Tolerance and Hospitality

Introduction

What are some of the virtues that help us sustain the politics of a common life amid competing loyalties, conflicting interests, rival visions of human flourishing, and incommensurable patterns of belief and practice? In a Christian account, love and justice must rank as primary. But these need further specification if we are to move beyond abstract admonitions and sustain a common life over time. This chapter examines tolerance and hospitality as two such virtues that help maintain a common life amid difference and disagreement, particularly of a moral and religious kind. Tolerance is analysed as a specification of justice, while hospitality betokens a specification of love. The key contrast between them is that while tolerance presumes a common life already in existence, hospitality does not, and seeks to generate one between strangers.

This chapter recognizes the importance of tolerance as a way of navigating plurality even as it criticizes certain understandings of tolerance and points beyond tolerance to hospitality as an alternative way of approaching those we find strange or objectionable. It begins by defining tolerance and situating its contemporary emphasis in a broader historical context. It then examines a number of theological and philosophical justifications for tolerance, outlining some of its key characteristics and presuppositions. Arguing that tolerance is a necessary but insufficient civic virtue for navigating difference and disagreement, the chapter goes on to define hospitality and discuss three, modern philosophical uses of hospitality as an alternative to tolerance. Going beyond its philosophical usage, the theological basis of hospitality is set out and then used as a
framework through which to approach inter-faith relations, such relations being a paradigmatic instance of the need to navigate constructively difference and disagreement. The chapter closes by contrasting tolerance and hospitality, drawing out why hospitality is necessary as a practice within democratic politics.

**Tolerance delineated**

In contemporary debates about how to cope with plurality and relate to those with whom one disagrees the concept of tolerance is a primary way in which this question is addressed. This is true not just for society in general, but within many religious communities. A common assumption in the literature relating to tolerance and religious diversity is that tolerance and the willingness to live with difference is a phenomenon that emerged in the West from the seventeenth century onwards. The emphasis on tolerance is seen also as a direct reaction against the allegedly religious wars of the post-Reformation era. However, the emphasis on the relative newness of tolerance is mistaken. It was, however, the search for a neutral arbiter between competing truth claims and a growing emphasis on individual autonomy that the notion of tolerance acquired increasing prominence. Acceptance of difference, and the advocacy of toleration as a good, are now seen as the pre-eminent way of thinking about how those who find

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3 Cary Nederman and John Laursen argue that the conventional picture of how the principle of toleration emerged in the West has been challenged by a considerable body of historical scholarship that demonstrates both the longevity and diversity of approaches to tolerance. Cary Nederman and John Laursen, *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Toleration in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds, Cary Nederman and John Laursen (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 1-16.
each other strange or objectionable should relate. Indicative of its prominence is the United Nation’s annual International Day for Tolerance on 16th November.\textsuperscript{4}

Tolerance involves the willingness to accept differences (whether religious, moral, or cultural) of which, at whatever level, one might, as an individual or as a community, find objectionable or which conflict with one’s own beliefs and practices.\textsuperscript{5} For a person or group to be tolerant, three conditions must be met. First, there must be some conduct about which one disapproves, even if only minimally or potentially. Second, although such a person or group has power to act coercively against, or interfere to prevent, that of which they disapprove, they do not. Toleration is constitutively linked to questions about the distribution of power: the tolerated are rarely those with more power, such as a majority or an elite. Third, not interfering coercively must result from more than acquiescence, resignation, indifference, apathy or a balance of power. One does not tolerate that which one is not concerned about; nor is it tolerance simply to accept what one cannot, or is not willing to, change (either because one lacks power to effect change or because, for whatever reason, one fears to use one’s power). Toleration involves a principled refusal to prohibit or seek to prohibit conduct believed to be wrong or harmful. As John Horton notes: ‘This gives rise to the so-called ‘paradox of toleration’ according to which toleration requires that it is right to permit that which is wrong.’\textsuperscript{6} Yet rather than a refusal to judge, tolerance entails a suspension of judgment about one thing – prosecution of the truth as one sees it here and now – in favour of a judgment for maintaining on-going relationship. Toleration thereby hangs precariously between power, morality, community and truth.

\textsuperscript{4} It was inaugurated after the 1995 ‘Year for Tolerance’. The day forms part of the UN’s efforts to promote human rights, mutual understanding between cultures, and social and economic development. http://www.un.org/en/events/toleranceday/ (accessed 01.08.17).

\textsuperscript{5} It is related to, but distinct from, notions of freedom of belief.

\textsuperscript{6} Horton, 'Toleration,' 431.
Against standard narratives, tolerance should not be seen as necessarily ‘secular’, Western or modern. Scriptural warrants for tolerance and freedom of conscience are given, for example, in Romans 14.1-23 and I Corinthians 8.1-12. Two early Christian advocates of toleration are Lactantius and Tertullian. And Medieval proponents include John of Salisbury, William of Rubruck and Marsiglio of Padua. Beyond the Christian tradition, arguments for tolerance and freedom of conscience are a theme in numerous religious and philosophical traditions. And tolerance is seen by some as a virtue that can occur in any form of social life. It is fair to say, however, that from the Reformation onwards, interest in the concept of tolerance intensified in the West, especially as it related to difference and disagreement about question of religious belief and practice. In the modern period, the increase of relations between Western Christianity and other faith traditions, initially as a result of colonial expansion and then as a result of increased immigration, gave a renewed impetus to the question of religious tolerance. Subsequently, the increasing cultural diversity in democratic societies and substantive ethical disagreement both between Christians and between Christians and non-Christians, for example, over abortion and same-sex relations, have led to assessments of how tolerance relates to the problem of ethical disputes.

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9 Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, V.19-21; and Tertullian’s *Apology* and ‘Letter to Scapula’.


Theological justifications for tolerance are varied and who or what is tolerated changes. Toleration also always has limits. For example, John Milton (1608-1674) presents a number of arguments for toleration throughout his work, some drawn from his heretical antitrinitarian theology, but is consistently and vehemently opposed to any toleration of Roman Catholics.\(^\text{15}\) The Anglican, Mandell Creighton (1843-1901) gave one of the most striking theological defences of tolerance. He saw it as condition of evangelical witness. After an account of how tolerance developed in the West, Creighton reflects on the need for tolerance to have a theological foundation, without which its exercise could easily become distorted.\(^\text{16}\) In Creighton’s view, tolerance is part of the faithful witness of the church to the truth it has received from God.\(^\text{17}\) Creighton’s analysis of the theological basis of tolerance in the light of the hope humans have in Christ is unusual. A more recent attempt to develop a constructive theological account of tolerance is given by David Fergusson, who himself draws on Reformation theological justifications of “evangelical toleration” such as that given by Sebastian Castellio, a contemporary and one time colleague of Calvin.\(^\text{18}\) For Castellio, and many other Protestant theologians, toleration was a precondition for the preaching and reception of the Gospel leading to conversion.\(^\text{19}\) For the most part, the theological advocacy of tolerance is grounded in some combination of the following: the inherent capacity of humans as created in the image of God the expression of which must be respected even if the form it takes is sinful (for example, free will); the fallibility and finitude of humans resulting from humans being created and fallen, and therefore the need for epistemic humility and a plurality of views as no one person or group holds a monopoly of truth; final judgment as to who is saved as lying with God not humans, so wheat and weeds

\(^\text{15}\) Arguments for toleration are evident in his early divorce tracts (1643-5) and *Aeropagitica* (1644) and continue to the preface of his unpublished *De Doctrina Christiana*. While even up to his final pamphlet, *Of True Religion* (1673), he inveighed against toleration of Roman Catholics.


\(^\text{17}\) Ibid., 135.

\(^\text{18}\) David Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 72-93.

should be allowed to grow up together; the nature of authentic confession as of necessity uncoerced (unwilling piety is no piety at all) and so freedom of conscience is a condition of true belief; and finally, the application of the golden rule to never do unto others as you would have them do unto you. There is a prudential dimension to this last argument: one cannot presume that the rulers of the day will share one’s own commitments. The situation of Christians around the world testifies to this, in some places Christianity forms the cultural majority and in others, Christians are a persecuted minority.

These theological rationales for tolerance are echoed in the four main modern defences of tolerance. The first approach to tolerance centres on concern about human fallibility and the limits to human knowledge. However, the concern about human fallibility should not be seen as a form of relativism. Neither does a concern about human fallibility imply that the tolerant person is completely sceptical about the possibility of knowing the truth about a particular question or issue. As Rainer Forst notes: “[T]he difficulty of toleration, which so many authors have wrestled with, is precisely to justify toleration without calling for the abandonment of ethical or religious claims to truth.” Moreover, a certain kind of relativist is actually opposed to the concept of tolerance. However, tolerance can imply a limited scepticism that maintains belief in an ultimate horizon of truth which differing positions may shed light on. In this sense, such justifications are epistemologically relativist while being ontologically realist. For example, Reinhold Niebuhr, for whom ‘complete scepticism represents the abyss of meaninglessness’, contends, in relation to religious toleration, that while each religion should seek to proclaim its ‘highest insights’, it should preserve a ‘humble and contrite recognition of the fact that all actual expressions of religious faith are subject to historical contingency

20 Connected to this point is a further argument that is less to do with tolerance per se and more to do with the nature and limits of political authority in relation to matters of doctrine and morality. Such arguments are mostly based on some variation of the separation of temporal and spiritual powers, often referred to as either the two swords or two kingdoms doctrine.

21 Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, 94.


and relativity.‘ In his view: ‘Such a recognition creates a spirit of tolerance.’ Arguments for tolerance on the prudential grounds of human fallibility can take a variety of forms. These include the view that neither party has complete possession of the truth, truth will benefit from free investigation (and thence dissent), and certainty in theological or philosophical questions is difficult to achieve. This approach to tolerance operates horizontally between parallel groups or persons.

A second way of approaching the issue of tolerance seeks procedures that are tolerant. This is to say that arguments for limits to intervention and coercion are invoked when someone has power to change another’s behaviour which they find objectionable. John Locke’s *An Essay on Toleration* (1667) exemplifies this approach. Procedural arguments are generally advocated in vertical relations where the exercise of judicial and political authority is held by one group (for example, a majority) over another (a minority). Bernard Williams identifies a procedural approach as central to what he calls ‘liberal pluralism’ and describes it thus:

On the one hand, there are deeply held and differing convictions about moral or religious matters, held by various groups within society. On the other hand, there is a supposedly impartial state, which affirms the rights of all citizens to equal consideration, including an equal right to form and express their convictions.

A problem with this approach, exemplified in the modern liberal state, is that the state is never neutral, rather it has very definite commitments that it prosecutes vigorously and often violently. Alistair MacIntyre, who is highly critical of liberal notions of the

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25 Ibid.
neutrality of the state, argues: ‘The modern state is never merely a neutral arbiter of conflicts, but is always to some degree itself a party to social conflict, and … acts in the interests of particular and highly contestable conceptions of liberty and property.’29 Thus, the foundation of, and procedures for, securing modern notions of tolerance prove self-defeating. However, whether or not a state can be neutral between rival conceptions of the good must be separated from the non-neutrality of the liberal state towards that which is judged intolerable. Tolerance depends on making a distinction between what is objectionable, but can be tolerated, and what is intolerable and is prohibited via recourse to a legal (and thereby coercive) process. The liberal state is never neutral, it is obliged to prosecute that which is judged intolerable as either a crime or to censor it in some way. For example, dog fighting as a sport or paedophilic sexual practice are crimes, while speech that is seen to threaten national security is censored. The liberal state, like ecclesial authorities, places limits on tolerance and displays toleration’s underside once that limit is reached: that is, it is intolerant of that which lies beyond the bounds of what is considered tolerable. Only now it is the liberal state that has the power and resources to “persecute” that which is judged intolerable.

The third approach seeks to argue for tolerance as a substantive good. The arguments for tolerance in On Liberty (1859) by John Stuart Mill are an example of this approach. However, framing analyses of how one should live with difference in terms of tolerance as a substantive good is conceptually problematic. As Bernard Williams comments: ‘The difficulty with toleration is that it seems to be at once necessary and impossible.’30 He points out that there is a difference between pragmatic tolerance and tolerance as a substantive value. Tolerance as a substantive value is based on a particular conception of the good: that is, the good of individual autonomy. This leads to the following problem: ‘The practice of toleration cannot be based on a value such as that of individual


autonomy, and also hope to escape from substantive disagreements about the good.\textsuperscript{31} Those who disagree with the liberal conception of the good will necessarily reject liberal conceptions of toleration just as they reject liberal conceptions of rationality on which the particular good of toleration is based. There is a further conceptual problem with arguments for tolerance as a substantive good based on voluntaristic notions of human autonomy. As Susan Mendus puts it: ‘We need to understand how people are interdependent as well as independent. We need to explain how autonomy is formed, not solely from the internal nature of individuals, but also from the nature of the society in which they find themselves.’\textsuperscript{32} To ground arguments for tolerance solely on individual autonomy ignores the ways in which agency depends on being embedded within wider sets of relations, for no one is an island unto themselves.

A fourth justification for tolerance directly addresses the above critique of tolerance by positing tolerance as a virtue. On this account, while tolerance intends to respect and enable autonomy, it seeks also to enable the good of a shared life to be sustained. Tolerance presumes and depends on a prior form of common life, which benefits both the tolerant and the tolerated. In intending this common life to be perpetuated, despite finding what a fellow member is doing objectionable, tolerance recognizes that membership of a relatively just and generous common life is a condition and possibility of purposeful agency that goes beyond mere survival. “Autonomy” understood as purposeful agency is not reducible to choice and is not necessarily voluntaristic. Independent action always exists within certain conditions and possibilities (economic, social, political, environmental, physical and psychological) that make that purposeful agency possible. Our choices inevitably have limits and one set of those limits are determined by the boundaries of what is considered tolerable by the customs, mores and laws of the polity within which an individual is situated. What is licit/tolerated in some societies is more varied than in others. But limits are inevitable even as these boundaries are always contested. Yet alternative forms of life and worldviews are needed if autonomy is to have


any meaning: if there is no choice, then autonomy is an entirely abstract proposition. So rather than autonomy per se, tolerance aims at maintaining plurality as a condition of purposeful agency amid commonality.33

John Bowlin develops a sustained philosophical and theological account of tolerance as a virtue. Building on the work of Thomas Aquinas, he envisages tolerance as a ‘natural virtue’ that occurs in all forms of complex society. He distinguishes tolerance from its distortions and semblances in order to define it as ‘the patient endurance of another’s objectionable difference.’34 Someone with the virtue of tolerance neither resents enduring what they find objectionable or scandalous, nor do they welcome it, nevertheless they tolerate it without effort or reserve, as this is the right or just response to objectionable difference.35 Revision or abandonment of what is found objectionable might be hoped for, but desire for renunciation cannot be a condition of toleration if the act is to be virtuous. As an act, tolerance is both a good in itself, and a means to achieve other goods. These other goods are a well-ordered and peaceable society characterized by a high degree of personal and communal autonomy. One tolerates the objectionable out of love for those goods which are a condition of human flourishing. The goods tolerance as a virtue intends are therefore shared between the tolerant and the tolerated: “The tolerant want to secure the common goods of that society, but they also want the person they tolerate to enjoy those goods and share in that society.”36

On Bowlin’s account, tolerance is a species of justice as it seeks what is due a fellow member of a common life if the good of the whole and the goods of association are to be

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34 Ibid., 118, 147, 164. It should be noted that Bowlin’s Christian conception contrasts with the earliest philosophical treatments of tolerance as a virtue by Cicero and Seneca, both of whom saw tolerance as a form of bravery that involved dignified or steadfast endurance in the face of suffering, injustice or the twists and turns of fate. This Stoic conception sees *tolerantia* as a self-directed virtue that enables self-control. This contrasts with a Christian conception which sees tolerance as a virtue orientated to sustaining right relationship with God and others. Bowlin’s account echoes this other orientated form first developed by Patristic writers building on Scriptural precedent.
36 Ibid., 119.
maintained. As a form of justice, the limits of tolerance, and thereby judgments about what is objectionable but tolerable and what is intolerable, are set by what is unjust. Those things that fracture the good of the whole by perpetuating systemic injustice to some should not be tolerated. Racism and sexism being two cases in point. Moral evil should never be tolerated. However, judgments about what is objectionable and what is intolerable will differ and be contested within societies and between societies. What Muslims, Christians and atheists find intolerable will differ within each group and between each group. For example, some will find wearing of the hijab objectionable but tolerable while others will argue that it is an unjust imposition on women and so should not be tolerated. And while sexism is judged intolerable, certain acts, such as sexist jokes, might be judged objectionable, while others judge such forms of speech intolerable, thereby justifying limiting the autonomy of those intent on making such jokes through coercively censoring them in some way. That said, not everything that is intolerable can be prohibited and so must, to some degree, be tolerated, lest, as Aquinas puts it, ‘certain goods be impeded or greater evils incurred.’ For example, some Christians judge abortion to be intolerable but argue it should be legally licit, albeit quarantined within certain limits, so as to avoid greater evils.

Part of sustaining a political life is making prudential judgments about what is objectionable but tolerable and what is intolerable and must be actively opposed or re-configured through a democratic or legal process. Navigating these different judgments takes us beyond toleration to politics as defined in the introduction. For example, for theological reasons, I find living in a state that possesses nuclear weapons intolerable and something to be endured whereas others, with justifiable, non-theological reasons, see possessing nuclear weapons as a rational and necessary policy in order to defend our

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37 As does Forst (Toleration in Conflict, 510). However, Forst and Bowlin have radically different conceptions of justice.

38 For an example of why, in certain contexts, making judgments about the licitness or otherwise of sexist humor can be extremely complex see Kimberle Crenshaw’s intersectional analysis of the 2 Live Crew’s album As Nasty As They Wanna Be. Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” Stanford Law Review 43.6 (1991), 1283-1295.

39 Quoted in Bowlin, Tolerance Among the Virtues, 179.
common life against domination or destruction by an oppressive foreign power. They view my call for getting rid of nuclear weapons as intolerable and dangerous. What is required between us is politics rather than tolerance. But in the meantime, I can endure those who advocate for the need for nuclear weapons and the apathy of my fellow citizens who have never thought about the issue even as I actively try to persuade them of their error.

Some things that are intolerable must still be endured because coercively prohibiting them would create havoc or greater oppression. Yet other things that are intolerable must be endured because, despite policy changes, they are systemic. Rather than patient endurance, they are must be endured impatiently as we engage in a democratic process to dismantle them at a structural and cultural level. Impatient endurance entails ‘cold’ or ‘righteous’ anger, which points to God’s wrath against sin and idolatry. Such anger is born out of grief for the gap between the world as it is and the world as it should be. For example, racism is an intolerable moral evil yet it is baked into the forms of life and structures of the West and so even as it must actively be dismantled through civil resistance and agitation as expressions of righteous anger, the reality is, that it has to be impatiently endured. But this is not to tolerate it. Likewise, patriarchy, debt slavery and ecological devastation, to name but three systemic problems, are all intolerable and their causes must be opposed in the strongest terms possible, yet they are not about to disappear, so must be impatiently endured.

At this juncture, a brief excurses on the distinction between problems and issues is helpful. Problems are systemic, long term injustices that take a shift of social imaginary

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40 This is to build on but also depart from Bowlin. That said, Bowlin does argue that some combination of contestation and tolerance is a central feature of democratic politics. Ibid., 171.

41 It is important to distinguish between wrath as blind fury that is vindictive and seeks revenge, and wrath as the urgent pursuit of retributive justice, respect and reparation. The latter is anger tempered by perseverance, orientated to hope, and yet which maintains a sense of urgency. For a constructive political theology of wrath see Willa Boesak, God’s Wrathful Children: Political Oppression and Christian Ethics (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995). For an account of ‘cold anger’ see Mary Beth Rogers, Cold Anger: A Story of Faith and Power Politics (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1990), 188–192; and Jeffrey Stout, Blessed are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 64–69.
and structure of feeling not just policy to change. A problem is an amorphous, multifaceted, and generalized structural condition such as crime or poverty. To focus on problems can be anti-political because it generates apathy and fatalism and so drains energy for change and directs people away from public action towards making the best of their situation for themselves and their family. In contrast to a problem, an issue is a specific and potentially “winnable” course of action or proposal targeted at identifiable people and institutions. As Saul Alinsky succinctly defines it: “An issue is something you can do something about.” If climate change is a problem, mountain top removal is an issue. If sexism is a problem, ending pay disparities based on gender is an issue. The focus on issues is a turn away from structure to agency. People cannot choose the problems that afflict them but they can choose the solutions they think might help alleviate those problems. Political action involves motivating and mobilizing people to act together for change through identifying the possibilities for agency through breaking structural problems down into winnable issues. Impatient endurance means addressing issues even while we endure problems.

What is tolerable relates to a prior set of commitments about the goods of a common life and conceptions of justice. A difficult case in point are those who, in bad faith, would use the goods of a democratic common life to destroy or subvert it. This is a move beyond dissent from established customary and legal norms. The crucial distinction is the intentional commitment to subvert and destroy the rule of law; the equality and dignity of all persons regardless of belief or identity; basic freedoms of speech, belief and association; and democratic politics as a primary form of solving collective problems and addressing social conflicts. Since World War II there have been various “political heretics,” including Marxist-Leninists, Fascists, and certain strands of Wahhabist/Salafist

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43 This will sound insufficiently radical or revolutionary to some. However, actual revolutions – as distinct from utopian fantasies – only ever address a cluster of issues and no revolution to date has solved problems like poverty or ecological devastation.

44 Aquinas treats this problem under the heading of sedition, defined as that which is opposed to and seeks to disturb justice and the common good. *Summa Theologiae*, I.II.Q. 42
Sunni Islam. Such groups are intolerable because, rather than either live in separatist enclaves, or dissent from and critique liberal democracy, they seek to destroy it through taking advantage of its goods in bad faith to actively undermine the bonds of trust and cooperation necessary to sustain a common life. This subversion is done in order to demolish democratic politics and establish what those committed to liberal democracy see as a tyrannous regime of domination. Again, differences will occur as to judgments about who is acting in bad faith and whose approach will subvert democratic life. Populists can argue plutocrats fall into this category, and libertarians can see democratic socialists in this light, while democratic socialists can see libertarians in the same way. There is a clear and uncontroversial mandate to use rule bound coercive power to police political heretics who commit crimes to achieve political ends (murder, kidnapping, bombing etc.), but what about the recruitment and grooming of new adherents? And should anti-democratic ideologies be considered intolerable speech and thereby censored or banned? How to address political heretics acting in bad faith without in turn destroying the conditions and possibilities of a democratic common life – the rule of law, freedom of association, freedom of speech etc. – is a vexed matter only addressable by contextual political judgments. There can be no one size fits all approach and tolerance is inadequate as a framework for developing policy as any coherent response demands an unequivocal and explicit commitment to substantive moral goods.

46 This echoes core arguments in Locke’s An Essay on Toleration. Locke sees as intolerable those who, by dint of their commitments, cannot be trusted to act in good faith (for Locke this was atheists), and those who are subject to a hostile foreign power and so likewise, cannot be trusted to act for the commonwealth (for Locke this was Roman Catholics).
47 As indicated in the discussions in this book of Augustine, class, and Black Power, there are judgments to be made about whether a liberal capitalist order is a basically just regime acting unjustly or a fundamentally unjust regime that needs to be overturned (a key distinction in Protestant resistance theory). However, even if the current political order is judged fundamentally unjust, if such a judgment entails a commitment to a more just and generous form of democracy pursued through democratic means it is entirely different in kind from one that makes the same judgment against the system but then intends to replace democracy itself with a totalitarian or tyrannous form of political order. While the latter sits within the moral terrain of sedition and renders its proponents intolerable, the former sits within the moral terrain of civil disobedience and its proponent’s views must be judged as to whether they are objectionable or not.
Tolerance is a necessary virtue in democratic politics but not a sufficient one. And while tolerance is a species of justice, as Bowlin argues, theologically, love as well as justice must form part of the response to objectionable difference. Bowlin focuses on forbearance as a form love takes as it endures. In contrast, I will focus on hospitality as another form love takes, particularly as it pertains to how religious differences might be approached lovingly. In doing so, the focus on hospitality provides a corrective to the narrow focus on tolerance that to many seems insufficient as the horizon of thought about the current context of religious plurality. As Nederman and Laursen point out: ‘One stimulus to enlarging the horizons of current toleration theorists may well be a careful examination and appreciation of how earlier thinkers dealt with similar issues concerning the diversity of human conviction and action.’ The analysis and assessment of hospitality given here constitutes precisely the kind of exercise that Nederman and Laursen call for.

**Hospitality and receiving the stranger**

As a way of framing relations between Christians and non-Christians (understood as ideal typical categories), hospitality is political. It is a way of conceptualising how to forge a common life with others with whom we disagree or who are, at some level, strangers to us. Although it can appear to be one way and non-reciprocal, it is *not* a form of agape or grace; that is, a one way giving without either conditions or the expectation of a return or counter-gift. Hospitality as a penultimate virtue operates with the expectation that an appropriate response will be given: the guest will be a guest and not an enemy who harms me. Hospitality aims at forging a common world of meaning and action between giver and receiver while recognizing actual or latent conflict and difference. Actual or latent hostility is converted into hospitality, even if only for a while.

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49 Nederman and Laursen, *Difference and Dissent*, 12.
Hospitality can entail enormous asymmetry between the gifts received and what is offered in return, and what is offered may only be a symbolic gesture such as a song or a word of gratitude. Yet the exchanges are tokens of recognition or esteem that marks both guest and host as having standing in relation to each other. The gift of hospitality both signals respect and demands reciprocal recognition from the other, a demand that presumes and intends the possibility of a common life. Ultimately, what is given in hospitality is oneself and the demonstration that, first, one is someone who can participate in reciprocal relations over time, and second, one recognizes one (and one’s household) is not self-sufficient, but needs others.\textsuperscript{51} The demand for and offer of reciprocal recognition via hospitality entails a simultaneous challenging of and a generous reaching out to another. It entails also the interplay of freedom, equality and association constitutive of all generative human agency. As the philosopher, Marcel Hénaff contends:

Above all, [gift exchange] remains governed by the triple obligation to give, to receive, and to reciprocate the gift. This is a paradoxical obligation, not only because it is at the same time free and required but also because for the partners it constitutes the reciprocal recognition of their freedom. The giver recognizes the other’s freedom by honoring him, but he also claims his own freedom through his offer of munificent gifts, which amounts to a challenge for the other to do the same. This agonistic relation is first and foremost an equal one.\textsuperscript{52}

The sociologist Marcel Mauss suggests that ceremonial and public gift exchange is an agonistic yet peaceful means of generating mutual recognition between distinct groups in contexts where there is no centralized, sovereign state. With the advent of the modern state, public and mutual recognition between strangers becomes increasingly mediated and guaranteed through law and bureaucracy – with tolerance replacing hospitality as the


\textsuperscript{52} Marcel Hénaff, \textit{The Price of Truth: Gift, Money, and Philosophy} (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 397.
primary virtue governing relations with strangers. The intolerable is that which is policed in some way by the state, the tolerated, that which is legally licit even if it is not socially commended. Although hospitality now operates in the shadow cast by the modern state, it is a non-state centric form of relation. It involves gifts from one’s customs and traditions being offered as a way of calling forth reciprocal recognition from others. Without the kind of public recognition generated by gift exchange, exemplified by hospitality given and received, then the kinds of social bonds such gift exchange can generate between diverse and potentially hostile groups is absent and entirely administrative and commodified ways of organizing and constituting social relations dominates political and social existence. The result is that persons become treated as things and the dynamic interplay of freedom, equality and mutual association becomes brittle and shatters. This is not to say hospitality is without its deformations. The corruption of hospitality results in forms of paternalism and clientelism (and the injustices these re-inscribe), or can trigger a degenerative cycle of mimetic rivalry leading to processes of scapegoating and victimization.53

Hospitality is conceptualized by a number of philosophers as an essential political practice for negotiating life with strangers. Foremost among them is Immanuel Kant. Kant accorded hospitality a central significance in his account of how people from different cultures can ‘enter into mutual relations which may eventually be regulated by public laws, thus bringing the human race nearer and nearer to a cosmopolitan constitution’.54 Kant sees hospitality as a ‘natural right’ possessed of all humans ‘by virtue of their right to communal possession of the earth’s surface’.55 He distinguishes the ‘natural right of hospitality’ from the ‘right of a guest’. The guest makes a claim

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53 This draws on the work of René Girard. The implication of his account of mimetic rivalry is to highlight the ambiguity of sacrifice—which I take to be a form of ceremonial gift exchange—as both a means of resolving or forestalling violent conflicts but through processes of scapegoating and victimization lead to violence being visited upon the one rather than erupting between the many.


55 Ibid.
upon one to ‘become a member of the native household for a certain time’.\textsuperscript{56} By contrast, a stranger may only claim a ‘right of resort’: that is, the right to enter into relations with other inhabitants of the land or community. The converse of this is that the visitor may \textit{only} attempt to enter into relations. It is on this basis that Kant critiques the inhospitable and oppressive behaviour of the ‘commercial states’ that conquered, rather than merely entered into relations with, foreign countries and peoples, for example, the British in India.\textsuperscript{57}

Alistair MacIntyre, like Kant, envisages hospitality of strangers as required if society is to be maintained and humans to flourish.\textsuperscript{58} Echoing Kant, MacIntyre sees hospitality as a universal practice.\textsuperscript{59} However, instead of grounding hospitality in notions of a universal possession like Kant, MacIntyre grounds it in a universal capacity: that is, the virtue of \textit{misericordia}. He understands \textit{misericordia} to denote the capacity for grief or sorrow over someone else’s distress just insofar as one understands the other’s distress as one’s own. It is not mere sentiment; instead, it is sentiment guided by reason. Following Aquinas’ definition of the term, he states: ‘\textit{Misericordia} is that aspect of charity whereby we supply what is needed by our neighbour and among the virtues that relate us to our neighbour \textit{misericordia} is the greatest.’\textsuperscript{60} For MacIntyre, to understand another’s distress as one’s own is to recognise that other as a neighbour, whether they are family, a friend, or a stranger. Thus, \textit{misericordia} directs one to include the stranger within one’s communal relationships. It is thus the basis for extending the bounds of one’s communal obligations, and thereby including the other in one’s relations of giving and receiving characterised by just generosity. In contrast to tolerance as a virtue, which presumes an already existent common life, \textit{misericordia} as the virtue that undergirds the practice of hospitality, intends to create a common life where there may be none.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 123.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 125.
MacIntyre’s conception of hospitality fits within his broader account of how different traditions of belief and practice can, over time, come to adjudicate between their rival accounts of the good life. This involves a process of wherein each tradition plays guest and host to the other. This inter-weaving of guest-host relations involves three steps.\(^{61}\) The first is that protagonists from each tradition must learn the language of their rivals’ tradition, enriching their own vocabulary where necessary. By inhabiting both standpoints they will be able to recognise what is and what is not translatable from one language to the other. MacIntyre cites the examples of Cicero translating between Greek philosophy and Latin and the Jesuits translating between Christianity and Confucianism as instances of this process. Translatability, and the consequent option of rejection, makes possible the second stage. The second step involves each protagonist giving an account or history of the other in the other’s terms, thus demonstrating that she properly understands the other’s point of view.\(^{62}\) MacIntyre then asks: “To what might the construction of such histories lead?”\(^{63}\) He answers this question by setting out the third step in his theory of how different traditions may negotiate their differences. This involves each tradition evaluating itself in the light of the other tradition and judging whether its own account of the truth is inferior to that offered by the other. For MacIntyre, if each tradition gives an account of the other and irresolvable problems are seen in either of the traditions that the rival can explain, or give a solution to, then it is rational for the “loser”, within the terms of reference of their own tradition, to accept their rival’s criteria of evaluation. Thus, as MacIntyre puts it, “Incommensurability … does not after all preclude rational debate and encounter”\(^{64}\). Whether one concurs with MacIntyre’s approach or not, the point about including his account of tradition-constituted deliberation about the good in a discussion of tolerance is that it points beyond the binary of tolerance/intolerance to a way of being.


\(^{62}\) Alasdair MacIntyre, “Incommensurability, Truth and the Conversation,” 117.

\(^{63}\) Ibid.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., 118.
committed to a distinctive position yet engaged with others for reasons intrinsic to that position: in short, it is suggestive of a roots down, walls down approach.

The force of MacIntyre’s account comes to the fore when it is located in contexts of hyper diversity. MacIntyre envisages the renewal of contemporary social, economic and political structures as emerging from local reflection and local political structures. It is only in the context of local communities that goods in common can be rationally deliberated upon and embodied. Particular conceptions of human flourishing can be embodied in anything from a congregation, to household farms, to schools, and businesses. However, to construct such embodiments requires engaging in co-operative enterprises with those whose point of view is very different. Thus, disagreements will be formulated in concrete terms as people make and remake schools, clinics, workplaces, and other institutions. The resolution of such disagreements is worked out through something like the process of inter-tradition conversation outlined above. For MacIntyre, and in contrast to the first argument for tolerance, far from being something to avoid, conflict is a necessary part of the process of deliberation. On his approach, and in contrast to the second argument for tolerance, religious reasons are not to be left at the door in order to take part in a space governed by supposedly neutral procedures; rather, “thick” language and clarifying what we disagree about is a precondition of rational deliberation about goods in common.

As should be clear from the above, MacIntyre neither advocates withdrawal into sectarian ghettos nor seeks to establish a single tradition that suppresses all dissenting voices. MacIntyre is sometimes criticized for having an idealistic account of tradition, yet he sees traditions as inherently contested, fissiparous entities that through their history of interaction and encounter, incorporate and build on bits and pieces of other traditions. While he gives a formal account of traditions, his conception can accommodate a vision of traditions as loose-leaf folders rather than tightly bound books, and thus envisage relations between traditions less in terms of incommensurability and more in terms of ad hoc commensurability. What is a significant problem in MacIntyre’s approach is that he gives no account of how his process of conversation between traditions is possible in a
context where power is distributed unequally; for example, where one tradition is dominant and another is an immigrant tradition. This is the reality of diversity in Western societies, even in North America where immigrant communities have to define themselves in relation to a prevailing Protestant hegemony. It is to the reality of unequal relations in plural societies and to the mutually constitutive nature of inter-tradition relations that hospitality addresses.

Jacques Derrida develops a very different conception of hospitality to that of either Kant or MacIntyre.\textsuperscript{65} Derrida’s account connects hospitality to democracy and its inherently exclusionary or sectarian nature. For Derrida, democracy involves drawing some and not others together in a circle that thereby excludes those on the outside. We call the circle ‘the people’ and democratic government is said to be of, by and for, and therefore entirely enclosed within, this circle of people. A generalized form of familial relation – namely, fraternity – is then taken as the sign or figure that is paradigmatic for political relations within the circle.\textsuperscript{66} By linking the political relation with the blood relation, the imagined and constructed political community is thereby rendered natural and necessary.

Derrida’s strategy for opening up and pluralising the circle is to contend that the circle constitutes only one pole of democracy. Its other pole is the absolute value placed on the equality and singularity of everyone. These two poles are in tragic relation to each other. As Derrida puts it:

There is no democracy without respect for irreducible singularity or alterity, but there is no democracy without the ‘community of friends’ (\textit{koïna ta philōn}), without the calculation of majorities, without identifiable, stabilizable, representable subjects, all equal. These two laws are irreducible one to the other. Tragically irreconcilable and forever wounding.\textsuperscript{67}


\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 22.
It is the ‘forever wounding’ quality of the relations between these two poles that opens the way for a more pluralistic democracy ‘yet to come.’ The value placed on the irreducible singularity of everyone, and the universal horizon this opens up, means democratic politics is able to include others outside the circle. It is hospitality that enables us to be receptive to the singularity of others. Derrida calls for a radical, kenotic and unconditional grace as the basis for a form of hospitality in which guest and host both recognise and mutually learn from each other. For Derrida, this unconditional, self-dispossessive hospitality (which is really a form of agapic love rather than hospitality) is the key to opening up the closed circle of friends. As such, it stands in a dynamic and deconstructive tension with the kinds of social and political patterns of sociality necessary to build stable and on-going relationships. Derrida explicitly recognises this tension:

Pure hospitality consists in leaving one's house open to the unforeseeable arrival, which can be an intrusion, even a dangerous intrusion, liable eventually to cause harm. This pure or unconditional hospitality is not a political or juridical concept. Indeed, for an organized society that upholds its laws and wants to maintain the sovereign mastery of its territory, its culture, its language, its nation, for a family or for a nation concerned with controlling its practices of hospitality, it is indeed necessary to limit and to condition hospitality. This can be done with the best intentions in the world, since unconditional hospitality can also have perverse effects.68

Derrida’s work highlights the paradox that to be hospitable we have to come from somewhere – we must have a home/circle of friends – yet such a circle depends on acts of

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exclusion. Acts of self-dispossessive hospitality are one way through which to open this circle. 69

Following the analysis of Kant, MacIntyre and Derrida’s differing conceptions of hospitality we can see that while hospitality may be a practice central to most cultures, it can be conceptualised (and practiced) in very different ways. Thus, living with those who are different, and framing relations with those who are different in terms of hospitality (rather than tolerance) entails understanding hospitality in the light of one particular tradition and then bringing these differing conceptions and practices into relation with each other. What follows is an assessment of hospitality within Christianity. Alongside a summary theology of hospitality, what follows includes examples of how hospitable reframes inter-faith relations.

**Inter-faith relations and hospitality**

In some contexts, it is the church which has a cultural-historical, and in parts of Europe, legal, priority. This means churches are not struggling to make sense of their new situation, have established institutions, educational and representational processes and wide-ranging relational networks. There is a tendency by those outside religious communities to understand this within a framework of discrimination and seek ways to use legislation to create equality between all faiths, whether minority faith traditions themselves want it or not. From the perspective of minority faith traditions such a process of equalization can be perceived not as one of levelling up but of levelling down and eventually excluding religion from the public sphere. 70 Such exclusion is often justified in terms of a commitment to tolerance (understood as a policy rather than a virtue).

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69 It should be noted that they are not the only way and they too are problematic. John Milbank criticizes Derrida’s ‘other-regarding’ ethics for re-introducing forms of self-possession and invulnerability and refusing the contingent and therefore open ended and uncertain nature of the moral life. John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 138-161.

In terms of inter-faith relations there are many instances where the Christian church is the host and other traditions are the guest. Rabbi Jonathan Sachs portrays this negatively as the ‘country-house’ model that demands assimilation.\footnote{Jonathan Sacks, \textit{The Home We Build Together: Recreating Society} (London: Continuum, 2007), 15-18.} Outlined here is a more generous and generative reading of hospitality that sees it as one, constructive way of framing the relationship between ‘established’ and ‘immigrant’ traditions. While the account of hospitality given here is specifically Christian, most traditions have beliefs and customary practices deeply embedded within them relating to hospitality. So while hospitality must always take a determinate form depending on which tradition is the host, it need not be an exclusively Christian approach to inter-faith relations.

Within Christianity, hospitality as a virtue and practice, when transfigured through God’s love, is part of the church’s witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the hospitality that weak and sinful humans have received from God.\footnote{For a more extensive reflection on the Scriptural and theological basis of hospitality as a Christian virtue and practice see Luke Bretherton, \textit{Hospitality as Holiness; Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity} (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 128-146.} We who bring nothing to our relationship with God echo this in our reception of others. Echoing the nature of divine-human relations, within the Christianity, there is a normative concern for the weakest and most vulnerable: for example, the poor, the sick, and the refugee. Moreover, the focus on the vulnerable stranger will, on occasion, mean that the church finds itself actively opposed by those who would be, by Christian criteria of evaluation, inhospitable to the vulnerable stranger. Thus the Christian practice of hospitality can be, because of its priorities, deeply prophetic, calling into question the prevailing economic, social or political settlement. Conversely, because of its particular understanding of what hospitality requires, the church is not uncritically welcoming of everyone: a proper evaluation must be made of who, in any particular instance, is the vulnerable stranger to be welcomed. The obligation to be hospitable thereby provides the resources for immanent critique of ‘real-existing’ Christianity when Christians fail to be faithful.\footnote{See, for example, Letty Russell’s feminist and postcolonial ‘hermeneutics of hospitality.’ Letty Russell, \textit{Just Hospitality: God’s Welcome in a World of Difference} (Louisville, KT: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).}
For Christians, welcoming the vulnerable stranger inherently involves a process of decentring and re-orientation to God and neighbour. This entails accepting that all our constructions of life are under God’s judgement. Welcoming the other as other is a means by which we respond to God’s judgement of human constructions of God and of our sinful perceptions of our neighbours. Welcoming the stranger re-orientates us to ourselves, our neighbour and to God by raising a question mark over the ‘way we do things round here’. Stories of faithful Roman soldiers and faithless disciples, of heretic women recognising Jesus as the Son of God while the male, religiously orthodox authorities fail to see and hear should alert Christians to how God is often a stranger and so to the possibility that strangers may well be the bearers of God’s presence to us. Taking account of the sinful and yet to be fully realised nature of all relations this side of the eschaton means all relations in this age are provisional. This provisionality involves both a deferral of meaning and fullness of relationship (the full significance and the fulfilment of all relations is yet to be disclosed) and a breakdown of meaning and relationship (in this age all our relationships are stained by sin). Thus, before Christ’s return, there is always something more to be known and encountered. Christians should never absolutize or fix their judgements about other traditions. Hospitality is always required as the other is always, at some level, a stranger.

It could be argued that hospitality, whereby one makes room for another, is an inherently patronising way of organising relations between strangers. This seems to be the nub of Sacks’s objection to it. The following are responses to such a criticism. First, hospitality, as outlined here, is precisely a way of countering patronising or excluding relations between strangers because it demands that the hosts become de-centred and transform their understanding of themselves in order both to make room for and to encounter the other. We could draw a contrast with tolerance, which demands no such process, and generosity, which may give abundantly, but does not generate any form of shared life. Second, hospitality refuses the fantasy of neutral ground on which all may meet as equals: all places are already filled by one tradition or another and so an account is needed of how to cope constructively with asymmetry between ‘established’ and
‘immigrant’ traditions if a common life is to emerge. Hospitality is a way of framing how mutual ground can be forged in a context where the space—be it geographic, cultural, or political—is already occupied and no neutral, uncontested place is available. To be hospitable is not simply to accommodate another, but, on a Christian account at least, it involves a process of re-configuring wherein both oneself and the other change in order that all may encounter God and each other in new ways.

A Christian conception of hospitality can involve forms of radical change and certainly involve listening to and learning from strangers as it entails forming relationship with those not like us and with whom we disagree, or even find scandalous. Practices of hospitality are thereby a means by which we encounter strangers—sometimes as their guest and at other times as their host. This is to follow after Christ who is the journeying guest/host. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as the rejected guest who in turn becomes the gracious, crucified host, a dynamic that is encapsulated in the Emmaus road encounter.74 Jesus journeyed with Cleopas and his friend on the road they were travelling, in dialogue with them about the kingdom of God. As two or three gathered together on the road they form a peripatetic assembly. Jesus is then a guest at their home, who then becomes their host at the meal. At this meal strangers see each in a new light, enjoy fellowship, and Jesus is understood to be the risen Lord. After this time of communion, the two disciples go out, leaving their home, and journey to the very heart of their social, political, and economic world—Jerusalem—to begin a new life bearing witness, with others, to the risen Christ. As a pilgrim people, the people of God are likewise to be a journeying teaching fellowship of guest hosts.

The encounter with strangers, whether as guest or host, is at the heart of how we encounter God—the ultimate stranger—in new ways. In Hebrews, amid an exhortation to lead a righteous life, we are told ‘not to forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it’ (Heb 13.2). There is the suggestion here that strangers may be the bearers of God’s presence to us. But angels are scary, off-
putting and threatening and ‘entertaining’ them involves demands on our time and resources (e.g. Abraham, Gen 18:2–15), and may involve threats to our family and livelihood (e.g. Lot, Gen 19), deep personal struggle (e.g. Jacob, Gen 32.24-30), incomprehension or shock (e.g. Mary, Lk 1.27-35), and we will not necessarily agree with what they have to teach us (e.g. Zechariah, Lk 1.8-20). Nevertheless, such troublesome encounter is often the primary arena of our encounter with God. To shy away from it, as if proclaiming the Gospel has nothing to do with learning from strangers, is to turn our backs on transformative encounter with God. It is also a way we learn to love our neighbors. Having to build relationship and listen to others through hospitable, community building ventures is a vital way in which Christians learn the humility and penitence necessary to hear from and love God and neighbour. Listening is a therapy for the self-love or pride that is the attempt to secure oneself outside of relationship with God and pursue illusions of self-sufficiency both in relation to God and neighbor.

The kinds of mutual transformation that just and loving hospitality involves necessarily entails loss as the familiar and what counts as ‘home’ is re-negotiated. For new forms of common life to emerge a process of grieving is necessary as both guest and host emigrate from the familiar. Such grieving is the prelude to the formation of shared memories; an interdependent identity narrative; and a new place emerging that both guest and host can call home. Without any account of loss and grief racist politics and an exclusionary nostalgia gain legitimacy and so the promise of hospitality is never fulfilled.

More generally, it is necessary to distinguish between common action in which the church, for a variety of reasons, some good, some bad, is the initiator and lead in generating that action and whose tradition of belief and practice sets the terms and conditions of such shared action, and common action that is a negotiated, multi-lateral endeavour. Within such multilateral endeavours, we find the basis of an exploratory partnership between faith institutions and those committed to democratic politics. For faith traditions and the tradition of democratic citizenship constitute moral traditions that propose the best way to prevent the subordination of human flourishing and social relationship to the demands of the market and the state are not law or some other
procedure, but through power born out of associating for common action. The congregation and the demos are echoes of each other and neither is a crowd whose disassociated and disorganised form leaves the individual utterly vulnerable to concerted action upon them by the state or the market.

Rather than an opposition between a politics of hospitality and a common life politics, the latter simply involves multiple points of hospitality as part of a guest/host dynamic. Inter-faith relations as a politics of a common life is subsistent on temples – authoritative traditions of interpretation and practice – and houses – local, contextually alert places of worship and formation (such as a congregation) – but is itself a tent: that is, a mobile, provisional place where faithful witness is lived in conversation with other faiths and those of no faith. Such a politics is a form of tent making where a place is formed in which hospitality is given and received between multiple traditions. Sometimes there are issues heard in the tent that can be collectively acted upon and some which cannot, but the encounter with others and their stories informs the sense of what it is like to live on this mutual (not neutral) ground, to dwell together in a shared place. The hearing of others interests and concerns in the context of on-going relationship and the recognition that everyone in the tent occupies the same mutual ground fosters the sense that in each other’s welfare we find our own. One of the best examples of this kind politics in practice is broad-based community organizing.75

**Hospitality and tolerance contrasted**

In contrast to the kind of hospitable politics sketched above tolerance is conservative: it presumes and seeks to maintain an existing form of life shared by the tolerant and the tolerated. Important and as worthwhile as that is, hospitality intends something different: it seeks constructive movement towards a different or new form of common life. Thus, unlike tolerance, hospitality does not presume the pre-existence of a shared society and does not know in advance whether the differences encountered will be intolerable; that is, whether the guest will be an enemy. Rather, it intends to create a shared society and it is

75 See Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*.
only in the context of that shared society that knowledge of the differences between oneself and another can emerge. Given the intention of hospitality is the formation of society it fails if relations remain locked in that between guest and host. Over time there should be movement into an on-going and reciprocal form of common life where there is a certain equality of agency and equal regard. But without the initial act of hospitality, this common life cannot emerge. The host acts in faith that the gift will be received and the guest acts in trust that they will not be dominated, while both act with forbearance with regard to the strange ways they encounter in each other.

As has already been noted, a substantive good all forms of tolerance intend to uphold is the good of autonomy. But in doing so, it presumes a high degree of agency already available and that the tolerated are embedded in a shared form of life they can navigate and negotiate. Hospitality makes no such assumption. It is orientated to seek the good of the stranger, not the one with whom a common life is already shared, and to provide what is lacking for someone to survive and thrive. Moreover, within the Christian practice of hospitality, it is imperative to enter relationship with, and accommodate, those who are not only different but those who are marginalised: that is, vulnerable strangers whose agency is impaired or threatened.

For Christians, making room for the other, particularly the vulnerable other, is a command. The imperative to welcome the weak and the vulnerable serves as a constant reminder to see and hear those members of society who are most easily marginalized, oppressed and rendered invisible. Tolerance involves no equivalent imperative to attend to and actively help those without a place or a voice in society; indeed, a tolerant society can be deeply oppressive for many of its members. By contrast, while the Christian commitment to hospitality is often ignored, it has also been consistently invoked and acted upon in relation to the treatment of the socially excluded. Moreover, the diverse and wide-ranging legacy of its practice, for example, in hospitals, hospices and the provision of asylum, demonstrates how hospitality has inspired a wide variety of community building ventures.

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76 Williams, ‘Tolerating the Intolerable’, 73.
The issue of exclusion comes to the fore in instances where a high degree of asymmetry is involved. Some hospitality is reciprocal: each hosts the other in turn. However, the practice of hospitality is often undertaken in a situation of asymmetry: one party is in a position of strength and the other in a position of vulnerability or weakness. An emphasis on asymmetry rather than foreignness, points to the insight of Georg Simmel, who in his essay *The Stranger*, noted that the stranger is not one who is geographically distant from us; that is to be in a situation of non-relation.\(^{77}\) Strangers are those with whom we share the same space but who are different from us. They are constituted by a coordination of simultaneous nearness and distance. Hence, as Simmel points out, the European Jews were the paradigmatic stranger. However, this is now the situation of many in hyper diverse polities. We encounter those of other faiths not only on our doorstep, but in our schools, hospitals, political institutions, and households. A temptation that besets members of liberal polities when they meet the stranger is the desire to objectify the other, creating a form of abstract relationship by which to manage and coordinate relations between generalised others in order that we never really meet them. This is, in effect, what tolerance does. By contrast, a Christian account of hospitality, while often not practiced, does directly address this temptation by generating meaningful encounter.

**Conclusion**

No one likes to be tolerated. It’s insulting. It casts the tolerated as an outsider or deviant and there hangs over it the suspicion that tolerance trades in charitable hatred. But under conditions of fallenness and finitude, where cultural, economic and political power is unevenly distributed, and where we fear what we don’t know but often lack the motivation to know better what we fear, then to be tolerated is better than to be persecuted. Would that everyone could be accepted just as they are, but, in the world as it is, we can’t and won’t and it is not always prudent to do so. In the meantime, those with power can, at a minimum, cultivate virtues that enable navigating the world as it is in

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ways that don’t kill or persecute those they find scandalous or strange. Tolerance as both a policy and a virtue is part of navigating difference so as to sustain a more just form of common life amid deep disagreement about basic questions such as those to do with the ordering of sexuality, gender, or religious belief and practice. But tolerance alone is not sufficient and at times it can be part of the problem. It is a *reductio ad absurdum* to imply that a public philosophy built around tolerance aims to get people to stop talking and acting together. Yet, tolerance, understood as enduring positions others hold that one finds objectionable, can reduce us to silence and inactivity out of fear that to seek to change what others think is, by definition, intolerant. Other, community creating modes are needed for navigating the objectionable and contesting what is judged intolerable, both by those with power and those with little power or position. Hospitality as a practice and a virtue is one such means for creating new worlds of shared meaning and action where agency is unevenly distributed. And when transfigured by the love of God in the power of the Holy Spirit, hospitality directs attention to the least, the lost and the last, seeking to foster conditions where those without power may, over time, develop the means to act for themselves in relationship with others. However, to ensure movement towards a more loving and just common life that seeks the flourishing of all, not just the majority or those with power, tolerance and hospitality need embedding in on-going forms of political life, and the dance of conflict and conciliation politics entails.

**Primary texts**


Tertullian, *Ad Scapulum*, Apologeticus #24
Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* V, 21 & 20
Locke, *Letter of Toleration?*
John Courtney Murray?