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# VIATORUM

## CONTENTS (XLVII, 2004) Nr.1

	PETER C. A. MORÉE
1 .....	Land, Nation and Faith
6 .....	KAREL DEURLOO
	Erets: Erd-Land für Menschen
15 .....	PETR POKORNÝ
	Das Neue Testament und die Frage nach dem Volk
26 .....	MICHAEL KRUPP
	Das Land im jüdischen Denken
34 .....	MONIKA ŠLAJEROVÁ
	Palestinian Church Reads Old Testament
63 .....	MARIA CLARA LUCCHETTI BINGEMER
	Living the Faith to Arrive in the Promised Land
90 .....	BOŽENA KOMÁRKOVÁ
	Czechs and Germans in our Century
99 .....	JINDŘICH HALAMA
	Volk und Nation in der neueren tschechischen (theologischen) Diskussion
105 .....	The Enlargement of the European Union and the Czech National Identity
	<b>BOOK REVIEWS</b>
115 .....	PAVEL HOŠEK
	Religious Pluralism as a Challenge

## LAND, NATION AND FAITH

It was still at the beginning of the second intifada that I happened to visit Jerusalem just after Easter. My hosts took me to some of the places, where the tensions were the highest at that moment: some streets in Ramalah, a part of Bethlehem or East Jerusalem. It was sad to walk in the Basilica of the Nativity of the Lord all alone, while outside the desperate Palestinian merchants waited, hoping to sell some of their souvenirs to the only tourist in town.

In Jerusalem I entered a bookshop after a visit to the Western Wall. I found some books that I was looking for and so I went to the counter. Again I was the only customer, though in a bookshop one worries less than at a holy site. The owner, perhaps happy to have his conversation of the day, certainly content with the trade, gave some comments on the books and then asked me where I came from. As I told him that I had arrived from Prague, he took a closer look at me with some enthusiasm. "Czechs have always been good to us," he said. "It is not their fault that so many Bohemian Jews died in the concentration camps, because they were sent there by the Nazis. In fact, some found shelter in the homes of Czech people. Moreover, the Czechs were also the victims of the Germans, just like us in that time." And of course he mentioned the delivery of weapons to the new state of Israel in 1948 by the Czechoslovak Republic, so the Israeli Forces could beat the armies of the neighboring Arab states.

He appeared well informed about the modern history of Central Europe, as he went on with his comments. "You did well after the Second World War with the German minority in Czechoslovakia," he said. "It was a perfect measure to expell the Germans from your land. They did not belong there, you took what was rightfully yours and established security by that. We should learn from you and do the same to the Palestinians here. We have to get rid of them and take what belongs to our nation," he proposed, standing just a hundred meters from the al-Aksa Mosque. I tried to indicate that these things are not as simple as they seemed to him and that they tend to return after years of even decades as unhealed memories which we have to face with pain and trouble. I was not able to express these comments,

as the bookshop owner became truly inspired by his perspectives. I did not even have the courage to tell him that I don't have a Czech passport, but instead, I took my books and left the shop in confusion.

This confusion became only bigger when in 2002 the Czech Prime Minister, Miloš Zeman, payed an official visit to Israel. There the situation had become even more grim and complicated, which led the leader of the Social Democrat Party to an advice similar to what the bookseller suggested: The state of Israel is in a similar situation as Czechoslovakia before the war. The best thing to do is to arrange an expulsion. Perhaps before he gave this interview, Mr. Zeman visited the same bookshop, but in this case his words caused international protests, especially from the neighbors of the Czech Republic. His statement meant the start of a new debate on nations, their demands, their identity and their co-existence in ethnically mixed areas.

The editorial board of *Communio Viatorum* decided to start a tradition of publishing each year one issue which elaborates on one specific theme. This first thematical issue concentrates on "Land, Nation and Faith," and presents articles from different angles and backgrounds all coming back to the fundamental question how we from a theological perspective relate to the notion of the land given to us (or demanded by us). The central point in this series of articles is which moral implications one can or should connect to land. Karel Deurloo in his elaboration on "erets" concludes that this notion is intrinsically connected to the notion of justice which is valid for everyone, Dutch or Czech, Palestinian or Jew. Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer describes how the combination of land and justice is understood in the context of Brazil.

A large part of the content of this issue is dedicated to the theological dimensions of the question of Israel and Palestine. Michael Krupp brings the perspective from the Jewish side, whereas Monika Šlajerová asks the question how Palestinian Christians read the Old Testament notions about the demands connected to the Promised Land. Another dimension of the theme of land and nation is brought in the two articles about Czech-German relations. The first one of Božena Komárková we present as evidence that this debate was continuing also in times when the totalitarian regime forbade to open this question in public. The second one of Jindřich Halama is rather a

reflection on the implications of the discussion among Czechs in the '30s of the 20th century.

In 1948, František Bednář, professor of Pastoral Theology at the Hus Theological Faculty of Prague, wrote a brochure with the title *The Transfer of the Germans from Czechoslovakia from the Ideological and Ecclesiastical Standpoint*. With it, he intended to defend the expulsion of the German minority of 1945–46 in a historical, moral and theological way. He states that the roots of the conflict between Czech and Germans in the Czech lands go back for centuries. “The German minority in the Republic lived alongside the Czech population for at least seven hundred years. The history of those seven hundred years does not present a picture of constructive collaboration, but one of a constant struggle of the German minority with the Czech majority and of the Czech majority with the German minority” (p. 10).

The two parts of the population were incompatible in their ideology, he said. Both had their nationalism, their self-definition, but from a moral perspective the Czech differed profoundly from the German. “The mentality of the Sudeten-Germans which was ultimately their doom, developed out of the robbery which characterised the seventeenth century in Bohemia. It was not only a question of language; the attitude of the German element was an expression of profound spiritual decline and moral dissolution, the idea of domination having ceased to be an evil and having become a virtue” (p. 30). The Czech nationalism on the other hand was founded on a solid spiritual foundation of the Hussite era. “It was not the ideal of conquest and violence, but zeal for the all-Christian idea that united the Czechs as never before; ardent love for the nation was combined with love for the spiritual life of the nation; it was not prompted by the longing for domination, but was willing to die in order that honour might be preserved” (p. 30). Bednář, therefore, comes to the conclusion that a decisive and forceful separation of Czechs and Germans was inevitable. “The transfer of the Germans is a tragic affair which will have infinite, unforeseeable consequences in the lives of individuals and of whole families, just as it is impossible to describe the grief of the Czech people during the last few years. It is, however, the logical result of the centuries-long development of evil and

of the unsurmountable ideological differences and differences of character between the Czechs and Germans living in the same country” (p. 62).

Bednár’s brochure, though the only one published in Czech protestant circles about this question, was not commonly accepted among Czech protestants. The leadership of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren refused to publish it as an official document of the church. There were other voices as well, albeit less vocal at the time. In a letter from the same year as Bednár’s brochure, another professor at the Hus Theological Faculty in Prague, Josef B. Souček, wrote that the expulsion of the Germans was a severe weakening of the tradition of Tomáš G. Masaryk. Souček wrote his letter to Karl Barth anonymously (published in *Freundschaft im Widerspruch, Der Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth, Josef L. Hromádka und Josef B. Souček 1935–1968*, Zürich 1995, p. 98–116). In that sense the violent wave of nationalism, that finally led to the expulsion of the German minority, denied the foundation of the Czechoslovak state in the democratic and humanist concept of its main founding father. This inevitably brings us today to the question why Masaryk’s idea of the Czechoslovak identity and state was not strong enough to prevent from this. Why was the Czech humanist tradition, that was and today still is strongly supported by Czech protestants, so silent and ineffective in a time, when things were on the edge?

Souček’s letter to Barth contains a sad tone, when it discusses this question. „Die ganze Massnahme wurde uns dargestellt – und zwar gerade von den moralisch verantwortlichen und demokratischen Führern – nicht als ein Akt der Rache oder der Bestrafung, sondern als eine kühl aufzufassende ‚notwendige‘ Massnahme, um uns ein für allemal zu befreien von einem anerkannt dornigen Problem. Es wurde uns gesagt, wir müssten diese einzigartige geschichtliche Gelegenheit benutzen und uns so gegen eine Wiederholung von München schützen. Gerade diese Art, die Sache zu betrachten war in meinen Augen ein schwerer Fehler, wenn nicht eine Sünde. Einen Ausbruch von Leidenschaft kann man verstehen und auch vergeben nach der Erfahrung einer sechsjährigen Besetzung. Aber dieser Versuch, sich selbst zu schützen durch anerkannt harte, ungewöhnliche und noch nie dagewesene, in der Tat ungeheuerliche Massnahmen,

scheint mir ein Stück ‚Hybris‘ zu sein, das nicht gelingen kann. Solche menschlichen Sicherungen scheitern immer. Nach meiner Meinung ist dieser ungezügelter Nationalismus, der sich in der Aussiedlung ausdrückt, das erste Übel, das ‚proton pseudos‘ unseres Leben nach dem Mai 1945, die böse Wurzel, deren erste Frucht der kommunistische Putsch ist“ (p. 104–105).

The conflict between the Czech majority and the German minority in Czechoslovakia has many parallels in the modern world. Its structure and discourse can be found in Belfast, in Sarajevo, in Kosovska Mitrovica or in Kigali. In the name of a higher authority, that is, in the name of the chosen nation and its divine mission, a piece of land is claimed as the sacred soil indispensable for revelation of the unspoiled identity of the nation. And often churches and religion act as a fueling source of such a conflict.

Voices like Souček’s can be heard in these situations, though sometimes not very explicitly. An example of this we find in the book of the Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Nashville 1996. In the course of this reflection on the war in the former Yugoslavia Volf finds the answer to the exclusion of nationalism in the Trinity. “I cannot live authentically without welcoming the others – the other gender, other persons, or other cultures – into the very structure of my being. For I am created to reflect the personality of the triune God” (p. 59).

The challenge put to us is whether in our reflections on identity and its implications we have the courage to be consequently inclusive in such a way that the land we received can be the fruitful soil for a humane society. The parallel between Czechs and Germans on the one hand with Jews and Palestinians at the other is a warning, especially when theology and religion are used as weapons in the conflict. We hope that this issue of *Communio Viatorum* gives the impulse to the opposite: faith and religion as a source of hope and reconciliation.

*Peter C. A. Morée*

## ERETS: ERD-LAND FÜR MENSCHEN

*Karel A. Deurloo, Amsterdam*

Der Hörer der Thora sieht im letzten Kapitel mit Mose die *erets* (אֶרֶץ), das Land. Ausgehend vom Nebo richtet sich der Blick vom trans-jordanischen Gilead nach Dan weit oben im Norden, dem Meer im Westen entlang nach dem Negev, dem Südland, um schliesslich auf Jericho zu ruhen, das gegenüber dem Nebo liegt: „JHWH sprach zu ihm: Das ist das Land, das ich Abraham, Isaak und Jakob zugeschworen habe, in dem ich sprach: Deinen Nachkommen werde ich es geben“ (Dtn 34,4). In der synagogalen Lesung gehört das Kapitel zum letzten Seder, der am „achten Tag“, dem Schlussfest nach der Sukkotwoche gelesen wird. Rabbiner S. Ph. De Vries zitiert bei der Besprechung dieses Festes<sup>1</sup> Psalm 119,96: „Von allem Vollkommenen habe ich ein Ende gesehen. Doch dein Gebot reicht sehr weit.“ Darum wird gleich am Ende wieder mit dem Anfang begonnen; am neunten Tag, an Simchat Thora. Danach rezitiert der Vorleser, der Chatan Bereschit (Bräutigam von Genesis) genannt wird, den Anfang der ersten Rolle und die Erzählung von der Schöpfung des Himmels und der Erde wird zu Gehör gebracht: „Die *erets* nun war...“

Der Hörer sieht die *erets* sozusagen vor sich. Es ist klar, dass hier mit „Erde“ übersetzt werden muss, aber liturgisch hat der Hörer die Worte über Mose, der die *erets* sah, noch nicht vergessen und sieht die Erde in der Perspektive des Landes. Ist dies wirklich nur eine Assoziation des Festes „Freude der Thora?“ An einigen Stellen im Tanakh fühlt sich der Leser genötigt, an beide Bedeutungen zu denken, z. B.: „Die Sanftmütigen werden die *erets* erben“ (Ps 37,11; vgl. Mt 5,5). In solchen Fällen pflegte Martin Buber mit „Erdland“ zu übersetzen (Ps 37,9), sowie er auch das Kompositum „Geistbraus“ bildete.<sup>2</sup> Israel und Kanaan stehen *pars pro toto* für Menschenvolk

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<sup>1</sup> S. Ph. De Vries, *Joodse rit en symbolen*, Amsterdam 1968, 100.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Buber, *Werke II. Schriften zur Bibel*, München/Heidelberg 1964, 1164f.



und Erdland. Das Geheimnis des biblischen Partikularismus ist der darin eingeschlossene Universalismus; aber um dieses Phänomen richtig zu verstehen, muss man von diesem konkreten Volk und diesem konkreten Land ausgehen.

Im ersten Zyklus der Abraham-Erzählungen geht es um das Land. Abraham, der in einem fremden Land lebt, erhält einen Auftrag:

Geh aus deinem Land  
aus deiner Verwandtschaft  
aus dem Haus deines Vaters  
in das Land, das ich dich sehen lassen werde (Gen 12,1).

Das Land, das er verlässt, ist das Zweistromland von Ur (Gen 11,28) bis Haran (Gen 11,31). Sein „Exodus“ wird so ausgedrückt: „Ich bin JHWH, der ich dich herausgeführt habe aus Ur der Chaldäer“ (Gen 15,7). Die Chaldäer, das sind die Neu-Babylonier, die Israel ins Exil geführt haben (vgl. z. B. Jer 32,5), sodass Abraham auch als Erzvater der zurückkehrenden Exulanten angesehen werden kann. Das Land Kanaan hat der Erzähler bereits zuvor beschrieben (Gen 10,19). Abram markiert dieses Land mit Altären. Der erste im Norden, bei Sichem, mit dem das Heiligtum auf dem Gerizim angedeutet wird, damit auch die Proto-Samaritaner (Israel/Josaf) sich in Abram, dem Erzvater, erkennen können (Gen 12,6). Der Süden, „Juda,“ erhält seinen Altar in Hebron (Gen 13,8). Abram ist jedoch der Vater des ganzen Volkes und verbindet daher „Juda“ und „Israel“ mit einem Altar auf der Grenze zwischen Norden und Süden, „zwischen Betel und Ai“ (Gen 12,8). Den wichtigsten Altar jedoch, den er – nicht als Markierungszeichen, sondern – für die Opferung baut, befindet sich an „dem Ort, den Gott ihm nennt“ (Gen 22,2ff.; vgl. Dtn 12,5 etc.). In der Periode des zweiten Tempels kann man in Juda einfüllen: der Zion; und in nördlichen Israel: der Gerizim. Die Thora ist gesamt-israelitisch; deshalb kommen die Namen Zion und Jerusalem darin nicht vor. Das Land ist in Genesis also auch das gesamte Land Juda und Israel, d. h. das der Zion- und der Gerizim-Gemeinde.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> B. J. Diebner, Zur Funktion der kanonischen Textsammlung im Judentum der vorchristlichen Zeit. Gedanken einer Kanon-Hermeneutik, in: *DBAT* 22 (1986), 58-73.

Wenn der Leser nun zu wissen glaubt, wie gross das Land ist, wird er durch Genesis 15,18 korrigiert: „vom Strom Ägyptens an bis zum grossen Strom, dem Euphratstrom.“ In Josua 1,4 ist die Beschreibung nur wenig bescheidener: „Von der Wüste und diesem Libanon an bis zum grossen Strom, dem Strom Euphrat, das ganze Land der Hetiter, und bis zum grossen Meer gegen Sonnenuntergang, das soll euer Gebiet sein.“ Das Land hat hier also den Umfang der persischen Provinz Jehud.<sup>4</sup> In Josua 22 wird betont, dass der Jordan keine Grenze ist. Der Übergang über den Jordan unter Josua ist kein geographischer Grenzübergang, sondern der Übergang von der Landverheissung zur Landgabe. Der Jordan fliesst sozusagen zwischen der Thora und den Nebiim Rischonim. Die Texte mit der weitesten geographischen Beschreibung des Landes gleichen denjenigen der prophetischen Vision: „An jenem Tag wird Israel der Dritte sein mit Ägypten und mit Assur, ein Segen inmitten der Erde. Denn JHWH der Heerscharen segnet es und spricht: Gesegnet sei Ägypten, mein Volk und Assur, meiner Hände Werk, und Israel, mein Erbteil!“ (Jes 19,24f.).

Im Buch Josua kann das Land zusammenschrumpfen bis auf die Grösse Jerichos. Die Stadt, die pars pro toto für das Land steht, ist *das* Beispiel dafür, wie sich Landgabe und Landnahme vollziehen sollen. Die Kundschafter, die Josua aussendet, erhalten den Auftrag: „Geht, besetzt das Land, zumal Jericho.“

Sie kehren mit dem Bericht zurück: „JHWH hat all das Land in unsere Hand gegeben“ (Jos 2,1.24). Geben (ן-ת-נ, n-t-n) und nehmen (ש-ר-י, j-r-š) sind die Leitworte des Buches, an die sich das Volk bei Ai nicht hält. Die Eroberung ohne ein Wort von JHWH misslingt. Die Erzählung ist das Beispiel dafür, wie das „Nehmen“, das Ererben, des Landes *nicht* geschehen darf. Eine Karikatur einer Landnahme, eine erfolgreiche Eroberung bietet die „Anti-Erzählung“<sup>5</sup> in Richter 18. Die Daniten „kamen über Lajisch, über ein ruhiges und argloses Volk, und schlugen es mit der Schärfe des Schwertes. Und kein Retter war da, denn die Stadt war weit entfernt von Sidon...“ (Ri 18,27f.). Das Buch Josua steht im Zeichen der Gabe seitens

<sup>4</sup> Vgl. Philip R. Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel,"* Sheffield 1992, 80ff. und B. J. Diebner, Erwägungen zum Namensform „Juda“, *DBAT* 25 (1988), 49–73.

<sup>5</sup> Uwe F. W. Bauer, „*Warum übertretet ihr SEIN Geheiss*“ *Eine synchrone Exegese der Anti-Erzählung von Richter 17–18*, Frankfurt am Main (etc.), 1998.

JHWH und des liturgisch geprägten Nehmens seitens Israel: Das Überschreiten des Jordans wird auf den Tag datiert, an dem das Passah-Lamm zubereitet wird (Jos 4,19; Ex 12,3), um nach drei Tagen Passah zu feiern (Jos 5,10). Das ist das Erste, was das Volk im Land macht. Es liegt folglich auf der Hand, die Gabe Jerichos – Josua 6, wo so deutlich mit der Zahl sieben gespielt wird – mit dem Schawuot-Fest zu assoziieren. Dort wird auf *jobel* (יִבֹּל), Trompeten, geblasen, wie beim *Jobel-Jahr*, dem fünfzigsten Jahr,<sup>6</sup> denn das Land gehört JHWH (Lev 25–23) und er ist der Geber. Wenn Josua das Land betritt, tut er das unter der Verheissung: „Jeden Ort, auf den eure Fusssohle treten wird – euch habe ich ihn gegeben, wie ich zu Mose geredet habe“ (Jos 1,3). In Vers 4 dann wird die oben erwähnte prophetische Ausdehnung des Landes in Aussicht gestellt. Mit dem Wort „gegeben“ weicht die Thora des Mose nicht aus Josuas Mund (1,8). Das Land ist das eschatologische Ziel der Thora. JHWH ist herabgestiegen, um sein Volk aus Ägypten aufsteigen zu lassen in das Land (Ex 3,8). Die Thora lesend und immer wieder lesend hält man sich die Perspektive des Landes vor Augen, auch wenn dieses Lesen der Thora im konkret gegebenen Land geschieht. Man kann es mit einem Sederabend in Jerusalem vergleichen, an dem man sagt: Nächstes Jahr in Jerusalem! Der Leser der Thora weiss, dass das Land seine Bewohner ausspeien wird, wenn es durch sie verunreinigt wird (Lev 18,25). Das Land bleibt ein sakramentaler und prophetischer Ort, auch wenn man darin sesshaft geworden ist.

Die *nebiim rischonim* (נְבִיאִים רִשְׁוֹנִים) erzählen Geschichte als Prophetie, und darum bleiben sie aktuelle, liturgisch zu lesende Bücher. Mit Josua zieht das Volk ins Land ein, am Ende der Königsbücher muss das Volk wieder aus dem Land – ins Exil. Das ist bereits Thema in der Thora (Deut 29), aber auch schon in der Thora kommt die Rückkehr in das Land wegen der Barmherzigkeit JHWHs vor. Den *nebiim acharonim* (נְבִיאִים אַחֲרֵינִים) zufolge bleibt das Land auch im Exil das eschatologische Ziel (z. B. Ez 37), wie gross oder klein es auch ist. Aber wie bei Abraham (Gen 12,1ff.), bleiben auch die Völ-

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<sup>6</sup> K. A. Deurloo, JHWH, Schöpfer und Geber des Landes: der „Yobel“ auf dem Sinai – und bei Jericho, in: M. Prudký (ed.), *Landgabe: Festschrift für Jan Heller*, Praha 1995, 31–43. Vgl. B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, Minneapolis 1993, 143ff.

ker im Blick (sowie im Zionslied Psalm 87). Am fünfzigsten Tag („Pfingsten“), dem Wochenfest, feiern die Juden die Gabe der Thora und damit implizit die Gabe des Landes. Die beiden sind unauflöslich verbunden, wie im Buch Josua zu lesen ist. Der Psalm, der dann ertönt – mit 7×7 Wörtern! – ist Psalm 67.

Gott sei uns (Israel) gnädig und segne uns  
und lasse sein Antlitz leuchten über uns,  
dass man auf der Erde erkenne deinen Weg  
unter alle *goyim* (גוֹיִם) deine Befreiung.

Die Völker werden in den folgenden Versen aufgerufen, den Gott Israels zu loben (V. 4–6), dann folgt die Zeile: „Die *erets* gibt ihren Ertrag.“ Ertrag: Sind das nicht diese *goyim*? Aber dann natürlich die *goyim*, die Israel als das gesegnete Volk in ihrer Mitte anerkennen.

Im Kontext heutiger Realität müssen sicher einige kritische Fragen gestellt werden. Zullererst aber muss festgestellt werden, dass Christen aus den *goyim*, die Israel als das von JHWH gesegnete Volk anerkennen, sich herzlich freuen über die Rückkehr der Juden in das Land. Streng genommen müsste es heissen: die Rückkehr der Judäer nach Juda, aber diese Judäer sind Träger des konfessionellen Namens Israel (Diebner), und darum sind sie zurückgekehrt nach Erets Israel, wie gross oder klein es auch ist. Christen dürfen sich auch freuen über den *Staat* Israel; Theologen ebenfalls – wegen des Aufblühens der Bibelwissenschaft im Land. Falls sie die Anerkennung des Staates jedoch theologisch begründen, insbesondere in biblizistischer Weise, ist es möglich, dass eine Diskussion – die nur dann sinnvoll ist, wenn sie auf rationaler Basis geführt wird – gerade durch religiöse Argumente verdunkelt wird. Der Staat sollte auf völkerrechtlicher Basis anerkannt werden, wie es ja auch geschieht. Solidarität mit dem Staat Israel braucht Kritik jedoch nicht auszuschliessen. Das Unterzeichnen eines öffentlichen Appells, der zur Beachtung des Schicksals der Palästinenser aufruft, sollte nicht zum Vorwurf des Antisemitismus führen, wie es mir bereits 1977 widerfuhr. Mit dem Palästinensern steht zugleich die Zukunft des Staates Israel auf dem Spiel – allein schon aus demographischen Gründen. Mitunter werden Theologen jedoch zu einer – weniger politischen als explizit theolo-

gischen – Reaktion herausgefordert, wenn biblische Aussagen direkt auf das aktuelle geographische Feld bezogen werden.

Ich möchte das mit einer persönlichen Erfahrung illustrieren: „Verstehst du, wie schwierig ich es finde, diese Geschichte Kindern zu erzählen“, sagte der kopti-sche Dozent des Bibelkurses für Laien in Bossey, als die Teilnehmer ein exegetisches Problem anhand von einigen Kapiteln des Buches Exodus diskutierten: Ägypten ist das Land des Todes, in dem hebräische Sklaven zugrunde gehen, aber der Gott Israels ist der Befreier, der sie herausführt aus dem Sklavenhaus Ägypten! Es hilft nicht weiter, im Hebräischen *mitsraim* (מצרים) zu sagen. Koptische Kinder sagen *misr*, und ausserdem schauen sie auf die Landkarte. Gerade sie wohnen dort und es ist ihr Land. – An der Konferenz nahm kein Palästinenser teil. Er hätte vielleicht das Deuteronomium aufgeschlagen: Gott hat Israel das Land gegeben: „Grosse und gute Städte, die du nicht gebaut hast. Häuser voll von allem Guten, die du nicht gefüllt hast. Ausgehauene Zisternen, die du nicht ausgehauen hast, Weinberge und Olivenbäume, die du nicht gepflanzt hast“ (Dtn 6,10f.). „Nicht wegen deiner Gerechtigkeit und der Aufrichtigkeit deines Herzens kommst du hinein, um ihr Land in Besitz zu nehmen. Sondern wegen der Gottlosigkeit dieser Nationen vertreibt JHWH, dein Gott, sie vor dir, und damit er das Wort aufrechterhält, das JHWH deinen Vätern, Abraham, Isaak und Jakob, geschworen hat“ (Dtn 9,5). Darum gibt Gott Israel das Land! Der Palästinenser würde gesagt haben: „Verstehst du, dass es für mich noch viel schwieriger ist, dies meinen Kindern zu erzählen?“

Eine koptische Schwester und ein orthodoxer, palästinensischer Bruder aus den Kirchen des Nahen Ostens, deren Existenz von uns meist ungenügend realisiert wird, stellen dem europäischen Exegeten Fragen in einer Zeit, in der er gerade erst gelernt hat, dass er das Alte und das Neue Testament in Solidarität mit Israel zu lesen hat. Ein solcher europäischer Theologe ist gegenüber seinen Mitchristen aus der arabischen Welt tief beschämt, dass er in einer geschichtlichen Tradition steht, die durch Antisemitismus beschmutzt ist. Er hat sich darüber gefreut, dass Juden ihre Freiheit im Altneuland fanden. Wenn er in der Bibel „Israel“ liest, kann er den Namen nicht mehr auf die Kirche als das „Neue Israel“ beziehen und ihn dadurch der jüdischen Gemeinschaft – in der Stadt, in der er wohnt, im Staat Israel oder wo

auch immer in der Welt – rauben. Jesus ist ein Jude. Über ihn kann nicht ein einziges Wort gesagt werden ohne das sogenannte Alte Testament, den *tanakh* (תנ״ך). Die messianischen Schriften, das sogenannte Neue Testament, machen es ganz klar.<sup>7</sup> Nur wer „Moses, die Propheten und die Psalmen,“ d. h. den *tanakh* kennt, kann in ihm den Christus erkennen (Lk 24,24ff.). So sagt es das Neue Testament. Eine Kirche, die das verleugnet oder verneint, verdient es nicht mehr Kirche des Messias Jesus zu heissen. Zu der Reihe sogenannter *notae ecclesiae*, Kennzeichen dessen, was Kirche-Sein ist, gehört, dass sie die Gemeinschaft derjenigen bildet, die den *tanakh* allen aus den Völkern der Welt vorliest, die ihn hören wollen; auf Befehl von Jesus Messias liest die Kirche, die mit Israel verbunden ist, aus den Schriften Israels die Geschichte von der Befreiung des Menschen: der Unterdrückte wird erlöst, der Schuldige freigesprochen. In Israel ist es zu hören gewesen und gehört worden: die Israeliten sind vor Gott bereits den Söhnen der Äthiopier gleich. Die Befreiung Israels gilt gleichermassen für Philister und Aramäer (Amos 9,7), palästinensische Muslime, Christen und Drusen. In den Schriften Israels – als der Manifestation des Hörbar-werdens und Hörens – lernt der Leser „inklusive zu denken.“ In Solidarität mit Israel lesend, entdeckt der Leser das Kriterium der Solidarität, und zwar darin, was man das „credo“ der synagogalen Liturgie genannt hat: „Höre Israel, JHWH ist unser Gott, JHWH ist einer“ (Dtn 6,4). Die Solidarität gilt Israel nicht um seiner selbst willen – jedenfalls nicht mehr als anderen Völkern – sondern um dessen Willen, was inmitten Israels zu hören ist. Jeder, der mit-hört, wird mit-verantwortlich und lernt mit-entdecken, was der Name Israel beinhaltet: Herausgerufen werden aus der Herrschaft der Religion in ein Land und eine Geschichte, in der der Eine Garant der Menschlichkeit sein will. Der Name Israel ist nicht fixiert, sondern ist sogleich wieder ein Aufruf, eine Einladung zum Hören. Wegen dieses „Hörens“ dürfen die Völker Israel lieb haben und segnen, wo immer es sich manifestiert, in Prag oder im Staat Israel. Wer Israel deshalb hasst, spricht sich selbst das Urteil; wer es deshalb

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<sup>7</sup> Vgl. auch den Artikel über die Landverheissung in den Evangelien und den Apostolischen Schriften von G. Jankowski, Dieses Land, in: *Texte und Kontexte* 80 (1988), 51–61.

verehrt, hat nicht gut zugehört und steht in der akuten Gefahr, einer typisch „heidnischen“ Religiosität in christlichem Gewand zu verfallen.

Kann ein Palästinenser das hörende Israel, kann er den Gott Israels lieb haben?

Macht ihm dies das historische und religiöse Debakel nicht beinahe unmöglich? Darf ihm sein eventueller Hass gegen den Staat Israel als unverzeihlicher Antisemitismus vorgeworfen werden? Ist es ihm übel zu nehmen, wenn ihm beim Lesen von Büchern wie dem Deuteronomium und Josua schaudert? Wer wollte nicht mit ihm mitschaulden angesichts der tödlichen Gefahr, die diese Bücher bilden, wenn sie fundamentalistisch gelesen werden? Eine kleine, extrem-fundamentalistische christliche Zeitschrift, die in den Niederlanden verbreitet wird, macht es in grotesker Weise deutlich: Im Krieg zwischen Israelis und Palästinensern liege der Anfang der Wiederherstellung von Israels Territorium bis hin zum Euphrat (Jos 1,4). Auch wenn man daran festhalte, dass Israel keine territoriale Absichten habe, der ewige Gott habe sie sehr wohl!

In abgemilderter Form ist der fundamentalistische Gebrauch des *tanakh* eine nicht unbedeutende politische Waffe – jedenfalls für einige im Staat Israel.

Mit den Augen palästinensischer Christen sehen wir plötzlich wie durch ein Vergrößerungsglas, was „Tanakh in Solidarität mit Israel lesen“ nicht bedeuten kann und darf. Paulus lehrt seine Gemeinde nicht exklusiv, sondern inklusiv zu lesen: Israel *und* die *goyim*: Erst der Jude und dann auch der Grieche.

Der Bezeichnung „Israel“ wird in unterschiedlichen Bedeutungen gebraucht.

In der Zeitung ist es der heutige Staat Israel; in einem Geschichtsbuch ist es z. B. das Reich Davids, oder das Nordreich gegenüber dem Südreich Juda. In der christlich-theologischen Literatur kann die Bezeichnung das ganze, weltweite Judentum meinen. In neutestamentlicher Zeit spricht man im „internationalen“ Kontext von Juden, während man im eigenen Umfeld lieber von Israel redet. Jeder Kontext bringt seine eigene Konnotation mit sich, wobei historische, nationale oder religiöse Färbung eine Rolle spielen. Manchmal differenzieren diejenigen, die die Bezeichnung verwenden, bewusst nicht,

z. B. weil sie den heutigen Staat Israel in selbstverständlicher Kontinuität zu „Gross-Israel“ unter David sehen möchten. Müssten wir nicht mit dem „Höre, Israel...“ einsetzen? Die Hörer dieser Aufforderung werden aufgerufen, „Israel“ zu sein; und wer im Namen Jesu mithört, kann diesem *aufgerufenen* Israel seine Solidarität nicht verweigern. Das Hören impliziert Kritik und Verheissung für Israel – auch in der Bedeutung von Staat oder Judentum – *und* für die Völker, denn in dem aufgerufenen Israel geht es um den Menschen, wie ihn Gott vor Augen hat, und um seine Freiheit.

Der Palästinenser darf hören und erfahren, dass die Verheissung des Landes auch *ihn* angeht. Der Jude darf hören, dass die Eroberung des Landes, wie sie in Ri 18 beschrieben ist, in einer Linie mit dem Götzendienst und der Verleugnung des Gottes Israels steht. *Tanakh* ist *die* prophetische Waffe im Gefecht um Frieden und Freiheit im Land, das Gott an Israel gibt und damit auch an die Palästinenser – sowie an die Tschechen und Niederländer. Aber man lernt, zuerst den Blick auf die Bedrängten zu richten, die Vertriebenen, auf die Sklaven, die dem Land des Todes entronnen sind und durch die Wüste hindurch näher kommen oder auf vollgestopfte Flüchtlingslager. Wenn im Tanakh Namen genannt werden, entstehen Wirklichkeiten, die sich im Laufe der Geschichte immer wieder auf andere Weise als wahr erweisen. Wer die Namen fundamentalistisch, historisch und – vielleicht noch deutlicher – geographisch fixiert, macht aus lebendigen Wirklichkeiten tote, ja tödliche Etiketten. Aber wehe dem christlichen Theologen, der vergisst, dass der jüdische Staat das historische Zeichen derjenigen ist, die dem brutalen europäischen Antisemitismus entronnen sind. Dieses Vergessen würde auch alle solidarische Kritik entkräften; und ausserdem: inklusiv über die *erets* sprechen kann ein solcher Theologe nur in Verbundenheit mit Israel, einschliesslich des Staates Israel.

Übersetzung von Uwe F. W. Bauer (schweizer Rechtschreibung).



# DAS NEUE TESTAMENT UND DIE FRAGE NACH DEM VOLK

*Petr Pokorný, Prag*

## 1. Das methodische und das sachliche Problem

Als mein Lehrer Josef B. Souček im Jahre 1939 den Vortrag „Das Volk in der Bibel“ hielt, überprüfte er damit die Glaubwürdigkeit der demokratischen Kritik am Nationalsozialismus Hitlers, der schon direkt unser Land bedrohte, und – was schlimmer war – der auch die Denkweise und das Selbstverständnis unserer deutschen Brüder und Schwestern sowohl in der evangelischen als auch in der katholischen Kirche im Sudetenland beeinflusste. Souček denkt gleich im ersten Abschnitt<sup>1</sup> über Sinn und Methodik seines Vorgehens nach. Es ist unmöglich, in der Bibel eine „Lösung unserer heutigen Fragen, detaillierte Vorschriften für unser Verhalten zu suchen“. Trotzdem ist er von folgendem überzeugt: „Falls für uns die Heilige Schrift Glaubens- und Lebensregel ist, heißt das, dass wir zu ihr um der in allen Fragen Belehrung willen hinzutreten sollen... Es geht darum, eine Richtlinie zu finden und sich an Beispielen aus der Bibel klar zu machen, wie eine Lösung der konkreten Fragen aussehen kann und soll, die niemals fertig sein kann, sondern die immer gefunden und errungen werden muss.“ Eine Auslegung und insbesondere schon eine Auswahl bestimmter Texte aus der Bibel kann also bei der gegenwärtigen Orientierung der christlichen Kirche in doppeltem Sinne behilflich sein: (a) Man kann in ihr eine grundlegende Richtlinie finden, aber auch (b) Verhaltensbeispiele in bestimmten Situationen, die man als gewisse Analogien unserer Lage definieren kann.

Natürlich, Souček setzt einige unausgesprochene Bedingungen voraus, die eine solche Arbeit erfordert. Vor allem: eine Richtlinie

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<sup>1</sup> Souček, Das Volk in der Bibel, in: *Für die Gott geweihte Nation*, Prag 1939, 1–11; Die Zitate in diesem Abschnitt sind alle auf Seite 1 zu finden.

kann man nur auf Grund einer Erwägung über die Struktur des biblischen Kanons und über die verschiedenen Rollen und Wichtigkeiten seiner einzelnen Teile finden. Meistens dienen als Richtschnur die klassischen christlichen Bekenntnisse, manchmal auch die einzelnen Konfessionen. Soll aber die Schrift eine Inspiration und eine kritische Norm der bekennenden Tradition selbst sein, ist es notwendig, dass wir grundsätzlich dazu bereit sind, auch über eine Theologie der verschiedenen Bereiche der biblischen Literatur, der einzelnen Bücher oder auch ihrer Schichten, ihrer wechselseitigen Beziehung, und über das Wesen ihrer Kongruenz zu erwägen.

Damit hängt auch ein anderes unausgesprochenes Problem zusammen, das Souček wohl bekannt war, nämlich das der Reichweite solcher Feststellungen für die Umwelt, für die außerkirchliche Welt. Auch unsere Umwelt sucht eine Belehrung in der Vergangenheit, auch wenn sie in irgendeiner gegenwärtigen Gesellschaftstheorie eine grundlegende Richtlinie findet und ihr gemäß in der Geschichte passende Modellsituationen sucht. Für einen Christen ist der Ausgangspunkt seines Denkens insofern mit dem Zeugnis über bestimmte Ereignisse der Geschichte verknüpft, als dass die Zusammenstellung seiner Klassiker, d.h. die Bibel, als Ganzes eine Geschichtsstruktur hat. Und aus der christlichen Suche nach Antwort auf gegenwärtige Fragen hat für die Umwelt nur ihre sekundäre, indirekte Seite Bedeutung: Während für einen Christen die Belehrung aus der Bibel eine gewisse Legitimation seiner Haltungen bedeutet, weil sie aus der Bibel kommt, ist für seinen säkularen Nächsten erst das Autorität, dass sich die empfohlenen Lösungen wiederholt im Leben beglaubigten. Das, wozu die Bibel führt, nimmt die außerkirchliche Welt höchstens als Empfehlung eines mit aktueller Gültigkeit altertümlichen Textes wahr.

Jedenfalls ist unser Vorgehen nur teilweise eine biblische Exegese. Es kann nicht die ganze Welt der biblischen Texte wiederherstellen, es fragt nur nach einigen ihrer Elemente und eilt, sie den unsrigen Problemen gegenüberzustellen. Deswegen schließt es nur kurze exegetische Teilstücke ein, es ist so eine „ungeduldige“ Exegese. Sie geht von unserem Weltbild, von unseren Problemen aus und sucht durch Versuchssonden ihre biblischen Analogien.

Das Problem, das dazu in diesem konkreten Fall führt, ist deutlich:

das Verhältnis zwischen Glaubensgemeinschaft und Volksgemeinschaft (keineswegs Staatsgemeinschaft). Damit hängt auch die rein säkulare Frage des Verhältnisses zwischen Bürgergemeinschaft und ihrer Solidarität mit dem Volk zusammen.

Der gegenwärtige Begriff Volk gewann erst im neunzehnten Jahrhundert seinen deutlichen Inhalt, zur Zeit der nationalen Revolutionen, in der Zeit, als die Abschwächung der Ständebarrieren es ermöglichte, dass sich einzelne breitere Gesellschaftsgemeinschaften ihre durch gemeinsame Geschichtserfahrung und meistens auch durch gemeinsame Sprache gegebene Identität bewusst machten. Manchmal wurde die Nation zur Chiffre für Machtinteressen einer kleinen Gruppe und zur Parole, die für diese Gruppe wenigstens so viele Sympathien gewann, dass sie ein nationalistisches Gebilde gestalten konnte, das zu ihren Gunsten den Rest der Bürger terrorisierte. Dies war die Situation in Deutschland, die uns berührte, als J. B. Souček seinen Artikel vom Volk in der Bibel schrieb. Die Rolle des Volkes untersuchte er am biblischen Israel mit seinem Bewusstsein einer Sendung, die ihm von Gott anvertraut worden war. Er stellte fest, dass das Selbstverständnis Israels als Volk Gottes, durch andere Wirklichkeiten gegeben ist, als durch „das natürliche, Blutprinzip.“<sup>2</sup> Das Volksprinzip ist nicht der höchste Wert. Israel wurde dadurch zu einem Volk, d.h. zu einer sozialen Größe mit einer beharrlichen Tradition, dass es als Bündnis verschiedener Gruppen, die alle einen einzigen Gott verehrten, den Gesetzen dieses Gottes diene. Das biblische Grundmodell der Volksgemeinschaft kann deshalb dem Nationalismus nicht zur Stütze werden.

Aus all diesen Gründen schien uns theologisch gesehen das Volk als eine zweitrangige Größe. Darüber hinaus wurde in der folgenden

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<sup>2</sup> Das Volk in der Bibel, 2; später (1970) Souček im Artikel „Israel und die Kirche im Denken des Apostels Paulus,“ gedruckt ursprünglich auf Deutsch in *Communio viatorum* 1971; zuletzt in: Petr Pokorný – Josef B. Souček, *Bibelauslegung als Theologie (WUNT 100)*, Tübingen 1997, 171–182. Er schloss den Gedankengang dessen ab, was er vor dem Krieg in seinem Artikel „Das Volk in der Bibel“ angedeutet hatte: Die Geschichte Israels als das Volk Gottes ist durch ständige Brüche, Versagen und durch eine sich wiederholende Diskontinuität der Träger der Sendung Israels als das Volk Gottes gebrandmarkt. Nur aus Erbarmen Gottes wird das Volk Gottes erneuert, und zwar durch unerwartete Berufungen: von Frauen, von Fremden, von Minderheiten. Damit wird nur bestätigt, dass der Träger der Kontinuität nicht das Volk selbst ist, sondern Gott, der selbst Steine in „Söhne Abrahams“ verwandeln kann.

Zeit des Kommunismus der Wert der nationalen Idee programmatisch durch die neue Einteilung in Klassen und Kasten (Parteigenossen, Parteilose) degradiert, die in dem sogenannten sozialistischen Lager quer durch die Nationen ging. Eine desto größere Überraschung war eine neue Blüte des Nationalismus, der in den meisten Fällen sehr absurd war („nichts, als das Volk!“), der gefährlich und abscheulich war und dazu noch sofort von den Kommunisten ausgenutzt wurde, die die Idee vom Volk vorher so sehr erniedrigt hatten. Die Entstehung der neuen nationalen Staaten ist zwar vor allem ein Ergebnis der Sehnsucht nach Überwindung der Diktatur, aber der neue Aufschwung der Idee der Nation ist deutlich. In Tschechien führte er bis jetzt, leider, zu keinem bewussten Geständnis zu den tschechischen Traditionen, und bei einer einflussreichen Minderheit der Bewohner äußerte er sich eher negativ: in Xenophobie, weil wir ein Land sind, das durch Zutun Fremder und auch durch eigenes Zutun ihre jüdische und deutsche Minderheit einbüßte.

Wenn wir kurz die wiedergegebenen Auslegungen J. B. Součeks mit einigen weiteren Beobachtungen zu ergänzen versuchen, so ist das durch eine neue Situation und durch neue Fragen, die aus ihr folgen, begründet: Worin besteht, trotz allen Vorbehalten gegenüber dem Nationalismus auf der einer Seite und der Entfremdung der Idee vom Volk auf der anderen Seite, der positive Sinn des Volkes als einer unbestrittenen geschichtlichen Erscheinung?

## **2. Das „Volk“ im Neuen Testament – Eine Relativierung des Begriffes**

Die nächste Entsprechung dessen, was wir heute unter dem Begriff Volk verstehen, bezeichnet in der Bibel in den meisten Fällen der griechische Ausdruck ἔθνος [ethnos] (hebr. גּוֹי [goj]), den die tschechische ökumenische Übersetzung im Alten Testament mit dem ungewöhnlichen tschechischen Wort „pronárod“ ausdrückt. Sie deutet somit an, dass aus der Sicht Israels der Begriff *goj* selbst einen abwertenden Klang hatte. Über Israel spricht man meistens als über Volk – אַמ [am] (in der LXX λαός [laos]). Es ist eine Sicht von innen. Das „Volk“ ist eine soziale Umwelt eines jeden Menschens, bei einem Juden war das die Gemeinschaft Israel. Die Unterscheidung λαός [laos] – ἔθνη

[ethne] (d. i. der Plural von ἔθνος) kann man auch im Neuen Testament verfolgen. Z. B. ist in Apg 26,23 das Volk Israel (λαὸς) von den Heiden (ἔθνη) unterschieden. In der ganzen Bibel wird aber wiederholt betont, dass die Berufung Israels tatsächlich eine Entscheidung Gottes ist, keine Folge der Qualität des auserwählten Volkes: Gott hat sich aus den Heiden sein Volk berufen (Apg 15,14; Dt 14,2).

Die Existenz verschiedener Völker und Sprachen, wie schon die ätiologische Sage in Gn 11,1-9 (Turmbau zu Babel) zu verstehen gibt, wurde als Folge der Sünde verstanden. Es ist deshalb begreiflich, dass in Ex 19,6 über das Volk Gottes als über ein heiliges (gesondertes) Volk (אֱלֹהִים; LXX: ἔθνος) geredet wird, mit der unübersehbaren Betonung darauf, dass die Erwählung Israels nicht auf seinen Qualitäten gegründet ist, sondern nur auf der Sendung, die ihm zuteil wird. Im Neuen Testament stoßen wir öfter auf dieses bewusste Durchdringen der Bedeutungen und auch auf die selbstverständliche Übernahme der heidnischen Terminologie. Israel, das Christus ablehnt, wird in Joh 11,48.50ff (vgl. 18,35) als ἔθνος (Tschechische ökum. Übersetzung - „národ“) bezeichnet, in Lk 7,5 oder Apg 10,22 wird über Israel als über ἔθνος (T. ö. Ü. - „národ“ und „lid“) geredet, d. h. in Ausdrücken der hellenistischen Welt, in der ihre Leser lebten. Volk bezeichnet in allen diesen Fällen einen Stamm oder eine Gruppe von Stämmen, die durch gemeinsame Traditionen verbunden sind, insbesondere durch eine Religionstradition. Sprache spielte sicher eine wichtige Rolle, wie wir auf Grund der Erzählung in Apg 2 über Pfingsten schließen können, aber die Vielheit der verschiedenen Sprachen wird nur als eine Barriere der Kommunikation wahrgenommen, die der Geist Gottes überwindet, nicht als etwas, was zur Definition eines einzelnen Volkes beitragen könnte. Die Ausgiessung des Geistes ist eine Wiedergutmachung der Trennung, die aus der eben erwähnten biblischen Geschichte abgeleitet wird. Um das Problem der Völker geht es hier nur indirekt. In Wirklichkeit geht es darum, dass die Pfingstproklamation der Apostel für die Juden, die in verschiedenen Ländern lebten (Apg 2,11), verständlich war und dass eine neue Wirklichkeit da ist, die im Stande ist, die babylonische Verwirrung der Sprachen zu überwinden. Dem Leser ist schon klar, dass die Sprache keine Barriere sein wird, die in entscheidender Weise die Mission bremsen könnte.

Damit ist ein grundsätzlicher Bruch angedeutet, der mit voller Kraft in Mt 28,19a ausgedrückt wird: Die Jünger Jesu sollen allen „Völkern“ (ἔθνη) seine Lehre überliefern und alle Völker taufen. Damit verschwindet die Grenze zwischen Juden und Heiden. Ausdrücklich und radikal äußerte schon früher der Apostel Paulus: „Es gibt keinen Unterschied mehr zwischen Jude und Heide, Sklave und Freier, Mann und Frau“ (Gal 3,28; vgl. 1Kor 12,13). Zur Zeit der Entstehung des Matthäus-Evangeliums schrieb ein Schüler des Paulus im Kolosser-Brief 3,9-11, dass mit der Annahme der Taufe („das Anziehen des neuen Menschen“) Unterschiede zwischen Jude und Grieche, Beschnittenem und Unbeschnittenem, Barbar und Skythe, Sklave und Freier verschwinden. Die ersten zwei Paare drücken dasselbe aus, das dritte ist nicht völlig eindeutig. Die Barbaren waren das Gegenteil von den griechisch sprechenden und ausgebildeten Bewohnern des Römischen Reiches; die Skythen (eine griechische Gesamtbezeichnung für nördlich vom Schwarzen Meer siedelnde Stämme) galten als die wildesten Barbaren<sup>3</sup>. Das dritte Paar deutet also die Unterschiede an, die auch unter den Barbaren herrschen. Und diese sind auch „in Christus“ überwunden. Also nicht nur der Unterschied zwischen Israel und Heiden, sondern auch die Unterschiede zwischen den einzelnen heidnischen Völkern sind aus der Sicht des Glaubens relativiert.

Oft wird man an Bilder des neuen Zeitalters aus dem Buch der Offenbarung erinnert, nach denen sich die Völker vor dem einen Gott beugen werden, und Gott ihr König sein wird (Offb 15,3), die Völker werden in seinem Licht leben, und vor dem Lamm ihre Herrlichkeit und Ehre bringen (Offb 21,24.26). Aber auch hier liegt keine Betonung auf dem Wert der Völkertraditionen, die ihre Erfüllung in Christus erlangen würden, und die in ihrer Mannigfaltigkeit eine Zierde des Reiches Gottes wären. Es geht nur darum, dass auch Heiden die Wahrheit und Einzigartigkeit Gottes, der sich in Jesus offenbarte, anerkennen und dass sie ihm gegenüber nicht widerspenstig sein werden.

Theologisch kann man den Reichtum der Völkertraditionen und

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<sup>3</sup> In der tschechischen ökum. Übersetzung ist „Skythe“ dann als „Wilder“ übersetzt.

ihre Anwendbarkeit im Dienst der Annäherung zwischen Menschen, im Dienst des Evangeliums, nicht leugnen, aber biblische Texte thematisieren auf keine Weise diese Wirklichkeit. Es ist wahr, dass am Ende des Altertums und am Anfang des Mittelalters Übersetzungen der Bibel in Völkersprachen entstanden, und dass so die Bibel selbst zur Entwicklung der Völkerkulturen beitrug. Noch die altslawische Übersetzung könnten wir vielleicht in diese erste vorreformatorische Welle einbeziehen. In der Tat steht die Bibel so an den Wurzeln vieler Völkerkulturen. Aber es ist nur eine indirekte, sekundäre Bedeutung. Dieselben Gründe, d. h. das Evangelium allen Menschen verständlich mitzuteilen, führten zur Zeit des Neuen Testaments dazu, dass die ersten christlichen Autoren das Griechische als internationale Sprache ausnützten, die ihnen eine schnelle Mission ermöglichte und die Unterschiede zwischen den Völkersprachen überbrückte. Der Apostel Paulus lernte vor der Reise nach Rom kein Latein, und an die römischen Christen schrieb er griechisch, ähnlich wie er nach Galatien griechisch schrieb. Übrigens drang die griechische Kultur auch dorthin, wo sich noch Stammes- oder Völkersprachen hielten. Lykaonisch redeten die Mengen in Lystra Barnabas als Zeus und Paulus als Hermes an (Apg 14, 11–13).<sup>4</sup>

Praktisch erschien das, was wir heute als Unterschiede zwischen den Völkern bezeichnen würden, in der biblischen Zeit und in den Augen der biblischen Autoren als Unterschiede im Lebensstil, Unterschiede zwischen den Kulturen. Die Frau, die Jesus um Heilung ihres Töchterleins bat, charakterisiert Markus mit den Worten, dass sie eine Griechin, Syrophönizierin von Geburt war. „Griechin“ bestimmt ihre kulturelle Umgebung (sie sprach griechisch und war in der griechischen Kultur erzogen) und wahrscheinlich auch das, dass sie keine Jüdin war.<sup>5</sup> Erst an zweiter Stelle wird davon gesprochen, dass sie eine „Syrophönizierin von Geburt“ war. Aber auch das ist eher eine Bezeichnung ihrer sozialen Stellung als ihrer Nationalität. Sie war phönizischen Ursprungs, war vielleicht auch des Phönizischen kundig, obwohl sie Schreiben und Lesen griechisch lernte. Sie war jedoch keine afrikanische Phönizierin, sondern eine syrische – aus dem

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<sup>4</sup> Lykaonie gehörte verwaltungsmäßig zur Provinz Galatien.

<sup>5</sup> In der tschechischen ökum. Übersetzung ist „Griechin“ als „Heidin“ übersetzt.

Gebiet der Städte Tyrus und Sidon. Ihr Lebensniveau überragte auffällig das Niveau des benachbarten Galiläa.<sup>6</sup> Nationalität in unserem Sinne war also keine entscheidende Wirklichkeit, weder theologisch noch praktisch.

### **3. Das „Volk“ in der Bibel – trotz allem eine außerordentlich wichtige Wirklichkeit**

Wenn der Glaube die Unterschiede zwischen Juden, Griechen, Skythen und den anderen Barbaren relativiert, ist das trotz all seinen Relativierungen eine wichtige Wirklichkeit – so wichtig wie die Überwindung des Unterschiedes zwischen einem freiem Bürger und einem Sklaven, oder sogar des (in der damals patriarchalischen Gesellschaft) Unterschiedes zwischen einem Mann und einer Frau war. Dies geht aus den Äußerungen des Apostels Paulus hervor, die wir im vorigen Abschnitt zitierten. Dass eine Überwindung solcher Unterschiede auf die Dauer nicht leicht war, kann man denjenigen Stellen der Evangelienüberlieferungen entnehmen, an denen man von Juden und Samaritern redet. Im Gleichnis vom barmherzigen Samariter (Lk 10,25–37) riskiert der Samariter für einen verwundeten Juden das Leben (die Räuber, die ihn schlugen, konnten in der Nähe sein) und auch die kultische Reinheit (der Jude war halbtot (V. 30), und so konnte der Samariter nicht wissen, ob er nicht eine Leiche antastet).

Ein besonderes Problem ist der Missionsbefehl des auferstandenen Christus an seine Jünger in Mt 28. Die Aussage, die wortwörtlich lautet: „...machtet zu Jüngern alle Völker...“ (V. 19),<sup>7</sup> bedeutet mit höchster Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass das Weitergeben der Lehre Jesu von einem Menschen zum anderen und das Taufen Menschen aller Nationalitäten angehen soll.<sup>8</sup> Weil aber Matthäus schon in Kap. 25,32 von versammelten Völkern redet, kann man nicht völlig ausschließen, dass er nicht noch etwas anderes im Sinn hatte: eine Beein-

<sup>6</sup> Siehe G. Theissen Theissen, Lokal- und Sozialkolorit in der Geschichte der syrophänizischen Frau (Mk 7,24–30), *ZNW* 75 (1984), 202–225.

<sup>7</sup> D. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra pagina series, Volume 1, Collegeville, Minn., 1991, z. St.

<sup>8</sup> Ich lasse die Frage beiseite, ob auch Juden eingeschlossen sind, Harrington z. St.



flussung der Völkerculturen durch Jesu Lehre. Das wäre sicher nur eine indirekte Folge der Mission, weil beide Aussagen sofort auf einzelne Menschen bezogen sind. In Mt 25,32 lesen wir „sie“ (griech. αὐτοὺς) – ein Pronomen, 3. Person, Plur., männlich, nicht Neutrum, wie es sein müsste, wenn es um das Voneinanderscheiden der Völker ginge. Genauso ist das in Mt 28,19: „Taufet sie“ (αὐτοὺς), d. h. Menschen, nicht Völker.<sup>9</sup> Gewiss ist nur das, dass der Evangelist jeden Menschen als ein Glied einer Volksgemeinschaft ansieht, und dass das kommende Zeitalter in sich notwendigerweise auch eine geistliche Integration der Völkertraditionen beinhalten wird.

Eine wirkliche Überraschung ist jedoch die Äußerung des Paulus aus Röm 9,3. Nach einem feierlichen Abschnitt über die Unerschütterlichkeit der Liebe Christi, der wie eine Kette aus einzelnen Aussagen gestaltet ist, nach denen einen Jünger Christi nichts von der Liebe Gottes, die in Christus Jesus ist, scheiden kann, kommt ein Satz, in dem der Apostel seinen Kummer über Israel ausdrückt. Aus dem Zusammenhang (V. 3) erkennen wir, dass der Ursprung der Traurigkeit die Scheidung Israels von Christus ist – die Tatsache, dass die Juden sich nicht zu Christus als zu ihrem Messias bekannten. Unerwartet ist Paulus, Reaktion: „Ich selber wünschte, verflucht und von Christus getrennt zu sein für meine Brüder.“ Das, was sein Trost im Leben und Sterben ist, würde er für die Rettung Israels opfern. Er würde all das opfern, was wir als das tiefste Motiv der Zuneigung zu Christus verstehen, kurz als das „Heil.“ Es ist so unerwartet radikal, dass viele Exegeten das für eine Hyperbel halten, für eine Äußerung, die nicht wortwörtlich gemeint ist. Paulus redet so, als wolle er die Rolle Christi auf sich nehmen, der zum Fluch (κατάρα) wurde, damit er vor dem Gericht Gottes die anderen rettet (Gal 3,13). Es ist ein Ausdruck der Bedeutung Jesu, der an den Hymnus über „den Knecht des Herrn“ aus Jes 53 anknüpft. Und Paulus nimmt hier fast die Rolle Christi auf sich – er will „verflucht (ἀνάθεμα) sein und (so entfernt) von Christus (ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ) zugunsten (ὕπὲρ) seiner Brüder, seiner Stammverwandten nach dem Fleisch“ (Röm 9,3). Es ist ein absichtlich provozierender Ausdruck, in dem das vorige „...weder

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<sup>9</sup> Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus. 3. Teilband*, Mt 18–25 (EKK I/4), Neukirchen-Zürich 1997.

Tod noch Leben... uns scheiden (χωρίσαι) kann von der Liebe Gottes, die in Christus Jesus ist“ (8,38a und 39b) mit der Aussage, nach der derselbe Apostel „verflucht sein will und (so entfernt) von Christus,“ kontrastiert. Die erste Aussage relativiert eigentlich die zweite. Die provokative Lästerlichkeit der Äußerung hat deshalb anscheinend vor allem eine rhetorische Funktion: Sie soll der Erörterung über die dauerhafte Rolle Israels den Boden ebnen, dessen besondere geschichtliche Sendung durch seine Ablehnung Jesu nicht abgeschafft ist (9,4–29; vgl. 3,1–4). Paulus redet von seiner Bereitwilligkeit, für Israel zu sterben, damit er um so wichtiger den Leser überzeugen kann, dass Israel nicht aufhörte, Volk Gottes zu sein (9,4–5). Die radikalen Worte wurden durch eine Erinnerung an konkrete Leute provoziert, an die „Brüder“ – an einzelne nach dem Fleisch (κατὰ σάρκα – V. 3) „Stammverwandte“ (συγγενεῖς),<sup>10</sup> die ihm in den Sinn kamen. Die Tatsache, dass es um Juden ging, erhöhte sein Trauma von der gegenwärtigen Scheidung. Aber grundsätzlich geht es um „Stammverwandte,“ also um Angehörige derselben Ethnie, derselben „Nation.“ Nüchtern drückt er in Röm 10,1 aus, um was es ihm am Anfang des neunten Kapitels ging: „Ich flehe zu Gott, dass Israel das Heil erlangt.“

In diesem Lichte scheint diese – sei es nur hypothetische – Bereitwilligkeit, sein eigenes Heil für die Rettung dieser Menschen zu opfern, als eine Wirklichkeit, die die Bedeutung des Volkes unermesslich betont. Wahrhaftig, es geht nur um eine gewisse Analogie. Eine Entsprechung zum Volk im modernen Sinne kann man in der neutestamentlichen Zeit kaum bestimmen. Eins ist jedoch gewiss: Es gibt hier einen gemeinsamen Nenner von Menschen, die für Paulus die Nahen sind (vgl.: Röm 13,9; 15,2), es sind seine Nächsten, die er dem Liebesgebot Jesu nach liebt (Mk 12,30 und Paral). Es sind diejenigen, die die Tradition darstellen, aus der er aufgewachsen ist, und auf deren Hintergrund er auch das ausdrücken muss, was er als Zeuge Christi Neues bringt. Die Definition einer solchen Gruppe von Nächsten kann sich ändern. Heute hat der Begriff Volk noch andere Züge und Funktionen, die nur für seine neuzeitliche Gestalt kennzeichnend sind. Der gemeinsame Nenner ist allerdings, dass es sich

<sup>10</sup> Die Tschechische ökum. Übersetzung hat hier ungenau „lid.“

um eine breitere Gruppe von Nächsten handelt. Aus diesem biblischen Gesichtspunkt heraus kann man das Positive des Phänomens eines Volkes ergreifen, und aus diesem Gesichtspunkt kann man auch gegenwärtige Vorstellungen über das Volk korrigieren, die aus der Nationalismusedeologie hervorgehen und keine Rücksicht auf konkrete Nähe zu Menschen nehmen, für deren Leben wir Mitverantwortung haben.

Übersetzung von Adam und Eva Balcar

# DAS LAND IM JÜDISCHEN DENKEN

*Michael Krupp, Jerusalem*

## Das unaufgebbare Ziel

*Als Rabbi Sera ins Land Israel hinaufzog, fand er keine Fähre um hinüberzukommen. Da erfaßte er die Fährleine und hangelte sich hinüber. Sprach ein jüdischer Ketzer zu ihm: Übereiltes Volk, das mit dem Mund schneller ist als mit den Ohren, noch immer befindet ihr euch in eurer Überstürzung. Dieser erwiderte: Ein Ort, der nicht einmal Mose und Aaron beschieden war – wer sagt, daß er mir beschieden ist!?<sup>1</sup>*

Rabbi Sera kam aus Babylonien. Er kam in ein Land, das die Römer gehässig Palästina, Philisterland, genannt hatten, als ob es hier schon keine Juden mehr gäbe. Zwar war den Juden Jerusalem seit dem verlorenen Bar-Kochba-Krieg im Jahr 135 n. Chr. verboten, sie stellten aber noch die Mehrheit der Bevölkerung. Die Juden lebten in den Bergen Hebrons, in der Küstenebene zwischen Gaza und Haifa, dem historischen Philisterland, und besonders in Galiläa und Golan, wo sie es immerhin, wie es die wiederaufgefundenen wunderschön ausgeschmückten Synagogenreste beweisen, zu einem bescheidenen Wohlstand gebracht hatten.

Aber als Rabbi Sera ins Land kam, ging es mit dem Land und der jüdischen Besiedlung immer mehr bergab. Nachdem die christliche Kirche Staatskirche geworden war, hatte sich die Lage der Juden in Palästina erheblich verschlechtert. Das Judentum wurde zur ‚gottlosen Sekte‘ erklärt. Die christliche Gewaltherrschaft bedrängte in erster Linie die Rabbinen. Immer mehr von ihnen wanderten nach Babylonien aus. Die Lage der Juden in ihrem Land immer schlimmer.

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<sup>1</sup> *Der Babylonische Talmud*, Traktat Ketubbot 112a

Mischehen wurden verboten, Staatsämter allen Juden versagt und Synagogenbauten unmöglich gemacht. Im Jahr 415 wurde das jüdische Patriarchat in Palästina aufgelöst.

Und dennoch zog Rabbi Sera aus dem reichen Babylonien, einem Land, wo es den Juden gutging, in das von Verfolgungen heimgesuchte Palästina. Er folgte damit einem Gebot der Rabbinen. Wie Israel damals am Fuße des Berges Sinai gesagt hatte, „wir wollen es tun, und wir wollen es hören“ (2. Mose 24,7) – „übereiltes Volk, das mit dem Mund schneller ist, als mit den Ohren“ – so galt auch jetzt noch das Gebot vom Besiedeln des Gelobten Landes als größte Erfüllung. Die Rabbinen lehrten:

*Man wohne stets im Land Israel, selbst in einer Stadt, die in der Mehrzahl aus Heiden besteht, und wohne nicht außerhalb des Landes, selbst nicht in einer Stadt, die in der Mehrzahl aus Israeliten besteht. Wer nämlich im Lande Israel wohnt, dem ist es so, als habe er einen Gott, und wer außerhalb des Landes wohnt, dem ist es so, als habe er keinen Gott... Wer im Land Israel wohnt, ist ohne Sünde... Wer nur vier Ellen im Lande Israel wandert, ist dessen sicher, daß er der zukünftigen Welt teilhaftig wird; selbst eine Sklavin im Land Israel ist dessen sicher.<sup>2</sup>*

Je größer die Bedrückung der Juden in Palästina wurde, je mehr Juden dieses ihr Land verlassen mußten, um so stärker wurde die Sehnsucht nach Rückkehr. Im Achtzehnbittegebet, dem jüdischen Hauptgebet, beten die frommen Juden dreimal täglich:

*Stoße in das große Horn zu unserer Befreiung, erhebe das Pannier, unsere Verbannten zu sammeln, und bringe uns zusammen von den vier Enden der Erde. Gelobt seist du, Gott, der du die Verstoßenen deines Volkes sammelst!  
Nach deiner Stadt Jerusalem kehre in Erbarmen zurück, wohne in ihr, errichte sie bald in unseren Tagen als ewigen Bau, und*

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<sup>2</sup> *Der Babylonische Talmud*, Traktat Ketubbot 111a.

*Davids Thron gründe schnell in ihr. Gelobt seist du, Gott, der du Jerusalem erbaust!*

*Unsere Augen mögen schauen, wenn du nach Zion zurückkehrst in Erbarmen. Gelobt seist du, Gott, der seine Gegenwart nach Zion zurückbringst!*<sup>3</sup>

Und nach jedem Passahfest rufen die Scheidenden sich zu:

*Nächstes Jahr in Jerusalem!*

Das Land Israel hat die Juden in der langen Geschichte des Exils niemals losgelassen. Auch wenn es dem Judentum verhältnismäßig gut ging, blieb die alte Zionssehnsucht lebendig. Aus der Menge der jüdischen Dichter sei *Jehuda ha-Levi* aus Spanien, 1085 geboren, herausgegriffen. In seiner *Zionide*,<sup>4</sup> dem Trauerlied um die Zerstörung des Tempels, das bis auf den heutigen Tag am 9. Aw, dem Gedenktag beider Tempelzerstörungen, in allen Synagogen gesungen wird, tritt diese Zionssehnsucht deutlich hervor: Aus der Gefangenschaft wendet sich das Volk Israel nach Zion wie eine in alle Richtungen zerstreute Herde, die sich zurück zur Hürde sehnt, wie eine Schar verschüchterter Kinder, die die Schürze der Mutter fassen wollen. Zion aber hört nicht. Es liegt stumm da, leidend wie sein Volk, in Trümmer zerschlagen. Seine Ruinen aber sind Zions Auszeichnung; denn sie sind Zeugen des göttlichen Handelns. Das ganze Land ist der Ort, über dem Gottes Geist ausgegossen wurde. Dieser Ort wurde Abbild Gottes, Wohnsitz seiner Gegenwart, Unterpfund, sichtbares Zeichen für seine Herrschaft. Die Gottesherrschaft steht aber noch aus, da Fremde im Haus Gottes sitzen.

Weil das Land aber Haus der Königsherrschaft Gottes ist, ist es jetzt schon Krone der Schönheit, unvergleichbar gegenüber allen anderen Ländern; seine Luft macht lebendig, sein Staub ist köstlicher als Myrrhe und seine Ströme sind Honigseim. So trägt es trotz aller Verwüstung den Keim der Erlösung für sein leidendes Volk in sich. Das Lied endet in der Übersetzung Franz Rosenzweigs:

<sup>3</sup> Achtehnbittengebets, in: *Siddur Sefat Emet*, Basel 1960, 43f

<sup>4</sup> Jehuda ha-Levi, *Zionslieder. Verdeutscht und mit Anmerkungen von F. Rosenzweig*, Berlin 1933, 32f.

*Dich begehrt zur Wohnstatt er selbst, dein Gott- und selig der  
Mensch,  
der dich erwählt, der dir naht und wohnt in deinen Höfen.  
Selig, wer harrt und erlebt und schaut, daß aufgeht dein Licht,  
des Strahlgeschosse die nächt'gen Schatten durchschlagen,  
deine Erwählten zu schauen im Glück, zu jubeln mit dir,  
die neu du jugendlich prangst wie einst in Urtagen.*

Nicht das Grübeln über große Gedanken zeichnet den Menschen aus, sondern erst das Handeln danach. Für JehudaHalevi ist die Pilgerfahrt ins Heilige Land schon Anbruch der Erlösung. So machte er sich als alter Mann dorthin auf. Ob er die Strapazen und Gefahren der Reise überstand und das Ziel seiner Hoffnung erreichte, die er mit seinen Liedern besang, ist unbekannt. Die Legende berichtet, daß er, vor den Mauern der heiligen Stadt kniend, die Zionide auf den Lippen, vom Schwert eines Kreuzfahrers durchbohrt, den Tod auf heiliger, ersehnter Erde fand.

### **Mystik und messianische Bewegungen**

Auch in *Spanien* nahmen die Verfolgungen zu. Im Jahr 1267 musste *Rabbi Mosche ben Nachman*, nachdem er in Barcelomna in einer der bekanntesten Disputationen mit dem Konvertiten Pablo Christiani siegreich hervorgegangen war, von dort nach Palästina ausweichen und brachte hierher die *Kabbala*, eine mystische Strömung des Judentums, die als Reaktion auf die vernünftig logische Religion – gerade eines *Maimonides* – entstanden war. Die Kabbala fand in Galiläa ein neues Zentrum und bestimmte für die nächsten Jahrhunderte die Einwanderung nach Palästina, indem sie durch ihre Lehre, die dem Land eine erlösende Funktion zuschreibt, messianische Bewegungen hervorrief. Durch die Kabbala wurde Israel wieder zum geistigen Mittelpunkt der weitverstreuten Judenheit.

Allen messianischen Bewegungen im Judentum ist der Gedanke gemeinsam, daß der Messias das weit zerstreute Volk gegen alle Widerstände der Feinde zurückbringen, und Gott dann seine Königsherrschaft für ewig antreten wird. Im *Buch Sohar* faßt die Kabbala ihre Lehre zusammen: Die *Schechina*, die göttliche Einwohnung, ist

die himmlische Entsprechung von Volk und Land Israel; Volk und Land gehören daher aufs engste zusammen. Was dem einen begegnet, das wirkt sich auf das andere aus. Als Israel sein Land verlassen mußte, wurde dieses zur Wüste. Indem Volk und Land zerrissen wurden, spaltete sich auch die göttliche Einwohnung. Da aber Israel Mitte und Ziel der Weltgeschichte ist, ist auch die Welt zerrissen; erlöst wird sie erst durch die wiedererlangte Einheit von Volk und Land Israel. Dann vereinigt sich auch wieder Gott mit seiner Entsprechung, der göttlichen Einwohnung.

In Spanien hatte sich, ebenfalls auf Druck der Verfolgung hin, eine besondere jüdische Gemeinde gebildet. Es waren die von der Inquisition verfolgten zwangsgetauften Juden, die aber von ihrer christlichen Umwelt nicht als gleichberechtigt anerkannt wurden. Sie wurden von diesen *Marranen*, ‚Schweine‘, genannt. Die Marranen hatten ihre eigenen Gemeinden, eine eigene Gottesdienstform und eigene Vertreter bei Kirche und Staat. Sie blieben auch in anderen Ländern als selbständige Gemeinden bestehen.

In dem *Trostbuch über die Leiden Israels*, von dem Marranen *Samuel Usque* geschrieben und 1553 in Ferrara veröffentlicht, tritt die marranische Erlösungshoffnung besonders deutlich hervor: Die Weltgeschichte wird durch Israel bestimmt. An die Periode des Ersten und Zweiten Tempels reiht sich gleichbedeutend die Epoche der Verbannung. Hier wird Israel durch die Knechtschaft, besonders aber durch die Nötigung, die es durch die Taufe erleiden mußte, von seiner Sünde geläutert. Die Vertreibungen sind Etappen des Erlösungsprozesses. Das Martyrium erhöht die Erlösungsnähe. Erst wenn Israel alle Tiefen des Leidens durchschritten hat, wird es würdig, seine Erlösung zu erlangen und ins Land zurückzukehren. Die Erlösungszeit sei jetzt angebrochen. Die Feinde Israels werden besonders durch die Türkenkriege bestraft und vernichtet. Aus allen Enden der Welt strömen die Kinder Israels ins Gelobte Land. Das wandernde Gottesvolk findet seine Ruhe auf den Wiesen und Äckern seines Heimatbodens, seiner ‚wahren Mutter‘. Die verdorrte Erde verjüngt sich; Israels Martyrium hat ein Ende.

Aber nicht nur die mystische Bewegung im Judentum, auch die rationalistische, die halachisch, gesetzestreu ausgerichtete Bewegung dieser Zeit betonte die Einmaligkeit des Landes. Der wichtigste Ver-



treter dieser Richtung war Rabbiner *Josef Karo* in Sefat, der Verfasser des Schulchan Aruch, der wichtigsten Gesetzeskodex im Judentum. Er schreibt:

*Nach nahezu fünfzehnhundert Jahren Exil und Verfolgung hat Gott sich wieder seines Volkes und seines Bundes mit ihren Vätern erinnert und brachte sie zurück aus ihrer Gefangenschaft, einen aus einer Stadt und zwei aus einer Familie, aus allen Enden der Welt zum Lande des Ruhmes.<sup>5</sup>*

Im Jahr 1621 wanderte *Rabbi Jesaja Horowitz* von Prag ins Gelobte Land.

*Jeder Mann von Israel, so schrieb er, muß das Land Israel umarmen, zu ihm wandern und von den entferntesten Teilen der Welt, getrieben von der Liebe seines Sohnes zu seiner Mutter. Es ist recht, daß die, die außerhalb Palästinas wohnen, nah oder fern, sich danach sehnen, das Land zu erreichen; denn so, wie der Allmächtige sein Volk erwählt hat, so hat er auch sein Land erwählt. Israel kann nur als ein Volk betrachtet werden, wenn es in ihm wohnt.<sup>6</sup>*

Auch in der schwärmerischen messianischen Bewegung bekam das Land Israel einen Ehrenplatz. Das Auftreten des falschen Messias *Schabtai Zwi* 1666 im Land Israel hielt die gesamte jüdische Welt vom Jemen bis nach Hamburg und den entfernten Gegenden wie Indien in ihren Bann, so dass Juden überall auf gepackten Koffern saßen und auf das Signal zum Aufbruch in das Gelobte Land warteten. Das Scheitern der Bewegung bescherte eine große Krise für das Judentum.

Als Gegenbewegung zum Sabbatianismus ebenso wie zur verhärteten Orthodoxie förderte auch der Chassidismus die Auswande-

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<sup>5</sup> Josef Karo, in: *The historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine. Memorandum submitted to the Palestine Royal Commission on behalf of the Jewish Agency for Palestine*, Jerusalem 1938, 20

<sup>6</sup> Jesaja Horowitz, in: *General Council (Waad Leumi) of the Jewish Community of Palestine, Historical Memoranda*, Jerusalem 1947, 94

rungsbewegung nach Palästina. Auch für die Chassidim war die Rückkehr nach Palästina der Anfang der Erlösung.

Im Jahr 1777 wanderten dreihundert Chassidim nach Safed, wo *Rabbi Mendel* aus Witebsk anerkanntes Haupt der chassidischen Bewegung wurde. In den nächsten Jahren folgten Tausende von Chassidim.

Als Sechszwanzigjähriger machte sich *Rabbi Nachman von Brazlaw* auf die Pilgerschaft nach Palästina. Die großen Schwierigkeiten, denen er auf seiner Wanderschaft begegnete, legte er symbolisch aus. Die Leiden, die er erlebte, seien die Leiden des Landes. So trat er schließlich in Konstantinopel als Narr auf. Nach der Rückkehr gab er vor, verwandelt zu sein. Alle Gebote der Thora haben sich durch die Fahrt nach Israel und im Leben dort erfüllt, damit ist ihre Bedrohung für immer erloschen.

*Ich habe, erklärte er, die Erfüllung der ganzen Thora erlangt, und hätte man mich sogar an die Ismaeliten in ferne Länder verkauft, wo es keine Juden gibt, und hätte man mich dort Vieh weiden lassen und sogar, wenn ich nicht mehr gewußt hätte, wann Sabbat und Festtage sind, und hätte weder Gebetsmantel noch Gebetsriemen mehr gehabt und kein Gebot mehr mir zuhanden, ich hätte doch die ganze Thora zu erfüllen vermocht.<sup>7</sup>*

## **Der Zionismus und der Staat Israel**

Die zionistische Bewegung, die mit der ersten Einwanderungsbewegung die Rückkehr des jüdischen Volkes in sein Land, das Land Israel, verfolgte, hat verschiedene Wurzeln. Zweifellos war aber die entscheidende die alte Zionssehnsucht, die am Land der Väter festhielt gegen alle anderen Ansiedlungsprojekte wie die eines Judenstaates in Argentinien durch den Philantropen Baron Hirsch, in Birobidschan durch die Sowjetunion und in Uganda durch den Propheten des Zionismus, Theodor Herzl. Die Zionistische Bewegung drohte auf dem sechsten Kongress 1903 mit dem Vorschlag Herzls in Ugan-

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<sup>7</sup> Nachman von Brazlaw, zitiert in Martin Buber, *Israel und Palästina*, Zürich 1950, 127

da ein „Nachtasyl“ für das jüdische Volk zu schaffen, auseinanderzubrechen. Herzl nahm auf immensen Druck von diesem Vorhaben Abstand. Danach kam es niemals mehr zu einer Diskussion, ob ein anderes Land geeigneter sein könnte als Palästina. Die Zionistische Bewegung hat immer wieder offiziell sich auf die alten biblischen und späteren Traditionen berufen und sie gegenüber den englischen Behörden, die das Mandat über Palästina vom Völkerbund, dem Vorläufer der Organisation der Vereinten Nationen, bekommen hatten, betont. In mehreren Memoranden stellte die offizielle Zionistische Organisation diese Traditionen zusammen. So 1938 in dem Dokument „The historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine Memorandum submitted to the Palestine Royal Commission on behalf of the Jewish Agency for Palestine“ und 1947 in den „Historical Memoranda“.

Mit der Gründung des Staates Israel 1948 schien der Zionistische Plan seine Erfüllung erlangt zu haben. Es gab einen jüdischen Staat in den Grenzen des historischen Palästina. Die Frage nach den Landesverheißungen und den Grenzen des Landes traten erneut auf, nachdem Israel die gesamte Westbank, den Gazastreifen, den Sinai und die Golanhöhen im Krieg 1967 erobert hatte. Nachdem die Frage des Gelobten Landes für die Golanhöhen, den Sinai und teilweise auch für den Gazastreifen wenig Bedeutung hatte, weil beide Gebiete nach jüdischer Tradition nicht zum alten Kernland gehört hatten, stellte sie sich in aller Schärfe in Bezug auf die Westbank. Hier versuchten nationalistische Kreise in Berufung auf die alten Landesverheißungen und den biblischen Befehl, das Land einzunehmen, diese Gebiete für sich zu beanspruchen und zu besiedeln. Aber auch im religiösen Lager blieb die Frage umstritten, ob man heutige politische Fragestellungen mit biblischen Geboten aus einer ganz anderen Zeit und in ganz anderen Zusammenhängen lösen kann und wieweit nicht Zusagen der Landesverheißung mit anderen biblischen Geboten, zum Beispiel, den Fremden zu lieben und Leben zu erhalten, kollidieren.

**PALESTINIAN CHURCH READS OLD  
TESTAMENT  
THE TRIANGLE OF ETHNICITY, FAITH,  
LAND – AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION**

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In the first part of this article I pose several fundamental questions: What is particular about the Palestinian Christians and why is it that they find themselves forced by the current context to confront the difficult question of the values of ethnicity, religion and land in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And how does this community of faith respond to the ongoing political conflict? Therefore in the first part I present in brief the reasons for the changed position of Palestinian Christians: the historical changes which led to the current situation in Israel/Palestine, as well as a short record of historical development and a demographic survey of Palestinian church(es). This then serves to provide a better understanding of the urgent need for forming a genuine Palestinian Christian identity by means of the inculturation of the local church and the contextualization of its theological thinking.

In the second, fundamental part I concentrate on the biblical hermeneutics of Palestinian theology in reaction to claims concerning the divine right of existence of the State of Israel and to the Land of Palestine which are justified by recourse to the Bible. I briefly outline the development of a genuine Palestinian theology and after it I answer the following questions: Why have the Bible and especially the Old Testament become for Palestinian Christians an unacceptable book? What are the Palestinian theological answers to the abuse of the Bible for political arguments and claims to the Land? Which are the biblical themes misused *contra nobis*? Should and does the Palestinian church develop a specific hermeneutical approach in its reading of the Bible and of the Old Testament? Is the reinterpretation of

the abused biblical texts possible and if so, what are the key interpretative methods which Palestinian theologians suggest? Are there encouraging biblical themes for Palestinian Christians too? Could the Bible also serve for reconciliation and not only as an instrument in the struggle of ethnicity and faith for the Land?

In the conclusion I summarise the chief hermeneutical points of Palestinian theology in reaction to the present conflict and the question of the Land.

### **Palestinian Christians and their church(es)**

Palestinian Christians' awareness of the need to form and find their own identity (ethnicity, nationality, faith) constitutes the first step in their holding their own view concerning the current political situation in Israel/Palestine – whether politically or theologically. This process has been going on continuously from 1948 up to present day, for example in the efforts towards the *arabisation* of the local church.

### **Identity of the Palestinian Christians**

The exodus of the Jewish population to Palestine and especially the rise of the State of Israel in 1948 and also the dubious claim to the whole Land of Palestine provoked an extensive response in particular from the Arab population and states. The question about the Land of Palestine/Israel intensified. Since the Palestinian Christians, as an inseparable part of Arab ethnicity and Palestinian nationality, were also confronted with the abrupt *fait accompli*, they were compelled to provide an answer to political and theological questions by themselves. Since 1948, Palestinian Christians have been living in a unique situation.<sup>1</sup>

The third element of Jewish religion and of the non-Arab ethnicity has given way to a situation of the two-sided relation of Muslims and

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<sup>1</sup> Valognes, Jean-Pierre. *Vie et Mort des Chrétiens d'Orient: Des Origines à nos Jours*. Paris, 1994, p. 566. "Bien qu'ils soient ethniquement arabes et établis dans un environnement musulman, qu'ils se distinguent peu, dans leur tradition religieuse et leur profil socioculturel, de leurs frères chrétiens de Jordanie et de Syrie, ils vivent en effet une situation unique au Moyen-Orient..."

Christians and to the common Arabic ethnicity. Therefore the Palestinian Christians are situated as a minority in faith and as an ethnically unwanted group between the two main components: Muslim and Jewish: "Aussi subissent-ils très directement les conrecoups du conflit israélo-arabes, qui se traduisent à leur égard par un double processus d'exclusion: les Israéliens, qui les renvoient à leur arabité, et les Palestiniens musulmans, ... ont tendance à les percevoir comme étrangers et à les traiter en adversaires."<sup>2</sup>

Thereafter the Palestinian Christians are confronted with at least three religious-ethnic-cultural contexts: Arab-Muslim, Israeli-Jewish and Christian (national and international). How is the identity of Palestinian Christians and their church(es) formed? The Palestinian Christians are conscious of the plurality of contexts, in which they live, and of the necessity to choose among them. The criteria is existential, cultural, and historical (1.2).

The urgency to discover and confirm their identity has arisen above all since the 1967 war and the declaration of the Intifada. The unprepared and powerless church(es) soon realized the necessity of a clear position in the face of oppressive events.<sup>3</sup> The new generation of Christians, facing the present challenges, has grown up with an understanding that neutrality is not neutrality and leads to isolation.

Palestinian Christians are confronted daily with the question about their identity not only in the form of historical events but also in the form of particular questions: „Gibt es das, christliche Palästinenser bzw. Palästinensische Christen?“<sup>4</sup> “Have you been converted from

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<sup>2</sup> Valognes, Jean-Pierre. *Vie et Mort des Chrétiens d'Orient: Des Origines à nos Jours*, p. 566.

<sup>3</sup> Khoury, Rafiq. „Unsere Kirchen sind keine Inseln.“ *Zur Identität der palästinensischen Christen*. In: Bechmann, Ulrike, Raheb, Mitri. *Verwurzelt im Heiligen Land. Einführung in das palästinensische Christentum*. Frankfurt am Mein, 1995, p. 36–50, p. 41. „Man hat den Eindruck, daß die Christen von der Situation völlig überrascht worden sind und nicht wissen, was sie tun sollen. In einer so Schwierigen Situation wenden sich die Christen ihren verschiedenen Kirchen zu, nur um voller Bitterkeit feststellen zu müssen, daß keine Stimme sich erhebt, zu ihnen zu sprechen, nicht einmal ein Wort der Ermutigung und der Hoffnung. Da die Kirchen nicht den Mut aufbringen... sind sie sich selbst überlassen und ohnmächtig.“

<sup>4</sup> Raheb, Mitri. *Ich bin Christ und Palästinenser : Israel, seine Nachbarn und die Bibel*. Gutersloh, 1994, p. 15.

Islam?”<sup>5</sup> How can a Christian be a Palestinian?”<sup>6</sup> The answers to these questions are very similar: “I am a Christian, a Palestinian, an Arab, and an Israeli.”<sup>7</sup> And if Naim S. Ateek were to move from the general to particular, he would be an Arab, a Palestinian, a Christian and an Israeli.

The Palestinian Christians define themselves as Arab Christians along with the Arab-Muslim majority context, as one of two religious communities of Arab ethnicity and of the one Palestinian nationality. « Elle partage la langue, la culture, la mentalité, les luttes, l'histoire, les aspirations, le sort de l'avenir, le milieu de vie. »<sup>8</sup> Christians were involved together with Muslims in the national restoration movement during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and contributed to a large extent to its birth and development. Even today the national belonging is of big importance for them. The question: “Are you Palestinian first or Christian first?”<sup>9</sup> appears as false; in its extreme position it leads to blind nationalism or secularism. The inclination to one of the solutions depends on which part of the identity is threatened at the moment. As Munib A. Younan says: “...Christianness is incarnated in Palestinianness, forming one identity, a Palestinian Christian identity that has specific and undebated elements.”<sup>10</sup>

From this point of view it is important to remark that Palestinian Christians pay attention to the Israeli-Jewish context and to the interpretation of the Bible derived from it above all in the frame of the international consultation process, due to an affinity of European partners to Judaism (Theology after Auschwitz). The Israeli-Jewish context is not for Palestinian Christians a determinative one, especially

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<sup>5</sup> Younan, Munib A. *Palestinian Local Theology*. Al-Liqa' Journal, Vol. 1 (May) 1992, p. 51–63, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Ateek, Naim Stifan. *Justice and Only Justice. A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*. New York, 1989, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Ateek, Naim Stifan. *Justice and Only Justice*, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Khoury, Rafiq. *La catéchèse dans l'Église locale de Jérusalem. Histoire, situation actuelle et perspectives d'avenir*, p. 83. Similarly: Raheb, Mitri. *Ich bin Christ und Palästinenser*, p. 78: „Der Kontext der christlichen Araber ist der arabisch-islamische Raum. Der arabisch-christliche Glaube und die arabisch-islamische Kultur haben einander im Laufe der Geschichte beeinflusst und bereichert. Dieses Verhältnis zu klären, kann ein genuiner Beitrag der arabischen Christen für die universale Kirche sein.“

<sup>9</sup> Younan, Munib A. *Palestinian Local Theology*, p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> Younan, Munib A. *Palestinian Local Theology*, p. 54–55.

for Israeli-Jewish's cultural and political separateness and diversity, for time limited activity and way of its existence in the area. It appears as something very distinct from the Arabic-Palestinian context of Palestinian Christians; the Israeli-Jewish element constitutes a culture apart.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless the context of Israeli-Palestinian conflict has provoked the search for a Palestinian Christian identity, it has stimulated the emergence of a Palestinian theology and improved ecumenical relations<sup>12</sup> and thus from this point of view it has a stimulating effect for Palestinian Christian identity and theology as Geries S. Khoury says: "I cannot distinguish between the Christian-Palestinian identity and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."<sup>13</sup>

### Historical Development of Palestinian church(es)

The third, very important characteristic of Palestinian Christians is not only their Arabness and belonging to the Palestinian nation but also their Christianity. In the question: "When did you become Christian?"<sup>14</sup> they can proudly answer: "I became Christian in the first

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<sup>11</sup> Khoury, Rafiq. *La catéchèse dans l'Église local de Jérusalem*, p. 84: "On peut certainement se demander pourquoi nous évitons de faire allusion à l'élément juif qui, pourtant, se trouve majoritaire dans une bonne partie de la Palestine. Evidemment, ce n'est pas par fanatisme nationaliste que nous le faisons. La raison est que l'élément juif... constitue une culture à part, qui ne détermine en aucune façon, du moins jusqu'à maintenant, le christianisme arabe de Palestine. ... Il suffit de parcourir cette partie de la Palestine où les juifs se trouvent majoritaires, pour se rendre compte de ce fait. Les arabes, chrétiens et musulmans, s'y trouvent mêlés, constituant au milieu de la population juive des îlots distincts à tout point de vue."

<sup>12</sup> Khoury, Geries Sa'ed. *The Palestinian Christian Identity*. In: Ateek, Naim Stifan, Ellis, Marc H., Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Faith and the Intifada. Palestinian Christian Voices*. New York, 1991, p. 71–76, p. 73: "Under occupation there is no difference between Orthodox and Catholic, Armenian or Syrian, Coptic and Maronite, Lutheran and Anglican, for we are all one nation, Palestinian... Our destiny is one, our pain is one, and our hope is one. This hope is in Jesus Christ, on one side, and in the liberation of our land, on the other side."

<sup>13</sup> Khoury, Geries Sa'ed. *The Palestinian Christian Identity*, p. 71.

<sup>14</sup> Fasheh, Munir. *Reclaiming Our Identity an Redefining Ourselves*. In: Ateek, Naim Stifan, Ellis, Marc H., Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Faith and the Intifada*, p. 61–84, p. 65.



century. When did you become Christian?"<sup>15</sup> Let's briefly outline the history of the Palestinian church(es).<sup>16</sup>

The original church of Palestine had arisen from a Jewish environment (around St. James) and became quickly marginal due to the mission to the gentiles. During the fourth century the Jewish-Christian church had become extinct, being replaced by the Roman-Byzantine church, Syriac in culture. The famous theological school of Caesarea as well as a flourishing network of Palestinian monasteries had been developing from the fourth century, working on the orthodox Chalcedonian theology and liturgical forms (taken by Antioch and afterwards by Byzantium). The Patriarchate of Jerusalem was established at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 at the expense of the Patriarchate of Antioch; but the significance of the Patriarchate consisted especially in the symbolic value of Jerusalem, the guarding of the Holy Places and pilgrimage.

The monophysite doctrine was also condemned at the council of Chalcedon in 451 followed by the emergence of the Non-Chalcedonian church(es) of ethnic-national groups: the Copts, the Armenians and the Syrian (Jacobites). The solidity of the Byzantine monitoring in Palestine avoided an expansion of Monophysite doctrine and churches *in extenso* during the fifth century. Therefore the Greek official state church (called the Melkite, that is, the Royalist Church) arose and kept the three patriarchates (Greek Orthodox of Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem) thanks to its adhesion to the Byzantine Empire.<sup>17</sup>

The Palestinian church(es) reached its golden age thanks to the Emperor Justinian, who had reorganized and enriched the church of

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<sup>15</sup> Fasheh, Munir. *Reclaiming Our Identity and Redefining Ourselves*, p. 65.

<sup>16</sup> Valognes, Jean-Pierre. *Vie et Mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, p. 566–613 and p. 284–335. Tsimhoni, Daphne. *Christian Communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank Since 1948: an Historical, Social, and Political Study*. London 1993, p. xi–xviii and p. 33–61.

<sup>17</sup> The Melkite Church is a result of three options: dogmatic (it opted for the official orthodox doctrine of Chalcedon during the christological controversies of the fifth century), disciplinary (it followed the example of Constantinople in the schism with Rome in 1054) and ritual (it abandoned its original Syriac liturgy in order to adopt the Byzantine one). Ritually, the Melkite church is Greek, with its original Antioch anchorage.

Jerusalem. This prosperous period ended during the Persian conquest (614) and soon after during the Muslim-Arab invasion (637/8–1099).

In the area of the Patriarchate of Antioch (geographically the Great Syrie), there had been a large Arab population even before the Muslim-Arab invasion and so the locals had become quickly *arabised* (holding the responsible state positions). Hence the Greek Melkite church can be called the “Church of Arabs.” The church served as a bridge between the Greek, Syriac, and Arab-Muslim cultures.

Although the Arabic-Muslim reign was not hostile to the Christians, there were lots of conversions and the decline of Christianity had began. In the early history of the Arab-Muslim reign, Jerusalem became the third Holy Place of Islam and Christians fell into the position of second-class inhabitants. The creativity of Palestinian theology and monastic life seemingly declined and only five dioceses remained in the beginning of the ninth century compared to the fifty bishoprics existing in the sixth century.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem followed Constantinople in the schism with Rome in 1054 and when the crusaders arrived to Jerusalem they found a divided church. The establishment of the Latin church and the Latin Patriarchate (until 1291) and the withdrawal of the Greek church hierarchy (serving Armenians of Jerusalem and Jacobites) succeeded their coming.

The Greek hierarchy could have returned after the reconquest by Saladin. In the time of the Mamluk-Muslim reign (1291–1516) Eastern Christianity was regarded with suspicion; they were persecuted. Nevertheless, the Franciscans were permitted to return to the Holy Places in Jerusalem.

The Ottoman reign of Palestine (1516–1917) restored Orthodox Melkite supremacy by recognition as a *millet* only the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.<sup>18</sup> By bringing the two Patriarchates closer together, it initiated the Hellenization (liturgy, clergy, the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre) of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The Armenian Orthodox Church, which was recog-

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<sup>18</sup> Millet system enables the autonomy in the administration, education, charitable institutions, the maintenance of law courts etc. The Patriarch became a civil representant of all Church communities.

nized as a *millet* in 1461, was entrusted by the governance of the Non-Chalcedonian church(es).

By the end of the sixteenth century the Palestinian Christians were exclusively Greek Orthodox. On the basis of the mutual agreement of the European governments and the Ottoman Empire Roman Catholic missionaries were allowed to move freely and the principal division of the Palestinian church began. Following the establishment of the Greek Catholic Patriarchate of Antioch in 1724, the Greek Catholic community, under French protection, arose in Palestine. Russia had begun (in particular after the Congress of Berlin in 1877–78) to protect the Greek Orthodox and later, Great Britain and Prussia had introduced and protected the Protestant churches. In 1847 Pius IX restored the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem and French diplomacy obtained an agreement for keeping the status quo concerning the Holy Places in 1852, which was approved by the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

The Hellenization of the Greek Orthodox Church became complete and since the second half of the nineteenth century the fight for the *arabisation* of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and clergy started inside the church and has continued up to the present day.

The First World War also affected the Palestinian Christians (casualties, persecutions etc.) and the British mandate (1917–1947) with the Balfour Declaration (1917) introduced on a large scale the third element of a Jewish population to Palestine and to its mutual Muslim-Christian relations. In 1948 the State of Israel was established and the exodus of Palestinians, both Muslims and Christians began in the direction of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, America and Australia. In 1967 the rest of ancient Palestine was occupied by the State of Israel and thus it continues till today.

Under the influence of historical development, the Palestinian Christians do not emphasize the necessity of inculturation of the Gospel, but rather the necessity of inculturation of the church and theology (the influence of the Hellenization of the local church and clergy and of Euro-American theology).

## Present demographic situation of the Palestinian church(es)

The decline of Palestinian Christians in Israel/Palestine due to emigration in comparison with the first half of twentieth century is an evident and alarming fact. The present demographic situation is difficult to describe in its real size due to the incompatibility of official Israeli state statistics and Palestinian or church statistics. Thus the numbers are approximate.

Palestinian Christians belong to five confessional communities in Israel (Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Roman Catholics, Maronites, Armenian Orthodox) and to nine in Occupied territories (in Jerusalem and the Holy Places: Syrian Catholics and Syrian Orthodox, Copt Orthodox, Protestant).<sup>19</sup> In all, the Palestinian Christians comprise between 150–170 thousand people (of whom 50,000 live in Occupied territories). The same count of Palestinian Christians live in exile. Christians represent about 2 % of population Israel/Palestine at all and about 12 % of its Arabic population.

In Israel, the Greek Catholics constitute a majority (at least 40 %, 40–45,000 believers). The second community in size is Greek Orthodox (about 30 %, 30–35,000 believers), third Roman Catholics (about 15 %, 12,000 members), fourth Maronites (about 7 %, 6,000 people, the majority in Galilee).

In the Occupied territories, the largest community is the Greek Orthodox one (50 %, at least 25,000 members) which dominate everywhere (especially at Beit Sahour and Beit Jalla) except Jerusalem and Bethlehem, where they are exceeded by Roman Catholics (30 %, 15,000 believers), who form a minority outside of Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Greek Catholics form a significant community only in Ramallah (about 3,000 believers, fifth in size, after Protestants and

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<sup>19</sup> Raheb, Mitri, *Zur Demographie der Christen in Palestina/Israel. Zahlen und Fakten*, in: Bechmann, Ulrike, Raheb, Mitri, *Verwurzelt im Heiligen Land. Einführung in das palästinensische Christentum*. Frankfurt am Main 1995, p. 28–35. Chacour Elias. *Auch uns gehört das Land. Ein israelischer Palästinenser kämpft für Frieden und Gerechtigkeit*, Frankfurt am Main, 1993, p. 284–285. Valognes, Jean-Pierre, *Vie et Mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, p. 571–575. Tsimhoni, Daphne, *Christian Communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank Since 1948*, p. 17–32. Gräbe, Uwe, *Kontextuelle palästinensische Theologie : streitbare und umstrittene Beiträge zum ökumenischen und interreligiösen Gespräch*, Erlangen, 1999, p. 26–33.

Jacobites). Syrian Catholics are about 500 members in Bethlehem, Armenian Catholics are only about 300 persons.

The Non-Chalcedonian churches are not numerous, between 7–10 % of Christianity in Occupied territories and only 2–3 % in Israel. The biggest one is the Armenian Orthodox Church (in Israel about 1,200 and between 1,500–2,500 members in Occupied territories), after it – the Jacobites (only in the Occupied territories: 1,500–2,000 people). The Coptic and Ethiopic Orthodox have only several hundred members in Israel/Palestine. The Assyrian Church (Nestorians) counts only eight hundred believers in Occupied territories.

Protestant churches are represented especially by the Anglican Church (in Israel about 1,000 and in the Occupied territories about 2,400 members) and the Lutheran Church (about 1,200 members in the Occupied territories). There are also about 3,000 Protestants of other church communities (Baptists, Methodists, Mennonites).

In sum, the two Greek churches (Orthodox and Catholic) form a plain majority with their anchorage in the Arab population marked by their nationalism. From the confessional and disciplinary point of view, the two Catholic churches (Roman and Greek) form a majority of 60 % of Christians in Israel (and 30 % in the Occupied Territories).

### **The question of the land and biblical interpretation for Palestinian theology**

The self-definition of Palestinian Christian identity as one of Arab ethnicity, Christian faith and Palestinian nationality (the aspect of the Land) is a very important axiom in their predominantly clear position in the actual Israeli-Palestinian conflict. From this self-definition the rest – the political, social, pedagogical and the theological commitment – ensues in favour of the creation of an independent Palestinian State. In the second part of this article I focus on the theological and hermeneutical effort of Palestinian Christians, passing over the other elements of their effort (political, pedagogical, social service).

## Israeli-Jewish pretention to the land and its justification

The hermeneutical situation has been changed by the mere fact of existence of a new State of Israel. “‘Israel’ signified ‘God’s people’ and we worshippers of God were living members of Israel... This traditional spiritual connotation of the name ‘Israel’ has been supplanted today by a political and military connotation... The present-day political Israel has, for all of us, obliterated or, at least, adumbrated, the spiritual Israel of the Judeo-Christian tradition. This is surely a tragedy.”<sup>20</sup>

By its very name the State of Israel already refers to the original recipient of the Old Testament promises, but above all it has claimed these promises only for itself at the expense of the current population of Palestine. From the Israeli-Jewish side there was the extreme territorial claim of some Zionist circles to the ‘Promised Land’ and from the Christian fundamentalist side blind support for the State of Israel from an eschatological point of view – both were and are justified by biblical themes and texts (Exodus, covenant, promise of the land, conquest and possession of the Promised Land – especially justified from the deuteronomistic tradition – the book of Daniel, Revelation, Rom 9–11). The third element tending in this direction was the Euro-american “Theology after Auschwitz,” which seeing to cope with the event of the Shoa, confused a positive relation to Jewish people with uncritical support of Israel.

Thus the hermeneutical context of the present Israeli-Palestinian conflict affected Palestinian Christian theology, which found itself in situation of the crisis of faith and the Bible.

Mitri Raheb also noted the change of point of view: “Josua und David waren für uns keine politischen, sondern geistliche Figuren, so etwas wie Heilige. Ein Symbol für unseren Glaubens-kampf... Die Bibel, die ich bis dahin als ‘pro nobis’ empfand, war plötzlich ‘contra nos’ geworden... In ihr ging es nicht mehr um meine und der Welt Erlösung, sondern um mein Land, das von Gott Israel zugesprochen

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<sup>20</sup> Berger, Elmer. *Prophecy, Zionism and the State of Israel*. Introduction by Arnold J. Toynbee. Quoted by: Ateek, Naim Stifan. *Justice and only Justice*, p. 76.

worden war und in dem ich keine Lebensberechtigung mehr hatte...”<sup>21</sup>

## **Palestinian Christians’ response – theology and biblical interpretation**

How do the Palestinian Christians cope with the Bible and especially with the Old Testament under the changed political and hermeneutical situation? The main, practical question which arises is: “How can the Old Testament be the Word of God in light of the Palestinian Christians’ experience with use to support Zionism?”<sup>22</sup>

### **Development of Palestinian theology**

At first after 1948 the Palestinian Christians were paralyzed.<sup>23</sup> Then quickly afterwards there appeared the position of denial of the new situation by the non-use of the name of Israel either in the political or the spiritual sense<sup>24</sup> and by omitting all references to the Israel of the Old Testament from liturgical life of community. International Christianity even accused them of neo-Marcionism.<sup>25</sup> Especially under influence from international Christians and mutual conferences, the Palestinian Christians were pressed on to deal with the Israeli-Jewish hermeneutical context. With the pressing political event of 1967 war

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<sup>21</sup> Raheb, Mitri. *Ich bin Christ und Palästinenser*, p. 79–80.

<sup>22</sup> Ateek, Naim Stifan. *Justice and only Justice*, p. 77–78.

<sup>23</sup> Gräbe, Uwe. *Kontextuelle palästinensische Theologie*. A whole survey of the development of the contemporary Palestinian theology on pages 34–152.

<sup>24</sup> E. g. “The Evaston Report,” the Report of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Evaston, Illinois, in 1954 and the two consultations about the refugee question in Beirut 1951 and 1956 (WCC and Near East Christian Council (NECC) and International Missionary Council [IMC]). KING, Michael Christopher. *The Palestinians and the Churches*. Vol. I: 1948–1956. World Council of Churches, Geneva 1981, p. 103–106 for Evaston, p. 44–60 and p. 107–123 for Beirut.

<sup>25</sup> Pike, James A. New York, Letter to Franklin Clark Fry, New York, 24. 10. 1956 in IMC Archives Refugees, Box 265605. In: Gräbe, Uwe. *Kontextuelle palästinensische Theologie*, p. 50: “We could not use the first lesson from Genesis assigned by the lectionary, because in it the Lord is quoted as promising to Abraham ‘and his seed forever’ ‘this good land!’ We didn’t want half the congregation to walk out before the sermon was reached; so we used something innocuous from the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus.”

began the fertile period of theological effort: “the misuse of the Bible in support of partisan political views”<sup>26</sup> and the religious justification of the existence of the State of Israel<sup>27</sup> was condemned also from an international Christian perspective, with many documents originating from Arab and Palestinian Christians themselves.<sup>28</sup> But if the western theologians ask for a more precise exegesis arguing that a more accurate hermeneutical approach helps a lot in resolving the religious and political troubles, the Arab theologians do not see in it an efficacious remedy. For them academic theology is impossible and the biblical interpretation must proceed from the present situation. One of the most progressive protagonists of Palestinian theology of this period is a Lebanese bishop George Khodr who got opportunity to speak at the “World Conference of Christians for Palestine” and during activities and consultations of the newly created “Near East Ecumenical Bureau for Information and Interpretation” (NEEBII).<sup>29</sup>

Thanks to the initiative of Gabriel Habib and WCC,<sup>30</sup> after the fruitless time of the Lebanese civil war a new active period began for Palestinian theology with a set of consultations of WCC, MECC and EMOK.<sup>31</sup> Under the aegis of the Ecumenical Institut of Tantur and

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<sup>26</sup> WCC Canterbury 1969. In: KING, Michael Christopher. *The Palestinians and the Churches*, p. 130.

<sup>27</sup> Christian Peace Consultation, Zagorsk in 1967.

<sup>28</sup> In particular the document “The Palestinian Question as a Challenge for Christian Faith” (authors: Jean Corbon, Samir Kafety, George Khodr, Albert Laham) from 1967 treats for the first time of biblical interpretation from the point of view Arabic Christians. The Jewish people are regarded as a people chosen for a spiritual purpose (the service of the redemption of all humanity) and thus they should not create a nation with the political purpose; the confusion of the welfare of the Jewish people and of the State of Israel is blamed on Zionism. Abraham’s blessing is applied to all nations and it reaches its fulfilment in Christ. Löffler, Paul, *Arabische Christen im Nahostkonflikt. Christen im politischen Spannungsfeld*, Frankfurt, 1976, p. 33–43.

<sup>29</sup> “World Conference of Christians for Palestine” (the first in 1970 in Beirut, the second in 1972 in Canterbury: refusal of the Zionist political interpretation as unacceptable both for Christians and “for Jews faithful to the spiritual message of the Old Testament.”). NEEBII was created in 1971 in Beirut. It arranged many local conferences (the most significant in 1971 in Beit Miri) and two international conferences in Aylesford 1972 (where representatives of the Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian sides met together for the first time) and in Brumanna 1973 (misunderstanding of the Euro-American and Arabic Christians).

<sup>30</sup> Created in 1974 from NECC, reorganized by Gabriel Habib (1977–1994).

<sup>31</sup> World Council of Churches and Middle East Council of Churches in Geneva at 1983, MECC and EMOK (Evangelische Mittelostkommission) in Cyprus in 1984.



headed by Gerios Sa'ed Khoury, the program and after it the annual set of conferences on the theme "Arab Christian and Muslim Heritage in the Holy Land" has developed, and theological effort has started to concentrate on the Holy Land and on its natural Arab Christian-Muslim context (contrary to the Christian context of the international consultation process in the past).

The new impulses for Palestinian theology are linked with several events in 1987/88: first the outbreak of Intifada (Theology of Intifada), the appointment of Michel Sabbah as indigenous Patriarch of the Roman Catholic Jerusalem Patriarchate and foundation of Al-Liqa' – Center for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land. (headed by G. S. Khoury, the second set of annual conferences was begun in 1987: "Theology and the Local Church in the Holy Land," with an important constituent document of the same name<sup>32</sup>). As a result of the effort of Al-Liqa' Center for contextualization of theology "Being a practicing and devout Christian and being a politically-actived and committed Palestinian, were no more perceived as necessarily mutually exclusive. Socio-political life were henceforth theologically relevant."<sup>33</sup> Regarding the hermeneutical approach, it remains limited mostly to general affirmations. The preference is for practice. Also the trilateral Christian-Muslim-Jewish conversations are pursued at an international and also at a national level. The Sabeel Center of Palestinian theology of liberation was founded and is headed by Naim S. Ateek with support from Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marc Ellis and is in particular oriented to international Christianity. Also the largest church hierarchy of the Holy Land has come together on the occasion of political events and has issued common statements. In the international consultation proc-

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<sup>32</sup> *Theology and the Local Church in the Holy Land. Al-Liqa' Journal*, Vol. 1 (May) 1992, p. 93–107. The document concentrates on: "the meaning of the universal Church and the local church, a definition of "contextualized theology" and the characteristics of the Church of the Holy Land." (p. 93). The Church is an incarnate Church, it does not live outside of time and place, it is local Church and has to incarnate the Christian message to the concrete cultural conditions: "...the role of contextualized theology becomes the exploration of general theological thought rich in potentialities, under those conditions in which believers live" (p. 100), it is called to read the events in the light of faith.

<sup>33</sup> Mazawi, André Elias, *Palestinian Local Theology and the Issue of Islamo-Christian Dialogue: An Appraisal*, *Islamochristiana* 19 (1993), p. 93–115, p. 104.

ess the discussions have even come to the view that “the Jewish question for the Christians becomes the Arab question for the Jews.”<sup>34</sup>

Thus the theology of the Palestinian Christians, nonexistent in early 1948, arose primarily with the support of international Christianity and in reaction to it: first paralyzed, afterwards forming its identity and standing in the Palestinian side of the controversy about the Land of Israel/Palestine and finally also opposing the biblical texts misused in support of political claims to the Land.

### **The general hermeneutical standpoints of Palestinian theologians**

The “liberation of theology” (from Hellenization and Euro-American theological influence) is for the Palestinian theologians a necessary first step for proposing hermeneutical solutions. It is gradually reached through the implementation of theology and church in the Palestinian culture, the natural Arab-Muslim context and daily reality: all the representatives of Palestinian theology want to proceed from situation, context to reach text, tradition, the Bible. They have developed a method of the contextualization, inculturation, or a model of Incarnation, especially suitable for the Holy Land. The orientation to practice (socio-pedagogical), to peaceful process (non-violent resistance), and to a trilateral dialogue is characteristic for this theology. Through the Incarnation they attribute to culture and to its plurality a positive and spiritual dimension. Doing theology and forming Palestinian Christian identity is an inseparable task; the theological grasp of present challenges is impossible without a solid anchorage in and understanding of the socio-political reality and self identity.

Palestinian theology emphasizes that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a political one and not religious. However it does not mean that Palestinian theologians do not take also a political standpoint to the present conflict. On the other hand, they do not want the dealing with the conflict and occupation to be the only aim or task of Palestinian theology.

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<sup>34</sup> Meier, Andreas, *Conference on Palestinian Local Theology; Towards a Theology of Liberation in the Palestinian-Israeli Context*, ALJ 1/1992, p. 65–77, p. 75.

One of the most progressive non-Palestinian theologians affected by the Palestinian question is Lebanese Greek Orthodox bishop George Khodr<sup>35</sup>. In particular, for him, the Palestinian question is a political one and the only legitimate form of theologizing about it is a rebuttal of those claims of the State of Israel which are justified using the Bible. In this sense he proposes a concept of the economy of the Holy Spirit<sup>36</sup> which enables a detheologisation of the political question and opens up the possibility for dialogue and the co-existence of the three religions of the region (the trinitarian model as against a Christological emphasis). With the concept of the economy of the Holy Spirit he opposes the Occidental church concept of the linear History of Redemption and its allegiance to the classical theological axiom 'extra ecclesia nulla salus,' which enables the religious exclusiveness, the theologisation of politics and vice-versa the politicisation of theology. Pneumatology, christology, ecclesiology and inter-faith dialogue are for Khodr deeply linked.<sup>37</sup> The detheologisation resolves the confusion of politics and theology, and the concept of the economy of the Holy Spirit proposes a new, interesting way for dialogue. It sketches a new global approach, but does not resolve the quandary regarding the use of the OT in the concrete. Therefore Palestinian theologians themselves have proposed different hermeneutical concepts for trying to deal with present hermeneutical challenges of the political situation and of the misuse of the Old Testament.

Concerning the second step, the hermeneutical approach, Geries S. Khoury asks the main question: "For us as Palestinians the interpretation of the Bible is not an academic exercise. It determines our

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<sup>35</sup> Khodr, Georges, *The Feelings and Reactions of the Eastern Christian Towards Issues Arising from the Palestinian Problem*, Aylesford 1972. Khodr, George. Theologische Reflexionen zum Palästina-Konflikt, In: Löffler, Paul. *Arabische Christen im Nahost-Konflikt*, p. 61–71.

<sup>36</sup> The Holy Spirit is through kenosis and under the form of 'logos spermatikos' already presents from the creation of the world in every person and in every religion. The Holy Spirit is identical with Logos-Christ and cooperates with Him.

<sup>37</sup> In the question of the election and promise of the Land Khodr maintained a universalistic and typological approach. There is no possibility for only one material fulfilling of the promise. On the contrary it aims at spiritual fulfillment in all the world and in the whole of humanity. The Land is a gift of God and belongs to those who suffer. The promise of the Land is seen by Khodr as a promise of the Kingdom of Heaven. Palestine is a place of the exodus of Christ to God, not of an earthly exodus of the Jewish nation to Palestine.

right to our land, whether God is not an God of all the oppressed or whether we are excluded as the ‘non-chosen people’...”<sup>38</sup> Therefore Khoury, a Greek Catholic layman, proclaims a God of the oppressed; if He would not, the Bible becomes the worst book in Palestinian history.

Mitri Raheb<sup>39</sup>, a Lutheran clergyman, starts from a similar point of view. He understands the Bible as a testimony of a persecuted minority and of its faith, a testimony of the lived truth and not of the objective facts. The testimony sought to share this lived truth. Therefore also interpretation without the framework of faith is impossible. On the other hand the testimony of the Bible is the testimony of an historically and culturally bounded community and therefore the historical-critical method is the principal appropriate interpretative method (rejection of the typological-allegorical method). In the current context, he accentuates the necessity of the method of the historical impact of the text and of the responsibility for one or another outcome of interpretation. The hermeneutical key is for him the pair of notions of the Law and Gospel understood as the two sides of God’s partial justice (the justice is from one required and to other attributed). The center of this key itself and of all the Bible, the OT and the NT, is person of Jesus Christ.

Mgr Michel Sabbah, Patriarch of the Roman Catholic Church in Jerusalem, envisages the Bible as a Word of God and not our own and thus develops an appropriate approach. In an effort to understand the Bible, we should approach it humbly, accepting the need of divine grace, and from within the community of church; we have neither the right to judge the Bible nor to use it for argumentation of any position. The Bible is God’s word in human word<sup>40</sup> and we cannot ask it questions which are not there: the Bible is a spiritual, not a

<sup>38</sup> Khoury, Geries Sa’ed, *Olive Tree Theology – Rooted in the Palestinian Soil*, In: Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Mission e. V., Jahrbuch für kontextuelle Theologien – Yearbook of Contextual Theologies, Aachen 1993, p. 38–75, p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> Raheb, Mitri, *Ich bin Christ und Palästinenser*. Chapter fifth: Bibelauslegung im israelisch-palästinensischen Kontext, p. 79–110.

<sup>40</sup> “La Bible est parole divine et humaine... Son message est divin, spirituel et éternel. Mais l’expression linguistique, littéraire, culturelle, historique et géographique qui nous le transmet est humaine.” (p. 82) Sabbah, Michel. *Lire er vivre la Bible au pays de la Bible aujourd’hui*. Lettre pastoral de Mgr Michel Sabbah. Documentation catholique, 16 janvier 1994, No 2086, p. 72–83.

political book. Mgr Sabbah encourages believers not to reject it, but to use it as a way to peace and reconciliation,<sup>41</sup> for it is the abusive interpretation of the Bible and not the Bible itself which should be rejected. Refusing the Bible, the Palestinian Christians make the same mistake as their opponents, understanding it as a book of history and already deprived of the land, they deprived themselves of the last refuge, of the Bible.<sup>42</sup>

On the other hand, Naim S. Ateek,<sup>43</sup> an Anglican clergyman, proposes a somewhat different approach to biblical interpretation. He chose the person of Jesus Christ<sup>44</sup> as a hermeneutic key for the Bible and for God's action. He tries to resolve the Palestinian problem with the misuse of the OT by searching for the authoritative (as against the non-authoritative) texts of the Bible. This tension of the texts reflects the two conceptions of God's essence through the whole Bible, the universalist and particular ones. The decisive question for such a distinction is: "Is the way I am hearing this the way I have come to know God in Christ? Does this fit the picture I have of God that Jesus has revealed to me?"<sup>45</sup> Christ is the peak of the prophetic tradition of the Bible (the Later and Twelve Monir prophets), alongside the nationalist tradition (the Former prophets, Zealots, Zionism) and the

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<sup>41</sup> "Si au contraire elle nourit en nous divisions ou rancunes, cela veut dire que nous déformons la parole divine et que nous en faisons une arme de mort et non de vérité. Et cela veut dire accepter le principe d'une lecture politique de la Bible, en oubliant son essence religieuse." Sabbah, Michel. *Lire et vivre la Bible au pays de la Bible aujourd'hui*, p.74.

<sup>42</sup> Sabbah, Michel, *Lire et vivre la Bible au pays de la Bible aujourd'hui*, p.81: "Par ce refus de la parole de Dieu, chers fidèles, vous vous faites complices et victimes de ceux que vous accusez. Et déjà dépouillés de la terre même, vous vous laissez dépouiller de votre Écriture Sainte... Donc la position sainte, face aux abus, est de défendre la parole de Dieu et non de l'abandonner... Accepter la Bible et y croire ne veut pas dire avoir Dieu pour adversaire, appuyant la partie adverse. Au contraire, y croire, c'est inviter les deux parties qui y croient à voir Dieu les appeler toutes les deux à se faire justice mutuellement et à se réconcilier."

<sup>43</sup> Ateek, Naim Stifan, *Justice and only Justice*. Chapter fourth: The Bible and Liberation: A Palestinian Perspective, p. 74–114, Ateek treats the theme of the biblical hermeneutic and the conception of God in first part on pages 77–100.

<sup>44</sup> "Jesus the Christ thus becomes – in himself and in his teaching – the true hermeneutic, the key to the understanding of the Bible, and beyond the Bible to the understanding of the action of God throughout history. In other words, the Word of God incarnate in Jesus the Christ interprets for us the word of God in the Bible." Ateek, Naim Stifan, *Justice and only Justice*, p. 80.

<sup>45</sup> Ateek, Naim Stifan, *Justice and only Justice*, p. 82.

Thora oriented tradition (Pharisee, Rabbinic and Reformed Judaism). Subjective decisions based on non-authoritative texts and practically a literal or spiritual interpretation (Ateek rather rejects the historical-critical method as a useless one), bring the risk of a dualism of the texts (which is implicitly included even in the principle of the Law and the Gospel) and support the “war of texts” among diverse communities; on the other hand the evolutionary model of the development of the tradition and the pure christological hermeneutical key makes more difficult dialogue with regions’ other two religions.

### **The elaboration of concrete biblical topics**

Although several general hermeneutic approaches to OT interpretation have been suggested as well as a general way of dealing with the main OT topics, concrete and nuanced biblical interpretations are rather rare. Nevertheless there are interesting concepts dealing with the misused OT texts.

The central theme of the theology of liberation, exodus, is not applicable in a Palestinian context without difficulty. First, because this model was uncritically transferred by Zionism into the present describing of the massive movement of Jews from different nations to Palestine/Israel, and second because already in the Bible itself the topic of exodus is inextricably connected with topics which are revealed as oppressive for the Palestinian nation, explicitly God’s election of the Jewish community-nation and above all God’s promise of the Land to this community and subsequently of the conquest of the Promised Land and the task of the expulsion of the first inhabitants (Palestinians are regarded as old Canaanites) and the possession of it.

From the Palestinian point of view, theologians are seriously concerned about remaining in a Land which is threatened by progressive emigration.

Mitri Raheb reinterprets the topic of the exodus<sup>46</sup> from the context of the Babylonian exile: He understands God’s promise and action always as a promise to the marginalized and oppressed religious community, serving as consolation and encouragement. It can never be

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<sup>46</sup> Raheb, Mitri, *I am a Palestinian Christian*. Minneapolis, 1995, p. 81–91.

seen as a claim – for in this case, the change of original context comes with a violent ideology, claiming ‘divine’ rights to the promises and God’s action. Raheb points to the change of context in the book of Hosea, where the threat of a new return to Egypt (Hos 9,1–3) is juxtaposed beside the promise of a new exodus (Hos 11,10–11). In the texts from Amos 9.7 and Jonah, Raheb points out the idea that e. g. the promise of the exodus and the care of God also belong to the enemies of the biblical Israel. So why could it not also be open to Palestinians?

Instead of the model of the exodus the Palestinian theologians choose another biblical model as central for expressing the current Palestinian political-religious situation, the model of Naboth’s vineyard: “...an ancient story with a modern ring to it. The death and dispossession of Naboth and his family has been reenacted thousands of times since the creation of the State of Israel. When reduced to its essence, it embodies the tragedy of Palestine as well as the suppression of the rights of the individual. But it is more than a story of tragedy, since at its heart stands a God who is a God of justice...”<sup>47</sup> The central Palestinian Christian model appears as one which not only draws out well their actual situation but also includes the call for cooperation with Israel-Jewish partners and offers an encouraging model for possible justice and reconciliation. “As with the story of Naboth’s Vineyard, we need Jews who will tell those with power that it is wrong according to Jewish scripture and tradition to confiscate the land of innocent people.”<sup>48</sup> Elias Chacour in particular emphasizes: “Naboth lebt noch”<sup>49</sup> and it means that there is still the hope that the end of the present story in contrary to the biblical one will still be open to justice and reconciliation, for Naboth is still alive. Just as there was a necessity to deal with anisemitism in the Bible, there is also necessity to deal with anti-canaanism, says Mitri Raheb. From this point of view, it will be necessary for Palestinian theology

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<sup>47</sup> Ateek, Naim Stifan, *Justice and only Justice. A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, p. 87.

<sup>48</sup> Khoury, Gerjes Sa’ed, *Olive Tree Theology*, p. 71.

<sup>49</sup> Chacour, Elias, *Auch uns gehört das Land. Ein israelischer Palästinenser kämpft für Frieden und Gerechtigkeit*. Frankfurt am Main. 1993, p. 124. German translation of *We belong to the Land*. San Francisco, 1990.

to solve the relation of nations (Palestinians) to biblical Israel and vice versa.

The questions about the election or the promise of the Land (see below) are not the only delicate ones. Certainly there are also texts about violence or anathematic texts in the Bible as Mgr Michel Sabbah<sup>50</sup> and Naim S. Ateek<sup>51</sup> show. Mgr Sabbah understands these texts as texts serving to confirm God's holiness and justice as a relevant component for keeping law in the society in the particular epoch of religious evolution, while Naim Ateek proceeds from today to judge these texts as non-authoritative ones. In this way Mgr Sabbah places these types of texts in their original milieu and wants to take into account their historical and cultural boundedness. Moreover he adds that there are also different texts which correct the previous ones.<sup>52</sup> The most controversial topics of the OT are the divine election and promise of the Land.<sup>53</sup> From the Muslim point of view such topics fall under the distortion of Revelation by the OT. The Palestinian Christians themselves understand the question as a typically Occidental one and deal with it especially at the beginning through spiritualization and universalization. So, for example, G. S. Khoury,<sup>54</sup> for whom all believers are chosen and Rafiq Khoury<sup>55</sup> for whom the promise and the gift of the Land serve as an exemplary demonstration of God's relationship to every land and nation. Naim Ateek counts these motifs among the early, particular biblical conception of God which was subsequently universalized: "The land that God has chosen at one particular time in history for one particular people is

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<sup>50</sup> Sabbah, Michel, *Lire et vivre la Bible au pays de la Bible aujourd'hui*, p. 75–77. Punishments (Deu 17.2–5; Exo 31.14; Num 3.38; Num 16.30; 1Ki 18.40) or anathemas (the conquest of Jericho and Ai; in Psalms 109.8–9; 129.5; 10.15).

<sup>51</sup> Ateek, Naim Stifan, *Justice and only Justice*, p. 82. Ateek evokes as an example of non-authoritative texts these ones: anathemas: Jes 6.17,21; 2Ki 2.23–24; the destruction of Amalek: Exo 17.14–16; Deu 25.17–19; 1 Sa 15.1–3; Egypt plagues: Exo 7–12; Exo 12.29; Exo 14–15.

<sup>52</sup> Sabbah, Michel, *Lire et vivre la Bible au pays de la Bible aujourd'hui*, p. 75–77: 1Ch 22.8; Pro 4.17; 21.7; Psa 62.11; Hos 4.1–2; Deu 27.19; 24.17; Eze 22.7; Jer 22.3; Exo 12.49; Lam 3.34–36; 1Sa 2.9; Is 53.

<sup>53</sup> Gräbe, Uwe, *Kontextuelle palästinensische Theologie*, p. 256–275.

<sup>54</sup> Gräbe, Uwe, *Kontextuelle palästinensische Theologie*, p. 259.

<sup>55</sup> Khoury, Rafiq, *Palästinensisches Christentum – Erfahrungen und Perspektiven*. Kleine Schriftreihe 7, Trier 1993, p. 41.



now perceived as a paradigm, a model, for God's concern for every people and every land."<sup>56</sup> In the following statement, the majority of Palestinian theologians agree with Ateek: He starts from an axiom that all land belongs to God, also the land of Canaan, whereas the possession of the Land depends on the obedience to God and His commandments while on the contrary disobedience violates the Land and leads to the expulsion of its inhabitants.<sup>57</sup>

Mitri Raheb with Mgr Michel Sabbah represent a somewhat different approach than the spiritual or the universalist one.

According to the general hermeneutic view of Mitri Raheb and of the anchoring of these topics in the Babylonian exile, he contextualizes and envisages once again the affirmation and the appropriation of the election, and of the promise of the Land as motifs respectable only within the specified framework of faith (without objective value) and as a relief for the weak and oppressed. He states that neither the election nor the promise of the Land is attributed in the OT to a state, but to a religious community as an unmerited gift. Moreover the relations in the Promised Land are described not only against the background of the possession by the biblical Israel of the Land, but rather they are marked by an eschatological point of view and as the destiny for the mutual peaceful dwelling of all nations in the Land. The acceptance of (Jewish) community belief in its own particular relation to God (election) and land (Promised Land) do not necessarily exclude the favourable mutual relations of diverse communities and especially do not exclude the possibility of making justice with the Palestinian national community!<sup>58</sup> It is the ideological attitude of the community which makes these motifs not agreeable for co-existence with other communities. In this way Raheb equates the Jewish biblical and actual references to the election and the prom-

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<sup>56</sup> Ateek, Naim Stifan, *Justice and Only Justice. A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, p. 108.

<sup>57</sup> Ateek quoted in these two cases the texts of: Num 35,34; Jer 2,7; 16,18. Deu 4,25–27; 28,63; Lev 20,22; Jos 23,15–16.

<sup>58</sup> Raheb, Mitri, *Ich bin Christ und Palästinenser*, s. 99: „Der Glaube an die Erwählung Israels und die Befreiung der Palästinenser müssen sich also nicht widersprechen. Denn ‚der Gott Israels‘ hat auch Interesse an den Palästinensern und an ihrem Wohlergehen.“

ise of the Land and the Palestinian national request for a land on the other hand, nevertheless within a mutual willingness to accept each other. Analogous to Raheb, Mgr Michel Sabbah wants to respect the claim to election and promise of the Land only in the religious sense – not in the political one – and introduce the thought that if some political authority wants to take the Bible “comme référence en ce qui concerne le don de la terre, cela veut dire qu’elle doit se laisser guider, dans le conflit en cours, par les principes de morale contenus dans cette Parole révélée.”<sup>59</sup>

For completion, there is also the theological voice of Elias Chacour who reverses the habitual order and envisages the promise of the Land, derived from dwelling on it, as prior to the election. The Land is given and election proceeds from this gift. It is given to protect those responsible the Land and to be of service to its inhabitants. This privilege and the duty of ethical standards at the same time is equally designated for the two nations living in the Land, both Israel and Palestinian.

As for every nation in the Middle East, Palestinian Christians remain, whether for its specific Christian meaning or not, bound to the Land as illustrated in particular by Elias Chacour<sup>60</sup> and the representatives of the traditional Arab church(es) in Palestine. Nevertheless, Palestinian theologians refuse to attribute a special holiness to the Land. It is only secondary, derived from the holiness of God or of the people who live there and are consecrated by God. The land is holy because the people take a responsibility for it, because they belong to it. In this sense, all Palestinian theologians express the same understanding as Chacour and are in line with the OT conception of election and God’s promises as a service to be the light for other nations. From the practical point of view the relation of Palestinian Christians to the Holy Land, to the Gospel and to Jesus is lived as something very special and forms in a strong way an essential part of their identity. Their relation to the Land is not shaped only by their national belonging, but even more by their specific Christian relation to the Land of Revelation.

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<sup>59</sup> Sabbah, Michel, *Lire et vivre la Bible au pays de la Bible aujourd’hui*, p. 81.

<sup>60</sup> Chacour, Elias, *We belong to the Land*, San Francisco, 1990.

The Palestinian and Jerusalem Church understands itself as mother of all churches.<sup>61</sup> “En notre terre Dieu a parlé et de notre terre sa parole se répandit dans le monde.”<sup>62</sup>

Palestinian Christians do not consider the gospel as something culturally strange to them, rather they understand it as something familiar, something in whose spirit they have lived until today, something that happened in their land. Palestine with its privilege of the “fifth gospel” essentially forms their Christian identity. “En la terre Sainte, la Parole de Dieu est loin d’être une légende merveilleuse ou un météore étranger à notre planète. Elle est plutôt une réalité vivante, concrète et charnelle.”<sup>63</sup>

For Elias Chacour, Jesus was a flesh-and-blood hero who walked in streets familiar to him and lived in their houses;<sup>64</sup> for Naim S. Ateek, the Palestinians were the first witnesses of the Resurrection,<sup>65</sup> Geris S. Khoury considers Jesus as the first Christian theologian in the Palestinian context and as an older brother<sup>66</sup> and Munib A. Younan presents Palestinian culture as a culture with fingerprints of biblical tradition<sup>67</sup> etc.

Palestinian theology on the one hand emphasizes that it was a Palestinian culture in which Jesus came: “...the Church was born in Palestine as the early disciples and followers of Jesus were Palestinians.”<sup>68</sup> „Ob sie nun jüdische, römische oder arabische Palästinenser waren – sie waren Palästinenser...”<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, they are

<sup>61</sup> *Theology and the Local Church in the Holy Land*, p. 95.

<sup>62</sup> Sabbah, Michel, *Lire et vivre la Bible au pays de la Bible aujourd’hui*, p. 82.

<sup>63</sup> Khoury, Rafiq, *La catéchèse dans l’Église locale de Jérusalem*, p. 131.

<sup>64</sup> Chacour, Elias, *Und dennoch sind wir Brüder. Frieden für Palästina*. Frankfurt am Main, 1991<sup>2</sup>, p. 26.

<sup>65</sup> Ateek, Naim Stifan, *Justice and only Justice*, p. 113–114.

<sup>66</sup> Khoury, Geris Sa’ed, *Olive Tree Theology* p. 41, 46.

<sup>67</sup> Younan, Munib A., *Palestinian Local Theology*, p. 57–58. Younan, Munib A., *The Holy Land in the Christian Tradition*. In: Williamson, Roger, *The holy Land in the Monotheistic Faiths* (Life & Peace Institute Conference Report 3), Uppsala 1992, p. 38–50.

<sup>68</sup> Ateek, Naim Stifan, *Justice and only Justice*, p. 113.

<sup>69</sup> Gräbe, Uwe, *Kontextuelle palästinensische Theologie*, p. 200. Interview of the author with Naim S. Ateek 31. January 1996 in Jerusalem: “...Ich wollte damit nicht sagen, daß sie solche Palästinenser waren wie die Palästinenser heute, aber sie gehörten zu Palästina, sie waren in Palästina geboren, sie lebten Palästina... Technisch gesprochen ist es natürlich richtig, daß der Begriff ‘Palästina’ erst seit Hadrian in systematischer Weise gebraucht wurde.”

ready to accept – as a part of the contextuality of God alone – the fact that God came into the quite definite context of the Jewish religious world. Palestinian theologians agree that Christianity and Islam are in part influenced by the Jewish religion.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless they continue to accentuate the importance of the event of Incarnation as well: „Daß er als Jude inkarniert ist, ist kein Problem für mich. Aber was mir am wichtigsten ist, das ist die Tatsache, daß er in einem Volk und in einer Kultur inkarniert ist.“<sup>71</sup>

In this context the theological question arose first in the international Christian consultation process whether Jesus was a Jew or Palestinian (see above) and even more, whether the Ressurrected Christ remains a Jew or not. G. S. Khoury responds to the objection: “Those who accuse us say: ‘Jesus was a Jew.’ In religious terms, Jesus was a Jew. In cultural terms, he lived in a Palestinian culture. Jesus was not an Israeli.”<sup>72</sup>

The acceptance of a Jewish Jesus does not imply for the Palestinian theologians the acceptance of the conception of a Jewish Christ. Such a representation of Christ signifies for them an abuse of the idea of Incarnation by decontextualization – it had already been decided in the New Testament that Jewish culture is not binding for the other cultural forms of Christian message.

### **Summary and challenges for Occidental theology**

The different hermeneutical keys serve Palestinian theology in opening up misused OT texts for a reading which is tolerable for Palestinian Christians and their church(es). The Palestinian theologians therefore search for this key, especially under the pressure of international Christianity which has provoked them to take a theological standpoint to the State of Israel and to its claim to the Land justified by some OT texts and themes.

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<sup>70</sup> Gräbe, Uwe, *Kontextuelle palästinensische Theologie*, p. 210. Interview of the author with Mitri Raheb: 19. September 1994 in Bethlehem.

<sup>71</sup> Gräbe, Uwe, *Kontextuelle palästinensische Theologie*, p. 210. Interview of the author with Rafiq Khoury: 30. June 1996 in Jerusalem.

<sup>72</sup> Khoury, Gerjes Sa'ed, *Olive Tree Theology*, p. 70.

The theological effort of Palestinian Christians aims in the first instance to deal with the changed hermeneutical situation in face of which the church stands: the spiritual connotation of the OT name 'Israel' as 'God's people,' in which even the Palestinian Christians feel to be included was transferred to the political value of a state, which is seen at least as an unwelcomed guest and which requires the homeland of Palestinian Muslims and Christians, the land of Palestine. Some of the OT texts were and are misused both by Jews and Christians for these claims. Even before the concrete theological effort started, they stressed two important axioms. First, although the religious arguments are used in the present conflict to support the political claims to the Land, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is seen by Palestinian theologians primarily as a political one (detheologization) and the use of the Bible as an argument in the political struggle for the Land is seen as an ideological abuse of something that is not and never was a historical description (nor future prediction about historical and political situations in the world). On the contrary – and this is the second axiom – the Bible is a spiritual testimony of faith. It is a testimony of a definite religious community, bound in time-space (often marginalized and oppressed, a testimony with many various voices).

These two all-embracing axioms imply for Palestinian theology the refusal of allegorical-typological interpretative methods on the grounds of the danger of an unrooted interpretation enabling the transfer of the biblical texts talking about the exclusivity of God's election and of the divine right to the Land. Therefore Palestinian theology proposes interpretative methods which would take into consideration a human responsible interpretation, rooted in the *Sitz im Leben* of the text: such as the historical-critical and the socio-historical method and the method of historical impact of the texts. Contemporary Palestinian theology is concerned both by the community to which the text was addressed and to the actual, local community of Palestinian Christians which read the text now: thus it uses also the narrative or rhetorical approaches to the text. Also thanks to this plurality of methods it represents a well-balanced contemporary theology, which wants both to stand in the old theological ecumenical tradition of the universal church and to contextualize this universal

traditional theology to the new condition of the local Palestinian church(es).<sup>73</sup>

Above all, the person of Jesus Christ serves as the hermeneutical key for the Bible. From Jesus Palestinian theologians derive the unity of the Old and the New Testament. The person of the earthly Jesus is understood as both Jewish and Palestinian because of the Incarnation, but the Resurrected Christ cannot be accepted as a Jew from a general, cultural, or ethnic point of view. Similarly and against a profane 'scientific' interpretation, the OT ceases for Christians to be the writings of a definite Jewish cultural-religious group and becomes the Word of God, a spiritual writing exceeding our understanding and its original historical-cultural binding.

Especially in this point it is necessary to pay attention to the possible misuse of the Bible. There could be the impression that if Palestinian theologians want to cope with the difficult OT texts they must partially agree to the logic of their hermeneutical opponents and balance between the so-called 'scientific' and the 'popular' methods of biblical interpretation. For this reason it is necessary to use both the historical-socio-critical methods, and the narrative, reader-oriented methods. For Palestinian Christians that means having the person of Jesus Christ and e. g. the model of Law and Gospel as a hermeneutical center.

Palestinian theology starts from the actual and local socio-political situation (Israeli claims) and from its own Arab (ethnicity)-Palestinian (land) identity to proceed to cope with the Biblical text (faith, interpretation). On the basis of these two local and current data, Palestinian biblical theology needs to cope with anti-canaanism in the Bible, with the relation of the biblical Israel to other nations, and it tries to deal with the themes of the exodus, the Promised Land (its conquest and possession), etc. Far from being entirely concentrated on all these themes it suggests general hermeneutic approaches and schematic dealing with these concrete models, and it proposes the model of Naboth's Vineyard as a biblical model for Palestinian expe-

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<sup>73</sup> Theology and the Local Church in the Holy Land, p. 98: "In the local church the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church actually exists and works. Thus the universal Church becomes not only a living presence in the local church but also a redemptive event, incarnate reality and visible truth."

rience, containing, as it does, a hopeful end: Naboth is still alive, reconciliation is possible. Even the themes of the divine election and the Promised Land to the Jewish community are seen from the religious and not from the contemporary historical political point of view. These two themes are tolerable for Palestinian Christians only within the parameters of faith and so are lived or equated with all other communities of faith. Only thus could the communities really achieve their promises for the peaceful co-existence of all nations and in mutual service to each other. And finally it can take the Bible as something serving – with its ethical standards – future reconciliation. The model of the economy of the Holy Spirit and the trinitarian accent of George Khodr is by far not an inferior one in this open theological and interreligious line. In words of Ottmar Fuchs,<sup>74</sup> Palestinian theology is an ecumenical, ecological and economical one.

The often emotional relation of Palestinian theologians to the Land of Palestine is not due only to their national belonging but also to their Christianity and to their close relation to the Revelation which happened in Holy Land. On the other hand, the Land of Palestine is not seen as something sacred in itself and the impulse and tragedy of the present conflict should not be exaggerated to such an extent that Palestinian theology would devote itself only to dealing with the consequences and topics of the conflict – it should survive even a successful reconciliation of both partners. Therefore the aims of Palestinian theology concentrate especially on the principal (against the actual!) theological context of Palestinian church(es): on Muslim-Christian interreligious and interfaith dialogue and on the discovery and the development of the Arab Christian and Muslim heritage in the Holy Land.

Palestinian theology was awoken from a thousand-years sleep by the abrupt political *fait accompli* of the existence of the State of Israel and of its claims and actions. It is an extraordinary, peculiar and vital theology, rooted in its Land of birth, a theology challenging by its extreme experience in the political-theological quarrel about the Land and the Bible and by different approaches(not only hermeneutical) to

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<sup>74</sup> Fuchs, Ottmar, *Kontextuelle Theologie: verwurzelt im Lebens- und Leidenszusammenhang der Kulturen*, In: Bechmann, Ulrike, Raheb, Mitri, *Verwurzelt im Heiligen Land. Einführung in das palästinensische Christentum*, p. 87–118.

the Occidental church. The Western church needs to ask itself about its own contextual conditionality, its actual consciousness of political reality and of the impact of its Biblical interpretation not only in its own Euro-American context.



# **LIVING THE FAITH TO ARRIVE IN THE PROMISED LAND A THEOLOGICAL-PASTORAL REFLECTION ON BRAZIL IN THE PAST FORTY YEARS**

*Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer, Rio de Janeiro*

*“The land was joined to life by an umbilical cord, (...). Surrounded, the land became someone’s thing, not everyone’s, not held in common (...), but history changes and as time has gone on the moment has come to think differently; the land is one of the planet’s goods, it cannot be granted to anyone, it is a social good and not a private one, it is the patrimony of humanity and not a weapon of anyone’s particular egoism. It is there to produce, to generate food, jobs, life. It is the good of all for all. This is the only possible destiny of the land.”*  
*(Letter of the Land, 1995)*

*“For the land is of humankind; it is not of God nor of the devil”*  
*(Glauber Rocha, in “God and the Devil in the land”)*

Following Vatican II the Latin American church began a process of reception of the Council’s new contributions at all its levels and in all its elements. To this end, through its episcopacy, it held assemblies which offered three important staging-posts for the ongoing tradition of the continent:

The first of these was the Episcopal Conference of Medellín in 1968 which tried to re-read Vatican II within the specificity of the Latin American reality. In Medellín it was already clear that ecclesial life cannot revolve only around liturgical practices but that it has to bring the struggle for justice to its centre. So it is necessary for the Church to take into the heart of its discourse the help of the social sciences to analyse reality, so that theology, pastoral and ecclesial life in all their dimensions can be permeated by the emphasis on the

unjust, suffering reality of the Latin American peoples, most of whom are Catholic, living in conditions of poverty and oppression.

What Medellín affirmed in its concluding document<sup>1</sup> was to be taken up again in 1971 by the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez in a book which was something like a manifesto of a new way of doing theology.<sup>2</sup> The objective of liberation theology would be to construct a theological discourse starting from the reality of oppression in which the Latin American continent was living. This would lead, in the understanding of thinkers of such weight as the late Father Henrique de Lima Vaz to the Church of the continent ceasing to be a reflexive Church and becoming a source Church.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the decade the process of attention to the unjust reality of the Latin American continent continued. The Episcopal Conference of Puebla, in 1979, was to take up again and consolidate the three defining characteristics of Medellín:

- a new way of doing theology, starting from an analysis of reality and the praxis of transformation; this was already enshrined as Liberation Theology;

- a new way of being Church starting from the articulation of the base communities consisting of ordinary people, the Base Ecclesial Communities which by that time were already numerous;

- a new priority for orienting the pastoral action of the Church and which led it to a “change of alliances” in its method of evangelisation; the struggle for justice, the change of the social space, in brief, the preferential option for the poor, a term formed and consecrated in the concluding document of Puebla.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the '70s and '80s, then, until the beginning of the '90s, Latin American Catholicism entered on a search for knowledge and understanding of its faith starting from the suffering reality which was experienced by the vast majority of its people. Within this reality marked by injustice and oppression, the problem of land was always one of the most crucial.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Documento de Conclusões da Conferência de Medellín*, Vozes, Petrópolis 1968.

<sup>2</sup> G. Gutiérrez, *Teologia da Libertação*, Vozes, Petrópolis 1971.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. H. de Lima Vaz, “Sinais dos tempos: lugar teológico ou lugar comum?” in *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 32 (1972), pp. 70–85.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Documento de Conclusões da Conferência Episcopal de Puebla*, Loyola, São Paulo 1979.

In Brazil this problem was one which most claimed the attention of the progressive grassroots groups and hierarchy in the Church. Brazil is a country of continental dimensions. In its rural areas it experienced the implacable dominion of the *latifúndio*<sup>5</sup> and the violence of the big landowners who have defended their lands, even the unproductive ones, with armed force. Alongside this can be placed the sad, even desperate situation of the rural workers and *bóia-frias*<sup>6</sup> and others who cannot manage to gain access to a small piece of land just to plant and live from.

This work seeks to describe something of this struggle for land in Brazil and its relation with the living out of faith. First I will describe how the attention of the Church was drawn to the agrarian problem in the '70s and '80s.<sup>7</sup> Then we will look at some of the biblical and theological elements with which Brazilian communities have reflected on their faith when confronted by the particular problem of life in the countryside which was theirs. Then I will try to present the specific work of the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), founded in 1975. Finally we can look at how the problem of the land is viewed in Brazil today, shaped in a new way by the MST<sup>8</sup> and how its link with the Church has thus been undergoing significant changes.

### **The Church and the Land Problem in the 70s and 80s**

The seventies were a veritable Pentecost for the Latin American Church. It was the time of the definition and consolidation of the Second Vatican Council through its entry into Latin America. Without the contribution of the Latin American continent, Vatican II would be incomplete, would be in mid-journey. For it was in this continent that the concretisation of the two great fundamental and primary

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<sup>5</sup> The *Aurélio* dictionary of the Portuguese Language (the major dictionary of Brazilian Portuguese) defines *latifúndio* as: a large rural property, especially one which has a large proportion of its lands uncultivated and is farmed using low-yield techniques.

<sup>6</sup> Farm labourers who go daily to a rural property, generally in order to do piece-work. The name comes from the fact that they usually take food (*bóia* in this sense is a colloquial term, meaning something like “grub”) from home which they eat cold (*fria*).

<sup>7</sup> For this I will use the document *A Igreja e a questão da terra (The Church and the Land Question)*, Paulinas, São Paulo 1980, coleção Documentos da CNBB.

<sup>8</sup> Movimento dos Sem Terra, that is, the Landless Movement.

intuitions of the Council happened, namely, the break with the old model of Church, which now came to understand itself as People of God<sup>9</sup> – and an opening to the world.<sup>10</sup>

The Council Fathers, returning from the Council to their Churches and trying to be faithful to this opening to the world, found not the developed European world, where the Council took place, but the world “from below” as Gustavo Gutiérrez calls it.<sup>11</sup> This is the world of enslaved black people, of oppressed peasants and of native peoples massacred over five centuries. On the other hand, it is also the world of an extraordinary and incredibly rich human and cultural capital, besides a formidable history of struggle and heroic resistance on the part of ordinary people.

The new solidarity with this sub-world, to which the Church in the continent felt itself called, was to imply on its part a self-criticism of its missionary activity, a denunciation of institutional injustice, a respect for native cultures, total support for their biological and cultural survival, and support so that these peoples could organise themselves and become subjects in their own history.

This support of the Church helped give rise, to a large extent, to the innumerable organisations of indigenous, black and poorer people which we have today on the continent. In a decade of popular effervescence and of military repression in all the continent, and especially in Chile, in Nicaragua, in El Salvador and in Brazil, the opening of the Church allowed the irruption of people within it, allowing a breath of hope and freedom to move across the continent.

The entry of the poor brought an immense wealth into the Church. Here was the Pentecost which the Brazilian and Latin American Church recognised in this epiphany of the poor of all races and the victims of every sort of oppression. It was these same poor people who since then have come to evangelise the continent and even the Church.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *op.cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Cf., the innumerable publications which appeared in this period. Among them, we can cite especially, A.Barreiro, *As comunidades eclesiais de base evangelizam a Igreja*, Loyola, São Paulo 1978.

In 1973 the Brazilian Bishops' Conference (CNBB) published three texts which were to prove fundamental for the whole question of poverty and oppression, each of them referring to a region of Brazil greatly affected by poverty or a specific problem. The problem of land appears there as crying out for urgent solution. The texts are: *Ouvi os clamores do meu povo* (I have heard the cries of my people), about the North East of the country; *Marginalização de um Povo: o grito das Igrejas* (The marginalisation of a people; the cry of the Churches), about the Centre-West and, for the indigenous area, *Y-Juca-Pirama – o Índio, aquele que deve morrer* (Y-Juca-Pirama – the Indian, the one who has to die). The texts covered basically the indigenous area which was seen by the military dictatorship of the time as an element of folk lore, whilst the rural area found itself under the control of the ideology of national security.<sup>13</sup>

In the '70s the countryside had a certain precedence over the city in terms of the growth of grassroots organisation, and the city felt itself somewhat challenged by this. CIMI<sup>14</sup> became something of a paradigm, a reference point for grassroots struggles. CIMI was to be a council with a minimal structure, of eight people, including one Indian, Eugênio, chief of the Bororo. Meetings began to be held between chiefs of different tribes, with the support of the Church and the missions. Indians and religious came away from these meetings with three certainties: the first, that the enemy of the Indian was not the Indian but rather the white man. This was most important for those tribes who were engaged in wars, sometimes even cultural ones, with other tribes; the second certainty was the necessity of reclaiming their own cultures, and the third, the reclaiming of their lands. And the mission of the Church was simply to support them. This new missionary approach, recognising the Indian as a historical subject, still provokes reactions today on the part of the official indigenous policy.

On Feb. 14th 1980 the 18th General Assembly of the CNBB<sup>15</sup> approved the document *Igreja e Problemas da Terra* (The Church

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<sup>13</sup> On this ideology, see J. Comblin, *A ideologia da segurança nacional*, Vozes, Petrópolis 1973.

<sup>14</sup> *Conselho Indigenista Missionário* – the Indigenous Missionary Council.

<sup>15</sup> Brazilian Bishops' Conference.

and Land Problems). In it the Church in Brazil laid out for the people and also for the government its vision of the land problem in the country. It stated that the situation of those who suffer because of land questions in Brazil was extremely serious and therefore it had decided to address a word to all brothers and sisters in the Faith, to all people of good will and responsibility, especially to the rural workers and indigenous peoples, concerning the land problem and the problems of those who live and work on it.

The document paid particular attention to the problem of land ownership in our country, reflecting on the social question of farm ownership, trying to give a preferential value to the point of view, the way of thinking and the experience of those who were suffering because of the land problem, taking on board the sufferings and anxieties, the struggles and hopes of the victims of the unjust distribution and ownership of land.<sup>16</sup>

Proclaiming, but also strongly denouncing, the Church said that it hoped that its expressing itself on this issue, accompanied by specific actions, would animate and give hope to all who, in the countryside, needed the land for work, or in the city for living. At the same time it issued a scriptural warning to those who wanted to “add house to house, field to field, until there was no more space and they would be the only owners of the land,” in terms of condemnation already used by the prophet Isaiah (Is 5,8). They also invited all persons of good will to join with and support the workers, not only so that they could reconquer the land, but so that they could work, keep themselves in dignity and produce the food which all need, and also to ally themselves with and support all those who live in sub-human conditions in the shanty towns and on the outskirts of the cities.<sup>17</sup>

### **The problem of land in Brazil: a cry raised to the heavens**

From the research carried out by the CNBB, a glance at the reality of the land problem in Brazil shows just how serious it really is. The land of all has become the land of a few and there exists a great

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. nn. 1–4.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. n.10.

concentration of land ownership in Brazil. The Agricultural Census of 1975 showed that 52.3 % of rural establishments in the country contained less than 10 hectares and occupied a mere 2.8 % of all land owned. In contrast, 0.8 % of establishments contained more than 1000 hectares and these accounted for 42.6 % of the total area. More than a half of the establishments occupied less than 3 % of the land and less than 1 % of the properties occupied almost a half.

Besides this, many of the big landowners own more than one property, which results in an even greater concentration of farm ownership. Moreover, land ownership had been growing progressively more inaccessible to a growing number of workers who needed it for work and not for trading. In 1950 only 19.2 % of workers did not own their own rural establishments. By 1975 this figure had risen to 38.1 %. In 1950 for every one worker who was not a landowner, 4.2 were. By 1975 the ratio had changed to one non-owner to 1.6 owners. Since 1950 this ratio has been diminishing, which indicates that there is a growing number of workers who do not have land and, in order to gain it, have to pay rent or are forced to invade it.

The census presented, in addition, the sad reality of millions of workers who had had to leave the land, be it their own, rented or occupied. Between 1950 and 1970 the opportunities for salaried work and subordinate partnerships on the land fell by roughly one and a half million jobs. The strangulation of small agricultural establishments is in turn closely linked to the expansion of pasturage and the inadequate reforestation policy. In 1970 the agricultural establishments with more than 20 hectares had 50.6 % of their lands taken by pasturage and only 8.5 % by crops. On the other hand, the small producers, with establishments of less than 20 hectares gave over 50.1 % of their lands to crops and 21.1 % to livestock.

Apart from anything else, the credit distribution policy benefited the large owners more than the small ones, those these were more numerous. And the risk of loans and mortgages being reclaimed contributed still more to the aggravation of the situation. Recent measures to change this situation, allegedly taking all aspects into consideration, have not led to a reorientation of the economic policy.

The sad situation of the rural worker in the North East must be particularly highlighted. Two decades of government intervention in

that region, through various organs<sup>18</sup>, which had as their objective overcoming socio-economic imbalances, have benefited the large landowners to the detriment of the rural workers. The farm ownership structure of the north east has worsened the situation of oppression and slavery in the country.

The policy of incentives in the Amazon region has not increased the productivity of the large cattle ranches which show a rate of utilisation inferior to that of the small producers. The conclusion can be drawn from this that, for the time being, the big economic groups have merely sought to benefit from the fiscal incentives. Also in the Amazon large businesses invade the rivers with fishing boats equipped with refrigerating plants. Carrying out predatory fishing, they cause hunger to the riverside populations who complement their poor diet with fishing. Small-scale fishermen from the coastal areas have likewise been prejudiced by tourist projects and industrial outflow.

None of the indigenous communities in contact with the national society have managed to escape assaults on their land. Although the Indigenous Statute is in force, conflicts in indigenous areas have grown increasingly violent and more widespread. Such conflicts are linked to the following factors: the fact that indigenous lands have not been officially demarcated; the invasion of those lands which have already been demarcated; the commercialisation and appropriation by FUNAI (the Government Indigenous Bureau) of the recourses of indigenous land; the prejudice that the Indian is a block on development; the non-recognition that indigenous lands belong to the indigenous themselves, by right, as peoples; the ignorance of the specific exigencies of the relationship of the Indian with the land according to their culture, uses, customs and their historical memory; to sum up, the complete marginalisation of the Indian from indigenous policy, in its planning and its execution.

The land problem caused the problem of uprooting, bringing about migration. In the '70s and '80s there were already millions of migrants, many of whom had, over the years, been obliged to leave their place of origin, primarily owing to the concentration of land owner-

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<sup>18</sup> Such as SUDENE (the North Eastern Development Agency) and DNOCS (the Department of Anti-Drought Measures).



ship, the extension of pasturage and the transformation of labour relations on the land. This is without counting the thousands of migrants who, as an extension of internal migration, moved to neighbouring countries.

A large part of the workers migrated to the big cities in search of work opportunities, enlarging the marginalised masses who live in sub-human conditions in the shanty towns, land invasions and overflows, on clandestine lots, in tenement dwellings and in the modern slave quarters of the dormitories of civil construction projects.<sup>19</sup> The uprooting of people led to insecurity because of the breakdown of social links and the loss of cultural, social and religious points of reference, leading to dispersion and the loss of identity. Another group moved to the pioneer regions of the country in search of land. However, frequently, their attempts to establish themselves on the land has come up against barriers: the difficulty of gaining definitive titles to the land if they buy it; the lack of support or even the failure of colonising companies; new expulsion from the land with the arrival of new land-grabbers or of real or alleged owners.

This whole state of affairs has led to violence in the countryside becoming an increasingly sad fact, with statistics of fatalities darkening the face of Brazil. In almost all parts of the Federation, in distinct forms, conflicts have arisen between on the one side, large national and multinational businesses, land-grabbers and farmers, and on the other hand, small-scale owners and Indians. Violence of every sort has been committed against these latter in order to drive them off the land.

The studies done in the '70s showed that every three days, on average, the major newspapers of the south east of Brazil published a report of conflict in the land. It was shown that these reports corresponded to less than 10 % of the conflicts listed by the agricultural workers' union. A count of the number of victims who suffered physical violence, made through the papers, indicated that more than 50 % of them died in these conflicts.

The extreme violence of land conflict in Brazil has taken on the

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. the book by F.Gorman *Favela da Rocinha*, Vozes, Petrópolis 1981.

proportions and characteristics of a war of extermination, in which the heaviest losses are on the side of the poor workers.

This sombre analysis led the Church to conclude that the responsibility for all this could not be attributed to God. It would be a blasphemy to affirm that God would want such a state of affairs. It is not God's will that his people suffer and live in misery. The Church perceived in this a structural injustice. The injustice which befell the small-scale landowners, the Indians and many rural workers was not merely the action of an individual land grabber and his gang, of a police chief and his policemen, of a judge and the court officials, of a registry office and notary. These would be rather the localised concretisations of that "institutionalised injustice" of which the Puebla document speaks.<sup>20</sup>

Trying to read the reality with the eyes of faith, the Church declared that a process of idolatry was underway which went hand in hand with injustice in respect of the land situation in Brazil. And this process was rooted in the fact that such things happened when property was considered an absolute good, used as an instrument of exploitation. Beyond the clear and transparent analysis which the Church made, it saw itself called also to speak the word which was its own, the word arising from reflection on faith and revelation, the word of theology. A theology of the land was being born.

### **A theology of the land**

Faced with the situation described above, the Brazilian Church felt itself called on to delve into its revelation and tradition in order to construct a discourse based on faith which would illumine the land question. Theology seeks to be this discourse, a meta-language based on revelation and the experience of faith which articulates the revealed datum with the help of scientific tools.<sup>21</sup>

And the first affirmation which is to be found in revelation is that the land is a gift of God given to all. The Church did not formulate this doctrine merely in response to the challenges which the problem

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Documento de conclusões de Puebla*, n.17.

<sup>21</sup> J. B. Libanio, *Teologia da Revelação a partir da modernidade*, Loyola, São Paulo 1992.

raised in Brazilian society, but also in harmony with a long tradition which has its roots in the Bible, in the message of Jesus, in the thinking of the Fathers and Doctors of the first centuries of Christianity. With love and fidelity the Church meditated on these texts and was able to extract from them their social implications for the transformation of the society in which we live.

The Judaeo-Christian revelation tells us that God is the creator and sovereign Lord of all. "For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hands are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it; for his hands formed the dry land" (Psalm 95:3–6, RSV). As creator and Lord, it is God who has the power to define the use and end of the land. From the beginning he handed it over to human beings so that they could put it under their dominion and take from it their sustenance. In formulating its social teaching, having before its eyes the situation of the Brazilian people, especially those who live in the countryside and rural areas, the Church retains the memory of the severe warnings of the Prophets of Israel who denounced the injustice of those who used the land as an instrument of exploitation and oppression of the poor and humble. In this way God's plan, that the land should provide material support for the life of a fraternal community of service, was not forgotten.

But it is particularly in the teachings of Jesus that the Church seeks the sources of its social teaching. Jesus, the Son of God, inaugurates the New Covenant and constitutes the new People of God and the new brother- and sisterhood through participation in the divine life. He reconciles us with the Father, brings about total liberation from slavery to sin and makes us all heirs of God and his co-heirs.

The whole of the New Testament, the New Covenant of God with his children, brothers and sisters of Jesus, points to the sharing in and practising of justice, to the distribution of material goods, as the necessary conditions for brother- and sisterhood amongst the children of the one Father, as the Sermon on the Mount teaches (Mt 5–7). Sincere conversion early on finds itself expressed in a gesture of gift and of reestablishment of justice, so well treated in the episode of Zaccheus (Lk 19:1ff). An exaggerated attachment to material goods, the refusal to share them out among the poor, can impede the radical

following of the Lord (Mt 19:16ff). The gospel ideal to be attained, the prefiguring on earth of the definitive Kingdom, when God will be all in all, is the construction of a fraternal society, founded on justice and love. For the Gospel, material goods should not be the cause of separation, of selfishness and sin, but of communion and the realisation of each person in the community of the children of God.

The Church has present the experience of the first community of Jerusalem, when fraternity in Christ, overcoming the barriers of selfishness, expressed itself in gestures of sharing: “All the believers had everything in common: they sold their properties and goods, and divided them, giving to each according to their need” (Acts 2:44–45).

As the base communities spread throughout the country, the Bible was more and more read and meditated on by the poor and suffering people who increasingly found in it a synthesis of faith and hope for their lives. And the Word of God increasingly acquired the power to motivate them so that the communities were not just meetings for sharing, but became also transforming agents in an unjust and oppressive society.

But the process of Revelation which will mobilise the people of God and awaken them to the struggle for liberation does not stop in the Bible. In the elaboration of its social teaching the hierarchy of the Church of Brazil tried to learn and value greatly the experience of the Church Fathers, who tried to translate for their societies the lessons of Scripture. The Church listened and allowed to be heard again the echo of the expressions of great force with which they too denounced the injustice of the powerful.

“It was greed which allotted alleged ownership rights.”<sup>22</sup> “The land was given to all and not only to the rich.”<sup>23</sup> “By the law of nations the distinction of properties and the regime of servitude was implanted. In natural law, however, the common ownership of all and the same freedom of all remained in force.”<sup>24</sup> This text is particularly expressive, associating as it does individual appropriation of land

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<sup>22</sup> St. Ambrose, *P.L.* Vol. A2, Col. 1046.

<sup>23</sup> St. Ambrose, quoted in *Populorum Progressio*, no. 23, *De Nabuthe*, C.12, no. 53, *P.L.*, 14,747.

<sup>24</sup> *Decrees of Gratian*, L.II, D. 13.

with the regime of servitude. Selfishness induces the strong to appropriate not only things, but also weaker people.

The Church today also still seeks light and guidance in the thought of the great Doctors who also tried to make a synthesis between fidelity to tradition and the new social realities which confronted them. It looks with special attention to the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas who had already seen in private property not an obstacle to the communion of goods, but an instrument for the realisation of its social destiny: “The communion of good is attributed to natural law, not in the sense that natural law prescribes that everything ought to be possessed in common and nothing should be possessed as someone’s own, but in the sense that, according to natural law, there is no distinction of ownerships, which is the result of conventions among people and tends to positive law. Thus it can be concluded that individual appropriation is not contrary to natural law, but is added to it by the invention of human reason.”<sup>25</sup>

So for St. Thomas individual appropriation would be one of the means of bringing about the social end of the goods of all. He himself explains this with greater precision in the same text: “As to the faculty of administrating and managing, it is licit for a human being to possess things as his or her own; as to their use, a person should not have exterior things as his or her own, but as common, that is, in a way that they can be communicated to others.”

With the evolution of society, positive law also had to evolve and to make explicit juridical norms to regulate the growing complexity of life in society and specifically in relation to the problem of property; of ownership and use of the land. The Church, although always respecting the due autonomy of the legal sciences and positive law, considers it to be its pastoral duty and mission to proclaim the fundamental demands of justice.

So it is that, in order to be faithful to the tradition which has been briefly recalled here, the Church, in its social teaching, when it today defends individual ownership of land and of the means of production always emphasises its social function. So Pius XII. condemned agrarian capitalism which drove simple farmers from the countryside, forc-

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<sup>25</sup> *Summa Theologica*, II, Ilae q. 66 art. 2, ad 1.

ing them to abandon their land in exchange for the illusions and frustrations of urban life: “Capital rushes to empower itself with land... which thus becomes no longer the object of love, but of cold speculation. The land, generous feeder of the urban populations as well as the rural ones, comes to produce only for this speculation and while the people suffer from hunger, the farmer, oppressed by debts, heads slowly towards ruin, the economy of the country is drained to buy, at high prices, the supplies which it finds itself obliged to import from abroad.”<sup>26</sup> Or, as John XXIII put it: “The goods of the earth are destined, above all else, to guaranteeing to all people a decent standard of living.”<sup>27</sup>

Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* made explicit the demands of natural law in relation to the problem of the land in a text of impressive relevance for the contemporary Brazilian situation.

In many economically less developed regions there exist extremely large scale rural properties, meagrely cultivated or kept for speculation, while the greater part of the population lacks land, or possesses only derisory plots and, on the other hand, there is a self-evident urgency for the development of the rural populations. Not infrequently those who work for the owners or cultivate part of their property in lieu of income receive a salary or recompense unworthy of a human being, they do not have a decent dwelling place, and they are exploited by intermediaries. Living in great insecurity, such is their personal dependency that all possibility of acting spontaneously and with responsibility is taken from them, as is all cultural growth and participation in social and political life. Therefore reforms are necessary in various cases: salaries should be increased, working conditions improved, job security increased, initiative at work stimulated and therefore, insufficiently cultivated properties should be distributed so that they might become produc-

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<sup>26</sup> “Al particolare compiacimento.” Allocation to members of the Congress of the Italian Farmers’ Federation, 15 November 1946, no.14.

<sup>27</sup> John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, n.119.

tive. In this case, people should be assured of the indispensable recourses and instruments, particularly means of education, and the possibility of a just co-operative organisation.<sup>28</sup>

Paul VI insisted on the principle that “private property does not constitute for anyone an unconditional and absolute right.”<sup>29</sup> John Paul II, speaking to the farmers of Oaxaca, declared: “For your part, those of you who are responsible for the people, you of the ruling classes who at times keep unproductive land which hides the bread which is lacking to so many families, to you human conscience, the conscience of the people, the cry of the outcast, and, above all, the voice of God, the voice of the Church, repeats with me: ‘It is not just, it is not human, it is not Christian to continue in certain clearly unjust situations.’”<sup>30</sup> Or again: “The wealth and riches of this world, by their origin and nature, according to the will of the Creator, are there to serve effectively for the usefulness and use of each and every person and people. So it is that to each and everyone falls the primary and fundamental and absolutely inviolable right to use these goods in solidarity, to the extent that it is necessary for the worthy realisation of the human person.”<sup>31</sup> All other rights, including property and free trade, are subordinated to this, as John Paul II teaches us: “A social mortgage is drawn on all private property.”

A mortgage is a guarantee of the fulfilment of obligations which have been taken on. From the Holy Father’s expression it can be concluded, then, that all private property is, in a way, pledged, marked by the obligations of its social meaning. A property compatible with such a primordial right offers, above all, the power of management and administration which, although it does not exclude ownership, does not turn it either absolute nor unlimited. It should be the source of liberty for all, never of domination nor of privileges. It is a serious and urgent duty to return it to its first end.

John XXIII’s warning is fitting here:

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<sup>28</sup> *GS* 71.

<sup>29</sup> *Populorum Progressio*, 23.

<sup>30</sup> Allocution in Oaxaca, *AAS* LXI, p. 210.

<sup>31</sup> Puebla, n. 492.

It is not possible to establish, a priori, what structure is most apt for agricultural business, given the variety of rural situations in each country and, even more, in the different parts of the world. However, when a human and Christian conception of the human being is held, a business which functions as a community of people cannot but be considered ideal; so the relations between its members and structures correspond to the norms of Justice.... The family type of business should be considered as particularly ideal. No one should stop working in order to ensure that one or the other become reality, according to the prevailing conditions.<sup>32</sup>

Or, to return to *Gaudium et Spes*: “Private property or some dominion over exterior goods confers to each one the absolutely necessary space for personal and family autonomy; they should be considered as a prolongation of human liberty.”<sup>33</sup>

“The land is a gift of God.” It is a natural good which belongs to all and not a product of work. But it is work above all which legitimates the ownership of land. This is what the smallholders understand when they concede the right to open up their possessions as free lands, unoccupied and unworked, for they understand that the land is a common patrimony and that while they work on it they cannot be expelled. The whole of revelation and the tradition of the Church supports this conception, as has been shown above.

It is important, finally, not to forget land for living, a particularly pressing problem on the outskirts of the cities, where families are obliged to live in inhuman conditions of crowding and insecurity, and from where they are, often, expelled, even with violence, to satisfy the interests of developers or for reasons linked to urbanisation. This expulsion from land for dwelling is more unjust and inhuman because the families are exposed to total homelessness and abandon.

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<sup>32</sup> *Mater et Magistra*, 139.

<sup>33</sup> GS, 71.



## **The Commitment of the Church in Brazil**

Having offered an overview and illuminated this by the Word of God, the Church of Brazil took upon itself in the '80s certain commitments in relation to the land. And it began with a humble and edifying self-criticism; it questioned its own land ownership.

1. As a first gesture, it undertook the submission of the problem of ownership and use of the goods of the Church to an examination and a constant revision as to its pastoral and social ends, avoiding real estate speculation and respecting the rights of those who work on the land.

2. It took on the commitment of condemning openly unjust situations and the acts of violence which were being committed in the areas of its dioceses and prelatures and to combat the causes which gave rise to such injustice and violence, in faithfulness to the commitments adopted in Puebla.<sup>34</sup>

3. It reaffirmed its support for just initiatives and for labour organisations, putting its strength and means at the service of their cause, also in conformity with the same commitments. It took care not to replace the initiatives coming from the people, and would seek to stimulate the conscientious and critical participation of workers in unions, associations, commissions and other forms of co-operation, so they might be truly autonomous and free organisations, defending their interests and co-ordinating the demands of their members and of all their class.<sup>35</sup>

4. It supported the efforts of people in the countryside for an authentic Agrarian Reform, in the various ways already defined, which would allow them access to the land and favourable conditions for cultivating it. In order to bring this about, it wanted to value, defend and promote regimes of family property, of ownership, of the tribal property of the indigenous peoples, of community property in which the land is conceived as an instrument of work.

It supported equally the mobilisation of workers to demand the application and / or reformulation of existing laws, as well as gaining

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<sup>34</sup> Puebla, 1160.

<sup>35</sup> Puebla, 1162.

agrarian, labour and welfare policies which would measure up to the worries of the people. It also supported in the same way the creation of the Yanonami<sup>36</sup> park in order to avoid the reduction or fragmentation of their tribal territory and insisted on the demarcation of the other indigenous reserves, including those situated in the border areas of the country.

6. An effort was made to defend and promote the legitimate aspirations of urban workers, many of them driven from the countryside, in relation to the rights necessary to an existence worthy of human beings, especially in what concerns the right to plots of land and dwelling, changing the set-up of urban ownership and of real estate speculation and the fundamental right to work and a just wage.

6. It committed itself to the condemnation, in accordance with the document of Puebla, both of capitalism, whose dire effects were in part outlined in this document, as well Marxist collectivism, the evils of which we had heard of from other countries.<sup>37</sup>

7. It renewed its commitments to deepen, in the ecclesiastical communities, rural and urban, the living out of the Gospel, convinced of its transforming power, as the most efficacious way for the Church to collaborate with the cause of the workers. In these communities, Christians, under the impulse of the grace of God, enlightened by the Gospel of Jesus and animated by the words of the Church – for example, by the encyclical *Mater et Magistra* of John XXIII – entered on a process of constant conscientisation and increasingly acquired a critical vision of reality. With all brothers and sisters in faith and all the workers the Church seeks to organise a new society. With them, finding support in God, a new spirit of living together will be awakened.

Assuming a serious commitment with the workers, it was necessary to nourish their courage and that of all, their hope and that of all, especially in times of difficulty and persecution. So it is that constantly reinvigorated by the memory of the promise and certainty of liberation brought by the Lord, lived in community and celebrated in the mystery of the Eucharist, Christians will fulfil among their brothers and sisters who are workers their mission of yeast, salt and light.

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<sup>36</sup> The Yanonami are one of the most embattled and decimated tribes in all of Brazil.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Puebla, 312, 313, and 546.

So the Church will contribute permanently in the construction of the new person, base of a new society. The Church of Brazil goes further, looking at the dire consequences of neo-colonialism which are on the horizon. The Bishops draw attention to the fact that, among the forms of neo-colonialism condemned by John Paul II, the most threatening today would seem to be the organisation of the international economy which devolves to Brazil and other underdeveloped nations the function of suppliers of food and raw materials of natural origin to the nations who control that economy. In this context, the great intensive strategies of capital will reinforce the condition of dependence experienced by the Brazilian economy and will hasten the process of proletarianisation of the country's rural workers. The problem of rural and urban workers and the problem of the land will only encounter a genuine solution if the mindsets and structures in which our society functions change. As long as the politico-economic system favours the profit of a small number of capitalists and as long as the educational model serves to maintain this system, including disregarding rural life and its values, there will be no genuine solution to the situation of injustice and exploitation of the labour of the majority.

On the other hand, it needs to be acknowledged that the experience and creativity of the Brazilian people which plants the land can indicate new ways for making use of alternative technologies and of community and co-operative forms of using instruments of work. But this society dreamed of by God and by humanity – this the Bishops of Brazil know and affirm – will only be able to be built with the effort of all, with the necessary participation of the young, with the union and organisation of the weak, those who the world holds in disregard and who God has chosen to confound and judge the powerful (cf. 1Cor 1:26ff).

### **The Birth of a Pastoral Land Commission**

It was as a result of this process of awareness-raising that the CPT<sup>38</sup> came into being. Its birth was not, however, an isolated fact, nor did it arise from the intuition of some more enlightened bishop or pastoral

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<sup>38</sup> The letters stand for *Comissão Pastoral da Terra*, the Pastoral Land Commission.

agent. It took place against the backdrop painted above. The Council itself had emerged into a world in which the Spirit of God irrupted over the whole of humanity and not just over the Church. A truly new effervescence possessed society. The church began, then, to see values in the ground of the impoverished peoples. It learnt to recognise the presence of seeds of the Word in different cultures and in the gestation of the new. It is there that the coming into being of the CPT is to be sought. The Pastoral Land Commission was founded in June 1975, during the Meeting of the Amazon District Pastoral Council, called by the CNBB and held in Goiânia. Initially the CPT developed a pastoral ministry with workers on the land. In the definition of Ivo Poletto, the organisation's first Secretary, "the true mothers and fathers of the CPT were the peasants, the smallholders, the Indians, the migrants, those men and women who struggle for their freedom and dignity on a land free of domination by capitalist property."<sup>39</sup>

Founded in the middle of the military dictatorship, as a response to the serious situation of rural workers, peasants and smallholders, especially in the Amazon region, the CPT had an important role. It helped to defend people from the cruelty of this form of government, which only served the interests of national and international capital, and opened up paths so that it could be overcome. It came into being linked to the Catholic Church, because the repression of the dictatorship affected many pastoral agents and working-class leaders and also because the Church had a good political and cultural influence. Indeed, in the darkest days of the dictatorship, the bishops were the only voice which could be raised in defence of human rights.

In the period of the dictatorship, the recognition of the link with the CNBB helped the CPT to carry out its work and keep itself in being. But from its early years the organisation acquired an ecumenical character, both in the sense of the workers who were supported as well as in the incorporation of agents from other Christian churches, most notably the Brazilian Lutheran Church (IECLB).

The smallholders of the Amazon region were the first to receive the attention of the CPT. However, the organisation quickly extended its

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Comissão pastoral da terra*, Paulinas, São Paulo, Collection of Documents of the CNBB, 1975.

work through the whole of Brazil, because the workers, wherever they were, encountered serious problems. So the CPT involved itself with those affected by the big dam projects and later with the landless.

Once the land had been guaranteed or conquered, the challenge was to survive on it. Thus the Family Agriculture project deserves a special mention in the organisation's work, both in terms of the organisation of production as well as in marketing. The CPT, together with its partners, was discovering that this production needed to be healthy, that the environment had to be respected, that water is a finite good. Attention turned back, then, to ecology.

The CPT has acted and continues to do so with salaried workers and pieceworkers, who have managed, for a while, to win something, but who encounter difficulties of organisation and making their case public. Beside these people, there are also the "peasants," forced many times in their work into conditions analogous to slavery.

In each region the work of the CPT adopted a different tone in accord with the challenges which the reality there presented. However, it never lost sight of the major reason for its existence, to be of service in the cause of rural workers, acting at the same time as a support for their organisation. It is the rural people who define the paths they want followed, their objectives and goals. The CPT accompanies them, not blindly, but with a critical spirit. So it is that since its beginning the CPT has managed to keep clear the fact that the protagonists of this history are the rural workers. The pastoral agents and bishops merely serve to give support and backing to their initiatives.

Finally, human rights, defended by the CPT, permeate their whole work. In their activities, explicitly or implicitly, what has always been present is the right of the worker, in their different realities. This has been so to such an extent that it could be said that the CPT is also an organisation which acts in defence of human rights or a Pastoral Commission for the rights of those who work on the land.

### **The Problem of Land in Brazil today: the growth of the MST**

Alongside the CPT there emerged another movement related to the struggle for land. Non-confessional and without direct links to the

churches, this movement underwent an enormous growth in the '80s and '90s and today is the leading movement in terms of the land question in Brazil.

From 20th to 24th January 1984 a group of 80 representatives of rural organisations from 13 Brazilian states met in a church near to the city of Cascavel in Pará in northern Brazil. At this meeting it was decided to create a national movement which would bring together people from the country who since the end of the '70s had been beginning to organise themselves to demand access to the land which had been taken from them by the process of mechanisation which had transformed Brazilian agriculture over the preceding decade. These people, who had already been called "landless" by the press, decided to incorporate this expression into the name of the movement and thus the MST was founded.<sup>40</sup> Today the Movement contains about 350 thousand families on settlements and about 150 thousand who live in camps. Considering that the average number of people in a Brazilian family is four, the MST militants number almost two million.

At the heart of the MST's struggle is land reform. According to data from IBGE (the Brazilian Statistical Office) the cost of creating a job in the car industry is 50 thousand dollars whilst the cost of creating a job in the country is 1,500 dollars. Besides this, again according to IBGE, Agrarian Reform would raise the salary of the rural worker who lives today on less than one minimum salary to three times that amount. Besides these advantages, smallholdings (less than 200 hectares) are responsible for more than 70 % of the total national production of pigs, poultry, milk, eggs, cocoa, bananas, beans and cassava. "Smallholdings are responsible for 35 % of the national production even of soya, which is Brazil's number one export." As for this, the data from IBGE demonstrates the unproductivity of large holdings (with more than 2,000 hectares). The big farms produce only 22 % of beef, 9 % of lamb, 2 % of pork, 1 % of poultry, 15 % of cotton, 33% of sugarcane, 22 % of soya, 2 % of coffee, 11 % of cocoa, 5 % of beans and 1 % of cassava. Umbelino emphasises the importance of the income produced by the smallholdings. "From all the

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<sup>40</sup> *Movimento dos Sem Terra* – Movement of the Landless.

money produced by Brazilian agriculture, 56 % is created by small-holdings, 30 % by medium-sized properties, and only 14 % by the large properties.”

In the MST there are more than 500 associations of production, sales and services, 49 Agricultural Production Co-operatives, 32 Service Provider Co-operatives with 11,174 direct members; two regional sales Co-operatives and three Credit Co-operatives with 6,521 associates.

There are 96 small and medium agro-industries which process fruits, flowers, milk and derivatives, grain, coffee, meat and sweets, besides various crafts. These economic activities of the MST generate employment, money and taxes indirectly benefiting more than 700 small municipalities in the interior of Brazil.

Linked to the production there is also education. Around 160 thousand children gain Basic Education in the 1,800 public schools of the settlements and camps. There are around 5,000 educators paid by the municipalities or states who have developed a specific pedagogy for the rural schools. The education sector is also present at the pre-school level (0–6) with about 500 educators. The MST has developed a process of literacy training for around 30,000 young people and adults in the settlements and camps. In order to develop all this work the MST counts with the support of the Pronera (National Programme of Education in Agricultural Reform), of the INCRA/MDA (the national land settlement and agricultural reform institute and the Ministry of Agriculture) and of the Education Ministry’s Literate Brazil Programme. Apart from these organisations, the MST is also supported by Unesco, Unicef and more than 50 universities.

There are at the current time 1,500 students from the MST in middle and higher education. The formation of administrators for the settlements and co-operatives and teachers is also taking place so that they can take part in the work developed in the settlements through the Josué de Castro Institute of Education and the municipality of Veranópolis in the very south of the country. 750 MST militants are studying at universities, of whom 58 are studying medicine in Cuba.

## **To be landless: more than a name, a mysticism**

When one hears speak of the Landless, one might imagine that these are rural workers, sharecroppers, or others who have no land. In reality, with the growth of the Movement, Landless has become a proper name, that of workers struggling for Agricultural Reform and to transform society.

Landless has become a sign of the retrieval of the dignity of workers called vagrants, kicked from one corner to another. The MST, through their option for struggle, have gained an identity. In the settlements and camps one can see men, women, even children wearing with pride caps or badges on their shirt collars where is written the phrase: "I am Landless." The person who, having no land, had nothing, has become, thanks to the MST, a respected member of society. And the MST is nothing other than hundreds of thousands of Landless. In spite of the criticisms which could be made of its ideology, the MST has gradually managed to claw back the human dignity of those who, without work and without land, saw themselves excluded from society. It has managed to get them to have documents and register their children. It has taught them to read and write and given them the joy and pride of seeing their children go to school. It has managed to put a roof over their family's heads.

Nevertheless, the true objective of the MST is Agricultural Reform as a struggle for all. Based on faith in humanity, the MST has composed its wish-list:

1. Human beings are precious, because their intelligence, work and organisation can protect and preserve all forms of life.
2. To love and preserve the land and nature. To go on improving our knowledge of nature and agriculture.
3. To produce food to eliminate hunger amongst humanity. To avoid monoculture and the use of agro-toxins.
4. To preserve the existing forest and to reforest new areas. To care for springs, rivers, marshlands and lakes. To fight against the privatisation of water.
5. To beautify the settlements and communities, planting flowers, medicinal herbs, greenery, trees...



6. To deal adequately with rubbish and to combat any practice of contamination and aggression towards the environment.

7. To be always in solidarity and to stand up against any injustice, aggression, or exploitation practised against the person, the community or nature.

8. To struggle against the big landholdings, so that all can have land, bread, study and freedom.

9. Never to sell the land gained. The land is a supreme good for future generations.

## **Conclusion**

Now that the MST has taken over as the big movement in the struggle for land, one might be tempted to think that the Church had withdrawn from the front line of this question, leaving a merely political movement to carry it on.

This, however, does not correspond to the truth. In reality, the role which the Church played in the years of the military dictatorship in Brazil, especially in the '70s and '80s has left indelible traces on the great struggles of the Brazilian people and even on its own understanding as a nation.

Just as the history of colonial Brazil cannot be understood without the important participation of the Catholic Church and notably the Society of Jesus, the more recent history of our country owes an enormous amount to the prophetic actions of the Church which acted courageously and intrepidly in the times of repression.

So it is that, even in the MST, many of the leading figures come from the ranks of the churches.<sup>41</sup> Although more discreet, the Church in Brazil continues to be a strong institution, with high levels of credibility, and still an integral part of the construction of their identity for Brazilian people.

The pilgrimages of the land and the waters are a clear example of

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<sup>41</sup> The leader of the MST, João Pedro Stedile, is an ex-Capuchin friar. José Rainha, another of the leaders, is a member of a Base Community. And the same holds true for many others.

this.<sup>42</sup> There are at the moment more than 20 of these throughout Brazil, constituting religious manifestations which affect thousands of peoples. Most of them are promoted by the Pastoral Land Commission. They are characterised by a privileged space in which faith and life are profoundly intermingled and where the cry of the people of the countryside makes itself heard. With the pilgrimages the CPT entered into the life of the people.

They are carried out in different ways and in various places. Some happen in popular pilgrimage places, others in places which the struggle and the conquests of the people have turned sacred. The pilgrimages of the land and the waters are a temple for the meeting of the divine and human, great celebrations which manifest and construct the unity of the Church. The land marches break the vicious circle of traditional pilgrimages, centred on individualism, on the search for comfort for the heart, for the transcendent, and which therefore happened around the saint and the altar. The land pilgrimages introduced as central elements the Word and the life of the people, and thus they have always had a prophetic dimension of denunciation of the oppression experienced by workers in the countryside and of the injustices which are committed against them. They search, through faith and the religious element, the transformation of society, the building of the Kingdom of God. They also break through strictly Catholic barriers and take on – in some places more, in others less – an ecumenical character, involving people of other Christian denominations and other faiths. The land pilgrimages have become in the last few years also water pilgrimages. They incorporate more this fundamental element of human life, trying to make everyone aware of the value of water – essential for the survival of the human race and of nature – and to alert people to the capitalist folly which wants to turn it into one more item of merchandise.

The pilgrimages of the land and waters do not just consist of celebration. Normally they are preceded by a process of preparation for the rural communities who take part in them. For this reason material is always prepared which includes a history of the place where the

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<sup>42</sup> Pilgrimage (*romaria*) is defined by the Aurélio Dictionary as: "Procession to some religious place. Meeting of devotees who participate in a religious celebration."

Pilgrimage is going to occur and celebrations are held to help prepare the spirit with a view to a better participation.

The triple idea of faith, land and nation is still present in Brazil today as it was before. And the simplest people of our country, despite making more and more use of the political instruments of struggle to attain freedom, still find in their faith the most powerful motivation not to get discouraged when faced with problems, and move forward, marching towards the promised land of which the Bible speaks, that land which the first indigenous inhabitants of Brazil used to call with the lovely name of “the land without evils.”

Dom Pedro Casaldáliga, bishop of the prelature of São Felix do Araguaia, composed the beautiful Mass of the Land without Evils, which ends with the following verses, a harmonious symphony of cultural pluralism and of the social struggles which permeate the Brazilian identity:

Uirás always searching  
For the land which will come  
Maíra at the beginnings  
At the end Marana-tha

The poor of this land  
We want to create  
The land without evils  
Which comes every morning.

(translation from the Portuguese by Tim Noble)

## CZECHS AND GERMANS IN OUR CENTURY

The following text was written in 1966 by the Czech philosopher Božena Komárková, who lived for most of her life (1903–1997) in the Moravian capital Brno. Most of her work remained unknown both in the Czech Republic and abroad till the Velvet Revolution, since the two totalitarian regimes of the 20th century tried to isolate her from society.

In the last few years her complete work has been published, containing both personal documents and essays. Due to the efforts of the Department of Ethics of the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University a selection of Komárková's essays was published in English (*Human Rights and the Rise of the Secular Age*, Benešov 2003). This collection does not include Komárková's essay on German-Czech relations, which we bring hereunder. The translator, Joyce Michael, provided also the following introduction.

*As you read the words of Božena Komárková (1903–1997), you will not only meet an erudite scholar whose broad grasp of philosophy, theology, and history are carefully expressed and creatively interwoven; you will also meet a human being who lived her convictions in extraordinary ways – through relationships with other people and courageous acts of conscience. During the Second World War, Komárková was arrested and imprisoned as a result of her participation in the anti-Nazi resistance movement. Having survived internment in a concentration camp, she taught philosophy, history, and geography at the secondary school level. She also completed her dissertation, and was preparing the “habilitation” thesis, which would have enabled her to become a university professor, when the communist party came to power in Czechoslovakia in 1948. Insofar as Komárková's thesis dealt with “Human Rights in 19th Century Philosophy,” the communist regime thereafter restricted her life work. Forbidden to teach, Komárková worked in a library until being forced to “retire” in 1951. Dr. Komárková was under surveillance for the rest of her life. Nevertheless, she continued to develop and record her thoughts*

*about human rights, Reformation traditions, philosophical dynamics, and historical realities. Publication of her writings was officially banned until after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. However, even during the communist era, Komárková courageously disseminated her ideas about human rights and related topics by delivering lectures, offering courses, and writing articles for the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. She was also quite involved with young people through the work of the Academic YMCA, with which she originally became associated prior to the Second World War. In 1977, Komárková was one of the first people to sign Charter 77, which was an important document that registered a public protest against communism, and throughout the 1980's, she held seminars in her apartment, which were primarily attended by dissidents.*

*Komárková's reflections on human rights contain a number of insights that our world continues to struggle with, for, and against. Although her complex thoughts require careful consideration, endeavors to enter into Komárková's probing perspectives are quite worthwhile – perhaps even essential – at this moment in time when beleaguered governments seem to be inclined to try to protect freedom and secure democracy with the use of force. Insofar as Dr. Komárková acquired and actualized her insights at the cost of personal sacrifice, she may be an apt mentor to anyone who would seek to introduce our troubled world to understandings of justice and compassion that have intellectual depth and practical import.*

## Božena Komárková

In this century, nationalism – on both sides – has characterized the common life of Czechs and Germans. Under its influence, we have opposed each other more than we have lived in community. Nationalism can be justified only in terms of the collective and personal self-determination that plays an intrinsic part in the human symphony. Thus, nationalism also arose within Herder's theories. However, from the outset, Herder tended to absolutize the values of his own nation. In this distorted form, the more nationalism is able to rely on political power, the more inhumanely it functions.

Within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, we did not have any power as Czechs. This probably contributed to the fact that we invariably have had to justify our national existence morally. The writings of the leaders of our nation, from Palacký to Masaryk, are proof of that. They did not succeed with this approach among all sectors of the population; however, the intelligensia took up their cause with whole-hearted resolve. We did not want – and were not able – to hold any nationality down.

The struggle for the preservation of our national identity was carried out within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. That fact manifested itself most clearly in the struggle over language. German was the official language. The mother tongue was not mentioned in statistics, and could function only as “general discourse” because not only public servants, but also workers in German manufacturing enterprises and craftsmen in the border regions, were identified as being German.

The situation was particularly strained in the educational system. Every Czech elementary school was the target of intense antagonism and was permitted only as a private school. For example, in Brno, there were only two impoverished Czech elementary schools prior to 1918. The situation was far better at secondary schools, which were maintained by the state – not by municipalities.

At the same time, the Germans had the greatest proportion of the economic power, especially in the northern border regions where Protestant immigrants from Saxony – who managed to put forth far greater initiative than the indigenous Catholic population – estab-

lished the largest manufacturing enterprises. The surplus agrarian population, which sought its livelihood in industry, subsequently flocked there from the interior. Thus, this area, which was highly Germanized during the eighteenth century, began to be filled with Czech inhabitants again.

All of this caused a lot of tension. A labor force was sought; however, the workers' demands to retain their mother tongue were not recognized.

After 1918, nationalistic circles of Germans refused to make peace with the establishment of the Republic of Czechoslovakia within the old historical boundaries of Bohemia and Moravia.<sup>1</sup> However, that resistance lost its force during a period of [economic] inflation in Germany. That situation caused propaganda in favor of annexation to Germany to lose all of its appeal.

There were many reasons for peaceful co-existence. In everyday life; we were in concert more than we were opposed to each other. The "conflict" became the concern of newspapers and assemblies; otherwise, Czechs and Germans lived and worked together, and went on strike together.

On the whole, the conservative Catholic population in the countryside had little sense of national friction. The national border was extremely variable and fluid. It changed according to the balance of power and other conditions. Families resulting from mixed marriages came over the border; children spoke both languages equally well or equally poorly. The school did not always clearly identify a national allegiance.

The social rights of the German minority were established by the Geneva Convention, and they were honored. We had a German university, two German institutes of engineering, and other German schools in such abundance that the number of pupils in the classroom was smaller than in Czech schools. Because a transformation of the social order did not take place with the formation of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, the Germans also retained their economic power.

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<sup>1</sup> At the time, Czechoslovakia also encompassed Slovakia and Ruthenia; however, the Germans were primarily opposed to the fact that the new Republic of Czechoslovakia included the regions of Moravia and Bohemia.

All of this contributed to the fact that, even before the Locarno Pact, our co-existence was peaceful and taken-for-granted.

In the mid-twenties, two German parties – the Agrarian Party and the Catholic People’s Party – abandoned the opposition wing of parliament and joined the coalition government. Later, the German Social Democracy Party also joined them.

An anecdote, which a German industrialist recounted, illustrates the situation well. Some Germans were invited to a house for a big party. Suddenly, children burst into the drawing room with an excited cry: “We won!” “What did we win?” “Why, the hockey championship.” “Ah, that. But the players are Czech.” “That doesn’t matter! After all, we’re Czechoslovak.”

The younger generation automatically became rooted in a sense of national allegiance through such everyday occurrences, although German schools fostered nationalism and Czechoslovak parents also were not particularly favorable. It was a pity for both groups of residents that their life together did not develop further along these [positive] lines.

Internal relations were not the impetus for the unfortunate events of the following years; their impetus came from without, in the form of the economic crisis of the 1930s and as a result of the Nazi movement in Germany, for which the economic difficulties provided a breeding-ground.

The highly-industrialized border region was affected by the economic crisis far more than the interior was. However, everything that the economic crisis bought about was tendentiously judged to be anti-German by the German sector, and feelings that had long since subsided began to come back to life again. However, because political authorities did not take the steps needed to bring the whole situation under control, it may be that, at the time, few people understood what kind of foundations were being laid by the unemployment.

Nevertheless, we may note that the weight of the crisis was not distributed equally between the two groups of residents, and the government was unable to assist those who were hard-hit – or else it responded too late.

Let us give an example of this: From the beginning, civil service employees were almost exclusively Czech. The reasons for this were



not entirely nationalistic. After the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, many German civil servants refused to take an oath of allegiance to the Czechoslovak Republic, and went into retirement or were fired.

The German political opposition could not contribute to a change in this tendency. Especially in Northern Bohemia, the German population showed little interest in civil service. Such work had a lower pay scale than jobs in industry had. Also, during the period of prosperity prior to the start of the 1930s, there was a sufficient number of jobs for all segments of the population, from manual laborers to educated intellectuals. Lawyers and doctors could work profitably in their chosen professions.

The economic crisis affected all sectors of the population without exception. More and more workers were laid off; unemployment swelled to appalling proportions; and, by virtue of its natural inclination toward radicalism, the younger generation was affected the most adversely.

During that period, interest suddenly increased in civil service, which was secure from dismissal and, consequently, was very appealing. Civil service had, to a considerable extent, been closed to the Germans, but they had not felt that fact to be a grave injustice until that time. Later (in 1935), this matter was resolved in favor of the Germans. However, that solution did not happen organically and did not have an impact on the mitigation of tension.

Subsequently, when economic life began to get moving again, the Germans quit their clerical jobs and returned to positions in industry. That very fact provides evidence that the issue of civil service was not the main reason for the Germans' discontent.

All in all, this did not come about apart from petty chicaneries within the lower offices, but, on the whole, the question was not ill-will on the part of the government.

In a more tranquil atmosphere, demands for greater equality could have continued to be met. As has already been mentioned elsewhere, in comparison with other states, the Republic of Czechoslovakia kept the Geneva Convention regarding national minorities quite well. Without the Nazi movement, the rift within the Republic of Czechoslovakia would never have occurred in spite of the difficulties of the 1930s.

As early as 1933, Henlein's Sudeten-German Party arose. This party set the unification of all "racial" Germans in the Republic of Czechoslovakia as its goal. From the outset, its subversive aims were clear, although Henlein was extravagant in his professions of loyalty. The Sudeten-German Party grew, to the detriment of the other parties that German inhabitants in the Republic of Czechoslovakia could choose. After five years, the Sudeten-German Party had drawn more than 90 % of all German voters into its circle. Finally, its motto became: "*Wir wollen heim ins Reich.*" ("We want a home within the *Reich.*") At the time, no one foresaw the manner in which this desire would finally be fulfilled.

I cannot describe what came next except in terms of personal experience.

I became acquainted with the reality of the Third Reich a few days after March 15, 1939. From a nearby city, which we had lost at the time of the Munich Agreement, uniformed members of the German army came to our town in a truck, and began to forcibly abuse the Jewish residents. Seeing that with one's own eyes was something completely different than hearing about it.

Until then, we had understood uniformed power to be a safeguard against the violation of order and justice. Now, for the first time, we experienced that power *encroaching* on both justice and order. We watched this – with despair at our own powerlessness; we watched with shame in our hearts, but we could not stop the tyrants.

Thus, an experience began that, prior to that time, we would never have believed to be possible. Spring was very beautiful that year. In an empty factory building at the edge of town, the International Red Cross had set up a camp for Jews from southern Moravia who had fled from the Nazis after the Munich Agreement. Now members of the German army paced there, and methodically flogged the people. We heard orders and shrieks, but we could not do anything about that. The contrast between this and the radiance of nature was unbearable. An unrestrained hatred began to grow within us then.

Only much later – in prison – did I learn to overcome this hatred with the help of God. That would not have been possible any other way. Resistance was a matter of human passion. During those years, we experienced so much cruelty and pain around us that, in the end,

we became numb to human suffering. We instinctively refused to acknowledge the agony, so that we would not ‘cave in’ because of it; we did not take it to heart. This numbness lingered in our spirits, and, later, produced various omissions with regard to fundamental human obligations.

The younger generation was affected even more adversely. It learned violence from those it hated, and it subsequently perceived that to be the substance of justice! In 1938, the violence perpetrated against the Jews outraged my secondary school students, all the more because their classmates suffered among the victims. When I returned from prison after the war, I discovered that these youth had changed. Reputedly, they were delighted to participate in beating Germans who were apprehended there. For me, those were dreadful days. The experiences of those six years had brought the students to this: they were now doing the very thing that they had been contemptuous of at the beginning. This was the sad consequence of those years: a hunger for revenge, a desire to repay evil with evil.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that our own actions contributed to a certain ‘exoneration’ (*rehabilitace*) of the Nazis remains our disgrace. Yet, one difference remains. Anyone who ignited those feelings and the hunger for revenge – anyone who extended the cruelty around himself – that man bears responsibility for what he stirred up. I do not thereby excuse the evil perpetrated by our people. But I do find that the Germans carry greater guilt on their shoulders.

The expulsion of the Germans – which was completely unimaginable before the war – materialized under the authority of an international agreement.

At the time, I scarcely was able to grasp the implications of this incident. Karel Veliký put an end to the insurrection of the Saxons in the same way that Nebuchadnezzar once dealt with Israel. Yet, should we have chosen the methods of barbaric antiquity? Did we have a right to take such steps? According to a statement by President Beneš, future generations would not forgive us if we did not take advantage of this opportunity.

I was not especially open to such reasoning. I needed to put the

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<sup>2</sup> Literally, ‘to repay a person with his own coin.’

question differently: After what had happened, how could we *live together*? I knew a single way: That would be possible only through joint repentance. Unfortunately, repentance does not belong among the categories of world history. Therefore, our ways have parted. Guilt remains on both sides, even if it is not distributed equally.

World history has not ended as a result of the war. In the future, we must rectify the past. The world has grown smaller. Now, it is not possible to stand *opposed to each other*.

We have already embarked on a new course. The initiative for this has come from Germany. The Gospel began to work among us with the arrival of Professor Hans Joachim Iwand and Martin Niemöller in this country. Beneath the cross, we can overcome the past. There is no other way. Relationships as close and amicable as those in this time have not occurred for centuries. As far as we are concerned, this will enable us contribute to the kind of future in which the power of sin will no longer be able to spread without impediments and will not be able to have free run.

(translated from the Czech by Joyce Michael)

# VOLK UND NATION IN DER NEUEREN TSCHECHISCHEN (THEOLOGISCHEN) DISKUSSION

*Jindřich Halama, Prag*

Die Diskussion über das Thema „Nation“ wurde im tschechischen Milieu mit dem Begriff „Staat“ eng verbunden und wurde vor allem in die Jahre um beide Weltkriege konzentriert. Die tiefgreifende Krisen und Veränderungen im Laufe des letzten Jahrhunderts führten wiederholend zur Reflexion unserer Geschichte, des Sinnes der nationalen und staatlichen Existenz.

Der Anfang dieser neueren Diskussion wurde durch Masaryks *Die tschechische Frage* (1895) gelegt. Masaryk hat den Sinn der tschechischen Geschichte als Fortsetzung der tschechischen Reformation formuliert: der Nationalprogramm muss in der Anknüpfung an die von Jan Hus und von den Böhmisches Brüder repräsentierten Ideale bestehen. Das wurde aus der katholischen Seite von der Historiker Josef Pekař opponiert, der den Sinn der nationalen Geschichte einfach in der Bewahrung und Entwicklung der nationalen Bewusstsein sah, wobei er den Anfang dieser in dem katholischen Patriotismus der Barockzeit suchte.<sup>1</sup>

Der Streit, der sich zwischen diesen beiden Konzeptionen entwickelt hat, ist noch immer nicht vorbei, er wurde aber von dem Philosophen Emanuel Rádl in seinem Buch *Der Kampf zwischen Tschechen und Deutschen*<sup>2</sup> grundsätzlich behandelt, in einer Weise die bis heute unüberholt bleibt.

Rádl macht darauf aufmerksam, dass mit dem Wort „Nation“ zwei verschiedene Begriffe ausgedrückt werden. Eine Auffassung, die auf den deutschen Philosophen Herder zurückgeht, sieht in dem Nation einen Organismus. Nach Herder ist eine Nation ein Volksstamm, der

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<sup>1</sup> Vgl. Patočka, Jan, *Was sind die Tschechen?*, p. 208f.

<sup>2</sup> Rádl, Emanuel, *Válka Čechů s Němci*, Melantrich, Praha <sup>2</sup>1993. *Der Kampf zwischen Tschechen und Deutschen*, Reichenberg 1928.

anfangs nur ein instinktives Gefühl seiner Einheit hat, bei besonderen Gelegenheiten kommt er aber zum Bewusstsein und mit der Zeit wird das Nationalbewusstsein immer stärker, bis zum Streben nach politischer Selbstständigkeit.

Nach Herders Auffassung ist die Nation die natürliche Fortsetzung der Familie und des Stammes, biologisch und auf Rasseninstinkte begründet. Sie ist ein Werk der Natur und demnach für den Menschen ein Schicksal. Das eigentliche Wesen der Nation ist von dem Volksstamm gebildet.

Diese Auffassung der Nation ist „östlich vom Rhein,“ namentlich in Deutschland, in den ehemals österreichischen Ländern, in Russland und auf dem Balkan verbreitet. In dieser Hinsicht ist Herder zum „Apostel des Panslawismus“ geworden (und sein Schüler Fichte ist für Pangermanismus verantwortlich).

Die andere Auffassung der Nation ist die politische und sie herrscht in den Ländern des Westens. Hier versteht man unter Nation ein Volk, das sich unter Anerkennung einer Verfassung organisiert hat. „Der Begriff der Nation setzt eine Organisation voraus, den Willen, sich zu organisieren, ein Gesetz, eine Verfassung, das Wissen um sie und Loyalitätsgefühl.“<sup>3</sup>

Nach der politischen Auffassung ist die Nation die Gemeinschaft freier Bürger, die den Gesetzen, die sie sich gaben, Loyalität entgegenbringen. Sie ist politisch und auf der Vernunft begründet, sie ist das Werk von Menschen.

„Dann wird die Nation ein Ideal, eine Aufgabe, ein Programm: noch besteht sie nicht, aber sie soll bestehen, und hinzu bedarf es der Läuterung und Hebung des Materials dieser Welt.“<sup>4</sup>

Das ist also Rádl's Auffassung: die Nation als Aufgabe, als Programm, als etwas, was nicht gegeben ist, sondern was man zielbewusst gestalten soll. Natürlich hat dieser Gedanke viel Widerstand begegnet. Ich möchte jetzt ein Beispiel geben, eine interessante Auseinandersetzung mit dem berühmten Schriftsteller Karel Čapek.

Čapek hat den Einwand gebracht, dass Nationalität nicht nur rational, programmatisch definierbar ist. Es gibt ein irrationelles Tsche-

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<sup>3</sup> Rádl, *Der Kampf...*, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

chentum, ohne Programm und ohne Gründe, irgendwo tief in menschlicher Seele. „...meine Augen und meine Hände sind mir gegeben; ich kann sie nur so gut wie möglich benutzen. Gerade so ist mir auch mein Tschechentum, meine Nationsangehörigkeit gegeben.“<sup>5</sup> Rádl antwortet, dass die Idee der Nationalität gewiss sehr tief und elementar sein kann. Heisst es aber, dass sie diese Qualität verliert, wenn wir sie begreifen und als Programm formulieren? Und wenn wir kein Programm finden, wenn unsere Nationalität ohne Begründung bleibt, dann sollen wir solche unbegründete Nationalität verlassen. „Dass wir aber so etwas von den Augen und Händen nicht sagen können? Dass uns nichts als beugen vor dem Schicksal bleibt? Wenn dich aber dein rechtes Auge zur Sünde verführt, so reiss es aus und wirf es von dir; ...und wenn dich deine rechte Hand zur Sünde verführt, so haue sie ab und wirf sie von dir...“ (*Mt 5,29f*).<sup>6</sup>

So lautet Rádl's theologische Begründung seiner Auffassung der Nationalität. In dem politischen Bereich heisst es Orientation auf Vertragsdemokratie. Derer Vorläufer findet Rádl sogar in den ersten Christen und ihren Anschauungen über den römischen Staat. Sie waren staatsgefährlich: nicht deshalb, weil sie den Staat direkt angegriffen hätten, sondern weil sie einen anderen Staat in Aussicht stellten, in welchem das Gewissen des einzelnen und sein Verhältnis zu Gott Grundlage des Lebens waren.<sup>7</sup> Seit den Tagen der Urchristen gibt es Streitigkeiten zwischen Staat und individuellem Gewissen. Es ging immer um den Grundsatz, dass das Gewissen des Bürgers ein primärer Wert sei; dass Gottes Gebot höher stehe als Menschensatzung, und dass daher der Staat seine Rechte dort einschränken müsse, wo das Recht des Gewissens anhebt. Der Staat ist die durch Vertrag zwischen freien und selbstberechtigten Nationen entstandene Organisation. So gilt es in der Vertragsdemokratie, an der die angelsächsischen Länder festhalten und die Rádl für die im Moment beste gesellschaftliche Organisation hält.

In den Staaten Mitteleuropas herrscht aber, wie gesagt, die organische Auffassung der Nation und des Staates. Nach dieser Theorie ist der Staat eine überindividuelle Schöpfung, ein Werk der Geschichte,

<sup>5</sup> Karel Čapek, *Národnostní filosofie E. Rádla*, KR 1939, p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> Emanuel Rádl, *Hlas srdce*, KR 1939, p. 105.

<sup>7</sup> Emanuel Rádl, *Der Kampf...*, p. 103.

ein Werk Gottes, vor dem sich das Individuum in Demut neigen muss.<sup>8</sup> Hegel gab dieser organischen Auffassung von Volk und Staat einen neuen Ausdruck. Die organische Auffassung setzt voraus, dass Volk und Staat einen Organismus bilden, dessen „Organe“ die Individuen sind. In den Ländern der Orthodoxen Kirche lehnt sie sich an die Mystik an;<sup>9</sup> die Ideologie Sowjetrusslands ist auf ihr aufgebaut. Und wenn man aus der Verbindung zwischen Nation und Kirche in der Orthodoxie annehmen will, dass die Orthodoxie das nationale Moment besser zu respektieren wüsste als der Katholicismus, das gerade Gegenteil ist der Fall.<sup>10</sup>

Zwischen dem organischen und dem Vertragsmodell steht die Demokratie der Mehrheit. Hier wird das Volk mehr oder weniger atomistisch aufgefasst, als eine Summe von Individuen. Die absolutistische Macht des einzelnen wurde zerstört, aber nur, um sie auf die Majorität zu übertragen. Es gibt kein Kriterium, Wille und Willkür der Mehrheit zu unterscheiden; die Mehrheit ist niemandem verantwortlich... Die Demokratie der Mehrheit ist einzig und allein auf der Idee der Macht aufgebaut: „Die Mehrheit siegt,“ ist ihr letztes Wort.

Zweitens kennt die Demokratie der Mehrheit nur „ein Gesetz ohne Ausnahmen und ohne Privilegien,“ d. h. dass sie kein Recht auf persönliche Überzeugung, auf eigene Sprache, eigene Kultur und eigene Religion kennt. Dieses ist bis zum äussersten im Kommunismus durchgeführt, wo das vermeintliche Interesse der Menschheit absolute Norm für das Leben des Individuums ist.

In Mitteleuropa ist diese Art von Demokratie sehr verbreitet; absolutistische Traditionen, die Schule des Marxismus und die relative

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<sup>8</sup> Im Geiste dieser Lehre sagte Friedrich Wilhelm IV. von Preussen: „Keine Macht dieser Welt wird mich jemals dazu bringen, das natürliche Verhältnis zwischen Herrscher und Volk in vertragsmässige und konstitutionelle Beziehungen zu verwandeln; nie werde ich gestatten, dass sich zwischen unserem Herrgott im Himmel und diesem Lande ein Blatt beschriebenen Papiere als eine Art zweiter Vorsehung eindränge.“ Guido de Ruggiero, *Storia del liberalismo Europeo*, Bari 1925, p. 264.

<sup>9</sup> Dazu schreibt Hromádka im Jahre 1922, dass man vom Russland nicht viel erwarten kann. Die Kirche, aber auch die Intelligenz, erwartet eine metaphysisch-religiöse Erneuerung, die ein ausserweltliches Prinzip durch die kirchliche, nationale oder staatliche Institutionen bringen soll, womit die praktische soziale und politische Arbeit verhindert sei. Das höchste Kulturideal kann nur religiös verwirklicht sein. J. L. Hromádka, *Pravoslavná církev a dnešní Rusko*, Kalich VII (1922), pp. 153ff.

<sup>10</sup> Rádl, *Der Kampf...*, p. 22.



Einfachheit einer solchen Auffassung der Demokratie lassen sie bei uns leicht Eingang finden.<sup>11</sup> Sogar bei Masaryk finden wir diese Züge. Masaryk spricht im Sinne einer Demokratie der Mehrheit, der durch die Humanität Schranken gezogen sind. Aber das Unzulängliche des humanitären Programms liegt darin, dass es endlich die Macht den Händen derjenigen überlässt, welche sie de facto haben und nur an ihr Gewissen appelliert, humanen Gebrauch davon zu machen.<sup>12</sup>

„Der Grundgedanke meiner Betrachtung ist,“ sagt Rádl, „dass die sogenannte kulturelle Auffassung des Staates verfehlt ist. Die Theorie, dass der Staat der Gipfel- und Sammelpunkt der kulturellen Bestrebungen seiner Bewohner sein soll führt zur Vergewaltigung der Nationalitäten. Es ist notwendig, die Trennung des Nationalen vom Staate durchzuführen.“<sup>13</sup>

Diese Worte wurden im Jahre 1993 neu gedruckt, in dem Moment, wenn Tschechoslowakei in zwei Nationalstaate geteilt wurde und wenn der Krieg in Bosnien ausgebrochen ist. Es gehört zu der Tragik der menschlichen Existenz, dass wir nach Jahrzehnten immer die selbe Probleme haben. Und nicht nur die osteuropäische Länder sind damit betroffen. Ladislav Hejránek macht in dem Nachwort zu Rádls Buch darauf aufmerksam, dass das Problem des Nationalismus auch „westlich vom Rhein“ wächst und vermehrt die Reihe der Ersatzreligionen, die als eine verfehlt Antwort auf wirkliche und dringende Aufforderungen unserer Zeit entstehen.<sup>14</sup>

Rádls Kritik an Masaryk wurde, dass er den Staat nur anthropologisch, positivistisch begründen wollte. Von hier aus lässt sich das Reich des Sittlichen und Idealen nicht retten. So ein Staat wird nur zum „Ausdruck des Nationalcharakters,“ zum Werkzeug für nationale Ideale, die Freiheit wird nur als eine Möglichkeit zur Entfaltung vererbter Anlagen verstanden. In solchem Fälle „wächst die Nation mit ihren Zielen nicht über sich selbst hinaus; ihre Grundlage sind letzten Endes nur Egoismus und eitle Selbstbespiegelung.“<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Rádl, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> L. Hejránek, *Doslov*, in: E. Rádl, *Válka Čechů s Němci*, p. 283.

<sup>15</sup> Rádl, *Der Kampf...*, p. 204.

Wenn aber die Freiheit nicht von dieser Welt ist, sondern die Idee einer Sendung voraussetzt, um derentwillen der Mensch frei sein soll, dann können Nation und Staat nicht das Ziel gesellschaftlichen Strebens sein, sondern nur eines der möglichen Werkzeuge für höhere Ziele. Das entscheidende Prinzip lautet, dass das Nationalprogramm im Grunde für jedermann annehmbar sein muss, nicht nur für eine Nationalität, Rasse oder Sprachgruppe. Wenn wir diese Auffassung der Nation und des Staates annehmen, werden wir bereit unsere Nationalität in den Dienst der (wahren) Menschlichkeit zu stellen.

## THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE CZECH NATIONAL IDENTITY

For this special issue on the question of land, nation and faith, the editorial board invited a few persons to give their view on the effects of the enlargement of the European Union on the Czech Republic. All interviewees live in the Czech Republic at the moment, though not all are holders of a Czech passport. The question they all got, was the following (some were asked a few additional questions):

In May this year the Czech Republic will become a member of the European Union. This moment poses to us the question what we want to contribute to this multinational community. Who are we and what do we bring with us? From our past we inherit dilemmas, some resolved, some unresolved, which partly determine our understanding of the own national identity.

How in your opinion should we best understand our national identity? What are the values worth preserving? What needs to be changed? What in this respect do you expect from entering the EU?

**Tanweer Ali** from the Great Britain lives in the Czech Republic for a number of years. After position in several financial institutions, he currently teaches at the University of New York in Prague.

The Czechs are historically one of the most advanced nations in Europe, with a tradition of reform, and a high regard for education and social cohesion, that stretches back to Charles IV and Jan Hus. More recently the values of humanitarianism, toleration, pluralism and democracy shone through in Masaryk's First Republic, which Karl Popper described as "the most open of all societies ever to develop in Europe." This was also one of the world's most advanced and prosperous economies. This background should help the Czech Republic regain its place as one of the most progressive societies in Europe, and perhaps become a leader in Central Europe; and in time a much

higher level of economic prosperity will again be the norm. What needs to be changed? Czech society's renewed receptivity to new ideas, technologies and horizons needs to be matched in equal measure by its political class.

**Do you see the traditions you mentioned present enough in today's discourse of political and cultural elite? What is or could be the institutional framework of this exchange?**

It is difficult to address exactly what would constitute 'present enough' as this country is going through a difficult process of transition - and perhaps the most difficult things to change are those that take the longest time. So to me it is not so important that these traditions are present enough, but to evaluate the progress that has been made and to look at the signs for the future. It is easy to be pessimistic, but one should bear in mind the level of the trauma of the decades preceding 1989 and to see how much has been achieved. It seems that the intellectual elite of the Czech Republic is fast making up for lost time - this is something one can see in the health and vitality of civil society. This last point is probably the main one that I would make in answer to the question. When I talk of civil society I suppose I have also answered the second question.

**Christopher Garlick**, an Englishman living in Prague for five years, is financial director of a British company operating in the Czech Republic

I see some Czechs as good, some as amoral. On the negative side, the fact that Czech society has been at least for the last fifty years very homogeneous means that there is little acceptance of those who are not Czech. Even among very intelligent people there is often no attempt to integrate the Roma. There is a surprisingly high level of racism in public life, in politics, even in the legal system. Another typical problem is that there is no expectation that those in public service will do their work without bribes. This is true is from the top to bottom of society and includes doctors, shop assistants, civil servants... Moreover it is generally accepted. I have also been shocked

by the “normality” with which some people steal from their employers, and how sometimes even sexuality can be used as a bribe.

Then, there is the good side. Czechs are capable of having a really good time together, of enjoying each other’s company. I am not used to people talking together so freely – even if maybe not about important things. The Czechs are a very artistic people. So you might see a “Keep off the grass” sign adorned with a beautiful picture! The architecture is superb.

Entering the EU may be helpful, as stricter rules can be introduced to counter the negative aspects.

### **Why do you stay in this country?**

Things to me seem strange and exciting. I cannot quite express the Bohemian attitude, one simultaneously of joy and tears, vitality and resignation. And as I said, the atmosphere when people get together is wonderful.

### **What do you think will change economically?**

This country could experience an economic miracle and return to the same relative wealth it had between the two world wars, with the proviso that the Švejk mentality decreases. More wealth could also bring to Czechs more pride in their country.

**Dr. Jiří Hanuš** is a historian and one of the founders of the Centre for Democracy and Culture in Brno.

Our modern national identity was created in the time of so called “national revival” – there we find its foundational features: Enlightenment-inspired scholarly thinking on the substance of national culture, national self-identification based in language and ethnicity, integration of national struggles with civic (constitutional) struggles, attempts to rest our national identity on the pillar of a wider Slavic world. Fortunately, some of these features belong to the past – e. g. old revival slavism in the form of rusofilism definitely passed in the last decades of the 20th century. What remains valid is the cultural element (we first think a lot, and only then found something) and the

civic element (national matters should be connected with basic human rights and liberal achievements). These emphases make us slightly different from some other nations in the Central-Eastern Europe, and I think they are a good capital for the “European orchestra.”

It cannot be ignored, however, that in the present Europe everything is open to the process of searching. What we start to experience with the rest of the Europe is a gamble in which basic things are questioned – the nature of political and economical freedoms, viability of a “caring” state, new dangers threatening the whole of the Euro-American civilisation. In all these discussions we should take positions coordinated with the rest of the Central European region, with whom we have in common primarily an experience of the Soviet totalitarian regime, positions showing respect to the anglo-saxon notion of freedom, which is getting weakened in continental Europe.

**T. G. Masaryk used to say that the “Czech question” is primarily a religious question. Would you consider this statement as something that passed away together with panslavism?**

This view was problematic already when it was formulated. Masaryk was a very popular politician, but this historically conditioned opinion did not even convince a number of his faithful proponents, not to mention the intellectual opposition. And today? Not even the People’s Party (KDU-ČSL) does rush to emphasize the religious-political themes. It is well known that they would not find an adequate response in the Czech secularised society. Religion is a minority group question, not a generally a Czech question. If inhabitants of the Czech Republic connect their existence with something religious, they are probably totally unaware of it.

**But was the idea of European Union originally not inspired by the Catholic Social Teaching? How can secular Czechs relate to that?**

Secularised Czechs will encounter in the European Union some rules belonging also to the equipment of the Catholic Social Teaching (primarily the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity). Their Christian

origin nevertheless is so clear any longer, mainly because of the fact that these rules have been embodied into programmes of centre-left European parties, which is (with certain reservations) also a case of the Czech political scene. It is now more complicated. Some Christian elements are present in Europe also in the conservative politics, and I would say that here they are more explicitly spelled out as Christian. I cannot guess what would be the next development – but at the moment it seems that both of the streams (the centre-left and the conservative) are in temptation to avoid the basic Christian as well as liberal premise, namely human freedom. Secularised Czechs would have to make decisions about the form and depth of this freedom, independently of their Christian or atheist “confession.”

**Michaela Johnová** is a student of the Bc program at the Protestant Theological Faculty in Prague and a member of the German-Czech Youth Forum. She lives partly in Germany.

The first of May – a day that many of us are looking forward to, but also a day that is looked at with great distrust or even with fear.

What will we bring with us? Everyone brings his bit to the mill, we like to say. This time to the mill called Europe. We bring with us a piece of pride, national pride or even patriotism, Czechness or Moravianness, honor for our national heroes at moments when we need to strengthen our self-esteem, boast for Becherovka and Pilsner Urquell, for Carlsbad Wafers, Czech dumplings and Saint Wenceslas, at times we need him the most. We have the feeling that the world falls apart at the moment that someone questions what we consider our own from our childhood. That is, that Becherovka, Pilsner Urquell and Carlsbad Wafers are not a product of Czechness, but have their origin among Czech (Bohemian) Germans.

At this point a large unhealed wound is opened – a part of the unsolved Czech-German history, which is everywhere, where some fragments have been renewed, in small doses, often implicit, but in their effect unignorable.

We bring with ourselves a bit of improvization, which we sometimes try to use in politics in an unfortunate way, we bring some

openness, but also closedness, sometimes even anxiety, a sense of humour, though not all have reached the top – the ability to make fun of oneself.

I wish that citizens of the Czech Republic would not give answers before they ask the question. Those are answers of the type “anyway, nobody is interested anyway...” I wish they try to start a dialogue. A dialogue, not a monologue or even some parallel to each other running monologues, which are often to be heard in our republic, and unfortunately not only at home, but due to the present information systems these things are distributed into the entire world very quickly.

I truly hope, that it will not be fear, that will keep our mill stone turning, but rather preparedness to carry responsibility for our deeds.

**RNDr. Ivana Macháčková CSc.** is a biologist working as director of one of the institutes of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

1. How we understand our national identity: We are a small European nation with many highlights and failures in our history – as any other nation. We have to accept our history as it is, and to try to perform a thorough analysis, so we can draw from it ideas for the future. My opinion is that the older generation has no problems with national identity, but the young people have and thus, it should be somehow defined.

2. What are values worth preserving: to be creative even under modest conditions.

3. What should be changed: First of all we have to learn to accept responsibility for our own life. We have to increase tolerance and open ourselves to diversity.

4. What do we expect from entering the EU: In spite of realizing that the first period will be difficult, I hope that entering the EU will help to realize the changes I mentioned under the 3 point.



**Mgr. Dana Moree** is a PhD student of intercultural pedagogy in Leiden, the Netherlands. She lives in Prague, where she works in the field of education and training.

Not long ago I visited a library in the Netherlands and tried to find some sociological literature concerning Communism and its heritage. It appeared there was not any research done so far, which surprised me a lot. Totalitarianism is a part of the recent Czech experience. We should not be very proud of it, but at the same time it is an important part of European history. I think that we should not exclude, but include this experience as a part of European history and reflect it in the encounter with other (democratic) countries.

What is our national identity? We should not be afraid to ask this question. Perhaps we should start the difficult process of seeking the Czech identity, to face our own experience and try to find some continuity. Last year the Czech sociologist Potůček wrote a report about human resources in the Czech Republic. He suggests thinking about the values and norms which were destroyed during past 40 years. Perhaps we should start to build our national identity again and try to link it to some basic principles, values and norms, which should become an important part of everyday life again.

I think that Czech cultural life is really worth preserving, especially cinematography, theatre and music. I hope that all of this will be not only open for Europe but it will be also developed for the future.

There is one other aspect. From my own experience I know that people from the EU-countries often appreciate the enthusiasm of the Czech people. We still have the feeling that we can finally do what we want and there are many people who are enthusiastic and creative. I would like this feature to survive also in the ordinary life of the “new Europeans.”

Some basic norms and values should be found again. Not only these which are obligatory but these which are ordinary: the feeling that going to some office does not mean facing corruption, and “good contacts.” Creating the basis for democratic life and openness, is what we really should do.

The process of seeking the new identity after Communism can be

easier in relation to others. The others are always a mirror to us, which can help us not only to find our own identity again but also to correct some obvious mistakes which we are making.

**Helena Povolná** is a student at Gymnasium Jaroslava Seiferta in Prague.

The French are proud of their republic, the English of their queen, the Germans of all the work they have done. But don't ask what the Czechs are proud of – you won't get an answer. The Czechs are completely different in understanding their nationality. We don't talk about the good we have, we rather highlight our dark sides.

Despite our own view of ourselves, I don't think that we come to Europe with empty hands. We bring with us our experiences with defending our identity against many impacts and influences. Our "fight" was successful, so it would seem: we're a sovereign state, we speak Czech, we celebrate Christmas with baby Jesus... I hope we can teach Europe that rather than size and force it is often the idea which you follow that decides your fight. And in return for this, Europe can teach us that it's not necessary to defend ourselves against everything foreign and that there are nobler ideals to follow than just one's personal intentions.

**Dennis Schipporeit**, a theological student from Germany, spends the academic year 2003–2004 at the Protestant Theological Faculty in Prague.

The Czech Republic simply belongs to the European Union. In their history, the Czechs were always connected to the central powers in Europe. Their country lays in the very heart of Europe. As they are a country for only a short time, it is important for the Czechs to be self-confident as an independent nation.

At the same time, entering the EU means to take one's place in a community of nations in which nationalism has to be overcome. All countries have to accept each other by keeping off from national or

even regional peculiarities and at the same time stress the common European cultural heritage.

As far as I see it after living in Prague for six months, the Czech Republic seems to be more than prepared to join the EU. At least among the students I am together with, I see that they mainly like their country, deal critically with their history and are open-minded towards foreigners. They show their “Czech way of life” to me and are interested in my way of life. This self-confident openness is exactly what I expect from all people who are members of the EU.

**PhDr. Jan Sokol CSc.** is professor in Philosophical Anthropology and dean of the Faculty for Humanities of Charles University.

Dilemmas are by definition unanswerable questions and national identity is rather something to be created in a sort of “daily plebiscite” (Renan), of course on the background of our experiences, including history. In my opinion, our present “identity” (or the lack of it) is particularly due to the long lasting and involuntary separation from Europe. Exactly because the Czechs played a historical role only in close connection with European streams and ideas – whereas periods of isolation were for the most part periods of stagnation – I do expect and wish a re-integration into European thought and life, an abolition of our national fears and fobies.

Besides the points mentioned above, I think EU countries should remind the more happy parts of Europe, that our present security, peace and well-being are by far not as matter-of-fact, as they might seem. Our part of the world should bring in the old and new message of necessary civic virtues, of solidarity, of the necessity to repent our own wrongdoings and the ability to forgive. This – or in short, the Christian-Jewish message of love – is the only “value” worth preserving.

**What do you think should be repented and what forgiven on our part?**

What is “our?” As an individual, I have to repent and to forgive. As a Catholic as well. As a Christian and as a Czech, I repent the passivity

of the Czechs towards the Shoah, the aggressivity against Sudeten Germans, the lack of gratitude towards those who fought and suffered etc. I have to forgive my (small) part of Nazi and Communist persecution. But this is my own business, not to be made public.

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*Pavel Hošek, Prague*

### **Religious Pluralism as a Challenge**

Harold A. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism. The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission*, Apollos, Leicester, England, 2001, ISBN 0-85111-488-1, 368 pp.

Harold Netland's book, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, focuses on the question, 'How should Christians understand their faith and calling in the environment of religious pluralism.' This idea is expressed in the subtitle of the book: *The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission*.

Netland's relatively comprehensive work (368 pages) is divided into two main parts: in the first part the author analyses cultural, social and spiritual developments of the last several decades, which lead to the rise of a worldwide phenomenon of religious and cultural pluralism. He describes the significant shifts in Christian valuations of non-Christian religions, as they are observable in the writings of a whole range of prominent Western theologians. In the second part of his book Netland suggests the basic presuppositions and principles of a responsible Christian theology of religions and attitude towards their adherents. These principles should then be employed in framing the theological context for interreligious dialogue, and also in re-shaping the theological substructure of missions and evangelism.

In the first chapter the author describes the gradual shift in the basic assumptions, which have formed the Christian view of other religions, especially among missionaries working outside the Western cultural context. The original (traditional) missiological assumption, typical of the greatest missionaries of the 19th century (W. Carey, A. Judson, D. Livingstone, H. Taylor and others) was based on a more or less completely negative valuation of non-Christian religious traditions. The vast missionary movement of the nineteenth century was motivated exactly by this assumption: The adherents of other religions are desperately lost and they need to hear the Gospel in order to be saved for eternity.

Later on, partially because of the so called post-colonial guilt syndrome, a more positive view of non-Christian religious traditions

appeared. Christianity was not viewed any more as their sharp anti-thesis, but rather as their completion and fulfilment. Since the second half of the 19th century religions were perceived by many missiologists as anticipations and preparations for the Gospel. Fragments of truth contained in these traditions are viewed in relation to God's general revelation. This perspective on other religions dominated at the missions conference in Edinburgh in 1910. Later, under the influence of the ideas of liberal Protestant theologians, much higher emphasis was put on the humanitarian and educational dimension of missions (the so-called social gospel movement). This trend was clearly observable at the missions conference in Jerusalem in 1928. In the thirties first attempts at creating a multireligious coalition appeared. The real enemy was perceived in secularism and materialism. All religions should fight against these trends together, hand in hand. Within Protestantism a wide spectrum of missiological approaches developed. The three clearly distinct perspectives on the interreligious relations are the conservative Evangelical, Neo-orthodox and Liberal.

In the Roman Catholic church, the decisive turning point in the 20th century has been the Second Vatican council. This council moved from the traditional exclusivist view towards an open inclusivism, as this view was supported by theologians like K. Rahner and H. Küng.

Besides the traditional exclusivism (the author of the book suggests for this view a less compromised label particularism), which insists on an absolute uniqueness and universal claims of Christ, and inclusivism, which insists on the soteriological necessity of Christ's atoning death, but acknowledges a partial salvific potential of other traditions (because they are in implicit relation to Christ), a third basic approach to other religions has appeared in the last few decades. This approach, called pluralism, gives up the normativity and universal claims of Christianity and puts Christ on the same level as other founders of religious traditions (Zoroaster, Buddha, Muhammad etc.). Many famous Christian theologians identify themselves with pluralism, for example W. Cantwell Smith, J. Hick, L. Gilkey, P. Knitter and others.

In the second chapter Netland analyses the intellectual and cul-

tural development, which gave rise to the pluralistic paradigm. Among the factors, which helped to pave the way for pluralism, Netland names the relativistic perspectivism of the Western philosophy, urbanizing and globalizing trends, consumerist and market-like approach to spiritual life, typical of modern West, and also omnipresent scepticism concerning any certainty in ultimate questions, which is, in Netland's view, a characteristic feature of modernity. Post-modernity is in this sense just a climax of this epistemological scepticism, typical of the Enlightenment thinking since Descartes, Hume, Kant and Nietzsche till modern times.

In the third chapter of his book Netland describes the process of gradual penetration of non-Christian traditions into the Western cultural horizon. He starts with the overseas discoveries of the 15th and 16th centuries. Then he speaks about the rising interest in non-European cultures caused by the tragic confessional conflicts during the thirty years war. He describes the discovery of Chinese cultural values by thinkers like Leibniz, de Montaigne and Voltaire and the romantic fascination with Indian world, observable in the works of Coleridge, Herder, Goethe, Schelling and especially Schopenhauer. At the end of the 19th century Buddhism becomes an object of interest among Western intellectuals and newly founded theosophic movement (H. P. Blavatska and others) rises in popularity.

In the fourth chapter Netland focuses on the continuing growth of interest in non-Christian traditions in the West, encouraged by intellectuals representing these traditions (Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan, Suzuki and others). He also observes the growing trend in the last decades (especially in the USA) to speak about spirituality, rather than religion. In contrast with the traditional emphasis on loyalty to an established tradition today the leading metaphor of religiosity in the West is the image of spiritual journey, quest, lifelong seeking.

In the fifth chapter Netland analyses the pluralistic theology of J. Hick. All religions are, according to Hick, culturally conditioned responses to the experience of one ultimate reality (the Real). Differences among religions are just at the surface level of mythological truth. On the esoteric or mystical level, religions all point to one and the same Absolute. They are all equal because they all offer a soteriological transformation of men and women from self-centered ex-

istence to Reality-centered existence. The originally conservative Evangelical theologian Hick rejects in this way all the universal claims of Christ, which he considers to be non-historical constructs of the New Testament writers and early church.

From the sixth chapter on Netland concentrates on preparing the ground for an adequate Christian response to the situation described in previous chapters. He emphasizes the fact that the question of truth is of key importance in all religions. It is therefore necessary to resist the temptation of pluralism and to deal honestly with the offensive fact of conflicting truth claims. All religious traditions answer in some way or other three basic questions: 1) what is the nature of religious Absolute 2) what is the problem with humanity 3) what is the solution of that problem. In light of these questions we can see clearly, Netland says, the incompatibility of religions. Netland insists that religious truth has a cognitive dimension, it can be expressed (though of course not exhaustively) in propositions with cognitive value and content.

In the seventh chapter Netland points to the unresolved inconsistencies of the pluralistic paradigm. He shows that the most famous non-Western thinkers, commonly understood as pluralists, are in fact inclusivists: Dalai Lama just as much as Suzuki or Radhakrishnan. They all consider their theology to be an all-embracing framework, which is objectively true. Hick's objection to particularism and inclusivism, that these views imply that most simple believers of world religions are significantly wrong in their view of ultimate reality, applies to pluralism no less: most religious believers view their religion as objectively true and universally valid, not as a culturally shaped human response to the ineffable Real. Hick's assumption of a common ground of all religions remains an undemonstrable speculation.

In the eighth chapter Netland defends apologetics as an essential part of interreligious dialogue. Christians have to be able to answer the question, why chose Christianity and not some alternative view. It is necessary to look for trans-contextual criteria of truth and meaning, not to give it up and fall into relativist scepticism. As the most appropriate method Netland recommends the cumulative cause apologetics as it was practised by G. K. Chesterton or C. S. Lewis.



In chapter nine Netland proposes basic trans-contextual criteria of truth, which make it possible to avoid the perspectivist dead end. These criteria should include inner coherence, explanatory power, principles of logic, universal ethical criteria etc. Crosscultural communication and understanding are possible (in principle) even though they are very difficult. Christian theologians have to build bridges to a dialogue, which doesn't avoid the question of truth.

In the last chapter Netland proposes an outline of a responsible theology of religions. It has to be based on Scripture, on the other hand it must build on a detailed knowledge of the content and meaning of other religious traditions and it must not misinterpret this content for apologetic and polemic purposes (as was often the case in the past). Netland criticizes Evangelical Christians that in the early period of modern theological reflection on other religions and inter-religious dialogue they were largely silent and that they are still behind even today. Among the basic theological themes, which have to be newly interpreted in light of the encounter with religious pluralism, are the doctrines of creation and general revelation in relation to world religions, the doctrine of sin and idolatry and their influence in religious life of humankind, the nature of the demonic and also the spiritual dimension of interreligious relations. Among the urgent topics on the agenda he lists the question of the accessibility of salvation for non-Christians, the problem of continuity and discontinuity between Christianity and other religions and the question of the relationship of culture and religion in crosscultural missions.

Netland's work is deservedly becoming a classic in the field. His longterm crosscultural experience in Japan, just as his many years of teaching philosophy of religion in university context enriches his analysis significantly.

On the other hand the book is so packed with diverse information from many different fields that it is sometimes difficult to follow the main line of the book's argument.

Another weakness of the book seems to be Netland's modernist, Enlightenment view of knowledge. Netland's objectivist view of truth is also marked strongly with the influence of analytical philosophy. Epistemologically his views seem to be over-optimistic concerning the accessibility of objective trans-contextual, trans-cultural truth and

meaning. His passionate defense of evidentialist apologetics seems to be a little onesided. The insights of the proponents of presuppositionalist approach to apologetics, which might provide a necessary balance, are not dealt with sufficiently. From the theological point of view, the limits of human knowledge due to our creatureliness and epistemological consequences of human depravity do not seem to be sufficiently reflected.

Nevertheless, Netland's call for dealing with conflicting truth claims as an essential part of interreligious dialogue is legitimate and needed. His critique of naive pluralism is penetrating and adequate. The book is certainly worth reading for anybody who is seriously interested in interreligious relations. It is a must for anybody who is involved in interreligious dialogue.

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