

Religions - Hope for a tumbling World

An Appeal.

1. A tumbling world

We are living in a tumbling world. The challenges for humanity are enormous:

- Barbaric wars are waged in many parts of the world; the threat of ABC overkill and nuclear disasters in war zones is acute.
- The sensitive climate system has reached many tipping points; if these are exceeded, the living space on earth is threatened.
- Wars, hopelessness due to poverty and climate catastrophes have already driven more than 100 million people to flee; the political tensions in the receiving countries are increasing.
- In rich countries, computerization is changing the social structure in a similar way to industrialization.
- The pandemic has overshadowed these challenges and pushed them into the background. In the meantime, they have reached politics.

2. Many people are unsettled, fear is spreading

Many people are increasingly feeling these threatening developments in their everyday lives. Forests are burning in Europe. Rivers have unprecedented low water levels. Elsewhere there is flooding. Because corn and wheat cannot be shipped freely from Ukraine, hunger is being exacerbated in many parts of the world. Energy prices are rising worldwide. Even in rich countries, the cost of living is becoming prohibitive for the more vulnerable. Such experiences unsettle people. They make fear. But fear de-solidarizes and creates a "non-culture" of growing rivalry.

Some political populists and religious fundamentalists use fear, lies and greed to widen the gaps between nations, cultures and religions, fuel hatred and violence, spread nationalism (national egoism) and xenophobia.

4. Religions as Sources of Hope

The world religions were and are for millions of people a source of hope and the strength to overcome fear, egoism and resignation, an inspiration for a life in universal solidarity.

The great longing for a united humanity in justice and peace, for which religions stand and work, has not lost any of its strength and is motivating more and more people, especially in times of fear.

5. Religions are often part of the problem, not the solution

At the same time, we are aware that the religious communities are in a difficult situation at this time when they are so urgently needed. Even many believers - including Pope Francis - painfully admit that religions (religious communities) are often part of the problem, not part of the solution.

- The Christian churches in Europe are losing confidence for a number of serious reasons. They are often too introspective, i.e. "sick", as Pope Francis diagnosed.
- Not only the Christian churches, but also Islam is stuck worldwide in a deep crisis of confidence. The alliance between religion and violence had already severely damaged Christianity in Europe. Religious terrorist violence threatens the credibility of the global Muslim community.
- Many are rightly irritated by the alliance between the warring Russian politicians and the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church.

3. Look for resources of hope

In this world situation, we, the signatories of this appeal, along with many people of good will, are looking for forces to help face fear and the challenges with courage. This cannot be achieved by promising security. Trust alone encourages finding hope and taking action. The more pressing the world situation is, the more hope the world

needs. It is only because of this that those responsible and the people do not lose confidence that the great challenges can be mastered.

6. Renewal of religious communities for the sake of the world

Nevertheless, there are strong forces in the religions of the world that reject and want to overcome this tragic connection of God and violence. In their political commitment to the world, the religions should orientate themselves towards their prophetic sources and not towards the interests of the powerful. True religion turns violence into (universal) love. Dignity, equality, freedom, justice and peace with all people and with nature are rooted in this.

At this solemn time, we, the signatories of this appeal, belonging to various faith communities, address ourselves to our own ranks and to all faith communities and to all people of good will.

We urgently want to remind ourselves and everyone:

- All religious communities need critical self-reflection and efforts at self-development and renewal in order to regain credibility and moral authority, which is often justifiably lost. Internal reform and theological consciousness of history is part of the hope we need.
- Right now, if religious communities are to be instruments of reconciliation and peace, they themselves must overcome all manifestations of mutual rivalry and strive for a culture of mutual recognition and respect.
- All religious communities need the courage and humility for "self-transcendence", ie to refrain from themselves, and to overcome their "collective narcissism" in order not only to pursue their institutional and ideological interests, but also to assume their shared responsibility for our common world.

7. not the death throes, but the birth pangs

In accordance with the Second Vatican Council (Nostrae Aetate 2), Pope Francis is very concerned that religions and all people of goodwill work together for the good of the world. In the document on the fraternity of all human beings for peaceful coexistence in the world, he recalls, together with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, that "God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters". Religions foment the hope that the current challenges that are making the world tremble are not the death throes of earth and humanity, but the birth pangs of a world where nations live in justice and peace in harmony with nature.

Tomáš Halík	Sociologist and theologian, Prague
Annette Schavan	Former German Federal Minister, Ulm
Paul M. Zulehner	Pastoral theologian, researcher on religion and values, Vienna
Maram Stern	Secretary General of the World Jewish Congress, Brussels and New York
Alberto Meloni	Historian, President of the European Academy of Religion, Bologna