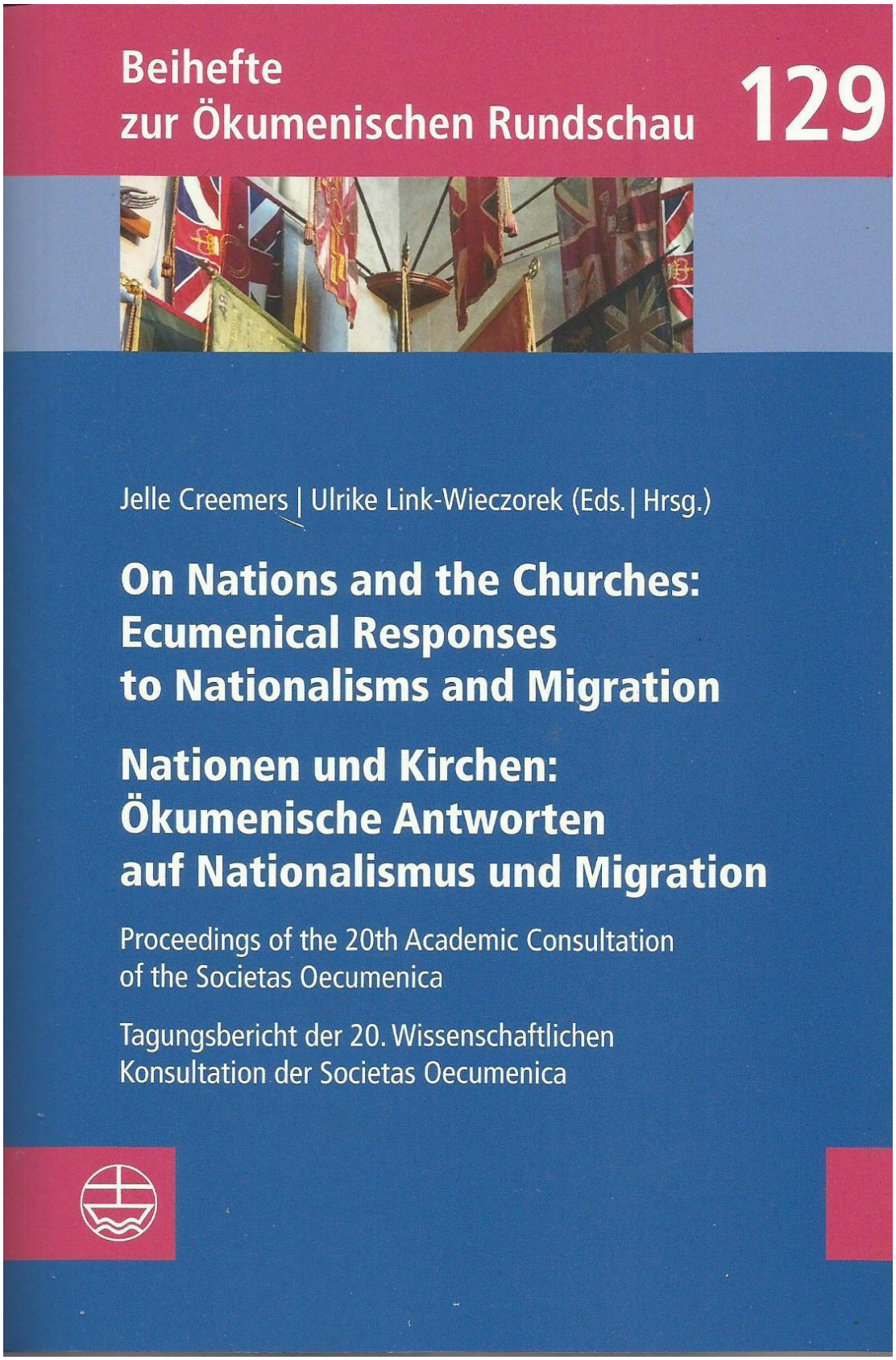
Ecumenical responses to Nationalisms and Migration



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Introduction



In the Consultation (23-29. August 2018) of the Societas Oecumenica in Ludwigshafen and Heidelberg on Nations and the Churches, various ecumenical responses were given to Nationalisms and Migration. There were many workshops. In the following, the reader will find the texts of one of the workshops with two Hungarian ecumenical speakers: the Lutheran Dr. Hab. Péter Szentpétery, Senior Lecturer at the Lutheran Theological University in Budapest and the Roman Catholic Dr. Hab. Mihály Kránitz, Dean of the Pázmány Péter University in Budapest. It was a rather tense workshop.

I am Dr. Margriet Gosker, a Dutch Ecumenical Theologian, and I am a member of the Societas Oecumenica. I also was the leader of this specific workshop. I responded to both Hungarian contributions. The contribution of Mihály Kránitz is surprisingly not included in Jelle Cremers and Ulrike Link-Wieczorek (eds.), *Proceedings of the 20th Academic Consultation of the Societas Oecumenica*, but it is published here. Both contributions (of Mihály Kránitz and that of Péter Szentpétery) and both responses of Margriet Gosker are included in the following document. The discussions within the group were rather tough.

I hope the reader will realise, that my questions in response to Dr. Péter Szentpétery were helpful and some of his answers are already included in his contribution. This is why ecumenical meetings are so important. We learn from each other and we inspire the thoughts of one another. And then we sometimes choose other formulations than before, or add some new thoughts.

That is what Péter did and therefore – as you can see – my questions do not always fit with the present text of Péter. According to my first question: Péter does not speak now of a ‘European Super State’ any more in his new text and he does not use the word ‘oppression’ any longer. His working title in Ludwigshafen was *Creation, Humankind and Nations. National States and Migration Crisis in Europe.* It explains why some of my questions look a bit curious now, but I am sure that our cooperation was fruitful.

Margriet Gosker

The Bell Rings

A Hungarian (Roman Catholic) Point of View

Mihály Kránitz

The bell rings… the bell rings for something, or rather the bell rings for somebody! We are trying to find an answer to this question within the framework of a short talk, according to the theme of our conference focusing on the present social situation the roots of which go back deep into the past. It is important to note that – as we can see on the basis Holy Scripture – God intended humankind to live in a community, in unity as a single folk. In the Old Testament one chosen folk became God's people carrying His promises, and in the New Testament the Church took over this role.



Let us examine history and learn from it in order to understand what the notions of nation and people mean for us in the context of Christianity. Back to the Old Testament, we can see that the Jews spent more than 400 years in Egypt, and yet they did not integrate.[20] The people did not become Egyptian or polytheistic in the course of centuries, they kept their identity, even though at that time Egypt was regarded as the 'West', as the modern world. In the New Testament times we can see something similar with Christians: in the Roman Empire they did not become 'Romans', i.e. polytheistic. They accepted martyrdom instead, and, eventually, they made the empire of many nations become Christian. Christianity developed in a rich liturgical diversity among the folks of different traditions, and, in addition, it created culture in the different branches of fine arts.

Diognetus

It is extremely interesting how the early Christian letter to Diognetus describes the presence and the tasks of Christians among a given people: "Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. Their

[20] The length of sojourning in Egypt varies in different records: Gen 15:13 (400 years); Exodus 12:40 (430 years); in Stephen's speech 400 years (Acts 7:6); in Apostle Paul's speech 450 years (Acts 13:20).

teaching is not based upon reveries inspired by the curiosity of men. Unlike some other people, they champion no purely human doctrine. With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign. And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labour under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country."[21]

This world today is practically uninterpretable without Christianity. The phenomena like e.g. migration which decisively influence the whole of modern Europe cannot be simplified to the question of the 'filling up' of Europe struggling with demography and employment problems. It is not so simple, because there is a people, a religion, a culture and a tradition behind each person, which decides their thinking, acts and their belonging to a nation. Since 2015 we have been witnessing a new migration wave. It is mostly from Islamic countries that refugees come from: either from war zones or there also economic refugees coming in the hope of a more prolific life.

The influence of colonization

There is another fact we must take into account, and this is Conquered lands were exploited, indigenous people were exterminated, and remote countries were occupied. Besides conquerors there were also church people arriving at remote lands: Catholics, Anglicans and the representatives of different Protestant churches. They intended to proclaim the gospel and embrace new peoples into the single folk of God. But the churches realized that they could not pursue mission against each other. This was later the message of Edinburgh at the World Missionary Conference in 1910. This was when Christianity entered into adulthood. It covered the way from the power of might to the strength of the gospel.

The Unity of the Church and the Unity of all Mankind

Our aim cannot be anything else than unity. The unity of the Church and the unity of all mankind. These two are closely related, because each and every person is invited to be a member of God's people. The bell rings for every one of us! Although members of different nations, we belong together, we are connected by human existence.

[21] From a letter to Diognetus (Nn5-6; Funk 397-398). http://www.vatican.va/spirit/documents/spirit_20010522_diogneto_en.html [accessed 04-08-2018].

All things considered, the question of migration does not have to be solved by the churches, today it is rather a political than a church issue. However, from a Christian point of view it is clear that if we see somebody in need, we should help them. On the Day of Judgement we will be asked: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All the nations will be assembled before him and he will separate men one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome…" and so on …[22] It is worth noticing that all *nations* will be assembled before the Lord. Belonging to a nation, a people, has a value before God. This gives you real character; you can identify with something if your human entity has roots and traditions.

One more example: the Apostle Paul organizes collection for the Jerusalem community.[23] The contribution was taken to Jerusalem, i.e**.** the Corinthians helped the Jerusalem community on the spot.[24] Earlier missionaries used to go from Europe to remote countries, nowadays we often experience that Christians from remote countries come to missionize us.

Pope Francis

Pope Francis explained today's Europe in the European Parliament on 25 November 2014. "In many quarters we encounter a general impression of weariness and aging, of a Europe which is now a 'grandmother', no longer fertile and vibrant. As a result, the great ideas which once inspired Europe seem to have lost their attraction, only to be replaced by the bureaucratic technicalities of its institutions."[25] As a matter of fact, Europe has nothing to give other nations if it resigns from its Christian roots. Technological development, modern life, freedom and entertainment have become values. Whole countries have broken off the traditional family models. People belonging to one nation and one religion are made to lose their identity by the false glitter of commercials, shops and abundance. The media and smart phones show everything through the world-wide web to the people living in the 'global village', whatever culture they may belong to. And, unfortunately, they show both good and bad alike. European churches,

[22] Matth 25:31-35.
[23] 2 Cor 8:10.
[24] 1 Cor 16:1-3.
[25] http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141125_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.html [accessed 04-08-2018].

European Christianity need to be reinvigorated. The bell is now ringing for us here in Ludwigshafen.

Laudato si

Ecumenism has a future because the churches can act together in the fields of faith and morals. We must courageously represent Christian faith and morals, even if regarded at present as 'old-fashioned', in the fields of family, nation and people living together. The Church has a social teaching, which can serve as guideline for acting. From a Catholic part, it is Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter *Laudato si* on care for our common home.[26] A testimony is necessary for the new generation living in the digital world. This generation does not often find its own homeland, people or family. We can provide social welfare for the newcomers, even until the end of their lives, because our economic power allows us to. But we must regard the person, too, who comes from a certain nation and tradition – what do we give them?

Manipulation

Of course, we must take 'manipulation' into account, because many take financial advantage on human trafficking when they tear out the young generation from their environment and mislead them with false promises. Nothing is dear to them, not even the lives lost in the Mediterranean. One thing is important: their victims, whom they 'launch' in deplorable boats, should pay. These people are uprooted from their traditions, families and their own folk and in the European abundant societies burn out, become lonely and are often ousted to ghettos, because the receiving country is only outwardly receiving.

What is real humaneness?

Christ was also a wanderer. Together with his disciples he put himself under the care of benevolent people. "It is the spirit that gives life" teaches Jesus.[27] Can we give spirit to the newcomers? Carrying food to their own place of birth might as well be solved. But weapon production is a bigger business.[28] Pope Francis openly protests against this.

[26] http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html [accessed 4 August 2018].

[27] John 6:63.

[28] "It's hypocritical to speak of peace while fueling the arms trade, which only serves the "merchants of death," exacerbating wars not fought to "solve a problem" but to benefit the weapons industry." https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2017/06/03/pope-franciss-prayer-stop-merchts-death/ .

Why do migrants flee?

Let us now pose the question of what migrants give us, as they are asked by nobody: What would you like? Why have you left your homeland? Why are mostly men coming as migrants? Why are strong, energetic people leaving their countries, leaving women and parents behind? There are several answers. They flee from wars, from weapons manufactured by western countries. There are economic refugees among them. They do not want us, neither our culture nor perhaps our religion. They want welfare, because at home they lacked it. The European Union wants to solve its demographic plight by receiving migrants. Others see manpower in them. There is labour shortage in the car factories. Europe refuses to do physical work. These people want to keep their religion. They remain together, because they can keep their identity in this way. They build mosques, marry among each other, they do not want to mingle – this is forbidden by the rules of their religions. And they often interpret European military interventions as a war of religion.

To turn towards them with love…

At the same time, it is a question, who to carry on a dialogue with? There is no single Islam. What is to be done? The churches are to join their forces: talk about the phenomenon, organize local aids, provide for health care, education and employment possibilities locally, act for the society together, demolish prejudices, and finally, to turn towards them with love. "The bell rings", the phenomenon calls us to wake up. Because all this may be about me, too? We can learn something from the migrants! They can have their opinions about us. The question is, whether we recognize the 'signs of times'. Do we seek God's will in the events? Or do we simply see a technical problem in the migration of our time? As from the time of Abraham throughout thousands of years yes, there is a future for the people, the nation, the family, the communities, the churches. What we have to offer is the gospel of Christ. We are also commanded to do so: "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation."[29] Let us ask the Holy Spirit that when the bell rings, it may wake us up to stronger faith and genuine activity, building the Church of Christ, in order to be able to experience something of the new creation, where "all peoples and nations became his servants"[30] and praise the Lamb, whose light the nations will walk by.[31]

[29] Mk. 16:15.
[30] Dan. 7:14.
[31] Rev. 21:24.

What is the balance between Identity and Caritas?

Questions in Response to Mihály Kránitz

Margriet Gosker



Many thanks for your contribution from a Hungarian Roman Catholic point of view. I am honoured I was invited to give you some response from a Dutch protestant point of view. I may pose some questions and remarks now.

1. All churches agree that our Christian faith has a transnational character, but the thing is: to what extent does it relate to the fact that we all live in national states and have our own national identities? I am a Christian and I am Dutch. You are a Christian and you are Hungarian. Looking at The Netherlands I see strong secularism and a complete separation between Church and State. Looking at Hungary I hear other things. In Hungary there seems to be a stronger link between State and Church. Can you say something about that?

2. My second question is as follows: you said you want to go back to the past, even deep into the past. This seems to me a typical Hungarian approach. It is not a 'reformed speciality' to go back to the Holy Scriptures of course. At first, you mention God's chosen people in Egypt. The thing is that the people of Israel were in the end just slaves and as such pushed into hard labour, and they were finally freed and could find their way back under the guidance of Moses.

By the way, Moses married an African wife (Num. 12:1). I wonder why you take precisely this example? You could have taken other quotes, following not the particular, but the universal line, which is also present in the Old Testament, for example, how the Torah shows openness and hospitality to strangers, with the argument that God's chosen people were strangers themselves.[32] Alternatively, you could have mentioned the

[32] Exodus 23:9.

hospitality and the openness for Ruth[33], the Moabitess or for Naäman, the Commander of the King of Syria[34], etc. The Jews in Egypt were strangers, but they were keeping their identity by not integrating, you say.

So why are you mentioning precisely this? Is it because you want to stress the need of nations or peoples to keep their own identities? Or is it because you want to show they trusted God and were also faithful to their own monotheistic religion? Both are possible and both are exactly the theme of our conference. Could you say something to this question? And as a little remark of criticism: in my opinion, we should not say the Church has taken over the role of carrying God's promises. Living Judaism is still carrying this role anyway nowadays. Could you respond to this too?

3. My third question is as follows: I see two main lines in your presentation. The line of taking care for our own (religious or national) Identity on the one hand, and the line of Christian Caritas on the other hand. Going to the New Testament, you mention how the early Christians kept their own Christian identity even in martyrdom. Like in the Egypt-quote, you also stress identity here. It seems you emphasize here only the religious identity? Or do you also mean the national identity? According to the famous letter of Mathetes to Diognet[35] you agree, that the true mark of Christian believers is to be fully aware of being a stranger (national identity) and never ever feel perfectly at home (religious identity), where ever they may live.

I think this is true and it is exactly how I feel sometimes in our secularised society. You see sharp all the political problems of recent immigration, asking why only young men with a Muslim background are coming to Europe. Muslim religion also has its own identity. You mention the traffickers and the dead bodies in the Mediterranean See. You also warn us not to be naïve. You do not embrace wishful thinking, such as the argument that immigration of young foreigners could help 'Grandmother Europe' in the struggle with demography and employment problems. On the other hand, you stress our Christian obligation to support everyone in need. That is your Caritas-line. I fully agree, but the tension between the two lines is still there. Do I see it right, when I suppose your Identity-line is a bit stronger than your Caritas-line?

[33] Ruth 2:10.
[34] 2 Kings 5.
[35] The letter to Diognet is very critical on Jews and gentiles.
http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-roberts.html [accessed 21 August 2018].