

William McComish:

Good evening. I have been asked to say something about the Geneva Spiritual Appeal.

The Geneva Spiritual Appeal, which I have the pleasure and the honour to preside, is an Appeal, which we made 20 years ago. It was a result of a very sad incident, when there was a crash of a Swiss Air airplane off Halifax in Nova Scotia, and everybody was killed. Since Geneva is a small city and everybody knows each other, we were able to organize an interreligious event in the Cathedral, of which I happened to be Dean at the time, to commemorate, to commiserate and to express our loss together, Muslims, and Christians and Baha'ies, and Budhists, and everybody else, and because of the success of this event, which was most unusual twenty years ago, we were asked if we could do something for the UN's Day the year afterwards, which was in 1999. And so, we gathered together in my office, and we wrote the Genevan Spiritual Appeal; we thought it was for one ceremony, a one-off thing. We were very worried about the state of the world, and the fact that there were many conflicts that seemed to have religious bases. So, we wanted to make it clear; as religious people from different traditions, that we had the same ethics, that we had the same values, and we also very quickly realised that we all believed that God listens to the prayers of everybody.

Now these, to us, seem simple statements, but ever since the Appeal has become very important to many people, especially to people in situation of conflicts. We have held ceremonies for peace in Syria, we have held ceremonies for the anniversary of the International Red Cross, we hold ceremonies every year, and this year, for our twentieth year, we will be asking for distinguished people to endorse our Appeal, people like the Pope and the Dalai Lama, and we will also be making it clear, that we are looking honestly at our texts and our religious narratives of history, because there has been so much that has been twisted in the history of our traditions:

Because our personal convictions or the religions to which we owe allegiance have in common a respect for the integrity of humankind.

Because our personal convictions or the religions to which we owe allegiance have in common a rejection of hatred and violence.

Because our personal convictions or the religions to which we owe allegiance have in common the hope for a better and more just world.

Representing religious communities and civil society, we appeal to the leaders of this world, whatever their field of influence, to strictly adhere to the following three principles:

- A refusal to invoke a religious or spiritual power to justify violence of any kind
- A refusal to invoke a religious or spiritual source to justify discrimination and exclusion
- A refusal to exploit or dominate others by means of strength, intellectual capacity or spiritual persuasion, wealth or social status

This is the heart of the Genevan Spiritual Appeal. It is a short text, if you need a kind of basic text for our work together, I would certainly suggest that you look at our Appeal. It is short, it is easy to understand, and these three great negatives make it clear who we are. And of course, it also makes it clear that there is no wiggle room in this statement; you either observe these principles or, if you try to bend them, then you are dishonest and we don't want to know about you.

So we will continue our work, we thought it was a one-off thing, and it's just become more and more important in the modern world; after Christ Church, after Colombo, after the shooting in California, after the Christians killed in Burkina Faso, and God knows how many crimes to come; there are people who believe that they can kill other people because of what they are. We refuse to accept this; we never will and we will oppose it with all our strength and all strength that God gives us. Thank you very much.

[*Appel Spirituel de Genève*](#) [*The Geneva Spiritual Appeal*](#) [*Llamada Espiritual de Ginebra*](#)