

NAGYPÁL Szabolcs

*The Person who Said 'No' but still Went**Affirmations and Negations*

*I have learned a lot from a particular direct and ironic saying. It describes the relativity of affirmations and negations in our lives. The saying goes like this: "If a man says 'yes', it means 'maybe'; if he says 'maybe', it means 'definitely not'; and a real gentleman never says 'no'. On the other hand, if a woman says 'no', it means 'maybe'; if she says 'maybe', it means 'definitely yes'; and a real lady never says 'yes'." Let us now consider a biblical perspective on the role of affirmations and negations in our lives, reading and meditating on one of the parables of Jesus.*

**THE VINE-GROWER'S TWO SONS**

"How does this seem to you: A man had two sons and, going to the first, he said, 'Son, go out and work today in the vineyard.' He replied, 'I won't.' Afterward he felt sorry and went out. Going to the second, he said the same to him. He answered, 'I will, Sir.' But he did not go. Which of the two did the father's will? They said, 'The first.'" (Matthew 21, 28-31)

**SPIRITUAL COMBINATIONS**

First of all, I see this parable of Jesus and Matthew as a genuine methodological guideline for my spiritual life. Even as I do so, the main question for me is, surprisingly enough, of a mathematical nature. There are two kinds of answers narrated in the story, but what about the other two possible combinations?

I mean there are the cases of 'No-Yes' and 'Yes-No' in the text, but what about the cases of 'No-No' and 'Yes-Yes'? Why are they left out in this story? In other words, there are two possibilities depicted in the narrative: if someone says *No*, and keeping the promise, she or he does not go; or if someone says *Yes* and she or he, for whatever reason, still goes. What about the other two possible combinations?

**REALISM QUESTIONED**

We have to lament and deliberate now whether these two other cases are realistic at all. My opinion is that Jesus is realistic enough when he decided to leave out the other two options from the parable. Maybe, I repeat, *maybe*, there is no third or fourth way to answer the invitation to go and work in the vineyard. We either say 'No'

to the invitation of the Father the Convoker and then we are able to go; or we say 'Yes' and then we are destined to fail to fulfil our calling and vocation.

How do I mean this? I think the whole answer and reaction depends on the question. It depends on the question which we ourselves let to be posed to ourselves, or – on the contrary – we deny to be posed.

**SCRIBES AND PHARISEES**

In and around the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) we are Christian students and young intellectuals. We are people of the *theist context*, whom the Bible calls *Pharisees*. At the same time we are people of the intellectual context, whom the Bible calls *Scribes*.

In this respect, our pivotal characteristic is that we are very careful with questions. We do not allow every question to reach us in depth. We meticulously discern and distinguish the questions which we are ready to face and answer. Naturally, and sadly enough, these are not necessarily the essential and existential questions that, in reality, are the only ones worth posing.

We, Scribes and Pharisees, are the people of the *Yes*. It is precisely our *Yes* that deceives us. Far be it from us to ever say 'No' to God the Parent when we are called; our cautiousness and our good taste totally forbids this. That is why we usually wander in the endless labyrinth of our *half-yeses*, our half-truths and our half-solutions. From the beginning we only pose a half-question, to which we can answer a full 'Yes' with finality and content.

**STAGGERING NEGATION**

It seems to me that to the full question, to the existential and eschatological question there can only be these two reactions: 'Yes-No' and 'No-Yes'. The question is so staggering, it is so perplexing and so astounding, that we have to say 'No' in order to preserve our ability to go. If we say 'Yes' immediately, it remains a half-yes, which is a non-detached, habitual and customary one. It forbids us from saying the full 'Yes' afterwards.

If we say 'No' to the full question, the dark night of the soul begins to surround us, and we will certainly awaken to the final 'Yes'. Those who dared to attempt to answer the full 'No', ended up with the opposite spiritual experiences. In short, it seems that 'Yes-Yes' and 'No-No's are possible to the half-question, but not to the full question.

The first son of the vine-grower in Matthew 21 said 'No' to his father's question, but still went to the vineyard. Perhaps it was precisely this 'No' that enabled him to go and begin work.

We now face this question: how would we, personally, answer this question? And, what is exactly our perplexing question?



NAGYPÁL Szabolcs (1974) is a graduate in law, literature and ecumenical theology. He is Roman Catholic, a theologian in the Békés Gellért Ecumenical Institute (BGÖI) in Pannonhalma, Hungary. He is a former chairperson of KÖD (Magyar SCM), and is currently a member of WSCF European Regional Committee (ERC) and global Executive Committee (ExCo). He co-edited the book *A Pentatonic Landscape. Central Europe, Ecology, Ecumenism* (Budapest, 2002). He is editor-in-chief of *Student World* and *Mozaik*.