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# Strangers and Fellow Citizens: Perspectives on Immigration and Society

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## Abstract

The article sets out a critical assessment of recent public reactions in Germany upon taking in large numbers of refugees since 2015, which have been swaying between moralisation and resentment. In this situation, public theology should ask how hospitality is linked to the perceived identity of a society and to its perception of who belongs, and what role Christianity might play in these debates. Drawing on a phenomenological perspective within contemporary German philosophy (Bernhard Waldenfels), and contrasting this perspective with historical and contemporary voices on migration within political philosophy (Georg Simmel, Michael Walzer), the article explores what the concepts of stranger, member and guest imply for the relation of 'us' to 'the other'. From this, I derive a suggestion as to how Christian theology could contribute to a change in the self-perception of society, centred around the seemingly paradoxical concept of 'belonging in not-belonging'.

## Keywords

Stranger, guest, member, migration, integration, fear, belonging, proximity, the political, the unconditional, church, Georg Simmel, Michael Walzer, Bernhard Waldenfels

## Challenges

The stranger is 'the wanderer . . . who comes today and stays tomorrow'.<sup>1</sup> For many western European countries, the analysis offered in the 'Excursus on the Stranger' by

1. 'Thus the stranger is not understood here as wanderer, the sense in which the term was used many times up to now, one who arrives today and leaves tomorrow, but as one who comes today and stays tomorrow.' Georg Simmel, *Sociology: Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2009), p. 601.

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German Jewish sociologist Georg Simmel (1908) seems of particular relevance today. Since chancellor Merkel suspended existing regulations and opened the borders for Syrian refugees entering from Hungary in September 2015, the aims and the legitimacy of German refugee policy have been disputed. The initial enthusiasm of a ‘culture of welcome’ in large parts of the population had been termed by some sociologists a ‘hybris of virtue’.<sup>2</sup> And, in fact, in the meantime, enthusiasm has been followed by a mounting feeling of unease. Doubts have turned into uncertainty; reservation has turned into hostility.

For any sustainable policy of immigration, support within the population is important. It seems to me that a sense of moral obligation alone is not sufficient to bring about such support. Still, most people would agree that those who are in need should be helped. But many have the impression—justifiably so or not—that the challenge to integrate large numbers of potential immigrants might be beyond the country’s capacities, and is definitely beyond their own power. Partly, this impression is due to misunderstandings and confusions about concepts and terminology. Three examples shall suffice:

- (1) The support given by many citizens was a sign of the vitality of a civil society, motivated by the will to help in a situation of immediate need. However, such support cannot replace an infrastructure that could in the long run help to integrate those who come. Yet, some church statements created the impression that this was exactly what was called for. As a declaration of church leaders within the Protestant Church of Germany, dating from Sept. 10th, 2015, reads: ‘We are deeply grateful to all those who . . . , as voluntary or professional workers, help to live a culture of welcome . . . and to put up refugees quickly and in humane conditions. As a church . . . we suggest to make a lived culture of welcome and the integration connected with it a central task within our congregations and institutions.’<sup>3</sup> Much as it is important to offer help in an exceptional situation like that of September 2015, integration into society is a task that might well overextend the capacities of particular congregations. According to critics, well-meant appeals to generosity and support do not suffice; rather, they trigger resentment.<sup>4</sup>
- (2) This is connected with the far-reaching political question whether in the present situation the right of asylum is being misused as a right of immigration. Will

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2. Michael Martens, ‘Die Eingeklemmten’. Interview with Iwan Krastew and Oliver Jens Schmitt in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 May 2016, p. 9.

3. Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, *Zur aktuellen Situation der Flüchtlinge: Eine Erklärung der Leitenden Geistlichen der evangelischen Landeskirchen Deutschlands* (s.l. 2015), [https://www.ekd.de/download/20150910\\_gemeinsame\\_erklaerung\\_fluechtlinge.pdf](https://www.ekd.de/download/20150910_gemeinsame_erklaerung_fluechtlinge.pdf). All translations from the German are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

4. German systematic theologian Martin Honecker explicitly accuses Church leaders of overstretching the commandment of loving one’s neighbour to an agapism and of ascribing responsibility to those who, on an individual level as citizens, could not be held accountable for the situation of refugees in the country. Martin Honecker, ‘Ist eine Migrationsethik notwendig? Orientierungen in einer komplexen Situation’, *Deutsches Pfarrerberblatt* 116.4 (2016), pp. 227–29.

those who are granted asylum move on (or go back) one day or have they come to stay?<sup>5</sup> Are they temporary migrants, strangers to whom we have a moral obligation to help for humanitarian reasons—or should they be seen as possible fellow citizens who, consequently, should have to meet certain standards? This uncertainty also has to do with a legal distinction that is often blurred: in Germany, refugees applying for asylum receive a right to stay for three years. Immigrants, in contrast, are subject to much stricter regulations.<sup>6</sup> The legal situation is complicated further by the fact that to be granted asylum presupposes individual persecution in the country of origin. Those who flee from a civil war, in contrast, are subject to ‘subsidiary protection’. German authorities have encountered great difficulties in enforcing this distinction with regard to asylum seekers from Syria. Moreover, there is also a large number of persons in Germany whose request for asylum has been rejected by court, but for whom deportation to their home countries has temporarily been suspended. Finally, the debate on taking in strangers is exacerbated by its European dimension. According to Dublin III regulations, the country in which the asylum seeker first applies for asylum is responsible for either accepting or rejecting the claim. In consequence, countries like Italy, Spain, Malta and Greece were soon overburdened with registration and initial reception of asylum seekers and were not able to receive refugees who were sent back to them from other countries due to Dublin III regulations. So far, however, attempts to develop a just system of distributing immigrants among European countries have proved unsuccessful.

- (3) Other aspects of the legal situation are also being debated. While the government claims that the Integration Law (*Integrationsgesetz*) of 2016,<sup>7</sup> read in conjunction

5. This question is reflected in the debate about terminology: Are those who come ‘refugees’ or ‘migrants’? According to German theologian and politician Richard Schröder, the latter term already blurs the distinction between ‘refugees’ and ‘immigrants’. Richard Schröder, ‘Was wir Migranten schulden—und was nicht’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 August 2016, p. 6.

6. The English language site of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, [https://www.bamf.de/EN/Startseite/startseite\\_node.html](https://www.bamf.de/EN/Startseite/startseite_node.html), which informs about the differences in application of these regulations, is currently under construction. The text of the relevant laws can be accessed at [https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch\\_asylvfg/](https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_asylvfg/) (Asylum Procedure Act, *Asylverfahrensgesetz*), [https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch\\_aufenthg/englisch\\_aufenthg.html](https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_aufenthg/englisch_aufenthg.html) (Act on the Residence, Economic Activity and Integration of Foreigners in the Federal Territory, *Aufenthaltsgesetz*), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32011L0095&from=DE> (Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on the eligibility for subsidiary protection), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:180:0031:0059:EN:PDF> (regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council on criteria for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection), all accessed on 7 December 2019.

7. The German Integration Act (*Integrationsgesetz*) is a so-called omnibus law, amending various legislative texts. The German version, presenting an overview of these amendments, can be accessed at [https://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger\\_BGBI&start=//\\*%255B@attr\\_id=%27bgbl116s1939.pdf%27%255D#\\_\\_bgbl\\_\\_](https://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&start=//*%255B@attr_id=%27bgbl116s1939.pdf%27%255D#__bgbl__)

with the Immigration Law (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*) of 2004,<sup>8</sup> creates a stable basis for integrating those who are granted asylum, others say that the Immigration Law only aims at acquiring highly qualified personnel, and hence does not go far enough in its efforts to help those who have to seek further qualification for the German labour market. According to these latter voices, the present situation calls for creating true ‘equality of chances, possibilities for social advancement, and for breaking up encrusted structures, thus making way for intercultural openness’.<sup>9</sup>

The examples reveal a considerable degree of uncertainty about who is coming and for how long, about the moral obligations of individuals and of civil society, and about the challenges posed by immigration for society. In this situation, I regard it as one of the tasks of public theology, understood as ‘reflecting the influence . . . Christianity has on the public spheres within a society’,<sup>10</sup> to engage in public discourse by asking for the self-understanding of society. What is the origin of the fears in large parts of the population? What role do the borders of a country play for the perceived identity of its citizens? How does the discourse on strangers and on hospitality tie in with social ethics?

In this article, I will address these questions by turning away from the aspect of moral obligation. Instead, I try to place these questions in the context of the perception of who belongs. I shall start by listening to three philosophical voices which explore the relation

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8. [https://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?start=//%5B@attr\\_id=%27bgbl104s1950.pdf%27%5D#\\_\\_bgbl\\_\\_%2F%2F%5B%40attr\\_id%3D%27bgbl104s1950.pdf%27%5D\\_\\_1575703407968](https://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?start=//%5B@attr_id=%27bgbl104s1950.pdf%27%5D#__bgbl__%2F%2F%5B%40attr_id%3D%27bgbl104s1950.pdf%27%5D__1575703407968) (accessed 7 December 2019).
9. ‘Ein gemeinsamer Integrationsvertrag sollte . . . zeigen, dass nicht nur Neuzuwanderer, sondern auch die Alteingesessenen—also wir alle—aber vor allem das politische System, Institutionen, Verwaltungseinheiten und Kommunen dazu beitragen müssen, Chancengleichheit, Aufstiegsmöglichkeiten und eine interkulturelle Öffnung verkrusteter Strukturen zu fördern.’ Georg Diez, Farhad Dilmaghani, Naika Foroutan and Werner Schiffauer, *Online-Petition: Das geplante Integrationsgesetz spaltet! Wir brauchen einen “Integrationsvertrag für alle”*, <https://www.openpetition.de/petition/online/das-geplante-integrationsgesetz-spaltet-wir-brauchen-einen-integrationsvertrag-fuer-alle> (accessed 19 February 2020).
10. ‘Öffentliche Theologie ist die Reflexion des Wirkens und der Wirkungen des Christentums in die Öffentlichkeiten der Gesellschaft hinein’. Wolfgang Vögele, *Zivilreligion in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1994), pp. 421–22. Yet it should be noted that this understanding of public theology shows a tendency to place Christianity over-against society. Therefore, it may well be counterbalanced by one that concentrates on self-critical reflection of the church in a public of which it is part, as advanced in Katie Day’s and Sebastian Kim’s recent *Companion to Public Theology*: ‘[P]ublic theology refers to the church reflectively engaging with those within and outside its institutions on issues of common interest and for the common good.’ Katie Day and Sebastian C.H. Kim, ‘Introduction’, in Day and Kim, *A Companion to Public Theology* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2017), pp. 1–21 (2).

of 'us' to 'the other'. Following the impulses derived from these voices, I will identify central features of the Christian tradition regarding the notion of strangers which could contribute to a change in the self-perception of society: the sense of belonging somewhere else, present in the exodus imagery, in the eschatological notion of earthly pilgrimage and in the identity ascription of belonging to Christ, can help relativise existing patterns of social belonging and facilitate re-imagining one's own identity. Centred around the seemingly paradoxical concept of 'belonging in not-belonging', I develop suggestions as to how the churches can work towards bringing about such a change in self-understanding. While it is necessary to take the ambivalences and fears connected with the imposition of hosting large numbers of strangers seriously, it is also necessary to counter these fears by fostering an awareness of unconditionality and abundance on which life relies and, consequently, to work towards an underlying sense of generosity and equity in the application of existing conditions for a right to stay. Rather than presenting direct consequences for practices and habits within society, regarding one's own identity in the light of belonging somewhere else can encourage people to engage in a creative re-imagination of life in society. Via the sphere of the political, understood as the symbolic field by means of which societies develop an image of themselves, such a change of perspective can unfold its effect even in a society that is not predominantly Christian.

While my perspective in this article is on the challenges within the German context, this does not preclude its application in other locations.

## Who Belongs? Strangers, Members and Guests

### *Strangers (Georg Simmel, 1908)*

The historical background of Simmel's famous 'Excursus on the Stranger' is not that of refugees, but rather that of 'economic wanderers', (possibly Jewish) traders travelling from village to village without staying on. Despite this difference, Simmel is helpful for our topic because his analysis focuses on the stranger who has come to stay, which is what is implied today when people speak of 'migrants': potential immigrants.<sup>11</sup> '[T]he stranger is not understood here as a wanderer, . . . one who arrives today and leaves tomorrow, but as one who comes today and stays tomorrow . . . , who has not completely overcome the loosening of coming and going, though not moving on.'<sup>12</sup> Two important aspects are to be noted here:

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11. Although it is the direct translation of the German 'Wanderer', the present-day use of 'migrant' does not have the same implications as Simmel's 'wanderer'.
  12. Simmel (ed.), *Sociology*, p. 601—trans. Anthony J. Blasi, Anton K. Jacobs and Matthew J. Knjirathinkal. 'Es ist hier also der Fremde nicht in dem . . . Sinn gemeint, als der Wandernde, der heute kommt und morgen geht, sondern als der, der heute kommt und morgen bleibt . . . , der, obgleich er nicht weitergezogen ist, die Gelöstheit des Kommens und Gehens nicht ganz überwunden hat.' German original: Otthein Rammstedt (ed.), *Georg Simmel. Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*, 7th edn (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 2013), p. 811.

- (1) While the 'wanderer' comes and goes, the real challenge for a community is posed by the 'stranger'. Since he has come to stay, his presence combines aspects of being near and being far. 'The stranger is a member of the group itself . . . an element whose immanent presence and membership include at the same time an externality and opposition . . . [R]epelling and distancing moments here comprise a form of togetherness and interacting unity.'<sup>13</sup> This unity of opposites structures all human relations. In the case of the stranger, it is brought to the fore 'in a configuration that can be formulated most briefly in the following way: The distance within the relationship means that what is near is far away, but being a stranger means that what is distant is near'.<sup>14</sup> It seems to me that this constellation lies at the core of the resentment with which people react to refugees in their midst. Those who are present now carry with them a history that is not and cannot be shared by those who have been living here all along—what is near is far away. But neither is it possible to keep at bay what those who have come carry with them—what is distant is near.
- (2) Simmel suggests that the degree of proximity and distance is dependent upon the type of similarity that is established towards the stranger: when the perceived commonality is restricted to some '*more general* qualities', maybe even humanity itself, the perceived distance is greater than in the case of a 'similarity of specific differences from the merely general'.<sup>15</sup> 'To the degree to which the elements of likeness are of a general nature, an element of coolness . . . [is added to] the warmth of the relationship that they establish, and the connecting forces have lost their specific, centripetal character . . . A special tension arises between [the] two elements [of near and far], . . . when the consciousness of having only something very general in common nevertheless gives special emphasis to what is not directly common'.<sup>16</sup> This can easily be made plausible by the way we react to news about oppression in a foreign country: usually, outrage is strongest when the victims present some similarity to our own background. At the same time, Simmel's observation implies that the mere appeal to morality because of a shared humanity, contrary to its intentions, can nourish feelings of foreignness or

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13. Simmel (ed.), *Sociology*, p. 601. 'Der Fremde ist ein Element der Gruppe selbst . . . ein Element, dessen . . . [S]tellung zugleich ein Außerhalb und Gegenüber einschließt . . . [R]epellierende und distanzierende Momente [bilden] hier eine Form des Miteinander und der wechselwirkenden Einheit' (orig.: Rammstedt (ed.), *Simmel. Soziologie*, p. 765). The classical example for Simmel is the history of the European Jews (Simmel (ed.), *Sociology*, p. 602; orig.: Rammstedt (ed.), *Simmel. Soziologie*, p. 766), and some passages suggest that his own experience as a Jew in Wilhelmine Germany has entered into his excursus.

14. Simmel (ed.), *Sociology*, p. 601. '[D]ie Distanz innerhalb des Verhältnisses bedeutet, daß der Nahe fern ist, das Fremdsein aber, daß der Ferne nah ist' (orig.: Rammstedt (ed.), *Simmel. Soziologie*, p. 765).

15. Simmel (ed.), *Sociology*, p. 603 (orig.: Rammstedt (ed.), *Simmel. Soziologie*, p. 768).

16. Simmel (ed.), *Sociology*, pp. 603, 604—translation mine. 'In dem Maße, in dem die Gleichheitsmomente allgemeines Wesen haben, wir der Wärme der Beziehung, die sie stiften, ein Element von Kühle . . . beigesetzt, die verbindenden Kräfte haben den spezifischen, zentripetalen Charakter verloren' (orig.: Rammstedt (ed.), *Simmel. Soziologie*, pp. 768, 770).

even hostility.<sup>17</sup> Naturally, this feeling is often internally censored—but as a consequence, it gets all the stronger.

As a result of Simmel's observations, it must be kept in mind that the experience of strangeness is characterised by an oscillating relation of proximity and distance. Not everything that strangers bring with them is foreign. Therein lies the challenge which the presence of strangers poses for a supposedly homogeneous society. By discovering elements of nearness in what seems to be distant, one's own cultural identity is called into question. A repelling impulse ensues which cannot simply be overcome by appealing to a shared humanity.

On this basis, we can now turn to Michael Walzer's discussion of membership.

### *Members (Michael Walzer, 1989)*

Similarly to Georg Simmel, American philosopher Michael Walzer, in the chapter on 'Membership' in his *Spheres of Justice*,<sup>18</sup> regards different degrees of distance and proximity as fundamental for the decision about who belongs and who should be accepted within a society. According to Walzer, even a universal value such as justice is linked to group membership: 'When we think about distributive justice, we . . . assume an established group and a fixed population, and so we miss the first and most important distributive question: How is that group constituted?'<sup>19</sup> In order to show that justice is not an abstract, free-floating concept, but is dependent on a sociological point of reference, Walzer explores the parallels between states and other sociological units: neighbourhoods, clubs and families.<sup>20</sup>

The thought experiment of likening a state to a *neighbourhood*, with perfect labour mobility and relatively unrestricted settling rights, aims to show that certain restrictions will arise just by themselves. Walzer regards this as a descriptive, not as a normative aspect. People will tend to stick together, and they will defend certain common (e.g. cultural) features—the specific commonalities mentioned by Simmel—against strangers. Thus, Walzer concludes, only if a certain identity is preserved on the state level, a certain plurality can arise on the local level. '[I]f states ever become large neighborhoods, it is likely that neighborhoods will become little states . . . Neighborhoods can be open only if countries are at least potentially closed.'<sup>21</sup> Consequently, successful integration is dependent on restriction of immigration according to a set of criteria. Relative

17. Simmel wonders whether this type of foreignness is even more insurmountable than the one produced by 'differences and incomprehensibilities'. Simmel (ed.), *Sociology*, p. 604 (orig.: Rammstedt (ed.), *Simmel. Soziologie*, p. 769).

18. Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989). The chapter on 'Membership' was published in 1981 and reprinted in a 2012 collection on *Migration and Justice*: Andreas Cassee and Anna Goppel (ed.), *Migration und Ethik*, 2nd edn (Münster: Mentis, 2014). Thus, for Walzer, the question of who belongs remains relevant even in a drastically changing global situation.

19. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 31.

20. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 35.

21. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 38.

openness on the local level is made possible by a clear-cut boundary—a state border, in this case—between those who belong and those who don't. In this respect, then, states are like *clubs*, 'with sovereign power over their own selection processes'.<sup>22</sup> Finally, taking in a stranger might also be motivated by a feeling of moral connection to somebody who 'belongs to us'.<sup>23</sup> As Walzer observes, the motivation to help those who come is greater when those who flee from their countries 'are persecuted or oppressed because they are like us', upholding the same principles, sharing the same religion or advocating the same civil rights.<sup>24</sup> 'In this sense, states are like *families* rather than clubs'.<sup>25</sup> This observation, too, is reminiscent of Simmel's notion of proximity. In Walzer's analysis, however, the descriptive feature of likeness acquires a normative overtone. According to him, when numbers of refugees become too large, 'we will look, rightfully, for some more direct connection with our own way of life'.<sup>26</sup>

As if to prove Walzer's point, in 2016 an advertisement could be seen in Germany which drew on these dynamics. It was part of a campaign by the German government to document successful integration stories, and it featured Abud, a Syrian apprentice in a car repair shop, and Stefan, his German supervisor.<sup>27</sup> In the subtitle, Abud admits that his German is far from perfect, while Stefan counters that his motivation is. Obviously, the ad is intended to appeal to the German self-perception as being well-qualified, organised and motivated. The implications hinted at in the unvoiced subtext could be put into even more radical words: this guest, a refugee and potential immigrant, is not the lazy parasite of the social network as some try to depict him. On the contrary, he is highly motivated (if not highly skilled yet) and will contribute to compensating for the shortage of skilled workers in Germany.

What the campaign does not say is that, contrary to the hopes of many, successful job integration of refugees is a long-term project and, at present, limited to very few exemplary cases, due to the complex requirements of the job market in an industrial country and the often unrealistic expectations of those who come. But even when these objections are left aside, the campaign shows that apparently the German government does not deem it sufficient to appeal to a feeling of justice and moral responsibility in order to obtain acceptance for a liberal immigration policy. Rather, it focuses on the potential benefit for the country taking in refugees. Moreover, according to the ad, acceptance of those who come is, to a certain extent, linked to social appreciation—the criteria of which are provided by the cultural self-understanding of a society.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Walzer takes the self-interest of society into account in deciding on who should belong and who

22. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 41.

23. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 41.

24. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 49.

25. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 41; emphasis mine.

26. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 49.

27. [https://www.deutschland-kann-das.de/Web/DEKD/DE/Menschen/Geschichte-3/\\_node.html](https://www.deutschland-kann-das.de/Web/DEKD/DE/Menschen/Geschichte-3/_node.html) (accessed 27 January 2017).

28. As German philosopher Axel Honneth puts it: '[E]s [ist] das kulturelle Selbstverständnis einer Gesellschaft . . . was jeweils die Kriterien vorgibt, an denen sich die soziale Wertschätzung von Personen orientiert'. Axel Honneth, 'Posttraditionale Gemeinschaften: Ein konzeptueller Vorschlag', in Axel Honneth (ed.), *Das Andere der Gerechtigkeit: Aufsätze zur praktischen Philosophie*, 5th edn (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2012), pp. 328–38 (334).

should not. 'The distribution of membership is not pervasively subject to the constraints of justice'; rather, justice is counterbalanced by 'self-determination in the sphere of membership'.<sup>29</sup> States have a '(limited) right of closure' towards immigrants, for without clear boundaries, 'there could be no communities at all'.<sup>30</sup> The community is the point of reference from which all guarantees of freedom and equality can be derived. By the same token, however, and elaborating on the concept of *metoikoi* in the Greek *polis* which he likens to that of modern guest workers, Walzer argues that those who are taken in should be eligible for full citizens' rights and duties.<sup>31</sup>

Walzer's communitarian position has been criticised from a liberal perspective. The most important arguments brought forward in this criticism are the following:<sup>32</sup>

- (1) Walzer regards the nation state as a culturally homogenous community. But nationalising what is perceived as the 'inner culture' of a given society in this way is a high price to pay, for it can easily give way to nationalism.<sup>33</sup>
- (2) Walzer's argument of justice being dependent on membership presupposes that there is no world government with sovereignty in questions of global justice and that, consequently, global justice cannot be implemented. While this is true, it is nevertheless possible to understand global justice as the interaction and integration of a variety of contexts in which justice is realised, such as citizenship, international trade, belonging to a global society, common humanity, or having access to a fair share of the earth and its resources.<sup>34</sup> As Indian economist Amartya Sen points out: 'Active public agitation, news commentary and open discussion are among the ways in which global democracy can be pursued, even without waiting for the global state.'<sup>35</sup> Consequently, even if justice can only be realised imperfectly, obligations of justice must not be restricted to fellow citizens.<sup>36</sup>

29. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, pp. 61–62.

30. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 63. In a similar vein, Marie-Luisa Frick argues that complete equality of citizens and foreigners would dissolve the idea of the state and, consequently, human rights for which the state is the basis. Marie-Luisa Frick, 'Wenn das Recht an Verbindlichkeit verliert und die Zonen der Unordnung wachsen, rettet uns keine kosmopolitische Moral', in Thomas Grundmann and Achim Stephan (eds), *Welche und wie viele Flüchtlinge sollen wir aufnehmen?* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2016), pp. 70–83 (78).

31. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, pp. 60, 71.

32. The following list partly draws upon Martino Mona, 'Recht auf Einwanderung oder auf politisch-kulturelle Selbstbestimmung?: Zur kommunitaristischen Kritik an einer liberalen Migrationspolitik', in Andreas Cassee and Anna Goppel (eds), *Migration und Ethik* (Münster: Mentis, 2014), pp. 147–68 (153–64).

33. Walzer's argument here is reminiscent of the German debate about an alleged *Leitkultur* (dominant or guiding culture).

34. Mathias Risse, 'Jedem das Seine—auch in der Flüchtlingspolitik', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 September 2016, p. 6.

35. Amartya K. Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 409–10. Furthermore, Sen mentions NGOs, social work, trade union movements, human rights campaigns or feminist activities as contributions to a greater participatory process upon which implementation of justice is contingent (Sen, *Justice*, p. 151).

36. Risse, 'Flüchtlingspolitik', p. 6.

- (3) This is backed by a third argument: according to Sen, justice should be connected to open impartiality, not to a closed impartiality which ‘incarcerate[s] the basic idea . . . of justice within the narrow confines of local perspectives and prejudices of a group or a country’.<sup>37</sup> Sen warns against ‘the trap of parochialism’: failing to distance oneself from one’s own background and avoiding to expose one’s own views to a distancing view from outside.<sup>38</sup> In opposition to Walzer, it could be argued that the historical, cultural and regional contingencies of belonging to one state rather than to another should not determine who can enjoy a decent minimum of options and resources in their lives and who cannot. As Sen puts it, ‘[a] sense of injustice must be examined even if it turns out to be erroneously based’.<sup>39</sup> If people perceive it to be unjust that some, due to their birth, are bereft of all chances for a decent minimum of life in peace, this intuition must be followed. Walzer’s club analogy, in contrast, has a bitter taste. It suggests the splendid isolation of the lucky few who are privileged by chances of birth.
- (4) Finally, the analogy of family, too, has implications that run counter to the idea of support for the less privileged, as it is suggested by the ‘difference principle’ in Rawls’s liberal conception of justice. The German ad campaign rests on the assumption that Germans perceive someone who is motivated to be ‘one of us’. It can be read as an attempt to include ‘the other’ into a concept of ‘ourselves’—in this case, not by regarding them both under the aspect of a common humanity, but by creating a more specific sense of commonality in Simmel’s sense, namely motivation. It can be asked whether this is realistic. Refugees may indeed be highly motivated—but still, in the public perception, this doesn’t make them family members. This has to do with the family imagery: it suggests a closed group created by birth rather than by loose ties that could be extended to take others in. Being confronted with strangers goes beyond well-meaning attempts to regard refugees as if they belonged to the same family. If one follows this observation, it might prove more fruitful to take the aspect of the stranger seriously, as shall be done in the subsequent section.

While the criticism voiced against Walzer’s conception of justice has to be taken seriously, Walzer’s conjunction of membership and justice contains an important contribution to our topic. By locating the questions of whom a society should take in and in what numbers in the spheres of political choice *and* of moral constraint, Walzer points to a central issue for the self-understanding of a society that public theology can help to address: ‘As whom do we want to see ourselves?’ If we follow Walzer, this question has a double implication:

- (1) ‘Who are we as the subject of sovereignty and of political choice?’ This aspect concerns the perceived identity as a society, and it influences the answer to the question of who should be included.

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37. Sen, *Justice*, p. 149.

38. Sen, *Justice*, pp. 403–404.

39. Sen, *Justice*, p. 388.

- (2) 'Who are we as the subjects of moral choice?' This question links the self-understanding of the members of a society as moral subjects to their acceptance of the decisions taken by their representatives.

Both questions presuppose a 'we', the status of which is precarious. For not only is this 'we' an aggregation from many individual standpoints; seeing oneself as part of a 'we' in questions of political and moral choice also implies belonging to a community which need not be (in fact, in most cases is not) identical with society as the subject of legislation and jurisdiction. The connotations the sentence 'We are the people' can take is a case in point. During the so-called 'Monday demonstrations' of 1989 in Leipzig which led to the end of the regime of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED*) and of the German Democratic Republic, demonstrators chanted 'We are the people', thereby demanding political participation. In the present-day demonstrations of the German anti-Islamic movement 'Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident' (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlands, PEGIDA*), the same slogan connotes both a national identity which is said to be in danger and the will to fend off unwanted intruders. In the former case, 'we' is the subject of democratic decisions and the expression of sovereignty; in the latter it indicates parochialism in Sen's sense and even an ideology of ethnic and religious uniformity that is hostile to others.

To sum up, while Walzer clearly has a point in regarding the sovereignty of the nation-state as a prerequisite for granting asylum, the assumption of a fixed, possibly even homogeneous, societal identity present in his approach is problematic. In order to re-assess the self-understanding as 'we' in relation to strangers, let us now turn to the third of the philosophical voices mentioned, and listen to the German philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels.

### Guests (Bernhard Waldenfels, 2012/2015)

The ambivalence of 'near' and 'far', of belonging and not belonging, characterised by Simmel's 'Excursus', is taken particularly seriously by the German philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels. In his phenomenological analysis of the notion of 'stranger', it becomes obvious that political and moral decisions, as well as the reasons we give for these decisions, are never completely free-standing, but are deeply rooted within our perception of ourselves and of others.

The ambivalent experience of meeting a stranger is mirrored in language: the Greek *xenos/xenē* means both 'stranger' and 'guest', as well as 'host'. In Latin, *hostis* can be 'stranger', 'guest', 'host', and even 'enemy'.<sup>40</sup> Waldenfels asks: 'Which aspect has priority? The stranger, the guest, or the enemy? This does not seem to be a mere question of definition; whoever gives an answer, positions themselves.'<sup>41</sup> Indeed, this seems to be

40. Bernhard Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene: Modi hyperbolischer Erfahrung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012), pp. 304–305.

41. 'Wer . . . genießt die Priorität: der Fremde, der Gast oder der Feind? Offensichtlich ist dies keine bloße Frage der Definition; wer darauf antwortet, bezieht Stellung' (Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene*, p. 305).

part of the reason why the present debate is so heated. While some see refugees as disadvantaged fellow-humans who come out of despair and need help, others regard them as parasites or potential terrorists. Waldenfels proposes not to mitigate this contrast, but to take the ambivalence it mirrors seriously. In his reading of Simmel, ‘there is no doubt that, in staying, the stranger violates the rules of normal hospitality. But what this . . . text calls into question is exactly the assumption that there is such a normality.’<sup>42</sup> As soon as somebody is accepted—even as a guest only—what used to be normal, changes. Life is not the same with a stranger in the house—even if this stranger is a guest and, as such, belongs to the family. ‘[T]he stranger may be an “element of the group”, but an element of a particular sort. His belonging to the group includes “an outside and a counterpart”. This . . . belonging in not-belonging is characteristic of the status of a guest . . . The guest is at home at someone else’s home.’<sup>43</sup>

Thus, every guest is located at the fringes of normality.<sup>44</sup> Having (or being) a guest presupposes such normality as much as it unsettles it. In this respect, hospitality is indeed parasitical on ‘normal’ social life. This is why Waldenfels calls the confrontation with the stranger ‘hyperbolic’, as derived from the literal meaning of the Greek *hyperbolē*, overspill. The hyperbolic element of hospitality transcends economic categories. In this, it equals the gift, the idea of which is lost as soon as people start assessing its value in money. Hospitality is unconditional—not in a moral, but in a phenomenological sense.<sup>45</sup> Waldenfels continues,

This is not to say that there are no conditions for hospitality; who receives others must dispose of a place where . . . to receive them—a place that necessarily implies certain limits. But it does imply that there is something un-conditional in hospitality, transcending normal conditions. The stranger . . . [and] the guest [are] more than normal group members or maybe less, but never simply someone among others.<sup>46</sup>

According to this observation, hospitality is not just the morally desirable attitude it appears to be in some official church documents. Rather, it is a breach within somebody’s normal life. The borders of normality are crossed,<sup>47</sup> and re-establishing them does

42. ‘Der Autor . . . läßt keinen Zweifel daran, daß der Fremde, sofern er bleibt, die Regeln der normalen Gastfreundschaft verletzt. Doch das, was dieser . . . Text in Frage stellt, ist gerade die Annahme, daß eine solche Normalität existiert’ (Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene*, p. 305).

43. ‘[D]er Fremde [bildet] zwar ein „Element der Gruppe“, aber ein Element von ganz besonderer Art. Seine Zugehörigkeit zur Gruppe schließt ein „Außerhalb und Gegenüber“ ein. Ebendiese . . . Zugehörigkeit in der Nichtzugehörigkeit . . . kennzeichnet den Status des Gastes . . . Der Gast ist beim Anderen zu Hause’ (Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene*, p. 305).

44. Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene*, p. 307.

45. Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene*, p. 308.

46. ‘Damit ist keineswegs gesagt, daß es keine Bedingungen der Gastfreundschaft gibt; wer andere empfängt, muß über einen notwendigerweise Grenzen setzenden Ort verfügen, . . . wo er sie empfangen kann. Sehr wohl aber ist damit gesagt, daß der Gastfreundschaft etwas Un-bedingtes innewohnt, das die normalen Bedingungen übersteigt. [D]er Fremde . . . [und] der Gast [sind] mehr als ein normales Gruppenmitglied oder auch weniger, doch niemals ist er einfach jemand unter anderen’ (Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene*, p. 308).

47. Bernhard Waldenfels, *Grenzen der Normalisierung: Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008).

not leave unchanged what there used to be.<sup>48</sup> This sounds somewhat dramatic, for it puts society at risk. But at the same time, it can also imply a chance for society. 'Belonging in not-belonging is characteristic of the status of a guest. . . . The status of the stranger creates togetherness among those who do not belong together.'<sup>49</sup>

Waldenfels goes beyond Simmel and Walzer by taking it seriously that taking somebody in is connected with an imposition but, at the same time, he understands this as a challenge to redefine one's own sense of belonging. In the final part of this article, I shall explore the relevance of the seemingly paradoxical concept of belonging in not-belonging for the topic of immigration and assess the contribution of religion and of public theology for facilitating a process of integration. I will start by reading a recent, far-reaching contribution on immigration in the light of the three philosophical approaches dealt with so far.

## Who Might Belong? Strangers and Society

### *Place and participation*

Joseph Carens, in his fine book on an *Ethics of Immigration*, favours a policy of open borders, while being well aware that this would presuppose a just world.<sup>50</sup> He is certainly right in his appeal to work towards such a goal. But as long as the world is not perfectly just, so that unrestricted settlement could ensue, states will have to maintain control over immigration. Carens may be right in his moral claim that far more people could be accepted than have been accepted so far.<sup>51</sup> But, as the above considerations have shown, it is a dilemma in the present refugee crisis that raising moral obligations of this sort is likely to obstruct the participatory processes necessary to making this aim real. When the dynamic, oscillating relation of proximity and distance which is present in Simmel's conception of the stranger is rigidified by putting up one-sided obligations, a process of 'estrangement by moralisation' might set in. When this happens, the power of an appeal to charity and hospitality is lost in the very act of appealing.

At the same time, as long as the world is not perfectly just, it is necessary to organise imperfect conditions politically. For this, Carens develops what he calls a theory of social membership, focusing on *place* and *time*: those who have been staying in a country long

48. This approach is more sensitive to the impositions involved for both sides in receiving strangers than Habermas's universalist suggestion of an 'inclusion of the other', according to which 'the boundaries of the community are open for all, also . . . for those who are strangers to one another and want to remain strangers'. Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. xxxvi. German original: Jürgen Habermas, *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen: Studien zur politischen Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), p. 8.

49. 'Zugehörigkeit in der Nichtzugehörigkeit . . . kennzeichnet den Status des Gastes . . . Der Status des Fremdlings schafft eine Zusammengehörigkeit zwischen Nichtzusammengehörigen' (Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene*, p. 307).

50. Joseph H. Carens, *The Ethics of Immigration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 295–96.

51. Carens, *Ethics of Immigration*, p. 220.

enough (legally or otherwise) should be entitled to membership in this society.<sup>52</sup> Carens admits that ‘it is much easier for immigrants to be seen as members of society when the immigrants resemble most of the existing population with respect to race, ethnicity, religion, lifestyles, values, and so on’—but, he continues, ‘these are not morally acceptable criteria of social membership . . . If states wish to avoid morally objectionable forms of discrimination, they must rely only on residence and length of time in allocating rights and ultimately citizenship itself.’<sup>53</sup>

As a formally unobjectionable criterion, this is hard to challenge. On the level of realising such a claim, however, aspects like being able to ‘develop a rich . . . set of human ties’<sup>54</sup> cannot easily be neglected. The challenge of being confronted with someone who has come to stay begins when their status as a temporary guest is over and they have to try and find their place within society. Taking these difficulties seriously is part of a realistic view of acceptance. As Sen’s argument has shown, participatory processes belong to realising justice as capability justice, even under imperfect conditions.

Such participation will involve, but must not be restricted to, connecting to each other on the ground of the mutual perception that, in some respect, ‘they are like us’.<sup>55</sup> Here, Walzer’s analogies of clubs and families are helpful. But in order to avoid Sen’s ‘trap of parochialism’, encouraging such ties should not only point out what those who are already here and those who come might have in common. Pretending that people are nearer to each other than they actually are will result in the opposite effect of self-seclusion and, similar to strategies of moralisation, will rigidify existing differences. Only if the oscillating relation of proximity and distance pointed at in Simmel’s and Waldenfels’s analyses is maintained, can that which is not equal be treated as equal and can belonging in not-belonging be established.

### *The sphere of the political*

The observations taken from Waldenfels’s interpretation of Simmel provide a hint as to how existing differences can be dealt with in the self-perception of society and, consequently, in political decisions. For this, the paradoxical formulation of ‘togetherness among those who do not belong together’ is central. It belongs to what, according to Waldenfels, characterises the political: *treating what is not equal as equal*.<sup>56</sup>

Treating what is not equal as equal is a key concept for the self-understanding of society in the context of migration. As Simmel’s considerations have shown, dealing with existing differences is a complex task. Even the appeal to focus on what is common on a

52. Carens, *Ethics of Immigration*, pp. 164ff. Despite many differences, in this respect Carens’s argument resembles Walzer’s claim that those who are admitted should be entitled to full citizenship.

53. Carens, *Ethics of Immigration*, pp. 166–67.

54. Carens, *Ethics of Immigration*, p. 164.

55. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 49.

56. ‘Gleichsetzen des Nichtgleichen’, literally, ‘equating what is not equal’. Bernhard Waldenfels, *Sozialität und Alterität: Modi sozialer Erfahrung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015), pp. 12, 205 *et passim*.

very general level, like shared humanity, can exacerbate perceived differences. But neither is it fruitful to solidify such differences without allowing for any potential for development and change in existing societies. Equality is not tantamount to the disappearance of differences. Rather, 'equality is the criterion to decide if and how someone is integrated into what is common'.<sup>57</sup> If the moment of *difference* in the concept of treating as equal what is not equal is levelled down, equality is confounded with indifference. If, however, the moment of *equality* is ignored, differences are enlarged and made absolute to the extremes of radicalism and nationalism. The task, then, is to take differences into account in a fruitful way, so that they do not disappear and dealing with them does not result in identity, but rather in non-indifference.<sup>58</sup>

With these considerations, we touch upon the sphere of the political. *The political* is to be distinguished, yet not to be separated, from *politics*.<sup>59</sup> It outlines a sphere that is present in some forms of embodied politics, such as symbols, key events, or practices—events like an inauguration ceremony spring to mind.<sup>60</sup> The political is not restricted to institutionalised politics; rather, it represents a constant tension pertaining to all aspects of the social order,<sup>61</sup> keeping the realm of experience open for the accompanying difference which is central for a phenomenological view of society: something shows itself as more than and as different from what it is.<sup>62</sup>

In what way is the sphere of the political relevant for public theology? Jürgen Habermas characterises the political as the symbolic field by means of which societies develop an image of themselves. As such, the political 'may well spur deliberative politics'.<sup>63</sup> According to Habermas, the concept is located in the early history of societies organised as states, when the connection to some sacred power was essential. Still, for Habermas, an indirect reference to religion is preserved in the concept. Today, it is present in the complementary and reciprocal relation of secular and religious citizens in public discourse.<sup>64</sup> Following this line of thought, religious belief and its reflection in public theology are part of how the political can be influenced and can, in turn, influence politics, even in a country whose citizens are not exclusively Christian. As shall be shown in the final section of this article, impulses from the Christian tradition can help develop a concept of identity in which the relation between proximity and distance maintains its oscillating character.

57. 'Gleichheit entscheidet darüber, ob und wie jemand in das Gemeinsame einbezogen ist' (Waldenfels, *Sozialität und Alterität*, p. 196).

58. Waldenfels, *Sozialität und Alterität*, p. 207.

59. Waldenfels, *Sozialität und Alterität*, p. 63.

60. Waldenfels, *Sozialität und Alterität*, p. 204.

61. Waldenfels, *Sozialität und Alterität*, p. 196.

62. 'Etwas zeigt sich als mehr und als anders, als es ist' (Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene*, p. 9).

63. Jürgen Habermas, "'The Political': The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology", in Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds), *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 17, 27. German version: Jürgen Habermas, "'Das Politische': Der vernünftige Sinn eines zweifelhaften Erbstücks der Politischen Theologie", in Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds), *Religion und Öffentlichkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012), pp. 28–52 (31, 45).

64. Habermas, 'The Political', pp. 19, 27 (German version: Habermas, 'Das Politische', pp. 35, 45).

### *Strangers and fellow-citizens (Eph. 2:19)—how motifs from the Christian tradition come into play*

As has often been pointed out in the present debate, biblical traditions mirror the experience of living in a foreign country. The motif of the stranger and the refugee are central for the self-understanding of Judaism and Christianity alike (Exod. 22:20; Lev. 19:34; Deut. 26:5; Ps. 39:13; Matt. 2:13-15). In social legislation as documented in the Old Testament, the stranger is under special protection of the law (Exod. 22:21; Deut. 10:19). This is founded on the experience of the people having been strangers themselves in Egypt. At the same time, it has to be kept in mind that the groups mentioned in Old Testament use of law cannot simply be captured with present-day categories.<sup>65</sup> Which impulses can biblical considerations provide for the understanding of the categories of identity and foreignness if such a hermeneutical *caveat* is taken into account?

A closer look at central passages from the biblical tradition reveals an interplay of two opposing tendencies. On the one hand, biblical regulations transcend the gentile ethos of focusing on one's own community. The ethos in relation to the stranger forms a horizon for understanding the identity of God's chosen people. Nevertheless, in the minority situation of the people during exile, there is also conscious demarcation from the majority in order to safeguard an identity of one's own.<sup>66</sup> But the wish to found identity on social homogeneity is counterbalanced by the admonition to remember one's own history of living in a diverse, even hostile, social environment. Likewise, in a number of New Testament writings, the Christian experience of being a social minority plays a role. The metaphor of being foreign becomes a general trait of Christian existence, both in the eschatological dimension of earthly pilgrimage (1 Pet. 1:23-25) and in the christological dimension of belonging to and living in Christ (Gal. 2:20). 'Sojourners' (*paroikoi*) and 'temporary residents' (*parepidēmoi*) are central notions for the self-understanding of Christians (1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11).

It is difficult to identify the social groups which are referred to in these descriptions.<sup>67</sup> But the focus of these passages is a theological reinterpretation of contrast to and distance from the surrounding society in the light of belonging somewhere else. Paradoxically, 'the negative experience of non-identity is interpreted as a specific trait of Christian identity'.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, and seen in an eschatological perspective, such reminders of belonging to the people of God do not preclude founding a stable society. Instead,

65. Rainer Kessler, 'Grenzen der Übersetzbarkeit: Biblisches Fremdenethos und die modernen Herausforderungen der Migration', in Marianne Heimbach-Steins (ed.), *Begrenzt verantwortlich?: Sozialethische Positionen in der Flüchtlingskrise* (Freiburg: Herder, 2016), pp. 82–93 (82–83).

66. Hermann Spieckermann, 'Die Stimme des Fremden im Alten Testament', *Pastoraltheologie* 83 (1994), pp. 52–67 (53–55).

67. While in the pagan background, there are some similarities to the Attic notion of *metoikoi*, in the Jewish tradition *paroikoi* is used as a rather negative term, connoting political and social subordination. Reinhard Feldmeier, *Die Christen als Fremde: Die Metapher der Fremde in der antiken Welt, im Urchristentum und im 1. Petrusbrief* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), pp. 13–17.

68. Feldmeier, *Die Christen als Fremde*, p. 104.

the act of relativising social belonging makes it easier to open up towards a social environment despite existing differences.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the self-description as ‘strangers’ counteracts tendencies to regard seclusion as a key to stability.

As these considerations show, social cohesion in the biblical tradition is not a fixed concept. Rather, it is characterised by the tension of identity and otherness, belonging and non-belonging. The relation to Christ replaces other identity markers (1 Pet. 2:9–10). While it would be one-sided to simply transfer legal and ethical regulations concerning strangers to the situation of today, this complex relation between identity and otherness which characterises the existence of Christians as ‘resident aliens’<sup>70</sup> can provide a helpful impulse for the present debate. In antiquity, the idea of a new sense of belonging in Christ, transcending established differences, found acceptance in all layers of society.<sup>71</sup> It is connected with transcending the boundaries of God’s chosen people from within (Mk 7:25–30 par.; Matt. 28:19). According to Pauline ecclesiology, Christian communities are shaped by a new sense of belonging ‘in Christ’ (Gal. 3:25–28; Eph. 2:14). This does not mean that existing differences (Paul mentions Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female) cease to exist—but in Christ, they no longer have any meaning.<sup>72</sup> The hope of which biblical traditions speak does not manifest itself in a fundamental change of society. Being one in Christ (Gal. 3:28) does not mean that in church contexts, the concept of ‘foreigner’ ceases to exist. Rather, the transforming power of biblical hope is experienced in relativising existing differences by a change of perspective. Only if the irritations connected with this are undergone, might it be possible that those who are far away might become neighbours, as has been suggested.<sup>73</sup>

Similarly, it would be naïve to use the biblical notion of ‘stranger’ to level out all differentiation between groups of those who come: displaced persons, refugees, migrants from different backgrounds.<sup>74</sup> The impulse the gospel can provide for the present debate does not consist in ignoring existing distinctions and differences between groups. Rather, Christian self-understanding can provide a horizon in which existing differences acquire a new meaning. Hence, Christianity can provide an impulse to re-imagine one’s own

69. Feldmeier, *Die Christen als Fremde*, pp. 178–79.

70. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony. A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something is Wrong*, expanded 25th anniversary edn (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014 [1989]).

71. Christoph Marksches, *Warum hat das Christentum in der Antike überlebt?: Ein Beitrag zum Gespräch zwischen Kirchengeschichte und Systematischer Theologie*, 3rd edn (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006), pp. 51–56.

72. For details of this reading of Galatians 3, see Thomas Wabel, *Die nahe ferne Kirche: Studien zu einer protestantischen Ekklesiologie in kulturhermeneutischer Perspektive* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), p. 437.

73. Kirchenamt der EKD, “. . . und der Fremdling, der in deinen Toren ist”: Eine Arbeitshilfe zum Gemeinsamen Wort der Kirchen zu den Herausforderungen durch Migration und Flucht (Hannover: Kirchenamt der EKD, 1998), para. 111.

74. Alexander Dietz, ‘Notwendige Differenzierungen in der Flüchtlingsdebatte: Kritische Anfragen in der Perspektive der Zwei-Regimenten-Lehre’, *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 142.4 (2017), pp. 325–42.

identity. Not only does this include sensitivity towards phenomena of multiple belonging and the ability to resist simple classifications;<sup>75</sup> it also entails a culture of remembrance concerning one's own origin. In Germany, many families have a background of displacement and flight in postwar times.<sup>76</sup> In the media and in literature of the 1950s, such experience was often glossed over by a romanticised ideal of *Heimat* and family.<sup>77</sup> As Christoph Hübenthal has suggested, such suppression might still be present in nostalgic, yet unrealistic images of cultural identity. But even when people speak of a 'multicultural society', there are underlying images of juxtaposed monolithic cultures, as if a clear-cut answer to the question 'who are you?' were possible.<sup>78</sup> Such ambivalences in one's own background need to be brought to mind, especially today, seventy years after postwar displacement, and with a third post-immigration generation of Turkish descent growing up in Germany.

What role can Christianity play in this situation, and within a religiously plural society? My suggestion is to assess church activities according to the following criteria:

- (1) The role of the churches in the debate on immigration has been described as cultivation of dissent.<sup>79</sup> Such dissent is not restricted to disagreement in political matters. As I pointed out above, the present disagreement includes underlying uncertainties which are not always transparent to the individual. In this situation, cultivation of dissent goes beyond the mutual elucidation of opposing political convictions, and it includes fostering an awareness of such hidden fears. In some cases, this may entail confrontation with people's own experience of foreignness, thereby revealing the wish for homogeneity as the desire to overcome one's own ambivalences. In any case, such unspoken fears should be taken seriously. If, instead, these fears are rationalised and glossed over, they won't disappear. Instead, they are likely to return and to be instrumentalised by right-wing movements such as *PEGIDA* or populist parties such as 'Alternative for Germany' (*Alternative für Deutschland, AfD*).
- (2) Furthermore, and following Waldenfels, Christianity—like other religions—can remind people that, with all the conditions that a society may (rightfully) set for a right to stay, hospitality rests on something unconditional. In this sense, the fears that the identity of one's own country might be put at risk are legitimate, but they have a positive implication: just as a gift indicates a dimension of superabundance

75. Michael Nausner, 'Changing Identities, Changing Narratives: Can Theology Contribute to a New Cultural Imagination of Migration?', *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 3.1 (2017), pp. 226–51 (248).

76. Christoph Hübenthal, "'Denn ihr seid selbst Fremde gewesen': Sozialethische Anmerkungen zum Migrationsdiskurs', in Michelle Becka and Albert-Peter Rethmann (eds), *Ethik und Migration: Gesellschaftliche Herausforderungen und sozialethische Reflexion* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010), pp. 15–23.

77. Hübenthal, 'Denn ihr seid selbst Fremde gewesen', p. 17.

78. Judith Butler and Reiner Ansén, *Kritik der ethischen Gewalt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), p. 57; Hübenthal, 'Denn ihr seid selbst Fremde gewesen', pp. 18–19.

79. Lutz Bauer, 'Fluchtort Deutschland: Kultur, Dissens, Dissens-Kultivierung', *Deutsches Pfarrerberblatt* 116.1 (2016), pp. 8–11.

which forms the backdrop of the goods traded in society, hospitality indicates a dimension of the unconditional in human relations which forms the backdrop of all conditions that are set for someone to be regarded as a member of society. Fostering an awareness of the unconditional, however, is not tantamount to an unconditional welcoming of all who come. But it does contribute to a change in perspective, individually and societal, in a twofold way: firstly, realising that one's own life, with all its constraints, can be seen in a horizon of abundance, can provide one with a sense of sovereignty that is often missing in the debates on asylum. Such sovereignty could lead to a certain generosity and equity in dealing with the burden that integration of strangers into society places on all parties involved, and it could help to deal with the fears and uncertainties mentioned above. Secondly, an awareness of the unconditional can also bring out ambivalences of hospitality that would otherwise remain unseen. This can be illustrated by regarding the notion of God's grace, which is probably the most prominent Christian symbolisation of the unconditional in human life. To become aware of grace as the basis for one's life is an ambivalent experience, for it calls into question what is thought of as fixed and stable. Grace is experienced, according to the Lutheran tradition, within the dialectics of law and gospel. In an analogous way, the ambivalences of the unconditional in hospitality are experienced in the confrontation with someone who (temporarily) belongs without actually belonging. The imposition connected with this experience is due to the fact that the presence of a stranger calls identities into question—the identity of society as well as one's own identity.

- (3) Keeping this ambivalence of hospitality in mind, it is easier to avoid the pitfalls of an all too optimistic image of the contribution strangers can bring to society, as is present in some church documents on migration. Instead, a realistic view of the situation should pay attention to the (inner and outer) difficulties connected with integrating large numbers of people from a different background into society.<sup>80</sup> The obligation to take up refugees pleading for asylum is to be distinguished from the task of integrating new members into society. Not everyone who comes has come to stay. But in relation to those who do stay, a process of 'de-estrangement' is called for, involving those who come and those who were there before alike. In this respect, Walzer's analysis of *metoikoi* and guest workers can be complemented. For even if full citizens' rights are granted under certain conditions, acceptance within society remains an issue. The Pauline reminder that Christians understand themselves as *parepidēmoi* and *paroikoi* can help to relativise existing, seemingly clear-cut boundaries of belonging as they are present in conceptions of the identity of the sovereign nation state.
- (4) Thus, religion can help to re-assess one's own cultural identity, which, as Simmel shows, can easily be called into question by hosting a stranger. The task of re-imagining one's own cultural identity<sup>81</sup> becomes less legalistic in the light of belonging somewhere else. When Paul applies the political concept of citizenship (*politeuma*) to the heavenly sphere of Christian existence (Phil. 3:20), he

80. Dietz, 'Flüchtlingsdebatte'.

81. Nausner, 'Changing Identities', p. 248.

relativises the bonds of societal belonging and, at the same time, re-establishes them by placing them in a different light. The eschatological dimension characteristic for Christian belief is an example of what Waldenfels calls belonging-without-belonging. Thus, in the light of religious traditions, it may become easier to see being foreign as part of one's own identity.<sup>82</sup>

- (5) A possible objection to these considerations might point out that present-day (German) society is not an entirely Christian community. Although this is certainly true, arguments reflecting the Christian tradition need not be misplaced. A concept of suspending differences without denying them as presented by Paul can contribute to a change in public awareness even within a society that is not predominantly Christian. Here, the notion of the political comes into play. As a horizon for the way a society sees itself, the political is open to influence from religious traditions. As a horizon for political decisions, the political reminds decision makers that any given political order could be different and, consequently, is accompanied by the possibility of its transgression and transformation. Christianity, like other religions, plays an important part in symbolising these possibilities. In doing so, religions contribute to the sphere of the political in a given society, even when not all members of this society are religious adherents. Likewise, it is a task of public theology to make alternatives visible which are rooted in the self-understanding of a society—without postulating that these alternatives must (or, indeed, can) be realised right away, but without giving them up altogether.

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82. Arnulf von Scheliha, 'Migration in ethisch-religiöser Reflexion: Theologiegeschichtliche und ethische Erwägungen zu einem aktuellen Thema', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 113.1 (2016), pp. 78–98 (94).