

Becoming Reconciled with our Future Kongress

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MICHAEL HOCHSCHILD¹

Ladies and gentlemen, I came to Munich to offer you a simple, but important question: Does hope have a future? I am asking you, since I believe that Movements like yours may actually be the answer – irrespective of how each Movement in your network might respond to this question separately. Why do I trust you so much? Well, this is not due to you, but to the question, which I would like to state more precisely now: Does hope have a future, or is our world embroiled in a hopeless cycle of crises and problems? If we give our future a chance, what sort of world can we imagine in this future? Would it be a world sustained by social and religious creative forces?

Answering these questions in a broad sense might be as easy as asking them, but I believe that this exercise will lead us directly to the Movements and their role in supporting the new world. Let us consider:

- 1 If we do not want to get lost within our contemporary crises, we need to strengthen our hopes for the future.
- 2 In addition to hope the world we imagine needs to be characterised by something other than “modernity”, since the modern social order has been compromised leaving us without a clear direction forward. In order to secure a different future, we need to orient ourselves towards an improved society, one which could be called ‘post-modern’.
- 3 This can only happen under the influence of new cultural players. Here, I would like to invoke the prophetic contribution of new religious and social Movements which are led by very high ideals. These Movements, thanks to these ideals, prefigure today how society and the Church can live together tomorrow.

As you can see, reconciling ourselves with our future appears to be attainable – especially for Movements. But in reality, it is unfortunately far more complex than this. There are two challenges which we can identify. One of them relates to the particular disposition of problems we are facing right now: We are experiencing a severe systemic crisis of modern

Commento [FO1]: Not sure what is meant here.

¹ Prof. Dr. Michael Hochschild, director and professor for post-modern thought at Time-Lab, Paris/Institut d'Études et de Recherches postmoderne, studied education, sociology, philosophy, psychology and theology at the Universities of Hamburg, Frankfurt and Bielefeld.

society. Now, it is no longer sufficient to adapt to new situations but due to the radical changes in modern society we need to see new ideas and ways of living. The second challenge addresses the new religious Movements as such, whose faith, engagement and trust are put to the test. If they pass, they will lead the way into a new world characterised by a sense of confidence in our future. To achieve this goal, however, the new religious Movements need to understand themselves in a new way, i.e. as creative social and cultural powers. Put simply: religious Movements need to become social Movements.

I would like to give some further insights into these two challenges starting with the particular disposition of our current problems: these problems are different from the challenges we had to face at the end of the 20th century, when some researchers were concerned that we were heading towards a “clash of cultures”. After the “cold war”, they argued, differences between cultures might become the new battleground for international conflicts. In this, the orient and occident could in time represent two sides of such a conflict. The only way to defuse this situation was to rely on the success of a strategy of dialogue. Churches, democratic parties, even media were invited to mediate between conflicting partners. The idea was to strengthen society and prevent conflicts by allowing very different players to take an active part in public discourse. It is amazing, that neither social nor religious Movements were asked to join this process.

Today, this situation has changed. Former channels of dialogues do not seem to work anymore; at the beginning of the 21st century new ways of dealing with conflicting parties need to be developed. And this is where all of a sudden, Movements come into view. Why? and what does this mean?

Without a doubt, today Movements are more important than at the end of the 20th century. This is due to the way they have developed, but also to the severe crises society is experiencing right now. Consequently, a lot of people are looking out for authentic ways of living and dissociating themselves from attitudes they judge as formal and bureaucratic. Here, it becomes clear why Movements appear to be more attractive than other organisations. It can also be stated, that the increasing importance of Movements coincides with the systemic crisis of our modern society. Here, social processes which underpin the division of labour within society became entangled and therefore started to falter. “Systemic crisis” became a metaphor for the modern modus operandi which had ceased to work properly. Since the financial crisis in 2007 economy ceased to be our primary means to navigate challenges. Unfortunately, right now, there are no other viable

alternative systems which could fill this gap, since art is exploited commercially while political decisions are made by central banks and not by politicians. I call these “hybrid times”, where Movements have the opportunity to offer alternative approaches. I believe that Movements can do this, since they have the ability to show how different life could be – even in these modern times.

The problem we are facing right now cannot be described simply characterised by the pluralism which we have known since the 18th and 19th centuries. No, the current dilemma of pluralism is, that it is out of shape! While society as a system was organised on the division of labour, it was possible to adjust to this or even to “humanise” the system. But if the system is out of shape there is nothing to adjust to! Therefore, we need to take into account that we are witnessing the end of the social system we have known, while new processes of socialization still need to become manifest. Modern institutions, which are an integral part of the previous set up, cannot answer these challenges alone. This might go some way to explain why religious groups are now being called upon to provide some help and support, since all the other systems seem to be disintegrating.

Today, we suffer from a state of perennial indefiniteness! Let me give you an example: in modern times, we have been promised freedom. But nowadays, this freedom has turned into a remarkable sort of imposition. If the system does not provide any steadiness, freedom cannot be truly experienced. I would like to add another example: the feared “clash of cultures” that was expected turned out to be a “clash within cultures”. “Cultures” are not homogeneous entities anymore: as you can see, the current state of Islam is tearing itself into pieces; even the EU acts in a similar way, not to even speak about the struggles in relation to the distribution of the earth’s resources, which remarkably threaten the world’s social peace.

Under such circumstances, it is not sufficient to look back and analyse how conflicts arose in the past in the hope that current mechanisms of communication could solve them today. If you try this strategy, for example, to work on the “refugees’ crisis” you might find out that knowing about the causes why people are leaving their countries might not help to come to terms with the question how we all should live together in one country. Asking for the causes, therefore, is not a strategy which leads to reconciliation; it just buys you some time and, thereby, expresses how helpless you are. In fact, this approach can even show a lack of vision! It is clear then, that what is needed, is to look forwards and to reconcile ourselves with our future.

In this, the new social, and especially religious Movements come into play. These are important, as it is part of their very DNA to express a vision for the future. They not only offer viable alternative for living in society, they also loosen the restrictive shackles of modernity, which characterises today's society. A member of such a Movement, which brings together the religious and social aspects, is equipped with a capacity to take responsibility for themselves and their environment.

Under these circumstances it is their task not only to perform as religious, but also as social Movements. Through their faith they achieve the possibility to harness their own cultural creative force. In this sense, religious Movements offer something that social Movements cannot since their engagement cannot be restricted to one single topic. On the contrary, being aware of God's relationship to the whole world, there is an indefinite number of concerns that religious Movements can focus on. It is crucial that Movements and the Churches they belong to work together. Only a reconciled Church can bring about wider societal reconciliation in a credible way. Indeed, a single "Together for Europe" might not be sufficient enough to reach this goal; instead, a "Together for the world" is required in this case. All other solutions cannot live up to the promises which lie within global Movements like the Focolare Movement, Sant'Egidio, Schoenstatt and the others.

To sum up: Does hope have a future? I asked you this question, because I am very sure that you are the answer. You will be needed when it comes to our reconciling with the future. Whenever you seize upon those culture shaping powers which lie within your Movements, you will become a living witness that there is indeed a path that can lead us all out of the current crisis into a better future. You show decisively that new religious Movements are born from the future – and therefore are absolutely capable of reconciling all of us with our future.