

Column on time

Ban on minarets is bad signal

Switzerland chose for a ban on the further building of minarets. In a referendum 57 percent voted for such a ban. It is not clear yet if this also leads to legislation. Meanwhile among others the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches (SEK) expressed its concern on this result. The Federation rightly thinks that this result does not solve but increases the existing problems.

Disagreement

I do not expect that such a referendum will be held in the Netherlands. I do not know what the result would be if it were to be held. The result in Switzerland was predicted. It is clear that in the Netherlands as well there is a lot of disagreement about the changes which the steady stream of immigrants has brought about. Recently in the advent-manifest of the churches in Twente the finger was put correctly on the spot. Who ignores this disagreement lets many people down.

Bad signal

This disagreement could level on Islam. There is cause for that as far as there is conscience segregation and extremism. Still it would be great injustice to the great majority of Muslims which want to be part of our society. A ban on a public demonstration of Islam (the minaret) therefore is a bad signal. As Christians we are assigned to actively promote participation of all people, regardless their outlook on life or religious background. You do not promote that with such a ban. A minaret is an element of many mosques. Although there are mosques without minaret, and although that would perhaps be preferable in particular circumstances, a general ban on the minaret would limit the freedom of religion.

To plead for freedom

In the Netherlands, and more general in Western Europe, there is freedom to build churches and mosques. It would be desirable that this same freedom would exist in countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia. There it is forbidden for Christians to build a church or they are seriously obstructed to do so. There population-groups are seriously discriminated. However this should not mean that the freedom we hold dear is limited for Muslims. As Christians we should stand up for the freedom of Muslims to profess their religion publicly.

Call to prayer

It is another issue to what extent the call to prayer is acceptable. I think restraint is needed here. A profession like 'There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah' should not be heard in the public space in an intrusive manner. Neither should church-worships be transmitted through megaphones (sounding church-bells is of another order). This provokes aggression and impairs freedoms as well. However it is something completely different than a general ban on minarets. We should not go that way.

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