

# WELCOMING STRANGERS

## HOSPITALITY AS A DUTY AND A SPIRITUAL ATTITUDE



Generalitat de Catalunya  
Government of Catalonia  
**Religious Diversity  
Advisory Board**

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# WELCOMING STRANGERS

## HOSPITALITY AS A DUTY AND A SPIRITUAL ATTITUDE

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY  
ADVISORY BOARD

Document 3

Religious Diversity Advisory Board document 3  
Welcoming Strangers. Hospitality as a Duty and a Spiritual Attitude  
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© Government of Catalonia  
Ministry of Governance, Public Administrations and Housing  
Directorate-General for Religious Affairs  
Carrer de Rivadeneyra, 6, 2n – 08002 Barcelona  
[www.gencat.cat/afersreligiosos](http://www.gencat.cat/afersreligiosos)  
[@afersreligiosos](https://twitter.com/afersreligiosos)

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## INTRODUCTION

This document, which it is my pleasure to introduce, is the third that the Religious Diversity Advisory Board has published. It features reflections and ideas related to the figure of the stranger and the phenomenon of immigration, and is further testimony to the Board's efforts to improve the management of Catalonia's diversity. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Board for its dedication and perseverance.

Back in the 1960s, in his book *Els altres catalans*, Francesc Candel wrote that Catalonia had become “calmer, fairer, more dignified and - why not say it? - more optimistic, affectionate and generous”<sup>1</sup> in its relationship with newcomers. He was referring to a particular wave of migration, the influx of Spaniards into Barcelona's metropolitan area in the mid-20th century.

The migratory movements we are experiencing today are different. They are more complex and problematic, but also more enriching. The globalised world we live in encourages such phenomena, and Catalonia is no exception in that regard. The backdrop, however, is still as Candel described it. Catalonia has welcomed strangers for centuries and continues to do so in the present. I would go as far as to say it is now more welcoming than ever.

Catalans have always shown hospitality to those who have left their country or territory behind in search of a better life. We do so out of great respect for them, because we, as a society from which people have also

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1 F. Candel: *Els altres catalans*. Barcelona, Edicions 62, 1964.

emigrated, are keenly aware that the arrival of newcomers has contributed to Catalonia's tremendous social and cultural wealth.

Catalonia is currently inhabited by people of 177 different nationalities, who, between them, speak 270 languages and practise the world's 13 main religions. In the space of just a few years, we have integrated a million people into Catalonia with no adverse effect on social cohesion and peace.

The hospitality of the people of Catalonia does not mean that coexistence is always plain sailing, however. It entails numerous challenges, in relation to which the Government of Catalonia plays a key role by applying policies for social justice which guarantee a balance that makes peaceful coexistence possible.

The Government will continue working to ensure that strangers are fully integrated into our society, protecting their dignity and showing them the hospitality and respect they deserve. We will do so because we are convinced that only together can we make Catalonia greater.

*Meritxell Borràs i Solé*

*Governance, Public Administrations and Housing minister*



## PREFACE

The Religious Diversity Advisory Board is pleased to present the third in its series of documents. Our first document looked at Religious Diversity in Open Societies (2013), and the second at *The Social Contribution of Religious Traditions in Open Societies* (2015). Here, we will be exploring the principle of hospitality as an ethical and spiritual attitude nurtured by all the major religious traditions.

*Welcoming Strangers*, as we have titled this document, is a duty and a spiritual attitude we consider an inherent part of the religious traditions, and of great importance in the historical context in which we are living. Catalonia is, and always has been, an open land, a place of transit. Its identity has been moulded by multiple migration flows and its relationships with peoples from afar. The religious traditions present in Catalonia urge us to welcome strangers who arrive here, to recognise their inalienable rights, and to treat them with dignity and respect.

As a result of this duty and spiritual attitude, help and care are made available to strangers to Catalonia, many of whom have a wide variety of needs. By offering newcomers a warm, dignified welcome, the religious traditions, along with numerous non-religious people and associations from civil society, make a contribution that we feel obliged to acknowledge and for which we want to express our gratitude through this document.

To counter the hermetic and xenophobic attitudes that unfortunately also exist in society, we wish to promote the human, ethical legacy of the religious traditions, which, in different languages, call on us to welcome

strangers, to attend to their needs, and to treat them with dignity and care, especially those in a situation of great social or economic vulnerability.

*Francesc Torralba i Roselló*  
*Chairman of the Religious Diversity Advisory Board*

## 1. RELIGION IN A GLOBALISED WORLD

A paradigm shift from secularisation to post-secularisation is currently taking place. In other words, we are in transition from a situation in which religion was not a significant variable in explaining the world and social states of affairs (a function hitherto reserved for major political ideologies) to one in which religions (and religious actors) are becoming increasingly important to understanding much of what goes on in the international, inter-state and local arenas, and even among individuals. Advocates of post-secularist theories have dubbed the 21<sup>st</sup> century God's century.<sup>1</sup>

Three interconnected phenomena help explain the change in question:

**1. Globalisation has led to the emergence of diasporas and the spread of movements, ideas, cultural patterns and human groups, as well as of religious beliefs and values.** It is causing the creation and growth of new ethnic and religious groups with origins in religious diasporas throughout the world (this is one way of interpreting the Mediterranean migrant crisis, the expulsion of Myanmar's Muslim minority, and the persecution of Christians in Iraq and Syria). Religious diaspora communities are becoming some of the most influential non-state actors in international politics today. Globalisation, rising pluralism in all societies and the appearance of new minorities are key factors in many countries' foreign policies. There is also talk of new phenomena, such as east-west *counter-colonisation* (a possible interpretation of the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism in western countries).

**2. New religious minorities are forming and some of the major religious traditions are experiencing a shift in their centre of gravity.** That of Christianity (i.e. the various Christian denominations as a whole)

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<sup>1</sup> Duffy Toft, M.; Philpott, D.; & Shah, T.S.: *God's Century. Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*. London, Norton & Co., 2011.

is gradually moving southward (Latin America and Africa). Islam's sphere of influence, meanwhile, is slowly relocating from the Middle East to the west and Asia.

**3. Religious beliefs are a key element in individual and collective identity construction.** Over 85% of the world's population associate themselves with a religious tradition, and the figure is set to rise in the coming decades according to highly regarded forecasts, such as that of Pew Research Center (2015). This phenomenon is not just occurring in the most poverty-stricken countries or so-called *failing* or *failed* states. Countries with different cultural and religious traditions and varying levels of economic development are being affected by the re-emergence and restructuring of religion.

Beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the birth and consolidation of the modern state saw the spread of a concept of *religion* as a set of beliefs and doctrines of an essentially private nature, separate from the public sphere and politics. The defining point in this process was the development of the notion of *sovereignty* in modern political theory, resulting in religion becoming a collection of beliefs that could influence the way individuals led their private life but never their public life.

Religion's expulsion from public life and politics enabled the state to progressively monopolise and capitalise on the loyalties historically enjoyed by the former. However, the transition to state- or nation-building, with religion becoming marginalised and private, has not been completed in many cases, including that of Europe. This might explain the newly acquired prominence of religious institutions in some countries. Consider, for example, the Russian Orthodox Church's growing presence and socio-political influence nowadays.

As indicated above, the resurgence we are witnessing is not exclusive to any one religious tradition. It includes Islam's revitalisation, both in the Arab world and non-Arab countries, such as Malaysia, Iran and

Indonesia. It also encompasses the growth of Evangelical Christianity (particularly *Pentecostalism*), the revival of Judaism and the rise of New Age spiritual beliefs, some of which are inspired by eastern traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism.

Globalisation has also made it easier for distinguished individuals to play a role in world politics, and religious leaders can become involved in international relations. Consider, for example, the Pope, as an international actor in a globalised world, not in his capacity as a head of state but as the leader of a transnational religion. The Dalai Lama, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, is another example.

Religion's resurgence is a *megatrend* directly linked to globalisation, defined as the emergence of a set of technological processes that have affected the international economy, telecommunications, the realm of information, and scope for interrelations between people, states and organisations, in addition to creating a global village.

As a consequence of globalisation, we live in a shrinking world. Some theorists suggest that globalisation itself has generated a cultural and religious resurgence as a response to growing global interdependence and a substantial rise in social pluralism, and has also paved the way for a *snowball effect*, whereby a religious resurgence beginning in one country has immediate effects on other countries.

There are other, more satisfactory explanations for religion's resurgence in the age of globalisation.

There tends to be an increase in the practice of religion in times of severe **economic crisis**, as well as at specific times in which dramatic events lead people to look for answers. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA in 2001, for example, there was a significant rise in religious practice and attendance at religious services and celebrations. The crisis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's major political ideologies, meanwhile, has not only created a sizeable void to be filled in terms of sources of answers and

ideas, but has also allowed for a new perspective, free from ideological and political filters, on certain global social matters.

Some sociologists and political scientists feel the principal factors in the phenomenon under discussion are widening **economic inequality** and the new wave of worldwide poverty, which is affecting even industrialised countries and is most vividly represented by France's *banlieues*. Ulrich Beck talked of *the revolt of the superfluous* and Zygmunt Bauman has critically used the term *human waste* in relation to large groups of young people directly excluded from the benefits of globalisation and for whom the economic system has no need. Unable to find solutions to their concerns in the culture and values of the country in which they have been born and raised, they enclose themselves in a skewed interpretation of aspects of the cultures and religions of the countries of origin of their parents and grandparents.

Many *banlieue* youths do not consider themselves fully fledged French citizens, but rather members of a transnational identity called *Islam*. Others regard themselves as being from their parents' country (Morocco, Algeria, etc.), despite it often being the case that they have never actually set foot there. Phenomena of this kind have become a factor in public policy. The issue of religion has become *intermestic* (i.e. of both international and domestic relevance). The problem of dealing with returning jihadists is just one example.

Some people (e.g. Fethi Benslama) interpret religion's resurgence as a reaction to the **process of deconstruction, degradation and decomposition undergone by religions** in a secular world. From that angle, it would be a consequence, paradoxically, of the process that began with modernity.

Lastly, a case for strictly socio-political factors related to the **crisis of the liberal democratic state** can be argued. The first generation of the Third World's elite, who came to power between the 1940s

and the decolonisation of the 1960s and 1970s, believed in the myth of modernisation inherited from the west, involving acceptance of the superiority of democracy, technological progress and industrialisation. Often, however, it has not produced genuine democracy or real economic development. In many Third World countries, on the contrary, the modernisation process and the secular state have failed, and there have been major political crises linked to corruption, authoritarianism and patrimonialism. The case of Algeria as of 1992 is a notable example. So too is that of Egypt, where a new conflict between religious and secular nationalists has arisen.

## 2. CATALONIA AS A HOST COMMUNITY

Due to its geographical situation, Catalonia has always been a crossroads of civilisations. The richness of its society is thus the result of the traces that different cultures have left here over time.

Statistics show that Catalonia's population has doubled four times in just the last three centuries. This is a consequence of waves of migration which have occurred at approximately 70-yearly intervals. They have entailed adaptation to unfamiliar mentalities and customs, giving rise to friction and disagreements that have only been overcome thanks to a tremendous spirit of understanding.

Such a spirit, it can be said, has always been characteristic of Catalonia, especially since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. There have been three major influxes of people between then and now, contributing to demographic growth, boosting the labour force and, ultimately, making Catalonia richer.

The first of those influxes took place in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was driven by the Second Industrial Revolution and the International Exposition that Barcelona was to host in 1929. Many people were attracted by the prospect of the public works to be carried out in the city, particularly the construction of its underground railway system.

There was population movement within Catalonia itself, depopulating rural areas whose inhabitants left for industrialised towns and cities. Furthermore, a large number of Spaniards arrived, mainly from southern Spain, Valencia and Aragon, having decided to take up residence in an area expected to be productively active.

The second influx, which took place in the 1960s and 1970s, involved much greater numbers of people than the first. Spain's 1959 Stabilisation Plan generated economic prosperity, which, in turn, led to industrial growth in Barcelona and its surrounding area. That growth was a magnet for the inhabitants of many of the rural parts of Catalonia and Spain



which had not yet managed to extricate themselves from the poverty in which the Civil War had left them.

Catalonia's population rose from 3,200,000 to 5,600,000 between 1950 and 1975, equating to an average increase of 100,000 people per year and representing the greatest demographic explosion experienced up to that point. An important factor in that explosion was the train known as "El Sevillano". Over the period in question, its packed carriages transported thousands of Andalusians from the land of their birth to Catalonia, where they hoped to find work and a better life. Francesc Candel explained the problems and concerns of such citizens in his 1964 book *Els altres catalans*, which serves as a record of their integration process in Catalonia.

The third and most recent influx began in 1996 and is still taking place at present. Almost half a million newcomers arrived in Catalonia between 2000 and 2005. While this figure is comparable to that involved in the second influx, the third wave of migration differs from its predecessor in that the newcomers in question were basically foreign immigrants. There was a rising flow of immigrants into Catalonia until 2008, when the economic crisis stemming from the collapse of the property bubble led to a number of emigrations, particularly among Latin Americans. Even so, Catalonia's population continued to grow, albeit more slowly, due to the arrival of European citizens (Italian, English and French nationals, initially) attracted by the territory itself and the multinationals operating here.

Some immigrants from outside the European Union have attempted to reunify their family in Catalonia. Those who came with the intention of returning to their homeland once they had built up a certain level of savings are still here, as the state of the economy has prevented them from earning as much as they would have liked. Meanwhile, desperation is leading numerous Africans to struggle to cross the Mediterranean Sea

in the hope of settling in Catalonia. There are also many Africans and Asians who come (or are looking to come) here in search of economic stability or, more often, to escape war and abuse in their own countries.

Given all the above, it is clear that Catalonia is now facing a situation different from those of the past, one that requires us to frequently review social models and develop an inclusive concept of citizenship which should omit nobody and make every individual feel actively involved in Catalan society. As Marta Rovira-Martínez and Xavier Aragall have observed, the scale of today's migratory movement is global, so "it is important that Catalonia does not think of immigration and human mobility as a transient phenomenon, but rather as something consubstantial with an economically advanced society, even in a context of economic crisis".<sup>2</sup>

The highly problematic nature of the current circumstances becomes all too apparent when we see that the countries of Europe do not share the same principles with regard to accepting outsiders, be they emigrants or refugees; that the European Union's proposed intake quotas are contested; and that mistrust and defensive and discriminatory policies are rife, despite censure from the United Nations and Amnesty International. Nonetheless, we feel we must continue striving, in both the public and private spheres, for greater openness to strangers in Catalonia.

It cannot be denied that there have been undesirable situations, misunderstandings and conflicts in social and working life in Catalonia. Newcomers have found themselves banished to slum areas and facing obstacles in terms of access to education and health services. It remains the case that the hardest, least skilled, most poorly paid jobs are earmarked for them.

Against that bleak backdrop, however, there are still rays of hope, such as those emanating from trade unions, associations and the religious sphere. Most of Catalonia's trade unions have sections that attend to and

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2 M. Rovira i X. Aragall: "Migracions locals i política migratòria a Catalunya". *Ara*. 28/9/2014.

advise immigrants and help them integrate into the world of work. Some associations and the vast majority of faiths, meanwhile, have established bodies to cover immigrants' basic needs (accommodation, food, clothing, etc.). In the religious sphere, which might be expected to be fertile ground for confrontations or discrimination, Catalonia has a rich network of associations that foster interreligious dialogue. They work for coexistence, peace and harmony among the different faiths, with the ultimate goal of helping to establish greater mutual respect between humans and to make the world a more culturally diverse and socially open place.

It can thus be seen that immigration has moved, and is continuing to move, Catalan society to alter models, habits and attitudes with a view to ensuring coexistence and upholding ethical principles that Europe has not always put into practice, despite the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

### 3. EXERCISING HOSPITALITY: A UNIVERSALLY RECOGNISED PRINCIPLE

Having ceased to be monocultural, monoethnic and monolingual some time ago, western societies are becoming more diverse, and Catalonia is no exception. History indicates that they have never actually been absolutely homogeneous. Catalonia has been a place of transit, an open land, for centuries. At present, however, the challenge diversity poses is greater than ever.

Difference is not deemed something shameful that ought to be hidden away. On the contrary, it is considered a source of richness, a positive factor, an element of fertility. It is not something that only affects part of society, but rather a *factum* of social, cultural, political, religious and moral life.

Our societies have left uniformity behind and consciously embraced diversity. This transition can only be viewed as positive, despite it presenting certain problems to which there are no easy solutions.

A web of social actors from very different places and symbolic and cultural universes are sharing the same public stage. This poses new, complicated challenges, which we must define in terms of humanist values. Humanism should be reinvented and subjected to a critical analysis that, all too often, has become an intellectual scaffold for ethnocentrism and intolerance.

We need to move away from the exclusive, Eurocentric humanism characteristic of some of the milestones of western thought, and towards a humanism “of the Other”, in the words of Emmanuel Lévinas; a humanism that recognises every human being as a person, someone with inherent dignity and value in themselves, and who, as Immanuel Kant would say, is above all price and must always be treated as an end in themselves rather than as a means to an end.

The challenge that diversity entails affects every citizen and social actor, not only those who exercise the power of the public institutions. It is thus a factor in success or failure where social cohesion is concerned. Each actor in the *polis* must assume the degree of responsibility corresponding to them and overcome the many endogenous and exogenous difficulties involved in receiving the Other. Practising hospitality is not easy, but western societies' future wellbeing and quality of existence partly depend on it.

A host society's economic, social and employment conditions, while of great importance, are not alone in determining whether or not the Other is received optimally. The community's axiological system is involved too, as it can facilitate but also be a huge obstacle to reception of the strange Other.

What is the nature of the pyramid of values of the citizens of our world? What is hospitality's position in it? To what extent do people feel they have a duty to welcome the strange Other?

Welcoming the strange Other raises serious questions for the host community. Must the guest's values, attitudes and procedures be accepted from the outset? Must they be accepted even if they call the values of the host civilisation into question?

Hospitality consists of welcoming the vulnerable, strange Other into one's home. This is an initial definition liable to undergo significant conceptual development. There can be no hospitality without a welcome, although a welcome can be given in a number of very different ways.

In everyday language, we say that someone is hospitable when they exercise their ability to welcome another human being into their circle of privacy, their innermost circle. True hospitality is based on recognising the dignity of the Other.

The situation of the Other we have taken in should make us think about the origins of and ultimate reasons for their vulnerability and how

much responsibility we, as hosts, have for it. The vulnerability of the Other has various causes and can take very different forms. Nonetheless, we cannot reject our proportion of direct or indirect responsibility for it.

Hospitality is at its most perfect when it combines *recta intentio* and *recto modo*. The former is based on the dignity of the Other, and the latter is exercised equitably, without any kind of classism or elitism. A welcome must, by definition, be universal, despite that clearly not always being possible. The host's home is vulnerable and a degree of order must be maintained there if it is to fulfil its function in providing a welcome.

Welcoming the Other requires not only respect for their dignity but also empathic recognition of their needs. Before being taken in, the Other is *in-firmus*; they are vulnerable and require protection. The host and the guest are not symmetrically situated in space and time. Their relationship is thus not one of equality between two people going through the same experience, but quite the opposite.

The context in which a welcome is given is asymmetric. The guest has needs. The host takes the guest into their home to meet those needs, as far as possible. The host, as a human being, also has needs. Nonetheless, they have a home, a place of protection (also vulnerable), which they are willing to offer the Other.

Welcoming someone could be defined as a prelude to listening to them. A good welcome is reflected in the climate and attitudes generated between people. A welcoming disposition is a personal quality and, undoubtedly, a form of perfection. When we welcome somebody, we show their experiences hospitality.

Welcoming someone is not only a matter of making space for them in our home, of giving them shelter and food. We must also welcome their experiences, which are inseparable from their personal identity. If we welcome a physical person but not their experiences, we are not providing a true welcome.

Willingness to welcome is an attitude that facilitates connection, a quality that can be attained through gradual human growth. It is a way of life, of establishing relationships, of building bridges. It arises from a positive experience of ourselves, one that we feel is a gift and a form of personal development. It consists of opening up to others and acquainting ourselves with personal sacrifice.

A guest constitutes a challenge. They present a new world with their words. Furthermore, as a human being, they can be loved. Hospitality generates a bond of affection between guest and host, a tie that makes the latter much more vulnerable and dependent than before. The practice of hospitality involves affection being communicated, feelings exchanged, experiences and ideas conveyed, and different sensitivities brought together.

Opening up to the strange Other represents a significant change in both a human's mental structures and their emotional structures. Love makes us more vulnerable, which is why we are afraid of it. It renders us much more heteronomous than we would like. By practising hospitality, the host establishes an emotional bond with the guest, a cordial relationship that could cause them great hurt.

Welcoming the Other is not a neutral encounter. It takes place in a very specific and private setting, that of the host's home. "The relationship with the other is not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion, or a sympathy through which we put ourselves in the other's place; we recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery", according to Lévinas.<sup>3</sup> The relationship with otherness is, indeed, full of mystery.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of *mystery* is etymologically linked to the idea of that which is hidden. What is mysterious is concealed, not outwardly visible, hidden behind appearances. In human reality, it is possible to detect an outer or phenomenal dimension and an inner or noumenal dimension.

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3 E. Lévinas: *El tiempo y el otro*. Barcelona, Paidós, 1993, p. 116.

The outer refers to that which is visible or perceived by the senses. What we comprehend of the Other is what we take in via our senses. However, the Other transcends the mental image we form using such information.

Hospitality is primarily a visible movement in which bodies are relocated. To a degree, however, it is also an invisible movement. The host goes to meet the guest, moving towards them to make room for them in their home, and the guest moves towards the inside of the host's home.

The physical movement involved in hospitality is the least noteworthy. The real movement is of the invisible kind. The host moves outside themselves, out of the circle of their *ego*, to look for the Other, to make room for them in their mind. Over and above a physical space, hospitality requires a mental space. Hospitality is only possible if the host ceases to think of themselves and thinks of the Other instead.

Driven by sensitivity, by a feeling of solidarity, the host moves to meet the guest's needs. Like freedom, hospitality is a possibility open to humans, but a learning process is required for it to be fully effective.

Fundamentally, hospitality is a substantial movement. Receiving the strange Other in their home alters the host's life substantively rather than accidentally. Their life ceases to be as it was and their personality undergoes a transformation. Their nature changes substantively if their hospitality is genuine and they fully welcome the guest. The host's encounter with the strange Other is not merely a brush but a head-on collision that shakes the structures of their personal identity.

Hospitality involves a substantial movement in two respects. In addition to that of the host, the person of the guest undergoes change. The contact between the two cannot be deemed accidental because, as a result of their encounter, the host discovers aspects of their potential and the guest learns to view existence in a different manner. If hospitality is shown in such a way that both parties are able to express themselves freely, the resulting connection alters their respective identities positively.



Hospitality consists of giving the Other *time*, of giving them *space* to grow, of reflecting on their intrinsic value. It requires the host to specifically seek to remain on the sidelines and their self to be discreet. It is an intersubjective principle that is put into practice when the host and guest encounter one another. An encounter is necessary for hospitality to be possible, but not every kind of encounter can be said to involve hospitality.

Hospitality is a form of encounter in which, over time, the strange Other becomes the familiar *you*. This metanoia does not occur immediately. It requires a process, time and space.

To properly welcome the strange Other, it is essential to learn to *decipher* the meaning of their presence. There is more to the Other than just their corporeity; more to their identity than just their physical presence. The Other *is* not their body, but they use their body to express themselves and communicate. As creatures of inner substance, humans do not outwardly reveal everything they are, but what they do show of themselves is a path into the core of their personality. This path is not without obstacles, but it is the only way to become more familiar with the Other.

It is possible, in other words, to *decipher* some dimensions of the universe of feelings inside the Other by analysing all the signs they make (gestures, expressions, words, exclamations, etc.). Human presence is expressive in itself and reveals personality traits that are part of each individual's more hidden side. As creatures of private affairs, humans have a social and a private dimension. The signs they make offer an insight into their inner self, but what they show of themselves never fully reflects what they really are. In many cases, not even they themselves know exactly what their secret or mystery is.

To genuinely practise hospitality, the host must break down the image of the Other, the stereotype that hides their true face. Only by

*deconstructing* that pre-established image will the host be able to become more familiar with the otherness of the Other. The Other cannot be identified on the basis of their public image, which evidently expresses something of what they are, but not necessarily what they really *are*.

The host must purge themselves of the *imago alteris* to be able to fully comprehend the mystery stemming from the otherness of the Other. They must banish this preconceived image from their mind and question their ideas to understand the Other for what they are. Hospitality initially arises within the person of the host. Only afterwards is it put into practice in the sphere of privacy. To be able to receive the Other, the host must create a void inside themselves. They must empty themselves of themselves and of the image of the Other established in their mind. Only then will they be able to open up satisfactorily to the Other, recognise them and accept them.

Hospitality consists of welcoming vulnerable strangers. It is thus a virtue closely related to compassion, to solidarity with the most vulnerable. It follows that social sensitivity is an intrinsic part of the principle of *hospitality*, as it enables us to open ourselves up to the most needy in our environment. It is a social and cultural virtue, and a basis for addressing social difficulties in earnest and for engaging in dialogue with cultures other than our own.

The principle of hospitality prompts us to welcome and look after the vulnerable Other. When developing and growing, humans are vulnerable and need protection. Our nature is such that we require protective structures for development. The first such structure is our mother's womb, where we are sheltered in a space ideally suited to our development for a time.

Hospitality compromises our capacity for self-absorption. It leads us to prioritise the Other and their needs, shifting our focus away from ourselves. Hospitality is the story of a coming together. There is a person

who is open and waiting, and another who arrives in search of physical and spiritual shelter for a time. It might seem that one of them, the guest, is in need, and the other, the host, has the role of provider. However, true hospitality means *you* and *I* eventually disappearing to be replaced by *us*.

Through the practice of hospitality, the Other is welcomed, in their otherness, and included in the host's personal circle. They are invited to *enter* the host's home and share the people and objects inside it, to cross the threshold that is the door separating *outside* from the privacy of *inside*. In this process of inclusion, the vulnerable, strange Other does not cease to be what they are, nor does the host's identity disintegrate.

In practising hospitality, the host moves outside themselves to find the Other. Doing so does not cause their identity to dissolve, but, due to the presence of the guest, exposes it and enriches it significantly. From that perspective, the practice of hospitality puts neither the personal identity of the host nor the identity of their home at risk. It rather allows for their public *exposure* and growth through dialogue with the Other.

Hospitality involves being ready for someone who arrives and capable of arriving with them; in other words, comforting and empathising with them, going out to meet them and accompanying them to one's home, or standing on the threshold with open arms and welcoming them inside. This is an enjoyable prelude during which the host waits patiently. The guest, for their part, stops, awaiting the person standing on the threshold of the home. They recognise the one who, more than their home, has opened up their very being to them.

Hospitality is ultimately based on the idea of vulnerability and strangeness. It is an activity that can transform the attitudes of guest and host alike. It corrects our spirit's tendency to make no effort whatsoever to analyse our perceptions, an inclination that renders us incapable of understanding anything that is not immediate. It is a practice that enables us to discover new affinities. It is an adventure in an unfamiliar

territory, requiring a range of attitudes based on perception, memory and imagination. Welcoming strangers but treating them as stereotypes does not entail any kind of hospitality.

Coming together with the strange Other should lead us to question our own categories and correct our tendency to simplify and stereotype the Other. Hospitality is an opportunity to enrich our own world, to release our spirit from the confines of personal memory. Connecting with the vulnerable, strange Other can revitalise our imagination and encourage us to accept risks.

Additionally, hospitality can become an intellectual exercise and an emotional experience. Ultimately, the essence of hospitality lies in rejecting the idea that there are boundaries that cannot be crossed.

## 4. DIFFICULT OTHERNESS

The act of welcoming entails accepting an existence other than one's own when it crosses one's path, and accommodating it in one's geographic, mental and emotional territory. All otherness is simultaneously disturbing and thought-provoking, as it opens up an unknown world to us, one that begins where we end. We can react to the unknown Other by ignoring them, rejecting them, or taking enough of an interest in them to let them in and move towards them.

There are two ways of referring to the *Other* in Latin, *alius* and *alter*. We perceive the Other as *alius*, 'alien', when we find their presence perturbing, causing us to regard it as a nuisance to be avoided or even a threat to be eliminated. When the Other is alien to us, our instinctive defensive reaction to the unknown results in us making them the focus of our prejudices and fears. Their alien nature makes us afraid that they will alienate us. We worry that opening up to someone whose difference unsettles us will prevent us from being ourselves.

When, in contrast, we receive a stranger as the messenger of a difference that complements us, they become the *alter* who makes us stop focusing solely on ourselves, an otherness that is beneficial and even liberating in that it frees us from our solipsism, from the confines of our personal world view. The Other introduces us to an unknown world that we must get to know and learn to accept.

This ambivalence where otherness is concerned is also present in the origin and etymology of the term *guest*, which can be traced back to *hostis* in Latin, meaning both 'foreigner' and 'enemy'. It is from *hostis* that *hospitem*, 'guest', is derived. The latter word, in turn, is the source of terms such as *hospice*, *hospital*, *hotel* and, of course, *hospitality*. It is worth noting that hospitals started out as hospices for pilgrims.

All this shows the very real difficulties humankind's relationship with

the unknown and newcomers has always entailed. The Other somehow calls our own identity into question, which is a source of concern yet also of growth. As the Polish writer and reporter on otherness Ryszard Kapuscinski observed, “I perceive the Other as being different; but the reverse is also true. For him, I am the Other.”<sup>4</sup>

With regard to our slow, gradual coming together with the Other, human history can be divided into three stages that reflect three different mentalities:

1. The tribal-isolationist stage (or mentality). For thousands of years, human communities did not venture beyond their own territories. Their cultural and religious references were a complete whole developed without outside influences. Each group had its own code and its own gods, who protected them from other gods. In most aboriginal cultures, the tribe took its name from its word for humans. Those who did not belong to the group were therefore not deemed human.

2. The imperialist-colonialist stage (or mentality). Expansion took place in the second period, involving movement towards the Other in the role of conqueror rather than guest. Invasive identities took possession of the Other to incorporate them into their world. The guest became an invader.

3. The pluralist stage (or mentality). With the abolition of colonialism in Africa and Asia, market liberalisation, and progress in the fields of communication and the media, so-called *globalisation* began apace in the second half of the 20th century. The formerly distant Other now lives alongside us. We are consequently learning about reciprocity as one another’s guests and hosts.

Rather than being successive, the three stages in question coexist inside each of us, as well as in cultures and religious communities. The tribal mentality denies the Other, the imperialist mentality absorbs them, and the pluralist mentality recognises them.

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<sup>4</sup> Ryszard Kapuscinski: *Encuentro con el otro*. Barcelona, Anagrama, 2007, p. 20.

It is often the case that the host and the Other are not on an equal footing when they come together. In the practice of hospitality, and particularly when welcoming immigrants, the coming together is asymmetric. Newcomers are defenceless in a strange land whose language is unfamiliar to them. They are at the mercy of the host country, which may or may not take them in. Whether hospitality is shown depends not only on the availability of material resources and generosity, but also on prejudices generated by fear of the unknown. Individually and collectively, we must constantly nurture our country's ability to take in immigrants, so that difficult otherness can become a path of fraternity.

## 5. ATTITUDES TO IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

As we understand it, the primary *function* of minorities in our society is to preserve our predilection for principles. They satisfy desires and needs that established society does not wish to make explicit or to recognise as such. Unofficially tasked with maintaining official moral principles, minorities are how our society keeps its conscience clear.

The idea in question is illustrated in Immanuel Kant's *Anthropology*. "Women, clergymen, and Jews normally do not get drunk, or at least they carefully avoid all appearance of it, because their *civic status* is weak. Their external worth rests simply on others' *belief* in their chastity and piety. All those who submit themselves not only to a public law of the land but also to a special one (of their own sect), are particularly exposed to the attention of the community and the sting of criticism. Drunkenness, which removes caution, is a *scandal* for them."<sup>5</sup>

Kant made no mistake in associating Jews and women in his warning about inebriation. Nowadays, adding "*illegal*" *immigrants* from the Third World gives a good range of examples of the role society assigns minorities. In each case, the job and the function of the minority consist of keeping society's conscience clear, of bridging the gap between pious proclaimed desires and unconfessed cravings, between sacred legality and impious reality.

Jews were *dirty money*. Prostitutes were, and still are, *indecent desire*. Similarly, illegal immigrants are an unskilled workforce that guarantees the existence of *undeclared work* and even *undeclared unemployment*. Prostitutes, Jews, Arabs and other minorities are not merely "marginalised" but structurally "marginal", in that they have the task of filling the *margin* or the gap between the official and the real country.

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5 I. Kant: *Antropología*. Madrid. Alianza Editorial, 1991, p. 75.



The case of illegal immigrants is the most recent. By referring to them as *illegal*, developed countries avoid any feelings of guilt about not recognising that they have been vital to their economic system. Europe imports labour from the Third World, but objects to a religion or culture arriving with it. An even dimmer view is taken of immigrants dating Europeans' daughters, attending the same schools as their children and living under the same roof as them. While governors seek to stem the influx on the one hand, employers and progressives foster it *a priori* (albeit for different reasons) on the other. They are basically accomplices in that respect, dividing the task of dealing with immigration between them. Neither group appears to want to tackle the problem in its entirety, so one looks to intercept the boats that cross the Strait of Gibraltar and the other takes in and protects the survivors. Immigrants are thus passed from one boat to another, from one short-term job to another, and from one charity-run home to another. The existence of certain "services" provided by particular "elements" (who might find themselves being prosecuted or protected) is tolerated, but there is no recognition that a country needs such people, nor that it exploits their precarious legal and employment status to the full.

Such hypocrisy is comprehensible in the case of civil society, if not economically or religiously justifiable. It is not comprehensible, however, when a European state founded on the very notion of equality among citizens decides to ordain the *non-existence* (not to mention defencelessness and helplessness) of prostitutes and immigrants, i.e. those whose mere existence refutes the principles on which it claims to be based. Evidence of tacit European fundamentalism can be found without having to look back to Yugoslavia or Algeria, where Europe's states supported or tolerated the destruction of everything they insist they believe in.

The modern welfare state is oblivious to that. It cannot see or be aware of that if it wishes to reaffirm the principles on which it founded

its particular form of power. Here, there are no prejudices or specific “identities”. Here, everybody forgets their origin and status when they come through the door and become a “citizen”. Here, everybody who works is entitled to Social Security and other social benefits.

The problem, of course, is not that the highly ambitious and universal nature of such principles is not mirrored in the reality of the country or the mentality of its citizens. It is simply that the *gap* that exists is so great that people have become indifferent to it, and it thus reinforces the situation or the prejudices the country is looking to address. This shows just to what extent legislation or a “regulatory ideal” can be “better” than the country itself; the extent to which it applies force to society without actually breaking it, paving the way for tacit, complementary, *sub rosa* uses.

Developed societies opt for this double standard that allows them to maintain a positive self-image. They leave the dirty work to regulations and other perverse administrative practices, exemplified by the circularity of contract and residence permit requirements, along with other “institutional irregularities” typical of laws on foreign nationals.

Such societies thus manage to speak a language that is “politically correct” but “practically corrected” to allow for de facto discrimination. That is why they are tremendously opposed to clearly and unequivocally formulating the principles on which ethical political practice related to immigrants should be based. Below, we propose a very simple formulation of the principles in question. The aforementioned opposition is the only possible explanation for them not having been formulated in such a way before.

According to Kant’s categorical imperative, it is only morally correct to act in a way you would wish everyone else to and “can at the same time will that it should become a universal law”. That not only means that exploiting or ejecting a poor illegal Moroccan is immoral. It also

means it is immoral to set them to work or “fix them up” with papers if you are opposed to society being as it would be if everybody did likewise, i.e. a mixed Arab and Spanish, Christian and Muslim society. In place of the double standard that keeps feelings of guilt at bay, this principle would oblige us to evaluate and quantify our racism, and even legislate in relation to it.

The Kantian imperative requires us to treat each individual as an end in themselves, never merely as a means to an end; i.e. as a person with their own objectives and not as an instrument or a production input. If we recognise that every individual includes their cultural background or circumstances, we may not accept them “as a part and not as a whole”. That *whole* encompasses their race, religion and culture; their lineage, in short. We would otherwise not be *engaging* with them but simply *making use* of their body, strength or intelligence. That is the logic of slavery, whereby individuals become objects to be used and, ultimately, assets with a price; something we can exploit or pay to use without putting anything of our own at risk.

Applied to immigrants, then, the two formulations of the categorical imperative would be as follows: 1) you must act in a way you are able to wish all your compatriots would; and 2) you must accept every immigrant not as a part but as a whole; not just the person, but also their ethnic, religious and cultural “circumstances”. Public acceptance of the principles in question would: 1) make any restriction applied to immigrants an explicit confession of citizens’ desires and prejudices; and 2) prevent immigrants being treated as non-persons, i.e. beings who may live in their host country but not shape it in any way.

People are not so much from the country that grants them citizenship as from that which they mould with their work, religion, semen and culture. It is therefore wrong to make use of a person’s physical effort or work if we are not prepared to accept them, so to speak, as a future

Muslim father of our grandchildren. This is the kind of respect for people a particularist moral code with universal scope has. It is the exact opposite of states' republican moral codes, which tend to offset their theory of "citizenship" through the practice of segregation, marginalisation and/or forced acculturation.

Explicit regulation of the principle in question would reveal each country's capacity to absorb immigration. While this capacity depends on many factors, we would expect it to be greater in countries or periods characterised by a higher level of social complexity and a lower level of state domination. It is no surprise that Catalonia has been at its most open when it has been most autonomous. After all, strangers can only be integrated into a society if and when it has its own structured, secure identity.

## 6. THE FIGURE OF THE STRANGER AND THE DUTY TO WELCOME THEM IN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

### 6.1. Judaism

According to the Jewish tradition, hospitality is a fundamental principle and a precept. *Hachnasat Orchim* ('welcoming guests') is one of the essential *mitzvot*<sup>6</sup> related to fraternity with one's contemporaries.

The Torah contains a story, that of Abraham and his wife, Sarah, which illustrates the great importance of the *mitzvah* in question. It describes in detail how Abraham went out of his way to welcome strangers by receiving them, letting them wash, relax, eat and drink, and, in particular, making them comfortable.

Why does Judaism attribute such importance to being hospitable to others, strangers included? The story of Abraham and Sarah sheds light on the precept. The verse that says "love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18) calls on us to show kindness (*chesed*), a basic value extolled by the Torah, which urges us to be kind in everything we do. Some *mitzvot* refer to specific situations, such as taking in those in need of shelter. The general precept of wishing others well and contributing to their wellbeing advocates acting thoughtfully.

In the aforementioned story, the Torah explains how Abraham, at the door of his tent in the desert, interrupted his prayers to attend to three travellers who were passing by. Despite his old age and the pain he was in (having circumcised himself three days earlier), Abraham diligently looked after his guests with Sarah's help. This highlights an implicit aspect of the Jewish tradition, namely that action aimed at emulating God and his qualities takes precedence over actual communion with him. Such action is thus to be given priority over transcendence in the event of the two coming into conflict. That is why Abraham halted his communication with God.

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<sup>6</sup> *Mitzvah* means commandment or precept. Its plural form is *mitzvot*.

Obedying the mitzvah of hospitality is a way of taking God's qualities as an example. The precept indicates that hospitality must be born of kindness, however, and not merely ritualised and meaningless.

The story of Abraham and Sarah thus involves a second mitzvah related to hospitality, that of "walking in God's ways", i.e. seeking to be like God in all his qualities. Showing hospitality is a means of imitating God and becoming closer to him.

Finally, there is a third mitzvah involved in being willing to look after others and putting that willingness into practice. It is that which refers to "doing what is right and just", a precept that provides guidance on how to behave in all situations that the Torah does not cover specifically.

The second and third precepts mentioned above highlight the idea of striving to do good and the principle of being kind to our fellow humans. Concern for the Other is an important aspect of the study of the Torah, according to the Torah itself. It considers people to have a natural tendency towards kindness, which can be demonstrated, among other ways, by inviting guests in and attending to them. Studying the Torah is meaningless for a person who is unwilling to care for others and lacks feelings of kindness. The Torah thus praises the hospitality Abraham and Sarah showed the three travellers as a source of inspiration for future generations.

Hachnasat Orchim offers general guidelines on how to act in everyday life, making it one of Judaism's central precepts. It is particularly significant when considered in a historical context. At many times in the past, due to persecution and the resulting diasporas, the Jewish community has required the hospitality and kindness of others to survive and preserve its religious tradition. The precept goes beyond spiritual transcendence and refers to actual physical survival. Under the Nazi and Soviet regimes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people risked their lives to follow it by sheltering Jews or celebrating the Sabbath with guests.

In summary, as the Jewish tradition's texts indicate, receiving guests is a way to become closer to God, in whose image and likeness every individual is made. Hospitality is therefore just as important as studying the Torah, an activity that represents the search for divine wisdom. If necessary, such study should be interrupted in order to fulfil the mitzvah of Hachnasat Orchim.

Honouring a guest is a way of honouring God. It is an act of kindness that can take very different forms. Examples include helping someone find work or learn something, offering them support, consoling them, and providing them with food. In the hope that everyone might endeavour to help others, the Torah exalts such hospitality and deems it a virtue.

## **6.2. Christianity**

Hospitality is an essential principle in the logic, way of life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Understood to mean unconditionally taking in the most needy, hospitality is the Christian religion's main criterion for judging faithfulness to its origins.

Christian hospitality draws on and is inspired by the biblical tradition. In the context of that tradition, it can be defined as a law, given that it is envisaged in the Old Testament's moral and legal codes; as a practice, given that it is one carried out by the patriarchs of God's people; as a tradition; as a ritual; and as a virtue, given that it is a habit that improves individuals and peoples.

The logic of Jesus translates into an ethic of love. That love has distinct characteristics and is expressed by Saint Paul in his hymn to charity (1 Corinthians 13). Its most defining trait is its universality, which entails loving everybody, even one's enemies (Matthew 5:43-46; Luke 6:27-35; Romans 12:20-21).

A specific form of the love in question is love for strangers, as Saint Paul stipulated with the command "don't forget to show hospitality

to strangers” (Hebrews 13:2). Throughout the New Testament, great emphasis is placed on the Greek concept of *filoxenia*, which means love of foreigners or the foreign.

*Filoxenia* does not merely consist of tolerating the Other; it entails loving them, wishing them well. *Xenos*, meaning both ‘foreign’ and ‘foreigner’, encompasses strangers, immigrants and exiles alike. It can be used in reference to any human in need of some kind of protection in a foreign land.

The duty to welcome others and invite them into one’s home is mentioned in a number of the parables and teachings of Jesus. Expressing such openness to others by sharing food with them is a particularly prominent feature of the Gospel of Luke, which refers to Jesus discussing the kingdom of God with those with whom he was eating on at least nine occasions. He ate twice with members of his own community (Luke 4:39) and once with his disciples Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42). Much to the annoyance of the Pharisees, he twice ate with tax collectors, such as Levi (Luke 5:29-32) and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). In addition to the meals in question, shared with people deemed “sinners”, he accepted the hospitality of the Pharisees at least three times (Luke 7:36-50; 11:37; 14:1 and following verses).

Edith Stein, a Jewish philosopher who converted to Christianity, explained the Christian idea of *xenos* in very clear terms. “For the Christian there is no stranger. Whoever is near us and needing us most is our ‘neighbour’; it does not matter whether he is related to us or not, whether we like him or not, whether he is morally worthy of our help or not.”<sup>7</sup>

Hospitality has always been a fundamental element of Christians’ lives. It was practised in the first Christian communities and present in the earliest forms of monasticism. It has taken on new meanings and been

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7 E. Stein: *Obras selectas*. Burgos, Monte Carmelo, 1998, p. 383.



shown in different ways in certain social contexts and at particular points in time, but remains an essential aspect of the Christian way of life.

Historians of Early Christianity have absolutely no doubt that Christians habitually made use of their possessions to help the most needy, even giving up their properties to attend to such people. There is a passage in the Acts of the Apostles that says “all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need” (Acts 2:45). This should be interpreted in the light of another passage, which says “all the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had” (Acts 4:32).

Julian the Apostate, among others, confirmed how important hospitality was in the first Christian communities. “Do we not see that what has most contributed to the success of atheism [=Christianity] is its charity towards strangers?”, he asked (Sozomen, Ecclesiastical History 5:15).

The tradition of hospitality existed throughout the pre-Constantinian period (which saw the construction of buildings specifically for pilgrims) and the Middle Ages. It has been kept up in the modern period and remains intact today.

Hospitality has also been highly present throughout the history of monasticism. This is clearly exemplified in the Rule of Saint Benedict of Nursia, chapter 53 of which describes how guests ought to be treated in monasteries. It reminds monks that they should receive all strangers as if they were Christ, with due courtesy and without making distinctions between them, and states that guests should eat with the abbot. “In the reception of the poor and of pilgrims the greatest care and solicitude should be shown, because it is especially in them that Christ is received” (Rule of Saint Benedict 53:15).

Saint Benedict's instructions regarding hospitality, which are put into practice in the works of mercy, have perpetuated a tradition that has existed since the earliest days of Christianity, one that was subsequently developed by the Church Fathers Basil (330-379), Jerome (342-420) and Augustine of Hippo (354-430). Hospitality enjoys a special status in Augustine's great work. Part 2:2 of *Sermon* 350 closely links the duty to show hospitality with the theological virtue of charity. Specifically, it says that charity "endures in adversity, is moderate in prosperity; brave under harsh sufferings, cheerful in good works; utterly reliable in temptation, utterly open-handed in hospitality; as happy as can be among true brothers and sisters".

Like other religions, Christianity is currently making a great effort to welcome and protect foreigners and immigrants, involving establishing spaces and structures for attending to them with care and respect.

### 6.3. Islam

Catalans call Catalonia "*casa nostra*", a lovely, explicit expression meaning "our home". It is a notion we should bear in mind when thinking about welcoming strangers.

In Islam, strangers are deemed guests, and there are basic rules of conduct related to the consideration guests should be shown, which ensure that they will be duly attended to. It is necessary to go further, however, as coexistence advances and a stranger becomes more than a guest. When that happens, we should start to think of them as a "neighbour" rather than a stranger and attribute all the rights a fully fledged citizen enjoys to them. Muslims study all this as part of the Islamic science of *akhlâq*, ethical forms of behaviour reflected in the ways individuals act and interact with their environment.

In the Muslim tradition, a stranger is a guest (*ḍaif*) who must be held in esteem and treated generously. There is a tale in the Qur'an which

begins with the words “Has the story reached you of the honoured guests of Abraham?”. Each of the three Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) has its own, slightly different version of a story in which the prophet Abraham, referred to as the *father of guests* in Islam, was visited by three angels. They said “salam”, and he responded likewise. Despite them being strangers, he immediately offered them a hearty meal.

In the eyes of any Muslim, strangers and foreigners represent one and the same thing and are directly entitled to the same privileges. Both are *al-mukramin*, guests who should be honoured. The Arabic word *al-mukramin* shares its root [k-r-m] with others such as *karim* (‘generous’) and *karam* (‘generosity’). Strangers and foreigners are, then, people to whom generous tribute must be paid. Muslims generally greet the Other, be they known or unknown to them, by saying “salam”, as Abraham did, and just as naturally. This word has a range of meanings, namely ‘health’, ‘peace’ and ‘wellbeing’.

Another typical way of greeting a stranger is by saying “marhaban”, which expresses great pleasure at receiving them and at being able to do so, reflecting the attitude every individual ought to have. The expression of pleasure is genuine in those with a welcoming mentality. A (peaceful) Muslim eschews ostentation, showing hospitality with the sole aim of fulfilling their duty to care for others.

A third way of welcoming a stranger is to say “ahla wa sahla”, an old expression still used today. It dates back to when people undertook long, often exhausting journeys over land, going many hours at a time without coming across anyone else and never knowing whether the people they did encounter would be hostile. Hearing the greeting “ahla wa sahla” would put their mind at rest. It literally means ‘you have come to easiness’, interpretable as “this stretch of land is free of obstacles, consider yourself among family”.

Strictly speaking, there is a fourth, even more reassuring expression, “ahla wa sahla, wa marḥaban”. Translating “marḥaban” as ‘welcome’ does not do it justice, as it actually means ‘a spacious, wide place’. So, “ahla wa sahla, wa marḥaban” tells a stranger that the stretch of land they are on is not only flat and free of obstacles, but also wide and open, as opposed to narrow and confined.

The above greetings are not just forms of expressing oneself but also of politeness, something Muslims deem very important. *Adab*, or courtesy in the fullest sense of the word, is a key virtue in Islam. It entails looking after everything and doing so as graciously as possible. Every gesture an individual makes reflects their *adab*.

The care a person takes to avoid making noise that might disturb their neighbours, the way they use a tool and even the way they close a door are all indicative of the extent of their *adab*. According to a saying from the religion’s traditional sciences (*hadith*), “all of Islam is *adab*”. It therefore follows that anything to which the courteous, respectful treatment advocated by *adab* is not applied is not Islam. Muslims are taught that Allah is kind to those who are kind.

Examples of Islam’s rules on welcoming strangers:

- A stranger who requires hospitality must be given what they are entitled to, i.e. accommodation for a day and a night and due hospitality for three days. Willingly entertaining a stranger after three days is considered a sincere gift or charity (*sadaqa*) on the host’s part.

- A stranger should not extend their stay beyond three days unless obliged to because their host expressly requests that they do so. When the stranger decides to leave, they must ask permission.

- Muslims must always have a bed available in case a stranger needs it.

Every Muslim is duty-bound to show hospitality. It is said that those who believe in Allah and the Day of Judgement must treat their guests well. Ensuring the wellbeing of guests is actually a caliphal responsibility.

The meaning of *caliph* has been distorted by the tendency of leaders to foster the idea that it is they who have the mission of governing alone in the world. The Qur'an reminds us that every man and woman is Allah's caliph on earth and, as such, has the responsibility of endeavouring to make the world a better place. Guaranteeing a guest's safety (*amâna*) entails a bond of trust with them, one that it is as important for the host to establish as it is for them to look after the rest of the world as a caliph. Not taking the responsibility in question seriously would make them cruel and pitiless.

*Amâna*, a word that has many concordances and is particularly significant for the Muslim community, has its origins in an earlier term, *amân*. The latter, which dates from pre-Islamic times and is still used today, refers to safety, protection, immunity, salvation and compassion. There is also *ahd al-amân*, a covenant of security, which is a formal commitment chiefly made in situations of conflict. The custom of granting and receiving *amân* is still respected today and remains deeply rooted in the culture of Islam.

One kind of *amân* involves a conflict's victors showing their defeated adversaries mercy as long as they respect a non-aggression pact, which nobody may break under any circumstances. Another kind of *amân* guarantees safe conduct. If, for example, a foreign trader or diplomat wishes to cross *dar al-islam* ('Muslim lands') considered *dar al-harb* ('conflict or war zones'), they should seek *amân* to do so under the protection of a governor or a person with some kind of authority.

The community (*umma*) acts as a single body as far as compassion and mutual esteem are concerned. Just as the suffering of a particular part of the human body can cause the whole of it to fall ill (as in the case of a fever or insomnia, for example), the suffering of part of humankind affects all those who wish for unity.

The history of Islam contains an emblematic example of true solidarity with immigrants. Muslims learn from the precedent of the so-called

*helpers* (*anṣār*) of Medina, inhabitants of the city who received immigrants with open arms. The immigrants in question came from Mecca, where they had been persecuted, and the *anṣār* treated them as if they were their brothers and sisters, paving the way for harmonious coexistence and the development of a civilised society. Many texts describe the relationship between the host society and the newcomers, and explain that the cultural differences involved were a source of mutual enrichment. According to a hadith, “loving immigrants (*al-muhâjir*) is a sign of a good *anṣār*, and hating them is a sign of hypocrisy”.

A stranger may wish to remain among their hosts on a long-term basis, in which case they acquire the status of neighbour. Muslims have particular regard for their neighbours, as the following hadith confirm and illustrate:

- Each person must respect their neighbour’s privacy as much as that of their mother.

- A Muslim who does not protect their neighbour is not trustworthy. A Muslim is worthy of their neighbour’s trust to the extent that they guarantee their safety.

- Those who believe in Allah and the Day of Judgement must not cause detriment to their neighbours.

- The prophet said that the angel Gabriel placed such emphasis on being kind to his neighbours that he thought he would be asked to assign them a share of his inheritance.

- Neighbours have more rights than anybody else due to their proximity.

- Neighbours are entitled to benefit from each other’s water. “Irrigate [your land] and then let the water pass to your neighbour.”

We end this section with a teaching known to the entire Muslim community, one that puts every individual on an equal footing. It is “be in the world as though you were a stranger and a wayfarer”.

## 6.4. Hinduism

Hospitality (*sakkara*) is one of the most valued qualities in Indian culture. It is a Hindu's duty to provide a stranger (*agantuka*) or a traveller or pilgrim (*addhika*) with food and offer them shelter. An unexpected guest is referred to as *atithi*, meaning 'one who arrives without a set time'. With the words *atithi devo bhava* ('the guest is like God'), the Taittiriya Upanishad advocates welcoming guests as if they were divine, thus giving hospitality a spiritual dimension.

The Hindu divinity with jurisdiction over hospitality (and marriage oaths) is Aryaman, one of the six (or twelve) solar deities (dityas) with the form of rays of the sun. It should be noted that the large number of deities in Hinduism does not entail a multiplication of gods, but is rather a means of attributing a sacred nature to a given attitude or aspect of reality, which thus becomes a manifestation of divinity.

Hinduism places particular emphasis on showing hospitality to holy people, such as *sannyasis* (ascetics who have renounced the world), and teaches that a host must always offer a guest kind words, a place to sit and refreshments (at least a glass of water), no matter how poor they may be. The scriptures also say that a visiting enemy should be treated in such a way that they forget the enmity between them and the host. In ancient times, that was exemplified by members of the warrior caste socialising with their adversaries in the evening after having fought against them during the day. Hinduism also has texts (in the Bhagavata Purana) that tell of a deity, specifically Krishna, washing a poor Brahmin's feet.

There are many other stories that point out the benefits of welcoming guests, as well as the negative consequences of neglecting them. One of the most expressive traditional welcoming gestures is to offer a guest a garland of flowers as a symbol of an exchange of affection and respect.

It must be borne in mind that India has traditionally had a caste system, which has been the basis of Hindu society since ancient times

and guaranteed its social cohesion. Traditional rituals to welcome guests are consequently very strict, reflecting fear of difference. Although India's current constitution does not recognise castes, they are still highly present in Hindus' mentality and customs.

While there is a great deal of solidarity within each caste, the rules related to interaction with members of other castes are very stringent, and those on interaction with outcastes even more so. According to the Manusmṛiti, Hinduism's most important book of laws, Brahmins may only show hospitality to other Brahmins, and must not entertain members of heterodox groups. In contrast, movements such as that led by Gandhi strived to put an end to the segregation of outcastes.

Hinduism, however, is paradoxical. While the caste system undeniably restricts interaction, at the opposite end of the scale there is a radical lack of distinction of the Other in relation to ultimate reality. In the strictest sense, there is no "Other" in Hinduism, because all beings are emanations or manifestations of Brahman, the absolute being, or Purusha, the primordial person.

That idea is expressed in texts such as "the one who sees manifestations of the Atman in everything and who has cognised through this the sameness of everything - both the pleasant and the unpleasant - such one is regarded as a perfect Yogi" (Bhagavad Gita 6:32); and "the wise look equally upon all - be it a Brahmin endowed with knowledge and humility, an elephant, a cow, a dog, or even a man eating a dog" (Bhagavad Gita 5:18). Just as a rope can be mistaken for a snake in the dark, the perception of difference is a trick of the mind.

Ultimately, thus, openness to all beings is Hinduism's highest aspiration. The greeting *namaste* ('I bow to the divine in you') reflects the intuition that there is divinity in the Other and, consequently, that every human is sacred.



## 6.5. Buddhism

As is typical of eastern cultures, Buddhism considers hospitality (*sakkara*) fundamental and encourages all acts and attitudes conducive to welcoming guests, strangers and travellers.

In contrast to Hinduism, with its distinctions between castes, Buddhism emphasises that hospitality should be shown to all, regardless of social status or religion. When a prominent citizen of Vaishali and generous supporter of Jainism called Siha converted to Buddhism, Buddha asked him to carry on showing hospitality to Jain monks who visited him.

Buddha himself has been described as welcoming, friendly and polite to anybody who sought to approach him. He requested that whenever a monk arrived at a monastery, the resident monks do everything necessary to welcome him, including getting a seat ready for him, giving him a bowl to wash his feet, and preparing food, drink and a room for him.

The figure of the monk is of great importance in Buddhism. The fact that a Buddhist monk is called a *bhikkhu* is relevant in itself. The word in question literally means ‘mendicant’, a reference to the itinerant lifestyle of such monks, whose vows include renouncing possessions and refraining from violence. In the past, they were itinerant all year round except during the three months of the rainy season. Monks who follow the Theravada tradition, the oldest school of Buddhism, possess nothing more than their robes and the bowls in which they collect food offered to them. Their bowls also represent their emptiness.

One of the traditional duties of lay Buddhists was to make the fivefold offering, which includes providing guests (*atithibali*) with food, accommodation and assistance. According to the Milinda-panha, a traditional text, if a guest finishes all the food they have been given, their host should keep cooking them rice until they are no longer hungry (Mil. 107). Buddha deemed reciprocating hospitality essential. “Whoever goes

to another's house and is fed but does not feed them when they come to his house, consider him an outcaste", he said.

A form of indirect hospitality common among Buddhists until recently consisted of making provisions for travellers and pilgrims. People built rest houses (*avasatha*) on the outskirts of towns and beside long roads. Volunteers cleaned them and supplied them with firewood and drinking water.

Buddha identified planting trees (probably along pathways), building bridges and shelters, digging wells and providing water for travellers as good deeds. The Buddhist philosopher N g rjuna urged King Gautamiputra to establish rest houses in temples, villages, towns and cities, as well as to ensure the availability of drinking water for travellers along roads.

The latter activity remains popular in Myanmar, where it is carried out by numerous associations (*wainay ya thukha*). In another context, the Japanese tea ceremony is an expression of refinement in terms of welcoming guests.

Acts such as those described above are inspired by the attitudes that Buddhist teachings nurture. According to *dharmā*, an individual's duties include attending to the needs of the community by putting principles such as non-violence and selfless service for the common good into practice.

At a more advanced level, Buddhist doctrine stresses the importance of cultivating four states of mind, namely *metta* (kindness), *muditha* (sympathetic joy), *upekkha* (equanimity) and *karuna* (compassion). The most important of them is *karuna*, as it encompasses tolerance, non-discrimination, inclusion and empathy with the suffering of others. Compassion (derived from a Latin stem meaning 'suffer with') enables one to perceive the situation of the Other as if it were one's own. The receiver thus becomes the received.

Compassion gives rise to wisdom (*prajna*), which leads to an understanding of the principle of interdependence (interbeing), makes

us aware that we are all connected, and enables us to see ourselves in strangers.

The factors behind an immigrant's displacement are factors that also affect us. We perceive their feeling of having been uprooted, their exposure to the elements, their struggles with an unfamiliar language and so on as if we had experienced them in person. So, wisdom inspires greater compassion, just as compassion is a source of wisdom.

## 6.6. The Chinese traditions

Chinese culture has developed over thousands of years, during which time different philosophical and religious traditions have seeped into the way millions of people think and act, often without them being aware of the origins of their ideas and behaviour. The Chinese world view has not only influenced China as we know it today, but also other Asian cultures, such as those of Korea and Japan. It has moulded the thinking of many of Catalonia's Chinese immigrants, even those who are followers of religions that arose in the west.

Taoism and Confucianism lie at the heart of Chinese traditional religious thought. The nature of each of them is more ethical than explicitly religious, to the extent that both are nowadays more widely regarded as philosophies of life than as religious systems.

Taoism originated in around the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. It centres on the figure of Laozi (or Lao Tse) (570-510 BC), the philosopher who wrote the *Daodejing*, the work deemed the main source of Taoist doctrine. Taoist thinking emphasises that humans are part of nature and that every component of nature comprises both negative elements (*yin*) and positive elements (*yang*), which seek a balance. Harmony between those elements gives rise to personal, social and cosmic harmony. Achieving such harmony often involves letting things take their natural course, without human intervention. This generates not an ethic of indifference

but an optimistic anthropology according to which nature, humans and the elements of the cosmos all have the means to establish a balance that enables them to fulfil their goals (chiefly harmony), if they are pursued with restraint and as part of a constant effort to comprehend the way that everything is interconnected.

Confucianism emerged around the figure of Confucius (551-479 BC), a philosopher who developed a social ethic based on diligent personal behaviour with the aim of attaining balanced human relations and a harmonious, respectful society capable of bringing the very best out of people. He proclaimed *ren* or “benevolence” to be the basis of all human relations, be they between citizens, between parents and their children, between husband and wife, between brother and sister or between friends. Every human’s endeavour to develop their potential for the good of the community should lead to a better, harmonious, peaceful society in which personal interests are secondary to collective interests.

Despite the differences between Taoism and Confucianism, there are three elements that are fundamental to both and affect their followers’ concepts of hospitality. The first is interest in human nature and its development following the natural way of the Tao, be it through personal growth or achieving harmony with the natural and social environment. The second is the importance attributed to each person striving to be good and honest, not for reasons related to transcendence (i.e. to be rewarded in another life) but as a duty that is part of everyday life. The third element, which stems from the second, is the human need for self-improvement through good, honest conduct, on the basis of which individuals can enhance their own life, their family’s existence and life in society in general.

Additionally, there are elements of order and harmony, which are classed as key objectives. Such elements involve evolution towards harmony within each individual (between their mind and body), as well

as between the transcendent world, nature and humankind. They are central to ethical thought in both Taoism and Confucianism, albeit with differing implications in some cases.

The Taoist tradition stresses that relations between individuals and groups must involve a degree of balance. Taking an interest in the Other and welcoming them should give rise to neither excessive familiarity or indifference. Taoism advocates welcoming the Other in a way marked by respect and freedom, so that each individual can develop their potential and seek personal balance and growth without in any way subordinating the other's will to their own. This delicate, considerate approach to welcoming the Other has often been perceived as apathy. However, it is actually rooted in profound respect for each individual's particular way of realising their own nature, balancing their inner *yin* and *yang* to unleash all their personal potential.

In Confucianism, welcoming the Other is part of the philosophy's fundamental principle of treating others kindly and diligently while observing conventions that reflect both respect and harmony between the receiver and the received. A Confucian welcome therefore often takes on a formal nature marked by certain rituals and aspects of etiquette which are sometimes interpreted as rigid and meaningless. Such rituals are far from meaningless, however. Since the earliest days of Confucianism (the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC), gatherings at which food and drink are shared have been considered occasions for honouring the differences between individuals and groups, as well as opportunities for strengthening the bonds of communion between participants.

According to Confucian philosophy, harmony that has both social and cosmic consequences is achieved when those sharing a meal follow the appropriate rituals. When the Other is welcomed with a meal, one group has the role of guest and the other group dispenses hospitality. They thus represent *yin* and *yang*, and will earn abundant blessings if

they interact cordially and harmoniously. At the same time, the diligence of the receiver and the sensitivity of the received generate bonds based on respect and comprehension, which pave the way for dialogue, a deep knowledge of one another and respect for different ideas, as a step towards understanding and the harmonious progress of the groups involved and of society.

The Chinese cultural tradition's two approaches to welcoming the Other are complementary rather than opposed. A Taoist welcome's respect and balance and a Confucian welcome's functionality and ritualism form a whole. In that whole, inner freedom and the outward manifestation of the welcome extended, within the limits of courtesy and generosity, are conducive to each individual's personal growth and the fruitfulness of social relations, leading to coexistence marked by a duty to develop ever-greater awareness of one's functions as a person and as part of a collective that looks to obtain the best people have to offer with a view to constructing a harmonious, civilised society.

It is worth noting that Chinese philosophy related to welcoming the Other has a very notable trait. Over the centuries, the Chinese culture, with its Taoist and Confucian roots, has not been militarily expansive. Its influence over neighbouring peoples has more to do with interest in its propagation, due at least in part to the high regard in which the Chinese hold their identity and the principles from their own philosophies.

The Chinese approach to welcoming the Other, as described above, is thus also considered part of civilising action that can teach people and groups from other cultures the true value of harmony, of personal and formal respect and of developing personal potential as forms of socialisation and ways of improving human, political and social relations to increase peace and harmony in society.

Welcoming the Other is therefore more than a question of interpersonal interaction. It aids the development of peoples, as a gift

generated by respectful, generous treatment, and brings the best out of every individual and every society.

## 6.7. Sikhism

In Sikhism, the duty to welcome the Other is manifested in various dimensions that have three fundamental elements in common. The first is the notion of teaching. In Punjabi, the word *sikhi* means ‘disciple’ or ‘follower’ of a spiritual master (guru). Sikhism had a succession of ten spiritual masters, the first being Nanak Dev Ji (1469-1539) and the last Gobind Singh (1666-1708).

The idea (which is highly characteristic of spiritual movements) that people gain access to spiritual experiences not through personal initiative but by following the teachings of a master is the basis of a profound feeling of being a spiritual heir, i.e. someone whom a master and a community have taken in so that they might, in turn, open themselves up to teaching. A sense of hospitality thus lies at the very root of Sikhs’ experiences and is expressed in the attitudes they are asked to adopt.

The institution of a human guru who was his disciples’ spiritual guide ended with the death of Gobind Singh. It has since been represented by the Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred scripture deemed the Sikhs’ eternal master. This is the second of the aforementioned elements. The scripture is considered a spiritual master, before which Sikhs remove their footwear and cover their heads as a sign of respect.

The Guru Granth Sahib provides instructions that give the Sikhs’ praxis meaning. The almost 6,000 hymns it contains stress that there is only one God, leading to the deduction that all humanity (the entire cosmos, even) is part of a single reality. The idea in question is reinforced by the presence among those hymns of poems that tell of the spiritual liberation of Hindu and Muslim sages, indicating an inclusive, universalist spirit. The suggestion of meditating on God’s name (*nam simaran*) is a

call for adoring devotion to God (*bhakti*), which should also be reflected in the quality of interpersonal relations.

The third fundamental element is the gurdwara or temple. The Guru Granth Sahib is displayed in gurdwaras, which Sikhs attend to show their respect to the masters who have set them on their spiritual path. A gurdwara is both a place of worship and a source of community cohesion. It is not only where hymns are recited, but also where community service (*seva*) is performed.

Sikhism's founder, Guru Nanak, established three essential principles that are the basis of the religion's hospitable outlook. They consist of constantly remembering the name of God (*Naam Japo*), doing honest work and protecting human rights (*Kirat Karo*), and being charitable (*Vand Chhako*).

Traditionally, regardless of their ethnic and religious background, social status and gender, anybody who believes in one true God, accepts the teachings of the gurus set out in the Guru Granth Sahib, follows the code of conduct (*Rehat Maryada*) approved by the Guru Khalsa Panth (the Sikh community) and respects other religions is a Sikh.

The principles in question are implemented through various practices intended to reflect the radical equality of all humans and, therefore, the necessity of adopting a welcoming attitude towards one another. The most widely known of those practices consists of men adding Singh ('lion') and women Kaur ('princess') to their name as a way of removing any possible difference between people which might give rise to discrimination. Some of those who accept the aforementioned principles undertake a ritual to be initiated into a community of pure Sikhs (*Khalsa*). Members of that community stand out socially due to the so-called five Ks, i.e. the requirement for them to carry a comb (*kangha*) and a ceremonial sword (*kirpan*), wear a bracelet (*kara*) and a piece of cotton underwear (*kaccher*), and refrain from cutting their hair (*kes*).



All Sikhs, be they initiated *Khalsa* (*Amritdharis*) or otherwise, have certain obligations. Evidently, many of their duties are directly related to worship-based spirituality, and they consequently participate in the assembly of believers, read the scriptures and say the necessary prayers. However, there are numerous duties that go beyond liturgy and have an ethical dimension. Every Sikh has to observe a clear code of conduct. On the one hand, there are various vices they must avoid altogether (lust, anger, greed, materialism and egocentricity). On the other, there are a number of guidelines for living healthily, including not eating meat, while smoking, taking drugs and committing adultery are all completely prohibited.

As is to be expected of a spiritual movement, the Sikh community follows teachings that entail ethical duties, and it is here that a significant praxis of hospitality is most clearly reflected. As a result of their belief in the fundamental equality of all people, Sikhs are firmly committed to protecting the weakest members of society and speaking out against any kind of injustice.

The spiritual work Sikhs undertake to adhere to their community's precepts and their commitment to different principles are embodied in selfless service for the good of society. There is a well known saying to the effect that liberation cannot be achieved without serving others.

Sikhs give 10% of their income to their gurdwara to be used for humanitarian causes. Of all the services Sikhs perform, the best known, and that which best reflects their hospitable mentality, is undoubtedly the *langar*, a communal meal served at gurdwaras.

Everyone is welcome at a gurdwara, as symbolised by its four doors, each of which corresponds to one of the cardinal compass points. The temple is open all day long and anybody may enter, provided they show respect. As mentioned earlier, a gurdwara is not only a place for acquiring spiritual wisdom and engaging in worship. It also functions as a

community centre. One way in which it does so is through its community kitchen or *langar* (a name shared with the aforementioned meal), where food bought with Sikhs' donations is prepared and served by volunteers.

Originally an emblem of a break with the caste system and food-related taboos, the langar nowadays represents Sikhism's desire to extend a welcome without restrictions. As an expression of fraternity, all those who take part in a langar sit together in rows and eat the same food. The langar is thus a paradigm of a shared life in which there is an unconditional welcome for everybody.

### **6.8. The Bahá'í Faith**

From its very beginnings, the Bahá'í Faith has developed a strong theoretical basis for openness that is not only geared to intra-community harmony but extends to the whole of humankind. Evidently, that theory validates a dynamic praxis that has become one of the most characteristic and visible aspects of the work Bahá'ís do.

Known as Bahá'u'lláh ('the glory of God'), Mírzá Husayn-Alí (1817-1892), founder of the Bahá'í Faith, received a revelation in 1852 and subsequently devoted his life to all kinds of marginalised people. That mentality, which earned him the epithet *father of the poor* in his own lifetime, has been adopted by his followers ever since.

Bahá'u'lláh preached and followed a doctrine of unity in which the essence of everything can be found. Unity is the cornerstone of the Bahá'ís' entire spiritual edifice. They believe in the oneness of God and the unity of humanity and of religion. Those principles are the foundation for a universal code of ethics intended to pave the way for the human race to mature.

Bahá'ís are engaged in an exciting, utopian project, central to which is the idea that humanity has come of age and, as envisaged in the sacred scriptures of the past, the time has come for all peoples to unite to form

a single worldwide society. In the words of Bahá'u'lláh, “the earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens”.

Bahá'ís feel that history's inherent dynamics are taking us towards the consolidation of a universal civilisation in which traditional barriers involving ethnicity, race, social class and religion should progressively disappear. To smooth the way for this to happen, global ethical principles that challenge a dichotomy-based world view need to be reinforced. That entails putting an end to prejudices of every kind, promoting gender equality, breaking down economic barriers, recognising the oneness of the major spiritual traditions, harmonising science and religion, and striking a balance between technological development and environmental protection. Unfaltering progress towards a worldwide political federation that will ensure human survival is vital.

Obviously, the above is not simply a political desideratum but a spiritually inspired aspiration based on the notion of a single God with a single plan for all humanity. Bahá'ís regard the different religions that have emerged over the course of history as nothing more than human responses to the plan in question being revealed by a series of messengers of God.

In the belief that the defining moment had arrived, Bahá'u'lláh was hailed as God's most recent messenger. He not only preached about the conversion of individual believers but also a collective transformation. “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilisation”, he said.

As a result of their sense of common belonging to a greater whole, Bahá'ís have all kinds of beliefs and share a code of attitudes which, along with theological formulations, incorporates ideals that form a global programme for progress. With a view to tackling the roots of the conflicts that beset humanity, they target the practical promotion of equality and justice. The Bahá'í Faith asks its members to work together for the

common good, rejecting any feelings of superiority, so as to become symbols of unity.

Historically, such work was accomplished through the words and deeds of Bahá'u'lláh's successors, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, who excelled at spreading the message further afield and internationalising it. Nowadays, through the Universal House of Justice (the movement's supreme legislative institution), Bahá'ís coordinate a wide range of initiatives designed to promote all-embracing hospitality.

Internally, the Bahá'í community's belief in the radical oneness of everything is apparent in its global administrative system. Its unified network of local, national and international administrative councils makes it a paradigm of harmony and cooperation. The approach of constantly seeking community consensus that takes the points of view of all members into account is representative of the ambitions Bahá'ís have on a worldwide scale.

Externally, the aforementioned belief results in an immense social undertaking. The Bahá'ís are highly aware that religion has always been a key factor in social change. With that in mind, they endeavour to analyse disparities affecting humankind and implement models for change. They have a deep conviction that establishing a new world order is not just a question of political reorganisation but revolves around a profound understanding of humanity's spiritual reality as the source of principles such as love, commitment, self-denial and humility.

Bahá'u'lláh's copious writings (books, talks, letters, etc.) clearly reflect a global perspective on reality. The thoughts they contain cover everything from matters that humans have been pondering for centuries (such as God, the human condition, principles and sources of motivation) to interdisciplinary (political, economic, ethical, philosophical, spiritual, etc.) ideas applicable to today's crisis.

Another feature of the perspective in question is that it looks at

the underlying causes of contemporary problems. By taking the same approach, Bahá'ís have concluded, for example, that poverty cannot be eradicated without firm action to promote the equality of women or without considering respect for nature a crucial variable when studying the problem. They apply the same logic to all present-day issues, such as cultural diversity, environmental protection, the decentralisation of decision-making and efforts to bring about a new world order.

Bahá'ís feel that spirituality encompasses not only a personal dimension but also humanity's collective progress. God's oneness must be reflected in humankind's unity by virtue of the different religions working together, as spiritual practice develops the innate qualities that underpin progress and happiness.

Bahá'u'lláh preached that people should be alert to the needs of their time, emphasising the pointlessness of spirituality lacking an engagement with history. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said that "the religion of God is for love and unity; make it not the cause of enmity or dissension". There is only one God, who created the universe and has, over the course of history, revealed himself through messengers who have told of his single divine plan.

The objective was to prepare for the emergence of a global civilisation that would see humankind reach a new stage of collective existence. Bahá'u'lláh said that his goal was none other than to improve the world and the peace of mind of its inhabitants. Accordingly, the Bahá'ís' duty to show hospitality is best reflected by their belief that faith should unshackle the human capabilities that, in conjunction with a consolidated ethical code, make social initiatives in the fields of education, development and environmental protection possible. This is connected to one of the community's most distinctive aspects, the notion that humankind's intrinsic unity entails all people being entitled to social and economic justice, with no privileges or exclusions, in a framework of interdependence and reciprocity.

The Bahá'ís have called for responsibility, stressing the great importance of universal hospitality, cultural pluralism and the preservation of biodiversity. In keeping with those ideals, their activities include participating in the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, which is linked to the World Wildlife Fund; publishing compilations of Bahá'í texts on the environment; opening offices of the environment, which promote education on sustainable development; running educational and teacher training programmes, and producing educational materials; establishing community radio stations; and implementing reforestation, organic farming, recycling and food security programmes.

It is worth highlighting that the huge range of projects Bahá'ís carry out are spiritually inspired, not driven by economic or purely pragmatic logic. They express their belief in being part of a single, united human family through practical solidarity and responsibility. They exclude nobody, extending a universal welcome as a guarantee of hope for humankind.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS: THE STRANGER AS A GIFT

It is time to draw this document to a close. Our look at the different religions present in Catalonia has confirmed not only the value they attribute to strangers, but also that they all regard extending a caring, respectful welcome to strangers as a fundamental duty.

More than a moral requirement, hospitality is a respectful, attentive, spiritual attitude towards the Other. It is a willingness to satisfy their various needs. Additionally, it inspires a desire to find out about them and learn from their presence. The stranger is thus a gift, someone who, wherever they may be, we must always treat as an end; who requires us to broaden our mind and make more room in our heart; and who can teach us principles and practices from other lands.

On the basis of Catalonia's rich religious tradition, with its diverse forms and manifestations, we wish to underline the value of hospitality and feel that education geared to fostering it is vital.

Hermetic and/or xenophobic attitudes are built on a foundation of fear and nurture all kinds of prejudices and stereotypes. To counteract them, we would like to highlight the importance of the social implementation of a welcoming ethic, an obliging disposition towards the most vulnerable individuals. This requires a major shift in mentality, one that involves not only the education arena but also the social, economic, health and political spheres.

Conceiving of the stranger as a gift means viewing them as an opportunity to learn and grow, to enrich ourselves on the basis of their principles, and to show them all the good, beautiful and noble aspects of ourselves as a people.

## THE RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY ADVISORY BOARD

### The Board's functions

The Religious Diversity Advisory Board's functions are established in article 62 of Decree 184/2013 of 25 June on the restructuring of the Government of Catalonia's Ministry of Governance and Institutional Relations:

*The composition, functions and legal system of the Religious Diversity Advisory Board, which was established under Decree 326/2011 of 26 April as a collegial body to advise the ministry with jurisdiction over religious affairs on the implementation of policies on such affairs and related to the different churches, faiths and religious communities active in Catalonia, are as envisaged herein.*

*The functions of the Religious Diversity Advisory Board are to:*

- a) Advise or report to the minister in charge of the Government of Catalonia's ministry with jurisdiction over religious affairs on any questions it is posed.*
- b) Propose such measures or approaches as it deems appropriate as far as relations with the different churches, faiths and religious communities active in Catalonia are concerned.*
- c) Provide, at the request of the minister in charge of the Government of Catalonia's ministry with jurisdiction over religious affairs, advice on and support in collaborative or cooperative relations involving the participation of the Government or Parliament of Catalonia in Spanish state institutions or international organisations.*



## The Board's composition

The Religious Diversity Advisory Board was established in 2011, since when it has comprised 11 members and been chaired by Dr. Francesc Torralba i Roselló.

### **Francesc Torralba i Roselló**

(Barcelona, 1967) Holder of a PhD in philosophy from the University of Barcelona and another in theology from the Faculty of Theology of Catalonia. He lectures in history of contemporary philosophy and philosophical anthropology at Ramon Llull University in Barcelona, where he is director of the Ethos Chair in applied ethics. He alternates his teaching activity with his work as a writer, and is also a member of a number of ethics committees. In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI made him an adviser to the Holy See's Pontifical Council for Culture. He publishes in a range of specialised journals and regularly appears in the media. Over the course of his career he has received various awards for essays written in Catalan and has published more than 70 philosophy books on highly diverse topics. He is essentially interested in making profound yet clear philosophy accessible to the general public.

### **Maria Teresa Areces Piñol**

(Lleida, 1956) Holder of a PhD in law from the University of Barcelona. She is currently professor of state ecclesiastical law and secretary general of the Faculty of Law and Economics at the University of Lleida, having previously been the Faculty's dean for 12 years. She is a former member of the Board of Governors of the Government of Catalonia's Institute for Autonomous Community Studies. She has focused her research on freedom of religion, family law, canon law, relations between religious faiths and the public authorities, and conscientious objection. Her numerous publications notably include a book entitled *El principio de laicidad en las jurisprudencias española y francesa* [The Principle of Secularity in Spanish and French Case Law]. Her most recent published work is a book called *La prohibición del burka en Europa y en España* [The Prohibition of the Burka in Europe and Spain]. She has been Lleida's municipal comptroller.

### **Lena de Botton Fernández**

(Barcelona, 1976) Holder of a PhD in sociology from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris. She is currently a lecturer in the Department of Sociological Theory, Philosophy of Law and Social Science Methodology at the University of Barcelona, as well as coordinator of the Interreligious Dialogue Group in the same university's Centre for Research into Theories and Practices for Overcoming Inequalities (CREA). Her lines of research revolve around immigration, cultural identity, female immigrants, interreligious dialogue and inclusive schools. Her work on Muslim women's contributions to international feminist discourse is of particular note.

### **Miquel Calsina i Buscà**

(Torroella de Montgrí, 1970) Lecturer at the Blanquerna School of Communication and International Relations (Ramon Llull University), as well as on the interreligious, ecumenical and cultural dialogue master's degree programme taught at the Barcelona Institute of Religious Studies. He is a member of the Joan Maragall Foundation's Board of Trustees, the Editorial Board of the journal *Qüestions de Vida Cristiana*, and the Faculty of Theology of Barcelona's Reflection on Theology and Thought Group. He is also the Diocese of Girona's social media delegate. He has coordinated the publication of works such as *Catalunya, reptes ètics* [Catalonia: Ethical Challenges] (2006), *Religions i espiritualitat en un món en crisi* [Religions and Spirituality in a World in Crisis] (2009) and *Valors útils per a la Catalunya del futur* [Useful Values for the Catalonia of the Future] (2009). He is co-author of *Les veus dels indignats a Catalunya* [The Voices of Catalonia's Indignant Citizens] (2013) and *Palabras clave de sociología* [Keywords in Sociology] (2015).

### **Lluís Duch i Álvarez**

(Barcelona, 1936) Holder of a PhD in anthropology and theology from the University of Tübingen. He is an emeritus professor in the Faculty of Communication Studies at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, in the Sant Fructuós de Tarragona Institute of Religious Studies, and in the Abbey of Montserrat, where he has been a monk since 1961. He has studied

the different languages of the symbolic and mythical universes, and their manifestation in modern everyday life. He has translated texts penned by Luther, Müntzer, Silesius, Schleiermacher and Bonhoeffer to Catalan and Spanish. He is the author of more than 50 books and opuscles, and of over 300 articles and contributions to collective works.

### **Daniel Giralt-Miracle i Rodríguez**

(Barcelona, 1944) Holder of a degree in philosophy and the arts from the University of Barcelona, a degree in information sciences from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, and a diploma in design and communication from the Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm in Germany. In addition to working as an art critic and historian, he has taught at the two aforementioned universities in Barcelona and has organised national and international art and design exhibitions. His responsibilities in the field of public and private cultural management have included being director of the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art and general curator of the International Gaudí Year. He is currently a member of the Executive Committee of Barcelona's Council for Culture, as well as a fellow of the Royal Academy of Sciences and Arts of Barcelona and the Sant Jordi Royal Academy of Fine Arts. The Government of Catalonia awarded him a Creu de Sant Jordi (one of Catalonia's highest civil distinctions) in 2013.

### **Francesc Xavier Marín i Torné**

(Gironella, 1963) Holder of a PhD in philosophy and a diploma in religious studies. An expert in Islam and the Islamic culture and civilisation, he lectures at Ramon Llull University, where he is the Identity and Intercultural Dialogue research group's principal investigator. He also lectures at the Institutes of Religious Studies of Barcelona and Vic, as well as on a number of postgraduate and master's degree courses on immigration, intercultural education and development in Africa. He has been a guest lecturer on Islam at the University of Barcelona and the Autonomous University of Barcelona. He is secretary of the Interfaith Association for the Study of Religion (FAR), and an honorary member of the ETHNOS and ORÍGENS associations.

### **Xavier Melloni i Ribas**

(Barcelona, 1962) A Jesuit with a PhD in theology and a degree in cultural anthropology. He is a member of the Christianity and Justice Study Centre, as well as a lecturer at the Faculty of Theology of Catalonia and the Sant Cugat del Vallès Institute of Fundamental Theology. He was a member of the Advisory Board to the 2004 Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona. He lives in and participates in the work of the Cova de Sant Ignasi Spiritual Centre in Manresa. He is the author of a number of publications on subjects such as theology, mysticism, interreligious dialogue and Ignatian spirituality.

### **Yaratullah Monturiol i Virgili**

(Barcelona, 1961) Scholar of Islam and exegete. She has lectured internationally on Islam, women, spirituality, interreligious dialogue and interculturalism since 1994. She cofounded and chaired Catalonia's first community of Muslim women (1994-2001) and Europe's first independent mosque for women (1998-2001). She directed both the first Muslim Women's Conference (1999) and the first Conference on Islamic Feminism (2005), and was the official representative of the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Organisations (FEERI) in Catalonia (2005). She has been deputy chair of the UNESCO Association for Interreligious Dialogue (2001-2009), a member of the Editorial Board of the journal *Dialogal* (2002-2010) and Spain's representative in the European Muslim Network (2000-2010). She founded the Association for the Development of Islamic Feminism (2004-2012) and cofounded the International Group for Studies and Reflection on Women and Islam (GIERFI, 2008-2012), which nowadays operates as a training centre for female ulemas in Morocco, directed by Asma Lamrabet. She has written various books and articles in addition to contributing to numerous collective works.

### **Joan-Andreu Rocha Scarpetta**

(Bogota, Colombia, 1965) Historian with a PhD in the history of religions. Vice dean of journalism at Abat Oliba University. Director of and lecturer on the church, ecumenism and religions master's degree programme at the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum in Rome. Guest lecturer

at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and the University of Tehran. His areas of specialisation revolve around communication processes in interreligious relations, the media and religions, and religious journalism.

### **Xavier Rubert de Ventós**

(Barcelona, 1939) Philosopher, politician, essayist and lecturer with a degree in law and a PhD in philosophy from the University of Barcelona. He is the author of a great many essays and philosophical writings on aesthetics, culture theory, practical philosophy (ethics and political philosophy) and general philosophy. He has been professor of aesthetics and composition at the Barcelona School of Architecture, and a member of both the Spanish and European Parliaments. He has received numerous awards, including the Government of Catalonia's Creu de Sant Jordi (one of Catalonia's highest civil distinctions), the Lletra d'Or Award for Catalan literature and the City of Barcelona Award for literature. He has been a member of the Dignity Commission (which seeks the return to their rightful owners of documents confiscated by the Franco regime), and is currently a senior fellow of the Philosophy and Social Sciences Section of the Institute for Catalan Studies, as well as president of the Barcelona Institute of Humanities.







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