

Editorial



Welcome to the second issue of **LIMINA – Theological Perspectives from Graz**.

The subject of this edition is “New nationalisms and the vision of a shared humanity”.

“World peace is necessary. World peace is not the golden age. World peace requires immense moral efforts on our part.”¹ These are the three arguments Carl-Friedrich von Weizsäcker set out at the beginning of his speech on the “conditions of peace” at the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 1963. The vision of a peaceful shared humanity shines bright in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the fundamental documents of different world religions. However, its light is being gradually diminished by the shadows of national separatism and assertion of dominance which are cast far into the heart of the European Union. On a global scale, economic, political and military rivalries between the great powers and other powerful alliances, each pursuing their own interests, are intensifying. Religious bodies and theologies – in different capacities and to different extents – are also part of these developments, sometimes entangled in them and sometimes in critical opposition to them.

This is why this special issue investigates the political, religious and theological options and strategies currently emerging in the force field between new nationalisms on the one side and global humanitarian practices and politics on the other. What does the future hold for liberal democracies and transnational or global-oriented politics in the context of these developments? What solutions do churches, religious communities and theologies pursue in the face of these challenges? From a Christian-theological stand-

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¹ https://www.friedenspreis-des-deutschen-buchhandels.de/sixcms/media.php/1290/1963_v_weizsaecker.pdf [8.3.2019].

point, transnational and global solidarity seem to be the only answer to the current political renationalization. Yet, we need to consider whether a one-sided theological focus on supra- or post-national concepts fails to recognise the effectively unbroken ideal of the nation state and is no longer able to provide adequate solutions. The question is – Is there a critical and constructive theology of state that can recognise and acknowledge the state’s power and relevance without nationalist constraints or dismissing it? All these conflicting tensions demand of us to imagine the unimaginable; or in the words of Weizsäcker:

“Since the beginning of humanity there has been, as far as we know, no world peace; we are presented with the unprecedented. The history of humanity teaches us that the so far unprecedented can often become reality one day. This requires extraordinary efforts; and if peace is to be humane than these efforts must be moral.”²

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The realisation of prophetic-visionary utopias as envisioned in the holy scripts of the Jewish-Christian tradition lies at the basis of the fundamental idea of the United Nations: The bronze sculpture by the Russian artist Yevgeny Viktorovich Vuchetich in the garden of the UN headquarters in New York is a sculptural reference to Biblical lore, showing a man hammering a sword into a ploughshare and entitled “We shall beat our swords into plowshares” (1957; it became known as the stylistic symbol of the GDR peace movement, 1980).³ The text reference appears twice in the prophetic books of the Bible:

“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Isa 2:2–4 [cited from the English Standard Version] // Mic 4:1–3)⁴

² Ibid.

³ Cf. images in Klaus Koenen, art. Schwerter zu Pflugscharen, in: Wi-BiLex, online: <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/de/stichwort/11412/> [8.3.2019]

⁴ In Joel 4:10, the promise of peace is sarcastically inverted to become the polar opposite through dissonant experiences of reality.

While the Biblical prophecy addresses the “house of Jacob” (Isa 2:5), the UN text now pledges that “we” – in reference to the peoples lead by God – pursue bringing about peace.

The universal horizon reflected within the development towards monotheism in the Scriptures of Israel (for the gathering of peoples see also, for example, Isa 56:6–8 or 66:18–23) reappears as a radically inclusive vision in the letters of Paul, who sees himself, following prophetic tradition, as the ‘Apostle of the nations’ called upon by God, in contrast to traditional contemporary discourses of identity and difference:⁵

“There is neither Jew nor Greek,
there is neither slave nor free,
there is no male and female;
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:28)

The purpose is not to negate *differences* but to free people of exclusionary and hierarchical *differentiation*.

According to the baptismal formula, collective identity is defined irrespective of ethnic-cultural, socio-economic and gender categories. Of course, the moment of unity is conceptualised with Christ at the centre in order to articulate the universal adoption of “Abraham’s offspring” (Gal 3:29) as children of God. People who do not believe in Jesus Christ are not part of the scope of discussion here.

The purpose is not to negate *differences* but to free people of exclusionary and hierarchical *differentiation* as *all* are called into a reconciled community of salvation, mutual tolerance and peace. Additionally, a post-Pauline re-lecture of the formula also refers to the creation tradition and the therein enshrined notion of humanity being the image of God in talking about the “new self” renewed after the “image” of the creator as the principle definition of identity (Col 3:10–11).⁶ The heterogenous multi-cultural *ecclesia* is not represented by a concept of ‘the people’. Instead it is described by using metaphors of family or ancient metaphors of the body to establish a sound shared identity for people of different backgrounds – a model that transcends ethnicity as a primary *boundary marker*. Referring to Christ as the head of the ecclesial body, giving it *corporate identity*, also reveals a critical stance opposing Roman imperia ideology with its equally universal claim, where the emperor embodies the head of the state.

⁵ The aim of the ‘New Perspective on Paul’ (keyword ‘Paul the Jew’) is not to contrast Christian universalism with ethnically defined Judaism.

⁶ In Col 3:11, the even more pronounced focus on ethnical-cultural differences goes hand in hand with the exclusion of gender aspects, which is problematic for the reception of Paul as well as Christian development.

In biblical tradition, which forms a basis for the idea of universal human rights, identity cannot be defined in an identitarian manner. Contrasting (also its own) ethnical categorisations and national(ist) agendas, the biblical tradition displays a universal vision of a peaceful and shared humanity, a utopia that demands ever new efforts: Which efforts can theology today make?

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The new issue of **LIMINA** is part of this effort. The first article in this edition by *Peter G. Kirchschräger* illustrates the inextricable link between democracy and human rights before he investigates in how far religions carry responsibility for human rights.

Robert J. Schreiter argues that the source of nationalism and populism lies in the growing inequality caused by globalisation. He suggests that the current discourse on ‘catholicity’ could offer a theological answer to these challenges.

Seldom have different world views clashed as dramatically as in the debate about the refugee crisis since 2015, putting human rights on the line. In light of this, *Marianne Wasmaier-Sailer* tries to find a solution to counteract the erosion of human rights and raise awareness.

The questions surrounding refugees and migrants also reveal clear divisions within Christian social ethics. In the face of current tendencies driven by civil society and individualism, *Axel Bernd Kunze* reminds us of the legal authority of the state as the basis of a respectful human community.

Two articles examine the fields of tensions between nationalism, religion and theology. *Hande Birkalan-Gedik* demonstrates that nationalist ideals always contain a gender component. She analyses the discourses and practices of the AKP, the governing party in Turkey, and traces the link between nationalism and religious symbolism on the example of the AKP’s discourses on martyrdom. *Kurt Remele* shines a light on why evangelical and fundamentalist Christians in the US support Donald Trump.

The final article of this issue by *Franz Gmainer-Pranzl* paints a clear picture of the church as a ‘universal church’ on the basis of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. A church that can rediscover its universality and catholicity by assuming a self-critical global approach and thus can become a true ‘church of the world’.

In LIMINA's new section "Open Space", a personal report by *Rita Perintfalvi* deals with the situation in Hungary.

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tolle lege – take up and read

Christian Feichtinger and Andrea Taschl-Erber
Issue editors, on behalf of the editorial team