

REGENT COLLEGE

**THE CALL OF A HOLY HOST: HOW LEVITICUS LEADS US TO A GRACE-FILLED
HOSPITALITY**

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Introduction

Welcoming the Other in modern western society is a forefront controversy, inspiring intense debate over oppression, assimilation, and integration. How can we welcome immigrants into our society without assimilating them and making them “like us”? How can they become integrated into a society with differing religious, cultural, and political expectations than their own? To what extent does a host accommodate a guest, and does a guest ever accommodate the host? These questions have lasting relevance and it is difficult to reach simple conclusions. To elucidate the particulars of conditions in host-guest relationships, the philosophies of two postmodern thinkers will be compared to the treatment of the foreigner in Leviticus. It will be demonstrated that conditions are not always oppressive, but can lead to the flourishing of both guest and host.

Unconditional Hospitality according to Levinas and Derrida

Philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida were highly interested in what it means to relate to the Other—both human and divine. As postmodern and deconstructionist philosophers, they represent some of the shifts which have occurred in Western philosophical thought. Exploring their conceptions of hospitality will reveal some of the ways in which we think about hosting others, especially as it pertains to refugees and immigrants.

Emmanuel Levinas, was a French-Jewish philosopher born in the early 20th century. Witnessing both World Wars and losing most of his family to the holocaust, questions of hospitality and violence were especially pertinent to his work.¹ Though well-versed in Torah, and certainly heavily influenced by it, Levinas was also interested in French post-structuralist

¹Andrew Shepherd. *The Gift of the Other: Levinas, Derrida, and a Theology of Hospitality*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 17.

thought and admitted the impact Greek philosophy had on his work.² As a post-structuralist, Levinas rejected the ontological ethics of modern society. Michener summarizes Levinas's problem with ontology as such, "Ontology forces predetermined categories; it attempts to unify at the expense of difference. Reality must be seen as one, rather than multifarious."³ This is because, for Levinas, the Other must be seen as a mysterious, transcendent being, which we are incapable of fully understanding.⁴ The moment one begins to "grasp" the Other, they are possessing and thereby oppressing it. This is made clear in Levinas' parallel of relationships to the action of a hand, "By taking hold of things, by treating being as a furnishing, transportable into a home, it disposes of the unforeseeable future in which being's ascendancy over us was portended; it reserves this future for itself."⁵ Categorizing the Other is inherently full of concepts like "mastery, domination, and disposition,"⁶ as Levinas puts it. For him, attempting to describe and acquire the Other is the same as idolatry. Just as attempting to "categorize" or represent God profanes his image and reputation, doing so for others, "dehumanizes the human Other."⁷

Another influential component of Levinas' thought is the concept of "infinite responsibility."⁸ The transcendent Other is a call to ethical action. Meeting the Other presents an ethical call for everyone, as host, to respond to the needs of that Other. As Levinas writes, "To hear his destitution which cries out for justice is not to present an image to oneself, but is to posit oneself as responsible, both as more and as less than the being that presents itself in the face. Less, for the face summons me to my obligations and judges me."⁹ The ethical task of hospitality

² Shepherd, 31.

³ Ronald T. Michener. "Face-to-Face with Levinas: (Ev)Angelical Hospitality and (De)Constructive Ethics?" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 43, no. 2 (April 1, 2019), 115.

⁴ Emmanuel Levinas. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1980), 171. Accessed November 6, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁵ Levinas, 160.

⁶ Levinas, 161.

⁷ Shepherd, 83.

⁸ Shepherd, 34.

⁹ Levinas, 213.

is not received from ontological categories, for such categories would make hospitality impossible. For Levinas, ethics arise from the relationship one has with the stranger. In meeting the Other we are called to act hospitably towards them.

Jacques Derrida, highly influenced by Levinas, spells out the implications these convictions have for hospitality more clearly. Derrida reflected much on the displacement of his own people, French-speaking Jews from Algeria, and the impact this had on his identity.¹⁰ Questions of belonging and presence are especially impactful for him. Derrida borrows much from Levinas' thought and imports it into his understanding of true hospitality. Like Levinas' post-structuralist assumptions, Derrida's conception of hospitality is that it is ultimately unknowable.¹¹ Furthermore, hospitality is a living contradiction; it should be unconditional and perpetually open to the other, while inherently containing limits and conditions.¹² Derrida states that hospitality assumes characteristics such as a host, who is master of the house and sets conditions, and a door, which serves as a threshold the guest must cross.¹³ While at the same time, true hospitality should exist without threshold and without master.¹⁴ Derrida is aware that these concepts are contradictory, but this does not limit his thinking. Hospitality's contradiction is necessary in our limited state. Derrida reflects an eschatological view of hospitality, stating that we cannot know hospitality *yet*, but instead, discover hospitality in the future when the Other comes to us.¹⁵ This line of thought is reflected in Derrida's understanding of the gift in host-guest relationships. He argues that when a gift is knowingly given by a host, it necessarily introduces

¹⁰ Shepherd, 46.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality," *Angelaki Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 5 no. 3 (2000): 7. Accessed November 17, 2023. doi/epdf/10.1080/09697250020034706?needAccess=true.

¹² Derrida, 13.

¹³ Derrida, 14.

¹⁴ Derrida, 14.

¹⁵ Derrida, 11.

an economy between host and guest, rendering the guest a debtor.¹⁶ This introduces an economy between guest and host, which has overwhelming potential to be abused. Thus, true hospitality exists without economy, but this is only achieved in the “not yet”--the future.¹⁷ We may begin in a place of limited, conditional hospitality, but his hope is that we eventually reach unconditional hospitality in the welcome of the Other. Shepherd summarizes Derrida’s thought as a call to deconstruction. Rather than appealing to laws of hospitality in ethics, Derrida urges that all should be deconstructing their laws and traditions in light of the ideal.¹⁸ Like Levinas, he hopes for a hospitality which is not mere invitation, but rather visitation.¹⁹ Hospitality arises from the call of the Other who inevitably presents themselves to us as hosts.

There is much to commend in Levinas and Derrida’s work. Namely, that hospitality must be an ethical response is a helpful critique of modern moral presuppositions. Along with this, Derrida’s encouragement to deconstruct tradition in light of unconditional hospitality serves as a call to be in constant conversation with ourselves and our traditions, fine-tuning our hospitality so that it is more just and more faithful. However, some of Levinas’ and Derrida’s assumptions should give pause. One wonders if it is at all possible to approach other people without attempting to understand them. Furthermore, understanding may be necessary for a truly just hospitality. They also posit a conception of relationality which “tends to be understood in adversarial terms.”²⁰ Both Levinas and Derrida approach hospitality with the assumption that it has overwhelming potential to be oppressive. They view any power differences to be inherently destructive, thus their desire to rid the practice of any categories or definitions. The idea that

¹⁶ Ilsup Ahn. “Economy of ‘Invisible Debt’ and Ethics of ‘Radical Hospitality’: Toward a Paradigm Change of Hospitality from ‘Gift’ to ‘Forgiveness.’” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 38 vol. 2: 250.

<https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=d1875c8b-3266-3673-a8ea-c684d20a1f57>.

¹⁷ Derrida, 9.

¹⁸ Shepherd, 65.

¹⁹ Derrida, 14.

²⁰ Shepherd, 84.

there would be expectations for a guest in another's home is inconceivable for Derrida and Levinas— any expectation is inherently oppressive. Thus, there is no potential for mutuality and instead a call to empty the self in response to the presence of the Other.

Conditional Hospitality in Leviticus

The biblical picture of hospitality, while sharing some of Levinas' and Derrida's impulses, presents a very different picture of guest-host relationships and the power within them. Leviticus, in particular, is often appealed to in order to construct a theology of welcome and hospitality. A common passage cited when advocating for the inclusion of strangers is Leviticus 19:33-34 which reads: "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God." At face value, this verse seems to present unconditional hospitality and full welcome. However, other passages in Leviticus complicate this matter. It is these passages of Leviticus to which we now turn.

Several passages in Leviticus restrict the activity of the stranger as well as the native Israelite. For example, numerous verses in chapter 17 present stipulations for the hunting and eating habits of both the native and the resident alien.²¹ Chapter 18 restricts the sexual lives of both native and foreigner and chapter 24 tells the disturbing story of an ethnically mixed member who is stoned for blasphemy. These passages are found in the section in Leviticus called the Holiness Code which includes Chapters 17-26. Here, Leviticus's focus shifts from priestly to communal. This section outlines how the community will enact holiness through their action, which necessarily includes social, political, and economic relationships.²² In this way, the community reflects the role of the priests in the land. Tamar Kamionkowski writes, "Just as the

²¹ Leviticus 17:8, 10, 13, 15.

²² Frank H. Gorman. *Leviticus: Divine Presence and Community*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmann's Publishing Co., 1997), 100.

priests bear responsibility for keeping the sanctuary pure and holy, the inhabitants of the land bear responsibility for the state of the land.”²³ The question remains, is it just for the foreigner to be included in these stipulations? Are foreigners welcomed unconditionally, or is their existence in the land predicated on their ability to follow God’s (and subsequently Israel’s) law?

Why Include the Ger?

The identity of the *ger* in these passages is of utmost importance, especially since they have often been interpreted as “proselytes.” Haim Gottschalk takes this position, describing the *ger* as a convert committed to Torah.²⁴ If this were the case, the uncomfortable elements of these passages would disappear. In a strange way, Gottschalk’s thought connects to Levinas and Derrida— accepting the foreigner as a native born is to “forget” their former identity as a foreigner.²⁵ This reading essentially erases the *ger*’s identity as foreign. Though this reading sounds comforting, it does not make sense of the text. Firstly, if the *ger* were a convert, who’s foreign identity must be forgotten, then there would be no reason to mention the *ger* as a separate category in the stipulations.²⁶ Furthermore, Leviticus does not make legal equals out of Israelites and foreigners. Foreigners are not expected to sacrifice to YHWH as Israelites do nor must they participate in all of the festivals.²⁷ The *ger* is also prohibited from owning land within Israel, making them clearly distinct.²⁸ Understanding the identity of the foreigner is relevant for questions about assimilation. Since the *ger* is not necessarily a willing convert, are these stipulations a way of changing the foreigner?

²³ S. Tamar Kamionkowski. *Leviticus*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 199.

²⁴ Haim A Gottschalk, “The Acceptance of the Convert Based on Leviticus 19,” *Jewish BibleQuarterly* 37, no. 4 (2009): 256. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=cf04ef44-4d9d-3c88-903f-6ed82713 Cd3>.

²⁵ Gottschalk, 256.

²⁶ Jan Joosten. *People and Land in the Holiness Code : An Exegetical Study of the Ideational Framework of the Law in Leviticus 17-26*. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, V. 67. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 63.

²⁷ Joosten, 64.

²⁸ Aaron White, “Reading Inclusion Backwards: Considering the Apostolic Decree Again in Fresh Context,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 48, no. 4 (November 1, 2018): 6. doi:10.1177/0146107918801514.

Leviticus 18:26-28 makes clear the reasons why the *ger* is included in the Holiness Code; foreigners and Israelites have taken residence on the land and their actions have the power to defile it.²⁹ Concern for the purity of the land is directly related to God's presence. Joosten describes the relationship between land and temple as "concentric circles of diminishing holiness."³⁰ The sanctuary requires holiness because it houses God's presence. The land, as the residence of the temple and therefore YHWH, requires purity.³¹ When people commit particular sexual transgressions, thus defiling the land, the land cleanses itself by "vomiting" the people out.³² Just as impurities must leave God's sanctuary, the land also must be kept pure. Kamionkowski, summarizing Kiuchi, writes, "...the land has no Day of Atonement for annual cleaning of the sanctuary, so its only avenue for cleansing is vomiting."³³ Including the *ger* in such stipulations is not done in order to assimilate them to the host culture. Rather, all who live in the land, native and *ger* alike, are expected to adhere to these stipulations because of the God who dwells there. The Holiness Code makes it possible for Israelites and foreigners to continue living in the land.

The narrative in Leviticus 24 provides a sort of case study for the dynamics of the law which applies to both Israelite and foreigners. A brutal and strange story, Leviticus 24 portrays an ethnically mixed dweller in Israel who is stoned by the community for blaspheming God. A person of mixed heritage committing blasphemy posed a moral gray area for Moses. The question working in the background is: should someone who is foreign be expected to respect the name and presence of YHWH? Even more specifically, what if that person's belonging is unclear? Kamionkowski writes that the purpose of this story is to demonstrate that the blasphemy

²⁹ Leviticus 18:28

³⁰ Joosten, 177.

³¹ Joosten, 178.

³² Leviticus 18:28

³³ Kamionkowski, 199.

laws unambiguously apply to any person living in the land.³⁴ The sin of blasphemy, like the sexual sins in Leviticus 18, is related to the importance of God's presence. Avivah Zornberg draws parallels between the blasphemy laws and the murder laws. He states, "Hatred is the emotion that motivates both violence in action—the *makkah*—and blasphemy in language."³⁵ This presents an inverse of the greatest commandment. The command to love God and neighbour finds its opposite in blasphemy and murder. The foreigners are not forced to actively worship YHWH in the land, but they must respect his presence in it. Blasphemy "belittles"³⁶ or "defaces"³⁷ that presence, in the same way that murder belittles and defaces another human being. Thus, it is shown that God's presence in the land is what predicates obedience on the part of the *ger* and the Israelite.

ANE Parallels and Differences

The expectation that a god's presence would elicit certain expectations for people's action is not foreign to the Ancient Near Eastern mind. Most ancient peoples conceived of temples in similar ways— it was the space in which the deity dwelt, bringing a touchpoint between heaven and earth.³⁸ The survival and security of communities was always tied to the welfare of the deity.³⁹ Along with this, purity rituals ensured that the deity would manifest itself and continue to live in the idol and thus the temple.⁴⁰ Taking this into account, it should not be assumed that a foreigner would be offended by the expectations of a foreign god, since all gods came with stipulations.

³⁴ Kamionkowski, 266.

³⁵ Avivah Gottleib Zornberg. *The Hidden Order of Intimacy*. (New York: Schocken Books, 2022), 188.

³⁶ Kamionkowski, 264

³⁷ Zornberg, 190.

³⁸ Michael B. Hundley. "Gods in Dwellings : Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East," *Writings from the Ancient World Supplements* No. 3: 134. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013). Accessed November 8, 2023. ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/regent-college/reader.action?docID=3118298

³⁹ Hundley, 136.

⁴⁰ Hundley, 365

There are, however, key differences between YHWH and other ancient gods. Firstly, the priestly rituals in Leviticus are not simply to ensure YHWH's happiness and benevolence, although they are connected to blessing. Ancient priestly rituals construed gods as needy beings, requiring constant care and pampering.⁴¹ YHWH is not offered food because he needs it, rather much of the rituals are connected to atonement and the sustaining of the community. Ancient gods were "interdependent, together connected to creation, charged with its upkeep, and threatened by its dissolution,"⁴² whereas YHWH is construed as wholly independent of creation, not needing anything from it, but nonetheless choosing to be in relationship with it. Such conceptions of the gods present them as divine guests in the human realm, who, in a way, warrant unconditional hospitality towards themselves. YHWH, on the other hand, presents himself as the ultimate host and true owner of the land.⁴³ The Israelites do not host YHWH, rather they are his guests in the land, who in turn host others.

Another key difference between ancient near eastern ritual and what we find in Leviticus is the inclusion of the land in purification. Michael Hundley notes that personal and communal instances of purification in the ANE perhaps needed the deity's assistance, but were not necessary for the gods to remain in a community.⁴⁴ Unless one were to enter the god's temple with a certain impurity, the gods are seemingly depicted as indifferent towards matters of individual and communal purity. The removal rituals designed to deal with this would occur outside of the temple.⁴⁵ The god(s) could be implored to aid in making these successful, but nothing beyond this is expected. YHWH, on the other hand, is highly concerned with what goes

⁴¹ Hundley, 266.

⁴² Hundley, 364.

⁴³ Leviticus 25:23-24

⁴⁴ Michael B. Hundley. "Keeping Heaven on Earth : Safeguarding the Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle," *Forschungen Zum Alten Testament. 2. Reihe*, vol. 50: 123. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck GmbH & Co. KG, 2012), Accessed November 8, 2023. search-ebshost-com.ezproxy.regent-college.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthTpe=ip,shib&db=nlebk&AN=2341901&site=ehost-live.

⁴⁵ Hundley, "Keeping Heaven on Earth", 130.

on in the community outside of his temple. For this reason, the land too is in need of upkeep, just as the temple is. Perhaps foreigners would have found these expectations strange, however, drawing parallels to assimilation as we define it today is difficult to do with certainty.

God's Dangerous Hosting Presence

Thus far, God appears to be a demanding host towards his guests. His very presence elicits a particular way of life. It is often assumed that God demands purity because impurity poses a threat to his presence. Michael Hundley, drawing connections between the vulnerability of ancient gods and YHWH, states, “Human imperfection is anathema to the divine realm, lest it offend or infect the deity.”⁴⁶ Certainly, there are many Old Testament passages and stories which lead us to assume that impurity poses a threat to God. If impurity exists in the sanctuary and the land, it becomes inhospitable for him and his presence among his people is threatened. But if God is depicted as the host of the land, why must the guests make it hospitable for him?

Geoffrey Harper argues that rather than impurity posing a threat to God’s presence, it is God’s presence which poses a threat to impurity in the land and sanctuary.⁴⁷ He demonstrates this by comparing Leviticus and Ezekiel 8-11. In Ezekiel, Judah has defiled land and the temple through violence. Harper highlights Ezekiel 8:6 which reads, “Mortal, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary?”⁴⁸ While this sounds like divine abandonment in the face of impurity, Harper clarifies that the purpose of the abandonment is not because impurity has posed a threat to God. Rather, YHWH is withdrawing in order to “enable eradication of impurity.”⁴⁹ He moves his presence in order to “clean” his house. This is made clear by the prophet’s declaration of

⁴⁶ Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth*, 123.

⁴⁷ Geoffery G. Harper. “Endangered or Dangerous? YHWH’s Presence and Impurity in Levitical Perspective.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 46, no. 4 (2022): 490. doi:10.1177/03090892211061175.

⁴⁸ Harper, 485.

⁴⁹ Harper, 488.

YHWH's abandonment before the temple is destroyed⁵⁰ and the anticipated judgment.⁵¹ In showing how Ezekiel's portrayal of divine abandonment is perhaps more complicated than assumed, Harper argues that this in turn applies to Leviticus. One cannot assume that when God's absence is threatened, impurity is a threat *to him*. In Leviticus, the mitigation of the threat of God's withdrawal is done through the expulsion of impure things. Impure people cannot enter the sanctuary,⁵² impure utensils are smashed,⁵³ impure relationships cause the land to spit everyone out.⁵⁴ Nadab and Abihu are burned⁵⁵ and the blasphemer is stoned.⁵⁶ This parallels earlier depictions of God's presence, such as in Exodus where Moses must remove his sandals before YHWH⁵⁷ and Israel is not able to go up the mountain, lest they die.⁵⁸ Harper puts it well: "Throughout Leviticus, therefore, the threat is consistently posed by YHWH's presence to impure objects and people, not vice versa. Failing appropriate cleansing measures, divine proximity signals banishment or death for the impure. The holy is dangerous."⁵⁹

The Call of a Dangerous Host

It may seem, thus far, that Leviticus portrays quite the opposite of Derrida's unconditional hospitality. The stranger is both categorized and set apart from the people of Israel and is expected to adhere to the Holiness Code in order to remain in the land. Furthermore, God's holy presence demands life-changing action on the part of his guests. This may confirm Levinas' and Derrida's assumption about power dynamics—the host is always a threatening presence.

⁵⁰ Harper, 486.

⁵¹ Harper, 487.

⁵² Leviticus 8:35

⁵³ Leviticus 11:35

⁵⁴ Leviticus 18:26-28

⁵⁵ Leviticus 10:1-2

⁵⁶ Leviticus 24:10-23

⁵⁷ Exodus 3:5

⁵⁸ Exodus 19:12

⁵⁹ Harper, 490.

It should be noted, however, that while God's presence poses a certain kind of danger, Israel is not necessarily called to reflect this towards the *ger*. Instead, the Holiness Code casts *everyone*, regardless of ethnicity, as God's guests in the land. Called to remember their status as foreigners in the land of Egypt,⁶⁰ Israel must humbly include and welcome the *ger* as a co-foreigner. In Levinas' and Derrida's view each host poses a threat to the guest. In Leviticus, God's holiness is dangerous for all, and both Israel and the *ger* have the ability to protect or harm one another, either by obedience or transgression. They are bound together in a relationship of mutuality, which requires cooperation and the adherence to God's expectations. God's presence is demanding, but Israel's presence need not be.

The relationship between Israel and foreigners, rather than being one of demand, is characterized by a reflection of grace—grace which they have been offered by YHWH. Critiquing Derrida's vision of debt, gift, and economy, Ilsup Ahn argues that rather than ignoring the economy that exists between host and guest, it should be seen as “a source of grace.”⁶¹ A true sense of exchange exists between host and guest, but the radicalness of hospitality is achieved when the host forgives the debt incurred by the guest.⁶² Perhaps this is what we see in Leviticus. God, as host, provides ways for people to remain in his land, even when they become impure, via the purity rituals. The Holiness Code, though harsh, provides a way for the community to survive in the land as well. Taken altogether, ritual and holiness code can be seen as moves of divine grace from God, a kind of protection from the threat he poses. The people reflect this kind of grace in adhering to the code and remembering their identity as strangers. The Holiness Code required the participation of the whole community to be effective, making Israelites and foreigners dependent on one another. Israel extends grace to the foreigner by remembering their

⁶⁰ Leviticus 19:34

⁶¹ Ahn, 264.

⁶² Ahn, 253.

experience in Egypt and welcoming them as their native born.⁶³ The foreigner, in turn, graciously adapts their lifestyle in order to protect the entire community. The threat of oppression is a reality, but it is mitigated by this gracious exchange between host and guest.

Applications

How does this kind of hospitality apply to our current Christian communities? Firstly, we must remember that God's holiness is life-shaping, but this does not mean that we become demanding hosts of those who are different from us. Rather, we are called to be caught up in a graceful exchange. Walter Brueggemann, in his essay "Othering with Grace and Courage" acknowledges this dynamic, saying, "...covenanting (and spirituality) consists in learning the skills and sensitivities that include both the courage to assert self and the grace to abandon self to another."⁶⁴ Christian hospitality should not force us to forget ourselves, as Derrida and Levinas suggest, nor do we necessarily "dehumanize" the other by attempting to understand them. Instead, our hospitality consists of a mutual exchange of grace, where both self and others are respected. Along these lines, not all expectations for guests are oppressive. In fact, they may be the way in which we offer grace and ensure the health of the community. Such expectations also provide language which can identify when both host and guest pose threats to the community. The legacy of colonialism is one example which may need such language. Colonizer's approached land with an attitude of ownership, without recognizing their status as guests, subsequently oppressing those who already lived in the land. Such a dynamic does not fit Derrida and Levinas's expectations. There are cases when the guests may be oppressive too.

Along with this, Leviticus shows that God's dangerous holy presence requires transformation. People living in the midst of his presence were called to shape their lives and

⁶³ Leviticus 19:33-34

⁶⁴ Walter Brueggemann. "Othering with Grace and Courage." in *The Covenanted Self*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1999), 8.

practices in order to continue being in relationship with him. Perhaps, then, Leviticus should serve as a reminder of the seriousness of this holy presence in our lives. God is a gracious host, but he does ask something of us. This is reflected in Jesus, who called his followers to shape their lives according to his. Christians should be aware of this transformative call, but the way in which this transformation interacts with those outside the church should not be characterized by dominance and assimilation. Rather, we should seek to embody the kind of mutuality we see in Leviticus. This means that the strange and familiar, the guest and the host, are called to ensure one another's well-being. When we find ourselves as hosts, we are called to respond to guests with empathy, remembering our own journeys as "foreigners" and outsiders. When we are guests, we should strive to respond to our hosts in gracious and understanding ways, paying attention to how our actions affect a community we are unfamiliar with.

Conclusion

Derrida and Levinas hoped for an unconditional hospitable response to the Other. The biblical view of hospitality complicates this ideal, but it does not offer something less hopeful. Instead, hospitality is a call to graceful mutuality between host and guest which is rooted in an understanding of God as the ultimate host, whose dangerous presence shapes our lives. In such hospitality, assimilation may be a threat, but it is mitigated by this mutual dynamic which binds us all in one community.

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