This paper reiterates and expands on the ideas I presented in a workshop entitled, “Hospitality is a Queer Thing” at the Annual Meeting of The Society for Pastoral Theology in Atlanta in 2009. At that workshop, I began by asking participants their reaction to the word “queer.” Their responses ranged from discomfort at the violent history of the word to an appreciation of the ways in which queer theory, a relatively new field of scholarly inquiry, offered a critical perspective on long-held notions regarding identity and sexuality (though no word of criticism regarding queer theory was offered in the workshop, it is important to note that such criticism has been sharp among some contemporary Christian theologians). As the conversation regarding people’s reactions to the word began to wrap up, one of the workshop participants asked, “Can I, a straight man, be queer?” I initially deferred his question, inviting participants to respond, before I gave my perspective: yes, I did indeed believe that my straight colleague could be queer and that the implications of an attempt to live a queer life were important for pastoral care and Christian ethics.

And yet, although this paper will answer that question affirmatively, it comes with a warning that being queer is not easy for straight men. In fact, living a queer life can be a tall order for any of us in contemporary life. Being queer is about more than sexuality, though sexuality is a fertile kind of rhetorical spot to begin to think queerly because it is a site that has such capacity to shape normative identity, to produce normative “selves.” To be queer is to live in such a way as to subvert those kinds of norms. Most of us are reluctant to live that kind of subversive life because we benefit from the norm. That benefit might be psychological—we can rest assured in our self-understanding as healthy and mature. It might be economic—fitting the norm means access to career advancement and job security and tax breaks and inheritance rights and marital benefits. It might be ecclesial—failing to meet the standards of the norm keeps us from being ordained. But for those who have been labeled “queer,” the cost of the norm is too high and the violence of the norm is
revealed by its demands of conformity. Queer theory, then, argues that the rewards of the norm are secured at the expense of those who fail to live up to the norm's demands. Queer theory articulates a challenging ethical claim: we need to take on queer identities in order to subvert the norm so that anyone who fails to meet/benefit from its exacting requirements might not experience the violence that follows that failure. In doing so, we stand in solidarity with countless queer folk who have paid a high price in Western modernity because they failed to measure up.

"Can I be queer?" I use the question as a *leitmotif* for this paper, inviting the reader to consider that question for her or himself. In fact, I believe that this queer ethical call is deeply congruent with some of the most powerful pastoral theological writing of recent years. This call to be queer is one way to understand the attempts in our pastoral practice to welcome the other. In exploring that question, this paper will trace the idea of hospitality—this act of welcoming the other—in light of contemporary pastoral theological reflection and the deconstructive theory of the French semiologist Jacques Derrida. The first section of the paper summarizes the work of Emma Justes and Henri Nouwen as examples of contemporary pastoral theologies of hospitality. The second section lays out Jacques Derrida's concept of the impossibility of true hospitality (an impossibility that should guide our efforts to risk hospitality nonetheless). The third and final section re-reads Justes and Nouwen in light of Derrida, demonstrating just how queer (and unsettling) hospitality can be.

**Hospitality in Contemporary Pastoral Theology**

Not surprisingly, various pastoral theologians have explored the concept of hospitality at some length. This paper will examine the writing of Emma Justes and Henri Nouwen as examples of this pastoral theological writing; both Justes and Nouwen have made the concept central to some part of their writing and reflection. Nouwen describes the movement from hostility to hospitality in his book, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Nouwen, 1975/1996) and Justes claims that the understanding of hospitality articulated in Christian theological and exegetical scholarship is the touchstone for being a skillful listener when offering pastoral care in her book *Hearing Beyond the Words: How to Become a Listening Pastor* (Justes, 2006).

Nouwen begins his discussion by spelling out the challenges of moving from hostility, an orientation to the other that he describes as endemic in modern Western culture, to hospitality. This move, says
Nouwen, is central to understanding our vocation as Christians: "But still—that is our vocation: to convert the hostis into a hospes, the enemy into a guest, and to create the free and fearless spaces where brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and fully experienced" (1975/1996, p. 217). Nouwen begins his discussion of hospitality by examples from Scripture. He cites Abraham and Sarah's hospitality to three strangers (Gen 18:1-15), the hospitality that the widow of Zarepath offered to Elijah, who then raised the widow's son from the dead (1 Kings 17:9-24), and the hospitality that the two travelers on the road to Emmaus offered to Jesus, unaware that they were sitting down to eat with the risen Lord (Luke 24:13-35).

These examples stand in contrast to an ambivalence toward the stranger and a pervasive implicit hostility that betrays the emptiness of our professions of peace and justice. In keeping with his long-standing reflections on spirituality and spiritual practices, Nouwen implores his reader to turn away from this hostility and to practice biblical hospitality, creating a free and open space that is marked by welcome and not be expectation or unstated requirements. This spiritual practice overcomes hospitality, turning the stranger into a guest and then erasing the distinctions between the guest and the host: "When hostility is converted into hospitality then fearful strangers can become guests revealing to their hosts the promise they are carrying with them. Then, in fact, the distinction between host and guest proves to be artificial and evaporates in the recognition of the newfound unity" (1975/1996, p. 218).

In Hearing Beyond the Words, Emma Justes uses hospitality as a foundation for faithful practices of listening to others when offering pastoral care. Like Nouwen, Justes begins by examining scriptural examples of hospitality; Justes examines only two Biblical narratives—one from the Hebrew Scriptures and one from the Gospel of Luke—but she explores them in much greater depth than did Nouwen. Interestingly, Justes references the story of Abraham and Sarah (Nouwen also named this story as an example of hospitality); her interpretation of the story in the first part of the pericope echoes Nouwen, but she moves beyond the portion of the narrative in which Sarah and Abraham entertain the strangers (Genesis 18:1-15) to reflect on the further travels of these strangers when they meet Lot at the gates of Sodom and he offers them shelter and a delicious feast. That night, the men of Sodom arrived at the door to Lot's home and demanded that Lot send the men out that they "may know them" (there is no doubt from the text that this kind of knowledge was to be sexual in nature) but Lot decided to send his daughters out to the mob
in order to protect the guests in his home. In this particular pericope, that decision is overruled by the visitors who helped to thwart the plans of the mob and to rescue Lot and his family from the coming destruction of Sodom. For Justes, Lot's willingness to sacrifice his daughters is an example of the demands of hospitality: "Lot took his role as host so seriously that he offered to protect his guests by handing over his virgin daughters to the mob" (2006, p. 3). As gay, lesbian, and other sexually queer folk are well aware, Sodom is a loaded site in any discussion of hospitality. As the only present-day people to be branded with the appellation of "sodomite" we understand the dangers lurking in the story of Sodom and its connection to inhospitality. We'll return to Sodom later in this paper, once we have Derrida's ideas in front of us; for now, though, we need to finish summarizing Justes' perspectives on hospitality.

When she turns to the New Testament descriptions of hospitality, Justes focuses on the account in the gospel of Luke where Jesus visits the home of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7). Simon displays an insulting lack of hospitality but Jesus himself lifts up the woman who washes Jesus' feet with her tears as an exemplar of hospitality. She offered Jesus an extravagant expression of hospitable welcome when Simon offered him no such respect.

Justes uses these two biblical narratives to lay out her pastoral theological claim that hospitality is characterized by vulnerability, humility, thoughtful availability, and reciprocity. These qualities describe pastoral practice marked by holy listening to another in a time of need.

Henri Nouwen and Emma Justes provide two rigorous pastoral theological perspectives of the importance of hospitality. Nouwen names hospitality as a central facet of an abundant, faithful spirituality and Justes relies on hospitality as a foundation for practices of effective listening in pastoral care. Each of their texts spells out the practical implications of theological and biblical perspectives and when viewed together those two works describe the importance of hospitality for Christian spirituality and for pastoral practice. What Justes and Nouwen offer their readers is not, however, a queer reading on hospitality; at this point, their perspectives on hospitality do little to help us think about the question, "Can I be queer?" That kind of queer reading in the context of contemporary pastoral theology is the purpose of this paper, however. In order to provide it, I will turn to Jacques Derrida's analysis of hospitality and sketch out the ways in which Derrida's ideas "queer" those of Justes and Nouwen.
"Hospitality—If There Is Any" is Queer: Derrida and Hospitality

Jacques Derrida is a central intellectual figure in the philosophical, cultural, and linguistic critiques of modern Western culture that were first articulated in the 1970s and that have expanded exponentially in various scholarly fields in the humanities up until the present. Derrida's ideas have gained broad purchase in both academic and broader cultural circles—he first coined the word deconstruction, a term widely used in a broad array of disparate contexts both scholarly and popular, and his ideas have been quite influential in the ongoing scholarly debates regarding the widely invoked but ambiguously defined terms of modernity and postmodernity. Although, the critical perspectives that Derrida helped author are often bundled under the term "postmodern," they are more appropriately named poststructural. That general moniker is more fitting because perspectives such as Derrida's stake a claim contrary to structuralism, which argues for universal structures of meaning imbedded deep in the cultural unconscious. Derrida's brilliant, dense, disorienting scholarship argues against such structures, claiming instead that there is no inherent, stable meaning at the core of language. Language, for Derrida, is ambiguous and uncertain. No single word in this sentence (or any sentence) has any intrinsic, originary meaning but can only convey meaning by virtue of its relationship to other words—other words in the sentence, other words in the endless signifying chain of concepts and ideas that each of us attaches to discrete words to provide them with meaning.

There are, for Derrida, no deep, intrinsic structures of meaning and he argues that efforts to erect such structures in our thinking are dishonest because they mask the inherent ambiguity, uncertainty, multiplicity, and slipperiness of language and thought. Further, those efforts are violent. They are violent to thought because they impose a singular interpretation on the multiple signifying connections that exist in language, thereby limiting our imagination (theologians might speak here of the limits of revelation). They are violent to some human beings because the singular interpretation is secured by dismissing or silencing any perspectives that differ; this silencing does not stop only with perspectives but with human beings who live out those perspectives in their lives and relationships.

One might imagine that Derrida's ideas would be hospitable to queer theory, queer thought, queer perspectives, and queer people because his ideas challenge the concept of a fixed norm and help to expose the lie of any such claim. In his later writing Derrida began to pay more
attention to religion and religious concepts; in this phase of his scholarship he explored the idea of hospitality on various occasions (Derrida, 1996/2000; 1997/2002b), deconstructing the term in order to expose its inevitable ambiguity and multiplicity: "Hospitality—if there is any—must, would have to, open itself to an other that is not mine, my hôte, my other, not even my neighbor or my brother" (1997/2002b, p. 363). The term hôte is not easily translatable from French to English, which explains why Derrida’s translator left the word in its original French in this passage. The word conveys a simultaneous meaning of guest and host, the one who gives and one who receives hospitality. The Latin term from which hôte is derived, hostis, conveys a simultaneous meaning as well: guest or enemy. The simultaneity of these terms is key to understanding Derrida’s perspectives on hospitality. Such simultaneity is more than multiplicity; rather, Derrida’s is asking us to hold these multiple understandings together simultaneously. There is in hospitality the possibility (an impossibility) of guest, host, enemy all at once. This simultaneity is hard to convey in English with two foreign words, one French and one Latin; the challenge to thinking that this simultaneity demands is better understood for those of us who think/speak/write in English by invoking English words derived from the same root(s) of hôte and hostis: host, hotel, hostel, hostile, hostage. Derrida is claiming that the implications of the (impossible) demands of hospitality can be understood by holding these contradictory terms as simultaneous possibilities made possible through hospitality. To try to convey this concept for an English audience, Derrida titled a public seminar on hospitality presented in the United, “Hostipitality,” joining hostility and hospitality into one word.

Because hospitality is a noun conveying certain kinds of practices, those of us in the pastoral and practical theological fields would be wise to think about the implications of those practices. Derrida helps our thinking (or confounds it) in this regard as well. He distinguishes between the practice of invitation of the other into our space and the practice of visitation by the other to our space. Invitation by itself is not hospitality; in fact it can thwart hospitality because we pretend we are being hospitable with our invitation while all the while we are constrained by limits as to what form our invitation can take. Who may we invite? Under what conditions can we invite them? Are we willing to be changed by our encounter with them or will we invite them in merely to assuage our own worried conscience that we make room for “their kind” in our congregation, our circle of friends? Does the other who is invited enter in as a subject—someone with a different perspective, different beliefs, different family and social relationships—or does s/he enter
in as an object that we have already labeled and presume to know and understand?

Keenly aware of this danger of invitation, Derrida argues that true hospitality (if it exists) is possible only in the moment of visitation, when the stranger, the other, shows up at our doorstep unannounced. They have taken the initiative, they have breached the distance. What do they want? Are they asking for my time, assistance, money? Are they in need? Are they merely seeking to know and be known? Are they dangerous, wishing to do me harm? At the moment of visitation of the stranger, there is no way to know; it is only at this point, says Derrida, that the possibility and the demand of hospitality are made real.

John Caputo, a prominent interpreter of Derrida's thought for both philosophical and theological audiences, describes the unknowability of the visitation: "What is to say that I will not be murdered in my bed by all this hospitality? How am I to distinguish between the guest and the outright enemy, who will do me and mine the worst violence? Am I not duty bound to protect myself and my family from such violence? Is this messianic madness not just madness plain and simple? Derrida’s answer to these questions, which are valid questions, is that there would never be any way in principle to eliminate all the risk and still preserve the idea of hospitality" (2007, p. 76). Derrida is quite clear on this point. In a conversation between Caputo, Derrida, and the philosopher Richard Kearney, Derrida claims: “I’m not sure there is pure hospitality. But if we want to understand what hospitality means, we have to think of unconditional hospitality, that is openness to whomever, to any newcomer. And of course, if I want to know in advance who is the good one, who is the bad one—in advance!—if I want to have an available criterion to distinguish between the good immigrant and the bad immigrant, then I would have no relation to the other [as wholly other]. So to welcome the other as such, you have to suspend the use of criteria” (Kearney, 1999, p. 133).

Derrida, then, argues that hospitality involves a risk that cannot be accounted for or abolished. Some might read this idea as a supreme description of nihilism and an acquiescence to the violence of contemporary society; they may assume that Derrida is castigating the simplistic naiveté of Nouwen’s call to turn hostility into hospitality and urging us all to retreat behind the safety of our cul-de-sacs and gated communities and video cameras and guarded compounds. This charge of nihilism is regularly leveled against Derrida and other poststructural/postmodern thinkers; it is not, however, a claim that Derrida ever makes. Rather, Derrida, having described the impossible demands inherent in hospital-
ity, also describes hospitality as an ethical obligation. In speaking of hospitality as the impossible, Derrida wonders if pure hospitality exists, whether there is any such thing as hospitality. What does Derrida mean by the impossibility of hospitality, by the phantasm-like quality of its uncertain existence? We can get a sense of Derrida’s meaning of impossible hospitality by exploring his understanding of two other concepts, concepts that contain a similar impossibility for which Derrida believes we must strive: the gift, and justice.

What does Derrida mean when he says a pure gift is impossible? John Caputo provides a short, clear summary of Derrida’s response to that question (2007, pp. 69-73). The impossibility of the gift occurs, according to Derrida, because as soon as a gift is given it begins to negate itself. If, as a giver of a gift, I bestow a gift on another then is there not some dimension by which I am the one who benefits? The other, after all, is indebted to me by virtue of my generosity and I feel a deep, warm satisfaction by virtue of my magnanimous charity toward the poor soul who benefited from my largesse. You might reply that surely there are more selfless forms of giving a gift than the cold, calculating example I just described. Surely there is another who is more capable of giving a gift without the calculating economics of debt and repayment (not necessarily monetary but moral) that I seem to embody. Possibly (though Derrida believes such a person is rare). But even if a gift is given completely selflessly, the recipient feels a debt of gratitude, a debt that s/he feels compelled to repay. A gift, then, is never free; it always carries with it expectations and responsibilities, debts and obligations. Despite this inevitability, Derrida encourages us to work toward the performance of giving a pure gift even if it is impossible. In doing so, he encourages to remember two things: 1) know the nature of the gift—know that the gift in its pure form is impossible (is, in fact, an example of the impossible)—but nonetheless, strive to give; and 2) use the impossibility of the gift to reflect on the concrete realities of economies. Strive to live within a system of exchange that is governed by impulses and commitments beyond the debt and the repayment, thereby using the pure gift’s impossibility to privilege concrete systems and practices that aspire to that impossibility.

Justice is another concept that points us to the impossible but that, nonetheless, presents an ethical imperative. Pure justice, says Derrida, is impossible (Caputo, 2007; Derrida, 1990/2002a). It is an ideal that is not achieved in the concrete—justice has little ontological weight—but is, rather, a concept that has resonance it its capacity to call us near to it.
This call is decidedly not a kind of Platonic ideal, an ideal “form” of justice. Rather, this justice is something always beyond our grasp. It is unexpected and unforeseeable, it shows up in the most unexpected places. It also compels us to commitments. Our laws may be inordinately insufficient substitutes for this unachievable justice but they are, nonetheless, the only concrete approximations of justice we have at our disposal. Our commitment, then, is to work to make our laws bend toward justice. In an effort to trace the tensions, connections, and disjunctions between the impossibility of justice and the ethical demands of the law, Derrida lays out three aporias (a circumstance in which a thesis can be logically put forth while the logic of the antithesis is logically apparent as well) in the working of the law (Derrida, 1990/2002a):

The first aporia, the epokhe of the rule: The law provides a rule for practice that can and must be exercised but if that rule is exercised mechanically, as a simple calculation, then the law will be unjust.

The second aporia, the haunting of the undecidable: Justice becomes real only by passing through the undecidable. This undecidability is characterized by two opposing points of view each making the same demand on us, and this impasse must be resolved one way or the other. That demand may be one of justice—the two opposing options may both point to justice even as they stand in an irreconcilable tension—or it may be the dilemma of facing two unjust options while having no other option available. It is only in those kinds of moments that justice might be revealed in the choice one makes. Deconstruction as an echo of the justice that is never really attainable seeks to reveal the complexity and the possibility in this undecidable choice.

The third aporia, the urgency that obstructs the horizon of knowledge: In the application of the law, justice does not wait. There may be a need for deliberation rather than the mechanical exercise of rules, the situation may be undecidable and unresolvable, and yet a decision is required; it cannot be deferred.

The demand, the impossibility, of hospitality is clearer when it is compared to the demand, the impossibility, of the gift and of justice.
These three concepts are all just that—concepts. And yet, they call to us to strive toward the impossible in the concrete. This striving is never achieved, never achievable. This is by no means a reason not to try, according to Derrida. This impetus to strive after the unachievable is a queer call; it is the foundation for the affirmative response to the question: “Can I be queer?” Derrida’s deconstructive move may begin in language but it moves from the theoretical to the ethical. It is a call to live oriented toward the impossible, to resist the norms that purport to reveal unshakable truth, to endeavor to unearth the fissures and fractures and to break apart hegemonic conceptions that boldly proclaim, “this is the way things are.” What happens when this Derridean impossible hospitality is placed into the midst of the pastoral theological perspectives on hospitality that have been articulated by Henri Nouwen and Emma Justes? The impossible infiltrates pastoral theology. How queer.

“Hostipitality” in Sodom: Theologies of Hospitality After Derrida

Derrida’s ideas present a fundamental challenge to Henri Nouwen’s concepts, not because they refute Nouwen’s ideas but because they claim a “both/and” quality, a simultaneity, that Nouwen seeks to erase. While Nouwen endeavors to move from hostility with hospitality, Derrida claims that both ideas are necessary to offer us the possibility of true hospitality not because hostility needs to be present but because we must never delude ourselves that we have vanquished it when we risk hospitality. I find Derrida’s perspective a clear-eyed corrective to a tendency to over-spiritualize the struggle that characterizes hospitality. I also find it a necessary perspective for understanding the other as another person—a subject, a self—and not merely as the object of my hospitable invitation. For Nouwen, the only agent in exercising either hostility or hospitality is the self; the other is the object who receives my cold indifference, simmering violence, or warm embrace. I am responsible for overcoming my hostility through my spiritual practice of my hospitality. The other simply waits for me to get my act together. For Derrida, hospitality and hostility are options available both to myself and to the other. I can practice hostility toward the other and he can practice hostility toward me; I can practice hospitality toward the other and she can offer me hospitality as well. The risk is greater—I cannot escape the possibility of violence—but so is the closeness, the possible impossibility of true hospitality. Derrida argues that the only way that this true hospitality might enter into the world is if we open ourselves up to the possibility of hostility, of violence.
Holding to the inescapable possibility of both also helps us to be self-critical of our own tendency to rationalize exclusion in the name of invitation. It is precisely at the moment when we delude ourselves into thinking that our invitation ushers in the transition from hostility to hospitality that we are most vulnerable to enshrining our hostility in a complex, implicit system of rationalizations and prejudices that operate to limit who precisely receives an invitation; Derrida reminds us that every practice of hospitality contains a possible practice of hostility. By doing so, he opens our eyes to the possibility of hostility so that we might seek to avoid it.

If Derrida’s ideas challenge Nouwen’s concept of a linear progression from hostility to hospitality, they are less unsettling to the pastoral theological perspectives of Emma Justes. They do, however, profoundly confound Justes’ reading of the Sodom story. In her exegesis of the passage, Justes names Lot as a paradigmatic host—a purveyor of hospitality—because he was willing to sacrifice his daughters: “Lot took his role as host so seriously that he offered to protect his guests by handing over his virgin daughters to the mob” (2006, p. 3). But is this act really hospitality? Is it really hospitality to those unnamed women that Lot is willing to sacrifice? Is it possible that Derrida’s concept of “hostipitality,” a realization that hostility is a possibility whenever hospitality might be offered, a fuller, more accurate description of that excruciating choice? I believe Derrida’s concepts are revelatory for the Sodom account in (at least) three ways.

His etymological analysis of hospitality places in front of us the image of the hostel—a place of welcome and rest for the stranger—right alongside the reality of the hostile mob. Further, his insistence that his hostel/hostile tension is understood only when both concepts are simultaneously seen as possibilities of the practice of hospitality offers a complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty that reveals to us the depth of the dilemma facing this group of family and guests as a hostile mob gathers outside their home/hostel. We understand this dilemma only through the “both/and” of having to hold to both concepts; Nouwen’s desire to overcome hostility with hospitality (a desire that Derrida would share but would refuse to spell out because he would find it impossible) does not reveal to us the irreconcilable dilemma facing Lot as he stood inside his home and listened to the insistent pounding, the angry shouts of the mob demanding that he send his guests outside.

Derrida’s description of ambiguous hospitality that can only be understood in the practices of invitation and visitation helps us appreci-
ate hospitable invitation to welcome the stranger into our home with a feast while terrifying us with the unexpected visitation of men intent on violence. This “hostipality” is dangerous. Welcoming the other can evoke tremendous anger in people who reside inside the walls of your homeland. The strangers in need can appear at the gates of the city and you can offer them hospitable welcome. That act of visitation/invitation also opens you up to the possibility of a riotous mob pounding on your door demanding to take the strangers you are sheltering. Derrida is honest in showing us the dangerous contours of hospitality even as he advocates for us to choose it.

Finally, Derrida’s three aporias of the law reveal the dimensions of the dilemma facing Lot, his daughters, and the strangers that they are hosting as they stand in their home and listen to the insistent, angry calls of the men outside. The third aporia, the urgency that obstructs the horizon of knowledge, is palpable in this narrative. Lot must decide now, the mob is outside and they are growing angrier, more insistent; their knocks on the door have turned to pounding and this pounding is growing more methodical and heavy. They will break the door down. Having chosen to offer hospitality, Lot must decide, he cannot avoid the decision. The second aporia, the haunting of the undecidable, is made real in this moment when Lot is forced to decide. There is no just choice. But there are only two choices to make. Stepping outside into the midst of the mob, Lot makes his choice: “Behold I have two daughters who have not known men; let me bring them out to you and do to them with them as you please.” Faced with undecidable options, Lot has made his choice. The first aporia, the epokhe of the rule, is revealed in this choice. Lot has followed the law of hospitality. He has applied it with uniform precision from the moment the strangers appear at the gate to the moment he offers his daughters. But this unquestioning application of the law is not justice. It is law—the law of hospitable welcome—but it is neither true justice nor pure hospitality.

And if the impossible of true justice is not manifest in Lot’s decision in that awful moment as he speaks to the mob, neither is the impossible of pure hospitality even if he adheres to the letter of the law of hospitality. Lot had to face a decision in that moment; Derrida’s reflections on hospitality help us plumb the implications of his choice but those reflections do not demand that we call Lot’s choice pure hospitality. Surely that act of sacrifice of Lot’s daughters, an act thwarted only by the power of the guests, need not be named as hospitality. Surely it is hostility—the kind of act that is always possible whenever we risk hospitality.
have been enough sacrifices in the name of sodomy; we need not rationalize those sacrifices in order to preserve the law of an inviolable hospitality. If we want to understand the implications of what happened on that night, we should listen to the daughters. And yet, they remain mute in the text; their testimony cannot be retrieved. Another option is to listen to the testimonies of the modern Sodomites, the queer men and women who have been sacrificed by religious traditions that have equated the love of these queer women and men with the bloodlust of a mob intent on rape. We sexual queer can provide a contemporary witness to the violence that has been wrought across the years as a result of the hostile enemies who appeared at Lot’s door. And we can testify that the effects of that violence have not been examples of hospitality; we can testify that those effects have indeed been quintessentially hostile.

“Can I be queer?” Pastoral hospitality will put us on the side of these contemporary Sodomites, a queer place to be. “Is it possible for me...to be queer?” Each of us will have to answer that question for ourselves. The choice “to be queer” consists of a conscious decision to choose to orient toward the impossible. It is a choice to risk practices of hospitality even as we recognize that our efforts might result in invitations that domesticate otherness rendering it familiar. It is a choice to hope for and work for justice while realizing that we might practice laws that prevent it. It is a choice to strive to give and receive the Gift without calculations of debt and repayment. None of these practices is ever really achieved. Queer hospitality is a risk, a gamble in the face of tremendous odds. But the impossibility of reaching them does not deter us from trying, from risking. Queer hospitality takes the gamble, attempting to offer true hospitality even as we recognize that we are vulnerable to hostility as we do so. Queer hospitality seeks to offer invitation and to remain open to unexpected visitations even as we recognize the potential for violence. This hospitality is the impossible that Derrida dares to call us toward. It is dangerous and disruptive, but it offers us a chance to see and appreciate and welcome and love an other. How queer. How queer indeed.

**Endnotes**

1. Derrida offers a reading of the Sodom story in his book *Of Hospitality*. In it he intentionally elides the reading of the Sodom story with the parallel pericope of the concubine from Bethlehem (Judges 19) who is sent out by her “master,” the Levite, to the angry mob of men where she is raped repeatedly. This is done so that the man can show hospitality to his guest. The next day, the Levite cut her body into twelve pieces and dispersed those pieces of flesh throughout Is-
rael. Derrida does not engage in any type of deconstructive playfulness with his analysis of this story. He does not attempt to justify it, to claim that it is hospitality. Rather, he closes with a haunting question: “Are we heirs to this tradition of hospitality? Up to what point?” (1996/2000, p. 155)

References


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