

Dear Sharon,

I am honored and very happy to follow your invitation (including "use my name"). Allow me to approach the extremely painful subject not directly, but picking up the current thoughts of the famous former judge and editor-in-chief of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (in: "Prantl's View - The Political Weekly Preview", *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of December 29th, 2019), finally concluding them upon the relevant item "75 Years After the Liberation of Auschwitz - What are the Lessons Learned from the Holocaust?!"

The story of the Holy Three Kings has been pleasing to me since my earliest days. "You have to imagine this figuratively: how King Balthasar climbs down from his elephant, King Melchior from his camel, King Caspar from his horse – and how the three then on their way across the meadow to the manger grind their magnificent long coats through the sheep's faeces.

As a child, this idea gave me a good pleasure. There is a lot of dirt on a sheep pasture; even if a curly star has pointed the way there. So the three kings arrive a little dirty at the child called Jesus. This means two things: firstly, it proves that cleanliness might not be the most important thing, even in the most sacred matters. Second, it turns out that the kings had to come down from the high horse not only in the real sense, but also in the figurative sense. One does not stand pumsily and splendidly in front of his God, even if he is currently in diapers.

But the evangelist Matthew, of course, didn't mention kings, not even the elephant, the camel and the horse, so nothing about the menagerie, as we Christians like to place them in front of the manger. Matthew writes that "magicians from the East", wise men from the East, gather with the newborn child. The further formation of Christian legends then made the Three Kings out of the Magi - probably because of the three precious gifts they brought to the infant: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Everyone knows gold. Some people know frankincense, myrrh knows almost no one in Europe. At least two thousand years ago, frankincense and myrrh were extremely precious resins used as medicine against all kinds of sufferings, also used in cult and as an aphrodisiac, or simply to smell good. Pure luxury, the visitors laid at the newborn's feet.

Gold, frankincense and myrrh: What did Jesus do with it? Matthew owes us an answer. If this childhood story were to play out in the present, one would not need to puzzle further about it. The Bible text about the flight of Joseph, Mary and the Child Jesus to Egypt gives the answer: all the beautiful gold, the expensive frankincense, the precious myrrh went on it for the tugs. More kindly, for the refugee aiders.

Hardly any other way, escape is possible in today's conditions. Those who (like Jesus, Mary and Joseph) want to escape Herod and his death squads must pay. Escape aid resp. smuggling is a market that is based on the usual rules of the market: Where demand is high, supply is increased. And the less money you have, the more flimsy the products you can afford: for the have-nots, there are crossings only on scrap barges and ailing inflatable boats.

The refugee child Jesus would not flee to Egypt today, but first to Lesbos and lie there in the dirt - next to Rajab, Nasri, Bobby, Farhar, Lucas, Hameddin, Kariem and Muhamad; and Joseph and Mary would perhaps seek to come to Germany with the child.

The story of the flight of the Son of God reveals the brutal reality. The child murder of Bethlehem, of which Matthew tells, is not historically documented anywhere. That is why many researchers believe

that it never took place, because such cruelty had to leave its mark on reports, letters or other documents. Ultimately, however, it is not the so-called truth of the text that matters. It is true, because we can easily list examples of such atrocities", although we have to mention firstly the Genocide, especially against people of all national origin with Jewish faith, we remember together on January 26th, 2020. "That is the horrible thing: we are so well-initiated into reality that we have no problem at all in assuming that the murder of the children of Bethlehem has happened!

Not everyone who comes today as a refugee is fleeing from killer commandos who directly threaten them. Some are fleeing everyday terror and violence in their countries. They must then read in their rejection notices that they have 'domestic escape alternatives'. This is perhaps what happened to the child Jesus: why flee abroad if one is only threatened in Bethlehem? The Jesus family could have sought security in another city, it would be said.

To be sure, many refugees are simply fleeing a miserable future. Today, they are fleeing from countries where they are not directly threatened at home and life, but where conditions are so corrupt, poor and chaotic that they see not only no longer a future there, but objectively don't have a real perspective which deserves the name "future". The motives of these mostly young people are not dishonorable, the hateful speeches of those who despise them are dishonorable!

Matthew constructs his gospel in such a way that the Messiah, send by God, is drawn into this calamity with his birth - on the side of the victims. So, the savior is one who needs to be saved so that he doesn't die.

So, it is not only with him, but with a large part of the biblical staff. If one sees the Bible from this point of view, it is a book of stories of escape and migration. Matthew's colleague, Luke, does it in a different way, but in the same way in intention. In his birth legend, the imperial order for the census forces the parents of Jesus to leave their hometown before he was born. With Luke, the Messiah is born in a foreign city without a hostel. In Matthew's case, the infant must immediately leave the house where he is born in order to escape the royal order of killing.

The author Matthew, who tells of gold, frankincense and myrrh, lived in the last quarter of the first century; he witnessed how the Jewish war turned countless families into wandering refugees, strangers in their own country. From the promised land of freedom, which Israel was according to the tradition and into which God had led his people, Egypt had once again become an Egypt, a land full of misery, hardship and affliction, a land in which one suffered from occupation and violence. That is why Matthew, in his legend of birth, sends his Baby Jesus among these people. He has to follow on their pathes in solidarity.

Matthew tells us about a child who has to flee from the perpetrators of violence. He likens the fate of his Messiah to the fate of the uprooted people of his presence. But even more: Matthew consciously constructs the story of Jesus according to the story of Moses. Like the great liberator of the people of the Old Testament, chosen by God, Jesus also comes from Egypt. Like Moses, who escaped the murder of Pharaoh in a reed box, he too is a man who has come away. Like Moses, who gave the commandments to the people on the mountain, Jesus will proclaim God's will in his Sermon on the Mount. And how could a refugee child begin his sermon differently than as such: Blessed are the poor, the suffering, the meek, the seekers of justice, the merciful, the peacemakers, the persecuted. Of them, the persecuted, we have to speak first.

Perhaps, the Lord's son is on the run again, this time not to Egypt. If we want to know where – then we are best looking in the refugee shelters, in the camps, on the ships in the Mediterranean."

That's why we should be inspired by the palm tree episode. "It comes from the Golden Legend, a medieval collection of sacred stories. It has been painted over and over again: by Albrecht Altdorfer and by the Italian masters Correggio, Caravaggio and Giorgione. Hans Baldung Grien has depicted it on the altar wing of the Freiburg Minster, the depiction of Anthonis van Dyck hangs in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich: It is the episode of the palm tree, which bends down when Joseph and Mary had to flee to Egypt with the child Jesus to have his dates picked; and between its roots, this palm tree makes a spring bubble.

So, even nature could not help but be softened by the sight of this family. This is to say: defence is not a natural reaction. It does no harm to politics if it bows down to the refugees. She has to come down from the high horse. The politicians must help. This is part of the Three Kings' message. This is not only true two thousand years ago. This will also apply in 2020."

It is still important to remind us human beings of what is given to us in numerous social orders of human history, which is told, among other things, in Genesis 1, 26 f. "26 And God said: Let us make men, a picture equal to us, who rule over the fish in the sea, and upon the birds of the air, and upon the cattle, and over all the beasts of the field, and over all the creeping things that creep on the earth. 27 And God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; and created them as men and wives." Psalm 8, 6 further clarifies this: "You have made him little less than God, and have crowned him with glory and honor."

The meaning of god likeness lies in the desire of man to align his actions with God, that is, in the ability to act ethically, in particular for the preservation and protection of others, for justice and sincerity. Consequently, the outstanding Prussian-German Rabbi Leo Baeck put it this way: "No matter how great the difference between man and man, the image of God is all their character, it is common to them all: it is what makes man a human being, calls him a human being" (in: "The Essence of Judaism", 1905)!

As far as I consider and understand the current discussions in Germany, in particular on the "handling" of refugees, foreigners, foreigners, people of other skin colours (?) or religions, we all should and must therefore be precisely concerned with assessing the question in each case not from the point of view of the person who may be obliged to act, but only from that of the person in need of assistance or of the person concerned! This one does not care who, when, why or who pays due respect to every human being, it is only important THAT this is done without exception! This applied and applies to all refugees, those who have landed or are stranded somewhere, as well as to all people of any descent, colour or religion! Therefore, for EVERYONE, it is a mandatory and urgent duty not only to provide first aid in order to immediately avert danger to life and limb of human beings, but - invariably passively and actively - to respect the image of our universal God as well as, if possible, to actively demand this human dignity, which must be granted to everyone as a matter of course (although certainly not everyone is born as a hero). In my view, omission is not only a "sin", but also a serious violation of social duties of conduct. By human standards, there is also a criminal offence when one or more state or ethnic communities stand idly by (and in some places - increasing again - even without a bad conscience!).

If the latter has now been recognized by a majority, Article 1 of the German Constitution, the "Basic Law" would have been deleted from this Basic Law as well as we should finally give up our hypocritical talk of human dignity, compassion, mercy and charity, including our common Christianity!

However, I still hope that we human beings have not completely mutated into insensitive and pitiful beings. On the contrary, it is imperative that we finally wake up throughout the world, especially inside the European Union as allied Member States AND as individual communities, and look for acute and long-term solutions to the problems that lie ahead! That is why, in my own vein, both arguments are right, the ones who are finally calling for effective help in immediate need, and the others, who are also rightly calling for solutions to problems at the root, and also rightly EU- or world wide solutions to solidarity. But all three are different pairs of boots! We should finally stop thinking of just ONE right way, besides human dignity must be granted without limits and without exception by everyone!

With my very best wishes, especially for the New Year 2020,  
Yours sincerely

Wolfgang

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