Chapter 3

Making Room for the Other: Hostility and Hospitality in a Christian Perspective

Stephen W. Sykes
Principal, St. John's College
Durham University

Introduction

In this essay I seek to identify two perspectives which bear upon the problem of xenophobia, the fear of strangers, from a Christian perspective. These may be entitled respectively the christological and the ethical and are contained in sections 3 and 4 of this paper. They are preceded by a brief section (1) in which a general orientation upon Christian faith is offered. This offers a perspective upon the phenomenon of hostility to the other or stranger (in section 2), which undoubtedly has featured, and continues to feature in Christian history. It could be argued that hostility is a problem to which the christological and ethical traditions provide the solution. But, as we shall see, embedded within both christology and Christian ethics is a further question, namely whether the Christian teaching embodying hospitality is intended to be applied to inner-Christian relations or whether it is generalizable to all social relationships (section 5). I argue that in order to understand the history of Christianity, especially in its encounters with what is strange or threatening, it is essential to acknowledge the doctrinal sources from which policies of hostility to the other have derived. But both its christological and ethical strands of teaching can justify a generous inclusiveness without loss of identity.

The Christian Faith

The Christian faith is a teaching which intends to bring about a community, society or church in which, together, women, men and children offer them-

selves to God. 'I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters [says Paul in an early writing, the letter to the Romans 12.1] by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship'. The church is itself an agent and a sign of something greater than the church, namely the doing of God's will upon earth. The church's prayer taught it by Jesus, includes the words, 'Your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6.10). God's will embraces all humanity, indeed the whole creation, in the realisation of peace; the church, therfore, is open to all human beings without exception.

The teaching is both about God, who God is and what God has done, and also about the way in which, individually and collectively, the 'living sacrifice' should be presented. It is a 'sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving' offered in gratitude to God, the giver of the possibility of life. It is, therefore, as Paul says the 'worship' of God, and is characteristically celebrated in the sacraments of the Chruch, especially in baptism and eucharist. Both sacraments focus the believer upon Jesus Christ, and what God has done for humanity in his death and resurrection. The pattern of life which derives from them is said to be new, transformed, or abundant. This life is to be offered as 'holy and acceptable to God', in a life-service embracing every aspect of human community and being.

Both themes of this teaching, the doctrine of God and the doctrine of sacrifice, imply an understanding of humankind, a theological anthropology. Human beings are said to have been made 'in the image and likeness of God', a doctrine developed on the basis of the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2; human beings are thus designed for fellowship with God. But the actual human situation is characterized by sin and evil, precipitated, it is taught by the 'fall' of Adam, and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. 'Sin came into the world through one man', asserts Paul in Romans 5, 'and death came through sin'. An analogy is drawn between the old head of creation (Adam) and the new (Christ). It is left ambiguous to what extent the image of God in humankind has been defaced, or even destroyed; Christian theological history debated the question vigorously. But the important point for our purposes is to see that Christian teaching presents what God has done for humanity as an act of rescue and restoration. It is an atonement (literally, 'at-onement'), a bringing together of God and humankind. 'In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself', says Paul (1 Corinthians 5.19).

For Jewish view on image of God see p. 23.

3.1 Hostility

How then, in the light of such teaching, could hostility to strangers arise in the history of Christianity, as it plainly has done and does? One explanation can readily be offered by the content of Christian teaching itself. It is openly admitted that human beings frequently manifest the signs of the old, untransformed life. Hostility to strangers, that is, unreformed behaviour, is evidence that the hoped-for change has not occurred to the degree that it should.[1]

[1] It is accurately controversial in Christian theology what this evidence signifies about the state of the Christian, and whether failure is inevitable. But *that* such unreformed behaviour occurs is universally admitted and regretted.

But this explanation does not get to the heart of the matter which is more problematic. The fact is that the very distinction between old and new, untransformed and transformed behaviour, creates and endorses a separation not merely between different action, but also between people. Paul, for example, frequently cites conventional lists of vices to avoid; but on at least one occasion the list is personal – 'fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers – none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God' (1 Corinthians 6.9-10; see also Ephesians 5.5; 1 Timothy 1.9). It is plain that it is easier to avoid certain forms of behaviour if one avoids the company of those who carry them out. A chain of citations from the Old Testament is used by Paul as a warrant in an argument for not being 'mismatched with unbelievers'. He concludes: 'Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God' (1 Corinthians 7.1).

Consistent with, and supporting the social pursuit of holiness of life are the battle metaphors which are deployed by Christian faith, to signify the seriousness of the struggle with evil entailed by the new way of life (Ephesians 6.12). It is understood that in baptism a person has renounced sin, evil and the devil, and in this way has mystically participated in Christ's crucifixion and resurrection (Romans 6.6). The radicality of the conversion of life is signified by the language of 'putting to death the old self'. The reference is internal; but the same radicality is available for deployment against people who are thought, for whatever reason, to embody a threat to holiness. That these could include groups or even races whose customs were unfamiliar, or misunderstood, or easily misrepresented, was not surprising, however tragic.

In this way it could be regarded as a Christian duty, part of the active defense of God's will for human life, that one should oppose *the people* who practice things thought to be immoral, unholy or undesirable. It must be said that in the second century Roman Empire, Christian Eucharists were thought to involve the murder of infants; and, of course, failure to offer sacrifice to the gods protecting the Empire was widely assumed to be a seditious omission. But in due course Christians in power were to make exactly the same assumption, in the medieval period about Jews, and after the Reformation about 'heretics' belonging to minority groups. Witches were victims of the same modes of thought, where the personification of evil fatally coincided with the political and social power to oppress or destroy 'the other'. There were often, thank God, those who understood and defended the obligation to seek the truth from the distortion of propagandist hysteria. But at the very least, it is important for Christians to understand how the conflict metaphors which lie embedded within their tradition can be deployed against 'the other', especially in context of unusual corporate pressure and anxiety.

Cf. Buddhist view on importance of being with like-minded people, p. 113.

A further feature of Christian teaching needs to be acknowledged. The ambiguity noted above about the degree to which the fall defaced or obliterated the created image of God in humanity left open the possibility of regarding whole groups or races as a threat to holiness. The story told in Genesis of Noah's son Ham who 'saw the nakedness of his father' (Genesis 9.22) and whose son, Canaan, was consequently cursed ('lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers', 9.25), was deployed against black races in Southern Africa to jus-

tify apartheid and white dominance. At an earlier period, because it was not uncommon to identify the 'image' of God with human rationality, mentally sick or handicapped people came to be regarded as no better than animals (that is, devoid of God's image), and even as late as the eighteenth century asylums in Europe might be visited as an amusing excursion, much as one would visit a zoo. Such examples are possible because the biblical sources lack explicit detail about the consequences of the 'fall', except in so far as it identifies death as the outcome. The use of the 'curse of Ham' is a particularly gross example of finding biblical texts to justify injustice. The mistreatment of mentally ill people, which has no conceivable basis in the Genesis narrative of creation, illustrates the dangers of speculative interpretation fuelled by ignorance or anxiety.

3.2 Hospitality: Christological Doctrine

As has already been mentioned above, christology has from the days of the apostle Paul been an element in the way in which human beings have understood themselves in the Christian tradition. 'Christological doctrine', that is, teachings about the narrative and the nature and significance of Jesus Christ, began in the very early communities of the Jesus movement of the first century CE. They were embraced by converts to Christianity, and taught by its leading authorities. The relationship of these teachings to what Jesus may have taught about himself is a complex matter of the reconstruction of evidence and lies beyond our scope. What is not in doubt is the fact that in the oldest book of the New Testament, 1 Thessalonians, Paul speaks of as the 'gospel' (good news), that it was held to be not a matter merely of report or word, but also of 'power and the Holy Spirit and full conviction' (1:5), and that it could be summarised in the following way: 'How you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming' (1: 9-10).

Belief that Jesus had really died and had been raised by God from death is, thus, the specific form which belief in God takes in Christianity. It changes the view of who God is, to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. Of course those who came to that belief already believed in God, but in a somewhat different way. Paul was a convert himself, and describes his conversion as a matter of God being 'pleased to reveal his Son to me' (Galatians 1.15; where the Greek reads 'in me', which has multiple layers of meaning). This christological shaping of belief in God is spoken of as 'the gospel', which is precisely 'good news' because it involves victory over death.

In a very extraordinary chapter of one of his letters Paul vigorously defends resurrection belief as a tradition of 'first importance', which he himself had received from others. He speaks of it as follows:

> That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter] and then to the twelve (1 Corinthians 15.4-5).

It is evident from the way in which Paul speaks of Christ's resurrection that not everyone believes this, and consequently has no belief in the resurrection of the dead. But this, he argues, is tantamount to misrepresenting God. If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then we are left, miserably, in our sins.

But who, in this argument, does Paul mean by 'us'? The disagreement of historical commentators at this point is instructive. They are based in the fact that Paul offers an analogy between the first man of biblical history, Adam, and Christ, both here and more extensively in his letter to the Romans. These two people are, he holds, individuals whose actions have decisive consequences for humanity as a whole, and stand therefore at the head of two 'creations'. Sin came into the world through Adam, and because of his sin death spread unavoidably to all humankind (Romans 5.12, where the Greek reads 'so death spread to everyone because all have sinned'; the Latin version translated this text as 'in whom all have sinned', and was taken to imply the transmission of 'original sin' from Adam to all of Adam's descendants). Thus the consequence of Adam's sin is universal. But, 'as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ' (1 Corinthians 15.22). It could be that the second 'all' is as universal as the first. There are interpreters who hold that the consequence of Christ's resurrection is the resurrection of all humanity; not necessarily to eternal life, but at least to final judgement, when God finally discriminates between good and evil. But there are also those who hold that the 'all' is not to be taken in the same way as the phrase 'all die in Adam'; that there is a limit on the number of the finally saved, which is expressed in the words 'those who belong to Christ' (1 Corinthians 15.23), which immediately follow.

The disagreement of interpreters at this point reproduces itself, and is reflected in the history of the tradition. It may be characterised as a more universalistic and a more sectarian tendency, according to whether the benefit of Christ's resurrection is thought to be shared by all humanity, or simply by those explicitly believing in Christ. This is a matter of some importance for the issue of the xenophobia, since the sectarian tendency lends itself to deployment where separation from the stranger is a socially attractive option. To be thought to be a stranger to the significance of Christ, whether through ignorance or rejection of christological beliefs, may under particular conditions of stress or anxiety, offer justification for segregation, fear or outright hostility and persecution. Allied to the charge against Jewish people of deicide (putting the Son of God to death) this became a particularly vicious option.

The universalist interpretation, however, remains in at least one form, even within the sectarian option. That is, in the belief in the requirement of universal evangelism. With comparatively rare exceptions it was held that the meaning of the words, 'Christ died for our sins' applied to all humanity, and that as a result this good news should be universally shared by preaching. Of course a missionary faith explicitly hoping for conversions is open to large temptations, and there is an important discussion to be held about the nature of improper influences. But in principle it must be asked whether the objections sometimes alleged against evangelism apply to any form of intellectual persuasion resulting in public behaviour. Is it intrinsically worse to attempt

to convince people of the resurrection of Christ than to convince them of the benefits of justice or democracy? The fact that it is possible to believe otherwise about any of these matters is not in itself a reason for failing to make the attempt. It could be argued that it is more honouring to human dignity to believe that persons are capable of rational convictions in the matter of religion - as of politics - than to treat their current views as inviolable prejudices.

The universalist option also reproduces itself in christological doctrine by means of further refinement of thought related to the humanity of Christ. Christian teaching insisted that Jesus Christ was genuinely human. A series of disputes in the fourth and fifth centuries CE led to a definition, agreed at a Church Council of Chalcedon (451 CE), which codified a certain type of language. In the one person of Christ there are said to be two 'natures', a divine and a human nature, inseparably and unconfusedly united. But a direct consequence of the doctrine is that the risen Christ still bears his human nature, that is our nature, but perfected.

This doctrine of Christ's common human nature is of vital significance for the issue of xenophobia, since it entails the unity of Gentiles and Jews in Christ. In the New Testament it is most explicitly taught by Paul in the Letter to the Galatians where he reflects upon his experience of conversion from the Judaism in which he was reared. The law, he holds, was a necessary but temporary expedient, which acted as custodian and disciplinarian of sinful humanity. But faith in Christ has changed this situation. Now all may be children of God:

> As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3.27-28).

Social distinctions have been replaced by unity. All are in fact the offspring of Abraham, to whom was given the promise that all the Gentiles would be blessed in him. This promise, Paul understands to be, in fact, the eternal gospel. Similarly, in the Letter to the Ephesians, attributed to, but not certainly by Paul, Gentiles are specifically addressed as once 'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise' (2.12). But now Christ has broken down the wall of hostility making 'one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace' (Ephesians 2.15). This new humanity, later Christian orthodoxy was to teach, is permanent and united to God in the very being of the Holy Trinity.

The range of consequences of this thought for Christian doctrine was massive, especially in the devotional and spiritual life of Christians and in the understanding of the sacraments of baptism and eucharist. In the latter lay the point of intimate contact with Christ in his death and resurrection, a union available to any person, Jew or Gentile, who confessed their faith in Christ. Though only some may become converts, the plan of God for reconciliation has universal, indeed cosmic intentions. For, as the letter to the Colossians (similar to that to the Ephesians) declared:

> In him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to dwell, to reconcile himself all

> things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross (Colossians1.20).

A universal reconciliation of any reality estranged from God, human or natural, is the aim and consequence of the coming of God into human life in the person of Jesus Christ. Its eventual achievement is guaranteed by the permanent presence of the human nature of Christ within the Godhead.

It would, perhaps, be right at this point for me to clarify my own understanding of the universalistic and sectarian tendencies within this inheritance. In my view the New Testament documents are strongly marked by a preoccupation with the forging of a new community identity. After the expulsion of Christians from the synagogues, which happened widely but not universally in the Graeco-Roman world after 80 CE, there took place in the new communities an intensifying of emphasis upon internal relationships with a strong sectarian character. This is particularly evident in the Gospel and Letters of St John, which speak with great feeling about the importance of love to the life of the community. But they do so in a way that strengthens the boundaries between insiders and outsiders, particularly outsiders who represent a threat to the doctrinal integrity of the community. In the Gospel of St John 'the Jews', meaning the authorities responsible for opposition to Christians, are seen as hostile to Jesus and his disciples; in the Letters of St John it is false teachers (antichrists) who are considered to be the source of danger.

This feature of the New Testament has unmistakably given rise, and still gives rise in Christianity, to the exclusionary politics of hostility and (even) hatred, despite Jesus' teaching about the love of the enemy. But this is only one element of the tradition, which has other impulses and imperatives. If it is to have a justification of any kind, that is, if it is not simply to be rejected out of hand (which would pose other problems of interpretation) then it lies in the sheer necessity of making discriminatory judgements. If the judgement upon Amalek is that it is bent on the cruel politics of annihilation, and must therefore be resisted, it may have been once the case that the existence of Christian communities was subject to annihilating threats. But nothing obliges any subsequent Christian community to assume that every form of opposition is of the same kind. The politics of retrenchment and withdrawal are not the only option in all circumstances. It requires an exercise of wise discernment to know truly the situation one is in.

Compare Jewish discussion of Amalek on pp. 33 ff.

So far I have considered only the issue of the sectarian tendency within the Christian tradition; but there is also the opposite, namely the universalistic. This is a less marked feature of the New Testament documents, but it remains the case that 'universalism' has been a recurrent feature of Christian history. By 'universalism' it is here meant the view that there is no form of hostility or opposition, not even the demonic, which ultimately escapes the supreme power of God's reconciling love. This view, which has its roots in a certain kind of philosophical theodicy, was expressed classically in early Christian thought by Origen of Alexandria (185-253/54) and was, even at the time, regarded as unorthodox.

But as a tendency within Christian thinking it has a very proper motive, namely resistance to a form of ultimate dualism. At the same time it has its own concomitant disadvantage. Rabbi Jonathan Sachs has recently identified this as the philosophical danger of abstraction, and termed it 'Plato's Ghost'.

On the contrary, in his view, 'our particularity is our window upon universality... we serve God, author of diversity by respecting diversity'.[2] What saves the idea of Christ's perpetual humanity from being abstract, we might add, is the sheer particularity of his life and death. We are united to Christ's humanity not in virtue of some abstract principle, but by the concrete fact of suffering. The eschatological conviction according to which suffering is finally transcended does not make it unreal.

I conclude, therefore, that both of the tendencies in the Christian tradition that I have described have their merits and dangers. The historic Christian community uses the Scriptures to illuminate its own circumstances. But the application of past examples to contemporary events requires wisdom. Wisdom is attentive to particularities and differences. Each human being is the bearer of a humanity loved by God. If circumstances require the political act of disengagement, withdrawal or separation from particular persons, that should never be seen as more than a penultimate necessity. The primary instinct is that of reconciliation.

3.2.1 Ethical Doctrine[3]

There is a close relationship between this christological teaching about reconciliation with God and ethical instruction concerning love. For the author of 1 John, indeed, 'God is love and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them' (1John 4.16). The New Testament is full of instruction to believers to love one another. In an anonymous writing now known as the Letter to the Hebrews, a late first century CE author explicitly and closely associates such love with hospitality to strangers:

> Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it (13.1-2).

These exhortations are set within the context of the letter's closing remarks. The author wishes to remind this fellowship of believers the behaviour that God desires: 'Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God' (13.16). While the exhortations are directed toward the group of believers, it is also set within a universal context. The preceding chapter encourages them to 'pursue peace with everyone *(pantōn)* and the holiness, without which no one *(oudeis)* will see the Lord' (12.14). Thus, the author prompts these believers to focus on those outside of the community as well as those inside.

Both of these dimensions are brought out in the first two verses of Hebrews. It is difficult to convey the full impact of Hebrews 13.1-2 in the English translation. Above, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) has translated *philadelphia* as 'mutual love'. This has been done, no doubt, to avoid the gender exclusivity of the more common translation, 'brotherly love'. However, 'mutual love' does not capture the familial sense that this word includes.

[2] Jonathan Sachs, *The Dignity of Difference* (London; New York: Continuum, 2002), 56.

[3] I acknowledge the substantial assistance of Laura L. Brenneman, my research assistant, in the preparation and formulation of this text.

The fellowship of believers is called upon to love one another as though they are siblings.

In another example, Romans 12.10, *philadelphia* is found with *philostorgos*, a pairing which highlights another dimension of family life, namely that of the love of parent for child. The verse in Romans reads, 'love [*philostorgoi*] one another with brotherly love [*philadelphia*]'. It is particularly striking that here Paul instructs the Roman believers, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, to redefine their notions of family in order to be inclusive to members of their fellowship. Here, it is '... the redefinition of boundaries in which Paul engages – a sense of family belongingness which transcended immediate family ties and did not depend on natural or ethnic bonds. The organic imagery of the interrelatedness of he body [Romans 12.4-5] requires to be supplemented for the emotional bond of family affection'.[4]

The second verse in Hebrews 13 is equally striking. Here the audience is urged to extend hospitality to strangers (*philoxenias*) because, in so doing, some people have entertained (*xenisantes*) angels unawares. The root word *xenos* had the literal meaning in Greek of 'foreigner', 'stranger', and even 'enemy'. This meaning, however, evolved until it came to encompass guest and host alike. This is the sense picked up by the New Testament and the Septuagint, where extending hospitality is called *xenizein*.[5]

Furthermore the word 'some' (*tautēs*) in Hebrews 13.2 surely includes a reference to Abraham's gracious hospitality to the three divine strangers at the oaks of Mamre (Genesis 18.1-8). In that episode, Abraham rushes to meet three unknown men and entreats them to sit in the shade of the oaks while he provides them with water for washing and a little bread. However, Abraham produces a feast for them of a slain calf, along with milk and curds. This type of hospitality is paradigmatic[6] and for the author of Hebrews, it is the way in which the believers are to welcome the stranger.

Jesus also entreats his followers to hospitality. In Matthew 25, he declares himself to be the *xenos* whom the believers are to feed, refresh, welcome, clothe, nurse, and visit (vv. 35, 36). Those who have shown hospitality to the *xenos* will be reckoned as sheep and welcomed into the kingdom of heaven (v. 34); those who were not hospitable will depart from the presence of the Lord into everlasting fire (v. 41). This is because Jesus considers the stranger to be his family member (*adelphos*, v. 40) and someone indelibly connected to him: 'just as you did for the least of these who are my brothers, you did for me' (Matthew 25.40). Carmen Bernabé Ubieta notes,

> The distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', between natives and foreigners which was made in a city by virtue of blood-line and ethnic group, was irrelevant for those who conceived their existence according to the Christian message. In Jesus, 'in his blood', all human beings – recognized as brethren—have become sons,

[4]James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary vol. 38b (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 741.

[5]Sir 29:25; Acts 10:6, 18, 23, 32; 21:16; 28:7; Heb 13:2; from John Koenig, 'Hospitality' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 299.

[6]See Philo *On Abraham* 107, 113; Josephus *Antiquities* 1.11.2 196; *b. Sota* 1ba (Babylonian Talmud).

members and heirs to the House of God.[7]

Ubieta's reference (Ephesians 2) is significant. As we have seen, there Paul discusses the power of the cross, which created a new humanity. There are no more strangers and aliens, but citizens with the saints and members of God's household (v. 19).

The vision offered in Ephesians picks up on the theme that the people of God are the guests of God. In fact, being aliens and sojourners are aspects fundamental to Israel's identity. In Genesis 15.13, Abraham was told that his descendants would be sojourners in a land not theirs, where 'they will be oppressed for four hundred years'. As slaves within Egypt, God heard their cry and remembered his promises to the patriarchs (Exodus 2.24). God took notice of the Israelites and delivered them from slavery. It is with this status as descendants of a 'wandering Aramean' and as slaves that the Lord called them out of Egypt and with which these people entered the land of promise (Deuteronomy 26.5-9). Within the context of the covenant between God and the chosen people, the Israelites were to acknowledge that the land belonged to God and 'with me you are strangers and sojourners' (Leviticus 25.23).

Compare Jewish views on ger*, p. 47.*

As guests in God's land and with the memory of being slaves in a foreign country, the people of Israel were to extend graciousness to the strangers who lived in their midst: 'The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God' (Leviticus 19.34; see also Exodus 23.9). As Christine Pohl says, 'Israel's historical experience and spiritual identity as chosen-yet-alien was a continual reminder of their dependence on God. Israel's status as a guest in God's land was the basis for gratitude and obedience'.[8] The practical expression of this was the care of the alien, along with other powerless people like the widow and the orphan (Deuteronomy 14.29).

This sort of care for *xenoi* was not common in the ancient world. Rather than concern for the welfare of others,

> ...animistic fear seems in many cases to have provided the first impulse for the noble custom of hospitality found among many primitive peoples.... But then it came to be realized that the basic feeling was reciprocal, and that it was more deeply seated in aliens in a strange land than in natives of the land who encountered aliens.... Hence the stranger came to be granted the fellowship of table and protection, and instead of being an outlaw, he became a ward of law and religion.[9]

The people of Israel, as the guests of God, extended protection and care to aliens in their midst.[10] Christians adopted this attitude of hospitality from

[7] Carmen Bernabé Ubieta, "'Neither *Xenoi* nor *Parakoi*, *Sympolitai* and *Oikeioi tou Theou*" (Eph 2.19)', in *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible*, 276.

[8] Christine D. Pohl, 'Hospitality from the Edge', *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1995), 125.

[9] Gustav Stählin, '*xenos*, *xenia*, *xenizō*, *xenodocheō*, *philoxenia*, *philoxenos*' in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* vol. V, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 3-4.

[10] Indeed, when they did not, it was numbered as one of the reasons for punishment and exile from the land. See Jer 7:5-7; 22:3-4, 15-16; Exod 22:21-25; Deut 24:17; 27:19; Job 31:13-22; Zech 7:9-12; Mal 3:5; cf. James 1:27.

their spiritual ancestors, doubtless because many of them experienced this care as Gentiles and strangers to the people of God.

Furthermore, Jesus' ministry had hospitality at its very core. When asked to sum up the whole of the law, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6.5 and Leviticus 19.18 (Matthew 22.37-40; see also Mark 12.29, 30, 33; Luke 10.27; Paul also made this statement in Romans 13.9-10). Love, complete love of God and love of neighbour, is the way of eternal life (Luke 10.25). The parable that Jesus tells here in response to the question 'who is my neighbour?' is one in which a Samaritan, someone who is an outsider, is upheld as the exemplary neighbour (Luke 10.30-37). Through this parable and by his association of himself with outcasts (Matthew 25.31-46), Jesus blurs the boundaries of insider and outsider. The followers of Jesus are to live their lives according to new ideas of kinship and humanity, thus welcoming those whom would have been previously unapproachable.

The gospels include numerous illustrations of how Jesus often came near people who were ostracised and allowed them to approach him. These people included sinners, lepers, tax collectors, unclean and foreign women, as well as those possessed by demons. His closest companions were people from the margins, manual labourers, such as fishermen, tax collectors, and women. And it is these people from undesirable backgrounds whom Jesus taught and with whom he shared table fellowship, the most powerful symbol of hospitality.

John Koenig notes how Acts continues this line of ministry:

> For its part, Acts may be read as a collection of guest and host stories depicting missionary ventures that have originated in circles associated with the earliest churches. Luke's special concern is to show how itinerant residential believers can support one another in the worldwide mission of the Church. Through this mutuality, he believes the Holy Spirit will bring about rich exchanges of spiritual and material gifts; and the Church will grow.[11]

Philoxenia and *philadelphia* are fundamental practices for early Christians. It is significant that loving and welcoming the stranger is set side by side with the love of our Christian family members (Hebrews 13.1-2 and Romans 12.10, 13). It is within the context of communal relationships that humans are best equipped to support and care for those who are living in the margins. This is because actively extending hospitality is difficult. It requires time and energy, not to mention the qualities of compassion and empathy. Mutual support, then, within the community is necessary to sustain this ministry to which we are called. Indeed,

> to do hospitality well, we need models for whom it is part of a way of life. We must learn from those who have found ways to practice hospitality within the distinct tensions and arrangements of contemporary society. We also need a community with whom to share the demands and burdens of welcoming strangers.[12]

[11] Koenig, 'Hospitality', *ABD*, 301.
[12] Pohl, 'Welcoming the Stranger', *Sojourners* 28 (1999), 14.

Finally, the concept of grace is an important motivation for acts of hospitality. Speaking from a Baptist tradition, but also for all who profess the mercy of God, Scott H. Moore says,

> . . . hospitality is a sign of our commitment to a culture of life. Hospitality is the means by which we in the middle take care of the vulnerable ones at the edges. . . . Cultivating hospitality is what we Baptists used to call 'growing in grace'. It is the means by which we treat others, not as they way they 'deserve' to be treated, but in the way God has treated us.[13]

3.3 Generalizing the Tradition

As I have already indicated, there is a serious question to ask, which already has its roots in Christian history, whether the tradition of hospitality to the stranger is generalizable, or whether the only access to it is by conversion to Christianity. The latter view would be an example of what I have called the 'sectarian' tendency, and it has large numbers of ancient and contemporary exponents. It has to be admitted that there is New Testament support for supposing that *philadelphia* is recommended as an internal Christian virtue, and is not the same as universal benevolence. On the other hand, as we have suggested there are social reasons why the protection and nurture of a particular identity was of importance at a particular moment of Christian history; and, in any case, there is a continuous need for wise discrimination between opposition of different kinds. 'Universal benevolence' is neither wise nor appropriate in all circumstances. Furthermore there is, as we have just suggested, a connection between the fostering of an intensively supportive community of love, and the capacity to sustain the arduous task of the support of the marginal. The two should not be seen as competitive with, or alternative to each other. In other words it is Christian teaching that hospitality can and should be extended to the stranger, whether or not s/he is part of the Christian community. What qualifies that person as someone with a claim on Christian compassion is her humanity, which is part of the humanity of Christ. To love her is to love Christ in her. As the Rule of St Benedict memorably taught, *Hospites tamquam Christus suscipiantur*/guests are to be received as Christ (Chapter 53).

Compare a Jewish view on compassion, p. 44.

Such a view might be expected to commend itself within Christianity, however much it has been contradicted in Christian history. The question is, however, whether it is dependent upon the christological reference. If so, it could only be expected to be of interest to Christians. To commend it to others would, in effect, be an invitation to conversion.

A double response to this challenge seems appropriate. On the one hand, I should like to be generally positive, rather than embarrassed about evangelism, which simply seems implicit in Christianity. It is true that the practices inspired by missionary zeal have included gross and wholly improper forms of constraint, manipulation and persuasion. But Christianity is rooted in an ineradicable desire for God, which it derives from the Hebrew Scriptures. It

[13] Scott H. Moore, 'Hospitality as an Alternative to Tolerance' *Communio* 27 (2000), 608.

seems impossible for a person to enjoy the vision of God and not to long to share it with others. The heart of evangelism is this desire to share, which exists long before particular modes or policies of sharing have been formulated. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) wrote of the longing to communicate which lies at the heart of all Christian experience, making it impossible for the phenomenon of Christian faith to be a solitary experience. The social character of the faith, above all participation in a community of praise, is of its essence. To hold this view of evangelism is a far cry from the psychological pressure and duplicity of which certain evangelistic practices are plainly guilty.

The great advantage of being positive about evangelism is that it enables Christians to speak of the relationship between love, suffering and repentance that is contained in the narrative of Christ's crucifixion. However difficult it may be for consistent theological formulation, it is at the crucifixion that God and the world's evil is brought into the closest relationship - at least from the point of view of classical Christian theology. To abandon that crux is to run the danger of embracing Plato's ghost, and of opting for an abstract deity.

Given then that a Christian cannot reasonably be required to abandon a desire that others may share a view which has so enriched his or her own life, is there a way of formulating these thoughts about the significance of hospitality which make them accessible to people of other religious traditions? At this point I want to invoke a metaphor for a common psychological process that may assist the discussion, the metaphor of 'making space' for an idea. Human learning is only possible on the assumption that we carry about with us a large reservoir of unexplored ideas and associations that we have picked up from a vast array of resources. Many of these simply remain dormant. Some are revived by new encounters; saying 'I didn't know that I knew that' makes perfectly good sense. Equally sensible is the idea that room or space can be made for a new idea, which is so far unassimilated to the larger schemes we use for organising our ways of thinking. We can discriminate between different kinds of new ideas, holding that some - for example, sci-fi fantasies - are too fantastic to be given serious thought, whereas others - which may even include ideas which originated in science fiction - have some serious points of contact with things we know or experience about the way the world is.

My suggestion is that the act of 'making space' for an idea from a religion whose schema we do not hold is both possible and desirable. Moreover that idea will have more or less significance for us, the more we can relate it to things that we have already experienced. My suggestion is that to 'make space' is itself a form of hospitality, a taking seriously of the other as other, a willingness to let the other be what s/he is on her own account, not to assimilate her to an existing rejection or caricature.

The difficulty for the conversation of religious traditions is that they work in a field already littered with caricature. Indeed so prevalent is this phenomenon that, rather like ubiquitous *kitsch* in religious art, it seems only practical to work with a theory that embraces, rather than one which excludes caricature. It might be possible to proceed in the following way. An unfamiliar thought from another religious tradition will bear a relation of some kind to

an existing caricature in the mind, which itself will suggest certain allegedly negative features of that tradition. Rather than attempt to reject the latter out of hand, an internal argument needs to be set up between the caricature and the new idea. If this is articulated publicly, it can offer opportunities for a continuing dialogue with people of other religious traditions, who are in this way brought into, not excluded from, the processes of refining understanding by escaping from caricature.

Recently Miroslav Volf, reflecting from the searing experience of the Balkan crisis (he is a Croatian who taught in a seminary at the outbreak of War in 1991), has written suggestively of the need for a proper distance from one's own culture, drawing upon the migration of Abraham as a 'stepping out of enmeshment in the network of inherited cultural relations as a correlate of faith in the one God'.[14] But departure is not to be understood as absence or flight; it is also a way of living in a culture, a creating of space within oneself to receive the other. The metaphor of 'making space' is adopted to avoid inhabiting a self-enclosed world that shuns others, or only admits them on already preformulated terms.

The same book has a profound exploration of the complexity of establishing non-exclusionary identities. Exclusion involves either insisting on sharp separation without interrelationships, or a policy of subjugation and assimilation. In neither case is the other taken seriously as other. But to be human means both to take in, and to keep out; the spatial metaphor implies the making of space for the other. My suggestion is, here, that hospitality to ideas from other religions involves a non-exclusionary judgement, which discerns them in their difference, neither excluding nor assimilating them, but providing them with space. In that space lies the possibility for the correction of caricature, for the enrichment of the imagination, for the relating of new ideas to more familiar experiences, and - should it not be openly admitted? - for conversion. The fear that one may be laying oneself open to conversion needs to be honestly examined. Is it not such a reaction unworthy of the love of God that casts out all fear? Does it not, from a Christian point of view, imply a curious narrowness in God's dealings with humanity to suppose that He has nothing to teach us through other ways of faiths? The anxiety that one is abandoning all forms of evaluation is groundless. To make space is explicitly to retain the possibility of a subsequent judgement or discrimination. The argument is in favour of a non-exclusionary judgement, which is well represented in the metaphor of 'making space'.

I write a final personal paragraph. Never in my life have I experienced anything remotely like persecution or oppression, especially not for my religious convictions. In this sense I may be uniquely disqualified from adding what a Christian is bound to add about repentance and forgiveness. Judgement about oppression may lead to anger against injustice, and anger is a human necessity. Without it we would have no way of resourcing our reactions to wrong-doing. But there is a difference between the immediate response to anger, and what a great English moral philosopher, Bishop Joseph Butler (1692-1752) called 'settled anger'. The latter can be, and has been in the history of human relations a great disaster for humanity. Unless humanity

[14] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 39.

learns a way of making space for the other who has committed wrong doing, violence will escalate to an intolerable degree. The mobilisation and institutionalisation of settled anger in politics is a threat to humanity, which the religions have no business to fuel.