



[Open letter of the IG]

## **Do the Reformed Cantonal Churches know what they are doing?**

Since twenty years the IG Feminist Theologians is monitoring the positions and practices of Churches in Switzerland, examining their contributions to gender equality. How serious are Churches in terms of women friendliness and to what extent are they eager to employ well educated women who self-consciously raise the question of their place within the Church? This time, the IG focuses on the situation within the Reformed Cantonal Churches. Usually one considers these to show a fairer sense of justice for the equality issue, as they accept women occupying the same pastoral positions as men. But the formal act of respecting gender equality does not establish much more than a fair point of departure. In what direction do Swiss Reformed Churches today prepare the ground in terms of gender justice?

Until recent years there used to be in the northwestern part of Switzerland four ecclesial positions for women's issues: the consultation office and the project office for women of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Basel-City, the ecclesial office for women's issues in Basel-Campaign (Reformed Church), as well as the office for women's concerns of the Roman Catholic Church in Basel-City. In recent times however, the official names of these positions were changed and the job descriptions were extended, while the percentage of time allocated to permanent education among women has not been increased. And at the present time the future of these positions remains more than uncertain.

In Zurich, we discover elements of the same phenomenon: that the protestant academy of Boldern is under financial pressure is one thing. But what would it mean for women, should *their* centre for discussing feminist theology and debating societal and political issues be lost? Since forty years Boldern is a home to feminist theology – what are the current reflexions, plans and strategies for compensating this loss of home?

As to the Zurich Church Council, from the year 2012 on it will count most probably only one female member. Thus, the new start inaugurated in 1999 with the election of four female Councillors will come to an end. Gender equality in terms of numbers in a decision making body is of course not in itself sufficient to guarantee ability to carry out reform and to show flexibility. The masculinisation of the church leadership is however, a cause of concern.

A bit more than twenty years ago the World Council of Churches launched the decade “Churches in Solidarity with Women” (1988-1998). During this period many initiatives have been taken by women and first steps of progress in terms of equality have been achieved. What results have come out of these ground-braking initiatives in our protestant theological faculties, in our lay training academies, in our churches?

The Reformed Churches are evidently compelled to reduce their budgets – a feature similar to what we observe in other institutions. Therefore it is important to know what they are going to close down, whether this is an issue of public debate and how communication is operated. It would be a protestant tragedy if, without regard for the visions of a more just world order, for solidarity with women and without awareness of the signalling effect, each Cantonal Church would do away with the achievements of the ecclesial women’s movement and the ecumenical decade through budget reduction. The female theologians of the church women’s offices have notably

pursued the goal of furthering the cause of women within the Reformed Churches and global society, of strengthening their networks and of fostering gender democracy. They were committed to communicating feminist theology as well as to rendering and valuing unpaid and volunteer work in the ecclesial environment. We ask for explanations on how the Reformed Churches envisage their priorities for the future – women are (the) church, that's our entry point. This however, is not only a matter of fact, neither a simple vision, but also a matter of budgeting, of investing in justice, education and democracy.

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