

Questions for Further Reflection – The Theological Declaration of Barmen

1. What does it mean for Jesus Christ to be the sole source of Christian proclamation – the “one Word of God whom we must trust and obey in life and in death”? Karl Barth, who argued passionately for Christ as the sole source of proclamation, wrote that there are also “secular parables of truth” – true words of God uttered by non-Christians or things in nature that shed light on the truth of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. What is the difference in Christ being the only source of *proclamation*, but finding other sources of *inspiration* and *understanding*?
2. The Barmen Declaration says the Jesus Christ’s “assurance of forgiveness” places a “mighty claim upon our whole life”. How is this true? What does it look like in the church? In our personal lives? What might it mean for our work of ministry and mission to, for, and in the world? Why is it important to reject that there are two spheres – the kingdom of the church and the kingdom of the state, the former being private and spiritual, the latter being public and worldly? What is the allure of this dichotomous view? What is the danger?
3. The Barmen Declaration defines the task of the state as “providing for justice and peace”, and the task of the church as the “ordering of human life”. How do you understand the difference between the two? What happens when the state interferes with the church’s task? What happens when the church interferes with the state’s task? What does it look like when one or the other tries to do both things? Why do you think the Founders of our nation insisted on the separation of these two things? What happens when one or the others does not seek to fulfill its task?
4. How do we in the Presbyterian Church live out the following statement in our polity and church order? “The various offices in the Church do not establish a dominion of some over the others; on the contrary, they are for the exercise of the ministry entrusted to and enjoined upon the whole congregation.” What do you think the “exercise” of ministry means? How do you understand the idea that offices in the church are for the exercise of ministry?
5. How do you define Christian Nationalism? What are the dangers of Christian Nationalism? Why do you think the church in Germany didn’t act until its own interests were threatened? How is the situation that led to the Declaration, and the Declaration itself, helpful to us today? How does it show the importance of Confessions, in general, for the church today?