How to Love Your Ideological Enemy
Karen Swallow Prior, Christianity Today 5.18.17

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The Bible exhorts Christians to speak "the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). We are obligated to emulate the example of Jesus, who balanced in beautiful harmony the demands of both love and truth. Those of us concerned with not abandoning truth as we speak in love find the cultural waters today increasingly difficult to navigate. Orthodox Christian belief consists of sound doctrine derived from a faithful reading of Scripture and informed by the millennia-long history of biblical interpretation, the witness of the early church, and the creeds. As I survey the lines demarcating Christian belief, I wonder if some of those who have drifted over to heterodoxy [holding opinions, beliefs, or doctrines that differ from an official, established, or orthodox position] might have stayed with us if the contemporary church were better at a powerful form of discipleship: **hospitable orthodoxy.**

Hospitality comes from the same Latin root word from which we get both *guest* and *host*. Host refers not only to one who receives a guest but also to an army or multitude, which is why the word *hostile* comes from the same root word as *host* and the Latin word for host also meant *enemy*. The hinge that joins all of these words — *guest, host, enemy, hostile, hospitality* and even *hospital* — is *stranger*. A stranger could be a guest or a host and could be an enemy. In this way, hospitality — given or received — always entails risk and exposure.

Thinking about hospitality in this more literal sense is helpful in considering how we, as members of the house of God, bear responsibility for protecting the doctrinal boundaries of faith and inviting others into that well-defined place.

1. People who practice hospitable orthodoxy welcome the seeker and stranger. They do not read, follow, or speak to only the like-minded. They do not operate in an echo chamber.
For many years, I have intentionally pursued conversations with those with whom I deeply disagree, both believers and unbelievers. Some question and criticize this, but the practice merely follows the example of Christ. Any so-called orthodoxy that avoids the cornucopia of God's image bearers isn't orthodoxy — it's a cult.

2. People who practice hospitable orthodoxy defend but are not defensive.
Those who are rooted in a foundation of objective truth outside of themselves — planted in soil deeper than a particular political or cultural moment — have little reason to be defensive. As Henri Nouwen writes in *Reaching Out*, while "society seems to be increasingly full of fearful, defensive, aggressive people anxiously clinging to their property and inclined to look at their surrounding world with suspicion," we who are rooted in the historical teachings of the church are not so. Rather, Nouwen says, we are free to fulfill our call "to convert the enemy into a guest and to create the free and fearless space where brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and

fully experienced." People often ask me how I am able to respond as graciously as I do when attacked, maligned, or trolled on social media or blogs. The answer is in the freedom orthodoxy offers — for things to be not about me.

3. People who practice hospitable orthodoxy are confident enough to engage hard questions.

This foundation of eternal and lasting truths offers both the freedom and the pleasure of entertaining hard questions — whether our own or those of others. For believers who care about orthodoxy, hard questions are an opportunity to increase in the maturity and understanding of one's faith. As we see in the gospels, Jesus is an example of someone who not only welcomed honest, hard questions but asked many of them himself. As an academic, I am encouraged to love hard questions, especially questions about topics that matter even more than schoolbooks. If we as believers weren't expected to struggle with hard questions beyond the knowledge that saves us, the Apostle Paul would not have warned us to work out our salvation in fear and trembling.

4. People who practice hospitable orthodoxy embrace both openness and exclusivity.

As Nouwen writes in *Reaching Out*, "receptivity is only one side of hospitality. The other side, equally important, is confrontation." He further explains:

Space can only be welcoming space when there are clear boundaries, and boundaries are limits between which we define our own position. We are not hospitable when we leave our house to strangers and let them use it anyway they want. An empty house is not a hospitable house. When we want to be really hospitable we not only have to receive strangers but also to confront them by an unambiguous presence, not hiding ourselves behind neutrality but showing our ideas, opinions, and lifestyle clearly and distinctly. Receptivity and confrontation are the two inseparable sides of Christian witness.

According to Nouwen, the ultimate purpose of hospitable orthodoxy is "not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place." This is the responsibility of all believers, since we are both hosts and guests within the house of orthodoxy.

As I look around the campus where I teach and the country I live in, I see many standing on the precipice of orthodoxy who could tip either way. The voices the Church should hear, support, and amplify are practicing the hospitable orthodoxy that's essential to Christian discipleship. People who practice hospitable orthodoxy kindly offer the truth that love requires. They understand that to be orthodox means not changing doctrine but being changed by it. And they earnestly hope and desire for the guest to become, once and for all, family within the house of God.