

## Saying 'No'

Sometimes the church has to say 'no'. 'No', against developments in society which are threatening for the wellbeing of (groups of) people. 'No', against an ideology which loses sight of human dignity; 'no' against an economy which is no longer of service to the people; 'no' against a theology which has lost sight of what it is about, trimming its sail to the wind and not living from the source anymore.

Sometimes the church has to say introspectively 'no' to herself – if she loses sight of what it really is about: living from the faith in the God of Jesus Christ and service to the world.

Saying 'no' is not so easy. It is aggravating to go against the flow. And it soon sounds intolerant. And we would not want to be that at any rate.

But sometimes it has to be. Churches and Christians have experienced that in Germany during Hitler's realm<sup>1</sup> and therefore almost exactly 75 years ago the Theological Declaration of Barmen<sup>2</sup> was formulated. The 'Confessing Church'<sup>3</sup> determined her position with that in the religious battle in Germany and kept her distance from the so-called German Christians who supported National-Socialism and introduced its principles in the church.

Then Lutheran and Reformed Christians said together 'No, never'. It can not be that a fascist ideology has the say in church. In and for the church only one revelation prevails: *'Jesus Christ, as he is attested to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God whom we have to hear, and whom we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We reject the false doctrine that the Church could and should recognize as a source of its proclamation, beyond and besides this one Word of God, yet other events, powers, historic figures and truths as God's revelation.'* (from Theological Declaration of Barmen - 1).

That sounds strict. Very strict indeed.

Will that still do today?

When it really matters, you have to stand on a firm foundation. If humanity is threatened, if injustice or poverty or discrimination is legalized and the church put on the spot, then you really have to know what your basis is. For the church that concentrates in the one name: Jesus Christ.

No, you can not use that to slap people in the face with. That is not allowed. Never.

But you have to stay alert. And you have to be able to point out where you stand. Churches and Christians have experienced that through the ages. In the Declaration of Barmen you see what up-to-date professing can be in such a situation. Therefore the Church Order of the Protestant church acknowledges the meaning of the theological declaration of Barmen for the profession in the present.

Saying 'no' should not become a second nature for the church - in order for her to principally mistrust everything that happens in culture, society and politics; on the contrary. She can enter into an open discussion and dialogue with everything that goes on. And wholeheartedly say 'yes' to that. But she needs to keep a watchful eye and not fall asleep.

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Third Reich'

<sup>2</sup> Barmer Thesen, May 31st 1934

<sup>3</sup> Bekennende Kirche founded in 1933 by Martin Niemöller