
Stranger: A Biblical Teaching as an Anthropological Resource

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The biblical priority to care for the stranger is high in both Old and New Testaments. Furthermore, the stranger includes not only foreigners in Israel's midst, but all those who are other to us, even we ourselves, and God. We are to see, make space for, and provide solidarity and shalom for strangers in an *I-Thou* manner, not exploit them as an *It*, respecting the boundaries as well as the relations between people. In so doing, we are able to hold in tension both the particularities of human difference and the universality of God's love for all. Perhaps theologians and anthropologists, as relative strangers, can begin to welcome and care more effectively for one another in this biblical "I-Thou" manner.

"The stranger is the essential metaphor of biblical experience and . . . the key to its ethical stance."

This article² will explore the biblical concept of the stranger, from both its Old and New Testament uses. How is the stranger perceived, protected, known, and understood? What are some ways in which these insights might prove beneficial to the anthropological enterprise of knowing the other? As mutually informing disciplines, theology and anthropology have much to offer each other. Anthropology has deeply enriched theology in revealing the complexities, diversity, and commonalities found in human cultures and contexts. Christian theology can enrich anthropology with resources for knowing the other from its

core affirmation that all humans are sacred, created in the image of the Triune God of love, and that to know the other, one must in a sense love that other. The Bible reveals that the way to know the other, the stranger, is not to keep an objective distance, but to learn to be true to the object/subject of one's knowing and honest about one's impact in the process (Barth 1963, 16-20).³ Being true to the other means drawing close enough to know that other without overpowering, assimilating, or annihilating the other (Volf 2006, 24-25). Authentic knowing includes a kind of welcoming and even embracing of the other. As Rabbi Marc Gopin writes, "The centrality of the stranger in both law and metaphor in biblical religions is at least one key to how a believer is supposed to love the other who

¹ Gopin (2006, 12).

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³ Cf. James Torrance writes that in Trinitarian theology reason is understood, not statically or substantively, but dynamically and functionally, as the capacity of the whole person to respond to the other, of being true to the truth, of "being true to one another in love" (Torrance 1996, 38).

is different and how the believer may also be loved by others or by God” (Gopin 2006, 3).

Many of us have been raised to be wary of strangers. Growing up in the church, I was familiar with Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan, his explanation of what it means to love one’s neighbor. What I didn’t realize until further biblical and theological study is that Jesus’ story is actually a revelation of what is at the heart of the Bible, indeed the heart of God—that care for the stranger is mysteriously linked to love of God and of neighbor, the fulfilling of the two great commandments.

It wasn’t until I visited a remote village above the Arctic Circle, Point Hope, Alaska, that I experienced what it means to be welcomed as a stranger rather than disdained as an outsider. Yes, my husband and I were referred to as *naluagmiu* (“people of bleached seal skin”). Yet we were given front row seating at the annual whale feast with rare delicacies from that feast, and we were welcomed into people’s lives, homes, and even a wedding while we were there. They welcomed us, yet also gave us lots of space to be ourselves. They realized that we were not habituated to eating *mikigaaq*, a delicacy of whale blubber fermented in the whale’s blood, so they gave us a sampling, but didn’t waste a lot on us. They also left us to our normal routine of sleeping from 11 p.m. until 7 a.m.—rather than doing what they did which was to sleep when they were tired and work and play when they weren’t, whether it was at 3 a.m. or 3 p.m. (We discovered this when we heard young men playing basketball outside our tent at 3 in the morning.) It was light all of the time, so why be confined to sleeping from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m.?

This experience illustrates for me the biblical priority of welcome and care for the stranger. The biblical faith affirms such a welcome as integral to human nature since humans are described as those who have been created in the image of a welcoming God. The main hypothesis of this article is that the biblical mandate to care for the stranger offers rich resources that correlate with and build on anthropological strategies for knowing the other. Secondly, I propose that biblical resources pertinent to welcoming the stranger have applicability when thinking about the disciplines of theology and anthropology welcoming one another. Theologians have come to affirm that Trinitarian theology greatly

benefits by attentiveness to its “locus in *particular* social, ecclesiastical, and political conditions,” such that the “social sciences . . . may become the handmaids of theological awareness, not tools of theological reduction (as is often presumed)” (Coakley 2013, 12). Is it possible that anthropologists also might welcome this stranger to its own field of study, and allow it to perform its unique role and offer its special gifts?

Even as Inupiat villagers welcomed us, gave us space to be ourselves and were willing to engage with us, and we were able to help students from the village attend the college where we taught, I believe there are ways in which anthropologists and theologians might more fully offer their gifts to one another. Insights from the biblical perspectives on engagement with the stranger can lead to mutual enrichment, while ensuring the retention of the integrity of both disciplines.

This article will glean resources from biblical perspectives on the stranger through examining three related areas. These areas include first, the biblical priority of welcoming the stranger (why); second, the scope of who qualifies as a stranger (who); and third, methodological approaches by which the stranger may be welcomed and known (how).

Biblical Priority to Care for the Stranger

The prioritization of care for the stranger is not a marginal or minor issue in the Bible.⁴ Rather it is a central and highly prioritized ethic within the biblical witness. “Of the 613 laws in the Torah, the one that appears most often is the directive to welcome strangers” (Newman 2007, A, 1:1). As theologian Orlando O. Espin writes:

Welcoming the stranger . . . is the most often repeated commandment in the Hebrew Scripture, with the exception of the imperative to worship only the one God. And the love of neighbor (especially the most vulnerable neighbor) is doubtlessly the New Testament’s constant demand.

(Espin 2006, 46)

In that way it correlates with one of the central driving forces of anthropology as the study and knowing of diverse others. And since, as Gopin writes, “The concept of stranger in human experience is

⁴ Cf. “Drawing on the Torah that emphasizes fraternity, humanity and hospitality, Derrida declares that hospitality is ethics itself and not simple one ethic amongst others” (Conway 2004, 8; with reference to Derrida 2000, 151).

relevant to almost all relationships,” it carries epistemic relevance for anthropological knowledge (Gopin 2006, 3).

The priority of care for the stranger is deeply rooted in scripture in four ways (Gushee 2013, 38). First, it is connected with the esteem placed on all humans as those who are created in God’s image.⁵ No one is outside of that profoundly exalted view of humans. As Rikk E. Watts states:

The biblical language indicates that all human beings—not just the Pharaohs of Egypt—in their physicality, their maleness and femaleness, and their interplay between individual and collective, are intended to be living pictographs of Yahweh the Creator, enlivened by his breath . . . and ultimately by his indwelling Spirit.

(Watts 2002, 21)

Strangers share the high esteem bequeathed on all humans, having been created in God’s image, and furthermore in the sacredness attributed to all human beings. David Gushee asserts that the idea that human life is sacred is “a conviction that is not only a core belief of the Christian church but also the greatest moral contribution of the Christian tradition to world civilization” (Gushee 2013, 1). Gushee continues, “If any human life is sacred, every human life is sacred.” In this way the stranger deserves to be treated with the highest sense of his or her dignity from a biblical and theological perspective.

A second basis for prioritizing care for the stranger is rooted in God’s compassionate love and care for all humans, particularly those most vulnerable. This is affirmed throughout scripture both in the Old and New Testaments, as is evident, for example, in Psalm 113:

Who is like the Lord our God,
who is seated on high,
who looks far down
on the heavens and the earth?

⁵ The image of God has been a contested subject throughout the history of Christianity. There has been agreement that what has been revealed in scripture as the character and nature of God pertains in specific ways to the created character and nature of humans. There has also been agreement that the covenant-making nature of God revealed as steadfast love, faithfulness, mercy, and justice indicates that humans are also most fully human when they also reflect these characteristics. For Eastern Christians traditionally and over the past 100 years in the West, the image of God has been understood in relational terms, since God is apprehended as a communion of Triune persons. Thus, humans are considered most reflective of God’s image when they exist in mutually loving and self-giving relationships.

⁶ For further exploration see (Gushee 2013, 388-410).

He raises the poor from the dust,
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes,
with the princes of his people.
He gives the barren woman a home,
making her the joyous mother of children.

(Ps. 113:5-9)

Third, God established laws of covenant faithfulness to embed his care for those most vulnerable into the very structure of community life. These laws were established to ensure the protection and well-being of the needy, including the stranger. Specifics about these laws will be noted later in the article.

Fourth, the inspired vision given to Israel for its eschatological future was of *shalom* for all of creation, including strangers. The process for moving toward that end included the invitation for Israel to be God’s vehicle of blessing for all people. The vision was one of shared destiny and even more profoundly of being part of one human family with one Father, or of one vine with many branches (Matthew 23:9; Romans 11:16-20; John 15:1-11).

As a side note, it is important to clarify that the profound honoring of human life was not meant to promote desecralized views of creation. Though biblically only humans are affirmed as being created in God’s image, the Bible also affirms that all of creation participates in God’s good purposes and can be viewed sacramentally. Thus, after denoting the three spheres in which the world of relation arises (nature, humanity, and spiritual beings), Jewish philosopher Martin Buber continues:

In every sphere in its own way, through each process of becoming that is present to us we look out toward the fringe of the eternal *Thou*, in each we are aware of a breath from the eternal *Thou*; in each *Thou* we address the eternal *Thou*.

(Buber 1958, 6)⁶

However, for the purposes of this article on theological anthropology, humans will remain the focus and particularly the way in which the biblical approach to the stranger may provide an epistemic lens for human knowing. The fact that it is such a significant biblical theme warrants its further exploration if anthropology is to draw resources from that stranger, the Judeo-Christian tradition. According to Rabbi Gopin:

there is no person of greater concern in the Bible than the stranger who is with us but not with us, women we know but do not know, who is a source of great mystery and yet ancestral familiarity, whose treatment by us is ultimately a litmus test of whether we and our culture have succeeded or not in the eyes of God, and whose experience is essentially a yardstick of our moral stature. If we love the stranger, protect him and see to his needs, then our society passes a kind of Divine test, and we also have the emotional and spiritual fulfillment of identifying completely with an echo of ourselves.

(Gopin 2006, 6)

Who is the Stranger?

The “stranger” biblically is both a very specific term applied to individuals, and also a more general and inclusive term that can refer to entire ethnic, religious, and national groups (Gopin 2006, 4). “There are several words in the original Hebrew of the Old Testament rendered into English as *alien*, *stranger*, *sojourner* or *foreigner*, depending on the translation. The most common word . . . is the Hebrew word transliterated into English as *ger*” (Espin 2006, 82). This term can also be used to refer to a “guest” (Gopin 2006, 6). The “stranger” or the “other” is an elastic biblical term used to refer to individual or collective selves, to correlate with the way “we see ourselves as part of more than one collective identity—the human race, the nation, the class, the family, the religion, and this complicates the question of self, other and boundaries” (Gopin 2006, 4).

“Stranger” has been typically used in the West as a way to designate a people or groups as other or alien. Yet, the Bible challenges rigid walls between the stranger and the self. Though a stranger is usually seen as foreign to us, and thus somewhat unknowable, biblically there is also the sense that this other shares

many commonalities with us, such that given a certain set of circumstances we could be intimately bound together as close family or friends. Thus the stranger, Pharaoh’s vice-regent in Egypt, is revealed as Joseph, brother and son (Gen. 42–43). Rahab, the prostitute of Jericho, becomes a member of the tribe of Israel and a specific ancestor of Jesus (Matt. 1:5). Ruth, the Moabitess, becomes the great-grandmother of King David and also one of Jesus’ ancestors (Matt. 1:5). The three strangers that visit Abraham are actually messengers of God, or perhaps even a revelation of God’s self. And ultimately an outsider, the “Word made flesh” and birthed in an animal trough, is the Messiah who comes to express love to all people (John 1:14).

Because, biblically there is a sense in which all humans are bound together and share a common core identity, something is lost when we avoid or fail to make contact with the “other.” As Gopin writes:

There is some element of tragedy in the fleeting encounter with strangers: an opportunity lost perhaps for the greater unity of the human spirit on this earth that is achieved when strangers become committed to each other through some shared experience. In Jewish theology there is an element of the Divine in every human being, in every stranger . . . There is some element of divine tragedy in strangers who have failed to be reunited, though the reunion seemed so possible at that instant. But the public space—between families and groups, at the border of the lives of strangers, especially where there is tragedy—also presents an immense opportunity for spiritual discovery and ultimate moral fulfillment.

(Gopin 2006, 7)

Historically, knowledge of those often distanced as strangers, foreigners, and the other has been one of the gifts that anthropology has conveyed to human understanding. This has occurred without necessarily a shared commitment to the idea of “the Divine in every human being.” Could more be gained by anthropology if it should incorporate biblical perspectives of this nature? Could it heighten the sense of meaning and purpose for anthropological work as well as offer some helpful strategies for knowing the other?

As we proceed to look more carefully at who it is that constitutes the stranger, the elasticity of the concept will become more apparent. Even the call to love the stranger, and the question of whether the stranger is still a stranger if beloved is a part of this elasticity. As Gopin writes, “Yet the biblical text holds love and the stranger in paradoxical tension” (Gopin 2006, 7). One might know the heart of the stranger (as in Exod. 23:9), and still remain strangers, thus making it possible to be loved while retaining the title of stranger (Gopin 2006, 8).

Biblically We are all Strangers

The Bible challenges God’s people first to remember that we all carry the identity of being strangers in one way or another. From the very beginning of the process of knowing, likeness and difference are included and held in tension. As mentioned previously, “The concept of stranger in human experience is relevant to almost all relationships. We human beings constantly create both very large and very small societies in which someone is a stranger to that society. Simultaneously we ourselves frequently experience varying degrees of estrangement in one setting or another” (Gopin 2006, 3). In other words, it is not merely the distant and different “other” who qualifies as stranger. We all in some sense share this identity.

Biblically, the Israelites were commanded to follow numerous practices to remind them that they were and had been strangers. Regular celebrations like Passover and Sabbath were established in part to help the people of Israel remember what it was like to have been strangers in Egypt, and that even now they were relative strangers, worshippers of Yahweh in the midst of a world worshipping other gods. These were ways of ensuring compassion, justice and humility towards others. It was crucial for those in Israel to remember their patriarch Abraham’s time of being a stranger in the land promised to him. The prophets reminded them again and again of these historical and ongoing experiences to encourage equity, generosity, and the recognition that their lives and possessions were a gift from God, not a basis for pride or exclusion.

As Volf points out,

The children of Abraham are not strangers pure and simple, however. Their “strangeness” results not from the negative act of cutting all ties, but from the positive act of giving allegiance to God and God’s promised future. Stepping out of their culture, they do not float in some indeterminate space, looking at the world from everywhere and anywhere. Rather with one foot planted in their own culture and the other in God’s future . . . they have a vantage point from which to perceive and judge the self and the other not simply on their own terms but in the light of God’s new world—a world in which a great multitude “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” is gathered “before the throne and before the Lamb.”

(Revelation 7:9; 5:9) (Volf 1996, 53)

In acknowledging who they are and have been as strangers, the people of Israel could perceive the multifaceted reality of their own identity and grant that to the identities of the strangers in their midst. Even as they acknowledged their own simultaneous “distance and belonging,” they could also recognize both the distinctive and universal elements in the identities of the other (Volf 1996, 49–50).

It was the very distance they experienced from their surroundings by being bound to God and to God’s future for them that created space where they could receive the other. As Volf explains, “The distance from my own culture that results from being born by the Spirit creates a fissure in me through which others can come in. The Spirit unlatches the doors of my heart saying: ‘You are not only you; others belong to you too’” (Volf 1996, 51).

As those grafted into Israel, practices of remembrance are enjoined to Christians as well. They are to remember having been rescued from being “strangers and aliens” while continuing to be simultaneously strangers in “this world,” and residents in the kingdom of God (Ephes. 2:19, Phil. 3:20). Remembering one’s status as “resident aliens” is crucial lest the rescue from servitude becomes an excuse for “entitlement, rejection, judgment, disconnection, and deliberate and pervasive forgetfulness,” which fosters an excuse for ignoring the needs of others rather than engaging responsibly with them (Labberton 2007, 137).⁷

⁷ As Carroll points out, “‘resident aliens’ is one of the translations given for the Hebrew and Greek words that refer to sojourners in the Bible” (Carroll 2013, 132). Cf. Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens* (1989).

There are parallels between Hebrew and Christian liberation from the oppression associated with being strangers. The Hebrews' yoke of bondage that resulted from being aliens was removed in their rescue from Egypt, and was replaced by a new yoke of citizenship in God's kingdom. This new yoke was the law that framed social structures for human flourishing, including the strangers in their midst. Christians also are invited to leave behind the yoke of spiritual bondage from being outsiders and aliens in the kingdom of God. In the New Testament Jesus invites "the weary and heavy laden" to come to him to receive his yoke of discipleship to him, "for my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28). This yoke is also designed to enable the human flourishing of all. In both cases deliverance requires receiving the generosity of God and extending that generosity to others, always remembering that it is a gift from God to be shared rather than a privilege that one has earned.

As Volf asserts, fundamental interdependence with all people is at the core of what it means to be human. To forget that common to our interdependence is the reality of a shared identity as strangers, at least in some capacity, is a way of cutting ourselves off from the bonds and responsibilities that tie us to one another. Volf writes, "The other then emerges either as an enemy that must be pushed away from the self and driven out of its space or as a nonentity—a superfluous being—that can be disregarded and abandoned" (Volf 1996, 67).

One disruptive movement within Israel and evident throughout the history of Christianity that contravened the sense of common identity as strangers, with all of its theological freight, has been a distorted approach to "chosenness." The idea that God had chosen a special people for God's redemptive purposes became a means by which a few tried to cut themselves free from the bond to the many to soar as superior beings over those who were not considered chosen. Thus the "chosenness" of Israel by God became one of those identity markers that was distortedly used for self-exaltation and the exclusion of others.

Furthermore, distorted views of being chosen have created ways of rationalizing abuse or neglect of the stranger rather than responding with biblically-commanded care. As Gopin writes, "The number of groups that, in the name of monotheism, have used the chosenness metaphor to destroy indigenous peoples physically or emotionally in the past millennium defies the imagination" (Gopin 2006, 14). Gopin explains

how incongruous it is that the three Abrahamic religions have each appropriated this idea in an ethnocentric way. "How anyone in their right mind could have read the Prophets of Israel and come to the conclusion that chosenness meant superiority or privilege is beyond me" (Gopin 2006, 14).

For the children of Abraham, honoring their own history and their core ancestral identity as strangers has been one means of challenging a self-aggrandizing use of chosenness. Scripture makes clear that Abraham was a stranger, moving from Ur to Haran, to Canaan, to Egypt, and back. He is chosen of God, but it is clear that in the midst of the gift of his particular relationship with God, "he is also a man through whom all nations will be blessed (Gen 12:3) and who follows the ways of God which involved a universal commitment to justice and righteousness" (Gopin 2006, 13). He is chosen as a *vehicle* of God's blessing for all people.

In fact, Abraham thus becomes an "ideal model of engagement with the world, without consuming that world or allowing it to consume him" (Gopin 2006, 13). His awareness of his own interdependency with others and his need for the care and hospitality of others as he sojourns, makes him especially gracious to other strangers. Thus:

Abraham also serves as a model of hospitality toward foreigners. When three strangers—unbeknownst to Abraham, messengers from God—passed by Abraham's home, he was so eager to offer them food and drink that he ran out to greet them (Gen. 18:1-6). As an immigrant himself, he understood the experience of being a stranger in a foreign land, and he was eager to make others feel welcome.

(Soerens and Hwang 2009, 83)

To be a child of Abraham was to reflect his virtues and follow in his ways. More implications from this will be explored later.

Similarly, the deep identity of the children of Abraham as strangers is reinforced through other key leaders of Israel. Stories abound in scripture to remind the children of Abraham that most of their key leaders were strangers, or were treated as strangers at some time. Rather than narrating it in a negative and threatening light, the Bible invites the reader to consider what gifts the stranger might offer.

Moses is a stranger in Egypt, the other even to his own people, a vulnerable child who comes close to annihilation as a child, and as an adult has to flee his home to find shelter among non-Israelites. Still, he is

hosted by the Pharaoh, the most powerful figure in all of the land, first as a baby, and later as a returning murderer. He is also dependent on the welcome and provision of Jethro and his family when he is a criminal fugitive. Yet it is this stranger who is able to lead the people of Israel out of bondage and into the Promised Land.

Strangers are also revealed as capable of making important contributions to the nations or communities that receive them. Joseph is able to establish a system by which Egypt is able to survive a horrific famine and to become a means by which surrounding peoples may endure it as well (Gonzalez 1996, 96-97; cited in Soerens and Hwang 2009, 84).

Ruth, whom Old Testament scholar John Goldingay likens to an Arab being received in a Jewish settlement, becomes a redeemer of Naomi's hope and lineage (Goldingay 1996). She is described by her Jewish mother-in-law as "better than seven sons" (Ruth 4:15), and she becomes the ancestor to King David, one of the greatest kings of Israel. Such inclusion is not contrary to God's choice of Israel to be a vehicle of God's blessing, but organic to it (Soerens and Hwang 2009, 85).

The most renowned stranger is Jesus, who spent his earliest years as an outsider in Egypt, under threat of extinction from Herod (Matt. 2:14). "Furthermore, Scripture suggests that all of us, as followers of Christ, whatever our nationality, have become aliens in this world, as our allegiances are to lie not primarily with any nation state but with the kingdom of God" (Soerens and Hwang 2009, 86).

Biblically the Stranger is One who is Especially Vulnerable, and thus Qualifies for Special Care, Protection, and Valuation

"The stranger or sojourner is the classic Other in monotheism" (Gopin 2006, 6). Unique to Israel at the time were the laws and social structures to ensure fair legal treatment rather than exploitation of strangers because of powerlessness, prejudice, or cultural differences (Deut. 1:16-17; 24:17-18; 27:19). Such protections included Sabbath rest from their work alongside the residents (Exod. 20:10; Deut. 5:14) and timely wages for work that had been done (Exod.

23:12; Deut. 24:14-15). Along with widows and orphans, sojourners were free to glean, since access to the land was otherwise difficult. "Sojourners were also to receive a portion of the special tithe that was collected every three years for the poor (Deut. 14:28-29; 26:12-13)" (Carroll 2013, 89). When Israel ignored these provisions, the prophets railed against them, expressing the anguish and anger of Yahweh to have the vulnerable people about whom God cared so much, be neglected and abused.

At times questions have been raised about whether the purity codes of Numbers and Leviticus were used to exclude strangers.⁸ In contrast, Mary Douglas argues that these books are remarkable for the fact that "they never use the principle of ritual purity to separate classes or races, foreigners or natives" (Douglas 1993, 25). She goes on to explain:

In the biblical creed defilement is not caused by contact with other people; it comes out of the body, or it comes out of moral failure. Everybody is liable to be defiled or to defile. This should be totally unexpected to the anthropologist used to purity codes in other religions.

(Douglas 1993, 25)⁹

Thus, biblically, defilement is not from contact with the stranger or the poor and thus not to be used as a basis for exclusion or oppression. Rather, Leviticus teaches God's people, "Love the stranger as thyself" (Lev. 19:34) (Douglas 1993, 26).

The fact that these protections and provisions were rooted in the nature and will of God made them inviolable in a way that laws based on social preference, political will, human reason, or longstanding tradition did not. They were not meant to be negotiable, for they were expressive of God's nature and woven into God's intentions for those he had created. Furthermore, as Gushee points out, even the king or ruler in the land was accountable to uphold such laws. No one was above the law established by Yahweh. "In many cultures, especially in the ancient world, the ruler defined the law and was above the law . . . But the kings of Israel found that they were indeed accountable to the same divinely given moral law that governed everyone else" (Gushee 2013, 62).

⁸ See for example Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (Weber 1952, 417).

⁹ Jesus taught similarly about issues of defilement in Matthew 15:10-20, that it is what comes out of the heart that defiles a person.

Certainly there are structures in the Bible that reflect the privileging of a few over the many, but as Richard Bauckham argues, these structures were temporarily tolerated while being relativized and transformed ultimately to be aligned with God's will for the flourishing and mutuality of all people. This allowance for interim structures of hierarchy is only one form of two aspects of a strongly egalitarian *direction* of thought in the Bible. And such hierarchical structures as the monarchy, for which Israel adamantly lobbied to replace its theocracy, were under scrutiny to ensure "that they operate for the good of all, rather than for the particular benefit of the privileged" (Bauckham 1997, 118). Thus prophets as humbly-born as Amos could confront political and religious leaders for abusing their role and violating the justice for all that God had commanded. Nathan could confront King David for his violation of Bathsheba and murder of her husband. The Mosaic law envisioned significant differences between Israel's king and the kings of the nations (Deut. 17:14-20). "The king is not to exalt himself above his fellow Israelites but to rule *as one of his people*" (Bauckham 1997, 122).

The second form of the one egalitarian direction of thought in the Bible according to Bauckham is radical opposition to hierarchical relationships and structures. This form of "radical opposition" to hierarchical human structure operates "especially to critique relationships of privilege, which give to one person or class privileges or rights at the expense of others who lack them" (Bauckham 1997, 118). Whether through the Exodus, the basic equality of family households in premonarchical Israel, provisions for debt-forgiveness and the return of land, God's action and law inscribed the equality of all people. And for those who fell outside of the normal provisions of land and family households, widows, orphans and the strangers, laws were designed such that "the whole society had to take responsibility . . ." for them (Bauckham 1997, 120).

Laws that were created in opposition to divine law were considered to be lacking in authority and moral suasion. Such laws were suspect for being arbitrary and often exploitive of the most vulnerable. Ultimately those who have been disadvantaged by laws via the political-legal community's application of them, including "women, children, slaves, foreigners, indigenous peoples, homosexuals, religious dissidents," and, I would add, people with disabilities, are to be drawn into the political community both to be adequately represented and also to offer their own authoritative voice (Gushee 2013, 63).

God as the Ultimate Stranger

Biblically, "stranger" is an identity so expansive that it is linked with God's identity. The ethical pull of the stranger is most profoundly anchored in God's own identification with the stranger. "The creation story also reveals God as Creator from out of this world, as the first biblical stranger who reaches across impassable boundaries to give birth, to nurture life, even as He or She is not completely part of it but rather in some undefined relationship" (Gopin 2006, 4).

The Otherness of God, God's patient waiting to be welcomed by human "hosts," the vulnerability of God (though volitionally so), the alienation of God by our destructive and self-aggrandizing behavior, all connect with aspects of strangers' lives, though obviously in different ways. Israel's loyalty to God was in part evaluated on the basis of their care for the stranger. This circumstance was all the more powerful in that the sojourner was a "not so thinly veiled metaphor for God in this world . . . We cannot find God or see God or even know how to do so without meeting the human stranger through love" (Gopin 2006, 6).

Thus it is not surprising in the New Testament that Jesus would make this identification with the stranger even more obvious. He was willing to come as an outsider, in vulnerability and dependency. He assumed an incognito identity, and worked to retain that veiled identity as long as possible. "He came to his own but his own knew him not" (John 1:11). Jesus seemed a stranger and outsider to the religious leaders and unknown by most political leaders during the whole of his life. At times he was a stranger within his own family, such as when he opted to stay with the religious leaders as a boy rather than travel home with his family, describing the temple as his "father's house" (Luke 2:49). Even among his own followers, after the resurrection he was seen as a stranger, whether with Mary Magdalene in the garden, or the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Jesus cared deeply about how strangers were received. He encouraged his followers to invite outsiders rather than friends to dine with them. And he described the final judgment in which those who have welcomed strangers from among the least of these will have welcomed Jesus, himself. "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matt. 25:35).

Thus love of God as the ultimate Stranger offers a paradigm for love of the fellow human stranger. God is honored in some mysterious way by the way we treat the most vulnerable in our midst (cf. Howell 2017).

The biblical narrative reveals that God is deeply aware of the plight of the stranger. God hears their cries, welcomes, protects, sustains, and even honors outsiders by expressing solidarity with them and including them in God's ultimate gathering around the throne and the Lamb in the end of time. And God commands God's people to follow in this way.

The Nature of the Bible's Mandate to Care for the Stranger

Having acknowledged the biblical priority of care for the stranger and the inclusive reality of who qualifies as a stranger, we turn now to identify specific elements involved in approaches to the stranger that hold possibilities for an enriched anthropological epistemology. As Martin Buber affirmed, to gain authentic knowledge of the other, it is vital that he or she be continually honored as a *Thou* rather than being reduced to an *It*. Buber's reflections on the human *Thou* were deeply grounded in knowledge of the eternal *Thou*. "Every particular *Thou*, is a glimpse through to the eternal *Thou*, by means of every particular *Thou* the primary word addresses the eternal *Thou*" (Buber 1958, 75). Given that each person is a glimpse through to God, someone created in God's image, Buber framed specific ways of approaching and coming to know and love that person, strategies that for our purposes can elucidate how biblical approaches to the stranger might be useful as an epistemic tool.

The process involves increasing understanding of the other, *Thou*, which the very nature of the *Thou* determines will always be an indeterminate and partial knowing (Buber [1958] and Polanyi [1974]). It also involves and even requires some form of transformative process for the *I*. Elements of mutuality and self-altering connection are necessary if I am to do justice to the other and avoid reducing the other to an *It*. And though it is not a linear process, there is a sense of progression in the deepening of knowledge that moves one from merely beginning accurately to see the other, ultimately to identification and solidarity with the other. The process is a demanding one in which changes to the *I* must happen repeatedly in order to

adapt to a more authentic knowing of the *Thou*. That is most profoundly the case when the Stranger in question is God, but it also applies to human knowing if I am going to face and dive beneath the many layers of presuppositions and a priori ideas I have about the other.¹⁰ I will describe this process as three-fold: seeing the stranger, making space for the stranger, and ultimately shalom with the stranger.

Seeing the Stranger

Because the stranger is by nature unknown she may also seem somewhat invisible. Whether through being unvalued, easily categorized, or unimportant to the tasks and preoccupation at hand, the stranger can remain something of a nondescript presence in the background of one's experience or context. Perhaps because of demands that might arise in noticing strangers, the temptation may be to ignore and actually structure one's experiences to avoid really seeing or being interrupted by such outliers. It is not difficult to think of examples of this especially now, with flotillas of boats filled with desperate people in the Mediterranean and the Adaman Sea hoping to be seen and rescued. To see the stranger requires openness to the promise of the gifts they bring, not merely the problems of who they are and what they may need. The gift of the work of ethnographers is to continually draw our attention to the strangers or the other in our world, and to keep them from being dismissed as unvalued or invisible. This accords well with biblical reminders that outliers exists in all cultural contexts and can bring their own rich gifts to cultural understanding. Furthermore perhaps biblical wisdom about what it means to move through the process from actual *seeing* to *shalom* with the stranger might prove helpful to ethnographic endeavors.

Wisdom about what *seeing* looks like and the rich fruit that it bears are evident throughout the many biblical narratives. "Face to face" is one evocative way in which the Bible depicts such seeing. To see God "face to face" is to glimpse something of the core truth of God's identity. Such face-to-face encounters are always a gift of self-revelation, culminating ultimately in the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, who is the

¹⁰ T.F. Torrance describes the transformative and even agonizing process of Israel coming to know the strange God, Yahweh, in *The Mediation of Christ*. Much of the agony comes from having to move from a self-referent posture of knowing, to a revelation-centered process of knowing, in which their very epistemological categories are like clay pots that have to be shattered and continually remolded by the power of God if they are to contain some semblance of truth.

face of God, the “image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). *Seeing* the ultimate Stranger is somewhat paradigmatic for what is required to see the strangers in our midst. As T.F. Torrance points out it requires a kind of ongoing reciprocity, or extensive back and forth mutually adaptive process. He describe it as “A two-way movement . . . an adaptation of divine revelation to the human mind and an adaptation of articulate forms of human understanding and language to divine revelation” (Torrance 1983, 17).

Faithfulness to *see* the other requires that we seek understanding by operating within the constitutive relations and framework of thought appropriate to the other, and avoid projecting an “external or alien framework of thought” onto that which we seek to understand (Torrance 1983, 13). Thus, according to Torrance, whether in natural science or in theology, progress in understanding is “necessarily circular” and highly demanding. This is clearly evident in the arduous history of Israel coming to see and know Yahweh throughout the Old Testament. It is in part our own “confusion of face” which complicates the process so much (Dan. 9:8). Confusion about our own identity and fear of the other clouds our ability to *see* the other accurately. Thus, patience, persistence, openness, and grace are all essential in the process.

The circular nature of the process by which one can move from a kind of blindness to greater seeing is evident in a greeting shared by the Zulu people of South Africa. The greeting includes two parts. One part is *Sikhona*, which means “I am here to be seen”; and the other part is *Sawubona*, which means “I see you.” To see the other is to move beyond the mischaracterizations of fear, indifference, or hate in which the other remains an *it*, to a kind of seeing in which the other is considered a *Thou*, worthy of love and care.¹¹ It also includes the willingness to be vulnerable enough to be seen or self-revealing and to gain new perspective on oneself.

The co-adaptive and mutually-revealing process involved in seeing the stranger is evident in a number of biblical narratives. As previously noted one of the mysterious sightings of “God” happens for Abraham while he is resting in the doorway of his tent in the heat of the day, and he sees three strangers standing nearby. “When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said,

‘My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant’” (Gen 18:2–3). Abraham’s approach to seeing means giving high honor to these visitors and utterly altering his plans from resting in the heat to serving them as best he can. These strangers bring with them a great word of promise and blessing for Abraham and Sarah of new life that is beyond anything they could imagine. The strangers see Abraham in a most revealing way and allow themselves to be seen by him and to be included in his life, his eating and his drinking. For Abraham, humble willingness to give up his small agenda of rest, opens him up to a much larger agenda that affects not merely Abraham and Sarah’s entire life, but also the future of their lineage, and ultimately of the world.

Boaz, a prosperous landowner, sees the stranger, Ruth, gleaning in his fields. He sharpens his focus to learn more about her from those who know her better, and then goes to meet her. In a short time of such seeing and coming to know, Boaz realizes that in this foreigner is a great treasure. So transformative is his having seen her that he describes her in ways that parallel Abraham himself: “You left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before” (Ruth 2:11). He immediately offers protection and provision to her, and invitation to continue to glean in his field.

In both cases, *seeing* strangers is not only transformative of the one who sees, but mysteriously binds together both the one who sees and the one who is seen.

The challenging process of what it takes to develop more accurate sight is evident in the relationship between Peter and Jesus in the New Testament. As David Benner conveys, there is interdependency in Peter’s process of knowing Jesus and knowing himself. His many presuppositions about Jesus are dealt with through a dialectical process of gradually being able to *see* who Jesus is as Peter is willing to gradually face more and more of who he (Peter) is in that light. As Benner writes, “It is . . . highly unlikely that he could have known the depths of his fears or the magnitude of his pride. These levels of knowing of self awaited deeper knowing of God” (Benner 2004, 27).

Biblically, it is clear that careful “seeing” requires being open to new demands and to new possibilities. Jesus describes two kinds of seeing in his story of a man

¹¹ Cf. “So long as love is ‘blind,’ that is, so long as it does not see a *whole* being, it is not truly under the sway of the primary word of relation. Hate is by nature blind. Only a part of a being can be hated” (Buber 1958, 16).

who is robbed, stripped, beaten, and left to die by the side of the road. Both the Levite and the priest see him but walk by on the other side of the road. The Samaritan, considered a stranger in that space, however sees the wounded man as a *thou*, is moved with compassion, and gives up his own agenda to serve and care for this stranger in distress. As mentioned previously, Jesus uses this story to illustrate the heart of biblical teaching about one of the two greatest commandments, the call to love your neighbor as yourself. Again, this is not a marginal ethical issue but central to the call of God's people.

Seeing biblically reflects a starting point for knowing that includes a striking shift of power, a willingness to open up to the unexpected, and a posture of humility and appropriate service. Thus Mary in seeing Jesus chooses to sit at his feet and learn in the way of a true disciple, while Martha clings to her own agenda and remains preoccupied with familiar roles, control, and given expectations (Luke 10:38–42). Martha does not seem at this time to see the wonder of who is in her midst, and the way in which that can change everything else.

Significant power differentials can block connection and distort knowledge. The role of the describer, category-maker, anthropological (or theological) assessor is an enormously powerful position. Depictions of the other carry enormous weight with immense implications and enduring impact. As theologian, Willie Jennings notes in *The Christian Imagination*, the ability by explorers and social scientists to name the other, to categorize them according to civilized or barbaric, developed or primitive, white or black, had a major impact with an oppressive burden the results of which many people of color continue to shoulder today (Jennings 2010). In scientific descriptions of the other in the nineteenth century people were assessed as having full or diminished humanity according to various physical and cultural features, and even head-measurements (Jackson and Weidman 2005). Many peoples were reduced to “its” rather than accurately known and honored as “thous.”

Seeing the other within the framework of a biblical view of the stranger, with all humans as “living pictographs of Yahweh,” requires a shift of power such that the other is treated with dignity and honor. It includes even a reverence for the other in the ways that he or she uniquely images the divine. And with that dignity, honor, and reverence comes the humble

admission that, “For now we see through a glass darkly: but then face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12, KJV). This process of seeing thus requires ongoing openness, humility, and provisionality in describing what is known in particular (cf. Backues 2017). And it requires tenacious and continual re-centering on what is known of a universal nature—that the other who is seen is a sacred wonder.

As Gopin writes, there are few arguments related to Jewish ethical behavior that are more challenging to believers than the idea that God resides in the image of the other human being.

It is as if a Divine voice says perpetually to the inner self who is conscious of the sacred laws of morality, “You want to find Me? You want to fast and suppress your body, or engage in any number of demonstrations of devotion in order to locate Me or conjure Me? Fine, go right ahead, but you have only to look and really see the stranger or estranged Other who walks past you every day. And the more you truly see him or her the more you will find Me.”

(Gopin 2006, 9)

Thus, a biblical vision of the stranger in which s/he is honored as *Thou*, resists categorical depictions. “Every *It* is bounded by others: *It* exists only through being bounded by others. But when *Thou* is spoken, there is no thing. *Thou* has no bounds” (Buber 1958, 4). Rather there is a sense of an openness of being that is acknowledged in the other and a permeability that resists categorization. For the one who seeks to know, it requires adoption of a posture of “‘faithfulness’ to what is given even as we hope to discover heretofore unknown aspects of reality, a reality that may yet reveal itself to future eyes in an ‘indeterminate range’” (Polanyi 1974, viii).

To see and come to know another as a *Thou* demands a kind of immediacy and face-to-face quality that breaks open normal categorical ways of describing the other.

But the mankind of a mere *It* that is imagined, postulated, and propagated by such a man has nothing in common with a living mankind where *Thou* may truly be spoken. The noblest fiction is a fetish, the loftiest fictitious sentiment is depraved.

(Buber 1958, 14)

Making Space for the Stranger

Seeing strangers in a way that obviates against reducing them to a category or an *It* opens the way for a second aspect of knowing the stranger, and that is making space, or welcoming that person into one's life. This requires adequate preparation and an approach that includes both openness and boundaries to avoid violating the other or one's own core commitments.

Preparation to meet and know the other includes careful study and training, as ethnographers well know. Additionally, authentic encounter and the kind of knowing of the stranger called for in scripture require internal and spiritual preparation. This has been described as "solitude of the heart" (Nouwen 1996, 44) or "creating space in myself for the other to come in" (Volf 1996, 141). Nouwen argues that without solitude of the heart in which I face my own contingency or limits along with God's great love, our relationships can become self-referential and exploitive. The other is easily reduced to an *It* who is there to serve my needs and fulfill my agenda. Spiritual preparation fosters discontent with a "self-enclosed identity" followed by a degree of self-emptying, since "the self that is 'full of itself' can neither receive the other nor make a genuine movement toward the other" (Volf 1996, 141).

Solitude of the heart awakens genuine desire for the *Thou*, rather than an approach to a person or community merely as a means to satisfy my curiosity, interest, or academic pursuits. The latter is not really a welcoming and free space for honest self-revelation of the other if that other is an object (*It*) to be studied, converted, or exploited, rather than a *Thou* to be treasured.

The space that is opened up in such preparation includes a readjustment of one's own identity before moving to explore the identities of the other. Real encounter and real knowing requires authentic openness to the other and thus a sense that the other is someone without whom I am incomplete. Biblically the stranger is someone to whom I am bound, as a member of my extended family and a co-heir of my future. Thus internal preparation to meet this other as a partner in my future rather than an object of curiosity or study shifts one's motivation. Such knowing is not about building up a knowledge base of abstractions by which to characterize the other. Rather the desire is for a living and transformative encounter, or meeting of the *I* and the *Thou* (Buber 1958, 11).

Historically, for some Christians, appropriate preparation and motivation have required a major

pilgrimage. As Nouwen writes, "To fully appreciate what hospitality can mean, we possibly have to become first a stranger ourselves" (Nouwen 1996, 68). Celtic Christianity at times fostered such a high value of the stranger that Celtic Christians were willing to go to considerable effort to prepare themselves for the spiritually and physically demanding challenge of laying aside their defenses in order to love the stranger.

The process in Celtic Christianity was that of a quest, becoming a *perigrini* or pilgrim. It included the willingness to become a stranger and to leave behind one's own comforts, possessions, certainties, and systems of control, while holding fast to a celebrative trust in God."

(Dearborn 2012, 139)

It is no surprise that J.R.R. Tolkien, who took some inspiration from Celtic Christianity, narrated the transformative process in both Bilbo and Frodo Baggins as they were willing to venture forth from the Shire (Fimi 2006, 156-170). Bilbo was especially suspicious of strangers as were all in his community, until he went on a quest with Gandalf and the dwarves, and awakened to the rich wonders available to those who are open to the other. As he learned to make space in his life for the dwarves with all of their own particularities, he did not lose what was distinctive about his "hobbit" identity. But rather than that being a boundary meant to keep others out, his identity now became a bridge to a sense of greater interdependency and vitality. And while retaining his hobbit love of nature, feasting, and the quiet life, he developed deeper values of commitment to the common good of all, and appreciation for the diverse peoples who populated Middle Earth. Thus, his final years were spent not in the Shire but with the Elves, neither fearful of the other nor ashamed that he had himself become the welcomed stranger in their midst.

Through all of this preparation Bilbo learned, in Volf's words:

to transcend the perspective of our own side and take into account the complementary view of the other. Even more . . . attending to shifts in the other's identity, to make space for the changing other in ourselves and to be willing to renegotiate our own identity in interaction with those of others.

(Volf 2006, 28)

Such preparation and pilgrimage is necessary for the sense of presence needed in the encounter with the stranger that correlates with Buber's characterization of *I-Thou* relationships.

The primary word *I-Thou* can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place without me. I become through my relation to the *Thou*, as I become *I*, I say *Thou*.

(Buber 1958, 11)

Because as Polanyi claimed, knowing is irreducibly personal, it requires full immersion of the whole person into the relational context (Newman 2007, 110). That means being present with the entirety of one's body and being.

To be fully present requires the gifts of space and self-offering, but also a suspension of judgment and criticism. Volf writes, "*the will to give ourselves to others and 'welcome' them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity*" (Volf 1996, 29, italics his).

To make space for the other means to offer space that is safe, free, and disarming. It is a safe space if offered, not as a way of changing people, but where if desired, change can take place (Nouwen 1996, 71). Iñupiat and Yupik students at the college where I taught in Alaska were often wary about opening up to receive anthropologists who would come to study them and their villages. They felt at times that their ancient ways were valued more than they were themselves. Though they were eager for their villages to have viable health clinics, working toilets, and fast moving vehicles, they sensed that the space they were invited to occupy was one that would reify them and their villages in quaint and static ways of life. They were grateful that their cultural identities as Iñupiat or Yupik peoples were being honored and valued. They sensed that what was particular to their lives and cultures was being treasured. But the sense of freedom to grow and change as part of the universal family of humankind felt somewhat absent. Thus, distrust and defensiveness prompted them and family members at times to make stories up for the people studying them, to create a kind of protective barrier behind which they could hide.

Freedom to grow and change in a way that is both consistent with the particularities of one's culture and the universal quality of one's humanity is the kind of

space where authentic knowledge can take place. As Buber writes, "The *It* is the eternal chrysalis, the *Thou* the eternal butterfly" (Buber 1958, 18). The stranger who is honored as a *Thou* is approached with openness to their multifaceted past, complex present, and their hopes and desires for their future.

This is where a discussion of appropriate boundaries in *I* and *Thou* relationships is so crucial. For the stranger to be willing to relinquish defenses and to be known, certain protections are vital. Though there is a sense in which the *Thou* is unbounded and to be known in all the dynamism and multiplicity of many overlapping identities, a bounded space is necessary for safe disarmament and genuine self-revelation to occur. Protections are vital to ensure that the relationship moves toward authentic knowing, *I-Thou*, rather than consumption, assimilation, subordination, or domination of the other, *I-it*.

A biblical approach to the stranger challenges and enriches modern notions of inclusivity, diversity, tolerance, or pluralism. These culturally chic concepts often have a market-based drive to them that can devolve into a force of "homogenizing consumption" or "boutique multiculturalism" (Fish 1997, 379; Newman 2007, 32). Rather than authentic relationship and knowing, such an approach to pluralism can flatten out the particularities of cultural diversity and be a force for deep conformity masquerading as pluralism. Thus Nicholas Boyle writes:

'Pluralism' is these days a popular word, and a comfortable idea, in many more and less theoretical contexts, but it is something of a mystification—an appearance of variety in the adiaphora in order to conceal the unity in what counts, a velvet glove round the hidden hand.

(Boyle 1998, 152)

The biblical narrative conveys both destructive issues that arise from the absence of boundaries and contrasting depictions of human flourishing where boundaries are sustained. Gopin describes the lack of respect for boundaries that was evident in the Garden of Eden as a:

story of over-consumption and the breaking boundaries—not in order to meet the other, to engage and appreciate the tree, but in order to consume and thus destroy it. Appreciation of the Other must respect boundaries of separate existence. Where there is no boundary there is no

recognition of anything but the self. Where there is nothing but the self there is only demonic destruction and self-worship.

(Gopin 2006, 11)

Rather than moving toward wisdom and true knowledge, Adam rejected his limits and “practiced ultimate alienation from the sacred aspect of the Other in the world” (Gopin 2006, 11).

What began as a healthy and protected set of relationships for Joseph and his people in Egypt devolved into oppression and slavery without those protections having been enshrined in covenanted commitments. Thus Israel was given covenants as the basis of life in the Promised Land, where they could live as a type of new creation. These covenants required them to live within their limits and to respect, rather than oppress the strangers among them, since they knew what it was like to have been so dehumanized themselves. Loving the stranger does not dissolve differences. Rather it becomes a means of owning their own particularities and receiving healing of their lingering wounds from having been abused strangers themselves. And in healing themselves they are also able to offer healing to care “for the Other who lives across a clear cultural, economic or political boundary” (Gopin 2006, 6).

The reason the stranger is “the essential metaphor of biblical experience” is that through welcoming the stranger Israel is able to hold in tension both particularities of human difference and the universality of God’s love for all (Gopin 2006, 12).

The stranger is loved but not consumed. The stranger continues to be different but is loved nevertheless. The boundary remains. And the love travels across the boundary day to day like light from the sun. But it does not consume and it is not consumed. Both remain vibrant and effluent, and the metaphor of Divine relationship to and love for the world is re-enacted in the relationship of self and other, in the ethical relationship of meeting across boundaries that are never destroyed.

(Gopin 2006, 13)

Thus Abraham as a model for such engagement retained his particular rituals and ceremonies while remaining committed to his call as a vehicle of blessing

for others. He was able to hold to his own deep priorities, while also defending those who lived as strangers to his ways in Sodom (Gen. 18:22-23). Lot, on the other hand, became so assimilated into that community that though he retained the value of welcoming and protecting strangers, he allowed his personal boundaries to collapse and offered his own daughters to be raped.

To offer a safe space that includes boundary protections is to be willing to live with the tension of honoring the wondrous humanity of the other, while at the same time recognizing marked differences that at times evoke conflict in that space.¹² Thus Nouwen argues that there is a place in welcoming the stranger for confrontation, rather than hiding ourselves behind some pretense of neutrality. “Real receptivity asks for confrontation because space can only be a welcoming space where there are clear boundaries, and boundaries are limits between which we define our own position. Flexible limits, but limits nonetheless” (Nouwen 1996, 98). To enter into an *I-Thou* relation requires an *I* who is aware of her own particularities and commitments, and willing to reveal them as such. For both parties it can become a space of increasing clarity about one’s own particularities and a willingness to explore those particularities critically. Both receptivity and confrontation are needed. “Receptivity without confrontation leads to a bland neutrality that serves nobody. Confrontation without receptivity leads to an oppressive aggression which hurts everybody” (Nouwen 1996, 99).

This is a challenging process that is easily violated. Because of this, followers of Jesus acknowledge the need for a mediator—the Holy Spirit. In the Bible protective boundaries to guide God’s people are created that are not only evident in the Word given to the people of God, but also ensured where the presence of God’s Spirit is welcomed. The Spirit’s “love presses not only outward to include others, but also inwards (and protectively) to sustain the difference between the persons, thus preserving a perfect and harmonious balance between union and distinction” (Coakley 2013, 24).

The movement of the Spirit to create unity in the midst of diversity is evident throughout the New Testament, particularly the book of Acts. Tensions arise as two very different communities, Jews and Gentiles, are brought together in the outpouring of the

¹² Duke University’s wrestling in January 2015 with its approach to Muslims and Muslim worship on its campus highlights the complexity of this challenge.

Spirit at Pentecost and the creation of the Church. The Spirit of God guides believers in navigating the turbulent waters of ethnic differences in ways that preserve cultural identities while retaining the core value of God's universal love and concern for all people. Jews thus welcome Gentiles without forcing them to be circumcised or adapt to their purity laws. Yet they must themselves relinquish some ancient traditions that exclude the other. Peter is inspired by God to let go of his judgment that certain foods and certain people are unclean (Acts 10:3-4). Accordingly he is willing to go to the house of the Gentile, Cornelius, to stay with him and share in his food. But he is also clear that there are certain non-negotiables. He makes clear to Cornelius that as a mere mortal, he will not be worshiped. Instead he offers him the wisdom from God for which Cornelius had prayed. He proclaims God's universal love: "God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-5). And he also proclaims the particular nature of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ (Acts 10:36-43).

Welcoming these strangers into their community meant that the Jews shared with Gentiles their greatest treasures, including their relationship with God, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and community life, while also honoring those cultural differences among the Gentiles that contributed to their well-being and their participation in the purposes of God. They were able in this way to fulfill the ancient commandment from Exodus 12:49, "The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native born. Love him as yourself for you were aliens in Egypt."

The Spirit's work among God's people equips them to develop more of a sense of their own positive identity as those who are beloved and chosen, by means of which the Spirit then empowers them to extend God's love to others. This makes it possible for them to move beyond the tendencies of a negative identity in which one defines oneself by who one is not, and thus by refusal of the other. Space is created that preserves particularity, but is expansive enough that their very particularity can become a means of welcoming and coming to know others.

Solidarity and Shalom with the Stranger

The biblical wisdom for knowing the stranger does not result in mere theoretical understanding accompanied by mild indifference, stoic tolerance, or resignation to parallel existences. Rather, the ultimate

goal behind the ethic of the stranger is "to arrive where we started and to know the place for the first time" (T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding"). That is, it is to return to the original story of Creation, of the Strange God who would create us and welcome us, as both strangers and those created in God's image, into God's own Triune communion. It is to remember that even as there is both unity and diversity in God's innermost being, we reflect God's glory by being one universal family composed of a rich array of cultures and languages. And it is to live with the vision that one day we will feast together as brothers and sisters from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

The biblical view of the stranger builds a rich case in which we realize our solidarity with all others, yet a solidarity that is not sameness. We are all strangers, and we belong to a God who was willing to enter into our world as a stranger in order to break down the dividing walls that we have erected to separate ourselves from God and from one another. To accept the gift of our solidarity with God and one another is not to capitulate to uniformity. Living in the tension of remaining strangers and thus somewhat unknown to one another (1 Cor. 13:12) while also being "no longer strangers" (Ephes. 2:19), preserves the gift of unity while sustaining particularity. Thus Gopin points to the "exquisite paradox of the sanctified life of the stranger, a blend of radical particularity in a morally challenging world, together with an acute commitment to the same world" (Gopin 2006, 13). When merely focusing on the universality of our solidarity it is easier to trample over particularist identities. On the other hand when the particularities of our identities are given hegemony, tribal and sectarian loyalties can override the value of the other.

From a Christian perspective, as members of one family we are called to live more and more into the likeness of the one in whose image we have been created. As we conform more and more to the character of God in Christ our family resemblance in self-giving love, freedom, joy, and gratitude will become more apparent. "At the same time, we are called into this unexpected family to become more distinct from one another in our created uniqueness allowing the particular glory of God in us to be seen and fulfilled. These two callings require one another and will test one another. Both come from God's imagination" (Labberton 2007, 154).

The goal is to live out our kinship as Father Greg Boyle describes. It is to move from separate rooms of existence, into the hall of service, and ultimately into

the ballroom of kinship where with all people we will one day feast and celebrate together (Boyle 2010). Strangers are not cast adrift, rarely to be known and welcomed, without a future or a hope. Rather they are welcomed with those gathered around the Lamb and the throne, “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev. 7:9).

I will conclude with a call for theologians and anthropologists as relative strangers to welcome and care more effectively for one another in this biblical “I-Thou” manner. This would include a refusal to create caricatures of the other. It would also include a commitment to see one another more accurately, to make space for the other, and to honor the other by guarding the particularities and boundaries of the other. It would mean acknowledging the gifts that are part of the disciplinary field of the other, while also being faithful to the particularities of one’s own discipline and thus engaging in confrontation from time to time. It would also mean adapting as appropriate to the learned wisdom of the other. Anthropologists may at times feel they are being offered *mikigaq* from theologians that is hard to swallow. Yet hopefully this truth is fermented in the blood of the ultimate stranger, Jesus—a cup of fermentation that is a cup of fellowship, of deep intimacy with God and with others.

This theologian for one appreciates that theologians and anthropologists share a familial resemblance of seeking truths about those who are strangers. And my hope is that anthropology will deal not merely with “the chrysalis form of religion” but that which in fresh turning “is born again with new wings” (Buber 1958, 116). I know theologians need anthropologists. Thank you for welcoming this theologian in this vital anthropological work.

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