

8<sup>th</sup> March 2025

## Nevertheless

**“Rejoice in the Lord always.  
I will say it again, ‘Rejoice!’”**

*Bible, Philippians 4:4*

Recently, my minister preached on the text above, and asked how Paul can encourage the Church in Philippi to ‘Rejoice!’ He was in prison in Rome. The fledgling Church was struggling to survive. Rejoice? Surely impossible!

That sermon touched me deeply and sowed the seed of this reflection. So, with my minister, I ask once again: how can *we* ‘Rejoice!’ – with unresolved conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine, when the world-order is so unpredictable, as the influence of the Church is diminishing, when our personal faith takes a battering, when we feel ashamed, or hopeless, or despairing? Rejoice? Impossible, is it not?

Karl Barth was a Swiss Reformed theologian, best known for his *magnum opus*, “Church Dogmatics”, and whose work influenced many 20th century theologians. In 1934, as the Protestant Church attempted to come to terms with Nazi Germany, Barth was largely responsible for the writing of the “Barmen Declaration”, rejecting the influence of Nazism on German Christianity, by arguing that the Church’s allegiance to the God of Jesus Christ should give it the impetus and resources to resist the influence of other lords, such as the *Führer*, Adolf Hitler – to whom he personally sent this declaration. Barth was forced to resign his professorship at the University of Bonn in 1935 for refusing to swear an oath to Hitler.

In 1962, my minister reminded us, Karl Barth published his commentary, *Epistle to the Philippians*. On the text above, Barth wrote:

*“Joy” in Philippians is a defiant “Nevertheless!”  
that Paul sets like a full stop against the Philippians’ anxiety.*

Today, as I look at a troubled world in fear and despair, I need this defiant “nevertheless” more than ever before. It’s the “nevertheless” of the wonder Moses felt as he heard God’s voice from the burning bush. It’s the “nevertheless” of Paul and the Philippian Church as they faced their trials. It’s the “nevertheless” of Barth in his rejection of the horrors of Nazism.

Will I ever be able to give myself fully to rejoicing in a troubled world? I don’t know. But I’ll hold to my “nevertheless”, for, right now, it’s all I have.

### **A prayer for today**

*God, help me to hold on to my “nevertheless”. Amen, and Amen, and Amen.*