



Divine election and migration: The worst possible way to address the predicament of refugees?

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Abstract

Some nationalists may suggest that divine election is the best possible way to defend their rights against an influx of people from elsewhere. Others would argue that divine election is the worst possible way to address the plight of refugees. In this contribution the question mark in the title is defended by drawing on a) ecumenical discourse on migration, b) Heiko Oberman's notion of "the reformation of the refugees" and c) by reflecting critically on teaching practices at UWC. It is argued that divine election can indeed offer consolation, especially to refugees, but only if the retrospective and doxological logic is recognised.

Keywords

John Calvin, divine election, migration, Heiko Oberman, refugees

1. The many faces of migration

The migration of people¹ – mainly from Africa to other parts of the world – forms an integral part of the evolution of the human species and its predecessors. From a (social) Darwinian perspective such migration is situated amidst an ongoing struggle for survival – the search for food and habitat amidst challenges posed by changing climatic conditions, predators and competing interests of other human communities. The movements of people can be restricted through military, political or economic means, but

1 This article is based on a paper read at the Kosmos summer school on "Religion and Migration", hosted by the Faculty of Theology, Humboldt University, Berlin, 8-11 June 2016. It has to be understood against the background of this theme, while the reflections on teaching practices are prompted by the context of a summer school.

mobility and migration seems to be as much embedded in human history as is settlement and the quest for identity.

For a privileged few migration is a positive experience, for most contemporary migrants this is associated with hardships: being uprooted, detained, trafficked or dying on the journey (WCC 2013:39). The term “migrant” includes diverging categories such as migrant workers, professionals, international students, refugees asylum seekers, displaced persons within their home country and victims of human trafficking (WCC 2013:40). There were 215 million migrants living outside their countries of citizenship in 2010, including some 20 million who migrate due to a deteriorating climate, approximately 15 million refugees,² 1 million asylum seekers and a further 12 million stateless people and 26 million people who are internally displaced due to conflict.³

That the theme of migration is discussed in the context of political decision making, ethical discernment, religion and theology is a function of the emergence of nation states and notions of citizenship. The boundaries between nation states will necessarily be contested since these protect the interests of some and limit the movements of others. This suggests an urgent need to reconsider notions of citizenship. All too often debates on citizenship focus either on the rights or on the responsibilities of citizens but there are prior questions that have to be addressed here, including of what entity one is a citizen (e.g. a nation state, also a town or a city), how does one become a citizen (by birth, through immigration or as a refugee) and what is the social status of citizens. In South Africa these questions were at the heart of the struggle against apartheid, i.e. debates on independent homelands versus a unitary state, race classification (also for the sake of affirmative action) and notions of “second class citizens”.

In short, current debates on migration are a function of political control over access to land and natural resources. It is within this context that ethical

2 According to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, a refugee is someone who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his [or her!] nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear is unwilling to, avail himself [or herself!] of the protection of that country” (quoted in WCC 2013).

3 These figures are quoted in *The Other is My Neighbour* (WCC 2013:41) and would need to be continuously updated in the contemporary climate.

concerns over the plight of refugees, civil wars, economic opportunism, visas, work permits, xenophobia and so forth have to be situated. In this contribution I will assume the descriptions and analyses of the scope, depth and impact of such concerns that are widely debated in the media and in scholarly literature. I will not seek to contribute to contemporary discussions on the immense challenges associated with current patterns of migration (e.g. regarding Syrian refugees, African migrants or human trafficking). I may merely note that the severity of the associated problems is likely to become vastly exacerbated due to climate change in decades to come. We may have to cope not only with millions but with hundreds of millions of human refugees. This link between migration and climate change is complex as a deteriorating climate may affect both the aspirations and the capabilities of a family to migrate from rural to urban areas or across borders.

Instead, I will focus on the role that religion in general and Christianity in particular may have in addressing such concerns. More specifically, I will raise the question what role (teaching) systematic theology may play in this regard. It needs to be stated upfront that such a role is necessarily limited since the major contributions would have to come from policy makers and humanitarian agencies. Nevertheless, from a purely functional perspective, the role of religion both in the root causes of migration (religious conflict amidst fundamentalist truth claims) and in addressing the plight of refugees (e.g. Muslim welfare organisations⁴ and Christian churches in Germany and South Africa alike) cannot be underestimated.

In order to limit the discussion I will take as a point of departure a recent booklet on migration produced by the World Council of Churches, entitled *The Other is My Neighbour: Developing an Ecumenical Response to Migration* (2013). I will offer a critique of this booklet and will then explore in more depth one rather unlikely theme that may both exacerbate the trauma experienced by refugees but may also help to diagnose the core of the problem, namely the notion of divine election. I will suggest that the conceptual problems related to migration are structurally similar to the problems discussed in debates on divine election so that the one may illuminate the other.

4 For one example, see Kidwai (2014).

2. An ecumenical response to migration

In the typical style of WCC documents on social justice, *The Other is My Neighbour* is the result of an extensive process of consultation with regional ecumenical organisations, member churches, activists and theologians over a period of sixteen months in 2011 and 2012. Three such consultations were held in Beirut, Geneva and Manila. The document is divided in three main sections. The first section explores biblical and theological insights related to migration, the second section describes the ecclesiological and missiological implications of migration patterns (given that 49% of the estimated 106 million migrants are Christians, typically forming migrant churches – par. 19), while the third section calls for a renewed ecumenical response to migration in the light of the theme of the Busan Assembly (2013), namely “God of Life, Lead us to Justice and Peace” (see WCC 2013:2). I will focus here on the document’s theological engagement with migration since its position on issues of justice and service (*diakonia*) to the victims of migration, which is indeed the main focus, is one that is shared by many other organisations in civil society.

To its credit, the document does not shy away from addressing the particularity of a Christian engagement with migration. It affirms the sacredness of all human life and the sanctity of God’s creation, values the biblical notions of justice and peace, renews a Christian response to the marginalised and excluded, and seeks to build inclusive human communities (WCC 2013:2-3). The document observes that the biblical writings are deeply rooted in migratory experiences (diaspora) and situations of exile (out of Eden, Egypt, Babylon, the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the church as pilgrims and strangers). The biblical texts do not denounce or affirm migration but recognise the hardships that this entails. The document even describes being dispersed and alienated as a mark of the church (*nota ecclesiae*) (par. 7). The people of God are “resident aliens”, always living in some tension with their socio-political context. Such migratory experiences enable the people of God to see in “the other”, the excluded and marginalised, nothing but the image of God (par. 8). The excluded other is therefore one’s neighbour, to be loved as oneself (Lev. 19:18, Matt. 19:19). Indeed, the church is a pilgrim community (par. 26), one that is not static, but dynamic and “becoming” in nature, one that transgresses existing boundaries (par. 27). The church consists of inclusive

local communities where walls that divide people on the basis of gender, class, citizenship, ethnicity and race have been broken down (Eph. 2:14). To recognise the contributions of the “other” to the life of the community creates space for inclusion and mutuality (par. 18).

Although the underlying tenor of the document may be found in its focus on (“universal”) human dignity as related to the biblical notion of being created in the image of God, it does not shy away from more particular theological categories. It portrays the God of the biblical texts as “a God who supports migrants in their plight and who sees to an end of exploitation” (par. 9). The Triune God is the creator, redeemer and sustainer of life. Jesus is the divine migrant who crossed various borders (par. 40). The Spirit sustains and empowers life and renews the whole creation (par. 15). God’s mission is grounded in the Trinity and is described as aimed at communion, transformative, inclusive and justice orientated (par. 23).

I wish to raise three questions regarding this document:

Firstly, it seems that there is an unresolved tension between the church as a “pilgrim community” (*paroikia* – par. 26-29) and as a “kingdom community” in which there are no longer strangers and aliens but only members of the household of God (*oikodoume* – par. 30).⁵ Migration therefore cannot be an aim in itself but only a corrective to oppression and injustice in a particular place. Is the emphasis on being strangers merely a polemic corrective and therefore not a substantive or constitutive one?

Secondly, there can be no doubt about the radically inclusive nature of the people of God, the followers of Jesus of Nazareth or the church as pilgrim community (par. 34-40). However, such a call for openness to the other as one’s neighbour does not resolve the conceptual problem plaguing discourse on inclusion and exclusion. What would one need to do to include those who wish to exclude others? Does this imply limits to inclusiveness? I suggest that this problem was already evident in the radically inclusive ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. He called those on the margins of society to repentance and conversion in order to accept the coming reign of God precisely because they needed to accept others who are also extended God’s

5 For a discussion of this relationship see Müller-Fahrenholz (1995), also Conradie (2008).

grace. It seems that a generalised option for inclusivity needs to be practiced through particular (individual and covenantal) acts of inclusion in order to work out the implications within a network of relationships. I will return to this aspect with reference to the theme of divine election below.

Finally, in offering ecumenical responses to migration in the journey toward justice, the document uses the well-known distinction between various forms of witness, namely the manifestations of the church as koinonia, leitourgia, martyria and diakonia. However, strangely, it leaves out the role of kerygma, i.e. proclaiming the reign of God. Does proclamation play no role in the migrant church at large, in becoming just and inclusive communities (par. 54)? Does this suggest some embarrassment with proclamation?

I suggest that this is more than a Freudian slip but indicates a failure to come to terms with an underlying political problem that is at stake in dealing with migration, namely exclusive claims of land ownership for a particular group of people. This is expressed in terms of the boundaries of nation states, the defence of private property, self-appointment as cultural custodians of such land and, especially, economic (if not military) control over the available resources. Such claims are all too often defended with reference to tacit or explicit notions of being God's chosen people – with a divine right to land ownership. Such claims have left a trail of blood in human history – not least in South Africa and in Germany. The solution cannot merely be an emphasis on universality and inclusivity. In responding to migration there is a need to come terms with particularity and location.

3. The worst possible way?

The Jewish-Christian tradition cannot avoid a debate on being God's chosen people, given the role that notions of divine election have played throughout this tradition. It therefore matters how divine election is interpreted. There are nevertheless two reasons why any talk about divine election would be avoided by those seeking to address the problem of migration from a religious perspective. Firstly, any notion of being God's chosen people may well lie at the root causes of conflict that lead to migration. Secondly, the problems encountered by refugees as they seek a home elsewhere are exacerbated by nation states and notions of national identity, often reinforced by religious claims to privilege.

In response, many may wish to avoid talk about divine election altogether. I suggest that this is not a legitimate option for those standing within the Jewish, Christian or Muslim traditions. These traditions are constituted by very particular narratives of God's engagements with equally particular people. To avoid talk about divine election is to avoid talking about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and David, Elijah and Isaiah, John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth, Mary Magdalene, Peter and Paul. One cannot take any of these characters seriously without doing justice to their sense of particular calling. The same applies to a long lineage of Christian saints, martyrs, church leaders and theologians. It would not do to focus on their sense of calling without taking into consideration their theological justifications for that calling, for better and for worse. It would also not do to focus on the positive traits of these characters without taking on board the exclusion of Cain, Ishmael, Esau and the self-exclusion of Judas.

I need to add that notions of divine election need not be disastrous in dealing with situations of migration. This is epitomised by Calvin's ministry to refugees in Geneva. Indeed Calvin was a refugee who ministered to a congregation consisting of an increasing number of refugees in Geneva amidst anti-French xenophobia (fuelled by the proportion of refugees compared to citizens) and some riots and attacks on refugees. This was exacerbated by the prejudices and societal expectations of wealthy refugees with aristocratic leniencies. Admittedly, Geneva was willing to assist strangers on their way, but the scale of the refugee influx was such that the city could not cope (see Naphy 1994:12-143). Heiko Oberman (2003:111-115) observes that the Calvinist reformation has to be understood as "the reformation of the refugees" following the defeat of the Protestant Princes in 1548 and 1549 and the expulsion of many Protestants amidst a redrawing of the map of Europe in the mid-sixteenth century.

Calvin's doctrine of predestination has to be understood against this context. Oberman acknowledges that notions of predestination are easily abused within the context of the religious wars. He quotes Philip Benedict to illustrate the repellent aspect of predestination: "Moral rigor shades over easily into self-righteousness, and the elect are rarely loved when they let the remainder of the community know that it is damned" (in Oberman 2003:114). Oberman insists that this amounts to a misunderstanding of Calvin's ministry and theology. He himself was labelled "that Frenchman"

(Vosloo 2009:40-41) who accepted Genevan citizenship only late in his life (in 1559). The key to his theology may well be found in his letter to king Francis with which he opened every edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Oberman (2003:114-115) captures the pastoral significance of Calvin's understanding of divine election:

The Calvinist doctrine of predestination is the mighty bulwark of the Christian faithful against the fear that they will be unable to hold out against the pressure of persecution. Election is the Gospel's encouragement to those who have faith, not a message of doom for those who lack it. In particular, it responds to the anguish that Calvin already felt in the early wave of persecution, which spread through Paris on the eve of his escape to Switzerland fearing that torture would force him to betray the other members of his underground cell. Rather than providing grounds for arrogance, predestination offers all true Christians the hope that even under extreme duress they will persevere to the end. Later, when the refugees had become settlers and citizens, they developed the scriptural insights fostered by this experience and hardened its doctrinal crust. It was then that election came to be regarded as a civil right.

Oberman (2003:118) argues that the seemingly abstract doctrine of predestination was a matter of existential faith for exiles. The refugees had no other place of refuge than in God's providence (2003:149). Oberman adds:

For those who had no permanent place of residence, not even a fixed stone on which to lay their heads, neither valid passport nor a residence permit, predestination became their identity card (2003:157).

Accordingly, God's favour, as expressed in the notion of divine election, is a message precisely aimed at refugees. It would be reductionist to suggest that Calvin's notion of election is best understood as being in the service of (French) nationalist agendas, i.e. that religious language provided a secondary justification for political persuasions. This would underestimate the ultimacy of what is at stake (!) here. Although the Genevan refugees

(many of whom were highly skilled⁶) were rejected in their home country, they were affirmed by Godself to be members of God's household. If one is about to be burned on the stake for one's faith this is probably the best available consolation. Even if one is rejected by one's own people, one's ultimate assurance in life and death may well lie in being elected by Godself. In this context the categories of election and damnation is nothing but an attempt to hold together a trust in God's compassion *and* God's justice (see Jonker 1989:66).

Would it be possible to retrieve such a notion of divine election amidst the migration of people in the 21st century? What about the differences in class and education between the Genevan refugees and contemporary African refugees? Such a retrieval is rather unlikely in a liberal political climate where tolerance and inclusivity seem to be contrary to any notion of particular election. Inversely, in the hands of reactionary movements and identity politics any talk about election is outright dangerous. Claiming to be God's chosen people or even God's chosen agent is language that is more often than not used to justify both oppression and terrorism.

That there is a widespread lack of interest in talk about divine election is acknowledged by Willie Jonker in his book *Uit Vrye Guns Alleen* (1989:158) – the last of a series of textbooks in systematic theology published in Afrikaans (ever!?). As Oberman (2003:156) also admits, "The doctrine of predestination, once a precious heirloom, now shows up only here and there at theological discount markets." New books on election and predestination are produced only from within extremely conservative reformed and evangelical circles – or in order to criticise the connection between predestination, nationalism and Zionism (as a visit to Amazon.com would illustrate). Admittedly, there is some retrieval of the particularity of God's grace in the context of liberation theology (the option for the poor), black theology (the epistemological privilege of the black working class) and Pan-African theology (Africans as God's chosen people), but this is scarcely ever related to classic discussions of divine election, not to

6 For a discussion of the economic contribution that French refugees made to the society in Geneva and the help provided to foreigners, see Biéler (2005:132-141). For a theological interpretation of Calvin's relationship with refugees in Geneva, see also Vosloo (2009).

mention predestination. Instead, an interest in divine election is replaced by an emphasis on universalism – which renders election obsolete and uninteresting, while grace may be taken for granted and is no longer costly (Jonker 1989:159). The problem of evil is then subsumed under evolutionary history as natural evil.

4. Divine election? Critical reflection on teaching practices

How, then, does one introduce the theme of divine election in the context of discourse on migration, if at all? Inversely, how does one introduce issues around migration in the context of discourse on divine election? If it is inappropriate and disingenuous to avoid such juxtaposition, can these themes be placed in mutually critical correlation? In the context of a summer school, it may be best to reflect critically on my own teaching practices in this regard in the hope of inviting others to offer comparative perspectives.

At the University of the Western Cape undergraduate courses in systematic theology are offered under five quite traditional rubrics, namely an introductory course on contested notions of Christian identity, followed by four modules on the doctrine of God, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the doctrine of the church in an ecumenical perspective. When I offer these courses I typically seek to clarify the core affirmations of the Christian faith, investigate these affirmations in terms of contemporary contextual challenges (including debates in African theology) and then require from students to develop a constructive response to such challenges by reinterpreting the content and significance of confessing “the one Christian faith” from within their own contexts.⁷

Where, within this framework, would one introduce the theme of divine election, if at all? This is no innocent question as this has been done in very different ways – by placing the theme of election under divine providence, under Christology, soteriology or Pneumatology – with diverging implications for the treatment of the subject (see Jonker 1989:17-18, 49). In

7 The phrase “confessing the one faith” is derived from the remarkable Faith and Order achievement to offer a common exposition of the Nicene Creed in which the member churches could recognise each other’s expression of the faith as authentically Christian and could at least explain differences (in emphasis) to each other (see WCC 1991).

the final edition of his *Institutes*, Calvin discussed the theme of election in the context of soteriology. In Calvinist scholasticism (following Theodore Beza) (double) predestination was placed in the doctrine of God and thus became the cornerstone for the whole baroque edifice of Christian doctrine, but often led to abstract speculation about being divine, treated as a point of departure rather than as a doxological conclusion (Jonker 1989:14-15, 54f). By contrast, the Barthian approach to relate divine election to Christology leads to an equally speculative form of supralapsarian universalism. In teaching practice I typically mention divine election as one possible theme that can be discussed under the doctrine of God but never actually include that for discussion in the module outline. Instead, I discuss this theme in a period or two on the relationship between justification and sanctification and again (for the sake of some repetition) in discussing baptism.

In my classes on baptism I often ask the students to reflect on this story: A pastor prayed after an infant baptism ceremony: “Lord, we ask that you write the name of this child in the Book of Life”. Another pastor commented afterwards that this prayer was inappropriate and should have been formulated as “Thank you Lord, for writing the name of this child in the Book of Life”. Of course this raises many questions, not least on the meaning of this “Book of Life”, but also about those who are baptised but seem to “go astray” later in life, the need for confirmation and baptismal vows. Is baptism a guarantee for or a subsequent sign of salvation? This quickly raises further questions about the very meaning and purpose of sacraments. If baptism does not seal God’s promises (as Calvin maintained), can it best be understood as a form of ethics, a sign of commitment and loyalty (as Barth maintained)? Once such concerns are raised by the students, I then inform them that the second pastor was in fact my own father (Pieter Conradie 1932-1966) and that this story was told to us by Prof Bethel Müller in a final year class at Stellenbosch University in 1987 – *after* some group discussion during which I was defending more or less the same position against a class mate with extreme right wing tendencies. This was a serendipitous moment, at least from a personal perspective.

In order to unpack this I then raise the classic theme of assurance of salvation (which is also the locus where Calvin introduced the theme of predestination). On what basis would one call oneself a Christian? On what basis does one become a member of the household of God? On what basis

may one believe that one's sins are indeed forgiven (by God)? This prompts a discussion of the classic Lutheran and reformed doctrine of justification and the relationship between "good works", faith and grace.

These questions are of course framed in rather traditional language. However, I then illustrate the social significance of these questions with several examples, including the story of the priest providing silverware to Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables* despite his theft of the other silverware (which allowed Jean Valjean to start a new life). The problems associated with offering amnesty during the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996–1998) often feature as well. My assumption is that doctrinal categories (especially soteriological concepts) are abstractions derived from metaphors used in a very specific social context in which they were highly meaningful.

One other example is that of the adoption of an HIV-positive orphaned girl whose parents died from AIDS-related diseases. If legally adopted, the child becomes a regular member of the new household, with privileges and responsibilities and will become an heir of her parents' inheritance. On what basis can she know that she is indeed part of the family? There can be no doubt about the need for such reassurance. Should she behave well? What if she messes up (again)? Would her HIV-status make any difference? Does the difference lie in her believing that she is part of the family? Clearly, what makes the difference is the legally stamped adoption papers but she would live in fear of being excluded once more if she does not believe that she has indeed found a new home in which she can be herself and interact with the other family members, household items, pets, etc. However, she would miss the joy of being a member of the household if she does not recognise the magnanimous grace of the parents who adopted her, who welcomed her in their home as one of their children and heirs. Any orphan is left with many further haunting questions, including the simple one: Why me? Why was I chosen and not others? What made the difference? This is a haunting question because the grace of the adoptive parents is necessarily particular. This is a matter of inclusion in the household but all-inclusivity is not possible. No one can be a global mother!

One could add similar examples with reference to the plight of refugees and asylum seekers. No one country can welcome all Syrian refugees or

Zimbabwean migrants. A spirit of inclusion requires selective particularity, dealing with individual cases albeit that this can also be situated in covenantal relationships.⁸ However, such examples do bring complexities that would require further reflection.

It is not difficult to see the significance of this example for theological reflection on the role of good works, faith, grace, baptism, divine election, gratitude and joy. In reflecting on such examples in the classroom I always point out that questions around assurance of salvation (inclusion in the household of God) follow at best a retrospective logic, with arrows pointing backwards: what makes the difference is neither good works, nor faith, nor cooperation with God's grace (synergism) but magnanimous grace (see Jonker 1989:35). This "difference that makes the difference" is discerned through retrospective attribution and is often expressed hyperbolically and exclusively: it is *only* God's grace that made the difference.⁹ Baptism is a sign and God's seal that this includes me. Why was I included and apparently not others (at least not yet)? Here an apophatic moment is required: This is a question that cannot be answered in any definitive way. It leaves room only for doxology, for expressing gratitude for the grace experienced and especially for experiences of joy. This is the only way in which talk of divine election makes any sense, namely as a form of pastoral reassurance in the midst of injustices and anxieties.¹⁰

8 It is instructive that Jonker (1989) treats election and covenant in the same textbook and in relationship with each other. It is also instructive that he does not explore the way in which both terms can become radically distorted through nationalism – with readily available examples in Germany or in South Africa.

9 See also Jonker (1989:49): "A posteriori the believer recognises in the message of election the eternal background of his [and her] redemption" (my translation).

10 Admittedly, the Augustinian tradition added that God's salvific intention is particular; not everyone will be saved. It is not as if it is God's will that all people would be saved – since human responses would then ultimately make the difference between eternal salvation and eternal damnation (see Jonker 1989:42-46). This is where a prospective logic (see below) becomes so devastating – as if one may know God's particular preferences. Insofar as one may entertain such a prospective logic it seems appropriate to emphasise the cosmic scope of God's work of salvation so that God as Creator and as Redeemer are held together in the consummation of all things. This is the intuition that is found in most forms of ecotheology (see Conradie 2015). However, any affirmative answer to the question whether everyone and everything will be saved in the end (despite its inclusive intention) also knows too much, still follows a prospective logic and all too often does not recognize the victims of history. In this regard the hypothetic universalism proposed by the school of Saumur in France may need to be revisited (see Jonker 1989:73-77).

To follow a prospective logic is spiritually perilous given the speculative danger of placing oneself in God's position (playing God). Accordingly, one may start with predestination (and reprobation) in the divine counsel (as if one has a right to be there), follow the implementation of such decisions through acts of divine election in history, extending grace to some, urging them to believe in the authority of the one offering such grace and calling them to show gratitude for good works. This prospective logic is perhaps kerygmatically unavoidable but harrowing if developed as a cornerstone for an entire theological edifice. It typically follows a deterministic logic by emphasising God's sovereignty – which is then inversely proportioned to human freedom (see Jonker 1989:38–39). This cannot but undermine a recognition of God's love. Moreover, the temptation for those in positions of power is to extend any notion of God's sovereignty to the sovereignty of the nation state – and to use that too to curtail human freedom, especially in terms of the migration of people.

In the classroom I suggest that any talk about the divine counsel should be considered with the utmost trepidation (how would we know that in any case) and then always with Oepke Noordmans' witty comment that "God's eternal decisions are taken at the very last moment" in mind (Noordmans 1979:493). I therefore prefer not to use the term predestination (a term best used with reference to the divine counsel) at all (except, perhaps, as a truly ultimate doxology, pushing a retrospective logic beyond the confines of history), while I note that the term divine election (in history) is one that cannot be avoided in the Jewish-Christian tradition.

It is this prospective logic (and its emphasis on divine foreknowledge) that has given the doctrine of predestination such a terrifying reputation – and justifiably so. The main problem is that it portrays the triune God as arbitrary while salvation is treated in a fatalist manner (see Jonker 1989:16). It portrays God's elective grace in a linear way as a prior decision with causal effect (Jonker 1989:146). Such a speculative image of God is not the God revealed in Jesus Christ (the one who was both elected by God and rejected by his own people); it is the God of the philosophers (Pascal), the God of natural theology (Jonker 1989:127). It is the same prospective logic that turns the reassurance that baptism provides into a corruptive exercise: What if the child (or grown-up) who has just been baptised later in life does "go astray" and eventually denies the faith? In short, baptism offers

consolation (*troos, Geborgenheit*) for those who need it (such as refugees, asylum seekers, victims of human trafficking, and AIDS-orphans) amidst experiences of exclusion and injustices, while it smacks of exclusion for those who pretend that they do not need such consolation from a position of privilege and comfort and who can therefore allow themselves to be tempted by a prospective, speculative logic.

This does not imply that a prospective (i.e. kerygmatic) logic is never appropriate. There may well be a need for the parent to reiterate to an orphan that she is indeed a child in the household, to believe that this is true and to live from that freedom. An ethics of gratitude and responsibility does follow from the message of being elected. There would be a need to confirm, regularly, to the victims of history that even though they are rejected by others, they are not rejected by God. There is a need to confront perpetrators and to warn that victims (e.g. of imperialism) may easily become perpetrators (e.g. the Afrikaner people) in future. However, for the one who needs consolation only a retrospective logic is appropriate in order to fathom the simultaneity of both God's justice and God's compassion. For the victims of history these character traits cannot be separated.

5. Conclusion

In discourse on divine election Christian thinkers have grappled with conceptual problems related to contextual dilemmas around inclusion and exclusion, particularity and universality. These same conceptual problems plague contemporary discourse on migration and more specifically on refugees. On the one hand the liberal (Kantian) emphasis on inclusiveness and universality is to be commended. There is indeed a need to regard human dignity as inalienable, especially for the sake of the victims of history, to translate such notions of dignity towards "universal" (or at least planetary) human rights and consider the implications of that for the intrinsic worth of all forms of life. Such inclusiveness is also deeply embedded in the African spirit of ubuntu. In Christian terms this is expressed in the catholicity of the church, the extension of the household of God (*oikoumene*) in space and time. As many scholars and activists have recognised, this implies an ethics of recognising the other as other and not merely an extension of myself, of hospitality and of caring for those in need.

On the other hand, such an inclusive spirit cannot avoid hard decisions of inclusion and exclusion – in civil administration and pastoral praxis alike. Inclusion has to be expressed with reference to a particular other in order to be transformative. Compassion has to be expressed in the particular or not at all. There is the further question how to include those who wish to exclude others. What does one do with the HF Verwoerd's and Adolf Hitler's of history? Are they to be included as well? How should one address the “repentance” of an Albert Speer or a Eugene de Kock? What about traitors, informers and tax collectors? Are migrants on a terrorist mission welcome too? Moreover, it is not always so obvious who are on the inside and who are considered to be outside. Should hybridity, being on the margins, multiculturalism and multiple identities be endorsed as a new norm or not? What about particular linguistic, cultural, ethnic and denominational identities?

The more one may wish to stress universal categories (human rights) and structures (the United Nations), the more others who do not have a stake in such corridors of power may wish to stress narrow group identities.¹¹ The more they do that, the more others recognise the need for umbrella categories that could include those that are excluded. However, any such inclusive umbrella terms are open for critique in terms of differences of gender, class, race, culture and civilisation. The abstract term “religion” is a case in point.

At best, the doctrine of divine election is an attempt to express God's grace and compassion to runaway slaves and refugees, the victims of history, the unlikely underdogs. However, my sense is that contemporary Christian theologians have to admit a massive failure to guard this mystery. In the same way that the doctrine of the trinity has elicited rampant speculation rather than doxology, speculative notions of divine election have been abused to defend narrow group interests rather than to express gratitude for compassion experienced. Perhaps this is where refugees may be able to teach learned theologians something. The last word may belong to Oberman (2003:165):

11 This observation is derived from a perceptive comment made by Christopher Duraisingham during a visit to the Department of Religious Studies at Stellenbosch University in the early 1990's.

Calvin...spelled out Scripture in the light of the persecution of the church and addressed his letters, commentaries and sermons to the afflicted churches. Their members, eyes darkened by blood and tears, could not see a thing of God's omnipotence and faithfulness and, against all the evidence of their senses, clung only to that one Word: the Lord knows who are his; he will not forsake the work of his hands. Outside of this context Calvin's doctrine of election is not only abhorrent but also ungodly. But within this horizon of experience it is a precious experiential asset which churches can only dispense with to their great detriment and which we, for as long as we may live under the protective canopy of our democratic rights, must keep alive and pass on to prepare ourselves and our children for the things that are coming.

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