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ACTS OF
RELIGION
JACQUES DERRIDA

Edited and with an Introduction by
GIL ANIDJAR

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A Note on "Hostipitality"

The thread of hospitality—here explicitly linked to forgiveness and friendship, to humor and to transcendence—can be followed in Derrida's work since at least *Writing and Difference*, most notably, though not exclusively, in his readings of Levinas. It has emerged in a more explicit fashion in *Politics of Friendship*, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, and recently in *Of Hospitality* (which includes two earlier sessions of Derrida's seminar on hospitality). But who or what is the subject of hospitality? To one reading of this question, the French language provides a disarmingly and quantitatively simple answer: the *hôte*. In French, the *hôte* is both the one who gives, *donne*, and the one who receives, *reçoit*, hospitality. As Derrida argues, however, this distinction finds its condition in the aporetic laws of hospitality that, prior to either, give to both *hôtes* the possibility and impossibility of the gift of hospitality. Who, then, is the *hôte* whose "violence" Derrida recalls at the beginning of *Adieu*, and who "dare[s] to say welcome" and thus "to insinuate that one is at home here . . . thus appropriating for oneself a place to *welcome* the other, or, worse, *welcoming* the other in order to appropriate for oneself a place"? To translate this *hôte* as either "host" or "guest" would be to erase the demand made by hospitality as well as the violence that is constitutive of it, "the notion of the *hostis* as host or as enemy." Hence, Derrida's neologism: *hostipitalité* raises in a radically new way the question of the subject of hospitality.

The following text is the first publication of Derrida's "notes" for sessions of his regular and widely followed seminars in Paris and in the United States.

Derrida teaches. This means, first of all, that his writing is fundamentally pedagogical, taking his readers on a course that, at various speeds and stages, constitutes itself as a pedagogical situation (recall the opening paragraphs of "Cogito and the History of Madness"). It also means that there are explicit links that tie his writing to his teaching. No doubt, a powerful example of this is found in *Politics of Friendship*, a book which, "in its present form," documents "what was only the first session of a seminar conducted with this title" (vii).

Aside from their status as a glimpse into Derrida's classroom, and as evidence of a teaching practice that is uncompromising in its meticulous preparation and its detailed elaborations, these four sessions constitute an exceptional, liminal text—not a polished essay—that provides a view of the reach of Derrida's "background" work prior to publication (hence the choice made here to preserve the unedited form of the material). In this particular case, Derrida's remarks on Louis Massignon, on Arabic hospitality and on aspects of Islam reveal themselves as essential parts of the reflections and readings that have appeared in print elsewhere as asides or marginal notes (for example in *Monolingualism of the Other* and *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*). Derrida's seminar is also a course in the comparative study of religion.

G. A.

HOSTIPITALITY

SESSION OF JANUARY 8, 1997

Where are we going? What awaits us at the beginning, at the turn [*au tournant*], of this year?

You are thinking perhaps that these are questions to laugh about.

But perhaps we are going to laugh, today.

We have not yet encountered this strange possibility, regarding hospitality, the possibility of laughter. We have encountered tears (those, for example, of the women who, during Tupinamba ceremonies of hospitality and “when they receive friends who go to visit them,” begin to cry as a sign of welcome [*en signe de bienvenue*], “with both hands over their eyes, in this manner weeping their welcome to the visitor”).¹ We have often spoken of mourning, of hospitality as mourning, of burial, of Oedipus and Don Juan, and recently even about the work of mourning as a process of hospitality, and so on.

But we have not evoked laughter. Yet it is difficult to dissociate a culture of hospitality from a culture of laughter or a culture of smile. It is not a matter of reducing laughter to smile or the opposite, but it is hard to imagine a scene of hospitality during which one welcomes [*accueille*] without smiling at the other, without giving a sign of joy or pleasure, without smiling at the other as at the welcoming of a promise [*comme à la bienvenue d'une promesse*].

If I say to the other, upon announcement of his coming [*sa venue*], “Come in [*Entrez donc*],” without smiling, without sharing with him some sign of joy, it is not hospitality. If, while saying to the other, “Come in [*Entre donc*],” I show him that I am sad or furious, that I would prefer, in short, that he not come in, then it is

1. Jean de Léry, *History of a Voyage to The Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America*, trans. and intro. by Janet Whatley (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 164.

assuredly not hospitality. The welcome must be laughing or smiling [*l'accueil doit être riant ou souriant*], happy or joyous. This is part of its essence in a way, even if the smile is interior and discreet, and even if it is mixed with tears which cry of joy, unless—as one can always suppose with our Tupinamba weepers, and as the hypothesis was offered—their welcoming ritual be associated with a cult of the dead, the stranger being hailed like a *revenant*.² “In the first place, as soon as the visitor has arrived in the house of the *moussacat* whom he has chosen for his host (the *moussacat* being the head of the household, who offers food to people passing through the village . . .), he is seated on a cotton bed suspended in the air, and remains there for a short while without saying a word. Then the women come and surround the bed, crouching with their buttocks against the ground and with both hands over their eyes; in this manner weeping their welcome to the visitor, they will say a thousand things in his praise.”³

Laughter and tears, then—through the tears, the welcoming smile, the *hôte as ghost* (spirit or *revenant*, holy spirit, holy ghost or *revenant*),⁴ here is what awaits us perhaps, what awaits us at the turn of the year, under the heading and in the name of waiting [*au titre de l'attente*];⁵ for the question of hospitality is also the question of waiting, of the time of waiting and of waiting beyond time.

Where are we going? What awaits us at the turn of this year, we were asking, and are we going to laugh? Are we going to cry? And if laughter were a new question for this seminar, what should one await from it, expect of it [*que faut-il en attendre*]?

We know nothing about this, of course, but we know enough to tell ourselves that hospitality, what belabors and concerns hospitality at its core [*ce qui travaille l'hospitalité en son sein*], what works it like a labor, like a pregnancy, like a promise as much as like a threat, what settles in it, within it [*en son dedans*], like a Trojan horse, the enemy (*hostis*) as much as the *avenir*, intestine hostility, is indeed a contradictory conception, a thwarted [*contrariée*] conception, or a *contraception* of awaiting, a contradiction of welcoming itself. And something that binds perhaps, as in Isaac's pregnancy [*la grossesse d'Isaac*], the laughter at pregnancy, at the

2. *Translator's Note*: The English edition of Léry offers the following note, which covers the issues here alluded to by Derrida:

[Alfred] Métraux [in *La religion des Tupinamba* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1928)] gives an overview of the ceremony of the tearful greeting, which was widespread among South American tribes east of the Andes, and among some North American tribes (see also Georg Friederici, *Der Tränengruss der Indianer*) . . . Métraux thinks that this ritual is associated with the cult of the dead, who names and exploits figure so often in the laments. [Charles] Wagley, in *Welcome of Tears*, notes the survival of this custom in 1953 in a Tupi-related tribe, the Tapirapé (de Léry, *History*, 252 n. 6).

3. De Léry, *History*, 164.

4. *Translator's Note*: The word *ghost* is in English in the text.

5. *Translator's Note*: “au titre de” could also mean “on behalf of” as in “je parle au titre de la Francophonie”: “I speak on behalf of Francophony.”

announce of childbirth. Abraham, of whom we will speak a lot today, laughs, like Sarah, at the announce of Isaac's birth (*Yiṣṣhaq* means "he laughs").

Hospitality must wait *and* not wait. It is what must await *and still* [*et cependant*] not await, extend and stretch itself [*se tendre*] and still stand and hold itself [*se tenir*] in the awaiting and the non-awaiting. Intentionality *and* non-intentionality, attention *and* inattention. Tending and stretching itself between the tending [*le tendre*] *and* the not-tending or the not-tending-itself [*ne pas se tendre*], not to extend this or that, or oneself to the other. It must await and expect itself to receive the stranger.⁶ Indeed, if we gather [*nous recueillons*] all these words, all these values, all these significations (to tend and extend, to extend oneself, attention, intention, holding [*tenue*], withholding [*retenue*]),⁷ the entire semantic family of *tenere* or of the *tendere* (Gr. *teinô*), we see this same contradictory tension at once working, worrying, disrupting the concept and experience of hospitality, while also making them possible. (I remember all of a sudden [*tout d'un coup*] that in English one says "to extend an invitation": to tend or extend [*tendre ou étendre*] an invitation—and we will see or recall in a moment that if hospitality seems linked to invitation, an invitation offered, extended, presented, sent; if it seems linked to the act of invitation, to the inviting of invitation, one must also make a note [*prendre acte*] of this: that radical hospitality consists, *would have* to consist, in *receiving without invitation*, beyond or before the invitation.)

If then we gather this entire semantic family of the holding [*tenir*], of the tending, the extending [*du tendre*], and the awaiting [*de l'attendre*], one must well expect [*s'attendre à*] an unlivable contradiction. I say "unlivable" because once more it is in death and on the edge of death [*au bord de la mort*], it is to death that hospitality destines itself—death thus also bearing the figure of visitation without invitation, or of haunting well- or ill-come, coming for good or ill [*la hantise bien ou mal venue*].

Let us unfold this contradiction that makes me contradict myself not only every time that I speak of hospitality, that I make it into a theme, be it a phenomenological, theoretical, speculative, or philosophical theme, but also every time that I offer hospitality.

Indeed, *on the one hand*, hospitality must wait, extend itself toward the other, extend to the other the gifts, the site, the shelter and the cover; it must be ready to welcome [*accueillir*], to host and shelter, to give shelter and cover; it must prepare

6. *Translator's Note*: See Derrida's discussion of his own translation of "s'attendre" and "s'at-tendre" in *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 64ff.

7. *Translator's Note*: The word *tenue* has many meanings in French. It has to do with duration and continuity, holding a session (in court, for example), with behaving oneself and good manners, house keeping and dress or uniform, and the handling of the road (for a car). *Retenue* has to do with holding and withholding and confiscating merchandise, holding a student at the end of the day in punishment, or, more seriously, a prisoner; *avoir de la retenue* is to behave with moderation and reserve, even wisdom.

itself and adorn itself [*se préparer et se parer*] for the coming of the hôte; it must even develop itself into a culture of hospitality, multiply the signs of anticipation, construct and institute what one calls structures of welcoming [*les structures de l'accueil*], a welcoming apparatus [*les structures d'accueil*]. Not only is there a culture of hospitality, but there is no culture that is not also a culture of hospitality. All cultures compete in this regard and present themselves as more hospitable than the others. Hospitality—this is culture itself.

Since I *also* happened to have said that burial and the cult of the dead is culture, that there is no culture without a culture of death,⁸ one will perhaps be surprised—but not for too long—when realizing that these two enunciations say the same thing, that they converge at the point where hospitality and the culture of the dead, of the abode as last resting place [*de la demeure comme dernière demeure*], beginning with mourning and memory itself, are the same thing (we will return to this in a moment). Hospitality therefore presupposes waiting, the horizon of awaiting and the preparation of welcoming [*accueil*]: *from life to death*.

But, *on the other hand*, the opposite is also nevertheless true, simultaneously and irrepressibly true: to be hospitable is to let oneself be overtaken [*surprendre*], to be *ready to not be ready*, if such is possible, to let oneself be overtaken, to not even let oneself be overtaken, to be surprised, in a fashion almost violent, violated and raped [*violée*], stolen [*volée*] (the whole question of violence and violation/rape and of expropriation and de-propriation is waiting for us), precisely where one is not ready to receive—and not only *not yet ready* but *not ready, unprepared* in a mode that is not even that of the “not yet.”

One must not only not be ready nor prepared to welcome [*accueillir*], nor well disposed to welcome—for if the welcome is the simple manifestation of a natural or acquired disposition, of a generous character or of a hospitable *habitus*, there is no merit in it, no welcome of the other as other. But—supplementary aporia—it is also true that if I welcome the other out of mere duty, unwillingly, against my natural inclination, and therefore without smiling, I am not welcoming him either: One must [*il faut*] therefore welcome without “one must” [*sans “il faut”*]: neither naturally nor unnaturally. In any case, the awaited hôte (thus invited, anticipated, there where everything is ready to receive him) is not a hôte, not an other as hôte. If, in hospitality, one must say *yes*, welcome the coming [*accueillir la venue*], say the “welcome”; one must say *yes*, there where one does not wait, *yes*, there where one does not expect, nor await oneself to, the other [*là où l'on ne s'attend pas soi-même à l'autre*], to let oneself be swept by the coming of the wholly other, the absolutely unforeseeable [*inanticipable*] stranger,⁹ the uninvited visitor, the

8. *Translator's Note*: See Derrida, *Aporias*, esp. 43–44/F83–84.

unexpected visitation beyond welcoming apparatuses. If I welcome only what I welcome, what I am ready to welcome, and that I recognize in advance because I expect the coming of the hôte as invited, there is no hospitality.

It is as if there were a competition or a contradiction between two neighboring but incompatible values: *visitation and invitation*, and, more gravely, it is as if there were a hidden contradiction between hospitality and invitation. Or, more precisely, between hospitality as it exposes itself to the visit, to the visitation, and the hospitality that adorns and prepares itself [*se pare et se prépare*] in invitation. These two hôtes that the visitor and the invited are, these two faces of hospitality, visitation and invitation, are not moments of hospitality, dialectical phases of the same process, the same phenomenon. Visitor and invited, visitation and invitation, are simultaneously in competition and incompatible; they figure the non-dialectizable [*non-dialectisable*] tension, even the always imminent implosion, in fact, the continuously occurring implosion in its imminence, unceasing, at once active and deferred, of the concept of hospitality, even of the *concept* in *hospitality*. To wait without waiting, awaiting absolute surprise, the unexpected visitor, awaited without a horizon of expectation: this is indeed about the Messiah as hôte, about the messianic as hospitality, the messianic that introduces deconstructive disruption or madness in the concept of hospitality, the madness of hospitality, even the madness of the concept of hospitality.

I do say "even of the concept in hospitality" because the contradiction (atopical: madness, extravagance, in Greek: *atopos*) of which we are speaking produces or registers this autodeconstruction in every concept, in the concept of concept: not only because hospitality undoes, should undo, the grip, the seizure (the *Begriff*, the *Begreifen*, the capture of the *concipere*, *cum-capio*, of the *comprehendere*, the force or the violence of the taking [*prendre*] as comprehending [*comprendre*]), hospitality is, *must* be, *owes to itself* to be, inconceivable and incomprehensible, but also because in it—we have undergone this test and ordeal so often—each concept opens itself to its opposite, reproducing or producing in advance, in the rapport of one concept to the other, the contradictory and deconstructive law of hospitality. Each concept becomes hospitable to its other, to an other than itself that is no longer *its* other. With this apparent nuance we have a formula of the entire contra-

9. *Translator's Note*: "L'étranger" can often, and more appropriately, be translated as "the foreigner" and even (although not in this particular instance) as "the foreign." It can also be read as "abroad" as in "voyager à l'étranger," to travel abroad. The expression "à l'étranger" could thus be read "to the stranger," "to the foreign," or simply "abroad." Because of those and other echoes (of Levinas as well), I have chosen to consistently translate "l'étranger" as "stranger" but minimally the more contained or current meaning of "foreigner" should always be kept in mind.

diction, which is more than a dialectical contradiction, and which constitutes perhaps the very stakes of all consistent deconstructions: the difference between something like "its" other (the very Hegelian formula of "its other"), the difference, therefore, between hospitality extended to one's other (to everybody their own, their chosen and selected hôtes, their integratable immigrants, their assimilable visitors with whom cohabitation would be livable) and hospitality extended to an other who no longer is, who never was the "its other" of dialectics.

Hospitality—if there is any—must, would have to, open itself to an other that is not mine, my hôte, my other, not even my neighbor or my brother (Levinas always says that the other, the other man, man as the other is *my* neighbor, my universal brother, in humanity. At bottom, this is one of our larger questions: is hospitality reserved, confined, to man, to the universal brother? For even if Levinas disjoints the idea of fraternity from the idea of the "fellow [*semblable*],"¹⁰ and the idea of neighbor [*prochain*] or of proximity from the idea of non-distance, of non-distancing, of fusion and identity, he nonetheless maintains that the hospitality of the hôte as well as that of the hostage must belong to the site of the fraternity of the neighbor). Hospitality, therefore—if there is any—must, would have to, open itself to an other that is not mine, my hôte, my other, not even my neighbor or my brother, perhaps an "animal"—I do say animal, for we would have to return to what one calls the animal, first of all with regards to Noah who, on God's order and until the day of peace's return, extended hospitality to animals sheltered and saved on the ark, and also with regards to Jonah's whale, and to *Julien l'hospitalier* in Gustave Flaubert's narrative (*The Legend of St Julian Hospitator* [*La légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier*]). Saint Julian was a great hunter before the Lord. A large stag was struck by his last arrow, a large black stag in the forehead of whom the arrow remains stuck though it "did not seem to feel it," a large stag, whose "blazing eyes, solemn as a patriarch or a judge." This stag announces three times to him that he, Julian, will kill his father and mother: "Accursed, accursed, accursed! One day, cruel heart, you will kill your father and mother."¹¹ And Julian (this is the whole story that you know or should read) does in fact kill them and later finds himself devoted to a duty of hospitality, to the point of receiving the visit, the visitation of a leper

10. *Translator's Note*: On the French "semblable," see what Emmanuel Levinas writes: "Le tiers est autre que le prochain, mais aussi un autre prochain, mais aussi un prochain de l'Autre et non pas seulement son semblable [The third party is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow]" (Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974], 200; *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis [Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998], 157).

11. Gustave Flaubert, "The Legend of St Julian Hospitator" in *Three Tales*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 67.

Christ who tells him "I am hungry," "I am thirsty," "I am cold," "take me in your bed and in your arms, embrace me."

If every concept shelters or lets itself be haunted by another concept, by an other than itself that is no longer even its other, then no concept remains in place any longer. This is about the concept of concept, and this is why I suggested earlier that hospitality, the experience, the apprehension, the exercise of impossible hospitality, of hospitality as the possibility of impossibility (to receive another guest whom I am incapable of welcoming, to become capable of that which I am incapable of)—this is the exemplary experience of deconstruction itself, when it is or does what it has to do or to be, that is, the experience of the impossible. Hospitality—this is a name or an example of deconstruction. Of the deconstruction of the concept, of the concept of concept, as well as of its construction, its home, its "at-home" [*son chez-soi*]. Hospitality is the deconstruction of the at-home; deconstruction is hospitality to the other, to the other than oneself, the other than "its other," to an other who is beyond any "its other." We have undergone such a test or ordeal a thousand times when, for example (to remain close to Levinas for a little longer), we saw that the border between the ethical and the political is no longer insured, that the third [*le tiers*], who is the birth of justice and finally of the state, already announces himself in the duel of the face-to-face and the face, and therefore disjoins it, dis-orientes it, "destin-errs" it; that the *beyond* the state (the condition of ethics) had to produce itself *in* the state—and that all the topological invaginations, which made the outside produce an enclave in the inside of the inside, were affecting the order of discourse, were producing deconstructive ruptures in the discourse and the construction of concepts.¹²

There is no apparent inconsistency, no absolute discontinuity between *Totality and Infinity*—which insisted upon the welcome [*l'accueil*] (the governing word) and upon the subjectivity of the subject as hôte—and then, ten years later, the definition of the subject as hostage, vulnerable subject subjected to substitution, to trauma, persecution, and obsession. Yet, there is a change of accent and a change of scenery [*paysage*]. After peace, after the peaceable and peaceful experience of welcoming, there follows (but this following [*succession*] is not a new stage, only the becoming-explicit of the same logic) a more violent experience, the drama of a relation to the other that ruptures, bursts in or breaks in, or still, you may recall some of those citations, an experience of the Good that elects me before I welcome it, in other words, of a Goodness, a good violence of the Other that precedes welcoming.

In fact, beginning with the texts that follow *Totality and Infinity*, for example in "The Trace," we had already lent our attention to the Levinasian definition of the

12. *Translator's Note:* See Derrida, *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas*.

face as *visit* and *visitation*: the face “visits me as already absolute” or “the face is of itself visitation and transcendence.”¹³ The concepts (disrupting of concepts) constituted by the motifs of hostage and substitution belong to [*relèvent de*] the same thought of visitation, that is to say, to the coming of an other as a *hôte* who is not invited [*comme hôte qui n'est pas invité*], a visitor who is not an expected guest, an invited guest [*un invité invité*], a guest the welcoming of whom I am ready for. This is indeed a thought of hospitality, and of hospitality to the infinite, to God, perhaps even more consistent, but it is a thought of hospitality where the one welcoming [*l'accueillant*] is second, where the welcoming [*l'accueil*] is second, no longer subject to the visit, to the visitation, and where one becomes, prior to being the *hôte*, the hostage of the other. There is no disagreement here with the logic of *Totality and Infinity*, but the displacement of accent intervenes in the self-contradiction, the self-deconstruction of the concept of hospitality. And with this concept of subjectivity or of ipseity as hostage, we have the inseparable concept of *substitution*, of the unique as *hostage* responsible for all, and therefore substitutable, precisely there where [*là même où*] he is absolutely irreplaceable.

Why does it appear to me necessary, today, to return to these motifs of hostage and of substitution?

To say it first in one word, before I explain myself better, I return to these two motifs of hostage and of substitution, from the point of view, obviously, of hospitality, in order to initiate, at the turn of this year, a turn in our trajectory, at any case in the references that guide us. We have spoken a lot about the Bible, what one calls the Old and the New Testaments, what Levinas himself, precisely in “The Trace” (in the passage I quoted earlier), had called “our Judeo-Christian spirituality.” But we have not yet come to the culture of this other Abrahamic monotheism that is Islam, about which even the most ignorant know that it too has always presented itself—perhaps even more than Judaism and Christianity—as a religion, an ethics, and a culture, of hospitality.

The mediation that seems to me here, and which is (perhaps, perhaps) the most appropriate in our context, is found, I will explain, in the figure of a spirituality that is, this time, Christiano-Islamic: the oeuvre, the thought, the extraordinary life of Louis Massignon.

Massignon was, if one can trust these words, an Islamologist and an Orientalist. He also oriented his entire life, his entire spiritual adventure, his entire testimony

13. In *Humanisme de l'autre l'homme*, 1963–64, but gathered in this collection in 1972; see Emmanuel Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” trans. Alphonso Lingis, *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 106; “La signification et le sens,” *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (Paris: Fata Morgana-Le livre de poche, 1972), 69.

toward an experience of hospitality, of Abrahamic hospitality. As strange or predictable as it may seem, he also made use of the words *substitution* and *hostage* in order to define, and to call for, a new approach to Islam, a new understanding [*intelligence*] of Islam on the part of non-Muslim Christians. But this understanding would be more than a theoretical or objective one; it would be or aspire to be a new form of partaking [*partage*] or participation between the three Abrahamic religions reinterpreted from [*à partir de*] a Christianity (Massignon was a Christian and he had undergone a sort of Christian conversion [*une sorte de conversion de chrétien*] to Christianity—a conversion that is somehow comparable to that of Paul Claudel—and which followed what he himself called a “visitation of the stranger”; we will come to this in a moment), from a re-thinking of Christianity nourished by Islam.

This is all difficult and complicated, as you imagine, but we must approach it [*il nous faut nous en approcher*], because it is all made in the name of a thought that is at its core an original and strong thought of hospitality, and because the words *hostage* and *substitution* do not appear here by chance.

I have no hypothesis for now regarding the possible rapports or meetings between Massignon and Levinas. To my knowledge, but I have not reread everything from this perspective, and I want to remain prudent, Levinas does not refer to Massignon, even though the latter's oeuvre, his teaching and his person were quite present and radiating in pre- and postwar Paris, in the very same circles in which Levinas was a participant.¹⁴ In any case, what I will say about it, most notably around hospitality, the hostage and substitution, has nothing to do with an investigation regarding priority or influence. It is rather a matter of a configuration that is structural, historical and even historial, a configuration that I judge significant, illuminating, and provocative for us. It makes one think [*elle donne à penser*]. It invites one to think.

What matters to me here today, more precisely, is to find a way to link what we have said so far with the question we have not yet come to, that of hospitality according to Islam, a question that is intrinsically interesting and urgent today, when the gravest ethicopolitical stakes concern *both* the tradition of internal or external—if one may say so—hospitality, in the Arabo-Islamic countries, cultures, and nations *and* the hospitality extended or—most often—refused to Islam in non-Islamic lands, beginning here “at home” [*chez nous*]. The analogies (limited but determined) toward which we will direct our interest cannot diminish in any way the singularity and originality of the two thoughts, Levinas's and Massignon's.

14. The *Collège de philosophie* was directed just after World War Two by Jean Wahl, great friend and protecting elder of Levinas. Massignon gave some lectures there; and Levinas' great friend, Blanchot, among others, participated with Bataille in the famous discussions about sin with Massignon, in 1944, at the home of Marcel Moré; with Bataille but also with Father Daniélou—Levinas knew Daniélou well; he often conversed with him—with Hyppolite, Sartre, Adamov, Klossowski, Camus, et al.

Whether Levinas knew Massignon or not, whether he cites him or not (as for me, I have never encountered a reference to Massignon in Levinas, nor reciprocally—the usefulness of indexes and computers, scanners, all the more so for amnesiacs like me). It is true that Levinas speaks little about Islam (like Rosenzweig, whose condescending, even pejorative pages on Islam we have studied before);¹⁵ but if this is true that he speaks little about it, a lot less than about Christianity, Levinas declares nothing but the greatest respect for Islam. Two examples, from *Difficult Freedom*; The first, the most marked, is found in “Monotheism and Language” (1959):

Islam is above all one of the principal factors involved in this constitution of humanity. Its struggle has been arduous and magnificent. It long ago surpassed the tribes that gave birth to it. It swarmed across three continents. It united innumerable peoples and races. It understood better than anyone that a universal truth is worth more than local particularisms. It is not by chance that a talmudic apologue cites Ishmael, the symbol of Islam, among the rare sons of Sacred History, whose name was formulated and announced before their birth. It is as if their task in the world had for all eternity been foreseen in the economy of Creation. (. . .) It is this that I should like to say, by way of explaining Judaism’s attitude to Islam, to a meeting of Jewish students—that is to say, clerics and a people of clerics. The memory of a common contribution to European civilization in the course of the Middle Ages, when Greek texts entered Europe via the Jewish translators who had translated Arab translations, can be exalting only if we still manage today to believe in the power of words devoid of rhetoric or diplomacy. Without renegeing on any of his undertakings, the Jew is open to the word and believes in the efficacy of truth.¹⁶

The other text, also in *Difficult Freedom*, seems interesting mostly because of the accent it places on heteronomy.

Like Jews, Christians and Muslims know that if the beings of this world are the results of something, man ceases to be just a result and receives “a dignity of cause,” to use Thomas Aquinas’s phrase, to the extent that he endures the actions of the cause, which is external *par excellence*, divine action. We all in fact maintain that human autonomy rests on a supreme heteronomy and that the force which produces such marvelous

15. *Translator’s Note*: Derrida is here referring to Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William W. Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971). For a short discussion of Rosenzweig’s treatment of Islam and some bibliographic references, see Barbara Galli’s “‘The New Thinking’: An Introduction,” in *Franz Rosenzweig’s “The New Thinking,”* ed. Alan Udoff and Barbara E. Galli, eds. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), esp. 186, n. 22.

16. Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 179; *Difficile liberté* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1976), 205–206.

effects, the force which institutes force, the civilizing force, is called God. (...) At the moment of this experience, whose religious range has for ever left its mark on the world, Catholics, whether secular, priests or monks, saved Jewish children and adults both in France and outside France, and on this very soil Jews menaced by racial laws heard the voice of a Muslim prince place them under his royal sovereignty.¹⁷

For those who may not know who Louis Massignon is, I will recall that he died at the age of seventy-nine, in 1962, that is to say at the end of the Algerian War during and against which he was very actively engaged (for this he was detained in the Hôpital Beaujon in 1959, having demonstrated with Sartre and François Mauriac and having almost lost an eye following an attack by demonstrators in 1958. He was also very active on behalf of Morocco and on behalf of the Palestinian refugees). Massignon was born in 1883 and after traveling to Algeria and Morocco, after failing at the *agrégation* in history, he began, in 1906, a great career as an Orientalist. He was a member of the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale in Cairo; he published numerous texts, among them, in 1908, "Saints Buried in Baghdad" and "Migrations of the Dead in Baghdad." He developed a relationship with Charles de Foucauld and with Claudel and experienced a kind of ecstatic conversion (one of his biographers reservedly writes: "1909: night of admiration with Foucauld"). He met André Gide, Henri Bergson, Charles Pierre Péguy, and gave mass for Charles de Foucauld in 1913. That same year he met the woman who will become his wife in 1914, though his life would be marked, in a way that is both intense and tragic, by homosexuality. During the war his first child was born and he began to publish on Hallaj, the mystic to whom he would dedicate an immense thesis (five volumes published as *La passion de Hallaj, martyr mystique de l'islam*),¹⁸ and the attention of a lifetime. The thesis was published in 1922 but the manuscript had been burned at Louvain in 1914. From then on, I cannot follow the considerable body of texts, travels, lectures, and events that mark this uncommon life.¹⁹ At this time, he also began a military and diplomatic career in the Middle East during which he met T. E. Lawrence (the two are dissimilar but comparable figures). He taught at the Collège de France after doing some substitute teaching there. He published numerous texts on Arabic as a liturgical language or as a philo-

17. Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 11–12/*Difficile liberté*, 24–25. *Translator's Note*: Levinas's lecture was delivered in Morocco. Levinas is referring to Mohammed V, king of Morocco, known to have refused to turn over his Jewish subjects to the French authorities during the war.

18. Louis Massignon, *The passion of al-Hallaj: mystic and martyr of Islam*, trans. Herbert Mason (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

19. I refer you for example, among other sources, to Pierre Rocalve, *Louis Massignon et l'islam* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1993) where you will find a bio-bibliography and a concordance both precise and precious, and to Charles Destremau and Jean Moncelon, *Massignon* (Paris: Plon, 1994).

sophical language, on "basic root-terms of the Muslim philosophical vocabulary." In 1923, he published a text that should be important to us, "The Three Prayers of Abraham Father of all Believers."²⁰ In this text, one reads the formulation of a central theme that inspires Massignon's entire exegesis and spiritual struggle, namely that the three monotheistic religions, as Abrahamic religions, are issued from a patriarch that came to this earth as a "stranger, a hôte, *gér*," and a kind of saint of hospitality. We will return to this major reference of Genesis 12:1, which plays a determining role in both Rosenzweig and Levinas (another time, we shall also return to the notion of *stranger* in Levinas), where Yahweh orders Abraham to depart, to leave his land and the house of his father, transforming him into a hôte (but, obviously, while promising him a land).

In order to outline the absolute, and absolutely originary role that the establishment of hospitality plays in Massignon's thought, in his spiritual, politico-spiritual adventure, I am going to quote a few texts, beginning with one he wrote in June 1949 after a long visit in the camps of Arab refugees in Palestine: "God did find a hôte in Abraham and these Arabs are the last witnesses of this cult of hospitality that our racisms deny. . . . But how many Christian exegetes are left who believe in Abraham's existence?"²¹

The same year, in Paris, during the study week of Catholic intellectuals, he asserted the following, which shows his devotion to Abraham, the absolute hôte and the father of the three religions, the traces of whom he constantly followed during his travels and missions:

During my missions, I tried to cover the itinerary of Abraham, from the *Lekh lekha* (Genesis 12:1 [when God tells him, therefore, "Go," "leave this land," get out of Ur] to "Hineni" ["Here I am"—not Genesis 21:2 as Massignon or Rocalve mistakenly asserts, since 21:2 is when Sarah, visited by Yahweh, gives birth to Isaac and says (we will return to this long scene of Isaac's laugh, of Isaac as a laugh that lasts for a long time, and is punctuated by Sarah who, alluding to a prior scene to which I would like to return as well), in Chouraqui's translation: "Elohim made me a laugh, any hearer will laugh about me;" in Dhormes' translation: "Elohim gave me reason to laugh; whoever learns of this will laugh about me."²² "Hineni" is from Genesis 22, the

20. "Les trois prières d'Abraham père de tous les croyants," in Louis Massignon, *Parole donnée* (Paris: Seuil, 1983) 257–72; trans. Allan Cutler in *Testimonies and Reflections: Essays of Louis Massignon*, ed. Herbert Mason (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 3–20.

21. Quoted in Louis Massignon, *L'hospitalité sacrée* (Paris: Nouvelle Cité, 1987), 30, n. 26.

22. *Translator's Note*: I translate here from the French translations used by Derrida, namely André Chouraqui (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, n. d.) and Edouard Dhormes (Paris: Gallimard, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," 1972). The NSRV translates Genesis 21:6 as follows: "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me."

moment when Yahweh puts Abraham to the test by asking him to cut Isaac's throat — J. D.]. I started in Ur in Chaldea, and went very close to Haran and to Beersheba where Abraham abandoned his elder son Ishmael [the story of Hagar and the genealogy of Muslim Ishmaelites — J. D.]. I went to Mamre where he asks for the forgiving of Sodom [this is one of the prayers that counted most for Massignon, and for Levinas as well. Levinas alludes to this prayer in the *New Talmudic Readings*: "Prayer of Abraham on behalf of the perverse Sodom threatened with just sanctions by the Lord, prayer by means of a sublime and famous bargaining, lasting ten verses (Genesis 18:22–32), with God himself, a very firm pleading in favor of Sodom before the Creator of the world, disputing about the notion of divine justice. It is precisely here that Abraham declares himself "dust and ashes": "I who am but dust and ashes" (verse 27)"²³ — J. D.], and finally to Jerusalem. There I understood that he was the Father of all faiths, that he was the pilgrim, the *gêr* [the stranger, the *hôte*], the one who left his own, who made a pact of friendship with the foreign countries where he came as a pilgrim, that the Holy Land was not the monopoly of one race, but the Land promised to all pilgrims like him.

A few years later, in 1952, Massignon, whom Claudel used to call "the knight of God," published in the *Revue internationale de la Croix Rouge* an article entitled "Respect of the Human Person in Islam and the Priority of Asylum Right over the Duty of Just War." There he wrote, "Whereas degenerate Christianity sees in Abraham no more than a incoherent folk image, the Muslim world in its entirety believes in its father Abraham, invokes him in a social and solemn fashion, for the salvation of each and all, the God of Abraham, at the annual Feast of sacrifices, 'Id al Qurban, at the end of the five daily prayers, at engagement celebrations and at funerals."²⁴

In the same text, it is indeed the hospitality of the *hôte* Abraham that is placed at the center of Islam and that makes of Islam the most faithful heir, the exemplary heir of the Abrahamic tradition. "The European no longer understands that, thanks to the heroic manner in which he has practiced the notion of hospitality, Abraham deserved as his inheritance not only the Holy Land but also the entering in it of all the foreign *hôtes* who are "blessed" by his hospitality. . . . Abraham's hospitality is the sign announcing the final completion of the gathering of all nations, all blessed in Abraham, in this Holy Land that must be monopolized by none. . . . The Qur'an mentions three times (XI, 72; XV, 51; LI, 24) the passage from Genesis

23. Emmanuel Levinas, *New Talmudic Readings*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999), 114; *Nouvelles lectures talmudiques* (Paris: Minuit, 1996) 83.

24. Quoted in Rocalve, *Louis Massignon*, 30.

(18:1–33).²⁵ It is from this fundamental text that Islam has deduced the principle of *Iqrā* (*dakhalk, jīwar*), right of hospitality, *ikram al dayf*, respect of the human person, of the *hôte*, sent by God.²⁶

But what is this “fundamental text” from which Islam deduced the right of hospitality? It is a text from *Genesis* often quoted by Massignon, a scene during which Abraham extends hospitality to three visitors, three *hôtes* sent by God. Before reading and commenting upon this text about an originary and triple hospitality, I would like to read some passages from Massignon’s letters where it is discussed in a certain manner, in his manner—this will give you an image of his quite singular fervor. These letters are reproduced in *L’hospitalité sacrée*:

The three Angelus at the core of my life are the three prayers of Abraham, which will burst on Judgment Day like fountains of consolation for broken hearts from the very pure heart of Mary our Mother. To these Angelus, instead of vocal prayers, a small shudder of the heart, which palpitates for the glory of the saints toward the All-Saint; let us not refuse it to the Holy Spirit; let us always say to Him the “fiat” in our worst distress. [August 20, 1948]

Our Badaliya is a reminder for everyone, and, first of all, for us, of the first, of the sweetest Christian duty: welcoming the other, the stranger, the neighbor who is closer than all our close ones [*accueillir l’autre, l’étranger, le prochain qui est plus proche que tous nos proches*], without reserve nor calculation, whatever it cost and at any price. [September 8, 1948]

Exactly forty years ago, I was still in Brittany. I had planted a large cross in the wasteland; it is still there. On October 7 and 9, I spent the day invoking the protection of Saint Abraham (who saved me from the Dead Sea) for my entire life, committing

25. *Translator’s Note*: The Qur’ānic references to the Genesis passage are the following:

XI, 71–72: “And his wife, standing by, laughed when We gave her good tidings (of the birth) of Isaac, and, after Isaac, of Jacob. She said: Oh, woe is me! Shall I bear a child when I am an old woman, and this my husband is an old man? Lo! This is a strange thing!”

XV, 51–52: “And tell them of Abraham’s guests, (How) when they came in unto him, and said: Peace. He said: Lo! we are afraid of you.”

LI, 24–27: “Hath the story of Abraham’s honoured guests reached thee (O Muhammad)? When they came in unto him and said: Peace! He answered, Peace! (and thought): Folk unknown (to me). Then he went apart unto his housefolk so that they brought a fatted calf; And he set it before them, saying: Will ye not eat?”

The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, trans. Marmaduke Pickthall (New York: Everyman’s Library, 1992).

26. *Translator’s Note*: Quoted in Rocalve, 33.

myself to pray this great prayer, still relevant. This year, Ibrahim who took his name for himself, who suffered with it, who offered with it his first born, renews his consecration to the father of all believers, to whom Mary shouted her joy on the day of the "Magnificat." "*Tou'azzimou nafsia erreb*, my soul glorifies the Lord." I pray of him that he offers us to God with the three Angelus, to repeat with him these three prayers which are one, the prayer of Sodom, the exile of Ishmael and the sacrifice of Isaac, in one and unique offering to the three divine Hôtes that Abraham received at Mamre where we prayed as if upon his grave on March 7, 1934. [October 8, 1948]²⁷

Let us now return to the text of Genesis 17 and 18. At age eighty-six, Abraham has had a son, Ishmael, from his servant Hagar since Sarai could not bear children. After he turns ninety-nine, Abraham receives the visitation of Yahweh, and this apparition ("He appeared" says one translation [by Edouard Dhormes]; "he makes himself seen" says another [by André Chouraqui]), this unexpected apparition by an uninvited visitor who makes himself seen, who shows himself, who comes ("shows up"),²⁸ this nonawaited irruption is, in itself, already a visitation.

And during this visitation, Yahweh announces other arrivals [*d'autres venues*], other hôtes, in sum, other visits or visitations. This visitation of Yahweh is so radically surprising and over-taking [*sur-prenante*] that he who receives does not even receive it himself, in his name [*celui qui la reçoit ne la reçoit même pas lui-même, en son nom*]. His identity is as if fractured. He receives without being ready to welcome since he is no longer the same between the moment at which God initiates the visit and the moment at which, visiting him, he speaks to him. This is indeed hospitality *par excellence* in which the visitor radically overwhelms the self of the "visited" and the *chez-soi* of the hôte (host).²⁹ For as you know these visitations and announcements will begin with changes of names, heteronomous changes, unilaterally decided by God who tells Abram that he will no longer be called Abram but Abraham (with wordplay, it seems, on Ab-hamon, "father of the multitudes"), much as later, before Isaac's birth, he will change the name of Sarai into Sarah ("my princess" into "princess").

This is the moment at which the visitation of the absolute hôte to the stranger that Abraham is not only changes—in a way, or, in any case, affects—the identity and the appellation of the hôte, but does so heteronomously at the moment the father of creation institutes Abraham as father of a multitude of nations. This institution of paternity constitutes the pact or covenant, sealed by the circumcision of the male child at eight days: "Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised

27. Massignon, *L'hospitalité sacrée*, 253–56.

28. *Translator's Note*: The expression *shows up* is in English in the text.

29. *Translator's Note*: The word *host* is in English in the text.

in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant" (Genesis 17:14).

Then Yahweh announces the coming of Isaac, but this visitation, which announces a birth, announces, in fact, another announcement and another visit or visitation, that of hôtes, of three visitors (*tres vidit et Unum adoravit*, as Massignon will translate in a text I will address later) who will come to announce to Abraham both that Sarai will have to change her name and that she will give birth to Isaac, he who laughs—and this already made Abraham laugh who, in a scene that is truly a scene of hospitality (titled by Chouraqui, in fact, "Abraham's hospitality"—the very scene discussed by Massignon in a letter from October 8, 1948), will soon receive these three visitors and extend to them hospitality, drink and food.

With these texts, with Genesis 17:15–27 and Genesis 18, we have what are for Massignon the founding texts, and they all speak at once the universal paternity of Abraham at the origin of the three religions, the pact, and the pact as experience of sacred hospitality. Since there are so many of them, I cannot quote or analyze all the passages of Massignon's texts where the word "hôte" is made into the fundamental word of the fundamental experience. You will find many such passages, all perfectly explicit, in *L'hospitalité sacrée*, which intersect with some of those I have read earlier. Here are two examples:

The hôte is the messenger of God (*Dheif Allah*). Abraham's hospitality is a sign announcing the final completion of the gathering of all nations, blessed in Abraham, in this Holy Land which must be monopolized by none. (...) This notion of sacred hospitality seems to me essential for a search after truth between men, in our itineraries and our work, here below, and toward the threshold of the hereafter. (...) With hospitality, we find the Sacred at the center of our destinies' mystery, like secret and divine alms. (...) This mystery touches the very bottom of the mystery of the Trinity, where God is at once Guest [*Hôte*], Host [*Hospitalier*], and Home [*Foyer*].³⁰

Of the three solemn prayers of Abraham, before the prayer for Ishmael, the Arab and the Muslims, before the prayer for Isaac and the Twelve Tribes descended from his son Jacob, the first prayer which we must take up once again is the prayer for Sodom, without either unhealthy curiosity or hypocritical disdain, in the evening Angelus, "che volge il disio" (Dante, *Purgatorio* 8:1). This is not the place to examine the conditions under which the texts of these three prayers have been handed down to us through all the mishaps to which the copyists and translators have been exposed. (...) The first prayer of Abraham is the prayer which he uttered on behalf of Sodom. . . . He had abandoned the townsman's life of Chaldea to take up the life of a

30. Massignon, *L'hospitalité sacrée*, 121.

wandering shepherd. He planted the first stake which rooted him in the Promised Land very near his own future tomb. The perfect hospitality which he offered to his three mysterious visitors ("tres vidit et Unum adoravit"), who came to overwhelm him with the promise of Isaac, led them to test him: Is Abraham, now that he is assured an heir, going to continue to look after the people of Sodom, allies of his nephew Lot, whom he has already saved only by force of arms, or will he disavow his pact of fidelity with them when he learns that they have gone astray by iniquity? Then the angels told him that the people of Sodom had committed terrible sins and that the Lord was going to destroy them. But Abraham himself had come into this land as a stranger, a *ger*: a guest [*hôte*]. The guest [*hôte*] is sacred and still remains so. (...) Sodom is the city of self-love which objects to the visitation of angels, of guests [*Hôtes*], of strangers, or wishes to abuse them.³¹

I would like to do at least *two things* for now, regarding the logic of this reference to sacred hospitality.

1. *On the one hand*, to recall that this was not, on Massignon's part, a neutral and expert discourse of exegetical knowledge, but rather the testimonial confession, the testimony, one would almost say the martyr of a burning experience, a passion of fire, a conversion that he himself describes, in the language of hospitality, as a memory of events and visitations that fractured his identity and that almost, as you will hear it, changed his name (much as occurred to Abraham and Sarah). Naturally, this fervent Christian who saw in Islam the best heir of the Father and of Abraham's hospitality, finds this language of hospitality again when he approaches both the mystery of Mary and Jesus (in the two post-Judaic religions) and the manifestation of Christ in Islam.

Here, for example, is a text from *La parole donnée*, entitled "Visitation of the Stranger [*Visitation de l'étranger*]." In it, Massignon answers a query regarding the meaning of the word "God," our representation of God and the correspondences, in him, of the word "God." "Before the Lord who has struck the blow, the soul . . . starts only to commemorate in secret this Annunciation, viaticum of hope, that she has conceived in order to give birth to the immortal. This frail Guest [*Hôte*] that she carries in her womb determines thereafter all of her conduct. It is not a made-up idea that she develops as she pleases according to her nature, but a mysterious Stranger whom she adores and who guides her: she devotes herself to Him. . . . The soul sanctifies herself to protect her Sacred Guest. . . . She does not speak about her Guest "didactically" . . . but rather testimonially, waiting for the moment when He

31. Massignon, "The Three Prayers of Abraham," 7-10/F260-63.

suggests to her that she invoke Him, making her progress in experiential knowledge through compassion."³²

Sacred hospitality, at once received and given, is founded not only on the Father or the patriarch Abraham but also on the Christian figure of the Trinity about which, as we saw, Massignon notes on February 2, 1962 (a few months before his death, when he summoned the Assembly of the Badaliya—the community of substitution of which I will speak in a moment), “God is at once Guest, Host, and Home.”

This visitation of the stranger, this language of sacred hospitality is inseparable from an experience (no doubt one that is brief in its actuality, if I may say so, but interminable in its temptation) of homosexuality. I refer you here to Destremeau-Moncelon, from whom I read the few lines that recall, discreetly but, in a way, clearly, some recognized facts. They also quote Massignon when he explains the double reference that marks his language when he speaks of “sacred hospitality”:

The faults of which Massignon accused himself are now known: his liaison in Egypt with Yā-Sīn bin Ismail, his Alexandrian nights with Luis de Cuadra in 1907, and because it immediately precedes his conversion, his attraction to Djabbouri, during the raid to the desert of El-Okhaydir. He will not keep the mystery from his friends. Paul Claudel, for example, wrote to the Abbé Fontaine on 9 February 1914, concerning André Gide: “He confessed to me the reasons for his resistance. They are the same ways [*les mêmes mœurs*] that [Massignon] practiced in the past.” Massignon will even contribute some clarifications at the end of his life: “The problem for me was that I was using the language of my sins, the language of the hopeless life I had led, in the homes of strangers [*chez des étrangers*], in search of something I did not know, that I had found in the shared agony of observing sacred hospitality.”³³

2. Finally, *on the other hand*, I would like to make manifest, in this testimonial logic of sacred hospitality, these two motifs of *substitution* and of *hostage* which cross so strangely, and in spite of so many differences, the same words in Levinas.

First, the word substitution, which Massignon could have encountered first in someone who had a certain influence upon him and who was one of three great figures he admired as a young man, namely, with Charles de Foucauld and Léon Marie Bloy, J. K. Huysmans (whom Massignon visits in 1900 just after his *baccalauréat*, when Huysmans, already suffering from throat cancer, has converted to Catholicism under the influence of one Père Boullan, who professed “mystical substitution” and

32. Massignon, “Visitation de l'étranger: Réponse à une enquête sur Dieu,” *Parole donnée*, 281–82; trans. Herbert Mason and Danielle Chouet-Bertola in *Testimonies and Reflections*, 39–40.

33. Destremeau and Moncelon, *Massignon*, 65–66.

the redemptive role of suffering).³⁴ Here is how Huysmans elaborates the doctrine of “mystical substitution” (you will find here again something of Levinas’s logic of the hostage “responsible for all”): “Humanity is governed by two laws that it ignores in its carelessness: the law of solidarity in evil, the law of reversibility in the good; solidarity in Adam, reversibility in Our Lord. Otherwise put, up to a point, each is responsible for the faults of the others, and must also, up to a point, expiate them. . . . God first submitted to these laws when he applied them to himself in the person of the Son. . . . He wanted for Jesus to give the first example of mystical substitution, the substitution [*suppléance*] of him who owes nothing for him who owes everything. . . .”³⁵

This concept of substitution will be found everywhere in Massignon’s spiritual itinerary. It is the first movement of absolute hospitality. Aside from the texts and speeches where this logic and this lexicon of substitution are operative, in 1943, Massignon founded, with Mary Kahil in Cairo, under the Arabic name for substitution, *Badaliya*, a kind of spiritual community (a Christian one, gathering Christians in the East, but turned toward Islam, such that some have seen here wrongly—well, actually . . . —an attempt at proselytizing that should be fought against). The wish to found this *Badaliya* dated from ten years earlier (1934, already with Mary Kahil). The first statutes of the *Badaliya* that came into existence in Damietta, Egypt, were published in April 1943; they announce that which is to be “realized and completed” in its “providential truth,” namely the “vocation of Christians in the East of Arab race or language, reduced by the Muslim conquest to being only a small flock”: “union of prayers, between weak and poor souls, who seek to love God and to give him glory, more and more, in Islam.”

The word *hostage* appears immediately, with a particular connotation, in order to designate who they are—who we are—who offer ourselves and commit ourselves, we who offer our life as a pledge. “We offer ourselves as pledge”—this is what the word *hostage* means—but as pledge, voluntary prisoners, guarded hôtes, in a kind of captivity or spiritual residency, in a foreign milieu that we respect, namely, Islam; a milieu that we want to bring back to the truth to which it is itself the heir and the trustee. Hostages, we offer ourselves as hostages—this means: we substitute ourselves for the others in order to give ourselves as pledge in this foreign milieu, with a mission, a duty which is not that of converting the Muslims (actually, it is, but without external pressure),³⁶ but rather of awakening, in the Muslim people

34. See Destremau and Moncelon, *Massignon*, 22ff.

35. Quoted in Destremau and Moncelon, 23.

36. Letter of May 20, 1938: “(Badalyia) The “conversion” of these souls, yes, it is the goal, but it is for them to find it themselves, without their suffering our insistence as an external pressure. It must be the secret birth of a love, shared Love. . . .” (Massignon, *L’hospitalité sacrée*, 208).

who are cut off and excluded, the truth of Christ, of the sacred face of Christ, of which this Muslim people keeps an imprint, even if it keeps an imperfect tradition.

The strong words of the text I will read are the following: hostage, substitution or *suppléance*, intercession or incorporation, tradition, transmission, heritage and precious deposit.

“Al-Badaliya” (Statutes)

To realize and complete, in all its providential truth, the vocation of Christians in the East, of Arab race or Arabic language, whom the Muslim conquest has reduced to no more than a very *small flock*.

This union of prayers between weak and poor souls who seek to love God and to glorify him, more and more, in Islam, was born in Damietta, Egypt.

Assembled, gathered, and governed by the same impetus, toward the same goal which binds us, and through which we offer and commit our lives, from now on, as *hostages*.

—This goal, Christ’s manifestation in Islam (“Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, in Islam”), demands a deep penetration, made of fraternal understanding and of careful attentiveness, in the lives of families, of Muslim generations, past and present, whom God has placed on each of our paths. He has thus brought us to the subterranean waters of the grace granted by the Holy Spirit. We are trying to find the living sources of these waters for this people who were excluded, cut off long ago from the promise of the Messiah as children of Hagar, for, in their Muslim, imperfect, tradition, they preciously keep something like an imprint of the sacred face of Christ whom we adore, of “Issa Ibn Maryam” whom we want them to rediscover in themselves, in their heart.

—In this mission of intercession for them, where we ask God, without respite nor interruption, for the reconciliation of this dear souls, for whom we wish to substitute ourselves “*fil badaliya*,” by paying their ransom in their place and at our expense, it is in replacement [*suppléance*] of their future “incorporation” in the Church that we wish to assume their condition, by following the example of the Word made flesh, by living among them each day, by partaking of their lives—us, baptized—like salt partakes of the taste of food.

—It is with this vocation for their salvation that we must and wish to sanctify ourselves, aspiring to become additional Christ [*d’autres Christ*] (like living Gospels), so that they recognize *Him* through us, and that we safeguard, with this silent and obscure apostleship, the sincerity of our own donation.

—Facing them, we must perfect and complete the Passion of Christ, since our ancestors, the Christians of the East have transmitted it to us as their unfinished

legacy: they did not dare to take up Mohammed's challenge, when, one day in Medina, he called upon them to prove the Incarnation by exposing themselves to the Judgment of God: that is to say through the ordeal of fire.

This test and ordeal, demanded by the founder of Islam, has been postponed until us. It was desired by Saint Francis who gave himself [*qui s'y offrit*] to it in Damietta, and by many others who, in silence, have given themselves for the sake of Muslim souls. It was given to us as a precious deposit, transmitted from age to age, and it is incumbent upon us to perfect and realize it.

—A role is reserved for us in this mysterious duel, where for centuries Christendom has been facing the refusal of the Muslim world. Through many an ordeal and many an apostasy, this struggle has provided Christendom with many a joy and much glory for Eternity, with the institution of liturgical festivals, the founding of religious orders and the death of many a martyr.

—Waiting for this hour, we pray for them and with Him during the three Angelus of the day, affirming, through Mary's "Fiat," the mystery of divine Incarnation that the Muslims wish to deny; at the same hours the call to prayer of the Muezzin gathers the hearts in the same adoration of the One God of Abraham; during our Friday communions, day of Christ's Passion, which is also their day of gathering, chosen unconsciously to testify of their own faith.

—Living in Muslim land, under the pressure of an atmosphere which would obscure and suffocate our Christian faith were we not hoping for this *shahāda* (testimony [*témoignage*]) of martyrdom, in a hope that remembers the oath sworn long ago by the Mercedarians to replace, if necessary, in the Muslim jails, the prisoners that they wanted to redeem. We must follow the behavior of Saint Francis and of Saint Louis, facing these millions of souls who wait for us and look at us, as we are called to testify through our life, and, if God permits, through our death, like Foucauld, to whom it was granted and who also asked for it for his friends: to return to Christ who asks us to continue his Passion, this *shahāda* which we desire to offer him, as unworthy as we are.

Goals:

- 1) The Badaliya addresses itself to the Christians of the East.
- 2) It proceeds from the consciousness of a particular responsibility of these Christians toward their Muslim brothers in the midst of whom they live. These Christians have a providential mission toward them and they want to be faithful to it.
- 3) Moreover, because they have suffered and are still suffering at their hands, they want to practice toward them the highest Christian charity according to the command of our Lord "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"