

## What kind of tempo does it take? - A reaction from Junia *Today*

From November 17-21, 2021, an international meeting of district apostles was held in Zurich, Switzerland. One of the items on the agenda was to discuss the topic of women's ordination. There is a great deal of interest in the topic of women in ministry, as evidenced by various actions by sisters and brothers in the run-up to the BAV. The apostles might have felt this pressure also independently of the actions of Junia *Today*. In the aftermath of the District Apostle Meeting, NAC International published a statement to report on the deliberations. In the headline, and thus telling, is the statement, "We are going our tempo." The church leadership seems to be aware of the close observation and sometimes impatience of its members.

Junia *Today* would like to comment on some of the statements in the article "We are going our tempo" of November 22, 2021 and classify them from the perspective of the initiative.

1. "This issue [ordination of women] needs intensive, careful deliberation."

In principle, this can only be in the interest of all believers. Junia *Today* welcomes this approach. At the same time, the impression arises that the topic is being dragged out or that reasons are being sought to prevent ordination and thus equality for women. After all, the respective church leadership has been visibly struggling with women's ordination for about 20 years.

In this context, consultation unfortunately also means that "men" discuss and decide about (instead of with) "women," which has a bitter aftertaste and, as a patriarchal decision-making structure, triggers unease.

2. "There should... not be the impression that the church allows itself to be pressured by societal changes."

Societal changes as such can hardly put the church under direct pressure; this is fundamentally opposed by the church's right to self-determination. Nevertheless, the church, as a living part of society, will also feel this pressure and must at the same time reflect the reality of life of its brothers and sisters. There are first signs of this, for example, the church leadership has at least begun consultations on the ordination of women.

For the rest, the church seems to be at least wait-and-see about social changes. The social changes it mentions, which relate to the equal rights and equal treatment of men and women, are by no means new developments. It is all the more positive that our church, as a result of its deliberations on the ordination of women, has now - albeit with great delay - anchored the fundamental right of equality (Article 3 of the Basic Law), which has significantly changed society in the course of the last decades, in the core of its doctrinal statements (woman and man - equal by God's will).

3. "In the past, there had been no official theological answer to the question of whether there were biblical reasons against the ordination of women."

*Junia Today* notes that the deliberations of the District Apostles' Meeting on the question "What does the Bible say - Old and New Testaments?" have finally been concluded, and henceforth the question will be "What does the Church say?" According to this, no arguments can be found from the Bible that speak against the ordination of women. This positive decision on a significant aspect of the topic of "women in ministry" is to be welcomed, although the consultation process up to this point could have proceeded much more quickly in view of the abundance of literature and theological treatises.

4 [... Fears that] cherished traditions will be lost must be taken just as seriously [...].

It can be assumed that many brothers and sisters want to hold on to cherished traditions. Traditions provide a sense of security and control. *Junia Today* welcomes the fact that the church leadership takes fears and concerns about the loss of traditions in the church seriously. However, it should also not be misunderstood that the "cherished traditions" in question here, i.e. the pastoral and preaching ministry by male ministers, are adhered to by a manageable proportion of conservative brethren. At the same time, interest among brethren in the faith who are willing to change will continue to grow in pastoral care and preaching by women in ministry, according to a survey *Junia Today* conducted at IJT 2019. The upcoming generation no longer knows reservations about women in spiritual functions; they are growing up in a social environment that is increasingly characterized by equality and equity at all levels, or the pursuit of it. The fact that this equality and equal treatment is lacking in the context of the church comes to the fore all the more as the church falls behind these social developments.

The church leadership will therefore not be able to avoid taking a clear position for or against the ordination of women. To wait until "cherished traditions" have faded would be to miss the opportunity to signal, through change - e.g., in ordination to spiritual functions - at least to church members willing to change, that the church wants to raise the full potential in all believers and thus fulfill its vision of being a church "where [all] people feel comfortable."

Exclusions based on gender, which have been practiced in our church for decades, are discriminatory and sexist. Dubbing this as "cherished traditions" trivializes a practice that many people suffer from. Upholding a "tradition" that exists at the expense of the integrity and esteem of many believers is more than questionable. It gives the impression that the *raison d'être* of discrimination may be debated. So much for that: there must be no room for this!

The church leadership must make it clear here: Discrimination is not a tradition, but a grievance that must be eliminated! The church leadership must and can communicate this to its believers through transparent communication and sound argumentation.

5. "[...] the topic is too important to be dealt with hastily and only with consideration for social trends."

The issue of "women in office" is indeed too elementary to be handled too hastily. In view of the years of more or less intensive deliberations by all involved, however, there can be no question of haste for a long time. The accusation that the church leadership is only working on the issue in consideration of social trends could in any case only come from those who cling to such "cherished traditions."

Many of those involved find it hurtful to speak of "social trends," since the word often has a rather negative connotation and could be associated with the word "zeitgeist," which is also often used negatively. At the same time, the NAC always strives to ensure that the Word of God is presented in a "contemporary" way. Basic human rights (GG Art. 3: No one shall be discriminated or preferred on the basis of sex (...)), should be recognized as such and treated with all necessary relevance and urgency, instead of diminishing them as "trends".

In summary, after decades of hesitation, the church leadership has finally and definitively entered the decision-making process on the issue of women in ministry. In the meantime, it has answered positively the fundamental questions about the will of God and about the statements in the Bible on this subject, and has now turned its attention to the internal church problems in this regard.

Junia *Today* notes in this regard that the church leadership with its doctrinal statements on "Woman and man - equal by God's will" is now publicly stating that the issue of equal rights and the non-discrimination of women has arrived not only in society, but also "behind the church doors".

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