

## **Disagreement in society**

The European elections caused a lot of discussion. But the most remarkable fact is the victory of the PVV<sup>1</sup>, which came with 4 seats into the European Parliament. Because of the Euro scepticism, or because of the vision on migrants and to be specific the Muslims? Many citizens in the Netherlands think that the problems which occur in society are insufficiently mentioned by most political parties, let alone solved. The PVV however is supposedly doing that.

In brief I want to make a few point by point remarks.

In the first place it should be clear that the church can not associate with points of view that are aimed to call Muslims criminals or potential criminals. When there is talk of removing (groups of) Muslims from Europe this should be strongly contradicted. We already see the deportation before us, with all the associations it reminds us of.

In the second place the presence of Islam in Western Europe in general and in the Netherlands in particular simply has to be accepted. Describing the Koran as a criminal book is disputable rhetoric. Christians and Muslims live of different sources. In the encounter that fact has to be the starting point. Neither the levelling of the difference, nor the abuse of each others sources offers any perspective in the meeting between the God-fearing.

In the third place: Muslims should, as do the supporters of other religions, have the freedom to profess their faith. They will have to do that in a society where church and state are separated. The separation of church and state is a fundamental conception, which was given in the Gospel. This separation does not mean that faith is just a matter of private interest. It does mean however that the church does not rule the state and does not want to enforce her laws on the state. Vice versa it means as well that the state can not rule over the church. In stead of church here can be filled in synagogue, mosque or temple. Where this difference gets lost, follows tyranny.

In the fourth place also from the church there will have to be an open eye and ear for the uncertainty, discomfort and hindrance which people, mostly from the social middle - and lower class, experience. The church is also church for people in problem-districts. If the church wants to be correct in such a way that she removes herself from people in these districts, she fails as community.

In the fifth place: the church cooperates with all those of good will and co-operates on the enlargement of the basis for peaceful coexistence of citizens and population groups. Concretely this means that contacts with Muslims should be maintained and where possible expanded, on local and national level.

In the sixth place: the call for more severe punishments should not result in an atmosphere of urge for retaliation. The government is the organization to restrain the evil and therefore does not carry the sword in vain. Individuals or groups which misbehave should be dealt with. The law should be maintained, otherwise 'liberty plucks justice by the nose; the baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart goes all decorum' (Shakespeare). Here it is however not about craving for retribution, but about justice. A community can not vent its rage on a criminal or group by punishment. Punishment is primarily meant to restore the legal order. In that the criminal him/herself is a human being greater than his/her crime. Justice and compassion are therefore not in contrast with each other.

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*In this column managers and staff members of the Protestant Church shed their light on actualities in church and society every fortnight.*

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<sup>1</sup> PVV = Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom)