

## **The importance of religion for the peace and development of Central Europe**

We live in an area that has experienced many turbulent times with severe consequences. Various ideologies, mythologies, and aggressive politics have destroyed or disrupted numerous cultural, scientific, and religious achievements. The worst thing has happened to mankind in all dimensions. It is normal to ask ourselves how to make a man truly the benchmark for building the future and to build the future according to man's standards.

However, it is indicated that, in the meantime, it has gone beyond the troubled borders of the Western Balkans and is increasingly becoming a reality for the rest of the world. We are witnessing the severe consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic, which has accelerated the expansion of all those invisible social cracks that ultimately show this world as divided and fundamentally closed. This problem is discussed in detail in the first chapter of Pope Francis' social encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, somewhat pessimistically titled "Shadows of a Closed World" (Nos. 9-55).

Already in the introductory part of the indicated encyclical (Nos. 1-8), it is emphasized that during the pandemic, "despite our strong networking, there was a split that makes it difficult to solve the problems that affect us all" (No. 7). So, contemporary digital communications have yet to succeed in giving the world and man that one new essential and idyllic community. However, in the beginning, they had much promise. And in all this, according to the Pope, neither the world in general, nor the European Union, nor that "history" in the sense of "teacher of life" has succeeded (No. 10). And not only have they not succeeded, but in our time we are witnessing a specific regression in that field. There is talk about reviving old conflicts and divisions and "new forms of selfishness" (No. 11). This does not mean only the current political and military conflicts but a broader one, too. In Nos. 12-13, the Pope talks about the problem of the one-way expansion of globalization, which thus benefits only the strongest and most prosperous. No. 15 speaks of a malicious spread of hopelessness and despair, often for some alleged higher values and interests. Furthermore, in No. 21, the Pope talks about the problem of economic rules that prove highly effective for economic growth but not for complete human development. In fact, in the relentless market competition that pits "all against all," the first person to suffer is the man, and I guess he should always be in first place.

In Nos. 27 and 45, Pope Francis talks about a kind of "culture of walls" that modern digital communications have not succeeded in overcoming ; if anything, they have deepened it further . Until recently, the Internet solemnly paraded with the phrase "knowledge society" seems to have given birth to an uncritical gathering of like-minded people who often have a wholly hostile and barbaric attitude toward

everything that deviates from their immanent opinion and worldview. In the following number (No. 46), the Pope admits that such a (dis)feeling can be found today even in some Catholic media: "Slander and gossip are tolerated, and all ethical standards and respect for the good name and others seem to be cast aside."

Let's go back a bit to No. 28, which talks about the insecurity and fear that become fertile ground for various mafias and criminal groups that almost traditionally like to present themselves falsely as protectors of the poor and the vulnerable. In Nos. 37-41, Pope Francis also speaks about what, as we know, mainly affects him, which is the current attitude of Europe toward migrants. Migration is something that visibly arouses fear among Europeans. The Pope points out that this is, on the one hand, admittedly natural, but that, on the other hand, today we should all work to integrate our openness toward others "within ourselves." Despite all this negativity, the Pope notes that we could witness extraordinary human kindness during the pandemic, representing a pledge of great hope. And hope is what tells us not only about the "thirst" for a "successful life" but also about the "longing for fullness" and the "desire to achieve great things" (No. 54). Hope is also courageous because "it knows how to look above personal comfort, beyond small security and small pleasures that narrow the horizon, to open ourselves to great ideals that make life more beautiful and dignified" (No. 55).

Finally, we will go back a bit to No. 34, where the Pope tries to answer the intriguing question of some believers as to whether the coronavirus pandemic really represents a form of God's punishment for human sins. Here, the Pope points out rationally that reality treats us as we treat reality. Therefore, he considers the pandemic a particular form of hope if it encourages us to think about our human nature's essence and to work together to better the world and the human race.

### **Faith and hope: a permanent challenge for everyone, and perhaps most of all for the believers themselves**

Some would probably say today, especially learned people from the intellectual world, that faith in Europe had more than an excellent chance to do something good and intelligent with our world and life for more than a thousand years and that now it would be better for it to finally step aside a little, to make room for the values of the secularized and emancipated world. And even some Christian theologians believe that Christian believers should come to terms with the fact that the modern world, whatever it was, arose precisely on Christian foundations. Admittedly, according to this, even contemporary non-believers should accept that Christianity will never be able to exclude itself from the nonexistent unity of this world entirely. Therefore, here I want to talk about faith and hope primarily as a permanent challenge for those who

feel and declare themselves believers, and that under the guise of what is possible, and should have already been realized but has yet to be, i.e., is not entirely realized.

The great Catholic theologian of the 20th century Karl Rahner believed in the indicated sense that Christianity must keep the scale of hope as high as possible: Only if it hopes radically and is not afraid to think "to the end" will the Christian faith turn out to not oppose "this" or "that," and to have no reason to be afraid of any "uninvented possibility of man" that could come in the future. For the latter premise to be understood correctly, it is necessary to first look at the short forms of Christian faith and hope, according to Rahner. Here, he primarily talks about a "petty-bourgeois Christianity" that "places its hope cheaply." On the other hand, there is also a related problem - both Christian and global - of "skeptical resignation" and "relativism" ; having become despondent in the meantime and losing the momentum of hope, the only thing left is to "follow their instincts like shrewd animals," seeking ever more "refined consumption," as well as "egoistic struggle" for mutual supremacy. Rahner, therefore, contrasts with these ultimately narrowed and simple forms of faith and hope that have "invincible hope" in the "absolute future," which is called "God." The one who is not opposed to this or that. That hope is incomprehensibly great for us, but at least we sense that it is big enough to cover and encompass us all in our differences.

Some might say this sounds very nice, but it is impossible, given this kind of man and world. However, we are not talking here about a well-established reality but precisely about the hope that this kind of reality, despite everything, can and should be incomparably better than it is. From the Pope's perspective, we just heard that we must hope things can and should be better in these challenging times. They could ask an additional question: Has there been a single significant achievement or progress in the history of humanity without the bearers of that achievement and progress not radically hoping that things could and should be better?

Regarding Rahner's objections about proper participation in the Christian faith, Pope Benedict had a similar opinion. In his epoch-making "Introduction to Christianity," he talks, among other things, about the established historical phenomenon of the existence of "a multitude of automated followers" versus a relatively small number of those "who entered into the inner movement of faith." Therefore, if we were to be painfully honest now, we could say that Christians did not make the best use of their historical chances. However, today the same could be said, if not even more truthfully, about the modern world, about which one can hear more and more often that it stands on the very edge of self-destruction, not only because of Europe's current political and war circumstances but also because of the desperate ecological and demographic picture. This is precisely why, today, no one has the right to call out the

other for his historical mistakes. Still, only that joint effort for the general betterment is the real and meaningful solution and attitude.

### **Community and philanthropy as living signs of hope**

The Catholic Church reached the latter position already during the II Vatican Parliament (1962-1965). Humanity and the world are seen here as a single whole, against which the Church sees its role as being in keeping with the continuation of Christ's saving work: "to bear witness to the truth (cf. Jn 18:37), to save, not to judge; to serve, not to be served by others."

The program of the current Pope Francis is marked with the same view. He believes that today's world needs witnesses of faith, not its theoreticians. Accordingly, he sometimes talks about the spirituality of the "new wave." "This is the spirituality of the new Church ... and it is the Church of love and mercy. It is a Church for everyone, not just for the chosen ones. It is the Church of sinners and converts, not of false saints and officials. Such a Church was announced by Pope Benedict XVI when he said that the Church of the future would exist as a small community of true believers that would be the 'salt of the earth' and the 'light of the world.'"

However, both popes certainly had something to say to the world. As we have already heard, Pope Francis often speaks out against unjust solutions, docility, selfishness, closed-mindedness, and religious or secular elitism. Pope Benedict, on the other hand, defined the reality of today's Western world as a kind of "totalitarianism in the name of liberalism." I would like to end this reflection with one thought from the current Pope, who points out that a solution involving killing someone is not progressive. Namely, many of today's habits, often presented with the prefixes of modern and advanced, are ancient archaisms of the darkest human past. Therefore, in contrast to such a history and humanity, what would be genuinely stylish and progressive would be a new sincere community and philanthropy that will neither hurt nor abandon, let alone execute, a single person.