoming sensitive to a supposed potentiality for violence within concepts such as ‘sacrifice’ and ‘substitution’, it is these very terms which figure so prominently in contemporary philosophical and ethical thought – in particular, in the writings of Levinas and Derrida.

of 'festive communion' in which humans brought the best of what they had to their deity and thus joined with the deity and others in a 'sacred' and 'celebratory meal'. Accordingly, the activity and notion of sacrifice is perhaps best appreciated when interpreted as an action of gift-giving.

Indeed, throughout the New Testament the language and imagery of 'sacrifice' is inextricably connected with the grammar of gift. This sense in which Jesus' life and death is not demanded from him as an obligatory payment to fulfil a contractual obligation, or as recompense for human indebtedness, but rather is offered freely as a sacrificial substitute, as a gift, a self-donation, is perhaps most clearly articulated in John 10:17-18. As evidence of the love between himself and the Father and in

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70 Bruce Chilton, Abraham's Curse: Child Sacrifice in the Legacies of the West (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 26-7. John Dunnill argues persuasively that far from being events designed to satisfy communal blood-lust, Old Testament sacrifices are best understood as activities of 'sociality', shared meals of hospitality. Dunnill contends that the basis for sacrificial occasions was to 'express a relationship of dependency to the power of God, a dependency that may be fearful, desiring to placate, but appears to have been, more normally, an affirmation of relationship.' John Dunnill, "Communicative Bodies and Economics of Grace: The Role of Sacrifice in the Christian Understanding of the Body," The Journal of Religion 83, no. 1 (2003): 79-93, 87. Emphasis added.

71 In response to his critics, Girard, in his later work, has acknowledged that there may be a positive and therefore legitimate use of the metaphor of sacrifice. In what follows, it will become clear that while influenced by Girard's theory of mimesis, our premise is that the notion and action of 'sacrifice' is not to be construed, in and of itself, as violent.

72 Noting 'the broad umbrella of "Anselmian theories"' which includes motifs such as 'sacrifice, satisfaction, vicarious suffering, punishment and propitiation', Boersma makes the important point that '[s]acrifice does not necessarily involve punishment, and vicarious suffering does not imply satisfaction or propitiation.' While making this important distinction in stressing that not all "Anselmian theories" are inherently violent, nonetheless, Boersma argues that the similarity of such motifs is the 'God-ward direction' they share. In all these motifs, Boersma asserts: '[t]he focus of reconciliation lies... not in the human subjects and in their response but in the death of Christ itself and in what it objectively accomplished. In this understanding the atonement does something for God: his honor or justice is upheld (satisfaction, punishment), or his anger and wrath are assuaged (propitiation). In other words, reconciliation involves some kind of economy of exchange.' Boersma, Violence, Hospitality and the Cross, 158-9. Emphasis added. Therefore, even while acknowledging the way in which a 'strict economy of exchange' with strongly 'contractual connotations' tends to 'belittle hospitality', Boersma's understanding that humanity owes a 'debt' to God, does appear to continue to operate according to this logic. Boersma, "Penal Substitution and the possibility of unconditional hospitality," 92. In contrast to such thought are the arguments offered by both David Bentley Hart and Daniel M. Bell Jr. who challenge the supposition that Anselm's theory is 'violent' or that it reflects the violence of the feudal system in which he writes. Bentley-Hart, offering a breath-taking resuscitation of Anselm, responds to critiques of Cur Deus Homo and argues that far from operating according to an economy of debt, Anselm understands
obedience to the ‘command from my Father’, Jesus states: ‘I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again.’

As John Dunnill has argued, there are a number of profound consequences stemming from this modern-day aversion to ‘sacrifice’, compounded by the ‘antisacrificial theory’ of Girard and his followers. As well as ‘a misunderstanding of the Christian roots in the worship of Israel, and of the character of Israel as an ongoing religious community’, significant for our argument, such antisacrificial sentiment – evident throughout Christian history – has, Dunnill asserts, ‘led to a misunderstanding of Christian redemption insofar as that has been expounded in terms of sacrifice, and necessarily it has led to a misunderstanding of Christ when he is named in sacrificial terms as redeemer, high priest, and final victim.’

Such sacrificial terms are integral to the Letter to Hebrews, where the death, spilling of blood, and sacrifice of Abel and of Christ are contrasted with one another. However, as we will see, when interpreted non-violently as actions of gift-giving such sacrificial and substitutionary images offer new insights into the salvific nature of Christ’s life and death.

The Typological Relation between Abel and Christ

As we have already noted in our previous chapter, the motivating factor for Abel in offering his ‘sacrifice’ to YHWH stems not from obligation or necessity. Abel’s

the gift of Christ as a gift ‘which precedes, exceeds, and annuls all debt’. David Bentley Hart, The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 360-72, 372. See also Daniel M. Bell Jr., "Forgiveness and the End of Economy," Studies in Christian Ethics 20, no. 3 (2007): 325-44. The notion of the atonement as a payment of debts, a remuneration of what humanity is obligated to pay to God seems to ignore the fact that as Creator of all things, there is nothing that humanity has, or is, that is not already gift, and thus there is nothing that humanity can give to God, which he does not already have.

Dunnill, "Communicative Bodies and Economies of Grace," 79.
actions in the narrative are, rather, evidence that he operates according to the principles of a gift-economy and his sacrifice is to be seen as an act of praise and thankfulness for the gifts that YHWH has bestowed upon him. In contrast to this gift-economy which Abel functions within, Cain’s actions are determined by the principles of competition and the contractual obligations and duties which underlie his economic paradigm. Cain sees his abundant produce not as a gift to be referred back to the Divine Giver in thanksgiving, nor as a gift to be shared with others in a communal feast, but rather as his ‘gained possession’ to be held onto, evidence of his own horticultural mastery and economic prowess. Accordingly, he reluctantly and begrudgingly brings to the sacrificial feast not his first-fruits, but his leftovers. Outraged at YHWH’s acceptance of Abel’s – his competitor’s – firstlings and fat and the accompanying Divine response to his ingratitude, Cain’s ‘loss of face’ sees him turn his face away from both his brother and YHWH (Gen 4:6). Operating according to the ‘us or them’, win-loss logic of a conflictual-competitive debt economy, what Cain perceives as the ‘victory’ of his younger brother, leads him to what, in his economic system, he considers his only logical, though drastic, step: eliminating his opposition. In the first act of fraternal violence, Abel’s blood is spilled, and his life, like a puff of breath, is snatched / seized from him.  

This connection between internal desire/coveting, the desire to have/to possess what is other, and external violence is one that recurs constantly in the pages of the biblical narrative. In episodes such as Adam and Eve’s seizing of fruit, Cain’s murdering of Abel, or Jacob’s life-time of seeking to gain mastery over others – Esau, Laban or YHWH – Scripture testifies to the way in which the desire to gain, seize, hold, and

74 While debated, the etymology of the name Cain does seem to be a pun on the Hebrew verb qana – to get, acquire or create.
75 Similarly, Abel’s name, appears to be a pun on the Hebrew hebel, meaning vapour, breath.
possess that which is other than us, and to bring it under our control leads inexorably to conflict and violence. As the epistle of James states explicitly: 'You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts' (Jas 4:2).

It is against this backdrop – in which Abel’s ‘sacrifice’ is understood as an act of faith, that is, as an action of responsive gift-giving (Heb 11:4) – that the writer of Hebrews speaks of ‘Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel’ (12:24). In contrast to Abel’s blood, spilled by the violence of his own brother, his life seized from him, Jesus has become our ‘brother’ (Heb 12:11-12, 17), laying down his life, offering up his blood freely.

Fallen humanity, caught in sin, finds itself trapped within the confines of a distorted and death-dealing economy. Incapable of gratefully accepting gifts from God and allowing these gifts both to be referred back to God and circulated on for the mutual enrichment of others, each individual holds onto what he or she has and avariciously seeks to take from others. The only place where reciprocity operates within this deformed economy of relations is with regard to the ‘pay-back’ mechanism of violence, where the imposition of violence upon one by the other is followed by the intense desire to strike back. The return of violence upon the other similarly awakens their desire for retaliation, and soon both parties are caught in a never-ending spiral of escalating violence, returning blow for blow, taking an eye for eye, until they give or receive, quite literally, the ‘gift of death’.

Christ, however, in assuming the human condition, does what humanity is incapable of doing. Firstly, in choosing to proceed like a lamb to the slaughter, in choosing death over retaliatory violence, in refusing to play by the rules of the death-dealing

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77 Other notable examples include Ahab’s desire for Naboth’s vineyard and Jezebel’s murderous scheme to bring this about (1 Kings 21) and David’s desire for Bathsheba which leads to his killing of Uriah (2 Sam 11).

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violence of a ‘pay-back’ economy, Jesus deconstructs the power and logic of evil. In Jesus’ non-violence, in his choosing of death over vicious response, the mimetic or ‘pay-back’ dynamic which lies at the heart of sin’s power is broken. The pastoral and economic metaphors, evident within the story of Cain and Abel, are echoed when the New Testament speaks of how Jesus responds to and overcomes this fallen tendency to violence. 1 Peter states:

When he was abused, he did not return abuse;
When he suffered, he did not threaten;
But he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.
He bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness;
By his wounds you have been healed.
For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls. (1 Pet 2:23-25)

Secondly, in contrast to fallen humanity which seeks to possess the gift of life bestowed upon them, therefore resulting in the annulling and dissolving of the gift, Christ lives a life of faithful gift-giving. In living and pouring out his life for others, and ultimately, in refusing to hold onto his life, but in offering his life back to the Father, Christ becomes our ‘substitute’. Such ‘substitution’ though is not to be understood in violent terms, as a ‘vicarious substitute’ in which Christ stands in our stead to receive punishment we deserve. Rather, as a number of writers suggest, the term ‘representative’ better illustrates Christ’s sacrificial action. In his death on the cross it is not a matter of Christ being our ‘substitute’ — that is, instead of me, but rather that Christ functions as our representative — that is, this is me.78 Chris Marshall, noting the ‘substitutionary dimension to Christ’s death’ in the Pauline writings, states:

It is substitutionary not in the sense of one person replacing another, like substitutes on a football team, but in the sense of one person representing all others, who are thereby made present in the person and experience of their representative. Christ died not so much instead of sinners as on behalf of sinners, as their corporate representative.\textsuperscript{79}

Interpreted in light of this Trinitarian dynamic of gift-giving, the cross is thus not to be understood as an action of divine violence – Christ the divine ‘whipping boy’ receiving the wrath of the Father on our behalf. Rather, the violence of the cross stems from the inhospitality of the world, which, operating according to the conflictual-competitive logic of a debt economy is, as the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel states, unable to ‘recognise’ or accept the Divine Gift. Christ the gift, the Divine Other, viewed as a potential threat to what we ‘possess’ and therefore a risk to the reigning economic paradigm, is seized and sacrificed for the sake of economic stability. The killing of the Son, the ultimate gift, is the final attempt of a hostile world to proclaim the precedence and pre-eminence of its death-dealing economy of conflictual-competitiveness and greed over and against God’s economy of freedom.

\textsuperscript{79} Christopher D. Marshall, \textit{Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime and Punishment} (Auckland, NZ: Lime Grove, 2001), 61. Emphasis original. Despite Marshall’s concern regarding sporting analogies there is still a sense in which the term ‘substitution’, as it is most frequently employed in contemporary life – on the sports field – provides an illustration of what we have been seeking to argue. The use of ‘substitution’ in sports takes place when a player is replaced due either to injury or incapacitation, or because the coach recognises the inability of the existing player to achieve the task required. Good coaches do not vent wrath and anger either at the injured player or the player who, unable to perform their role is being replaced, nor at the ‘substitute’ who comes onto the field to replace this player. (To do so hardly assists the ultimate aim of creating a functioning team unit who in confidence will perform the roles they have been prepared for.) Rather, the coach views the exiting player with compassion and empathy and the ‘substitution’ is performed in the hope and expectation that the entrance of the new player will allow the team to achieve its primary goal – victory. Likewise, Christ’s ‘substitution’ on our behalf comes not so that he can receive the vitriol and rage of the Father (Coach) but so that he can accomplish the task in which we have failed – of living as persons and therefore bringing what is created into communion with God. As with all analogies there is the inevitable shortcoming, in that in this case, Christ is substituted in for the entire team!
and grace. The crucifixion of Jesus is the inevitable outcome of the clash of two distinct economic models.

However, in refusing to hold onto the gift for himself, but in offering his life freely for others, in choosing not to shy away from violence, but rather facing it head on, Christ chooses freely to encounter the ultimate enemies of human existence. On the Cross, the death-dealing reciprocal exchange of ‘pay-back’, the cycle of violence, comes to a grinding halt. Violence, sin and death are assumed by the one who cannot be conquered by them. The resurrection of Jesus is the evidence that the power of sin and death cannot overcome the loving hospitable embrace of the Triune God. As Tanner notes: ‘Christ is victor here, but the underlying model is that of the incarnation itself.’

Importantly, this also means that the cross is not primarily about the Triune God suffering with humanity in an act of solidarity, as Jürgen Moltmann and others suggest. While positive in emphasising the Trinitarian nature of the Cross, an overemphasis on suffering and the, at times, speculative nature of such theologies runs the risk of reducing the atonement to a theodicy. Such theologies, as Colin Gunton suggests, lose sight of the greater biblical truth: ‘that God does not suffer history, he moves it’. The incarnation and cross are primarily about divine agency not divine suffering. While Christ’s life culminates in a barbaric, torturous and suffering death, it is not in Christ’s death and suffering per se that hope is found. Rather, it is the resurrection and therefore Christ’s victory over violence and death which provides hope for creation.

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80 Tanner, Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity, 29.
The Cross, therefore, despite its horror and suffering is not, as Brown and Parker maintain, 'a sign of tragedy', but rather is ultimately a sign of victorious suffering love. Far from giving testimony to a vindictive and punitive God of violence, Christ's death is the clearest evidence of God's abundant, gracious, and non-coercive love. Christ's 'sacrifice', far from being understood according to the strict logic of economic exchange prevalent in some distorted Anselmian theories, is actually best seen as the re-establishment of the gift-giving economy, the re-assertion of an ontology of grace. As the Prologue declares: 'From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace' (John 1:16). The resurrection of Christ testifies to the fact that it is not an economy of forced exchange, grounded in law and manifested in contractual obligations, but rather an economy of grace, love and freedom stemming from an ontology of communion which is the underlying reality at work in the created world. Understood in light of the gift-giving economy which stems from such a Trinitarian ontology, the cross, as Tanner states, 'does not save us from debts to God by paying them... the cross saves us from the consequences of a debt economy in conflict with God's own economy of grace by cancelling it.'

Understood, therefore, as a Trinitarian act and interpreting the terms 'substitution' and sacrifice non-violently, Christ's death appears as the climactic expression of hospitality of the gift-giving God. Gunton summarises our argument well when he writes:

83 Brown and Parker, "For God So Loved the World?", 27.
84 To his credit, Hans Boersma does honestly confront the uncomfortable legacy of 'Anselmian theories' and points to the way in which 'juridicizing, individualizing, and de-historicizing tendencies' were exacerbated by the development of federal or covenant theology in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century. Boersma, Violence, Hospitality and the Cross, 163-170. For a further elucidation of the distinction between debt-payment and gift-giving see James B. Torrance, "Covenant or Contract? A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland," Scottish Journal of Theology 23 (1970): 51-76.
85 Tanner, Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity, 88, and Economy of Grace, 65. Tanner's assertion that God's salvific purposes operate in accordance with an economy of grace rather than a debt-economy is perhaps best illustrated in Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:23-35. As an aside, one of the disappointing omissions from Tanner's otherwise noteworthy work, is that her method of constructing a theology from 'principles' seems to come at the cost of engaging directly with the biblical text.
Trinitarian biblical talk of the saving action of God draws heavily on the language of sacrifice, and it is this that forms the gateway to the theology of the Trinity here outlined. God the Father 'gives up' his only Son, allows him to be delivered into the hands of sinful men. Jesus lays down his life, and, particularly but not only in the theology of the Letter to the Hebrews, offers his humanity, made perfect through suffering to the Father. So it is with the Spirit. As the gift of the Father he is aparchai, first fruits, of the perfecting action of God in Christ. Although, under the conditions of the Fall, the sacrifice of Jesus must take the form of the spilling of blood, that aspect is not of the essence of sacrifice, which is rather to be found in the notion of gift. It is the Father’s giving of the Son, the Son’s giving of himself to the Father and the Spirit’s enabling of the creation’s giving in response that is at the centre. It is by such a means that we move from the economy to the heart of the being of God. It is as a dynamic of giving and receiving, asymmetrical rather than merely reciprocal, that the communion that is the triune life must be understood. 86

Once for All: Infinite Responsibility or Imitative Response?

So what of the accusations that, 'Christian theology with atonement at the center... encourages martyrdom and victimization', that 'the cross... communicates the message that suffering is redemptive', that those seeking to be a 'faithful follower of Jesus' are taught that 'suffering for others will save the world.' 87 The misplaced charge, that Christ’s death valorizes an ethic of martyrdom and suffering, stems from the basic problem that we have been seeking to elucidate. When interpreted purely in ethical terms and with a low Christology, the life and death of Jesus could indeed

86 Gunton, One, Three and Many, 225, n.19.
87 Brown and Parker, "For God So Loved the World?," 2-3.
be construed as commending an ethic of martyrdom and suffering. However, in contrast to the bifurcating of ethics from ontology apparent in both the thought of our atonement critics and that of our philosophical interlocutors, we have been at pains to assert that in Christian theology, ethics does not precede ontology but rather is inextricably connected to ontological concerns.

It is the assumption of humanity by the Word and his living as our 'representative' a 'perfect life', a life of faithful obedience, made 'perfect through sufferings', which the New Testament emphatically states is a 'once for all' sacrifice. It is the ontological nature of Christ's 'once for all' life and death which provides the basis for Christian ethics and which clearly distinguishes Christian ethical thought from that of Levinas and Derrida. For, despite the similar grammar employed, the term 'substitution', understood Christologically, has a distinctly different tone from its Levinasian usage. In Levinasian thought it is the 'I' as a 'substitutionary self' with 'infinite responsibility' before the face of the Other which is the basis for ethics. In Christian theology it is Jesus Christ who as the 'substitutionary (representative) self' has taken on 'infinite responsibility' 'once for all', who provides the basis for human ethical response. In contrast to Levinas' assertion that 'I am man holding up the universe "full of all things"', the claim of Christian faith is that it is Christ, the one in whom 'the fullness of God dwells', who holds up – that is, sustains and redeems – the universe. That is, it is Jesus – the creator of all things, the Messiah who has come – whose death and subsequent resurrection overcomes the hostility of the world, thus reconciling all things. It is not our actions, but God's actions in Christ which re-instates an ontology of peace, re-establishing an economy of loving gift-exchange (Col 1:15-20).

The 'once for all' nature of Christ's death only makes sense and thus can only be construed as a non-valorization of suffering if Christ's significance is understood not

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88 Levinas, Humanism of the Other, 57.
ethically – as just another ‘moral teacher’ but rather ontologically. It is not Jesus' humanity per se that has salvific function, but rather the particularity of his humanity assumed by the Word, that has salvific import. As Tanner eloquently puts it:

It is the particularity of Jesus' humanity, its specific shape or mode, that comes to include us. We are not included in Christ's life simply because the humanity assumed by the Son in Christ is common, shared by Christ and every other human being. It is this particular person – and not the humanity of Christ per se – that has universal efficacy, in so far as everyone else is drawn to it, united with Christ's own life.... Therefore our acts are not saving as Jesus' are. Jesus' humanity is the one united with the Word that assumes it for salvation; we are the ones saved through this act of God. Our graced lives are part of the effects of the incarnation which are universal in scope. The incarnation is achieved by Christ before Christ assumed us to himself; we are all already saved by Christ, in the sense that the saving power of Christ is already complete and does not need repeating or re-enactment by any of us.89

According to the writer of Hebrews, it is the fact that ‘we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all’ (Heb 10:10), that Christ has offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins’ (Heb 10:12), which thus provides the basis then for the ethical imperative, to provoke one another to love and good deeds’ (Heb 10:24). Likewise, in Romans, the free gift of the grace of the one man Jesus Christ, which through his obedience overcomes death, leads not to a call to martyrdom and death-dealing, but rather provides the basis for Paul’s appeal: ‘to present your bodies as living sacrifices’ (Rom 12:1). In these passages and throughout the New Testament, the ethical injunction is neither to continue to engage in death-dealing nor to glory in suffering or other forms of perverse masochist ethic. Instead, the

89 Tanner, Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity, 54-5. Emphasis added.
Christian ethic is a call to ‘lead a life worthy to which we have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Eph 4:1-3).

It is as a result of the ontological change brought about through our incorporation into the resurrected body of Christ that we are called not to the impossibility of ‘infinite responsibility’ but rather to the radical, but nonetheless joy-filled, ‘imitative response’. Hence, the saints in Ephesus are instructed: ‘be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’ (Eph 5:1-2).

In contrast to Levinas’ and Derrida’s ethics of deference, in which one seems required to give up any sense of one’s own needs and where in enacting ‘infinite responsibility’ for the Other one constantly faces the nagging sense of guilt that in preferring one, one has therefore sacrificed an-other,\textsuperscript{90} the Christian ethic is not a call to self-obliteration. Instead, the activity of ‘imitative response’ is a summons to participate in a joyous sharing of reciprocal love. It is the fact that Christ’s ‘substitution’ is once and for all, that he takes upon himself ‘infinite responsibility’, that paradoxically liberates us from the impossible and potentially paralysing and guilt-inducing demand of ethics, yet at the same time empowers us, summoning us to take ‘substitutionary’ and ‘responsible’ actions for the Other. Christ’s ‘once for all’ sacrifice does not lead to an antinomianism, a neglect of ethics, but rather provides the very basis for Christian ethical behaviour. Tanner summarises our argument well, when stating: ‘When Jesus’ life is not abstracted from his humanity’s assumption by the Word and its soteriological point, the call to imitate Christ, to correspond in action to Christ own life, also moves away from any simple valorization of self-denial or self-sacrifice.\textsuperscript{91} That this call to ‘imitative response’ –

\textsuperscript{90} See Derrida, \textit{Gift of Death}, 70-1.
\textsuperscript{91} Tanner, \textit{Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity}, 75.
the provocation to enact love and good deeds in a world of brokenness –will almost ineluctably involve suffering is not to be denied. It is to this theme and to a further explication on the nature of a life of ‘imitative response’ that we will return in our final chapter.

But if Christ, as our corporate representative, the second Adam, has inaugurated the true form of personhood, a life lived in communion with the Father, characterised not by violent and conflictual relationality but by radical gift-giving towards the Other, how does humanity enter into this personhood? If, in Christ, the hostility and violence of the world has ‘once for all’ been overcome, how does humanity cross the threshold, so to speak, and begin to participate in this experience of hospitality? Our response to this, the fourth of the questions we posed on commencing this chapter, is that it is not human ethical action, but rather the response of faith to God’s initiatory actions which provides the basis for entrance into this new life of hospitality and thus leads to the practice of hospitality to the Other. Not only is it our contention that human ethical action – the life of hospitality – is predicated on the reception of God’s initiatory gift of faith and a response of active obedience, but also that theological knowledge itself, the very ability to speak of the God who offers such a life, is likewise, dependent on the gift of faith. These assertions – that the response of faith is prior to ethics and that Christian theology as gift, is neither totalising nor threatened by otherness – will be illuminated further in our concluding reflections. How such a proposal differs from that of our interlocutors will be clearly explicated, as, ‘face to face’ with the readings of Levinas and Derrida, we return to that most disturbing of episodes, the Akedah.
The Primacy of Grace and the Optics of Faith

The Akedah: Abraham’s Sacrifice and the Call to Faith – (Gen 22:1-19)

The biblical character of Abraham, and in particular the climactic episode of the Abrahamic narrative, the Akedah, have long been the attention of theological, philosophical and ethical discussion, and as we have already observed, play a significant role in the ethical thought of both Levinas and Derrida. Levinas recognises that one cannot engage with the troubling Akedah narrative without reflecting upon Kierkegaard’s musings on this episode so strikingly presented in Fear and Trembling. While respectful of Kierkegaard, Levinas finds his ‘teleological suspension of the ethical’ deeply troubling and expresses astonishment not only at Kierkegaard’s move of putting ‘God above the ethical order!’ but also at the very obedience of Abraham to God’s call to sacrifice Isaac. For Levinas, the key to the story is the fact that Abraham kept himself ‘at a sufficient distance’ from this obedience to hear the second, and more important call from the voice of the angel, commanding Abraham to stay his hand. According to Levinas – who throughout his writings repeatedly distances his philosophy from ecstatic religion or forms of mysticism, instead advocating an ethical praxis of the Torah as true mysticism – the Akedah is not, as Kierkegaard would suggest, the ‘suspension of the ethical’, but rather is the beginning of the ethical. Contrary to Kierkegaard’s interpretation ‘where subjectivity rises to the level of the religious’, it is, Levinas claims, ‘Abraham’s attentiveness to the voice that led him back to the ethical order’ which ‘is the highest point in the drama.’

Similarly, in The Gift of Death, Derrida offers an extended commentary on the Akedah and Kierkegaard’s thought. Derrida argues that each of us, like Abraham, faces the

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94 Ibid., 77.
95 Ibid.
dilemma of Mt Moriah each and every moment we make an ethical decision. He writes: 'Day and night, at every instant, on all the Mount Moriahs of this world, I am doing that, raising my knife over what I love and must love, over those to whom I owe absolute fidelity, incommensurability.' For Derrida, every decision to respond to an Other involves therefore a sacrifice or betrayal of other others to whom we also owe responsibility and thus, '[this] land of Moriah... is our habitat every second of every day.' However, in taking the leap to interpret the Akedah – and Kierkegaard's reading of it – as fundamentally being about ethics, and in doing so, turning the very singularity of this moment of decision by Abraham into a universal paradigm, does Derrida not, as Dominic Moran asks, 'risk banalizing that momentous event, divesting it of its exemplarity/singularity?' Is the narrative of the Akedah – and for that matter, Kierkegaard's usage of the story in Fear and Trembling – primarily concerned with the question of ethics? A closer reading of the Akedah text itself, with particular attention to the interplay between visual and aural imagery, suggests otherwise.

A recent fashion for commentators seeking to offer a fresh perspective on this long-discussed narrative is to offer Levinasian-inspired readings of the text, giving particular emphasis to the optical motifs within the text. Influenced by midrash commentary on the narrative and by Levinas' own assertions regarding the face – that 'the epiphany of the face is ethical'; 'the dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face'; that there is 'authority in the face'; that 'the face says to me:

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96 Derrida, Gift of Death, 68.
99 Optical imagery is indeed critical to the narrative, appearing explicitly three times in the passage: 'Abraham looked up and saw' (22:4); 'Abraham looked up and saw a ram' (22:13); and Abraham called that place 'The LORD will provide/will see. On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided / he shall be seen.' (22:14). NRSV.
“You shall not kill” — such new readings place great emphasis on the face of Isaac. Thus, Claire Elise Katz, seeking to explain what it is that allows Abraham ‘sufficient distance’ to hear the second voice preventing the sacrifice from being followed through, claims:

[S]omething had to take place in order for Abraham to be receptive to this voice: he had seen the face of Isaac....The staying of the hand was the continuation, or affirmation, of an action that was already set into motion; Abraham had already begun to abort the sacrifice. That is, he has turned from sheer obedience to the ethical.

Likewise, James Mensch suggests that:

In a Levinasian reading of the story of Abraham, God appears in the face of Isaac. The voice of God, commanding Abraham not to kill Isaac, is an appeal issuing from Isaac’s own face. The face exhibits, to

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100 For these Levinasian assertions regarding the Face, see Wright, Hughes, and Ainley, "Paradox of Morality," 168-180, 169; Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 199, 78; Levinas and Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," 13-33, 24; Levinas, Ethics and Infinity, 86-87.

101 Claire Elise Katz, "The Voice of God and the Face of the Other: Levinas, Kierkegaard, and Abraham," The Journal of Textual Reasoning 2, no. 1 (2003): <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/tr/volume2/katz.html> (20 April 2007). Emphasis added. Katz's paper, is one of a number responding to the primary work in the same journal: Marc Bregman, "Aqedah: Midrash as Visualization," The Journal of Textual Reasoning 2, no. 1 (2003). Each paper draws on midrash commentary and to a greater or lesser extent, the work of Levinas, laying particular emphasis on the optical motifs present in the Akedah narrative. Other than Emmanuel Levinas' essay "A Propos Of "Kierkegaard Vivant", which appears in Proper Names, (75-79) where he briefly deals with Kierkegaard's interpretation of the Akedah, nowhere in Levinas' philosophical writings does he explicitly offer his own interpretation of the Genesis 22 narrative. Nevertheless, the 'Levinasian readings' offered by others with their emphasis on the centrality of the face of Isaac in summoning Abraham back to the 'ethical order' do have a strong consistency with Levinas' own thought. It is therefore not too great a 'leap' to imagine that Levinas' own reading of the text would not be too dissimilar. Levinas, in his belief that 'the Face is a fundamental event' through whom God speaks, would undoubtedly agree that it is in seeing the face of the human Other – Isaac – that Abraham thus sees the face of God and therefore steps aside from blind obedience and returns to the ethical order. The face of the human other overcomes the [un]ethical voice of God.
those who can recognize it, the authority without power that marks God’s presence.  

But are such readings, in which primacy is given to the optical signifiers, *faithful* to the narrative? While there are certainly optical signifiers within the *Akedah* story, the aural motifs that appear throughout the text appear to be at least as, if not more, important for interpreting the narrative. Just as there are three explicit optical motifs, so too there are three aural occurrences where Abraham *hears* – and significantly – *responds obediently* to a voice of the Other. To the address of each of these voices – God (v1), Isaac (v7), and the angel of the LORD (v11) – Abraham answers with the declaration of his availability: “Here I am” (*hineni*). Indeed, a defining feature of Abraham’s faithfulness is *his obedience to what he hears*, not merely in this episode, but throughout the Abrahamic narrative. While those offering ‘Levinasian readings’ speculate on what Abraham *saw*, thus enabling him to *hear* the voice of the Angel, the text actually reverses this order. Hearing the voice of the angel (v11), Abraham pauses his knife mid-point and then *responds obediently* to the Angel’s command to stay his hand. It is after this *aural reception and subsequent obedient response* that the text explicitly states that ‘Abraham looked up and saw’ not, as midrash writers and post-modern Jewish readings of the text posit, Isaac’s face, but rather, the face of ‘a ram’ (v13).

The text suggests then, that it is not the human ethical encounter with the Other, that is, the *seeing* of the face of Isaac, which is the primary moment within the episode. Rather, the very ability to *see* Isaac’s face stems from Abraham’s *faithful obedience* to the voice of God. It is not, as Levinasian thought asserts, the immanence of human ethical behaviour which is the transcendent moment, but rather an encounter with

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103 Indeed, even Levinas, though ignoring the first voice, asserts that the critical point of the story is Abraham’s *hearing* of the second voice of the Angel.
the transcendent Angel of the Lord, and one's availability (hineni) and obedience to his command which thus determines the morality of one's actions.\textsuperscript{104}

Even if one does follow a 'Levinasian-reading' and give particular emphasis to the optical imagery that appears within the passage, such a reading still runs counter to the conclusion that the narrative is one primarily concerned with ethics. Indeed, it is in testimony to the faithfulness of God – the pre-eminence of God's sight and God's activity of graciously providing a ram to sacrifice – that Abraham proceeds to name the place of sacrifice, Jehovah Jireh, stating: "The LORD will provide/will see". On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided / he shall be seen" (v14). In this enigmatic name conferral consisting of a pun on the basic word of 'see' – with the first half of the pun, being active: God sees, followed by the second passive clause: God is seen – Abraham issues a profound pronouncement. Echoing the description of his mistress Hagar, who earlier had named the angel of the Lord she had encountered, "El-roi", that is, "The God of seeing has seen me" (Gen 16:13), Abraham, in the activity of naming, confesses that his seeing of God – that is, his knowledge of / relationship with YHWH – does not stem from his initiative, but rather has its origin in God's primary action of seeing and calling him. Likewise, his ethical actions stem not from his own determination of appropriate ethical behaviour but rather are actions of obedience to the address of the Divine Other who calls and commands.\textsuperscript{105}

Thus, even if engaging in a 'Levinasian-reading', one were to concur with James Mensch that God appears in the face of Isaac, such a reading does not inevitably lead

\textsuperscript{104} As will become clearer as we proceed, none of this is to suggest a simplistic 'divine command theory' approach to ethics.

\textsuperscript{105} Having already pre-determined that the narrative is concerned with 'ethics' and that God's initial command is unethical, Levinas, in only giving credence to the second of the voices, thus implies a disregard or disobedience to the first primary command of God. Such a distinguishing between the two addresses not only seems to run contrary to Levinas' very notion that addressed by the Other we are called to responsibility and obedience, but also begs the question on what grounds one establishes what is ethical. If faced and addressed by the Other we are called to infinite responsibility, then how does one determine whether the command of this face is ethical or unethical and thus to be obeyed?
to the prioritising of ethics over faith. That the face exhibits ‘the authority without power that marks God’s presence’, Mensch acknowledges, is not transparent to all, but rather only ‘to those who can recognize it’. It is our contention that such recognition, the ability to see the presence of God in the face of Other requires a transformation of our optics. Such optical transformation finds its basis not in human action, but rather, the eyes of faith that allow such recognition are themselves, a gift of grace.

It is this prioritising of grace over ethics which is the central theme of Kierkegaard’s ruminations on Abraham and the Akedah, expressed via his pseudonym Johannes De Silentio, in Fear and Trembling. Far from interpreting the Akedah as a passage concerned with ethical dilemmas, Kierkegaard, as Ronald Green states: ‘uses a surface discussion of ethical questions to present his more basic soteriological concerns.’ 106 The point behind Kierkegaard’s use of Abraham as a ‘figure’ or ‘type’ in Fear and Trembling is, as Green notes, ‘to establish a Christian ontology in which the order of merit – of ethics, “the law,” or “works righteousness” – is subordinated to the realm of grace. The “teleological suspension of the ethical” is introduced not to defend a form of conduct but to point the way, in the face of persistent human moral failure, to God’s redeeming grace.’ 107 As Green puts it:

_Fear and Trembling_ is not a defense of the possibility of murder at God’s command, nor is it, despite the commentators, a celebration of Abraham’s moral heroism. Quite the contrary, it is a tribute to the one who first adopted the stance to which all his spiritual descendents are called; the stance of living “beyond ethics” in absolute dependency on God’s grace. To sinners, it is the stance

106 As Green observes, ‘whatever ethical concerns are present in _Fear and Trembling_ are radically secondary to its deeper soteriological purposes.’ Ronald M Green, “Enough is Enough: _Fear and Trembling Is Not about Ethics_,” _Journal of Religious Ethics_, 21, no. 2 (Fall 93): 191-209, 192-3.

107 Ibid.: 199.
symbolized by the name of the place of Abraham’s sacrifice, Jehovah-jireh: “God will provide”.108

It is here, in this offering of an ontology in which ethics is subordinated to grace, that we therefore see some unexpected yet clear parallels between the thought of atonement critics discussed above, and Levinasian-Derridean thought. Both Levinas and Derrida in their belief that the Akedah narrative is primarily concerned with general ethical questions, find the passage – and particularly Kierkegaard’s interpretation of the passage – troubling. Brown and Parker and other atonement critics repeat this same error. In viewing the cross fundamentally as about ethics they presume that Jesus’ death is offered to us as a general ethical model to emulate. It is the failure of such advocates of exemplarist Christologies to recognise the particularity and singularity, the ‘once for all’ nature of Jesus’ life and death, which leads them to suggest that Christ’s death valorizes an ethic of self-sacrifice and suffering and perpetuates an economy of sacrifice. However, in contrast to both Levinas’ and Derrida’s ethical reading, Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling asserts that the central theme of the Akedah narrative is not a summons to return to ethics, but rather a call to enter a journey of faith.

And what is the nature and who is the object of this faith? The writer of the letter, having outlined a long line of those who have lived by faith – including Abel and Abraham – states that these ancestors though ‘commended for their faith did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect’ (Heb 11:39-40). The writer of Hebrews states instead that it is Jesus who as ‘the pioneer and perfecter of our faith’ – its origin and telos – we are to ‘fix our eyes on.’109

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108 Ibid.: 204.
109 Heb 12:2, NRSV. ‘Fix our eyes’ from New International Version
But doesn’t fixing our eyes on the face of the Other, bringing them within the sphere of our consciousness, as our philosophical interlocutors have argued, involve totalising and violating them, robbing them of their otherness? Does not the activity of ‘doing theology’ consist of a Jacob-like attempt to wrestle the Divine into the confines of language, therefore reducing Him to an object which can be assimilated and brought under our domination? Such questions bring us back to the second of the two questions we posed at the beginning of section two of this work, namely:

To what extent is Levinas’ and Derrida’s critique of the totalising, logo-centric, nature of Western philosophy also true of the theological enterprise? That is, is theology – the attempt to give an account of the character and actions of God – likewise, a discourse of totality and sameness, one that therefore excludes the Other?

For Levinas and Derrida any attempt to speak of God, risks doing violence to God’s transcendence. That is, in endeavouring to speak of God through language, we run the very real risk, as noted by Feuerbach, of turning God into an idol. But is this the case for Christian theology?

The Face of the Other: Christ the Dazzling Eikon and the Non-Violating Nature of Christian Theology

12 But all those who did accept him
he empowered to become God’s children
That is, those who believed in his name – 13 those who were begotten,
not by blood, nor by carnal desire, nor by man’s desire, but by God.
14 And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us.
And we have seen his glory,
The glory of an only Son coming from the Father,
filled with enduring love.
16 And of his fullness
we have all had a share –
love in place of love.

17 For while the Law was a gift through Moses, this enduring love came
through Jesus Christ.

18 No one has ever seen God; it is God the only
Son, ever at the Father’s side, who has revealed Him.110

Jean-Luc Marion, sympathetic to the Levinasian and Derridean critique of onto-theology, attempts to construct his own post-metaphysical theology upon the development and elaboration of the concept of the ‘saturated phenomenon’. For Marion, the ‘saturated phenomenon’ refers to ‘the impossibility of attaining knowledge of an object, comprehension in the strict sense’, not ‘from a deficiency in the giving intuition, but from its surplus, which neither concept, signification, nor intention can foresee, organize, or contain’111 For Marion, it is the Christ event which is the ‘saturated phenomenon’ par excellence. With unmistakable echoes of the Prologue, Marion speaks of the incarnation as:

a phenomenon saturated to the point that the world could not accept it. Having come among its own, they did not recognize it; having come into phenomenality, the absolutely saturated phenomenon could find no room for its display. But this opening denial, and thus this disfiguration, still remains a manifestation.112

Reiterating the theme of this section on the primacy of grace and the optics of faith, Marion contends that Christ’s face is not an object that, seen by the self, is thus made captive to human consciousness and grasped and comprehended as a totality.

110 Brown, John [I-XII], 3-4.
111 Jean-Luc Marion, “In the Name,” in God, the Gift, and Postmodernism, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 20-53, 39-40.
Rather, it is the face of Christ, who as the active agent places the viewer in His gaze. Drawing on the juxtaposition of light and darkness within Johannine thought and the mystical theology of Psuedo-Dionysius, Marion argues that revelation does not consist in us finding God, but rather God finding us. The face of Christ is not seen and thus absorbed, but rather produces ‘bedazzlement’ for sight. Christ is not reducible to an idol, but rather is an eikon, the One who gives us a glimpse of the Divine communion, yet never able to be totally captured by thought. As the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel states, ‘No one has ever seen God; it is God the only Son, ever at the Father’s side, who has revealed Him.’ That is, seeing the face of God in Christ, and likewise the ability to see the image of God in the human Other, is dependent on the prior event of God bedazzling us and giving us eyes of faith to see God’s own self-revelation. Our acceptance, our welcoming of the Word, and thus our adoption ‘to become God’s children’ stems not from human initiative, but rather is a response of faith, a response that is itself dependent on an external ‘empowering’. The human action of ‘believing in his name’ is simply a response to the prior desire of God. Those who see Jesus, who are illuminated by the ‘light of the world’, are those who, according to the gospel, have been born from above. Dazzled by our encounter with the light that shines forth from the crucified, yet resurrected, face of Christ, we become the objects who through ‘fixing our eyes’ upon the iconic face of Christ, undergo a process of transformation.

113 Marion, God Without Being, 100-102.
115 The importance of icons within contemplative spirituality and the rich legacy of such use within the Orthodox tradition is one that the iconoclastic Western church is, by and large, oblivious to. This said, such an emphasis on the transformative agency of the iconic face of Christ can be discerned in perhaps the most unlikely source: the lyrics of the worship chorus ‘Shine Jesus Shine’, written by British evangelical-charismatic songwriter Graham Kendrick. Drawing on both Johannine imagery and that of Pauline thought in 2 Cor 3:17-18, Kendrick’s lyrics emphasise that our transformation is not found in human activity, but rather in the passivity of basking in the ‘dazzling’ light that shines forth from the face of Christ.

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\text{Lord the light or your love is shining,} \\
\text{In the midst of the darkness shining,} \\
\text{Jesus light of the world shine upon us,} \\
\]
dazzling light, so our vision is transformed, enabling us to catch, in the vulnerable faces of others, glimpses of the face of God.

The primacy of faith in the realm of soteriology holds true too for the practice of theology itself. Just as human salvation stems not from human ethical actions, but rather from the initiative God has taken in Christ, so too, the action of theologising – speaking about God – finds its basis not in human intellectual insights, but rather in the prior speech of God. Christian theology, put simply, is the attempt to put into words that which through the Word has first been spoken to us.

Accordingly, this means that the activity of doing theology, of speaking about God, is likewise dependent on taking a stance of faith – that is, receiving God’s gift of grace which therefore opens our eyes to see. Unlike the pragmatic agnosticism of our interlocutors in which the distinction between the human Other and the Divine

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Set us free by the truth you now bring us,
Shine on me. Shine on me.

Shine Jesus shine
Fill this land with the Father’s glory
Blaze, spirit blaze,
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Lord and let there be light.

Lord I come to your awesome presence,
From the shadows into your radiance,
By the blood I may enter your brightness,
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness,
Shine on me. Shine on me.

As we gaze on your kingly brightness.
So our faces display your likeness.
Ever changing from glory to glory,
Mirrored here may our lives tell your story.
Shine on me. Shine on me.
Other is blurred, and ethics is given priority over grace, Christianity is a summons to faith not in the incomprehensibility of the unknown Other, but rather in Jesus, the Word made flesh. While agreeing with Levinas' assertion that 'the dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face' (TI 78), it is the Christian claim that the fullest revelation of the divine is manifest in the human-divine face of Jesus Christ, and the ability to see the trace of the divine in the Other is dependent upon a transforming of our sight, the receiving of the gift of eyes of faith. Such faith is not a well-meaning faith in the 'natural' human inclination of empathy towards the fellow human. Rather, biblical faith is a trust in God’s faithfulness to fulfil his promises and overcome human brokenness and then a life of empowered obedience lived in response to God’s initiatory actions in ending hostility. Such faith does not lead, as Levinas and Derrida fear, to ethical inaction. Their charge – undoubtedly influenced by their observation of the behaviour of the Church in Germany and Algeria – that ‘a metaphysical relation with God’ is often accompanied by an ‘ignorance of men and things’ is one that fails to strike true of authentic biblical Christian faith. Rather, as so vividly displayed in the life of both Abraham and Jesus, faith involves a hearing of the address of the Transcendent Other, accompanied by a response of obedience. As we will explore in our next chapter, the primary evidence of this life of faith, is one’s response of obedience to the command ‘to love one another’.

116 Throughout this work we have observed how those influenced by post-modern sensibilities contend that Christian theology, in its offering of a universal salvation through the particularity of Christ, involves an oppression of difference and otherness, an oppression which is manifested in violence towards women, the earth and Others in general. In rebuttal of such critiques in chapter four we have outlined how the Christian doctrines of Trinity and Creation offer an ontology not of sameness but rather of communion, an ontology in which otherness is affirmed and celebrated. So too, far from being a totalising narrative of dominating power, central to the Christian doctrine of Christology that we have sketched in this present chapter is the belief that Christ’s power is demonstrated not in violence and oppression of Others, but rather in the kenotic actions of suffering love. Not only is it the content of Christian theology which responds to the accusation of totalising violence, but more so, the very nature of theology should lead to a practise which also refutes such claims. That the attempt to offer words about God, finds its basis in God’s prior activity of the giving of His Word, means that theology is always tentative and provisional. The Christian claim that any talk about God is utterly dependent on God’s own self-revelation thus should lead not to a posture of arrogance, but rather to one of epistemological humility.
Summary

In this chapter we have traced the outline of a Christology and soteriology in which Christ is understood as the universal solution to the inhospitality and hostility present in our world. Using motifs drawn from the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel and the book of Hebrews – Christ the Logos as creator, sustainer and redeemer of being; trembling flame-dazzling light; hidden host-homeless guest; substitutionary sacrifice, and Eikon – and, drawing on resonances with the Old Testament characters of Abel, Abraham, and Jacob, we have argued that it is in Christ and in the singularity and particularity of his incarnation that humanity finds the basis for authentic personhood. The significance of the entirety of this life – a life characterised by an intimate relationship with the Father and one of radical obedience and due to the fallen nature of the world, suffering – is not, we have argued, primarily one of providing a moral or ethical example. Rather, it is the ontological change brought about by Christ’s assumption of fallen humanity and his resurrection triumph over sin, violence and death, which establishes the only secure foundation for the practice of a radical hospitality to the Other. This understanding, that at the cross the ontological problem of death and division is overcome, is perhaps most clearly articulated in a passage from Hebrews, in which many of these themes – creation, vision, struggle, obedience, and sacrifice – converge.

But we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

It was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings....

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might
destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendents of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make the sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested’ (Heb 2: 9-10, 14-18).

Christian theology claims that those who are seen by Christ and who through faith are incorporated into the body of the resurrected Christ, are set free from slavery to mimetic violence and therefore to the fear of death. They become, through the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ, new gift-giving persons. The shape of this new Christologically-formed personhood, which, having received the hospitality of God, is called and empowered to act hospitably through its new life in the ecclesia, will be the focus of our final two chapters.
Seen by the Other: The Call to Faith
(John 1:35-31)

The motif of Christ as *Eikon* and the transformation that occurs as we look to the face of Christ is one employed by British theologian David F. Ford in his book *Self and Salvation*. Ford, in a Christology shaped by a close interaction with the thought of Levinas, suggests that 'being faced by God' and 'turning to face Jesus Christ in faith' are among the defining characteristics of Christianity.\(^1\) Ford states that 'the risen face of Jesus is a 'revelation'', and claims that this 'unveiled' face 'transcends simple recognisability... eludes our categories and stretches our capacities in the way in which God does.... provok[ing] fear, bewilderment, doubt, joy and amazement.' Facing such a face, he believes, 'generates a community whose life before the face is endlessly interrogative, and whose response to it leads into ever new complexities, ambiguities, joys and sufferings.'\(^2\)

Despite the innovative nature of Ford's work – fashioned as it is by engagement with a number of contemporary theologians and philosophers (Jüngel, Levinas and Ricoeur) and the lives of contemporary saints (Thérèse of Lisieux and Dietrich Bonhoeffer) – his concept of a 'worshipping self' *generated* by its facing of the face of Jesus, does, however, seem to revert to an exemplarist Christology. John Webster suggests that the employment of the concept of 'the face' as primary soteriological metaphor – a metaphor 'tending to be static rather than dramatic, to Christ as image rather than agent' – results in Ford failing to give sufficient attention to the 'historical

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\(^1\) Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 24-5.

\(^2\) For Ford, the 'underdetermination' and 'self-effacement' of this face 'constantly urges those who look to it that they should route their seeking the face of Christ to other people.' For Ford, Christ's 'substitutionary responsibility creates an exchange through which each person can be related in responsibility to each other. This *generates* a community which can be bound together in joyful responsibility to those outside it.' Ibid., 172-3. Emphasis added.
specificity' and the 'once for all character of the action of the Son of God.' Such a Christology, 'afflicted with a socialising and moralising tendency', Webster argues, offers 'Christianity as a form of human life or religion' therefore 'transposing the gospel into a moralistic or experiential register'.

But does using the 'face of Christ' as one's primary soteriological metaphor, inevitably lead to an exemplarist Christology and a Pelagian soteriology? A close reading of Scripture reveals that the concept of Christ as eikon, rather than being construed as 'static', can still be understood as underscoring the dramatic agency of God in Christ. Both Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion – who adopts, though not uncritically, Levinas’ conception of the Face – suggest that an encounter with the Other, far from reducing the Other to an idol which is grasped and totalised, rather leads to 'a dazzling, where the eye holds more than it can hold.' In an encounter with the Divine Other, the face of Christ cannot be reduced to an idol, but rather our gazing at the Other is reversed by the gaze of the divine icon who envisages us. It is not our sight that has primacy, but rather our very seeing of Christ is dependent on His own self-revelation to us. That is, seeing the face of Christ is dependent on the prior event of God seeing us, of God revealing Himself and giving us, through the gift of faith, eyes to see.

This claim that our identity and salvation stems not from our initiative – whether ethical actions or intellectual insight – but originates in the active seeing, calling, and naming of the Divine Other, is strikingly made in the Fourth Gospel. In narrating the episode which marks the beginning of the discipleship of Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, and Nathanael, the Fourth Gospel eloquently connects this theme of seeing with that of hospitality.

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4 Levinas, Of God Who Comes to Mind, 67.
5 Marion, God Without Being, 21.
With striking parallels to the Akedah narrative, the Fourth Gospel records that John the Baptist, on being approached by Jesus, declares: “Look! Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the world’s sin” (1:29), and again later, John the Baptist declares to two of his disciples: “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” (1:36). In response to John the Baptist’s bold Christological declaration, two disciples – Andrew and John, ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ (7) – begin to follow. It is Jesus though, who takes the initiative and speaks for the first time in the Fourth Gospel. The question “What are you looking for?” (1:38), as Raymond Brown observes:

 touches on the basic need of man that causes him to turn to God, and the answer of the disciples must be interpreted on the same theological level. Man wishes to stay (menein: “dwell, abide”) with God; he is constantly seeking to escape temporality, change, and death, seeking to find something that is lasting.  

The disciples’ reply to Jesus’ initiatory question with their own query: “Where are you staying?” Their active and energetic response to Jesus’ invitation to “Come and see” (1:39) testifies to their desire for a place of permanence and intimacy, a place to dwell and abide in safety and security. Such a desire for stability and intimacy is both strikingly evident and urgently requires redress in the contemporary globalised, post-structuralist, post-foundationalist world – a world where permanence, boundaries and foundations are constantly being dismantled and deconstructed, both literally and metaphorically.

Andrew’s immediate action after spending time with Jesus is to find his brother Simon and to announce not that he has spent time with a Rabbi, but to boldly declare that he has found the Messiah. Taking his brother along to meet this Messiah, Jesus

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6 Brown, John [I-XII], 55.  
7 For discussion of the identity of the unnamed disciple in this passage see: Ibid., 73-74.  
8 Ibid., 78-9. The verb menein – to dwell, to lodge, to abide – which appears three times in 1:38-39, is a motif that is developed throughout the Fourth Gospel.
‘looked⁹ at him and said, “You are Simon, son of John; your name shall be Cephas” (which is rendered as “Peter”’) (1:42). Caught in the gaze of a face – a gaze not of violence but full of love – Simon, restless and shifting, discovers a new identity, his new name Peter – Rock, testifying to the solidity and stability that ensues from being seen, named by, and found/founded in Christ.

In what is clearly a parallel story, the Fourth Gospel then continues with a recitation of Jesus’ encounter with Philip and Nathanael (1:43-51). As with the previous episode, it is Jesus who takes the initiative, travelling to Galilee and finding Philip. Philip, like Andrew, responds to his being found by then seeking out another – in this case Nathanael – to be brought to see and be found by Jesus. Replicating Andrew’s ‘Messiah’ declaration, Philip, confident after encountering Jesus in the new-found ability to see clearly, announces boldly to Nathanael: “We have found the very one described in the Mosaic Law and the prophets” (1:45). Despite Nathanael’s initial doubt – “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” – Philip persists, instructing Nathanael: “Come and see for yourself” (1:46).

As with Simon Peter, so with Nathanael: Jesus sees Nathanael approaching and declares: “Look! Here is a genuine Israelite; there is no guile in him” (1:47). To Nathanael’s puzzled enquiry: “How do you know me?” Jesus states, that prior even to Philip’s invitation to Nathanael to “Come and see”, he had already been seen.

Indeed, in contrast to Jacob, who as the first ‘Israel’ sought to see God on his own terms, Nathanael, true to his name – ‘God has given /gift of God’ – becomes aware that his seeing is ultimately conditional on his first being seen. Unlike Jacob/Israel, whose vigorous wrestling with God is testament to his constant attempt to comprehend God, Nathanael’s posture of passive-responsivity, is characteristic of

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⁹ The verb ‘looked’ – ἐμβλέπειν – Brown states: ‘means to fix one’s gaze on someone and thus to look with penetration and insight.’ Ibid., 74.
genuine faith. Nathanael’s reception of the gift of faith, his receiving of God’s goodness and grace, leads to an active response. In an outpouring of ‘praise speech’ he offers the climactic Christological declaration of the titles offered in these episodes. “Lamb of God”; “Rabbi”; “Messiah”; the One ‘whom Moses in the law and the Prophets testify to’, indeed, but even more so, Jesus, Nathanael declares, is the “Son of God”, the “King of Israel” (1:49). Nathanael’s reception of the gift and his accompanying annunciation of faith lead Jesus to announce that through such eyes of faith “you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (1:51). Thus, as Luke T. Johnson notes, ‘in a single deft allusion John has Jesus identify himself as the Holy Place where humans encounter God, the one who has descended from God and returns to him, and the “gate” through which others can go to God.’10 For those who receive the gift of faith, and whose eyes are opened to see, Jesus appears as the new House of God – Bethel– the locus of God’s hospitality.11

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11 See Genesis 28:10-22.
Chapter Six.

Dwelling in Christ and the In-Dwelling Other: The Forming of the Ecclesial & Eschatological Self

'The Forming of the Ecclesial & Eschatological Self

Community is a terrible place. It is the place where our limitations and our egoism are revealed to us. When we begin to live full-time with others, we discover our poverty and our weaknesses, our inability to get on with people, our mental and emotional blocks, our affective or sexual disturbances, our seemingly insatiable desires, our frustrations and jealousies, our hatred and our wish to destroy. While we were alone, we could believe we loved everyone. Now that we are with others, we realise how incapable we are of loving, how much we deny life to others.'

- Jean Vanier

Previously, we have argued that all of creation, including humanity, is brought into being as a gift, its origins lying in the hospitable and ecstatic actions of the loving Triune God. Distorted though, by our own desire to live distantly and separately and therefore cut off from the life of this divine communion, humanity becomes fearful of otherness. The Other is no longer perceived as one who comes offering joy, enrichment and mutual beneficence, but rather as a threat to our existence, one to be struggled against and overcome. Fear erupts into violence, hospitality gives way to hostility.

Stemming from the infinite love shared between Father, Son and Spirit and their desire that humanity should enter into the joy of communion, humanity is not left in this state of hostility and homelessness. Rather, in the event of the incarnation, the Son comes and enters the totality of the human predicament. Although there are vestigial moments of joy, intimacy and love, it is, ultimately, betrayal, suffering and death which come to the fore as a hostile humanity, enmeshed in a self-serving.

1 Jean Vanier, Community and Growth, 2nd ed. (Homebush, Sydney: Society of St Paul, 1980), 17.
death-dealing economy of violence reveals its unpreparedness to receive the ultimate gift of the true Host.

It is, however, the audacious claim of Christian faith that through this violent and humiliating death of the Son of God and his subsequent triumphant resurrection, the antagonism and aggression that besets the world has been defeated. The non-violent, non-coercive overcoming of the *inhospitality* of the world – the inauguration of a *new way of being*, of authentic *personhood* – is grounded therefore, not in human ethical effort or *desire*. Rather, rooted in the actions of God on our behalf, it stems from God’s *desire* for humanity. It is this premise that underlies the thought of the writer of the Letter to the Ephesians.

Summarising the themes taken up in our previous chapter, Ephesians 2:1-10 claims that the misplaced and perverted ‘passions [*epithumia*] of our flesh [*sarx*]’ – that is, our lust for the Other separate from the life of divine *communion* and our desire for control over the Other – results in our ‘following the desires [*thelema*] of flesh [*sarx*]’, and the pursuit of our own selfish interests. Such a pursuit of otherness without communion ultimately manifests itself in violence. Like children at a birthday party, any initial gratefulness and glee at the presentation of gifts soon gives way to envy, resentment and suspicion, which thereafter degenerates, more often than not, into actions of violence. Humanity, created to be the image-bearers of God, instead become ‘children of wrath’ [*ogre*].

According to the writer of the letter, the problem

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2 In contrast to the idealistic notion of the ‘innocence of childhood’ it is important here to note Irenaeus’ understanding that Adam and Eve, and humanity *per se*, were not born ‘perfect’ but that imperfection is a fact of their/our infantility and creaturehood. Andrew P. Klager expresses this well:

Adam’s self-preserving impulses and prideful negligence although intrinsic to his creaturehood and ultimately unavoidable, led to his disobedience. The inclination towards self-preservation is a direct result of Adam’s “essential imperfection... an imperfection that arises from the very fact of his creaturehood.” As a corporeal being contingent on the progression of time, it is natural to do what is necessary to keep oneself alive, which for an imperfect and infantile being implies the neglect of others.
humanity faces, therefore, is not primarily a moral problem, one of the breaking of legal stipulations which, placing humanity in debt, is thus rectified by a violent and retributive act of God’s wrath. The good news is not that through Christ we have been saved from God’s wrath and violence. On the contrary, the good news is that God, abounding in love towards us and ‘rich in mercy’, has, in Christ, overcome our wrath which expresses itself in violence towards both God and each other. This action of grace, ‘the gift of God’, is dependent not on our salvific ethical actions, but rather results from being ‘made alive together with Christ’, being ‘raised up with him’ and ‘seated with him’, that is, being incorporated into the body of the one who bears the scars of humanity’s inhospitality.

Thus far we have argued that it is the assumption of humanity by Jesus the Word and his subsequent face to face encounter with human violence, his struggle with and overcoming of death, which provides the basis for humanity’s ontological and therefore ethical transformation. That is, central to historical Christian faith is the belief that Christ, as the representative of humanity, has defeated death and offers new life for those who put their faith in Him. But how exactly does this being ‘made alive in Christ’, actually come about? That is:

1. How does the self enter into the authentic and genuine form of personhood found in Christ; and what are the processes that bring about the transformation from the self in hostility to the hospitable self?
2. What are the contours and characteristics of this new hospitable self?
3. What are the significant features one should see as evidence of the ecclesial community’s new ‘hospitable way of living’, as it exists in and through the life-giving breath of the Spirit of Christ?

4. What are the practices, rituals and rites which sustain this alternative way of living within a world in which hostility and enmity continue to exist?

It is these questions which will concern us in the remainder of this work and in this chapter we will turn our attention to the first two of these. Continuing with the themes of dwelling and inhabitation from our previous chapter, we will reflect on the way in which dwelling in Christ entails the presence of the Paraclete, the disturbing Other, within the baptised self. It is, we will contend, this indwelling Other, who, through the activities of re-clothing, prosecuting, disturbing, expanding and renovating, actualises the new post-baptismal existence and transforms the affections and desires of the fearful and hostile self. What begins to emerge, as the self participates in this work of the Spirit, is the forming of a self with new contours and a new character. ‘Keep out’ signs are replaced by ‘welcome’ doormats, barricaded boundaries give way to opening doors. In the words of John Zizioulas, biological existence is replaced by a new ecclesial existence. Or, as we have suggested, the ‘hostile self’ begins to make way for a new ‘hospitable self.’ Such a self, having received the gift of love from the Divine Gift-Giver, through the transforming power of the Spirit, becomes a lover of others.

In this chapter therefore, our focus will be primarily pneumatological and anthropological, as, describing the transforming work of the Spirit within the self, we set forth an alternative account of identity than that offered by our philosophical interlocutors. Having offered such an account, in our subsequent and final chapter, we will turn our attention to the two final questions, outlining both some of the defining features of, and the practices that sustain, this new ecclesial existence – the life of hospitality.

3 See Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 49-62.
Baptism: The Crucified, Resurrected and Re-clothed Self

Earlier, in reflecting upon Jesus' call of the first disciples, we gave particular attention to the motif of Christ as dwelling place. We posited that it is in being seen by Christ, in responding to his initiatory call and in dwelling with and in him, that one finds authentic personhood. Throughout the New Testament these images of dwelling and inhabitation are central to the attempt to articulate the ontological transformation that takes place as humanity enters into and participates in the redeeming work of Christ. As one enters through faith into union with Christ, the Spirit, who raised Christ from the dead, enters and indwells the believer. To be found in Christ involves the entrance of the Spirit of Christ into the self and the incorporating of this new Self into the Body of Christ – the welcoming of the self into God’s new community being formed in the world.

From the earliest days of the church it was the rite of baptism which both marked one’s entrance into the Ecclesia, and also played a significant role in the Church’s understanding of the transformation of the self that took place as one confessed faith in Christ. For New Testament writers, baptism was not viewed as a ‘purely external rite’, serving as a “mere symbol”, or ‘as a rite that effects what it symbolizes.’ On the contrary, baptism was understood as an ontological event in which the new believer entered into union with Christ. The Apostle Paul employs a number of striking motifs in his writings to elucidate this ontological transformation that takes place within believers as they pass through the waters of baptism.

Firstly, for Paul, baptism was understood as a participation in Christ’s death and resurrection. In sinking under the water, the believer was ontologically united with

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Christ in his death, and in being raised up out of the water was incorporated into a new life found in Christ. Thus, Paul states:

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain (Phil 1:21).

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory (Col 3:3-4).

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:19-20).

Paul’s employment of life and death vocabulary in these passages does not primarily refer to the possibility of such life and death experiences occurring now that the new disciple has chosen to imitate the moral example of Christ. While the imitation of Christ does stem from participation in Christ, and the practice of radical unconditional hospitality contains the very real possibility of suffering and potentially biological death, Paul is here concerned with making an ontological statement about what has already taken place. Paul’s conception of the self is that those who respond to Christ’s call and embrace the gift of faith enter ontologically into union with Christ, and thus participate in the death and resurrection of Christ. Such an understanding is perhaps most clearly articulated in Romans, where Paul writes:

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5 Emphasis added.
6 Emphasis added.
Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:3-11).

Secondly, when Paul speaks of baptism in other passages, he employs imagery of one being re-clothed and prepared for a banquet. Drawing on the actual practice of the baptism ritual during the apostolic period – that of stripping off old clothes and being baptised in the nude, before putting on new garments – Paul again stresses the ontological transformation that occurs as one enters, through faith, into union with Christ, and the ensuing ethical behaviour that flows from this new ontological reality. Thus, in Galatians, Paul states that, to be ‘baptized into Christ is to have clothed yourselves with Christ’ (Gal 3:27).

The language employed here is evocative, suggestive of the Spirit as the chief designer and wardrobe assistant who fashions new clothing and then re-dresses the self. Such imagery is particularly striking in our contemporary consumer age with its fascination with image and the projected appearance of the self. Unlike the post-
modern self which is lauded for its chameleonic nature, its malleability and the ability to constantly re-invent itself – a self in which appearance is simply a simulacrum and where identity is closely linked to one’s entity as a consumer – the baptised self, is being dressed in new, long-lasting ‘imperishable’ apparel.\(^7\) In contrast to the contours of the postmodern self, which, projected onto the billboards, web-pages, television screens and magazines, constantly changes and is re-drawn according to the dictates of ‘fashion’, the self inhabited by the Spirit finds itself being conformed to the image of a different \textit{eikon}.\(^8\)

The corollary of this ontological transformation is the commencing of a process of transformed character and ethical behaviour. In contrast to the models and fashion-designers of ‘reality’ television programs such as \textit{America’s/New Zealand’s Next Top Model} and \textit{Project Runway}, whose behind the scenes bickering, envy and petty jealousies betray the poised and glamorous personas portrayed on stage, Paul urges the believers at Colossae to rid themselves of such ‘anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language’, and calls on them to cease lying to one another...‘seeing that you have \textit{stripped off the old self} with its practices and have \textit{clothed yourself with the new self}.’ In Paul’s logic it is the new post-baptismal reality which dictates that members of this new community, ‘chosen... holy and beloved’ should now \textit{clothe yourselves} with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.... and above all, \textit{clothe yourselves} with love....’ (Col 3: 8-14).

Thirdly, elsewhere Paul mixes metaphors, combining these motifs of death, burial, and re-clothing with imagery drawn from the Jewish rite of circumcision. Thus, in his letter to the church at Colossae, Paul writes:

\(^7\) 1 Cor 15:35-58

\(^8\) The imagery of Christ as transforming \textit{eikon} is expressed in Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth, when he writes: ‘Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.’ (2 Cor 3:17-19)
In him [Christ] also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead (Col 2:11-12).

In summary, for Paul, faith in Christ, dramatically evidenced in the rite of baptism, entails an ontological transformation as the old self, full of hostility and violence, is, like old clothing, cast aside, put to death, in Christ. In its place emerges a new resurrected self, which ‘comes to fullness’ in Christ, the one in whom the ‘fullness of the Godhead dwells’ (Col 2:9-10).9 To be found in Christ, means the beginning of a process of preparing for the final eschatological banquet. Suitable attire is required for participants attending such a significant and auspicious occasion, and though humanity, confined to the limits of its own wardrobe is incapable of dressing itself in the appropriate garb, the Spirit of Christ as the authentic fashion designer with access to all the fullness of Christ, is in the process of replacing our rags for riches, substituting our torn and stained garments with that which cannot rust or rot.10

The Paraclete: Presence of the Absent Christ, Disturbing Comforter

While using different vocabulary from that utilised in the Pauline writings, Johannine thought also employs a number of evocative images to describe the process by which the self dwelling in Christ and indwelt by the Spirit undergoes a transformation from hostility to that of a hospitable self. In Johannine thought, the dwelling of God within his disciples takes place through the work of the Paraclete. While the meaning of the Greek term parakletos – derived from the verb parakaleo, literally, ‘to call beside’ – has been the subject of considerable scholarly debate, the multiple and contrasting nuances of the term, far from being problematic, rather

9 As Zizioulas puts it: ‘baptism leads to a new mode of existence, to a regeneration (1 Pet 1: 3, 23), and consequently to a new “hypostasis.”’ Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 53.
10 Matt 6:19-20, Jas 5:2.
provide a broad and rich palette for depicting the work of the Spirit. Below, drawing upon these differing interpretations, we will suggest that it is the seemingly paradoxical, yet actually mutually reinforcing motifs of the Paraclete/Spirit as Presence in Absence and Disturbing/Prosecuting Comforter, which provide a striking portrayal of the Spirit's transformation of the self.

It is no coincidence that discussion of the Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel occurs during Jesus' final discourse to his disciples, in the context of a pre-Passover shared meal. It is in the intimate surrounds of their final meal together that Jesus explicitly speaks of the hospitality of God about to be made manifest in his glorification, and the subsequent formation of a new community — a community comprised of those who through faith in Christ will be indwelt by the Spirit. The initial intimacy of this Last Supper shared between the Rabbi and his disciples — demonstrated in the reversal of roles as Jesus washes his disciples feet — is soon dissipated by a misunderstood prediction of Judas' betrayal (13:21-30), Jesus' announcement of his imminent departure (13:33), and his sharp rebuff of Peter's bravado (13:36-38). As the conviviality, familiarity and trust gives way to a new atmosphere of uncertainty and fear, Jesus speaks words of reassurance to the troubled disciples:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and

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11 Four main interpretations for the term *parakletos* are offered — comforter/consoler, advocate/attorney, intercessor/mediator/spokesperson, and exhorter/encourager/witness — with interpreters differing mainly over whether the term should be understood actively or passively, forensically or non-forensically. Raymond Brown concludes that 'we find that no one translation of *parakletos* captures the complexity of the functions, forensic and otherwise, that this figure has.' Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John [XIII-XXI]*, vol. 2 (New York: The Anchor Bible/Doubleday, 1970), 1137. For a summary of the issues surrounding interpretation of *parakletos* and an outline of the various interpretations offered see 'Appendix V: The Paraclete' in Brown, *John [XIII-XXII]*, 1135-1144. See also M.M.B. Turner, 'Holy Spirit,' in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 341-351, 349.

12 John 13-17
will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also”
(John 14:1-3).

Central to Jesus’ reassurance to his now fearful and anxious disciples is the paradoxical explanation that his imminent departure will inaugurate a new experience of radical hospitality, that the ushering in of the eschaton of hospitality and peace is dependent on his forthcoming absence. Using imagery of the host who goes ahead to prepare for a banquet feast, Jesus announces that his intention is not to leave his disciples languishing as orphans but rather, he reassures them, his departure will only be temporary and ultimately his absence will result in his ongoing presence and union with his disciples. Thus his declaration: “I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also” (14:3) is reiterated three times through this Last Supper discourse: The Spirit will come and ‘abide’ and ‘be in you’ (14:16-17); Jesus will return to dwell with his disciples (14:18-21); and the Father and I ‘will come to them and make our home with them’ (14:23-24). The outcome of Jesus’ glorification on the cross and thus his triumph over human hostility, will be the dwelling of God within a newly constituted humanity; a humanity that in seeing and receiving Jesus, has therefore seen, believed in, and received the hospitality of the Father.

In an unexpected correlation with the insights of our post-structuralist interlocutors, Johannine thought therefore speaks of a paradoxical relationship between presence and absence. The presence of the Spirit is dependent on the absence of Christ, with Jesus himself stating: “it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (16:7). In Johannine thought, the newly constituted humanity, brought into existence after the glorification – death and resurrection of Jesus – is not to be characterised by a ‘metaphysics of presence’, evident in Philip’s Jacob-like request “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied” (14:8). Rather, it is the very absence of Jesus which is
the precondition for the new community of faith becoming the presence of Christ in
the world, as the Spirit enters this community and acts as revealer and teacher to
them (14:26, 16:13). This new humanity will be known for its faith even in absence
(20:29) and for the radical love shared between them (13:35).

This aporetic association between presence and absence extends too, to the contrasting
roles of the Paraclete as both comforter/consoler and Prosecutor. John 16:8-11 employs
courtroom imagery characterising the Spirit-Paraclete as Prosecutor who comes to
testify against and ‘to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement’ (16:8).
The Paraclete’s role here as Prosecutor is not however one of convincing the world of
its sin, for, like the other Paraclete, Jesus, whom the world could not see or accept, the
Spirit of Truth is unable to be seen or known and therefore received by a world living in
illusion and lies (14:17). Indeed, as Max Turner notes, rather than offering
‘independent witness’, the Paraclete’s task of prosecuting (16:8-11) is inextricably
linked to its function as teacher and revealer to the new community of faith
(16:12:15). It is in ‘guiding the new community into all truth’ by ‘declaring the
things that are to come’ (16:13) that the Spirit points to the glorification and
victorious triumph of Jesus over the hostility of the world. As teacher and revealer
the Spirit reminds the disciples of the sin of the world in refusing to accept the gift of
Jesus, demonstrates the injustice of the world’s justice that adjudges guilty the only
One truly innocent and just, and reinforces the point that the world in condemning
Jesus, has judged itself. In doing so, the Spirit therefore reveals to the disciples the
way in which Jesus’ death stems from an inhospitable world trapped within the
confines of a scapegoat system, a system in which the Other is perceived not as gift,
but threat.14

14 See Brown, John [XIII-XXI], 711-714.
This revelation by the Spirit, bearing witness to Christ’s victory over death and therefore the overcoming of the hostility of the world, while comforting and consoling – serving, as Brown suggests, as ‘an antidote to the sorrow that seizes the heart of the disciples in face of Jesus’ departure and of the onslaught of the persecution in the world’ – is also, however, by its very nature, discomforting.\(^{15}\) The presence of the Spirit of Truth within the self in its revelation of what has taken place in the death and resurrection of Jesus by corollary exposes to the self the assumptions, illusions and downright deceit under which the self continues to operate. In speaking truthfully of the hostility of a world, bent on violence and control of the Other and by announcing that such a system has been defeated in Christ, the Spirit exposes the powerful ideologies still at work in the self which function to exclude us from the Other.\(^{16}\) The Paraclete’s work of consoling and comforting as it dwells within this newly constituted humanity does not, therefore, consist of a reassurance of the Same, a smoothing over and soothing of tension and difference. Rather, the Spirit is one who unsettles the self, or, to use Anthony Gittins parlance, is ‘a presence that disturbs’.\(^{17}\)

This imagery of the Spirit as the Prosecuting Other – of the self interrogated, accused, in one sense, even held hostage by this Disturbing Other – is evocative of language employed by Levinas. Nevertheless, there is a clear contrast between Levinasian thought and that which we propound. The disturbing presence of the Spirit, unsettling the self, revealing the self’s participation in the system of sameness which therefore excludes and victimises the Other, ultimately summons the self not to an

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 714. Significantly, Brown’s use of the medicinal term ‘antidote’, alludes to the notion that the process of healing, the journey to a personhood of wholeness, often involves discomfort and pain.

\(^{16}\) For an especially insightful and helpful reflection on the essential connectedness between the practise of hospitality and honouring of the truth, see Reinhard Hütter, "Hospitality and Truth: The Disclosure of Reality in Worship and Doctrine," in Bound to be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics and Ecumenism (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 56-77. See also Stanley Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 142-146.

\(^{17}\) Anthony J. Gittins, A Presence that Disturbs: A Call to Radical Discipleship (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori/Triumph, 2002).
endless Levinasian examination of one's ethical actions. Rather, the self is called again to accept and participate in the new life brought about by the once-for-all redemptive actions of Christ.

Thus far in this chapter we have outlined an account of how the Spirit as the presence of Christ, working within the believer, makes available the benefits of Christ's overcoming of the inhospitality of the world. Through the waters of baptism the old biological self is crucified and a new self emerges. The in-dwelling Spirit of Christ actively actualises this new self through the process of re-clothing the self in new imperishable clothing appropriate for the final homecoming and union with the Divine Other. At the same time, by prosecuting/disturbing the self, the Spirit exposes to the self the lies and ideologies which function as a discourse of hostility distancing the self from others. But what are the contours of this new self that emerges from the baptismal waters? How does one conceptualise this hospitable self, united with Christ and indwelt by the Spirit? Does the Spirit as the disturbing Other inhabiting the believer overpower or efface the self? Can one, in light of the post-structuralist critique of the notion of self-identity, even speak of a self, distinct from Others? Is it possible, in an age of deconstruction, to conceive of a 'centred self', one able to be inhabited by an Other?

The Contours of the Emerging Hospitable Self

A Bounded and Centred Self?
Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf responds to these probing questions by tackling head-on the post-structuralist conception of the self. Volf notes insightfully that despite Derrida's aversion towards 'hegemonic centrality' his understanding that difference is internal to the self presupposes the existence of some kind of centre.

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Indeed, as Volf observes, 'when talking about identity one cannot do without a center; otherwise, the talk of difference and its being internal to oneself makes no sense.'\textsuperscript{19} Volf points out that Derrida himself seems aware of as much when he states that:

There is no culture or cultural identity without this difference \textit{with itself}.... self-difference, difference to itself [\textit{différence à soi}], that which differs or diverges from itself, of itself, would also be the \textit{difference (from) with itself} [\textit{différence (d') avec soi}], a difference at once internal and irreducible to the "at home (with itself)" [\textit{chez soi}]. It would gather and divide just as irreducibly the center of hearth [\textit{foyer}] of the at home (with itself)." In truth, it would gather this center, relating it to itself, only to the extent that it would open it up to this divergence.\textsuperscript{20}

Instead of being considered hegemonic and therefore exclusionary of otherness, Volf argues that 'personal centeredness must be preserved for the sake of difference'\textsuperscript{21} and, in contrast to a Derridean centre, which seemingly acts as 'merely a container of the difference',\textsuperscript{22} Volf proposes an understanding of the self with a 'de-centered center'.\textsuperscript{23}

Integral to Volf's 'distance-belonging' schema, which he offers as a model for understanding human identity, is his reflection upon the doctrine of the Trinity. For Volf, the perichoretic dynamic which exists within the Trinity 'describes the kind of unity in which the plurality is preserved rather than erased,'\textsuperscript{24} and therefore offers an important resource for our conception of personal identity – a conception which

\textsuperscript{20} Derrida, \textit{The Other Heading}, 9-10.
\textsuperscript{21} Volf and Gundry-Volf, \textit{Spacious Heart}, 46.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Volf, \textit{Exclusion and Embrace}, 71.
\textsuperscript{24} Volf, "Trinity is Our Social Programme," 105-124, 110.
recognises the way in which self-identity is constituted by the Other interior to the self, and yet also affirms the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the self. Volf, arguing that human identity is created in the image of this Trinitarian God makes two claims regarding identity. Firstly, that 'identity is non-reducible', that is, that in contrast to Martin Buber's thought, a person cannot be reduced to their relations. For Volf, the person 'is always already outside of the relations in which he or she is immersed' and therefore by implication the notion of a self-identity involves some sense of boundaries. Secondly though, Volf believes that 'identity is not self-enclosed' and contends that such 'boundaries of the self are porous and shifting.'

Drawing on the work of Colin Gunton, Volf states that:

The self is itself only by being in a state of flux stemming from 'incursions' of the other into the self and of the self into the other. The self is shaped by making space for the other and by giving space to the other, by being enriched when it inhabits the other and by sharing of its plenitude when it is inhabited by the other, by re-examining itself when the other closes his or her doors and challenging the other by knocking at the doors.

In imagery which concords well with our description of the Spirit as a prosecuting and disturbing presence, Volf posits that it is as a result of the new birth in and by the Spirit, that a 'fissure' is formed in each believer 'through which others can come in.'

Differing from the divided and fractured post-modern self, which is constantly undergoing deconstruction and demolition, this understanding of the self recognises the way in which the self is constituted by the presence of the Other, but also affirms that hospitality is dependent on a metaphysical home, that the welcome of otherness

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25 Ibid., 111.
26 Ibid., 112.
27 Ibid. Gunton, noting the spatial imagery within the Trinitarian notion of perichoresis argues that the term is best understood not as 'dancing around' but as 'making room'. Gunton, *One, Three and Many*, 163-66.
is dependent itself upon some form of ‘boundary maintenance’\(^{29}\). Following Volf here, we endorse the idea of boundaries that distinguish the self from the Other. While affirming the insights of post-structuralist thought, that the self is ‘constituted in relationality’,\(^{30}\) is open to, and shaped by otherness, we, like Volf, maintain that such openness to difference is only possible if one can conceive of some \textit{a priori} sense of identity, a self composed of a de-centred \textit{centre}.

Such a model of identity, of the self as a home with walls which create a safe haven where the self can be nurtured and yet with doors and windows which open to the Other, is evident too in the thought of Catholic writer Henri Nouwen. For Nouwen, the solution to a world of loneliness and inhospitality comes not from ‘creating a milieu without limiting boundaries.’\(^{31}\) Echoing the sentiments of Volf, Nouwen believes that ‘openness loses its meaning when there is no ability to be closed.’\(^{32}\) Instead Nouwen asserts that:

real openness to each other also means a real closedness because only he who can hold a secret can safely share his knowledge. When we do not protect with great care our own inner mystery, we will never be able to form community. It is this inner mystery that attracts us to each other and allows us to establish friendships and develop lasting relationships of love. An intimate relationship between people not only asks for mutual openness but also asks for mutual respectful protection of each other’s uniqueness.\(^{33}\)

\(^{29}\) Volf, "Trinity is Our Social Programme," 111.
\(^{30}\) Butler, \textit{Giving an Account of Oneself}, 64.
\(^{32}\) Ibid.
\(^{33}\) Ibid., 32. The basic necessity of boundaries for ongoing existence and health is most apparent in the world of cellular biology. Caroline Westerhoff, using the analogy of the cell membrane to develop her case that boundaries need not be understood as violent and exclusionary \textit{per se}, writes: Like a cell membrane, a boundary must be semi-permeable: admitting and containing only what is necessary for sustaining and enriching life, discharging and excluding anything that does not belong within its borders. A membrane that
Nouwen contends for a conception of self in which ‘the painful contours of our hostility’ are overcome by the gradual creating of a ‘free, fearless and friendly space’.34

In the model of self-identity offered by Volf and Nouwen, the self consists of a ‘de-centered center’ with porous boundaries which both safeguard one’s particularity and uniqueness and yet, containing apertures, also gives the Other access to the self. Critical within this model, as Volf notes, is the question as to whether it is the ‘god of the self’ or the triune God who ‘is the doorkeeper deciding about the fate of the otherness at the doorsteps of the self’?35 An excellent illustration of such a model of self-identity, which, while affirming particularity and uniqueness, recognises the way in which the self is constituted in communion with others and gives attention to the question of the identity of the ‘doorkeeper’, is found in the parable Jesus tells in John 10.

**Centred Catholicity (John 10:1-21)**

Jesus’ parable in John 10 appears somewhat enigmatic. However, as Kenneth E. Bailey has demonstrated, critical to an understanding of this parable is an understanding of shepherding practices employed during Jesus’ time, practices which have continued almost unchanged through to contemporary Palestine.36 In a first-century Palestine context, sheep belonged to small family-owned flocks and over many years an intimate relationship would develop between the livestock and their shepherd. Palestinian shepherds knew all their sheep individually, often by name, and led their small flocks from in front, with the sheep following in response

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to the reassuring and known voice of their shepherd. During the day, sheep belonging to various families would intermingle in the pastures and at night they would return, for their safety, not to a sealed or secured barn or building, but rather to an enclosed courtyard, under the watchful eye of a gatekeeper (thyroros). The following morning, the child agreed upon by a number of families to shepherd their collective sheep would arrive and the sheep would respond to the distinctive call or whistle (often a flute) and leave the sanctuary of the pen for another day in the pastures. During the summer months shepherds often would not return to the village courtyard but would utilise make-shift pens that dotted the hill pastures, often constructed of rock walls and topped with thorn-bushes, to protect the sheep from wild animals. In this case, the shepherd would sleep in the entrance to the pen, thereby becoming the gate.

While Jesus’ parable, as Raymond Brown rightfully posits, acts as a figurative attack on the Pharisees, it also illustrates well the notion of the self and personal identity that we have been developing. While the sheep maintain their own individual and particular identity – known intimately by name and owned by specific families – their identity is not constituted by a radical separation from sheep of other folds. Rather, the key determinant in the establishing of the identity of each sheep is their proximity to, and intimacy with, the shepherd. However, centring one’s life around Jesus, the parable contends, does not necessarily guarantee safety. Indeed, while the imagery of the gate-keeper elicits a sense of safety and protection, Jesus’ statement “I am the gate” and his emphasis on the movement of ‘coming in’ and ‘going out’ develops this image in a surprising and disturbing way. The image, Rodney Whitacre notes, ‘is not that of a door as a barrier for protection, but of a door as a passageway.’

37 Brown, John [I-XII], 383.
Such an understanding of identity is brought into even sharper focus using the categorisations of missiologist Paul Hiebert, upon whose work Volf also draws. In contrast to *bounded sets* which operate on a binary logic, i.e. either/or, us/them, or, *fuzzy sets*, in which boundaries are effaced or blurred, Hiebert suggests that identity is best understood as a *centred set*. In a centred set model, identity is defined in terms of (1) a *centre*, that is a unifying principle of unity or source of loyalty/object of allegiance, and (2) the *relationship* one (or one’s group) has with that centre. Within such a model there is (3) *variational* movement, i.e. proximity or distance from the centre which therefore creates (4) a *dynamic* quality to the relationship. ⁴⁹ These four key characteristics of a *centred set* conception of identity: *centred*, *relational*, *variational* and *dynamic*, are all evident within the parable of the Good Shepherd. In the parable, the key determinant regarding the identity of the sheep is their *relationship* with the central figure – the Shepherd (Christ) – a relationship of intimacy in which the sheep *know* the Shepherd’s voice and are *known* individually by name. However, the sheep are not confined or captured but rather move freely from this centre and their self-identity is also co-constituted by their engagement with, and difference from, sheep of *other* folds.

Ultimately, the Christian conception of the *hospitable* self that we have developed is therefore not an *essentialist* conception of identity, one based upon rigid boundaries and a clear demarcation between the self and the Other. Neither though does it subscribe to an *instrumentalist/constructionist* model of identity, which sees the self as containing no *essence*, but as simply an assemblage of its relationships, one in which the self is constantly undergoing a process of ‘recycling’. ⁴⁰ Rather, the conception of self-identity we have developed, refusing the bifurcating logic inherent in other models, recognises the uniqueness and particularity of the self, but also gives due credence to the way in which the identity of the self is constituted by both *others* and

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the Divine Other. The hospitable self is a catholic identity constituted by being in Christ and being incorporated with others into the life of communion within the Ecclesia.

The Expanded and Renovated Self

Such an understanding of the corporate or catholic nature of identity distinguishes the Christian concept of the hospitable self from the conceptions of the self offered by both Levinas and Derrida. Sharing the Foucauldian presupposition, that knowledge is power and that all relations are inherently relations of power over the other, both Derrida and Levinas, as we have observed, have a deep suspicion of the concept of community, preferring instead to advocate a relation between the self and the Other based upon distance and separation. But inevitably, such an ontology means that despite the advances beyond the autonomous and self-grounding self of Cartesian thought, the post-structuralist self still appears as a lonely and alienated 'I'. As Richard Rorty, perceptively notes, there is 'no 'we' to be found in Foucault's writings, nor in those of many of his French contemporaries.'

But can one really speak of a self, and therefore of an ethic of hospitality, without a 'we'; that is, without the notion of community? If, as Alasdair MacInytre and Stanley Hauerwas contend, our ethical behaviour and the character and virtues that shape such behaviour are formed by narratives of meaning and being which emerge from within the shared experiences of a community and their tradition, then the Levinasian and Derridean suspicion and distrust of both community and tradition/dogma becomes deeply problematic. Can an isolated and estranged 'I', divorced from the identity-shaping structures of community and tradition, devoid of a narrative of being or meaning, without a metaphysical 'home', really offer hospitality to the Other?

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In contrast to this post-modern self, central to our Christian account of the self is the belief that the baptised self, indwelt by the Spirit of Christ, is not a rootless and centre-less wanderer, _separate_ and _distant_ from the Other. Rather, through baptism, the self becomes a newly constituted person, incorporated into a new community, the Body of Christ. Colin Gunton succinctly expresses this distinction stating that, ‘a person is different from an individual, in the sense that the latter is defined in terms of _separation from_ other individuals, the person in terms of _relations with_ other persons.’

Or, as Volf puts it:

The Spirit sets a person on the road toward becoming what one might call a “catholic personality,” a personal microcosm of the eschatological new creation. Catholic personality is a personality enriched by otherness, a personality that is what it is only because all differentiated otherness of the new creation has been reflected in it in a particular way.

Once again the New Testament uses a number of different images to express this new ecclesial reality, to describe a self which, united with Christ and indwelt by the Spirit, is joined ontologically with Others who are _in_ Christ. In pointing to this conception of a self which is simultaneously in _communion_ with others and yet still retains its own particularity and identity, perhaps the most evocative image is the corporeal imagery of the Body of Christ, which Paul uses in his first letter to the believers at Corinth (1 Cor 12:12-31).

For Paul, the human body, while comprised of _different_ and _particular_ parts distinguishable from one another, remains nevertheless, _one_ body. Paul both affirms the _differences_ that exist – Jews, Greek, slaves, free – but stresses that such _differences_
are grounded not upon an ontology of *separation* and *division*. Drawing on banqueting and hospitality imagery, Paul contends that identity is found not as separated individuals but rather is constituted as *one* Spirit inhabits *all* and *all* drink from the same Spirit. Unlike our philosophical interlocutors who see *difference* and *communion* as antithetical, arguing that *communion* is simply a disguise for *sameness*, the Christian conception of the body of Christ affirms that particularity, difference and uniqueness is not threatened by communion and mutuality. Rather than difference being dissolved and dissipated into a totalitarian *Same*, it is the Christian claim that in *communion* the particularity and uniqueness of each self is honoured and celebrated.

As well as this corporeal imagery of the Body of Christ, with Christ as the crowning glory, the head (Eph 1:22-23, 4:15-16, Col 1:18), Paul also employs architectural and ‘home-making’ metaphors to describe the new community that, post-resurrection, has emerged in the world. The *ecclesia*, the called-out community, is, Paul asserts, God’s building (1 Cor 3:9) being built upon a sure foundation with Christ as its cornerstone (1 Cor 3:11, Eph 2:20). It is, Paul contends, the members of this new community, ‘joined together’ in Christ, who are being grown into a ‘holy temple’, ‘built together in the Spirit into a *dwelling* place for God’ (Eph 2:21-22, 1 Cor 3:16). This new community of hospitality, founded upon and participating in the radical hospitality of the Triune God offered in and through Christ is, Paul argues, ‘a new humanity’. The violence and hostility that formerly existed between those of different ethnic identities – Jews and Gentiles – Paul asserts, has been put to death in Christ whose death and resurrection has restored the original primordial peace (1 Cor 3:9,11,16; Eph 2:11-22).

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44 For further reflection on the peace-making and home-making connotations contained in Ephesians 2:12-22 see Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement*, 206-7, 279-80.
In the same way, Peter employs architectural images of the temple in Jerusalem, calling for his listeners to come to Christ ‘the living stone’ and to allow themselves to ‘be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’ (1 Pet 2:4-10). Again, the imagery employed here speaks not of a totalitarian sameness. While each individual stone of the building has both aesthetic and functional qualities, these qualities are only fully actualised when the stone is combined with other stones to create a structure that both functionally provides shelter and is also pleasing to the eye. The imagery here is not of the architecture which characterised modernity – static and sterile monoliths of monotonous uniformity and sameness – but rather of a building constructed from naturally-hewn stone. While each stone has its own unique features – shapes, shades, hues – it is the combining of these different stones into a new structure which, rather than detracting from each stone’s distinctive qualities, has the opposite effect – enhancing and enriching the visual appeal of each particular stone, combining to create a powerful overall aesthetic.45

Such architectural language, in which the new baptised self is understood as one being renovated and expanded, offers therefore a further striking image of the Spirit. In Christ’s absence it is the Spirit’s presence, the Spirit operating as a master builder, who is refurbishing the self, ‘making room’ within it, preparing it for inhabitation by the Other. Such a metaphor is both appropriate and particularly poignant in contemporary western culture, where the fascination with the re-designing and renovation of houses is evidenced in the abundance of home-improvement and do-it-yourself television ‘reality’ shows. In contrast to many of these reality shows, in which superficial, and at times tacky, renovations are hurriedly undertaken in a race against the clock, culminating at the end of the set time-frame – either 60 minutes or a weekend – with back-slapping, high-fives and ‘made-for-television’ smiles, is the

45 Hence the significance of John’s vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:9-21, in which the walls of the new dwelling of God, composed of the full array of treasured gems and precious stones, present a sight of almost unspeakable beauty.

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arduous and long-term journey of both joy and sorrow, delight and despair that those involved in genuine construction projects experience. The transforming work of the Spirit is more akin to the ‘labours of love’ exhibited on the UK’s Channel 4 television series Grand Designs, which follows the emotional highs and lows as buildings are designed and built or meticulously restored over an extended period of time. Indeed, this analogy of understanding the work of the Spirit within the self as a long-term and difficult building process – one which, while involving deconstruction, and a considerable work of renovation and restoration, also requires, at times, the creation of all ‘new’ spaces – is conveyed well in a recent episode of this series.

A Welsh couple returning to their ‘home-land’ after highly successful careers in London purchase an 18th century folly – a castle perched on a hilltop. The days of ‘glory’ of the building – used as an exclusive hunting lodge – are now but a distant memory and the building lies abandoned, in a state of disrepair, and uninhabitable. The programme traces the painstaking love and care as the couple and their team restore and renovate the dilapidated building. However, far from simply dismantling the decrepit and stabilising the historic structure – a return to the past – the architectural design includes the addition of a new contemporary structure. It is this new structure, with vast walls of glass offering panoramic views of the outside and multiple guest bed-rooms available for offering hospitality, which represents the transformation from folly – an exclusive stronghold set distant and isolated, with a single bedroom for the use of its owner – to a new, hospitable reality. The building that emerges, composed of redeemed features and new innovations, and constructed securely to withstand the extreme weather that can assault it in its exposed setting, is thus open to the otherness of the world around it. So too, the Spirit’s transformation of the self, while restoring aspects of our personality damaged by sin, is not a return

to the past but rather creates a new hospitable identity. The space created within the self for the Other is inextricably linked to the ultimate purpose of preparing the self for its ultimate home-coming, for its union with the Triune God, when as the dwelling-place for God, the Bride will walk in the radiating light of the Lamb (Rev 21:23-24) and God will be ‘all in all’ (1 Cor 15:28).

As we have noted, central to the new life of this ecclesial self, as it is incorporated into a new community and formed into a new dwelling, is the development of and adherence to a new pattern of behaviour. Of critical importance however, is the understanding that this new behaviour stems not from duty or obligation, but rather flows from the inward transformation being experienced within the self. So it is that Paul, in his damning critique of the banqueting etiquette of the church at Corinth (1 Cor 11:17-34), sees the increasing disharmony and lack of respect being shown between members – the return to the hierarchical, paternalistic and oppressive relational patterns of 1st Century Graeco-Roman society – as simply symptomatic of the underlying problem: a loss of emphasis upon and experience of the most critical gift – love (1 Cor 13-14). Paul’s letters to the new emerging communities of believers are full of commendations, where he urges his listeners to remain true to the ontological transformation that has taken place within them and to follow a new set of household codes characterised by love and mutual submission. He recognises however, that the capacity for these communities to live as a new humanity of welcome and hospitality is utterly dependent on the extent to which they remain connected to the life-giving love of Christ which courses through the veins of the living organism. 47 Such an understanding, that ethical behaviour is not primarily something ‘we do’, but rather stems from something being ‘done to us’; of hospitality not as a mode of doing, but rather a mode of being; the notion that love for others is

47 Thus Paul, employing the body metaphor once again, advocates that ‘speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love’ (Eph 4:15-16).
only possible as one participates in the dynamic of love which those in Christ find themselves caught up in, are recurring themes within Johannine thought.

The Loving and Desiring Self

In Johannine thought, the touchstone of one’s love for Jesus and therefore for the Father, is obedience to their commandment: “that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Likewise, 1 John states:

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he as commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them (1 John 3:23-24).

Read deontologically, the Fourth Gospel and 1 John could be construed as arguing that one’s duty and appropriate response to God’s love is to keep his commandments, or, following the logic of Levinas, that love for the other is love for God. Such a reading is, however, rendered nonsensical by the metaphor of the vine that Jesus employs while speaking to his disciples in John 15. Obedience to Jesus’ commandments – love for God and for others – is not perceived as an ethical duty, nor even as an ethical return to God’s initiative, but rather is described as an unavoidable ontological reality. Thus Jesus states:

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:4-5).

This emphasis on the inexorable connection between the self abiding in the love of Christ and therefore being transformed into a lover of others, likewise, is the repeated refrain in the Johannine epistles. As in Matthew’s gospel (Matt 22:37-39),
John sees the two commandments of the Torah: the love of God (Deut 6:5) and the love of one's neighbour (Lev 19:18) as inextricably connected. John is adamant that far from offering a new commandment, the only change is that through Christ dwelling within and transforming the self, obedience to these commands has now become possible. (1 John 2:7-8). The evidence 'that they have come to know him' (1 John 2:4), the proof, that the self abiding in Christ has 'passed from death to life' (1 John 3:14), that they have 'eternal life abiding in them', (1 John 3:15) that they have been 'born of God and know God' (1 John 4:7) is, John unequivocally states, their obedience to his commandment – that they love one another (1 John 3:14,23).

With allusions back to the grapevine imagery used in the Fourth Gospel (John 15), John declares that those 'born of God,' in whom the seed of God abides, cannot bear tainted fruit (1 John 3:9). For John, the clearest expression of such tainted fruit, a sign that rather than being exposed to the light that brings life, one 'is still in the darkness', is hatred for the other (1John 2:9-11; 3:18-21). Such hatred, John suggests, stems from fear of the other produced when we live according to the desires of this world. In his instructions to believers, John writes:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever (1 John 2:15-17).

The influence of René Girard – at least with regard to how his earlier writings have been interpreted – has led to common misconception that the mimetic drive and

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therefore both desire and imitation are inherently negative. 49 But it is not desire per se that is wrong. Indeed, as numerous philosophers note, including Levinas, desire is one of the core constituting elements that makes us human. For Augustine, as well as other early church Fathers, desire was understood positively. Desire, aroused by, and inflamed by the Father’s love for us, functions in drawing us back towards the loving God who alone can answer our deepest longings and meet our need for communion. 50 In the famous words of St. Augustine’s Confessions:

You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. 51

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49 In Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World Girard states that Christ, ...offers not the slightest hold to any form of rivalry or mimetic interference. There is no acquisitive desire in him.... The Gospels and the New Testament do not preach a morality of spontaneous action. They do not claim that humans must get rid of imitation; they recommend imitating the sole model who never runs the danger – if we really imitate in the way that children imitate – of being transformed into a fascinating rival: He who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked (1 John 2, 6).

On one side are the prisoners of violent imitation, which always leads to a dead end, and on the other are the adherents of non-violent imitation.... While such a passage hints at a non-violent imitation and a positive conception of desire, this is never developed explicitly in Girard’s thought, and indeed, within a page of the above quote he switches back to a dualistic mode of thinking in which mimetic desire is seen as inherently violent stating: ‘Following Christ means giving up mimetic desire.’ Girard, Things Hidden, 430-1. Akin to the complex thought of our other French interlocutors, it is in an interview format that much of the misunderstanding regarding Girard’s ambiguous understanding of mimetic desire is resolved. To Rebecca Adams, Girard acknowledges that desire itself is constitutive of what it means to be human and is thus impossible to give up, and explains that he is advocating the giving up of appropriative desire. See Rebecca Adams, “Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: An Interview with René Girard,” Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: Conversations on Myth and Culture in Theology and Literature, A Special Issue of Religion and Literature 25, no. 2 (1993): 11-33. Despite Girard’s clarification in this context, nevertheless, it has been up to Girardian scholars, particularly those developing his work along explicitly theological lines, to expound a more positive notion of mimetic desire and imitation. For a sampling of such work, see Willard M. Swartley, ed., Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies and Peacemaking (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 2000).

50 For a stunning exposition, shaped by a close reading of Gregory of Nyssa, of how God awakens within us an ‘infinite inflaming of desire’ thus drawing us into a pilgrimage ‘always discovering and entering into greater dimensions of this beauty’ see Hart, The Beauty of the Infinite, 187-210.

Elsewhere, Augustine explicitly connects the love gifted to us through the indwelling Spirit and therefore the arousal of our desire for the Divine Gift-giver, stating:

the gift of the Holy Spirit, by whom charity is poured forth in our hearts, that we may be drawn to God by a desire and yearning for Him, and reaching Him may find rest, and want nothing besides.\textsuperscript{52}

In contrast to this positive form of desire, 1 John speaks of three negative features that characterise the desire that stems not from the Father but from the world (kosmos): (1) 'the desire of the flesh', that is, the desire to gain personhood without entering into communion with otherness; (2) in an allusion to Gen 3:6, 'the desire of the eyes', the seeking to seize and lay hold of God's freely offered gifts; and (3) 'the pride in riches', the hoarding of these resources for oneself rather than sharing with others. For John, these are all aspects of the world's love, in which the Other is understood as a threat to the self and therefore one to be feared. Conversely, 'there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear' (1 John 4:18). Ultimately, it is John's assertion that these desires of the world (kosmos) are merely transitory, having been overcome once and for all through Christ's death and resurrection. In contrast to negative, acquisitive and appropriative desire, in which fear of the Other eventually develops into an open hatred and aversion, and separation from the Other is often accompanied by later explicit attempts to control the one different from oneself,\textsuperscript{53} is the non-acquisitive and non-appropriative desire – the way of Christ – that is fanned into flame by the breath of the in-dwelling Spirit of Christ. Participating in Christ, the self is inexorably drawn into a mimetic imitation of the way of Christ. Participation leads to imitation and, as James Alison contends, through such imitation of Christ, Christians, 'learn to


\textsuperscript{53} While the most obvious example of this during recent history is undoubtedly the Holocaust, the system of apartheid which held sway in South Africa during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century also epitomises such qualities. Fear of the majority 'black' population and a desire to maintain economic control by the minority 'white' population, manifested itself in a structural system in which distance and separation provided the basis for the development of open aversion and subjugation of the other.
receive their identities as human beings through an entirely nonrivalrous, nonenvious, nongrapsing practice of life."\(^5\)

For those ‘born of God’, who abide in the secure dwelling of Christ and who thus experience – initially in small, but ever-deepening measures – the intoxicating reality of the height, depth and breadth of the love of God, there is an accompanying re-channelling of the desire within the self. The re-arousal of the dormant desire for genuine life-giving love, once released, launches the self onto a life-time journey of faith, one in which the gift of love received is passed onto others. Such loved and therefore loving selves differ from those still controlled by the non-redeemed acquisitive and appropriative desires of this world, for whom the Other is seen not as one coming to bless, nor, as one requiring blessing, but rather as a dangerous threat – an adversary who, potentially able to take possession of the items acquired and appropriated for oneself, is therefore to be feared. A Christian conception of desire in which the Divine Other is understood therefore as the origin/cause of desire, as the Other who moves towards us (in the event of the Incarnation), and as the telos, the end-point of that desire, leads to a conception of the self as a sojourning self. Aroused by its desire for the Other, the self, in receiving its life as a gift, journeys alongside others, as they together seek the final revealing of their full identities.

Such an understanding of the self obviously differs markedly from that of our post-structuralist philosophers. For both Levinas and Derrida there is no telos or eventual rest to desire, for as Levinas states: ‘the Other is not a term: he does not stop the

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5 James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 168. Both Alison and others who, drawing upon Girard’s mimetic theory have emphasised the positive aspect of imitation, have been criticised on soteriological grounds for being too subjective and placing too great a weighting upon human action. However, as should have become clear by now, such does not have to be the case. An emphasis upon *Imitatio Christi* is not ultimately a call for a return to a human-driven ethic, the opening of the back-door for the return of Pelagianism. The imitation of Christ, as we have argued, is an inseparable corollary of one’s participation in Christ.
movement of Desire. The other that Desire desires is again Desire.\textsuperscript{55} Not only does such an account of desire appear utterly exhausting – as John Zizioulas suggests, an 'interminable motion is inconceivable'\textsuperscript{56} – but such a self, a self which desires without rest or \textit{telos}, reminiscent of Mark C. Taylor's 'careless wanderer',\textsuperscript{57} is, as we have already suggested, the anthropological foundation for the over-consumptive tendencies of 'late' capitalism.

This connection between the contemporary practice of over-consumption and post-modern philosophical accounts of identity with their loss of \textit{telos} and their emphasis on \textit{distance} and \textit{separation}, is also observed by William T. Cavanaugh in his \textit{Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire}.\textsuperscript{58} Cavanaugh persuasively argues that, contrary to popular sentiment, greed is not \textit{attachment}, but rather \textit{detachment}. It is the fact that we perceive ourselves as \textit{detached} – that is \textit{separate} and \textit{distant} – from what is Other (whether human or non-human) that provides the basis for the acquiring of consumer items and/or relationships, their subsequent use, and then their disposal – freeing us up for acquisition of the next commodity. Cavanaugh writes:

In consumer culture, dissatisfaction and satisfaction cease to be opposites, for pleasure is not so much in the possession of things as in their pursuit. There is a pleasure in the pursuit of novelty, and the pleasure resides not so much in having as in wanting. Once we have obtained an item, it brings desire to a temporary halt, and the item loses some of its appeal. Possession kills desire; familiarity breeds

\textsuperscript{55} Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, 269. Elsewhere Levinas writes:

The negativity of the In- of the Infinite – otherwise than being, divine comedy – hollows out a desire that could not be filled, one nourished from its own increase, exalted as Desire – one that withdraws from its satisfaction as it draws near to the Desireable. This is a Desire for what is beyond satisfaction, and which does not identify, as need does, a term or an end. A desire without end, from beyond Being: disinterestedness, transcendence – desire for the Good.

\textsuperscript{56} Zizioulas, \textit{Communion and Otherness}, 51.

\textsuperscript{57} Taylor, \textit{Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology}, 157.

contempt. That is why shopping, not buying itself, is the heart of consumerism. The consumerist spirit is a restless spirit, typified by detachment, because desire must be constantly kept on the move.\textsuperscript{59}

Cavanaugh's insight into the way in which consumerism is grounded not in attachment but detachment also helps explain the compelling and yet tragic nature of many of those who, seeking to escape from the contemporary culture of consumerism in which they have been raised, embrace a new form of asceticism, detaching themselves from both material possessions and relationships. Such a way of life, in which detachment from people, place and possessions is often synthesised with a romanticism of nature, rather than responding to the underlying problem, simply perpetuates the restlessness and drivenness of the modern individual. The disastrous consequences of such asceticism is perhaps no clearer demonstrated than in John Krakauer's moving account of the life and death of Chris McCandless: \textit{Into the Wild}. McCandless, an intense and idealistic recent college graduate, seeking to discover his true self and live an authentic existence, gives up his existing identity – money, possessions and name – and spends two years hitch-hiking around the States, before eventually, tragically, starving to death, alone, in the Alaskan wilderness. It is both poignant and sobering that McCandless, reading Boris Pasternak's \textit{Doctor Zhivago} as he approaches death, underlines the following passage, a passage that echoes many of the themes we have reflected upon.

Now what is history? It is the centuries of systematic exploration of the riddle of death, with a view to overcoming death. That’s why people discover mathematical infinity and electro-magnetic waves, that’s why they write symphonies. Now, you can’t advance in this direction without a certain faith. You can’t make such discoveries without spiritual equipment. And the basic elements of this equipment are in the Gospels. What are they? To begin with, love of

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 47.
one's neighbour, which is the supreme form of vital energy. Once it fills the heart of man it has to overflow and spend itself. And then the two basic ideals of modern man—without them he is unthinkable—the idea of free personality and the idea of life as sacrifice.\textsuperscript{60}

Elsewhere, where Pasternak writes: 'And so it turned out that only a life similar to the life of those around us, merging with it without a ripple, is genuine life, and that an unshared happiness is not happiness...,' McCandless had scribbled in a margin notation: 'Happiness is only real when shared.'\textsuperscript{61}

A desiring self, restless, always on the move, never at rest, acquiring and appropriating possessions and yet driven away by fear from others, resembles the troubled characters of Cain and Jacob. In stark contrast is the Patriarch Abraham, whose travel is not directionless, but rather is a journey, originating in the gift of faith from the Divine Other; who heads towards a final destination, the promised land of rest, and whose arrival in this new land is characterised by the building of relationships of mutuality with the other.

\textit{The Eschatological Self}

This Christian understanding of the sojourning eschatological nature of the self distinguishes it from the restless self of post-structuralist thought, ever on the move, consuming otherness to fill the vacuum of identity. Though baptised into Christ and incorporated into a new community, nevertheless the self continues to live in the in-between, in the \textit{now-but-not-yet}. For the believer, the face of the Divine Other has been revealed. In seeing Christ they have seen the Father, and become aware of the final resting place and the road they must journey along to reach this final destination (John 12:45-46, John 14:1-7). And yet, even while seeing the face of Christ, such vision does not encompass or capture the face. As we have already

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 188.
noted, the face of Christ the Other is not something we can reduce to an idol, laying hold of and controlling it. Rather, the face of the resurrected Christ is an *eikon*, a brief glimpse of totality, and yet infinite and beyond our total comprehension. An encounter with the resurrected Christ serves, therefore, not as an end-point. In contrast to our Jacob/Israel-like tendency to grasp at and contain the divine, an encounter with the risen Christ actually summons us to an ongoing pilgrimage of discovery, a voyage in which Christ's presence, by his Spirit, is assured, even though, not always recognised.62

While our identity has begun to be disclosed, it also remains 'hidden' (Col 3:3), awaiting its final unveiling. It is with Christ's return that our full identity will be revealed, when the opacity that blurs our eyes will finally be lifted and we shall see Christ 'face to face'. It is in the final *eschaton* that 'knowledge' as an attempt to totalise, categorise and grasp the Other, will finally and completely be overcome by the 'knowledge' of love (1 Cor 13:12; 1 John 3:2). Finally, liberated from fear and hostility, we will enter into the intimate and loving embrace of the Divine Other, the Triune God. Our entrance into the fullness of God's hospitality and thus the revealing of our full identity will be symbolised in the receiving of a 'new name' (Rev 2:17).63 The Triune God who walked in the garden with Adam and Eve in the

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62 The archetypal example of this tendency to seek to 'hold' onto and domesticate ecstatic moments of divine visitation is found in the story of the Transfiguration of Christ. While dazzled by the face of Christ, Peter's immediate reaction is to seek to erect shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. This desire to 'stand-still' and capture the moment for perpetuity, far from being unique to Peter, is one that all on the journey of discipleship encounter. Like Peter, we need reminding that the road to resurrection glory - which the Transfiguration prefigures - involves taking the path of suffering - the way of the Cross.

63 Walter Scott, commenting on the significance of the imagery in Revelation 2:17 writes:

A white stone was largely employed in the social life and judicial customs of the ancients. *Days of festivity* were noted by a white stone; days of calamity by a black stone. *A host's appreciation of a special guest was indicated by a white stone with a name or message written on it*. A white stone meant acquittal; a black stone condemnation in the courts of justice. Here the overcomer is promised a white stone with a new name written thereon, which none knows save the happy recipient. It *is the expression of the Lord's personal delight* in each one of the conquering band. It is by no means a public reward.... The new name on the stone, alone known to the overcomer, signifies Christ, then known in a *special and peculiar way to each one*, and
beginning will come and set up his ‘home’, dwelling in his restored creation, establishing a garden city. The trees within the city will bear abundant fruit which rather than being hoarded for oneself, or offered deceptively to the Other, will be given and received freely and joyfully as gifts. This city, of great beauty and diversity, its inhabitants drawn from every nation, tribe, people and language, while surrounded by walls, has gates which are always open and is a city which welcomes other sojourners drawn to the healing waters and dazzling light that emanate from within (Rev 7:9, 21:1-22:5).

Such a vision, of eternal light, of the peace and tranquillity of a garden, not of a restlessness without end, but rather, an endless rest, leads Augustine in The City of God to write:

the seventh day... our Sabbath, whose end will not be an evening...
the eternal rest not only of the Spirit, but of the body also. There we shall rest and we shall see, see and love, love and praise. Behold what it will be, in the end to which there shall be no end!64

In such an account as we have outlined, the term eschaton does not mean, as Levinas fears, ‘a finality, an end (fin)’, in which the seizure or appropriation ‘of God as a telos... degrade[s] the infinite relation with the other to a finite fusion.’65 Rather, the Christian eschaton speaks of the hope for an endless rest in which the self maintains its particular and unique identity – gender, language, ethnicity, personality – and yet lives in communion with others, one in which the closer the self is drawn to the

that surely is reward beyond all price and beyond all telling. It is a secret communication of love and intelligence between Christ and the overcomer, a joy which none can share, a reserved token of appreciative love.

Walter Scott, Exposition of Revelation, quoted in Hebert Lockyer, All the Divine Names and Titles in the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 258. Emphasis added.


infinite beauty, the source of all light and love, the Wholly Other, the more the self is aware that it has only just begun its pilgrimage of discovery.

Summary

In this chapter we have outlined the development of the ‘hospitable self’. Though there are some similarities with the concept of identity offered by Levinas and Derrida, there are also clear areas of divergence. While Levinas, in his belief that before the ‘face of the Other’ the self cannot help but respond and be hospitable, is unable and/or unwilling to give an account of the reasons for this ‘hospitable action’, we have attempted to offer an explicit description of the source of an ethic of hospitality. Our central argument throughout this chapter has been that hospitality is not firstly something we do, but rather something that we are. That is, the love of God – the Wholly Other – and the love of Others is not something which finds its origin in the self, but neither is it pre-ontological, beyond being, and therefore unable to be explained. Rather, as the Fourth Gospel declares, any love we have for the Other is simply fruit that is produced as the love of the hospitable God fills and expands the self. As John states: ‘We love because he first loved us’ (1 John 4:19).

Likewise, though there are some resemblances between the post-structuralist account of the self and our portrayal of ‘hospitable personhood’ – in particular, the notion of an in-dwelling Other that disturbs the self, and an identity, that not-yet fully disclosed, is in the process of ‘becoming’ – there are also clear distinctions. In contrast to post-structuralist thought with its emphasis on difference which therefore conceives of a relationship with the Other based on distance and separation, one in which there is always an element of hostility, our account of the self builds upon an explicit ontology of communion. The self, we have contended, is not a deconstructed individual, meaningless and purposeless, ever on the move. Rather, the self is better
conceived of as a catholic self, in which true identity is unveiled as we are indwelt by the Divine Other and incorporated into the new existence of the ecclesia. While the breath of God gives us biological life (Gen 2:7), it is as one abides in Christ that the life-giving Spirit (1Cor 15:45) breaths fresh air into our dusty and musty interiors. As these dark and dank attics and basements of the self, full of hidden hurts and festering fears – with the potential over time to develop into open hostility and hatred – are exposed to the light and swept clean, so room is made within the self for others.

The relationship between christology, pneumatology and self-identity that we have traced here, and the ontological transformation that takes place within the self as it dwells in Christ and is in-dwelt by the comforting, yet disturbing Spirit, is perhaps no more clearly articulated than in the work of second century theologian Irenaeus of Lyons, in his concept of recapitulation. For Irenaeus, it is the incarnation and Christ’s identification and union with humanity which has made possible the capacity for humanity to enter into union through Christ with God. As Irenaeus states: ‘How shall man pass into God, unless God has [first] passed into man?’66 This new humanity, established in Christ, is then passed onto humanity as the Spirit of Christ comes and dwells in the lives of humanity. Irenaeus writes:

These things, therefore, He recapitulated in Himself: by uniting man to the Spirit, and causing the Spirit to dwell in man. He is himself made the head of the Spirit, and gives the Spirit to be the head of man: for through Him (the Spirit) we see, and hear, and speak.67

In a recapitulation of the themes we have developed in this chapter, Irenaeus posits that it is the inhabitation of the Spirit within the believer making possible the self’s identification and union with Christ, which leads to a new-found ability to see, hear

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66 Et quemadmodum homo transiet in Deum, si non Deus in hominem? AH 4.33.4.
67 Haec igitur in semitipsum recapitulatus est, adunans hominem spiritui, et spiritum collocans in homine, per illum enim videmus, et audimus, et loquimur AH 5.20.2
and *speak*. Through the Spirit, the eyes of controlling *desire* which seek to possess the Other are salved and opened to recognise the Other not as threat but gift; ears, deaf to the call of the Other, are unblocked; the mouth, prone to violent outburst, now issues forth praise. This new life of welcome stemming from those transformed by the Spirit and incorporated into the ecclesia will be our focus in the next, and final, chapter.
So what is the nature of the relationship with the Other shaped not by hostility? We have already noted Derrida’s scepticism regarding whether ‘pure’ hospitality/genuine gift-giving can function in the economy of human relations. For Derrida:

Now the gift, if there is any, would no doubt be related to economy. One cannot treat the gift, this goes without saying, without treating this relation to economy, even to the money economy. But is not the gift, if there is any, also that which interrupts economy? That which, in suspending economic calculation, no longer gives rise to exchange? That which opens the circle so as to defy reciprocity or symmetry, the common measure, and so as to turn aside the return in view of the no-return? If there is gift, the given of the gift must not come back to the giving. It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged...¹

But must gift-giving operate outside of an economy of reciprocity? In contrast to Derrida’s ‘pure’ unilateral gift, an episode recounted in the Fourth Gospel suggests that it is by the very exchanging of gifts with the Other that hostility is overcome. That is, it is in the action of giving to and receiving from the Other, in participating in moments of hospitality, that our own inner hostility towards otherness is surmounted.

¹ Derrida, Given Time, 7.
Jesus, returning from Judea, chooses to make his way via the shorter but less-travelled route through Samaria. Travel-weary, thirsty, seeking shelter from the heat of the day, Jesus stops at the well of Sychar, and in so doing encounters a Samaritan woman. An Other, scapegoated and distanced from her own community, the woman is forced to come to the well in isolation. As we observed earlier, in the Fourth Gospel's account of the calling of the first disciples, it is Jesus who takes the initiative, making a request to the woman to: “Give me a drink” (v7). The woman’s response to Jesus’ initial and subsequent requests highlights the degree of antagonism and hostility, developed over the centuries, existing between the Jews and Samaritans. Her retort to this Other who dares to contravene the established norms for relational interactions: “Who do you think you are! You, a male Jew, speaking not only with a Samaritan, but with a female Samaritan at that!” (v9).

Commentators often point to the use of irony in this passage and to the role that misunderstanding plays as a literary technique, suggesting that while Jesus is speaking of the ‘living water’ as a spiritual reality (see John 7:38-39), the woman is concerned only with the physical realm. But does such a clear demarcation really exist? In the verbal sparring that takes place it is clear that both Jesus and the woman see the conversation as fundamentally concerned with questions of economy, identity and one’s relation with the Other.

In response to the woman’s initial antipathy, Jesus begins to speak of a new economy of gift-exchange – ‘the gift of God’ – in which the woman could participate. To Jesus’ suggestion that it is he who can provide ‘living water’, the woman not only bluntly points out the practical impediment to Jesus providing such a ‘gift’ – “You have no bucket and the well is deep” (v11) – but also through her rhetorical question – “Are you really greater than our [Samaritan] ancestor Jacob?” (v12) – seeks to establish and consolidate her claim to the well. Despite being an ‘outsider’ to her own community – a fact that due to her presence, alone, in the middle of the day, Jesus undoubtedly...
would have deduced – the woman seeks to make clear that it is she, not he, who is at ‘home’ and thus as ‘host’, the one to be offering gifts.

Alternatively, the woman’s response can be understood according to a broader, more inclusive reading of our. Thus the woman’s rejoinder, “Are you really greater than our [joint] ancestor Jacob?” can be paraphrased: “What is the ridiculous economy of the gift which you speak of? Do you really believe in the reality of an economy which steps outside the history of hostility and the economy of struggle which epitomises our joint ancestor, Jacob?” (v12). While growing slightly more comfortable in the presence of this male Jew, potentially becoming open to the possibility of sharing the well, the woman wants to remind Jesus that ethical behaviour and actions are not singular abstracted moments, but rather are always shaped by cultural history and memories. Challenging Jesus’ naive idealism in which a Samaritan woman and a Jewish male could share a drink, the woman makes it clear that Jesus’ gift-giving economy, while a nice concept, is an impossibility, one unable to emerge given the history of mutual ethnic hatred.

Despite the woman’s rudeness, defensiveness, and outright antagonism, Jesus perseveres, highlighting that in contrast to this historical economy of struggle, the new economy of gift of which he speaks is characterised not by competition but by mutuality, nor by limit and scarcity but by an abundant excess. Those who choose to accept the ‘gift of God’ and enter into this new existence “will never be thirsty again.... The water that I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (v14).

Jesus’ persistence pays off. The animosity of the woman to this unexpected ‘guest’ who breaks the prevailing conventions of social interaction slowly gives way to curiosity; her interest aroused by the mention of ‘living water’ which, in endlessly quenching her thirst, would therefore free her of the lonely trek each day to the well.
Her admission, that she desires such water for herself, to reduce her own sense of isolation and otherness, momentarily ends the verbal joust and brings the conversation to a deeper, more intimate level. Jesus’ next request of her: “Go, call your husband, and come back” (v16), cuts to the heart of the matter, touching on the raw nerve from which stems some of her retaliatory rancour. Entrapped, like her ancestor Jacob, in her own history of destructive and broken relationships, the woman seeks healing water to soothe her inner wounds. Shunned, alone, and vulnerable, the woman’s sense of identity and self-worth have been shaped by the centuries-old, well-established, and dominating ideologies: women are second-class citizens, Jews are the enemies, unmarried women with a track record of divorce are impure. The woman’s aggressiveness towards Jesus is simply an outworking of these prevailing prejudices towards the Other which she has incorporated, her virulence, a manifestation – an ‘imitative response’ as it were – of the ostracism she has experienced at the hands of her own inhospitable community.

As quickly as the conversation moves to a deeper level of engagement, the woman, aware of the chink in her armour now exposed, turns the conversation away from the particular – the subject of her own brokenness – and back to the general – the familiar territory of the enmity that exists between Jew and Samaritan: “Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is Jerusalem” (v20). While the woman turns the discussion back to the questions of ethnic hostility, reminding Jesus of the differences that divide them, again Jesus’ response is to point her to His new alternative economy. It is not geographical location nor ethnic background but rather one’s knowledge and acceptance of ‘the gift of God’ and thus one’s entrance into the new alternative economy of the Kingdom, that will determine one’s identity (v21). In this new existence which is the authentic form of personhood, otherness does not divide but rather is constitutive of communion. Those who through the Spirit have had their own inner brokenness revealed and are led into ‘truth’ will, with this hostility conquered, join with others in
worship of the Wholly Other and participate in a new economy of mutual gift-exchange.

It is at this stage of proceedings that the disciples who had earlier in the story ‘gone to the city to buy food’ (v8), now return. While ‘astonished’ to see Jesus contravening established norms by speaking not only with a Samaritan, but with a woman to boot, the disciples remain silent. The fact that the disciples ‘do not criticize Jesus’ behaviour,’ Rudolf Schnackenburg attributes to ‘the reverent attitude of the disciples towards Jesus’. But does this give too much credit to the disciples? While silence can often be a sign of reverence and respect, it can also testify to an extreme awkwardness and discomfort. To ask their rabbi who the woman is would require an acknowledgment of her presence, but the disciples are trapped themselves within the same economy of hostility, in which the differences between women and men, Samaritans and Jews, are ones that divide. Their optics shaped by the prevailing ideologies, in the eyes of the disciples, the woman is a nobody, a faceless, barely visible, Other.

Likewise, Schnackenburg sees the evangelist’s comment in verse 8 (‘His disciples had gone to the city to buy food’) as ‘an afterthought’ and commenting on the hasty departure of the woman states: ‘that there is no need to see anything in the abandonment of the water-jar except that she wants to reach home quickly and unimpeded, to return with the people’ (see v28). However, it seems much more


3 Schnackenburg, John, 443.

4 Ibid., 424, 443.
likely that these detailed editorial asides are in fact crucial to understanding the central emphasis of the narrative. For, it is the contrasting behaviour of the Samaritan woman and the disciples which provides the backdrop for understanding the second section of the story.

Declining the food that his now returned disciples have purchased in the village, Jesus continues to expound on the topic begun with the now absent woman: that of human relations and economics. The disciples, while willing to buy food from Samaritan ‘retailers’, still regard the Samaritan woman as an inferior and impure Other. Their attitude towards Samaritans in general is one of barely veiled disdain, one in which relations exist only under circumstances of dire necessity – their need for food – and even then to be pursued along purely formal and contractual lines. In contrast, the behaviour of the Samaritan woman in leaving behind her water jar is testimony to her breach with such an economy of hostility and her acceptance of, and entrance into, Jesus’ new gift-giving economy. Disregarding the cultic laws which prevent the sharing of drinking and eating vessels, the woman leaves her jar, so that Jesus may indeed use it to draw water freely from the well.

Jesus – employing the ‘unclean’ vessel to draw water from the well – thus enacts before the eyes of his disciples the alternative economy which he has been expounding. Making use of the transforming and destabilising power of sight, Jesus now redirects the inward gaze of the disciples outwards, stating: “Look around you, and see how the fields are ready for harvesting” (v35). While for the disciples Samaria is a barren wasteland to be moved through as quickly as possible, to Jesus, they are golden fields, full of abundant life. Their current context is an ideal location to declare and enact the new economy of the kingdom – an economy characterised not by competition but rather by an appreciation of one’s differences, one where

\[5\] As with verse 8, the evangelist’s utilisation of an editorial aside in verse 9 to remind the reader of this point, has the paradoxical effect of highlighting the importance of this detail to the overall narrative.
sower and reaper 'rejoice together', sharing in the delight of mutual gift-exchange (v36). In declaring to the disciples that "I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour" (v38), Jesus indicates that others have already gone before them into this harvest field – the Samaritan woman! – and invites them to join her in this missionary task. Using the apostolic language of sending (apesteila), Jesus portrays the Samaritan woman not as a faceless Other to be ignored, but rather as a model of apostolic activity.⁷

And, such is the witnessing power of this Samaritan missionary, her desire that others may discover this 'Gift', that the formerly discordant community, believing in the woman's testimony, return to the well in the heat of the day, for their own thirst-quenching drink with the 'Messiah'. The ensuing transformation of the village inhabitants, their entrance into the new economy of the 'gift' and thus the overcoming of inter-community tension and intra-ethnic hostility is evidenced in their immediate actions. The transactional relationality borne out of mistrust and prejudice, in which the Other is ignored while commodities are purchased for individual consumption, now gives way to an opening of their homes to Jesus and his disciples. The former Others are now welcomed into the village and the Samaritans provide hospitality to the 'gift of God', supping intimately with He who 'is truly the Saviour of the world' (v42), the one who, in overcoming division, inaugurates in Himself a new economy.

⁶ New International Version
⁷ My thought here is assisted by Karen Heidebrecht Thiessen, "Jesus and Women in the Gospel of John," Direction: A Mennonite Brethren Forum 19, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 52-64.
Chapter Seven.

Performing a Different Script: Participation in the Practice of Ecclesial Hospitality

As long as there are fears and prejudices in the human heart, there will be war and bitter injustice. It is only when hearts are healed that the great political problems will be solved. Community is a place where people can be human beings, where they can be healed and strengthened in their deepest emotions, and where they can walk towards unity and interior freedom. As fears and prejudices diminish and trust in God and others grows, the community can radiate a witness to a style and quality of life which will bring a solution to the troubles of our world. The response to war is to live like brothers and sisters. The response to injustice is to share. The response to despair is a limitless trust and hope. The response to prejudice and hatred is forgiveness. To work for community is to work for humanity. To work for peace is to work for a true political solution; it is to work for the kingdom of God. It is to work to enable everyone to live and taste the secret joys of the human person united to the eternal.

Jean Vanier

While our post-structuralist philosophers have a strong aversion to the idea of community, we have contended it is only in communion with Christ, and thus in community with others that the self finds its true identity. The Christian narrative, conveyed through Scripture, is the account of a hospitable God, the Triune God of communion, who freely creates a world different from and other than Godself. Creation is not out of obligation, nor necessity, but rather the world comes into existence ex nihilo, an abundant and extravagant gift, which stems from the overflow of love shared within the Godhead. Hostility does not therefore exist within this ontology of primordial peace, but is brought into existence by humanity's refusal to accept the free gift offered them and by their failed enterprise to gain immortality separate from divine communion. While it is God's desire that the world and humanity, created in the image of God, should be brought into the joy of the Divine embrace, humanity, in

1 Vanier, Community and Growth, 45.
its ‘sinful’ desire for *communion* without *otherness*, construes the Other not as one to delight in, but rather as one to be feared, struggled against and overcome.

This hostility towards both the human Other and the Wholly Other however has been overcome through Christ. It is through the incarnation that Jesus, as the representative of humanity, in living a life of obedience and genuine sacrifice/gift-giving, overcomes the ontological obstacle to *communion*, death. Refusing to abide by the death-dealing logic of an economy based on debt and violence, but rather offering his life *freely* back to God, Christ, the second Adam, re-establishes the original peaceful pattern of relationality, re-constituting an economy of grace and freedom. Those who respond to the call of Christ and are *united* with him in his death and resurrection, receive ‘eternal life’, and enter into this new form of authentic personhood. Being found *in Christ* involves, through the work of the indwelling Spirit, a transformation of one’s affections and *desires* and the incorporation into a new form of life, the sociality of the *ecclesia*. It is this community of covenant people constituted not by their own efforts but by God’s gift, and drawn to participate in the hospitality of the Triune God, who are empowered to live lives which welcome rather than distance Others.

That Christian faith is not reducible to a universal ethic and that the biblical story is not a ‘how-to-live’ book offering injunctions and suggestions for individuals to assist them to become more ‘ethical’, should, by now, be obvious to the reader. Instead, it has been our contention that Christian faith is an alternative account of the world, its being, and its ultimate purpose. In particular, it is an account of God’s formation of a covenant people, who, to the extent that they continue to *dwell in Christ* and therefore participate in the hospitality of the Triune God, give witness to God’s gracious and loving actions of creating, sustaining and redeeming the world. As Richard Hays puts it:
...the primary sphere of moral concern is not the character of the individual, but the corporate obedience of the church. Paul's formulation in Romans 12:1-2 encapsulates the vision: "Present your bodies (somata, plural) as a living sacrifice (thysian, singular), holy and pleasing to God. And do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." The community, in its corporate life, is called to embody an alternative order that stands as a sign of God's redemptive purposes in the world.²

But, what does this 'alternative order', witnessing as 'a sign to God's redemptive purposes', look like? What shape does the relationship between the self and the Other take when based not on fear or toleration, but on love? While in one sense revisiting themes we have explored throughout this work, in responding to these questions below, we will endeavour to pull together the montage of thoughts and to bring into clearer focus how the relationality of the ecclesial person differs from the modes of relationality envisaged by either the contemporary discourse of the market or that offered by our post-structuralist interlocutors. In contrast to either the formalised contractual relationship of the market-place or the unilateral relationship of the 'pure-gift', most often manifested in forms of 'charitable giving,' we will suggest that the Christian narrative posits a relationship between the self and the Other of asymmetrical mutual gift-exchange, one founded upon love, joy and freedom. Having outlined the shape of this redeemed relationality which serves as the telos of the ecclesial life, we will then return to the two further questions we posed earlier, asking:

1. What are the significant features one should see as evidence of the ecclesial community's new 'hospitable way of living', as it exists in and through the life-giving breath of the Spirit of Christ?

2. What are the practices, rituals and rites which sustain this alternative way
of living within a world in which hostility and enmity continue to exist?

The Ecclesia:
Relations of Purified Exchange and the Telos of Mutuality

Not the ‘Gift of Death’ but the Life of Resurrection Joy
In August 1944, imprisoned in Tegel prison and facing death, Dietrich Bonhoeffer,
jotted notes for the outline of a book in which he proposed to set out ‘the real
meaning of Christian faith’. He wrote: ‘The church is the church only when it exists
for others.’ Confronted by the church in Germany which had lost sight of its
responsibility to the other, in particular to the Jews, Bonhoeffer contended that true
faith is an: ‘Encounter with Jesus Christ’. Further notes augment this theme:
The experience that a transformation of all human life is given in the
fact that ‘Jesus is there only for others’. His ‘being there for others’ is
the experience of transcendence. It is only this ‘being there for others’, maintained till death, that is the ground of his omnipotence,
omniscience, and omnipresence. Faith is participation in this being
of Jesus (incarnation, cross, and resurrection). Our relation to God is
not a ‘religious’ relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best
Being imaginable – that is not authentic transcendence – but our
relation to God is a new life in ‘existence for others,’ through
participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendental is not infinite
and unattainable tasks, but the neighbour who is within reach in any

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4 Ibid. Emphasis added.
given situation. God in human form... 'the man for others', and therefore the Crucified, the man who lives out of the transcendent.\textsuperscript{5}

While his writing here has an almost Levinasian tone to it, critical to understanding Bonhoeffer’s thought is the phrase: 'through participation in the being of Jesus'. In a radical divergence from Levinas’ and Derrida’s infinite responsibility,\textsuperscript{6} Bonhoeffer contends that, '[n]o one is responsible for all the injustice and suffering in the world',\textsuperscript{7} instead positing that the believer’s ethical imitation of Christ, that is, one’s ‘existence for others’, is utterly dependent upon one’s ‘participation in the being of Jesus’. Such ‘participation in the being of Jesus’, as we have already noted in the previous chapter, involves, through the sacrament of baptism, the death of the self-centred individual. Indeed, as Bonhoeffer so powerfully articulates elsewhere in The Cost of Discipleship: ‘When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.’\textsuperscript{8} Critically however, and in contrast to our post-structuralist interlocutors, this death of the self is not the ultimate telos. Christian ethics is not grounded upon the death of the self, but rather stems from the new resurrection life inaugurated in Christ, into which the newly baptised self enters. Bonhoeffer elucidates this important distinction with his comparison of Socrates and Jesus:

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 381-2.
\textsuperscript{6} Levinas is fond of quoting a passage from Dostoyevsky’s Brothers Karamazov: ‘Each of us is guilty before everyone for everyone, and I more than the others.’ Cited in Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 146. See also Levinas, Outside the Subject, 44. Elsewhere Levinas states: ‘One is never without debt with regard to another.’ Levinas, Ethics and Infinity, 11. Derrida concurs stating: ‘This guilt is originary, original sin. Before any fault is determined, I am guilty inasmuch as I am responsible... Guilt is inherent in responsibility because responsibility is always unequal to itself: one is never responsible enough.’ Derrida, Gift of Death, 51.
\textsuperscript{7} Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers, 13.
\textsuperscript{8} Bonhoeffer’s powerful prose, in reinforcing the discussion from the previous chapter, is worth quoting here in full:

The Cross is laid on every Christian. It begins with the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of this encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves in union with His death – we give our lives to death. Since this happens at the beginning of the Christian life, the cross can never be merely a tragic ending to an otherwise happy religious life. When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.

Socrates mastered the art of dying; Christ overcame death as "the last enemy" (1 Cor 15:26). There is a real difference between the two things; the one is within the scope of human possibilities, the other means resurrection. It is not from *ars moriendi*, the art of dying, but from the resurrection of Christ that a new and purifying wind can blow through our present world.... If a few people really believed that and acted on it in their daily lives, a great deal would be changed. To live in the light of the Resurrection—that is what Easter means.⁹

Central therefore to the Christian account of hospitality that we have sought to expound, and fundamental to the distinction of such an account from that offered by our post-structuralist interlocutors, is this emphasis upon the resurrection. As Oliver O'Donovan emphatically declares: ‘Christian ethics depends upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead’.¹⁰ The determinative role in our account of both ontology and teleology are understood in light of this resurrection, that is, they are of an eschatological nature.¹¹ In contrast to a unilateral relational structure in which the *telos* appears to be the self-sacrificial *death* of the self, the *telos* to which the *ecclesia* looks forward and which shapes its ethical action is not the death of the self, but rather the joy of mutuality. ‘Being there for others’ is therefore not an *end* in itself but rather is the *means* to the end, the summoning of the Other to participate in the new economy of gift-exchange, in which gifts of love are freely given and received.

Indeed without this distinctive *telos*, an ethos of ‘being there for others’, while preferable to a relational model of the self over the other, continues to perpetuate

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unhealthy relational patterns. The unilateral nature of ‘being there for the other’ – often manifest in ‘charitable giving’ from a distance – has a number of problematic consequences for both the donor and the recipient. Not only does such a form of giving run the risk of developing patronising and paternalistic attitudes which disempower and dehumanise the recipient, but such a form of relationality also has a number of problematic consequences for the donor. Engaged in such a uni-lateral movement, the donor misses out on the richness and nourishment that the Other may offer in response, while the distance that often accompanies ‘charitable giving’ can mean that the donor, no longer exposed to the immediacy and challenge of the Other, can avoid the call to repentance. Being there for the Other can thus lead either to a new form of ethical smugness in which the self receives a psychological reward for its beneficence to the Other or, conversely, to entrapment in the never-ending demands of the Other, therefore creating a form of dependency detrimental to both donor and recipient.

Ultimately, therefore, an ‘ethic of hospitality’ that is divorced from an ontological account of how hostility and death have been overcome inevitably becomes distorted and regresses to a human ethic of law and duty emptied of its liberating and life-giving dynamic. This contention is shared by another German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann. Reflecting on the renewed emphasis on ethics within Christian theology post World War Two, Moltmann warns of the perils of an ethic divorced from the joy that stems from resurrection life. In his *Theology and Joy*, he notes that, ‘Theology does not have much use for aesthetic categories. Faith has lost its joy, since it has felt constrained to exorcise the law of the old world with a law of the new.’

Like his predecessor Bonhoeffer, Moltmann recognises that when divorced from the underlying account of the joyous new life that those in the Church, incorporated into the resurrection body of Christ participate in, ‘Christian ethics’ leads inexorably to a

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new law of bondage and slavery. In an extract striking for its use of what we have come to see as Levinas' signature phrase – 'infinite responsibility' – Moltmann writes:

Our social and political tasks, if we take them seriously, loom larger than life. Yet infinite responsibility destroys a human being because he is only man and not god. I have an idea that laughter is able to mediate between the infinite magnitude of our tasks and the limitations of our strength. Many people, who really get down to work, are saying – and rightly so: 'Unless we do a lot of joking, we have to cry and cannot get anything done.'

Moltmann summarises well the key theme we have here sought to explicate, stating:

... being-there-for-others is not the final answer, nor is it an end and not even freedom itself. It is a way, although the only way, which leads to being-there-with-others. Christ’s death for us has its end and future in that he is with us and that we shall be living, laughing and ruling with him. Being-there-for-others in vicarious love has as its end to be with others in liberty. Giving bread to the world’s hungry has as its end to break our bread with all mankind. If this is not our end, our care for others merely becomes a new kind of domination. Church for others may easily lead us back to the old paternalism, unless its ultimate end is that kingdom where no one needs to speak up for the other any more but where each person rejoices with his neighbor and all men enjoy themselves together. Being-there-for-others is the way to the redemption of this life. Being-there-with-others is the form which the redeemed and liberated life itself has taken. The church therefore must not regard itself as just a means to an end, but it must demonstrate already in its present existence this free and

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13 Ibid., 46. Emphasis added.
redeeming being-with-others which it seeks to serve. In this sense – and only in this sense – the church is already an end in itself, not as church complete with hierarchy and bureaucracy but as the congregation of the liberated. In that sense the church’s function reaches beyond its own demonstrative value of being. In the remembered and hoped-for liberty of Christ the church serves the liberation of men by demonstrating human freedom in its own life and by manifesting its rejoicing in that freedom.14

Egalitarian yet Asymmetrical Relations

In contrast therefore to the unilateral relationship with the Other envisaged by our post-structuralist interlocutors, in which the ‘gift of death’ is the ultimate gift one can give, the ecclesia, living in light of the resurrection and facing towards the hope of the final eschaton, is summoned and empowered to live a new form of life. We have already noted the way in which the Apostle Paul, describing this new humanity as the Body of Christ, contrasts the relational patterns of this alternative form of personhood with the hierarchicat paternalistic and oppressive relational patterns of 1st Century Graeco-Roman society. Membership within this new welcoming community is not based on a status according to ethnicity, gender, or wealth. Rather, as Paul notes, such status distinctions that the world draws are relativised (Gal 3:26-29). Using banqueting imagery, Paul argues that unlike the seating arrangements of the surrounding Graeco-Roman society, where those of higher status were afforded seats closer to the host, ‘God has so arranged the body, giving greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another’ (1 Cor 12:24-25).

However, while with regard to status there is equality within this new community, the experience of each individual as they make their way through life is not necessarily equitable. Paul, recognising that members of this new community still suffer the vagaries of the human condition – some experiencing suffering, while others experience joy, some having an abundance, others having little – does not therefore advocate for an equality of gifts – ‘the same gift for one another’ – but rather for ‘the same care for one another’, a ‘mutual affection’. Paul explicates this further in his letter to the Philippians, where he urges that Christians’ experience of ‘encouragement in Christ’ and ‘sharing in the Spirit’ should shape their treatment of each and every other. Paul writes: ‘Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to our own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’ (Phil 2:3-5).

In Paul’s thinking, the new post-resurrection community of the ecclesia now operates according to a new ethos. Having received the gift of Christ – a genuine gift, not earned, but offered freely – the ecclesia consists of a community whose self-centred desires have been put to death and in whom new desires and affections are emerging as a result of the work of the indwelling Spirit. Paul contends that the attitude of the members of this community, undergoing transformation through the work of the disturbing Comforter, should not be one of self-interest, nor one of ‘pure’ disinterest, but rather, that sharing the mind of Christ, each should seek each other’s interest. Rather than espousing an ethic of self-obliteration, in which the prioritising of the other corresponds with a loss of the self, Paul suggests that as each looks to the interests of the other their interests will also be met by others acting according to the same principle. Instead of the win-loss logic which undergirds a unilateral, self-sacrificial model of ethics, the new ‘household of God’ is to be characterised by a win-win logic, based upon a principle of mutuality.
Terminology employed by John Milbank helps delineate further between the nature of the relationality of the ecclesia, stemming from the distinctive Christian account of ontology and teleology that we have emphasised here, and that of our interlocutors. One of the most trenchant critics of the ethical philosophies offered by Levinas and Derrida, Milbank claims that at the heart of their project is a ‘refusal of reciprocity.’

In response to the thought of both Derrida and his former pupil, Marion, Milbank argues that Christianity offers a metaphysic not of ‘pure gift’, but of ‘purified gift-exchange’. And, unlike Levinas, who ‘never really considers whether reciprocity could be itself asymmetrical’, Milbank advocates for a relational model of ‘asymmetrical reciprocity’.

While Derrida, in his analysis of the gift, argues that any form of reciprocity or return of a gift traps the gift into an exchange economy, therefore annulling it of its giftedness, Milbank, drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, suggests there are two features which distinguish a gift from that of a binding contract. First, the gift, rather than being returned immediately – which ‘implies a lack of gratitude, a desire

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15 Milbank, responding directly to the concept of the ‘pure-gift’ offered by Derrida and developed in stricter theological terms by Derrida’s former student Jean-Luc Marion, argues that the desire for reciprocity, and an ensuing relational structure of exchange, does not have to be understood negatively, as an egotistical obsession, but rather can be understood as pointing to an underlying intersubjectivity. In Milbank’s analysis, Levinas’ and Derrida’s work, in attempting to move beyond the ‘disinterested subject’ of Kantian ethical thought, ultimately affirms an ethic of self-sacrifice, one in which the ultimate telos is the self which ‘obliterates’ itself for the other. Consistent with this concern, Milbank argues that it is the legacy of Kantian thought, based on ‘disinterest’ in which both the self and other have been depersonalised and abstracted, that ‘ensures that utterance and personality fade towards the sublime object, rendering them transparent.’ Milbank, "Reciprocity, Part One," 335-391, 376-7. See also Milbank, "Can A Gift Be Given?," 119-161. J. Todd Billings suggests that while Milbank’s critique of Derrida’s view of the gift is correct, his identification of Kant as lying at the root of this problematic ‘refusal of reciprocity’ stems from a misinterpretation of Kant. See J. Todd Billings, "John Milbank’s Theology of the "Gift" and Calvin’s Theology of Grace: A Critical Comparison," Modern Theology 21, no. 1 (January 2005): 87-105.

16 Milbank, "Can A Gift Be Given?," 131.

17 Milbank, "Reciprocity, Part One," 342.


19 Derrida, Given Time, 7.
to discharge a debt as soon as possible' – usually involves a 'delay of return'. And, second, the gift given back is almost always different, that is, there is a 'non-identical repetition between the gift and counter-gift'.

To understand what Milbank is saying here it is worth applying his analysis of gift-giving to our contemporary world and the experience of participating in the so-called 'hospitality industry'. Arriving at a cafe or restaurant, we order, receive our drink and/or meal, and then, at the conclusion, pay a price that has been agreed in advance – either through a verbal agreement such as bartering, or, more generally the case in a Western context, through an implicit agreement, in which having seen the prices listed on the menu and in choosing to order we enter into a contract for services. At the end of our meal, not only are we 'obliged' to pay immediately – indeed, to leave without paying would constitute 'theft' – but likewise, the price to pay, the 'gift-return' so to speak, is, except in exceptional circumstances, not open to renegotiation, but rather follows an identical repetition. Obviously there are occasional exceptions to this contractually agreed price. Firstly, if the customers feel that the service delivered

20 Milbank, "Can A Gift Be Given?," 125.
21 Ibid. Some question as to whether Milbank's 'purified gift-exchange' purged of its agonistic tendencies goes far enough. Kathryn Tanner notes that despite their differences, the contrasts drawn between the models of non-commodity gift-exchange which theologians such as John Milbank, Stephen Webb and Catherine Pickstock use as the basis for their theologies of 'gift-giving' and the capitalistic system of contractual commodity exchange are, 'overblown'. Tanner argues that there are clear similarities between non-commodity gift-exchange and the commodity exchange of the capitalistic system: (1) the focus on status; (2) the similarity between both money and gifts with regard to circulation, risk and delay; (3) the competitive tendency of both capitalistic markets and non-commodity gift-exchange systems; and (4) the fact that in certain circumstances gift exchanges are 'implicitly contractual'. Tanner, Economy of Grace, 52-54.

While there is a fair dose of truth in Tanner's observation – one only needs to observe the 'gift-exchange' that takes place in Polynesian societies often motivated by status, one-upmanship, and competition for mana – what Tanner seems to fail to recognise, as Daniel M. Bell Jr. notes, is that writers such as Milbank 'share Tanner's rejection of such a logic.' As Bell observes, Tanner's 'unnuanced polemic against exchange' stems from too quickly associating theologians like Milbank 'with a wholesale and uncritical embrace of anthropological models of non-Western gift exchange. Furthermore, the distance she effects from those theologians comes about largely by means of her particular definition of exchange as a payment predicated on a debt.' Daniel M. Bell Jr., "Review of Economy of Grace, by Kathryn Tanner " Religion and Theology 14, no. 2 (2007): 235-237. Elsewhere, engaging in a more detailed reflection on Tanner's work, Bell, while sympathetic, again concludes that 'Tanner’s critique of exchange generally, and gift exchange in particular, is overbroad.' Bell Jr., "Forgiveness," 325-44, 338.
- for example, the quality of the meal – does not justify the payment about to be rendered and upon lodging a complaint have their outstanding bill reduced. Or, secondly, on the occasions when the customers are so delighted in the ‘gifts’ they have received, that they seek to offer a further gratuity. However, the general rule is that what one customer pays for a cup of coffee is the identical price that all customers pay for a cup of coffee. Thus, while such a relational engagement is perhaps evidence of an underlying desire for relations of reciprocity, such contractual transactions are not genuine ‘gift-giving’. Each participant’s ‘gift’ and behaviour, rather than following the random paths evident in the free expression of love and joy, follow a pre-ordained and pre-determined procedure.22

None of this is to suggest that one cannot experience ‘hospitality’ while engaging in a relationship originally established along contractual lines. To adopt again the example of the restaurant: regular patronage at a specific restaurant over a long period of time often leads to a deepening of relationships between the owner and the guest and the initially formal relationship of service-provider and consumer develops into one of friendship. Instead, our point is that genuine relationships of hospitality and love with the Other must move beyond the purely formalised nature of contractual relationality.23

The problem, Milbank contends, with Marion’s and Derrida’s aneconomic ‘pure gift’ and the unilateral relational structure advanced in Derrida’s and Levinas’ work, is that such a notion, rather than offering an alternative to the contractual relationality

22 Even the ritual of offering a gift above and beyond the expected and obligated return – ‘tipping’ as it is sometimes termed – has, in some contexts, been robbed of its gift-like character. Thus, in the United States, the practice of ‘tipping’ is an expectation and to fail to offer a ‘tip’ is seen either as a criticism of the service received or evidence of one’s ‘stingy’ character. Further, in many situations a percentage of the final total is automatically added to the bill as the customer’s ‘tip’.

23 Such development of relationships of mutuality and respect are not confined to the ‘hospitality industry’ but rather have the potential to develop in all human relations. Indeed, all of us undoubtedly have the experience of being treated ‘specially’ by others, of experiencing ‘grace-filled’ encounters with those who are simply ‘doing their job’.
that characterises the economic system of capitalism, is instead grounded upon the same conception of the world: a world of isolated individuals and a refusal of reciprocity. As Milbank writes: 'capitalist contracts which bind inexorably and impersonally are in theory the result of entirely willed, voluntary emissions from isolated egos capable only of either inflexible demand or else absolute free gift.'

In contrast to either unilateral or contractual relationships, perhaps the clearest illustration of a relational mutuality – one composed of an 'asymmetrical reciprocity' in which each agent engages in a dynamic of 'purified gift-exchange', a gift-exchange following a pattern not of identical repetition but rather of 'free expression' – is the sexual gift-giving that takes place in life-long, monogamous relationships, such as marriage. In healthy relationships, the offering of gifts to the Other is based not upon distance and separation but rather on intimacy and proximity, and the self, rather than having power over the Other, extends itself to the Other, sharing in a mutual dance of desire, joy and delight. Within such relationships the return of counter-gifts stems not from a forced duty or obligation, nor out of necessity, but rather, is a joyous offering of pleasure back to the Other, a desire to participate in a celebration of mutual gift-giving. Indeed, sexual relationships in which one partner holds power over the Other and the Other is forced/obligated to respond are almost universally recognised as a violation of the others' freedom and constitute rape, while sexual relationships where the response from one partner simply stems from an agreed contractual transaction are characteristic of 'the oldest profession' known: prostitution. Both incidences are a distortion of the mutual joy, delight, intimacy and sharing of love that are essential to authentic human sexuality.

It is no coincidence,

24 Milbank, "Reciprocity, Part Two," 486.
25 C.S. Lewis also points to the example of the marriage relationship in making the same points: that self-denial is not an end in itself, and that neither does a return, or the 'promise of reward,' make 'the Christian life a mercenary affair.' C.S. Lewis writes:

The negative idea of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point. I do not think this is the Christian virtue of Love. The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial,
therefore, that instructions on marriage feature so prominently in the ‘household
codes’ of Paul and other early church writers. Not only is it the case that such
monogamous relationships of fidelity and love provide the sound basis for families
and societies as a whole, but the loyalty, faithfulness, and the giving and receiving of
gifts envisaged in such relationships is also seen as analogous to the relationship that
Christ seeks to build with His church. 

Within a Christian account therefore, the practice of hospitality, the giving of gifts to
the Other, does not stem from a slavish adherence to the infinite demand of ethics,
nor follow a prescribed and formalised pattern, but is rather a free joyful response to
God’s grace, an action that stems from the self’s participation in a new law: the
dynamic of love. As Moltmann writes:

The so-called *new obedience is new* only when it is no longer obedience
but free, imaginative and loving action. The so-called *new law is new*

but not about self-denial as an end in itself.... there lurks in most modern minds the
notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is
a bad thing, [and] I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics
and is no part of the Christian faith.

We must be troubled by unbelievers when they say that this promise of reward
makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. There are different kinds of rewards.
There is the reward which has no natural connection with the things you do to
earn it, and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things.
Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man a mercenary if
he married a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward
for a real lover, and he is not a mercenary for desiring it.... The proper rewards are
not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity
itself in consummation.

C.S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in *Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces* (London: Collins-

Thus the imagery of the Hebrew Scriptures in which YHWH speaks of himself as husband to his,
often unfaithful, wife, Israel (Isa 54:5, 62:5), is utilised too by Jesus in referring to himself as the
bridegroom coming for this bride (Matt 9:15, 25:1-13; John 3:29). The metaphor is also employed in
other New Testament writings, with the epistle to the Ephesians in particular correlating the
mutual gift giving and receiving of the marriage relationship with the relationship Christ has with
the Ecclesia (Eph 5:22-33). The imagery reaches its zenith in Revelation, with the portrayal of the
eschatological union between Christ and his church (Rev 19:7, 21:2, 22:17).
only when it is no longer a law but the play of love which does the right whenever it does as it will.27

The enactment of such gift-giving, the practise of ‘imaginative and loving action’ requires first and foremost, therefore, not legal or political changes, but our ontological transformation. To engage in the ‘play of love’ is dependent not on our ethical actions but rather upon our death. Surrendering to the grace of God, entering into God’s drama consists in an ontological transformation, as division and separation gives way to communion and otherness, and as our inner hostility is replaced by hospitality. As John Zizioulas puts it: ‘communion and otherness are supposed to permeate our lives in their entirety. They are to become an attitude, and ethos rather than an ethic and a set of principles.”28

If, however, authentic hospitality is not an ethic but an ethos, is not the programmatic following of a pre-determined set of responses but is more akin to what Samuel Wells refers to as improvisation,29 is there though, a discernable pattern or shape to such free expression? If true life-giving hospitality occurs as, suffused with the love of Christ, one serves as a vessel of love and grace to the Others encountered in the journey of life, nonetheless, are there some defining characteristics and qualities of such ‘purified gift-exchange’? That is, despite the multiple variations that stem from differences in personalities, cultures, and context, are there particular universal features that one should expect to see as the called-out community of the Ecclesia participates in the divine life of hospitable gift-giving?

27 Moltmann, Theology and Joy, 67.
28 Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 81.
29 Samuel Wells, Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004).
Features of Ecclesial Hospitality (2 Cor 8:1-15; 9:1-15)

Seeking to raise funds for the church in Jerusalem undergoing famine, the Apostle Paul, writing to the believers in Corinth, commends the example of the believers in Macedonia, who he sees as a prime illustration of this new ethos of mutuality and 'purified gift-exchange' in action. Drawing on Paul's example of the Macedonians, in what follows, we will offer five features that we contend are evidence of a community whose practice of hospitality stems from, and is nourished by, its participation in the divine drama. Ecclesial hospitality, we will argue, is characterised by: (1) the cheerfulness and joyous disposition of those who are giving; (2) a radical generosity, that is, a giving which is profligate, excessive and abundant; (3) the universal and unconditional nature of such gift-giving; (4) a conscious and deliberate choice to enter into relationships of close proximity with strangers; and, (5) the willingness of the giver to accept and endure suffering. While these five characteristics are by no means exhaustive, we do maintain that it is the presence of these features which serves as corroborating evidence of the claim to love God. Or, following the logic of the Johannine epistles, the features of this divinely-empowered hospitality expressed to the Other bear witness to one's claim to be abiding in Christ.

The Cheerfulness and Voluntary Nature of Hospitable Giving

The first feature that testifies to one's participation in the divine drama of God's hospitality is, we propose, the cheerful and joyful demeanour of those engaged in the offering of gifts of love. We have all undoubtedly endured the experience where the disposition of the hosts jars with the very offering of hospitality, where the atmosphere is anything but 'welcoming.' Situations where, as an unexpected Other, we turn up unknowingly at the most inappropriate and inopportune moments, and while the host greets us and summons us to enter, their gloomy disposition betrays a barely veiled sense of displeasure at this unwanted imposition upon them. The occasions when we sense the eyes of the host watching apprehensively as we
clumsily navigate ourselves ungainly around family heirlooms balanced precariously around the home; observe the horror on the host’s face when, rather than following accepted social convention and refusing the first offer of second helpings, a guest instead heartily fills their empty plate once again; or the scarcely disguised gasps of dismay as a guest, oblivious to social etiquette, commits unbeknown to themselves, another social faux pas.\(^{30}\)

Such ‘hospitality’, often motivated by an adherence to social norms or ethical duties, or a ‘gift-giving’ arising from self-interest in which one seeks to raise one’s status through giving, and/or engages in giving to prevent the ‘loss of face’, stands in stark contrast to the cheerful and joyful demeanour of those whose gifts are an overflow of love stemming from their participation in Christ. Decrying gift-giving/hospitality motivated by obligation or compulsion, Paul commends the example of the believers in Macedonia, whose generous gifts are not \textit{extorted} (9:5) from them \textit{reluctantly} (9:7), but rather, are given ‘voluntarily’ with \textit{cheerfulness} and joy (8:3; 9:7). While in the midst of ‘a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part,’ Paul writes, and notes further that the giving, far from being ‘reluctant’, is characterised by keenness, the benefactors ‘begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints’ (8:1-4). For Paul, therefore, the demeanour of the donor is a tell-tale sign of the motivating factor for one’s actions of hospitality and gift-giving.

Why Paul regards motivation as so critical is expressed in his aphorism: ‘the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully’ (9:6). Prosperity preachers and tele-evangelists are right in recognising that Paul offers here a core principle of a new economy, but are sadly

\(^{30}\) A comedic example of how discomforting such experiences can be, is vividly portrayed in Jay Roach’s movie ‘\textit{Meet the Parents}’ (2000) in which male nurse and Jew Greg Focker (played by Ben Stiller), experiences the ‘hospitality’ of his prospective father-in-law, ex-CIA agent and WASP, Jack Byrnes (played by Robert DeNiro).
mistaken in their understanding of that principle. Far from advocating a giving stemming from self-interest – the more one gives the more one will get in return – Paul is simply reiterating the principle which undergirds Jesus’ alternative economy of the Kingdom of God proclaimed in Luke’s gospel:

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back (Luke 6:37-38).

In God’s economy of grace it is those who, having experienced God’s grace, are freed from judgment and condemnation and who are now enabled to offer such forgiveness and unconditional giving to others. In contrast, once giving ceases being cheerful, but becomes a matter of determining debts incurred and accounts owed, and stems not from an attitude of joy and thankfulness, but rather, is motivated by ethical duty and obligation, then one has begun to cut oneself off from the life-giving grace of God and, quite literally, has annulled the gift.\footnote{Such is the message of the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:23-35), in which the action of a servant, in demanding the day’s wages he is owed by a fellow servant, is juxtaposed against the cancellation by the King of his own enormous outstanding debt – 15 years wages. While acting legitimately within the parameters of the law in demanding what he is owed, the action of the servant is evidence of his failure to understand, and enter into, the true freedom of grace.}

For both Jesus and Paul, as for Derrida and Kant, the motivation of the giver is critically important. However, whereas Kant and his neo-Kantian successors seek to purge the gift of its agonistic tendencies, Paul holds not to the concept of a ‘pure’ disinterested giver, but rather believes that the interests and desires of the self are transformed as one participates in Christ. In the Christian account, therefore, genuine giving is not an obligation imposed upon us, but, rather an inevitable outward expression of the transformation taking place within the self. As Volf states:

\begin{quote}
Inscribed in the very heart of God’s grace is the rule that we can be recipients only if we do not resist being made into its agents. In a precisely
\end{quote}
defined way that guards the distinction between God and human beings, human beings themselves are made participants in the divine activity and therefore are inspired, and powered, and obliged to imitate it.\textsuperscript{32}

**The Extravagance of Aneconomic Hospitality**

The second feature we should not be surprised to see amongst those whose actions are ‘inspired’ and ‘powered’ by their participation in the character-forming divine drama, is an *extravagance* and excessive quality to their hospitality. As with the Macedonians’ ‘wealth of generosity’ (8:2), such excessive and profligate giving stems from a radical re-orientation and transformed conception of resources and therefore economics.

At the heart of human economics is, Daniel M. Bell Jr. argues, an ontology of poverty. That is, human economics is grounded upon a basic description of the world in which humanity competes for *scarce* resources.\textsuperscript{33} In contrast to such an ontology based upon the core principles of *scarcity* and *lack*, in which human relations are therefore understood, at best, as ‘a tamed version of Hobbes’s state of nature,’\textsuperscript{34} is the Christian ontology we have outlined. Entering into the Christian narrative – with its distinctive ontological and teleological account of the world – is to have our lives reshaped according to a new script and in our performing of this new script we are given the privilege of participating in God’s new economy.


\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.: 327.
God, the giver of all gifts, does not give miserly nor manipulatively (Jas 1:17, Matt 7:7-11), but the reception of His gifts does entail our transformation. To respond to the call of Christ, to be incorporated into His Body, is to be initiated into a new way of being, one where the hording of resources for oneself is transformed into a faith in God’s daily sustaining of our corporate needs. Like the provision of manna to the Israelites in the wilderness, the ecclesial life is one of daily dependence on God’s grace. Those participating within this new divine economy do not therefore give out of their surplus, offering what they have left over after sustaining their own needs. Rather, akin to Levinas’ claim that ‘to give is to take bread out of one’s own mouth, to nourish the hunger of another with one’s own fasting’ Christians are to give out of their weakness and poverty. Such hospitality, dependent not on our own resources, is a movement of faith, a demonstration of one’s confidence that ‘God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance’ (9:8). But more than this, it is an assurance that God will provide not merely one’s own ‘daily bread’, but will also provide sufficient bread to share with others. Thus Paul, in imagery reminiscent of Jesus’ own words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:25-34) speaks of God as the supplier of seed and provider of bread, who gives enough ‘so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work’ (9:8).

Participation in God’s new economy, based not on scarcity and lack, but which operates according to the aneconomic principles of excess and abundance, is, therefore, typified by a radical and extravagant giving. As Stanley Hauerwas puts it:

Only by being initiated into the Christian tradition concerning the economy called ‘trinity’ does one have a chance of being freed from the necessities called ‘economics.’ For Christians know that the love displayed in God’s life is not a zero-sum game but one of overflowing plenitude.36

35 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 56.
Critical once again, however, is the understanding that the end of such giving out of poverty, is not self-sacrifice, the starvation of oneself for the Other, but rather the enacting of a new economy of mutuality. Paul therefore explicitly states that the trusting of oneself to God’s steadfast faithfulness and one’s participation in this new economy does not ‘mean that there should be a relief for others and pressure on you’. Rather, the desired end of such giving is one of a ‘fair balance’ (8:13-14).

Our repeated emphasis here is that while self-sacrifice, suffering, and potentially even death may serve as the means, the ultimate end envisaged in the action of hospitality practised by the Church is not one of masochism, or, as Milbank bluntly puts it, ‘self-obliteration’, but rather the joy of a shared life of mutuality and communion. It is, to paraphrase Jesus, ‘in losing our lives – of self-interest – that we therefore find and enter into true living.’ Such an emphasis forces a radical re-reading of some of the biblical passages most often cited with regard to giving; passages most often interpreted as commending and exhorting a life of self-sacrificial giving as an end in and of itself.

38 Addison G. Wright, S.S. offers a compelling re-reading of the story of ‘The Widow’s Mite’ recounted in the Mark and Luke’s gospel (Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4). Wright, noting that the story ‘almost universally is seen as some kind of observation on the measuring of gifts, or, as an exhortation to “give till it hurts”, or, as an example of some virtue to be acquired’ asks provocatively whether ‘apart from the text, if any one of us were actually to see in real life a poor widow giving the very last of her money to religion, would we not judge the act to be repulsive and to be based on misguided piety because she would be neglecting her own needs?’ Having given a comprehensive overview of the various interpretations offered by commentators, all of which ultimately view the story as concerned with the nature of gift-giving – that is, (a) that the story is about the measurement of a gift, that a gift can be measured according to the amount given – i.e. the proportion given to what we have, the willingness to give all we have, and/or (b) that a gift depends not on amount, but on the spirit of the donor – Wright then suggests that such interpretations fail to read the story in the immediate context. Wright observes that the story is preceded by Jesus’ critical comments on the Scribes whose commendation of the ethical and religious duty of ‘giving alms’ to the temple has the consequence of ‘devour[ing] widows’ houses’ and is followed by Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of the temple. Read within its context, the story, Wright argues far from being an approbation of the Widow’s gift, is rather, ‘a downright disapproval’. The story, Wright contends:

[D]oes not provide a pious contrast to the conduct of the scribes in the preceding section (as is the customary view); rather it provides a further illustration of the ills of official devotion. Jesus’ saying is not a penetrating insight on the measuring of
Universal and Unconditional Giving

The third defining feature of the hospitality of the Ecclesia, evidence of their participation in the new divine economy, is the universal and unconditional nature of their giving. Within a world of inequalities, injustice and need, and with finite resources at one's disposal, donors are often called upon to give an account of their giving, to offer some rationale for why and how they determined who should receive their offered hospitality and gifts of aid— to provide, in 'market-speak', some sort of 'cost-benefit analysis'. Within such circumstances, one often hears language of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' Other. However, the very notion of a 'deserving' or 'undeserving' stranger is rendered nonsensical in light of the Christian doctrine of sin. God's gift offered to us is a free gift, one that is dependent not on the achievement of certain moral standards, nor on an ability to live ethical lives. As Jesus states: 'the Father... makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous' (Matt 5:45). Indeed, as we have argued strenuously throughout, it is not moral transformation or ethical behaviour that entitles us to reception of God's gifts, but rather the converse; it is the reception of the free gift offered in Christ which provides the basis for our ontological and therefore moral and ethical transformation. It is this belief that we are all sinners and that our justification is dependent not on our own actions, but rather stems from God's gracious gift, which puts an end to criteria distinguishing between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' others.

Likewise, the Christian understanding of the eschatological nature of identity—the fact that the Other is not at this time able to be fully known, but rather that their true
and full identity awaits a final unveiling and disclosure – once again speaks against any attempt to classify or categorise the Other. As Zizioulas states:

[I]t is not on the basis of someone’s past or present that we should identify and accept him or her, but on the basis of their future. And since the future lies only in the hands of God, our approach to the other must be free from passing judgement on him or her. Every ‘other’ is in the Spirit a potential saint, even if he or she appears to have been or continues to be a sinner.39

At this point, despite our disagreements, there is a strong correlation with the thought of Derrida. While we have contended that Derrida’s philosophy is ultimately incapable of providing a stable structure for the practice of hospitality, nonetheless, Derrida’s desire for a hospitality which operates beyond the constraints of law and principles resonates with the argument we have put forth here. Derrida writes:

[T]o the extent that we are looking for criteria, for conditions, for passports, border and so on, we are limiting hospitality.... But if we want to understand what hospitality means, we have to think of unconditional hospitality, that is, openness to whomever, to any newcomer. And of course, if I want to know in advance who is the good one, who is the bad one – in advance! – if I want to have an available criterion to distinguish between the good immigrant and the bad immigrant, then I would have no relation with the other as such. So to welcome the other, you have to suspend the use of criteria. I would not recommend giving up all criteria, all knowledge and politics. I would simply say that if I want to improve hospitality... the politics of hospitality, I have to refer to pure

39 Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 6.
hospitality... if only to control the distance between in-hospitality, less hospitality, and more hospitality.\textsuperscript{40}

Derrida perceptively recognises that any attempt to have criterion available by which we evaluate and distinguish the ‘good immigrant’ from the ‘bad immigrant’, the ‘deserving stranger’ from the ‘undeserving stranger’ has the effect of extinguishing our relation with the Other. Indeed, that the establishing of ethical principles, that is the ‘categorization of what ought and what ought not to be done’ goes hand in hand with a moral categorization of the Other, is a point made insightfully by John Zizioulas, who argues:

... the other is not identifiable ontologically in moral terms, for he or she would cease to be truly Other if placed in a class or category applicable to more than one entity. By being a person, the Other is by definition unique and therefore unclassifiable. Only in this way can one remain truly and absolutely, that is, ontologically, Other.\textsuperscript{41}

In the world of ‘professionalised charities’ with giving often reduced to a set of ethical principles the Other is often in danger of being categorised and classified. While not necessarily adhering to crude classifications according to moral attributes, donors, often following strict economic criteria, are required to determine whether the potential recipient demonstrates the nous and wherewithal to purposefully utilise the gifts and thus is ‘deserving’ of the precious resources being bestowed upon them. Such an attempt to determine whether the Other will be a ‘success story’ and thus worthy of time, effort and resources, is though, in one sense, no less an act


\textsuperscript{41} Zizioulas, \textit{Communion and Otherness}, 81.
of ethical classification. In contrast to such hospitality is the ethos of ethical apophaticism, which, as Zizioulas suggests, should characterise the ecclesia.

The gospels provide multiple episodes – our example of the Samaritan woman in John 4, being just one – which illustrate this distinction between the tendency to classify and categorise the Other and the contrasting ethos of ethical apophaticism. Another striking example of what we are seeking to express here is contained in Victor Hugo’s classic, Les Misérables. In one of the most memorable scenes of the novel, the protagonist of Hugo’s story, Jean Valjean, having been turned away or ejected from all the other dwellings in a village, arrives as night falls, on the doorstep of the local bishop, Monseigneur Bienvenu. Such has been the power of the discourse of ethical categorisation and classification to which he has been exposed, that as the door opens and before the bishop is able to speak, Jean Valjean blurts out, by way of introduction, a catalogue of his own moral background, failings and tribulations:

See here! My name is Jean Valjean. I am a convict; I have been nineteen years in the galleys. Four days ago I was set free.... When I reached this place this evening I went to an inn, and they sent me away on account of my yellow passport, which I had shown at the mayor’s office, as was necessary. I went to another inn; they said: "Get out!" It was the same with one as with another; nobody would have me. I went to the prison, and the turnkey would not let me in.

42 None of this is to deny the importance of wisdom with regard to the distribution of gifts and nor is it to ignore Jesus’ adage of not ‘throwing pearls before swine’ (Matt 7:6). Indeed, the need for wisdom with regard to ‘stewardship’ of resources is one that is central to the Christian life. Our point here, is simply that such wise ‘stewardship’ is to be determined not according to the logic of human economics – the funding only of prospective ‘winners’ – but rather by the radical nature of the gospel, which operates according to a different ‘wisdom’ in which God chooses the ‘foolish’, ‘weak’, ‘lowly’ and ‘ despised’ to be the recipients of his gifts (1 Cor 1:26-29).

43 See further Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 111-112.

44 The bishop’s name is itself highly significant: ‘Bienvenu’ being French for ‘welcome’. For this episode see Il.iii - The heroism of passive obedience in Victor Hugo, Les Misérables, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1994), 51-54.
I crept into a dog-kennel, the dog bit me, and drove me away as if he had been a man; you would have said that he knew who I was. I went into the fields to sleep beneath the stars: there were no stars; I thought it would rain, and there was no God to stop the drops, so I came back into town to get the shelter of some doorway. There in the square I lay down upon a stone; a good woman showed me your house, and said: "Knock there!" I have knocked. What is this place? Are you an inn? I have money; my savings, one hundred and nine francs and fifteen sous which I have earned in the galleys, by way of my work for nineteen years. I will pay. What do I care? I have money. I am very tired... and I am hungry. Can I stay?45

After nineteen years of exposure to the discourse of social exclusion, Jean Valjean, despite being freed on parole, identifies himself according to the moral label attached to him by society – "I am a convict." Fully aware of the prejudice against such characters, and having himself taken on the tag of 'undeserving', Jean Valjean seeks to reassure his host that while he may be an unworthy recipient of 'welcome', he does however possess money and therefore is able to pay for any hospitality provided. The bishop's welcoming response: "Madame Magloire, put on another plate", suggests to Jean Valjean a misunderstanding and thus he reiterates his introductory refrain: "Stop! Not that, did you understand me? I am a galley-slave – a convict – I am just from the galleys" and presents his yellow passport of parole as corroborating evidence of his untrustworthy character. While on the second response from the bishop: "Monsieur, sit down and warm yourself: we are going to take supper presently, and your bed will be made ready while you sup", the new

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reality being offered begins to dawn on Jean Valjean,\textsuperscript{46} even then his predisposition leads him once again to stress that he can pay for his lodgings.

Elsewhere in this work we have alluded to the belief that central to the redemptive nature of hospitality and the overcoming of the ideological power of exclusion is the offering of, the reception, and the vocalising of, a new name and title. Such a claim is similarly observable in Hugo’s thought with the bishop’s referring to Jean Valjean as \textit{monsieur}. Hugo states:

\begin{quote}
Every time he said this \textit{monsieur}, with his gently solemn, and heartily hospitable voice, the man’s countenance lighted up. \textit{Monsieur} to a convict, is a glass of water to a man dying of thirst at sea. Ignominy thirsts for respect.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

In contrast to ethical categorisation, in which the Other is labelled according to his or her qualities – physical, social, moral – and hence classified as a ‘terrorist’, a ‘fundamentalist’, or a ‘pervert,’ is the identity-shaping nature of authentic naming. Ethical classification takes place outside of relationship, and in a form of self-fulfilling prophecy, the self, interacting with, and interpreting the actions of the Other in accordance with the limits and parameters of the category which it has imposed upon them, is therefore blinded to, and unable to discover the true reality of

\textsuperscript{46} Hugo writes: ‘At last the man quite understood; his face, the expression of which till then had been gloomy and hard, now expressed stupefaction, doubt, and joy, and became absolutely wonderful. He began to stutter like a madman.’ Ibid., 52.

\textsuperscript{47} Those familiar with the story of \textit{Les Misérables} either from Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil’s enormously successful musical, or from the multiple adaptations brought to film, miss out on one of the earlier scenes – l.x.: \textit{The bishop in the presence of an unknown light}. The scene details the disturbance of the bishop through his paradoxical experience of receiving the hospitality of a dying conventionist. Initially ‘shocked at not being called monseigneur’, as the bishop and conventionist engage in debate and discussion, the bishop’s own prejudice towards the conventionist gradually dissipates and the scene concludes with the priest kneeling on his knees seeking the benediction of the atheist, who has, meanwhile, expired. This scene in Hugo’s novel provides the background for the development of the bishop’s own radical ethical apophaticism and its expression in unconditional hospitality, and reinforces the point we have stressed throughout – that the offering of radical unconditional hospitality to the Other is inextricably connected to our willingness to receive hospitality from this same Other. Ibid., 25-33.
the Other. In contrast, and as we have observed earlier, the investiture of names upon the Other, taking place in the context of relationships of trust and love, constitutes the true identity of the Other, summoning them to actualise their authentic identity, to live out the truth of their bestowed name. 48

Near and Distant Neighbours: Proximity to the Other, Pilgrimage to the Periphery

Thus far we have suggested that the hospitality practiced by the ecclesial community that has received and continues to participate within God’s free and gracious hospitality will be characterised by joyfulness, cheerfulness, and extravagant generosity, and will be universal and unconditional by nature. Nevertheless, the question still remains, who, on a practical basis, is the Other to whom we are summoned to extend this radical kingdom hospitality? How, in a world of ‘infinite need’ do we decide who to offer assistance to? Questions of discerning to whom, and how, with the finite daily resources we have at our disposal we respond to the needs of the Other have always existed. However, living in the contemporary ‘globalised world’ where, surrounded by a milieu of media and bombarded daily by the ‘needs’ of a multitude of Others we are unable to claim ignorance of their plight, such ethical questions take on an even greater complexity. In such a ‘globalised world’, even when the motivation may not be one of seeking to justify ourselves, we

48 A particularly striking example of how ‘labels’ referring to general qualities – whether physical, social, moral, economic – can degenerate into a violent ‘name’ which, imbibed by the Other thus imprisons them in a world of terror, and the fact that such ‘labels’ usually testify more to the inhumanity of those bestowing the name than the one on whom the name is being bestowed, is found in the story of the Demon-Possessed man recounted in the gospels of Mark and Luke (Mark 5:1-20 & Luke 8:26-39). Serving as a scapegoat to the local Gentile community of which he is a part, the young man with epilepsy, suffering from uncontrollable fits, like Jean Valjean and other victims of exclusion, reaches the point of accepting the ‘legion’ of ‘names’ with which he is labelled. Despite the depraved condition Jesus finds him in, the ministry of restoring the man to wholeness, involving exorcism and the practical assistance of re-clothing, centres around the critical question Jesus asks the man: “What is your name?” Exorcised of the ‘legion of names’ and therefore freed from the imprisonment and torture stemming from the labels and classifications imposed upon him by the community, the young man now enters into a new identity and vocation, commissioned by Jesus to be the first Gentile missionary to the cities of the Decapolis.
nevertheless find ourselves uttering the same question as a young lawyer in an encounter with Jesus: "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29).

Miroslav Volf, responding to this difficult question, suggests that while 'Christians are obliged to love every human being' the 'noble' concept of 'the whole human commonwealth as an ethical community of love' is 'an impossible ideal.'49 For Volf, 'the claim that love's scope is universal does not imply that we do not differentiate in how we ought to love those with whom we have special relations and those with whom we do not.'50 Drawing upon the thought of Augustine and Aquinas, Volf argues that while we are called to give hospitality to the stranger this 'does not imply undifferentiated cosmopolitanism that would preclude giving special attention to our own family, ethnic group, nation, or broader culture. Not only is it right to maintain boundaries of discrete group identities....It is also right to devote one's energies so that the group to which we belong would flourish.'51

For Volf, it is those with whom we have developed 'thick' relations – 'proximate others' – who, on a daily basis, are the others who should be the primary recipients of our care and extension of love. However, while not necessarily his intention, does Volf's advocacy of a differentiation between 'thick' and 'thin' relations ultimately suggest a two-tiered approach to hospitality, one in which hospitality is extended first to those with whom we have 'thick relations' – i.e. biological/cultural relations/those who are Christian – and then, with the remaining reserves, offered to the more 'distant' strangers, to those we are more 'thinly' related to? And if so, does such an ordering, the prioritising of those to whom we are 'thickly' related over 'thinner' relations, really give testimony to the radical nature of God's hospitality? Indeed, does not our entrance into the ecclesia, new birth in Christ, the eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ, mean that our identity is no longer

50 Ibid.: 25.
51 Ibid.
determined according to biological bloodlines? Is not the gospel a radical call in which the familial demands of kin and relatives are relativised by the greater demand of the Kingdom? Indeed, Paul, noting the characteristic marks of those who have entered into the new life in Christ, rather than establishing a hierarchy or natural order, seems to see the care of fellow-believers ('thick' relations) and others ('thin' relations) as occurring together. Thus, in his letter to the churches of Rome Paul writes: 'Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers' (Rom 12:13). As Terry Veling suggests:

If our hospitality extends only to the intimate circle of our family and friends, then we are only doing what most people do. We are not extending our lives much further than the conventional ways of the world, whereby we offer friendship to those who we know will offer us friendship in return. Jesus' teaching, however, seeks to offer us a proposed world that we could inhabit.... The kingdom of God is concerned with friendship and hospitality to those who are not normally "our friends", to those who are not part of our "circle", to those who have no means of returning our hospitality – and this is the true test of what hospitality means. Otherwise, it is simply loving those who love us, which is all too easy, all too human.

Similarly, John Zizioulas suggests that it is the very action of loving a stranger more than one's immediate biological family which provides evidence of the transformation that has taken place within the believer, of the conversion from a 'biological' to an ecclesial existence. Zizioulas writes:

The result of this freedom of the person from the nature, of the hypostasis from biology, is that in the Church man transcends

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52 John 1:13; 6:52-58.
53 Does Jesus' broadening and widening of his kin (Matt 12:46-50, Mark 3:31-35) hold true for his disciples too?
exclusivism. When man loves as a biological hypostasis, he inevitably excludes others: the family has priority in love over “strangers,” the husband lays exclusive claim to the love of his wife—facts altogether understandable and “natural” for the biological hypostasis. For a man to love someone who is not a member of his family more than his own relations constitutes a transcendence of the exclusiveness which is present in biological hypostasis. Thus a characteristic of the ecclesial hypostasis is the capacity of the person to love without exclusiveness, and to do this not out of conformity with a moral commandment (“Love they neighbour,” etc.) but out of his “hypostatic constitution,” out of the fact that his new birth from the womb of the Church has made him part of a network of relationships which transcends every exclusiveness. 55

Nevertheless, even if our experience of God’s radical hospitality summons us to love beyond our immediate family and kin, to transcend exclusiveness and offer hospitality to the more distant stranger, this still begs the question, which stranger?

Throughout this work we have noted the extent to which ‘distance,’ as emphasised in the work of Levinas and Derrida, is ultimately problematic. In particular we have noted the extent to which the Other of our philosophical interlocutors, an Other, distant and separate, transcendent, beyond being, unable to be comprehended, is ultimately in danger of becoming simply an abstraction. As Oliver O’Donovan notes, many Christian theologians themselves appear embarrassed ‘by the element of proximity in the term “neighbour” (in Latin, proximus)’ and instead advocate for a ‘generalizing interpretation of the love-command’. However, parables like the Good Samaritan, O’Donovan contends, ‘should not be used to support an abstract moral schematization.’ The parable, O’Donovan rightly points out, is not about deciding

55 Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 57-8.
from a distance who one’s neighbours are, but instead stresses ‘the element of contingent proximity’.56

Karl Barth, in his *magnum opus*, *Church Dogmatics*, offers some helpful reflections on this difficult question of our responsibility, our call to express God’s love to ‘near’ and ‘distant’ neighbours. Like Volf and O’Donovan, Barth argues that God’s command and the call to responsibility for the Other does not take place in an abstracted vacuum, but rather is always received in a particular context. In contrast to a faceless Other beyond *being*, Barth posits that crucial to a genuine encounter with the Other, is the necessity that we must ‘look the other in the eye’.57 For Barth: ‘[B]eing with the other man means encounter with him. Hence humanity is the determination of our being as a being in encounter with the other man.’58

In a reiteration of our earlier reflections, Barth argues that it is in the process of *seeing* and of being *seen* that the ‘distinction and particularity’ of ‘man within the cosmos’, the distinction of the self ‘from the one who sees him’ becomes evident.59 For Barth, such *seeing* of the Other is not a one-way process, but rather a dynamic of mutuality. Thus Barth writes:

> To see the other thus means directly to let oneself be seen by him. If I do not do this, I do not see him. Conversely, as I do it, as I let him look me in the eye, I see him. The two together constitute the full human significance of the eye and its seeing. All seeing is inhuman in which the one who sees hides himself, refusing to be seen by the fellow-man whom he sees. The point is not unimportant that it is always two men, and therefore a real I and Thou, who look

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58 Ibid., 248. While gender-neutral language is to be preferred, as with the work of others featured—notably John Zizioulas—we have, for simplicity and clarity, left quotations unchanged.
59 Ibid., 250.
themselves in the eye and can thus see one another and be seen by one another.\textsuperscript{60}

Barth continues:

It is a great and solemn and incomparable moment when two men look themselves in the eye and discover one another. This moment, this mutual look, is in some sense the root-formation of all humanity without which the rest is impossible. But it is to be noted again that in the strict sense it can take place only in duality, as I and Thou look one another in the eye. Where a man thinks he sees and knows a group, or a group a man, or one group another group, ambiguity always arises.\textsuperscript{61}

Barth’s mutual seeing, dependent on proximity, is an important and necessary response to the optical-shaping power of contemporary media. We live in a globalised consumer world saturated with images, where the daily news broadcasts consists of a constant stream of staccato images, accompanied with un-emotive 45 second ‘news’ voice-overs, which, rather than bringing the Other \textit{closer}, has the opposite effect. Eventually the images become an undifferentiated blur, a sea of de-contextualised faces. Against the backdrop of this constant cycle of tragic human events – played as much to ‘entertain’ as to ‘inform’ and which remain ‘news’ for a day and then are replaced by the next breaking story – we are in danger of becoming ‘numbed’ to the sea of faces and of slipping into ‘compassion fatigue’. That such an overload of visual images can ultimately lead not to action but indifference is powerfully captured by Irish musician Bob Geldof, who sings:

\begin{quote}
I don’t care if the Third World fries  
It’s hotter there I’m not surprised  
Baby I can watch whole nations die
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[60] Ibid.
\item[61] Ibid., 251-2.
\end{footnotes}
And I don’t care at all\(^{62}\)

It is this problem – the fact that images in an image-saturated world eventually cease being *seen* and thus lose their impact – which results in P.R. and marketing companies endlessly seeking new ways to impact viewers with a *visual* of their product. We grow accustomed therefore to pictures of starving children with swollen bellies presented with emotive background music – images employed by ‘professional’ charities as a marketing tool, *faces* utilised for raising funds for this voiceless and ‘helpless’ Other.

True encounter of the Other, therefore, requires not merely the engagement of our eyes, but also our aural senses. Thus Barth states: ‘Being in encounter consists in the fact that there is mutual speech and hearing. The matter sounds simple, and yet it again consists in a complex action: I and Thou must both speak and hear, and speak with one another and hear one another.’\(^{63}\) Arthur Sutherland concisely summarises Barth’s important point here:

> Whereas seeing another human is critical, it is only in speaking and hearing that one crosses into the boundary of relationship. The real problem with encountering a stranger is our imagination: it is why we begin each new encounter with the question, Who are you?

\(^{62}\) Bob Geldof’s lyrics from his *The Great Song of Indifference* are obviously not an indication of Geldof’s own sentiments. After all, this is the rock-star who has spent over twenty-five years – beginning with the Ethiopian famines and ‘Band-Aid’ in 1985, and continuing through to his involvement with the *Jubilee* 2000 movement – campaigning for the *Others* of the ‘forgotten continent’: Africa. Geldof’s lyrics are, rather, a powerful use of irony. The poignancy of the song is heightened by the music to which the lyrics are set – an Irish jig. Inexorably moved to dance as Geldof engages in his lament of the indifference of the world, listeners find themselves confronted with the paradoxical nature of the post-modern world, one where – to use Neil Postman’s phrase – we ‘amuse ourselves to death’. See Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1985). Bob Geldof, "The Great Song of Indifference," on *The Vegetarians of Love* (Phonogram Ltd., 1990).

\(^{63}\) Barth, *CD III/2*, 252.
Hospitality requires being open to the self-declaration of others, allowing them to say who they are.64

Finally, reinforcing what we have already asserted, Barth argues that genuine encounters, built upon this seeing and hearing of the Other, are then characterised by two further principles: the rendering of mutual aid and a gladness of heart. True hospitality takes place in an encounter with the proximate other in which we see and hear the Other and allow ‘thick’ relations of mutuality and joy to develop.65

But what happens in the contemporary world characterised by fracture and isolated living, when those who are affluent and fortunate to live with plenty often live distant from the stark and painful realities of the broken, inhospitable world? While not necessarily living behind the walls of ‘gated communities’, much of the church – particularly in the West – is no longer proximate to those who are the excluded. How then, does O’Donovan’s belief that Christian ethics is characterised by a ‘contingent nearness,’ that our neighbor is the one whom we ‘chanc[e] to be next to... in the contingencies of life’66, actually operate? Dietrich Bonhoeffer, perhaps of all 20th century theologians, was most aware of this danger of the church becoming disconnected from the harsh inhospitable realities experienced by those classified as Others, scapegoated and excluded from society. For Bonhoeffer, it is the treatment of our most distant neighbour that provides evidence of our spirituality:

If beyond his neighbour a man does not know this one who is furthest from him, and if he does not know this one who is furthest from him as this neighbour, then he does not serve his neighbour but himself; he takes refuge from the free open space of responsibility in the comforting confinement of the fulfilment of duty. This means

64 Arthur Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 36. Our attention to the thought of Barth in this section, we owe to Sutherland.
65 See Barth, *CD III/2*, 260-66.
that the commandment of love for our neighbour also does not imply a law which restricts our responsibility solely to our neighbor in terms of space, to the man who I encounter socially, professionally or in my family. My neighbour may well be one who is extremely remote from me, and one who is extremely remote from me may well be my neighbour.67

Again, Barth offers some thoughts which help elucidate this important point. In contrast to abstracted universal Others, for Barth it is in the particularity of the concrete context and the relationships which compose one's life, that responsibilities to 'near and distant neighbours' emerge.68 While recognising the factors of language, location-geography, and history used to distinguish and differentiate 'near' from 'distant' neighbours, Barth refuses to succumb to a tendency within theological ethics of setting up different spheres of ethical behaviour. While we receive the command of God in a set context, Barth asserts that 'the concept of one's own people is not a

67 Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers, 259.
68 Barth states:

When he hears the command and is summoned to obey it, he does not float in empty space. The earth or lower cosmos which is his dwelling, his nature and history, is not like the surface of a sphere in the mathematical sense – a place on which every point is like every other and could be interchanged with it. He is not called to freedom in fellowship, to be a man or woman, a child, a father or mother, at a place which might just as well be that of another man and the particularity of which is conditioned merely by the fact that he is this individual and not another. God speaks with him as one who is what he is in relationship to these near and distant neighbours. Since God addresses him as the man who exists in these particular relationships to the men of his own and other races, they acquire for him the character of an allotted framework in which he has to express his own distinctive obedience. He is not told in what this obedience has to consist by the fact that it is required at this point.... But he is here given the field on which he must act when he does what is demanded by the command of God. It is here that he is before God and in fellowship. It is here that he is man or woman, child, father or mother. It is here that he is everything else that his nature carries with it. It is here that he is this individual. It is here that he is called and bound and made responsible. It is here that he must see and do the will of God. But "here" is the place where there are for him near and distant neighbours.

fixed but a fluid concept.” Echoing our earlier argument, Barth argues that the believer, shaped by their relationship with the Triune God is constantly being expanded and widened. For Barth, ‘the command of God wills that a man should really move out from his beginning and therefore seek a wider field.” Thus Barth argues:

The circle of his language, and therefore his near neighbours, and therefore his people, will imperceptibly grow wider and embrace these relative foreigners originally excluded from it. And if in this relationship between him and them it is a matter of obedience to the command of God, this will not take place merely by natural compulsion. He himself will wish it. By an inner necessity he will transcend the barrier of his own speech and people.

Further on, he states:

If His [God’s] Word and command are heard and accepted by a man, this man cannot be concerned only with his own people. Beyond this he must be concerned with this greater people. He is again led out of the narrower into the wider sphere. Called to obedience among near neighbours, in the same obedience he is turned to those who are distant.

Writing against the increasing rise of nationalistic identity, Barth argues that:

One’s own people in its location cannot and must not be a wall but a door. Whether it be widely opened or not, and even perhaps shut...
again, it must never be barred, let alone blocked up. The one who is really in his own people, among those near to him, is always on the way to those more distant, to other peoples.73

Barth acknowledges that this widening, this transcending of barriers, the movement of turning to the distant other creates a tension – referred to earlier as a ‘discomfort’ – but believes that the disciple, ‘obedient to the command of God will always be summoned and ready to endure this tension and to seek to overcome this antithesis.74 In a manner reminiscent of Derrida’s aporetic tension which serves to open us up to the Other, Barth argues that this tension leads to our circle of ethical responsibility being opened and constantly expanded. Barth, speaking of the Christian believer, states:

As he holds his near neighbours with the one hand, he reaches out to the distant with the other. And so the concept of his own people is extended and opened out in this respect too. It is true that he belongs wholly and utterly to his own people. But it is equally true that the horizon by which his people is surrounded and within which it exists as his people is humanity. It is equally true that he himself belongs wholly and utterly to humanity.75

Responding to the tendency to create a clear demarcation between ‘near’ and ‘distant’ neighbours and to establish of different spheres of responsibility, Barth emphatically concludes:

[W]e have to say at once that we are not dealing with two such spheres, but only one. At every point those who are near and those who are distant, our own people and humanity, have proved to be correlated concepts denoting one and the same reality. This one

73 Ibid., 294.
74 Ibid., 297-298.
75 Ibid., 298. Emphasis added.
reality is the way on which man finds himself from the narrower to the wider field, from his own people to foreigners. The one man is actually in this transition. He is not first and intrinsically in his own people, and then perhaps in humanity as well. In his own people he is on the way to humanity, and in humanity on the way from his own people. And so the command of God does not see and meet him either at the one point or the other, as a member of his own people and then perhaps as a participant in its relationships with other peoples, but always as one who is on the way from the one to the other.\textsuperscript{76}

Barth’s understanding of the terms ‘near’ and ‘distant’ neighbours as ‘fluid’ concepts provides an important clarification of our emphasis on ‘proximity’. It is axiomatic that hospitality does not take place with a faceless other but rather with a stranger who is proximate and who we therefore see and hear. However, the likelihood of encountering this stranger, our proximity to the other is not merely one of ‘chance’ – one determined by biology, culture (language or history), or, geographic boundaries – but rather is itself dependent on our obedience to God’s call. The fact that the identity of the believer is not determined by language, location, or history, but rather that one ‘is actually led into this sphere’ and ‘belongs to it only provisionally and temporarily,’ and that the ecclesial and eschatological self ‘is originally and finally free in relation’ to this sphere thus enables us to be called ‘to the way of a pilgrim’.\textsuperscript{77} As a pilgrim we are, by the discomforting of the Spirit, ‘led out of the narrower into the wider sphere’ and ‘turned to those who are distant.’\textsuperscript{78}

In summary, while we have argued that hospitality is not a practice that takes place from a distance but rather involves proximity to the Other, an important proviso to

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 302.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 297. Emphasis added
make is the extent to which such proximity to the Other is not left to chance but rather involves a conscious, active step of obedience on behalf of the believer. A defining feature therefore of those who have experienced the radical hospitality of the kingdom is the deliberate choice to relocate their lives, to ensure that an encounter with the stranger, the Other, is not an occasional or haphazard event, but rather a frequent and daily occurrence. Such a spirituality of proximity – a defining feature of Liberation Theology, with its recognition of God’s ‘preference for the poor’ – is manifested in the practices of ‘social relocation’ or ‘downward mobility’. If, as Ched Myers contends, Jesus’ model of ministry and God’s work of societal transformation takes place not from the centre of power (Jerusalem) outwards, but rather moves inwards from the margins (Galilee), then the evidence of the ecclesia following in the footsteps of Jesus and responding to the promptings of the discomforting Spirit is its relocation to the periphery, and its proximity therefore to the excluded and forgotten strangers. It is here in the wildernesses of our society, our own contemporary Galilee and Samaria regions, that a genuine transforming encounter with the Other – that is, Christ and the stranger – can occur, and that a new mode of living which witnesses prophetically against the prevailing discourses and ideologies of our day, begins to emerge. So it is that Jesus, intentionally choosing to take the shorter but more troubled route through Samaria, rather than hurrying through, tarries at wells, and in engaging ‘morally suspect’ locals in conversation, seeks to see and hear the tales of this Other. It is from this deliberate, purposed proximity and the ensuing development of a reciprocal relationship of mutual gift-exchange, that the life-giving water of a new kingdom gushes forth and begins its outward flow.

79 See Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man: A Political reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008). For a popularised version of Myer’s critically acclaimed book – described by fellow American theologian Walter Wink as ‘quite simply the most important commentary on a book of scripture since Barth’s Romans’ – and hence an introduction to his socio-literary approach to the gospel of Mark, see Ched Myers, Stuart Taylor, and Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, Say to This Mountain: Mark’s Story of Discipleship (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996).
Cruciform Hospitality

Nevertheless, both human finitude and the reality of human sinfulness mean that relations of mutuality characterised by joyful, abundant, and generous gift-giving are only glimpsed momentarily. Even in the redeemed community of the ecclesia, where human relations are undergoing transformation, the practise of such radical hospitality, and the existence of a new 'economy of grace' are not always immediately apparent. While Milbank and others are right in distancing a Christian ethic from an ethic based upon death, in which the loss of the self is seen as the highest good, the reality is that the theme of suffering punctuates the ethical vocabulary of the New Testament. Though writing to a 'new community', being transformed into a new hospitable home, New Testament writers do not call for an ethical imitation of the non-competitive gift-giving relations of the Trinity, but rather, recognising the reality of human finitude and the ravages of sin, call the new community to an imitation of the suffering and ultimately self-sacrificial love of Christ.80

In Ephesians, members of the new community, comprised of Jews and Gentiles, are called to 'be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' (Eph 5:1-2). In calling the believers at Philippi to give up self-interest – and a utilitarian disinterest – for a life of mutual interest, Paul argues that believers should seek to have their

80 Both William M. Swartley and Jim Fodor point to the indissociable connection between discipleship and suffering, noting how the themes of suffering and imitation are integrally connected in New Testament writings – particularly the Pauline corpus. Echoing our thoughts from the previous chapter regarding the Discomforting Spirit – who whilst 'comforting' us in our affliction, nonetheless, leads us into that suffering and affliction as He renovates us, making room for otherness – Fodor suggests that suffering is 'perhaps one of the most determinative, identifying marks of the church.' Fodor continues, stating: 'Suffering certified the disciples' witness as Christians; it marked them as followers of Jesus. In one important respect, then, mimesis is not only something that Christians do as much as it is something that Christians undergo; mimesis is something we suffer.' Jim Fodor, "Christian Discipleship as Participative Imitation: Theological Reflections on Girardian Themes," in Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies and Peacemaking, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 2000), 246-276, 250. In the same collection, see also Willard M. Swartley, "Discipleship and Imitation of Jesus/Suffering Servant: The Mimesis of New Creation," 218-245.
minds conformed to that of Christ, whose life, exemplified by humility and obedience, ultimately leads to the cross. While a new community in which love is exchanged freely may be the ultimate telos, this highest good is yet to come in all its fullness. That humanity still struggles against the divine embrace of the loving Triune God explains why the offering of gifts of love, the participating in God's action of hospitality, will involve risk, suffering, pain and sorrow.

While the world has been summoned to participate in a new economy of gracious gift-giving and loving exchange, inaugurated in Christ's resurrection, the ongoing reality of sin means that such hospitality is not always received or reciprocated. That the offer of unconditional and universal hospitality is not dependent upon the acceptance of this love-gift or upon a reciprocated response is the central emphasis of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus instructs his disciples to 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you'. Volf, commenting on Jesus' command to his disciples to 'be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,' notes that it is not the case 'that he was demanding that they emulate the perfection of the eternal divine love.' Rather, Volf says:

The disciples will be the children of their Father in heaven, not so much when they, echoing a divine kind of reciprocity love those who love them (v.46), but when they imitate equally a divine kind of one-sidedness of the God who makes 'the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous' (v.45) by loving their enemies and praying 'for those who persecute' them (v.44). It is not so much the giving that feeds on and delights in love's reciprocation that the disciples are called to emulate; that kind of giving will eventually take care of itself if the other kind of giving is practised, the kind that seeks to elicit the non-existent response of love in those who practise the very opposite kind of love. Jesus demanded not so much that we imitate the divine dance of love's
freedom and trust, but the divine labour of love's suffering and risk. The love that dances the internal love of the Trinity; the love that suffers is the same love that turned toward a world suffused with enmity. The first is the perfect love of the world to come; the second is that same love engaged in the transformation of the deeply flawed world that is. ⁸¹

To participate in God's generous work of hospitality, to receive God's grace and then to share this grace with others therefore involves, of necessity, walking the way of the Cross. As Paul states, 'to know Christ and the power of his resurrection' requires a 'sharing in his sufferings' (Phil 3:10-11). The action of the ecclesia in 'being-there-for-others,' the cheerful and joyful practise of lavish and excessive hospitality, offered unconditionally to those who, abused and ignored, live on the margins of our societies, will almost inevitably result in moments of betrayal, loss, humiliation, suffering and possibly death. And yet, such loss is not a masochistic ethic of self-sacrifice, nor a lauding of martyrdom. Rather, one can engage in such giving in the confidence that not only does our participation in Christ entail our own death, but also it ensures our participation in His resurrection victory over death itself. Daniel M. Bell Jr. powerfully summarises what we have sought here to convey:

As for the risk of death attendant upon the ceaseless generosity that characterizes a forgiven and forgiving people, this too is neither denied nor minimized. When giving that is unconstrained by scarcity, debt or loss confronts the economic order, it may begin to resemble the way of the cross. Yet... this aneconomic vision refuses to cede to death the central position in life. Against economy, this vision posits that it is not death that is the fulcrum of life; rather, it is God's honor — God's relentless determination to bring humanity to its created end — that enables the embodiment of gift exchange. In

⁸¹ Volf, "Trinity is Our Social Programme," 105-124, 114.
material terms, this means that resurrection is granted pride of place in this material order between the times. We can give and receive now, without end, because what appears to be a loss is recognized as finally nothing that matters.82

Ultimately, it is this belief, that God in Christ has overcome death and hostility once-for-all, that provides the basis for the practise of radical hospitality. Jesus’ declaration to his disciples remains true for those who await with expectation his return, and the banquet to end all banquets:

...you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. When a woman is in labour, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you (John 16:20-22).

Being Sustained:
Identity-Shaping Practices/Rituals/Sacraments of the Ecclesia

Our contention throughout this work has been that ‘hospitality’ is not in the first instance an ethical activity, but rather, is fundamentally a mode of being—a description of the relations of communion that exist within the Godhead. As the self enters through faith into this life of communion and begins to experience the richness of love of the hospitable God, so it is led, by necessity, to share this hospitality with others. Hospitality is therefore an ontological reality which as Alan J. Torrance notes, cannot ‘be reduced or translated into a deontological one—not even by advocating an ‘ethic of hospitality’. Torrance’s comments, in referring to the Christian action of

82 Bell Jr., "Forgiveness," 341.
worship, are equally eloquent in expressing this critical point: that hospitality is not fundamentally something 'we do', but rather an event 'done to us’ that we thus participate in. Torrance writes:

> It is precisely the theological insight that God's grace actually includes the provision of the very response demanded by it that distinguishes Christian worship [hospitality] from religious ritual [an ethic of hospitality]. Christian worship [hospitality] becomes thus the free participation by the Spirit in something that God perfects on our behalf, whereas worship [hospitality] as religious ritual [an ethic of hospitality] is a human task, namely one that ultimately can be little more than a vain attempt on the part of finite creatures to approach the 'Transcendent' and offer some requisite attitude.... Christian worship [hospitality] shares in a human-Godward movement that belongs to God and which takes places within the divine life. It is precisely into and within this that we are brought by the Spirit to participate as a gift of grace. It is this enhypostatic emphasis which liberates us from a model of participation conceived as purely subjective – and, therefore, ultimately inexplicable – act on the part of those who are echthroi te dianoia.... Worship [hospitality] is not some valiant subjective response, therefore. It is a gift of grace which is realised vicariously in Christ and which is received and participated in by the Spirit.83

If, however, hospitality is ultimately not something 'we do', but rather a practice that stems from 'who we are', how does the new 'ecclesial self' sustain this way of life in a world of hostility? How in a world where the discourse of terror constantly tells us that the Other is to be feared and in which the market reduces human relations to relations of contractual necessity and obligation, does the Ecclesia continue to remind

83 Torrance, Persons in Communion, 313-314.
itself that it gives a different account of human relationality – an account based not on fear, nor on economic scarcity, but rather on participation in God’s new economy of abundant and excessive love, and characterised by mutual gift-exchange, in which the needs of all are met?

The recent work of Christian ethicists such as Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder has brought back to the attention of the church the central importance that practices play in the formation of Christian character and virtues. In particular, their work has highlighted that the formation of character and virtues is not an individual process, but rather takes place as the self is incorporated into a community and imbibes the narratives and practices that are integral to this community and tradition.84

The complex and dynamic relationship between the practices of a community and the narrative/doctrines/beliefs from which these practices stem is observed by Serene Jones, who, drawing on the work of theorists J.L. Austin and Judith Butler, suggests that ‘human beings become certain types of persons by learning to perform the often unconscious but socially constructed scripts of personhood embedded in the language and cultures in which they live.’ Such scripts, Jones posits, ‘are not only performed by us; they also have the constitutive power to perform us.’85 Applying

84 That Christian ethics far from being a universalist ethic grounded in reason, is, rather a social ethic which emerges from the gospel and is lived out by the ecclesial community is the central tenet of John Howard Yoder’s The Politics of Jesus (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), and Hauerwas’ The Peaceable Kingdom. The theology of Barth and the communitarian philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre play an important role in both Yoder and Hauerwas’ ethics. On the influence of Barth in Yoder’s thought see John Howard Yoder, “Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics: Gospel Ethics versus the Wider Wisdom,” in The Royal Priesthood: Essays on Ecclesiology and Ecumenical, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 102-126. For introductory readers exploring the influence of MacIntyre’s thought on Christian ethics see Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation, eds., Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), and Jonathan R. Wilson, Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre’s After Virtue (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997).

this imagery specifically to the Christian community, Jones suggests one way to conceive of doctrines is as "‘dramatic scripts’ which Christians perform and by which they are performed’. 86 Jones contends that:

When one is sanctified, one performs and is performed by the script of divine love that comes to us in Jesus Christ, a script mediated to us ecclesially. It is the script of Christian identity, and its patterns of movement and thought are the patterns that comprise the essence of our Christian practices. This script, it is important to note, is not just something that Christians learn to enact. Rather, as the very context within which we become who we are, it is the script of our most fundamental selves. As such, when we perform and are performed by grace, our lives take on the form that we are." 87

While Jones’ concept of doctrine as a ‘dramatic script’ is useful for reconfiguring an understanding of how doctrine and practices relate to one another, it is important to note that except in the formal environment of academic theology, believers rarely engage directly with the ‘propositional statements’ of Christian doctrines. Rather, Christian doctrines are themselves communicated through performance and participation in communal practices and sacraments fundamental to the life of the Ecclesia: the reading of the narrative of Scripture, the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, and the celebration of the Eucharist.

86 Ibid., 75.
87 Ibid., 60. Emphasis added. Jones, akin to our suggestion of the Spirit as fashion designer and wardrobe assistant, makes use of the metaphor of ‘adornment’ utilised by French feminist theorist Luce Irigaray, and contends that:

[A]dorning materials determine not only how others perceive us, but also how we perceive and embody our understanding of our own deepest identity in relation to others.... When a person of faith “puts on Christ” (as Paul often remind us in his epistles), that person wears forms of behaviour, belief, actions, attitudes, and specific practices that conform that person to Christ. Such a person puts on the law of love, and this gift of grace adorns the self, giving specificity, edged, skinned determinativeness to the self in Christ. When one is sanctified, one is regenerated, formed anew – adorned in the grace of God’s redeeming love.

The Communal Reading of Scripture

The understanding of Scripture as a ‘script’ which the Christian community performs is suggested by a number of writers. In his book *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*, Samuel Wells draws upon a highly suggestive essay by N.T. Wright to suggest that the salvation narrative can be conceived of as a five-act drama: (1) Creation; (2) Israel; (3) Jesus; (4) The Church and (5) Eschaton. Placing particular stress on the Church’s performance in Act Four, Wells argues that this performing ‘requires more than repetition, more even than interpretation’ of the text of Scripture which narrates the first three and half acts of the drama. Neither though should the ethical actions of the Church consist of ‘origination, or creation de novo.’ Rather, Wells suggests, ‘the key to abiding faithfulness, is improvisation.’

Such performing-improvisation, however, is only possible as the community gathers to read Scripture and allows this script to re-shape its life. Thus, as Richard Hays suggests: ‘We learn what the text means only if we submit ourselves to its power in

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88 See N.T. Wright, "How Can the Bible be Authoritative?," *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 7-32. Well’s draws on N.T. Wright’s now well-known Shakespearian play analogy, in which Wright proposes that Scripture be understood as four acts: (1) Creation; (2) Fall; (3) Israel; (4) Jesus; with the New Testament – in its description of the newly inaugurated community, the Church, ‘giving hints... of how the play is supposed to end’ – being seen as the first scenes of the fifth act. Wells, astutely observes that Wright’s model, in putting the church at the end of the story, forgets that ‘the story is fundamentally about God’ and therefore ‘insufficiently distinguishes the church from the eschaton.’ Well’s modified five-act model, with its stress on the Church performing in Act Four continues to recognise ‘a genuinely human dimension to the drama’, while re-affirming that the eschaton and the climax of the drama is ultimately in the hands of God, not humanity. Wells, *Improvisation*, 52-53. See also Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, 5 vols., vol. 2 (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992).


90 The fact that Scripture can only be interpreted and embodied in the life of a community is stressed by Nicholas Lash, who asserts that: ‘The performance of Scripture is the life of the church. It is no more possible for an isolated individual to perform these texts than it is for him to perform a Beethoven quartet or a Shakespeare tragedy.’ Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 43. Emphasis added. Barth makes the same point with the emphatic statement that ‘any attempt to hear and receive the Word of God in isolation’, results in ‘no real hearing and receiving’. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of the Word of God, Vol. 1/2*, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. G.T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 588.
such a way that we are changed by it.”\textsuperscript{91} Or, as Wrights puts it: ‘We must allow scripture to teach us how to think straight, because by ourselves we don’t, we think bent, we think crooked.... the Spirit broods over us as we read this book, to straighten out our bent thinking’.\textsuperscript{92} In the end, the Church’s ‘performing’ of Scripture is dependent on Scripture’s reforming and transforming of our worldview. Scripture is best understood not primarily as an object which we interpret, comprehend and then perform, but rather as the interrogating subject which deconstructs our lives and re-narrates them into a new script. That is, it is not Scripture that is read by the community, but rather, first and foremost, Scripture that reads us.

The analogy of Scripture as a dramatic text evocatively conveys the belief that Christian ethical practices are neither grounded in universal principles accessible to individuals through the exercise of reason, nor consists in a strict formalism. Rather, Christian ethical practices are an innovative and risky exercise, which emerge from a community as they seek to interpret and participate in God’s story of salvation within their own lives and context. This dynamic, in which through the ecclesial practice of reading Scripture we find ourselves being re-narrated and transformed as agents and therefore empowered to perform this hospitable script, is also evident in the Christian practice of corporate prayer.

\textit{The Lord’s Prayer}

\begin{quote}
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{92} Wright, "Bible Authoritative?,” 26.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

(Matthew 6:9-13)

To engage in the daily recitation of the Lord’s Prayer is, for believers, to be reminded afresh of the new community and the distinct narrative of which they are now a part. To pray ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed (holy) is your name’ is to recognise again that the Father is not my God, a God limited by national, cultural, gender or ethnic differences, but rather that the Wholly Other, transcendent in His otherness, is Father to all. To join in prayer with those one has never met in Iraq, Rwanda, Palestine, Congo, Afghanistan, Colombia and Pakistan, with those who suffer on a daily basis the distress caused by the reality of hostility in the world, is to state that they are not mere faceless and voiceless Others, but are, in Christ, brothers and sisters. In appealing that ‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’, believers both express their deepest desire that the hostility and enmity in the world will be overcome by the radical incoming peace of the kingdom, while renouncing the propensity to seek to bring about this reality according to their own time-frame and strategies. They are reminded that the kingdom of peace they long for, ultimately begins with the quelling of their own fears, the conversion of their own hostility. In praying ‘Give us our daily bread’ believers acknowledge that the gifts provided by God are not merely for personal sustenance, but, to truly be gifts, must be passed on and shared with others in greater need. And yet, this ‘passing on’ of the gift of bread, it is reaffirmed, is only possible through the empowering grace of God. Thus, in asking for ‘forgiveness from our debts’, believers confess the extent to which they continue to be marred by sin – that there remain recalcitrant aspects of their lives which they struggle to surrender to God’s grace. In such an act of confession it is therefore impressed upon them anew that any attempt to ‘pass on’ God’s grace to
Others goes hand in hand with a ‘passing over’ of the sins of commission and omission that have been committed against them, that the giving of gifts must be accompanied by a for-giving of the hurts suffered at the hands of Others.

Acknowledging that their feeble attempts to ‘pass on’ grace are themselves utterly dependent on both God’s initial ‘passing over’ – His overcoming and thus cancelling of a debt economy that leads to bondage and death – and His ongoing graciousness and transformation, believers are led to humbly recognise again their reliance as recipients of this grace. Thus, those who have received forgiveness, offer forgiveness and those who have experienced the hospitality of God seek, through his empowering, to offer this hospitality onto Others. Finally, the community of praying believers is led to admit the temptation it faces to hoard resources, to seek distance and comfort away from the discomforting gaze of the Other. Aware of such temptations, whispered by the Accuser through the medium of their televisions, talk-back radio, newspapers, web-blogs and neighbourhood gossip, they ask that God by his Spirit will free them from such temptation and instead will lead them down the difficult, but ultimately more life-giving pathway, the path that leads to the stranger.

Late in his life Karl Barth became fond of stating that: "To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world." In reciting the Lord’s Prayer, believers participate in a practice that opens them once more to God’s disordering of their own internal hegemony such that they may therefore participate in His gracious purposes of re-ordering the world.

**Eucharist**

Finally, critical to the sustaining of a life of hospitality is participation in the character-forming sacrament of the Eucharist. Different theological traditions interpret the Eucharist in different ways. For some, the Eucharist, though inaugurated by Christ, is essentially a human practice, which primarily functions
symbolically, as a means to assist the community in 'remembering' the story of Christ. Other Christian communities, harking back to the early church tradition of the 'Love-Feast', suggest that the Eucharist is best understood ethically, as a summons to share one's resources and food with others. In other sacramental traditions, the Eucharist involves the actual metaphysical presence of the risen Christ, and participation in this sacrament results in ontological transformation of the self as the believer takes the body of Christ into oneself. Following the same dynamic we noted with regard to Scripture and the Lord’s Prayer we would contend that that the Eucharist cannot be reduced to mere human practice but is first and foremost a divine action of hospitality in which we are called to participate.

The Eucharist does not consist of a mere subjective recollection of Christ's death, the remembrance of an ethical 'hero' we seek to honour and then emulate. Instead, the Eucharist is an actual encounter with the Risen Christ, the one who through his death and resurrection has overcome death and hostility. Participation with others in this Love-Feast is dependent therefore on an encounter with the first Gift-Giver, the 'origin' of the love shared amongst those gathered around the table. However, as we gather around the table to feast upon the gifts, we are called to respond appropriately to these gifts. Our ability to be truly ‘grateful’, to offer ‘thanks’ and to engage in the life-giving cycle of gift reception, thanksgiving and passing-on, is dependent on the presence of grace within our lives. Receiving the gift of Christ’s body and blood we are confronted once again with the actions or inaction which function as obstacles, blocking the passage of transforming grace. Hence the instructions of Jesus, that to engage in the dynamic of gift-giving, to receive God’s gift and thus to participate as a vessel of God’s divine love requires a reconciliation with others with whom we may be angry (Matt 5:23-24). Likewise, Paul stresses that for the Love-Feast really to be a feast of love requires that those present are ‘discerning the body’ (1 Cor 11:27-34). To participate in God’s gifts summons us to

93 Eucharist is derived from the Greek word ‘eukaristos’, meaning ‘grateful’ or ‘thankful’.
pass-over the barriers that divide. It is the deconstruction of barricaded lives and the bringing near of the Other who had been distant, which allows us to then pass-on God's gifts, to participate in the action of mutual gift-giving.

Thus, as with the reading of Scripture, and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer, participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist is, finally, not about comprehension, nor understanding, but rather about transformation. The presence of Christ in the Eucharist is not something to be seized and held on to but rather is a presence which in eluding our grasp, transforms us. The face of the Risen Christ is not something which we see, an idol, trapped within the confines of human subjectivity, but an eikon which sees and dazzles us, transforming us with its Transcendence. Or, as Cavanaugh suggests: In our participation in the Eucharist it is not we who are doing the consuming, but rather, we who are being consumed.94

Summary

In this chapter we have outlined the shape of the new ecclesial life entered into by those indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. In contrast to either the formalised contractual relations of market-hospitality, or the ethics of self-sacrifice proffered by our philosophical interlocutors, we have contended that the Ecclesia is the site of an alternative – and the authentic – form of human life. It is within the Ecclesia that human beings have the opportunity to find their true identity as gift-givers: receiving God's hospitality and empowered to pass on such grace, building relationships of mutuality in which gifts of love are exchanged with others. The performance of such gift-giving, in a world still suffering the ravages of sin, is, we have suggested, characterised by five features: (1) the cheerfulness of the giver; (2) the extravagant nature of the gift; (3) the indiscriminate – universal and unconditional – nature of the

94 Cavanaugh, Being Consumed.
giving; (4) the proximity of the giver to those who are receiving the gift, and (5) a quiet fortitude and patience in the face of suffering which stem from a confidence that Christ's resurrection means that hostility and inhospitality will not have the last word.

The sustaining of this life of hospitality, lived in the midst of the contemporary globalised world of endless restlessness, ongoing antagonism and antipathy, and overwhelming need, is, we have argued, found not in post-modern discourses, nor in the acquisition and consumption of the never-ending novelties of the market. Rather, it is through participation in the centuries-old practices and sacraments of the Ecclesia – Scripture, Prayer, Eucharist – that human beings finds themselves re-narrated into a new story, imbibe the principles of a new economy, and experience an ongoing transformation from hostile selves, fearful of others, to hospitable selves.
Jesus' plans to create a new community, a new covenant people who through their lives will witness to the in-breaking hospitality of God’s Kingdom begin in a rather inauspicious way. His choice of disciples seems somewhat unusual to say the least. Two sets of brothers hailing from Galilee — sometimes friends, sometimes competitors — whose ‘friendly rivalry’ from their dirty, smelly and unpredictable existence as fishermen spilt over into this new domain as disciples. James and John had particularly fiery tempers and liked to ensure they came out on top. Also, like other Galileans, their fierce regional loyalty was accompanied by distrust, often extending to an outright disdain, of Others who did not fit into their plans. Philip, another Galilean from the same town as Simon and Andrew — practical and down to earth — always wanting to know with certainty the ‘where to’ and ‘what for’ (John 14:8), and his friend, Bartholomew. Then there was Matthew, the tax-collector, who understandably kept good distance from the other Simon who made it clear what he thought of this ‘low-life’ collaborator. Blood on the floor would not have been a good look when the ‘Rabbi’ was proclaiming lofty and unrealistic ideals such as ‘love of one’s enemies.’ There were a bunch of others jostling for position, seeking to curry favour with the Rabbi, and then Judas, who tended to stay aloof of these inner-group dynamics and power politics, concerned either with pragmatic questions: Was there sufficient money in the coffers to fund the ongoing ‘ministry’ of the Rabbi and support crew? Or, with P.R. questions: How was ‘the ministry’ being received by the power-brokers of the day? Altogether, as a rag-tag, motley assemblage, such a travelling troupe promised to be anything but harmonious.
Early in his ministry, Jesus organises a field-trip, an 'experiential-education' module, designed to expose his closest followers to the relations of mutuality integral to life in His Kingdom (Luke 9:1-6). This diverse group of disciples are sent to the villages with no resources: bag, bread, money or tunic, their 'ministry' and indeed personal sustenance, utterly dependent on the gifts provided by those they seek to 'minister' to. And yet, while the disciples receive the welcome of the villagers, their own reception of these 'needy people' is less forthcoming when the crowds later turn up uninvited, jeopardising their planned private audience with their Rabbi. Indeed, in comparison to the warm welcome they had received from the villages, which had therefore sustained them, allowing them to 'bring the good news and cure diseases', the disciples' response to these same crowds is barely veiled hostility: "Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place" (9:12). It could be suggested that such an instruction is simply an act of pragmatism by the disciples who are beginning to develop the necessary skills required for successful event management. But is this really the case? Could it be, rather, that the disciples, seeking to continue spinning tales of their exploits performed during 'their mission' are envious of the crowds who now threaten to rob them of time with their Rabbi? While the disciples see the hospitality extended to them by the villagers as only right, a de-facto payment for their 'teaching and healing' services rendered, here the disciples receive no benefit from the crowds, who rather pose a serious risk, threatening to drain the group's limited resources.

Jesus' audacious proposal that rather than send the crowds away to purchase their own provisions the disciples should cater for them, is met with bewilderment by his disciples. Keen to display their common-sense and increasing responsibility, the disciples point out that they have extremely scarce resources – five loaves and two fish, sufficient to feed the thirteen of them. And then realising that the ever-enigmatic Jesus must be having a laugh at their expense, they join in on the
presumed joke, comically stating: "...unless we are to go and buy food for all these people!" (9:13). After all, who purchases food for over five thousand 'free-loaders', most of whom they barely know? Who hosts, on the spur of the moment, a giant picnic catering for all-comers?

Having for once cottoned onto Jesus’ humour, the more at ease disciples – awaiting the Rabbi’s instructions now on how they will plan their retreat and where therefore they will share in their simple fare of bread and fish – are stunned when Jesus proceeds to press the now tiresome joke further. Seating the throngs gathering before them into groups of fifty or so, the increasingly confused disciples find themselves, reluctantly at first but in mounting awe and amazement, participating in a miracle of hospitality. With mouths full and eyes wide open, the disciples find themselves caught up in a new economy, partaking in a foreshadowing of the ultimate banqueting feast.

Such an experience would be expected to alter one’s conception of hospitality and gift-giving. Alas, while such incidences – including epiphanic encounters with Moses and Elijah – open the disciples to a new miraculous realm of the Kingdom, they, like ourselves, are all too ‘human’ in their brokenness. Competition, not mutuality, still characterises their relations with one another (9:46-48). Making their way down to Jerusalem for an expected confrontation with the religious and political elites, the disciples, pausing in the region of Samaria, attempt to find a resting place for their Rabbi. Snubbed by the Samaritan villagers on account of their intended destination, James and John, true to their name and in an exhibition of the fiery temper fuelled by an inner hatred towards the Other, seek to demonstrate their new faith in the miraculous by commanding fire down on their inhospitable hosts. Inauspicious indeed.
Time passes and two disciples, having travelled along with the twelve and others on this journey of learning and discovery, now make their way from the turbulence of Jerusalem to the relative safety of Emmaus. With heavy hearts and confused minds, fearful of the authorities, the two pedestrians are engaged in intense debate and discussion. As they seek to make sense of the tumultuous and ultimately traumatic events of the previous ten days – events which have culminated in the outrageous ‘idle tale’ of ‘hysterical women’ verified by Simon Peter – the two disciples are at first unaware of the presence of the fellow traveller. Interrupted from their discussion, suspicious and fearful, their faces downcast both emotionally and physically, vigilantly avoiding eye contact, they are reluctant to engage with this unknown stranger, and do so only when it begins to appear as though the newcomer is oblivious to the events that have transpired in Jerusalem. With a note of incredulity, Cleopas, one of the disciples, sets about filling the naive newcomer in on the events of their roller-coaster journey, revealing who they are and narrating how and why it is that they come to be here on this road.

It is at the conclusion of their account, that this stranger then begins the process of re-narrating their story, discovering meaning within the seemingly chaotic chain of events, lifting the shroud of confusion from their veiled minds. Indeed, such is their intrigue at this stranger, able to re-cast what appears to them as a jumbled set of random moments into a larger meta-narrative with meaning and purpose, that the two disciples, despite their fears and in a testimony to the gradual transformation that has taken place within them during their long journey of discipleship, now urge the stranger to receive their offer of hospitality and join them for an evening of further discussion.

Responding to their invitation in the affirmative, their guest, in actions that recall earlier experiences of hospitality and table fellowship ‘takes their bread, blesses it,
breaks it and offers it back to them’. Immediately the eyes of the disciples are opened, and they realise that their dinner guest is in fact the resurrected Jesus, their dinner-guest, the true Host. Their gaze upon Jesus does not, however, bring closure to the moment; the now recognised face of Jesus is not captured or comprehended as a totality. As with other post-resurrection appearances, the seeing of the resurrected Jesus leads not to the ending of the story, but rather serves as the beginning of a new narrative. As with all those who through the reading of Scripture, participation in the Eucharist, and offering of hospitality to the ‘stranger’, experience an encounter with the living Christ, what follows is not inactivity and contemplative navel-gazing, but rather an immediate impulse to mission. And so, in the dwindling light of day the disciples re-trace their steps, returning excitedly to Jerusalem to testify to the dazzling, dawning light of the new post-resurrection world. So it is, with those who encounter the reality of the risen Jesus and experience the radical hospitality of the Kingdom which overcomes inner hostility and transforms the self. Summoned out from behind closed doors where they hide from fear, they are empowered to go and live as agents of hospitality, signs of the new economy of the kingdom in the world in which they reside.

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1 Luke 9:16 and 22:19
2 Such imagery draws on Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance to the disciples in a locked and darkened room, where they hide ‘for fear of the Jews’ (John 20:19-23). Jesus’ entrance, while bringing peace to the disciples, does not lead to a closure to otherness, a stationary stagnancy within the Same. Rather, the breath of the Holy – aka ‘Disturbing’ – Spirit gives rise to a missionary posture as Jesus commands that those who have received the gift of peace are now to enter into the world to interact and engage with those they fear. Thus his disciples are sent as bearers of peace, living lives of forgiveness in a world of hostility which retains debts for offences perpetrated by others.
Conclusion.

Grounded Hospitality: Community, Ecological Care and Inter-Faith Relationships

Central to this work has been the contention that building relationships with the stranger has become increasingly difficult in an age where the dual discourses of the 'war on terror' and 'the market' hold sway. The influence of these pervasive discourses means Others come to be conceived as threats. The stranger is either to be explicitly feared – a potential 'terrorist' coming to 'destroy civilization' and our place in it – or, is simply another abstract commodity, at best, to be 'tolerated', or at worst, competing for limited resources, one to be struggled against.

In response to this understanding of human relations, essentially Hobbesian by nature, Emmanuel Levinas' and Jacques Derrida's philosophies of hospitality summon the individual to live not in disregard or fear of the Other, but rather to recognise that the Other is already within the self. That is, the self's very existence, constituted by the call issuing from the face, is an existence of 'infinite responsibility' for the Other.

The Levinasian and Derridean emphasis on the primacy of the Other and their placing of ethical subjectivity at the centre of their philosophies provides a much needed corrective to much of Western philosophical thought. Likewise, that the central metaphor which guides their ethical thought is 'hospitality' immediately strikes a chord with Christian theology and practice. Nonetheless, despite the richness of their respective thought ultimately we have determined that the ethical philosophies of Levinas and Derrida fail to provide a stable foundation upon which to construct an explicit Christian account of hospitality.
Throughout this work we have noted that the term ‘hospitality’ itself, and therefore the practise of such an ethic, are shaped by an underlying ontology – narrative of being – and, by accompanying conceptions of eschatology and teleology. Thus, while Levinas insists that ‘My task does not consist of constructing ethics; I only try to find its meaning’,\(^1\) the very nature of this meta-ethical project, with its search for meaning, involves – implicitly, at least – engagement with ontological questions. While the Levinasian and Derridean accent on the mystery and the non-classificatory nature of the Other is a positive feature of their thought, the accompanying emphasis on separation and the asymmetrical and unilateral structure they advocate for human relations appears rooted in a belief that violence between the self and the Other is unavoidable. It is the eschewal of any overarching narrative and the failure to explicitly offer an account of the *telos* that motivates human ethical behaviour, or to offer a hope that the ‘hostility’ that besets the world will eventually be overcome, which diminishes the achievement of Levinas’ and Derrida’s ambitious projects. Geoffrey Bennington summarises our findings well when, referring to Derrida’s philosophy, he observes: ‘Deconstruction... quite consistently, gives no grounds for any doctrinal epistemology, ontology or ethics’\(^2\). Indeed, the fact that ‘deconstruction’, while critiquing other theories is considerably more reticent about offering replacement theories or accounts – that is, in engaging in the process of ‘reconstruction’ – is a failing that Derrida himself is aware of. Derrida states:

> I don’t think deconstruction ‘offers’ anything as deconstruction. That is sometimes what I am charged with: saying nothing, not offering any content or any proposition. I have never ‘proposed’ anything, and that is perhaps the essential poverty of my work. I never offered anything in terms of ‘this is what you have to know’ or ‘this is what

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\(^1\) Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 90.  
you have to do'. So deconstruction is a poor thing from that point of view.³

It is this 'essential poverty', and therefore the vacuity of terms such as 'difference' and the 'Other', which means that this post-structuralist 'ethic of hospitality' is also, ultimately, incapable of responding to the totalising, hegemonic and exclusionary discourses of the contemporary world. Within the discourse of global capitalism, differences become syncretistically and subtly absorbed and then marketed as new lifestyles to adopt, new products to be consumed. And, as Alistair Kee suggests: 'from the perspective of the ideology of exclusion/inclusion the excluded are not the Other from whom we might learn but merely the Lesser at whom we take fright.'⁴ 'Otherness', 'difference' and 'hospitality' abstracted from any broader narrative account easily become subsumed and subverted by the prevailing ideologies of the day.⁵

In contrast, the historical Christian faith offers a radically different account of the world than either that proclaimed by contemporary ideological discourses, or given by our French philosophers. According to Christian theology, a life of hospitality ultimately finds it basis not in a summons back to human ethicity, but rather is discovered as humanity obediently responds in faith to the address of the Divine Other, putting its hope in the hospitable actions of the Triune God, who, through the Incarnation of the Other and his 'once for all' substitutionary sacrifice, has overcome hostility and death. In contrast to the deconstructed self whose relationship with the Other is of a unilateral and non-reciprocal nature, the Christian account testifies to the possibility of a redeemed relationality. As the Spirit – the Disturbing Other – transforms the optics and desires of the self, the Other comes to be seen not as one to be feared nor one to be struggled against. Rather, as the self surrenders to the

⁴ Kee, "Blessed are the Excluded," 362.
⁵ Ibid., 363.
overcoming-embracing love of God found in Christ, the appropriative urge to assimilate and consume the Other is replaced by a desire to enter relations of genuine mutuality.

The emergence of such relationships within a world scarred by histories of hostility and enmity, involves a long journey involving suffering and pain. To undertake such a pilgrimage requires courage and entails a spirituality of ongoing repentance and forgiveness. Still, despite its arduous nature, such a sojourn can be undertaken with confidence for two reasons: Firstly, because one travels the road not alone, but alongside others, and most significantly with a guiding – though often unseen – companion who has trod this path before. And, secondly, because there is the empowering hope that beyond this way of the cross is the promise of resurrection joy.

Unfortunately, the church, all too human, often loses sight of this radically ‘good news’ as imagination and desires fall prey to the distorting power of other narratives. There have though, even during the darkest periods of human history, by God’s grace, existed remnant communities, who through their faithful imitative response, have continued to give testimony to God’s in-breaking hospitality. During the Second World War, Bonhoeffer, lamenting the state of the church in Germany, declared with hope:

The restoration of the church will surely come from a sort of new monasticism which has in common with the old only the uncompromising attitude of a life lived according to the Sermon on the Mount in the following of Christ. I believe it is now time to call people to this.6

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With the decline of western Christianity and the emergence of a new post-Christendom context,\footnote{See Philip Jenkins, \textit{The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).} it is the appearance of such new monastic communities which, as well as keeping Christian faith alive in western societies, offer perhaps a glimpse – though imprecise and dim – of such an alternative hospitable reality. Christine Pohl, in an appendix to her \textit{Making Room}, highlights eight examples of such communities. Despite their different foci – ministry with the disabled, the poor, homeless, refugees, prisoners or students – their different settings, the distinctive spiritual practices that nourish them, and the different theological traditions upon which they draw, common to each of these communities is the practice of hospitality.\footnote{See Pohl, \textit{Making Room}, 188-195. Alongside Pohl’s list – which includes communities such as L’Abri, L’Arche and the Catholic Worker – other notable communities, which, despite their small size, have, as Bonhoeffer suggested, played a critical role in the ongoing restoration of the Western church include Taizé, Iona, Sojourners, and, more recently, A Rocha, and the emergence of other neo-monastic communities such as The Simple Way in the United States. Despite the different charisms, contexts and structures of each of these communities – whether places of silent retreat and prayer, worship, teaching, ecological activism or solidarity with the poor, gathered or dispersed, whether following formal monastic structures or being of a more organic nature – the \textit{raison d’être} of each of these communities is the desire to model an alternative way of life in the chaos of late western modernity.}

A particularly valuable piece of research flowing from this intersection between theology and praxis would be to explore the articulated theologies of these new emerging communities.\footnote{While current research is being undertaken regarding the sociological dimensions of these emerging communities, to my knowledge, there is no research that has been done along explicitly theological lines.} Does the emphasis on the practice of ‘hospitality’ within such communities emerge from close attention to particular theological traditions? And, if so, which particular theological traditions are mined, and which are ignored, perhaps out of suspicion that they have nothing worthwhile to offer? Likewise, with the use of Scripture, which books and narratives are used to support ‘theologies of hospitality’ and which are avoided?

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While beyond the scope of this current project, another avenue of fruitful enquiry would be to apply the theological notion of hospitality we have developed to two particular ethical concerns. The first of these is the contemporary ecological crisis. As noted in passing earlier, Levinas, his attention focused on inter-human relations, seems almost oblivious to the possibility of how his thought may be applied with regard to the non-human Other. And, while Derrida touches on such questions, he never expands his ethics of hospitality explicitly into the field of ecological concerns. However, in an age of anthropogenic global climate change, it is becoming abundantly clear that the plight of the human Other is inextricably related to the condition of the non-human Other – eco-systems and the planet as a whole. Inter-human and ecological ethics cannot be treated as separate or distinct areas of discussion but must be approached together. What might a Christian theology of hospitality mean not only when the spectre of global warming refugees looms large, but also when the very nature of life itself is threatened? What does the ‘welcoming of the Other’ entail if the Other, usually construed as a stranger on the doorstep, is understood also as the threatened species living unbeknownst in the backyard? How might the metaphor of ‘hospitality’ either work alongside, or perhaps, even move beyond metaphors more typically used to frame a Christian ethical response to the created world: metaphors such as dominion, stewardship, or even, partnership?

A second area of potential ethical application for such theologies of hospitality would be inter-religious relationships. While the twentieth century supposedly heralded the end of religious-motivated conflict, the flames of religious violence, post 9/11, have been re-ignited. Since 9/11, moderate voices within both Islam and Christianity have been at pains to point out that the conflict is not between ‘religions’. But the reality must be faced that many religious leaders – both Islamic and Christian – their

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10 For discussion on this see chapter two, note 16 above.
theology based on an apocalyptic millenarianism, do see the physical-military struggle as part of the cosmic battle between ‘good and evil’.

In such a context, the practice of hospitality has a critical role in enabling and enhancing the building of relationships of mutual understanding and respect. Historically, inter-religious dialogue has often been an activity engaging theologians, clerics and religious leaders, in venues such as conference centres, religious institutions or universities. But in a world saturated with discourse and rhetoric, is the sharing of yet more words, even in the form of ‘civil’ dialogue, the most appropriate response for cultivating understanding between religious devotees? Does inter-religious dialogue foster the reciprocity essential to the formation of a more just and peaceful ‘global village’? Some suggest that the starting point for inter-religious exchanges is not dialogue, but rather hospitality. Pierre-François De Bethune writes:

Hospitality belongs to the realm of ethos, which consists in letting the other in, of ourselves entering the other’s space. Communication is made by gestures, less explicit than language but also less ambiguous. It means sheltering a stranger or offering food. It is antecedent to logos and goes beyond it. It is essentially an experience. Therefore time, and still more warm-hearted attention, must be given to it.\(^{12}\)

One practical example of such thinking is The Abraham Path, an initiative of the Global Negotiation Project at Harvard University, which seeks to build a route of cultural tourism following the footsteps of Abraham / Ibrahim through the countries of the Middle East.\(^{13}\) It is hoped that everyday pilgrims from Judaism, Islam and Christianity, in retracing the steps of their shared founding Patriarch Abraham, will,


\(^{13}\) See <http://www.abrahampath.org/about.php>, (Feb 20, 2009).
in journeying together and being hosted by local families along the route – Muslim, Jewish or Christian – develop a greater understanding and mutual respect for one another. William Ury, the Director of the Harvard Global Negotiation Project, interviewed for the radio program ‘A World of Possibilities’, suggests that the depth of animosity between people sometimes makes ‘face to face’ encounters with the Other too painful or difficult. Ury notes:

...the approach that we’ve traditionally taken – which is a very important approach not to be discounted – is a face-to-face approach, you bring people face to face with each other and you try to engage them in dialog.... th[e] idea of the Abraham Path Initiative is a side-by side approach, very different from face to face. There are a lot of people who will not come face to face, whose opinions, whose beliefs are so strong, particularly when it comes to issues of faith and identity, that they’re not comfortable actually sitting in the same room with each other, and if they do they just exchange platitudes. And so maybe there’s a possibility of actually engaging them in a side-by-side activity, which is actually walking. Walking together, side by side or alongside each other, in common respect of the person who actually is the common ancestor of all three faiths: Abraham.14

Commenting further on this distinction between a ‘face to face’ and ‘shoulder to shoulder’ approach, Ury states:

Conversations are different when you’re sitting across the table from someone than if you’re going out for a walk, particularly in a beautiful setting. There’s a kind of a quality of side-by-side activity that is more inclusive, that is more casual, is more informal, is less

tense. The Abraham Path initiative is a side-by-side activity. I have this feeling and this faith that it will slowly create a space for thousands of conversations that will have all kinds of unexpected turns, that will hold the possibility of creating a new environment that holds the possibility of mutual respect and coexistence based on peace and justice.\textsuperscript{15}

Ury’s comments remind us that prior to the ‘face to face’ encounter with the Other, so emphasised in Levinasian thought, the practice of hospitality commences by standing in solidarity and walking alongside the Other, ‘shoulder to shoulder’. The example of Christ on the road to Emmaus is instructive. His journey with others begins first in silence, a simple case of accompanying alongside; progresses to respectful listening, and then only later does he begin to speak. It is such sojourning and careful attentiveness which provides the basis for the ‘face to face’ encounter and participation in table fellowship which follows.

The power of divine hospitality to transcend the exclusionary and distancing boundaries that humanity constructs both physically and psychologically is a theme we have highlighted throughout this work. This ability of God’s grace to overcome barriers is evident again in Luke’s crucifixion narrative (Luke 23:39-47). Despite the state of spatial disjunction – three men physically ‘set apart’ from their executors and detractors, ‘hung up’ as objects, serving as deterring examples to others – a brief, but remarkable conversation takes place. The Jewish insurrectionist hanging beside Jesus, naked and broken, his campaign of ‘liberative terror’ ended, inquires as to whether there is room in the divine kingdom for one such as him. Jesus responds: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” A few verses later, with Jesus’ passing, a Roman centurion declares: “Surely this was a righteous man.” Thus, at the climax of Luke’s narrative we witness a Jewish insurrectionist – read

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
'terrorist' – and a Roman centurion – read 'oppressor' – both recognise, in Christ, the face of divine hospitality.

The practice of hospitality transforms all individuals involved, overcoming fear, indifference and selfishness, creating mutual understanding and respect. More than this though, for Christians, there is the belief that in practising hospitality, in welcoming the stranger, we participate proleptically in an eschatological reality. This is the practice we are invited to perform as we await with longing and expectation the homecoming of the Triumphant Host and the final and eternal banquet where all who have seen the face of Christ - 'victims' and 'oppressors' – will be welcomed with open arms.
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