

Small group
discussion material
on the subject of

"Values"

Introduction

The subject of "values" is being discussed more and more now-a-days. Why? In different areas of society, a loss of values has become noticeable. Not only the crime on the streets, but also the immoral behaviour at top level in commerce or politics are signs of this. And if British scientists want to combine human and animal genes (which the state now allows them to do), this raises these questions:

- ☞ What values do we have?
- ☞ Do we recognise some of these values as more important?
- ☞ According to which values do we live?

Such questions are not only interesting philosophically, but also relevant to daily life. We have to make countless major and minor decisions in our lives – often several times a day. Most decisions are very directly influenced by the values which are important for us. This is also true for life as a musician and artist.

There is another important reason for you as an artist to occupy yourself with this question:

Art has the power – and often the function – of holding a mirror up to individuals or society and "telling" them about values – often even using purely instrumental music or abstract art. But this is dependent on people having thought previously about the question of values and also living according to certain values.

In this material for discussion groups, we want to look at some "values" – knowing that the subject is actually inexhaustible. These are intended as stimulus for thought, and can of course be supplemented from elsewhere. "Values" are of particular importance in Christian faith. For this reason, the Christian view will be expressed here on a number of occasions.

We hope you will have many stimulating, valu(e-)able discussions!

Beat Rink / Crescendo

1st discussion round

In our first meeting, we can introduce ourselves to each other and discuss the first questions:

- ☞ Which values do we have?
- ☞ Which of these values are most important for us?
- ☞ Which values were important in my upbringing? Have I adopted these critically or uncritically?

The 1st value: YOU!

Let's imagine that the values we have form the walls of a house. They determine how we move and how we live.

A house is only as stable as its foundation. What forms the foundation of a secure house of values? It is the certain knowledge that "I am valuable!"

"I am valuable!"



Now it is possible to say this sentence in a more or less thoughtless way, because it does of course sound self-evident.

But how firmly we really believe it has a lot to do with our biography.

- ☞ Can you think of an experience in which you noticed: "I am valuable."? (Not because you did something special, but because you are *you*?)

- ☞ Is this awareness that "I am valuable" really the foundation of your house of values? Or are you carrying another message inside you: "I am valuable if..." or "I am valuable, but..."?

- ☞ What are the consequences of this

A) for your life?

B) for your artistic activity?

C) for your relationships with others?

- ☞ How do we achieve a healthy self-confidence? What could the following statement mean for us: "*Man is made in God's image*"? (This is, by the way, the basis for the first article of the constitutions of Germany and other states: "Human dignity shall be inviolable".)

2nd discussion round

Value no. 2: Love



Is it true that "Hell is other people"?

A famous statement by Jean-Paul Satre is "Hell is other people".

What does your fellow human-being mean to you? Of course, it is not possible to put and to answer this question in such a general way. So let's put it another way: how do you experience the people who are important to you? (Think about the 5 – 10 most important relationships on your life and write them down: relatives, friends, colleagues.)

For you, these people are...

- ...hell?
- ...supportive? They are important for you because they help you, support you, do good things for you.
- ...hindrances? They get in the way of your plans and aims.
- ...demanding? They always want something from you – or you think they do, and you have to give them this or please them.
- ...competitors? You like them – but only as long as they (as musicians/artists or in other areas are not as good or not better than you)
- ...people who give you love! You receive a lot of love from them
- ...people who receive your love, for whom you can do something good? (Even irrespective of what they give you)
- ...(potential) friends?
- ...people from whom you can learn something?
- ...

So let's take a moment and ask ourselves:

- ☞ Which of these characteristics dominates your most important relationships?
You can write down a name next to each characteristic mentioned above.

- ☞ What caused your relationship to others to take on this characteristic?

- ☞ How does this affect the rest of your life (including other relationships)?

There are many sides to a relationship with others. But there is one value we can seek to bring into every relationship: *love!*

The golden rule

In the ancient world, there was a so-called "golden rule":

"Do not do to others what you do not wish others to do to you" (Socrates, Plato, Buddhism)

It is interesting that Jesus formulates this statement even more radically:

"So whatever you wish others to do to you, do the same to them." (Matthew 7,12)

- ☞ What does this mean for us in concrete terms – in everyday life (including as an artist?)

3rd discussion round

Value no. 2: Love (continued)

Artistic love

Love is no foreign word for artists. One could argue that artists are particularly capable of love, because they keep up an intensive love for art. Love in this case is not simply a matter of being enthusiastic about something, "being in love", but rather something other than that.

☞ What is the special feature of "artistic love"? (Open discussion)

e.g.

- being able to take time for others (even when the other person is a stranger)
- wanting to understand "others"
- wrestling with artistic material and bringing the best out of it
- having patience and hope...
- forgetting oneself
- ...

☞ In which direction has art taught you to love: your own artistic work or that of others?

☞ Is it also possible to apply the characteristics of artistic love, as we described them above, to love between persons?

Loving until it hurts?

We notice at once: loving persons is sometimes harder than loving art. It is sometimes the case that with persons no love is returned, and sometimes love can even be hard work.

Mother Theresa said: "*We must love until it hurts.*"

Hardly anyone has spoken about love as much as **Jesus**. He said:
(Luke's gospel, chapter 6:27-38)

²⁷"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bles those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from

taking your tunic. ³⁰Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³²"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. ³⁴And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

- ☞ What could this mean for you in concrete terms – for example, in your attitude to colleagues?

- ☞ How can one learn to grow in love, to love as Jesus loved?

- ☞ Are there people who are waiting for a sign of your love?

Food for thought:

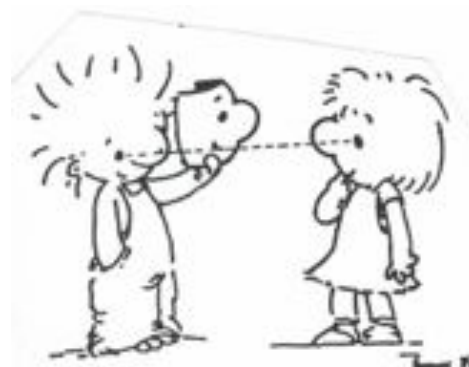
Love is not just a word and a task, but also a gift of God. We can ask God to give us love. "*For the love of God is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.*" (Rom. 5,5).

4th discussion round

Value no. 3: Truth

Love and truth

In the so-called Great Song of Love (1 Corinthians 13) we read: "Love rejoices in the truth". In the 10 Commandments we read: "You shall not speak false evidence against your neighbour" – that means, "you shall not damage your neighbour by untruths".



What is the relationship between love and truth? (What occurs to you spontaneously on this?)

Art and truth

In art, truth and authenticity are important values.

☞ How and where do we notice untruth, dishonesty

a) in art? (concrete examples)

b) in a person's life?

☞ What is the result of not being authentic? And what are the results of authenticity?



☞ Do we have role models (in art or in life generally) from whom we can learn how to be authentic?

The sculptor and author **Ernst Barlach** wrote in 1911:

„What the human being has suffered and can suffer... that engages my attention. My native language in art is the human figure or the milieu in which the human being lives, suffers, rejoices, feels, thinks...“

What can we make of the statement "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the father but by me*"? (Jesus in John 14,6)

5th discussion round

Value no. 4: Mercy

☞ Let us take time to look at the picture by Ernst Barlach on the last page: does it tell us anything about mercy? What do we see in it?

☞ What is mercy (another word would be "grace")? Let us attempt a definition:

☞ To what extent is mercy connected with love and truth?

Mercy and forgiveness

A musician tells us: "In the orchestra I have a neighbour at my desk who has been mobbing me constantly. Then in one concert he became completely confused and no longer knew where we were. For a moment I thought: "Now your chance has come to leave him lost and on his own. But then the thought suddenly went through my mind that I should love him. And so I showed him the place."

Mercy obviously has a lot to do with the readiness to forgive. Why should we forgive others? There are no logical grounds for this. It is a basic attitude which is linked to our system of values.

From a Christian point of view, it also has a lot to do with how we understand God and our experiences of God. In the Bible, we read much about God's mercy, about his grace and his readiness to forgive. Even the Old Testament is full of this:

"The Lord is gracious and just. Our God is merciful." (Psalm 116,5)

📖 In Psalm 103 we read:

*"Praise the Lord, oh my soul,
and that is in me bless his holy name.
Praise the Lord, oh my soul,
and do not forget all the good things he has done for you,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and mercy."*

In "The Lord's Prayer", there is, alongside numerous requests, also an indirect appeal to us: "...and forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors...".

- ☞ Where have you experienced "receiving forgiveness" and "forgiving others"?

- ☞ What are the consequences if we do not forgive?

Thoughts: readiness to forgive and mercy – they belong to the most important values – at least in culture influenced by Christianity. Welfare institutions, hospitals and our western system of justice are based on this. Where these values are lost, our society is in danger.

6th discussion round

Value no. 5: Trust



One could object that "trust" is not a value, but an attitude, even a state of mind. It is more difficult to demand of someone that they should "trust!" than that they should "love!", "be authentic!" or "be merciful!". If basic human trust, which every child has, has been broken or weakened, it cannot be restored or healed just with an order.

It is especially true that sensitive, artistic people often experience that their basic trust has been disappointed and broken.

Winning trust back

Trust cannot be restored at the touch of a switch, but requires a healing process. Someone who had been disappointed by a particular person said to this person: "I can indeed forgive you and am willing to do this, but my trust in you has been disappointed and at the moment I have lost confidence in you. This will probably need time..."

But trust can grow again, it can even be learned. Even self-confidence (e.g. for a musician after a bad concert) can grow again.

☞ Do we recognise this? Which of the following experiences have you had:

a) You have been disappointed by others and then you have had to decide to trust someone again.

b) You have let yourself down and have had to learn that you are capable of achieving something again...

c) You have lost your trust in God because life has disappointed you and you have to learn that God wants the best for you.

Trust = faith

Another word for trust is "faith". Trust and faith can be closely connected. Can faith be a value? We could perhaps also say: it is the **ground** on which the house of values stands. And it is better for the house to stand on a stable rock than on sand...

Isaiah 26,4: "Trust in the Lord for ever! For the Lord, the Almighty, is the Rock eternal".



☞ Do I have a foundation like this?

☞ Or have I never had the opportunity of building my house on a foundation of faith?

☞ What does it mean to "trust God" in a biblical sense?

Faith first of all has something to do with the trust that God means well with us. He has created us, he wants to show us His love and give us a fulfilled, valuable life.

How does one begin to believe?

There are various ways:

- a) One looks closely at the message, the statements in the Bible and begins to **understand** them. This can also happen through a Bach oratorio ...
- b) One looks closely at people who have had an experience of God.
- c) One begins to trust that the numerous testimonies which speak of a personal God are true.
- d) One **claims for one's personal life the truth** of what the Bible says.
- e) One can express one's trust in God in a prayer.

Prayers of trust

*"Dear God,
I want to trust you.
I want to build my house on firm ground
Please show me that you are alive and that you love me.
Amen."*

*"Jesus Christ,
thank you for coming into this world. You have paid for
everyone's sins on the cross. For my sins as well.
Please forgive me where I have gone my own way and
have lived without you.
I receive your forgiveness gratefully.
Be the foundation of my life.
I want to build my house on your ground.
Amen."*

7th discussion round

Value no. 6: Freedom

The garden of freedom

Freedom is such an important value, demanded at all times, because some people exercise power over others, make use of them and exploit them, tie them down in dependency and impose a yoke on them. The French Revolution carried this word on its flag. But it is precisely the development of the French Revolution that demonstrates a danger: where one single value is made absolute and isolated from other values, particularly that of love, (Paul calls it the highest value), it becomes dangerous.

Described in the picture of our house, freedom is the garden around the house. I can move freely! I can go even further – out through the garden gate.

But every garden has its boundary. This has to respect not only society, but also single individuals: I have to position my fence in such a way that it does not take anything away from my neighbour's garden. Inversely, I have to be able to trust that others respect my boundary and do not tear down my fence in the name of their freedom or camp on my ground without asking.

Now not everyone has the same need of freedom. Some prefer to have a small garden, some prefer a park around their house; a park in which one can also hold celebrations – that is, an area in which others can move freely and feel at home without any need to feel afraid of making mistakes.

Artists love freedom and need a free creative area around them. But they also need a fence around it to protect them from their own egotism and the egotism of others.

☞ Question: What does this picture of the garden and the fence say to you?

☞ Where can you move your fence outwards?

☞ Where do you have to bring it in?

☞ Where do you have to repair it?

☞ The 10 Commandments (see below) can be seen as fence posts which help us to live in freedom. Can we see them this way too?

The 10 Commandments:

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down and worship them.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days shall you labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.
5. Honour your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.
10. You shall not covet your neighbour's house...or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

Food for thought:

☞ What does this mean: *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free."* ? Galatians 5,1

8th discussion round

Value no. 7: Discipline

Not a popular value

Why self-discipline? It is certainly not a "popular" value.

We live in a world which does not proclaim the value of self-discipline.

For example: banks offer their customers more and more generous ways of going into debt, or electronics dealers let you take the most expensive pieces of equipment with you and pay for them later in monthly installments. Of course, generosity is not the motive behind this, but the interest in a financial profit. The principle according to which the customer, and modern man in general, is expected to behave is hedonism (Greek: hedone = pleasure): "Everything that's fun

for me is permitted". It is as if modern man hears a message that "Your freedom is unlimited. You don't need a fence round your garden at all, instead you can move with complete freedom. Your house, your piece of land – you can extend them as you please."

- ☞ Do we see tendencies in our society to dissolve important values (e.g. the 10 Commandments, [see above]) under the banner of hedonism?

- ☞ What price do we pay for this?

- ☞ On the other hand, can joy come from self-discipline? (Perhaps because one would then have time for other values?)

Artistic Discipline

Let us look at the topic again from a very practical point of view: musicians and artists have to develop a great deal of self-discipline. It is possible to practise too much, but also too little. Both can be the result of a lack of self-discipline. But neglect or perfectionism can equally damage art and perhaps even your health.

- ☞ Let us tell each other about good and bad experiences in this area.

- ☞ How can one train self-discipline? (Does anyone have some practical tips?)