



Racial (*völkisch*) nationalism and Christianity are incompatible

Statement issued by the German Bishops

Germany is experiencing turbulent times. The mood is agitated and society is polarised. A growing proportion of the population is being drawn to right-wing extremist or right-wing populist movements. In the right-wing extremist milieu, there are discussions about forcing people with a migration background out of the country using the slogan “remigration”. We bishops expressly support the fact that a lively and strong protest movement is making itself heard on the streets of Germany. Anyone who expresses their opposition to the machinations of right-wing extremists in a democratic, liberal and humane spirit deserves the support and respect of us all. We are glad that so many Christians are committed like this and are standing up for human dignity, human rights and democracy!

With great concern we notice that radical thinking is on the rise and is even turning into hatred of fellow human beings – especially because of their religion, origin or skin colour, because of their gender or sexual identity. Against the backdrop of this development, we see the multitude of crises that Germany and Europe have been experiencing for years. The global financial crisis of 2008 and the euro debt crisis have led to uncertainty and also to real experiences of loss. The large number of refugees who, since 2015, have come to Europe, and Germany in particular, has awakened a willingness to get involved in many people, but has also made quite a few feel overwhelmed. The coronavirus pandemic has radically changed the lives of many people. Finally, the war against Ukraine has profoundly shaken the assumption that peace in Europe stands on firm pillars. Terror and war in the Middle East are also part of this crisis scenario. In addition to all this, there are the major challenges of our time, such as climate change and the far-reaching changes brought about by digital progress. Concern and fear of the future are increasing. However, the multitude of crises must not become a breeding ground for the erosion of civil democratic awareness and the rise of extremist positions.

Germany and Europe experienced the rise and fall of several extremist ideologies and movements in the 20th century. Their catastrophic consequences remind us to remain vigilant today. The Church therefore emphatically rejects all forms of extremism. They are irresponsible threats to the common good and the liberal order. Right-wing extremism currently poses the greatest extremist threat to our country and to Europe.

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Right-wing extremism asserts the existence of peoples that can supposedly be sharply distinguished from other peoples in terms of their “essence” and cultural life forms. There is talk of “natural” and “artificial” nations. For this ideology, the nation is a community of descent, ultimately a community of blood. The coexistence of people of different ethnic origins, religious affiliations and cultural backgrounds is therefore fundamentally questioned, if not rejected, by this way of thinking. The people are thought of as an “ethnos”, as a community of ethnically and culturally equal or similar people. This is the ideology of racial (*völkisch*) nationalism. After the horrors of National Socialism, however, our Basic Law understands the people for good reason as a “demos”, i. e. as a community of equals who build and shape our society together on the basis of human and civil rights.

Right-wing extremist attitudes and concepts are fundamentally aimed at marginalisation and exclusion. In this radicalised thinking, the equal dignity of all people is either denied or relativised and thus declared to be an irrelevant concept for political action. For the Church, however, it is clear that every human being possesses a dignity that is inviolable and cannot be disposed of. It is rooted in the belief that all people are created in the image of God and is the basis of human rights. Thus, human dignity is the starting point and goal of the Christian view of humanity. This way of thinking is also reflected in our constitution. In sharp contrast to National Socialism and the New Right, the Basic Law expressly recognises the fundamental importance of human dignity, which determines the state order and all social interaction.

The focus on the culturally homogeneous concept of one's own people necessarily goes hand in hand with a narrowing of the principle of solidarity, which is of central importance in Catholic social teaching and is a guiding principle of the German constitution. Right-wing extremists call for “social patriotism”, by which they mean solidarity within the people as understood in racial-nationalist terms. Those who do not belong to this nation should enjoy fewer rights and less social participation, even if they live and work in Germany. This means striking at the roots of democracy, which is characterised by the idea of equal rights for all. Solidarity is denied to all those who do not belong to one's own community. This applies to those seeking protection, whom they generally no longer want to let into the country. And it applies to those in need elsewhere: development cooperation with poor countries is therefore rejected, as is support for states that like Ukraine – are under attack and struggling to survive.

The view of the Church is different: Those persecuted for political, religious or racial reasons and war refugees must continue to be accepted in our country. And: for the Church, the concept of the common good always has a universal horizon. We therefore advocate multilateral cooperation and solidarity – both at European Union level and worldwide.

Right-wing extremism has existed in Germany and Europe since the Second World War. In recent years, however, right-wing extremist attitudes have become much more widespread in society, they have become “sayable” and are gaining influence. After several waves of radicalisation, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party in particular is now dominated by a

racial-nationalist attitude. The AfD oscillates between genuine right-wing extremism, which the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution attests to in some state associations and the party's youth organisation, and right-wing populism, which comes across as less radical and fundamental. Right-wing populism is the fickle fringe of right-wing extremism, from which it is ideologically charged. In both cases, stereotypical resentments are given free rein: against refugees and migrants, against Muslims, against the supposed conspiracy of the so-called global elites, and increasingly also against Jews.

We say with all clarity: racial (*völkisch*) nationalism is incompatible with the Christian image of God and man. Right-wing extremist parties and those that are rampant on the fringes of this ideology therefore cannot be a place of political activity for Christians and cannot be voted for. Moreover, the dissemination of right-wing extremist slogans – including racism and anti-Semitism in particular – is incompatible with professional or voluntary service in the Church.

We appeal to our fellow citizens, including those who do not share our faith, to reject and repudiate the political offers of the far right. Anyone who wants to live in a free and democratic society cannot find a home in these ideas. Anyone who votes for parties that have been categorised as “proven right-wing extremist”, at least in part, by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution is opposing the fundamental values of human coexistence and democracy in our country.

To avoid any misunderstandings: The clear vote against any form of right-wing extremism in no way means that the Church will withdraw from dialogue with people who are receptive to this ideology but are willing to talk. There should be a discussion of radical views, but they must also be exposed. Clear opposition to right-wing extremism also does not mean that existing economic and social problems – such as the realisation of social justice or the integration of migrants – can be minimised or ignored. They must be tackled. Anything else would only further strengthen the right-wing extremists. But all approaches to solutions must be in line with the humanitarian ethos that is pre- and co-shaped by Christianity and that defines the foundations of our state and society in Germany. Human dignity, human rights, especially the protection of life from its beginning to its natural end, and solidarity are its elementary components.

Among all these values and principles, the equal dignity of all people plays a fundamental role. Without a comprehensive understanding of human dignity, there can be no free and just coexistence. Human dignity is the core of the Christian view of humanity and the anchor of our constitutional order. Let us all offer resistance when human dignity and human rights are threatened! Let us actively work together for liberal democracy!

Resolution of the Plenary Assembly of the German Bishops' Conference on 22 February 2024