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Bearing Witness:

Reframing Christian-Muslim Encounter in light of the Refugee Crisis

In his homily on the 6th of September 2015, Pope Francis called on every parish in Europe to welcome a refugee family. That same weekend, refugees arriving in Munich were greeted at the train station by a large group of German citizens holding welcome signs. In London, communities organized to make the trek across the English Channel to meet with migrants stuck at the camps in Calais. Throughout the summer and into the autumn of 2015, over 1 million refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants arrived in Europe. Germany and Sweden combined to accept, either permanently or temporarily, at least 600,000 of these people.[i] And in the face of increasing criticism from her own party, and in light of rising public support of right wing parties, Chancellor Angela Merkel has led the way in defending a moral vision of European liberalism, human rights, and the rights of refugees to *non-refoulement*. Churches have acted creatively and often quietly to welcome and advocate for migrations. The Waldensian Community in Italy has created safe corridors for thousands of migrants crossing the Mediterranean; Greek churches, in the face of their own economic crisis, have housed, fed, and advocated for migrants stuck on the borders with Macedonia. German and Swedish churches have testified how their own communities have been revitalized through engagement with migrants—with many people returning to the church because of the witness and action of these communities on behalf of migrants.

These are far from reflecting the sole or even predominant response in society, the church, and political arena. The Hungarian government forced migrants off the train and attempted to stop refugees from moving through Hungary toward Germany and Scandinavia, even going so far as to propose building a wall. Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister, argued that

the migrants threaten the Christian identity of Europe.[ii] Péter Erdő, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Budapest, reportedly declared that Hungarian churches were prohibited from sheltering refugees, claiming that "if we did so, we would be human traffickers."[iii] Similarly, the Slovakian, Polish, Bulgarian and Cypriot governments issued statements that they would only accept Christian refugees as Muslims would threaten their identity.[iv] This type of rhetoric is not limited to Central or Eastern Europe, but is of a more common vintage and is central to the rise in popularity of right wing nationalist parties across Europe. David Cameron and other European leaders have also called attention to the apparent incompatibility between new arrivals and Europe's secular and Christian heritage.

Over the course of 2016, the urgency of addressing the migrant crisis, both in Europe and in the Middle East and Africa, has given way to internal policy debates within the European Union and rise of nationalist parties with anti-immigrant positions. For instance, the closing or restriction of the Schengen agreement on free movement, proposals to amend the Dublin system, shifts to adjudicate legal status in the first port of arrival which are predominately Italy and Greece, a tenuous deal with Turkey, and the promise to share the burden across the continent with 120,000 people resettled or relocated, have all contributed to a political stalemate. Examples abound of the increase in anti-immigrant political parties: anti-immigration rhetoric as a centerpiece of the campaign for the U.K. to leave the European Union, Donald Trump's proposed ban on Muslim immigrants, François Fillon's argument that France is grounded on Judeo-Christian-Secular values that Muslim citizens and migrants must accept, and Orbán's claim that Hungary must serve as a bulwark for European Christian values. In the midst of this political quagmire and rising nationalism, the ongoing war in Syria, the inhumane conditions of camps in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, and Greece, and the

dangers of crossing the Mediterranean or the Aegean continues to produce cycles of despair and death for millions of people.[v]

How are we to interpret the refugee crisis in light of Christian theological and political convictions? Is the most faithful Christian response to offer a defence of Judeo-Christian values and the heritage of a Christian and secular Europe as a justification for limiting migrants and refugees? What are we to make of the lack of political, moral, and theological courage and imagination from the dominant voices in Europe and North America? How do we challenge the crossroads, blockades, bombs, and camps that have caught so many people in their grip, or the fear and political apathy that leaves many people in Europe and North America distracted or impotent to act?

Of course, we could and should offer an assessment of the financial problems in Europe, Greek debt, the conflict in Ukraine-Russia, fear of interventionism in Middle East post Iraq and Libya that leaves little pressure to resolve the Syrian war, the terror attacks in Paris and Brussels and justified worries about security, and now the fallout from the British vote to leave the EU— these are all factors that cannot be ignored. But as a political theologian, I want to focus on a fairly obvious but too often unnamed aspect that has shaped European and North American political and moral responses to forced migration: namely, the long and uneasy relationship between Christianity and Islam. Looming large, and often central to the rhetoric of those political and religious figures championing closed borders, is the relationship between Islam, Christianity, and Western political liberalism.[vi] As Anouar Majid wrote nearly a decade ago, "No one seems to be reading the intense debate over immigration and minorities who resist assimilation as the continuation of a much older conflict, the one pitting Christendom against the world of Islam."[vii] The refugee crisis, however, has made this long simmering debate much more explicit. Luca Mavelli and Erin

K. Wilson argue in the introduction to their fascinating edited volume, *The Refugee Crisis and Religion,* Western perceptions of what counts as a good or bad Muslim are vital for understanding public rhetoric toward forced migrants and the policy decisions taken by various political actors. These divides and divisions testify to the "growing importance of religious identity in the politics of migration and refugees."[viii] The refugee crisis has often pitted, in ways real and imagined, Christian migrants who 'deserve' welcome over and against Muslims migrants who are treated with either suspicion or disdain.

The Refugee Crisis as an Inter-Religions Kairos Moment: Thinking with Jürgen Moltmann

In a fascinating but largely undeveloped claim, Jürgen Moltmann contends that there are certain pre-conditions and cultural forces that facilitate constructive interreligious dialogue. Rather than dialogue being either universally productive or a generic mandate, he argues that "a special *kairos* is needed for fruitful dialogue."[ix] These *kairos* moments can emerge from socio-political challenges, shared intellectual concerns, or inter-religious conflict. The friction and questions of the day press religious communities and persons together into an encounter that might evolve into both conversations and action. If these factors are not present, dialogue risks devolving into a self-involved and staid encounter between religious experts debating metaphysical minutiae or religious authorities. "The dialogue between the religious communities has a tranquilizing effect on things as they actually are, and is in tendency completely conservative."[x] Instead, Moltmann advances a vision of inter-religious encounter as an act of political theology. In sketching this theo-political framework for dialogue, he argues that a productive *kairos* moment will be marked by at least three primary conditions. First, "a life-threatening conflict exists worldwide" such

as the Cold War or nuclear proliferation. Second, "the truth which serves life itself is at stake" and thus debate is focused on the conditions for a just and truthful alternative to the dominant forces of the world as it is. Finally, the questions of life and truth must either be shaped by or impinge upon religious communities and thereby call for conversion both within and between traditions.[xi]

The migration crisis in the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, and the various political, economic, and military events that caused it, should be approached as one such interreligious *kairos* moment. It invites Christians, Muslims, and other communities together in critical engagement to addresses the socio-political, theological, and ethical challenges of migration. Part and parcel of the challenge and opportunity facing Christians in the West in responding to the migration crisis is to discovery a new framework for Christian-Muslim engagement, one that holds together particularity and openness, debate and dialogue, social action and theological inquiry. Yet the primary and loudest theological responses to the phenomenon of migration and the violence of the Assad regime and groups like ISIS has been to return to long standing tropes of inherent difference and cultural rivalry. Rather than viewing the migration of refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom are Muslims, as an opportunity to re-evaluate and reframe Christian-Muslim-Secular engagement, it has spurred a rise in populist nationalism and xenophobic policies and the comeback of Christendom political theologies.[xii] However, as Ingolf Dalferth writes in a different context, "To wish to return to times supposedly much more favourable for the Christian faith is completely misguided. Now as then, the church is faced with the same basic problem: ensuring that the word of the cross is recognized in its words and actions, it's worship, witness, fellowship, and service."[xiii] Alternatively, in the numerous church statements advocating for a more open response to migration, written by the Roman Catholic Church, the Church Committee on Migrants in

Europe, the World Communion of Churches, and other denominational bodies, there is nothing more than passing references to Islam and Muslims. Surely theologians and church leaders have mentioned this as an aspect, but often only in passing and without any real nuance or care.

The church in Europe and North America again faces what Moltmann identified in the opening of *The Crucified God* as an "identity-involvement dilemma." He asked how might Christians be in "critical solidarity with our contemporaries"[xiv] without sacrificing the particularity of their identity. The dual crisis of identity and relevance described over 40 years remains acute today. Now we might add and expand on Moltmann's questions to account for those posed by migration and the increasing cultural and religious diversity and interreligious encounters occasioned by it. Do Christians lose their identity if they are in solidarity with migrants and refugees—many of whom are Muslims? Should solidarity prioritize religious identity such that Christian migrants from the Middle East and Africa are given priority over non-Christians? How can Christians in Europe engage in interreligious solidarity on behalf of migrants and refugees when this solidarity might break communion with more immediate national neighbour and even fellow Christians?

Or on the other hand, how can Christians be relevant to their Muslim neighbours without giving up their identity as followers of the crucified Lord? Does not the particularity of the Christian Gospel—with its accounts of sin, the cross, the incarnation, and the Trinity—notions that are deeply problematic to Muslims, have to be silenced in order to be in genuine solidarity? Must Christians in Europe and North America choose between their particular identity or their relevance to either society or their Muslim neighbours?

These questions are not primarily academic ones, but carry deep existential import for Christian witness and discipleship today. As a member of the World Communion of

Reformed Churches' Task Force on Migration in Europe, I have visited Christian communities working with migrants in Greece and heard their theological questions about how to hold together commitments to welcome and engage in interreligious solidarity with an enduring commitment to saving power of Jesus Christ. Other Christian communities in Europe speak of their desire to help and care for migrants per the biblical injunction, but also note their honest and real concerns about the impact of cultural and religious differences on their societies that might occur through a large migration of Arab Muslims into Europe. Still others argue that this is not the time to worry about theological and cultural identity, but one that demands creative actions that seek justice for refugees and migrants that are caught in life and death situations.

If Christian theology and the church communities are going to offer a bold engagement with current migration context, we must come to grips with both the fear and nostalgia that has marked so much public discourse around both migrants and Islam and chart an alternative to the current models of engagement with Islam. Affirming again, as we should, that Christians have a call to care for the neighbour and migrant, or that the Geneva convention promises *non-refoulement* and the right to movement, are necessary but not sufficient claims. In the face of large scale migration, Christian theology and ethics are confronted with our own limitations and inadequate approaches to Islam. As the Princeton Seminary professor and theologian Daniel Migliore wrote in the context of post 9/11, "Adding to the problem is the lack of preparation that the Christian church and Christian theology bring to this new and complex engagement with Islam."[xv] Christians in Western Europe and North America have much work to do to in order to understand Islam, engage with Islamic thought, and engage with Muslims. Unless and until Christian theology, ministry, and political ethics confronts its long and uneasy relationship with Muslims and

understanding of Islam, we will remain caught between the dominant motifs of fear and nostalgia that cling to past Christian Europe or simplistic accounts of tolerance that calls for a generic love of neighbour but fails to address genuine difference. The political, ethical, and theological issues that Christian-Muslim encounters occasion are not going away in our lifetime. It is thus all the more urgent for Christians in the West to muster both the courage and humility to begin to risk genuine engagement with Muslims.

There is a loose analogy, although with significant differences, between our own theo-political context and that of the theological scene after World War II. Like then, Christians are being confronted afresh with the question and claims of another religious tradition—one that share much in terms of Scripture, theological imaginary, and history, but has often been ignored or poorly understood by dominant Christian thinkers. After a generation of relative theological silence from Christians in the face of the *Shoah,* Jürgen Moltmann and Johan Baptist Metz, amongst others, attempted to think theologically about Christian complicity in the death camps, human suffering, and Christian interpretations of Judaism. Such theological reflection demanded addressing the history of anti-Semitism in the Christian tradition, addressing suppersessionist interpretation, listening attentively to Jewish thinkers, and reconsidering classic paradigms of theodicy. This remains unfinished, but vital, theological work that continually presses Christian theologians, in the words of Karl Barth, to "begin again at the beginning" in articulating our theology, politics, and interpretation of Scripture in light of engagement with Judaism.

Of course, the *Shoah* and the history of anti-Semitism within the Church cannot be directly compared to the challenges raised by our relationship with Islam or the migration crisis today. There are important Scriptural, historical, and theological distinctions between Christian engagement with Judaism and with Islam. Jews have always been a much closer

neighbour to Western forms of Christianity than Islam; moreover, Christians actions against Jews were more clearly those of a majority in power over against a minority. Nevertheless, as Anne Norton puts it in the conclusion to her wonderful book, *The Muslim question,* "I see the Muslim question as the Jewish question of our time: standing at the site where politics and ethics, philosophy and theology meet"[xvi] Our *Zeitgeist* is one in which Islam looms large and still few Christians have chosen to engage in a reconsideration of Islam, the history of colonialism, or the history of anti-Islamic rhetoric in the church. The shifts in theological thinking and methodology brought about by dialogue with Judaism after the *Shoah* may be a guide to a reconsideration of Christianity and Islam in the late modern world.

While Arab Christian theology has a long, albeit largely forgotten, history of such creative and constructive engagement with Islam, most academic, public, and church based Western Christian conversations about Islam are generally characterized by overly simplistic notions.[xvii] Part of this is due to the fact that the vast majority of Christians, even Christian theologians and pastors, are completely uneducated about Islam. There is an urgent need for Christians to engage with the diversity of Islamic ideas and practices concerning God and God's relationship with the world—and not to simply return to tropes of either a violent lawgiver or to neatly evade difference in the name of commonality. This would entail learning the basic contours of Islamic philosophy, jurisprudence, theology, and understandings of scriptural interpretation and prophecy—and to desist from the recurring habit of proof-texting the Qur'an or Hadith to support a claim for the inadequacy of Islamic thought. Just as Christianity and Judaism are vast and diverse living intellectual traditions, so too is Islam.

Bearing Witness: A Proposal for Reframing Christian-Muslim Encounter

Part of the recurring difficulty in approaching Christian-Muslim relations is not only due to political rivalries—real or imagined—between Christendom and the *Dar al-Islam,* but to the fact that both Islam and Christianity offer comprehensive visions of God and the world. These theological accounts involve significant overlap concerning the One God, creation, scripture, prophecy, the human condition, the calling to conversion, and the import of religious claims on the political sphere. These shared concepts, however, diverge in pivotal ways over what David Burrell calls the "outstanding neurological issues" of God's (tri)unity, the nature of Jesus, the prophethood of Muhammad and the status of the Qur'an.[xviii] More often than not, these differences have led to mutual recrimination, theological misunderstandings, and polemics. While that last half century has seen important steps taken to advance Christian-Muslim debate beyond polemics—paragraph three of *Nostra Aetate,* appeals to a shared Abrahamic heritage, and the *Common Word Between Us and You* are all examples—the search for a shared theological foundation has proven elusive. Even topics of apparent shared commitment such as belief in the One God, the doctrine of creation, or the call of Abraham, are interpreted in vastly divergent ways that are intertwined with the distinct claims that each tradition makes about Jesus, Muhammad, God, and scripture. For instance, following Paul's reading in Romans 4 and Galatians 3, Christians understand Abraham as an exemplum of faith that is thereby justified by God's grace. In contrast, Muslims view Ibrahim as an ideal monotheist and the builder of the Ka'ba. This is not even to mention the diverging interpretations of Isaac and Ishmael and the ways that Genesis 16-21 have fed into anti-Muslim and anti-Christian polemic.[xix]

One could argue, then, that attending to the theological debates between Christians and Muslims is a distraction from the pressing socio-political challenges facing the world today. Debates about the (tri)unity of God, Abraham, Muhammad, the divinity of Jesus, the nature

of divine revelation, and the importance and limitations of law are all unnecessary to the central issues presented by massive global migration. Instead of Christian theologians rethinking approaches to Islam as part of a new *status confessionios*, the current political realities of our world demand a turn to shared action. Better to focus on the dialogue of life and politics, then on theology.

While there is some wisdom to this suggestion, an inter-religious focus on social goods and justice is also a move into hotly debated terrain. Social formation of communities and their conceptions of justice and equality are part and parcel of their 'religious' commitments. The neat divides between religion, as the realm of personal piety or ritual action, and politics, the arena of justice and law, simply does not hold for the vast majority of human history. To assume they do, and that, for instance, Christology can somehow be divorced from how Christians understand justice or that Muslims might conceive of a notion of ethics apart from the long history of Islamic jurisprudence, is untenable and naïve. In point of fact, many of the arguments against accepting Muslim migrants into Europe or North America turn on central theological claims about Muslim views of God, the law, political authority, and tolerance. As Moltmann himself notes, theology should be inherently political and particular. To wish to excise the particularity of a religious tradition in the name of interreligious engagement or political conveniences truncates the complexity of our theo-political realities. "If religion is made a private affair instead of a matter for the state, then it is inescapably relegated to the private sphere….Religion must be restricted to reverence for God and to personal conduct. That means Christianity without the Sermon on the Mount and the discipleship of Jesus. It means Judaism without the Torah, and Islam without the Sharia."[xx] Thus to consider the "political question" of dialogue is also to engage with theological debate and reflection, even as theology and dialogue must also become political unless it become staid.[xxi]

How might Christians in Europe and North America, then, begin re-thinking Islam and engaging with our Muslim neighbours in ways that recognizes this complexity and also holds together tensions between identity and relevance, particularity and openness, the theological and political? Is there a better way to think about both our differences and shared commitments that neither paper over deep disagreement nor imagines we are stuck in an endless cycle of recrimination and fear? Rather than seeking a shared theological foundation or an *a priori* agreed upon notion of just action, I want to sketch briefly how Christian-Muslim encounter can be reframed as ongoing practice of bearing witness to God and God's coming justice.

The call to bear witness is a recurring invitation and demand in both the New Testament and the Qu'ran. In the prologue to the Gospel according to John, the author describes John the Baptizer as one that is sent to bear witness to the light (John 1:6-8). Similarly, in the post-resurrection scenes of both Matthew 28 and Acts 1, the disciples are given the task of bearing witnesses to Jesus Christ. The Islamic tradition shares an overlapping, albeit distinct, focus on the category of witness. The primary criteria for becoming a Muslim is to recite the *Shahada*, a term that means testimony or witness and derive from the Arabic root for witness: *sh-h-d.* In one sense to be a Muslim is to be one that bears witness. The centrality of witness is reinforced in each of the five daily calls to prayer, where the *muezzin* calls out *ashhadu* (I bear witness) that there is no God but God and that Muhammad is the messenger of God. Throughout the Qur'an, there are numerous mentions of the importance of bearing witness to the unity and uniqueness of God. God is said to have taken the children of Adam and "made them bear witness" (7:172) to God, even as God "witness that there is no deity but God, and so do the angels and those with knowledge—that God is maintaining creation in justice. There is no deity except God, the Exalted in Might, the Wise" (3:18)." For both Christians

and Muslims, to bear witness is a key component of what it means to live in faithful submission to God.

While the category of witness is indigenous to both religious traditions, the term is supple enough to not presuppose a shared agreement about God, justice, or scripture. In fact, one of the benefits of considering Christian-Muslim encounter through the lens of witness is that it remains open-ended and dynamic. To bear witness is to give an account or a testimony, but one that is inherently contestable and thereby leaves room for cross examination, debate, and mutual learning. While the category of witness might conjure up negative images of proselytizing and polemics, proper attention to theological claims about God's transcendence and role in conversion press against such an interpretation. To bear witness is, as in the famous Grünewald alter piece, to point away from oneself and to God's action in the world. Witness is neither polemics nor apology. As Karl Barth quipped in his seminal commentary on Romans, "no divinity which needs anything, any human propaganda,—can be God."[xxii] In fact, a strong view of God's transcendence and freedom—whether grounded in the Christian or Islamic tradition—presents checks against an account of witness as a possession to be distilled or an argument to be defended. Rather, witness is an act of humble and confident trust that points toward God and trusts in the power of God, not human argument.

For instance, in the opening to John Calvin's *Institutes of Christian Religion*, he offers an analysis of the human condition, our distorted knowledge of ourselves and God, and finally God's act of communicating with humanity through Scripture to draw us back to right faith and knowledge—which is true wisdom. While Calvin appeals to coherence and historicity of Scripture, he ultimately concludes that the Text alone will not convince apart from the work of the Spirit. It is the Spirit that ultimately draws human beings to faith and not argumentation—even Scripture's own.[xxiii] In his book, *God is Beautiful,* the German-Iranian

intellectual, Navid Kermani, offers an in-depth reading of the power and beauty of the Qur'an.[xxiv] Through studies of both various *Hadith* and *Sira* (biographies of Muhammad), Kermani shows that the primary way that the early followers and companions turned toward the message of the unity of God was not through argumentation but beauty. It was the Qur'an's self-authenticating power and beauty of the transcendent God revealed in the rhythm of recitation that drew people into the community. The agent of conversion, then in both of these theological renderings, remains God. The human task is simply to witness to the Divine.

Witness is an act of humble particularity, which is marked by a non-anxious confidence in the One in whom we place our trust, faith, and submission. The central task, then, for both Christians and Muslims, is not to defend religion or protect one's own religious power or position, but to offer a creative and living witness to God and God's coming just rule. Such a posture of engagement is a sign of faith and trust in the security of God. We are not called to convince someone of our own superiority (theological or otherwise), but to 'offer a reason for the hope that is in us' (1 Peter 3:15). As Gerhard Böwering wrote in a special edition of *Concilium,* edited by Moltmann and Hans Küng, "If any real dialogue is to come about, it cannot occur in unequal confrontation or compromise but in living witness and honourable conduct toward each other in God's service."[xxv]

Witness, then, makes porous the theoretical division between mission and dialogue. To enter into inter-religious dialogue about God's (tri)unity, the prophecy of Muhammad, the Qur'an, the relationship between law and grace, and any of the other neurological issues, is not a compromise on one's identity in the name of relevance but an act of creative learning and mutual witness. The witness of Muslims, for instance, to the mercy and compassion of God recited in the *bismillah* challenges Christian theology to better articulate our own

understandings of the atonement, even as this dialogue serves as a corrective to Christian misunderstandings of Islamic ideas of God as merely a judge or lawgiver. Similarly, the task of articulating in a coherent fashion why Christian theology confesses the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth requires creative new theological work that is somehow both dialogue and mission. Critical differences regarding the place of Jesus within the divine acts are not finally resolved, but reframed beyond the polemical tropes that have made up much of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Interreligious dialogue are opportunities to advance theological learning, engage in constructive debate that clarifies differences, all while offering and receiving mutual witness.

This type of nuanced and engaged theological dialogue will inevitably encounter false witnesses and mutual misunderstandings that each community has about the other. Too often exchange between Muslims and Christians has been marked by accusations and misunderstandings of the other. For instance, the recurring physical interpretations within the Islamic tradition about Christian views of God's fatherhood and the incarnation of the Son are often nothing more than crude stereotypes that are unintelligible to Christian confession. The fact that these persist so widely and lead to accusation of *shirk* (making associates with God) has had increasingly hostile impact on Christians in places like Malaysia, where legal courts have challenged the Christian use of the term God. Similarly, the Qur'an claims that "there is no compulsion in religion" (Surat al-Baqirah, 2:256) and that Christians are "nearest in affection" (Surat al-Ma'idah, 5:82) does not match the witness of many Muslims toward Christians in Egypt and Iraq. Certainly, there are courageous Muslims in the Arab world arguing for increased respect and freedom for Christians and Jews, but too often false theological witness has had grave consequences. To engage in witness, then, is also to

challenge and correct false witnesses and to invite one another into dialogue and dispute in the "most virtuous manner" (Surat al-'Ankabut, 29:46).

It is here that a Christian political theology of Islam in light of the refugee crisis must offer a prophetic word against the fear and false witnesses that feed into anti-migrant policies. The depictions of refugees as a deluge and as threat to Christian and Western values often deploy longstanding Christian tropes against Islam, Muhammad, and Shari'a in order to describe Muslims as inherently violent and other. Longstanding Christian theological depictions of Islam are interwoven in our current political discourse. For instance, one can still ask serious questions about security or Islamic political theology without resorting to comparing refugees fleeing from wars in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan to the Ottoman army advancing on Vienna. Unfortunately, as the opening of this paper made clear these type of tropes and anti-Muslim sentiment are far too common. In fact, the few passing references that Moltmann makes to Islam primarily revolve around his concerns about the relationship between strict monotheism and political theologies of monarchy. In *The Trinity and a Kingdom,* Moltmann writes that "strict monotheism has to be theoretically conceived and implemented, as Islam proves."[xxvi] This claim functions as a foil to advance Moltmann's own social Trinitarianism that posits that a proper theology of the Trinity engenders radical mutuality and political sharing. While these comments are far from a developed engagement with Islamic political thought, Moltmann's implication that Islamic concepts of God's sovereignty necessarily entail theocracy simplifies the complex and diverse ways that Islam has understood the relationship between divine and human sovereignties. It is not difficult to hear echoes of this assessment about Islamic political thought in the current nationalist anti-migrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric in Europe, Australia, and North America. As Bishop Munib Younan, the Palestinian Lutheran Bishop of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, eloquently argues,

"simplistic anti-Islamic" views that are "common in the West" are acts of "false witness against our neighbors" that have dire social and political consequences.[xxvii]

In the Islamic tradition, the notion of witness is tied up not only with testifying about God's oneness, but also in testifying for the sake of justice. In Surat al-Nisa' (4:135), God implores those who believe to "be steadfast maintainers of justice, bearing witness for God, though it be against yourself, or your parents or kinsfolk, and whether it be someone rich or poor, for God is nearer unto both." It is not enough, then, to bear witness to theological ideas, one is called to bear witness to a vision of God's rule or kingdom that combines truth and justice, what in Arabic is called *haqq*. By challenging false witness, Christians are invited not only into dialogue for the sake of theological conversation and learning, but primarily in order to bear witness to God and God's rule as an alternative to the cycles of death, poverty, war, tyranny, and terrorism that are crushing the world and human beings. Christian theology in the West must offer a theopolitical alternative to the dominant voices drawing on Christian theology to reject refugees, particularly Muslims, and instead re-imagine migration as a new opportunity for to reframe Christian-Muslim encounter through the call to bear witness.

If Western Christians are going to offer faithful and creative witness to God's future justice that does not merely parrot the changing political winds of the day, we must find a way to rediscover our own deepest identity as one that is given eccentrically in the justifying grace of God in Jesus. This grace compels and commands followers outward into acts of justice marked by embodied solidarity with the despised, the forgotten, the neglected, and even the perceived enemies of 'Christian Europe'. Such witness is rooted in the deep particularity of the Gospel, but understands this identity not as a possession of a religion or bounded by territory, but as a gift and vocation that allows for non-triumphalist and non-anxious interreligious engagement for the sake of the world. In this way, we might say that if

Christians in Europe and North America are to find their identity, they will need to do so by losing it for the sake of witness to God. Or as the Qur'an notes, "O you who believe! Be steadfast for God, bearing witness to justice, and let not hatred for a people lead you to be unjust. Be just; that is nearer to reverence." (Surat al-Ma'idah, 5:8).

[i] See for instance Philip Connor, "Number of Refugees in Europe surge to Record 1.3 Million in 2015" *Pew Research Report,* Washington, D.C. (August 2, 2016)

[ii] Ian Traynor, "Hungarian PM says Europe in grip of madness," *The Guardian*, 3 September 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/03/migration-crisis-hungary-pm-victor-orban-europe-response-madness (Accessed 1 December 2016).

[iii] Balazs Korayni, "A Nation Divided: Hungarians loathe and help refugees," *Reuters*, 5 September 2015. http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-hungary-divide-idUSKCN0R50F120150905 (Accessed 1 December 2016).

[iv] Luca Mavelli and Erin K. Wilson (eds.), *The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 7.

[v] See Peter Tinti and Tuesday Reitano, *Migrant, Refugee, Smuggler, Saviour* (London: Hurst and Company, 2016)

[vi] These divisions within Western responses have been ceased upon by groups such as Daesh (ISIS) to advance their own vision of a world divided between Muslims and Christians. In fact, a central strategic aim of ISIS is to eliminate the grey zones of coexistence and to refuel a conflict between Christendom and the *Dar al-Islam*.

[vii] Anouar Majid, *We Are All Moors: Ending Centuries of Crusades Against Muslims and Other Minorities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 3-4.

[viii] Luca Mavelli and Erin K. Wilson (eds.), *The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 7.

[ix] Jürgen Moltmann, "Is 'Pluralistic Theology' Useful?" in Gavin D'Costa (ed.) *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 153.

[x] Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 228.

[xi] Jürgen Moltmann, "Is 'Pluralistic Theology' Useful?" 156.

[xii] Joshua Ralston, "Islamophobia and the Comeback of Christendom: A Riposte to Adrian Pabst," *ABC Religion and Ethics Portal,* 4 August 2014 http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2014/08/04/4060254.htm (Accessed 1 December 2016)

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[xiv] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology,* translated by R.A. Wilson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 7.

[xv] Daniel Migliore, *The Power of God and the gods of Power* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 116.

[xvi] Anne Norton, *On The Muslim Question* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 228.

[xvii] For more on Arab Christianity and the history of its theological engagement with Islam, see Sidney Griffith, *Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*: *Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

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[xix] See Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 117-220.

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[xxiii] See for instance, John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion,* Edited by John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960) I.VII.

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