
WHAT HAS THE CHURCH'S INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS ACHIEVED?

The Church has been very outspoken about many issues that concern politics, but they have not always been able to bring their point across as efficiently. But other times they have been able to achieve quite a lot in regards of political matters. It is all down to the definition of achievement. And the definition of achievement can be understood quite vaguely in regards to the Church; this is because most of the times they do not direct power to bring about immediate change within politics, but often times what they have been able to achieve was shed light on the wrong-doings of the government and make people notice the things that would have otherwise been swept under the carpet. We can discern that from the impact the church has had worldwide over people by media interest, starting important discussions and debates and essentially because they have the power and influence to make people think differently and look at things in a different light. Christians should want to serve the greater good, meaning they should want what is best for our society. They want the world to be a place of peace, unity and social justice. And when this is not reflected within the politics of their time, they oftentimes try to speak up against it. In this text, I will discuss and look at different examples where the Church has been able to achieve something within politics, even if it was only to some extent.

The Church has managed to raise concerns and campaigned over the excessive and ever growing reliance on foodbanks, that have become an acceptable means of survival in the UK, although they were initially only set up as temporary means for people that were struggling to feed themselves and their families. Even for people that are employed in such an economically developed country as Britain, it has become somewhat the norm to obtain food from foodbanks. The Church is playing a major role, calling into question the governments and people's reliance and their unreasonable 'faith in foodbanks'. In recent years, the number of people that have no other option than to go to foodbanks to obtain food have risen drastically, as we can learn from the graphs below:

The reason why so much more people are relying on foodbanks has nothing to do with laziness or because they are sluggish people, who do not want to work. Most of the time it is because these people who actually do go to work, get paid very low wages (as seen on the graph on the next page), that they do not even have enough money to buy the necessary food that they require to feed themselves or their family.

Many of these people also rely on benefits of some sort, and the UK government has been known for implementing penalties and punishing people who rely on benefits with later or no payments at all. Causing these people to rely on foodbanks to help them to eat. As mentioned in the text, the reason why so many churches choose to take on the role of the state and help, is because many Christians identify with the idea of sharing bread, loving their neighbor and caring for others. So it makes perfect sense as to why the people of the church have come together to help out those who are hungry and in need of more food.

90% of foodbanks are run by Churches.' Even though it has been argued that the government believes that more people are using more foodbanks, because more and more foodbanks are opening stations over the country. This claim is not true, because the growing numbers of

foodbanks are essentially down to the fact that more people need food, because of late welfare payments or punishments and because they do not earn enough wages to cover all their basic costs. It should be the role of the government to create fairer wages, so people who work should not have to rely on foodbanks. And because Christian churches recognize this need, they open more and more foodbanks, so nobody must go hungry. In addition, they do not just offer them food, but also a place where people can open up and share their stories with other people in similar situations.

Therefore, the church has managed to achieved quite a lot by filling the gaps in the system and within society, where the government's efforts have fallen short and where it has not been able to help and support all their people that are in desperate need of food and do not have no other options. The church has proven itself to take on the responsibility of the government and it shows that they have done an even better job than the government, who lets its people down and without food, has done.

Many Churches have also had a lot to say about invasion of Iraq in 2003, but unfortunately they did not achieve their objectives on preventing Tony Blair on going to war and therefore failed in pursuing and introducing their ideologies within the realm of politics. The Church of England did not agree with the USA led war against Iraq because it did not go hand in hand with the teachings of the bible; where it mentions that if someone does you harm you should not fight back, contrary to the Old Testament where it states you should fight back. Evidence for this would be in Matthew 5:38-40 where Jesus teaches us about fighting back: 'You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you, don't fight back against someone who wants to do harm to you. If they hit you on the right cheek, let them hit the other cheek too. If anyone wants to sue you in court and take your shirt, let them hit you on the other cheek too. If anyone wants to sue you in court and take your shirt, let them have your coat too.' This implies that the Church believed that instead of fighting back against the atrocities and destruction that has been inflicted to us after 9/11 by Al Qaeda; we should instead back down and be the bigger person by not fighting back and giving them the other cheek if they strike us. And because Tony Blair was an avid Christian, the Church of England thought that it could have some influence on his choice of going to war.

But they did effectively not achieve their desired end goal, but I will discuss why they might have achieved to represent themselves as reputable source in political matters; which could aid them in the future, as there has been a lot of media discussion about this theme ever since.

It is quite contradictory that the reason why Tony Blair said he went to war, was one where God had apparently inspired him that it was the right thing to do; even though the Church of England had said that it warned him of joining forces with the US and to wage war in Iraq; because they were afraid of the implications and of the consequences it would have on both parties.

If the Church was able to achieve anything in this instance, it was that it managed to prove itself to the world as an institution who would have been right in such political matters as to not waging war. Proof for this is when we look at the aftermath of the Iraqi war and the sufferings that have gone on ever since: such as terrorist attacks that in the UK and in the rest of the world.

Therefore, even though the church did not achieve on stopping Blair from going to war, they still managed to achieve one thing. Which is being a reliable, trustworthy and honest source in

regards to certain political matters concerning waging war with other countries, and that Tony Blair and the UK would have been better off, if he would have listened to the Church of England, instead of his own advice.

The Barmen declaration was a declaration that stood for religious freedom by relying on Protestant doctrine. It was not completely rebellious, as there was no use of violence. But they prompted the church to promote and stand for social justice. It was written in 1934 by the Confessing Group of Germany and its greatest influencer was Swiss theologian Karl Barth. The Group was mostly concerned about the merger of state and church. It was addressed to the state and the 'Deutsche Kirche', who allowed Hitler to make a joint state and church (in some cases), as he did not have control over all churches, but he also shut a lot of them down completely, as seen with the Jewish and catholic churches. The Barmen declaration did not have a clear and direct achievement at the moment of its release and it also never had intended on completely destroying Nazi regime, but it was still able to help shed light on the fact that Hitler was an evil persecutor, someone who saw himself above God and who did not have the Church's best interest at heart. He only saw it as part of his regime to take over and be in control over first Germany and then go on to conquer the world. The Confessing Group saw the Church as a Holy place and they did not believe that Hitler stood for any of the rules, laws and testaments that their German evangelical church upholds.

The 'German Christian' movement was toughly influenced by Luther, who was also known for abusing Romans 13, so that people would respect authority at all times. Luther also permitted antisemitism and modulated some parts of the Old and New Testament which he considered to be 'too Jewish'. From this we can discern that he was a major influence on merging the protestant church with Hitler's ideology into a Reich church. In return, Hitler had helped the German Christians to win new elections towards the synod of the new national Evangelical Church. This new church even went as far to incorporating an 'Aryan Paragraph', which did not want anyone else to be part of their church and the Confessing Church quickly realised that this cannot be right, because everyone is welcome in the house of God.

Hitler wanted to take over the church and this goes to show, that the opinion of the church on political matters is quite important. Otherwise Hitler would have not wanted to work together with the church. Even though he had no personal interest about its background, he knew that for many traditional people the church played a vital role in their lives and the only way to reach these people and make them believe that his regime was the right one, was by joining forces with the church and working towards his own end goal. He only had his own personal malicious plan and all he wanted to do was bring about his twisted ideology in a time where people in Germany were suffering greatly and had no one else to look up to that passionately promised them as much as he did. So, it is understandable why the Barmen declaration alone was not enough to prevent Hitler from coming to power and ruling the country. This is because of the time it was written in, the country was in a turmoil, in desperation to anything or anyone that would save them from their despair and Hitler represented himself and symbolized this to the majority of people during that time, who had no other sense of hope left.

Therefore, it was not able to bring about such a great achievement that it had probably initially hoped for, but what it did was it was able to make sure and pay great attention that the Nazi state could and did not take over the Protestant churches in Germany completely, so he never had control over all of the Holy places.

The Barmen declaration proves itself, by referring to the bible. Jesus says he is the only way to God/heaven and that there is no other way to enter it. Hitler calling himself the 'Führer' is putting himself in the position of Jesus. The Confessing Church realised that Jesus is the only truth and way, and they did not want to encompass someone like Hitler as part of their daily lives, because it clearly warns about this in the Holy Scripture, that we should not obey or idolise any other person to such an extent, except for Jesus. The proof for this is where it states: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14.6). "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber... I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved." (John 10:1, 9.)

Another way we can look at the achievements of the Barmen declaration if we look at its effects it has had even after its time. As we can still recognize from its contemporary relevance which it has had in Indonesia, concerning the Christian Batak Protestant Church (HKBP). It has been incorporated into their church since 1951 and ever since it has helped them dealing with issues regarding Muslims and their sharia being incorporated in the national Indonesian law and with the Pancasila and the declaration has inspired them deeply.

The Kairos document was written in 1985 and it was the most important of its time.

It demanded the state to let go of the idea to justify their actions by abusing Christian theology and manipulating it in order to rationalize and excuse their horrible and unexplainable actions. It also demanded of the Church to side itself with the oppressed and not the oppressor, because God also always takes sides with the ones that are being oppressed and exploited. It was divided into three parts.

In the Kairos document, we can see how state theology plays a huge role, how it uses the status quo to excuse itself for its brutal systematic racism and forces the other side to commit or else they can either face the consequences of being tortured or killed. It proves this with the help of and misuse of Romans 13, as we have also seen in the Barmen declaration. It uses law and order to enforces its doctrines and labels anyone who does not obey a communist, without ever even second guessing the states own actions. It hides behind the justification and following of God, but in reality, this is not the case.

Secondly, the Church theology did not directly approve of apartheid, but it was insincere and quite biased. It did not long for justice, it just wanted reconciliation. It also failed to properly investigate what events were taking place at the time, and instead held on to the same traditional views, that were not appropriate for its time, such as non-violence which did not change anything for anyone.

The Prophetic theology wants to call for action to be done and return to the real meaning of the bible, it wants to be relevant, understand and observant of the current time and state of affairs. It wants us to be realistic about the fact that we first have to confront with evil in order to then be able to completely get rid of it. It teaches us not to lose faith and to always have hope and thinking what would Jesus do if he were in our position. It looks upon and uses examples where there has been oppression in the bible as we can see with the Hebrews and the Egyptians and how God granted them freedom and how he will do the same in South Africa.

The document somewhat helped apartheid in South Africa to come to an end. And this is

proven by the fact that it eventually did come to an end six years after the document was released. Many Christians were critical of apartheid, but it was a group of Black theologians that came together to create the Kairos document. They saw it as the perfect opportunity and the right time in history of South Africa to protest the tyrannical, oppressive and cruel government.

The state initially felt attacked and did not warmly accept and receive the document, they almost even went so far that they wanted to ban the documents in South Africa, but luckily they did not. And even though the Kairos document did not have an immediate, total or direct effect on ending apartheid; what it essentially did was it clearly expressed itself that what was going on in South Africa was not right in the light of God. The Kairos document helped achieve worldwide recognition and discussion, by vast media coverage.

It also shows how the Church has managed to achieve to have some influence over how people think. If the state is not doing its job properly and influencing people to commit unmoral acts, which it considers to be appropriate measures, the Church can uncover and see the actions for what they truly are: sins. When the Church recognizes this, and makes its people aware of this fact, Christians (and other people that have been inspired) can unite and point out the wrongdoings of the state to everyone else and then eventually demand change. Even though this process of change is not an easy one and as before change can be brought about it will first get hard again.

It also has managed to achieve and put light on the fact that all Churches must listen to the voice of the oppressed people, because only then can it understand both sides of the story and make an appropriate judgement out of the situation. This is because during the time the document was written (and before) only the state (and white people) had all the power and made it seem like what they were doing was not actually as the other side made it out to be (if they had a chance to even be heard by anyone else). The state covered up what they were doing, with the use of violence. When police used violence, it was considered appropriate and when the Blacks fought back by defending themselves, it was considered real violence.

The state brainwashed its people through the media, but as mentioned in the document you can only do evil and cover it up for so long until Gods works uncovers and exposes the situation for what it stands for. Essentially the point that the declaration made was that the state was being run and influenced by evil, which means it comes from the devil and that God was on the opponent's side.

Some German theologians confessed:

'We are caught up in historical and present-day relationships which helped to bring about your oppression and still maintain it today. People from our country and our continent of Europe contributed to the economic exploitation of Africa and the theological justification of racism and apartheid during colonial times, and we too benefit from present political and economic relations with system of injustice in southern Africa.'

To conclude the Church has had quite some achievements and we can discern from the examples of the foodbanks, invasion of Iraq, Barmen declaration and the Kairos document. Which essentially all goes to show that the voice of the church and also its actions are required for the government and politics to work accordingly and moreover because it most of the time wants the greater good for its people.

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