

Conference of European Churches (CEC)  
Tallinn,

Being European – A Sociological Assessment 2023 and Beyond

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank you very much for the invitation to come here to Tallinn and to the Conference of European Churches. Entering into dialogue with people of the most diverse colours is something which is close to my heart, since my experience shows that this dialogue can be very fruitful and – what's more – that it is absolutely necessary. It is necessary not just for Europe and for the world we live in together, but also for the development of my own theories, which lives from dialogue, and I have often noticed that in different church contexts much of what I painstakingly find out as a sociologist has already been thought about and lived out. Therefore, I am all the more pleased to have the opportunity to have a discussion with you and enter into dialogue with you.

Allow me to say at the outset that I am an ardent pro-European, that is, I am convinced that the way forward into the future for us is only through a common and strong Europe, simply and above all because a relapse into nation-state egoisms, as we have seen and are seeing, firstly, only leads to quarrels, conflict, hardship, and even war, and because secondly, the European nation-states, including France, England and Germany, are being left to their own devices and are too small, weak, and insignificant in the global world to have any positive influence. But together, Europe is (still) large and strong enough to exert positive influence on the global world, and that should be our goal. But this means quite clearly and resolutely that I do not see Europe as an instrument for combating others: as a weapon against China, the Middle East, Russia, or America. The great problems of humanity: epidemics, climate change, the extinction of species, huge social inequality, as well as growing social loneliness and the loss of meaning, and above all the danger posed by nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, cannot be solved by any 'bloc' in the world alone. We will perish and die if, in the long run, we divide the world into blocs and then live in mutual competition, confrontation, and enmity. We must stop constantly thinking of 'our world' (Europe) in opposition to the other world or worlds. We should rather use Europe to make the world as a whole – everything under the heavens, as Zhao Tingyang says – a better place. Incidentally, this also means that even if many here may not like to hear it, a

sustainable European security architecture must include Russia in the long term, because otherwise we will institutionalise conflict, enmity, and threats – and ultimately war. Moreover, this means that in the long term the European security architecture can only be part of a global security order, which we must work toward – in open dialogue with non-Europeans, i.e. the Chinese, the Indians, the people in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. They are many, many more than us, and they have suffered long enough from European arrogance, and from the conceit of Europeans thinking that they know better – indeed, that they are better than others and must therefore impose our values and our order. I do not dream of such an imperial, know-it-all Europe, but of an open, dialogic, resonant Europe which by its very nature does not aim to rule, control, and enforce, but to ‘listen and respond’. Listening and responding with willingness, resulting in the transformation of the self again and again, the transformation of the self without defining the goal of this transformation from the outset: this is the core of resonance, the core of a resonant relationship with the world which is at the heart of my own sociology and philosophy. Thus, I dream of a resonant Europe, of Europe as a resonant space. In what follows, I would like to explain to you what this means, focusing on the question of how this Europe is structurally and institutionally constituted today and what role religion and the churches can, or even must, play in the transformation toward a resonant, democratic Europe. My thesis is that religion must by no means be an obstacle to resonant democracy, but if understood and lived in the right way, can really be an important, even crucial resource for the formation and training of resonant practices and attitudes.

Resonances are full of preconditions – not only in relation to music but also in society. And they are especially so in a society which I attempt to describe with the concept of the ‘breakneck standstill’. According to my diagnosis, Europe in 2023 is essentially in a breakneck standstill. This expression encompasses two things: on the one hand, that modern society of the western, capitalist type is racing – for structural reasons, it must really race, but on the other hand it stays put or is frozen. It – and that means Europe – has lost its sense of movement. This is a hotchpotch, which is in a way a core insight of what I am trying to explore as a sociologist.

When a society is forced to permanently grow, to accelerate, to push itself forward, but loses its sense of forward movement, then it is in a crisis. And the interesting question that arises is: does such a society really need an institution like the church? I would like to reflect on this with you, since this is a question which arises both in church contexts and from a sociological perspective: do we need something like this

here? Or is it just an anachronism? Is the church ultimately a remnant of another form of society and another way of relating to the world?

If one wishes to argue in this way, one quickly finds good reasons to say: yes, churches and religions no longer fit into our age of a religiosity cobbled together by the self, where everyone somehow constructs their own view of the world, where we have at least religious pluralism, in which many different voices offer very different interpretations. My students often say that – they say there are like different kinds of superstitions, and religion is one of them. That is certainly one way of interpreting the present. At the very least, one can say that there are a variety of religious offerings and that the state should not attach any special importance to organised religious institutions since it would violate the requirement of neutrality: why do we have a Sunday when Sunday is holy only for Christians, but Friday for Muslims, Saturday for people of the Jewish faith, and other days for the adherents of other faiths? Isn't it better for everyone to take time off when they want to take time off? That's where it starts, and the same question can of course be asked about Christmas – although this festival is celebrated on different days even in traditional Europe – and about schools: why are Catholic and Protestant religious lessons a school subject in Germany, but not hippie teachings or Hygge, or lessons on the Eastern church? These questions do arise, and they are indeed being asked and discussed. One can even argue that churches are potentially a disruptive factor in society since the insistence on a work-free Sunday is simply a disadvantage for global economic competition. And if there are also constant concerns that stem cells may not be used for research, then that is also a disadvantage for global competition. Then we just fall back, so it goes in this view, then one can say: the church is an anachronism which fits neither into the ideological reservoir nor into the self-interpretation of a modern society, an anachronism which is only a problem. This is how one could approach the question I posed at the beginning. And to be honest, I sometimes have the impression that church representatives themselves somehow share this view.

I am sometimes a bit shocked when I talk to people who are involved in the church and perhaps even hold positions of responsibility, but then say: "Yes, that's just the way it is – no one really wants to listen to us anymore, and we also have the feeling that we perhaps have nothing to say in the current crises". One could then cheekily ask: "What about the Covid debate, which is still ongoing? Compulsory vaccination – yes or no? School closures – yes or no?" Does the church have a strong voice, is there a function, a religious authority which might still have something

to say to society that society should not say or does not dare to say? And above all: do churches have a right to say something here?

There is another crisis indicator which someone from the church context drew my attention to, namely at the celebration of a theological faculty. This person told me that until 30 or 40 years ago, when he was asked about his profession, he was proud to say that he worked in the church context. Today it is something he is instead ashamed of, or he tries to avoid saying this right away by stating that he works for an institution of the welfare state. And I found this very interesting, because if it has come to that, you can see that there is a problem for the churches, at least in the western and central European context – quite a big one.

And what I really wish to do now is to convince you – not as a somehow religious person, but as a sociologist – that yes, the church can play an important, even a very important role in this society. Simply because I believe that it does have something to offer to society. By this I do not mean: because the churches have fundamental truths and can and should tell people what to do and what not to do. Not because the values and morals of the church are the right ones and should be imposed on others. But because modern society – and therefore European society – is at a breathless, breakneck standstill, which comes with a rather steep price, since we notice that this society is desperately looking for an alternative way of relating to the world, of being in the world. And where can this society look for other ways of entering-in-a-relationship with life, even with the universe, the cosmos, nature? Where can we find this alternative reservoir?

In what follows I would like to explain that we as a society, as Europe, are in a serious crisis and that we certainly need religious institutions, traditions, practices, constructs, convictions, and rites in order to perhaps find our way out of it. I wish to make the fundamental idea clear that this society massively lacks a listening heart – in political terms and in all other respects as well. And that is why we need ideas, practices, and the like which make it clear to us what this could actually mean – to have a listening heart. We can find elements of an answer in religious contexts. However, I do not deny that churches themselves often do not have a listening heart, but frequently a heart that is deaf, hard, and steely: if church authorities simply wish to proclaim and enforce truths, then they lack a listening heart in every respect.

To develop my thesis, I must begin with a more precise diagnosis of society. Yes, I have already presented this many times, but I would like to present it again in its essence and perhaps also sharpen it.

Some say that there is no such thing as society *per se*, but that there are *political* events, processes, and institutions, as well as economic, religious, legal, and sporting ones, and that these all exist side by side. However, I believe that society can be used as a collective singular, that there is indeed something like a whole, a totality of society in which the various institutions and people work together and shape each other. I describe the basic form of this society with the term 'dynamic stabilisation'. This is how I define a modern society. A society is modern if it can only stabilise itself dynamically, that is, if it is systematically and structurally dependent on permanent growth in order to reproduce itself and maintain the institutional status quo.

I am not saying that the fact that our European society is accelerating is something special historically. Here I always get into trouble with historians who point out to me that earlier societies were also accelerated, that there were super-accelerated periods in history, and that growth can also be observed in other contexts. And yes, of course, if we look at population growth or the development of civilisation, we always see something like an acceleration curve, so that one can say that modern society only fits into a longer-term historical time frame.

But what is special about my definition is not *the fact that* society is growing, for example in terms of population or economic production, or that it is accelerating in many ways, but that it *must* in order to maintain the status quo. Actually, it is very easy to understand this if we look at Max Weber, who said that most societies we know – before modern society – simply met their needs. They had a very keen sense of what one needed to survive. We need so and so much bread or this amount of grain to get us through the winter; so and so much heating fuel, a good house, some clothes, two pairs of trousers maybe, and then I have what I need. And that is what I keep producing: if the trousers are worn out, I repair them, and if I cannot repair or darn them, then I make identical ones once again. Of course, we not only need a house, food, and clothing, but also what we need now, depending on the historical-cultural context, for one's religious cult, for the rites, for the temple, for example, or for the priestesses and priests. This means that there was a sense of what one needed, and of course this changes historically. Why does it change? Partly because of environmental conditions, sometimes there is an enemy at the door, sometimes the climate changes, sometimes there is a shortage of some raw material that I need. All of this then drives innovation, and of course there is also the fact that people are curious, they want to try out new things, and suddenly they discover something

exciting; and if it is good, it is often implemented as a cultural innovation, though not always.

Thus, if you think historically about societies, they are of course not static but always accompanied by innovation and change, and often this has to do with acceleration and growth. I believe that Ian Morris and other scholars are right when they say that it is helpful to look at energy balances: people need energy to acquire energy. Food is the most important form of energy, and then of course heating – in our latitudes anyway; and so the question would be: how do I obtain enough energy to get through the winter? Or simply to live? Historians have found that over thousands of years people – or living beings in general – have often had to use exactly as much energy as they need to achieve their goal, for example, to be able to live. And that is why when people make a discovery, for example because they are curious, the evidence shows that it will have ramifications for the future if you can obtain the same amount of energy with less effort. For example if we cook, fry, or bake food – or one step before that, invent fire – we can obtain the same amount of energy for our metabolism with much fewer energy inputs. And if we humans notice that, then of course we do it that way. In this way, you can actually retell quite well from history how it became possible to get more out with the same amount of energy inputs; Morris talks about *energy capture*. Of course, it also works as a principle for innovation – to get exactly the energy I need with *less* effort.

That is why I do not claim that earlier societies were static. But this – our – society has the problem that it must expend *more and more* energy in order to preserve what exists. I would say that this is – and this is how Max Weber defined it – actually irrational from the structural and systemic perspective. You can see this best in the economy: you must – whether you are a company or a federal state, a city or a country, the EU or whatever – you must *permanently* grow. This means that you have to achieve economic growth, increase productivity, strive for constant product and process innovation. We are seeing this right now – in the new coalition government, all three parties agree: "We need growth!", "The growth engine must get going!", "We want to grow out of the crisis!", says German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. And together with him ALL European heads of government say the same thing, including Russia, and China, and India, and Saudi Arabia, and the USA too. And I ask you quite directly: *where exactly do you want to grow, at least in Germany?* I would really like to discuss this with these gentlemen. Where do you want to grow? Should we buy more cars? I do not want to question the fact that Mercedes, BMW, and VW live from the purchase of more of their cars. Of course, they say it was a good year when they sold more

cars. Or bigger vehicles with more horsepower and more tonnage or something, value – value must be produced, so to speak, but this is produced mainly through *more* cars and *more* trucks. We can have green fantasies for a long time, but the automotive industry remains one of the main growth sectors in Germany.

Robert Habeck, the German Minister for Economic Affairs, might then say: "No, I do not want growth in the automotive industry", so the question is: perhaps in the aircraft industry?! We are growing there as well, in fact we have the strongest growth there, the aircraft curve has gone upward almost vertically – before Covid anyway, but now and against the background of the climate crisis? No, don't grow, it's a dumb idea.

OK, so if not in mobility, maybe we will grow in the housebuilding sector? At the moment the construction industry is booming, we even talk about construction inflation, but then look at soil sealing – that is a huge problem. More and more land is being built on and thus sealed. So saying in the long run that we want growth in the housebuilding sector is not a good idea either.

So we grow elsewhere. In computers and smartphones? Which are being replaced faster and faster anyway? We now throw away billions of devices every two years. This is really bad for rare earths, for coltan, lithium, and other resources. So anyone with a bit of a brain will say, "Nah, we don't really want to grow in that area either."

Then we will grow in the food industry – that would be the next suggestion. Most of the stuff, most of the food we throw away is not particularly harmful to the environment. The problem lies elsewhere: those who could buy the food if the food industry says it wants to grow, are already overweight anyway. That's how it is! The societies which can afford more food suffer from obesity. You can say that as flatly as you can say it sweepingly. And do you know what the food industry is doing because of this? It ensures growth by adding certain enzymes or additives to food which switch off the satiety signal between the stomach and the brain, so that we continue to eat even if we are already full.

So the problem is that we simply have to keep growing in all industries, because otherwise jobs cannot be preserved, although objectively speaking it no longer makes sense to grow. It doesn't matter which industry you look at: for example, the clothing industry – we already throw everything away anyway, even though our clothes are still good and wearable. Every culture before us would consider us insane for that

reason alone. We throw them away just because they're no longer fashionable, so we don't want to grow there either. The pharmaceutical industry is also growing constantly, also in terms of vaccines, as we saw during the pandemic – that is good too. So I don't want to say that society should *never* grow. But what I am saying is that it shouldn't *have to* grow all the time just to preserve what it has. I find it really absurd to always talk about growth abstractly. Those who are asked to say concretely where one should grow usually do not have a good answer. He or she will probably say: in green technologies, but that is only avoiding giving a substantive answer, and it is also never enough to achieve the necessary growth rates.

What is even more absurd is that we do not want all this growth simply because we are greedy. We need it because without growth we can no longer maintain the entire existing social structure. If we decide now that we do not want to grow any more, we will not only have lots of unemployed people and shuttered companies overnight. The country's tax revenues will also fall, but at the same time expenditures will rise because we must start growing again, but above all because we have to pay those who are out of work. We would then no longer be able to pay pensions, we would not be able to maintain the healthcare system, the entire care sector would be even more dramatically underfunded, and cultural institutions could no longer be funded.

Thus, the entire system lives from the fact that we must grow every year. And where we do not have to grow, we become faster. Take the example of Japan: the country had hardly any growth for many years, but then the pressure to accelerate and become more efficient became all the greater. This is logical since if everyone can produce more cars, it does not matter so much whether one is the market leader or the second largest, because the cake itself is getting bigger. But if the entire cake does not get bigger, you have to be the cheapest on the market – and the fastest. That is why the pressure to improve then becomes even greater.

Thus, as a consequence we see that we live in a system in which we *must* become faster every year. We *must* speed up, we *must* be innovative, be the first to have that new product, the first to have better production methods. We have to produce more, so to speak, so that we can preserve what we have. This also means that we must invest more physical energy each year – whether from wind, the sun, coal, nuclear power, or other sources. We need more and more energy to keep the growth game going, that is, to preserve what we have.



At this point, one can once again clearly see the irrationality of this society, the European type of society. I do not think there was any form of life earlier which lived in such a way that it needed *more* energy each year just to preserve what existed. Let us recall Ian Morris and energy ratios. I said earlier that historically, change always occurred when it was possible to obtain a higher yield from the same amount of energy, or the same yield from less energy. But a society which systematically says that we should live in such a way that we have to invest, convert, and "capture" *more and more* energy in order to maintain what we have, is perverse. And it is not only physical energy which has to be used, but also political energy. Politicians must constantly motivate, challenge, and encourage us. The old should be mobilised once again, the young must be encouraged earlier, studies should no longer take twelve semesters or ten until the first degree, but only six until one receives a bachelor's degree. They see this at all levels. And I don't blame them at all: I would probably do the same if I were a politician.

So one must invest political energy, physical energy, and moreover – psychological energy, because accelerating, innovating, and growing – that's not what systems or machines do, that's what we do! Yes, *we humans* will have to run faster next year than we did this year. And the thesis I associate with this is that this logic of social institutions systematically creates a relationship of aggression with the world. I believe that we all feel this in our bodies – and especially during the pandemic. Our relationship with the world is aggressive. Why? Because the to-do list is exploding. Every year we must achieve a bit more. On both a small and large scale, this puts us in an aggressive relationship with the world. On a large scale, of course, we see this above all in the ecological crisis. Industries are acting more and more recklessly, drilling deeper and deeper for oil, digging for rare earths and coltan and everything else that can be extracted from the earth, and polluting us with it, so to speak. This systematically creates a relationship of aggression with the environment. You can also see the growing aggressiveness in politics: if you live precariously and always hear "Yes, we have to improve, we have to become better", and if all this affects the individual, then the Other, who constantly has a different opinion, who constantly wants something different, who loves differently, believes differently, and does I don't know what else differently, is then simply an obstacle. He should shut up.

An interesting study by my colleague Michael Bruter at the London School of Economics says that: The troublesome thing about democracies is that the political culture is changing. The person with a different political viewpoint is no longer seen simply as a dialogue partner

with whom one has to deal, but as a hateful enemy who must be silenced. And you see that in the US, for example, in the way Republicans and Democrats confront each other. For example, "Lock her up" was the Republican cry against Hillary Clinton, "Lock her up". And in England, you could see that between "Brexiters" and "Remainers." Some were steadfastly in favour of Brexit, others absolutely against it. But one can see this logic of mutual enmity and contempt all over Europe at the moment, for example in the conflict between anti-vaccinators and pro-vaccinators, anti-abortionists and pro-lifers, climate change activists and -deniers, etc. There we no longer have a debate about how we want to live, how we arrange our respective way of life, but that the others should shut up; we regard the others as enemies whom we want to silence! And that is on both sides: either we declare them fascists or something else, for example, traitors to the country. In any case, one can see: this aggressive relationship to the world, that comes from the permanent compulsion to grow, that never ends because it can never be pacified, also translates into politics and it translates into the individual way of life.

I also believe that this is reflected in what is called burnout or what we perceive as a burnout crisis. This has become really dramatic and, according to the figures available so far, further intensified during the Corona crisis. The entire media are steadily and consistently reporting on people who have burnout. I am not citing the media here to prove the clinical extent of mental illness, but to emphasise the social significance of the fear of it. Frequently, when I speak in a large hall, I ask the question, which would also be quite interesting here: Who of you sometimes says to yourself, or at least has thought in the past year: "I have to slow down a bit next year", or "I have to get rid of something, otherwise I might also get burnout", or "I'm at risk of burnout"? As a rule, almost all hands go up. This is the case for students, for professionals, even for pensioners. The feeling "It won't go well for much longer" has become the culturally dominant feeling in Europe. And that is completely independent of whether the increasing sick leave due to burnout is also backed up by diagnoses. We know that these figures require attention. But I believe that the discourse itself makes it clear that there is a crisis. In fact, we're dealing with energy problems in both instances: we are overheating the atmosphere, generating heat, increasing energy investment, using more and more energy to maintain what we have. This creates an energy problem in the climate and an energy problem for the psyche: both burn out.

At this point, I would like to introduce a further point, namely, what exactly I mean by the term breakneck standstill. I think the reason the

situation has gotten so culturally aggravated – as I pointed out at the beginning – is that we have lost the sense of moving forward. I don't want to deny that this modern growth program has also been extremely attractive for the longest time. Actually, we cannot be thankful enough for it because it has brought incredible economic prosperity to Europe. This logic of dynamic stabilisation has also produced scientific discoveries. I would say to my critics on the left that if you overlook this, then your criticism will be toothless, because I do believe that the free market and capitalism were essential engines for creating all the opportunities and resources that we have today. They were associated with certain ideas, promises of a cultural, almost quasi-religious nature: Everybody thinks that everybody else is an idiot through the increase in productive power – as Marx would have said, and on this point he was simply right and Marcuse later grasped it, actually with the whole critical theory – a pacification of existence became possible in principle. According to the promise, we would become so successful in working with nature and overcoming deficiencies that we would no longer have to fight for everyday life, nor to be afraid of not having a place in the world, of becoming illegitimate, so to speak, or superfluous; we would no longer have to fight for our economic existence, and would overcome scarcity. Logically, that was a great promise! Also, by the way, ignorance would disappear because of scientific progress: "We will know how to live right." And by "live right" I mean something like "give birth right" or "love right" or "sleep right" and "eat right". If you remember, that was also the promise of the European Enlightenment. And even beyond that, the promise: "Through acceleration power, we will overcome time scarcity, we will have time in abundance!"

In the meantime, it is obvious that not a single one of these promises is even close to being fulfilled. Strictly speaking, no one believes any more - not even our growth supporters in the German traffic light government or in the European Parliament - that things will get better. Global competition will become much sharper in times of climate crisis, and the problem will also be exacerbated by the countries catching up with us. We have to adjust to the fact that everything will become much tougher in terms of competition and dwindling resources. That's what has been maintained for a long time, especially from circles interested in economics. What's interesting is that the whole development increases uncertainty, I mean, for example, that never before has the uncertainty about what to eat and what not to eat been greater. Or also the nonsense about the question of who cannot tolerate what kind of food. It's really absurd: today we know a lot about the connection between food and the body, but we no longer know what to eat. For example, I used to think eating a lot of fat was bad for your weight, but recently I

read that a lot of fat is just fine – even for losing weight. And sugar does not release sugar at all, nor diabetes! It doesn't matter what thesis you pick – people actually don't know what they should eat any more. You also know this very well if you are dealing with children: some say, "Well, I can't eat that", others "I'm not allowed to eat that", still others "I'm not allowed to eat this with that", "I should eat in the morning", "I should not have breakfast", "I shouldn't eat anything for twelve hours", in short: We don't know any more!

You can also show this with another example, in an area where, as a man, I had better exercise humility. But I still find it interesting, namely when it comes to pregnancy. We see that the fear of childbearing *increases* the more we know about it. This is also connected to the feeling of powerlessness, because it is the equipment, the ultrasound for example, that tells me what I should do and how things stand with me and the child. My own feelings no longer play a role. We know less today about how children are actually born than we have known for centuries or even millennia before.

This ignorance is increasing in all areas, incidentally also with the result that people are dissatisfied with themselves. There is an interesting study that says that before the fall of communism – and to some extent until today – people in East Germany actually felt much more comfortable in their skin than in West Germany. The feeling of not being enough, not being satisfied with oneself, actually having to be completely different, is constantly increasing. We no longer have the sense to find the good life through this increase, to find a successful relationship to the world. We now see: this does not fulfil the promise. Despite this, Europe tirelessly wants to keep growing. Even the opposition parties have nothing different to offer.

Modern Europe, the modern social system, was so successful and also so promising because and as long as people felt they were working for a better future. You can see this in data from all western or early industrialized societies: There, parents have always worked with the conviction – not only in the middle classes, but far into the working classes or the middle and lower classes – that if they work hard, make an effort, make sacrifices, then their children will have it better one day. This was a very strong conviction and motivational force, which, incidentally, also created intergenerational resonance or solidarity. We work hard and we also sacrifice a lot, and the children will enter this realm of freedom, so to speak, "they will be better off". Now, on the other hand, you can see across the board – and Silicon Valley is leading the way – that both parents and children are saying: "We have to do

everything we can so that the next generation doesn't fare much worse than us." Suicide and depression rates are particularly high in Silicon Valley because the children there are convinced: "We will never be able to keep this standard." And meanwhile empirical social research from Japan to the USA and even more so through Europe or Australia shows that parents, indeed the majority of adults, think that we have to do everything we can so that the children are not worse off. This is a crucial point for me: We no longer have the feeling that we are walking towards a promising future, but that we are running away from an abyss that is catching up to us from behind. That's what I mean by the term breakneck standstill: We have to run faster every year in order not to fall into the abyss that is coming faster and nearer behind us – not least due to the climate crisis.

Let us now finally come to what I want to counter and why I believe that churches are needed: Democracy doesn't work in the aggressive mode, I think that you can say that in general. The slogan "Give me a listening heart" from King Solomon in the Bible thus also acquires a political dimension. It already has it in the Bible: Solomon asks God, when he is still very young and unexpectedly becomes king, not for power or weapons or allies, but for a listening heart. That is actually a passive, a receiving quality. This is exactly what is needed in a democracy – and by the way also in the churches. For long enough, the church has lacked this far more than democracy, and often it still does today. But let's stay with democracy, the institution that is so fundamental and characteristic of Europe. It also holds great promise. This promise is that each and everyone shall have a voice, including those who disagree with politicians or the churches. Democracy only works when each and everyone has a voice that can be heard. But lately I've come more and more to the conclusion that: the ears are also part of it. It's not enough that I have a voice that is heard, I also need ears that hear the other voices. And I would go even further and say that besides the ears, one also need this listening heart that *wants* to hear the others and answer them. The other person should just not shut his mouth, because he is a traitor to the people or an idiot or whatever. That is quite difficult in today's society. Everyone thinks that everyone else is an idiot. This is particularly serious when someone is so completely committed to democracy. Democracy is the central creed of our society, but it requires voices, ears and listening hearts. I have often made this clear using the refugee example. There are those who say that we have let far too many refugees into Europe, that those who have opened the borders are traitors, and others say that we ourselves are the criminals, because we let the refugees drown and freeze to death at the borders, because we are selfish and self-serving and are prepared to walk over corpses and

override fundamental rights. Both sides had and have the feeling that it is actually a fight against criminals.

That is why I think we should stay with Max Weber, who said that intellectual honesty means first hearing that there are perhaps arguments on the other side that concern me, that have something to say to me. That is the republican understanding of democracy, that citizens meet each other as people who have something to say to each other, and that doesn't just mean "I have something to say to *you*", or "I once gave him *my* opinion", but "*You* also have something to say to *me*", "I want to let *you* reach me". The republican concept of democracy is that through this mutual attainment, mutual transformation occurs. And that enables us to speak with Hannah Arendt, *Natality*: it enables us to start anew, to bring forth something new.

That is why I want to say: Democracy needs a listening heart, otherwise it does not work. Such a listening heart does not fall from the sky, however, this attitude is particularly difficult to adopt in a society of aggression.

My thesis is, therefore, that the churches in particular have command of narratives, a cognitive reservoir, rites and practices, spaces where a listening heart can be practised and perhaps experienced. That would be the basic thesis that I would like to present right away: we must let ourselves be called. I have been saying this as a sociologist for a very long time and I am not repeating it now because I am at the Conference of European Churches. We have a crisis in the ability to be called, and this is reflected in the crisis of faith and the crisis of democracy alike. I would put it like this with Bruno Latour. The most important thing is that I STOP.

That is one of my favourite words – stop. The listening heart goes well with it. On the one hand, this magnificent word "aufhören" in German means to stop, to halt. On the other hand, the word stop means that while I'm working through the to-do list, I'm exhausting myself on the hamster wheel, in a breakneck standstill, hearing upwards, listening outwards, listening upwards, calling me and letting something reach me differently, from a different voice that says something different than what is on my to-do list and what is to be expected anyway and consists of a functional exchange, so to speak.

Society, indeed European democracy, needs the ability to be called. I tried to grasp this ability with the concept of resonance, it's not just a capability, it's a different relationship to the world. If my diagnosis is correct, then we are facing this exact problem: we are always in aggression mode, because we still have to work this off, but that, we want to have this, experience that, and so on. And the question is, is

there something different? The modern fundamental attitude is aimed at control, dominance, power. This is what Adorno and Horkheimer brought to our attention in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. But as soon as we listen to the music, we notice: here it is not really about controlling, increasing. Not by listening; perhaps when making music, we can still argue about it, but when listening, I just listen. But somehow I'm tempted to quickly write this text message and see what the news media write, and actually stop listening to music. But suddenly, suddenly I stop! I stop, but something reaches me! Music often has the power to transform us. Sometimes I have the feeling that you even feel it in body, i.e. when music grabs you, or when something calls you and you react to it. The physical state of aggregation changes, so to speak. You really notice: something like breath comes into being, a breathing relationship with the world. And that's exactly the moment when something reaches me, yes, something calls me. Then I don't know what comes out of being called, but that is how a moment of resonance begins.

For me, resonance has four defining elements, or moments: the first is *Affectation*, perhaps one can even say: the call: something is calling me, making me stop, and so this something must, can it just be what I've always thought. A transgressive moment comes into play here. Resonance is not pure harmony and pure agreement, otherwise it would not be resonance. If I only always hear the same thing, only stronger, if I am only reinforced in what I have always thought, felt or done, then this cannot be described as a resonance relationship, because resonance means hearing a decidedly different thing, and that can also be quite irritating. Since another voice is reaching me in some form. We all know that, it is not a secret capability that you have to learn, it's something even young children do and infant and developmental research backs it up. It is that first moment when the child stops and realizes that what he is doing interacts with what he is achieving. For example it makes a noise and it hears its mother or whoever is taking care of it, and answers!

The second moment of resonance arises here, namely *Self-efficacy*. What I do enters into a kind of connection with this other. Connection is an important moment and the basic form of resonance for me is listening and responding; something reaches me and calls to me and I suddenly realise that there is a connection because I am able to react to what I have received. Perhaps one may know this from situations at the university; or many of you know this from the school context or from working with young people; or when on any occasion speaking to a full hall – or preaching to a congregation: One often has the feeling of talking to a wall. You see dull, indifferent faces or tired looks, or people hanging over their mobile phones anyway, half asleep. Or people hate you if you

say something wrong, or you change it, or you don't change it – either way you can take a beating these days. But then you also feel very clearly when the opposite relationship arises: there you suddenly and literally see how resonance arises when a thought is expressed – the posture changes, the direction of the gaze, the gaze itself, the eyes light up, something comes into motion. If you try to measure that – the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics in Frankfurt does something like that – then you can even make it visible: Where I suddenly stop, where I allow something to reach me, even my breathing rate, my heartbeat, my skin resistance changes, and there is a change in hormone release. We respond to the call, we make something with it, and that is precisely where we feel alive. That is the moment of feeling alive. Bruno Latour, Corinne Pelluchon, Andreas Weber and many others say the same. The moment of being alive is precisely when I am not only called, but suddenly realise: I can make something with the voice that reaches me, with the music that I encounter there. Sometimes, however, we fail to do just that. Then, even with music as beautiful as we have just heard, we can state: This is my favourite song, but it doesn't reach me at all (this time). Because I lack this response, the ability to listen at that moment, this approach, yes, the opening up and making something of it.

However, where we succeed in reacting effectively to a touch, the third moment of resonance occurs: the moment of *Transformation*. Since, where resonance comes about, where I really listen and connect with what reaches me, I transform myself, I get into a different mood and think differently. I begin to look at the world differently, or to think differently. It is like this, by the way: when I am in deep depression or burnout, I am no longer capable of resonating. The resonance is not about a cognitively comprehensible meaning, that would be untouched by burnout. Burnout is almost the opposite of resonance, burnout is the state in which I am no longer capable of resonating, in which nothing can reach me and I am also unable to reach anything or anyone, here I lack the ability to be called and also the self-capacity, and then I also feel internally frozen, almost unable to move. If, on the other hand, I experience resonance and can let myself be called, then I also experience transformation: I am no longer the same, but I transform in the moment of experience. As I said, this is this moment of vitality.

But the bottom line is that I can't force this moment. I can buy expensive tickets for the best concert, and think: "Tonight!" At my first Pink Floyd concert, I thought: "Today I will experience enlightenment". But somehow it wasn't like that. I don't know why, but I found it boring. Although it seems almost like blasphemy to say that; Pink Floyd is my favourite band and they have been the heroes of my youth. By the way, when



something like this happens, we always try to convince ourselves that it was incredibly great, that it was unbelievably good! I think the stronger the people erupt in ostentatious enthusiasm, the less resonance there was likely to actually be. You can't force it, even with the most expensive tickets and not with the best setting. *Candlelight dinner* is also such a thing, or *Christmas*: the expectation is highest on Christmas Eve, we are mostly in the mode of desperation to cope with everyday life until 5 pm, and then we suddenly and punctually want to resonate with the family, with the Holy Family and with the Holy Message on top of that and, to be honest, as everyone who works in the corresponding positions knows: alienation and potential for conflict have never been greater than at this very moment. Because you can't create resonance and certainly not at the push of a button. That is usually where the candlelight dinner fails: it leads to argument instead of resonance. The fourth moment of the resonance relationship is therefore its unavailability: it cannot be manufactured, bought or forced.

But when the opposite happens, when resonance really occurs, then transformation also takes place. The exciting thing is – and I think I have undervalued this so far: nobody can predict what will come of it. That is quite important: if the church believes that it always knows what is right and what should come out of it, then it is no longer a resonance institution, but a resonance killer. Naturally, when we get into a discussion later, I might say what I always say, that I already know exactly what I'm going to say in response to an argument, because I have done it a hundred times before. And the other participants in the discussion, the representatives of other churches, perhaps do the same, they say what they have already said ten times and then we just live with the fact that this discussion remains resonance-free. But it can also happen that we suddenly allow ourselves to be reached, that we stop and say: "I have never looked at it like that". Then something new emerges from it, but it is completely impossible to predict firstly whether it will happen and secondly at what point and thirdly what will emerge from it: the unavailability of resonance therefore includes its openness to the outcome. Resonance is a poor tool if all one cares about is optimisation: I always know in advance exactly what the result should be when it comes to optimisation. My colleague Hans Joas speaks here of the *creativity of behaviour*, but actually my favourite metaphor for this moment is Hannah Arendt's concept of natality, which I already mentioned: that is when the new thought suddenly arises, which I didn't think of before, and neither did you. Therefore resonance is, so to speak, the place of new birth. But this newness is unavailable, it cannot be foreseen or predicted.

So what do we need in this society? I think this society needs a remembrance of exactly this ability to be called and the experience of the corresponding open-ended self-efficiency. On the one hand, this works dispositionally, that is, when I am able to step out of the aggressive mode; for a moment not to ask: "What does that have to do with me? What do I get? What do I still want to achieve? What can I control? What do I control? What do I not control?" "Perhaps you could say that you need to make yourself naked, you need to make yourself tangible and that always means making yourself vulnerable. And that is naturally super hazardous in a society based on competition and striving for growth. In any case, I first need a certain attitude, and the attitude doesn't guarantee me that there will actually be a resonance. I also need the corresponding social and material spaces for this.

My position is that religion does indeed have those spaces, or at least: that at its core it aims to provide such spaces. It has the elements that can remind us that a different world relationship than the increase-oriented, availability-oriented one is possible. Starting with the concept of time, just think of songs like "My time is in your hands", or of the church year. That is what my father always said: "It is totally boring, nothing happens, the same thing every year for 2000 years." I would reply: "That is exactly the point! No innovation, no increase, no growth!" That is a different conception of time than our concept of time as an economic resource that we have here. The spatial concept is also different: When you go to a church, there is nothing there that you can make available, so to speak, that you can bring under control, or dominate. The aggression mode doesn't find a target at all. Good, unless, of course, you hate the church and would like to tear the cross off the wall, naturally there is that too. But people who don't go there with such an intention end up in a spatial context in which the aggressive attitude disappears for a moment. You literally feel it all over your body.

It seems to me that the crucial point is that all religious thinking, the entire tradition, the best religious interpretations are based on the idea and realisation of resonance relationships. I only learned this late, after I had written the resonance book, but let's take the example of perichoresis, the Trinity: this is a resonant relationship between Father, Son and the Holy Spirit – and perhaps also with us as believers. I have written before about whether the Catholic religion in particular as a denomination might have resonance qualities and I would say: Yes! Quite a few, in fact, and I almost believe that it has more, or at least different ones, than Protestantism, and also more physical ones. I was always envious as a child, for example, of making the sign of the cross or dipping my fingertips in holy water, or even when it comes to invoking all

the saints. The idea in all these gestures and rites is always that we make some kind of connection, a resonance connection to the world and to another world. Something touches me and ignites a transformational effect in me, that is the idea that is shared and experienced there.

Incidentally, the longing for such resonances in society is incredibly high, even far beyond the religious context. In my opinion – and also strengthened by a very good dissertation that Hana Dolezalova wrote on the subject in Jena – almost all phenomena that run under the label of 'New Age' or esotericism can be interpreted as an expression of a deeply rooted resonance longing and also resonance conviction. People look for resonances in stones and herbs, streams and mountains and in the stars, if they want to regain or recover drawing from them. "Yes, there is somehow a relationship between this precious stone and me" or between the Bach flowers and me, or between the holy water and me. On the other hand, I have to protect myself from the evil eye and the mysterious rays of the earth. They are all resonance ideas. The reason why astrology and horoscopes are still so widespread and popular is not that they are plausible from an astronomical point of view or offer good explanatory models. Most people who consult them justify themselves with phrases like "I don't actually believe it, but still...". Still what? I think they are so attractive even to many late modern people because they provide a sense of a relationship between the world-encompassing ultimate, or encompassing reality, the cosmos, and our innermost being, our destiny – a resonance relationship.

I believe that it is precisely from this that religion per se derives its great power, namely from the fact that it makes a kind of vertical promise of resonance, that it says: the silent, cold, hostile or indifferent universe is not at the basis of my existence, but a response relationship. The core of religious thinking in the monotheistic religions for me is probably far beyond, certainly in Hinduism and also in Buddhism. But let us remain with Christianity. For me, the basic idea is that the reason for my existence is not the silent universe, a cold mechanism, bare chance or even a hostile counterpart, but that there is an answering relationship. "I have called you by your name, you are mine". If that's not a resonance appeal! Something called me and meant me. Or envision the concept: "I gave you the breath of life". There are an infinite number of such images in the Bible, and I therefore interpret them as a single document of cries, calls and pleas to be heard, to resonate, to echo in the face of a silent starry world.

And the Bible, faith, the church gives this one answer, this one promise: there is someone who intended *you* to be, who called *you*, who also

*hears* you, even if he is not available in the here and now. Resonance in itself is constitutively unavailable, we have just heard that, even with resonance with people in the same space, but the crucial thing is the promise, or is it a promise? That we are in a resonance relationship. The churches can very easily break this promise if they themselves become a steely authority that no longer listens, that already knows and therefore also does not hear the people but commands them and possibly even abuses them. But it has the opportunity to open up and maintain the potential, resonance spaces. And a tangible, physically visible resonance axis forms there, for example in the prayer posture; what is meant is even physically felt. As a sociologist, I asked myself: "When a person prays, is it directed outwards or inwards?" And the amazing realisation was: both at the same time! This same axis arises from the basis of my existence. There, at the basis of his existence, the praying person stands in a relationship to the encompassing other, as Karl Jaspers puts it. The essence of my existence is a resonance relationship.

This is not just a theological thought, it is a living religious practice, let's look, for example, at the Lord's Supper. Three axes of resonance are activated at the same time, the one between people, from people to things and to the encompassing other – *communio* is created, a relationship between people and a relationship to the comprehensive whole. I'm not asking if it's reasonable to believe, if there's proof of God, if the Bible explains the world, or even is God's Word, or anything like that. Not only can I not answer all these questions as a sociologist, I cannot even ask them in a meaningful way. I am concerned with the question of what kind of world relationship arises from or in religious practice. My final word is therefore: religion has the power, it has a reservoir of ideas and a ritual arsenal full of corresponding songs, corresponding gestures, corresponding spaces, corresponding traditions and corresponding practices that open a sense of what it is to be invoked, to be transformed, in order to stand resonant.

If society loses that, if it forgets this form of relational possibility, then it is finished for good. And therefore the answer to the question of whether today's society still needs the church or religion can only be: Yes! Thank you very much for listening!