
Service Students’ Church (Erasmuslaan)

Dear friends,

We just have heard Ecclesiastes saying to us: ‘Come now, I will make a test of pleasure’. It’s like we are invited to be present at the first day of Creation. All kind of little pieces of our world being composed, joined, connected… houses, vineyards, fruit trees, little breezes, murmuring rivulets, herds and flocks, singers, delights of the flesh. It’s like we are invited by Ecclesiastes to sing together with Claudia Bartoli: love, replies the stream, love, replies the wind, love the little swallow… I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself, that’s the challenge of Ecclesiastes.

And why, why shouldn’t we accept and take this challenge? Why should we think: well, no, let us accept only his conclusion that this is all vanity? Why should we trust his conclusion without having tried to follow his advice? All these little pieces of Creation, are they only misleading? To be distrusted? Is laughter mad every time it breaks through our harts and faces? And pleasure that cheers your body is it always without any use?

Dear friends, come now and let us follow our master Ecclesiastes. The light that God created at the first day of his Creation, the light of the sun, that has caused vast deserts and awful aridity but that has brought these beautiful sunflowers too, I might see what was good for mortals to do under heaven during the few days of their life. So he bought male and female slaves, including concubines.

And he advised: enjoy yourself, take the pleasure–test in order to recognise where you can find the wind from God that swept over the face of the waters at the first day of his Creation. Do the labour-test: built houses and plant vineyards in order to recognise where you can find the treasures of God’s Kingdom. Do the erotic test: buy singers, male and female, and try the delights of the flesh in order to recognise how God’s love is to be discovered.

The Wisdom of Ecclesiastes is not an advice to follow a pre-established set of rules. Nor is that wisdom a nice word for a sombre and depressive way of life. Rather, Ecclesiastes remembers us that not all reality is already God’s creation. There are many forms of the delights of the flesh that are violent and oppressive. But in so far as there is God’s creation in our reality, these kinds of pleasures are good for mortals to do under heaven. There are many structures of labour that are alienating and forms of slavery. But in so far as there is God’s creation in our reality, these kinds of structures are good for mortals to build up under heaven. And so on … The wisdom of Ecclesiastes, the tests he proposes, they neither refer to a pre-established world nor to obedient people. He calls for creativity, human creativity, because we always have to rediscover the first day of God’s creation.

So, what do mortals have to do ‘under heaven’? Our master Ecclesiastes tells us that we have to pay attention to the creation that looms up in our reality. He tells us that we have to rediscover every morning again the creation that emerges out of our waters, and darkness, and out of our bodies and worlds. In my view, this is the kernel of the theologian’s work. To be every morning again prepared to work on the expression of the looming Reign of God in our own world. Of course, theologians at a university have to do that in a scientific way. But nevertheless, in this respect we can learn a lot from artists. We have to become artists of a new humanity, as once is formulated in liberation theology.
The famous Spanish painter Joan Miró once has made a work called: *A Star caresses the Breast of a Negress*. It expresses his strong feeling that the darkness of the Night is illuminated with brilliant colour and the clash of contradictory ideas. For him, the Night is not only the expression of the dark side of our reality, the absence of light, the impossibility of hope. It is also the situation for a strange cosmic dream in which all kind of known and unknown creatures recognize the magnitude of all things. The Night has a brilliance of its own according to Miró.

These are important ideas for artisans of a new humanity, as theologians have to become. It confirms the sensation that there is an infinite space and that darkness, far from being merely the negation of light, contains every imaginable colour. So, what have mortals to do ‘under heaven’ when they want to follow master Ecclesiastes? The real test of pleasure is to rediscover the brilliance of human beings in our often so contradictory world, a world that contains so many situations, which are not touched by Gods creation till now. We have to bark at the moon, to say it with a title of one of Miró’s paintings. Our barking often asks for a continuing struggle, a scientific struggle and a social and economic struggle. But within that struggle, sometimes an unexpected brilliance touches us, something that has a magnitude that illuminates our destiny. Perhaps, at these moments a wind from God sweeps over the surface of our bodies and worlds. A Spirit of God. Therefore, I guess, Ecclesiastes says to us: come now and take a test of pleasure. Enjoy yourself.

Amen. Let it be that way.