

## **Protestant Church: 'Separation church and state of great importance'**

22-10-2009

In our country the churches have no seats in parliament. And the Balkenende administration may never interfere with the procedures in the Protestant Church. Before the law everybody is equal and there is separation of Church and State.

But the actual meaning of this principle regularly is subject for discussion. For example there is freedom of religion which may collide with other constitutional fundamental rights, like the freedom of speech.

This discussion will be held on Friday November 13 by the synod of the Protestant Church, based on the discussion paper 'The church and the democratic constitutional state – a fix'. Various representatives of political parties will attend as observers.

The Protestant Church in the Netherlands values the separation of church and state. She fundamentally accepts the democratic constitutional state and does not seek political power. She is grateful that she can organize her own religious life in freedom and that this fundamental right is also open to other denominations.

### **Discussion paper local congregations**

This is written in the discussion paper 'The church and the democratic constitutional state – a fix', which will be discussed by the synod of the Protestant Church in November. The memorandum is intended as discussion paper for local congregations and the national church. Further the church wants to give more insight on her position with relation to the government and her role in society.

### **Need for position**

According to the synod board there is an urgent need for a protestant position on the relation between church and state and on the place of the church in society. In the past years it was often discussed. Can the local authorities contribute financially to the building of a house of prayer? Should the government go on funding Christian schools? Is a religious leader allowed to speak negatively about homosexuality for example? Is an atheist entitled to speak offensively about God-fearing people?

### **Minorities**

Questions like that are directly involved with protection of minorities, also of religious communities, as part of democracy and religious freedom. As result of religious terrorism in the world and attacks in our own country the readiness to respect religion seems to decline. At the same time the interest from the side of the government increases, because they notice how much influence faith and religion can have on citizens.

The Protestant Church sees a responsibility here. According to church order (article 1, section 6) it is her task to call up 'to renewal of life in culture, society and state.'

### **Composition**

The report, 'The church and the democratic constitutional state – a fix. Assistance for the discussion in congregation and church', is based on conferences and the reactions of 33 expert theologians, historians, lawyers, politicians and other social scientists. Final edition was done by Professor Dr. Leo Koffeman (Protestant Theological University), also active at the expertise centre of the church ministries.

### **Arrangement**

The paper describes what the ideas were in the history of protestant theology about the relation to the government and provides a draft of recent developments in the relation between state, society, religions and churches. Subsequently the theological questions are addressed which play a role in determining the position of the Protestant Church towards culture, society and government.

The last chapter contains 'Practical perspectives' to shape the relations between church and society in the democratic constitutional state, both on local and national level. The paper is intended to function as elementary document for the reflection on this theme within the Protestant Church.

*On Friday November 13 the general synod will discuss the paper. Representatives of political parties have been invited to attend as observers.*

The English translation of the report: [www.protestantchurch.nl/statements and reports](http://www.protestantchurch.nl/statements_and_reports)