

# Thoughts on the Use the (Hebrew) Bible in the Assessment of Current Ethical Issues – Part III: The Example of “Diversity”

Markus Zehnder

Internationale Hochschule Liebenzell; ETF Leuven; Ansgar Teologiske Høgskole  
[markus.zehnder@ihl.eu](mailto:markus.zehnder@ihl.eu)

**Abstract:** This article attempts to apply the most salient principles developed in Part II concerning the question as to how to use the (Hebrew) Bible to assess current ethical issues to the example of diversity. It becomes clear that modern concepts of diversity and biblical concepts of diversity are not fully identical. While diversity in the biblical sense is an important value in the Bible, the same cannot be said of modern notions of diversity. On the other hand, there is no reason why all aspects of these modern notions should be completely rejected.

**Keywords:** Bible – diversity, biblical ethics – diversity

## Introduction

The aim of this third part of the article on questions concerning the use of the Hebrew Bible and the Bible as a whole is not to provide a thorough treatment of the topic of diversity from an ethical point of view; rather, the aim is more modest: to present a brief outline of how the aspects mentioned in the second part of the article can be applied to a specific case.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. General Observations

a) The first problem is that “diversity” is a term that is used in many different ways and therefore in itself complex and ambiguous. The second problem is that it is not absolutely clear which biblical texts might be identified as possible candidates for the application to the topic of diversity – regardless of the specific ways in which this topic is defined.

b) For our purposes, “diversity” will be identified as the aspiration to have men and women, and persons of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, living and working closely together in one and the same institution or administrative unit. Related to the aspect of ethnic and cultural diversity is a tendency towards the support for open border policies. In more extreme versions, the aspiration is that persons with an ethnic background different from the people of the receiving societies would have considerable influence, or would even become the dominant force. In some, predominantly but not exclusively secular variations, “diversity” also relates to the inclusion of persons with what is called different gender identities and sexual orientations.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A brief example on a different, but somewhat related topic can be found in Zehnder (2021b); a book-length example is the monograph on “The Bible and Immigration” (Zehnder 2021 a).

<sup>2</sup> The term “aspiration” can be used best with a view to the situation in the U.S. and Canada, as well as big international corporations in the rest of the Western world. As a randomly chosen example for the first position see the website of the Glion Institute of Higher Education (<https://www.glion.edu/magazine/cultural-diversity-workplace/>). For an example of

c) As a matter of fact, “diversity” in one form or another has become one of the most prominent aspirations in Western societies, both on the political level, but also in all areas of life, including education, economy, art, and so on. It is also worth noting that almost every single seminary, including evangelical seminaries, now has a statement on diversity prominently posted on their website.

d) While this is seen by many as an expression of high levels of tolerance not previously attained, it is clear that this is not really the case in important ways, because the new levels of what can be called cancel culture, the exclusion of people who do not share the fundamental presuppositions and convictions of those who promote “diversity”, cannot be overlooked.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The Biblical Material

a) If we look at the biblical material that can be related to the concept of “diversity” in some way or another, it can be observed that in diversity statements in evangelical institutions of higher education, reference is made routinely to the multi-ethnic church of Antioch (Acts 11:19–26; 13:1–3) and to the multitude from all nations revering the Lamb (Rev 7:9–17).<sup>4</sup>

b) The biblical material is, of course, much more complex. It begins with God creating “heaven and earth” with a rich diversity of created beings, both plants and animals, culminating in the creation of humankind, with whom he enters in a personal relationship (Genesis 1). This shows that diversity in the sense of pluriformity is at the heart of God’s creative will. As far as humankind is concerned,

---

the relationship between the promotion of ethnic diversity and liberal immigration policies see the online document “A Wesleyan View of Immigration” (<https://www.wesleyan.org/a-wesleyan-view-of-immigration>). A (cautiously formulated) argument for the necessity and benefits of replacing the current structures of dominance see Gest (2022). As for the last element, the promotion of the inclusion of persons with different gender identities and sexual orientations, one can point to various initiatives taken by the European Union, such as the “European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award” that contains a specific “LGBTIQ Equality Strategy” ([https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/tackling-discrimination/diversity-and-inclusion-initiatives/european-capitals-inclusion-and-diversity-award\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/tackling-discrimination/diversity-and-inclusion-initiatives/european-capitals-inclusion-and-diversity-award_en)).

<sup>3</sup> One of innumerable examples is the rejection of Italian professor Rocco Buttiglione as member of the European Commission in 2004, because of his conservative views on family and homosexuality. Roberto Castelli, the Italian Justice Minister at that time, issued the following comment: “This decision shows the real face of Europe, a face which we don’t like. It’s fundamentalist, which is absolutely not on” (Smith 2004). Besides the political sphere, also the areas of media, culture, business, education, and religious institutions are affected by this phenomenon. It would be easy to fill volumes by enumerating examples of just the last couples of years. Just on the very day of the completion of this article, it was announced that French authorities decided to revoke the license for the broadcaster C8, because, i.a., their reporting on immigration was not “balanced” enough.

The present author has not only observed, but in some cases also personally experienced manifestations of cancel culture (or discrimination) over several decades. The latest example is the employment policies at Biola University. Under the leadership of Biola’s president Barry H. Corey, and in the case of employees at Talbot School of Theology at the instigation of the Dean of Faculty (Scott B. Rae) and the interim Academic Dean (Timothy Pickavance), 13 new professors were hired at the beginning of the fall semester 2022, eleven of them women, about half of them also persons of color, one Asian American, and only one white male (with a specialization in racial equity in nursing), while at the end of the same semester 14 professors were let go, most of them white male (including the present author).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Biola’s Statement on Diversity (<https://www.biola.edu/about/diversity>); the passage from Revelation 7 is not mentioned, but the formulation “we strive to reflect the eschatological community which will live in perfect shalom” is used.

God's blessing on humanity to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gen 1:28) comes to fruition in Genesis 10, in a plurality of groups that are distinct in terms of territory (אַרְצֵי), language (לְשׁוֹנֵי), and ethnic affiliation (מְשֻׁפְּחָה). This presents a counter-model of sorts to current notions of ethnic diversity, because the different ethnic groups live separated from each other. God is said in Deut 32:8 to be involved himself in the separation of peoples into different nations with their territories. He creates a separate new people with the nation of Israel, distinguished from the other nations. While the limits to membership in this nation are not unsurmountable, both on the individual and the collective levels – see the cases of the family of Rahab and the Gibeonites as examples (Joshua 6 and 9) – it is still clear that Israel was not supposed to function along the lines of what the modern notion of “diversity” implies. The Israelites were not expected to have their settlements transformed into multi-ethnic and multi-cultural places, where the true aspiration of God's call for this people was only reached if an Israelite would live in his village alongside a man from Kush and a woman from Elam.

c) On the other hand, it is mentioned in Exod 12:38 that a number of non-Israelites accompanied them on the way out of Egypt. Leviticus 24:10–11 tells the story of a man whose father was an Egyptian and whose mother was an Israelite. Numbers 10:29–32 points to the Midianite Hobab as living among the Israelites. In Num 11:4 foreigners are depicted as instigating the Israelites against Moses. Numbers 12:1 mentions Moses' marriage to a Kushite woman. The examples of Jethro, Caleb, Rahab, the Gibeonites, Ruth, Uriah the Hittite and many others also demonstrate that at no point in the history of the (emerging) people of Israel was the concept of ethnic coherence understood in a strict sense.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, there are a number of texts in the Pentateuchal law collections that admonish the addressees to support the *ger* (“sojourner”).<sup>6</sup> The *ger* is a person coming from outside, in many or most cases likely from outside of the nation of Israel (see Zehnder 2021a, 21). In some ways, since he is living within the Israelite community, his inclusion in this community does in fact mean the creation of “diversity” in the modern sense of the term. However, there are nevertheless important differences, as we will see in the following paragraph.

d) Support of the *ger* is a matter of helping a person in need, not a means to remedy a perceived deficit within the Israelite society that would present itself if not enough foreigners would join them. No demographic rebuilding to reach diversity is in view. Moreover, assimilation is the goal, not the creation of a multicultural society in which different cultures exist side-by-side on equal terms. While there is no biblical program prescribing that the borders of the community needed to be closed to any person coming from outside, modern concepts of ethnic or even religious diversity were clearly absent in orthodox Yahwism. This is obviously even more true for gender diversity when it comes to various positions of leadership etc., let alone diversity of sexual orientation or non-binary gender identities.

---

<sup>5</sup> Stricter tendencies can be found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah in particular (for details see Zehnder 2021a, 50–55).

<sup>6</sup> See especially Exod 22:20; 23:9; Lev 19:10, 33–34; 23:33; Deut 1:16; 10:18–19; 14:28–29; 24:14, 17, 19–22; 26:11–13.

e) Looking at texts in the Hebrew Bible that describe the future and the eschaton, the following picture emerges: In the Hebrew Bible, the dominant model is that of various pagan nations coming as pilgrims to Zion. However, they are not expected to be staying there permanently, mixing together and with the Israelites into a new diverse unity, but clearly seem to continue to reside in their own territories. There will still be a plurality and diversity of distinct ethnic groups in the eschatological future, but gravitating around the spiritual center in Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup>

It is possible to tentatively integrate the various expectations into a complex coherent whole in the following way: God's judgment over his people, related to an attack of foreign powers against Jerusalem, precedes the salvation and ultimate re-establishment of Israel, which in turn will lead to a subordination of foreign peoples, combined with their inclusion into God's eschatological salvation. This means that those foreigners that were not destroyed by God's judgment will enjoy God's blessings that are mediated by Israel. Foreign nations, as far as they survive the eschatological judgment, will not be dissolved as such in a face- and boundless unity, but retain distinct identities. They will, however, be united in their orientation towards Zion and her God, in the state of "servants" (see Zehnder 2005, 540–41).

f) Turning to the New Testament, the first remarkable observation is that Jesus assigned much more importance to women among his followers than was normally the case among Jewish rabbis at that time. The weight of this observation is heightened by the fact that this is a counter-cultural trait of Jesus's ministry. This observation is corroborated by the fact that in Acts several women are described as fulfilling important roles in the early Christian mission and the congregations that arose from it, and by the place of importance given to women in the corpus of Pauline letters.<sup>8</sup>

g) Passages such as Gal 3:28 and Eph 2:19 underline the unity of the body of Christ, a unity that transcends ethnic (and other) distinctions.<sup>9</sup> Such texts are frequently used as arguments both for liberal immigration policies and the promotion of diversity (see, e.g., Senior 2008, 32). According to Eph 2:19, the Gentiles, who before Christ were *xenoi* ("foreigners") or *paroikoi* ("sojourners"),<sup>10</sup> are now full citizens of the kingdom of God, together with the *hagioi* ("holy ones"). Whatever the exact referent of *hagioi* may be, the main point is that the new people of God is a unity in which distinctions of religious-ethnic background do not matter. By using the term "sojourners", Eph 2:19 can be seen as pointing to the fulfillment of expectations found in a small number of prophetic texts in the Hebrew Bible, according to which the "sojourners" will be included in the new people of God in the eschatological future.<sup>11</sup>

According to Gal 3:28, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is not male and female." Does this support the current understanding of "diversity"? What this verse, in my view, means is that in the emerging Christian communities, among those who are baptized in

<sup>7</sup> For details see Zehnder 2005, 499–540.

<sup>8</sup> For details see Lee (2021).

<sup>9</sup> In other texts, Paul does not *describe* the unity among believers of various backgrounds, but *urges* them to live accordingly; see, e.g., Rom 16:16.

<sup>10</sup> It is unlikely that a precise technical distinction between the two terms is in view (see, e.g., Thielman 2010, 179).

<sup>11</sup> See especially Isa 14:1 and Ezek 47:22–23.

Christ (v. 27), there is no difference between “Jews and Greeks” and the other categories that are mentioned, as far as their new identity in Christ and their status before God is concerned; they are “all one in Christ Jesus” (v. 28b). It is clear that Paul here expresses the view that in some important ways all fundamental human distinctions are superseded by the new reality of the unity of the body of Christ to which the believers belong (so also George 1994, 284), and that in Christ they have full access to God as “sons of God” (v. 26). On the other hand, it is also evident that the mention of the third category, male and female, cannot be interpreted to mean the abolishment of the differences between the sexes in general; the context of the writings of Paul makes this unambiguously clear (see, e.g., George 1994, 289–291). This observation can, however, in itself not be taken as proof that the same is true for the first two elements, the distinctions between Greek and Jew on the one hand, and slave and free on the other. The element of the distinction of male and female is different from the other two in that it is established with creation itself (see Gen 1:27). With respect to the distinction between slave and free, one has to consider that Paul severely undermines the institution of slavery, though he does not venture to abolish it (see, e.g., George 1994, 289). It is also important to observe that Paul does not question the legitimacy and importance of social distinctions and hierarchies in general.<sup>12</sup> As far as the first distinction (Jew and Greek) is concerned, it can be read in two ways: either as pointing to the (antagonistic) difference between Jews and Gentiles, or more broadly to ethnic differences generally, with the distinction between Jews and Gentiles only being a specific example of these differences. The alternatives are, however, not mutually exclusive, for even if one opts for the first variant, it could still be argued that by extension ethnic differences in general can be included. As in the case of the other two categories of distinctions, it is clear from other passages that what Paul has in view is not the erasure of the distinctions, but their redemption.<sup>13</sup>

One of the primary ethical consequences of the assertions made in the two texts is that love for the fellow believer must not be limited by ethnic considerations. Secondly, such texts imply that legal regulations found in the Hebrew Bible must not (or no longer) be used in a way that separates believers based on their respective Jewish or Gentile backgrounds (cf. Jervis 1999, 107). This is borne out in some detail and as a matter of principle in the decisions of the Jerusalem Council referred to in Acts 15. There is no distinction between Gentile and Jewish believers, the former are included in God’s people and must not be demanded to obey the Jewish law *in toto*, with the exception of some fundamental regulations (Acts 15:19–20; for details see Zehnder 2021a, 98).

In the case of both Eph 2:19 and Gal 3:28, we are not dealing with general anthropological or societal claims; rather, it is all about the new creation of the body of Christ. The passages do not state that ethnic differences need to be overcome or ignored completely in the context of a policy that promotes diversity. They only argue that such distinctions need to take a backseat and must not be

---

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Rom 13:1–7. 1 Corinthians 11:3–15 shows that differences between genders are seen as important even within the order of the church. 1 Corinthians 12:5 is one of the many examples that point to distinctions and hierarchies within the church. Other texts, like Eph 5:22–6:9 – although in this case, it is disputed whether it is Pauline – social distinctions and gender distinctions are combined, with a view to life outside of the church.

<sup>13</sup> This explains why Paul emphatically points to the continuous differences between Jews and Gentiles in Romans 9–11.

allowed to interfere with the unity of the body of Christ. Also, these texts mean that there is no more room for ethnic pride (or for the abuse of power based on one's social position or a man's privileged position over women).<sup>14</sup>

The focus on Christian identity before God and on Christian unity implies that these passages cannot be directly related to immigration or diversity issues, except for aspects that have to do with the body of Christ in which distinctions of ethnic background are relativized. Of course, it can be argued that there is an additional way in which these texts are relevant for broader issues, in that ethnic pride at the expense of other ethnic groups outside one's own is delegitimized in principle. This does, however, not add anything to what can be inferred already from Genesis 1.

An additional point has to be raised: The view that creational differences such as those of ethnicity are irrelevant with respect to a person's standing before God does not imply that such differences can be ignored when it comes to ordering practical life, including the organization of civic life in a state. These are two different aspects of reality that cannot and must not be conflated.

h) The texts that were investigated in the previous paragraph certainly support the view that in principle it is preferable to build church communities that are comprised of various ethnic – and indeed, social – backgrounds. This point is reinforced by the following observations: The early church in Jerusalem, according to Acts 6:1–7, was composed both of Hellenists and Hebrews. They obviously had their own meetings (see Prill 2009, 334), and yet they were united under one overarching umbrella, under the leadership of the apostles. It is also noteworthy that there were no “attempts made by the Aramaic-speaking majority to demand cultural or linguistic assimilation” (Prill 2009, 336). Also the church in Antioch, as can be gleaned from Acts 11:19–21 and 13:1–3, was multi-ethnic in character (so also Prill 2009, 336–37); the same goes for the church in Philippi as depicted in Acts 16:13–33 (so also Prill 2009, 338–39), and the church in Corinth as described in Acts 18:2, 7–8 (so also Prill 2009, 339).<sup>15</sup> The fact that the mission teams that were headed or composed by Paul also were multiethnic points in the same direction (for details see Prill 2009, 340). Such observations need to be considered carefully when organizing church life in multi-cultural or multi-ethnic contexts (cf. Escobar 2018, 106).<sup>16</sup> It is, however, not clear that the first Christian congregations were mixed based on the notion that this had to be done as a matter of principle. They may have done so simply due to pragmatic reasons, mirroring reality on the ground rather than creating new realities. It is also possible that in many areas congregations were not mixed and were not actively seeking to change this state of affairs. Furthermore, the distinction between church and state has to be kept in mind, and therefore no one-to-one transfers can legitimately be made from one realm to the other. Especially, one has to keep in mind that questions of diversity in the general society and of immi-

---

<sup>14</sup> So also George 1994, 285.

<sup>15</sup> According to Acts 17:4, 12, the situation was similar also in Thessalonica and Beroea.

<sup>16</sup> It is often argued that a multi-cultural make-up of the local church prefigures the eschatological situation of a multi-cultural body of Christ or more generally a new humanity (see, e.g., Escobar 2018, 106). The eschatological picture of the body of Christ or humanity in general is, however, not as straightforward as this approach suggests (for more details see the following paragraph).

gration policies are wholly distinct from questions of church building and congregational organization.<sup>17</sup>

i) Of special importance are texts that describe the future people of God in Revelation. According to Rev 7:9–17, among other texts, the eschatological people of God will consist of “a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues” – that is, it will be multinational and multilingual. Therefore, many commentators claim, the church and other Christian organizations should strive to mirror this eschatological picture in the here and now (e.g., Carroll R. 2013, 128). Some add that Christians should work to mirror these realities also in the realm of the general political body (e.g., Strine 2018, 489). This argument does, however, in my view not stand to scrutiny. First, the eschatological images of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are too vague to be used as concrete prescriptions for a particular policy in terms of ethnic mixing. When John sees people of all nations and languages praising God before his throne, it does not mean that they represent multi-ethnic bodies or that they are transformed permanently into multi-ethnic bodies. Almost on the contrary: The fact that nations and languages are distinguishable presupposes some kind of separation between them. Second, the realm of the church cannot simply be identified with the broader society, because the addition of the spiritual domain and the work of the Holy Spirit enables congregations to be formed and to behave in ways that cannot be copied by the outside world. Third, as a matter of principle, future states and conditions cannot be taken as automatically or necessarily dictating how life in the current situation on this side of eternity has to be organized.<sup>18</sup> This is broadly accepted in other areas of life. As an example, we can point to the fact that the overwhelming majority of Christians marry, although marriage is not an institution that will be carried on in the world to come (Matt 22:30). Thus, the question arises as to why one would want to implement an eschatological state in the present age in one realm (question of the importance of ethnic differences), but not in the other (marriage)? On the other hand, what these texts in Revelation show is a continuation of the appreciation of pluriformity that is already visible in the creation report of Genesis 1, especially seen in connection with Genesis 10.

j) The general thrust of the New Testament texts is to presuppose the distinctions of nations as the normal condition of communal life in this world, a condition that does not need to be overcome by human means. Acts 17:26 in particular confirms the view that a differentiation of various ethnic groups together with concomitant national structures is seen as a positive institution ordained by God himself. The book of Revelation expects that even in the time of the completion of world history there will be a distinction of various, clearly definable ethnic groups among the people participating in God’s salvation.<sup>19</sup> The same book, in chapter 13, also depicts an attempt to establish a unified global state as part of the rule of the (final) anti-Christ.

---

<sup>17</sup> Inclusion (into the congregational community) of foreigners who have been admitted to a country is not the same as addressing the question of who should be allowed to cross the border.

<sup>18</sup> That would amount to an inappropriate conflation of ages.

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Rev 21:24–26; 22:2.

k) It is also important to recognize that the New Testament contains a good number of texts that advocate for a distinction between believers and non-believers.<sup>20</sup> This implies that a distinction between “in-group” and “out-group”, between “Us” and “Them”, is part of the worldview of the New Testament authors and understood by them as divinely ordained. Against this background, the church will not find support in the New Testament when it actively promotes liberal immigration policies that open the doors for immigrants with a non-Christian background or with a background that is even antagonistic towards Christianity.

Overall, as far as ethnic distinctions and borders are concerned, the few passages that relate to these issues confirm that ethnic and national distinctions are divinely ordained aspects of communal life at least on this side of eternity.

l) Besides creational pluriformity there is an additional type of pluriformity that can be observed in the New Testament, which can be labeled “spiritual diversity”. This diversity comes to the fore, in addition to the texts in Revelation mentioned above, in the diverse viewpoints of the authors of the New Testament writings as well as in the considerable variation in church life that the New Testament writings exhibit, both in the Book of Acts and the epistles.<sup>21</sup>

m) There is no clear trajectory in the Bible (apart from the spiritual domain) that would point to a movement from less to more diversity (of whatever kind) as an ideal or aspiration as its endpoint.

n) The core values of life (as the most important value enshrined in creation), love, justice and equality do not point to diversity as a goal; nor do the texts describing the life conditions established at creation nor those related to the example of Jesus. Rather, both the principles of order and liberty can be seen as in some ways being potentially in conflict with modern notions of diversity. On the other hand, human dignity and love of neighbor are foundational principles that need to be taken into consideration in all circumstances, also with respect to questions about diversity.

o) On the whole, there is only relatively little overlap between modern notions of diversity and priorities in the agenda of the New Testament writings, for the most part limited to practical considerations of the organization of mission and church life in Greco-Roman societies that can be labeled multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. This does not, however, mean that modern concepts of diversity automatically need to be rejected in all aspects as “non-biblical”.

### 3. Extra-Biblical Evidence

a) There are countless different studies that present different results concerning different levels related to diversity in today’s world. As far as diversity in the workplace is concerned, one of the more recent studies shows that there are both positive and negative impacts (Emerald Publishing Limited 2021).<sup>22</sup> This is to be expected: Enhanced diversity will result in an increase of perspective and variety of knowledge, skills, and experience. On the other hand, there is also a chance for a de-

---

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Rom 15:31; 1 Cor 6:5; 2 Cor 6:14–15; 2 John 10–11; 3 John 7.

<sup>21</sup> Such variations can also be found in the Hebrew Bible, but in this case more related to chronological sequence.

<sup>22</sup> A more optimistic assessment is found in Razaqat (2022).



crease in social cohesion, for poorer or more difficult communication, and for increased conflict. To point to one randomly chosen example: It has been proposed that the recent near-collapse of the second largest Swiss bank, Credit Suisse,<sup>23</sup> was in part due to the diversification of the upper management in the last decades (see, e.g., Zürcher 2023).

b) When it comes to the promotion of ethnic diversity in neighborhoods, the results of the groundbreaking study presented by Harvard sociologist Putnam in 2007 look mostly negative. He finds that, “In the short run, ... immigration and ethnic diversity tend to reduce social solidarity and social capital. New evidence from the US suggests that in ethnically diverse neighborhoods residents of all races tend to ‘hunker down’. Trust (even of one’s own race) is lower, altruism and community cooperation rarer, friends fewer” (Putnam 2007, 137). This thesis is related to a large number of various empirical studies undertaken during the last couple of decades, covering a whole range of different geographical areas and life settings (see Putnam 2007, 142–143). The most important source is the *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*, conducted in the year 2000 in 41 very different communities in the U.S., including interviews with about 30,000 people living in very different situations (see Putnam 2007, 144–146). The survey shows that, “The more ethnically diverse the people we live around, the less we trust them” (Putnam 2007, 147); “[i]n more diverse communities, people trust their neighbours less” (Putnam 2007, 148). Somewhat surprisingly, “in-group trust, too, is lower in more diverse settings” (Putnam 2007, 148). This means that, “Diversity seems to trigger not in-group/out-group division, but ... social isolation” (Putnam 2007, 149). There are other negative effects besides trust, among them: lower confidence in local government; lower confidence in one’s own influence; lower expectation of communal cooperation; lower engagement in charity and volunteering; fewer close friends; less happiness and lower perceived quality of life (see Putnam 2007, 149–150). In sum, “inhabitants of diverse communities tend to withdraw from collective life, distrust their neighbours, regardless of their skin” (Putnam 2007, 150–151). Diverse communities are also less egalitarian, more crime-ridden, and have a higher share of poorer, less educated inhabitants (see Putnam 2007, 151).<sup>24</sup> Putnam (2007, 154) observes that the negative impacts of diversity affect all social groups in similar ways: men and women, young and old, whites and non-whites, affluent and poor, conservatives and liberals, etc. It is also important to note that, “Economic inequality ... does not appear to cause, amplify or obscure the apparent effects of ethnic diversity on social capital” (Putnam 2007, 157). The same goes for the quality of communal infrastructure (see Putnam 2007, 157).

On the other hand, Putnam also maintains that, “In the long run, ... successful immigrant societies have overcome such fragmentation by creating new, cross-cutting forms of social solidarity and more encompassing identities. Illustrations of becoming comfortable with diversity are drawn from the US military, religious institutions, and earlier waves of American immigration” (Putnam 2007, 137). What we can observe, and what Putnam’s remarks also point to, is that long-term potentially

---

<sup>23</sup> Prevented only by its acquisition by UBS in 2023.

<sup>24</sup> Lower amounts of trust are not only related to diversity, but also to age, specific ethnic groups, as well as lower economic and educational status. At the same time, these factors mostly intersect with diversity (see Putnam 2007, 152–153). Interestingly, it turns out that districts that are equal in terms of economic status or crime-rate etc. are still different in terms of trust depending on the degree of ethnic diversity (see Putnam 2007, 153).

positive effects of diversity will not automatically come into effect, but in those cases in which a given society succeeds in managing higher degrees of diversity well. As the available data show, the likelihood of a positive outcome will depend on various factors, especially cultural and racial distance between locals and immigrants (see, e.g., Schmittler Heisler 2008, 83). Success is not a mere question of time. Success – and costs – are not predictable and depend on a multitude of factors that are different in each case.

Some of Putnam’s assumptions with regard to the long-term positive effects look questionable when one considers the parameters by which he determines the positive effects of immigration-driven diversity: enhancement of national cuisine and “culture of all sorts”; enhancement of creativity, resulting in better and faster problem-solving; more rapid economic growth; offset of the impending negative economic effects of the retirement of the baby-boom generation (see Putnam 2007, 140). As far as the cuisine is concerned: It is astonishing that such a point is even mentioned – and continues to be mentioned – in serious debates about migration, since (especially in the age of internet) all kinds of recipes from the whole world are readily available through internet, and ingredients to use them are also readily available through international trade; in addition, not much enrichment can be said to be added if there are three or five kebab-stands or sushi-bars (to choose two random examples) instead of one in a given district. As far as the general cultural argument is concerned: It is obvious that not all foreign cultural elements can be accepted as positive on moral or aesthetical grounds;<sup>25</sup> moreover, many valuable local cultural elements may come under threat, with potential negative effects on the sense of identity of the original local population. Better and faster problem-solving may in many instances be an effect of intellectual diversity rather than racial, ethnic, or cultural diversity;<sup>26</sup> in any case, this is an issue that is much too complex to be assessed in general terms. Concerning the economic effects, things are much less straightforward and again more complicated than Putnam suggests (see Zehnder 2021a, 183–211). Generally speaking, immigration-driven enhancement of diversity leads to a growth in GDP, but not in GDP per capita. For an ethical evaluation of the economic developments, one would, of course, also need to take into consideration the economic effects of mass-migration in the sending countries.

Putnam’s study, as far as the findings of the short-term effects of increasing diversity on social cohesion are concerned, have been subject to various criticisms and double-checking. One of the most important examples of the latter is a study by James Laurence and Lee Bentley of the University of Manchester, published in 2016 in the *European Sociological Review* under the title “Does Ethnic Diversity Have a Negative Effect on Attitudes towards the Community? A Longitudinal Analysis of the Causal Claims within the Ethnic Diversity and Social Cohesion Debate.” Their results are as follows: In principle, the negative causal effect of increased ethnic diversity on social cohesion does in fact exist, with some modifications, however: the effect is higher among *stayers* than among *movers*; especially among the latter, pre-existing bias concerning ethnic diversity may be an important factor determining the degree of their disengagement with the community. Also, other factors like the quality of the community services need to be taken into account, as much as differences

---

<sup>25</sup> An example, as evaluated from a Western perspective, would be female circumcision.

<sup>26</sup> As Putnam himself suggests (see Putnam 2007, 140).

in values that exist between young single persons without children and elderly married home-owning persons with children. Also, the tendencies are not predictable for individual cases. All these qualifiers notwithstanding, the general connection observed by Putnam is confirmed by Laurence and Bentley.

Interestingly, there are many other studies that confirm Putnam's main findings, among them the following: a 2014 study from Australia (*Journal of Urban Affairs*: "Ethnic Diversity and its Impact on Community Social Cohesion and Neighborly Exchange"); a 2015 study by the University of North Carolina examining a number of regions across Europe (Social Forces: "Ethnic Diversity, Economic and Cultural Contexts, and Social Trust: Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Evidence from European Regions, 2002–2010"); and a study by the University of Gothenburg about the situation in Sweden published in 2017 (Strömbäck 2017, 1–17).

The findings of these studies can be summarized in the following way: "Flourishing is maximized within communities that enjoy high levels of trust and voluntary cooperation. Social solidarity is not an automatic byproduct of interactions among people. Rather, communal solidarity is a human creation – a byproduct of shared customs and traditions, common moral values and aspirations" (Amstutz 2017, 106).

c) The promotion of ethnic diversity is related to mass-migration. Mass-migration, however, is inseparably connected to negative side-effects both on the psychological, the economic, and the security levels, to name the most salient ones (for details see Zehnder 2021a, 152–233).

d) The promotion of cultural and religious diversity faces the question of the compatibility of values connected to the cultures and religions (or a-religious worldviews) involved. In my view, it is obvious that there are elements of various competing cultures, religions, and a-religious worldviews that are not compatible. To take a random example: arranged marriages that happen against the will of the bride (or bridegroom) are either seen as wrong or right, and treated accordingly by the legal system of a given place. To claim that all approaches and practices should be allowed in a society, out of respect for the (competing) values of the groups living together in a diverse society, would mean to destroy a fundamental principle of any constitutional state – namely: one and the same law for all citizens –, opening the door for the breakdown of the society (see Huntington 1993).

e) The promotion of diversity in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity leads to yet another problem, which is dealing with the large numbers of people for whom, based on their worldview or religious convictions, promoting LGBTQ+ values is wrong. This has already led to a considerable number of harsh discriminatory actions of state authorities against people with conservative convictions,<sup>27</sup> which, of course, turns the concept of tolerance and inclusion on its head and exposes the practical limits and inconsistencies of the concept of diversity.

---

<sup>27</sup> As can be seen, e.g., in the actions taken by FBI agents against parents who speak out critically at school board meetings against the promotion of LGBTQ+ values at their schools, or the wide-spread vilification of persons being critical of the promotion of LGBTQ+ values in the public sphere as "right-wing extremists" (see, e.g., a press release by the US House Judiciary Committee from 22 May 2022). The phenomenon can be observed even on the level of international relations, with various U.S. administrations targeting particular countries in Africa that position themselves against the promotion of LGBTQ+ values for financial repercussions (see, e.g., Warner 2016), or the E.U. doing the same with

f) Looking at historical precursors of multicultural, diverse societies, the picture is extremely complex. Each case has its particularities, and the differences between them and current Western models make it impossible to make one-to-one explanatory transfers and predictions. As for the largest modern-day example of a multi-ethnic society, the U.S., no definitive assessment can be given, because of the steady changes in the specific makeup of the experiment.<sup>28</sup> Looking at two prime examples in ancient history, one can observe that the ethnic and cultural/religious diversification led to the weakening and eventual downfall of previously strong empires, Assyria (in the course of just over one century) (see e.g., Zehnder 2007) and Rome (after several centuries) (see, e.g., Holland, 2018). Overall, historic observations tend to suggest negative outcomes of the creation of multicultural, diverse societies once the traditions and religious values of the people groups involved are not compatible. A historic case is – in contrast to a wide-spread popular myth – Spain under Muslim rule (see, e.g., Fernandez-Morera 2016); more recent examples can be found in (Ex-)Yugoslavia or the Indian subcontinent, as well as the often violent tensions between tribal groups in many countries in Africa.<sup>29</sup>

g) There are also inherent problems related to the question of access to the diversity-bonus. In the current circumstances gender and race are the dominating categories; more recently, sexual orientation and gender identity have gained prominence as well. This focus means that other categories tend to be given much less attention: social background (broken family, poor home, etc.), rural vs. urban, faith commitment (outside of seminaries), disability (including non-traditional forms of disability), etc. If one were to exchange a predominantly white male leadership body of a seminary in Denmark – to choose an example related to the conference at which this paper was presented – that consists of persons from different social backgrounds and different faith journeys and perhaps denominational backgrounds, with a new body consisting of men and women of different ethnic backgrounds who are all middle-class and very similar in all other respects except for ethnicity and gender: how much would one gain?

h) An additional problem related to diversity is the following: In its current form, diversity means the replacement of the principle of meritocracy by other considerations. However, whenever this course of action is chosen, there is – always – some injustice occurring on the individual level. This happens easily when a person is hired just because she is a woman or a person of color to enhance diversity. However, it also happens in other circumstances, not related to diversity. A main factor is nepotism, for example when persons are hired because they are family members or friends of persons steering a hiring process, or when someone happens to have been around those making the

---

member states that are not affirmative of LGBTQ+ values enough (like Poland in the past and Hungary in the present; see, e.g., Casert and Spike 2022).

<sup>28</sup> It is evident that the dynamics of the diverse ethnic and cultural/cultural composition of the U.S. has changed drastically from the 1960s onward. Until then, the U.S. was rather homogeneous in terms of its ethnic and cultural/religious outlook (overwhelmingly white and Christian, with a clear majority of the population being Protestant and having their roots in the western and northern parts of Europe), with the only exception being the descendants of slaves imported from Africa. This situation has changed dramatically since. For details about the demographic changes in the U.S. see Zehnder (2021a, 169–171).

<sup>29</sup> Which in recent years have been connected to and exacerbated by the involvement of radical Islamic groups (like Boko Haram) in many countries adjacent to the southern edges of the Sahara.

decision for a while. Generally, connections to people of influence play an important role. With respect to hiring processes at institutions of higher learning, ideological conformity is another decisive factor. All these phenomena very often infringe on the principle of meritocracy, and this may prevent a sound type of diversity in terms of institutional background from being implemented.

#### **4. Biblical and Extra-Biblical Evidence Combined**

In this section, we just look at one topic, the assessments given by Christian and Jewish ethicists and the consensus of the orthodox voices over the centuries of the Christian church. As far as I can see, the general promotion of diversity as understood in the current context does not appear on their list of priorities.

#### **Conclusion**

There is, of course, much more that would need to be dealt with in a thorough investigation of the ethical questions raised by the promotion of diversity as currently understood. However, this short outline demonstrates the importance of the following two points in particular:

- Consideration of the relevant biblical material in all its breadth, instead of selective focus on a limited number of texts (that support the own preconceived agenda).
- Consideration of relevant extra-biblical information.

In the present case of diversity, the result seems to be relatively clear in the sense that modern concepts of diversity do not seem to be a primary concern from a biblical-ethical point of view, even more so when taking into consideration the voice of the historical orthodox majority. This does, however, in no way take away the clear biblical admonition to treat every human being in all their diversity with love. It also does not take away from the possibility that in certain cases it may well be appropriate to enhance diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, social background, faith journey, or personal life experience of any kind, for the good of all persons involved. What is needed is a case by case sober assessment of diversity related issues in every specific situation, taking into consideration all the relevant biblical and extra-biblical data.

## Bibliography

- Amstutz, Mark R. 2017. *Just Immigration: American Policy in Christian Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Biola University. 2019. "Theological Statement on Diversity". <https://www.biola.edu/about/diversity>.
- Carroll R., M. Daniel. 2013. *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Brazos.
- Casert, Raf, and Justin Spike. 2022. "EU Takes Hungary to Highest Court over LGBT, Media Rules". *AP* 15 July. <https://apnews.com/article/hungary-gender-identity-gay-rights-5a18372fabda636154783d5fd3557608>.
- Emerald Publishing Limited. 2021. "Diversity in the workplace: Positive and negative impacts on performance outcomes". *Human Resource Management International Digest* 29 (4): 32–34. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HRMID-04-2021-0088>.
- Escobar, Samuel. 2018. "Refugees: A New Testament Perspective". *Transformation* 35 (2): 102–108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378818782269>.
- European Commission. 2024. "European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity". [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/tackling-discrimination/diversity-and-inclusion-initiatives/european-capitals-inclusion-and-diversity-award\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/tackling-discrimination/diversity-and-inclusion-initiatives/european-capitals-inclusion-and-diversity-award_en).
- Fernandez-Morera, Dario. 2016. *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise: Muslims, Christians, and Jews under Islamic Rule in Medieval Spain*. Wilmington: ISI Books.
- George, Timothy. 1994. *Galatians*. NAC 30. Nashville: Broadman & Holman.
- Gest, Justin. 2022. "What Happens When White People Become a Minority in America". *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/22/us-white-majority-minority-nation-demographic-change/>.
- Glion Institute of Higher Education. 2023. "Cultural Diversity in the Workplace". <https://www.glion.edu/magazine/cultural-diversity-workplace/>
- Holland, Gerald. 2018. "Migrants Sank the Roman Empire. Now, They're Sinking the U.S.". *Shreveport Times*, June 12. <https://www.shreveporttimes.com/story/opinion/2018/06/12/migrants-sank-roman-empire-now-theyre-sinking-u-s/690658002/>.
- Huntington, Samuel P. 1993. "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72 (3): 22–49. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315255156-19>.
- Jervis, L. Ann. 1999. *Galatians*. NIBC; Peabody: Hendrickson.
- Laurence, James, and Lee Bentley. 2015. "Does Ethnic Diversity Have a Negative Effect on Attitudes towards the Community? A Longitudinal Analysis of the Causal Claims within the Ethnic Diversity and Social Cohesion Debate". *European Sociological Review* 32 (1): 54–76. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcv081>.
- Lee, Dorothy A. 2021. *Ministry of Women in the New Testament*. Ada: Baker Academic.
- Prill, Thorsten. 2009. "Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church". *ERT* 33 (4): 332–346.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2007. "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First Century". *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30 (2): 137–174. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2007.00176.x>.

- Rafaqat, Simon, Sahil Rafaqat, Saoul Rafaqat and Dawood Rafaqat. 2022. "The Impact of Workforce Diversity on Organizational Performance". *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies* 14 (2): 39–50. [https://doi.org/10.22610/jeb.v14i2\(j\).3301](https://doi.org/10.22610/jeb.v14i2(j).3301).
- Schmittler Heisler, Barbara. 2008. "The Sociology of Migration". In *Migration Theory: Talking across Disciplines*, edited by Caroline B. Brettell and James F. Hollifield, 83–111. London: Routledge.
- Senior, Donald. 2008. "Beloved Aliens and Exiles". In *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey*, edited by Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese, 20–34. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv19m641k.6>.
- Smith, Tamsin. 2004. "Italians 'Affronted' by EU Official Row". *BBC News*, 13 October. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3739154.stm>.
- Strine, Casey A. 2018. "Embracing Asylum Seekers and Refugees: Jeremiah 29 as Foundation for a Christian Theology of Migration and Integration". *Political Theology* 19, 478–496. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317x.2018.1504730>.
- Strömbäck, Jesper. 2017. "Stabilitet i en föränderlig värld: medieanvändning och social sammanhållning". In *Larmar och gör sig till*, edited by Ulrika Andersson, Jonas Ohlsson, Henrik Oscarsson and Maria Oskarsson, 1–17. Gothenburg: Göteborgs universitet, SOM-institutet. [https://www.gu.se/sites/default/files/migrated/1640330\\_stabilitet-i-en-f-r-r-nderlig-v-rld---jesper-str--mb--ck.pdf](https://www.gu.se/sites/default/files/migrated/1640330_stabilitet-i-en-f-r-r-nderlig-v-rld---jesper-str--mb--ck.pdf).
- Thielman, Frank. 2010. *Ephesians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- US House Judiciary Republicans. 2022. "DOJ Labeled Dozens of Parents as Terrorist Threats". <https://judiciary.house.gov/media/press-releases/us-house-judiciary-republicans-doj-labeled-dozens-of-parents-as-terrorist>.
- Warner, Gregory. 2016. "When the US Backs Gay and Lesbian Rights in Africa, Is There a Backlash?". *National Public Radio* 30 August 2016. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/08/30/491818892/when-the-u-s-backs-gay-and-lesbian-rights-in-africa-is-there-a-backlash>.
- Wesleyan Church. 2013. "A Wesleyan View of Immigration". <https://www.wesleyan.org/awesleyan-view-of-immigration>.
- Wickes, Rebecca, Renee Zahnow, Gentry White et al. 2014. "Ethnic Diversity and Its Impact on Community Social Cohesion and Neighborly Exchange". *Journal of Urban Affairs* 36 (1): 51–78. <https://doi.org/10.1111/juaf.12015>.
- Zehnder, Markus. 2005. *Umgang mit Fremden in Israel und Assyrien: Ein Beitrag zur Anthropologie des "Fremden" im Licht antiker Quellen*. BWANT 168. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Zehnder, Markus. 2007. "Die 'Aramaisierung' Assyriens als Folge der Expansion des assyrischen Reiches". In "... der seine Lust hat am Wort des Herrn!", *Festschrift für Ernst Jenni*, edited by Jürg Luchsinger, Hans-Peter Mathys, and Markus Saur, 417–438. Münster: Ugarit Verlag.
- Zehnder, Markus. 2021a. *The Bible and Immigration: A Critical and Empirical Reassessment*. Eugene: Pickwick.
- Zehnder, Markus. 2021b. "Biblical Migration Ethics: Two General Principles". *Biola Good Book Blog* 29 Sept. <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2021/biblical-migration-ethics-two-general-principles>.

Ziller, Conrad. 2015. "Ethnic Diversity, Economic and Cultural Contexts, and Social Trust: Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Evidence from European Regions, 2002–2010". *Social Forces* 93 (3): 1211–1240. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sou088>.

Zürcher, Christoph. 2023. "Hat die Wokeness die CS erledigt?". *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 25 March. <https://www.nzz.ch/nzz-am-sonntag/hat-die-wokeness-die-cs-erledigt-ld.1780962>.