

Reflections on the annual watchword 2022

"Whoever comes to me, I will not turn away", says Christ.



They will have thought of something, the group that chooses the year's watchword. "Whoever comes to me, I will not turn away," says Christ. The 37th verse from the 6th chapter of the Gospel of John was chosen by the Ecumenical Working Group for Bible Reading in an intensive discussion process so that it could become a motto for the year 2022.

Probably each and every one of us immediately thinks of something when we hear the word "reject": My own experiences of rejection, where I was not wanted. As a child, I was not let into the game, I did not gain admission to higher education, I did not get the job I had planned, I was turned down by the admissions office for university places. Shattered dreams, hopes that were dashed and life plans that could not be realised.

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Probably each and every one of us immediately thinks of something when we hear the word "reject": There are also plenty of topical references to it. Refugees are excluded at the so-called external borders of the EU and many, many other countries. Presumably that is why they are called external borders, because they can be used to exclude people and humanity. They then become rejections that end fatally, by drowning in the Mediterranean, by forced return to the situation I wanted to escape, because war, civil war, persecution, torture, hunters make a life there impossible.

The pandemic has led to new kinds of rejections. When my mother was in hospital after a fall and later in short-term care, we were not allowed to visit her because of Corona restrictions. Trips to the members of the United Evangelical Mission are not possible at all or only in a very limited way.

And they are getting louder again, the voices of those who think their freedom is threatened by politics and science because they are expected to wear masks, get vaccinated and restrict contacts so that others don't have to die. Two of my children work in intensive care units and are shocked by what they encounter there and by the ignorance of those who deny the truth. I am also shocked by the unholy alliance of those who oppose the measures to contain the pandemic with those who would rather see people drown in the Mediterranean than offer them a helping hand.

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Something else comes to mind when I think of the word "turn away". A compulsory school reading in my day that ends with the words:

"Answer me!
Why are you silent? Why?
Doesn't anyone answer?
Does no one answer???
Does no one, no one answer???"

It is the war returnee Beckmann who, in Wolfgang Borchert's drama "Outside the Door", full of despair, finds only these words. Beckmann, a war returnee, despairs of life in the face of millions of deaths. Now he asks questions, but wherever he goes he is turned away, the doors are slammed in his face after flimsy excuses have been made for what has happened. In the experience of irresponsibility, of euphemistic excuses, his image of God also dies. He calls upon him: "Oh, you are old, God, you are unfashionable, you no longer keep up with our long lists of deaths and fears. We don't really know you any more, you are a storybook god. Today we need

a new one. You know, one for our fear and need. A brand new one. Oh, we have looked for you, God, in every ruin, in every shell hole, in every night. We've called out to you. God! We have shouted for you, cried for you, cursed for you! Where were you then, dear God? Where are you tonight? Have you turned from us?"

God's response echoes Beckmann's lament when God replies:

"My children have turned from me, not I from them. You from me, you from me. I am the God in whom no one believes any more. You have turned away from me." God's response in Wolf-gang Borchert's drama fits the year's motto.

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Looking back on the past year and looking forward to the coming one, the year's motto helps me to tackle things, to take responsibility, to let go of excuses and to open doors. The promise of Jesus is the best motivation for this. I am welcome, even the denier of pandemics is welcome, if he comes to HIM, even the right abyss, if he gets involved in the discussion and comes to Jesus. For God wants to win every human being, for this he calls everyone to be on the way in a committed mission: to oppose all hatred, to stand up for the lives of the tortured and persecuted, to change things where I can change them. And this succeeds on many occasions. Let us experience this together and live Jesus' promise:

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God bless us all in this New Year 2022.