Turning a Curse into a Blessing?
Theological Contributions to a Resource-Orientated Narrative on Migration in Europe

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Abstract: This chapter argues that, grounded in a biblical theology of migration, the theology of the Catholic Church offers both theoretical and practical perspectives on migration that might enable Europeans to gain a sense of hope in the current situation. In theological terminology, they can show how the "curse" of flight and migration can be transformed into a "blessing," which is to say, into a reality that can create new—perhaps even better—life. Regina Polak shows how a theological approach to migration might contribute to secular societies in four steps. First, she assesses the wider context of the migration from the perspective of the social sciences in order to identify the central theological questions. Second, she presents a biblical-theological approach to migration. Third, some aspects of the teaching of the Catholic Church are presented. Fourth and finally, she asks what consequences can be drawn for Europe today.

Flight and Migration as a "Curse?" [Level 1]

Calling flight and migration a "curse" is characteristic of a religious rather than a nonreligious account of these phenomena. To perceive a phenomenon as a curse means that one experiences live-destroying energies for which no human being is responsible. One feels powerless, a pawn in the hands of a cruel fate. One has the impression of being overwhelmed by an uncontrollable power—a power which might be identified with "God."

Already in the Ancient Near East migrants were seen as a threat to the wealth of the autochthonous population, a curse sent by God.[1] Hence, the Apiru—a group of slaves and foreign workers suffering in Moses's Egypt, who later came to be called Hebrews—were treated as a risk for the stability and the security of the land. They were considered responsible for epidemic plagues and increasing poverty and therefore had to be expelled from the land. After the Hebrews had escaped the humiliating conditions of slavery, Egyptian historians such as Hecataeus of Abdera and Manetho described their flight as an expulsion of

[1] See David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norten, 2013), 22-32.

vermin that had been menacing the land.[2] The refugees themselves, however, continue to tell this story rather differently: as the Exodus, the liberation of the children of Israel by God.

In the 21st century most people in secularized Western Europe would probably not characterize flight and migration as a curse in the religious rather than the nonreligious sense. However, in the public and political discourse of most European countries the arrival of two million people since autumn 2015 has been considered a disaster of apocalyptic dimensions—yet not for the refugees, as one might assume. Instead, the situation is interpreted as a catastrophe for the *receiving* countries. The way some leading politicians, journalists, and even bishops of the Catholic Church talk about migration suggests that Europe is currently experiencing a curse: an unforeseeable destruction. Sebastian Kurz, the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, claimed that "such a year must not happen again."[3] He was referring neither to the war in Syria nor to the 5000 people who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015, but to the demands made on his country. The Hungarian Bishop, Laszlo Kiss-Rogo, talked about a "Muslim invasion"[4]; the Polish Bishop, Piotr Libero, compared refugees to German crusaders[5]; the tabloids warned of the "Islamization" of Europe; and even in more moderate public and political discourses the perception of flight and migration was dominated by characterizing both phenomena primarily as a problem for Europe.

It is obvious that the integration of migrants into European countries will be an immense economic, political, social, cultural, and religious challenge throughout the upcoming decades. Although it would be naïve to underestimate all these problems, it is crucial to note that they are neither new nor caused just by flight and migration, as public opinion suggests. Europe has been a society of migration for decades, such that issues of social and political justice in the management of diversity would have to be on societal and political agendas in any case. Increasing poverty and cultural as well as religious pluralization have been inner-European challenges for a long time. Above all, as long as no decisive international efforts are made to deal with the global causes of flight and migration, neither flight nor migration will cease. Europe finds itself at the beginning of a new era. As Zygmunt Baumann pointedly put it, migrants and refugees are the "harbinger of bad news," meaning that their arrival is proclaiming the collapse of "an order that has lost its binding force," thus

[2] See ibid., 27-32.

[3] For Sebastian Kurz's presentation of the Austrian Report on Integration 2015, see the article in *Die Presse*, available at: http://diepresse.com/home/politik/innenpolitik/5069799/Asyl_So-ein-Jahr-nicht-wiederholen (accessed 05/2017).

[4] See the article in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, available at http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fluechtlingskrise/kritik-an-papst-franziskus-ungarischer-bischof-spricht-von-invasion-muslimischer-fluechtlinge-13790835.html (accessed 05/2017).

[5] See the article in *Cicero*, available at http://www.cicero.de/weltbuehne/fluechtlinge-polen-tueren-zu-im-christenland/60248 (accessed 05/2017).

bringing the bad news from all over the world to Europe's door.[6] Refugees and migrants teach us that the political and economic world order has to be transformed. Flight and migration are one of the great challenges of the 21st century.

In order to deal with all the socio-political and socio-cultural challenges accelerated by flight and migration in a constructive way, Europe needs resource-oriented narratives that stress the potential of these phenomena. Such narratives should not gloss over the problems. However, given the quantity and quality of the crisis of transformation confronting the whole world today, Europe needs to develop narratives that can make meaning, promoting endurance and courage among Europeans for the next century. Theologically speaking, Europe needs hope. Without resource-orientated narratives, without mental and spiritual empowerment, Europeans run the risk of failing. Europe will not solve the crisis without learning to see flight and migration as an opportunity.

In this chapter, I will argue that biblical theology and the theology of migration of the Catholic Church offer both theoretical and practical perspectives on migration that might enable Europeans to gain a sense of hope in the current situation. In theological terminology, they can show how the "curse" of flight and migration can be transformed into a "blessing," which is to say, into a reality that can create new—perhaps even better—life. I will show how a theological approach to flight and migration might contribute to secular societies in four steps. First, I will assess the wider context of the phenomena of flight and migration from the perspective of the social sciences in order to identify the central theological questions. Second, I will present a biblical-theological approach to flight and migration. Third, some aspects of the teaching of the Catholic Church will be presented. Fourth and finally, I will ask what consequences can be drawn for Europe today.

A Social Scientific Approach [Level 1]

The Global Context [Level 2]

Politicians and the media regularly talk about "flows" or "waves" of refugees. No wonder that many Europeans feel "overwhelmed," "overrun," or even "drowned" by migrants. These metaphors are not new. They were used in antiquity when the arrival of the "barbarians" indicated the transformation towards the Middle Ages. Both in the past and in the present,

[6] Zygmunt Baumann, *Strangers at Our Door* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 15.

these metaphors foster the impression that migration is akin to natural disaster.[7] Migrants have been perceived as aliens, they come in masses and have neither face nor name. They threaten the traditional order.

In the 21st century more people are migrating than ever before. According to the United Nations, the number of "international migrants"[8] has increased worldwide from 173 million people in 2000 to 244 million people in 2015.[9] The number of displaced persons has reached a peak since World War II with 65.3 million people in 2016—including 21.3 million refugees, 40.8 million internally displaced persons, and 3.2 million asylum seekers.[10] The number of people who were turned into refugees because of natural disasters is estimated to be about 150 million, increasing rapidly because of desertification, draught, and flooding.[11] The number of temporary migrants, interior migrants, and descendants of migrants is unknown. However, on the whole the percentage of migrants of all kinds makes just 3-5% of the world population. Talk about Europe being "flooded" by migrants, then, is rather exaggerated. Moreover, the majority of migrants are migrating *within* their home countries and continents. There is not a single European country among the five countries receiving most of the world's refugees, Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran, and Jordan. Lebanon accommodates the highest percentage of refugees according to the inhabitants: 183 out of 1000 people are refugees,[12] but, nonetheless, Europeans are afraid of the "masses."

When it comes to religious diversity growing because of migration results are similar. Compared to religious diversity worldwide, Europe is still not diverse enough for Europeans to be afraid of being drowned by strangers. The Pew Research Center has developed a Religious Diversity Index (RDI). No European country reaches an RDI higher than 6 on a scale from 1 to 10.[13] Austria's RDI is 3.8, Germany's RDI is 5.3—but the political discussions force the impression of Europe having an RDI of 10. RDIs in Eastern European countries are even lower, but the fear of being "erased" by Muslims is exponentially higher. It

[7] See Walter Pohl, "Die Entstehung des europäischen Weges: Migration als Wiege Europas," in *Migration*, ed. Reinhard Neck and Heinrich Schmidinger (Wien: Böhlau, 2013), 27-44.

[8] International migrants are persons whose main residence has been located outside their native country for more than one year. See United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division, "Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration," *Statistical Papers Series M* 58/1 (1998), 18.

[9] See United Nations, *International Migration Report 2015* (New York: United Nations, 2016), available at http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2015_Highlights.pdf (accessed 05/2017).

[10] See the statistics compiled by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, available at http://www.unhcr.de/service/zahlen-und-statistiken.html (accessed 05/2017).

[11] Of course, there are only estimates for the numbers of this future crisis. See the statistics compiled by the International Displacement Monitoring Centre, available at http://www.internal-displacement.org/ (accessed 05/2017).

[12] See United Nations, *International Migration Report 2015*.

[13] See Pew Research Center: Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Global Religious Diversity 2014*, available at http://www.pewforum.org/2014/04/04/global-religious-diversity/ (accessed 05/2017).

seems that the less historical experience there is with religious diversity, the stronger is the fear of diversity. This lack of experience also refers to the European history of discriminating, expelling, and exterminating people of other than the majoritarian cultural or religious tradition. Although the majority of migrants in Europe and the European Union are still Christian,[14] the increase of religious diversity is attributed only to Muslims and thus considered a problem: Islam is perceived as "the" other, even "the" alien religion that does not belong to Europe.[15]

Neither the quantity nor the quality of flight and migration must necessarily lead to the fear witnessed all over Europe today. However, there are several and severe reasons to become fearful. Flight and migration are not accidental, but have concrete reasons: first, the global neoliberal economic regime, creating poverty, inequality, injustice, and consequently a spillover of superfluous people;[16] second, European consumerism—a life-style devastating shared resources which is sustainable only by battening on the poor;[17] and third, the wars in many parts of the world which to a large extent are also an inheritance from European colonialism and World War II[18]—including their current support by the Western military-industrial complex. None of these reasons were unknown before 2015, neither flight nor migrations were unforeseeable. In the report, *The first Global Revolution*, published by the Council of the Club of Rome in 1991, Alexander King already argued that

> It is more likely that population pressures, the lack of opportunities and conditions of tyranny and oppression will have generated waves of migration to the North and the West, which will be impossible to contain. Our successors are likely to see mass migrations on an unprecedented scale. Such movements have already begun… Mexicans slipping over the border into the United States, and Asians and Africans migrating to Europe. It is not difficult to imagine at a future date, innumerable hungry and desperate immigrants landing in their boats on the northern shores of the Mediterranean.[19]

[14] See Pew Research Center: Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Faith on the Move: The Religious Affiliation of International Migrants 2012*, available at http://www.pewforum.org/2012/03/08/religious-migration-exec/ (accessed 05/2017).
[15] Which is historically incorrect. See Michael Borgolte, *Christen, Juden, Muselmanen: Die Erben der Antike und der Aufstieg des Abendlandes 300 bis 1400 n. Chr.* (München: Siedler, 2006).
[16] See Saskia Sassen, *Expulsion: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
[17] See ibid.
[18] According to Dominique Moïsi, this history is one of the important reasons for Europe's fear of the foreigner as well as the resentment against Europe in the Near and Middle East. See Dominique Moïsi, *Kampf der Emotionen: Wie Kulturen der Angst, Demütigung und Hoffnung die Weltpolitik bestimmen* (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2009).
[19] Alexander King and Bertrand Schneider, *The First Global Revolution: A Report by the Council of the Club of Rome* (Telangana: Orient Longman, 1991), 42.

Last but not least, flight and migration break open borderlines of demographic categorization methods. Traditional concepts of the state, the nation, the ethnos or the law of the land are shattered. Here "super-diversification"[20] of global migration, fostering mobility and pluralization, changes the quality of migration. Contemporary options of mobility and communication facilitate transnational migration as well as multiple belongings and identities that no longer fit into the classic concepts of either being at home or staying abroad. A transnational revolution is taking place that transforms institutions, societies, cultures, and states as well as politics.[21] This revolution is part of the far-reaching processes of transformation that started in 1989. Since then there is a kind of war for a new hegemonic world order in which Europe is to lose influence and power.

Indeed, there are many reasons for Europe to be frightened. The extent and the consequences of the transformation processes are really threatening. However, instead of facing the real fears in order to strive for solutions it seems easier to hide within a quite diffuse "Angst," the (in)famous German angst, a kind of anxiety which can be abused to avoid dealing with real problems. With the support of politicians, who use these feelings for their interests,[22] fears are projected onto "the" refugees and migrants. This is quite easy because they have no political lobby and thus are more vulnerable to such public projections. So instead of fighting the reasons of flight and migration refugees and migrants are combated. They serve as scapegoats to avoid dealing with one's own responsibility for the global and local political situation. Hence the arrival of refugees and migrants proclaims "the end of the world as we know it." [23] And as we know from Greek mythology, instead of confronting bad news, it is easier to confront the messenger.

From a theological point of view, these contextual factors raise several questions: Are there hermeneutics which allow for the interpretation of the current global movements as an opportunity, a resource, even a sign of hope? Are there ways to deal with all the different forms of fear occurring in the context of flight and migration without putting the blame on refugees and migrants? Are there any narratives that would allow for meaning making amidst the current developments? Are there any normative criteria that offer orientation for the ethical and political issues within the context of flight and migration?

[20] See the video by Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, *Global Migration Patterns*, available at http://media.mmg.mpg.de/ (accessed 05/2017).
[21] See Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 7.
[22] See Ruth Wodak, *Politik mit der Angst: Zur Wirkung rechtspopulistischer Diskurse* (Vienna: Konturen, 2016).
[23] Baumann, *Strangers at Our Door*, 16.

Types and Meanings of Migration [Level 2]

The concept of migration can be applied to a variety of different phenomena: geographical mobility, permanent emigration or immigration, temporary movements for migratory (seasonal) work, peregrinations within the life circle, and compulsory forms of migration like flight, expulsion, displacement, and deportation or transnational migration which means migration as a permanent lifestyle. All these types of migration differ from each other in structural ways and have diverse consequences and impacts on the migrants as well as on the sending and receiving countries. Migration also differs in organizational structures. For instance, recruiting migrants actively for the local labor market differs from sending for migrants' families or undocumented migration. There are diverse motives of flight and migration which can reach from autonomous decisions to total structural compulsion, induced by political pressure or economic violence.[24]

Definitions of so called "migrants" are similarly diverse. While the United Nations define "international migrants" as persons who have been residing outside their native country for more than one year, in Austria and Germany people can be considered migrants up to the third, even fourth generation. They are called people with "Migrationshintergrund (migration background)." In Austria, such a person is defined as someone whose father or mother was born in a foreign country.[25] Given that there are different understandings of the concept of migrant in every country, one has to be careful when interpreting academic and non-academic media reports. In Austria, a variety of persons in very different situations, including different and diverse legal statuses, are subsumed under this polyvalent word. Talking about flight and migration thus requires a careful use of all these concepts, not only because they have practical consequences concerning political rights, legal status or sociocultural recognition, but also because being a "migrant" can be a stigma.[26] Whoever develops theories on flight and migration has to be aware of the fact that many refugees and migrants do not want to be reduced to this definition, having experienced that being perceived as a migrant can lead to humiliation and exclusion. Discussing flight and migration is never a neutral issue. Whom do the hypotheses and theories on migration support? Whose interests are served?

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[24] See Christoph Reinprecht and Hilde Weiss, "Migration und Integration: Soziologische Perspektiven und Erklärungsansätze," in *Migrations- und Integrationsforschung – multidisziplinäre Perspektiven: Ein Reader*, ed. Heinz Fassmann and Julia Dahlvik (Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2012), 15-16.

[25] See Österreichischer Integrationsfonds, *Statistisches Jahrbuch Migration & Integration: Zahlen. Daten. Indikatoren 2015* (Vienna: Statistik Austria, 2015), 22-15.

[26] See Bernhard Perchinig, "Migration, Integration, Staatsbürgerschaft – was taugen die Begriffe noch?," in *Integration in Österreich: Sozialwissenschaftliche Befunde*, ed. Herbert Langtaler (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2010), 13-33.

These questions are crucial for defining human beings "on the move." However, they are also relevant for the interpretation of the phenomenon of migration, given that the *meaning* of migration has neither been as negative nor as exploited for political interests as in today's public discourse. In the 19th century, for instance, migration was considered a privilege for educated people and therefore played an important part in many a "Bildungsroman."[27] As a historical constant migration also promoted demographic and economic growth as well as social and cultural transformation and progress—in spite of the political and social conflicts, oppression, violence, and war to which phenomena of migration have always been connected.[28] What human flourishing, then, could have been or could be possible in all areas—in economy, politics, culture, as well as social and religious life—if migration was perceived as a potential rather than a problem, a force for innovation?

Migration can also be considered a "mirror"[29] because most of the migrants' problems are also problems for some parts of the autochthonous population and, consequently, for society as a whole. For instance, the discussion about the so-called "Bildungsferne" in German speaking countries, the problem of under- if not un-educated persons who have difficulties with writing and reading, is not just related to migrants, but also to significant parts of the majority population. Thus, migrants' problems often make visible what issues society as a whole is facing. Seen from the perspective of the theory of inclusion,[30] migration can therefore enable society and politics to identify those structures, processes, institutions, and persons in the social, political, economic, juridical, educational, cultural, and religious realm that restrict, damage or destroy the life of all people in society. Migration can be seen as a hermeneutical tool. As a consequence, society can learn to interpret problems made visible by migration as opportunities for change. Migration can help the receiving countries to learn about their internal problems and thus provoke processes of transformation. It is a vital opportunity for *all* members of a society to deepen their theoretical and practical understanding of justice: to fight for the dignity of each person, to foster participation in societal institutions, and to establish structures for the recognition of diversity.[31]

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[27] See *Literatur und Migration*, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Munich: Text + Kritik, 2006).

[28] See Massimo Livi Bacci, *Kurze Geschichte der Migration* (Berlin: Wagenbach Verlag, 2015); *Enzyklopädie Migration in Europa*: *Vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Klaus Bade (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007); and Jochen Oltmer, *Globale Migration: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2016).

[29] Vilém Flusser, *Von der Freiheit des Migranten: Einsprüche gegen den Nationalismus* (Braunschweig: Bollmann, 1994), 30 (my translation).

[30] See *Politik der Inklusion und Exklusion*, ed. Ilker Ataç and Sieglinde Rosenberger (Vienna: Vandenhoeck, 2013).

[31] See *Kultur der Anerkennung: Würde – Gerechtigkeit – Partizipation für Schulkultur, Schulentwicklung und Religion*, ed. Martin Jäggle, Thomas Krobath, Helena Stockinger, and Robert Schelander (Baltmannsweiler: Hohengehren, 2013).

Of course, this is an enormous challenge because it demands far-reaching change in both perception and practice; but if this challenge is accepted, the common effort of a society can turn migration into a "window"[32] through which a possible world can be seen where persons of diverse social, cultural, and religious identities can learn to live together in peace and justice. Can theology contribute to a solution of these challenging tasks?

Migration as a Driving Force for Socio-Religious Transformation [Level 2]

Migration is neither the cause nor the source for the current global transformation processes, but it accelerates them. Hence, the socio-religious diversification confronting Europe today is not caused by migration alone, but also by the increasing secularization and the increasing economization of religion, as well as the semantic transformation of what people mean by "religion." Migration is just one dimension in this process, making the challenge of learning to live in difference more visible. Crucially, religious pluralization is not only caused by Muslims (as media and politicians often suggest); rather, in some European metropoles—cities such as Hamburg or Rotterdam—the majority of Christians are coming from outside rather than inside Europe.[33] Accordingly, experts are talking about the "De-Christianization of European Christianity."[34] Migration also transforms the quality of the majority's religion: migrants bring new religious topics, interpretations, and practices and therefore can vitalize autochthonous religious communities. Mission and converts can renew the inhabitants' religion through their "strange" ideas such that new communities might be founded.

Migration does not cause the process of pluralization, but stimulates reflection on it. Peter L. Berger raises two important questions in this context. How can religions coexist? And how can the religious and the secular coexist?[35] Even if most people—migrants and non-migrants alike—do not live in the strong dichotomy of a religious *or* a secular identity, this plural dualism has consequences for the political management of religion as well as the peaceful conviviality of human beings. Hence, the question of the perception, the interpretation, and the handling of plurality is the core issue of modern societies in Europe.

For theology this means to reflect on the *theological* dignity of diversification and plurality. Is it possible to recognize the otherness of the other in one's own *religious* terms?

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[32] Flusser, *Von der Freiheit des Migranten*, 30 (my translation).

[33] See Arnd Bünker, "Migrationsgemeinden als Sehhilfe: Überlegungen zur veränderten Realität des Christlichen in Mitteleuropa," in *Religion und Bildung in Kirche und Gesellschaft: Festschrift für Norbert Mette*, ed. Gottfried Bitter and Martina Blasberg-Kuhnke (Würzburg: Echter, 2011), 85-92.

[34] See Giancarlo Collet, "Gemeinsam das Evangelium verkünden," in *Gerechtigkeit und Pfingsten: Viele Christentümer und die Aufgabe einer Missionswissenschaft*, ed. Arnd Bünker, Eva Mundanjohl, Ludger Weckel, and Thomas Suermann (Ostfildern: Grünewald, 2010), 242-266.

[35] See Peter L. Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

What is the *theological* meaning of the experiences of otherness, diversity, and strangeness? Since these questions and experiences also raise doubts concerning any absolute truth, many religious people are frightened by them. This may be one of the reasons why migration is interpreted as a threat to religious identity. In times of global and local crisis the demand to change one's religious attitudes can be threatening, as for many people religion might be the only stable anchor in a dangerous world.

A Biblical-Theological Approach [Level 1]

The Global Context [Level 2]

What is required in the context of global migration is a theology of the history of migration. Such a theology is risky, given that the meta-narratives plotted by many theologies of history have legitimized and led to a tremendous amount of violence. Theology has been used to authorize political power. Adolf Hitler was applying a "theological" hermeneutics in order to argue for his policies when he assumed a "divine predestination (*Vorsehung*)" for his mission.[36] He considered himself an instrument of God, putting divine plans into practice. Hence, theologians have to be careful when they reflect on the meaning of global migration, especially when they try to offer a positive perception. A theology of migration which attempts and aims to see migration as a sign of hope can all too easily result in a cynical story, ignoring the violence and suffering within migration histories. At the same time, Christian theology cannot avoid asking for the meaning of history. Christians believe in a God who reveals Godself in concrete historical conditions, redeeming humanity already now. The account of the history of salvation, then, must include migration.

The stories in the Bible prevent theology from reducing the meaning of migration to a catastrophe. Ethical monotheism, developed by the writers of the books of the Old Testament, is learned step-by-step over the course of centuries. It has its roots in phenomena of migration: displacement, deportation, and diaspora. Migration is the *locus theologicus* of biblical theology: the place where theology is generated. It is reflected upon with profundity.[37] In the Old Testament, migration phenomena are considered bad because they mean suffering, violence, murder, and death. Migration is often seen as a consequence of sin, especially as the

[36] See Friedrich Heer, *Der Glaube des Adolf Hitler: Anatomie einer politischen Religiosität* (Vienna: Ullstein 1968); Rainer Bucher, *Hitlers Theologie* (Würzburg: Echter, 2008).
[37] See Regina Polak, "Migration: Heimkehr zu Gott und seiner Sozialordnung," *Dialog-DuSiach* 104 (2016), 21-38.

result of injustice and the betrayal of God. For example, Deuteronomy reflects on the exile in Babylon, where the people of Israel had been deported after the destruction of Israel. Living in the diaspora they start to ask for an explanation of their situation. First, Israel has broken its covenant with the God of their fathers. The people worshipped idols, thus forgetting about JHWH. Second, they did not care for justice in their society according to their law so that poverty grew throughout Israel. The destruction and deportation of Israel are the consequences of these sins. Israel has to repent in order to turn back to the Torah. The fruit of these reflections is the development of ethical monotheism characterized by two main principles. To avoid a catastrophe like this in the future, JHWH has to be worshipped truly and the people are obliged to establish a just society. For this purpose, Israel develops laws for the religious cult and for society. Taking responsibility for the poor, the widows, and the orphans as well as for the strangers is at the heart of the law. It serves as an indicator as to whether the people of Israel are or are not loyal to JHWH. Practicing faith in God is connected to the responsibility for justice.

Accordingly, the theology of migration is the result of a learning process within the context of migration. The suffering is not legitimized spiritually, but perceived as a commitment to learn in religious as well as political terms. The concrete socio-political situation becomes the context for questions about the religious meaning of migration. Crucially, the results are practical. The learning process consists of indispensable elements: first, perceiving the initial situation as it is, including all the bad and evil, all the suffering; second, exploring one's own contribution to this situation, which includes recognizing one's own guilt; third, remembering history and the religious tradition and re-learning it in the light of the current tragedy; fourth, being willing to repent and being open to transformation. Through this complex process, the people become able to develop new ways of religious and political life.

Moreover, the theology of migration is the result of a spiritual and an ethical learning process. This learning process can be detected in most of the biblical stories of the Old Testament. The experience of the exodus is the source of this theology. Even if the biblical account is not accurate in historical-critical terms,[38] the story of the escape from slavery in Egypt becomes the core narrative of the people of Israel. The flight from a brutal religious and political regime becomes the center of migration theology. This experience is the point of departure for asking about God and the ethical and political implications of one's faith. The learning outcome is the conviction that only God is the Lord of history such that human

[38] See Jan Assmann, *Exodus: Die Revolution der Alten Welt* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2015), 57-71, 105.

beings are not allowed to rule over each other through violence or exploit each other for personal interests. All the famous so called "Judeo-Christian" values to which public and political discourses refer repeatedly are created in this process of reflection: the dignity and equality of every human being (Gen. 1), because migrants are not a mass of people but persons with biographies; the experience of the unity of humanity (Gen. 10), because migrants and non-migrants are all members of the human family; the dignity of the stranger and the duty to love her or him (Lev. 19, 34 and many parallels), because the people of Israel had been strangers and slaves themselves but were liberated by God. Migration history is the root of the obligation to care for the poor while recognizing difference.[39] Taking the catastrophe of the destruction and deportation of Israel as a stimulus, the people of Israel transformed the curse of migration into a blessing. In the biblical tradition, this turn includes a practical agenda because spiritual experience and political learning are not separated. In this way, the logic of salvation can be learned.

The theology of migration is not an abstract theory, but learned step by step under different and diverse circumstances. It has to be remembered and renewed again and again because the people of God fail consistently, forgetting their "principles." In order to avoid this forgetting, memorizing and studying become central institutions for the Jewish people. The practices of memorizing help to learn hope in difficult and devastating situations. Hope therefore is not just optimism, but the mental and practical orientation during hard times that there is a meaning to everything that happens, a meaning which will become clear in the end. Theologically speaking, it means not to lose one's orientation towards God, being convinced that the Lord will help. Such hope is well educated, eminently practical, and can be learnt through training. It follows an inner spiritual logic: since it has been possible to transform catastrophes into new life in the past, such transformation will be possible in the time to come. Since God kept his promise to liberate his people in the past, God will do so in the future, in spite of their sins. However, the help of God is connected to the actions of human beings.

This rationale can also be found in a variety of books of the New Testament, especially in the Gospels. The members of the communities behind the Gospels and Epistles were neither migrants nor refugees, but the socio-political circumstances in which they were living were also difficult and even disastrous. Within these communities there were many families who had lost members to the prosecution of Christians by the Roman Empire. Many Jewish Christians had been crucified by the Roman government. The temple in Jerusalem was

[39] During Sabbath, every member of the house is free to concelebrate: the slaves, the strangers, even the animals. See Ex. 20:10; Deut. 5:14.

destroyed— a disaster for both Jews and Jewish Christians for whom the loss of their spiritual and ritual center meant a loss of hope. Within the pagan surrounding they were treated as strangers. Under these circumstances, the Jewish Christians did what Jews had always done to cope with a crisis: they remembered their narratives, utilizing them as hermeneutical tools to interpret the current situation. In accordance with their migrant ancestors, they took the situation as a moment for living and learning faith. Since these narratives helped to draw hope from the long history the Jews shared with God, the Jewish Christians dared to trust in the old promises again and anew: God has liberated his people in the past, God will liberate them again in the future. The core of the traditions of the Jewish Christians implied that God is capable of creating new life amidst complete despair. In the story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Jewish experience becomes concrete again. The "new" faith is a result of remembering and interpreting their tradition with their scriptures, with the Torah and the Prophets. Crucially, the stories that re-open redemption in the current crisis are the stories of migrants.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the migratory hermeneutic shaped many stories of early Christians. For instance, Jesus and the disciples led the life of itinerant preachers in Galilee among the poor. Jesus described himself as homeless (Lk. 9:58). Luke tells us that the life of the savior starts in the social periphery of a strange city, rather than in the center of the political and religious power. Matthew uses the motive of the flight to Egypt to show the deep connection of Jesus of Nazareth to Israel: Jesus has to be liberated by God, brought out of Egypt (Mt. 2:13-15).[40] The association with Moses is evident. However, Egypt can nonetheless be seen as a place of redemption, because Jesus crosses borders, becoming the Messiah of all the Jewish as well as the non-Jewish people. Hence, the pagans are now able to connect with Israel, thus finding their way to JHWH. Again, a migrant turns out to be the *locus theologicus* for the revelation of God. Moreover, the disciples of Jesus are asked to live without a stable home, as homeless people, in order to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Heb. 11:13 and 1 Pet. 2:11 explain that the experience of being a stranger and a guest is a constitutive dimension of belonging to the Christian community. In Eph. 2:19 the concept of "πάροικοι", the Greek word for migrants with a right of residence, is used to interpret the identity of Christians with pagan origin. Because of the redemption of Jesus Christ, they are no longer strangers without any civil rights, but full citizens among the holy people and housemates of God. The reconciliation between Jews and non-Jews thus is described with the hermeneutics of migration. Last but not least, encountering a stranger means encountering

[40] See Thomas Söding, "Das Refugium des Messias: Die Flucht der Heiligen Familie nach Ägypten," *Communio* 4 (2015), 343-354.

Jesus Christ himself (Mt. 25). Accordingly, biblical stories can be seen as stories of how to live and learn faith. Many of these learning processes took place in the context of the experience of migration. It is within the context of crisis, then, that theology is born.

Nonetheless, the experience of migration is not necessary to learn about God. Refugees and migrants are not nearer to God than other human beings. As we also see in the Bible, there are "good" and "bad" people, victims and victimizers, among them. However, the experience of migration allows for the intensification of some of the experiences that enable us to experience God:[41] powerlessness, dependence, fragility, vulnerability. The experience of being excluded can facilitate the possibility as well as the ability to ask for God and to thus become aware of God's presence. Of course, settled people can also experience God in such a way, but for them it might be harder as they can rely on their own security. Also, experiences of being a stranger seem to be seminal sources for sustained spiritual practice and theological reflection. Learning processes do not happen automatically, neither for migrants nor for non-migrants, but there are conditions we can learn from the biblical stories: one has to be ready to criticize oneself, willing to remember and to repent, and open to transformation. One has to be prepared to ask what current occurrences mean for *oneself* and for *oneself with others*. What does God demand from *me*, from *us*? What is *my*, what is *our* responsibility in this situation? Which kind of transformation am *I*, are *we* asked for?

Crucially, these questions are the central questions for Europe today, facing flight and migration. The curse of migration today could be turned into a blessing if Europeans were willing to enter a process of remembering and learning. It is obvious that this is not an easy task and requires a lot of courage. It is hard because Europe's economic and political system is not on the side of the migrants, but rather comparable to Egypt or Babylon. For Europeans, then, the challenges are different, but the dynamics at the heart of these challenges might be the same.

Types and Meanings of Migration [Level 2]

The Bible is ripe with migrants and non-migrants. Of course, the types, the reasons, and the meanings of migration are different from today and cannot easily be compared with our current situation. However, what we can learn from these stories is how to perceive and interpret flight and migration. More important than separating human beings into migrants and non-migrants, more important than defining human beings according to their ethnical origin or social belonging, is the uniqueness of every human being. We find long lists of

[41] "God" in this sense is not a philosophical or theological idea, but a vivid reality.

names in the Bible because no human being shall be forgotten. We learn about foreigners and strangers behaving the way God wants human beings to behave—examples are Ruth and the Roman solider of Capernaum—human beings who therefore belong to the people of God. Moreover, migrants and non-migrants need each other: the young Jewish-Christian movement around Jesus would not have survived without the support of the settled communities, but the migration experience has a deep influence on how human beings and humankind are interpreted: in the end, all human beings are strangers on earth. They yearn for a home, but this home is the relationship with God. The earth does not belong to humanity; it is a gift that has to be protected carefully. Even the promised Holy Land is just a gift, bound to the fulfillment of the Torah.

Migration is thus an important matrix for the biblical interpretation of history and anthropology. It leads to ethical and political consequences, such as the connection between worship and the conditions for a just society, that will become fruitful for humanity. This is the task for the people of God, Jews and Christians alike.

Migration as a Driving Force for Socio-Religious Transformation [Level 2]

The idea that migration is a driving force for social and religious transformation has deep roots in biblical stories. Migration forces us to transform the social, cultural, political, and religious situation. The experience of migration might allow for the recognition of diversity. Already in Genesis 1 the plurality of creation is perceived both as a given and as a gift. But the authors of the biblical stories are not naïve: the story of the tower of Babylon (Gen. 11) points to the ambivalence of diversity, where the diversity of languages is experienced as something painful because people cannot understand each other. However, biblical theologian Jürgen Ebach has demonstrated that the dispersion of humanity can be interpreted as a way to protect human beings from abusing each other to build a totalitarian project everybody has to serve and submit to.[42] The difference of languages, then, helps human beings not to understand each other too quickly. It makes communication necessary, thus protecting the uniqueness and individuality of every human being. Difference is seen as something painful, but at the same time it is recognized as the precondition of learning. For Europe, accepting that plurality as given allows us to interpret diversity and difference as values contributing to human flourishing. This is one of the most important challenges today.

[42] Jürgen Ebach, "Globalisierung – Rettung der Vielfalt: Die Erzählung vom 'Turmbau zu Babel' im aktuellen Kontext," in *Weltentfremdung, Weltoffenheit, Alternativen der Moderne: Perspektiven aus Wissenschaft – Religion – Kunst*, ed. Hartmut Schröter (Münster: LIT, 2008), 39-58. For a similar account, see also Ched Myers, "Cultural Diversity and Deep Social Ecology: Genesis 11 and Acts 2," in *Our God is Undocumented: Biblical Faith and Immigrant Justice*, ed. Ched Myers and Matthew Colwell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012), 17-36.

The Catholic Teaching on Migration [Level 1]

Building on the biblical tradition, the Catholic Church has developed a theology of migration. The Papal Instruction, *Erga migrantes caritas Christi – The love of Christ toward migrants*, is one of the seminal sources for the current situation.[43] In the Catholic Church migration is considered a "sign of the times": "We can therefore consider the present-day phenomenon of migration a significant 'sign of the times,' a challenge to be discovered and utilised in our work to renew humanity and proclaim the gospel of peace."[44] In Catholic teaching a "sign of the times" is a historical event that transforms the mindset of the majority of the members of a society. Seen through the eyes of faith, this event can be perceived as a situation in which God reveals Godself, thus transforming it into an experience of grace. Of course, migration as such is not a place of grace. This interpretation would be rather cynical. However, migration can turn or be turned into an experience of grace if it is interpreted as a challenge to proclaim the gospel of peace which sets a practical agenda. *Erga migrantes* shows the same logic as the biblical tradition, translated into contemporary times. A "sign of the times" simultaneously encourages and demands human activity.

The document goes even further: "The passage from monocultural to multicultural societies can be a sign of the living presence of God in history and in the community of mankind, for it offers a providential opportunity for the fulfilment of God's plan for a universal communion."[45] Through this process of transformation, then, God Godself can be experienced. This experience is inextricably interwoven with practical duties:

> Therefore Christians are called to give witness to and practice not only the spirit of tolerance – itself a great achievement, politically and culturally speaking, not to mention religiously – but also respect for the other's identity. Thus, where it is possible and opportune, they can open a way towards sharing with people of different origins and cultures, also in view of a 'respectful proclamation' of their own faith. We are all therefore called to a culture of solidarity, often solicited by the Magisterium, so as to achieve together a real communion of persons. This is the laborious path that the Church invites everyone to follow.[46]

[43] Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Instruction Erga migrantes caritas Christi – The love of Christ towards migrants* (Vatican State: Vatican, 2004).
[44] Ibid., thesis 14.
[45] Ibid., thesis 9.
[46] Ibid.

The Catholic Church knows that it recommends a difficult and demanding process of learning, a process which has political ramifications. Hence, *Erga Migrantes* reflects on migration not only from a hermeneutical perspective, but also from ethical and political angles:

> International migration must therefore be considered an important structural component of the social, economic and political reality of the world today. The large numbers involved call for closer and closer collaboration between countries of origin and destination, in addition to adequate norms capable of harmonising the various legislative provisions. The aim of this would be to safeguard the needs and rights of the emigrants and their families and, likewise, those of the societies receiving them. At the same time, however, migration raises a truly ethical question: the search for a new international economic order for a more equitable distribution of the goods of the earth.[47]

Accordingly, the theology of migration elaborated in *Erga migrantes* paints a picture of the future through remembering the biblical narratives in a way that allows for their application to the current situation according to a biblical logic:

> Foreigners are also a visible sign and an effective reminder of that universality which is a constituent element of the Catholic Church. A vision of Isaiah announced this: 'In the days to come the mountain of the temple of Yahweh shall tower above the mountains… All the nations will stream to it' (Is 2:2). In the Gospel our Lord Himself prophesied that 'people from east and west, from north and south, will come to take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God' (Lk 13:29), and the Apocalypse sees 'a huge number… from every nation, race, tribe and language' (Ap 7:9). The Church is now toiling on its way to this final goal; today's migrations can remind us of this 'huge number' and be seen as a call and prefiguration of the final meeting of all humanity with God and in God.[48]

This perspective can give hope, enabling and equipping people to experience the current challenges not as a problem but as the point of departure for the creation of a better world. At the same time, the Church points out that international migration is rooted in "sin," emphasizing the "deep split" in humanity. However, by taking migration as an opportunity to become active in the history of salvation, sin can be healed. This is the deep hope of the Church, according to the biblical memory. It is an ambitious spiritual conclusion with a potentially enormous political impact.

[47] Ibid., thesis 8.
[48] Ibid., thesis 17.

Consequences? [Level 1]

Of course, neither the biblical stories nor the biblical law can be applied directly to today's global and local challenges. The contexts are completely different. In biblical times, there were no international movements, no nation states, and no political borders. There were fewer people, no global economy, and no military weapons with global reach. Moreover, reasons for migration were as different as social and cultural frameworks. Also, the teaching of the Catholic Church cannot be applied directly onto each and every situation in the same way. Neither the Bible nor the Papal Instruction offer a political program. However, they can suggest a way of describing and dealing with the challenge of flight and migration. Through the co-operation between migrants and non-migrants, populations and governments, societal institutions, and experts they have to be translated into current contexts to become and to be helpful. Theological perspectives on flight and migration remind us of important spiritual, ethical, and political principles that have been learned in the course of history. Reflecting on migration theologically can show that solutions to contemporary problems are to be found by remembering history, learning within new contexts, asking for the different responses and responsibilities, thus being willing to transform one's way of living. Theology can contribute to a resource-oriented approach to migration by reminding us of the origin of the values of human dignity, the unity of mankind, and the juridical and political recognition of the stranger, asking for God. Perceiving migration as a possibility to learn justice, peace, and living together in diversity, perhaps also as a possibility to learn about God, can give people hope in difficult situations. Theology does not trivialize the tragedies of flight and migration, but it can show how catastrophes can be transformed into chances for human flourishing.