

interested in early Christianity and the development of Christology may be inspired, provoked even, to revisit the writings of earlier theologians for themselves in view of Sumner's claims. If he is correct, there is surely much opportunity for further fruitful enquiry to come. This work is a welcome contribution to theological scholarship and a worthwhile addition to the personal library of theological students and professionals alike.

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**Andrew Shepherd, *The Gift of the Other: Levinas, Derrida, and a Theology of Hospitality* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 2014), pp. xi, 264, ISBN 9780227174845. £22.50**

Andrew Shepherd starts his book, *The Gift of the Other: Levinas, Derrida, and a Theology of Hospitality*, by drawing attention to the shadow-world of refugees, asylum seekers, poverty, fear of terror, and the purported breakdown of community in contemporary Western society, despite a perceived increase in 'connectedness' and 'openness' (p. 1). Noting the philosophical and ethical thinking of hospitality arising from the conflicting territory of these global concerns, Shepherd's book sets out to provide a theological account of hospitality. The book essentially falls into two main sections, weighted towards the second half. The first three chapters cover Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida's thinking on hospitality towards the other, and the second part (over the course of four chapters) cover Shepherd's rehabilitation of hospitality 'upon theological foundations' (p. 13).

Shepherd's presentation of Levinas and Derrida is instructive. It is also commendably generous, although the lengthy quotations could be substantially cut or paraphrased. Drawing on both figures together in this manner is fruitful for thinking about hospitality. Shepherd lucidly demonstrates the important ways in which Levinas puts ethics firmly on the table as a response to the face of the other, and how

this emphasis on ethical *relations* turns philosophy from self-centred solipsism to the challenge of relationality, responsibility and the other. Hospitality is the ethical response to the infinite demand from the other. Derrida, heavily influenced by Levinas, emphasises the other as *tout autre*, irreducible; the recognition of this otherness results in the necessity for openness to singularity rather than universalisations and generalisations that seek to control and contain otherness. There is a certain impossibility in such an openness, as well as potential danger, but it is precisely this impossibility that allows Levinas and Derrida to challenge oppositions between ‘them’ and ‘us’, between citizen or host and the supposedly ‘dangerous’, excluded and marginalised stranger, asylum seeker, outsider or intruder. Perhaps most laudable is the fact that Shepherd brings Levinas and Derrida to a theological and Christian audience that might be unfamiliar with continental philosophy.

Shepherd poses the question: ‘But does a philosophy and the practice of hospitality have the capacity to overcome the totalizing discourses of global capitalism and the “war on terror” which are relentlessly reinforced by the media of our technological societies?’ (p. 12). The opening ‘But’ gives it away: his answer, in essence, is ‘no’. A Christian theological account of hospitality, he argues, provides the ground for understanding humanity in its relationship to hospitality, the rationale behind its failings, as well as the hope of redemption. At this point, the issues Shepherd skilfully brought out in Levinas and Derrida’s thought slip to the side and out of sight (they remain in the conversation but as foils rather than genuine interlocutors): Christian theology becomes the reasoning and answer. To construct his own theology Shepherd relies on Eastern Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas much of the time, promoting what he calls ‘orthodox biblical faith’ and ‘authentic Christianity’ (p. 39). In this second section of the book, he constructs and conceptualises the hospitable, ecclesial and eschatological self; he engages with scriptural accounts of Jesus’ life, as well as covering the topics of sacrifice, Christology, baptism, the Trinity and creation. Shepherd is keen to articulate a distinctly Christian ontology, which grounds the self in a relationship of freely-given love in communion with Father, Son and Spirit. Such a Trinitarian ontology becomes Shepherd’s basis for hospitality, and

thus an account of how ‘human relations are shaped by, and should reflect, Trinitarian relations. To be a person is to be a gift-giver and receiver, to acknowledge that we are constituted by the gift/call of the Divine Other, and to recognize that our lives are only fully human as we live, making space for others’ (p. 124). In Shepherd’s theological account, then, human relationships are characterised by ‘freedom, mutual self-giving and love’ (p. 124); inhospitality, or sin, is thus a ‘perversion’ of this personhood (p. 139).

There is a hint in Shepherd’s introduction that his theological account arises out of a nostalgia for a time when a Christian ethic of hospitality seemingly did hold a central place in society, whereas today, hospitality has become – according to Shepherd – increasingly ‘depersonalized and institutionalized’ (p. 12). This whiff of nostalgia explains perhaps why, despite his admirable engagement with proponents of continental philosophy, Shepherd essentially falls back on traditional Christian theological concepts without much revamping. It is also why the two sections of his book remain somewhat estranged. It is this point that is perhaps most disappointing. Had Shepherd been less determined to move from a philosophical account of hospitality (embodied by Levinas and Derrida) *to* a Christian theological account – in other words, had he let their thought inhabit his theological understanding *more* openly and less bound by disciplinary and confessional boundaries – he might have been able to confront more fully the violence and conflict in the Christian church and its practice of hospitality today. This relates to another lost opportunity of this book. Shepherd’s ‘rehabilitation’ of the concept of hospitality is a laudatory attempt to respond to the global issues that are clearly highly relevant for the church and for Christian theology. It is, however, a shame that Shepherd did not use this opportunity to reflect more specifically on some of the church’s own failings of hospitality, in relation to, for instance Jews, women and homosexuals. To grapple theologically with these specific issues would, presumably, impinge on any thinking of the church as a complex place of openness and exclusion, hospitality and hostility. While Shepherd’s theological analysis of eschatology, ecclesiology, the Eucharist and scripture are no doubt valuable, they do not address, even theoretically, such challenges (past and present) to the church and the Christian practice of hospitality. Critiquing

Levinas and Derrida for their emphasis on the subjectivity of relations between self and other, Shepherd's claims for an ontology that falls thus under an objective claim to reality grounded in a Christian meta-narrative, leaves little room for open questions, dialogue, discussion or error. Was not such an openness and recognition of the elements of hostility always haunting practices of hospitality precisely the lesson Shepherd could have learnt from his own attention to, and exposition of, Levinas and Derrida?

One might suggest that Shepherd is offering a *prescriptive* engagement with theology and its relationship to hospitality. But for 'a constructive theological account of the ethic of hospitality' (p. 14) there remains a very real need to go further in addressing the challenges to Christian theology past and present, rather than retreat into comfortable and idealised areas of Christian dogma. This ties in with Shepherd's rather unconvincing critique of Levinas and Derrida. He argues that their thinking is too marred by 'division' and 'separation', 'asymmetry' and 'non-reciprocity', too 'adversarial and conflictual', criticising a worldview in which 'such conflict is embedded in the very fabric of the created world' (p. 96). But apart from being a rather forced critique of his otherwise nuanced exposition of their thought, would not a consideration of such conflict and asymmetry ensure greater attention to church practice that has exercised precisely such a position of divisiveness and separation in the face of particular groups of outsiders? Further, arguing that hostility and violence 'exist due to the failure of humanity to accept the *free* gift of the Trinitarian God and live in God's all-encompassing love and grace' (p. 14) proffers an individualisation and dispersal of responsibility that absolves institutions and organisations, church laws, dogmas, leaders and communities of the guilt of inhospitality. Also, what about those who have failed to *offer* or *present* this gift as free to *all*? To speak of the failure of accepting God's love and grace too easily risks projecting this failing onto those who have experienced exclusion from Christian hospitality, thus imposing further victimhood on them.

Shepherd's book nonetheless provides an excellent impetus for theology to grapple further with figures such as Levinas and Derrida as a result of his detailed and capable introduction to their conceptualisation of hospitality to otherness. If readers take Shepherd

seriously on the need to awaken to the demands of hospitality for Christianity today, then surely the consequence will be a self-critical examination of traditional Christian *topoi* also in light of its failures. If this is accompanied by a genuine openness to the (also non-Christian) other, to *change*, and challenge dogmas that have legitimised (and still legitimise) systematic exclusions, then Shepherd's book will indeed have succeeded in setting in motion vital acts of hospitality.

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