

# Nationalism and Migration as Challenges for Ecumenical Theology

*A Starter in a German Protestant View*

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Let me start with a short biographical reminiscence: I am German and I was born in 1955. I was barely 13 and in the middle of my secondary schooling during the 1968 German student movement. My father's family came from East Prussia and, as children, we thought the aunts and uncles on that side were all quite strange and a bit difficult to work out. But they never taught us to love the German flag as a symbol of the fatherland, our homeland, and we weren't interested in learning to love it.

Many years later, in 2006, countless little flags in the national colours suddenly sprang up everywhere to celebrate the Football World Cup in Germany. Flags were proudly displayed in the windows of houses and shops, flags waved at me from cars, and I really struggled to fight off an unexpected sense of queasiness that engulfed me.

For me, national pride was, and continues to be, very closely linked with nationalism. I didn't experience true nationalism personally but, for a very long time, nationalism was like a dark cloud blowing over us from the past, seeping into the atmosphere of our family.

A week ago, we were able to celebrate a family reunion of all the East Prussian relatives from my generation and younger. Sadly, the generation of parents have all passed away. Some of these former refugees and displaced persons are now residents of the USA or of Austria, some live in Bavaria, others in Northern Germany. Around half of them have married partners from other nationalities. We were able to gather at my house in Mannheim. We headed off for a day trip to the Hambach Castle. This day trip destination is very closely linked to our conference theme, as well as having considerable relevance to the German national flag.

The Hambach castle was originally a fortress from the Middle Ages. At the time of the event that I would like to share, it had been long abandoned and lay in ruins. Nevertheless, it served admirably as a festival loca-

tion for a political protest meeting that was camouflaged as a festival in May 1832.<sup>1</sup> Around 30,000 people – also including citizens of Poland – travelled to these ruins on the mountain in the Palatinate region, allegedly to celebrate a festival. Certainly, a festival did take place, but it was liberally peppered with political speeches, in which freedom of the press, of assembly and speech, revocation of customs barriers and even women's rights were openly demanded.

Against this background, a key role was played by what was later to become the national flag: Participants at the festival draped themselves in black-red-gold flags, badges and sashes. The pre-cursor of the German national flag was carried at the head of the festival procession. Also described as the ›founding mother‹ of the modern flag, this standard was then hoisted on the tower. For some 20 years, the flag had already been a symbol of freedom in the aftermath of the wars of liberation from Napoleonic rule. In the many German principalities, this longing for unity as a nation that defined the Hambach Festival in 1832 originated from a longing for freedom and fundamental civil rights. These could only be delivered in a watered down version, if at all, in the many small principalities. And the »fatherland« stood for these ideals:

As they moved up the hillside to the fortress, demonstrators sang what had been written in the published »invitation« to the festival:

»Onwards, you German men and youth from every social standing,  
where the holy spark of the fatherland and of freedom  
sets aglow every breast,  
stream on.«<sup>2</sup>

What can we learn from this? The combination of differentiating exclusivism as a designation of nation was not yet definitive during the Hambach Festival in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nation was a concept of freedom from monarchist arbitrariness and despotism, representing, in particular, free-

<sup>1</sup> FRISCH, LUTZ, ed., *Das Hambacher Fest 1832. Wiege der deutschen Demokratie*, Regensburg 2014; <https://www.demokratiegeschichte.eu/index.php?id=80> [accessed April 10, 2020].

<sup>2</sup> »Auf, ihr deutschen Männer und Jünglinge jedes Standes, welche der heilige Funke des Vaterlandes und der Freiheit die Brust durchglüht, strömt herbei!«; cf. JOHANN GEORG AUGUST WIRTH, *Das Nationalfest der Deutschen zu Hambach*, Neustadt 1832, 6 [accessed April 10, 2020] <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=TnhTAAAAMAAJ&rdid=book-TnhTAAAAMAAJ&rdot=1>.

dom of opinion. Unity of the nation was supposed to guarantee this, through liberation from small and large-scale monarchist rule and the freedom of citizens in the free »nation«. Polish participants at the Hambach Festival also held and supported these ideals, having themselves waged the so-called »November Uprising« back home in 1830 against Russian rule. Liberal Germans were deeply impressed by the Polish struggle for freedom. They had supported the fight with associations that delivered dressing materials and relief supplies into the war zone. The great wave of Polish emigrants fleeing their homeland after the suppression of the November Uprising were given an enthusiastic reception in most German states. And now it was an honour that a Polish delegation had come to the Hambach Festival; their presence alone symbolised something akin to the longing for a liberal unified Europe and they were seen as role-models in the fight for freedom.

The Songbook of Music from the Hambach Festival contains the following verses about the Polish citizens:<sup>3</sup>

»We saw the Poles, they moved away,	»Wir sahen die Polen, sie zogen aus,
As if fallen to the dice of destiny.	Als des Schicksals Würfel gefallen:
They left the homeland, the father's house,	Sie ließen die Heimat, das Vaterhaus,
In the barbarian robbers' claws.	In der Barbaren Räuberkrallen:
Before the Tsar's sinister face	Vor des Zaren finsterem Angesicht
The freedom-loving Pole does not bow down.	Beugt der Freiheit liebende Pole sich nicht.
We too, dear Patriots, we are moving	Auch wir, Patrioten, wir ziehen aus
In tightly held rows,	In festgeschlossenen Reihen;
We want to found our own father's house	Wir wollen uns gründen ein Vaterhaus,
And want to consecrate it to freedom	Und wollen der Freiheit es weihen:

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 12–13.

Because before the tyrant's face	Denn vor der Tyrannen Angesicht
The free German will no longer bow down.«	Beugt länger der freie Deutsche sich nicht.«

Once again: It is clear here that by referring to the concept of nation and the father's house, they are not seeking to look back to the past, quite the contrary: This is dealing with the future and how it will be structured. If this were a theological concept – which, in the first place, it is not – then it would actually carry liberation-theological connotations. The nation is not inherited, it has to be won, and constructed absolutely according to the ideals of a humane citizen's life. At the Hambach Festival, the concept of nation is not yet ready to be celebrated, it remains a libertarian future vision.

This can, in fact, be different, and it did evolve differently in the continuing German history. We intentionally referred to this fact in the invitation to this conference, pointing out the many different ways in which the reference to a nation can be taken: »The political spectrum ranged from a liberal, even quasi liberation theological impetus to attempts to sacralize the nation.«<sup>4</sup>

In this presentation, I would especially like to reflect on the relationship of the churches to the nation and the people. It is only at the end that will I return to the question of their response to the migration movements. My aim is to offer an entry point to the reflections in this book. The majority of what I would like to share now is presented by many other authors far more accurately and in much greater detail. Just to mention it in this introduction: It is a particular pleasure that we could find key contributors from across the worldwide ecumenical movement, as Peter Phan or Kaholi Zhimoni. They broaden our European focus as they offer the opportunity to reflect on their perspectives and experiences from the USA and India.

Back to »Nationalism and Migration«: I will primarily concentrate here on two Protestant studies on the subject of »Nation«:

– A study published by the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) from 1999, titled *Nation im Widerspruch [Nation in Contradiction]*<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Signalia. Rundbrief der Societas Oecumenica* 35 (2017): 7.

<sup>5</sup> HELMUT EDELMANN and, NIELS HASSELMANN on behalf of the Vereinigten Evange-

– A study from the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, *Church – People – State – Nation*, published in 2002<sup>6</sup>

First of all, a short phenomenological analysis might be appropriate:

### *1 People and Nation: A very brief Phenomenological Analysis*

In the study *Church – People – State – Nation* prepared by the Leuenberg Church Fellowship we will find the following attempt at a definition:

»People and nation refer to the way entities which are politically active organise and understand themselves and also to the various other active entities or alien groups which are excluded.«<sup>7</sup>

It is clear this is dealing with a self-determination that is the result of *differentiation* from others. In the ecumenical movement, we have reflected for a long time about the phenomenon of the formation of identity, about arriving at self-determination by means of differentiation. As we all know, this is a particular challenge for the relationship between churches. As a result, we can also understand the contemplation of ecumenical models of »unity« as a contemplation of a less divisive, differentiating concept of identity. And now, some 60 years after contemplation of this topic first started in ecumenism, we are able to find an intellectual partnership with the Social Sciences, where precisely this concept is being scrutinised and reflected upon. Identity as the inclusion of another, while respecting their

lisch-Lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands, eds., *Nation im Widerspruch. Aspekte und Perspektiven aus lutherischer Sicht heute*. Eine Studie des Ökumenischen Studienausschusses der VELKD und des DNK/LWB, Gütersloh 1999.

<sup>6</sup> WILHELM HÜFFMEIER, On behalf of the Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, ed., *Kirche – Volk – Staat – Nation. Ein Beitrag zu einem schwierigen Verhältnis. Beratungsergebnis der Regionalgruppe der Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft Süd- und Südosteuropa / Church – People – State – Nation. A Protestant Contribution on a Difficult Relationship. Report of the Discussions in the South and Southeast Europe Regional Group of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship*, Frankfurt am Main 2002; Germ. Text 11–100, Engl. text 103–165. Hereinafter page numbers of German text in brackets.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 112, 2.2.1 (22–23.) referring to REINHART KOSELLECK, FRITZ GSCHNITZER, KARL-FERDINAND WERNER and, BERND SCHÖNEMANN, »Volk, Nation,« in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* VII, ed. OTTO BRUNNER et. al., Stuttgart 1992, 142.

otherness – this is the subject matter of the newer reflections on identity.<sup>8</sup> The ecumenical catchword regarding *unity in reconciled diversity* has long been following this track.<sup>9</sup> In the Protestant academic world, you will often hear high praise of difference, which is for the most part combined with an anti-ecumenical scepticism.<sup>10</sup> This overlooks the complex dynamics and dialectics that are intended with the reconciled diversity, and it overlooks that differences can *only* be valued in these dynamics and dialectics; they should not become destructive of life.<sup>11</sup> Naturally, it also needs to be said that tendencies to overemphasise differences, even within ecumenical dis-

<sup>8</sup> Cf. ANDREAS RECKWITZ, »Subjekt/Identität. Die Produktion und Subversion des Individuums,« in *Poststrukturalistische Sozialwissenschaften*, ed. STEPHAN MOERBIUS and, ANDREAS RECKWITZ, Frankfurt am Main 2008, 75–92; INGRID JUNGWIRTH, *Zum Identitätsdiskurs in den Sozialwissenschaften. Eine postkolonial und queer informierte Kritik an George H. Mead, Erik H. Erikson und Erving Goffman*, Bielefeld 2007. For discourse in ecumenics cf. e.g.: Kirchenamt der Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), ed., *Ökumene im 21. Jahrhundert. Bedingungen – theologische Grundlegungen – Perspektiven*, EKD Texte 124, Hannover 2015, 57–59. For german version see [https://www.ekd.de/ekd\\_de/ds\\_doc/ekdtext\\_124\\_oekumene.pdf](https://www.ekd.de/ekd_de/ds_doc/ekdtext_124_oekumene.pdf) and for english version see [https://archiv.ekd.de/english/download/ekdtext\\_124\\_ecumenism.pdf](https://archiv.ekd.de/english/download/ekdtext_124_ecumenism.pdf) [accessed February 14, 2020]. Gruppe von Dombes, *Für eine Umkehr der Kirchen. Identität und Wandel im Vollzug der Kirchengemeinschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 1994 (1991); DAGMAR HELLER, ed., *Bekehrung und Identität. Ökumene als Spannung zwischen Fremdem und Vertrautem*. Conference of Societas Oecumenica 2002, BÖR 73, Frankfurt am Main 2003; CHRISTOPHER ZARNOW, *Identität und Religion. Philosophische, soziologische, religionsphilosophische und theologische Dimensionen des Identitätsbegriffs*, Tübingen 2010; REINHOLD BERNHARDT, »Synkretismus als Deutungskategorie für multireligiöse Identität,« in *Multipel religiöse Identität: aus verschiedenen religiösen Traditionen schöpfen*, ed. Reinhold Bernhardt and, Perry Schmidt-Leukel, Beiträge zu einer Theologie der Religionen 5, Zürich 2008, 267–290 as well as the pertinent chapter by DOMINIK GAUTIER, *Die Ambivalenz des Realismus. Reinhold Niebuhrs theologische Ethik in rassismuskritischer Perspektive*, dissertation, Universität Oldenburg 2020, Part II, Chapt. 2 (in preparation for print).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. e.g. HARDING MEYER, *Ökumenische Zielvorstellungen*. Bensheimer Hefte 78, Ökumenische Studenhefte, Göttingen 1996; idem., »Unity in Diversity, a Concept in Crisis: Lutheran Reflections,« in *One in Christ 24* (1988), 128–141; JUTTA KOSLOWSKI, *Die Einheit der Kirche in der ökumenischen Diskussion. Zielvorstellungen kirchlicher Einheit im katholisch-evangelischen Dialog*, Münster 2008; FERNANDO ENNS, *Ökumene und Frieden. Bewährungsfelder ökumenischer Theologie*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2012, 31–39.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e.g. FRIEDRICH WILHELM GRAF and, DIETRICH KORSCH, eds., *Jenseits der Einheit. Protestantische Ansichten der Ökumene*, Hannover 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. also ASSAAD ELIAS KATTAN, »Einheit statt Vielfalt? Überlegungen eines orthodoxen Theologen,« in *Blick zurück nach vorn. Das Zweite Vatikanum aus der Perspektive*

cussion, also play a role here. Perhaps we are quite simply dealing with a problem that is inherent in the ecumenical movement.

Thus, it is a matter of a complex dialectic of self-determination and a form of »permeable« differentiation. It is precisely this permeable differentiation that plays a major role with regard to the phenomena of nation and people being examined here. And it is also clear that the possibility of combining nation and migration correlates with this. To put this in general terms: The stronger the two poles drift apart and self-determination arises from a *closed* differentiation, then the more detrimental to life will be the structure of the »nation«. In our speeches, we mostly differentiate between *nationalism* as a form of religious or ideological superelevation of belonging to a people, and a nation of »*understandable national sentiment*« or, alternately, a »*healthy national awareness*.«<sup>12</sup>

Nationalism can be an entrenched national sentiment that ultimately settles over time and under specific political conditions. However, this can also lead to oppression and tyranny.<sup>13</sup> Typically, churches do not simply fall from the sky – despite the best hopes of some – instead, they are intertwined in the natural living conditions of people. In this book the churches' role in this interaction and ideas about how we can determine their ecumenical role in this day and age will be considered.

## 2 Theological Interpretations of »Nation«

Within the Lutheran tradition, it is generally preferred to see the concept of nation according to 20<sup>th</sup> century notions of an »order of creation«. This alludes to the life-enabling function of the nation and the state system. The order of creation helps to protect the world against chaos and to create a living space. As early as the Middle Ages, the theologian Anselm of Canterbury deemed human sin to be absolutely destructive as it harmed God's order, and thereby made the coexistence of people impossible. But what exactly is this »ordo«? For Anselm, who was in the middle of an investiture dispute while also fighting with the King over the independence of the Church, neither the people, the nation nor the state were included in his

*der multilateralen Ökumene*, ed. ELISABETH DIECKMANN and, KARL KARDINAL LEHMANN, Würzburg 2016, 155–159.

<sup>12</sup> HÜFFMEIER, *Church – People – State – Nation*, 147, 6.1.1. (»verständliche(s) Nationalgefühl«, »gesunde(s) Nationalbewusstsein«, 61).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 148 (61).

reckonings. Later in Lutheran history this did, in fact, become the case: Even though Luther himself most likely pursued a more pragmatic and functionalist train of thought, people were now developing an ontological understanding of the order of creation. God apparently created ethnically-defined peoples in order to form a nation and, with this nation, to mould a specific, organised realm of creation in which people could live. It is generally well known that the Reformed Boers in South Africa also invoked similar concepts. And there can be no doubting the fact that the German Christians, in their absolute loyalty to Hitler, took advantage of his theological theory to effect a National Socialist interpretation of Christianity. The concept of nation became a dubious religious value. Dubious because it reinforced the rise of Nationalism »with all its dire consequences«, as the 1999 self-critical study by the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany »Nation im Widerspruch« [Nation in Contradiction] lays out.<sup>14</sup> It names the »dire consequences« of nationalism as:

»Ethnic discrimination and exclusion, the development of the concept of the enemy, the oppression and brutal persecution of minorities and destruction of their cultures.«<sup>15</sup>

Accordingly, the theological question is whether the nation, or also the state, are identifiable with an order created by God. Alternately, might they belong, at the very least, to a worldly order – according to present day Lutherans in the text mentioned above – or perhaps belong to the *penultimate* things (Bonhoeffer) and are therefore able to be changed. Philosophically and sociologically, it is probably logical to differentiate between an understanding of the essence and a constructivist understanding of the nation, or perhaps, taking a philosophical-historical perspective, to distinguish between a realistic and a nominalistic understanding.

And classical fields of theology have to be moved through too: What do we actually understand by »God's creation«? How would we determine the relationship between Church and Nation? And there is the question of whether God can be considered as being effective, be that directly in history, or even in the history of a people. The articles of this book very of-

<sup>14</sup> EDELMANN and, HASSELMANN, *Nation im Widerspruch*, 20: »mit all seinen schlimmen Folgen«.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*: »Ethnische Ab- und Ausgrenzungen, der Aufbau von Feindbildern, die Unterdrückung und grausame Verfolgung von Minderheiten und die Zerstörung ihrer Kulturen ...«

ten reflect on whether the ›people‹ and ›God's people‹ are actually inter-linked, and whether the concepts of nation and migration are, in fact, contradictions.

Current events that continue to have an impact on us lead to these theological considerations.

### *3 Current Events*

It will not be possible to explore these questions without reference to current events, as it is well known, and as I would just briefly like to indicate here: Since the political turnaround in 1989, we now live in a Europe where the concept of nation is once again being used wholeheartedly, and where the boundaries to nationalism are frequently being crossed – yes, across the world we live in fear once again of the »dire consequences« of nationalism. At the same time, we are seeing people from non-European ethnic backgrounds and cultures wanting to leave their homelands and to live in Europe. When I was a child, still in primary school, I would often think to myself as I dozed off to sleep in the night how lucky I was to have been born into what was now a safe and secure Germany, and Europe. Today, people no longer feel they are forced simply to accept the random lottery of birth. Do we actually need to fear a »*Clash of Civilizations*«, as Samuel Huntington believes?<sup>16</sup> What concept will we adopt to counteract the pseudo-religious superelevation of nation, from the Christian occident through to the Hindu Hindutwa? And above all: What role can the ecumenical movement play in this debate?

This should be worked out in this book. And so let us first examine the specific relationship between churches and nations!

### *4 Churches and Nations*

There can be no doubt that the churches have a special relationship to this issue.

Frequently, in specific historical contexts, they have established a very close connection between Church and Nation, even though they have no

<sup>16</sup> SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York 1996.

less critical, prophetic material in their guiding principles and their self-conception to avoid an identification of church, nation and religion. (I will come back to this in greater detail later.) The Lutheran study referred to previously draws attention to the understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ, and to the Biblical motif of the universal people of God. The study advocates for

»fundamental ecclesiological reconsideration with respect to the one people of God and the one Body of Christ, as well as the ecumenical scope of these two themes«<sup>17</sup>.

It could be said that we already have been on this path by holding the conference on »Nation and Migration« where the articles of this book are from.

In fact, the main argument within the 1999 German Lutheran study states:

»The talk of peoples and nations as creation orders has no foundation in the Bible«. <sup>18</sup>

The publication *Church – People – State – Nation* echoes these ideas.<sup>19</sup> The focus in this text is specifically located in the Churches' perspectives in Southern and South-Eastern Europe, and the »dire consequences« of nationalism<sup>20</sup> are illustrated, among other things, with reference to »*the events in former Yugoslavia*«. <sup>21</sup> This document also contains a particularly relevant critical retrospective on the Protestant past and its specific combination of church, people and nation. »*Peoples and nations are historical entities*« <sup>22</sup>. The rejection of a – shall we say – essentialist theology of the state, or nation, as an order of creation is also tangible here. Above all, the »*worldwide responsibility*«<sup>23</sup> is particularly borne in mind, and it is critically ascertained that, in the past, and also from a Protestant point of view,

<sup>17</sup> EDELMANN and, HASSELMANN, *Nation im Widerspruch*, 81 (»grundlegende ecclesiologische Neubesinnung hinsichtlich des einen Gottesvolkes und des einen Christusleibes sowie der ökumenischen Tragweite dieser beiden Motive«).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>19</sup> HÜFFMEIER, *Church – People – State – Nation*.

<sup>20</sup> EDELMANN and, HASSELMANN, *Nation im Widerspruch*, 20.

<sup>21</sup> HÜFFMEIER, *Church – People – State – Nation*, 148, 6.1.2 (62).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 106, 1.3 (16).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 106, 1.3 (16).

this has been overshadowed by an explicit »proximity to the state«. <sup>24</sup> The concept of nation and the world must not be allowed to be played off against each other; this is the central theme of the study prepared by the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, a group which is now called the »Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)«. <sup>25</sup>

The study, »Church – People – State – Nation« can be seen as the outcome of a theological dialogue between a number of European Protestant churches. It is also an example of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship's notion of wanting to clarify their mutual recognition and acceptance as churches, and then to think through theological questions together – primarily contextually topical questions – so that they can achieve a mutually agreed position that can be presented to the wider public.

It would be so good if our conference, which can be received by this book, can, at the very least, be recognised as being the preparatory academic work towards a similar process of concept formation on a broader ecumenical level. Because it is, in fact, doubtful whether the churches can achieve a joint commitment in the world if they remain divided over the core provisions of such a pledge. That this simply cannot be done can already be seen in modern politics. The churches have to consider how their guiding Christian principles can face up to the challenges of our time. In order to do this, they need to rework their previous theological concepts here and there, but they need to cope with the fact that the Christian creed doesn't offer opportunities for direct ethical or political derivatives or deviations. This is presented very clearly in each of the above-mentioned studies. First and foremost, the Leuenberg Church Fellowship study developed its concrete theological questions from an analysis of the contextual circumstances of the churches. In spite of this, both studies consider whether it wouldn't be appropriate to ascertain theological guidelines that would enable the respective concrete situations to be analysed. It is interesting that they do not find these in any specific doctrines. Instead, the theological guidelines are to be found when these same doctrines are viewed anew through the lens of Biblical texts, bearing in mind their effect in history. I will look more closely into this aspect shortly.

It should be pointed out here that traditional teaching on the topic of the relationship between Church and Nation, or alternately between Church and State, varies widely within the Protestant Churches in the

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 106, 1.2 (16).

<sup>25</sup> In German: Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa (GEKE).

GEKE/CPCE Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. At various points and situations in history, all of these churches have had to grapple with the tensions involved in the relationship between Church and State. The relevant section dealing with the Methodist Church in *Church – People – State – Nation* highlights this aspect particularly clearly, given that the Methodists are well known for becoming a member of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship in 1997.<sup>26</sup> In their development of faith and creed, this Free Church tradition is wholly based on a (Free Church) concept of the separation of Church and State. And yet, in spite of the best intentions, this concept has not always prevailed in an unambiguous manner through the reality of the Church's history. I would like to present this quote from the text:

»In the British Isles Methodists have adopted various attitudes towards the state from firm loyalty to vigorous dissent. In some countries the Methodism of the British tradition has effectively become an established Church (e.g. in Tonga) while in others (e.g. Italy) the free church tradition is characteristic.«<sup>27</sup>

During our conference, we have focussed our attention sharply on this issue, when Andrea Strübind reflected on the experiences of the Free Church tradition. She speaks about an »ambivalence« of perspectives on Church and State relationship.<sup>28</sup>

The Lutheran study, *Nation im Widerspruch [Nation in Contradiction]* describes this issue as a »rational-irrational duality« that lurks within the concept of the nation. Both a sense of enthusiasm for the concept of »nationhood«, as well as a rejection of this self-same concept are each, for the most part, emotionally highly charged.<sup>29</sup> By presenting my biographical associations with this concept at the beginning of this article, I wanted to shine a light on this issue from a personal perspective. That said, it really is important that theologically we are able to keep a clear head on this topic and on its history.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 136–137 (49).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 136 (49).

<sup>28</sup> See the contribution of ANDREA STRÜBIND in this book.

<sup>29</sup> EDELMANN and, HASSELMANN, *Nation im Widerspruch*, 25.

## 5 Different Contexts of Nation and Nationalism

It was already written in the conference abstract: The notion and the realisation of the concept of the nation are tremendously diverse.

Most of the texts that I read in the course of preparing for this article clearly differentiate between a legitimate love of a nation, which can also be described as patriotism, and the illegitimate notion that can so easily lead to the »dire consequences of nationalism«. <sup>30</sup> The positive functions of national consciousness and national values lie mainly in the fact that they provide people with a sense of orientation and a concept of identity to support and promote life in a community. According to *Church – People – State – Nation*: »They provide a manageable realm of common life and experience and for cultural, social and political activities. This is where people feel at home and find guidelines and means of identification.« <sup>31</sup> However, the following sentence sounds the warning: »But people and nation must not constitute a context where others are excluded or marginalised.« <sup>32</sup>

It is precisely the Christian Creed, which sees all people as God's creatures and knows that Christ was sent to Earth for all people, that needs to represent a critical corrective measure here. But that is easier said than done: According to the individual political situation, a strong national sentiment can have different faces: It can be coupled with exclusivism, chauvinism and imperialistic ends. However, as was demonstrated through the example of the Hambach Festival, it can also lead to a realisation of freedom and resistance against foreign domination. Above all, as occurs in the situation of social groups with minority status among the diaspora, it can serve the purpose of claiming the rights of equality, and exercising these rights, especially in the form of the right of groups to nurture their own collective memory and to maintain one's mother tongue. In particular, in terms of diaspora groups in Europe, to which almost all Protestant groups outside of Germany and the Scandinavian countries belong, a contemporary model of an ethnically defined »people's church« also needs to be considered at this present time. <sup>33</sup> The concept of diaspora should be able to be

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>31</sup> HÜFFMEIER, *Church – People – State – Nation*, 106, 1.3 (16).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 105–107 (16/17).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. for the following STEFAN TOBLER, »Nationale Kirche, Volkskirche oder Öffentlichkeitskirche? Gedanken zur Zusammengehörigkeit von Kirche und sprachlich-kultureller Identität am Beispiel Siebenbürgens,« in *ÖR 2* (2017): 169–187 as

formed as a creative space of representation for ethnic and religious minorities – but, even here, this is dependent on the particular peoples' self-identification not leading to the exclusion of remaining groups living in that country. This has to be managed together. This problem does not just exist in Protestant minority churches with ethnic roots located in Hungary or Romania. The problem also has a new face confronting us through the churches of migrant African or Syrian believers in Europe and, thus, also in Germany.

The concept of nation in this form of collected diversity would then be a social construct, in which a number of ethnic and linguistic groups would *want* to live together. The United States of America is a classic example of this notion; it has been mentioned time and again in this respect, as is also Switzerland, here in Europe. Germany, however, is counted among those nations that freely invoke the »myth« of common ancestry – and this is a myth, for the simple reason that you only need to take a slightly closer look at this model across many countries, not just in Germany, to discover very quickly that migration and a plurality of peoples have always played a key role dating back to the country's very early history.<sup>34</sup> As Germany travels the path to becoming an immigration society, this image of nation will need to change. In this respect, Peter Phan's contribution is very interesting because he explores and highlights the inaccurate, ideologized notions of migration. He has stated that all our nations are actually based on a past that is shaped by migration. No matter what a national concept of self might be – and, to avoid the »dire consequences of nationalism«, it is clearly necessary to cast at least a glance outside the box – nation and world responsibility do belong together.

In this regard, it would now seem to be an appropriate point to speak of the potential of Christianity and the ecumenical movement to take the lead. For this, I will follow the above-mentioned Protestant studies with a look at Biblical texts.

well as MARIO FISCHER and MIRIAM ROSE, eds., *Theologie der Diaspora. Studien-dokument der GEKE zur Standortbestimmung der evangelischen Kirchen im pluralen Europa / Theology of Diaspora. CPCE study document to define the situation of Protestant churches in a pluralist Europe*, Wien 2019.

<sup>34</sup> See the contribution of PETER PHAN in this book.

## 6 The Bible and the Problem of Nationalism and Migration

In both the Protestant studies referred to previously, the theological reflections about the concepts of »people« and »nation« from around 20 years ago lead into the question of migration.<sup>35</sup> This occurs especially in the theological criterion regarding the examination of Biblical texts: Both studies unfold their (self)critical arguments against a precarious relationship of church and nation from a chapter about people and nation in the Bible. In this way, both establish the justification for the correction of the traditional Lutheran development of a theology of creation orders. Ultimately, both plead for a functionalist understanding of nation as a created, allotted living space, which it is valid to shape, and for which responsibility is to be carried.<sup>36</sup> The Polish Roman Catholic article from Elżbieta Adamiak shows thoughts in this direction.<sup>37</sup>

In any case, the Protestant studies each state, »It is clear that the Biblical word for nation(s) cannot be compared with that which we have understood since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the creation of the national states.« However, a significant point can be learned here if one looks more closely at how the category »people« is used in the Bible. Critically, in the Old Testament, »people« is not used in the sense of an exclusive religious elevation, where it initially speaks of a historically identifiable »people of Israel«. Historically, Israel is included in the plurality of peoples or tribes. Through God's free election, and without any sense of Israel's merit, Israel becomes God's people within the covenant and, thus, become the beginning of the people's pilgrimage to Zion. In this way, the election is meant to be inclusive, to the benefit of all mankind, and certainly not exclusive. In particular, it is crucial that the God of this covenant in the Old and in the New Testaments is, in fact, the God of all peoples. Jesus' sermon on the Kingdom of God makes it clear that He does not see this Kingdom as being limited to the borders of Israel. Furthermore, in the early Christians' missionary work, the integration of so-called heathens into God's covenant became an identifying Christian characteristic. When the talk here is of the Christians as »God's people«, that does not give anyone the right to

<sup>35</sup> Cf. for the following, EDELMANN and, HASSELMANN, *Nation im Widerspruch*, 67–81; HÜFFMEIER, *Church – People – State – Nation*, 137–147 (50–61).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. EDELMANN and, HASSELMANN, *Nation im Widerspruch*, 80–81; HÜFFMEIER, *Church – People – State – Nation*, 141, 5.3.2 (54) und 142–143, 5.3.7 (56).

<sup>37</sup> See the contribution of ELŻBIETA ADAMIAK in this book.

claim a theological basis for invoking creative exclusivity for the nation into which they were born.<sup>38</sup>

Quite the opposite, it needs to be said. In the Bible, the historical category of the people is raised into the eschatological vision of the congregating people of God who are on the journey to God's Kingdom. Through this, a prophetic-critical perspective, relativising the existing perspective, arises from this point specifically on the historical formations of people, nation and state. It is dealing with the entire picture here: with everything that unites Christians with the promises of Jesus Christ. A life in peace and righteousness, enabled by God's love through Jesus Christ, which is valid not only for all branches of the Church, but for all of humankind. Both studies refer to the Biblical option for the weak.<sup>39</sup> And so, it is only natural to refer here to the special protection of refugees and of strangers that we know so well from the Old Testament.<sup>40</sup>

Likewise, this plays an important role in the New Testament – I am reminded of the Last Judgement of the world, Matthew 25:31–36. With these examples, the New Testament reinforces the need for commitment on behalf of the weak in the steps of Christ. And finally, there is also the great challenge of Paul's vision from Galatians 3:28, in which the fixed cultural and ethnic identities are monumentally put into perspective.<sup>41</sup>

From this pool, the prophetic-critical vision of Christians lives in historical social entities such as the nation. The church intrinsically has to live this prophetic-critical perspective – in whatever concrete, structural Church-State relationship that might be. I look forward to discover whether we mightn't be able to confirm this view as an ecumenically supporting perspective.

So what exactly is »nation« in this Biblical illumination?

<sup>38</sup> Cf. for this HÜFFMEIER, *Church – People – State – Nation*, 142 (55): »To apply the biblical conception of the people of God to individual peoples is to fail to understand the people of God in an appropriate way, based on how Christians understand themselves in their living experience of faith as the one, worldwide, eschatologically gathered people of the one God.« also *ibid.*, 143, 5.3.8 (56). The Lutheran document expresses itself decidedly self-critical: Lutheran tradition has for a long time substantiated its theses by consulting isolated and single passages from scripture as *dicta probantia*. »Therefore, it could give the impression that its statements about *Volk* and *Nation* were actually in line with biblical tradition to prolong these into the respective present time.« EDELMANN and, HASSELMANN, *Nation im Widerspruch*, 67.

<sup>39</sup> HÜFFMEIER, *Church – People – State – Nation*, 146 (60) und 151 (65); EDELMANN and, HASSELMANN, *Nation im Widerspruch*, 73.

<sup>40</sup> See the contributions of HECTOR SCERRI and PETER-BEN SMIT in this book.

<sup>41</sup> See the contribution of NICO HUTTUNEN in this book.

## 7 Nation in a Biblical-oriented perspective

It follows that there is a view of ›nation‹, in which the nation has to fulfil the following functions:<sup>42</sup>

Nation is a

- *Community of remembrance*, in which reconciliation work is undertaken, and there is an attempt to process experienced stories of guilt.
- *Community of socialisation*, in which people, under provision of freedom, are socialised into individual forms of a community culture, which can also be multicultural. The Leuenberg Church Fellowship study does not explore this possibility of a community supported by a plurality of cultures in any great detail. This can most likely be traced back to the abundance of Protestant minority churches in Europe, especially given that they were responsible for this text.<sup>43</sup>
- *Lawful freedom structured community*. The Lutheran document is particularly clear in this respect. »The liberal-emancipative approach of the national state (U.L.-W.: see Hambach Festival!) is essential. It is clearly not to be understood exclusively. Its aim should not be to close itself off from other nations, but to open itself to others. Citizens of a nation should no longer simply be equated with or classified as a particular ethnic group, a ›tribe‹ or a ›people‹.<sup>44</sup>
- *Community of shared responsibility* for the shaping of the national state (from within), but certainly also looking towards the outside on a mission to achieve worldwide justice and freedom. The churches are particularly encouraged to keep an eye on this area of conflict and to participate in activities of public commitment.
- A nation is, however, *not a church community or a religious community*. In specific circumstances, historical circumstances have certainly led to an identification with a nation, language and of a particular Christian religion. The Catholic Church in Poland, the Protestant Church in Transylvania, and even the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia or the Anglican Church of England. What is relevant for the nation in the manner outlined above – the balancing act of communality and openness – that

<sup>42</sup> Cf. for the following EDELMANN and, HASSELMANN, *Nation im Widerspruch*, 99–106; HÜSSMEIER, *Church – People – State – Nation*, 145–146, 5.4.5–5.4.7 (58–60).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. HÜFFMEIER, *Church – People – State – Nation*, 145–146, 5.4.6 (59).

<sup>44</sup> EDELMANN and, HASSELMANN, *Nation im Widerspruch*, 102, 6.2.2.

is especially relevant for such denominational churches. In this regard, the ecumenical movement should also be useful and able to help.

As we draw towards the conclusion, we still need to ask:

### *8 What about Migration?*

When the concept of nation is understood in this way, as an entity that is open to the outside for the shaping of life in freedom and responsibility for themselves and for others, then the question about the role of migration for the understanding of nation becomes less complex or challenging. This is because, logically following the definition described above, uniformity of language and story of heritage are not mandatory components of this concept. The Lutheran study, in particular, advocates for the concept of nation being kept clearly separate from the idea of ethnic homogeneity.<sup>45</sup> It points to the findings of modern ethnology, »that the integration of heterogeneous elements is an essential feature of all peoples.«<sup>46</sup>

This is the topic of Peter Phan<sup>47</sup>. I will therefore here restrict my comments simply to clarifying how upcoming and future migration movements can also be conceived as being integrated in a contemporary and a theologically-reflected concept of nation, without having to abandon a sense of national sentiment. Nevertheless, the responsibilities of the future – no, of the present – lie in the challenge of forming nations in which there is no pressure to conform or adjust, in which minorities are not disadvantaged, and in which everyone is prepared to do as much as possible to enable equal opportunities for all. This is where the Churches have a lot to contribute, knowing that they are strongly encouraged by the Gospel to make a genuine commitment to support the weak. In this respect, the Lutheran study advocates for relative homogeneity,<sup>48</sup> while the Leuenberg study points to the development of meta-cultural mutual criteria of commitment and bonds, such as recognition of the constitution. Most likely, however, we will need to anticipate and count on a Europe of different histories, with varying speeds in any development of relative homogeneity.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. PETER PHAN'S contribution in this book.

<sup>48</sup> EDELMANN and, HASSELMANN, *Nation im Widerspruch*, 108.

And what would the role of the Churches and ecumenical movement be in this process? In conclusion now, I will simply present a couple of key terms:

### *9 On the Role of the Churches Today*

»In so far as nationalism grows out of a desire for self-realisation, Christians should understand and respect it. The danger of nationalism is, however, that it may seek to fulfil its aim at the expense of the interests of others and that it can make the nation an absolute value which takes the place of God. The role of the Church must therefore be to help to direct national movements towards just and worthy ends.«<sup>49</sup>

This was a statement from the Cottesloe-Declaration of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1960, as it dealt with the »dire consequences of nationalism« in South Africa. In detail, this means that,

Churches must:

- be a prophetic and creation-preserving force.
- serve in their own shape or form as an orienting testimony for society. Ecumenical collaboration is essential for this.
- carry out public relations work.
- represent humane globalism and, in this way, assist the appreciation and perception of the concept of nation in a global context.
- be ecumenical for these tasks, mutually strengthen one another in their prophetic function as well as in mutual criticism.

Churches are called to the ecumenical movement, to meta-national unity, which takes place through the shared reference to Jesus Christ and the knowledge of the presence of God.

*Translation: Heather Rae*

<sup>49</sup> *Cottesloe Declaration*, South Africa (1960), Part II,17, see [https://kerkargief.co.za/doks/bely/DF\\_Cottesloe.pdf](https://kerkargief.co.za/doks/bely/DF_Cottesloe.pdf) [accessed April 11, 2020].