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Theology of Diaspora

CPCE study document to define the situation of Protestant churches in a pluralist Europe

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Content

Summary **1**

Introduction **5**

1. Mandate and assignment **5**

1.1 The aim of the study process and the study document 5

1.2 Mandate and study process 6

1.3 Assignment 8

1.4 Structure and content of the study document 10

Part A: Historical and present usages of the concept of diaspora **12**

2. Historical functions of the concept of diaspora in recent church history **12**

2.1 Observations from the history of the concept and church history 12

2.2 Diagnosis for the present 16

3. The concept of diaspora and current church self-perceptions **17**

3.1 Diaspora as self-designation? 18

3.2 Church in the minority 19

3.3 Key images and phrases of minority churches 20

3.4 The ecumenical perspective - Catholicism and diaspora 21

3.5 Protestant profiling 22

4. 21st century diaspora identities as a research topic for cultural studies and sociology **23**

4.1 Trends in transdisciplinary diaspora research 23

4.2 Diaspora identity and diasporic consciousness 25

4.3 Definitions and types of diaspora 26

4.4 The potential of cultural studies to interpret diaspora 27

4.5 Fresh insights for Protestant churches and theology 29

Part B: Biblical understandings of diaspora and their historical contexts **30**

5. Diaspora – self-interpretation between punishment and promise 31

6. Jewish Diaspora as the context of the early Christian church 32

6.1 How the destruction of the Temple impacted on Diaspora 32

6.2 Solidarity between the Centre and the Diaspora 33

6.3 Diaspora as a bridge between cult and text 34

7. Diaspora as existence of the New Testament church 35

7.1 Diaspora as mission among non-Jews 35

7.2 Diaspora as a time-bound entity 36

7.3 Diaspora as a theological statement about election and distance 37

Part C: Diaspora as a relationally focused concept – 21st century diaspora theology..... 39

8. The relationally focused concept of diaspora... 39

9. Church in a strange land – the strangeness of the church.................................. 40

9.1 Church in a strange land 42

9.2 The strangeness of the church 45

9.3 The concept of strangeness for a theology of diaspora 47

10. Church in relations – Protestant life in diaspora as public witness to the gospel 47

10.1 Worship 50

10.2 An open and hospitable church 52

10.3 Church festivals and public holidays 53

10.4 Church education 54

10.5 Reconciling action 54

10.6 Days of Christian Encounter 55

10.7 Diakonia 56

10.8 Pastoral care 56

10.9 Community work 57

10.10 Church in multilateral relations 58

11. Church in the public and public theology **60**
11.1 Diaspora, church and the public 60
11.2 Diaspora, secularisation and pluralism 62
11.3 Public theology as an open paradigm 66
11.4 Ideas for a public theology of diaspora 67
11.5 Responsibilities of public theology 70
11.6 Forms and formats of public theology 72
11.7 Public theology and ecclesiological consequences 73
11.8 Public theology of diaspora as an ecumenical project 74
Conclusion **75**
12. Consequences for CPCE’s development **75**
Annex: Participants in the “Theology of Diaspora” study **76**

Summary

Many Protestant churches are in the minority - in Europe and all over the world. Some churches have been in this situation for many decades, while for others it is a new challenge. Yet others see themselves moving towards life as a minority. The experience of being a minority comes with limited options and serious concerns about the future. At the same time, churches look with profound gratitude at the courageous, creative and persistent commitment of many Christians to their faith. Individual families, congregations and pastors have preserved and handed on their faith, in particular under Communist governments. Present-day challenges to minority churches lie mainly in the huge catchment areas of the congregations, financial concerns and highly complex social and diaconal problems. That is why the CPCE General Assembly in 2012 initiated a study process on the topic of diaspora as a form of public theology, with the aim of in-depth theological reflection on the church diaspora situation, and of real-life sharing among the churches about their experience of diaspora.

The concept of diaspora developed here understands diaspora as shaping fullness of relations in a spirit of Christian discipleship. A concept of diaspora focused on relations can appeal to the biblical use of the word *diaspora,* which describes a structural relation. While the concept of minority church or minority situation reduces this wealth of relations to a numerical ratio, and tends to imply a deficiency, the strength of a relationally focused concept of diaspora is that it highlights the polyphony of life relations in diaspora congregations and understands this as an essential part of creative organisation.

We can understand the special form of these polyphonic life relations as discipleship in the form of a “Protestant adventure in a non-Protestant environment” (Wilhelm Dantine). And if we experience the environment in which we are placed as strange or different, that may help us to be daring and see it as a challenge.

Christian minority churches have a very rich network of relations; an important one is CPCE itself. This way, churches can mediate in conflicts, to gain understanding for other national perspectives and so contribute to peace, just as they, unfortunately, often contributed to war in earlier times. Minority churches are bridging-places of different kinds, between eastern and western Europe, between conflict parties, between Christians and non-Christians.

Christian minority churches face the challenge of constantly reshaping their own – in this case Protestant - profile in relations with the society in which they live. They are also actors, not just victims of social processes. It is helpful to realise that we can only make our own contribution when and where we live in community and share responsibility for it.

Minority churches are ‘avant-garde’ because they tread new paths in situations that often appear to be difficult. They think up new ways of doing things and rely strongly on their members to take on church responsibilities without payment. In that respect, they are often ahead of churches that are (still) in majority situations.

In addition, such a relationally focused concept of diaspora can help us to reflect on the ambivalent experiences of congregations in minority situations, experiences that are basic to the survival of Christian faith. This ambivalence is evident, for example, in the verses about being the church *in* the world but not *of* the world (Jn 17:16) or being the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5:13f). One way of summing up this ambivalence is in the phrase “church in a strange land – strangeness of the church”.

Seen Christologically, the relation between ‘church’ and ‘in-a-strange-land/strangeness’ takes on a special meaning. The church relates to Christ but is not identical with him; it is fundamentally distinct from the world and Christ intends it to be “one”. Paul makes that clear when he speaks of the body of Christ, with which believers are related individually and thereby collectively (1 Cor 10:16b-17). The characterisation of Jesus Christ as the stranger to be welcomed in Matthew 25:35 (“I was a stranger and you welcomed me”) interprets the concept of stranger in Christological terms. This is an argument not only for churches to be opened to those previously unknown to them, but also for vigorous support for strangers, e.g. in the current debate about refugees.

We may understand the concept of ‘strangeness’ as a dimension of diaspora existence. A church that is not only aware of its dispersion and minority status, but also of its strangeness, makes clear that fulfilling the church’s mandate to publicly proclaim the gospel must also involve finding a *bridge* between our own (church) language and the language of the society around us. The concept of bridge is always ambivalent, meaning both strangeness - in the sense of being separated - and connectedness. Being a bridge means linking separated elements without eliminating their difference.

With a relational understanding of diaspora, the document describes and explores the multifarious relations of congregations in diaspora situations. It brings out the de facto wealth of relations in which diaspora churches live and proclaim the gospel. That enables discoveries and mutual inspiration. A relational diaspora theology aims to reflect the reality of the churches and, at the same time, uncover new perspectives.

The most important bridging event is the Christian service of worship. In addition, there are public holidays to mark church festivals, and outreach through church buildings. Such action in relations involves taking educational action, striving for reconciliation, and providing pastoral and diaconal care. Diaspora churches make important contributions to connecting and bringing people into conversation, e.g. through days of Christian encounter (as in central Europe), ecumenical activities and various forms of community work.

Shaping relations from the spirit of Jesus Christ and by way of witnessing to the gospel always has a social, cultural and political dimension, i.e. a public dimension. ‘Public theology’ means the churches’ mission to speak out in political, societal, cultural and academic contexts. This concept serves as a dynamic paradigm for theological reflection on these different connections and the diverse contexts of church activity - for the benefit of the whole of CPCE.

How the churches operate, using what media and which ‘publics’ they serve, will depend on their respective context and opportunities. Hence, public theology is an open paradigm that every church and congregation will have to define in practice for themselves.

Public theology contains the hope that God works beyond the churches in the world and in society. Moreover, it hopes that the reconciliation event in Jesus Christ also brings transformation going beyond those who explicitly believe, and that churches can work with non-Christians for the sake of human beings and the human community.

Accordingly, public theology (and thus a theology of diaspora conceived as public theology) understands modern pluralism not as fate but as the fruit of Christianity. A public theology of diaspora is actively involved in social discourse, without demanding a privileged status for its own standpoint, imposed on all citizens through state power or legislation. Participating in the thinking process of civil society and influencing political discourse takes very different forms, as the following examples show.

Public statements by churches on proposed legislation or current policies are the classical form of public theology. This also covers demonstrations, vigils, prayers for peace and public banners on church buildings. A second particularly visible form of public theology is symbolic action. The Bible contains rich evidence of publicly visible symbolic action, both in the workings of the prophets in the Old Testament and the deeds of Jesus in the gospels. The cultural activity of churches is a third form of public theology, when it visibly relates to certain ethical and political concerns. A fourth form is church education, in particular when raising ethical, social and welfare issues. The same thing applies to church journalism. It comprises church media and individual articles, in which Christians contribute to public debates from a recognisably Christian perspective or even spark such debates themselves. Through their public involvement, individual figures can also reach cross-border European audiences. When churches organise forums for public debates, e.g. round tables or meetings of concerned citizens, they participate in the shaping of civil society and democratic structures. That reflects the insight that ‘the public’ is not static but needs to be continually reconstituted.

All churches have their own traditions of public theology, even though many CPCE churches do not use the term for this kind of church activity. Some have reservations about ‘public theology’ due to their rejection of ‘political theology’. Political theology either stands for a problematic co-option of the church by the state or, on the contrary, for radical theological criticism of certain political structures. The necessary discussions on how Protestant churches are involved in civil society and contribute to public debates are themselves part of public theology.

Speaking of a “theology of diaspora in the form of public theology” means that minority churches also understand themselves as having a public mission and that they reflect on their specific possibilities of fulfilling such a public mandate.

Public theology as theology of diaspora must not be understood as a project restricted to certain denominations. Instead, we should regard it as an ecumenical project for Europe. Public theology seeks to encourage us to intervene in this world and publicly testify, in word and deed, to the gospel of God’s love, God’s agape or caritas. Yet the basic ecumenical structure of a Protestant diaspora must also become visible in the way in which we do public theology. Hence ecumenical cooperation at all levels – local, regional and European – must be reinforced and deepened. The signing of the Charta Oecumenica in many church settings was an important step in this direction.

Developing a theology of diaspora is a project that still involves various challenges, which the study process has appraised and examined in detail. To start with, the concept of diaspora plays only a marginal role in current documents produced by CPCE churches about their self-understanding. The same applies to historical definitions of Reformation ecclesiology. By contrast, when the concept of diaspora gained prominence, i.e. in 19th century German-speaking Protestantism, it was problematically fraught with German national cultural policy. Nowadays, however, current exegetical research and contemporary cultural studies are providing many new perspectives on diaspora. These research projects share the appreciation that diaspora is primarily a productive, integrative and positive way of life. Ideas from studies of early Judaism, the early Christian texts and the manifold diaspora communities in the modern era have introduced a paradigm shift: oriented less towards deficiencies than towards opportunities, and away from an essentialist, static understanding of diaspora towards a relational, performative approach. The study document presents these ideas in a spirit of constructive criticism - in focusing on the organisation of diaspora relations, it perceives and defines the needs and the opportunities, the suffering and the creativity of life in diaspora.

Having said that, this framing of a theological concept of diaspora always assumes that the quest for a certain meaning or task of diaspora must primarily be left to those – churches or individuals – who live in diaspora themselves, as a “faith decision in view of an actual historical situation”, to quote Austrian theologian Wilhelm Dantine. For that reason, this engagement with diaspora in the effort to find an appropriate understanding is a kind of identity check by CPCE churches (see section 3) and a theological offering.

The study process on the theology of diaspora reaches the conclusion: a renewal of the Protestant term diaspora opens significant opportunities. We can understand our own particular congregation as part of a wider community with common roots. That may strengthen the bonds between CPCE churches. The concept of diaspora will perhaps contribute to renewing denominational identity in ecumenical openness. The concept of diaspora makes churches open to ecumenical commitment, as Christians understand themselves to be witnesses together to the gospel of the human-friendly God.

Introduction

1. Mandate and assignment

1.1 The aim of the study process and the study document

The present study document is a distillation of the results of the study process on the Theology of Diaspora, which was commissioned in 2012 by the General Assembly of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) in Florence.

Protestantism is in the minority in many countries in Europe. At the European level, the number of Protestants is lower than that of Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians taken together. Increasingly, however, Catholicism too is developing into a social minority. The life of faith in diaspora is becoming a common ecumenical experience. Migration, the existence of migrant churches and parishes and their effects on church fellowship are part of this context, along with interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism.

Many CPCE member churches do not use the concept of diaspora to express their self-understanding as minority churches. The study documents “The Church of Jesus Christ” (1994) and “Church – People – State – Nation” (2002) likewise managed without the term, speaking instead of ‘minority churches’ or churches constituting a minority both confessionally and ethnically.

In keeping with the aim of the study process, the study document discusses the relevance of the concept of diaspora as a term for theological interpretation under present conditions and makes proposals for a necessary redefinition. Its intention is to find positive and inviting terms that express the journey character, the participatory structure, the opening to society and the ministry of the church, and are comprehensible in the present day. Examples of such new terms are ‘church of witnesses’ (*église de témoins*) or ‘outreach community’ (*communauté de rapprochement*) used by the United Protestant Church of France.

This search starts from an interpretation of diaspora as ‘church in relation(ship)s’. As diaspora churches consciously live out their various relations they develop their theological self-understanding, gaining valuable inspiration for reflection about church action in the public at large. They develop a theology focusing on the reasons why the church takes public action. If CPCE wants to do justice to its remit of making the voice of Protestantism audible in Europe it will need such public theology.

1.2 Mandate and study process

Even before the study process started, the topic of diaspora featured on the CPCE agenda as a practical matter and topic for theological reflection.

In a decision on its structure and future work, the Leuenberg Church Fellowship in 1994 underlined: “Minorities are especially important as a symbol of witness and service. The majority of churches participating in the LA are minority churches, which often fulfil their mission in difficult situations. In the present re-structuring of the continent and the various individual countries these minorities are often overlooked and their voices are scarcely heard in international activity. In this respect the LCF is called to active solidarity.”[1]

Likewise in 1994, the Southeast Europe Regional Group wrote, under the heading “Diaspora as a Form of Life”:

“The freedom of the Church shows itself in that it can live and serve as a minority in an alien environment. Living in the diaspora is not a new experience for the people of God. God calls to his people in situations of new beginnings, and leads them into the new and unknown. So too the Church today in this new situation, in all its historical ambiguity, can recognise in faith a liberation and the call of God.”[2]

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[1] Results of the 4th General Assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (from original translation of decisions), in: Wachsende Gemeinschaft in Zeugnis und Dienst. Reformatorische Kirchen in Europa. Texte der 4. Vollversammlung der Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft in Wien, 3. bis 10. Mai 1994, edited by Wilhelm Hüffmeier and Christine-Ruth Müller, Frankfurt am Main, 1995, 261 (published only in German).

[2] The Christian Witness on Freedom. Findings of the Southeast Europe Regional Group, in: Leuenberg Documents Vol. 5, ed. Wilhelm Hüffmeier, Frankfurt am Main, 1999, 157-186, here 177.

CPCE very early recognised the importance of lived church solidarity for its fellowship. This became clear through its cooperation with the working party of Protestant diaspora aid organisations in Europe (AGDE). At its annual meeting in 2009 the AGDE concerned itself intensively with outlining an architecture of future Protestant solidarity in Europe. In its report to the CPCE General Assembly in 2012, the Presidium stated that the cooperation between CPCE and AGDE was an “eloquent expression of the unity between witness and service” as called for in the Leuenberg Agreement (Article 36).

The first pilot project on the theology of diaspora took place with the participation of several theological faculties from 2011 to 2013, and focused on theology students. The findings of the final conference organised with Centro Melantone in Rome – in the 40th anniversary year of the Leuenberg Agreement – are summed up in a number of theses headed “Diaspora and Identity”, that were published in the journal *focus* 20 (November 2013) and served as a basis for the subsequent study process.[3]

In December 2013, the CPCE Council decided to establish a small group of experts to draft a thematic plan for the study process. The Council endorsed the plan in June 2014 and, in order to carry it out, a number of other experts joined the group. It conducted the study process in cooperation with various institutions:

- Gustav-Adolf-Werk e.V. (GAW)
- Verein Evangelische Diaspora e.V.
- Working group of Diaspora aid organisations in Europe (AGDE)
- Southeast and Central European Faculty Conference (SOMEF)
- Theological faculties and universities in Europe
- Universities and institutions of cultural studies in Europe
- German Research Foundation (DFG)

In March 2015, an interdisciplinary conference took place in Neudietendorf (Thuringia/Germany) in cooperation with Jena and Leipzig Universities and the Gustav-Adolf-Werk. The aim of the conference was to link theology in with recent religious, cultural and sociological research on diaspora. Then, in September 2015, a student conference followed at the Waldensian Theology

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[3] English summary at: http://www.leuenberg.net/de/focus/CPCE-focus-20-32013 (last visited on 3.9.17), 10-12.

Faculty in Rome, attended by students from nine universities and seven European countries. After working on the identity of minority and diaspora churches in Europe they produced a set of 14 theses that have also contributed to the present study document.[4]

The student conferences played a fundamental role in the method adopted by whole study process. Firstly, they served to foster young scholars and communication between member churches involving the younger generation. Secondly, they enabled a broad participation, which the topic of diaspora requires. Thirdly, being part of the process and the method adopted, the student conferences seriously addressed the concept of diaspora as focusing on relations.

1.3 Assignment

In order to test the usefulness and redefine the concept of diaspora as a tool for theological interpretation, we first need to deal with the changes in respect of church history, culture and theology to which the concept and its use have long been exposed. Three questions require more clarification:

1. We note generally that the concept of diaspora has detached itself from its church settings. Furthermore, as already mentioned, many member churches do not use it to describe their own self-understanding. Therefore, the first question concerns the role it still plays, or can play, in the way churches communicate about themselves.

2. Detached from its usage in theology and church language, a concept of diaspora established in cultural studies has come to the fore in current academic discussion. There needs to be clarity on how a theology of diaspora can relate to the discourse of cultural studies.

3. That leads to the basic question of where the concept of diaspora comes up in the churches and in university theology and how theology faculties, in particular, talk about it.

The purpose of this study being to draw conclusions for the self-understanding and further development of churches in their role as minorities or diaspora in Europe, we divided the study process into four areas, the findings of which are presented throughout this document. The four areas of study are:

(1) The reception of the “diaspora” concept in sociology of religion and cultural studies

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[4] The topic of the conference was: Die Selbstwahrnehmung und Selbstdeutung von Minderheits- und Diasporakirchen in Europa. The final theses (in German) are available for downloading at: http://www.leuenberg.net/sites/default/files/basic-page/10_schlussthesen.pdf (last visited on 3.9.17).

In order to prevent work on a theological concept of diaspora being restricted to theological and church usage, the study relates the theological treatment of diaspora to the above-mentioned discourse in cultural studies. Within the church and theological usage we need to distinguish between (a) a descriptive sociological understanding of diaspora, relating to the situation of churches regarding their membership numbers, (b) an interpretation of diaspora in the self-perception of a church and (c) a theologically filled concept of diaspora on a biblical and Christian basis. We must also distinguish between the use of the term diaspora in the sense of *minority* churches and its usage for *migrant* churches and congregations. There are also phenomena of “double or multiple diaspora”.

(2) The self-understanding and self-interpretation of churches in view of their minority situation

In most countries of Europe, the Protestant churches are in a minority situation, but one that takes many different forms. The study document therefore cites different diaspora experiences of CPCE member churches. By way of example, we look at the situation in eastern Germany and central, eastern and southern Europe, along with churches in typical city situations. The study process examined when and why certain churches interpret their minority situation as diaspora and why other churches do not. There also needed to be clarity on the implications for a church’s actions when it understands itself as ‘diaspora’. This particularly applied to the concern for public theology, which is the third area of study (see below). We touch on the ecumenical dimension by examining how Catholic theology deals with diaspora experiences.

(3) Outlining a theology of diaspora as a form of public theology

Life in diaspora is by no means only specific to minority and migration churches - it is an essential feature of Christian faith and the church (1 Pet 1:1). Biblically and theologically we must think about what it means that the church of Jesus Christ is *in* the world but not *of* the world (John 17:16), that it understands itself as a pilgrim people of God that has no lasting city here but is looking for the city that is to come (Heb 13:14). How does the pilgrimage relate to the future city, the eschatological hope of the church, to its task of seeking the best for the earthly city in the here and now (Jer 29:7)? A theology of diaspora also has to keep in mind the concept and phenomenon of “strangeness” – the strangeness of faith and the strangeness of the God who became human. The tension between “home” and “a foreign country” informs diaspora experiences, literally and figuratively, and the way they have been interpreted theologically in history and in the present. The tension between the present existence of the church and the believers, on the one hand, and their eschatological destiny on the other, is expressed in the concept of *Entweltlichung* [removing the worldliness from the church], first coined by Rudolf Bultmann and referring back to the writings of Paul and John. Its use by former Pope Benedict XVI in his address in Freiburg, Germany, in 2011[5] sparked considerable discussion. A theology of diaspora that understands itself as a form of public theology will seek to encourage the church to engage critically and constructively with society and to be there for people in their present needs and experiences. Hence our task was to define the concept of diaspora in such a way as to counter any confinement to the inner-church milieu and to encourage an inviting communication of the gospel in the present day. The study process therefore intended to create a link between international discussion on the concept of public theology and the debate on the concept and theology of diaspora. In doing so, it also had to refer to the discussions on the growing secularism and pluralism of modern societies in Europe and their impacts on religion(s), church(es) and Christianity.

(4) The significance of a theology of diaspora as CPCE itself clarifies its role in Europe

If CPCE itself wants to rise to the challenge of raising the voice of Protestantism in Europe – something that has been frequently called for in past years - it will need a conception of public theology that, at the same time, reflects the diaspora situation. Public theology as theology of diaspora could become a new ecumenical project for Europe and an ecumenical time check. In practical terms, we want to build a bridge to the CPCE work areas and pursue the question of the consequences arising for CPCE's further development.

1.4 Structure and content of the study document

The study document develops the concept of diaspora as a term for theological interpretation. The core thesis is that diaspora should be understood as being about relations since diaspora (dispersion) is basically about dependence on something else. This interpretation may derive from the biblical διασπείρω, which describes a structural relation. Unlike the concept of a minority situation, which tends to describe a state of deficiency, a relational focus of the concept of diaspora enables churches to see themselves in multifarious relations.

Understood in terms of relations, diaspora describes churches as being: in fellowship with other churches; in relation to foreign countries and as strangers; in relation to the Bible and tradition; and in relation to one another as protagonists of a certain religious practice, confidently acting in society as their public relations mandate. This enables a constructive handling of the concept of diaspora similar to the perspectives on it found in sociology of religion and cultural studies (diaspora as a bridge, a third place, “doing diaspora”), which the study document addresses.

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[5] See Rudolf Bultmann, Das Evangelium des Johannes (KEK II), Göttingen, ^{20}1978, 435; Pope Benedict XVI, Die Entweltlichung der Kirche, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 25.9.11, online at: http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/papstbesuch/papst-benedikt-xvi-die-entweltlichung-der-kirche-11370087.html (last visited on 5.8.17).

In its three main parts, the study links description and analysis with normative and theological issues. *Part A*, beginning with section 2, sheds light on the use of the concept of diaspora, not just in the history and present of Christian churches but also in the diaspora research of modern cultural studies. *Starting* from the observation that the concept of diaspora has fallen into disuse, theologically and ecclesiastically, there is first a description of the problems of a theology of diaspora and the historical functions of the concept of diaspora in modern church history. Section 3 describes European church perspectives on a theology of diaspora, discussing the concept from the dual angle of diaspora as seen by oneself and as seen by others. While churches and theology rarely use the concept of diaspora at present, it plays a major part in the current discourses in the disciplines of history, cultural studies, anthropology, religious studies and sociology. Section 4 gives an overview of diaspora identities in the 21st century as a topic for transdisciplinary research.

Part B examines (in section 5) the concept and self-understandings of diaspora in the Bible and its historical contexts. It links up historical and exegetical analyses with question about their systematic-theological relevance, thereby laying the foundations for the new approach to a theology of diaspora developed in *Part C*. Both the Old and New Testaments see diaspora existence from the double angle of punishment and promise. Recent exegetical research shows that the context of the Jewish Diaspora (section 6) is key to understanding the diaspora existence of the New Testament church (section 7). These findings contain important stimulus for a relationally focused concept of diaspora as set out in *Part C* and tested in terms of its usefulness. After a summary (in section 8) of findings up to this point, three elements of the new understanding of diaspora follow. Section 9 starts with being-in-a-strange-land and strangeness. Section 10 unfolds the relational side along with the understanding of church in diaspora as a church of witnesses (*église de témoins*) commissioned to give living testimony to Protestant life in diaspora. Finally, section 11 explains a renewed theology of diaspora as a form of public theology that also reflects upon the public role of diaspora churches. Taking up and elaborating on these ideas, the document draws conclusions in section 12 about the work and future development of CPCE.

Part A: Historical and present usages of the concept of diaspora

2. Historical functions of the concept of diaspora in recent church history

2.1 Observations from the history of the concept and church history

Inquiring into the meaning of the concept of diaspora and related theological aspects is, of course, not an end in itself. In the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe the search for a common language, also a common theological language, is always a question of lived solidarity within this church communion. In this sense, theology must be truly contextual.

Taking account of this solidarity at the terminological level is thus both an obligation and a challenge. Here we are concentrating on the concept of diaspora to find how useful it is in the light of its history. Can it still be meaningful today if it contains an asymmetry possibly derivable from its historical roots, if it was mainly applied externally to others, and if not all CPCE churches see it as applicable to their situation? In the light of this question, the following observations from the history of the concept and church history must be understood solely as examples of a theme that is, by its very nature, much more complex. These observations are limited in terms of content and argument due to the concern of this study document, and should therefore be situated within its overall context.

Under these preconditions, a look at the history of the term diaspora in the German-speaking regions – purely by way of example – will allow us illustrate and deepen the above remarks. In Protestantism, ‘diaspora’ was first used in associations founded in the 19th century (something still felt to this day) and was associated with a certain social form of Protestant Christianity. 1832 saw the establishment of the Gustav Adolf foundation, the predecessor of the Gustav-Adolf-Werk, but there was no talk of diaspora. The appeals from the founder period of this aid agency still speak quite pragmatically of help and support for Protestant congregations and of “a common Christian spirit”,[6] not yet of diaspora. They thus managed without a theological dimension of the minority situation of others. The term first arose in this context in 1842.[7]

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[6] Karl-Christoph Epting, Diasporawissenschaft aus der Sicht des Gustav-Adolf-Werkes als Diasporawerk der EKD, in idem, Evangelische Diaspora. Ökumenische und internationale Horizonte, Leipzig, 2010, 83.

[7] Hermann-Josef Röhrig, Diaspora – Kirche in der Minderheit. Eine Untersuchung zum Wandel des Diasporaproblems in der evangelischen Theologie unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Zeitschrift “Die evangelische Diaspora“, Leipzig, 1991, 37f.

In the second half of the 19th century the concept of diaspora became increasingly popular in the circles interested in Protestant minorities. They were already perceiving diaspora not only a religious phenomenon but also as a cultural one, related to origin. That in fact gave rise to an asymmetry of attribution, which started from German majority Protestantism and referred to minority Protestantism in Europe and the world church, not to forget minority Protestantism in the Catholic-dominated areas of Germany. At the latest in the period of the German empire [1870-1918], the term diaspora was widely used in Protestant circles and had established itself in the church and Protestant society.

The national offence felt by Germany through its defeat in the First World War reinforced the link between the national and confessional diaspora again, particularly as German Protestantism as a whole went into national and nationalist isolation, from which – it thought - only a revision of the Treaty of Versailles could liberate it. The concept of diaspora became a topic of theological reflection in Germany precisely at this time, although there were clear tendencies in the direction of identifying national with confessional diaspora even before the First World War. An important organ for Protestant diaspora was “Die Evangelische Diaspora”, a magazine published by Franz Rendtorff, a Leipzig theology professor and president of the Gustav Adolf association. Even before the First World War, Rendtorff had pressed for the work of the Gustav Adolf association to be rooted in academic theology. “Die Evangelische Diaspora” was to become the journal of a completely new discipline, diaspora studies (*Diasporakunde*). This was planned as a branch of practical theology, i.e. located in Franz Rendtorff’s own discipline, which was responsible for reflecting on church action. In his inaugural speech as rector of Leipzig University in 1925, Rendtorff described diaspora studies in the broader sense as part of an overarching discipline called “studies of foreign countries” (*Auslandskunde*, *Auslandsbildung*), which aimed at internationalising study courses, e.g. in the field of Law. In the narrower sense, however, diaspora studies were to become part of a course on “Germanness abroad”.[8]

The attempt to establish the subject in theology faculties went hand in hand with the establishment of missiology as an academic discipline from the end of the 19th century, likewise intended to represent theological reflection on practical work and intimately connected with the existence of certain support groups – the mission societies. A further parallel exists with another subject that, like diaspora studies, was not able to establish itself at the theology faculties: church studies (*Kirchenkunde*), a precursor of sociology of religion and intended to keep the pastors abreast with religious reality.

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[8] “Auslandsdeutschtum”. Cf. Röhrig, Diaspora – Kirche in der Minderheit (see note 6), 67.

Franz Rendtorff had a study centre built in Leipzig for students from the “diaspora churches”, which is now the head office of the Gustav-Adolf-Werk. During their stay in Leipzig, the students from the churches from the Protestant diaspora were meant to concentrate on the specific situation of their own churches and congregations. The aim was to do contextual theology, but the content came from Germany, not from the churches and countries of the diaspora themselves, as the theological training institutions there were considered too small to offer this subject.

One of the main demands of the champions of the diaspora issue was to protect national (primarily German) and confessional minorities. There was some disagreement as to whether the concept of diaspora related to the existence of minority Protestantism as a whole, or only to *German* Protestantism at home or abroad. The German Evangelical Church, the then federation of Protestant regional churches in Germany, took a decision with serious consequences in this regard: the term diaspora was to be restricted to the *German* Protestant diaspora abroad.

Viktor Grüner, a pastor in Riga (Latvia) and lecturer at the Herder Institute there, wrote that diaspora was not a “defiant community in which a minority group, in the midst of oppression, often talks itself into preferring to go under with honour rather than to vegetate in dishonour.” Grüner also said that “the national totality idea, in a church guise,” was “fascinating a diaspora congregation with its delusion”.[9] Others saw that quite differently, however, above all in the formerly Prussian areas of Poland, in Transylvania and Sudetenland. In 1934 Gerhard May, a pastor serving in Celje in Slovenia, published a book called “Die volksdeutsche Sendung der Kirche” (the national German mission of the church). In a certain sense, it summed up his activity as director of studies at the Franz Rendtorff centre in Leipzig. In the book, May related the idea of diaspora very closely to the idea of German nationalism. However, he soon learned from National Socialist church policy that the link between confessional and national diaspora was ideologically undesired and so, as early as in 1940, he was able to write: “The concept of diaspora is only properly used in its real sense in the church field.”[10] In 1944, May became bishop of the Evangelical Church in Austria and henceforth saw diaspora existence only as the life of his church under a Catholic majority. After 1945 the Vienna Faculty of Protestant Theology became a stronghold of revised diaspora theology. That was also the position of Wilhelm Dantine, professor of systematic theology, who took the experience of his own church as a starting point for his theological reflection and considered credible existence as a minority to be an important responsibility.

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[9] Harald Uhl, Evangelische Akademie und Diaspora. Zwei unbekannte Wesen, Vienna, 2006, 15 and 17.

[10] Ibid, 26.

After 1945 the newly founded Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) included “serving the Protestant diaspora” in its constitution. In view of the experiences in and with Nazi dictatorship, the link between national and confessional diaspora was severed, at least officially. Remnants of nationalist thinking subsisted, however, applying to the remaining German minorities in Eastern Europe, e.g. the Transylvanian Saxons. ‘Assimilation’ was regarded as a risk in the context of diaspora. During the Second World War, however, the German Evangelical Church as an institution had, as indicated above, found that its contribution to “cultivating Germanness” was not desired by the Nazi state, and after the war the nationality (*Volkstum*) question was largely settled by the expulsions of Germans from the then Polish and Czechoslovakian territories.

Nowadays, in individual cases, e.g. in Hungary and Romania, the national question is closely linked to Protestant church adherence. This shows that confessional and national diaspora can still be closely connected. The unsettled questions therefore include – not least from the theological perspective – whether there can ever be something like a ‘pure’, merely confessional or religious diaspora at all, or whether a national and cultural orientation still plays a major role. That would seem to be so, in cases of double or multiple diaspora (confessional, linguistic, national); a clear distinction between these various factors is not easy in the real life of diaspora congregations.[11]

The immense wave of secularisation of the last few years and decades has made Protestantism in Europe a minority almost everywhere. Whether the concept of diaspora is useful in this situation is not at all clear. Protestantism used to be culturally dominant in Germany, and now Protestants have to face the question of whether they are now willing to use the diaspora concept as a way to describe themselves. Protestantism in the German Democratic Republic (“East Germany”) was very reluctant to talk about diaspora, although the GDR was soon subject to the massive secularisation that looks to be in store for the whole of Germany. In a lecture in 1973, Magdeburg’s bishop Werner Krusche spoke of the danger of Protestant communities closing themselves up in diaspora. According to him, the issue was not survival but “preparing the members of the congregations for mission in sober hope”.[12] After all, the diaspora in which they lived was ideological in nature. Today’s CPCE member churches have likewise been reluctant to use the concept of diaspora.

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[11] Compare section 4 on transdisciplinary diaspora research.

[12] Wolfgang Ratzmann, Diaspora als Leitbegriff der ostdeutschen evangelischen Landeskirchen. Ein praktisch-theologischer Blick in die kirchliche Zeitgeschichte, online: http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~diaspora/pub.htm, no page numbers (last visited on 6.8.17).

As we look back at these historical findings it might seem that the work of the Protestant diaspora aid organisations – the Gustav-Adolf-Werk and Martin-Luther-Bund – is no longer relevant. Please note: this is not to play down the extraordinary achievements of the effective diaspora agencies and their churches on behalf of the family ties of European Protestantism, quite the contrary. To think that would be a misunderstanding. It is just that we are examining the concept of ‘diaspora’ and related notions, and not the solidarity for and with Protestant minorities that many committed Christians continue to show. In view of the historical burden weighing on the concept, and its one-sided use, the question is whether ‘diaspora’ can develop strengths and capacities that speak for restoring it to full relevance.

2.2 Diagnosis for the present

Nevertheless, it seems that the existence of a theology of diaspora is taken for granted – at least in the view of German and Austrian Protestant churches, but also far beyond and independently of them. Over 80 issues of “Die Evangelische Diaspora” and the equally interesting journals “Beihefte Evangelische Diaspora” are evidence of how people in southern and eastern Europe and beyond (in Latin America) have been reflecting on diaspora for decades, as a way of describing and accounting for their own situation.

Having said that, the question is to what extent this theology of diaspora is contextual theology, i.e. part of how minority churches see themselves, and to what extent it is part of an attribution from outside.

For the German-speaking context there could be a suspicion that describing church life in a minority with the aid of the theologically fraught concept of diaspora – going back to the 19th century, as has been shown – is an attribution that, while promising solidarity at eye level, is little more than a mild form of what other discourses call orientalism. That is to say, projecting something onto others and leaving the power of interpretation not with those concerned but with those who make the descriptions and attach labels to situations. This critical question still stands, because calling a community of Germans living beyond their country’s borders a ‘national’ community is also a projection from the 19th century. Clearly those living in diaspora in the 19th century were frequently German, with whom people felt national bonds, but Germans abroad were later claimed as Germans even if they did not see themselves as such – at least not as national-minded Germans in the spirit of the 19th century. Equally, with respect to Protestant “Germanness abroad” (as in the 1920s) the attribution of diaspora could therefore be an expression if not of a colonialist attitude, then of a certain paternalism.

With respect to non-German minority Protestantism, the question arises in a special way. The 2014 centennial commemorations recalling the beginning of the First World War revealed that German Protestants at the time – at least many of their official representatives – were of the opinion that they were *first* committed to Germany's national interests and only *secondly* to showing solidarity with Protestant Christians in other countries. The fact that Protestants and Christians in other countries saw things in exactly the same way with respect to their own nations does not detract from that fact, since German Protestantism sustained its position with incomparably higher self-confidence, as statements from August and September 1914 show.

In any case, a theology of diaspora may never be regarded in isolation – we must always consider its cultural, political and thus specific historical context.

The study process on the theology of diaspora has attempted to link up theoretical work on the topic of diaspora with the question of Christian identity based on lived diaspora practice and genuine diaspora solidarity. This required a certain amount of historical reflection, as outlined above. We now need to supplement this by considering past and present experiences in the CPCE member churches themselves.

A new theological understanding of diaspora can only emerge, however, if a great many CPCE member churches share this concept as a description of themselves and it then proves helpful for theological communication and understanding within CPCE. Consequently, it is essential to take into account the way different CPCE churches conceptualise their minority situation.

3. The concept of diaspora and current church self-perceptions

The everyday reality of many CPCE churches is characterised by minority situations, and through their living and working in diaspora. At the same time, these realities differ greatly, as do the conclusions the churches draw for their ecclesiological self-understanding. The diaspora situation and the way the churches perceive themselves mutually condition one another[13] - church life in the minority is an open, dynamic process of identity-building.

What importance does the concept of diaspora have in this definition of identity? What images and motifs do churches resort to in order to describe their own situation and identity?

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[13] The insights in this section derive from the results of the CPCE Student Conference “Diaspora als Selbstwahrnehmung – Diaspora und Selbstwahrnehmung” (in brief: Diaspora and Identity), that took place in the context of the study process on the theology of diaspora from 21 to 24 September 2015 at the Waldensian Faculty in Rome. All the presentations (in German) are accessible at: http://www.leuenberg.net/de/studienprozess-theologie-der-diaspora (last visited on 17.08.17)

3.1 Diaspora as self-designation?

Church statements and programmatic texts on the self-understanding of Protestant churches from the last few decades rarely use the concept of diaspora. In a nearly 3300 page corpus of memoranda, guides and foundational documents of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD-Texte) between 2002 and 2015 the word diaspora is only mentioned 10 times.[14] It comes up equally rarely in the programmatic documents of other European minority churches in France, Italy, Austria, Slovakia and Czechia. We therefore note a certain caution and reserve on the part of churches about using this term, unlike in cultural studies and sociology.[15]

Where the concept of diaspora does appear it has several different church-related and theological connotations. It contains tensions and evokes positive, negative and ambivalent associations. There are often political and church-policy implications. For example, the interlocking of religious diaspora and national identity may lead to an ambivalent self-understanding between bonds with society, which adheres to other faiths or confessions, and isolation within it. The theological ambiguity of the term diaspora comes out very clearly in the varied ecclesiological self-interpretations of the Reformed Church in Hungary, which understand the diaspora situation as a sacrifice and punishment, but also as an opportunity and challenge.

The eschatological dimension[16] of the concept of diaspora appears the least often in the self-perception and self-interpretation of Protestant churches in Europe. It almost seems forgotten. Protestant churches interpret the term most readily at the descriptive, sociological level, designating either a territorial situation (e.g. Waldensian churches outside the Waldensian Valleys) or a numerical sociological minority. Another – rarely used – sociological interpretation understands diaspora as a concept of transition, a state between the former *Volkskirche*, with extensive membership in the population, and complete secularisation (as in eastern and central Germany). These interpretational variants also come under another term that expresses the way most Protestant churches in Europe see themselves.

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[14] Cf. Sara Duderstedt, Ole Duwensee, Gordon Sethge, Deutsche Perspektiven, Beitrag zur Internationalen Studierendenkonferenz in Rom, 2015, http://www.leuenberg.net/sites/default/files/basic-page/02_deutsche_perspektiven.pdf, 7 (last visited 7.9.17).

[15] Examples of this viewpoint: Charim Isolde/Borea/Gertraud Auer (eds), Lebensmodell Diaspora. Über moderne Nomaden, Bielefeld, 2005; Ruth Mayer, Diaspora. Eine kritische Begriffsbestimmung, Bielefeld 2012; Jana Evans Brasiel/Anita Mannur (eds), Theorizing diaspora. A Reader (Key Works in Cultural Studies, 6), Malden [et al], 2003.

[16] See section 9 of this study, “Church in a strange land – strangeness of the church”.

3.2 Church in the minority

A common experience of Protestant churches in these countries is, however, that they are – to a greater or lesser degree – in a minority situation within a society where the majority either has another religious commitment or is indifferent to religion. Current social megatrends suggest that the minority situation of the Protestant churches will increase in the next few decades. These trends include increasing mobility and individualism, migration, religious pluralism, the increasing lack of religious affiliation, secularism, and the popularity of secular and esoteric competitors. Membership is falling, congregations are dwindling and churches are particularly affected by demographic change.

Within the minority churches there are more minorities. Many of today's minority churches are the results of church unions or federations and therefore bring together different ethnic minorities with their respective traditions, styles of piety, confessional cultures and theological emphases. The self-perception and self-interpretation of Protestant churches is also reflected in how the churches relate to and interpret their minorities. The Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy has, for example, responded to the challenges of having a large share of migrants in their congregations with the programme "Essere chiesa insieme" (being church together), in order to promote mutual recognition and integration. They thereby show the desire to practise being church together, in spite of considerable differences. At the same time, it has become clear that living together in diaspora is a multidimensional challenge.

Another common experience of Protestant churches in Europe is that they find themselves in dynamic, rapidly changing societies, in which they participate. This context forms the framework within which the churches and their members live and work. On the other hand, the churches see themselves as challenged to position themselves vis à vis differing social, political and religious groupings.

The self-perception of being a minority church in a dynamic, rapidly changing society is empirical and reflects the perception of the individual church members. The Protestant churches interpret this situation in different ways – positively, negatively or ambivalently: as punishment, as a threat, as a difficulty, as a general condition, as an opportunity or as a challenge. They also relate to this situation accordingly, by distancing themselves from society or feeling inferior to it, or by developing certain forms of activity and involvement in society and engaging with it. At the institutional level, church leaders develop various strategies as responses to these social circumstances such as profiling, structural reforms and liturgical reforms. The church documents we analysed contain different interpretations of the nature of a minority church that are in tension among themselves. The self-designation as minority church, however, has a strongly descriptive, sociological orientation that needs to be supplemented by other terms, so that it can do justice to the theological view and definition of the church.

3.3 Key images and phrases of minority churches

Some of these supplementary terms are key images, words and phrases that have accompanied the history and identity-building process of the church and at the same time interpret it. Christians can reassure themselves of their identity in key images and phrases, and strengthen their self-confidence. The key images and phrases give orientation regarding the church's calling and fulfilment of its tasks. What is more, they aim to give the public an authentic, inviting picture of the church. To do so, they have recourse to biblical and theological motifs. For example, Peter's exhorting the first Christians to be ready to give an account of Christian hope (1 Peter 3:15-16) is, to this day, regarded as a model of the way minority churches define their relationship to society in the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren in Czechia, according to the interpretation of New Testament scholar J. B. Souček. Over against a largely atheist society, the way of life and articulation of faith of individual Christians are to serve as mission to society.[17] Other images and phrases often used by CPCE churches are of the "people in the wilderness" (Ex 13:18), the "little flock" (Lk 12:32), the Johannine dualism of world and disciples (Jn 14:17), the sayings about the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5:13f) from the Sermon on the Mount, and "Hear the word that the Lord speaks to you" (Jer 10:1) from the Old Testament.

Besides the reference to Scripture, references to historical tradition play a prominent role for the present definition of church identity in minority situations. The self-confidence of Austrian Protestantism still feeds on preserving detailed memories of the six generations of underground Protestants in the 17th and 18th century, when Protestantism was exposed to massive persecutions. To this day, Protestants often define their identity through their historical heritage.[18] Indeed, churches in minority situations tend to cultivate their historical heritage in a special way, with symbols and terms playing a central role. The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren in Czechia still bears its history visibly in its name, while in France Protestants frequently display the Huguenot cross, a symbol of Reformed history recalling oppression and resistance.

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[17] Vgl. Jakub Ort, Michael Pfann, Christine Schoen, Tschechische Perspektiven, Beitrag zur Internationalen Studierendenkonferenz, Rome, 2015, http://www.leuenberg.net/sites/default/files/basic-page/03_tschechische_perspektiven.pdf, 2ff. (last visited on 7.9.17).

[18] Vgl. Alexander Hanisch-Wolfram, Marcus Hütter, Simon Konttas, Österreichische Perspektiven, Beitrag zur Internationalen Studierendenkonferenz, Rome, 2015, 3ff.

Besides having recourse to biblical-theological and historic traditions, key images and phrases are likewise nurtured by various experiences of difference that churches have in minority situations. Bishop Julius Filo describes the task of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia as being “the prophetic voice in society”. Aware of their own otherness in a Catholic country, Protestants have the responsibility to stand up courageously and powerfully for their own ethical values, and to advocate for them publicly - particularly when they diverge from those of most people in society.[19]

Finally, it is the self-understanding of the church and its mandate that are the source of the phrases defining church life that aim, in turn, to give church life a new sense of direction. Laurent Schlumberger, president of the National Council of the United Protestant Church of France, coins such phrases when he calls for Protestantism in France to change course, moving away from a “niche church” towards a “church on the open sea” (église du large).[20]

The key images and phrases quoted here are contextual and time-bound, representing the different way in which CPCE churches resort to biblical motifs, narratives from the culture of memory, or Reformation convictions - or coin new expressions in order to interpret their own minority situation theologically. These interpretations will at the same time set priorities for church action and respond to the respective social situation. Finally, these are ways of meeting the challenge of rearticulating the churches’ own ecclesiological self-understanding as minority churches, with the aim of conveying their self-interpretation, calling and mission in a comprehensible and catchy way.

3.4 The ecumenical perspective - Catholicism and diaspora

Catholicism also uses diaspora as both a descriptive, sociological category and a means of theological interpretation.[21] Much more strongly than in Protestantism, however, the concept of diaspora in Catholicism focuses on the mission of the church to the diaspora: as a “salvation history must".[22] Diaspora is understood as a place calling for missionary endeavours. That correlates with biblical ideas of a field from which new and great things can spring up, or with the story of the Emmaus disciples, who – through their encounter with the Risen Christ – reinterpret their situation and gain a sense of mission. In Catholicism, too, authors evoke classical biblical topics to interpret diaspora theologically. That enables a positive understanding of diaspora as an opportunity and a challenge. Related to the fundamental purpose of the church since its beginnings, diaspora has a positive theological connotation in church tradition, from Augustine´s "De civitate Dei" to Pope Paul VI's "Lumen Gentium". It is the place to which God sends the church as an institution of salvation. Hence in Catholic understanding, diaspora is primarily associated with mission.

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[19] Radim Pačmár, Michaela Poschova, Slowakische Perspektiven, Beitrag zur Internationalen Studierendenkonferenz, Rome, 2015, 3f.

[20] Laurent Schlumberger, Kirche sein in einer sich verändernden Welt. Herausforderungen und Chancen für unseren Auftrag heute, zitiert nach: Claire Oberkampf, Quentin Milan-Laguerre, Beitrag zur Studierendenkonferenz, Rome, 2015, 13. Original French source: http://conseilpresbyteral.fr/guide.html (last visited on 7.9.17).

[21] The following remarks take Catholicism in Germany as an example. Cf. Susanne Clausing, Ann-Marie Felsch, Carsten Voswinkel, Katholizismus und Diaspora, Beitrag zur Internationalen Studierendenkonferenz, Rome, 2015: http://www.leuenberg.net/sites/default/files/basic-page/04_katholizismus_und_diaspora.pdf (last visited on 9.7.17). A recent Catholic publication sheds light on the fundamental dimension of diaspora as a place of theological thought: Benedikt Kranemann/Petr Štica (Hg.), Diaspora als Ort der Theologie. Perspektiven aus Tschechien und Ostdeutschland (Erfurter theologische Schriften 98), Würzburg, 2016.

3.5 Protestant profiling

The country contributions at the CPCE student conference in Rome in 2015 pointed out that the concept of diaspora is rarely used and, when it is, it means different things in the self-perception of Protestant churches. Hitherto 'minority church' has been the most common term by which Protestant churches in Europe have described themselves. This concept reflects the sociological situation of these churches and places them in relation to one or several majority formations, such as the Catholic Church, or the societal group of non-believers. However, even when 'diaspora' is used, it is a sociological description. The genuinely theological potential of the concept of diaspora has not been fully tapped. The students at the Rome conference found this to be a deficiency. That is where the special importance of the concept of diaspora might lie – that it gives a theological interpretation of minority situations and enables reflection on the future.

The profiling of Protestant churches is an ever-recurrent challenge. In view of our increasing minority situation, we need a theology that spells out the purpose and mission of Protestant churches in the world, strengthening Christians in their identity and mission, and making Protestant churches visible and effective in society. In rapidly changing societies, Protestant voices need to be audible, with a clear, relevant, up-to-date and comprehensible message. A theology building on these insights invites us to grasp this situation as a challenge, to position ourselves socially and to rely on contact instead of isolation, on connection instead of withdrawal. For that, a church community must be free to live out its own faith without danger. Where this is not possible, all Christian churches are called to work for this freedom and give energetic support.

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[22] Karl Rahner, Theologische Deutung der Position des Christen in der modernen Welt, in: idem, Sämtliche Werke, Bd. 10, Kirche in den Herausforderungen der Zeit, Freiburg, 2003, 251-273, here 258.

If we want to find a new, in-depth meaning in the concept of diaspora to enable its acceptance as a theologically grounded expression for the self-understanding of minority churches, it would help to look over the fence of theological disciplines. One field to explore is diaspora research in cultural studies, which have long used the concept as a paradigm for identity-building processes in the present day.

4. 21st century diaspora identities as a research topic for cultural studies and sociology

4.1 Trends in transdisciplinary diaspora research

Diaspora has become a central concept of research in cultural studies, anthropology, political science, history and sociology, precisely because it is not yet fraught or burdened with the formation of political theory, unlike in the past. Such research perceives the ambivalence of the concept as its strength. Cultural studies deal only marginally, if at all, with the theological tradition of Diaspora, most notable in Judaism. Non-theological diaspora research takes an interest in ‘diaspora’ in order to gain a more differentiated understanding of globalisation and migration. It sees diaspora as a forward-looking - because transnational - multiple and fluid form of identity of groups and individuals. To that extent, cultural studies primarily rate diaspora as a positive phenomenon that could be a model for societies undergoing globalisation. They see it as worthy of much more appraisal, with all its diverse functions within and between societies. Most publications take diaspora communities and their dynamics as examples of how social identity actually works in modern societies. This fits with the currently predominant perspective of cultural and social sciences, which are particularly interested in hybridism,[23] ambiguities, fragmentations and differences.[24]

Yet the ambivalent dimensions of diaspora identity are increasingly emerging as well: “The concept of diaspora is situated in tension between cosmopolitan disconnectedness and a radical nationalism that is no longer territorially defined".[25] Diaspora communities can be transnational and nationalistic at the same time, open and conservative, democratic and anti-individualistic.[26] The concept of diaspora is also enriched by recent research on ethnicity (symbolic ethnicity[27]), nationalism ("imagined communities"[28]), transnationalism[29], transculturality[30] and cultural memory. It is also becoming clearer that the binary attributions of 'victim' or 'victimiser' are alone not suited to the historical coverage of exploitative and unjust structures and thus need to be deconstructed, without in any way relativising the massive injustice and suffering experienced. Moreover, since the end of the 20th century, the concept of diaspora has aimed to supplement, if not replace, the more individualistic concepts of refugee, immigrant, exile. This research aims to give more attention to the processes of collective identity-building in pluralist societies, in view of their high political relevance. That mainly concerns migrant communities or 'new' minorities.

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[23] Cf. Robert Young, Colonial Desire. Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race, London, 1995.

[24] For diaspora research see e.g. Stuart Hall, who defines diaspora experience not as implying essence or purity but as insight into the need for heterogeneity and diversity; it relates to hybridity, an idea of identity that lives with and through difference, not in spite of it (Stuart Hall, Cultural Identity and Diaspora, in: Jonathan Rutherford, Identity, Community, Culture, Difference, London 1990, 222-237; Robin Cohen, Social Identities and Creolization, in: Kim Knott und Sean McLoughlin, Diasporas. Concepts, Intersections, Identities, London/New York 2010, 69-73.

Diaspora studies are rethinking not only identity but also space as a geographic and social factor. Paul Gilroy's concept of "Black Atlantic"[31] is highly influential. This aims to overcome the image of Afro-American identity that portrays Africa as an (idealised) centre and America as exile. Instead, he thinks that black identity is better understood as a mix of more complex transatlantic relations, crossings and interactions – and as an experience of discrimination and degradation common to both sides of the Atlantic.

Diaspora research may be either synchronic or diachronic in its tendency. While the former examines networking, social processes and functions in a closely defined period, mostly in the present, the latter covers longer periods or earlier historical epochs. Unlike synchronic research, diaspora research in historical studies also subjects Christian communities to intensive examination.[32] However, it has been rare to find historians studying the way in which certain communities used the concept of diaspora to designate themselves or others.[33]

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[25] Ruth Mayer, Diaspora. Eine kritische Begriffsbestimmung, Bielefeld, 2005, 8.

[26] Pina Werbner, Complex Diasporas, in: Kim Knott and Sean McLoughlin, Diasporas. Concepts, Intersections, Identities, London/New York 2010, 74-78.

[27] Herbert Gans, Symbolic Ethnicity. The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America, in: Werner Sollors (ed.), Theories of Ethnicity. A Classical Reader, New York 1996, 425-459.

[28] Benedict Anderson, Die Erfindung der Nation. Zur Karriere eines folgenreichen Konzepts, Frankfurt/New York, ^{3}2006.

[29] Gunilla Budde et al, (ed.), Transnationale Geschichte. Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien, Göttingen, 2006; Ludger Pries (ed.), New Transnational Spaces. International Migration and Transnational Companies in the Early Twenty-First Century, London, 2001.

[30] Andreas Langenohl et al (ed.), Transkulturalität. Klassische Texte, Bielefeld, 2015.

[31] Paul Gilroy, Black Atlantic Modernity and Double Consciousness, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993.

Instead of an *essentialist* concept of diaspora, researchers in the field of diaspora studies prefer a *relational* concept. This aims to cover network structures, identity-building processes in relation to bonding and differences, and dynamic identity between its attribution to oneself or by others. In practice, objects of study include pilgrimages, financial transfers, cultural festivals or Facebook groups.

Diaspora studies focus particularly on social processes of growing pluralism and individualism that are part of (western) modernity. That concerns generational and gender-specific diaspora identities, individual identity strategies within diaspora communities and the special features of individual diaspora communities.

4.2 Diaspora identity and diasporic consciousness

Cultural studies and sociology are interested in the specific form of diaspora identity. That is often linked with a normative or Utopian interest in new, ambivalent and hybrid identity formations. Here are some important insights.

Diaspora identity as social identity takes place through the politics of memory. That possibly also involves “invented traditions”,[34] which are memories with no historically provable correlation. The politics of memory are in the hands of the actors themselves, those who ‘do diaspora’. The question is therefore always: who actively cultivates and transforms diaspora identity, with what intention and by which media? Prominent players are both leaders in the diaspora community and mediators between it and the society of residence (“diaspora entrepreneurs”[35] or “diasporists”[36]).

Diaspora identity has a performative character; it needs festivals, everyday rituals and cultural traditions. A crucial breaking point here is the intergenerational transfer. The generation of grandparents still understood the meaning of festivals, the parental generation merely celebrates, and the younger generation ultimately does not know what is being celebrated or why they should celebrate this festival. This transfer time and again leads to losses, but also to new syntheses, and each generation develops new ways of behaving and identity models.

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[32] Cf. Susanne Lachenicht (ed.), Religious Refugees in Europe, Asia and North America (6th – 21st Century), Hamburg, 2007; idem, Hugenotten in Europa und Nordamerika. Migration und Integration in der Frühen Neuzeit, Frankfurt/New York, 2010.

[33] One example is Gisela Mettele, Weltbürgertum oder Gottesreich. Die Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine als globale Gemeinschaft 1727-1857, 93-100.

[34] Eric Hobsbawm/Terence Ranger (eds), The Invention of Tradition, New York, 1983.

[35] Alexander-Kenneth Nagel, Vom Paradigma zum Pragma. Religion und Migration in relationaler Perspektive, in: Sociologia internationalis 48 (2012), 221-246, here 237.

[36] Hauke Dorsch, Globale Griots. Performanz in der afrikanischen Diaspora, Berlin, 2006, 9 and 248-257.

Diaspora identity is a complex identity or an identity of division:[37] awareness on the part of actors that they are in diaspora leads to their developing multiple identities, relating to different real-life contexts, such as their work environment, circle of friends, diaspora community, or reference to societies of origin. These identities do not exist side by side like monoliths, however, but mutually influence one another, without merging. This particularly applies to the second and third generation of diaspora communities.[38]

People shape diaspora identity as ‘boundary work’, i.e. through both ascertaining and redefining differences. Their identity has no firm boundaries but takes place in continuing processes of negotiation, both collectively and individually, in dialogue between the way they see themselves and the way others see them.

4.3 Definitions and types of diaspora

There are at least three discernible meanings of diaspora: a social form, a type of consciousness and a mode of cultural production.[39]

As a *social form* diaspora is typified by a triadic relation between (1) a globally scattered group that identifies itself as belonging together, (2) the territorial residence contexts and (3) the contexts identified as homeland.[40] The triadic model must be nuanced even more, however, by including the relations of one diaspora community to other diaspora communities in the same residential context. These relations may be more political, economic or cultural.

Another connotation of diaspora is a *type of consciousness or identity*. Paradoxically it is called ‘a home away from home’. Religious diaspora consciousness leads to a heightened selfreflectiveness about how our own religious practices and beliefs may be justified by contrast with others, or with majority practices. It also confronts the challenge of carefully distinguishing between culture and religion, and allocating the individual life practices to one of the two areas.[41] Many shifts take place between the first, second and third diaspora generation.

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[37] Isolde Charim, Einleitung, in: idem and Gertrad Auer Borea (eds), Lebensmodell Diaspora. Über moderne Nomaden, Bielefeld, 2012, 11-16, here 14. She says that a diaspora is always a divided community, regardless of how close it may be; it is the experience of division.

[38] The multiple diaspora identities may be expressed in ‘a new grassroots cosmopolitanism’. Categories of simple nation-state adherence are replaced by more complex models. This particularly applies when there are educational, travel and economic opportunities.

[39] Quoted from Steven Vertovec, Three Meanings of ‘Diaspora’, exemplified among South Asian Religions, in: Diaspora. A Journal of Transnational Studies, Vol. 6, No. 3, Toronto, 1997, 2.

[40] Steven Vertovec, Three Meanings of ‘Diaspora’, exemplified among South Asian Religions, in: Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies, Vol. 6 (see note 39), 5; Gabriel Sheffer, A New Field of Study. Modern Diasporas in International Politics, in: Modern Diasporas in International Politics, ed. Gabriel Sheffer, London, 1986, 1-15; William Safran, Diasporas in Modern Societies. Myths of Homeland and Return, in: Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies, Vol. 1, Toronto, 1991, 83-99.

Cultural anthropologists are primarily interested in diaspora as a *mode of cultural production*, in which diaspora identity permanently re-forms as culture-mediating, transforming, synthesising and hybrid. Media and social networks play a central role here.

Robin Cohen[42] has presented another form of diaspora typing. He distinguishes between victim diaspora (e.g. Armenians), labour diaspora, imperial diasporas (historical British colonies), trade diaspora (Venetian trading settlements), deterritorialised diaspora (Sinti and Roma) and mobilising diaspora.

Many people with diaspora awareness find themselves in a double or multiple diaspora situation: linguistically, culturally, ethnically and religiously.

A point of disagreement in cultural studies debates is to what extent the concept of diaspora presented here is applicable to Christian communities. Christian denominations in minority situations are mostly not explicitly related to an (earthly) home country or country of origin, except if they are linked through ethnic, linguistic or cultural diasporas (e.g. migrant congregations). Non-theological research has so far addressed Jewish, Muslim and Hindu diasporas more intensively than Christian ones. The contribution of theology to the cultural studies debate lies in filling this gap.

4.4 The potential of cultural studies to interpret diaspora

Cultural studies analyses of diaspora communities mostly involve a normative interest in highlighting the opportunities and effectiveness of diaspora consciousness. Here are some models of interpretation:

- Diaspora as *new publics* or “subaltern counterpublics”:[43] diaspora communities create informal counterpublics. This has particularly been true of disadvantaged communities that have little access to the institutionalised publics of their societies of residence. These counterpublics can give rise to creative interpretations of identities and policy-making. At the same time, diaspora consciousness[44] formed and articulated in counterpublics motivates people to commit to their own diaspora group and its rights in the institutionalised public, and in so doing to create public visibility as well. Therein lies the special emancipatory potential of counterpublics. Counterpublics and political publics are connected by interim publics.

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[41] For a summary see Steven Vertovec, Transnationalism, London/New York, 2009, 141-155.

[42] Robin Cohen, Global Diasporas. An Introduction, New York, ^{2}2008.

[43] Nancy Fraser, Rethinking the Public Sphere. A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy, in: Craig Calhoun (ed.), Habermas and the Public Sphere, Cambridge, 1992, 109-142.

- Diaspora as a bridging-place: diaspora communities are places of bridging from one culture to one or several others. They serve not only as places of mediation and encounter, but also as places of reassurance of their own identity. The metaphor of the ‘third place’ also plays an important role in describing the function and opportunity of diaspora communities.[45] Applied to diaspora, the term means that the cultures of the society of origin and the society of residence meet in the diaspora community and so create links and mediation. Cultivating a culture (of memory) both preserves this and creates a contact zone to other groups. These bridging places can also be called “dialogic spaces”.[46] Diaspora can be a bridge in still another sense: diaspora consciousness links the local level with the global, the regional with the European level.[47]

- The concept of ‘transmigrants’ stems from migration research. These are migrants who open up social “fields that span national borders and thereby develop and maintain multiple relations of a family, economic, social, religious, political and organisational kind”.[48]

- Diaspora as a wealth of relations: diaspora communities are characterised by forming a particularly varied social network: to the society of residence, to other diaspora communities in the society of residence, to the society of origin and often to other diaspora communities in other societies of residence. Because these relations are not very institutionalised they have been paid far too little attention. They function particularly well as informal networks.[49] Such international networks can use their societies of residence as enrichment and an opportunity, particularly for economic, political and cultural relations.

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[44] Nancy Fraser underlines the function of (counter-)publics to form social identity. See Nancy Fraser, Rethinking the Public Sphere. A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy, in: Craig Calhoun (ed.), Habermas (see note 43), 109-142, here 125.

[45] The concept of third place comes from urban planning or urbanity research. Ray Oldenburg represents the idea that – besides their private homes (first place) and workplaces (second places) - people need public places for informal encounter, e.g. squares, public gardens, fountains and benches. See Ray Oldenburg, Celebrating the Third Place. Inspiring Stories about the ‘Great Good Places’ at the Heart of Our Communities, New York, 2000.

[46] Ayman Abu-Shomarand, Malcolm MacDonald, Dialogic Spaces. Diasporic negotiation of difference, in: JPCS 3 (2012), 1-36.

[47] See Cohen, Diasporas (see note 42), 516.

[48] Petrus Han, Theorien zur internationalen Migration. Ausgewählte interdisziplinäre Migrationstheorien und deren zentralen Aussagen, Stuttgart, 2006, 151.

[49] That particularly happens in cases in which diaspora communities receive little financial support. Politicians should acknowledge that diaspora communities bring transnationality and connectivity to their societies of residence.

- Diaspora communities that arise through migration change their power and organisational structures compared to their countries or societies of origin. Participatory networks arise, instead of strong hierarchies. Initiatives started by individuals gain great importance.[50] Self-help and civil society commitment, and thereby a push towards more democracy may develop. However, this is bound up with an intensive form of social control. In a religious sense there is often a greater role for the laity. Religion becomes less ritualistic and more community-oriented.[51]

- Diaspora as inclusive avant-garde: researchers use this term because diaspora communities often feature informal networks, personal initiatives of individuals regarding the politics of memory and the organising of cultural life, along with new identity models. Processes take place in small communities, which can have a formative power for the future of the respective societies of residence and origin.

4.5 Fresh insights for Protestant churches and theology

A relational concept of diaspora is crucial for the context of this study. It may help minority churches to discover the many and varied relations in which they live. They may then become aware of the enriching nature of this many-faceted and dynamic fabric of relations. This is not to deny the real difficulties of church diaspora existence, but a positive outlook on the future should be offered as well.

Minority churches could give more attention to the important role of the internal church public, of counterpublics, part-publics and the international church public in the way they see themselves and others see them. Other publics also have a high political importance because they create opportunities for participation and forums for forming opinion. That above all applies to situations of rapid social change. Public theology takes place in all the different forms of public.

Churches can hardly espouse the concept of hybrid identity in a religious sense since Protestant churches derive their norms from the Bible and fundamental Reformation convictions. Yet they can show more appreciation of the fact that Christians in diaspora situations have a deeper understanding of some aspects of biblical testimony and place neglected issues in the centre. Every theology is contextual in the sense that it relates to its social and cultural context in dialogue and engagement and, from this context, constantly rediscovers the many facets of the gospel.

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[50] For an overview, see Steven Vertovec, Transnationalism, London/New York, 2009, 146-148.

[51] See, in general, Alexander-Kenneth Nagel, Vom Paradigma zum Pragma. Religion und Migration in relationaler Perspektive, in: Sociologia internationalis 48 (2012), 221-246.

The concept of bridging-place may stimulate us to think about why and how minority churches are already places for bridge-building and dialogue and why they want to be such places. Church educational work (at schools, or voluntary work, e.g. with families or senior citizens) enables bridge-building between Protestant Christianity and secular life projects, between Christian interpretations of life and other religious orientations. Diaspora as a bridging-place also takes place non-verbally: through concerts, buildings or exhibitions.

Diaspora communities can become especially meaningful bridging-places for migrants where they find cultural refuge and, at the same time, grow into the new society of residence.

Minority churches serve as an inclusive avant-garde for other churches in that they have developed creative approaches to church work with very limited resources and have experience in making an effective contribution to society outside the institutional context.

The Bible, whose normative quality has already been mentioned (3.3), also provides potential ways of interpreting diaspora, enabling the insights outlined above to be brought into constructive conversation with the central normative frame of reference of Protestant Christianity. This will be illustrated in the next section.

We note that diaspora has become a central concept of research in cultural studies, anthropology, political science, history and sociology. This is precisely because it is not fraught or burdened by previous political theory. Analyses of diaspora communities undertaken in cultural studies mostly imply a normative interest in bringing out the opportunities and effectiveness of ‘diaspora consciousness’, by means of the models of interpretation used. The relational concept of diaspora developed by cultural studies contains considerable opportunities for the way churches and theology handle diaspora. This concept can allow minority churches to discover the complex and dynamic fabric of relations in which they live and to whose constructive shaping they can crucially contribute as places of bridge-building and dialogue. The contribution of a theological concept of diaspora to discourse in cultural studies and sociology consists in representing the reality of Christian diaspora.

Part B: Biblical understandings of diaspora and their historical contexts

Our investigations into the use of the concept of diaspora in cultural studies debates, in current documents from CPCE churches and in 19th century German-language theology have proved challenging. The concept is partly burdened by nationalism, it rarely occurs in current church documents and the concept of diaspora used in cultural studies is not directly applicable to all

Christian minority churches. In view of these findings, any theological use of the concept of diaspora in future will call for special justification. In fact, the concept of diaspora is indispensable because it is the only one that enables a specifically theological and biblically grounded reflection on minority experiences. There is no alternative biblical concept. In addition, it can be shown that the concept has great potential when it is understood in the light of recent exegetical research and insights from cultural studies. In Part B, we will now present exegetical and historical research on the biblical understanding of diaspora. Building on that, Part C will then set out a theology of diaspora based on a rediscovered and redefined concept of diaspora.

The discussion of the importance of diaspora in the biblical texts and related tradition is extensive and inspiring. This section discusses the tension between the traditional interpretation of diaspora and recent exegetical research on the topic. As we strive to articulate a theology of diaspora it will be helpful to keep this tension in mind.

5. Diaspora – self-interpretation between punishment and promise

There are two lines of recent research into the biblical content of Διασπορα.

One of these lines tries to interpret it as a *comforting concept*.[52] To quote Erich S. Gruen:[53] "Jews as a people require no territorial sanctuary. They are 'a people of the Book'. Their homeland resides in the text, not just the canonical Scriptures but an array of Jewish writings (...). The text becomes a 'portable Temple'. A geographical restoration is therefore superfluous, even subversive. To aspire to it even deflects focus from what really counts, the embrace of the text, its ongoing commentary and continuous interpretation. Diaspora, in short, is no burden; indeed, it is a virtue in the spread of the word."

The second line stresses the *negative content*. Diaspora turns into exile (גלוה), a bleak vision. Despair and bitterness characterise the state of Diaspora. The religious endeavours of the people focus on returning, acquiring a real home. Or, where this is not possible, at least a mythical home. Diaspora is a state to be overcome.[54] Drawing on Old Testament textual findings and Jewish-Hellenistic writings, Van Unnik interprets Diaspora as a definitely negative concept.[55]

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[52] Cf. particularly Martin Baumann, Diaspora (RGG^4 II, 827); also idem, Der Begriff der Diaspora als analytische Kategorie, Leipzig, 2000.

[53] Erich S. Gruen, Diaspora – Jews amidst Greeks and Romans, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 2004, 233; George Steiner, 'Our Homeland, the Text', in: Salmagundi, 66 (1985), 5; Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination, Berkley, 2000, 3-23.

[54] Willem Cornelis van Unnik, Das Selbstverständins der jüdischen Diaspora in der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit, Leiden, 1993.

6. Jewish Diaspora as the context of the early Christian church

In a comprehensive analysis of Jewish writings from the time of the Second Temple (530 B.C. to 70 A.D.), John J. Collins claims that the legacy of Hellenistic Diaspora Judaism does not come from Judaism but the early Christian church. Collins thinks that the Hellenised Jews did not manage to gain the respect of the Hellenistic world that they had hoped for.[56] Frantisek Abel takes this up and argues that the letters of the Apostle Paul to his congregations must be primarily understood in the light of what was going on in the Hellenist Diaspora.[57]

What can the two lines of interpretation of Jewish Diaspora presented above contribute to our understanding of the Diaspora situation of the early Christian church? To answer this question we need more details about the situation of the Jewish Diaspora that formed the background of the young Christian church. How did the Jews in the Hellenistic Diaspora interpret their identity? As a blessing or a curse, as a provisional arrangement to overcome, or as a permanent state of affairs with a positive outlook?

6.1 How the destruction of the Temple impacted on Diaspora

The destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. meant a deep caesura for the identity of Judaism in antiquity. This event is an important, if not the most important point of orientation in Jewish discussion of Diaspora. The Temple in Jerusalem suddenly no longer existed as a source of spiritual inspiration, a symbol of religious and national identity. The story goes that Judaism then had to reconstitute itself, finding new means of manifesting its religious existence and having to adapt to a life in Diaspora for an unlimited time. Recent research has corrected this narrative, although it sounds very plausible. Chaim Milikowsky argues that the early Midrash texts do not highlight the destruction of the Temple as a crucial turning point. Instead, these texts understand the exile more as a continuum that runs through the whole period of the Second Temple and points beyond it. The idea of the destruction of the Temple as a caesura does not appear until late rabbinical literature.[58] Erich Gruen makes an important observation, namely that the whole period of the Second Temple must be seen as a time of Diaspora. The number of Jews in the Diaspora from Italy to Iran was much greater than the number of those living in their Palestinian home, and certainly not all of them had ever been to Jerusalem.[59] It therefore seems likely that the destruction of this symbol had little effect on the self-understanding and identity construction of the Jews in the Diaspora.

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[55] Ibid, 89-147.

[56] John J. Collins, Between Athens and Jerusalem. Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids^2, 2000, 275.

[57] Frantisek Abel, Inakosť a jej konzekvencie v kontexte zvesti apoštola Pavl, in: Ondrej Prostredník, a kol. Cudzie nechceme, svoje si nedáme? Prekonávanie xenofóbie a antisemitizmu v náboženských textoch a praxi, Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave, 2013, 117.

Recent studies have also examined the conditions in which Jewish Diaspora communities lived at the time of the Second Temple. There is a broad research consensus describing Diaspora Jews as a large group spread around the Mediterranean, with good chances of economic development, high social status and the possibility of political participation.[60] Diaspora Jews faced the challenge of integrating these positive Diaspora experiences into their own religious memory, according to researchers. William Davies tries to interpret the difference between a territorial centring on Jerusalem and the lives of Jewish communities on the periphery. Although they felt the attraction of the centre as something very personal and powerful, Davies says, there was no territorial dimension for Diaspora Judaism.[61] Margaret Williams speaks of a balance between Diaspora assimilation and preserving an identity bound to the centre.[62]

6.2 Solidarity between the Centre and the Diaspora

With Erich Gruen, then, we underline that it is misleading to presuppose a dichotomy between Diaspora as a mutually exclusive positive or negative experience. The members of Hellenistic Diaspora Judaism were not eyewitnesses to the destruction of the Temple and this gave them no cause to develop a special theology of Diaspora. The idea of preferring home over diaspora, or vice versa, is more of a modern assertion that still finds a strong response in modern diaspora research.[63]

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[58] Chaim Milikowsky, Notions of Exile, Subjugation and Return in Rabbinic Literature, in: Exile. Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Conceptions, Leiden, 1997, 265-295.

[59] Gruen, Diaspora (see note 53), 233

[60] M. Stern, Jewish People I, in: Shmuel Safari and M. Stern (eds.), The Jewish People in the First Century, vol. 2 (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum, Section One), Philadelphia, 1976, 117-183; Emil Schürer, The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ III.1, London/New York, 2014, 1-176; Irina Levinskaya, The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting, Grand Rapids, 1996, 127-193.

[61] William David Davies, The Territorial Dimension of Judaism, Philadelphia, 1992, 116-126;

[62] Margaret H. Williams, Jews and Jewish Communities in the Roman Empire, in: Janet Huskinson, (ed.) Experiencing Rome. Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire, Routledge, London/New York, 2000, 305-333.

Gruen’s attempted compromise in interpreting the concept of Diaspora can be summed up in the following sentences. It becomes clear that despite the strong idealistic bond to Palestine and Jerusalem, the Diaspora Jews developed an unequivocal loyalty to their countries of Diaspora and kept this up. The Jews in the Mediterranean were not apologetic and did not experience their Diaspora situation as shaming. They did not even describe themselves as Diaspora; there is no evidence for the idea that they were separated from the centre and led only fragmentary, incomplete lives. Loyalty to the country of their birth in the Diaspora and piety towards Jerusalem were completely compatible. The symbols of exile and expulsion no longer oppressed Diaspora Jews at the time of the Second Temple, which is why they developed a sense of identity in which Jerusalem and Diaspora were interwoven with each other.

6.3 Diaspora as a bridge between cult and text

While Gruen mentions the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, but rejects its interpretation as a caesura in the self-perception of Diaspora Jews, Ra’anan S. Boustan presents a different, though matching set of arguments. He points to texts which rabbinic literature calls eye-witness reports of the viewing of temple furniture (τὰ ἅγια σκεύη) in Rome.[64]

These eye-witness reports can be found in the first strata of rabbinic literature. They stem from rabbis who claim to have seen, in Rome, the seven-branched menorah, the curtain and various garments of the high priests. Rabbi Eleazar ben Yose and Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai, two rabbinic authorities who lived in the second century B.C., are quoted in this connection. Their phrases are almost identical and open the door to a broader discussion on the significance and limits of visual access to temple furniture.

The rabbinic eye-witness reports serve as a counterweight to the destruction of the Temple, and the related transfer of Temple furniture (τὰ ἅγια σκεύη) to Rome. The reports underline the value of seeing, and the physical activity of travel. Singling out the Temple objects in the reports nuances the traditional picture given by rabbis in the Jewish Diaspora after the destruction of the Temple. According to this picture, the text and the book take on the role of the cult and cultic objects. When interpreting the Diaspora we can certainly speak, albeit cautiously, of the importance of mobility and the bond to the cultic centre in Jerusalem. This hypothesis is supported by the idea of rabbinical mobility as a bridge to overcome the distance between the Diaspora and Palestine, and also by the display of holy objects in Rome.

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[63] Gruen (see note 53) here refers to Urbach and Petuchowski. Ephraim E. Urbach, Israel Within World Jewry, in: Moshe Davis, World Jewry and the State of Israel, New York 1977, 217-235; Jakob Josef Petuchowski, Judaism 9, (1960), 17-28. Quoted in Gruen, Diaspora, 342, no. 20.

[64] Ra’anan S. Boustan, The Dislocation of the Temple Vessels. Mobile Sanctity and Rabbinic Rhetorics of Space, in: Ra’anan S. Boustan/Oren Kosansky/Marina Rustow (eds.), Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History. Authority, Diaspora, Tradition, Philadelphia, 2011, 135-146.

7. Diaspora as existence of the New Testament church

The New Testament text is very sparing in its use of the term διασπορα. The Greek text of John's Gospel (Jn 7:35) mentions the diaspora (dispersion) of the Greeks. The Letter of James is addressed to "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (Jas 1:1, NRSV). The expression is used similarly in 1 Pet 1:1 to name the addressees. We find the term twice in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8:4 and 11:19) in a verbal form. Persecution drove Apostles and believers into different countries. It is striking that Paul does not use this concept at all, nor do the Apostolic Fathers. However, Justin Martyr (100–165), one of the first Apologists, speaks of diaspora in his *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* (113,3) in order to polemically differentiate between the Christian church and the Jewish Diaspora.[65] We will now briefly analyse these texts.

7.1 Diaspora as mission among non-Jews

The reference in John 7:35 indicates that the author of John's Gospel was familiar with the use of the term διασπορα to mean the areas in which Greek-speaking Jews lived.[66] Some authors also think that it might mean Christian mission in the Jewish Diaspora. The author of John's Gospel is then reflecting on the experience of spreading the Christian message. It possibly means a mission not only among members of Hellenistic Judaism, but also among other groups who were outside the Jewish Diaspora and called Greeks.[67] However, the passage does not refer to ethnic Greeks, as is shown by a linguistic analysis of this sentence in the whole context of John's Gospel. In fact, John generally uses Ἕλληνϵς to denote non-Jews (Gentiles),[68] instead of the usual term, τὰ ἔθνη. Consequently, Diaspora in John 7:35 must be understood in the context of mission among non-Jews, which was already reality for the addressees of this Gospel.

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[65] Justin, Dialog mit dem Juden Trypho (Bibliothek der Kirchenväter 33), Kempten, 1917.

[66] Johannes Schneider, Das Evangelium nach Johannes, Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament, Berlin, 1985, 168. See also Harald Hegermann, Das hellenistische Judentum, in: Johannes Leipoldt, Walter Grundmann (ed.), Umwelt des Christentums, vol. 1, Berlin, 1985, 292-345.

[67] Ernst Haenchen, Das Johannesevangelium, Tübingen, 1980, S. 357. The possibility that non-Jews are meant here is discussed by Karl Ludwig Schmidt, DIASPORA - διασπορά , in: ThWNT vol.2, 102. In footnote 12 he point out that the Hellenised Jews in Acts are called Ἑλληνιστάς HELLENISTAS.

[68] J. Ramsey Michaels, The Gospel of John, Grand Rapids, 2010, 457-458.

7.2 Diaspora as a time-bound entity

The interpretation of the use of διασπορα in James 1:1 and 1 Peter 1:1 depends on deciding who the addressees were. If these letters were sent to Jewish Christians then the word is used in the usual way to mean the Jewish Diaspora. If they were sent to Gentile Christians, however, then a figurative, “Christian” meaning must be assumed.[69] Biblical scholars have discussed this question very extensively.

In the case of the Letter of James, some authors claim it is about Christians in a diaspora situation.[70] Generally, the addressees were understood to be the dispersed people of God promised by the Prophets (Hos 2:2; Jer 3:18; Ez 37:19; Ps Sol 17:44); this was the true people of God, consisting of Jews and Gentiles (Rev 7:4-8; Gal 6:16).[71] Sophie Laws clarifies the addressee situation, and, together with James Dunn, speaks of the God-fearing (σϵβόμϵνοι). The addressees accordingly did not belong to Judaism – they had a strong tendency towards monotheism, but had not become proselytes. So we should imagine precisely the group that is also often mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (Cornelius in 10:2; Lydia in 16:14; Titus Justus in 18:7; and “others” in 13:16; 13:26; 17:4; 17:17). For this group in the area regarded as Diaspora by the Jews, the Christian message was just as attractive as the Jewish religion. Its characteristics were monotheism, high ethical standards and reference to Scripture, yet without the social disadvantages entailed by full adherence to the Jewish community.[72] It looks as though the Christian community understood itself as the true Israel of the last days. The idea of the twelve tribes is raised several times in the New Testament (Mt 14:28; Lk 22:30; Rev 7:4-8). The Apostolic Fathers, too, expressed the way the Christian community saw itself as a time-bound entity in a certain space. However, rather than using the expression Διασπορά they described Christians as guests in Rome, Corinth, etc. (1 Clement; Polycarp).

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[69] Schmidt, DIASPORA - διασπορά (see note 67), 103.

[70] Jiři Mrázek, Bláznovství víry podle Jakuba. Výklad Jakubovy epištoly, Prague, 2006, 14. Mrázek also thinks that the Letter of James dates back to before 70 A.D.

[71] Horst Balz/Wolfgang Schrage, Die Briefe des Jakobus, Petrus, Johannes und Judas (Das Neue Testament Deutsch 10), Göttingen, 1985, 14.

[72] Sophie Laws, A Commentary On The Epistle Of James (Harper’s New Testament Commentaries), San Francisco 1980, 37; James D.G. Dunn, Unity and Diversity in the New Testament, London 1977, 239-266. Scot McKnight makes another proposal. He thinks that the author of the Letter of James stems from Jewish Messianic community and thus sees the twelve tribes as ethnic Jews who are part of the Apostle-led Messianic communities. Then the restoration of Israel must be understood in the spirit of Amos 9:11-12. James uses these words to speak to the assembly of apostles (Acts 15:13-21). Scot McKnight, The Letter of James, Grand Rapids, 2011, 65-67.

7.3 Diaspora as a theological statement about election and distance

The discussion about the addressees of 1 Peter reveals a similar tension. The mention of Diaspora in 1 Peter 1:1 led the Church Fathers, Erasmus, Calvin and many recent exegetical studies to suspect that the addressees were among the Jewish Christians.[73] Yet the biblical reference to the unholy past of the addressees and their conversion (1 Pet 1:14; 1:18; 2:10; 2:20; 3:6; 4:3) has shown this opinion to be untenable.[74] The mention of the geographical names of landscapes or provinces also suggests that the Pauline mission fields are included. A closer look at the geographic areas shows that the group of addressees is actually not precise and almost utopianly vast. That makes the claim that this is a theological statement much more likely. The writer means all Christians living in dispersion in the five provinces.

An important point for the interpretation of Διασπορα here is its link to the two attributes in 1 Peter 1, addressing “the exiles of the Dispersion (…) who have been chosen (…)” (ἐκλϵκτοῖς παρϵπιδήμοις). This indicates the situation of the addressee group. They are in a new situation, were elected by baptism in Christ and are consequently separated from society.[75] Διασπορα is then the state caused by divine election and makes the elect into refugees in dispersion. That means then that the addressees are not Jews in Jewish Diaspora, but Christians as such.[76] “Owing to special election, Christians are a select group who (as 1 Peter continues to explain), through a transformed life placing them at a distance from their surroundings and in conflict with them, are thus alienated from the usual adherences, and have to live as a scattered and isolated minority.”[77]

In this context, Margaret Aymer suggests that the New Testament scriptures should be understood as testimonies about migrating communities. As such, they are not meant to be used as a fortress against a changing world but as guidance to understand the world better, in order to be able to decide correctly between adaptation and protest in individual situations.[78]

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[73] Norbert Brox writes at length on this in: Der Erste Petrusbrief (Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 21), Zürich, 1979, 24-34.

[74] Brox mentions that Augustine and Luther had already thought these were Gentile Christians, ibid., 25, note 33.

[75] Ibid., 56.

[76] Balz/Schrage, Briefe (see note 71), 68. Also John Norman Davidson Kelly, A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude, New York, 1969, 40; Karl Hermann Schelkle, Die Petrusbriefe. Der Judasbrief (HThK 13/2), Freiburg, 1970, 19.

[77] Brox, Erste Petrusbrief (see note 73), 56.

[78] Margaret Aymer, Sojourners' Truths. The New Testament as Diaspora Space (The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center 41) Atlanta, 2015, 1-18.

The concepts of election, foreignness and dispersion, which have a distinct meaning in Jewish tradition, are used here in a double sense. On the one hand, they deliberately express continuity with Jewish and biblical tradition; at the same time, however, they move away from the Jewish self-understanding. Diaspora in early Christian writings increasingly means a temporary state. Clarification is needed on why the concept tended to be positively connotated in the Jewish-Hellenistic context, but more negatively in early Christian literature. Christian existence in the Dispersion is defined by the expectation of the imminent parousia. Because parousia is a question for the near future, Christians are not meant to adapt to their environment or have firm links with their surroundings (Rm 12:2). Roots in a geographical home are to be replaced by a transcendent hope (Phil 3:20).

The interpretation of the concept in New Testament literature is consequently characterised by internal tension. But the development runs counter to Judaism. The life of the young Christian church is also interpreted as a Diaspora existence. Soon, however, probably in an effort to detach themselves from the Jewish Synagogue, Christians stop using the concept of Diaspora. The matter remains. The Christians live in dispersion but think this will be temporary, not forever. The positive interpretation of Diaspora in Hellenistic Jewish communities as justification of a permanent existence in dispersion seems to become a problem in early Christian apologetics. Terms like ‘stranger’ or ‘guest’ become substitutes for it in early Christian literature.

A closer consideration of the use of the term ‘Diaspora’ in Hellenistic Judaism would therefore give us a broader understanding of it and a new perspective on how it has functioned in Protestant theology to date. Such consideration could help us to understand the rooting of the concept in Jewish tradition and perceive its transformation in early Christian tradition from a new and enriched perspective.

We must therefore conclude with a question: how can reflecting on a theology of diaspora benefit from the Diaspora interpretations of Jewish literature about the Second Temple? Judaism at the time enjoyed at least phases of relative prosperity through a comparatively high social status and corresponding political influence. Is that positive Diaspora experience not similar to the historical experience of many Protestants? Is it not much more appropriate to interpret the diaspora existence of Protestant churches in the 21st century as a fulfilment of the universal claim of the gospel, making Protestant Christians not winners or losers of history but an integral part of a world loved and saved by God?

Part C: Diaspora as a relationally focused concept – 21st century diaspora theology

8. The relationally focused concept of diaspora

We have seen that new possibilities for a contemporary theology of diaspora arise when church-specific and biblical understandings of diaspora identities (sections 3 and 5) are brought into conversation with transdisciplinary research on diaspora identities in cultural studies, history, religious studies and sociology. The goal is not to declare a non-theological concept of diaspora to be a category of theological interpretation. Rather it is to articulate a theological concept of diaspora that relates critically and productively to non-theological understandings of diaspora. In this way, the concept of diaspora, which is burdened by phases of problematic usage in recent church history (section 2), can be filled with new theological content in keeping with biblical testimony.

At the same time, the defining of a theological concept of diaspora is always based on the insight that the search for a certain meaning or a function for diaspora must be primarily left to those – individually or as a church – who find themselves in diaspora. It is a “faith decision in view of a concrete historical situation”,[79] as Austrian theologian Wilhelm Dantine put it. For that reason, this engagement with diaspora in the effort to find an appropriate understanding is a kind of identity check by CPCE churches (section 3) and also a theological offering. The concept of diaspora developed here understands diaspora as creating fullness of relations. This is a form of discipleship. A relationally focused concept of diaspora can be based on the biblical use of the Greek word (διασπείρω), which describes a structural relation (see section 5). While the concept of minority church or minority situation reduces this wealth of relations to a numerical ratio and tends to imply a deficiency (section 3), the strength of a relationally focused concept of diaspora could consist in highlighting the polyphony of the life relations of communities in diaspora and creating them in the first place (section 10).

With such an understanding of diaspora - open to each and every relation(ship) - we will, in the following, discover the many and varied relations that characterise congregations in diaspora situations. In discipleship, these diaspora congregations are on the road together with other Christians worldwide. This journey must be located in the most varied life connections arising for communities in diaspora. The special form of these polyphonic life relations can be understood as discipleship in the form of a “Protestant adventure in a non-Protestant environment”.[80] So if we experience the environment in which we are placed as strange or different, that may help us to be daring and see it as a challenge.

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[79] Dantine, Wilhelm, Stadt auf dem Berge? in: Protestantisches Abenteuer. Beträge und Standortbestimmung in der evangelischen Kirche in der Diaspora Europas, ed. Michael Bünker, Innsbruck, 2001, 48-89.

A relationally focused concept of diaspora is embedded in thinking on the nature of the church, which in multiple ways is conceived of as a relational event. The study “The Church of Jesus Christ” (1994) indicates the possibility of a relational ecclesiology when it distinguishes between the ground, form and shape of the church. The ground of the church is God’s action in Jesus Christ, meaning his creative, saving, calling and perfecting relationship with people. The church realises its form as a community of people founded in God, who want to live from, and trust in, this relation to God. The mission of the church being “to witness to all humankind, in word and deed, to the gospel of the coming of the Kingdom of God”,[81] it links the church to the world in many different ways.

Such an ecclesiology and its relationally focused concept of diaspora helps to express the ambivalent experiences congregations have in minority situations, which are basic for the existence of Christian faith. Examples of this ambivalence are the biblical sayings about being the church *in* the world but not *of* the world (Jn 17:16), or being the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5:13f). It may be summed up in the phrase ‘church in a strange land – strangeness of the church’.

We will now attempt to define a new theology of diaspora (section 9), starting with a description of this ambivalence. Then we will show, using practical examples, how the concept of diaspora can help churches to interpret their life and action in relationships (section 10). These remarks on Protestant life in diaspora as public witness to the gospel lead into thinking about how a theology of diaspora should be developed as a form of public theology (section 11). Sections 9 to 11 therefore link theological discourse on the concept of diaspora with current diaspora discourses in other disciplines and, in addition, with the discussion about public theology.

9. Church in a strange land – the strangeness of the church

One thing common to all Reformation movements is that they understood themselves as new beginnings or came to understand themselves that way. Different people or groups felt called, for reasons of theology or the practice of piety, to break with their institutional church home in order to preserve the pure word of God, and deliberately set out towards creative understandings and implementations of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world. We could consequently also say: encouraged by the Bible, they dared to go into ‘a strange land’. There, in the course of this venture, they gradually came up with completely new ideas for fashioning the church and society, which then became part of their new religious and sociocultural home. In short, through the complex reshaping processes that accompanied the European Reformations and in which their supporters participated directly or indirectly, the church gained a new home in a strange land.

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[80] Ibid., 63.

[81] The Church of Jesus Christ. The Contribution of the Reformation to Ecumenical Dialogue on Church Unity, in: Leuenberger Hefte 1, edited by Michael Bünker and Martin Friedrich, Leipzig, ^{2}2012, 105f.

The underlying development processes were by no means linear, as we know. Rather they also depended on attitudes towards those parts of the social environment that did not go along with those new beginnings, or took other paths to follow what they had recognised as being divine will. While one group of Reformation movements saw themselves as firmly rooted in the world and strove to reach out to society as a whole, others found their destiny precisely in turning their back on the world as they knew it. The ambivalence of the semantics - that in Judeo-Christian tradition from its beginnings embraced terms like ‘setting out’, ‘pilgrimage’, ‘strange land’, ‘home’ or, indeed, ‘dispersion’[82] – is also felt in the historical Reformations, in their forms and in their effects. They all began their journey by leaving their church home and were churches of God ‘in a strange land’. However, not all of them – if indeed any – aspired to develop into a church that was strange to the world around it.

This impact is observable not only in the first few decades of Reformation history. It accompanied the development of the first European, later worldwide Protestantisms, precisely because it is inherent in the Protestant self-understanding. Finally, from the midst of the first forms of Reformation church life, groups soon sprang up that represented certain Reformation ideas and saw themselves called, or forced, to distance themselves from the surrounding majority Protestantisms. In short, to set out into a strange land.

The study “The Church of Jesus Christ” expresses the challenges to the churches in minority situations as follows:

“Where churches of the Reformation exist as minority churches, the Reformation insight of the claim of the gospel on the whole of life has resulted in a distinction from the majority of society. Such delimitation can be beneficial for witnessing and can be experienced as liberation. It then results in a 'non-conformist' form of life which claims to have the character of witness. It is true, however, that in such cases it often becomes necessary to distinguish this 'non-conformist' practice of witness from a sectarianism unfaithful to the Reformation which can withdraw from constructive engagement for the whole."[83]

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[82] Cf. here Part B: Biblical understandings of Diaspora and their historical contexts.
Translator’s note: In the following, the German original dwells on *fremd/Fremde/Fremdheit*, for which the best idiomatic equivalents (also usable figuratively) seem to come from Ex 2:22 “I have been a stranger in a strange land” (KJV). Bible quotes are generally from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

9.1 Church in a strange land

The idea of the church living in a strange land is biblical and can be traced through the ages of Christian history.[84] The Old Testament contains many narratives about the experience of being a stranger. Called by God and endowed with God's promise that he will be a blessing, Abraham moves from his home into a foreign land (Gen 12). The story of Moses is also about moving around in foreign parts. Born abroad in Egypt and adopted by the daughter of Pharaoh, he is not able to reach home in the Promised Land, despite all his years of wandering. The Exodus event generally raises the issue of the life of God's people in the wilderness, i.e. in a strange land, and also produces ethical precepts. Exodus 23:9 reads, "You shall not oppress a resident alien [stranger, KJV]; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."

In the New Testament, living in a strange land is a characteristic of those who believe in Jesus Christ. Referring to Abraham as a model in faith, the Letter to the Hebrews underlines that faith makes us strangers "as in a foreign land" (Heb 11:9). 1 Peter also speaks of Christians as "aliens and exiles" (1 Pet 2:11). They apparently understood themselves as a "congregation of the last days",[85] that was called upon to proclaim the time of salvation that had dawned with Christ's resurrection. The community that Jesus wants to build and that is withdrawn from the power of death (Mt 16,18f) has an eschatological character. The early Christians understood themselves as people living under the sole lordship of the risen Christ and, by contrast with other people, already in the last days. Through the "spirit of holiness" sent by Christ as the coming Messiah, they are the "Messianic community".[86] Paul calls them "saints" (Rm 1:7; Phil 4:21; 1 Cor 6:1 and often).

Christologically, the relation between church and being a stranger in a strange land takes on a special meaning. The church, that is not identical with Christ but related to him, is fundamentally different from the world and destined by him to be one. Paul makes that clear when he speaks of the Body of Christ, with which the believers have an individual and thereby collective relationship (1 Cor 10:16b-17).[87] With Jesus Christ being characterised as the stranger to be welcomed in Mt 25:35 ("I was a stranger and you welcomed me") the concept of stranger takes on a Christological dimension, which argues not only for opening the churches to newcomers but also for energetically assisting new arrivals, e.g. refugees.

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[83] The Church of Jesus Christ (see note 81), 124.

[84] The "church in a strange land" has been much discussed recently, particularly in the Roman Catholic Church. Cf. Medard Kehl, Kirche in der Fremde. Zum Umgang mit der gegenwärtigen Situation der Kirche, SdZ 118 (1993), 507-520.

[85] Werner Georg Kümmel, Kirchenbegriff und Geschichtsbewusstsein in der Urgemeinde und bei Jesus, Zürich/ Uppsala, 1943, 10.

[86] Ibid., 18.

In the introduction to this section we explained how the idea of the church in a strange land connects with the Reformation. Furthermore, Luther's Two Kingdoms doctrine distinguishes between the spiritual and the secular realm, not in order to demonise the world but so that both, church and worldly authority, represent the two forms of God's reign. For Calvin, the true church is that of the elect, whom God alone knows. The statement in Hebrews 11:23 that believers are "strangers and pilgrims" (KJV) in this world applies particularly to them (Inst. II, 10, 13, 15).

In view of these findings, the feeling of being in a strange land has accompanied Christian churches and communities from the beginning. In their origins, the Christian communities have been regarded - frequently in fact, but certainly in literature - as being in a world foreign and in some cases even hostile to them. 1 Peter 2:11 describes this minority situation as that of "aliens and exiles". This is how Christians saw themselves,[88] having to suffer more and more from defamation, exclusion and persecution due to their 'difference'.[89] In the second century, a Christian author summed up the increasingly paradoxical situation of Christians as follows: on the one hand, they are "not different from other people through home country or language and customs. They do not dwell in their own cities, use a different language and lead a peculiar life". On the other hand, they dwell in their home country "only as second-class citizens; they fulfil all the tasks like citizens and suffer all burdens like strangers; every foreign country is their homeland and every homeland a foreign country".[90]

If we jump from early Christianity into the recent past and our present, it is striking that the church and religion are foreign bodies not only in declared atheist states such as the former Soviet Union, China or North Korea, in which anti-religious propaganda was and still is common, but also in secular states. Many minority churches and individual communities were able to preserve Christian life only under great difficulties and with huge sacrifices, for decades, in particular under Communist rule in Europe. Many Christians had to accept personal disadvantages in order to confess their Christian faith, e.g. being excluded from certain educational opportunities and professions. It was possible to save many specific traditions from oblivion thanks to high commitment and loyal perseverance. People now find it all the more painful if, under conditions of freedom and pluralism, such traditions are no longer appreciated and continued by the next generation. Openness for new things often goes hand in hand with mourning the loss of beloved traditions. The many Protestant diaspora churches in the whole of Europe contribute to its cultural wealth and the diversity of Christian life. In a Europe of the regions, this diversity remains extremely important. CPCE wants to bring out this diversity of denominational and regional forms of expression of Protestant faith. That happens e.g. in the CPCE songbook “Colours of Grace”.

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[87] See the relationally focused concept of diaspora, explained in section 8.

[88] Ernst Dassmann, Weltflucht oder Weltverantwortung. Zum Selbstverständnis frühchristlicher Gemeinden und zu ihrer Stellung in der spätantiken Gesellschaft (JBTh 7), Neukirchen, 1992, 189-208, here 197.

[89] Christoph G. Müller, Diaspora - Herausforderung und Chance. Anmerkungen zum Glaubensprofil der Adressaten des 1. Petrusbriefs (SNTU 32), Linz, 2007, 67-88, here 78.

[90] Letter to Diognetus, 5.1 and 5.5.

The French system of *laïcité* – strict separation of church and state - makes it hard for the churches to gain a hearing in the general public. Protestantism, that has always been a kind of absolute minority alternative to dominant Catholicism, organised itself in the French Protestant Federation of Churches right at the start of the strict separation of church and state in 1905. It today represents two thirds of Protestant churches and associations with the most varied Protestant and Free Church emphases, including the biggest Protestant denominations in France (Lutheran, Reformed, Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal). It contributes to a fruitful dialogue between these different branches of Protestantism and represents them in contacts with the government and ministries, public institutions and the media. This close alliance is unique in Europe.

Another example of the church “in a strange land” is migrant churches. In 2004 migrant churches made up 10 percent of French Protestants but their share is continually growing, above all in big cities and the Paris region, in which Sunday services are held in 60 languages.[91] A prominent representative is the Communauté des Eglises d’expression africaine de France, a community of African churches founded in 1990; it has over 50 local congregations with a total of 15,000 members. A common feature of migrant congregations is that they have strict views of faith and morality and frequently look down on the historical Lutheran and Reformed congregations. These are “now also becoming minorities in the minority (...), caught in the double bind between the discreet role they have learned to play in French culture and the courage needed to evangelise" (Parmentier, 2015).[92] Migrant churches have three major concerns:[93] communicating a religious and cultural identity, giving their members diaconal and social support, and evangelising their new home country, France. Since they live "not only in diaspora but also in a strange land" (Parmentier, 2015) the question is whether they can retain their identity after years in their host country. It also remains to be seen whether they and the churches of historical Protestantism in France will remain 'strangers' or whether they can form a community of solidarity in view of the diaspora situation in a secular society.

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[91] Bernard Coyault, Un voyage inattendu au cœur de l’Eglise universelle. Panorama des Eglises issues de l’immigration en région parisienne et en France (Information - Evangélisation 5), Lyon, 2004, 52.

9.2 The strangeness of the church

With respect to the strangeness of the church, we can make a triple distinction: it is a *constitutive* feature, a *consequence* of secularism in the modern world and a possible *result* of the church's problematic self-isolation.

1. Strangeness as a constitutive feature of the church

The feature of strangeness can be traced back theologically to the difference between the world and the church. The church is in the world, but not of the world (Jn 17:16). It has a heavenly home (2 Cor 5, Phil 3). Strangeness is also a peculiarity of the biblical message, that proclaims the scandal of the cross (1 Cor 1), the message of which stands in contrast to the wisdom of the world. Being church does not mean living primarily for itself, but being there for others.[94] Reports of present-day diaspora experiences do not support the idea of a church that only reaches to the church door and not far beyond. In other words, instead of focusing on being different (*communauté de distinction*) such a church wants to be a community that reaches out to others (*communauté de rapprochement*).

2. Strangeness as a consequence of growing secularism and pluralism

The fact that the church seems strange is also an expression of its ritual diversity and its concern to set itself apart not only from the world but also from other churches. Here there are also

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[92] Elisabeth Parmentier, Evangelische Migrantenkirchen in Frankreich. Eine Herausforderung an die einheimischen Diasporagemeinden (lecture at Diaspora Conference in Neudietendorf, 5.3.15, typescript).

[93] Bernard Coyault, Les Églises issues de l'immigration dans le paysage protestant français. De la 'mission en retour' à la mission commune ? (Information - Evangélisation 5), Lyon, 2004, 3-18.

[94] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Resistance and Submission: Letters and Papers from Prison, Fortress Press, 2015: "The church is the church only when it exists for others."

"cultural and historical factors which can have either a positive or a negative impact on the church's faith, life and witness".[95] The strangeness of the church is also a consequence of the changes currently underway, which can probably best be described as processes of religious transformation, and which certainly do not imply a falling away from religion. It is merely becoming clear that claims on and expressions of Christianity no longer go via the classical, authoritative means of communication, i.e. the institutional churches. One consequence is that general knowledge about religion as such and about existing faiths can no longer be taken for granted. This is a considerable obstacle to a differentiated and competent interaction with religion and religions in civil society. Furthermore, the related immense shifts in sociocultural attitudes and mentalities in the last few years and decades have reduced Protestantism in Europe to a minority almost everywhere.

That applies – but not only - to secular France, where historical Protestantism is facing the challenge of rethinking its relationship to society and to its history and heritage, in order to be church in a new, mediating and thereby more communicative way.[96]

3. Strangeness as a result of the church's problematic self-isolation

The fact that the different and diverse churches are foreign to so many people is also a trend for which the churches are partly responsible themselves. Ecclesiologically, this has developed out of the self-understanding of a church that estranges itself and withdraws from the world. This estrangement may take different forms. The church may demonise the world, concentrate on internal retreat, only exist for itself (as a religious elite), isolate itself or go along with and support the idea of election while rejecting the non-elected. However it may happen, with estrangement from the world, the church contradicts the idea of God loving the world (Jn 3:16) and the mission entrusted to it. Hermeneutically, estrangement from the world means stressing a purely dogmatic relation to the Bible, disregarding the world of the reader/listener. That is frequently accompanied by a purely reproductive function of dogma. The latter is expressed liturgically in rigid forms of language which few people find meaningful nowadays, and in codes that are hard to understand. People who come from 'outside' have a hard time feeling at home in such a church.

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[95] The Church – Towards a Common Vision. Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (WCC Publications), Geneva, 2013, para. 34.

[96] French quotes from Laurent Schlumberger, Etre Eglise dans un monde qui bouge. Défis et opportunités pour notre mission aujourd'hui, in: Vivre l'Eglise. Le conseil presbytéral. Un guide, Paris/Lyon, 2013, 25 (online).

9.3 The concept of strangeness for a theology of diaspora

The concept of ‘strangeness’ can be understood as a dimension of diasporic existence. A church that is aware not only of its dispersion and its minority existence but also of its strangeness, makes it clear that it must always be a matter of finding a *bridge* between our own (church) language and the language of the respective society, in order to do justice to the church’s mission to preach the gospel in public. The concept of bridge always involves an ambivalent experience, denoting strangeness both in the sense of separateness and of connectedness. The bridging role involves connecting separated elements without abolishing their difference. In a specific case, that would be the start of a relational understanding of one’s own minority situation enabling the constructive interpretation of a relationally focused concept of diaspora (see sections 4 and 8). The ‘church in a strange land’ would become a ‘church in relations’, which is the topic of the next section.

10. Church in relations – Protestant life in diaspora as public witness to the gospel

Being a Protestant Christian means living in the light of the gospel of the “free and unconditional grace of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ”.[97] Churches and congregations, scattered in cities and in the countryside, live by this gospel and are witnesses to its life-giving message.[98]

How is ‘Protestant life’ properly described? The Leuenberg Agreement puts it in pointed, demanding terms: “This [gospel] message makes Christians free for responsible service in the world and also ready to suffer in that service. They know that God’s will, as demand and gift, embraces the whole world. They stand up for justice and peace on earth between individuals and nations. In consequence, they must join with other people in seeking appropriate rational criteria and play their part in applying these criteria. They do so in confidence that God sustains the world, and as those who are accountable to him.”[99]

An essential dimension of Protestant life is, accordingly, an orientation to the whole of life in its many different relation(ship)s – to social reality, as well, and the public environment of congregations and churches. The gospel claim is to be also heard and accepted outside the church; and this public claim of the gospel is the reason for the public mission of the church.[100]

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[97] Agreement between Reformation Churches in Europe (Leuenberg Agreement), edited by Michael Bünker and Martin Friedrich, Leipzig, ^{2}2012, Article 4.

[98] Cf. Helmut Santer, Die Bedeutsamkeit der Bibel für evangelische Christen in der Diaspora, in: Die Evangelische Diaspora 72, Leipzig, 2003, 11-28, here 21: “We have become reserved about what we should say based on the gospel, and wonder at the fading Protestant profile. The profile of a church disappears with the declining connection with the gospel.”

[99] Leuenberg Agreement (see note 7), article 11.

Taking up this public mission is not a matter of the power and position of churches in society, but of living in the light of the gospel in witness and service, and following Christ who ministered to the world and sacrificed himself for it (Phil 2:7). Witness and service also describe the relation of the church to the world: as service to others and as overcoming borders between ‘us’ and ‘strangers’, as a ministry of peace and reconciliation.

Church action is therefore effective when this message has an effect in the social environment and possibly in an area that is quite different and foreign to us, nationally or in terms of religious and other beliefs. In the early church, “(...) cultural and ethnic differences were relativised, both in the way individual believers saw themselves and in the way the Christian church as a whole saw itself. (…) Living ‘in Christ’ meant: in the realm of the new existence determined by the Christ event, the old compulsions of separation and differentiation that affected social life had lost their ability to determine historical existence.”[101] In this spirit, churches and congregations – independently of their size and present importance – play an important role in society today to overcome tensions and shape a constructive way of living together in their environment. In accordance with this role, they invite people to “walk in newness of life” (Rm 6:4) and thus talk about the gospel in words and actions.

“The proclamation of the Word of God is a public event: every worship service has its share in this public communication of the gospel.”[102] The question here is: How do churches express and communicate this public claim? In other words, what are the general conditions of church activity in local congregations? What structures, what organisational goals and what activities support and foster communicative action? And what goals and activities tend to impair it? Which of them are really ‘easy access’ in a good sense, open and inviting, stressing the service character of the church and its participatory dimensions?

These questions are along the lines of the basic conviction that the church, according to Protestant understanding, is not primarily an institution. Rather, it is a community and an event:

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[100] That follows from the “great commission” (Mt 28:18-20) and God’s love for the “world” (Jn 3:16).

[101] Church–People–State–Nation. A Protestant contribution on a difficult relationship. Report of the discussions of the South and Southeast Europe Regional Group of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship; in: Leuenberg Texts 7, ed. Wilhelm Hüffmeier, *Frankfurt am Main,* 2002, 141.

[102] Anchor in Time. Protestant Worship in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe between Conservation and Change. A study based on case studies, eds Michael Bünker and Michael Martin, Vienna, 2012, 6.7.

it is a congregation in which the Word of God is preached and the sacraments administered. In other words, “the foundation of the church is God’s action in Jesus Christ to save humankind”.[103]

Diaspora churches are churches that traditionally live in a minority situation; they have long formed a minority among other denominations, in their nation, and in their region. But also where churches in the past had a position in the centre of society, many of them are today losing this role for a variety of reasons, and slipping more and more into a diaspora situation.

In all the throes of change, however, we must hold on to the insight that church life from the gospel in diaspora does not differ essentially from church life in other situations and contexts.[104] The specific problems and challenges, including the opportunities and potentials, differ according to the church situation. Dwindling and frustrated congregations, on the one hand, and attractive and lively congregations, on the other, can be found in big mainline churches as well as in diaspora contexts.[105]

Sociological analyses of growing congregations give evidence of this.[106] There is no proof that some congregations are more capable of growing than others due to their situation, surroundings or their demographic composition. There are at most certain signs and features indicating a certain predisposition for successful growth, but they do not necessarily occur in all ‘successful’ congregations. “And – that is the encouraging thing about the investigation…growth can happen everywhere,” the authors simply state.[107]

Church life from the gospel in diaspora – this expression describes the tension between the identity and role of a minority church as an actor in society. Of course, the presupposition is that church activity in the general public is significant when it visibly witnesses to the life of the gospel and brings out the church’s true nature.[108] In keeping with this insight, we will now give a few examples of practical church action in a diaspora situation that highlight the internal richness of the church and ‘Protestant life’.

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[103] The Church of Jesus Christ (see note 81), 104.

[104] In large and in tiny congregations people depend on the presence of the Holy Spirit to blow where it will. In diaspora congregations, just as in all other congregations, the presence of God is a gift, bestowed by grace alone, without merits and achievements of any kind. The quality and importance of a church or congregation cannot be judged by the number of meetings, events and activities, just as passivity and serenity do not necessarily testify to strong faith. Every church depends on God’s grace in its life.

[105] To name one example, church attendance in diaspora churches may be as low as in the large established churches. But when people gather from a very large area in a diaspora congregation they sometimes experience the fellowship as something special. The experience of community can have greater significance here than in a milieu where the church is an ordinary part of society and where people often suffer from loneliness and anonymity. However, such contrasts may be found in every sphere of church life.

[106] Wilfried Härle/Jörg Augenstein/Sibylle Rolf/Anja Siebert, Wachsen gegen den Trend. Analysen von Gemeinden, mit denen es aufwärtsgeht, Leipzig, 2008.

[107] Ibid., 302.

10.1 Worship

Worship is the centre of church life. The CPCE study “Anchor in Time”[109] presents a very broad range of different forms of worship. It tells of experiences with services in big cities and in quite remote places, in homogenous regions and in very heterogeneous contexts. The document also mentions the changing sociocultural contexts in which worship services are held today. But services play a very important role in all church situations and contexts. They are “the” sign that we do not manage our lives from our own strength but live from resources bestowed on us that we can only accept with gratitude.

People experience the services described in “Anchor in Time” differently and in many ways. They are a spiritual home, strengthening denominational identity and ethnic awareness; “not just a worship ritual”, but also promoting a sense of belonging; offering a platform for dialogue on the different ways of searching for meaning in life; or a reliable place to meet and a space that is open to all comers, granting protection.

There is no doubt that “in geographical and confessional diaspora situations the service of worship mostly takes on a central position as a social and religious event…”[110] Many reports from diaspora churches confirm this central position. That applies to mother-tongue services, which, in addition, often follow an order reminiscent of the old home country of the congregation’s forebears. They are a very important stabilising element for life in a strange land.

Other examples (not mentioned in “Anchor in Time”) are ad hoc services held with refugees, or with the staff of international companies. Also important in this context are services for ethnic minorities, who often form a denominational minority in the respective country.[111]

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[108] In view of their worries and needs, congregations and churches in minority situations frequently see themselves confronted with the difficulty of seeking “positive models inspiring them to start afresh instead of managing the scarcity”. Heino Falcke, Kirche am Ende oder vor einer neuen Chance, in: Christoph Dahling-Sander / Margit Ernst / Christoph Plasger (ed.), Herausgeforderte Kirche. Anstöße – Wege – Perspektiven. Festschrift anlässlich des 60. Geburtstags von Eberhard Busch, Wuppertal, 1997, 459-464, here 460.

[109] See note 102.

[110] René Krüger, Die Diaspora. Von traumatischer Erfahrung zum ekklesiologischen Paradigma, in: Beihefte Evangelische Diaspora 7, Leipzig, 2011, 131.

[111] E.g. Ukrainian Orthodox services in Czechia or Czech services in Serbia. These services strengthen social bonds as do international congregations in general. For many people they are a place of refuge in a strange land, where children often learn about the culture and tradition of their country of origin.

With respect to integration efforts, “Anchor in Time” mentions “bridging services”. Because services play a central role in the life of the churches – and often they are the only “events” of this kind in the respective region – they bridge the differences between cultures, nations, North and South, East and West, and also among confessions. Services of worship offer the opportunity to show that we do not have to laboriously invent these bridges. They have long been there, due to the fact that God in Jesus Christ has bridged the greatest distance – between God and humankind. Christians are therefore invited to follow God on this bridge to other people.

One example of this bridging function of worship in the tension between tradition and innovation is the different worship practice that the Waldensian and Methodist Churches have developed in Italy[112] in their encounter with migrants. Two patterns have emerged.

First, each group holds its own service and is organised separately. There are occasional contacts and exchanges between the two groups.

Second, in other towns Italians and people of different languages and backgrounds form one congregation. There are different types of worship service on offer, taking account of the respective traditions, cultures and languages. These local churches want the different groups to grow closer together and so they hold joint services at regular intervals.

Creating exchange, contacts and relations between migrant communities and the churches can open ways to integration in the host societies. These are socially relevant endeavours. They aim to show how, inspired by the gospel, churches can build bridges and take steps to overcome borders that are, at the same time, “a socially critical and prophetic sign against racism and exclusion”[113] and testify to humanity and hope for the divided world.

Finally, we would like to mention a type of worship practice that has potential for church action in diaspora. These are times of worship that form a “counterpoint”[114] in the routine of daily life. They attempt to encounter people where they gather in great crowds – at railway stations, airports or at mega-events such as city festivals, or sporting and cultural events. Churches in diaspora can impact on society and gain public attention precisely with such easy-access events and small-scale formats. They are a sign that the church does not want to keep to itself but sees itself as a “church for others”. Relatively small diaspora churches, in particular, could benefit from sharing and dialogue about successful practical examples of reaching out and encountering groups distant from the church.

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[112] Anchor in Time (see note 102), 2.1.

[113] Ibid., 2.1.

[114] Ibid., 2.3.1. The example comes from Switzerland.

These examples of worship activity in diaspora situations form a broad range of different models. But perhaps this is in itself attests to the “unity in diversity” of Protestant churches, which is founded on the integrating potential of the gospel.[115] Diaspora churches that reflect on their external relations and take the opportunities arising to position themselves in society, will – even if their capacities are limited – set an example of church life lived from the gospel.

10.2 An open and hospitable church

The openness of a church is frequently documented, or sometimes measured, by its keeping the church doors open, apart from during church services. Keeping a church open, even during the week, may indeed provide a space for meditation and rest, or for reflection about faith in a building that is primarily meant for public worship.[116]

Church buildings can, indeed, offer an occasion for church activity with public visibility. A prominent example of this is the Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady) in Dresden.[117] The drive to reconstruct it mobilised thousands of people. Its ruins were originally a symbol of the horrors of war, but now, thanks to many initiatives from home and abroad, it attests to international friendship and is a visible symbol of reconciliation and hope.

There are a whole lot of similar projects on different scales in diaspora churches. In Czechia, for example, the reconstruction of a church or parish centre has in many cases become a symbol of belonging together. Barriers and prejudices were overcome, and very often also denominational and national borders. In many places where these projects were carried out – after being well communicated in the given municipality – they also ensured good, sustainable relations with the representatives of political life. For the stakeholders involved in a solidarity initiative to preserve a church, this may prove to be a milestone in the life and history of the town or village. The representatives of public life particularly appreciate this, as they often lack the opportunity to bring people together for a good cause. Sometimes there are reports that such a church restoration is “a hopeful sign” for the whole village.[118] A network of relations arises, contacts and connections are cultivated and a support network grows up. In its own way, the church in a diaspora situation contributes to enhancing a sense of community.[119]

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[115] It is not easy, but rewarding, to tap into this potential even in “mini-congregations”, which do not always have an ordained pastor, let alone appropriate church facilities.

[116] See Christian Möller, “Wenn der Herr nicht das Haus baut…”, Briefe an Kirchenälteste zum Gemeindeaufbau. Göttingen, ^{6}2007, particularly the first two chapters “Die Predigt der Steine” and “Kirchen erzählen vom Glauben”, 110-114.

[117] Cf. Generally on the topic Johannes Hempel, Erfahrungen und Bewahrungen. Ein biographischer Rückblick, Leipzig, 2004, 224-227.

[118] Frequently those who were involved in this work – voluntarily and without pay – are willing afterwards to participate in other areas of public life.

A special opportunity for churches in the Czech diaspora is, finally, Open Churches Night, which generally meets with great interest among large parts of the population. This church activity is meanwhile so popular that in some towns it takes place several times a year, often jointly with other institutions – museums, theatres and town halls. Precisely people who are distant from the church perceive these activities as positive signs of shaping the public space together and the churches playing an important role to that end.

10.3 Church festivals and public holidays

Whether or not public holidays specific to certain confessions are justified is an ongoing argument in Czechia, involving the non-church public and the churches equally.

Easter Monday has always been a public holiday in Czechia. By contrast, Good Friday was only reintroduced as a public holiday in 2016, after the Communist government had abolished it fifty years before. Until then, many Christians had taken the day off on Good Friday (and other Christian feast-days) in order to be able to attend services of worship. During the Communist era, in particular, this was a witness to faith. In general, observing the church year was a very clear sign of a Protestant way of life.

Today, as society becomes more and more secular, things have fundamentally changed and the tradition of church feast-days is being called into question.[120] The Protestant churches would like to keep to this tradition, notwithstanding. In public discussion the churches see it as their responsibility to point to the *theological* dimension of the church year, which is an integral part of the public character of our faith.[121]

Countering the declining importance of church feast-days in society, there is a noteworthy growth in popularity of services outside the cycle of church festivals. Examples are services at the start of the school year, on St Valentine’s Day, services to mark civic anniversaries or national remembrance days, such as the end of the Second World War or the liberation from concentration camps. These services give the churches the chance to act in the public eye and likewise offer special opportunities for ecumenical cooperation.

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[119] See the apt description by Jana Potočková, Evangelisch sein aus der Sicht einer tschechischen Pfarrerin, in: Die Evangelische Diaspora (Jahrbuch des Gustav-Adolf-Werkes 68), Leipzig, 1999, 40-45.

[120] In many areas of business, Sunday is more and more becoming a working day. However, Christians would still like to celebrate the day of Christ’s resurrection or *dies dominica* (the Lord’s day).

[121] Cf. the rationale of Gerhard Sauter, Schrittfolgen der Hoffnung. Theologie des Kirchenjahres, Gütersloh, 2015, 236-237.

10.4 Church education

Church education constitutes an important bridge to the next generations and to people who are not church members. Here is an example of how, in the context of diaspora churches, religious education in schools deals with the topic “the church year”. Representatives of churches from five countries (Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Czechia) worked together to produce a teacher’s manual for religious education, to encourage “celebrating together – knowing about each other”.[122] It presents a pathway through the church year, accompanied by biblical texts and supplemented by songs, pictures and first-hand reports from the individual churches and their traditions. It stresses common ground, but also names the differences in professing and celebrating their common faith. The book can be used not only in the churches themselves but also in schools in which religious education is not a curricular subject (e.g. in Czechia). It explains what is central to celebrating Christian festivals, in a very elementary yet theologically competent way. The book successfully contributes to greater understanding, communication and insight – also across the borders of nations and religious backgrounds.

10.5 Reconciling action

Relations between churches can be burdened by painful experiences in the past, just as can relations between different states, nations and social groups. These were often conflicts and wounds that have left deep, indelible impressions in their memories. Dialogues among experts, historical research and education are vital in this field, along with awareness-raising. They make it possible to see dramatic events of the past - that attest to hatred and hostility – in a broader context and so to understand them. Yet very often these initiatives lack the power to remove and heal the bitter memories in people’s hearts and minds.

A project called “healing of memories“[123] arose in South Africa in the 1990s that was quickly adopted in Europe.[124] In the last few years, the World Council of Churches, Conference of European Churches and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe have initiated “healing of memories” processes, on a larger or smaller scale, e.g. in Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Hungary,

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[122] Helmut Hanisch/Dieter Reiher (eds), Miteinander feiern – voneinander wissen. Feste im Kirchenjahr, Göttingen, 2008.

[123] http://www.healing-memories.org/ (last visited on 9.8.17).

[124] See Alan D. Falconer / Joseph Liechty. Reconciling Memories, Dublin, 1998.

Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.[125] Invitations went out to places of reconciling actions that were symbols of dramatic events and tensions, with the aim of overcoming the resentments remaining from spiritual wounds and offences caused by past events. In short, to heal memories.

Crucial for a lasting impact of conflict management is that these reconciling initiatives are accompanied by study processes, consultations and publications, with participation not only by churches but also by public institutions. Through taking part in such reconciliation processes churches have an opportunity, inspired by the gospel, to seek “the welfare (shalom) of the city” (Jer 29:7).

An example of such activities is the joint commission of Catholic and non-Catholic historians and other experts in Czechia, who tackled the task of researching the life and death of the martyr Jan Hus (burned at the stake in 1415 in Konstanz).[126]

Acts of reconciliation initiated by the Protestant and Catholic churches recently run along the same lines. They focused on places that symbolise violent acts during re-Catholicisation in the 17th and 18th century. In cooperation with all the local churches, events were organised at these sites to express the striving for reconciliation. As a symbolic gesture ‘crosses of reconciliation’ were erected. These crosses point symbolically to the fact that old wrong must not prevail when the word of reconciliation reaches human hearts.

10.6 Days of Christian Encounter

The Days of Christian Encounter (*Christliche Begegnungstage*) are occasionally called the “small Kirchentag of diaspora churches”. That underlines their seeking an encounter that originally arose as a grass-roots initiative by some diaspora congregations, with a unique character that they would like to retain.

The series goes back to an initiative by the former Evangelical Church of Silesian Upper Lusatia, which, starting in 1991, co-hosted a community encounter with the Protestant churches in Poland and the Czech Republic (thus called from 1993). Since then the meetings have taken place every two or three years. As of the encounter days in 2005, the Protestant churches in Slovakia, Hungary and Austria became active supporters, along with the Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Bavaria and Saxony. Over time, the encounter days have developed into a meeting of Christians from Protestant churches from the whole of central and eastern Europe; the latest one was held in Budapest in 2016 and was very well attended. The gatherings have gradually created a cross-border network of congregations, churches and the most varied initiatives. Meanwhile the organising churches also receive support from the local authorities of the host cities. The Days of Christian Encounter are a special opportunity for small diaspora churches to draw attention to themselves and their concerns in the broader public of a particular country.

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[125] Cf. Dieter Brandes/Olga Lukács (eds), Die Geschichte der christlichen Kirchen aufarbeiten. Healing of Memories zwischen Kirchen, Kulturen und Religionen. Ein Versöhnungsprojekt der Kirchen in Rumänien, Cluj Napoca, Leipzig, ^{2}2009; Manoj Kurian/Dieter Brandes/Olga Lukács/Vasile Grăjdian (eds), Reconciliation between Peoples, Cultures and Religions. Reconciliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina compared to European-wide experiences. The European interreligious consultation on “Healing of Memories”, Sibiu, 2012.

[126] At the final symposium of this study process Pope John Paul II not only paid tribute to the position of Jan Hus “among the Reformers of the Church”, he also expressed his regret at the way in which Hus lost his life (*Address of the Holy Father to an international symposium on Jan Hus)*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1999/december/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_17121999_jan-hus.html (last visited on 9.8.17).

10.7 Diakonia

In some countries, the term “Diakonie” is a synonym for a large organisation that is an important player on the labour market and built into the social system. However, this is generally not the case in countries in which churches are in a diaspora situation. Here the diaconal centres tend to be independently run and sometimes quite small, frequently also relying on financial support from abroad. They do important work in the social field for their region, so that many regard them as symbols of hope and life.

Often it is these diaconal institutions that strengthen people’s trust in the church. It can build on that and find many opportunities for church activity. In addition, these institutions have highly ramified external relations with the region, the country and even internationally.

In central and eastern Europe, working with mothers and children has recently proved to be an effective area for harnessing the potential of diaspora churches for pastoral care and diaconal ministries. At the churches’ initiative, informal centres or clubs have sprung up in parish centres, where mothers or fathers can meet with their toddlers. They offer a meeting place that is open to all and yet protected. It invites parents to meet and share, with childcare and activities for children and practical assistance such as swap-shops for children’s clothes. In fact, more non-church than church families participate in such centres as there are very few similar ones outside the church. Occasionally these groups develop the initiative to found a nursery school. Whether in villages or towns, they also often serve to fuel discussions on how to enliven the public space.

10.8 Pastoral care

In many countries, there is already a tradition of pastoral care in public institutions as a firm part of the churches’ mission. It is then organised ecumenically, as a matter of course. In Czechia this is the case with military and prison chaplaincies, but not with hospital chaplaincies. The government has started to change this situation, however, by putting pressure on churches to organise pastoral care in hospitals in ecumenical responsibility.

In a society like the Czech one, that is strongly atheistic, the work of hospital chaplains, in particular, is very well received. Today they are part of the governing bodies of these institutions and are members of ethics councils.

An example of a very open ecumenism is the ‘psychosocial intervention team’ in the Czechia. Founded and organised by church and non-church professionals, it intervenes during disasters and serious accidents. Services or memorial ceremonies are also organised in memory of victims of natural disasters and other misfortunes. Here, too, it is very clear that church life in the light of the gospel always means service to the public.

10.9 Community work

Minority churches[127] often have the feeling that they are powerless. They regard themselves as insignificant and do not trust themselves to be able to change anything. However, with this attitude they often underestimate themselves and underperform.

That need not be the case, however, when churches rediscover their chances and opportunities. A precondition for this is that churches no longer only see their diaspora situation as an unendingly negative story, still focusing on withstanding the adversities of their environment. Instead, they need to understand their present situation as actors in multiple relations internally and externally, and muster the courage to shape these relations, establish community and bring people together through reconciling action. Even the smallest church ultimately lives from the fact that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19). This reconciliation applies to all people.

Here are a few possibilities of church action that have proved themselves in congregations:

- Cooperating with other local organisations (school, sports club, fire brigade)
- Offering resources – often “human resources” (volunteers e.g. in refugee support, experts), or financial (taking up a special collection)
- Offering protected spaces for discussions of communal problems, helping to solve problems, referral to external bodies

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[127] That is particularly true of Czechia with its numerically small congregations in the middle of huge conurbations.

- Inviting others to participate in partnerships, which churches very often have more of than other local organisations (twinnings, partner churches abroad etc.)
- Offering premises for education, culture, gatherings, asylum support group meetings, clothing banks etc.
- Sharing through specifically church information channels
- Bringing church sensitivity to questions of justice, ethics and social issues
- Opening church educational institutions
- Drafting political positions on concrete issues

This is more a list of ‘secondary virtues’. But that is often how churches are perceived in the municipal public. The churches can, however, certainly understand and offer them as a consequence of ‘the main thing’. After all, there are very different ways of inviting people to share in life in the light of the gospel and reconciliation in Jesus Christ. What effect this variety of church action has, or does not have, on the recipients lies in God’s hand.[128]

10.10 Church in multilateral relations

Church in relationship applies from the congregational level to that of interchurch cooperation and functioning bilateral or multilateral networks. An important project of the Reformed Church of Hungary, that fits well with this study, is a trilateral venture also involving the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. It is under the umbrella of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), and aims at getting each of these churches enthusiastic about the experiences and attempted solutions of the others. The starting point was the realisation that societies in the western world are becoming more and more secular, and that the role and responsibilities of the churches need to be redefined. It is about discovering new forms of mission and new forms of cooperation by participating churches. The approach is based on “learning as we go”.[129] The goal in 2016 was to come up with a few recommendations for the WCRC based on experience to date as to how being church can be lived more clearly and expressed in society. Delegations appointed by the partner churches visit one other church, and get to know the projects there along with the problems around that church's role in the respective society. They then reflect on them on the basis of their own experience. The joint approach of fact-finding visits ("learning as we go") aims to enable participants to work on different problem solutions through the experiences of the others. This project represents a new form of cooperation between different churches in core areas of church activity.[130]

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[128] Cf. Christoph Meyns, Produktive Irritation, in: Kirche und Gesellschaft. Kommunikation-Institution-Organisation. ed. Christoph Landmesser and Edzard Popkes, Leipzig, 2016, 35.

[129] A report on this motto and the churches’ project of cross-border cooperation is available in Hungarian at http://reformatus.hu/mutat/9701/ (last visited on 9.8.17) with an English summary at http://reformatus.hu/mutat/9761 (last visited on 17.10.17).

The model focuses on multilateral partnerships that, under certain circumstances, can be evaluated, assessed and found beneficial. Belonging together, despite the different cultural backgrounds of the churches, is a prominent feature of the diaspora concept and that is what the model emphasises, without denying the cultural identity of the respective church. Questions remain as to how such a process of rapprochement impacts on the theological self-understanding of the individual churches involved. However, the project is forward-looking in that new or unorthodox solutions may surface for discussion. The project focuses on contextuality and multiple perspectives. This coincides with the direction in which ecumenical theology is developing, which makes *koinonia* the central binding aspect and continues the tradition of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship as expressed in "The Church of Jesus Christ".[131] The aim is not to achieve administrative or spiritual unity but a process of being together and of intensive exchange. That enables a joint focus on the life of the church in community and the life of the church in dialogue. "(T)he endeavour for common witness and shared service"[132] here takes on a new dimension. The participants' have an eminently theological interest in this pilot project: it is meant to raise the issue of 'being church' in public as diaspora, and to present the church's ministry more clearly in this context.

If churches understand themselves as church in diaspora, they will be able to focus their own debates on the surrounding reality more clearly and to define their theological positions more exactly. A public theology as diaspora theology offers the opportunity for churches to be proactive rather than reactive: their being in diaspora will then constitute an opportunity and they will no longer perceive it as a transitional situation. CPCE is a community of many diaspora churches and, as a learning community, can become a forum for forward-looking project ideas.[133]

As explained above, we understand the examples of Protestant life in diaspora to be forms of public testimony to the gospel. These public testimonies can already be understood as forms of public theology if the latter is not restricted to social ethical-type statements, for example. Public theology needs to broaden its base, and in the following we will use arguments from systematic theology to explain why this is so.

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[130] In the European context, the cooperation between the Evangelical Lutheran and Evangelical Reformed Churches in France and the Netherlands stands out.

[131] The Church of Jesus Christ (see note 81).

[132] Ibid., 146.

[133] See Thesis 14 of the CPCE Student Conference in Rome in 2015 (documentation only in German): http://www.leuenberg.net/sites/default/files/basic-page/10_schlussthesen.pdf (last visited on 9.8.17).

11. Church in the public and public theology

11.1 Diaspora, church and the public

Like the church as a whole, every individual church is, independently of its size, involved in many different relations - with society, policy-makers at the local, regional, national and transnational level, the state, culture and academia. In short, with the public in its different forms. Understood as a relational concept, the concept of diaspora will help us to reflect theologically on the relationship of the church(es) to the public.

The church's mission to witness to the gospel publicly and to all people (Mt 28:18ff) applies to all churches – in majority and in minority situations. This mission of proclamation is not confined to preaching at services of worship[134] and passing on faith when raising children, teaching about church, education by the church as a whole and – given the statutory conditions – religious education at public schools. Rather, the churches and individual Christians witness to the gospel in their words and actions in everyday life in society - at work, and in their in leisure-time and cultural activities.

The church's relation to the public does not only follow from its mission of proclamation but also from its diaconal responsibility. *Diakonia,* besides *leiturgia*, *martyria* and *koinonia* is one of the essential expressions of the church's life. Diakonia is the term used for the church's social action, not only spontaneously, but also in its organised form. Diakonia is not restricted to the churches' direct assistance or their social work. It also includes the mandate to serve society as a whole; after all, according to Jeremiah 29:7, it is also the task of the church in diaspora to seek the welfare of the city. Besides proclamation, that includes prayer for the community and for those who bear political responsibility, active advocacy for the common good and participation in discussions arising in society.

'The public' is a complex term, designating "that dimension of all social institutions and aspects of life concerning the common interests and needs, rights and duties of members of a society".[135] In keeping with the growing pluralism of modern societies, there is a plurality of publics.

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[134] Cf. CA XIV: *publice docere*.
[135] Wolfgang Huber, Kirche und Öffentlichkeit (FBESG 28), Stuttgart, 1973, 45.

Within the church, too, there are many publics, to the extent that different groupings and movements maintain their own media (journals, press services, radio and TV broadcasters).

'The public' as a key democratic phrase relates both to the transparency of political processes and decisions for all citizens and the equal, universal participation of citizens in political decision-making processes.

Public debates are therefore fundamentally important for democratic societies, to which critical media, politically committed citizens and a lively civil society make a decisive contribution. Democratic processes are subject to change. They are fragile and threatened, even if the institutions operate with stability. 'Post-democracy' is the label attached to the trends towards a real decline in the political participation of ordinary citizens in favour of economic elites.[136] The democratic public is equally threatened by changes in the style of public talking and writing: through contemptuous hate speech and generalisations.

Churches affirm a free democratic public for the sake of their public mission of proclamation; but they can promote and support a functioning democratic public through their public action. Christians are particularly called on to advocate with others against the exclusion of minorities and for a respectful, differentiated culture of public debate.

We will now reflect theologically on the relationship between church and society, as far as this is possible for the different societies present in Europe today.

Although the church and society can be clearly distinguished on theological and sociological grounds, they are bound up in different ways. The church members appear in different roles in the societal subsystems and their religious upbringings at least partly determine their individual value-based attitudes. Conversely, the church is subject to influence from the society around it.

Distinguishing the church from other institutions and groups in a pluralist society is not an end in itself. However, that should not be avoided, either, in a society that is not, or no longer exclusively shaped by Christianity. While the church can be understood as a "contrasting society" [137] according to its historical origin and its nature, at the same time it is also part of society and its influence is felt there. Not just under the conditions of a broadly supported *Volkskirche*, but also when in the minority - the church, or the individual churches, are always a segment or subsystem of society, with the different social systems reciprocally perceiving each other as their respective surroundings.[138]

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[136] A prime mover in this debate was Colin Crouch, in: Post-democracy, Oxford, 2008.

[137] This expression stems from Gerhard Lohfink. See Gerhard Lohfink, Wie hat Jesus Gemeinde gewollt? Zur gesellschaftlichen Dimension des christlichen Glaubens, Freiburg/Basel/Vienna, ^{7}1987; idem., Wem gilt die Bergpredigt? Beiträge zu einer christlichen Ethik, Freiburg/Basel/Vienna, 1988.

Today's relationship of church and public is not sufficiently covered by the classical dualism of church and world. Nor is it enough to locate the church only in the dyad of church and state. Among modern sociological conditions, the church has its place "in the triadic relationship of state, church and society".[139] That also applies to churches in a diaspora situation. If the church wants to understand itself as part of social structures and as an element of culturally, i.e. symbolically conveyed communication processes, neither image is really appropriate – that of the church as a 'contrasting society' or that of a church functionally integrated into society. Rather, the social task of the church consists in "taking on a mediating role due to its own message and using its specific competence. It mediates between individuals and their societal life contexts; but its prime area of mediation is between individuals and the believed reality of God. In this double, and at the same time specific, sense, the church is an intermediary institution."[140] It is also true that the church does not only have a mediating function. It must understand itself as a social actor, addressing itself to society and by no means only to the state.

People who live in a functionally differentiated and pluralist society participate in the interactions and communication of a whole number of systems, not just one. Consequently, there are many different connections and interactions between the church and other social systems. The challenge and opportunity for the church is to witness to the gospel in many different interactions and relations, and so bring to bear its 'being church' for the benefit of society. That includes expressing criticism and raising alternative political and ethical proposals in social debates.

11.2 Diaspora, secularisation and pluralism

With respect to a theology of diaspora in the sense of public theology, the urgent and central theological issue is: does the way of communicating the gospel as described above really reach into present-day societies? Another question follows: is the outreach of communicating the gospel – understood as God's communication with humankind – bound to the outreach of communication via the church, or does it find other paths? The fact that the church has received the great commission to communicate the gospel does not mean that it always succeeds. On the other hand, theology has long since become aware that communicating the gospel can also take place outside of the constituted church and its communication channels. The attempts at an explanation range from the early church doctrine of *logos spermatikos* (‘the generative word’) – the all-pervading idea of God is to be found in every rational being – to Paul Tillich’s thinking about the latent church as a spirit community.[141] Karl Rahner, in turn, thought about anonymous Christianity,[142] while Trutz Rendtorff and Dorothee Sölle talked of Christianity (or the church) outside the church.[143]

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[138] On the model of system and environment cf. the functional system theory of Niklas Luhmann.

[139] Wolfgang Huber, Kirche in der Zeitenwende. Gesellschaftlicher Wandel und Erneuerung der Kirche, Gütersloh, 1998, 269.

[140] Ibid.

The doctrine of light in Karl Barth’s later writings is relevant in this context.[144] Barth held to the idea of God’s self-opening in Jesus Christ, without whom we cannot know God nor communicate about God with any claim to truth. Consequently, there can be no autonomous lights or sources of revelation besides the one light that shines in Jesus Christ and in the gospel that attests to him (Jn 1:4–8). Yet Barth also anticipates the reflection of this light outside the church and outside of Christianity. There are lights, such as an enlightened humanism, which do not shine by themselves but reflect a light of God as the moon reflects the light of the sun. Starting from the parables of Jesus, says Barth, there can be words outside the biblical records that make the one true word of God itself into true words.[145] Consequently, besides the “*direct testimony to* Jesus Christ in the words of the prophets and apostles” and their biblical witness, plus the “*indirect testimony to* Jesus Christ in the message, action and life of the Christian church”, Barth also counts in “secular prophets and apostles of all kinds and degrees of greatness”.[146]

If we agree with Barth’s theological thinking, and also with Tillich, the resonances of the divine word must be expected not only where there are resonances of church proclamation and communication of the gospel outside the church – where people “are *reached* in some way by God’s gospel in its biblical-church form, are *touched* to a greater or lesser extent, are in some way *influenced* and *determined* by it”[147] – but also where people have no direct or indirect contact with the Christian message.

Public theology, and also a theology of diaspora projected as public theology, understands modern pluralism not as a disaster but as a fruit of Christianity. A public theology of diaspora gets involved in social discourse without calling on state power or legislation to prescribe a privileged status for its own standpoint for all citizens.

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[141] Paul Tillich, Systematische Theologie, Bd. III, Stuttgart, ^{5}1977, 179ff., 426ff.

[142] Karl Rahner, Die anonymen Christen, in: idem., Schriften zur Theologie, Bd. VI, Einsiedeln/Zürich/Cologne, 1965, 545–554; idem., Anonymes Christentum und Missionsauftrag der Kirche, in: idem., Schriften zur Theologie, Bd. IX, Einsiedeln/Zürich/Cologne, 21972, 498–515.

[143] Trutz Rendtorff, Christentum außerhalb der Kirche, Hamburg, 1969; Dorothee Sölle, Die Wahrheit ist konkret, Olten, 41968, 117ff.

[144] Karl Barth, Die Kirchliche Dogmatik IV/3, Zollikon-Zürich, 1959, 40–188.

[145] Barth, KD IV/3, 125.

[146] Barth, KD IV/3, 107 (his emphasis).

[147] Barth, KD IV/3, 134 (his emphasis).

Public theology certainly does not mean mere lobbying by churches or university theology in the public sphere. Rather, it is of interest to the public itself, and to such members of society who do not belong to Christianity or declare themselves to be of no religion. Jürgen Habermas has repeatedly explained that the secularising of state power must not be confused with the secularising of civil society. He thereby criticises a “one-eyed secularist reading of secularist state power, which sets up false fronts”.[148] Habermas counters the false alternative of enlightened universalism and multicultural relativism by acknowledging that the universalist concern for political enlightenment is only fulfilled by fairly recognising the particular self-assertive claims of religious and cultural minorities. In religious traditions and their semantics, he says, lies a possibly not fully tapped potential for interpreting human existence that a secular language cannot fully replace – at least, not for the foreseeable future. Habermas is thinking here, for example, of the Jewish and Christian talk of humankind being made in the image of God, which in bioethical and biopolitical connections expresses the non-disposability of humankind in a way that, in a certain sense, is superior to the terminology of human dignity. Consequently, “the liberal state must not only expect secular citizens to take religious fellow citizens seriously as persons when they meet in the political public. The liberal state may even expect them not to rule out the eventuality of recognising their own intuitions in the content of religious positions and statements – thus potential truths that are brought into a public, not specifically religious debate.”[149]

Religious citizens and religious communities are, according to Habermas, allowed to use an explicitly religious language and appropriate arguments in public discourses – e.g. about questions of bioethics and biopolitics. However, he continues, they do have to accept that the politically relevant content of their contributions can only enter the process of political decision-making after it has been translated into a generally accessible discourse independent of faith authorities.

Doing such translation work is the concern of public theology. Public theology must be founded in Christian tradition and also be able to act ‘bilingually’: “Public theology has to give information about its own biblical and theological sources, but it must also speak a language that can be understood by the public as a whole."[150] In other words, it must be able to mediate hermeneutically and argumentatively between biblical grounds and general rational grounds.

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[148] Jürgen Habermas, Wie viel Religion verträgt der liberale Staat?, NZZ of 6.8.2012, http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/startseite/wie-viel-religion-vertraegt-der-liberale-staat-1.17432314 (last visited on 10.8.17).

[149] Ibid.

Habermas speaks of a post-secular society without, however, calling into question the process of secularisation. Habermas here denotes another kind of public interaction with religion, not a strengthening of religion. At the very start of the 2000s, Detlef Pollack, a sociologist of religion, stated that it was "simply not true that the churches were emptying but religion was booming".[151] In view of the sociological facts there can indeed be no talk of a megatrend of religion or spirituality,[152] unless the concepts of religion or religious are overstretched so that in the end everything and everyone can be called religious or "religioid".[153]

Gerhard Wegner, a Protestant theologian and sociologist, concludes: "Those times have past in which we could claim without contradiction that everyone basically had religious interests but cultivated them nowadays in a very individualised way, and the loss of status of the church was due to its dogma and authoritarian style no longer suiting people. Naturally we still need to distinguish between religion and church – but without the church, religious communication hardly takes place at all."[154]

For a theology of diaspora it is, however, of crucial importance not just to distinguish between church communication and communication of the gospel but also between communication of the gospel and religious communication. Whether Wegner is right that "religion itself […] is withdrawing into its own field" or not – whatever is meant exactly by "religion" – is a controversial issue in terms of religious sociology. However, this is different from the systematic-theological question of whether, with religion, the gospel of God is also withdrawing from society. If communicating the gospel, as described above, is to be understood as God's communication, this withdrawal would be consequently be God's withdrawal from society. Then we would need to speak of God’s disturbing silence, constituting the innermost core of what Johann Baptist Metz diagnosed as the “God crisis”.[155]

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[150] Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Öffentliche Theologie in der Zivilgesellschaft, in: Ingeborg Gabriel (ed.), Politik und Theologie in Europa. Perspektiven ökumenischer Sozialethik, Ostfildern, 2008, 340–366, here 349.

[151] Detlef Pollack, Säkularisierung – ein moderner Mythos? Studien zum religiösen Wandel in Deutschland, Tübingen, 2003, 137.

[152] Ulrich H.J. Körtner, Wiederkehr der Religion? Das Christentum zwischen neuer Spiritualität und Gottvergessenheit, Gütersloh, 2006.

[153] This term probably goes back to Georg Simmel. Cf. Volkhard Krech, Georg Simmels Religionstheorie (Religion und Aufklärung 4), Tübingen, 1998, 66.

[154] Gerhard Wegner, Religiöse Kommunikation und Kirchenbindung. Ende des liberalen Paradigmas?, Leipzig, 2014, 7.

Theologically we must keep in mind that communicating the gospel can take place in different ways. We must not simply equate the crisis of obsolete internal church forms of proclamation and their language with the speechlessness of the gospel. However, the churches face the question of what it can mean to witness to the gospel to those of no religion, habitual atheists and religiously indifferent people. At the same time, public theology lives from the mission to proclaim the gospel and the trust that God will work in God’s world beyond the church.

11.3 Public theology as an open paradigm

The involvement of the church in public discourse has been discussed under the heading of public theology for some time now. Public theology is an open paradigm, interpreted in specific ways in different contexts.[156]

There are different overlapping discourses in the debate about public theology.[157] Besides the debate about civil religion in North America, that has now been going on for some time now in the European context, there is a discussion about the concept and conceptualisation of political theology. But the discourse about contextual theologies and the different variations of a theology of liberation is also continued in the discourse on public theology, or on the variety of public theologies. Another overlap is with the discussion about public religion.[158] This term was first used in the 1990s to discuss the role of religions as sources and influences for civil society commitment, but now the interest of researchers has moved to religions as institutions and political actors.

There are three basic questions regarding public theology. First, there is a social ethical question about the public validity of particular religious orientations. Then there is a fundamental theological question about the public communicability of such claims to validity and their justifications. Thirdly, there is an ecclesiological question about the role of the church in these communication processes.[159]

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[155] Johann Baptist Metz, Gotteskrise. Versuch zur „geistigen Situation“ der Zeit, in: idem. (ed.), Diagnosen zur Zeit, Düsseldorf, 1994, 76–92.

[156] Important foundational texts since the beginnings of the debate are now conveniently available in one volume: Florian Höhne/ Frederike van Oorschot (eds), Grundtexte Öffentliche Theologie, Leipzig, 2015.

[157] Cf. also Dirk J. Smit, Das Paradigma Öffentlicher Theologie. Entstehung und Entwicklung, in: Höhne/van Oorschot (eds), Grundtexte (see note 149), 127–141.

[158] See José Casanova, Public Religions in the Modern World, Chicago, 1994.

All three basic questions need to be explored, on the one hand, in the direction of a theology of diaspora and, on the other, of church diaconal activity and Diakonie/Diaconia as the name of church organisations. The particularity of Christian convictions and orientations is closely linked with the theological topic of diaspora. A theology of diaspora positioned as public theology has to keep in mind the intercultural character of Christian theology. How does that play into the contribution public theology can make to the debates of a civil society in which Christian faith is the faith of a minority?[160] In the Asian context the "interaction between the Christian minority community and the greater community"[161] is a central issue. Elaine M. Wainwright, an Australian theologian teaching in New Zealand until 2014, reports of the work of the PaCT (Public and Contextual Theology Strategic Research Centre) at Charles Sturt University (Australia), whose conferences regularly bring people together from different Pacific nations. These gatherings and the publication of their proceedings are, she says, "public theology as people engage with their lives and the incredible challenges and possibilities of being people in diaspora".[162]

11.4 Ideas for a public theology of diaspora

Pioneers of public theology were Ernst Lange (1927–1974) and Austrian Lutheran Wilhelm Dantine (1911–1981), who was one of the fathers of the Leuenberg Agreement. Their ideas should be taken up and taken further for our situation and the challenges of the present. Dantine and Lange presupposed that life in diaspora is by no means only the specific situation of minority churches. Instead, it is a characteristic of Christian life that needs to be kept in mind from an ecumenical point of view.

Under the heading "ecclesia and diaspora" Ernst Lange described the existence and life of the church as alternating between gathering and scattering. According to this understanding, the diaspora situation also applies to those churches whose members form a large share of the population statistically speaking, or even the religious majority. Gathering (ecclesia) and dispersing (diaspora) are, according to Lange, alternating and related phases, with the phase model applying to congregational life:

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[159] Florian Höhne, Öffentliche Theologie. Begriffsgeschichte und Grundfragen (Öffentliche Theologie 31), Leipzig, 2015.

[160] See James Haire, Öffentliche Theologie – eine rein westliche Angelegenheit? Offentliche Theologie in der Praxis der Kirche in Asien, in: Höhne/van Oorschot (eds.), Grundtexte (see note 155), 153–171, here 154.

[161] Ibid., 159.

[162] Elaine M. Wainwright, "Texts@context to Borrow a Phrase: a Contribution from Oceania", in: (eds.) H. Bedford-Strohm, Florian Höhne, Tobias Reitmeier, Contextuality and Intercontextuality: proceedings from the Bamberg conference 23.-25.06.2011, Zürich/Berlin, 2013, 154.

"In the gathering, the focus is from the start and exclusively on the communication of faith, in the broad sense, by striving to understand the Word: ultimately the whole of reality is the subject of the meeting.

In the dispersing, believers can only hope that they will find communication where they are present and available, and that in communication they will experience the promise breaking through. […]

In the gathering, the focus is on perceiving the promise in the light of reality. There many eyes and many ears are a help.

In the dispersing, the focus is on perceiving reality in the light of the promise. There believers depend on their own eyes and ears."[163]

Lange continues: "The problem and at the same time the opportunity of present-day congregational life is that the diaspora phase has gained unbelievably in weight and extent compared to the congregation gathered. The ecclesia is squeezed into a quite narrow period of leisure time. When the Christians leave the gathering they literally change worlds and every person has to find the transition to *their* world."[164] According to Lange, the "burden of guarantee in the diaspora phase" is less heavy for the pastors or other staff, and it weighs "almost entirely on Christians who are not church civil servants but 'lay people'".[165]

Lange's phase model is pioneering in not limiting the concept of diaspora to the demographic minority situation but in using it for the life of the church and congregation in a modern secular society. The contrasting of the gathered community and the individual presence of Christians in the diaspora phase offers a narrow view of the presence of the church in modern society, because it does not consider church forms of community outside the service and their interfaces with non-church forms of community. They range from the church choir to different congregational groups and activities, from parish festivals and cultural activities to the church kindergarten. The connections between congregational work and community work come to mind in this context as well.

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[163] Ernst Lange, Chancen des Alltags. Überlegungen zur Funktion des christlichen Gottesdienstes in der Gegenwart (Handbücher der Christen in der Welt 8), Stuttgart/Berlin, 1965, 142f.

[164] Ibid., 149.

[165] Ibid.

Wilhelm Dantine contributed more ideas for a theology of diaspora that understands itself as public theology. In an ecumenical context, Dantine described the diaspora existence of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria as a “Protestant adventure in a non-Protestant world”.[166] Written in 1959, his essay of the same name argued for a new beginning and theological fresh start for his church after 1945. He occasionally called the diaspora congregation a “Christian partisan group”.[167] That sometimes brought him into conflict with his own church, at least at the official level.

Dantine was interested in getting a hearing for the biblical message of freedom in a society that was still profoundly influenced by the legacy of the Counter-Reformation and the restoration after the Congress of Vienna (1814-15). Dantine differentiated between God-given freedom and the tendencies to privatise faith, as well as modern trends toward de-individualisation and loss of personal identity. As an institution of freedom, “minority Protestantism could change from a curiosity to a ‘city on a mountain’”, although only if the Evangelical Church no longer understood itself as an end in itself. The Protestant adventure of which Dantine speaks, and which he encourages his church to embrace, consists in “refraining from any proselytism, seeking the welfare of the country in which one lives. […] It is about the adventure of faith and love that never seeks its own and always accepts those who are weary, perplexed and harassed”.[168]

Diaspora means the church scattered in the international community. Referring to John 12:24, Dantine presented his theology of diaspora as theology of the cross: “But ‘diaspora’ means being scattered like God’s seed in the ploughed field of the world. The grain of wheat bears much fruit when it dies. A church wanting the future will become a ‘dying church’. […] A dying church is understood here basically as a church that goes to its death for the sake of its witness, because it does not want to live for its own sake. The church in discipleship to its Lord is not church in the world but church ‘for the world’.”[169]

As church for the world, the church has the mandate to participate in God’s mission – the *missio Dei*. God’s mission is “the movement of God to human beings”.[170] In this sense, it is called to be a “church of witnesses” (*église de témoins*) or an “outreach community” (*communauté de rap-*

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[166] Wilhelm Dantine, Protestantisches Abenteuer in einer nichtprotestantischen Welt, in: idem., Protestantisches Abenteuer. Beiträge zur Standortbestimmung der evangelischen Kirche in der Diaspora Europas, ed. Michael Bünker, Innsbruck, 2001, 37–47.

[167] Quoted by Ulrich Trinks, “Offene Kirche”. Zum Erinnern an Wilhelm Dantine, in: Dantine, Protestantisches Abenteuer (see note 165), 9–22, here 12.

[168] Dantine, Protestantisches Abenteuer (see note 165), 46.

[169] Quoted from Trinks, “Offene Kirche” (see note 166), 21.

[170] Evangelising. Protestant Perspectives for the Churches in Europe, mandated by the Council of the CPCE, edited by Michael Bünker and Martin Friedrich, Vienna, 2006, Preface. http://www.leuenberg.net/sites/default/files/publications/evangelising.pdf (last visited 28.8.17).

prochement), to quote the United Protestant Church of France. Public theology, too, always has a missional dimension. It does not replace mission in the New Testament understanding. Vis-à-vis wrong alternatives the CPCE understands “mission as talk *and* action, dialogue *and* witness. It manifests itself in preaching that awakens faith and in diaconal activity, as well as in the work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation”.[171] If mission “encompasses all areas of life where the church addresses people in the light of the gospel”[172] and if the church is fundamentally a “missional church”[173] – and the CPCE a “missional church fellowship”[174] – then public theology will always have a missional dimension. Public theology is theology in and for certain societies but oriented to justice, peace and reconciliation for everyone.

Worldwide bonds are therefore always an integral dimension of all public theology. Many CPCE member churches are closely linked through partnerships, projects and numerous personal ties with churches and Christians in crisis regions. They share the variety of assignments, concerns and challenges of “ecumenism in the 21st century”.[175] The CPCE church fellowship is in solidarity with all persecuted Christians and churches. It notes with deep concern that Christians and other religious communities are marginalised in many regions of the world, or even threatened with imprisonment and death.

11.5 Responsibilities of public theology

Dietrich Bonhoeffer hoped for a time when “people will again be called to speak the Word of God in such a way that the world is changed and renewed. It will be a new language, perhaps quite nonreligious language, but liberating and redeeming like Jesus’s language, so that people will be alarmed and yet overcome by its power. (…) Until then, the Christian cause will be a quiet and hidden one, but there will be people who pray and do justice and wait for God’s own time.”[176]

Bonhoeffer wrote these sentences in prison in 1944. His historical context was not the same as ours. Nevertheless, we must ask self-critically whether theology and the church today are no longer thrown back onto the beginnings of understanding and whether the church's proclamation today is as powerful, liberating and redeeming as Bonhoeffer longed for.

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[171] Ibid., section 1.2.

[172] Ibid.

[173] Ibid., section 1.7.

[174] Ibid., section 4.5.

[175] Ecumenism in the 21st century. Conditions – Theological Foundations - Perspectives, published by the Church Office of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD-Text 124), Hanover, 2015. https://www.ekd.de/ekd_en/ds_doc/ekdtext_124_ecumenism.pdf (last visited on 3.9.17)

[176] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Resistance and Submission. Letters and Papers from Prison, ed. John W. de Gruchy, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2015, 390.

If we can learn something from him for public theology in a secular and pluralist context it is primarily to ask the elementary question, who is Jesus Christ for us today? This question has certainly not been settled such that we would only need to talk about *how* to engage in contemporary Christian proclamation. Theology that honestly confronts a situation in which Christian faith does not exist unquestioned is "waiting theology"; it does not have to pronounce on everything and anything. Rather – as Bonhoeffer himself thought – on many an ethical question it can only maintain a meaningful silence and not play down its inability to speak, even in questions of faith.

If theology and the church agree to discourse with the modern world and pluralist society that will have repercussions on the definition of what faith is about, in other words, on theological doctrine. Public theology is not a conveyor belt for existing theological and ethical convictions, but a place of societal learning, in which precisely theological issues are reconsidered in the public domain in "open-ended discussion".[177] State universities, too, are a form of the public domain and not secluded institutions.

Two questions are important. What can secular society learn from the church, or churches, and what can church and theology learn from secular society, modern scholarship, modern law, the arts and so on? After all, the reality of Christ, according to Bonhoeffer, reaches beyond the borders of the church.

The responsibilities of public theology come under the heading of public talk about God on a biblical basis. They include the critiquing of religion. No area of reality is separated from God's reality and so there are no theologically neutral zones. In his Large Catechismus, Martin Luther explains that what we set our hearts on is our god. Likewise, theology has the critical assignment – in the public domain and in different publics – to ask what it is that people set their hearts on, and what follows from this not only at the individual level, but also in society.

Certainly, public theology's own talk of God must be subject to constant criticism and self-criticism in the spirit of the first commandment, since all talk of God – also and precisely in theology and the church – is in danger of being instrumentalised and abused for political or other purposes.

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[177] Ulrich Körtner, Diakonie und Öffentliche Theologie. Diakoniewissenschaftliche Studien, Göttingen 2017, 48.

11.6 Forms and formats of public theology

As explained so far, public theology comprises “dialogical participation in reflecting on the identity and the crises, the goals and the responsibilities of society”.[178] Participating in civil society reflection and influencing political discourse happens in very different ways, depending on the topic, the position of the church, the structure of the public and the social situation. Here are seven of these ways, without claim to completeness:

(1) *Public statements* by churches on proposed legislation or current policies are classical forms of public theology. They include demonstrations, vigils, prayers for peace and public banners on church buildings. In this way, churches attempt to impact on what they see as problematic social processes, or to advocate for certain political options, visions or goals, and thereby to convince as many people as possible.

(2) Another particularly noticeable form of public theology is *symbolic actions.* The Bible is rich in publicly visible symbolic actions, both in the workings of the Prophets in the Old Testament and in the actions of Jesus in the gospels. Such symbolic actions can provoke and surprise, they re-enact abuses or demonstrate options for creative action. They are food for thought precisely because they manage without extensive explanations or rationales. Hence they are also, and precisely, comprehensible for non-Christian or non-religious people. Such an action might be ringing church bells to mark political events or switching off the illumination of church facades in protest at certain political demonstrations or rallies. Or again, it could be the visible participation of disadvantaged groups at church events.

(3) Churches carry out a third form of public theology through their *cultural activities*, if they recognisably link them with certain ethical or political concerns. These may be benefit concerts in favour of refugee work or art shows on the topic of peace and reconciliation. Other examples are book presentations or readings on social issues.

(4) The fourth form is *church educational activity*, particularly when this involves discussing ethical and social issues, and questions involving the whole of society. Educational work creates a public and, at the same time, has an effect on this public. Such educational work may take place at church academies, during programmes for parents at church schools and kindergartens, or at parish evenings. Action days such as the ecumenical “Week for Life” in Germany and Switzerland (in Austria this is only an initiative of the Roman Catholic Church) are part of public theology.

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[178] Wolfgang Huber, Offene und öffentliche Kirche, in: Florian Höhne/Frederike van Oorschot (eds), Grundtexte Öffentliche Theologie, Leipzig 2015, 199–209, here 206.

(5) *Church journalism* is a fifth form of public theology. It includes church media as well as individual articles in which Christians contribute their viewpoints to public debates from a discernibly Christian perspective, or even spark the debate themselves. Through their media activity, prominent individuals may reach audiences across borders, or even at the European level.

(6) Churches as institutions are themselves directly active in society as employers or in their economic behaviour. By committing themselves and their individual organisations to certain ethical principles, they exert direct influence on economic and social structures, independently of how great or small the scope for action really is. When congregations are consistent in buying only fairly traded or organic food products, for example, they advocate for fair trade and environmentally sound farming.

(7) When churches themselves *organise forums for public debates*, e.g. round tables or public meetings, they participate in shaping civil society and democratic structures. That expresses the insight that public opinion is not static - it is changeable and needs shaping. All citizens are responsible for this, and particularly the media and all institutions. The church’s contribution can feature as the seventh form of public theology.

All churches have their own traditions of public theology, even if many CPCE churches do not use the term ‘public theology’ for this kind of activity. Reservations about the term ‘public theology’ are often founded on a rejection of ‘political theology’, because this either stands for a problematic cooption of the church by the state or, on the contrary, for radical theological critique of certain political structures. The CPCE churches are very different in character owing to their historical experiences and their social contexts. However, through sharing experiences and ideas they can learn from, and with, one another. Talking about the threats and challenges facing them, they can enter into dialogue and together develop ideas for a public theology for CPCE as a whole.

11.7 Public theology and ecclesiological consequences

The concept of diaspora has on occasion been linked with criticism of the concept of *Volkskirche*,[179] which not all CPCE member churches use and some reject. A theology of diaspora, developed along a relationally focused concept of diaspora and describing the task of public theology from there, will enable us to overcome this apparent dichotomy between diaspora church and *Volkskirche*, and together to articulate the ecclesiological concerns of very diverse CPCE churches. The following aspects of a certain understanding of *Volkskirche* might then be relevant to a diaspora ecclesiology.

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[179] Günter Besch, Theologie der Diaspora? in: Die evangelische Diaspora 46, Leipzig, 1976, 31–38; for the Catholic discussion see Norbert Greinacher, Art. Diaspora, in: Sacramentum mundi I, Freiburg i.Br. 1967, col. 879–885.

The church

1. „Is present in public and does not act in secret. It takes part in processes of forming public opinion on questions affecting the whole of society.
2. Is organised in the smaller units of a network, easily reached in the life world of people.
3. Does not regard plurality as disturbing; in the context of its own denomination it can expressly affirm it (‘openness’).
4. Can tolerate different forms of participation and non-participation in church life, and does not exclude those who do not match the regular, expected profile of church membership.
5. Is separate from the state but cooperates with it in some areas on a contractual basis.
6. Participates in the physical, mental and spiritual needs of people in society.”[180]

11.8 Public theology of diaspora as an ecumenical project

Public theology as theology of diaspora must not be defined in a narrow denominational way. On the contrary, it should be an ecumenical project for Europe. Public theology wants to encourage us to intervene in this world and to publicly witness to the gospel of God’s love – God’s agape or caritas – in words and actions.

By understanding diaspora as a relational event, the Protestant churches can claim to be the true church in the biblical sense, if “confessional diaspora in itself, and precisely because it is diaspora, has established ecumenism […] as the basic structure”.[181]

The ecumenical foundation of Protestant diaspora must, however, be recognisable in the way in which public theology is done. For this to happen it will be necessary to strengthen and deepen ecumenical cooperation at all levels – local, regional and European. The signing of the Charta Oecumenica in many different church settings was an important step towards this.

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[180] Michael Beintker, “Kirche spielen – Kirche sein”. Zum Kirchenverständnis heute, ZThK 93, 1996, 243–256, here 254.

[181] Wilhelm Dantine, Strukturen der Diaspora. Situation auf dem Hintergrund des österreichischen Protestantismus, in: Die evangelische Diaspora 38, Leipzig, 1967, 37–56, here 55.

Conclusion

12. Consequences for CPCE's development

A renewed theology of diaspora, seeking to interpret diaspora in terms of its wealth of relations, may deepen the theological understanding of the church fellowship existing in CPCE. On the other hand, CPCE is growing increasingly important for a theology of diaspora, in the following respect:

Minority churches are experiencing real empowerment through their connections with other minority churches and with the Protestant churches in Europe and throughout the world. At the same time, CPCE can become even more of a learning community. It lives from the real-life processes of networking, sharing ideas, and mutual advice and counselling.

A freshening-up of the Protestant concept of diaspora opens the following opportunities: churches and congregations can be understood as part of a more comprehensive community with common roots. That may also lead to a stronger sense of oneness as a fellowship of churches. In this way, the concept of diaspora may make a contribution to renewing denominational identity in ecumenical openness. The concept of diaspora opens up churches to ecumenism as people understand each other as Christians and as fellow witnesses to the gospel of the human-friendly God.

All this leads to the following *recommendations for further work*:

1. In the spirit of public theology, CPCE should be further developed in order to strengthen the Protestant voice in public, this often being the voice of minority churches.

2. A pan-European public continues to be desired. CPCE should take up the question of what it can contribute to developing such a European public.

3. Our own minority experiences make us sensitive to the situation of other religious or non-religious minorities. It is recommended that CPCE examine how it can strengthen its commitment to such minorities as an expression of its fellowship of witness and service.

4. A theology of diaspora as a form of public theology should also be developed in the direction of interfaith dialogue. It is thus recommended that the findings of the study process on the theology of religions be linked to those of the study process on the theology of diaspora, in order to ascertain what topics arise from this comparison for the further theological work of CPCE.

5. The ecumenical bonds within CPCE and also with other churches and denominations is described by the phrase “unity in reconciled diversity”. Further thought should go into what this phrase means for the theology and situation of diaspora.
6. It is recommended that new forms of encounter be developed alongside those existing in CPCE, and that existing ones be strengthened. We think e.g. of encounter conferences for members of synod from the member churches, or of youth gatherings, in order to involve the younger generation more than has been done so far.
7. In order to make CPCE a genuine learning community for the next generation, we recommend continuing the model of student conferences that played a key role in the study process on the theology of diaspora.
8. There is a connection between the study process on the theology of diaspora and the study process “Education for the future”. Generally the topic of education should be paid more attention in CPCE’s work, because education (of the stakeholders) is the precondition for being able to do public theology (including its translation exercises). That applies to professionals and also with respect to continuing education for voluntary workers in congregations.
9. The topic of education should be paid more attention because education creates public audiences (education in schools, at universities, adult education, training for volunteers, working with senior citizens, intercultural education), in which public theology can also take place.
10. The study process on theology of diaspora will bear fruit as a CPCE project by continuing in discussion processes and dialogues in local churches.

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