

Land, Nationalism and Christian Faith

by Janos Pasztor

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I have to confess that I am biased when dealing with this subject. We Hungarians are both emotionally and intellectually deeply touched by sorrowful experiences and/or false views relating to all three items of the title given for this paper. We are in need of being enlightened by the Word and Spirit of God.

The 1920 Versailles treaties have destroyed not only the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but Hungary itself was cut down to one third of its original size, and millions of Hungarians became citizens of the newly created professedly national, but in reality multi-ethnic states around us. Just to give a few illustrations: out of the roughly around 3,000 congregations of the Reformed Church in Hungary about 1,200 remained in Hungary proper. The largest Hungarian speaking theological Faculty has been in Romania since 1920. This painful fact is a wound that has not been healed ever since. Therefore the topic of this paper is a burning issue for us Hungarians that is being handled differently by different people. Unfortunately we have people who approach the problem from an irresponsible extreme right wing position demanding back the historical territories; some of them cover their extremist views with a superficial Christian cloak. There are also those who try to be indifferent to the questions involved. The position I myself represent is that the changing of borders today would cause more difficulties even if the world community would favor such demands (which does not). Therefore I am among the many, who respect the political status quo, and organize their lives accordingly. The European Union with its spirit of reconciliation and professed cultural plurality seems to offer the best solution for our problems.

I am also aware of the fact that we are not alone with such problems. Many nations are in far more difficult situations, such as the Kurds, their land having been divided between five different states. The immense sufferings of the so-called “developing world” or two-thirds world must not be forgotten. The crisis in Iraq, Afghanistan, and around Palestine has brought together many possible elements of tragic situations: there is separation, hunger, destruction and hopelessness, with a direct effect and threat upon the world situation.

My Christian faith presents me with the privilege and obligation to look at the problems of land and nation in seeking “to test and approve what God’s good, pleasing and perfect will is” (Rom 12:2) concerning the matter. For this reason I have to find my orientation in the Holy Scriptures even for the questions of land and nationalism. I see encouraging signs that this pattern is being followed not only by Reformed theologians, but also in other denominations. In the Hungarian theological scene we experience an emerging consensus between many Roman Catholics and Protestants concerning the most significant questions of our society. In this ecumenical spirit I can set out to search the Scriptures in relation to the questions of land, nationhood, and Christian faith.

I.

The Bible itself, and the history of dealing with the questions of land and nationhood after the closing of the Canon seeking biblical answers make it clear that these problems are interrelated. In fact they overlap one another as there are no nations – with the very significant exception of the people of Israel for over one and a half thousand year – without a land.¹ In our approach we shall follow the sequence given in the title turning first to the land question that will be followed by seeking guidance about nationhood and ethnicity.

● The first important point is that emphasis must be laid upon the unity of Creation and Redemption: God of Israel and of the Church – is Creator and Redeemer. It was for a long time a remnant of early Gnostic influences that there has been less emphasis on Creation than on Redemption with serious losses for theology in general and for concepts of land and nation in particular. Resulting from the Rediscovery of the significance of the Word of God in the Neo-reformation theology of the 20th century – that might be termed the “DOMINUS DIXIT THEOLOGY”² – has resulted in Creation taking its rightful place in theological discussion.³ Thus the unity of creation and redemption must be taken seriously. The land is important; its creation was said to be good. There is no Platonic dualism that depreciate the significance of land.

● Creation means first of all the bringing about and giving extremely significant role to land

¹ One might object to this statement and bring up the question of the Kurd who have no organized statehood. Yet they live in a well defined area allotted to different states. Considering that in Northern Iraq they now have a somewhat precarious autonomy, they are somewhere in a borderline situation.

² Karl Barth, *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*, (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1925,), 193f.

³ “The recovery of creation as a major motif I theology has taken place.” Walter Brueggemann, *THE LAND Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical faith*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) xii.

that is the “actually earthly turf,”⁴ or soil. That is the precondition for life in general, and for life and history of humans in particular. The word, land, earth, ground, ארץ appears 25 times in the two account of creation (P & J , Gen 1-2.). Ground, soil, אדמה is used once (1:25). The sequence of the reports shows that earth had to be organized in its relation with waters in order to bring forth the possibility of life out of the Chaos.⁵ The organized land was the precondition of life appearing on it.

● Then came the creation of the human being, who is a mystery. The relationship of the human being with the land is essential part of his/her life. The report on human creation in P and J are set side by side by the Redactor at the very beginning of the Book of Genesis. Obviously the two accounts were meant to be understood as complementaries. According to P man is given the task to rule over all the earth. J informs us that this task is to be carried out through dwelling on it (in the Garden), cultivating it, taking care of it. This relationship of ruling-dwelling-cultivating-caring between humans and the earth, belongs to the very essence of his/her being. This can be described as functional complementarity, that of actions. There is, however, another important fact that is necessary to understand human mystery.

● J points out that he/she⁶ was made out of earth, out of the soil (turf), Man became נפש חיה, an organic unity of the soil and what God had breathed into it.⁷ Therefore by virtue of creation humans have the earth as organic part of their existence. While dealing with the earth the person is dealing with him/herself. Earth became land in relation to humans, who are – in turn – humans in relation to the land. This is possibly a most special relationship to earth. The land-soil-dust is an essential part of his/her existence. Consequently just as they are related to God and to one another their relationship with the land is equally important.

● The fact that the relationship of male and female with the capacity and promise to bring forth children and the growth of personal relationship into family and nations includes that the collective character of humanity is not just an addition, but part of the Creator’s original design. It is particularly important in relation to the land. “Israel’s theory of land, as it is

⁴ Brueggemann, op. cit., 2. There is a slight difference between the English land, and the German *Land* words although *das Land* can also mean soil.

⁵ George A. F. Knight, *A Christian Theology of the Old Testament*, Rev. edition (London: SCM, 1964). 99-109.

⁶ “God did not make a man and a woman. He created, *bara* (as 1:1), Man...Man alone is not Man...Each of the two sexes merely represent Man, one malely, one femalely.” George A. F. Knight, *Theology in Pictures A Commentary on Genesis, Chapter One to Eleven*, (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1981), 17.

⁷ “And man became a living nephes. No longer is he merely a clay. The very life of God is in him. Nor is he now a mere body...He is a total person, body, soul, and spirit, a psycho-physical self.” Knight, *Theology in Pictures* op. cit 24-25.

portrayed in the conquest traditions and the Torah provisions, is that the land is assigned to the entire community as a trust from Yahweh... This land is... designated not as a possession, but an 'inheritance.'⁸

● But the fullness of the mystery of human existence includes something more. Coming back to Gen 1:26-27 we see that the special situation of humans is described as having been created in God's image and likeness. The J "counterpart" of this statement is 2:7." The Lord...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." Here we have what might be termed as ontological complementarity. Man belongs to God not only as part of creation, a result of God's handiwork, but belongs to God in a unique way as God's likeness having a share of the breath of life breathed into his nostrils, i. e. a mysterious kind of participation in God. Actually that gives the ultimate authority and possibility to rule over the earth. In other words, the human being by virtue of his/her very existence is in a mediating position belonging to both to creation and also in a unique way to the Creator.

● This might be regarded as a summary of what has just been said of the peculiarity of man and woman. The expressions emphasize that ruling-dwelling-cultivating-preserving is being done by virtue of their belonging to God in the way just described. All these amount to inform us that the creation stories of Gen 1 - 2 give the dynamic and in a sense dialectic relationship between earth and humans. Based upon the intrinsic relationship just described the ramification with the following elements of this relationship can be listed:

a.* The earth needs someone to keep it in order and cultivate it accordingly. Without the creation of humans and their participation in "ruling" over the earth, it might return to the chaotic situation before. God himself keeps this order through man created after his image.

b.* On the other hand, the human being needs the land which makes human existence possible. In this respect land is a gift.⁹ By virtue of having been created to have a special relationship to the land: it belongs to the very essence of his/her being.

c.* Furthermore, as life includes growth and development the human being is also in need of fulfilling his/her duties with the land. In the dynamics of fulfilling this role, he himself develops, and his/her life gets meaning.

d.* It can also be formulated in such a way that land is a task. God has put him/her upon it to rule, cultivate and take care of it. This fact shows the gift character the task. Without

⁸ Brueggemann *op. cit.*, 177f.

⁹ Land as a gift is an important expression of the relationship of humans with the land particularly, but not exclusively in the case of Israel: Brueggemann, *op. cit.*, 45-50.

fulfilling the task any person would lose his/her humanity.

e.* The land, therefore is not only a physical necessity for life, but it demands the whole living *nephes*. Humans would not be humans without land and without responsibility for it. Whenever or wherever this responsibility is neglected serious trouble develops. This neglect came about due to human sinfulness. The consequence of this is that the human being does not keep away chaos from the environment, but causes it. Today due to the great efficiency of technological development the consequences are disastrous.

f.* This relationship fundamentally includes human-in-relationship to other people. It is not a gift-task only for an individual, but also for the community represented in Gen 1-3 by the “first couple”. Their life is continued in their children and in the coming generations growing into clans, tribes and nations.

g.* For these reasons we might conclude this section by saying that the fullness of the human being according to God’s creating purpose consists of threefold relationship: he is related to God his/her Creator; he is related to the one another. The third vital factor of this relationship is that to the land. Whichever of the three is missing the real humanity of humans has been seriously wounded. Walter Brueggemann in his enlightening and thought provoking book, *THE LAND Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, deals with the question of land in relation with the past and present of the people of Israel and for the Church as she has been implanted into the tree of Israel, and also because of the serious crises developed around the Land of Promise which are causing grave consequences for the whole earth.

● At this point we must come back to speak of the sinfulness of humans. The human being having rebelled against God, all three relationships – to God, to other humans, and to the land (environment) – were seriously damaged. Thus the authority to rule and work has been fundamentally questioned with devastating effect on all relationships bringing hatred with humans, and bringing back elements of chaos with the destruction of environment and the threat of climatic change. The enormity of the environmental problems with deadly consequences is just opening up before our eyes and experience.

● In spite of all these God has not ceased to give land to humans. Even Cain was given land with a certain protection (Gen 4:15-16). From human rebellion onwards the land question has become extremely serious and dangerous. With the rapid growth of technological development this broken relationship threatens now the whole earth in terms of depriving peoples of their land, the capacity for killing and also for destroying the environment. The

latter is approaching the point when land will not be able to fulfill its role of being the mother earth making life of plants, animals and humans possible. Here we have to point to the effects of military-industrial development that has grown together with technology in general along with the spectacular successes of electronic communication in particular.

● However, before all these dangerous element of development could be seen God in his mercy and faithful love continued to deal with humankind in order to save them from the consequences of their self-defeating rebellion. He chose a person, Abraham and the people descending from him to be agents, servants, and fellow-workers¹⁰ of his saving activity. The *locus classicus* of these purposes and actions can be found as a nucleus in Gen 12:1-4. Abraham is chosen to be a blessing for all nations of the rebellious human race. In order to fulfill this he was given a land, the Land of Promise. The story of which was again emphasizing the intrinsic relationship between man and the land he/she lives on. It was a gift that by its very nature became a task.¹¹ The task included – right from the beginning until today – to build up proper relationship with other people, who lived on the land of Promise (Gen 12:6).¹²

● In the history of Israel the relationship with the land was a very dynamic and also dramatic one. The whole dynamism was meant to help Israel to develop fully its existence an important element of which was to serve others (Is 49:6). This dynamism is characterized by Walter Brueggemann as dialectic of land and landlessness, home and homelessness.¹³ It comes out of the story of creation, Abraham and Moses leading Israel into the Promised Land that was to be managed as an arena for justice. “Israel’s experience is of being in and belonging to the land never fully given, never quite secured...Israel is always on the move from land to landlessness and from landlessness to land.”¹⁴ When possessing the land out of grace the temptation comes to forget the three things: The land is a fulfillment of promises coming from grace alone. Land, Yahweh and Torah belong organically together.

¹⁰ St. Paul writes about this in I Cor 3:9. It has been pointed out that man by naming the animals acted as the Creator’s fellow worker.

¹¹ Brueggemann, *op.cit.*, 56-61.

¹² In Gen 11:27-12:6), where we read about the migration of *Terah, Abram’s* father how he tried to go to Canaan, but settled in Haran instead. What he could not do, was done by his son, because he was lead by God’s word. The Word reached him in Haran to take him into a new situation where they would be blessed in order to pass on blessings to the other tribes around them (12:36). Later history takes some sad turns concerning the relationship of Abraham’s descendants with the other nations. However, they were to be a challenge for one another right through. To analyze this text and in the context of Jerusalem and Gaza in 2004 is a great challenge for the church.

¹³ “The words of Jeremiah are subtle and dialectical. Of course he grieves about land-loss....But his words are not simple announcements of land-loss. They are the curious transformation of landlessness to announce that land-loss is the way of faith to the new land.” Brueggemann, *op.cit.*, 115.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

● Land is to be possessed always in relation of obedience to Yahweh and the Torah which speaks emphatically about the stranger, גֵר (Ex 22,21 + 77 times in the Pentateuch). They had to remember that it was a land not to be usurped, and not just to be mastered. “Land possession is held...only as land practices are under the discipline of neighbor practices grounded in the Torah.”¹⁵ This remembrance should have been vital. However, due to their sinfulness, forgetfulness came and so gift sometimes became a booty. In the history of the Promised Land enjoyment together with others was often turned into exploitation. The very land that promised to create space for human joy and freedom became the very source of dehumanizing exploitation and oppression.”¹⁶ Thus forgetfulness led to losing the land in exile. In spite of losing the way the dynamism of promise and fulfillment has worked by grace alone over the ages.¹⁷

● The Holy Scriptures do speak about land given to other peoples as well. The identity of the Giver and his purpose of giving blessings to all nations guarantee their close interrelatedness. The major thrust of God’s purpose has been that in addition to the Land Promised and given to Israel that each nation has been given land to live on and be blessed by the Creator¹⁸. Therefore not to respect the rights of other peoples, and the forceful taking away their land and/or its exploitation is under God’s judgment. It is condemned by the Word of God (Is 5:8). This kind of attitude cries out for justice (Is 19:16-25; Jonah 4:11). In the contemporary extremely difficult situation: the tensions and agonizing struggles in Palestine, and world wide are to be seen in this light.

Thus we have arrived at the extremely complicated issues of globalization in the post-modern world that shows a curious amalgamation of ancient tendencies of greed, and desires to achieve full life at the expense of others in classical and neo-colonialist form, with the amazing and accelerating industrial-technological development that include to revolution in telecommunication in our days. Sometimes amalgamation is mixed up with a false “theological” view of history based upon neglect of the Biblical texts in their context. There is no possibility to enter into a detailed analysis of this. To put it shortly what we witness today is a senseless and suicidal denial of the obligation given by the Creator to humans to

¹⁵ Ibid., 203.

¹⁶ Ibid., 204ff.

¹⁷ Ibid., 67ff.

¹⁸ There is a difference between blessing and salvation. See Claus Westermann, *What Does the Old Testament Say About God?* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979) 25-33 & 39-52. Cf. Brueggemann, *op.cit.*, 198.

honor the divine plan of keeping a balance between cultivation and preservation (taking care). Man did not fulfill the obligation of Gen 2:15 and developed with sufficient regard of considering the damages cause by its cultivation agricultural and industrial. There is no balance between the two. The result is that the basic conditions of life on the land are threatened. Thus humankind lives in a world today near the very abyss of annihilation as the fundamental conditions for life in this planet are withering away.

II.

A very important element in this dynamic, dialectic and threatening development of life on the land has indissolubly grown together with humans as “political animals”. There has been a reference to the fact, that land is given to man in community. It was according to the design of the Creator that “it is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). Therefore we turn now to the questions of nationhood and nationalism.

We have to consider the fact that during the last century, the horrors of WWII, the *Shoa*, also the sad events of the last 15 years from various genocides in Africa and in Europe, the agony of the Holy Land have delivered deadly blows in the name of nationalism – always with direct relation to the land question – on the hopes of humankind. It is of great significance that we all should be ready for self-examination and for accepting criticism of others. In doing this we are guided by the Word and Spirit of God, who is also the Spirit of Wisdom and sobriety (II Tim 1:7). Paul Tillich is right in saying that it is a task of theology to give answers to existential questions raised in world and society.¹⁹ It is in this spirit that we should be dealing with our topic.

I regard the question of nationhood as a deeply existential one. I am human in and through my being Hungarian, Moloccan, Indonesian, or Afrikaner. For this reason the question of ethnic identity coincides with my humanity. In other words: nationhood are bound up with the other question: What is man? What does it mean to be human?

These questions can be answered in various ways such as:

- ~ based on race;
- ~ based on the priority of culture;
- ~ based on political and power relations.

¹⁹ “The method of correlation explains the contents of Christian faith through existential questions and theological answers in mutual interdependence.” quoted by Alexander J. McKelway, *The Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964) p. 45.

We shall make no attempt to give answers based on these grounds. It is obvious that neither of these aspects is sufficient to give a full answer, but each one contains important elements that help to clarify the issue.

● This question is put forward and is given the most beautiful reply in Psalm 8: *What is man that thou shouldst remember him*²⁰?

Thus man is the creature specially remembered by God. This remembrance has come to its fullness in the Christ Event (Incarnation, Life, Death, Resurrection, Ascension and Sitting on the Right of the Father, sending the Holy Spirit), but it began with Creation. God created humans and kept on remembering them. In order to get a clearer view of this relationship we turn to the Book of Genesis.

● From the first page onwards we read about the power of God's Word that created the universe, and working for the salvation of humankind in Christ. In doing so God stepped out of his Three-in-One-self. It is the fundamental conviction of the Universal Church based upon Revelation, that God is Trinity. The mystery of the Trinity is the intrinsic relationship of Perfect Love²¹ of the Three-in-One. Each one of the divine Persons has its peculiarity distinctiveness, and each one penetrates the other two as beautifully expressed in the teaching of *περιχωρήσις* (*interpenetratio*) of *St. John of Damascus*. Therefore in the work of creation that is the work of the Father with the full involvement of the Son and the Holy Spirit²², we see the full Trinity at work.

● Creation was not a necessity, but the wonder of the outpouring of God's love. This explains that God created man/woman in order to have a personal love relationship with them. Part of Creation God also brought about life in terms of relationships and development, which is history.²³ This events upon the earth are intrinsically bound up with humans, who have the power and responsibility of action. This is described in Genesis as the creation of humans in the image and likeness of God. The symbol of image carries within itself the reality of being in relationship. By virtue of God creating man in his image a creature was brought about that has a part of the relationship within Godhead in two ways. He/she is related to God and to the other humans and last but not least to the earth, to our environment,

²⁰ Psalm 8:4 in the New English Bible 1970. This renders the original זכר. God remembers humans. This is the Gospel: Christ came the ultimate pledge of this remembrance.

²¹ That is the reason why the Scriptures, particularly 1 John 4:8 says: **God is love**. This means that the relationship within the Trinity is that of love. This love is being poured out in Creation, Providence and Redemption.

²² Gen 1:2 speaks about the Spirit hovering over the waters and the Word (the Logos, the Son) utters the words which act. Cf. John 1:1-3.

²³ History is events on the earth consciously recognized, registered and acted upon by humans.

as we have already seen it. Just as the relationship among the members of the Trinity is love, the relationship of humans with God and with one another is love. It is a relationship in love that carries within itself the prospective development of inter-human connections such as family, tribe and nation.

The important elements of this love-relationship between God and humans as well as between humans are

to be able to speak;

to be able to be spoken to;

to communicate with full existence²⁴;

in freedom without coercion limited by love and understanding.

● This perfect relationship of communication with love – as we have already seen – was broken by human rebellion. By sin humans separated themselves

from God ;

from one another;

alienated from their activities;

cause damaging to the earth, destruction of their environment.

It also brought about the end of full and trustworthy communication.

This full alienation of all significant spheres of human existence, the troubles and deadly destruction, a history of cruelty, lack of understanding and empathy has developed. All these have led to the despair²⁵ of the post-modern era²⁶ with the realistic possibility of humans destroying themselves, the fruit of our work and the environment in our days.

From the point of view of our topic this alienation includes the tensions and enmity within family, a nation and between nations. In other words it is not possible to comprehend fully the problems of ethnicity without looking at the state of humankind in the presence of God.

● The first chapters of Genesis not only gives us an account of human rebellion and its

²⁴ In the Scriptures speech is never identical with oral communication. The Word of God is also the deed of God. God speaks and the world comes into being. Eve and Adam speak by taking the forbidden fruit. Later on the oral communication of the prophets was bound up with actions. The yoke in Jeremiah's neck: the marriage of Hosea. The same happened in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. He also spoke by healing and feeding people proclaiming thereby the coming of the Kingdom. The climax of this communication in the unity of word and deed is the very Cross of Christ that includes his words which is continued in the Christian worship proclaiming the death of Christ in the unity of Word and deed (1Cor 11:26). That means that Christian worship -as opposed to that of the Islam - is not only verbal communication. Romans 10:17 is to be understood accordingly.

²⁵ D. J. Hall, "Despair as Pervasive Ailment" in: Walter Brueggemann (ed.), *Hope for the World Mission in a Global Context*, (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 83-94.

²⁶ Pásztor János, *Misszió a XXI. században*, (Budapest-Velence: Somhegyi Kiadó, 2000) pp 189-260.

disastrous consequences, but tells us about the infinite love of God which was not destroyed by human disobedience. He continued to be faithful to his original design to have humans as his partners in history that includes a positive evaluation of collective identity: family, tribe and nation.

The first utterance of God after the act of disobedience in Gen 3:9 should be taken as the first words of good news: the proto-evangelium.²⁷ Where are you? God seeks the rebellious creature in order to save him. The Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament give us a detailed account of God coming after lost humans. In the course of this seeking-saving activity God calls *Enoch, Noah, Abraham* and his descendants.

The story of *Abraham* gives us the most pointed aspects of God's seeking and saving activities. He was called by the Lord after the sad event around the attempt of building a "tower that reaches to the heaven" (Gen 11:1-9). They wanted to restore and keep unity by doing so, and making name for themselves by means of substituting God's saving grace with their efforts of religious arrogance. The punishment is that they lose even the existing unity: they do not understand one another any more. Hence the alienation of the nations which blocked the building of the tower.

They are scattered all over the place. Both origin and further development are seen and described by Scripture as being full of ambiguities. The origin is connected with sin and defiance. God came down to strengthen the forces of confusion. However, he did so in order to prevent building unity on false premises (Deut 8:17-18)²⁸. Thus this confusion was a preparation for blessing. The genealogy of Gen 10:10-32 shows that all descendants of Noah are under Yahweh's care. Abraham comes from this family. God blessed him and prepared the full blessing and salvation for all (Gen 12,3). Abraham's call is an answer to the crisis of the failure at the tower and is the continuation of God's dealing with all nations. It is not the existence of nations that is judged in the Babel Tower story, but their desire to reach heavens: "Man insolently hopes to find unity by *using* divinity for his own ends."²⁹ The purpose of electing Abraham is to build up real unity of peoples. His call was to be continued in the call of Israel which included an agenda for all nations.³⁰

²⁷ Even before the promise of Gen 3,15 which has traditionally called proto-evangelium. Cf. Knight, *Theology in Pictures, op.cit.*, 44-45.

²⁸ Knight, *Theology in Pictures*. 118-120.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) p 431-434; 494-496.

● *Abraham* had to leave his family behind without breaking family ties.³¹ Thus there is a continued ambiguity of family-tribe relationships. He was blessed and served that other nations--all the scattered ones--might also be blessed. The Old Testament speaks about the election of Israel to be covenanted with the Lord. This covenant is for the sake of others from the very beginning. The Law put a particular emphasis on taking in the aliens.³² The stories of *Rahab*, *Ruth*, *Job* – all Gentiles – confirm this intention of the Lord. The prophets gave messages to the neighbors, even to the enemy Moab: “My heart cries out for Moab.” (Is 15:5). The trying events of the Babylonian captivity even confirm this plan of God for Israel:

*It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Israel...
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that you might bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*
Isaiah 49:6

The underlining message in all these is that God wants people to be reconciled in and through his love.

To sum up the witness of the Old Testament in relation to nationhood we have to say the following:

~ The act of creation of humans carried in itself the community of love and communication between God and humans, in family and in the course of development, in tribe and nation. This nationhood carries in itself an important element of our being created in God's image.

~ In the corruption caused by human rebellion that relationship of love and communication was broken: hatred, inner strife and enmity between human communities became a rule of the day.

~ Sin permeates humans in their individual and collective existence. Thus nationhood, national consciousness can and has often become a foothold for demonic powers that often use religion as means of divisions and destruction..

~ All human societies - tribes and nation - must count with the reality of this ambiguity of communal existence. This ambiguity cries out for the balancing power of God first in Abraham and Israel with the view and promise for the sake of all nations.

~ God loves all nations without showing favoritism. He seeks all nations and offers his saving grace to all ³³.

³¹ See his relationship with Lot, the nephew (Gen 13-14), and getting a wife for his son from the family (Gen 24:4).

³² Deut 10,19.

³³ From this point of view the apocalyptic literature in general and the Book of Daniel in particular is of particular significance. E.g. Dan 2:36; 3:29; 4:34-35; 6:26-27.

~ Peace and reconciliation between warring parties can take place under the Kingship of the Lord.

The climax of this seeking comes, when He himself in Christ enters history: The Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost (Luke 19:10).

● This good news is for all nations. Even on the day of Pentecost this uniting purpose of God is seen in the pilgrims' coming to understand the proclamation of the apostles (Acts 2:6-12). As the story of the mission is going on the important stations of the development of the mind of the apostolic Church is opening up for other nations (Acts 10:35; 15:14-17). In Antioch a congregation came into existence which included Jewish, Greek, Arab and Black members. That church anticipated the heavenly worship of the Book of Revelation (7,11), of which earthly worship is a part. Thus that congregation in its very existence proclaimed that God wants all nation to live in peace and be united in the Body of Christ. This state of affairs at Antioch was a kind of precondition for launching the great missionary enterprise that brought the Gospel to Europe and to the whole world.

From the point of view of our ethnicity the following circumstances are important:

~ A person is addressed by Christ through the apostolic witness in his original state as member of a family, tribe and nation;

~ in order to find a new community sisters and brothers from all nations not as a replacement of the old community, but as a new source of power of serving his/her traditional community;

~ for this purpose as a member of the new community he/she is sent back to the old one to be at witness of Jesus Christ the author and perfecter of full salvation for both individual and communal life;

~ as a result new communities come into being some of them consist of people of one nation, others comprise of several;

~ in every case their belonging together in the New Community which is the Covenant People of the Lord and the Body of Christ. Wherever they are they should be aware of this togetherness - catholicity - of the Chosen People;

~ at the same time they should be aware of their responsibility for the others in terms of witnessing - the light function (Mt 5:14) - and in terms of radiating healing powers in society - the salt function (Mt 5:13). In other words to be present for the others;³⁴

³⁴ "Das <Für-andere-da-sein> Jesu ist die Transzendenzerfahrung!... Glaube ist das Teilnehmen an diesem Sein Jesus" Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung* (Hamburg: Siebenstern - Taschenbuch, 1971) English translation: *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

~ the awareness of this responsibility and mission of the ὤεκκλησία, the Chosen People as the Body of Christ is renewed and strengthened is also aware of its mission to testify about the saving Lord with its full existence which centered in the celebration of the Eucharist which is sharing Christ together, and is continued in offering what they have to all everywhere in the witness of daily life in which the worship goes on;

~ This going out to the world cannot be done without taking the events of history – including the facts of nations and their situations – seriously everywhere.

● It has been a significant part of all these experiences that Christ came to us through people from other cultures who proclaimed Christ in our midst taking up our culture and cleaning it from elements contrary to the word of God³⁵. The example of the Hungarian king *St. Stephen* of the 11th century is illuminating. He appreciated Hungarian culture, and exposed it to be cleansed from elements he thought were contradictory to the Gospel³⁶. He also understood the right of all people to share the Gospel without giving up their national identity. This was more than tolerance³⁷. He believed that the plurality of cultures is the wealth of the Commonwealth.

There is another important aspect of the fact of many nations having been called to the One Church. Thus sharing is bound to have an effect on our own cultures. We have been influenced by others. If we see various European dictionaries, and analyze the words they clearly show the influence of other languages. Saxon, Norman, Slavic, German, Turkish, Latin all influenced and enriched English and other languages all over the place.

Here again the guiding principle is that Christ cleanses, purifies all cultures. There are elements in every culture - including that of America - which should not be accepted. Naturally this problem is becoming very acute in the culture of globalization, when American culture has influenced most cultures in the world. In my own personal experience I have taken in elements of British, Kenyan-African and American culture that never questions the centrality of my being Hungarian.

These considerations might help us to be rid of both inferiority complex and feelings of superiority. It is not difficult to be overwhelmed by the amazing Anglo-Saxon, Dutch and

³⁵ Christ enters every culture, purifies it and uses it. Cf. Helmut Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (1956). During the second half of the 20th century Africans struggled with this problem.

³⁶ There are poems and stories about *St. Gellert*, missionary in the days of *St. Stephen*. He listened to and was fascinated by Hungarian folk-songs.

³⁷ In order to avoid misunderstanding we have to point out that in spite of his wisdom in many things *St. Stephens* shared the intolerance of the Constantinian-Theodosian Era in terms of religion. Christianity was introduced by force all over Europe. It was also taken for granted by *Stephen's* instructors in the faith.

“Western” culture, and feel lost or insignificant. Every nation contributed to world culture in the past and also in our own days. In the center of Budapest there is a piece of the Berlin wall: a gift of the German people for our contribution to bringing down that wall. It is easy to add more examples from the history and the present situation. We all must fight against looking down on other people with contempt which is often a kind of psychological recompensation for an inferiority complex. Feeling overpowered by the surrounding culture it is easy to find some people, whom we consider having even lower status than we think ours is.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal 3:28. This belonging together of people of different origin is not only a result, but also an essential part of the Gospel. Therefore it is part of “Christian culture”, i.e. of the culture of any society thoroughly influenced and shaped by the Gospel. Actually the looking down with contempt on people of other kind has often been a temptation in the church (James 2:1-4)³⁸. It was particularly strong in the so called Constantinian-Theodosian Era of the unity of church and state. It also made a damaging mark now and then on the traditional missionary enterprise that often took the “natives” as inferior creatures.

Today, due to the migration – movement of refugees, working in foreign lands, tourism – all over the world has brought about much tension. The fear of migrants coupled with hatred of the aliens³⁹ are tendencies to be fought against with the power of the Word and Spirit of God. These issues are also closely connected with the serious problems of globalization.⁴⁰ The widespread danger of terrorism have multiplied these fears. Even in the history of the church this unity of peoples has often been forgotten. We have to put a particular emphasis on the significance of bringing together people from all nations in the Church in relation to all excesses of nationalism. Therefore all attempts to support racism of any kind, hatred or contempt for other nations must be shunned from the life of the Church.

● It is to be welcomed that the sense of national identity formerly suppressed in previously colonial territories and in the lands oppressed by the Soviets has been strengthened. However, the terrible events caused by extreme nationalism should make us all cautious in our

³⁸ In Kenyan culture the old person greets the younger ones thereby authorizing him/her to reply. First we thought they were impolite.

³⁹ There were two sad events that happened at about the same time. Several hundred of Afghani refugees saved by a Norwegian tanker, who were dying on the deck of the big ship were denied entry into Australia. At the same time (2001) in Hungary the government planned to turn the empty barracks in Kalocsa used earlier by the Soviets into a refugee centre. The whole city all parties and civil organization protested. The Archbishop of Kalocsa and the Reformed Church remained silent.

⁴⁰ Cf. There is an immense amount of literature about this. Pásztor János, “Ökumené és globalizáció”. *Theologiai Szemle*, XLIV/2. 2001. 92-97.

judgment and actions in these areas. It has to be emphasized that the normal expressions of national identity are not to be disapproved of. The theological foundation of this is that the Word in her/his context addresses a person. If God calls a Moluccan, he/she responds to this call with a “yes” of whole existence soul, intellect, will and body including the “context”, which the person is organically part of. The positive response, the “yes” is expressed with the deep conviction that the Gospel of Jesus Christ gives the best hope for both the individual and for the people collectively. A Hungarian cannot do more for his/her people than to follow Christ in obedience in carrying on His mission.

However, many have misused and manipulated that natural right, both outside and within the churches. In political life it has been relatively easy to swap the horse of communism for that of nationalism. Extreme forms of this could be witnessed in Europe, as well. The dangers and disastrous consequences of this is daily experience even today. Hatred, which is the source of that kind of thinking and behavior, represents a continued danger, and therefore challenge for Christians.

Facing all these it is to be emphasized once again that an essential part of my national identity is the readiness to be exposed to critical examination. This should lead us to collective repentance. In the light of the Word we can get our consciousness of national identity right over against a romantic and false patriotism.

● In view of all these we have to emphasize that in Christ there is reconciliation between people separated by race, class and events of history. It is a significant part of the mystery of Christ that all nations are together as parts of his body (Eph 3:6). All nations need the Savior, and praise him together (Rev 7:9-10). This “multinational” character is an important part of the Gospel. In the congregation at Antioch, Jews, Arabs, Berbers and even at least one black person Συμεών ὁ καλούμενος Νίγερ, which demonstrated in its very life this uniting and reconciling power of Christ. This fact excludes any superiority complex.

We may come to the conclusion that land and nationality belong together. Dealing with the two topics separately we could not help referring to the other. Indeed, the People of God in the Old Testament chosen to serve the salvation of all nations as well as the latter do need their land as a gift and a test that can be carried on in taking it from the hand of the Creator and Redeemer who want us to serve for reconciliation of every land and every nation.