

AZ ÜLDÖZTETÉS ELŐL VALÓ MENEKÜLÉS TEOLÓGIÁJA

THEOLOGY OF FLEEING FROM PERSECUTION

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ÖSSZEFOGLALÁS

Ez a cikk a vallási üldöztetés elől való menekülés teológiai indokait vizsgálja. A keresztények Közel-Keletről való menekülésének jogosságával és céljával kapcsolatban felmerült kérdésekre adott reakcióként született. Összehasonlítottuk a Bibliában említett menekülés típusait és okait az üldözött, Irakból és Egyiptomból menekülő keresztények történeteivel, és ebből négy különböző teológiai megközelítést vontunk le - az „üdvösség forog kockán” megközelítést, az altruista/közös értelmű megközelítést, az Isten hangjának meghallása megközelítést és az opportunista megközelítést. Célunk, hogy az üldözöttek, valamint a nekik szolgálatot teljesítők számára lehetőséget biztosítsunk arra, hogy eligazodjanak a különböző érvelési lehetőségekben, amelyeket az üldözöttek választanak, amikor a menekülést fontolgatják.

Annotation

This article ponders the theological reasoning behind fleeing from religious persecution. It emerged as a reaction to questions raised about the legitimacy and purpose behind the fleeing of Christians from the Middle East. We compared the types of fleeing and their underlying reasons mentioned in the Bible with stories of persecuted Christians fleeing from Iraq and Egypt, and we identified four different theological approaches – the "Salvation at stake" approach, the Altruistic/common sense approach, the "Hearing God's voice" approach, and an Opportunistic approach. Our aim is to provide an opportunity for the persecuted as well as those ministering to them to navigate among the different reasoning options the persecuted take when considering fleeing.

Anotácia

Tento článok pojednáva o teologickom zdôvodnení úteku, ktorý stojí za náboženským prenasledovaním. Vznikol ako reakcia na otázky spojené s legitimitou a cieľom úteku kresťanov z Blízkeho východu. V článku porovnáваме typy útekov a ich zdôvodnenie v Biblii s

príbehmi prenasledovaných kresťanov z Iraku a Egypta. Na základe týchto poznatkov sme identifikovali štyri rôzne typy teologického prístupu - nebezpečenstvo ztraty spásy, altruistický prístup, počúvanie Božieho hlasu a oportunistický prístup. Cieľom článku je poskytnúť prenasledovaným a tým, ktorí s nimi pracujú, možnosť orientovať sa v dôvodoch, ktoré vedú prenasledovaných kresťanov k úteku.

Kulcsszavak: keresztényüldözés, Egyiptom, Irak, menekülés teológiája, a szökés tipológiája, menekülés a Bibliában, üldözött keresztények

Key words: religious persecution of Christians, Egypt, Iraq, theology of fleeing, typology of fleeing, fleeing in the Bible, persecuted Christians

Klíčovú slová: Náboženské prenasledovanie kresťanov, Egypt, Irak, teológia úteku, typológia útekov, útek v Biblii, prenasledovaní kresťania

1. Introduction

The migration¹ wave to Europe from the Middle East during and after the war against ISIS raised many questions about the legitimacy and purpose behind the fleeing of Christians. In this article, we focus on a narrow subgroup of Christians from Iraq and Egypt who fled as a result of religious persecution² aiming our attention at their reasoning behind fleeing and then drawing from it theological approaches.

In this article, we first focus on what the Bible has to say about fleeing from persecution, and then we present the research design and the conclusions of the field research among persecuted Christians

¹ This article presents topical findings of Miláčková's dissertation which was written with the support of GA UK 108119 – Persecution of Christians in the Middle East and Their Migration.

² We use Tieszen's theological definition of persecution as working definition for this article. "Any unjust action of mild to intense levels of hostility directed at Christians of varying levels of commitment resulting in varying levels of harm which may not necessarily prevent or limit these Christians' ability to practice their faith or appropriately propagate their faith as it is considered from the victim's perspective, each motivation having religion, namely the identification of its victims as 'Christian,' as its primary motivator." TIESZEN, Charles Lowell. Re-examining religious persecution: constructing a theological framework for understanding persecution. Bonn : Johannesburg: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft ; AcadSA, 2008, s. 47.

from Iraq and Egypt and based on the interviews. Finally, we offer four systematic-theological approaches that represent motivations behind fleeing from persecution among the researched group.

We hope that the conclusions will help to further the knowledge of the afflicted as well as those ministering to persecuted Christians.

2. Fleeing in the Bible

The foundational premise of this article is that the Bible is a word of God. He is sovereign and relational and communicates through various intermediaries as well as directly with individual believers and the Bible should be for Christians a guide for life. Yet, does the Bible offer normative guidelines about when to flee, or does it allow for individual decision-making? The importance of understanding the biblical message is crucial and pressing for many contemporary Christians who are faced with the decision to stay or flee and who look for guidance in the Holy book.

What does the Bible say about fleeing? What typology can we see in the biblical texts? In the Old and New Testaments, we find many reasons behind fleeing. A central theme uniting the various narratives of fleeing is to escape from severe physical danger, punishment or death. The most frequent reasons were: a) famine in the land (e.g., Noemi and her family fleeing to Moab (Ruth 1), Abram fleeing to Egypt (Gen 12)); b) escaping physical danger (e.g., Moses fleeing to Midian (Ex 2), David fleeing from Keilah (1 Sam 23)); c) seeking a better future (e.g., Noemi/Ruth returning to the land of Judah (Ruth 1)); d) escaping dictatorial paranoia (e.g., David escaping from the furious king Saul (1 Sam 20-21, 27) and his son Absalom (2 Sam 15), Jesus's parents fleeing before Herod (Matt 2), and the nation of Israel fleeing Egypt (Ex 12-14) which was at the same time clearly a case of:) e) religious persecution. Other examples of fleeing motivated by threats against one's life include Elijah fleeing from the wrath of Jezebel (1 Kings 19) and the prophet Uriah fleeing to Egypt before king Jehoiakim (Jer 26). Paul fled from Damascus (Acts 10) and, with his co-preacher Barnabas, fled from Iconium to Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14). Even Jesus himself fled when his life was threatened on several occasions (e.g., in Jerusalem (John 8 and 10), in Nazareth (Luke 4), and in John 7, where we read that he purposefully avoided Judea because he knew that certain Jewish leaders wanted to kill him).

In the examples mentioned above we can see that the Biblical narratives give rather blunt accounts of the true motives behind fleeing. Furthermore, they point out guiding principles for staying or fleeing. Upon what did the individuals in these narratives base their decision? There are several different motivations. First, we find God's direct intervention in people's lives through dreams and prophecies.

These interventions spoke directly into their situation and instructed the concerned person/people about the coming danger and their task to leave. The concerned people then had to choose whether to stay or leave. Submission to God's will was their choice: if they obeyed, they survived.

The second type of decision making was built on a personal relationship with God, on knowing his will and hearing his voice. In some texts we read about the importance of timing. This is obvious in Jesus' case, for he knew that his time to die had not come yet (John 2:4, 7:6;30).

The third type of decision was built on a "common sense" of the concerned person or people around them. For example, Naomi, or even the families of Joseph's brothers, were in danger of starving to death, and the only way to avoid this fate was to migrate/flee into a country where food was abundant. In these two cases, we do not see any divine guidance or that they sought God's guidance while making a decision about staying or fleeing.

These three main approaches rescued the concerned people from death through fleeing for a given time and situation.³ The Biblical texts do not imply or assume that God was displeased with people who fled based on a common sense decision; likewise, we do not see a divine abandonment of those who flee. God often used their exile to shape them and transform them for whatever he had for them in the future. In most cases the times of exile were only temporary. The return to the homeland was then either initiated based on God's direct guidance or on common sense.

Even though some biblical characters (e.g. Jesus, Paul, Peter) were rescued for a given time in a given situation, in some cases, later at another time and in a different situation they did not flee, but submitted themselves to persecution, and many died.

In sum, we identified three different reasoning types behind decision-making about fleeing, yet we cannot see any normative approach through those texts that a believer must certainly follow.⁴ However, the examples show the importance of personal knowledge about God, recognition of his voice and the willingness to obey his command. Decision-making about fleeing from persecution as shown in those biblical passages is highly relational, personal, and situational. The uniting theme in these examples is fulfilling God's will and/or pro-

³ There are also other cases in which preventative steps saved Israelites from a disaster. That happened during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29-30) when persecution was avoided because they returned to God and followed his will, or again through the faith and action of Esther and Mordecai.

⁴ ANDREWS, Jonathan, ed. *The Church in Disorienting Times: Leading Prophetically through Adversity*. Langham Global Library, 2018, s. 35.

tecting one's life.

Having had the three reasoning types behind fleeing that we discovered in the Bible in mind, we designed our field research aiming to explore what led the persecuted Christians (either believers of Christian background (BCBs) or believers of Muslim background (BMBs) from Iraq and Egypt to flee, and how they argued their decision-making about fleeing.

3. Methodology

The research was designed as an adapted grounded theory research using semi-structured interviews and convenience sampling for choosing participants.

This research topic was security-wise and emotionally very sensitive, therefore, extremely high confidentiality measures were taken to protect the participants as well as the interviewer. The targeted participants were contacted either by the researcher in person in refugee camps in Lebanon or through different gatekeepers (church and humanitarian workers) in Egypt, Lebanon, and the Czech Republic. The participants supposed to be believers of Christian background (BCBs) or believers of Muslim background (BMBs), come from Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, and had to flee their home(country) because of being persecuted for their Christian faith. The faith aspect must have been the main reason for persecution. The current physical location of the person during the time of the interview wasn't important.

The pilot research took place in the summer of 2018 in Lebanon. As a result of this time, the research sample and research instrument (questionnaire) were adjusted. The pilot showed that it is practically impossible to find Syrian BMBs or BCBs who fled because of being religiously persecuted: they fled because of the atrocities of war. Therefore, we limited the research to Egyptians and Iraqis. Yet, the four contacted Egyptian BCBs who fled because of religious persecution refused to give an interview due to fear for their families in Egypt being targeted (persecuted) by the police. After identifying suitable participants, about half rejected the interview due to fear for their or their families' security. Also, we excluded from the research Christians whose stories indicated economic or political reasoning behind fleeing.

The study was conducted due to COVID traveling restrictions partially in person in Lebanon, Egypt, and Czechia and partially synchronously online. The research took place in three phases between 2019 and 2021. The research sample includes 16 participants, 11 men and 5 women. Not all wanted to mention their age, but it was obvious that there were two main age groups represented. The young adults between 20 and 30 years and then participants in their forties; only

one participant was older. Half of the participants were single, two divorced and six married. Eight participants were from Egypt and eight from Iraq; four were of Christian background and 12 of Muslim background of which were four of Salafi background, two of Shia, and one of Sufi background). The research sample includes different forms and intensity of persecution (from fear of future harm, threats, incarceration, physical attacks and killing a family member). At the time of the interview, the participants were in Egypt (3), Lebanon (8), Czechia (2), the Netherlands (1), Greece (1), and France (1). Out of the 16 participants, three fled within their home country, and 13 fled abroad.

4. Typology of Fleeing

The field research suggests the following: 1) All interview participants saw fleeing as the only option for survival and to live out their Christian faith. 2) There isn't one type of fleeing but two types depending on the purpose of the flight. We call them the immediate and subsequent types.

The **immediate type** of fleeing from persecution is instinctive. The believers felt imminent danger, therefore wanted to save their lives. The goal of the immediate flight was to reach physical safety. They did not have much time to think about it and choose the "most suitable and best" destination. They just fled. After evaluating their situation and type of persecution, some ran to another city within their country, or some fled abroad. Previous contacts and the possibility to enter another country also played a role in deciding where to flee. Since their flight was in a rush, they usually fled without anything (e.g. money, personal documents). Depending on the situation of the persecuted believer, multiple immediate moves might have occurred. They fled from one place to another, and when they faced persecution in that city also, they fled to another one.

The **subsequent type** of move has another goal. It is a move pursuing happiness⁵ This flight means that persecuted believers were already physically safe, yet the hardship of life, lack of opportunities, and the desire for a better life accompanied with an opportunity to travel to a better (meaning religiously safer and economically more developed) country made them move again. This is not a flight out of danger, but a planned move.

All of the interview participants underwent the immediate type of flight fearing for their own life. Only a few at the moment of the interview or when we met some of them again have done the subsequent type of move. Those who moved again were located either in Lebanon or in Iraqi Kurdistan. They were looking for opportunities to

⁵ The term and concept is taken from the US Declaration of Independence.

move to another place and start again. When an opportunity came up, they moved to another place.

Based on the field research, we have identified four types of motivations behind fleeing from religious persecution. Three are related to fleeing itself, and the fourth one is implied as it stands in opposition to fleeing.

1. The first category can be called altruistic as the people who fled did it for the sake of their family members—or because they had to preserve their (own) life, some adding that this was in order to take care of their family and to continue Christian ministry. This category of decision-making was identified for both the immediate as well as the subsequent type of move with interviewees who had a family and were responsible for it. Single or divorced ones argued with protecting one's lives.

2. The second category has been identified only as a reason for the subsequent type of a move. It is 'decision-making based on direct guidance by God, by hearing His voice, and abiding to it. Yet, none of them directly mentioned God's guidance while fleeing from the immediate danger. However, the interviewees repeatedly mentioned the importance of seeking God's will, guidance, and protection through prayers. They attributed to God and his will the fact that a way opened up for them during the persecution and that they were able to escape and save their lives. This type of an "indirect" guidance has been apparent in regards to the immediate type of flight.

3. The third approach can be called an opportunistic approach and it was identified with the subsequent type of move. With the move, people sought their personal and family interests and well-being, claiming that the reason for their flight was religious persecution. Such an approach was labeled by a number of BMBs as disgraceful, for people who move for this reason "make Christ's sacrifice cheap".

4. We identified one more type of action related to persecution: Christians refused to flee and decided to stay and endure persecution regardless of the cost. They either felt called to stay in their area to continue the ministry, or were so old, weak, or rooted to their area (Iraqi BCBs) that they had no more strength and courage to move. Since these people didn't flee, we didn't include them in the field research.

Among the interviewees, there were people who repeatedly refused to move abroad as a subsequent move, or they returned back to their countries because they were convinced that the Lord had called them to minister there.

In sum, the field research suggests that the altruistic approach is the main argument behind the immediate type of fleeing, while for the subsequent move, it is common that obedience to a personal calling of God or family/self-interest play a more significant role.

5. Theological Perspectives on Fleeing

In this section, we interpret these four identified types of thinking theologically, building on various authors and theologians throughout history.⁶

5.1. 'Salvation at Stake' Approach

This approach views fleeing as a negative or even forbidden option in light of salvation. Christians professing this approach do not see flight as an alternative, because they see fleeing as denying their Lord and by doing so, they would lose their own salvation.

At the beginning of the 3rd century major religious persecution came on Christians through the decrees of Caesar Decius and later Valerian. Many refused to deny Christ by fleeing from persecution. Those who stayed were often severely tortured, and many martyred.⁷ For many church leaders of that time, fleeing was viewed as denying Christ (apostasy); therefore, one's salvation was at stake. One representative of this approach was Tertullian, who believed that nothing happens without God's will and that "persecution is worthy of God" and that "it ought not to be avoided, because it is good".⁸ "Tertullian viewed flight as, at best, a poor alternative to standing firm and at worst, as apostasy." For Tertullian, fleeing from persecution was unacceptable, for it only showed human fear, weakness, and cowardice which is not what the Lord calls his followers to embody.⁹ Enduring persecution until the end was viewed as giving back to God and a guarantee of entering heaven.¹⁰

⁶ We do not place demand on presenting an exhaustive overview of possible theological interpretations, we want to re-open the discussion about escaping from religious persecution and to give the afflicted followers of Christ a possibility to navigate themselves in the possible interpretations hoping that they would search their own hearts and seek God's will in the process.

⁷ The other option how Christians could have avoided persecution was either to bribe Roman officials or sacrifice to Roman Gods. LANE, Tony. *Dějiny křesťanského myšlení*. Jiří BARTOŇ, přel.. Praha: Návrat domů, s. 23–30.

⁸ TERTULLIAN. *De Fuga in Persecutione*. In: [cit. 25.08.2021]. Dostupné z: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0409.htm>

⁹ SUTCLIFFE, Ruth. *To Flee or Not to Flee? Matthew 10:23 and Third Century Flight in Persecution*. *Scrinium*. 2018, roč. 14, č. 1, s. 139. DOI: 10.1163/18177565-00141P10; TERTULLIAN. *De Fuga in Persecutione*.

¹⁰ SUTCLIFFE, Ruth. *To Flee or Not to Flee?*, s. 142.

Not all bishops and church leaders from the 3rd century viewed Tertullian's hardline approach as the only option for a believer. Cyprian and Origen, for example, fled first themselves, yet later in life they argued against and encouraged withstanding persecution till the end and they themselves underwent torture (and Cyprian was martyred).¹¹

Since the clergy was to set an example, martyrdom became the fate of many bishops of that time. These martyrs set the precedent for the coming generations. Those who fled or otherwise avoided persecution were viewed as apostates and as such were doomed for eternity. Martyrdom had become a standard virtue and expectation of a Christian's lifestyle. However, "rushing" to death or voluntary martyrdom was discouraged¹² and viewed as heretical and unorthodox.¹³

This approach to fleeing can be also viewed as pre-conventional using Kohlberg's scale of moral development¹⁴, insofar as it is the external authority figures, the church fathers, the bishops, the exegetes who say what is true about fleeing and salvation, what is right or wrong. The believer's thinking and behavior follow a pattern of obedience and punishment, for if one would flee, he would lose his salvation.

5.2. Altruistic/Common Sense Approach

The second approach views decision-making about fleeing from persecution as an act made out of respect, love, and responsibility to others and oneself. I list four reasons that argue for fleeing rather than enduring persecution: not to be guilty of one's own death, to continue

¹¹ Ibid., s. 148–160.

¹² Schirmacher sees a tendency to seek after martyrdom during the 2nd century, and compares it with certain similar aspects of slavery, such as that if one can be set free, it is better and wiser to do so. Jesus understood the circumstances behind persecution, therefore he told his disciples that they should be "as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves". Matthew 10:16. SCHIRRMACHER, Thomas. *The Persecution of Christians Concerns Us All Towards a Theology of Martyrdom*. Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft Culture and Science Publ., 2018, s. 59–61.

¹³ MIDDLETON, Paul. *Radical martyrdom and cosmic conflict in early Christianity*. London ; New York: T & T Clark, 2006, s. 24–25.

¹⁴ Kohlberg has come up with six stages of moral development divided into six stages where the stage one meant the lowest level of moral development and level six the highest level. Stage one is also called (obedience and punishment) and is to be observed at children till the age of nine. In this stage rules are viewed as absolute and therefore must be obeyed. If not, punishment will follow. Cherry, "Levels of Developing Morality in Kohlberg's Theories"; Zhang and Zhao, "An Analytical Overview of Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development in College Moral Education in Mainland China."

God's work, to protect the body of Christ, and for the benefit of the neighbor.

It was already the early church fathers who pondered the question of if and under which conditions it is permissible for a Christian to escape from persecution and so to prevent one's death or forced denial of Christ.¹⁵ The first argumentation that supports fleeing is that Jesus requires us to take care of ourselves. Therefore, one should protect himself and if possible avoid death in order not to make oneself and the murderers abettors of evil. According to Clemens, if one stays unnecessarily in persecution that would lead to death, he would be guilty and an abettor of one's own death.¹⁶ The second theological position considers that one may preserve oneself through flight in order to benefit other Christians and continuation of God's work.¹⁷ Unnecessary martyrdom would be viewed as selfish and inconsiderate.¹⁸ The third reason encouraging fleeing is for the good of the entrusted believers. To protect the flock, the bishop or church leader should avoid drawing "negative attention to the whole Christian community" and spare them so violence.¹⁹ That should happen in order to serve the interest of the church, and only under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.²⁰

The three above mentioned argumentations provide a relational caring aspect for others. Even though the first one focuses the most on the person itself, it still takes into consideration the others (the persecutors) in a way that believers should not submit themselves unnecessarily to death and so cause the persecutors to commit a sin by killing them. The other two argumentations see the protection of one's life as a means to benefit the community of other believers. The relational caring aspect for others is obvious.

The Old and New Testaments present God as a loving and caring God full of compassion.²¹ Those attributes God seeks also for the world and expects that his followers will extend these relational values to the people they are living with. God calls us to care for our

¹⁵ One issue was to escape the persecution and/or so deny Christ, yet the bigger issue was under what conditions may these Christians return back to church (the Donatist schism).

¹⁶ SUTCLIFFE, Ruth. *To Flee or Not to Flee?*, s. 147.

¹⁷ SAUER, Christof, ed. *Bad Urach Statement: towards an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom for the global church mission*. Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2012, s. 67.

¹⁸ SUTCLIFFE, Ruth. *To Flee or Not to Flee?*, s. 151.

¹⁹ Cyprian fled from Carthage for prominent people of his time "were more likely to be targeted". *Ibid.*, s. 154–155.

²⁰ SAUER, Christof, ed. *Bad Urach Statement*, s. 68.

²¹ For example: Ex 34:6-7, Ps 86:15, Ps 89:14, Mica 6:8, Lk 6:36, Mark 12:28, Mat 22:39.

neighbors, the “particular others”²², those near to us, family members and other people God put in our lives. The example of the Good Samaritan in Lk 10:29-39 extends these particular others to whomever around us who needs help, even an enemy.

The Ethics of Care theory which stresses “the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility”²³ corresponds with this biblical notion. Moral emotions such as sympathy and empathy for others aren’t viewed in this theory as egoistic emotions, but rather—if cultivated—as guides of what morality recommends in a sense of what would be the best moral action on behalf of the particular others.²⁴

Relating this mandate of care with decision-making about fleeing from persecution comes out very naturally. Fleeing from persecution in order to protect and preserve the particular others should be of the highest moral calling (if the particular others cannot handle persecution anymore). This approach proves a certain level of sacrifice for the responsible one, for he/she is not to “further their own individual interests; their interests are intertwined with the persons they care for”.²⁵ That is especially true if fleeing wouldn’t be a personal choice for the responsible one, but that they would do it for the benefit of others.

1.1 Hearing God’s Voice Approach

This approach is based on a biblical premise that God is a communicating God and the followers of Jesus, his sheep, hear his voice (John 10:27). This implies a rather intimate relationship with God, his knowledge, a certain level of spiritual sensitivity or even maturity and willingness to listen to God’s voice and then submit to his will.²⁶

²² Held uses this term in her book to refer to those who need our care; may it be children, family members, friends, etc. HELD, Virginia. *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

²³ *Ibid.*, s. 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, s. 10–11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, s. 12.

²⁶ Recognition of God’s voice is a highly subjective process and as Kierkegaard aptly mentions growing in faith can be learned only over a long period of time. Therefore, the word of God to a believer is (into some extend) unverifiable by the outsiders for only the one who heard God’s voice knows if he heard well and acts accordingly in faith. KIERKEGAARD, Sören. *Fear and Trembling*. In: Religion Online [online], kap. Preface. [cit. 20.09.2021]. Dostupné z: <https://www.religion-online.org/book/fear-and-trembling/> Acts 16:6-25 emphasizes that apostle Paul’s ministry had been guided and led by the Holy Spirit.

God's direct word brought to the believer through the Holy Spirit is the decisive aspect²⁷ for a persecuted believer on the issue of fleeing or staying.²⁸ It is the Holy Spirit who blows where he wills, somewhat unpredictable, unbound, who can "suspend" ethics (meaning independent morality) yet always acts in unity with the Father and the Son.²⁹ In Kierkegaard's words, it is the paradox of faith in which "the individual determines his relation to the universal [the world] by his relation to the absolute [God]." That relationship may be unintelligible to the outer world.³⁰ It is the believer's personal relationship with God from which flows the certainty about God's will for one's life that overrides other reasons for decision-making such as love and concern for family members/neighbors, church doctrine or personal desires without compunctions. A believer's submission to God's voice comes from loving and respecting Him.³¹ This means that God may ask some believers to persevere in enduring persecution, and for some to move away from it. Their response should honor his request.

In this approach, we can see a connection with the ethics of care theory. It is the fact that one acts/cares (sacrificially) for the good or on behalf of the particular others that links this approach with the theory. The believer acts out of love and the desire to please God, not as a result of duty and an order.³²

1.1 Opportunistic Approach

By this term, we mean an individual's decision-making based solely on what the person views as most suitable. This approach does not have much theological support, unless one considers the approach (often pejoratively dubbed 'the prosperity gospel or wealth and health gospel')³³ representing the view that God wants us to be successful

²⁷ This was the case of Cyprian who fled being prompted by the Holy Spirit. SUTCLIFFE, Ruth. *To Flee or Not to Flee?*, s. 153–155.

²⁸ ANDREWS, Jonathan, ed. *The Church in Disorienting Times*, s. 33–41.

²⁹ ELLUL, Jacques. *To Will & To Do*. Philadelphia Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1969, s. 213–214. Including foot note information number 20.

³⁰ KIERKEGAARD, Sören. *Fear and Trembling*, kap. Problem II.

³¹ In footnote 20, Ellul remarks that God respects individual's decisions, seeing him as ethically responsible, yet God awaits one's „free decision of willing obedience in love” without manipulating the human or „spiritual automation” that would certain acts view as „holy” because commanded by the Holy Spirit.” ELLUL, Jacques. *To Will & To Do*, s. 213.

³² In Acts 16:6-25 we can read how the apostle Paul's ministry was guided and led by the Holy Spirit and that Paul submitted to God's guidance out of relationship and trust that that is the best and wisest decision.

³³ COLEMAN, Simon. *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*. Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge

and do well.³⁴ This approach encourages Christians to take steps that will lead them on a path of fulfillment of their desires and needs, including moving for a better future.³⁵

The majority of theologians and churches adhere to a view that even though one should take into consideration one's own well-being and that of others, well-being and protection of one's own life should not be the "supreme good". One should not flee out of fear or cowardice or emigrate in order to find a more secure, peaceful and prosperous life.³⁶

Theology of fleeing and staying plays an important role in personal decision-making. Based on the above-mentioned approaches, the question is not whether fleeing from persecution is right or wrong so much as which reasons guide the decision. Were persecuted Christians seeking God's will for their lives in regards to staying and fleeing? Were they honest and obedient in the process? These questions cannot be answered by anyone else but them, yet one thing is clear: "When persecution arises, careful consideration must be given to determine whether or not remaining in a situation of suffering is necessary in order to accomplish the will of God."³⁷

1 Summary

In this article we presented our research findings about how Christians (BMBs and BCBs) from Iraq and Egypt reason their decision about fleeing from religious persecution, and then we suggested theological interpretations that explain their reasoning. Doing so, we aim to provide for the afflicted as well as those ministering to them the opportunity to navigate in different reasoning options while considering staying or fleeing.

While comparing the biblical stories with the field research, we conclude that there are many similarities when it comes to reasoning behind fleeing – the physical survival, wellbeing of the family, obedience to God's calling, or the desire to have a better life. From these reasons, we concluded four approaches that guide the believ-

University Press, 2000, s. 28.

³⁴ WILKINSON, Bruce. *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking through to the Blessed Life*. 2013.

³⁵ The prosperity gospel approach generally avoids the topic of persecution and suffering (as well as the persecuted and suffering church) for it collides with their general approach focused on health and wealth.

³⁶ SAUER, Christof, ed. *Bad Urach Statement*, s. 68.; ACCAD, Martin. *When the State Starts Crumbling: A Theology of Staying* [online]. 2014 [cit. 29.01.2021]. Dostupné z: <https://goodfaithmedia.org/when-the-state-starts-crumbling-a-theology-of-staying-cms-21663/>

³⁷ SAUER, Christof, ed. *Bad Urach Statement*, s. 68.

ers in making a decision. First, it is the fear that fleeing would mean the denial of Christ and therefore one will lose salvation; second, the best interest of the particular others must be the highest motivation for fleeing. The third theology expects deep personal knowledge of God's voice which will become the decisive argument for staying or fleeing from persecution. The fourth theology is related to pursuing happiness.

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Theology of Fleeing from Persecution

Thoughts on this theological study

If you are hated by the world, keep in mind that I was hated by the world before you. If you were of the world, you would be loved by the world: but because you are not of the world, but I have taken you out of the world, you are hated by the world. (John 15,18-19.)

In the preaching of the church, this promise is rarely emphasized. Perhaps because we fear that such talk is unattractive. When it comes to promises, we prefer to emphasize the positive content: healing, comfort, deliverance, salvation. Jesus spoke openly that the life of the disciple would be like the life of his master: the world hates you, because you are not like him. Understanding this is an existential question for Christians.

The Church recognized early on that persecution was linked to mission. Tertullian spoke of the blood of Christians being seed. Being a Christian is not only a way of life, but also a mission.

The church must prepare Christians for these things. But the decision remains a matter for the individual. The Christian is not alone in his decision if he is taught the right doctrine. The important message is that God does not burden anyone beyond what he/she can bear. The source of strength lies in fellowship with Christ. Jesus Christ demonstrated two decisive things in his passion: he remained in close communion with the Father, and he had no hatred for his persecutors.

This study takes a well-grounded approach to the problem. It presents clear alternatives. The biblical and church-historical background is based on well-chosen literature. The authors have correctly met the objective.