

## **What does the church say?**

“What can ‘the church’ say? To the Board of the general synod this is a question for which there is not just one answer. Obviously authority plays a part. And that is something you do not get easily. Literally all authority is questioned nowadays, within as well as outside of the church. Even an election result is subject of discussion. If you do not like the result, you simply demand recount of the votes.

### **Rather ambivalent**

Yet there is something ambivalent in our relationship with the authorities. This is best demonstrated with the government. Because we often feel that the government is at right angles to the individual freedom. The government is a nuisance for the hard-working citizen. But at the same time something goes wrong - whether it is about the flu or the grit for the roads – the same citizens cry at the top of their voices that the government failed badly.

### **Why doesn't the church say anything about ?**

Meanwhile the relation we have with the government is the very image of the relation we have with the national church. There is a lot of complaining that the church speaks so little. The church is supposed to participate in all kind of debates: “Why don't you say something?”

### **Why does the church say something about that!**

But at the same time the church does speak, an outcry arises. Either, because the church should not be involved in the topic at hand, or, because she should, but ventilates precisely the wrong point of view. Because, when people say the church should speak, they mean that the church should say what *they* think.

### **Reactions**

The reactions to the recent letter to the government of Israel were a striking example. “You should not concern yourselves with politics.” Or: “You should, but you should have said precisely the opposite.”

### **Trust**

I do not have an instant solution. I do know that authority has a lot to do with trust: trust is slowly gained, but easily lost. We as synod-board have to be well aware of that constantly.

### **To say what has to be said**

But in the mean time we have to do what we are there for. We have to execute the policy made by the synod. And sometimes we have to let our hearts speak in all honesty – not with every subject and not all the time. But if you feel inside that the Gospel assigns you to do so, you have to say what has to be said. Even if it does not always get everyone's approval.

March 20<sup>th</sup> 2010 – Rev. Peter Verhoeff, moderator general synod Protestant Church in the Netherlands