

The Venture of Vulnerability

Christological Engravings on Disturbing Questions about Migration¹

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Abstract

Human vulnerability wields a precarious power in migration discourse at present. This is shown especially clearly with people who are fleeing. The power of vulnerability works on the side of those who are fleeing but also on the side of those who see themselves affected in their own vulnerability by this fleeing. People, groups, and states seek to protect themselves from vulnerability by abandoning others to vulnerability – the classic Herod strategy.

The connection between vulnerability and migration is a key theme and reveals a sign of the times. What perspectives does Christian theology bring to this problem area? Christianity confesses a God who exposes himself voluntarily to the venture of vulnerability – from the manger to the cross. Migration also belongs to the primary challenges of Christianity since the Christmas narrative of Jesus and his parents fleeing to Egypt is told. Is there a ‘power of Vulnerability’ consisting in risking one’s own vulnerability? And to what extent does this power change migration from a pressing reality into a sign of the times in which the presence of God is revealed?

Migration and Vulnerability: A Key Issue

Refugees are extremely vulnerable. They cannot count on the assistance of relatives and friends in a foreign country and fear for their well-being and often even for their lives. They come to places where they are not wanted because they are viewed as indigent or lazy, have-nots, or even criminals. Even those who were well off in their native countries but then had to flee for political reasons, as was the case with many intellectuals in Nazi Germany, live in difficult, i.e. precarious, circumstances in their countries of refuge. Refugees and migrants are characterized by what is called “high vulnerability”: they are limited in their ability to fend off attacks; they lack life resources of their own and need the protection of others. “Vulnerability” is therefore a key term in present discussions on migration.²

¹ Translated by Diane Gössing.

² This vulnerability can very easily end up in unspeakably cruel deaths for many; see, for example, the report on a station for a children’s medical unit in the world’s largest refugee camp, Dadaab in Kenya (Bauer 2011).

For theology this is very interesting, for vulnerability is one of theology's key themes. It is a central Christian belief that in Jesus Christ God became a vulnerable human being. Christian teaching on the incarnation asserts that by his own free will God made himself vulnerable in the form of a human being made of flesh and blood. God did not simply create an extremely fragile and vulnerable world and then, without any concern, leave it to its own devices. On the contrary, in Jesus Christ God himself becomes vulnerable. Jesus was born as a helpless baby, and his family had to flee with him to Egypt. Christian theology begins with birth and flight, both of which are signs on the path of vulnerability.

This fact makes possible a discursive approach from Christology to the complex of problems surrounding migration today. Birth is a form of "biopower" (*biopouvoir*), as the French philosopher Michel Foucault termed it (Foucault 1998). The fact that seven billion people now live on this earth confronts us with the explosive force of this "biopower." Vulnerability becomes apparent everywhere. What dislocations will the pressure from migration created by the growing world population cause? How many of the seven billion people on earth will die of hunger and war, disease and impoverishment? How can people protect themselves from the violence inherent in the unfair distribution of global life resources?

As a sign of the times, migration is marked by vulnerability. Refugees in particular should protect themselves as much as possible from harm. Because they are so vulnerable, they need protection. Therefore in the context of today's discussion on migration, vulnerability is considered something to be avoided, and people must be protected as much as possible against vulnerability. That is quite understandable. But Jesus Christ acts in a completely different way: in him God became human and thereby freely took on the risk of vulnerability. And he really was wounded. When he was a newborn child, his family had to flee; as a preacher and miracle worker he was openly attacked and in the end brutally tortured and killed. Why does Christianity consider this life of a vulnerable migrant a sign of salvation? What significance does this have for the interdisciplinary discourse on migration that theology must enter?

Nativity and Vulnerability: Jesus, a Child with a Migration Background

Migration is one of the primary challenges for Christianity. Here the focus is on Jesus Christ, a man who, according to the biblical record, had experience as a

refugee. This central aspect has been largely ignored in the current discussions on Christology. Migration is not yet a key aspect in those discussions.³ I hope that my paper will help correct this shortcoming, because the migration aspect of Christ is relevant for both the context of Christology and discussions on migration. The biblical Christmas stories already point to this: they focus on the connection between birth, migration, and vulnerability, thereby opening the way to a theological discourse that gains new relevance in today's social debates. Therefore, the biblical Christmas story, which focuses on the vulnerability of Jesus, will be discussed first.

The stories of the birth of Jesus have prominence in the gospels of Luke and Matthew. They are an important factor in the history of the church and down to this day continue to have great influence because they are the basis of the Christmas feast. The evangelists focus their gospel narratives on the fact that Jesus was born a poor and vulnerable infant. No one is more vulnerable than a newborn child: it cannot protect itself from attacks by wild animals or malevolent people. It cannot maintain itself or care for itself. Even if there is a glass of water right next to it, an infant will die of thirst if no one gives him that water. In fact, a newborn child is a symbol of the vulnerability of human beings.

This vulnerability is even more extreme in Jesus because his parents cannot offer him the protection of a home. When he is born, they migrate away from home. Luke's gospel states that they had to leave because of tax considerations. This takes place at a bad time, because Mary is far along in her pregnancy. Jesus is not born at home but in a strange town in an unprotected place. The beguine Mechthild of Magdeburg (born 1207) emphasizes this when she writes that Jesus was born "on the road on that night in Bethlehem—in a strange town where she [Mary] herself was a poor homeless guest" (Mechthild of Magdeburg 1997: 199).

³ Even recent approaches to the topic do not deal with this question even when they discuss the danger to the life of the child. Cf. Welker (2012: 22): "According to the biblical witnesses, Jesus is thus threatened not only at the end but already at the beginning of his life." Migration is not an issue here.

Jesus' family cannot find room in the inn (Luke 2:7), even though or *perhaps precisely because*, the birth is imminent. The mother, who is so obviously close to her time and most in need of the protection of walls, is turned away. A birth means work, creates noise, is a source of disturbance, and, all in all, is a risky business. How much easier is it to just say there is no room in the inn? No one there is willing to include the excluded by sharing their resources with them. They are worried that the pregnant woman will cost them too much. This has consequences: even though the event takes place close by, the people in the inn miss out on this all-important birth. They lose importance and are not mentioned again in the Christmas story.

The New Testament tells us that Jesus was born in a place characterized by poverty and social exclusion. This is a salient theological statement. Even though at the time of the New Testament it was not unusual for humans to be revered as gods, these gods were never poor, powerless, and marginalized. "Powerful heroes and magnificent emperors were the ones who were deified in the Hellenistic world" (Placher 1998: 244). Jesus is not born as the son of a wealthy and honored king but as a child of poor migrants. The king of heaven, God's own son, is not born in a palace, well protected and well-provided with everything. His place of birth is outdoors—the Christian tradition tells us—in a stable with livestock.⁴ Jesus begins his life in poverty outside the protection of walls. He is not laid in a well-cushioned cradle but in a meagre manger.

Matthew's gospel shows just how unusual and unexpected this unpretentious place of birth of Jesus really is while telling the story of the magi from the East (Matthew 2:12). They come in search of the newborn king of the Jews—and promptly go the wrong way. They follow the prevailing order of things and look for him in Jerusalem in the palace of King Herod. That is a dangerous error not only for the magi but also for Jesus and his family, for their coming alerts the dictator. Herod wants to know where this child is whose birth the unusual star foretells. Without a second thought, he tries to use the magi as a kind of state Trojan horse: he pretends to want to offer homage to the child but in reality is plotting to kill him. With the magi's help he wants to find out exactly where Jesus was born. Only the intervention of the angel ensures that the magi

⁴ The New Testament does not mention a stable, but Luke does speak of the manger (Luke 2:7), so it is logical to assume that he was thinking of a protected shelter for animals. Matthew describes the place of birth an *oikos*, i.e. a house or a dwelling (Matthew 2:11).

from the East do not become a cog in the dictator's deadly machine. They return to their homeland another way, thus avoiding Jerusalem.

The magi are also interesting for questions about migration because they come from afar. They are highly respected at home and not automatically respected in Jerusalem. The moment they cross borders they become migrants who must earn their recognition. In addition, as non-entities (*Dahergelaufene*, as we say in German) they can easily become victims of the dictator's capriciousness. In a foreign land there is no political power they can turn to for protection. But precisely these perfect strangers find the way to the place of the birth of God; they overcome their own marginalization. In addition, they subvert the social ostracism of the innkeepers by presenting their gifts to the newborn king in the manger.

They are not the only ones to offer generous gifts. "Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock" (Luke 2:8). They too subvert the ostracism of the innkeepers and help protect the newborn. At that time, Shepherdesses and shepherds wander over fields and meadows, through brambles and wilderness. They live in the outdoors without modern outdoor clothing and seldom enjoy the protection of walls and roofs. They are vulnerable. Therefore, they must be very alert at night. Bands of robbers, wild animals and destructive storms are a danger to them and so they have to set night watches. Shepherds need their flocks in order to survive. Often the animals do not belong to them, but instead they are paid for the protection they give. Then too, they will only survive if they assure the safety of the animals. Otherwise they will be in trouble and have to pay for the loss or will lose their employment.

The shepherds in the field are people who have no standing in society. They are unimposing figures and are never invited to big, social important occasions and festive parties. How different their role in the Christmas story is! Here the outcasts receive a special invitation from heaven to visit the place of God's birth. An angel appears and explains the meaning of the child in the manger, bringing them the message of the birth of the Messiah. "And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger"

(Luke 2:12). The detailed theological description by the angel is not directed to scriptural experts, who preferred to remain at home with their books, not to high priests, who stayed close to their altars, but to have-nots in an open field. The sign the angel mentions is familiar to them: they understand births and mangers, even if this birth goes far beyond their ability to understand. Then a whole host of angels appears and exclaims, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:13f.). The roving shepherds, who are never the focus of public attention, are invited by a higher power to the place of the birth of God. They are found worthy to report the heavenly news of the birth of the Messiah.

They respond quickly: “Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us” (Luke 2:15). They are in a hurry. But it is not easy to hurry with a herd of sheep, so they leave their herd there. They are taking a big risk, for in their absence they may lose their animals, their most important resource for survival. They do not hesitate to take the risk. Then they arrive at this unimposing place of the birth of God. What do they see, when they arrive at the manger? They find a baby, naked, small, and vulnerable, helpless in every respect—that is how God comes into the world. It is not a God of sovereignty and triumph who is lying here, who wants to make the little people feel even smaller; on the contrary, it is a God who has surrendered himself to human life, taken it upon himself, and shares it as a human with other humans.

The devoted care of the parents, the shepherds, and the magi overcome the social exclusion of the newborn child. In this way, the wretched place of birth, the stable with the child in the manger becomes a place full of life. Even though the child and his family are in danger, his place of birth has a glow of love and a feeling of security. This is indeed the most important thing the young family takes with it and is in need of most. The earthly King Herod now dares make his unspeakable grab for power. The family must flee headlong from murder and death at the hands of an unscrupulous power of state. “When the magi had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him’” (Matthew 2:13). A political power wants to do away with the newborn. Even the parents are unlikely to be able to survive the political murder of their child. All three have to leave their country and its political, cultural, and economic borders. So Jesus becomes a child with a background of migration, which makes him so much more vulnerable to the dangers of life.

Becoming Human—Daring Dedication

The gospels do not give us exact historical facts. Modern biblical interpretations ask us to take into account that Jesus was probably not born in Bethlehem (cf. Stegemann 2010). In addition, it is impossible to discern which experience of forced migration influenced the story of the flight to Egypt. Still, the stories of the birth of Jesus are the foundation of a theology of vulnerability that begins with the escape and is therefore relevant for questions of migration. In their Christmas narratives, Luke and Matthew make “vulnerability” and “migration” central topics of Christian theology because they make it clear that God appears as an endangered and vulnerable baby. Just what this means becomes clear when compared to Greek mythology. The goddess Athena appears in armor already at her birth. She is not a vulnerable, sucking baby. Well protected and ready for war, she is a woman, born from the head of Zeus. But Jesus comes without weapons, nor does he have any shield. To stay alive, he needs the protection and dedicated attention of other people. Jesus in the manger is vulnerable because he is a tiny newborn. This vulnerability reaches its peak with the escape from political forces and the emigration to a foreign land. Vulnerability, which is a challenge for all migrants, becomes more intense when people are forced to migrate.

The message of Christmas is that in Jesus Christ God enters into the midst of human poverty and vulnerability. God makes himself small and vulnerable in order to give power to the small and weak. This describes the central aspect of the Christian faith: the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. “Incarnation” usually means being born into vulnerable flesh. So, in the first instance, this means the belief that in Jesus, the son of Mary, God becomes human. But incarnation does not refer only to Jesus Christ. On the contrary, incarnation is the grammar underlying all of theology—it is the structure, the basis of everything theology has to say. If we abandon the incarnation, all of Christian theology crumbles. The incarnation of God shows how humans can successfully become humane.

The Second Vatican Council focused on this incarnational characteristic of Christian faith, which refers not only to the incarnation of God but also to that of humans. Incarnation is the pivot of the theology of Vatican II.

Therefore the Son of God walked the ways of a true Incarnation that He might make men sharers in the nature of God: made poor for our sakes, though He had been rich, in order that His poverty might enrich us. (*Ad gentes* § 3)

When God became human, humanity changed; the heavenly engraved itself on what is earthly. What was separated has been rejoined; what was excluded has been included.

God Becomes Human: Incarnation as a Daring Act of Migration

“Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head” (Luke 9:58). It is with this impressive metaphor for migration that Luke’s gospel encapsulates Jesus’ exposure, which begins with his birth and continues throughout his entire life. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the foundation of a theology of vulnerability and thereby at the same time of a theology of migration. That may seem a daring assertion at first. But the etymology of the word migration shows that it actually suggests this claim. The Latin word *migrare* means to move from one place to another, in particular, to emigrate, to cross a border.⁵ God does precisely that in his incarnation. God, the completely other, the creator of the world, relocates and enters into creation. There is no greater or riskier relocation. He moves from a protected, even invulnerable, place to a risky place full of danger. God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ is a risky relocation, a daring act of migration.

This is only true, however, if God does not just pretend to become human but actually does so. This explains why christological debates in the early church focused on the natality of Jesus (Keul 2012; 2011). It is the main argument against Gnostic, discarnate ideas. The child in the manger is proof that God did not simply put on different clothes or disguise himself. God does not come as a Trojan horse. Jesus is born as a tiny, vulnerable child into insecurity and danger. The cross of Jesus is not the first enormity to confront us; his birth is already a provocation. God does not remain in a lofty position; rather, in Jesus, he surrenders himself to the conditions of human life. Incarnation is migration down to where people who must flee are subject to multiple dangers. God does not respond to the risks of life by retaining his invulnerability. On the contrary,

⁵ In current German usage, the general meaning of the term *Migration* as a “change of location” has almost been lost. In English it is more common, as for example in “bird migration”.

he responds with a daring gift, with full dedication. To heal the vulnerability of the world God makes himself vulnerable.

In his study “Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation” (The Cross of Jesus as a Risk of Incarnation) Günter Thomas defines incarnation as “assuming life as it actually is, as submission to what has always been the greatest risk of created life. Hereby, the son faces the powers of natural, social and cultural destruction” (Thomas 2007: 169f.). This is truly astonishing: no human being wants to be hurt; they protect themselves from injuries that could be painful and endanger their lives. What exactly is the significance for salvation in God’s daring to be vulnerable, which Christians claim happened in the incarnation? The question is raised by the fact that Jesus’ dedication of himself ends in the “worst case” of incarnation, i.e. his death on the cross: “This is my body, which will be given for you” (Luke 22:19). To offer one’s life for others is the greatest gift imaginable. The cross exposes the full enormity of God’s incarnation. God subjects his only son not only to the frailty of flesh but also to the entire cruelty of human beings—what could be worse?

Yet this dedication is not “the most extreme perversion of love that is possible,” as Doris Strahm fears (2010: 296). It is deeply human. William Placher states: “Love means to make oneself vulnerable to the point of suffering, to care for others in such a way that a true relational exchange takes develops, including all the risks that go with it” (Placher 1998: 240). People can live together in a truly humane way only if they are willing to allow themselves to be vulnerable for the sake of love. Not only Jesus, but every newborn child needs the generous gifts of other human beings. Without dedication, injured people are ruthlessly thrown back upon themselves, and a merciless society develops. Christology counteracts this mercilessness by introducing the life force of self-giving.

In the Bible “dedication” refers to the entire life of Jesus from his birth, through his work as a practitioner of the “Kingdom of God,” including his death and resurrection. The use of the term today in German, “Hingabe”, dedication is often understood as something passive, where someone becomes a victim, suffering violence. But the discussion that Marcel Mauss initiated on the social role of giving (Mauss 2009) shows that dedication can be an active form of

sacrifice in which someone, of his or her own free will, makes personal resources available for a higher purpose and offers them freely: time, money, energy, food, creativity, housing. This is by no means a sign of subservience even though it entails aspects of a victim. When something is done in the self-giving mode, when someone enters completely into something, doing it with passion, and giving everything he or she has, then a life-giving power flows out of it. One can dedicate oneself completely to playing, to a career or to a kiss. The latter points to the erotic aspect of dedication, for in love people experience the ultimate intensity of life. Jesus shows us, that there is an active power at work in dedication to God, humankind, and to creation that creates life, that uplifts and inspires. In what follows I will call this “power out of vulnerability,”⁶ a power that only those who dare to be vulnerable can experience.

The Human Becomes Humane: The Christian Alternative to the Herod Strategy

Because God became human and dares to become vulnerable in Jesus, humans are called to follow his example. The Pastoral Constitution of Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, emphasizes this in its theology of calling:

The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. ... For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man.” (*Gaudium et spes* § 22)

God’s union with every human gives direction to the calling of every human. In following Christ, the human finds his highest calling in becoming fully human in the flesh— to be precise, to do it in the context of the concrete realities of his or her own time. The human being’s participation in the nature of God (*Ad Gentes* § 3; *Dei Verbum* § 2) is not at all extraterrestrial but occurs in the calling to be human as a calling to be humane. This occurs within the venture to be vulnerable and takes place within social contexts, political challenges, and cultural discourses.

A Christian theology of migration follows these signs laid by God in daring to be vulnerable (cf. Keul 2013, 107– 115). Incarnation shows itself as a risk of dedication that was taken two thousand years ago but also transpires in the world today. God becomes human and humans become humane when they dare to dedicate themselves in love, respect, and esteem to others. This aspect is also

⁶ Sarah Coakley speaks of “power in vulnerability” but does not use the term to refer to social challenges such as migration (cf. Coakley 2002: 5).

present in the New Testament in view of migration and flight. The Christmas stories tell of the birth of the vulnerable Son of God. But they also tell us how other people react to this vulnerability. In fact, these stories almost constitute a didactic play on how people should deal with vulnerability—their own and that of others.

King Herod is a key figure in questions of migration. When he learns from the magi that Christ has been born, he is afraid that he may lose his kingdom and thus his wealth, social standing, and political power. He fears that he will be deeply hurt. To protect himself, “he ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under” (Matthew 2:16). I call this the “Herod strategy.” To avoid being hurt, one hurts others. People have not only a shield in their hand to protect themselves but weapons for a preemptive attack. The king, a political power in the service of the Roman Empire, does not even hesitate to attack the life of the Messiah. “Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born” (Matthew 2:4) He is prepared to kill the bringer of salvation to protect his personal interests.⁷

This “Herod strategy” is popular and was widely applied throughout human history, not only by individuals but also religions, cultures, and political systems. It has its beginning in little everyday things but can lead to the spilling of blood in which lives are massacred without a second thought. In the church as well, which should follow the Christian alternative of risking dedication, it was used time and again in the course of her history.⁸ This makes it much more

⁷ The “Herod strategy” cannot be used for anti-Semitic arguments. The Christmas narratives do not present Herod as a member of that religion but as a politician who wants to kill the Jewish Messiah. Matthew does not even mention the fact that the historical Herod was a Jew (cf. Baltrusch 2012).

⁸ The attempt by members of the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church to cover up the sexual abuse by clergymen, which has become public since 2010, is an example of this. Church leaders wanted to prevent harm to the church from disclosure of the

imperative that Christology reflects theologically on questions of migration and vulnerability. In the New Testament, the dictator Herod is the negative foil against which the Bible presents a Christian alternative. The magi and the shepherds and especially his mother Mary and social father Joseph show what this means. They risk vulnerability in order to protect Jesus from Herod's act of power. Like many parents all over the world, they do not hesitate to share their life's resources to give newborns a good start in life. Mary and Joseph are even willing to give their lives. For them, too, the flight to Egypt can end in death. It is significant that even Jesus' social father is willing to take this risk. At the very least, when the danger presented by Herod becomes evident, he could say: "What does it matter to me? He's not my child." By leaving, Joseph could avoid the risk of being killed. But he does just the opposite. "Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt" (Matthew 2:14).

Here Joseph shows the necessity of protecting oneself against injury. He does not stay where the life of his family is in danger but flees. He also does not take the easy and safe path of shirking his responsibility as the social father by absenting himself. Instead, he does everything possible to assure the child's survival. Joseph is unexpectedly generous and willing to sacrifice himself. He could serve as a role model today for social fathers and mothers of every kind, for people who dare dedication, giving support and protection to others.

The parents of Jesus react to their own vulnerability and to that of their child in a completely different way than Herod and the unconcerned inhabitants of the inn do. Their actions reflect what God does in incarnation: they become humane through their willingness to migrate and to dare dedication. It is an essential aspect of Christianity to be moved by the vulnerability of others and to go where people are unable to protect themselves. Of course, it is quite understandable that people and states want to be invulnerable in a world fraught with violence. But a God who becomes a child, subverts this way of thinking. The child in the manger shows an alternative way of dealing with vulnerability. The group of people in the Christmas stories who dare to dedicate themselves to others is varied in terms of religion, culture, and politics. The shepherds are Jews who believe in a Jewish Messiah and honor Jesus in the manger; the magi from the East belong to a different religion and a different people and stand for a foreign country; Mary and Joseph themselves are Jewish and stand on the threshold to Christianity.

offenses and were willing to accept the fact that they thus committed another offense against the victims of sexual violence.

Daring dedication is an essential aspect of humane life. In the Christian faith, this dedication is founded in God's incarnation, the vulnerable child in the manger. This foundation is Christianity's "unique selling proposition." At the same time dedication, which people risk in the context of the vulnerability of others, plays an important role in other religions too. Therefore, it can be a starting point for interreligious dialogue and also for social debate. For what is one willing to sacrifice? Through what means does one strive for this goal? It is very important for the future of humankind that a serious dialogue on this takes place and that people be willing to engage in a mutual relativization of one another. Even the 9/11 terrorists in New York, the black widows in Chechnya, and the Christian Breivik in Norway dared to sacrifice themselves. They were practitioners of a very malignant form of religiosity that creates precarious distortions by raising violence to a higher level. In such a social context, it is the decisive role of religion to be a force for humanity, even though and because religions are not always a force for peace.

The child in the manger demonstrates that vulnerability is an unavoidable consequence of physical life in a body. To live, this child needs the labor pains of his mother Mary, the visit by the poor shepherds, the gifts of the magi of unknown origin, the persevering support of his social father. He needs the dedication of other humans to make his life possible. For life to be humane, it is not enough to simply avoid being hurt. This is true not only for every newborn but for all of humanity as well. The corresponding movement toward daring dedication must balance the need for self-protection. This is possible only if one is willing and able to bear affliction. There is a real possibility that one could fail through dedication. But dedication can only unlock life if people dare to confront this danger: people who work with complete dedication, who bear children, work passionately for peace, and to protect endangered persons, who risk their lives to assert human rights, who speak openly before truth commissions about painful facts or stand up to a dictatorship. All that increases personal vulnerability. These are activities that work against self-protection against injury. They may even end in death.

Still, this dedication opens up life. It can develop into a form of power that stems from vulnerability. This power does not reduce a person's resilience, but

increases it. Daring to be vulnerable strengthens people such as Mary and Joseph who work for the protection of another. This does not happen automatically. No human can create this power—it is divine grace. But where this power grows, it can even topple dictators. This was seen in the fall of 1989 and again recently in the people who unselfishly risked their lives in the Arab Spring Movement and continue to do so.

Migration as a Hopeful Sign of Our Time: Power out of Vulnerability

For some time now, “vulnerability” has become a specialized term in interdisciplinary scholarship. It has central significance for climate research, in government safety analyses, and in city development concepts, in the war on poverty, and in research on resilience and happiness. Vulnerability is also a key term in the discussions on migration.⁹ In this case, it is important to differentiate between voluntary and forced migration, even though the boundaries are not always clear-cut. On the one hand, people sometimes migrate voluntarily. To go abroad for a period of foreign study is something many students aspire to. People move from one place to another to follow their love, to find better professional opportunities, or because the culture of another country fascinates them. But even those who migrate voluntarily increase their vulnerability. They leave social networks, are unprotected while travelling, previous protective tactics no longer hold sway, life situations become incalculable. But when people do this of their own free will, they do not experience themselves mainly as victims, even if they are forced to make sacrifices. They make sacrifices because they hope for much more than they risk.

In the case of forced migration for economic, political, or ecological reasons, the victim aspect is in the foreground. Vulnerability is raised to a higher power. “It is hard to go, when you have to,” writes Michalis Pantelouris in view of the migration situation in Europe (Pantelouris 2012: 5). Migration often becomes a leap in the dark. It can be especially hard for those who are forced to flee. And it can also beset those who see their own vulnerability at risk when others choose to flee. The island of Lampedusa is a symbol of this dilemma today. Vulnerability is precarious around the world, which is why dealing with migration is so full of conflicts and violence. Still, migration can become a positive sign in our time,

⁹ This is even more so in English- than in German-speaking scholarship, which is only gradually following this lead. See, for example, Afifi and Jäger 2010.

opening up new options for action. A Christology that is based on the power of vulnerability can make a contribution here.

The Unspeakable Power of Vulnerability:

Naming the Costs of Self-Protection to Others

Migration is a sign of our times. It points to something unheard of, something that demands to be heard: the unspeakable power of vulnerability. This power does not begin only *after* harm actually took place—the possible danger of being vulnerable already entails power. People and states try to protect themselves from harm, and they are willing to let other peoples or states suffer harm in order to achieve this. The European Protection System Frontex (Frontières extérieures), which is responsible for the external borders of Europe (founded in 2004 by the European Council, with its headquarters in Warsaw), is an example of this. The military power of Frontex clearly shows how precarious the situation of states and unions can be. Every state has an interest in protecting its own borders against attacks from outside, and, in the view of its citizens, even the duty to do so. Thus, they need borders, barricades, and weapons. But what about those who are “outside” and need the resources “inside” in order to survive?

On the outside borders of Europe there are daily endurance tests of human rights. Military actions are euphemized as “technical and operative support” or as “repatriation actions of member states”.¹⁰ The choice of words hides the violence entailed in the refusal of entry at borders, (mass) deportations, refusal of water to the thirsty (or those dying of thirst), or the use of firearms of all types. Everyone who lives in Europe is ensnared in this power system. A Christology that starts with vulnerability focuses on the victims of others. It asks what the costs of self-protection are not only for one’s self but also for others. A definitive aspect is to openly name the active power issues, to discuss them and to decide how to answer them. Self-protection and harm to others often lie close together.

¹⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frontex>. ; cf. also Tohidipur 2009.

This should not be concealed, especially in the case in point, namely, the defense of states.

Individuals, communities, and states often accept that others will suffer if this ensures their own self-protection. The boundary between self-protection and injury to others is unclear in these cases. When refugees who have a long, dangerous, and grueling path behind them are refused entry at a border, the question arises: When does the state simply take a loss? When is collateral injury willingly provoked? When is violence actively sought? The defense of European borders shows what is also happening elsewhere. Discussions on migration demand special attention to the power that can grow from one's own vulnerability. What resources are used to avoid injury? Are these personal resources or those of others—natural resources of other countries, the labor of other people under ruinous conditions, the resources of future generations? These questions arise when a *victim* is viewed from a christological perspective. In this way the term makes us sensitive to the injuries to others when personal self-protection is sought.

Against the Utopia of Invulnerability:

Towards a Culture of Sharing

Achilles and Siegfried are figures of classical and Germanic mythology who speak for the age-old human dream of invulnerability. For good reason, people and states, religions and cultures seek to be invulnerable. Injuries are painful and can be dangerous. If they increase, than life itself is threatened. But even then this human dream of invulnerability is not a solution but a dangerous utopia: it leads to tunnel vision that excludes everything contrary to this supposed invulnerability. This problem is especially acute in dictatorships. It can even be said that wherever the goal is to achieve invulnerability dictatorial practices become standard. A state that tries to make itself invulnerable in the end harms those it has a duty to protect. In Germany in 2011 discussions about the government Trojan clearly established that this is a dictatorial practice. Whether in the form of Trojans on PCs, unofficial operatives, or undercover agents—government Trojans surreptitiously gain trust so that, in the end, the power of state can attack even more effectively.

The dictatorships that fell in the Arab Spring showed what power lies in the utopia of invulnerability. Those dictators tried to be invulnerable; they did not have to abdicate because they had enough weapons to protect themselves. But they were not successful. Instead of being able to ensure their power system, their states entered a spiral of violence. The more weapons dictators used, the more citizens were injured and the more resistance grew. The more they

strengthened their system of spies, spread lies, and installed a regimen of fear, the more their citizens sought to hear the truth and bravely made it public. The more dictators become unscrupulous in their increasing use of weapons to protect themselves, the more the probability of their overthrow grows. It is a fatal utopia to expect that individuals or states can make themselves invulnerable by using weapons. In the Arab Spring, and long after, such a notion led to unspeakable sacrifices from countless people.

In today's global processes of migration individuals, cities and states try to make themselves invulnerable. This problem is evident in the conflicts that arise in "arrival cities" all around the globe. Doug Saunders coined the technical term "arrival cities," (2010), which refers to special urban districts everywhere in the world that are created by the rural-to-urban-migration. They are a new and very large poverty movement. From the outside one can see only poverty and affliction, and it seems as if hardly anything ever changes here. But that is not true. Arrival cities are characterized by high upward mobility into better-situated social levels. But because more and more people keep coming to them, the depletion through upward migration is not apparent. The established core cities perceive these covert, illegal, and rapidly growing locations as a threat. They react with "Herod strategies" and close up, refuse access to their inner centers, and exclude the newcomers. They protect themselves by building walls, and sooner or later they come with bulldozers. The utopia of invulnerability produces unspeakable exclusions.

Arrival cities direct attention to the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion. They are a means to create or to prevent injuries. This does not mean naïvely attempting to avoid creating exclusions by including everyone. That is impossible, because space and resources are limited. On the contrary, the goal is to create a culture of sharing. In this context, it is relevant that the term "culture" is derived from Latin *cultura*, which refers to the process of the cultivation of land and animal husbandry. This process needs both inclusions and exclusions. Ergot must be eradicated from the wheat in a field, because it will poison the bread. No foxes are allowed in hen houses. Targeted exclusions are necessary for establishing a culture. The crux here is what each culture includes and what it

excludes. Just how critical this question is becomes apparent at every border that excludes people from the country of their hopes and its resources.

*Strengthening the Power out of Vulnerability:
Becoming an "Arrival City"*

From the perspective of a Christology of vulnerability, it is not sufficient to protect oneself. On the contrary, a double question emerges here, which arises when decisions are made at borders and then demand answers. Where is it truly necessary to protect oneself from harm? Where is "daring dedication" possible? Christology overcomes the attempt to be less vulnerable through what Jesus Christ stands for. Daring to be self-giving undermines and subverts exclusions for which the core cities usually stand.

Saunders emphasizes that arrival cities have a high potential for creativity. People come to them in the hope of improving their own lives and even more the lives of their children. Every day they accept austere deprivations, and through inventiveness, great energy, and perseverance they become survival artists. They return a major part of their earnings to their families "at home" in their places of origin. They take risks and open themselves to vulnerability. Those who have very little themselves create a generous culture of sharing. They become creators of a culture by daring dedication.

Arrival cities live by the power that grows out of vulnerability. It is due to this power that migrant suburbs can truly become "arrival cities," places of birth or slip into impoverishment, apathy, and violence. This power is not only present in arrival cities; it is also a challenge for the core cities. Their way of looking at arrival cities is often darkened by the utopia of wanting to become invulnerable. This is evident in the derogatory terms "slums" and "shantytowns." Christology points the way out of this tunnel vision. It inscribes daring dedication onto the migration discourse—that is its special engraving. Through the power out of vulnerability, a new category comes into play, making it possible to open up the closed narrative of the core city for alternative discourses. That does not occur without controversy, struggle, and power conflicts on where self-protection is necessary and where daring dedication is called for. But the core city as well can and must rely on the power out of vulnerability, which is already active in the arrival cities.

Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) says: "You need a place, so that a departure can occur" (Certeau 2009: 181). This "place of departure" lies in the villages of origin, the migrants come from; it drives them onward and energizes them. At the same time, migration shows that "a place of arrival" is needed, a place full of surprises that questions the order of things because people are enticed to dare.

“Many of the most desirable neighborhoods in New York, London, Paris and Toronto began as arrival cities” (Saunders 2010: 25).

Core cities also need the vagabonding creativity that is subversively represented in arrival cities. When core cities only strive to make themselves invulnerable and batten down the hatches, their creativity dries up. Imperceptibly, they lose their future. Whenever they overcome their “Herod strategies” and build bridges, they transform themselves into cities of birth. These bridges are present in streets, water pipes, and electricity supply systems, built into the new conurbations on the outskirts. Physical and mental bridges are always hazardous: one never knows what will cross them and enter into the core city; bridges make one vulnerable. But only if the core city dares to be vulnerable can it become an arrival city. Christology shows that social strategies can also follow the power out of vulnerability, build on it, and strengthen it. This kind of strategy is necessary. Migration is perceived in many places as a dangerous writing on the wall, a *Menetekel*. But arrival cities transform migration into a sign of hope in the present time¹¹ because they invent a culture of sharing.

The polarity of core and arrival cities shows its strength in the fact that it can be applied to other areas. In this sense, it is possible to ask where Christology builds bridges or receives bridges and so becomes a place of birth too. Or is it sufficient unto itself and isolated from foreign discourses? In dealing with the current debates on migration, there must be a bridge. Its foundation can be found in Jesus Christ himself who experienced forced migration, who dared to dedicate himself and experienced resurrection.

¹¹ See also the observation by Saunders: “Arrival cities are not causing population growth; in fact, they are ending it. When villagers migrate to the city, their family size drops” (Saunders 2010: 26).

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