



# Forum Young Theology

Protestantism  
**BETWEEN** Nationalism  
and Cosmopolitanism





# About

Public discourses in Europe are shaped more and more by nationalist positions. This has an impact not only on political debates of the respective societies; it also challenges the Protestant churches in Europe.

In the framework of a digital academy and a conference in Vienna in 2021/22, more than 55 young theologians discussed in the Forum Young Theology in Europe how the different European churches, despite their different national traditions, can shape a common Protestantism united in their confession of Jesus Christ.

**In this Journal you will find the results of their work.**

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# Digital academy



## Conference Vienna

11-14 May 2022

### Protestantism BETWEEN Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism

#### 48 young theologians from nine European countries met to dis- cuss perspectives for a future Protestantism.

In seven digital lectures, they ask how Protestant churches can respond to rising nationalism. And they consider how important their own national roots are for their Protestant identity. Ever since the early days of the Reformation, the churches in Europe have been firmly rooted in nationalism, as General Secretary Mario Fischer noted in the first digital presentation. But the models of society are diverse and complex, he said, and that applies to the churches as well. Beyond all the different traditions, language forms and identities, they are united by a common evangelical faith.

How the old traditions in the existing church congregations have been loosened and reshaped by migration in the 21st century was summed up by Thorsten Moritz of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) during the fifth digital lecture: "Today's migration is tomorrow's multiculturalism."



**With much praise and fresh impetus, 22 young theologians from 12 countries look back on an eventful Conference.**

The four days were all about getting to know each other. Already in the opening lecture by Peter Morée from the University of Prague it was said: "We need to work together with other Protestant churches, especially in the forthcoming time." Afterwards, the participants presented their home churches to each other to show the diversity of Protestant churches in Europe and to make clear what they have in common and what they do not.

#### Toxic Nationalism

"The Protestants are not everywhere as cosmopolitan as they like to claim." That has a lot to do with the local historical developments, says Volkmar Ortmann, University of Gießen, Germany. "But," adds his colleague Mirjam Sauer, "language, nationality and identity naturally belong closely together." Thus, Protestant minorities, as in Transylvania, find strength through their cultural imprint with their own identity.

And because identity is far from nationalism, the conference team developed the term "toxic nationalism" and distinguished it from "national identity": "We cannot help where we are born, what language we learned first, and what costumes we wear at festivals," says Anna Lerch from Switzerland. "But we are responsible for making sure that this healthy national identity does not become toxic."

This getting to know each other could be continued during the city tour through Vienna led by Michael Bünker, former bishop of the Protestant Church A. B. in Austria. In addition, there was time for conversation, laughter and even singing together during the shared meals and evening program.

On the third day of the conference, various workshops were held to work on outputs that would translate the theoretical reflections into practical applications.

On the following pages you can see the results of the workshops.





Be inspired by  
our thoughts  
and bring it  
back to your  
home.

# 7 Bible Texts

## Passages about Integration

### New Testament

1. JOHN 4: Jesus and the Samaritan woman - An encounter with a person from another culture.

The Discussion ends with a focus on worship. God's Spirit unites all people in one worship, truth and love. This is true already now, but also in eternity.

2. ACT 2: The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost and brings many languages:

- The event of tongues focuses on different people gathering around one gospel
- Holy Spirit didn't teach everyone to speak the same language, but gave one joyous message in different languages

3. GAL 2:17; ROM 3:9-20 Justification by Grace: The whole humanity is affected by sin and we are all equally justified through God's grace in Jesus Christ

4. ACT 10:1-8: Encounters between Peter and Cornelius: God helps Peter overcome his cultural prejudice and

shows him how the gospel includes all people in the new covenant and new creation.

### Old Testament

5. Ex 18: The encounter between Jethro and Moses: Moses' Midianite father-in-law Jethro gave him advice on how to guide the people of Israel and this intercultural encounter helped the people of Israel. We can and should learn from other cultures.

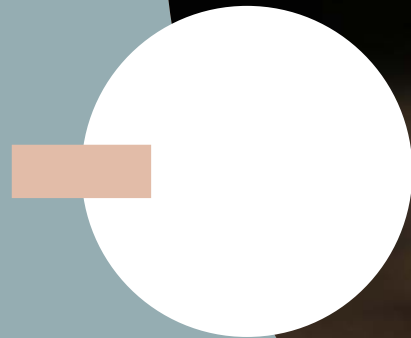
6. Ru 1:16 Ruth and Naomi: Ruth makes a choice of love and leaves her old culture to become someone else  
- Our cultural identity is not stable and it changes throughout our life. This change can never be forced but can only be made out of love.

7. 1. KING 17:8-16: Elijah and the widow in Zarephath: God knew that there was a famine in Israel, but he sent his prophet to help one foreigner.



# Practical

Three Examples  
for Meditations



Philippians 3:20

# The citizen ship in heaven

“For our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a savior The lord Jesus Christ.”

# Ideas for meditation

Because of our common faith in Jesus Christ, we don't just have one citizenship, but also another citizenship in heaven. Our culture, history and ethnicity are not the only factors which shape our identity, but we are also shaped by the love of God in Christ. We are called to embrace our new identity in Christ, which is all at once already a reality here on earth and in heaven but also still in the process of being revealed. We find our courage and hope in the promise of our full citizenship in heaven while today we to continue in our way in Ecumenism.

## Prayer

Let us pray to God, Father and Mother.

Thank you for having brought us together from different nations and confessions. Thank you for calling us to understand each other with good intention, even though we don't speak the same language.

Thank you for the wealth of tradition we have in our confessions. Let us pray to our saviour Jesus Christ. He in whom we find an identity, which surpasses all distinctions here on earth.

Thank you for our local culture and history that shapes our identity. Thank you for letting us embrace our diversity in your heavenly city, where we are all citizens.

In your name we thank you for removing our prejudice regarding earthly distinctions.

Thank you for making us belong together.

Let us pray to the holy spirit

Thank you for making us a community through music. Like different "Colours of Grace", our citizenship in heaven has one melody, but different instruments to express it. Your heavenly music can already be heard in different tongues on earth.

Thank you for letting us see a vision of your heavenly city even though we are not there yet.

Give us your blessing and courage to continue this walk in ecumenism.

Unite us under the roof of Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe.

Amen.

# The Great Multitude ● in White Robes



Revelation paints us a eschatological picture of a inclusive community of worship. The emphasis in this reading is on the small word “every”: every nation, every tribe, every people and every language are standing before the throne and before the Lamb. This invites us to celebrate our language, tribe and ethnic differences in church and worship as well as in everyday life. Yet we are encouraged to see the whole creation united in one love and one worship. There is one message (vers 10;12) and one common love which is expressed in different ways trough every nation, tribe, people and language. We use different language in our liturgies, but our common love is God.

Related Readings  
Jes 54:1ff  
Ps 104  
Ps 19  
Ps 33:1-15

## In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

**Opening prayer**  
In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.  
In the name of the God who calls with boundless love every race, every tribe and every nation. Praise, glory, wisdom, honor, power and strength belong to you forever.  
Amen.

**Thematic prayer**  
O God.  
You have created us differently: We look different, we speak different language, and we all have an unique way of expressing who we are.  
Yet your love and grace for us has no limits.  
You call us through your grace

and join us in love.  
Remind us each day that we can love, because you have loved us first.  
Help us see that we are all belong to you despite our differences and are called to love one another with your love.  
Amen

**Thematic prayer as confession**  
O God.  
We have hungered for love and acceptance and at times we have not loved enough nor have accepted others, friends and enemies.  
Yet you forgive us and satisfy our hunger and thirst for love. We have cried and shed tears because we were rejected by others and at times we have also rejected others, the ones we love most and ones we don't care about.  
Yet you wipe our tears and bring us together.  
Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet your unfailing love for us will not be shaken nor your covenant of peace be removed.      ISAIAH 54,10

# Ideas for meditation

In the story of Moses and Jethro we see an example of an encounter of two people, who for are not part of each others tribes. In the first part of the story we read about the initial meeting and the creation of this relationship. In the second part we read about the development of this relationship, which creates a new communion for Moses and the people of Israel.

## First part (or first day):

- Meeting: Decide to visit. Doing a journey.
- Greeting
- Wish the peace to each other
- Sharing feelings and what happened
- Welcoming to my house / "my place"
- It's a safe place, without interference
- Listen to each other
- Give information about myself
- Reaction to the story of my partner
- Common prayer and faith confession
- Ceremony: liturgy and sharing of food.

## Second part (or second day):

- Observation: need a long time
- Asking for explanation - we often have false preconceptions and we need to modify these impressions.
- Present a view about the situation, considering the community and the partner.
- Suggestion of a solution for the group
- Let the group do it its way - they know conditions and appropriate persons
- Closing the meeting/event
- Continuing in common lives with new experiences

## Exodus 18

# Jethro & Moses



# Identity from outside and inside



		Content	Methods	Materials
Outer perspective	5' 10'	How would an Alien describe me? - Description - Writing	Creative writing	Pen, paper
Inner perspective	5' 5' 5'	What formed me? What made me who I am? Where do I come from? What are my roots? - Look and select pictures - Talk in pairs - Presentation/class conversation	The pictures are lying on the floor. The students need to look at them, and place a brick on those ones, which they think fits them most (3-5 bricks/student). They find partners and talk about why they have chosen a certain picture. Some students summarize what their partner has told them about their origin.	Pictures (village-city, big family – small family, rich – poor, world map – map of the country, church, abstract pictures etc.) Bricks
Correlation	5' 5'	Letter to the Alien - Individual writing - Reading to each other in pairs	The student should describe him/herself to the alien they have “met” in the creative writing.	Pen, Paper Creative writing result
Conclusion	5'	What has changed?	A class discussion about the difference between the outer perspective and the inner perspective.	

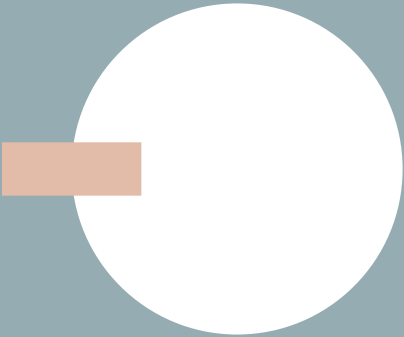
## Lesson Plan

**Goal**  
To make youth sensible for how their identity can be seen from an inner and outer perspective.

**Target Group**  
13 – 15 years, but it can eventually be scaled up and down for younger or older students.



# Canon



1  
Come and see what our life could be, Come!

2  
joint in faith for you and me, Come!

3  
God's new o - por - tu - ni - ty here and now in his - to - ry grow - ing u - ni - ty. Come!

for singing with friends





# Blueprint for a two hour webinar

## How my identity impacts my faith

WELCOME

get to know each other

15'

INPUTS

**Leading Questions:**  
How far has church influenced me? How do I live my faith in my life (including aspects of the daily life, in the society, at work etc.)

**Function:**  
Identification and become aware of the own position/identity.

**Possible lecturers:**  
sociologist  
professor of practical theology  
member of youth church group

**Alternative:** 3 statements of 10 Minutes each with a discussion of the lecturers afterwards.

45'

DECONSTRUCTION

I Think about the story of my life.  
Individual work with a virtual pin-board for personal notes

15'

DISCUSSION

in small groups about the individual notes with common notes/ results (including the lecturers)

20'

PRESENTATION

Presentation of the results of the groups

Afterwards Conclusion and Farewell

25'



Because it is  
not our nation  
that bind us as  
Christians but  
our faith.

# 9

## Theses about Nationalism Identities and Christian Churches

Towards an Inclusive Identity in Christ



# 1

## Everyone has local and/or regional roots

AND IS LIVING IN SUCH A CONTEXT. A COSMOPOLITAN WAY OF LIFE TENDS TO DENY THESE ROOTS AND CONTEXTS. IDENTIFYING WITH A „NATION“ SEEMS TO OVERCOME THIS TENSION.

# 2

## Nationalism can turn toxic

WHEN IT BECOMES EXCLUSIVE (WORKING WITH IN- AND OUT-GROUPS) AND CAN BE USED TO MANIPULATE A PEOPLE. NATIONALISM (INCLUSIVE OR EXCLUSIVE) OFFERS AN IDENTITY, WHICH A FREE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT CAN'T PROVIDE.

# 3

## Bottom-up communitarism

THE POSITIVE ALTERNATIVE - WE CALL IT BOTTOM-UP COMMUNITARISM - TRIES TO BUILD OPEN AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES AND NATIONS.

# 4

## Any identity has two sides

IT IS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT, WHICH CAN BE EXPERIENCED IN CONTEXT, AND IT MAY BE A STRONG FEELING. INSTITUTIONS (CHURCHES, STATES) ALWAYS HIGHLIGHT A CERTAIN IDENTITY. FOR A NON-BELIEFING POLITICIAN, WHO IS USING RELIGION IN POLITICS, RELIGION WILL BE ONLY A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT, WHILE FOR THE BELIEVER RELIGION HAS AN ADDITIONAL TRANSCENDENT ASPECT.

# 5

## The core of churches' identity is Jesus Christ

BELONGING TO CHURCH DOES NOT MEAN TO LEAVE BEHIND NATIONAL, REGIONAL, SEXUAL OR ANY OTHER IDENTITY. (REFER TO GAL 3,28 AND/OR RM 3,29-31).





# 6 As Churches we cannot stay for ourselves

BUT NEED TO BE READY TO SERVE SOCIETY (DIACONIA) AND TO BUILD UP RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS/CHURCHES (MISSION AND ECUMENISM) REFER TO MT. 28, 19-20.

# 7 The encounter has a transformative power

INSPIRED BY MARTIN BUBER AND EMANUEL LEVINAS WE SEE, THAT THE ENCOUNTER WITH CHRISTIANS FROM OTHER TRADITIONS HAS A TRANSFORMATIVE POWER – THIS IS GODS WORK IN PEOPLE.

# 8 Nobody is alone an executor of Gods will

NOBODY AND NO INSTITUTION IS ALONE AN EXECUTOR OF GODS WILL. GOD IS ACTING IN THE WORLD THROUGH THE HANDS, THE VOICES AND THE LIVES OF DIFFERENT PEOPLE.

# 9 The message is higher than the language

NATIONAL LANGUAGES AND CULTURES ARE A VEHICLE FOR THE GOSPEL EXPERIENCING DIFFERENT LANGUAGES AND CULTURES LEADS US TO THE CATHOLICITY (ONE UNDIVIDED CHRISTIAN) OF CHURCH. SPEAKING DIFFERENT LANGUAGES IS OFTEN WEAKENING THE NATIONAL IDENTITY, IN CHRISTIANITY THE OPPOSITE IS HAPPENING.



**This is a manual  
you can work with  
mix and match.**

# Team

**to connect so much in  
such a short time**

The Forum Young Theology in Europe is organized by the Evangelischer Bund Hessen together with the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and the Center for Protestant Theology East (ZETO) and is co-financed by the Erasmus+ program of the European Union.

Dr. Volkmar Ortmann and Dr. Mirjam Sauer from the Evangelischer Bund Hessen, Dr. Oliver Engelhardt, Marcus Hütter and Kathleen Müller from CPCE and Gerhard Servatius-Depner from ZETO are significantly involved in the design and implementation of the project.

Project manager Marcel Kehr takes care of the administrative processes and consults together with Hans Genthe the public relations of the project.



**From left to right:** Gerhard Servatius-Depner, Kathleen Müller, Oliver Engelhardt, Volkmar Ortmann, Mirjam Sauer und Marcus Hütter.





# FORUM YOUNG THEOLOGY

## Current perspectives for a future Protestantism

For more information, visit [young-theology.eu](http://young-theology.eu)