Exclusive Border Crossing

Considerations on Exclusive, Inner-Religious Demarcations

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Abstract

From 1933, the inner Protestant ‘German Christians Church Movement’ from Thuringia took control over some Protestant regional churches in Germany. For the German Christians the main motives of their agitation were the creation of a ‘volksch’ belief system based on race, Christianity and ‘dejudaization’ (of Christianity).

Based on the theoretical considerations of spaces, boundaries and exclusion, the article uses the example of the German Christians to show under which conditions individuals are denied entry into an imaginary religious space. ‘Exclusivist border crossings,’ as this phenomena is named here on the theoretical perspective, can explain how religious arguments exclude people from entering a religious space such as salvation when the access criteria are linked to birth-related conditions.

Keywords

space – border – social imaginaries – race – Third Reich – Protestantism

1 Introduction

A concept is presented here that deals with demarcations in the religious context. Boundaries of every kind can be found in all areas of social action, and thus also within religious thought patterns and community structures. Membership in a religious community itself marks a border between members and outsiders.

Such boundaries are usually surmountable, but there are also ideologically constructed borders that are accepted by one segment of society and cannot be surmounted by another segment of society. Racist conceptions of society can serve as a classic example of how ideological constructions expand boundaries, divide people into groups of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' and, as a result, do not allow cross-border passage from one group to another.

By means of examples from the time of the Third Reich, the question will be pursued as to how – in a religion that understands itself as universalistic in nature, such as Christianity – a demarcation on the basis of racist ideas can emerge. The exclusion of certain people based on racial characteristics plays a central role in the reasoning behind such a demarcation. In order to define the terms used in this study, Kim Knott's conception of space in relation to religion is examined here, followed by the introduction of a new concept of an 'exclusivist border crossing.' To illustrate the mechanisms involved in this kind of 'exclusive border crossing,' ideas and practices are considered that were common to some denominations of German Protestantism during the period of National Socialism.

2 Exclusion – a Conceptual Limitation

The concept of exclusion can be found in the most varied used contexts within many different scientific disciplines. For example, historians Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt use it to analyze the social exclusion mechanisms of the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* [Volk community] during the time of the Third Reich. In its basic promise, the *Volksgemeinschaft* was initially based on the rhetorically propagandistic inclusion of all 'racially pure *Volksgenossen*' [members of the Volk]. Ultimately, however, the concept of the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* did not define who was to be assigned to it, but was based rather on a firm concept of exclusion. The *Volksgemeinschaft* was first and foremost a concept that clearly defined who was not allowed to belong to it due to some established basic assumptions that were racial and anti-Semitic. Put simply, the National Socialists were not concerned with social homogenization, but with the "production of racist inequality."¹

In the social sciences, especially in sociology, you can find a model of exclusion used to describe marginalized societies that are ignored by the majority due to their origin, socialization, occupational status, etc., to the extent that

¹ Bajohr/Wildt 2009, p. 17.

these fringe groups hardly have any chance to participate in society.² To explain the social impact of this exclusion, Charles Taylor distinguishes between social theory and the social imaginary

(i) because my focus is on the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories, and legends. It is also the case that (ii) theory is often the possession of a small minority, whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society. Which leads to a third difference: (iii) the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.³

Finally, in practice, exclusion is not based on a rigorous theoretical conception but instead on its acceptance and implementation by broad sections of society. Heinz Bude comes to the conclusion in his analysis, referring to the game-theoretical considerations of Claus Offe,⁴ that ultimately there are two manifestations of social exclusion:

Due to fundamental criteria of exclusion, which are related to legal status, social skills, education or cultural affinity, one cannot even get involved, but on the other hand one can also be stigmatized, demoted and ignored by certain circumstances. An example of the first case is the 'foreigners' within our expanded world who have exchanged relatively secure entitlements for abundant unsecured bids, encountering insuperable barriers.⁵

In the following pages, this last point mentioned by Bude will be the decisive criterion in my explanatory approach of the 'exclusivist border crossing': There exist barriers for certain groups on the basis of criteria which they cannot under any circumstances influence for themselves what are here referred to as borders, which give the individual no access to a religious-transcendental space as a result of exclusion by other people. To illustrate my reflections, I use an empirical example from the time of the Third Reich in which exactly this type of exclusion occurred. The insurmountable barrier in this example was

² Cf. the overview by sociologist Heinz Bude, who also names the different perceptions of those marginalized groups in the various western countries (Bude 2004).

³ Taylor 2004, p. 23.

⁴ Offe 1996.

⁵ Bude 2004, pp. 10 et seq.

attributed to race. However, at the end of my remarks, I will briefly outline in an excursus how the approach I have suggested explains religious exclusion in relation to race and give further examples of exclusion which can be explained with the help of the 'exclusive border crossing.'

3 Race as a Border of Exclusion

The term 'race' is understood below – of course, only in the temporal context of 20th-century ideas – as a birth-based, attribution-based, immutable nature and property of all individuals, each of whom are assigned to a particular race. In addition, race is not just a social attribution, but always involves a hierarchical categorization that generates a system of domination and subordination. The essential and characteristic types can be of an external-physical nature and/or a mental-psychological nature. A change in those ascribed 'racial characteristics' is in principle not possible in most of the contemporary racial theoretical ideas and underlying conceptual usage. Assimilation does not dissolve the ascribed racial traits, which is why the external attribution of belonging to a particular race and having the associated 'racial characteristics' persists.

On a theoretical level, all attributes perceived as negative in the Christian understanding⁶ could be abolished by a conversion to Christianity through baptism. For example, it would not be possible to continue using anti-Jewish stereotypes to describe a former Jew after his or her conversion, since that convert would be perceived as a Christian and no longer as a Jew. In practice, however, stereotypes persisted for centuries around believers who themselves or whose ancestors had converted from Judaism to Christianity.⁷ In early modern Spain, religious and biological lines of reasoning were already interconnected when referring to the "purity of the blood" (*limpieza de sangre*) with regard to converts.⁸

In such thinking, conversion to the Christian faith was fundamentally possible, but these converts and their descendants remained 'second-class Christians' because of their Jewish ancestry. Although baptism enabled the attainment of Christian salvation in this case, it did not succeed in reversing the attributed (negative) racial qualities.

6 I use the example of Christianity because the following empirical example comes from the Christian context of 20th-century German Protestantism.

7 Mosse 1997, p. 128.

8 For a more detailed explanation, see Hering Torres 2006.

In the understanding of the racial doctrine, which has become increasingly established since the 19th century, an assimilated Jew who has also converted to Christianity continues to be understood as a Jew, since, despite the adjustments, the racial characteristics are understood as permanent and, moreover, inheritable. Accordingly, representatives of such socially constructed thinking have also considered descendants of converts to be 'racial Jews.' The biologicistic components (above all, blood) were the decisive criteria in the popular racial theories at this time, which determined the racial affiliation of an individual and thus ultimately also his or her religious identity, since converts and their descendants in the most extreme cases – as will be shown – were denied their identity as Christians due to 'racial characteristics.'

The immutability of (attributed) racial affiliation distinguishes this 'modern racism' from early modern racial categorization. If the latter is not a rigid system, but rather flows ('fluid boundaries') between attributed racial and religious identities,⁹ 'modern racism' represents a wholly unchangeable categorical system in which the division of humans into races is anticipated at birth (through the blood).

Such 'modern racism' is defined in terms of content via ethno-cultural differences, the alleged immutability of which is codified. Such ethnocultural differences are usually based on perceived differences in language, customs, kinship relationships, etc., which are interpreted as genuine essential characteristics of an imaginary collective such as a people (*Volk*).¹⁰ Adding to the typical characteristics of racist categories are also alleged patterns of behavior ascribed to this imaginary collective – its 'essence.' For example, 'Jewish vengefulness' is one of these ideas which is repeatedly formulated in anti-Semitic contexts, as well as the 'non-adaptability' of 'the Muslim' in alleged Christian-European civilization standards. This is addressed in the context of European migration debates. In his study on racism, George M. Frederickson identifies yet another essential feature of racism which is of central importance for the following considerations on 'exclusive border crossing.' For Frederickson, racism is expressed

also in the practices, institutions, and structures that find their supposed justification or validity in perceiving a group as 'different.' [...] [Racism] either directly serves as the rationale of *racial order* or demands the

9 Lynch 2017, pp. 293 et seq.

10 Frederickson 2004, p. 13.

establishment of such, that is, a permanent hierarchy of various groups, which reflects the laws of nature or the will of God.¹¹

Thus, if there exists the possibility of assimilation or, in the context of institutionalized religion, of conversion, there should be no talk of racism in the religious frame of reference. Racist thinking denies every possibility of adapting the other to one's own 'collective' (the in-group) due to innate and unbridgeable opposites to one's own self. One can speak in this context of exclusion, "if inclusion means a relationship characterized by the granting of fundamental rights of recognition and participation. Exclusion then means to be excluded from such rights."¹²

This mechanism, as has already been briefly mentioned, has been increasingly used in the last few years in the study of history, e.g. to describe the social integration power of National Socialism under the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft*, which in turn was based on a strong idea of exclusion.¹³ A coexistence of Germans and Jews – or people who were categorized by the Nazis as Jews – was considered unthinkable, hence the attempts to separate the 'other' socially from the Germans. The individual identity of the 'German' or, in the concrete example used here, of the 'Christian German,' was based on a definition of the 'other,' who did not belong to one's own collective.¹⁴ People perceived as racially different were denied access to the determining community by the determining community itself.

In South Africa under the apartheid regime, as well as during racist legislation in the US, this exclusion was accomplished at the political level and determined residents' entire social lives.¹⁵ Such exclusion of people from social and political participation in the US and South Africa did not make any reference to religion. Individuals supposedly 'racially inferior' or declared by the determining group as 'other' could still participate in the religion of the ruling community. In concrete cases, this means that blacks in the US and South Africa

11 Frederickson 2004, pp. 13 et seq. [emphasis in original].

12 Callies 2004, p. 19.

13 See Schmicheen-Ackermann 2012.

14 These mechanisms are explained in detail by Rembold/Carrier 2011. Likewise, in the Christian context, this type of identity formation becomes visible, for example, in the 19th and 20th centuries in Germany, where representatives of Protestantism and Catholicism pointed out the differences between the two denominations in order to strengthen their respective members' sense of belonging. Steinhoff 2004, p. 561.

15 Such racist demarcations are not to be understood as mere political guidelines, but are based above all on various mechanisms at work locally, which render such limitations tangible. An analytical consideration of how these mechanisms work can be found in Zimmer 2003.

could become part of the Christian community, despite the massive oppression due to their skin color.

When referring to racial exclusion in the religious sphere below, this does not mean that, for example, blacks in the US were admitted to church congregations, which nevertheless strictly separated blacks from whites. There was no racial exclusion in the Christian understanding of salvation, because the 'non-white Americans' were granted access to institutionalized Christianity. By viewing race as entrance to a space of religious salvation, I mean something different: Individuals are denied access to 'divine salvation' due to their alleged belonging to a race, as will be exemplified below. This means that people are denied the opportunity to experience religious salvation by excluding them from baptism, communion, and ultimately the entire Christian community. The acceptance of the sacraments and reception of the divine message in the context of ecclesiastical instruction is reserved for those who belong to the allegedly 'correct race.' There is no alternative option for the excluded to become or remain Christian because of their race. The space meant here as 'divine salvation' has a border that only people of the 'right race' can overcome. The affected individuals, excluded from access to this space, are not only positioned outside 'salvation' by such a demarcation, but are at the same time prevented from accessing it.¹⁶

4 Kim Knott's Explanation of Spaces and Boundaries

Referring to theories of space established in the humanities and social sciences over the last two decades,¹⁷ British religious scholar Kim Knott has translated the conception of space to the sphere of religion,¹⁸ whereby only her thoughts on boundaries in the religious context will be considered here. In contrast to a pure theory, Knott sees her approach more as a method ("a set of tools") to explain certain mechanisms within religions with the help of spatial concepts.¹⁹ Taking up the different conceptions and theoretical models,²⁰ Knott places not the space, but the border that surrounds the space in the center of her

¹⁶ Callies 2004, p. 32.

¹⁷ See, for example, Drost/North 2013. Støtzer 2010 provides a contextualization of sociological spatial concepts in relation to religion. A research overview of the social-geographical borderscape concept can be found at Dell'agnese/Amilhat Szary 2015; Brambilla 2015.

¹⁸ Knott 2005. For the location of space theory in the study of religion, cf. Knott 2008a.

¹⁹ See Knott 2009.

²⁰ A research overview of the 'spatial turn' within religious research can be found in Knott 2015. On the influence of the 'spatial turn' on theology, cf. Bergmann 2007.

explanation, since in the first place the boundary creates the space and then the content its shape: “[It] is the boundary – not the interior space – that establishes the principle of containment and the attribution of sacrality.”²¹

In simplified terms, this model means that, for example, an object can only be considered ‘holy’ or ‘magical’ if it clearly differs from profane objects because of the qualities assigned to it, and if an (imaginary) boundary exactly captures the point of transition between holy and profane:

[It] is boundaries – themselves constructed and invested with meaning – that define containers and position people and objects, that generate margins, and encourage, permit or prohibit crossings. Insides and outsides, I suggest, are themselves constituted by boundaries.²²

Only the boundary, defined by a determining group, defines the space that it surrounds. And the respective definition of the border determines what kind of space it is and who (and under what conditions) gains access to this space. In most cases, the access criteria are clearly defined by the determining group, and the individual can decide whether to enter that imaginary space – but only with approval and observance of the access criteria.

In terms of Protestant Christianity, this can be illustrated by a simple example: In order to gain access to divine salvation, according to popular theological teachings, certain access criteria must be fulfilled. Normally, this is first and foremost the sacrament of baptism.²³ Referring to Knott’s analysis, in the Protestant understanding baptism functions as the criterion that distinguishes secular space from the space of the Christian community, which in turn represents the precondition for access to divine salvation. Baptism communicates central beliefs such as fellowship with Christ and the lifelong claim to validity and ritualistic expression, so that baptism provides a “double communicative achievement” [...] “the clear verbal determination and at the same time interpretive-open symbolizing [...]”²⁴

21 Knott 2008b, p. 45. Knott relies on so-called container models, where imaginary containers act as a visualization of a clearly defined space.

22 Knott 2008b, p. 45.

23 In the general Christian understanding, only through baptism does a person become Christian, that is, a member of the religious community. See Alles 2005. In the dogmatics of Catholicism, baptism is the basis for the attainment of salvation; in Lutheran dogmatics it is the means by which one is accepted into the covenant of God and attains divine salvation. See Koch 2005; Steiger 2005.

24 Grethlein 2005, p. 374.

Simply put, the 'baptized' – 'non-baptized' distinction decides whether or not the individual gains access to salvation by engaging in communion with Christ. The representatives of each church as a determining group set the criterion and individuals can then decide²⁵ whether they would like to have access to this space, for which they would normally be baptized. The boundary in this (simplified) model is between 'baptized' and 'non-baptized,' and under normal circumstances all human beings are basically given the opportunity to cross that boundary by joining the Christian community through baptism and gaining access to divine salvation. Further criteria for attaining divine salvation in the respective denominations are of no importance at this point, since baptism is assumed as a basic prerequisite on which the other criteria such as receiving communion are based.

The creation of such a demarcation with the help of dogmatic regulations on the part of ecclesiastical institutions only works through social acceptance. If a rule, a criterion for demarcation, does not find acceptance in the social life of the group in question, then such a provision is merely of a theoretical nature. It therefore needs, as Taylor puts it, a "common understanding that enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life."²⁶

Conversely, social practice, which is in constant motion through social, economic, political, and other factors, can establish imagined norms that run counter to the actual theoretical conceptions. Or, the newly established norms – established in the sense of socially lived practice – affect other previously valid definitions and gradually adapt those definitions to the new social imaginary. For example, this can be seen in the increasing acceptance of homosexuality within contemporary European Protestantism, where the social imaginaries have led to a change in the 'grand narratives' of Protestantism over the course of decades. "That is, new imaginaries do not just happen; they are socially constructed. Changing them requires emotional and cognitive work built on interactive processes of individual and social awareness and reflection. That dynamic set of processes may entail violence [...]."²⁷

Using the example of demarcation between Jews and Christians from a Christian perspective, the dynamics within the different imaginaries can be clarified. In the early modern period, the social exclusion of Jews in Central Europe was based primarily on social factors. With a conversion to Christianity and thus a crossing of the border, the majority society usually stopped the

25 Infant baptism as an unconscious act of accession to the Christian community should be disregarded here.

26 Taylor 2007, p. 24.

27 Stephenson 2011.

exclusion. In the theological understanding ('grand narrative'), those people became Christians, and in the lived practice of the simple people ('social imaginary') such a reinterpretation usually took place.

However, with the gradual establishment of racial theoretical ideas in large parts of German society from the second half of the 19th century onwards,²⁸ the order that had prevailed until then changed. Theorists such as Paul de Lagarde, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and others gradually changed the social imaginaries with their works, so that ideas of people's diversity based on racial characteristics became an integral part of social imaginaries within much of German society in the 1910s. The exclusion of Jews at this time worked on the basis of racial characteristics. Even when they converted to Christianity, these people continued to experience discrimination, since the converts were still understood to be Jews in the 'imaginings' of ordinary people.²⁹

From a dogmatic Protestant perspective, these converts became Christians because they were received into the Christian community through baptism. Although the border crossing took place at the religious level, at the social level – in lived practice – a demarcation had already taken place which prevented those converts from being understood as a fully integrated part of (Christian) society.

However, the social imaginaries of that time not only worked within practical day-to-day life; they also influenced the beliefs of church representatives so that, no later than the mid-1910s, more theoretical concepts emerged that attempted to theologically justify the already existing demarcation between 'Jews' as a race and Christians³⁰ in order to adapt the 'grand narratives' to the 'social imaginaries.'

5 Exclusive Border Crossing to Divine Salvation in the Example of 'Race'

In his call for a pluralistic Christian theology, Perry Schmidt-Leukel critically calls attention to various forms of Christian exclusivism. Access to divine salvation – conceived from a Christian perspective – is linked to certain conditions. For example, belonging to a Christian church may include adherence

²⁸ This also affected other societies, as the history of colonialism shows.

²⁹ See Junginger 2011, pp. 68–80.

³⁰ See Schuster 2017, pp. 45–52.

to the practice of baptism or a belief in Jesus Christ and/or a life inspired by Jesus.³¹

With regard to non-Christians, there are again different theological models of how such exclusivism can be justified along with the consequences that result: The *radical exclusivism*, which for my reflections represents the decisive form of Christian exclusivity,³² denies any possibility of salvation for those who do not allow themselves to be baptized and do not believe in the message of Jesus. This includes people who never come into contact with the Christian message or have the opportunity to receive baptism.³³

Access to divine salvation, which is understood here as an imaginary space, is accordingly bound by strict access criteria, but the individuals, in the normal case, given the opportunity to receive the Christian message, themselves fulfill these criteria and gain access to this space. It is an individual decision to be baptized and to believe in the Christian message – if access to baptism and teaching is given, which shall be assumed in the rest of this analysis.

The transition to the space of divine salvation is subject to certain prerequisites, but the individuals themselves have at all times the opportunity to obtain these conditions and thus fulfill the admission criteria. As a result, the space is a product of a symbolic marking created by action – for example, by setting the access criteria.³⁴

However, such a mechanism is overridden if the determining group establishes access criteria that the individuals themselves cannot influence. This can be illustrated by a supposedly racial affiliation. While under normal circumstances individuals can decide for themselves whether or not they want to become part of the Christian community by being baptized and thus fulfilling the theoretical presupposition for salvation from a dogmatic Christian perspective, the attributed racial affiliation can preclude such access from the outset, as the following example illustrates.

In the 19th century, a ‘national Protestantism’ emerged in the German territories which partially integrated racist and anti-Semitic ideas into theological

31 Schmidt-Leukel 2005, p. 97.

32 Other forms of Christian exclusivism according to Schmidt-Leukel are *moderate exclusivism* and *undecided exclusivism*. Schmidt-Leukel 2005, pp. 96–99. Both forms also reclaim the ‘sacred knowledge of God’ exclusively for Christianity. However, they do disclose various theological possibilities for non-Christians to attain divine salvation without the possession of external (baptism, etc.) and internal (belief in the Christian message) criteria. Since both, in contrast to radical exclusivism, represent a weakened form, they will not be discussed further, since only the mechanisms of radical exclusivism are important for the following considerations.

33 Schmidt-Leukel 2005, p. 97.

34 For a more detailed description of this mechanism, see Stoetzer 2010.

teaching. In connection with race-theoretical considerations as well as the 'Volkish movement' (*völkische Bewegung*)³⁵ that had been developing since the beginning of the 20th century, exclusivist understandings of Protestantism emerged, interpreted by its proponents as a religion exclusively for 'Germans' in the racial understanding.

Building on this development within Protestantism, German Christian groups were founded in the second half of the 1920s which in addition to these racial theoretical ideas also integrated the National Socialist ideology into the theological teaching structure of Protestantism.³⁶ Anti-Semitism was one of the central basic constants of those groupings, which is why representatives of the various German Christian associations demanded the "dejudification" (*Entjudung*) of Christianity on May 26, 1932, which included, among other things, the exclusion of "Jewish Christians."³⁷ The term "Jewish Christians" in this context described Christians in the sense of church members who, in the understanding of racial theory were still considered Jews, since they either converted to Christianity themselves or one of their ancestors belonged to the Jewish faith. Such a demand for a "dejudification" of Christianity and its church makes it clear that the German Christians wanted to exclude all 'racial Jews' from the church – these were evangelical Christians in the theological as well as their own understanding. Also, no sacramental acts such as baptism or communion were allowed to be performed on 'Jewish Christians.'

After the heterogeneous German Christian movement fragmented into various currents in the course of 1933, the particularly radical German Christians' Church Movement (*Kirchenbewegung Deutsche Christen*) succeeded in consolidating its power over the Thuringian Evangelical regional church and retaining it until the end of the war in the spring of 1945.³⁸ In addition to the Thuringian state church, especially the Protestant regional church of Mecklenburg was under the influence of the German Christians' Church Movement.³⁹ In addition, the radical ideology of the Church Movement influenced other regional churches in Germany during the time of the Third Reich. Accordingly, it was not a small, marginal grouping without any noteworthy

35 For more on this, see Puschner 2001; Breuer 2010.

36 On the German Christians, cf. Bergen 1996. On the German-Christian ideology, cf. Gailus 2001; Heschel 2008.

37 Kaiser 2013, p. 38.

38 This is not the place to discuss the history of the German Christians' Church Movement. Cf. the two standard books by Böhm 2008; Arnhold 2010.

39 To date, there is still no satisfactory representation of the regional church of Mecklenburg during the time of the Third Reich. A first impression is given in Peter 2016.

societal impact, but an internal Protestant movement that controlled several regional churches and their religious program for over a decade.

The stated aim of the German Christians' Church Movement was the complete 'dejudification' of Christianity. To this end, representatives of the Thuringian German Christians founded together with other Protestant churches in the spring of 1939 the Institute for the Study and Elimination of Jewish Influence on German Church Life. Well-known theologians and humanities scholars in this research institute tried to come up with, among other things, proof of a racial, non-Jewish origin of Jesus.⁴⁰ The institute's publications included a 1941 'Jewish-free' New Testament with the intention of disconnecting the entire doctrine of Christianity from its Jewish roots.⁴¹

In addition to such work on the 'dejudification' of Christian doctrine, history and liturgy, the Church Movement also sought in parallel to promote the 'dejudification' of the church in Germany.⁴² In 1937, pastors of the Church Movement complained to the relevant ministerial authorities that there were still exemptions for church workers in other regional churches who were considered 'Jews' under the National Socialists' race laws.⁴³ While this complaint referred only to staff members of regional churches, a few years later it resulted in the complete exclusion of all Christians who were racially understood as 'Jews' or of 'mixed blood' from regional churches under the influence of the German Christians' Church Movement. Attending church services, receiving the sacrament or baptizing a child was suddenly no longer possible for these people at the beginning of the 1940s – at least in those areas under the religious-political control of the German Christians' Church Movement. Likewise, Jewish children and children with Jewish ancestors were prohibited from being converted through baptism.

This means that people were or could no longer be part of the Christian community because of their externally attributed 'racial affiliation.' As we have seen, there was no 'transformation of the race' in the understanding of popular racial theories, which is why these 'Jewish Christians' remained Jews from the perspective of the Church Movement and for that reason were not allowed access to the 'native' (*arteigen*) Christianity of the Germans.⁴⁴ Even if an individual was part of the Christian community of faith as well as a member of the Thuringian regional church by baptism, it could happen that this individual

40 On this and the entire research program of the institute, cf. Schuster 2017.

41 See Lorenz 2017.

42 More at Schuster 2017, pp. 45–69.

43 Regional Church Archive Eisenach, A 764–1, n.p.

44 This was justified by an alleged desire of God to 'preserve the race order.' See Schuster 2017.

was suddenly excluded from this 'community space.' The individual did not fulfill the access requirement – that is, membership in the 'Aryan race.'

I would like to call this phenomenon 'exclusive border crossing.' This means that the individual cannot influence the criteria that entitle him or her to cross the border. Concerning the category of race, it should be noted that not all racial theoretical representatives adopted the strict assumption that an individual's racial characteristics were unchangeable. The philosopher and racial theorist Othmar Spann, for example, assumed that Jews and "half-Jews" were quite capable of "transforming their race."⁴⁵ Likewise, one of the pioneers of the volkisch movement, the Orientalist Paul de Lagarde, saw at least the theoretical possibility that Jews could become 'Germans' in a racial sense.⁴⁶ However, the concept of race included in the present understanding excludes such possibilities of 'racial change,' even on a purely theoretical level, since race was perceived as an unchangeable category in the common understanding of racial theoretical considerations of the 20th century. The reference to race as the category that determined who did or did not belong to a particular space such as a people, community, or even religion, was actively used to prevent 'others' from entering the room. As pointed out at the beginning, such identity constructions mainly work from the exclusion of non-members.⁴⁷

Space, in this case divine salvation, possesses the property of social power in this context. Ideas remain "fleeting and without basis" if they are not implemented within a space and with appropriate demarcations.⁴⁸ In the empirical case presented here, this means that the theoretically conceived exclusivist approach to divine salvation, with the help of the access criterion of race, also had to be concretely implemented in order to not remain a mere thought construct.

Professor of Systematic Theology at Jena University, Heinz Erich Eisenhuth,⁴⁹ member of the German Christians' Church Movement and self-confessed anti-Semite, initially spoke in his theoretical reflections on the racial relationship between Jews and Germans against the possibility mentioned by Paul de

45 Spann 1935, pp. 281–283.

46 Sieg 2007, p. 351. The well-known Berlin court preacher and anti-Semitic agitator Adolf Stoecker also believed that Christian baptism could clean up all the Jews' allegedly negative racial characteristics. Mosse 1997, p. 147.

47 Klaus von See points out that the vagueness of the term 'Aryan' contributed significantly to making this exclusion mechanism work, since there was no basis for assessing who the 'Aryan' was; the definition was based rather on who did not belong to the 'Aryan race,' which facilitated an arbitrary exclusion (von See 2003, pp. 56–59).

48 Knott 2015, p. 214.

49 Biographical details as well as Eisenhuth's theological concept of a synthesis of Christianity and National Socialism can be found in Wolfes 1999.

Lagarde of the racial crossing of Jews. Despite recognition of Lagarde's anti-Semitism, Eisenhuth stated that Lagarde was completely ignorant of the 'racial diversity' between Jews and Germans "if L[agarde] considers Germanization of the Jews to be possible."⁵⁰

The very same Heinz Erich Eisenhuth wrote in 1941 on behalf of the Association of Protestant Church Leaders a scientific report in which he – partly arguing with Martin Luther – analyzed the position of those "Jewish Christians" from a German Christian perspective. Eisenhuth positioned himself clearly at the beginning and drew attention to the insuperableness of racial tension:

Jewish Christians are and will remain Jews after baptism, so that their religious experience and expression will always be of a Jewish nature. The identification of the Jews with the Jewish star should keep alive the awareness of the unbridgeable gap and separation between the races. [...] Even the Jewish Christians belong to the people, which, visibly marked by the Jewish star, must be recognized as the greatest danger to the world.⁵¹

A "Jewish Christian," despite his or her affiliation to the Protestant Christian religious community, was here defined by the determining group as 'not belonging,' since his or her externally attributed racial attachment to Judaism could never be lifted despite baptism. Accordingly, Eisenhuth demanded further in his assessment:

1. Jewish Christians are to be excluded as enemies of the Reich from all forms of the church community.
2. German pastors are not allowed to perform any official acts on Jewish Christians.
3. It is not permitted to collect church taxes from Jewish Christians.⁵²

In mid-December 1941, the Protestant churches of Thuringia, Mecklenburg, Saxony, Nassau-Hesse, Anhalt and Lübeck adopted the demands of the above-mentioned report from the Jena professor as an official church guideline. In addition, they proclaimed that a "German regional church has to promote the religious life of German national comrades. Jewish Christians [*Rassenjüdische Christen*] have no place and no rights there."⁵³

⁵⁰ Eisenhuth 1934, p. 149.

⁵¹ Eisenhuth 1941, p. 125. For more, see also Schuster 2017, pp. 88–92.

⁵² Eisenhuth 1941, p. 126. In this report, Eisenhuth conferred even to war prisoners more religious rights, for example spiritual counselling, than to 'Jewish Christians.'

⁵³ Eisenhuth 1941, p. 127.

Former Christians who were considered 'racial Jews' no longer had any possibility of attaining religious salvation in the Protestant understanding. However, such thinking can be demonstrated not only by the representatives of the radical German Christians. Even pastors who were opposed to the direction of the German Christians within Protestantism in part refused to baptize Jewish converts or those of 'mixed race' [*Mischlinge*], whereby they denied them access to 'salvation'.⁵⁴

Such thinking can be found, for example, in the young Martin Niemöller, one of the spokesmen for the Confessing Church in the Third Reich. The Confessing Church had established itself as an Protestant counter-direction to the German Christians. In spite of the differing theological interpretations of church relations with the state, the same mental mechanisms with regard to demarcation can be seen among the members of the Confessing Church as with the German Christians. For Martin Niemöller, a member of various right-wing, anti-Semitic organizations in the 1920s, converts who had converted from Judaism to Christianity still remained Jews. Niemöller understood the Jews not as a community of faith, but as a biological collective.⁵⁵ Such ideas had already started to manifest themselves in German Protestantism in the second half of the 19th century. However, these were not exclusively theological debates within a closed scholarly field. Rather, the idea that Judaism was a biological collective spread through Protestantism and other venues into broad sections of German society.⁵⁶

It must be noted at this point, however, that there were also opposite viewpoints rejecting the prohibition on baptizing Jews.⁵⁷ A 'border crossing' in the sense presented here was accordingly considered possible by some members of the Confessing Church. Ultimately, it was not the theological debates around the baptism and acceptance of Jews into the Christian community that alone created these notions of an 'exclusive space.' As Christopher J. Probst demonstrates, anti-Semitic ideas and stereotypes were normal for supporters of the German Christians and the Confessing Church, as well as for representatives who were not affiliated with either faction.⁵⁸

54 Manfred Gailus points out the case where a Berlin pastor of the Confessing Church [*Bekennende Kirche*] refused to baptize Jewish converts. Gailus 2001, p. 497. This refusal was based on the racial attribution of the individual as a Jew, which thereby defined the borders of salvation.

55 To the disparate role of Martin Niemöller see Ziemann 2019b and Ziemann 2019a, pp. 209–234.

56 Probst 2012, pp. 17–27.

57 Meier 1968, p. 99.

58 Probst 2012.

This ubiquitous anti-Semitism of varying intensity and severity had been an integral part of broad circles within German Protestantism since the 19th century.⁵⁹ In the 1930s, in combination with the anti-Semitic measures of the National Socialists, it created the space that made the exclusion of Jews or 'Jewish Christians' socially viable in the first place. It was the Protestant consciousness that had emerged over several decades as a result of the different political and social developments of the time which allowed the openly racial arguments of anti-Semitism to find acceptance in broad sections of its own denomination.

A similar development in the Catholic arena can be observed for France: During the time of the Vichy regime, political anti-Semitic measures were a part of everyday life. Broad sections of the Catholic majority cooperated with the regime and thus contributed actively to the social exclusion of the Jews. The Protestant minority, shaped by centuries of their own discrimination, declined to cooperate and in part practiced solidarity with the Jews.⁶⁰

Clearly, religion can actively contribute to the creation of 'exclusive spaces' that, in their conceptual design, are conceived to exclude others. In extreme cases, as in German Protestantism in the 19th and 20th centuries, such a creation of space can even lead to denying the 'other' access to this space altogether by resorting to racial modes of argumentation. It must be remembered, however, that religion is always influenced by the larger social environment and only the interaction of religious ideas and social influences can produce such ideas of exclusion. While Protestantism, due to its state-supporting character in the 19th century, opened up and actively promoted many of the racial and anti-Semitic ideas within the German social framework, Protestant representatives in France behaved in completely different ways.

6 Excursus: 'Exclusive Border Crossings' among the Christian Gnostics

The 'exclusivist border crossing' approach to understanding how religious exclusion mechanisms function by attributing immutable characteristics to individuals cannot be related only to racist (religious) thought patterns. The 'exclusive border crossing' describes the claim to exclusivity of an in-group that establishes and defines its boundaries, which in turn determine who (and under what conditions) has access to such an imaginary space as 'salvation.'

59 Engelmann 1984.

60 Greschat 1992, p. 286.

The same mechanism of reserving salvation exclusively for some individuals over others can be found in teachings from the ancient Christian Gnostics. The Gnostic Christian doctrine divided humans into spiritual (pneumatic), mental (psychic) and carnal (hylic) individuals. Although all three groups belonged to the same human race, only the spiritual group, according to Gnostic convictions, was capable of salvation at all.⁶¹ This thinking becomes particularly clear in the so-called Sophia myth, which among other things states that only the pneumatics can find their way back to transcendence through their divinely given knowledge.⁶² The entire world, in its (gnostically conceived) different facets, can only be completely seen and comprehended by those beings who are in possession of the God-given 'seed of knowledge.' Only this realization, which results from acquiring this essential 'seed,' thus grants access to the transcendental world.⁶³

In the Gnostic Christian mode of thinking, knowledge – which cannot be attained through aspiration or piety – forms the access criterion which enables 'entry' into the space – here, the transcendental world. The individual does not come into the possession of this knowledge through his or her actions. The attainment of knowledge is rather predetermined by the distribution of the divine 'seed' already at birth, which is why the individual has no way to access salvation through his or her own influence. Ultimately, according to the Gnostic mindset (as the determining group), the possibility of possessing the divine knowledge determines who can gain access to salvation. To all others, this access is blocked from the outset, since the access criterion – possession of the 'seed' that leads to knowledge – is an unchangeable characteristic of a person.

7 Summary

Using the example of race as a socially constructed category, Sally Haslanger points out that the normative position is always determined by the hierarchically highest category. 'White,' 'Germanic,' etc. acts as the normative position from which all other supposed races are defined.⁶⁴ This interpretation can also be applied to the example of the Christian Gnostics cited above, who used their interpretation of salvation as the normative basis for their definition of

61 Rudolph 1994, pp. 100 et seq.

62 See Hafner 2003, pp. 274–280.

63 Hafner 2003, p. 519.

64 Haslanger 2012, pp. 184–186, p. 284.

the 'other,' the 'non-pneumatics.' In such a model of thinking, and to stay with the example of Christianity, God can be interpreted as fair from an internal perspective. God gives his grace to a few chosen ones, since only God has the right to show mercy.⁶⁵ This means that only God is granted the right to decide who will be given salvation. By what standards this happens is again a human interpretation. The substantive borders of the determining or in-group, such as a 'correct' race, are based on the in-group's view of God's plan.

The approach presented here shows that a dominant religious group can establish accessibility criteria for an imaginary space, such as salvation, which certain individuals are incapable of fulfilling from birth. The characteristics attributed to the individual by the determining group fundamentally prevent entry into the respective space, without the individual being given the opportunity to fulfill the access criteria through actions or behavior.

An 'exclusivist border crossing' of this kind is always based on the specifications of the determining in-group, from whose perspective the 'others' are judged. Such an exclusive understanding of religion can, under certain conditions – determined by the dominant religious group – lead to the complete and permanent exclusion of an entire group of 'others.' On the theoretical level, the exclusionary approach of 'exclusivist border crossings' can explain how religious arguments exclude people from entering a religious space such as salvation when the access criteria are linked to birth-related conditions.

Collective practice is less concerned with a complete understanding of the reasoning that legitimizes those exclusions. Anti-Semitism continues to function by passing down stereotypes attributed to all Jews. It is not the wording but rather the recognition by the masses, the in-group, that enables the exclusion of the 'other.' Russian scientist Anatoly Fomenko, mathematics professor at Moscow University and a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, for example, has tried to prove in a seven-volume epic that world history as it is known today is one big fraud. In fact, Jesus was born in Crimea in the 12th century, the crucifixion took place near today's Istanbul, and all the cultural achievements of humanity are of Slavic origin.⁶⁶ He seeks to construct a new national identity through religion based on nationalist-populist ideas that are already virulent in society. If thought patterns such as those of Fomenko become accepted in the broader masses of society over time, then again the same mechanisms of exclusion from the 'other' will take place. Who belongs to the 'others' is interchangeable in each case, since the exclusion mechanisms are based on 'social imaginaries.' Decisive in the model presented above is the

65 Schmidt-Leukel 2001, p. 115.

66 See Fomenko 2003.

insurmountable border to the in-group, in this case rejecting everything ‘non-Russian,’ which includes religion.

Similarly, rumors have spread over the Internet that former US President Barack Obama is in fact Muslim. Right-wing militant Christian groups seek to restore an imagined ‘true white Christian America,’ which is why they attempted to prevent the election of a non-white president.⁶⁷ In American society, which has been heavily anti-Muslim since September 11, 2001, such rumors have quickly become an imaginary reality in parts of American society, such that nearly a third of all Americans still believe that Obama is in fact a real Muslim.⁶⁸ Obama’s Christian baptism played no role in this case, since the assumption prevail yet again that once Muslim – always Muslim (which in no way applies to Obama, because he was never Muslim).

These examples illustrate that there can exist insurmountable boundaries in the realm of the religious, drawn by racial arguments. Not infrequently, today’s extreme nationalists use such religious demarcations to construct new national identities and exclude ‘others’ without giving them any opportunity to belong to the in-group.

Biography

Dirk Schuster was born in 1984 and studied history and science of religion at the University of Leipzig until 2009. In March 2016 he defended his dissertation at the Free University of Berlin (title: *Die Lehre vom »arischen« Christentum. Das wissenschaftliche Selbstverständnis im Eisenacher »Entjudungsinstitut«* [The Doctrine of an Aryan Christianity. The scientific self-conception of the Institute for De-Judaisation in Eisenach]). Between 2011 and 2014 he was a PhD scholarship holder at the *Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation*. Since 2014 Dirk Schuster is Research Assistant at the Institute of Jewish Studies and Study of Religion at the University of Potsdam, Germany. Between 2015 and 2016 he was also Assistant at the project *Edition of the proceedings of the Protestant Regional Church in Romania* at the University of Koblenz-Landau. In 2019 he is visiting fellow at the Institute of Study of Religion at the University of Vienna.

His main interests are the interaction of religion and politics, Atheism and the history of the Transylvania Saxons.

67 See Kaczynski/Massie 2017.

68 Ali 2017.

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